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## The Imaginary of the Name

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### Introduction

All human groups, past or present, have specific conceptions of the hereditary transmission of physical, mental or behavioral traits from ascendants to children. Indeed, they present a corpus of structured ideology in this area. A large number of societies have worked out original genetic theories that, as a rule, do not content themselves with thinking the biological blood ties, the phenomenon of resemblance and similarity, or sickness and death, but refer also to an explanatory model that globally accounts for the existence of the world, providing an ideological justification for its being, its organization and its reproduction. They see the individual as an integral part of the society in which they live and of the world around them (Augé & Héritier 1982).

The beliefs and representations connected with the individual's reproduction and development form a symbolic configuration in which the mother, the cosmos and the unborn child are united in a sort of symbiosis. The theme of the newborn's kinship with the extra-human world holds an important place in the collective representations of the child, for Albanians (like other cultures), often consider a child to be *not entirely a human being in its own right* until the rituals following the birth have definitively integrated it into the social group. This is true notwithstanding the fact that certain Balkan folklorists were unaware or denied the existence, in Southeast-European cultures, of beliefs concerning a possible life before birth or reincarnation (Stahl 1977). Similar claims, which specialists of the region have almost always advanced, perhaps even a bit too often, are surely founded on a limited model of interpretation rather than on an insufficient corpus of documents. These beliefs enable us to reconstruct the substantial ties that still bind the child to the world from which it comes. This world coincides not only with the long chain of ascendants but also with the world of the dead and the supernatural. The documents concerning the representations actualized in naming ceremonies may show what are clearly components of diffuse theories, such as that of the person's alter ego or of reincarnation.

In Albania, every individual occupies a determined place in a chain of descent. The criteria of this determination are usually conceptions concerning physical resemblance and difference, paternal and maternal kin ties, ceremonies celebrating the birth, as well as marks and practices involving augury, prediction, divination and predestination, etc. Through these conceptions, the *individual* components, which give the individual his/her singularity, are conjoined with the *inherited* components, which mark his/her place in the chain of family and kin, the *symbolic* elements, which make him/her part of the cosmic world, and the *attributes* that the person acquires and which ensure his/her social identity by giving it its individual expression, as it is with the name in particular. It is, in fact, the whole set of these multiple components and attributes that merges the individual with the space and the time in which they are embedded.

In addition to the individual, the notion of personhood includes their direct social and cultural environment, which lends meaning to their existence. The person is thus defined by situations, events and certain social powers endowed with an integrating function. Personhood, then, is not something rigid and inert. It includes many individual idiosyncrasies, as well as a sort of specific historicity. Still, it is the duty of the traditional authorities, the elders and the sages, to interpret any originality in terms of its status as an “event.”

Above all the name is never a free creation. The naming process follows a set of rules governed by the explicit criterion that only one name fits the individual. The problem is to discover this name. For Lévi-Strauss,

The choice seems only to be between identifying someone else by assigning him to a class or, under cover of giving him a name, identifying oneself through him. One therefore never names: one classes someone else if the name is given to him in virtue of his characteristics and one classes oneself if, in the belief that one need not follow a rule, one names someone else ‘freely’, that is, in virtue of characteristics of one’s own. And most commonly one does both at once.” [Lévi-Strauss (1962:240[181])]

Indeed, by way of the name, the givers, whether these are the biological or the spiritual parents, class themselves in a milieu, a period and a style, while the bearers of the name are classed in several ways because each name has a conscious or an unconscious cultural connotation that permeates the image others form of the bearer and which may have a subtle influence in shaping his personality in a positive or a negative manner (Lévi-Strauss (1962:245–246[185])).

The name-giving ceremony, therefore, is a very important event. It is a response to the complementary concerns to differentiate the individual while at the same time integrating him into the community, which in turn recognizes him. Some parts of the birth celebration, in particular naming the child, attempt to define the specific components of the new arrival by stamping them with a verbal marker that has relevance for the community. On the one hand, through the name the genealogical line of family and kin, as well as each person’s territorial belonging are defined; on the other hand, the same ambivalences found in all relations and values, which structure the social body and personal identity, are reproduced. The name is a symbolic attribute of the person. Its allocation and transmission are governed among Albanians not by rigid rules but by customs that are flexible enough to leave room for a degree of personal inventiveness without actually giving the parents full freedom of choice.

### **Rituals of naming and exposure**

In the Kosova region of Kamenice, it is customary, when the time of birth draws near, for the men of the household, the kin group and the neighborhood, to gather in the *oda*, the room used to receive guests, next to the room where the woman is to be delivered. If she has a boy, one of the

guests, who probably enjoys the best reputation among those assembled, the trust of the newborn child's family and a good destiny in life, will have the ritual obligation of *me i dhanë emnin*, "giving or lending" the newborn baby his own name (Pllana 1970). The unmarried girls, accompanied by an older woman, announce the news of the birth to the men with special songs. They beg the designated guest to "give his name" to the new baby (Doja 1991:93):

*Ore vllazën, ore kojshi,  
sonte na e kemi ni thmi,  
e kemi ni thmi, ni hasret,  
s'po dim emnin kush t'ja ngjet.  
Le t'ja ngjet aga Mehmet,  
ishalla bahet si aj vet!*

Oh my brothers, oh my cousins,  
we have a child here tonight,  
we have a little child, a new-  
born child,  
we don't know who is going to  
give it his name.  
Let Mehmet Aga give the child  
his name,  
Let's hope that it will become  
like him!

Among Christians, the term *pagëzim*, "baptism," is heard more often than among Muslims, but both groups usually say *me i ngjitë emrin*, *me i vu emrin*, *me i dhënë emrin*, "to stick, put, give" the name to the child. The term *pagëzim* is generally reserved for the sacrament of baptism, which, although widespread among Albanians in primarily Orthodox or Catholic regions, is almost never assimilated to the naming ceremonies. The child is often baptized in church only after having been given its definitive name in the rituals organized for this purpose.

One formerly common custom, which is almost entirely omitted from the ceremonies today, was the practice of using lighted candles to determine the child's name. It has been described as it was practiced in the region of Drenica in Kosova (Pirraku 1978), but it is also mentioned by other ethnographers as existing in both the North and the South, for example in the region of Myzeqe, in southwestern Albania (Mitrushi 1972). The ritual is performed especially in the case of a boy, although there are accounts of the same custom being practiced for the birth of a girl, but in this case the ceremony is reduced to a minimum.

This custom, which no doubt denotes a Christian influence, is known in other European cultures as well. Because of the more coherent and conscious religious structure in these societies, however, it is used only to call upon the healing powers of certain saints when the child is seriously ill. To identify the required remedy, four candles were placed around the bed, one at each corner, and each candle was given a saint's name. The first to go out indicated the pilgrimage to be undertaken (Loux 1979:62). The procedure is altogether different in Albanian culture, where the custom was equally widespread among Christians and Muslims.

After the delivery, the mistress of the house carries the newborn child into the men's room, where it will spend its first night, alone with the master and mistress of the house. The mistress takes from the main room of the house a *shkam*, a three legged stool, a common piece of Albanian furniture, which she

turns upside down with the legs in the air. On the legs, she places a big round loaf of bread, over which she spreads a pair of *tirk*, the tight-fitting white wool trousers typical of the costume worn by the men in the North. She lays the child on top of the *tirk* and covers it with a red headscarf with black splotches. Near the child's head, she places another loaf of bread on which she disposes three candles of identical size. The master of the house gives each of the three candles the name of a living elder whom he esteems to be the wisest, bravest and probably richest man in his village. Sometimes, it is the mistress of the house who will ask the chief of the lineage to "give" her the elders' names. In other cases, it is not directly the master and mistress of the house but the godparents who are responsible for the ceremony, which includes: symbolically cutting the umbilical cord, the purifying bath, dressing the child, naming the child, laying the child in the cradle. Sometimes the godmother is assisted by three betrothed maidens, *nër unazë*, literally "with the ring," who are regarded as being pure, upright and protected by the gods who govern life. They usually come from three different villages. Each brings a candle to which she has secretly given the name of the man she regards as the most renowned elder in her village. They also bring letters or another object belonging to their fiancés or another close relative, preferably one in the army, as well as some pins and needles. Throughout the ritual, they poke holes in the letters from their fiancés, uttering the wish that the new baby will live as many years as there are holes in the letters. The audience's attention is fixed on the candles, to see which will burn the longest. The name of the elder borne by this candle, known only to the mistress of the house, the godmother or one of the three maidens, will be the child's name. This name is kept a secret from even the mother of the new baby and the rest of the household. For the time being, all that is announced is a temporary name.

In most cases, the newborn baby is provisionally named *Uk*, "wolf," or *Keq*, "bad or naughty," *Shyt*, "bald, dull, unfinished," *Cub*, "thief, bandit." After the birth, a woman of the household who is "blessed" with many children takes the newborn baby up on the roof of the house, turns to face the mountains and cries out: "*Come, wolf, the she-wolf has borne a wolf child!*" And she climbs back down (Pirraku 1978:133–134). From that moment, the child is called "Wolf," until he is given his real, permanent name. Sometimes among Muslim Albanians, the child is raised up and receives the temporary name of one of the most famous early prophets of Islam (Suleimani 1988:29). These names are supposed to bring the child luck, happiness, prosperity, success and other advantages.

When six weeks, six months or a year have elapsed, the child's parents make lavish preparations for the public bestowal of a definitive name. Among the guests of honor are, to be sure, the elders whose names had been given to the candles at the first naming ceremony, although they still do not know whose name was chosen by chance. Among the guests of honor, too, are the godmother or the three maidens who brought the candles, and who now have the honor and the obligation to bring gifts for the child and the other members of the family, notably food and items of layette and clothing. At the start of the ceremony, the master of the house, in the presence of the mistress or, in other cases, the godmother, holding the child on her lap and in the presence of the godfather, takes the floor and solemnly announces the person who has been

chosen by fate to “make a gift” of his own name to the new baby. The elder in question, flattered to have been chosen, stands up and congratulates the new baby with the same solemnity. In other cases, the master of the house calls on the elder thus chosen to ask him:

*me zemër t'ia falë emnin e vet dhe  
ta pranojë për probatin të zotin e  
shpisë së djalit të emnuem me  
emnin e tij.*

to be good enough to give his  
own name and to regard the  
master of the house as one of  
his best friends.

In all cases, the aleatory aspect of the ritual is no doubt often emphasized to produce the desired name. We thus have here an apparently but falsely “probabilistic” method of name-giving that reconciles the partly free play of inter-personal relations within the limits of the requirements of an objective order. If we take a closer look at the agents required to carry out this complex ritual, we will see that they can be arranged into a system of relations of opposition and complementarity. The actors of the ritual are sometimes the mistress of the house, sometimes the godmother and sometimes betrothed maidens. They are actually or symbolically assisted by the master of the house, who takes an active part; by the godfather, who plays an implicit and effective role alongside the godmother; and by the soldier fiancés of the maidens, whose presence in the ritual is mainly symbolic. The three pairs of actors stand opposite each other in a relation of confirmation or substitution. The intermediate position of the godparent pair is explained by their role as mediators between the two generations. In all events, while these actors have the active role in the ritual, the child who receives the name and the elder or ancestor who gives the name has a passive role. The ritual objects, too, are arranged according to the same relations of opposition and complementarity, underpinned by a symbolic logic articulated around the opposition masculine/feminine. The relation between the letters and the needle, like the relation between the *tirk* and the headscarf, and the relation between the tripod stool and the loaf of bread, stand in a symmetrical relationship as opposing terms on the male/female axis.

## Objects and Identity

Pins play a large role in the costume of Albanian women, and their systematic use begins when the girl reaches puberty. They are used to hold together many pieces of clothing, but particularly to pin the scarf to the hair, which, once the girl reaches puberty, must no longer be allowed to show. The sewing needle, too, is one of the young woman’s chief instruments, as well as one of her defining attributes, especially when she begins to use it to prepare the pieces of the men’s costume for her future husband. He is generally long awaited, in terms of time or space, and the letters he writes both represent him and prefigure the pieces of his clothing. Both the young women’s tools and their gestures speak here of love and marriage. The same connotation is attested by a body of comparable practices and beliefs found in other European cultures, reinforced by the fact that the other end of the needle, the eye, alone or associated with the thread, seems clearly to be a vehicle for female sexual symbolism (Verdier 1979:236–246).

The headscarf is also a symbol that changes with each stage in the woman’s life-cycle, just as the *tirk* is a symbol of male virility that is inalterable once the man has reached adulthood and acquires the right to speak in public, to carry a rifle and to marry. The loaf of bread becomes a symbol of the home tended by a good housekeeper, just as the three-legged chair is a symbol of a house worthy of its master. The *shkam* and the *tirk*, regarded as very old, typically Albanian objects, symbolize the child’s roots in the culture of its ancestors, just as the headscarf and the loaf of bread symbolize the honor and moral values of the household, in other words the prestige of the blood of the family line. The *shkam* is the “seat” on which the master sits when he offers hospitality or where he seats his guest. The same word is used for the “threshold” of the house, while, used as an adverb, it means “fully, wholly, perfectly, absolutely” (Çabej 1976:151). The *shkam* is the guarantee that the child is rooted in the total legacy of the lineage, just as the *tirk* seems to guarantee that the child develops his social personality, and that he grows into a “man respected for his words and deeds.” The red of the headscarf further shows that dishonor can be washed only with blood, just as the bread shows that life will bring dignity only if it produces children.

All of these objects play a secondary role, though, while the attention is fixed on other objects: the candle and the flame. The relations between the ritual objects thus reproduce the relations established between the ritual actors. The active agents are opposed to the passive objects as the active objects are opposed to the passive agents. The ancestor is opposed to the candle as the child to the flame, in a relationship of symbolization by permutation of the signifier and the signified; whereas the child is opposed to the ancestor as the flame to the candle, in a relationship of incarnation through symbolization of the life-course that runs from death to birth through a process of regenerative destruction.

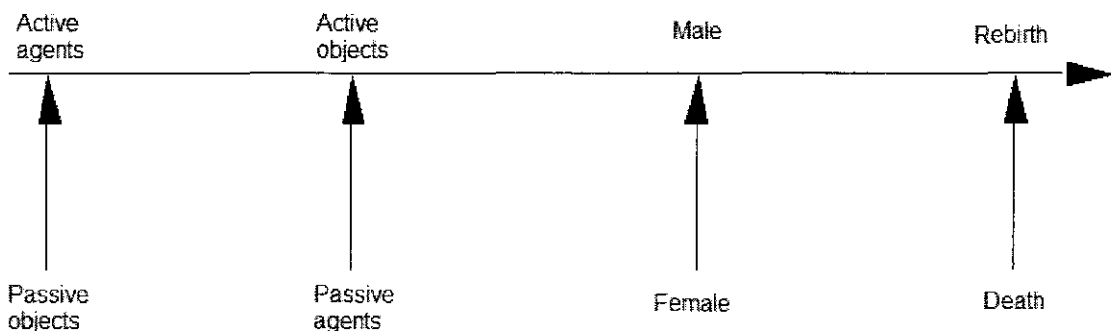


Figure 1. *Relations of opposition and complementarity in the naming rituals.*

The arrangement of the agents and objects necessary to the ritual in such a system of reiterated relations of opposition and complementarity points up the symbolism of birth, which thus finds its place in a pattern of cyclical rhythms and values overlaid in a series of synthetic structures. In this overall set of symbols, any new birth, alliance or friendship, symbolized here by the naming rituals, is merely a special synthetic structure within the immanent rhythm of the cycle of life and death. This rhythm reproduces the replacement of one generation by the next through the set of oppositions expressed in the

relations established among the active or passive agents and objects of the ritual.

The images of the heat symbolism involved in this rhythm form synthetic structures expressing the destruction of a worn-out life in order to give birth to a new life, which is at first feeble and feminine but contains the seeds of potential powers and forces, virtualized in the flame that burns down in order to generate new life. The young fiancés also cease to exist as such once the marriage is consummated, which is symbolized by the preparation of the wedding clothes. The godparents, too, cease to exist as ritual celebrants in the wedding once the nuclear family has been created, symbolized by the attributes of marriage, the headscarf and the *tirk*. Likewise the master and mistress of the house will yield their place to the new generations when the new household is established, here symbolized by the loaf of bread and the three-legged chair.

A complementary answer to the question of how the person is conceptually linked with his ascendants and social relations as a whole is provided by the notion of the alter ego or twin spirit present in other practices. This notion is found in the rituals of exposure used as a typical procedure for giving the child its name, or rather its second name, particularly when the couple's children regularly died at birth.

The cradle with the newborn baby is placed upside down at the intersection of two paths and left there until the first person to pass by sees it and hurriedly turns it over. This is a version of the familiar *Märchenmotif* of the exposed child and similar in many ways to the biblical story of the babe in the bulrushes episode of *Exodus* 2. The information about Albania is attested in ethnographic accounts from at least the mid-nineteenth century (Von Hahn 1854:149). Frazer drew copiously on these sources for his compilations of the *Golden Bough* (1990). Otto Rank (1952) also took an interest in the same traditions, then, current among Albanians and in neighboring populations, when he analyzed the mythic exposure of children. Among Bulgarians, too, if it so happens that three children of the same mother die immediately after being baptized, the parents conclude that the godfather has been ill chosen. Thus when a fourth child is born, the midwife lays it down at a crossroads and conceals herself from whoever might happen upon it. The first person to come along, man, woman or child, is supposed to pick up the abandoned baby and, without a backward glance, carry it directly to the church. The child is christened there with the name of the person who found it, and who thus becomes the new godparent (Krauss 1894:194).

It seems that, to some extent, the symbolic effectiveness of the ritual has to do with this random element (Brouskou 1988). The stranger cannot refuse to participate; he knows his role and from that moment on becomes the child's godparent. He presides over the symbolic cutting of the umbilical cord and gives the child a name, generally his own. The child thereby seems to be endowed with a new external individual identity. Nevertheless, while Frazer (1918:251) sees the procedure as essentially a way of tricking the spirits supposedly in relation with the child, it is more logical to see the child as having entered into a kinship relation with an outsider, which bears more



resemblance to an affinal relation. In this case, as in other comparable situations, the foreigner enjoys the prestige of exoticism and, by his presence, embodies the opportunity of widening social ties (Lévi-Strauss 1971:26[7]). The child might be picked up by someone of a different religion, but that would in no way alter the ritual. It might even be picked up by someone who had *gjaku* relations with the household, in other words owed a “blood-price.” There would then be an obligation *me pajtue gjakun*, “to pacify the spilled blood,” in the name of friendship.

Similar re-naming methods are used in the case of children born with serious malformations, hydrocephalics, children whose psychomotor development is highly abnormal, children who are epileptic, mentally retarded or suffering from other disabilities. These children are regarded as “smitten by the evil eye” or as “changelings,” having been interchanged with children of the *Xhinde* or evil spirits. In the first case, the child is exposed, preferably on the feast day of Saint George, with the avowed intention of curing them by giving them a new name. It even happens that the family does not ask the passerby to “give” the child his name, but simply “takes” his name, if it is known, and gives it to the child without telling the person. This is the preferred method in the Drenica region of Kosova because it is believed to be more effective in keeping the child from the evil eye.

In other cases, Tuesday is the day for exposing a “changeling;” the child is put down on the threshing floor, and someone calls out three times to “Tuesday,” to re-exchange the sick child for the one who was not sick. Tuesday, *E-Martë* in Albanian, is probably believed through a double popular etymology to be both “Mary’s Day” and a supernatural power having the vocation, from *marr-të*, to “take and remove.” When the baby begins to cry, it is said by the people exposing the child, “it’s ours,” and they call it by another name. Then the mother picks it up and hurries away without looking back (Pirraku 1978). Similar rituals, actualizing such representations of exchange, are found in other Southeast-European groups, for instance among the Romanian populations (Stahl 1977:290).

### **Alter egos and reincarnation**

It is evident that the connection between the person’s name and his life and soul is very closely felt. Possibly it is for some such reason that, on asking a someone’s name and being told it, the Albanian says *E paç me jete!* “May you live long with!” as he does when told how many relatives one possesses. A corollary follows naturally in the case of the dead. Albanians have a horror of death that is absolutely Homeric in expression and intensity, yet the return of their souls to earth after death is always desirable. It is believed that the dead grandparent’s soul will be enabled to leave Paradise and find a new home in the body of the infant to whom its name is given. Thus, by giving a dead person’s name to a newborn child, the Albanian do not so much wish to preserve the name of the dead as to give its soul the opportunity of reincarnation. It is even reported that the neighboring Greek Macedonian add on this occasion that only owing to these reincarnations of the souls of the dead is Paradise saved from overcrowding (Hasluck 1923).

It must be admitted that, in the Albanian case, it is difficult to set a hard and fast rule concerning the relationship between naming customs and the principle of the reincarnation of ancestors, except that the child probably inherits the components of his personality from his grandfather or the person whose name he has been given. The overall stock of traditions does not provide a satisfying answer as to how the person is conceptually linked with his ascendants and with his lineage as a whole. We could talk about the probability of a theory of reincarnation, which we would be tempted to describe as “diffuse,” according to the terminology used in comparable cases studied by anthropologists (Rabain 1979:164). We must therefore not look for a homogeneous theory of reincarnation properly speaking, nor hard and fast rules about the transmission of spiritual constituents. The principle of the reincarnation or return of an ancestor is not expressed by abstract speculations, but instead in its applications to specific events that arise at set times. It is less a doctrine than a possibility, or a hypotheses, which takes shape in the presence of certain indications displayed by the child or certain unexpected turns taken by a ritual.

Different signs of physical resemblance are used to identify the child with a given ascendant in the paternal or maternal line. The complementary answer is provided by the notion of ancestral spirit conveyed by the name given. The objective of the naming rituals is to seek to induce something of the ancestor whose mark is recognized in the child's behavior and which would be comparable to a component of the person discovered elsewhere as well, to return and enter the child (Heritier 1996:55). This something does not dictate the newborn child's acts, but it does give them a particular form and style, easily identified by those who know the living person or knew the deceased, a form and a style that is hoped will shape and construct the person of the newborn child.

In all events, based on such theories, it is natural enough that Albanians (and people with similar notions) should suppose that a child develops the character and qualities of the dead relative whose name, and therefore soul, it possesses. It is believed that the child will at least be fortified by the attributes of the person whose name he inherits, whom he will give new life and add to his own person. The life principles of the person are transmitted to the child through those performing the ritual, in other words the active agents, in this case: the master and mistress of the house, the godparents, the young fiancés, who carry out the naming ritual; or the other people who are charged with the rituals of exposure. Nevertheless, mention is always made of the passive agents, the old men invited to “lend” their name or the stranger whose name is “taken.” Although they talk about transmission of the grandparents' ancestral values to the grandson, Albanians as a rule speak simply about the homonym leaving his character traits to the child. One inherits the values of the person whose name one bears, in other words the person is made up of various elements, and it is expected that the child who carries the name of a particular grandfather will display the same qualities.

In a given family situation, the behavioral and character traits of a child, his specific ways of acting and his physical features, in particular the resemblance he bears to a grandfather, can become signs that are interpreted as indicating

a return. The attention of those close to the child is caught by a number of behaviors, which set off the search. The different hypotheses, formulated as affirmations, of the return of an ancestor, or in a more attenuated form, of the transmission of character traits or qualities of those with the same name, or of a more diffuse transmission within the same line, can all be regarded as attempts, of the same nature but of decreasing intensity, to find an answer. Whether it is a question of reincarnation properly speaking, of transmission of individual temperaments or of diffuse family “qualities,” the investigation seems always to proceed in the same way. A behavior, an attitude, an expected or unexpected incident during the different rituals and symbolic practices surrounding the child’s birth and development, therefore, become the subject matter for spontaneous interpretation.

The anthropological literature attests that the transmission of particular powers, properties or features skips a generation, more rarely two, passing from grandparents to grandchildren (Augé & Héritier 1982). In effect, a number of details point to assimilation of the first and third generations, and to the particularly close ties between the two. The restrictive relations obtaining between successive generations are often “corrected” by the more flexible, freer relations between alternate generations. According to an infantile “phantasy of the reversal of generations,” reported by psychoanalysts, children are convinced that as they themselves grow, their grandparents shrink (Jones 1948:407–412), so that, as time goes by, their respective positions have been interchanged. This allows a fusion between past and future generations, which blends the two into a single whole.

Even the traditions surrounding birth and socialization are more highly developed, at least when it comes to certain ceremonial sequences, among members of the third generation. In Albanian groups, it was customary for the maternal grandmother to hurry to her newly delivered daughter as soon as she learned of the birth from a child sent from her son-in-law’s house. In most regions, it is the paternal grandmother who awaits the newborn baby. She must be the first to lift it up, to take it in her arms, to cuddle it and carefully arrange it and protect it from unexpected misfortune. The immense joy that filled the grandmother exploded in the rhymed congratulations, the songs, lullabies and other traditional oral forms surrounding birth (Doja 1991:64):

*Lindi djali për bina,  
u gëzua nëneja,  
pa kur ta marrë në dorë,  
ta kërcejë e ta këndojë,  
gjithë hallet t’i harrojë.*

A boy’s been born, big as a  
building,  
his mother’s been rejoicing,  
when she takes him in her  
arms,  
plays with him and sings to  
him,  
she forgets all her worries.

The name is usually handed down from one generation to the next, particularly in the paternal line, from grandfather to grandson or great-grandson. The practice of naming the child after its biological grandparents is still a well-established tradition in Albanian families, though it does not seem to be uniform. In those families that pride themselves on fidelity to the lineage

legacy, these names are necessarily passed on to the eldest children, the first born, second born and down to the couple's third child (Tirta 2004:205–214). In spite of the apparent rigidity of the rituals, a way can almost always be found to give the child the name of one of its grandparents or the name the grandparents had chosen in advance. In addition to the name, an effort is made to pass on the different symbolic connotations connected with the character traits and life-force of the ascendants as well as with the relations cultivated with the founder of the lineage, for it was believed that, by giving his name, he would be reincarnated in the newborn child. Albanians thus have a stock of beliefs and practices regarding the relations of identity and substitution between the child and a dead or living ascendant. This is attested by, among others, a couplet recorded in the Italian Albanian community at Montecilfone in the Molise (Doja 1991:97).

*Një ditë së punoja ka një mal,  
më thanë më u kishi lerë një djalë;  
ishi tata i lerë si një djalet,  
e a thërritëm zoti Gjergji Petë.*

One day when I was working in  
the mountains,  
they told me I was father to a  
son;  
it was as if the father were born  
himself with that son, and we  
called him Gjergj, too.

This custom with which we are acquainted in European societies whereby an eldest son is given his paternal grandfather's name can be regarded as a title which is both obligatory and exclusive. There is an imperceptible transition from names to titles, which is connected not with any intrinsic property of the terms in question but with their structural role in a classificatory system (Lévi-Strauss 1962:252[190]). Indeed, the Albanian theory of transmission does not take equal interest in all individuals. In the North, it is believed that the power of the paternal grandfather, together with his longevity and his blood, which is inherited in the agnatic line, is passed on to the eldest son of the eldest son.

Yet, the same theory also privileges the relationship between a son and his mother's brother. While in general, according to Albanian etiquette, the father's parents take precedence of the mother's when a child is to be named, a dead maternal grandparent would take precedence of a living paternal grandparent. Albanian children are also reputed to resemble their maternal uncle (Memia 1963:110). They are in effect associated with the values and qualities of their uncle's "blood," transmitted through their mother's "milk." They belong to the same milk tree (*gjini*) as their uncle, they are related by *one* "milk," which is constructed by the same *gjaku*, or blood tree, whose best representative is the maternal uncle himself (Doja 1999). The names of classificatory grandfathers are used with the same connotations. The names of local people reputed for their bravery and wisdom, their sense of honor and hospitality, their prestige and wealth or other estimable values are borrowed as well.

It seems that, on the symbolic level, there is also a sort of "paternity contest" between the two ascending generations, whether paternal or maternal, reel or classificatory, comparable to other analogous situations (Lallemand 1993:217). By way of the name, collective ideology seems to establish an

opposition between the bare fact of the father's act of procreation and the destiny of the newborn child, which is voluntarily and "amicably" determined by the ancestor and vouched for by the grandparent. These representations diminish the father's image and express his dependence on the elder members of the family and kin group. It is as though the true descent tie were systematically played down, apparently in favor of the mystic amicable duo formed by the newborn child and his ancestor, or the ancestor's stand-in, the biological or classificatory grandfather.

Constructed in the same way in many other societies studied in the anthropological literature (Rabain 1979:161–212), these representations are an attempt to shape a response, at the symbolic level, to the problem of the child's place in society. Through his genealogical position, the child will have to pass from the status of outsider to that of a social being. Recognizing the descent tie, however, merely places the child on a time line, in the continuation of his ascendant's line, whereas the representation of the relationship between the child and his ancestor introduce a more cyclical dimension. By positing that the child inherits the spiritual principles of one of his ascendants, usually a grandparent, Albanians locate not only the child, but also his progenitors, in the cyclical time of their own lineage. Through the child, the progenitors are themselves placed in an *amicable* relation with their descendants. The child, identified with the ancestor or the ancestor's spirit, ensures the continuation of the lineage. The newborn child comes into the world under the sign of a debt of friendship and alliance that is contracted, and at the same time, paid off.

Such attitudes and behaviors nevertheless remain difficult to grasp if they are not linked with those surrounding the father/son and grandfather/grandson resemblance, in particular. The similarity acknowledged, and even required, between the child and a given category of kin, first attested by Malinowski (1929), is a constituent feature of the overall arrangement whereby societies define relations between affines. The components of the ideology of procreation and the various mystical influences are the other variables retained by the anthropological analysis, whose greatest merit is to provide a clear distinction between genetic givens and sociological issues (Leach 1961).

### **Names and Relations**

Albanians do not have a positive prescription for these issues. The child "is allowed to" look like its father, its mother or someone else in the paternal or maternal line. Albanians do not say who the child "must" resemble, but they do wonder about the kind of resemblance that is likely to capture if not the child's future destiny, at least its character traits. Analogous analyses in modern Greek culture have led to similar conclusions (Vernier 1999). Whereas having the same name engenders a form of affinal relationship that can go as far as to exclude some marriages. Although it is rarely mentioned, this form of symbolic kinship is known throughout Southeast Europe (Stahl 1977:289). The resemblance confirmed by society, whether it involves physical features or the name, is always a sociological variable that clearly designates a relationship based on alliance or friendship, as opposed to filiation or descent.

At this point, let me extrapolate from the theory of the poetic function of the linguistic message as defined by Roman Jakobson (1960). I would be tempted to see in social behavior the two basic modes of arrangement used in both verbal behavior and mythic thinking, namely selection and combination. I had the occasion to see that alliance and friendship are structurally represented by Albanians as a parallel reduction of the distance between two mutually equivalent patriline, called “blood trees,” which are otherwise located on a selection axis; while filiation and descent represent the convergence of a patriline and a matriline, a “blood tree” (*lis-i-gjakut*) and a “milk tree” (*lis-i-tamblit*), which are thus located on a combination axis (Doja 1999):

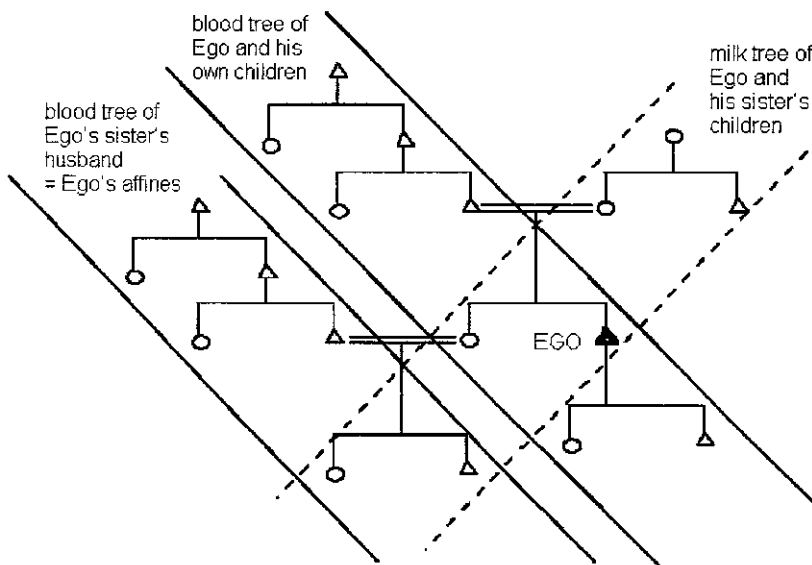


Figure 2. *Matrimonial alliance is a parallel close relationship contracted between two blood trees that want to share the same milk tree. The orthogonal encounter between a milk tree and a blood tree does not yield a marriage alliance but the convergence of Ego's paternal and maternal ascending lines.*

Clearly, in social structure, as in poetry and myth, every sequence of significant units tends to construct an equation. In such conditions, the imaginary representations of the ancestor's alter ego or his reincarnation or spirit, borne by the naming practices, should appear as a projection of the principle of the equivalence of the social values of alliance and friendship onto the axis of the combinatory sequence of filiation and descent. This is what gives this type of social behavior its symbolic, complex and polysemic essence. This way of envisaging the succession of generations and the tendency to weave between grandparents and grandchildren a kinship tie, through the projection of the social values of alliance and kinship, include many more elements still. One of the profound significations of this construction obeys first and foremost an essential logic of ambivalence.

The public use of an ascendant's name, like the resemblance between the child and an older member of the family, raises the problem of the twin existence of the elder and the child. Generally speaking, the relationship between the two, one of whom could be viewed as the double of the other, appears as though one had a tendency to absorb the other, or to “replace” him, and even to be

edging the older version towards death. Among Albanians, as in other European cultures, the newborn child is not considered merely as a returned ancestor. The bodily and nominal similarity is interpreted as a substitution: the recently deceased ancestor “comes back” in his grandson. If the father should die before his child is born, the son is given the name of his dead father. Likewise, the new baby can inherit the name of another child who has died.

Even though the first impulse is to name the newborn child after its grandparent in order that the latter’s name may not die out, the sequence of thought is apparently that life ends when the soul leaves the body, and that where a name goes the soul of that name goes too. That is, if an old woman’s name is given to her grand-daughter, her soul will leave her body and enter the infant’s, so that afterwards the old woman will die. In this line of logic procreation is conceived not as the addition of a new being to those who exist already, but as the substitution of one for another (Lévi-Strauss 1962:257–258[194–195]).

For the same reason, people are careful not to “take” the name of another living child in the kin or territorial group. All the same, it is a common Greek superstition that two persons bearing the same name cannot live in the same house, for in that case either the one or the other must die (Hasluck 1923). Also the living father or mother’s name is never given to a child, while it is usual to ask permission before giving the name of living grandparents, be they real or classificatory. Since the distance between the two is so small, it is appropriate to keep them apart in the social space, to avoid confronting them and to feign ignorance of their dangerous similarity.

The public pronouncement of this “resemblance” is always regulated by a ritual. For instance, the name of a living descendant is always bestowed with a discretion underlain by the social values of friendship and benevolence. Another name is often given at the same time; this is a nickname or another version of the same name designed to “throw other people off the trail.” Whether the ascendant whose name has been borrowed is dead or alive, use of his name is generally shunned in favor of a general designation or preceded by relationship terms such as *dajë*, *xhajë*, *xha*, “uncle,” or *plaku*, “old man.”

Cases in anthropological literature are frequent enough to show how the individual name is never used in either direct address or indirect reference to relatives, the relationship term doing service in all such cases. Even when addressing a non-relative, the individual name is very seldom used. The normal form of address consists of a relationship term, according to the relative age of the speaker and the person addressed. Only when non-relatives are referred to in conversation is it customary to use the individual name, which even then will not be used if the context plainly indicates the person referred to (Lévi-Strauss 1962:260[196]).

Nevertheless, neither the resemblance nor the name is in itself a threat that requires separating two beings that are too close or too closely related. It is simply something that it is dangerous to mention, like the individual’s good looks, intelligence or other qualities. In other words, like the “evil eye,” this

would be the “evil word” of envy, jealousy or rivalry complementing the individual on his positive attributes with the ulterior motive of doing him harm.

In the case of the ritual of exposure, we are probably dealing with a process governed by a principle of economy that can be found in analogous situations (Lallemand 1993:222–223). To be sure, there is only one child here, but an elusive one, divided between two worlds. Through him, the parents can do battle with this erratic being from another hostile, alien, unknown world, so as to ensnare, capture and fix him definitively within *our* own friendly world by giving him a new name. The term *xhinde*, “genie” or “spirit,” which betrays an Islamic origin, refers to bodily deformities and to monstrosities, which seem to be the most prevalent images used in these rituals and which denote the impossibility of identification with humans. These are forest spirits characterized by their monstrous appearance and their ability to instantly change into an animal. They belong to that world where species tend to merge into terrifying apparitions, the limits of classification and order.

We can now understand why this child represents the intrusion of a term that is the reverse of the human person. Like other analogous situations analyzed in the anthropological literature (Rabain 1979:197–201), the Albanian concept of the changeling probably supposes the existence of a second family line parallel to the human family, much as the line of ancestors replicates the line of the living family members. While this parallel recognition articulates the ordinary child with the ancestor’s benevolence and with ancestral powers, the changeling double-ganger would be a monstrous “other” with which the human being entertains a hostile, deadly relationship. The replica-child would thus be a distorted mirror image, which cannot be articulated with any historical dimension corresponding to the human order into which he must be inserted. If the atypical birth or development of a child forces the society to come to grips with the strangeness of biological life and the hostility of the outside world, it will attempt to overcome this strangeness and this hostility by giving the child, be he ordinary or monstrous, a social identity founded on friendship and kinship. This dynamic vision tends to substitute recognition for despair, action for resignation. However the tradeoff is a simplification of complex givens, the splitting of existence, with the homogeneous repetition of the same representations of exchange and re-exchange denying the diversity of the objective causes of sickness.

As to the naming ritual, its symbolism should be apparent. The fire blazes *up*, at the cost of the candle, which burns *down*. The individual life of the ancestor is thus placed at the service of the lineage and family line until the very end, marked by extinction and death. This is what enables him to be born anew, incarnated in the body of the child that will now grow *up*. Likewise, while one category of ritual exposure reinforces and renews alliance relations, sometimes by superceding relations of vengeance, others clearly announce a hostile, malevolent intent that might at times turn out to be harmful to the mediator or to the ancestor alter ego. At any case, giving the aged grandparent’s name to the newborn child is almost a sort of insurance against the child’s premature death.



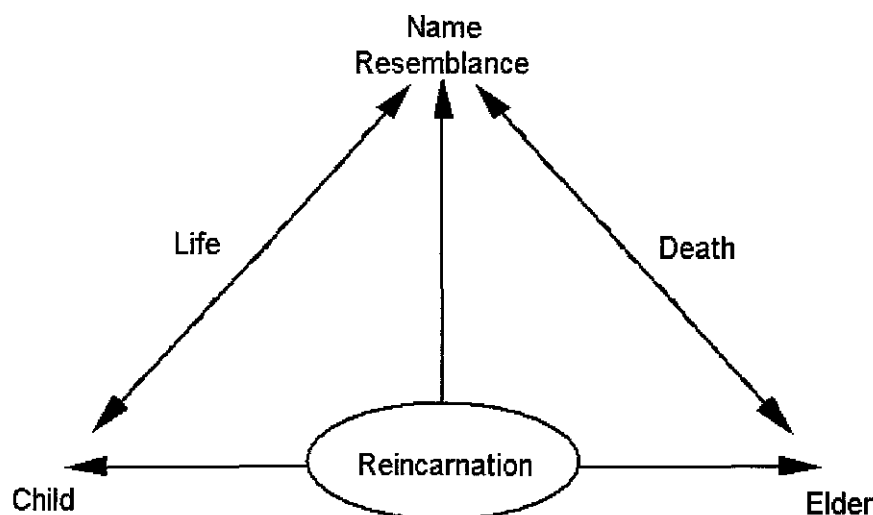


Figure 3. *The ambivalence of reincarnation.*

A different light could be cast on this problem by following Edmund Leach in considering the relationship as an equation of the not-now with the other world: “In that case past and future coalesce as attributes of the other in contrast to the present which is the factual experience of real life. The relationship between the ‘here-now’ and the ‘other’ can then be seen as one of *descent*. My ancestors belong to the ‘other’ category and so do my descendants. Only *I* am in the here and the now” (Leach 1966:115). This temporal break between the generations is thus readily and often assimilated to a distinction between the living and the dead, which is highly significant for understanding the information.

In addition, exogamy rules usually stipulate that a wife must not be closely related to her husband. Some aspects of marriage thus show a curious reciprocity with some aspects of death and war. It is incestuous to have sexual intercourse with a woman from one’s own group, but legitimate and fitting with one’s wife, that is to say with a woman who, initially and in all likelihood, could belong to an enemy group. Likewise it is a crime to kill a member of one’s own group and an act of valor to kill an enemy (Leach 1965).

Among Albanians, a final and important stage in the symbolic construction of the person is marked, in the case of young males, by the giving of a rifle and participation in the armed activities of the kin and territorial group. Especially in the North, inclusion in the *Djelmenia*, the “youth group,” which was the armed force of the lineage community (Doja 1999), took on great ritual importance. As a rule, the traditional Albanian virtues of heroism, courage, bravery, honor, etc. were defined primarily in the context of warfare and feuding. However, along with the young men’s feuding activity, betrothal and marriage mark full inclusion in the society for the young people of both sexes. In extreme cases, young women manage to become full-fledged members of society only after having had children, especially male children.

## Conclusion

In Ancient Greece as well, marriage and war were in a way “complementary institutions” that definitively made the young people part of the society (Vernant 1968). Marriage is always exogamous to a certain degree, just as the construction of the person always requires that something be surmounted. To attain the status of socialized adults ready to give life, young people of both sexes must surmount the death of their own childhood and seek a fiancé in the outside world, which is ambivalent, friendly and hostile at the same time.

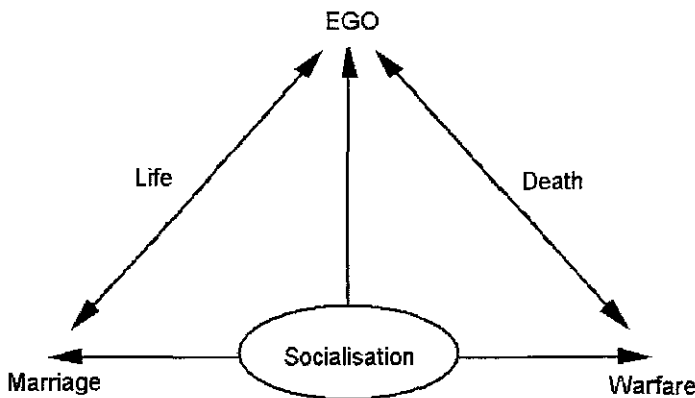


Figure 4. *Ambivalence of the construction of personal identity.*

Structurally, the bestowal of a new name “repairs” the symmetry that has been upset at birth. In contrast to a stable duplex, the eponym is presented as superseding the birth-name, with which it is thus somehow at strife, even as its declared “prevalence” reconfirms paradoxically the persistence of the displaced “supplanter.” The renaming act helps to anchor an astonishing network of internal doublings and echoes, in the explorations of twinning and projection, identity and difference. Such correspondences are like *stretti* in a longer fugue, in which repetitions and connotations counterpoint the basic doublings of newborn and ancestor. What is striking in all this is the way the names seem to reproduce, via the delicately animated shifts of language and ritual, the very mechanisms of a projection and self-reflection, as if the problem of twinning had extended its domain to the relation of word and act.

The reflexive turn in the name figures a dynamic intimacy, a co-inherence of self and other, newborn and ancestor, grounded in mutual resistance. The reciprocal movement recalls the oscillation between external confrontation and internal division and provokes a complementary reading of the contest in which the stranger is not only the child’s twin but its own phantasmic projection, who confers the gift of otherness, the blessing of change, of becoming, and is then abandoned. The mythical agon is from this perspective a parable of self-begetting. The new name testifies that the child has avoided the melancholic deadlock of being merely a newborn: by grappling the phantom of invulnerable selfhood, he is empowered as agent of his own alteration. The sign of this transformation is the act of renaming, which carries the dramatic agon into the social arena. The emphasis on “knowing by

name” forms the arena in which the struggle for “face” or “priority” is finally staged. The name thus enacts at the symbolic level a version of the struggle it represents at the existential level.

In such conditions, the affective bonds as well as the social relations and values of alliance and friendship between affines indeed seem to have something in common with the relationship between love and hate, as well as that between the living and the dead. The quest for the origin and reference to the ancestors guide and condition the construction of the person’s identity and their socialization. Such a conception leads to the notion of personhood and the socialization of the individual, since he will probably be seen throughout his life in reference to the bond he has established with the ancestor who is recognized as having determined his personal destiny and to whom he is supposed to give new life. It could thus be said that these traditions serve more or less to express the both “biological” and metaphysical thinking in which biological heredity and social heredity are intertwined.

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