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## **A Literary Anthroponastics of Three Selected African Novels: A Cross Cultural Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Names as markers of identity are a source of a wide variety of information. This paper explores the names of characters to show the sociocultural factors which influence the choice of names and the effects that the names of these characters have on the roles they play. Using a variety of personal names from Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments*, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, and Nawal El Sadaawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, the study revealed that, the choice of names in Akan, Igbo, and Arab societies are influenced by the day of birth, the family one belongs to, circumstances surrounding one's birth, titles, and religion. Furthermore, writers chose these specific names to reinforce the roles characters play in the literary work. These findings have implications for onomastics, characterization, and further research.

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## 1. Introduction

Anthroponomastics as a branch of onomastics has been explored in different contexts. There are two main branches of onomastics known as anthroponomastics and toponomastics. Anthroponomastics deals with the study of personal names while toponomastics deals with the study of place names (as cited in Al Zumor, 2009). Researchers' attention to the study of personal names may be as a result of the significance of personal names in any culture or society. Notable among research on personal names are studies by Agyekum (2006), Ansu-Kyeremeh (2000), Al Zumor (2009), Exner (2005), Obeng (1988), Oha (2009), and Udoye and Cyril (2012). These studies have shown that, names are not only markers of identity and arbitrary but a source of a variety of information (Agyekum, 2006; Al Zumor, 2009; Ogunwale, 2012). The use of names in a literary text is also a very important tool for the identification of characters. It is therefore not surprising that anthroponomy has also been applied to literary works. This has also been looked at by researchers such as Adams (2011), Butler (2010), Croft (2009), Dalen-Oskam and Haag (2005), and Wamitila (1999). The use of personal names in literature has a suggestive potential which is based on the message writers intend to convey to readers (Felecan, 2012). Gonzalez (2010) notes that, literary onomastics helps in the discovery of meanings which has a contribution to the interpretation of a text. It should be pointed out that, studies on onomastics in general have concentrated on single cultures of particular groups of people. There is therefore the need for further research on literary texts, specifically, African novels as representations of different African cultures in order to ascertain the similarities and differences in the naming system of Akans, Igbos, and Arabs and the effects of these names on the roles of characters. It is in view of these issues that this study seeks to do a literary anthroponomastics of three selected novels, *Fragments*, *The Joys of Motherhood*, and *Woman at Point Zero*, from a cross cultural perspective.

This paper seeks to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Which sociocultural factors influence the choice of names among the Akans, Igbos, and the Arabs?
2. To what extent do the names of some selected characters influence their roles in the three novels?

## 2. Theoretical Framework

African literature is an important area for a discussion on names and their relevance for literary analysis. In many African societies, names are not randomly assigned to people; they are given for specific reasons. For example, a woman whose babies die a few days after birth continuously will have recourse to giving subsequent babies death-prevention names. Obeng (1998) in his studies on the pragmatics and structure of death-prevention names asserts that, death prevention names have the ability to assure the child bearers' survival. The study further shows that, death prevention names are names of strangers or migrants, destructive or dangerous animals, objects associated with low status or jobs, and expressions of emotions and requests. Pragmatically, Obeng (1998) emphasizes that, death prevention names are culturally meaningful because they provide the life experience of a people and also show the emotions, belief systems and opinions of the givers of the names.

Similarly, Ansu-Kyeremeh (2000) indicates that, Bonos (a people of Ghana) have a two-name system, which comprises the ascribed and given names. Ansu-Kyeremeh (2000) explains that the ascribed is the name derived from the birthday of the child and the given name is the name given by the father of the child. In order to always satisfy the two-name system, substitutes are provided for given names through month names, birth order names, nicknames or appellations, and circumstantial names and even the adoption of Christian and Islamic names. Ascribed and given names are usually gender indicative but some substitute given names are gender neutral. Functionally, names identify the person in the area of his ethnic or cultural background, serve as a reminiscence to some pleasant and unpleasant experiences which may have some sociocultural implications. Names also serve as a linkage between the physical state and spiritual state. Substitute

names, in a way, protect the given name from abuse and dignities (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2000).

Moreover, Agyekum (2006) states that, Akan (a people of Ghana) names are a representation of the Akan culture, philosophy, thought, environment, and their interaction with foreign culture. Agyekum (2006) adds that, names are not arbitrary but are based on sociocultural and ethnoprismatic contexts. Names can be affected by social variables such as sex, hierarchy in birth, circumstances of birth, the person's structure, status etc. Agyekum (2006) provides a typology of Akan personal names under birthday names, family names, circumstantial names, flora, fauna and physical structure names, theophoric names, honorifics and title names, insinuating, proverbial, insulting, and nick names. There are innovations which were hitherto not part of the Akan culture but have now emerged as a result of westernization, education, and foreign religion. These factors have given rise to innovations such as multiple names, hypocoristic names, Christian or western names, matrimonial names, nationalists' names, kingship terms, and anglicized names which are realized through either orthography or translation. (Agyekum, 2006)

This posturing is not specific to Africa alone. According to Al Zumor (2009), Yemeni personal names are also not arbitrary but are based on the sociocultural and pragmatic contexts. He provides a typology of personal names based on local and external factors. The local factors which influence the choice of Arabic names are the agricultural environment and weather, names of some continents, countries and cities, birthday names, issue number, money amounts and currency, and circumstances of one's birth. External factors which also contribute to the naming of Arabic names are brand and innovation names, masculine names, weapon names, special physical and behavioral features of birth, foreign names, and other names he considers as miscellaneous names.

Oha (2009) argues that, praise names of Igbo (a people of Nigeria) chiefs are not only a sign of identity but are ideological in nature. In that, the praise names which are employed by chiefs reflect their social relationships, power relations, and reconstruct their goals. It, in the end, helps to reconstruct identities of acceptable,

desirable, and respectable images for their bearers. These names relate to the philosophical and cognitive experiences.

In addition, Udoye and Cyril (2011) in their study of the morphological analysis of Akwa personal names reveal that, most of the Akwa (a people of Nigeria) personal names have God as their semantic underpinning. Structurally, there are names with God in the initial position and final position of sentences. However, in nominal compound, God occurs as the second noun and in instances of a verb and a noun where the verb is an imperative verb, the noun represents God.

Ogunwale (2012) in adopting Iwundu's terminology in a pragmalinguistic study states that, the proverbial expressions used as Yoruba (a people of Nigeria) personal names establish that the concept of cooperative principle is guaranteed. Yoruba personal names fall into ideational, experiential/observatory, testimonial, admonitory, and monumental. Ideational names show the speakers' experience of the worldview while testimonial names are an evidence of a person's achievements. Experiential names express the life experience of the namer and the society based on the changes in life. Admonitory names express advice to guide individuals and guard his present and future. Monumental names extol the remarkable personal achievements in terms of physical or socioeconomic status. Ogunwale (2012) concludes that, societal perspectives and impoverished knowledge of the indigenous language can be the reasons why people no longer take on such names. In another study, Ogunwale (2012) looks at the pragmatic roles of Yoruba personal names. Using Allan's (1989) interpersonal illocutionary acts as a paradigm, he asserts that Yoruba personal names can perform pragmatic roles as constatives, predictive, commissives, encode acknowledgements, directives, and personal authority.

The above studies point to the fact that, names are not arbitrary but have cultural and pragmatic significance. As far as the use of names in literary text is concerned, Wamitila (1999) in his study points out that names of characters are very important in literature. The names of characters go beyond individualizing

to being a semantic, pragmatic, allusive, and symbolic import that must be seen in the perspective of the overall structure of a particular work. Names foreground particular themes or motifs, reveal the fictional character, situate a character within a specific and identifiable cultural setting, reveal different points of view and even used as a plot device, as a sarcastic or a satirical strategy. Writers of literary texts have the tendency to use allegorical names that reflect the important traits of a character either humorously or ironically. These symbolic and allegorical names reflect on their humanity, care, love, and understanding. This means that, names are used for various stylistic effects. Dalen-Oskam and Haag (2005) look at some first and family names from Dutch literature. In Dutch literature, family names are rarely used but predominantly used for the main characters, while first names of other characters are mostly used. The family names used is more than one of identification. The personal names of the characters used express the emotions of one of the characters while the family names of these characters are used as weapons of defense by the other characters.

Furthermore, Croft (2009) examines the naming of the evil one in two fantasy series: *The Lord of the rings* and its background legendarium and the Harry Potter books. In both Tolkien's legendarium and Rowling's works, there are different personifications for naming the evil one to show the power relationship that exists between the namer and the named. While some of the characters avoid saying the name of the evil one out of fear of attracting attention or causing insults, some also use the true name to show that they are not afraid or superstitious. There are others who use a different name to deny evil powers and those who use flattering form of address to show their close and privileged relationship with the evil one. The evil ones also exhibit their power and mastery over other characters by renaming them. The evil ones also re-name themselves to show their power over their own destiny. Metonymy and synecdoche are the two figures of speech which are used in place of a character's name.

In Butler's (2010) view, there are three onomastic techniques which contribute to the distinctive nature of dystopian fiction. These

are propaganda, classification, and regulation. The propaganda rule deals with the fact that names are shaped according to the needs of the ruling or naming authority. The classification technique deals with the fact that there is a direct link between form and intentions of use and regulation deals with the fact that literary names are selected intentionally to direct character interpretation.

Adams (2011) examines the various etymological claims of *Cratchit*, a surname shared by most of the characters in Dickens work *A Christmas Carol*. Adams (2011) reports that, there is the need for a mixed etymology in order to make linguistic and literary sense. In fiction, names should not necessarily be of a single etymon but can resolve multiple associations within an author's imagination and can carry multiple meanings. Dickens' use of names has a fictive significance. The use of the name *Cratchit* demonstrates that Dickens' names can be more meaningful since they are meaningful markers of character and theme. He identified five etymons of the name *Cratchit* and adds that, the etymology of the name does not only help in the significance of the name but the significance of the novel.

The above literature suggests that, names in literary texts go beyond just the concept of an address term to other factors which are likely to affect the overall interpretation of a literary work. In the same vein, this work looks at the names in *Fragments*, *The Joys of Motherhood*, and *Woman at Point Zero*, and the effects of the names on the roles of characters.

### **3. Crusaders, Custodians and Puppets in *Fragments***

In *Fragments*, *Onipa Baako* travels to the United States to study and comes back with nothing except the knowledge in his head and some books. In his search for work, he is denied a number of times because he refuses to pay bribes. When he is finally employed, he is paid for virtually doing no work. He becomes a misfit in the post-independence Ghanaian society that has become commodified and full of materialism. In the end, he has a nervous breakdown. In this novel, Armah (2006) deals with themes such as disillusionment in post independent Africa,



loss of hope, and the corruption of African nations.

The Akan names identified in *Fragments* are affected by the day, family, title, and circumstances of birth. The day on which a child is born affects the name he or she is given. The Akans have a predetermined naming system for every child based on the day of one's birth. One does not get the chance to choose which day name he/she wants. These names are known as *kradin* (soul name) among the Akans of Ghana. "The names of the days were derived from names of deities and their particular days of worship" (Agyekum, 2006, p. 213). These names are gender indicative, that is, they mark the gender of a child. In *Fragments*, the use of the name *Efua*, *Araba*, and *Yaa* refer to females born on Friday, Tuesday, and Thursday respectively, while names like *Kofi*, *Fiiifi* and *Kwesi* refer to males born on Friday and Sunday respectively. The use of the name *Fiiifi* is an example of a hypocoristic name for a male born on Friday. The use of hypocoristic forms is under the category of names that Agyekum (2006) describes as innovation in the Akan naming system. The use of day names in the Akan society reflects the belief system that the human being is made up of three components: soul, body, and spirit, the day name which is the *kradin* (soul name) indicates that the human person has an acknowledged soul, one that lives on even when the body decays.

In addition to day names, family names are also given in *Fragments*. The family names are names given by the father to the child. These names are usually based on the twelve patrilineal clans of the Akans (Agyekum, 2006). The twelve patrilineal clans have certain names associated with them. Examples of family names identified in *Fragments* include *Asante-Smith*, *Korankye*, *Crabbe*, *Kunkumfi*, *Baiden Essilfie*, *Boateng*, *Brempong* and *Anoa*. It is worth mentioning that, the use of the hyphenated name *Asante-Smith* is as a result of westernization, where some families attach European names to their local names. The father has the right to name the child after the father of the father, especially in the case of a first born child. In the Akan culture, the matrilineal system of inheritance is practiced; this system indicates that, the child belongs to the mother's family; the father is considered a

stranger in a household. Thus, by giving his family name to the child, the father is ensured a place in the child's life, and he becomes known publicly as the father of the child. The use of family names gives a sense of belongingness as members of the same family name are considered one. Agyekum (2006) is, therefore, right in arguing that family names in Akan are markers of personal and group identity.

Title names are names which were previously used as titles but with time have gained the status of a given name. *Naana* is an example of a title name which is the feminine form of *Nana* which is a title for chiefs and the elderly in the Akan society. The use of title names has implications for royalty and the honor given to the elderly. It is not surprising that the elderly are given title names because the elderly in the Akan society are believed to be a source of wisdom in the same way as chiefs are considered the spiritual heads of a community. Thus, in *Fragments*, we have *Naana* for Baako's grandmother and *Maame* for his mother.

Akans often name their children depending on the circumstances surrounding the birth of the child. There are varied circumstances which can determine the name of an individual in the Akan setting. These circumstances can be related to anthroponyms (place of birth), temporynms (period of birth), manner of birth and death prevention, and survival names. In the novel, two names were identified as circumstantial names which are manner of birth names: *Mensah* and *Baako*. *Mensah* refers to the third male child in sequence from a mother and *Baako* signifies that he is the only son of his mother.

Apart from these general interpretations of names in the Akan setting, the novel also contains certain names that have implications for characterization. *Onipa Baako* is the protagonist in *Fragments*. Literally, his name means 'a man alone'. Subsequently, he is the only one to have attained a higher level of education in his family. He is even the only one who has travelled outside the country in his family. With his accomplishments, the family sees him as their benefactor, the one who will bring them to the level of the 'have's' in the community, who will make it

possible for them to rub shoulders with the rich and famous.

The name *Onipa Baako* is, therefore, significant as far as his role in the story is concerned. Given the fact that his family sees him as the savior of the family, they are disappointed when he comes back empty handed. He is unable to raise them to the standard of living they had expected. His mother's anticipation that she will finish her building and ride in a car is dashed when he fails to come home with a car of his own. She tells Juana, "He will come back a man. A big man" (p. 57). Her reference to 'big man' indicates the thinking at that time of people who have traveled abroad and came back with a lot of things to make their people happy. Such people like *Birempong* in the novel are referred to as 'been-tos'; they wear the latest European fashion, drive the latest models of cars, have money to send their family members to the 'been-to' wards of the hospital, and are generally heralded by all.

Furthermore, *Baako* appears to be the only one struggling against the massive corruption in the country. He refuses to give bribes for services which he has already paid for. When he applies to the Civil Service for a job he is astounded that they keep telling him to come the next day, without addressing his concerns. His former teacher, *Ocran*, tells him, "That's what they say when they want a bribe ... Nothing works in this country. What can you expect?" (p. 121). In the end, he becomes so stressed from the demands at home and the untenable situation in the country that he breaks down. Juana, the Puerto Rican psychiatrist seems to be his beacon of hope and in the end, there is a hint that perhaps, *Baako* will consider working with Juana and not alone as before.

In addition to his sole crusading persona, *Onipa Baako* is portrayed as the only 'untainted' Ghanaian in the novel. His former teacher, *Ocran* had been one to fight the system but he had given up, deciding and even encouraging *Baako* that he should find out what he can do and do it *alone*. The repetition of the word, *alone* and its synonyms found metaphorically in the actions of the main characters, who tend to engage in solitary pursuits, all emphasize the significance of the

novel's fixation on solitude; being different from the norm. *Onipa Baako* thus reminds readers of *The Man in Armah's* first novel, *The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born*. A solitary character who in the midst of others appears alone and is portrayed as the only one who wants to do the right thing. *Onipa Baako* is an epitome then of the lone crusaders Ayi Kwei Armah is noted for using in his novels. His name is then an apt metaphor of his portrayal as the only ideal man with the right mindset and moral aptitude.

*Baako's* grandmother, *Naana* is presented by Ayi Kwei Armah as an embodiment of tradition. She is the one who insists on the right traditional processes being undertaken before *Baako* leaves the country, during the pouring of libation to the ancestors prior to his departure, *Naana* watches *Baako's* uncle carefully so that he does not make a misstep in the process. Her name indicates that she is an elder, *Naana*, a derivative of *Nana* (elder) is the most elderly person in the household but it is an indictment of the times that she is not accorded the respect she needs by her daughter, *Efua* and granddaughter, *Araba*. *Naana* speaks with so much wisdom about situations: "The world has changed..." the old woman murmured, then raised her voice. "Always and everywhere the same words that bring a sickness to the stomach of the listener. The world has changed...and they think it is enough to explain any new crime, to push a person to accept all" (p. 144)

She even foresees future events. For instance, she complains bitterly about the naming of *Araba's* child before the seventh day. Traditionally, a baby is brought out to be seen by everyone and given a name on the eighth day after its birth (Adjah, 2011). However, *Baako's* sister and mother think that by outdoorizing the baby earlier, around the end of the month when workers have been paid, they will get a lot of presents and money from well-wishers; completely disregarding tradition and the health of the child.

The irony of the situation is that elders like *Naana* are disregarded in this postcolonial era but when their predictions come to pass, they are seen as witches of destruction. *Naana* thus, represents the wisdom of a bygone era, and her presentation is symbolic of the society's loss

of traditional values that enrich the life of the community and ensure the sustenance of a vibrant culture. Therefore, the writer uses her together with *Baako* to lament the destruction of a former healthier way of life and to castigate the present's extreme materialism that is detrimental to the society's development and growth.

A character who is the embodiment of this extreme materialism is *Brempong*. His name literally means *the big one*. An *Obirempong* in Akan society is a 'big man' who has money and power. This is another predominant masculine image in Ghanaian literature. The desire to be a 'big man' in the society and to command the respect, service and awe of many people has been the driving force behind many men's ambitions. In his groundbreaking book on men in Ghana, Miescher (2005) asserts that ideals of elderhood and 'big man' status have formed continuity in Akan societies since the nineteenth century, although responsibilities and expectations of elders and big men have changed over time. Wealthy traders and businessmen who contributed generously to the development of their larger communities were regarded as *abirempon*, (big men) and *mmarima pa* (valiant men). Wealth was seen as a precursor of 'big man' status, and modern big men's wealth consisted of money and investments, real estate and cash crops while older forms of big men, the 19<sup>th</sup> century *abirempon*, were measured in terms of people, subjects, wives, slaves, and other dependents who provided labor.

Mekgwe (2007) discusses the materialism that has become so pervasive in the society as a result of the 'big man' status that many men aspire to in *Fragments*. She claims that the character, *Brempong* who Onipa Baako encounters on the plane to Ghana, is astoundingly materialistic and wise to Ghana's new ways of materialism and consumerism. *Brempong* wants to be seen as a 'big man', and he enjoys the prestige associated with his status as a 'been-to' 'big man'. A 'been-to' is a person who has been to Europe or America, and comes back laden with many goods for his family and friends. In this regard, Armah presents manhood in postcolonial Ghana as being hinged on male productivity. The family/woman becomes consumer of the

success produced by the man, and success is measured in the material possessions one has such as cars, television sets and refrigerators; having the status of a 'been-to' further enhances one's reputation in the eyes of the community. This phenomenon that Mekgwe (2007) refers to as *Cargo mentality* is also characterized by extreme exhibitionism.

*Brempong* then becomes emblematic of the rot in the society that Armah criticizes vehemently in his book. In satirizing his character, Armah portrays *Brempong* as a puppet who moves to the prompting of his family and society, bringing them goods from foreign lands that are often useless in the country.

#### 4. Children and Wealth: The Burdens in *The Joys of Motherhood*

Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* is set in two geographical areas: Ogboli in Ibadan and Lagos. The story is told of a young woman, *Nnu Ego*, who believing in the society's prescription of motherhood, puts all her efforts into the raising her children at the detriment of her own happiness. The irony in her story is that she dies by the side of the road, poor and alone.

The Igbo names which were identified in *The Joys of Motherhood* are affected by the day, circumstances, family or lineage of the child. The Igbos of Nigeria are a very enterprising people who believe in commerce. They have four days in the week and these correspond to their market days. The names of the market days are *Nkwo*, *Eke*, *Orie*, and *Afor*. Each Igbo town, therefore, adopts one of the days as its market day. Children born on a market day are named after the day, thus the name *Adankwo* is the name of a female born on an *Nkwo* market day; thus, she is the daughter of *Nkwo*. In the text, *Adankwo* was the oldest wife of *Nnaife*'s senior brother, *Owulum* and was inherited by *Nnaife* after the death of his brother.

Circumstantial names are also found in the text. These names are temporonyms, manner of birth and death prevention names. *Adaku*, the youngest wife of *Owulum* who was inherited by *Nnaife* is "the daughter of wealth" (Emecheta, 1994, p. 170) and *Obiageli*, one of the twin girls born to *Nnu Ego* and *Nnaife* is, "she who has come to enjoy wealth" (Emecheta, 1994, p. 187). These names suggest the

improved economic status of the parents at the time of the birth of the child. Adaku's name influences her role in the text as she uses every opportunity to acquire wealth and despises Nnaife for being poor. *Obiageli* who was born after the father's return from the war came to meet improved economic conditions in Nnu Ego's family. This highlights the importance that Igbos attach to wealth as an individual's measure in the society is in part determined by how much money he has.

Manner of birth names identified in the novel are *Nnu Ego*, *Ngozi*, *Obi*, *Agunwa*, *Nnamdio*, *Adimabua*, and *Malachi*. *Nnu Ego* is the daughter of Agbadi and Ona whose earlier marriage to Amatokwu was childless and resulted in a divorce, and her second marriage to Nnaife. *Nnu Ego* means "twenty bags of cowries" (Emecheta, 1994, p. 26). *Ngozi* is the first child of Nnaife and Nnu Ego who dies some months later. *Ngozi* means "blessing", *Obi* (the friend of Agbadi) is "father's heart", *Agunwa* (Agbadi's senior wife who was buried with a slave girl) means "the heroic child", *Nnamdio* (one of the sons of Nnaife and Nnu Ego) means "This is my father" (Emecheta, 1994, p. 155), *Adimabua* (the third child of Nnaife and Nnu Ego) means "now I am two" (Emecheta, 1994, p. 112) and *Malachi* (One of the second set of twins born to Nnaife and Nnu Ego) means "you do not know what tomorrow will bring" (Emecheta, 1994, p. 187). The manner of birth names identified in the text shows the important place a child holds in the Igbo society. Nnu Ego and Nnaife gave these names based on specific occurrences and circumstances during the time of pregnancy and delivery. For instance, *Ngozi* is given to their first child because his presence makes Nnu Ego no longer a failed woman and provides a guarantee that her second marriage would be successful. *Nnamdio* was given that name because he looked just like Nwokocho Agbadi (Nnu Ego's father). The child is considered as a blessing and so issues of childlessness are abhorred. When an individual in the Igbo society is unable to give birth, it is considered a misfortune.

There are also death prevention and survival names such as *Oshiaju*, the first surviving child of Nnaife and Nnu Ego, which means "the bush has refused this" (Emecheta, 1994, p. 80). This name was given to the child in

order for him to live. Nnaife was of the view that this second child unlike the first was not going to die but rather live and become a man. According to Obeng (1998), death prevention names are ugly in nature to prevent the spiritual parents of a child from taking him/her back. The existence of death prevention names therefore, signifies that the Igbos believe in the existence of a spiritual world.

Some of the names also show the family or lineage of the individual. These include *Nnaife*, *Ubani*, and *Umunna*. *Nnaife* means upright father, *Ubani* means rich soil, and *Umunna* means clan or kinsmen. That is, these families or lineage are known for their uprightness, richness, and a specific clan respectively. The family or lineage an individual belongs to informs the choice of this name. These lineage names are given the males in the Igbo society because of the patriarchal nature of the Igbo society. It also gives a sense of belongingness just as the Akan family names.

*Nnu Ego*, although "... the apple of her parents eyes" (Emecheta, 1994, p. 27) and valued by the father because of the circumstances surrounding her birth, is slighted because of her inability to bear children when she marries her first husband. In her second marriage, she is able to have children although she suffers extreme poverty in taking care of them. Her name which is synonymous with wealth does not have any influence on her life as a character because as soon as she begins to have children, she becomes destitute. The irony of Nnu Ego's name and life is that whereas her society believes that children equate wealth because one's children will grow up and take good care of one when one is old and infirm, unfortunately, Nnu Ego's children do not do this.

If you spent all your time making money and getting rich, the gods wouldn't give you any children: if you wanted children you had to forget money, and be content to be poor...Never mind, he will grow soon and clothe and farm for you...  
Emecheta (Emecheta, 1994, p. 80).

They leave her destitute and lonely until she dies a sad embittered woman by the road side. Her name and life are symbolic of the point the writer wants to emphasize in the text that



motherhood is not a guarantee of wealth and happiness.

*Adaku* is Nnu Ego's co-wife and the wife Nnaife inherits when his elder brother dies. In the novel, her quest for wealth is reflected in every aspect of her life. Most of the issues she talks about are money related. For instance, when she gives birth to twin girls and Nnaife complains that what he would do with these 'things'?, she tells him not to complain about the birth of the twins because in twelve years' time he would start benefitting from their bride price. She herself says that, everyone accuses her of making money all the time but she loves money and wants a good life for her children. The writer even states that "On that very day, *Adaku* was living up to the meaning of her name the daughter of wealth" (Emecheta, 1994, p. 170). She opened a new store and gave the old one out for rent on a yearly basis. In the end, not satisfied with all the money she has accumulated as a business woman, she resorts to prostitution to make more. Like, Nnu Ego, who is symbolic of the insane desire for children, *Adaku* is representative of the insatiable need for wealth and materialism that drives people to engage in all sorts of questionable practices.

### 5. Searching for the Elusive in *Woman at Point Zero*

Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* is about an imprisoned prostitute known as *Firdaus* waiting for her death sentence. Her experiences of homelessness, poverty, circumcision and sexual assault and exploitation cause her to see death as the only form of escape from her life.

Arab names used in the text are circumstantial, title and theophoric names. The circumstantial names are basically manner of birth names. Examples of such names are *Hassenien*, a pimp, *Fawzy*, another pimp who expressed interest to marry *Firdaus*, *Marzouk*, a man who offers to be a pimp for *Firdaus*, *Shawki*, a friend of *Sharifa* and *Fathey*, a co-worker of *Firdaus* at the corporate office she goes to work. *Hassanein* is the first of twins, *Fawzy* means reward, *Marzouk* is wealth, *Shawki* means longing and *Fathey* means opening. The use of manner of birth names like *Hassanein* and *Fathey* shows the Arabs'

recognition of instances of special birth, while *Fawzy*, *Marzouk*, and *Shawki* signify the important place of children in the Arab society. Circumstantial names are also found in the Yemeni Arabic personal names by Al Zumor (2009).

Arab title names are usually related to the Islamic religion. In *Woman at Point Zero*, two title names are used. These are *Sheikh* and *Imam*. *Sheikh* is the title for a Muslim scholar and *Imam* is the name for the one who leads prayers at the mosque. In the text, *Firdaus'* uncle is a *Sheikh* as well as her husband. These names are given to males only. Although little is said about the *Imam* mentioned, the *Sheikhs* are explored in depth. *Firdaus'* uncle does not live up to expectation as implied in his name because as a Muslim scholar who knows much about the precepts of his religion, he does not adhere to these precepts in his life. He sexually exploits the young *Firdaus* and gives her in marriage to a much older man who maltreats her. Similarly, *Firdaus'* husband is a man who does not understand the tenets of his own religion and thus mistreats women.

The majority of the names used in *Woman at Point Zero* are related to the religion or belief in Islam. Theophoric names, according to Agyekum (2006), are names which show a belief in supernatural being. It is realized that most of these names are related to the prophets, specifically, Mohammed and others. In the text, there are about two variants of the name Mohammed such as *Mahmoud* and *Mohammadain*. There is also the use of theophoric names to indicate some virtues like light as in *Hala*, *Firdaus'* youngest cousin and, patience, as in *Sabri*, a pimp. The irony of the situation is that many of the characters with such theophoric names live lives that are in complete opposition to the meaning of their names, for example, *Mohammadian* and *Sabri*. However, *Hala'* role in the novel is indicative of her name. She brightens up *Firdaus'* life by getting closer and being friends with her.

The name *Firdaus* means Paradise. Considering the fact that her name has a glorious meaning, one would have expected the protagonists to have had a blissful or fulfilled life. It is ironic to find just the opposite in the novel. She becomes a victim of gross sexual abuse and exploitation. In the end, she is about to be

hanged. Her situation does not suggest any bliss or fulfillment. However, when one considers the character carefully, it becomes evident that the significance of her name to her role is not to be taken superficially. She is presented as a character from whom the other characters come to for sexual satisfaction and happiness. She is like a fountain from which men come to drink for satisfaction. The men may find paradise in her but the problem is that she does not find such paradise within or without herself. The men leave her wounded in soul and spirit. She is commodified and exploited.

*Firdaus* subsequently leaves the world of prostitution for the corporate world, thinking that it would afford her the respectability she needs. Unfortunately, she discovers that as long as she is a woman, there is no running away from her sexuality and the gaze of men who only see her as a sexual object to be used. Finding no way out of her dilemma, she goes back to prostitution determined to be her own master. Even here, she has no peace because she has to contend with a pimp who wants to rule her. Saadawi contrives to place *Firdaus* in an untenable situation where there is no way out of her dilemma. The writer can be said to be satirizing the name of *Firdaus* by claiming that indeed there is no paradise on earth.

*Firdaus* possesses some inner strength which makes her quite strange. She is a character who is not afraid of death and she speaks of death as something which will bring her joy and accomplishment probably because of the abuse she keeps experiencing. She despises this world and the people in it. For someone whose name means Paradise, it is not hard to understand that she longs for death. For it is only after death that one can go to paradise. Her portrayal subsequently alludes to the religious belief that there is no peace for the religious adherent in this world, it is only by dying that one can attain this peace of mind that is so elusive on earth.

*Sheikh Mahmoud* is one of the religious leaders in the story, a pensioner who marries *Firdaus*, a girl young enough to be his granddaughter. Normally, one would expect that a religious man of repute such as he would know better and refuse such a pedophilic marriage. Rather, he marries *Firdaus* and

subjects her to inhumane treatment that does not befit a wife. For someone whose name *Mahmoud* is a variant of *Prophet Mohammed*, he is expected to be an honorable character. However, we see an indecent old man who is repugnant with a facial swelling that oozes smelly pus. Obviously, his personality is ironic to his name. The writer may be making a mockery of dishonorable religious leaders of his kind.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

On the whole, the significance of names to the development of a person cannot be overemphasized. It is this same phenomenon that writers employ in their characterization and create characters whose roles in the texts are reinforced by the names they are given. This scenario is exemplified in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born*, where the main character remains nameless, and invisible. He appears on the fringes of life as if he is not an active participant in events. His portrayal is significant in the sense that by not giving him a name and making him peripheral (although he is pivotal), the writer succeeds in showing the readers how marginalized the 'upright' man is in the post-independent corrupt country portrayed in the text. Therefore, long after a reader has finished with the story, the names or lack therefore, of certain characters continue to resonate and remind the reader of what has been read.

This paper is a literary anthroponomastics of personal names of characters in three African novels, two from West Africa and one from North Africa. The analysis reveals the sociocultural factors which influence the choice of names in these different settings. The work also underscores the use of personal names in literary texts to achieve stylistic effects. It is realized that communities in North Africa and West Africa give day names and circumstantial names to their children for numerous reasons. This finding confirms the assertions by Agyekum (2006), Ansu-Kyeremeh (2000), and Obeng (1998) in previous studies that names are more than mere linguistic labels used to reflect issues of identity, life experiences and belief systems of a group of people. The other significant finding from this analysis is that the writers of these texts used characters whose names indicate the themes of

the texts. In *Fragments*, Onipa Baako is the lone crusader trying to do the right thing, whilst Naana bemoans the lack of traditional virtues in a changing world, and Birempong lives up to the ideals of a materialistic culture. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego indicates that children are not necessarily the source of wealth and comfort in one's old age as believed and Adaku shows that money is the most important thing in life. Lastly, Firdaus in *Woman at Point Zero* satirizes hypocritical religious beliefs and practices that fail to provide alternative avenues for being a woman. This study has also proven that names in literary texts in literary texts are symbolic, indicators of character and themes and also contribute to the interpretation of a text (Adams, 2011; Butler 2010; Wamitila, 1999).

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