

EDO PERSONAL NAMES AND WORLD VIEW¹

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Edo personal names as they manifest in the culture, and relates them either directly or by extended interpretation to the World – view of both the ancient and the contemporary Edo psyche. The argument is that these names are used to affirm certain aspects of Edo culture.

Our study reveals that there are common onomastic factors which underlie the naming of children in the Edo society. The first section of the paper gives the introductory background of the Edo people, as well as, the background to the Edo naming ceremony.

The second section is the main body of the paper. It deals with the sociocultural significance of Edo names. In this section, names are classified and discussed according to the socio- cultural beliefs such names reveal. Also, in order to reveal the meanings of the names examined, each name is broken into its constituent morphological parts.

The last section is the conclusion to our study. The main thesis of this study is that deductions can be made as to the nature of the socio-cultural patterns in a society

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based on examination of the meanings embodied in the naming system of that society.

1.0: INTRODUCTION

In traditional African societies, personal names are not just arbitrarily concatenated words but rather words that reflect the World-view of the people. World view is defined in this paper as ‘ the beliefs and thoughts (conceptions, ideas, opinions) about the world and human life within the world’. Edo personal names express such beliefs and thoughts of Edo people. Consequently, the utterance by a shakespearean character to the effect that ‘there is nothing in a name’ is a false expression in the African context, especially in the Edo culture. The Edo people attach great significance to the meaning of names as it is believed that the name given to an individual will determine his fate. This is reflected in the Edo proverb ‘*Eke ne a he eni ghe e re eni la ghe*’ (a person is a reflection of his / her name).

Naming, therefore, is a carefully planned event. The choice of a name for a child, a prospective title – taking initiate, a new bride etc, is a very careful exercise which indeed require some divination.

1.1: THE LANGUAGE EDO AND THE PEOPLE

1.1.1: THE NAME EDO

The name Edo which is used to refer to the language and the people ,is believed to have been the name of the headslave of Ogiefafa, a man who lived in the time of Oba

Ewuare (1440 – 73). The slave saved the Oba (before his ascension to the throne) from a murder plot by some elders of the Benin Empire. After the death of this slave, the land was named **E**do in his honour by Oba **E**wuare.

The term **E**do was later used by scholars to encompass the **E**do group of languages. To disambiguate the above use of the term, Elugbe (1979: 98) suggested that the term Edoid be used to refer to the **E**do group which included peoples who did not claim any right to the name **E**do.

Elugbe (1979) classified **E**do language as belonging to the Proto North – Central Edoid group. The Edoid language group along side other Nigerian Languages like: Yoruba, Igbo, Nupe etc belong to the kwa branch of the Niger – Congo family tree (Greenberg 1966).

1.1.2: **TRADITIONS OF ORIGIN**

According to Elugbe (1979:90), there are four main traditions of origin: autochtony; Benin Origin; Ife origin; and origin in an Edoid area other than Benin.

1.1.3: **GEOGRAPHY**

The **E**do people occupy seven local government areas of **E**do State in Nigeria, namely; Oredo, **O**via North – East, **O**via South – West, **O**rhi~~o~~nmw~~o~~n, **U**hunmw~~o~~de, **E**gor and **I**kpoba – **O**kha. The area lies between latitude 6° 12' N and longitude 5° 45' E. It is about 90 kilometers inland from the South of the Benue river which flows into the

Gulf of Guinea. To the East and North – East of this area are the Igbos, to the South are the Ijaws, Urhobos and Itsekiris, and to the North and West the Yorubas. The 1991 census gave the population of these people as about a million and a half.

1.1.4: **CULTURE**

The **E**do people are rich in culture and tradition. They are best known however as being a center for Arts and crafts. Their works in bronze, brass, carvings and terra – cotta are renowned Worldwide.

1.2: **BACKGROUND**

The names given to a child distinguishes the infant socially and incorporates it fully into the wider society (Ryan 1981: 140). The **E**do naming ceremony (*Izomo* ‘Act of choosing a child’) takes place seven days after birth for healthy children and fourteen days for sickly ones.

The naming ceremony not only separates the infant from the spirit world, but also initiates him into the physical world of human existence. This is attributed to the fact that the naming of a child is seen as the uniting of an individual with the universe and society.

A sickly child is watched by the parents for fourteen days. During this period, a temporary reference such as *Umwēni* which means ‘you do not have a name’ might be given to the child. If the child is ill for a long time, the name might be adopted. A sickly child that recovers after the stipulated period, is then given an identity and incorporated into society through the naming ceremony. This is because once a child is name, he / she is believed to desire life. Guemple (1965 : 324) reports the same experience for the

Eskimo people, where the conferral of a name may be delayed a few days to ascertain if the child will live.

Child naming is a joyous occasion among the Edo people because children are regarded as wealth and as instruments of lineage continuity. The parents, Oka – egbee (head of extended family), egbee (members of immediate and extended family) as well as friends and well-wishers are usually present at the occasion. During the ceremony, the ancestral spirits are invoked for blessings. The items used include: coconut (which represents wealth that the child will bring to the family – coconut was an important item of trade brought by the Portuguese to the Benin Empire), orhue (white chalk – which symbolizes purity and happiness), native gin and colanuts (used for invoking ancestral blessings for the child), honey (which symbolizes the sweetness of life), and alligator pepper (which symbolizes the bitter side of life).

The parents of the child are the principal actors. The name they give is generally the identity the child grows with. Before the actual name is given however, seven different animal names are given to the child to deceive evil forces present and distract their attention from the actual name. Although other people present equally give their preferred names, the parents are not necessarily bound to adopt them. Sometimes, however, such names may be adopted to please some members of the family.

2.0: **THE SOCIAL – CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF EDO NAMES**

In a study of this nature, there are two approaches to attempting interpretations of names. One is to base such interpretations on the knowledge already available to us as to

the nature of socio-cultural patterns and norms in Edo culture. The other is to attempt to make deductions as to that nature, on the basis of the meanings embodied in the names examined. The second approach is more valid in so far as it gives some degree of autonomy to onomastics as a scholarship. In other words, an attempt to speculate on the nature of socio-cultural norms and practices on the basis of these names would suggest that names alone could be reliable empirical evidence on which some hypothesis may be formulated. Consequently, while we attempt to discuss these names as if they possess sufficient evidence upon which we can arrive at independent conclusions, we will occasionally have to rely on some other Edo traditional belief systems as collaborative evidences.

Below are some of the major factors that govern naming in Edo. Edo personal names could be classified under the following groupings:

- A Names depicting beliefs
- B Names depicting the concept of the World and the Edo Kingdom
- C Names depicting Edo Kinship system
- D Names depicting ethical and social values
- E Names depicting events / circumstances at birth.

2.1: **BELIEFS**

2.1.1: **Belief in Destiny**

The Edos believe that every living person has an Ehi (guardian angel) which has the dual function of being one's destiny as well as a counterpart and guide in the spirit

world (Erinmwini). According to Bradbruy (1973: 262), Omwan (the living person) and Ehi are the two halves of a single being ---- before birth each individual is believed to predestine himself (hi) by making a statement before Osanobua, the Creator, setting out a life programme and asking for all that will be needed to carry it out successfully.

The following names reflect this belief:

1. Ehiosu:

Ehi + o + su

{Guardian pronoun to guideSpirit}

'It is the guardian spirit that guides'

2. Aizehinomo:

A + i + ze + ehi + ne + omo

{Impersonal Pronoun} {negative marker} choose {guardian spirit} for child

'A child's destiny is not chosen by the parents'

3. Ehimwenma:

Ehi + mwen + maa

{Guardian Spirit} my good

'My guardian spirit is good'

4. Aisagbonbuomwan:

A + i + se + agbon + bu + omwa
{Impersonal Pronoun} {negative marker} reach world determine person

'One's destiny is not determined in the world'

The names above are given to re-affirm the belief that one's sojourn on earth is predetermined. Also, in giving such names, the giver has the hope that the Ehi of the child so named, will be benevolent.

2.1.2: **Belief in Re – incarnation:**

The Edos believe in two types of re-incarnation: Ancestral reincarnation and infantile re-incarnation. While ancestral re-incarnation is desired infantile re-incarnation is regarded as an abomination.

Names like 5 and 6 below reflect the belief in ancestral reincarnation.

5. Iye:

'Mother'

6. Iyorre:

I + yo + re
I go come

'I have gone and come'

These names are given to children who are believed to be re incarnation of some dead member of the family. The Edo belief that the dead is survived by children, in a way, is a manifestation of the doctrine of transmigration of souls.

Edo cosmogony identifies three categories of persons: The Igbakhuan (the elementals), the Emwanagbon (the human beings) and the Okpemwan (the super – human beings).

The Igbakhuan represent the focal point in reincarnation: their life span is short. The term Igbakhuan (synonymous with the Yoruba term, Abiku) refers to someone who is “predestined to a continual cycle of birth, death and re – birth”. (Akinnaso 1981: 55). Children born under these circumstances bear names to that effect:

7. Gumwendia:

Gu + mwen + dia

With me stay

‘Remain with me’

8. Onaiwu:

Ona + i + wu

This {negative die
marker}

‘This one won’t die’

9. Sonarae:

Se + ona + rae

Reach This one ?

‘leave this one behind’

These names are pleas to the Igbakhuan child by the parents to reside long in the human world. They are wishes for long life.

The Emwanagb_{on} also re-incarnate, their life span is much longer than that of the Igbakhuan. It takes them a longer time to re-incarnate between deaths. Besides, in Edo cosmogony there is an upward movement of souls in terms of graduation from one category to another. The Emwanagb_{on} after fourteen re-incarnations get absorbed into the realm of okpemwan spritually, if they are found worthy. At this stage, they cease to re-incarnate as humans. The Okpemwan are one step above the Emwanagb_{on}. Oral tradition has it that once the Emwanagb_{on} transform into Okpemwan, they remain in the astral world as sub-gods until such a time that conditions favour their incarnation for the first time as Okpemwan. People in this realm are the Obas and men who perform heroic deeds while on earth. Such persons are believed to have the power of protection against all evil, hence names like:

10. Igbinad_{olo}:

I + gbinna + Ad_{olo}

I {to seek Ad_{olo}

Protection}

'I seek the protection of Oba Ad_{olo}'

11. Igbineweka:

I + gbinna + Eweka

I (to seek) Eweka

(protection)

'I seek the protection of Oba Eweka'

2.1.3: **Religious Belief**

Names in this category capture the African notion of cause. The modus – operandi of the universe is attributed to spiritual agencies. These agencies are credited with causing disturbances in everyday experiences as well being responsible for any misfortunes or illnesses.

Edo every day experience can be explained in terms of one main force – the Erinwin (Astral forces). The Erinwin are believed to have a high spiritual excellence of the soul. This is reflected in the following name:

12. Erinwingbovo:

Erinwin + i + gbe + ovo

{Spiritual {negative to do envy

Beings} maker}

'The spirit beings are not envious of humans'

Osanobua , {osa ne o bu uwa}

'God' { God that Pron establish wealth}, is believed to be the highest of

the astral beings and the creator of all living things, hence names like:

13. Osarodion:

Osa + re + odion

Osa copular verb eldest

'God is the eldest'

14. Osaro:

Osa + roo

God exist

'God exists'

Names nos. 15, 16, and 17, below capture the fact that Olokun (God of sea, wealth, and fertility), Ogun (god of iron), and Osun (god of healing) are the most venerated of the Edo gods.

15. Okungbowa:

Okun + gbowa + uwa

The sea to plant wealth

'Olokun (water god) ensures wealth'

16. Ogunbo:

Ogun + bo

Ogun to be favourable

'Ogun (God of Iron) is favourable'

17. Igbinosun:

I + gbinna + Osun

I seek protection osun

'I seek the protection of Osun (God of healing)'

Ancestors are below the gods in hierarchy and only those who have achieved the status of Okpemwan influence naming:

18. Igbinnewuare:

i + gbinna + Ewuare

I {to seek Ewuare

Protection}

'I seek the protection of Oba Ewuare'

19. Igbinnazaka:

i + gbinna + Azaka

I {to seek Azaka

Protection}

'I seek the protection of Azaka'

2.2: **CONCEPT OF THE WORLD, THE EDO KINGDOM AND ITS RULERS**

2.2.1: **Concept of the World and the Edo kingdom**

Edo cosmogony states that Edo land (formally known as Idu) is the origin of the world. Edos also believe that the world will never come to an end, contrary to the

christian belief in a day of judgement. The **E**do land in the scheme of the universe is seen as the core of existence. These beliefs are revealed in names like:

20 Idukpaye:

Idu + Kpee + aye

The **E**do land to be a long time world

*'The **E**do land has been in existence for ages'*

21. Edosomwan:

Edo + see + omwan

Edo surpass person

*'The **E**do land is greater than the individual'*

22. Edorisiagbon:

Edo + ore isi + agbon

Edo focus marker source world

*'The **E**do land is the origin of the world'*

23. Edogiawerie:

Edo + i + gi + a + werrie

Edo {negative allow {impersonal to turn over

Marker} pronoun}

*'One cannot subvert **E**do land'*

24. Agbonifo:

Agbon + I + fo
World {negative finish
Marker}

'The world won't ever end'

25. Agbonkonkon:

Agbon + konkon
World to be big

'The world is big'

2.2.2: The Rulers

The Edo system of government was highly stratified with the Qba at the summit. He was the focal point of all administrative, religious, commercial and judicial matters. He was believed to be divine and the owner of all lands in the kingdom (Ben-Amos 1971:41). In conferring on children the names below, the ancient and contemporary Edo man reaffirms his belief in the supreme nature of the Qba:

26. Osagiobarre:

Osa + gie Qba + re
God send King come

'The King is ordained by God'

27. Qbasogie:

Qba + see + Ogie

King Surpass ruler of fiefdom

'The King is greater than the ruler of a fiefdom'

28. Aiguobasimwinoto:

A + i + gue + Oba + simwin + oto

{Impersonal {negative be with King Struggle land
Pronoun} marker}

'One does not dispute the ownership of land with the King'

29. Obayanto:

Qba + yan + oto

King own land

'The King is the owner of all lands'

The Benin Kingdom had many fiefdoms which were administered by Enigie (fiefdom rulers). Each village or ward was guided daily by the edion (senior age-grade set). In troubled times, the edion were consulted first before the enogie (if need be). The names below encode this information.

30. Igbinogie:

I + gbinna + enigie

I {seek fiefdom rulers
Protection}

'I seek to be protected by fiefdom rulers'

31. Igbinedion:

I + gbinna + edion

I seek protection elders

'I seek to be protected by the elders'

2.3: KINSHIP SYSTEM

2.3.1: The Place of the Father

Descent is reckoned patrilinearly in Edo society. Much emphasis is therefore placed on the role of the father in a family. The importance of the father is reflected in the following names:

32. Erharuyi:

Erha + re + uyi

Father is prestige

'A child's honour derives from the father'

33. Erhahon:

Erha + ore + a + hon

Father focusmarker Impersonal pronoun hear

'In a family, the word of the father is supreme'

34. Erhabo:

Erha + bo

Father protects

'It is the father that protects one'

35. Erhabude:

Erha + o + buu + ude

Father pronoun go to advice

'The father gives advice'

It is interesting to note that names that elevate the mother to a position of supremacy in the family are non-existence.

2.3.2: Polygamy

The Edo society is basically a polygamous one, polygamy may not be unconnected with the man-power needs of the society. Bradury (1973: 154) reports that Edo villages are cultivators. Men and boys plant the main crop-Yam, while women and girls plant and maintain subsidiary crops. According to him, a man who has to tend his own subsidiary crops feels ashamed.

In such polygamous homes there are petty rivalries between the different wives and their offsprings, such situations motivate the following names:

36. Aimievbiye:

A + i + mien + ivbiye

{Impersonal {negative see {children of same
pronoun} marker} mother}

'Children from the same mother are supportive under all circumstances'

37. Aimierrovbiye:

A	+	i	+	mie	+	erre	+	ovbiye
Imp.pron		neg.marker		see		equal		child of the Same mother

'There's no one as close to one as his , maternal sibling'

In fact in the Edo society, the terms Ovbierhamwen “my father’s child” and Ovbiyemwen “my mother’s child” are commonly used to discriminate between the maternal and paternal siblings . Siblings of the same mother as shown by names nos. 36 and 37 above, feel more closely related.

2.3.3: The Place of Children

In Edo society, children are much valued above wealth, and kingship. The names below reflect this belief:

38. Aghabiomo:

A	+	gha	+	bie	+	omo
{Impersonal Pronoun}		Aux		give birth		child

'When one has a child, the child looks after the parents in old age'

39. Ogbomo:

Ogbe	+	ore	+	oghe	+	omo
extended family		focus marker		{possessive marker}		child

'The extended family belongs to the child'

40. Omosefe:

Omo + see + efe
Child surpass wealth

'A child is more important than wealth'

41. Omosede:

Omo + see + ede
Child surpass crown

'A child is greater than a crown'

Name no. 38 reflect the culture that the old are cared for by their children. Hence, in the Edo society and indeed in most African societies there are no old people's homes.

2.3.4: **The Place of Family / Relations**

The extended family plays a very important role in the Edo society. It is made up of a man and his brothers and sons and their families as well as his uncles and their families and the unmarried daughters in the family. The most senior person in the group has a theoretical moral authority over its other members (Bradbury 1973: 157) . For every Edo individual, identity with ones ogbe or egbee (Extended family)is very important. Names nos. 42 and 43 below reflect this:

42. Aibangbe:

A + i + ban + egbee
{impersonal {negation give up {extended
pronoun} marker} family}

'One cannot renounce his extended family'

43 Ogbewii:

Ogbe + e + i + wii
{Extended negative pronoun {negation lost
Family } marker}

'through extended family system a lineage is never lost'

2.4: ETHICAL AND SOCIAL VALUES

Edo moral laws, though unwritten, regulate social behaviour. These laws are passed from generation to generation through oral literature and the naming system. Names in this category highlight ethical and social values such as bravery, hardwork, good behaviour, communality and respect:

44 Ekpen: (Bravery)

'Tiger or Warrior'

45 Egbenayalobe: (Hardwork)

Egbe + ne + a + ya + la + obele
Body that {impersonal use pass {rough
Pronoun} path}

'The path to success is rough'

46. Aghaleladia: (Good behaviour)

A + gha + lele + adia

{impersonal auxiliary follow straight path
pronoun}

'one's behaviour is conditioned by his peers'

47. Akugberetin: (Communality)

A + kugbe + o + re + etin

{Impersonal join pronoun be strength
(Pronoun)}

'Unity is strength'

48. Aigbedion: (respect)

A + i + gbe + edion

{Impersonal {negation beat elders
Pronoun} marker}

'One does not beat one's elders'

2.5.0: NAMES THAT DEPICT EVENTS / CIRCUMSTANCES AT BIRTH

Various events that occur before the birth of a child play significant roles in the naming of that child. The names discussed in this session are divided into different relevant events / circumstances.

2.5.1: Time and Place of Birth

Children born at particular times and places may motivate names like nos. 49 – 51 below.

These times and events have no special cultural or spiritual significance. Such names are

simple and are normally made up of simple noun phrases.

49. Ota

Evening

'Child born in the evening'

50. Evbu

Dew

'child born on a dewy morning'

51. Ugbo

Farm

'Child born in the farm'

2.5.2: **Economic Situation at Birth**

The economic situation of a family at the birth of a child motivates names like nos 52 – 54. Such names are usually condensed sentences as they are usually descriptions of complex events.

52. Idemudia:

I + de + mudia

I fall stand

'I am stabilized'

53. Abieyuwa:

A + bie + ye + uwa

{Impersonal {to give in wealth

Pronoun} birth}

'Born into wealth'

54. Adesuwa:

Adese + Uwa

Centre Wealth

'Born in the midst of wealth'

from the above names it appears that the birth of a child inspite of any adversity being experienced by the family is perceived as a blessing or progress.

2.5.3: A much Desired Child

Bareness is a curse hence when a couple has a much-desired child special names are given. A much desired child of any sex motivates a name like:

55. Edoghoghò:

Ede + Oghoghò

Day happiness

'Day of happiness'

A much desired female child could be given a name like nos 56 below (because coral beads are highly treasured items).

56. Ivie

Coral beads

'Precious daughter'

On the other hand, a much desired male child could be given a name like:

57. Owen

Sun

'Precious son'

This is attributed to the fact that the sun is the source of all existence, and the male child is seen as the source of the continuity of a lineage.

2.5.4: **Special Circumstances or Attributes Peculiar to a Child At Birth.**

Children born with peculiar attributes are given special names that encode these information:

58. Qdion

elder

'Senior twin'

59. Qvbokbhan

Junior

'Junior twin'

60. Dada

'A child born with dreadlocks'

Again, like the time and place names, these are normally simple noun phrases.

2.5.5: **Survival of Conflict and Stress in the Family**

Most religious names can also be used to make statements about the survival of a family in situations of conflict and stress:

61. Osamudiamē :

Osa + mudia + me

God stand me

'God stood by me'

62. Osaze:

Osa + o + ze
God pronoun to cause
'God delivered me'

Also, names depicting states of the mind may be given:

63. Ifueko:

I + fu + eko
nom.prefix calm stomach
'The Heart is calmed'

Situations that motivate the above names are normally major crises in the lives of the experiencers. For instance, if a family goat dies, such an event would normally not motivate such names. Events like death of a loved one, accusations of infidelity, barrenness, false accusations, and decline of fortune could motivate such names.

It must be noted that no Edo name has negative connotation. Information on negative events are eliminated from personal names.

Yoruba personal names also have this attribute. Akinnaso (1980: 28b) states that, in Yoruba personal names, all negatively valued events are raised to positively valued status for the purpose of personal name construction.

3.0

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we set out to examine some Edo personal names from the socio-cultural points of view. As we have seen, the Edos in naming children, make

fundamental statements as to their beliefs about the world around them and their everyday experiences. Naming therefore in the Edo context, is a major tool for transmitting beliefs, family and communal history, as well as, moral and societal values in a society where tradition is passed from one generation to another through the oral medium. In particular, we tried to show that Edo personal names, as part of Edo culture and oral literature, provide useful information about the ethos of the people.

NOTES

1. The verb 'serae' belongs to the category Awobuluyi called the "Splitting Verb". The two halves of a splitting verb come together to form one unit of meaning, Serae means 'to leave

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