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Names in Igbo Folk Religion

By Idenze Ezeme

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Many Igbo traditional names, now mostly used as surnames, have deep spiritual meanings. However, many of these names changed when Christianity spread in the early 1900s. This led to the rise of Chi names. In Igbo belief, Chi means a person's spirit or destiny, but Christian missionaries took it for the Christian God. Because of this, names like Chioma, which originally meant "good chi" or "lucky," were changed to mean "God is good." In the past, names were related more to philosophy, dates, and circumstances at birth.

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Àlà Names

Names dedicated to the Earth Mother Àlà / Ànà / Ànị are very numerous, emphasising the importance of Àlà in Igbo society as the chief spiritual force on earth after the high God and derivatives. [Interestingly, most 'Chi' in names like Chiedozi, Chinyere, Chiemeka, Chijioke, Chika today can be substituted with Ani / Ana / Ala like Aniedozi, Aninyere, Alaemeka, Anijioke, Anika.]

Ànà / Ànị / Àlà / Àlị / Elị - The Earth Mother (deity)

Ájáànà / Ájáàlà (f) - Ala, the earth mother

Ànịèméká - Ala has 'done' beyond our wishes

Ànịgèkwú - Ala will speak [for the meek] / carry out her divine will [in our favor], Ala will vindicate her followers, Ala will embarrass detractors

Ànìèkwénánsí (Ekwensi) – Ala protect from poison / witchcraft / evil

Ànìèdózíé – Ala has protected, restored, repaired

Ànìèméná – Ala has done it all / answered our wishes

Ànìyèmézè – Ala bestowed leadership on me

Ànìgbòògù – Ala has prevented a fight [Perhaps by the birth of a child, a fight over a woman's fertility was avoided.]

Ànìwètà / Ànìwètàlù – Ala brought [this child]

Amádìohà – Ágbàrà of justice, lord of lightning

Chímà – Chí knows, a resolute compass of providence (chí).

Chíkà – Chí is great, an infallible compass of providence (chí).

Èjìòfọ (Ejiofor) (m) – Righteous, wielder of the staff of divine authority/justice (òfọ) [òfọ were usually held by male heads of the family obtained from the naturally fallen branches of a special tree and were used as a staff of authority that could be sworn on.]

Èjìogù (m) – Righteous, swearer to the face of divine justice (ógù) [Somebody who is innocent and swears to ógù (íjì ógù) has divine backing over an accuser and an accuser may be harmed (íbà ùrè) if their name is called upon.]

Íkèngà (m) – The cult figure of the right hand

Kámálù / Kámánù / Kálù / Kánù – Amadioha, ágbàrà of justice, lord of lightening

Ndígwé – Heavenly descendants, heavens favoured.

Njókù / Íféjìókù – Ágbàrà (deity) of yam, agriculture, and fire [who the

new yam festival is partly dedicated to.]

Nwágbàrà / Nwágbàlà – Child (devotee) of an Ágbàrà, under divine grace.

Nwànjókú / Nwáíféjókú – Child (devotee) of Ñjókú

Nwígwé – Child (devotee) of Ígwé or descendant of a title holder.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Nze is an Igbo history and culture enthusiast with an in-depth passion for exploring the rich cultural heritage, traditions, and historical narratives of the Igbo people. His works is mostly focused on pre-colonial Igbo societies, traditional belief systems, leadership systems, and the impact of European colonialism.



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