




# Environmental determinant of religious names: A study of *Úgwú* and naming among the Nsukka-Igbo people of Nigeria

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This article makes a contribution towards understanding the correlation between *Úgwú* (hill or mountain) and personal names among the Igbo people of Nigeria. Sacralisation of the natural environment which include hills or mountains is a belief that cuts across religions. Among the Igbo, the perceived sacred value placed on such natural environment prompted a series of socio-cultural changes. Personal names are usually drawn from deified entities such as the earth, sun, rivers, and so on. Studies on Igbo personal names portrayed the environmental determinant for personal names in different Igbo-subcultures. However, the pattern of Nsukka-Igbo names, influenced specifically by *Úgwú* has hardly gotten any scholarly attention. This study, therefore, provided evidence that *Úgwú* is the single most environmental element that shaped the culture of naming among the Nsukka-Igbo people with its psycho-social and economic implications. Drawing from the theory of sacralisation, which stresses on placing religious values on objects, this article showed that the deified *Úgwú* environment influenced an unprecedented frequency and exclusive nature of *Úgwú* personal names in the study area. Documentary research, observation and interview methods were used to collect and analyse secondary, as well as primary data for this study. The article drew attention to the increasing influence of *Úgwú* on personal names in Nsukka-Igbo, and its effects which include the conservation of the environment occasioned by the deification of *Úgwú*.

**Contribution:** This article shows that the deification of natural environment of *Úgwú* influenced the increasing frequency of *Úgwú* personal names and its associated variants among the Nsukka-Igbo people of Nigeria.

**Keywords:** *Úgwú*; hill; mountain; personal names; sacralisation; environment; conservation; taboos.

## Introduction

This study showed that the geographical prevalence and associated religious belief of *Úgwú* (hill or mountain) shapes the nature, type and frequency of the use of *Úgwú*<sup>1</sup> personal names among the Nsukka-Igbo people of Nigeria. The special topography of Nsukka with hills (Unameh 2018) and valleys probably triggered a rather religious consciousness among the forebears and progenitors of the people. This is not surprising considering the prevailing theses on African religious thought and worldview that support the interpretation of every natural or human experience through religious prism (Kagama 2015; Mbiti 2015; Ndemanu 2018; Nyamiti 1977). The natural environment such as hills, mountains, valleys, lakes, trees, et cetera are deified in many traditional societies. The native Americans, the Aboriginal Australians (Gratani et al. 2016), the local Indians, other indigenous human groups in Africa (Ashanti, Ghana; Yoruba, Igbo, Nigeria; Zulu, South Africa et cetera) and elsewhere in the world developed myths around hills or mountains that affected among other things naming patterns and personal names. In Africa for instance, this traditional system of belief is entrenched despite the increasing influence of the 'two dominant foreign religions – Christianity and Islam' (Olatunde 2016). Although significant variations may exist, the belief to consider or attach spiritual meaning to mountains, hills, et cetera among the practitioners of African religion correlates with the practices in animism. However, the indigenous religion of Africa cannot be exclusively cornered to this belief system in light of the shreds of evidence on monotheism (Awolalu 1976; Ekeke & Ekeopara 2010; Luyaluka 2017; Mbiti 2015; Ngedu 2014; Parrinder 1970).

1. Personal names, also known as anthroponomy, are a set of names by which individuals are known.

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Yet, it cannot be denied that there is an apparent influence on the belief in natural environment, particularly hills and mountains that shape the peoples' personal names.

In African societies, personal names are not merely identifiers and labels but have deep socio-cultural meanings and functions (Agyekum 2006; Akinnaso 2013; Falaju & Yusuf 2020; Mandende 2009; Suzman 2009). Earlier theorists (Adamic 1942; Markey 1982; Searle 1967) on personal names had pointed at anthroponomy as mere tags or identifiers. This is not the case in Igbo, nor in the African society. Circumstances surrounding a child's birth determine the type or nature of name to be given (Nkamigbo 2019; Onumajuru 2016). For instance, *Chizaram ekpere* [God has answered my prayer], *Chiagoziem* [God has blessed me], *Uchechi* [as God wishes], *Chibuikem* [God is my strength], *Chioma* [good God], *Obianuju* [One who was born after her older siblings], and *Somadina* [let me not be the only child] and so on, are all indicative of the experiences and expectations of parents before and after the birth of a child. Similarly, the beliefs that certain children have the ability to reincarnate and be born several times by the same mother (Ilechukwu 2007; Stephenson 1986), cause the death of their siblings, or make their parents impotent or barren have survived from the ancient to the modern Igbo. Therefore, a child could be named *Somadina* so as to open the opportunities of luck for more children in the family.

Studies on the origin and nature of Igbo personal names (anthroponomy) abound (Jell-Bahlsen 1988; Mmadike 2014; Ogbulogo 1999; Okagbue et al. 2017; Udoye 2019). These works recognised the place of religion and importance of names in Igbo. Few of the works (Jell-Bahlsen 1988; Mmadike 2014; Njoku 2007) dealt with aspects of the environmental determinants of personal names in different Igbo sub-cultural groupings. However, none have studied the pattern of Nsukka-Igbo names with a significant variant from other Igbo sub-cultures. This study focuses on the peculiar Nsukka-Igbo personal names which are specifically shaped by religious beliefs and is influenced by the natural environment of *Úgwú* – hills or mountains. Drawing from the theory of sacralisation, this article establishes that the religious implications of *Úgwú* personal names in Nsukka-Igbo have effects on the socio-cultural life of the people which includes the conservation of *Úgwú*.

The study, in part, adopted a documentary method as data used were drawn from secondary sources – archival materials, journals, books and internet sources. Besides, observation and interview methods were also used to collect primary data and were interpreted through logical inference and content analysis. The article found that the persistent belief on *Úgwú* as element of religion and its effect on people's personal names have tremendous socio-cultural implications which include but are not limited to the conscious efforts to protect *Úgwú* as a symbol of religious belief.

## Theoretical underpinning

The theory of sacralisation, originally linked to Emile Durkheim (Marshall 2010:86), explains the system of belief

that assigns sacred 'roles' to animate or inanimate objects which include physical or natural environment. Sacralisation, as Montemaggi (2015:291) argued, connotes 'a process whereby individual religious actors and groups construct religious tradition by attributing value to single ideas (sic) and practices'. Recent studies on religious actors attributing values on objects have linked Emile Durkheim's ground-breaking 'work on sacred-profane dichotomy' (D'Orsi & Fabio 2018). In Durkheim's thesis, the sacred seems to be the superstructure or the central feature of religion, as he described religion as 'a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden' (Biswas 2018; Gharavi 2014). A growing number of scholars support Durkheim in linking sacred objects with deep social implications in societies (Caillois 2001; Lamothe 1998; Schmidt 2001; Zika 1988). Indeed, objects framed as sacred in every religion could elicit both positive or negative social reactions. The Bible and the Q'uran, which are perceived as sacred texts by Christians and Muslims, respectively, increasingly affect the cultural lives of people around the world. Ideas from these texts led different human groups onto the path of civilisation and development, peace-building, protection of the environment, helping the poor, et cetera (Gibb 2013; Mangalwadi 2012). In contrast, these texts, in their different degrees, also influenced uncritical zeal and fanaticism that is at the centre of terrorism (Niditch 1995) and destruction of the environment. Countless senseless wars, massacres, genocides and so on were perpetrated as if the human agents were acting-out the scenes in these sacred texts. These actions appear to be the effects of Rudolph Otto's idea of *Omininous* – a non-rational feeling or emotion from one's religious conviction (Sarbacker 2016). Indeed, the out-pouring of emotion attached to sacred objects by members of a group produces mixed and contradictory reactions; it could either be good or evil.

Though African religion does not have written scriptures like in many other religions, certain oral traditions are thought to be sacred, and have the same functions. Besides, hills and mountains, the ocean, land and landscapes, et cetera, are sacralised in many religions including African traditional religion (ATR) (Mbiti 2015). Because the beliefs and practices in ATR have survived the strong influences from foreign religions, particularly Christianity and Islam, sacralisation of hills and mountains, land and landscape, et cetera, appears to be common among contemporary Africans irrespective of their religious inclinations. Pinnacles of hills or mountains for instance, have become scenes of special prayer sessions<sup>2</sup> among the Christian communities of Nsukka-Igbo.

Certain areas of hills or mountains around Nsukka are adorned with vestiges of shrines and sacred grooves where sacrifices and worship are performed by the adherents of ATR. Drawing from the theory of sacralisation, it is interesting

2. It is regular to see Christian religious worshippers attending prayer sessions on hills or mountain like *Úgwú ezema*, *Úgwú lejja*, *Úgwú arba*, *Úgwú* queens et cetera situated in Nsukka environs. The people subjectively reconstruct the concept of desert to mean hill or mountain. According to Nnedinso (a 40-year-old Christian believer who was interviewed at Amankwo village, Nsukka, on 30 December 2019) who usually visits Ugwu Ezema, the serenity in the desert draws the presence of God.

to observe that placing religious values on hills or mountains among the Nsukka-Igbo people has enormous social implications. The authors, employing random sampling method,<sup>3</sup> observed that over 15% of the personal names among the people are connected to *Úgwú*. As names are not mere tags and identifiers in African societies, *Úgwú* personal names have interesting socio-religious significances. Activists, among them the worshippers and adherents of ATR, challenge the destruction of *Úgwú* as Nsukka environs are constantly urbanised. Such efforts to conserve *Úgwú* have resulted in a clash of interests between developers and the activists.<sup>4</sup>

From the foregoing, it can be clearly derived that the sacralisation theory fittingly explains the process of placing religious value on the *Úgwú* natural environment as this affects personal names and other cultural aspects of the people of Nsukka-Igbo and beyond.

## Nsukka-Igbo worldview on *Úgwú*

Nsukka is among the different subcultures within the Igbo ethnic group in south-eastern Nigeria. The region comprises 88 rural communities and the Nsukka Urban centre, which is referred to as university town, because of the presence of the University of Nigeria (Madu 2007:111). Nsukka seems to be a reconstructed version of Ns'ka which is commonly used among the local and indigenous people. Perhaps the challenge posed by the dialectical pronunciation of the vowel between 'S' and 'K' in the original version of the word influenced the early missionaries and educators to add the vowel 'u', hence Nsukka. Oral history reveals that Nsukka, Obukpa, Eha Rumona and Okpuje were the sons of Asadu – the progenitor of the people (Shelton 1968). Nsukka was later known for his heroic deeds and power to clear a large expanse of land.<sup>5</sup> Ns'ka is perceived to be connected to 'Ns'aa' meaning 'let me cut', probably grass. The suffix 'ka' could suggest 'better'. These ideas are suggestive of the proficiency of Nsukka over his brothers to clear bushes in the plain or valleys, rather than in the hilly or mountainous areas.

Nsukka is used in a generic sense to describe the various communities and towns that make up what is known as the Northern Igbo group (Abidogun 2007; Shelton 1968). In another usage, Nsukka being part of the towns that make up the aforementioned group is a distinct town of three quarters: Nkpunano, Nru and Ihe na Owerre. Moreover, Nsukka is a local government comprising 12 towns. From the foregoing, it needs to be clarified that Nsukka is used in three separate senses:

- As a subculture and geopolitical distinction;
- As a name of a town;
- As a local government area.

3.The authors observing the principles of random sampling method, assessed the class lists of students in the University of Nigeria and observed this pattern of names.

4.This is the view of our informant, Ugwuja Ishiwu (a 79-year-old farmer interviewed on 05 January 2020 in Eha-Elumonah).

5.A local Nsukka musician Onununwa popularised this concept in her song *Ns'ka d' oyi*.

In this study, Nsukka is conceived as northern Igbo group which comprises all the three items as stated above. Among the various towns that make up Nsukka, there are resemblances and cultural affinities expressed mainly in their dialects, food, masquerade tradition, marriage customs, and rites of passage. Nsukka people are found mainly in Enugu state, south-eastern Nigeria. Nonetheless, this does not preclude the existence of these people (Nsukka) in other regions in Nigeria. The term Enugu or *Elu-Ugwu* could be loosely translated as a summit of a hill or mountain. The name appears to be a symbolic reminder of the hilly or mountainous landscape of Enugu State. Many of the communities in Enugu state including Enugu capital city, Udi, Nkanu, and Nsukka, share these topographical characteristics. In Nsukka for example, as many as 51 different hills or mountains were recorded or counted by the authors.<sup>6</sup>

Hills or mountains in Nsukka have a special religious significance. *Úgwú* in its linguistic categorisation could be hill or mountain. Perhaps for lack of appropriate label and classification, *Úgwú* is used in a generic sense to describe 'natural land formation with a significant protruded landscape' (Rosenberg 2020). The specification that mountains should have a well-defined summit as opposed to the rounded feature of hills is not considered in Igbo vocabulary and understanding of the distinction between mountain and hill. The placement of an adjective or suffix *ja*, *ntikiri*, *obere* (different dialectal names for 'small' within Nsukka) or *kan'*, *shire*, *nukwu* (different dialectal names for 'big' within Nsukka) before *Úgwú* is a mark of distinguishing the size of a particular *Úgwú*. Depending on the size of *Úgwú* in an area, *Ugwuja* (small hill or mountain) in town 'X' could appear to be *Ugwukan'* (big hill or mountain) in town 'Y', and vice versa. It is interesting to note that *Úgwú* is part of *earth* or *land*, which is marked by its height or elevation, size, and summit. In a more elaborate understanding, Nwala (2010:7) affirmed that *Ala* includes *Ala-miri* and *ala okpo*. *Ala-miri* includes the oceans, seas, rivers, streams, lakes, et cetera on which water spirits live together with fishes and other aquatic living things and objects. *Ala okpo* includes the dry land on which living beings (man, animals, living insects, tress, et cetera) exist. It also includes the mountains, hills and valleys.

*Earth* or *land* in Nsukka dialect is referred to as *Al'*. *Ani*, *ana*, *ali*, and *Ale* could also be regarded as earth or land in other Igbo dialects and subgroups. This part of natural environment has a special religious importance with well established myths regarding its origin and use. In Nsukka and by extension 'Igbo traditional religion, pantheon of gods or goddesses is a remarkable feature' (Kanu 2018). They are the 'go between' and intermediaries between man (*mmadu*) and God (*Chukwu*). Among these intermediaries is the *al'* – *earth-goddess*. This goddess seems to be more recognised in

6.Even though there are numerous hills and mountains around Nsukka, it was difficult for the authors to accurately and manually count them owing to financial limitations, difficult terrains, and other challenging experiences.

different Igbo subcultures. Water or lake goddess, of which Jell-Bahlsen<sup>7</sup> (2008) studied, is common among those living around the river or lake. The role of the goddess is not only to make the earth fertile for agriculture, it functions as a guardian of morality (Kanu 2018). In addition to the veneration of the earth-goddess in Nsukka, there is a special *Úgwú* deity. It is believed to have great powers in guarding the people from calamity, protecting them, and helping to sustain peace and well-being. Apart from the *Onu-al'* or *earth-goddess shrine*, there are numerous individual and community *Úgwú* shrines. These shrines are located at different hills or mountains that are in the study area. Learning from the theory of origin of religion (Culotta 2009), it is perhaps possible that the breath-taking features of many of these hills or mountains inspired the forebears of Nsukka-Igbo traditional religion to create an animistic style of worshipping *Chukwu*, through *Úgwú*. In an interview with Emeka Ojukwu by Forsyth (1982), the interviewee argued that:

[T]he black man faced with a strange mountain, quickly turns his back on this terrifying monster, seeks out a calf from his miserable herd and begins the regular sacrifice to the god of the mountain. Very soon the mountain has become sacred and therefore impenetrable. (p. 136)

Ojukwu's position is a common belief among the different human groups within Africa, particularly the Igbo. The awe and amazing height of hills and mountains around Nsukka possibly led to the deification of *Úgwú* among the people in the area, just as Ojukwu rightly observed. Different African societies place a high religious premium on hills and mountains alike. Among the Karamoja peoples of Uganda:

God's presence is denser in high places, especially on a dominant mountain (*emoru*) which reaches into the heavens above the clouds and so therefore [*sic*] closer to His abode. Mountain people, particularly the Ik and the Sor, inevitably have a spiritual potency denied to the plains people, at least so long as the former are in their mountain homeland. (Knighton 1999:122)

This trend of belief has been recorded among the Akan (Ghana), Zulu (South Africa), Kikuyu (Kenya), Sukuma (Tanzania), Hamar (Ethiopia), Yoruba or Igbo (Nigeria), and so on. Like in many African societies, the worldview of Nsukka people is anchored on religion. In other words, every human experience within this group is interpreted through religion. Nsukka (Igbo) people are predominantly Christians. But there are remnants of the 'dying' ATR in the area. Also present are the members of Islamic religion; there is a record of slow but steady growth of Islam especially within Enuguwu Ezike and Ibagwa Aka (Rufia 2012; Uchendu 2010). These two towns, part of the Northern Igbo communities, are also known as Nsukka. Bearing in mind the theory and principles of acculturation or enculturation (Kim 2007), a change of

7. Sabine Jell-Bahlsen is an anthropologist whose works are dedicated to African cultures, particularly Igbo. The authors' rare opportunity to have a discussion with Sabine on lake goddess during the Africanity Conference held at University of Nigeria, Nsukka (9–13 December 2018) has partly enriched their understanding of peculiar intermediary in Oru-Igbo subculture.

culture, expressed in part through syncretism and apostasy, is inevitable as the people interact within the same space.

Hills and mountains also have special significance in Christian, as well as Islamic religions. Jewish patriarch Moses was given the Decalogue or the Ten Commandments by God at mountain Sinai. The activities between Moses and God on the mountain (Winther-Nielsen 2005) extol sacralisation of the mountain. Although the Sinai's narrative was silent on the nearness of the mountain's summit to where Yahweh lives, other incidence like the Tower of Babel story (Marlowe 2011; Gn 11:4), implicate thoughts of closeness between the mountain's pinnacle or high-rising structure and supposed God's abode. Although the Christian, as well as Islamic worldviews, in part, relate to Knighton's report on the Karamoja peoples, this is not consistent with Nsukka people's perception of *Úgwú* in relation to nearness to heaven or abode of God. Even though *Elu-igwe* (above the sky) has since been thought to be where God resides by many contemporary Igbo, our informants have a different opinion. They argued that almighty God, the good spirits and ancestors stay in *Ogwa* (abode in the hereafter), which is not conceived in equitable terms as Christian heaven. For Opata,<sup>8</sup> Attamah,<sup>9</sup> and Ishiwu<sup>10</sup> *Ogwa's* location unlike the 'heaven that is situated above the clouds' cannot be known by mortal beings. The deification of *kpakpando* (star/s), *onwa* (moon), *anyawu* or *enyanwu* (sun), *ala* or *al'* (earth), *Mmiri* or *m'nyji* (water), *Úgwú* in Nsukka-Igbo religion, appears to be more of the enactment and sacralisation of intriguing objects. It is most likely on this note that *Úgwú* was sacralised. In spite of the fact that the majority of the contemporary people of Nsukka now profess Christianity, sacralisation and conservation of *Úgwú* has remained with significant social-cultural implications. The personal names connected to *Úgwú* and their associated variations, which are common among the people, is a clear reminder of the influence of *Úgwú* deity on the life of the people.

## *Úgwú* religious or personal names among Nsukka-Igbo

Hundreds of names connected to *Úgwú* with other prefixes or suffixes are found among the people of Nsukka more than any other Igbo group. The authors observed this trend as they compared patterns of personal names from different people within the Igbo nation. It is not erroneous to conclude that about 50% of personal names connected to *Úgwú* are part of the identifiers and peculiarities of Nsukka people. The influence of *Úgwú* deity on personal names could suggest its 'sweeping importance' in the life of these people. For instance, one of the respondents narrated how her father was given Ugwu as his first name at birth:

8. Damian Opata is a 71-year-old retired Professor of English and Literary studies and a devotee of ATR. He was interviewed on 21 February 2021 in Nsukka, Enugu State.

9. Joseph Attamah is a 50 year civil servant. He declined the offer to become a priest of the famous Idenyi Nkwo deity because of his new religion – Christianity. He was interviewed in Nsukka on 10 January 2021.

10. Onyishi, Ishiwu Anthony, is the eldest man in Umuario village, Nsukka. He is about 83 years old and was interviewed on 12 February 2021. He added that a place called Amala in Udenu Local government in Enugu state is where his people migrated to after death. Though, one cannot see the ancestors with our mere human eyes.

'It was after sacrifices were made at *onuokike* or *Úgwú* deity that my grand-mother gave birth to my father. My father's name was in recognition of the role played by the *Úgwú* deity.' (Ogechukwu Ugwu, 35 years old, trader, 21 February 2021, Nsukka)

This kind of reason and the fulfilment of other personal aspirations by *Úgwú* have led the people to bear *Úgwú* associated names. Among other reasons is to recognise the transcendent power and assistance of *Úgwú* or to ward-off the possible evil spirit from attacking a person. As it is argued among the people, 'a person's name "follows him or her"'. In other words, a person's destiny as it relates to success and failure could be tied to their names. This belief is deeply entrenched in Nsukka, and indeed in other Igbo subcultures. *Úgwú* personal names with their meanings are tabulated in Table 1 to Table 4, while Table 5 lists the *Úgwú* personal names whose meanings are unknown.

It is interesting to know that in spite of the burgeoning influence mainly from Christianity and Islam in Nsukka, many of the above personal names have changed forms but have not been entirely abandoned. Our informant, Onyishi Al' nwa Ezugwu or Eze-ugwu<sup>11</sup> pointed out that his surname Eze + ugwu was shortened from Eze + ugwu + onah. What he claimed to be his original name agrees with the combination of three compound words as seen in Table 2. However, shreds of evidence abound as a growing number of people in Nsukka and indeed the entire Igbo abandon their Igbo names for mainly Western names (Nkamigbo 2019). Despite this new development, *Úgwú* personal names and its numerous variants are functioning as patronyms and not forenames for a good number of people in the area. This trend was conveyed in the study of Ala names by Mmadike (2014) who observed how Ala names ceased to be borne as forenames since the advent of Christianity in Igbo land. Following this trajectory and pattern, Nsukka Christians or Muslims bear *Úgwú* names as surnames keeping their Christian or Islamic names as first names, for example, Lawrence Ugwuanyi, Christain Ugwueze, Ismail Ugwu, et cetera. Those with compound forms like Ugwu + *awoke*, et cetera, now bear *Ugwu* or *Awoke* but not both.

Studies on the interaction between Igala and the northern Igbo group – Nsukka – portray the socio-religious and political influences of the former on the later before British colonial rule in Nigeria (Shelton 1968; Umameh 2018). Warriors from the Igala ethnic group conquered the Nsukka northern Igbo group and dominated the region's political and cultural life. This could explain the reason for the Igala names, as seen in Table 3. Political conquest and cultural domination may not be the reason for the Idoma names attached, to as shown in Table 4. Probably for the sake of proximity which influenced trade and intermarriages between Idoma and the northern Igbo group (Adakole 2018), certain borrowing of names became inevitable and this could be the reason for the adaptation as shown in Table 4. Our informants and even those who bear the names as listed in Table 5 were not able to provide the meanings of the names therein. The authors

11. Onyishi Al' Nwa Ezugwu is the eldest man in Amankwo Village, Nru, Nsukka. He is about 94 years old, and was interviewed in his home on 12 January 2021.

**TABLE 1:** Nsukka *Úgwú* personal names and their meanings (one and two compound words).

Number	Personal name	Meaning
1	<i>Úgwú</i>	Hill or mountain (deity)
2	<i>Úgwú + óké</i>	Male hill or mountain
3	<i>Úgwú + já or rítikiri</i>	Small hill or mountain
4	<i>Úgwú + òdò</i>	Hill or mountain of masquerade
5	<i>Úgwú + àkù</i>	Hill or mountain of treasure
7	<i>Úgwú + ásògwá.</i>	Mountain of chief
8	<i>Úgwú + òzìòkó</i>	Hill or mountain for the 'titled chief'
9	<i>Úgwú –ànyì</i>	Our hill or mountain (Suggestive of community deity)
12	<i>Úgwú –ishiwú</i>	Hill or mountain of chiefs
13	<i>Úgwú –ònyìshì</i>	Hill or mountain for the eldest in the village or community
14	<i>Úgwú –óchá</i>	White hill or mountain
15	<i>Úgwú + ádá</i>	First daughter's hill or mountain
16	<i>Úgwú + ònàdì</i>	Hill or mountains whose fathers are alive
17	<i>Úgwú + òkòrò</i>	Hill or mountain for the boy (s)
18	<i>Úgwú + ógbú</i>	Hill or mountain of the titled men
19	<i>Úgwú + ézèá</i>	Hill or mountain of the chief
20	<i>Úgwú + èzè</i>	Hill or mountain or hill or mountain of the king
21	<i>Úgwú + òkpé</i>	Hill or mountain of hawk
22	<i>Úgwú + éké</i>	Hill or mountain for the beginning of Igbo native week
23	<i>Úgwú + èzèdè</i>	King of Ede's hill or mountain
24	<i>Úgwú + òdòdó</i>	Hill or mountain of flower
25	<i>Ézè + úgwú</i>	King of hill or mountain
26	<i>Ódò + úgwú</i>	Hill or mountain of odo (masquerade) deity
27	<i>Úgwú + ámá</i>	Hill or mountain of chief and hill or mountain of the village
28	<i>Úgwú + ìnyì</i>	Hill or mountain of special tree <i>inyi</i> that is believed to ward-off witches or wizards
29	<i>Úgwú + ídènyì</i>	Hill or mountain of goddess of Idenyi
30	<i>Ónú + úgwú</i>	Mouth or entrance of hill or mountain
31	<i>Úgwú + ègèdè.</i>	Hill or mountain of banana
32	<i>Úgwú + ágú</i>	Hill of lion
33	<i>Úgwú + àdàkà</i>	Hill or mountain of chimpanzee
34	<i>Úgwú + òkpòzì</i>	Hill or mountain of chief (s)
35	<i>Úgwú + ma</i>	Hill or mountain of masquerade

**TABLE 2:** Nsukka *Úgwú* personal names and their meanings (three compound words).

Number	Personal name	Meaning
1	<i>Úgwú+eze+ugwu (Úgwúèzúgwú)</i>	King of all hills or mountains
2	<i>Úgwú + nwá + èzè</i>	Hill or mountain of a child of a king
3	<i>Úgwú + nwá+ àrùà</i>	Hill or mountain for the child of Aruah (Aruah is a kind of mace for the eldest leader of the community)
4	<i>Úgwú + nè + ògwù</i>	Hill of the deities of <i>Úgwú</i> and Ngwu
5	<i>Úgwú + nwá+ògwù</i>	Hill or mountain, child of Ngwu deity
6	<i>Úgwú + ìyí + ányí</i>	Our hill or mountain of river
7	<i>Ézè + úgwú + òriè (Ezugworie)</i>	King's hill or mountain of the market day – orie
8	<i>Úgwú + oke + já</i>	Small male hill or mountain

**TABLE 3:** *Úgwú* personal names with Igala contacts and their meanings.

Number	Personal name	Meaning
1	<i>Úgwú + Àttá</i>	Hill or mountain of Attah of Igala
2	<i>Àttá + úgwú</i>	King's Hill or mountain
3	<i>Úgwú + àttàmà</i>	Hill or mountain of the priest
5	<i>Úgwú + ágábá</i>	Hill or mountain of lion of the lions
6	<i>Ézè + úgwú + ónà</i>	King's hill or mountain of chief
7	<i>Ugwu + onah</i>	Hill or mountain of chief
8	<i>Úgwú + Ásádù</i>	Hill or mountain for the chief lieutenant to Attah of Igala. Asadu is a probably, Nsukka version of 'Igala word, Ashadu' (Shelton 1968)

**TABLE 4:** *Úgwú* personal names with Idoma contact and their meanings.

Number	Personal name	Meaning
1	<i>Úgwú + ágbó</i>	The hill or mountain for town crier
2	<i>Úgwú + ítòdò</i>	Hill or mountain of pucupine
4	<i>Úgwú – òkwò</i>	Hill or mountain of pillar (strong men)
5	<i>Úgwú + éjé</i>	Hill or mountain of leopard

**TABLE 5:** Nsukka *Úgwú* personal names whose meanings are unknown.

Number	Personal name
1	<i>Úgwú+ òrikò.</i>
2	<i>Úgwú + ázóh</i>
3	<i>Úgwú + ágámá</i>
4	<i>Úgwú + ríhábá</i>
5	<i>Úgwú + éléké</i>
6	<i>Úgwú + ézémá</i>
7	<i>Úgwú + óbùtè òvùtè</i>
8	<i>Úgwú + ógbùké</i>
9	<i>Úgwú + ógbhéné</i>
10	<i>Úgwú + òmèjè</i>
11	<i>Úgwú + òmóké</i>
12	<i>Úgwú + áróké</i>
13	<i>Úgwú + àwóké</i>
14	<i>Úgwú + érúá</i>
15	<i>Úgwú + ónú</i>
16	<i>Úgwú + èkwò</i>
17	<i>Úgwú + òwó</i>
18	<i>Úgwú + èyè</i>
19	<i>Úgwú + òtì</i>
20	<i>Úgwú + ògòdò</i>

reasoned that probably because of the influences from Igala and Idoma, the original names might have evolved into forms whose etymological meaning is difficult to understand by the contemporary Nsukka-Igbo people.

Despite globalisation and foreign religious presence, the aforementioned personal names have survived for centuries in Nsukka. This trend and pattern of names, no doubt has considerable implication on the psychological, social and economic well-being of the people of Nsukka, the entire Igbo region, and beyond. To this end, the subsequent discourse is on the connectedness of *Úgwú* personal names, and the implication for the society with examples from Nsukka-Igbo group.

## Dimensional causation and implication of *Úgwú* names among Nsukka-Igbo

A common knowledge of causation is best described when one process, state otherwise known as ‘a cause’ leads to the production of another process otherwise known as an effect (Bunge 2012). Drawing from the knowledge of causation, *Úgwú* names have implications on the life of the people of Nsukka. These effects could be explained through psychological, and socio-economic dimensions, which are discussed in following section.

### Psychological dimension

Sigmund Freud’s famous thesis on the psychological origin of religion – religion is borne out of wish for protection from

the terrors of life and nature (Cereceda 2018) – has attracted criticisms from many scholars (Banks 1973; Kristol 1949; Palmer 2003). However, Banks (1973) acknowledged that the criticisms are not sufficient enough to entirely reject Freud’s thesis. As deduced from the theory, fear is at the base of human projection of God and the subsequent taboos, rituals and worship. This belief agrees with the sacralisation of *Úgwú* among Nsukka-Igbo as a means to communicate with their perceived supreme reality – *Chukwu*.

As observed earlier, names in African traditional concept is not merely a tag in relation to the bearer. There are spectrums of paranormal beliefs attached to names. In this regards, *Úgwú* personal names are symbolic. It could be a mark of protection, appreciation, and dedication to a particular *Úgwú* deity who is thought to influence human destiny. Prior to ‘post-contact’ cultural experiences in Nigeria, the *Úgwú* names were appreciated among the people. Many members of the present Nsukka people have no regard to the *Úgwú* names and have since been abandoning and reconstructing such names. Xenocentrism – total abandonment of one’s culture has been recorded not only among the Igbos but in many ethnic groups in Africa (Mmadike 2014). A good number of people who still bear *ugwu* as either surnames or first names are in constant psychological struggle. Worse still, the practice of Christianity by the majority of the members of Nsukka communities has put more pressure on the psychology of the people regarding the acceptance of the *Úgwú* names. In this regard, in an event of misfortune or happiness *Úgwú* names are often perceived as bad or good luck. When it is the former, various rituals are performed by ‘man of God’ (a Christian religious priest) or a traditional religious specialist as *Dibia* (traditional healer/diviner/priest). In this practice, which often bears the mark of *syncretic* mix of ideas in Christianity and ATR, sometimes there is a family spiritual exercise of ‘breaking a perceived curse linked to the stagnation or lack of progress in a family’.

This kind of practice has a far-reaching implication on the general behaviour and function of the individuals in Nsukka. With this kind of mental or psychological challenge, the tenacious belief in the efficacy of *Úgwú* personal names as a source of misfortune on one part, affects every departments of a person’s life. In many instances, the exorcism, the spiritual warfare of warding-off evil spirit and binding a probable ‘*Úgwú* spirit’, are done with elaborate ceremonies and frivolous celebrations. And this no doubt has spiral affects on socio-economic well-being of the people.

### Social-economic dimension

Social and class struggle has been the grim reality within or among human groups (Okoye et al. 2021). Within the Igbo, social stratification connected to caste system has attracted scholars’ attention (Obinna 2010). However, little has been studied on the increasing social struggles that border on variables other than caste-system among the subcultures. In reality, many Igbo conceive certain others as inferior based on dialect, personal names, geographical location, and so on. On the one hand, the Southern Igbo, particularly Anambra,

presume themselves as the 'original' Igbo. On the other hand, the Northern Igbo communities are believed to be timid and not 'real Igbo'. Truly, the Southern Igbo had an advantage of early contact with the European missionaries (Ekechi 1972). This truncated the flourishing political dynasty and dominance of Igala which extended from Nsukka to parts of Anambra (Shelton 1968). The gains of this exercise, and the subsequent knowledge and exposure to European ideals, put many people from Anambra at an enviable advantage. Soon, the opportunities were used in a manner suggestive of mild chauvinism and stereotype. For example, '*I bu onye ime obodo*' (you are a timid person) and '*u nu na bu ka ogbenye*' (your people are always poor) are some of the chauvinistic identifiers used mostly by people from Southern Igbo Anambra, Imo, and part of Abia to address a Nsukka person. The concept *Nwa Nsukka*,<sup>12</sup> became a derogatory label for the Northern Igbo group; dialect and special personal names which include those associated with *Úgwú* are common marks of Nsukka-Igbo people. Archaeological evidence has put Nsukka ahead in iron smelting (Agu & Opata 2012; Okafor 1992; Okonkwo & Ibeanu 2016) among the Igbo. Although this finding is indicative of early civilisation among the Igbo, the emergence of European missionaries, civilisation and the subsequent opportunities therefrom have put those living around the riverine areas particularly those from Anambra with enormous advantages as the original pattern of civilisation in Nigerian communities was halted. The missionaries and colonisers soon produced Igbo interpreters, artisans, lawyers, doctors, teachers, priests and a sort of *para-colonisers* (mainly the members of the Southern Igbo people) particularly Anambra people (Dike 1962). Those who learnt these European skills also exhibited segregation and looked down on other Igbo who did not possess these sought-after knowledge and skills. And because Nsukka was in a hinterland, far from the riverine areas (Dike 1979), it was among the last places in Igbo land to be evangelised and hence exposed to Euro-Christian know-how. This probably affected the socio-economic life of Nsukka people. With these opportunities on the part of Anambra-Igbo, a good number of Nsukka people wanted to speak or behave like *Nd' ugbo* (Southern Igbos especially Anambra people). According to our informant:

[I]n those days, those Igbo who visited Nsukka with *nd' ocha* [white people] were respected. They even treated us disdainfully as if they were in the same level with *nd' ocha*.' (Ugwuishiwu, Onyeka, 75 years old, retired civil servant, oral interview, 01 October 2019)

Many people with *Úgwú* personal names and other names peculiar to Nsukka were target of such chauvinistic perception and stigmatisation. The name gives one away easily to be stigmatised or exploited. Giving credence to the aforesaid position, Arai and Peter (2009) depicted how personal names become precursor to marginalisation of immigrant community in Sweden. The authors also observed how the immigrants tend to change their personal names for acceptance and job opportunities. The pattern of class

12. Perhaps, to correct the impression of derogatory framing associated with *Nwa Nsukka*, a popular Nollywood film – *Nkoli nwa Nsukka* depicted how 'timidity' did not affect the great indigenous knowledge production or ingenuity of Nsukka people. The heroine, Racheal Okonkwo (Nkoli) upheld incorruptibility, truthfulness and high moral standard as she challenged the 'Nwa Nsukka' derogatory constructs from her neighbours.

struggle and marginalisation of Africans by the colonisers is well documented (Falola 2009; Ocheni & Nwankwo 2012). It is probable that the *para-colonisers* learnt this style of behaviour to exploit their fellow Igbos, using among other things, *Úgwú* personal names and other Nsukka-Igbo names to identify their victims. Notwithstanding this development, many young generation Nsukka people, as the authors observed, are motivated by the stereotype not only to sustain their personal names which include *úgwú*, but to meaningfully engage in works that lift them at par with other Southern Igbo, particularly Anambra.

More so, new thinking, particularly among the older Nsukka adults, shows how personal or family names that are linked to deities are thought to be sources of misfortune. This is the reason for the common religious exercise of exorcism experienced in many families irrespective of the members' religious affiliations. For instance, *Mkpoché iye ojo shi ne agburu* (cleansing of the 'family root') is a common term to describe this process among the Nsukka people. This kind of exorcism and cleansing involves payment of money to a Christian priest or ATR *dibia* (priest) as the case may be. Evidence from our informants among them, Aruma<sup>13</sup> and Asogwa<sup>14</sup> shows how different families and villages contribute huge sum of money for cleansing and warding off evil associated with deities which include *Úgwú*.

## **Úgwú personal names and conservation of Úgwú in Nsukka-Igbo**

Issue of environmental protection has been at the front burner around the world. Various stakeholders that include non-profit making organisations and governments have set blue-print towards protecting the natural environment. Genuine efforts to curtail the rate of destruction of the environment through human activities are recorded (Asthana 2020). Nonetheless, economic pressure, urbanisation, and other human needs, no doubt, are the *impetus agitat* – the driving force or reason for the continuous environmental degradation and destruction. Deforestations all around the world particularly in the Brazil's Amazon forest and the Congo forest have attracted the attention of peoples around the world (Hobson 2019). Despite encouraging policies to protect the natural environment, landscapes including hills and mountains are destroyed, making way for building of new cities and for economic gains (Pettinger 2019). Unfortunately, studies on climate change and possible negative implications on the universe have implicated the destruction of the ecosystem and natural environment as part of the reason for the increasing temperature and natural disasters around the world (Pettinger 2019). In this regard, efforts should be intensified towards conservation and protection of the natural environment including *Úgwú* as a way to protect our universe from the disasters and the

13. Interview conducted on 10 April 2020 with Ngozi Arumah, a 50-year-old Catholic.

14. Interview conducted on 29 April 2020 with Nnamdi Asogwa, a 45-year-old follower of indigenous African religion.

possible 'demise'. Among the Nsukka-Igbo people, the idea of protecting the environment particularly *Úgwú*, is likely not to protect the environment or the universe per se like the environmentalists, but to sustain their religious beliefs. This is consistent with the reasons for the protection of the natural environment which include mountains among the different African societies (Boamah 2015).

Despite the previous studies on the abandonment of African traditional culture which include personal names and religion, emerging findings show a growing interest in cultural practices among the young adult population of Nsukka (Uwaegbute 2021). The authors' observation through an increased participation in traditional practices by the youth in the area of study, collaborated Uwaegbute's discovery. The authors randomly selected 30 young persons with different religious backgrounds that bear the name *úgwú* and the associated variants, to assess their perceptions on the conservation of *Úgwú*. A total of 17 informants opposed the destruction. Only nine supported the destruction of *Úgwú* as they claimed that the *Úgwú* deity is a source of misfortune. While four of the respondents were indifferent on whether or not to conserve *Úgwú*. While supporting the destruction of *Úgwú*, one interviewee said:

'*Úgwú* is one of the numerous natural gifts from God. And because God has admonished us to judiciously use what he created to improve ourselves, I support the crushing of stones and sand around *Úgwú ezema* so long as it brings development to our community. I do not care about the deity around the *Úgwú* as Christ has demanded from us not to fear any principality and darkness.' (Michael Ezugworie, 30 years old, trader, 13 October 2020)

On his part, Ugwu<sup>15</sup> (Oral Interview 2021), one of the informants that supports the conservation of *Úgwú*, replied to the authors during the interview as thus:

'I am a Christian but I do not support the destruction of *Úgwú* deity or anything associated with it. Jesus had advised that we should give Cesar what belongs to Cesar and to God what belongs to him. Let us respect each other. My grandparents believed in *Úgwú* and it protected them; I do not want to challenge what saved my family...' (Ugwu, Chinonso, 31 years old, graduate student, 03 December 2020)

With the support from those who practice ATR like Atamah Onu-ugwu, Attamah ohe, Attamah, and numerous other sympathisers of ATR, many *Úgwú* around Nsukka are protected from destruction. Attamah, Onu-úgwú<sup>15</sup> for instance has vowed to be killed rather than destroy the *Úgwú* that was handed over to him by his ancestors. He believes in the taboos handed down to him about the *Úgwú* deity. This idea is in line with the findings of Udezo and Stanley (2012). Although there have been excavation of sand and gravels around some *Úgwú* in Nkpologu, Ezema, Edem, Ihe, and so on, there have also been a series of consultations and appeasements of the gods and oppositions from the practitioners and traditionalists therein. From the foregoing,

15. Interview conducted on 13 December 2020 with Onu-úgwú Attamah, about 90 years old (the interviewee did not know his real age).

it is indeed the effect of sacralisation of *Úgwú* that really ignited the emotions similar to Rudolph Otto's ominous which has helped to reasonably protect the natural environment of *Úgwú*. Specifically, this article has shown that: (1) the sacralisation and framing of *Úgwú* personal names translated into social actions which include a conscious conservation of the natural environment of *Úgwú* in the study area, and (2) the identity crises occasioned by the pattern of *Úgwú* personal names among others, spurred diligent efforts to improve the socio-economic life of the people in the study area. To reverse the worsening effects of climate change, beliefs associated with the conservation of the natural environment, as exemplified through the beliefs in *Úgwú*, should be sustained and preserved. A think tank should be established to organise workshops on the need to sustain the belief in *Úgwú* among the Nsukka-Igbo, as a viable medium for environmental conservation.

## Conclusion

There is a significant influence of natural environment as *Úgwú* towards the development of religious thought and belief in Nsukka-Igbo, south-eastern Nigeria. This is seen in the nature and types of personal names common among the people. Many people, who bear *úgwú*, as personal name, still believe in the efficacious nature of the name as it relates to good or bad luck. This is the reason for the constant conservation and sustenance of the *úgwú*, names on one hand and the abandonment of the name by some persons, on the other. Others had thought that the name and its associated forms are ancient and old fashioned. To this end, a good number of the people have either abandoned it or used it only as patronymic or surname.

From the foregoing discourse, it is established that the natural environment like *Úgwú* became personal names because of the belief in the power of gods and spiritual realities. The essence being the protection of the individual and by implication the conservation of the natural environment. Although this thought is common among the adherents of African religion, it is still not uncommon among the later generation of the people who are mainly Christians and a few Muslims.

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P.O.A., C.O. and M.O. equally contributed to this article.

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