

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF SOME AFRICAN PERSONAL NAMES

This essay was suggested by two different conversations. One, with John Penney, was about whether social usages in naming, still found among peoples near to their purely oral traditions, might throw light on obscurities of personal names and relationships in ancient inscriptions. The other conversation was with Macar Aciek Ader, a Dinka studying in Oxford, and concerned how much of the Dinkas' understanding of their history, values and form of society was passed from generation to generation through their personal names.

In his short book *English Ancestry* (1961) Sir Anthony Wagner, then Garter King at Arms, wrote that in the modern world industrialization, demographic mobility, the decline in importance of kinship and descent, and the erosion of older social hierarchies, might have been supposed to have relegated the study of genealogy to 'the scrap-heap of forgotten studies'. But on the contrary, he had found that 'the mobility and fragmentation of much modern life' had increased the genealogists' professional business, for 'Cut off from his roots by profound changes in ways of living, by migration far from home and by loss of contact with his kindred, modern man seeks more or less consciously to reconstitute human links which may restore to his life lost dignity and meaning' (ibid.: 6). It would appear from this that what professional genealogists are being asked to do today is much what students of early inscriptions are attempting for the peoples of past civilizations: to discover and partly bring to life the names of dead national or cultural forebears.

Some of those now searching for their ancestors may hope to find a 'lost dignity' in historically notable family connections

with people of reputable status, character or talent; some may prefer the discovery of quite humble, even criminal (if distant, of course), ancestry to complete genealogical anonymity, but to know the names and relationships of their ancestors rarely has any direct bearing on the conduct of their own lives. For the Dinka of the Southern Sudan, it still has. Yet how far, Macar Aciek Ader and I considered, might the last forty years of endemic civil war in the Southern Sudan, and the political and economic disruption of their traditional way of life,¹ be hastening younger and future generations of Southern Sudanese along the road which Wagner's 'modern man' had taken over the last two hundred or more years? What would Dinka 'become' if oral memory, and their language itself, were impoverished by human dispersion through war, modern education, and new kinds of work away from home? Already many Dinka words well known to adults forty years ago, and richly allusive and evocative in relation to their history and culture, are not familiar to many of the younger people. Nearly twenty years ago in Khartoum, I found that the expressions 'children of one belly' and 'children of one penis', which only twenty years before that had been taken for granted by children to distinguish those related through a mother from those related through a father, were considered coarsely archaic - 'Chaucerian' was the word a Dinka friend used - in educated circles. The loss of such words and turns of speech deprives some personal names and relationships of part of their cultural and historical meaning.

This is, of course, what has happened in our own society. Let me take my own full name, Ronald Godfrey Lienhardt. 'Ronald', according to the book, comes from roots in Norse meaning 'Might, Power'; but my parents, if they knew it, or found it out, never told me so. It has certainly been no exemplar. 'Ronald' was fashionable around the time I was named (1921), and was a clearly British-sounding name. My father, a Swiss, was sensitive to anti-German popular feeling - even extending to dachshunds - during the Great War. My mother liked the sound of the name (she did not like such very English names as 'George', 'Herbert', etc., of whom she seemed to have known too many), and associated 'Ronald', I suspect, with the then romantic 'matinée-idol' Ronald Colman. If so, she never told me and, later, thought it absurd to call a child 'Elvis', for example. 'Godfrey' is, of course, the Anglicized form of 'Gottfried', my father's name. In German, its association with God and Peace is there on the surface more than in 'Godfrey', but the name was not chosen with that in mind. 'Lienhardt', according to some perhaps dubious derivations, refers to the boldness of a lion, but I was never told so and I doubt if most of the family believes it or cares about it, conscious as they are of being Lienhardts.² It is somewhat ironical that after baptismal precautions against

¹ Which has become even more oppressive since this was written.

² My older cousin Walter has since told me with amusement that there is a cave in Switzerland called the *Lienhart Hölli*, sometimes said to have been occupied by strayed companions of Richard Coeur de Lion.

having me thought to be German (or, for my father, more sinisterly 'Prussian') at school I was at once nicknamed 'Fritz' as an affectionate form of address. I think that for my school-friends' parents, from whom they must have picked up the name, 'Fritz' was the comradely German equivalent of the English 'Tommy'; for me it sounded acceptably volatile. To be nicknamed 'Kraut' would have been a different matter. In the army in the last war, however, 'Fritz' would have been rather unsuitable, so for some I became 'Leo'.

I excuse this long personal comment because here I am fairly sure of my facts, and in order to make a contrast with African naming. If my parents had told the vicar that they wished me to go through life as 'Mighty and Powerful God's Peace Lionbold', he would, I certainly hope, have objected. Those names would have carried a message, but an embarrassing one, so my first names could only be used as personal names *because* those original fossilized meanings were long dead in them. For the Dinka (as for many other Africans), in almost all names the 'meaning' is still alive: and there were then few or no non-Dinka words with etymologies known only to a learned minority.

We, also, have names which still retain something of their meanings as common words. For women particularly, there are the flower names - Violet, Rose, Lily etc. - some of which perhaps sometimes incongruously carry a sense of delicacy and sweet scent with them; and there are the month names - April, May, June - but not usually the months which suggest the cold fall of the year and winter. 'Christmas' for a man exists but sounds somewhat eccentric in English, though 'Noel' is quite conventional. More comparable in principle with some African custom was the Puritans' conscious and determined effort to make personal names preach a virtue or recall and acknowledge a sin. Miss Withycombe (1977: xl) for example writes: 'Foundlings were obvious subjects for the ingenuity of Puritan ministers, and they were freely given such names as *Helpless, Repentance, Lament, Forsaken, Flie-Fornication*'. And she mentions an American christened 'Preserved', whose surname was 'Fish'. Yet on the whole most of our names today, for most of those who bear them, have become meaningless sounds, except as designating particular individuals.

In Africa the case is very different. Ebo Ubahakwe (1981: 99), writing of the Igbo of Nigeria, comments: 'An indigenous African name on the whole *personifies the individual*, tells some story about the parents or family of the bearer and in a more general sense, points to the values of the society into which the individual is born. Unaware of these facts, some Western scholars are puzzled that Africans make a "fuss" about names' [emphasis added]. Those names thus endow the individuals who bear them with social personality. With this in mind, I turn now to some Dinka names, starting with Macar Aciek Ader, with whom *this* particular 'fuss' started.

The three names 'Macar Aciek Ader' mean respectively 'Black Ox, Man of God, Tether (Cattle)'. For non-Dinka, the words in translation

seem less like a possible personal name than do the meaningless sounds, 'Macar Aciek Ader', of which it is composed. But for the Dinka, whose thought is permeated by their interest in cattle, the meanings of the words are alive in the name itself. This is not to say - it would be ludicrous - that people add up, as it were, the meanings of the words of which a personal name is composed whenever they hear or use it. But 'Macar' means something, 'Aciek' means something, 'Ader' means something; when put together they only make sense as a person's, and a man's, name. Where English names are both names and ordinary words, the difference between the name and the word can be made by the use of the capital letter or definite article. If you want to call a plumber, you do not look up 'Plumber' in the personal column of a directory; 'the Plumbers of Cowley' would mean a well-known Cowley family, 'the plumbers of Cowley' suggests a guild of plumbers. But if in a Dinka cattle-camp you say 'bring Macar', only the context will make clear whether you want a black ox (as distinct from an ox of some other colour) or whether you want to see a man called 'Macar', rather than another man, called, say 'Malwal' (from a red-brown ox).

Every adult Dinka man has at least one name which refers at once to him, and to one of the colours and configurations of colour in cattle, for which the Dinka have a vast repertoire of words. Some relatively few of these colours, and thus the personal names that go with them, have special social values. They may be associated, if not very strictly, with seniority of birth or descent, or as the most fitting sacrificial victims for particular divinities. Cattle boldly marked with black and white have an imaginative affinity with the black and white of a stormy, lightning-streaked sky, and have marked liturgical importance in relation to God in the Sky and the spiritual phenomena of that upper region. The ox Majok, a name for one such configuration, is regarded as one of the finest of sacrificial offerings, and is the appropriate gift from the father for the initiation into manhood of a first-born son. Macar, a black ox, is also a liturgical colour, but for different reasons. It suggests a birth late in the child-bearing life of the mother, or the historical memory of such a birth, and a black ox is the appropriate sacrifice for that aspect of God which presides over the ending of things. 'Aciek', the second name, indicates that Macar's father is likely to have been born after a long delay, when worry about childlessness had led Macar's grandparents to seek the help of a man possessed by God, an *aciek*, literally 'creator'. 'Ader', his grandfather's name, implies that he was born after a previous child or children had died. Its meaning, 'Tether (cattle)', in this context refers to the tethering of cattle to pegs, as the Dinka do when they bring them in from grazing, and when they reserve and dedicate a beast for sacrifice for a particular spirit or purpose. Here as a personal name it is a metaphor for restraining death, by promised sacrifice, from striking again. So we may suppose that somewhere along the line the family has suffered from a fear of childlessness, been favoured with divine help, and mourned a premature death.

When my friend Dr Francis Mading Deng ('Francis Brown-Speckled Ox Sky Spirit') named his first-born Donald, he did so partly

because 'Donald' sounded euphonious with 'Deng' (for he will be so known, not, as traditionally, 'Donald Mading'), partly because with a diplomat father and an American mother, 'Donald' would spend a good deal of his life among anglophones, but partly also because he had ascertained that 'Donald' came from roots meaning 'world mighty'. Thus he gave his son an honorific name, associating him hyperbolically with his own father, Deng Majok, a renowned paramount chief of powerful character, along with the line of his descent. Dr Deng has kindly supplied me with this further comment on his father's names:

His personal name at birth was Deng. During his early childhood, Deng acquired a dog to which he was so attached that he shared his milk and food with the dog, something the Dinka look upon as revolting. When Deng could not be persuaded to give up the habit, his grandfather teased him by calling him 'Deng Majong' - 'Deng the doggish'. The name Majong stuck with Deng all his life. The neighbouring Twic and Rek tribes, misinterpreting 'Majong' to be the Ngok Dinka version of 'Majok', 'the Pied, Black and White', the most senior colour-pattern assigned to the eldest son of the first wife, began to call him 'Deng Majok'. Deng was attracted by the name, especially as it gave him a colour seniority which was not his, but that of a half-brother, who though younger was regarded as the senior son of Chief Kwol Arop and heir to the paramountcy. Since Deng Majok did in fact usurp tribal leadership from his supposedly entitled half-brother with the intervention of the British, this perversion of his name gave his position a ring of legitimacy which was otherwise at best controversial.

A Dinka name even in its simplest form thus carries, and is intended to carry, a message, both for the child given it, to whom it will be explained later, and for that child's own children. Though the detailed circumstances of any particular naming would not normally be known outside the family and those who share its affairs (for the Dinka, however, quite a wide circle), those with one or more of the same names know that at some time their families along with many others have had some powerful experience in common. From one end of Dinkaland to the other, for example, 'Aciek' would indicate that there had been some strong connection with a holy man; Godfreys, and such, have no common ground of this sort; but Elvises still commemorate a known culture-hero and his ethos. Dinka names constantly reaffirm their common culture and common interests. Ours, if anything, emphasize our diversity of origin and background. It is noticeable that sometimes people who would disclaim any belief in astrology feel some affinity when they find that they have a sign of the zodiac in common, and if one of a person's given names were always the appropriate sign of the zodiac, that in itself would serve as some introduction when meeting strangers. It was a very long time before I found out that my colleague Peter Rivière, Radcliffe-Brown, and I were all born on the same day of the year.

In small societies of Brazilian Indians, the stock of possible personal names is as small as four, and it might be expected that

there would be few names in very small societies where individuals are always in close personal contact and can differentiate by looks, gestures or context. It is not usually difficult here to know which of two, or even three, Johns in the same company of friends is meant at any given moment. But some very large societies also tend to limit the number of acceptable names by administrative or religious rule, as though a society's stock of names were an index of its religious, ethnic or national integrity. According again to Miss Withycombe's *Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names*, by German law a child may not be given a name which cannot be proved to have been used before (presumably particularly in Germany), and Christian ecclesiastical rules require a baptismal name to be chosen from names of saints or others with Christian credentials.

Even then, proportionately very few of all permissible names are commonly chosen in practice, and preferences change from time to time. Miss Withycombe notes that in the later thirteenth century, the names Henry, John, Richard, Robert and William accounted for 38% of all those recorded; and the lists of the ten or so commonest names given yearly in *The Times* newspaper, suggest that most *Times*-reading parents prefer their children to have at least one name which does not single them out, since it is shared with many of their coevals. A very singular name may embarrass a child, and perhaps a name chosen by many readers of *The Times* may be assumed, by the upwardly mobile, to be approved by 'Top People'. In societies like that of the Akan of Ghana, where every child automatically has one name taken from the day of the week on which it was born, or the Bari neighbours of the Dinka, where one of a child's names follows inevitably from its birth-order in the family, its nominal homogeneity with very many others of the same speech community is assured. There may be names which are usually given only to those in families of higher status, but they also will have one name placing them in a situation they have in common with many of lower status. Since all Fante and Ashanti are given day-names, Robinson Crusoe's 'Man Friday' may have been a Ghanaian king, whereas in English it suggests inferior status.

I do not know how many names there are among the two million or more Dinka, but theoretically they would seem to be limited only by the uncountable range of features of the natural or social environment which have traditionally been accepted as suitable for personal names; these names reflect the natural and social world the Dinka know. Praise-names derived from cattle-colours give scope for imagination and invention; they give pleasure as literary creations but, as I shall mention, they tend to be relatively ephemeral. There are no names at all for days in Dinka, and so no day names, and none automatically mark seniority in birth, even though there are important social distinctions between eldest, middle and youngest children. But however many personal names there may be, they are all, with very, very few exceptions, recognizably *Dinka* words. There is some overlap with the kindred Nuer, but even there it would always be possible from a census list to distinguish between a Nuer and a Dinka population. Except for Christian Dinka (and still fewer Muslims), foreign names were not adopted, for the Dinka sought little or nothing from neighbours unlike themselves. British

officials were known to most of them only by the cattle-names which they had given them; their aeroplanes similarly were 'sky-canoes' for the Dinka and their bicycles 'iron donkeys'. So in 1947, after half a century at least of one or another kind of foreign government from the north - Turko-Egyptian, British, Sudan Arab - they were scarcely culturally or linguistically colonized. The turmoil of the last thirty years, while emphasizing their rejection of political domination, has doubtless modified this cultural exclusiveness, and for many of them made some sort of pidgin lingua franca necessary.

When, or very soon after, a child is born, the family (in which the paternal grandparents and the midwife have important roles) choose a name. God 'creates' (*cak*) the child, the family 'create' it as a person of that name. This one name is the basic name which the child will carry through life and after death, whatever others may be acquired on the way. That name is usually short, a word of one or two syllables, with the gender distinguished (though not invariably) by a prefix. This almost curt directness of the given name is in marked contrast to names among some African peoples of other language-groups. The Igbo and the Yoruba of Nigeria, for example, have large numbers of personal names which, by compounding ideas and proverbial references, are in effect whole sentences, even sermons. There are I think few didactic Dinka names like (to select some names at random from Ebu Ubahakwe's book [1981]) 'Colleagues Never Speak Well of Each Other', 'There Is Nothing That People Cannot Negotiate or Talk About', or 'No one Understands the Thoughts of Others'. These suggest a world of secrecy and intrigue quite different from that of the Dinka, who in principle, at least, believe in being straightforward and forthright with others.

Worth more systematic attention, are the many words *not* chosen as personal names. The Dinka take quite a number of their names from those of birds and animals, for example, but I have never heard of anyone called by the word for that bird of ill omen, the owl, or for eaters of carrion.³ Again, what the Dinka call *thiel*, 'spiteful envy and jealousy', though frequently alluded to in songs, is not in my experience given as a personal name; whereas, according to Dr John Beattie (1957), among the Banyoro of Uganda there are many names based upon these vices. They suggest that Banyoro suspect neighbours of wishing to harm them, possibly through witchcraft and sorcery, and in some way, Dr Beattie says, protect themselves by openly voicing that suspicion. The Dinka also have notions about witchcraft and sorcery, and abhor them, but they play little part in their daily lives, and are not a source of the constant anxiety which seems to be felt among many other African peoples. They are regarded as un-Dinka, in the sense that drawing a knife in a fight is (or rather, perhaps, was) regarded as un-British.

³ I am told by my friend Emmanuel Bol Kuanyin that 'Vulture' is used, though not common.

⁴ I have since heard of 'Thiel', but again it is rare.

A final example of contrasting African styles in naming also comes from the Igbo, who have very many names spelling out the attributes of God, many concerned directly or indirectly with wealth and material prosperity, and some derived from occupations. The Dinka had no occupations in the sense of trades, so there were no personal names connected with specialization of labour, or interest in material wealth, except in cattle, which themselves had spiritual rather than material value. Dinka are commonly named after divinities which at some time have affected the family; but among them these religious names are simply taken over from divinities, whereas among the Igbo they are often didactic, pious generalizations and moral adages. I cannot imagine among Dinka such names as the Igbo's 'The World Is Not a Bad Place' or 'God Is Not Bound By Individual Wishes'. Such differences more than hint at the connection between a people's stock of personal names, and traditional sentiments and mores in a way not paralleled among ourselves.

The given single name very usually commemorates a dead relative or ancestor, and this again is of some comparative importance, since African societies seem to differ very markedly in their use of personal names for commemorating their dead. Then there are names which draw attention to special circumstances of birth, some of them experienced at some time by almost all other Dinka families; some denote qualities (Agoth, 'bellicose'), or situations (Mum, 'confusion'), and others recall spiritual agencies, tribal sections, places or material conditions which have either at the time of the birth, or of a previous birth, strongly affected the well-being of the family. Many common names, as I have mentioned, refer to creatures or things of everyday observation. Thus there are Agany, 'monitor lizard', Akwei, from *kwei*, the black-and-white fish eagle, Ding, from a fish. Many such names also have an immediate association with the colours of cattle, as for example Makwei, a black-and-white ox. There are names taken from things and activities around the homestead or the cattle-camp: Kuot, 'a gourd'; Mawien, after *wien* 'twine', a name (like Ader) meaning a child born in the context of a death, since in mourning Dinka replace their bead waist-girdles with twine; Kuol, a small bitter cucumber growing wild in homesteads and used in rituals; Arop, 'dung-ash', also so used. Of situational names, Moroor or Manoon suggests a birth or conception in the grass forest (*roor*) or the grass (*noon*). Koriom, 'the locust', indicates birth in a time of famine. Examples of spirit names are Deng, as I have mentioned, associated with the rain and ubiquitous as a sky spirit among the Dinka; Garang and Abuk, both spirits and the Dinka's Adam and Eve; Cyer, the planet Venus, or a comet; and many names following from the tutelary divinities - 'totems' - of the numerous different clans of the Dinka. Ring, 'flesh', is an outstandingly important divinity and common name in some priestly clans, and Aiwel, or Longar, or both, occur in those clans which claim descent from that original priest and culture hero of the Dinka. Twins are usually given special names, Ngor and Can being most usual for boys. Dinka associate twins with birds, disposing of them in trees at death if they die young, according them respect, as sky-related, and speaking of them as having 'flown'

rather than died, so twin-names indicate that those who bear them must receive special treatment. Those whose birth immediately follows that of twins are called Bol, if male, and Nyibol, if female, which suggest an increase, or exaggeration, of something. As in many other African societies, names which record a preceding death are very common, for example Akec, 'it is bitter', after the death of a parent; Dut, 'consolation', (perhaps after the gift of a 'cow of the consolation'); or Manhiem, 'of the (body) hair', which is allowed to grow during mourning.⁵

There are now a large number of Dinka who have received European Christian names in the course of their education (though particularly in Protestant missions, somewhat recondite Old Testament names were often chosen); and some families have been at least nominally Christian for some three generations. Where a Christian name is taken, in ordinary educated usage it is added to the Dinka given name, so a boy called Bol at birth, later adopting the Christian name John, will be known to most of his educated acquaintances as John Bol. Bol, let us say, is the son of Ding. In traditional Dinka usage, he is Bol Ding, or among intimates called by a nickname or ox name; in educated usage, he is referred to as John Bol Ding. His father also may be a Christian, known to his educated friends as, say, Edward Ding. But I doubt if as yet, at least, it is at all usual for a Christian name from a previous generation to be incorporated genealogically. John Bol Ding therefore does not become John Bol Edward Ding. If, as I suppose, these Christian names remained genealogically supernumary, even though between educated Dinka they were a usual means of identification, it suggests that they did not as yet signify anything of lasting historical importance to the Dinka. They indicated primarily (though now very importantly) that their bearers had been in contact with missions and schools, and related them only to those others of similar background. For what are still the great majority, they convey nothing else about a person's history or social personality as a *Dinka*, for they signify a partial assimilation to a world scarcely known to their ancestors.⁶

And it is possible, by dropping the Christian name, to try to reject that assimilation. When African states became independent, Christian names which had given their bearers some sort of place in the foreign colonial structure of society were often deliberately repudiated. The Ghanaian poet who had made his name as George Awoonor-Williams changed in mid-career to Kofi Awoonor, and who remembers Kwame Nkrumah as 'Francis'? On the other hand, President Hastings Banda, whose attitude to European culture and values remains quite different from that of some other African nationalist leaders, has happily retained that name while taking an indigenous honorific title. Comparable is the atavistic way in which, according to Dr Al-Shahi, northern Sudanese of slave origin who do not know what

⁵ I am sorry that space does not allow me to incorporate here more valuable information from Emmanuel Bol Kuanyin.

⁶ Christian Dinka often, perhaps most usually, address and refer to each other by Dinka names in their personal relations.

their own ancestors were called, after emancipation adopted names which are of more ancient, classical status in Arabic than those of their former masters.⁷ A change of personal names would thus seem, in Africa now as in the Middle Ages in England, to indicate a shift in the distribution of power and status in a society. And there are indications in some African families that what might become a kind of family surname, in African states as in mediaeval Britain, is tending to replace older systems of single, uncompounded names. Those are too complex for bureaucratic tabulation, in a telephone directory, with names like Ding Deng Ding, Ding Deng Deng, Deng Deng Ding, Deng Ding Deng, and so on.

There are also nicknames, like those familiar in the West, which draw attention to a personal peculiarity of appearance or habit. The name of Deng Majok or Majong already mentioned, initially given to tease him about his pet dog, will suffice as an example, since it was probably preserved only because he was a well-known chief, and then its real provenance and history was probably not known outside the family. Such a common nickname as Manhom, referring to someone with a large head (*nhom*), would only be preserved if the bearer were of historical significance on other counts. But there are also names which mean a great deal culturally to all Dinka during at least part of their lifetimes, but which do not seem long to survive their deaths, except for some very outstanding individuals. These are the names by which Dinka men are praised in song and salutation by metaphorically associating them, through the colours of their oxen, with innumerable aspects of the social and natural world around them. They attracted my attention, as indeed they interest the Dinka; and more generally in the day-to-day affairs of the cattle-camp, a stranger gets the impression that it is scarcely possible to find any Dinka whose name or part of it is not directly or indirectly associated with cattle-colours. But (as I was rather surprised to find) when one comes to look at genealogies, such names figure less prominently than they seem to in daily life. I and others have already written about these praise-names at some length, so to show how they are formed I give one more example from those supplied by Dr Deng, and from the hundreds, possibly thousands, that may have existed.

Praise-names are constructed as follows. Let us suppose that a man's display ox, or one with which the inventor of his praises wishes to associate him, has a pattern of black and white spots with the basic name *makuac*, directly related to the spotted pattern of the leopard, *kuac*. The praise-name of the owner of that ox might refer to anything which the praiser sees as similarly spotted, or which he associates with the leopard. Hence, to give Dr Deng's examples, he may be praised as 'Respecter of Girls', because the leopard is thought to be more passive towards women than towards men, or 'Wild Cat', after a skin from that animal worn at dances, or 'Piercer of the Skin', because the spots look like holes in the skin, probably of animals speared, and thus carrying with it the idea of prowess in hunting. Some such name may be used to praise

⁷ See Ahmed Al-Shahi's article in this issue.

many different men, or may be used for the same man - Lanbar, 'Tall Game', for a man whose ox is coloured like the elegant giraffe, is an example. But a gifted composer has scope for originality, and the names can be poetic riddles, or a kind of *nom de guerre*. They are important for self-esteem, and for showing what the Dinka observe and admire in the world about about them. But a list of personal names preserved genealogically from the past would scarcely indicate these intense Dinka interests, and the metaphorical cattle-names would present a problem to a later translator of Dinka songs. I suggest that they tend not to be preserved as the names of particular individuals because (in this respect like adopted Christian names) they have no relevance for establishing a Dinka's position in the system of values and traditional structure of Dinka society, as a member of a particular family, of a particular place, belonging to a particular lineage of a particular clan. They do not, like the recitation of the full name through agnatic ancestors up to the clan-founder, announce some of a person's rights and duties, or encapsulate the social background of the bearers.

Dinka clan names are not given as part of the full name, but for any Dinka to know a person's clan was, and probably largely still is, a matter of life and death. At marriage, according to the Dinka rules of exogamy, the elders must ensure that the prospective bride and groom cannot trace any relationship by descent on either the father's or the mother's side, unless this relationship is judged to have become very distant and a ceremony is performed to sever it. Otherwise the marriage may be incestuous, and a source of illness and death. Already twenty years ago, Dinka exiles in Khartoum were beginning to be *unsure* in some cases. For the collection and distribution of marriage cattle also, a wide range of kin is involved, and for this an extensive knowledge of names and their genealogical status is essential. Similarly, in cases of homicide, it is necessary to know which are, as it were, Montagues or Capulets, since homicide if uncompounded by compensation in cattle, demands blood vengeance, and blood vengeance may develop into feud which can outlast the generation in which the homicide occurred. The clan also defines the religious practices, prescriptions and proscriptions of those who belong to it, and even when Dinka were guests in Oxford, it was well to ask about clan-based food taboos. To break those also could be a cause of sickness and death.

So to place a Dinka socially, it is not enough only to know a person's individual line of descent. You have to ask also what clan he belongs to, which may or may not be apparent from the name of the founder. The way in which this is asked is itself of some interest for resolving what would seem to be a paradox of personal naming; the way in which names are required to identify individuals while also merging them into the common identity of their various social groups. For the literal translation of the question 'What is your clan?' is 'You are a person of the children of the family of what colour (type, kind)?', where the word used has the primary

meaning of the colour of animals. And as I have said, what 'colour' you are in this sense decides whom you may marry, and may decide, in a homicide, who is likely to kill or be killed by whom. At this level the particular individual designated by his personal names is of secondary importance; and the statement attributed to various Oxford figures when rebuffing an unwanted acquaintance - 'It's not you I dislike, it's just your type' - would seem to Dinka to be in the nature of human relationships.

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