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The Concept of Nwa-nwa and Nwadiana in Igbo Culture

By Maduagwu Nzubechi

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FEATURE
IMAGE

**A serene house in igboland, Photo
Credit: P. A. Mc C, 1870-1900.
Source: The British Museum**

Article image · caption retained from the published Ozikoro article

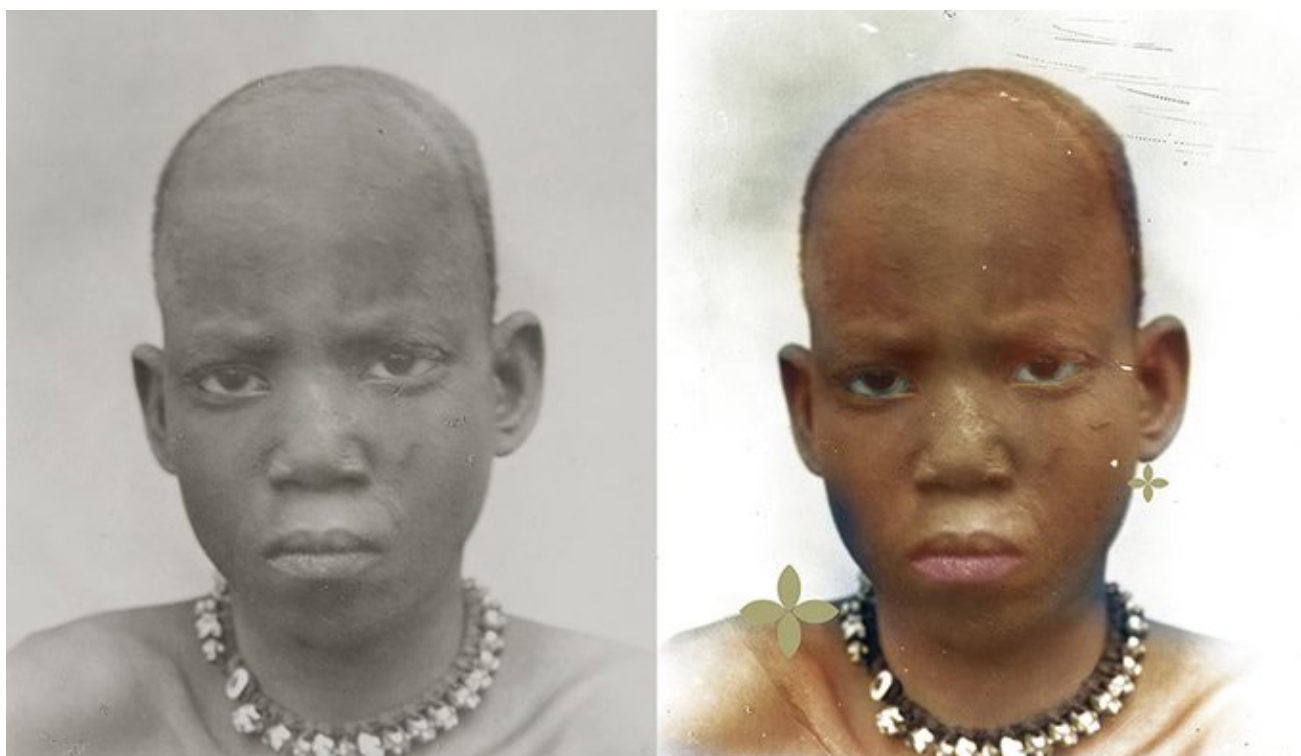
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THE CONCEPT OF NWA-NWA AND NWADIANA IN IGBO CULTURE

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Have you ever been to a meeting in your hometown and the head of a goat being shared is allotted to your father's sister's children as "oke nwadiana" and you are wondering, why should they be given that?



A child of Öka (Awka) photographed by British colonial government anthropologist Northcote Thomas, 1910-1911, right version colourised from black and white, left, 2018. Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge.

01

Meaning

Nwanwa is a grandchild of a family either from a male or a female child. Nwanwa from a female child married outside is considered to be

of more value especially if the nwanwa is very mannered, kind, supportive, humble and respectful. And this particular Nwanwa is referred to as “nwadiana”.



An Igbo girl from Nibo, present-day Anambra State, with ùlì designs on her skin. Photographed by Northcote Thomas c. 1911. MAA Cambridge.

The arrival of a Nwanwa born by a female child (nwadiana) to his maternal home attracts the killing of cock (a male chicken /oke okpa / cockerel) to herald his or her arrival, in Igbo this practice is referred to as “Nwanwa na eri okuko”

02

Rights of Nwanwa

- Rights during funeral rites:

The Nwanwa [born by the male] member of the family is held in high



esteem because he is the one that makes the first digging of a burial site chosen by his Father's sister's children who are married outside the community.

- “Bee ndi nnaochie” as sanctuary:

Nnaochie is any relative from your ikwunne (maternal home). Nwanwa (nwadiana) has a right to come back to his/her maternal home and be sheltered if his life is threatened in his/her paternal home. This is very evident in the practice of Igba oso ochu where the nwanwa might run to his/her maternal home after committing manslaughter. Although they can be given shelter, he/she must not commit evil in his maternal home(Ikwunne) and if it is confirmed, the whole community will jointly send him/her away and ban him from coming there for life. So every community desires an nwanwa or a nwadiana ga turu ugo lota (bring prestige to the community) not one that brings shame to the community.



A man and child from Igbariam, c. 1911. MAA Cambridge. Originally, nna (father) Igbo names did not reference a monotheistic deity, neither were they necessarily about a person's direct father. Nna names are about the collective of ancestors and all who come under them (umunna).

• Oke nwanwa/nwadiana

Depending on the meat killed during an occasion, ndi nwanwa/nwadiana is entitled to the neck/head of a goat (Ewu) or a cow (ehi). For smaller animals like chicken (okuko), Ọgazi (Guinea fowl), ỌdỌkuma, Ọkwa (Partridge (or Francolin). Nwanwa especially nwadiana enjoys more care, attention, love, favour and is allowed to participate and partake in activities that progress the affairs of the land.



Uche Nworah, ABS MD shares meat with his kinsmen at Enugu-Ukwu. photo credit: Redesigned odogwu Blog

· At death

The ikwunne of a nwadiana is to be duly informed of the passing of their beloved nwanwa. In cases of suspected foul play from the umunna, the ikwunne might trigger an investigation into the cause of death of their nwadiana.

· Nwa-mkpuke or nwa-okwa

In cases where a child is born out of wedlock (ime mkpuke), the nwanwa in this case is absorbed as part of the ikwunne as a diala/diana.



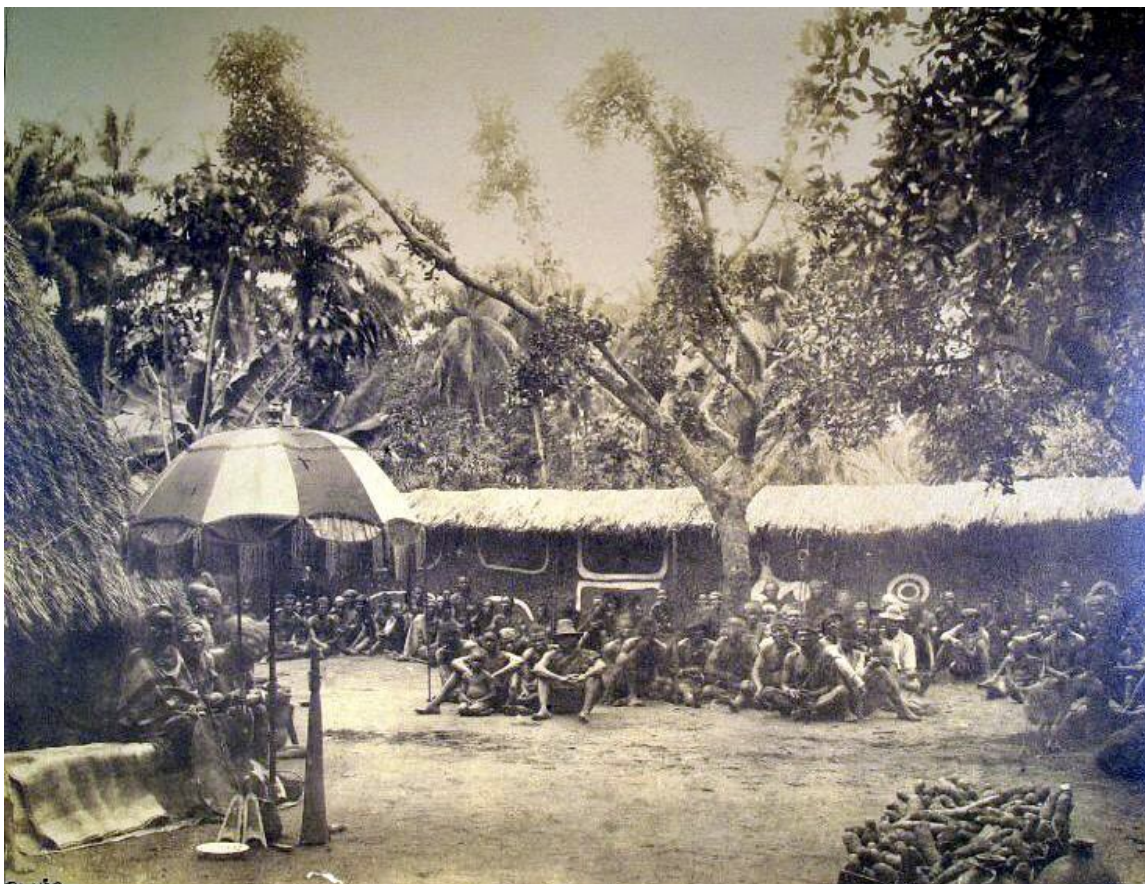
A woman and child from Agukwu Nri, photographed by Northcote Thomas, 1910-11. Colourised Ukuru 2018.

03

Roles and Privileges of Nwanwa

- As a mediator;

Nwanwa or nwadiana is expected to act as a neutral mediator in cases of family disputes knowing fully well that they are not part of the umunna and have no stake in material things in the family. And knowing fully well that they are not entrenched in the politics of umunna, they are the best bet to settle okwu ezin'ulo after umuada.



A Meeting in an Igbo Notable's Compound, 1890s. British Museum

- As grave diggers;

During funerals, ndi nwanwa especially the male ones are charged to dig the graves for funerals and the female nwanwa aid in cooking for the guests.

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Nzubechi is a history, political enthusiast who dabbles into social commentary once in a while



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