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## Influential Factors in The Selection of Bamanan Traditional Personal Names in Buguni

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### ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Bamanan halkında geleneksel isimlendirme sürecini ve bu süreci etkileyen faktörleri incelemektedir. Araştırmanın amacı, Bamanan topluluğundaki isim verme uygulamalarının nasıl geliştiğini anlamaktır. Çalışma nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden fenomenolojik yaklaşımla yürütülmüştür. Veriler, Buguni bölgesinde yaşayan ve isim verme konusunda deneyimli 35 kişiyle yapılan görüşmeler ve odak grup tartışmaları aracılığıyla toplanmış ve içerik analizi yöntemiyle incelenmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda, isimlendirme sürecini etkileyen beş temel faktör tespit edilmiştir: din, aile kökeni, küreselleşme, cinsiyet ve tarihsel olaylar. Din, bu süreçte önemli bir rol oynamakta; İslam ve Hristiyanlık etkisiyle dini isimlerin tercih edilmesi, bazen geleneksel isimlerin geri plana itilmesine yol açmaktadır. Aile kökeni ise, saygın büyüklerin isimlerinin çocuklara verilmesi yoluyla aile bağlarının güçlenmesini ve kültürel mirasın devam etmesini sağlamaktadır. Küreselleşmenin etkisiyle, uluslararası ünlüler ve siyasi figürlerin isimleri yaygınlaşmakta; bu durum kültürel anlamdan çok hayranlığın bir göstergesi olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Cinsiyet, isimlerin belirlenmesinde bir diğer önemli faktör olup, erkek ve kız çocuklar için farklı isimlerin tercih edilmesini sağlamaktadır. Tarihsel faktörler ise önemli olayların ya da kişilerin anılması amacıyla isimlendirme sürecinde etkili olmaktadır. Bamanan halkında isimlendirme, doğum koşulları, aileye duyulan saygı ve sevinç gibi unsurları dikkate alan özenli bir süreci ifade etmektedir. Geleneksel uygulamalar ile modern etkilerin birleştiği bu süreç, isimlendirmenin kültürel kimlik ve aile ilişkilerindeki önemini açık bir şekilde göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Bamanan, Geleneksel isimler, İsimlendirme uygulamaları, Onomastik, Buguni

### ABSTRACT

This study explores the factors influencing traditional personal names among the Bamanan people. It aims to find out naming processes in Bamanan community. The type of research employed in this present study is a qualitative approach through a phenomenological approach. Data was collected using the structured interview and focus group discussions with 35 experienced name-givers in Buguni and analyzed based on the content analysis. The findings revealed five key factors influencing naming practices: religion, hereditary influences, globalization, gender, and historical events. They uncovered that religion played a major role, with Islamic and Christian influences leading to the adoption of names related to these faiths, sometimes at the expense of traditional names. Additionally, hereditary factors highlighted the practice of naming children after respected family members to foster familial bonds and cultural continuity. They also unveiled that globalization introduced names of international celebrities and political figures, reflecting admiration rather than cultural relevance. Furthermore, gender influenced naming conventions, with specific names assigned to boys or girls. Finally, the findings also discovered that historical factors showed that names might honor significant

*historical figures or events, preserving cultural heritage. The Bamanan naming process involves careful consideration of birth circumstances, honoring deceased or living relatives, and expressing familial joy. This process reflects a blend of traditional practices and modern influences, enlightening the importance of naming in cultural identity and familial relationships.*

**Keywords:** *Bamanan, Traditional Names, Naming Practices, Onomastics, Buguni*

## INTRODUCTION

The onomastic literature covers a variety of naming practices, including anthroponomy or anthroponomastics and toponymy or toponomastics (Prabhakaran,1997). Anthroponomy or anthroponomastics refers to the further study of personal names (first name, middle name, nickname, surname, etc.) while toponymy deals with the names of places (village, town, country, etc..). Personal names in Africa have very powerful cultural content so that they can reveal many hidden cultural things. They are not just used for identification; rather they personify bearer. In Olawale, Abernathy (2005) declares, “There is much meaning in a name. If you are given the right name, you start off with certain indefinable but real advantages” When interviewing a diviner, Berglund (1975, p.287) in Neethling points out that the name is the person and the name, and the person are the same. According to him, the diviner advocates that people can do harm to others through their names. Thus, the present work focuses on the anthroponomy of the Bamanan people living in Buguni. Naming occurs when people confer an identity to a newborn baby. Naming reveals information about named people: gender, birthplace, religion, ethnicity, nationality and their rank of arrival to their family. This happens through language depending on the ethnic group the person belongs to (Minkailou, 2017). Giving traditional personal names to people among the Bamanan ethnic group was a common practice in the past. Even though this traditional practice was used to describe and inform about the birth conditions. Carrying out studies on African personal names in general and the Bamanan ones in particular is a hindrance because most of those transmitted names are oral source- based. Naming in the Bamanan milieu serves to determine the social, ethnic and cultural belonging or membership of their bearers since they shed light upon the named people. This way of naming traditionally among Bamanan seems to be neglected by the modern generation. This gap is likely due to the lack of knowledge related to the great value of these Bamanan traditional personal names. The ignorance of the meaning of these names can be conducive to the death of those names. In line with the specific objectives of the study, the following research questions have been designed:

- What are factors influencing the choice of Bamanan traditional personal names?
- What are Naming processes among Bamanan people?

The study specifically aims to find out the factors influencing the choice of Bamanan traditional personal names and their naming processes

## METHOD

The current study makes use of qualitative research. It uses a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of Bamanan people in Buguni, Mali, concerning their traditional naming practices. Phenomenology is chosen for its focus on understanding how individuals make sense of their experiences and the meanings they attach to them (Creswell, 2013). This approach is particularly well-suited to uncover the cultural, social, and historical factors that influence naming practices in Bamanan society. The research focuses on 35 experienced name-givers in Buguni, selected using purposive sampling. Participants are chosen for their extensive knowledge of Bamanan naming traditions and their roles as cultural authorities or elders. The setting of the research is Buguni, located 170 km south of Bamako. In this community, names hold significant cultural value beyond mere identification, often reflecting a person’s family history, social standing, and spiritual beliefs. Data is collected through semi-

structured interviews and focus group discussions. Interviews allow participants to share their experiences and insights on the criteria for naming, the cultural meanings of names, and influences such as family and religion. The data is analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the factors influencing Bamanan traditional personal names. Phenomenology research is particularly suited for this study because it offers a detailed exploration of participants' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to their naming practices (Moustakas, 1994). This approach allows the study to reveal the cultural, social, and emotional significance of names in Bamanan culture, aligning with Creswell's (2013) view that phenomenological research is ideal for capturing the essence of lived experiences

## **RESULTS**

The data presented in this study is organized thematically, based on the research questions: What are the factors influencing the choice of Bamanan traditional personal names? and What are the naming processes among Bamanan people?

### ***Factors influencing the choice of Bamanan traditional personal names***

Many factors influence the choice of personal names. The findings reveal a significant number of factors which influence the choice of personal names among Bamanan people. These factors determined include religion, hereditary factors, globalization, gender and historical events.

#### ***Religion***

The findings showed that religion is one of the major factors which has a great impact on the choice of Bamanan traditional personal names. Responses from participants related to both the structured interview and the focus group discussion bear witness to the fact that the choice of a personal name is significantly influenced by one's religious affiliation. According to Makondo (2012, p.70), almost every human being is religious in one way or another. Then, that religion includes the acknowledgement of a greater force outside the self that shapes a person's destiny. On the basis of their religion, Bamanan people believe in gods (fetishes); most of the time, they name newly born babies accordingly.

Although Bamanan traditional personal names exist, they are still influenced by new religions, mainly, Islam and Christianity. Indeed, these two monotheist religions influence personal naming practices among this ethnic group. In other words, some traditional personal names disappear in favor of others concerning the two monotheist religions. The participants from the structured interview and the focus group discussion indicate that the introduction of those religions deeply affected the naming practices among Bamanan people. One participant underlined the fact that many Bamanan people refused to name their babies after their grandparents or according to circumstances related to their birth because they are now Muslims or Christians. Thus, they follow the Christian or Muslim- oriented naming practices. According to Evans and John (1999, p.66), religion shapes one's culture. Indeed, the naming system involves culture since it deals with the cultural construction of the naming practices. Research established that the two popular religions, mainly Islam and Christianity, had a strong influence in naming practices among Bamanan people. From the different interviews, it has emerged that most of the Bamanan traditional personal names run the risk of dying because of the enormous use of the names belonging to the aforementioned religions. The survey reveals that most of Christian and Muslim's belief name babies according to their religion to reflect their faith in their God.

#### ***Hereditary factors***

The findings show that some Bamanan people prefer to name their babies after certain members of the family. These family members might have passed away or are still living. The respondents strongly underline that most of the time the members of the family who were or are admired will have their names bestowed by the present family. Naming after deceased relatives helps maintain relationships among

family members and ensures the continuity of traditional names (Mbiti, 1990, p. 102). The belief behind naming practices is that the new name bearer will likely follow the path of the original name bearer in terms of traits. Although Bamanan traditional personal names are used following the social context, the naming practices after the members of a family have nothing to do with the social meaning. Hence, the name 'Juma' which literally means Friday is used to name someone who was born on Friday (in Arabic). When a person is named after this day, it means he was born exactly on Friday. For this reason, certain names match with the explanation related to the typology of names. Some names like Dunanke, Dunanba (foreigner) are conferred to children after people who do not belong to the family, and they may be used to fool the evil spirit.

Responses from both focus group discussions and interviews reveal that naming children after living or dead people tends to foster the relationship among members of the family and other non-relative people and to keep sustainable the use of the Bamanan traditional personal names.

### ***Globalization***

The findings reveal that the outside world has a great impact on naming practices. A participant from the focused group discussion advocates the fact that some Bamanan people name their children on the basis of the celebrities from around the world. He adds that names of prominent footballers considerably appear. He also underlines that Bamanan people live in the modern world, so the role celebrities play on naming practice can't be neglected. The name-givers choose those names of celebrities to show their admiration without thinking about the personalities behind. Therefore, the name of some popular political figures frequently used influences the naming practice among Bamanan people. In other words, the name of a politician or personality is conferred to children, but it doesn't mean that it has a real meaning in the given context. It is used by name-givers to express the joy that they have towards the politician or the personality. Thus, "names of politicians or personalities are conferred to children not because they have a specific meaning but to express admiration" (Evans & John, 1999, p. 66).

### ***Gender Factors***

Kwattsha (2009, p.56) underlined the gender identity means to feel like a female or a male. This refers to an individual's own feelings of whether she or he is a woman or a man, or girl or a boy. The researcher found that gender could be one of the factors which influence a lot naming practices among Bamanan people. The responses indicate that gender could determine the name that the newborn babies should have. In other words, there are names which are typically conferred to girls and other to boys in Bamanan traditional society. Wasa, the name of twin, is only bestowed on a baby girl not on a boy. However, some names may be used for both genders. For example, Bako (after mother) and Fako (after father), circumstantial names, can be used for both genders to show that they are named after the death of their father or mother.

### ***Historical Factors***

Data from interviews and the focus group discussion show that some children are named after certain icons of history. Some are named after some prominent guerillas of the Malian history such as Sujata (the king of Malian empire), Babenba (the king of Kenedugu) just to name a few. The reason behind these naming practices among Bamanan lies in keeping sustainable those names and the like for those historical events.

When Mali got its independence in 1960, many children were named after well-known personalities who fought for independence although those names were not only just about Bamanan traditional personal names, rather the overall of personal names. In fact, the naming practices for Bamanan people were significantly influenced by the historical circumstances which occurred in their community. Thus,

the responses from data collection strongly reveal that the historical circumstances have a considerable impact on the choice of the naming practices among Bamanan people.

### ***Naming processes among Bamanan people***

Each culture in Africa deals with its own principles of naming practices and procedures. Some confer a baby a name on the basis of the relatives who depart this life while others name after the living relatives. In Bamanan traditional personal naming practices, it has been revealed that the name givers take into account three elements when naming a baby. Those three elements are mainly the circumstances related to the birth, naming after a late or a living relative and conferring name on baby to denote joy. According to Mbiti (1991), in some cultures, the baby bears the name of the deceased relatives whom the named baby is deemed to look like. One informant argued this same naming procedure in Bamanan society.

It is commonly believed that naming procedures among Bamanan people involve not only the participation of the closest relatives, but also the assistance of the bearer's parents. According to Mbiti (1990), the birth of a baby concerns not only parents, but also many relatives, including the other relatives and the deceased. As far as the findings are concerned, names among the Bamanan people are not randomly chosen; instead, they are carefully selected on the basis of all the required procedures. Those names are used by bearers in all their lifetime.

The statement of one of the informants from the focus group discussion caught the attention of the researcher when he said that the first two babies born are for the father and their relatives whereas the third one belongs to the mother and her relatives. In other words, the relatives on the father side of the two newly chronological order born babies should select names at their convenience without involving the mother and her relative sides. Although the relatives of the father bestow the third baby a name, the mother and her relatives are allowed to choose the name and to inform the name-givers (father and his relatives) in secret before the naming day

## **DISCUSSION**

The first goal of this study was to shed light upon factors influencing the choice of Bamanan traditional personal names. The findings showed that Bamanan personal names are not randomly conferred to newborns; instead, they are selected based on different reasons such as circumstances and events that parents experience before or during the birth. In other words, each event that occurred during pregnancy has a great impact on the choice of newborn name. Those cultural and social factors included the place of birth, time of birth and the seasons of the year. Factors influencing the choice of Bamanan traditional personal names included religion, globalization, hereditary, gender and historical event. The findings revealed that the dominance of the two monotheist religions, mainly Islam and Christianity have greatly influenced the naming practices among Bamanan people. The impact of those religions is so great that most Bamanan traditional names disappear. In other words, the two different religions have become part of the Bamanan people's life as well as their naming practices. Globalization also influenced the naming practices among Bamanan people. Thus, the data focused on the fact that there are certain name givers who conferred the name of celebrities to baby to show their love to them. Another influential factor which was debated in the result was hereditary. This aspect requires the fact that name givers name baby after a member of family or a relative to foster the lineage of family. The finding described the gender as the influential matter of Bamanan traditional personal names since they helped to make use of female or male name. However, there are some names which can be conferred to both genders. The last influential factor of naming practices lied in the historical events. Bamanan people might name their child after some icon of the past.

The second aim was about naming processes among Bamanan people. The findings showed that the naming practices were complex, so name givers considered various cultural considerations. In other words, when conferring a name to baby, the name givers considered the basic naming principles which were to name a baby after the member of family or the close relative.

The findings revealed that not all Bamanan people were allowed to name a baby; instead, the role was assigned to the baby's paternal father or maternal mother. The name givers should consider the proposal of the extended family members of the baby to be named. The findings revealed that the time allotted for naming a baby occurred between fourth to ninth days after its birth.

Moreover, the findings showed that ceremonies of naming practices are too optional. Each family has its own way to congratulate the new mother who gives birth to the baby. Although it was not the question of research, some parents sacrificed goats or cows and invited fellows to take part to the ceremony at home. Some parents offer something to ancestors and ask them to protect and accept the newborn's life.

## CONCLUSION

The study on Bamanan traditional names shows how naming is deeply connected to the Bamanan culture, religion, and social practices. Naming is not just a simple act; it's full of cultural meaning and influenced by religion, family traditions, global changes, gender, and historical events.

The influence of Islam and Christianity, along with globalization, has changed traditional naming practices, leading to more names with religious or modern meanings. Family traditions and gender are still important, with names often chosen to honor family history or indicate the baby's gender.

In the Bamanan community, naming involves careful thought and follows cultural rules. Both paternal and maternal relatives are involved, and there are specific times for naming ceremonies. This study shows the richness of Bamanan naming traditions and the importance of preserving and understanding these cultural practices.

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