UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

AN ETHNOLINGUISTIC INVESTIGATION OF SAFALIBA PERSONAL NAMES AND NOMENCLATURE SYSTEMS

BY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE AWARD OF DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN AFRICAN STUDIES

INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN STUDIES

JANUARY, 2023

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my independent research conducted at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, under the supervision of Prof. Albert Kanlisi Awedoba, Prof. Mercy Akrofi Ansah, and Prof. Obadele Kambon. I have duly acknowledged the work of others where applicable, and this dissertation has neither been published in whole or in part, nor submitted to any other university for the award of a degree.

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ABSTRACT

Personal names are a vital category of proper names and are traditionally studied within the field of onomastics. They reflect the expressive nature of language in conveying sociocultural realities. This study provides a comprehensive account of Safaliba personal names, situating them within linguistic anthropology as indexes of cultural knowledge and lived experience. t examines the typology, social significance, and historical and social factors shaping Safaliba naming practices.

Employing a primarily qualitative ethnographic approach, complemented by basic quantitative summaries, the research draws on both primary and secondary data. It documents core categories of Safaliba names, including appellative, proverbial, circumstantial (e.g., theophoric, death-preventive, birth-related, and posthumous), teknonyms, and nicknames. Findings reveal that Safaliba names are semantically rich, context-dependent, and often opaque to outsiders yet deeply meaningful within local knowledge systems. Names mark social transitions, encode moral and spiritual values, and function as repositories of memory, tradition, and ancestral knowledge.

The study reveals that Safaliba naming practices are dynamic, shaped by internal factors such as intermarriage and migration, which lead to intercultural borrowing, and by external factors including colonialism, formal education, and the overall spread of religions such as Islam and Christianity. The gradual shift from culturally grounded names to neutral or hybridized forms illustrates how social, religious, and political forces mediate identity, social prestige, and belonging.

The research concludes that Safaliba personal names continue to serve as tools of cultural preservation even as they adapt to social change. They are linguistic archives that affirm oral traditions as valid sources of knowledge and provide insights into the relationship between language, culture, and identity. This study contributes to African onomastics, offers a model for research on other understudied African communities, and highlights the enduring significance of names as socially and spiritually embedded instruments of cultural continuity. The findings also carry practical implications for education, policy, and cultural preservation, including opportunities to use digital technologies to develop accessible databases for names and related cultural knowledge.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Safalinaa Kafinti II (Chief of Mandari, known in private life as Mr. Godwin Bodua-Mango), whose unwavering commitment to preserving the history of the Safaliba people inspired me from an early age. As his young secretary, I had the privilege of recording his recollections—an experience that planted the seeds of this scholarly journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To God be the glory—for every step, and for the strength and grace that carried me through this journey.

I wish to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of my supervisors, Prof. Albert Kanlisi Awedoba, Prof. Mercy Akrofi Ansah, and Prof. Obadele Kambon, whose guidance and insightful feedback greatly shaped this work. I remain profoundly grateful for their steadfast support and mentorship, which will continue to inspire and guide my academic pursuits.

My ability to undertake the PhD programme was made possible through the generous support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, in collaboration with the University of Ghana, under the Enhancing Capacity and Postgraduate Education in the Humanities (ENCAPEH-UG) project. This funding eased my journey, making it enjoyable and free from financial stress. Special thanks also go to the ENCAPEH-UG team—Prof. Agyei-Mensah, Prof. Offei Mensah, Mr. Bennedict Adjei, Mrs. Afia Attrams, and Nancy Owusuaa—for their facilitation and administrative support throughout the programme.

I am grateful to my mentors, Prof. Ana Deumert and Dr. Faisal Garba, whose support and mentorship, facilitated by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, greatly enriched my time at the University of Cape Town. I also remain thankful to Prof. George Akaling-Pare, Prof. Evershed Amuzu, Prof. Avea Nsoh, and Prof. Samuel Atintono for their constant encouragement.

A heartfelt thank you goes to my family for their prayers, love, and unwavering support—especially my parents and Madam Margaret Abudu (Mrs. Mango); my siblings (the Mangos): Fati, Kenneth, Naa, Bernice, Rabi, Afisah, Abudulai, and Toufiq; and my nieces, nephews, and in-laws. Special thanks also to Mr. Saaka Adams for his constant support and the significant role he has played in this journey.

I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to the fellows and staff at the Institute of African Studies: the Director, Prof. Samuel Ntewusu; Prof. Dzodzi Tsikata; Prof. Akosua Adomako Ampofo; the late Dr. Nagbigne; Prof. Deborah Atobrah; Dr. Benjamin Kwansa; Dr. Osman Alhassan; Dr. Nii Dortey; Prof. Kojo Amanor; Prof. Richard Asante; Prof. Daniel Avorgbedor; Prof. Esi Sutherland; Dr. Edwina Ashie-Nikoi; Dr. Peter Narh; Dr. Mjiba Frehiwot; Dr. Irene Appeaning Addo; Dr. Hasiyatu Abubakari; Dr. Siakwa; Dr. Obodai Torto ; Dr. Edwin Adjei; Dr. Mark-Anthony Alongya; Aunty Josephine Kpelie; Aunty Agatha Augustt; Mr. William Asare; and many others.

To my research assistants, Alhaji Dawuda and Haruna, thank you for your patience and hard work during data collection and writing. I sincerely appreciate the chiefs, elders, and teachers of Mandari, Tangyiri, Gbenfu, and Manfuli—especially Mr. Gbolo Moses—and the Safaliba people for their hospitality and support during fieldwork. I also acknowledge the support of the Bole District Planning Coordination Unit, the Bole District Electoral Office, and the Bole Hospital.

To my colleagues—Mr. Amarkine Ameteifio, Dr. Promise Eweh, Ms. Aseye Tamakloe, Mr. Eric Tei-Kumadoe, Dr. Selorm Dorvlo, Dr. Abena Karikari, and Mr. Kwesi Amoak—thank you for making this journey worthwhile.

To my friends—Dr. Ayesha Amadu, Dr. Gideon Akolgo, Dr. Jersley Chirawurah, Dr. Ronald Reagan Gyimah, Mr. Ekow Arthur-Entsiwah, Zaaida Nayina, Jennifer Taluah, Jennifer Kamassah, Mr. Sedzro Mensah, Habiba, Andy, Ebenezer, Florence, Winifred, Darius, Sandra, Asor, Margaret-Max, Aunty Maggie, and Anthony—thank you all for your friendship and encouragement.

To all who, in diverse ways, contributed to this journey, I remain deeply grateful.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DPCU	District Planning and Coordination Unit
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GIS	Geographic Information System
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
Lit	Literal Translation
PL	Plural
RS	Remote Sensing
SG	Singular
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendant
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

It has been widely asserted that the first interaction between or amongst people usually involves the question, "What is your name?" thus underpinning the significance of personal names. Indeed, since the inception of time, personal names have been conferred and used in all known societies (Alford, 1988). These names tend to be a "badge" of cultural identity (Hanks et al., 2006, p. xi) and often reflect various kinds of information about a society. These may be historical, sociological, and cultural, economic and occupational, philosophical and linguistic, among others. Personal names have thus been recognised as both universal and inevitable due to their symbolic relevance of identification in society. Given this array of information and data, the study of personal names has evolved into a multidisciplinary field.

The study of names, onomastics, has attracted the attention of anthropologists, archaeologists, historians, linguists, philosophers, and sociologists, among others. Onomastics is grouped into 'anthroponomastics or anthroponymy' (the study of personal names) and 'toponymy or toponomastics' (the study of place names). Major research in the field under investigation has been carried out by various scholars, including (Abubakari, 2020; Adjah, 2011; Agyekum, 2006; Akinnaso, 1980; Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2000; Awedoba, 1996, 2000; Bisilki, 2018; Dakubu, 2000; Fortes, 1955; Jindayu, 2013; Kyiileyang, 2017; Nakuma, 2001; Nketia, 1969; Odotei, 1989), underscoring the significance of this field of study. In virtually all cultures, the fundamental reason for naming is for purposes of individual and societal identification. Since personal names ensure generational continuity, it could therefore be inferred that individual identity plus family identity gives complete identity to a person.

This has been re-echoed in Finch's (2008) assertion that a name performs two functions: first, it marks individual identity, and second, it gives some indication of the various social worlds that one inhabits, thus encapsulating family identity and connections, ethnicity, and nationality. Furthermore, personal names mark individual identification and differentiation. Naming symbolises self-concept generally by evidently bringing to the fore the various perspectives. This includes the social reality, values, history, social structure, culture, traditions, philosophy, environment and social connection of people who belong to a group, however that group is defined. Thus, naming inherently responds to the questions "who am I?", "where am I?" (environment and history), "what do I make of myself?" (given and self-given names), and "what do others make of me?" Names are mental representations, attitudes, and perspectives of people within a given context. They function not only as labels but also as carriers of meaning that reflect individual, social, and cultural identities. Names may, therefore, be considered a form of social capital—defining interpersonal relationships such as family ties, ethnic affiliations, and group membership. They also represent cultural capital by reflecting one's self-image, competencies, and the aesthetic qualities of language. Thus, names can be seen as symbolic capital, embodying power dynamics, status, and social inequality.

Names are usually encoded with semantic content and have a sociocultural purpose. They show a relationship between language and social practices and mirror language as a tool for understanding a specific society. Names serve the dual purpose of being both referential and a means of categorising people as belonging to families, clans, lineage groups, generational sets, and ethnic groups. Names function as universal tags that link a linguistic form, the name, to a person, entity, or identity, the referent (Agyekum 2006). This relationship reinforces the idea that names are not arbitrary; rather, they derive their social, cultural, and symbolic value from the context in which they are used—thus supporting their role as different forms of capital in

society. Similarly, Agyekum (2006, p. 211) notes that "[t]he language of the people is manifested in the naming systems and practices... [and] also depicts the social stratification of the society." By this, Agyekum suggests that naming systems not only reflect the linguistic creativity of a people but also serve as markers of social identity and hierarchy. In many Ghanaian societies, names may reveal a person's clan, rank, profession, or ancestral lineage, thus reinforcing the existing social structure. This perspective supports the view that naming practices are deeply embedded in the cultural and social fabric of a community, as is evident in the Safaliba context.

Algeo (1992, p. 728) opines that "[p]eople are almost invariably named; indeed, a human being without a name would be socially and psychologically less than fully human." This seemingly profound statement nevertheless highlights the role of names in conferring the status of being both human and a member of society. Without names, communication would, in practice, be difficult, if not impossible. Names reflect linguistic, social, and historical distinctions between and among members of a group, or closely related groups, or groups in proximity. Naming, thus, marks individuality and connectedness. Blount (2015, p. 617) contends that "[p]ersonal names can link individuals into social histories, locally within the family and more broadly within society, both reflective of underlying systems of knowledge, even if awareness of those systems is marginal or superficial. Personal names are part of the social, cultural, and historical system." This seemingly expansive view highlights how names serve not only to connect individuals to their familial and societal pasts but also to reflect systems of knowledge embedded within a culture.

Names also offer insight into the social and cultural organisation of a society, which may include gender differentiation, roles and statuses, and leadership structures. In addition, they may encode relevant information about the environment a group inhabits. Mphande (2006, p. 106) notes that personal names are words by which "reality is known and spoken of and are the most meaningful lexicon in the vocabulary of any language. Personal names are an important part of the language inventory because not only do personal names describe the environment, they also store all the differences about the fauna and flora."

The significance of personal names cannot be overemphasised. Besides their basic function of identifying the bearer, personal names are among the most obvious and overt means of acquiring knowledge about society—its beliefs, values, and practices. This confirms Fortes' (1955, p. 338) observation that "names are not just a verbal notation for the different phases or aspects of a person's status and life history. They are symbols deeply charged with meaning, derived from a whole culture." Names epitomise individual experiences, historical events, lifestyles, and cultural ideas and beliefs. Thus, by gaining an understanding of personal names and naming practices, one may arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the ethos of a society. Personal names are, therefore, an integral component of a group's cultural identity.

The ever-increasing spate of globalisation has resulted in increased interaction among the various cultures of the world. This has undoubtedly led to greater acculturation. A good litmus test for the rate of acculturation in any given society could be in the kinds of personal names they bestow. The influence of colonialism, religion, and "modernisation" is one of the most important drivers of acculturation (Crane, 1982). For instance, a change in the kinds of names and naming practices could signify a cultural shift, a fashion choice, or a facelift through the

transliteration of traditional names (Abdul, 2014). African names have the potential to bring to light the many facets of African culture, particularly where documentary evidence is scarce.

This research is an empirical study of Safaliba personal names and nomenclature systems, with the overarching objective of providing insights into the culture and society of the Safaliba people. The study seeks to investigate the Safaliba naming system, analyse and interpret traditional personal names, and categorise names based on their linguistic features. Additionally, it provides a trend analysis of personal names across Safaliba villages, examines socio-cultural and political dimensions, and explores the impact of acculturation on Safaliba personal names and nomenclature systems.

1.2 Problem statement

Naming practices are deeply embedded in cultural and social identity. Akinnaso (1980, 267) rightly observes that "…since one's identity as a person and as a member of society is an object of universal concern, it is to be expected that personal naming practices will be related to identity concerns in all cultures." Among the Safaliba, this connection is especially strong. Personal names are not only markers of individual and collective identity but also custodians of memory, tradition, and ancestral knowledge. Despite this cultural importance, Safaliba naming systems remain significantly under-documented in academic scholarship. This lack of documentation cannot be separated from broader historical disruptions. Mandende (2009) argues that colonisation profoundly shaped Africa's history. It introduced foreign cultural values and practices such as formal education and external religions. These developments deeply affected local naming traditions. Kambon and Mireku (2019) support this view, noting

that colonial and neo-colonial influences have led many Africans to adopt the names of their former colonisers. As a result, indigenous naming systems rooted in Africa's oral traditions have been increasingly displaced.

These naming systems were passed down through generations and functioned as oral archives embedded in communal processes of socialisation, such as observation, participation, and storytelling. In the past, Safaliba children grew up within their communities and absorbed indigenous knowledge through lived experience. Today, however, classroom-based learning, migration, and urbanisation have weakened these traditional transmission routes, and these shifts in knowledge transmission have also affected naming patterns. Like many African societies, the Safaliba have experienced changes in naming due to colonialism, the spread of Christianity and Islam, and formal education. Missionary activity, in particular, led to the partial conversion of Safaliba people from African Traditional Religion (ATR) to foreign faiths (GSS, 2013; 2014), which contributed to the adoption of non-native names. Other contributing factors include intermarriage, especially with the Vagla, Gonja (Ngbanye), Wala, and Choriba/Choroba, as well as migration and globalisation. In addition, some Safaliba youth increasingly perceive indigenous names as archaic and opt for foreign names to reflect religious or modern identities. This shift underscores the urgent need to document Safaliba naming practices and to analyse how they have evolved. Yet, scholarly attention to these naming systems remains minimal.

While pioneering studies by Fortes (1955), Awedoba (1996, 2000), Dakubu (2000), Nakuma (2001), Kyiileyang (2017), Bisilki (2018), and Abubakari (2020) have provided valuable insights into the naming systems of Gur-speaking communities, they do not capture the full diversity of this language family. Documenting the Safaliba naming system thus makes a vital contribution to this body of knowledge and to the preservation of African intangible heritage. This study addresses a significant gap. It explores Safaliba personal names within their cultural, linguistic, historical, and social contexts, and offers an insider perspective on how names encode identity, memory, and cultural values. By doing so, it contributes to African onomastics, Gur/Mabia language scholarship, and broader efforts to document and preserve indigenous knowledge systems for future generations.

1.3 Research Objectives

The study's overarching goal is to investigate Safaliba personal names and nomenclature systems. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Examine the social significance of Safaliba personal names.
2. Examine how Safaliba names may be classified in typologies and by what criteria.
3. Identify the factors that account for changes in Safaliba nomenclature systems.

To address these objectives, the study employed a questionnaire interview, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. The main questions were developed based on these objectives and were supported by follow-up probes to encourage detailed responses. he instruments were reviewed by my supervisors and colleagues to ensure clarity, cultural appropriateness, and alignment with the study objectives. This review served as a form of pilot-testing, since it helped refine the wording of questions and the overall structure before field administration.

1.4 Research Questions

Guided by the objectives outlined above, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the social significance of Safaliba personal names?
2. How may Safaliba names be classified into typologies, and by what criteria?
3. What factors account for changes in Safaliba nomenclature systems?

1.5 The relevance of the Study

For societies with limited documentary records, research on names offers valuable insights into the beliefs and philosophical values of the Safaliba people and the ways these are reflected in their naming system. In the context of widespread intermarriage between Safaliba speakers and speakers of other languages, as well as the influence of foreign religions—particularly Islam and Christianity—this thesis examines the consequences of interaction between the Safaliba community and external cultures. The research provides an insider's perspective on Safaliba culture and society through their names and nomenclature systems.

Given the oral nature of Safaliba traditions and the scarcity of written documentation, there is a pressing need to study and record aspects of the society. Rapid social change in the study area further threatens the indigenous knowledge embedded in Safaliba personal names. This study represents an effort to provide a written account that complements oral transmission by documenting Safaliba personal names and nomenclature systems. In doing so, it not only

creates a reference for future generations but also situates naming practices within their social context, allowing for nuanced and in-depth analysis. Ultimately, the research fosters appreciation of Safaliba naming traditions, stimulates discourse on the value of indigenous names, and contributes to broader conversations on African cultural heritage and onomastics.

1.6 Organization of the Study

The study is organised as follows: Chapter One provides a general introduction and includes the background of the study, the problem statement, research questions, research objectives, and the relevance of the study. Chapter two offers an overview of the Safaliba people, with emphasis on their socio-cultural life. This includes a description of their social organisation, traditional political structure, religion, marriage system, geography, economy, and naming practices. The in-depth sociocultural background supports an understanding of the naming and nomenclature systems under study.

Chapter three presents the literature review and theoretical framework. It outlines the history and key developments in the field of onomastics, introducing its definitions, origins, significance, and major trends. It also discusses onomastics in the African context, including the factors driving change in anthroponymic systems, and provides theoretical and methodological grounding for the study. The chapter explains why Safaliba personal names are discussed within the framework of Linguistic Anthropology.

Chapter four discusses the research design and methodology. It outlines the ethical considerations, study area, study design, and research methods employed. This chapter is central to understanding how data were collected and analysed. Chapter five examines the typology of Safaliba names and their social significance. It shows how the categorisation of

names reflects Safaliba values and includes detailed descriptions of naming rituals and processes. Naming rites are explored as more than mere acts of name-giving—they involve cultural rituals that confer identity upon the neonate. The typology of names is based on shared sociocultural and linguistic features and includes both indigenous names and contemporary names borrowed from other languages or foreign religions. Semantic content, linguistic structure, and etymological and ethnographic descriptions are also provided.

Chapter six explores changes in Safaliba names and naming systems. It focuses on individuals who ethnically identify as Safaliba but do not bear Safaliba names. The chapter examines the factors behind these changes and situates them within broader cultural dynamics. It highlights how Safaliba people exercise agency in appropriating or adapting new cultural elements. Chapter Seven concludes the study by synthesizing the key findings, drawing overall conclusions, and highlighting its contributions to knowledge. It further outlines implications for future research and provides recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

LANGUAGE PROFILE AND THE SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE SAFALIBA PEOPLE

2.1 Introduction

This section outlines the linguistic profile and socio-cultural background of the Safaliba people to provide contextual grounding for the study. The term *socio-cultural* refers to the interconnectedness of social structures, practices, and cultural beliefs that shape the daily lives and worldview of the Safaliba people. The chapter is divided into four sub-sections as follows: Sub-section 2.2 discusses the genetic classification of Safaliba; Sub-section 2.3 examines the climate and geography of the Safaliba area; and Sub-section 2.4 explores the socio-cultural context of the Safaliba people, focusing on the concept of personhood, social organisation, traditional political structure, marriage, religion, and the local economy.

2.2 Language Classification

The Safaliba language belongs to the Gur group of languages and is spoken primarily in the Bole District of the Savannah Region of Ghana. Genetically, it is classified under the Oti-Volta sub-branch and is closely related to Waali, Dagaare, Farefare, Dagbani, and Mampruli (Eberhard et al., 2019). The term *Safaliba* refers to both the language and its speakers, while a single speaker is referred to as a *Safaluu*. In addition, individuals may be identified by their hometowns; for example, *Mandaya* and *Gbennima* denote people from Mandari and Gbenfu, respectively. The Safaliba language is not known to have distinct dialects (Bodua-Mango, 2012; Bodua-Mango, 2015). Figure 2.1 illustrates its genetic affiliation with other languages within the Niger-Congo family.

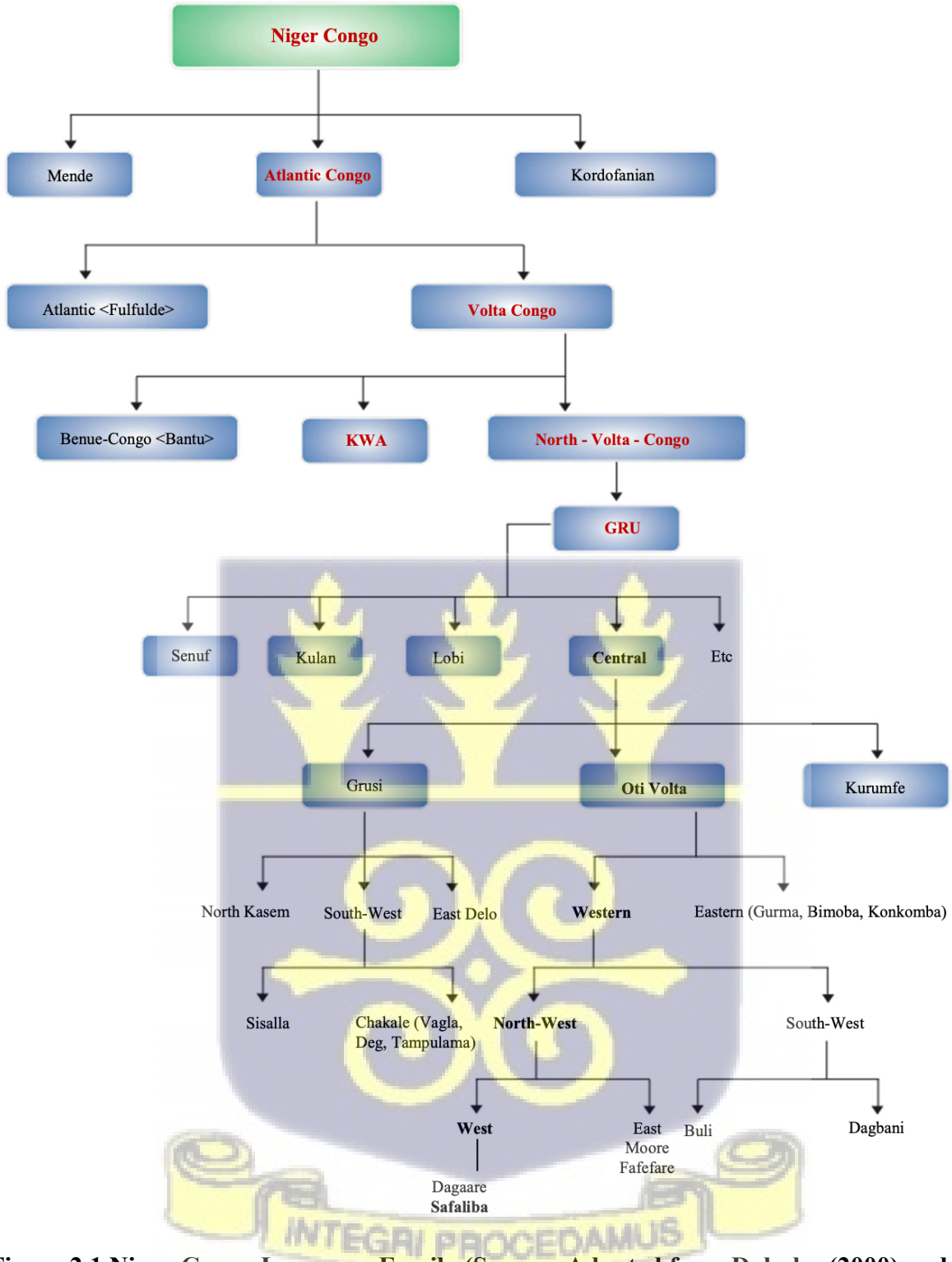

Figure 2.1 Niger-Congo Language Family (Source: Adapted from Dakubu (2000) and Awedoba (2022, unpublished)

2.3 Climate and Geography

In view of the pragmatic importance of the Safaliba climate and overall geography in their naming traditions, I present a brief discussion of the area's climatic and geographic characteristics. These factors influence naming practices because the Safaliba are an agrarian society, and the climate has a direct bearing on livelihoods, experiences, and the symbolic references embedded in names. In this sense, certain names are linked to climatic conditions or agricultural cycles.

According to a report by the Bole District Assembly (2011), the Bole District, where Safaliba is spoken, has a "heterogeneous population." The ethnic groups that occupy the area, in addition to the Safaliba, include the Gonja, Vagla, Brifor, Mo, Dagaba, and Pantra. The Bole District is one of the administrative divisions of the Savannah Region—one of the new regions of Ghana created in 2019. It is bordered to the north by the Sawla-Tuna-Kalba District, to the east by the Central Gonja District, to the west by the Banda District, and to the south by the Kintampo South District. The Bole District falls within the Savannah vegetation zone and is characterized by drought-resistant trees such as shea and baobab. It experiences two seasons: a rainy season from May to October and a dry season from November to April. The dry season is typically cool at night but hot and dusty during the day due to the Harmattan—the dry, dusty north-easterly trade winds from the Sahara Desert. Unlike the southern part of Ghana, the area has only one farming season per year, and soil erosion is common as a result of heavy bursts of rain. The district is also close to the Black Volta, which has historically served as the main source of water and fish for the Safaliba people. In addition to a few springs and wells, several machine-dug boreholes have been constructed in recent years to provide water. The area is rich

in igneous rocks, possibly remnants of volcanic activity in the distant past, and contains a few hills scattered across the landscape.

The major Safaliba villages are Mandari, Gbenfu, Tanyiri, Manfuli, Nsunua, Chorubawala, and Ntereso (see Figure 2.2). As a result of wars and diseases, some Safaliba villages—for example, Wulasi, Siguru, Sikiri, and Gitenwini—are no longer in existence (Bodua-Mango, 2015). Oral history suggests that the Safaliba people are the autochthons of the area, although the Gonja inhabit some parts as well. The Safaliba are said to have migrated from Côte d'Ivoire and first settled in Mandari (referred to as the eldest Safaliba village). Other Safaliba people later migrated to Gbenfu, Tanyiri, Wulasi, and Chorubawala, among others. The Bole District map (see Figure 2.2) indicates the Safaliba villages and highlights the study towns relevant to this work.

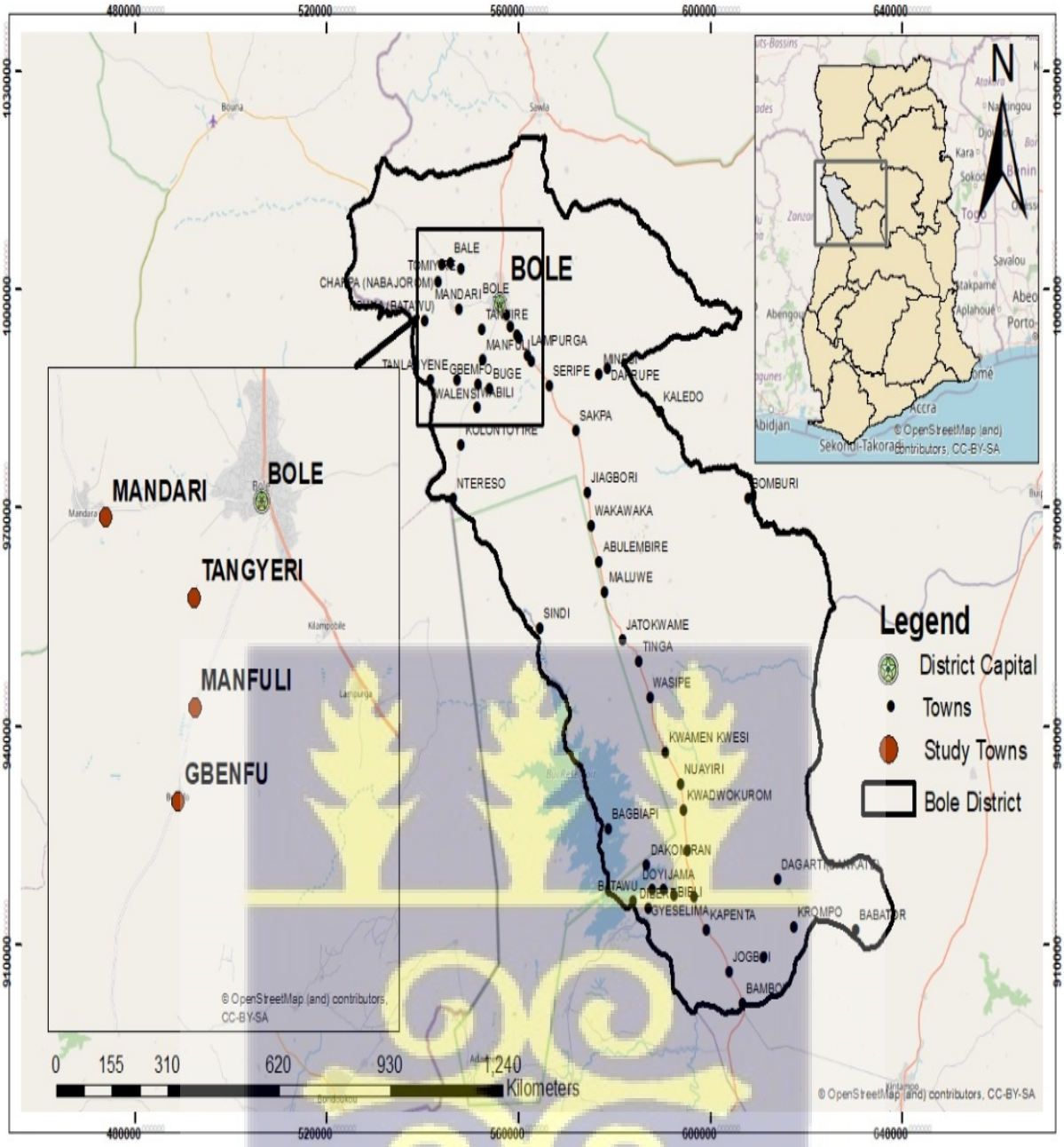

Figure 2.2: The Bole District Map (Source: Department of Geography and Resource Development, University of Ghana, RS/GIS Lab.)

Figure 2.3 presents the specific locations of Safaliba-speaking villages. The shaded areas numbered 1–7 represent traditional Safaliba-speaking communities, while 8–14 indicate locations where Safaliba is not the dominant language but is spoken by a minority.

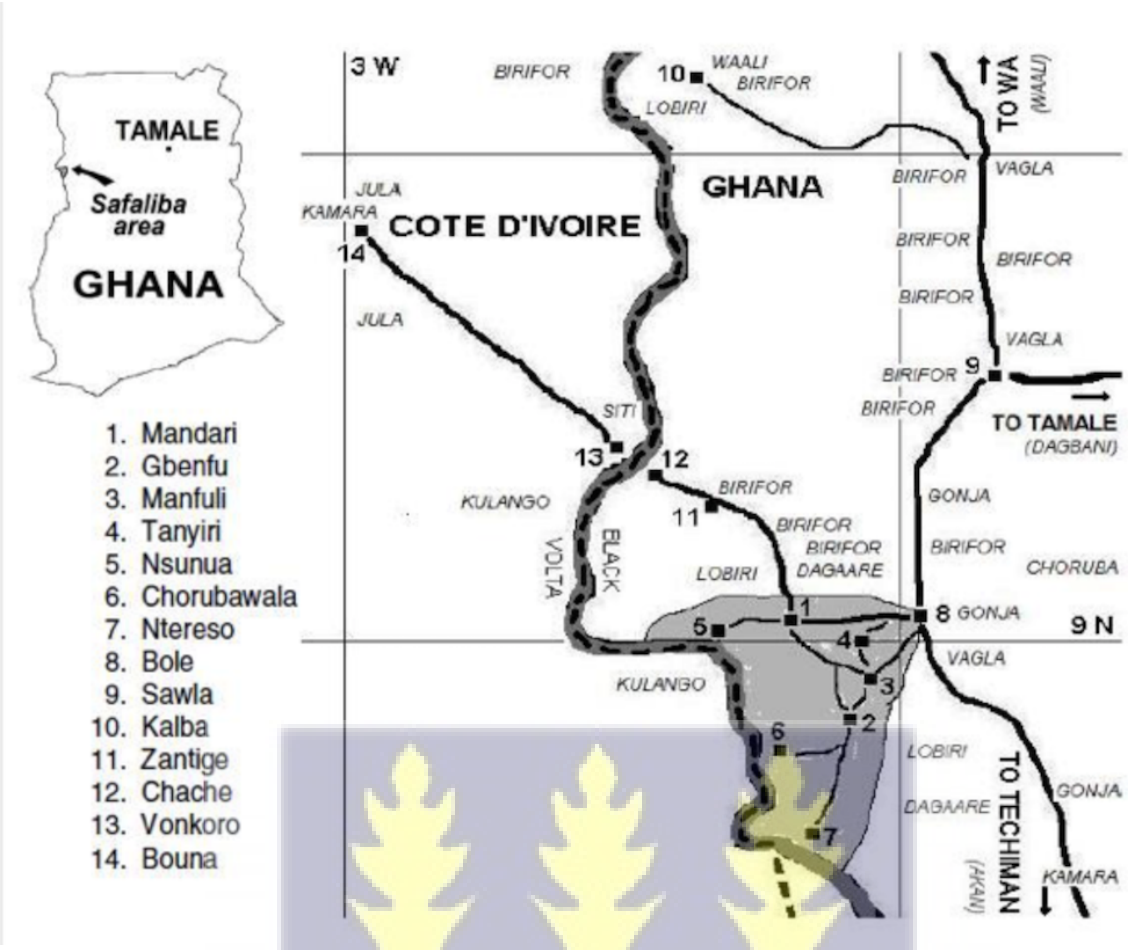

Figure 2.3: Safaliba-Speaking Villages (Source: Schaefer (2009, p. 6)

Safaliba is also spoken in Sawla and Kalba, which were formerly part of the Bole District until the creation of new administrative districts under Legislative Instrument (L.I.) 1768. These areas became part of the Sawla-Tuna-Kalba District, inaugurated on August 27, 2004 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014, p. 1). In Sawla, Safaliba is spoken primarily as a first language by Safaliba migrants and as a second language by many indigenous residents. Alongside Waali and Dagaare, Safaliba functions as a lingua franca in the area (see Figure 1 for linguistic affinities). The Safaliba people often intermarry with other ethnic groups, especially in the Bole and Sawla-Tuna-Kalba districts, leading to the proliferation of Safaliba speakers across both districts. Additionally, Safaliba is spoken in Vonkoro, Bondoukou, and Bourna in Côte d'Ivoire.

2.4 Socio-cultural Information

The introductory remarks in Chapter One emphasise that personal names are not created in a vacuum but are instead rooted in a society's cultural framework. Every culture embodies a unique set of beliefs, values, and traditions that signal its identity and presence in the world. This is reflected in the personal names of indigenous Africans, which are closely connected to the culture of the society. To understand personal names and the nomenclature systems of the Safaliba people, this study must begin with a discussion of the concept of a Safaliba person and the relevant social and political institutions.

2.4.1 The Safaliba Concept of a Person

This research has found it necessary to provide an overview of the concept of a person in the Safaliba context, as it lays the foundation for understanding the social structure within which naming occurs. This is because personhood is inextricably linked to society, its beliefs, and organizational structure — all of which shape who is named, how names are chosen, and what meanings they carry in Safaliba culture. The category of living things (*boŋkaarısı*) comprises humans (*nınsaala*), animals (*dunsi*), and plants, including trees (*daaru*) and grass (*mɔ*). Among these, humans occupy the highest rank because they possess *nfɛrɛ* (reason), *hakıla* (morality), and *dɔgırı* (kin or social recognition). However, not all human-born individuals are regarded as full persons. Children born with severe deformities or abnormalities may be regarded as spirit children (*alizinisi* – dwarfs) or snake-born infants (*waafuru* – snakes), not belonging to the human world. These "spirit children" may be abandoned in the bush—a form of infanticide rooted in fear that they may bring misfortune to the community. This belief system resonates with other northern Ghanaian societies. Awedoba and Denham (2014) describe similar

practices among the Kasena and Nankani, where such children are referred to by anthropologists as “bush babies,” “dwarfs,” “fairies,” or “babies of misfortune” (Awedoba & Denham, 2014; Fortes, 1987; Goody, 1972; Rattray, 1932).

In Safaliba cosmology, personhood extends beyond the living to include the dead, ancestors, and even non-human entities. Certain animals, such as snakes and birds, are not killed when encountered, as they may embody ancestors or deities sent to deliver messages or offer protection. Rivers, too, are regarded as sacred, believed to host spirits that guard the land. Among the Mandari people, the river *Galigu* is revered as such a protector, where fishing or bathing is forbidden because these acts constitute sacrilege. Offenders are thought to incur misfortune brought directly by the river spirit, affecting both their clan and the wider community.

Despite some physical similarities between humans and animals—such as having a body (*ɪŋŋa*), blood (*zɪŋ*), and bones (*kɔba*)—animals are not regarded as *nɪraba* (persons) because they do not possess a *sɪaŋ* (soul). While certain animals like dogs may demonstrate human-like qualities such as loyalty, they are not considered *nɪnsaaɬa* (humans) or *nɪrɪba* (people). However, dogs are ritually significant; they are used in purification rites for serious moral transgressions such as murder or suicide—offences believed to bring disaster upon families and communities unless cleansed. After death, humans are believed to transition into different ancestral statuses depending on how they lived their lives. If a person leads a bad life—characterized by actions such as stealing, murder, violating community taboos, or engaging in sorcery—it is believed that his or her soul will be rejected by the ancestors. Such individuals may not be welcomed into the ancestral realm and could face spiritual consequences, including

being forgotten or unhonored in rituals. A morally upright person may become an ancestor—*kpeŋsuŋŋa* (good spirit)—while one who lived immorally is considered *kpeŋbɛrʊ* (bad spirit), requiring ritual redress through libation (*basi koŋ*). This belief contrasts sharply with the treatment of animals, whose deaths do not involve such spiritual consequences. As De Craemer (1983, p. 23) observes:

> the African notion of person encompasses both a metaphysical and a physical world. It includes inner and invisible spheres as well as outer and visible ones. It fits into a system of relationships that includes the unborn and the dead, along with the born and the living. It is a link in a chain of ancestors and descendants. And it is at the dynamic center of the cycle of rites of passage that delineate and make sacred the stages of human existence.

Names also play a vital role in establishing personhood in Safaliba culture. A name carries social identity, spiritual power, and even predictive capacity. As Fortes (1987, p. 249) explains, names not only position individuals within society but also influence personality and destiny. He writes: "La personnalité, l'âme, viennent avec le nom, de la société." In other words, it is the society that creates, defines, and imposes the distinctive signs, moral expectations, and social roles that constitute the personne morale in that context. Consequently, the Safaliba avoid bestowing *yobɛya* (bad names). In Safaliba thought, personhood is not simply a matter of biological life—it is a relational, moral, and spiritual status conferred by society. It extends across the metaphysical and physical worlds, includes the unborn and the dead, and is embedded in rituals, names, and kinship systems. This relational and cosmological view of personhood is not an abstract idea but one that informs everyday life and social relations. It underpins kinship obligations, authority structures, and communal roles. Understanding Safaliba conceptions of personhood therefore provides an important foundation for examining the broader structures of social life. It is within this framework that the social organisation of the Safaliba people can be meaningfully understood.

2.4.2 Social Organisation of the Safaliba People

In some African societies, "[k]inship is the bedrock, so to speak, of the society" (Awedoba, 2000, p. 16). Tracing kinship is very important and is reflected in naming systems (Guma, 2001). The terms *dɔgri* (kin), *bee* (child), and *nɪrɪba* (people) refer to descendants of Safaliba land. Thus, descendants may be referred to as *Safalbie* (Safaliba child), *Safalnɪrɪba* (Safaliba people), or *Safaldɔgri* (Safaliba kin or relation). Safaliba people often boast of their kinship ties by making statements such as *Safalbie nema*, meaning "I am a Safaliba child."

The Safaliba are patrilineal in their social organization, with a patrilocal pattern of residence. Patrilocality refers to living in the father's place and implies "residence in a patrilineal group generated by virilocality repeated through the generations" (Barnard & Spencer 2009, 778). Safaliba communities are traditionally based on the concept of family *dɔgri*, which consists of descendants of the same male apical ancestor or patrilineage. A strong spiritual bond exists between the patrilineage and their ancestors—*yarɪba nima* or *saanima*—who are believed to act as guardians. The Safaliba residential arrangements reflect this patrilineal structure. The extended family lives together in compounds headed by the oldest male of the senior generation, known as *zaka nunkorogu* (head of the house) or *zu suba* (lit. head owner). These compounds are built close to one another, just a few metres apart. They are usually clustered around the chief's compound, the market, and shade trees where people gather. Each compound houses members of the extended family, while farmlands are located several kilometres away from the residential areas.

Inheritance and succession also follow patrilineal principles. Rights to property, political and religious offices, and other privileges are determined through the male line. Inheritance is usually exercised by the oldest male family member, not necessarily the direct descendants of the deceased. For example, farmland ownership is transferred through the father's lineage, hence the expression *saabie* ("father's child"). However, exceptions exist: personal property and some religious offices—such as the *Tingbanasuba* (earth priestship)—may pass to a male child identified as *maabie* ("mother's child"), if his mother belongs to the lineage entitled to the office and no suitable male exists from the direct male line. Women, by contrast, typically inherit their mother's belongings, such as clothing, cooking utensils, and household items.

Joint ownership further reinforces collective lineage identity. Patrilocal residence entails shared rights over compounds, land, animals, artefacts, and even spiritual resources like shrines and gods. Political offices, including chieftaincy and land ownership, are also jointly held within the lineage. Each patrilineage is additionally identified by totems (*dunge*), which may be animals or sacred objects symbolizing the group. Lineage members observe restrictions or taboos (*kisibu*) tied to these totems. For instance, the Kupo family is forbidden from eating *kue*, a type of bush mouse.

There is often a close kinship bond among individuals belonging to the same kin group, leading to a strong sense of commitment and expectations of reciprocity. Members of the lineage are expected to provide social and psychological support to one another, especially in times of need, exemplifying the value of "being each other's keeper." Support may take the form of care for the sick, bereaved (including widows, widowers, or orphans), and the elderly. For example, fosterage is traditionally encouraged among the Safaliba people, particularly in cases of childlessness. Male children are often sent to live with their paternal or maternal uncles, and

females with their aunts. Fosterage promotes solidarity within the kin group and helps to address social inequality. This is corroborated by Goody (2005, p. 211), who notes:

> [f]ostering acts to reinforce the bonds between physically dispersed kinsmen who may live in villages anywhere from two to two hundred miles apart; it serves to bridge the gap between generations by giving a more concrete meaning to the ties of classificatory siblingship between first and second cousins; and it helps to diminish the social distance between estates by familiarizing members of each with the ways ('the secrets') of the others.

Kinship among the Safaliba is central not only to social life and inheritance but also to the structuring of leadership, spiritual responsibilities, and political authority. The interconnectedness of lineage, residence, and kinship ties forms the foundation upon which traditional political structures are established and maintained.

2.4.3 Traditional Political Structure of the Safaliba People

Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940) distinguish between two types of African political systems: centralised and acephalous. Centralised systems refer to societies where power is vested in a single authority. Conversely, the term *acephalous* has been used to describe traditional African systems in which political power resides at the clan or lineage level. Prior to British colonial rule, Northern Ghana exhibited both systems—centralised and non-centralised (acephalous). Brukum (1999) notes that societies such as the Vagla, Konkomba, Tampluma, Bimoba, Grusi, Frafra, and others were classified as acephalous, indicating that they lacked political heads and were characterised by egalitarian and non-stratified systems. In contrast, the Gonja, Dagomba, and Nanumba were recognised as having well-structured governments headed by chiefs.

Daannaa (1992) explains that in Northern Ghana, centralized societies operated under a system of control where the *naa* (chief) inherited the position by birthright and acted as a mediator

between the leaders of different divisions. Under British colonial rule, the terms "majority" and "minority" were introduced to distinguish between centralised and acephalous societies. In acephalous systems, the *Tingbanasuba*—the earth priest—served as both spiritual leader and custodian of the land. The British administration placed the autochthons (referred to as *Nyamase*) of groups such as the Vagla, Safaliba, and Mo under Gonja chiefs (Brukum, 1999). Consequently, the Safaliba were governed through Gonja authorities during the colonial period.

Today, the Safaliba operate a dual chieftaincy system in which both a Safaliba chief and Gonja chief preside over community affairs. For instance, in Mandari, there exists both a *Mandarinaa* (Safaliba chief of Mandari) and a *Mandariwura* (Gonja chief of Mandari). The two titles, though similar in form, belong to distinct traditions: the *Mandarinaa* represents Safaliba authority, while the *Mandariwura* is embedded within the Gonja political hierarchy. Bodua-Mango (2015, 8) notes that the *Mandarinaa* performs key administrative functions such as dispute resolution and the oversight of festivals. In addition, the *Mandarinaa* safeguards customary law, mediates conflicts within the community, presides over important rites of passage, ensures the observance of taboos, and serves as custodian of land and ancestral traditions. By contrast, the office of the *Mandariwura* is tied to the Gonja polity, where succession to the office of the *Bolewura* (chief of Bole) requires first serving as *Mandariwura*.

The Gonja follow a pyramidal political system, with the highest office being the *Yagbonwura,* the paramount chief, whose seat was historically located in *Nyange* before its relocation to Damongo under British colonial rule. In a similar way, the political structure of the Safaliba centres on the office of the *Safalinaa*, demonstrating that the people have long practised chieftaincy—*naalun*. Eligibility for this office is restricted, as a person with physical

impairments cannot become *Safalinaa*, and once enskinned, a *Safalinaa* may only be removed in proven cases of witchcraft.

Safaliba communities are organised according to *zaka* (household groups) and *weya* (sections), or *bu* (clan). Each Safaliba village is governed by three main authorities: the *Safalinaa* (political head), the *Tingbanasuba* (ritual head), and the *Kupo* (linguist). The *Safalinaa* manages secular and administrative matters, while the *Tingbanasuba* serves as the spiritual custodian of the village deity. The *Kupo* acts as a spokesperson and messenger for both the *Safalinaa* and *Tingbanasuba*. Safaliba land is communally owned, requiring collaboration among these three authorities for effective governance. As Bodua-Mango (2015, p. 8) explains, while the *Safalinaa* handles dispute resolution and attends public ceremonies, the *Tingbanasuba* offers sacrifices to the gods to ensure peace and agricultural prosperity. Each Safaliba *buu* (clan settlement) is headed by the eldest male, known as the *zaka nunkorigu*. Every clan has its own house head. Settlements are based on family *zaka* or *dɔgri* (patrilineal kinship), comprising members who trace their lineage to a common male ancestor. Clan elders play both administrative and spiritual roles, including pouring libations, offering sacrifices to the deity, and leading decision-making for socio-economic development. Family meetings are led by the *zaka nunkorigu*, and decisions are typically made by consensus. Intra-clan and inter-clan disputes are resolved by the respective clan heads.

Village settlements are united under the authority of the *Safalinaa* and the *Tingbanasuba*, the latter literally translated as "owner of the land." While this title does not imply literal land ownership, it underscores his responsibility in ensuring the land is used altruistically for the benefit of all. The *Tingbanasuba* knows the boundaries of all land used for settlement and farming. Though he has no right to sell land, he oversees its allocation. He alone is authorised

to pour libations and make sacrifices to the land gods. The Safaliba hold the land as sacred. Rituals are performed regularly by the *Tingbanasuba* to cleanse and pacify it. As the spiritual head, he leads community sacrifices to thank the ancestors and seek their protection. Economic prosperity—mainly derived from land-based activities such as farming and fishing—is closely tied to these ritual practices.

Although descent is primarily patrilineal, maternal lineage holds significance. The term *maabee* (mother's child) highlights this. In some cases, the *Tingbanasuba* may be selected from the matriline, particularly when there is no suitable male candidate from the paternal line. In rites of passage—such as marriage, naming, and funerals—individuals are expected to participate in the rituals of their mother's lineage as a sign of kinship recognition. Awedoba (2000) documents a Kasena proverb, "one does not use his left hand to point to the mother's village," which is mirrored in the Safaliba saying *ba ba di nugua tɛɛra maa yiri*. This reflects the enduring significance of maternal ties. The Safaliba also maintain a joking relationship (*yaalun*) between cross-cousins, which blends teasing, horseplay, aggression, criticism, and humour without causing offence. Radcliffe-Brown (1940, p. 195) describes this "joking relationship or *parenté à plaisanterie*" as "a relationship between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence." For instance, a man may tease his mother's brother's children using humorous insults or playful ridicule without causing offence, and they are expected to respond in kind. This relationship fosters social cohesion and allows tensions to be diffused in a culturally acceptable manner.

As noted, the *Safalinaa*, *Tingbanasuba*, and *Kupo* work collaboratively in governing the affairs of the Safaliba. Succession to these offices is based on seniority and lineage, typically passed to sons of previous officeholders after the completion of final funeral rites. Eligibility is determined primarily through the paternal line. The traditional political system is thus grounded in kinship and communal authority, where leadership roles are inherited and legitimacy is maintained through spiritual and social accountability. These same principles also extend to the institution of marriage, where kinship, alliance-building, and the transmission of identity and lineage structure intimate relationships and ensure continuity of the community.

2.4.4 Marriage among the Safaliba People

Marriage is a vital institution in all African societies, as "social and ritual exchanges bind affines" and enable individuals to "establish affinal ties with others who fall outside the patrilineal group" (Awedoba, 2000, p. 19). Among the Safaliba, marriage represents a key socio-cultural milestone. Every individual who reaches the marrying age is encouraged to marry. However, marriage is not viewed as a private affair but as a communal event involving various actors, particularly the extended family and elders. Traditionally, parents play a central role in selecting suitable spouses for their children. It is often the responsibility of the parents to find a wife for their son or a husband for their daughter. In some cases, a young man may be assisted in getting married after completing a period of service with his paternal uncle—a practice known as *golibu* (fosterage). This reflects the Safaliba view that child-raising and responsibilities such as marriage are shared duties of the extended family rather than the sole concern of biological parents. Partner selection involves thorough background checks on the prospective spouse's family. These investigations focus on health (e.g., hereditary diseases, mental illness, leprosy), character traits (e.g., gossip, theft, disrespect), and perceived spiritual

concerns (e.g., witchcraft). Only after these inquiries yield satisfactory results is permission to marry granted. In recent years, it has become more common for young people to present their preferred partners to their families, although family approval remains essential.

The Safaliba society practices exogamy, meaning individuals are expected to marry outside certain defined social groups, especially within their own patrilineage or clan. This system is not intended to promote marriage outside the entire Safaliba ethnic group; rather, it regulates marriage to avoid unions within close kinship circles. For example, marriage between parallel cousins (i.e., children of two brothers or two sisters) is prohibited. However, cross-cousin marriages (between the children of a brother and a sister) are allowed, and such arrangements are referred to as *diikulibu*, meaning "house marriage." During festivals such as the annual fire festival, an aunt or uncle may invite their nephew to select one of their daughters for marriage, reflecting the communal and negotiated nature of marriage alliances.

Although polygyny (a man marrying multiple wives) is permitted in Safaliba culture, sororal polygyny—marrying sisters—is strictly forbidden. A man may marry as many women as he is able to support, provided that the women are not siblings. However, this raises important concerns about gender equity. In cases where the woman is the breadwinner, the system offers little room for alternatives such as polyandrous unions, as current norms remain strictly polygynous. These arrangements reflect deeply embedded patriarchal values that prioritize male authority and lineage continuity. Gendered expectations in marital structures have largely gone unchallenged, although social transformation and economic pressures are beginning to prompt critical re-evaluation, particularly among younger generations.

Marriage is patrilocal, meaning the wife relocates to her husband's residence after marriage. Children born from the union belong to the father's lineage. In the event of separation or divorce, the woman typically returns to her natal home. Levirate marriage—where a widow marries her deceased husband's brother—is not practiced among the Safaliba. Thus, if the husband dies, the widow is free to return to her family.

A marriage is not considered complete until the groom's family presents the customary bridewealth, known as *pɔse* cola, to the bride's family. This ritual affirms the marriage, grants sexual rights, legitimizes children, and formalizes the transfer of the bride into her husband's lineage. The groom's father usually provides this bridewealth for a first marriage and may include items such as sheep, yams, or cash. In subsequent marriages involving the same groom, this responsibility shifts to the groom himself. Additionally, on special occasions, the groom is expected to send yams, drinks, and meat to his in-laws to demonstrate goodwill and his continued commitment. Bridewealth may include money, locally produced drinks, and traditional attire such as a smock. Another important marriage ritual is *denkobu*, where the groom works on his father-in-law's farm. This task demonstrates the groom's readiness and ability to care for his future wife. Traditionally, pre-marriage tasks such as *denkobu* served to assess the groom's suitability and commitment. Today, however, the practice is increasingly symbolic. In rural areas, *denkobu* may still be observed, but urbanization, formal education, and wage labour have led to its adaptation or complete omission. Thus, while the ritual persists, it functions more as a cultural marker than a practical test of readiness. Beyond its economic aspects, bridewealth carries deep symbolic meaning. It legitimizes the union, affirms paternity, and secures the status of children. Without this exchange, the marriage is considered unrecognized, and children born from it are referred to as *sensenkoma*—those born out of

wedlock. Such children are typically denied inheritance rights and do not fully belong to the father's lineage. Thus, the presentation of bridewealth is not merely ceremonial; it guarantees the legal, social, and spiritual recognition of both the marriage and any offspring, and affirms the man's paternal rights. Among the Safaliba, marriage is not just a union between individuals but a foundational institution that reinforces kinship, legitimizes descent, and sustains social cohesion. It is also deeply bound to spiritual and moral responsibilities, reflecting broader beliefs about life, the ancestors, and the unseen world.

2.4.5 Safaliba Religion

Traditional religion has been practised among the *Safaliba* people for a long time. In recent times, however, Christianity and Islam have also become part of the faith of some *Safaliba* individuals. *Safaliba* religion is grounded in the belief in a Supreme Creator, *Naamwini* (chief God), *Mwini* (lesser gods), and *Yariba nima*—*Saanima* or *Kpembe*—the ancestors who protect the living. This structure can be likened to a trinity of divinities: *Naamwini*, *Mwini*, and *Kpembe*. The *Safaliba* believe that these three spiritual forces live in unison. Therefore, for one's prayers to be answered, they must be offered through the ancestors to the lesser gods, and ultimately to *Naamwini*. Although it is believed that each individual has a personal *Mwini* god, there is a consensus on the existence of a *Naamwini* whose authority and power supersede those of both the lesser gods and the ancestors. It is also believed that everyone's purpose or destiny, *yelwa*, is predetermined before birth. This destiny is generally unchangeable; however, in exceptional circumstances, the ancestors may intervene—usually for benevolent reasons—to alter it. Evil forces or witches, known as *sɔnba*, can also negatively influence a person's destiny.

Death does not mark the end of one's relationship with the living. Instead, the deceased becomes an intermediary between the living, the deities, and the Supreme Being. Living family members have an obligation to perform final funeral rites for the deceased to ensure their successful passage into the land of the dead and their elevation to ancestorship. In return, ancestors are expected to safeguard the well-being of their living relatives. Living descendants consult ancestors through divination and rely on them to improve their lives. They must also nourish their ancestors through libation and sacrifices to maintain ongoing spiritual communion. However, not everyone becomes an ancestor. One must have lived as a respected elder with an exemplary life. Persons considered witches are excluded from ancestorship; consequently, their funerals are not performed.

Each *Safaliba* village has a lesser god responsible for protection against plagues, infertility, and other misfortunes. These gods serve specific functions—bringing rain, ensuring land fertility, preventing disease, and safeguarding the people. Their dwellings—rocks, water bodies, groves, or forests—are considered sacred and carefully preserved. *Naamwini*, being too great to be worshipped directly, is honoured through the lesser gods, typically via animal sacrifices and libation pouring. During these rituals, ancestors associated with the lineage are invoked by name and called upon to intercede for the living.

The *Safaliba* also have a deep connection with the land, *Tengɛ*, which is believed to be *Naamwini*'s wife. *Tengɛ* is the source of life—providing farm produce, forest animals, and fish from water bodies. The land is regarded as a lesser god, and its well-being directly affects the people's survival. This belief is echoed across Northern Ghana, where the *Tingbanasuba* (Earthpriest) acts as the land's religious custodian (Barker, 1986). His role is primarily

spiritual, serving as an intermediary between the people and the spirit of the land. Due to their belief in the spirit of the land and their ancestors, the *Safaliba* celebrate post-harvest festivals such as the Yam Festival and *Ambatigi*. These festivals express gratitude for a successful farming season. *Ambatigi* [*anna ŋ ba tigi*] translates as "Who is not satisfied?"—symbolising abundance and collective well-being. The festivals are both a thanksgiving and a prayer for continued harvests. During these celebrations, the *Tingbanasuba* pours libation to invoke blessings and protect the land from drought or harmful occurrences. A yearly cleansing of the land is also conducted to remove spiritual contamination from acts such as bloodshed or outdoor sexual intercourse—believed to hinder rainfall and agricultural success. Maintaining harmony with the spirit of the land is thus crucial for survival.

Safaliba traditional religion also emphasizes virtues such as love, patience, honesty, respect, generosity, unity, communal living, and collaboration. The people are morally obligated to take part in communal duties such as farming and cleaning. Unlike some other religions, the *Safaliba* do not believe in heaven or hell. Instead, they believe that those who lived good, exemplary lives will reunite with the ancestors after death. To guide moral behaviour, taboos and prohibitions are enforced. Violating them provokes the wrath of the ancestors and the Supreme Being. Offenders may suffer consequences that extend to their families and communities. In such cases, divination is used to identify the transgressor(s), and the *Tingbanasuba* prescribes the necessary sacrifices for atonement.

2.4.6 The Traditional Economy of the Safaliba People

The traditional economy of the *Safaliba* people can be described as agrarian. The *Safaliba* primarily depend on agriculture, focusing on the cultivation of tubers such as yam and cassava; grains such as maize, millet, and sorghum (or guinea corn); and legumes including groundnut, cowpea, beans, and bambara beans. Legumes are typically cultivated on a small scale. Vegetables like okra, pepper, and *agushi* (a cucurbitaceous plant) are also vital to the *Safaliba* economy. These vegetables, along with leafy greens such as baobab leaves, are preserved for the lean season by drying. Maize and cassava are also dried and used to prepare the staple food *Tuo Zaafi* (TZ), and these dried items may be sold at local markets. Yam is the most widely cultivated crop in *Safaliba* communities. Varieties of yam include *Seidu-bile*, *Wokor*, *Kponaa*, *Jellen*, *Takaranva*, and *Logpere*. Oral history indicates that the water yam known as *Seidu-bile* was introduced to the *Safaliba* community from Côte d'Ivoire by a *Mandari* citizen named Alhaji *Seidu-bile*. A local proverb says, *"Nyuri perku san heri lorbi seguya ndi saa"*, which translates as "A big peel of a tuber of yam is better than eating *Tuo Zaafi*." This reflects the cultural preference for *Kabila* (pounded yam or *fufu*) over *Tuo Zaafi*. Though both dishes are staples, *Kabila* made from yam is more highly esteemed.

Safaliba land is blessed with several economically valuable trees. The climate is favourable for cash crops such as sheanuts, cashew, mango, neem, kapok, and *dawadawa*. The proverb *"Dakuri kun da sia"*, meaning "You can buy a hoe but not a waist," signifies the importance of agriculture in *Safaliba* life. The hoe is the most commonly used tool in farming, and agricultural work is carried out manually. Economic activities are shared between men and women. Women engage in *gari* processing, sheanut picking, cashew collection, and the preparation of *dawadawa* and *konton* (spices made from kapok seeds). These tasks are carried

out in addition to their traditional roles in household chores and assisting with farming during planting and harvesting seasons. The Safaliba believe that women play a crucial role in maintaining the household. A local proverb states, *"Pɔgɔ ni han ba wore sira dii ziniga una man volra gbende uba sela"*, which means "It is a woman who does not want to live in her husband's house who uproots cassava she did not plant." This illustrates the expectation that women must support their husbands to sustain a peaceful home.

In addition to crop farming, the Safaliba rear livestock such as goats and sheep. These animals are essential for sacrifices offered to appease deities. More recently, some *Safaliba* have begun rearing cattle. Hunters may keep dogs for hunting purposes, and families typically rear chickens and semi-domesticated guinea fowls. Livestock are also sold to meet financial needs, especially for essential expenditures and ritual purposes.

The Safaliba are skilled in traditional handiwork, which supports both cultural preservation and economic sustainability. In earlier times, when mattresses were unavailable, *Kalan* mats, *mmiri* rope, *jesi* thread, and *pɛɛ* baskets were made by *obirɛ* weavers, although not in large quantities. These items were often traded in Côte d'Ivoire. *Sanyeba* blacksmiths are renowned for producing tools such as the *kure* (hoe), *kerige* (chisel), *suwe* (knife), *nyoka* (plier), and other metal objects, which are sold to neighbouring groups such as the Gonja, Dagaaba, Lobi, and Birifor. Another economic activity among the Safaliba is the carving of *toru* (mortars) and *tulaa* (pestles), which are used in pounding *fufu*. Carvers also make statues, doors, door frames, windows, and talking drums.

Nabagilun (hunting) was once a common economic activity but has declined due to recent regulations aimed at protecting wildlife. Additionally, the Safaliba engage in traditional medicine, treating conditions such as *kaba* (bone fractures), *babasi* (gonorrhoea), *mansugu* (dysmenorrhea), *zika* (hunchback), *konte* (facial paralysis), and *korito* (a curse-related illness). In recent times, some Safaliba youth, both male and female, have become involved in illegal small-scale mining, commonly referred to as *"galamsey."*[1]

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the language profile and sociocultural context of the Safaliba people, with attention to climate, social organisation, political structures, religious beliefs, marriage practices, and economic activities. These elements are not merely descriptive features of Safaliba society but are pragmatically important, as they provide the conditions that shape naming practices. For instance, climate and geography influence names through agrarian livelihoods and symbolic references to agricultural cycles, while kinship structures, ancestral ties, and religious orientations embed names within wider social and spiritual frameworks. Together, these factors demonstrate how naming traditions emerge from and are sustained by broader cultural processes. By situating the Safaliba within their ecological and sociocultural context, this chapter has laid the foundation for interpreting the dynamics of Safaliba personal names. The next chapter reviews the literature on onomastics globally and within Africa, positioning the Safaliba case within wider scholarly debates on language, culture, and identity.

[1] The term *galamsey* is used in the Ghanaian context to refer to illegal small-scale gold mining.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

The literature review provides a comprehensive overview of the history and development of onomastics as a field of study. It reviews foundational studies in the field, identifies gaps in the literature, and positions the present study within those gaps. Central to the review is the foundational question of the discipline: *What is a name?* The review traces the evolution of onomastic studies—from early foundational works to contemporary trends—highlighting general principles, theoretical approaches, and illustrative case studies from around the world. It also explores the nature of onomastics within the African context, examining the factors that have influenced shifts in African anthroponymic systems. In addition, the review addresses relevant methodological and theoretical considerations, establishing a foundation for the discussions in subsequent chapters. Overall, this review offers a contextual framework through which future directions in onomastic research may be considered.

3.2 Background and Debates in Onomastics

Onomastics is the umbrella field under which the study of personal names falls. It is a subfield of linguistics that examines the origin, etymology, history, and use of proper names (Algeo, 2010). Crystal (2008, p. 339) describes onomastics as a "branch of semantics which studies the etymology of institutionalised ('proper') names, such as the names of people ('anthroponymy' or 'anthroponomastics') and places ('toponymy' or 'toponomastics'); also called onomatology." While onomastics broadly refers to personal names, toponymy focuses on place names. Other subfields include ethnonyms (names of nationalities and ethnic groups),

choronyms (names of regions and countries), and glottonyms (names of languages). This study falls under anthroponomastics, as it examines the personal names and nomenclature systems of the Safaliba people. The study of onomastics typically involves investigating proper nouns and their origins. Anthroponomastics, one of its most important subdivisions, focuses on personal names. Khoa (2010) notes that naming practices are fascinating aspects of onomastics, serving not only the primary purpose of individual identification but also fulfilling sociocultural and psychological functions. Blanár (2009, p. 90) observes that "[o]nomastics has become established as a relatively independent discipline of linguistics with extensive connections to other disciplines of the social and natural sciences." He adds that the earliest accounts of onomastics—specifically the study of proper names, which he calls "the first historical documents of a language"—were mainly recorded by social scientists.

The study of names has drawn contributions from scholars worldwide and sparked public interest. Onomastics overlaps with many disciplines, perhaps because names and naming are central to all aspects of human life. Names reflect culture, history, customs, belief systems, and other features of society. As Algeo and Algeo (2000, p. 265) note, "onomastics relates to every discipline, subject field, and activity that human beings pursue: we are a species that categorises and labels." They cite anthropology, linguistics, sociology, business, cartography, history, psychology, genealogy, and philosophy as fields concerned with proper names. Similarly, Khoa (2010, p. 6) remarks that "as regards naming, many previous onomastic studies suggest that this matter relates not only to linguistic values but to many non-linguistic areas as well, such as history, psychology, and philosophy." Anderson (2007) explains that onomastics covers names, their origins, and sociocultural functions. Hough (2016) proposes that the study of names should be considered a "linguistic universal," requiring contributions from both academics and non-academics. He notes that "[a]ll known languages make use of names—

most commonly, but not exclusively, to identify individual people and places" (Hough, 2016, p. vii). Thus, the study of names is vital to understanding human language, as it reveals how we organise the world and form connections. Onomastics is, therefore, an interdisciplinary field. Although it is now a relatively autonomous branch of linguistics, onomastics maintains strong links to other areas in the social and natural sciences. Its linguistic foundations cannot be separated from these related disciplines, and its methodologies often draw from them. Onomastic research employs empirical and deductive methods similar to those used in linguistics (Blanár, 2009), including linguistic classification, analysis, and description. Descriptive, historical-comparative, typological, and spatial approaches are commonly applied.

Ainiala et al. (2018) note that the field has intrigued linguists and philosophers for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Throughout Western intellectual history, scholars have explored fundamental questions: what constitutes a proper name, what is its meaning and function, and how does it relate to its referent? Names are used universally to refer to people, places, and entities, enabling efficient communication. They are also symbols that carry emotional and cultural associations, encompassing identity, history, custom, kinship, ownership, authority, and wealth. Ainiala et al. (2018, p. 13) explain:

> [t]he word name has two fundamental meanings. On the one hand, a name is a word or combination of words, … referring to one identified person, being, subject, or object, in which case the term proper noun or proper name can be used. On the other hand, it can mean a word or combination of words, such as boy, referring to persons, beings, subjects, or objects as a representative of its class, whereupon we can speak of a common noun or an appellative.

Alford (1988, p. 1) observes that "[e]thnographic research has failed to reveal a single society which does not bestow personal names on its members," implying their universality. While personal names exist in all cultures, the types of names, naming procedures, and social uses vary widely. The naming process follows conventionalised rules, and a newborn's name is deliberately chosen for its symbolic power to convey messages and reflect identity. As Alford (1988, p. 29) concludes:

> [j]ust as naming objects and places in the natural world makes them socially significant by providing a common label, naming a child is a part of the process of bringing the child into the social order. A named child has, in a sense, a social identity. To know a child's name, in a sense, is to know who that child is. And when the child is old enough to know his own name, he, in a sense, knows who he is.

Although naming is an ancient tradition likely dating back to prehistory, the precise moment humans began using names remains unknown. Examples appear in most ancient records and mythologies, often bearing etymological meanings that suggest origins in ordinary words. The study of names can therefore be considered both ancient and contemporary, as systematic inquiry into names dates back to Ancient Greece. This discipline offers insights into human communication and the organisation of the world. Blanár (2009, pp. 89–90) observes that "[t]he earliest records of proper names, which often represent the first historical documents of a language, have long attracted attention, especially from scholars in the social sciences." By the early nineteenth century, historical and philological explanations replaced pre-scientific views, focusing on a name's etymology (derivational basis). Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are credited with pioneering works in onomastics, developing the first European theories of proper names. Since ancient times, Greek personal names have been formed by combining verbs, adjectives, and nouns, reflecting diverse linguistic, social, and religious contexts.

Saarelma-Maunumaa (2003) notes that, although language experts and philosophers have long studied names, consensus on their definition is lacking. Many proposed definitions have faced strong criticism, particularly regarding the relationship between names and referents (Hough, 2016; Obi & Chukwuogor, 2021). Traditional onomastics examines the significance, reference, connotation, logic, and denotative function of names. Persistent theoretical issues include the meaningfulness, translatability, and gender of personal names. Central to the field is the debate over whether names are purely designators or carry descriptive content. The theory of reference—key to both language and philosophy—remains under active investigation, with varied methods and frameworks applied to naming.

Smith (2016, p. 1) remarks that "[n]aming is a specific and elemental way in which humans use language, and so the function and meaning of names lie at the very heart of literature and philosophical debates about language." He cites Plato as the first to raise the question of reference and significance in the *Cratylus* dialogue, where Socrates considered whether names are "conventional" or "natural," and thus whether they are arbitrary or inherently related to what they signify. Plato believed there was a descriptive correlation between words and referents. In contrast, Kripke (1972) and Mill (1906) argued for an arbitrary relationship. This disagreement fuels ongoing theoretical assessments of names.

Although conventionally considered a subfield of linguistics, onomastics has received little scholarly attention (Algeo, 2010; Joseph, 2004; Nuessel, 1992). Algeo and Algeo (2000, p. 267) argue that "[i]f lexicography has found a principled basis for excluding proper names from its purview, linguistics has often done so in an unprincipled way, simply by ignoring the data. Yet proper names are a part of language, and a very important part, which require[s] attention." This neglect may stem from the persistent definitional disputes in onomastic discourse,

including the referential versus descriptive debate. The meaning embedded in naming has long generated controversy (Bigelow, 1978; Halliday, 1979; Lyons, 1987). Philosophers and logicians have attempted to define proper names as linguistic indicators denoting people, though not all accept them as linguistic signs. Two major positions dominate: the meaningful (descriptivist) and the referential. Sekyi-Baidoo (2019, p. 1) observes that "[p]erhaps the most debilitating thing that has occurred in the study of names [is] the connotation/denotation, meaningfulness/meaninglessness or lexical/deictic controversy." The referential theory holds that proper names function solely as labels without meaning, while the descriptivist theory treats them as linguistic signs that convey meaning. From the nineteenth century to the present, referential theorists have typically argued that proper names are meaningless. Kripke (1972) and Mill (1906) maintained that proper names have a referential link to their bearer or object but lack inherent descriptive content. For Kripke (1972), proper names are arbitrary signs serving as labels; Mill (1906) similarly described them as meaningless designators of extralinguistic objects. Thus, proper names do not identify their bearers through attributes. For example, the surname *Mango* does not share the qualities of the fruit; it simply denotes a person. Shakespeare addresses this connotational–denotational debate in *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* (1872, 2.2):

> What's in a name? That which we call a rose[.] By any other word would smell as sweet. So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called, Retain that dear perfection which he owes Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name, And, for thy name, which is no part of thee, Take all myself.

Here, Shakespeare leans toward the denotational position, suggesting that names, though familiar symbols, lack a fixed one-to-one relationship with meaning.

In contrast, descriptivist theorists such as Frege (1952) and Searle (1958) argue that proper names condense descriptions of their referents, recognising them as possessing defining properties in the language. From this view, names have meaningful signs linked to their referents. For example, *Rabbi* conveys "teacher" or "master." Changes of name, as seen in the Bible and in everyday life, also support the meaningfulness of names. Despite extensive philosophical and linguistic analysis, consensus in onomastics remains elusive. Established theories sometimes appear parallel rather than connected (Blanár, 2009). Some scholars seek a "third way" between opposing views, arguing that names cannot represent something real without both classification and meaning (Walther, 1973). Increasingly, scholars accept that proper names may express certain characteristics of meaning (Walther, 1973; Blanár, 2009).

From this, it follows that variations in naming practices and the social functions of names demand systematic study. Yet the absence of philosophical and linguistic consensus has limited deeper inquiry (Frege, 1952; Kripke, 1972; Mill, 1906; Searle, 1958). The two dominant positions—meaningfulness and referential—can be seen as complementary rather than contradictory (Justice, 1998). This study adopts such a complementary stance, recognising that while names may be meaningful in some cultural contexts (due to the name-giver's intent), they can be semantically opaque in others. It further argues that the source language must be considered, as language is the primary lens through which naming, as a cultural practice, is understood.

3.3 Proper Names from the African Perspective

For decades, African onomasticians and experts in African studies have debated the nature and functions of proper names, emphasizing their cultural and social significance. Many scholars argue that proper names are unique and meaningful components of culture, connected to society through language. In response to this debate, several African onomasticians (Agyekum, 2006; Akinnaso, 1981; Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2000; Batoma, 2009; Dakubu, 2000; Mmadike, 2014; Nkamigbo, 2019; Obeng, 2001; Ogie, 2002; Onukawa, 2011) have highlighted the semantic transparency of African names, showing that they can be broken down into morphological and semantic components and serve as significant cultural markers. Furthermore, African names are logical and non-arbitrary, reflecting the societies in which we live, our customs, beliefs, values, and life experiences. This aligns with Obeng (2001), whose ethnopragmatic analysis of Akan and other African names demonstrates that names are morphologically transparent and function as culturally coded communicative tools. As Obeng (2001, 1) observes:

> African names are important channels for 'speaking' for and about African societies. They are used to achieve a number of goals, including showing human relationships and social roles; revealing Africans' quest for truth and meaning in life; pointing to the name users' hopes, dreams and aspirations… Children's names may even provide insights into important cultural or socio-political events at the time of their birth.

Ogunwale (2012, p. 176) reinforces this view, noting that African names epitomize the linguistic and cosmic perspectives of the people, with bearers potentially reflecting the characteristics embedded in the names. African names perform a variety of communicative functions, extending beyond personal identification. Tatira (2004) highlights how even animal names, such as Shona dog names, encode social commentary, humour, or criticism, illustrating the broader cultural use of naming. Awedoba and Owoahene-Acheampong (2017) extend this discussion to nicknames, pseudonyms, and assumed names, noting that these too can convey

sociocultural values and insights. Obeng (2001) further explains that name-givers often employ indirectness and ambiguity as defensive strategies in socially sensitive situations, using names to convey messages without provoking confrontation. This underscores the dialogic and performative nature of African naming practices. Scholars consistently highlight that African names reflect broader cultural, spiritual, and social realities. Sekyi-Baidoo (2019) notes that semantic content is more significant in African (and some Asian) cultures than in Western cultures. Akinnaso (1981) observes that African names encode a variety of sociocultural facts, whereas European names are often treated as arbitrary labels. Saarelma-Maunumaa (2003, p. 50) echoes this, emphasizing that the meaning of African names is recognized by both name-givers and bearers. Madubuike (1976, p. 7) sums up these arguments:

> [s]ome people say that there is nothing in a name. This is a grossly misleading statement. It is difficult to think of anything one can do today without making use of his name. In our modern society with its strong economic structure, a man who has no name is a man who has nothing. People, organizational groups, [and] businesses of various kinds are all identified by one kind of name or another. Countries, towns, cities and villages are all identified by names.

Adjah (2011) similarly argues that Ghanaian names function as repositories of unwritten knowledge, likened to diaries where cultural and social information is recorded and transmitted. Names, therefore, provide insight into personhood, social organization, values, religious beliefs, and even cosmic perceptions, reflecting the lived experiences and collective memory of African societies (Adjah, 2011; Akinnaso, 1981; Gbenga, 2006; Okere, 1996).

Naming in African societies serves both identification and sociocultural functions. It encompasses semantic transparency, moral guidance, social commentary, and cultural memory. Across African cultures, careful name selection reflects deep religious inclinations, social norms, and the importance of collective intervention by celestial and supernatural forces, making names a rich site for understanding African sociocultural realities. Even informal names—nicknames, pseudonyms, and assumed names—carry meaning and social significance, demonstrating the all-encompassing role of naming in African societies. The utmost interest in the study of proper names stems from language and its ability to transmit and preserve aspects of culture. In this vein, various studies conducted by African scholars have recognised that proper names and typologies are best defined based on the sociocultural setting, and therefore should be discussed as such. Ainiala et al. (2018) note that there is an interest in studying names primarily because language is embedded in names. They explain:

> [w]hen we speak of names on a philosophical and theoretical level, we are always speaking about both meanings found in the human mind and our external reality. As the two-fold meaning of the word name already shows, expressions that are categorising and those that are identifying can somehow be quite similar to one another. They are both words of a language but moreover, common to them are the recognition and naming of various, real-world phenomena and beings as well as those in the imaginative world (Ainiala et al., 2018, p. 14).

In conceptualising names within the African context, Gbenga (2006) notes that names mirror the worldview of African people, accentuating and situating the significance of their experiences. He illustrates this claim through examples from the Yoruba of Nigeria, where proverbs underscore the significance of names and their connections to cultural wisdom.

A person's name represents the character and way of life of a community, their experiences, histories, and aspirations. Therefore, a person's name greatly influences their personality. Furthermore, Gbenga argues that names are more than just identifiers for the Yoruba people; they are fundamental to human existence, experiences, and personhood. He concludes that, similar to descriptivist theories of reference in the philosophy of language—which hold that every name has a corresponding description—so do Yoruba proverbs and names. Obeng (2001) offers a similar perspective on Akan names, showing that they often reference the day, season, or circumstances of birth, functioning as cultural narratives embedded in morphology and semantics. Alford (1987, p. 30), in his cross-cultural study on names, explains: "[a]n economical theory of naming might suggest that names are bestowed upon children as a direct and pragmatic means of distinguishing one individual from another. But naming typically does much more than this. Often the naming of a child is given significant social meaning." Thus, the bestowal of a name signifies the child's membership in society and serves to announce legitimate paternity, suggesting that the child is a valid member of the community. Having a name may also entitle the infant to the protection of ancestors or inclusion in community rituals.

The marking of personhood and social identification is one of the most important reasons for naming in African societies. Naming differentiates humans from other living organisms, delineates one's soul, and plays a significant part in developing consciousness (Alford, 1987; Charles, 1951). Charles (1951, p. 35) elucidates:

> A new physical person seems to require a special designation; in a sense, it would be intolerable to have no name, to wander in limbo, a Being Without A Name, therefore with no clear existence. Naming gives one existence; makes him a part of the world of men; and dramatization bodies forth the significance and importance of this experience, and assists in casting the new person in an appropriate role in the drama of life.

In this sense, naming not only affirms existence but also symbolically welcomes the child into the community. In many African societies, this process follows a timetable and is accompanied by ceremonies and rituals such as libation pouring, putting drops of water and alcohol in the child's mouth, shaving the hair, circumcision, marking the body, and placing beads on the child's waist (Abubakari, 2020; Agyekum, 2006; Dakubu, 2000; Nwadiokwu et al., 2016). Furthermore, African scholars emphasize that names also reflect the circumstances of birth, family and clan bonds, pregnancy experiences, the setting or place of birth, and other subsequent occurrences, all of which influence the choice of names (Agyekum, 2006; Charwi, 2019; Egblewogbe, 1987; Lusekelo, 2018; Mutunda, 2016).

For instance, Charwi (2019) notes that naming in the Datooga of Tanzania is connected to specific events before a person's birth as well as what customs prescribe in that society. She asserts that naming is culture-specific and linked to social realities. As shown by the statistics and discussion, the Datooga nomenclature system is primarily a linguistic expression of social realism. Egblewogbe's (1987) research on "[t]he structure and function of Ghanaian personal names" found that for Ghanaian personal names—specifically the Akan, Dagbani, Dangme, Ewe, Ga, Waali, Dagaare, Gonja, and Kasem—an individual's name is connected with many events in their life, as well as those of kin and the greater social group. These occurrences span from conception to birth. They include issues during pregnancy (for instance, premenstrual conception, difficult pregnancy, prolonged stay in the womb—usually a year—abnormal delivery such as breech birth, and distinctive birth characteristics), reincarnated birth, day of birth, birth order, place of birth, and names marking special events.

Many African onomasticians researching various ethnic groups have widely attested that names in the African context are a treasured source of information and a vital strategy for conveying societal messages. Names have long been used to convey messages covertly or indirectly, often discussed under proverbial and allusive names (Adjah, 2011; Caesar, 2019; Musonda & Simwinga, 2019; Egblewogbe, 1987; Gilbert, 2010; Koffi, 2019). In this light, Batoma (2009) explains that for the Kabre of Northern Togo, the community uses names as a verbal strategy to express sentiments and opinions, especially in violence-laden situations. Gilbert (2010) likewise observes that until the early twentieth century, mothers in Akropong-Akwapim (Ghana) gave their children unique names that conveyed past suffering—both to protest and to serve as cautionary cues. According to Caesar (2019), such names contain inference elements and reflect the namer's thinking and feelings, while also having a positive or negative impact on the named.

Similarly, Obeng (2001) shows that Akan proverbial and allusive names operate as indirect speech acts, enabling name-givers to make veiled social commentaries, issue warnings, or express resistance in ways that are socially sanctioned yet potentially face-threatening if expressed directly. In Dangme society, for instance, allusive names are directed at a person or persons as a result of certain happenings, with the recipient(s) left to draw the connection (Caesar, 2019). Adjah (2011) notes that the Ewe of Ghana use allusive names to mock neighbours, kin, and friends. These names, whether proverbial or allusive, have no direct bearing on the child but depict the parents' perspectives on the role of humans in society, their connection with the supreme being, and the expectation that named children will adopt the virtues reflected in their names.

Madubuike (1976) also observes that some names in Igbo society serve as social mechanisms to convey messages, confront, caution, appeal, or respond to associates, foes, or rivals. He notes that such names are common in polygamous families. Rivals tend to consider the name as an indictment and a judgement against bad intentions, which can help minimise conflicts in family and society.

The above discussion underscores that African names are meaningful and crafted to reflect sociocultural realities. Although the semantic transparency and sociocultural basis of African names have been acknowledged, scholars such as Agyekum (2006), Akinnaso (1981), Ansu-Kyeremeh (2000), Dakubu (2000), Lusekelo (2018), Madubuike (1976), Mandende (2009), Nkamigbo (2019), Saarelma-Maunumaa (2003), and Sekyi-Baidoo (2019) observe changes in African anthroponymic systems leading to instances of semantic opaqueness. Obeng (2001) also notes similar shifts in Akan naming practices, where postcolonial influences, urbanisation, and intercultural contact have led to the adoption of less semantically transparent or foreign-derived names. Various arguments have been postulated, but they have been largely attributed to the growing complexity of African societies, intercultural interactions, and the postcolonial experience. This will be discussed further in section 3.4.

3.4 Changing African Anthroponymic Systems

The study of anthroponymic systems reveals past, present, and probably future information about a given society, as well as changes that may occur over time. Such names can, in fact, point to where societies are headed. In recent times, there have been discussions about the changing anthroponymic system of African societies. Obeng (2001) observes that African naming systems are deeply tied to socio-cultural identity and that shifts in these systems often mirror broader historical and cultural transformations. These changes are to be expected, given that African societies have histories of both internal interactions with neighbouring ethnic groups and external interactions through colonization after the arrival of the Arabs and Europeans. Such encounters introduced foreign cultural values and naming practices, often bringing shifts not only in naming conventions but also in the semantic and pragmatic functions of names. Wardhaugh (1992) theorises that language is always evolving and that this evolution is best explained by "both internal and external factors," as was the case with all social change. Thus, it is largely accepted that language contains the seeds of its own change. One manifestation of this change, particularly in naming, is described by Sekyi-Baidoo (2019, p. 383):

> whilst we busily proclaim and work within the concerns of the meaningfulness or semantic transparency of African and Asian names in particular (as against names of many Western societies), and as we apply these meanings to support other linguistic - semantic, syntactic, morphological, phonological, sociolinguistics and pragmatic studies - we also at the same time experience growing atrophication or decreasing importance of the lexical senses of African names in contemporary culture.

Such alterations would nevertheless manifest even in the absence of any outside influences because languages frequently adopt linguistic elements by borrowing from other languages. Nonetheless, it appears that language change is greatly affected by external factors. It is thus important to document these changes, as nomenclature systems remain one of the less researched aspects of anthropology in Sub-Saharan Africa (Herbert 1996). African scholars

have often overlooked the close connection between societal and cultural change—particularly those arising from cultural interaction—and transformations in naming systems. Yet, studying such changes may represent 'historical onomastics' or even 'dynamic onomastics' (Herbert 1996, 4; Saarelma-Maunumaa 2003, 10). Madubuike (1976, p. 13) explains the changes in the African anthroponymic system by stating:

> [f]oreign names have infiltrated into the continent, … Today many Africans answer to foreign names, mainly Christian and Moslem names. While originally these foreign names might have had definite meanings, they are not always given to the African with any particular consciousness of meaning. Many Christian names are derived from the Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Celtic and Teutonic tongues.

He sums up that the reason why Africans bear foreign names is linked to colonisation and the "civilising" exercise in Africa, which conveyed the idea that everything in Africa was undeveloped, barbaric, and ungodly. Additionally, he notes that, post-independence, many societies and nations in Africa changed their names. Examples of African nations that altered their names after gaining freedom include Ghana, Zambia, and Mali, among others. This claim is supported by several scholars (Kambon & Mireku, 2019; Lusekelo, 2018; Mandende, 2009), who point out that many Africans today give their children names that once belonged to their colonisers as a result of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Lusekelo (2018) reports that African societies have been in constant interaction with people from other cultures. This includes pre-colonial contacts with surrounding ethnic groups and foreigners, particularly European colonialists. As a result, African naming systems and their semantic imports have been influenced by these cross-cultural interactions. Therefore, by examining personal names, it may be possible to describe the effects of intercultural exchanges in African communities. Lusekelo examines how the Nyakyusa people's interactions with missionaries, colonists, and Swahili people have affected their given names. He establishes that naming practices resulting from contact between various cultures are visible in personal names.

Scholars note that religion is a key driver of changes in naming customs across African societies. Ikotun (2014) argues that the introduction of foreign religions such as Christianity disrupted indigenous naming systems, as seen among the Yoruba of Nigeria, while Resani (2016) observes a similar trend among the Bena of Tanzania, where parents' religious affiliations became central to name choice. Beyond religion, intercultural interactions also play a role. Sekyi-Baidoo (2019, 7) explains that although names were traditionally constructed with clear semantic or conceptual content, this awareness has diminished as societies became more complex or modernized, leading to names that are increasingly opaque in meaning. This perspective aligns with Nkamigbo's (2019) study of the Igbo, which shows that while names were once chosen to reflect cultural philosophy, contemporary practices are now shaped by external factors such as new religions, urbanization, and Western ideologies. Taken together, these studies suggest that religion, intercultural contact, and modernization intersect to reshape naming practices in Africa, often weakening the semantic transparency of traditional names.

Similarly, Saarelma-Maunumaa (2003) shows that the adoption of Christianity and the spread of European cultural elements have significantly altered the Ambo naming system in Namibia. Many traditional practices were replaced by European and Christian customs, leading not to a purely Europeanized system but to a new and dynamic one that blends African and European names. This reflects a broader trend across African societies, where changes in anthroponymic systems are common and often result from both internal and external influences—typical occurrences in all cultures. Overall, the literature highlights key issues such as the transparency and opacity of naming, African naming systems, and processes of change. The data on Safaliba names will be discussed within these themes, ensuring that the review enriches the study's analytical framework.

3.5 Theoretical Framework of the Research

This section presents the theoretical underpinnings within which the study of Safaliba names and nomenclature systems is situated. The framework guiding this research is grounded in linguistic anthropology—understood here as both a theoretical orientation and a methodological principle—offering a holistic lens for examining how language and culture intertwine in the naming process. While some scholars view linguistic anthropology as primarily methodological, others, including Duranti (1997) and several world-renowned linguistic anthropologists, employ the term "theory." This study adopts the more flexible usage, recognising its dual role in guiding both conceptual interpretation and methodological application. In line with this orientation, the section first outlines linguistic anthropology and its core concepts, then demonstrates how these ideas inform the present analysis. The emphasis is on the interpretive lens through which the data are understood, while methodological procedures are addressed in the following chapter.

3.6 Linguistic Anthropology and the Study of Names

Linguistic anthropology is an interdisciplinary field that studies how language shapes and reflects social reality. Drawing from both anthropology and linguistics (Duranti 1997; Foley 1997), it examines language through an anthropological lens, addressing issues such as cultural transmission, the relationship between language and social structures, and the ways in which cultural constructs influence perception. Its central concern is how language functions as a cultural resource, shaping communication, fostering social identity, and sustaining cultural systems. Hymes (1963, 277) defines it as "the study of speech and language within the context of anthropology," emphasizing its concern with the role of language in broader sociocultural environments and its function in creating and maintaining societal norms. Similarly, Duranti

(1997, 2) underscores its aim as uncovering cultural understandings by examining language—viewing language as a cultural resource and speaking as a cultural practice. This perspective resonates with Humboldt's idea that reality is embedded in language and that language and culture are inseparably intertwined.

Methodologically, linguistic anthropology draws on both linguistics and anthropology to explore language as a communicative tool and a reflection of social order. Studies typically focus on speakers in natural interaction, examining not only what is said but also what is left unsaid. Common methods include participant observation, personal interviews, focus group discussions, and audio-visual recording and transcription. This speaker-centered approach highlights language's dual capacity to create both homogeneity and heterogeneity within and across groups and cultures. As Windt-Val (2012) observes, language is an "essential part of the contents of our consciousness" that structures life, solves problems, and conveys feelings, memories, and experiences. Similarly, Foley (1997) emphasizes that anthropological linguistics examines language through the prism of culture, seeking to uncover the meaning behind the use, mis-use, or non-use of language in its various forms, registers, and styles. Language remains the central theoretical concern of linguistic anthropology because it is an indispensable tool for providing ethnographically grounded explanations of culture. As Duranti 1997, pp. 2-3) observes, focusing on language allows researchers to address fundamental anthropological topics "such as the politics of representation, the constitution of authority, the legitimation of power, the cultural basis of racism and ethnic conflict, the process of socialization, the cultural construction of the person (or self), the politics of emotion, the relationship between ritual performance and forms of social control, domain-specific knowledge and cognition, artistic performance and the politics of aesthetic consumption,

cultural contact and social change." While sociolinguists and dialectologists also study how people use language (Hudson, 1980), linguistic anthropology goes further by examining language as a representational resource through which individuals and groups construct identity.

3.7 The Usefulness of Linguistic Anthropology to the Current Research

From the above discussion of linguistic anthropology, it is evident that this study can be situated within this field. In the following discussion, I provide justification for the choice of this framework. This thesis falls within the domain of linguistic anthropology because it is based on the premise that people's language—in this case, their name utterances, cultural practices, and nomenclature systems—are closely connected. The study demonstrates how the Safaliba language is the fundamental lens through which Safaliba naming can be understood as an aspect of culture. Following Windt-Val (2012, p. 273), language is an "essential part of the contents of our consciousness" that structures our lives, helps solve problems, and expresses feelings, memories, and experiences.

While some may debate whether linguistic anthropology is a theory or a methodological principle, this study treats it as a framework that guides both analysis and interpretation. Linguistic anthropology is suitable because language is indexically rich and can evoke the realities of the Safaliba people, particularly as embedded in their naming and nomenclature systems. The heterogeneity of languages and naming patterns across societies underscores the need for a Safaliba-specific account. Safaliba names exhibit personal, spatial, temporal, and shared deixis. They are both referential and meaningful—not only to the bearer of the name but also to the name-giver, the wider Safaliba community, and others, including the Gonja,

Vagla, and neighbouring Mabia-speaking groups. Furthermore, personal names reveal patterns of thought and behaviour, reflect both expectations and lived realities, and demonstrate changes over time (see chapter six).

Mphande (2006, p. 107) argues that names are "words by which reality is known and spoken of, [and] are the most meaningful lexicon in the vocabulary of any language; they are an important part of the language inventory." Names reflect the environment, track differences in flora and fauna, and encode cultural knowledge. Similarly, Agyekum (2006, p. 210) notes that "[a] society's world is fitted to words and words may also be fitted to the world," highlighting the strong relationship between reality and language. Given intracultural variation, language reflects the diversity of customs and ways of living. One widely applied insight in anthropological linguistics is the distinction between *emic* (insider) and *etic* (outsider) perspectives (Pike, 1967), which this study applies through observation, interviews, focus group discussions, audio recordings, and transcription.

Naming reflects the interconnection between language, historical events, cultural practices, and worldview. Religion is a key component of Safaliba cultural systems, and many names are anchored in their ancestral-based traditional religion, Islam, and Christianity. The Safaliba believe in the omnipotent God (*Naamwini*), worshipped through deities or intermediaries, and this belief is reflected in their naming practices. This study is grounded in linguistic anthropology, which offers a holistic framework for understanding names as both linguistic and cultural expressions of identity. It emphasizes the interconnection between language and culture, demonstrating that names do more than label individuals—they reflect social circumstances, family ties, lineage, values, and cultural worldviews. Names construct identities

by shaping how individuals see themselves and are seen by others, and by negotiating identity in contexts of social change. For example, the adoption of Christian or Islamic names can signal religious affiliation, while the retention of indigenous names may express cultural pride.

Contemporary linguistic anthropology offers three interconnected concepts for understanding the role of language in culture: indexicality, performance, and participation (Duranti, 1997). Indexicality highlights how names point to and are shaped by personal, social, temporal, spatial, and cultural contexts. Performance emphasizes the symbolic and ritual acts involved in naming, showing its role beyond mere designation. Participation recognizes the active role of family and community members in the naming process. Together, these concepts demonstrate that names do more than label individuals—they reflect lived experiences, social values, and cultural identities. Silverstein (1976) defines indexes as signs with existential correlations to their referents, which may be personal, spatial, temporal, or shared, making them pragmatically meaningful. As Duranti (1997, p. 19) explains:

> "[to] say that words are indexically related to some 'object' or aspect of the world out there means to recognize that words carry with them a power that goes beyond the description and identification of people, objects, properties, and events. It means to work at identifying how language becomes a tool through which our social and cultural world is constantly described, evaluated, and reproduced."

Safaliba names encode semantic content with deep sociocultural underpinnings. Children are often named after respected individuals, whether living or deceased, including biological or distant relatives, exemplary community members, or ancestors believed to be reincarnated. Names such as *Nyaariba* (grandfather), *Nyaa* (grandmother), and *Naatogumah* (chief's namesake) illustrate personal deixis, often used to navigate social hierarchies and respect cultural norms (see chapter five under teknonyms). Spatial deixis, as in names like *Gbenfunaa* and *Manfulinaa*, marks the place of birth (anthro-toponyms), while temporal deixis, including *Dongo*, *Damba*, and *Narnyo*, reflects the time or season of birth (temporonyms). Social deixis

indicates family lineage, occupation, or status, as seen in appellations *sɔluŋbu*. Since Safaliba names carry sociocultural and historical significance, they are not arbitrary tags. Language functions as a carrier of culture and identity, allowing societies to express their worldviews.

Using methods from linguistic anthropology—focus group discussions, participant observation, and in-depth interviews—this study deduced the meanings and etymologies of Safaliba names. Names emerge as indexes reflecting personal, spatial, temporal, and shared sociocultural realities. By framing the research within linguistic anthropology—here understood as both a theoretical orientation and a methodological principle—this study accounts for the interwoven nature of language, culture, and identity in Safaliba naming practices. The typology and significance of Safaliba names (chapters four and five) not only reflect local societal norms, philosophy, and history but also resonate with naming practices in other Ghanaian and African languages, illustrating how language serves as a cultural resource across contexts (see Abubakari, 2020; Bisilki, 2018; Cheditey, 2019; Agyekum, 2006; Saarelma-Maunumaa, 2003; Batoma, 2009; Akinnaso, 1980; Chishiba, 2017; Charwi, 2019).

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the background, scholarly debates, and developments in onomastics from both global and African perspectives. Since antiquity, names have functioned as tools for indirect social communication. From Ancient Greece onward, they have attracted scholarly attention, with a central question being whether they serve a descriptive role or merely designate referents. The referential school views names as meaningless, while the descriptivist school considers them meaningful. African scholarship highlights the importance of examining

names within their specific cultural contexts, recognising the continent's societal heterogeneity. In these settings, names reflect personhood, social organisation, societal ideals, allusive strategies, circumstances of birth, and cultural preservation. Naming is often guided by established schedules, accompanied by rituals and ceremonies.

This study adopts a complementary perspective: while names are often meaningful, semantic opacity can arise. Shifts in anthroponymic systems—driven by internal interactions and external influences such as colonialism and introduced religions—have, in some cases, eroded semantic transparency. The chapter concluded by identifying linguistic anthropology as both the theoretical and methodological framework for this research, positioning names as indexes of sociocultural realities expressed through language.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methods and data sources on which the study's findings and conclusions are based. The research is an ethnographic investigation into the personal naming systems of the Safaliba people. Ethnography provides the methodological framework through which lived experiences, cultural meanings, and the dynamics of naming practices are examined from the perspectives of insiders. The chapter outlines the research setting (study area), participant selection, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, and analytical approaches. The study employs qualitative, inductive methods, supplemented by descriptive summaries to situate the findings within their broader research context.

4.2 Research Area

This research is an ethnographic investigation of Safaliba names and nomenclature systems. Safaliba speakers are reportedly found in both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire; however, this study was restricted to Ghana due to COVID-19 restrictions and challenges with cross-border access. In Ghana, the Safaliba people are primarily located in the southwestern part of the Savannah Region, within the Bole District. They inhabit twelve indigenous Safaliba-speaking communities, five of which are near extinction. The seven active communities are Mandari, Gbenfu, Manfuli, Nsunua, Tanyiri, Chorubawala, and Ntereso (Figure 3), while Jitenwini, Siguru, Sikiri, Wabile, and Wulasi are almost extinct but remain under Safaliba jurisdiction. The total population of Safaliba speakers is estimated at 5,000–7,000 (Schaefer, 2009; Eberhard et al., 2022).

Given the ethnographic orientation of this study, community selection was purposive, with an emphasis on capturing diversity in religious affiliation, intermarriage patterns, and cultural practices. Practical considerations of accessibility and security also informed the choice of study sites, particularly given the risks posed by illegal small-scale mining (commonly referred to as *galamsey*) in the district. Four communities—Manfuli, Gbenfu, Mandari, and Tangyiri—were selected because they provided the cultural and social contrasts necessary for exploring the dynamics of Safaliba naming practices.

Manfuli is a Safaliba-speaking community historically associated with the Gonja people. Through intermarriages between Gonja men and Safaliba women, Safaliba gradually became the dominant language of everyday interaction, while Gonja retained importance for ritual performance. The community is headed by the *Kadiwura* (literally, "owner of the community"), who combines political and spiritual authority. Manfuli has no mosque or church, and many inhabitants are farmers, hunters, or diviners, although some youths have recently taken up *galamsey*. Manfuli was selected for its unique cultural blend, particularly the intersection of Gonja patriarchy and Safaliba linguistic influence, which directly shapes naming practices.

Gbenfu is a multilingual community of indigenous Safaliba who have intermarried with Gonja, Losor, and Vagla groups. It is located within the Bole District and has both Safaliba and Gonja chiefs, a legacy of colonial indirect rule. Although historically rooted in traditional religion, many names in this community are now Islamic, reflecting religious change. Farming is the main occupation, though many youths are also engaged in *galamsey*. Gbenfu was selected for its religious and linguistic diversity, which significantly influences naming practices.

Mandari is the largest and oldest Safaliba community, located in the heart of Safaliba territory. It is religiously plural, with traditionalists, Christians, and Muslims, and ethnically diverse, including Safaliba, Gonja, Vagla, and Jula groups. Despite this diversity, Safaliba remains the language of daily interaction and ritual use. Like Gbenfu, Mandari has both a Safaliba chief (*Mandari Safalinaa*) and a Gonja chief (*Mandariwura*), a structure imposed during colonial rule. Intermarriages—especially between Vagla and Gonja—are common. Farming, hunting, shea nut collection, and cashew cultivation are the main livelihoods. Mandari was purposively selected for its religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, making it central to understanding naming variations.

Tangyiri is located southeast of Bole and is inhabited by a single family lineage. The community has survived depopulation caused by disease through intermarriage with Vagla, Gonja, and Dagaba groups. It remains predominantly traditionalist and is headed by the *Tangyiri Naa*. Farming and hunting are the main livelihoods. Unlike Manfuli, where language shift occurred, Tangyiri has preserved Safaliba as both the language of everyday life and ritual practice. Tangyiri was selected for its lineage-based homogeneity and cultural variability through intermarriage, providing a contrasting case to larger, more diverse communities.

Together, the four communities reflect the religious plurality, interethnic marriages, and cultural practices that shape Safaliba naming systems. This purposive selection allowed the study to capture ethnographic variability without resorting to statistical sampling. By juxtaposing heterogeneous and relatively homogeneous communities, the study was well positioned to examine how cultural forces and community structures influence Safaliba naming practices.

4.3 Research Design

A research design is the overall strategy that researchers adopt to logically and effectively address a research problem (Babbie, 2010; De Vaus, 2006). It outlines interrelated steps guiding a study from data collection through analysis and discussion of findings. The choice of research design depends on the research philosophy and the nature of the research problem, and careful planning is required to select methods tailored to the research questions. As Babbie (2010) notes, effectively answering research questions depends on adopting an appropriate philosophy and design. Reviewing methodological approaches used in similar studies can also inform a coherent research strategy. Philosophically, this study adopts an inductive approach, where data play an active role in theory development (Howell & Kent, 2021b, p. 9). According to Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996), an inductive research approach involves four key steps:

1. Investigate a phenomenon and delineate its attributes;
2. Explore these attributes in varied situations;
3. Analyse the resultant data to identify systematic patterns; and
4. Construct a theory once systematic patterns are discovered.

Aligned with an inductive orientation, this study is grounded in an interpretivist epistemology, which views knowledge as socially constructed and context-dependent. Rather than seeking objective generalizations, the research aims to understand how Safaliba names encode cultural meanings, social relationships, and lived experiences. To achieve this, the study adopts an ethnographic design, which is particularly suited for exploring cultural practices such as naming, emphasizing immersion, contextual understanding, and documentation of meaning as experienced by community members. This methodological orientation aligns with qualitative traditions in anthropology; as Duranti (1997) notes, ethnographic studies seek not only to

describe observed cultural patterns but also to explain why they exist and what they signify. Using qualitative and ethnographic methods, I engage closely with community members to interpret naming practices from within their cultural framework, ensuring that findings are culturally meaningful and grounded in lived realities.

The study relies primarily on qualitative data, supplemented by basic descriptive quantitative summaries to contextualize findings. Patton (2002) and Creswell (2017) note that qualitative studies can include simple numeric representations—often called "qualitative analysis of quantitative data"—to enhance understanding without shifting the study toward a quantitative paradigm. Babbie (2010) emphasizes that numbers in qualitative research serve purely descriptive purposes, illustrating patterns rather than testing hypotheses. Similarly, Kuckartz (2014) highlights that counts or frequencies can enrich qualitative data, supporting interpretation while preserving ethnographic insights. The methods employed—observation, in-depth and key informant interviews, and focus group discussions—capture rich narratives and cultural meanings from an insider perspective. This approach enables the research to authentically reflect community experiences and Safaliba voices, while the quantitative elements are used solely to provide contextual support.

4.4 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

In ethnographic research, sampling is guided not by statistical formulas but by the pursuit of information-rich cases that offer depth and cultural relevance (Patton, 2002; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Accordingly, this study adopted purposive sampling as the primary technique, emphasizing the selection of communities and respondents who could provide detailed insights into Safaliba naming practices. Four communities—Mandari, Gbenfu, Manfuli, and

Tangyiri—were purposively selected based on their diversity in family structures, religious affiliations, patterns of intermarriage, linguistic variations, and cultural practices. Practical considerations, including proximity to the researcher's base and security concerns in parts of the Bole District, also informed the selection. Collectively, these communities provide a range of contexts necessary to capture variability in Safaliba naming systems.

To ensure that participants were well-positioned to provide meaningful insights, the following inclusion criteria were applied: (1) must be a Safaliba speaker; (2) must be aged 15 years or older; (3) must have at least one parent who is a Safaliba speaker; and (4) must have lived in the sampled community for at least ten years. Respondents included chiefs, family heads, opinion leaders, key informants, youth and women's group leaders, and general community members, ensuring representation across social roles, age groups, and genders. In total, over 200 individuals participated across the four communities, including interviewees, focus group participants, and those engaged in informal conversations during fieldwork. The distribution reflected both community size and willingness to participate, but the emphasis remained on capturing a wide spectrum of voices rather than statistical representation. Purposive sampling enabled the study to prioritize cultural depth and variability, engaging respondents with diverse religious backgrounds, intermarriage experiences, and social positions, thereby capturing the complex ways in which Safaliba naming practices are maintained, adapted, and transformed.

4.5 Data Collection

The study adopted an ethnographic approach to data collection, designed to capture the lived experiences, cultural meanings, and dynamics of Safaliba naming practices. Ethnographic methods emphasize prolonged engagement in the field and the use of multiple, complementary techniques to document cultural phenomena. To enhance the credibility and validity of the findings, the study employed diverse data sources—including participant observation, key informants (such as elders, chiefs, and community experts), in-depth and semi-structured interviews, questionnaire interviews, focus group discussions, and freelists. This triangulation allowed for cross-checking of information, reduction of bias, and assurance that the findings reflected authentic and reliable representations of Safaliba naming practices. Together, these methods provided both depth and breadth: interviews and observations yielded rich ethnographic accounts, freelisting revealed broader patterns of cultural salience across participants, and questionnaires captured demographic and general trends.

4.5.1 Participant Observation

Observation formed the foundation of data collection, allowing the researcher to witness naming practices and related cultural activities in their natural context. Prolonged presence in the community enabled observation of rituals, ceremonies, and everyday interactions. Field notes documented the contexts in which names were used, the social roles of participants, and the cultural meanings attached to naming events. The researcher participated in ceremonies such as child-naming rituals, enskinment of chiefs, marriage ceremonies, and everyday community life. These opportunities for immersion deepened understanding of the symbolic and social dimensions of naming. Field notes, photographs, and audio-visual recordings complemented direct observation, providing a multi-layered record of practices and performances.

4.5.2 In-depth and Key Informant Interviews

In-depth and key informant interviews were conducted to gather detailed narratives and specialized insights into Safaliba naming practices. Semi-structured interview guides included questions on respondents' biographical details, family backgrounds, free listing of names, and perceptions of naming practices. A total of 213 interviews were carried out across the four communities, including key informants such as chiefs, elders, and opinion leaders who provided historical and contextual understanding of naming norms and practices. General community members were also interviewed to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives. Most interviews were prearranged, with some conducted opportunistically based on participant availability. Extensive note-taking and recordings documented emergent themes and contextual observations.

4.5.3 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Nine focus group discussions were conducted to capture collective perspectives and stimulate group reflection on naming practices. Groups were segmented by age, gender, and social roles, including male-only, female-only, mixed groups, and a group composed of a chief and his elders. Each discussion comprised 6–12 participants and lasted 60–90 minutes, consistent with established ethnographic practice (Hennink et al., 2020; Neuman, 2020). FGDs encouraged open and interactive discussion, enabling participants to share, compare, and debate their views. This revealed shared beliefs, contested ideas, and new insights. Two trained research assistants supported the sessions by taking notes and managing recordings, while the researcher moderated. Ground rules were explained at the outset to ensure a respectful and inclusive discussion environment.

4.5.4 Freelisting

The study employed freelisting (Weller and Romney 1988; Borgatti 1999) to identify the most salient categories of Safaliba names as recognized by community members. Participants were asked to list all the types of names they knew, which helped to map the cultural domain of naming and to determine the most frequently recalled categories. This method minimized researcher bias and foregrounded emic perspectives on what counts as most salient within the naming system. As a core method in cultural domain analysis, freelisting enables researchers to delineate domain boundaries, assess item salience, and examine variation in cultural knowledge across individuals and groups.

4.5.5 Questionnaire Interviews

Questionnaire interviews combined both structured and open-ended items. Structured items collected demographic information and broad patterns of naming practices, which were later summarized with descriptive statistics. Open-ended questions allowed participants to elaborate on their answers, ensuring that rich qualitative insights complemented quantitative summaries. This hybrid format provided both breadth and depth—capturing general trends while preserving cultural nuance (Bryman 2016; Creswell 2014).

4.5.6 Secondary Sources

Secondary data provided historical depth and supported triangulation, with registers from schools, health facilities, electoral offices, and birth and death records reviewed to examine naming patterns over time. These were supplemented by data from the District Planning Coordination Unit (DPCU), hospital attendance registers, and the Ghana Statistical Service's 2020 population and housing census, helping to contextualize local demographic patterns and

complement ethnographic findings. Comparative literature on naming practices among related groups—such as Kusasi, Konkomba, Birifor, Dagomba, Dagaba, and Kasena—further enriched the analysis (Abubakari, 2020; Bisilki, 2018; Cheditey, 2019; Dakubu, 2000; Nakuma, 2001; Kyiileyang, 2017; Awedoba, 1996, 2000). By integrating participant observation, in-depth and key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and secondary sources, the study provided a multi-layered understanding of Safaliba naming systems, enhancing the credibility, depth, and richness of the findings in line with ethnographic best practice.

4.6 Research Fieldwork

The fieldwork component of the study extended over one year, beginning with exploratory visits, identification of potential research sites, and research planning, and culminating in the main data collection phase. Between January and February 2020, a reconnaissance visit and preliminary data collection exercise were conducted, which included community outreach and the recruitment of reliable research assistants who were trained to assist with data collection. These preparatory activities were undertaken after obtaining approval from the University of Ghana Ethical Review Board. The main data collection occurred between April 2020 and January 2021. During this period, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and attended prearranged cultural events. The extended fieldwork allowed the researcher to build trust with participants, respond flexibly to emerging themes, and refine research instruments iteratively as new insights unfolded. This iterative engagement, central to the ethnographic design, enabled the study to capture the depth, authenticity, and contextual nuances of Safaliba naming practices.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

In conducting this study, established ethical principles and codes of conduct were strictly observed. Ethical issues can arise at multiple stages of research, including data collection, processing, and dissemination, particularly in qualitative studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Addressing these considerations is essential for ensuring the credibility and integrity of the research. At the University of Ghana, it is standard practice to obtain approval from the Ethical Review Board prior to commencing fieldwork. For this study, the required documentation was submitted five weeks before the proposed start date, and approval was subsequently granted, ensuring that the rights and dignity of all research participants were fully protected. The research was conducted responsibly and ethically (Blumberg & Schindler, 2005), with key measures including obtaining informed consent from all participants, guaranteeing voluntary participation, and safeguarding anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study. The informed consent form used in this research is attached to the questionnaire (see Appendix A).

4.8 Data Processing and Analysis

Following fieldwork, data processing began with the transcription of tape-recorded interviews. Field notes and other collected materials were carefully reviewed for errors, omissions, and gaps, after which the data were coded and summarized. To ensure confidentiality, field notes were stored securely, and digital files were maintained in password-protected folders.

The study employed qualitative content and thematic analysis to process and interpret the data. Observation notes, interview transcripts, focus group discussion records, and other materials were systematically coded into themes derived from the research questions and objectives. Although open coding, axial coding, and constant comparison are formally associated with grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), these techniques are widely applicable in

ethnographic research. They provided a systematic way to organize and interpret field data while preserving participants' perspectives and cultural meanings (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Kondracki & Wellman, 2002; Patton, 2002; Weber, 1990).

Analysis proceeded inductively: open coding of participants' expressions was followed by grouping through axial coding and refinement via constant comparison. This iterative process facilitated identification of key mechanisms influencing naming practices—such as religious change, intermarriage, and language shift—across communities, age groups, and genders. To enhance analytical rigor, memo-writing was employed to document emerging interpretations, explore rival explanations, and capture reflective insights. Negative case analysis was conducted to examine exceptions that did not fit emerging patterns, refining and validating the findings.

Finally, triangulation across multiple data sources—including key informant and in-depth interviews, observations, focus groups, and documentary records—strengthened the credibility, depth, and trustworthiness of the results. All data were transcribed, coded, and thematically analyzed to identify the typology, social functions, and evolving patterns of Safaliba personal names (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.9 Chapter Summary

The chapter discussed the methodology adopted in this research, outlining the research area and target population, the research design and approach, data collection techniques, ethical considerations, and data processing and analysis. The study was primarily ethnographic, with descriptive quantitative elements included solely to provide contextual support (Patton, 2002; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Babbie, 2010; Kuckartz, 2014), used only to describe patterns and complement the qualitative analysis without imposing statistical inference. Purposive sampling was employed to select research communities and participants, ensuring cultural diversity and the inclusion of information-rich cases. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth and key informant interviews, and focus group discussions, complemented by relevant secondary sources. Following data collection, transcripts, field notes, and recordings were coded thematically, and qualitative content analysis was used to identify patterns and emergent themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Weber, 1990). Findings were then interpreted and substantiated with existing theoretical insights, ensuring both depth and credibility in the presentation of Safaliba naming practices.

CHAPTER FIVE

SAFALIBA NAMING RITUALS, TYPOLOGY OF NAMES, AND THEIR SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the first and second research questions. It examines Safaliba naming rituals, the typology of names, and their social significance. These are discussed collectively because naming is a powerful statement about becoming and being human—a marker of transition from a non-human existence to incorporation and acceptance within the Safaliba community. Naming rites transcend the mere act of name-giving, encompassing rituals that potentiate the conferral of a name on a neonate. They serve important social purposes aimed at ensuring 'safe' transitions in the Van Gennep sense. These rites involve complex processes that consider the pre-life stage, the role of ancestors and deities in becoming and being, and the participation of family and community.

With regard to typology, Safaliba personal names are classified based on shared features such as sociocultural significance and linguistic configuration. The discussion covers both indigenous and contemporary names, including those borrowed from other languages and foreign religions. The semantic content of names and other linguistic features that emerge are examined. Literal translations, contextual meanings, and etymological and ethnographic descriptions of personal names are also provided.

5.2 Safaliba After Birth Rituals and Naming Ceremony

This section examines the cultural practices surrounding childbirth and the conferment of names among the Safaliba. Naming is not treated as an isolated act but as part of a broader cycle of after-birth rituals that reflect beliefs about life, health, spirituality, and social integration. The discussion is therefore divided into two parts. The first focuses on after-birth rituals and practices, highlighting how they safeguard both mother and child, reinforce communal solidarity, and establish a connection with ancestral spirits. The second part explores the naming ceremony itself, showing how names are selected, announced, and celebrated, as well as the social, spiritual, and linguistic meanings that these names carry. Together, these sub-sections demonstrate that naming is embedded in ritual processes that affirm identity, continuity, and belonging within Safaliba society.

5.2.1 After Birth Rituals

This refers to the period preceding the actual naming ceremony. It is characterised by numerous rituals and practices aimed at protecting the mother and child, both physiologically and spiritually. Among the Safaliba, the priority after a child's birth is to safeguard the health of both mother and newborn. Traditionally, this responsibility falls to the Traditional Birth Attendant (TBA), known as *Osire* ("collector"). After a successful delivery, several rituals and practices precede the naming ceremony. These include cutting the umbilical cord, bathing the child, announcing the birth, and burying the placenta and blood. All are rooted in the community's belief system, and the ensuing discussion describes each in detail.

Upon the child's birth, it is the paternal aunt's duty to provide the necessary items for the afterbirth rituals and the naming ceremony. If she is unavailable, the paternal grandmother assumes this role. These items include *chi* (millet), *samani* (black pepper), *nua* (chicken), *kangari* (shea butter), *chone* (shea nut), *pɔse* (cola nut), *pulongu* (shaving knife), and *fanfanu* (soap). Each plays a specific role in the Safaliba naming process, as will be discussed in the following sections.

Because the health of both mother and child is paramount, a peppery chicken soup is prepared for the mother to aid recovery from labour pains. *Samani* (black pepper), added to the soup, is believed to "heal" or "cool the sore" (*ku nantere* or *maa nantere*). The chicken provides protein for rebuilding tissues in the reproductive system. The mother also bathes in hot water to relieve pain and aches. *Chi* (millet) and *kangari* (shea butter) are combined to prepare *baga*, a special porridge believed to stimulate breastmilk production.

For the newborn, millet and black pepper are placed beside the head of the bed as symbols of the Safaliba's agrarian identity. This is believed to instil a spirit of hard work as the child grows. For female infants, shea nuts are added to represent expected gender roles, since Safaliba women engage in shea nut picking and butter making—tasks traditionally assigned to women. Shea butter, beyond its domestic and cosmetic uses, has become a commercial product in recent times. In addition, *samani* (black pepper) is chewed and spat onto the baby's head to prevent *zu hensei* (macrocephaly) and promote strength and health.

After delivery, the umbilical cord is cut by the TBA to physically separate the baby from the placenta. While modern medicine explains cord-cutting in biological terms, the Safaliba attach symbolic meaning to the procedure: the placenta is believed to embody a spiritual connection between the child and the other world. Thus, cutting the cord is understood as severing that link and marking the child's transition into the human community. The placenta itself, along with the delivery blood, is buried to prevent it from falling into the wrong hands, as it is believed that evil persons could use it to harm the child. Burying the placenta also establishes a spiritual bond between the child, the land, and the ancestors, affirming that the child belongs to the Safaliba society. For male children, three women undertake this task; for female children, four women are required. The placenta and blood are usually buried behind the house or bathhouse in places where water collects, as such locations are thought to repel evil spirits. This practice also symbolises the belief that a child is tied to the land—born on it, sustained by it, and ultimately returned to it in death.

The ritual bathing of the child follows, symbolising the washing away of evil spirits that may have accompanied the child from the spiritual world. Since the child is regarded as a *saana* (visitor) from afar, this bath is also an act of welcome. The paternal aunt usually performs the ritual; in her absence, the paternal grandmother or another elderly woman of good character may take her place. The TBA may also do so if the parents wish. The bather's moral character is considered crucial, as it is believed the child may acquire the traits of this person—similar to how a name influences character. If the bather is believed to possess witchcraft, it could be passed to the child. Poor bathing or lack of affection during this ritual is thought to cause the child to develop an unpleasant body odour. After bathing, shea butter is melted and applied to the navel to ease umbilical cord detachment and to massage the baby for healthy skin.

Traditionally, men are prohibited from being present during childbirth. Only after the umbilical cord is cut, the child is bathed, and the placenta is buried is the father officially informed of the child's birth. He then announces the delivery to selected family and community members.

5.2.2 The Naming Ceremony

The naming ceremony is an obligatory ritual that publicly marks the birth of a child among the Safaliba. It is celebrated by the parents, immediate family, and the wider community. The ceremony welcomes the newborn into society, symbolising that the child belongs not only to the parents but also to the entire community. While naming practices differ across societies, their universal function is incorporation into society (Van Gennep, 1960). As Alford (1988, p. 2) notes:

> [b]ut while children in all societies are named, naming practices vary dramatically from society to society. In some societies, individuals receive a single given name, while in others, individuals receive one or more given names, along with one or more patronyms, matronyms, or surnames. Names are bestowed according to a rigid timetable in some societies; while in others, weeks, months, or even years may pass before a child is given a name.

Among the Safaliba, the ceremony is traditionally called *zu puni*, literally "head shaving." It is also referred to as *suuna*, a Hausa loanword meaning "a name" or "naming ceremony" introduced through Islam. Though the terms are often used interchangeably, their use reflects religious orientation: non-Muslims generally prefer *zu puni*, while Muslims use *suuna*. The non-Muslim *zu puni* differs slightly from the Muslim *suuna*. This thesis, however, is limited to how the Safaliba originally performed the naming ceremony before the introduction of Islam and Christianity (i.e., pre-Islamic and pre-Christian practices). For Safaliba adherents of Islam or Christianity, the traditional *zu puni* may be combined with religious ceremonies, but such blended forms fall outside the scope of this study.

The naming ceremony is performed once the newborn's umbilical cord has fallen off, usually within a week of birth. It lasts about 15–20 minutes and is held in the forecourt of the *zaka kpengu* (family house). On the eve of the ceremony, reminders are sent to family and friends. The paternal aunt plays a central role: she provides the *pulongu* (shaving knife) and holds the child throughout the ceremony, including during the shaving of the hair and, if the child is male, depending on the child's sex, the naming ceremony consists of either three or four stages. For females, the sequence is: *zu punni* (shaving of the head), *yo bingri* (bestowal of the name), and *zukoba beya ummb* (burial of the bad hair). For males, the sequence includes four stages: *zu punni*, *yɔ ngmaabu* (circumcision), *yo bingri*, and *zukoba beya ummb*. The rituals are summarised in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1: Summary of Naming Ceremony Rituals

Ritual	Male	Female
zu punni (head shaving)	Yes	Yes
yɔ ngmaabu (circumcision)	Yes	No
yo bingri (naming)	Yes	Yes
zukoba beya ummb (burial of bad hair)	Yes	Yes

The *zu puni* begins with guests assembling at the forecourt of the family house, seated in a horseshoe shape. Once everyone is gathered, the *Kupo* (master of ceremony) requests that the child be brought forward. A "responsible" woman, usually the paternal aunt, carries the child to the centre and sits with the child on her lap. Beside her are a calabash of water and the *pulongu*. An elder uses the knife to shave off the child's hair, which is called *zukoba beya* ("bad hair"). This ritual is mandatory and highly valued in the Safaliba tradition. Although simple, it carries deep symbolic meaning. The shaving of the *zukoba beya* represents purification from the "bad hair" (*naate*), which is believed to hinder growth. It also marks the child's transition from being a *saana* (stranger) to becoming a recognized member of the community. In addition,

the act detaches the child from the spirit world; the burial of the shaved hair, together with a cola nut, symbolizes entrusting the child to the earth priest, who performs protective rituals. The rite further signifies unity between the child's families and is believed to aid healthy development by cleansing impurities carried from the spirit world.

To conclude the ritual, the paternal aunt, who holds the child, washes the hair into a calabash. However, shaving is postponed during the harmattan season (November–March) to protect the child from cold and dryness; the hair is removed after the season to fulfil custom. For male children, circumcision (*yɔ ngmaabu*) follows immediately after hair shaving. Traditionally carried out by a circumciser (*yɔrgmaara*, literally "penis cutter"), sometimes called *wanzam* (borrowed from Hausa), the procedure symbolizes cleanliness. Though borrowed from Islam, it is also considered a preventive measure against infection and disease, as removal of the foreskin facilitates proper washing before prayer. After hair shaving and circumcision, the circumciser receives *pɔse* (cola nut), *pulongu* (shaving knife), *fanfanu* (soap), and money in appreciation. This is followed by *yo bingri* (name-giving). The child's name (*yoori*) may be chosen before birth, often based on the circumstances of birth, but it is publicly announced on the day of outdooring by the paternal aunt. During the *yo bingri*, the aunt lifts the child and announces the name aloud—three times for a boy, four for a girl—after which the child is formally known by that name and patronym. Well-wishes follow, and relatives present gifts to support the child's upbringing. The *Kupo* (master of ceremony) requests continued support from family and community, underscoring the communal responsibility for raising the child. Parents may also host a feast, during which guests wash their hands together in a calabash, symbolizing unity and collective responsibility for the child's future. Songs are performed in

praise of God, to recall family lineage, and to express hopes for the child's survival and growth into a responsible adult.

Beyond the exceptions of divination-derived names, Safaliba naming practices encode cultural, social, and moral meanings. Names often commemorate ancestors, reflect the circumstances of birth, or carry spiritual significance, such as those linked to deities like *Gbolo*, who aids childless couples. Other names convey lessons about life, morality, and survival, guiding behaviour and reinforcing societal values within the community. The final rite—the burial of the *zukoba beya* (bad hair)—is private. The hair, together with the water from handwashing and, in the case of boys, circumcision blood, is buried discreetly, usually behind the house or bathhouse, where water collects. As with afterbirth blood and the placenta, secrecy prevents "evil people" from using it for harm. The burial further symbolizes detachment from the spirit world and incorporation into human society.

5.3 The Social Significance of Naming among the Safaliba People

Alford (1988, p. 1) observes that "[i]n all societies, individuals typically receive a name or a set of names, and in no society are names applied unsystematically or randomly," highlighting that naming practices are conventionalized. Questions such as when an infant is named, by whom, and whether the naming is private or public, are culture-specific. While naming is a cultural universal, the practices surrounding it are always particular to a community. Personal names function as markers of identity, distinguishing one person from another (Agbedor & Johnson, 2005). In Safaliba, a name (*yoori*) is polysemic, extending beyond a symbolic label of identity to encompass a person's attributes. Idiomatic expressions such as *o so yoori* ("he/she has a name") and its negation *o ba so yoori* ("he/she has no name") denote a person of honour

versus one without, thereby reflecting the cultural weight attached to names. This resonates with Dagaaba usage, where idioms reveal "both the range of attributes which a name-bearer can have and the somewhat philosophical posture which the Dagao adopts vis-à-vis names and naming" (Nakuma, 2001, p. 2).

The first significance of naming lies in establishing personhood. Society plays a central role in conferring personhood (Fortes, 1987). Safaliba cosmology situates humans at the apex of a hierarchy of living beings (*boŋkaarısı*), above animals and plants. Humans are thought to embody four elements—soul (*sıaŋ*), body (*ıŋŋa*), blood (*zıŋ*), and bones (*kɔba*). Animals share body, blood, and bones but lack a soul; plants rank still lower. To count as a full person, one must demonstrate reasoning (*nfɛrɛ*), morality (*hakıla*), and kin recognition (*dɔgırı*). Some beings, such as spirit children (*alizinisi/alizina*) or snake-born infants (*waafuru*), though born human, are seen as lacking full personhood (Fortes, 1987; Goody, 1972; Rattray, 1932; Awedoba & Denham, 2014).

Naming thus marks the passage from potential life to full social personhood. Ansu-Kyeremeh (2000, pp. 21–24) notes that at the naming ceremony (*abadinto*), "the child's humanness and individual identity is confirmed with the symbolism of a name." Similarly, Dakubu (2000, p. 53) observes that "[t]he initial naming of a child shortly after birth can be regarded as a public announcement of the child's birthright as a member of a recognized group." Until this moment, a child is regarded as a *saana* (visitor), still tied to the spirit world. Ritual gestures—such as touching the child's tongue with water and honey to symbolize truthfulness—reinforce the rite's moral and spiritual weight. Comparable beliefs across Mabia cultures (e.g., Kusasi, Dagomba, Likpakpaanl, Sisaali) hold that the unnamed child remains an outsider until a name affirms life, acceptance, and identity.

Beyond establishing personhood, Safaliba personal names encode social roles, responsibilities, and biological distinctions, while also reflecting broader cultural interactions, including influences from neighbouring groups and religions. Names communicate beliefs, kinship, occupations, sex-specific attributes, and local geography. They may commemorate historical events, political happenings, or circumstances of birth, and often signal family lineage, royal descent, or ancestral vocation. In this way, naming situates individuals within both immediate and extended social networks, linking personal identity to communal life and historical memory.

In many African societies, a name is perceived as an important indicator of the bearer's character and a pointer to the name-bearer's past, present, and future. In the Safaliba context, the 'past' often refers to ancestry or reincarnation (*sigiri*), the 'present' to social identity and lived status, and the 'future' connotes destiny or expected life achievements. Names also carry moral force. The Safaliba adage *ba ba kota nira yo beru* ("we do not assign a bad name to a person") reflects the emphasis on conferring good names, while the proverb *yo bɛru ture ʊ suba* ("a bad name follows its bearer") underscores the lasting moral consequences of naming. Bad names (*yobɛya*), are avoided due to associations with misfortune. As one respondent recounted:

> As far as names are concerned, they follow the bearer. I will refrain from mentioning a name. My maternal aunt—my mother's junior sister, *Maabile* [literally small mother]—bore that name and lived a miserable life. She remained childless throughout her life. It is a bad name. (Personal communication, December 2020).

When asked for the name, she revealed it was *Cheŋzaala* (walk alone), and remarked, "Have you recently heard someone addressed as such?"

Where potentially harmful meanings must be invoked, indirection is used to deflect negativity. For example, the name *Banaya* ("they will get tired") is derived from *Hariba na ya* ("my enemies will get tired"), using the plural pronoun *ba* ("they") to distance the bearer from hostile forces. This practice reflects key ideas in linguistic anthropology: names are more than labels—they index personal and social experience, convey identity and fate, and perform social meaning.

Anthropologically, birth and naming are integral to the life cycle of rites of passage—birth, adulthood, marriage, eldership, and ancestorship. Van Gennep (1960) conceptualized these transitions as phases of separation, liminality, and incorporation. In Safaliba thought, the naming rite performs precisely this work: it separates the infant from a pre-social or spiritual state, holds the child in a liminal stage until naming, and then incorporates the child into kinship and community. The belief that a person only "comes into existence" when named explains why unnamed children are excluded from funeral rites. The process typically involves the father and close paternal kin, though grandparents and respected elders often influence the choice. Children may be named after relatives or honourable figures, with the hope of transmitting their virtues. Gender plays a role in naming, though some names are neutral, particularly those associated with infant-death prevention, theophoric references, or circumstances of birth. If an infant cries persistently after being named, it may be interpreted as a sign of spiritual incompatibility. In such cases, the child is often renamed after a deceased relative believed to have "returned," reflecting the Safaliba belief in reincarnation (*sigiri*).

Viewed through the lens of linguistic anthropology, Safaliba naming illustrates both indexicality and performance. Names index kinship, social position, cosmology, and moral

standing, while the ceremony itself enacts the severing of ties with the spirit world and the child's entry into society. Names are thus not mere labels but speech acts with tangible social consequences: they inscribe identity, assert belonging, and shape destiny. This aligns with Obeng's (1998) analysis of Akan naming as pragmatic action, where names negotiate face, encode evaluation, and deflect harm through indirection. In Safaliba practice, naming affirms ties to ancestors and deities, integrates the child into kinship and community, and performs the collective memory and moral vision of the people.

5.4 Typology of Safaliba Personal Names

Having discussed the rituals and social significance of naming, the next step is to examine the typology of Safaliba names. Personal names encompass both indigenous and adopted first and last names. First names are given at birth, while last names (or surnames) often function as patronyms, indicating family lineage or descent. The concept of personal names also extends to appellations, teknonyms, nicknames, and other linguistic forms used to refer to an individual.

The typology of Safaliba names reflects the philosophy and value system of the people. Naming draws on beliefs in deities who serve as intermediaries to the Supreme Being (*Naawmini*), the natural environment, moral lessons, daily struggles for survival, and the circumstances of birth. These factors shape the rationale and symbolism embedded in names. It is important to note that naming patterns vary across societies; the rules governing one cultural system cannot be generalized universally. Naming practices are shaped by social institutions and by economic, political, and environmental factors. While cross-cultural parallels exist, placing naming systems in universal terms risks flattening their cultural particularities. Thus, any analysis of Safaliba names must be grounded in local patterns and diversity.

The indigenous Safaliba naming system encodes history, social organization, belief systems, values, and economy. Names often derive from proverbs or birth circumstances, similar to the Ewe, where names symbolize the context of birth and the philosophy of the people (Agbedor & Johnson, 2005). This contrasts with the Ga system, in which personal names are largely predetermined by seniority, sex, lineage, or clan, though adjustments may be made in special cases (Odotei, 1989). Traditionally, consultation with a diviner was crucial in Safaliba naming, similar to the Kusasi practice. As Abubakari (2020, p. 26) observes, "the consultation of a soothsayer and the performance of rituals are often critical in the determination of most personal names among the Kusasi. The belief in divine intervention is deeply rooted in all aspects of the lives of the people and commonly manifested in their naming practices.

The choice of a Safaliba personal name is never random. It is shaped by life experiences, aspirations, belief systems, cosmological views, daily struggles for sustenance, and the circumstances of birth. Names also signal biological distinctions (male/female), social roles, and communal responsibilities. Indigenous Safaliba names are carefully selected, with a strong emphasis on choosing a good name, since names are believed to influence character and destiny. A personal name is viewed as the "window to the soul"; hence, names with negative connotations are generally avoided, though some are employed strategically to avert misfortune. Similarly, among the Igbo, parents exercise caution in selecting names due to their spiritual implications for a child's destiny (Okagbue et al., 2017). Likewise, Nakuma (2001) notes that among the Dagaaba, personal names encode worldview, social organization, and cultural philosophy.

Safaliba personal names can be grouped into the following categories: family names; appellative and community-specific names; proverbial names; circumstantial names; temporal and festive names; reincarnate names; theophoric names; day names; order-of-birth names; flora- and fauna-inspired names; nicknames; teknonyms; and names influenced by foreign religions or ethnic groups.

5.4.1 Family, Community-specific and Appellative Names

Some family and community-specific Safaliba names derive from proverbs, though proverbial names are treated separately in this chapter. Certain names are associated with specific Safaliba communities; for example, *Manwo*, *Torsige*, *Kamwinibasagi*, *Mmiri*, *Kapori*, *Natoki*, *Kuubu*, *Saadaari*, and *Taapoye* with Mandari; *Basaa*, *Buribuah*, *Kirbaani*, and *Basiba* with Gbenfu; and *Kamwinibasagi* and *Taapoye* with Tangyiri. The reasons for this distribution are not entirely clear but may relate to ancestral heritage or clan ties. While the use of family names is common in many cultures, it is not universal: in some societies, surnames signal genealogical relations, whereas others use mononyms or different naming systems. Sjöblom (2012, p. 131) notes that:

> [t]he terms surname, family name or last name can be defined as a byname which is situated after the individual's main name, that is, first name – or given names – in a first name and surname combination. A surname is a hereditary byname or meant to be hereditary according to certain rules in a family, and it can be determined in different cultures in different ways.

The structure of Safaliba names differs significantly from American and European naming systems. Britto (1986) notes that in the United States, family names are obligatory, so every individual is identified by both a first and a last name. In contrast, the Safaliba do not traditionally use family names. Instead, families are distinguished by their appellations

(*sɔluŋbu*), which serve as primary markers of group identity, genealogy, and occupation (appellations will be discussed in detail later). A Safaliba person's identity is tied to the father, and the standard naming system consists of a first name and a patronym—the father's given name—which functions as a surname in formal contexts. Traditionally, there is no lexeme for "surname" in Safaliba. A person may have one or more given names but no family name, and identification is usually based on the first name; when distinction is necessary, the patronym is added. Within extended families, if two people share the same name, the suffix *-kpengo* ("big/elder") or *-bile* ("small/younger") is attached to differentiate them—for example, Banaya-*kpengo* (Senior Banaya) and Banaya-*bile* (Junior Banaya).

Thus, a person's identity is constituted by their own given name and that of their father. Patronyms function as the traditional means of authenticating paternity. Biliski (2018) reports similar findings among the Bikpakpaam, where children adopt the father's first name as a surname. As a result, personal names in Bikpakpaam "individuate more than they perform a group marker function," and they overlap across clans and dialects, so an individual's name alone rarely specifies clan roots or place of origin (Bisilki, 2018, p. 19). By contrast, the Ga and Akan mark genetic relations explicitly through the use of family names (Odotei, 1989; Agyekum, 2006).

In recent years, some Safaliba people, particularly those with formal education, have made a concerted effort to preserve family names. Modern bureaucratic systems require individuals to provide a surname in addition to their given name, which has encouraged the use of compound names combining the father's and grandfather's names, often hyphenated. For example, if my father is Bodua and his father is Mango, my surname becomes *Bodua-Mango*, indicating that I am Bodua's daughter and Mango's granddaughter. The adoption of family names, beyond

signaling family identity, has been influenced by formal education as well as foreign religions and cultures. Nakuma (2001, p. 12) reports a similar development among the Dagaaba, noting that "the two-name system was imposed by formal education."

As noted earlier, appellations serve as key markers of group identity among the Safaliba. In addition, community-specific names indicate origins in particular Safaliba-speaking communities. Thus, Safaliba people use both appellations and community-specific names to signal personal identity and group belonging. By "community-specific names" I refer to indigenous Safaliba personal names that mark group identity and can be traced to specific communities. These names demonstrate that personal names are not mere labels but carry personal and social significance, often linked to kinship. For instance, *Kirbaani* is traceable to Gbenfu, while *Manwo*, *Torsige*, and *Bonkoregi* are associated with Mandari. Other names, however, are pan-Safaliba in distribution. In what follows, I discuss selected community-specific names, highlighting their meanings, literal translations, etymologies, and ethnographic contexts.

Manwo –"I love"

This community-specific name is proverbial, derived from the saying *Dogire man wo an wa lebe ma ka*, which translates as "It is because of my love for my relations that I ended up like this." The proverb implies that excessive devotion to kin can undermine one's own wellbeing. The name thus comments on the dangers of overcommitment, teaching that one must be cautious even in dealings with close relatives. Bearers of this name can be traced to Mandari, specifically the Naaweri clan, one of the earliest families to settle in Mandari and holders of the chieftaincy position to this day. The name has since been anglicised as "Mango."

Torsige – "Head-pad"

This name derives from the proverb *Gosia tosige maali kun too*, literally "a red-thorn head-pad can be made but cannot be used to carry a load." It advises against plotting evil against others, for only the will of God (*Dagaa*) ultimately prevails. Since destiny (*yelwa*) is believed to be predetermined, no one can alter it except through God's will. While witches (*sɔnba*) may attempt to interfere with a person's destiny, ancestors are expected to intervene. Thus, *Torsige* expresses confidence in divine and ancestral protection. This name is traced to Mandari.

Kamwinibasagi – "If God does not permit"

Derived from *Ka mwini basagi*, literally "without God, nothing is successful," this name reflects belief in the supremacy of the Creator (*Naamwini*), who protects the living. It expresses dependence on divine will. The name occurs in both Mandari and Tangyeri.

Goli – "Raise"

This name is associated with the Goliwere clan of Mandari. It reflects the agrarian character of the Safaliba people and their hospitality. Historically, the Goliwere provided food for visitors to Mandari, and the name emphasizes care for others. Clan members are also known as healers specializing in bone-setting, receiving and treating the injured from surrounding communities.

Tingbani – "The land god"

This is the name of a deity who protects Safaliba lands. *Tingbani* shrines are typically located in groves or bushes between Mandari and Tangyeri. These sacred places are visited only by the *Tingbanasuba* (Earth Priest) to consult the gods on matters such as rain, fertility, protection against plagues, and the wellbeing of the people. Variants of the name include *Tiffu* and *Mwini*.

Kolige – "Stream"

Derived from the proverb *sɔrikon na pali kolige* ("it is the water on the road that fills the stream"), this name originates in Mandari. It also functions as a circumstantial name, given to children born by a stream or just after their mother returned from one. The proverb emphasizes that small contributions accumulate into something significant, akin to the English adage "little drops of water make a mighty ocean." The name conveys the lesson that even seemingly minor things can eventually become valuable.

Kirbaani – "Yam porridge"

This name comes from the proverb *Kirbaani kun di suru* ("yam porridge is not eaten in anger"). *Kirbaani* is a staple dish, eaten hot, which must be consumed slowly and carefully. The name therefore teaches patience and carefulness in all endeavors: success requires perseverance, while haste leads to failure. This name is traceable to Gbenfu.

Koriyɔku – "Hook, release it" (Humility)

The saying *kori yoo ku* refers to removing a thorn from the flesh gradually, since doing so hastily causes more pain. The name symbolizes humility, patience, and flexibility, virtues considered essential for success in Safaliba society. It also conveys the interdependent nature of the community, where arrogance undermines social support and cooperation.

Tibe – "Let us be"

This name, associated with Mandari, advises peaceful coexistence. It reflects the belief that peace fosters progress and development in all aspects of life.

The above examples illustrate community-specific names among the Safaliba. Although family names are not traditionally used, such names, together with appellations, serve as markers of both personal and group identity.

5.4.1.1 Appellative Names

Appellations are names other than a person's given name and may also be referred to as honorifics, titles, or praise names. They can designate families, clans, or individuals and are often based on personal or societal accomplishments. In many African societies, appellations serve as an important means of identifying and distinguishing people, families, and ethnic groups. As noted earlier, Safaliba families are identified primarily by their appellations. Agyekum (2006, p. 222) observes that in Akan society, "[s]ome other names are achieved outside people's given names," including titles conferred through occupation, battle, or stool succession. Similarly, in Safaliba society, appellations function as markers of identity, lineage, and achievement, complementing the given name to convey social and cultural significance.

In a qualitative interview conducted in January 2020, an elder explained that "ethnic groups, clans, and families are known by their *sɔluŋbu* appellation." He further noted that appellations serve as a window into a person's character—good or bad—and reveal one's potential, status, occupation, and accomplishments. For example, the current Safaliba chief (*Safalinaa*) of Mandari is addressed by the appellation *Jara* ("Lion"), which praises his bravery by comparing him to the lion.

Dakubu (2000), in her study of "Personal names of the Dagomba," notes that many titles are used to address individuals who hold positions in society or have notable achievements. Similarly, among the Safaliba, titles and appellations mark persons of status, particularly leaders; for example, *Naa* ("chief") or *suba* ("owner") are suffixed to designate authority, as in *Safalinaa* ("Safaliba chief"), *Mandarinaa* ("Mandari chief"), *Gbenfunaa* ("Gbenfu chief"), and *Tingbanasuba* ("Earth Priest"). Appellations also signify family membership, indicating

belonging to a particular family or clan and functioning as enduring markers of lineage and heritage. The Safaliba practice a clan system, known as *buu* ("clan") or *zaka* ("house"), in which the oldest male of the senior generation serves as the clan head—*zaka nunkorogu* ("head of the house") or *zu suba* ("clan head")—overseeing clan affairs. Members are identified by their *sɔluŋbu* praise names, which signal kinship, status, occupation, or achievement, extending the social and moral significance of names beyond the individual to families and the wider community.

Appellations among the Safaliba people include *Jenjina* and *Nafuga* (for male and female royals, respectively), *Tingbanasuba* (Earthpriest), *Yelnde* (Linguist), *Ekpa* (first settlers), *Duah nyen* (the warriors), *Sannye* (the blacksmith—*Esa* and *Boyega* for male and female blacksmiths), *Gbani* (first Muslim settlers in Safaliba communities), *Wattara* (another Muslim group of Wangara origin), *Ko* (the Vagla group), *Duah-bugibe* (carvers), and *Plebe* (pallbearers), among others. These titles are predominantly associated with males, reflecting the male dominance characteristic of traditional Safaliba society. They also mirror the society's broader socio-cultural and socio-economic organization.

There are instances where individuals are addressed by appellations not because of personal achievements or family ties, but because they bear the names of people of substance and great accomplishment. In such cases, the Safaliba use the titles of the forbearers of those names, particularly for children believed to be reincarnated, who are referred to by the titles of the individuals they are thought to have reincarnated. This practice shows deference to the forbearer, as it is generally forbidden for younger persons to directly mention the name of an

adult or for anyone to openly mention the name of a person in a high position, which is considered impolite in Safaliba society. Consequently, titles such as Naa (chief), Yariba (grandfather), and Nyaa (grandmother) are very common in Safaliba-speaking communities. In these cases, the use of appellations functions as a politeness marker rather than reflecting actual accomplishments. A similar practice of bestowing titles figuratively in childhood is also reported among the Bikpakpaam. Bisilki (2018) notes:

> the practice of directly naming a child after another adult or ancestor is not common among the Bikpakpaam… when a child is thought to be a reincarnation of an ancestor. Here, the name of the ancestor is not directly replicated for the child. Instead, the child is given a title name or a title-derived name in which is configured a sense of reincarnation or of kinship to the ancestor concerned. (p. 19)

This use of appellations differs from the phatic use of kinship terms such as *nsa* ("father") and *mma* ("mother"), which are sometimes extended to strangers.

Appellations or title names may also be religious (Agyekum, 2006; Dakubu, 2000). Besides the Earth Priest (*Tingbanasuba*), who holds a key position in Safaliba society, various titles have emerged through the introduction of Christianity and Islam. Within Christianity, titles such as *Pastor*, *Prophet*, *Elder*, *Deacon*, *Reverend*, *Father*, *Sister*, and *Brother* are common once individuals are ordained into religious offices. These titles are primarily used among English speakers, but their pronunciations are often nativized in Safaliba contexts. Muslims are also identified by titles such as *Imam* (male Islamic leader), *Alhaji* or *Alaaji* (male), and *Ajia* or *Hajia* (female) for those who have completed the pilgrimage to Mecca. In some cases, these religious titles are used informally as nicknames.

To summarise, family names, community-specific names, and appellations among the Safaliba function as important markers of group identity. Community-specific names are often proverbial or insinuating. Families are associated with particular appellations (sɔluŋbu), which encode status, occupation, and accomplishments, and which often trace descent to a male apical ancestor or leader. Individuals believed to be reincarnated forebears, or those named in honour of a distinguished relative, may likewise be addressed with titles out of reverence or politeness. Title names may also be religious in nature or function as nicknames. Importantly, appellations in Safaliba society are predominantly male-specific, reflecting the norms and ethos of a patrilineal culture.

Viewed through the lens of linguistic anthropology, these practices go beyond reference. They are indexical, pointing to kinship, ancestry, occupation, or moral expectations; they are performative, since bearers are expected to embody the qualities encoded in their names; and they are participatory, as families and communities continually reinforce and circulate these names in interaction. In this sense, Safaliba names are not simply labels but dynamic social actions through which identities and relationships are negotiated and sustained.

5.4.2 Proverbial or Insinuating Names

Proverbial names in Safaliba are referred to as *selli yoye*. The word *selli* ("proverb") is polysemous, encompassing meanings such as intriguing, wonderful, mysterious, and unexplained. For the Safaliba, the value of proverbs lies not only in interpreting present circumstances but also in unveiling past events. Proverbs are imbued with wisdom and general truths about life which may be difficult to utter directly; hence, they are packaged in proverbial form. In the same way, name-givers sometimes coin personal names as proverbial expressions, using them to comment on social realities. Some Safaliba names are derived directly from proverbs, while others themselves give rise to proverbs. These proverbial names therefore convey meanings deeper than their surface form.

Awedoba (2000), in his study of Kasena proverbial names, notes that such names are not always drawn from specific proverbs but are described as "proverbial" because of the wisdom and philosophical reflection they embody. He explains that:

> [n]ame giving provides each Kasena person who is entitled to give a name to self or other with the opportunity to coin a proverb…names are [not] necessarily coined from proverbs or are put to the same uses as proverbs. Rather, it is because they refer to reflections on personal circumstances and the name givers' attempt to philosophise and comment on life. (p. 57)

In this sense, the deeper meaning invested in a name is what justifies its description as proverbial. Comparable accounts are reported for the Dagaaba (Nakuma, 2001), another Gur-speaking people. Safaliba proverbial names likewise highlight moral values, but their scope is broad. For instance, names such as *Nognia*, *Mmiri*, *Taakabu*, and *Habuziri* warn against hatred and instead promote love, unity, and cordiality. As Simelane-Kalumba et al. (2014, p. 24) observe, "Africans are well known for their generous array of proverbs and proverbial names." They emphasize that proverbial names are often shortened forms of longer proverbial statements and are embedded with socio-cultural commentary that may confer responsibility

on the bearer. Agyekum (2006) similarly explains that proverbial names are "couched in the form of innuendoes," often reflecting strained relationships or social tensions around the time of pregnancy or childbirth. Ojoade (1980, p. 199) underscores the anthropological value of such names, noting that:

> the study of proverbial names is particularly important because, like proverbs, they indeed mirror the life of Africans as already indicated. Proverbial names reflect what the Africans do and how they live; what values they abhor or uphold; what they think, what joys and what grief they experience.

In Safaliba, proverbial names can be grouped into two broad categories. The first consists of **coined proverbial names**—names directly conceived from proverbs. These often reflect the worldview, beliefs, and values of Safaliba society, making observations about behaviour, social norms, power dynamics, and subsistence concerns. They encapsulate truths and principles, recall past events, and crystallize philosophies of life, religion, and culture (Agyekum, 2012; Finnegan, 2012; Ojoade, 1980). The second group consists of **proverbialized names**—names not originally derived from proverbs but used in proverbial ways to comment on relationships or circumstances.

Coined proverbial names derived or extracted from well-known Safaliba proverbs—as already indicated in the discussion on family names. The use of a single word from the proverb can remind the Safaliba person of the entire proverb and the lessons it conveys. For example, the name *Essunga* appears in the proverb *Essunga na binge bɛɛ*, which literally means "the good you do is for tomorrow," i.e., good deeds live on. Similarly, the name *Kapori* occurs in the proverb *Kapori na tiiri nyia*, meaning "watch behind you, it will massage your heart (calm your bravery)," which is interpreted as "a leader with a solid following is confident of the support they have."

Furthermore, this group of proverbial names addresses many issues. Names such as *Essunga* ("do good"), *Zinisunga* ("live together well"), and *Onngesonga* ("a good or generous measure") highlight the importance of kindness, unity, and generosity. Two others—*Sabaligu* and *Kuribunu*—relate directly to subsistence and the economy of the Safaliba. *Sabaligu*, derived from *Sabaligu na wun tenge* ("a gentle rain soaks the ground better"), reflects the experience of Safaliba agriculturists in a savanna ecology prone to sudden, destructive downpours. The proverb emphasizes that gentle rain is more beneficial to farmers than heavy storms that wash away topsoil, and it is also extended metaphorically to diligence: the value of steady planning and effort over last-minute dependence on luck. *Kuribunu*, derived from *Kuribunu kun kongi yeesa* ("a hoe item will not lack glean even in drought"), advises Safaliba farmers to continue working hard even in adverse weather, for some harvest is always possible.

Additionally, this group of proverbial names reflects the Safaliba hierarchy of gods. For example, one interpretation of the name *Tosige* ("head-pad") emphasizes the supremacy of God: *a person's destiny cannot be changed except by the will of God.* Similarly, *Kamwinibasagi,* translated as "without God, nothing is successful," affirms belief in the supreme being Naawmini. Other names such as *Banaya* ("my enemies will get tired") and *Bananemwini* ("they are not God") highlight the conviction that, despite the unrelenting efforts of enemies, only the supreme God ultimately determines an individual's fate. Together, such names capture the Safaliba people's religious worldview and their faith in divine authority. Other proverbial names encapsulate moral values central to Safaliba society. Names such as *Manwo* ("I love"), *Nognia* ("who loves you with this?"), *Mmiri* ("thread," symbolizing what binds people together), *Taakabu* ("knowledge sharing"), *Habuziri* ("hatred is a lie"),

Maalabajera ("a peacemaker doesn't get angry"), and *Sunsi* ("good deeds") all articulate the ethical ideals of love, unity, peace, generosity, and moral integrity.

In the realm of power relations, names can also serve as social commentary. *Sotenjera,* literally "it is those who have that get angry" (i.e., it is the rich who get angry), points to the privileges wealth and power afford and how such privileges shape social interactions. This echoes the Kasena name *Nabwombajegechega* ("the poor have no claim to the truth"). Yet, the Safaliba name *Zinikaara* ("sit and watch") complicates this hierarchy by asserting that wisdom is not exclusive to the old, even within a gerontocratic society. While age is often equated with wisdom, the name acknowledges that youth, too, may possess knowledge and insight.

As noted earlier, the second group of proverbial names is not directly derived from proverbs but is used proverbially, often to comment on relationships with others. For example, in contexts of family feuds, children may be given names that serve as indirect messages to rival families. The name *Banaya* ("they will be tired"), when given in such a situation, signals that enemies will eventually grow weary of plotting evil, as their efforts will fail. Similarly, a childless family engaged in a feud might be mocked for their childlessness. When they eventually have a child, they may name the child *Nokisire* ("the defender" or "the one who has proved everyone wrong"), signalling to rivals that their enemies' taunts have been defeated. In such cases, proverbial names become living reminders of the circumstances surrounding a child's birth.

As Obeng (2001) emphasizes, African proverbial names often employ indirectness to convey critique, admonition, or social commentary without provoking open confrontation. These Safaliba examples illustrate how such names encode subtle messages and moral guidance, reflecting the name-giver's experiences and the social realities surrounding the birth. While some names may carry critical or admonishing overtones, others are purely commemorative or descriptive, highlighting the multiple communicative functions of proverbial naming.

Structurally, Safaliba proverbial names can take the form of single words, phrases, or full sentences, often realized as imperatives or interrogatives. Since proverbs and wise sayings can be too lengthy for personal names, many are clipped to create shorter, more manageable forms. For example, *Banaya* ("they will be tired") functions as a complete utterance on its own. By contrast, *Zinisunga,* derived from the longer proverb *Zinisunga na kooli dogiri* ("staying together well gathers people around you"), is shortened to make it easier to pronounce and remember. As Nakuma (2001) notes that clipping a sentence to form a name is mainly to make it short enough to be easily pronounced and remembered. Extending this insight, one can argue that clipping also ensures names remain both practical and memorable without losing their proverbial resonance.

Additionally, as noted in the discussion on personhood in chapter two, the Safaliba people avoid using bad names (*yobɛya*). Thus, names that convey negative messages are directed away from the bearer. For example, the name *Banaya* ("they will be tired") carries a negative message, but because it begins with the third-person plural pronoun *ba* ("they") rather than the first-person singular *n* ("I") or the second-person singular *i* ("you"), the ill meaning is deflected

from the name bearer. By contrast, names such as *Cheŋzaala* ("empty walk"), *Wɛɛbu* ("useless"), and *Ninberu* ("bad person") are avoided altogether.

Another feature of Safaliba proverbial names is that they are often sex-specific. Two notable male names are *Dataabee* and *Zugudaa*. *Dataabee*, derived from the proverb *Dataabee gbele kun mɛ* ("the child of a male rival can be ogled but not beaten"), reflects a cultural expectation: although Safaliba society is generally viewed as male-dominated, this proverb suggests that a child brought into a marriage by a woman cannot be punished by the new husband, for fear his wife may leave. In this way, the new husband is paradoxically powerless regarding the child of a *data* (male rival), even though he is head of the household. *Zugudaa*, from the proverb *Zugudaa taki yaara* ("climbing plant—pull and tire"), refers to people who are fierce and strong. As there is no feminine equivalent, the name implies that physical strength is associated exclusively with men. Another male proverbial name, *Kapori* ("look behind"), emphasizes how a united group emboldens its leader by providing solid backing.

Common female proverbial names include *Banaya* ("my enemies will be worn out"), *Bananemwini* ("they are not God," meaning human plans fail because only God decides), and *Tanira* ("reach a person; you only know someone's true nature after living together"). These names focus on human relationships and warn that enemies are often close by, so one must act with caution. At the same time, they convey hope that the Supreme Being protects His people against such enemies.

Across the proverbial names collected, recurring themes of sustenance, subsistence, survival, and struggle highlight their cultural importance. *Sabaligu*, from *Sabaligu na wun tenge* ("a gentle rain soaks the ground better"), and *Kuribunu*, from *Kuribunu kun kongi yeesa* ("the hoe will not lack gleanings even in drought"), both stress the value of hard work and persistence in farming. The name *Goli* recalls the Safaliba tradition of generously welcoming and feeding visitors, while *Kirbaani* refers directly to yam porridge. Even clan names carry symbolic weight: *Baliweri*, which emphasizes the importance of being calm or flexible, incorporates *bali*, the cooking tool used to stir millet porridge into *saa*, the stiff staple food eaten with broth.

In this thesis, proverbial names are translated literally, with summaries in standard English provided for clarity. To elaborate further, some examples are discussed below.

Onngesonga – Fetch well

Onngesonga is a male name derived from the proverb *Ɔŋŋi suŋŋa na tɔki nuusi*, which literally means "fetch well will make open their hands to receive." The deeper sense conveyed by this name is that generosity never lacks recipients. Everyone is pleased with cheerful or generous givers, and this encourages the Safaliba to be generous.

Dataabee – Male rival's child

The name *Dataabee* derives from *Dataabee gbele kun mɛ*. As explained earlier, it conveys the idea that a man cannot discipline his stepson through corporal punishment; instead, he may only show disapproval through looks or gestures. This restraint exists because the man fears his wife may leave him if he beats her child. Thus, the proverb literally means that the child of a male rival "can be eyed but cannot be beaten." This name is given to males.

Banaya – They will be tired

The female name *Banaya* comes from *Hariba na ya*, meaning "my enemies will get tired and give up." It refers to the evil thoughts or wishes others may have against the bearer, implying that such ill intentions will eventually fail. The name highlights the supremacy of *Naamnini* (the Supreme Being), who protects the Safaliba people.

Sotenjera – It is the rich that get angry

The female name *Sotenjera* comes from *Sote-n-jera*, literally "it is the rich that get angry." It reflects the social unfairness where the deprived are not seen as having the right to express anger because their opinions are considered unimportant. This resonates with the common saying that "the poor have no voice."

Berunlawra – It is bad deeds that affect

This proverbial name is drawn from *Beru n lawra* ("bad deeds affect"). It teaches that while good deeds may go unnoticed, bad deeds spread far and eventually rebound on the doer. From this, the Safaliba are encouraged to pursue good and avoid evil, for "a good name is best."

Saalibulache – No more procrastination

The name *Saalibu la che* refers to procrastination, regarded as a harmful habit that prevents success. It warns that delaying important actions can lead to missed opportunities. This idea parallels the sayings "time lost can never be regained" and "procrastination is the thief of time."

Bananemwini – They are not God

This female name comes from *Ba nane mwini* ("they are not God"). It indirectly warns enemies, known or unknown, that their evil plans will fail because only God determines destiny. It affirms Safaliba belief in *Naagmnini* (the Supreme Creator) as the protector and ultimate arbiter of human fate.

Taapoye – Each other's backs

The name *Taapoye* comes from the statement *Yeli npore kin yeli nige* ("say it behind my back but not in my presence"). Bearers of this name are often traced to Tangyiri. It highlights the destructive nature of backbiting and cautions the Safaliba to be mindful in their dealings.

Zinisunga – Live well

Zinisunga derives from the proverb *Zinisunga-na kooli dogiri* ("living well together gathers people around you"). It teaches that peaceful coexistence strengthens family and social bonds, echoing the saying "united we stand, divided we fall."

Essunga – Do good

The name comes from the proverb *Essunga na binge bɛɛ* ("the good you do is for tomorrow"). It encourages Safaliba people to act with kindness, as today's good deeds create a better future and lasting legacy.

Kapori – Watch back/behind

Derived from *Kapori na tiiri nyia* ("watch behind you, it will massage your heart"), this name suggests that courage is rooted in unity and support. A brave leader, for instance, draws confidence from knowing his people stand firmly behind him.

Sabaligu – Gentle rain

From *Sabaligu na wun tenge* ("a gentle rain soaks the ground better"), this name contrasts the benefits of steady, gentle rain with the harm of sudden floods. It symbolizes the value of steady, progressive effort over haste, since what is done gradually often yields better results.

Bayayah – They are tired

The male name *Bayayah* comes from *Pelbe ya ya* ("pallbearers are tired"). It is often given to a child born after a mother has lost several children in succession. The name expresses hope that pallbearers will no longer be burdened, implying that this child will survive.

Tanira – Reach a person

From *Ta nira* ("get close to a person"), this name teaches that true knowledge of someone comes only through close association, not hearsay. It warns against forming opinions of others based solely on what others say.

Kuribunu – Hoe item

The male name *Kuribunu* is clipped from *Kuribunu kun kongi yeesa* ("a hoe will not lack gleanings even in drought"). It highlights the Safaliba dependence on farming, teaching that hard work guarantees sustenance. Even meagre returns are valuable, reinforcing the principle that "one must suffer to gain."

Zinikaara – Sit and watch

Derived from *Zini kaara ba so bile* ("sit and watch has no small"), this name cautions against underestimating observers, including children. It conveys that wisdom is not reserved for the old; sometimes the young may know more than their elders. The moral is never to underrate anyone.

Nognia – Love

The name *Nognia* is derived from *An nog e naa?* ("who loves you with this?"). It warns that material possessions do not guarantee affection; in fact, wealth can become a source of envy or hatred.

Mmiri – Thread

Mmiri is used metaphorically to emphasize the importance of unity, much like thread binds fabric. Numbers without unity can be counterproductive; every society needs a unifying force to bring its members together.

Taakaabu – Looking at each other

Although not derived from a proverb, *Taakaabu* functions proverbially. It conveys the idea of learning from each other's experiences and emphasizes communal norms, conformity, and continuous learning within society.

Maalabajera – A peacemaker does not get angry

From *Maala ba jera* ("a peacemaker does not get angry"), this male name stresses that the role of mediator requires patience and self-control. Whether peace is achieved depends on the peacemaker's temperament. It cautions mediators to be empathetic, patient, and genuinely interested in others' well-being.

Ntorebanye – It is mine they have seen

This name criticizes self-centeredness and hypocrisy. It refers to those who see faults in others but not in themselves, echoing the saying about ignoring the plank in one's own eye while pointing out the speck in another's. It reflects human tendencies to be faultfinders while blind to personal flaws.

Habuziri – Hatred is a lie

A male name from *Habu ziri ne* ("hating each other is of no use"), *Habuziri* warns that hatred is destructive and rooted in false premises. The Safaliba are encouraged to cultivate love and support instead.

Zugudaa – Climbing plant

From *Zugudaa taki yaara* ("climbing plant—pull and tire"), this name symbolizes strength and resilience. Like a liana that withstands pulling, it represents fierceness in adversity and the futility of plotting evil against others. It reassures that *Naawmini* protects His people.

Saadari – Rainy day

Saadari ("rainy day") refers figuratively to times of need or hardship. Since rainy days prevent farming and other productive activities, the name encourages saving food or resources for difficult times, teaching prudence and foresight.

To summarise the discussion on proverbial names, understanding the underlying proverb, the sociocultural context, and the rationale for bestowal is essential to appreciate the meanings attached to these names. As Obeng (2001) notes, African proverbial names often respond to socially sensitive situations, using indirectness to convey guidance, critique, or moral lessons without provoking confrontation. In Safaliba society, proverbial names remind people of the source proverb or coined expression and the lessons it conveys. These names form an open system: some are directly derived from proverbs, while others are coined according to specific circumstances, allowing for new names to arise as situations demand. Not all proverbial names criticize or admonish; many are descriptive or didactic, reflecting the diverse communicative and social functions of naming.

A key feature of Safaliba proverbial names is that they are largely sex-specific. Although sex is not morphologically marked, speakers intuitively know which names are male or female. Proverbial names often encode culturally valued norms, virtues, and life lessons, with male names frequently emphasizing sustenance, wealth, bravery, and strength, reflecting the

society's patriarchal ethos. These names also reflect concepts central to linguistic anthropology: they carry shared meaning (indexicality), guide behaviour (performance), and embody social participation, as name-givers draw on personal and communal experiences to create meaningful names. In this way, bearers of these names often live by the proverb itself, making each name a lived script shaped by social reality.

5.4.3 Other Names

Names discussed under "Other Names" include day names; circumstantial names (e.g., death-preventive, theophoric, names of shrines and deities, posthumous names, manner-of-birth names, anthro-toponyms, and temporonyms); fauna and flora names; nicknames; teknonyms; and names derived from foreign religious beliefs or ethnic groups.

5.4.3.1 Day Names

The term *day names* refers to names given to children based on the day of their birth. According to Agyekum (2006, p. 213), a day name "is the first automatic name that every Akan child gets based on the day s/he was born, even before the child is officially named." Naming children according to their day of birth is a pervasive practice in West Africa (Abubakari, 2020). Synchronically and diachronically, this phenomenon occurs throughout all Akan groups and is believed to represent the individual's soul name, *Akradin* (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2000; Agyekum, 2006). Sekyi-Baidoo (2019) notes that the Akan have "two basic classes of names" for males and females corresponding to the day of the week on which they were born. Akan day names are systematic, following a predictable pattern encompassing all seven days of the week.

This practice is also attested among the Kusasi (Abubakari, 2020) and the Dagomba (Dakubu, 2000). Abubakari (2020) notes that Kusasi has names for all seven days of the week, though these are usually secondary, as other names are more commonly conferred on children. Consequently, while some people use day names as official names, others do not. Similarly, the Dagomba employ day names, which may serve as primary names. Unlike the Akan, whose day names are indigenous, Dagomba and Kusasi day names are derived from Hausa and Arabic. Like the Kusasi and Dagomba, day names exist in Safaliba society, but they are primarily borrowed from Hausa, as indigenous Safaliba day names were not observed—likely due to the language's lack of terms for the seven days of the week. Naden (1996, p. 3) notes that Northern Ghana's Upper East and West Regions are primarily populated by Gur speakers, with weekday terms borrowed from Hausa or Arabic. Abubakari (2020, p. 27) similarly observes that Kusasi day names are "borrowed from Hausa and ultimately derived from the Semitic (Hebrew/Arabic) seven-day week system," although they have undergone morphological and phonological transformations.

Unlike the Akan (Agyekum, 2006; Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2000; Sekyi-Baidoo, 2019) and Kusasi (Abubakari, 2020), Safaliba society does not frequently use day names. Their irregular use likely reflects the presence of an established indigenous naming system and the absence of ritual or traditional significance attached to the seven-day calendar. The lack of indigenous terms for the days may also contribute to their low popularity, as community members may not fully understand the meanings of these names. In contrast, Akan day names are well-established for both sexes and widely practiced.

Historically, the Safaliba observed a six-day week, based on the names of neighbouring villages, and traditionally measured time according to market days, festivals, and seasons (dry and wet, farming cycles, harvests), rather than the seven-day week used by the Akan, Hausa, or Arabic systems. This is reflected in the prevalence of festive or festival-day names such as *Donyu, Damba,* and *Narnyo*. Dakubu (2000) similarly notes that Dagomba names, such as *Damba* and *Chimi*, commemorate births during specific lunar months or festivals. Unlike the Akan, for whom day names are believed to represent the individual's soul (Akradin), the Safaliba do not attach such spiritual significance to day names, likely because these names are non-Safaliba in origin and their original meanings are not widely known.

Fieldwork data show that, despite adopting Hausa-derived names for the seven days (see Table 5.2), Safaliba lacks a complete system of day names for both sexes. For example, male names were recorded only for Thursday (*Musah*) and Friday (*Jimah*), while female names appeared only for Sunday (*Laadi*), Monday (*Tene*), and Friday (*Jimaah/Jinche*). This pattern resembles that among the Bulsa, where a complete set of day names exists but is not necessarily used (Kroger, 1978, p. 108). The incomplete use of male day names is common in non-Muslim communities (Dakubu, 2000, p. 57), which may explain the Safaliba case.

Dakubu (2000, p. 57) notes:

> [t]he reason for this is uncertain, but a likely explanation is that these names are not the most favoured type of primary name. Like day names in the south of Ghana, they can be assumed by anyone, without a naming ceremony, and have no implications for the individual's social identity.

Details on the Safaliba day names are presented in Table 5.2, which lists male and female versions corresponding to the seven-day calendar. In Dagbani, for example, masculine forms such as *Azindoo* and *Sibidoo* are created by suffixing *-doo* ("man") to the Hausa-derived day names *Azuma-* and *Asibi-*, respectively.

Table 5.2 Day Names

Day of the Week		Male	Female	English gloss
English	**Safaliba**			
Sunday	Aladidari		Laadi	Sunday born
Monday	Atenedari		Tene	Monday born
Tuesday	Atalatadari			Tuesday born
Wednesday	Alaribadari			Wednesday born
Thursday	Alemusadari	Musah		Thursday born
Friday	Alijimahdari	Jimah	Jimaah/ Jinche	Friday born
Saturday	Asibitidari			Saturday born

Source: Fieldwork 2020

The data show that male day names borrowed from Hausa/Arabic, as indicated in Table 5.2, are limited to *Musah* (Thursday-born male) and *Jimah* (Friday-born male). Consequently, corresponding male day names for the other days of the week are absent, indicated in the table by blanks. Female day names such as *Laadi* (Sunday-born) and *Tene* (Monday-born) similarly lack male counterparts, though the reason for this pattern is not immediately clear. Morphologically, the male name *Jimah* is combined with *-che* ('woman') to form the female counterpart *Jinche*, a usage borrowed from Gonja. Similarly, the day of the week is marked with the Safaliba suffix *-dari* ('day'), whereas in Arabic the equivalent marker *yoom* ('day') appears as a prefix.

Table 5.3 presents the day names borrowed from languages other than Hausa and Arabic, as revealed in the fieldwork data. Some of these names, such as *Jinche* ('female Friday-born'), are hybrid forms: the root *Jimah* comes from Hausa, while the element *-che* ('woman') is derived from Gonja. Other examples include names borrowed directly from Akan, such as *Yaa*, *Ama*, *Kojo*, and *Kwame*. The inclusion of these hybrid and borrowed names illustrates the dynamic interplay of linguistic and cultural influences in the Safaliba naming system. The

prevalence of such names may be explained by the lack of a complete day-name system in Safaliba, intermarriages with speakers of other languages, and prolonged settlement of Safaliba individuals in Akan-speaking or Gonja-speaking areas, especially for employment purposes.

Table 5.3: Day names borrowed from other languages other than Hausa and Arabic

Day	Male	Origin	Meaning	Female	Origin	Meaning
Sunday	Akwesi	Akan	*Male Sunday born*	Akosua	Akan	*Female Sunday born*
Monday	Kojo	Akan	*Male Monday born*			
Tuesday	Kwabena	Akan	*Male Tuesday born*	Abena	Akan	*Female Tuesday born*
Wednesday	Kwaku	Akan	*Male Wednesday born*	Akua	Akan	*Female Wednesday born*
Thursday	Yaw	Akan	*Male Thursday born*	Yaa,	Akan	*Female Thursday born*
Friday				Jinche	Gonja	*Female Friday born*
	Kofi	Akan	*Male Friday born*	Afia	Akan	*Female Friday born*
Saturday	Kwame	Akan	*Male Saturday born*	Ama	Akan	*Female Saturday born*

Source: Data gathered from fieldwork in four Safaliba villages in 2020

5.4.3.2 Circumstantial or Situational Names

Circumstantial or situational names refer to names given based on the circumstances surrounding a child's birth. These names are not necessarily chosen by the name-givers but are often determined by the birth context, including the time or period of birth, manner of birth, and location of birth. As Obeng (2001, p. 41) notes:

> [t]hus, African names are important channels for 'speaking' for and about African societies. Birth-circumstance names inform us about what happens at birth and are thus completely linked to the name-bearers' or name-givers' life histories as well as to their overall environments or habitats.

Obeng (2001) further emphasizes that birth circumstances such as tragedy, festivals, fortune or misfortune, and birth order play significant roles in African naming traditions. Such circumstances serve as reminders to the name-givers and recipients about what occurred during the child's birth and may encourage actions to avert the recurrence of misfortune. Similarly, Russell (2007, p. 8), in his discussion of Meithei names, observes that "[t]he circumstances before and after the birth of a child prompt the parent to give a name X and not Y." These circumstances may include the date and time of birth, parental feelings, or social and economic conditions. Circumstantial names are often used to commemorate memorable events, whether positive or negative.

Among the Safaliba, examples include: *Nornyo*, for a child whose mother had a difficult labour; *Bilesi*, given following a series of same-sex births to indicate that the parents cannot control the child's sex; and *Chiraba* (borrowed from Gonja), for a child conceived after a prolonged period of childlessness. Other examples are *Bamutu* ("came but did not meet," a posthumous child), *Gariyoni* ("pass a year," for a child born after twelve months of pregnancy), *Damba* (for children born during the Damba festival), and *Dongo* (for children born during the Eid al-Adha celebration).

Circumstantial names are widely attested across African societies and globally. They can indicate the circumstances of birth, determine a child's fate, reveal family conditions, mark ethnic and linguistic affiliation, and reflect societal perceptions of spatial, social, temporal, economic, and consanguineous identities (Abubakari, 2020; Agyekum, 2006; Bisilki, 2018; Blum, 1997; Cheditey, 2019; Nakuma, 2001; Russell, 2007; Sekyi-Baidoo, 2019). Numerous studies confirm their significance. For instance, Cheditey (2019) shows that most Birfor names are circumstantial, reflecting family conditions or events deemed memorable at the time of birth. He cautions, however, that parents are careful in choosing such names because of their potential positive or negative influence on the child. Nakuma (2001) categorizes circumstantial names as code names among the Dagaaba, marking place, period, or manner of birth and signaling ethnic and linguistic affiliation. Blum (1997, p. 364) adds that these names may govern the child's fate, harmonizing with the time and place of birth and, to some extent, describing the society in which the child lives.

Agyekum (2006, p. 219) classifies circumstantial names into four subgroups: (a) anthro-toponyms, (b) temporonyms, (c) manner-of-birth names, and (d) death-prevention or survival names. This study further includes situational names such as theophoric names, names of shrines and deities, posthumous names, twin names, historic names, position-of-birth names, flora and fauna names, and names acquired later in life (nicknames, teknonyms, and title names) under the broader category of circumstantial or situational names. Details of these categories are presented in the ensuing discussion.

5.4.3.3 Death-Preventive Names

Death-preventive names, also known as survival names, are a vital group of Safaliba names given to children with the aim of preventing infant mortality. Typically, such names are bestowed on children born following a string of sibling deaths, in the hope of breaking the cycle. They embody the anguish and frustration of repeated infant loss while simultaneously expressing the hope that the named child will survive, or at least disrupt the chain of deaths. These names are restricted to children born to the same parents, thereby limiting them to full siblings.

Bisilki (2018, p. 21) notes that "[t]he belief that naming can be used to prevent child mortality permeates African cultures. Among the Bikpakpaam, as with many other African ethnicities, it is believed that if a mother suffers successive or frequent infant deaths (especially when the non-surviving children are of the same gender), another death can be forestalled by giving the next child a special name or a name that looks odd." In line with this broader African practice, Safaliba death-preventive names are typically unappealing to the ear, often denoting filth, worthlessness, or foreignness. Multiple Africanist scholars (Agyekum, 2006; Obeng, 1998, 2001; Opoku, 1973; Bisilki, 2018) emphasize that survival names are intentionally *strange, nasty, or derogatory* (foreigners, animals, filth, etc.).

Among the Safaliba, such names are believed to render children undesirable to death itself, thereby safeguarding their survival. Examples include *Tampouri* ("rubbish dumpsite"), *Kpaga* ("rubbish"), *Mooru* ("grass"), *Moosi* ("a person of Moosi origin"), *Bayaya* ("they are fatigued"), and *Tosege* ("head pad"). These are not names that a Safalo would normally give to a child, since they carry the character of insults and denigration. Safaliba death-preventive

names are also gender-neutral and reflect key linguistic anthropology concepts: indexicality, as they point to specific birth circumstances; performance, through rituals associated with death-preventive or theophoric names; and participation, as the community plays a role in recognizing and upholding naming norms.

The underlying philosophy resonates with Obeng's (2001) comprehensive analysis of survival names in African societies. He observes that "survival names are shown to be meaningful and to refer to the lives of both their bearers and the name-givers. Names in African cultures may be pointers to their name-bearers' and name-givers' fears, religious beliefs, and philosophy of life and death" (p. 90). Survival names, therefore, emerge not only from the immediate trauma of infant mortality but also from broader cosmological and social understandings of life, death, and the unseen powers believed to govern them.

In the Safaliba context, the protective strategies also extend beyond naming to ritual practices. For example, a child may be symbolically "sold" by being placed in a basket and paraded around the village, as though transformed into a commodity or chattel, thereby rendering the child useless to death. Such practices reinforce the symbolic power of names as a social technology of survival. In this way, death-preventive names simultaneously encode the memory of past tragedies, articulate parental fear and frustration, and embody the community's hope that the cycle of loss can be interrupted.

5.4.3.4 Theophoric Names and Names of Shrines and Deities

Agyekum (2006) explains that some names reflect the name-giver's belief system, which is why they are referred to as theophoric. Among the Safaliba, who are deeply religious, many names express veneration for the Supreme Being *Naaŋmınnı*, the lesser gods *Mwini*, various deities and shrines, and even the ancestral dead. These names embody the belief that the agency of the supernatural permeates all aspects of life. Names such as *Kutanemwini* ("God is the giver"), *Bananewnini* ("they are not God"), *Kamwinibasagi* ("if God does not permit"), and *Venkumwini* ("leave it to God") represent the Safaliba people's reliance on divine authority in matters of existence.

Theophoric names are often bestowed in gratitude to the Supreme Being for enabling conception and safe delivery, particularly after long periods of infertility or repeated child deaths. Such children are frequently sought through divination, and families agree that once the child is born, they must be named in honour of the deity who granted them. Failure to do so is believed to bring dire consequences, such as incessant crying or even the child's death. These names are not mere labels but index the child's sacred origin and ongoing spiritual obligations. Bearers of the name *Gbolo*, for instance, must placate the Gbolo deity before they can marry or engage in sexual relations. This requires ritual offerings, such as alcohol (*daa*) brewed from *kpaya* sorghum and millet (*kikaare*), presented to the deity. They are also forbidden from consuming red monkey (*ŋmaŋ zia*) or dog meat (*baa ninnu*). Such lifelong restrictions and ritual obligations demonstrate that theophoric names are lived practices that enact performance through repeated ritual acts and participation through the involvement of families, elders, and spiritual leaders in naming, guiding, and enforcing these duties.

These names are typically gender-neutral and may be given to both boys and girls. Examples include *Gbolo*, *Kipo*, *Laanga*, *Kupo*, *Jebuni*, *Tiffu*, *Mwinii*, *Tingbani*, and *Kungi*. Table 5.4 below presents these names and their origins.

Table 5.4 Theophoric Names and Names of Shrines and Deities

Name	Origin
Gbolo	Name of deities found in Manfuli and Mankumah, believed to grant children to childless families.
Kipo	Name of the Sonnyo deity, revered for assisting childless families with conception, among other things.
Laanga	Name of the Manfuli deity who grants children to the childless.
Jebuni	Name of a Gonja deity invoked to counteract the "death spirit." The term derives from *jo* ("drive") and *ebuni* ("death spirit"). The deity is consulted in cases of murder or suicide to cleanse the land and prevent calamity. Widows must also undergo a cleansing ritual before remarriage. The name is often given to children believed to be reincarnated.
Tingbani	Safaliba deity associated with land fertility and protection. Usually located in the groves of Mandari and Tangyiri, this deity is believed to ensure both agricultural abundance and protection from plagues.
Tiffu	A variation of Tingbani, this deity likewise protects the Safaliba people and their territories.
Mmini	Means "lesser god" in all four Safaliba-speaking communities, though most commonly used in Tangyiri and Mandari.
Kungi	Deity name originating from Choriban, a Vagla-speaking community in Bole. A child born on a day considered pleasing to the local gods may be named *Kungi*. The name entered Safaliba practice largely through intermarriage with the Vagla.

Source: Fieldwork 2021

5.4.3.5 Posthumous Names

In the Safaliba culture, there are names given to children born after the death of a biological parent, usually the father. A child born in this circumstance is referred to as a posthumous child. Although most of these posthumous births involve the death of the biological father, it may also apply to a person whose mother dies during birth. These names include *Daboo* (empty house), *Suku* (child's mother died during delivery), and *Bamutu* (came but did not meet), a name borrowed from Gonja. These names are typically gender-neutral and reflect key linguistic anthropology concepts: indexicality, since they directly point to the circumstances of birth; performance, as they are often reinforced through rituals connected with death-preventive or theophoric naming practices; and participation, because the wider community plays a role in recognizing, accepting, and upholding such naming conventions. Posthumous names have also been reported in some nomenclature systems of peoples such as the Konkomba of Ghana (Bisilki 2018) and the Lamba of Zambia (Chrishiba 2017).

5.4.3.6 Manner of birth

This category of names relates to the sequence of children's birth, often referred to as *positional* or *birth-order names*. According to Bisilki (2018), such names generally indicate an individual's position among siblings of the same mother. Similarly, Agyekum (2006) explains that birth-order names specifically mark the sequence in which children are born. In the Safaliba context, these positional names highlight the birth order of children who share the same biological parents. Examples include:

1. **Bilesi** – a name given to female children born after a series of male siblings. The underlying implication is that parents have no control over the sex of their children. Thus, when a girl is born after several boys, she is named *Bilesi*.

2. **Forgor** – a name bestowed on a child born when the mother did not menstruate (not usually the first birth). Some mothers may be unaware of their pregnancy in such situations.
3. **Yoori** – refers to a breech delivery, in which the baby is born feet first.
4. **Chiraba** – a borrowed name from Gonja, used for a child born after a prolonged period of childlessness, without recourse to the intervention of deities. This name is typically given to female children.
5. **Twin names (Naa, Pognaa, and Danni)** – in Safaliba, *Naa* is given to male twins and *Pognaa* (derived from *pogo*, meaning "woman") to female twins. If one twin dies, the deceased child is named *Danni* and an effigy is made to represent the lost twin. The effigy is treated as though it were alive, with the aim of preventing the surviving twin from following the deceased into death. In contemporary practice, some Safaliba Muslims adopt Islamic twin names, such as *Alhassan* and *Fuseina*, *Latif* and *Latifa*, *Habib* and *Habiba* (for mixed-sex twins), or *Asana* and *Fuseina* (for twin girls).
6. **Dari** – a unisex name given to the child born immediately after a set of twins. This is considered an automatic name.
7. **Kaluge** – a title reserved for the last-born child. The child retains this name until another sibling is born, at which point the younger sibling assumes the title.

5.4.3.7 Anthro-toponyms

Anthro-toponyms are personal names derived from places, geographical features, or specific locations associated with a child's birth. A child may be named after the village or town of birth, particularly if the location is outside the parents' home community. In some cases, children born in transit are named after the place of delivery. These names thus function both as circumstantial and anthro-toponymic. In Safaliba, such names exist and may also serve as nicknames. Examples include Bindaa, Manni, Tanga, and Kolge. Linguistically and anthropologically, anthro-toponyms operate as indexical signs: they point to the spatial and social circumstances of birth, mark mobility across communities, and inscribe geographic memory into personal identity. Their use also reflects participation, since the wider community recognizes and affirms the relevance of these place-linked names in everyday interaction.

5.4.3.8 Temporonyms

In the literature, a *temporonym* refers to a name derived from the time, period, or occasion of birth. Russell (2007) explains that the relevant temporal frame may be social, political, or economic. Safaliba temporonyms exist, though they are not especially common. These names are assigned to children whose birth coincides with significant festivals, events, or seasons, thereby embedding a temporal index within personal identity. For example, *Narnyo* ("the brightest star") may be given to a child born at night during the period when the moon is absent, and the sky is illuminated predominantly by the star *Narnyo*. Another widely attested temporonym is *Damba*. The Damba festival, celebrated by the Safaliba, marks the lunar month corresponding to the third month of the Islamic calendar. Although rooted in the commemoration of the Prophet Mohammed's birth, *Damba* has also become a local occasion

for exalting chiefs. As Dakubu (2000) observes in her work on Dagbani, children born on the day of the Damba celebration are often named *Damba*. In such cases, the name functions as a living archive of calendrical time and ritual practice.

From a linguistic anthropological perspective, temporonyms highlight how naming practices encode social memory and situate individuals within larger cosmological and historical rhythms. They serve as temporal anchors—linking the name-bearer's identity to collective experience and shared cycles of time. This contrasts with anthro-toponyms, which index space rather than time. While anthro-toponyms ground identity in *place* (e.g., birthplace, terrain, or geography), temporonyms locate identity in *time* (e.g., seasons, festivals, historical moments). Together, these categories demonstrate how Safaliba naming practices map personal identity across both spatial and temporal dimensions, making names powerful semiotic tools of cultural orientation.

5.4.3.9 Flora and Fauna Names

Flora and fauna names derive from the physical environment of a society, indexing both ecological knowledge and cultural value systems. In Safaliba, such names are often metaphorical: the bearer is associated with traits of the plant or animal from which the name originates. For instance, the name *Jara* ("lion") functions as a titular name applied to some Safaliba chiefs. Through metaphorical extension, the lion symbolizes strength and bravery, attributes that chiefs are expected to embody. The name thus operates simultaneously as praise and as an indirect injunction to uphold justice and courage in leadership.

From a linguistic anthropological perspective, these names exemplify the semiotic process of indexicality, where linguistic signs point to broader cultural associations (Silverstein, 1976). They transform elements of the natural environment into social commentary, encoding ideals of personhood and authority. Agyekum (2006) and Russell (2007) similarly note that flora and fauna names highlight physical characteristics or symbolic structures that invite comparison between the environment and human identity. In Safaliba society, then, flora and fauna names do not merely label individuals; they embed ecological knowledge, moral expectations, and social hierarchies into personal identity. Tables 5.5 and 5.6 present examples of these names.

Table 5.5: Safaliba Fauna Names

Name	Male	Female	English Gloss
Jara	Yes	No	Lion
Pontonopron	Yes	No	Whale[2]/Big fish
Kogo	Yes	No	Piercing fish
Zaranfu	Yes	No	Poisonous snake

Source: Fieldwork 2020

Table 5.6: Safaliba Flora Names

Kaliga	No	Yes	Fig Tree
Mooru	Yes	Yes	Grass
Manni	Yes	Yes	River
Zugudaa	Yes	No	Climbing plant
Tanga	Yes	Yes	Hill
Kobire	Yes	No	Stone
Kolige	Yes	No	A well
Gonu	Yes	No	Cotton
Bindaa	Yes	No	Confluence (where two rivers meet)
Narnyo	Yes	No	Brightest star

Source: Fieldwork 2020

[2] Although whales are not part of the Safaliba riverine ecology, the reference is metaphorical rather than ecological. The name indexes largeness and might, consistent with the Safaliba practice of using fauna in symbolic and proverbial ways.

5.4.3.10 Nicknames

Nicknames are names other than a person's given birth name. They are also referred to as pet names or hypocorisms (Obeng 2001). Nicknames "are variously described as fondling endings, terms of endearment, diminutives, effeminate diminutives, or familiarity markers" and may convey "both the affection of the speaker and the diminutive nature of the referent" (Newman and Ahmad 1994, 159). They may be humorous, or they may arise from a particular occurrence or a distinctive physical feature of the bearer. According to Awedoba and Owoahene-Acheampong (2017), a person may adopt a nickname or have one bestowed upon them by others. While some nicknames are offensive and despised, in other cases, nicknames that may seem belittling are nonetheless accepted and even embraced. Cheditey (2019 p. 61) explains that nicknames are "usually given by people within the same age bracket who identify themselves with particular names whilst growing together in society. As the names imply, they are sometimes given at birth based on the physical outlook of the person by parents or other relations."

According to Obeng (1997, 2001), hypocoristic forms serve important social functions, fostering intimacy, solidarity, and a sense of belonging among equals. At the same time, they can express deference and respect in interactions marked by differences in age, status, or power. Their use follows sociolinguistic conventions that depend on factors such as age, social rank, and hierarchy, which determine whether a nickname is exchanged reciprocally, used with honorifics, or avoided altogether. While among peers such names strengthen bonds of friendship and cohesion, in hierarchical contexts superiors may use them freely, but subordinates must adhere to politeness and deference.

These patterns highlight the interplay between language, culture, and social structure, showing that names are not merely identifiers but tools for negotiating relationships, asserting status, and signalling propriety within African communicative contexts. Among the Safaliba, nicknames may reflect a person's character, physique, or other attributes, reference the community of birth, or arise from amusing incidents. They can be self-bestowed or assigned by peers, sometimes complementing the given name, and in certain cases, even displacing it. Table 5.7 presents examples of Safaliba nicknames.

Table 5.7 Nicknames

Name	**Meaning**
Bonkoregi	What is old
Gbenfunaa	Chief of Gbenfu
Kaabereba	It will pain them
Bilingu	Difficult to turn (Spiritual strength)
Puanaa	Cheeky chief
Mpoliya	I am fat (fit to do anything, physical strength)
Konka	Best drummer (konka name of drum)

Source: Fieldwork 2020

A narrative is told of a man associated with the nickname *Bonkoregi.* Because he was penniless, he attempted to sell his possessions, but prospective buyers consistently offered less than his asking price. Eventually, he was compelled to sell on the buyers' terms, which were obviously lower. In response, he would often remark, *Bon koregi che naa vera*, meaning "what is old yet beautiful?"—a proverbial expression indicating that selling old items does not yield significant profit. Owing to its proverbial resonance, the expression became established as a Safaliba name. Nicknames in Safaliba culture thus reflect the descriptive function of names. They often emerge from physical traits, behaviours, speech patterns, or memorable events and serve as

informal yet socially recognized identifiers. They also demonstrate indexicality, pointing to observable characteristics or lived experiences, and participation, as they are typically coined and reinforced by peers, family members, or the wider community.

5.4.3.11 Teknonymy

Teknonymy is the practice of referring to a parent—usually a mother or father—by the name of their child, serving as a form of respect. In Safaliba society, this practice carries added significance when children are believed to be reincarnated elders or ancestors. To avoid directly invoking the sacred or personal names of deceased family members, teknonyms are used instead. This reflects three interrelated dimensions: indexicality, as names point to social roles and relationships; participation, as it relies on communal norms and shared knowledge of lineage; and performance, as respect is enacted through language in everyday interaction.

It is also common in Safaliba society for individuals to be addressed by titles such as *grandma*, *grandfather*, *friend*, or *chief*, or for couples to address one another by their children's names. It is considered impolite for a woman to address her husband by his first name, and equally inappropriate for younger people to address elders or high-ranking individuals by their first names. Teknonyms serve as a culturally and politically motivated strategy to avoid such breaches of etiquette, functioning simultaneously as a means of showing respect and upholding social hierarchy.

Comparable patterns occur in other African societies. Among the Nguni, Xhosa, and Zulu, women observe *hlonipha*—a set of social and linguistic norms of respect—by abstaining from using their husbands' male relatives' names or any words resembling them. Similarly, Zulu men may use *hlonipha* to demonstrate reverence toward seniors and ancestors (Herbert, 1990; Rudwick, 2008; Rudwick & Shange, 2009). These parallels underscore the shared African principle that names are socially embedded markers of deference, hierarchy, and cultural propriety. Table 5.8 illustrates examples of teknonyms used among the Safaliba.

Table 5.8 Safaliba Teknonyms

Teknonym	**Male Version**	**Female Equivalent**
Grandparents	Yariba	Yaa
Parents	Saa	Maa
Friend	Daba	Daba
Chief	Naa	
Chief's namesake	Naatogumah	
Sibling	Yaadaba	Yaapogo
Elder sibling	Kpiyaa	Kpiyaa
Younger sibling	Yaba	Yaba
Paternal Uncle/Aunt	Asuba	Nyaana
Elder Paternal Uncle	Sankpen	
Younger Paternal Uncle	Sanbile	
Elder Maternal Aunt		Makpen
Younger Maternal Aunt		Mabile

Source: Fieldwork 2020

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the typology and etymology of Safaliba names, providing a comprehensive socio-cultural and linguistic account of their forms and functions. The analysis demonstrated that Safaliba names are not arbitrary labels but symbolic, meaningful, and referential entities that encode the worldview, beliefs, values, and lived experiences of the Safaliba people. Naming was shown to be both a linguistic and ritual act: through naming rites, children are incorporated into the human community, marking their transition from potential personhood to recognized social membership.

Safaliba names function as cultural texts, conveying meanings that extend beyond the individual to reflect broader social, spiritual, and ecological realities. They index human relationships, historical memory, cosmological orientations, and modes of thought central to Safaliba society. Typological analysis revealed the rich diversity of naming practices, including proverbial names, family- and community-specific names, appellative names, day names, and circumstantial names—such as death-preventive, theophoric, posthumous, shrine-related, and manner-of-birth names. Other categories encompassed anthro-toponyms, temporonyms, fauna- and flora-derived names, nicknames, and teknonyms.

The chapter also observed processes of linguistic and cultural borrowing, as the Safaliba adopted names from neighbouring groups such as Gonja, Vagla, Akan, and Hausa, as well as from global religions such as Islam and Christianity. This borrowing illustrated how naming practices served as sites of cultural contact, negotiation, and identity construction. Structurally, Safaliba names demonstrated a wide range of linguistic possibilities. They could consist of single lexical items, phrases, or full sentences, often taking the form of statements, imperatives,

or interrogatives. Names were also sometimes clipped from proverbs or proverbial expressions, condensing complex moral and philosophical teachings into concise anthroponyms.

From a linguistic anthropological perspective, this chapter underscored the centrality of names as communicative practices that functioned at the intersection of language, culture, and ritual. Safaliba names were performative and indexical signs: they not only referred to individuals but also enacted social relationships, marked participation in communal life, and embodied shared cultural values. As Duranti (1997) and Foley (1997) remind us, linguistic anthropology views names as part of a wider semiotic ecology where language is inseparable from cultural practices, identities, and worldviews. Within this framework, the Safaliba naming system emerged as a rich ethnolinguistic archive, reflecting both continuity and change in cultural knowledge, social organization, and inter-ethnic interaction.

In sum, the chapter demonstrated that Safaliba names were both linguistic and cultural artifacts. They provided insight into how the Safaliba conceptualized personhood, sociality, spirituality, and the natural environment. At the same time, the system revealed processes of adaptation, borrowing, and negotiation with external cultural and religious influences. By foregrounding the symbolic, ritual, and indexical dimensions of naming, the chapter contributed to the broader linguistic anthropological argument that names are powerful cultural tools for enacting transition, encoding and transmitting knowledge, and sustaining identity and social memory.

CHAPTER SIX

CHANGES IN SAFALIBA NAMES AND NOMENCLATURE SYSTEMS

6.1 Introduction

Having discussed the typology of Safaliba names and their sociocultural significance in Chapter Five, this chapter addresses the third research question by examining the observed changes in Safaliba names and nomenclature systems. As highlighted in the literature review, naming customs and practices reflect the religious, social, economic, and political backgrounds of name-givers (Agyekum 2006; Akinnaso 1981; Ansu-Kyeremeh 2000; Dakubu 2000; Lusekelo 2018; Madubuike 1976; Mandende 2009; Nkamigbo 2019; Saarelma-Maunumaa 2003; Sekyi-Baidoo 2019, etc.).

Like any other aspect of culture, the personal names of the Safaliba people have undergone change. Such change is expected, since culture is dynamic and foreign cultural influences are inevitable. This chapter therefore demonstrates the nature of these changes in Safaliba names and nomenclature systems. The discussion begins with an examination of key issues such as who the Safaliba name-givers are and the considerations that guide them in selecting names for children. It addresses why names are given in Safaliba society, the factors considered before a name is chosen, and the origins of the names currently in use. To establish the extent and nature of these changes, the chapter presents a statistical analysis of the names borne by people who identify ethnically as Safaliba. Finally, it offers possible explanations for the cultural attitudes, perceptions, and observed transformations within the Safaliba anthroponymic system.

6.2 Name Givers and the Safaliba Society

Name-giving in Safaliba society is traditionally grounded in family traditions and broader societal principles, although the final decision often follows consultation with a diviner. Once chosen, the child's name is publicly announced on the day of the naming. The term *name givers* refers to individuals with the prerogative to select a child's name(s), which may include biological parents, extended family members, esteemed community leaders, or close associates of the parents. In some cases, consultation with a diviner is unnecessary because the circumstances of birth already determine the child's name. Such names may reflect the order of birth, place or time of birth, or dedication to a deity, particularly when conception is believed to result from divine intervention. When a newborn is thought to be a reincarnated being—carrying the spirit of an ancestor or deity—the ancestor's name may be replicated, or a title name assigned to convey this belief. Conversely, if the child is regarded as a "new" person, the father typically assumes responsibility for naming, often consulting his parents, other relatives, and sometimes his wife. This system reflects the patrilineal organization of Safaliba society.

Where the biological father is unknown, or in contemporary contexts where a father refuses paternity, mothers and their relations assume the responsibility of naming. This underscores that naming in Safaliba society is not solely the prerogative of biological parents but a wider sociological affair. For contrast, among the Logbara of Uganda, mothers, grandmothers, and other female relatives are primarily responsible for naming, since children are considered "the affair of women" (Dalfovo, 1982, p. 120). By contrast, among the Saramaka Maroons of Suriname, virtually anyone may name a child (Aceto, 2002; Price & Price, 1972; Schottman, 2000). Table 6.1 presents responses from the field data regarding name givers in Safaliba society.

Table 6.1: Name-Givers

Name Giver	Frequency	Percentage
Men	118	57.0
Women	1	0.50
Both	86	41.50
Other (Specify)	2	1.00
Total	207	100

Source: Analysis of research data, October 2022

The question of who names a child is central to understanding prerogatives of authority in Safaliba society. The data demonstrate that naming is predominately a male prerogative: 57% of respondents indicated that men hold the right to name children, compared to less than one percent for women, with about 41.5% attributing the responsibility to both parents (Table 6.1). A very small proportion of respondents pointed to other community members—such as religious leaders, elders, and respected figures—as having this role. Taken together, these patterns reveal that child-naming authority is situated within a patriarchal structure, consistent with broader Safaliba social organization in which men dominate inheritance, political leadership, and property control. Naming, in this sense, extends men's power into the domain of kinship and identity formation.

Responses to who actually named individual participants further reinforce this picture. As Table 6.2 shows, fathers were most often identified as name-givers (56.7%), while mothers were rarely reported (<1%). Joint parental naming was mentioned by only about 9.6% of respondents, suggesting that even when women participate, their role remains limited and often secondary. Paternal grandparents—especially grandfathers—were also significant (16.3%), whereas maternal grandparents had a comparatively marginal role. When disaggregated by kinship line, the data show a striking imbalance: paternal kin accounted for 74.9% of name-givers, compared to just 5.3% for maternal kin. This imbalance underscores the degree of male

dominance in naming practices and the symbolic weight of paternal lineage in Safaliba society. Nevertheless, the data also reveal signs of social change. Beyond the paternal line, respondents mentioned other relatives such as aunts, uncles, and cousins (5.8%) as well as non-kin figures such as family friends, religious leaders, community leaders, and teachers (1.4%). Findings from focus group discussions corroborate this emerging trend, with participants noting that families sometimes extend the privilege of naming to trusted friends or respected community figures. Such practices suggest a gradual expansion of naming prerogatives beyond the paternal prerequisite, reflecting broader shifts in social relations and authority structures.

Despite this change, one principle remains consistent: the right to name a child is closely tied to personal integrity and social standing. Whether kin or non-kin, only individuals regarded as persons of exceptional character are accorded this privilege. This enduring requirement highlights the moral weight attached to naming, which extends beyond a mere act of identification to a practice embedded in Safaliba notions of propriety, lineage, and social order.

Table 6.2: Name-Givers of the Research Respondents

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Mother only	1	0.5
Father only	118	56.7
Both parents	20	9.6
My maternal grandmother	3	1.4
My maternal grandfather	7	3.4
My paternal grandmother	4	1.9
My paternal grandfather	34	16.3
Other relatives (aunt, uncle)	12	5.8
Don't know	6	2.9
Other specify	3	1.4
Total	208	100.0

Source: Analysis of research data, October 2022

6.3 Factors that Influence the Choice of a Given Personal Name

In Chapters 2 and 5, the factors that influence the choice of a name were briefly discussed. These factors include ethnic and family identification, the circumstances surrounding the birth of a child, life lessons, societal values, and the time of birth, among others. To validate this knowledge, the research deployed a survey questionnaire to collect respondents' views. This section provides evidence from the data to answer the following questions:

1. Why do people give names in the Safaliba society?
2. What factors are considered before a name is chosen?
3. What are the origins of names used among the Safaliba people?

The results of this survey are presented in the ensuing discussion based on the above three sub-research questions.

Regarding sub-question 1, respondents were asked about the rationale for naming among the Safaliba people. This was a multiple-choice question, and respondents could indicate multiple reasons for why names were given. The predetermined answers were derived from a review of the literature and from focus group discussions. Most respondents (36.6%) regarded ethnic and family identity as the main reason for naming. This finding echoes earlier works by Fortes (1955) and Awedoba (2000), who similarly emphasize the role of lineage and kinship identity in the naming process among other Mabia groups. The second-most cited factor was the need to establish paternity, thereby making a person eligible for family inheritance (31.2%). The third factor identified was the desire to differentiate people (25.9%), reflecting the referential function of names, where naming marks individuality and distinguishes one person from

another within the community. A further 20.5% of respondents highlighted naming as a means to mark humanness or personhood, a point also noted by Charles (1951), Alford (1987), and Fortes (1987). Other reasons given included the desire to tell a story (2%) and the hope that the name would give the child a bright future, since a person's name is seen as a reflection of their future (0.5%).

Table 6.3: Why Do People Give Names? (N = 205 respondents)

Reasons why people give names	Frequency	Percentage
Ethnic and Family Identity	75	36.6
To be addressed as human	42	20.5
To distinguish people from each other	53	25.9
To tell a story (Bravery, motherly care)	4	2.0
To have a promising future	1	0.5
For family inheritance	65	31.2
Other Specify	1	0.5

Source: Analysis of research data, October 2022

To answer sub-question 2, which examined what is considered before choosing a name, participants were asked to identify the factors they believed the Safaliba take into account when naming a child. The responses included circumstances surrounding the child's birth, the religion of the parents, the day of birth, and other considerations. A parallel survey question triangulated these findings by asking respondents to indicate the factors they themselves considered when naming a newborn. Religion (50.8%) and consultation with a diviner (21.5%) emerged as the two most dominant considerations. About one in ten respondents (10.7%) emphasized the day of birth. Other factors included circumstances surrounding the birth (5.1%), the use of names as markers for distinguishing people (3.4%), names with good meanings (2.3%), names to signify humanness (2.3%), proverbial names (1.7%), and names reflecting life experiences (2.3%). These statistics highlight the central role of religion and spirituality while also illustrating that Safaliba naming is deliberate, meaningful, and far from arbitrary (see Table 6.4).

Table 6.4: Factors Considered Before a Name Is Chosen

Factors Considered Before a Name Is Chosen	Frequency	Percentage
Divination/ Gods/ Reincarnation	38	21.5
Proverbial Name	3	1.7
Circumstance surrounding birth	9	5.1
Day Name	19	10.7
Good Meaning	4	2.3
Life experiences	4	2.3
To mark humanness	4	2.3
To distinguish people	6	3.4
Religion	90	50.8

Source: Analysis of research data, October 2022

The third sub-question, which examined the origins of names used among the Safaliba people, was addressed by analysing first and surnames collected from school registers, community health record books, and the names of respondents. The objective was to categorise the names according to their origins and identify the most frequently used ones, thereby determining which names are most representative of Safaliba society.

The findings are presented in tabular form, showing the first and surnames drawn from the different sources, along with their corresponding frequencies and percentages. An analysis of the data from school registers revealed that Islamic names were the most prevalent, constituting 67.3% of surnames. These were followed by Safaliba names (15.2%), Akan names (5.2%), Gonja names (4.9%), Vagla names (1.6%), Christian names (1.3%), Ewe names (0.4%), Wala names (0.1%), and names from other languages (3.9%). A similar trend was observed in the distribution of first names. Islamic names accounted for 73.9% of the total, followed by Christian names (8.5%), Safaliba names (6.8%), Gonja names (4.1%), Akan names (2.2%), Vagla names (1.3%), Ewe names (0.6%), and names from other languages (2.6%) (see Table 6.5). This dominance of Islamic names highlights the deep-rooted influence of Islam in Safaliba

society, reflecting both historical processes of religious expansion and the continuing cultural significance of Islam in shaping identity and naming practices.

Table 6.5: Origins of First Names and Surnames of School Registers

Origins of names	Surnames		First Names	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Safaliba	143	15.2	66	6.8
Islamic	631	67.3	720	73.9
Akan	49	5.2	21	2.2
Vagla	15	1.6	13	1.3
Gonja	46	4.9	40	4.1
Christian	12	1.3	83	8.5
Ewe	4	0.4	6	0.6
Wala	1	0.1	0	0
Other	37	3.9	25	2.6
Total	938	100.0	974	100.0

Source: Analysis of research data, October 2022

Regarding the data collected from the community health records, the analysis showed that Islamic names were the most prevalent in this population, making up 63.1% of surnames. Safaliba names accounted for 16.3%, followed by Vagla (5.0%), Akan (4.3%), other names [3](6.4%), Christian (2.8%), and Ewe (2.1%), with no Gonja names recorded. A similar pattern emerged with first names: Islamic names constituted 58.8% of the total, while Safaliba names represented 12.9%, Christian names 9.8%, Vagla names 4.8%, Akan names 4.3%, Gonja names 3.8%, Ewe names 0.5%, and names from other languages 5.2% (see Table 6.6). The dominance of Islamic names in health records highlights how medical institutions reflect and reinforce prevailing religious and cultural naming preferences within Safaliba society.

[3] These names were identified during the coding process of the school registers. Names not matching any of the primary categories (Safaliba, Islamic, Akan, Vagla, Gonja, Christian, Ewe, Wala) were assigned to "Other." Frequencies were then calculated based on this classification.

Table 6.6: Origins of First Names and Surnames of Community Health Registers

Origins of names	Surnames		First Names	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Safaliba	23	16.3	54	12.9
Islamic	89	63.1	247	58.8
Akan	6	4.3	18	4.3
Vagla	7	5.0	20	4.8
Gonja	0	0	16	3.8
Christian	4	2.8	41	9.8
Ewe	3	2.1	2	0.5
Other	9	6.4	22	5.2
Total	141	100.0	420	100.0

Source: Analysis of research data, October 2022

A combined analysis of the school registers and community health records indicates that Islamic names occur with remarkable frequency in the Safaliba community, underscoring Islam's significant influence on naming practices. Alongside these, names from neighbouring communities such as Vagla, Gonja, Wala, Ewe, and Akan, as well as Christian names, also appear though in smaller numbers.

In terms of recurrence, the most frequently occurring Islamic names include Seidu, Mohammed, Abudulai, Abubakari, Mumuni, Mariama, Hawawu, Zenab, Barikisu, and Ayisha. Among Safaliba names, the most common were Kipo, Gbolo, Nognia, and Langa. The data also revealed biblical names—many of which have Hebrew, Greek, or Latin origins—such as Abraham, Samuel, Emmanuel, Joseph, John, Michael, Isaac, Elijah, Mary, Deborah, and Sarah Esther. Figures 6.1 to 6.4 illustrate the distribution of these names across the different databases.

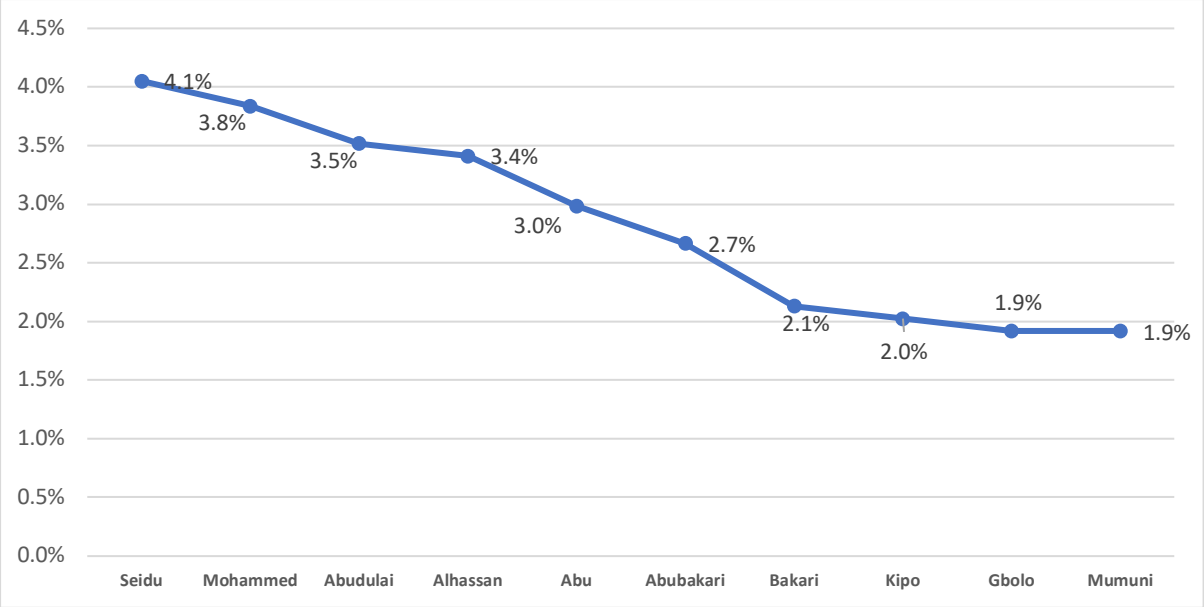

Figure 6.1: Surnames: School Registers (Source: Analysis of research data, October 2022)

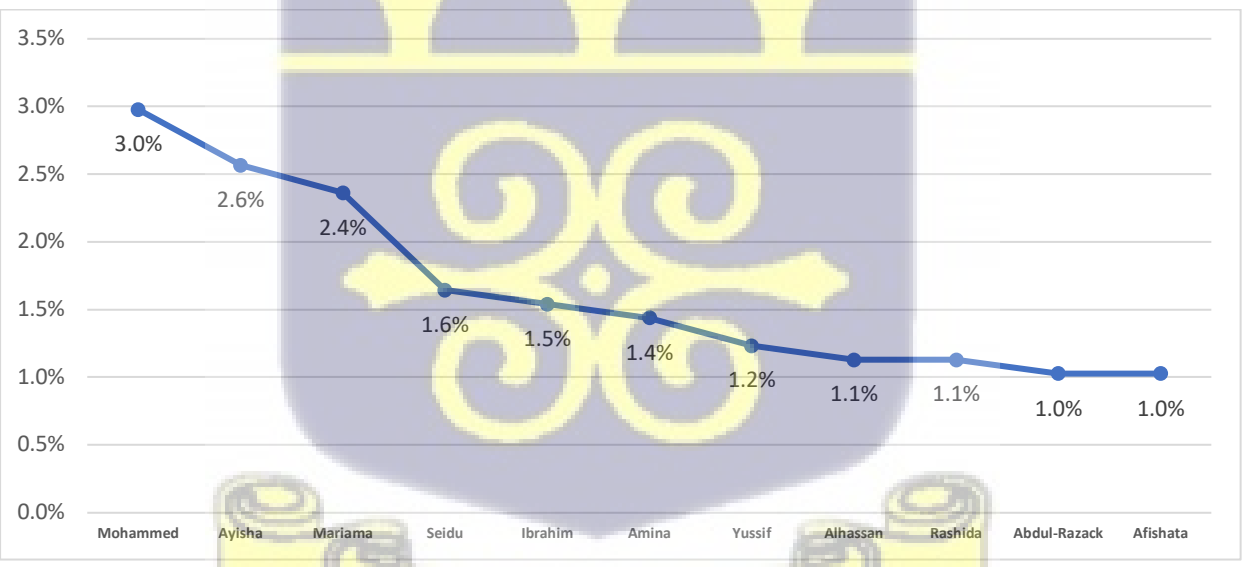

Figure 6.2: First Names: School Registers (Source: Analysis of research data, October 2022)

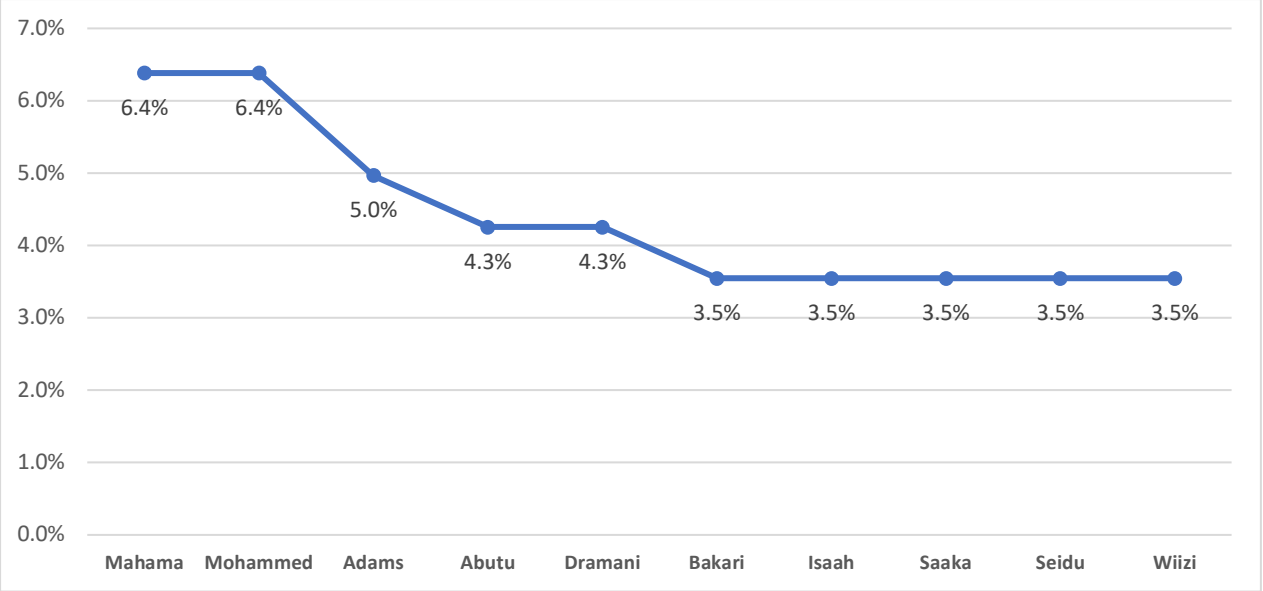

Figure 6.3: Surnames: Community Register (Source: Analysis of research data, October 2022)

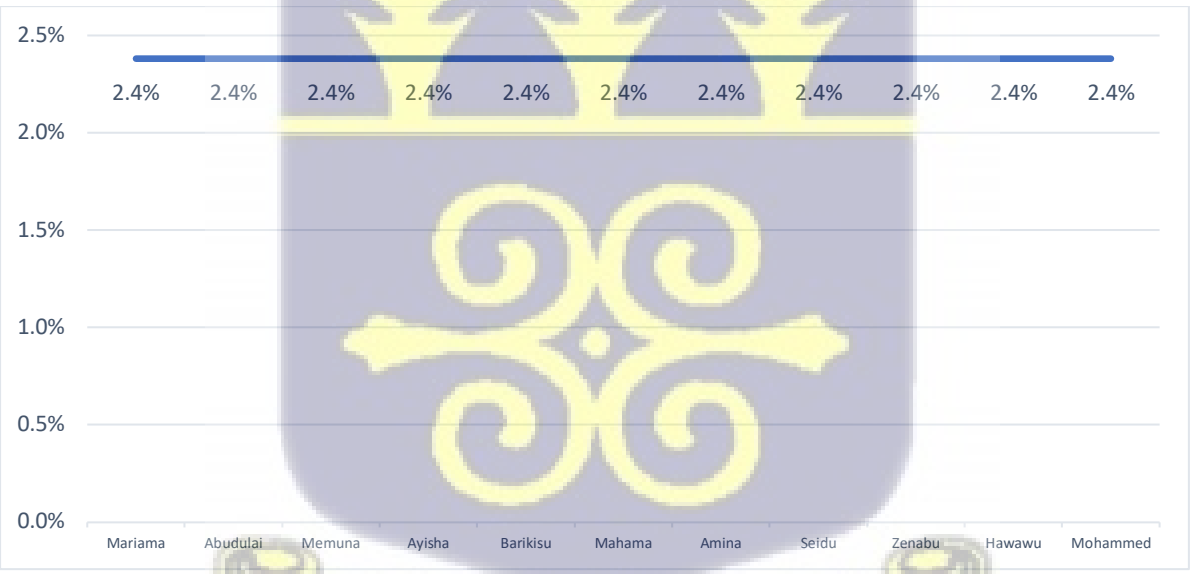

Figure 6.4: First Names: Community Registers (Source: Analysis of research data, October 2022)

To further substantiate the validity of the data presented above (derived from school registers and community health records), the names of the study's respondents—who all ethnically identify as Safaliba—were also analysed. The findings reveal that Islam is currently the most dominant source of first names among the Safaliba: 51.6% of the names collected were Islamic in origin. This is followed by indigenous Safaliba names (17.8%), Akan names (7%), Gonja names (6.6%), Losor names (5.2%), Vagla names (4.7%), Christian names (2.3%), Choruba names (2.3%), Chiriba names (0.5%), and Anglo-Saxon names (1.9%). The data thus underscores the extent to which Islamic names have overtaken indigenous Safaliba names, reflecting the growing cultural and religious influence of Islam within the community.

A similar trend is observable in surnames. Most surnames borne by Safaliba respondents are also of Islamic origin (44.6%), though this figure is somewhat lower than that recorded for first names. Indigenous Safaliba surnames constitute 28.2%, while the remaining are distributed across Gonja (9.9%), Akan (5.2%), Losor (4.2%), Choruba (4.2%), and Vagla (2.3%) names, with 0.5% drawn from other ethnic groups. Unlike in the case of first names, no Anglo-Saxon surnames were recorded. This suggests that the level of Anglo-Saxon enculturation remains relatively minimal compared with the influence of Islam.

Interestingly, the data shows that the dominance of foreign-derived names is not limited to first names but extends to surnames as well. This finding is noteworthy, given that surnames typically mark family, ethnic, or community affiliation. The prevalence of Islamic surnames, therefore, points to significant shifts in cultural identity among the Safaliba. Table 6.7 illustrates the origin of both first names and surnames.

Table 6.7: Origins of First Names and Surnames of Respondents

Origins of names	First Names		Surnames	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Safaliba	38	17.8	60	28.2
Islamic	110	51.6	95	44.6
Akan	15	7.0	11	5.2
Vagla	10	4.7	5	2.3
Gonja	14	6.6	21	9.9
Anglo-Saxon	4	1.9	9	0.0
Christian	5	2.3	2	4.2
Losor	11	5.2	9	0.9
Chiriba	1	0.5	1	4.2
Choruba	5	2.3	213	0.5
Total	213	100.0		100.0

Source: Analysis of research data, October 2022

In sum, the findings from the survey show that the choice of a personal name in Safaliba society is shaped by a complex interaction of factors. Beyond the immediate circumstances of birth and family identity, names reflect wider cultural, religious, and historical influences. Exogamous marriages, migration, and intercultural borrowing broaden the pool of available names, while colonial and missionary interventions reinforced the preference for foreign and religious names. At the same time, the survey data highlight a shift in perception: many respondents regard indigenous names as old-fashioned or less compatible with modernity and religious ideals, even though others consciously retain them as a marker of Safaliba identity. These dynamics reveal that naming is not simply a matter of individual choice but a socially embedded practice that connects family history, cultural continuity, and broader processes of change.

6.4 The Changing Anthroponymic System among the Safaliba

This section discusses the results of the data analysis in relation to the three sub-research questions. Firstly, the data indicate that the religious faith of name givers is a crucial determinant of the names bestowed on new-borns. As shown in Table 6.8, 54.4% of name givers are traditionalists, 40.6% are Muslims, and 5.0% are Christians. Although a significant proportion of first and surnames are of Safaliba origin, religious names—particularly Islamic ones—dominate. This pattern reflects the respondents' own religious affiliations: 52.1% identify as Muslim, 19.3% as Christian, and 28.6% as traditionalist (Table 6.8). The data also show a decline in the bestowal of traditional names. Further analysis indicates that among traditional names, 51.6% are first names, while 48.4% are surnames.

Beyond the names themselves, the data reveal shifts in Safaliba naming practices, particularly in rituals and ceremonies. Contemporary ceremonies often blend traditional customs with Islamic and Christian elements. Despite these changes, traditional rites remain compulsory, as discussed in Chapter 5, highlighting the enduring influence of indigenous practices. For example, male circumcision during the naming ceremony has been borrowed from Islam. Likewise, the term *suuna*—from the Hausa word for 'name' or 'naming ceremony'—is now widely used, even among non-Muslim Safaliba, in place of the indigenous term *zu puni*. Among Christians, naming ceremonies are often marked by christenings or baptisms. During fieldwork, one observed Christian ceremony involved the pastor placing water on the infant's tongue with his forefinger, followed by honey. This practice likely draws from Akan traditions, where water and alcohol symbolize the expectation that the child should speak truthfully (Agyekum 2006). During naming the child's tongue is touched with water and honey, symbolizing purity, truth, and sweetness in speech.

From a linguistic anthropological perspective, these practices demonstrate how naming is not only a social and religious act but also a deeply communicative one. The symbolic act of touching the child's tongue with water and honey functions as a form of language socialization, embedding cultural expectations of honesty, purity, and blessing into the child's future speech. The borrowed Hausa term *suuna* illustrates how lexical choices index broader histories of contact, religious conversion, and identity negotiation. Similarly, circumcision, christening, and traditional rites reflect the layering of cultural ideologies, where language, ritual, and belief systems converge. Naming practices thus serve as sites where linguistic forms (names, borrowed terms, ritual utterances), cultural meanings, and social identities are intertwined, shaping both personal identity and the moral framework for verbal conduct within the community. Table 6.8 below presents the religious affiliation of both respondents and name givers.

Table 6.8: Religious Affiliation of Respondents and Name-givers

Religious Affiliation	Respondents		Name-Givers	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Christianity	41	19.3	10	5.0
Islam	111	52.1	82	40.6
Traditionalist	61	28.6	110	54.4
	213	100	202	100

Source: Analysis of research data, October 2022

Apart from the influence of religion, the data indicate the impact of social interaction with neighbouring cultures. Specifically, several non-native Safaliba names are attributable to other ethnic groups such as Vagla, Gonja (Ngbanye), Choruba, Dagaaba, Wala, Mo, and Chiriba. These groups live in close proximity to the Safaliba. As shown in Figure 6.6, intermarriage between these groups and the Safaliba is significant: 25.9% with Gonja, 18.1% with other groups (Chiriba and Choruba), 7.8% with Vagla, 1.7% with Dagaaba, and 0.9% with Mo, together constituting 54.4%. Such high levels of intermarriage likely account for the presence

of many non-native Safaliba names, particularly since the data on "who names" suggest that about 42% of respondents believe both parents participate in the naming process.

On the subject of intermarriage, Awedoba (2006, p. 1) observes:

> Northern Ghana today is home to a number of different peoples speaking a variety of related languages and exhibiting considerable cultural similarities. Some of these peoples claim to be autochthonous, while others, like the dominant or aristocratic lineages among the Dagomba, Mamprusi, and Gonja, claim descent from warrior immigrant groups that invaded the area and imposed their rule over the indigenous peoples. They intermarried with these peoples, whose daughters they took as wives and whose languages and social norms they eventually adopted.

Additionally, the high levels of intermarriage between the Safaliba and members of other ethnic groups reflect the exogamous nature of Safaliba society. Awedoba (2006) corroborates this observation, noting that "[i]n many Northern Ghanaian communities, marriages are exogamous and are forbidden between relatives" (p. 2). Another striking feature of the data is the prevalence of Akan names—5.2% of surnames and 7% of first names. This is noteworthy given that the Safaliba do not live in close proximity to Akan-speaking communities. Indeed, the proportion of Akan names is higher than that of some neighbouring ethnic groups, such as Vagla (2.3% surnames and 4.7% first names) and Gonja (2.3% surnames and 4.7% first names). The relatively high incidence of Akan names among the Safaliba can be attributed to two historical and social factors: the migration of Safaliba people to southern Ghana for employment opportunities and the displacement of some Safaliba communities during the Samory and Babatu wars and raids.[4]

[4] Samory and Babatu were notorious nineteenth-century slave raiders who were black, Islamized Africans. They collaborated with European nations responsible for the enslavement of Africans to raid African communities in quest of slaves.

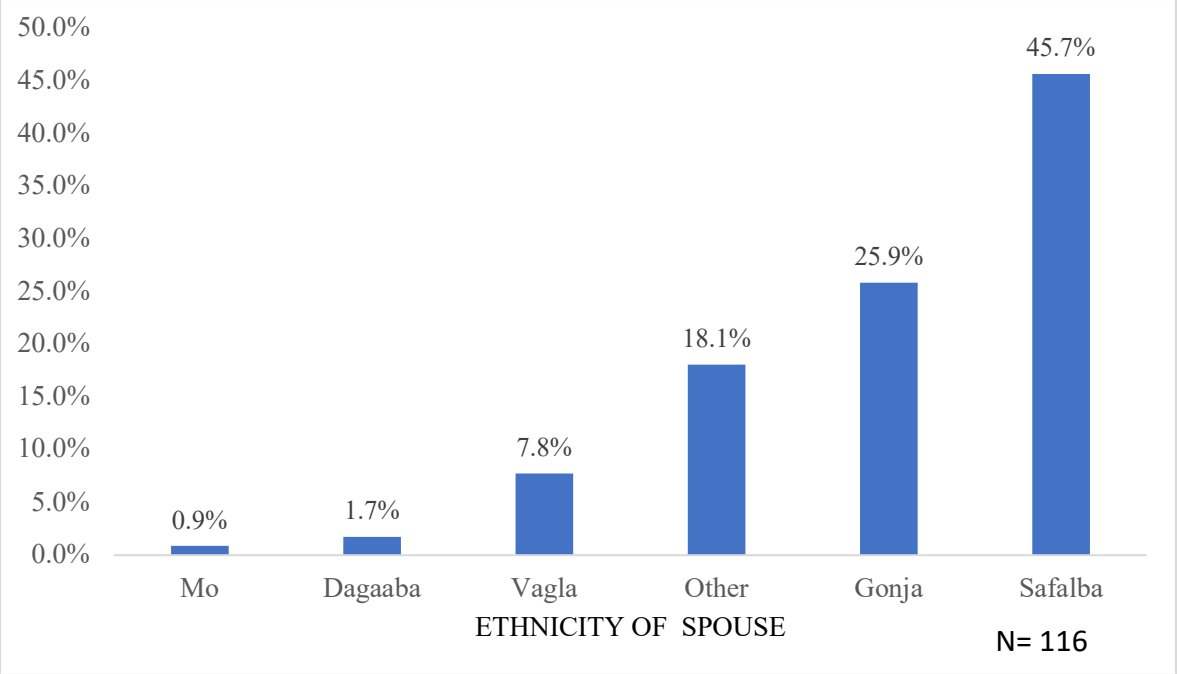

Figure 6.5: Percentage distribution by Ethnicity of Spouse (Source: Analysis of research data, October 2022)

6.4.1 Explanations for the Observed Changes in the Anthroponymic System of the Safaliba People

If one proceeds from the premise that names (both first names and surnames) historically borne by individuals who ethnically identify as Safaliba were exclusively indigenous, then the data demonstrate that the Safaliba anthroponymic system has undergone—and continues to undergo—significant change. This section highlights the principal drivers of these changes, which can be classified as external and internal factors.

"External factors" refer to influences originating outside Safaliba society, such as evangelism by religious groups (Islam and Christianity) and colonization, since missionaries and colonizers were not of Safaliba heritage. In contrast, "internal factors" are elements initiated at least partly by the Safaliba themselves, including intermarriage, migration, and intercultural borrowings

resulting from sustained contact with neighbouring ethnic groups. Among external influences, the spread of foreign religions—particularly Islam—emerges as the most pervasive. The widespread adoption of Arabic names, already common across northern Ghana, provides clear evidence of this impact.

Prior to the arrival of Christian and Muslim missionaries, the Safaliba practiced African Traditional Religion. Missionary activity, however, led many Safaliba to convert to these foreign faiths, which is reflected in naming practices. The statistics demonstrate this impact: individuals who convert to Islam (Tuuba)[5] or Christianity often adopt new names aligned with their faith, and new converts frequently give their children names that reflect these religious identities. In light of this influence, the following section provides a historical account of the origin and impact of religious activities on the changing Safaliba nomenclature system.

6.5 Historical Account of the Religious Influence on Changes in Safaliba Nomenclature

Among the present-day generation, Christians and Muslims are most commonly identified by their religious names. This section examines the historical origins and influence of religious activities and actors on the evolving Safaliba nomenclature system. The emphasis on religious activities is informed by the data, which reveal that the religious affiliation of name givers is a significant determinant of the personal names Safaliba people confer on their children and themselves (see Table 6.8).

[5] *Tuuba* denotes repentance and a vow of discipleship to Allah. The term is also applied to individuals who convert to Islam.

6.5.1 The Origin of Islam among the Safaliba

Tables 6.5, 6.6, and 6.7 indicate a notable shift in the Safaliba naming system towards Islamic names. These names, usually of Arabic origin, are nativized[6] before adoption into Safaliba. Additionally, the Safaliba borrow some Islamic names from other language groups—particularly the Gonja—who have had prior contact with Islam. These borrowed names are often already nativized in Ghanaian languages, which share similar phonological structures with Safaliba, and therefore require little to no further adaptation. The Safaliba's tendency to adopt names from other ethnic groups is pervasive in northern Ghana and likely contributes to the high prevalence of Islamic names compared to names from groups such as the Gonja (Dakubu, 2000; Awedoba, 2006).

Two main hypotheses explain how Islam was introduced to the Safaliba. The first posits that Islam reached the Safaliba through their proximity to the Gonja, who have a long-established Islamic tradition. Dakubu (2000, pp. 53–54) observes that northern Ghanaian groups can be broadly divided according to whether Arabic names form an integral part of their primary naming system. This distinction corresponds to the presence or absence of strong Islamic influence, although bestowing an Arabic-derived name does not necessarily indicate religious devotion. Among the Gonja, Dagomba, and Wala, sections of each ethnic group frequently give children Arabic-derived primary names, whereas this practice is less common among the Kasena, Dagaaba, Bulsa, and

[6] Nativisation is the process whereby the absence of a language's native speakers leads to phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and stylistic changes, shaped by the speakers' own language patterns.

Kusasi. Islam is believed to have first reached the Safaliba via the Gonja. Awedoba (2006) notes that, although traditional religious beliefs remain significant, Islam has taken deep root in northern Ghana. Awedoba (2006, p. 2). explains that the roots of Islam:

> date back to pre-colonial times. Islam is particularly strong among peoples like the Dagomba, Mamprusi, Gonja, and Wala. Not only do we find people bearing Moslem names, the recognized Moslem feasts such as Eid UL Adha and Eid UL Fitr are celebrated, even if the actual celebrations are not devoid of traditional non-Islamic features, and people pray faithfully five times a day, and attend the mosque on Fridays. Islam was introduced via the trade that brought Hausa and Wangara traders to these parts. Where and when the ruling elites espoused Islam many of their subjects followed suit and Islam was on its way to becoming the religion of the state.

The second hypothesis emphasizes the role of traders and Islamic clerics, mainly from Côte d'Ivoire. Barker (1986) highlights the key role of Muslim traders in propagating Islam, noting that the Volta basin—now Burkina Faso and Ghana—was reached by Hausa traders from eastern Niger and Mande traders from Sudan between 1300 and 1900. These traders engaged in gold and slave trade and were often accompanied by Muslim clerics, who gradually became affiliated with chiefly courts (Barker, 1986, p. 48). Mahdi (2013) further documents that Arab traders brought Islam to West Africa as early as the eighth century, followed by Muslim academics who contributed to mosque construction and educational institutions. By the 15th century, Mande and Wangara traders introduced Islam specifically to northern Ghana.

Bodua-Mango (2012) traces the genesis of Islam among the Safaliba to Muslim migrants from Côte d'Ivoire, who assimilated into Safaliba society and adopted the language. The Gonja and other tribes arrived later, following the Safaliba. Awedoba (2006, p. 10) explains that the emergence of the Gonja dynasty resulted from Mande or Malian warriors who invaded the Black Volta basin in the seventeenth century, intermarrying with locals and adopting the Guan dialect spoken by Gonja descendants. Gonja society consisted of commoners, Muslims, and princes, and intermarriage over time blurred distinctions between these groups.

Massing (2012) provides a detailed account of Islam's spread in the Volta basin, particularly among the Gonja. He notes that Jakpa established the Gonja kingdom in the 16th century, and that Islam spread through clerical lineages, most notably the Kamaghate, a dominant clerical lineage of the Western Volta basin. The Kamaghate lineage, tracing its origins to the Jula/Soninke of Begho and Kong, brought Islam to Begho and subsequently to Gonja and surrounding peoples (Massing, 2012, p. 57). The establishment of the Gonja kingdom involved clerical lineages who organized "missionary or monastic orders" across Muslim and non-Muslim regions on a hereditary basis, thereby establishing centers of power essential for the spread of Islam. This influence is directly reflected in the predominance of Islamic names among both the Gonja and the Safaliba.

Massing (2012, p. 60) observes that "the first mosque in Gonja land was built at Buipe—a few miles upstream of the junction of the Black and White Volta—which became the residence of the first Gonja imams and has furnished the imams of Gonja till the present day." Buipe, located in the Savannah region near the Bole district where the Safaliba live, remains a center for Islamic education. The Larabanga mosque, built in 1421, stands as one of the oldest in West Africa, further illustrating the deep Islamic influence in the region. Conversion of ruling elites reinforced the spread of Islam, as Muslim clerics served as "spiritual and practical advisors" to chiefs, embedding Islam within societal structures (Awedoba, 2006, p. 2). Descendants of Muhammad al-Abyad, also known as Fati Morukpe, served as imams in the Gonja divisions, and their influence spread to the Safaliba through intermarriage.

The second hypothesis attributes the growth of Islam among the Safaliba to the geographical proximity between Ghanaian Safaliba-speaking communities and Safaliba-speaking villages in Côte d'Ivoire. This closeness facilitated sustained interaction through trade and intermarriage, thereby strengthening cultural and religious exchange. Consequently, Ivorian villages such as Bouna, Bondoukou, and Vonkoro have been identified as having Safaliba speakers (Bodua-Mango, 2015, p. 7).

The presence of Islam within Safaliba communities is visible in the establishment of distinct neighbourhoods with predominantly Muslim populations, locally referred to as *Yarisi.* In Mandari, for example, this section is called *Yarisiweri* ("Muslim quarter"). Residents of these sections are often identified by the appellation *Gbane.* Massing (2012, p. 80) confirms this, noting: "in Mandari, we found *Gbane*." The *Gbane* serve as Islamic clerics in Mandari and Gbenfu, and many of them speak Jula, a language of Côte d'Ivoire, alongside Safaliba. My study further found that, in addition to the *Gbane*, another Muslim lineage, the *Wattara*—also traced to Côte d'Ivoire—has settled in Safaliba areas such as Sawla, Bole, and Kalba. As noted earlier in my discussion on appellations, *Gbane* refers to the first Muslim settlers in Safaliba communities, while *Wattara* denotes another Muslim group of Wangara origin. Their presence not only highlights the historical spread of Islam into Safaliba areas but also demonstrates how Muslim identities became embedded within Safaliba social structures through titles and appellations. The historical roots of these groups can be traced further back. Massing (2012, p. 69) recounts that the *Gbane*, who had earlier settled in Begho before 1590, later moved to Bondoukou and Bouna. Bondoukou, in particular, became a major Islamic centre where Jula settlers took on roles as religious leaders, councillors, and traders, while maintaining close ties of trade and intermarriage with Bole, only 30 km away. As a result, Jula eventually emerged as a secondary language among Safaliba speakers in Mandari and Gbenfu.

This evidence indicates that the Kamaghate lineage was not the sole agent in the transmission of Islam to the Volta basin. As Massing (2012, p. 68) notes, oral traditions recall that following the destruction of Begho, a war leader from Kong sought assistance from Imam Kamaghate, who travelled with Kwabena Timite and other Muslim groups through northern Côte d'Ivoire, gathering followers including the *Gbane* at Ouangolo. Over time, Bouna evolved into an Islamic learning hub and a traditional training ground for Gonja imams. Its proximity to Bole further reinforced Islamic networks through trade, intermarriage, and clerical exchange.

The fall of Begho thus catalyzed the dispersal of Jula people across the Volta basin, including into Mandari, Bole, and other Safaliba-speaking villages. Taken together, these movements and exchanges account for the enduring Islamic presence among the Safaliba and its reflection in naming practices, where Islamic names dominate alongside indigenous ones. The above discussion provides a historical account of the spread of Islam in the Volta Basin, which offers important background for understanding its impact on Safaliba nomenclature.

6.5.2 Christian Influence in the Safaliba Area

Christianity in Africa dates back centuries and is now deeply rooted in many societies across the continent. Awedoba (2006) explains that Christianity emerged in northern Ghana during the same decade as colonialism. Diboro (2000) further notes that missionary presence and activity in southern Ghana can be traced to the earliest stages of Ghana's Christianization. However, attempts to evangelize northern Ghana initially received little attention. Various denominations—including the Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches—eventually spread Christianity in northern Ghana (Baker, 1986). Catholic dominance was particularly strong in the north, especially in the Upper Regions. Diboro (2000) therefore

argues that it is virtually impossible to discuss Christian missions in northern Ghana without reference to the Catholic mission. Der (1974, pp. 41–42) recounts:

> Christianity was introduced into Northern Ghana in 1906 by the Society of Missionaries of Africa, commonly known as the White Fathers. The circumstances under which the missionaries arrived in Northern Ghana were more of an accident than the product of a conscious plan on the part of the White Fathers to evangelize in the area… In 1906, however, the White Fathers were permitted to open a mission station at Navrongo. In 1913, the Wesleyan Church Mission was also allowed to establish a mission station in Tamale…. Permission had been granted to the White Fathers to establish themselves in the Northern Territories under certain conditions: the mission station was to be near an administrative post; only the English language would be taught in the mission's future schools.

Christianity was introduced only a few decades ago in the Safaliba area, and the Christian population remains a small minority. Compared to Islam, Christianity is spreading more slowly among the Safaliba. Bodua-Mango (2012) observes that churches are nevertheless emerging across the area, with Christianity steadily becoming more visible. Growth has been strongest among traditional believers, while the Muslim population has remained largely unaffected. The Joshua Project (2022) reports that a number of churches have been established in the Safaliba area. Although a few Protestant churches are present, the Roman Catholic Church remains the most dominant, having been the first to build a church in the area. More recently, Protestant denominations such as the Assemblies of God and the Church of Pentecost have also constructed church buildings, though these remain relatively new.

Bible translation has played a significant role in promoting literacy and the growth of Christianity in Ghana. From 1962 onwards, the Institute of Linguistics—now the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT)—collaborated with the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, to translate the Bible into local languages (Barker, 1986). Following the translation of the New Testament into several Ghanaian

languages, GILLBT expanded its activities to include literacy programs, promoting mother-tongue reading and writing alongside Christian teaching. This initiative eventually extended to minority languages, including Safaliba. In 1998, Dr. Paul Schaefer, a Bible translator with GILLBT, and his spouse Jennifer Schaefer began studying Safaliba. Together with native speakers, they developed an orthography, which was subsequently used in adult literacy programs and in producing educational booklets for pupils. Portions of the Bible were also translated into Safaliba, complemented by audio recordings through the Faith Comes by Hearing initiative to reach non-literate speakers. The Safaliba community has shown strong receptivity to these translation and literacy efforts, actively collaborating in the process.

Despite these efforts, Christianity's overall influence remains marginal. Data from this study show that only about 2.3% of first names are Christian, with none of the respondents' surnames reflecting Christian affiliation. These low numbers underscore the relatively limited reach of Christianity among the Safaliba, particularly when compared to Islam, which has achieved deeper integration. Nevertheless, a handful of biblical names were recorded, including Abraham, Samuel, Emmanuel, Joseph, John, Michael, Japhta, Isaac, Elijah, Mary, Deborah, Sarah, and Esther.

6.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the personal names of the Safaliba people, the individuals who assign them, and the factors that influenced the naming of children. The findings revealed that most name-givers were male, reflecting the dominance of men in Safaliba society. Naming was shown to be a deliberate and meaningful practice, with names serving as markers of personhood, ethnic and family identity, religion, life lessons, societal values, time of birth, and the commemoration of significant events.

The analysis further demonstrated that the names borne by individuals who ethnically identified as Safaliba derived from diverse linguistic and cultural sources, including Safaliba, Gonja, Losor, Vagla, Choruba, Dagaaba, Wala, Mo, Akan, Islam, Christianity, and Anglo-Saxon traditions. Among these, Islamic names were most prevalent, surpassing indigenous Safaliba names in both first names and patronyms.

The chapter also highlighted that the Safaliba anthroponymic system had undergone significant change, consistent with the dynamic nature of culture and the inevitability of cultural contact. These changes were attributed to both internal factors—such as intermarriage and social interaction with neighbouring groups—and external factors, including trade, colonization, and the spread of foreign religions such as Christianity and Islam.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the main findings of the study, highlights their significance, discusses implications, and offers recommendations for future research. The study sought to advance the field of onomastics by providing detailed insights into the personal names and nomenclature systems of the Safaliba people of northern Ghana. Specifically, it examined the social significance of Safaliba personal names, their typology, and the factors contributing to changes in Safaliba naming practices.

The study addresses key methodological and theoretical concerns. Following Justice (1998), who proposes a unified theory of names, it views names as performing both descriptive and referential functions depending on context, emphasizing their complementary rather than mutually exclusive roles. Methodologically, the study employs ethnography, using participant observation, key informant interviews, and focus groups to capture the lived experiences and cultural contexts of naming practices. Theoretically, it is grounded in linguistic anthropology, adopting a holistic framework that treats names as both linguistic and cultural expressions of identity. This perspective highlights the interconnection between language and culture, demonstrating that names do more than label individuals—they embody social meanings, convey cultural knowledge, and reflect collective identities. While some scholars regard linguistic anthropology primarily as a methodological tool, others, including Duranti (1997), highlight its theoretical potential. This study adopts a flexible stance, recognizing linguistic anthropology as both a conceptual lens and a methodological principle to guide data interpretation and the investigation of naming practices.

For linguistic anthropologists and scholars of African onomastics, the findings provide fresh empirical evidence on how naming practices both embody and negotiate social life, making this research relevant, citable, and significant within broader debates on language, identity, and culture. The chapter proceeds by restating the research objectives, summarizing key findings that contribute to the growing literature on African onomastics, and offering recommendations and suggestions for future research.

7.2 Restating the Research Objectives

Naming practices are deeply embedded in cultural and social identity, serving as markers of personhood, repositories of memory, and expressions of communal values. Among the Safaliba people, personal names hold particular significance, yet these naming systems remain under-documented in academic scholarship. Historical disruptions—including colonization, missionary activity, and formal education—alongside internal factors such as intermarriage, migration, and generational shifts, have influenced the Safaliba naming system. These changes, coupled with perceptions of indigenous names as archaic or incompatible with modern and religious identities, underscore the urgent need to document and analyse Safaliba names within their cultural, social, and linguistic contexts. Despite extensive scholarly interest in African onomastics and the Gur/Mabia language family, naming systems among smaller groups like the Safaliba remain under-documented. This study addresses that gap by documenting and analysing Safaliba personal names within their cultural and linguistic context, contributing to onomastic studies and Gur/Mabia language scholarship through the creation of valuable linguistic archives.

To this end, the research objectives are restated here to frame the summary of key findings:

1. To examine the social significance of Safaliba personal names, highlighting how names encode identity, history, and cultural values.

2. To explore the typology of Safaliba names, identifying the criteria and patterns used to classify indigenous, borrowed, and religiously influenced names.

3. To identify the factors accounting for changes in Safaliba naming practices, considering both internal dynamics (e.g., migration, intermarriage) and external influences (e.g., colonial and missionary interventions, globalization).

7.3 Summary of Key Findings

Safaliba personal names are semantically rich and context-dependent, encoding social, cultural, and spiritual meanings. This study identified several core categories that together illustrate how naming practices operate as active social instruments and cultural archives.

The first of these are appellative names, which reflect identity, lineage, status, and character, often serving as clan-based praise or title names. In Safaliba society, these names index family background and religious affiliation. For instance, Nafuga and Jenjina signal royalty, while Gbane and Wattara point to Muslim ancestry (Yarisi). Such names entail performance, as bearers are expected to uphold royal dignity or fulfill social roles, and participation, since families and communities actively reinforce these names as markers of belonging.

A further important category involves proverbial names, known as sɛlli yɔyɛ—a polysemous Safaliba term meaning "intriguing," "mysterious," or "unexplained." This is one of the largest categories and falls broadly into two subtypes: (a) names derived directly from proverbs, such as Essunga na binge bɛɛ ("The good you do is for tomorrow"), which encapsulates values of

patience, kindness, and deferred reward; and (b) proverb-like social commentaries, such as Torebanye ("It's only mine they see"), which critiques hypocrisy and selective judgment. These names index collective wisdom, critique social behaviour, and embody lived experience. They demonstrate indexicality, performance, and participation, as they are not only chosen to comment on life but also enacted and reinforced within everyday interactions. In this sense, Safaliba proverbial names confirm Awedoba's (2000) observation that name-giving allows people to "philosophize and comment on life," even when not drawn directly from proverbial texts.

Another major category is circumstantial names, which are tied to birth contexts and often involve divinatory or spiritual mediation. These include (a) death-preventive names, given to children born after repeated infant loss, to protect them from premature death; (b) posthumous names, given to children born after the death of a parent, often the father, or when the mother dies in childbirth; and (c) theophoric names, invoked after spiritual consultation with deities. Theophoric names carry strong religious dimensions. While the Safaliba acknowledge an omnipotent God, Naamwini, they also engage lesser deities in cases of infertility, infant mortality, or communal tragedy. Children believed to be granted by a deity are named accordingly, as in Gbolo, Kipo Laanga, and Jebuni (a Gonja deity invoked to drive away the death spirit and cleanse the land after disaster). Bearers of such names are bound by lifelong obligations, including taboos, sacrifices, or dietary restrictions. These names are typically gender-neutral, underscoring their sacred rather than social nature. Circumstantial names as a whole demonstrate indexicality by marking specific temporal, spatial, and cultural contexts of birth, while their associated rituals highlight performance and participation.

Alongside these formal categories, nicknames occupy a more descriptive space. They often arise from physical traits, behaviours, speech patterns, or memorable events, but they are socially recognized and enduring. Such names point directly to lived experience (indexicality) and are sustained through peer and community reinforcement (participation).

A final key category is teknonyms, which shift identity by referring to a parent—typically mother or father—through the name of their child. In Safaliba thought, this practice is not only a social strategy but also intersects with beliefs in reincarnation. Children regarded as returning ancestors should not be directly addressed by their personal names, as doing so may be considered spiritually inappropriate. Teknonyms therefore provide a protective and respectful means of reference, enabling parents to be identified through the child without invoking the child's name. Comparable practices are found elsewhere on the continent; among the Nguni peoples (e.g., Xhosa, Zulu), the hlonipha custom requires women to avoid uttering the names of their elders—or even words that contain similar sounds—as an expression of reverence (Oosthuizen 1996; Finlayson 1995). Both cases illustrate how naming practices operate within broader cosmological and moral frameworks, encoding respect, protection, and the negotiation of social relations through linguistic avoidance.

Taken together, these categories show that Safaliba naming practices mark life transitions, transmit cultural and moral values, and connect individuals to the community and ancestral knowledge. Rituals involving water, honey, and symbolic acts during naming ceremonies reinforce the belief that names influence the bearer's destiny. Naming practices are shaped both by internal factors—such as intermarriage, migration, and generational change—and external influences, including colonialism, missionary activity, formal education, globalization, and the

spread of Islam and Christianity. Statistical evidence shows a predominance of Islamic names even within families oriented toward indigenous practices, underscoring how naming negotiates identity, prestige, and belonging.

Ultimately, Safaliba names function as cultural and linguistic archives. They preserve memory, tradition, and oral knowledge, while simultaneously performing indexical and performative roles that communicate identity, social belonging, and communal cohesion. Despite adapting to social change, names maintain cultural continuity, transmitting values and memory across generations. Through the lens of linguistic anthropology (Duranti 1997), these findings affirm that naming is not merely a linguistic act but a socially and spiritually embedded practice that sustains community identity and cultural memory.

7.4 Potential Contributions of the Study

The research makes significant contributions to African onomastics by providing a comprehensive and empirically grounded account of Safaliba personal names and nomenclature systems, thereby filling a major gap in the literature on African naming practices. By examining the social significance, typology, and evolving patterns of these names, the research demonstrates how naming practices both reflect and negotiate cultural, social, and spiritual identities. In doing so, it shows that names function not as mere labels but as culturally embedded markers of identity, engaging key linguistic-anthropological concepts such as indexicality, performance, and participation. These findings contribute fresh empirical evidence to theoretical debates on the interplay between language, culture, and social life.

In addition to these theoretical contributions, the study enriches understanding of African naming systems by documenting how Safaliba names integrate Islamic, Christian, and neighboring ethnic influences. This offers nuanced insights into processes of cultural change, assimilation, and resistance. The systematic documentation of these practices also preserves an important aspect of intangible cultural heritage and highlights how personal names encode historical, environmental, and ancestral knowledge that might otherwise be lost.

The study also carries practical significance. It provides guidance for educational and cultural initiatives aimed at promoting awareness of local languages, naming practices, and heritage preservation. The findings reveal that Safaliba names function as tools of cultural continuity while adapting to social change, highlighting their role as linguistic archives that affirm oral traditions as valid sources of knowledge. Furthermore, it identifies opportunities for digital technologies—such as accessible databases of names and related cultural information—to support cultural preservation and language revitalization.

Beyond the Safaliba context, the study provides a model for research in other understudied African communities. It shows how the integration of empirical evidence with theoretical and methodological insights can illuminate the interconnections between language, culture, and identity. In this way, the research underscores the enduring significance of personal names as socially and spiritually embedded instruments of cultural continuity.

7.5 Limitations and Recommendations

This study, while providing valuable insights into Safaliba naming practices, is not without limitations. Fieldwork was limited to Ghanaian Safaliba-speaking communities, and the only other Safaliba-speaking community in Ivory Coast could not be visited due to COVID-19 restrictions. Although oral interviews and participant observation yielded rich qualitative insights, inclusion of the Ivorian community would have provided a more representative and comparative perspective. These limitations point to important directions for future research, such as extending investigations to the Ivorian Safaliba community to examine potential variations and continuities across national boundaries, as well as conducting comparative work with other Gur/Mabia languages to highlight regional naming patterns and cross-cultural similarities and differences.

Further research could also explore the relationship between naming and contemporary issues such as education, Christianity, Islam, gender, migration, and digital identity, which were only partially addressed in this study. Subsequent studies might adopt mixed methods, combining the ethnographic depth of qualitative approaches with the broader perspectives afforded by large-scale quantitative surveys. Collectively, such work would enrich knowledge of Safaliba naming systems and contribute more broadly to African onomastics.

Digital technologies present promising opportunities for the development of accessible, searchable databases of names and related cultural information. Such platforms could support longitudinal studies tracking changes in naming practices, enable comparative analyses across languages and regions, and serve as valuable resources for both scholars and community

members engaged in cultural preservation and language revitalization. Educators may also integrate Safaliba names and oral traditions into curricula, emphasizing the cultural and social significance of language, while policymakers and community leaders can use these insights to safeguard indigenous identity in the context of modernization and globalization.

Beyond academic research, the findings carry practical implications for education, policy, and cultural preservation. Collaborative, interdisciplinary research involving scholars from African Studies, Linguistics, Anthropology, and Sociology can foster nuanced theoretical frameworks and methodological innovations. At the same time, systematic documentation of indigenous knowledge systems—including personal names, proverbs, and oral histories—remains essential, not merely as cultural artifacts but as socially embedded systems that convey history, morality, and communal identity.

Overall, documenting and analyzing personal names is not simply an academic exercise but a vital means of preserving intangible cultural heritage, enhancing cross-disciplinary scholarship, and informing education, policy, and community practice. By laying this foundation, the present study ensures that naming systems such as those of the Safaliba continue to illuminate the interconnections between language, culture, and identity in dynamic African contexts.

7.6 Conclusion

This study has provided a comprehensive examination of Safaliba personal names and nomenclature systems, situating them within African onomastics and linguistic anthropology. Safaliba personal names are more than mere labels; they are culturally embedded markers of identity, social belonging, and moral guidance, shaped by their typology, social significance, and historical and social contexts.

Key findings reveal that names are semantically rich, context-dependent, and perform multiple functions: indexical, performative, and participatory. Appellative names signify lineage, status, and character; proverbial names encode social critique and communal wisdom; circumstantial names mark birth contexts and spiritual mediation; teknonyms protect the spiritual and social identity of children and parents; and nicknames reflect lived experience and social interactions. Across these categories, naming practices serve as repositories of memory, tradition, and ancestral knowledge, while simultaneously negotiating cultural change. As Justice (1998) emphasizes, names perform both descriptive and referential roles, while Duranti's (1997) linguistic-anthropological perspective underscores their embeddedness in social and spiritual life. Similarly, Awedoba (2000) observes that name-giving allows communities to comment on life and transmit moral lessons.

Safaliba naming practices are dynamic, influenced by internal factors such as intermarriage, migration, and generational shifts, and by external factors including colonialism, formal education, and the spread of Islam and Christianity. Despite these transformations, names continue to maintain cultural continuity, functioning as living cultural archives that sustain social memory and communal values across generations.

Drawing on both ethnographic research and theoretical insights, this study contributes both empirically and conceptually to African onomastics. It provides a model for investigating understudied communities and demonstrates how names encode social, moral, and spiritual realities. The findings also offer practical guidance for cultural preservation initiatives, including the use of digital technologies to create accessible databases of names and related cultural knowledge, enabling longitudinal and comparative research.

While the research was limited to Ghanaian Safaliba communities, its findings have broader implications for Gur/Mabia languages and African naming practices. Future research could extend to the Ivorian Safaliba and other communities, exploring contemporary influences such as education, religion, migration, and digital identity.

In conclusion, Safaliba personal names exemplify the inseparable relationship between language, culture, and identity. They are socially and spiritually embedded instruments of continuity, affirming the enduring significance of African naming practices for cultural heritage and community identity.

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APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN STUDIES

INFORMED CONSENT

INSTRUCTIONS: Introduce the respondent to the survey. Ask to speak with the responsible adult in the household. Obtain the informed consent of this respondent to the entire questionnaire by reading out the informed consent below.

My name is _____, a Research Assistant working with Ruth Karehina Bodua-Mango, who is a PhD Candidate of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. I am assisting Ruth Karehina Bodua-Mango to conduct research about Names and Nomenclature Systems of the Safaliba of Northern Ghana. This research is part of her academic work and is an essential requirement for the award of a PhD in African Studies. You were randomly selected for this interview. You will be asked questions about your demographic information, the naming custom, your perceptions about names and also to freelist names in Safaliba. The questions will take approximately 30 to 40 minutes and your responses will be recorded. Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you can choose to stop at any time, or skip any questions you do not want to answer. Your privacy is important to me. The information (including personal information) you will share with me will not be shared with anyone. Your responses would be kept confidential. The researcher (Ruth Karehina Bodua-Mango) may share information such as the name of this village or district with her Institute or with other researchers, who are legally required to protect this information. When the research findings are shared with the public, no information will be included that may link you to the study. Your personal information will be masked by using alpha-numeric codes that no one can understand except the researcher who directly collects and analyses the data. Be assured that any information that could be linked to you, such as your name will be removed even before the analysis is done.

AIM OF THE RESEARCH

This study aims to provide a detail description of Personal names and Nomenclature systems of the Safaliba. Of key interest is in the categorization of names based on semantic and morphological analyses, typology, etymology, and gender distinction of Safaliba Personal Names.

BENEFITS AND DISCOMFORT

Being the first elaborate work about names among the Safaliba, this research (including its compilation of names) will inevitably serve as a reference document for future generations. More generally, it is expected to stimulate the much-needed discourse on the importance of names and the need for traditional African names. This research has no foreseeable major risk associated with it.

CONTACT

Do you have any questions about the research or what I have said? If in the future you have any questions about this research, kindly contact me by phone on 0248343873 or by email: ruthmango@gmail.com.

CONSENT STATEMENT

Do you [name of the respondent is optional] like to participate in this research interview?

Yes___

No____

I willingly accept to take part in this research having understood the purpose of the research.

Name…….

Contact……..

Signature ……...

Thumbprint [ ]

Date……

(Day/Month/Year)

STATEMENT BY RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

I ……the Research Assistant responsible for this interview taking place on…….. confirm that I have carefully read and explained the purpose, benefits, and discomfort associated with this research to the respondent and she/he has consented to the interview. I pledge to conduct the interview as indicated in the instructions and abide by the ethics of the research to the letter.

Name of Interviewer……

Interviewer Signature

Date……

SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1a. Surname ……..……..

1b. First Name …..……

1c. Maiden Name …….

2. Sex of respondent: 01=Male; 02= Female

3. Age of respondent? ……

4. Age category

01= 15-24

02= 25-40

03= 41-60

04= 61 years and over

5. Which ethnic group do you belong to?

01= Gonja

02= Vagla

03= Safalba

04= Mo

05= Brifor

06= Lobi

07= Dagaaba

08= Other (Please specify)…… ……

5. What is your marital status?

01= Married

02= Living-together
03= Divorced

04= Separated

05= Widowed
06= Never married

6. If yes [01&02] which ethnic group does your spouse belong

01= Gonja

02= Vagla

03= Safalba

04= Mo

05= Brifor

06= Lobi

07= Dagaaba

08= Other (Please specify)……

7. If yes [04&05] which ethnic group does your spouse belong

01= Gonja

02= Vagla

03= Safalba

04= Mo

05= Brifor

06= Lobi

07= Dagaaba

08= Other (Please specify)……

8. What is your religious affiliation?

01= Christianity

02= Islam

03= Traditionalist

04= No religion

05= Other (Please specify)……

9. Highest Level of education completed?

01= Never attended School

02= Primary

03= JSS/JHS

04= Middle School Living Certificate (MSLC)

05= SSS/SHS

06= Secondary (O' Level)

07= Vocational/Technical/Commercial

08= Post Middle/Post-Secondary Certificate

09= Post Sec. Dip (HND, Teacher training, Nursing, Unive. Dip)

10= Bachelor degree

11= Postgraduate

10. Can you read or write in English language? Yes____; No ___

11.1Can you read and write in any local language? Yes____; No _____

11.2 Can you read and write in any local Arabic? Yes_____; No _____

12. What is your occupation? Category to which occupation belongs:

01. Manager

02. Professional

03. Technicians and Associate Professionals

04. Clerical Support Workers

05. Services and Sales Workers

06. Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers

07. Craft and related trades workers

08. Plant and machine operators, and assemblers

09. Elementary occupations

10. Other occupations

11. None

12. Student

13. Don't know

13. What ethnic group does your father belong to?

01= Gonja

02= Vagla
03= Safalba
04= Mo

05= Brifor

06= Lobi

07= Dagaaba

08= Other (Please specify)……

14. What ethnic group does your mother belong to?

01= Gonja
02= Vagla
03= Safalba
04= Mo
05= Brifor
06= Lobi
07= Dagaaba
08= Other (Please specify)……

15. What is your First Language [L1]?

01= Gonja
02= Vagla
03= Safalba
04= Mo
05= Brifor
06= Lobi
07= Dagaaba
08= Other (Please specify)……

16. What is your Second Language?

01= Gonja
02= Vagla
03= Safalba
04= Mo
05= Brifor
06= Lobi
07= Dagaaba
08= Other (Please specify)……

17. Which other languages, if any do you speak?

01= Gonja
02= Vagla
03= Safalba
04= Mo
05= Brifor
06= Lobi
07= Dagaaba
08= Other (Please specify)…….

18. In which town or community did you grow up?

01= Mandari
02= Gbenfu
03= Tangyiri
04= Manfuli
05= Other (Please specify)…….

19. How long have you lived there?

01= 15-24

02= 25-40

03= 41-60

04= 61 years and over

20. How long have you stayed in this community?

01= 15-24

02= 25-40

03= 41-60

04= 61 years and over

SECTION B: FREETISTING OF NAMES

21. Please, free list Safaliba names you know.

22. Please, free list names you consider Safaliba Surnames or Family names.

23. Please, free list names you consider Safaliba First names.

SECTION C: PERSONAL NAMES

24. Who named you?

01= Mother only

02= Father only

03= Both parents

04= By maternal grandmother

05= By maternal grandfather

06= By paternal grandmother

07= By paternal grandfather

08= Other relatives (aunt, uncle)

09= Don't know

10= Other, please specify……..

25. What is the religion of the person who named you?

01= Christian

02= Islam

03= Traditionalist

04= No religion

05= Other (Please specify)……

26. What factors do you think were considered before you were named?

01= Divination/ Gods/ Reincarnation
02= Proverbial Name
03= Circumstance surrounding birth
04= Day Name
05= Good Meaning
06= Life experiences
07= Just a Name/ To be addressed as human
08= To distinguish people
09= Other (Please specify)……

27. Have you ever changed your name?

01= Yes

02= No

27a. If yes, why did you change your name?

01= Change in religion to Islam
02= Change in religion to Christianity
03= For an English name
04= Because of education
05= Did not like the name/Bad meaning
05= Other (Please specify)……

27b. Record of name change: From ……to……

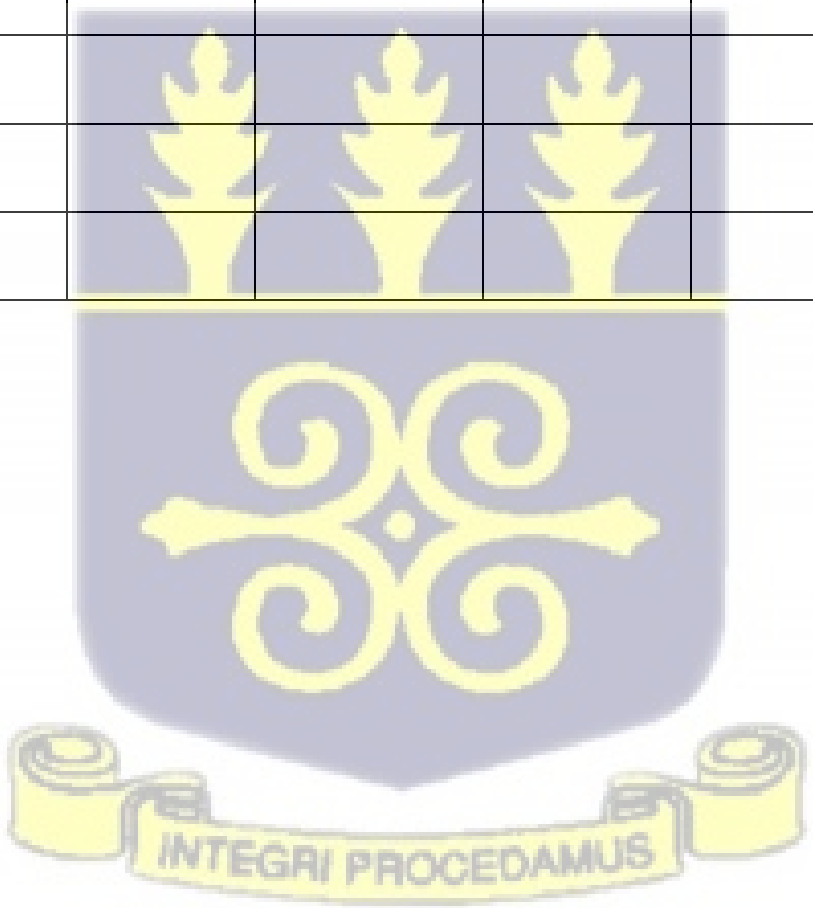
28a. Do you have children?

01= Yes

02= No

28b. If yes, what are their names?

Name(s)	Sex	Who named him/her?	What is the religion of namer?	Name's meaning?	What is/are the reasons for the name?	Is this name Male, Female or Unisex?



PERCEPTIONS ABOUT NAMES AND NAMING

29. Why do people give name?

01= Ethnic and Family Identity
02= To be addressed as human
03= To distinguish people from each other
03= To tell a story (Bravery, motherly care)
04= To have a good future
05= For family inheritance
06= Other (Please specify)……

30. Who names?

01=Men
02= Women
03= Both
04= Other specify……...

30a. If Male namers, what kind of a man?

01= The Elderly
02=The Respected
03= A relative
04= A traditional leader
05= A religious leader
06= Other specify……...

30b. If female namers, what kind of a woman?

01= The Elderly
02= The Respected
03= A relative
04= A traditional leader
05= A religious leader
06= Other specify……...

31. Among Safaliba people, on marriage does a person receive/take additional name, change his/her name, or retain the pre-nubial name?

01=Yes
02= No

31.1. What happens after a woman gets married?

31.1a (i) Given additional name?

01=Yes
02= No

31.1a (ii). If yes

01= Change in religion to Islam
02= Change in religion to Christianity
03= To be recognized as a member of the family/ culture
04= Other specify……...

31.1a (iii). If no

01= No need/ Already has a name
02= Culture/patriarchy
03= Other specify……...

31.1b (i). Given a new name?

01=Yes
02= No

31.1b (ii). If yes why?

01= Change in religion to Islam
02= Change in religion to Christianity
03= To be recognized as a member of the family/ culture
04= Other specify……...

31.1b (iii). If no why?

01= No need/ Already has a name
02= Culture/patriarchy
03= Other specify……...

31.1c (i). Continues to be known by pre-nuptial name? Yes [ ] No [ ]

31.1c (ii). If yes why?

01= Culture
02= Name given by parents
03= Other specify……...

31.1c (iii). If no why?

01= Culture
02= Other specify……....

31.2. What happens after a man gets married?

31.2a (i) Given additional name?

01=Yes
02= No

31.2a (ii). If yes

01= Change in religion to Islam
02= Change in religion to Christianity
03= To be recognized as a member of the family/ culture
04= Other specify……...

31.2a (iii). If no

01= No need/ Already has a name
03= Culture/patriarchy/Men don't change their names
06= Other specify……...

31.2b (i). Given a new name?

01=Yes
02= No

31.2b (ii). If yes why?

01= Change in religion to Islam
02= Change in religion to Christianity

03= To be recognized as a member of the family/ culture
04= Other specify……...

31.2b (iii). If no why?

01= No need/ Already has a name
02= Culture/patriarchy/men don't need a new name
03= Other specify……...

31.2c (i). Continues to be known by pre-nuptial name? Yes [ ] No [ ]

31.2c (ii). If yes why?

01= Culture
02= Name given by parents
03= Other specify……...

31.2c (iii). If no why?

01= Culture
02= Other specify……....

32.1 Do Safalba classify name gender/sex wise?

01= Yes
02= No

32.2 Can you classify names based on gender?

01= Yes
02= No

32.2a. If yes, list names considered as male;

32.2b. List names considered as female;

32.2c. List names considered as unisex names;

33. Does everyone know the gender distinction of names in Safaliba?

01= Yes
02= No

34. Are there any reasons for that particular name or names?

01= Men and Women cannot bear the same name/ gender differences

02= Gender /biological roles

03= Culture

04= Behavioural differences

05= Direction from God

06= Other specify……..

35.a Are there names considered family or clan names?

01= Yes
02= No

35b. If yes what are these names?

36.a Are there names based on family occupation?

01= Yes
02= No

36b. If yes what are these names? ……..

37a. Are there names based on status in the community?

01= Yes
02= No

37b. If yes what are these names?

……...

38a. Are there names based on order of birth?

01= Yes
02= No

38b. If yes what are these names?

……...

39a. Are there names based on the day of the week?

01= Yes
02= No

39b. If yes what are these names?

……...

40a. Are there names based on circumstances surrounding one's birth?

01= Yes
02= No

40b. If yes what are these names?

……..

41a. Are there names based on place names?

01= Yes
02= No

41b. If yes what are these names?

……...

42a. Are there death preventive names?

01= Yes
02= No

42b. If yes what are these names? ……

43a. Are there borrowed names in Safaliba?

01= Yes
02= No

43b. If yes, what are these names and from which language group?
01= Gonja

02= Vagla

03= Safalba

04= Mo

05= Brifor

06= Lobi

07= Dagaaba

08= Arabic

09= Other (Please specify)……

Borrowed names	Sex	Language group

44. Are there other types of names ?

01= Yes
02= No

End Time: …….

APPENDX B: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

Official Use only
Protocol number

Ethics Committee for Humanities (ECH)

PROTOCOL CONSENT FORM

Section A- BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Title of Study:	An Ethno-linguistic Investigation of Safaliba Personal Names and Nomenclat Systems
Principal Investigator:	Ruth Karehina Bodua-Mango
Certified Protocol Number	

Section B– CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

General Information about Research

The research seeks to explore the typology, etymology, semantics, and morphological makeup of Safaliba personal names. The study will try to identify sex distinctions in Safaliba names as well as investigate the variations in names across Safaliba villages.

The study will consist of personal interviews with selected respondents and focus group discussions with three groups of people. The required duration for participants is as follows: personal interviews – 35 minutes each; focus group discussions – 1.5 hours each. The study will primarily adopt a qualitative approach, supported by basic descriptive statistics. Qualitative data will be collected through personal interviews and focus group discussions,

while simple quantitative summaries will be derived from participants' responses to provide contextual support.

Both primary and secondary data will be used for this study. Secondary data (mainly names of people and their relevant biodata) will be collected from sources such as community registers, school registers and the Birth and Death registry; and Primary data will be collected through personal interviews of sampled respondents. Each respondent is expected to meet the following criteria: (1) at least one of the parent should a Safaliba speaker; (2) the respondent must be a resident of the sampled community for at least ten or more years; and (3) the selected respondent should be at least 15 years old and above.

The chiefs, their elders and other opinion leaders in the community will be selected by asking the Chiefs and Assembly members of the communities to identify knowledgeable individuals for the focus group discussions. A focus group discussion will include up to 10 people and shall not exceed 12 people.

Benefits/Risks of the study

The research hopes to stimulate the much-needed discourse on the importance of names and the need for traditional African names. The research seeks to analyse and interpret traditional Safaliba names so as to shed light on some facets of the culture and society of the Safaliba people. Also, since there is no elaborate research on the nomenclature of Safaliba names, this research will specifically make a compilation of Safaliba names and will serve as a reference document for future generations.

This research will serve as an avenue to sensitize respondents on the need to keep traditional Safaliba names. No physical and health risks are anticipated in this research. However, the interview requires some level of intrusion in asking for the ages of participants and other family related information regarding naming, which might be family secrets. Unfortunately, there is no alternative method for gathering reliable data about respondent or household naming systems besides obtaining it directly from residents within the study area.

The participants are expected to take some valuable time off their busy schedule to respond to the interview questions. Sitting through the 40 minutes long interview might also generate some discomfort, thus, participants will be encouraged to request a break when they so wish. No sensitive materials associated with this research will be published.

Confidentiality

For assured anonymity, the research findings that will be shared with the public will exclude information that may link the findings to the respondents. The names of respondents may, however, be important for verification in case the interviewer detects any inconsistency in the responses of the respondents. The interviewers will be made to sign a non-disclosure agreement prior to the start of data collection. Therefore, the confidentiality of the information collected on the face of the questionnaire is assured.

The principal researcher and her research assistants will be the only persons responsible for handling and analyzing the information the respondents provide. The database into which the respondents personal information will be keyed in will have all personal information masked with a unique alpha-numeric code that no one can understand except the principal researcher.

All questionnaires will be securely kept and the data that has been entered into the database will be encrypted to prevent unauthorised personnel from accessing them.

In instances where the principal researcher is expected to share information such as the name of the village or district in which the research is undertaken with the supervising Institute, or with other researchers for further research, the Institute or new researcher will be required to sign a document to legally protect the information that will be shared.

Compensation

No compensation is associated with this research except for Community Reciprocity token given to chiefs and refreshment, which will be given to participants during Focus Group Discussions.

Withdrawal from Study

Participation is entirely voluntary and participants are free to halt the interview at any time, or skip any questions they do not want to answer. Privacy is important in this research, hence any information (including personal information) would be kept confidential.

Participants wishing to withdraw should inform the interviewer of his or her intention and may in addition contact the researcher (Ruth Karehina Bodua-Mango) phone contact: 024-834-3873

Contact for Additional Information

In case of any research-related injury participants may contact

Ms. Ruth Karehina Bodua-Mango

Institute of African Studies

University of Ghana

Post Office Box LG 73

Legon

Email: ruthmango@gmail.com

Telephone: 024-834-3873

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant in this study you may contact the Administrator of the Ethics Committee for Humanities, ISSER, University of Ghana at ech@ug.edu.gh or 00233- 303-933-866.

Section C- PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT

"I have read or have had someone read all of the above, asked questions, received answers regarding participation in this study, and am willing to give consent for me, my child/ward to participate in this study. I will not have waived any of my rights by signing this consent form. Upon signing this consent form, I will receive a copy for my personal records."

_____

Name of Participant

_____

_____

Signature or mark of Participant Date

If participant cannot read and or understand the form themselves, a witness must sign here:

I was present while the benefits, risks and procedures were read to the volunteer. All questions were answered and the volunteer has agreed to take part in the research.

_____

Name of witness

_____

_____

Signature of witness / Mark Date

I certify that the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research have been explained to the above individual.

_____

Name of Person who Obtained Consent

_____

_____

Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent Date

APPENDIX C: TYPOLOGY OF SAFALIBA NAMES

Family, Community-specific and Appellative Names

Basaa

Basiba

Bonkoregi

Buribuah

Goli

Kamwinibasagi

Kapori

Kirbaani

Kolige

Koriyooku

Kupo

Kuubu

Manwo

Mmiri

Natoki

Saadaari

Taapoye

Tibe

Tingbani

Torsige

Proverbial Names

Bananemwini

Banaya

Bayayah

Berunlawra

Bileanta

Dataabee

Essunga

Mmiri

Goli

Habuziri

Kamwinibasagi

Kapori

Kirbaani

Kuribunu

Maalabajera

Manwo

Nognia

Nokisire

Ntorebanye

Onngesonga

Saadari

Saalibulache

Sabaligu

Sotenjera

Taakabu

Taapoye

Tanira

Tosige

Zinikaara

Zinisunga

Zugudaa

Appellative Names

Jara

Safalinaa

Jenjina

Nafuga

Tingbanasuba

Boyega

Duah nyen

Duah-bugibe

Ekpa

Esa

Ko

Sannye

Gbane

Wattara

Yelnde

Circumstantial Names: Death-Preventive Names

Bayaya

Kpaga

Mooru

Moosi

Tampouri

Tosege

Circumstantial Names: Theophoric Names and Names of Shrines and Deities

Bananewnini

Gbolo

Jebuni

Kamwinibasagi

Kipo

Kungi

Kupo

Kutanemwini

Laanga

Mwini

Mwini

Tiffu

Tingbani

Circumstantial Names: Posthumous Names

Bamutu

Daboo

Suku

Circumstantial Names: Manner of birth

Gariyoni

Bilesi

Chiraba

Yoori

Danni

Dari

Kaluge

Naa

Pognaa

Forgor

Circumstantial Names: Anthro-toponyms

Gbenfunaa

Kolge

Manfulinaa

Manni

Tanga

Circumstantial Names: Temporonyms

Damba

Dongu

Narnyo

Flora and Fauna

Gonu

Jara

Kaliga

Kobire

Kogo

Kolige

Kozia

Manni

Mooru

Pontonopron

Tanga

Zaranfu

Zugudaa

Teknonymy

Naa

Naatogumah

Ndaba

Nma

Nsa

Nyaa

Nyariba

Kpiaa Makpen Mabile

Yaapogo

Yaadaba

Asuba

Nyaana

Sanbile Sankpen Nyana

Nicknames

Bonkoregi

Gbenfunaa

Kaabereba

Bilingu

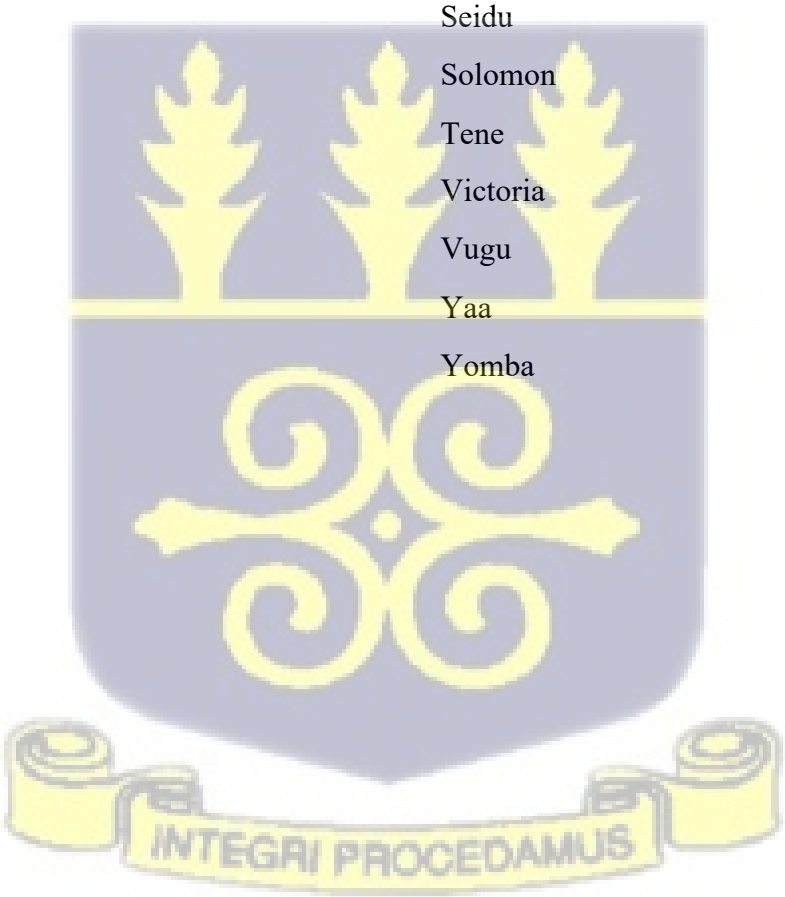
Puanaa

Mpoliya

Konka

Borrowed Names

Adam
Afia
Ajara
Alizaa
Ama
Aramata
Asaa
Ataa
Bamutu
Barbara
Bernice
Chiraba
Forgor
Godwin
Hawa
Jacob
Jimaah
Jimaah
Jimah
Jinche
John
Joseph
Kojo
Laadi
Mary
Monica
Moses
Musah
Samata
Seidu
Solomon
Tene
Victoria
Vugu
Yaa
Yomba



APPENDIX D: LIST OF NAMES COLLECTED

Abasobu
Abataba
Abataba
Abeyantata
Abienta
Abrewa
Abubakari
Abudulai
Abutu
Acheyemsi
Acholo
Adama
Adia
Afia
Afishah
Ahia
Ajankotiba
Ajankotiba
Ajara
Akati
Akunatu
Akuri
Alhassan
Alidu
Alizaa
Amaliya
Amoah
Amoro
Amubele
Anaba
Anabaŋibɛ
Anataba
Anawasa
Anisile
Anyomu
Aramata
Asana
Asheu
Asongo
Atta
Aworo
Awusi
Ayaa
Ayaba
Ayei
Ayeshtu
Ayewona
Ayie
Azamanye
Azamanyela
Badiaku
Badie
Badugo
Bahabahe
Bakari
Bakumah
Balara
Balewizi
Ballah
Bamisi
Bamutu
Banampa
Bananiwini
Banayah
Banginira
Bangiri
Bangra
Bankaligu
Banna
Banogira
Banta
Banweri
Bapuo
Bariwo
Basiba
Basobo
Basobunu
Bawuni
Bayalah
Bayalibunta
Bayayah
Baye
Bayenta
Bayivela
Bayor
Bayor
Berolawra
Bernice
Berubataba
Bilanyeta
Bilingu
Bingirisi

Biniwazun
Boduah
Bonbere
Bonberu
Bondaw
Bongsina
Bonkori
Bonrilaw
Boregi
Boregi
Borijon
Boronsun
Brubuah
Bruwana
Bula
Bumbile
Bunobee
Bunyeni
Chamori
Chankpalabuni
Cheinumu
Chenzala
Chewuna
Chiraba
Chorgribe
Daabu
Daani
Dabanyeyala
Dabasana
Daboo
Dabor
Dakura
Dakuri
Danyagiri
Dari
Darko
Dataabe
Dawuda
Deleka
Dibo
Dikumwini
Dinanta
Dingara
Dino
Dinonaa
Diso
Diso
Dogirinoma
Dogrenbere
Dogu
Dokoh
Dolu
Domba
Donberu
Donche
Donkor
Donwasore
Donwer
Duah
Durinyeyala
Esunga
Ewura
Fatima
Fogor
Friya
Gariyoni
Gbagili
Gbande
Gbensibu
Gberechu
Gbolo
Gilimwini
Gilimwini
Gmaagu
Gmamina
Gmantoa
gmantoa
Goako
Godwin
Goli
Gonu
Haana
Habuziri
Hanie
Haramwini
Harawizi
Harigu
Hawa
Hunyena
Ibrahim
Iddrisu
Issahaku
Jacob
Jamani
Janaba
Jansew

Jaramoah
Jebuni
Jedu
Jeduah
Jewu
Jimah
Jinaa
Jinche
Kabonche
Kafinti
Kamalideen
Kambakpi
Kamwinibasagi
Kananku
Kananpenaa
Kanbana
Kanyanga
Kanyiti
Kapori
Kara
Karahena
Kasah
Katakule
Kawuribi
Kayewuna
Kejenwura
Kerege
Kesira
Keyewuna
Kipo
Kiribani
Kogo
Kojo
Kolige
Konda
Kontubu
Koriyoko
Koru
Kosiaku
Kosiaku
Kotobiri
Kotomah
Kpaga
Kpatewizi
Kpema
Kponkpogili
Kubri
Kugiberu
Kukuyaa
Kundisa
Kundisuru
Kunfo
Kungi
Kunmerima
Kuntume
Kupo
Kuta
Kutabanye
Kutalamwini
Kutu
Kuubu
Laaba
Lajo
Langa
Lanyo
Lasani
Lilasum
Maaya
Mahama
Makin
Malabajera
Malabanhara
Malabankara
Manful
Mango
Mani
Manma
Manmari
Mantu
Manwo
Mariama
Mbabilyesi
Mbadigiazaa
Mbalamwini
Mbapor
Mbataba
Mbatumwini
Mbawele
Memunatu
Miama
Mohammed
Monica
Moru
Moses
Mosi
Mpawore

Mumuna
Mwini
Mwinibangi
Mwinikara
Mwininje
Mwininkuma
Mwininye
Mwiri
Naa
Nabile
Nabolbu
Nabon
Nabundabu
Nabunu
Nacheme
Nambo
Nanche
Nangbernaa
Nangolina
Nanno
Nantori
Napagita
Napogo
Nasira
Natoki
Natomah
Nbakaliba
Nbalaveni
Nbasali
Ninbala
Nkutabanye
Noginira
Nokisire
Nonbulu
Nongiri
Norgira
Nsaa
Nsumanana
Ntorebanye
Nyenache
Nyinamanyia
Nyomuyalanani
Obaidah
Onzairu
Osman
Pagba
Paribu
Pentu
Pergilibamore
Pobacheri
Pogonaa
Poreyala
Porivela
Posanbu
Posiba
Puanaa
Saaka
Sabaligu
Sabudari
Safalnaa
Sagi
Salamatu
Salanga
Salele
Salia
Salibulache
Samata
Samuah
Sanbew
Sange
Sanke
Sankundema
Sansuga
Sanyiba
Seidu
Seidubile
Sellah
Shaibu
Simendon
Sinabu
Siyanzi
Sogili
Sonyo
Soribadongi
Sorikon
sotenjera
Sotibe
Sugba
Suku
Sumananna
sunga
Sunga
Sunsi
Sunyezi
Taaba
Tagiba
Takabu

Takiyara
Tampori
Tanga
Tanira
Tapoye
Tapoye
Tene
Tesinia
Tibazu
Tibe
Tifu
Tindawa
Tingbani
Tino
Tizananyia
Tongira
Toribanye
Tosige
Tota
Tumanani
Tunweya
Vabile
Velingi
Victoria
Vugu
Waanaa
Waawu
Wari
Webu
Werbu
Wilandon
Wuriche
Yaa
Yakubu
Yawah
Yeboah
Yelikuta
Yelinpori
Yoligu
Yomba
Yori
Yussif
Zaranfu
Zena
Zinikara
Zinisunga
Zuguda