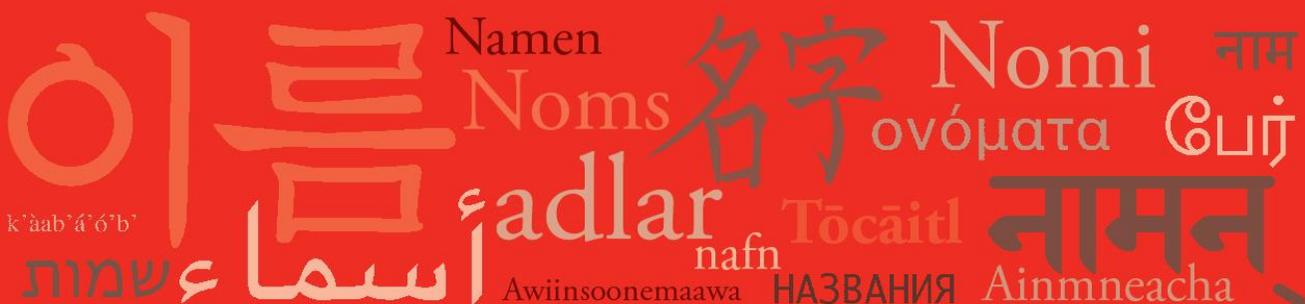


Names | A Journal of Onomastics



Editorial

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In the Spring of 2024, an official call for papers was opened for a special issue of *NAMES* devoted to “Name Bias and Prejudice”. From anthroponyms to commercial names, toponyms to zoonyms, proposals focusing on any name type, in any language or culture, from any time period, and utilizing any analytical method were invited. Proposals examining name bias and prejudice in the arts (e.g., literature, music, film) were also strongly encouraged. In response to the call, the journal received a large number of international submissions representing the breadth of modern onomastic research. Upon receipt, each submission was subjected to double blind review. During this evaluation, proposals were evaluated for not only for their conceptual fit to the Special Issue theme, but also the following criteria: scientific innovation; writing style and organization; argumentation; potential to make a substantive contribution to onomastic research; topicality of the research question posed; clarity of the theoretical framework; appropriateness of the preliminary reference list; and adherence to the *NAMES* Style Sheet. Those proposals which received the highest qualitative and qualitative assessments were then invited to submit a completed manuscript for possible publication, after subsequent review for thematic content, language, organization, and argumentation. At the end of this exceptionally rigorous review process, four papers were selected for inclusion in the Special Issue.

The first of this four-article collection was contributed by the following trio of researchers from Belgium’s University of Liège: (1) Professor Emeritus, Serge Brédart, a scholar in psychology and onomastics, whose pioneering research has contributed greatly to our current understanding of the cognitive processes involved in memory, identification, and names; (2) Christel Devue, a cognitive psychologist whose research centers on memory and facial processing; and (3) Valentine Vanootighem, a postdoctoral researcher in cognitive psychology whose research involves the role of personal names, memory, and recollection. Combining their interdisciplinary backgrounds, for the present issue, these scholars contributed an empirical investigation of people’s emotional reactions to having their name misprocessed, forgotten, replaced, or mispronounced during a conversation with friends and close colleagues. This study adds to the already impressive body of work published by this team of researchers, both individually and collectively (e.g., Brédart 2019; Brédart & Vanootighem 2022; Devue, Badolle, & Brédart 2024).

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The second article in this special issue also deals with the psychology of personal names. However, in this investigation, the focus is placed on the emotional effects of having one's name used by others as a term of derision. Although, as the author points out, there are certainly many historical examples of personal names that been used in this manner, the article centers on one modern exemplar: *Karen*. After providing a brief history on the etymological development and eventual introduction of *Karen* into the US American lexicon, the article presents the results of an online survey conducted with 681 respondents named *Karen* to measure the location, frequency, and severity of the prejudice and discrimination they have received in reaction to their name. The article is punctuated with first-hand commentary from many respondents. It was the product of a cooperative research initiative between Karens United, a non-profit non-partisan organization to increase public awareness of and sensitivity to the harms of namism; and the onomastic researcher, Professor I. M. Nick, the Editor-in-Chief of *NAMES*. This article builds on the author's past research which examines the strategic use of names and naming to stigmatize, ostracize, and dehumanize others (e.g., Nick 2017; 2019; 2012).

While the first two contributions center on the unintentional and intentional misuse of personal names upon individual name-bearers, the third article in this special issue examines the issue of name prejudice and discrimination from a broader scientific standpoint. Written by Professor Ömer Gökhan Ulum of Mersin University in Turkey, this article examines name bias on Kurdish-origin individuals and Syrian Arab refugees within Turkey's socio-political landscape. Building on work examining culture and identity (e.g., Ulum & Köksal 2018; 2019), this empirical investigation uses social identity theory and Allport's contact hypothesis as its theoretical framework and measures the influence of name bias on respondents' socioeconomic opportunities, cultural integration, and psychological well-being. The findings reported in this work not only make a substantive contribution to the scientific study of names and namism, but also highlight the critical need for more the role onomastic research can play in uncovering societal threats to diversity, equality, and equity.

The fourth and final contribution to this special issue was contributed by Professor Emilia Aldrin, whose work in socio-onomastics has been seminal in advancing the field (e.g., Pilcher, Deakin-Smith, Aldrin, & Ngyuen 2024; Ainiala, Aldrin, & Eggert 2023; Aldrin 2023; 2016;). For this special issue, her article examines the ways in the naming strategies used in school children's textbooks can either deconstruct or (re)construct societal prejudice and bias. To make illustrate this point, the article utilizes a Progressive Discourse Analytic approach to examine the overt and covert messages that names convey about cultural and diversity and gendered identity. Although the investigative focus of this study is three 21st century primary school textbooks used in Sweden, as the author sagely points out, the lessons learned in this study are applicable more broadly to the specific role of names play in helping to support or thwart diverse, welcoming societies from one generation to the next.

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Notes on Contributor

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