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The interface between toponyms, hydronyms and geography: The case of selected Shona names from three provinces in Zimbabwe

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This paper argues that naming has always been a serious activity among the Shona of Zimbabwe. The people have always used names not only to express their emotions, but have also used place names or toponyms to explain cultural activities and describe the natural and physical environment surrounding them. In an effort to bring out this interesting facet of the Shona naming practice, the researchers embarked on research covering Manicaland, Masvingo and the Midlands provinces. The paper concludes by arguing that place names are valuable not only to historians and anthropologists, but also to economic and physical geographers in the realm of what is called cultural geography today. It is also a wake-up call for researchers in different areas to use multidisciplinary approaches to their studies.

Introduction

Naming has always been a very serious and non-arbitrary activity among the Shona of Zimbabwe. Pongweni (1983:1) observes that '[w]hen one looks at Shona names, one cannot but be struck by the wealth of information, historical, descriptive, picturesque and human, which certain names provide about people *and places* that bear them' (emphasis added). The people have always named places in line with events, shape or appearance of natural phenomena, as well as political power, among others. Jepson (2011: 9) boldly states that it would be hard to find a place name that has no meaning, and folk etymologies bear witness to this. Thus a name is not just a label, but a highly communicative facet, which does not only communicate feelings, but other issues such as political and social ones. In an effort to bring out this interesting facet of the Shona naming practice, the researchers embarked on research covering Manicaland, Masvingo and the Midlands provinces of Zimbabwe. The paper gives the theoretical grounding, and then discusses terms that are important to the interface between toponyms and geography before analysing some selected names from these three provinces. The paper notes that the Shona respond to the world around them as is reflected in the names that they give. It then concludes by arguing that place names are valuable not only to historians and anthropologists, but also to economic and physical geographers in the realm of what is called cultural geography today.

Research methods

This research used a qualitative approach. The reason why the researchers opted for this type of approach is because it is a method that involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach. As far as Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 3) perceive it, 'qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in

terms of the meanings people bring to them'. Shank (2002: 5) defines qualitative research as 'a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning'. Here, systematic means 'planned, ordered and public', following rules agreed upon by members of the qualitative research community. Empirical means that this type of inquiry is grounded in the world of experience (Walliman, 2011).

There are a number of advantages in using qualitative research on issues like toponyms. These advantages include the flexibility to follow unexpected ideas during research and explore processes effectively, sensitivity to contextual factors, ability to study symbolic dimensions and social meaning, and increased opportunities to develop new, empirically supported ideas and theories (Ospina, 2004; Driscoll, 2011). The tools that can be used with the qualitative approach include both formal and informal interviews, questionnaires, documentary evidence and observations. This research relied largely on interviews and observations, whereby the researchers inquired about the common names that had meanings and listened intently to names of places that were being called out. This was followed up by informal interviews with the elders to ascertain the possible origins and meanings of the identified names. The interviews were carried out with some elderly people because the researchers perceived that they still had valuable knowledge about historical events and places attached to the names, although some of the interviewees had been affected by what we may term the colonial and church bug.

The advantage of using interviews is that, it is less intrusive. When asked the meaning of a given name, the response came spontaneously. The research was also supported by the use of documentary evidence. In this situation the researchers browsed books and other documents that contain literature on place names, such as Jepson (2011) and Meiring (2014). These books were insightful because they helped to shed more light on this

area of linguistics which is often overlooked by some people who are of the opinion that it has nothing to really offer to the world of academia and development.

The research identified ten names for discussion. The reason for the selection of these specific names over others was that they are easy to comprehend, considering that most readers of this article may not be familiar with Shona names, be they toponyms, hydronyms or anthroponyms. The data collection was done by interviewing 30 citizens who were chosen in the three provinces, ten from each province. Given that a successful research endeavour involves choosing prospective participants who have the right information for the study (Neuman, 2006), a blend of purposive sampling and snowball sampling was adopted in the selection of participants for this study. Purposive sampling ensures that participants with the right information are selected. In snowball sampling, '[r]esearchers identified a small number of individuals who have the characteristics in which they are interested' (Cohen et al., 2007: 116). In this regard, a few people of middle age were included to give place names which they felt were common and easily understood in the provinces. Elderly people were then chosen to augment the information from the middle aged, and to help shed light on the possible origins and meanings of the identified names. Thus the individuals in turn identified others to the researchers. According to Cohen et al. (2007) snowball sampling is appropriate where identification of participants is difficult.

Those from Manicaland gave hydronyms like Rusape and Nyamunga and toponyms like Nyarupara, Ibweburi, Mahwemasimike and Ibwerimwe. Those from Masvingo province gave Mhandamabwe and MunwewaMwari as examples, while those from Midlands province gave Gonawapotera and Gandavaroyi. It is hoped that a discussion of these selected names will inspire others to venture into more studies in the area of Shona place names. The researchers do acknowledge that the names are not that many, but the fact that they cover three provinces of the country is deemed to be a good beginning.

Theoretical framework

The paper roots its observations in the theory of Afrocentricity. As Gray (2001:3) puts it, it is

a perspective which holds that African people can, and should see, study and interpret, and interact with people, life, and all reality from the vantage point of sane African people—rather than from the vantage point of European people, or Asian, or other non-African people, or from the vantage point of African people who are alienated from Africanness.

In other words, it is to place Africans and the interest of Africa at the centre. It is to analyse and give meaning to phenomena from a genuine African's worldview. This is because the African and European worldviews are different, since Africa is not the West (Chinweizu et al., 1980), thus making it difficult to neatly import and implement ideas from one cultural milieu into the other. Despite the limitation that it is inward looking, Afrocentricity makes a valid assertion that African ways of looking at and understanding reality have a lot of positives, which ironically are jettisoned once we make use of Eurocentric scholarship. It is this treasure, hidden

from Eurocentric scholarship, which Afrocentricity challenges contemporary Africans to unearth and revivify for their benefit. Using the theory, the cultural wealth embedded in Shona hydronyms and toponyms is exposed and their significance vindicated. Since definitions belong to the definers (Morrison, in Hudson-Weems, 2004), it is plausible that names by the Shona, about the Shona, and for the Shona be appreciated using a theory that appreciates the Shona worldview.

It is also important to note that to name is also to communicate. The article therefore was also informed by several theories of communication. At the basic level, communication takes place when an individual or individuals transmit a message and that message is taken or received and interpreted by those who have heard and think that they understand it (<http://www.praccreditation.org/resources/documents/APRSG-Comm-Models.pdf>). DeVito (1988) and Wrench and Punyanunt-Carter (2012) concur that communication is the act, by one or more persons, of sending and receiving messages that are distorted by noise, occur within a context, have some effect, and provide some opportunity for feedback. Communication may be graphically presented as in Figure 1 which shows the linear model of communication. From this figure, it can be argued that those who give the names are the ones who encode and send the message(s). The name itself is then channelled together with the referent, which in this case is the object that has been named. The one who interprets the meaning of the name is the receiver who decodes it.

This model is important in that it helps the reader to understand the Shona naming practice as communication. Whatever names a place has, no matter how opaque it is, is meant to relay some information about a particular geographical feature. When one thinks about what a name may possibly mean, then one is actively decoding the message, which in this case is the meaning, carried by the given name. It is equally important to note that for communication to be effective, it has to be in a given context. In the case of Shona toponyms, the context is the cultural environment within which these names are found and given. The significance of context in interpreting names as part of communication is made clear when one considers the reality that effective communication can best take place in an environment where the communicating sides are within the same cultural setting.

Figure 2 highlights the importance of cultural contexts, as well as other factors that contribute to successful communication or the misinterpretation of messages. It is in the light of this view that the researchers would like to bring to the attention of both geographers and other interested parties, such as cultural practitioners and town and rural planners, that understanding the cultures of given areas

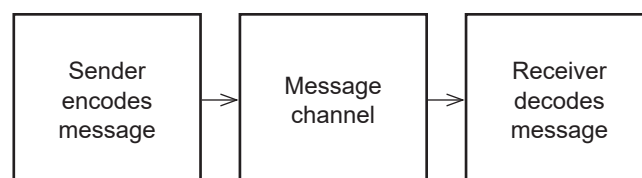


Figure 1: Linear model of communication

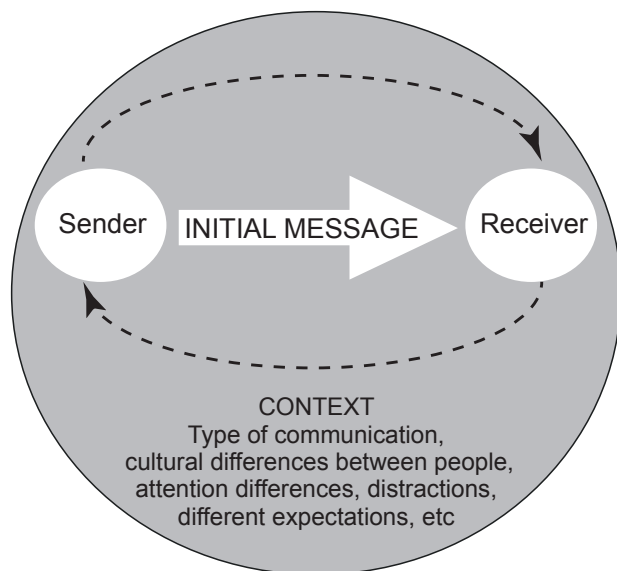


Figure 2: The systematic model of communication (simplified)
(Adopted from the Oxford Textbooks website <http://fds.oup.com/www.oup.com/pdf/13/9780199582723.pdf>)

will go a long way in minimising the distortions that may be caused by misinterpretations and mispronunciation of names.

Definition of key concepts

The concepts to be elucidated for the purpose of this article are geography, culture, culture region, cultural geography, cultural landscape and onomastics.

- **Geography:** this word is used by scientists to mean earth description—it seeks to describe the cultural phenomena that characterise the earth's surface (www.aboutgeography.com). Geography seeks to answer, among others, these questions: Where are the things located? Why are they there? What is their significance? What is the particular location or region like? Why are some places on earth alike or different from others? Culture fits in under geography because cultural geography as a subfield of human geography focuses on the patterns and contacts of human culture, both material and non-material, in relation to the natural environment and how humanity organises space. This results from the fact that human beings have an awareness and curiosity about the distinctive character of places, and also because they think and act territorially, which raises certain emotions in them, and it is these emotions that inform how they name certain topographical features.
- **Culture:** this is the total way of life that characterises a particular group of people (Spencer-Oatey, 2012).
- **Culture region:** this refers to a portion of the earth's surface that has common cultural elements, for example, in Zimbabwe the Shona area as a common cultural space where people have a similar response to it (www.aboutgeography.com). The people respond to their cultural space in an almost uniform manner in that their economic and cultural activities are to a large extent informed and guided by the physical features of the areas that they live in.
- **Cultural geography:** this is a subfield of human geography.

Cultural geography explores how and why communities live in the places they have as their local habitats, and how they obtain resources. It also investigates how they interact with each other, and how they interact with their environment, focusing largely on people and their activities, such as culture and economics.

- **Cultural landscape:** this includes buildings, man-made or the natural environment and it is to these that the Shona respond to. A cultural landscape provides a sense of place and identity to its inhabitants, giving them scope to map their relationship with the land over time. This landscape is therefore part and parcel of a people's heritage and life. Names fall under onomastics, a branch of linguistics, indicating the link between language and geography. The study of place onomastics is called toponymy. Students studying geography in Shona-speaking places can have a more informed understanding of the subject by being exposed to the names of geographical phenomena and the layers of meaning conveyed by such names. In addition, teachers can be informed by some of the names since some of them are self-explanatory and instead of relying on examples from textbooks on certain phenomena like seasonal rivers and streams, indigenous names can be very informative.

Significance of the selected names

Some of the names that are discussed in this paper are given as they are currently legally spelt. It is unfortunate that when the renaming of cities, towns and other settlements was done in May 1982, the correct spelling was not carried through. If the exercise had remained an ongoing one, maybe the names that some places like the town of Rusape carry would have been different today.

Rusape

This is the name of a river found in Makoni district in Manicaland province. The town of Rusape was founded by colonialists on the banks of this river. Interviews with the elders in Manicaland indicated that the name is a colonial corruption of Rusipwi ('that which does not run dry'). Moller (2014: 109) observes that names from older languages have been disregarded and lost as the true origins of the adapted or revised forms of names. The original name meant *rwizi rusipwi* ('a river that does not run dry'). The origins and meaning of the word can thus be traced in the form of the remnant words (Moller, 2014). Thus the pronunciation of names tends to be anglicised by English-speaking persons (Meiring, 2014). The question that remains unanswered is how does one tell a community that a word in their language is unacceptable for naming the place where they live; when that is the pronunciation of the name they have known for many generations (Meiring, 2014: 5)? The elders testified that despite all droughts, including those of 1992 and 2002, the river did not dry up. The town of Rusape has never been under the threat of water shortages. To a geographer, especially one studying hydrology, such a name is in itself very informative because one learns that the river is perennial. Thus the indigenes gave the river such a name after carefully studying its nature, and today the name communicates its characteristic, that its waters are ever-flowing. The name thus is communicative. The geographer also knows why

people who settled in a particular place grow certain types of crops. Those around Rusape, owing to good rains and a reliable water source, grow *madhumbe* (taro or cocoyam, usually mistranslated and confused with yams) and *tsenza* (Livingstone potato) both of which do well in such conditions. It is also a call to the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) and other researchers to see what practices the people have implemented to make sure that the river does not run dry. Today's communities may learn what can be done to be assured of perennial sources of water. There is a lot we are told by the name. It also informs those who want to establish industries that there is little risk of running short of water.

Nyamunga

This is a name of a river that runs through, and separates Murwira and Basira Schools on one side and Bangure School on the other in chief Nyashanu's Buhera district of the Manicaland province. Again, interviews with the elderly indicated that the original name was Nyamhunga, but is now Nyamunga, a possible impact of the 1955 orthography, which did not clearly distinguish a voiced sound from the breathy-voiced counterpart (Fortune, 1972:21). This is a case where African names were pronounced by non-African speakers with sounds from their mother tongue (Meiring, 2014: 6). Moller (2014: 118) notes that over time the different orthographic conventions used for recording words and names resulted in the variant forms of toponyms for the same place. In cases like these, Meiring (2014: 5) underscores that the spellings for such names should have been based on the orthographic rules of those particular languages. With Nyamunga, the 1955 orthography has remained, even after contemporary clarification of the writing system. The river runs through a predominantly low rainfall area where *mhunga* (pearl millet) was the predominant crop. In terms of grammatical structure, Nyamhunga is an ownership phrase with:

- (1a) *nya-* - ownership prefix
 (1b) *-mhunga* - substantive phrase

The elders explained that the place has the capacity to sustain especially the *mhunga* crop, as communicated by the name. If the people try other crops that require high rainfall, like maize, there is usually poor or no yield at all, yet with *mhunga*, there is usually a good yield every year. Whereas Koopman (quoted by Ngubane, 1998:178) observes that in Africa the name is a person, here is a case where one cannot separate a name from the place that bears it as well. To contemporary society, the toponym therefore is a summary statement that refers to the main crop that was prevalent in the past and also one that is very suitable for the area today when most rural farmers are shifting towards maize, the national staple food in Zimbabwe.

The name becomes a reminder to farmers to grow the crop, which is in tandem with the rainfall pattern of the area. The name also assists government operators and those of the Agricultural Research and Extension Services (AREX) in their planning and how best they can assist farmers in coming up with a meaningful yield. Instead of going there with maize seed for distribution, government and AREX need to take the *mhunga* seed. It also means the people can be advised to keep indigenous chickens (christened

road-runners) which thrive well on the *mhunga* grain. Thus the name is communicative in many respects. This validates the view that, among the Shona, naming is the same as writing a book (Zvarevashe, 1998: xii). Shona naming is thus a unique comprehensive discourse (Makondo, 2010).

Mhandamabwe

It is a name of a place in the Chivi district of Masvingo province. Morphologically, it is a compound nominal construction that is described by Fortune as a complex nominal construction. Complex nominal constructions in Shona are made up of a Noun Prefix + Complex stem (Fortune, 1983; Mashiri & Warinda, 1999). In the given example, the complex stem contains two lexical constituents, namely a verb and a noun. The verb (stem) is *-banda* (crack, split) and the noun is *mabwe* (stones). The constituents are:

- (2a) NP - N-
 (2b) Complex stem - *bandamabwe*

The complex stem's constituents are as follows:

- (3) Verb Radical + complement (Substantival Phrase)
-band- *mabwe*

The place is rocky and quite difficult to grow crops in, so working in such fields is akin to *Kubandamabwe* (splitting stones). Previously, it was sparsely populated because people had realised that the land did not yield much in terms of crop production.

The name also communicates the history of the place. Interviews indicated that the place is also the possible origin of the proverb, *Zvinhu zvi dzwa chembere yekwaChivi yakabika mabwe ikaseva muto* (Some things are worth trying, an old woman from Chivi cooked stones and got some potage out of them), which is an immortalisation of the difficulties of living in the area. The proverb captures that living in the area is tough and the situation gets worse in periods of drought. The name also conveys the idea that tilling or even weeding is predominantly an act of striking and breaking stones, thus suggesting that it is not suitable for crop farming. It therefore summarises the injustices of the colonial regime's Land Apportionment Act which pushed the indigenous people to arid and semi-arid areas, unsuitable for survival. The name has significance to planners, welfare organisations and resettlement officers. The name indicates that the place is stony and not good for human habitation or, it cannot sustain high populations, thus making it necessary to resettle the people somewhere where the land is more productive. There is also great need to make sure boreholes are sunk as a way of guaranteeing a sustainable supply of water for the region's inhabitants. It becomes clear that most crops do not do well, except small grain crops, such as sorghum (*mapfunde*), which do not require high rainfall. Those who grow this type of crop normally have meaningful harvests, while those who grow maize experience poor yields.

The name also expresses a number of suggestions to relevant government departments. It suggests, to government, the need for food reserves to assist people in the hunger-prone area. Apart from small grain crops, such an area could also be fit for goat-rearing. The name may

also be a piece of advice to those in the Ministry of Transport that gravel for road-making can be readily available. This toponym clearly shows that names among African people are part and parcel of their existence (Ngubane, 1998). Names are loaded with meaning (Zvarevashe, 1998).

MunwewaMwari

This toponym falls into the category of what are referred to as theophoric names. These are names that are given in awe of the Supreme Being, whom the Shona call Mwari. In most cases these names are significant because they reflect the respect and belief that Mwari (the Supreme Being or God) is their protector and guarantor of their lives. MunwewaMwari is, however, the name of a mountain in Gutu district of the Masvingo province. This is translated as 'finger of God'. It is a descriptive name—the mountain has the shape of a finger pointing up into the sky, thus pointing to where God is believed to reside. This is a situation where the name-givers looked at the mountain in anthropomorphic terms (Koopman, 2014: 32), that is, taking it as human. The name bears testimony to the undoubted fact that the Shona have always been religious and believed in a higher being whose name is today translated as God. Gelfand (1968) observes that the first reaction of the white man, without pausing to reflect or indeed find out whether Africans had a faith of their own, insisted that the Africans do not profess any religion. Yet every human being is religious in one way or another (Makondo, 2010). In fact, Africans have been rightly described as notoriously religious (Mbiti, 1991). Such a name disproves the missionary and colonial mentality which has doubted whether the Shona had a religion, or even a soul. The name also reflects how the Shona marvelled at God's creativity in that He created a mountain that looks very much like the finger of a human being.

Mahwemasimike

This name is similar in nature to the preceding one. It is the name of a mountain in Honde Valley in the Mutasa district of the Manicaland province. The name is descriptive of the nature of the mountain. The mountain is made up of two huge pillars of rock that appear to be planted. This explains why they are called Mahwemasimike (rocks that appear planted). This name is made up of three constituents, namely Noun Prefix (Ø)-, *mahwe* (stones/rocks) and *masimike* (that are planted). The first one is a noun (and substantive), and the second one is an ideophone. It is constructed thus:

- (4a) Noun Prefix - (Ø)-
 (4b) Noun - *Mahwe*
 (4c) Ideophone - *masimike*

While the indigenous people may not be in a position to explain how the mountains were formed, their ability to realise that the mountain looks like one that was planted is informative enough to geographers. Geographers can carry out research and find out whether this mountain came about as a result of folding, faulting or weathering.

Nyarupara

This is the name of a mountain in Buhera district in Manicaland province. It means the bald one, or the one with a bald patch. The name is made up of an Ownership Prefix (*Nya-*) and a

Noun Phrase (*rupara*), from *muparavara* which means a bald head. Its constituents are as follows:

- (5a) Ownership Prefix - *nya* -
 (5b) Noun Phrase - *rupara*

The highest part of the mountain is a large sparseness of granite stone with no vegetation, while the sides are covered with trees and grass. Its shape resembles that of a bald-headed person from which it derives its name. It is known that when one is bald, hair does not grow on a given part of one's head, usually the top. With the mountain, its top part comprises the granite rock which geographically is understood to be so hard that very little, if any, vegetation grows. A geographer would get clues from the name to figure out that the mountain has a very hard surface which does not support plant life. This makes it easier to explain the concept, status and characteristics of granite rocks.

Ibwerimwe

This name means one stone. It is the name of a place in Chief Tangwena's place in Nyanga, Manicaland province. This place is so called because this is the only rock outcrop in the area. The people in the area are not agreed on how the stone came to be there, but the size of the stone makes it impossible to accept or even believe that it was carried to that place by someone. This name, like the others that have thus far been discussed is not only descriptive. It is also a noun which falls in the realm of a complex nominal construction. What sets it apart from the others is that this one is entirely made up of two substantives, a noun and an enumerative. These are *ibwe* (stone) (noun) and *rimwe* (one) (enumerative). The geographical value of this stone is that teachers of geography may use this phenomenon to explain the effects of erosion. This stone is possibly a product of erosion that seriously affected that area and exposed this particular stone.

Ibweburi (rock with a hole)

This name describes a scientific phenomenon. It is the name of a rock that is found in Nyanga, about two kilometres from *Ibwerimwe*, in Chief Tangwena's place. As the name makes clear, it means a stone with a hole in it. Even though the people in the area may not explain this stone from a scientific perspective, the stone itself is full of information that may be helpful to the teachers and other researchers of geographical phenomena that the hole may have developed as a result of weathering. Instead of teachers citing examples from foreign lands, the very existence of this stone is a teaching aid that will go a long way in assisting students to understand the effects of chemical weathering. Any teacher who will be able to use what is in his or her environment will get the benefit that comes with being observant to what is around him or her. Hence, the name is self-explanatory; it conveys information about the stone's shape and stature.

Gandavaroyi (where witches are thrown into)

It is a name of a pool and the place around it, found in Gokwe. Thus it is both a hydronym and a toponym. Structurally, the name is a complex nominal construction consisting of a verbal clause, that is,

- (6a) NP - Ø -
 (6b) Verbal clause - -*kand- a varoyi*

Through the name, it becomes clear that in the Shona worldview witchcraft has always been viewed and considered a reality despite government efforts to outlaw it. Again, another truism is that, contrary to colonial mentality, the Shona never practised witchcraft. There were even expeditions to flush witches out. Once it had been proven beyond reasonable doubt that one practised witchcraft (usually by *n'angas*), one was thrown into this pool to drown. The name also reminds us of the climate and other geographic conditions of the area. It suggests that the place in Gokwe is uninhabitable, alluding to the tsetse-infested sections. The name, just like Mhandamabwe, further alludes to the colonial Rhodesian government's resettling of black Zimbabweans from fertile lands into the Gokwe region, which can be viewed as the worst alienation one can get, as if one is a witch. Places like Gandavaroyi, to which they were pushed, were so life-threatening that Bannerman (1970: 103) describes such places as 'more like graves than places to live in' and that, 'it was actually easier to die than to earn a living tilling such a wasteland'. The implication is that it is so terrible in such a place, that only witches can survive.

Gonawapotera

This is the name of a pool in the Chirumhanzu area along the Shashe River in the Midlands province. The name has been immortalised by Zvarevashe in his novel of the same name (1978). It too is a complex nominal constituted as follows:

- (7a) NP - Ø -
 (7b) Complex stem - -*gon-a wapotera*

The complex stem consists of a verb (stem) (-*gon-a*) and a relative clause (*wapotera*). The name means it destroys anyone who would have taken refuge in it. It was mainly used as refuge for those caught and proved to be practising witchcraft. They were thrown to die in the pool, as a sure way of ridding society of such people. Equally important, those who had committed incest were also thrown to drown in the pool.

Just like *Gandavaroyi*, the name also suggests that the Shona treasured harmonious coexistence and those whose behaviour was detrimental were dealt with. Incest was considered a terrible abomination which could court terrible disaster for the whole community. Such disasters could be in the form of long droughts or illnesses. As such, the Shona guarded jealously against wronging the spiritual world as doing so was a sure way of placing their lives in danger. The name thus shows the interconnectedness of the secular and sacred worlds in the Shona milieu, indicating that the people were very religious. It also suggests that the people were a peace-loving society, who treasured sound relations not only among themselves but also between the physical and spiritual worlds, contrary to Eurocentric perceptions that their lives were characterised by fighting and only knew peace through exhaustion and not reason (Armah, 1973). Again, it emerges that the people had a close bond with their immediate physical environment.

Conclusion

What emerges is that Shona names are not innocent labels. The names are culture-bound (Pongweni, 1983) or situation-tied (Kahari, 1986). Instead of looking for examples from far and wide, a good practitioner would look at the immediate environment, for Shona names are laden with meaning. A geographer knows why a landscape has certain characteristics, why people are settled in a particular place and why they grow certain types of crops. Apart from battling to explain why certain crops do or do not do well in particular areas, a good teacher needs also to fall back on Shona names for they are vivid explanations of geographical aspects. A cultural practitioner knows the kind of people the Shona were, their practices and distastes. The names are an important torch in self-discovery and self-definition both of which are crucial in the decolonisation process Africa is engaged in. It is necessary that Africans decolonise their minds by insisting on traditional names (Ngubane, 1998). Thus, Shona names are an important aspect of Zimbabwe's cultural heritage. A look at Shona names proves that English names have no cultural, linguistic or environmental significance to the Shona who consider the environment as part and parcel of everyday life. The East African proverb is true, that if you inherit a name, you also adopt its affairs (Ibekwe, quoted by Makondo, 2010). In the same vein, continual use of colonial names is invariably an adoption and perpetuation of the colonial affairs. Modern Shona society is thus challenged to practise self-naming, for it is a sure way of explaining and understanding reality. Only through it can they be masters of their own environment and destiny. Their names are in effect communicators on the environment, practices and lifestyle of the indigenes. The warning is quite clear: 'Ignore Shona names at your own peril'.

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