



## SENUFO AND THE SPECTER OF TRANSFIGURATION

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### **Abstract:**

The Senufo peoples in West Africa and in Côte d'Ivoire, in particular, have suffered a double colonization, including that of the Mandingo who have had the most penetrating and pervasive cultural and linguistic impact on them. Mandingo loan surnames within the Senufo communities are quite an edifying example. Although many members of these communities are complaisant about these loan names, over the years, increasing numbers of Senufo have expressed the desire to recover their ancient surname. Amidst this movement, a line on the sly, both insidious and alarming, has been firmly taking place. Indeed, some Senufo, more often than not, senior executives and icons of the Senufo communities, have abandoned the ancestral surname to adopt a new surname – the first or middle name of their father or a revered ancestor. Given the dimensions of Senufo names and surnames, what justifies this adoption? In what ways does this endanger the survival of the Senufo identity? It turns out that this practice is in line with a pseudo capricious desire for a search of originality which, unfortunately, takes on the appearance of a fad. This very situation surreptitiously presages another chaos regarding the cultural identity within the confines of the Senufo linguistic and cultural group.

**Keywords:** Senufo, Mandingo, patronymics, denaturation, transfiguration, culture and identity

### **Introduction**

Côte d'Ivoire, a former French colony, is a medium - sized country located in West Africa as indicated on the map below (Figure 1). Despite its size, it encloses sixty or so ethnic groups that speak different languages and which are grouped into four larger linguistic families: the Gur, the Kwa, the Mande and Kru (Greenberg, 1955; Silue 1998;

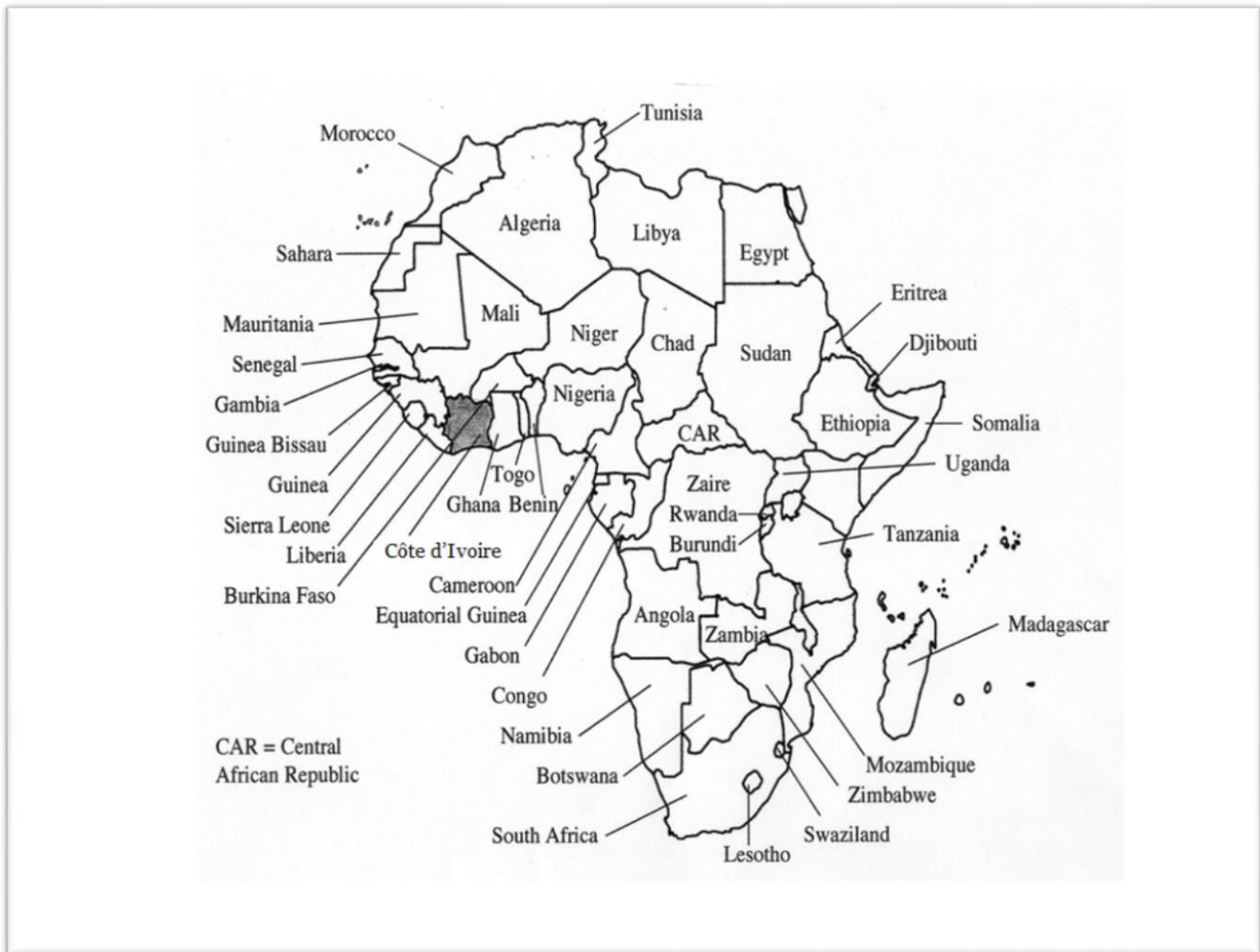
Welmers, 1955) (cf. Table 1 & Figure 2). Each family has a set of cultural and linguistic groups sharing the same language with dialectal variants within each. Côte d'Ivoire, like most African countries underwent Western colonization.

**Table 1:** The ethnic groups of Côte d'Ivoire by language family

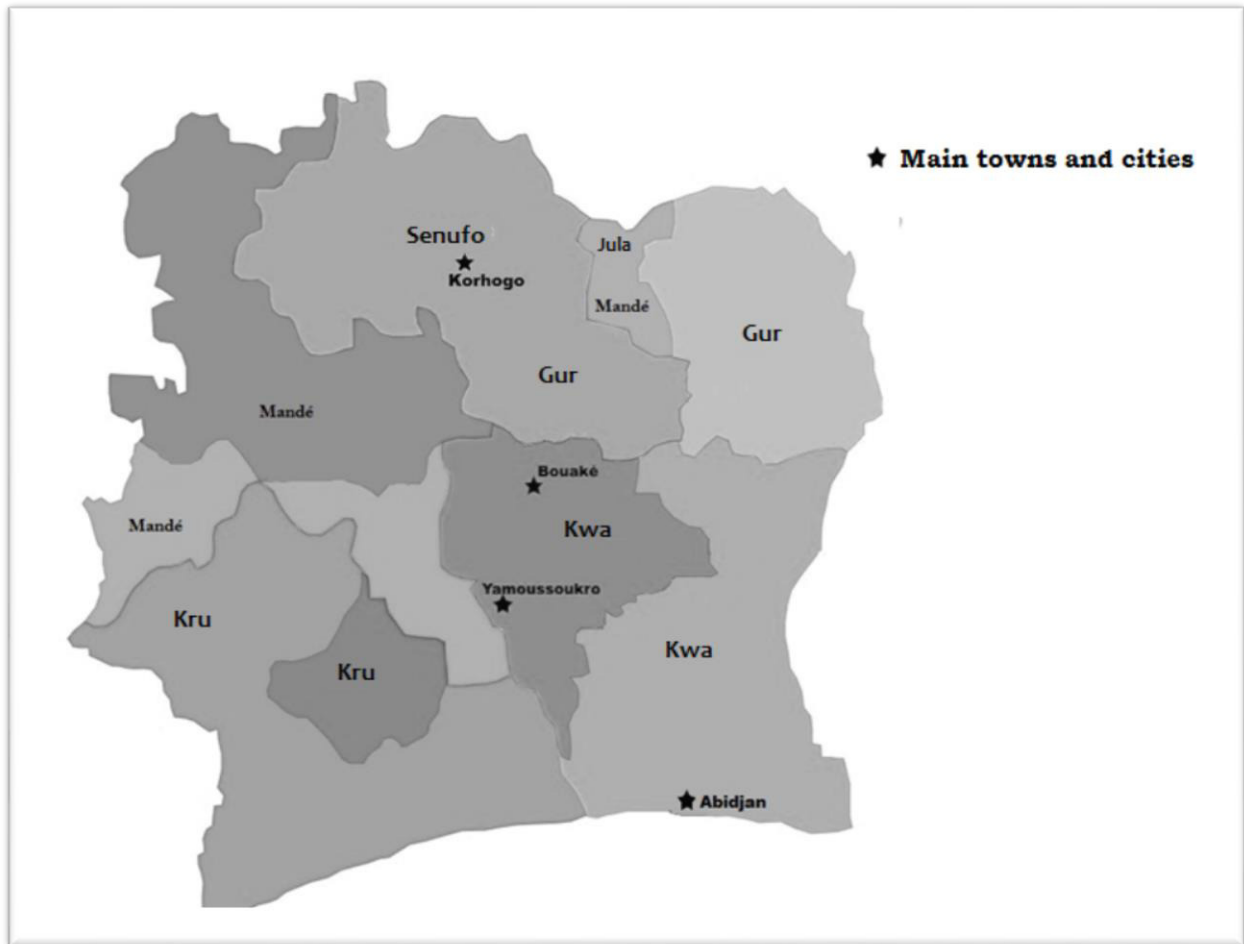
<b>Gur</b>	<b>Mande</b>	<b>Kwa</b>	<b>kru</b>
Senufo	Mandingo (Jula)	Baulé	Wee/Weh
Kulango	Yacuba	Agni	Bété
Lobi	Guro	Abbey	Ahizi
Gourounsi		Abron	Dida
Oti-Volta		Attyé	Godié
Kirma-Tyurama		Algoon	
komono			

The table clearly shows that every major language group includes several language families within which further subdivisions are often identified.

**Figure 1:** Côte d'Ivoire in Africa



**Figure 2:** Ethnic and Linguistic map of Côte d'Ivoire



The Senufo cultural and linguistic group, by the number of its members, is cited among the most representative ethnic groups of the country. It is useful to note that native Senufo peoples are also found in neighbouring countries, such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Ghana (Ouattara, 1988).

In Côte d'Ivoire, Senufo originate from the north where their natural habitat includes the regions of Bagoué, Poro, Tyologo and Hambol whose main cities are Boundiali, Korhogo, Ferkessedougou and Katiola, respectively. The Senufo languages spoken in these regions have among them rates of mutual intelligibility that vary from 55 to 95% (Silué, 2000). Within each language family, there are also various dialects. Table 2 shows the languages of the Senufo group per regions.

**Table 2:** The main Senufo languages in Côte d’Ivoire in the main regions

Regions Languages	Poro (Korhogo)	Hambol (Katiola)	Tyologo (Ferkessedougou)	Bagoué (Boundiali)
Senari	x			x
Jimini		x		
Nyarafolo			x	
Palaka			x	
Shempire				x
Tagbana		x		

As indicated in the above table, the Senufo cultural and linguistic group includes six major languages. It is also noteworthy that there are dialectal variants for each language.

The presence and contact of diverse cultural entities in the same physical space often creates a cultural belligerence, open or on the sly, a natural law which is generally crowned by various and sundry forms of colonization. Thus, the Senufo people in Côte d'Ivoire, in particular, underwent a double colonization – the French and the Mandingo (Tuho, 1984 Holas, 1966; Coulibaly, 1978 Crowder, 1993). However, it is undeniable that the one by the Mandingo has remained the most penetrating and pervasive, culturally and linguistically speaking.

The Senufo communities are generally docile, law-abiding and particularly often inclined to usher others, because of their high sense of hospitality (Ouattara, 1999). This is seen through the extent of intermarriage within Senufo communities. However, it is generally admitted that the most glaring characteristic of the Senufo is their natural tendency to embrace patterns from other cultures, whatever the nature, sometimes quite lightly. As a proof, the Senufo in Côte d'Ivoire, got to the point where they have adopted sections of other cultures as you select an object on a store shelf (Diarassouba, 2015). The clearest example to date remains the barter of their ancestral Senufo surnames for Mandingo ones (Diarassouba, 2007, 2015; Tuho 1984).

Mandingo people, known under the generic and popular name '*Jula*', have had an undeniable cultural and linguistic impact on Senufo, the consequences of which will still be visible for long, given the current circumstances. This Mandingo influence came largely through wars of expansion of Mandingo Muslim conquerors. First, Tieba Traoré and then the dreaded Al Mami Samory Touré, both from the territories which coincide with areas that cover the current states of Mali and Guinea, respectively. These campaigns that took place from the 17th to 19th century launched at the same time the foundations of the indoctrination of Senufo people. Then *marabouts* wrapped up the campaign of colonization through the penetration of Islam in Senufo communities that

they orchestrated (Holas, 1966; Ouattara, 1977; Person, 1975; Diarassouba, 2007). In fact, the conversion of Senufo to Islam, in a subtle way, went through a transaction in which they were encouraged to reject their names in order for them to adopt Mandingo surnames, based on hypothetically alleged equivalences between the eponyms of Senufo surnames and Mandingo's (Diarassouba, 2015; Tuho 1984; Person, 1975). A further reason for taking Mandingo patronymics, in marabouts' view, was that Senufo ancestral surnames pagan and animistic. For a better understanding of this phenomenon, see Diarassouba (2007; 2015) and Tuho (1984). Table 3 below serves as a recall.

**Table 3:** Equivalence between Mandingo and Senufo surnames

<b>Senufo surnames</b>	<b>Eponyms</b>	<b>Mandingo surnames</b>
Sékongo	squirrel	Kamara Traoré Sanogo
Silué	Brown monkey; python	Koné Konaté
Soro	panther; leopard	Coulibaly Keita
Tuho / Tuo	lion; le phacochère	Diarassouba Dagnogo
Yéo	Dwarf antelope	Ouattara

The table shows a straight symbolic connection through the eponyms, something that strengthens and consolidates an alleged validity of equivalences. Unfortunately, to date, this is done only in one direction (Tuho 1984; Diarassouba, 2015), as a Camara (Mandingo) never becomes a Skéongo. Despite this fact, Mandingo surnames have been massively harbored in Senufo communities. Furthermore, the table shows that many family names can be associated with the same symbolic animal and vice versa. For example, Kamara or Camara, Traoré and Sanogo are all set to the eponymous squirrel alone. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Diarassouba and Dagnogo refer back to two different eponyms, lion and warthog.

In previous studies (Diarassouba 2015 Tuho, 1984), this phenomenon of surname borrowing was underscored, because of the magnitude of this sociological fact quite striking by the extremely wide and diversified range of foreign surnames; something that commands the attention of the Senufo themselves as well as their fellow citizens.

### **Why do you reject your so sweet and melodious family names? Do they burn the skin?**

The above vignette, a joke of a Daffi<sup>i</sup> with a Senufo, is very telling if anything as to how others feel about Mandingo loan surnames used by Senufo communities. Beyond the friendly banter, sociologically established through the alliance between the Senufo and the Daffi, this could be a perfect example of the voice of all those silent masses who chuckle. In another study, Diarassouba (2015, p.174) notes that a true Koné, that is a member of the Mandingo community, was quick to tell another Koné, this time a false one, that he was not "Senufo" but a "Jula" from Boundiali. Yet nothing, absolutely nothing, could justify the desire of the true Koné to act so, if not a veiled annoyance; the irritation of seeing an intruder wearing an artifact of his existential essence. For it must be remembered, the surname is the first social identity pageantry (Diarassouba, 2015).

There are also many situations in which after introducing a "Diarassouba or Coulibaly," the introducer, often from Mandingo stock, immediately adds that the person introduced is Senufo, by way of avoiding an embarrassing ethnosociological amalgam; embarrassing for the other, but not necessarily for the Senufo in general, as we stated in earlier work (e.g., Diarassouba, 2015). In an insert, as noted, Sir Moussa Coulibaly is outraged that he was called Soro Pélifor, his authentic Senufo name. Similarly, it is common to see many Senufo converted to Islam prefer Mandingo patronymics (Dagnogo, Ouattara, etc.) even though their official papers bear "Sékongo" and "Yeo", respectively.

A study conducted in 2014 on a sample of 1500 Senufo aged 25 to 87 years (Diarassouba, 2015) showed that, beyond the professions of good faith regarding the resumption of Senufo surnames, in reality, the moves and behaviors of the would-be candidates often tend to clearly suggest that the idea has not yet really taken shape let alone to realize it. Therefore, it comes as no surprise to observe members of Senufo communities strongly resist the burgeoning movement towards the rehabilitation of this quite representative feature of any culture – the patronymic.

The reasons why Senufo are often reluctant to recover the ancestral surnames are varied and numerous. Some people pointed to age, alleging that they were too old to go back to ancestral names, and others raised a number of issues to justify that the move was not worth the trouble. For instance, a prelate said that was not at issue, as far as he was concerned, because he has no kids. Some other people just questioned the ability of name changing to translate into better social conditions, as that is what

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<sup>i</sup>The Daffi originating in Burkina Faso and Mali, are in a covenant relationship (joking relationship) with Senufo.

counted most; and still some others simply thought the loan name was a legacy from biological fathers. Therefore, it should be something to reckon with (Diarassouba, 2015). All these arguments seem, to a large extent, to reinforce the idea that many Senufo were complaisant about willfully plastering the false identity, jettisoning thus, by the same token, the substance – their ancestral names – that is both, base and source of their existential vibrations. This attitude according to Manonni (1950) encodes the prototype of the mindset of most colonized people around the world. Further, according to Fanon (1952), in the same order of thing, colonized people often tend to sublimate the effects of colonization by devoting unreasoning attachment to its artifices and devices. It is not, therefore, surprising that Senufo communities vouch an inordinate taste for the “things” of the colon which they often believe underpin their true and authentic identity.

However, the 1980s saw the budding of a cultural consciousness rising, largely thanks to the publication of a book entitled, “J’ai changé de nom. . . . Pourquoi?” (I have changed my name . . . Why? [My translation]) by Professor Charles Valy Tuho in 1984. After the jolt and commotion that resulted from the publication of this book had been blunted, there followed a motion geared towards recovering tribal patronymics. However, it proved slow, chopped and unsteady because of the indecision of some and the cultural imbroglio of others among icons of Senufo communities. It is a pressing feeling to believe that most of these iconic figures were actually cultural waivers, therefore reluctant to make a return to roots, as it seems more desirable for them to wear the mask to which they strove to grant certain permanence, pretending to be oblivious of its ephemeral nature. It should be acknowledged, all the same, that this movement, despite all its flaws, did, nevertheless, leave some undeniable traces to date. The entire nation was witness to events that caught the national psyche, when some outstanding people from the Senufo community resumed ancestral name<sup>ii</sup>. Consequently, some community members followed suit: outstanding personalities, such as professors, journalists and also less glamorous members, some men of the people, carried by the icons, did likewise.

Much as it is pleasurable to note that the process is still running, though at its own pace, a number of decisive cultural acts carried out here and there by some Senufo people appear to be as haphazard and alienating as those posed by Senufo under the influence of Mandingo culture and civilization. The thing is that some members of Senufo communities have started coining patronymics. One is empirically justified to assume that as some Senufo hanker for an identity, a search that is often unsteady and whimsical, they seem to drive further the nail that seals the coffin of cultural chaos.

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<sup>ii</sup> Emeritus Professor of Economics, the first black President of the National University of Côte d’Ivoire

How can this move be accounted for? In what ways does it endanger Senufo cultural identity? This project of study aims at elucidating these questionings.

## **Methodology**

It should be noted at the outset that this study was based on the focal points of an earlier investigation that involved a sample of 1,500 participants, throughout the territory (Diarassouba, 2014).

## **Procedure**

**Informants:** focal points, usually opinion leaders in their respective regions or places of residence and who are important resources in this project, were brought back on board in a number of cities and towns, such as Korhogo, Ferkéssédougou, Boundiali, Dabakala, Katiola, Bouake and Abidjan. Bouake and Abidjan are the two largest cities of Côte d'Ivoire where thousands of members of Senufo communities reside. The other cities, as pointed out earlier, are located in the native habitat of Senufo people.

**Research Assistants:** the same participants who took part in the previous project of investigation (Diarassouba, 2015), were reassigned to the same sites as before, in the cities mentioned above.

**Data collection tools:** face to face and by telephone interviews, focus group and desultory discussions, on one hand, and survey questionnaires, on the other, were the main instruments used in this study. The themes were as follows: the abandonment of loan surnames and the creation from scratch of Senufo patronymic names.

**Data analysis:** themes were split into sections for ease of operation. For example, a) proven cases of abandonment of foreign surnames; b) proven cases of creation of surnames: deeper motivations; c) real and potential difficulties; and d) consequences.

## **Results**

Exploring the world of Mandingo loan surnames within Senufo communities could be likened to a kind of endless enigma. Indeed, each new incursion reveals novel pieces to bring to solving the puzzle, which compounded difficulties. One may be well justified to think that issues relating to borrowed names is like digging in a grab-bag, which is why the mode of allocation of surnames seems obscured and haphazard. This, as one would expect, raises another problem, especially regarding the equivalencies established between Mandingo and Senufo surnames, in terms of mutual intelligibility that feeds on a would-be symbolism of the eponyms. But in order to stick to the



objectives of this study, I will be concerned specifically with aspects of the results that substantiate elements regarding efforts towards the rehabilitation or inclinations thereof of Senufo cultural patterns.

### **Attempts to resume ancestral names**

A faction of the Senufo communities members, though still negligible compared to the very high number of Senufo who carry a Mandingo family name (40 to 90%, depending on the area, urban or rural regions, Diarassouba, 2015), has begun to show some form of irritation related to loan names, for various and diverse reasons. This segment includes both those who actually carry Mandingo names and those who do not. Among those who have taken a decisive step, the main reasons are, among others, the administrative difficulties tied in name borrowing as shown below (Table 4). For this faction, the return to ancestral sources was just like a straightjacket. In sum, they were made to do so. Next, some members of Senufo communities no longer perceived the wisdom of keeping a surname they now regard as an historical blunder, worse yet as an insult of *marabouts*<sup>iii</sup> to the whole Senufo cultural group. Needless to recall that in the mind Mandingo *marabouts*, Senufo surnames rhymed with fetishism (Diarassouba, 2015; Tuho, 1984).

The recovery of ancestral names itself includes several case scenarios. There are those for whom there were no major difficulties. This is for example, the case of the people for whom there was perfect harmony between loan names carried by the father and those of his offspring, be it in the situation of generic or particular Senufo surnames (Cf. Generic vs. Gbatôh names, Diarassouba, 2015). In this case, those that borrowed Diarassouba or Fofana just recovered Tuho / Tuo or Foooh, respectively, at the registry office. However, things got a bit complicated in cases where there were blatant unsolved irregularities concerning the father and offspring or among children of the same family regarding Mandingo loan surnames (Cf. Table 4, p. 7). For example, when the foreign surnames carried by the father and children did not match, enormous administrative difficulties, varied and complex in many respects, stood in the way when it came to recovering ancestral names. This is the situation of members of two families in different regions that we met and whose cases for name change had been pending in court for their floor for ages then. Table 4 below offers a perfect illustration of a baffling and quite intriguing situation, for the discrepancies and disparities regarding loan surnames constitute a genuine skein to disentangle and a real “obstacle

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<sup>iii</sup> A *marabout* in Islam is supposed to be a religious leader. In this respect, he is equivalent of the Imam. However, this word has negative connotations, as it implies some form of evil practices.

course” for administrators at the registry office, when members of such families decided to go back to roots.

**Table 4:** Disparities among Mandingo loan surnames held by members of the same nuclear family

The offspring of Sinan (father)	Gbatôh (Senufo) patronymic	Senufo Gbatôh totemic animal	Equivalences between Senufo and Mandingo eponyms suggested by <i>marabouts</i>	Mandingo loan patronymic
Elder son	Ziao	Buffalo/giant antelope	–	Fofana
Junior sister	Ziao		–	Diabaté
Junior brother	Ziao		Brown monkey; python	Koné
The youngest child	Ziao		Land squirrel	Traore

This table raises some comments, among which the mismatch that introduces a factual anachronism between Gbatôh eponymous and those suggested by Mandingo marabouts. It is obvious that the 'large antelope or' buffalo ', are very different from the 'brown monkey 'and the 'python', on the one hand, and quite distinct from the 'land squirrel', on the other. Therefore, the equivalences between 'Ziao' and 'Kone', Diabate or 'Traore' do not represent any sensible sociological reality neither from the Mandingo perspective, nor from that of the Gbatôh cosmogony. Further, in an earlier study ((Diarassouba, 2015, p.168), the Gbatôh totemic animals assigned to Fofana and Diabaté were “Fohh” (python) and “Ganon” (protective bird), respectively. We have been presented with quite a weird picture which begs for some clarification. Based on informants’ reports, an attempt has been made to shed light on this obscure issue.

"Ziao," a generic and typical surname that is found in Gbatôh communities (located in the areas including Boundiali and vicinities), was the family name of the father until his death. But now not only did his children aged then 50 to 90 carry Ziao, but they each had a separate Mandingo surname than other siblings. It appears that these siblings were often not in permanent contact due to the fact they lived in areas distant from each other. Next, given the fact that the Gbatôh surnames are different from the well-known generic category (Soro, Silue, Yeo Tuho / Tuo and Sekongo) for which certain norms had been already established, there was no reference on which *marabouts* could lean. From then on, *marabouts*, operating in a vacuum and certainly influenced by their personal philosophies, proceeded then to the conversion to Islam of

these brothers and sisters, assigning by the same token Mandingo surname in a very carefree manner. It was reported that some went ahead and assigned their own surname to the convert. Since name assignment was far from being a scientific truth, everything resulted in this nonsensical table. Thus, this composite and variegated picture of Mandingo surnames in the same biological family is a 'masterpiece' *marabouts* cleverly realized when converting children from the Ziao family to Islam.

The converts' ignorance of Islamic culture and the zeal of *marabouts* are the cause of this confused picture that confuses more than one observer. Diarassouba (2015) raised the case in which the same Senufo surname "Tuho / Tuo" was conferred two distinct Mandingo eponyms, henceforth two different Mandingo surnames in Senufo two sub prefectures distant by twelve kilometers only. In one, Napié, the Tuho/Tuo was assigned 'Diarassouba' whose totemic animals according to *marabouts* are 'lion' and 'warthog', and in the other, Karakoro, "Ouattara," which has for Mandingo eponym 'dwarf antelope' (For more on the issue please see Diarassouba, 2015).

The many hurdles linked to loan names which the Ziao children had to go through, prompted them to wanting to recover ancestral surnames. They told us that they would be unable to say how often they had to use a certificate of individuality to prove that their father was actually their father, whenever they made a request for official documents that included parental information, without mentioning numerous setbacks they suffered due to the very situation. And thousands of members of the cultural group that found themselves locked up in this typical case are found in the rural as well as urban areas, all over the country.

Amidst Senufo willing to come back to cultural ancestry, by recovering their authentic name, a faction opted for the creation of new surnames. In lieu of a generic or totemic surname, these people adopted the first name or middle names of their father or a revered ancestor, instead. Before proceeding any further, and to allow for a better understanding of this issue, it was deemed useful to recall the societal dimension, semantics and sociological value of the first names in the Senufo culture, in general.

Senufo names usually have this specific feature of espousing a cause, a fact, an event that holds deep meaning for the biological parents or members of the extended family or even the clan. Therefore, the name is expected not only to be the incarnation of what it has come to symbolize, human and spiritual values wise, by osmosis, but also to keep alive that symbolic guardian or fact in the minds of social partners sharing the same cultural patterns. Then, carrying a name could help ward off the evil congenial to the original object or event it symbolizes. From this angle, there is no limit to Senufo names but the one imposed by events and social facts that mark the memory of men in society, and which concern both the visible and invisible world. By way of illustration, a few examples are given below.

- **Denan:** (the man whose guardian is a genie): This name is given in honor of a genie that marked in a particular way a given family,
- **Klotioloma:** (I leave it to god). This name is given in memory of the tribulations suffered by a family. By the same token, it is hoped that god will conjure all future ills or evils,
- **Kapinnêtiôh:** (female child who was born during a war). This recall the event, but it is also hoped that bearing this name will help avert war and its horrors,
- **Mikanidjo:** (I will not speak any more). Speaking at a certain moment in the life of a parent has been detrimental to the speaker. This name in memory of the event or circumstances is also a warning against speaking lightly.
- **Midjembiéri:** (I will keep quiet and follow what god has meant to happen). Parents who have suffered many setbacks (Death, humiliation, etc.) of all kinds rely on God for fair justice.
- **Minhfounh:** ([Literally unnamed] a person who is not often given credit for their good actions. Parents, who feel this way, will give their offspring this name, hoping it will help conjure what it embodies.
- **Gnima:** (derived from 'Tiérignima' [Iron Health]). A parent who has experienced enormous difficulties, health wise, will give this name to their child. It is supposed to shower on the bearer the value and qualities it embodies.

The Senufo names listed above are often phrases or expressions. Alongside this difficult category quite hard to grasp and round up, many others are also in use. For instance, there is a category related to the day of the week. Although there are some dialectical variations, one can easily say that these names are transversely set in the Senufo cultural group. Then we also distinguish those related to birth order in the nuclear family, and finally the category that refers to particular births, such as twins or triplets.

**Table 5:** First names derived from weekdays

Days Name	Tenni (lundi)	Tennizenhon (mardi)	Yarba (mercredi)	Yalmassa (jeudi)	Yatchima (vendredi)	Sibiri (samedi)	Yalèri (Sunday)
Male names	Tennina	Tennizenhon	-	Yalmassa	Tchima	Sibiri	-
Female names	Tennidioh	Tennizenhon	-	Yalmassa	Tchima	Sibiri	-

Note that there are no names derivatives of Yarba (Wednesday) and Yalrèri (Sunday). No plausible explanation has been given about it. While the same name for the masculine and feminine is set for Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, that is tennizenhon, yalmassa, and sibiri, respectively.

**Table 6:** Names relative of birth order in a family

Birth order	1st	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3rd	4th	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>
Name						
Masculin	Zie	Zana	N'golo	Beh	Doh	M'baha
Féminin	Yele	Gnon	Gnere	Bara/Bere	zele	Gnaman

In this category the table shows only six names. We have not, as yet, been able to collect some clear information as to why that is so.

It is also noteworthy Senufo devote a specific category of name to twins, triplets and also the child that follows immediately because these are regarded as particular or extraordinary births (Cf. Table 7, below).

**Table 7:** Singular births and specific names attached thereto

Names	Extraordinary births	Twins/triplets	1st birth after twins/triplet <sup>iv</sup>
Male		Gnonnan	Kolo
Female		Gnondioh	Kolo

Although Gnonnan and Gnondioh are the most common, many forms and types of combination may be made, but always with the prefix "gnon" (prefix for twin), for instance, Gnongnigué, Gnonbégé, Gnondianwa, Gnongboho, Gnonblé, set irrespective of the gender.

Senufo names, as shown above, are always well motivated. Then the symbolism and semantics embodies in the names give a special touch and aura that encapsulate the bearer. That being said, how does surname coining on the basis of names fit in the panorama of Senufo cosmogony?

### **Name coining**

Genesis: In the first place, names that became surnames, later on, did often play a very positive role in the community, such as when they allowed for differentiating among

<sup>iv</sup> A birth that is not twins nor triplets or any other number beyond one. The name “Kolo” is given to the child.

several members of the community who carried precisely the same name. Thus, the name of the father or ancestor came into play to part two or more people who bore "Tuo Seydou," "Ali Koné," "Gonan Coulibaly," or again "Sidiky Diarassouba<sup>v</sup>," for example.

In another scenario, a son, because of his singular and exemplary commitment to his father or a grandparent or ancestor, would decide to pay them a tribute by adding their name as a middle name to his given name. In a sense, this move was a simple attempt to perpetuate the memory of the one we bear the name.

It turned out that creating a unique piece became a fond whim which makes one stand out in the community. This seemed a great stratagem for those from the community willing to get rid of the Mandingo loan surname. Henceforth, in the process, the loan surname was dropped for the benefit of the ancestor's name that now filled in for the surname. And because the new surname was an original Senufo name, two birds were killed with the sole and only one stone: dropping the Mandingo name and creating one from scratch (Cf. the vignette below)

**No more fight, we are no more in the numbers nor in the alienated stock.  
Just launch a new line of design and style and let us wait and see**

In a humorous way, one of the advocates of surname coining found time to entertain us during our investigation, as shown in the vignette above.

A couple of things must be underscored here. First, the names from which the new surnames were derived were self-assigned. Then, creating a new surname was tantamount to initiating a cultural thread to be continued by offspring or a sociological fact which other social partners would build on. The vignettes below (1-5) clearly illustrate further instances of the take of some informants (both bearers and non-bearers of new surnames) during our investigation, the main questionings of which were concerned with the merit of coining surnames and how this may endanger some essential cultural artifacts, i.e., authentic family names.

- 1. These novel contributions, in my view, enrich the area of these cultural patterns.**
- 2. Is there a crime in calling oneself "Zébré?"**
- 3. You are waging the wrong war. The culture may be enriched otherwise. Let us first properly promote what already exists.**

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<sup>v</sup> In native community of the researcher, there are 4 people who carry the same name and surname ( Sidiky Diarassouba ). Therefore, one resorts to the father's name to distinguish among them during our social gathering, i.e., Sidiky Nongotiala , Sidiky Tando , Sidiky Nagnon and Sidiky Kpoh (Nongotiala, Tando, Nagnon, and Kpoh are fathers' names).

4. **The loss will not occur through me. Frankly, I'll properly do my part**
5. **Who is closer to our culture, a "Diarassouba" or my name which is hundred percent Senufo, with no mix nor preservatives?**

The texts of some of these vignettes do have some flavor of irony and sarcasm (see 2, 4, & 5). Five, in particular, makes a blunt hint to the researcher who still goes by this loan patronymic. We must also note that despite the quite bold statements as shown above, the advocates of new surnames that we had access to show some blatant uneasiness. Not only were most of them tense and reserved, but also they often tried to turn our investigation into derision. Some even waved a red flag suggesting thus that we had an incursion into their privacy. Finally, some of these thumbnails are quite indicative of the spirit that prevailed during some interviews.

Followers of this new line of surnames are usually senior executives of the nation, who held high positions of authority. Nationwide, some of these well-known coined surnames read as follows: Dona-Fologo Yédiéti, Yadé, etc. Other new surnames, less known nationally, but still in use in the respective communities and job sites of bearers. These include, Yardjouma, Djandaga, Yaroyouma, Founzéye, katiéni, Fohna, Katana, Tiembogo, etc.

This section of the study has made it possible to explore the thorny issue of loan surnames, which viewed from different perspectives, stands as an uncontrolled and wild sociological phenomenon. We have observed that the way back to cultural ancestry is strewn with numerous and various difficulties. Further, initiatives geared to coining surnames may become sources for serious concerns in many respects. One of these is that because Senufo names and surnames have very little in common, because they are culturally, semantically and etymologically incommensurable, turning a name into a surname may become culturally damaging in more than one respect.

## **Discussion**

The issue of Mandingo loan surnames within Senufo communities could be likened with a bouillabaisse, because of the bewildering and confusing disorder that characterizes it. This chaotic fashion for borrowing Mandingo surnames denotes the lightness with which Senufo themselves jumped into the process of cultural alienation, indiscriminately and without reserve, feet and hands bound.

The consequences of the above has proven to be disastrous in many regards, as demonstrated above, at the administrative as well as the personal and cultural levels. Worse yet, the irony is that a great number of Senufo people, as if under the spell of an exacerbated stoicism and masochism, continue to resist the return to ancestral sources. Marivaux (1725) warned that freedom is dependent on the slave's awareness of his

enslavement condition, as this awareness is the sole and only fact that can lead to revolt. It is high time that the click took place in the minds of thousands of Senufo still reluctant to change. Returning to cultural names transcends both the act of changing and the doer of the action; it involves something that is both existential and pre-existential to these: it is about culture, the collective soul of a people.

The phenomenon linked to the creation of surnames from scratch and which began timidly in the 80s seems to be gaining some ground today. From one or two examples of surnames manufactured in those days, today there are nearly two dozen. Thus, the new surname is used instead of Coulibaly, Koné and Sanogo, challenged on the basis of cultural dissonance. Getting rid of the Mandingo family name for a Senufo name is more than commendable. But does replacing Mandingo loan surnames with coined surnames sound like a viable solution, culturally speaking?

In their quality and capacity as respectable and respected personalities in the country, these name designers are also opinion leaders and role models. View the position, the sociological role and the socio-economic power of these members of the Senufo communities, we must fear that their actions spill out, should not that yet occur. In this line of thinking, one of our informants, in a veiled manner, alluded to them making a comment according to which it is the iconic figures everyone watches or follows, therefore we had better be concerned with them, in the first place. This would seem to justify our apprehension that lay people may walk in the wake of these stray icons.

The generic or specific surname (totemic one, i.e., Gbatôh's) is a rallying point between all members of Senufo communities claiming the same patronymic. Not only does strengthen the sense of belonging, but also it is often the case that one hears the holder of a given surname brag about values and prestige attached to it. The family name, originally, is descriptive. Primarily, it refers to the qualities or the first central primary occupation of the original communities of the Senufo Cultural group (Diarassouba, 2015).

First names, as presented above, refer to another kind with different semantic and symbolic features. Compared with the ancestral surnames, individuality and the idiosyncratic trait are the most characteristic elements of the name. For example, the name "Gnonnan" can only be carried by a male twin or triplet. Similarly, Kapinnêtiôh can only be given to a female child born during a time of war. However, in the dynamics and logics of name coining, a "Gnonnan" (Twin male) could become the family name that the offspring of a surname '*manufacturer*' would endorse. What cultural value could that line with? Conversely, the ancestral family name is the soul of entire communities, and above all, a people as a whole.



Coining names therefore seem to pose some problems at several levels. Firstly, by replacing the ancestral surnames with names, one removes an essential part of culture, which necessarily entails the stifling of a set of vibrations, the symbolic and semantic foundations by which Senufo people celebrates the sociocultural life. Hence, there arises a problem of existential order. The rehabilitation of the Senufo soul, its culture, can only be achieved through the regeneration of its roots, an immutable etiological law recalled by Soro (2012). Then using names in lieu of authentic surnames would seem to further blur the cultural patterns and precipitate, by the same token, the annihilation of important benchmarks by which the Senufo guide and ensure their existence as an entity in the societal context. Therefore, the creation of surnames is comparable to the destruction of the yardstick by means of which the culture could be measured and thus ensure effective traceability. Precisely, this was the very thing that was decried, when members of Senufo communities adopted Mandingo surnames in a haphazard manner (Diarassouba, 2015). High caution is required here, let's we end up in a situation where *one flees a dead snake to come face to face with another alive and more venomous* (Senufo proverb).

## Conclusion

It is undeniable that a great number of Senufo people have sinned on several levels during and after Mandingo colonization, which is why their culture has been so profoundly distorted, especially regarding languages and surnames. The bitter and painful awareness gained from this by some members of the Senufo communities has prompted these to wanting to become themselves again. This has been diversely appreciated as a glimmer of hope, even if this move concerns only a small faction of Senufo communities. A promotion with respect to the rehabilitation of Senufo culture seems a 'must' in order to have more people on board and help forward thus a much more global movement involving much greater numbers Senufo towards courts of justice for name change. This movement will fall short of its aim without the sincere and full engagement of the iconic figures and the waking actions of intellectuals from Senufo communities. Beyond restoring the legal value of the family, recovering the ancestral name is a way of redeeming the dignity of a people.

Much as it highly desirable to work towards the remaking of a cultural soul, it is also necessary and imperative that this is properly done. Indeed, coining surnames seems as harmful and damaging as the irrational and wild adoption of surnames form another culture, because in either case this implies the dissolution and annihilation of *symbolic and semantic* values associated with ancestral names. Further, replacing ancestral surnames with simple names may be assimilated with treasuring a container

devoid of contents and substance, which recalls the sandwich man of Tuho (1984). Considering the deep impoverishment and distortion of Senufo culture for the benefit others, in this case the Mandingo's, what will be the contribution of the Senufo during the sharing time in the concert of cultures. The space of this study seems the right place to launch an urgent and pressing appeal to leading figures and opinion leaders of the Senufo communities to invest more in and for the cause of their cultural identity. In so doing, they will substantially contribute to safeguard an important part of the Senufo culture, ancestral family names. As they set out to do this, they should also be watchful about moves, however insignificant they may appear to be, geared towards fanning the destructive flames of their culture. While it is true that there are no forests without trees, it is also true that a single tree cannot hide the forest. However, it is undeniable that a single untreated diseased tree can decimate an entire forest. The Senufo should not be his own gravedigger, making himself unrecognizable through self-transfiguration by his irrational acts, his poor and inappropriate sense of judgment, his selfishness and short-sightedness.

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