



## EXAMINING THE CONTRIBUTION OF SELECTED AFRICAN NOVELS TO THE NAMING RITES

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**ABSTRACT:** *In the African context, a new-born baby receives his or her names during the naming ceremony. After receiving all the names, these names play a very important role in the existence of an African family. But with colonization, the way Africans received names has drastically changed because of the interference of the new cultures that were brought by the colonizers. One of the main factors that are part of the changes is Christianity. It is this regard that African writers in the quest of African dignity try to depict through the various novels in this article in which circumstances names are given, and how the naming ceremonies are affected with colonization until in this era of Globalization. These naming ceremonies have great importance in the existence of Africans and that is why they have been painted vividly in African literature.*

**KEYWORDS:** Birth, Naming rites, African society, African novels, Globalization.



## INTRODUCTION

Names in Africa have meaning which refers or links to an important event in the existence of a child or in one of the relatives of a child. That is why choosing a name for a baby is highly important in African society. For instance, an overambitious name could have significant consequences on the child since he bears the name while on the other hand, a simple name will have such impacts or it will not carry such high expectations in the existence of the child. This is the reason why one must understand that in Africa, names reflect the circumstances surrounding the birth and in certain contexts, the names in certain communities, also reflect the day of birth and the environment surrounding it, these are the common names given to the children in Africa. To sum it all, it is thought that the actual choice of names for the children in Africa can influence the life of both the children and the relatives.

But before, a name is given to a child; there are also some steps to follow. For instance, in most cases, the traditional naming ceremonies are usually performed on the seventh day after birth in some African societies, others do it after the ninth day, and even some do it after the position of the moon. On the D-day, very early in the morning some rituals (oracular consultations and divination) are performed to welcome the child to the new world. Then family members and very close friends of the relatives gather to pray to God for long-life, good health and prosperity for the child; and congratulate the parents for the good job done because a child is a wealth in some African communities. The elders present the name or names of the baby to the gathering and people shower gifts in various forms to the baby and the parents then commence the merrymaking. These naming ceremonies have great importance in the existence of Africans and that is why it has also been painted vividly in African literature.

### **Naming rituals in African context**

The naming rituals take place a few days after the birth of a child and these rituals are performed so that names are given to the baby. The baby receives a name which is personal to him/her and this marks its ritual entry into the family. These are held in the presence of those invited by the parents of the baby. The parents of the baby invite friends, relatives and well-wishers to the ceremony. Before everything must begin, there is the need to consult the ancestors through prayers. Then libation is poured on the earth for the ancestors or the Mother Earth to welcome the new child that they have sent to the universe of the living.

According to tradition, an elderly person in the family or among the invitees usually announces the names of the new-born baby. And then, the guests or the visitors bring gifts to the parents of the child. The Ghanaian writer Ayi Kwei Armah presents an overview of this through *Fragments* (1989).

*They'd put the baby in a new cradle lined with deep-colored blue, gold, red and green kente and put him out there on the porch, a square of the morning sunlight falling on one side of a wide brass pan next to him. The fan stood behind the cradle, something else he had tried not to understand that day. They came in magnificent Sunday groups, the guests, their splendor making it impossible for Efuwa to keep from smiling and going beyond the gate to look at the line of cars before the ceremony could start [...] this was a rich crowd of guests, too, sitting at first like a picture already taken. Woolen suits, flashing shoes, important crossed legs, bright rings showing on intertwined fingers held in front of restful bellies, an authentic cold-climate overcoat from Europe or America held traveler-fashion over an arm, five or six waistcoats, silken ties and silver clasps, and a magnificent sane man in a university gown reigning over*



*four admiring women in white lace cover shirts on new dumas cloth; long, twinkling earrings, gold necklaces, quick- shining wristwatches, a great rich splendor stifling all these people in the warmth of a beautiful day – but that was only an addition to the wonder: the sweat called forth new white handkerchiefs brought out with a happy flourish, spreading perfume underneath the mango trees. The hunchback himself was in royal kente, brilliant as a painting set against the gate, looking anguished after cars that came by and didn't stop to let out more glistening dignitaries for him to welcome (Armah, 1989, p.181).*

From the above passage, Armah illustrates the modernized ways in which the naming ceremony is held. The naming ceremony was supposed to be something symbolic but nowadays people try to show their wealth through what they wear for the occasion and they want to make it extravagant. But in the novel, there is the main character Baako who opposes the dressing code during the 'outdooing ceremony' of his nephew. This ceremony is intended to welcome the baby from the spiritual world to the living world.

According to Armah's novel, the naming ceremony is supposed to be held on the eighth day after the child's birth. In the real modern world, the African traditional values are corrupted by modernization and globalization in the sense that traditions are no longer respected. For instance, people chose names without understanding them. Furthermore, they chose names from soap operas, movies and from game players. It is in the same way they do the African traditions for the sake of money; it has brought its consequences in the novel which causes the death of the child. The rituals must be on the eighth day to let the child stay and let him break the bond between him and the spirits. But his mother and grandmother decide otherwise. Only the blind Naana is against the premature outdooing ceremony because she can foresee things from the other world.

### **The meaning of names in African context**

From time immemorial names have great impacts on the people that they have been given to. Traditional African names often have unique stories behind them and this differs from one person to another. From the moment a child has been given birth to, or the time or the day he or she is born, several factors influence the names parents choose for their children. This is highly depicted through every ethnic group you look at in Africa; these names reveal a wealth of information about the bearer and the family he or she comes from. Among the many ethnic groups on the African continent, picking out names can be influenced by whether the positive or negative circumstances the family finds themselves in around the time the child is born. Like in African cultural contexts and in the world, people name in order to differentiate, to recognize and finally to know.

If events truly affect the names given to a child, there are palpable examples that are shown through some of the works of African writers. When we take for instance *Things Fall Apart* (1958), there are many instances where some reflect the circumstances in which the child is born.

*“Why is Okonkwo with us today? This is not his clan. We are only his mother's kinsmen. He does not belong here. He is an exile, condemned for seven years to live in a strange land. And so he is bowed with grief. But there is just one question I would like to ask him. Can you tell me, Okonkwo, why it is that one of the commonest names we give our children is Nneka, or “Mother is Supreme!” We all know that a man is the head of the family and his wives do his bidding. A child belongs to its father and his family and not to its mother and her family. A*



*man belongs to his fatherland and not his motherland. And yet we say Nneka – “Mother is Supreme”. Why is that?’” (Achebe, 1958, p.96)*

From the above speech made by Okwonko’s maternal uncle Uchendu, he had learned a very good lesson from his exile. His mother’s kinsmen had been very kind to him, and he was grateful. But that did not alter the facts. He had called the first child born to him in exile Nneka – ‘Mother is supreme’ – out of politeness to his mother’s kinsmen. But two years later when a son was born he called him Nwofia – ‘Begotten in the Wilderness’.

Furthermore in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Achebe gives another example concerning the naming in the traditional Igbo society: Our fathers knew that Chukwu was the Overlord and that is why many of them gave their children the name Chukwuka – “Chukwu is Supreme” (Achebe, 1958, p. 125). Chukwuka is part of the names that depict the Africans’ belief in God. Sometimes these names are used to praise the supernatural beings especially when parents have struggled for children for a number of years and when their hopes are lost. They give up everything in the hand of God or other supernatural beings which take care of the parents’ plight by awarding them with a child. These children who have been sought from other deities apart from God are also named after the deities who have helped the parents in cases where there has been child mortality.

Achebe’s description of the Igbo names is not only depicted through his first novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), but also through his second one, *No Longer at Ease* (1966) where he illustrates some aspects of the traditional ways of the Igbo named their children during colonial era. He comes out with how the main character of the novel and his siblings receive their names and their meanings.

*“Obi Okonkwo was indeed the only palm-fruit. His full name was Obiajulu – ‘the mind at last is at rest’; the mind being his father’s of course, who, his wife having borne him four daughters before Obi, was naturally becoming a little anxious. Being a Christian convert – in fact a Catechist – he could not marry a second wife. But he was not the kind of man who carried his sorrow on his face. In particular, he would not let the heathen know that he was unhappy. He had called his fourth daughter Nwanyidinma – ‘a girl is also good’. But his voice did not carry conviction” (Achebe, 1966, p. 6).*

With the advent of colonialism through its institutions such as the church and the colonial government, some African names are translated into colonial languages such as English and French. These names include the family names and all other received names. This phenomenon can be seen in all the colonial states in Africa even at the present time.

The relationship between the deities and their days of worshiping is illustrated through *Ancestral Sacrifice* (1998) when during every prayer that is mentioned in the novel there are some appellations like ‘Supreme god of Saturday’ and ‘Mother Earth of Thursday’ are used. This illustrates the fact that in the Akan pantheon, that every day of the week is a day of worship to a god and every deity has a particular day in the week.

But even though Europeans are not used to the names based on the day of birth in their civilizations, they come out by establishing names according to the dates of birth. These can be seen on the French calendars set up in the francophone African countries. While picking up any calendar in any francophone African country, for instance, you will notice that the name “Gérard” which is assigned to the third day of the month of October in Benin in West Africa



is the same on the same calendar in Chad in Central Africa. From the French policy of assimilation, where they wanted the colonized to adopt their culture and to behave like them, they must also have their names in lieu and place of African names. From this, one must deduce that these day-born names are only seven in African ethnic groups while the European saints' names are many so they thought of having at least three hundred and sixty-five names which refer to the days of the year. They have created a calendar where one can find European saints' names on them which have been applied to the date of birth of Africans. For instance, when you are born on Monday, third of October in Togo, you will have your African day-born name which is Kodjo and the European saint name which is Gérard so your name is Kodjo Gérard.

The same situation is described through Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1966) where he indicates that even though Africans have their African names, they also have some European names attached to them. This is done because the child has to go to school and there they teach in the language of the colonizers.

*"In those days Obi got on very well with his three sisters, Esther, Janet and Agnes, but not with Charity, who was his immediate elder. Charity's Igbo name was 'A girl is also good', but whenever they quarreled Obi called her 'A girl is not good.' Then she would beat him until he cried unless their mother happened to be around, in which case Charity would postpone the beating. She was as strong as iron and was feared by the other children in the neighborhood, even boys"* (Achebe, 1966, pp.54-55).

People who have a little knowledge about the culture of the community, in which names are given, automatically understand the meaning of these names. For instance in certain African societies, the names of the twins determine who comes first or second. According to the Ewes of Ghana, the first of the twins is referred to as the youngest because he or she is believed as a messenger who comes first into the world to do a check up on things before the elder one comes.

This aspect of naming twins is depicted in *The Joys of Motherhood* (2008) which paints a vivid picture of the traditional Igbo manners on which the writer has some knowledge about.

*"The Owulum twins were very beautiful. They did not go to school, but they had learned to read and write in the few evenings they could be spared to attend lessons. They could sew, and had been taught through their mother's strictness to be very quiet. They were identical in appearance, but not in character; the one called Kehinde, 'the second to arrive', was much deeper than Taiwo, 'she who tasted the world first'"* (Emecheta, 2008, p.229).

Moreover, it is good to mention that in some aspects of African culture and in certain communities, especially in West Africa, children who are born twins and those who follow them have names based on their position.

Furthermore, in his article "The Sociolinguistic of Akan Personal Names" (2006), Agyekum presents an overview of ordinal names in the Akan traditional naming context. He says:

*Ordinal names include Piesie, 'first born', made up of pie, 'erupt from a place', and sie 'anthill'. Here, the pregnant woman's stomach is compared to an anthill and the first-born is conceptualized as the one who has erupted from the anthill thus making an exit. The children who come after the piesie have names that morphologically correspond with the Akan numerals, 2nd – Manu, 3rd- Mensa and Mansa (female), 4th- Anane/Annan, 5th-Num/Anum,*



6th- Nsia, 7th- Nso/Esuon, 8th- Nwotwe/Awotwe, 9th- Nkroma/Akrom, 10th- Badu/Beduwaa, 11th- Duku, 12th- Adunu, 13th- Adusa [...] The names above that have two forms refer to Twi and Fante forms (Agyekum, 2006, p.220-221).

These are the various ways that Agyekum has given a detail of the Akan traditional meanings of the names. He goes further by explaining the meaning of certain Akan names based on the circumstances of the birth.

### Receiving a name in Africa

In West African cultures as far as the naming ceremony is concerned, there is the belief that if a mother suffers constant infant or child mortality, then the reason behind it is that it is the child's mother in the underworld that does not want the child to stay in the living world. To fight this unfortunate situation, the biological parents in the living world give the child a weird name. That bizarre name is given in the sense that when the other mother in the spirit world will not accept such a name on her child therefore she will not like to accept the child over there and this would make the child stay. The names that are given to these children are generally derived from nasty objects, filthy places and something they are expressions of emotions.

*“The naming ceremony after seven market weeks became an empty ritual. Her deepening despair found expression in the names she gave her children. One of them was a pathetic cry, Onwumbio – ‘Death, I implore you.’ But Death took no notice; Onwumbiko died in his fifteen month. The next child was a girl, Ozoemena – ‘May it not happen again.’ She died in her eleventh month and two others after her. Ekwefi then became defiant and called her next child Onwuma – ‘Death may please himself.’ And he did” (Achebe, 1958, p. 55).*

But in general, the simple reason is also that those weird names that are given must be unpleasant even in the ears of the living. The names are given most of the time to the children whom they believe come and go back several times. It refers to the same child who tortures his mother through constant child mortality. Most of the African communities where this phenomenon is common, the belief that if the name is funny, the child will be ashamed to go back to the spiritual world and in the end if the relatives of the spiritual world recognize the child with such a weird name, they will be annoyed and refuse to call it into their world.

For instance, in the Akan community in West Africa especially in Ghana, during the process of the naming ceremony, the person performing the outdoor ceremony pours into two separate glasses water and alcoholic drinks which can be a locally made gin or an imported one. With the new-born baby placed on his or her lap this person will announce the child's name, dip his or her right forefinger into the water and then onto the child's lips saying “when you say it is water, it must be water.” The same procedure will be done by using the local alcoholic drink or the imported one “when you say it is gin, it must be gin” and this will be repeated three times. The significance of this is to demonstrate the importance of honesty in life and being able to identify good (in the form of water) and bad (in the form of alcohol). Some other people carry out the same process using something sweet such as honey (which replaces water) and something unpleasant such as salt (which also represents alcoholic drink) to teach the child that life can be both sweet and unpleasant. A typical example of this explanation is described through *Ordained by the Oracle* (2006).



*“He raised the head of the child and dipped his finger into the gin. He turned and asked the second elder sitting next to him. ‘Have you got the name?’ ‘Yaw Agyepong alias Yaw Kra.’ ‘Agyepong Baffuor Bonsafo. Now Agyepong we have met here to welcome you to this world. All trees have names, so do all animals. Equally all men born into the world must have names. We are all bearers of different names that our deeds are known [...] ‘And today we name you after your grandfather, Agyepong. He was a good man who held in his arms the riches and good things of this world. We want you to follow his footsteps and carry with you in this world, his good name and deeds. ‘You can achieve these things if your ways are paved with honesty and when you grow up you must say “wine” if it is wine and “water” if it is water. Never speak with water in your mouth or show your back upon any act demanding bravery and defense of your honor. He concluded the libation [...] all the people craned their necks towards the center of the circle as drops of gin and water were put on his tongue in turn three times. The little child let out a shrill cry. The silence that had enveloped the area as the invocation was made was broken and gin was now served in the twelve calabashes. As they passed round, each took a sip and called aloud ‘Yaw Agyepong’” (Konadu, 2006, pp. 203-204).*

The family name is a fundamental name that the child receives as marks of personal or group identity. When you belong to a family, you must be identified by that family through their names. Most of the family names are derived from the patrilineal clans of the forefathers that are given to children. Logically speaking, children who trace their genealogy to one patrilineal clan have or share similar family names. There is a palpable example in Chinua Achebe’s ‘African Trilogy’ where the main character in *No Longer at Ease* (1966) is retraced back to *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Obi Okonkwo in *No Longer at Ease* (1966) is the great son of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* (1958). From the very beginning, Obi whose father is now known as Isaac was called in *Things Fall Apart* Nwoye. Nwoye after many problems with his father, he decides to convert himself into the new religion which is Christianity. When he received the new faith as it was during those days, he turned his name into Isaac to sweet the new religion and to break away from his cultural heritage. But when Isaac gets married to Hannah, they have a son whom they name Obi. Obi is not a Christian name but an African name. Obi’s full name is Obiajulu – ‘the mind at last is at rest’; the mind being his father’s of course (Achebe, 1966, p.6).

Even though Obi’s parents are Christians, they have given the name Obi to their son which shows that they still have African heritage in their hearts. Nwoye, which is a very uncommon name, but mostly used by the Igbo people means “His mother’s pride”. But what is more interesting about the Isaac (Nwoye)’s family is that they keep the name Okonkwo which refers to the name of his father and the grandfather of Obi. Okonkwo, the main character in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and his son Nwoye (now Isaac) have many divergences of opinion concerning several things in the life spent by Nwoye at his father’s house. In the end they keep the name Okonkwo to retrace it back to the hero of Umuofia.

Conclusion can be drawn that family names distinguish one member of the community from all the other members of that same community. By mentioning the name Okonkwo in Umuofia, everybody knows automatically that the person belongs to the lineage of Okonkwo. Therefore, it is possible to picture a group of people out of a bigger group only by the family names.

There are also many ways people can receive names from different social contexts and situations. For instance, it can be done through kingship and during marriage. Before a person becomes a chief or a king, that person has a name which is known to the whole world before



the kingship calls him or her where he or she receives a stool name that will be known from now on. But with modernization, the chief or the king can be called by both names that is his or her stool name when he or she is with his people as a chief or King. On the other hand when he or she is a civil servant before becoming a chief that person is entitled to be called by their real names which are officially known on their birth certificates. This scenario is the same as that of the people who have names which are known to them officially, that is when they are with the outside world like in school and at work. These same people when they come home have different names by which they are called. Most of the time, they call those names which are called at home and which are not known outside the house are called ‘domestic names’ and the other names are official names. Sometimes also the chief or king may be called by his or her kingship title and his or her African names.

*“There was no doubt whatever in the mind of Captain Winterbottom that Chief Ikedi was still corrupt and high-handed, only cleverer than ever before. The latest thing he did was to get his people to make him an Obi or king, so that he was now called His Highness Ikedi the First, Obi of Okperi. This among a people who abominated kings! This was what the British administration was doing among the Igbos, making a dozen mushroom kings grow where there was none before”*(Achebe, 1964, p.58).

It should be noticed that as the names are received so do people’s prestige and social standing within the community in which they live. This means that the accumulation of names is proportional with social elevation. Most of the names acquired after their initial names are through some good deeds. When the names are acquired negatively it also affects the person’s prestige and social standing within her or his community and society in general.

It must also be noted that people acquired new names out of affection and they received them from the people. For instance, in *The Concubine* (1966), there are some instances where the given names are rarely used or may be used later in life. Instead of using these given names they prefer to use their diminutive ones to show endearment or affection to one whose name is used. Among the characters, there are names like Ekwueme which is shortened as Ekwe and Ahurole as Ahule.

Apart from the names that are given to children at birth and people when they receive them after a circumstance, there are many ways people can receive other names and this may be through an exploit or an initiation in a secret society. From *Things Fall Apart* (1958), the reader will come across such names from the very beginning of the novel until the end. The first set of examples of names is given at the very beginning of the novel.

*“His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honor to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat. Amalinze was a great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten, from Umuofia to Mbaino. He was called the Cat because his back would never touch the earth. It was this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight which the old men agreed was one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights”* (Achebe, 1958, p. 3).

This exploit of being undefeated in the battle for many years has given the name cat to Amalinze. This passage shows that Achebe has once again shown through the picture of Amalinze, the fiercest wrestler, how Africans can receive a name easily. These are examples of how certain personal names are derived from fauna and flora in the sense that it is their





physical structures that are compared. From that fight and for many other exploits Okonkwo also received a name.

*“Okonkwo was popularly called the ‘Roaring Flame’. As he looked into the log of fire he recalled the name. He was a flaming fire. How then could he have begotten a son like Nwoye, degenerate and effeminate? Perhaps he was not his son. No! He could not be. His wife had played him false. He would teach her! But Nwoye resembled his grandfather, Unoka, who was Okonkwo’s father. He pushed the thought out of his mind. He, Okonkwo, was called a flaming fire. How would he have begotten a woman for a son? At Nwoye’s age Okonkwo had already become famous throughout Umuofia for his wrestling and fearlessness”* (Achebe, 1958, pp. 110-111).

The nicknames are sometimes referential to the behavior of the people who bear such names. Most of the nicknames are derogative and meant to give stamina to the bearers to be good achievers in their ways of life as the case of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Okonkwo’s name, the ‘Roaming Flame’ is an appellation which can be said to be honorific to his status in the community of Umuofia.

Apart from this, Achebe uses various ways in naming people. He shows that people can also receive names when they join a secret society. Examples of such names are: Evil Forest, Dry – meat – that – fills – the – mouth and Fire – that – burns – without – faggots (Achebe, 1958, p. 67). The egwugwu are identified through these names. The egwugwu as masked ancestors appear in important legal matters and pronounce the verdict. No one can deny their judgment, because no one is wiser than their ancestors. No one discloses the identity of the man behind the mask, even if he happens to identify the voice or the walk of a particular familiar man. (Ohadike, 1996, p. XXX)

Furthermore, Achebe again shows through *Things Fall Apart* (1958) that there are other ways to name or receive. These are done based on the situation during a space of time in the existence of people in the community whose names depict the sour, fear and the sorrow of the relationship that exists between the people of the community, their neighbors and the foreigners. All these names are meant to denounce the relationship between whether it is positive or negative. It is also meant to pertain to some aspects of life and what people endure through conflicts which ensue in human relations. Examples of such names are efulefu, this means men of no title, worthless and empty men (Achebe, 1958, p.103). There was a time, these people were looked down upon by the people of their community and when the new religion was introduced by the white missionaries, they embraced it wholeheartedly. These people are referred to as the excrement of the clan (Achebe, p.103).

In the same way, the name “my buttocks” is given to the Igbo interpreter who translates the words of the white missionaries. This man instead of saying “myself” always said “my buttocks” (Ibid 104). Many people in the community laugh at them because of his dialect which is harsh to the ears of Mbanta and they receive the name “my buttocks”.

Moreover, there are rivalry and insinuating names that indicate the rift between the African people and the colonial governments. The narrator explains the rivalry between the villagers and the people that work for the colonial government in the following passage.

*“But apart from the church, the white men had also brought a government. They had built a court where the District Commissioner judged cases in ignorance. He had court messengers*



*who brought men to him for trial. Many of these messengers came from Umuru on the bank of the Great River, where the white men first came many years before and where they had built the center of their religion and trade and government. These court messengers were greatly hated in Umuofia because they were foreigners and also arrogant and high-handed. They were called kotma, and because of their ash-coloured shorts they earned the additional name of Ashy-Buttocks. They guarded the prison, which was full of men who had offended against the white man's law. Some of these prisoners had thrown away their twins and some had molested the Christians. They were beaten in the prison by the kotma and made to work every morning clearing the government compound and fetching wood for the white Commissioner and the court messengers. Some of these prisoners were men of title who should be above such mean occupation. They were grieved by the indignity and mourned for their neglected farms. As they cut grass in the morning the younger men sang in time with the strokes of their matchets: 'kotma of the ash buttocks, He is fit to be a slave the white man has no sense, He is fit to be a slave'. The court messengers did not like to be called Ashy-Buttocks, and they beat the men. But the song spread in Umuofia" (Achebe, 1958, p.106).*

The implementation of colonial rule created a frustrated society where the powerless Africans had to use various means to counterattack the white man's rules and ideologies. This method is used by giving nicknames to the people in the white man's administration. The names used are sometimes derogatory in the way that the Africans in the white man's administration think that it is an insult to their jobs and its values. Achebe mentions in the novel that the people of Umuofia have turned these derogatory names into songs which make allusions to them and they become furious. Though the interaction between the Europeans and the Africans have been going on for centuries in many different ways, most Africans did not come directly into contact with the white oppressors and confront European culture until the modern era.

Taking on the husband's last name after marriage is a common thing in the modern society introduced by Globalization into Africa. This has been shown in many celebrated marriages throughout Africa and it is described in African Literature where, for instance, Hannah Okonkwo in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1966) has adopted the name Okonkwo which is her husband Isaac's last name. This is an example of how a great number of ladies take their husband's name and drop their maiden names, and they sometimes combine them with their matrimonial names. Hannah Okonkwo can also be called Mrs. Okonkwo because she has tied the knot with Isaac Okonkwo. When these ladies after marriage have given birth, they automatically become a member of the family hence the name 'our wife'. And then many other names follow like, 'mummy' followed by the name of her child or one of the children, especially the elder one. The man is called 'daddy' so, so and so. Others again would also come for the couple from the relatives. These names are 'uncle' and 'auntie'. All these names are due to change into parenthood.



## Naming in the church

This part of the article deals with the two aspects of the naming ceremonies held mostly in the various churches in Africa. The first aspect deals with the naming ceremony for the new-born babies and the second shows how African people through the baptismal have changed their names for being born again in Christ. A typical example of the second aspect of naming in the church is shown through *The Return of the Falcon* (2001).

*“I grew between two churches. With the advent of the Presbyterians two years later, also introduced by a court crier of my uncle, Panim Kwame Kusi, it was becoming clear that there was a calculated plan by all the stool bearers to liberate themselves and leave the stool to the little gods. Panim Kwame Kusi went a little further than the others. He acquired a site at the end of the village and built a chapel on it. He removed all his brothers, their wives and their children from his house because they refused to join the church and severed connection with his brother – in – law who was the priest of the great Drobon. He divorced his second wife and gave names to his daughters and sons, all big sounding and some of them unpronounceable by the people who were hearing those names for the first time. His first son was called Kwaku Sormo (Solomon) and the second, Kwasi Dumaye (Emmanuel)”* (Konadu, 2001, pp.11-12).

Both ceremonies are biblical practices of faith, where believing Christians or Christian parents show their faith publicly for dedication to God through baptismal which is a naming ceremony or through the naming ceremony of the children by the Christian parents to the members of their congregations or to their relatives. With the first ceremony, it is the recognition that children belong first and foremost to God, and in His goodness, gives children as gifts to parents.

The adoption of the Christian names started back in history when the Europeans started to come into Africa. The Christian missionaries converted the people from their old ways and religious beliefs and practices by using ultimate force or cranny manners. The attractiveness of the new faith to all those who found themselves disadvantaged in some way under the old one adopted wholeheartedly Christianity; later on, it is also the attractiveness of the mission school, due to its connection to the colonial government. And although the missionaries showed some aggressive traits, the empowerment of the laws is always to the colonial powers.

It is through these schools that the naming ceremonies started because in those days it was difficult for the white missionaries to pronounce the African names so these missionaries have to find names according to the people mentioned in The Holy Bible. Secondly, since the schools were owned by the missionaries and they were in the quest of heathens to convert them in the name of Christianity, they had to adopt new methods to name the school children through their system of baptismal where they considered them to be born again in Jesus Christ. It is also said in *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) that “When the missionaries first came, they didn’t think Igbo names were good enough. They insisted that people take English names to be baptized” (Adichie, 2003, p.275)

In most French speaking countries in sub-Saharan Africa, there are Christian biblical names which were given to children after birth and when they had to go to school. Some children were given the names when they had to undergo their Christian baptism while others were given the names because their parents were Christians. In a few instances, one observes that some children were given the names because of their church prophets who advised the parents to adopt certain biblical names for their children. This observation is also depicted through *Purple*



*Hibiscus* (2003) when Father tries to convince Amaka to choose an English name for her confirmation but the girl cleverly declines it, and lectures him about the meaning of certain African names, and also the reason why the church forces people to adopt English names.

*“He handed Amaka a piece of paper and told her he had written some suitably boring names on it, that she had only to choose one and he would leave. After the bishop used it in confirming her, she need never even mention the name again. Father Amadi rolled his eyes, speaking with a painstaking slowness, and although Amaka laughed, she did not take the paper.*

*“I told you I am not taking an English name, Father,” she said.*

*“And have I asked you why”*

*“Why do I have to?”*

*“Because it is the way it’s done. Let’s forget if it’s right or wrong for now,” Father Amadi said, and I noticed the shadows under his eyes.*

*“When the missionaries first came, they didn’t think Igbo names were good enough. They insisted that people take English names to be baptized. Shouldn’t we be moving ahead?”*

*“It’s different now, Amaka, don’t make this what it’s not,” Father Amadi said, calmly. “Nobody has to use the name. Look at me. I’ve always used my Igbo name, but I was baptized Michael and confirmed Victor.”*

*Aunty Ifoema looked up from the forms she was going through. “Amaka, ngwa, pick a name and let Father Amadi go and do his work.”*

*“But what’s the point, then? Amaka said to Father Amadi, as if she had not heard her mother. “What the church is saying is that only an English name will make your confirmation valid. ‘Chiamaka’ says God is beautiful. ‘Chima’ says God knows best, ‘Chiebuka’ says God is the greatest. Don’t they glorify God as much as ‘Paul’ and ‘Peter’ and ‘Simon’?” (Adichie, 2003, pp.271-274).*

To crown it all, the Europeanization of African names is a point that is necessary to be discussed. To enable the missionaries to pronounce the African names or by ignorance they wanted the Africans to change their names in the conformity of the Europeans’. Some also comported themselves as if African names were not conformed to God’s will so they would not have access to heaven if they kept those indigenous therefore they had to change those names into that of Westerners’ to be heaven’s standard or norms. Through this they comported themselves as if God the Creator of heaven and the earth who gave the power to Adam in order to give names to all the created things. Nyantakyi has exemplified an illustration when he mentions this:

*Can’t we wait for a while? One sister said. “Sister Frema is on her way.” She meant Martha Freeman. Before she became a convert, she was called Ama Frema. She adopted Martha when she was baptized and decided to Europeanize her surname by spelling it Freeman” (Nyantakyi, 1998, pp. 54-55).*

From the above illustration, it is denotable to recognize that there is nothing good about Africa, even the indigenous African names since Africans have to Europeanize their names in



conformity to the western standard to suit the desire of the Europeans who came to Africa for civilizing missions. Therefore the African names had to be also civilized and this continued until this era of globalization. But a lot of Africans have understood the pride in their indigenous African names that is why just before, or after their independence some of the African leaders have decided to get back proudly their African names.

This pride can be referred to the Ghanaian philosophical thought which is Sankofa. It means that there is no shame in going back to what you have once in your lifetime shunned. Below are the names of peoples who with pride preferred to be called by their indigenous African names: Kwame Nkrumah was once called Francis; Chinua Achebe had Albert as his Christian name; Ngugi wa Thiong'o used to be called James Ngugi, just a few to mention. If in any other instance we have to discuss the only good things about Africa, it is only its natural resources such gold, diamond, uranium and the petroleum products.

## CONCLUSION

African naming system and practice is the picture of the people's belief, ideology, religion, culture, and philosophical thought. These African names are well-understood and analyzed when people have a deep insight into the understanding of their cultural practices and the knowledge and culture of Africa. The African names are therefore philosophical in the sense that the names refer to some elements of African human experience and their ways of life.

It must also be noted that Africans believe that there are some powers linked to the African names when these names are received with the values inherited from the socio-cultural norms. The names can affect the individual positively or negatively. The individual's names are of concern to the community and the society as a whole because the individual performs and participates in the activities and the life of the society. Moreover, African names may show group identification and reveal some aspects of the traditional and cultural patterns and behavior of the concerned culture.

From the above analysis, conclusion must be drawn that African names indicate the various contexts in which the names are given. These names may be the days on which the child is born, the manner in which the birth is given, the family names which are passed from one generation to another, the circumstances surrounded the birth, the religious names which may be the traditional African religion or Christianity and Islam, and European names which are the fruits of the colonization that make the Africans copy blindly the western names. Every conscious African has at least a birthday name plus a family name. Apart from those names, there can be a combination of other names in addition to the birthday name and the family name. From the additional names, one can retrieve the baptismal names through his or her conversion into Christianity or Islam and this is done most of the time when the individual grows up in the society and decides to embrace the new religions brought up by the colonial masters during the colonial conquests and through the contact with the Muslim merchants during the Trans-Saharan trade.



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