Rites of initiation and the mystery of the self

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Colin Turnbull draws on theatrical performance to characterise the transformative power of ritual -making visible the invisible [199O]. My paper is a critique of that very anthropological approach to ritual which has kept the self invisible.

I am concerned here with an instance of initiation ritual. My subject is social identity and its symbolisation. During the last few years, I have been pleading somewhat plaintively for anthropologists to address the mystery of the self. Historically, the self has been treated as determined or licensed by society, and as defined by the other people with whom the individual interacts. Rather than trying to appreciate-if not to reveal - the mystery, we have glossed over it by inventing the self in the image of our own theoretical models, either of the societies with which we were dealing, or of the more generalised nature of the relationship between individual and society. In a recent series of papers, I have attempted to focus attention on the tendency for individuals' perceptions of their selves to be lost or ignored in anthropological and other social discourse by our generalisation of them in to ethnicity, locality, sect, class orm other collective category [seeCohen,1989; in press(a),(b)and(c)].

In this paper I wish to illustrate my argument at a more personal level by looking at naming as a ritual means of initiating the person in to an identity, explanations of which almost invariably privilege the social definition of the individual over his/her self-concept. I will pose the question of why naming, apparently such a routine event, is nevertheless accompanied by-ritual and is thereby given special significance. For the purposes of this paper, I leave aside the naming rituals of the Great religious Traditions, for reasons both of practicality and theological complexity.

In a paper published nearly forty years ago, Lucile Charles suggested that the rituals which attend the giving of original names are much less 'dramatic' than those for subsequent name changes [Charles, 1951]. I will return is due course to this matter, strange to us, of succession in a person's naming career. Yet the record shows that name-giving is frequently a ritual affair [see Alford, 1987, pp.47ff.], dramatic or not. Why should this be so?.

Anthropologists who have been schooled in Van Gennep's and Turner's analyses of rites de passage, and in the cross-cultural study of classification systems, may well be inclined to answer that the ritual of naming terminates the dangerously ambiguous condition of liminality - of being, in Turner's phrase, 'betwixt and between', neither one thing, nor the other: biologically,but not yet socially, constituted; a presence, but not yet a member. Naming, as Lévi-Strauss pointed out, is a mode of classification, and classification is a necessary condition of possession [1966]. Following his logic, naming is required for a society to possess a person, that is, to make that person a member. It does not often confer full membership: that remains a task for future rite of initiation. Rather, it confers socialness [Alford, 1987, p.29], possibly in a way which signals some of the conventions of social organisation. I shall refer to instances of these later on. One aspect of this minimal socialness may be the propitiation of ancestors or spirits who are themselves integral elements of the society; or of a God, gods, or religious precepts which, similarly, are major referents in the socety's identity.

The evidence for this kind of interpretation is very powerful. It suggests that the point of such ritual is to confer socialness, rather than selfhood: that is to say, the performance of ritual which sacralises the conferment of a social identity also minimises the mystery of the self, either by concealing it, or by making the self in a social image, or both. This is largely the view that anthropology took in the past. We are coming gradually to recognise that it is inadequate: for, in concentrating on the social construction of self, it ignored self-consciousness, the prized capacity for reflection which we so value in ourselves and which the naive intellectual traditions of western scholarship led us to deny in cultural others. In recent years we have become aware of the theoretical, methodological and literary artifices by which we created the Other as qualitatively different. At the same time, the development of symbolic anthropology has revealed the personal discretion which individuals exercise in their interpretation of symbols. We can no longer render the self as a mere replicate in miniature of society or social group. A fresh look at rites of naming may therefore suggest the tensions which inhere in the relationship of individual to society, tensions which are trivialised if regarded as capable of their mechanical resolution trough ritual.

Since I found it in my fieldnotes and used it recently in a paper about the self and individuality, I have been tormented by the interpretations which might be put upon a statement made by a whalsay man that he had 'a right' to 'be himself'. What kind of right? legal? natural? Is it a right if it is merely proclaimed by him, but - and this was obviously his complaint - not recognised by others? The word

now has such common currency: human rights, political rights, gay rights, the right to self-determination (whatever that may mean), states' rights, natural rights, animal rights, the right to life... Bernard Crick has waned that we have so abused verbally a precious idea that we risk rendering it quite meaningless [1990, p.5]. The political theorist, the lawyer, perhaps even the philosopher, might so argue; the anthropologist cannot, for we must proceed from ordinary language, from the common, audible verbal currency, and 'rights', however debased semantically it may have become, remains an extraordinarily powerful idea. The effect of its deployment is to transform a mere claim into an axiom, a proposition which is not subject to the disciplines of proof.

In ordinary speech, it is clearly the case that 'rights' goes far beyond the legal sphere. We ordinarily use 'rights' in a relational, rather than just an absolute, sense: to assert, say, the entitlements of a wife vis-a-vis her husband; the worker in respect of the management: the right to be heard, to an opinion, to work, and so on. Indeed, in ordinary discourse, the assertion of 'rights' may well be in contradiction to the law. Another instance from my notebook is the statement made by a prominent whalsay skipper after he had been acquitted by the Sheriff's Court in Lerwick of having flouted quota restrictions on North Sea herring. His lawyer was able to demonstrate that the hapless young arresting naval officer was unable in court to distinguish a herring from a pilchard. Months later and still passionate with indignation, the skipper said to me, " How dare they stop me from fishing? It's my right. I'm a Shetlander and a whalsayman. I'm doing what my father did, and his afore him. It's got nothing to do with the law. If I can get fish out of the sea, it's my right. The politicians and judges can say it's illegal, but they can't say it's not my right." Now, this is very complicated, is it not? For here is a view, not of natural rights (for he would deny the same entitlement to Dane or Frenchman in shetland waters), obviously not of legal rights (for he rejects these as offensive), but of a right which inheres in his localness and is warranted by his skill, knowledge, need and by custom. In his view, the right can be impeded by the law but can not be invalidated by it. In effect he is saying the same as my first complainant: take away my right to fish, and you take away my right to be my self.

Now, the right to be one self has no legal foundation: not in the legal systems of the United Kingdom, nor, so far as I can discover, in any body of law anywhere - though, of course, I stand to be corrected. Indeed, one will find widespread disagreement about who has the right to determine who a person is: the person in question? Or the others with whom that person interacts? Here I raise the problem of identity in a very broad way and, as I suggested earlier, this problem is replicated in social science practice which generally treats identiy either as imposed upon a person by the Other; or as formulated by a person through the reflective process in which he relates himself symbolically to the other. Whether as passive recipient or as active agent, the self in social science has been largely a social construct. The view I would oppose to this orthodoxy is of the individual as 'authorial' of 'self-directing'.

Anthropology has long been uncomfortable with 'the self'. Generally in the literature, the 'person' is treated as a socially constituted entity, endowed with rights and obligations, a component of the social mechanism [see Carrithers et al, eds., 1985; Harré, 1987]. The 'individual' is a rather less precise entity, visually observable but theoretically problematic. How individual is an individual? The 'self' is the most elusive of these three: Mead's 'I', an aware being capable of reflection. Harré implies that the self is a culture-specific notion and refers to'that inner unity to which all personal experience belongs" ,(1987, p.51). For Nikolas Rose, the notion of a private self, or 'soul', is a chimera, for our 'sbjectivities' have been comprehensively invaded by, and shaped to the interests of those who exercise power over us. In his new book, Governing the Soul [199O], he argues that our mentalities have been transformed into, what Foucault neatly called, 'governmentalities'. Bureaucrats, professionals, managers, therapists and advertisers have turned the self into public space within which they all pursue their own interests. The self has been occupied and alienated.

Anthropologists have long debated the question of whether the concept of 'self' is as culturally specific, as Eurocentric and as vulnerable as these rather pessimistic discussions imply. I am certain that it is not. But let us simply accept, if we may, a proposition which would be valid for most of us - that it is possible to distinguish conceptually and experientially between the caracterisation of a person made by others and expressed in her or his social identity; and that person's self-concept. Our ability to make this distinction anthropologically follows from the development of modern anthropological approaches to culture, symbolism and meaning.

As these went through their more recent paradigm shifts, so the possibility and usefulness of generalising and stipulating the meanings of symbols was increasingly questioned. Writers emphasised the element of symbolic interpretation which is not generalisable because it is personal and inarticulate or unarticulated. Scholars as different in background and orientation as Firth and Fernandez addressed themselves to, respectively, the 'private' and the 'inchoate' in symbolism, rather than to the explicit and specifiable. The power of symbols, in this view, derives from what can be left unspecified and unspoken. Later still, we reach a dialogic genre in which symbolic forms are regarded as being incapable of translation at all, either because they lack analogues (as in Barth's account of serial initiation among the Bakhtaman of the New Guinea Highlands [1975]); or because they are self-referential (as in Roy Wagner's depictions of Daribi ritual and 'lethal speech' [1978]); or because they are inexpressible other than in their original form (as in Taussig's rendering of Colombian narcotic rituals [1986]); or because they are, quite simply, devoid of meaning, as Barley suggests for the instuments of Cameroonian Dowayo ritual [1983].

We need only to note that, with each stage of this theoretical progression, the nature of symbolism and of the process of symbolic interpretation is conceptually transformed to allow more discretion to the individual, the self. The meanings of

symbols are no longer thought of as being 'handed down' from on cultural high. The *forms* may be received, but as media for the individual's more or less unconstrained construction of meaning, which may or may not coincide with that of others. *Individuals* make meaning using shared cultural devices.

If initiation rites and names are read in this light, you will readily appreciate that they tell different kinds of story than their earlier ethnographers lead us to suppose. We may now have to deal with as many 'texts' of the ritual as there are paticipants, for we are theoretically bound to acknowledge each of them as authors.

This dialectic of the individual as (a) socially constituted, and (b) as 'authorial' lies behind most dilemmas of identity and their analysis in social science. It is manifest in many discussions of naming although a great and obvious lacuna in the literature on naming is ethnography which deals substantially and descriptively with people's experience of being named and with the meanings they impute to their names as symbols or icons of themselves. As I mentioned earlier, many writers have drawn attention to the light shed by conventions of naming upon the nature of the societies in which they occur. For example, there is the use of local ancestors' names to stress continuity and the primacy of affiliation to the descent group; or, conversely, of the parent's choice of an affinal forebear's name to express the importance of the child's *bi*lateral descent [Rossi, 1965]; there is the French requirement to use an officially approved saint's name, not to indicate allegiance to the saint nor even to the Church but, according to the socio-linguist Monique Léon, to France herself [Léon, 1976]. In an ingenious study of naming in te Bigouden-sud region of Brittany, Segalen finds in the naming of children after their godparents a reflection of the conditions of life and death in the Nineteenth century, for it created a 'spiritual bond' with godparents who, with life expectancy being very uncertain, were frequently required to assume the responsibilities of parenthood [Segalen, 1980, p.69].

Anthropologists have also looked extensively at the putative meanings of names: at whether these are descriptive, predictive, both, or are merely arbitrary. They have also raised the paradox that while the name is, in a sense, the individual's possession (although names are ubiquitously claimed as the property of a group), a hook for the individual's identity, it is usually bestowed by others and obligates the individual in its use [Zonabend, 1980, pp. 7,15]. Implicit in many of these issues, and sometimes raised explicitly, is my own topic: the confrontation of individual and society.

Because the naming forms we have discovered among 'other cultures' appear unfamiliar, we have constructed them as sociologically significant, and have simply assumed that they model the individual, the self. David Maybury-Lewis recalls the sheer consternation he caused by almost the first question he put as a nervous neophyte ethnographer to the headman of the Akwe-Shavante village in which he had just arrived to do his fieldwork. "What is your daughter's name?" [1984]. Frantic consultations ensued prompted, first, by the multiplicity of possible answers to the question; and, secondly, by its impolite nature. Work on other Ama-

zonian peoples confirm that they too find such direct questioning about names unacceptable (egs. Bamberger on the Kayapo [1974, p.364]; Ramos on the Sanumá [1974, p.172]). How odd that we actually address people by their names. Among the Moslem Kandayan of North-west Borneo, and the Nigerian Oru-Igbo, the impoliteness of addressing people by their given names is avoided by the use of 'greeting-names'. These may be descriptive, often slightingly so. For example, there is the freckled-faced Kandayan boy addressed as *silalat* (*tay-talat*, excrement of flies) [Maxwell, 1984, pp.35-6]; and the less than assiduous Igbo man greeted as, 'he eats while the others farm' [Jell-Bahlsen, 1989, p.203]. Or they may constitute a kind of fomulaic word-game in which the greeting name elicits a congruent response, exchanges which, according to Jell-Bahlsen, serve to confirm a person's identity. She gives this example: greeting name - 'if sickness kills somebody'; answer - 'it goes to the grave with the corpse' [ibid. p.204]. Evans-Pritchard described the variety of greeting terms used by Nuer, of which the best known is the ox-name, after the person's favourite ox which, in te case of a male, would usually be the beast given to him on his initiation [1964]. Richard Antoun observes that the use of proper names as modes of address, rather than of reference, in the Jordanian village of Kufr al-Ma is deprecated since it ignores the several forms of address available as means of indicating respect[1968].

We know of many other, perhaps less exotic circumstances in which formal names are not used. In Lewis [Mewett, 1982 and East Sutherland [Dorian, 1970] the coincidence of given name, patronymic and surname is so frequent that other means are required to distinguish among individuals. Segalen finds a similar issue of homonymy in Bigouden-sud. Hence we find 'substitute naming systems' [Dorian, ibid.] or nicknames, 'by-names', popular names or *surnoms*, perhaps referring to physical characteristics, place of birth or residence, personal idiosyncrasy or whatever. For similar reasons, in Barbados and Bermuda nicknames are in widespread use among all but the elect and the elite, and are supplemented by the owner's car registration number, even in public announcements of mariage or death [Manning, 1974]. In many societies, these descriptive 'informal' names were formalised in due course into family names, as was the case among Kurdistani Jews on emigration [Sabar, 1974] and for Mexcan Indians in Zinacantan in a process linked to lineage segmentation [Collier & Bricker, 197O].

To add to these complications is another which I mentioned earlier, also ubiquitous, in which the name of the individual changes at various moments during his/her life. According to Needham, the Borneo Penan change and/or add names as their children are born or as significant kin die [1964; 1965; and also see 1971]. Writing about the Phillipine Ilongot, Rosaldo argues that such name changes should be regarded as indicative of social relationships and of egalitarianism, rather than of social classification [1984]. Through them the individual's identity is manipulated by his/her significant others, as in the Moroccan *nisbah*, the identity tag a fixed to a person by others which refers to what *they* regard as the person's

salient associations [Rosen, 1984]. Yet again we see views of naming as a means by which society attempts to make the self.

A similar argument has been used in respect of Bimanese Islanders, whose naming conventions a]so connote the primacy of kinship since, on becoming a parent, a person assumes a teknonym, referring to his/her eldest child. This is not uncommon elsewhere. But the Bimanese go further: on becoming grandparents, people replace their teknonyms with 'paidonyms', referring to the name of the first grandchild [Brewer, 1981, p.206]. Lopes da Silva reports that after initiation, a Xavante boy is given the name of his mother's brother; but since adult homonymy is proscribed, the uncle has simultaneously to divest himself of his old name and take a new one [1989, p.384]. For the Xavante, names may be 'individual identifiers', but they are also public and corporate property, intended for distribution rather than for private hoarding [ibid.,p.336].

All of this is customarily explained as a means of imprinting society on the initiate's blank consciousness. Even when this is done through ostensibly supernatural devices, the ritual is nevertheless given social reference to the exclusion of the personal. I offer you two examples. The Sanumá Indians, Brasilian hunter-gatherers, name their children after forest animals. An animal of the chosen species is ritually hunted and killed by the father after he has observed appropriate taboos [Ramos, 1974]. It is not a random choice, for the child will be invested with the spirit of the animal which will enter through its lower spine. However, this does not betoken an ideology of human-animal symbiosis, nor even a form of totemic belief. Grafted on to it through te ritual sequences of naming are practical and pragmatic statements of social balance: betwen kinship and affinity; between agnatic and non-agnatic kinship, statements which correct the biases of formal social organisation. So the child who is supposedly named for an eponymous coccyx spirit is actually an ambulant depiction of the sanumá ideal of social normality.

The second example. While Jewish naming in the pre-exilic biblical era strictly avoided the repetition of forebears' names - since not to do so would traduce the uniqueness of the original holder - in *post*-exilic times, such repetition, referring to grandparents, became normal. In the post- Talmudic period Sephardic Jews established the practice which they still routinely follow of naming children after living relatives; Ashkenazim, more fearful of the fallibility of dangerous spirits which might attack the wrong person, restricted repetition to the names of already-deceased forebears, as they still do. Rabbi Jacob Lauterbach finds no theological rationale either in any of these practices nor in their transformations. They were circumstantial [197O]. It does not take much ingenuity to see why, historically, Jewish emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual might give way to stressing continuity - to the extent that individuality becomes so masked that even the Angel of Death can be misled. But this broad historical view utterly ignores the self-perception of the named individual and, as in the Sanumá case, simply assumes that this would be congruent with a social logic.

There would not appear to be much room for the 'authorial self' in these views of selfhood and naming. In almost all of them, naming is a means of placing the individual in the social matrix. Where is the individual's exercise of her/his own discretion? Where is the discretionary self anything more than the dependent variable of social structure and historical circumstance?

My final example is one of the most noted in the literature, Goodenough's famous comparison of naming in two Oceanic societies, Truk (in the Caroline Islands) and Lakalai (on the north coast of New Britain). On Truk, personal names are unique to individuals. On lakalai, by contrast, they are extremely limited, and other strictly coded forms of address are used.

So, while Truk naming clearly emphasises individuality, Lakalai naming stresses the social order [p.271]. The apparently obvious inferences to be drawn about the relative rights to individuality in each society would, however, be quite wrong. Truk social organisation is firmly based on matrilineal descent groups whose lineage elders exercise near-absolute authority over the decisions of their juniors. Individuality exists, quite literally, in nothing more than name [p.273].

Lakalai presents the obverse case. Public values emphasise *individual* achievement; lineages have few corporate functions; and leadership, like that of the Melanesian Big Man, is sustained tactically rather than based on seniority. While, in Truk, personal virtue elicits nothing, in Lakalai it is everything. The lakalai are rugged individualists, and their apparently contradictory naming conventions are to be understood as 'continual reminders that people are, after all, part of a social order' [p.274].

Goodenough concludes that names communicate ideas of the self and of self-other relationships [p.275]. His account reveals with the greatest clarity the conventional *modus operandi* in the anthropology of naming and, more generally, of identity: the asumption of an isomorphism between the anthropo-logic of interpretation, and the ways in which the persons thus named made sense of and supplied meaning to their selfhood and their experience of being named. We constructed cultures in the images of our own intellectual consciousness, and then derived selves from them.

My forenames do not convey to me any message about myself. The same may or may not be true of others present-I simply do not know, and would not wish to presume. Yet, anthropologists did routinely make such presumptions about the bearers of 'other cultures'. Because their naming forms differed from 'ours', we seemed to suppose that they must be sociologically significant, and further supposed that individuals would think alike about the social significance of their names and naming practices.

Of course, part of our error lay, and still lies, in applying to all of these forms of appellation and reference the culture-specific verbal category of 'name'. If we used different words to describe what these terms actually do - signify respect; address and/or refer to someone; denigrate, greet or associate a person with his forebeas, then we might not be led into the naive assumption that other cultures

simplify or compromise the self as much as, or to a greater extent than we do [see Zabeeh, 1968, p. 65]. We recognise 'religion', 'kinship', 'politics' as culturally-biased semantic discriminations; why not 'name' as well?

But our theoretical construction of other people's selfhood is not merely a technical fallacy, nor a mistake of anthropology alone. First, it is in the nature of social interaction. We can only engage with people if we can model for ourselves their mentalities. How else could we have expectations of them? But what we are doing in this process is denying people their selves - or, rather, we are supplying selves to them and assuming that there is no dissonance between *our* construction of their selves, and *their* sense of their selves. In making the kinds of assumption we have witnessed about the social and personal significance of names and their meanings, we neglect people's self-consciousness and, in so doing, deny them the right to self.

Whether or not societies themselves deny selfhood to novice members through naming and initiation rituals, our rendering of these rituals has certainly done so. We see this in the doctrinal interpretations of Chisungu and Mukanda. These were based on generalisation from the exegeses of indigenous ritual specialists which, in privileging the sociological significance of the rituals, neglected utterly the meanings which initiation may have had to the individuals concerned. Our literature is full of similar accounts of socially scripted personhood. I object particularly to that view of initiation which sees the addition of a novel aspect of identity as being tantamount to a remaking of the self. It can not be such a thing. Initiation may *add* to the self's span of potential experience, but even in the most extreme cases, such as entry into a monastic order, it does not, because it can not, amount to a discarding of the former self. One may dislike one's past; even attempt to distance oneself from it; but it is not discardable as a component of the self. Doctrinal interpretation is just a convenient way of inventing the self to suit our own intellectual purposes - 'ethnocentric intellectual gimnastics' [Turnbull,*op.cit.*,p.51].

I must briefly mention also two other calumnies which are frequently uttered in the social science invention of social selfhood. The first confuses individual*ism* with individua*lity* treating bot as the pursuit of self-interest. The second sees the self as a peculiarly Western concept. A recent example of the first is Walter Goldschmidt's argument that selfhood is not determined by social structure but has its origins in neurophysiological drives to self-gratification which are later tansformed by culture into the aspiration for prestige [1990]. Goldschmidt sees the task of culture (being itself the product of biological evolution) as the discovery of means to transform into communicable and acceptable social behaviour the putative fact that the neural development of the infant demands a strong emotional and tactile relationship which, in due course, inclines the maturing individual to become 'affect-hungry' [p.32] and to seek other kinds of self-gratification. The individual is thus self-driven ('motivated') rather than society-driven, but in a specific direction. Goldschmidt draws on a wide range of ethnographies to come to the somew-

hat unsurprising conclusion that ritual is a ubiquitous means through which societies tackle the common imperative of restraining the self. This is a pretty bleak view: that we require ritual to neutralise self-interest at the cost of self-awareness.

The second common misinterpretation is of self-awareness as a peculiarly Western concern which arises from the propensity of Western thought to strict segmentation. This rather indiscriminate account of 'Western' culture was recently restated in a tour-de-force by the Chinese geographer, Yi-Fu Tuan [1982]. He depicts the Western self as an aspect of the person which historically has become increasingly segmented and introspective, replicating the tendency to segmentation which is observable in all aspects of 'civilisation' from domestic to theatrical space and the conventions of cuisine.

It is a remarkably sustained argument, yet is built on a false assumption: that in 'premodern' societies, the self is irreducible; later, in modernity, it becomes separable into discrete components. But this is merely old-fashioned role theory of a kind which has been animating debate among social psychologists for decades. Tuan's evidence that societies such as Dinka, Tswana and Wintu are 'unpartitioned', i.e. do not discriminate between the self and the collectivity, has been well-rehearsed in the literature, but is unconvincing. It confuses cultural theories concerning the power and efficacy of personal agency with cultural theories of selfhood and self-awareness, echoing a similar mistake made earlier by anthropologists such as Lienhardt and Zahan.

If, as the social psychologist Ralph Turner has long argued, roles are accretions of the self, rather than its divisions [egs. 1962;1987], then there is no basis for discriminating *a priori* between concepts of the self in 'pre- modern' and 'modern', or non-western and western societies, or whatever other of these tired old dichotomies one wishes to parade. It is a mark of our own intellectual naivete that we have sceptically required anthropologists to *prove* the existence and saliency of selfhood in other cultures.

Where, then, does all this lead? I regret that I do not have a dazzling substantive conclusion to put before you, but only an assertion. Because of the nature of our research, intensive fieldwork among small numbers of people, people whom we come to know sufficiently well that we can distinguish among them as *individuals*, we are uniquely placed to reveal society and culture are aggregates of *selves*. Although we may disagree among ourselves theoretically on the nature of their individuation and their aggregation, that view acknowledges that we are dealing with self-aware, self-conscious individuals,not with replicates in miniature of the statistical tendencies or behavioural models attributable to *our* ways of representing the social generality.

Of course the self is elusive; self consciousness is not easily amenable to academic study. The self is a mystery which neither society nor anthropology can reveal precisely or demonstrably. We have to rely on disciplined interpretation and imagination. But this difficulty is not a warrant for us imply to neglect the meaning of the Chisungu to a Bemba candidate in favour of the interpretation offered by the

ritual specialist; it does not entitle us to dismiss my Whalsay friend's claim to his'rights' as a misuse of the English language or of a legal and philosophical concept.

The libyan Zuwaya boy is asked, in front of his lineage members: 'Who are you?'

'Muhammad'.

'Muhammad who?'

'Muhammad son of Abdullah?'

'Abdullah who?'

'Abdullah son of Muhammad.'

'Muhammad who?'

'Muhammad son of Bilal.' [Davis, 1989, p.109.]

Anthropologists know enough to realise that this ritualised recitation is neither a factual rehearsal of descent, nor a comprehensive statement of identity. Why is naming a matter for ritual? Our customary answer has been that ritual establishes society's rights over the named individual who, in turn, is the reby instructed in the obligations of social membership. But the other competence of ritual, hitherto neglected in our accounts, is that it provides means through which individuals construct the terms of their membership, establish the meanings of selfhood and society to them, rehearse their rights to their selves, selves whose public mystery they can sustain precisely because they are masked by ritual.

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