

## A SOCIO-ONOMASTIC ANALYSIS OF NICKNAMES IN THE FULANI CULTURE, CAMEROON

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the sources of nicknames in the Fulani language, their situational domain, their sociocultural relevance and their perceptions within the Fulani context from the account of Leslie and Skipper's (1991) socio-onomastic theory. Data were collected through participant observations and semi-structured interviews from community members. The findings reveal that Fulani nicknames have historical, social and cultural resonances. The identified nicknames bear sociological, pragmatic and communicative functions that match the Fulani people's collective existence and shared experience. This article helps us appreciate Fulani culture's creativity and spans our knowledge of ethnicity and social identity. The researcher recommends that other scholars pursue research in other aspects of Fulani culture, and to revamp studies on Cameroon's native languages, which face extinction.

**Keywords:** *Fulani language, nicknames, perceptions, socio-onomastics, sociocultural relevance*

### **1. Introduction**

African names have ancestral origins as they are all shaped and influenced by the sociocultural norms of the individuals comprising social groups, they are members. Odebode (2005, p.211) echoes this view contending that they are "indexes to characters and are part and parcel of African heritage which reflect the social background, religious affiliation, occupation, gender, and politics." Harder (2008, p.1) defines names as "words signifying special and tangible things, either living, as in the case of a person or an animal, or inanimate, as in the case of a place or a concept." Thus, names are labels of identification and differentiation used in social life, ascribed to animate and inanimate beings. He singled out different kinds of human names encapsulating personal names, first names, last names, pseudonyms and nicknames. However, names may communicate more complex meanings, as Baltes opined (1991, p.75) "names can have some central meanings other than the simple identification of the bearers". Names, therefore, are interpretable in given socio-cultural contexts. In the African context, names' meanings derive from "complex social negotiations,

learned, interpreted and reified through socialization” (Leslie & Skipper 1990, p. 273). The meanings of names are based on the ethno-pragmatic backgrounds of name givers and bearers.

This study examines through the socio-onomastic lens the nicknaming system in the Fulani language. It looks into the sources of nicknames singled out and domains, the socio-cultural relevance of these socio-semiotic signs, and their perceptions within the community.

Sociolinguistic studies on the Fulani in Cameroon are scarce, and there is little information on Naming and virtually no literature concerning nickname practices in that ethnic group. Nicknames in cultures differ in structure, usage and interpretation and since Fulani nicknames conform to ethnolinguistic, social, and cultural traits, they need to be understood epistemologically and socially.

The following research questions will guide our research:

1. What are the sources and situational domains of Fulani nicknames?
2. What are the social and cultural significance of Fulani nicknames?
3. What are the perceptions of Fulani nicknames?

This research in the urban setting of Ngaoundere is relevant as it enhances awareness of the Fulani nickname construction system, social dimensions, roles and representations. Also, it disseminates intercultural knowledge and skills in a multilingual Cameroon proud of its linguistic heritage and diversity. In addition, it demonstrates cultural practices of nicknames. It adds tone to the discourse of nicknames by socio-onomastic scholars who perceive nicknames as deeply seated in people’s racial and cultural backgrounds.

## **2. Review of related literature and studies**

This section reviews the literature on nicknames and sociolinguistic roles. It equally overviews scholarship on socio-onomastics, a domain in sociolinguistics and examines previous works undertaken in Cameroon cosmology.

### **2.1. Nicknames**

Names are given to individuals at birth to recognize them or discriminate from other family members and society. In addition to original names, parents mark their children with other identities to signal expectations or differentiate them

from other children who carry the same name, and alternatively, these latter take other attributes to reinvent themselves; otherwise, they receive them from other people in the society to typify their behaviour or character. These extra adopted or received names are called “nicknames”, widely spread in the Fulani community, multifaceted and varying according to lineage, purpose and socio-economic factors.

Kennedy & Zamuner (2006) define nicknames as referring expressions used to identify the bearer which is different from the names given to the person by the parents. They are descriptive terms used to refer to others. Thus, nicknames are additional, evaluative and unofficial names, but colloquial and casual referents, given to individuals to address or represent them. They are given optionally, so they are not mandatory as names (Gladkova, 2002) and some are transient. All in all, nicknames are cultural-bound and anchored on experience (Pour 2009; Mapako 2016).

## **2.2. Understanding the socio-pragmatic roles of nicknames**

Nickname practices are profuse in families, peer groups, workplaces, arts, politics, sports, and business, based on people’s expectations, occupational roles, status, age, gender, and ethnicity. Nicknames, for instance, perform roles such as fostering solidarity, enhancing group affiliation and belonging, especially within social circles (Mensah, 2016); making the person more clarified or drawing people’s attention (Hagström 2012); describing the personality of the person such as “weight, height”, cultural or racial background, such as colour, nationality or the place of origin or the career (Morarasu 2006); showing affect and distinction (Garayeva, Akhmetzyanov, and Khismatullina 2016); portraying the character behaviour or showing the similarities between the character and another famous character (Akhmetzyanov, and Khismatullina 2016); abbreviating a long name or avoiding a desired and desirable meaning associated with the name to make the name more memorable, or sometimes because a nickname or a synonym pseudonym is easier to spell or to pronounce (Crystal 2003); showing familiarity and friendship; showing status or power; showing sarcasm or irony. From the above, nicknames display an array of diverse and understandable functions in a social and cultural setting.

### **2.3. Socio-onomastics**

“Socio-onomastics” is a broader concept of onomastics – the diachronic study of names of people and places and their distributions. Socio-onomastics, which emerged in the 1970’s, broadened the scope of the onomastic study including names variation within a sociolinguistic framework. Specifically, Ainiala (2016, p.371) defining socio-onomastics, states that it ‘examines the use and variety of names through methods that demonstrate the social, cultural, and situational conditions in name usage’. Ainiala and Östman (2017, p.2) extensively explain that:

socio-onomastics stresses the importance of looking at the use of names in every-day interaction: variation in name usage, why some names are avoided, why some names are coupled with particular pejorative attitudes, and how name users themselves perceive the very names they use. Socio-onomastics takes into account the social, cultural, and situational variation are studied, and the reasons why people know certain names (but not others) are examined. Studying attitudes and stances towards names and name usage are also part of socio-onomastic research.

On balance, socio-onomastics deals with the synchronic variation of names over space and time, their socio-cultural roles, and people’s attitudes. Today, socio-onomastics has become a field of interest in the field of sociolinguistics and pragmatics, dealing with the practical use of names in daily interactions while exploring their situational, cultural, interactional and cognitive dimensions.

### **2.3. Domain in sociolinguistics**

Holmes (2013) points out that certain social factors, namely the interlocutor, the social context of the talk, and the function and topic of the discussion proved helpful in accounting for language choice in different kinds of speech communities. They are known as “domains” of language use. “Domain” shows that each language or variety of language is assigned to a specific purpose, location, or group of people in society, such as the work domain, family domain, friendship domain or religious domain, etc. A domain involves typical interactions between typical participants in typical settings.

Spolsky (2012) argues that the domain is valuable in investigating individual and community language use. Similarly, Fishman (2000) remarks that language speakers in ethnic minority communities tend to link certain languages with specific domains. For instance, the language used at home or in one’s neighbourhood may differ from those spoken at school or work. The decision

may be focused on the function of the two speakers about each other, or the topic of the conversation, who both view the domain in the same ways (Coulmas, 2005).

Topic, role relations, and geography, according to Fishman (1972), are elements that influence the concept of domain. He claims that the topic can be a language regulator in multilingual situations. For example, someone might adjust their language to the interlocutor's when discussing specific topics. Role relation, according to Marjohan (1988), is that the languages you use are decided by the interlocutors with whom you communicate. For instance, a father may converse with his mother, a child with his mother, and a mother with her child. He also says that locality influences the languages you use because of where the discussions occur.

#### **2.4. Previous studies**

The following are research endeavours on the synchronic and social variation of names in the Cameroon scholarship. Anchimbe (2011) discussed name avoidance by Cameroonians and some of the socio-pragmatic impacts it creates. Focus was on five items that were often used in place of personal names – *manyi* (mother of twins), *tanyi* (father of twins), *moyo* (in-law, especially male), *mbanya* (co-wife in a polygamous marriage), and *mbombo* (namesake). The paper identified some of the contexts and purposes for which these terms were used. The researcher concluded that Cameroon, like many other postcolonial contexts, is acutely different from certain English-based Western cultures in which using someone's name may be part of a positive politeness strategy and not disrespect or impoliteness as it is the case in the Cameroonian and some other African cultures. To call certain people by their names in these cultures is not disrespectful and a sign that they have no honour to merit the respect that goes with not calling them. The terms studied here are also often used strategically on people who are not, for instance, mothers/fathers of twins or who may be strangers or first-time acquaintances.

Mensah and Mekamgoum (2017) explored *Ngâmbà* personal names as communicative acts that mirror a wide range of human experiences within the *Ngâmbà* sociocultural context. Their article traced the stories behind these names, investigated their communicative and socio-onomastic significance and

analysed their ethnopragmatic meanings. The study discovered that *Ngâmbà* personal names index individual or collective identities and belongings and embed significant historical resonances and cultural assumptions that reflect cruel and sometimes pleasant personal memories, unresolved tension and promising futures.

Unlike previous studies, the current traces the origin of nicknames in the Fulani language. It examines the domain of usage, the significance and the Fulbe people's views of such colloquial names in their community.

### **3. Theoretical framework**

This study is rooted in Leslie and Skipper's (1991) socio-onomastic theory of nicknames. Socio-onomastics theory accounts for the history, origin, variations and contexts of names about the name-givers, bearers and users. Nicolaisen (1985, p.123) emphasises that the variables stem from "different societal and cultural registers." Hough (2016) observes that socio-onomastics offers new insights into names, naming systems and the varieties related to their etymology senses. These insights provide clues that naming practice varies across cultures as to the types of names, the structure and the sociolinguistic and pragmatic functions they perform within the environment of the name givers, users and bearers. Leslie and Skipper's (1991) socio-onomastic theory of nicknames contends that nicknames are not merely arbitrary symbols of identity but can also signify status, power, achievement, privilege and meaningful social organization within a defined social context. From this perspective, these socio-cultural factors are helpful for the analysis of nicknames in the Fulani community.

### **4. Research Methodology**

The Fulani speech community spreads all over Africa, especially in Central Africa, West Africa and North Africa (Yepdia, 2002). The language falls into the Niger-Congo family of languages. Fulani people speak the Fulbe language with significant variations from one country to another, at the phonology, vocabulary, and syntactic level. In Cameroon, they are settled in the Far-North, the North, the Adamawa, the North-west and the West, where pastoral and nomadic activities are their routines. The Fulbe language is a lingua franca evolving in the Greater North of Cameroon, functioning as a language of social cohesion

between the natives and speakers of different linguistic backgrounds. Fulani nicknames are applied in all domains of life and maintain universal meaning though some differences are based on settings.

Fulani people settled in the urban area of Ngaoundere were the main participants elicited to yield nickname features which would serve as the backbone of this ethnographic study. The researcher used qualitative techniques to collect data. Through interviews, he interacted with young and adult Fulani members and collected 100 nickname variables. A random sampling technique was used, and sources were picked from different locations, on campus, in the streets and at home. Young people and adults of different genders were sampled, and their input helped shape the literature for discussing nicknames in this field-work. The descriptive analysis method was used to carry out a comprehensive interpretation of data and summary of findings.

**5. Findings and discussion**

This section analyses and interprets nickname varieties gathered from Fulani group members. Four research questions were formulated at the initial stage. They questioned the sources of Fulani nicknames, their situational domain, their socio-cultural relevance and perceptions, which are analysed alternately in the following discussion of findings.

**5.1. Sources of Fulani nicknames and situational domains**

Findings on the sources of Fulani nicknames identified 16 stems of nicknames in the Fulani language, such as: the kingdom, social relationships, age, animals, natural resources and objects, social exploits, birth, death, marital status, personality, emotions, offence, expectations, physical features and wealth. Each of the identified sources is analysed to understand the motives.

**Table 1: Nicknames associated with the kingdom**

<b>Nicknames</b>	<b>domain</b>	<b>Fulani interpretation</b>
<i>Yerima</i>	royalty	The successor to the throne: prince
<i>babarey</i>	royalty	The notorious lamido of Rey Bouba is known to be absolutely authoritarian, mystic and ruthless in the history of the Greater north of Cameroon. If a person exhibits such behaviour or character, he may be nicknamed so.

The above nicknames are royal terms which apply to traditional rulers. Bearers of these nicknames display characteristics as being invested with power, authority and respect. “*yerima*”, used as a nickname, in the Fulani setting, is ascribed to youths or adults behaving as princes to dignify them. “*babarey*” is tagged on tyrannical rulers in the community like the Lamido of Rey-Bouba in the city of Garoua.

**Table 2: Nicknames associated with social relationships**

<b>Nicknames</b>	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Fulani interpretation</b>
<i>sobadjo</i>	friendship	My friend
<i>ketdou</i>	friendship	Neighbour
<i>djouldo</i>	religion	Any person who belongs to the Muslim community
<i>abba</i>	kingship	A nickname for father
<i>inna</i>	kingship	A nickname for mother

Fulani people also used friendship terms as nicknames to address their friends or neighbours for social harmony, as illustrated by words like “*sobadjo*” and “*ketdou*”. The word “*djouldo*” is used for distinction in their social group, to isolate Muslim believers from Christians or pagans. Kingship terms are also used in the family to show respect to elders. Children may call their father “*abba*” instead of “*baba*” or their mother “*inna*” rather than “*dada*”, to emphasize reverence.

**Table 3: Nicknames associated with age**

<b>Nicknames</b>	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Fulani interpretation</b>
<i>dottijo</i>	age grade	Any old and experienced man
<i>wossom</i>	age grade	Nickname given to any older father
<i>derkedjo</i>	age grade	Young boy
<i>mama</i>	age grade	Nickname given to any older mother

Age is another source of nicknames that help Fulani people distinguish adulthood from childhood as shown in Table 3.

**Table 4: Nicknames associated with animals**

<b>Nicknames</b>	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Fulani interpretation</b>
<i>baree</i>	lion	A lion-like person
<i>ngaakel</i>	bee	A talkative person
<i>bandaa</i>	whale	Your mouth is as big as the mouth of a whale.
<i>du’udji</i>	owl	You look like an owl.

Animals are also sources of nicknames in the Fulani language. Odd nicknames are given to individuals to indicate they have characteristics of wild animals, insects, fish and birds. Such labels are employed to portray man’s physical



power (*baree*); noisy attitude (*ngaakel*) and odd physical appearance (*bandaa, du'udji*).

**Table 5: Nicknames associated with natural resources and objects**

Nicknames	Domain	Fulani interpretation
<i>kanguee</i>	gold	A nickname given to a new-born female baby signifying that she is as precious as gold.
<i>nuurul baiti</i>	light	A nickname given to a newly wedded girl meaning that she is the light of the house.
<i>tilmiza</i>	Jewellery	A nickname given to a female meaning that she is precious as a pearl.

Natural resources constitute another important reservoir for nicknames. Nicknames likened to nature, and objects are given to children at birth or newly wedded girls to extol them (gold, pearl, light).

**Table 6: Nicknames associated with social exploits**

Nicknames	Domain	Fulani interpretation
<i>sudeis</i>	cognition	Someone who recites the Quran smartly is given a nickname like, Imams or Quran reciters in Mekkah (Saudi Arabia).
<i>danfodio</i>	history	It is given after Usman Dan Fodio, the first person to introduce Islam in Cameroon. The nickname used to name a heroic person.
<i>moddibo</i>	teaching	Any person who teaches religion well.
<i>dakaré</i>	speaking	Someone who has good skills to convince or persuade people. Someone who has good oral skills.
<i>bo'beruu</i>	cognition	A nickname given to a man who possesses many oxes and has immense knowledge about them. He understands their body language and can predict the fate of the beasts.
<i>duroy</i>	cognition	Attributed to a person who is extremely good at shepherding

In social exploits, nicknames among Fulani groups designate people who show high intellectual fits in Quran learning (*sudeis*), brave people (*danfodio*) and smart rhetoricians. These attributes give bearers pride and worthy values, which distance them from others on the social scale.

**Table 7: Nicknames associated with birth and death**

Nicknames	Domain	Fulani interpretation
<i>gadji</i>	family tie	The last-born child in the family
<i>adda</i>	family tie	The first-born girl in the family
<i>iya</i>	family tie	Attributed to the first elder brother
<i>gambo</i>	family tie	A child who is born after twins.
<i>yaya</i>	family tie	Attributed to the first-born boy in the family
<i>nene</i>	family tie	Attributed to the third elder sister
<i>dadda</i>	family tie	A senior sister. The one born after the first

		child.
<i>yugu'da</i>	family tie	A boy whose elders are girls.
<i>dudu</i>	family tie	The first-born female after males.
<i>sadjo</i>	family tie	A boy born after two children.
<i>soeti</i>	fertility	A woman who has given birth to many children.
<i>ori</i>	time	A child born early in the morning.
<i>laabi</i>	road	A child born on the road.
<i>eggi</i>	migration	A child born during migration
<i>hamma gaab ndo</i>	survival	A child in the family who has survived after the first two or three has passed away.

Parents give nicknames to children at birth to inform the community about the birth rank of the child, and the circumstances under which the male or female child was born, such as the time, the location and the event.

**Table 8: Nicknames associated with marital status**

<b>Nicknames</b>	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Fulani interpretation</b>
<i>guida'do</i>	marriage	The loved one. Nickname a polygamous husband gives to the spouse he loves the most.
<i>kepbin ndo</i>	marriage	Nickname for a newly married girl.
<i>naouliko</i>	marriage	Nickname for women having the same husband.
<i>hamdia</i>	marriage	This word comes from the Arabic <i>hamdam</i> "gratitude or acknowledgement" and is given to a woman who is married to a polygamous who already has three wives and she is the fourth. It means to thank God, and it is enough.
<i>tchu mba ndo</i>	marriage	It is attributed to a young married woman to mean the chosen one.

Fulani nicknames show interest in marital status and relationships among couples. For instance, in a polygamous household, where the husband has many wives, he may call his dearest wife "*guida'do*"– my sweetheart. The fourth wife is given the nickname of '*hamdia*' to indicate that she is the last in the series and above all implies that the husband will not take another wife.

**Table 9: Nicknames associated with personalities**

<b>Nicknames</b>	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Fulani interpretation</b>
<i>nga'lalel</i>	habit	A person who likes wearing white clothes
<i>bakari djaagol</i>	habit	Someone who likes wearing pullovers
<i>djengui</i>	habit	A person who always shows up to ceremonies very late.
<i>asta hara</i>	kindness	When a woman is charitable.
<i>dudu hippo ndi</i>	ignorance	Naïve or foolish girl
<i>samaro'ka</i>	manner	Given to males who behave as females
<i>keerker</i>	habit	A person who likes meddling in people's

		business.
<i>ardo pewe</i>	morality	Untruthful person
<i>sahido</i>	morality	Truthful or reliable person
<i>balwa nde</i>	moral quality	Wicked person
<i>mal Djamba</i>	attitude	hypocrite
<i>djarabeel</i>	attitude	A shameless person.
<i>saata hore</i>	attitude	A stubborn person
<i>yida ka</i>	attitude	A person who eavesdrops on someone's conversation.
<i>déii</i>	attitude	A wife who is serious and calm
<i>maddjoudo</i>	attitude	A person who does not meet religious rules
<i>gabdo</i>	attitude	She never gives up, whatever the challenges
<i>wancho</i>	attitude	Somebody who has itchy feet.
<i>mbo'lol</i>	hole	A person who eats or drinks a lot without being satiated or quenched.
<i>gaariatu</i>	habit	A person who likes eating porridge quite a lot.
<i>adamu dalang</i>	appearance	Given to children wearing filthy clothes.
<i>kalloudo</i>	attitude	A jealous person

Nicknames depicting behaviours portray people with positive, negative or strange personalities. They are idiosyncratic, dynamic and circumstantial.

**Table 10: Nicknames associated with emotions**

<b>Nicknames</b>	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Fulani interpretation</b>
<i>yüidé am</i>	passion	Sweetheart
<i>séinido</i>	happiness	Someone who makes somebody glad.
<i>asta yii ndii</i>	love	A beloved woman
<i>barkindo</i>	grace	The blessed one. Nickname, a family, gives to their daughter-in-law to show their love.

For instance, nicknames dealing with emotions are used to denote love and passion. Fulani people in their social relationships use emotive words to pour out their feelings. Those who receive them feel loved and considered.

**Table 11: Nicknames associated with offence or insult**

<b>Nicknames</b>	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Fulani interpretation</b>
<i>kado</i>	religion	Any person who does not belong to the Muslim community.
<i>matchoudo</i>	social class	Slave person
<i>djaloudjo</i>	social class	bastard
<i>quinado</i>	identification	Mad person
<i>karamajo</i>	identification	wizard
<i>nyitdoudo</i>	identification	Ugly
<i>tchatdo</i>	identification	selfish
<i>gaïnako</i>	social class	shepherd
<i>bilkidjo</i>	social class	Illiterate

<i>dammoudo</i>	identification	Short person
<i>adjabadjo</i>	social class	prostitute
<i>koutouroujo</i>	identification	Physically impaired person

Offensive nicknames in the Fulani society are stereotypes used to insult people on the basis of their religious beliefs; identity and physical experience. By and large, these nicknames are derogative and exclusive.

**Table 12: Nicknames associated with expectations**

<b>Nicknames</b>	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Fulani interpretation</b>
<i>bello</i>	hope	The boy will be kind and gentle towards people.
<i>asta djam</i>	hope	This particular nickname brings hope to a family facing many challenges.
<i>chenoudo</i>	hope	The young married girl will make her husband happy all the time.
<i>wardidjam</i>	hope	She will bring peace to the whole family.
<i>kebbindo</i>	hope	She will give many children to her husband.
<i>salti</i>	hope	The hope of procreation in the family.
<i>hambarka</i>	grace	It is coined from Arabic <i>barka</i> which means blessing. It is attributed to a boy to mean that he is a blessed child.
<i>wardidjam</i>	hope	A wife who comes with peace.
<i>kebbindo</i>	hope	She will provide many children to her husband.
<i>feisendo</i>	hope	She will bring harmony to her home.
<i>hairia</i>	fortune	She will bring fortune. It is attributed to a newly wedded girl.

Nicknames representing expectations apply both to females and males in social life contexts. Through their choices, name-givers determine the fate of the boy in his future life and the fate of the girl in her future marital home. Individuals receiving them feel honoured and blessed.

**Table 13: Nicknames associated with physical features**

<b>Nicknames</b>	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Fulani interpretation</b>
<i>labbo</i>	physical appearance	Very tall person
<i>saatoudo</i>	physical appearance	Physically strong man
<i>ndottii ree</i>	physical appearance	This is a kind of grass which is very short but strong. It always looks green despite climate change. This nickname is given to males who are short and very strong.

Physical features in Fulani nicknames are employed to type people whose physique is impressive. They are related to height and strength. They provoke curiosity and amazement.

**Table 14: Nicknames associated with wealth**

Nicknames	Domain	Fulani interpretation
<i>djugga</i>	riches	Fortunate man
<i>mardo</i>	riches	Wealthy person

Wealth is another source where Fulani people resort to name successful people. The Fulani society types fortunate males or females as “*djugga*” or “*mardo*”. Bearers of such nicknames feel proud.

## **5.2. Social and cultural significance of Fulani nicknames**

### **5.2.1. Nicknames as Social Deixis**

Social deixis is concerned with encoding destinations relative to participant roles, particularly the social relationship between speaker and addressee (s) or speaker and some referent (Levinson 1983, p.63). It refers to the social characteristics, or distinctions between the participants or referents in a speech event. In Fulani cosmology, nicknames exhibit social roles as reverence and honour. Children at home would utter the nickname “*abba*” to address their father instead of “*babba*”; they would say “*inna*” to call their mother instead of “*dada*”, – these items aimed at showing respect to their parents and revealing their grandeur. The Fulani also attribute royal titles as “*yerima*” to their sons to elevate them and make them unique.

### **5.2.2. Nicknames as Mocking Devices**

The findings revealed that using nicknames among Fulani people plays a cynical function. Informants acknowledged that they ascribed nicknames to their peers and members of the community in a mocking tone to ridicule them based on their physical appearance, their behaviour, habits, status, activity and disability, as portrayed below:

*baree*: A lion-like person

*ngaakel*: Talkative person

*dammoudo*: short person

*bandaa*: Nickname given to people with a big mouth.

*du’udji*: Given to someone to indicate that he looks like an owl.

*nga’lalel*: A person who likes wearing white clothes

*matchoudo*: A slave person

*djaloudjo*: bastard

*nyitdoudo*: Ugly person

*tchatdo*: selfish

*gaïnako*: shepherd

*adjabadjo*: prostitute

*koutouroujo*: A person who limps

### **52.3. Nicknames as Temperonyms**

Some nicknames used as temperonyms are given to children in the Fulani group to remember a notable event in the family. These kinds of nicknames with temporal and spatial dimensions are fundamental not only to the name but also to the entire community as they point back to crucially important historical and cultural phenomena of the society. The events may denote happiness, sadness or circumstances. Below are some data highlighting temperonyms:

*ori*: A child born early in the morning

*laabi*: A child born on the road

*eggi*: A child born during migration

*hamma gaab ndo*: A child in the family who has survived after the first two or three siblings have passed away.

### **5.2.4. Nicknames as markers of Social Status and Social Class**

The Fulani coined typical nicknames to showcase social status and social class. Concerning traditional rulers or individuals possessing mystical powers and showing authoritarian ruling as the Lamido of Rey Bouba in Garoua, youths and adults call them “*babarey*”.

Nicknames related to social class designate individuals who possess many riches. Such people are respected for their belongings and possessions. They are called “*djugga*”, “*hairia*”, and “*mardo*”. The first two are applied to females while the latter is meant for males.

### **5.2.5. Nicknames as markers of Bliss**

Benediction is an illocutionary force to which Fulani parents accord much importance. The Fulani society gives their newly married girl nicknames which embody grace, success and prosperity once in their marital home. Parents give such nicknames to their daughters to hook the family-in-law and wish them happiness in their marital life. Some examples are as follows:

*barkindo*: The blessed one. It means the family-in-law welcomes the daughter - in-law happily with words of grace.

*chenoudou*: The girl will bring joy to her husband.

*wardidjam*: A married girl will bring peace to the family.

*kebbindo*: The married girl will give many children to her husband.

#### **5.2.6. Nicknames as markers of Exclusion**

Exclusion is one of the characteristics of nicknames in use in the Fulani community. Youths and adults for social distance use specific nicknames to exclude people who do not belong to their religious background or are not faithful to Muslim religious precepts. The nickname “*kado*” applies to people not adepts to the Muslim religion. “*maddjoudo*” is meant for people who do not respect religious rules. Givers of such nicknames see non-members of their group as outcasts.

#### **5.3. The perception of Fulani nicknames**

The findings show that Fulani nicknames are symbolic tools to represent people and they communicate significant values inherent to this society.

##### **a) Achievement**

The Fulani person perceives nicknames as a referent to describe achievement in politics, religion, business and farming. Typical examples include:

- *babarey*: A person who exhibits authoritarian and mystical attributes like the lamido of Rey-Bouba
- *sudeis*: A person who recites Quran like Imams and religious leaders in Saudi Arabia.
- *danfodio*: A heroic person.
- *dakaré*: Someone with abilities in oral skills – rhetorician.
- *bo'beruu*: A person who is knowledgeable in cattle management, communication and fate prediction.

##### **b) Social Power and Influence**

The Fulani person also perceives nicknames as an index of pride. In this context, people are addressed as “*kanguée*” – you are as precious as gold; “*yerima*” – prince; “*nuurul bait*” –you are the light of the house; “*tilmiza*” – you are as precious as a pearl. These nicknames develop happiness and feelings of love on the part of the bearers.

**c) Humour**

Fulani nicknames equally trigger humour among the members. Some nicknames are given to people and fade away with time. For instance, youths call their peers “*dammoudo*” – short person; “*koutouroujo*” – physically impaired; “*djaloudo*” – bastard; “*bilkiddjo*” –illiterate, etc. These coined names are playful, offensive and reductive.

**d) Reminder of Historical and Cultural Past**

The Fulani society’s nicknaming system is widely based on situations and circumstances. One of the peculiarities of the Fulani nickname lies in its ability to remember an event in just a nickname, conceal an entire history in a nickname and hold high esteem in its traditional values too. A nickname like “*laabi*” – A child born on the road, reminds people about where the child is born. “*ori*” – A child born early in the morning, is a nickname which refreshes people’s minds on the period of the birth of the individual; “*eggi*” – A child born during migration, which recalls the circumstance under which the child is born; “*hamma gaab ndo*” – A child in the family who has survived after the first two or three siblings have passed away, which informs the society that there was a series of death in the family of that child and then the child carrying such a nickname is also threatened. This nickname is generally kept secret from outsiders.

**e) To Differentiate Age Grade**

Another cultural relevance of nicknames in the Fulani group is that children, apart from their official names, from birth, are given other names which depict their age grade among which: “*yugguda*” – A boy whose elders are girls; “*dudu*” – the first born female after males; “*gadjj*” – the last born girl or boy in the family. These nicknames are instrumental to social harmony and cohesion.

**f) Factor of Social Integration**

In the quest for peace and social cohesion, the Fulani society uses amicable nicknames of friendship, marriage and expectations to create a social bond between the addresser and the addressee. They are “*sobadjo*” – my friend; “*ketdou*” – neighbour; “*yüidé am*” – sweetheart; “*wardidjam*” – a wife who comes with peace. These lovely terms are phatic communion items that help to establish and maintain good relationships between the speaker and the hearer. Addressees receive them with alacrity and communicate peace and serenity.



## **6. Conclusion**

The purpose of this ethnographic study was the exploration of Fulani nicknames dwelling on their sources, their significance and the perceptions of such given names among the Fulani. One hundred nicknames were gathered from young and adult Fulbe informants through semi-structured interviews. Data were analysed based on Leslie and Skipper's (1991) socio-onomastic theory and the findings yielded significant results. The findings show that Fulani nicknames roots are multifold; they source from the kingdom, social ties, age, animals, natural resources, objects, social exploits, birth, death, marital status, behaviour, emotions, offence, expectations, physical features, wealth, to name but a few. Their situational domain pertains to fauna, valuables, cognition, history, teaching, family ties, marriage, customs, personalities, love and passion, grace, religion, social class, identification, physical appearance and riches. Fulani nicknames communicate sociolinguistic information about the sociocultural realities of the group. They are stimuli used to portray reverence, mockery, social class and status, bliss, exclusion and identity. They represent values such as achievement in politics, business, religion and farming; connote social power, influence, and humour; remind essential events about the bearers; they are coined to establish age differences and phatic communion among the community members. This contribution to the development of Fulani culture helps to add further knowledge on the literature of Fulbe people.

## **7. Recommendations**

The literature on Fulani nicknames is not exhaustive, and can be expanded into other research pursuits. As native languages in Cameroon face endangerment, more efforts should be made by researchers to conduct research in other aspects to enhance the Fulani culture.

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