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Traditional Naming Systems and Reincarnation among the Igala People of Kogi State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The Igala people of Kogi State, Nigeria, endowed with rich cultural and religious practices, believe that an Igala-born child is reincarnated through an ancestor, who lived a fulfilled life while on earth. In Igalaland, it is believed that a child reincarnates through a departed soul and even through incarnate beings. Naming systems in African society, Igalaland inclusive is considered a very important rite because the birth of a child in the land is celebrated with great joy as the rite introduces the newborn child to the family and the community. Hence, the aim of this work, therefore, is to unearth the traditional naming system and reincarnation among the Igala people. The work found out that with the advent of Christianity and civilization, traditional institutions and values started changing. A child in Igalaland in the past was not named until the circumstances surrounding his birth had been examined. This concerns the parents' beliefs about God and their ancestors. Hence, the traditional naming was described as "heathenish" and was given Hebrew and European names which were meaningless to them. Added to the above, the work equally found out that even though it is Ojo (God) that put a baby there in the first place, the Igala believe that the living dead and other forces are also recognized as being responsible for the malformation and development of a child. The work suggests that despite the impact of Christianity and modernization on the indigenous practices of the people, aspects of Igala culture said not to be outrageous or inimical to the gospel, be incorporated into Christian practices. The study combined the use of historical observation and a phenomenological approach.

Keywords: Igala naming systems, reincarnation and Igala culture.

Introduction

The traditional naming system among the Igala people of Kogi State, Nigeria, is one of the very important rites of passage in African societies. The ceremony officially announces the arrival of a new child to the extended family and the community at large and even confers on the child a name. The name given to a child can have an enduring influence on the personality and upbringing (Adega and Atodo, 1). Adega and Atodo equally note that traditional Africans live and celebrate life. Their daily activities are woven with strong

religious convictions, and nothing happens, therefore, without religious interpretation. According to them, every stage of an individual's life is marked with religions, ceremonies, and rituals. They added that for traditional Africans, the life cycle starts from the time of conception of a child and terminates at death. Nwubuisi in Iyere (96) lays credence to the above as he asserts that: "When a child is born, he is born into a community of men and women with established customs and ways of life, thinking and behaving. It is this community with established customs and ways of life and of thinking that will shape the young person's view of the world, his way of life and ways of thinking."

Reincarnation is the belief of transmission of the soul-that human souls pass through more than one bodily existence in this world. In some form, the human body is believed to be transformed into another human being or a living creature as animals. The African Traditional Religionists believe that the spirit of an ancestor enters the child at conception or the quickening in the womb or even as late as birth. The reborn soul is believed to be that of a paternal or maternal relative. Great efforts are made to marriage arrangements to ensure that there is proper affinity so that tradition may be followed and ancestors reborn (Tim, A. Ilori et al, 142-143).

Like others in African Societies, the Igala people believe that the living dead re-emerge or reincarnate in Igalaland through babies and other forces. Given this, the study aims to examine the traditional rites of a newborn child cum reincarnation in Igalaland, with emphasis on the influence of modernization on the above cultural and religious practices.

Traditional Naming Systems in Igalaland

The naming of a child is regarded as a significant event in many traditional communities in Africa, and it is often marked by special rituals. A name is believed to print an indelible mark on a person. It makes the individual a complete human being accepted in the community of the living, not of the "living-dead". In some African cultures, a child with no name is referred to as "it or a thing" and if it happens to die before the naming ceremony, it is regarded as though it was never born (Thimbell in Iyere, 102).

Naming rite varies from one culture to another in Africa. Among the Weppa-Wanno, when a child is about two to three months old, and he has been circumcised (if a male), the father (atha-omo) carries the child from the mother (Iye -oma) early in the morning to his popular parlour or room. He plays with the child as he chews some alligator pepper (ache). After some time, he calls the name (Eli) he wishes the child to be called three times and then kisses the child by the mouth, allowing the chewed alligator pepper (ache) to enter his or her mouth. He says the following words:

Ivhia ache pile uno	I chew alligator pepper into your mouth.
Lu Ogwe mhe	Take after me
Kha in Ogwe Iye	Do not take after your mother
Tolo gba	Be very strong
Mho ugba somi somi	Be very wise
Kha nope ole eh	Do not fear your age mate
Kha zho oya de ode	Do not be deceived by anyone
Ogbena aga alimi apemba lumbe	May God and our ancestors protect you.

It is interesting to know that in some cultures in Africa, the naming ceremony is a festive occasion, not as simple as that of Weppa Wanno people described above. Among the Masai cattle herders of East Africa, a naming ceremony is an occasion for celebration. When a child

is given a name, a fat bullock, Jet black without a single streak of white, is chosen from the family herds. The bullock is killed, cooked deliciously and placed before the mother of the child to be given a name, who sits in her compound, and the women of the community would come to greet her and offer her some gifts of milk and she in turn would come to give them some of the bullock meat. He concluded that in the evening of that day, she carries the child to the cattle Kraal where the child is named in the presence of her husband and three elders.

Egbunu (60) lays credence to the above as he asserts that the birth of a child in the Igala traditional society is greeted with great joy (Uyolile). This is so because in most cases children are considered great treasures (Omachoko) from above. Egbunu states that after the birth of a child at "Ogwe" (the place of delivery) and the baby is brought into the living room, the father of the child goes around to the relatives to announce the coming of a new baby and the "Ojile Kumagba" (the favour received). The degree of joy that greets this occasion depends on whether that child was the first child in the family or long-awaited due to a delay in pregnancy. The in-laws (Am'ana) on the wife's side have to be as well informed as other relatives and neighbours so that they do not pick offence for hearing it from outsiders.

Egbunu notes that the naming ceremony of the child takes place on the "Egwele" (fourteenth) day after the birth of the child. Prior to the "Egwele" ceremony, the child and the mother would not be allowed to come to public places (Ododa), especially marketplaces (aja) or "Anukwu Ibogijo" (the abode of the elders) because she is considered to be in "elifo" (impure) and weak. Other women who come to keep her company, either the biological mother of the woman, aunt, or other concerned more elderly relatives, do the cooking, fetching of water, firewood and washing of clothes on her behalf. She is never allowed to go to the "anukwu" (the abode of elders) at this stage for any reason whatsoever. For the child, Adega and Atodo (5) added that:

- i. The skin is considered to be too tender to be exposed to the cold or sun.
- ii. This period is used for the treatment of the child's navel and several medications that are required for the survival of the baby.
- iii. Series of consultation are made as to the destiny of the child, which ancestor has reincarnated in the child and what name is the child to be called.
- iv. In the case of deformity, complicated birth formation and the critical illness of the baby, it is on record that "Ebo ata muda", meaning "the shrine will kidnap the child." That is why the Igala people don't have so many deformed/disabled persons.

Adega and Atodo noted that apart from the above-listed reasons, which seem to be physical, the process also serves as a protective cover for the woman and the child to regain their spiritual balance via purification and gather momentum for full entry into society's daily life. Egunu (61) added that on the day of the "egwele", the member of the extended family (abo olopu) gathers from all over the villages and hamlets at "atakpa" (the family hut). The "abifa" (diviner) who consults the oracles is then contacted to disclose the mind of the ancestors in respect of the appropriate name to be given to the child. The diviner could be there in person or must have been contacted earlier before the disclosure of the name at this gathering. In most cases, the child's parents usually suggest the names, considering the birth's circumstances. The diviner then picks any such names that appeal to the ancestors.

In this manner, the diviner is supposed to reveal to them which among the deceased relatives or ancestors reincarnated.

Adega and Atodo (2) collaborate with the above as they assert that the “egwele” (fourteenth day) ceremony, literally “egwele ebo” (fourteen-day divination), refers to the traditional naming ceremony among the Igala people. According to the above writers, it is the second important rite of passage, or life circle ritual meant to welcome and integrate the newborn child into the family and the community. They concluded that it is the very first that directly impacts the newborn baby, aside from the earlier pregnancy rites, which involve the mother in particular and the family in general.

The concept and phenomenon of names and the naming practices “the egwele” (fourteenth day) ceremony is held in high esteem among the Igala people of Kogi state. It is regarded as an indispensable condiment that sweetens the birth of a child, which is one of the rites of passage commemorated in Igala traditional religion and culture -names and the name-giving ceremonies known as egwele ebo among the Igala people is like an art form “which requires conceptual understanding, skills in language for proper encoding and decoding, religious concentration and deliberateness (Adega and Atodo 2).

Adega and Atodo argue that the question of who brings the child out for the first time matters a lot. The flash point they noted, is predicated on the belief that “the child will likely take after the character of the person who introduces him/her to the world” i.e. the person who carried him or her to see the sky/sun for the first time. Thus, special care is usually taken to choose somebody respected by the family, enviable and impeachable character to bring the child out for the first time on the fourteenth day after the delivery into the arena for the naming. They concluded as they elaborated that “this person carries the child accompanied by the mother and several family members and friends with this recitation “Oma gb’omu Ata we, gb’omu Iye we” meaning ‘Child listen /heed the voice of your father and mother’ for many times as possible as they move from the mother’s hut to the “Atakpa” to meet the father and Abifa” where the divination and consultations between the father and the Ifa priest/diviner will eventually review the child’s name.

Belief in Reincarnation among the Igala People and Functions of an Oracle Priest (Abifa)

Reincarnation is the belief of the transmission of soul-that human souls pass through more than one body's existence in the world. In some form, the human body is believed to be transformed into another human being or a living creature as animals. This is mostly believed in the Eastern religion as Buddhism or Hinduism. (Tim, et al 142-143). As noted (Tim et al.), the African Traditional Religionists believe that the spirit of an ancestor enters the child at conception or the quickening in the womb or even as late as birth. The reborn soul is believed to be that of a paternal or maternal relative. They concluded that great efforts are made to marriage arrangements to ensure proper affinity so that tradition may be followed and ancestors reborn.

Reincarnation is a concept or terminology that has generated much debate in academic and religious circles. “It is a religious or philosophical concept that presupposes the soul or spirit, after biological death, begins in a new body that may be human, animal or spiritual depending on the moral quality of the previous life’s action”. The life cycle of birth, death and rebirth was recognized as a replica of the natural agricultural cycle (Atodo and Adega, 06).

In African Society, death is not the end of human life, rather, it is a transition from the earth (the physical world) to the spirit world, the abode of the Ancestors. According to Atodo and Adeg, African burial arrangements portray this by making provisions for the comfort of the dead people during the journey. Such provisions could include clothes, food items, cosmetics and sometimes slaves, as it is true with the burial of rulers are made available for the journey into the world of the living-dead. Also, death and whatever happens thereafter is connected to the African perception of the soul.

There is a considerable measure of interrelationships between the three domains of life, an interrelationship and interaction that are central to the continued existence and sustenance of the living and the control to which is the prerogative of the ancestors, with their overwhelming power and authority. Thus, the people believe that the power and authority of the individual increase from childhood through adulthood to ancestorhood stages. It is believed that the dead re-emerge in their (Igala) society through babies and incarnate beings (Miachi, 221). Miachi also notes that the Igala people believe that conception, *efu enyo*, can only be brought about by the act of the supreme Being, Ojo and the equivalent of "God" in English religious thought. To *enyu efu* is to be conceived of a baby. The saying, *ojo Katete ajenwu one nyo efu*, which means "God alone can make one pregnant", shows clearly in the mind of Igala people the source of the power that controls and determines the pregnancy. However, even though it is OJO who put the baby there in the first place, the people also believe that other non-divine beings and forces are also recognized as being able to cause malformation in the developing baby.

Miachi further pointed out that the Igala believe that witchcraft, sorcery and their ancestors are powerful agencies in their society and that witchcraft and sorcery are caused by human beings who can easily be identified and punished. However, to them, no one can fight the ancestors as it is believed that the ancestors strike at the erring living decedents without warning and, often, the retribution could be in the form of creating fertility problems, sickness, or even death. The point, therefore, is that, out of the metaphysical agencies or powers that allegedly affect biological procreation, the ancestors' role is overwhelmingly paramount; that is, it is far more than the power of witchcraft and sorcery. He concluded that based on the above, it is believed that the baby that is delivered is a reincarnated ancestor. It is the same ancestors who have the responsibility of looking after the development of the unborn baby that comes out of the womb in a re-incarnated form. Thus, the ancestors would not agree to reincarnate in the baby if the baby's parents had defaulted in their social obligations to their living kinsmen or their ancestors. This is an example of the negative ways by which the ancestors respond to the failure of their descendants mentioned by some authors on this subject who do not understand and appreciate the dynamic of the believe systems of the societies they are writing about.

Death in Igala Kingdom is not the real end of life. The deceased is believed to be a living spirit who re-emerges in the child to be born in the deceased's family. The concept of reincarnation, called *ekwudawa* which (literally) means coming back to life in a child after death. It is also believed that a deceased person may reincarnate as often as possible and be either male or female. This implies that a deceased male may reincarnate as a female child. In reincarnation, no physical resemblance is necessary. It is known through Ifa (Oracle). It is a practice of the Igala to consult the oracle fourteen days after a child is born to find out which deceased relatives brought the child into the world. Usually, the deceased who reincarnates in the child will become the god (Ojo) of that child (Apeh, 231-232).

The concept of reincarnation is a common phenomenon in most African beliefs. It has manifested in names such as Makedono, Abimaje, Acheneje, Iyabo, Babatunde, Nnenna, etc. The belief in life after death is, thus, a part of the culture of African societies, especially primitive and pre-colonial communities. The Igala share the belief with other African peoples, that the spirit of an ancestor is reborn in a child. As part of the concept of reincarnation, they believe that a child born within a certain period, especially after the death of a loved one, will be named after him. The belief here is that the dead relative can come back to this world by reincarnating into the family that showed him or her love, while he was spending his or her first life on the earth (Achoba, 54).

The Igala people's belief in reincarnation is so strong and fundamental that even the little reincarnated baby will be accorded the full respect of the departed elder. They believe that children are ancestors reborn on earth. When a child is born it is through divination that people know who has been re-incarnated. Once the reborn ancestor is identified, the particular ancestors become the new child's spiritual godfather or godmother (OJO) (Adega and Atodo, 06).

When a child is born, an important ritual step is taken on the fourteenth day, to ascertain, through the diviner, who among the ancestors it is that has come in that baby. This is the ritual of *egwele ebo or ebo egwele* which means the fourteenth day divination. On this day, the spiritual guardian, the OJO to the baby is ascertained. The baby is brought before the *abifa*, the diviner, by the parent, who pays a token fee from 50 kobo to 1 naira, depending upon the wheel of the diviner. To the Igala people, *ene kia li ane*, (he who can see the inside of the ground), *ane* see those things which cannot, otherwise, be seen by the ordinary person. In the people's thought, therefore the diviner has the power to see the unseeable, in other words, he is a seer or clairvoyant. He can communicate with the dead and is regarded as very knowledgeable. Consultation with the dead is through the Ifa Oracle, by which the diviner talks to the dead and receives messages, which he communicates back to the baby's parent. Adega and Atodo added that the diviner picks any names that appear to the ancestors. In this manner, the diviner is supposed to review to them which among their deceased relatives or ancestors has reincarnated in the child. They concluded that the belief in reincarnation is the pivot on which divination rests to ascertain correctly the ancestor that has returned to the new baby. Thus, the name he or she would be called.

Igalaland and its People

Igala land, before the advent of Christianity in Nigerian society, has attracted several writings. Scholars working on the Igala are interested in knowing where the Igala people came from, they wonder whether the Igala people were the original inhabitants of the area they occupy or whether they came from somewhere else, and how long they have been living in their present location. Furthermore, there is the question of the origin and development of the Igala language, of which Ebu (a language of the Ebu of Oshimili North Local Government area of today's Delta State) is a dialect (Miachi in Abalaka, 11).

Igala history is shrouded in myths and legends. The historical origin of the Igala people has remained a controversial issue over time due to the near absence of written documents. The origin of the Igala people is not quite certain. However, several traditions and claims have been advanced to provide, answers to their origin (Okwoli in Abalaka, 12). Abalaka also notes that the late Ata Igala, Alhaji Aliyu, and Ocheje Obaje, in 1964 told the Nigeria magazine that "... the first wave of migration into the country (Igala) seems to have taken place about the 12th century A.D and was led by Amina, a Zaira princess and warrior, who fought her way to Idah. She came with the Hausa and the Nupe followers whose

descendants are associated with the Jema's and Ibo quarters in the town". Abalaka further notes that the same Ata Igala was interviewed by a journalist, Mr. Micheal Asaju of the Spear magazine as regards the origin of the Igala people. In reply, the Ata Igala said that the early settlers in Igala "came from Arab country of Yemen and were in the present Nigeria at the same time as the founding fathers of the Yoruba, the Jukuns and the Beriberi (Kanuris or Bornu). He concluded by saying that the above, was not an attempt to ridicule or discredit the Ata for giving two traditions about the origin of the Igala people.

The question of who the Igala are and what their ethnogenesis is should readily be answered by all Igala children. This is because nobody will take you seriously if you cannot identify yourself or say where you came from. Igala is the people ruled over by Ata (of course, there is only one Ata in the world). As for the origin, at least four possibilities have been advanced: the Hausa origin, the Yoruba origin, the Benin origin and the Yemen origin (Usman, 27). Usman also opines that the progenitors of Igala were present at the tower of Babel in present-day Iraq, where God confused human language because they attempted to build a tower to reach heaven. Those who could understand themselves moved out in a group, and Igala moved to neighboring Yemen. From there, they made their way through Ethiopia, the central African Republic and Cameroun and finally entered Nigeria and stayed on Jukun land briefly.

Egbunu, in his work *Chieftaincy Titles Among Igala People*, asserts that the people of Igala are evenly distributed all over the land, with Anyigba, Idah, and Ankpa more densely populated. The Igala are sparsely found in Edo, Delta, and Anambra states. But the huge bulk of people are in Idah, Ankpa, Dekina, Omala, Olamoboro, Ofu, Ibaji, Bassa, Lokoja, and Ajaokuta, respectively (49-50). Egbunu notes that Igala land could be said to be a sort of terminus. It is located strategically at the natural crossroads in Nigeria. Owing to this reason, it is influenced both positively and negatively by trends of events as it is pulled in different directions. By and large, it has enjoyed some degree of encounters with the Yoruba, Edo (Benin), Juku, Idoma, Nupe, Igbo, Ebira, Bassa kwonu and Bassa Nge. This experience naturally left certain imprints on the tradition or culture of the Igala people. As Oguagha puts it, "Oral traditions would seem to indicate that the Igala are essentially an amalgam of various Nigerian ethnic groups and that the Igala have been in contact with the various Nigeria neighbours". The view of Oguagha could be said to be to some extent correct because its central positioning accounts for the land being considered in melting pot, yet, it might not be quite true to conclude that Igala is totally a conglomeration of other ethnic groups. It could, therefore, be summed up that Igala existed as an entity on its own before the other cultures were assimilated into its mainstream.

Igala land is located in the Eastern part of Kogi state, Nigeria. Laying approximately between latitude 6 30' and 8 North, and longitude 5 30' and 7 40' East, the land mass is about 13,685,61 square kilometers. Igala territory is bounded by the River Niger and River Benue on the West and North, respectively. On the South, it has borders with Onitsha and Osukka while its Eastern limit touches Idoma land. Within Igala land, the people speaking the Igala are numerically and culturally dominated. The common political identity is traced to the 17th century Ata Ayegba Oma Idoko (Edime, 117).

Atojoko in *Aduku Leadership Through Service* asserts that Igalaland covers an area of approximately 4982 square miles with a total population of 361, 119 persons (1962 census), 684, 880 persons (1963 population census) and 2.5 million presently. The present boundary of Igalaland does not conclude exactly with the traditional limits of the Kingdom. The greater parts of Idoma land, Nssuka Area, Kogi Central, Kogi West, and Anambra Area

(North of Onitsha) were part of the Igala Kingdom. The Ata Igala formerly exercises suzerainty over them. The strategic position of Igalaland has brought it into contact with many ethnic groups including Edo, Ibo, Jukun, Idoma, Nupe etc (87).

Linguists classify Igala and Yoruba languages as belonging to the Kwa sub-group of the Niger-Congo family. As it is evident, prolonged interactions between the Igala and their neighbours have exerted some influence on the language. Historical facts, for instance, show that interaction with Igbo land dates back to the 9th century AD. Miachi in Abalaka lays credence that: the egwu (Masquerades) of the Igala are similar and, indeed, are related to egwugwu of Igbo land, the egwugwu of Asaba (Delta state) with some slight difference (15).

In addition to the above, Abalaka asserts that the “Masquerades culture had already built bridges between the Igbo peoples, between the Igala and Benin”. In the same way, he stressed that there were “striking similarities in ritual practice, cultural objects, linguistic terms and titles” between the Igala and the Benini.

The lowland riverine areas of Igalaland are flooded seasonally, making it possible for padding rice and controlled fishing in pounds owned on a traditional or clan basis. The Ibaji area is the major place washed by flood. This makes the area more fertile than any other place in the land. The residing floods leave behind a large quantity of fish in ponds and lakes. This fact plays an important role in the economics and social life of the people (Okwoli in Abalaka, 15). Abalaka identified, among other things, that due to the fertility of the soil, 90% of the Igala people practised farming, and farm products such as yam, cassava, maize, melon, groundnut, and others were abundantly produced. However, due to shifting cultivation practised today, bush burning, and tree felling, a good proportion of the forest is gradually destroyed, and wild animals are fast becoming extinct.

Within the Igala, there are dialectical differences. Egbunu in Abalaka affirms that dialectical differences are noticeable, yet people are not divided. The Idah dialect, the central dialect, the Dekina dialect with Bassa/Igbirra influence, and the Ankpa dialect with Idoma influence. With the advent of British Colonial masters and missionaries, the English language has spread to every nook and cranny of the land, even if it were at some level of pidgin English. The villagers in the land are a conglomeration of houses whose first settlers founded as a result of good farmland, with rich fish ponds, and favourable hunting expeditions. But in most cases, people leave according to clans (olupu), thereby giving way to the circular style. In some instances, land disputes, incessant illness, death of children, war, epidemics, marriage, and banishment could occasion relocation. The buildings were traditionally mud walls with thatched roofs (16). From the foregoing, we can affirm that from time immemorial, Igala people lived in traditionally mud walls with thatched roofs. However, it is worth noting that today, owing to developments, locally constructed houses with thatched roofs (unyiegbe) have given way to solid cement walls rectangular in shape with corrugated roofing sheets to match in Igalaland.

From a religious and spiritual dimension, the ogijo-olopu acts as a spiritual leader. The office holder is seen as a symbol of unity of a living member between the clan and the dead. In the event of any misfortune, he consults the oracle (ifa) and performs the ritual on behalf of the young generation (Amoma Ubi) because he mediates between the ancestors and their descendants. The ogijo keeps the “Okwute”. It is only in the event of death that such is transferred to the next most senior elder (Egbunu in Abalaka, 17).

The major commercial centres in Igalaland are Anyigba, Idah, Ankpa, Ajaka, Afogagamu because of their nodal focal points in the land. As it were, Idah remains today the traditional

seat of culture of the Igala people. Yet Anyigba is considered a cultural meeting owing to the centrality of its location. Anyigba has also remained the venue for the “Italo” which was introduced by the colonial administrators in about A.D. 1942 (Adegbe, 14). Today, observed by the researcher there are other major towns known for their commercial activities such as Abocho, Ejule, Odugbo, Gboloko and so on.

Igala Culture

Since creation, man has been working relentlessly to meet the fundamental needs of his existence: food, clothing, and shelter, as well as to bring under control other forces of nature. Thus, in the process of realizing his potential to live and conquer the universe, man has left behind traces of his achievements at every stage of his development, and cumulative knowledge of his various achievements constitutes what is referred to as culture (Abdullahi, 253).

Culture as a social phenomenon has been defined variously by social scientists. It is appropriate to attempt to re-state some theoretical definitions to broaden our knowledge of this often-used but confused concept. Abdullahi observes that culture or civilization taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of his society. He maintains that culture comprises inherited art, facts, goods, technical processes, ideas, habits and values (254). Abdullahi equally notes that culture in Igala context refers to those beliefs, practices and customs that are transmitted through the ages and are still cherished and valued by the present generations of Igala. The Igala cultural heritage, therefore, includes the conduct of marriage, the rearing of children, the mode of dressing, arts and crafts, the manner of speech, the style and pattern of building, social organizations, institutions, etc, (254-255).

Abdul, Umar, and Musa Yunusas, in *Projecting Igala Culture and Tradition Through Igala Home Video and Medium*, affirm that the culture of the Igala people is very similar to the culture of most other Nigerian people, especially those from the middle belt. Cultural practices such as kingship, funeral ceremonies, and belief systems are very similar to those of other Nigerians, especially in religion (133). Adegbe's *Unique Igala Cultural Festivals* holds the same view when he says that Igala culture, like any other culture of the world, has attained the height of its development. According to him, Igala culture, in its pristine purity, is a complete code of life, which has, in its complex nature, covered all spheres of human endeavour. That Igala culture, like other ones in the world, directs one to love his brother the way he loves himself and gives much regard to one's quests. No wonder there is an adage in Igala which says: “Eju Ononojo majome ubinwu mara. Meaning... “One who goes into borrowing for the comfort of his visitor and pay after his departure”. “Onomele-we doji ehia eje expukpu-nwun” meaning... “You don't have to suffer if your relation is in affluence”, are of paramount important in Igala culture” (2).

The Igala people, just like many other traditional Africans have knowledge about God before the advent of Christianity and Islam. In the Igala culture, the main thoughts about God could easily be sieved from the names and titles ascribed to God and their proverbs and myths about God. The names they give their children, which have something to do with the recognition of God's intervention in human life, are also of great importance. In such riches of the culture are well embedded the relevant attributes, the nature and work of God. Similarly, Olabode asserts that a popular Nigerian adage says: “It is the home we do observe before we give a name to a child”. In other words, we do not give a name to a child until we

have examined the circumstance into which the child is born. Consequent upon this, it is understood to mean the parent's belief in God and the position that he finds himself at the time of birth that predetermines such a name. Olabode also affirms that as a result, a parent can either use such a name to give thanks to God for doing wonders in his life or use the name to reach out to his mockers or adversaries. For example, one could name his child *Enyojo* or *Ibukun-Olu* which means God's blessing which is a loud confession of what God has done in the lives of the parents through the provision of this child (32-35).

The Social-Cultural Relevance of Traditional Naming Systems and Reincarnation among the Igala People

Traditional naming systems and reincarnation is of great importance to the culture of the Igala people. This is because Igala, before the period under review, had a vibrant culture. Therefore, in order for the rich culture of Africa not to disappear, aspects of Igala culture that are non-hygienic, antisocial, and inimical could be considered appropriate for integration into Christianity. The importance of the above cultural practices in Igalaland can be seen from the facts stated below.

In Igala culture, indigenous names and procedures involved in giving names show that African traditions embrace the natural and supernatural elements, the relationship between the living and the dead. But its uniqueness has been misunderstood in the western world and therefore taken for granted. In view of its importance, Atodo (02) notes that personal names among the Igala are not mere labels showing which person is responsible for a child's birth but for a full designation for the bearer as well as carriers of several other information beyond the surface. He added that Igala indigenous names encapsulate a wide range of religious thought, philosophical speculations, proverbs, customs, norms and values of the people. He asserts that Igala names tell stories, convert abstract ideas to living stories, and tell stories beyond the story about different aspects of one's life. They compare many usual and unusual circumstances that the family or community once experienced, or world events that occur during or before the child's birth. Traditional naming systems tell the histories behind the names and project our socio-cultural identity pride and our religion-philosophical richness. These were the norms among the Igala people of Kogi State, Nigeria, until the encroachment of several historical forces in African affairs. In a nutshell, the Evangelization of Christianity, along with colonialism, has more than any other forces in human history, worked hand in hand in destroying the connection between personal names and cultural affinity, and has since contributed to the gradual erosion of African culture of names and its database.

The Igala people, just like many other traditional Africans have knowledge about God before the coming of the Christian missionaries or Isam. In Igala culture, the main thoughts about God could easily be sieved from the names and titles ascribed to God and their proverbs and myths about God. The names Igala people give their children which have something to do with recognising God's intervention in human life, are also of great importance. In such riches of the culture are well embedded the relevant attributes, the nature and work of God. Olabode (32-35) lays credence to the above as he opines that a popular Nigerian adage says, "It is the home we do observe before we give name to a child." In other words, we do not give a name to a child until we have examined the circumstances into which a child is born. Consequent upon this is understood to mean the parents' belief in God and the position that he finds himself at the time of birth that predetermines such a name. He concluded that as a result, parents in Igalaland can use such a name to thank God for doing wonders in his life. Atodo (8) added that among the Igala people of Kogi State, names and naming ceremonies

are religious activities that transcend even the natural world. Igala indigenous names and the process of being bestowed on the bearers reveal a great deal of religiosity.

As it were, the Igala, just like the Unwara people of Afigbo in Agha (cited by Adama), bear the name of the ancestors because they claim to have a close relationship to their namesake, who is believed to have reincarnated. The name helped to identify people with their compounds and parents, the native Igala name helped to identify events that occur at the place of birth of a person (121). Adamo also observed in view of this that:

Among the Africans, names are symbolic. They represent the totality of what a person is. The Yoruba people of Nigeria regard names as having special power. Names are chosen with great care because such names may represent ones' prayer to God and to the divinities. It may also be expression of faith in existence of God (Orumbe), Gods' goodness (Chukwu dima) Gods' providence (Yiopese) and Gods' love, (Olufemi). Names may represent the parents experience in life or during birth most of these names are not just given without meaning (36-37).

Edimes in *The Imperatives of Imparting Igala History and Culture*, lays credence to the above submission that Igala names are both personal identity and identification with one's community. He further states that bearing Igala names does not make one less a Muslim or Christian. He concludes that plenty of Igala names illustrate attributes of God or express human awe, admiration, gratitude to God, etc.

The names are the representation of the rich Igala heritage, values, religious beliefs, proverbial and philosophical expressions, repository of history and general world view (Atodo and Adeg, 09). They equally note that Igala names are self-encoding and decoding; the mastery of the Igala culture and language will afford an enquiring mind the power to understand the associated meaning of those names. They concluded that various clans or words do have their distinctive names that can be used as means of identification for them. Thus, apart from personal names that were associated with certain settings, facial marks-beautification, often go along with the giving of personal names all during the "egwele" ceremony.

Recommendations

The advent of Christianity and modernization in Igalaland has influenced the people's culture positively and negatively. Therefore, aspects of Igala culture that are not outrageous, detrimental, unhygienic, or inimical to the gospel should be incorporated into Christian practices.

Like others in African societies, Igala people, not minding the influence of Christianity and modernization on their cultural practices, should be encouraged and proud to bear their traditional names since they are for personal identity and identification with one's community. Bearing and maintaining traditional names should be incorporated since it does not make less a Christian or Muslim. Finally, belief in reincarnation should be equally encouraged because it helps preserve the culture and religion of the Igala people and Africa at large.

Conclusion

In view of the fact that Christianity and modernization in Igalaland confronted many Indigenous practices (enwogwucheko) and rejected them, the unique culture of the people ought not to be rejected or underrated by Christianity or civilization. Instead, the two

cultures need to be examined in the light of the scriptures with respect, in which case, Igala people and Africa at large, are called upon to believe and appreciate their cultural heritage for the sake of posterity as this will go a long way in making Christianity in Igalaland and Africa at large, realistic and acceptable without resistance.

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