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BAATƆNU PERSONAL NAMES FROM BIRTH TO DEATH

Wendy Schottman

The Baatɔmbu (or Bariba), numbering some 500,000 comprise the largest ethnic group of northern Benin. They occupy most of the historical region known as Borgu, of which a small part is situated in adjacent Nigeria. Their language, Baatɔnum, is a Gur language related to the central and the Gurunsi groups (Manessy, 1981: 105). The Baatɔmbu are the numerically dominant members of a political community composed of several sub-groups. At the top of the complex and rigid social hierarchy are the noble Baatɔmbu, or Wasangari, formerly warriors who, according to oral tradition, originated in the Kisra migrations. They imposed themselves on the area progressively from the fourteenth century to the eighteenth and lost their original language. The group of commoners, who are cultivators and hunters, is composed primarily of Baatɔmbu of the lower category, who came as migrating hunters from the east. It also includes a small number of Mokolle, of Yoruba origin, as well as Tienga and Boko, both speaking Mande languages. Fulani, situated in nearby encampments, and Gando—descendants of former slaves, war captives and 'abnormal' children—settled in nearby separate villages, make up the two lowest socio-ethnic groups.[1]

1 AN OVERVIEW OF BAATƆNU PERSONAL NAMES

A Baatɔnu child is born with a birth rank name. Atypical characteristics of the pregnancy or delivery as well as notable circumstances surrounding the event of the child's birth can be at the origin of another name. These names, along with a possible nickname acquired some time during childhood, are called *bii yisiru*, 'child names', or *yisi piibu*, 'little names'. They are perfectly suitable for children, but you must not die before having acquired another name, a real name.

This plurality of names borne by any one individual is one important characteristic of the Baatɔnu naming system. Synchronic plurality is commonplace; it concerns Baatɔmbu of both categories equally and is no sign of merit. Diachronic plurality, on the other hand, must be

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[1] For a much more comprehensive description of the history of the various groups inhabiting Borgu and the relationships between them the reader is referred to Lombard (1965) or Kuba (1998). The latter deals only with the integration of the Wasangari aristocracy and the autochthonous commoners.

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earned by honourable behaviour and primarily regards members of the aristocracy. A Baatɔnu will change his name no more than a few times throughout the course of his life; the shedding of one name and acquisition of another is an intrinsic part of the individual's progress from one stage of achieved status to another. Thus the chronological classification used here reflects an important aspect of the Baatɔnu concept of personal names: progress in life towards the much sought after status of respected and remembered ancestor will be marked by one or more changes of names. Essentially, one progresses from a set of ascribed, unprestigious 'little names', through various character-shaping nicknames, to finally obtain, if one is considered worthy of it, a prestigious, spiritually powerful real name.

Another characteristic of the Baatɔnu system of anthroponyms is that a clear opposition between a personal and a collective name, i.e. between a name connected with and belonging to a specific individual owing to a social act of bestowal (Bean, 1980) and a name connected with and belonging to a group of individuals following an original social act of bestowal, is somewhat artificial. In fact, most types of Baatɔnu personal name individualise by classifying. We will see, for example, that fourth-born sons are reputed to have a bad temperament. A *Boni* (fourth-born son) is therefore a certain type of person; all *Boni* are of a common essence or species. Circumstance names (2.4), baptismal names (3.1) and inherited title names (4.1) also identify the individual as belonging to a specific category of people with a common denominator. This aspect of Baatɔnu names will be further developed in the sections concerned and in the conclusion.[2]

Most Baatɔnu personal names, virtually all 'real' names, cannot be translated. They are devoid of etymological or referential meaning for those who use them, but still full of social and sometimes even spiritual meaning.

Only a social equal or superior can use a Baatɔnu's name to address its bearer. An inferior uses a term of address derived from kinship terminology ('father', 'mother', 'big brother', etc.). When two strangers meet who are equals, a certain feeling of mutual confidence must be established before they reveal their names. As with other aspects of one's family or intimate life, a name must be revealed with circumspection, for ever-present malevolent people can use any number of elements of an individual's persona, including his name, to harm the family through occult means.

At present, one can observe rather important modifications in the use of Baatɔnu personal names, especially in urban areas or in those under Islamic influence. This article deals with the traditional system of personal names as it existed before the influence of Muslims and

[2] The fact that names can be indicators of class, and the concept of individuation as a form of classification, are dealt with at length by Lévi-Strauss (1962: 253–86).

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Christians was felt.[3] A few comments on the major modifications this system has recently been submitted to are included in the conclusion.

2 NAMES THAT CAN BE RECEIVED AT BIRTH

The identity of the person who chooses a child's name at birth is of little importance. Firstly, for the Baatɔmbu giving a birth name is never an occasion for expressing oneself as an individual harbouring feelings of rancour or deception towards family or neighbours; a name carries a message, but it is not a personal message. Secondly, naming a newborn is not perceived as an honour, or a right, reserved to the parents or some elder member of the descent group, nor is it thought necessary to consult the wisest member of the family or a specialist to ensure that the correct choice is made. The Baatɔmbu have the impression that the name or names given to a newborn are an obvious, natural choice ensuing directly from the circumstances of the child's conception and birth. They rarely remember which elder of the paternal family actually 'chose' the name.

2.1 A birth rank name

Every child automatically receives a birth rank name.[4] One series of these names exists for girls and one for boys, from the first-born to the eighth-born child of a man and any one of his wives. Thus, if a man has three wives (consecutively or at the same time), and each has given him one son, all three boys will be called *Woru* (name given to the first son).

Several slight differences exist between the birth rank names given to nobles and those given to commoners. Among the nobles, the birth rank name of the first two children of each sex, i.e. the name of those most likely to gain access to a position of power, varies according to the generation name of the child (see 2.9).

Certain birth rank names used by the Baatɔmbu are also used by the neighbouring Hausa, who consider them Muslim names. The names in question are marked '**m**' in Table 1. My informants reject a Muslim

[3] This article is based on field research carried out in two villages in the eastern part of Baatɔnu territory, first in Subadɔ, near Pérére, in 1986 and then in Tontarou, near Nikki, in 1988. Structured interviews were carried out with approximately thirty middle-aged and elderly people, some commoners and some nobles. The emphasis in interviews was on the traditional system of naming as they perceived it having functioned when they were young. The original plan was to obtain data of a different nature through questionnaire-guided case studies, but this technique was abandoned, as reticence was encountered about discussing what was perceived as an intimate topic often involving painful memories (unsuccessful pregnancies, infant mortality, deceased relatives, etc.). I wish to express here my gratitude to Marc Sacca, who was my interpreter during both these periods of field research and who served as an essential local contact after I had left Benin.

[4] In this respect the system differs quite fundamentally from the system of Guidar 'number names' as described by Collard (1973). The Guidar do not number a child, i.e. do not give him a birth rank name, if the circumstances of his birth are considered deviant (twin, posthumous, born after a sibling that died, etc.).

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TABLE 1. Birth rank names of Baatɔnu commoners

Birth rank	Boy	Girl
First	*Woru*	*Yɔɔ*
Second	*Sabi*[a] **m**	*Bonã*
Third	*Biɔ*[b]	*Bake*
Fourth	*Bonĩ* / *Bonĩ,-Woru*[c] / *Woru*	*Buyɔ̃*
Fifth	*Sanĩ*[d] **m** / *Woru-Sanĩ*	*Daado*
Sixth	*Woru-Mɛ̃ɛ̃re*[e] / *Mɛ̃ɛ̃re* / *Woru*	*Beru* / *Yɔ̃ɔ̃*
Seventh	*Sabi-Mɛ̃ɛ̃re* / *Sabi-Tori*[f] / *Woru-Tori* / *Woru*	*Bonã-Mɛ̃ɛ̃re* / *Yɔ̃ɔ̃-Mɛ̃ɛ̃*
Eighth	*Tori* / *Woru*	*Sɛ̃rari* / *Bonã-Sɛ̃rari* / *Bona-Mɛ̃ɛ̃re*

Notes

a Sabiu (or the shortened form *Sabi*) is a Muslim name used by the Hausa.

b Biɔ is a personal name in the Bornou and the Manga areas where the Beriberi live. It is also a name used by the Kanuri.

c The use of *Woru* (first son) for the fourth son calls for an explanation. Fourth-born sons are reputed to have a bad disposition. A *Boni* (fourth-born son) is typically a 'tough', i.e. *bɔɔbu*, child, the type that often gets into fights and becomes a source of trouble for the family. In the hope of counteracting this natural tendency the name *Woru* is placed after the name *Boni* or substituted for it. Several of my informants stated that fifth, sixth and following boys also tend to be 'tough' and that it is therefore customary to also add *Woru* to their names. It should be noted that people's knowledge in regard to birth rank names is much less certain beyond the fourth-born child of either sex.

d Sanĩ is the Muslim name used by the Bambara and the Hausa for the second-born son.

e When you reach the sixth or seventh child of the same sex there is a tendency to return to the beginning of the series, placing *Mɛ̃ɛ̃re* after the name. This term (also pronounced *Mɛ̃ɛ̃ru*) carries a meaning of plurality that is not used elsewhere, apart from the greeting *ka sɔ̃ɔ̃mɛ̃ɛ̃ru* with/days/several 'It's been a long time.'

f There was a certain amount of disagreement among my informants concerning which birth rank *Tori* designates. As noted above, this is typical when you enquire beyond the fourth-born of either sex.

origin for these names, whereas such names as Amadou, Salifou or Salimatou, given to converted Baatɔmbu, are definitely recognised as being Muslim. Although the presence of sedentary foreign Muslim merchants in important centres along the caravan trade route dates back to the fifteenth century in Borgu (Lombard, 1965: 83; Brégand, 1998), the relative influence and prestige that now characterise the Muslim community are recent and have not eclipsed a long tradition of condescension on the part of the proud Baatɔnu warriors towards this non-bellicose people. Considering the fundamental place that birth rank names occupy in the system of Baatɔnu personal names, it is probable that these names are of Semitic rather than specifically Muslim origin.

Most birth rank names can be completed or replaced by a highly emotive type of praise name. The resulting double name is used especially by the mother, to calm or cajole her child, or by praise singers. The majority of these names expressing affection or homage are

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TABLE 2. Birth rank names of Baatɔnu nobles

Birth rank	Boy		Girl	
	Kpai generation	Wure generation	Kpai generation	Wure generation
First	*Woru-Bɔkɔ*[a] / *Woru*	*Biɔ-Wure* / *Biɔ*	*Dabu*	*Yɔ̃ɔ̃-Wure* / *Kĩnã*
Second	*Sabi-Guro*[b] / *Sabi*	*Sabi-Buuru*[c] / *Sabi*	*Bonã-Wĩru* / *Bonã* / *Dɛ̃ge*	*Bonã-Wure* / *Bonã* / *Dɛ̃ge*
Third	*Biɔ̃-Geo*[d]			

Notes
All birth rank names not indicated are the same as for Baatɔnu commoners (see Table 1).

a It is worth noting that *bɔkɔ* is the form of the adjective 'big' used with nouns of the -g class, whereas the form for the -w class, to which all terms designating human beings belong, is *boko*.

b Guro means 'iron' (noun) in Zerma and is also used as a person's name in that language.

c Buuru is a person's name in Hausa.

d Biɔ-Geo means 'real Biɔ', as opposed to *Biɔ-Wure*, the first-born son who belongs to the *Wure* generation. This would seem to indicate that the more elaborate Baatɔnu noble system of birth rank names—with a distinction made according to generation membership—is a modification, brought about by the Wasangari, of the system used by commoners.

of foreign origin. Indeed, Baatɔnu *griots* have a *penchant* for inserting in their praises proverbs or expressions in a foreign language—notably Hausa, Zerma or Yoruba. Here are a few examples of this flattering lengthening of birth rank names:

Third boy: *Biɔ-Kpɔɔ*. This name is a sign of affectionate mockery, for *kpɔɔ* means 'monkey' in Baatɔnum.
Fourth boy: *Bɔ̃nĩ-Guda*. *Guda* is the birth rank name for the fourth-born son in Hausa.
Fourth boy: *Bɔ̃nĩ-Teesi*. *Teesi* is an affectionate, shortened form of the Yoruba name *Teesilimi*.
Fifth boy: *Sanĩ-Demɔ̃*. In Hausa *demɔ̃* designates a type of lizard known for its patience. The term is used by Hausas as a name for a boy whose mother suffered during pregnancy, but managed to bear her misfortune due to her great patience.
First girl: *Yɔ̃ɔ̃-Koto*. *Koto* is a name used for the eldest child—boy or girl—in Malinke.
Fifth girl: *Daado-Gɔ̃nĩ*. *Gɔ̃nĩ* means 'expert' in Hausa.
Sixth girl: *Beru-Kɔda*. *Kɔda* means 'youngest child' in Zerma.

If a newborn receives another name at birth in addition to his corresponding birth rank names, his birth rank name is usually placed before the other one to obtain a type of compound name. If circumstances are such that if a child is given no other name at birth (see 2.2–8) family or friends often add a nickname to the birth rank name, resulting once again in a compound name that is sufficiently

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uncommon to allow identification of the individual in his village. This compound name will be the one used by the person's social equals and superiors.

The birth rank name, alone or lengthened by the addition of the associated praise name, is the only personal name used by a superior in the greeting litany (Schottman, 1995). In other words, for this daily ritual, concerned more with social relations and hierarchy than with personal relations, the individual is addressed, respectfully, as a member of a specific birth rank category. In fact the lengthy greeting litany features the inferior's birth rank name alternating with his generation name, which serves more fully—and therefore more honourably—to identify him as a member of one of the two existing generation groups (see 2.9).

In order to allow a superior to address an inferior whose birth rank name he does not know, either while greeting him or in conversation, the name of the firstborn is used as a generic birth rank name. This is not due to any special status attached to the names of the firstborn son and firstborn daughter, but rather to the fact that they offer, statistically, the greatest chance of being the correct name.

2.2 A gratitude name: one element of requisite spirit worship

When a woman is unable to conceive, or has given birth to several children who have died young, she may decide to seek the help of a spirit. The spirit in this case is not considered to be at the origin of the procreative difficulties plaguing the family; the woman does not seek to appease the spirit, but rather humbly makes some offerings and requests its assistance. If the woman then becomes pregnant, she—and later on her grown child—will regularly return to the spirit's altar to express their gratitude and to assure for themselves the protection of its benedictions. This assiduous adoration of the spirit considered to have enabled the conception or the survival of the child is the principal condition to be met in order to assure oneself of the spirit's continuing vital assistance. A rather minor condition is that the child carry the spirit's name, the name of the object that houses the spirit or another name chosen by the spirit. This spirit name must be used regularly and the person who bears it also must observe some minor taboos.

Instead of addressing herself to a spirit, a childless woman may seek help from the soul of a deceased twin. If she then conceives and gives birth to a child, that child will be named *Bari*, a term used only under these circumstances and that has no etymological root in Baatɔnum.[5]

When a woman gives birth to a live child after an exceptionally difficult delivery, gratitude to God will be shown by bestowing a name

[5] The soul of a deceased twin is represented by an object made with a stick to which are attached bunches of cowries. The surviving twin carries this object at all times and cares for it. Twins are considered to be extraordinary, superior people whose prayers and maledictions are more powerful than those of ordinary people and whose soul has the power to help the living who come to it in difficulty.

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of the following type on the child: *Gusũnɔ̃ kĩ*, 'God desires (it)', *Gusũnɔ̃n bii*, 'God's child', or *Gusũnɔ̃ kĩro*, 'God's loved one'.

2.3 A name to mark a non-ominous departure from the norm

For the Baatɔmbu, a normal pregnancy consists of a nine-month gestation of a single child who is born head-first and expelled face-down. A normal child is born to a married couple, both still living and of normal reproductive age. Certain 'abnormalities' of gestation, delivery or early development are taken to be a sign that the baby is a witch. Such a dangerous source of unintentional harm to the family must be eliminated. This is done either by means of infanticide or by giving the newborn to neighbouring Fulani pastoralists who do not share the Baatɔmbu's beliefs, thus forming a category of slaves known as Gando or *machube*.[6]

Other deviations from the norm are tolerated, as they are not thought to be ominous. The Baatɔmbu do not consider the unusual circumstances of conception, gestation or birth in question to be a sign from the supernatural powers, nor do they believe that the child's destiny can be even partially determined by these circumstances. There is simply a feeling that this unusual entry into life will always be part of the individual and should therefore be recorded in the person's file, so to speak, by giving him or her the appropriate name. Here are a few names of this type:

Wãnĩ: a child born prematurely.[7]
Tɔkɔ Bɔra: 'He/She is the old person's friend': a child born of unusually old parents.
Suaku: a child conceived before the mother began to menstruate.
Sika: a child who is a twin. The name is added to the birth rank name of the child.
Gado: 'bed' in Hausa; the sibling born after twins. The Hausa believe that twins lie in the uterus on top of the child who is born after them. This younger sibling is therefore the twins' bed.
Bãnsu, 'ruins': a child whose mother died giving birth or whose father is no longer living. The child is born to an incomplete family, a family that is in ruins.

Although these names are automatically given to the newborn when circumstances call for it, they may well, contrary to the gratitude names discussed above, never be used. Whether a name of this type becomes the individual's usual name or not is decided by practical and euphonic factors. For example, if someone else in the neighbourhood or, *a fortiori*,

[6] The following are considered to be signs that the newborn is a witch: breech birth, a child that slides out on to its stomach at birth, a child born with teeth or with extreme birth defects, and a child born after only eight lunar months of gestation. A child whose first teeth appear in the upper gum is also identified as a witch baby (Sargent, 1989a: 5).

[7] The child must, however, be born after more than eight lunar months of gestation (see preceding note).

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in the homestead bears the same birth rank name as the baby, and if that name has become the person's usual name, the name referring to the child's atypical entrance into life is likely to become at least part of his usual name. The chances of this type of name being used increase if it is considered to sound good with the child's birth rank name or with any other name given to him at birth.

2.4 A circumstance name: acknowledgment of a sign from the supernatural powers

If a child is born in an unusual place, if it is born on a day of celebration or if its birth is concomitant with some more or less notable event, the timing of the events is not perceived as coincidental. The out-of-the-ordinary—but in no way abnormal—circumstances in question are taken to be a sign from the supernatural powers. Humans must acknowledge having perceived the sign and they do so by giving the appropriate name to the newborn child. For most of the circumstances in question a name already exists, but if the birth is concomitant with a unique event a circumstance name will be coined to fit this occasion.

The family feels no need to consult a diviner in order to determine which name is the adequate response, as has been observed among other African ethnic groups (Deluz, 1970: 75; Bonnet, 1981: 134; Bonvini, 1988: 219). Similarly, if a child falls ill the parents will not turn to a diviner to ascertain whether the illness is due to a poorly chosen response, i.e. to a poorly chosen name (Houis, 1963: 27, 39; Deluz, 1970: 76; Tonkin, 1980: 655; cf. Bonnet, 1981: 143; Parkin, 1989: 76). For the Baatɔmbu the message is clear and the appropriate response is obvious.

All of the following names, except the last two, are standard responses to circumstances perceived as notable but not extraordinary or unique.

1 Born in an unusual place:
Yakasu, 'bush': child born in the bush.
Swaa, 'road': child born during a trip.
2 Born on a notable day or in a notable period of the calendar:
Dɔ̃ɔ̃bu, 'fire' + nominal suffix: born during the month of *Dɔ̃ɔ̃Kɔ̃ru*, first month of the Muslim-based calendar used by the Baatɔnu, when a ritual involving fire is performed.
Gããnĩ: born during the month of Gããnĩ during which the ceremony of the same name is celebrated.
Sakoo, 'he who slaughters / slits throats': born during the Tabaski celebrations.
Mũku: born on a Pérédé market day in the traditional calendar based on the cycle of local markets.
Sãngo: a girl born on Sunday.
3 Born at the time of a notable event:
Deburu, 'the state of having eaten one's fill': born after an unusually good harvest.
Bonãn Nisi, 'Bona's co-wife': girl born the day her female relative

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Bona got married.
Bonãn Durɔ, 'Bona's husband': boy born the day his female relative Bona got married.
Dede: deformation of the French *deux deux:* born during the first elections in Bénin when people were requested to vote two by two, that is, *deux par deux*.
Ballot: born during Governor Ballot's visit to Africa.

In a few cases, a distinction is made by means of the tone pattern between the proper noun, here a name, and the common noun from which it is derived. You can observe a difference in the tone pattern for some of these names, depending on whether it is used for designating a boy or a girl.

The act of naming is in this case an essential element of the on-going dialogue between humans and the spirit world. This vital segment of communication is saved from oblivion in a simple and efficient manner: as a name it is not only permanently attached to the person most concerned but also brought into the domain of daily speech.

In fact, whether a circumstance name is actually adopted for daily use depends once again on practical and euphonic factors, as was explained for the preceding category of names (2.3). Those circumstance names, however, that acknowledge a sign of a particularly favourable entry into life are quite sure to become at least part of the individual's most generally used name.

When the child's birth coincides with a bad omen, such as a fire or a drought, a different form of acknowledgment is chosen: the family will consult a diviner or a member of a spirit cult to establish how the concerned powers should be appeased. The child will not be given a circumstance name in such a case, as no one desires to perpetuate the memory of such an inauspicious beginning to life.[8]

2.5 A stranger name: commemoration of the providential encounter of two individuals' paths

A newborn child can receive what I will call a 'stranger name' if an individual comes along just after the delivery and 'claims' the baby. A passer-by can claim only a child of the opposite sex. A man will say, *Nɛ̃n kurɔwa*, 'She is my wife,' and a woman will proclaim, *Nɛ̃n durɔwa*, 'He is my husband.' If the passer-by is a man called *Tãmũ* the baby will bear the name *Tãmũn Kuro*, 'Tamu's Wife'. If a male baby is claimed by a woman named *Bonã* he will be called *Bonãn Durɔ*, 'Bona's Husband'.

[8] This is what Akinnaso (1980: 283) refers to as 'the positive sanction principle': the Yoruba eliminate any 'negatively sanctioned' home contexts such as witchcraft, poverty or disability from personal names, considering that a person's name plays a role in his or her destiny and that bearing such a name may have unfortunate results. This principle is not universally applied: the Basotho and amaXhosa of South Africa can give to an illegitimate child a name expressing abhorrence of his parents' deviant sexual behaviour, thus obliging the child to live with 'a perpetual reminder of the unfortunate circumstances of his birth' (Thipa, 1987: 112).

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The passer-by must be a *sɔɔ*, 'stranger', that is, someone who does not belong to the child's paternal or maternal family. He could be a neighbour who knows the family well or a complete stranger from another village, perhaps even from another country and belonging to a different ethnic group. The person who claims the child gives the parents a symbolic sum of money. Traditionally three cowries were paid for a boy and four cowries for a girl.[9]

If a chief happens to pass through a village when a woman has just given birth, he will not make a detour to see the newborn child. When he is informed of the event he can, if he so desires, claim the child by pronouncing the usual 'She's my wife' in the case of a baby girl or by proclaiming *Nɛ̃n bɔrɔwa*, 'He's my friend,' if the newborn is a boy. In the latter case the child will take the chief's *gɔɔbiru*, his prestigious inherited title name (see 2.7 and 4.1).

It is thought that the successful delivery of the child, and thus an auspicious beginning of his life, has taken place under the good omen of the stranger's presence. If this fortuitous encounter is given recognition and saved from oblivion by the stranger claiming, and thus naming, the child it is hoped that the child will benefit fully from the stranger's good fortune and lead an equally good life. This explains why the stranger must be an adult who is perceived as having lived a respectable life in order for the parents actually to validate his or her claim by using the ensuing stranger name for their child.

Symbolically buying a newborn child in this manner entails no obligations for either party: the providential encounter of the two individuals' lives is recognised and given form and substance through a brief, simple naming ceremony, after which the stranger continues on his way.

2.6 A slave name: seal of a fictive sale meant to divert malevolent spirits

When a child is born of a woman who has given birth to several other children none of whom has survived, the family can decide to react by implementing a plan aimed at ensuring the survival of the newborn child. A fictive sale of the infant will be carried out in order to dissociate the child from its family, plagued by infant mortality. By selling the child the family also sells the child's soul, removing it from the grip that malevolent spirits obviously have on the souls of all the newborn children of the family.

The newborn baby will be placed either on a refuse heap or in a large calabash. In the latter case an adult member of the family will load the

[9] This association of the number three with males and the number four with females is observed in many Baatɔnu rituals and has been noted for other West African ethnic groups (Zahan, 1963: 53, 161; Calame-Griaule 1987: 33, 533–5, 196). The two explanations I was given for this symbolism refer to physiological differences. When a girl is excised the wound requires four months to heal, whereas the incision made to circumcise a boy heals in three months. Alternatively, one can oppose the four elements of which a female's genitals are composed (two large labia and two small) to the three elements of the male genitals.

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calabash on his or her head and walk through the village announcing, 'Here is a slave for sale.' Someone who lives in the village but who is not related to the child, or someone visiting or just passing through, agrees to 'buy' the child for a symbolic sum, traditionally three cowries for a boy and four for a girl.[10]

In most cases the child will be named 'Slave of so-and-so'. If the redeemer is called *Kpera*, for example, the child will bear the name *Kperan Yo*, 'Kpera's Slave'. It is also possible for the child to become the redeemer's direct namesake or to be given a name chosen by the redeemer and never used before in the child's family.

This sale, sealed more by the name that dissociates the child from its family than by the money exchanged, entails for the family a few small obligations towards the redeemer that vary from one region to another. No long-lasting relationship is established between the so-called slave and the person who bought him: the Baatɔmbu consider that Providence sent this person in response to the steps taken by the family to save their child.

According to my informants, slave names are not very frequent among the Baatɔmbu. If, as Retel-Laurentin and Horvath (1972) suggest, the various themes evoked in personal names in Africa are a good indication of the anxieties of any given ethnic group, one would have to conclude that the Baatɔmbu are not much preoccupied with infant mortality. In fact it would seem necessary first to determine the powers imputed to names and the exact circumstances that are considered to allow or justify attributing them. It is probable that names to divert malevolent spirits are infrequent among the Baatɔmbu primarily because the slave name is the only type of name they consider capable of doing so. One does not encounter, for instance, a type of name used by many African ethnic groups in this situation that designates the child as a worthless or despicable object ('garbage', 'manure', 'broken calabash', 'trouble'), based either on the belief that one can thus divert the evil spirits (Journet, 1981: 112; Kintz, 1986: 34; Arensen, 1988: 126; Palau Marti, 1992: 100–1; Parkin, 1989: 65) or on the belief that such a name will spite the child into living so as to prove that it is worth something (Isichei, 1978: 334–5). Neither does one find names of the type used by the Sabe in response to infant mortality, names that are an appeal to the child's good will and reason ('Don't-leave-any-more'), thought to be a factor in his fate (Palau Marti, 1973: 325), or such names as 'Death-makes-you-miserable' (Agblemagnon, 1984: 85) or 'Suffer-uselessly' (Retel-Laurentin and Horvath, 1972: 67) that express the family's anger and determination to triumph over death. Not only do the Baatɔmbu recognise but one type of name as an efficient means of increasing the newborn's chances of survival, they have recourse to a fictive sale sealed by a new name only after the early death of several siblings. This contrasts sharply with the use of various

[10] See the preceding note.

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types of name meant to ward off death among the Nzakara, for example, as these names may be given to a newborn even in the absence of unfortunate antecedents in the family, merely as a preventive measure (Retel-Laurentin and Horvath, 1972: 58).

2.7 An inherited commoner title name

A child of the commoner category can inherit at birth the name of a deceased member of the family. This type of name is called a *gɔɔbiru*, although certain informants claimed that this usage was not correct. They considered that the term should be used only for a name inherited at a mature age by someone who has given proof of his or her merit (see 4.1). The word *gɔɔbiru* is composed of *gɔɔ*, 'death', and *biru*, 'back (noun); after'. It is a name that is perpetuated after the death of, i.e. in the back of, its bearer.

If an elderly person of the commoner category dies and a child of the same sex is born in his or her extended family during the first or second funeral ceremonies, the newborn will most probably inherit the deceased's name. The child is considered to be not a reincarnation of the defunct relative but rather his or her potential social and spiritual replacement. It is also possible, but less frequent, for a commoner to inherit a name even if his birth does not coincide with funeral ceremonies. The newborn could inherit the name of a deceased paternal grandparent—either a direct grandparent, i.e. a parent's parent, or an indirect grandparent, a sibling or cousin of one of the former. Sometimes the name of a deceased paternal aunt or uncle is inherited. But you cannot inherit your father's name.

If a satisfactory name is not found on the paternal side of the family, candidates from the maternal side will be examined. Indeed, the deceased must meet certain standards so that his or her name will be a desirable inheritance. Someone who died before reaching the mature age of approximately 40 years, who had succumbed to a serious illness, committed suicide or had not led a respectable life will not be taken into consideration.

A selection is thus carried out by means of these names, a selection of the morally and physically fittest individuals that benefits the newborn and the entire family. The memory of these exemplary members of the family is perpetuated for the good of all, living on with the younger members who bear the names. The chances of a commoner leading a long and respectable life are improved when he or she inherits such a name at birth, for the namesake serves as a model. The person who receives the name is encouraged to put the moral and spiritual character of his inheritance to good use.

It is probable that this type of name, used only by the autochthonous commoners, should be analysed with reference to a belief, widespread in Africa, that grandparents, or at least their souls or vital energy, somehow relive in their grandchildren. These names are therefore quite distinct from inherited title names (4.1), undoubtedly of Wasangari origin, despite the same term (*gɔɔbiru*) being used for both as a result of the linguistic assimilation of the immigrant aristocrats.

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2.8 A joking spouse name given by a grandparent

A joking relationship exists between Baatɔnu children and their indirect grandparents, i.e. the numerous siblings and cousins of their direct grandparents. A sense of extreme, imposing intimacy and a certain degree of equality should be displayed by the members of these two generations, one of which replaces the other with time, and this is done through ritual joking. One type of joke consists in addressing one's grandparent of the opposite sex as 'my wife' or 'my husband'. This fictive spouse relationship allows a little boy to joke with his grandmother by saying, 'Prepare yourself, because I'm coming to sleep with you this evening,' or 'What have you prepared for me to eat?'[11]

As soon as the birth of a child is announced, one of its grandparents of the opposite sex can come to greet the newborn and say, 'He's my husband,' or 'She's my wife.' If the grandfather who comes is called *Yerîmã*, the baby will have the name *Yerîmãn Kurɔ*, 'Yerima's Wife'. If a grandmother named *Bake* claims her newborn grandson as her husband, he will bear the name *Baken Durɔ*, 'Bake's Husband'.

The Baatɔmbu are very fond of this type of name, for two reasons. First, the mother can use this type of name even with her first or second child, whereas she would be criticised for lacking *sekuru*, 'shame', i.e. for being disgracefully immodest,[12] if she used the child's other names. When she addresses her son or refers to him as 'Bake's Husband' it can be considered that she is participating in a beneficial collective joke; if, however, she were to call her son by his birth rank name or his birth circumstance name she would be perceived as shamelessly calling attention to her new status of parent, of which she clearly cannot yet be worthy at her young age. So the joking name offers one way to circumvent this *sekuru*-based name taboo that concerns mostly young mothers but also, to a lesser extent, young fathers. In fact, since there is also a *sekuru*-based taboo on using one's parents' names (that is, one's mother's and father's name, but also the names of their siblings and cousins), a variation on the joking name must be used. Thus the young, duly respectful and modest parents will not call their firstborn by her name, 'Bake's Husband', but rather will use a descriptive term such as *Yaayin Durɔ*, 'Mother's Husband', thus avoiding the name 'Bake', which refers to their mother.[13] Other variations on joking spouse names

[11] For a study of the various types of joking relationship practised by the Baatɔmbu see Schottman (1998).

[12] *Sekuru* can refer to a virtuous 'shame' or a dreaded 'shame'. The former, which can be called *seku geeru*, 'good *sekuru*', is a mixture of inhibiting modesty, reserve and humility that must be displayed in any situation of social inferiority. 'Real' *sekuru* is a formidable, unbearable shame that can be brought on by poverty, incompetence or any asocial behaviour.

[13] This and other name taboos are found in their 'mildest' form among the Baatɔmbu: name avoidance is not extended to the homonyms of the relatives concerned (cf. Kintz, 1986, on the Fulani), nor is the use of similar-sounding words forbidden (cf. Herbert, 1990, on 'respect through avoidance' as practised by the Nguni, speaking a south-eastern Bantu language).

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would be descriptive names of the type *Yaayi Sasɔn Durɔ*, 'Husband of the Mother from Sasɔ', *Delegen Kurɔ*, 'Delegate's Wife', or *Sunɔ̃n Kurɔ*, 'Chief's Wife'. It is possible for a descriptive term of this type to acquire the status of a personal name, perhaps even replacing the original joking name it is based on, if for practical, euphonic or other reasons it becomes widely used.

The second reason for the popularity of this type of joking name is that it serves as a reminder of the existence of the special joking relationship that unites alternate generations, and this relationship is a source of pride and pleasure. The grandparent whose name is featured in the joking name is clearly identified, each time the name is used, as someone who has succeeded in procreating two generations of descendants. At the same time, grandparents, by giving and then using this type of name, can express their pride in their grandchildren. The name thus offers a means of subtle, indirect praise giving, not only for the two fictive spouses but for anyone in the community who cares to use the name. The fact that, at least traditionally, only indirect grandparents could be the origin of a joking name of this type deserves explanation. In the same way that it is considered shameless for young parents to use the name of their firstborn, a grandparent who proclaimed the existence of his direct grandchildren by giving one of them a joking spouse name would be condemned for lacking *sekuru*, 'modesty'. If, on the other hand, he displays in this manner his pride in his brother's or cousin's child, the joke is all to his honour.

2.9 Two non-personal, category praise names

Each Baatɔnu belongs to one of two alternating generations and to a patrilineal clan. The two generations are named *Wure* and *Kpai*. A boy whose father belongs to the *Wure* generation will be a member of the *Kpai* generation, and his children will be of the next *Wure* generation.

The terms designating a person's generation and his or her clan are considered to be not *yĩsiru* 'names' but *tɔ̃mãru*, a nominal derivative of the verb *tɔ̃mã*, 'to praise'. Indeed, these terms are used by praise singers and also by a superior when greeting an inferior. In both cases the use of the category names attests to the speaker's detailed knowledge of his addressee's place in his family and in his society, knowledge that one retains only for those worthy of such attention. These two category names deserve mention here alongside personal names for two reasons.

First, these collective, category names are sometimes added to a personal name to form a compound name that can become the person's usual name. Second, as I mentioned in the overview, categorically to oppose Baatɔnu personal and collective names does not seem justified, as personal names such as the birth rank name (2.1) or the baptism name (3.1) are also identifying the individual as a member of a specific category of people who share the same essence. All members of the *Wure* generation share a certain essence that differentiates them from all those who are *Kpai*. The *Wure* generation is considered slightly superior to the *Kpai* generation and this explains the choice of *Wure* as the

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generic generation name, to be used by a superior in the greeting litany, for example.

It is, indeed, suitable that members of alternate generations of a descent group resemble each other, for, as we saw in 2.8, grandchildren are considered to be their grandparents' replacements; there are only two socially active generations at any one time, one *Wure* and one *Kpai*. This concept of a cycle of two generations underlies the ritual joking relationship that binds members of the two *Wure* (or the two *Kpai*) generations.

For the Wasangari, generation names allow members of two contiguous generations to be kept distinct, ensuring that title names of power (cf. 4.1) are first passed on to members of the older generation.

3 NAMES THAT CAN BE RECEIVED AS A YOUTH

3.1 The baptismal name of a young noble

Each Baatɔnu of the noble category, i.e. each Wasangari, should receive a *kɔ̃nĩ̃ yĩ̃siru*, 'baptismal name', preferably between the age of reason, situated at age 7 or 8, and adulthood. This new name marks the young person's elevation to a new status, and his or her child names must no longer be used.

Kɔ̃nĩ̃ yĩ̃siru literally means 'shaving name'. Indeed, the young noble's head is shaved during the name-giving ceremony. The baptism takes place in the chiefdom, during the annual Gaani ceremony, high point of the year for the Wasangari.

The name is chosen by *Yɔ̃ Kogi*, a classificatory sister of the supreme chief, from among the names borne by now deceased members of the paternal family. Preferably a name used by someone of the grandparents' generation is selected; giving a name borne by someone of the parents' generation is avoided so as to respect the natural cycle of two generations.

One important criterion in choosing a baptismal name is the colour of the person's skin. It is also possible, if the young person is a boy, to be guided by a possible resemblance between the person's temperament and that of one of the animals that serve as emblems of certain baptismal names for boys.

Preference is given to a name that is considered to sound good with the birth rank name, as the latter will generally precede the baptismal name and thus form a compound name. Certain baptismal names are already coupled with a specific birth rank name, owing to the historical celebrity of a certain individual carrying that specific compound name. The young Wasangari who receives one of these baptismal names will automatically take on the corresponding, fictive birth rank name.

A resemblance that is noticed between the young Wasangari who is to be baptised and a respected deceased member of the preferably paternal family can be a basis for choosing the name of the deceased. The eponym's honourable behaviour will serve to guide and inspire the young Wasangari throughout his adult life. In former times this aspect

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TABLE 3. The baptismal names suitable for each complexion type

Complexion type	For a girl	For a boy
Light	*Gãnnĩgii*	*Yaaru* (emblem: the buffalo)
	Yãki	*Dafia* (emblem: the camel)
	Kpaayɛ̃ro	*Kɔɔra* (emblem: the river Niger, known by the same name)
Dark	*Yĩĩre*	*Gbagiri*
		Mɔ̃ɔ̃ra (emblem: *guru baru*, a plant with large leaves)
Intermediate	*Bɛrɛkɛgii*	*Sero* (emblem: fire)
	Due	*Saka* (emblem: the crane)
	Mãnũ	*Sɛnɔ̃*
	Garia	
Two shades and ugly	*Kpalɔ̃mɛ̃*	*Tassigii* (emblem: the hyena)

Notes

When the name has an emblem it is indicated in parentheses after the name. I was able to find a meaning or origin for only three of these names: *Yãki*, 'clear, neat, clear-cut'; *Yĩĩre*, the name given to the third-born girl in Bambara, and *Mãnũ*, a boys' name among the Hausa and the Kanuri.

of the baptismal name was quite important to those Wasangari near the summit of the political hierarchy, for if the supreme chief's sister bestowed a powerful baptismal name on a young boy, a name that had belonged to a successful, powerful Wasangari, this was meant to confer on him a definite spiritual and political advantage. At present, baptising a young Wasangari is more a social than a spiritual act. By ceremoniously bestowing a baptismal name on a child—a name that is nowadays selected by the family—the supreme chief's sister gives her blessing to the aspirations that the type of noble name epitomises and thus imparts to the child the strength he will need not to disappoint the society in which he lives.

As with birth rank names, one finds highly emotionally charged names associated with baptismal names. Such names are used mostly by *griots* to sing the person's praise. Most of these praise names have no meaning in Baatɔnum, but I was able to identify a number of them as personal names or nouns, designating an esteemed character trait or the emblem animal in Hausa, Bambara or Zerma.

3.2 A joking nickname

An individual can acquire a *bɔrɔkɔ̃ru yĩsiru*, 'jokester (in Dendi) name', anywhere from the age of reason, i.e. from 7 or 8 years of age, to old age, but most names of this type are acquired during a person's youth. A joking nickname is often given by a ritual joking partner who is a cross-cousin or an indirect grandparent, but can also be given by a friend or, more rarely, by a superior. This is the only type of name that an individual can also bestow on him or herself.

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Those Baatɔnu joking nicknames that make reference to a genuine character defect or to a reprehensible act committed by the individual serve as a form of indirect discipline. A rebuke thus expressed cannot easily be brushed off, because it is broadcast daily through the use of the nickname. In addition, the person being chided in this manner has no choice but to be amenable and co-operative with the name giver, as the invention and use of such nicknames is just a healthy, socially encouraged 'joke'.[14] In this way nicknames, as Parkin points out, are used 'to shape the identities of others' or, in the case of self-naming, to allow people to 'carve out their own identities'.

Most joking nicknames are unique, as they are coined with reference to a specific event in the individual's life or a tendency observed in his behaviour. The following examples clearly illustrate the allusive quality of such names. As Siran (1989: 213) concisely states, the meaning of these incomplete statements is 'not in the words, but in their relationship to a situation' and we must therefore be aware of the original context of the message to understand it.

Kusu, 'Partridge'. During a hunt the young man in question had failed to catch a partridge despite most favourable conditions.
Yaru, 'Sheep'. The young man thus named had stolen a sheep. He had been made to walk around the village displaying the stolen animal.
Kũnã Mɔ̃di, 'Black Cat'. This name refers both to the person's dark complexion and to his habit, in youth, of walking around at night.

3.3 A proverb name

This type of personal name consists in a well established proverb or, more often, the first part of a proverb, the remainder being easily inferred.

Among the Baatɔmbu only people of servant status, either servants of one of the spirit cults or royal servants, are given proverb names. A servant's proverb name is an impersonal message addressed, depending on the type of servant, by the possessing spirit or the supreme chief to any members of the community who feel it concerns them; it is a capsule of irrefutable wisdom formulated by the ancestors that will be borne inextricably by the messenger for the rest of his or her life. This message is thus broadcast wherever the messenger may go, and is meant to help people lead a morally better life. Any reasonable adult will listen attentively to proverb names, reflect and then modify his or her behaviour if the moral lesson of the proverb pertains to him. The

[14] As I have pointed out elsewhere (Schottman 1998) the terms of the Baatɔnu joking relationship (*gɔnnaru*) designate the indirect grandparents and cross-cousins respectively as the ideal sources of education and social censorship. The Baatɔnu who criticises his cross-cousin, directly or indirectly, is protected by a diplomatic immunity of sorts, and the grandparent finds the transmission of his knowledge to his 'replacement' facilitated by the joking equality and lack of 'shame' that unite them.

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acquisition of this new name that aspires to serve the community, and the obligatory abandonment of all former names, mark the passage of the individual to a new subservient status.

A proverb name can be used by the Baatɔmbu to address a personal message, but in that case it will be bestowed on a dog (Schottman, 1993). This is a strategic means of addressing a criticism or warning, for when the head of the household names his dog 'Humans-are-difficult', for example, no on-the-record reproach has been addressed to the neighbour concerned. Yet everyone who overhears him calling his dog is perfectly aware that it is a response to the neighbour's conduct, and a solution will be sought.[15]

3.3.1 The proverb name of a servant of a spirit cult

When a Baatɔnu becomes an adept of a spirit possession cult he or she may, depending both on the cult and on their status in it, receive a new name. Three collective spirit cults are practised by the Baatɔmbu, two of foreign origin and one of Baatɔnu commoner origin. People initiated into the cult of Songhai origin do not change names. Those who join the Nago[16] cult receive a new name that appears to be a proverb in Nago or an esoteric form of Nago that is incomprehensible to the majority of Baatɔmbu. I will deal here only with the names given to certain adepts—those of servant status—of the *sãmbãnĩ* cult, the native and dominant spirit cult, which is practised throughout Baatɔnu territory.

Both men and women become *sãmbãnĩ* adepts and all the sub-groups of the Baatɔnu community are represented (Wasangari nobles, commoners, Gando and Fulani). The large majority of adepts of this cult, however, are women of the commoner category and I will therefore, to simplify expression, refer to 'woman' and 'she'. A woman who has fallen ill, being possessed by a spirit of this cult, will be laid down on a mat in the kitchen to spend the night there. During the night a spirit will come and shave her head. If the woman's head is entirely shaved, it indicates that she belongs among the higher ranking members of the cult. If the spirit shaves only half the person's head it is a sign that the new adept is a *Biɔn kiriku*, 'Biɔ's servant'. *Biɔ*, the name given to the firstborn son among the nobles, here refers to God. In this latter case, the spirit who possesses the *kiriku* (this shortened form is generally used), will communicate the adept's new name to her during the night. The person's former names must not be used, lest the spirit, offended, exact retribution.

The following proverb names illustrate the comprehensive character of the message transmitted, allowing a broad spectrum of reprehensible behaviour to be addressed:

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[15] See Samarin (1965), Kaboré (1982), Bonvini (1985), and Koopman (1992) for a similar use of proverb-type dog names.

[16] This term is of French colonial invention and refers to the group of Yoruba origin living in the central part of Benin, just south of the Baatɔmbu.

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A n gisɔ yɛ̃. The complete proverb is *A n gisɔ yɛ̃, a n⋆ sia yɛ̃*, 'If you know today, you don't know tomorrow,' that is, you may be aware of the present but you don't know what the future will bring.
Ya duura. The complete proverb is *Ye a duura, ya nũn kpia*, 'Whatever you sow, that is what will grow for you,' which means that you get what you deserve in life.
A mɔ̃ yiru. This is a shortened form of *A mɔ̃ yiru, kpa a mãn tia kɛ̃*, 'If you have two, give me one,' a proverb which urges people to be charitable.
Tɔ̃nu sɛ̃. 'Man is difficult,' therefore you must learn to be patient and tolerant in life.
Gemã sɛ̃. 'It's truth that is difficult,' but you must be courageous and face it.

The people who carry these messages, that is, the adepts, have been chosen by the spirit which inhabits them for their courage, confidence, self-control and public presence (Sargent, 1982: 81–2). They are outgoing members of the community who have gained prestige owing to their cult membership and the powers of divination conferred on them by the spirit they possess. As far as women are concerned, belonging to a spirit cult is one of the few means at their disposal to become truly respected and influential members of society (Sargent, 1989b: 212). Only the foolhardy would not reflect on the message conveyed by these proverb names, a message formulated by the ancestors, sent by the supernatural and carried by powerful messengers.

3.3.2 The proverb name of a royal servant

The supreme chief of Nikki has a certain number of *kiriku*, 'servants'. They are people who were chosen at an early age from a Gando village under his rule. Traditionally the inhabitants of the village were slaves and captives. These royal *kiriku* receive the same type of proverb name as the cult *kiriku* when they take on their new status. In their case it is the supreme chief who chooses the new name and thus addresses a message of wisdom to those he rules.

4 NAMES THAT CAN BE RECEIVED DURING ADULTHOOD

4.1 A gɔɔbiru: an inherited title name

Lombard (1965: 302) wrote of the Baatɔnu institution of *gɔɔbiru*, 'It was of highest ethnological interest due to the richness of its complexity, but also to the fact that it was, to the best of my knowledge, unique in sub-Saharan Africa.'[17] Wasangari title names, which can be placed in several categories according to their mode of transmission and the privileges attached to them (Lombard, 1965: 302–19), traditionally played an essential role in the political life of the community. There are also two types of commoner *gɔɔbiru*: those given

[17] 'Elle avait par sa richesse et sa complexité, mais aussi, du moins à notre connaissance, par son caractère unique en Afrique Noire, un très grand intérêt ethnologique.'

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to hunters and those used by others. The institution of *gɔɔbiru* is almost exclusively masculine, as women were virtually absent from the traditional political scene and have never participated in hunting. A *gɔɔbiru* is, as we will see, a mark of achieved status and, as Sargent (1982: 45) points out, 'a woman's status in general . . . is ascribed rather than achieved'. One of the few title names inherited by women is that of *Yɔ̃ Kogi*, detained by a classificatory 'sister' of the supreme chief. Her important function during the 'baptism' of young noble children was described above (3.1).

All three types of *gɔɔbiru* are inherited during the second funeral ceremony. In principle, this final and much more elaborate ceremony takes place several months after the death, but in practice it often requires many more years for the family to put aside the necessary finance. The deceased's inheritance, including his name, is settled only on the occasion of this second ceremony, after which his soul will finally rest in peace.

The *gɔɔbi*, i.e. the person who inherits the name, will generally be at least 40 years old and will have led a life such that his family and the community are convinced that he is capable of following the deceased's good example. To bear a *gɔɔbiru* is a much sought-after honour, for, although it is certain that the *gɔɔbi* prolongs the memory of the deceased, he is at the same time assured that his own memory will be perpetuated: he becomes part of a type of immortal essence of an exemplary human that lives on through a succession of carefully selected mortals of one descent group.[18] The exemplary traits characteristic of the *gɔɔbiru* in question provide a spiritual and moral guideline that benefits the individual and through him the extended family.

The *gɔɔbi* cannot be the deceased's son. He will be chosen from among the cousins, nephews and younger brothers of the defunct individual. A child who has been brought up by his paternal uncle, which is a common practice, stands a good chance of becoming his uncle's *gɔɔbi* if he shows himself worthy of such an honour. Indeed, this indirect transmission of a *gɔɔbiru* is favoured by the family, as those who bear the name then belong to a larger descent group, and that augments the prestige of the name. Another advantage of the indirect mode of transmission is that bonds between collateral relatives are strengthened. The importance of this aspect of the institution of *gɔɔbiru* is not to be underestimated in a society that is characterised, according to Lombard (1965: 60), by political instability, the great fragility of the central source of power and a multiplicity of conflicts and territorial scissions.

When people inherit a title name their other names must no longer be used. The child names, i.e. those received at birth or during youth, must be discarded, and if the person has a Wasangari baptismal name

[18] Lombard (1965: 306) states that the Baatɔnu inherited title name allows the soul of the deceased to be reincarnated. This concept was unanimously rejected by my informants.

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the latter is replaced by the *gɔɔbiru* and becomes available to a deserving young member of the family who has not yet been baptised.

The institution of *gɔɔbiru* is probably of Baatɔnu commoner origin and existed before the Wasangari came from the east and settled in Borgu. The hunters of the commoner category were the ones who most needed the spiritual help that could be provided by an inherited title name. A deserving hunter can inherit one of the three hunter *gɔɔbiru*: 'chief of the hunt', 'chief of the small hunt' or 'chief of the big hunt'. The *gɔɔbi* must be a hunter of irreproachable behaviour and, even more important, a person who is known for his occult powers, perceived as indispensable to ensure the protection of the hunters and the success of collective hunts.

In addition to the above *gɔɔbiru*, which are specific to hunters, a Baatɔnu commoner can 'find' (*wa*) a non-specific title name in his paternal family if he is a good farmer and hunter. However, a *gɔɔbiru* will not be passed on to a descendant who is counted among the oldest people in the village: the new *gɔɔbi* should have a sufficient number of active years still ahead of him to be able to perform acts that will bring honour to the title name he bears.

Commoner *gɔɔbiru* are names of diverse types that have acquired the status of title names owing to the exemplary lives of the individuals who originally were given the name in question. If a Baatɔnu commoner leads a dishonourable life, not only will his name not become an inherited title name, but it will disappear from circulation as a proper name for several generations, tainted by association with a disreputable individual.

Each branch of each Wasangari dynasty has a certain number of *gɔɔbiru* that are borne by its members. The title names, and through them those to whom they are attributed, are organised in a hierarchy. In fact the primary function of the noble, Wasangari title name is to define the hierarchy of candidates for the various positions of power or prestige. In certain provinces the highest-ranking *gɔɔbiru* corresponded in pre-colonial days to a position of territorial command, while in others, including Nikki, the most highly selective *gɔɔbiru* were purely honorary. Formerly, competition to obtain the most 'powerful' (spiritually or politically) *gɔɔbiru* was intense. A Wasangari with a 'little' title name will ideally inherit a more prestigious one, the former title name then being passed on to a young brother or a deserving descendant.

Traditionally the hierarchy of noble *gɔɔbiru* evolved with time according to the destinies of those who bore them. Bravery during raids or war, other exploits and, of course, becoming a local chief or the supreme chief of one of the three chiefdoms enhance the value of the title name. At present the Wasangari hierarchies are relatively static and the exploits susceptible of modifying them are of the same nature as those taken into account for Baatɔnu commoners: proving oneself to be a hard-working, generous, respected individual who is exempt of devious behaviour.

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Griots play an important role in the process of acquiring renown for one's *gɔɔbiru*, whether of the noble or of the commoner type. Not only does the praise singer cite the exemplary behaviour of the person who at present bears the title name, he also enumerates the exploits of the long series of eponyms. Hiring the services of a *griot* is also the best way to ensure that one's reputation, and therefore one's *gɔɔbiru*, benefit fully from such strategically public gestures of generosity as making a donation to the poor or to those who are organising funeral ceremonies and therefore have a considerable number of people to house and feed.

Formerly, strangers travelling through a village would address themselves to the person bearing the most powerful *gɔɔbiru* to be housed, fed and, above all, protected from attacks. Villagers would seek out the same person to resolve conflicts, as a *gɔɔbi* is a symbol of strength and irreproachable morality.

Although the institution of *gɔɔbiru* is still very present, it no longer has the repercussions and the depth that it formerly had. The extremely complex system of Wasangari title names, intimately tied up with the transmission of royal power, has probably suffered more than most other domains of traditional culture, owing to the transfer of power that came about during the colonial period. As for the commoner title names, which originally were closely bound up with the dangers of big game hunting and the renown that one could achieve by killing lions and buffalo, the present system is also a much impoverished version of the original.

4.2 A teknonym or similar category name

A Baatɔnu teknonym has the form *X-n Baa*, 'X's father', or *X-n Yaayi*, 'X's mother'. We can include here names in the form of category terms such as *Yaayi Tɔkɔ*, 'Old Mother', or *Baa Yari*, 'Father Yari', this last being a clan name, for a Baatɔnu teknonym corresponds not with the biological status of genitor but with the social status of caretaker.

At first a teknonym is merely a descriptive and respectful way of referring to or addressing an adult. It is only with time that one of the various teknonymic terms used of an individual may acquire the status of a proper name if many people come to use it regularly. In general it is either children who adopt this type of name for an uncle or aunt, or a wife who gets into the habit of referring to and addressing her husband in this manner as a sign of respectful shame.[19] This explains why men have a teknonym more often than women.

[19] The same *sekuru*, 'shame', that inhibits the well brought-up mother from using the name of her first and second children is at play here: using her husband's name would be a 'shameless', i.e. immodest, display of the intimate relationship that she has with him. A respectful woman therefore addresses her husband with *wũnɛ̃*, 'you', or *Baa*, 'Father'. A teknonym is allowed on condition that it designates the husband as the father not of one of her own children but of another child brought up in the homestead. The mother often chooses the child of one of the father's brothers for this purpose.

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A Baatɔnu does not automatically receive a teknonym when he or she becomes a parent, as is the custom among other ethnic groups (Needham, 1954; Thipa, 1987: 116; Parkin, 1989: 82). A Baatɔnu teknonym does not replace an individual's other names, for it is not given as a consecration of a newly acquired status, nor is the precise form it takes rule-governed, although it is considered preferable to describe someone as the father or mother of a niece or nephew, rather than using the name of their own child. Like the joking spouse name (2.8), this type of name allows people to circumvent shame-based taboos on using the names of certain people and also affords a means of indirectly and very economically praising those who are thus publicly identified as having obtained classificatory (if not biological) parent status.

5 CONCLUSION

The absence among the Baatɔmbu of the frequently observed waiting period before a name is bestowed on a child, whether it be until the umbilical cord falls off (Zahan, 1963: 83; Kasongo,1988: 143) or some other culturally determined period (Middleton, 1961: 34; Akinnaso, 1980: 277; Journet, 1981: 105; Siran, 1989: 208; Palau Marti, 1992: 93; Gaillard and Starzman, 1995: 107), does not imply that social recognition of the newborn is immediate and unconditional. Sargent (1989a: 117) states that for the Baatɔmbu 'there seem to be progressive phases of recognition of the child as a permanent member of society, key among which is the appearance of teeth. Both mothers and fathers state that they await the appearance of teeth anxiously to determine the future of the child and, in fact, to identify the child's essence—human or witch substance.' If the birth name (or names) are attributed to all non-witch babies immediately after birth, it is simply because there is no choice to make. There is no need to consult a diviner to determine the correct name for the child, no need to observe the child to ascertain which name suits him best, and no need to wait out the initial period of isolation to see whether the child is meant to survive; it is the circumstances of the child's conception and birth that bestow his first set of names on him, in a rule-governed manner. There is no namegiver, in the sense of someone who has the prerogative of selecting among available names or inventing a name, as the case may be, and there is no naming ceremony.

Each newborn is perceived as a unique individual having the specific chance in life that corresponds to the cross-categorisation symbolised by his set of allotted birth names. Inauspicious circumstances are neutralised through sacrifices, only the neutral and auspicious ones being retained through names. Some of the names attributed at birth catch on and become the person's generally used name, while others remain passive elements not used for reference or address. Two types of birth name, however, are sure to be used regularly: gratitude names and slave names. In the first case the child's birth is the result of the mother's active intervention to modify the spectre of an unfavourable

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Providence. The mother and child owe eternal gratitude to the spirit who has come to their assistance, and exclusive use of the spirit-designated name is one of their obligations. A slave name signs a different type of intervention organised by parents not willing merely to note passively the circumstances of their child's entry into life. By selling the child they have modified his chances in life and the regular use of his slave name substantiates the sale.

Ideally this original set of what could be called 'orthodox' names, as opposed to informal names, as defined below,[20] will be replaced in the course of the individual's lifetime by another orthodox name, corresponding to an achieved social and spiritual status. The birth names that most clearly function as collective names, however, continue to be used: the birth rank name is used in combination with the baptismal name, and both the birth rank name and the generation name, to the exclusion of all other names, appear in the greeting routine and praise singing.

When one compares this change from one orthodox name to another with the acquisition of a series of names by Chinese men (Watson, 1986) or by the Murle (Arensen, 1988) or the Penan (Needham, 1954) throughout their lifetime, what sets the Baatɔmbu apart is that the new names are not bestowed to mark any of the various clearly defined social or biological stages of life: childhood, adulthood, parenthood and elderhood. For the Chinese 'the possession of many names testifies to the fact that a man has completed the cycle of life' (Watson, 1986: 629). A Baatɔnu teknonym or joking spouse name could be analysed as having this function but not a *gɔɔbiru* or noble baptismal name. These names correspond not to a stage in life but to a social validation of what the individual has achieved with his chance in life. A *gɔɔbiru*, whether of the noble or the common variety, marks the person's accession to a new category of individuals of which the representatives of society have deemed him to be worthy. This new category of individuals, contrary to that formed by those sharing the same birth rank name, a slave name or another birth name, is of a diachronic nature: the bearers of a *gɔɔbiru* succeed each other in a descent group, sharing one exemplary essence that each bearer must honour and perpetuate with his life. Noble baptism names, which are achieved earlier in life, place individuals in categories that are less strictly diachronic but obey the same principle, allowing each young candidate for the available *gɔɔbiru* to be matched, according to his potential, with a name whose influence will guide him.

As has already been pointed out (2), Baatɔnu birth names do not afford an occasion for the father or mother or another namegiver to transmit a personal message. This form of allusive communication, in which the child—who is given a name that is a well formed, if elliptical,

[20] The terminology, and concept, of orthodox as opposed to informal names have been borrowed from Parkin (1989), although the Giriama and Baatɔnu naming systems are too different for the same definitions of these two types of names to be used.

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utterance—'is only the vehicle of a message which neither describes him nor is directed at him' (Siran, 1989: 213), has been analysed in the literature as an indirect means of expressing a criticism, mockery or warning that avoids open conflict (Koopman, 1987, 1989; Kasongo, 1988: 149–51) or as a self-satisfying airing of social relations (Middleton, 1961: 40; Retel-Laurentin and Horvath, 1972: 96–8; Tonkin, 1980: 655–6; Bonvini, 1988: 219–20; Samarin, 1988; Siran, 1989; Suzman, 1994: 259–60). Baatɔnu birth names are not communicative acts, at least not between human beings.

Only joking nicknames, that can be classed among informal names, and proverbial dog names (Schottman, 1993) offer the Baatɔmbu a possibility to transmit a personal message, most often of negative content, through the act of bestowing a name. In both cases the characteristics of these names are such that the addressee cannot react openly to the criticism or mockery the names express. A joking nickname is a socially acceptable joke that must be taken with good grace, and the reproach skilfully encoded in a dog's proverb has no official existence, so that the addressee would be condemned if he started an altercation. One's only recourse is to respond in kind.

The two other categories of names that can be placed in the class of informal names are joking spouse names (2.8) and teknonyms, including similar category names (4.2). Informal names are always non-rule-governed, bestowed informally and can be replaced by or used simultaneously with another name of the same category. The informal names are the only ones that offer a possibility of expressing and negotiating personal and family relationships. These names carry no prestige but people can take pride in bearing them and pleasure in using them, for they attest to their integration into a group of friends and into their family. Ironically, perhaps, these are the names most frequently used, with adults at least, for their non-orthodox status makes it possible for inferiors to use them without seeming shameless.

The traditional system of Baatɔnu anthroponyms has been transformed by colonisation, urbanisation and the steadily growing influence of Islam, as well as the much more recent introduction of Christianity. It remains to be determined whether the frequency of different types of names has changed and whether certain categories of names have undergone a qualitative shift, as Suzman (1994) has observed among the Zulu. It is obvious that the fact that names, to be officially recognised, must now be registered at birth has affected those names traditionally given later in life to validate achievement. A noble baptismal name is now chosen at birth by the family, although the child will later attend the baptism ceremony and there is a tendency not to use the name until it has been bestowed on the child at that point by Yɔ Kogi. In colonial days Christian names were chosen for and imposed on all those who went to church or the school. Conversion to Islam also implied a new name. The synchronic plurality that is one characteristic of the Baattɔnu naming system easily allows a Christian or Muslim name to figure among an individual's set of birth names. It is sometimes combined with a birth rank name or another name and may

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become the person's most generally used name, but it may never catch on, or be used only by a small group of people. There seems to be a tendency, in respect of the initial set of names, to cease using those that are a passive sign of recognition of the newborn's life chance—and that were always of optional use—and retain only those symbolising the parents' active intervention to modify Providence. It is hoped that the present study will provide a basis from which further investigation into the modifications undergone by Baatɔnu traditional naming practice can be fruitfully pursued.

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ABSTRACT

The circumstances of a child's birth define his or her starting point in life, and they will be inscribed in the child's file, so to speak, by means of a set of rule-governed birth names. These 'child names' are perfectly suitable for this initial stage of life, but all Baatɔmbu aspire one day to replace this original set of 'orthodox' names by another orthodox name, an inherited title name, corresponding to an achieved social and spiritual status. Commoners and nobles have separate institutions of *gɔɔbiru*, 'inherited title names', but in both cases the successive bearers of a *gɔɔbiru* share an exemplary essence that each must honour and perpetuate with his life. Baatɔnu nobles bestow baptism names on children around the age of seven, allowing these young candidates for the various *gɔɔbiru* to be matched, according to their potential, with a name whose influence will guide them into adulthood. Joking names and teknonyms can be classified as non-orthodox or informal names and seem to fill a gap left by the orthodox names, allowing personal and family relations to be expressed and negotiated. These names carry no prestige, but their use affords pride and pleasure and, unlike orthodox names, they can be used without infringing 'shame'-based taboos.

RÉSUMÉ

Les circonstances de la naissance d'un enfant définissent son point de départ dans la vie et sont inscrites dans le dossier de l'enfant, pour ainsi dire, au moyen d'une série de noms de naissance régis par des règles. Ces "noms de naissance" conviennent parfaitement à cette étape initiale de l'existence, mais tous les Baatombu aspirent un jour à remplacer cette série de noms "orthodoxes" par un autre nom orthodoxe, un nom noble hérité reflétant le statut social et spirituel atteint. Les roturiers et les nobles ont des institutions distinctes concernant le *gɔɔbiru*, le "nom noble hérité", mais dans les deux cas les personnes qui portent successivement un *gɔɔbiru* ont toutes en commun une qualité exemplaire que chacune d'elles doit honorer et perpétuer pardessus tout. Les nobles Baatombu donnent des noms de baptême aux enfants vers l'âge de sept ans, ce qui permet d'assortir les jeunes prétendants aux divers *gɔɔbiru* en fonction de leur potentiel, à un nom dont l'influence les guidera à l'âge adulte. Les noms fantaisistes et les teknonymes peuvent être classés dans la catégorie des noms non-orthodoxes ou informels et semblent combler un vide laissé par les noms orthodoxes, car ils permettent d'exprimer et de négocier les liens personnels et familiaux. Ces noms ne revêtent aucun prestige, mais leur usage procure de la fierté et du plaisir et, contrairement aux noms orthodoxes, ils peuvent être portés sans enfreindre les tabous fondés sur la honte.

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