

Review

Personal names speak for themselves: exploration into anthroponymy among Fulah in Mali

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The Fulah ethnic group of Mali, though strongly Islam-influenced still keeps some authentic personal names, tainted with the Fulah cultural history. This paper is interested in identifying the typologies of Fulah personal names and determining the socio-cultural circumstances surrounding their emergence. It makes use of Duranti's (1997) theory of performance, indexicality and participation. The qualitative method was adopted for data collection and analysis. The findings reveal that Fulah personal names are the result of particular life events including, inter alia, the birth order in the family, the birth period, week days, gender, and survival desire.

Keywords: anthroponymy, Fulah, Fulfulde, onomastics, personal names.

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INTRODUCTION

Conferring names to people is a common social practice world-wide. Children are traditionally named according to specific life circumstances in which the birth took place. The Fulah ethnic group of Mali makes no exception in that, at birth, children are named with respect to particular sociocultural events; names become part of the bearers' identity, the expression of the expectations from the name giver and a valuable source of information about gender, birthplace, order and period of birth, ethnicity, and religion, etc. (Viriri, 2018, Minkailou, 2017, 2020). Research in Malian anthroponomastics has paid little attention to Fulah personal names and naming practices.

This paper aims i) to explore Fulah personal name typologies; and ii) to determine the sociocultural events surrounding their creation. These objectives will be achieved in answering the following research questions:

What are the typologies of Fulah personal names? And What are the circumstances which induce their creation and use?

The theoretical background to this paper is offered by Duranti's (1997) concepts of performance, indexicality and participation. *Performance* relates to how communicative acts are carried out. Bearers of highly meaningful traditional personal names act within a particular socio-cultural framework: their names perform some socio-cultural actions expressed in terms of social status or power of action. *Indexicality* is the property of signs that stand as indexes and that are characterized by their existential relation with what they refer to. To recognize that words are indexically connected to some object or aspect of the world is tantamount to recognizing that words are carriers of a power that goes beyond the description and identification of people, objects, properties, and events. Fulah traditional proper name bearers are indexically connected to their world which is

Constantly described and referred to and interpreted through those names. *Participation* involves taking part in social activities. Speaking a language involves the ability to use sounds which allow participation in interaction with other members of society. The connection through this world, real or imaginary, is partly realized through the performative power of words, partly made possible thanks to the power of words to point to something beyond themselves (Duranti, 1997). Adopting Fulah traditional personal names is part of the bearer's active participation in sociocultural activities. This tripartite perspective from Duranti stands very useful to the present paper in that it provides the ethno-sociolinguistic background for the Fulah proper name analysis.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The site for the study is Macina, in the region of Mopti in central Mali. The area is known to be one of the Fulah strongholds. A research assistant, native speaker of Fulfulde from the English Department was used to collect data from native Fulah people.

The research methodology adopted to collect information from the respondents is the interview. The unstructured type, highly flexible, was adopted with the aim of getting in-depth information. In some cases, phone calls were necessary to collect data from well-versed people in the domain of traditional names, their meanings and circumstances which generate them. The cell phone was used for recording information that was saved, later listened to and transcribed.

The population is made up of Fulah villagers. The sample is made up of forty interviewees. The main criteria for an informant inclusion are to be over forty

(40) years old and to be a native speaker and resident from the site. The study does not include family names in its scope, nor does it concern toponyms. It focuses on traditional non-Islamic and non-Christian personal names which are about to completely disappear under the influence of the two main monotheist religions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research on anthroponomastics relies on the theory that there is a strong interface between a people's language and their cultural practices; language use is seen as a cultural practice as well as a powerful instrument to view and understand how a particular social group structures their environment, including their naming practices. Naming is seen as a process whereby individuals organize and classify their social and cultural environment. It is universal in that all people are named or at least are linked to a naming system. The language of a community therefore appears as the means whereby their beliefs and thoughts, cognition and experiences are expressed. It is equally manifested in their naming systems and practices, marriage, kinship, politics, economics, healthcare systems, religious beliefs and practices, etc. In this respect, names appear, as the most meaningful constituent of the lexicon of a language (Mphande 2006).

The findings of this study have displayed a number of personal names classified into typologies and the social and cultural circumstances which induce their creation in traditional Fulah society. Determinants of Fulah personal names include the birth order in the family, gender, the period or date of birth, the social status, protection or survival, blessing, beauty, flora and fauna, and traditional gods thought to ensure the protection of name bearers or to thank those idols.

Types of traditional Fulah personal names

The analysis of the data collected has displayed several Fulah personal name typologies.

Birth order gender-based personal names

Table 1. Traditional Fulah society names children using a combination of gender and the birth order in the family as a determinant. In this sense, personal names become birth order gender-based as illustrated in the table below.

Birth order	Boy	Girl
1 st	Hammadi, Haadi, Haadiire, Afo	<i>Diko, Dikooru, Dikel, Dikal, Dikere, Dikoore</i>
2 nd	Sammba, Sammburu, Cammbel, Cammbal.	<i>Kummba, Kummbaare, Kummburu, Kummbel</i>
3 rd	Demmba, Demmburu, Demmbel	<i>Pennda, Pennduru, Penndere, Penndel, penndo</i>
4 th	Yero.	<i>Takko, Takkel, Takkuru.</i>
5 th	Paate.	<i>Daado, Daaduru, Dadel.</i>
6 th	NJobbo.	<i>Demmo.</i>
7 th	Dello.	//
Last child	Kodda.	<i>Kodda (last one)</i>

While this order displayed in the above table appears as a general principle among most Malian Fulah communities, children may also be attributed names of relatives (namesakes), this time, regardless of any birth order.

The same birth order gender-based personal names, particularly for boys, appear to be dedicated to traditional gods (idols). They are meant to keep children under the protection of those gods (idols) and pay tribute to them to show that they are highly venerated and by the same token, that society recognizes their authority:

Hammadi is the name of the first son dedicated to the god *Ham*;

Sammba is the name of the second son dedicated to the god *Sam*;

Demmba is given to the third son to dedicate him to the god *Dem*;

Yero is given to the fourth son to dedicate him to the god *Yer*;

Paate is the name given to the fifth son to dedicate him to the god *Paat*;

Njobbo is the name given to the sixth son to dedicate him to the god *Njob*; and

Delo is the name given to the seventh child to dedicate him to the god *Del*.

Names of week days as slave personal names

Fulah communities also name children according to the day of birth, regardless of gender. Names, therefore, act as archives which store all significant facts about history and other daily activities (Mandende et. al., 2020). So the Arabic names for week days borrowed by Fulah people are adopted after they have undergone phonological adaptations to the structure of Fulfulde. For *Altinèrè* (from Arabic [al ienain]) are personal names given to children, boys or girls, born on Monday. Similarly, *Talataarè* (from Arabic [aəulaəa:u]) is given to children of either sex born on Tuesday. *Alalbaarè* (from Arabic [al arbia:u]) is attributed to children from either sex, born on Wednesday. *Alkamisaarè* (from Arabic [alhami:s]) is given to children from either sex born on Thursday. *Aljumaarè* (from Arabic [aldžuma'a]) is attributed to children from either sex born on Friday. *Asowere* or *Asawèrè* (from Arabic [assabtu]) is given to children from both sexes born on Saturday. *Alam* and its variant *Aalaite* (from Arabic [al ahad]) are given to children from both sexes born on Sunday.

The use of the names of week days as personal names does not mean that it is not possible to create and use personal names from other circumstances. *Beydaari* (the added one) is a good illustration in that it is a slave personal name which has no connection with week days.

Superstitious survival and protective personal names

Many African societies name children according to specific life circumstances. The names are often superstitious and are used as protective shields against early child death. Ennin and Nkansah (2016) recognize that in African societies, names are not randomly assigned to people, but for specific reasons and argue: "for example, for a woman whose babies die a few days after birth continuously will have recourse to giving subsequent babies death prevention names" (p.70). They further argue that such names have the power to assure the bearer's survival. The researchers equally sustain that death prevention names are drawn from names of strangers or migrants, destructive or dangerous animals, low status objects or jobs. Equally used are various sorts of negative names including ugly or low-priority names all of which meant to ensure the survival of a child or an adult from harm, a strategy devised to fool evil spirits to leave the bearer alone. Renaming is also used during illness or danger that often occurs where danger is rampant and life is fragile. Similarly, Fulah people attribute protective names drawn from their sociocultural environment with the aim of fooling death. That is why they give ugly personal names such as *Tiddal* and *Nyaga* (rubbish), *Jukkiri* (garbage) and *Birgi* (animal excrements) with the aim of informing the evil spirits and witches behind the repetitive deaths in the family that the bearers of these names are not loved by their people, and therefore should be left alone. The same holds true with *Geeda* and its variant *Gida* (I do not like him any more) used to ensure the survival of the child because death tends to like what people like most, and not what they do not like. *Dinnda* (pen or enclosure) and its variants *Dinndadakiji* (donkey enclosure) and *Dinndabali* (sheep enclosure) are used with the same protective intent.

Other instances of Fulah protective survival personal names include the male personal name *Guuro* and its female counterpart *Wuuri* (the one who is going to survive), *Jubbalo* (he who will live long), *Suturaare*, an Arabic loan (protected by God) and *Ala'accu* and *Alla'reeni* (a God protected child) are all attributed to new-born babies to wish them protection and survival.

Blessing, wish and beauty-related personal names

At times, names appear highly communicative in that they become allusive in terms of the expectations, feelings and opinions they express (Batoma, 2009). In this sense, they may be ontological to capture and express the ontological identity of the name bearer, pedagogical, to express the plurality of their socio-cultural identities and allusive, to convey messages in an indirect way. In similar ways, Fulah personal names are sometimes used to express wishes, blessing and beauty (both physical and moral) to their bearers. For instance,

Moyfere (he who brings happiness or well-being) and its variant *Moyfuru* (good person) are given to babies so as to satisfy a parent's wish and expectation for his children. Such names often shape the future life of their bearers. Personal names carry with them long-term consequences because they act as labels which usually influence the socialization of children and contribute to the development of personal identities and at times, their behaviors in life (Viriri, 2018). They are believed to determine the type of person the bearer will be (Guma, 2001). *Malel* and its variant *Malal* (the blessed one) are attributed in the same conditions with the hope that the child will really be a blessed person in his future life. Similar conditions guide the attribution of *Cehido* (the joyful one) generally to women.

Other such traditional Fulah personal names meant to shape their bearers' future life include *Malaado* (the blessed one), *Seebo* (the most loved one), *Naydo* and its variant *Nayraado* (the lucky person), *Belko* and its variants *Beldohoore* (the lucky one) and *Welloore* (the lucky woman), *Arsukunte* (the rich person or he who can bear all kinds of difficulties), *Kawdo*, *kowy*, *Ceydo*, *Seyoor Sewo* (the happy woman), *Gelaajo* (a good wish), *Jannji* (as beautiful as the moon), the male name *Nafannde* and its female variant *Nafore* (he who is interesting or important), *Lobbo* (the beautiful one), *Warjam* (he who brings peace), and *Kola* and its variant *Kolaado* (the trustworthy). These names and several others are all attributed with the intent of shaping the conduct and the physical appearance of their bearers.

Special circumstantial personal names

In African societies, personal names serve to give an identity and define their bearers (Nyambi et. al, 2016); they also tend to carry a symbolic and usually less transparent meaning (Bagwasi, 2012). In the same sense, Fulah people like to attribute names to their children according to special social events including feasts such as Ramadan. *Julde* (feast), *Korka* (Ramadan) and the Arabic loan *lidi* (feast) are parts of those special personal names drawn from special social events. *Julde* is given to a baby born during a feast like Ramadan or Tabaski. His name becomes his identity which reports about his birth period. In the same vein, *Korka* and *lidi* are given to children born during the fasting month of Ramadan.

Other special circumstantial personal names concern *Cerno*, *Mobbo* and *Modibbo* given to people versed in Islamic sciences. At this stage, the specificity of these names lies in the fact that they are not given right from birth, but appear in the course of life and eventually replace the name given at birth. When *Modibbo* in particular becomes a *sufi*, he is renamed *Seeku* (from Arabic *Sheikh*). A last special circumstantial name is *Egguru* given to children born during nomadic periods.

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Flora and fauna-based personal names

Hussein (1997) underlines the importance of names which, he finds, basically derive from social and religious beliefs and values, geographical locations, natural phenomena and objects, wild and domestic animals, and colour or occupation. Similarly, traditional African personal names reflect cosmological and sociolinguistic information encoded in varying surface linguistic structures basically meant for identifying individuals in any given culture and society (Ogunwale and Bamigbade, 2014). Following those general principles, Fulah people being nomadic cattle breeders, draw parts of their personal names from their flora and fauna. Therefore, *Bigal* (heifer) is attributed to new-born babies to express beauty and love for them. The name bearer is compared to a heifer, a young female cow which has not calved yet, with all its physical beauty. *Ngaari* and its variant, *Ga'al* (ox) are given to new-born babies, especially when they are big, to wish them the strength of an ox. Likewise, the traditional ugly name *Fowru* (hyena) is given to a child to ensure his survival; the hyena being an ugly animal most often disliked in African societies, its name is given to a child so that he (unlike his elders who did not survive) can survive. If nobody likes him, death in turn, will not like him and will let him alone. In plain words, *Fowru* is used by Fulah people to fool death. In like conditions, *Koorooru* (cobra) is given to babies to wish strength and killing power (especially in the domain of wars) for a child, just like a cobra.

Personal names for children born after twins

In traditional Africa, the birth of twins appears as a special event. Twins therefore receive special attention and names according to cultures and a child born immediately after twins also receive a special name in relation to the twins again. Fulah communities do not have many such personal names. The findings of this study have uncovered a single case, *Saajo*, given to a child from either sex, born right after twins. The same personal name *Saajo* is however found among Bamanan people who use it to indicate that the bearer is fifth in the family birth order (Minkailou, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Traditional Fulah personal names remain full carriers of Fulah cultural and linguistic history. They look unpredictable in that they are guided by the circumstances under which the birth took place. For until the child is born and under what social and cultural circumstances it is born, the name cannot be predicted with accuracy (Agyekum (2006). Individuals receive names as identities that inform about the bearers' birth circumstances, including the birth order, period and

place, gender, flora and fauna, etc. These events help shape the basic Fulah personal names and their typologies; they may equally help shape the future conduct of their bearers. While children born after twins have special names, twins themselves do not seem to have any such names; the neighboring Bamanan ethnic group does have special names for twins. There is however the twin personal name *Fune* (twin) used across various languages such as Bamanankan, Fulfulde and Songhay. A structural analysis of Fulah personal names shows that most of them are simple nouns (94.53%); very few are phrases (3.12%), followed by full sentences (1.56%) and adjectives (0.78%). This study is just a start; further research on Fulah anthroponymy with a special focus on family names (their diversity could make them particularly interesting) and Fulah toponymy is recommended.

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