Research Article,

SOME SELECTED IGBO NAMES AND ITS SYMBOLISM IN TRADITIONAL RELIGION: AN INTERPRETATIVE PARADIGM

Authors: Madukasi Francis. Chuks*
Department of Religion & Society. Igbariam Campus, Anambra State, Nigeria.

Corresponding Author: Madukasi Francis. Chuks

Abstract: Names are not just given for the sake of giving names in traditional Igbo communities respectively. Names are given according to the circumstances that surrounded the birth of a child and this actually makes such names to be symbolic and impregnated with meanings. In traditional Igbo communities, certain names are believed to be part or associated with molding of a person’s character. However, Igbo names play some vital roles or significance in these societies. This paper examines why names are given in these two tribes and to bring out their interpretive paradigm. Certain names are given in order to maintain and make peace and cordial relationship among the community members. Names are given to warn or guard against and challenge envy which usually leads to conflict in the community. Names are given to challenge the prospective evil doer to enable him refrain from evil. Names are given to maintain whole some relationships between man and supernatural. Names are given to insult, appeal or praise to the players of the Heavenly spiritual abode and the mundane Earth to enable them achieve a welcome goal or objective. Names are given to signify the various designations that individuals hold especially in respect of others with whom he may be having interaction with be it political, religious, social, and economic.

Keywords: Conflict, Envy, Relationship, Symbolic, Protection.

Introduction:

Before having a brain-storming acid test on this topic, the first question that comes to mind is: What is a name? It was William Shakespeare that asked this vital question and went further to explain that it is a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. Basically, unwittingly, what is practically the behavioral and cultural attitude of people of the western societies to names and giving of names? Since time immemorial, the totality of the culture contact or assimilation has been a source of frustration and perhaps of wonderment to the people of Africa when they see or hear such strange names which the foreigner’s living in their Territorial boundaries bear and are still bearing up till today. However, do to their own lukewarm attitude towards their own names – that is behavioral attitudes simply anchored upon their own culture, Africans invariably find it very difficult to understand and digest the reason why a white man should bear such names as green, stone, young and so on. For the sake of cross-fertilization of ideas as far as socio-cultural import is concerned, therefore, it is a sine-qua non and imperative to note that to the non-western man of African continent, or of Nigeria, and in the example or analogy chosen here the Igbo race in...
particular, names have their cultural, religious, political, economic, and sociological significance and symbolism. No wonder why Ezeanya wrote that for the Igbo people, as for the Hebrews, a name is not just a personal label for the sake of identity. It means much more (1994:7). On this, Nabofa asserted that names of individuals, places, objects and events have meanings, they are not mere labels. Rather each name mirrors the mind of the originator at the time it was given (1994:63). Also, we should note the fact that not only do names have their meanings and symbols among the Igbo Ethnic group in Nigeria, but this meaningfulness equally makes possible the use of names sociological tendency or phenomena such as the person –to-person, group-to-group, community-to-community relations and interactions in the African view, the total expression of the aesthetic, social control and maintenance of order and so on. At birth, a name is given to a child; there is a belief in the African culture that there is a notion of permanence about the name given. More so, one of the most important customs of the Igbo people eastern Nigeria in line or connection with birth of a child is, the naming ceremony. Again, Ezeanya asserted that: The naming ceremony is as important to the Igbo people as it was to the Hebrews of the old. One has only to read the Old Testament to see the similarities between the Hebrew custom and that of the Igbos in this as many other aspects of life (1994:4).

Origin of Names:
The genealogy of giving names started from time immemorial. Suffice it to say that giving of names to both living and non-living things primarily began from the creation of man. God created series of things but gave him (man) a special privilege to have dominion over the animals by giving their names. According to the book of Genesis: Then the lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him. So out of the ground the lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name (2:18-19). This is the genesis of giving name from time immemorial. Analytically, among the things God created either from animal kingdom and plants, it is only man that practically possesses the creative abilities or power in mental and psychic forms. Moreover, it is true that animals and plants of different species, even the smallest of microscopic creatures, have the inclination to procreate themselves through sexual process or genetic mutation. In fact, every living thing possesses this power of reproduction but it is only man who has the proclivity to reflect on his experience and express it with names even symbols. We should not forget the fact that this creative power is part and parcel of the Divine essence of consciousness within virtually every human being as a homo Sapience. It is this element or characteristics of divine awareness which distinguishes him (man) from all other living creatures in either the animal plant kingdoms respectively. No wonder why Nabofa opined that: Psychologists have often asserted that the only difference between man and animals, plants and minerals is that whereas man can engage in abstract thinking and attain to self-consciousness as well as engage in metaphysical analysis, animals follow their instincts and have not yet attained to that self-consciousness that gives rise to various forms of symbolization (1994:4). From the perspective of the Hebrew usage, a person received or for a new name to be given to a person it simply indicates or showcase a brand new change in his rank or appointment be it in the area of socio-political or religio-economic endeavor (Gen. 17:5; 32:28). Apparently, the most frequent source of the name which was given was somehow circumstantial at the period or moment a child is born. Probably, it might concern the mother who gave birth to the child biologically or otherwise (Gen, 4:1). No wonder why Eve, the mother of all mothers called or named her first child Cain simply because she had gotten a male child. Invariably, Rachel while in labour, about dying when she was to put to bed, named her son Ben-oni, ‘son of my
sorrow’ (Gen, 35:18). However, the name often than not basically concerns the father as the head of the family (Exodus, 2:22). But in most cases, this circumstance was prophetic as regards the naming of Jacob (Gen, 25:26). Consequently, the most vital category names is that which clearly contains some divine titles, names, or symbols to show divine essence and authority. This is most out-standing characteristic of Hebrew names because it depicts the people’s close relationship, interaction with and trust in God. In fact, these names express outwardly and eternally the supremacy, power, or the mercy of God, the help expected from Him, the feeling of kingship with Him. At times, these names relating to their national God are shortened or abridged but the divine elements being communicated and are understood. Also, among the Hebrew’s, names represent character and the essence of personality of a person. Among the Igbo speaking people of eastern Nigeria, when a child is born the naming ceremony is usually observed with great joy and feasting. The naming ceremony takes place precisely after seven Igbo-weeks (twenty-eight days). The relatives of the celebrants are invited both male and female and are equally entertained. During the process of the naming ceremony, two or more names may be given to that same child. But we should take note of the fact that the general name indicates the name of the Igbo week-days (Eke, Oye, Afor, and Nkwo). However, the other names that follow these are always significant, symbolic, imbued and fully impregnated with meaningful idiosyncrasies and ideologies for the members of the family and the relatives than the first name given. Such name may characteristically and pragmatically express a remarkable event or circumstance that surrounded the birth of that child or very closely connected with the family. According to Idowu, it is generally believed that if a person’s name is known, it will be easy to bless the person or harm him by magic (1973:84). Honestly, the long awaited birth of a male child and prayed for in the family is basically an occasion or event of immense joy and satisfaction and because of this, the new born child may be named such names like “Chukwuemeka”, which means that God has done it for the family or “Chimaobim” which means that God knows my heart desire. Another such names are “Ifeanacho” meaning that the family has gotten what it has been longing for. But in another way, parents or families who have lost some children may call the surviving child, “Ndubuisi” which means that what really matters is being alive or “Chebeluonwu” which stands for or as a warning to think of death. Although, in this discourse, our main objective is first to vividly present the fundamental philosophy which basically determines the attitudes of the Igbo people as a classical tribe in eastern part of Nigeria towards names, naming, and also present a comprehensive classifications of names as it has to do with their sociological usages and intersperse. These classifications, with penetrating/striking analysis thereby laying bare the complete diverse meanings and interpretations (social, religious, economic, psychological) with which the names are fully pregnant and have sociological import. To digress a bit, we should not forget the fact that some unbiased and visionary scholars have done some works or research about the origin of the Igbo people. Such scholars like (Idigo, 1955, Idigo, 2001, Omorogie, 1989, Ikeanyibe, 1999, Isichie, 1976, and Eyisi, 2010) confirmed logically with Biblical and archeological evidences the Hebrew nexus and origin of the Igbo people in diaspora. The examples of such names given by Rev. Cannon Udoabata Onunwa are very instructive in this instance. According to Onunwa, if an Igbo person gets a child at a time that coincides with the period he is celebrating a vindication by an ethical deity after an Oath, he may, out of happiness, give names which will communicate such glad tidings of vindication to the child. If the child is a male one, he may be given such names as:

Chinagorom: the gods (sic) are my vindicator.
Anaebonam: may the Earth goddess not accuse me of an evil.

Chimaobim:
Emesiebom: do not accuse me of what I know nothing of.

If it is, however, a female child she may be given such names:

Chinasa: the gods (sic) speaks in my defense.

Chiebonam: may the gods (sic) not accuse me of anything.

Chijiaga: God has my vindication.

In case of false accusation and there is no person to bear witness that could vindicate the claims of the just, there are also consolatory names and expressions which would assure the innocent of impartiality of God and the ethical divinities. Such names include the following:

Chukwu-ga-ekwu-onum: God will speak for me.

Chukwu-ga-ekpe: God will judge.

Mogo: The spirit will exonerate me.

Ikpe-Chukwu: God’s case (is always free from false judgment (1990:127f).

From this perspective, (Nabofa) opined that:

The above and many other such personal Igbo names effectively communicate the people’s firm belief in the sincerity and justice of God, other ethical deities and the ancestors to defend the just and innocent. The historical, theological and ethical information, concepts and beliefs encoded in such names are communicated from generation to generation in the community (1994:64-65).

Symbolism and its Concept:

Clearly in behavioral of human psychology, it is a known fact that ideas simply emanates from experience or revelation (Nabofa, 1994:3). Man being what he is, is always eager or inquisitive to ascribe meanings to each of its experiences and it is this kind of attitude that actually stimulates man’s instinct of curiosity from the known to an unknown, especially as it has to do with his religious awareness (Nabofa, 1994:3). In other words, he uses such religious ideas to elaborate rituals that inculcate decrees and doctrines “concerning the Nature of God, the Universal Being, Fatherhood and Beneficence of God, Eternity and Immortality of the Soul” (Akintola, 1992:2). Nonetheless, among all the things God created, it is only man that possesses that natural tendency or proclivity for creative powers in mental and psychic forms to reflect on his experience and express it with symbols, upon the fact that animals and plants have that power to reproduce themselves through natural methods or otherwise (Nabofa, 1994:4). Nabofa again asserts that: Man is not only a symbolizing and conceptualizing animal. He is also “meaning–seeking”, but meaning can only be stored in symbols. Hence symbols constitute power resources liable to use and misuse. A society and its religion can only be understood through an analysis of the symbols by which its members communicate, worship, express their faith, evangelise, and manipulate relationships especially those involving religious beliefs (1994:21). Nonetheless, Nabofa (1994:21) went further again to argue that by studying and learning about symbols in their religious contexts, we can find a kind of back-door approach to a deeper theological understanding of what the Africans actually believe, actually practice and actually say about their faith. The symbols makes you think says Paul Ricoeur (1971:404f). According to the book of Genesis: God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; man and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth (Gen, 1:27-28).

From the psychological point of view, Nabofa notes that:

Psychologists have often asserted that the only different between man and the other animals, plants and minerals is that whereas man can engage in abstract thinking and attain to self-consciousness as well as engage in metaphysical
Madukasi Francis. Chuks / SOME SELECTED IGBO NAMES AND ITS SYMBOLISM IN TRADITIONAL RELIGION: AN INTERPRETATIVE PARADIGM

analysis, animals follow their instincts and have not yet attained to that self-consciousness that gives rise to various forms of symbolization (1994:4).

Buttressing this further, Edwin Smith argues that:

Neglecting this fact, some writers make the mistake of supposing that the untutored Africa is incapable of abstract thinking. By changing mu-ntu, ‘human being’, into bu-ntu he expresses the ideas of ‘manliness, virtue, humanity’. Yet, while well able to think abstractly, he prefers to put his thought and feeling into vivid concrete terms (Smith, 1966:10-11). Nonetheless, Nabofa (1994:3) in recognizing the significance of concrete terms as symbols of religions asserts that “the metaphysics of any religion cannot be fully and adequately studied, grasped and appreciated without a fair knowledge of its symbolic forms and processes which normally emerged out of the illumination”. Omijeh (1983:195) laments that “nowhere did early missionaries and Western writer’s misunderstand African cultures and societies as in the rituals and symbolism”. Sundermeier (1998:39) asserts that symbols relate to actual world and always have a material side; they can be heard, felt and imagined. He argues that because of their sensory character, they can speak to the emotional nature of human beings. They are satisfying; that is why it is in their nature to be accepted. They have to resonate with the feelings and value of the group and individual (Sundermeier, 1998:38-39). Nabofa (1994:77) argues that every scholar in the study of religion in Africa is aware of the fact that liturgical symbols, especially the non-physical ones, are enmeshed in the totality of African culture and that African Biblical scholarship really appreciates the benefits derivable from the use of appropriate African symbols in interpreting the Biblical message to mediate and suite the African situation. Samuel Abogunrin (1991) asserts in justifying the commentaries and importance of some scholars for the African culture opined that: While God exists totally free from culture; human beings are totally immersed in culture. But God from beginning has used human culture as the milieu to reveal Himself to mankind. In communicating his revelation to man, God has often submitted to cultural limitations because human beings cannot comprehend supernatural truths outside his own cultural understanding. Therefore, God has always revealed himself (sic) in terms of human language and culture. African religion and culture which shaped the lives of our fathers have continued to exert great influence on life in Africa. It therefore, means that biblical interpretation in Africa must take cognizance of this particular spiritual, cultural and intellectual milieu (Abounding, 1991: vf). However, before we start the discourse on the concept of symbols, Ekeke (2010:6) argues that it is of paramount significance that we align our discussion on the symbolism to a theoretical framework to help us assimilate and understand in full details the orientation we are set to examine and in this wise, one main theoretical view that would be considered very vital would be the symbolic interactionism of George Mead which is a theory synonymous with symbols in social institutions of human interaction. Ekeke (2010:6) again asserts that “once we have conceptualized an object we can now think of that object even when that object is no more invisible. Therefore, the object is thought of symbolically”. He argues further that symbolic conceptions and thought reduces this shortcoming of limited experience of human beings to what we actually see, hear, or fear, therefore concludes that almost all interactions between and among human beings are dimensions of exchange of symbols by presenting four primary and interrelated levels (Ekeke, 2010:6). The first level is impulse and that “impulse which involves an immediate sensuous stimulation, the need to do something about it” (Ritzer, 2000:208). The second one is perception, and according to Ekeke (2010:6) “George Mead sees perception as involving incoming stimuli as well as the mental images they create. People do not simply respond immediately to stimuli but rather think about and assess them through mental...
imagery. They also actively select characteristics of a stimuli and release among sets of stimuli”. Ritzer (2000:208) argues that such a stimuli, may have several dimensions, and the actor is able to select among them. Buttressing this further, Ekeke (2010:6) asserts that George Mead calls the third level manipulation. He argues that sequel to the manifestation of the impulse with the object perceived, what follows immediately is action-taking with regard to the conceptualized symbol. The fourth and the last level according to George Mead is consummation and at this level that actor in symbolic interaction particularizes the specific objective of his choices of the many possible meanings or interpretations of the object, towards satisfying the original impulse (Ekeke, 2010:6). In another development, Giddens (1997:565) defines symbols as something that stands for, represents a person, idea, letter, figure, or sign that expresses a sound, a number, a chemical substance. The implication here is that, one symbolic form may be capable of several meanings or interpretations and this made Radcliffe-Brown (1969:142) to argue that whatever has a meaning is a symbol and the meaning or interpretation is what is expressed by the symbol, that is to say, the “translation, explanation, meaning or conceptualization of the sign-object would be in relation with a subsequent sign representing the same object” (Partmentier, 1994:5). Strictly speaking, symbols vary among different class of people and worshippers and we should not forget the fact that the adherents of the diverse religions believe that they are not worshipping or rather venerating images associated with their religions, but invariably they are using them to stimulate the whims and caprices of their imagination to the proper act of worship (Okoye, 2011:52). This is why Wosien (1992:30) posits that “when a symbol is made to have finite meaning, as opposed to merely being a paraphrase of the mysterious, an approximation to reality, then it becomes an idol”. Those who are in the field of Psychology of Religion will be most concerned with how symbols are used to manipulate, and how they actually influence the mind and behaviour of the believer (Nabofa, 1994:5). In fact, images, emblems or symbols are not end in themselves, but means to an end (Adelowo, 1990:162), no wonder all professions or religious bodies, be it traditional religion, Christianity, Islam and other secular bodies expresses their experiences through symbols, while these expressions could be articulated and mediated in religious emblems, ideograms, icons, rituals, songs, prayers, myths, incantations, vows, customary behaviour and personifications (Nabofa, 1994:4). In this wise, Ezeanya (1994:8) opines that “one of the important customs of the Igbo people of Nigeria in connection with the birth of a child, is the naming ceremony. For the Igbo people, for the Hebrews, a name is not just a personal label for the sake of identity. It means much”. However, in indigenous religious practices the basic assimilation and understanding of these so called religious symbols makes itself to be comprehensive, rapid and compact to use, it equally assists in understanding and concentration during any kind of religious rituals to achieve divine essence (Nabofa, 1994:4). No wonder, when Christianity and Islamic religions came to Africa, because traditional religious symbols have their ambiguities and these could shroud their true meaning to the unwary, they branded those symbol as objects of heathenism, animism, idolatry, fetishism and so on (Nabofa, 1994:5). Thus, according to Geoffrey Parrinder (1987:127) “such religious symbols are means of expression used by Africans, scriptures of a sort, in the arts which Africans developed and whose originality and power have been recognized by European artists such as Picasso, Epstein and Henry Moore”. He argues that “painting and sculpture, in stone, ivory, brass, wood, clay, cloth and other materials have been used since time immemorial for daily purposes and for important representations. These express people’s beliefs from the inside, though their interpretation by others is not always easy” (Parrinder, 1987:127). Because of the use of such derogatory terms by the Western and Arab scholars, visionary and articulated religious scholars, theologians and
leaders of thought in various endeavours deemed it wise to consider giving this term symbol a definition, today the word symbol means an image, object that suggests or refers to something else (Hornby, 1995:1215). Thompson (1970:9) asserts that symbol is anything which exists for its purpose of pointing people beyond itself. Cohen (1974:26) sees symbols as “objects, acts, relationships or linguistic formations that stand ambiguously for a multiplicity of meanings”. This concept of symbol made Clifford Geertz to conceive of culture as a text (Crapanzano, 1986:68-76) which serves as a vehicle for conception (Geertz, 1973:91). Kreinath (2005:102) argues that this implies that any form of ritual action can be seen as a kind of religious behaviour, which is approached through the lens of a broad linguistic model. Here, what this tries to point out is that we have various symbolic forms and that there is every possibility for one symbolic form to be given several meanings and such meanings would equally be given at different segments depending upon the ability and capability of the interpreter’s level of consciousness and intelligence (Nabofa, 1994:6). However, Susanne Langer (1958:174) in her book Theology and Life, simply made a distinction between a mere sign and symbol and according to her, a sign merely or probably indicates a thing, while a symbol however represents it. Buttressing this further, Sundermeier argues that: Symbol should not be confused with allegory. The law of analogy prohibits this. Allegory links up things which do not belong together, adding something to reality. Symbols, on the other hand, make visible the powers which belong together, and participate in each other. Nor should a symbol be confused with a sign. Signs are one-directional, unmistakable. Symbols condemn several aspects which are not fully explainable. Interpretation can change, without the previous interpretation losing its validity, even when its significance decreases. Different interpretations are not mutually exclusive. They have to be understood as supplementary, since each interpretation embraces only one level of meaning, be it social [as in social anthropology], legal, psychological or religious. Synchronising these levels is the essential task of the symbol (Sundermeier, 1998:39). In one of his own contributions, to what symbols stands for, Carl Jung (1979:20) asserts that these are meaningless in themselves; they equally have acquired recognizable meanings through common usage or even deliberate intent. He further argues that: What we call a symbol is a term, a name or even a picture that may be familiar in daily life, yet that possesses specific connotations in addition to its conventional and obvious meaning. It implies something vague, unknown or hidden from us…Thus a word or an image is symbolic when it implies something more than its obvious and immediate meaning. It has a wider “unconscious” aspect that is never precisely defined or fully explained. Nor can one hope to define or explain it. As the mind explores the symbol, it is led to ideas that lie beyond the grasp of reason (Jung, 1979:20). Mircea Eliade (1987:861) asserts that symbol reveals certain dimension of reality that would otherwise elude our knowledge and this deeper dimension is disclosed or revealed not only through the reflection of the interpreters of the symbols but in the “internal or innermost logic” proper to the symbols themselves. Radcliffe-Brown (1952:143) argues that whatever has meaning is a symbol and the meaning is what is expressed by the symbol. Nonetheless, Symbol by definition is communal that converts latent power into energy (Sundermeier, 1998:53). Buttressing this further, Paul Ricoeur (1995:5) explains that “symbol as a multiple-meaning expression characterized by a hidden logic of double reference. Symbols are like signs in that they intend something beyond themselves. But whereas the sign possesses a relatively obvious and conventional set of denotations, the symbol’s meanings are polysemic, difficult to discern, and virtually inexhaustible in depth”. Benjamin Ray (1976:17) posits that mythical symbols and ritual acts are thus decidedly instrumental and they not only say what reality is, but they also shape the world to conform with, this reality. In this respect,
religion plays an enormous role in African societies. He argues that archetypal symbols express a community’s past and they structure collective rites for corporate benefit and in the traditional context religion cannot be a purely personal affair; the relation to the sacred is, first of all, a communal one (Ray, 1976:17). According to Sundermeier (1998:38) symbols, unfolds reality in such a way that it communicates reality. He argues that “there is no other reality than that accessible in the symbol. The symbol lives from unity, even when it is directed at the partial. It does not cry out from within reality, but emanates reality in such a way that participation becomes possible. It comes from the whole and unfolds it before us. The ‘whole’ is the world around, of which the invisible world is an essential part” (Sundermeier, 1998:38).

However, this concept of symbol is seen as, a recognition of one thing as standing or representing another thing (Firth, 1973:79). Tillich (1959:54) asserts that “symbols are similar to signs in one distinctive respect: both symbols and signs point beyond themselves to something else” when “it finds acceptance in the group consciousness” (Tovey, 2004:12). On a general note, symbol from the above definitions given would be seen as a hallmark of an idea, a logo, a sign, a ritual or perhaps a psycho-behavioural pattern that stands out as an overt representation of an inner experience or essence of the unconscious (Nabofa, 1994:7). Symbols themselves represent the continued role of tradition (Gibson & Dunbar-Hall, 2006:396). Symbols always contain something of them, sometimes strongly, sometimes faintly (Sundermeier, 1998:38). No wonder Montgomery (2016: 17) asserts that “most Africans used the symbol of the master as a cloak for their own spirits”. To sum up this, in traditional religious practices and systems, Igbo names would be described as a “hallmark of symbol of dignity, royalty, respect” (Nti, 1990:86) in the tradition and hegemony of the Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria because of various functions it performs.

### African Concept of Names in Relation to Morality:

In Africa naming is unique and meaningful, even among people of different subcultures within a speech community. Name for the Igbo is not just a tag, it have social, linguistic, historical, religious and philosophic interpretations. Because of the close tie between morality and belief, it is deductible name can be a guide to morality. The Igbo, therefore, through names live. Morality, of course, is the proper articulation of relationship between human beings. Alongside the fact of the place of name for the Igbo, is the power of word itself. The deep reflective character of the Igbo is reflected in their names vividly shown especially in their naming ceremony. Name in traditional Igbo culture itself is an art that carries with it a lot of information. Most names simply recount history of particular events such as war or any serious event that has to do with life. A look at the concept of name in Igbo culture may help reveal more about the Igbo morality and how this affects the formation of conscience. African names are not mere labels, they are pregnant with meanings. They manifest a person inner reality and express African cosmology, the social, economic political and religious values of the society, the tensions and struggles of man in society. Thus Igbo names bear great moral import in the formation of conscience. Igbo name shapes their bearers. However, this has greatly changed with the modern time. Now people takes names without so much reflecting on what the meaning they may have. Naming and being named is very important for the Igbo, this may account for the unparallel desire of most Igbo people to belong to one form or the other. Name is important for identification and is in most cases the simplest form of identification. That's why the Igbo bear Ahamefula (my name will not lost). For the Igbo's, children are given theophoric names by their parents like, Ifeanyichukwu (nothing is more than God). With this, the child is made to believe and trust only in God (Chineke). The study assumes a position that the Igbo do not give names to their children anyhow, it argues that names of
children of the Igbo born are a projection of not only the whims of the parents but also a window through which we mirror their lives and concatenations. At times, such names constitute an aphorism unto themselves as well as an exemplum of their worldview, what we may in Igbo refer to as *Uwa Ndi Igbo*. Naming reveals the people's sociological and ideological culture, vis-a-vis, their folkways, fears and aspirations, joys and hates, ideals and values as well as their cultural and spiritual values in which they hold so dear. This paper observes that every generation sets its own value. That is why the philosophic meanings of naming of the previous generation of our forebears sharply contrast with those of the succeeding generations. It could be said, therefore, that one lives according to ones name. The naming of a child both humanizes and socializes him. It makes him a member of family society. Names are believed to carry with them their morality also. More implicitly than explicitly, these forms of formation of conscience show the wisdom of the ancients.

**Igbo Worldview:**
A worldview has been referred to as how people perceive and explain their world, or the ways things are or change in their environment. According to Ogbu (1992) and Kraft (1979) a worldview can be understood in terms of a unified picture of the cosmos explained by a system of concepts, which order the natural and social rhythms, and the place of individuals and communities in them. In other words, a world-view reflects people's basic assumptions about, and perceptions of the universe, which give orientation and value to their lives. A people's worldview stands for their source of explanations for the ways things are in the world, including their theories of illness, death, and misfortunes, and how human afflictions and problems can be resolved. No wonder Animalu (1990) asserts that “a worldview or cosmological framework refers to a people's way of organizing their activities which explain the how and why of daily existence” (p. 43.). Worldviews are products of experiences so pregnant with drama that such experiences give rise to symbols or totems of some sort. The symbols give rise to thought or creative intelligence (*ako-na-uche*) and creative intelligence gives rise, in turn, to the customs and codes of the society, which are so internalized, from childhood onwards, that they go unquestioned as a way of life. A cultural group such as the Igbo is able from their worldview, to explain reality, life and the human environment, and predict space-time events, and finally exert control over them. According to Ejizu (1987) the force of Igbo Religion as of any other religion or ideological system rests with the cosmology, which undergirds it. In the case of the traditional Igbo, all forms of individual and group religious practices occur within the broad outline of their worldview (Ejizu, 1987:132). Particular belief systems, such as the basis for the ritual naming of a child, the *Okuku Onye-Uwa* ceremony, and death and burial rites and other traditional values and practices emanate from and are validated by it. Animalu (1990) argues that it is not only religion, but also most other aspects of Igbo traditional socio-cultural life that come under the influence of Igbo worldview.

**Igbo Social-Cultural and Moral Values:**
A major social practice among the Igbo is the ritual naming of the newborn. For an Igbo child, the ceremony of being named is the beginning point of being socialized into the membership of the community. Some of the names given to the child during such a ritual, as *Onwubiko* (death, I implore you) bear testimony to the suffering and desperation experienced by the parents preceding the child's birth. Such names often help to make the child to resolve, to acquire good decorum, to avoid adding, to the pain of existence already suffered by the parents before he or she was born. Furthermore, influenced by Igbo worldview, Igbo birth rites initiate sex-role orientation at an early age. The child is expected to model after the reincarnated ancestor or deity represented by the godfather or godmother (the *Onye-Uwd*). People point to gestures, character traits, looks, and other signs to confirm that the child really is a
reincarnation of a loved one or a deity. Thus, a middle-aged man may call a baby, grandfather because he perceives the baby as a reincarnated grandfather. From birth, rites of passage are designed to celebrate and initiate the child into the family and community. In the past, wealth and children were considered as, in one way, related. Children were more valued than money. This is expressed in the Igbo name Nwakaego, meaning, "Child is more precious than money". Customary life among the Igbo is based on omenanilomenala, the ancestral rules of the land grounded on the laws of the earth goddess, Ani/Ala. Animalu (1990) listed the Igbo market week to consist of four days: Eke, Orie, Afar and Nkwo. Different towns or villages hold their markets on different market days. All local deities have special market days that are sacred to them. For the fact the Igbo perceived motion as cyclic changes of space and time, they used the same names, as above, Eke, Oye, Afar, Nkwo, to designate both locations in space, and locations in the time of the four-day Igbo market week (izu). Hence, among the Igbo, the assertion, "Afamefula" (may my name never be lost), becomes a matter of identity and a guiding principle in the lives of individuals, and communities.

Names and Morality:
In Igbo cosmology, the Igbo are religious ones. This is because, it is a society based on the religious cosmology, a cosmology which looks at the world as a unified whole. It is society where life, its enhancement and preservation are cherished as a value. It is a society in which the inhabitants of all cosmic forces are expected to work in harmonious relationship in order to maintain an organic cosmic harmony. The traditional Igbo orientation to the ultimate is their great respect for morality and so they dread the consequences in-built in committing any offense against the Supreme Being, the ancestors, local divinities and deities. The ultimate, which a traditional Igbo person cherishes, is to live a good and worthy life here on earth, die and receive full and proper burial rites and finally rejoin his ancestors who lived well and died a good death. This could only be achieved within a decent moral order.

Names (Aha):
Selected Igbo Names and Their Interpretative Paradigm:
In other not to waste our precious time counting and recounting, an endless names in among Igbo speaking people of Hebrew origin, we have decided to select some the names given voluntarily by the Igbo parents. These classifications of names, bears most of the sociological implications as we have maintained all along in this paper. Although, the following Igbo names, drawn from the Nigerian and South African situation, equally depicts how the people use personal names to transmit their religious beliefs especially about God. A lot of information could be gathered from an Igbo name, as each one carries some significance and meaning. From an Igbo name, one could gather information such as the market day someone was born (Okafor means a male born on Afor day), their clan (Nwaneri means a descendant of Eri), the profession of their father (Ezeana means the descendant of a priest of Ani), as well as the circumstances around their birth (Ijeagha refers to a child born during war). Besides these things, alot of Igbo philosophy is apparent in many names. Take for example, the meanings of these names:

Afulukwe: “Seeing is believing”
Akobundu: “Wisdom is Life”
Azikiwe: “To turn ones back is better than getting angry”
Chibueze: “God is King”
Ezinne: “Good Mother”
Jideofor: “Hold on to righteousness”
Nneka: “Mother is Supreme”
Nkeiruka: “The future is greater”
Nwachukwu: “Child of God”
Onyemobi: Who knows the heart?
Onwuasoanya: “Death respects no one”
Tabansi: “Have the patience (of a vulture)”

Naming Ceremony in Igbo Traditional Religion and Their Interpretations:
Name occupies a very important and central place in the Igbo culture. To be exact, naming in the Igbo tradition begins somewhat earlier than the actual naming ceremony. The period before the event, that means the period of pregnancy is equally important, sometimes determining what name a child is given after birth. Once a woman has a safe delivery the naming ceremony gives the family and relations the opportunity to express their feelings. Names also surrounds the circumstances a child is born.

The names given to infant in some cases indicate the faith the family has in the proficiency of the local deities. A child maybe named Akwali or Udo or Nwangwu depending on the parent's faithful affinity to the deity. The process of naming within themselves follows the same prescriptive rituals as well as modus operandi. It hinges on the demands of traditional religion of their forebears, irrespective of alien religious faith. For instance, the names unique to our ancestors are no longer attractive to the present generation. Indeed, naming among our ancestors was sentential, syntactically speaking. However, sentential naming is customary of the Igbo people in general, as Achebe (1982) aptly puts it; Igbo name "is a full-length philosophical statement (p.67)." Essien (2004) Affirms that some of the sentential names are "positive, and negative...names," and "declarative sentential names (p.1 15)." For example, some sentential names are the following:

**Odibemje:** There is no place I am going (sort of "I wait and see.").

**Omeremsorom:** He that hurt me should avoid me.

**Olembadimma:** Which town (or people) is or a good?

**Ejirimezeba:** Did I become rich or wealthy on account of Ezeship (i.e. Kingship).

**Emereonyeokwe:** Who is hurt or offended and he agrees?

**Igbojimkpo:** The Igbo arm themselves with boasts.

**Elesionyeiroanya:** Do not look at or mind the enemy.

**Agbosolannadi:** You do not run a flight of life through vampire or wicked kinsman.

**Nnadiborusilam:** May vampire or wicked kinsman not vilify me.

**Onyesimfee:** Who really asks or wants me to pass or survive.

**Nnadiawuke:** Wicked or vampire kinsman is not a haven of kinship.

**Ihegwuruike:** The thing that defies strength.

**Nkemjemereomara:** What I would do for Omara (people).

**Onwummerebiojiripeempe:** It is death that makes (or diminishes the number of) a family to be small.

**Ukabiaralam:** May trouble not come to me.

**Nnadikachi:** Vampire or wicked kinsman is greater than one's personal god.

**Onyekwuruje:** Who is courageous enough to speak up (near to the brave person).

Names, like those above, are no longer given to the present-day people. Rather names that reflect their value system are those that appeal to the adherents of the twenty-first century post-religious modernism, as well as those that reflect the spirit of the time. Consider the following examples:

**Oluebube:** Miracle.

**Odera/Chidera:** (If) God predestines or ordains.

**Kaosisochukwu** (Abbreviated Kosi): As it pleases God.

**Kamsiyoochukwu** (abbreviated Kansi): As I requested God.

**Chisimdi(iri)** (abbreviated Simdi, to make it sound foreign): My God said I shall live.

**Lyaiakimo:** (Water does not lack in Imo (River).

**Ogechukwu** (abbreviated Oge): Gods time is the best.

**Igbo Names and Its Moral Implications:**

According to Madu (1997) asserts, "The term 'morality' derivers from the Latin plural "mores", meaning morals or manners. It is used to mean the generally accepted code of conduct in a society or within a sub-group of society. Secondly, it is used to mean the pursuit of the good life" (p.l 13). Obiefuna cited in Madu (1997) maintains that "Morality is man's conscience determined by his future, which serves as potentials in moral decision (p. 113). Obiefuna here considers morality from...
the eschatology. Metuh cited in Madu (1997) distinguish four elements of morality as: Ground of morality; or what makes an act good or bad. That is, that from which is an act or prohibition device its binding force. For example by law, custom, religion, society, etc. Motive of morality: the reason for which an individual does a certain act. Criterion or morality: Measures by which we know what is right or wrong (i.e. Conscience). Sanctions for morality: or reward or punishment which usually goes with morality but not essentially part of it (p.1 14). Arinze (2001) states that "in Igbo traditional society religion is the basis of morality both through the beliefs of the people as well as through the sanctions imposed by customs and prohibitions" (p. 123).

**Names Relating To Time of Birth:**
Some are named after weather due to the state of the weather then. Some are named after thunder, market day (Okonkwo, Okorie, Ekeamaka, Nwafor, Nwoye), rain, drought, harvest.

**Names That Show Religious Feelings:**
Many of the names that are given show people's religious feelings. The names given to infant in some cases indicate the faith the family has in the proficiency of the local deities. A child maybe named Akwali or Udo or Nwangwu, Nwodo, depending on the parent's faithful affinity to the deity.

**Names Which Describe the Child or Its Background:**
There are names which mark the habits of the child, activities in the family or country, unusual events, the places where the child was born, the interests of the parents or community (such as keeping cattle, collecting honey), social relationships (especially names of kinsmen such as uncle, grandparents, nephew, and so on). Names like, Nnamdi, Okoroji, Dimgba, Nneka, Ukamaka, Uzoamaka, Ogbuefi.

**Religious Implications of Names:**
Since Igbo parents do not name their children anyhow, naming has (traditional) religious implications. According to Kanu (2015) In African Traditional Religion, the desire for life ndu and its preservation is the *sumnum bonum* (the supreme and every other thing is expected to serve its realization. The prominent appearance of Igbo proverbs, parables and personal names project the height of the value the African places on life. For instance, the Igbo would say *Ndubuisi* life is the first. From this perspective, life for the Igbo is the prime necessity. Life should be pursued before and above every other thing or value.

**Ndukaku:** Life is greater than wealth. This is a little bit related to the first if life is greater than wealth, then, wealth must not be pursuit at the expense of life. A very significant concept of *ndu* among Africans is the idea that *ndu* is from God. This makes the human person a theomorphic being. This explains why the Igbos say, *ndu sin a chi* (life is from God). It is, thus, not surprising that the Igbo-African would name their child:

**Chi-nyere ndu:** God gave life *Nke-chi-nyere:* the one God has given *Chi-n'eyendu:* God gives life. Therefore, acting on the dictates of religious influence, Anyachonkeya (2006) comments that; When a baby is born, the parents will enquire from a diviner (*dibia afa*), among other things, who reincarnated the baby and who will perform the traditional *iriiga oga l'onu* as well as the person to shave the baby's hair. These inquiries are considered germane because it is feared that the baby might come to some harm if the inquiries were not made. The inquiries are pursued ever before the baby is given a name. (p. 118). These eschatological and ethnographic implications associated with naming are knitted in the naming of a born and in Igbo land by extension. *Okwa mba na achi na olu* (The bush fowl of a people shouts in voice). Indeed, the religious implication of naming is the arrowhead under which all other implications lie and so we now proceed to enquire into the other implications associated with naming in Igbo land. For the Igbo stock, *chi* is supreme in their belief system. That is why Achebe (1982) agreed, that *chi* is a concept that is "central in Igbo psychology." What does an Igbo born do without placing God in the front burner? Absolutely
nothing! (p.93). He further said that this is why Igbo gives their children these names:

Chukwumaeze: (God knows the king),
Maduawuchukwu: (Man is not God),
Chukwuma: (God Knows),
Chukwudi: (God lives),
Chioma: (God is pleasant),
Alisichukwu: (Do not underrate God),
Ngozichukwuka: (God's blessing is supreme),
Chimsi(ri)mdi: (My God said I will live),
Munachimso: (My God is with me),
Chinwendu: (God is the owner of life),
Chinyere/Ihechinyere: (God's gift [is supreme]),
Chiamaka: (God is good), (p. 94).

Arua (2009) concurs to this assertion. He says: "The meaning of names resides in the message they convey, the wishes they express, the histories they record and the gratitude (to God) they express", (p.65).

Names and its Sociological Implications:
The social implications of naming are legion. This paper will examine a few examples of them under certain criteria. One of the social criteria revolves around marriage. From the discipline of sociology, we learn that functions of marriage, among others, include security, sexual gratification, companionship and procreation. The premium attached to procreation in marriage is reflected in the following names Igbo parents give their children.

Uzoejinwa(adighiechiechichi): (The path or route where a child is begotten (does not close).
Nkwutesilanwa: (Mention is possible where a child is begotten).

(a) Social Implication of Naming: Allusion or Innuendo:
Another social perspective under which an Igbo parent gives names to his or her child is a reply to his or her neighbour's taunting. Such naming has allusive connotation.

Anochirimonyeanya: (Who is it have I blocked?).
Omeremsorom: (He/She who hurt me should avoid me).

Emereonyeokwe: Who is it that is hurt or offended and he/she yields?

(b) Social Implication of Naming: Supremacy of Child Over All Else
Another social implication of naming is in respect of supremacy in which children enjoy over wealth.

Ahiazuwun: (No market sells [a] child).
Maduamaka: (Human is incomparable or is uniquely beautiful).

Madukaejekwu: (It is in human being we can boast).

(c) Social Implication of Naming: Supremacy of Kinship or Siblings Over Other Considerations:
Naming under this heading recognizes the incomparable gains of kinship in begetting siblings.

Ikwuka: (Kinship is supreme).
Izikalanwunne: (Whispering for decision-making is supreme among siblings).

(d) Social Implication of Naming: On the Supremacy of Kinship or Siblings Over Other Considerations:
Naming under this heading recognizes the incomparable gains of kinship in begetting siblings.

Ikwuka: (Kinship is supreme).
Izikalanwunne: (Whispering for decision-making is supreme among siblings).

(d) Social Implication of Naming: On the Supremacy of Kinship or Siblings Over Other Considerations:
Naming under this heading recognizes the incomparable gains of kinship in begetting siblings.

Ikwuka: (Kinship is supreme).
Izikalanwunne: (Whispering for decision-making is supreme among siblings).

(e) Social Implication of Naming: Gender Superiority:
Because of the patriarchal nature of the Igbo people, certain names given to male children allude to gender superiority. That is why the people concede preeminence to procreation in marriage.
So they are overtly conscious and desperate to beget male children. An Igbo parent is happy when he or she begets male and female children. But even at that, he looks forward to seeing the child of his or hers who he or she would call a child (nwa) to come from his or her (first) son. That is why in Owerri regional dialect, especially in Mbaise and Ngor-Okpalla, parents give their male children the name *Azuwuine*, which means: "I am proud I have got a successor and inheritor"! *Nwokediegwu*: (A man is awesome), *Amutaobielo*: (After begetting a child, a son, the mind is at rest, (This name has the same contextual meaning with Obiajulu). *Obidimaru*: (May my mind be heavy with satisfaction). *Amaeruchi*: (Homestead or family would not obliterate). *Obiefule*: (May my family not obliterate). *Onyekeleihem*: (May no one share my inheritance). *Amefule*: (May [my] family not get lost, or go into oblivion).

(f) *Eschatological Implication of Naming*
This criterion of naming should come under religious implication. However, this paper chose to give it a special highlight owing to its confounding semanticity. Naming under this criterion reveals human emptiness and helplessness to the unknown, death and vagaries beyond man’s compass. This paper explores the following names Igbo parent may give his son.

*Onyemaelu*: (Who knows the cosmos above?).
*Amaiewuwalamba*: (Who knows the (finale of the) world from the beginning). *Onwuamaeze*: (Death knows no king).
*Onwuanaibe*: (Death accepts no kinsman in exchange)
*Onwuharonye*: (Who does death spare?).
*Onwuegbuchulem*: (Death, I implore you; don’t kill me untimely).
*Onwumerebiojiripaempe*: (Death made a family to be very small), etc
*Onwubiko*: (Death please)
*Onwughara*: (Death forgive).

**General Symbolic Functions of Names:**
There are so many roles name plays in the socio-cultural, socio-religious, socio-political and economy of the traditional Igbo society. From the history of mankind Sofola (1973:109) argues that the antics and dynamics of social behavior and interaction in human communities, communities of social animals with absolute powers for proper reasoning and verbalizing, actually calls for the performance of the adaptive functions in which the entire members adapt to one another and to the social environment. In another way, adjustments of desires, rights and temperaments of the whole individuals are encoded such that they do not jeopardize those of others; complete resolution of conflicts and the elimination of disruptive factors are somehow some of the essential nutrients that a society must grapple or contend with. More so, if organization, order and stability are to be maintained in our human society, then these vital problems must be grappled with squarely. These would be seen from the names given in traditional Igbo society and their functions, among these are:

1. Names primarily are for identity.
2. Names acts as an order to maintain and make peace among the community members.
3. Names acts as a warning against and challenge envy which usually leads to conflict in the Community.
4. Names challenge the prospective evildoer to enable him refrain from evil.
5. Names seek to maintain wholesome relationships between man and the supernatural.
6. Names seek to insult or appeal to the players of the heavenly spiritual abode and the Mundane earth to achieve a welcome goal.
7. Name acts as a communicative medium to affirm people’s belief in the sincerity and justice of God, other ethical deities and ancestors to defend the defendless and the innocent.
8. Names signifies or symbolizes seniority

Conclusion:

Almost every Igbo personal name, and those of things and places, has deep theological, philosophical, sociological, ethical, economic and political meanings. They express the people’s belief in the different characteristics or attributes and capabilities of God, other ethical deities and the ancestors and other objects of worship the sacred, ritualized and profane. In Igbo tribe respectively, names are called or announced daily, and when they are used the ideas that are surrounded and connoted with them are directly transmitted and received. However, most of the Igbo personal names are prayerful and thanksgiving expressions. Basically, like all other forms of prayers, they communicate religious ideas a great deal in Igbo paradigm. This brief study has attempted to explore the implications of naming and morality among the Igbo. Sources consulted accede the fact that naming has social, linguistic, philosophic colouring. The Igbo names children bear are a reflection of their parents’ thoughts and life's travails. Put differently, the names given to children are the whims of their parents. Why not? Yes, as Achebe (1982) aptly puts it, an Igbo name “is a full-length philosophical statement” (p.67) and goes ahead to lay bare his discursive agenda: If you want to know how life has treated an Igbo man, a good place to look is the names his children bear. His fears, his joys, his sorrow, grievances against his fellows, or complaints about the way he has been used by fortune, even straight historical records are all there (p.96). Yes, even how he has been used by fortune, etc., is there, hence, such names as Enyekwaramlezi (Where I actually or truthfully given [this child?]). The name just summarizes the point for an Igbo parent, who has lost many of his children to death; he got one at last at his old age and queries his chi: Were I truthfully given this child? Okafor (2004) recaptures this truth of fiction of Achebe in another captivating way and in the process restates the corpus of this essay. He said, on the occasion of naming a child on the eighth (market) day: a father gives his child a name that is usually a statement about the family's circumstances. Again, in Igbo land as in most traditional patrilineal societies, families are anxious to have male offspring who will perpetuate their names. This paper unveils the world view of our people as regards our ideological culture. Naming among Igbo people showcases their fears and aspirations, joys and hates, ideals and values as well as cultural and spiritual values in child rearing practice in Africa. In effect, we should love our language and live our language by giving our children Igbo names, for our culture is our essence as a people. No more Igbo names that carry a lot of meaning and brings a lot of good luck to who has it, these days it is English names to children and even some people who had their Igbo names have made their names sound English, examples, Uchenna to Urch, Ikechukwu to lyk, Chikayima to Kyma, Chidumebi to Dume, Chukwuemeka to Chuks etc. Igbo people should be proud of themselves by not allowing the Igbo language to die off.

References:


Reference:


[29.] National Teachers’ Institute, 1990. NCE/DLS Course Book on Cultural & Creative Arts Cycle 2, Kaduna, Nigeria.

[30.] National Teachers’ Institute, 1990. NCE/DLS Course Book on Primary Education Studies Cycle 2, Kaduna, Nigeria.


