

## **IGBO CULTURAL NAMING PATTERNS AND WESTERN RELIGION IN SELECTED COMMUNITIES IN AWKA-SOUTH ANAMBRA STATE SOUTH-EASTERN NIGERIA**

**Bentina Alawari Mathias**

Email: bentinad1@yahoo.com

Department of Sociology & Anthropology  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

**&**

**Onyima Blessing Nonye**

Email: Nonyelin2003@yahoo.com

Department of Sociology & Anthropology  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

### **Abstract**

The paper examined the culture jam between the Igbo cultural naming patterns and western religion and the resultant conflicting ideologies, meanings, and symbols. The Igbo culture is very unique. This very evident in their different ways of life and particularly in names given to villages, title holders, names given to persons at birth and even names given to married women by their husbands. All these and others were disrupted with the advent of western religion. Using symbolic interactionism and ethnographic methods involving participant observation and 12 in-depth interviews, the paper tried to revisit the traditional Igbo cultural naming patterns in selected 21<sup>st</sup> century Igbo communities in Awka South Local government Area. The findings of the study show that the conflict between the Igbo cultural naming patterns and western Christian religion was a result of lack of understanding and misinterpretation of the culture by the early bearers of the western religion. It therefore suggests that visitors to every Igbo society should try to understand the basic principles of each cultural practice before condemning it.

**Keywords:** Awka, Igbo, Naming patterns, Symbolism, Theophoric onomastics, Western Christian Religion

### **Introduction**

Many studies such as Anyachebelu, (2015; Azuonye, 1990; Amuzu, 2015; Edwin, 1994; Harrison, 1999; Olatunji, Issah, Yusuf, Muhammed, &, & Sulaiman, 2015; Trevor Burnard, 2001) on onomastic patterns have over time focused on the patterns of naming in diverse societies and some others focused on the impact of westernization and modernization on African naming patterns. However, few studies (Edeh, 1985, 2009) exist specifically on the impact of foreign religions on traditional onomastic patterns in Africa (Ameel, Storms, Malt, & Sloman, 2005; Amuzu, 2015; Fitzpatrick, 2012; Ibrahim, 2014; Moyo, 2012; Olatunji et al., 2015). This paper is set to fill this gap by focusing specifically on the rising preference for Christian theophoric onomastic patterns over traditional Igbo onomastic patterns. Generally, religious and cultural concerns regulate naming patterns across diverse societies, mostly in order to preserve religious and sociocultural identities (Chitando, 2001). The culture of naming is a universal cultural phenomenon but it is also particularistic (Olatunji, Issah, Yusuf, Muhammed &

Sulaiman, 2015) and this is why this study is focused on the unique Igbo naming patterns and how it has been influenced by western Christian religion. The Igbo is one of the major indigenous ethnic groups found in south eastern Nigeria. Their primeval religion was but is now partially an aspect of African Traditional Religion (ATR) known as Igbo traditional religion. This is now so because in recent times the religious inclinations of majority of the Igbo population align and tilt towards Christianity and their contemporary culture is gradually been attuned with westernization. A keen observation of the location names of Igbo communities or what (Azuonye, 1990; Bucher et al., 2013; Mateos, 2014; Olaoye, 2015) termed ‘toponymy’ (location/place onomastic) such as villages, towns, cities and even names of states in the larger south eastern Nigerian cities shows compromised westernized-Igbo spellings and Anglophonized pronunciations of most Igbo geographical enclaves. For instance, *Enu-Ugwu* is now *Enugu*, *Ọka* is now *Awka*, *Ama-Ọbia* (*Ama ndi Ọbia*) is now *Amawbia* etc. These anglophonized toponyms distort the meanings and the historical information associated with these south-eastern Nigerian cities, towns and villages. The Igbo seem to have forgotten that ‘place-names are strong and reliable indices or records of a people’s historical origin, their genetic and social relationships (kinship), their culture and philosophy’ (Olaoye, 2015 p. 39). However, this is caused by acculturation processes of westernization more than religion.

Again, pre-colonial Igbo land had culturally shared patterns of onomastic expressions in terms of semantics, morphology and phonology but all these are best described as altered, due to what we may call unrestricted and un-pragmatic acceptance of acculturation influences, necessitated by external culture contacts. Years after the colonialists and missionaries left the shores of Igbo land, these acculturative influences still holds sway. This reveals the power of culture-contact, which should never be glossed over; because we must note that whenever there is culture-contact there must an alteration, modification or total change. Though, it should be noted that acculturation does not often follow lineal evolutionary sequence from the western world to Africa, as there are three types of acculturation- accommodation, fusion and integration (Oke, 2006) and change in itself is multi-directional which could be from internal innovations, discovery or inventions and diffusion. It seems that the culture with a greater wave of influence tend to alter others when there is culture contact and that may be why the extent to which the west experienced alteration, modification or total change may not be significant relative to its influence while in contact with Africa. However in this case, the focus is on externally driven change as a result of contact with Christianity.

Again, apart from geographical names, other named entities such as ascribed-names given to persons at birth, market day names, now generally known as week days, achieved-title names given to individuals, and even names given to married women by their husbands, has not escaped dilution, modifications and transformations. This implicitly and covertly compromises its original Igbo semantic significance and essences. It is pertinent to note that in Africa, ‘names are not taken with levity because of their socio-cultural importance’ (Olatunji et al., 2015, p. 73) but it seems the Igbo are unconsciously treating the Igbo naming patterns with *laissez-faire* due to their recent inclinations and convictions towards Christian religion. In pre-colonial Igbo philosophy and worldview, the importance attached to names is one of the reasons why, the Igbo bear *afam/ahamefuna*-meaning ‘may my name not get lost’. In spite of this Igbo onomastic

ideology, it is arguably true that the socio-cultural naming patterns of the Igbo are getting lost as it is gradually been replaced with Christian theophoric naming patterns.

Following from the above, this paper employed qualitative methods of data collection to critically examine the recent trend in favour of Christian onomastic patterns as observed among the 21<sup>st</sup> century Igbo and why. The paper is therefore categorized into four sections; firstly it employed ethnographical methods in ascertaining the Igbo traditional naming patterns before western religion in a bid to explore what it was before present. Secondly, the study examines the status of Igbo naming patterns after western Christian religion. This is because scholars like Fitzpatrick, (2012) citing Lieberman Mikelson (1995) have stressed the need for studies on before-and-after of what happened to African names due to colonialism and slavery. Thirdly, the paper explores the conflict or the nature of the interactions among Igbo traditional naming patterns, contemporary Igbo naming pattern and western religion. The final section discusses some extrapolations the implications made from the findings of this study, and makes some cogent recommendations and conclusion.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study employs symbolic interactionism- a micro-analytic perspective as an explanatory framework, since naming patterns are social constructs shaped by social processes, socio-cultural interactions and sometimes beliefs on metaphysical realities; which often demands deeper insights in untangling its webs of meanings (Lewis, 1976; Musolf, 1992; Reynolds & Metzger, 1973; Stryker, 1987). A name extends beyond its superficial significance as main source of an individual's identity, it is laden with innate symbolic connotations and meanings; permeating the social, cultural, religious, economic, political life and diverse contexts of an individual. The Igbo believe that names may trigger a sort of an 'innate-releasing-mechanism' which may cause an individual to produce an instinctive behavior, character or make someone to exhibit some personality traits even against ones' wish. With this sort of belief in an Igbo person's subconscious, names are apportioned to animate and inanimate entities cautiously. This is because names influence behaviours in Igbo onomastic philosophy. This worldview and other onomastic philosophies among the Igbo create varying naming patterns as observed in family names, toponymy (place names), personal names, etc. Historically in Igbo land, names were given to a particular geographical area by the founder solely by his discretion (Odinani Nri, 2016, p. 9). The toponymy could be assigned from visible geographical features within and around a particular settlement. Most times, these location names could be derived from experiential encounters in the founder's migration history which connotes a whole lot of symbolic significance. Animate or personal names has continued to be altered or changed totally, particularly *Nwosu*- child of an outcast, which could be a family name (surname) or an individual's first name signifying the offspring of or lineage from the *osu* caste group. *Umuosu* could be a village/place name meaning a village of outcasts or the lineage or children from the *osu* caste group found in few places among the Igbo. An *osu* is segregated against and does not interact in the area of marriage and other critical areas with the so-called free-born. Thus, among the 21<sup>st</sup> century Igbo, the inclusion of *osu* as prefixes or suffixes in one's name signify a covert interactional limitation on the individual bearing such name. For instance, people bearing *osu*, find it difficult marrying a none-*osu* and many more inhibitions. The *osu* group existed

prominently in pre-colonial Igbo society but with civilization, caste groups are gradually being integrated with the free born (Leith-Ross, 1937). This goes a long way to reveal how far a simple name could serve as a repository of history, information and meanings spanning over millions of years and can determine who one relates/interacts with. Thus, in recent times you find people changing their names from *Nwaosu* (Child of an *Osu*) to *Nwachukwu* (Child of God). This adoption of religious names is not only informed by experiences of interactional limitations but by Christian religion. The *osu* caste system aligns with the ideologies of Igbo traditional religious philosophy but is totally abhorred in western Christian religion. This is one of the reasons why western Christian religious names and Igbo traditional naming patterns clash or wield a level of influence on each other. In fact, Christian religious names currently prevail over the traditional Igbo naming pattern, because of the symbolic meanings attached to the two conflicting onomastic patterns. The findings below show a lot of other reasons and the transformations that has taken place in the Igbo naming patterns and the Igbo onomastic philosophy within the purposively selected study area.

### **Study Area**

This study was conducted between May 2016 and September, 2017 in purposively selected communities in Awka south Local Government Area of Anambra State Nigeria namely Amaikwo and Amaenyi communities. They were selected because they host a whole lot of Christian churches and they are one of the central autochthonous communities in the Awka capital city. Since, this paper is focused on the influence of Christian religion on Igbo onomastic patterns; the study concentrated on describing features of the study area related to the study focus. There are two main churches namely the Catholic and Anglican churches with innumerable numbers of Pentecostal and African indigenous Christian churches. The Roman Catholic Church lagged behind the Anglican Church in entering Awka but it has built a larger presence ever since. The Catholic faith has two large cathedrals - St. Patrick's and St. Mary's Catholic Church in Awka as well as four smaller churches such as SS John and Paul's, St. Anthony's, St. Peter's and St. John's spread around the town. Administratively, since 1977 Awka has served as a diocese for the Roman Catholic Church serving 107 parishes and five chaplaincies. Similarly, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) of the Anglican Church was instrumental in bringing Christianity into Eastern Nigeria through Reverend Samuel Ajayi Crowther who founded the Niger branch in 1857. Its oldest church in the town is believed to be the Church of the Holy Spirit which was completed in 1930. Its largest church today is the Cathedral Church of St. Faiths with a typical Sunday attendance of 1,200 (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Awka>).

On the other hand, the Igbo originally practiced a version of African Traditional Religion (ATR) known as Igbo Traditional Religion before the advent of Christianity into south-eastern Nigeria. In terms of the traditional religious practices, Awka has been the home of the Agbala Oracle a deity said to be a daughter of the great Long Juju shrine of Arochukwu (Neaheer, 1979). The Agbala oracle was consulted to resolve disputes far and wide and was famous until it was finally destroyed by colonial authorities in the early part of the 20th century (Anigbogu & Onyima, 2013; Neaheer, 1979; Uchenna, 2007). The *Imo Oka* deity and masquerade festival also forms part of the traditional religion of the people. Awka (In Igbo is pronounced *Oka*) the capital of

Anambra State, Nigeria has an estimated population of 301,657 based 2006 Nigerian census. Awka comprises seven Igbo groups sharing common blood lineage divided into two sections (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Awka>). Ifite Section, the senior section, comprises four groups, Ayom-na-Okpala, Nkwelle, Amachalla, and Ifite-Oka followed by Ezinator Section, which consists of three groups, Amikwo, Ezi-Oka and Agulu. Each of these groups has a number of villages, which all together, comprises 33 villages in Awka (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Awka>). In recent times, these places are best described as a melting pot of cultures.

### **Methodology**

This study employed ethnographic methods such involving 12 in-depth interviews (IDI) and participant observation to examine nature of interaction existing between Igbo Cultural Naming Patterns and Western Christian Religion among selected Igbo communities in Awka Anambra State Nigeria. Twelve study participants involving eight males and four females were randomly selected from two purposively selected from Amaikwo and Amaneyi. The criteria for anyone to be included in the study is age (60years and above), this is because within the Igbo society, people within this age bracket are considered elderly and informed enough on community history, culture and tradition. Informed consent was sought from the study participants, promise of confidentiality and anonymity was orally obtained before the interviews commenced. Most of the participants were first consulted earlier with a request to participate in the study; dates and time for interviews were fixed days before the actual interviews took place in their different homes. Each interview section lasted between 30-50 minutes because of interference from household members and visitors, which often led to a pause of the interview sessions for a while before continuing. Content analysis was employed after transcription, transliteration and coding of the data collected. Data was then interpreted based on the research objectives which enabled some ethnographic extrapolations to be made.

### **Ethnographic Findings**

#### **Igbo Cultural Naming Patterns before Contact with Western Christian Religion**

The findings of this study show that in pre-colonial era in most Awka communities, Igbo personal names were given based on so many factors namely; mother's birthing experiences, family historical experiences, and natural occurrences as at when the child was born, among others. In the words of one of the study participants;

Awka in the olden days, we had a special way of naming our children. For example, we name our children based on the traditional four market days in Igbo land depending on which of the days the child was born. Anyone born on *eke*, *oye*, *afo* or *nkwo* was named *Nwaeke* (child of *eke*), *Nwaoye* (child born on *oye*), *Nwafo* (child born on *afo*), or *Nwankwo* (child born on *nkwo* day) respectively (Personal interview, 2016).

Situations at birth can also determine a name given to a child and this implies that the social-context at birth is a primary determinant in onomastic patterns among the Igbo people found in Awka. For instance a study participant opined that;

‘In those days in Awka, families experiencing child or maternal mortality and still births (locally attributed to evil force known as *ogbanje*), there is always the prevalence of names

such as *Onwura* (death leave us alone), *Onwubiko* (please death), *Maonwukwe* (If it pleases death), *Ozoemena* (May it no happen again) etc (Personal interviews, 2016).

Contemporary children do not bear such names any longer even if the parents were experiencing child mortality. On the other hand, title names are often given to accomplished individuals in Igbo land and they signify an achieved not an ascribed status, because Igbo society is one which explicitly and implicitly encourage and uphold the philosophy of hard-work and abhors laziness. This is why those who through the dint of hard-work and not through dubious ways are given traditional titles by their various community kings/leaders (*Eze, Igwe, Obi*) with names showcasing the type of achievements and contributions to the development of the society which they have made. In pre-colonial Awka, traditional title holders, bear names such as *Ogbuagu* (a man who killed a lion) *Ezeji* (an accomplished yam cultivator/farmer), *Nwatamalu*, *Nwawunnaya*, *Mgbachido*, *Ajayija* etc. However, in current times title names are now given to the highest bidder not considering sources of wealth whether they are dubious or not. This signifies a gradual loss of value. For instance, before colonial encounter names like *Avbamevbune* (may my name not get lost), *Nwavbor* (a son born on *afo* market day) and *Ovbdodinma* (may our town be peaceful/prosperous) as pronounced by Awka people, though recently pronounced as *Ahamefula/Afamefuna*, *Nwafor*, *Obododinma*, etc is gradually missing in contemporary onomastics. Though, these names tend to be more secular than religious. These names were usually first names before the Christian religious incursion but now they occur only as surnames. Again, pre-colonial Igbo husbands call their wives *Egodiya* or *Akudiya* (husband's wealth), *Ugodiya* (husband's dove), *Obiageli* (she's come to eat/enjoy), *Ochekwa-aku* (preserver of husband's wealth), *Obidiya* (heart of her husband) among many other lovely names. This has now being replaced with names like baby, sweet, mine, treasure, etc. The question remains why are the Igbo abandoning their Igbo onomastic pattern for occidental onomastic patterns?

### **Igbo Cultural Naming Patterns after Contact with Western Christian Religion**

The contemporary naming patterns in Southeastern Nigeria show a rising trend in modern English names with Christian themes and ideologies. The adoption of theophoric or religious oriented occidental names among Igbo Christians reflects the actual and symbolic portents of western Christianity as an irresistible acculturative force. Findings shows that the onset of these adopted Christian theocentric names began with the practice of baptism, christening/naming ceremony among orthodox churches (Catholics/Anglicans) or during child dedication church services in the more radical Christian denominations known as Pentecostals/protestants. Symbolic implications connected with attached thematic meanings and representations of such names tend to be the driving force directing the Igbo Christians towards adoption of Christian names, which could be Christian names translated or transliterated into Igbo or English. These Christian names come with themes on Christian saints, creed, tenets, Christian heroes like apostles and disciples among others. Christian religious themes and Biblical names like Matthew, Mark, Luke, Paul, John, Titus, Moses, Joshua, Faith, Glory, Peculiar, Precious, Purity, Righteous, Rebecca, Miracle, etc are preferred to Igbo traditional names. In recent times, personal Igbo surnames such as *Nwaosu* (child of from an Osu caste lineage), *Nwagbara* (child of a deity) have all been replaced by acclaimed born-again Christians with *Nwachukwu* (child from God's lineage) and the like. Cultural names which previously served as elements of cultural

and historical retention such as *Onyima* (name signifying a sacred scepter for a woman who has given birth to about ten children without the experience of child mortality); *Ezeji* (king of yams) often given to people whose lineages were great cultivators of yam tubers is no longer borne; *Igafumughere* (you won't find fault in me); *Agundu* (Living lion- given to brave men); etc are gradually relegated in favour of names with Christian themes. Surnames (not personal first names) now occur showcasing the names of an individual's immediate father's Christian religious names such surnames like Mathias, Paulinus, Titus, Peter, God'swill, Ferdinand. They are currently used to replace surnames such as *Nwosu* (Son of an outcast); *Nwagbara/Nwadibia* (child/son of a deity/diviner). Feminine names like *Mgborie/Mgbolie/Mgbaoye*, *Mgbankwo*, *Obiageli*, are branded by contemporary Igbo women as archaic and no mother gives such names to her daughter in recent times. These feminine Igbo names have been replaced with Christian names such as Christiana, Mary, Hannah, Christabel, Emmanuela, Rosemary, Charity, Paulina, etc. This new Christian onomastic pattern attacks, distorts and defiles existing autochthonous kinship networks, thereby destroying genealogical chronologies in Igbo societies. Igbo Christians abandon such surnames because they have been indoctrinated in the church that such surnames are fetish, ungodly, and satanic or that bearing such Igbo names will influence ones' life negatively. This trend is leading to drastic alterations in the traditional Igbo naming patterns, which on the contrary to what is assumed by Igbo Christians, tries to capture historic incidences, Igbo values and worldviews, family history, clan founder's philosophies, deities and the like. They have also forgotten that traditional Igbo names are embodiment of biographies and abandoning them implies a huge loss of the Igbo cultural heritages and identities. Even those who still retain their Igbo names prefer to fine-tune its pronunciations and spellings in Igbo. Again, this is what some respondents referred to as 'trendy Igbo names' now in vogue. For instance a study participant has this to say;

Previously, names in correct Awka pronunciation like *Ivbeoma* (A good thing), *Obuora* (The desire of all), *Dezie* (Keep it safe), *Chinyel* (God's gift), *Madika* (Humans are greater) and *Emeke* (Done properly). In general modern Igbo pronunciations are *Ifeoma* *Obiora*, *Dozie*, *Chinyere*, *Maduka* and *Emeka* (My relative Emeka gets mad when his mother calls his name the Awka way – Emeka). In trendy Igbo pronunciations we now names like *Ify*, *Oby*, *Dozy*, *Chy*, *MK*, *Mekus* (Study participant, May 2016).

From the above, a critical mind should ask, why would the young Igbo boy get angry because his name was pronounced in the right Awka Igbo accent? The value of mother-tongue competence is very crucial in understanding Igbo traditional names. It seems that the retention of a traditional Igbo name instills a sense of shame on the bearer particularly among the younger generation of Igbo in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It also shows how this adoption of the so called civilized religious names impacts on an individual's psyche and self-perception. Naming, re-naming and/or not naming triggers tensions, as either way would always attract reactions from on-lookers. This trend of renaming is also more evident among the diaspora Igbo, which may have been necessitated in their quest to be more occidental, or quest to acquire foreign citizenship and visas. This shows how far the quest to look and sound modern or western is negatively influencing young minds and devaluing the Igbo culture. Similarly, religious Igbo names often does not escape the attachment of God (*Chi*, *Chukwu*, *Chineke*) as prefix or surfix in such names just like a study participant opined;

Three of my nieces born about three years ago were given such trendy religious Igbo names as *Kosisochukwu* (as it pleases God) now trendily called *Kosy*; *Kamsiyochukwu* (Just as I pleaded with God) now trendily called *Kamsy* and *Chimamanda* (My God will not fail) now called *Amanda*. The correct Awka renditions of these names would have been: *Eleoshisochikwu*, *Elemshiyochikwu* and *Chimayaraada*.

### **The Conflict between Igbo Cultural Naming Patterns and Western Religion**

The unsolicited incursion of Christianity in Igbo land has resulted to a covert conflict with Igbo onomastic pattern which gave room for re-naming and re-self-identification. One reason for this renaming practice is that contemporary Igbo Christians have been deeply indoctrinated with Christian ideologies that stresses that names are more than tags, they can convey powerful imagery and also influence behaviour (Fitzpatrick, 2012, p. 16). This is a wrong understanding of the philosophies and motives behind traditional Igbo naming patterns. The motive behind the adoption of Christian religious names seems to be its spiritual significance, which unconsciously to the Igbo is becoming debilitating to the traditional Igbo psyche and cultural onomastic pattern. Some issues arising from the examination of the interaction and relationships existing between Igbo traditional naming patterns and western Christian religion are implicitly complex. It shows that the nature of interaction between Christianity and Igbo names has grown to be either that of equality or inequality. If the nature of interaction was that of equality, then the degree of influence on each other would have been reciprocal. Non-reciprocity in terms of degree of influence means that the status of relationship existing between Igbo cultural naming patterns and western Christian religion is remarkably unequal. The findings of this study clearly reflect this inequality as western Christian religion exerts greater influence on the Igbo traditional naming patterns and it leads to devastating alterations on the Igbo identity, history and cultural heritage. Names to a large extent serve as repositories of identity information, ethno-history, migration patterns, inter-communal encounters (wars, conflicts and tales about resolutions), peaceful inter-group relations (marriage, trade) among others. Personal names are inseparable from the issue of identity and as such adoption of Christian names by Igbo people showcases Christian religious identity as against Igbo cultural identity. The Igbo traditional onomastic pattern captures situational occurrences in families and communities, morals, values, natural episodic disasters and other phenomena and essences. For instance, Olatunji, Issah, Yusuf, Muhammed &, & Sulaiman, (2015) examined the significance of personal names as showcasing the realities of everyday life in most African societies. Names are ways in which man comes to terms with reality (Bradshaw & Samuel Bradshaw, 2009, p. 665). Thus, absconding from the Igbo traditional naming pattern and aligning with western religious naming as currently done by majority of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Igbo population will end up taking away the Igbo reality thereby depleting the essences of Igbo identity and cultural heritages.

### **Discussion**

Names not only aid in the construction of identity but also in the concretization of a people's collective memory (Fitzpatrick, 2012). But what happens when a cultural group, have lost or are gradually loosing deep rooted naming patterns and the philosophies behind it? The 21<sup>st</sup> century Igbo has almost lost their traditional onomastic patterns due to adoption of foreign Christian religion. Culture-bound names are rejected in favour of biblical or Christian names (Chitando,



2001, p. 145). This continuously leads to alterations in the autochthonous Igbo naming patterns and with the exponential continuity of this trend; it is gradually leading the Igbo to abandon culturally oriented names back to Igbo theocentric names because of some significant conscious efforts by Igbo people to quell the tide such the ‘*Otu suwakwa Igbo*’- An association or movement that encourages people to speak Igbo language. It has also being observed that the Igbo group are gradually going back or now prefer Igbo religious names (not culture-bound names like *nwosu*) laden with meanings, but with bias to their love, appreciation and expectations from their *Chi* (God) (Uchenna, 2007; Nwoye, 2011, 2012; Nwoye, 2014). Thus, you now have a preponderance of theocentric names like *Chimamanda* (my God will not fail), *Chigbogu* (God has resolved the conflict/fight), *Chiebuka* (God is big), *Chibuike* (God is strength), *Chielota* (God has remembered), *Chizitara* (God sent), *Chineye* (God gives), *Chimbuchi* (My God is God), *Uchechukwu* (let God’s will prevail in this matter) and so on. The above names and more also mirror birth experiences, place of birth, awesomeness of God and incidences during and after conception and delivery among other. Furthermore, a re-growing preference for Igbo names has made it for virtually all Christian denominations to now accept Igbo names for baptism, unlike before when the church will insist on western/saints names only. As for the significant conscious efforts, there is need to appreciate the ‘*Otu suwakwa Igbo*’ and similar groups, although they often focus on other activities other than preservation of Igbo names and language. There is need to therefore note that since socio-cultural change is inevitable, total return to traditional Igbo naming practices may not fully suffice again; maybe the ‘new marriage of convenience’ resulting to traditional forms mixed/spiced by theocentric inclinations might remain the pattern for some time.

In sum, the phenomenon discussed in this paper has been stressed as not unconnected to the unsolicited British colonialists’ incursion into Nigerian and by extension Igbo land. Current literature has dealt significantly with the impact of colonialism and slavery on Africans, Igbo cultures inclusive (Fitzpatrick, 2012; Anyachebelu, 2015; Azuonye, 1990; Chitando, 2001; Mateos, 2014; Okon, 2014; Olatunji et al., 2015) and as such not the focus of this paper but less emphases was laid on its influence and interaction on an aspect of Igbo culture, which is the naming pattern. Worse still, lesser attention has been given to the increasing preference for theophoric naming pattern as against the indigenous traditional Igbo naming patterns. This paper has tried to capture this trend especially for record purposes of what is happening among the contemporary Igbo. Put differently, there is a preponderance of Christian religious onomastic pattern than for the traditional Igbo onomastic pattern. The overt reason is that majority of the Igbo people practice Christianity. In specifics, the Igbo(s) hypothetically have over 96% of the Igbo populations as Christians; about 2% are adherents of the Igbo traditional religion, less than 1% are Muslims, while the rest are either irreligious, humanists, atheists, secularists or the like. The impact of this trend on the sustainable development and preservation of Igbo culture, identity and heritage is better imagined than experienced. This is because onomastic patterns signify a people’s identity and projects their culture. The Igbo people seem to have forgotten that a name is an index of history (Okon, 2014).

## Conclusion

The study therefore concludes that for the retention of a true Black identity, African identity or Igbo identity, we must stick to original traditional cultural naming patterns, because the adoption of occidental Christian religious names is unoriginal or counterfeit. The paper stressed that nothing on earth exists without a name (Fitzpatrick, 2012) and so names are significant social constructs of identity, histories and memory and as such must not be undermined. This also implies that names are universal realities but naming patterns are contextual and particularistic, this brings about diversities of onomastic pattern which results to a clash when there is culture contact. This paper has also shown that names not only holds spiritual and psychological significance but also maps the history of places, phenomena and people. The conflict between the Igbo cultural naming patterns and western religion is a result of lack of understanding and misinterpretation of the culture by the early bearers of the western religion. It therefore suggests that Christian religious adherents and visitors to every Igbo society should be tutored or they should try to understand the basic principles and onomastic philosophies underlying each cultural practice, before trying to dissuade their converts from traditional ways of life.

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