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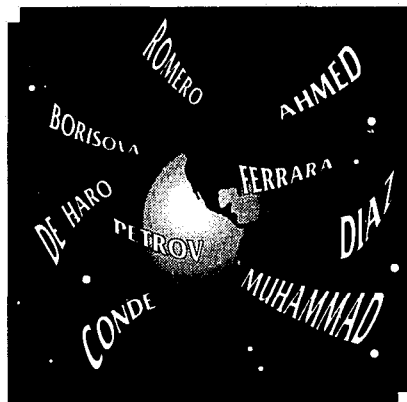
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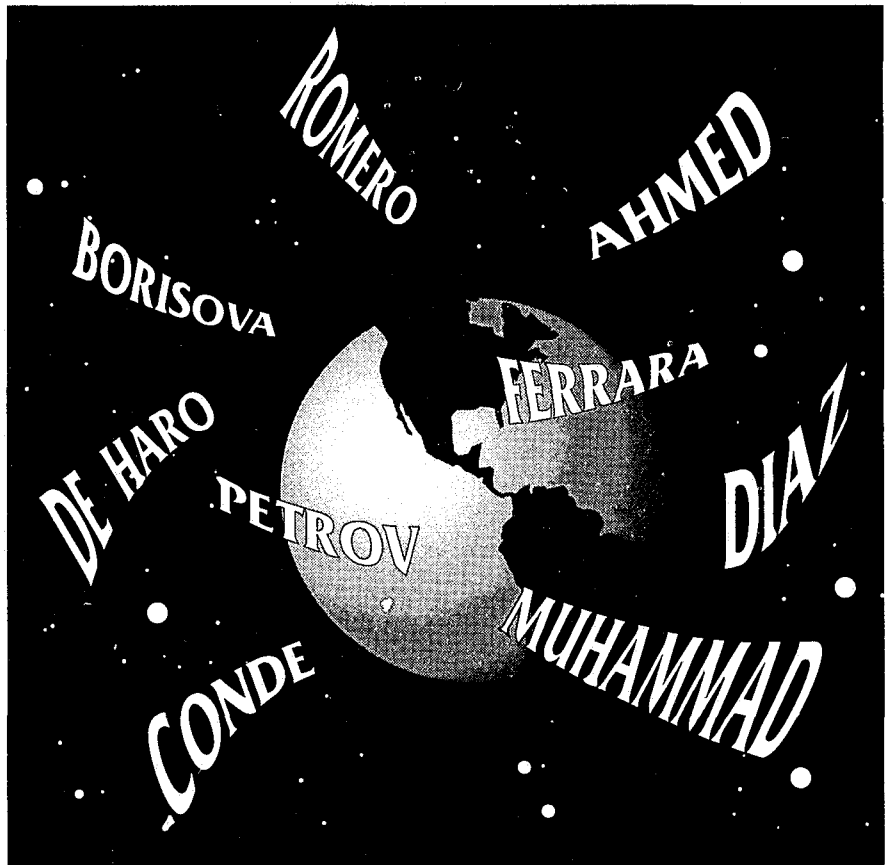
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A Name Is Just a Name— Or Is It?

By
J. PHILIP BOLLER, JR.



Recently, the victim of a serious assault identified herself to the police as Maria Elena Rodriguez-Diaz. She then indicated that she wanted to prosecute her assailant because he had threatened her for some time and was very likely to assault her again. She also advised the police that she planned to move in the near future and provided them with her new address.

Unfortunately, at the time of the trial, the police were unable to locate the victim at her new address, and the neighbors informed them that they did not know a Ms. Diaz. However, the victim did, indeed,

reside there, and the neighbors did know her, but not as Ms. Diaz.

On another occasion, a State trooper stopped an individual in a rural area for a minor traffic violation. His driver's license was in the name of Mikhail Ivanovich Petrov. The trooper checked this name through the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), but NCIC had no record in the above name. A warrant, however, had been entered into NCIC in the name of Mikail Ivanovich, which was the name he was known by in the community. Unknown to the trooper, the driver was wanted for a violent homicide. But, the driver was

aware that a warrant had been issued for his arrest and had been eluding law enforcement for some time.

Although the trooper planned to simply issue a traffic citation and let the driver leave, the driver thought that he was about to be arrested for the homicide. As a result, the trooper was placed in unnecessary jeopardy, and a wanted subject eluded apprehension.

Law enforcement personnel come into contact with a wide range of people and cultures on a daily basis. Therefore, proper and complete identification of subjects and/or victims is of the utmost

importance. What happened in each of the above incidents could and should have been avoided, but cultural and/or ethnic differences complicated matters and prevented accurate identification.

Accurate identification of any individual is often difficult at best, and it is even more complicated if the officer or investigator is not familiar with how various cultures construct proper names. This article discusses the formation of various proper names. It also offers some suggestions that may help law enforcement officers identify accurately individuals of cultures common in American society today, including Italians, Filipinos, Middle Eastern peoples, Nigerians, Russians and Ukrainians, Southwest Asians, Spanish-Americans, and Spanish-speaking individuals.

Italians

In most cases, when constructing a name, Italians start with the given name, which is the first name, followed by the surname or last name.¹ However, in formal or legal situations, this order is often reversed, and an individual's name is followed by "di" (of) and then the parents' names. For example, the name Giuseppe Esposito di Giovanni e di Francesca Ferrara indicates that Giovanni Esposito is the father and that Francesca Ferrara is the mother of Giuseppe Esposito. If both of Giuseppe Esposito's parents are deceased, "fu" precedes the father's given name and the mother's full maiden name, as in Giuseppe Esposito fu Giovanni fu Francesca Ferrara. If only one parent is deceased, the name would be

written as Giuseppe Esposito di Giovanni e fu Francesca Ferrara.

In addition, in certain parts of Italy, it is customary for women to retain their maiden name after marriage. However, if they immigrate to the United States, oftentimes, they decide to adopt their husband's surname.

Filipinos

Filipino names are also constructed by placing the given name first followed by the surname.² However, in most cases, a Filipino's middle name will be the mother's maiden name. For example, an individual named Benjamin Herrero Colobong has a mother whose maiden name is Herrero.

Middle Eastern Names

Citizens of most Middle Eastern countries speak and write various dialects of the Arabic language.³ However, written, formal language is the same in each Arabic country—it is the language of the Koran, the Islamic holy book. And, even

though this practice may facilitate communication among fellow Arab nations, in the United States, Arabic names are not always spelled the same way each time they are written in English.

To foster the uniform English spelling of Arabic proper names, the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) established a standard transliteration system for the transliteration of Arabic names into only one English equivalent.⁴ Transliteration is the representation of letters or words in the corresponding characters of another alphabet.

For example, the Arabic word "abd" means servant in English. However, these letters represent a transliteration of the Arabic characters for "abd" into the English spelling. Servant is simply the English translation of the Arabic word "abd."

The MESA system was not designed to designate a correct English transliteration, but merely to eliminate multiple-correct, and

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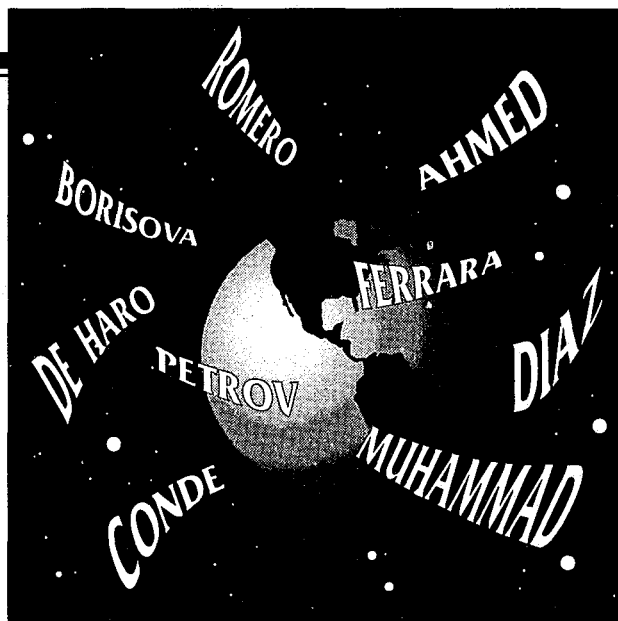
Special Agent Boller is assigned to the FBI's New York City Field Office.

therefore, possibly misleading transliterations. For example, the name Muhammad has approximately 50 possible English spellings, but only one MESA transliteration.

Obviously, applying the MESA system has definite practical applications to law enforcement. In fact, prior to adopting the MESA system, the FBI's New York Office initiated 19 separate investigations on the same subject because his name had been spelled 19 different ways. After transliterating each of the various names into their MESA equivalents, the FBI realized that all 19 subjects were actually the same individual, and the 19 cases were consolidated into one.

Whenever possible, it is very important to have Arab subjects write their names in Arabic and in English in the manner that they normally use. Then, if the English spelling of the Arabic name is not the same as the MESA transliteration, it can later be noted as an alias. In addition, every subject's name, written in Arabic, should be protected as evidence and a photocopy sent to a translator for an English transliteration according to the MESA system or to the nearest FBI field office for transliteration by an FBI language specialist.

In addition, law enforcement officers should also realize that as is the case with Italian women, most Arab women do not change their name as a result of marriage or divorce. Therefore, the concept of "maiden" and "married" names will probably be unknown to them be-



cause they will keep their father's surname for life.

Nigerians

Nigerian names are constructed with the given name first, followed by the surname.⁵ However, Nigerians may legally change their names with the Bureau of Vital Statistics in Lagos, Nigeria. They can also change their date of birth by having only one other person affirm the accuracy of the new date of birth, and then have a birth certificate issued under their new name with their new date of birth. Therefore, if Nigerians wish to hide their identities for illegal purposes, it may be almost impossible to identify them without a complete description and fingerprints or the assistance of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

Russians and Ukrainians

Russian and Ukrainian names are constructed in a manner similar to English names.⁶ However, the middle name is a patronymic and the surname is the family name. The patronymic, or middle name, is de-

rived from the father's given name. Thus, a son whose father's name is Ivan would have the patronymic Ivanovich, and the daughter would have the patronymic Ivanovna. Care should be taken not to label the patronymic as the surname.

In addition, Russian or Ukrainian surnames have both masculine and feminine forms. For example, a married Russian female whose name is Alexandra

Ivanovna Borisova is the daughter of a man whose given name is Ivan. Her last name indicates that her husband's surname is Borisov. Married Russian and Ukrainian women also are never known by their husband's name, such as Mrs. John J. Doe. Instead, they are known by their own given, patronymic, and family names.

The standard form of address among Russians and Ukrainians includes the given name and patronymic, but not the surname. For example, Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev would be known as Mikhail Sergeyevich to his acquaintances. However, within the family and among close friends, diminutives, or nicknames, are used almost to the exclusion of formal given names, and one given name may have several diminutive forms. For example, "Misha" is one diminutive for Mikhail (Michael) and "Sasha" is a diminutive for Alexander.

Additionally, the Cyrillic alphabet is the primary alphabet in the Russian Federation. And, because there is no standard transliteration

system, an English transliteration is largely a matter of choice. As a result, the surnames Borissov, Borissoff, and Borisoff, for example, are all viable English transliterations of the same surname. Therefore, for accurate identification, it is important that law enforcement officers obtain the full and complete name, including the given name, patronymic, and surname. Also, subjects should be asked to write their name in the Cyrillic alphabet. Then, if their name is similar to a name in question, further investigation may be warranted.

Southwest Asians

Individuals from Southwest Asian countries, such as Afghanistan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, or Sri Lanka, construct their names in a variety of ways.⁷ And, a full explanation of how each culture constructs proper names is beyond the scope of this article. However, for purpose of explanation, the characteristics of Pakistani names and what information law enforcement officers should obtain to identify Pakistani subjects will be provided here.

A typical Pakistani proper name may denote various religious, racial, ethnic, tribal, or caste characteristics. Oftentimes, there is no distinction between the given name and the Muslim or Christian name. There are also numerous common names, and as a result, persons who belong to different families may have identical names. In such cases, parentage usually determines identity.

Also, male Pakistani names usually have three units, two of which can be described as principal and the third as auxiliary. The auxil-

iary unit may either precede or follow the principal units. It may denote characteristics of family, tribe, or caste, but very often it signifies a title of respect, such as "Khan," "Mian," or "Shah," which a person may adopt upon attaining a certain level of social distinction. Such titles of respect are equivalent to the English title "Mister." The principal units are essential and interdependent as in the common Pakistani name Abdur-Rahman.

If possible, law enforcement officers should have Pakistani subjects write their names in Urdu script in the form and order they normally use. These should then be sent for translation. In addition, for

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those not intimately familiar with Pakistani culture and language, it would be best to record accurately all units of the individual's name and to consider all units as a whole.

Additionally, the English spelling of Pakistani names is largely a matter of choice. This often results by altering vowels and consonants. For example, Mohammad may also be written as Muhammad, Muhammed or Mohammed; Ahmed may be written as Ahmad; Hussain as Hossain, Hossein, or Husain. It should be noted, however, that these vowel and/or conso-

nant alterations do not necessarily change the name as a whole.

To ease this confusion, law enforcement officers should obtain the following information from Pakistani subjects in order to identify them accurately:

- Full name and occupation
- Father's name and occupation (For married women, the husband's name should be obtained as well.)
- Date of birth
- Religion
- Tribe or caste
- Details of residence, including the house number, street, locality (Mohalla), village or city, Tahsil (subunit of a district), district, province
- Name of the local Pakistani police department (Criminal and identification records are kept at the police station nearest the subject's residence, while central records are maintained only by certain specialized agencies and only with respect to certain types of crimes.)
- Place where the passport was issued, as well as the passport number (This information is important because Pakistan has no central passport office. In addition, the office that issued the passport can possibly provide a photo of the person, if necessary.)

Hispanic and Spanish-Speaking People

Hispanic and Spanish-speaking persons usually use the surnames of

both parents to construct their proper names.⁸ Neither surname is ever considered to be a middle name. The surname of the father usually precedes the mother's, and the two surnames may or may not be joined by the conjunction "y" or by a hyphen. For example, Juan Romero y Conde is the same person as Juan Romero-Conde. Juan is the given name; Romero, the father's surname; and Conde, the surname of the mother. The following variations of the same name may also be found: Juan Conde Romero, Juan C. Romero, Juan Conde, Juan Romero C., or Juan Romero.

Legally, a Hispanic female retains her maiden name after marriage, but it is also common practice to drop the surname of the mother and to add that of the husband joined by the preposition "de." For example, when Luisa Romero-Conde marries Carlos Villa-Tovar, she will be known as Luisa Romero de Villa. Should her husband die, she will be known as Luisa Romero Vda. de Villa (Vda. is an abbreviation for "viuda," meaning widow).

The preposition "de," with or without a definite article, such as "el," appears in a number of Spanish surnames. Formerly, this preposition was an indication of nobility, but today, such a distinction no longer exists. However, some families have retained it as a part of their surname. Some examples of this are the surnames De Haro, De Lora, Del Campo, Del Valla, De la Torre, De la Rosa, and De la O.

After Spanish-speaking persons have resided in the United States for some time, they may anglicize their

names. Even so, their signatures may not necessarily represent their full and correct names. This is particularly true of Spanish-speaking people whose signatures are written with many flourishes. Whenever there is any doubt as to the correct spelling of a person's name, the subject should be asked to write it down. This practice should also make it easier to verify previous records.

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Additionally, if subjects provide only one surname, it will be necessary to question them further to obtain full and correct names. If both surnames are not known, or in the case of a married female, all three surnames, the persons have not been identified accurately. As a result, an officer may have difficulty locating the individuals at a later date, since many often use both surnames interchangeably.

Conclusion

In general, if there are any doubts as to any individual's identity, it is usually best to have them write their entire proper name, in their own handwriting. Also, for individuals of certain cultures, it may

be wise to use various combinations of the proper name when conducting inquiries.

The United States is home to people of various ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds. As such, law enforcement officers around the country must take this diversity into account and must attempt to become familiar with the various customs of the individual ethnic groups that reside within their jurisdictions. Learning to record accurately and to understand proper names of various ethnic groups is but one avenue law enforcement should take toward mutual respect and understanding.

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Footnotes

¹ Interviews with Special Agent Carmine Nigro and Language Specialist Ralph Sigona, Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York, New York.

² Interview with Det. Benjamin Herrero Colobong, New York City Police Department.

³ Interview with Dr. L.O. Gowani, Ph.D., Language Specialist, Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York, New York. A few of the Arab-speaking countries are Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates. Other languages of the Middle East are Kurdish, Urdu, Pashto, and Persian.

⁴ Middle Eastern Studies Association of North America (MESA), Department of Oriental Studies, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona.

⁵ Interview with George Fallon, Postal Inspector, New York, New York.

⁶ Interview with Eugene W. Fedorenko, Ph.D., Intelligence Analyst Instructor, Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York, New York.

⁷ Contact with U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration.

⁸ *A Practical Spanish Grammar for Border Patrol Officers*, U.S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office).