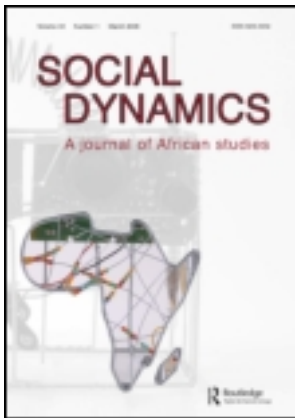


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## Social Dynamics: A journal of African studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rsdy20>

### Changing place names in post-apartheid South Africa: accounting for the unevenness

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Version of record first published: 02 Aug 2012.

To cite this article: Mcebisi Ndletyana (2012): Changing place names in post-apartheid South Africa: accounting for the unevenness, *Social Dynamics: A journal of African studies*, 38:1, 87-103

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02533952.2012.698949>

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## Changing place names in post-apartheid South Africa: accounting for the unevenness

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This paper examines the renaming of South Africa's public places, following the country's democratic breakthrough in 1994. The process has unfolded unevenly throughout the country's nine provinces. The paper explains this unevenness. Fundamentally, it contends that the act of renaming has unfolded largely as a restoration of indigenous memory, which, in turn, is mediated by a number of factors. The lopsided nature of renaming is indicative of the similarly uneven manner in which South Africa's black population recalls indigenous memory. How black people relate to colonial memory also determines whether or not they would want to change it: some came to identify with colonial memory, while others were offended by it. This contrasting symbolism of colonial memory is a result of the varying 'native policies' pursued by the Boer republics, on the one hand, and the British colonial states, on the other. In other instances, indigenous memory simply vanished due to the absence of reminders, while some descendants evolved a new identity that to some extent erased the memory of their ancestry.

**Keywords:** place names; colonialism; memory; identity; acculturation

### Introduction

Post-apartheid South Africa has seen numerous changes. Toponyms (or place names) have not remained unaffected. A process of renaming is currently under way, initiated by the African National Congress (ANC)-controlled government. Though assuming political office in 1994 with an overwhelming majority, the ruling party only embarked on the process in earnest in 2002 – a full eight years into the new South Africa and halfway through the second parliament. It followed the reconstitution of the advisory committee, the National Place Names Committee (NPNC), in 1998 into the South Africa Geographical Names Council (SAGNC) (Department of Arts and Culture 1998) and the issuing of new guidelines: *Handbook on Geographical Names* (Department of Arts and Culture 2002). The new guidelines aimed to eliminate duplication; rectify orthographic errors; accord official recognition to place names commonly used by residents; and to sensitise toponyms to South Africa's democratic values and diverse history. International conventions, passed under the aegis of the United Nations, also imposed their own requirements on South African toponymy. They called for a reduction of oxynyms (names of international cities that are replicated in many other countries), compliance of names

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to the orthographic rules of the national language, and the recognition of indigenous names by which locals refer to their communities.

Renaming has since unfolded, but unevenly so throughout the country's nine provinces. Some provinces are not only ahead, but have also been bolder than others, renaming major cities, prominent streets and popular public spaces. Others have either not started or simply made few, negligible changes. Nor has the exercise unfolded without controversy and contestation. Some name changes have elicited vociferous opposition. Organised groups emerged, with the specific aim of opposing the renaming process through public protests and legal challenges. The courts have been brought in to preside on the legality of other changes and have indeed, in some, instances, reversed renaming, citing procedural flaws, which only served to make the protagonists even more determined to effect the change. In another instance, one city has two names – Pretoria and Tshwane – with each name supposedly referring to a particular part of the city. It has been a contentious subject.

Renaming has not escaped scholarly attention. Toponymy, the study of place names, is an established discipline in the South African academy. Peter Raper, who is an onomastician (or names expert), and Elwyn Jenkins, a linguist, have been engaged in a meticulous exercise of documenting toponyms. Raper's repeatedly updated texts, the *New Dictionary of South African Place Names* (2004) and *Dictionary of Southern African Place Names* (1989), are valuable sources. Jenkins (2007) narrates the post-apartheid renaming process with commanding insight, drawn partly from his service, together with Raper, among others, in the NPNC and later in the SAGNC. Their works provide insight into the origin, meaning and orthography of South Africa's place names. Meiring (1994) provides a useful guide of how renaming can be done in a manner that meets with popular acceptance.

Most of the scholarship on place names therefore is embedded largely within toponymy and linguistics. Not much dedicated attention has been paid to the politico-historical dynamics that drive the process, especially focusing on the post-apartheid era. In particular, what is missing is an account of the unevenness of renaming throughout South Africa. This paper is an attempt to fill in this gap. It is critical to note from the outset that this paper does not desire, nor pretend, to account for every name change or lack thereof in each instance. Rather, the paper is an account of what are perceived to be the major trends that have defined name changing in general, and points to specific instances, in no particular order of preference, to illustrate the points made.

Specifically, the paper contends that the renaming process is primarily a function of the varying manner in which the black population relates to colonial memory. Some identify with it, while others may be ambivalent. These contrasting relations to colonial memory stem from the equally different native policies pursued by the colonial authorities, which exerted different influences on the native population. The varying colonial influences have, in turn, determined whether or not there is any local impetus towards renaming. Moreover, the timing of its commencement and its subsequent scope is reflective of the tension between appeasement and redress that has characterised South Africa's nation-building exercise.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part provides a theoretical framework. Drawing from some historical examples, it explains the origin, significance and intent of toponymy. Following this is an appraisal of the current status of the renaming process in South Africa. Included therein are references to the public reaction and discourse over name changing. Then, using the theoretical framework

outlined in the initial part of the paper, an analysis is provided accounting for the pace and unevenness of renaming since 1994 to date.

### **Toponymy: origin, meaning and intent**

Toponyms are a repository of the past, which satisfy two needs – one existential and the other political. Existentially, toponyms speak to the irrepressible urge within mankind to assert identity. Place names thus become an outward manifestation of how people perceive themselves, both their history and value system. Thus Cohen and Nurit (1992) argue that toponyms are part of a ‘process of attaching meaning to one’s surrounding through mutual sharing of symbols’ which is ‘part of human comprehension and socialization’ (p. 655). Reflecting on the experience of colonial Singapore, Yeoh (1992) notes that street names in the settler community ‘denoted the symbolic transfer of sentiment and the imagery of colonial hopes’ and ‘conjured the idyllic imagery of the English countryside through names like Devonshire Road or Chatsworth Road’ (pp. 313–15). The place names were so culturally dislocated from their locality as to suggest that, according to Yeoh, settlers sought to ‘escape the impress of the tropics and native culture and symbolically to exist in British settings’ (ibid., p. 316).

Naming, therefore, is not a neutral exercise. It is mediated by power relations, depending on the political order. Toponyms in colonies reflected the cultural assumptions of the ruling settlers. Feipel (1925) notes that American cities and states were named after places from where settlers came:

[T]he name of Boston, Massachusetts, reminds us of the part of England from which the first Puritan settlers emigrated. ... In a similar manner, Bangor, Pennsylvania, was named by its first settler in honor of their native place in Wales; and Helvetia, West Virginia, by Swiss settlers after the ancient name of their fatherland. (Feipel 1925, p. 82)

The personage honoured in this way tended to be the agents of the colonial intrusion. These included the royalty, nobility, warriors, statesmen, ecclesiastics, writers, scientists, explorers, pioneers, settlers and landowners. For example, to name but a few, Virginia was named after the Virgin Queen of England; Raleigh (capital of North Carolina) after Sir Walter Raleigh and the James River after James I. This had become such a common practice within the US by the 1920s that, according to Feipel, one author writing at the time presented it as a natural phenomenon: ‘It was only natural that the European colonists who first settled on the shores of America should commemorate their sovereigns and patrons by naming places in their honor’ (ibid., p. 82).

Where suburban street names reflected the history and the self-imagery of the settlers, in communities of the conquered, indigenous-population street names were racial markers, denoting a category of inhabitants within a particular residential area. In an Arab residence, for instance, one would find Arab Street, in a Chinese area Chin Chew Street, and so on. The idea, according to the colonial administrators, was to ‘prevent confusion and disputes’ over which racial group should live where (Yeoh 1992). The intention of colonial toponyms was to rupture ‘the relationships between collective indigenous history, culture, identity and location condensed in native-place names’ (Herman 1999, p. 77).

Colonial toponyms are indicative of cultural prejudice and political expediency. Settlers regarded themselves as standard-bearers to be emulated by the conquered natives. The natives were assumed to lack a history worth celebrating or preserving. Colonialism was touted as a civilising mission, converting the natives into the image of the settlers. Linked to this was a political strategy, designed to shore up colonial oppression. Racial markers were meant to divide the numerically dominant indigenous population into multiple ethnic entities to pre-empt a united resistance against colonial rule. Street names were not commemorative of the history or culture of the indigenous population. But suppressing indigenous memory did not engender hegemony of the colonial toponymy.

Colonial subjects tended to ignore official place names, but continued using their own old pre-colonial ones and the new names reflecting their own meaning of their surroundings. The result was parallel sets of toponymy: one codified and backed by official power and the other unwritten and reinforced by indigenous culture. The persistence of indigenous toponymy, within a colonial context, was a form of resistance against cultural imperialism, a refusal to accept the supposed cultural superiority of the settlers. That is why, according to Herman (1999), the demise of colonial rule was quickly followed by a renaming exercise, erasing colonial toponymy and granting official recognition to indigenous toponymy.

Where settlers were not overtly prejudicial, according to Herman, they adopted a deceptive 'anti-conquest' posture. This entailed 'glorifying the Other at the same time that the other is denied real power' (ibid., p. 77). Indigenous names were adopted as toponyms while, simultaneously, indigenous culture was being trampled upon. Herman posits the toponyms of America's Aloha State (or Hawaii) as one illustration of this phenomenon. The public space was replete with Hawaiian toponyms, but the Hawaiian language, the very tool that transmits the culture that is supposedly respected, was suppressed. Schools prohibited use of indigenous language as far back as 1896. Hawaiian consequently acquired a stigma as an unwanted language, and certainly one without value for someone aspiring towards upward mobility in society. By the 1980s, only 2,000 Hawaiians could speak the native language (Herman 1999).

Descendants of early settlers often adopted the 'anti-conquest' posture. Herman (1999) explains that the idea was to distinguish and distance themselves from the brutal effects of early colonialism. Yet, that still left local culture powerless, just as it was at the height of colonialism. In its perverse form, 'anti-conquest' toponymy is manifested by transmogrified (or corrupted) names. These are place names that derive from the indigenous language, but have been orthographically changed to suit English phonetics to a point where they have even lost their etymology (or original meaning). They include names such as Idutywa (Dutywa), Mtata (Mthatha), Bisho (Bhisho) and Kentane (Centane) (*Daily Dispatch*, 29 July 2004). Such corrupted place names stand out as a supposed representation of multiculturalism, yet those they supposedly represent may not even know their meaning. They say absolutely nothing about those they presumably represent.

Overall, colonial toponymy reinforced spurious claims to ownership over territory. The urge is understandably stronger where ownership is contested. Cohen and Nurit (1992), for instance, note that Israeli toponyms follow a similar pattern because of the contested nature of the state of Israel. Israeli toponyms are geared at stressing the Jewish claim to Israeli ownership. Biblical place names are particularly common in the settlements that were created under the religious Likud Party, as a

way of strengthening Jewish claim of ownership over what are otherwise disputed territories. The ancient biblical names are meant convey the message of Jews returning home. They are specifically designed to counter what some have labelled a Jewish colonial invasion into Palestinian territory. Thus, Cohen and Nurit contend that Israeli toponymy is essentially 'that the Jewish people have returned to the land of Israel. It is their property, as given to them by the Lord, and they are fulfilling the sacred commandment of settling the land as ordered by the Lord'. (1992, p. 662)

Toponymy is thus employed in service of ideological legitimation. Israeli toponymy, Azaryahu (1986) informs us, is overtly infused with the founding ideology of the state, Zionism. The biblical origin of place names denotes the religious orientation of the Zionist ideology: that Israel is the preordained home of all Jews and this was foretold in the Bible. The name 'Israel' is itself derived from the 'ancient kingdom of Israel' and what some know as the West Bank or 'an occupied territory' was officially designated Judea and Samaria in 1977 by the government of the religious right, Likud Party.

In other words, toponymy is reflective of the existing political order, especially its underpinning values and ideology. Place names serve as a public text that both communicate and affirm public identity. Azaryahu puts it as follows: 'They are indicators of political identity while at the same time being part of it. They also help to form a desired political consciousness among the population' (1986, p. 581). Toponyms communicate a public message, whose content is prefigured by the political orientation of the state, whether colonial, junta or democratic. This makes toponymy inevitably fluid. Political order is susceptible to persistent change.

German history illuminates the fluidity of toponymy. Pre-unification German toponymy exhibited the military tradition of the time. Streets bore the names of army generals who won battles over France and of the battles in which they were victorious. Post-1870, unified Germany's toponymy was replete with the name of Otto von Bismarck, the diplomat who was central in its unification. Bismarck was honoured in every German city to promote German national consciousness. The Nazi victory of 1933 saw yet another wave of changes. Names commemorating social democrats, in keeping with Nazi dislike of the latter, were particularly singled out for erasure and names of Nazi martyrs rose up in their stead. Military names were preserved since they suited the continuing militarisation of Germany under Adolf Hitler. When Nazism fell in 1945, so did its accompanying toponymy. Toponymy that symbolised the new Communist authority, in East Germany, especially, gained prominence. Rosa Luxemburg featured prominently indicating her status as the ideological icon of East Germany (Azaryahu 1986).

Place names are containers of memory as well as a legitimising tool. Their content is prefigured by the character of state. In a colonial context toponyms reflected the cultural prejudice of colonial settlers, replacing pre-colonial toponymy, and affirmed their hegemonic status. That it is a reflection of existing political order makes toponymy inevitably fluid. It changes as a political order is altered to reflect the values upon which the new political regime is founded.

### **Toponymic landscape: Post-1994 South Africa**

South Africa's toponymy was no different to any other country with a long colonial history. Post-apartheid South Africa inherited a racist and Eurocentric toponymy, which, in many cases, replaced indigenous place names. Some place names were

derivatives of racial slurs: *kaffir*, *boesman* and *hotnot*. Various derivatives of the racial slur *kaffir* alone numbered 418 in July 1994. Port Elizabeth and Cape Town's black neighbourhoods referred to various sections of their communities as 'Native Units' and 'Native Yards' respectively (Jenkins 2007). Needless to say, South African toponymy made a renaming process inevitable upon the establishment of a non-racial, democratic state.

The pace and extent of renaming, however, belied the necessity of the toponymic changes. Changes were not automatic, but required agency and resources in order to implement these changes. The SAGNC and its provincial counterparts, Provincial Geographical Name Councils, are authorised to recommend changes or the correction of names that fell foul of the official toponymic guidelines – i.e. offensive and misspelled names – to government. But whether or not the rest of the apartheid toponymy changed hinged on agency and public endorsement. Members of the public can apply for a change of a place name, but it is left to the local or provincial government to solicit public input in order to determine whether or not there is sufficient public support for such a change.

In other words, official disposition towards renaming and public sentiment determines the pace and scope of renaming. This prefigured unevenness for the aforementioned determining factors varied across the nine provinces depending on their specific political considerations, unique political identity and the effect of colonial symbolism on the collective psyche of the indigenous populace in each province. Only two of the nine provinces have shown much zeal for renaming. Caution, timidity and downright indifference, to varying degrees, have characterised how the other provinces have dealt with name changes. To be sure, the tone was somewhat set by the national government, influenced by its own national considerations.

Nelson Mandela's inaugural administration adopted a cautious approach. Relatively few prominent public places and natural features changed names during Mandela's inaugural administration. These included presidential residences,<sup>1</sup> airports<sup>2</sup> and dams. Careful not to undermine his reconciliatory project, Mandela was wary of erasing place names that honoured apartheid figures and history, especially replacing them with names of individuals associated with the liberation struggle. Dams especially were the first to experience the initial wave of renaming.<sup>3</sup> At that time natural features were not subject to public approval or endorsement of the statutory bodies. The ministry responsible had unilateral powers to effect the changes. Even then Mandela counselled the presiding minister, Kadar Asmal, against renaming Hendrik Verwoerd Dam to Lake Luthuli, which would have honoured the former ANC president and a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, Chief Albert Luthuli.

Only two provinces, Transvaal and Eastern Transvaal, changed names completely in 1995 to Gauteng<sup>4</sup> and Mpumalanga respectively. Although KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) was the first province in 1998 to rename a town, Stanger to KwaDukuza, that distinction did not signal or inject any sense of urgency to the renaming process in the province. Six years later, Mpume Mbatha, chairperson of KZN's Provincial Geographic Names Committee, lamented the slow pace of renaming in the local newspaper, *The Witness*: 'Only six of the 60 municipalities approached in the province have made submissions to correct mis-spelt geographic names' (Natal Witness 2004, p. 3).

Mpumalanga Province, followed by its neighbouring Limpopo Province, exhibited more urgency and renamed prominent public entities. Though it had also renamed itself back in 1995, Limpopo opted for a modest change from Northern

Transvaal to Northern Province. It took the province six years to change to its present name, Limpopo. One province tinkered with the existing name – i.e. Orange Free State to Free State, three others adopted various derivatives of the same name – i.e. Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Northern Cape. In one instance, two names of erstwhile separate entities were fused into one for a reconstituted province – i.e. Natal and KwaZulu into KwaZulu-Natal. Another newly created province adopted a name that denoted no more than a geographic location – i.e. North West. Jenkins (2007) notes that Popo Molefe, the inaugural premier of North West, cited cost as the stumbling block. Yet North West is not discernibly any poorer than Mpumalanga.

The pace and scope of renaming picked up in the early 2000s. This coincided with the change of presidency from Mandela to Thabo Mbeki; the latter succeeded Mandela in June 1999. Where Mandela had counselled caution, Mbeki expressed not only impatience, but also bewilderment at the persistence of colonial toponymy. Speaking at an international Tourism Indaba, held in Durban, on 3 May 2003, and assuming the identity of a tourist passing through South Africa, Mbeki (2003) quipped:

I would call on places that have names that are strange to me as an African, such as Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown, King Williamstown, Berlin, Stutterheim, Fort Hare, Fort Beaufort and East London, and try to understand who Graham was, such that a town must be named after him, and why we have a small town in the Eastern Cape that shares the same name as the great city of Berlin.

In the same address, Mbeki could not conceal his disgust at the continuing celebration of colonial personalities that wrought agony on the indigenous population, while those who freed South Africa from colonial oppression went uncelebrated. He posed the question, not really to invite an answer but simply in expression of the intensity of his feelings:

Where should we build a monument to pay tribute to those who fought to defend our independence! If the British colonel Graham, who gave his name to Grahamstown, was a merciless butcher of the Africans whom he helped to subjugate, why should I accept that an important university town of our country should be named after him! (Mbeki 2003)

Jenkins (2007) observed that it took Mpumalanga, in 2002, to break the lull that had set in following the renaming of the KZN town from Stanger to KwaDukuza in 1998. The province renamed 10 major towns all at once.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, the Eastern Cape has not changed any of its numerous Eurocentric town names, such as East London, Queenstown, King Williams Town, Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth, Aliwal North, Uitenhage, Berlin, Beaufort, Alice, Stutterheim, Alicedale, Graaff-Reinet, Cradock, Somerset East, Molteno, Colesburg and Port Alfred. Instead, the province has preoccupied itself with correcting the spelling of existing names, such as Bisho to Bhisho, Umtata to Umthatha, Idutywa to Dutywa. Jongela Nojozi, chairperson of the province's Geographical Names Committee, once remarked on South Africa's public broadcaster's television programme *Asikhulume* (2007) that the reason the Eastern Cape prioritised orthographic corrections is that it is the least controversial and thus easiest to do. By implication, Nojozi's committee has avoided major toponymic changes for fear of inciting public outcry.



Public outcry and subsequent uncovering of fraudulent activities halted the Western Cape's initiative in 2001. Peter Marais, then mayor of Cape Town, wanted to change Adderley Street to Nelson Mandela Avenue and Wale Street to FW de Klerk Street, honouring two of South Africa's Nobel Prize recipients and architects of the political transition. But the initiative was met with serious objections, citing lack of public participation. A subsequent investigation revealed that Marais's purported petition to change the street names contained fraudulent names. He eventually withdrew the proposal in July 2001. Marais's successor, Gerald Morkel, quickly dampened any expectations of accelerated changes: 'Cape Town will not follow the example of the Northern Province, Eastern Cape or Mpumalanga, where the wholesale altering of names has left in its wake racial divisions and sectoral bitterness' (Saturday Weekend Argus 2002, p. 7).

After a stammering start, the Western Cape government finally convened a committee in 2003 to oversee the renaming process. It identified 11,000 place names that would be considered for change (Sunday Weekend Argus 2004). Nine years down the line, nothing has changed. Western Cape's nomenclature remained distinguished by Eurocentric toponymy – for example, George, Barkly West, Worcester, Stellenbosch, Hermanus, Paarl, Robertson, Oudtshoorn, Malmesbury, Laingsburg.

Gauteng Province has followed a moderate approach. South Africa's richest and most prominent town, Johannesburg, remains unchanged, as do just as many of its surrounding towns, such as Vereeniging, Springs, Boksburg, Benoni, Nigel, Germiston, Vanderbijlpark, Brakpan, Krugersdorp, Roodepoort, Heidelberg, Bronkhorstspuit. In one rare instance, moderation gave way to boldness. The city government renamed Pretoria, the country's capital, to Tshwane in 2005. Pretoria's (or Tshwane's) white residents protested. One group even hoisted a placard purportedly deciphering the meaning of each letter in the new name Tshwane:

T aking  
 S tealing  
 H ijacking  
 W hite's  
 A ssets  
 N ames  
 E quities (Sunday Times Metro 2005, p. 1)

The city government appeared to backtrack. It issued a fuzzy declaration: the city would remain Pretoria, while the metropolitan area would be known as Tshwane. Official approval of the name change, from the Ministry of Arts and Culture, is still pending at the time of writing. Minister Pallo Jordan appeared hesitant to grant official approval. He expressed his concern: 'We always have to consider the fact that Pretoria is not merely a metropolis in South Africa. It is also the capital of the country, so it has international implications' (Jenkins 2007, p. 161). But that has not deterred the city government from referring to the city as Tshwane. Billboards put up on the outskirts of the city just before the 2010 Soccer World Cup read: 'Welcome to the City of Tshwane. The City of Champions'. Government officials evidently wanted visitors to be clear about their location. The earlier explanation purporting to distinguish the names that referred to the metropolitan area and the city was clearly a ruse to silence the outcry.

Changes in Gauteng have mostly been directed at streets, especially in Johannesburg's cultural precinct of Newtown. A number of streets around the historical Market Theatre were renamed to honour South Africa's prominent artists and progressive journalists.<sup>6</sup> Prominent streets that bore names of apartheid architects elsewhere have also seen changes, such as Hans Strydom Drive to Malibongwe Drive, DF Malan Drive to Beyers Naudé Drive and Hendrik Verwoerd Drive to Bram Fischer Drive.

### **Public response**

Toponymic changes, as noted already above, stirred controversy. A cursory survey of correspondence published in the print media showed the public brouhaha to centre on identity and history. The views inescapably reflect South Africa's racial fissures. Critics objected that renaming was an attack on their identity, seeking to expunge them from South African history. Proponents welcomed renaming as a way of reaffirming their identity and inserting their previously marginalised history into the public record.

The aforementioned placard, objecting to Pretoria being renamed Tshwane, reaffirms the essence of the meaning of place names: that they embody one's identity and history. Beyond the obvious pejorative message of the placard, the protesters evidently felt that the new name would engender a loss of identity and history. Pieter Mulder, leader of a predominantly white-Afrikaner conservative party, the Freedom Front Plus, was equally direct in this opposition denouncing renaming as 'a slap in the face of the Afrikaner community who still regard the history and name to be important to them' (Sowetan 2004, p. 6). Not only that, Pieter Groenewald explained further, it 'trampled ... the traditions of the Afrikaner' (Citizen 2005, p. 3).

Critics did not find the omission of the history of Africans bothersome. It is taken for granted that because the names refer to towns, which are a modern phenomenon, they necessarily have to exclude Africans. G.E. Turley of Walmer, Port Elizabeth, argued that place names symbolise a civilisation that would otherwise not have been possible without the very colonial agency that is now denounced. Turley wrote:

[I]f it is necessary to rid this province of every last vestige of colonial rule why not demolish all the cities, towns, roads, and factories built by colonialists and start afresh?

The bald truth is, of course, that the colonists brought civilization and creature comforts to this continent and without their efforts and sacrifices the current elite who govern this country would not now be enjoying the good life with all the trappings of luxury they feel they deserve. (The Herald 2002, p. 6)

Agreeing with Turley, one 'Sinbad' of Humewood, Port Elizabeth, argued that changing the names would, therefore, be tantamount to stripping South Africa of its civilisation and reverting back its primitive state:

To carry this name changing frenzy to its ridiculous conclusion and get rid of everything colonial, we should also throw out the English language, isolate ourselves from the rest of the developed world and go back to living in the trees. (ibid.)

The foregoing suggests that colonial history unfolded in the absence of Africans. Africans may have been physically present, but were invisible. They did not make history, but were subjects of history. History was made by the white community and their historical figures, hence they deserved the honour of being included in toponymy. This point comes out forcefully in one exchange over whether or not Cape Town's Huguenot Tunnel should be renamed after the former political activist and human rights lawyer Dullah Omar. R. de Villiers (of Mondeor) wrote that the name should be retained because the Huguenots were more worthy of such recognition than Omar. The Huguenots, explained de Villiers, contributed 'to jurisprudence, agriculture, manufacturing, mining and society in general over more than 300 years'. As for Omar, 'whatever' he might have accomplished, de Villiers retorted, 'pales into insignificance compared with those of the Huguenots and their descendants over more than three centuries' (This Day 2004, p. 10).

Rather than meddle with history and the South Africa's identity, detractors further contend that government should focus more on tangible development instead. James Gibson, of Port Elizabeth, put it as follows:

Changing the names ... seems to be inconsequential in comparison to the creation of employment, the provision of education ... and adequate health-care, the policing of our streets and the overall economic stability.

This policy only equates to window dressing especially when you have not even begun to address the concept of a successful future. ... In 20 years' time it will be irrelevant to the majority of our youth what Port Elizabeth is called. What will make a difference is whether they are educated, employed, healthy and safe. The past will always remain exactly that, the past (This Day 2004, p. 10).

For Mark Pritchard, name changing is in fact a costly exercise just on its own: 'Imagine the cost for business. Stationery will have to change, directories and street maps. It is just unnecessary' (Natal Witness 2004, p. 3). In other words, renaming place names is a wasteful expenditure that consumes financial resources that could otherwise be utilised meaningfully in 'real' development.

Interestingly, the cost of naming, which supposedly distracts financial resources from much-needed development in black neighbourhoods, did not feature in the arguments advanced by black correspondents. They considered renaming a necessary corrective exercise. It conferred recognition on formerly marginalised black personalities and reaffirmed their history. Dolly Mtambo of Chesterville wrote: 'It will be great to see the names of our heroes up there' (ibid.). Pinky Miya of Umlazi added that reflecting one's culture and history in toponymy is an affirming and validating process: 'I would be glad if some of the names changed to Zulu names. At least our elders would be able to recognize them' (ibid.).

That toponymic changes always incite an outcry, especially from South Africa's white community, is inevitable. Apartheid toponymy affirmed their identity and history, while suppressing that of the indigenous population. Mpumalanga and Limpopo effected changes in the face of an organised and determined opposition, but complied with the guidelines. The extent to which changes are effected hinges on the presence of a determined local agency, which, in turn, as explained below, is a function of how the local populace relate to colonial memory that is celebrated through pre-1994 toponymy.

### Post-apartheid toponymic changes: An analytical framework

Toponymic changes were inevitable following the inauguration of South Africa as a non-racial democracy in 1994. Apartheid toponymy constituted an anomaly. Part of it was offensive to the country's new founding values and presented a one-sided account of history. Three factors, however, mediated the nature and extent of that change. Firstly, while the African nationalist character of the ruling party necessitated a change, it was nonetheless subject to political considerations of the time. Secondly, the diverse colonial paths traversed by South Africa's locales and contrasting native policies engendered varying colonial experiences, which, in turn, pre-figured different relations to colonial memory. Thirdly, what became of colonial memory post-apartheid also depended on the extent, if any, of the cohesiveness of local identity and the presence of the agent of articulation.

African nationalism draws from African identity and history. In the course of the anti-colonial resistance, nationalists held up indigenous institutions and culture, and pointed to their history as justification of their demand for equality. The contention was meant to refute colonial claims that the indigenous people are unfamiliar with democratic practice and would have remained undeveloped without a colonial agency. The past, especially anti-colonial heroes and victorious battles, was also used as inspiration to anti-colonial resistance. A strong part of the legitimacy of the nationalist movement, therefore, was its promise to affirm and validate African identity and history.

The renaming of places of national significance, as Mandela's government undertook soon after assuming political power, albeit limited, was symbolic of the reclaiming of the country as well as affirming the personage and the history of those that apartheid deemed inferior. The new names indicated the dawn of a new political order, which, unlike the pre-1994 order, would be sensitive to the values and history of all its peoples. However, renaming under Mandela's inaugural presidency was discernibly different to what followed under his successor, Thabo Mbeki.

Renaming under Mandela's presidency, as noted earlier, sought to be inclusive. Mandela counselled against erasing names honouring Afrikaner figures, even Hendrik Verwoerd (Simpson 2000). This was occasioned by the reconciliatory objective of Mandela's inaugural administration. Whites had feared that the predominantly black government would exact vengeance for the brutality and pauperisation that had been inflicted upon the black populace by successive union and apartheid governments. Mandela's public gestures – from meeting with his prosecutor Percy Yutar and visiting Hendrik Verwoerd's widow, to wearing a rugby shirt, a sport that symbolised racial segregation – were intended to allay white fears.

Mbeki's presidency faced somewhat different demands. His ascension to office in 1999 coincided with increasing discontent within the black community that Mandela's presidency was overly placating of whites with little redress for former victims of racism (Gevisser 2007). Unlike the public leader that Mandela was, Mbeki was also a nationalist intellectual. Affirming African history and experience thus became the hallmark of Mbeki's presidency. African Renaissance, which was the centrepiece of Mbeki's presidency, drew inspiration from Africa's pre-colonial achievements, for instance. He was continuing a theme that had been started by Pixley Izaka kaSeme's, 'Regeneration of Africa', back in 1906 (Karis and Carter 1972). So it was that renaming under Mbeki's presidency not only gained urgency

but was also, to a large extent, a restoration of indigenous names, which had been buried under colonial memory.

The unevenness of the renaming process belies the uniformity of the intent and impact of colonial toponymy on the native population. It recorded colonial history and celebrated conquest, while repressing indigenous toponymy. To the native population, colonial toponymy stood out as a constant, inescapable reminder of subjugation with all its horror. Signage reflecting the new colonial names was anchored into the land that formerly belonged to the indigenous population and symbolised dispossession and subjugation. It is not unexpected therefore that colonial toponymy would attract local enmity. But the extent to which colonial toponymy remained a permanent object of local enmity hinged on the nature of 'native policy' pursued by the colonial state during the course of colonial rule.

To the extent that colonial toponymy represented colonial culture and authority, its imagery could be softened by the effect of colonial policy towards the native population. This depended on whether it adopted an assimilationist approach or remained aloof and even repressive towards the locals. The contrasting ways in which, for instance, the Eastern Cape province, on the one hand, and Mpumalanga and Limpopo provinces (or northern provinces), on the other hand, have dealt with colonial toponymy was partly prefigured by the equally contrasting colonial histories.

Conquest in the Eastern Cape was soon followed by acculturation, while settler–native relations in the northern provinces remained defined by separation and hostility. The British justified their role in the Eastern Cape (and Natal) as one of civilising the natives, turning them into their own image. Natives were drawn into service for the British settler community not only for wage labour, but also to imbibe British culture. Settlers assumed a tutelage role, introducing the locals to everything British (Mostert 2000). Such lofty ideas were never part of the Boers' colonial mission in the northern provinces. Boer–local relationships were marked by slave labour (or *inboeklinge*) and outright hostility for the most part of colonial rule (Delius 1983).

This does not imply that there were never any shared spaces in the northern provinces (i.e. Mpumalanga and Limpopo), where acculturation could have happened. Missionaries, through Christian conversion, as they had done in the Eastern Cape, created an indigenous class that espoused a hybrid culture in the northern provinces. But the scope of the missionary enterprise, duration and the fate of the Christian converts differed. In the Eastern Cape the missionaries first arrived in the eighteenth century and made a breakthrough in the 1850s following the Nongqawuse catastrophe that greatly undermined the capacity of the local community to remain self-sufficient. About 30,000 locals were estimated to have left their villages for employment in the settler community (Mostert 2000). A concerted effort was subsequently undertaken to build even more missionary schools, resulting in the emergence of Healdtown, St Matthew's, St Mark's, Salem, Peelton and Mount Coke among others. Lovedale, which had been established earlier in 1820, was refurbished. This led to a burgeoning of a missionary-trained African elite that espoused English culture and paid allegiance to the British crown (Cook 1949).

By contrast, Mpumalanga's Christian converts, for instance, only emerged after 1860, following the arrival of missionaries, under the aegis of the Berlin Missionary Society. A community of Christian converts, *Botshabelo*, 'a place of refuge', was subsequently established in 1866. It was a refuge from the taunts and harassment

that Christian converts suffered within the non-Christian, African communities. But, the *Botshabelo* community subsequently splintered in 1873 and a section thereof went to establish another community, *Mafofolo*, the ‘place of gladness’. The split was precipitated by missionary insistence on complete erosion of African custom. The converts sought to retain some customary practices while still adhering to Christian teachings. They chose to leave rather than completely renounce their culture. *Mafofolo* provided a free space for the expression of that hybrid culture.

But *Mafofolo* was short-lived. Its success threatened the sustainability of the missionary-controlled mission stations and labour supply to the Boer farmers, as people joined the community. *Mafofolo* suffered military attack in 1876, resulting in its disintegration. While Mpumalanga’s hybrid African community was losing its cohesiveness, in the Eastern Cape it was gaining organisational strength and prominence in public discourse. Its voice achieved dominance in public culture due to the proliferation and its control of newspapers, such as *Isigidimi* (Christian Express), *Imvo Zabantsundu* (Opinions of People of Colour) and *Izwi Labantu* (The Voice of the People). This dominance consequently conferred upon them leadership of political organisation and agitation in the Eastern Cape (Odendaal 1984).

The dominance of the assimilationist, cultural strand within the Eastern Cape’s public culture softened the alien, invasive symbolism that had earlier characterised colonial toponymy. Having embraced the culture and authority it represented, it is possible that the local enmity towards colonial toponymy made way for some degree of identification. Not that the locals never had alternative, indigenous names for colonial towns. Almost every Eastern Cape town has one – for example, East London is called *eMonti*; Grahamstown *eRhini*; Queenstown *eKomani*; King Williams Town *eQonce*; Alice *eDikeni*; Alexandria *eMnyameni*; Stutterheim *eCumakala*; Butterworth *eGcuwa*.

The point is that the extent of acculturation induced a state in which colonial toponymy ceased to represent an invasive, alien force, but where a segment of the local populace, which subsequently assumed an influential public role, embraced the culture and the authority it symbolised. By contrast, hostility between settlers and locals, coupled with an absence of an organised, cohesive hybrid class, only accentuated the strangeness and invasiveness of colonial memory in the northern provinces. This made it easy for local politicians to remove colonial toponymy and restore indigenous names.

The relative absence of urgency to rename Gauteng’s town names is possibly owing to their relative (industrial) newness and, consequently, absence of the descendants of early African inhabitants among the current black population. Most black residents are descendants of recent arrivals into present-day Gauteng, following the discovery of minerals. It does not mean, though, that (southern) Transvaal, renamed Gauteng, lacked African presence or that the land upon which it was founded did not belong to Africans. Voortrekkers did encounter African presence, especially Tswanas and Mzilikazi’s Ndebele, against whom they were involved in skirmishes. Tswanas were subsequently hounded off towards what eventually became Bechuanaland, while Mzilikazi, who was himself fleeing from the Zulu king, Shaka, settled in modern-day Zimbabwe. Among Gauteng’s black populace currently there are not many direct claimants to the land, on the basis of original ownership. Rather, their ancestry, as noted earlier, is mostly from outside of Gauteng. The relative lack of alternative indigenous names, which invoke pre-colonial

identity, for the Gauteng towns testifies to the absence of a strong and immediate indigenous claim of ownership over this territory (Davenport 1987).

In other words, Gauteng is a cosmopolitan province. This is underscored by its very African (Sesotho) name, Gauteng (or Egoli in isiZulu), meaning 'a place of gold'. The name thus denotes Gauteng's recent origin as an industrial place, whose cosmopolitan identity has been shaped by the contemporary experience of migrant workers from various parts of the country and southern Africa. That the name does not refer to pre-colonial African settlement or activities is further illustration of the relative absence of a prior claim to ownership. Very little, if any, exists in Gauteng that is reminiscent of a pre-colonial past (N. Ramatlhodi, personal communication, 16 August 2010). Nor has there emerged an interest group mobilising to restore a pre-colonial identity (A. Hlongwane, personal communication, 16 August 2010).

Name changing in Gauteng, therefore, is not necessarily a restoration of African identity or an affirmation of prior ownership. Renaming of streets in Johannesburg, as noted earlier, shows that only an overt association with the unpleasant memory of apartheid invites renaming. The new names, however, do not denote an ethnic identity. Rather, they convey the cosmopolitan identity of South Africa's most vibrant city.

Absence of local agency explains the Western Cape's indifference. Not that its toponyms do not warrant changes. They too symbolise colonial conquest and dispossession. South Africa's indigenous Khoe-San population were the victims. They not only lost the means of subsistence, but also had their indigenous toponymy replaced by colonial toponymy. They became slaves to the settler community. Western Cape's colonial toponymy thus represents an unpleasant memory, which would ordinarily warrant renaming, but that memory is far removed from the descendants of the Khoe-San.

To be sure, the Khoe-San community disintegrated in the aftermath of colonial conquest. They were assimilated into the settler and other African communities. As a result, they assumed the identity of their hosts, adopting their language and religion. Part of the Xhosa-speaking Gqunukhwebe clan, for instance, includes Khoe-San ancestry (Mostert 2000). Most of their descendants, conceived through interracial relationships with Dutch settlers, emerged as a distinct group classified 'Coloured' (Marais 1957).

But, though numerically dominant, the 'Coloureds' do not constitute a homogenous community. They adhere to various cultural practices or hold different identities, which are not necessarily influenced by their ancestral Khoe-San memory. In the other words, 'Coloured culture' is distinctly different to its Khoe-San ancestry, but shares some aspects with many other South African cultures. The point, therefore, is that Khoe-San memory is both hazy and without any advocacy in contemporary South Africa. The surviving Khoe-San community is simply too minute and politically marginal to mount a significant toponymic movement.

Any toponymic changes in the Western Cape are likely to be occasioned by the offensiveness of existing names and in pursuit of political capital. But Eurocentric place names may be spared, for they represent not only the history of the ruling party – i.e. Democratic Alliance (DA) – in the province, but also of its significant English-speaking constituency. Some gestures will be made, though, towards the African community as part of the DA's attempts to rehabilitate its image and that of Cape Town among the African community in general. Africans, outside of Cape

Town especially, decry the city as the last colonial outpost and the DA is widely seen as a liberal, white-centred party.

But the new names are unlikely to honour individuals with an overtly African nationalist background or association with the national liberation movement. That would invoke associations with the liberation movement, the African National Congress (ANC), something that would sit uncomfortably with the DA and its support base. The party has cast itself as an opponent of African hegemony, which it sees as spearheaded by the ANC. That disposition has made the party popular among sections of the minority groups that feel overlooked in favour of Africans. Neutral personalities, either with a prominent human rights record or transracial appeal in the Western Cape, will be honoured instead. That may include names drawn from the Khoe-San history to strike an 'anti-conquest posture' as a way of distancing themselves from their colonial past. Such names are also politically expedient, for they have undertones of atonement.

This paper has provided an account of the unevenness of the renaming in South Africa since 1994. It showed that renaming is determined by the state of indigenous memory among the living, whether or not they can remember it. Other parts of the country lack reminders or carriers of indigenous memory, leading to its loss. How black people presently relate to colonial memory also determines their disposition towards name changing. Assimilation into colonial culture has made some identify with Eurocentric place names, resulting in indifference towards name changing. Where relations between settlers and the locals remained hostile, Eurocentric place names held up a permanent symbolism of invasion and strangeness, making them easy targets for changes.

## Notes

1. In January 1995 both official residences of the president were renamed: Libertas in Pretoria became Mahlambandlopfu, a Tsonga term that means 'the washing of the elephant', denoting the 'new dawn'; Westbrooke in Cape Town became Genadendal, named after mission station in the Western Cape established in 1738. The name honoured the Khoe and former slaves who lived at the station and contributed towards the evolution of Afrikaans. The deputy-president's residence in Pretoria, Overvaal, changed to Oliver Tambo House in October 1997; and the amphitheatre at the Union Buildings changed to *Mali-bongwe Embokodweni*.
2. In 1995 DF Malan was renamed Cape Town International Airport; Louis Botha became Durban International Airport; Jan Smuts changed to Johannesburg International Airport; and Lucas Mangope was replaced with Pilanesberg Airport.
3. Hendrik Verwoerd changed to Gariiep; Braam Raubenheimer to Kwena; Charlie Malan to Impofu; Fanie Botha to Tzaneen; Hans Strijdom to Mokolo; Hudson Ntswanisi to Nsami; Jan Wassenaar to Klaserie; Lake Menz to Darlington; Mokgomo Matlala to Arabia; Paul Sauer to Kouga; PK le Roux to Vanderkloof; and Sarel Hayward Canal to Orange-Riet Canal.
4. The other was Gauteng Province, which changed from Transvaal.
5. These included Ellisrus to Lephallale; Messina to Musina; Naboomspruit to Mookgophong; Nylstroom to Modimolle; Pietersburg to Polokwane; Potgietersrus to Mokopane; and Warmbaths to Bela-bela.
6. Becker Street was changed to Gerard Sekoto; Minaar Street to Mahlathini Street; West Street to Ntemi Piliso Street; Pim Street to Gwigwi Mrwebi Street; Goch Street to Henry Nxumalo Street; Wolhuter Street to Margaret Mcingana Street; Sydenham Street to Noria Mabasa Street; Avenue Road to Dolly Rathebe Road; Park Road to Barney Simon Road; and Bezuidenhout Street was renamed Miriam Makeba Street



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