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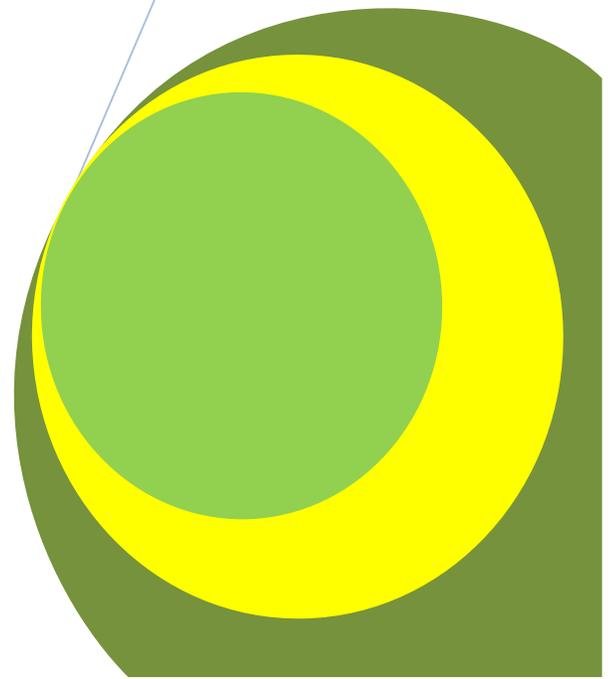
Research Article

Decoding School Mottoes: A Case of Selected Schools in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This paper, which falls in the onomastic paradigm, looks at purposively selected school mottoes in terms of their place in the life, not only of the pupils who pass through the institutions but also in terms, of their national significance. A huge chunk of our lives is spent literary on the school bench learning hence the motivation to study these small value-laden linguistic capsules,so small yet having so much say in shaping who we later become. We argue that these reflect a certain value system which in some cases may be seen as retrogressive and 'islandic' or reflecting a lager mentality in an 'independent' country-residual elements of the colonial hegemony. Since Zimbabwe has many such institutions, this study, which is by no means exhaustive, will only look at a few purposively selected institutions-institutions many ordinary Zimbabweans would choose for their children. Naming can be seen as primary and the ascribing of a motto as secondary and a furtherance of the 'cause' of the former. Because of this obvious link between the two, a brief discussion of the significance of naming is inevitable.

Keywords: names, mottoes, onomastics, core values, vision, mission statement.

INTRODUCTION

In Zimbabwe, by the time one gets a first degree one would have spent on average two years at crèche, one at an Early Childhood Development centre or preschool, seven at primary school, six at secondary school and four at university making it a total of twenty. It should be noted that these twenty are part of the early 'impressionable' years and the school, through its formal and informal or hidden curricula, has lasting imprints on the psyches of those who pass through its gates. This explains why the researchers thought it worthwhile to research on the potential impact one aspect of this significant socializing agent might have on its products. At the epicentre of the different agents of socialisation is inculcation of a certain set of values, and mottoes, which are under study here ,can be seen as axiological agents-inculcating values the learners stay with for the rest of their lives. We argue that these reflect a certain value system which in some cases may be seen as retrogressive and 'islandic' or reflecting a lager mentality. Some depict colonial trends that are a legacy to those who benefitted from that system while for those who were at the receiving end, it is something they would like, at best, to forget or at worst to erase from their environment. Since Zimbabwe has many such institutions, this study, which is by no means exhaustive, will only look at a few purposively selected institutions-institutions many ordinary Zimbabweans would choose for their children. Because of the obvious link between names and mottoes, this study will often treat these together as the latter may often be seen as an extension of the former.

Background to the Study

In 2002 there was a controversy when the then Minister of Education, Sport and Culture, Aeneas Chigwedere attempted to replace what he referred to as colonial names with Zimbabwean ones. An example that comes to mind is that of Prince Edward which was supposed to be renamed Murenga Boys High, after the Njelele spirit medium who assisted the local heroes who fought Chimurenga 1 of 1896-7.This move was vehemently resisted by both white and black Zimbabweans leading to the abandonment of the move. A compromise was reached where the school authorities agreed to change the Games Houses to those of rivers in Zimbabwe. It is not Prince Edward alone that resisted the move but most of the schools that were in the same boat with it. This example

helps to show how important names are, they are not just tags, if they were why all the fuss over simply changing from name A to B? What it simply means here is that there is more to naming than meets the eye, as Langer (1974:2) puts it:

Giving something a name is the vastest generative idea that was ever conceived: its influence might well transform the entire mode of living and feeling in the whole species within a generation.

Thus it is this desire to unravel the hidden agenda behind this naming game that triggered the researchers to study the selected school mottoes.

Closely linked to school mottoes are school names which the researchers felt are inextricably connected. As shall be clearly spelt out in the conceptual framework, the two are usually intrinsically intertwined since the former, just like a country's constitution or a company's corporate mission statement pronounces the school's core values. Mottoes are not just purposeless statements but well thought out statements of intent. It is the fulfilment of such that gives the school its image, in other words its 'name' or 'culture' or 'tradition'. For instance Heritage School which was established in 1999's website reads 'We want your children to translate the sentiments of the school motto (Alta Pete (Aim High) into all areas of their lives...'

The link between school names and mottoes is quite apparent in some instances. For example Peterhouse's motto is 'Conditur in Petra' (It is founded on the rock) in reference to the biblical Peter on which the Church was to be built. Thornhill, which opened on the air force base in Gweru in 1955's motto is 'Per Spinas ad culmina'(Through Thorns to the Summit) which is a pun on the name of the school. The school motto also echoes the Royal Airforce motto 'Per Ardua ad Astra'(Through effort to the Stars) because of the obvious link of the two; one was built on the 'ruins' of another.(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thornhill_High_School accessed 18-02-12).

METHODOLOGY

The school mottoes analysed in this work were purposively selected and are made up mainly of those from established schools, some as old as one hundred years. They include missionary, government and private schools. A few were collected from what are considered to be very good schools established well after the country's independence which include private and well resourced schools. The mottoes were then subjected to content analysis which refers to 'studies that analyse the content of texts or documents (such as letters, speeches, annual reports etc). "Content" refers to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, themes or any message that can be communicated' (Mouton,2001:165). The reason for including such institutions was to show the continued hold of the colonial thinking on post-colonial people.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Significance of Naming

According to some religions such as Christianity, naming has its origins in creation. It is a privilege given by God to the first man he created. He was given the privilege to name both flora and fauna and by so doing God gave him dominion over everything he had created (Genesis 1 verse 26-30).What was named became that. Abram was renamed Abraham which means father of many nations (Genesis 17 verse 5).God changed his name to the one which means father of a multitude to seal the covenant He had with him. Thus he/she who names is at an advantage, he/she wields the power or authority, he / she can empower or disempower and the named has to live with the label until maybe someone more powerful comes and renames.

In an article entitled 'Saints, Princes and Pioneers: The Politics of Changing School Names in Zimbabwe', Pfukwa and Barnes (2009:4-5) assert that:

> In naming and renaming the name-givers unwittingly impose their culture on a physical landscape that already carries its own historical traditions and values... One cannot ignore the limitless multitude of connotations and cultural attributes attached to every name that is given to a place.

A change of name indicates a change of status. For example, the patriarch Abram and his wife Sarai are renamed "Abraham" and "Sarah" when they are told they will be the father and mother of many nations (Genesis 17:4, 17:15). Simon was renamed Peter when he was given the Keys of Heaven (Matthew 16).Saul became Paul to mark a metamorphosis in his life's journey from a persecutor of Christians to an apostle of Christ. After defeating colonialism many peoples adopt new names for their nations to mark a new dispensation. For instance Rhodesia became Zimbabwe-Rhodesia as a compromise name to accommodate the wishes of the main players in the aborted 1978 Internal Settlement. She was then christened Zimbabwe after majority rule in 1980.

Throughout the Bible, people are given names at birth or even before birth that reflect something of significance or describe the course of their future lives. For example: Solomon means peace, and the king with that name was the first whose reign was without warfare. Likewise, Joseph named his firstborn son Manasseh

(an Hebrew name meaning "causing to forget") as a gesture of forgiveness to his brothers who had sold him into slavery (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Name).

When a child is born in a family, a name has to be found and given to the new born. In some cultures the naming act is a huge ceremony. In Shona culture for instance, there are different names like "regombwa" where relatives gather for naming, "remudumba", the one the mother is asked to give soon after delivery, for the pain she goes through during the pregnancy and in labour, finally "rejemedzwa", the one from the ancestor who causes the baby to cry until their name or that of a relative they choose is given to the child (Gombe, 1998).Such is the importance of naming that even dog names (Mukusha and Masaka 2010), beerhall names (Nyota et al., 2009) and school names (Pfukwa and Barnes ,2009) have not escaped the radar of many intellectuals interested in onomastics. Names have also been found to be a form of political dialogue between the oppressor and the oppressed as well (Mutami et al., 2011).

One can also choose to erase from memory through renaming or mispronunciation or innocent misspelling or deliberate re-spelling (to let the name conform to the oppressor's language, 'the language'). Naming then is a sign of authority, God-given or otherwise. Shadreck, Misheck, Abednigo and Daniel in Babylon as slaves had their names changed to Hananiah, Mishael ,Asaria and Belteshazzar by King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 1 verse 7) to show his authority over them. In Hebrew Daniel means 'God is my judge' but this name was changed to Belteshazzar which means prince of Bel, or Bel protect the king. In a way the naming was meant to 'paganize' them and therefore remove them from their culture and God. So naming should not be seen as just innocent expression. In the early 1980's the Zimbabwean government appointed a Place Names Commission which worked under the auspices of the National Monuments Committee to advise government on how to shed off the vestiges of colonialism through names (Beach,1986:8).It had been realized that some indigenous names of places and features had been corrupted while others had been obliterated altogether. This renaming exercise shows the significance of names. Towns, roads and tourist resorts ,among many other institutions, were given new 'indigenous' names as a mark of the new found independence .For example in Zimbabwe, Salisbury became Harare, Fort Victoria became Masvingo and Gwelo became Gweru. Interestingly Victoria Falls maintained its colonial name because changing the name to its original poetic Mosi oa Tunya (The smoke that thunders) was felt by some responsible Zimbabwean to have the potential to hurt tourism since the falls are one of the seven wonders of the world, because as the argument went, the tourists would have problems adjusting their mindsets. It should be noted that the same tourists have no problems in flying into Zambia whose colonial name was Northern Rhodesia or Zimbabwe formerly Southern Rhodesia and Zimbabwe-Rhodesia to access the tourist resort! This example shows how important naming is in people's lives: the people who had named the falls in honour of their queen resisted the name change because it would have felt like 'deknighting' her while those who wanted to change the name gave in because the powerful moneyed Western tourist would be upset and not lay the perceived golden eggs. Mazarire (1999) in an article entitled 'Of Spelling Errors and Historical Distortions: Historians, Museums and the Way Forward: Oral Traditions Concerning the Identity of Maziriri, the Svikiro of the Chivi People' urges government and different stakeholders to attend to spelling errors and distortions which result from such historical naming mishaps which have far reaching consequences on a nation's memory.

Naming is not just a simple affair. In some communities, certainly the patriarchal, it is the duty of the father, not the mother, to give a child his or her name because of the power differential between the sexes. In others, such as the Varemba of Zimbabwe, one assumes a new name after undergoing the initiation ceremony which marks a transition from boyhood or girlhood to manhood or womanhood and it is considered very offensive to continue to address the graduates with their old childhood 'milk teeth names'. Married women in many indigenous communities in Zimbabwe at least assume new names upon marriage what one can refer to as teknonyms. Before one has an own child the totem is used such as MaNyoni and So-and-so's mother when one begets a child because it is disrespectful to use the maiden name under such circumstances. The other reason that this is done is to show that the woman is now taken and now "belongs" or is now "owned" by somebody. The other reason that this is done is to show that the woman is now taken. In an article entitled 'Girl Battles to Use Her Own Name' in The Herald of 9 January 2013, it is reported that a 15 year old girl is suing the Icelandic State for the right to legally use the name given to her by her mother. The name under contention is 'Blaer' which means light breeze in Icelandic but it is not on a list approved by the government. Like a handful of other countries, including Germany and Denmark, Iceland has official rules about what a baby can be named. All this shows how important names are in people's lives.

Fasiku, though specifically focusing on Yoruba naming practices, succinctly captures the significance of names, in the world in general and in Africa in particular, when he says:

> A name, according to most cultural heritages, depicts the nature and life of a corporate personality, body or organisation; the focus and outlook of a personality, body or organisation, to a great extent, are influenced by the name he or she bears. For the Yorùbá, names are more than identification tags; they constitute an integral part of human existence. Some names are used to accentuate and situate the significance of an experience, event or phenomenon, and like proverbs, are instruments of arousing, defining, manifesting and establishing the expectations, aspirations and consciousness of the bearers. (Fasiku, 2006: 52)

After collecting and studying inscriptions on vehicles, which can be seen as a form of naming or 'mottoing', Nyoni and Nyoni (2010:15-16) observe that:

> Vehicles can be seen as an extension of the owner's ego. Like cattle in the African setting they are given 'names' according to how they were acquired, their 'behaviour', their contribution to family welfare and reflect interpersonal relationships especially prior to their acquisition.... [The inscriptions] include the panegyric, the taunting, the religious, the eccentric, the politically conscious, the humorous and the cuckoo type. From these one can take a glimpse of the culture and cosmology of the people in which such texts are found.

Naming is therefore a very important endeavour in human beings. For example the psychologist Robert Merton coined the term "self-fulfilling prophecy" (SFP) in 1948 to describe "a false definition of the situation evoking a new behaviour which makes the originally false conception come true" (Merton, 1968: 477 cited in Bearman and Hedström (2009:294) to show the power of naming. In a follow up experiment in 1968 Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson told a group of teachers that certain students were on the verge of an intellectual growth spurt. By the end of the school year, these designated students who were in fact randomly selected and therefore no different from the rest —who nevertheless had received more positive attention from the teachers because of the label—actually achieved higher average test scores than their peers. http://changingminds.org/explanations/theories/self-fulfilling_prophecy.htm

Significance of mottoes

Ken Wert a motivational speaker posits that, "A motto is a core value tersely and frequently expressed. It represents a fundamental belief that helps shape behaviour as we try to live up to the message it expresses."(http://meanttobehappy.com/whats-the-motto-with-you-the-power-of-personal-mottos-part-i/).   Hence mottoes can inspire one to do a variety of things such as take action, overcome obstacles, keep working towards goals set, persevere even in the face of overwhelming opposition in order to do what Ken calls 'living up to our highest selves, reaching inside and pulling the best within to the outside' (http//meanttobehappy.com/mottos - that-inspire-greatness-the –power-of personal-mottos-part-iii/).Thus when schools craft mottoes, they are guided by their core values in order to create a certain culture, a culture that oozes them with the ethos relating to what the school wants, how it wants to be seen and what it strives for. It is through mottoes then that the school can infuse the values they want absorbed by the learners in order for their school to 'tick'- giving the school an image and a name. Thus if a school thrives on excellence, then it picks the best practices for its pupils and makes these habits part and parcel of their life campus while at school and beyond.

Mottoes vary widely depending on the core values of organisation. The following are a few well-known examples: The best or nothing (Mercedes Benz), Connecting people (Nokia). We also have national mottoes like In God We Trust (USA) and Truth Alone Triumphs (India).These mottoes give companies or nations the drive, emanating from the core values implied through them. Hence Wert cannot be wrong when he describes mottoes as, "Guide posts and verbal beacons along the journey of life, street names on the map of life, sort of a compass to help one get the bearings on course"(http//meanttobehappy.com/whats-the-motto-wit-you-the-power-of-personal-mottos-part-i/ Accessed 12-11-12).

Thus from the above discussion, it becomes quite clear that both names and mottoes are crucial beacons in the lives of individuals, what more for organisations like schools that deal with young and impressionable minds?

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF SELECTED SCHOOL MOTTOES

Prince Edward is one of the top schools in Africa established in 1898 and then known as Salisbury Grammar School, the oldest boys' school in Harare and second oldest after St. George's College and 38th oldest school in Africa. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_Edward_School#History. The school badge has a crown and three feathers granted to it by Prince Edward. It is a school modelled on the English system. Its name is meant to remind current and later generations of the might of the British Empire and influence. What is interesting is themotto of the school: Tot Facienda Parum Factum (Latin which means so much to do, so little done) which are believed to be Cecil John Rhodes' last words. This is not an accident as indicated by one renowned Zimbabwean author who says 'the oppressors present themselves and their culture as a model of excellence, heroism and humanity' (Moyana,1989:2).This is the reason why there was resistance to the name changes. Wasn't it the chief chef who declared that a rose by any other name will still smell the same? Why is this one smelling differently? Rhodes the British arch-imperialist one of the models of Prince Edward as reflected in their choosing his last words as inspiration for their students, wrote:

> I contend that we are the finest race in the world and that the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race. Just fancy those parts that are at present inhabited by the most despicable specimens of human beings what alteration there would be in them if they were brought under Anglo-Saxon rule? (Emphasis added) (Atkinson, 1972:5).

The same mentality is discernible in what Lord Buxton, the British High Commissioner in South Africa in 1909 defined as a civilized and responsible African

> one who lives in a brick house, not a hut, habitually goes to work; wears European clothes using a clean pair of handkerchiefs, goes to church regularly and has severed connection with ancestral spirits and beliefs, his wife carries her baby in a pram, educates them and generally raises them along European lines, speaks and writes English fluently…(cited in Education and Social Transformation in Zimbabwe by Shamuyarira, in Developing Dialogue vol. 2 ,1978 : p58-72).

From the quotation African ways of life are denigrated and the Western/English perceived as the ideal. The hut, African clothes, African religious practices and language are seen as inferior and dangerous and the school system, through both its overt and covert curricula, have peddled and continue to broadcast this gospel or mission i.e. to 'bleach' the African both physically and mentally so that the blackness is transformed forever into saintly whiteness.

Watershed, one of the top schools in Zimbabwe which was established in 1987 has the motto 'Ex Ardius Floid' which means 'Through hard work we prosper'. Although, when the school was established Latin had long died, the powers that be saw it prudent to craft a motto, so central to the learners' aspirations and the institution's vision, in that language disregarding the +/- 15 living local languages of the learners. More interestingly is the school's mascot, the owl, which is associated with witchcraft by the majority indigenous people in Zimbabwe. Bourdillon (1991:175) writes of witches who are believed by many Zimbabweans of 'secretly keeping familiar beasts of the night such as hyenas, owls etc which they can ride or send on evil errands'. Their presence in a homestead or even near one is considered evidence of an attack by witches. Bloomhill (1991:175) writes of witches carrying birds of ill omen like owls on their wrists. Mavesere and Mvenge (1999:23) concur with the above when they say 'owls are strongly associated with witchcraft in Shona society. Oral traditions portray the owl as the harbinger of a witch...' The Herald of 21 May 1998 reports of a dead owl which had been sent to the governor of Masvingo: 'the owl, a symbol of witchcraft in Shona, was delivered to the governor's offices'. The gesture of sending the nocturnal bird is equivalent to the sending of 'symbols' such as bullets in envelopes to rivals or enemies in the Western contexts. Colonialists bring with them their own norms and values and these include signs and symbols in their world such as what colour of flag to hoist. In the British world the owl is a symbol of wisdom while the nocturnal creature is perceived by most indigenous people as the harbinger of evil as it is associated with sorcery and death. In a way such institutions can be perceived as small European cultural islands where willingly those endowed with often prohibitive fees and levies can send their sons and daughters to be baptized in the name of European 'civilization' and to create new beings from the black lads and lasses.

New independent schools seem to follow hot on the footsteps of old colonial ones. For instance 'The Heritage School' established by two families boasts of a clearly articulated curriculum developed from British National curriculum and adapted for Zimbabwe. At The Heritage School the work of our teachers and the lives of our students are shaped by our Mission Statement and the ideals of our motto, "Alta Pete" (Aim High).https://sites.google.com/site/theheritageschoolzw/home/directors-welcome (Accessed on 14-02-13).The motto of the school, which was founded in 1997, is in Latin, a dead language while the curriculum, according to the school homepage is modelled on the British (master's) curriculum. Whose heritage is the school, 'The Heritage School' is advancing or perpetuating? As Ngugi (1981:93) notes the products of such a school system's way of looking at the world, even the world of the immediate environment is inevitably Eurocentric: "Europe [is] was the centre of the universe. The earth moved [moves] around the European intellectual scholarly axis".

Riverton located East of Masvingo is another example. This is a school established by a black Zimbabwean long after independence but the name sounds exotic and the motto is in Latin. We feel as researchers that the ignoring of the indigenous names and languages in giving schools names and crafting mottoes subtly sends a very loud and obvious message to the learners about their identity.

Lomagundi and Hillcrest are some of the very few established schools with mottoes in Shona, an indigenous language. Lomagundi, which is a corruption of Nemakonde's motto is 'Tabatana' (We are [now] united).What is interesting is that although the college was established in 1983 it was 'let' to use the name 'Lomagundi' a serious distortion and meaningless and sounds very much unShona and insultive to the people who own that name in Makonde District of Zimbabwe.

Schools linked to militant characters in the history of Zimbabwe's colonisation seem to exude this militancy in their mottoes for example Allan Wilson (We are men of men),Jameson (Sine Metu (Without Fear).On the other hand church schools seek to evangelize through the same for example St. John's High and Dominican Convent :Veritas (Truth),Regina Mundi : Luceat Lux Vestra (Let your light shine), St. George's College :Ex Fide Fiducia (From Faith Comes Confidence), Mukaro : In Crus Salus (In the cross there is salvation) and Gokomere:

Vincere Caritate (Conquer with love)[not might or brute force].Mission schools have their own heroes hence a number have names of saints/people as their names and the mottoes advance what values these luminaries stood for (Christian principles).

CONCLUSION

This paper analysed selected school names and mottoes in Zimbabwe and concluded that these contain loaded messages that reflect the nature of human relations past and present at national level. Mottoes reflect the values the institution stands for and wishes to inculcate in the young and impressionable minds that partake of its curriculum diet both overt and hidden. Sadly some of the names and mottoes reflect a colonial babalaas: a number of mottoes are in Latin, a dead European language the message being that a dead European language is better than living African languages in an African setting. Many schools bear names of European characters that have been documented to have caused untold suffering to the indigenes. The researchers believe that this is an insult to the formerly colonized, marginalized and dehumanized who are forever reminded of the deep colonial scar and call for a replacement of the names and mottoes or adding a 'warning' sign similar to those written on cigarette packets .Something like: 'The continued use of this school name and motto is not meant to be an insult to the formerly subjugated but should be viewed as an innocent record of unavoidable historical vicissitudes,' would suffice.

*babalaas (S. African English) is adopted from the Zulu word ibhabhalazi which means a hangover resulting from drinking too much alcohol.

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