

## THE IGBO PRAISE NAMES AND SONGS: A BRIEF SURVEY

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### Abstract

This paper studies praise names and songs given to or rendered to people for their achievements. Praise is the expression of approval of one's achievements or qualities. Many mediums could be used in achieving this. One of which is name praise, eulogic or panegyric song could be directed to someone or something in order to herald his or its achievements or good qualities. More so, the purpose of this praise is to eulogise the characters and the achievements of chiefs and kings in their various courts and palaces with the aim of receiving their patronage (Finnegan, 1970). The death of culture on some Igbo mythology that have not been investigated prompts this study. The paper therefore, seeks to investigate the songs rendered to an achiever and sub-class names referred in Igbo as "aha otito" (praise names), which are additional names taken by or given to individuals, either in backing up the traditional titles they have taken or in testifying to their competence in various vocations such as hunting, herbal healing, artistic productions, etc. The study reveals that there is slight difference between "aha otito" (praise name) as well as "aha echichi" (title name) respectively. The study concludes by appealing to researchers to embark on urgent study of minority of Igbo culture as many of them are gradually going into extinction.

### Introduction

This paper makes a spirited attempt to survey Igbo praise names and songs as contained in Igbo mythology that has been a contentious issue in contemporary Igbo society. Praise is the expression of approval of one's achievements or qualities, whereas names serves as the door to the house of experiences, a guide to hidden meanings in the shadow nooks of time and place. Names tell stories, liberate or imprison. They may also serve as self-fulfilling prophecies. Praise names can be seen as texts of visions or enslave, especially with respect to their use in the context of chief ship where power and personal ego are often involved. In the like manner, songs or poem are equally used in praising one over an achievement. According to Okoye (2012), it exist in many different parts of Africa in particular and the world in general. To Mapanje and white (1983), Finnegan's "Poetry and Patronage" (1970), amongst other scholars asserts that the purpose of praise poems is to eulogise the characters and the achievements of chiefs and kings in their various courts and palaces with the aim of receiving their patronages.

Okoye (2012) still believes that, in Nigeria, the above claim could be true with the Hausa and Yoruba's, but not with the Igbos who do not attach much importance to the "Igwe or Eze" (king), talkless of the chiefs. Awoonor (1974) testifies that praise singing is an art which may be part of a chief's court as among the Ashanti and the Hausa. More so, Chukwuma (1994) in her study of "The praise poem" averred that in some Igbo praise poems, the individual is the subject of praise and often times he praises himself. According to her, this practice should not be thought of as mere egotism, but must be considered in the communal context. She also asserts that almost every member of the society has his "Praise Poem" which is either given to him or made by himself about his deeds.

Nevertheless, depending on the role we are playing, each of us has more than one name. At our Jobs, we have a title. At home, we are husband or wife, mummy or daddy. To our parents, we are son or daughter. Names are important and they distinguish us from each other. Also, in each name, is attached either good and loving mother or father and this is where praise comes in.

### **Importance of Study**

This study is of a great importance as it highlights some personal names given to or taken by people as their identities may be praise oriented, and the praise may be directed to either the supernatural, the bearer or the giver of such a name, for example, parents. The specific importance are:

- i. It examines the meaning of Igbo praise names (aha otito), sobriquet used in greeting (aha otutu), and the title names (aha echichi).
- ii. Ascertain when and where these names should be used.
- iii. It highlights how these names should be used.

### **Methodology**

This paper makes use of emergent and survey design. Emergent research design notes Aboh (2019), is a research design that is based on data. That is, as the data emerge, the data can be incorporated into the work. The study anchored on the data gotten from the ideal speaker community that has the good knowledge of these praise names.

### **Problem of the Study**

The focus of this study is not on personal names that are praise oriented but on the sub-class referred to in Igbo as “aha otito” Praise names, which are additional names taken by or given to individuals either in backing up the traditional titles they have taken or in testifying to their competence in various vocations such as hunting, herbal healing, artistic productions. The study intends to show that there is slight difference between “aha otito” (praise name) and “aha otutu (sobriquet) used in greeting as well as “aha echichi” (title name) respectively.

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### ***The Concept of Igbo Praise Names***

The act of praising is performed in many cultures as a means of encouraging positive behaviour in people, although we know that in some cases, it could be hypocritical. Within the Igbo cultural context, praising as an ideal positive reinforcement act, is justified with the wise saying that, e too dike na nke o mere, o mekwaa ozo. (if a great person is praised for his or her good works, deeds, achievements, he or she would do more). Indeed, for the Igbo, the culture of praising is often harnessed in making people become more committed to working for the public good in concrete terms, apart from trying to demonstrate personal excellence to others. By extension, praise meaning is a cognate pragmatic and semiotic act through which obligations and expressions of abilities and achievement are communicated.

In other words, the praise name is not just an identity but also a text that functions in the social context of relationships, power differentiation, and reconstructions of goals. Just like all Igbo personal names as shown in. Ubahakwe (1981), Igbo praise names possess structures of meaning that relate to philosophical and cognitive experiences. Nonetheless, names are important and they distinguished us from each other. More so, in each name is attached either a good and loving mother or father. To our kings, “Eze ome udo”, a king that is known for peace maker. To an achiever, “Ikemba ndi Igbo”, The pillar of Igbo nation. These are where praise comes in. Put succinctly, the followings that are attached to one’s name is meant to praise for his or her good works, deeds, achievement as earlier stated and to motivate one to do more.

In like manner, amongst the Igbo people, praise songs are for those who make inclusive and impressive achievements in town, like great farmers, great wrestlers, great hunters, and the heroes of war, (Okoye, 2012). Anyadike (1981:60) who was concerned with the heroes of war said that praise songs and chants were used for Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu during the Nigeria-Biafra war of 1967 through 1970. The Praise songs and chants were also made for other exceptional Biafran soldiers and officers whose courage in the face of bullets was quickly passing into legend. Okpewho (1990) in his examination of formulas in Mandika Epic .....” is of the opinion that praise are almost like an exclamation of admiration and wonder, following the description of some outstanding incident in the hero’s career.

To Okoye (2012), exaggeration is the life wire of praise in oral performance. In the words of Awoonor (1975), “exaggeration should be said to be the hallmark of praise poems”. Okoye (2012) expanding his

view posits that, today, many poets are singing praise songs for the political leaders with the hope of gaining their patronage. If they receive it in sufficient quantity the praises continue, but if not their innuendo become gradually sharper. The purpose of praising a person genuinely through song is to encourage him to continue in whatever good he is doing so that others might emulate or copy the person.

More so, whether as a means of performing the act of praising or mere identification of its bearer, a name is universally seen as being very significant in the life of its bearer. To buttress this, Kaplan and Bernays (1997) in the language of names explain that, names shape the language of the daily draw of gesture, avowal, and inference that is part of our social life.

Full personal names, first and last taken together stand at the intersection of opposing pulls. They set the bearer apart as an individual but also provide the bearer with fairly and extended kinship ties, and so focus both the present and the past. And beyond this, they have an occult associative and symbolic power. They are charms.

### **The Difference between Igbo Praise Names (Aha otito) And Sobriquet Used in Greeting (Aha otutu)**

When a member of any Igbo society obtains a name which summarizes his deeds in the society, such name is “aha otutu”, which in the Igbo world view is a kind of greeting rather than praise. There is a slight difference between “aha otutu” (sobriquet used in greeting) and “aha otito” (praise names). Just as there is a difference between “aha echichi” (title names), “aha otito” and “aha otutu”, respectively. Aha otutu may be praise oriented, in other words, it may also be a name that gives praise or that praises, or a name that generally teaches philosophy of life without any tickling of the ego. Every adult in Igbo society normally chooses “aha otutu” which people greet him or her.

Okoye and Okoye (2009) in their own view, believes that when a member of any Igbo society obtains a name which summarizes his deeds in the society, such names is “aha otutu”, which in the Igbo world view is a kind of greeting rather than “praise song or poem. However, Finnegan (1970) on her part, says that praise names may also be used to describe clans, animals or inanimate objects and they are usually explicitly laudatory. “Aha echichi” (title name), may be praise oriented and is normally “aha otutu”, because titled individuals are supposed to be greeted properly. That is to say, in recognition of what they are, or have made themselves for others to recognize. It is considered abnormal among the Igbo not to honour someone who has been properly honoured by tradition. Greeting an individual with his title name is also a way of showing respect for tradition. Again, in some cases, “aha echichi”, “aha otito” and “aha otutu”, may be extensive. That is, they may be a very long rendition structurally shared by the bearer of the name (s) and the person being hailed or greeted in the ensuing discourse. In fact, what we have in such situations is a (verbal) performance on identity.

Chukwuma (1994) in her study of “the Praise Poem” averred that in some Igbo praise poems (or songs), the individual is the subject of praise and often times he praises himself. Chukwuma (1994) expanding her view, also posits that this practice should not be thought of as mere egoism, but must be considered in the communal context. She further stressed that almost every member of the society has his “praise poem” which is either given to him or made by himself about his deeds. When a member of any Igbo society obtains a name which summarizes his deeds in the society, such name is “aha otutu”, which in the Igbo world view is a kind of greeting rather than praise.

### **List of Some Igbo Praise Names (Aha Otito), Sobriquet Used in Greeting (Aha Otutu) As Well As Title Names (Aha Echichi) Respectively.**

1. Agbaegonkiti
2. Ajaanu
3. Akaekpuchiowa
4. Akajiaku
5. Akalusiangene
6. Akuenwebe
7. Akuiriri

8. Akunaatakasị
9. Akunwata
10. Anaeriaku
11. Anuanagbaegbe
12. Anukpolunku
13. Anunkankampi
14. Anyanwu ututu
15. Arabinagu
16. Arusinajeuka
17. Dikeanakpaogwu
18. Ebubedike
19. Egbeigwe
20. Enyikwonwa
21. Eriweaguagu
22. Ezeamanogaechi
23. Ezediohanna
24. Ezeebunafu
25. Ezeego
26. Ezeji
27. Ezekudele
28. Ezekwesiri
29. Ezeomma
30. Ezeomeudo
31. Eziahakaego
32. Gburugburu
33. Igirigindu
34. Ikemba
35. Ikukuamanonya
36. Iteego
37. Mmiridoroedo
38. Mmirimma
39. Mmirinebuogwe
40. Nneoma
41. Nshanshamiri
42. Ntumagburuenyi
43. Nwachimereeze
44. Obataobie
45. Obialinanna
46. Obidiya
47. Ochendo
48. Ochinanwata
49. Ochiriozuu
50. Odjukonamba
51. Ogbuagu
52. Ogbuanyinya
53. Ogbuehi
54. Ogbukaagu
55. Ogbunehendo
56. Ojemaenweiro
57. Ojenanwayo
58. Okaaoburuuzo
59. Okaaomee
60. Okwuruoha
61. Oluola
62. Omeifeego

63. Omeiheukwu
64. Omekagu
65. Omekannaya
66. Omemgbeoji
67. Omenuko
68. Omereoha
69. Ononenyi
70. Ononiikpoaku
71. Onwanaetirioha
72. Onyimonyi
73. Orimili
74. Osimiriatunnu
75. Osinanwataburugaranya
76. Otagburuagu
77. Oyiridiya
78. Ozoigbondu
79. Udelegbaola
80. Ugodiya
81. Utuagbaigwe

These list of names above that are examples of “aha otito”, “aha otutu” and aha echichi respectively, in Igbo land are sometimes used interchangeably. For instance, names are given or taken based on the intension of the giver or the taker. It should be noted in some Igbo society, what is given or taken as “aha otito” (praise name) and aha otutu (sobriquet use in greeting) may be given or taken in another society as “aha echichi” (title name) and so on. It is also argued when we tend to make generalization on these Igbo names because the intention for given or taken them varies from one society, to the other. Like we earlier said in this study, that praise name is not just an identity, but also a text that functions in the social context of relationships, power differentiation and reconstruction of goals. As part of proper names, they are not mere literally expressions but also indicators of experiences. More so, we should also have a look at few examples of Igbo praise songs as seen in Okoye and Okoye (2009), thus,

Text i

General Ojukwu  
 Ikemba ndi Igbo  
 Eze Igbo gburugburu  
 Nwa huru ala nna ya n'anya  
 Mgbe Igbo juru onye ka ha ga-eziga  
 I kwuputa si ha ziga gi

Ojukwu

I ji ogbunigwe gwoo ndi iro iba na Mkpoo  
 Jiri shoo batiri suo ha akwu n'osimiri Naija  
 Ojukwu  
 Nkenke enyi churu igwe enyi oso  
 Nwaegbe nkanka nku  
 Onye gwere ndi iro ka ose n'Uzuakoli?  
 O bu Ojukwu  
 Ikemba  
 Anyi ji gi eme onu n'ututu  
 Anyi ji gi eme onu n'ehihie  
 Anyi ji gi eme onu n'abali  
 Nnoo  
 Ikemba nnoo  
 Eze Igbo, nnoo.

The pillar of Igbo nation

King of all the Igbo nation  
Lover of his fatherland  
When the Igbo asked for who to send  
You volunteered yourself for the big task  
Ojukwu  
You used Ogbunigwe to massacre the enemies at Mkpoo.  
You grind them with shore battery at river Niger  
Ojukwu  
The little elephant that defeated a multitude of elephants  
A hard skin warrior  
Experienced fighter  
Who killed thousands of enemies at Uzukoli?  
It is Ojukwu  
We are proud of you in the morning  
We are proud of you in the afternoon  
We are proud of you in the night  
Welcome  
King of the Igbo nation, welcome.

Text ii

Jagwa  
Otagbu nchi  
Otagbuo o bulata  
O nuriwa gbowa  
kpowa nna ya ukwu  
Ikoro ya na anu achaala  
Ofe di utu o bu jagwa  
O tagbuhị ewi o tagbuo nchi  
Jagwa  
Ogbu ka egbe

Jagwa  
Killer of grass cutter  
On bringing home your game  
you rejoice and bark  
calling on your master  
to inform him of your feat  
if soup is tasty, it is Jagwa  
when stew is good, it is Jagwa  
for if it does not kill rabbit it will kill grass cutter  
Jagwa!  
You kill like gun

Text iii

Sunday Nweke  
Ogbukaagu  
Ufodu gara ugu Awusa ichu ego  
Ufodu gara obodo oyibo ichu ego  
Ma o nweghi ebe i gara  
I si na ego di ebe niile  
Naani egbe ka i bu aba ohia  
Buru nchi na mgbada na-alota  
Buru adaka na ezi ohia na-alota  
Anu ndi a i na-ere ka I ji enwe ego  
Ego I nwetere n'anu ndi a ka I ji chie ozo

I gburu ehi asaa n'ozo  
Gbuo mkpi asaa  
Gbuo ebule asaa  
Sunday ogbukaagu  
Ebe o bu na I gbuola agu  
Anyi ga-akpozị gi ogbu agu  
Maka na dinta agaghị egbu  
Agu neeri tupu o zaba ogbu agu  
Sunday ogba n'ufe  
I na-egbu egbe na-efe n'elu  
Ndi ike jere bata obodo anyi  
Egbe gi a na-agba ka ukpaka kara n'uguru  
Kawararam- Kawararam!  
Sunday dike  
Ajo anu  
Nwa gaagaanogwu  
Egwu anyi na-ekele gi  
Ndi egwu Umuto na-ekele gi

Sunday Nweke  
Ogbukaagu  
Some went to the North to make money  
Some went oversea to make money  
You refused going anywhere  
Saying that money is everywhere  
With only your gun you entered into the bush  
And came out with grass cutters and antelopes  
Chimpanzees and bush pigs  
From their sales you made your money  
From their sales you got your ozo title  
You slaughtered seven rams  
Sunday Ogbukaagu  
Now that you have killed a tiger  
We shall be calling you tiger-killer  
Because a hunter should not kill ten  
Tigers before he qualifies for the name  
Sunday, you killed flying birds while they are on air  
Your gun brings eagles down from the air  
Your gun brings hawks down from the air  
If armed robbers enter our town  
Your gun cries like harmattan oil-bean pod  
Kawararam- kawararam  
Sunday the great  
The people's lion  
The small wood that heats an oven  
Our song greets you  
Umuto dancing group greets you.

The above praise songs could also be used for personal friends, wives, brothers, and other relations of poets to appreciate good things they did.

### Summary

It is not only human beings that are given praise names. This is to say that both communities, supernatural and even animals are sometimes given praise names. With respect to communities, praise name is often used in constructing the pride of their identities, in fact for patriotic reasons. It is a rhetorical means of gaining the favour or enlisting the support of the being in question. For instance, in the case of several names given to God in Jewish religious tradition.

### Conclusion

The focus of this paper has been on praise names in Igbo chief ship as signs of power. This demonstrates the power of signs in culture and society. It locates the analysis within the context of debates on the ontology and practice of chief ship in Igbo culture and history.

More so, the paper attempted to show that these names express competing ideologies. Praise names adopted by chiefs are sometimes indirect responses to or interrogations of other chief ship names and leadership styles. In other words, an indirect verbal exchange on chief ship is already going on among chiefs and non-chiefs through praise naming. There is no doubt that chief ship needs to be made more meaningful and relevant to the contemporary culture and democratic governance. As Africans, chiefs have already started moving from the chiefdoms of their local communities to the chiefdoms of virtual global community, there is the need for a proper ideological transformation of the institution. African chief ship needs to be revolutionized so that chiefs become means of liberating their communities from political oppression, hunger, diseases and above all, ignorance.

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