

## ANTIDOTE AND SUCCOR POTENCY OF BININ AND ESAN NAMES AS CULTURAL MEANS OF MANAGING MORALE IN SOCIETY

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***Abstract:** This study examines savaging morale issues through indigenous names which, takes conscious effort, and how this has helped Africans, particularly Benin and Esan people to conquer their environment and enhance relationships and as well douse Westcott's (1995) assertion on Benin names. Consequently, the need to save indigenous identity, understand these names, their meanings and their succor potency so as to further conquer and enhance relationships becomes necessary, especially for foreigners who may wish to domesticate and for indigenes to improve upon at such time that western civilization is sweeping away African cultural values. The choice of Binin and Esan names was informed by the cultural intra-relationship of both ethnic groups. In addition, the indigenous names borne by members of these ethnic groups are philosophical and connotative, this drives the succor potency that make such names effectual and inform the antidote and succor potency which build morale in African society. Hence, this paper examines the primary essence of names, which is identity, meaning of names and situations where their antidote and succor potencies are relevant and active. It further examines the history and classes of names and the experiences behind some particular names of both ethnic groups. It further extricates how antidote and succor potency are enjoyed by the bearer and caller, and how they help in the management of morality through hearing and interpretation. It recommended that indigenous Binin and Esan names should be borne by Binin and Esan sons and daughters in as much as they retain their antidote and succor potency. This will help ethnic identification through individual names and at the same time do its antidote and succor relief, which aids morale management and contributes to positive construction in society. It concluded that for foreign names not to take over our indigenous names and throw us into ethnic identity confusion and endanger our indigenous name value, we must encourage the bearing of our indigenous names.*

### Introduction

It is not possible to identify the time man began the use of names in Africa. It is a very old art which began in pre-historic era. However, most ancient written texts make use of names. A name is a specific label on a person, place or thing. The names of people are referred to as personal names. Although all cultures use names, naming tradition vary from people to people. It could be simple or complex. In traditional societies, names serve several purposes. For instance, in Africa names are revered and they are handled meaningfully. In another direction, imagine how it would have been possible for human beings to relate without names. The use and importance of names encourages its study. The study of names is known as onomastic or onomatology. Onomatology is the study of proper names of all kinds and the origin of names. These words originated from Greek (onomastikos) "of or belonging to naming" and (onomatologia) from "name" while toponymy or toponomastic is the study of the names of places, it is also a principal branch of onomastic. Antroponomastics is the study of personal names (Wikipedia, 2011:1). The importance of personal names differs from one culture to another. In Benin and Esan culture, it connotes a lot, even as a cultural instrument for morale management in society.

The essence of giving names to children at birth in Binin and Esan are of defferent purposes. It is not only for the need of identification as may be imagined by those who may not know the in-depth purpose of names in Africa, particularly in Binin and Esan as it concerns this study. Virtually everything in the world and beyond which could be imagined has a name. In some communities much is not attached to

human names, but in some other societies names implies a lot. Binin and Esan fall into the societies where names mean so much to every family. Binin and Esan names stems from indigenous language of the people. These names are coined in such a way and manner that it will be beneficial to the hearer, bearer or both. The choice of Binin and Esan became necessary because of the interrelatedness of their culture. Moreso, the people of Esan migrated from Binin. Before the advent of written history, Binin and Esan names were used as reservoir of incidents, belief and other human activities that were wrapped in names. Indigenous Binin and Esan names have beneficial meanings that are of benefit to the bearer, hearer or both. The coining of a name often encapsulate identity, religion, day, time, belief, succor, antidote, which are capable of boosting human morale as well as impact on human behavioural management for a dependable society. Indigenous Binin and Esan names are similar. This comes as a result of cultural tie between the people of Esan and Binin. However, time and events have induced slight differences in the languages of both communities. In spite of this, the philosophy and moral impact on indigenous Binin and Esan names subsists. This has continued to this day, though in scanty occurrence in recent times. This is due to influence of Christian and Islamic belief where most of the existing names are derived. Globalization has also had its own impart due to popular culture on name bearing. If the effect of religion and globalization are allowed to take their firm hold on the continuity of bearing foreign names, Binin and Esan stand the chance of losing antidotic and succor potency names. More importantly, it will affect indigenous

identification which has its own cultural importance in society. Considering the relevance of indigenous names, there is no doubt that it impact on morale in society. Moral, morality and morale shall be exchangeably used to take home the argument of this thesis because of their similarity in meaning. According to the *New English Dictionary and Thesaurus*, Moral... of or relating to character and human behaviour, particularly as regards right and wrong;... capable of distinguishing right from wrong. Morale... the tone, spirit, or mental condition prevailing with regards to courage, discipline, confidence, etc. Morality...the doctrine of moral duties, ethics, virtue... (2005).

### What Informs Binin and Esan Names

Binin and Esan names are given to children at birth. This is influenced by circumstances, events, religion, sometimes parental status, life experience, psychological state of mind of parents also inform the names parents give to their children. The number of names given to each child is dependent on parents, grandparents, uncles, aunties, etc and on birth circumstances, especially if the child is the first born of a new family, then each relation or family member may wish to name the child. The practice of giving individual name to children is a traditional art, while some children are given a single name, some have more than one. However, it was observed that the practice of giving an individual several names arose only in complex societies, as a result of either or both two developments. One was increasing population, in communities in which a number of people received the same name (Westcott, 1995). It is obvious that indigenous names had in-depth and morale impact implication. These names are coined from everyday words, phrases and short sentences. Binin and Esan indigenous names are thematic and focused, not only for the purpose of identification but for the purpose of passing a message that impact on morality towards a better society. The primary element of Binin and Esan names is indigenous language. Another is cultural or philosophical world view of the people. The second thing that informs Binin and Esan names is the day the person was born, belief, event, history, respect, clan, religion, accidental occurrences and most importantly morale. Patronymic phrases also inform these names, examples are Omo-Osagie, Omo-Amadasun in Binin. In Esan you have Omo-Asun, Omo-Oleabhiele, Omo-Ataga, etc. This is against Westcott's (1995) assertion that, in Nigeria, few Binin personal names are occupational...and none are patronymic, like English Wilson (son of will") (1) and it goes beyond these functions.

Indigenous names have helped to expand the usage of indigenous language when given as name. It

makes the name common as its knowledge is brought about by frequent calling of the bearer. It also creates and enhances understanding of indigenous language by strangers who may wish to know the meaning of the name. Through this process they also gain from the message or impact of the name.

It is also presumably believed that names, especially indigenous names have spiritual implication. Names of individuals, as it is generally believed in some parts of Africa, and West Africa to be precise, particularly southern and Western Nigeria which include Binin and Esan have the power to enhance or demean the bearer's achievements in life. For instance, before a foreigner who bears foreign names can study Ifa or become Ifa priest he or she must change his or her name. The change of names depends on how far the individual intends to go into *Ifa* divination. I know of a young lady who came from the United State for the purpose of studying *Ifa* divination, she was advised to change her names so as to make it acceptable to *Ifa*. Perhaps, the only language understood by *Ifa* is Yoruba language. The young lady changed her name to *Ifayemi* for her to be acceptable to *Ifa*.

Some Binin and Esan names are also informed by day. This is why some of the names specify day such as Eduzola, which means Sunday. In recent times, due to modernity and education such names are no longer given as names in indigenous language, rather they are given in English language. Another element that informs indigenous Binin and Esan names is belief about God or god. There are also personal, communal and general world view and beliefs that are built into names. Example of such names in Binin is Osayande which means God owns the day. Idahosa, which means I listen to God. Osagie means, God-sent. For the lesser gods, Eboigbe, which means, god cannot kill this child. Examples of names that are informed by cultural philosophy are Aimiukhu, which means you cannot see death. Ukhumaenogie, which means, death does not know the duke. Esan has similar elements that inform names. Examples of such are Osebhahiemen which means God did not disappoint me. Osehontue meaning God heard prayer. Names that are informed by cultural philosophy include; Okougbo, which means one who was born in the farm. "Son of the farm" it is usually a masculine name. This could also be assumed to mean that the child likes farm from birth. The same is applicable to Okoeki meaning, one who was born in the market, or presumably one who is going to be a skillful trader. Another is Aimiuguina, meaning you cannot locate death so as to beg it. Alekuewanbho, meaning we should learn or derive wisdom from it. Esan names like Etusi might sound vague but its full pronunciation is Eture-Usi, meaning news has gone round. Another name in this category is

Ebeagbor. Its full meaning is Ebeagbor nenokai, meaning whatever will survive does not mind dry season. In whatever way it is assessed, it is obvious that various elements inform Binin and Esan names as observed. No surprise therefore, that much of the names they give to their sons and daughters celebrate the child. To the Edos, the pomp and colour of a child-naming event reflect a deep commitment to the child. The names they give are lessons in philosophy and their vision of life. To them, therefore, the saying "what is in a name?" "Mocks what is right, important and dear. The Edos do not treat a child's name as if it is just a label. Rather than names of objects and places thereof, they give names that are brief statements about and prayers to the world, the home and the environment. Sometimes they give names that mark the time, the event or the season in which the children were born (Igbe, 2006:53-54) Igbe's view is a major summary of what naming and names stands for in Binin and Esan communities.

#### **Analysis of some Binin and Esan names and how they impact on morale in society**

Most Binin and Esan names follow the same pattern when carefully extricated. This is due to the closely related culture of the two ethnic groups. It is worthy of note to state that Binin culture gave birth to Esan culture, hence, the close relationship. The elements that inform Binin and Esan names convey morale information. It could be religious or social. For instance Osahon in Binin and Osehontue in Esan both have the same meaning which is God heard prayers. This ordinarily encourages one to pray. The name Osezele, meaning God is behind one's success in any endeavor is an Esan name. These names are ecclesiastical in meaning. They pass moral message to the bearer, the caller and the listener who understands the language.

In Binin some names are philosophical as well as possess morale potential, which inspires positive reasoning. Such names include Amadi. It is a short form of Amadaiyenagbon, which means if you are not courageous you cannot live. Another is Uwaila or Uwaifo which means time of wealth does not end or pass one, who probably worked hard. Okuomose is another Binin name which passes a morale message. It means war is not pleasant. In hearing this name, it passes moral information to the hearer that he or she should avoid war. Sokpuwu, which means except death also falls within this category. This simply informs the hearer that it is only death that is a hindrance. Another is Uwudiakheoma, meaning death does not wait for anybody to prepare or get ready, hence one should be prepared at all times. Omoruyi, means respect or honour bestowed on parents by children. All these names impact on one's moral

acuity. Although the messages passed by these names may not register once, as time progresses the name and its meaning begin to impact on the bearer and caller. Here are some other Binin names that carry moral messages. They are; Akhahouwa, if one is looking for wealth you could pass through hard circumstances to achieve it. Another is Ehimamiegho, meaning if the spirit or destiny of anybody does not agree with the danger that tails him, it will not affect him. Another Bini name that convey moral message is Nekpenekpen a siri-uwa, often abbreviated Nekpen. It means one draws the rope of life with patience. Also, there are Binin names that ascribe respect to the monarch of Binin kingdom. They are Aguobasimi, meaning you don't contend with the Oba. Obasuyi, meaning the Oba deserves honour, Obayu-uwana meaning Oba is bestowed with wealth. There are Esan names that carried the same moral messages like Bini names. These include; Osehobo, it means God is the greatest doctor. Obhafuoso is another Esan name with moral message, it means not even one person is free from the problems of this world. Osobhalenakho, meaning nobody knows tomorrow. Onoguekhian means, one who walk or work well and Aitiegbemi, with full pronunciation, Aitiegbemienele da tue uwa á, which means, it is because one does not place value on *enele* that is why it burns one's house. (*enele*: unrefined palm fruit extract that is inflammable though not too useful). This means though this extract is not too useful, it must of necessity be taken care of so that it will not wreck havoc. That means one should place value on everything irrespective of their usefulness or unusefulness. Some Esan names also emphasis respect. They are Okhoadena, which means respect begets respect. Omuekpen, which means she is respectful. This name is a feminine name, which is circumstantial. Another is Omoigberale, which means a child does not beat the father, this is reprimanding.

There are various Binin and Esan names which convey moral messages for a better society. These names serves as point of reference for some members of the society who face moral problems related to what a particular name implied. The essence of names bearing moral weight is to answer moral questions that evolve from social relationship out of which social vices emanate.

The social relationships in which men live are links of authority, indicating the proper places of individuals and prescribing courses of conduct for them. Man live in a *moral community* (emphasis mine) and his behaviour

is prescribed by relationship... Good morality is living in appropriate relationships with other people, high or low, old and young (Parrinder, 1969: 67)

The level of morality in society in which man duels determines their relationships and behavior and informs action and inaction. These actions and inactions also influences human names in Binin and Esan and in the course of relationship the meanings and implications of these names with moral messages are better understood and their potency of antidote and succor are released to impact on people and initiate change. The short story below exemplifies this.

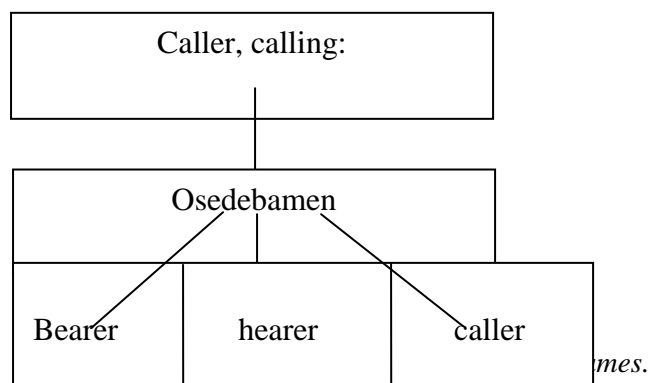
Emase once decided to pack out of his community because of the serious challenges he was facing. He sat down and thought about where to relocate to and settle down. Finally, he decided to move to his friend's house in Itegebe. Before he got there it was already very late and his friend and his family had already gone to bed. As he got there, he stood by the door post and knocked. His friend heard and called on his daughter, named Igiesoimen, which means nowhere is good. When the stranger heard this name, he knew the meaning. However, he interpreted it repeatedly to himself so as to extract the morale content of the name, Igiesoimen. Immediately, he turned round and began to go back home. He said to himself, every community has its own challenges and people must face and overcome these challenges to bring about good society. Immediately, the stranger was relieved. This is because the antidote in the name doused the effect or internal pressure of the challenge he was facing and released succor to take its course. That was where the courage to turn round towards home came from. However, his friend's daughter opened the door, came out but could not find her father's friend. He went in to report to her father. Her father came out and saw his friend going back home. He called on him, apologized, probably, he thought his friend was annoyed because the door was not opened

on time and informed him that the door is opened. His friend came back and told him that he was not annoyed. That the name he heard gave him relief and succor to go back and face the challenges that he was running away from.

In the light of this short story, Igiesomen, a name helped to change somebody's perception about life's predicament. It enabled him to manage his morale, which will in turn impact on the society he is going back to with a different perception with a view to add value to his community's development. The names, what they stand for, and the community that is able to impart on its indigenes through names must be seen as intelligent and knowledgeable. This has again proven that Africans have a viable system of thought before colonization, therefore;

To say that African peoples have no system of thought, explicit or assumed, would be to deny their humanity... There are many reasons, and powerful ones are that they express the life force, continuity with the past and unity in the present community, and these are reasonable ideas (Parrinder, 1969; 25)

Binin and Esan Indigenous names reflect their importance in circumstances that affects them through relationship in community. To effectively manage morals for a better society, names, therefore becomes a means of moral instruction in Africa, particularly among Binin and Esan people in tripartite form.



The calling of Benin or Esan names has triple effect. For instance, when the above name, Osedebamen is called by the caller it ministers to the bearer in two folds: (a) as his personal name (b) that God is with him, because Osedebamen means God is with me. The bearer is also ministered to because he would also like to call it to him or herself: that God is with him. The caller has already called it to himself. The meaning of the name may assume different interpretations in their minds but the subject matter of the name, in relation to its meaning stands and any analysis or connotations stems from it in relation to time and events going on in the mind of the caller, bearer and hearer. No matter how it is reasoned the meaning of the name is bound to produce succor to either of the three in relation to the prevalent situation in the mind.

### Managing Morale in Binin and Esan Societies through indigenous names as cultural phenomena

It must be admitted that it's difficult to manage morale. This is because it affects the decision

Morality raises the most fundamental questions about how one should live one's life. All people have a number of notions of right and wrong. These notions manifest themselves in a variety of ways. Some of these beliefs pertain to simple matters such as manners of taste, others pertain to more general matters such as customs and laws, and others guide the most fundamental of human life. These are the belief that shape one's character and determine what others think about one as a human being. One's moral beliefs say more about one as an individual than does any other aspect of existence. Whether one is rich or poor, old or young one's moral beliefs do more to define one's life than any thing else (Rot, 200:564).

The need to salvage moral issues through indigenous name must have been a conscious or unconscious effort. However, we have seen the importance of morality to human existence and society. In essence, Binin and Esan names do not only have antidote and succor potency but they add value to

of an individual who may have different background, training and worldview. What is morally wrong to others might be right in his or her view. It will therefore be easier to manage moral, in this context, if an indigene with Binin or Esan cultural inclination, bearing in mind that an individual respond to his or her culture quickly and freely because his or her cultural sentiments are attached to it. The ability of Binin and Esan names to manage morale is limited to Binin and Esan indigenes or to some one that understands the language except when interpreted. By managing, it means these names are able to impact on the individual as managing is the process of... controlling men... to secure the optimum achievements of objective (Light, 1982: 10). These names take control of the human mind as antidote against negative intensions as well as provide succor as achievement of its objective. The above short story is a clear example of this process of names managing morale. Morality is an essential factor for effective human relationship and a better society.

cultural and moral belief of a people. It is a clear exhibition of the ingenuity of a people who placed high premium on morality in society.

### Recommendations

We are already in an era of identity crisis. Indigenous names are being promoted through

indigenous culture, visa-avis through indigenous language. This includes indigenous understanding. For instance, China, India and so many other countries scarcely bear any name that is not an indigenous name, and at first call of their names you know where they come from. An attempt to call them is an attempt to learn how to pronounce the name properly. That leads to finding out the meaning of the name. Gradually, you are partaking in that culture. It therefore becomes important for Binin and Esan people to encourage Binin, Esan and others to participate in our culture by doing the followings:

- (a) The people of Binin and Esan should give indigenous Bini and Esan names to their children.
- (b) For those who are Christians, they should convert biblical names or its meaning to Binin or Esan names.
- (c) Children should be discouraged from acquiring English names in addition to their indigenous names.
- (d) Indigenous names should be used as baptismal names in churches.
- (e) The name bearer should be thought the correct pronunciation and meaning of his or her names early enough as he or she grows.

### Conclusion

The intrinsic and extrinsic value of Binin and Esan names make it worth bearing. Therefore, to avoid future identity and moral crisis Binin and Esan names should be encouraged. More so, it becomes so important to enshrine the bearing of Binin and Esan names because it has been observed that such distinctive African linguistic traits as Binin personal names are now rapidly vanishing in North America (Westcott, 1995:2.) What is seen in America is a reflection of what is happening in Africa, particularly in Binin and Esan. It is also important to note that some families are bearing foreign surnames. This is because, sometimes, nobody has or wants to bear indigenous surname. In essence, their children bear English names and surnames. It is very important, especially for the purpose of morality and identity to revitalize the bearing of indigenous names. This is also part of the promotion of our culture.

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