

WHAT IS IN A NAME? THE SOCIAL AND
HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF GA NAMES¹

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Among the Ga-speaking people of Ghana the traditional naming system provides a wealth of information but for members of the ethnic group, it individuates the bearer by giving information about his background.² Personal names provide material for the study of the social organisation of the people.³ Thus names give information on:

- 1) The town of the person
- 2) The quarter (Akutso)
- 3) The Ancestral home of the patrilineage (We)
- 4) The particular family of the lineage (We) if there is a deviation from the name.
- 5) The seniority of the bearer in relation to other siblings of the same set of parents.⁴
- 6) Special circumstances surrounding the child's birth if these are considered unusual.

In a significant sense Ga names give information about the history, social organisation, beliefs, values and customs of the Ga and the aim of this paper is to examine the Ga naming system to highlight the significance of Ga names.

Who are the Ga?

The Ga-speaking people occupy the territory stretching northwards from the Gulf of Guinea on the Coast to the feet of the Akwapim hills.⁵ They are bordered on the West by the Awutu, a Guan speaking people, and on the East by the Adangbe, a people with close linguistic affinity to the Ga.⁶ The Ga language belongs to the Kwa sub group of the Niger-Congo family.⁷ The Ga are divided into six major settlements. From West to East these are:

- 1) Ga Mashi (Central Accra)
- 2) Osu (Christiansborg)
- 3) La (Labadi)
- 4) Teshi
- 5) Nungua
- 6) Tema

Each of these settlements has a number of fishing and farming villages scattered on the Accra plains. The six settlements are sub-divided into Akutsei (sing. Akutso) or quarters, the numbers of which differ from town to town. For example Ga Mashi has seven, Nungua two and Tema four. Each Akutso is again divided into Wei (sing. We) ancestral homes or patrilineages which also differ in number from one Akutso to the other. Every Ga belongs

to one of the Wei of the settlements.⁸ Since the Ga are patrilineal each person belongs to his or her father's Wei.

Whatever their ethnic identity might have been in the distant past from the late fifteenth century the Ga Coast has attracted a continuous wave of people and cultural influences from outside. In 1680 the Ga were defeated by the Akwamu.⁹ They won their independence from Akwamu in 1730 only to lose it to Akyem who had helped them to overthrow the Akwamu yoke. In 1742, the Asante took over from the Akyem and exercised their sway till 1826. Besides the political domination of these three groups of Akan at different periods of their history the Ga also developed strong ties with other Akan groups such as the Fante and Akuapem on account of their fishing and trading contacts and with the Adangbe and Ewes their not too distant neighbours. Nigerians, Brazilians and Europeans of different nationalities also settled among the Ga. The immigrants came to settle as representatives of their government, refugees, traders, artisans, fishermen or labourers seeking their fortune in the flourishing Accra trade. Many Ga-speaking people of today make no secret of their European, Brazilian, Nigerian, Akan and Ewe origin and this mixed ancestry is reflected in the names they bear.

The naming system

Personal names are given according to seniority and sex. For example a first or second son's name is not affected by siblings of the opposite sex coming before or after him. This also holds true of names of daughters, as is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Male		Female	
1st son	<u>Tete</u>	1st daughter	Dede
2nd son	<u>Tete</u>	2nd daughter	<u>Koko</u>
3rd son	Kwei (Mensah) ¹⁰	3rd daughter	Kal
		4th daughter	Tsotsoo
		5th daughter	Fofo

Tete and Dede are so basic to Ga personal names that a man is called Tetetee (Tete's father) to emphasize his maleness and a woman Dedenye (Dede's mother) to emphasize her femininity. Every Ga man can be addressed as Tetetee and every Ga woman as Dedenye regardless of age. As soon as a Ga says "Look at what a man - Tete's father - is doing or a woman - Dede's mother - is doing" the listener knows immediately without being given any details

that the individual in question is behaving in a way considered to be unbecoming of his or her sex.

Apart from these basic sets, each We has its distinctive set of names used by alternate generations. The basic sets are added as a suffix to reflect the order of seniority. For example, in Lante Djan We of the Asere quarter in Ga mashi, the names used are shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2

First Generation			
Male		Female	
1st son	Lante	1st daughter	Lamile
2nd son	Lantei	2nd daughter	Lamioko
3rd son	Lankwei	3rd daughter	Lamkai
4th son	Lankai	4th daughter	Lankwei
5th son	Lamayi		

The original names are:

Table 3

Male		Female	
1st son	Lam - Tete	1st daughter	Lam - Dede
2nd son	Lam - Tete	2nd daughter	Lam - Koko
3rd son	Lam - Kwei	3rd daughter	Lam - Kai
		4th daughter	Lam - Tsotsoo
		5th daughter	Lam - Pofo

Tete is shortened to Te, Tete to Tei; Dede to Le, Koko to Ko; Tsotsoo to Tso, Pofo to Fo and Kai, and Kwei are simply joined to the lineage name, to give the present version of the names as indicated in the Table 2. With such a rule, it is fairly easy to determine seniority among siblings of the same parentage. A man, his brothers and the sisters have the same set of names as his paternal grand-father, grand aunts, his son's children, his father's brother's children and his father's children by wives other than his mother. A name is determined before the bearer is born by virtue of his or her position in the family. This apparent rigidity contrasts with the system used by neighbouring ethnic group such as the the Akan and Ewes.

Among the Akans for example there is no such rigid system of naming. It is a combination of free choice and norms with the father choosing names from both his paternal and maternal lineages. The Ewes usually name their children according to events, circumstances, qualities and values upheld by the parents.¹¹

In spite of the pre-determined nature of names among the Ga, the system makes allowance for exceptional situations. Avoidance¹² of the use of the lineage names, or non-conformity to the set pattern, is allowed under special circumstances. This has to do in cases of an accident, a curse, an unusual death or a special blessing. These are supposed to have their roots in the spiritual world. Again when unsavory qualities or incidents such as pre-mature or violent death, violence, misconduct and stupidity become associated with a particular name in the family the name is omitted entirely from the list. In this instance, it is usually only the affected family of the lineage which drops the use of the name in question.¹³

Avoidance of the use of the lineage name is also permitted when a child loses its father before it is born. It is then named Ahia or Antobam. A baby born in response to a petition to a god is also named after the god or given a name used by the lineage of the worshippers.

The commonest avoidance technique is with regard to what is known as reincarnate names. It is believed that when a couple lose their babies in succession, it is the same child that keeps on coming back into the world after death to cause misery to the parents. The reaction of the parents to this is to allow the child to be mutilated with ugly facial marks and to avoid using the lineage names. Such a child is known as a "gbobalo"¹⁴ and given a gbobaloi agbei (gbobalo's name). Such names are either words or statements: e.g. Kukwei (pot), Kuntso (toilet), Djokoo - come and sit down, Adjumadjan - vain task. Ahie aakwe - we are holding it to see; kpa yaafo - stop crying. Other such names sometimes express defiance, examples: Kwan da ho - the way is clear (i.e. you are permitted to leave). Bo oba - it was you who came. (So, you can go). Atse afo - it should be thrown away. Gbo oya - die quickly. Others are in the form of questions: Mami Oshi? - (What have you left behind?). Mami akee? - (What have I said?). The whole concept is to treat the child with as much contempt as possible.

In describing a similar practice among the Akan, Sarpong states:

to stop such a child from his "bad behaviour" the baby who is born next is given any name by those present at its birth. The funnier or uglier the name the better. The baby is thus ~~marked~~ ashamed to go back. This is the origin of such Akan names which translate as Incenerator, Dew, Slave. Such babies may be marked on

the cheek or around the lips to indicate that they have been enslaved.¹⁵

Just as recurring death of babies of one woman is considered a curse and leads to the avoidance of the use of lineage names so is multiple birth by one woman considered a blessing from the gods¹⁶ and also leads to the suspension¹⁷ of the lineage names till a set of five special names has been exhausted. The names used for children of multiple birth among the Ga¹⁸ are Akwele and Akuoko for a set of twin girls; Oko/Akwete and Akwete for a set of twin boys; Oko and Akwele for a boy and a girl, Tawiah for the child born after the twins or the third child in a set of triplets. Ago for the second child after the twins or the fourth in quadruplets and Abam for the third born after the twins.¹⁹

Supplementary names instead of total avoidance, are sometimes given to Ga children. These names are often message names or names given in recognition of peculiar circumstances surrounding the birth or childhood of the bearer.²⁰ Other message names²¹: Fee hi (all is good) or Ame nonn (the same people) indicate that the bearer is preceded by siblings of the same sex. Ame edoo (they are the ones who are upset) shows that the parents, most often the mother, is quite happy with the child regardless of the feelings of others.

Other supplementary names are day names gbi gbei - a name given to a child according to the day of the week on which he or she is born. Attendance to this is an appellation, Sabla. The sabla falls into two categories - the first is the Sabla which is attached to specific names. Any bearer of the particular name regardless of lineage is addressed by that appellation. The second is personal to the bearer and can be a nickname given to him by others or by himself. The appellation is supposed to extol the qualities or beliefs of the bearer or in the case of the first category, an ancestor who bore the particular lineage name. According to A.A. Amartey [1969] the first category of Sabla is usually used at meetings where the use of lineage names will be considered impolite since there are bound to be elders present who bear the same names as the youth. For example, Amaa will be addressed as "Oshae Akpe", "(Oshiapem) - you are not afraid of a thousand" and Ayikai as Osi ahame - "Kingmaker".²² It is a common practice for a Ga to address himself with his appellation whenever his integrity is at stake or when he wants to indulge in self-exaltation. Whenever a Ga says a "mi" - plus his appellation e.g. "mi Oshiapem" he is probably denying something he has been accused of or telling people to be well prepared for a confrontation in dealing with him. The simple mention of the appellation with 'mi' is a complete sentence the meaning of which depends on the context. It could mean "what you

are accusing me of is far below my dignity" or "watch out, I am a force to reckon with, nobody gets away with trifling with me".

Names and Associated Beliefs and Values

The naming system of the Ga highlights the beliefs and values of the people. A name is a means of corporate identification. Spiritual backing is given to the system to ensure its effectiveness and continuity. The spiritual backing is strengthened by the manner in which Ga society was organized in former times. Ga society was formerly grouped around deities who protected, defended, blessed, reprimanded, punished or cursed. According to F.L.Romer²³ [1754] one Putti (Okpoti) the high priest of Labadi informed him that after death, the ancestors, if they had died peacefully in their beds, go to the Supreme God and are used to strengthen the powers of the lesser gods who are his representatives on earth. The Ga belief in reincarnation and the information given by Romer quoting Okpoti imply that the people shuttle between the spiritual world and the mortal world assisting humanity by strengthening the powers of the lesser gods after death and then coming back to life to perform their human duties. In referring to the Akan who also believe in reincarnation, Sarpong states that "the distinction between men and their ancestors is not big as ancestor can become man and man can become ancestor at any moment".²⁴ The Ga believe that just as there are good human beings and bad ones, so are there good spirits and bad spirits. Both the spiritual and human authorities need to identify their children in order to protect them from danger. In their view, the names provide such identity so that whenever a Ga name is mentioned the god of the lineage knows immediately that it has to pay attention in case his supernatural intervention is needed. The lineage name gives a Ga a sense of security for it makes him confident that with his identity the gods of his lineage will never forsake him. This is the reason why a Ga prefers to stick to his lineage name and very rarely deviates voluntarily.²⁵

The spiritual aspect of Ga names is illustrated in the Kpodziemo or outdoor ceremony. The Ga give social recognition to the existence of the child only after it has been given its lineage name on the eighth day after birth. Before then, it is kept indoors. If it dies before the eighth day it is not reckoned to have been born at all and its name is given to the one born after it. It appears that formerly, the waiting period was two weeks instead of one. This impression is from an observation of a Danish author of the eighteenth century in a description of kpodziemo which lends credence to this and brings out its spiritual content.

naar et Barn er fjorten Dage gammelt, holder man en Fest og giver det navn. En mængde Negre af begge køn samles i Husets Gaard og Sætter sig som sædvanlig i Rundkreds paa Hug. Barnet bliver lagt nogent paa Jorden midt i kredsen, og en Praestinde eller, men sjældnere, en Praest springer frem og tilbage over det og raaber imens hele Tiden Navnet. Som det skal baere.²⁶

When a child is fourteen days old they organise a feast and give it a name. Many negroes of both sexes assemble in the courtyard of the home squat as is usual in a circle. The child is laid naked on the ground in the middle of the circle and a priestess or very seldom a priest springs forward and backward over it while shouting the name the child should bear. (Writer's translation).

Modern day naming ceremony still retains its spiritual dimension, although a traditional priest or a priestess does not play any role at all. The ceremony is performed at dawn whilst the moon is still up. The child is stripped naked, shown to the moon and laid in a circle of ash three times alternatively. Water symbolising rain is then thrown on the roof and allowed to drop on the child. Someone of a commendable character in the lineage either male or female depending on the sex of the child is chosen to kick the child gently three times asking the child to emulate him or her. A drop of corn wine is then put on the lips of the child telling it that corn is the staple food of the Ga. Libation is then poured and the child's name is announced with a bottle of Schnapps of which everybody present is expected to take a sip from a common glass immediately after pronouncing the child's name. Corn wine and other refreshments are later served and anybody who wants to present the child with a gift or money is allowed to do so through an Otsiame chosen for the occasion. Usually this is someone with a good sense of humour who announces the gift or the amount presented while the rest of the gathering shout their appreciation or gratitude in unison.

In the naming ceremony, the sky god as well as the moon and the rain are called to commune with the earth god and the child's naked body in the presence of the ancestral spirits and representatives of the living members of the child's parents lineages and friends. A special address in the form of a libation is then poured.

Agoo! Ataamei ke Awomei
Wene afi me?
Wene afi Hoo (gbi le gbei)
 Niime! a-Hoo

Hiao
 Hiao
 Hiao
 Hiao

Naa mei a-Hoo	Hiao
Naa gbo ni ba le	Hiao
Woke le miitsoo Tsotsoobi eei	Hiao
Tswa Omanyaba	Hiao
Woseii ayi ati	Hiao
Wobole Kutu Wokpe	Hiao
Wodze bu wodze nu no	Hiao
Woye wonu wokodzi ano adzo wo	Hiao
Gbo ni ba le etse yiwala	Hiao
Enye yiwala	Hiao
Esee tuu	Hiao
Ehie fann	Hiao
Eyi abagbo dzen	Hiao
Koni wekumeiabii wona faanii wonofa le	Hiao
Ga humibi le kooyoo tswaa dani owieo	Hiao
Ona onako, onu onuko	Hiao
Yeifoyei atsomo toi ni amewo ketara {i	Hiao
Eko ata {i ni eke aba	Hiao
Eke edin ba, eke eyen aaya	Hiao
Aso owirefo nankafo sulokplo ni aata heko ni eekee aka	
befeeba le {ia (weku le gbei) nee bii miidzie kpo le.	
Ani ni wodzoo nee wodzoo le lo	Ooho
Hoo ke Hogbaa gbee le	Eagbo
Nyewoa eyia	Hoo
Tswa Omanyaba	Hiao ²⁷

Attention venerable Fathers and Mothers	May it be so
What day is it today?	"
Today is indeed Saturday	"
Saturday of our grandfathers	"
Saturday of our grandmothers	"
We are today showing the stranger who has joined us to the moon.	"
We ask that good fortune be our lot	"
May we have many men to direct our affairs	"
May we have many women to care for our homes	"
So that we may form a full circle when we meet	"
When we dig a well may we find water	"
When we drink water may we have peace, good health and prosperity	"
Long life to the father of the stranger who has joined us	"
Long life to his mother	"
Darkness behind him (May he never go back)	"
Light before him (May his path be clear).	"
May he have respect for the world (be respectful)	"
So that we the family members may always find it easy to forgive him	"

The humble Ga waits for the wind to blow before he speaks
 Even if you have heard you haven't heard
 May childbearing women become like gourds
 May we sit for more people to come and join us
 He came with black hair may he go with white
 If any snake, malicious person or sorcerer
 May complain that in this ancestral home (We) May it be so
 there is always an outdooing
 As we bless are we blessing him? No!
 Wednesday and Sunday kill him²⁸
 May he die!!
 Everybody hoot at him Ooho
 We ask that good fortune be our lot May it be so
 We ask tat good fortune be our lot

The text of the libation shows that all the participants including the child are addressed. It is obvious that it is the spirit of the child which is being addressed since he or she is too young to understand what is going on. The occasion is used to inform the baby and remind the participants of the moral and social values. These are peace, humility, respect, fertility, discretion and diligence.

The system of using the same set of names for alternate generations and the seniority pattern, help in bringing home to the individual a sense of responsibility and the respect he owes to the people around him. An eldest son's name is constant reminder to him of his headship and what is expected of him.²⁹ A father is also compelled to show respect to his son who either bears the name of his father or his father's brother. It is sometimes impossible to mention the name of the child without the prefix Mii which is a title of respect. The children are supposed to be old men and women who have come back to life. The Ga also give recognition to the various stages of a man's life by giving titles. The prefix Ataa which may mean father and the prefix Awo which may mean mother are used in addressing people considered old enough and for that matter, addressing them by their personal name only connotes disrespect. Examples are "Ataa Ako" and "Awo Kookoi". There are also precise titles indicating the status of the one addressed in relation to other members of the family. These are "Onukpa" - Senior, "teng" - intermediate and "fio" - junior. These become "Ataa Nkpa", "Awo Nkpa (or AAankpa)", "Ataa teng", "Awo teng" or "aateng". "Ataa Fio", "Awofio" or "Aafio". Another method of identification is to use as prefix the name of the first born in addressing the father or mother. Ataa Amartey can be addressed as "Amaa-tse" or "Amealetse", depending on whether his first born is a male or female respectively.

In the Ga family where the same set of names keep on recurring, these titles help in distinguishing one individual from the other. Day names, appellations, "Sabra", colour, stature or name of lineage or town of the mother are also used for identification. For example in a house full of several Amarteys it will not be unusual to hear "Amartey Kodjo", "Ataa Amartey", "Amaatse", "Ameeletse", "Ataa Nkpa",³⁰ "Amartey Nkpa", "Amartey fio", "Amartey Tsuru (Fair coloured Amartey)", "Amartey Din (Black Amartey)", "Amartey Osu (mother from Osu)" and "Kai bi Amartey - (Kai's son Amartey)".

A change in the status of a woman in the society can be assessed by the way she is addressed. When a woman gets married she does not take on her husband's name but keeps her own. As soon as her first child is born her status changes. Now her value as a human being in the society emanates from her role as mother. Her attachment to the husband is confirmed by childbirth. Kookoi married to Ataa Ako does not become Mrs. Odotei as modernity demands but "Odoi nye (mother of Odoi)" she is therefore not identified with the individual man to whom she is married but with the whole lineage. Any member of the lineage who hears a woman addressed by her child's name feels responsible for her welfare and runs to her aid for the sake of the children she is producing for the lineage. She is reckoned as an asset³¹ to the whole lineage.

Akan Influence

Historically the naming system of the Ga is a rich source of oral tradition and other historical insight. As stated earlier the Ga of today are a people of mixed origin and evidence for this can clearly be seen in the naming system. Personal names are clear historical indicators of ethnic origin. Akan settlement and cultural influence can readily be observed by the use of names like "Otu", "Amponsa", "Ofosuwa"³² etc. and "Adjiri", "Abeka", "Kwakupom"³³ etc. Further research shows that the Wei which use these names are of Akan origin. The Akan settlers continued to use their Akan names even after having been assimilated completely into Ga Society.

The Akan influence on the Ga naming system is observed in the use of day names by the Ga. Isert stated that

As a rule a person has two names one after the day of the week on which it is born and the other as a personal name. It never bears the name of the father but gets its own. Neither is the married woman called by her husband's name but her own.³⁴ (Writer's translations)

It is significant that the day names of the Ga are based on Akan days of the week and not on Ga days. These are:

Table 3

DAY OF THE WEEK

English	Akan	Ga
Sunday	Kwesida	Hogbaa
Monday	Dwoda	Dju
Tuesday	Benada	Djufo
Wednesday	Wukuda	Sho
Thursday	Yawda	Soo
Friday	Fida	Sohaa
Saturday	Memenda	Hoo

Table 4

Day Names

Day	Akan		Ga	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Sunday	Kwasi	Akosua	Kwashi	Akoshia
Monday	Kwadwo	Adwoa	Kodjo	Adjoa
Tuesday	Kwabena	Abena	Kwable	Abla
Wednesday	Kweku	Akua	Kwaku	Akua
Thursday	Yaw (Ekow)	Yaa (Aba)	Kwao	Aba
Friday	Kofi	Efua	Kofi	Afua
Saturday	Kwame	Ama	Kwame	Ama

Ga names from the third born are sometimes based on Akan numerals as shown in Table 5 and 6 below:

Appellations among the Gas also show a remarkable Akan influence. Practically all the appellations are in Akan. Examples of names and appellations are (1) "Sabang Diawuo", (2) "Twitwegu", (3) "Anomapodua", (4) Otonsa ma nsafo, (5) "Abebrese" etc.

Kropp-Dakubu [1981] has given examples of appellations in Ewe and English drawing a distinction between conventionalised appellations which are inherited with the lineage name and appellations peculiar to individuals.³⁵

Table 5

Names Based on Akan Numericals

Akan		Ga	
Male	Female	Male	Female
3 Mensah	Mensah	Mensah	Kai
4 Anan	Manan	Anang	Tsotsoo
5		Anum	Fofo
6 Nsia	Esia	Nsia	Shasha
7 Esuon/Nsonwaa	Esuon	Ashong	Ashong
8 Botwe/Awotwe	Awotwe	Botswe	Botswe
9 Nkrumah	Nkrumah	Akrong	Akrong
10 Badu	Badua	Badu	Badu

Table 6

Ga and Akan Numericals

English	Akan	Ga
Three	Mansa	ete
Four	Anan	edzwe
Five	Anum	enumo
Six	Esia	ekpaa
Seven	Esuon	kpawo
Eight	Awotwe	kpaanyo
Nine	Akron	neehu
Ten	Du	nyonma

Other Foreign Influence

Other groups of foreign origin can also be detected among the Ga through the use of personal names. Names like Obodai, Torto, Sai etc. borne by the people of Anahor division of Labadi and Osu are of Ewe origin. European names like Lutterodt, Richter, Reindorf, Hansen, Vanderpuye, Bannerman, Orgle etc. show a relationship and inter-marriage between Ga women and Europeans of Dutch, Danish and English origin living in the forts, castles and plantations. Brazilian names like Azuma Nelson, Perigrino etc. are pointers to a Brazilian origin of the bearers. Further

equiries on these names unfold centuries of historical events and relationships. From the Europeans, the Ga adopted the use of surnames, Christian names, nicknames³⁶ etc. just as they had adopted certain naming practices from the Akan. All these are supplementary names.

Although the Ga are patrilineal, they occasionally make concessions to the woman's family or the father's mother's lineage³⁷ when it comes to naming. In such cases permission has to be sought with a bottle of drink for libation to be poured to use the name. Historical evidence can be obtained from such instances when Ga men get married to foreign women especially those of prominent families. A typical example is that of the Royal Kowe quarter of Labadi. There are six Wei of Kowe, five of which bear Akan names. These are: Akonor We, Pobi We, Ahimako We, Asuman We, Frimpong We. Romer³⁸, [1760] writing in the eighteenth century makes reference to an Akwamu king, Akonor giving out royal women in marriage to the Caboceers of Labadi and Ga Mashi. The Labadi Caboceer named one of his children, Akonor, after the Akwamu king. The use of the name "Akonor" leads one to the historical fact that there is an Akwamu connection between the royal families of Akwamu and Labadi and this happened at a time when the mantse who was ruling at the time was from "Kowe". This is vital to historical evidence in Labadi.³⁹

Other Insights

Besides the names that reflect historical relationships and foreign infiltration of the Ga past, there are names which in themselves recall incidents in the oral tradition of a whole group. An example is the name Ashiakwei used by the Abafum quarter in Labadi. According to Labadi oral tradition, a man named Ashiao went hunting and discovered a man and his pregnant wife in the forest. The man Oteng, a fugitive from Aburi was brought home to live with his wife in Ashiao's house. The wife had a baby boy and he was named "Ashiao Koi shi bi" which means a child of Ashiao's house. This was shortened to Ashiakoi (Ashiakwei) a name used by Otewe (Oteng We) lineage of the Abafum quarter of Labadi. Whenever the origin of that We is given the name Ashiakwei is used as historical evidence to prove their alien origin.

The Ga naming system does not only provide evidence of relationships with foreigners but also gives an idea of Ga policy in the past. It appears that some quarters (Akutsai) did not allow immigrants to settle among them. Examples are the Amanfa division of Nungua and the Kowe quarter of Labadi. As the ruling family in Labadi for a greater part of the Seventeenth Century to the nineteenth century, the Kowe quarter allowed immigrants to settle either on the outskirts of the town or mix

with other Akutsei. That is why personal names of foreign origin among the lineage of Kowe quarter in Labadi are fewer than in the other Akutsei.

The Ga practiced a policy of integration. They allowed foreigners to hold offices in the traditional government of the town. It appears that socially the integration was only partial. Evidence was always left to prove antiquity and authenticity. This is shown by the Ga proverb, 'Wo non wo non notsasei ye mli'.⁴⁰ This means that among all those who are vociferously claiming ownership are the real owners. The social distinction is left to provide historical evidence in case of dispute. This acted as a check in the political arena or claims of ownership in the family setting. The degree of application of this policy differed from town to town. It is more difficult to detect the barriers to total integration in the family setting because the method is more subtle and differs from family to family. It needs very careful enquiry before obtaining the answer. An example can be found in Ahimako We of the Kowe quarter in Labadi. The descendants of one Yocomo Akrong were given permission to use the lineage names although her children did not belong to the We. They, however, do not use the name Odoi-Kpoti the lineage name for the third male child. They use the name Mensah, common to all third born male children. This is to show that they are Yeiabii⁴¹ i.e. children of women of the lineage and do not, under normal circumstances, belong to the We.

The Ga naming system did not only borrow from other cultures but it also influenced others with whom the Ga came into contact. Foreign men adopted the use of Ga names. Some followed the exact order of naming of a lineage of their choice either through inter-marriage, friendship or ownership by the lineage and others mixed foreign with Ga names. In this instance, the name of a Ga first born is given to a third born or any order of choice. It is interesting to note that even though some groups of Akan migrants kept their Akan names, they dropped the flexibility of their system of naming and adopted the comparatively rigid Ga system.

The Ga naming system also reveals the spread of the Ga population and the various groups in the migrations. In 1680, when the Ga were defeated by Akwamu, the Ga king and his followers fled eastwards and founded towns with their capital Glidji in the present Republic of Togo.⁴² They were later joined by other Ga people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries whenever life in Accra became too insecure or difficult for them. They so stuck to their naming system that later immigrants had no difficulties in tracing members of their lineage and settling among them.

Through the naming system, it is even possible to trace the original ancestral homes of Ga communities living within other

Ga communities. For example the "Klanaa" quarter, "Tunna We" of "Abese" quarter, "Nii Tete Nteni We" and Ayi We of the Abafum quarter in Labadi are of Ga Mashi origin. The Lamte Djan We of the Asere quarter in Ga Mashi can easily be traced in every Ga town. There is a bond of family relationship among them. This bond is not limited to the Lamte Djan We members, but any Ga who meets another Ga bearing the name used by his or her own lineage immediately concludes that there must be a relationship whether putative or real. The name then becomes a passport or identity card for receiving hospitality or help in any form.

Conclusion

The naming system of the Ga is indeed a distinctive feature of its culture. Rules are adhered to which make it possible for the individual to be easily fitted into his small family unit which is in turn fitted into the larger Ga social structure. The social structure, values and beliefs can easily be ascertained. The value placed on women, children, age and seniority is apparent. The system ensures both continuity and conformity to the lineage with the ancestors commuting between the world of the gods and ancestral spirits and mortal beings. The historical value of the naming system is remarkable though it has its drawbacks. The cyclical nature of the naming system poses a difficulty in working out the depth of genealogies, since the recurrence of names makes the identification of individuals with historical periods and specific dates practically impossible. However, the naming system is a repository of oral traditions and traditional politics or diplomacy. The Ga-speaking people through their naming system have displayed a capacity for responding to historical processes by absorbing immigrants and their cultural practices. It is a two-way current with the Ga taking and giving to the people with whom they came into contact. In short, a Ga name is an unwritten document.

Footnotes

1. 'The Gas use almost twenty different types of names which can be divided into three classes ... birth names, appellations and titles' ... M.E. Kropp-Dakubu: *One Voice the Linguistic Culture of the Accra lineage*. (African Studies Centre, Leiden, 1981), p.82.
2. A.A. Amartey. *Gnanye Aba*. (Bureau of Ghana Languages, Accra, 1969), p. 7-86.
3. The exceptions are discussed later.
4. A man with several wives gives the same set of names to children born with each wife.
5. The Akuapems are a sub-group of the Akan ethnic group.

6. The "Closest linguistic relatives" of the Ga - Kropp-Dakubu, [1981] p.89.
7. J.H. Greenberg. *The Languages of Africa*. (Bloomington, 1966), p.5.
8. A *We* is an ancestral home. It comprises a group of people who trace descent through the male from a common male ancestor. Several of these *wei* sometimes related to each other by blood or joined by immigrants in one residential area form an Akutse. The Akutsei form the town.
9. I. Quaye. *The Ga and their neighbours*. Ph.D. Thesis. University of Ghana, Legon, 1972. (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis).
10. Mensah is commonly used by all the ethnic groups of Southern Ghana.
11. Personal interviews.
12. A.A. Amartei gives reasons for departure from the naming pattern, 1969. p. 55.
13. An example is the avoidance of the use of the name Awule by a section of Adiko *We* in Ga mashi. The family claims that the Awules born to it usually turned out to be stupid. However, other families in the same lineage continue to use the name Awule because it had not had that experience with the use of the name.
14. *Gbo* - means die; - *ba* - means come. This means one who died and came back.
15. Rt. Rev. Dr. Peter Sarpong. *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*. Ghana Publishing Corporation. 1974. p.39.
16. Customs and beliefs associated with twins - M.J. Field, *Religion and medicine of the Ga people*. Oxford University Press. London and Accra, 1937, 1961. p. 180-182.
M. Kilson - "Twin beliefs and ceremony in Ga Culture". *Journal of Religion in Africa*. Vol.5, No.3, 1973. pp. 171-179.
17. In exceptional cases the multiple birth name is combined with the lineage name. e.g. Adjele Tawia.
18. Some other ethnic groups such as the Akan and Ewe also have a multiple birth naming system. Personal observations.
19. The Akan, Tawia, Nyarkomago and Abam are so similar to the Ga names that Kropp-Dakubu [1981] thinks the Ga names were adopted from the Akan.
20. M.E. Kropp-Dakubu [1981] describes some of them as trouble names. p. 143.
21. An example is the name *Nyommo aale* - it is only God who knows which was given to a child whose birth was marked by unexplainable circumstances. First, the mother left the husband in anger and returned to her own people only to discover that she was pregnant by the husband. She was so determined not to have another child by the husband that

she made several fruitless attempts to abort the pregnancy. When the baby was due she went through days of agonising labour pains and it was only after a herbalist had given her special herbal concoction that the baby was born looking as "ugly as the father". The mother just took one look at the child and named it "Nyommo aale". Only God knows and refused to go back to the husband. Personal interviews.

22. A.A. Amartey. op. cit. 1969. pp. 42-43.
23. F.L. Romer. *Tilferladelig Eftterretning om kysten Guinea*. Copenhagen. 1760. pp. 50-51. Putti refers to one Odoi-Kpoti in Labadi oral traditions. Caboceer is a term used loosely by the Europeans to describe the heads of the traditional authorities of the settlements.
24. P. Sarpong. op. cit. Accra. 1974. p.40.
25. Personal interviews.
26. P. Isert, 1917: *Breve fra Dansk Guinea 1783-1787*. Copenhagen: Nielsen and Lydiche (Axel Simmelkiaer), p.116. I. Ravnkiaer (ed.).
27. A.A. Amartey, 1969. p. 28-31.
28. Sunday and Wednesday refer to the day of some of the Ga Deities.
29. A man with a more Senior name can demand respect from an elder person who has a junior name on the basis of being "an elder brother a father" etc. It is the spirit behind the name and not the age which is paramount under such circumstances.
30. Sometimes the personal names are dropped leaving the titles for addressing the individual.
31. This is very important among the Ga where wealth is counted in terms of the number of children and slaves possessed by an individual or lineage.
32. These are names from the Dadebanaa Section of Otublohum quarter of Ga Mashi. See "Akwamu and Otublohum: An 18th Century Akan Marriage Arrangement" *Africa* xxix, 4, 1959. pp. 391-404.
33. From Adanse in the Alata quarter of Ga Mashi.
34. P. Isert. op. cit. Copenhagen. 1917. p.116.
35. A.A. Amartey. 1969. pp. 57-86. Personal interviews. Kropp-Dakubu. 1981. pp. 131-134.
36. Christian names refer to first names of European origin usually given to people at Baptism. There are non-christians with these 'Christian' names just as there are Christians who have refused to take on European First names.
37. In such cases, permission has to be sought with a bottle of drink and libation poured for borrowing the name.

38. F.L. Romer: *op. cit.* Copenhagen. 1760. p. 142.
39. Kowe and Abese. Personal interviews.
40. Literally means - It is ours! It is ours! But among them are the real owners.
41. The Ga are always quick to use the term "Yeiabii" women's children whenever lineage members feel threatened.
42. I. Quaye. *op. cit.* 1972. p. 110.

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