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*We dedicate this book to the babies of our world –
Ben, Nathaniel, and Hannah
and to our partners in parenting them –
Jerry and Philip*

an obligation to care for them and each other as best we can, providing them both physical and spiritual nourishment and a full understanding of their ancestry. Your greatest source of support in this effort will continue to be the women in your kin group.

Two hundred years of European colonization have strained our connection with the past, and we struggle to regain and maintain the most basic rights. It seems appropriate to close with a poem written by an Aboriginal poet, Bobbi Sykes, in which pregnancy is a metaphor for the challenges we face:

We do not always talk
of our pregnancy
for we are pregnant
with the thrust of freedom;
And our freedom looks to others
As a threat.

The View from the *Wuro*

A Guide to Child Rearing for Fulani Parents

Michelle C. Johnson

THE FULANI OF WEST AFRICA

The Fulani (also known as the Fula, Peul, and Fulbe) constitute one of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa. Numbering about 10 million, they are distributed across the southern edge of the Sahara Desert in a broad east-west belt of savannah that includes open woodland interspersed with grassland. The largest concentration of Fulani is found in northern Nigeria, where they are intermixed with settled Hausa people, but they also constitute minority groups in most other countries of West and Central Africa, including Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Togo, Ghana, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, and Chad. The Fulani speak Fulfulde (which belongs to the West Atlantic group of Sudanic languages), as well as the languages of their "host" countries. Most Fulani are practicing Muslims.

Because they are scattered over a vast area, inhabiting many different countries and leading somewhat diverse lifestyles, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly who "the Fulani" are. For convenience, the Fulani can be roughly divided into three major groups based on

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the degree to which they adhere to their traditional, pastoral way of life. The first group comprises the nomadic or pastoral Fulani, who regularly move with their families in search of optimal conditions for their herds of cattle. For example, in the dry season (roughly September to May) the Fulani of northern Nigeria travel south with their herds to avoid drought and to find adequate grazing land. In the rainy season (roughly June to August), their herds are taken north to avoid the dreaded tsetse fly, a source of disease in both cattle and humans.

Their cattle are highly valued by the pastoral Fulani whose sustenance depends on the milk and milk products that provide the bulk of their diet during the rainy season and that are exchanged for grain. Only on special ritual occasions such as the naming ceremony of a child will they slaughter a cow and eat the meat, and they sell cattle only when in dire need of cash.

For pastoral Fulani, cattle are central not only to sustenance, but to their very sense of identity. The cow is such an integral part of their life that it is said to be the father of the Fulani; according to a proverb, "If the cattle die, the Fulbe will die." Being a "good Fulani" is synonymous with being a competent herder, and the nomadic way of life is still considered to be the most "Fulani-like." Their cattle inspire men and herd-boys to compose songs and poems when traveling with them. Cattle are adorned and given names, and herd-boys as young as seven years of age will know the cattle calls, the genealogy of their herds, the types of grasses favored by their animals, and the *gikku* (character) of each.

Settled or sedentary Fulani make up the second group. Most settled Fulani are completely engaged in agricultural production and do not own cattle. Having no herds and hence no need to move, they reside in permanent villages. "Town Fulani," who hold jobs or are students in large cities, also fall into this category.

The largest group of Fulani today are semi-sedentary. They practice a mixed economy of cattle herding and agriculture. Hence, they must strive for both a practical and an ideological balance between herding and farming, constantly weighing the need for seasonal grazing to ensure the health and safety of their herds against the need to stay in one place to tend their crops. Since pastoralism is still highly esteemed and remains central to personhood and

The View from the *Muro*

identity, most Fulani think of themselves as herders more than farmers and would sacrifice their crops for the well-being of their herds. The manual that follows is based on the lifestyle and child-rearing practices of the semi-sedentary Fulani.

Traditionally, most Fulani of all groups maintain a three-tiered status system of social groups: "free" Fulani (the traditional ruling class), artisans (blacksmiths, bards, woodworkers, and women potters), and descendants of slaves. As among some other West African pastoralist groups, marriage among the Fulani ideally occurs within a limited circle defined by ties between male relatives. Some Fulani are polygamous and, when Islamized, follow the Muslim limitation of four wives. Favored marriage arrangements unite the children of two brothers or the children of a brother and sister. For all sedentary, semi-sedentary, and nomadic groups, the new wife leaves her own family's compound to reside with the groom's family. Cattle are generally transmitted from father to sons. Among the most Islamized groups, however, women, including widows, may inherit a share of cattle. Upon marriage, a woman commonly receives one cow from her husband; daughters may also receive a cow from their father at this time.

The semi-sedentary Fulani reside in villages or semipermanent camps. Their basic residential unit is the *wuro*, a term referring both to a physical structure and the particular social group that inhabits it. A *wuro* includes a cattle-owning husband, his wife or wives and their children, and his male relatives with their wives and children. A *wuro* must have at least one resident woman member; otherwise, it is referred to simply as a *suudu*, or a place where one finds shelter.

Everyday life in the Fulani *wuro* is characterized by rigid gender separation. Among all but the settled groups, men are responsible for the bulk of the cattle-herding duties such as daily pasturing, watering, veterinary care, and planning the seasonal migrations. Many older men become quite skilled at curing cattle diseases and maintaining the general health of their herds. Women spend their days caring for their children, cooking, maintaining the *wuro*, milking the herds, making dairy products such as yogurt and butter, and marketing these in exchange for grain products such as rice or millet. In addition to gender, age is another fundamental principle of

social organization; elders are shown the utmost respect and deference by younger members of the society.

The most valued traits of Fulani personhood and identity are summed up by the term *pulakku*, or "Fulani-ness." The desired qualities range from physical and cultural characteristics, such as being light-skinned and slender, to psychological factors, such as having a sense of shame, speaking Fulfulde, and taking good care of one's family and (for all but the sedentary Fulani) one's herds. A proper Fulani should be in full control of his or her own needs and emotions, and should show *seemteende* (modesty and reserve), *mumyal* (patience and fortitude), and *hakkilo* (care and forethought). For most groups, being a good Fulani also means being a good Muslim. Nevertheless, Muslim men and especially Muslim women usually continue to maintain faith in many traditional Fulani religious beliefs, including acknowledgment of the power of ancestors, spirits, and witches. Fulani parents strive to instill these highly valued characteristics and orientations in their children from infancy on.

In the childcare guide that follows, I propose as its "author" a Fulani woman born in a village but schooled in France. I base her character loosely on a young Fulani student from the village of Kaparitis (Guinea-Bissau) whom I met while living in Guinea-Bissau. My invented author extends this student's biography into a future of my own imagining. Like this student and my invented author, there are many Fulani women today who are searching for ways to maintain village practices with which they grew up – especially when it comes to raising their children – while enjoying the benefits of modern, urban life.

THE VIEW FROM THE WURO

A Guide to Child Rearing for Fulani Parents

About the Author

This is a guide to child care for Fulani parents. Although the advice is primarily tailored to the needs of parents having their first child, it may also be of use for more experienced parents living in the city who want to get back in touch with our traditional "village" child-rearing philosophy and practices. In this manual, the period immediately following birth and early childhood receives the most emphasis, but there is also some advice concerning young children up to about age ten.

I myself was raised in a small Fulani village where my family both kept cattle and farmed. After attending the village Qur'anic school, I continued my education in the French school in a nearby town. I was especially fortunate for this opportunity, since it is more common for boys than girls to continue their studies. I would often remind myself of this as I made the three-mile walk to and from school under the hot sun. I finished at the top of my class and received an international student scholarship to study psychology and education in France. After completing my studies, I returned to my home country and am now living in the city and teaching classes at the local teacher training college. Having raised my four children in the capital city made me particularly

aware of the differences between urban and rural life, and it is my sincere hope that our village traditions will continue to be important to all Fulani and our children. It is for this reason that I write this manual.

I have tried to focus on those problems, events, or precautions that are most central to Fulani village life, including basic child care, the importance of relatives, and how to protect babies against attacks from witchcraft and other dangers and diseases. This manual is designed to assist both mothers and fathers, but due to the nature of our society, mothers will find it of more interest, and so I address women directly in most sections. I hope that this manual will help prepare the way for the often rough but always rewarding journey of parenting, and that it will inspire many generations to come.

As I am still a young woman, let me assure you that I do not claim that the words on these pages have more truth or legitimacy than the words of our elders. Our elders always have the best advice, and it is to them that I dedicate this manual.



MAKING A BELLY AND BEGINNING THE STRUGGLE

Getting Ready

Soon you are going to have a baby – your true introduction to womanhood is about to begin. Childbearing is life's most important task, one that women alone can perform. As you well know from your womanly experience, raising children is a lifelong endeavor. Although it is very hard work and totally consuming, the rewards to you, your husband, and your families make it all worthwhile. The emotional rewards, increased social status, and future cattle that children ensure add immeasurably to the benefits of marriage. With the birth of your first child, you and your husband will become full members of adult society. Before your pregnancy, you were known merely as a *surbajio*, a young girl, neither a full wife nor a full woman. Becoming a mother sets you on your way to economic independence. At the same time, you must be faithful to your hus-

band, you will no longer be able to spend your nights attending games and dances with the other women, and you must accept your new role as a mother with absolute dedication.

Although this is an exciting time for you, it is important to remain calm and to keep your emotions under control as a good Fulani woman should always do. Pregnancy and childbirth are very unpredictable, and both bring considerable dangers to you, your family, and your baby. In fact, childbirth is probably the most common cause of death for women of childbearing age. Babies also run considerable risk during this joyous yet anxiety-filled time. Since they are delicate and desirable creatures, they are commonly taken prematurely from this world by spirits, witches, and other forest-dwelling creatures. Avoid calling attention to your pregnancy until the birth is imminent, to protect you from greedy spirits, as well as jealous co-wives and barren women of the community. In any case, there is no need to spread the word to your family and friends, since they will probably know of your pregnancy anyway. Young children are especially good at sensing newcomers. If you see them sweeping, handing out straws, or calling out names while looking over their shoulders, they may be signalling a pregnancy.

Your First Pregnancy

If this is your first pregnancy, you should begin making plans to leave your husband's compound and return to your father's compound. Some women prefer to return home as soon as they discover they are pregnant; others may remain at their husband's compound until the third or fourth moon, when their husbands can see that they are "making a belly." This decision should be made by you and your family, but you should most definitely not remain with your husband past the seventh moon of your first pregnancy. Giving birth is a very dangerous time for you and your baby, and it is best to be surrounded by the people you most trust. Your family will protect you and your baby against dangerous forces and uncompromising in-laws. They are also the best source of the affection, generosity, and trustworthiness you need at this important time.

Do not expect your husband to visit you while you are away. In fact, it is important for him not to have any contact with you, your

mother, or your father during this time. Don't worry about being away from him and his family. He has relatives, perhaps other wives, and his herds to worry about. More than likely, he will make inquiries concerning your well-being, and he will send gifts of millet and salt to you and your parents. Ignore the frequent demands your in-laws are likely to make for you to return to your husband's compound. Keep in mind that giving birth to your child has everything to do with you and very little to do with them. There will be plenty of time later for them to enjoy the child.

While you are pregnant with your first child, you will be known as "pregnant child," or *boofida*. Staying at your own family's compound will relieve you of your burdensome daily work and will allow you to observe the important precautions and taboos that go along with your esteemed condition. For one, you cannot sleep outside or with your grandmother. Instead, you should spend the night and most of the day inside a *suura*, a special shelter that will be built for you out of branches from the *barkshi* tree. Staying in your *suura* will ensure that you have limited contact with men and cattle. Most pregnant women spend their days inside playing with young children and helping with light household chores. You must arrange your hair in a simple, unadorned style appropriate to your condition, and you should not wear cosmetics or jewelry: unlike other women, a pregnant woman doesn't have to worry herself with beauty.

All you should be concerned with at this time is taking care of your most fundamental needs, relaxing, and observing these precautions and taboos. Don't rush anything. Plan to stay with your family for at least six moons and up to a year after your child is born. After this time, you can return to your husband's compound a new woman.

Later Pregnancies

If this is not your first pregnancy, you should simply carry on with your normal, everyday routines in your husband's compound. A woman doesn't have the time to worry about later births as she does with her first. Since you now know how challenging it is to observe strict rules and taboos for such a long period, you will find your later pregnancies much easier; they simply won't interfere with your life

as your first pregnancy did. Even if you don't mention anything to him, your husband may suspect the pregnancy and bring you gifts of meat and groundnut cakes. You and your husband can continue to have sex, and you should continue to fulfill your wifely duties of cooking for him and bringing him bath water.

With later pregnancies, you always have the option of returning home to your natal compound, and some women prefer to do this. If you decide to make the trip home, you should leave around the seventh moon of your pregnancy. If you stay with your husband, however, make sure he leaves the house when the time for birth is near. Have a female companion such as a trusted co-wife sleep with you instead. She will protect you much like your own family did when you had your first child. No men should be around when you give birth, even to later children. Childbirth is not their business – this is the Fulani way.

The Struggle

No doubt many people will remind you what to do and how to do it with regard to giving birth and surviving the first few months. Nevertheless, here are some suggestions to help you know what to expect and hence to ease your transition from girlhood to motherhood. Pregnancy lasts about ten moons, or roughly 280 days. If you are at your husband's compound, you should refrain from all work-related activities about one week before your expected delivery. Have a co-wife take over your routines, and expect to return the favor some day. Be prepared to give birth alone or with a companion. When you feel the pains come – which we call *lunwa*, the "struggle" – light a fire and squat on the floor of your shelter. As you feel the pains intensify, grit your teeth, close your eyes, and take up the kneeling position. Try to keep calm and do everything you can to avoid screaming. It is shameful to show fear of childbirth, and if your co-wives and mother-in-law hear you, you will never hear the end of it. This is one of the reasons that Fulani women like to give birth in their own family's compound!

As the baby emerges from your womb, it is of utmost importance that you make sure he or she comes in contact with the ground. This ensures that the earth will be welcoming to your child,

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and it establishes a powerful connection between the baby and his or her new home. If this contact with the earth is not made, your child will be less attached to his or her birthplace and may be more prone to leave you later in life.

The cry of your newborn child should signal your female companions to come into your shelter. If the "struggle" continues after you have delivered the baby, forget shame and go ahead and scream, since you may be having twins. If so, you will no doubt need extra assistance. Once your baby has been born, don't be alarmed when you are bombarded with birth attendants, family members, neighbors, and friends (all female, of course). If this is your first child, you might become a bit overwhelmed or nervous when so many people arrive, but you will benefit from listening to the suggestions, directions, and criticisms of the more experienced women around you. Take all insults and teasing as a good Fulani should. After all, proper mothering is not a skill with which women are born; it must be learned, and some women become better at it than others.

After your female companions have joined you in your shelter, an attendant should cut the umbilical cord with a knife or razor blade and rub the area with ashes from the fire. Have someone bury the afterbirth in the same spot where your child first touched the ground, to further strengthen the connection of place and identity that will be so important for you and your child. One of your female companions – most likely your grandmother or an older maternal relative – will heat a pot of water and wash you and your new baby thoroughly with an herbal mixture. Wash the baby directly above the place where the afterbirth was buried, to prevent it from rotting. You and your baby should continue to bathe with warm water morning and night for two moons if your child is a girl and for three if you have a boy.

It is crucial that you and your assistants maintain the fire that you lit before you gave birth; it should burn continuously during the first week of your child's life. Do not let the fire die out under any circumstances until the child's naming ceremony, which should be held on the eighth day.

Once you have had your first child, you and your husband will soon experience a change in social status. To mark this, your relatives will shower you and your child with gifts. For example, you

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should receive beautiful gowns from your husband's father and bedding materials and a ceremonial set of calabashes from your mother. Your mother must also provide her new grandchild with a decorated calf halter, which she will place around the child's neck. Your husband will give you a few head of cattle and a *danki* mat on which you can display your cooking utensils. Your husband himself will be said to "know his cattle." Having established his own household, he will experience his first taste of freedom from his father. For your part, you are no longer a *surbajo* nor a *boofilo*; you have achieved the elevated status of a *kaabo deɓbo*, a girl "who has born one." As such, you have earned the right and responsibility of milking your husband's herd, which is the key to gaining your economic independence.

A Note on Complications

So far, I have emphasized what to expect during a problem-free, successful pregnancy and delivery. In doing so, I have probably made everything seem very easy. Sometimes it is, but at other times there can be complications.

First of all, becoming pregnant isn't always as easy as we would like it to be. There is a chance that you could find it difficult to "make a belly," even when your menstrual cycle is regular and there are no obvious problems. Infertility can be a very distressing time for young couples, since there is typically great pressure from everyone, especially in-laws, to have a child. Some fathers-in-law become especially anxious and critical during this time. Although in schools the books we read tell us that fertility problems can be due to either the wife or the husband, in our villages women are most often blamed, so be prepared. Your husband should not become angry at you over this matter, but you must realize that it is only natural for him to be frustrated and to feel shame, especially if you have been married for a couple of years and are still childless. Don't be surprised if your husband speaks of leaving you. While this may seem harsh, you know that among our people, failure to bear a child is grounds for divorce, just as you could divorce your husband if he failed to provide you with enough cattle to milk. However, most husbands do not take such drastic action. Although he may never

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admit it to you, your husband may even seek herbal medicines and magical remedies to maintain or enhance his sexual vigor and aid in conception.

When you finally do become pregnant, don't be surprised if you have a miscarriage, something that is very common among Fulani women. Early during pregnancy your womb might "spill," and later in the pregnancy the "little one" might "spill." Although this may be frustrating for hopeful young mothers, there is nothing that you can do about it, so there is no use worrying about it too much. Giving birth to a child who never takes its first breath can be more of a shameful experience than womb spilling. If this happens, bury the child right away in your garden and don't make too much fuss. Still unnamed, the child was not actually a person yet. The best thing you can do is to try again for a successful birth to make you and your families happy.

If your problems with infertility and miscarriage continue, consider the possibility that they could be due to witchcraft. Witchcraft is a common danger and should be taken seriously. Failure to make a belly as well as premature deaths of babies can often be traced to the actions of witches. As a pregnant woman, you are especially vulnerable to mystical attacks by postmenopausal women or barren women who, out of jealousy, may resort to witchcraft by "eating" your child before he or she has a chance to be born. Only a specialist can determine whether your condition is caused by witchcraft, so make plans to consult one. If you are a Muslim, do not discuss your suspicions of witchcraft with anyone, especially not with any men, since they will probably tell you that belief in witchcraft is nonsense and incompatible with the doctrines of Islam. They will say, for example, that only Allah can take the life of a human being. Don't let such men alter your views. Listen to your maternal instincts. It is your job to do everything you can to protect your unborn baby as well as yourself, and you will get nowhere if you listen to the easy explanations offered by men.

If you are still not pregnant after a few years and you have tried all of the traditional remedies, it may be time for other measures. You could ask one of your relatives for a foster daughter to raise, or your husband might request a son from his relatives. Or you might want to try another husband.

The View from the *Wuro*

CARING FOR YOUR BABY

The Naming Ceremony

Your newborn is an uncivilized, incomplete being who has no self-control and is completely at the mercy of his or her needs. After all, your child doesn't even have a name yet! You should make arrangements to name your newborn one week after birth. The naming ceremony is of utmost importance since, without a name, your baby is not a person. This is an important day for you, your husband's family, and the village at large. The baby's father and his relatives will publicly recognize the child, who will indeed be introduced to and accepted by the entire community.

Since this is such an important event, expect everyone to attend: the baby's father, his relatives, your family, former slaves, and members of other Fulani lineages. The ceremony should be held at your parents' homestead. Your husband's family and your father's family must each provide a bull for the ceremony. The bull of your husband's family should be bigger than your father's. After all, your husband is the father of your child, and he should be prepared to demonstrate this fact publicly. In addition, your husband must also provide a sheep of the same sex as your child — according to Islamic custom the sheep should be white. Your husband and his relatives should arrange for a blacksmith to perform the animal sacrifices. Observing these simple rules will bestow good fortune on your child — something all parents want.

Here are some tips to make sure that your baby's naming ceremony is a success. The separation of men and women during the ceremony is important. Let the men do the "men's things," such as handling the distribution of the meat to your relatives, to important guests, and to the women for cooking the day's meal. As for the women attending the ceremony, they will present you with many wonderful things such as kola nuts, pounded millet, meat, and blessings for the health of you and your baby.

Before the actual name is given, your infant's head may need to be shaved completely, especially if you follow Islamic custom strictly. You and your sisters should first arrange for a healer to make sure that it is a good day to shave the child's head and that there is no

sign of witchcraft. If the healer suspects something, he may suggest putting off the shaving (and hence the ceremony) until another day, when he can ensure the baby's safety. If your child is a boy, his head should be shaved by your father's brother. For a girl, your brother should shave the baby's head, since your daughter may grow up to marry your brother's son. Once the baby's head is shaved, make sure your sisters (or your husband's sisters) take the hair and hide it to prevent a witch from doing any harm to your child.

After the shaving, your baby should be washed thoroughly with a medicinal mixture of water and herbs. The infant should then be carried around the *wuro* – three times for a boy and four times for a girl. The next step is for the blacksmith to ritually slaughter the sheep (by slitting its throat and uttering the proper Qur'anic verses). Finally, the blacksmith will pronounce the baby's name aloud for everyone to hear. The name that you choose for your baby should be appropriate to his or her gender and birthdate. As you know, each day of the week has at least one masculine and one feminine name associated with it. Remember that your baby can't be named on a Wednesday or a Saturday since we consider these days to be unlucky for holding a ritual. In contrast, Tuesday is a particularly favorable day both to give birth and to hold a naming ceremony. If your child was born on a Tuesday, consider yourself truly blessed; a Tuesday birth will bring good luck to both your newborn child and your family.

The naming ceremony provides an important early contact between your baby, your relatives, and the community, and it plays a crucial role in how your child's identity is formed. Presenting children to the village and giving them a name are important early steps in establishing their social position among family members and in the society at large. After all, knowing one's relatives and one's social position in relation to them is an essential quality of *pulaku*, or "Fulani-ness."

Recovering from Childbirth

Starting on the day that you give birth, you must observe a forty-day rest period. During this time, you should refrain from working. Let your relatives or co-wives take over your daily duties of milking,

fetching water and firewood, cooking and cleaning. If you have other young children, your co-wives or sisters should take care of them. You must not pray, fast, or have sexual relations with your husband. For the next five months, bathe only with hot water.

During your confinement with your newborn, expect lots of visitors. Don't be surprised if you are surrounded by grandparents, other relatives, and young children for most of the day. If your baby is sleeping when visitors arrive, always wake the little one out of courtesy to your guests. One of the most important things in your child's life is the recognition and appreciation of his or her relatives, and this should begin at birth. The presence of so many people is also very good for you, since your baby should be held continuously during the first few weeks of life; as you can imagine, this is hard for one person to do. Take advantage of this period of rest and confinement to concentrate entirely on breastfeeding, caring for your infant, and getting your strength back. Childbirth takes a lot out of a woman, but before you know it you will be back to your normal routines, little one and all.

Once your seclusion period of forty days is over, you should return to your everyday routines. Simply tie your baby to your back by wrapping a large cloth tightly around your waist. That way, you can carry on with your chores of fetching water and firewood, milking, and cooking. Another option is to have an older child (such as a daughter or a niece) carry your baby around for you while you do your work, bringing the baby to you occasionally to breastfeed. Don't try to make your baby conform to any routines or schedules of eating or sleeping: by attempting to order the disordered nature of a child, you would be wasting valuable time and energy that could be spent on milking or cooking.

Protecting Your Baby from Illness and Witchcraft

As a new mother, one of the most important challenges you will face is keeping your child healthy and safe. In the first few years of life, illness is common, but you can increase your chances of keeping your child healthy by observing your postpartum taboos and taking some precautions. Keep in mind that most illnesses (especially serious ones) can usually be traced to attacks by spirits or witches.

Certain spirits, which we call *dyirima*, reside in large trees, termite hills, springs, and some uncultivated areas. Though often invisible to us, they commonly scare babies by pulling on their arms and legs, which is why babies frequently cry for no apparent reason.

Pay extra attention to properly orienting yourself and your baby. Make sure that your sleeping mat is oriented east to west, and always sit or lie on the east side facing west. Although you are probably not accustomed to paying such strict attention to orientation at bed time, it is absolutely crucial that you start doing so now, since this is a time of danger and vulnerability for you and your baby. Remember that dusk is the time of day when the spirits are most likely to try to harm your baby.

During the first week of your child's life, always keep something made of iron – perhaps a knife or a scrap of a knife blade – near your baby at all times, especially while he or she is sleeping, as it will protect your little one by keeping away witches or spirits that desire babies. You should also carry a knife with you for protection at all times. Most mothers keep a *gariyabhi*, a small knife used to cut straw, tucked under their skirts. During the first week after birth, you should avoid being alone. Always have a friend or a relative accompany you to the bush when you relieve yourself.

Although these precautionary measures may seem tiresome or excessive, take them seriously. The last thing you want to face at this moment is a life-threatening attack on you or your child by witches or child-seeking spirits. Moreover, even though everyone knows that babies are highly valued and beautiful, direct compliments can be life threatening and must be avoided at all costs. Directly praising your baby can produce a serious condition we call *hundako*, or “mouth.” Comments such as, “What a healthy baby!” or “That’s a good-looking, fat baby!” could lead to your infant’s death. If anyone says to you, “*Wuny, saka ma na wood?*” (Wow! Your child sure is beautiful), you might reply, “*Hundako ma soppu funulo ma*” (Your mouth points right to your asshole).

Fear of witchcraft aside, every Fulani wants a beautiful baby, and it is only natural to want to bathe, oil, and mold your baby to conform to the ideals of *pulaaku*, or “Fulani-ness.” This is easiest to do after the bath, when the baby’s body is flexible. Practice a post-bath beautifying treatment that includes pressing the baby’s nose

between your thumb and index finger to make it thinner, molding the head, and gently stretching the limbs. This can be very enjoyable for you and rewarding to your child. The mother of a newborn is always proud when her own mother looks at her child and calls him or her “big head.” Keep in mind, however, that beautiful babies are also desirable babies. Someone – or something – might take your beautiful baby, causing your little one to fall sick or even die. To avoid this, offset the beautification routine with protective measures. You might try giving your child an offputting nickname such as *Birigi* (Cow-turd) or *Juggal* (Horse-picket). Rolling your child in cow dung is also a good way to fool greedy spirits into thinking that your child is not worth taking. Occasionally, remark to a friend, “Have you ever seen such an ugly baby?” Another helpful tactic is to attach a chip of the *kabi* tree to a string and tie it around your baby’s neck. You should also pay a visit to your local blacksmith early on and have him pierce your child’s ear or scarify his or her cheek for extra protection from witches and spirits.

In addition, Muslims and non-Muslims alike can also benefit from making a visit to a *marabout*. This Qur’anic scholar and ritual specialist can give you amulets containing Arabic writings to place around your child’s neck, wrists, or waist. These amulets will not only protect your child against sorcery, they will also make him or her strong and successful in later life. In addition, you can bathe your child with medicinal herbs and also with water previously used to wash Qur’anic verses off wooden planks by our children studying in Qur’anic school. At the same time that you are caring for your baby in these ways, try to avoid any public displays of affection, especially with a first born. Everyone knows that babies are irresistible, so this is very hard to do. You can enjoy your baby all you want in the privacy of your own home, but to ensure your baby’s health and safety, you and your husband should maintain an attitude of reserve toward your child in public.

During your baby’s first rainy season, the child is extremely susceptible to the cattle- and child-killing fever we call *omre*. There seems to be a connection between *omre* and a small antelope we call *lewala*, so do not eat *lewala* meat during your child’s first year. If you can acquire a *lewala* skin, you can make a protective bracelet from it to place around your child’s wrist during this dangerous time.

Feeding Your Baby

Breastfeeding is of utmost importance for both you and your baby. By giving the child your breast, you are not only providing him or her with a source of nourishment, you are displaying total motherly devotion. To ensure success in breastfeeding, there are a few things you should do. Before nursing your baby for the first time, take a purgative gruel to purify your blood. Continue to purge yourself with Bilma salt, and eat a stew of haricots mixed with the leaves of the milk-yielding plant, *agaba*. This will increase your milk supply. If you have given birth in the cold season when food is abundant and your diet is extra rich, avoid eating too much of foods such as butter, meat, couscous, and cassava, or your baby will suffer from overrich milk.

As the mother of a new child, you should be hypersensitive to your baby's needs. Offer him or her your breast at the slightest whimper – after all, no mother wants to become “deaf” to her child's crying. Responding immediately to your baby is the best way to avoid unwanted criticism from other women. If your mother-in-law is around, be extra attentive to your child, or she will be the first to yell, “*Arr myinimo*” (Come and give him the breast). This public criticism is embarrassing for a young mother and may bring shame to you and your family. Although your mother-in-law may be too much to handle at times, try to remember that she has good intentions.

You should realize that breastmilk is a powerful substance that can be dangerous. If breastmilk should drop onto your son's penis while he is nursing, he might become impotent later in his life. If breastmilk should drop onto your daughter's vagina while she is breastfeeding, she may have a very difficult time staying married.

Feel free to supplement your own breastmilk with that of the other nursing mothers in your compound. Your sisters-in-law, mother-in-law, and co-wives are your best options. In addition to breastmilk, you can give your child undiluted cow's milk, goat's milk, or butter as early as the first week.

Frequent *basi* treatments are also important for your child's nutrition and safety (Plate 14). *Basi* is a mixture of water and herbs that we give to newborns for general physical and spiritual health.



Plate 14. From birth, Fulani infants are given *basi*, a mixture of water and herbs to promote general physical and spiritual health. This mother is giving her baby her own special *basi* from a recipe passed down by her mother. Photograph by Paul Riesman, courtesy of Suzanne Riesman.

To give your child *basi*, simply dip your fingers into the pot and once the mixture has cooled, dabble your fingertips onto the baby's lips so that the liquid drips in a little at a time. If she hasn't shared it with you already, ask your mother for her *basi* recipe. All mothers have their own special recipes, usually passed down to them from their own mothers. However, if you are asked by someone from a neighboring *wuro* for your own *basi* recipe, don't give it to her. It's fine for you to share some *basi* you've already mixed, but you should keep your recipe a secret.

You may also introduce *bita* into the diet within your baby's first month of life. To make *bita*, simply mix pounded millet flour and water to make a thin gruel. Add tamarind pods, baobab fruit pulp, red peppers, or sugar for flavor.

Despite all these supplements, you should continue to breastfeed your child until well into his or her second or even third year of life. This is very important for your child's personality development.

Perhaps you've heard the Fulani sayings, "One can understand another's personality by knowing the breast from which one sucked," and "The milk that is nursed is the milk that comes back." Through breastfeeding, you are transmitting not only nourishment, but your own personality traits and idiosyncratic qualities to your child, such as the tendency to be talkative or taciturn or the tendency to eat quickly or slowly.

Most importantly, breastfeeding is an expression of devotion and maternal affection. Babies who are nursed at least two years by healthy mothers with "good milk" will have a closer relationship with their mothers in later life. If you do not breastfeed for this period, you run the risk of your child being less intelligent, less attached to you, and more prone to leave you later on. Of course, no mother wants this.

An additional benefit of breastfeeding for at least two years is that it may help you avoid becoming pregnant again too soon. If you do get pregnant, wean your child immediately. The milk that forms in your breasts belongs now to the child you are carrying, and it would be dangerous for any other child who "steals" it. If you continue to breastfeed your child while pregnant, he or she may develop "weaning disease," accompanied by diarrhea, which can be very dangerous. You can treat weaning disease by giving your child a cooked egg gathered immediately after it was laid by a chicken that has not yet had any offspring.

If your youngster resists weaning once you have made a new belly, you should consider summoning a *marabout* to recite verses from the Qur'an while spitting on some of the child's food. This will help to curb desire for the breast and will set your child on the road to successful weaning. Grandmothers can also be a great help: A drastic but very efficient way to wean a reluctant child is to send the baby to your mother. Away from you, your child will probably lose the desire to nurse. To ease the transition, the grandmother may offer her own breast to the child. This helps pacify the child, but soon he or she will realize that there is no milk and will lose interest. However, be forewarned that some grandmothers feel so sorry for their grandchildren during this difficult time, and experience such deep love for them, that they produce milk themselves! In that case, the *marabout* will be your best solution.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Toilet Training

Since you will be carrying your child around on your back for the first couple of years, you need to be very aware of your baby's excretory needs. Many mothers find it easiest to give their baby an enema twice daily, once in the morning and once at night (Plate 15). If you do so, your baby will slip into a routine, and it will be easier to train

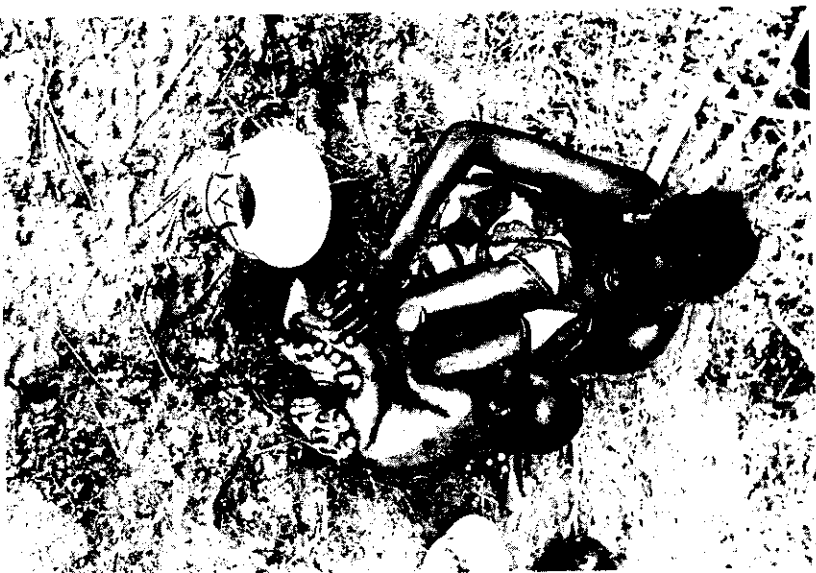


Plate 15. This Fulani baby has just been given one of his two daily enemas. His mother is jiggling him on her feet to encourage a bowel movement. Photograph by Paul Riesman, courtesy of Suzanne Riesman.

the child later. To administer an enema, fill a rubber bulb with water, lay your child belly-down and crosswise over your lap, and gently squeeze the water into the baby's anus. Next, place the baby in a sitting position on your insteps and jiggle a bit to encourage a bowel movement. If you do not have a rubber bulb (our ancestors did not), you can use your mouth to push the water. If you prefer not to administer an enema, you should place your baby on your insteps to stimulate a bowel movement.

After children can walk independently, they can be trained to go to the bush to relieve themselves. But remember that unlike the *zurro* the bush is a dangerous place, so children should always be accompanied on these outings until the age of six or so.

The Development of *Pulaaku* ("Fulani-ness")

Early childhood is a time of freedom and exploration when children begin to break away from their parents and spend more time in play groups with other children. This period marks the beginning of the qualities we Fulani treasure and believe make us who we are. You are aware of the vital importance of *pulaaku*, which includes *sementende* (modesty and reserve), *minyul* (patience and fortitude), and *bakkiilo* (care and forethought). As a parent, you must actively encourage the development of these qualities.

All Fulani parents wish to encourage *pulaaku* in their children, but you must remember that this process takes time and requires patience. Don't expect much at an early age. Although your child has been acquiring these qualities gradually since birth, they will not be firmly in place until around age six or so. You will know that your child has reached this crucial stage of development when he or she begins to recognize all the extended family members and to call them by name.

As early as age two or so, begin teaching your child the importance of the family in knowing one's place and one's identity. Encourage your youngster to greet relatives when they come to visit and to share food with them. A good way to test your child's knowledge of his or her relatives, as well as to exercise memory skills, is to ask the child to deliver an object or a message to a certain relative. You should not praise your child directly for successfully completing

the task, for such expressions of emotion are not Fulani-like. Nevertheless, you may show your satisfaction indirectly by letting your child overhear you say to another adult, "See how he knows who so-and-so is."

It is also a good idea to begin insulting your child now and then. You might say, "I am older than you and I have seen all of the foolish things you have done." This will help your child learn to accept the authority of adults. Likewise, you must teach your child never to hit or insult any older child. With this training, your child will soon learn to accept insults from parents and elders and may begin to insult younger playmates.

Good language skills are of course necessary. It is important that you begin teaching your child to speak early. Bounce your child on your knee and say words and phrases, playfully encouraging him or her to repeat them.

The Mother's Role

As parents, you and your husband both share the duties of loving and caring for your children always. You must strive to create a strong, basic sense of trust in them, so they grow up to know that the world is generally good and that people can be relied on. They should also grow up knowing that, as your children, they belong with you and that their future is with you. Moreover, you must instill in them the general importance of kinship, including what it means to be a relative, what duties are associated with kinship, and the idea that we Fulani are "all one." In addition to sharing these responsibilities, mothers and fathers also have separate but complementary duties in rearing our children.

As a mother, you are your child's most important supporter and caregiver. Assuming that you come from a well-respected family and lineage, you are by definition suitable for motherhood and your child will receive your good qualities at your breast. As a new mother, you have probably noticed that there is nothing you do that doesn't involve your child in some way. After all, those who are related "through the milk" experience long-lasting feelings of affection and devotion toward one another. Your relationship with your children should be carefree and relaxed — one of intimacy rather

than shame. Around your children, you can do things like eating and sleeping that you would be ashamed to do around your in-laws.

As a new mother, you have probably experienced a powerful emotional attachment toward your baby, who has suddenly become the most important thing in your life. For the first few years, you will be completely devoted to your child, maintaining physical contact with him or her day and night. A good Fulani mother should not be separated from her baby for more than one or two hours in a day before the age of two. Although some Fulani consider this intense emotional bond to be a "weakness," it is actually a completely normal and highly valued part of motherhood. Without it, you would be considered a bad mother.

Don't be surprised if you, as a mother, experience a closer relationship with your daughters than with your sons. This is completely normal, especially considering the fact that you will spend more time with a daughter than with a son — or, for that matter, your husband. As she grows up, you will be your daughter's primary counselor, and she will be one of your closest companions. Because of this special relationship between mothers and daughters, it is only natural for you to favor girls over boys. Yet it is important to have and value sons. Remember that when your children grow up and marry, you will rely more on your sons than on your daughters for security and comfort, since your daughters will move away to live with their husbands, while your sons will remain with you.

Raising Girls and Boys

As a mother, it is your job to be a consistent teacher, role model, and companion to your daughter. You must teach her how to be a good daughter and a good sister, and it is also your job to teach her the skills that she will need to be a wife. Most of these skills are centered around the *wuro*. As early as age three or four, you should begin teaching your daughters about child care, cooking, and fetching water and firewood. Around age six, help your daughter learn how to pound grain, weave fans and mats, decorate calabashes, and sew. At this age you can also begin teaching her how to milk cows and make butter, and she can help you sell these products at the market.

Our young girls take on responsibilities and have much less free time to play with other children than boys do. When they do play, you will probably notice your daughters imitating your behavior, practicing the skills that you have taught them. For example, they might pick up small sticks and pretend that they are running after imaginary herds. They may also build miniature camps and wells, play at cooking, and carry around dolls. Encourage this behavior since imitative play is a very good way to learn and will prepare your daughter for her later adult roles.

The daily activities of boys are less routine than those of girls. While your son is two or three years of age, he will spend most of his time in and around the *wuro* with you and his siblings and other young boys and girls. It is up to your husband, however, to teach your son that, as a boy, his life lies primarily outside the *wuro*. Once he is four or five, start encouraging him to spend more time with other young boys his age so he can form lifelong friendships.

You should also encourage your son to spend more time with his father who will teach him the value and importance of cattle. Many Fulani fathers agree that the best way to start to do this is with a calf of his own as his first gift. Have your son name the calf, teach him to take care of it, and he will soon come to love and cherish it. The calf will later become the basis for your son's first herd. When he is five or six, your husband should begin teaching him how to tend the herds, clear the fields, and raise crops, as well as how to build mud fences around the fields to keep the cattle away from the crops and grain supplies. By the time your son is seven years old, he will be ready to begin spending his days out in the fields with his father, his older brothers, or his uncles. Your son should start accompanying his father on long journeys with his herds in search of water and salt. He should learn how to take care of the goats and cows by himself — how to give them water, graze them, and tie them up at night. By the age of nine, he should be well on his way to being a good herdsman.

Discipline and Education

Parents' disciplinary style should be subtle yet firm. Remember that children are very much like cattle; some stray from the road but

eventually rejoin the herd, while others may become lost forever. Whereas much of your child's personality is predetermined by Allah and through the transmission of qualities through breastmilk, it is your job as parents (and most of this responsibility falls to the father) to make sure that his or her behavior does not stray too far from Fulani standards.

Keep in mind that it is the nature of small children to be irresponsible, to make mistakes, and to lack self-control, especially before they have fully developed social sense and *pulaaku*. Thus, you should never become too frustrated or angry with your children when they are very young. You do, however, need to make every attempt to train and to educate them in politeness, good manners, and proper etiquette so they can participate in society. If your child is acting in an inappropriate way, calmly suggest that the child alter his or her behavior. If you are a moral person and come from a good, respectable family, then your child will have received these qualities at your breast and should thus have the intelligence to take your suggestions seriously. If your child is being obstinate and ignores you, then it is up to you as a mature adult to find a solution. Avoid using force.

From time to time, you may become so frustrated that you yell at or threaten your child. This is only normal and is bound to happen occasionally. The job of being a parent is difficult and never-ending. However, you should never threaten to stop loving your children, nor should you try to make them feel guilty.

Although you may have heard experienced parents talk of beating their young children, saying that this is a good way to make them fear and respect adults, you have probably never actually *seen* them do so. This is because other family members usually prevent it. When a parent threatens to hit a child, other family members usually urge the parent to be easy on the child. As you become a more experienced parent, you will come to appreciate the importance of social influence in the education and discipline of your children. This helps maintain peaceful relations among everyone, and it also teaches children from an early age that they can count on others for support and protection. My advice to you is that, as a good Fulani, you should control your anger with your children; do not depend on your relatives to stop you from doing something that would later bring shame to you and your family.

Pulaaku, or "Fulani-ness," holds that one should not be dominated by emotions. Self-control is one of the most important virtues to instill in your young children. Of course, it is ridiculous to expect total emotional control from young children even after they have begun to develop Fulani-like qualities; still, you can show them indirectly that the raw expression of emotion is both useless and meaningless. For example, if your five-year-old child cries because he or she was hurt in some minor way (such as falling down), you should ask the child, "Who hit you?" even if you know that no one did. Teach your child that the only legitimate reason for crying is that he or she was intentionally harmed by another person.

For most of our people, being a good Fulani is inseparable from being a good Muslim, so religious education should be a basic part of your child's upbringing. In the past, parents could choose whether or not their children would study the Qur'an, but Islamic education has recently been made mandatory for all Fulani groups. Therefore, around the age of six, your sons and daughters alike should begin to learn to read Arabic letters. In addition to their formal religious education, encourage your children to pray, since prayer is proof of dedication to Islam.

Circumcision is obligatory for Fulani boys. When I was growing up, circumcision for girls was also a standard practice. There is much variation among different groups of our people in how the rite of circumcision is done for both boys and girls, at what age, by whom, and for what specific reasons. As you know, in recent years our practice of circumcising girls has become controversial. Some parents are changing the way circumcision for girls and boys is done, while others are deciding not to circumcise their daughters altogether. However, many Fulani parents still feel that circumcision is crucial for a girl's social, intellectual, and religious development. As modern parents concerned with both respecting tradition and supporting change, this will be something that you will have to think about carefully and discuss with your husband and family.

A Few Words for the New Father

The birth of your child will be one of the most momentous occasions in your life, establishing your independence as an adult. Your

responsibilities toward your child will grow as he or she does. Your behavior toward your children is considerably different from your wife's. Whereas she should show devotion, attachment, and affection toward your children from the very beginning, you should work on maintaining emotional distance. You are the children's principal authority figure, and keeping a certain distance will force them to fear, respect, and obey you. Although it is only natural that you will occasionally want to play with your children, you must not do so too much, or they will never listen to you when you are serious and want them to do something. Much of your verbal interaction with your children should be in the form of giving orders. Another important job you have is to arrange for betrothals, maybe even when your daughters are still infants, to ensure the continuity of your lineage. Just as mothers experience a closer relationship with their daughters, you will play a larger role in the lives of your sons and will tend to favor them. Your position in the village, your virility, strength, and sense of self-esteem all rest on the number of sons that you have.

A Final Note: Keeping the Community in Mind

The advice that I have offered in this manual is far from complete and far from the last word. Remember to include your relatives, friends, and co-wives in making all important decisions regarding the general health and education of your children. If you fail to do so, they may become offended. Worse yet, they may give you unwanted advice and criticize you, causing you shame. It is best to avoid all this by letting them participate in the first place. Keep in mind that parenting is too much work for one or two people alone – it takes an entire community to effectively raise a child.

Never Leave Your Little One Alone

Raising an Ifaluk Child

Huynh-Nhu Le

THE IFALUK PEOPLE OF MICRONESIA

The atoll of Ifaluk includes two tiny inhabited and two uninhabited coral islets of barely one-half square mile located in the Western Caroline Islands of Micronesia, which is in the western region of the north Pacific Ocean. The two inhabited islets, Falalop and Falachig, are separated by a 3.5-meter-wide channel that is completely dry during low tide and can easily be crossed on foot even during high tide. Ifaluk is about 350 miles east of Yap, the political center of the Western Carolines, and about 400 miles south of Guam, the nearest economic center. As of 1995, the Ifaluk population consisted of slightly over 600 individuals. Woleian is the primary language spoken on Ifaluk and the neighboring atolls of Woleai, Lamotrek, Faraulep, and Eauripik. Many men, but very few women, also speak English. According to Ifaluk legend, the island's first inhabitants came from Yap, although historical accounts identify migrants from Polynesia as the earliest settlers.

Beginning with Spain in the 1600s, for the last few centuries, the Caroline Islands have been under the control of several colonial powers. In 1898, Germany purchased the Carolines from Spain and