

Innovations

The Religious Significance of Name and Naming in Igbo Cultural Society- A Comparative Analysis of Anambra and Enugu States, Nigeria

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Abstract : *This paper examines the religious significance of name and naming in Igbo cultural society. 12 Participants engaged in the Key Informant Interview (KII) were drawn from two Igbo states of south eastern Nigeria; Anambra and Enugu. Using a descriptive narrative approach, the study revealed that the Igbo name is not just a mere tag or a label, but embodies the rich Igbo religious and cultural values of the people. Igbo names and naming ceremonies have reflected significant religious world views of the Igbo. It serves as a source of identity to the child at one hand, it determines the child's destiny and behaviors, and had also serve as a means of initiating the newborn into the kingdom of humans, the family, the community, and among others. Unfortunately, these values communicated through Igbo names have been under serious threat in the contemporary times due to factors which include; preference of western-sounding names to traditional names, blending of traditional names with English names, and above all, the rampant use of abridged traditional Igbo names. The recent developments poses a challenge to the sustainability of those values and worldviews of the people often communicated through these traditional names.*

Keywords: *comparative, cultural society, Igbo, name, naming, religious, significance*

Introduction

A name is a word or set of words by which a person or thing is known, addressed, or referred to. In the African-Igbo context, however, a name goes beyond mere labels for individual identification or impression. African names are not just signs but also symbols that evaluate the nature, essence, characteristics, functions, and orientation of an object, person, or place relative to what role it plays in the sight and understanding of the one who gives the name (Echekwube, 2005). In Igbo culture, names are highly valued; it has a deeper religious, socio-cultural, and philosophical significance. As such, “names in Igbo as in many African cultures and religions are not mere labels, rather they reflect the immutable desires of the sires and the community in which the child is born to commune on the creator in designing his destiny” (Oha, 2018). A name is believed by the Igbo to be a primary source of identity for the bearer and shapes a person's character, behavior, and destiny. It is a common belief among the Igbo that the name one bears determines the person's destiny. Thus, the popular Igbo folktale has it that “*Afa onye na du ya*”, meaning that one's protects him or her. Traditional Igbo names often have deep meanings and are given based on various factors like circumstances of birth, aspirations for the child, religious beliefs, and others.

One predominant value of the Igbo that is often communicated through traditional Igbo names is religious values. Thus, for Mbiti (1969) Igbo names typically held spiritual reverence and are meaningful. The Igbo, just like other Africans are religious people. The five-fold classifications of beliefs in African religious thoughts are practicable among the Igbo people. There is the belief in God (the Supreme Being God) known in Igbo as *Chineke* (the creator God) or *Chukwu* (Great God); belief in divinities or deities (spiritual agent of the Supreme Being); this includes the earth goddess (*Ala*), the Sun goddess (*Anyanwu*), the goddess of the farm (*Ufiajioku*, *Eha/ Afa* spirits), the goddess of the four Igbo market days (*Eke*, *Orie*, *Afor*, and *Nkwo*); belief in spirits; this include the spirit of the hill, forest, streams, rivers, lakes, spirits of dead members who do not receive proper burial rites, the spirit of born-to-die (*Ogbanje*), the spirit of witches and the guardian spirits; beliefs in ancestors as custodian of the laws and customs of the people; and finally, the belief in magic and medicine (Idowu, 1973; Latsju et al., 2022; Ugwu & Ugwueye, 2004).

These religious beliefs are communicated in the names the Igbo give to their children. Thus, among the male folk in Igbo land, one finds names such as *Chukwuebuka* (God is big), *Ugochukwu* (Eagle of God), *Ekeledilichukwu* (Thanks to God), *Okwudilichukwu* (All words belong to God), *Chigozilim* (God has blessed me) and among others. The female names include *Chidimma* (God is good), *Kaosisochukwu* (as God pleases), *Eberechukwu* (God's mercy), *Chioma* (Good God), and so on. Ordinarily, every Igbo child has a name given to him or her by his or her own ‘Chi’ (i.e. his or her personal god or guardian spirit). This name is derived from the deity of the market day in which the child is born. These names are often passed down from one generation to another, linking individuals to their

ancestors and preserving family heritage. The naming process, which is called by different names in Igbo society, such as *ibu afa*, *Iru Umuaka*, and *Ichi Ite Olu*, *Ipuifenwa*, *Ibanwa- afa*, or *Iba afa* is often marked by some religious rituals across Igbo communities.

Even though previous scholars have carried out related studies on the various aspects of names and naming in Igbo society (Nzegwu, 1995; Rasak, 2010; Nwoye, 2014; Anyachonkeya, 2014; Anyachebelu, 2015; Chukwu, 2018; Cookey & Ijioma, 2019); it was discovered that most of these studies were very limited in scope (content and context-wise). Secondly, with few exceptions, these past studies often based their findings on a reviewed literature. The present study was more practical and encompassing in its approach. It engages two Igbo States in a comparative study that aims principally at unveiling the religious significance of name and naming in Igbo cultural societies. The use of KII is believed to have a greater advantage over other method of data collection. It among others allows the researcher to access the original information from the communities under study. The research is relevant as it unveils the basic tenets of Igbo religious beliefs communicated through names and naming in Igbo cultural society.

Materials and Methods

Study area

The Igbo refers to both an ethnic and linguistic group. As an ethnic group, the Igbo people are an ethnic group in Nigeria found in Abia, Anambra, Delta, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, and River states of Nigeria. They have a common border with the Igala and the Idoma on the Northern part of Nigeria, the Ijaw and Ogoni on the South, the Yako and Ibibio on the Eastern boundary, and the Bini and Warri on the West. The principal rivers are Niger, Imo, Anambra, and the Uiasi River. The Niger divides the Igbo into two uneven areas. The bulk of the population lives east of the Niger, with heavy concentration at Okigwe, Orlu, Owerri, Onitsha, and Awka. The other part of the Igbo group lives west of the Niger. The Igbo belong to the Sudanic linguistic group of the Kwa division (Uchendu, 1965; Onwuejeogwu, 1981). The Igbo speak the Igbo language. It is usually said that while the other two major ethnic groups in Nigeria (the Hausa and the Yoruba) also inhabit other countries in Africa, the Igbo are found as an indigenous population in no other country in the world than their present Nigerian setting. The Igbo area is an area inhabited by people with almost identical but variable cultural traits in an oscillated geographical area (Ekwunife, 1999). Igbo elders have maintained that the Igbo are indigenous to their present location in Nigeria and have not migrated from elsewhere to their present location. Ideally, among the Igbo, communities are easily identified through their traditional names.

Participant Recruitment

The study involved 12 persons who were randomly and purposively selected from the Anambra and Enugu States of Nigeria. 6 persons were picked from 3 Local Government Areas in each of the State. The two major criteria that guided the selection were the age and the position held in the communities. The age range is 70 years and above. The reason for this choice is simple. The researchers assume that elderly persons and persons who occupy or had occupied one position or another in the communities would have more grounded knowledge and information regarding the subject matter under study. A referral sampling technique was employed to enable the researchers to locate informants who meet the above criteria. The participants comprised of 8 males and 4 females. See Table 1 for the socio-demographic information of participants.

Table 1. Socio-demographic information of the participants

S/N	Name of participant	Sex	Age	Educational Qualification	Position/ Status	LGA/State of Origin	Location when Interview
1	Nnaobi	M	75	MSc	Traditional Ruler	Idemili North/ Anambra	Obosi
2	Obee	F	70	HND	Woman Leader	Igbo-Etiti/ Enugu	Nsukka
3	Oga	F	73	SSCE	Isiokpu/ Head of Daughters	Awka South/ Anambra	Awka
4	Meche	M	70	BSc	Chief Priest	Nsukka /Enugu	Nsukka
5	Mebo	M	74	PhD	Member Chief Cabinet	Awka South/ Anambra	Awka
6	Ezika	M	72	BSc	Traditional ruler	Nsukka/ Enugu	Ameze
7	Ugwu	F	76	SSCE	Ezenwanyi	Igbo-etiti/ Enugu	Nsukka
8	Ododi	M	71	BA	Onyeisi (Elder)	Igbo- Eze North/ Enugu	Nsukka
9	Igu	M	72	BEd	Elder	Anambra East/ Anambra	Nando

10	Eloma	M	70	BA	President Age grade	Anambra East/ Anambra	Nando
11	Basim	F	73	MA	Former women Leader	Idemili North/ Anambra	Onitsha
12	Ogwa	M	71	BSc	Member council of Chiefs	Igbo-Eze North/ Enugu	Nsukka

Note: Names used in the table are pseudonyms

Data collection

The primary instrument for data collection was the Key Informant Interview (KII). The KII was carried out through physical contact and virtual platforms. An open-ended structured question was produced in printed and soft copies. While the hard copies were used during the face-to-face interview, the soft copies were forwarded to the identified participants through their WhatsApp and e-mail addresses. Their responses came in both written and audio forms. The use of the latter technique was necessitated due to the cost of traveling to conduct face-to-face interviews with all the participants in the two selected States. The interview was conducted in two languages; English and Igbo. Those who were not very efficient in the English language were permitted to use their local parlance to communicate their experiences on the various subjects of the interview. This was later transcribed into the English language for use during the data analysis stage. The interview question was guided by three major objectives; (1) the significance of name and naming, (2) the motivating factors in the choice of name, and (3) the nature of the naming ceremony.

Data Analysis

The data generated were organized thematically and analyzed through a descriptive narrative approach. The study adapted Colaizzi’s (as cited in Nche, 2019) phenomenological approach to qualitative data analysis. Following Colaizzi’s seven steps, the data was analyzed as follows:

1. The researcher familiarizes herself with the participants’ experiences through reading, re-reading, and carefully transcribing audio recordings/ voice tapes to gain a deep understanding of the participants’ accounts.
2. Each interview audio recording was carefully transcribed by the researchers and significant statements that pertain to the phenomenon under study were extracted.
3. Each transcript was read and re-read to capture the essence and meanings relevant to name and naming as expressed by the participants.
4. The identified meanings were then clustered into themes guided by the objective of the study.

5. A comprehensive and detailed description of the phenomenon based on the formulated meanings was sorted into clusters of themes of the study.
6. The exhaustive descriptive description from the participant's accounts was then condensed into a short dense statement that captured only the essential information on the theme of the study.
7. Finally, the accounts of the participants were further confirmed and clarified.

Findings and discussion

The participants described a range of knowledge and experiences on the religious cum cultural significance of names and naming practices in their various communities. These experiences are analyzed under the following three major sub-themes; significance of name and naming in Igbo society, motivating factors in the choice of name, and the dynamic nature of naming practices/ ceremony in Igbo society.

Significance of names and naming. In both the Anambra and Enugu States of Nigeria, it was discovered that meanings are attached to every name bears by the indigenes. As such, an Igbo name goes beyond a mere tag. It conveys some important and salient values and worldviews of the Igbo people and communities. For example, the participants hold that the name of a child bear has a strong influence on the life, destiny, future, and behavior of such a child. They also see a child's name as a means of identity. While both Nnaobi (personal interview) and Meche (personal interview) believe that the name given to a child determines the child's destiny, Mebo (personal interview), and Ezika (personal interview) hold that this is not in all situations. Illustrating how the name given to a child can influence the child's future or destiny, Basim (personal interview) maintained:

There was a child named 'Ogadinma' (It shall be well). Everything about her is ogadinma (it shall be well) and she later renamed her name to 'Odiwomma' (Is well). After that, things began to go well instantly for her.

Eziaka further submits:

Sometimes the name given to somebody follows him. There are some names you give a child and it will psychologically affect his or her destiny. Names like Ndididi (patience), Ositadimma, Ekete of Oburu (if negative or positive God knows)

Rather than influencing the child's destiny, Oga (personal interview) and Obee (personal interview) were of the view that the name a child bears influences his or her behavior. Oga expressed the influence of a name on the life and behavior of a child when she noted:

One's name helps one in life. For example, a name like Chinazo (God's protects) protects one no matter the challenges in life, while names like Agummadu (Lion in Human form) make one behave like a loin or devourer.

The participants unanimously agreed that a child's name served as the very first source of identity for the child. According to them, it provides a sense of who a

child or a person is and the community the person comes from and also helps in protecting and propagating the family pedigree. According to Nnaobi, names such as *Onweluego*, *Ojiazu*, *Abadagu*, and *Nwaalor* are inherited names in his community Obosi and they explain the family and village where the bearer of each of the names came from. It provides an easy identification of the bearer.

The above positions of the participants have in one way or another aligned with previous studies on the subject matter. For example, Oha (2018) in his study observes that “names in Igbo as in many African cultures and religions are not mere labels, rather they reflect the immutable desires of the sires and the community in which the child is born to commune on the creator in designing his destiny” (97). Thus for Chukwu (2018):

Igbo names played significant roles in sustaining traditional values and language as well as marking one’s identity... Igbo names have great value and tell a lot of stories about the people’s cultural values such as ambition, hospitality, morality, and peaceful co-existence therefore, Igbo names portray complete diction of the child’s past, present, and future. (1)

In his comparative study of the effect of culture on naming ceremonies in Igbo and Yoruba societies in Nigeria, Rasak (2010) finds out that each name tells a story about the individual, his family, and the society to which he belongs (15). This also reinforces Achebe’s (1982) position that an Igbo name is a full-length philosophical statement:

If you want to know how life has treated an Igbo man, a good place to look is the names his children bear. His fears, his joys, his sorrow, grievances against his fellows, or complaints about the way he has been used by fortune, even straight historical records are all there (67& 96).

For Anyachonkeya(2014):

The names of children of the Igbo are a projection of not only the whims of the parents but also a window through which we mirror their lives and concatenations. Such names constitute an aphorism unto themselves as well as an exemplum of their worldview, what may in Igbo be referred to as *Uwa Ndi Igbo*. (113)

Thus, “Igbo names are given from the heart not from a list of prearranged names. Igbo names cannot be collected in a book. They come from the imagination of the heart. They are created via events and situations”(Cookey & Ijioma, 2019:27).

The various significance of naming was also highlighted by the participants. The participants saw naming and the various processes involved as a means of introducing the newborn child to the family, friends, and community, whose primary aim is to develop a bond between the newborn child and the family members, friends, and the community at large.

Motivating factors in the choice of a name. Participants identified many factors that inform the choice of name for a newborn in their different communities. Four major factors emerged from the participant’s views; the market day a child is

born, the circumstances or occurrences at the birth of a child, and the religious/philosophical beliefs and values of the family or community, the recorded achievement of the father or forefather of the child. Concerning the first factor, it is very common for the people of Anambra State to name a child after the very market day on which the child is born). According to Oga and Nnaobi:

A child born on *Eke* (the first Igbo market day) is often named *Nweke* (for male), *Ekegboo*, *Mgbaeke* (for female). Same are with children born on *Oye*, *Afor* and *Nkwo* market days. They are often named *Nwoyeoka*, *Okoye*, (for male), *Mgboye* (for female); *Okafor* (for male), and *Mgbafor* (for female); *Nwankwo*, *Nkwoka* (for male), *Nkwogbo*, and *Mgbankwo* (for female) and so on.

The practice of naming children after the Igbo native market days embodies some religious undertone. It is believed in Igbo traditional society that each market day has its own *Chi* (goddess). Naming a child after the market days is a sign of recognizing and appreciating the particular *Chi* that permits the birth of the child. This recognition and appreciation is very important in Igbo traditional society. The Igbo people believe that every person has his or her personal *Chi* and that the much a person becomes in life depends solely on his or her *Chi*. It is important to note that these beliefs have been stronger in the traditional society than it is today. Many factors however could be responsible for this. One part is the influence of social change on the perception of the population and then the influence of Christianity.

The second important factor that is shared by the participants as a motivation towards name-giving in Igbo society is the circumstance or occurrences at the child's birth. The circumstances could take diverse forms; child mortality, delayed conception, consistence miscarriages, rampant death, trial, and persecution, among others. Thus Nnaobi observed:

A family that experiences child mortality much would give the child names like "*Onwuteaka*" (death does not come close), "*Onwulozoo*" (death it is enough), and so on. There is a say in Igbo that "*Afa onye na-eyi ya*" (one's name resembles the person).

Concerning this Oga remarked:

Names such as *oguguomakwa* or *Chinekeguguom akwa* (has wiped my tears or God has wiped my tears), *Chiazagom* (God has answered my prayer) were often given when the parent of the newborn baby had gone through rigorous afflictions or pains, which could take the form of delayed childbearing, miscarriages or other forms of problem in having a child.

Both Obee and Oga had to narrate their personal experiences to bring home how circumstances can influence the choice of the name parents give to their children.

Obee submits:

One of my daughters was named "*Ogechukwu*" (God's time). This name was given to her because of the condition I went through before her birth. I waited for ten good years after my first child before I finally conceived. And when the child

came, I suggested to my husband that the baby girl be named “*Ogechukwu*” (God’s time).

Oga noted:

My second son’s name is “*Omeifvejideofor*” (meaning whatever you do try to hold justice). This name was given to him as a result of the trial and persecution my husband went through at the hands of his stepmother. It was during this period of persecution that my second son was born and my husband had to name him “*Omeifvejideofor*”.

It is important to note here that it is not always a negative circumstance that informs the choice of a name in Igbo society. The blessing recorded during the birth of a child also influences a child’s name. This was observed by Nnaobi “A child born during the time the father built a zinc house maybe called *Unoigwe* (sky house), *Oyiboka* (modern technology is great), *Onyinyechukwu* (God’s blessing) and so on.

As earlier observed, the participants from the two States concede to the religious factors in naming a child in their various communities. “A man who wishes his child to be close to God would give the child names like *Chukwuka* (God is great) for male and *Chidimma* (God is good) for female” (Nnaobi). Another important religious value identified by participants that is often considered when choosing the name a child bears in Igbo society is to engage in *Igba-Afa* (divination) to ascertain the departed member of the family who reincarnated the new child. Oga narrated her own experience when she submitted:

My immediate brother was named “*Akuchidebelu*” (Wealth kept by God), the name of our mother’s late father. When he was born, our mother saw him as a replica of her late father, and thus, had a firm belief that her late father had chosen to visit her through the newborn son. So she then named the son after her late father’s name “*Akuchidebelu*”.

The purpose of this practice is to ascertain the true identity of the departed member of the family that re-incarnated in the new child known in the Igbo language as *Ino-Uwa* (Reincarnation or coming back to the world (Ekwunife, 1999). This practice has a strong bearing on African-Igbo traditional religious thoughts and worldviews. A thorough examination of the Igbo religious worldview indicates that the Igbo people have a strong reverence for their ancestral link. The reason is quite understandable. The Igbo community as meant to understand consists of both the visible and invisible beings. “A community for the Igbo denotes first and foremost an ontological, moral, religious, and effective quality of human relations. It is ontological in so far as all the members of the community are believed to have descended from a common ancestor” (Nzomiwu, 1999). Thus, Ekwunife (1999) submits “aside the belief that the ancestors bring blessings and serve as a watchdog over their families, Igbo revered their ancestors much because of the belief in *Ino- Uwa* (Reincarnation)” (12). In the Awka area of Anambra State for example:

An average Awka man does have a special regard for any of his children believed to have been endowed with the personality traits of the departed members of his family. This is why names like *Nnanna* (my father's father), *Nnemme* (my mother's mother), and *Nnenna* (my mother's father) were household names in Igbo land (Allison, 2024: 314).

This religious worldview continued to influence most of the decisions taken by an average Igbo man. Yet others still submit that the achievements of a child's father or forefather inform the name a child bears in Igbo society. According to Mebo, names like "*Ikenna* (Father's strength), *Ikenkwuaba* (*the pride of my strength*) *Nwabunnaya* (*a replica of his father*), *Nnabuike* (*Father is strength*) and among others portray the unique and strong reputations left behind by the child's father or forefather in the society.

Naming ceremony. The participants apart from one person agree that naming is often marked with a ceremony. From the description presented by the participants, the ceremony has two major dimensions; there is the social and the religious dimensions. The first dimension of the naming ceremony involves the gathering of family members, friends and well-wishers, age grade, and above all, the extended family of the parents of the child being named (that is, the *Umunna* as called in the Igbo language). It is a moment of rejoicing with the child's parents and exchange of gifts for the new baby. The guests are in turn entertained properly with food and drinks. The second dimension, which is the religious dimension showcases the important religious values of the Igbo people. In some communities, the very first step during naming is the *Igba-Afa* (Divination) to ascertain the departed member of the family that comes back to life in the newborn child. This is often marked with some ritual incantations as can be seen in Nnado, of Anambra. The naming ceremony in Nnado in Anambra East Local Government area of Anambra State was narrated by Igu (personal interview) and Eloma (personal interview). According to Igu:

In my community Nando in the olden days the elderly ones gives names to a child. After one month of the birth of the child, the father takes the child to the head of the village along with the child's mother. They will work around the palace seven times. The head of the village will give a name to the child. There will be breaking of cola nut. Alligator pepper will be chewed and poured into the child's eyes. Then the child will start crying and afterwards, handed over to her mother.

Related experience was shared by Eloma:

After the birth of a child in my community Nando, the child will not open his or her eyes. The mother of the child will put her breast milk into the child's eyes. After four market days the child will be taken to the village square, where the elders will lay hands on the child and say prayers for the child, and name will be given to the child.

The naming experience in Obosi presents a related and as well unique feature:

The ceremony that accompanies giving a name to the new born is called “*Ipuifenwa*” which is “*Ibanwa Afa*”. The parents will invite friends, and members of his extended family (*Umunna*) including that of his wife. When the invitees are gathered, the mother will bring out the baby, and hand him or her to the husband who in turn hands the child to his. He would give the child to the eldest man in his family who takes the child, prays for him/her with cola nuts, after which he calls the child name to the hearing of all the people present. A plate is then brought and all the people present will put money in the plate pronouncing their blessings for the baby (Nnaobi) .

It would be necessary to reflect further on the significance of Oji- Igbo and *Oseora* in every known Igbo society. Oji Igbo or the Igbo cola-nut (*cola acuminata*) is used for prayers in different ceremonies in Igbo society to ask God Almighty for blessings. These include title-taking ceremonies, Igbo traditional marriage ceremonies, white weddings, child-naming ceremonies, a celebration of new yam festivals, and other important feasts. Igbo cola nut, as Olikeyi (2001) submits: Is so unique that every part seems to carry a symbolic charge, ranging from its structure to its color and taste... the tiny central lobe that holds all the cotyledons intact is a special part for the spirits. it symbolizes the unity and central interaction that exist between the visible and the invisible worlds.(119 - 120)

Aside from the religious significance, the presentation of Oji Igbo to one’s guest or visitor is perceived by the Igbo as a sign of welcome by the host. It symbolizes how happy the people are in receiving their visitors. Ekwunife (1990) sums up the meanings cola-nut (Oji- Igbo) conveys for the Igbo in the following words:

Kola-nut expresses, communicates, and unifies Igbo ideas of friendship, acceptance, and approval, achievement, productivity, and wealth; joy and sorrow; family, village, and clan; unity and diversity of the Igbo world; hierarchy, authority, royalty and purity; wholeness of the human being; the fullness of life and the perpetual presence of the spirits among men. (109-110)

Ose-ora (alligator pepper or *Aframomum melegueta*) on the other hand, is used for many purposes in Igbo land. It is used for pacification of spirits against evil spirit attacks, it is a cleansing item in the sense that a person who breaks the rule must be cleansed with the *Ose-ora* before the deity will forgive the person, and it is also used in libation in Igbo religion by the practitioners, and finally, it is used in prayers for good luck.

The naming ceremony has many imports. It is according to Ogwa (personal interview) a source of initiation, identification, and belongingness to the community. Articulating the spiritual/ religious significance of the naming ceremony, Ugwu (personal interview) maintains that “naming ceremony initiates one into the kingdom of humans because until a child is named, he or she still belongs to two kingdoms; the kingdom of human and that of unborn children”. This reflects the African-Igbo worldview which divides the universe into two realms; *Uwa ana ahu anya* (visible world) and *Uwa anaghi ahu anya* (the invisible

world). “These worlds, that is the visible and the invisible worlds are not mutually exclusive, but overlap. The invisible world made up of *Eluigwe* (the sky above) and *Ala-Mmuo* (the spirit world) as well as *Ala-Mmadu* (the human world) are inhabited by beings” (Madu, 1996:5). So, what Ugwu was trying to emphasize is that until a child receives a human name, such a child cannot be said to belong to the visible world. It is by receiving human names that a child moves from the spirits or invisible realm, which he describes as the kingdom of the unborn to the kingdom of humans- the *Ala-Mmadu* (human world). The above experience was not very far from Nwoye’s (2015) two major significant naming ceremonies in Igbo society: It is by this ceremony that the newly born Igbo child gets to become defined as an individuated human through the ritual act of being assigned a name by which to identify him or her in the course of her earthly existence. It showed that the cultural practice of the Igbo naming ceremony encompasses six -stage processes, namely; announcement, preparation, welcoming and presentation of a gift to the child, ritual presentation/ naming of the child, feasting/ communion, and departure stage. (276)

Rasak (2010) “believes that the prayers offered for the child during his naming ceremony played an important role in the life of the child thus named; during the prayers, special requests are made for a life worth living and an enjoyable one for the child” (15).

It is important also to observe that there was no uniform term used for naming in the two States studied. Different terms have been identified and these include; “*Iba afa*” or *Iba Afva*; “*Ipuifenwa*”, “*Ibanwa Afa*” *Igu Afa*” or “*Izu Afa*”. The different terms or spelling, nevertheless, do not constitute any threat whatsoever. It only reflects the diverse dialects found among the Igbo. The same variation was witnessed concerning the timing for naming. The participants present different days as obtainable in their various communities. In Anambra State naming could take place on *Izu-asa* (7 Igbo market days, i.e 28 days) as can be seen in Awka and Obosi, or on four market days or one month as seen in Nnado. In Enugu State, naming could take place between 1- 2 weeks (in *Aku*) and 16 days (in Enugu-Ezike). It is important to note that *Izu* in Igbo language means one week. For the Igbo people, a week (*Izu*) is made up of four Igbo native market days (*Eke, Ori, Afor, Nkwo*). While the conventional week is counted 7 days, a week (that is *Izu*) is counted 4 days in Igbo society.

Nevertheless, the above values expressed by the Igbo people through their names and naming processes, as lamented by the participants have been under serious threat of extinction in the contemporary era. This situation as the participants observed poses a challenge to the continuity of these cherished Igbo values often communicated through their names. The different factors identified as responsible for these current attitudes according to the participants include the preference for more English-sounding names to Igbo traditional names by the younger generation, the blending of Igbo names with English names, and lastly, the increased love and preference for a more abridged- form of the original

names to the full names/ pronunciation (see Table 2). The participants noted that the younger families no longer adhere to the principles and procedures of naming in Igbo traditional society. They instead named their children after a celebrity or a model or went for a name picked in books.

Table 2. The original and abridged forms of Igbo names and their meanings

Original Name	Original meaning	Abridged form	Abridged meaning
Chukwubikem	God is my strength	Bikem	My strength
Chidimma	God is good	Dimma	Is good
Chimamanda	My God never fails	Amanda	Never fails
Ebubechukwu	God's glory	Ebube	Glory
Kenechukwu	Thanks be to God	Kene	Thanks
Amarachukwu	God's favour	Amara	Favour
Kaosisochukwu	As it pleases God	Kaosi	As it
Ogechukwu	God's time	Oge	Time
Ebelechukwu	God's Mercy	Ebele	Mercy
Uchechukwu	God's wish	Uche	Wish
Chukwunnoso	God is close	Nnoson	Is close
Chineyenwa	God gives children	Nnenye	It gives
Chukwuebuka	God is great	Ebuka	Great
Chinecherem	God thinks for me	Neeche	It thinks
Onyekachi	Who is greater than God	Onyeka	Who is greater
Chetachukwu	Remember God	Cheta	Remember
Chukwujekwu	God will speak	Jekwu	Will speak
Chizoba	God protects	Zoba	Protects
Toochukwu	Praise God	Too	Praise
Arizechukwu	Thanks be to God	Arize	Thanks
Chibueze	God is king	Eze	King
Nwakaego	Child is greater than money	Ego	Money
Nkeiruka	The future is greater	Nkeiru	The future
Ndukaku	Life is greater than wealth	Nduka	Life is greater

Source: From the KII sessions

Conclusion

The study has successfully ex-rayed the religious significance of names and naming in the two States of South Eastern Nigeria; Anambra and Enugu. It has revealed that Igbo names as with most African names are not just mere labels/tags or a convenient badge of identity, rather they always bear a message, a meaning, and a prayer. It embodied information on the people's philosophy of life. This is why naming is not carried out haphazardly in Igbo society. There ought to be some motivating factors that inform the choice of every name, among which is the religious values and worldviews of the parents and the community. The process of naming is often marked with some sort of ceremony; which encompasses the religious, social, and cultural worldviews of the Igbo. Unfortunately, these rich Igbo values often communicated through their traditional names are under serious threat of extinction in the contemporary time. The resultant effect would be the loss of identity. The sustainability of these values would therefore lie greatly on the ability of the elderly members of the Igbo societies to re-orienting the younger ones and re-enforcing these values in their different communities today.

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