Biebuyck, Daniel P. "Names in Nyanga Society and in Nyanga Tales." In Comparative Research on Oral Traditions: A Memorial for Milman Parry, edited by John Miles Foley, pp. 47-71. Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Press, 1987. (copyright by author in 1985)

Names in Nyanga Society and in Nyanga Tales

Daniel P. Biebuyck

The social, ritual, and psychological significance of personal names in African societies is well known, but their use, function, and meaning in African oral literature, particularly in tales, are not adequately documented. The general stylistic and symbolic importance of names in African orally transmitted texts has been acknowledged (Finnegan 1970: pp. 470-79). There is ample information on the role of praise names in panegyric literature, of drum names in the musical transmission of messages, of different types of names in dirges, and on proverb names. More extensive analysis of names in African tales and epics, however, is needed. This essay will examine the use of names in Nyanga (eastern Zaire) society and in Nyanga tales (samples of Nyanga tales can be found in Biebuyck and Mateene 1970; Biebuyck and Biebuyck 1986).

The Nyanga Name-Giving System

Although the contexts, circumstances, and modalities in which names are given vary widely in different societies, the personal name is always thought to be an essential aspect of the human personality. Among the Kongo-Mpangu of southwestern Zaire, the child at birth is merely a *kimpiatu* (caterpillar); the imposition of a name transforms the baby into a *muana* (child). In fact, the name is as essential a component of the human person as are the body, the soul, and his/her double counterpart (Van Wing 1959: pp. 220-26, 257). As a person goes through the life cycle and assumes new social identities and roles, he/she acquires new names. A person will eventually have several names, which are neither randomly given nor haphazardly used. Among the Komo of eastern Zaire, for example, a child receives a birth name, usually

from a grandparent, a few days after birth. This name either expresses a relationship with the community or identifies the child with a living or dead kinsman. This birth name is often "hidden," known only to a small circle of closely related people, and is used mainly in purification or healing rituals. The Komo person subsequently receives other names at circumcision, at an adult age, and at the birth of a first child (de Mahieu 1980: pp. 121–22). Among other groups such as the Kongo-Boma (southwestern Zaire), a person may choose his/her own name upon reaching adulthood and receive additional names from healers during treatments or from the members of voluntary associations and secret societies in initiations (McGaffey 1970: pp. 96–98). Among the Luba of southeastern Zaire, an unborn child gets a *dizina dya munda* (name of the womb), the "real" name, which the mother receives in dream and through oracles from a dead family member or an ancestor. This "being" name, as Theuws calls it, is taboo for a person's peers and juniors. One later selects a personal name for common use unless the parents have already given such a second name shortly after birth. Other names are reserved for special positions, such as that of chief, headman, hunter, diviner, or blacksmith (Theuws 1962: pp. 43–45). For the Nkundo-Mongo of west central Zaire, the father in principle has the right to choose a name for his child. Although there is no fixed date for conferring this name, the father promptly imposes the name of a deceased or living relative, sometimes even his own name. The sentiments of the mother and her family must also be taken into account because the premature death of children is often attributed to the rancor of the deceased, who are said to compete with one another for the possession of a homonym among the living. To satisfy the desires manifested by several deceased relatives in dreams and through oracles, the parents give the newborn child a "neutral" name, such as Efalina, which means Without-Name (Hulstaert 1938: pp. 499–500).

The Nyanga of the eastern Zaire forest region follow strict procedures in the giving and using of names, according to the following schema:

1. *Rina ra moko*, birth name. This name is received very shortly after the birth of the child when the midwives and close female relatives of the baby "buy" a name with fiber ring money from the men assembled in the men's house. The Nyanga generally distinguish three major categories of birth names. The

choice and meaning are all related to personal or collective experiences, circumstances and events in the family group, or to a parent's skill or a physical or moral attribute. They are:

a. *Rina ra ngoa*, name of joy. These names primarily reflect smooth relationships within the family and the local group, and also happy events and experiences. For example: Kubuya (Joy) is given when people in the local group get along very well; Ndoore indicates that father, mother, and grandparents are still alive; Mutimamore (lit., long/tall heart) signifies that the father is unafraid of any kind of trouble; Ngea (a monkey species with smooth black and white fur) means that the father is a very clean person. Some "names of joy" have a broader spectrum of references, such as Wira (Friendship) given to a child whose mother was provided in marriage by a man with whom the father had a blood pact; Ubuto (Kinship) or Butinda (Shell Money) is bestowed upon a child born of a father and mother who had close kinship relationships before their marriage; Barea (Circumcised-Ones) is given to a child whose father was Hunde by ethnic origin but had become a Nyanga by undergoing the circumcision rites.

b. *Rina roteso*, name of pain/suffering. This type of birth name is related to the lack of harmonious relationships in the group caused by quarrel (*ubangu*), anger (*busibuke*), and hatred (*bushu*), or to past and present internal or external misfortunes. For example: the name Uneno (Scorn) is given when the wife does not like her husband; Bushu (Hatred) if the father is not liked by his kin; Mintsori (Tears) when a grandfather recently died; Kasiwa (What-is-left) if the father was dead when the child was born; Burinda (Anger) when war rages between two chiefs; Mishiki (Fear) because the pregnant mother was afraid of childbearing problems.

In both cases there is a large number of names from which to choose. The exact reasons why a particular name is given are known only to close relatives of the child; any single name, although restrictive in its basic meaning, may be selected because of a variety of joyful or mournful events and experiences. The category of "names of suffering" is certainly the most elaborate and complex one, and the Nyanga sometimes distinguish subcategories such as *rina ra rwaka* (name of famine), *rina ra bita* (name of

war), *rina ritimwa* (name of being fooled and abused), and *rina rabumba* (name resulting from the quarrels between co-wives and the troubles within the polygynous household). Some names are reserved for male children, some for females, while others can be applied to children of either sex.

c. *Rina riasa*, name of twinship. Distinctive names are prescribed for twins, for some children born in an unusual manner and therefore associated with twins, and for children following twins. Various combinations are possible because of the sex of the twins: for example, twin boys are called Mutia and Irumbo, twin girls Muurwa and Nkuo, a twin boy and girl Mutia and Nkuo. A child following twins may be referred to as Butu, Kamara, or Ukutu; Kika is the name for a child born feet first. The choice of names in these cases is stereotyped and very limited, and no clear meanings of the terms could be gathered from the Nyanga.

The use of birth names is the subject of strict regulations in daily verbal interaction, based on the Nyanga dictum that "When he/she calls someone by his/her birth name, it means that he/she knows him/her well." Parents can call their sons or daughters by their birth names; older and younger brothers and sisters can refer to their siblings in the same way, although as they grow older many preferred options (spirit names, teknonyms) become available. A husband cannot use a birth name for his wife and vice versa; instead, they have recourse to youth names, and as soon as the couple has a child, to a teknonymic name.

2. *Rina ra mushumbu*, name of a divinity; also referred to as *rina rihera*, name of offering. Nyanga men and women worship a small pantheon of male and female divinities. When a child becomes sick or when diviners ascribe a nefarious in-group experience to the anger of a divinity (e.g., because a group neglects a traditional cult), the child is dedicated to the divinity, receives his/her name, and becomes a devotee for life. The range of these spirit names is limited because of the small number of divinities; some names like Nyamurairi, Muriro, Muisa, Muhima, and Hangi are typically given to men; others such as Ruendo, Musoka, and Kahindo to women; still others like Nkuba or Kahombo to both men and women. Some of these names have a clear-cut meaning; for example, Nkuba means Lightning, Musoka is Snake, Kahombo is Good Luck. The etymological implications of some names as

perceived by the Nyanga, however, are more complex. In the name Nyamurairi (the fire god), for example, the Nyanga note two possible explanations: either *murai*, bold-one or hero (thus Nyamurairi is Master Hero) or *iraa*, to give a last will, to say good-bye to someone (thus Nyamurairi is the one who imposes his will). Differently from the birth name, the focus in the selection of the spirit name is on a particular ritual need. These names are commonly used in various types of interpersonal relationships, and some individuals are best known to the wider community by them.

3. *Rina ra busaria*, a youth name. Although men's puberty rites are socially extremely important and ritually elaborate, Nyanga men do not receive a distinctive name during this initiation. This differs from other Bantu groups in which the imposition of such a name is customary practice to mark a vital change in social personality from child/adolescent to full-fledged adult male. As they mature, many men and women, however, do find themselves a youth name, which may refer to a special skill or some other personal characteristic. The great singer of the Mwindo Epic took as an adolescent the name Rureke, which referred to his skill in making sleeping mats. As the Nyanga were increasingly exposed to European patterns, numerous youth names were borrowed from more or less Nyangaized Christian names, from European-made objects, or from French and Swahili terms, thus Ruisi (Alouis), Poro (Paul), Kasito (Gaston), Ruminiki (Dominique), Kataina (Cathérine), Karafuro (Carrefour, i.e., Crossroads), Rimeti (Alumettes, i.e., Matches), Sahani (Plate). These names are essentially used by adolescent boys and girls in their relationships with peers, but some individuals may be known by this name for a lifetime.

4. *Rina ra mwana*, child's name (i.e., teknonym). Married men and women automatically receive the teknonym at the birth of their first child, whether it is a boy or girl. The name stays with them throughout life; even if that first child dies, the name is not replaced by that of another child. Teknonyms are constructed simply by using the terms *she-* (a variant of *ishe*, meaning his/her father) or *nya-* (a variant of *nina*, his/her mother) followed by the child's birth name; thus a man is called Shetubi and a woman Nyatubi after their child Tubi. Parents of twins are not referred to by the above-mentioned twin names but are simply known as Shiyasa and Nyiasa (father of twins, mother of twins).

In daily interrelationships teknonyms are extremely important

because they have an honorific connotation and mark status. Spouses prefer the term in addressing each other, and children also commonly employ these terms for their parents. Men obligatorily use the teknonym for a daughter-in-law who has given birth to a child. It should be noted that numerous names are constructed as pseudoteknonyms. In these cases the terms *she-* and *nya-* mean owner of, possessor of, characterized by, master of.

5. *Rina rishembo*, name of the one being spoken about, mentioned, or referred to (reference names). This complex category includes praise names, curse names, nicknames, and jocular names (*rina ra busheu*). Some of these names are temporary, while others remain with a person until death. The meanings of such names commonly bear on a physical or moral quality or deficiency, on a skill, or on a reputation. A person thus may be called Kacoco (onomatopoeia for the sound of the hummingbird) because he speaks in a voice reminiscent of this sound, Shebukende (lit., Father-thick-stomach) because he has a swollen belly, Shengoma (lit., Father drum) because he is a master drummer, Sherungu (Father-sounds-of-forest) because he is a great hunter. Persons may acquire one or more of these names over a lifetime. One of the great experts on Nyanga culture with whom I worked for many years was named Burinda (Anger) at birth; soon he got the name Muriro because he was dedicated by his father to the divinity of that name. In addition, while he was still a little boy the chief one day called him Karibiri, after the name of one of his Pygmy drummers simply because the boy used to spend much time with him, eventually learning his skills and techniques. The name Karibiri stayed with him for the rest of his life. These names are not commonly used by close relatives but rather by peers, age-mates, and colleagues.

It is noteworthy that in interpersonal relationships Nyanga men and women have at their disposal a large number of standard names that are used ad hoc in a particular context but are not part of one's fixed set of personal names. Some of the insults or praises contained in them must be spoken only in a person's absence or at a distance. As an example, a woman can praise her husband as a provider for bringing her game as Shebana bani (Father-of-my-children), Shecari (Master-of-the-birth-house), Shekaruo (Master-of-the-ladle); she can curse and insult him as Shemburire (Master-many-problems), Shemushuha (Master-scrotal-hernia), or Shekabongo (Master-knots-on-the-head). A son can

praise his father in his presence as Shekaruo (Master-of-the-ladle) and at a distance as Shekaramo (Master-of-salvation/healing), Shemukushu (Master-of-the-billhook), or Shebongo (Master-goodness). Such standard names are applied in particular circumstances to parents and children; for grandchildren, paternal aunts, and maternal uncles there are only customary praise names.

6. *Rina ra muringa*, name of the copper bracelet, name of status. These names are reserved for headmen of villages, the heads of local kinship units, and candidate chiefs before their enthronement. They also include a small number of names exclusively reserved for an enthroned chief, such as Nkumbirwa, Ntabana, and Nkonye, which are obligatorily used by the chief's subjects when they refer to him. Persons holding certain political or ritual offices are frequently called by the generic term for their office; for example, a man may be known as Shemumbo because he is the father of the chief's ritual wife, as Katumbi because he is the chief's servant, or as Shekabi because he administers the poison ordeal.

7. Patronymics. There is no specific term to denote this type of name, but the Nyanga refer to it as *mwana wa rebe*, child of so and so. Patronymics are commonly employed by a man for his daughter-in-law, particularly if she is childless. Instead of using one of her personal names, he will mention her, for example, as mwana wa Shetubi, child of Shetubi, or mwana wa Katumbi, child of Katumbi, identifying her father with his teknonymic or status name. Patronymics are often applied in discussions to men and sometimes to women for the double purpose of specifying their social identity and honoring their father; for example, Buhini wa Nyankuba, Buhini (son) of Nyankuba, or Bukore mwana Shemuhiirwa, Bukore child (of) Shemuhiirwa.

Village elders commonly identify women exogamously married to men of their social group by their youth name followed by the terms "daughter of" (*mwisi wa*) or "young woman of" (*kikumi ca*) and the kinship group or landed estate from which they originated. Two examples would be: Mafura mwisi wa Baasi, Mafura, daughter of the Baasi group; Mafura mwisi wa Bisakukatare, Mafura, daughter of the Masters-of-the-Katare-estate. Elders also refer to those women, particularly when they have children, by their teknonymic name plus "wife of" (*mukari wa*) or "sister of" (*mwisi abo*), especially if the husband or brother is a status holder: for example, Nyakanyiki mukari wa Katumbi, Nyakanyiki, wife of

Katumbi; and Nyantsese mwisi abo Buhini, Nyantsese, sister of Buhini.

This brief analysis of an intricate system of name-giving and name use should sufficiently provide an idea of the extreme importance attached to these verbal categories and the complexity of an institution in which hundreds of standard names, most of them with precisely remembered meanings, are manipulated to situate a person in the social system. With this background in mind, we can now examine the occurrence of names in Nyanga tales.

Personal Names in Nyanga Tales

The Nyanga distinguish two kinds of tales: ***uano***, in which one or more songs occur, and ***mushinga***, in which there are no songs. The ***uano*** involves intensive interaction between narrator and audience because the audience participates by singing refrains, repeating phrases, or providing answers to questions posed in the songs. Both categories of tales, however, share similar plot situations, themes, and dramatis personae. The two types of tales are told by both women and men of different age groups. A third category of tales, called ***karisi***, is a specialized form of ***uano***, tales interlaced with songs. Identified by the same generic term as the epics (***karisi***), these tales present heroic themes. Some are based on or derived from freely narrated short episodes that are contained in the large epic texts; others have only the major dramatis personae in common with the epics. *Karisi* tales are narrated and sung by mature men and women.

A number of questions are relevant for the present analysis: by what terms and/or names are the primary and secondary actors identified in these tales; when and how are they identified; what are the functions and meanings of the terms. These questions will primarily involve the human actors in the ***uano*** and ***mushinga*** tales. It should be remembered, however, that the entire range of actors falls into several major categories: characters identified by animal names but who act just like humans; actors presented at some point as human but who later reveal themselves to be animals in disguise; supernatural actors (Ongo, the Creator God; some divinities; "a spirit" and the "spirit of the paternal aunt"); extraordinary beings (the specter Mpaca, the ogres Kirimu/Birimu,

the watersnake Mukiti); human actors. In a few tales the actors are presented under the names of personified trees (e.g., the tall magically laden ***muro*** tree), plants (e.g., the ***nkamba*** vine or ***itui*** fruit), parts of the body (e.g., Muwa, Penis; and Kampiri, a special word for Vulva; Bunu, Mouth; Kote, Ear; Meso, Eyes; Membe, Nose in one tale, Arm and Mouth in another, and Leg, Eyes, Head, Back, and Heart in yet another tale), objects (buffalo tail as a sceptre; arrow), and natural features (e.g., Niyantsa, Mrs. Lake) and phenomena (e.g., Mweri, Moon; Mbura, Rain).

Although there are many tales involving only animal or human characteristics, there are none in which the supernatural or extraordinary beings are the exclusive actors. In numerous tales the categories of actors are intermingled; for example, humans interact with characters named after animals and/or with supernaturals and extraordinary beings. The Creator God and some divinities seldom occur in the tales, and whenever they do, they are identified by their specific names, such as Ongo, Creator God, or Nkuba, Lightning. Extraordinary beings are encountered more often and always appear under their generic names, such as Mpaca, a male or female specter; Kirimu, a male or female ogre (and Birimu, a group of ogres); Mukiti, a legendary watersnake. Mpaca is often presented disguised as a young woman, a bride, or a wife; and Kirimu is seen as an anthropomorphized being since humans at first do not recognize him/her. The spirit of the paternal aunt, appearing in dream as a counselor, is always presented under the kinship term ***sinkari*** (his/her female father, i.e., paternal aunt).

In the numerous tales with animal actors, those posing as humans are generally identified by the generic term for the species, such as Ntsuu, Elephant; Ngoi, Leopard; Nkoko, Chicken; Inju, Eagle; Nkuru, Turtle; Mbibi, Dog; Kiringeshe, Centipede; Mpongo, Catfish; and Mukii, Hedgehog. Their humanness is often enhanced by the prefixation of the morpheme *Muna-* (pl. *Bana-*, a term used also to indicate social origin, membership in a particular group, and various affiliations). In the tales, therefore, Leopard may be referred to as Ngoi or Munangoi, and Dog as Mbibi or Munambibi. There are some exceptions to this rule. Within the general category of antelope (***mobe***), particular species such as Nteta (Duiker) or Nkenge (Bongo) are recognized as actors, and some distinctions are also made within the classes of wild pigs, snakes, and bats. Epithets are occasionally used for Leopard, such

as Minebusara, Master-of-the-deep-forest, Munakituka, Master-wild-beast, or Shebahi, Mr. Hunter; and for Buffalo as Minentse, Master-of-the-trail. Although dogs, particularly trained hunting dogs, have numerous personal names, they are mostly presented in the tales under the generic term Mbibi.

It is noteworthy that the Nyanga, although living in a forest region bordering on highland savannahs that is the habitat of a vast diversity of animals, have limited the number and range of animal actors to certain species of mammals, birds, fish, insects, reptiles, and molluscs. Some of the ritually most important animals, such as the aardvark (*kamontso*), the hornbill (*mombo*), the flying squirrel (*mpake*), and the gorilla (*muhumba*), do not appear as actors in the tales. Imaginary animals are virtually absent, except for Ngere, an animal representation of Lightning, who is found occasionally. Chimpanzee (*siko*) predominates in tales in which animals initially don a humanlike disguise but ultimately betray their real nature. The disguised Chimpanzee, however, is given the special name Arende, and his true identity is revealed through the use of unique terms, some constructed as patronymics (Camondo, Son-of-raffia; Camuri, Son-of-vine) and others as descriptive names (Nkendi-butea, Maker-of-fiber-ring-money; Ububi-Wabota, Tireless-Evil; Ukoo-rwaniruha, Grief-tires-me-out).

The group of human actors represents by far the most complex and diversified category in Nyanga tales. Human actors are referred to either by generic terms or personal names, or by both.

1. *Human actors without personal names.* There is a large number of tales in which male and female actors are simply identified by kinship terms, social age, and status terms:

> *Kinship terms.* The most frequently occurring terms are father, mother, child, son, daughter, husband, wife, brother, sister, senior and junior sibling, father-in-law, mother-in-law, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, maternal uncle, and paternal aunt. Other kinship identifications such as grandparents and grandchildren are rarely used, and categories such as sister-in-law, brother-in-law, paternal uncle, and maternal aunt do not occur. From the opening formula to the end of the tale the actors are simply known by their appropriate kinship relationships; for example, *Bamukari na moke barika nti nti barebuta*, a wife and husband were settled without having given birth (to children) for a long time.
>
> *Social age.* Terms that establish major actors only as a full-fledged man (*wabume*), mature woman (*mumina*), young woman (*kikumi*), young man (*musike, mushukira*), or young mother (*mubire*) abound in Nyanga tales. Two examples would be: *Kwabesenga bomina barinda nti babingwa na wabume uma*, there were seven mature women and they were married to one mature man; *Mushukira waheke kikumi*, a young man set out to court a young woman. Terms such as *mukungu* (old-one, male or female), *ntangi* (first born), and *mwantsare* (last born) occasionally identify an actor.
>
> *Social status.* Few actors are denoted by social status. The recurring ones include the chief (*mwami*, a term reserved for a chief who has not yet gone through the final consecration), the preferred wife (*ngantsi*), the despised wife (*nyakashombe*), the senior (*mukwakare*), the blood friend (*mwira*), the orphan (*nkubi*), and the diviner (*muuri*). Incumbents of other social statuses, such as nobles, headmen, counselors, ritual experts, healers, circumcisors, and members of secret societies are rarely or never mentioned.

These three categories of generically named actors are intermingled in many tales. Parental relationships are often indicated by verbal forms; for example, *Kwabesenga wabume uma nt'wabuta bana bashatu bababume*, there was one mature man who begat three male children. Prospective in-laws are often identified anticipatively by their appropriate affinal terms; for example, a tale in which the marriage bond is not yet established may begin as *Bamuhunga n'ishibe bendenda mu kitanda*, a son-in-law and a father-in-law frequently went to the hunting camp.

2. *Human actors with personal names.* In a considerable number of tales human actors are given personal names, which may be combined with the above-mentioned generic categories, as in the following examples: *Nyakisa wabuta bana, uma nti ngi Mwera n'entangi nti ngi Kisa*, Mother-Kisa brought forth children, one was called Mwera and the first born was called Kisa; *Karekare kwabutwanga mwana mukari uma, erinare nti ngi Buringanye*, very long ago there was born one female child, her name was Buringanye.

What types of personal names are used? From the point of view of their structure, the names fit mainly into the earlier mentioned classes of birth and youth names, spirit names, teknonyms, reference names (praise, curse, insult), patronymics, and names relating to group origin. Exceptions are possible. In one village, for example, two male narrators told twelve tales about chiefs in which they were identified by a personal status name, such as Muvuni, Ruhembe, Rungombe, or Ringesa (historically known among the Nyanga or neighboring groups) or by a fictive one, such as Nkete, Katawa, or Kirukuri. Many new names in addition may be constructed as descriptive phrases. Except for a few spirit names, twin birth names, and some ad hoc names used in interpersonal relationships to flatter or to scorn, the actual names used in the tales are rarely those employed in daily life. The tales present, in other words, a vast panorama of names specially created for them. Some of the special names used in tales may have been borrowed from neighboring ethnic groups (Hunde, Pere, Komo, Aasa, Tiri) with whom the Nyanga are in close contact or from the Pygmies (Twa, Remba) living among them, but most are "invented" especially for the purposes of storytelling. The meanings of invented names, therefore, may be either clear-cut and self-evident, or implied, allusive, puzzling, and ambiguous. Some derive their full meaning from the context and the dyadic positions in which they are utilized; a few names escape exact etymological interpretations by present-day Nyanga but may still be understandable because of context. The following examples illustrate the various possibilities involved.

Human actors are denoted by terms resembling birth or youth names. The actor is occasionally identified by a real twin name (e.g., Mutia or Nkuo), but all other names are specially created for the tales. Their meanings relate to personal characteristics, external and internal events, skills, and experiences. A few names of this type occur in tales, such as Iyange (reference to a white bird, implying Very Beautiful), Uano (Tale), Katobororo (Encircled-One, Surrounded-One), Manko (Crafty-One), Mwenge (Intelligent), and Kitengi (Ignorant). An example would be: ***Kwarikanga mumina uma nti wabuta mwan'uma erinare ngi Iyange***, In a place dwelt a mature woman who had given birth to one child, its name was Iyange. Also included in this category are: some names derived from abstract terms, such as Busene, Poverty, and Butumba, Wealth; some "meaningless" names such as Ierere, a

personification of *erere*, a frequently sung refrain; and some names that bear on a physical deficiency, like Munyoho (Scurvy), Kirumbu (Deaf-Mute), Kitingiti (Cripple), or Mpa (Very-Beautiful).

A few human actors are known by their spirit names. Among women these are mostly Kahindo and Ruendo (the names of two divinities that seem to be of Hunde, i.e., foreign, origin), and among men they are Nkuba (Lightning) and Muriro (Fire); for example, ***Wabume uma nti wabuta mwana uma, erinare ngi Ruendo***, one mature man begat one child, her name was Ruendo.

Human actors are also called by teknonymic names. Some cases involve a real teknonym, that is, in the story the mother or father is called after the name of a child mentioned in the text; for example, Nyamutia (Mother of Mutia) gave birth to Mutia and Nkuo, or Shebunge (Father of Bunge) married two women (the son is later called Bunge). Many personal names in the tales, however, are constructed as pseudoteknonyms that virtually always apply to male actors and thus start with the morpheme *she-* (father of, to be understood as Mister, with *she-* marking a moral quality or a skill). The pseudoteknonyms may be based on: abstract terms, such as Shebushu, Mr. Hatred, Shebuhanya, Mr. Bad-Luck, Sheburongu, Mr. Generosity, Shebukana, Mr. Greediness; an activity, like Shekitei, Mr. Trapper, Shekitingi, Mr. Cultivator; an expertise, for example, Shebuki, Mr. Honey (an expert honey gatherer), Shemirumba, Mr. Barkcloth (an expert barkcloth maker); or a descriptive phrase, such as Shemuhana-binwa, Mr. Giver-of-counsel, Shewenge-bukuru, Mr. Big Wit, Shemengi-abi, Mr. Two-Wits, Shekarobanya, Mr. Confusion-Maker. These kinds of characters frequently occur in contrasting dyadic sets. In one story Shebinwa-biyanga (Mr. Words-do-hurt) is opposed to Shebinwa-bitayanga (Mr. Words-do-not-hurt); in another Shebirungia (Mr. Well-Cooked-Things) to Shebibisi (Mr. Raw-Things); in yet another tale the distinction is between Shebwenge (Mr. Intelligence) and Shirunge (Mr. Ignorance).

Human characters may be identified by nonteknonymic descriptive phrases. These mostly occur as dyadic opposites: Mukwakare-wa-binwa, Senior-with-words, and Mwanunke-wa-binwa, Junior-with-words; Tungo-meso, Open-eyes, and Kaekae, Onlooker; Barubia, Noisemakers, and Benda-nama, Those-entering-secret-council; Ntanikwanga, I-am-not-being-given, and Ntasimwanga, I-am-not-being-refused. Some names are

untranslatable but acquire meaning because of the addition of a qualifier; for example, Ierere (a name based on the refrain *erere*) wokumbuka, of the village, and Ierere wobusara, of the forest.

As far as functions are concerned, in tales centering on human actors identified only by generic terms, the tone and plot development are clearly suggested in the introductory statements. The focus is on close social relationships (kinsfolk, affines, blood friends) that are placed in a certain setting (the hunting camp, the forest, the village) and evolve around particular activities and/or decisions with far-reaching implications. Countless tales begin with variations of one of the following opening statements:

- —One mature man (or, a husband) and his wife (or, wives) went to the hunting camp
- —A man and his daughter went to the hunting camp,
- —A young man went in pursuit of a young woman,
- —A man begat *n* sons (or, *n* daughters),
- —A man begat a female child (or, a woman gave birth to a female child),
- —The father of a child left him/her his last will,
- —A chief married *n* wives; among them there were the beloved-one and the despised-one,
- —Two men made a bloodpact.

All these tales are moralizing and sometimes philosophical; they bear on precise kinship and affinal relatinships and concentrate on a very small implicitly defined social group. The terms used are general and therefore allude not to particular individuals but rather to specific social categories. Although the actual wording of these tales varies enormously, the final outcome is nearly always predictable. In the tales in which a man and his wife (or wives) go to the hunting camp, something unusual or illicit thus is bound to happen; for example, the husband tries to fool his wife, or he leaves her alone in the camp and some extraordinary events occur. In tales in which a man and his daughter go to the hunting camp, parent and child engage in incestuous relationships (sometimes resulting in the birth of a child), which they unsuccessfully try to conceal. In tales involving an unadvised and whimsical young man who sets out in pursuit of a young woman, he either marries an unfit wife or encounters difficulties (e.g., the specter of the forest impersonates his wife). In tales in which two men have made a blood pact, they engage in activites that are contrary to the friendship code and thus the bond is disrupted.

In tales in which the actors are identified by personal names, several configurations are possible. One or two (rarely more) key actors are named in the introductory statement and retained throughout the story; or, the actors, initially mentioned under generic terms, are designated by personal names in the course of the story, frequently in a song, a proclamation, an announcement, or a conversation.

The functions of personal names are most apparent in texts in which the actors' names are provided at the start of the tale. The names reveal, overtly or covertly, a quality, a skill, a character trait, a physical feature, or an ambiguity about the actor(s). They dispense with further elaborate description and announce the tone and plot development of the tale, regardless of the setting or activity involved. This is particularly evident in tale introductions that present two opposing characters, such as Busene (Poverty) and Butumba (Wealth), Sheburongu (Mr. Generosity) and Shebushu (Mr. Hatred), Shewenge-bukuru (Mr. Big-Intelligence) and Shewenge-mariata (Mr. Little-Intelligence), Ntanikwanga (I-am-not-being-given) and Ntasimwanga (I-am-not-being-refused), Mukwakare-wa-binwa (Senior-of-words) and Mwanunke wa binwa (Junior-of-words), Barubia (Noisemakers) and Benda-nama (Council-goers), or Ruendo (Journey; i.e., one who loves to travel) and Mushimamirimo (Lover-of-work). In these instances the invented descriptive names, sometimes constructed as teknonyms, function similarly to those of contrasting animal characters, such as Leopard and Dog, Leopard and Duiker, Hawk and Chicken, or Shrew and Wasp. Whereas animal tales are mostly etiological and stress the origins of their inveterate enmity or permanent bodily features, the tales with named opposing characters have social, moral, and philosophical explanations. Even when no contrastive actors are presented in the introduction, the name of a single character may still suggest physical or moral attributes that are sufficiently clear to set the mood of the tale (e.g., Iyange, bearing on the girl's beauty; Bushu, Hatred; Shemuhanya, Mr. Bad-Luck; Karumbirumbi, One-always-asking-for-beer).

Personal names mentioned in the introductory statement may have other functions. In tales that start with vague generic identifications, the personal name can help pinpoint the sex of a key actor (e.g., A young mother gave birth to a child; its name was Kahindo, a spirit name given to women only). In other tales the name subtly alludes to a possible confusion. In one text, for

example, a man called Mununguнungu (Very-cunning-one) has a daughter, and he decrees that she can be married only to a suitor who succeeds in plucking a calabash growing high in a tree. When the suitor climbs the tree, he sings, asking: "Is this the one now?" (i.e., is this the calabash you want), and the answer given by the audience is "Mununguнungu outdoes his colleagues" (as if they were praising the shrewdness of the father Mununguнungu). In fact, the narrator and the audience have in mind the term *munongonongo*, which is used in other similar tales and means "that nice nice one." The name of Mununguнungu (Very-cunning-one) thus also implies the image of a person who always equivocates and changes his mind.

Personal names occur frequently in the songs that are interspersed in the *uano* type of tale. These songs sometimes present an opportunity to identify specifically an actor previously known only by a generic term. Apart from the vividness they lend to the story and the dramatic interaction they allow between the narrator and his audience, the short songs incorporated into the *uano* tales have several functions. Constructed as monologues with refrains or as dialogues, the songs are conceived as warnings, exhortations, self-identifications, laments, self-praises, challenges, insults, accusations, allusions, cryptic messages, and revelations. Some have magical connotations in that the actor derives from his song the force to achieve a certain task or he fails because the song is incomplete (the mispronunciation or incomplete mention of a name is a major indication of failure).

Personal names are essential media that clarify the functions of the songs. In numerous cases they also have clear prosodic functions in helping to establish the ideal seven- or nine-syllable line count of the song. Specific examples, drawn from texts presented in Biebuyck and Biebuyck (1986), illustrate these points. In one tale, a woman called Nyangano decrees that her daughter Uano will be married only to a young man who can succeed in playing the sanza throughout the night. When the first suitor, unable to perform the task, falls asleep, she kills him singing the same line three times:

Nyangano wayanga Birunge.
Nyangano killed Birunge.

In this simple song, the mother identifies herself by a teknonymic name and calls the previously unnamed suitor Birunge (Madness; Stupidity). The mother brags about her deed and ridicules the

suitor, but at the same time she unknowingly reveals her evil action to the outside world. As if alerted by the song, the senior brother of the murdered suitor sets out in pursuit of his kinsman and subsequently defeats the mother.

In a second tale, a father decrees that his daughter Sabirwa shall be married to a man who is able to harvest his field of runner beans. Two consecutive suitors sing the following lines while unsuccessfully attempting to harvest the beans:

Tunkonde tunkonde tunkondera
Wakindito ngi warii Sabira
Let us swindle, let us swindle, let us swindle
He who will finish them will carry Sabira away.

and

Tunkonde tunkonde tunkondera
Wakindito ngi warii Nsobera
Let us swindle, let us swindle, let us swindle
He who will finish them will carry Nsobera away.

Immediately after the song, the narrator states that both suitors are overpowered by the task and flee. The key element in these two similar songs is the girl's personal name, which is mispronounced by the suitors. Their inability to render her name adequately is the equivalent of failure.

In a third tale, an unnamed young woman whimsically wishes to be married to "a man with white teeth." Unknowingly she is married to a disguised chimpanzee. At the peak of her troubles, the young woman is saved by a sung revelation received from the spirit of her deceased paternal aunt. The song is as follows:

Ee kanyere kani
Tindikiti
Naruhani kwirenga
Tindikiti
Umeya kundo
Tindikiti
Ushishe Bubi-wabota
Ntindikiti
Mbu Bubi-wabota nti ngi moke wabe
Tindikiti
Nkendi-butea nti ngi muramu wabe
Tindikiti
Nkendi-butea nti ngi muramu wabe

Tindikiti

Ee! my young woman
Accompany me!
I am tired of telling you
Accompany me!
You have arrived over there
Accompany me!
Ask Bubi-wabota (Very-Evil-One)
Accompany me!
Say Bubi-wabota is not your husband
Accompany me!
Nkendi-butea (Maker-of-fiber-ring-money) is your brother-in-law
Accompany me!
Nkendi-butea (Maker-of-fiber-ring-money) is your brother-in-law
Accompany me!

In this song the paternal aunt admonishes and scolds her niece and then specifies the real identity of the disguised chimpanzee husband by providing descriptive names that are not used for humans. In the dénouement of the story the knowledge and possession of these names have a soterial value, for they allow the young woman to unmask the real identity of the spouse.

In yet another tale, a boy goes to play a game of dice with the powerful Nkuba. After they have spread out a mat to throw dice, the boy sings:

Eerere, eerere
Iwe wakuba na Kabari
Eerere, eerere
Na Nkurongo na Muasha
Eerere, eerere
Na Muntindi na Rintoro
Eerere, eerere
Na Kinsonge na Kirubi
Eerere, eerere
Kibukuru Nyamancence

I played (lit., that he played) with Kabari
Eerere, eerere

With Nkurongo, with Muasha
Eerere, eerere
With Muntindi, with Rintoro
Eerere, eerere
With Kinsonge, with Kirubi
Eerere, eerere
Kibukuru Nyamancence

There is magic in this enumeration of names of mysterious individuals (some called after a mountain, birds, and imaginary persons) because the boy defeats Nkuba as soon as his song is finished. In addition, the accumulation of sonorous names heightens the poetic intensity of the narrative.

Tales in which the actors have personal names are generally told by the best and most creative narrators among mature men. These tales hence are less numerous than those that present generically identified dramatis personae. The invention and use of such personal names are hallmarks of the originality and creative impulse of the gifted narrator. The uniqueness and diversity of the names lend special distinction, freshness, and attractiveness to a tale. Rising above the narrow level of the etiological and moralizing tale, the gifted narrator addresses broad intellectual and philosophical problems. The actors presented are not bound by the recurring difficulties of kinship relationships among agnates, cognates, and affines but rather illustrate prototypical universal characters—of persons who think they are intelligent or who are thought to be stupid, of persons who misuse words and fail to see their power, of persons who always disagree or refuse, and of troublemakers, deceivers, and braggards. Few of the actors identified with invented personal names recur in tales narrated by different men of separate villages. When similarly named characters occur in diverse tales, the creativity of the narrators is fully manifest in the type of story told around them. In six tales (out of a corpus of over one thousand), one of two central actors is called Mwenge (Intelligent) or a variation thereof (Shebwenge or Shewenge, Mr. Intelligence; Shewenge-bukuru, Mr. Big-Intelligence; Shemengi-abi, Mr. Two-Intelligences; and Mwenge-wa binwa, Intelligent-with-words). This character is used contrastively with Kitengi (Ignorant), Shirunge (Mr. Stupidity), Shewenge-mariata (Mr. Little-Intelligence), Nyamengi-abi (Mrs. Two-Intelligences), and Shemuhanga-binwa (Mr. Craftsman-with-words).

Although they all involve some type of trickery, the stories woven around these characters are quite different (except for the two tales about She(b)wenge and Shirunge, told by the same narrator at an interval of two years). The contexts of the tales indicate that the implications of the names vary. In the tale of Mwenge (Intelligent) and Kitengi (Ignorant), both go to trap, each makes four baskets to transport the meat. Intelligent convinces Ignorant that they should eat the latter's four baskets of meat while still in the hunting camp. When the meat has been eaten, the two trappers travel back to their village in the forest, and Intelligent asks Ignorant to climb a palm tree and cut two clusters of palm nuts. After successfully cutting the first cluster, Ignorant falls from the tree and faints (there is irony here in the word usage because Intelligent obviously supposes that his congener is dead). Arriving in the village to give the news about the alleged death of Ignorant, Intelligent finds him there alive and drumming. He returns to the forest and sees Ignorant's corpse rotting (the entire story is dreamlike, as if Intelligent's conscience were revealing these awkward situations). Intelligent consults Centipede, the great diviner, who advises him to share equally with Ignorant. He divides the meat, and Ignorant "has arisen now." The narrator concludes that "even a person of surpassing intelligence may be fooled by an ignorant one." In fact, the story criticizes those men who always want to be wiser than others by trying to outsmart them. The tale context indicates that Mwenge really refers to a shrewd or cunning person and Kitengi to one who is not as stupid as he might appear.

In the two tales about She(b)wenge and Shirunge told by the same narrator, one is much longer and more detailed in descriptions and conversations. Both tales, however, follow the same plot outline, which is as follows. She(b)wenge and Shirunge are blood friends living in different villages. She(b)wenge has fourteen daughters and Shirunge, fourteen sons. Implicit in the blood pact but not stated in the tale is the notion that some of these children would be preferred marriage partners. Shebwenge apparently has refused to let his daughters be married to Shirunge's sons. In the beginning of the tale, Shirunge is thus contemplating how he could arrange for his sons to marry them. He makes two large boxes in which he hides his sons; preparing for a voyage, he leaves the boxes in the guardianship of his friend Shebwenge (to increase the irony of the situation, Shirunge had

invited his friend to open the boxes but the friend had declined as an expression of trust). The boxes are deposited in the girls' enclosure. While Shebwenge and his wife go to the fields, the girls open the boxes, find the young men, and have sex with them. After some weeks the girls become pregnant, but the parents still do not know about the hidden lovers. When Shirunge returns from his journey, the boxes are finally given back to him, but the girls cannot resist and go to reside with their lovers in Shirunge's village. Shebwenge claims his daughters back in vain; accusations against Shirunge brought before the chief are to no avail. Shirunge becomes the head of a large group of people, while Shebwenge dies as "a man of nothing." The context of the tale establishes Shebwenge as a wicked person who does not use his intelligence wisely, and Shirunge as one who is not as stupid and crazy as he is thought to be. The tale content lends a special meaning to the *she-* morpheme with which both teknonymiclike names are constructed, for instead of the usual notion of "father of" or "Mr.," *she-* ironically implies the idea of "would-be" or "so-called."

In the tale about Shewenge-bukuru and Shewenge-mariata, the two men have made a blood pact. The first one has four daughters and the second, four sons. Shewenge-mariata obtains one of Shewenge-bukuru's daughters as a wife for his senior son, promising that he will give marriage payments at a later date. He sets out instead with his sons and the girl to a distant place beyond a lake. Shewenge-bukuru searches and finds his friend. Shewenge-mariata, however, upon seeing his friend arrive in the far distance, instructs his children to tell Shewenge-bukuru that he is dead and to bury him under a pile of leaves (all this because Shewenge-mariata hopes to escape paying the marriage goods). Shewenge-bukuru, as if he had a premonition about the intentions of his friend, tells his children to cover him with leaves and carry him into the village as if he were also dead. When they place him in the grave where Shewenge-mariata lies, the friend is prompt to reveal his trickery. In this unusual and elliptical tale, the name Shewenge refers to two different types of personages: one who is indeed an intelligent and poised individual (he gives what the friend asks and trusts him) who is able to outwit others, and one who thinks he is clever but in reality is, as the narrator concludes, a *wambusa*, a man of nothing.

The actors in a fifth tale are a husband and wife called Shemengi-abi and Nyamengi-abi. They go to visit a friend, an

old man who has cannibalistic tendencies. Shemengi-abi apparently knows about this habit, for without his wife's knowledge he brings ten human skulls in a shoulderbag. Arriving in the village, they are welcomed by the old man and receive meat, which the wife refuses to eat (the reasons for it are subtly specified; the meat seems to be human flesh), thus breaking the code of hospitality. Doom is foreshadowed, and when the husband and wife go to sleep they ponder which *wenge* (intelligence, wit, intellectual skill) they should use to escape the danger. The narrator then implies that the wife could not help find a solution, for in the morning her husband unexpectedly pours the skulls out on the village floor as a gesture of defiance to the old man, who concludes "you also are a man!" Husband and wife return home and Shemengi-abi says to his wife: "And you, are you Nyamengi-abi? Both of us were going to die, but you did not bring forth a single *wenge* (idea) to save us. But I did know the *wenge* (i.e., I had the knowledge) necessary to save us." In this tale the man Shemengi-abi is not only clever but also has foresight, and the name is actually a self-praise meaning that he thinks for two. When he scolds his wife, "are you Nyamengi-abi" he is alluding to the teknonymic naming custom. It is as if Shemengi-abi were the father of a child named Mengi-abi, in which case his wife as the mother is automatically called Nyamengi-abi.

In a sixth tale the actors Mwenge-wa-binwa and Shemuhanga-binwa have made a blood pact; the first has a son and the second a daughter. The narrator implies that Mwenge-wa-binwa could not get Shemuhanga-binwa's daughter as a wife for his son. He makes a box in which he hides his son and leaves it with his friend. Soon after Mwenge-wa-binwa has taken back his box, the daughter of Shemuhanga-binwa is pregnant. The chief hears about it and Shemuhanga-binwa is accused of incest. At the trial, however, Mwenge-wa-binwa reveals the secret and thus frees his friend, saying: "You used to say that you know everything, but I here managed to deceive you." The narrator concludes: "One must never think one knows everything; everything is not known by a human who eats terrestrial foods." In this tale Mwenge-wa-binwa is a poised and intelligent person, who by means of trickery easily defeats one who thinks he has superior and exclusive knowledge.

It is noteworthy that two other narrators told the same story

but used the opposing characters of Shebinwa-bitayanga (Mr. Words-do-not-harm) and Shebinwa-biyanga (Mr. Words-do-harm). In one tale Shebinwa-bitayanga has seven daughters and refuses to let them be married to his blood friend's seven sons. Shebinwa-biyanga goes on a journey and leaves his sons locked up in an enclosure under the supervision of Shebinwa-bitayanga. Soon the girls are pregnant, and Shebinwa-bitayanga is accused by his wife of having committed incest. When the case is brought before the chief, Shebinwa-biyanga saves his friend by declaring: "You stated that my sons should not marry your daughters. Lo! You scorned me. These sons of mine have made your daughters pregnant."

In the second tale, Shebinwa-biyanga has seven sons and Shebinwa-bitayanga has seven daughters. The two men, who have made a blood pact, live in separate hamlets. Shebinwa-bitayanga apparently has refused to permit his daughters to be married to the sons of Shebinwa-biyanga, for the latter ponders what to do with his sons. He harvests eleusine and packs it in seven bundles with his sons in seven other bundles. He tells Shebinwa-bitayanga that he is short of storage room and leaves the bundles containing his sons in the enclosure of his friend's daughters. Soon the girls are pregnant; the husband is accused by his wife of incest. He consults an oracle who instructs him to ask his friend for seven goats in lieu of his daughters. When he arrives home with the goats, he tells his daughters to join their husbands.

Conclusions

Names in Nyanga society are not only means by which persons acquire their individuality and are assigned a place in the social system but also convey other messages (for the neighboring Hunde, see Joabe-Mahemu wa Kaoma 1977: p. 101). They must be applied correctly, in the appropriate context, and by the right persons, since the misuse of names is socially and ritually dangerous. To explain, for example, that a child must not bear the name of the father, the Nyanga say that such practice, ***nti riri buri wirengecange na we***, is as if one were making oneself equal to him (i.e., comparing oneself to him as if one were boasting as having the same status and privileges as he or as if one were assuming his identity). Names establish identities, and

homonymous names signify a sharing in another's identity. In tales that are based on personal interaction and allude to specific social situations and to legal, moral, and philosophical principles, the narrators hence avoid using names by which individuals are customarily identified in society. The few exceptions are those tales in which commonly used names are ambiguous because they are applied to both males and females or because they refer to a particular category of persons; for example, Kahindo, which may be a spirit name, is also the term given to any girl born after a succession of boys. Narrators must not leave the impression that their tales, which are told for members of a small intimate community, are addressed as critiques or praises of the behavior of specific persons. They focus rather on broad categories of social relationships or on prototypical characters. The human actors therefore are presented either under generic terms or under denominations specially created for the tales. The narrators then create the necessary distance between themselves and the real persons whom they may have in mind. Personal names in the tales identify the sex of an actor, reveal his/her true identity, establish a parental relationship, or depict a physical or moral character. Without elaborate descriptions, personal names thus may foreshadow an interdependence, a competitive situation, a test, a dramatic event, a dilemma, a confusion, or a mystery to unravel.

In Nyanga oral performance the tales in which the actors have descriptive names, frequently conceived as teknonyms, constitute the supreme expressions of creative skill and personalized narrative. They deal with unusual themes and are elliptical and ambiguous. The names used are not only colorful and allusive but also intriguing and confusing to the listeners; the full meaning of the terms can be understood only from the context of the narrative. The action is set on a theoretical and speculative level by using completely fictive situations in which prototypical characters operate.

The use of similar characters in the initiation system of the *bwami* association of the Lega (eastern Zaire forest region) provides a striking analogy. During these rites the Lega initiates explain the moral philosophy on which the system is based by means of aphorisms that are sung in a dance context. Most of the aphorisms present one or two contrasting characters (e.g., Mr. Many-Many-Heads, Mr. One-Eye, Glittering-One, Mrs. High-Buttocks), who are also visually represented by the use of

figurines, masks, and other sculptures as well as manufactured and natural objects. All are intended as direct or oblique illustrations, positively or antithetically formulated, of moral, legal, and social principles and philosophical concepts (see Biebuyck 1973: pp. 218–20).

University of Delaware

References

Biebuyck, Daniel P. *Lega Culture: Art, Initiation, and Moral Philosophy among a Central African People.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973.

_____ and Biebuyck, Brunhilde. *"We Test Those Whom We Marry": An Analysis of Thirty-Six Nyanga Tales.* Traditional Cultures in Modern Africa, no. 1. Budapest: African Research Program, Loránd Eötvös University, 1986.

_____ and Mateene, Kahombo. *Une anthologie de la littérature orale Nyanga.* Brussels: Académie royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, 1970.

de Mahieu, Wauthier. *Structures et symboles. Les structures sociales du groupe Komo du Zaire dans leur élaboration symbolique.* London: International African Institute, 1980.

Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral Literature in Africa.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970.

Hulstaert, G. *Le mariage des Nkundo.* Brussels: Institut royal colonial belge, 1938.

Joabe-Mahemu wa Kaoma. "Notes d'introduction à l'anthroponymie hunde." *African Languages*, 3 (1977), 92–102.

MacGaffey, Wyatt. *Custom and Government in the Lower Congo.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970.

Theuws, Th. *De Luba-Mens.* Tervuren: Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, 1962.

Van Wing, J. *Etudes bakongo. Sociologie, religion et magie.* 2nd ed. Brussels: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959.