

Naming as a strategy for identity construction in selected 21st century Nigerian novels

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ABSTRACT

Although studies within linguistics are quick to demonstrate how language constructs identity, little attention has been given to the symbolic uses of names in the construction of identity in Nigerian novels, and this tends to undermine the fundamental role of lexis such as names in the construction of identity. The present study therefore employs Castells' identity framework to investigate how names are a linguistic resource for identity construction in selected 21st-century Nigerian novels. Four novels by Nigerian authors representing the four geographical zones of Nigeria were purposefully sampled. The analysis is both quantitative and qualitative. The study illustrates that identity is an incoherent concept, revealing that the study of identity requires the application of systematic and methodological approaches.

Keywords: names, identity; Nigerian novel; Castells identity framework; identity construction

INTRODUCTION

People employ language in the social construction of everyday life. In speech and writing, forms of sentences articulate and reproduce identities and ideological views. Arguably, the language we use, whether it is our mother tongue or not describes who we are and Gisbon (2004, p.1) notes that “language is a control feature of human identity. When we hear someone speak, we immediately make guesses about gender, level of education, age, profession, and place of origin”. Beyond this individual matter, Spolsky (1999, p.181) notes that “a language is a powerful symbol of national and ethnic identity”. This means that language unites or binds people who belong to a particular speech community.

If a Nigerian in the United States of America for instance, meets with another Nigerian, it will be a great meeting because it is a meeting between people who speak the same language (at least Nigerian English). Because they speak the same language, they will see themselves as one; as a people who have the same national identity. This is a form of collective identity. Collective identity is seen as “the discourse of ‘languages’ as the ‘natural’ reflexes of national identities” (Auer 2007, p.1). Collectivities are treated as unique “quasi-beings which express their identities” (2007, p.2) through certain features equally unique to them. Among these features, the national language has a privileged role.

The idea that collective identities and languages are connected in an essentialist way has been a key concept of modernity; it underlies the legitimisation of nations and continues to be deeply rooted in our language ideologies. According to this collectivist ideology, each collectivity (particularly a nation) expresses its own individual character through and in its language. Collectivities – nations, but also ethnic or social groups – are no longer assumed to naturally exist, for instance on the basis of genetics, ancestry or birth, but are seen as social and ideological constructs, which rely on language.

Beyond the level of language that signals identity, there is the manifestation of personality either as an individual or a member of a group. This is a form of social identity where individuals

use linguistic items, such as naming strategies, to identify with the people they consider as theirs or members of their group. Here, names are constant of identity with which people surround themselves according to their social identities. The names people bear or are given have the capacity to categorise them into either negative or positive social types. This implies that when people are labelled, they carry with them different capacities for expressing habitable or inhabitable group identities, capacities which may work in one environment but fail in another (Blommaert 2005).

In Nigerian literature, modern writers in English are grouped into three generations, namely the first which is made of writers such as Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe, the second which has writers like Niyi Osundare and Ben Okri and the third which is composed of writers who were born after Nigeria's independence and started publishing from 2000 to date. We are concerned with the last group in this paper. This group is also known as 21st-century Nigerian writers. Among the 21st-century voices of Nigerian novelists are Tanures Ojaide, Biyi Bandele, Chris Abani, Wale Okediran, Chimamanda Adichie, Sefi Atta, Maik Nwosu, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Jude Dibia and Liwhu Betiang. These writers have received significant critical acceptance, especially as a majority of them have been assessed locally and internationally as well as been awarded prose fiction prizes at various times.

Helon Habila, Abimbola Adelakun, Vincent Egbuson and Okey Ndibe, whom we have selected for analysis in this paper, also belong to this group. Neither detached nor indifferent to the ugly socio-political chasm in their country, these Nigerian novelists could more aptly be described as social engineers who are actively involved in reflecting and refracting every bit of their national developments (Griswold 2000, Onukaogu and Onyerionwu 2009). They have given issues such as political tyranny, fraud, corruption, sex, kidnapping, and university teachers' labour actions a place in their novels. These novelists understand euphemistic expressions better than their predecessors do; hence, the fire and brimstone approaches in the novels of the first and second generations are dumped for subtle and pragmatic language.

The novelists under study may not have an identical artistic vision, but their novels have undisputedly shown the intricate relationship between the novelists, their works and their society. They use various forms of names to construct different identities in their novels. Implicitly, the search for one's roots and for who one is can be expressed in the novel with names. Names have great utility values. They can be employed to legitimise a group's identity as well as to other groups' identities. Through the textual structures of names, identity can be constructed, reconstructed and negotiated. It is therefore significant for a paper such as this to investigate how names function as agents of identity markers in the 21st-century Nigerian novel.

Identity is a fluid term to define. Attempts to define identity are complicated by "the fact that different scholars have approached the concept based on the theoretical postulations of their respective disciplines" (Aboh 2010, p.3). The non-unified approach to the study of identity is connected to its complex nature. Identity, according to Iglesias-Alvarez and Ramallo (2003, p.259), is a fragmented concept "deriving from a conglomerate of social representations that are acquired – mostly in an unconscious manner – during the socialization process, and that are gradually altered in the course of our existence". Identity is not always coherent, and it is often unstable.

The impact of names on identity construction is the premise upon which this paper is based. It is interesting to see how names are used to construct, reconstruct and negotiate identities in the 21st-century Nigerian novel.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

The underlying meaning, from a dynamic point of view of the identity of individual speakers, speech communities and their language varieties, is to show how, and by what means speakers exploit the mechanisms of linguistic features to strategically display their identities. Coulmas holds the view that “every speech act is an act of identity, and all utterances vary with respect to the relative importance of identity display” (2005 p. 178-9).

Cummins’ (1986) work which categorizes society into the “dominant” and the “dominated” shows a need to identify the bonds among language, culture and identity. Trueba and Zou (1994) studied the cultural identities of the Miao in China. Their study of Miao undergraduates in an institution dominated by the Han China reveals that the strong cultural identity of the Miao students allowed them to draw on such affiliation for academic success.

Okolo’s (2008) investigation of Ndibe’s *Arrows* focuses on the explication of indigenous thoughts in African urban fiction. She argues that the writer’s recourse to indigenous ideals helps to give his work an African identity. This is because the novel takes a lot from the novelist’s culture expressed in the novelist’s adoption of indigenous moral values as a gauge to “wild city vices”; an influence of western culture.

Erritouni’s (2010) study of Habila’s *Angel* deals with the exposition of issues such as despotism and failure of public institutions, which has preoccupied African fiction since the 60s and its effects on ordinary people and dissident intellectuals. Erritouni notes that Habila shares his predecessors’ concern with the political conditions in postcolonial Africa but rejects the view that political oppression in the post colony is a consequence of the continuing effects of colonialism and neo-colonial exploitation. These studies have provided illuminating insights on both the concept of identity and on the novels under the consideration of this paper, but they have not focused on the central role of naming in the construction of identity. This paper, therefore, fills this gap as it examines naming as a strategy for identity construction in 21st-century Nigerian novel.

CASTELLS’ IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION FRAMEWORK

Castells (1997) proposes an alternative approach, which is more flexible than the traditional (social) linguistic theory and emphasises the negotiable nature of self and other-positioning. The process of formation, or in Castells’ terms, the construction of identity appears to be a fundamental issue in our world. Castells (1997) believes that society is in a constant flux and individuals are unable to continue their lives in a constant vacuum of meaning and they will have to acquire the experience of meaningfulness by organising the cultural materials that happen to be available to them.

Castells argues that the historical and cultural context has to be carefully taken into account when analysing anything in any particular country or region. Given that for Castells, the information age is characterised by a dominance of social structure over the human agent, it is apposite to note that the social and the system colonising the life-word are being updated to the era of global information. Castells’ vision of the social agency, as an analytic counterpart for the social structure in the age of information can be expressed with the words identity, identity policy and new social movements. The new social movement primacy is given to a different kind of category of social agency – identity and identity based movements. Identification as such, is, of course, a historical and a universal socio-psychological phenomenon but rises to the centre of social change and change making. This, argues Castells, is the true meaning of the primacy of identity politics in the network society. The search

for meaningfulness, according to Castells (1997, p.8), triggers specific kinds of identity-formation processes. These identity types are legitimising, resistance and project identities.

Legitimising identity is a strategy employed by the dominant class to sustain its hegemony over the dominated. In Castells' views, there are people that struggle for, and use, the power of the state for various goals, both democratic and progressive, and identify themselves as agents of civil society. This category of identity supports the institution with the legitimisation that it requires. It is often integrated into social institutions as a way of maintaining a status quo.

Resistance identity is a mechanism devised by the minority to question the dominance of legitimising identity. This level of identity-formation has the imprints of grass roots at the level of collective identity formation that does not mobilise itself within the civil society, but is materialized as community building. These communes bring together the excluded, the stigmatised and the anguished to gain a collective experience that gathering around a common meaning can offer. What is characteristic to the commune-building is resistance against the surrounding society and against other communes. This gives it the name resistance identity. This kind of identity construction is the core for the formation of social identities. The resistance identity seems to be the most influential identity category of our times because our societies would not stay in their fragmented state. Hence, Blackledge argues that subordinated groups "may not always accept the symbolic power of the dominant group, but may symbolically resist the power by adopting linguistic practices which are counter to those of the dominant groups" (2000, p.29). Legitimising identity is a conscious linguistic act showing that society is in a constant flux.

The last type, project identity, is a step further in terms of resistance identity, as it involves evolving from the passivity of resistance to action, which calls for a change of society. This kind of identity construction emanates as a result of the communes reconstruction of legitimate identity. Castells holds the view that these will be the identity construction of the future. The resulting conception of these forms of identity construction sees language as one of several dimensions, which are exploited in the constructions of identities, being in variable degrees subject to deliberate modification. Castells' identity construction framework offers insight into how language is centrally involved in individuals' expressions of their identity.

METHODOLOGY

Data for the paper were drawn from four purposively sampled novels, which represent the four geographical zones of Nigeria. These are Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* [henceforth *Arrows*] (2000) from eastern Nigeria; Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* [henceforth *Angels*] (2002), northern Nigeria; Abimbola Adelakun's *Under the Brown Rusted Roofs* [henceforth *Rusted Roofs*] (2008), western Nigeria; and Vincent Egbuson's *Love my Planet* [henceforth *Planet*] (2008), southern Nigeria. The writers were selected based on their being 21st-century Nigerian novelists, and the ability of their novels to capture the phases and 'faces' (content) of 21st-century Nigerian novels and of the country's socio-historical and political developments. Egbuson and Habila have published more than a novel each. In the sampling process, however, those that have won prose fiction prizes are selected.

In terms of data analysis, both qualitative and quantitative methods are employed. The quantitative analysis will account for the frequency and percentage distribution of names and the qualitative analysis deals with the interpretation of fragments taken from the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Name signifies something “special and tangible” (*Encarta Encyclopaedia* 2005). Arua (2009, p.65) argues that “meaning is the central consideration in naming”. Generally, in Africa, names are not given haphazardly; they convey particular messages about historical events. These historical events range from describing the circumstance that surrounds the child’s birth through the emotion of its parents to the socio-political situation of the community in which the child was born.

The table below presents the distribution of names according to their linguistic sources.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Names

Languages	<i>Angel</i>	<i>Arrows</i>	<i>Planet</i>	<i>Rusted Roofs</i>	Frequency	%
English	10	17	7	1	25	10.3
Hausa	2	4	7	3	16	6.6
Igbo	2	13	1	0	16	6.6
Izon	0	0	23	0	23	9.5
Pidgin	0	1	1	0	2	0.8
Yoruba	9	10	4	59	82	34.0
Others	9	17	33	28	77	31.9

Table 1 shows the preponderance of indigenous names, 88.6%. It indicates names taken from Hausa, Igbo, Izon and Yoruba. These are the languages spoken by the sampled novelists. The novelists use more of Yoruba names in their novels, making Yoruba to have 34.0%, the highest in the table of distribution.

Pidgin with 0.8% has the lowest employment of names. Pidgin is used to describe the name of a bar for example, Mama Joe. Mama Joe means Joe’s mother (*Angel*). In *Planet*, there is the use of Mama Bomboy, which means ‘the mother of a baby boy’. Hausa and Igbo, two major Nigerian languages, have 6.6% each. The table also reveals the use of more Hausa than Igbo names. Izon has 9.5% with no usage from other novelists except Egbuson.

The domain of “Others”, though with just 19.3% of names, is quite revealing. “Others” reveals two important dimensions to the investigation of names as identity. First, it includes names that have Nigerian ancestry, but which cannot be traced to any particular ethnic nationality. The similarity in names as well as the difficulty in linking some of the names under the category of “Others” to specific ethnic nationalities demonstrates a unified Nigerian identity. Secondly, Nigerian novelists use names from various ethnic groups to uphold their Nigerianess.

Another striking issue arising from the table of distribution is the relatively low use of English names. English has 10.3% in spite of the fact that English is Nigeria’s official language and these novelists document their experiences in English. They seem to have a negative attitude towards English. The rationale for such negativism towards English is examined later in this paper. Having done a quantitative analysis of names in the sampled novels, it is expedient to investigate what these names represent in the text. What the names in the sampled text represent are categorised into three sections. The first addresses names and the expression of cultural identity, the second deals with names as the expression of resistance and the third investigates how names form the basis for group differentiation.

NAMING AND THE EXPRESSION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

Peoples and cultures all over the world have the meaning of their names matrixed in their cultural moorings, belief systems and general world views. There is so much to a name that every name (at least in the African/Nigerian context) heaves with ideo-political and socio-cultural significance. Here, the subtle cultural politics of naming is examined. The table below is a sampled presentation of names across the data.

Table 2: Nigerian Names and Their Cultural Undertones

Names	Meaning Equivalent	Source	Novel
Akinyele	A courageous person fits the home.	Yoruba	<i>Angel</i>
Iyese	Mother of children	Edo	<i>Arrows</i>
Nkeiruka	The future is vaster and greater	Igbo	<i>Arrows</i>
Oguguamakwa	Wiper of my tears	Igbo	<i>Arrows</i>
Tarinumu	Understand love	Izon	<i>Planet</i>
Akponumu	Understand the world	Izon	<i>Planet</i>
Iyabo	Mother has reincarnated	Yoruba	<i>Planet</i>
Ekunsumi	I am tired of crying	Yoruba	<i>Rusted Roofs</i>
Akirikogbon	A seeker of new knowledge	Yoruba	<i>Rusted Roofs</i>

The names in Table 2 reflect the cultural realities of the Nigerian people. Most writers would prefer to use Nigerian names for their characters as a way of preserving their identity and compensating themselves since they have to write in English to be nationally and internationally intelligible (Griswold, 2000).

The cultural meanings, which indigenous names have, are transferred to the characters in the fictional world and the fictional characters are made to act these names. For instance, the Igbo name Nkeiruka, which translates as ‘the future is greater (than the past)’, is a name given to female children. It is a name filled with hope and expectation of good things to come in the future. Thinking about Iyese, Ogugua wonders: *Perhaps she imagined that I could be that sun. Perhaps I was her faith (Arrows, p. 171)*. In the context of the novel, it is used to describe the confidence Iyese reposes in Oguguamakwa, her hope and faith, the one that will liberate her from the manacles of Isa Bello and prostitution.

Similarly, the name Akponumu which means “understand the world” is given to Wenni’s long awaited male child. Wenni had started to treat his wife badly because of her inability to give birth to a male child. When Larami, Wenni’s wife, finally gives birth to a male child at an old age, the name that best suits the child is Akponumu. The name is given by Wenni when he learnt the virtue of being patient with people and situations. The cultural politics in the Izon name is that all should be patient and understand that the world is deeper than one can ever imagine. Moreover, Wenni’s attitude towards his wife’s inability to give birth to a male child substantiates the premium most Nigerians still place on male children over female ones.

The name Akinyele is an indication that the society appreciates valour. Only male children bear this name since the males are known for strength and bravery, especially during wars. The fragment below justifies Uncle Bode, who is also known as Mr Akinleye, behaviour. While Auntie Rosa ferociously laments the ill-treatment meted on Bola by security agents, Mr Akinleye, being a brave man, (as in acting his name) restrains himself from crying and shouting like Auntie Rosa.

See what they have done to him! God will pay them back!’ Auntie Rosa cried. Uncle Bode got up and walked out to pace the veranda (Angel, p. 62).

Though there are situations where the linguistic repertoire alone could not mean what the names signify, they can be exploited together with other semiotic resources to contextualise socio-symbolical meanings which are relevant for identity construction. For example, the Yoruba name, Ekunsumi upholds the belief that names in the Nigerian context are loaded with meanings. Ekunsumi, which translates as “I am tired of crying” is the name given to *abiku* children. A woman reports the circumstance that informs such a name:

“They are terrible children. They never stay”, another woman joined. “My brother’s wife was plagued by abiku for a long time. The boy kept coming and going for a long time. What name didn’t she give him: ... Ekunsumi...” (Rusted Roofs, p. 192)

Ekunsumi is, therefore, a mother’s empathic appeal to her *abiku* child to stay. The mother’s appeal is informed by the love for children by Nigerians, which is not detached from the ideological sentiment that a woman’s wealth can be measured by the number of “mouths she feeds”. Other related forms of Yoruba names given to *abiku* children are Duroorike, which means ‘stay and see how caring we are’, and Durosinmi which roughly translates as ‘stay and bury me’. These are names which name-givers employ to persuade the *abiku* child to stay. Once these names are mentioned, a Yoruba person does not need to be told that the mother of that child has been plagued by *abiku*.

The relationship between a name and its spiritual resonance is captured in the fragment below:

‘Everybody calls him Tarinumu, because of his healing power which depends on the love in the patient’s heart... And it has been found to be true. That is why everybody in Oggazza calls him Tarinumu, love song’ (Planet, p. 170).

The name, Tarinumu, describes a herbalist whose ability to heal draws from the love that resides in the patient’s heart. The healer, Tarinumu, is so named because of the positive spiritual aura that emanates from his personality. It is an Izon name which translates as “understand love”. The pragmatic motivation for the choice of the name is that love is the only way to peace. Egbuson’s adoption of Tarinumu suggests that it is only love that can bring peace to the troubled Niger Delta region. Arguably, the name enables the novelist to identify with his Niger Delta people whose longing for peace has been shattered by oil exploration. Oil exploration in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has led to untold hardship, and activities such as gun duel, arm robbery and kidnapping, being consequences of poor oil exploration policies, have stolen the peace of the region.

Similarly, the Igbo name Oguguamakwa, which means “wiper of my tears”, illustrates the semantic potential of Nigerian names and the connection that exists between names and circumstances. Empirically, Oguguamakwa is expected to comfort his suffering people. The name, Oguguamakwa, typifies the fact that names in the Igbo cultural practice is informed by the circumstance that surrounds the child’s birth. It is usually a name that is given to the children whose parents had had difficulty in having children or those who have lost valuable things: this includes human beings. The name, therefore, resonates with the ideology of the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria that children are synonymous to joy, comfort, wealth and power. However, these writers’ use of names from their ethnic groups is a display of ethnic identity. Ndibe and Adelakun’s extensive selection of names from Igbo and Yoruba, for instance, is to legitimise their Igbo and Yoruba respective identities.

It is also observed that Nigerian authors do cross-ethnic borrowing of names. The basis for cross-ethnic borrowing is to promote a unified cultural identity for the Nigerian people. For instance, in Egbuson’s *Planet*, there is the use of Iyabo. Iyabo is a Yoruba name which means mother has returned/reincarnated. *Iya* means “mother” and *bo* translates as “return”. It is usually given to female children, more especially, if the child was delivered immediately after the child’s grandmother passed on. It is

believed that it is either of the newly born baby's paternal or maternal mother that has come back to life. In the novel, Iyabo was born after her paternal grandmother had passed on. The employment of the name Iyabo defines the African ideology of reincarnation: an explication of the cyclic nature of life which validates the African belief of a mysterious bond between the dead and the living. The fact remains that our names form the core of our identity: they are windows to one's self and the name becomes the prism through which the cultural ethos of the people can be accessed.

The fact is that most educated Nigerians think of themselves as Nigerians. This may not be their primary allegiance when the chips are down, but it is an everyday operative identity secured by Nigerian proselytes. Moreover, this pan-ethnic, cross-regional Nigerian identity is one that the novelists themselves promote. Griswold (2000, p.12) would argue that:

...must novelists avoid ethnic or regional parochialism, using: techniques such as populating their novels with a heterogeneous (and sometimes unlikely) cast of Nigerian characters...

In these ways, Nigerian novelists always claim to write novels for all Nigerians. The Nigerian reading population also eschews parochialism for the same reason. They do not favour writers of their own ethnicity or books about their home regions. Rather, they are curious about how the novel portrays a Nigerian identity and how it addresses the country's socio-political developments. Evidently, at least from the foregoing argumentation, the utilisation of names from several Nigerian languages in Nigerian novels is to legitimise the novelists' Nigerian identity. The high statistics of names, 88.7%, belonging to indigenous names is a testimony of the position that the novelists' use of names is aimed at legitimising their Nigerian identity.

NAMING AND THE EXPRESSION OF RESISTANCE IDENTITY

This section examines the centrality of names in the exposure between "what we are" and "what they are not". The analysis will show that identity is not only built up in sequences of reported dialogues, but they also become interactively significant by projecting characters as representatives of negative social types. The sample of English names in the data echoes the politics that surrounds identity construction. The characters with English names exude negative traits. Some of the non-English names, their ordinary meaning and contextual meaning are presented in the table below:

Table 3: Non-indigenous Names and their Contextual Meanings

Names	Original/Ordinary Meaning	Contextual Meaning	Novel
Alice	Of noble kind	Unserious Student	<i>Angel</i>
Hagar	Abraham's maid turned wife	Sex worker	<i>Angel</i>
Emilia	To rival, to emulate, to excel	Sex worker	<i>Arrows</i>
Violet	A bluish-purple colour	Sex worker	<i>Arrows</i>
Fred	Peace ruler	An oil worker who sleeps with people's wives	<i>Planet</i>
Sally	Princess	Sex-worker	<i>Planet</i>

The writers' deployment of English and non-English names demonstrates an act of resistance identity construction. As can be inferred from Table 3, the ordinary meanings (which were gotten from www.thinkbabynames.com) of the non-indigenous names have been altered to rhyme with the identity constructive goals of the novelists. The contextual meanings are the pejorative meanings the authors

have assigned to these names. These names are therefore discussed based on the identity display of these fictional characters. In all the sampled novels, except for *Rusted Roofs* where no sex worker is discussed, all the characters who are sex workers are given English names and non-indigenous names. It seems to suggest that, by the writers' processes of characterisation, the commercialisation of sex is alien to Africa. This position is not, however, invariable as there are sex workers in most African cities. But, then, these sex workers are not allowed to 'work' freely as other workers do. Amama, Ereki's mother, describes Sally's prurient sexual behaviour:

'Leave Sally alone in Oil City. Sally's face that men's eyes cannot pull away from, her legs that were carved by Tamara's best carver... Sally's voice is like a new song in the village square that makes the blood in men boil ... can Sally be for you alone?' (Planet, p. 16)

Amama admonishes her son to distance himself from a girl who sleeps around with everyone. A village square is a playground for everybody. Implicitly, Sally's sexual adventure has no boundary and anyone, just as with the playground, can have sex with her. So, Amama admonishes Ereki to dissociate himself with such a lady whose sexual identity is questionable. The question is why Sally (whose name means a princess and her behaviour is expected to resonate with her name) and not any other Ijaw name? The name, Sally, axiomatically points to how naming is central to marking social types. Amama's views of Sally is contrastive, she delineates herself from ladies whose legs "were carved by Tamara's best carver." Arguably, Sally is a name that one can identify with prostitutes.

Such naming practices could be connected to the deconstruction of colonial dominance. The colonialists christened both people and places in their own way, not minding whether these people already had names, with the colonial ideology appearing in the names themselves. Moreover, after the eclipse of colonialism, there is the rechristening of places as well as people with names of traditional value given to indigenes while negative behaviours are given English names.

Emilia, one of the prostitutes in *Arrows*, explains this position in a more intriguing manner:

'As for Emilia, it's like a label on a loaf of bread... Emilia is the name with which I return all the fake smiles that greet me at night. It's the name with which I utter whispers into men's ears.... It is the name with which I throw my thighs apart for a stranger's erection and afterwards take his money... It is the name with which I am connected to the night and nothing else...Because Iyese is not a prostitute. Emilia is.' (Arrows, p. 132-3)

If one asks the question "what is in a name?" the answer is "identity". Names, at least from Iyese's view, describe who we are and what we do. Since names are linguistic windows to who we are and what we do, the resonances of this reality of naming can better be appreciated if measured against the backdrop of the Western domination of Africa. The novelists' efforts are, therefore, to dismantle English domination by characterising English names with negative meanings. Commercialisation of sex, if not universal, at least in the African cosmology, is regarded as a social vice. In this regard, naming becomes a political institution that expresses people's political ideology.

In another instance, when Kela goes to get *pure-water* (a Nigerian Pidgin slang for hot drink) for Auntie Rachael, he meets Hagar at MayFair Hotel. She takes him to her room. Kela narrates what follows.

I watched her smoke in silence... When I told her I was going, she stood up. 'Let me walk you out. Oh I've something for you'. She opened the drawer again and rummaged inside, throwing out packets of condoms... I looked down embarrassed. 'Take them away. They might come in handy', she said with a wicked laugh. (Angel, p. 118).

There are two outstanding issues in the above example. The first is that Hagar smokes. Kela watches with trepidation because in his Nigerian cultural mores, though some ladies smoke, it is abominable. Most ladies who smoke are city residents who are in touch with Western ways of life and most often, they do it secretly. Even Hagar admits that smoking is a “bad habit” (p. 115), but she still indulges in it. In the second instance, the gift she has for a 15-year-old boy is packets of condoms. Hagar’s act suggests moral degradation. The noun phrase – a wicked laugh – is semantically loaded. She gives *a wicked laugh* because she knows that what she is doing is inappropriate. Her giving Kela packets of condoms can trigger a promiscuous behaviour in Kela. Hagar’s acts resonate with her promiscuity. By exophoric reference (Biblical account of Hagar sleeping with her master, Abraham) the name fits Hagar, a person with questionable sexual character. In fact, in the novel, Hagar’s step-father makes sexual overtures at Hagar. The name, Hager, resonates with infidelity, something that is not properly done. The naming strategy illustrates how names can be organised to espouse identity construction.

One can surmise that the assignment of English and non-Nigerian names to characters with negative dispositions is to delineate identities. Such identity delineation is a resistance strategy to indicate what “They” (people who own those names do) and what “We” (the giver of those names) do not do. The impetus is to dismantle the dominance of English and any other language that is considered antithetical to their existence.

DOING THINGS WITH NAMES: THE ‘POWER’ IN NAMING

Just as words can be used to do things, names are also used to perform certain actions. Equally significant is the novelists’ portrayal of the power to impose names with social and political identity upon their characters. Such naming is examined below.

Table 4: Names with Ideo-political Functions

Names	Ordinary Meaning	Contextual Meaning	Novel
Brother	A boy or man with the same natural parents as another person or people.	One who identifies with the grief of his people.	<i>Angel</i>
Joshua	The Israeli leader who succeeded Moses and led the Israelis to the Promised Land (according to Biblical account).	Revolutionist	<i>Angel</i>
Moses	Drawn out of water.	Revolutionist	<i>Planet</i>

The name, Joshua, has a Hebrew origin. Habila’s use of Joshua rhymes with the Biblical Joshua who led the Israelites to the Promised Land. The revolutionary trait of the Biblical Joshua is also found in Joshua Amusa of Habila’s *Angel* who led the revolution that questions the despotism and continuous stay in power of the military. When Auntie Rachael admonishes Joshua to stay aloof of the planned demonstration, he tells her:

But it is too late to go back... I assure you it’ll be simple and peaceful. That’s part of the reason I am joining them, to make sure it doesn’t get violent (Angel, p. 124).

Joshua clarifies that his involvement in the demonstration is not just to lead it, but to make it peaceful and to bring it to a logical end. Obviously, Habila’s use of Joshua is connected to his understanding of the role the Biblical Joshua. Any character could have played that role but the

pragmatic deployment of the name becomes linguistically symbolic as there is a correlation between the Joshua in the novel and another Joshua that exists in the mental architecture of the reader.

Another striking feature of the name Joshua Amusa is the blend of a Christian name with an Islamic one. Amusa is a Yoruba version of Hamzah. Hamzah is a disciple of Prophet Mohammed, who fought gallantly and was killed in one of the battles he fought alongside the Prophet. Habila's blend of both Christian and Islamic revolutionists is symptomatic of his ideological persuasion that both Christians and Muslims can unite to fight a common cause.

In *Planet*, Moses belongs to Simple Justice, a militant organisation that blows up oil terminals and kidnaps oil workers as a way of demonstrating its dissonance with oil exploration in the Niger Delta. Moses of *Planet* like Joshua of *Angel* is saddled with the task of liberating his people. Moses' recruitment into Simple Justice is an opportunity to resist the activities of oil companies in his hometown, and to protect his environment from oil pollution. Therefore, the name he bears is connected to the role he performs: a revolutionist. The semantic content of Moses in *Planet* is indexed in the Biblical Moses' role who led Israelites out of Egypt. Moses is expected to lead his Niger Delta people from the bondage of oil exploration. This naming strategy is quite significant because the assignment of names is rallied on the pragmatic relations of the names.

Similarly, though Brother (see Table 4) is an English word, it has a Nigerian cultural connotation of oneness and describes a people of similar social dilemma. Most residents of Poverty Street gather at Brother's tailoring shop each night to agonize over their hardship. Some occupants of Poverty Street (in Pidgin) tell Brother:

*'Ah, Brother. You be good man', they murmured.
'...Who I get pass una?...You be my family.'* (*Angel*, p. 97)

In the above extract, Brother is told that he is a good man and he responds that he has no one except them; they are his family. Brother, whose real name is Mohammed, gains a new name because of the brotherly role he plays in Poverty Street. Moreover, unlike those in power, Brother accommodates everyone who comes to his shop. The change of name from Mohammed to Brother does not change the behaviour of the bearer; it only amplifies and reincarnates the leadership potential imbued in the Islamic prophet, Mohammed. Brother, therefore, serves as the rallying point for the actualisation of the people's dreams of a better nation. In the name, Brother, is the recreation of the community spirit the Nigerian people are known for and which has been eroded by the quest for riches. In the primordial community spirit, which the novelist tries to recreate, a person's life is not individuated from that of the other members of the community.

The names in this category include those taken from English, Islam, Christianity and other world languages. A striking feature about these names is that they represent the ideological affiliations of the sampled novelists. For instance, Adelakun's preponderant use of Arabic names, none from Christianity and a single name from English (Mike) is a representation of her Islamic identity. Similarly, Habila's, Ndibe's, and Egbuson's utilisation of Christian names portray their affiliations with Christianity.

CONCLUSION

It can be surmised that the names people choose for their children and other people reflect the relationship between name and identity. This is particularly true of the names discussed in this paper. Hence, names are political conduits, which novelists use to depict their country's socio-political dislocations. The sense of personal identity and uniqueness that a name gives us is the core of why names interest us and why they have individual and societal importance. Moreover, the adoption of Castells' identity

framework has justified the claim that language, lexis to be specific, is fundamentally involved in the expression individuals' identities.

The exploitation of non-indigenous names also point a direction to the novelists' level of exposure, and how their educational development underscores the way names are utilized in their novels. Moreover, the category of non-indigenous names is dominated by names with English origin. Explicitly, the dominance of English names is connected to Nigeria's colonisation by Britain and the universality of English.

The use of names also substantiates the claim that identity is a fragmented concept that is subject to change. As the novelists take names from other languages their identities shift from one identity construction to the other. However, for these novelists, the use of indigenous names is a way of retaining the values of their traditional cultures in a fast changing world of globalisation.

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