

Article

This Is the Sacrifice: Language, Ideology and Religious Identity Performance in Erei Personal Names

God'sgift Ogban Uwen ^{1,*} and Edadi Ilem Ukam ²¹ Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar 540271, Nigeria² Department of General Studies, University on the Niger, Umunya 433103, Nigeria; edadi.ukam@uniniger.edu.ng

* Correspondence: godsgiftuwen@unical.edu.ng

Abstract: This paper examines personal names derived from traditional religious beliefs and practices among the Erei people in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State in South-South, Nigeria while utilising insights from the multidisciplinary inferences of socio-onomastic theory to account for the cultural, social and situational contexts that create the religious content of the names. Data were obtained by means of participant observation and semi-structured interviews during six months of fieldwork involving 40 participants who were the name-givers, name-bearers and name-users. Our findings highlight the socio-onomastic tradition of Erei people in which personal names are bestowed through a conscious application of symbolic linguistic resources to express and perform ideologies and identities that are rooted in the traditional religion's foundations and sociocultural practices that represent Erei people's indigenous beliefs system and spiritual worldview. Focused on the ideals of African traditional religion, religious identities are constructed through the use of personal names related to idol worship, the mysteries of death, reincarnation and commemoration, cultural festivals and performances, symbolic objects, familial rankings and other aspects derived from their environment that also bear traditional religious significance. And because this set of personal names is now predominant among the ageing population and is losing contemporaneity due to an increasing subpopulation with a new (Christian) beliefs system, this study serves to preserve a transiting and endangered Erei socio-onomastic practice that represents the people's traditional cosmology.

Keywords: ideology; traditional religious identity; Erei personal names; linguistic resources; identity performance; socio-onomastic tradition



Citation: Uwen, God'sgift Ogban, and Edadi Ilem Ukam. 2024. This Is the Sacrifice: Language, Ideology and Religious Identity Performance in Erei Personal Names. *Languages* 9: 326. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages9100326>

Academic Editor: Anthony Pak-Hin Kong

Received: 13 June 2024

Revised: 1 October 2024

Accepted: 2 October 2024

Published: 9 October 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Across societies, religious practitioners explore the linguistic resources of the immediate environment to contextualise the symbolic ideologies formed through naming practices that are situated within the relevant aspects of the religious identity performances of the name-bearers, name-givers and name users. Nigeria is a multireligious nation that practises the African Traditional religion, Islam and Christianity. The people of Erei (where this study is situated) practise two of these religious affiliations: the Africa traditional religion and Christianity. This study is concerned with the African traditional religion which operates under the principles of a hierarchy of beings, belief in God (gods), divinities, ancestors and spirits and the practice of traditional medicine in a universe that consists of a physical (visible) and spiritual (invisible) world (Metuh 1987; Idowu 1991). African traditional religious practices were deeply entrenched in Nigeria before the advent and successful implantation of Christianity through missionary activities that penetrated through coastal and hinterland routes in the mid-19th century and spread to other parts of the country (Obi 2013). Although Christianity gained grounds and sourced adherents from the large population of devotees of the traditional religion, many practitioners of the latter were (and are still) conscious of the continued propagation of its tenets.

Religion is described as a system of beliefs and practises that regulate attitudes. [David and David \(2020, p. 274\)](#) argue that religion is an attitude and beliefs that are “real or imagined, or a system of thoughts that are considered divine, sacred, supernatural, of higher truth and the values, practices, moral codes and rituals that are associated with such system.” It is a system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things that prescribes a range of regulated practices and behaviour that define the worldview of a people, and in the African traditional religious perspective, religion encompasses beliefs and practices that are autochthonous. This makes religion a propelling force that provides answers to complex issues, and it influences people’s reasoning in regulating the total self by identifying with and practising certain principles that suggest communality and solidarity ([Helsinki 2006](#); [Pargament et al. 2013](#); [Schachter and Hur 2019](#)). This, according to [Werbner \(2010, p. 234\)](#), is achieved through regulated practices “underpinned by institutionalised organization and collective consciousness and solidarity.” These tenets have had an impact on the socio-onomastic traditions practised across cultures in Nigeria that ascribe religious identities through the bestowal of personal names. Identity is guided by beliefs, and religion has a powerful role in shaping the psychological and social behaviour of human beings who practise these beliefs ([Ysseldyk et al. 2010](#)). Identity, and the consciousness of it, is a source of pride and confidence, and can evoke a metaphysical, cultural, epistemological, axiological and religious awareness that constricts ontological dependence and group relationships ([Isajiw 1990](#); [Igboin 2014](#); [Boluwaduro 2019](#)). Religious identity is formed through a unique way of practising religious rituals that create a sense of belonging and membership of a religion engaged in series of activities. One of the productive sites for the performance of religious identity is naming practices ([Mensah 2020](#)). Names and naming help to situate the religious affiliations of the name-givers, name-bearers and name-users.

Scholars have argued that name-givers bestow religious-based personal names that exemplify traditional religious beliefs and practices ([Atel 2004](#); [Abioje 2014](#); [Godson and Igodo 2020](#); [Etteokon and Isaac 2021](#); [Mabuza 2022](#); [Mensah 2015, 2020, 2024](#); [Felecan and Bughesiu 2021](#)). These authors have examined socio-onomastic traditions across many ethnolinguistic groups to identify personal names and naming practices that suggest that the name-bearers, name-givers and name-users were (or are) devotees of the African traditional religion. The names in such contexts are symbolic sociocultural elements used in situating traditional religious identities. The influence of traditional religious practices in the ascription of religious identities that shape socio-onomastic traditions are seen to be prominent in Erei personal names. Erei is a generic name for the language and a micro minority ethnolinguistic group in the Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria, and the people have a rich culture with a unique socio-onomastic system ([Inya 2011](#); [Uwen 2018, 2019](#); [Uwen and Ekpang 2022](#)). The use of the Erei language as symbolic tool in the contextualisation of this socio-onomastic tradition to broaden our understanding of the people’s ideological worldview arising from their long devotion to traditional religious practices is yet to be examined. To fill this gap, the present study aims to apply insights from socio-onomastics, sociolinguistics and sociocultural precepts to broaden our knowledge of how to interpret Erei personal names that define the religious identities of the people. It is believed that the findings will contribute to the discourses within socio-onomastic studies from the lens of a micro-minority ethnic group. The study is significant because it serves as reference material for the preservation of a transiting naming culture and provides clues into the synchronic and diachronic dimensions in Erei naming system. Also, our findings and theoretical contributions can enrich sociolinguistics and socio-onomastic studies, coming from a synchronic viewpoint of the traditional religion-based personal names of a micro-minority ethnic group in Nigeria. This category of personal names is transiting because the name-bearers are in the ageing population and the younger generation is propagating symbolic ideologies of resistance to bearing the same names as they believe the names contradict their new (Christian) belief system.

Religious Ideology and Naming

The deployment of linguistic resources to narrate lived experiences that communicate ideology is a common social behaviour among discourse participants across cultures (Fairclough 1989). van Dijk (1989, p. 6) defines ideology as “a complex cognitive framework that controls the formation, transformation, and application of other social cognitions, such as knowledge, opinions, attitudes and social representations”. Ideology is the belief, whether it is conventionally socio-political, cultural or religious, upon which people base their actions, behaviour and/or discursive practices (Poynton 1985; Fairclough 1989). Language is expressed and propagated through a set of assumptions, values, norms, principles, expectations and conventional practices that the society imposes on language users (Fairclough 1989; Chilwa 2010). Reiterating the ideological relevance of language, Farb (1993, p. 168) asserts that “people’s language is the exit value through which their beliefs and thoughts, cognition and experiences are articulated.” Therefore, beliefs and ideologies are inextricably linked to language, which serves as a powerful cultural resource in the transmission of the history, worldview and philosophy of a people that is also expressed in their religious practices.

Explicating the relationship between religion and ideology, King (2003, p. 198) asserts that religion does “not only provides a transcendent worldview that grounds moral beliefs and behavioural norms in an ideological base, but religious traditions also embody these ideological norms in a community of believers”. More so, religion relies on the dual conception of human nature, while ideology stresses its unity and materiality, as both play complementary roles in introducing and practising norms that shape individual and collective life (Claval 2014). The core tenets of religion are faith and worship, while ideology drives the practise of these principles. Also, religion is inseparably linked with spirituality, but both dwell on sacred elements, even though the latter is a component of the former. Specifically, spirituality is the “search for the sacred” while religion is “the search for the significance that occurs within the context of established institutions that are designed to facilitate spirituality” (Pargament 2013, pp. 14–15). Religious ideology is therefore enacted through contemplated principles related to metaphysical realities which are reflected in personal names.

Naming and creating names are processes of constructing and instantiating ideological colourations or (re)construction of a (shift in) beliefs system, whether it is ethnocultural, social, institutional, political or religious (Chilwa 2010; Ayantayo 2014; Aguboshim 2021). Here, personal names become ideological constructs that emanate from the interface between language, culture and history as foregrounding tools for constructing identity. Language, in this context, defines the contestations on how meanings conveyed through names represent ideology and ascribe identity labels. Since personal names are aspects of the linguistic system of a speech community, language (utilised in bestowal of personal names) is the symbolic tool that communicates the ideologies that are construed in names within the socioreligious and ethnopragmatic contexts of the name-users.

2. Theoretical Framework

Socio-onomastic theory is considered relevant to this study. The theory of socio-onomastics is conceptualised from the sociological perspective to describe names as process of social action (Leslie and Skipper 1990) and to account for the social, cultural and situational contexts in which names are bestowed, used and interpreted in different social and cultural registers (Nicolaison 1985; Ainala and Ostman 2017). Socio-onomastics draws from history, sociolinguistics, anthropology, ethnopragmatics, sociology and cultural studies to engage different dialogues on names and naming systems to interpret the ethnopsychology of the people and the ethnopragmatic functions of names in the sociocultural context. The expanded spectrum of the disciplines involved in socio-onomastic investigations speaks to the cognitive and social aspects of naming to accentuate “the cultural values of a people and historical backgrounds of name-bearers” (Aboh et al. 2022, p. 114). This allows for an investigation of the social origins and uses of names within various situations and contexts

which account for the social belongings of the name-givers, name-bearers and name-users and the variation in their naming traditions across time (Walter 1971). These variations in naming systems related to the linguistic structure and sociocultural functions of names also offer insights into the meanings of, and the people's attitudes and stances towards the names they bear (Ainiala and Ostman 2017). On this, Clark (2005) has emphasised that meaning, derived from the value society places on their linguistic and sociocultural systems, becomes a tool that can be used to explicate the worldview conveyed to people through the names they bear. Lombard (2015) adds that socio-onomastic theory facilitates a cultural interpretation of names with socioculturally and locally assigned meanings that show the experiences of the people. Mensah et al. (2024, p. 4) assert that "the social basis of the theory accounts for the sociocultural contexts within which names function, and which provide the basis for analyzing the contextual and pragmatic meanings of names". The authors clarify that there are social motivations behind naming systems that differentiate the perceptions about certain regimes of names from the psychology and beliefs that are embedded in such names which are correlated with the circumstances of the time. The grounds for name giving is a core sphere of socio-onomastic tradition that accentuates how and why certain names are bestowed in given situations. This instantiates the claim that names are influenced by non-linguistic factors such as religious beliefs and cultural traditions (Kalkanova 1999). The focus of this study is the deployment of socio-onomastic insights in the investigation of personal names that account for Erei traditional religious practices. The names bear significations that provide the descriptive context for their interpretation and convey the perceptions that correlate with the people's belief system, cultural values and lived experiences that represent their traditional religious ideologies and identities. This correlates with the position that personal names can represent deeper kinds of identity, act as objects of emotional attachment and reflect community mores and social customs that can be used to interpret their ideological and social stance on the naming system (Puzey and Kostanski 2016). In Nigeria, authors have applied insights from socio-onomastic theory in the analysis of personal names across ethnolinguistic groups and cultures. For instance, Ikotun (2010) investigates the social relevance of Yoruba personal names using insights from socio-onomastic theory. Imoh (2018) utilises the principles of the theory to examine the structuring and patterning of Bassa personal names while Aboh et al. (2022) apply the principles to establish how Christianity has impacted the gendering of personal names among the Bette people in Cross River State. Uwen and Ukaegbu's (2024) study also shows how socio-onomastics deepens our knowledge of how personal names connect with Igbo religious beliefs that generate the conceptualisation of *Chi* among Christians. Socio-onomastic theory is therefore suitable and relevant to this study as the authors will draw from its insights to examine Erei personal names connected with traditional beliefs and the situated meanings and the functions they perform within the worldview of these people.

3. Methodology

Data for the study were collected using an ethnographic research approach during six months of fieldwork involving a representative sample of 40 participants who were among the name-givers, name-bearers and name-users. Apart from being indigenes, the justification of the sample size is because the selected participants were custodians of the traditions of the Erei people and were recruited based on their deepen knowledge of Erei socio-onomastic tradition from this perspective. The participants were adequately informed and their consent was obtained before their participation in the exercise. Other ethical issues regarding the concealment of their identity and beliefs were adhered to. Regarding the demographic information about the participants, 32 (80%) were males and 8 (20%) were females who were within the age bracket of 45 to 75. The higher number of males is because the sociocultural structuring of Erei culture allows men to play prominent and exclusive roles in naming children and performing other traditional religious rituals. The age bracket of the participants was chosen to capture the target subpopulation of traditional

religion-based name-bearers and name-givers that were knowledgeable of the religious circumstances that motivated the bestowal of such names. Among the participants, 30 were devotees to the traditional religion (75%) while 10 (25%) were Christians. This allowed the researchers to elicit opinions on emerging attitudes towards the names, particularly from name-bearers who had converted to Christianity.

The methods used for data collection were participant observations and semi-structured interviews with the aid of audiotope recorders and field notes. Participant observations offered the researchers (who are also indigenes of Erei) the opportunity to participate passively in the social contexts in which the religious names were used. They were related to the subpopulation from whom the relevant data were extracted. Here, the authors assumed the positionality of passive participants and unbiased observers in all communal events that involved the mention and use of such names. The authors did not encounter any serious limitations; rather, being indigenes of Erei helped to remove accessibility constraints and afforded the authors the opportunity to learn more about the traditional imports of the names. Utilising the semi-structured interview technique, the researchers deployed open-ended questions to solicit responses that provided clues into what informed the religious names, their socioreligious interpretations and how the personal names create traditional religious identities that are related to the beliefs system of the name-givers, name-bearers and name-users. Also, audiotope recorders and field notes were used for the recording and documentation of participants' opinions, which helped in the validation of the study. The relevant data were later reviewed and transcribed for 64 personal names that were constructed within the Erei socio-onomastic tradition and had traditional religious conceptualisations. Using the thematic method of data analysis, the personal names were translated and coded into thematic concerns, which were then interpreted based on the traditional religious ideologies that created the identities of the participants within the scope of the study.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis adopts the descriptive method where data are interpreted based on the views of the participants that reflect the traditional religious worldview of the people. To achieve this, Erei personal names influenced by the people's attachment to their traditional religious worship and doctrines are thematised into five subheadings to capture the different dimensions of traditional religious identity performance as presented below.

4.1. Personal Names Derived from Deities

There are many deities that exist within Erei culture that connect and maintain the chain of transcendental communication between the living, the dead and the supreme being. One participant (Onèté: male 74) noted that some of the idols are as old as the migration period and settlement of the inhabitants in the present geographical location of Erei. The deities are considered to be vital tools that allow(ed) for peaceful communal existence, protection from enemies and mutual cohesion among the people. Mbiti (1975) emphasises that the worship of deities is a core aspect of African cosmology as they are considered to be primordial divinities and spirit beings that connect the people with other beings and the ancestors. The relevance of deities is reinforced as believers often build shrines to provide them with shelter and protect them from unnecessary access by non-devotees. The personal names that represent the Erei people's devotion to deities are explained in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Erei personal names derived from deities.

Name	Symbolic Representation(s) of the Deity
Èlot	Any acceptable fetish object
Obin	Special stones/roundly folded objects made from white clothing and plants
Mfám	Stones/certain species of plants
Ègwé(òbé)	Lake, pythons and crocodiles
Isèréi	Ram/snakes
Ábú	He-goat/hallucinating herbs
Ipá	Squirrel fastened on a specific species of trees
Ndòm	Bitch
Inámáng	Specific stream
Iyòli	Specific stream
Ngwú	Designated stone
Èkup-òrák	Snakes
Okwé-ètán	Designated stone
(È)Ánòk	(This is the) sacrifice

In Table 1 above, *Èlot*, bestowed on male children, is the generic name for all deities (gods and goddesses) that are assumed to play different roles in the existence of the worshippers. *Obin* (Female deity), *Isèréi* (Male deity), *Èkup-òrák* (Female deity; forbids the eating of snakes) and *Inámáng* (Water goddess; warriors drink from the stream before embarking on war) are deities' names bestowed on male children. The idols are believed to perform different roles in warfare. A participant (Úlòṅ: male 65) believed that the names signify the spiritual transmigration of the powers of the deities to the name-bearers. Our findings also show that, during intercommunal wars, the gods were consulted to ensure that warriors defeated their enemies, and in the event that the enemies appeared to be overwhelming the warriors, the gods could blur the vision of the enemies and protect the fighters until they arrived home safely. *Ndòm* and *Iyòli* are goddesses that bring fertility and procreation, a condition that is assumed to be evident within the name-bearers. *Ngwú* and *Okwé-ètán* are male names that represent the gods that give wrestling might. Úlòṅ explained that during wrestling contests, sacrifices were offered and rituals performed in the shrines where the stones representing the gods are carried by the selected contenders to the wrestling arena as a symbolic representation of guardian and victory over the opponent. The authors also found out that *Mfám* is a god that kills evildoers and those who attempt to poison others. The name-bearers are cultural representations of the need to practise emulative virtues and shun evil. Also, it is observed that male children are named after the *Ègwé(òbé)* goddess to instantiate the beliefs that worshippers (and name-bearers) are protected and prosperous. *Ábú* (god) is bestowed on male children to eulogise the male cult. A participant (Ègwú: male 60) explained that it is a male cult that embodies initiation rites performed at *òdum-ábú* (*ábú* forest) that transform the initiates from childhood to adulthood and launch them into engagement in assignments that were not meant to be known by women. Like [Udom and Nana \(2024\)](#) argue, initiation in this context involves the separation of the initiates to undergo some mental, physical and spiritual exercise to test their patience, perseverance and discipline. It is a spiritistic and mediumistic process meant to lead to a transitory transformation to allow the participants to assume masculine dignity and enjoy the patriarchal privileges of men. Ègwú told us that *Ipá*, whose name-bearers are exclusively males, is a fertility goddess that is appeased annually to usher in a new farming season to cause the farmlands to be fertile and propel a bumper harvest. The last of this order of names is *(È)Ánòk* (this is the sacrifice). It is a feminine name that connotes sacrifice for the deities to avert (un)predictable calamities. The name-bearer serves as a mediating instrument between the name-givers and the gods. Sacrifices are symbolic physical, spiritual, sociocultural and religious instruments in Erei cosmology. One participant (Úgwú: female 70) stated that items that serve as sacrifices are not negotiable, and they are well preserved and handled with care until they are offered, 'accepted' and

'consumed by the gods. This is carried out by the priest(s) who takes on a mediating role to appease the gods and save the living from unpleasant circumstances.

The contextualisation of the Erei worldview on beliefs on deities and the bestowal of such names is seen to be a cross-cultural tradition. Among the Erei people, the authors observed that children are named after deities depending on the beliefs in their specific roles to transmigrate qualities of the deities to the newborn in instances where they were consulted before the birth of the child and/or the circumstances surrounding the birth of the child, especially where such births coincide with the arrival or the festival of the particular deity. To corroborate this claim, [Abioje \(2014\)](#) states that, among the Yoruba, personal names such as *Èsúbíyí* (*Èsú* has given birth to this child), *Ogúnwálé* (*Ogún* has come home), *Osunmáyoḡwá* (*Osun* has brought joy) and *Ifábúnmi* (The oracle gave me) are associated with the consultation of deities arising from various circumstances surrounding the birth of the child. One participant (Ngwú: male 67) also acknowledged that "the many idols worshipped in Erei re-enacts individual and collective search and desire for protection, security, prosperity, procreation, longevity, revenge, punishment, social cohesion and spiritual might." He added that names contextualise the continuity of the people's traditional connection with the deities in the historical, physical and spiritual realms. The desire for personal and communal benefits from the eponymous names reflect an ethnopragmatic significance in terms of the merging of self-identity with the qualities and identities of the deities. Another participant (Ibí: male 63) argued that the reason for the bestowal of the names of deities on (male) children is that Erei operates under a patriarchal system where men head their traditional institutions. Ibí affirmed that the devotees of deities in Erei are traditionally headed by a male who serves as the priest and diviner, and is qualified to obtain sacrifices for the gods and mediate between the living and ancestors. Through this structuring, the name-bearers are viewed from the perspectives of the priests and the deities they represent. This set of personal names has symbolic relevance as they connect the veneration of worshipping deities with the worldview of the people. When asked about name-bearers' attitudes to deities-related personal names, some of the participants pledged never to bestow similar names on their children and expressed regret about why their parents bestowed such idolatrous names on them. However, the choices express sociocultural ideologies that situate the religious identity of the Erei people and expose the diachronic dimension of their socio-onomastic tradition.

4.2. Erei Personal Names Related to Death and Spirits

The conceptualisation of death and its representations through personal names cut across cultures. For instance, [Mensah \(2024, p. 1\)](#), in a study on death-related personal names among the Igbo, Ibibio and Owe people of Nigeria, has argued that some personal names "have cultural semantics used to acknowledge inevitability and unpredictability of death; to admit the existence of superior forces that control the affairs of human beings and to question the temporality of life." An aspect of Erei cosmology also reflects the people's beliefs in the mystery of death and the co-existence of spiritual beings that dwell among the living. This tradition is enacted through the bestowal of personal names that narrate Erei people's conceptualisation of death and spirits related to death in their worldview. Such personal names that fall into this categorisation are explained below.

In [Table 2](#) below, *Igbè* (Death) and *Útú* (Life) are paradoxical personal names that are bestowed on children by parents to reflect the mysteries in life and death. Our findings show that, in Erei traditions, a child who bears *Igbè* is believed to have conquered death since death cannot kill itself. *Útú*, on the other hand symbolises a covenanted disconnection from death and a declaration of willingness and desire to live among humans. One participant (Èbe: female 55) reported that *Útú* is bestowed on a child by couples who had repeated stillbirths to deny death and call for life. Both names convey a spiritual affront against infant mortality and an expression of longevity. *Úbú* (Ghost) is apparition which is a fearsome and dreadful figure in the beliefs of Erei people. Parents' position is that its frightful appearance is intended to scare off death from the dreadful looks of the name-bearer. Also, *Onyèné*

(Coming and going), *Ọsé* (Moving about), *Ọsusé* (One who goes and comes around) and *Ọjé* (One that is always going on errands) bear similar ethnopragmatic and sociocultural significance related to the pains associated with infantile deaths. One participant (Ája: male 67) argued that children who were born after such repeated incidences are given such names to renew parents' and communal ethnopsychological consciousness of the temporality of such children. Ája added that such children are perceived as agents and spies for death as they are unwilling to live. Also, some parents stated that such names are sociocognitively conceived to symbolically convey shame and guilt onto the name-bearers in order to 'coerce' them into staying alive by showing them love and care.

Table 2. Erei death- and spirits-related personal names.

Name	Gloss
Ìgbè	Death
Útú	Life
Úbú	Ghost
Ọnyèné	Coming and going
Ọsé	Moving about
Ọsusé	One who goes around
Ọjé	One that is always going (on errands)
Ukám(anu)	One's spirit that controls fate/destiny
Ọsọmási	He is not human
Ọsọmisi	He belongs to the tree
Útò	He/she is not owned by anyone
Ọsọmútò	One who is not related to anybody
Ánép	She is not beautiful
Ètán	Stone
Èkọn	Traditional beacon
Wèrén	Small fish/animal
Ọsubi	Small and insignificant person

Parents noted that *Ukám(anu)* (One's spirit that controls fate/destiny and/or personal god) is bestowed on children to reflect the people's beliefs in the existence of a guardian angel that ensures favourable destiny and protection of the life of the name-bearer. This belief aligns with *chi*, viewed in Igbo cosmology as an individual's personal god, guardian angel, individual providence and companion that is needed to shape one's destiny in the duration of one's lifetime (Achebe 1975; Uwen and Ukaegbu 2024). The other set of death-prevention names in this category are *Ọsọmási* (He is not human), *Ọsọmisi* (He belongs to the tree), *Útò* (They is not owned by anyone), *Ọsọmútò* (One who is not related to anybody) and *Ánép* (She is not beautiful). In Erei naming practices, the authors observed that *Ọsọmási* traditionally connotes longevity and communicates the needlessness of death befalling the bearer since he is not human. *Ọsọmisi* transfers familial attachment of the name-bearer to tree(s) in the forest. This objectifies the name-bearer as an inanimate entity that should not attract the wrath of death. *Útò* and *Ọsọmútò* are sociocultural constructs that convey an abrupt denial of any link between the bearer and their human family, which is meant to 'confuse' death particularly by linking such persons with families that have suffered a continuous loss of loved ones. *Ánép*, according to a participant (Odúbò: 62 female), is ironically bestowed on a beautiful female child to demonstrate resistance to and distract the goddess that kills fine-looking maidens. *Ètán* symbolises a hardened solidification that death cannot permeate through to inflict more sorrow on the parents who had lost dear ones earlier. Odúbò affirmed that *Èkọn* (Traditional beacon) represents a particular species of tree used traditionally to delineate boundaries of farmlands and residential plots to avoid trespass. The authors observed that, in Erei socio-onomastic practice, *Èkọn* is a symbolic being that sets the bounds for death as it cannot invade a property that does not belong to it. Also, *Wèrén* (Small fish/animal) and *Ọsubi* (Small and insignificant person) connote the alignment of the name-bearer with something that is small, worthless and

insignificant in order to distract death. This is because, in the people’s cosmic vision, death does not easily befall insignificant people. However, one of the participants (Ọsé: female 47) agreed with the motivations for the bestowal of such names but expressed regret about the ethnopragmatic impressions that conflict with her Christian beliefs. She confirmed that idolatrous names in Erei are now concentrated with the ageing subpopulation as the emerging socio-onomastic tradition is tilting towards bestowal of names that propagate Christian ideals.

Death-related names commemorate the experiences related to the deaths of children of parents and in recognition of the supernatural power that decides who lives or dies and represents the certainty of death and the temporality of life (Mensah 2015, 2020). The names are ritualised representations bestowed on children in order to deceive spiritual beings and prevent death from befalling the name-bearers (Mensah et al. 2021). Mensah (2020) demonstrates that this type of socio-onomastic practice is a cross-cultural tradition in Nigeria as it is also reflected in Yoruba (*Ábíkú*), Igbo (*Ogbánjé*), Efik (*Èká-Ábásí*) and Ibibio (*Èsén émáná*) cultures. This practice recounts how unpleasant experiences are resonated using language that captures memories that reflect individual, collective and cultural identities (Uwen and Ene 2024). Parents who were the name-givers of this category of names confirmed that they do so as a commemoration of misfortunes and losses generated by the deaths of their children. According to them, in Erei naming tradition, death-related personal names are memories of continual incidences of infant mortality meant to evoke sympathy from the spirit of death and its agents, and provide psychological relief and renewed assurance that the calamity of death will not befall the name-bearers and name-givers. This socio-onomastic tradition evokes traditional religious identity performance and suggests the vulnerability of the living to death and supernatural forces.

4.3. Personal Names Related to Reincarnation and Commemoration

As is seen in naming traditions across many cultures in Nigeria, there is also a set of Erei personal names that reflects the people’s worldview on the reincarnation and immortalisation of dead ancestors. On this, Seeman (1983) corroborates that some personal names are commemorative in nature, and are meant to maintain a living memory of dead loved ones to ease bereavement through symbolic reincarnation and the creation of a namesake that reconnects the living with the dead. This set of personal names are in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Reincarnation- and commemoration-related personal names.

Name	Gloss
Ákeasém	Paternal grandmother
Ákeakém	Maternal grandmother
Áseakém	Maternal grandfather
Áseasém	Paternal grandfather
Ètètè	Great grandfather
Èyák	Part of him/her (is back)
Údimé	He/she is not lost
Úbíni	He/she has arrived
Ụfúni	He/she has come back
Onuwèn	Our visitor

In Table 3 above, *Ákeasém* (Paternal grandmother), *Ákeakém* (Maternal grandmother), *Áseakém* (Maternal grandfather), *Áseasém* (Paternal grandfather) and *Ètètè* (Great grandfather) demonstrate the culture of immortalisation of dead ancestors through the bestowal of incarnational and commemorative personal names. One participant (Únyá: male 72) told us that such personal names do not merely utilise Erei linguistic resources to express the traditional ideologies of the people related to how the lives of the dead should be emulated so that they are remembered, but they are also commemorative tools used to sustain memories of the living and remind them of their forebears and their heroic deeds.

Interpreting these as transgenerational connections imposed through names, another participant (Ègwú: female 70) added that such children (even from infancy) often grow up to manifest some physical resemblance to and attributes of that particular ancestral namesake in terms of their behaviour, height, complexion, size and general dispositions. Ègwú believes that the names provide a symbolic mediation and continued spiritual harmony between the living and the dead to foster intergenerational familial identities and legacies. Reincarnation-related naming culture has been established as a common practice in socio-onomastic traditions across Nigeria. For instance, [Abioje \(2014\)](#) mentions that *Babátúndé* (Father returns) and *Iyábò/Yétúndé* (Mother returns) are Yoruba personal names that depict reincarnation and transgenerational connections. Also, among the Efik, [Akpanika and Duke \(2021\)](#) explain that personal names such as *Ukpong* and *Ekpo* (Soul of the dead), *Etete* (One's father), *Ekaete* (One's mother) and *Ukpongetesie* (The soul of the father is back) represent the people's belief in the re-embodiment of lives while [Uwen and Ekpang \(2022\)](#) argue that such names demonstrate the symbolic ideological preserve of the Erei people in the commemoration of their loved ancestors. This situates the practice as integral aspect of African traditional beliefs which has been integrated into socio-onomastic traditions.

Another set of personal names that depict reincarnation are *Èyák* (Part of him/her is back), *Udimé* (He/she is not lost), *Úbíni* (He/she has arrived) and *Úfúni* (He/she has come back). We observed that *Èyák* ethnopractically describes a child who shows some aspects of the ancestor named after him/her in terms of their traits and/or physical looks, while *Udimé* is a symbolic name bestowed on children in memory of the tragedy surrounding the circumstances of his/her birth. One participant (Úbinè: male 74) substantiated the circumstances that led to the bestowal of *Udimé* on one woman who was in her mid-40s at the time of the study. According to Úbinè, the mother delivered the baby and died of blood loss and that all efforts to save her were to no avail. He said the name reminds the name-givers of the instant reincarnation of the late woman through her newly born daughter. *Udimé* is social construct that assures the name-givers and name-users that the death of the woman was not a total loss. Also, within the worldview of the Erei people, *Úbíni*, *Úfúni* and *Onuwèn* (Our visitor) socioculturally represent traditional precepts that depict the expectations of children born into the family. We observed that these names are cultural scripts that reflect the people's hospitality and care for expected guests represented by newborns (the name-bearers) in this context. The names are meant to accord respect to dead family progenitors and enact the people's beliefs in another existence afterlife. This is also a popular socio-onomastic culture among the Tiv who believe firmly in the existence of an afterlife; that is, they believe that after death, an individual will start a new life which allows their soul to return ([Dzurgba 2007](#); [Mensah 2020](#)). One participant (Ègwè: male 70) emphasised that some of these names are not used to immortalise any kind of ancestor, but are reserved to commemorate ancestors who lived heroic lives with moral virtues to emulate, and they must have been 'properly' buried in line with the *unú* (heroic burial) tradition of the people. In addition to expressing the memories of the experiences of the name-givers with ancestors who showed love, support and solidarity, Ègwè added that the names are familial properties that preserve the progenies of valued human capital and resourceful persons who were the custodians of family history, heritage and ancestral tradition to protect family values. The personal names here are components of the traditional religious practices of the people that operate a synchronic socio-onomastic trend and explore the Erei language to express spiritual ideologies and situate them within the established religious identity of the people.

4.4. Personal Names Related to the Environment and Its Inhabitants

There is also an aspect of Erei socio-onomastic tradition that connects the people with their physical environment and its inhabitants, which they depend for the rehearsal of their religious beliefs. [Wolmer \(2007\)](#) demonstrates that humans and their physical environment are represented as having a reciprocal relationship within cosmological ideologies and religio-cultural practices, and people value the environment as an extension of the physical

and spiritual existence of the living and dead. The connection between the physical, spiritual, living and dead is rooted in the people’s religious beliefs and worldview. Erei people’s dependence on the environment and its products and the impacts they have on their belief system have direct and significant influence on the bestowal of personal names.

The authors observed that *Úwòm* (Communal home), in Table 4 below, is a representation of the collective and communal belonging of children after birth, where they become the ‘property’ of the community beyond their biological parents. *Úwòm* is symbolic of paternal ownership and the worship of certain idols that require a collective sacrifice to avert calamities for a lineage. Also, *Ìkọ* (Leaves), *Èghọt* (Bush), *Ọdum* (Forest) and *Ọdumúso* (Communal forest) connect the name-bearers, name-givers and name-users with the sociocultural conceptualisation of plants in the ecosystem within the cosmology of Erei people. One participant (Èsu: male 53) explained that *Ìkọ* is symbolic of children who survived life-threatening disease(s) after the application of traditional medicine derived from medicinal plants. Èsu expatiated that *Èghọt* is related to *Ìkọ* but is extended to represent a fertile site for hunting and the setting of traps for animals, while *Ọdum* and *Ọdumúso* reflect paternal and communal ownership of forests. The names in this context relate to the traditional religious, socio-economic and cultural relevance of natural forests in the worldview of the Erei people. Apart from these benefits, the participant stressed that the personal names reflect the craft of traditional diviners who depend on herbs, leaves, plants and forest products to consult ancestors and idols and transmit their messages to the worshippers. This act reflects the traditional religious beliefs of the people who conceive of these items as bearers of cosmological symbols. Beyond Erei, [Sibana \(2000\)](#) has argued that in the wider African context, the management, utilisation, preservation and sustenance of the physical environment are tied to, and structured by, the people’s spirituality and ideologies that regulate their traditional religious practices. [Uwen and Ohonsi \(2023\)](#) assert that, within the Nigerian sociocultural context, fresh branches of trees with leaves are symbolic cultural elements that convey different messages depending on where they are placed along the road. It is this religio-cultural milieu that reflects the symbolic relevance of plants and animals, and shapes the people’s cosmic vision that orders the utilisation of resources from the physical environment. This position is in line with the claim of one participant (Ọdom: male 70) who reported that the Erei people regulate access to certain forests (e.g., *ọdumégwé(òbè)*) in order to check for the indiscriminate harvesting of forest resources including some rare species of animals and plants which are believed to retain the spiritual, medicinal, nutritional treasures and religious beliefs of the community. The forest here has a symbolic heritage, a transgenerational property and a communal preserve for the performance of some sacred rituals by traditional religious adherents, many of which are exclusively performed by men for initiates.

Table 4. Personal names derived from the environment and its inhabitants.

Name	Gloss
Úwòm	Communal home
Èghọt	Bush
Ìkọ	Leaves
Ọdum	Forest
Ọdumúso	Communal forest
Ọyọ	River
Údọp	Flood
Ábani	Night
Èrubá	Land
’Onòli	A specific communal land
Jép	Crocodile
Ụgo	Eagle
Èshi	Pig
Ènyi	Elephant

We also observed that other names such as *Ọyọ* (river) and *Údọp* (flood) in Table 4 above, connote a depiction of water to connect with the sensual, socioeconomic and spiritual functions it performs in shaping the social, cultural and religious identities of Erei people. A participant (Onuwèn: 69 male) added that *Ọyọ* and *Údọp* are symbolic names that express the significance of water as source of life, a tool for spiritual purification and a site for regeneration. The magical qualities of a (overflowing) river during flood, according to him, allow for the invocation of spirits, provide a source of magical power from aquatic spirits and allow for a reconnection with aquatic gods and goddesses. Water, in the people's beliefs, is a powerful symbol of traditional religious activities where certain spirits are invoked and sacrifices are offered to some water goddesses for the well-being of worshippers. One participant (Ọgbán: male 67) noted that *Ábani* (Night) connotes a watchfulness that stimulates the spiritual consciousness required to tame evils perpetrated by spirits at night. Again, Ọgbán reported that *Onòli* is a circumstantial name bestowed on a child who was born in the year the community (which operates shifting cultivation system) farmed in their farmland called *Onòli* (which has now been developed into a residential area). The rotational farming system accompanies the performance of certain rituals to appease the gods of land for productivity. He also told us that *Èrubá* (Land) symbolises the sociocultural instrument that depicts the source and sustenance of life, and because plants, animals and human beings depend on land to live and procreate, land ethnopractically performs the function of reproduction which the child will grow to attain. The authors observed, that, in the people's worldview land also serves as the mediating point between the living and the dead as libation rituals are performed and liquid is poured on the land to transmit it to ancestors. This performance is a core traditional religious activity that depends on land for the conveyance of conditions from the living to the dead.

Erei personal names are also derived from animals which are integral creatures that live in the environment. Rybatzki (2012), as cited in Mensah (2015), explains that animals' names are symbolic in the African worldview, and depending on their peculiar features, parents bestow such names on children to reflect their characteristics such as bravery, aggressiveness, power, speed and harmlessness, among others. The participants argued that animals occupy and maintain a prominent space in the traditional Erei religion as they are symbols of various deities and ancestors and are used as instruments for sacrifices to appease aggrieved gods and ancestors. One participant (Èghọt: male 57) recounted that the names *Jép* (Crocodile), *Ụgo* (Eagle) and *Èshi* (Wild pig) are socioculturally symbolic. For instance, *Jép* is a symbol of a goddess and a wild carnivorous reptile with cultural and religious implications that show that the name-bearer cannot be consumed by a predator and *Ụgo* connotes royalty as the feathers are symbolically attached to the caps worn by traditional title holders in the community. Also, *Èshi* signifies familial commemoration of the killing of wild pigs by hunters (living and dead) in the past and present. Our findings also show that *Ènyi* (Elephant) traditionally symbolises physical endowment, strength, vigour, longevity, harmony, wisdom and individual, paternal and communal strength. One participant (Ọwáli: male 73) acknowledged that in the ancient times, certain spirits could be invoked into an elephant by any aggrieved man, causing it to destroy the farmland and crops of his supposed enemies as a demonstration of spiritual superiority. Ọwáli noted that Erei people believe that animals have souls like humans, and they are often exchanged for the lives of humans to appease the gods and evil forces. In the same way, the appearance of some animals at certain times of the day reinforces cultural and religious beliefs as such scenes connote ancestral communication and the delivery of very vital messages to the individual, family or community. In such events, according to him, *ágbọgbọ* (diviners) are consulted to reveal the rituals that need to be performed and sacrifices that should be offered to avert calamity. This is why certain animals are preserved through communal taboo system that protect biodiversity, as they are conceived as being sacred beings and symbols of life, deities and cultural regeneration.

We observed that there is the symbolic connection and interrelatedness between Erei traditional religious practices and the ecosystem. The people venerate the environment

that symbolically shelters their ancestors and other spirit beings and believe that the regeneration of the environment is linked to the centrality of accessing and utilising the religio-cultural products of the forest. So, retaining and propagating this indigenous knowledge system becomes a generational responsibility as the environment is fused to the social lives of the people as an integral part of religious activities and communal existence. This is because the environment (through the forest), produces timber and non-timber products for grazing, traditional medicine, wild fruits, animals and other benefits that support human existence and development, and allows for the propagation of the traditional religious beliefs of the people.

4.5. Other Traditional Religion-Related Personal Names

The final set of personal names are those with various traditional religious significations ranging from family and relationships to traditional symbols, male societies, festivals and symbolic instruments to eulogise heroic deeds as presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Other tradition-related personal names.

Name	Gloss
Ọgbán	First son
(W)Ubi	Any child other than the first son (or daughter)
Ọtái	First wife
Ipé	Animal horn
Èbin	Drum
Èkpè	Traditional male society
Èbòngò	Second in the hierarchy of Èkpè society
Ènòg	Wrestling
Ọgè	Knife

From the personal names in Table 5 above, one participant (Ụgo: female 7) told us that *Ọgbán* (First son) conveys sociocultural significance whether he is born into the nuclear or polygamous family. This is because the Erei people operate under a patriarchal structure where men play prominent roles in family and communal settings. Ụgo told us that the first son has enormous and power-wielding roles following those of the father, and in polygamous families, it is presumed that the wife that has the first son is considered to be favoured by the gods. This is because, in the traditional religious belief system, in the event of the death of the father (husband), the first son must be consulted before key family decisions are taken. The first son is a traditional symbol of the father, he is allotted a special share of the inheritance, and is allowed to ratify decisions about family property and the marriages of all of the daughters born into the family. The authors observed that *(W)Ubi* (Any child other than the first son or daughter) is not permitted to undergo any of the traditional rites and initiations meant for the first sons, which makes such children somehow traditionally less relevant. Also, *Ọtái* (First wife), usually bestowed on the first wife, is traditionally ranked highest in polygamous families and she is culturally empowered to represent the other junior wives in some familial and communal events. If the husband dies, she is the one traditionally allowed to mourn the husband and leads others in all aspects of funeral rites meant to be undertaken by the wives. The names *Ipé* (Animal horn) and *Èbin* (Drum) are symbolic instruments for traditional performances in Erei. One participant (Ilem: male 66) stated that *Ipé* and *Èbin* are cultural symbols that stand for the voice of the family and community. Ilem argued that the instruments designed to be “talking tools” are exclusively handled by men (who often perform certain rituals) to convey symbolic meanings related to power, strength, masculinity, eulogising heroes (living and dead) and certain spiritual invocations during specific traditional events and performances. The participant added that animal horns (carved to function as flute) and talking drums (made from wood and dried animal’s skin) are vital components of symbolic rituals as they are played to transmit different tones to disseminate messages

such as the announcement of specific festivals, funeral rites, praises for familial heroism, the conferment of traditional titles and heroic exploits and communal summons. These activities are all combined to instantiate the performance of traditional religious experience of the Erei people.

The other personal names, *Èkpè* (Traditional male society) and *Èbòngò* (Second in the hierarchy of *Èkpè* society), fall in the category of names bestowed on male children by men who belong to all the hierarchies of *Èkpè* society. In ascending order, *Èkpè* society is ranked in four strata: *Èkpè ténjá*, *Èkpè èbòngò*, *Èkpè iyámngbè* and *Èkpè mbòkò*. One participant (Igbòn: male 74) who belonged to the four hierarchies stated that the four ranks in *Èkpè* society are represented by four masquerades believed to be reflections of ancestral spirits whose human identities (when worn and masked) must not be disclosed to non-initiates. He told us that the masquerades (among which *Èkpè èbòngò* is the most dreaded) hold a curved iron or raffia cane in the left hand and leaves (*ikò ukámanu*, *èhaláng* and *èkòn*) which could be used to cleanse the land of evil, scare off evil spirits and heal those that are possessed of evil spirits. The authors also observed that the masquerades are culturally preserved and only made to appear during initiation rites, specific ritual ceremonies, funerals of members and award of honorary *Èkpè* titles. On the origin of this ritual, one participant (Úwèn: male 72) recounted that *Èkpè* society is a core part of the culture of the Efik in Southern Cross River State which was brought to Erei during their earlier interface with the Efik people some centuries ago. According to Úwèn, the language of the society, *nsimini*, is usually learnt with other secrets by the initiates. He added that the *Èkpè* society operates on the axiom “keep your eyes wide open but keep your mouth shut” and “see what you can but do not say what you see”. Úwèn disclosed that it is the highest hierarchy members of *Èkpè mbòkò* that are permitted to wear the *nsimini ankara* that bears the *nsimini* language, understood and interpreted only by members. The accounts of the participants align with [Asuquo's \(2019\)](#) explanation of the operation and cultural significance of *Èkpè* society among the Efik people. Another name in this order is *Ènòg* (Wrestling). On this, one participant (Igbò: male 74) affirmed that the name is bestowed on a male child born during the *Ènòg* festival (celebrated in August of every year) while others bear the name to reflect the cultural relevance of the event. He narrated that the festival bears cosmological significance in the worldview of the Erei people to the extent that families of contestants in the traditional wrestling matches consult different deities for the protection and victory of their sons engaged in the fiesta. The authors discovered that in the people's beliefs, wrestling offers the opportunities to display masculine qualities such as strength, courage, perseverance and determination to conquer, and men are rated and accorded honour depending on the number of opponents defeated during intra- and intercommunity wrestling contests. Also, *Ọgè* (Knife) is bestowed on male children for the evocation of other cultural significations. For instance, one participant (Èdadí: male 53) acknowledged that *Ọgè* is integrated into the traditions of Erei to symbolise deep cultural and spiritual significance such as power, hunting and a defence weapon. He noted that the sharp edge of the knife depicts the capacity of the holder to delve deep into the flesh of any enemy in case of attack. He added that it is also used during traditional ceremonies to demonstrate warfare and heroic adventures, and on other occasions to signify severance of ties from evil ancestors and bad spirits. Although the authors observed that the younger generation of Erei are becoming unwilling to bear these names because of their connection with the traditional religion, the systematic ordering of the personal names purposely uses the Erei language to contextualise ideologies that demonstrate the performance of the traditional religious identity of the people explained within the people's socio-onomastic tradition.

5. Conclusions

The study draws on insights from socio-onomastic theory to interpret the role of the African traditional religion in the naming traditions of the Erei people. The theory helps in the explication and analysis of a set of names that convey sociocultural meanings in Erei by traversing naming traditions, the African traditional religion and the ethnopragmatic

functions of the names to construct, situate and sustain the traditional religious identities of the name-givers, name-bearers and name-users. The theory provides a descriptive framework and grounds to diachronically situate the names within time and space as symbolic cultural resources that employ a religious lens to construct the identities and lived experiences of the Erei people. The study centres on exploring African traditional religion's ideals to instantiate religious identities ascribed through the bestowal of personal names related to the deities the people worship and their social significations, the vulnerability of the people before death and consolation strategies within their beliefs system. It highlights the people's beliefs in existence afterlife and commemoration of befitting ancestors, the symbolic representation of communal festivals and traditional performances and the sociocultural relevance of the environment and its products that connote religious significance. The study also demonstrates how the Erei language is utilised to express situated ideologies and various domains of personal names are available for the performance of traditional religious identities. It is shown that the Erei belief system is communicated through these personal names, and that traditional religion includes spiritual, social, psychological, physiological, behavioural and institutional functions. These functions manifest through self-actualisation, self-regulation, anxiety control, the direction of existentiality and communal life, the propagation of ideologies and religious identity performance. Through this, personal names based on traditional religious orientations become a symbolic vehicle to identify, negotiate, construct, delineate, perform and reinforce religious identities that communicate the situated beliefs and worldviews explained in this study using the rich linguistic resources of the people. As demonstrated in the study, some participants' expressive disconnection from the traditional religion-based personal names shows the impact of Christianity and the infusion of an emerging socio-onomastic tradition in Erei that has introduced Christian ideologies into the naming culture. The trend is observed to be propagated by the young generation of Erei people who are becoming resistant to bearing traditionally constructed personal names. This protest signifies a detachment from the influences of such names on their destinies that is conceived through the tenets of their new religious belief system. This emerging stance reflects the significance of this study as it serves as a reference material that documents a transiting naming culture in Erei. The current study is limited by its scope and the lack of time to delve into the new naming practice of Christian names and the implications this has for the people. Based on this development, we suggest that further research may investigate the emerging socio-onomastic tradition in Erei personal names that enacts the performance of the people's Christian religious identity. This way, the motivations and implications of the diachronic shift in Erei naming practices will be better appreciated.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, G.O.U. and E.I.U.; methodology, G.O.U.; software, G.O.U.; validation, E.I.U. and G.O.U.; Formal analysis, G.O.U.; investigation, G.O.U. and E.I.U.; resources, G.O.U.; data curation, E.I.U., writing—original draft preparation, G.O.U.; writing—review and editing, G.O.U.; visualization, E.I.U.; supervision, G.O.U.; project administration, E.I.U. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no funding.

Informed Consent Statement: Verbal consent has been obtained from the interviewees to publish this paper.

Data Availability Statement: The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this are available within the paper.

Acknowledgments: The authors appreciate late Lawrence Uwen, Mathew Owali Esu, Daniel Ukam Ogban, Ilem Ukam, Marshall Odom Uwen, Onete Ivi Igbon and Ukam Igbe Ogban who assisted in the realisation of this study.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

- Abioje, Pius. 2014. *African Ancestral Heritage in Christian Interpretations*. Cape Coast: University of Cape Coast Press.
- Aboh, Romanus, Eyo Mensah, Idom Inyabri, and Lucy Ushuple. 2022. Christianity and the gendering of personal names among the Bette people in Southeastern Nigeria. *Journal of Religion in Africa* 53: 1–25. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Achebe, Chinua. 1975. Chi in Igbo cosmology. In *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. London: Heinemann.
- Aguboshim, Felix. 2021. An exploration into the conceptual, factual and biblical significance of names. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews* 11: 127–33. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Ainiala, Terhi, and Jan-Ola Ostman. 2017. *Socio-Onomastics: The Pragmatics of Names*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Akpanika, Ekpenyong, and Emmanuel Duke. 2021. A phenomenological approach to beliefs in supreme being and divinities in Efik traditional religion. *Pinsi Journal of Art, Humanity & Social Studies* 1: 1–8.
- Asuquo, Offiong. 2019. The social significance and implications of the Ekpe shrine in Calabar, Nigeria. *GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis* 2: 132–37.
- Atel, Edwards. 2004. *Dynamics of Tiv Religion and Culture: A Philosophical-Theologica; Perspective*. Lagos: Free Enterprise Publications.
- Ayantayo, Jacob. 2014. The phenomenon of change of name and identity in Yoruba religious community in the light of social change. *ORITA Journal of Religious Studies* 42: 1–16.
- Boluwaduro, Eniola. 2019. Ideology and identity construction in Ibibio personal names. *Sociolinguistics Studies* 13: 231–50. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Chiluwa, Innocent. 2010. Discourse of naming among Christian charismatic movements in Nigeria. In *Language, Literature and Discourse. A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Lekan Oyeleye..* Edited by Ayo Kehinde, Akin Odebunmi and Ayo Ogunsiji. Munich: Lincon, pp. 233–48.
- Clark, Cecily. 2005. *Onomastics in the Cambridge History of the English Language Vol. 2*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Claval, Paul. 2014. Religion and ideology. In *The Changing World Map*. Edited by Stanley D. Brunn. London: Springer, pp. 349–62.
- David, Abraham, and Stephen David. 2020. Sociolinguistic study of language use in different Christian denominations. *COOU Journal of Arts and Humanities* 5: 272–82.
- Dzurgba, Akpenpuun. 2007. *On the Tiv Tribe*. Kaduna: Government Press.
- Etteokon, Eno, and Baridisi Isaac. 2021. The tripartite analysis of God-based names in Ibibio. *Pindus Journal of Culture, Literature and ELT* 2: 85–97.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1989. *Language and Power*. London: Longman.
- Farb, Peter. 1993. *Word Play: What Happens When People Talk?* New York: Vintage Books.
- Felecan, Oliviu, and Alina Bughesiu. 2021. Introduction. In *Names and Naming Multicultural Aspects*. Edited by Olivia Felecan and Alina Bughesiu. Cham: Palgrave, pp. 1–80.
- Godson, Chuchukwu, and Eze Igodo. 2020. Socio-religious imperatives in a name: Traditional perspective of the Igbo of Nigeria, West Africa. *African Journal of Culture, History, Religion and Traditions* 2: 10–17.
- Helslin, James. 2006. *Essentials of Sociology: A Down to Earth Approach*. Boston: Pearson.
- Idowu, Bolaji. 1991. *African Traditional Religion. A Definition*. Ibadan: Fountain Publishers.
- Igboin, Benson. 2014. African religious discourse on names and identity. *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religion* 3: 26–40.
- Ikotun, Reuben. 2010. The social use of Yoruba names. *Names* 58: 169–86. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Imoh, Phillip. 2018. An onomastic study of the structure of the Basa personal names. *ANSU Journal of Language and Literary Studies* 5: 50–72.
- Inya, Friday. 2011. *How to Read and Write in Erei*. Abakili: The Luke Partnership.
- Isajiw, Wsevolod. 1990. Ethnicity identity construction. In *Ethnic Identity and Equality: Varieties of Experiences in a Canadian City*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 34–91.
- Kalkanova, Tatyana. 1999. Sociology of proper names in Sofia since 1970. *International Journal of Sociology of Language* 135: 85–98. [[CrossRef](#)]
- King, Pamela. 2003. Religion and identity: The role of ideological, social and spiritual contexts. *Applied Developmental Science* 7: 197–204. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Leslie, Paul, and James Skipper. 1990. Towards a theory of nicknames: A case for socio-onomastics. *Names* 38: 273–82. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Lombard, Carol. 2015. *The Socio-Onomastic Significance of American Cattle Brands: A Montana Case Study*. Ph.D. thesis, The Free State University, Bloemfontein, South Africa.
- Mabuza, Mandinda. 2022. Individual names and personality: A consideration of some beliefs. *Onomastica* 12: 34–57.
- Mbiti, John. 1975. *Introduction to African Religion*. London: Heinemann.
- Mensah, Eyo. 2015. Frog, where are you? The ethnopragsmatics of Ibibio death prevention names. *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 27: 115–32. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Mensah, Eyo. 2020. Name this child: Religious identity and ideology in Tiv personal names. *Names: A Journal of Onomastics* 10: 1–15. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Mensah, Eyo. 2024. Death is the cause of my predicament: A cross-cultural study of death-related personal names in Nigeria. *Death Studies* 47: 1–12. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
- Mensah, Eyo, Kirsty Roman, and Mfon Ekpe. 2024. The representation of people in the Ibibio anthroponymic system: A socio-onomastic investigation. *Languages* 9: 188. [[CrossRef](#)]

- Mensah, Eyo, Vivian Dzokoto, and Kirsty Rowan. 2021. The function of emotion-referencing names in Ibibio. *International Journal of Language and Culture* 8: 218–44. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Metuh, Emefie. 1987. *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religion*. Ontsha: IMICD.
- Nicolaison, W. F. 1985. Socio-onomastics. In *Proceedings of the 15th International Congress of Onomastics Sciences*. Leipzig: Karl-Marx-Universität, pp. 108–32.
- Obi, Chidiebere. 2013. Religion as basis of social order. In *The Kpim of Social Order: A Season of Social Uprising*. Edited by George Uzoma Ukagba, Des O. Obi and Iks J. Nwankwor. Bloomington: Xlibris Corporation, pp. 425–50.
- Pargament, Kenneth. 2013. Spirituality as an irreducible motivation and process. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 23: 271–81. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Pargament, Kenneth, Melisa Falb, Gene Ano, and Amy Wachholtz. 2013. The religious dimension of coping: Advances in theory, research, and practice. In *Handbook of Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*. Edited by R. F. Palutjian and C. L. Park. London: The Guilford Press, pp. 560–79.
- Poynton, Cate. 1985. *Language and Gender: Making a Difference*. Oxford: OUP.
- Puzey, Guy, and Laura Kostanski. 2016. Names and naming: People, places, perceptions and power. *Multilingual Matters* 4: 34–50.
- Rybatzki, Volker. 2012. From animal to name: Remarks on the semantics of Middle Mongolian personal names. *Memoires de la Societe Finno-Ougrienne* 264: 333–38.
- Schachter, Elli, and Asa Ben Hur. 2019. The varieties of religious significance: An idiographic approach to the study of religion's role in adolescent development. *Research on Adolescence* 29: 291–307. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
- Seeman, Mary. 1983. The unconscious meaning of personal names. *Names* 31: 237–44. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Sibana, Backson. 2000. Community participation: NGOs and IGOs in nature management. In *Environmental Security in Southern Africa*. Edited by Daniel S. Tevera and Sam Mayo. Harare: SAPES Books, pp. 212–29.
- Udom, Daniel, and Aniekan Nana. 2024. Initiation in Ibibio culture and traditional religion. *NJIKO: A Multidisciplinary Journal of Humanities, Law, Education and Social Sciences* 2: 48–55.
- Uwen, God'sgift. 2018. Parametric variation of personal and possessive pronouns in Erei and English. *Journal of the Linguistics Association of Nigeria Supplement* 111: 85–93.
- Uwen, God'sgift. 2019. English loanwords as lexical enrichment to the Erei language. *Journal of the Nigerian Language Project* 1: 54–66.
- Uwen, God'sgift, and Edem Ene. 2024. Guns end dreams: Linguistic choices as trauma narrations in Baki and Adedoyin's End sars rhythms. *Cogent Arts and Humanities* 11: 1–14. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Uwen, God'sgift, and Eunice Ukaegbu. 2024. God is life: A sociolinguistic and ethnopragmatic conceptualization of *Chi* in Igbo naming practices. *Journal of Black Studies* 55: 25–45. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Uwen, God'sgift, and Juliet Ekpang. 2022. A socio-onomastic categorisation of Erei personal names. *Onoma* 57: 267–84. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Uwen, God'sgift, and Ugenlo Ohonsi. 2023. Language on the road: Semiotic (mis)representations of road signs in the Nigerian sociocultural context. *Ahyu: A Journal of Language and Literature* 6: 118–32. [[CrossRef](#)]
- van Dijk, Tuen. 1989. Structures of discourse and structures of power. In *Communication Year Book 12*. Edited by James Anderson. Newbury Park: Sage, pp. 223–40.
- Walter, Hens. 1971. *Namenforschung Heute. Ihre Ergebnisse und Aufgaben in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*. Berlin: Akademisch-Verlag.
- Werbner, Prina. 2010. Religious identity. In *The Sage Handbook of Identities*. Edited by Margaret Wetherell and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. London: Sage Publications Ltd., pp. 233–58.
- Wolmer, William. 2007. *From Wilderness Vision to Farm Invasions: Conservations and Development in Zimbabwe's Southeast Lowveld*. Harare: Weaver Press.
- Ysseldyk, Renate, Kimberry Matheson, and Hymie Anisman. 2010. Religiosity as identity: Towards an understanding of religion from a social identity perspective. *Personality and Social Psychology* 14: 23–37. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.