

Attributes of *Ushi* Deity of Akpoku Etche of South Nigeria

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Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.	
Citation: Emmanuel Echezolochi Amadi, Ph.D & Uwom Kenoye Ophagharanan Igoniko, Ph.D. (2026). Attributes of Ushi deity of Akpoku Etche of South Nigeria. UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, 2(10), 65-74.	<i>This paper examines the attributes of Ushi deity of Akpoku Etche. In Akpoku Etche, Ushi deity is regarded as the most influential and most powerful divinity. Because of his potentials and benevolence in the generality of the life of the people, Ushi is known today and associated with attributes such as Ushi onye udo (god of peace), Ushi onye-eshiokwu (god of truth). In addition to this Ushi oche obodo (the god that protects the community), adanefu (the god that goes to war and never returns without accomplishing his aim). The study relied on primary and secondary sources. The study also adopts phenomenological approach to interpret and describe the attributes of ushi deity. Findings from the study show that the attributes of Ushi deity reveal the reality of his existence in the everyday life of the people. The study recommends that indigenous Etche researchers and custodians of Etche tradition should systematically document the history, attributes, myths, rituals, taboos, symbols and functions associated with Ushi deity before such knowledge will go into extinction.</i>
	Keywords: Akpoku, Etche, Ushi Deity and Attributes.

Introduction

In Akpoku, *Ushi* deity occupies an important place in the life of the people. Among the deities, *Ushi* is regarded as the most influential and most powerful divinity. Thus, he is the only divinity in whose honour festival is organized. As a great festival, it not only attracts people from far and near, but also an avenue in which the deity is revered with special sacrifices. In fact, his potentials always reflect in the people's daily speeches. For instance, when a man is accused of a crime where he claims to be innocent, he will raise his two hands up to the sky and say thus: *Ushi lee akam* (*Ushi* look at my hands), *Ushi ma eshiokwu* (*Ushi* knows the truth), *Ushi ekwele* (*Ushi* forbids). Indeed, these expressions affirm the people's believe in the efficacy of the deity. This study, therefore, examine the significance of the attributes of *Ushi* deity in the life of Akpoku people.

Background of the Study

Akpoku is located to the north bank of the Niger Delta and bordered by various communities and clans. It is bounded to the north by Umuoye Etche and Unuekwuene of Ngor-Okpala State in Imo State. It is bordered by Mba clan and Okehi clan of Etche, Obite Etche, Opehi, Umuikoro and Orishieze of Ngor-Okpala, Imo State on its East. Akpoku is bordered to the south by Odufor, Nihi, Opiro and Egwi in

Etche; to the west is the Ozuzu clan of Etche. It is comprised of six villages of Umuoria, Umuaghara, Ummekwuene, Umuorde, Umudim and Okomoko with a common forebear. From the administrative point of view, Akpoku currently forms part of the towns of Etche LGA, Rivers State, Nigeria (Amadi, 2025, p. 416).

The economic activities of the people of Akpoku largely depend on agriculture. There is a significant farming population as well as other traditional activities like palm-wine tapping, fishing and hunting. In terms of agricultural products grown within the community, the yam and cassava are given special attention and grown in relatively large quantities.

Climatic condition of Akpoku is affected by its geographical location in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The community has two major seasons; the rainy season and the dry season. Rainfall is mostly from March through November and the relatively dry period is November through February. These seasonal changes are a critical aspect of environmental conditions under which people carry out their agricultural activities and other socioeconomic activities.

Akpoku believe in a Supreme Being known as the God who created everything in the universe, Chineke, who is the foundation of their spiritual worldview. As in many traditional African societies, the Akpoku people do not approach the Supreme Being directly and be the first to initiate contact with Him. Worship and communication with the Supreme Being have, however, traditionally been mediated through a pantheon of divinities which hold significant positions within their religious worldview and practices (Amadi, 2025, p. 417).

Methodology

This study was carried out as an interview – based research. Two types of oral investigation procedures were utilized viz:

- i. Reports of devotees of *Ushi* deity of Akpoku about the importance of the attributes of *Ushi*
- ii. Handed down tradition about meaning of the attributes of *Ushi*

Several considerations drove selection of participants for interview for the study. These included the individual's social position in the community, membership and role in relevant cultural organisations, traditional or social title held, degree of cultural affiliation, educational background, the level of social exposure and past travel experience. Preference was given to people who showed a strong cultural tie to the local community since such people were believed to know more about the traditions, customs, beliefs, and cultural practices of the community in question.

Conceptual Review

Etche

Etche is one of the 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Rivers State, located in the north of the state. The area is bounded to the North by Ngor-Okpala Local Government Area of Imo State and continues Eastward toward Abia State (Nwiyi, 2012, p. 68). Traditionally, Etche is divided into five primary clans for administrative purposes. These clans are Mba, Okehi, Ozuzu, Igbo Agwuruasa and Ulakwo Umuselem (Amaele, 2000, p. 1). The inhabitants of Etche speak Etche language which is one of the indigenous languages spoken in Rivers State (Ndimele, 2003, p. 11). Geographically, the area sits within the tropical rainforest zone of Nigeria and exhibits marked seasonality. Heavy rains are common between March and October, whereas the period from November to February is rather dry and sunny. The region is mostly flat with fresh water rivers and streams running through it. The principal economic activities of the population include agriculture, fishing, hunting, palm-wine tapping, and the production of locally distilled gin, among others (Amadi & Uwom, 2024, p. 58).

Religiously, the people of Etche believe strongly in the existence of a Supreme Being called Chineke. He is said to be the creator of all things in the universe. The traditional religious worldview of a large number of African societies does not normally involve the direct worship of the Supreme Being. Rather, a pantheon of divinities performing essential functions in the traditional religious system facilitates communication and devotion (Amadi & Uwom, 2024, p. 3).

Divinities in West African Culture

Among the Yoruba Orisa-nla, also known as Obatala, the creator divinity is the most prominent divinity. This divinity, in the words of Mbiti (1969, p. 76) is the supreme divinity in Yoruba land, and one who acts as God's earthly deputy in creative and executive functions. In much the same vein, Idowu (1973, p. 169) also described him as Deity's son or deputy, vested with the power and authority of royal sonship. According to Booth, (1977) "Orisa-nla is believed among the Yoruba to have been the first creation of Olodumare or even his image or symbol on earth" (p. 63).. In the word of Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) Orisa-nla is the creator divinity in that he was commissioned by the Supreme Deity to create the solid earth, to equip it, and mould the physical form of man. Although his role in the creation of man as they noted, is limited to moulding alone, it is believed among the Yoruba that it is Orisa-nla's prerogative to make the human form shapely or ugly as he wishes. As they further asserted, despite the fact that he is often described as the vicegerent of Olodumare, his role, position and authority are derived from and delegated by God. In consequence of this, Orisa-nla has no absolute power or authority of his own.

The authors mention a number of qualities of Orisa-nla which are believed to reflect his nature and character. His name, Obatela, means "King of whiteness" or "Lord of the white cloth," and the white colour is hence dominant in the religious activities linked with him. His temple is whitewashed as a matter of custom and his sacred emblems are white chalk and white utensils. During religious activities, priests and priestesses are usually dressed in white clothes and decorations. Offerings made to him are usually bloodless, e.g. snails and shea butter. The water stored at his shrine is changed daily to ensure a high standard of ritual purity.

In this theological view Orisa-nla is related with purity and holiness and is therefore seen to embody the holiness of God. His association with purity casts a heavy moral burden on his followers. The worshippers are therefore required to lead lives of moral integrity, cleanliness, and upright conduct. The moral and spiritual state of the people is figuratively to be as pure water taken in the early morning from an unspoiled and uncontaminated spring.

According to Awolalu and Dopamu, another attribute of Orisa-nla is *Alabalase*, meaning “He who proposes and also disposes”. This title for them only referred to Orisa-nla’s great power as the proposer who wields the scepter. For them, the scepter, according to Yoruba belief was passed on to him by God Himself. Despite this, he could not be regarded as the absolute proposer and disposer of things.

For he received the sceptre of God. Then the human king becomes derivatively divine when Orisa-nla hands him the sceptre. They further stated that Orisa-nla is venerated in Yoruba nation. In numerous places you will see his temple and his priests and priestesses. Their supplication to him is frequently this, (barren women that they may be blessed with children,) Similarly, water from his temple is offered to expectant mothers to have their offspring shapely moulded. Water from his shrine is also used to treat invalids. The water is normally drawn quite early in the morning. Awolalu and Dopamu said that the drawer should not talk to anyone from the time she gets out of bed up to the time she gets the water from the spring. His day is kept for Sunday (p.78).

According to Ajayi (1981) discussion on Yoruba divinities without a remarkable reference to Orisa-nla remains incomplete. This creator divinity, he noted possessed in him multi-dimensional attributes that sets him apart from other divinities among the Yoruba. For Ajayi, Orisa-nla is regarded among the Yoruba as the father of all the divinities of Yoruba land and one who named them after himself. He is of the view that Orisa-nla represents to the Yoruba, the idea of ritual and ethical purity. In his words, Orisa-nla enjoys monogamy in the sense that it is absolutely, impossible for peace to reign when there is multiplicity of wives (pp. 68- 69).

Sango is one of the prominent divinities in Yoruba religious tradition and is associated primarily with thunder and lightning. Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) recorded several traditions concerning Sango as a historical personality. According to these accounts, Sango was believed to have been the fourth Alafin of Oyo and was subsequently deified after his death, becoming associated with thunder and lightning. In this role, he replaced Jakuta, regarded as the earlier Yoruba divinity of thunder whose name is associated with throwing or fighting with stones. Sango is understood as an expression of the Supreme Being’s divine anger against individuals who violate accepted moral standards within society and is consequently regarded as one of the most feared divinities. His presence is traditionally perceived through phenomena such as thunder, lightning, and thunder-related afflictions. Sango is believed to prohibit and punish offences including falsehood, theft, and poisoning. Thus, thunder and lightning serve as reminders of divine judgment. Individuals who have committed

serious wrongdoing or who have doubts concerning their own moral character are traditionally believed to experience fear and apprehension during thunderstorms. According to Awolalu and Dopamu, persons believed to have been struck by Sango are not accorded ordinary burial rites; instead, Sango priests perform the burial and appropriate rituals are conducted at the location where the incident occurred.

Awolalu and Dopamu further explain that punishment attributed to Sango is understood as a form of royal judgment, and a person who dies through such punishment is not traditionally mourned. The death is interpreted as a consequence of wrongdoing because Sango is believed to manifest his power particularly against persons guilty of perjury, moral misconduct, or other serious offences. When lightning strikes a house, specific ritual procedures are reportedly carried out by Sango priests. Until the object known as Edun-Ara, commonly interpreted as the thunderstone or thunderbolt, is located and removed from the affected site, the occupants are traditionally expected to avoid sleeping in the damaged house. Temporary accommodation may instead be sought in a smithy or in specially constructed shelters.

Sango is also described by Awolalu and Dopamu as a tutelary divinity served by both priests and priestesses. His devotees traditionally wear necklaces made of red and white beads, while the Magba, or priest of Sango, characteristically allows his hair to grow and styles it in a manner associated with women. During possession, the priest is believed to possess extraordinary abilities, including the capacity to carry fire upon his head without sustaining injury. Shrines dedicated to Sango are found in different parts of Yorubaland. A typical shrine is described as containing a three-pronged staff supporting a vessel in which axes, stone celts, or objects traditionally identified as thunderbolts are kept; these objects symbolize Sango’s instruments of punishment. Worshippers offer various sacrifices, including cowries, goats, sheep, oxen, and fowls. They also appeal to Sango for peace, longevity, prosperity, material well-being, and protection from physical dangers and unseen forces (Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979, p. 83). Tasie (2013) further associates Sango with the symbolism of light because of his connection with thunder and lightning (p. 63).

George (1980) provides a description of the physical setting of a Sango temple, emphasizing the contrast between its sacred function and its modest material surroundings. He describes a contemporary sanctuary situated in a confined urban space among commercial activities and workshops. The altar is positioned beyond a screen and consists of a low, dark carved structure supporting a large bowl containing celts or so-called “thunder-stones,” which are

popularly believed to be meteorites but are often ancient implements. Small painted or decorated figures may also be placed around the altar, while leather containers, calabashes containing charms, and other ritual objects are suspended above it. Offerings such as kolanuts, food, and oil may be placed before the altar depending on the occasion and the resources available to worshippers. George's description illustrates that, despite the importance attributed to Sango within Yoruba religious tradition, the physical appearance of the sanctuary may be relatively modest rather than elaborate (George, 1980, p. 65).

Ogun occupies an important position among the divinities of the Yoruba and is traditionally associated with iron and warfare. Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) describe him as the principal patron of blacksmiths, hunters, warriors, and other persons whose occupations involve the use of iron and steel. Because iron is regarded as belonging to Ogun, activities involving metal, including surgical procedures and bodily practices such as circumcision and tattooing, are traditionally connected with him. Yoruba tradition further portrays Ogun as a hunter who descended from heaven through a spider's web in pursuit of his hunting activities. When the divinities were preparing to enter the world but encountered difficulty in finding a passage, Ogun reportedly used his magical machete to clear a path through the dense forest. Because of this service, the other divinities praised him, contributing to his designation as *Osin Imole*, understood as chief or foremost among the divinities (Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979).

Ogun is also portrayed as a fierce and warlike divinity and is consequently associated with divine judgment and the expression of God's wrath. Traditional belief maintains that an oath or covenant made in Ogun's presence must be honoured. Among adherents of traditional religion, oaths may be administered in legal or dispute-resolution contexts by having the person taking the oath kiss a piece of iron, thereby affirming the truthfulness of the declaration. Individuals suspected of harbouring harmful intentions may similarly be required to swear before Ogun. False testimony or perjury is believed to invite serious consequences because Ogun is regarded as a defender of justice, fairness, truthfulness, and moral rectitude. His authority therefore extends beyond warfare and craftsmanship to the regulation of ethical conduct and the enforcement of social obligations.

Despite his formidable character, Ogun is also venerated for his protective and benevolent qualities. Hunters traditionally seek his protection during dangerous expeditions, while in contemporary contexts drivers and cyclists are also believed to appeal to him for safety against accidents (Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979). Ogun shrines may be located in front of houses or within blacksmith

workshops, with iron serving as his principal symbol. Other objects associated with him include rocks, elephant tusks or tails, *porogun*, *Dracaena fragrans*, and pieces of metal. Dogs are regarded as his distinctive sacrificial food, while palm wine is traditionally identified as his preferred drink; other offerings may include fowls, tortoises, rams, kola nuts, bitter kola, yam, and palm oil (Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979, p. 81). Idowu (1962) further observes that Ogun shrines are sometimes situated at the entrances to the shrines of other Yoruba divinities. This placement reflects the understanding of Ogun as the "way" through which access to and movement from the other divinities is made possible (p. 127).

Mbiti (1969) described Ogun as "chief among the divinities". According to him, this is as a result of multiplicity of activities associated with him (p.76). According to Booth (1977, p. 170) Ogun is also known as possessor of two machetes. With one he prepares the farm, with the other he clears the road. This for him, explains why offerings are made to him in connection with any sacrifice in that he is responsible for the knife that is used. As he further reports, Ogun is also associated with justice in the sense that oaths are taken in his name over piece of iron.

Ogun, Booth also observed is a rather fierce and unbending deity. He maintains that as a god of iron one is expected to meet him:

In the place of battle, in the place of
wrangling, in the place where torrents of
blood fills with longing as a cup of
water does the thirsty.

He further pointed out that Ogun among the Fon, Gua, is believed to be not only the child of Mawu and Lisa, but also closely associated with them in the "sky pantheon".

As regards his festival, Benjamin (1976, pp. 79-80) reports that among the Yoruba, the annual Ogun festival usually takes place in the dry season when there is good hunting. For him, since Ogun is the patron deity of hunters, fresh bush meat is required for his festival.

Although the festival as he further observed is sometimes the affairs of the whole town; it is more often celebrated by individual family compounds whose members are devotees of Ogun. According to him, the festival date is determined through divination in accordance with Ogun's wishes. Prior to the event the Ogun priest known as *Olade* in conjunction with the officiating family head prepares themselves morally and physically, so that they may be acceptable servants of Ogun.

Benjamin is of the view that in, order to achieve this, they must abstain from cursing, fighting, sexual intercourse and eating certain foods. The day before the festival, Ray noted

that men undertake a hunting expedition in the surrounding bush to gather fresh game. In the evening of the next day, an all night vigil is observed in the shrine of Ogun with some items such as palm-wine and beer to be presented and consumed by the people. Also, Ogun's special praise chants are sang in the honour of the iron divinity. Significantly, the songs as Ray rightly pointed out not only entertain the people, but also attract Ogun's attention and induce him to shower his blessings upon the assembled congregation.

This is closely followed by offering of kola nuts to Ogun by each family head on behalf of his house holds. The kola as he remarked also Signify friendship and reconciliation among the people; with this, the devotees of Ogun through the instrumentality of *Olade* (Ogun's priest) asks for Ogun's blessings and protection during the year. Since Ogun is the god of iron and steel, he also asks for Ogun's protection from things made of metal, for instance, from automobiles, bicycles, axes, knives, guns, etc.

The high point of the festival, he noted is marked by formal presentation of sacrificial items before the Ogun shrine by the priest which usually consists of snails, palm wine, pigeons, and dogs. Symbolically, these items, he maintains, not only mediate and control Ogun's relations with mankind, but also help to establish a bond between the worshippers and the divinity.

Ogun by his nature is fierce, violent and aggressive. In consequence of this, he is considered by the Yoruba as agent of God in the execution of His wrath and judgment. Despite this, people also approach him for his kindness especially, drivers, hunters and all whose profession is associated with iron for protection. Ogun is symbolized by iron. Among his numerous taboos include, palm kernel oil and snake Thursday is observed as his day.

Orunmila is also another remarkable divinity of Yoruba. This divinity, in the words of Mbiti (1969) is reputed to be an Omni linguist divinity who understands every language spoken on earth; and one who represents God's Omniscience and Knowledge. For him, this divinity manifests itself among men through the oracle of divination. He also describes him as the "Word", or "Writing" of God. An essential attribute associated with Orunmila is that he represents the element of order and predictability (p. 76).

Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) also refer to Orunmila, or Ifa, as the deity responsible for the Yoruba oracle tradition. Orisa-nla is recognised as the deputy of Olodumare in the creation and ordering of the universe, whereas Orunmila is seen as His agent inside wisdom and understanding. According to Yoruba mythology Orunmila was present at the moment of the determination of human destinies. So, he is called Eleri Ipin which means "the advocate" or "witness

of human destiny". According to Awolalu and Dopamu, it was believed that Orunmila was sent into the earth with Orisa-nla to protect humanity. He is therefore asked to guide and counsel in matters relating the past, present and future, as he is traditionally considered to possess knowledge about human affairs.

Another essential attribute of this divinity they observed, is that people consult him on all occasions, and before any action is taken. Man therefore, seeks his guidance when there is problem, when he is embarking on any project, when choosing the time of marriage, when performing marriage ceremony, when a new baby is born, when laying the foundation of villages, markets or houses, when entering into a covenant, when going to war or making peace, and throughout the passage of life. For them, it is believed among the Yoruba that it is Orunmila who can probe into the dark bosom of the future, and give advice on how to change an unhappy destiny into a happy one.

The priest of Orunmila, as they further noted, is called *Babalawo* "the diviner". Literally, *Babalawo* means "the father who has the secret." *Babalawo* as they inform us is believed to be endowed with the power of esoteric knowledge, with this he can pry into the future and learn the wish of Orunmila. More often than not, he wears white clothes and shaves his head. In consulting Orunmila, the diviner makes use of the geomantic form of divination known as Ifa. The word Ifa according to them is at times referred to as Orunmila.

Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) report that Orunmila is worshipped in all Yorubaland and his shrine is often located in the houses of his followers or priests. Palm kernels, cowries and elephant tusks are his main sacred objects and these are kept in a covered bowl or a white plate. The priest of Orunmila is called to do the necessary sacrifices from time to time, and there were occasions when people were to do some sacrifices too. Simple offerings are palm oil and kola nut along with bitter kola; elaborate offerings are fowl, pig or he-goat in accordance with the prescriptions of Orunmila, explains Awolalu and Dopamu.

Esu or Elegba is another significant person in the Yoruba religion. Christian missionaries, historically, have not understood Esu and equated him with the Judeo-Christian idea of the devil, as pointed out by Awolalu and Dopamu (1979). In Yoruba traditional religion, however, the notion of Esu is more multifaceted, with Esu being regarded as a deity that embodies the forces of evil, obstacles, and challenges, yet also has benevolent and protective attributes towards those who honor him appropriately. He is considered one of the deities who is closest to Olodumare (the Supreme Deity). Esu is known as having a special role in the realm of ritual and human behavior; Orisa-nla, divine

authority of creating and ruling in the worlds; Orunmila, wisdom and foreknowledge.

In this capacity Esu is known as an “inspector general” of ritual activities. He is said to watch the actions of both the gods and human beings, and then relay his insights to Olodumare (Awolalu & Dopamu 1979). In this context, the rituals under his control are subject to his permission, and it is thought that his suggestion will determine whether or not they are accepted by Olodumare. Therefore, problems faced by people may be the result of Esu's inability to facilitate or approve a matter. Esu can also be called upon as a means to cause trouble for an opponent or as a means of protection from bad luck and bad circumstances. As an intermediary between God and humanity, he can act as an accuser or a defender of divinities or humans before Olodumare in Yoruba religion. If he is honored and fed with the right foods, he is seen as being able to be benevolent and protective.

One of the significant qualities that are said to belong to Esu is that he is unpredictable and more difficult to satisfy completely. Even when an individual may have an opinion that Esu has got what he is supposed to have, he may still be deemed as being discontented and thus be able to react negatively (Awolalu and Dopamu 1979). This impression fuels the reverence and fear given to him, and many other deities are thought to be able to acknowledge his authority. Traditional stories about him include one in which he is the god of thunder, whose name Sango, and who declared that he could conquer any god he met. Then Esu's face turned to him and he questioned him to know whether this claim also applied to himself, and he was quick to retract the claim. Awolalu and Dopamu see this tradition as reflecting the dual nature of Esu, who can also cause trouble, break down relationships between people and cause confusion.

However, Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) stress the point that Esu is not approached only for the fear that he may engage in destructive activities. He is also venerated in many communities as a tutelary god and is deified and approached in a similar manner to the other Yoruba divinities. His followers honor his protective and kindly nature and pray, give gifts and make offering in the expectation of his favour. Such trust is also evident in the personal names they give to their children that include the name 'Esu'. Names like these illustrate that although Esu is a god who has mixed associations and even fearful ones, he is also considered to be a mighty god that can give protection and help in Yoruba religious beliefs.

Such names as they observed are *Esubiyii* (Esu gives birth to this) and *Esubayii* (Esu accepts or saves life).

The shrine of Esu, according to them, is usually made outside the town or village. It can also be found in the

compound or at cross roads. He is symbolized by a stone slab or a piece of rough laterite stuck into the ground slantingly. Sometimes, they are of the view that Esu is represented by an image made of mud or wood. He is worshipped and propitiated throughout Yoruba land as people offer him cowries, cocks, he goat and dogs. Thus, the blood of the animal victim is usually sprinkled on the image or emblem of Esu.

Finally, they pointed out that Esu, not only frequently receives a portion of the sacrifices

offered to other divinities; but also in some areas, annual festivals are held in his honor, and people on such occasions ask for his blessing on farming and protection against evil. Esu's sacrifices consist of red palm-oil, red roosters, and he-goats. And Saturday is observed as his day. In spite of his tricky, unpredictability, and sometimes negative character, it is believed that in Yoruba the dominant attitude towards Esu is one of affection rather than of fear.

Sopono is another influential and dreaded divinity of Yoruba in the sense that it is the manifestation of the wrath of God on erring members of the society. Among the Yoruba, it is believed that Sopono is endowed with the powers to inspire terror in all people. He is a divinity responsible for chicken pox. As a god of chicken pox, he punishes offenders with the disease.

/ Because the divinity is terror to people, he is not usually called Sopono but they call him by any of his appellations. For instance, *Olode*, “the lord of open space” “or the owner of the open space”. *Obaluwaye*, “the king who is the lord of the earth”. *Ile-ghona* the hot earth and *Baba* “The father”. Like Sango, Sopono forbids lying, poisoning and bad magic. His punishment is royal punishment which must be accepted with cheerfulness, joy, gratitude without complaint. Thus, when anybody is killed by chicken pox, people must not mourn the victim, his property is confiscated by the priests, and his body is buried in the bad bush (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979, p. 85).

Awolalu and Dopamu further observed that, that is why Sopono is called *Alapadupe*, “one who kills and is thanked for the killing”. According to them, People believe that he wears red apparel and wanders about when the sun is very hot. This is why people are warned to desist from wearing red apparel and wandering about in the sun lest they incur his displeasure. Finally, they noted that the shrine of Sopono is usually found outside the village. At the shrine can be found mound of earth over which is placed a wide-mouthed clay pot called *agbada*. By the side of the *agbada* can also be found a special broom made from *Ose potu* (*sida Carpinifolia*) which is smeared with Osun (cam wood).

Also remarkable among the Yoruba divinities is Oya, the goddess of the River Niger believed to be the wife of Sango. According to Awolalu and Dopamu (1979, p. 87) Oya wept bitterly when her husband committed suicide that the tears from her eyes formed certain rivers of which River Niger is one. Oya as they further report is worshipped mostly by women who usually carry fire in bowl and parade the street during the festival. For them, wherever Oya is worshipped, a river or lake is dedicated to her.

Moreover, the river goddess is also associated with the winds and tempests. Among the Yoruba, it is believed that Oya in most cases accompany her husband during his thunder storms; ripping up trees, and destroying the erring members of the society. Apart from this, she is also known as a fierce warrior and protectress of women especially those who throng her shrine for help. Also, at her disposal are lightning, tornadoes, and winds. Finally, other names associated with her include, *Oya-ajere* "carrier of the container of fire", *Ayaba mikua* "Queen of death". Among her numerous emblems are sword or matchet, and flywhisk. Her sacrifices consist of egg-plant, red wine, tobacco, purple grape, etc. Her taboos include, palm kernel oil, ram, and pork.

In the traditional religion of the Edo people, Olokun has a very high position, and is considered to be second to Osanobwa (the Supreme Being). According to Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) the name Olokun literally means "owner of the sea" which denotes his connection with water and other bodies of water. He is traditionally considered to be a son of Osanobwa and just like Orisa-nla for the Yoruba, is also one of the leading divinity of Edo land as his royal power comes from that of his divine father. There are conflicting views of the gender of Olokun. Some worshippers see the divinity as a woman and depict the deity in some temples in female form, but others see it as a man even if the image is used is female. Among his followers are particularly women, particularly among the Urhobo. In fact, tradition dictates that his daughters can do the ritual for him when he is being instructed to make an offering to Olokun. Olokun is predominantly seen as a god of good fortune, wealth and well-being. It is believed that he brings this rain and fertilises the soil; for these reasons devotees appeal to him for wealth, commercial success, prosperity and general welfare. Water pots, white chalk and white cloth are his sacred symbols.

Olokun can also be linked to purity, holiness, inspiration and idealism. He has always been associated with white fowls, white pigeons and white cloth, and purity has been defined as his representative of divine purity. Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) also add that people with Olokun characteristics are said to be intellectually inspired, highly magnetized, very charming and have a very keen sense of

precision. The principal priest of Olokun is called the Ohen Olokun whose main duty is to act as a mediator between the people and Olokun. There are other priests that serve Olokun in Edo communities, but the Ohen Olokun is the highest in rank.

Ogiuwu is another great divinity of Edo, and it is believed that he is the god of thunder and lightning. In Ogiwu, thunder and lightning are interpreted as divine punishment for those who are not within the confines of the accepted social and moral norms, and the reason behind its being interpreted as divine judgment. Ogiuwu is understood as an embodiment of divine judgment as it manifests divine punishment through thunder and lightning to those who are not within the confines of the accepted social and moral norms (Awolalu and Dopamu 1979). The traditional view of Ogiuwu is that he is a son of Osanobwa and has great wisdom and power. His authority is thought to be especially important in relation to human beings as he is linked to the blood in which Osanobwa fashioned human beings. As a result, some of the Edo traditions credit the arrival of human beings into the world to Ogiuwu. The people who are afraid of him, and desire not to die too early, traditionally pray to Olokun and Ogiuwu and observe rituals in order to seek protection from his wrath. According to Awolalu and Dopamu, the previous sacrificial rites of Ogiuwu might involve a man, a woman, a cow and a goat, and may have been large in times of pestilence. However, in modern practice, animal sacrifice is usually used to replace human sacrifice.

Notable divinity among the Igbo is Agwu. According to Awolalu and Dopamu (1979, p. 94) Agwu is a patron divinity of diviners among the Igbo who seek to discover secrets and give advice on spiritual matters. Remarkable attributes associated with Agwu as they noted is that people are usually possessed by Agwu. When this occurs, the person so possessed is called to be a devotee or a diviner hence refusal might be greeted with calamitous consequences.

Explaining further Ejizu, (1986, p. 122) described Agwu as "a highly ambivalent and dynamic deity; a spirit force. For Ejizu, it is the patron spirit of diviners and medicine men. As he further noted, specialists excel in harnessing the positive features of Agwu to enhance their practice.

Attributes of *Ushi* deity

Because of his potentials and benevolence in the generality of the life of the people, *Ushi* deity is known today with the following attributes; marks that distinguish him from other deities. *Ushi onye eshiokwu* (that is, *Ushi* a god of truth). In Akpoku, it is believed that *Ushi* deity does not lie whether in the morning, afternoon or at night. The deity is always on the part of truth. As an enforcer of morality his yes is yes

and his no is no. the deity to the best of knowledge of every Akpoku man does not derail from the part of justice. He is always straight and unbendable in his dealings with people. *Ushi* deity is a god that nobody can lie against and go unpunished. That is why any person who is not transparent will not be a committed devotee of *Ushi* deity. No matter the offence one commits whether in the open or in secret. It is believed that *Ushi* deity most know the truth and will say it. He frowns at injustice. He does not only abhor those that tell lies, but also exposes such people before the public.

For instance, according to oral testimonies, in 2020, a man from Umudim Akpoku named Osuigwe put a poison in his friend's drink during child dedication and he died thereafter. Osuigwe was accused and was expected to confess but he refused. A week later *Ushi* deity exposed him by inflicting him with a swollen stomach which has remained incurable till date (Amadi, Joshua, 05/06/ 2026, oral interview).

Ushi nwe ikpe (that is, *Ushi* will judge). In Akpoku religious thought, *Ushi* deity is seen as an impartial judge. In consequence of this, he abhors bribe and manipulations. Akpoku people believe that judgement belongs to the deity in the sense that whatever happens an Akpoku man will say *Ushi* will judge. Even in the face of victimization, the popular saying is that *Ushi* deity will judge. This further explains that no matter what, nobody can bribe or manipulate the deity. On several occasions it has always been disastrous for those who had attempted to bribe the deity. For instance, in 2023, a young man from Umuekwene Akpoku named Manuakolom was killed by *Ushi* deity in his attempt to bribe the deity through the priest with the sum of five hundred and fifty thousand naira when he was asked to take an oath after he had used his younger brother Chijoke, a boy of 15 years for money rituals in Lagos State.

Omnipresence, in Akpoku, *Ushi* deity is seen as omnipresent. That is why an akpoku man will always say *taa emene Ushi nor naya*, meaning that *Ushi* deity is here. In Akpoku, there is a belief that *Ushi* deity is everywhere. That is why wherever an Akpoku man is, home or abroad and commits evil *Ushi* must detect the offender and expose the person. It is also believed that wherever an Akpoku sons and daughters are *Ushi* deity is there with them. This essential attribute of the deity is not only felt in one community of Akpoku, but also to all the six villages of Akpoku. Whatever atrocity one commits be it in the open or in secret it is believed that *Ushi* deity will know. For instance, according to oral investigations, there was a man named Onyebuonu Nwobilor from Umuoria Akpoku who wanted to subject all his *Umunna* (kinsmen) under his control. To accomplish this wicked act, he travelled to Benin in Edo State and returned with a very powerful charm which he buried at village central place of gathering

according to how the medicine man had instructed him. In 2023, all of a sudden Onyebuonu became sick and later died of stroke on May 15, 2023. Through divination, it was revealed that *Ushi* deity was behind his death. All his evil deeds in the years were unveiled thereafter (Anaele, Martins, 10/ 05/ 2026, oral interview..

Omniscience. In Akpoku, some people see *Ushi* deity as omniscient. In Akpoku religious thought, what this suggests is that the deity is all knowing; attribute that sets him apart from other deities in Akpoku. By associating *Ushi* deity with this quality does not in any way suggest that he is in the same rank and file with the Supreme Being to whom all depends on, but we are trying to show the reality of this arch-divinity in the people's belief, and in their everyday life. In Akpoku, it is believed that *Ushi* deity knows and sees everything. In consequence of this, every Akpoku man see him as *ohu he nor na nzuzu* (that is, the god that sees that which is in secret). For instance, studies reveal that in 2024, a woman named Juliet from Okomoko Akpoku was inflicted with paralysis after she had killed her husband Clement, a primary school teacher, with a poison prepared for her from one medicine man from Ogoni, Rivers State. She did this in order to abscond with her lover one Mr. Victor akwuruaha, a stranger who was living in Lagos State. In her confessional statement she thought she would not be exposed but the god that sees everything unveiled all her atrocities.

Omnipotence. This is another powerful attribute that distinguishes the deity from other deities in Akpoku. In Akpoku religious thought, *Ushi* deity is seen as the most powerful and strongest of all the deities. He is the only divinity in Akpoku whose potentials and supremacy permeate all the six villages of Akpoku. That is why an Akpoku man will always say *Ushi bunchemirinaecheoha* (that is, umbrella that covers Akpoku). This further suggests that his efficacies and potentials have no limit in Akpoku. It is believed that whatever crime one commits the offender will not escape the wrath of the arch-divinity.

Ushé onye udo. In Akpoku *Ushi* deity is seen as a god of peace. As a god of peace he abhors war and violence and anything that can generate tension in the land. Whenever there is crisis in the land such a chieftaincy tussle, landed property and murder, *Ushi* deity usually shows his grievances through unusual occurrences such as a big tree or branch falling down especially when there is no wind or rain, a cock crowing at odd time (for instance, at midnight). For instance, on the 4th of March 2024, there was a serious conflict between two families, named Umuejechi and Umunwachukwu all in Umuaghara Akpoku community. According to oral testimonies, the two families were claiming ownership over a certain piece of land. Later the matter got to a point where the two families not only began

to see themselves as cat and dog, but also employed all kinds of means such as hired killers, guns, charms, to overpower the other so as to claim the land. The most excruciating aspect of it all was that every effort made to bring the warring families together was like going to the river to fetch water with a basket. One fateful morning, one ancient *akwa* (silk-cotton tree) said to be as old as indigenous Akpoku, all of a sudden fell down. When the oracle was consulted by the elders of Akpoku it was revealed that it was the handwork of *Ushi* deity. According to the oracle, *Ushi* said that the land in dispute belongs to Umunwachukwu family and not Umuejechi family; hence they should desist from claiming what does not belong to them (Akanwa Gift, 15/ 05 2026, oral interview).

Ushi onye ebere. (That is, *Ushi* god of mercy). *Ushi* deity is a god of mercy. As a merciful god, he does not descend so hastily on the erring and recalcitrant members of the society without sign. As a merciful god, he often shows leniency for those who were unable to redeem their vows especially those who had received favour, from him. For instance, if a person promises to come to the shrine of *Ushi* deity to show gratitude to him on a given *nkwo*, that is, the sacred day of the deity and is unable to meet up, the person can plead for extension to the next *nkwo* through the priest of *Ushi* deity. After due consideration, *Ushi* deity will grant the request. Furthermore, as a merciful god, he often shows leniency to those who had offended him unintentionally. For instance, if by accident one kills *Ushi's* goat or fowl, *Ushi* will not descend on the offender rather he will show leniency.

Ushi oche obodo (that is, *Ushi* the god that protects the community). *Ushi* deity is a god that protects the community. In Akpoku, *Ushi* deity is seen as an umbrella that protects the community, this is a truism because an Akpoku man will always say *Ushi zurukaeme*, meaning that, *Ushi* deity is capable. The reality of this fact is that in the shrine of *Ushi*, there is *ihechinma* (old blunt cutlass), placed at the foot of *uha* tree, it is believed that with this cutlass the deity offers to the people protection against unseen evils and dangers.

The above mentioned attributes reveal the reality of his existence in the everyday life of the people. For instance, it is because *Ushi* deity is real to the people through his various manifestations and benevolence that the Akpoku have identified him with a name. Some Akpoku give names to their children which are descriptive of their faith, belief, hope and ideas about the deity. Examples of such names are *Nwa Ushi* (*Ushi's* child), *Umu Ushi* (*Ushi's* children), etc. This is when an individual has consulted the deity for children, etc. Furthermore, the fact that the name of the arch-divinity is always on the people's lips in discussions, conversations, prayers and everyday life reveals that the

deity is real to the Akpoku people. The Akpoku man will exclaim in the face of sudden danger *Ushi ekwelenjor*, *Ushi ekwele* (that is, *Ushi* forbid bad thing or *Ushi* will not agree), and when they meet with fortune they will say *Ushi kanka-oo* (that is, *Ushi* thank you).

Kelekele ukwu churumba oso (the god whose ankle alone is enough to pursue a community).

Elelianwatteya agbanuoku (the god who when neglected does wonders).

Ordoro oguejikpe (the god nobody can dare or challenge)

Eburuonu uda (the god that does not heed to pleas when he is out for vengeance).

Adanneehwu (the god that goes to war and never returns without accomplishing his aim).

Nshikoataanida (the god nobody can discomfit).

Anukporoku juruonu (dried meat that fills the mouth).

Oshishikankwu (the tree that towers above palm trees).

Odumodumo ohuzuoha (he who sits at a place and oversees the entire community).

Odumodumo eche (he who sits at a place and protects his children wherever they may be (Akujor Marcus, 20/05/ 2026, oral interview).

Findings

Our findings reveal *Ushi* as a god of justice and moral regulator. This means that the deity not only warn against wrong doing but also punish those who go contrary to the established moral standards of the community. Our findings also reveal *ushi* as a powerful deity believed to influence the life of the people. This means that the deity is believed to possess the supernatural powers through which he protects not only his devotees but also intervene in situation affecting the people.

Our findings also reveal *ushi* as a moral reference point in Akpoku. This reflect boldly in the peoples daily speeches and expressions about the benevolence of the deity in moment of victimization, injustice, and depravation.

Recommendations

- **Documentation of indigenous knowledge:** Indigenous Etche researchers and custodians of Etche tradition should systematically document the history, attributes, myths, rituals, taboos, symbols and functions associated with *Ushi* deity before such knowledge is lost.
- **Preservation of oral traditions:** Elders, traditional priests and other knowledgeable custodians should be encouraged to transmit

relevant oral traditions relating to *Ushi* to younger generations.

- **Academic research:** More scholarly studies should be undertaken on *Ushi* and other indigenous deities of Akpoku Etche. Such studies would contribute to the broader understanding of African Traditional Religion and the religious heritage of the Niger Delta.
- **Cultural education:** Indigenous religious and cultural knowledge should be incorporated, where appropriate, into community-based cultural education programmes. This would help younger people understand the historical significance of *Ushi* without necessarily compelling them to participate in its worship.
- **Protection of sacred sites:** The shrine or other sacred places associated with *Ushi*, and other important cultural heritage sites as a matter of fact should be well preserved for future references and for posterity.

Conclusion

In Akpoku, *Ushi* deity, as earlier pointed out, occupies an important place in the generality of the life of the people. Describing *Ushi* with such attributes as omnipotent, omnipresence, omniscience, god of justice, god of peace, god of truth, etc for the people, does not in any way suggest to equate the deity with the Supreme Being. In Akpoku, the association of *Ushi* deity with such attributes not only affirm the people's believe in the efficacy of the deity but also reveals his importance to the people.

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