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To Be Given Names
Displaced Social Positionalities in Senegal and Angola

ABSTRACT: During fieldwork, anthropologists are given many names that point to their intersectional placement regarding race, class, gender, nationality, and religion. Yet, careful consideration of vernacular forms of designation reveals that such generalizing categories do not always reflect the ways in which people are named and positioned in a given context. While acknowledging the relevance of intersectionality, this paper discusses the relationship between naming and social positionality through a comparative consideration of names employed to designate Dulley in Angola and Santos in Senegal. It explores how these designators, ascribed to the researchers by their interlocutors, contextually identify their positionality. Through concrete examples, it shows how this process of emplacement can both enable and restrict one's possibilities of action and experience.

KEYWORDS: ethnography; intersectionality; naming; positionality; Angola; Senegal; vernacular expression

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IRACEMA DULLEY AND FREDERICO SANTOS DOS SANTOS

INTERSECTIONALITY AND VERNACULAR FORMS OF INTERPELLATION

It is by now widely accepted in the social sciences and beyond that the positionality of subjects in the world is overdetermined by their social placement through markers such as race, class, and gender. Within this picture, intersectionality studies make visible that intersectional crossings between these categorizations further overdetermine the possibilities of action and experience of social subjects.[1]

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1 The term intersectionality was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43.6 (1991), pp. 1241–99. A non-exhaustive list of works inspiring our engagement with this subject includes Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981); bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Hyman, 1990); and Audre Lorde, *The Black Unicorn* (New York: Norton and Company, 1995).

For instance, if subjects are by default assigned a hierarchically inferior position in the world by the fact that they were born a woman, further inequalities can result from the addition of other social markers to this condition: If one is not only a woman but also black and queer, one's unequal placement is even greater. Intersectionality was proposed by black feminist scholars whose positionality in the world allowed them to formulate a critique not only of racism but also of (white) feminism. Their critique of the knowledge produced in ignorance of such overdeterminations informs our thinking as we propose to complexify the general categories employed in intersectionality studies through a consideration of local, vernacular forms of interpellation.

On the one hand, we acknowledge the political and epistemic value of the reduction performed by categorizations such as race, class, and gender due to their revelation of the historical situatedness of the asymmetries that are inherent to power relations. On the other hand, we are faced with the fact that we rarely find straightforward equivalents for such categories as we attempt to translate them into non-academic, non-Anglophone contexts in the so-called Global South where we develop our research as anthropologists. Thus, we explore here the complicated relationship between emplacement and translation as we compare the names given to Iracema Dulley in Angola and to Frederico Santos in Senegal. Whereas Iracema had her personal name changed and was designated in Portuguese as *branca* (white), *doutora* (doctor), and *irmã* (sister) and in Umbundu as *ocindele*, Frederico was renamed Bamba Fall by one of the families who hosted him and called a *toubab*. What the terms *ocindele* and *toubab* have in common is that they are vernacular terms that simultaneously

hint at the positionality of the 'white' and the 'foreigner' but do not fully correspond to it.

Investigating the effects of such names and how they emplaced us during our fieldwork, we contend that understanding positionality also involves paying attention to how general categories are displaced in the process of their translation into local designators — in the cases addressed here, into Portuguese, Umbundu, and Wolof. It is certainly true that names such as *branca*, *ocindele*, and *toubab* point to intersectional positionality related to race, class, gender, and place of origin. Yet, reducing the names that one is given by others to such generalizing categories poses the risk of flattening out our understanding of the relationship between the gaze of others, the names they give us, and where this places us in relation to them. It is with this in mind that we propose to reflect on the implications of such acts of naming in the context of our fieldworks in Angola and Senegal. What follows engages with these questions: Towards what local social positions do the designations we were given gesture? What historicity is contained in the iterations of these names? What do they say about one's behaviour and about what is expected of one in a given situation? What contextual possibilities of action and experience do they allow for or foreclose? To what extent can one accept or reject them? What would be the consequences of doing so?

FIELDWORK: NAMING DISPLACEMENT

During fieldwork in Angola, Iracema was given many names. Her first name, Iracema, was often transformed into a local variant that she had never heard before: Iracelma. After repeating the correct pronunciation of her name a couple of times on different occasions to different

people to no effect, she gave up and accepted the new name. Thus, whenever she heard that name, she knew it referred to her and responded to it. Despite the fact that she did not feel any connection to this new name and did not even like it, she understood that her actual name was unknown to her interlocutors and easily replaceable by a local name everyone seemed to recognize. Thus, in the process of being made more familiar to her interlocutors, she accepted to be further estranged from herself in language as she took on a name that sounded too similar to be someone else's and too strange to be her own.

Indeed, this might be a significant part of what fieldwork is about: engaging with one's perception of oneself (which includes one's self-image, one's supposed abilities, and the sound of one's name) through the gaze and speech of others as one realizes that one's self-perception is not confirmed by those one encounters. This is made visible in the process of transliteration of one's name, which sometimes cannot be reproduced in a different phonetic system and symbolic environment. It is relevant to note that the transliteration of the name Iracema has happened not only in Angola, but also in different English-, French-, and German-speaking contexts. Transliteration is one way in which one's externality vis-à-vis a context that is different from the one in which one was originally named is marked at the moment of interpellation: Every time one is thus called, one is reminded of the fact that one's placement in a new context is always a kind of displacement. Transliteration indexes foreignness, otherness, and non-belonging.

Iracema was also assigned two status names during fieldwork: *doutora* and *irmã*. *Doutora* (a female doctor, in Portuguese) is the epithet by which she was frequently addressed by those interlocutors who had first met her as a researcher. In Angola, it is not uncommon for those who

have completed a university degree to be called doctors as a mark of distinction, even if they do not hold a PhD. Therefore, the fact that she came from Brazil with a university degree to do research automatically placed her in this position. This hierarchical, respectful form of address made her uncomfortable, for she was used to being called by her first name in both daily and academic situations elsewhere. However, she accepted it as an accurate description of her social position and responded to it. This was not devoid of irony, for she was not always in the position of the expert during her fieldwork. On many occasions, she was told to consult elderly male authority figures who were considered specialists in whatever was related to Umbundu expression. They called her *doutora*, but she was the one learning from them even though many of them did not hold an academic degree.

On her first field trip to Huambo, Central Angola, the nuns who hosted her also called her *irmã* (sister, in Portuguese), a form of address that she inadvertently reciprocated. The person who had found her a place to stay and put her in touch with her hosts was a nun she had met in Luanda. Given the fact that she had travelled alone by bus from Luanda to Huambo and used to walk everywhere — something white foreigners rarely do in Angola — she was mistaken for a nun on many occasions. It took her some time to realize the misunderstanding. She finally did so when asked questions about her congregation of origin. Surprised, she explained to the nuns hosting her that she was not one and pointed to the fact that she did not wear religious clothing, to which her hosts replied that Brazilian nuns sometimes do not. Had she been a practicing Catholic, she would have immediately understood that the meaning of 'sister', in this context, had to do with belonging

to a religious community and not with a general feeling of openness and sorority.

Her positionality during fieldwork was marked by these two forms of address. In the first case, the status name she was given both distanced her from her interlocutors and assigned her the place from which her research became possible: the respected but distant position of the white intellectual who is supposed to be talking not to everyone but to the (elderly, male) authorities on the subject being investigated by her/him/them — a position that was not only ironic, but also restrictive of her interests, curiosity, and longing for horizontality. In suggesting who she was to talk to, her interlocutors influenced the kind of discourse she would be able to produce and reproduce. On one occasion, after an interview with an elder affiliated with the UNITA party,[2] his wife explicitly told her, 'Work for us, *doutora*!', despite Angolan politics not having been mentioned as a topic in their conversation. In the second case, the misunderstanding assigned her a comfortable place in the religious community at first, but then created an uncomfortable situation that finally became a joke.

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2   Angola became independent from Portugal in 1975. In the wake of independence, the diplomatic attempt to divide the power of the state between the main anticolonial movements that had fought against colonialism failed. The MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola) inherited the state from Portugal and started to rule the country from Luanda. This was almost immediately opposed by UNITA (National Movement for the Total Independence of Angola) and FNLA (National Liberation Front of Angola), giving rise to a civil war that lasted until 2002. During this period, UNITA, backed by the US and apartheid South Africa in the context of the Cold War, challenged the MPLA's claim to the state with the support of Cuba and the Soviet Union. Central Angola, where Umbundu is spoken and Iracema did her fieldwork, is the place of origin of Savimbi, UNITA's mythical leader, as well as of many of its officials. After the war ended, UNITA became a political party and remains a relevant force of opposition against MPLA rule until now.

The first name she was given depended on the adaptation of her first name to the pool of names commonly employed by her interlocutors, whereas the status names she received in Portuguese referred to something people either knew or assumed to know about her. The latter were given to her with respect and consideration. Yet, among the names one is called during fieldwork are not only direct forms of address; one might also overhear others speaking about oneself to other people, such as was the case with *ocindele*. On the one hand, the fact that she was white, or Brazilian, was directly mentioned as an explanation for her assumed lack of knowledge about certain local specificities (local diseases, culinary singularities, specific rituals, and practices related to witchcraft). On the other hand, given the fact that most white people cannot speak Umbundu, people usually felt at ease to talk about her as *ocindele* whenever they spoke Umbundu among themselves, for they assumed that she would not understand that they were referring to her.

Ocindele, a term that was translated as 'white' in the context of colonialism and the related process of racialization, points not only to one's skin colour, but also to one's wealth, position of privilege, and/or foreign status.[3] At the time when this translation was coined, Umbundu speakers employed *ocindele* both to designate the white merchants with whom they used to trade and to describe someone who was black but wealthy and behaved in a way considered foreign. Thus, in colonial sources, one finds black people who are said to be *ocindele* — due to their wealth, proximity to the colonizer, or estrangement from

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3   On the translation of *ocindele* as 'white', see Iracema Dulley, 'Naming Others: Translation and Subject Constitution in the Central Highlands of Angola (1926–1961)', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 64.2 (2022), pp. 363–93.

local social ties. The juxtaposition of white merchants and local wealthy traders through this name points to the perception that they occupied a similar position in Central Angola before the establishment of colonial rule.[4] Iracema was called *ocindele* at first glance, based on her appearance. As a white woman, it would have been unlikely not to be called that. The fact that she was positioned as a white female researcher in the field overdetermined her possibilities of access and experience. Yet, this name cannot be equated with race alone, for it is as much about social status or class as it is about race. For instance, being white automatically creates the expectation that one should have the means and willingness to pay for transportation. This is what she learned as she listed to her Umbundu-speaking interlocutors. On one occasion, as she preferred walking home to taking a moto taxi, the driver deridingly told his colleague that 'the *ocindele* has no money'.

In Iracema's case, people talked about her behind her back because they imagined that an *ocindele* would not understand Umbundu. Supposing her deafness to their language, they marked her foreignness, her racial positionality, and her assumed social class without taking her presence into consideration. She could understand that she was being talked about only because she could understand their language. Yet, although *ocindele* and *toubab* point to a similar position and disposition related to whiteness and foreign status, in the case of Frederico it would not have been necessary for him to understand Wolof to notice that people were talking about him.

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4   For an Umbundu account of the period that precedes and follows the establishment of colonial rule in Central Angola in the aftermath of the Bailundo War (1902–03), see Iracema Dulley, 'Chronicles of Bailundo: A Fragmentary Account in Umbundu of Life before and after Portuguese Colonial Rule', *Africa*, 91.5 (2021), pp. 713–41.

When Frederico initiated his fieldwork in Dakar in September 2019, he frequently heard children playfully crying out together: *'Toubab, toubab, toubab*!' as they pointed their fingers at him. Adults were usually more discreet and merely pointed at him.[5] He initially thought that they were referring to Touba, the sacred city of the *muridiyya* brotherhood he used to attend during his fieldwork in Brazil. With time, he noticed that although he used to wear a *were wolof*, typical Senegalese clothing that had been given to him by his friends, his phenotype (skin colour and type of hair) and his bodily stance (the way in which he walked, laughed, and spoke with a Brazilian accent) informed his interlocutors that he was a *toubab* and summoned the local codes through which his positionality was read. Generally speaking, *toubab* refers to a person whose skin is white and whose status is that of a foreigner of high social standing and Western origin (coming especially from countries in Europe and North America). Moreover, it references the French colonial history of the country, in the context of which local populations were racialized and an opposition between the colonizer and the colonized was forged.[6] Yet, a black Senegalese person can also be assigned that name by Senegalese people who consider that he does not fit the local criteria of belonging.[7]

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5   A similar situation has been described by other researchers. See Gilson José Rodrigues Jr, 'Em nome do reino: ações humanitárias brasileiras de Tuparetama (Brasil) a Dakar (Senegal)' (Doctoral Dissertation, Social Anthropology, Centre for Philosophy and Human Sciences, Federal University of Pernambuco, Recife, 2019), p. 7, and Eva Evers Rosander, *In Pursuit of Paradise: Senegalese Women, Muridism and Migration* (Los Angeles: Nordic Africa Institute, 2015), p. 32.

6   Hélène Quashie, 'La Blanchité au miroir de l'africanité: migrations et constructions sociales urbaines d'une assignation identitaire peu explorée', *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 220 (2015), pp. 760–85 (p. 763).

7   Frederico Santos dos Santos, 'Casa de tèranga: nomeações e materialidades na migração transnacional entre Senegal e Brasil' (Doctoral

Encountering a *toubab* can also cause reactions of fear. As Frederico was traveling the 560 km that separate Mboumba from Dakar with a friend, their bus broke in front of a village and they spent hours on the road waiting for it to be fixed. As children left school to go home, they ran on the road and talked to the passengers. Frederico tried to greet them, but they were afraid and showed reservations. One of the children even cried as he tried to shake hands with him. Some of them hid between the bushes to better observe him from a distance. He was reminded of Frantz Fanon, who felt dehumanized as his presence was racialized by white children who told their mothers that they were afraid of him.[8] But the situation experienced by Frederico, differently from that of Fanon, did not question his humanity. The impression he had was that those children had never seen a *toubab*. His friend explained to him that children living in the interior of the country had probably never been to a big Senegalese city such as Touba or Dakar, where they would have met a *toubab.*

Toubab, in that it designates a social position based on the relationship between Europeans and Africans, implies a division between two classes of people, rather than between two different continents: the colonizer and the colonized. This reductive opposition between colonizer and colonized underscores the totalizing character of a system of classification historically connected to Senegalese colonial history. As affirmed by Jean and John Comaroff, despite the complexities of colonial societies, such systems tend to be perceived and represented based on a dualism that solidifies the distance between those who rule

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Dissertation, Social Anthropology, Federal University of São Carlos, São Carlos, 2022).

8   Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* [1952], trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Pluto Press, 1986).

and those who are ruled, white and black, European and non-European, as well as the ways in which they inhabit such positions and identifications.[9] However, such categories are neither fixed nor stable.[10] Thus, the designation of someone as *toubab* assigns this person a marker that indexes complimentary qualities (such as modernity, seriousness, and rigor) that are simultaneously opposed to racialized African stereotypes (such as laziness, superficiality, and primitivity). Yet, *toubab* is not always a complimentary designation.

Being a *toubab* can also be synonymous with acting and thinking like a Western person, which involves having no god, being driven by *xalis* (money), being absent from life in the family and community, lacking solidarity and hospitality, and embracing individualism. These characteristics are often deeply condemned in Senegalese contexts.[11] According to Edward Said,[12] such stereotypes of the 'other' rest on historical constructions based on processes of generalization, homogenization, and inferiorization. These stereotypes construct reductive images dependent on centres of authority and canons that do not take other perspectives into account. As indicated by Iracema Dulley and Lorena Muniagurria, the processes through which 'subjects are located and displaced in different contexts occur in association with the categories

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9   John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 25.

10   Quashie, 'La Blanchité', p. 763.

11   Bruno Riccio, 'Talkin' about Migration: Some Ethnographic Notes on the Ambivalent Representation of Migrants in Contemporary Senegal', *Stichproben — Vienna Journal of African Studies*, 8 (2005), pp. 99–118 (p. 118) <https://stichproben.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_stichproben/Artikel/Nummer08/07_Riccio.pdf> [accessed 11 March 2020].

12   Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

that designate them and assign them a social place'.[13] In processes of interpellation, it is frequently the case that categorizations are driven by the desire to establish an absolute, sovereign distinction between the colonizer and the colonized. *Toubab*, the name employed by strangers to designate Frederico during his fieldwork, gestures towards this otherness. Yet, what defines otherness is not fixed.

In the case of Frederico, the main reason for calling him a *toubab* was his bodily appearance, for in Senegal he was considered white although in his place of origin, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, he was considered black. Thus, people on the streets would assume that he was not Senegalese just by looking at him. Yet, he was not called *toubab* by everyone he encountered during fieldwork. As people got to know him better, they frequently commented that he practiced *teranga*, a term imperfectly translatable as generosity: He made donations and gave alms to strangers, made himself available to help his interlocutors, and participated in religious rituals despite not identifying as a Muslim. In view of the ways in which he behaved, his position as a *toubab* was displaced on many occasions. As a fluid designation, the term *toubab* can perform either the inclusion or the exclusion of someone in the local dynamics. As he spent time with his interlocutors in their *keur* (in Wolof, both the home and the communal practices and bonds associated with it), he was assigned a social place that distanced him from that of the *toubab*.

However, his name in Portuguese, Frederico, and his usual nickname, Fred, reinforced his placement as a *toubab*, that is, as someone who does not belong to the *keur*. This

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13   Iracema Dulley and Lorena de Avelar Muniagurria, 'Performance, processos de diferenciação e constituição de sujeitos', *R@U*, 12.1 (2020), pp. 8–18 (p. 9).

was the case until at a certain *keur* in the city of Touba, where he was given a room for the second time, the woman in charge found it difficult to pronounce his name. While the whole family was watching television after dinner, she offered him watermelon and told him that he would be called Bamba Fall from that day on. He was then offered an explanation for their choice of this name, which revealed their motivations underlying this act of naming. Bamba Fall is composed of two names: Whereas Bamba refers to Amadou Bamba, the founder of the Muslim brotherhood *muridiyya* to which the family belongs, Fall is the surname that identifies the family. Thus, upon receiving this name, Frederico was included in the family as an honorary member. They asked him to use the names Frederico and Fred only in Brazil. *Nga tudd?*, 'What is your name?', was a question he was asked by his hosts on that evening and on subsequent days. Whenever he answered Frederico or Fred, he was humorously told off. *Maa ngi tudd Bamba*, 'My name is Bamba', in turn, made everyone smile, hug him, and go with him for walks in the city. Through this act of naming, he was placed in a different position that opened new possibilities of relation and experience while also making clear what the expectations of his hosts were.

What is the relationship between Bamba Fall, the name given to Frederico, and Amadou Bamba? Although philosophical discourse frequently assumes that proper names are marks devoid of meaning, ethnographic research shows us that this is not the case at all.[14] Rather, proper names position people in the web of relations in which they operate. They connect them to certain people (as happens, for instance, in the case of surnames, in which

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14   João de Pina-Cabral, 'Outros nomes, histórias cruzadas: apresentando o debate', *Etnográfica*, 12.1 (2008), pp. 5–16.

one's line of continuity with one's family is marked) and differentiate them from other people (for instance, if one is assigned an Arabic name one's belonging to a Muslim community is marked and this differentiates one from those not encompassed by it). The distribution of proper names among a given population does not happen randomly, for proper names do not merely fulfil the function of designating individuals in social interactions. Instead, they constitute a 'safe index of the socially significant character of naming practices'.[15] As Frederico was called Bamba Fall, this did not merely create a Bamba, but a Bamba Fred. Bamba became his name and he learned to respond to it in mutuality. As an added layer of nomination, this name bestowed upon him a new social position.

Naming indicates and establishes a subject in space and time, and thus sediments this subject's positionality in relation to others.[16] As Frederico was displaced from the position of *toubab* through the performative act of his naming as Bamba Fall, this inaugurated for him a different positionality in the *keur* of his hosts and extended this new position beyond it to the different sets of relations that had the *keur* as their starting point. As happened with the transliteration of the name Iracema as Iracelma, this new name situated him in the relational context of his fieldwork. Placed in a kind of relation with the *keur* that integrated him as a fictive relative on the basis of *teranga*,[17] the more

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15   Robert Rowland, 'Práticas de nomeação em Portugal durante a Época moderna — ensaio de aproximação', *Etnográfica*, 12.1 (2008), pp. 17–43.

16   On this matter, see Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 33 and *An Anthropology of Names and Naming*, ed. by Gabriele vom Bruck and Barbara Bodenhorn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

17   Ivy Mills, 'Sutura: Gendered Honor, Social Death and the Politics of Exposure in Senegalese Literature and Popular Culture' (Doctoral Dissertation, African American Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 2011), p. 1.

Frederico approached the position of a relative, the more he distanced himself from the social place of the unrelated *toubab* and gave in to the demands of his hosts.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

What if Frederico or Iracema were to reject the names they were given and claim their social position as researchers instead? This is to be understood as a merely rhetorical question, for although anthropological research is frequently marked by a certain degree of extraction, it is also the case that anthropologists in the field are far from occupying the position of a sovereign subject. For instance, structural factors, such as funding for producing research on people historically considered 'others' in colonial and imperialist contexts, constrain as much as enable the researcher. From this perspective, the names one is given during fieldwork expose the anthropologist's vulnerability and reiterate the need to respond to the positionalities defined by one's interlocutors. As argued by Judith Butler, the subject's constitution in language can occur without her knowledge, as happens in the third-person address that interpellates a subject without requiring a response.[18] In order for one to act as a subject and not simply occupy the third-person position, one needs to respond to the names one is called.

Interpellation is not a descriptive act, about which one can determine whether it is true or false by comparing it with facts in the world. It does not have description as its main function, even though it might appear as descriptive in the context of colonial classification, ethnographic writing, or post-colonial self-presentation. Rather, interpellation establishes 'a subject in subjection, to produce

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18   Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 33.

its social contours in space and time. Its reiterative oper-
ation has the effect of sedimenting its "positionality" over
time'.[19] Thus, the names given to Frederico and Iracema
by their interlocutors not only allowed them to conduct
research; the names were assigned in view of their inter-
locutors' appreciation of the positionalities that Frederico
and Iracema were deemed able to occupy. These names
also determined, for instance, who Iracema was going to
talk to and in what capacity and from what position of
belonging Frederico would be allowed to interact with
Senegalese families. Through acts of naming, anthropolo-
gists are placed and displaced.

People are assigned names by others everywhere, be-
ginning with the context in which they are born and named
by their relatives. The names one receives precede and ex-
ceed oneself.[20] Yet, they do not precede and exceed one
in the same way in every situation. Based on a comparison
between Angola and Senegal, this brief position paper in-
vites us to think through the implications of acts of naming
in different contexts. We contend that the theorization of
naming cannot depend solely on abstractions that, while
deemed universal, are in fact the result of the singular
placement of (frequently Western, male, and white) phil-
osophers — and intersectionality studies are a powerful
tool to make this visible. Rather, generalization is always
provisional and contextual, dependent on the consider-
ation of singular forms of nomination to be understood in
relation to the contexts and languages in which they occur.
Taking into account the relevance of social positionality
made visible by intersectionality studies, we ask: What

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19   Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 34.
20   Jacques Derrida, 'Des tours de Babel', trans. by Joseph F. Graham, in
      Difference in Translation, ed. by Joseph Graham (Ithaca, NY: Cornell
      University Press, 1985), pp. 165–207.

does the constatation that proper names are not merely neutral designators of individuals in social interaction do to the theorization of naming? How can one extend general categorizations by taking into consideration other conceptualizations of it? Let us provisionally end here with this open question.

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