

# Investigating the Onomastic necessity of using Afrocentric names over Eurocentric ones in the renaming of South African Geographical Features



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## ABSTRACT

This article investigated the onomastic need to use Afrocentric names as replacements for Eurocentric ones when renaming South African geographical features. The article further showed how the use of Eurocentric names contradicts the transformation and decolonisation agenda for onomastic epistemic justice. Afrocentricity and Decoloniality were identified as relevant theories to underpin the study. The article employed a qualitative approach where content analysis was used for data collection and analysis purposes. The data were randomly collected from names attached to stadia, university buildings and streets. The findings of the article established that there should be synergy and alignment between the renaming and transformation agenda. The article further articulated that the reason(s) behind the use of Euro-centric names over Afrocentric ones are onomastically obscure and opaque. The article recommended that committees and structures responsible for the screening and approval of new names should consider involving or co-opting onomasticians, so as to perform an accurate analysis and provide alternative perspectives. Lastly, experts in Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) should also be co-opted by the South African Geographical Names Council.

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## INTRODUCTION

At a general level, onomasticians and sociolinguists may contend that naming plays an important role in building personalities and identities, and keeping individuals connected with their identity, culture, and history. In South Africa, like any other African country, names are not bestowed on people merely for a person to have a name by which they will be called and known. On the contrary, names carry a far much deeper meaning than being merely a string of letters or words. Just like any other country in Africa, South Africa experienced the horror of white brutality, as they were stripped of their land, culture, and identity. Africans were denied the right to express their identities freely. Even when South Africa gained its independence in 1994, many changes were made but the Eurocentric and Western epistemologies of naming remained as part of what is called the African Renaissance. The authors contend that the Europeans knew that the African culture was the indigenous people's pride and identity and that it gave them their sense of belonging. Therefore, taking that away from them meant a total loss of their identity and power.

In the South African context, there are national legislations that guide and govern the renaming of geographical entities. The National Place Name Committee (NPNC) was established in 1939 to name public entities such as towns, cities, and post offices. However, it needs to be noted that during apartheid, the committee primarily represented Afrikaans, as most place names registered between 1977 and 1987 were occupied by Afrikaans-speaking people.<sup>1</sup> It is against this background that Khumalo adds that many towns in South Africa were established during the apartheid era.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the towns were assigned the names of Western leaders and European people who were considered important at that time because these towns were built by the Europeans. Ndletyana adds that street names in suburban areas often reflect the colonisers' history and self-imaging, serving as racial markers.<sup>3</sup> Strictly, for this reason, Suzan (2000) in Erlank articulates the following: "In 2000, the South African Geographical Names Council (SAGNC) chairperson emphasized the importance of renaming not only entities but also correcting indigenous names that were abolished by apartheid rulers".<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the South African Geographical Names Council (SAGNC) was established in 1998 to standardise geographical names in South Africa. The fundamental goal of this structure is to correct, standardise, and transform the country's landscape through renaming. This study investigated the onomastic need to use Afrocentric names over Eurocentric ones when renaming South African geographical features. The SAGNC was established to address the previous naming injustices, and in view of this, this article advocated the use of Afrocentric names when renaming geographical entities.

From an observational point of view, when apartheid ended, the governing political organisation decided to rename some of the geographical features such as streets and places after the heroes who fought against the apartheid government and the colonial administrative system. In the new democratic South Africa, it can be observed that the renaming of geographical features focused more on regaining the power that was lost during the apartheid era, and the system neglected the African naming tradition, which is a significant part of their regaining African identity and renaissance. Against this backdrop, Machaba postulates that the entities that were given Eurocentric names reflect the power, authority, and control once exerted on indigenous people by the colonised.<sup>5</sup>

After South Africa regained its independence in 1994, many changes were made and the major change was to change anything colonial, the system, and the administrative system. From an onomastic perspective, the renaming of public entities geographical entities (streets, cities, places, etc.) was and is still one of the critical changes that are undertaken as a way of decolonising and transforming the system. As was the case during the colonial era, geographical features were named after white leaders such as DF Malan, Jan Smuts, Cecil John Rhodes, etc. It is also observed that most of the geographical features of public entities in democratic South Africa are named after fallen leaders and other prominent people such as Nelson Mandela, Peter Mokaba, Chris Hani, Steve Biko, Solomon Mahlangu, etc. What compounds the problem in the current article is the lack of synergy and alignment between the renaming and transformation agenda. The authors contend that one of the reasons associated with renaming is to transform the system. However, the current article interrogates why Eurocentric (colonial) names are used to rename and transform the system over Afrocentric ones. The article explored the extent to which Eurocentric names help to advance the decolonisation and transformative agenda. Forthcoming from the above-stated problem, the current article addressed the following objectives:

- To identify the reasons behind the use of Eurocentric names when renaming South African public entities over Afrocentric ones;
- To explore the extent to which Eurocentric names advance the decolonisation and transformative agenda;
- To establish the existing resonance between people and cities, streets, places, etc. around

<sup>1</sup> E.R. Jenkins, "From Leliefontein to Megawatt Park: Some Trends in the Naming of South African Places," *English Academy Review* 7, no. 1 (December 1990): 60–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10131759085310071>.

<sup>2</sup> Langa Khumalo, "African Languages in the Teaching and Learning Domain," *The UniZulu Workshop on Language Policy* (University of Zululand, 2017), 219.

<sup>3</sup> Mcebisi Ndletyana, "Changing Place Names in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Accounting for the Unevenness," *Social Dynamics* 38, no. 1 (March 2012): 87–103, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02533952.2012.698949>.

<sup>4</sup> Natasha Erlank, "From Main Reef to Albertina Sisulu Road: The Signposted Heroine and the Politics of Memory," *The Public Historian* 39, no. 2 (2017): 39.

<sup>5</sup> Mbali Aldromeda Machaba, "Naming, Identity and the African Renaissance [Sic] in a South African Context" (2004).

them; and

- To strive for a balance between semiotics and the use of Afrocentric names when renaming public entities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Eurocentric *vis-à-vis* Afrocentric naming systems

There is a clear distinction between Eurocentric and Afrocentric naming systems and patterns. De Klerk and Bosch state that Eurocentric names have no meaning attached to them.<sup>6</sup> In other words, European people are given names by which they would be known or called, but the names do not mean anything to them, they are just words and tags. Similarly, according to Penzura, in Western tradition, naming is used to confirm that a new person has come into being and the being has to be given a name to signify its existence.<sup>7</sup> The name given to this new life does not have any meaning to it, and because of that, there is no link between the name and the bearer.

From the above-mentioned, it can be noted that the use of Eurocentric names, western epistemologies and practices to rename South African geographical features does not have any meaning that African people can relate to. In Western tradition, the meaning of a name is not important, as naming is mainly for reference purposes. Even if the name has a meaning, the name-giver does not bother to find out the meaning because the meaning is not recognised. An individual and the name are viewed as separate entities, as there is no connection or link between the two. Thus, the current article will assist in establishing the resonance between renaming and people linked to those names. Furthermore, Eurocentric names were considered superior to African names by many people. This resulted in them adopting their naming system and patterns. As African people were forced to have new names, they started adding English names to their existing names or removing some African names to add new names. For instance, if a person was given the name “*Matome Mokone*”, they would change their name to *Peter Matome*, substituting the name *Mokone* with a Eurocentric name ‘Peter’. People started adopting Eurocentric naming patterns, where they opted for a Eurocentric name as their first name and their African name as the second. For example, they would have *Jacob* as their first name and *Moraka* as their surname.

### An Afrocentric naming system and its significance in an African context

In South Africa, different people are responsible for naming children in different cultures. As this task of naming is not given to anyone, there are particular individuals assigned for this task, such as family members, religious leaders, and traditional healers. In support of this, Mandende states that only elders of the family or community, traditional healers and or religious leaders were the only name givers in African societies.<sup>8</sup>

In many cultural groups of South Africa, the first stage of naming is after the birth of a baby. Mandende adds that birth names convey messages that name-givers want to pass through the name, and these names are considered very important.<sup>9</sup> According to Ngubane and Thabethe, choosing personal names in African societies is a conscious decision, rather than a random process.<sup>10</sup> The authors stress that the process of naming requires people who are qualified to follow the correct procedures because names can have a negative or positive impact on the child. For instance, a name given to a child can cause sickness, because the ancestors do not agree with the name. Some studies have shown that in many cultures, women are responsible for naming children at birth, as it is seen that grandmothers and aunts can name children, or have the final say in the bestowal of names. In contrast, De Klerk and Bosch argue that with regard to the Eurocentric naming system, names are given by parents only.<sup>11</sup>

The article highlights that there are public entities that have been named after political leaders and heroes who fought against the political injustices during the apartheid system. The Kgoši Mampuru Prison

<sup>6</sup> Vivian De Klerk and Barbara Bosch, “Naming in Two Cultures: English and Xhosa Practices,” *Nomina Africana* 9, no. 1 (1995): 68–85.

<sup>7</sup> C. Penzura, “The African Philosophical Conception of Personal Naming among the Shona Speaking People of Zimbabwe” (University of South Africa, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Itani Peter Mandende, “A Study of Tshivenda Personal Names” (University of South Africa, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Mandende, “A Study of Tshivenda Personal Names.”

<sup>10</sup> Sihawukele Ngubane and Nompumelelo Thabethe, “Shifts and Continuities in Zulu Personal Naming Practices,” *Literator: Journal of Literary Criticism, Comparative Linguistics and Literary Studies* 34, no. 1 (2013): 1–7.

<sup>11</sup> De Klerk and Bosch, “Naming in Two Cultures: English and Xhosa Practices.”

is one of the many examples of geographical features named after political heroes/leaders in democratic South Africa.

### **Pretoria Central Prison - Kgoši Mampuru Prison**

In 2013, the Pretoria Central Prison was renamed after Kgoši Mampuru by the former South African president, Jacob Zuma.<sup>12</sup> Kgoši Mampuru was sentenced to death by the Afrikaner government for the murder of his half-brother Sekhukhune. The Bapedi King was later hanged in 1883 in Pretoria Prison. As a result, the prison was named after him, not only for transformation reasons, but as a strategic imperative to advance synergy among renaming, political alignment, and the transformation agenda.

### **Naming and its significance in a South (African) context**

Naming as defined by Chauke is a sociolinguistic act that is closely attached to hopes, fears, values, traditions, and events in people's lives.<sup>13</sup> Naming connects indigenous people to their African traditions and history. Naming can mean different things to different people, but what gives a name meaning is the message attached to it. To many cultural groups in South Africa, names are more than tags of reference, they are more like prophecies to the name-bearers from the name-givers. For instance, a name-giver can name a child, *Khumo* (Wealth) with the hope that their child would grow up to be very rich or successful. African people attach different notions to their names, it can be hope for the future, emotions, and feelings, which can be negative or positive, depending on the state of the relationship between the mother and the name-giver. Therefore, it can then be argued that naming cannot be separated from culture and identity. Hence, the article aimed to disrupt the use of Eurocentric names to rename South African geographical features to advocate Afrocentric names instead.

### **Intersections among language, renaming and identity preservation**

According to Manatsha, the colonial system played a major part in destroying the identities of the indigenous people in many ways.<sup>14</sup> For instance, the oppressors erased all the indigenous place names that were on public entities and replaced them with Eurocentric names that represented their culture, ideologies, and identities. When linking renaming and identity, Peters attests that identity is considered one of the basic needs of human beings, communities, and nations, as it defines who we are as individuals or as a nation, when identity is formed through different aspects such as history, culture, language, or religion.<sup>15</sup> Based on the above-mentioned, it can be interpreted that the process of renaming means searching for a new identity and redefining oneself. The article acknowledges that colonialism played a key role in removing the identities of the conquered and colonised communities (indigenous people) by erasing all the indigenous names of places and streets.<sup>16</sup> Machaba submits that the entities that were given Eurocentric names reflect the power, authority and control that were once exerted on indigenous people by the colonisers.<sup>17</sup>

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This article is underpinned by Afrocentricity and decoloniality theories. According to Asante, Afrocentricity is more concerned with the studies of the ideas and events from the perspective of indigenous people as the main players rather than victims.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Mazama adds that Afrocentricity is about restoring integrity as Africans because indigenous people do not exist in isolation but as a form of an ontological order that includes entities on a higher spiritual plane than us.<sup>19</sup> As one of the strategic objectives to achieve this objective, the naming and renaming of geographical features can be used as a

<sup>12</sup> Johan Moll, "Prison Renaming: Solving Intractable Internal Problems by External Renaming?," *Nomina Africana: Journal of African Onomastics* 33, no. 1 (2019): 69.

<sup>13</sup> Mkhacani T Chauke, "Personal Names and Naming Practices among the Vatsonga," *The Anthropologist* 19, no. 1 (2015): 303–12.

<sup>14</sup> Boga Thura Manatsha, "The Politics of Renaming" Colonial" Streets in Francistown, Botswana," *Historia* 59, no. 2 (2014): 272.

<sup>15</sup> M.M. Peters, "(Re-)Building a National Identity by Renaming Places in South Africa," Munich, GRIN Verlag, 2016, <https://www.grin.com/document/592930>.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Reysen, Jamie S Snider, and Nyla R Branscombe, "Corporate Renaming of Stadiums, Team Identification, and Threat to Distinctiveness," *Journal of Sport Management* 26, no. 4 (2012): 350–57.

<sup>17</sup> Machaba, "Naming, Identity and the African Renaissance [Sic] in a South African Context," 170.

<sup>18</sup> Molefi Kete Asante, "The Afrocentric Idea in Education," *The Journal of Negro Education* 60, no. 2 (1991): 172.

<sup>19</sup> Ama Mazama, "The Afrocentric Paradigm: Contours and Definitions," *Journal of Black Studies* 31, no. 4 (2001): 387–405.

tool. Asante continues to suggest that African people need to displace the European ways of feeling, being, and thinking by replacing them with ways that are connected to their own African cultural experience for them to be free.<sup>20</sup> Asante stresses that Africans have to share their experiences as agents rather than victims of the injustices, racism and discrimination caused by the colonisers and start celebrating their Africanity. It is against this background that the current article aimed to investigate the onomastic need to use Afrocentric names over Eurocentric ones when renaming South African geographical features. It can therefore be concluded that there is a resonance between Afrocentricity as a theory and the topic under attention.

According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni, decoloniality is a political weapon for resistance and social action that allows African people to reinvent their identities and reassert their humanity as black and African in their particular social settings.<sup>21</sup> To add to this, Asea adds that the theory of decoloniality can be defined as an action-oriented idea for enabling indigenous people to salvage, re-name, re-unite, and re-write historical topics as agents of history.<sup>22</sup> This article interrogates the use of colonial names when renaming South African geographical features. It can therefore be justified that decoloniality as a theory is relevant to this article because it advocates for the importance of indigenous cultures and names when renaming and naming public entities, as they allow African people to remove coloniality and tell their stories through an African perspective. This paper argued and advocated for the use of indigenous names to name and rename South African geographical features. It is also argued that the use of Afrocentric names to rename public entities will also help Africans to re-write and narrate their political and cultural history through an African eye, and celebrate their indigenous identity.

## METHODOLOGY

This article adopted the qualitative research design. The researchers employed and relied on content analysis as a qualitative method of data collection and analysis purposes. It needs to be mentioned that the researchers also intended to include face-to-face interviews with the members of the SAGNC to get their perspective regarding the use of Eurocentric names over Afrocentric ones when naming and renaming South African geographical features. However, this was never done due to their unavailability.

### Data Collection and Analysis

For this paper, content analysis was employed to analyse the data collected. According to LeCompte and Schensul, the process of content analysis involves the reduction of large amounts of the acquired data so that the researcher can make sense of the data.<sup>23</sup> Content analysis entails reading and rereading the source and target texts to find parallels and discrepancies that helped the researcher create themes and categories.<sup>24</sup> The researchers, however, failed to conduct face-to-face interviews with the members of the SAGNC due to their unavailability. Hence, content analysis was used to identify twenty-six (26) geographical names that were further classified into six categories. For this article, only nine (9) geographical names were discussed and analysed qualitatively. This was followed by the discussion of the qualitative themes which emerged from the discussion of findings.

### Ethical considerations

This article has received written approval from the Tshwane University of Technology Research Ethics Committee and the reference number is FCRE Ref#: FCRE/APL/STD/2022/12. Copies of the approval letters can be obtained from the primary researcher.

<sup>20</sup> Asante, "The Afrocentric Idea in Education."

<sup>21</sup> Sabelo J Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Decoloniality as the Future of Africa," *History Compass* 13, no. 10 (2015): 490

<sup>22</sup> Wilson B Asea, "Epistemic Decoloniality of Westernised Higher Education: A Discourse on Curriculum Justice and Knowledge Integration at Historically White Universities in South Africa," *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 21, no. 4 (2022): 375–93.

<sup>23</sup> M.D. LeCompte and J.J. Schensul, "Analysing and Interpreting Ethnographic Data," in *Book Five of the Ethnographer's Toolkit*, ed. J.J. Schensul and M.D LeCompte (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> S.B. Merriam, *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1988).

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

For the purpose of data presentation, analysis and discussion, the current focused on eleven (11) names, which were grouped into six categories. These categories helped the researchers to easily present and analyse each and every name selected in this article.

### Categories of geographical names

#### First category: Geographical names attached to streets

##### 1. Lillian Ngoyi Street (Pretoria and Johannesburg)

Lilian Masediba Ngoyi, a prominent anti-apartheid activist and treason trialist, was imprisoned for high treason in 1956. She was barred from performing from 1962 through 1972 and again in 1975. To honour her legacy, a street in Johannesburg was renamed Lillian Ngoyi Street. Afrocentricity allows African people to realise their humanity and self-determination while opposing Eurocentric supremacy. The street was renamed after the anti-apartheid activist, as there is no history connecting her to the place other than advocating women's rights. The article aimed to investigate the significance of the African IKS, arguing that the colonial name 'Lillian' does not connect Africans with their roots. The use of indigenous names in renaming entities allows African people to gain their humanity back. However, the literature submitted on the street name suggests that Eurocentric people and systems still hold power over indigenous people, as the Eurocentric naming pattern is still being used.

Afrocentricity accords African people the opportunity to completely realise their humanity and self-determination and to also position themselves to oppose and eradicate Eurocentric supremacy. According to this analysis, the street was renamed after the anti-apartheid activist because of her work as the head of the African National Congress Women's League. Be that as it may, no history connects her to the place other than the fact that she advocated women's rights. One of the objectives of this article was to investigate the significance of the African IKS. It may be argued that the name 'Lillian' does not connect Africans with their roots, as it is a colonial name.

Objectively speaking, the use of indigenous names when renaming entities gives African people a chance to get rid of the power that the colonial system still has over them and realise that through naming, they can gain their humanity back. Based on the literature submitted on the street name, Lillian Ngoyi Street, it may be concluded that Eurocentric people and systems still have power over the indigenous people, as the Eurocentric naming pattern is still being used. The street should have been named using her indigenous name, 'Masediba' (which means mother of a well/fountain). In that case, the street would be 'Masediba Ngoyi Street' instead of Lillian Ngoyi Street.

##### 2. Charlotte Maxeke Street (Pretoria)

Charlotte Makgomo Maxeke, born in 1874, was a prominent African activist and teacher. She attended Edwards Memorial School in the Eastern Cape and later moved to Kimberley after discovering diamonds in 1885. Maxeke founded an employment agency for Africans and was the first Black woman to hold the position of parole officer for juvenile offenders. She is revered as the "Mother of Black Freedom in South Africa" and a nursery school in Tanzania bears her name. In her honour, Mitchell Street in Pretoria was renamed Charlotte Maxeke Street. This article explored the use of Eurocentric names in promoting decolonisation and transformative agendas. However, the street name Charlotte Maxeke does not reaffirm the identities of Africans and may have been renamed using her Sepedi name, *Makgomo*, instead of *Charlotte Maxeke Street*. This would align with the idea of transformation and decolonisation, as it removes colonial names and celebrates African indigenous identity.

Decoloniality serves as a political tool for African people to redefine their identities and reaffirm their humanity as black and African in their specific social contexts. In this article, it is understood that streets are renamed to celebrate and symbolise the identity of the country or a certain place. The name given to the street, Charlotte Maxeke, does not recognise and celebrate the political activist, as it is considered Eurocentric. One of the objectives of this article was to explore the extent to which the use of Eurocentric names helps to advance the decolonisation and transformative agenda. In this context, the above-mentioned street name does not redefine and reaffirm the identities of Africans.

Objectively speaking, Eurocentric names are used as tags of reference. In other words, they do not have any meaning that African people can relate to. In this article, street names are used to decolonise and

transform the country, with a view that the names given to some streets in South Africa seem to go against the purpose of renaming. It may be argued that Charlotte Maxeke Street should have been renamed using her Sepedi name, *Makgomo*, resulting in *Makgomo Maxeke Street* rather than Charlotte Maxeke Street, to instantiate transformation and decolonisation in the true sense of the words.

## **Second category: Geographical names attached to roads**

### **1. Albertina Sisulu Road (Johannesburg)**

Albertina Sisulu, born in Tsomo, Eastern Cape, was a prominent political activist, nurse, and community activist in South Africa. She was a key figure in the anti-apartheid struggle and advocated women's rights. She was married to the South African political figure Walter Sisulu. Albertina Sisulu was born in Tsomo, Eastern Cape, on October 21, 1918. She was a political activist, nurse, and community activist, as well as one of South Africa's high-profile leaders in the anti-apartheid struggle. She advocated women's rights because she opposed the apartheid government's mandate that women carry passbooks as part of the passed legislation. She was also married to Walter Sisulu, a political figure.

Afrocentricity suggests that Africans must replace Eurocentric customs and thinking with ones tied to their own African cultural experience. Names tell stories and represent individuals' identity and culture. The R24 road in Johannesburg has been renamed Albertina Sisulu Road, aiming to decolonise and move away from the previous system that did not recognise African culture and people. *Nontsikelelo*, meaning 'mother of blessings', should have been used instead of the Eurocentric name Albertina, as the former has a relatable meaning to Africans. The adoption of Eurocentric names in renaming entities opposes the decolonisation and transformation process, as it hinders Africans from identifying with their roots.

### **2. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela Drive (Johannesburg)**

This article explored the renaming of the Olifantsfontein Road to Winnie Madikizela-Mandela Drive in honour of the legacy of Nomzamo Winifred Zanyiwe Madikizela, a social worker and political activist in South Africa. Madikizela was born on September 26, 1936, in Mbongweni, Bizana, and was the second wife of South Africa's first black president, Rolihlahla Mandela. The African National Congress (ANC)'s National Executive Committee led the Women's League, and Madikizela was known as the 'Mother of the Nation' by her followers.

Decoloniality as a theory serves as a political tool for African people to redefine their identities and reaffirm their humanity as black and African in their specific social contexts. In this article, it is understood that streets are renamed to celebrate and symbolise the identity of a country or a certain place. The name given to the street, *Winnie-Madikizela Mandela*, does not recognise and celebrate the political activist, as it is Eurocentric. One of the objectives of this article was to explore the extent to which the use of Eurocentric names helps to advance the decolonisation and transformative agenda. In this context, the above-mentioned street name does not redefine and reaffirm the identities of Africans.

The article argues that Afrocentric names on roads allow indigenous people to tell their history and experiences through their perspectives. Critics argue that the road should have been renamed using Winnie Madikizela's African name, such as Zanyiwe Madikizela-Mandela Road or Nomzamo Madikizela-Mandela Road, rather than Winnie Madikizela-Mandela Road. Objectively speaking, the renaming of Olifantsfontein Road to *Nomzamo Madikizela-Mandela Drive* highlights the importance of preserving the identity and experiences of indigenous people in South Africa.

## **Third category: Geographical names attached to universities**

### **1. Nelson Mandela University (Gqeberha)**

Nelson Mandela, a prominent political figure, was South Africa's first democratically elected president from 1994 to 1999. He was a fierce anti-apartheid campaigner and co-founder of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the African National Congress's military wing. After being convicted of sabotage and other counts in 1962, Mandela was freed in 1990 after 27 years in jail. The South African Naming Council decided to rename the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University to Nelson Mandela University in honour of Rolihlahla.

It is noted that decoloniality empowers indigenous people to recover, rename, and reunite historical issues as indigenous agents. To decolonise and transform, indigenous people need to recover from the injustices experienced under the apartheid regime and re-write their history through naming. The educational institution is named Nelson Mandela University after South Africa's first black president, Nelson Mandela. However, the name Nelson is not considered African because it does not have a specific meaning attached to it. Therefore, it is suggested that the institution's name should have been '*Madiba Mandela University*' or '*Rolihlahla Mandela University*', as using his African name to rename the University would not alter the point that he struggled and served his African people but would cover cultural and transformation aspects.

#### **Fourth category: Geographical names attached to hospitals**

##### **1. Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital (Soweto)**

Chris Hani, born in Sabalele, was a prominent figure in the struggle for independence in South Africa. He joined the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) in 1957 and was influenced by the conviction of ANC leaders in the Treason Trial in 1956. In 1993, Hani was murdered by Januzs Walus, an anti-Communist Polish refugee with ties to the White nationalist AWB. In his honour, a hospital was renamed the Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital at Soweto.

It can be understood that decoloniality as a theory is more concerned with the removal of non-indigenous dominance and colonisers' notions that make colonised people feel powerless. The name 'Chris', a Eurocentric name, does not carry an African identity. The Baragwanath Hospital was renamed 'Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital' in 1997, adding Hani's name to the existing name 'Baragwanath'. This renaming solidified the hospital's past and present, highlighting the superiority of the colonial naming system over African names. The hospital's name, now a name with no meaning, only belongs to an ANC political figure.

##### **2. Steve Biko Academic Hospital (Pretoria)**

Steve Biko, born in the Eastern Cape in 1946, was an anti-apartheid activist and the voice of black freedom in South Africa. He was at the forefront of the "Black Consciousness Movement" in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The current hospital name, Steve Biko Academic Hospital, was changed to honour him. However, the name 'Steve' is criticised for its Eurocentricity and lack of honour for African culture. The name Bantu, meaning "people," conveys a message of transformation, inspiring people to stand together and fight for their African traditions.

On this name, Afrocentricity was employed in this article to argue that African people need to redefine and appreciate their culture. The noun phrase "Bantu people" conveys a message of transformation that inspires people to stand together and fight for their African traditions in the same way that Bantu Biko battled against the apartheid regime. The name Steve does not honour African culture, and experts such as Mazama and Asante emphasised that Africans must stop lingering on oppression and instead consider the renaming process as a consciousness victory and celebrate it.<sup>25</sup> The Eurocentric name 'Steve' is problematic for the country's development, as it was imposed on indigenous people with the promise of a brighter future and education. Biko's original name, Bantu, meaning "people," should have been used to rename the street. The choice of an African name to rename the hospital would not erase his legacy as an anti-apartheid fighter but would celebrate African culture.

#### **Fifth category: Geographical names attached to stadiums**

##### **1. Peter Mokaba Stadium (Polokwane)**

The name Peter Mokaba Stadium was assigned to a stadium in Polokwane in the Limpopo Province. The stadium was named after the freedom fighter and patriot Peter Ramoshoane Mokaba, who was also the head and president of the ANC Youth League. The stadium was originally known as Pietersburg Stadium before being named Peter Mokaba Stadium. The name change was intended to honour Mokaba and his legacy, as Afrocentricity suggests that African interests, values, and perspectives should predominate. The stadium was named to honour and transform the anti-apartheid activist from his hometown. The article

<sup>25</sup> Mazama, "The Afrocentric Paradigm: Contours and Definitions"; Asante, "The Afrocentric Idea in Education."

argues that Mokaba's indigenous name, Ramashoane, should have been used, as it is considered a colonial name. Critics argue that the use of Peter over Ramashoane does not resonate well with the transformation agenda, as there is an intersection among language, naming, and history preservation.

The goal of decolonisation is to eliminate the colonial system, and using a colonial name undermines the naming system practised by Africans. Critics may argue that the stadium should have been named after Mokaba's African name, such as 'Ramashoane Mokaba Stadium', for transformation reasons and epistemic justice, as a core imperative of decoloniality in the philosophy of naming.

## **2. Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium (Gqeberha)**

As stated earlier, Nelson Rolihlahla Madiba Mandela was a prominent South African political figure and was the first democratically elected president of South Africa from 1994 to 1999. He was a fierce anti-apartheid campaigner and co-founder of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the ANC's military wing. Mandela was convicted of sabotage and other counts in 1962 but was freed in 1990 after 27 years in jail. The stadium, previously called Namboole Stadium, was renamed Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium to honour the South African hero.

The theory of decoloniality questions the universality of Western beliefs and emphasises the power processes that led to their formation in other inferior regions. The stadium's English name, Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium, does not support the ideals of social justice and equality, as it promotes inequality and injustices. The purpose of renaming in South Africa is to eliminate Eurocentric systems and traces, but African people seem to have normalised Western beliefs and systems. It has been argued by critics that the stadium should have been named after Mandela's African name, such as 'Rolihlahla Mandela Bay Stadium' or 'Madiba Mandela Bay Stadium', not only for transformation purposes but also for celebrating and preserving indigenous naming and knowledge systems.

## **Sixth category: Geographical names attached to university buildings**

### **1. Solomon Mahlangu House Building at Wits University (Johannesburg)**

Solomon Kalushi Mahlangu, a Mamelodi-based ANC activist, was falsely charged with murder and terrorism by apartheid authorities in 1977. Despite pledging innocence, he was accused of sharing the group's common aim and condemned to death. Despite multiple appeals and international protests, his conviction was maintained, and he was killed by hanging in 1979. In 2016, the Senate House Building at Witswatersrand (Wits) University was named after Mahlangu.

The theory of decoloniality focuses on spreading and growing decolonisation attempts in countries experiencing oppression and colonisation. The name of the university building, Solomon Mahlangu House at Wits University, aimed to remove symbols of colonialism that celebrated colonial power relations. This article explored the extent to which the use of Eurocentric names helps advance the decolonisation and transformative agenda. The renaming of the building, Solomon Mahlangu House, does not resonate well with the decolonisation agenda, as it contradicts the purpose and reasons for renaming public entities. It could be argued that the building should have been renamed using Mahlangu's indigenous name, to read 'Kalushi Mahlangu House', for transformational reasons and epistemological equity, as the core importance of decoloniality in the thought process of naming.

### **2. Josephine Moshobane Residence at the University of Limpopo (Polokwane)**

Josephine Sekgana Moshobane, a student at the University of Limpopo, was a passionate advocate for the rights of black students. She was tortured and injured by apartheid police while in solitary confinement. In honour of her anti-apartheid efforts, the female student residence, formerly known as Turfloop residence, was renamed after her. Afrocentricity suggests that the name Josephine is Eurocentric and does not belong to indigenous languages. This article, which investigated the significance of African indigenous names in preserving African IKS, argues that the name Josephine does not honour the memory of the political activist. Based on the literature, Moshobane's indigenous name is Sekgana Moshobane. It is suggested that the female residence should be renamed using her indigenous name, as African names carry deeper meanings and create a person's identity. The name 'Sekgana' narrates the story of the heroine as an African person, not as a victim of apartheid brutality. The country cannot use the same system to destroy

people to honour Moshobane. Therefore, the residence should be renamed using her African name, such as Sekgana Moshobane Residence.

### **Discussion of the Qualitative Themes**

Several key themes dominated the onomastic discourse surrounding this article. The following are the five qualitative themes that emerged from the literature review that was consulted, as well as from the analysis and discussion of the data.

#### **Qualitative Theme One: Renaming and identity preservation**

In South Africa, public entities often fail to celebrate the culture of the African people, with many still believing that children should have an English name as their first name and an African one as the second. Studies have shown that Eurocentric names do not contribute to the identity of Africans and their culture. Indigenous names are more than tags of reference, as scholars such as Chauke and Guma emphasise their significance in connecting indigenous people to their roots and history.<sup>26</sup> If the renaming process focused more on indigenous culture and names, it could have transformed the country and given people a sense of belonging. Eurocentric names are foreign to African people, as they do not have any meaning attached to them, driving Africans away from their culture. Indigenous naming systems play a significant role in reconnecting Afrocentric people to their roots and cultures, as seen in streets such as Thabo Sehume Street in Pretoria, which speaks to the African identity.

#### **Qualitative Theme Two: Interface between renaming and political power and influence**

Renaming in South Africa has historically been politicised and used to establish the ruling regime, as it was during the apartheid era. Renaming public entities focused on claiming back political power, shifting from transforming the country and preserving indigenous knowledge to commemorating ANC leaders and pushing their political agenda. Scholars such as Clarkson (2008) argue that those in power have the authority to select names and change their meanings to suit their political agendas. Renaming in South Africa is more about making a statement to the old apartheid government, painting the country with the names of their political heroic figures. It can be argued that renaming is an act of revenge, taking back what was stolen from black people, rather than regaining their cultural footing and power. The names given to public entities do not celebrate indigenous culture, as Eurocentric naming systems and patterns are still used to name and rename public entities. For example, the names given to public entities commemorate anti-apartheid activists, who were members of the ANC.

#### **Qualitative Theme Three: Renaming and history preservation**

Renaming is crucial for connecting individuals with their culture and history but using Eurocentric names to rename public facilities does not preserve African culture. Names serve as personal archives for significant events and the history of our culture and families. Political leaders carry the political history of our country, and their African names also do. Eurocentric names maintain the past of the colonisers, so Africans cannot prioritise and use them to restore Afrocentric history. Indigenous languages and names have a responsibility to develop the culture of the community and nation. Indigenous names used in renaming keep traditions alive. However, the renaming of geographical features may not preserve indigenous history as it has turned into a political agenda, used to make a statement to the apartheid regime. The colonisers used naming to push African people from their cultures and customs, preserving their history by giving them Eurocentric names. African IKS can only be preserved through naming, and if the SAGNC considers African names when selecting Afrocentric names to rename geographical features, the African IKS will be preserved.

#### **Qualitative Theme Four: Eurocentric renaming practices over the Afrocentric one**

This study examined the impact of Eurocentric names on African people, which were introduced through Christianity and influenced their naming practices. Africans have accepted Eurocentric customs for

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<sup>26</sup> Chauke, "Personal Names and Naming Practices among the Vatsonga"; Mthobeli Guma, "The Cultural Meaning of Names among Basotho of South Africa: A Historical and Linguistic Analysis," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 10, no. 3 (2001): 15.

naming babies and public entities, with some arguing that South Africans still see English names as superior. Traditional African people attribute diverse meanings to their names, which sets them apart and unique. Naming is more than just assigning a label; it involves rules and patterns. Public entities should reflect African culture and history, but the colonial naming system is valued more than the traditional Afrocentric naming system. The Eurocentric naming system views names as reference tags, serving as a point of reference and making pronunciation easier for Africans. In renaming, traditional naming systems should be used, as it allows name-givers to convey a narrative or history of a society. However, the Eurocentric naming system is not considered in the renaming process, demolishing the history of Africans, and hindering decolonisation and transformation.

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#### **Synthesis of the main findings and theory application**

##### ***1. The renaming process was not properly conceptualised***

The literature in this study has indicated that the right procedures were not used when renaming geographical features. It was further discovered that the process of renaming geographical entities focused on honouring those who fought against the apartheid regime, but the whole process was not properly conducted as the geographical features were named using the Eurocentric names that African people attained during the apartheid era. The article found that the geographical names given to public entities do not resonate with the transformation agenda; Eurocentric names cannot be selected, standardised and approved as decolonial and transformative tools in the country. It is therefore clear that in this context, careful consideration was never done in the process of naming and renaming the geographical entities.

Based on the literature reviewed in this article, Afrocentricity emphasises that Africans must begin to celebrate their Africanness and begin to relate their experiences as agents rather than victims of the racism, discrimination, and injustices brought about by the colonisers. One of the objectives of this article was to explore the extent to which Eurocentric names advance the decolonisation and transformative agenda. African names imply that for African people to be free, they must replace European modes of feeling, being, and thinking with the ones that are rooted in their own African cultural experiences.

##### ***2. The use of colonial names in an attempt to decolonise and transform the system***

The literature review conducted in this article has shown that the process of renaming in South Africa still endorses the colonial naming system and pattern when naming and renaming public entities. The article discovered that the geographical features named after those who are considered political leaders use the Eurocentric names that were imposed on them by the colonisers. It was discovered that the renaming of public entities was never on the transformation and decolonisation agenda, as the naming council ignored the removal of Eurocentric names in the renaming process. The literature in this article also suggested that the only way to achieve the purpose of renaming is to use indigenous names in the renaming process. According to the theory of decoloniality, African people can only truly overcome colonialism by redefining who they are and reclaiming their humanity in their unique social contexts as Black and African people, rather than by continuing to see the world through a Eurocentric prism. One of this article's aims was to strive for a balance between the semiotics and semantics of Afrocentric names when renaming public entities. The naming committee attempts to remove colonial names with other colonial names,

which shows that the transformation attempt is far from being achieved; we cannot use the names used to destroy African cultures to destroy the colonial cultures.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are postulated from the presentation, analysis, and discussion of the findings:

### ***1. Consideration of names recorded in African languages in the renaming process***

In this article, it was revealed that African people have different naming systems and patterns that are followed and used when naming people. These systems and patterns are different from the Eurocentric ones. The researchers suggest that the implementation of indigenous names when renaming public entities would be a great way to reconnect and restore the identity of the country and its people. The article found that Afrocentric names (African indigenous names) carry the cultural history of the African people and tell a lot about who they are and where they come from. The use of Eurocentric names on the current geographical features does not celebrate the history of Africans but instead destroys it and their African identity as well. Having noted this, the article recommends that African indigenous languages and names should be used when renaming public entities and not as mere appendages to colonial names, as they play a major role in the transformation of the country. These names are the only way through which the naming committee will destroy any trace of colonisation and keep African people culturally anchored.

### ***2. The involvement of onomasticians in the committees that deals with the selection and the standardisation of geographical names***

The article revealed that the onomastics perspective is often overlooked in the selection and standardisation of names for geographical features, leading to Eurocentric names. The Minister of Arts and Culture is responsible for standardising these names, which could celebrate and restore the identity of indigenous people through renaming. However, if the process does not involve onomastic input, the main reasons for renaming and naming will be missed. The article recommends proper participation from people with the knowledge of onomastics studies and IKS, initiated by the SAGNC. This involvement would help achieve transformation, decolonisation, and preserve African indigenous cultures, allowing African people to feel a sense of belonging and relate to the names given to their public entities.

### ***3. Interviews to assess the technical capacity of council members***

The article argues that it is essential for the selection committees to conduct interviews as a way of assessing the technical and professional competence of candidates seeking to serve on a provincial or national council responsible for geographical names. This process will ensure that all selected members possess the necessary expertise and capacity to contribute effectively to the council's work. By thoroughly evaluating each candidate's qualifications, the committee can ensure that those appointed are well-equipped to make informed decisions, thereby enhancing the council's overall effectiveness and ensuring that its goals are met with the highest level of professionalism.

### ***4. Collaboration between geographical names councils and academic associations that deals with onomastics***

The article posits that an urgent collaboration is needed between geographical names councils and academic associations focused on onomastics. Such cooperation would ensure that the themes discussed at symposia and annual conferences align well with the objectives of the councils. In addition to this, this collaboration would help to ensure that conference themes are also informed by the challenges council members face when handling submissions from communities. This alignment would foster more effective discussions and resolutions that directly support the councils' work.

### ***5. Involvement of university structures that deal with naming and renaming***

In addition to the above-mentioned recommendation, this article further suggests that it is important to involve university departments and structures focused on naming and renaming when planning symposia and annual conferences. Given that universities are embedded within speech communities, it is equally

crucial to extend invitations to ordinary community members, allowing them to participate in these discussions. By including both academic experts and local voices, the discourse can be enriched with diverse perspectives, ensuring that naming and renaming processes are inclusive and reflective of the broader community's cultural and linguistic realities. This collaborative approach will foster greater understanding and ownership of the decisions made.

## CONCLUSION

Since the country's independence, the focus of renaming in South Africa has been on decolonisation and transformation; yet, it appears that little attention is paid to the various name patterns and systems during the renaming process. The data in this research revealed that an onomastic perspective is not taken into account in the naming and renaming process, resulting in Eurocentric names being preferred. Against this background, indigenous names should be used to rename geographical features, as they serve an important role, not only in the preservation of IKS but also in linking African people to their cultures and identities.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available in the Tshwane University of Technology Open Repository (TUTDoR) at:

<http://tutvital.ac.za:8080/vital/access/manager/Repository/tut:2541/SOURCE1>.

## DISCLAIMER

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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