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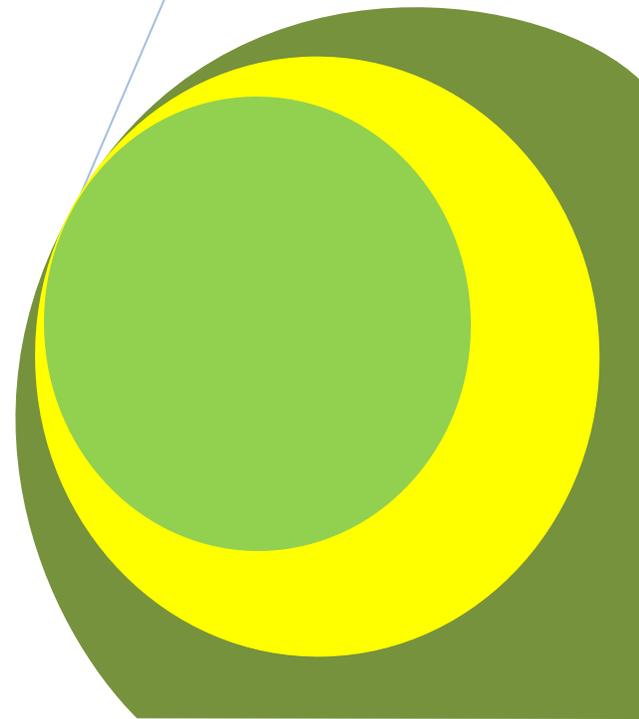
Research Article

Historicity of Some Ndebele Toponyms in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Names can be a repository of a people's past, experiences can be ordered into toponyms and the toponyms intern preserves the past experiences. This paper looks at some toponyms as named by the Ndebele and analyses how these are derived from history to Ndebele place names. The paper also analyses the sound and morphological processes that take place for Ndebele toponyms to be derived from history. Particular emphasis is placed on the history that led to the derivation of the toponyms and how the names preserve that history. The paper analyses Ndebele toponyms under categories of history that are; the royal Ndebele history, colonial history, post colonial history, Ndebele military history and those from past topography, topography and past activities. People name their environment, hence the names are taken from Ndebele areas in Zimbabwe that are Matabeleland, Bulawayo and Midlands provinces.

Key words: Toponym, Ndebele, Historicity, Matabeleland, Bulawayo.

Introduction

Language is an important tool in the understanding of a people, it tells of their culture and history, their association with each other and with other people. The names that people give to places can be clues to the history of the name givers or aspects of national and world history. Toponyms given by the Ndebele and those found in Ndebele habitats reflect the history of the Ndebele and indeed the history of Zimbabwe. Some toponyms reflect the past topography of places, present fauna and flora, while some keep the history of the people because of their connection with a historical period or historical activity and event. To adapt history into Ndebele toponyms, rules of Ndebele phonology are followed resulting in some sound changes from the original words. Principles of Ndebele derivational morphology are adhered to in the derivation of toponyms from history; there is much Ndebele and international history frozen in Ndebele toponyms.

Toponyms from Ndebele Royal History

Toponyms are names of places; these places can be locations in urban, rural and wild areas. The Ndebele have named many places in Zimbabwe since their arrival with king Mzilikazi from Zululand. The South African history of the Ndebele and their subsequent experiences in Zimbabwe has seen them derive names for places using these experiences. History has been used to derive names for towns, rural localities and aspects of ecology that includes geomorphology and drainage. In these toponyms, there is a lot of embedded history that is the source of the names and the history is in turn, preserved in the toponyms.

      The fact that toponyms are names of places means that they usually occur as locatives in Ndebele. Locatives in Ndebele have a formula for their derivation which is by locative constructs; these are morphemes that partially carry the locative meaning. When toponyms are used as locatives in Ndebele, affixation is employed to derive toponyms from history. The locative affixes in Ndebele are */e-/, /ko-/, /ku-/* and */-eni/*. This however, does not mean that all toponyms occur as locatives, they can occur as non-locative nouns using the initial vowel */i/*, they can be even personified using */u/*. The affixation and derivation process is done on an aspect of history to derive a toponym, preserving history in the process.

      It is imperative that people name their environment to make communication easy, it becomes the duty of the people to organise nature and the environment into concepts called toponyms as pointed out by Wardhaugh:

> We cut nature up, organise it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we
> are parties to an agreement to organise it in this way. (1986:213).

Ndebeles left Zululand as a small militant Nguni group under Mzilikazi Khumalo, son of Matshobana; they were running away from king Tshaka. King Tshaka's capitol was called Bulawayo and when Lobhengula became king after Mzilikazi, he named his capitol Bulawayo from king Tshaka's capitol. The Zulu king Tshaka, named his capitol Bulawayo (the one who is killed), remembering the time e when he fled for his life from Zulus to his uncle; to this end Nyathi says:

UTshaka wakha isigodlo sakhe wasithi nguBulawayo, ekhumbula isikhathi lapho efuna ukubulawa ngamazulu. (1994:6)
(Tshaka built his capitol and named it Bulawayo, remembering the time the Zulus wanted to kill him)

Today the second largest city in Zimbabwe and ideally the Ndebele capitol is called Bulawayo or locative *koBulawayo*. The toponym Bulawayo is derived from Ndebele migration history, it becomes a constant reminder that the Ndebele migrated from South Africa. The royalty of the Ndebele started in Zululand where they were a chieftain under the Zulu kingdom, the naming of their town after the Zulu capitol bares the royal historicity of the toponyms Bulawayo.

People have been naming new places using their past experiences from their place of origin. The Irish that came to South Africa in the height of colonialism brought some Irish flair to South African toponyms.

One characteristic of the Irish who came to South Africa was that they tended to settle in towns, a reaction to the often deprived conditions they had been brought up in on small farms. Why swop one kind of rural poverty for another? For this reason Irish place names in South Africa are mostly urban. (McCracken, 2010:09)

Names of the Ndebele royal family, who are the Ntungwas, are used as toponyms in Bulawayo urban, as a way of preserving Ndebele royal history. Table 1 below shows some of the Bulawayo urban toponyms that are derived from Ndebele royal history. Suffice to note that Ndebele royal history stretches to Zulu royalty and this history is also captured in Bulawayo toponyms.

Table 1: Ndebele toponyms from military and political history

Toponym	Ndebele/Zulu royal history source
Mzilikazi- residential area	First Ndebele king
Lobhengula-residential area	Son and successor to Mzilikazi
Lozikeyi-school	One of Lobhengula's wife
Senzangakhona-school	Zulu king and the father to king Tshaka
Magwegwe-residential area	One of king Mzilikazi's chiefs
Matshobana-residential area	Chief of the Ntungwa and the father to Mzilikazi
Khumalo-residential area	Clan name for the Ndebele royal family
Nkulumane-residential area	Mzilikazi's eldest son who was killed for acting king when the chiefs thought the king was dead
Sotshangane- flats	Leader of the Gaza Nguni in what is now Mozambique
Sidojiwe-flats	One of Lobhengula's sons
Mhlahlandlela	Ndebele homeland under chief Gwabalanda
Njube- residential area	One of lobhengula's sons
Famona- residential area	One of lobhengula's wives

The above toponyms are a Ndebele museum telling of their history from Zululand and preserving the royal lineage which is under threat of extinction from colonial and tribal dominance in Zimbabwe. The trend in toponyms is not

limited to the Ndebele toponyms only, in American and South African toponyms, a similar trend is observed. Place names in the United States and South Africa tend to be more easily traceable to their origins, such as towns simply named after the founder or an important politician of the time, with no alterations except a simple suffix, like -town.

The Bulawayo toponyms are a full Ndebele royal family genealogy, affixation is used to make them locatives and toponyms as in the following example:

Umzilikazi (king Mzilikazi), */i/-* (non human noun class initial vowel)> *iMzilikazi* (place) *e+Mzilikazi>*
eMzilikazi (at Mzilikazi)

The Bulawayo urban toponyms are evidence that the Ndebele people use their royal history to derive toponyms and in this way their history is preserved.

Toponyms from Ndebele Military History

The Ndebele were a militant group from Zululand, which raided other groups for survival, as was the norm in close of the 19th century in Southern Africa. Military regiments were sent on raids across Zimbabwe in what was then the Ndebele kingdom; these military regiments are sources of some Ndebele toponyms, as their names are used to name places where they were once stationed. Some of these Ndebele regiment names are even used today as toponyms in Zimbabwean urban centres, where they are unbelievably linked to Ndebele military history. Toponyms from Ndebele military history are not only derived from the names of regiments and warriors but some are from the experiences of the regiments in parts of the kingdom.

The tendency across the world cultures is that toponyms are used to preserve past military achievements, treaties and unforgettable battles of the particular culture. Elizabeth in wisegeek.com alludes to this trend when she highlights that:

Toponyms can be place names, real or imaginary, as well as names derived from places or regions. Toponyms are found in many different arenas of industry, enterprise, culture, and current events. It is not unusual to find toponyms used for places that recall other places, as well as wars, treaties and agreements, bands, food and fabric, among other items (2003).

Gweru is the biggest city in the midlands province and its name comes from an Ndebele military regiment that was stationed near the area in pre-colonial Ndebele state times. Lobhengula had a regiment stationed at what is now called Insukamini about twenty kilometres west of Gweru. The regiment crossed the river now called Gweru River from which the name comes from. Mr Mithi, a resident of Insukamini notes that the toponym Insukamini is taken from the Ndebele regiment during Lobhengula's time; hence, it carries Ndebele political and military history. The area is a vibrant and growing growth point; it uses the name of the military regiment Insukamini as its toponyms and is referred to as:

e-Nsukamini (at Nsukamini)
i-Nsukamini (Nsukamini)

Pre-colonial history of Zimbabwe is preserved in the toponym Insukamini, where there is also a big dam called Insukamini dam.

The Insukamini regiment; its legacy did not contribute to the name Insukamini near Gweru city only, the influence of the regiment affected the naming of Bulawayo urban toponyms. The Insukamini was led by Manondwana Tshabalala (Nyathi: 1994), he was the Commander of the force and a very important military adviser to the King. Manondwana Tshabalala's name and legacy are preserved in the toponyms for a Bulawayo high density residential area *eTshabalala*.

According to Mithi, the name Gweru also derives its existence from the Insukamini regiment, which was camped near what is now Gweru River. He points out that the regiment had problems crossing the river to the eastern parts of the kingdom where Shona vassal chiefs reigned; the place where they crossed the river had a very steep slope. The warriors climbed a very steep slope after crossing the river; they referred to the climbing as *ukukhwela* (to climb). The place was then called *kwela* (climb) and eventually the river, when the whites came they pronounced then /k/ as /g/, this sound change is posited by Grimm's law of voiceless to voiced sound change, and the name changed to *ghwela*[1]. There was loss of aspiration and the low back vowel /a/ partially assimilated to /o/ creating the following chain of change:

Ukukhwela> khwela> ghwela> gwelo> Gweru.

The Shona changed the liquid /l/ to the alveolar trill /r/ and the final vowel changed to /u/, However, some areas near Gweru town still use Gwelo, as in Lower Gwelo district. Insukamini is not the only toponym named after Lobhengula's military regiment, the residential area in Kwekwe city called Mbizo is named directly after Lobhengula's *Imbizo* regiment under Mtshane Khumalo, which was camped there, the *Imbizo* was inherited from Mzilikazi. Every time the name *Mbizo* is used, the Ndebele political and military history is immortalised. Beach echoes the history of the imbizo regiment:

> In 1879 a major force under Lotshe and Manyewu attacked the Mhari capitol of Nyaningwe, the Ndebele force consisted of the *Mbizo ibuto* (1986:33)

King Lobhengula had several *impis* that were stationed across the area under the influence of the Ndebele then. One of the king's armies was the *Insizwa* regiment that was stationed around present day *Insiza,* the name of the regiment was used to name the area up although there has been deletion of the semivowel /w/ to *Insiza* from *Insizwa* (bachelors) regiment. Where there is Kwekwe city today, the *Ameva* (thornes) regiment was stationed near the area where there is Amaveni high-density residential area in Kwekwe. The regiment was stationed in the area and fought many of the Shona chiefs that were in the area during the time of Lobhengula, the commander of the regiment was Mazwi Gumede.

However, Mithi in another theory says the name Amaveni also came from the Imbizo regiment's problems with the terrain in its periodic raids, the Imbizo had its problems says Mithi, to the west of Kwekwe town, there is a residential area called *amaveni,* the *Imbizo* had to avoid thorns in this area which are called *ameva* in Ndebele[2]. Affixation was used to derive a locative for the place with many thorns as follows:

> *e+ameva+eni>eamevaeni>emeveni>amaveni*

The colonial government corrupted the word to *amaveni*, however the history is still preserved. Many areas in rural Matebele land are called by the names of these military regiments from Mzilikazi to Lobhengula, and many people are not aware that these are actually from Ndebele military history. Some of the toponyms cited by Nyathi are:

> *Ugodlwayo* regiment > *koGodlwayo* (rural area in *Filabusi*)
> *Amatshetshe* regiment > *eMatshetsheni* (rural area near Gwanda)
> *Inyamandlovu* regiment > *eNyamayendlovu* (rural area north west of Bulawayo)

The regiments were scattered across the Ndebele state's expanse and this helped in naming the areas, these toponyms remained to the present day. Nyathi says:

> *Imvamisa yikuthi ibizo lebutho yilo ebelisiba libizo lomuzi kumbe indawo lapho okulomuzi khona* (1994:57)
> (The tendency was that the name of the regiment became the name of the homeland or the area where the homeland was located)

In the Nkayi area, there is a toponym *eZinyangeni* (at the traditional healers), MaNyathi says the place was a base for Lobhengula's *iZinyanga* regiment. From hearing the name, one thinks the place is famous for traditional healers and some believe it is named after the concentration of Medicine man. However, there is nothing extra ordinary about healers in the area but the place is named after the Ndebele regiment *izinyanga*. The Ndebele came and conquered the territory and to foster Ndebele identity across the area, Ndebele military names were used as toponyms. Saparov points to a similar development in Armenia.

> It seems that the renaming of place names intended to demonstrate the position of the local communist authorities towards the language issue by reinforcing the Armenian-ness of the republic. (2003:191)

Near *Zinyangeni* is *Mkhalandoda* (where a man cries), MaNyathi explains this toponym according to the Ndebele regiment that was stationed there . She says the *Mkhalandoda* regiment was based in the area now called *Mkhalandoda* in Zimbabwe near Nkayi growth point. The etymology of these toponyms is not recorded for the benefit of future generations who may not understand that their places are named after mighty men of valour in Ndebele history.

A few kilometres east of Bulawayo there is a place called *Ntabazinduna*, this is the place where king Mzilikazi killed Ndebele chiefs who had crowned his son , Nkulumane , assuming that the king was dead . The

toponym is derived from the mountain on which the chiefs were killed, *ntabayezinduna* (the mountain of the chiefs), deletion of some sounds then derived the toponym *eNtabazinduna*.

Toponyms from Colonial History

There are some Ndebele toponyms that are a remnant from the colonial era in Zimbabwe. These toponyms came into being due to the colonial experience in Zimbabwe that saw the British rule the country for years. The Ndebele have some toponyms that are a reminder to the colonial period.

King George the IV of England is used as an eponym for a school for the disabled in Bulawayo up until today, even the black Government at Independence did not change the name. The school situated in the Khumalo surbub of Bulawayo is a reminder that the area was once under British rule. The Ndebele have adapted the name to *eKhingijoji/eKinggeorge,* naming it to maintain the legacy of the British in Zimbabwe rather than renaming it as most people do after gaining political independence from their colonisers.

The Ministry of Labour offices in Bulawayo are called by some old Ndebeles *koMmesilanti*. To this effect Mithi says when people finished standard six, junior certificate, ordinary level and advanced level, they went to the Labour office where there was a miscellaneous of jobs. Miscellaneous is an English adjective, which means of many kinds, mixed composition or character; companies advertised these miscellaneous jobs with the Labour office. The Ndebele rephonologised the word to *mmesilanti*, by voicing the initial nasal and deletion of vowels to give the toponym *Mmhesilanti*. The history of colonial labour is immortalised in the toponym *koMmesilanti*. Colonial history of Zimbabwe is preserved in Ndebele names, although some of the names were not from the Ndebele but from other people especially the English.

Toponyms from Post Colonial History

Zimbabwe got its independence from the British in 1980, since then there has been naming of some places by the Ndebele after events and characters of the post independent era. Some of the toponyms are reminiscent of the liberation struggle used in post independent Zimbabwe to honour heroes and heroic events of the war of liberation.

> In 2000, Zimbabwe sent troops to fight rebels in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the troops were paid good monies and they came back to build houses in Bulawayo. The area in which they built their houses is in Cowdry Park and today the area is called DRC/ *eDiyarasi.* The Ndebele in naming the place in Bulawayo preserves the DRC war. The war was a post independent activity in Zimbabwean politics that has left a mark in Ndebele toponyms and it will be perpetually remembered through the name of this residential area. (Ndlovu, 2011:143)

The Bulawayo International Airport is called Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo airport, this toponyms is derived from the veteran liberator and former vice president, Joshua Nkomo. The name of the airport is in honour of the late vice president of Zimbabwe; it only became possible to name the airport after him in independent Zimbabwe, as this was not possible under colonialism. The toponym becomes a post independent derivation by the Ndebele to remember their leader for decades of struggle and independence.

Toponyms from Past Topography/Social and Economic Activities

Toponyms in Ndebele are also derived from the past activities of an area; this could be an economic, social or religious activity that the area was famous for. *Esiphongweni* thirty kilometres north east of Bulawayo, is another toponym that embodies history. Majozi who is from the area says during the colonial era there was a white farmer in the area who kept Goats and people would go to his farm to buy Goats. The farmer sold mainly male Goats *impongo* in Ndebele. The people then called the area *empongweni* (at the male goats), the following affixation was used to derive the toponym:

e+ impongo + eni> empongoeni> esiphongweni

The first sound change is the glide formation in the environment where vowels follow each other /w/> *empongweni*. There is insertion of /-si-/, and dissimilation of the nasal /-m-/ and aspiration of the voiceless bilabial plosive /-p-/ to give the toponym *Esiphongweni*[3].

Mithi's interest in Ndebele names in the Midlands province, stems from the fact that he thinks no one cares to identify the areas with Ndebele history. He notes that he once worked at a dairy farm south of Gweru where presently there is Senga residential area; the name is an Ndebele word which means to milk. When workers went to

work in the dairy farm they would say *siyasenga* (we are going to milk) and the name Senga */Seŋa/* was derived. With the influence of Shona which now dominates the area, the voiceless velar nasal */ŋ/* was changed to the voiced */ŋg/* and it is now */Seŋga/*. The name is derived from the history of the dairy farm and that history is preserved in the name Senga, which is Ndebele to milk.

The colonial government corrupted some Ndebele names that they found in the colony. However, at independence, the dominantly Shona government failed to correct some Ndebele toponyms as Beach points out:

> Under colonial rule, many names of natural features such as rivers and mountains were miss-spelt, and after independence in 1980, a place names commission began work on the correction, where necessary, of all names. (1986:8)

Ndebele toponyms do not embody political history only; even past topography is preserved in names when the ecology has changed. In Silobela in the midlands province, there is a place called *eMkhonyeni* (at the baobab tree), while there is no single Baobab tree in the area. The toponym is derived from the name *umkhomo* (baobab) using locative affixes as follows:

> *e+ umkhomo + eni> eumkhomoeni> emkhonyeni*

There is syncope of the vowel */u/* to *emkhomoeni*, the environment of vowels following each other influences sound change in Ndebele, the bilabial nasal */m/* changes to a palatal */ny/* to give the name *eMkhonyeni*. Manyathi, an old lady from the area, says there was a big Baobab tree that was a rainmaking shrine. She strongly believes that the tree dried up when missionaries discouraged people from conducting rainmaking ceremonies under the tree.

Some Ndebele names point to the past economic activity of an area or its past social prominence. In Tsholotsho, there is a place called *eJimila*, to this Ndlovu from the area says in the past there was a white man who had a farm in the area and his name was Jimmy Millar. The name was combined and changed to *Jimila* by Ndebeles; it carries the history of the area up to the present day.

The past cultural and economic history of an area contributes to the present toponyms in some Ndebele toponyms. Place names can give clues to past cultural landscapes. They can also offer evidence of past migrations (sequent occupancies) in an area, even when time has erased other evidence.

Conclusion

Some Ndebele toponyms are remnant of past experiences thereby preserving the history through which the Ndebele people have traversed. Some toponyms as discussed in the paper, mirror the past and are a repository of history. Ndebele history can be traced back to Zululand in South Africa through some toponyms in urban and rural areas. The Ndebele settlement in Zimbabwe and their military history is recorded in toponyms named after Ndebele military regiments and military commanders. Past topography and past social and economic activities are also used to name places were these activities were done. One can get a holistic appreciation of Ndebele and Zimbabwean history from Ndebele toponyms.

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