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(Re)writing an urban landscape: Street names in Harare's CBD after 1980

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This paper examines some changes in street names in Zimbabwe's capital city, Harare, after 1980. It is guided by some current perspectives in onomastics such as onomastic erasure, descriptive backing, and studies in the linguistic landscape. A historical background of the country from 1890 is given in order to understand how European names emerged on this urban landscape. From a corpus of over 51 names, it was observed that only 19 street names were changed. The changed names are discussed alongside the old name. The study observes that these street names are statements of power on the urban landscape. Whenever street names (and other place names) are changed on a landscape, history is rewritten or in some cases erased and replaced by a new script.

Introduction

This paper sets out some of the problems in theorising place names with an emphasis on the southern African continent. It argues that theory has generally focused on the personal name and there has been less attention in theorising the place name. It builds up from the research that has guided the discipline over the last 40 years. It goes on to explore some of the current perspectives that can guide research in onomastics, such as studies in the linguistic landscape, descriptive backing, and onomastic erasure. The discussion then analyses some street names of Harare's central business district (CBD), giving brief notes on the history of each name. The paper argues the new street names erased colonial names and that names on an urban landscape are statements of power.

The scope of the problem

The affective element in the personal name has always been easier to conceptualise and theorise, whereas articulation of the same in the place name is more subtle and sometimes difficult to tease out. It appears the emotions around place names are most pronounced in periods of political change, and die down with those in power often prevailing during the period. The act of naming is an act of recording histories, cultures and values, and can also be an act of peeling away old names that the place carried, along with the package of meanings around those names. Like personal names, place names have a lot of emotions around them (Lubbe 2011). For instance, the name Rhodesia has a lot emotions around it.

It is a fact that place names are a part of the wider social, historical, cultural and political discourses on the physical landscape. The place name has deep links in the physical, cultural and historical landscape, as observed by scholars such as Carter (1987), Said (1993), and Wittenberg (2000), but onomastic theory in southern Africa has not fully developed this dimension. Much has been done in building dictionaries and describing different places in different spaces on the subcontinent, but

there are still a few gaps in developing a robust theoretical frame around place names in southern Africa. Pursuit of new thinking in place names takes us beyond the basic issues of classification, standardisation and documentation which have been the major concerns in current scholarship.

The place name is not some dormant linguistic feature on a landscape, but is a live expression, an active text that can convey a myriad of meanings to the reader (or in some cases the "viewer"). Place names, like all other names, resonate with limitless possibilities in meanings, which peel off like onion skins. Like any other text, the place name can be interpreted in any way, and it also has a context, or interacts with other texts around in it.

Some current perspectives in onomastics

Onomastics scholars have drawn from theories of linguistics and fitted the name into some framework of onomastic research. For example, Van Langendonck (1987) delves into semantic theory and how it influences naming patterns and processes. Literary onomastics has made significant inroads with scholars such as Squire (1996), and Nilsen and Nilsen (2007) looking at names in the literary text. All these aspects of linguistic analysis are valuable in any study of the language landscape, especially in multicultural settings.

Carter (1987) argues that by giving English names to the Australian coastline and some islands in that region, James Cook and other European explorers "erased" a whole history of the south Pacific. These places had their "original" names: it is only that they were not mapped and not recorded. In a similar act of erasure during the colonial era, European names were imposed on the African landscape, deleting their African identities (Wittenberg 2000). Through onomastic erasure, the new name deleted a whole history and along with it a whole culture. The process of onomastic erasure occurs wherever different peoples, languages and cultures interact. It can be subtle, as explorers or missionaries pass through the space, or through conquest, or some change in political power. Erasure of names is the point of interest in this discussion because new street names in Harare have erased the colonial names. Alongside erasure, we need to briefly explore the concept of descriptive backing.

Louwrens (1994), citing Meiring (1993), adds the term "descriptive backing" to onomastic analysis. She defines descriptive backing as the whole collection of meanings, connotation, associations (and even speculations) around a name. In the framework of descriptive backing, every name can be seen as an aggregate of perceptions that includes and simultaneously excludes certain attributes associated with that name. Through descriptive backing, names become an important aspect of the cultural and historical narratives of any physical space and this includes the urban language landscape. It follows from this argument that the street name, which is the focus of this discussion, is an integral component of the visual discourse(s) of the community.

This discussion superimposes the template of descriptive backing and erasure on the linguistic landscape. A reader who reads (or "travels") through a book on names derives an aggregate of meanings derived from the names that he meets in the text. Similarly the traveller, the viewer, reads a visual text called a street name or some other visual feature on the urban landscape and ascribes meanings and connotations to it. Using Meiring's (1996) thesis, this collection of meanings, associations and perceptions linked to that street name can be called descriptive backing.

The meaning of place names has a reciprocal nature in that the namer of the place has certain intended meanings s/he seeks to convey, while the reader of the same text can have interpretations that are very different from the intended meaning. In other words, while the namer seeks to ascribe certain meanings, the reader can ascribe their own meanings. Du Plessis (2009: 105) touches on this problem in bilingual signs at a South African tourist site when he

points out that "[p]arallel language visibility is not always effective" because different readers will have different interpretations of the same sign.

Ultimately, the resulting or interpreted meaning might be far removed from the original, intended meaning. Names in an urban landscape and beyond can also be seen in this respect. Du Plessis (2009) asserts that any discourse on names in any form in physical space has a direct impact on the linguistic landscape. Putting it differently, the onomastic landscape is necessarily an extension of the linguistic landscape. It is this onomastic dimension within the linguistic landscape and language visibility that underpins this discussion.

Some benchmarks in research in linguistic landscape studies

Gorter (2007) studied the linguistic landscape from a multilingual perspective in Rome, while Coupland (2010) worked in Wales, Backhaus (2006) in Tokyo, and Ben-Rafael et al. (2010) did his work in Israel. Others include Hicks (2002) (Scotland), and Kostanski (2011) in Australia. Du Plessis, (2009; 2011) and Kotze (2010) have researched this extensively in South Africa. The latter authors are a useful point of departure for any study of the linguistic landscape in the southern African region.

Du Plessis (2009) observes that while research on the linguistic landscape is growing elsewhere, there is little evidence of scholarly interest in this field in southern Africa. This should not come as a surprise because it is a fairly new area of research elsewhere as reflected by most of the literature in this area (for example, Gorter 2007; Shohamy and Gorter 2008; Cernoz and Gorter 2006; Singahasiri 2013). Most of these studies are no more than ten years old. So it is an area of study shaping itself into a full discipline and there are endless possibilities in this field. Perhaps before discussing the language landscape and language visibility, it is worthwhile to develop a working definition of the linguistic landscape.

The concept of linguistic landscape is a relatively new area of study and overlaps into visual discourse. Landry and Bourhis (1997) were the first to use the phrase linguistic landscape and it appears most scholars keep going back to these two (see, for instance, Cernoz and Gorter 2006; Backhaus 2006; Singahasiri 2013). Landry and Bourhis (1997: 25) define the linguistic landscape as

> [t]he language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, shop names, commercial signs, and public signs on government buildings combine[d] to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region or urban agglomeration.

This definition, which has been widely accepted by scholars as standard, clearly indicates that names are part of the linguistic landscape. Place names appear on road signs, institutions or names of buildings. Reh (2004) and du Plessis (2009: 104) point out that language visibility and linguistic landscape is the "display of language in any public space". Study of the linguistic landscape examines, among other things, written language or signs in the public sphere.

Singahasiri (2013), working on the Landry and Bourhis definition, brings out three key points: the visibility, the salience, and the fact that the text is located in public space: "the most unique feature of Linguistic Landscape is that it refers to text presented and displayed in the public space" (Singhasiri 2013: 1).

The linguistic landscape is a public script available to all and sundry, a public text that everyone can read. What meaning each reader gives to it is quite another matter. The linguistic landscape is a visual text, a visual script that narrates the histories, cultures, and traditions of a space. The space can be as small as a cafe or as big as a continent. The linguistic landscape is a lens through which we can identify social, cultural and historical traits or narratives (Singahasiri 2013).

The power to name

Those in power often prescribe names for public spaces. This is the top-down naming process as opposed to the bottom-up process that is found on informal or unofficial signs (Cernoz and Gorter 2006; Singahasiri 2013). The dominant language on display reflects the prevailing power relations. Du Plessis (2009) also cites the top-down/bottom-up processes in the linguistic landscape, and goes on to say that the top-down will be the official and prescribed, as set by some regulatory authority or government, such as with official buildings or street names. The top-down process is influenced by the dominant ideologies and the power relations in the landscape in question. The top-down/bottom-up processes can also be called the overt and covert naming process in linguistic landscape.

Those in power will determine what signs go up in public spaces, as du Plessis (2009: 220) observes that

> one should not underestimate the manipulative value of the linguistic landscape and the prominent role played by ideological considerations in determining the language choice for top-down public signs.

In other words, the rulers express their power by taking up the largest portions of public space and this is the top-down process. Bottom-up processes will be the informal and the people driven, set by forces other than government agencies (Singahasiri 2013). The linguistic landscape is an important site for the "language struggle" and it translates into the other struggles in society.

Landry and Bourhis (1997) suggest that the linguistic landscape serves two key functions, namely the informational function, and the symbolic function. Hicks (2002), cited in Kotze and du Plessis (2010), adds a third one: the mythological or folkloric function. Place names carry a vast portfolio of functions, representing histories, connecting communities, and promoting cultural heritage. The dominant language often has the greatest space in the linguistic landscape, and of these three functions the third is of considerable interest to this discussion.

The folkloric function

Place names, besides performing the informational function of marking linguistic territory, have the potential of revealing past cultural/linguistic borders. Puzey (2011) suggests that this is especially significant for minority languages. Kotze and du Plessis (2010: 77) express the same sentiments by saying that the "mythological (or folkloric) function of the linguistic landscape is fulfilled mainly through place names, which are often all that remain of traditional cultures". Place names in Zimbabwe have endless narratives that celebrate the past of most language groups. They become a cultural peg around which people weave identities through myths and legends.

The two dimensions of the linguistic landscape

Mamvura (2014), citing Gorter (2006) and Nicolaisen (2011), argues that perception of a landscape can be at two levels. First, it is a piece of land – a physical place, and second, it is a symbol, a concept in the mind. The linguistic landscape takes both these attributes because it comes as a linguistic representation of some physical reality (i.e. a place). Coupland (2010) gives a related view of the landscape by emphasising the notion of linguistic landscape as a metaphorical concept, derived from the concept of the natural landscape. The linguistic landscape becomes a way of "languageing" towns and cities, which embodies modern ways of seeing urban spaces. The street name is part of this urban space. It is a physical element and it is also a language on the urban landscape.

A brief note on the Zimbabwean liberation war

Colonial rule in Zimbabwe began with the raising of the Union Jack in Salisbury (now Harare) in 1891. Armed resistance by the local people was suppressed and the country became a British colony. Active political resistance started simmering again after World War II, and by 1960, black nationalists began to actively demand power. Armed conflict broke out in 1966, with attacks being launched from Zambia. The Rhodesian government was able to stop these incursions by 1968. By this stage, the nationalist movement was in two parties, the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). The armed wing of ZAPU was called the Zimbabwe Peoples Liberation Army (ZIPRA), and ZANU established the Zimbabwe National Liberation Army (ZANLA)

In 1971, guerrillas resumed operations from northern Mozambique and spread into the north-eastern area of Zimbabwe. Others continued to operate from Zambia. This time round, guerrillas posed a serious threat to Rhodesians and this led to the détente exercise and a declaration of a ceasefire in 1974. This diplomatic offensive was spearheaded by the then US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger.

Negotiations broke down mid-1975 and the war was restarted at the beginning of 1976. This was the final and bloodiest phase of the war as guerrillas opened up new fronts along the Mozambican border. Fighting continued as politicians negotiated, and by 1979 guerrillas had penetrated into most of the country. Peace finally came in 1980 when a ceasefire was signed at Lancaster House, London, in December 1979. Rhodesia was renamed Zimbabwe and the capital city, Salisbury, became Harare.

The sources of the street names

The names in this paper are drawn from an atlas of the streets in Harare's CBD. The discussion also draws upon Makaudze's (2013) seminal work on the streets of Masvingo. Using theories of identity and postcolonial approaches, he analyses those streets, focusing on how they become sites of cultural memory. Out of a corpus 41 names, 19 were analysed using the theoretical framework outlined above. The remainder have retained their original names. Street names that are referred to as numbers such as First, Third, Fifth, Sixth and Seventh were not included in the analysis. Each post-independence name is presented alongside the colonial name that has been erased. A brief historical background of each name is given. These memories can be the recent past of the liberation war, or go even deeper into the past. These narratives are not exhaustive but are useful pointers to the key issues around the street names. The street names are presented in Table 1.

The following street names have not changed: Colquhoun, Mazowe, Blakiston, Fife, Central Avenue, Selous, Livingstone, Orr, Wynne, Raleigh, Luck, Pennefather, Abercorn, Bute, Bank, Cameron, Albion, Speke, and Union. Most of these names are linked to the pioneers who established Rhodesia and they still remain part of the landscape of the CBD. It appears no one is in hurry to change them. This mixture of old and new names creates a linguistic landscape rich in language, history and culture.

Street names as mirrors of the past

A street name is a public sign and every public sign is a visual narrative, a public text that everyone reads. Each reader of this text can ascribe his/her own meaning. A street name not only gives information, but it spells out an identity and other attributes of the community where the name is found. Most of the post-colonial street names of Harare's CBD tell the story of Zimbabwe's struggle for independence. Each name evokes memories of the conflict which has been narrated in great detail by historians.

Through onomastic erasure the new street names have created a new linguistic landscape. These new street names are more familiar and closer to the majority of the people who travel these streets.

Table 1: Street names in Harare's CBD

Post-independence name	"Erased" name
Herbert Chitepo Avenue Herbert Chitepo was a prominent nationalist. He was the first black lawyer in Rhodesia and defended many cases when nationalists were put on trial by the Rhodesian government. He left the post of Director, Public Prosecutions in Tanzania to lead the external wing of ZANU. He played a critical role in the launch and prosecution of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle. He was assassinated in a car bomb in Lusaka on 18 March 1975.	*Rhodes Avenue* Cecil John Rhodes made his fortune in the gold and diamond fields of South Africa. He used much of his wealth to support British colonial expansion in Africa. In the process he spearheaded the occupation of what became Rhodesia.
Josiah Chinamano Avenue Josiah Chinamano was a nationalist who was deputy to Joshua Nkomo, president of ZAPU. Along with others, he was harassed and detained in Rhodesian prisons during the liberation struggle. He served in the Zimbabwean government after independence. He died in 1984.	*Montague Avenue* The only Montagu known to this author is the Italian family in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet. Probably a better connection is William Montague, the Earl of Salisbury (1285–1319), a prominent soldier during the reigns of Edward I and II.*
Samora Machel Avenue This is a major street that runs through the CBD of Harare. Samora Machel was the first president of an independent Mozambique and played a key role in hosting Zimbabwean nationalists and guerrillas between 1975 and 1980. Along with Julius Nyerere and Kenneth Kaunda, he set up the Frontline states which was the forerunner of SADC. He died in 1986 in a mysterious air crash near the South African border.	*Jameson Avenue* Leander Starr Jameson played an active role in establishing Rhodesia. He became notorious for the Jameson Raid when he tried to overthrow Paul Kruger's government in the Transvaal in 1896.
Julius Nyerere Way Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania, was one of the African leaders who played a critical role in the decolonisation of southern Africa. He was able to engage the former colonial powers with tact and diplomacy and at the same time giving moral and material support to Zimbabwean, South African and Namibian guerrillas. Most of the support was coordinated by a Tanzanian military officer, Brigadier Hashim Mbita.	*Kingsway* The origin of this name is not clear. Probably means the street of the British monarch.
Robert Mugabe Road Robert Mugabe was another nationalist who was detained for 10 years before taking over the leadership of ZANU in 1977. He worked closely with Joshua Nkomo in setting up the Patriotic Front during the liberation war. He was the second president of Zimbabwe and stepped down from power on 21 November 2017.	*Manica Road* Manica is the eastern province of Zimbabwe.
J. Z. Moyo Avenue Jason Ziyapapa Moyo was the leader of the external wing of ZAPU. He led ZIPRA, the armed wing of ZAPU, until he died in a parcel bomb explosion in Lusaka in 1977. He worked closely with Josiah Tongogara in setting up the Patriotic Front in 1976.	*Stanley Avenue* Henry Morton Stanley was a member of a group of European explorers who explored the Great Lakes area in the mid-nineteenth century. Their maps enabled Europe to colonise the subcontinent. He is well known for leading an expedition to find David Livingstone.
Josiah Tongogara Avenue One of the best known guerrilla leaders in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. Never far from controversy, he led the armed wing of ZANU until 1979, when he died in a car accident in Mozambique. He is in many ways an icon of the Zimbabwean struggle for liberation.	*North Avenue* This name is self-explanatory. It marks the northern boundary of Harare's CBD.
Simon Muzenda Street Simon Muzenda was a prominent nationalist who worked alongside others such as Robert Mugabe, Leopold Takawira and Cephas Msipa. He was also detained for nearly 10 years, and upon his release, he went to Zambia, then to Mozambique where he became Robert Mugabe's deputy. After independence he served as deputy prime minister and later as vice president until he died in 2004.	*Fourth Street*

Post-independence name	"Erased" name
Leopold Takawira Street Leopold Takawira was an active nationalist who became the first deputy president of ZANU in 1963. He was detained along with others in 1964. He died in detention in 1970, because, it is alleged, the prison wardens ignored his diabetic condition.	*Moffat Street* Robert Moffat was an English missionary based in Botswana. Naturally he worked closely with hunters, explorers, miners and ultimately the pioneer column which marched from Mafeking to Fort Salisbury in 1891.
Nelson Mandela Avenue As leader of the ANC, Mandela spent most of his life fighting apartheid. He became president of South Africa in 1994 after spending 27 years in jail. He made great sacrifices yet went on to preach forgiveness. His service to mankind earned him respect throughout the world.	Baker Avenue *Samuel Baker was another explorer of* the Great Lakes of central Africa.
Robson Manyika Avenue Robson Manyika was a prominent guerrilla leader. He served in ZIPRA, then switched to ZANLA in 1971. After 1980 he held various government posts and died in 1989.	*Forbes Avenue* Major Forbes part of a military unit that pursued King Lobengula as he retreated from Bulawayo in 1893.
George Silundika Avenue George Silundika was an active member of ZAPU and worked closely with the ZAPU leader, Joshua Nkomo. He was a minister in the first government of Zimbabwe and died in office in 1981.	*Gordon Avenue* George Gordon was a British military officer who at some time was based in Khartoum, Sudan.
Simon Mazorodze Road Simon Mazorodze was a medical doctor who gave medical supplies to the guerrillas during the liberation war. After the war he became deputy minister of health, and later minister of health. He died in 1981.	*Beatrice Road* (Origins unknown)
Sam Nujoma Street Sam Nujoma was the leader of the Namibian liberation movement, SWAPO. He became president of Namibia after its independence in 1990. He stepped down in 2005.	*Second Street*
Kaguvi Street Kaguvi was a well-known leader of the first wars of resistance to colonial rule. Kaguvi worked closely with Mbuya Nehanda and both were arrested and hanged in 1898. They became a source of inspiration for guerrillas in the liberation war.	*Pioneer Street* The Pioneers were the European column that marched to present-day Harare in 1890, raising the Union Jack and declaring it a British colony. This was fiercely resisted by the local inhabitants led by King Lobengula in the south of the country, with Kaguvi and Nehanda coordinating the northern part of the country.
Mbuya Nehanda Street Mbuya Nehanda was a heroine who led the wars of resistance in northern Zimbabwe in 1896. She worked with Kaguvi. She was arrested, tried and hanged in 1898. Legend has it that her last words were "my bones shall rise again". Some 70 years later another generation drew inspiration from these words.	*Victoria Street* This street was named after the British monarch, Queen Victoria. Most of Africa was colonised during her long reign (1837–1901).
Kenneth Kaunda Avenue Kenneth Kaunda was a Zambian nationalist who became president in 1964. He accommodated liberation movements from southern African countries and was a founder member of the Frontline States which was the forerunner of the SADC.	*Railway Avenue* This is the southern boundary of Harare's CBD. It runs adjacent to the railway line which runs from west to east.
Harare Street Harare is the name of a pre-colonial chief who lived in the area. Little is known about him, but he was probably of the Shawasha or Mufakose clan.	*Salisbury Street* Lord Salisbury was the British Prime Minister when the pioneers raised the Union Jack in 1890.
Chinhoyi Street This is a town 100 km northeast of Harare. The town is well known for a series of caves which are a tourist attraction. The original name of the caves is Chirorodziva.	*Sinoia Street* This was an anglicised version of the new name.

The short notes that have been given around each name are a summary of the longer story behind it. A combination of all these post-colonial names gives an interesting perspective of the liberation struggle and some of the leaders who spearheaded it.

On the other hand, the erased street names give a good narrative of occupation of the country. Most of the personal names represent those who drove the colonisation of Rhodesia and glorified the British Empire. It has also been noted that many names in the CBD remain unchanged and they are not likely to change in the near future.

Furthermore, this paper shows that those in power will often decide what names will dress the landscape. Lubbe (2011: 60) expresses this well: "Through the amendment of a place name, it is explicitly demonstrated that the concerned government, or body in authority, has (political) power at its disposal". This is not peculiar to Zimbabwe only but occurs everywhere (Gorter 2007; du Plessis 2009).

These street names which are now public scripts were unheard of in Rhodesia. With the changing of the guard in 1980, these names were formalised, and gazetted in the typical top-down process (du Plessis 2009). With the names, came the different meanings that Meiring (1996) would call descriptive backing. As they dominate the landscape, they become statements of power. They are semiotic statements of the new dispensation which draws from its past. They are names that carry deep historical significance especially to the generation that fought the war of liberation. These names are as significant to Zimbabweans as Trafalgar is to the British people, or Valley Forge to the Americans.

Conclusion

This paper explored some of the current perspectives that can guide research in street names such as studies in the linguistic landscape, descriptive backing and onomastic erasure. It has argued that street names are, among other things, important repositories of the history of a nation. The names will often display prominent players of different eras, periods of conflict and periods of peace. Every time street names are changed on the urban landscape, history is rewritten, amended or in some extremes completely erased and replaced by a new script. The street names often reflect the language and culture of the dominant power.

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