Road and school naming: A basin of history and culture in Lupane District of Matabeleland North Province, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Naming in most African communities is a very crucial concept being celebrated as names are a repository of cultural and historical information. Significant events and historical figures are remembered through naming. The focus of this paper was to unfold the perception that names attached to roads and schools (primary and secondary alike) in Lupane District of Matabeleland North Province in Zimbabwe, shed light on the preservation of history of the Ndebele people. Qualitative research methodology was employed to study the place names. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with ten purposively sampled elderly informants from the community and local authority personnel who have substantive knowledge of the subject under study. Also, document analysis of Ndebele narrative texts was used for data gathering. The study developed an argument that it is the past which gives identity to an individual or ethnic group. Some of the findings of the study were that the landmark names in Lupane District extend the community's commemoration of notable heroes and their achievements. Historical evidence has fostered the indelible mark of the names in Matabeleland, thereby serving as forms of linguistic as well as historical records for posterity. In the same vein, the study revealed that significant events and people in Lupane District have been remembered through place naming evident in the schools and roads, among other observable landmarks consciously tagged by the community and the responsible local authority. The study concluded that, signposting such as road names and schools naming, expresses the worldview of the Ndebele people in Lupane thereby asserting ownership of their space and authority to contribute to the construction of national narratives. As such, onomastic practice in Lupane District is driven and manipulated by the Ndebele people's historical milieu. An exploration of the origin and meanings of place names in this regard enabled the study to establish their symbolic significance.

Keywords: road naming, school naming, history, culture, Lupane District.

Introduction

Names and naming system in most African societies play a very significant role. There is no name for the sake of a name; instead, names are symbolic, and they are historical, social and cultural signal of important events in a particular area and time. This implies that the onomastic process has its own ideologies. Naming is 'a powerful vehicle for promoting identification with the past and locating oneself within wider networks of memory' (Alderman 2008, p. 195). The impetus of this study is to shed light on the idea that names given to roads and schools in Lupane District have a telling effect on the history and cultural background of the Ndebele people in the Provincial Capital and the entire nation. These names also give identity to the residents of the place. Notwithstanding the symbolic significance and strategic link to the identity of the Lupane residents, it is noteworthy that not much work at the level of accessible reference article has been published on the district. The only comprehensive available resource material has been census reports. It is, therefore, this yawning information gap that this research article plugs, while also

contributing to the information repository about the district from the research approach adopted by the study.

Some road names in Lupane are informative and commemorative. They inform people about the history of the Ndebele people and the events which took place in those areas. In the words of Mitchell (2000, p. 100), landscape is a 'form of ideology,' and 'one of the chief functions of landscapes is precisely to control meaning and to channel it in particular directions.' From the perspective of critical landscape study, place names are more than passive artifacts. They are symbolic texts embedded in larger systems of meaning and ideology that are read, interpreted, and acted upon socially by people (Duncan, 1990; Pinchesvski & Torgovnik, 2002). Particular attention is paid to the following roads: *Fighting*, *Mazankila* and *Gomoza*. These are the most significant roads in the district which symbolically reflect history of the Ndebele people of Lupane. In the same vein, schools in the district are not named for the sake of naming, instead they have symbolic names and accord places the 'symbolic capital' status. Symbolic capital manifests in that people use place naming to lay claim to the landscape as a device for communicating heritage and identity (Alderman, 2008, p. 199). The term 'symbolic capital' is drawn from the work of Bourdieu (1984; 1991). Bourdieu defined culture as a 'field' in which social actors compete not only to accumulate economic capital, but also symbolic capital, those practices and goods that are defined as socially distinctive, desirable, and superior (Gartman, 2002, p. 257).

Symbolic capital contributes to the reproduction of power and privilege within the social world because it confers status, prestige, and honour upon its holder. It originated from Bourdieu's concern for understanding how aesthetic issues and notions of taste are used to reinforce the importance of social class beyond the sheer measures of monetary wealth (Alderman, 2008). As such this triggered the researchers to analyse the following names given to the following secondary schools in the district: *Mabhikwa, Kanyandavu, Kwesemvubu, Gomoza, Zwangendaba, Menyezwa, Somgolo, Lupanda* and *Isipopoma.* The names largely highlight that school names in Lupane District are greatly influenced by power structures in the Ndebele society. They also reflect on the world view of the Ndebele people.

Methodology

The study utilised the qualitative research paradigm. Semi-structured in-depth interviews and document analysis of Ndebele narrative texts were used for data gathering. It was envisaged that critical and very particular historical information relating to roads and schools naming would be revealed better if the respective community in this case, Lupane District of Matabeleland North Province, had an opportunity to tell its own story. In this regard, the explorative study used the descriptive survey research design. The

descriptive survey design was used because it is one of the most appropriate and effective modes in collecting information, describing it and explicating perceptions, values and viewpoints (Leedy, 1997). Meanings were then constructed from the responses triangulated with document analysis derived from the selected Ndebele texts such as *Umzila Kawulandelwa* by Ndlovu (1990) whose setting is derived from the geographical setting of the research. A purposive sampling of ten respondents, age range 60 to 80 years, constituted the interviewees. These were derived from the elderly people who have personal practical and historical information about the district and events leading to the specific names. Informants from the local authority at Kusile Rural District Council were interviewed as they are the responsible authority safeguarding such monumental places and their naming.

Background to the understanding of Lupane District

Lupane District is situated in the Lupane provincial capital in Matabeleland North Province in Zimbabwe. It is located along Bulawayo -Victoria Falls Road and it is 171km away from Bulawayo. Lupane is a borrowed name from Tonga lexical item "*Lupale*" which means a dry land. Hence, one can argue that this critically reflects that the Tonga people were the original inhabitants of the place since the place was initially named by them. It becomes evident that the Ndebele people came in and the Tonga people moved themselves to Binga District after the invasion of the Ndebele people under King Mzilikazi into their territory. The coexistence of linguistic groupings in Lupane and subsequent naming is in line with what Alderman (2008, p. 199) argues that "place naming is employed in constructing and institutionalising nationalistic histories." In an interview, respondents highlighted that the major reason why they moved themselves to the Northern part of the country is that they did not want the influence of these people who had their own culture and spoke a different language. Therefore, the Ndebele people became dwellers of the place and thus they named it "Lupane", a borrowed name from *"Lupale"* Tonga name.

The naming of Lupane is also reminiscent of other places in Zimbabwe that have been named in a way that shows the general trend of how history and ethnic identity influences place naming. For example, Zuvalinyenga (2020) presents that the name of Bindura town itself has multiple variants. During the pre-colonial era the area was known as *Pindura Mhuka* Hill because of the abundance of wild animals that the inhabitants relied on for food and other uses, that is, hides for clothes and bones for tools (Bindura Municipality website). Another explanation says that the name derives from an herb variety that was used to change the gender of unborn children.

Mpofu (2014, p. 12) asserts that "Lupane district, also known as *Kusile* is one of the seven rural districts of Matabeleland Province of Zimbabwe." The districts bordering Lupane District, are Hwange, Binga,

Nkayi, Bubi, and Tsholotsho (Census, 2012). The place is not appropriate for crop production as it is characterised by sandy infertile soils. This confirms that the place is a dry land as it is largely known of critical water shortages and hence, annual droughts. Most of the people in this district undertake small scale farming for sustenance, they however, fail in crop farming due to rainfall shortages. Agriculture is the major economic activity for people in this area, although livestock ownership is still gendered in Matabeleland North Province (Chingarande, Matondi, Mugano, Chagwiza and Hungwe 2020, p.21).

According to the 2012 census report; Lupane District had a population of 98,864 among 28 Wards. Kucherera (2014, p. 3) postulate that "Lupane District is reach in natural resources such as timber, coal, methane gas and wildlife, of which most of these resources have not been explored, except for timber and wildlife. On the western side of Lupane State University is the *Zikungwa* Wildlife Park and thus almost all seasons wild animals are seen in the place going to and from the nearby Lupane dam in search of water.

An Analysis of Selected Roads in Lupane District

It is of paramount importance to note that names attached to roads in Lupane District are descriptive and commemorative. At the same time, they preserve the history of the Ndebele people in the district and the Zimbabwean nation at large. Road naming in this district is an interpretation of historical events that took place in those significant areas. Chabata (2012, p. 54) holds that "quite a number of features in Zimbabwe have their names driven from the important historical events." This highlights that names carry within themselves historical and cultural events. Hence, the focal point of this section is to analyse the symbolic onomastic practice attached to '*Fighting*', '*Mazankila*' and '*Gomoza*' roads. These are the three major symbolic roads in the district with their historical interpretations which have been summed up in the names for historical archiving. Significantly, the names, in their self-informative enigma, silently enlighten people a lot about what took place in those places. Magudu, Muguti and Mutami (2014, p. 74) assert that "a name is an important form of identity of a particular place and at times it can tell a story." As such, these road names provide information about historical incidents attached to those places.

'Fighting' road is one of the historically significant roads in Lupane which was named by white colonists during the liberation struggle and even today the road still bears a foreign name, and the name has not been localised into Ndebele language. The road was constructed just after the police camp in the district to the east direction and it stretches up to Nkayi Growth Point. When someone talks of '*Fighting*' road, the next thing that comes in his/her mind is the war atmosphere which had catastrophic effects to the people in the district and the nation at large. '*Fighting*' road is a memorial name that is given in honour of the war which took place in Lupane district at round 1970s between the white colonists who were led

by Ian Smith against the Ndebele people. The road was strategically established during the time when black people were prohibited by colonists to enter some places. Ndlovu (1990) touches on the major reasons for the establishment of this road, hence he says;

> *Iqembu lesibili elalikhokhelwe lijaha elilamehlo abomvu gebhu esasimuthi nguBulalibhuni, laphiwa umsebenzi okuyahlola emgwaqweni uFighting Road. Babehlose ukubona ukungena kwesitha ngalumgwaqo lokuthi umaquphul angathiywa ngaphi.*

> (The second group which was led by a man with red eyes we used to Call Bulalibhunu- meaning, kill the Whiteman, was tasked to go and search for enemy in Fighting Road. The major purpose for the construction of this road was to help the colonialists clearly see the invasion of the enemy forces into the territory and to set bombs.)

In support of Ndlovu's argument, all participants in an interview concurred as they highlighted that the road was constructed in wide stretch to control and monitor the movement of the Ndebele people from one place to another. Furthermore, they confirmed that colonists set binocular guns also known as sniper guns along the road and those who would cross over were killed.

Mazankila a borrowed name from "Man is a killer", is also another road in the district whose name has been derived from a historical war incident. The road is in *Jibajiba* village in Lupane district where most of the white colonists were killed by the Ndebele people during the liberation war in that road. Initially, the road had no name, and the road was named by the opponents as "Man is a killer" in commemoration of the aftermath of the war and in remembrance of the colonists' blood which was shed in that significant road during the Zimbabwe war of liberation. The 'man' who was being referred to in this incident was black person who conquered and killed the enemies who were white colonialists. This onomastic practice by the white people was a means to preserve the history that would be functional for the younger generation. History is important because it determines the future and present. Of paramount importance is that history invites us to go back to our past and fetch the lessons of the past. However, the Ndebele people could not pronounce this alien name and as such, they corrupted the name and localised it as *Mazankila*. It is vital to note that the localised names became meaningless. *Mazankila* is, therefore, a Ndebele name without the overt meaning since it is more of a phonetic derivative. This literally distorted the actual meaning of the name since every name gives information about something. In this light, Kearns and Berg (2002, p. 285) have argued that 'names are a constitutive component of the landscape', rather

than simply 'being entities in [and on] the landscape.' As they also assert, the construction of place identities is carried out through the pronunciation of geographical names as well as their inscription into signs, documents, and maps.

Gomoza road is also one of the significant roads in Lupane District. *Gomoza* is a Ndebele name which was derived from *Somoza* Tonga name. *Somoza* is a common herbal tree in Gomoza which in Ndebele is called *Ubande* which has got some headache healing properties. It is vital to note that, as earlier stated in the discussion, most of the place names in Lupane are borrowed from Tonga language because the Tonga people were the initial inhabitants of the place before the Ndebele people who were led by King Mzilikazi came in. Respondents in an interview highlighted that in the 1950s the Tonga people then migrated themselves to the Northern parts of Zimbabwe like Binga and Zambezi because they did not want the influence of the immigrants (Ndebele people) into their territory. Hence, the Ndebele people after gaining the territory localised almost all the place names to suit their language.

It also came forth in an interview where an elderly woman respondent, seventy-six years of age, stated that *Somoza (Ubande)* in Ndebele is a type of tree with medicinal properties for headache; and the tree was very popular and helpful in the community as people would burn its roots to cure headache. Even in this present day, the tree is still significant to the community as Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) is part and parcel of the Ndebele culture. The tree is more important in the community given the escalating costs of modern medicines and most people in rural areas could not afford to purchase these remedies. This highlights the relevance of traditional medicine in a global village. The naming of *Ubande* could be argued to be showing that 'emphasis is placed less on the name itself and more on the cultural practice of naming, that is, how people seek to control and contest the naming process as they engage in wider economic, social, and political struggles.' (Alderman, 2008, p. 199). Hence, one argues that ethno-veterinary medicine has a space in this global era. This reminds the Ndebele people to go back to their traditions and adopt the lifestyle of utilising traditional herbs because they are free and easily accessible.

These trees (*Ubande*) made the place so popular such that the Kusile Rural District Council of Lupane and the community named the road after these significant trees because they were of much help to the community which could not afford to buy expensive medication for headache. It is of paramount importance to note that Lupane is a dry area, and it is characterised by extreme hot weather especially during summer and headache could easily affect the inhabitants and hence, communities, especially in the Gomoza Village, sort healing and comfort from *Ubande* tree which is the most valued and important natural resource in the village. As such, the road stretches from Lupane Police Camp to *Gomoza* Village shopping Centre. The place has become so popular in the district because people in the community value

very much their indigenous knowledge which is distinctive to their culture. The overall impression is that this onomastic practice in Lupane is culture bound as IKS cannot be secluded from the Ndebele culture. As such, the naming of this road captures the culture of the Ndebele people in the community and the nation at large.

An Analysis of Selected Schools in the District

School naming is an ideologically bound practice in Lupane district. It is also a symbolic act that sheds light on some important historical and cultural events. Schools are learning institutions that are also a reservoir of culture and history in the district. Learners are taught their indigenous languages which are a carrier of their culture and history, and in this way, they get to know of these two important aspects which shape their future. Culture and history are two interwoven terms which allow for affirmative changes within the society. Culture is given impetus by historical events. On one hand, culture is defined by Matsumoto (1996, p. 16) as "…the set of attitudes, values, beliefs and behavior shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next." This means that culture is a habitable and celebrated philosophy of life in the society. Philosophy of life refers to thoughts, behaviour and attitudes that come from a society's thinking patterns. Hence, culture in a society becomes a guiding force in terms of thinking patterns. It also signposts the way things should be done. On the other hand, history refers to the account of human events which occurred in the past. It is a very significant facet of the human world, signaling the constant discourse between present and past. History is much more important, especially to the younger generations, because it enhances an individual's self-understanding. For instance, in a school set up, individuals have a heritage which is unique to each other. Hence, in such a scenario, learners need to attain more information on historical events so that they identify or get to know themselves. History teaches appreciation of one's values, norms, and culture. Of paramount importance is the understanding that history inculcates some feelings of oneness amongst people in the community. Hence, the focal point of this section is to analyse names attached to schools in Lupane district which are a basin of culture and history of the Ndebele people in the district.

In commemorating some important events or iconic leaders in the district, the Ndebele people have named some schools after the historical events and significant people. Most names given to schools in Lupane district provide deep understanding of the history of that person after whom the school has been named. Goldstein (1978) in Alderman (2002) asserts that "the naming of schools after historical figures is a subtle yet powerful way of communicating the accomplishments of previous generations." This highlights that the naming process is important because it reminds people of their past and this becomes a way for people to identify themselves with the place.

Mabhikwa High School is one significant educational institution in the district which bears the Chief's name, *Mabhikwa Khumalo*, and reflecting upon the naming of the school as 'symbolic capital' of the district (Bourdieu, 1984). According to one of the respondents who boasted of nearly eighty years of age, claiming to "have seen it all", the school was named after Chief Mabhikwa in recognition of his very important role as a leader who could lead the community, bear people's problems, and preside over social issues. He has also been celebrated as a custodian of culture, values, beliefs, and norms; and ensured equal land distribution. The respondent further claimed that the name, *Mabhikwa* High School, on its own, tells a story about the chief, his clan and territory. As such, naming this school after the chief became a significant way the chief gains communal appreciation of his historical and cultural successes. This onomastic practice became a platform to remember the chief and his good deeds for the community. It also emerged as an important event which illuminated the good relationship between the community and chief. Chief *Mabhikwa* is a famous figure who was perceived by the respondents as being responsible for the growth and development of his people. He fosters peace and unity in his territory. He promoted the spirit of *Ubuntu* in the community, which is an important aspect being celebrated by the Ndebele people in the community. In this regard, naming of the school after Chief Mabhikwa is in line with the assertion that place naming can be conceptualised as a form of symbolic capital used to associate places with consumable and exclusive visions of the past. Identification with these naming patterns serves as a source of social distinction for some people (Alderman, 2008). The naming practice was defended by one male respondent over the age of seventy-three, as a way of preserving the chief's clan name and conserving the district's history under Chief *Mabhikwa*. Furthermore, the respondents concurred that naming of the school after the Chief became a platform to motivate learners historically so that they look back into their history and attain life affirming values, and history becomes a guiding post that leads to positive transformation. Zuvalinyenga (2020) in her research about Bindura and the naming of the place in Zimbabwe avers that the area was under the jurisdiction of Chief Chipadze, thus for him and his subjects it was known as Chipadze. To commemorate the chief, there is a suburb in Bindura that is known as Chipadze; there is also Chipadze Stadium, Chipadze Farm, and Chipadze School.

In an interview with one of the respondents, it came forth that, some years ago in the Rhodesian government, there was a very big pool in *Lenkalisi* village in Lupane district. A white woman who was named Lake Alice used to fish in this pool that was adjacent to where she lived. With passage of time, the first school which was established in the place was named after her. However, this Ndebele community, at the time, could not pronounce this foreign name; they then phonetically corrupted and localised it to *Lenkalisi* Secondary School, as the two separate words rhymed into a single word. This incident captures the history of the Ndebele people of that area in Lupane and how they coexisted with the white people in

their locality. As Alderman (2008, p. 199) argues, 'whether written or spoken, it is now understood that place naming represents a means of claiming the landscape, materially and symbolically, and using its power to privilege one world view over another.' Hence, the respondent further averred that naming this village and school after this significant white woman was also a way of preserving the history of this famous woman in the village. Her history has been kept through this onomastic practice in a manner that would allow it to be handed over through generations. The naming practice attached to the school and place also commemorates this prominent and symbolic woman in the district. Her fishing hobby is still being celebrated in the village as an inspiration to most women because there are very few of them, especially in the district, who have interest in fishing as this has largely been seen as a hobby mostly attached to men.

Table 1: Secondary Schools in the District which were named after significant events

Name of School	Significant Event
Somgolo (Tonga name)	Named after rain making ritual ceremony.
Isipopoma (Ndebele name)	Named after water rock falls.
Kwesemvubu (Ndebele name)	Named after a pool where Hippopotamus used to stay after drinking water in the pool.
Kanyandavu (Tonga name)	Named after a pool where lions used to drink water.
Zwangendaba (Ndebele name)	Named after the Ndebele Chief *Zwangendaba.*
Gomoza (Ndebele name borrowed from Tonga name Somoza a medicinal tree)	Named after popular medicinal tree (*Ubande* in Ndebele) in the area which treats headache.
Menyezwa (Ndebele name)	Named after Chief *Menyezwa*

Field Notes (2019)

Table 1 illuminates the observable phenomenon that school naming in Lupane district is not just a mere practice, instead it is a symbolic practice.

Conclusion

The intricate historical interplay between the roads and schools' names vis-à-vis historical archiving in Lupane is unmistakable. The names tell a story about the various ethnic groups whose historical footprints have remained etched in Lupane district. Notably from the discussion, it emerges that the history of struggles towards liberation of the province and assertion of Ndebele and Tonga ethnic groups' identities has remained a priority. These struggles stem from the liberation struggle for independence from the colonial stranglehold to the post-independence period characterised by the need to assert a people's

cultural identity. Cultural preservation through indigenous knowledge systems of the Ndebele ethnic group has been reinforced through naming, as observed through trees such as *Ubande* with significant medicinal properties that have been revered in Lupane and surrounding areas to-date. Culture and history have emerged as the key domains of focus in the onomastic practice within Lupane district, and this has been in spite of the fact that part of that history is documenting and commemorating the lives of former colonists, an issue which reflects lack of acrimony against the former adversaries of the Ndebele people. A great sense of attachment is created when one names a place, road or school, as social amenities, thereby fostering a sense of responsibility in taking care of such landmarks without compulsion.

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