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**The Religious and Socio-Cultural Implication of African
Names: Igbo Naming System as a Paradigm**

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Abstract

Man is a religious being and whatever he does revolves around his religious belief because humans' belief is that the spiritual controls the physical and the supernatural controls the natural. All over the world, name has been an important aspect of human life. Some people of the world give their children names without considering the implications of those names on their children. By implications we mean the effects of the names given; but this is not so with Africans. Africans in the past valued their culture and their worldview so much that they portray them through their names. In

Africa, particularly in Igbo land, names given to children are sacred because they are given before the presence of both the living (man) and the dead (spirit) as witnesses. Name and naming ceremony in Igbo land especially in Anambra State of Nigeria is a very important issue that cannot be toyed with. These days, it has been observed that the present Igbo people in particular, and Africans in general have lost sight of the sacredness and values of their names as well as the implications of the type of names they give their children. To correct this error, this paper therefore, aspires to look into the different Igbo names as one of the African countries as well as their religious and socio-cultural implications. This will be beneficial to the present Africans, particularly the Igbo people in choosing the names they give their children, knowing that names given to a person can affect him or her negatively or positively.

Key words: Religious, Socio-cultural, Implication and Paradigm

Introduction

Africans have been known from the past by their total inclination and belief in the Supreme Being and other gods which they venerate. It should be noted that their lives anchor on these spiritual beings which were believed to control all human affairs here on earth. This is why all they do; they do them in reverence to the gods they worship so that they will maintain the cordial relationship that has been existing between them from the time of their forefathers. In looking into this topic, we observed that “a man’s name is not like a mantle, which merely hangs on him and which one perchance safely twitch and pull, but a perfectly, fitting garment, which like the skin has grown over him, at which one cannot rake and scrape without injuring the man himself” (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe). As one grows, one major question most of the elders who come across him or her would ask is ‘What is your name? One grows up to find himself or herself asking the same question to little children. The routine response is always “My name is ...” There is hardly a person in the whole world without a name. In Igbo land of Anambra State of Nigeria, name is very sacred and important and is always marked by a naming ceremony (Ogbalu, 1979).

Igbo people are a tribe which speak the Igbo language in Nigeria. They are mainly found in Anambra, Enugu, Abia, Imo and Ebonyi States. They are also found in Aniocha and Ika areas of the Delta State. The people of Igbo can as well be found in some parts of Rivers and Akwa - Ibom States. Supporting the various areas where Igbo people could be found, Nwosu (nd: 2) says.

Igbo people are located in the eastern part of the country (Nigeria), with people of Ibibio in the East, Ijaw in the Southwest, Idoma people in the Northern part, and Benin and Agbor for Igbo speaking parts in the old Bendel State as their confine. They comprise seven states: Anambra, Imo, Ebonyi, Abia, Enugu, Rivers and Delta State.

Discussing the location of Igbo land, Agugu (2006, p. 1) says: “the Igbo land is between the latitude of 5° C and 8° C in the Eastern part of “Greenwich line” of the River Niger”. According to this scholar, the Igbo land has over land mass of “50, 641 sq. km”, (15, 800 sq mile). He further stressed that a lot of cultures exist in Igbo land as well as different dialects which is very important for the day to day communication among the Igbo and their neighbours including the people that first settled in Igbo land.

Religiously, it must be noted that Igbo people can be likened to the people of Israel who attach so much importance to names given to their children. They give meaningful names based on the circumstance in which the child is born; bearing in mind the value and the implications of them. Miller & Miller (1973, p. 477) opine that name reflects the Hebrew concern to establish inheritance right and to prolong the prestige of important individuals. For example, the name Abraham means father of all nations (Genesis 17:5); Sarah means mother of all nations(Genesis 17:15&16); Moses means a child picked by the water side (Exodus 2:10); Isaac means laughter (Genesis 21:6); Samuel means a child asked of God (1Samuel 1:20); Ichabod means the glory of God has departed from Israel (1Samuel 4:21); Jacob means a grabber (Genesis 25:26); Jabez means a child born in pain (1Chronicle 4:9); Israel means struggled with the Lord and prevailed (Genesis 32:28); Immanuel means God with us (Mathew 1:23); and Jesus means a saviour (Mathew 1:21). Likewise, Africans give their children meaningful names. Thus, Mbiti (1977) says, “nearly all African names have meaning. Some names describe the personality of the individual or his character or some key events in his life, though this explanation is not sufficing, but it expresses the fact that the name given to one influences one”

In African countries as in Igbo land, the names given to a child are not randomly selected by guessing or by research work carried out on names, but by careful selection by the parents based on certain experiences of their lives and whatever name that is given to a child, signifies something (Ekwealor, 1996, p.2). The high esteem African names, Igbo names as example, command is deteriorating. They are no longer proud to answer African or Igbo names; rather, they prefer foreign ones.

In the past, names in Igbo land as part of Africa have been a matter taken very serious because a name given to a child in most cases affects the future of that child positively or negatively. In this present dispensation, the vision parents had in the past in giving their children names have been lost because of the coming of white men with their culture. These days, Igbo people like other African tribes prefer European names to Igbo names even when they do not know the meanings of those European names. A good example is such name like Lynda which means serpent.

Nowadays, most of the Igbo people in Anambra State of Nigeria no longer consider the type of names they give their children, their meanings and their

implications. Some people go as far as changing their Igbo names to European names saying that their names are heathen like and devilish. The change of names by many Igbo people has made them to lose their identity and thus, can no longer be recognized by their people or ancestors, and this has socially and religiously affected them negatively.

What is a Name?

Name is the name of anything, be it person, animal, thing or place. In this context, it is the identity mark of any person which distinguishes him or her in the midst of other people. In a nutshell, a name is what a person answers which is used to identify him or her. It may be a nick or a guy name, as long as it made the person to stand out different from other people. A name is very important because from the beginning of the creation, God gave all that He created names (Genesis 1&2). From that time to date, people have been trying to imitate God who told them in Genesis 2: 19 to give names to every new thing that comes into the world or is invented by men. This is why Igbo people also give names to their new born babies in accordance to Biblical injunctions. Again, if people do not give things names, it will be difficult to identify those things because things can only be identified by their names. This is why Emenanjo and Ndubugbo (1980, p.27) state that “everything on earth has its own name”. This helps to note that the names given to things differ.

Some African Names and their Meaning

These are some African countries’ names given to their children and the meanings of such names.

Ghana

Ahobanbo meaning *protection*, Ahoofe meaning *handsome boy*, Nkonimide meaning *a winner*, Nkoso meaning *progress*, Adom meaning *help from God*, Kplorm meaning *guide me*, Kpormor meaning *hope*, Manusi meaning *in the hand of God*, Dhakirah meaning *remember God*, Bashirar meaning *bringer of God*, Hilal meaning *happiness*, Majid meaning *glorious*.

Zambia

Muzungu meaning *a traveller*, Chikkwa meaning *the remaining one*, Nalumanga meaning *a stingy person*, Chilufya meaning *forgetful*, Chisanga meaning *born in another marriage*.

Zimbabwe

Adasha meaning *he loves God*, Aizivaishe meaning *God knows*, Akudzwe meaning *praise*, Anashe meaning *in God*, Anenyasha meaning *God have mercy*.

Cameroun

Ananda meaning *worthy of love*, Deshawn meaning *God is gracious*, Gaynell meaning *happiness*, Kendis meaning *pure* Jamar meaning *handsome*, Denzel meaning *wild one*, Beyonce meaning *beyond others*

Kenya

Imani meaning *faith*, Numa meaning *beautiful*, Maluum meaning *the best of among others*, Aban meaning *light*, Adhiramdo meaning *born in the west*.

Angola

Aldonza meaning *sweet*, Aline meaning *lovely*, Adelia meaning *kindness*, Amindo meaning *most beautiful*, Avelina meaning *life*.

South Africa

Janet meaning *God's gracious gift*, Kefilwe meaning *I'm given*, Lesidi meaning *the light*, Uuka meaning *arise*, Onelenna meaning *she is with me*

Egypt

Nadia meaning *hope*, Earlene meaning *noble woman*, Ealasaïd meaning *promise of God*, Earnest meaning *serious minded*, Naak meaning *golden*

Liberia

Yeanue meaning *life has come*, Suah meaning *a new beginning*, Zokaya meaning *my heart be patient*, Poady meaning *mother is good*, Thema meaning *queen*

Burkina Faso

Ariel meaning *God's lion*, Atias meaning *gift*, Benarela meaning *son of vision*, Lazar meaning *he helped*, Orli meaning *light for me*

In **Nigeria**, the two other major tribes we have are Hausa and Yoruba apart from Igbo tribe. These are some of the names given by Hausa and Yoruba people with their Igbo and English equivalents.

Yoruba	Igbo	English
Ibukunoluwa	Ngozichukwu	God's blessing
Ayo	Añuri	Joy
Ife	Ifunanya	Love
Annuoluwapo	Eberechukwuka	God's mercy is great
Funmi	Onyinye	Gift
Adefoun	Adaeze	Princess

Remilekun	Nwankasiobi	Consolation child
Nifemi	Humnanya	Love me
Gbekelolu	Kaḡḡbara Chukwu	It is left to God
Ibilola	Imunwaburu	Child birth is gain

Hausa	Igbo	English
Idara	Añuri	Joy
Abudusalam	Onyeziudo	Messenger of peace
Abdullah	OnyeziChineke	Servant of God
Babangida	Nnanweulo	Father of the house
Faizah	Mmeri	Victorious
Imam	Okwukwe	Faith
Kauna	Ihunanya	Love
Zanifa	Amara	Grace
Tijani	Onyinye	Gift
Yankari	Ndidi	Patience

Philosophy behind Igbo Names and Their Values

The African people attach great importance to the names of things and persons. To them, nothing is said to exist until that thing is named. Names are not just abstract terms couched in indefiniteness; they are not mere labels. But they are pregnant with meaningful and symbolic importations (Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979, p.36). The names which the people give to their children clearly reflect the importance of African names. Each of the names when examined carefully is either a full sentence or contraction of sentences.

Igbo names have significance of expression and intensity of human emotions attached to them. The attachment does not only have personal living memory, it is also a record of persons and events that have been associated and connected with them. There is more in a name- joy and sorrow, pathos and passion, tragedy and comedy, humanity and inhumanity, the fact is that there are usually centered on Igbo names, all the philosophies- all the love and tenderness, all the hate and scorn, all the jest and satire, all the hopes, aspirations and ambitions- that people who bear these names are capable of (Opara 1998, p.172). Nze (1981, p.24) also avers

The names are but the pages, experiences and the chapters in the life history of every household; more than this, they are the diary of daily record either of a person's progress and development or of his deterioration and downfall. These names are not saccharine but, like an aircraft's box, that record the content or totality of the individual Igbo.

It, therefore, means that Igbo names are not only meaningful but also reflect on certain experiences and certain circumstances that occurred during child birth, human sojourn on earth, and also social expectations. They reflect joy, sorrow, deaths, potentials, prospects and other things of life. Igbo names are not like English names where they bear Bush, Forest, Water, Storm, Scorpion, River, Rock, Wind and many others. Any name an Igbo man gives to his child has a philosophy behind it and at the same time has some religious and socio-cultural implications.

It must be noted that inasmuch as the names Igbo people give to their children reflect the philosophies of their lives, it is very clear that they do not likely give their children bad or evil names simple because the child is born in a bad circumstance, rather they give their children names that are good in order to change that evil situation to good one and this really helps to change the situation for better. And where they peradventure give bad names to their children, it will be to make mockery of that situation in which the child was born and not necessarily that they like the names. Such names are: Iloṅṅo, Ilokanṅo, Aghadi, and many others.

The religious and socio-cultural implications of African names are seen in the philosophies behind those names and these are reflected in the type of names they give. Religiously, most African names, Igbo names to be precise, are in one way or the other reflecting the general accepted view that the spiritual controls the physical. Therefore, almost all African names reflect directly or indirectly the spirit embodied in the gods they venerate.

Some of the Philosophies behind Igbo Names

- (i) Igbo people give names based on the experiences they had in life, either as individual, family, village or community.
- (ii) They give names based on what the person is expecting in his life
- (iii) They give names in order to appreciate what God has done in their lives
- (iv) They also use names to praise God or human beings or any good thing that has happened in their lives
- (v) Igbo people also give names based on what they believe or based on their world view
- (vi) They give names based on the name of their market days.

- (vii) Igbo names are also given based on the name of God the Creator or based on the gods they venerate.
- (viii) They also give names based on the person that reincarnated in the baby

Let us look into some of the names Igbo people give to their children based on the above philosophies and their religious and socio-cultural values and implications.

Names Given Based on the Past Experiences of Life

Igbo people give names to their children base on their experiences in life, which is based on what they have been through or encountered in their lives. It may be a thing of joy or sorrow, in which ever case, the names given to children born in that particular situation, reflect on that circumstance in which they were given birth to. Examples:

Ọzọemena: meaning *let what has happened before not happen again*. This type of name is given when something bad such as terrible disease or untimely death has happened to a person, family, village or community. It is believed that when this type of name is given, it will help to prevent further occurrences of the same evil. It does not follow that because a child is born in time of sorrow they should give him “Iruuju” meaning Sorrowful as in English name -Deirdre or Cessair.

Ọnwúbiko: meaning *death please kill us no more*. The name is given in a family, village or community where death has taken so many lives both old and young. It is to plead with death to stop killing them.

Ọnwumere: meaning *the act of death or what death has done*. This posits a picture of the advent of a child into a household during a time when all is woe and desolation, perhaps on account of some grievous calamity that had befallen the family. This is just to say that it is death that has caused these sorrows, may be sorrows of childlessness and not to enjoin death to continue killing them.

Echezona: meaning *do not forget about the past*. The name is given to inform people that they should not forget what has happened in the past, be it good or bad. It is to remember the good done to you in the past by someone and payback, and also to remember the bad that came across you and be more careful.

Chigboogu: meaning *God come to our rescue*. It is a name given in a situation that people have been fighting one another either in the same family, village, town or community. The name is given asking God to intervene in the matter because He is the last solution, and not a name like Emily which means Rival.

Chinasaokwu: meaning *God is my advocate*. This is a name given when one has been in suppression of another person powerful than him. He uses this name given to his baby to ask God to plead for his case.

Ọguebego: meaning *the battle is over*. This is a name given when someone has been delivered from a very long time problem.

Nkọlịka: meaning *we will testify about what has happened*. It is a name given when someone is giving testimony of what has happened to him. To show that he has gotten that which he has been looking for and that is why he is testifying about it.

Names Given in Order to Appreciate What God has Done

Chukwuemeka	meaning	God has done well
Chukwudalụ	meaning	God thank you
Kenechukwu	meaning	Thank God
Chukwudiọgọ	meaning	God is gracious
Chukwuemelie	meaning	God has conquered
Chizaram	meaning	God has answered me
Chukwuanụgo	meaning	God has heard
Chukwukadibịa	meaning	God is greater than Physicians
Chukwuebuka	meaning	God is great
Chukwudịebere	meaning	God is merciful
Chidimma	meaning	God is good
Chiamaka	meaning	God is beautiful
Chidịebube	meaning	God is glorious
Chimamanda	meaning	my God will not fall

The above names are used to appreciate God for one thing or the other which He has done to people. All these names are positive names which portray the values of Igbo names and they directly or indirectly have religious and socio-cultural implications/undertone.

Names Used to Praise God or Human Beings

These are names that are given to praise the nature or character/quality of God or man.

Chukwuebuka	meaning	God is great
Chidịebube	meaning	God is glorious
Mmọọjekwu	meaning	God will decide
Mmọọbụike	meaning	God is strength
Chukwudiile	meaning	God is effective
Chukwunwike	meaning	God has the power
Mmadụka	meaning	Man is greater

Mmaduḅugwu	meaning	Man is prestigious
Mmaduakonam	meaning	I shall not lack human being
Chukwudimma	meaning	God is good

Names Given Based on Beliefs or Worldview

Ọfokaja	meaning	No evil can befall an upright person
Ọfokansi	meaning	An upright man cannot be harmed by charms
Chukwukadibia	meaning	It is God that can heal all manner of sicknesses

Mmoṅnago	meaning	God defends the weak and the helpless
Ndubuisi	meaning	Life is the foremost before other things.
Ndukaku	meaning	Life is better than money
Ọnwuasanya	meaning	Death respects no one
Ọnwuamaeze	meaning	Death do not respect kings
Onyekaonwu	meaning	Who is greater than death?
Akubuike	meaning	Wealth is strength
Nwokebuike	meaning	Man is important
Nnabuike	meaning	Father is important
Mmadukaku	meaning	Man is greater than riches
Mmadukaajiaka	meaning	Humans are supportive
Azubuike	meaning	Relatives are strength
Mmaduagwuna	meaning	Humans shall not be lacked

All these names are given in different situations to show Igbo peoples' belief or their worldview about life, human beings and God. They are views that are not disputable.

Names Given Based on the Name of the Market Day

The market days we have in Igbo land are- Eke, Orie, Afọ and Nkwọ. Eke is the first followed by others. It is the Igbo peoples' belief that Eke and Afọ are male and that male children are usually born on those days; while Orie and Nkwọ are female and female children are usually given birth on those days. Nevertheless, their names can be given to both male and female.

Nwankwọ	-Male -meaning	Nkwọ's (market day) son that is born on Nkwọ day
Nwafọ	- Male - meaning	Afọ's son- born on Afọ day
Nweke	- Male - meaning	Eke's son- born on Eke day

Nwoye – Male - meaning	Orie’s son- born on Orié day
Mgbeke – Female - meaning	Eke’s daughter- born on Eke day
Mgborie -Female- meaning	Orie’s daughter- born on Orié day
Mgbankwọ – Female- meaning-	Nkwọ’s daughter- born on Nkwọ day
Mgbafo – Female- meaning-	Afo’s daughter- born on Afo day. Others include:
Ọnunkwọ- Male	
Okonkwọ- Male	
Okoye-Male	
Okafo- Male	
Okeke- Male	

The names are given based on the market day in which the person is given birth to. The religious implication being that the spirit of each market day whose name has been given to the baby will take the responsibility of protecting the baby from evil throughout his or her life. On the socio-cultural implications, it was believed that the spirit will help to pave a good and prosperous way for a child that bears his name.

Names Given Based on God or the gods the People Venerate.

Some of the names Igbo people give their children that are related to Supreme God directly are few. This is because there are many names they give to their children that are attached to gods. These are some of the names

Chukwu	meaning	God
Mmọọ	meaning	Spirit because God is seen as spirit.
Eke (not market day) -	meaning-	The creator of the universe
Olisa	meaning	God

Apart from the names given in relation to the Supreme God, there are other names Igbo people give their children which are based on the gods they venerate in their different communities. Some of them include the following

Nwammọọ	meaning	Son of the Spirit
Nwagbala	meaning	Son of Deity
Enemmọọ	meaning	We look unto the spirit
Mmọọkwe	meaning	If it pleases the Spirit
Okemmọọ	meaning	Great Spirit

Mmuṛaa/Mmṛkwe-	meaning-	If Spirit permits
Mmṛotoo	meaning	Let the Spirit praise
Mmṛodi	meaning	There is Spirit
Mmṛokelu	meaning	The Spirit creates
Mmṛokwugwo	meaning	The Spirit pays
Mmṛonago	meaning	Spirit speaks for one.
Mmṛonekwu	meaning	Spirit speaks
Mmṛonazo	meaning	Spirit defends
Mmṛochekwa	meaning	Spirit protects

Names Given Based on Peoples' Relationship with One Another

These types of names are mostly given when there are troubles and quarrels among the people in which case one person is oppressing the other because he is stronger or wealthier than him. In this situation, the weaker has no other option than to ask God to fight for him.

Chigorom- meaning- God vindicates me

Chekwebekwukwu- meaning- Trust in God in time of troubles

Chinwekwu-meaning- God has the final say

Chimunya- meaning- My God is awake to see what my enemies are planning against me

Chikaodiji- meaning- Everything is in God's hands

Chikwado- meaning- If God allows my enemies they will prevail with their plans if not, they will fail.

Names Given Based on the Person that Reincarnated in the Child

Igbo people also give their children names based on a person that reincarnated in them, because they believe in reincarnation. It must be emphasized that these names have religious and socio-cultural implications on those that bear them because Igbo people believe that a child that bears the name of a person he or she reincarnated in has some characters of that person. The characters are mostly positive although there may be some occasions a little bit of the person's negative character may manifest. This is because it was the belief of the Igbo people that only good people with good reputations

when they were alive are allowed to reincarnate. Therefore, they believe that any of their ancestors that reincarnate in their children is a thing of joy and therefore, that child must bear the name of the person he reincarnated. Some of the names include the following

Nnenna- meaning *father's mother*. It is a name given when the person reincarnated is the mother of their father.

Nnenne-meaning *mother's mother*. It is given when the person that reincarnated is the mother of their mother.

Nnanna-meaning *father's father*. It is given when the person that reincarnated is the father of their father.

Nnedi- meaning *mother is alive*, given where mother reincarnated.

Nnabija- meaning *my father has come*, given when the father of the is reincarnated. These names are given at times together with the real name of the persons they reincarnated.

Some of the European names given by Igbo and African people which have bad meanings

Lynda	Serpent
Cynthia	Snake
Kennedy	Misshapen head
Cecilia	Blind
Emily	Rival
Claudia	Cripple or Lame
Mara	Bitter
Leah	Weary
Calvin	Bald
Gideon	Having a stump for a hand
James	Supplanter
Jersey	Cow
Juliet	Downy bearded
Deirdre	Sorrowful
Portia	Pig

Mallony	Unlucky
Cessair	Affliction
Campell	Crooked mouth

Conclusion

There are diverse cultures in the world, so also are names. Igbo names are unique and cannot be compared with other names of other cultures. They are so unique that Igbo people should be proud of them. This paper has been able to inform us about a tribe in eastern part of Nigeria called the Igbo. It has also been able to look into the sacredness and values of African names which were portrayed clearly using Igbo names as examples. It also went further to explore some of the philosophies behind Igbo names and the religious and socio-cultural implications attached to them and discovered that there are some names that bring good luck and some that come with bad luck. It was also observed that the sacredness and values attached in the names given by Igbo people in particular and Africans in general are deteriorating resulting in some negative omen befalling our young ones. This paper therefore, upholds that Igbo people and Africans in general should consider the meaning and implications of every name before giving it to their children. They should go back to their old reasons and ways of giving their children names so that their lives will be affected positively.

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