





# Investigating the Onomastic Need to Rename Gender-derogatory Toponyms: A South African Perspective



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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the onomastic necessity of renaming gender-derogatory toponyms in the South African landscape. It contends that there is a need to interrogate the reasons behind gender-derogatory names and how society relates to these names. Four theories: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Critical Toponymic, Socio-onomastic and Feminism theories guided, shaped and informed the authors' argument. Qualitative in nature, the article employed content analysis for data collection and analysis purposes. A database of over twenty-five (25) toponyms that are considered gender-derogatory was purposively collected and analysed. These toponyms were further grouped into different categories for easy presentation and analysis. It was found that there are gender-derogatory toponyms among South African geographical features, many of which were named using African languages. Furthermore, there is an existing intersectionality between gender-derogatory toponyms with toxic masculinity and feminism. For these reasons, the article postulated that there should be synergy, resonance and constructive alignment among toponyms, renaming, transformation agenda and identity construction. The article further recommends renaming gender-derogatory toponyms and raising awareness about the renaming process and its approach. It emphasises that renaming should be guided by semantics and linguistic ideology rather than race, language, or political power and its influence.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is unequivocally clear on the issues of gender and the equality of genders.<sup>1</sup> The current South African government purports that all genders are equal and should be treated as such. This stance is demonstrated through gender programmes that are currently advocated by and through the state.<sup>2</sup> The South African government further echoes the importance of gender issues

<sup>1</sup> Republic of South Africa (RSA), *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa No. 108 of 1996* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1996), <https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/images/a108-96.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> T. S. Madzivhandila and M S Dlamini, "Woman and Youth Owned Enterprises in South Africa: Assessing the Needs, Opportunities and Challenges," in *SAAPAM 4th Annual Conference Proceedings: Limpopo*, 2015, 605–18.

through a national department (Department of Women, Youth and People with Disabilities) that deals with issues of women, and attendant gender inequalities, so that these issues can be dealt with at a governmental and yet strategic cabinet level.

The South African government has made positive strides in promoting gender equality, as demonstrated by the number of women in Cabinet, the positions of leadership that they occupy both in the government and private sector, together with the recognition that women get in all facets of the means of economic production.<sup>3</sup> However, the present authors observe that the renaming of toponyms that are gender-derogatory is one area where the government has not made any positive strides. This is demonstrated by the existence of gender-derogatory toponyms, which are mainly derogatory to women.

The study of toponyms has been explored and presented by many studies, including the naming of different geographical landscapes such as schools, residential areas and others.<sup>4</sup> The authors further postulate that names of residential areas are a form of identification, as they describe one's place of residence, culture and so forth. This is unfortunately the opposite for women as gender-derogatory toponyms do not resonate with women living in those areas and do not reflect the identity of the women from those areas.

What triggered this article is the silence of the South African Geographical Names Council and other relevant stakeholders on the use of gender-derogatory toponyms in renaming places in South Africa. The article further postulates that the national agenda on transformation and decolonisation through naming and renaming is only directed to English and Afrikaans toponyms. According to Kadmon, toponyms indicate the social and power structures through which the identity of the city and society is constructed rather than just being abstract names in the spatial organisation of cities.<sup>5</sup> These power relations are problematised in the current study through scrutiny of toponyms such as *Seropemperekele*, *Dunuza*, *Mshayezafe*, *Hlalampysa*, *Mosewawa*, *Khalambazo*, *Kommegampone*, *Nquza*, etc., which carry negative connotations that can be associated with toxic masculinity.

While the article acknowledges and appreciates the effort to redress the oppressive and apartheid toponyms as demonstrated by the recent renaming of William Nicol Drive in Johannesburg to Winnie Mandela Drive a political struggle veteran, it does, however, note that gender-derogatory toponyms have not been replaced to redress the oppression and negative connotations represented and perpetuated by such toponyms. In a country such as South Africa, which is characterised by a high rate of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), the article argues that some of the aforementioned names may also propagate social ills such as GBV. Therefore, the article investigated the onomastic need to replace gender-derogatory toponyms in South Africa.

The article delved into the onomastic necessity of renaming gender-derogatory toponyms in South Africa. Its primary objective was to determine if these toponyms could be replaced and to further understand the rationale behind their original assignment.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework is a structure that condenses ideas and hypotheses that are created from evidence that has already been tested and published and are then synthesised to establish a theoretical foundation for data analysis and interpretation of the meaning of research data.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Grant and Osanloo, label the theoretical framework as a blueprint that establishes direction and outlines the details of an entire research project.<sup>7</sup> This article was underpinned by four theories, namely; Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Feminism Theory, Critical Toponymic Theory and Socio-onomastic Theory.

<sup>3</sup> Madzivhandila and Dlamini, "Woman and Youth Owned Enterprises in South Africa: Assessing the Needs, Opportunities and Challenges."

<sup>4</sup> Itani P Mandende and Madoda P Cekiso, "A Socio-Onomastic Analysis of Some Government School Names in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province," *South African Journal of African Languages* 42, no. 1 (2022): 68–76.

<sup>5</sup> Naftali Kadmon, "Toponymy and Geopolitics: The Political Use—and Misuse—of Geographical Names," *The Cartographic Journal* 41, no. 2 (2004): 85–87.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Kivunja, "Distinguishing between Theory, Theoretical Framework, and Conceptual Framework: A Systematic Review of Lessons from the Field.," *International Journal of Higher Education* 7, no. 6 (2018): 44–53.

<sup>7</sup> Cynthia Grant and Azadeh Osanloo, "Understanding, Selecting, and Integrating a Theoretical Framework in Dissertation Research: Creating the Blueprint for Your 'House,'" *Administrative Issues Journal* 4, no. 2 (2014): 4.

### Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

According to Liu and Guo, CDA in linguistic research intends to unpack the interdependence of various aspects of society such as language, ideology, and power relations.<sup>8</sup> Blommaert and Bulcaen proffer that CDA indicates that discourse is a societal power object that is not transparent, which constitutes social aspects and conditions.<sup>9</sup> They further specify that the purpose of CDA is to bring the opaque power dynamics of society into visibility. The communication of toponymy and CDA is recommended by Giraut and Houssay-Holzschuch, who found that the critical analysis of place names and place naming in Toponymy discloses a connection between knowledge and power.<sup>10</sup> In this manner, the chosen place name indicates some knowledge of the place, and it also reflects a certain power relationship that is sustained and maintains itself through its use within the location itself.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Giraut and Houssay-Holzschuch opine that the naming of places is indicative of how power controls territories and that the process itself maintains that regulator.<sup>12</sup> The significance and relevance of CDA in this study lie within the lines of power and dominance in society. From an onomastic perspective, it can be articulated that some names that have been assigned to geographical features reflect power dynamics, patriarchy, toxic masculinity and feminism.

In this article, CDA was instrumental, as it enabled the authors to critically assess, analyse and explore toponyms and their meanings. In essence, Liu and Guo postulate that CDA in linguistic research intends to unpack the interdependence of various aspects of society such as language, ideology, and power.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, this theory provided a platform for marginalised societies to express their interpretations of the relationship between gender-derogatory toponyms and their perceived meanings within speech communities.

### Feminism Theory

According to Wang, from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the first wave of feminism emerged, with the goal of “establishing the legal policy that women have equal rights”, and that they are human beings and cannot be treated like property.<sup>14</sup> Gender inequality was severely inveterate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with men in superior and dominant positions while women occupied inferior and submissive places as part of social customs at the time. Feminist literature often foregrounds women’s political rights and emphasises equality between men and women, despite there being biological differences between these genders.

The fundamental belief behind feminist theory is that from the beginning of human civilisation, women were assigned a secondary status by masculine-dominated social discourse and Western philosophical tradition. The history of every civilisation shows that women have always been subordinated to a position with little to no means to re-claim their unique identity unless and until they re-visit the history, explore it and finally re-establish it through their own experiences and insights. To explore their own unique identity, women have had to define themselves against the male-informed ideals and beliefs that are passed down from generation to generation. These beliefs have produced dominant systems by creating female subjects who are conditioned to accept the values of the system.<sup>15</sup> This framework is quite relevant to the article, which sought to restore the identity and dignity of women through language and the assignment of toponyms. The framework can empower women to partake in the naming or renaming process of places and thus ensure that women are not derogated through toponyms. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is quite clear that all South African citizens are equal, and as such, none should be discriminated against or repressed in any form, including based on gender.<sup>16</sup> The application of this theory to language, naming and or renaming might aid in restoring the identity and dignity of women.

<sup>8</sup> Ke Liu and Fang Guo, “A Review on Critical Discourse Analysis,” *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 6, no. 5 (2016): 1076.

<sup>9</sup> Jan Blommaert and Chris Bulcaen, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 29, no. 1 (2000): 447–66.

<sup>10</sup> Frédéric Giraut and Myriam Houssay-Holzschuch, “Place Naming as Dispositif: Toward a Theoretical Framework,” *Geopolitics* 21, no. 1 (2016): 1–21.

<sup>11</sup> Giraut and Houssay-Holzschuch, “Place Naming as Dispositif: Toward a Theoretical Framework.”

<sup>12</sup> Giraut and Houssay-Holzschuch, “Place Naming as Dispositif: Toward a Theoretical Framework.”

<sup>13</sup> Liu and Guo, “A Review on Critical Discourse Analysis”; Blommaert and Bulcaen, “Critical Discourse Analysis.”

<sup>14</sup> Y. Wang, “Co-Designing with Older Adults for Voice Assistive Technology” (The Ohio State University, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> Javeed Ahmad Raina, “Feminism: An Overview,” *International Journal of Research* 4, no. 13 (2017): 3372–76.

<sup>16</sup> Republic of South Africa (RSA), *The Constitution of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996)* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 1996).

The framework will empower both men and women to interrogate and disrupt the coloniality of naming and renaming, as far as gender is concerned.

### **Critical Toponymic Theory (CTT)**

The emerging field of “critical toponymic studies” differed significantly from previous scholarship on place and street names in three major ways. First, it was articulated at the intersection of cultural geography and political sociology, and it was distinguished by interdisciplinary research rather than traditional linguistic analyses. Second, the new field was conceptually infused with social theory, as opposed to the theoretical descriptivism that characterised traditional linguistic approaches to the scholarship on street names. Third, scholars who adhere to the tenets of critical toponymic research have proven to be acutely aware of issues of power, hegemony, dominance, and inequalities inscribed onto space through place-naming.<sup>17</sup>

Toponymy has experienced a critical turn as geographers have moved beyond the traditional focus on etymology and taxonomy to interpreting toponyms within their broader socio-political context, and especially the role they play as ‘symbols of memory or socio-political ideology’.<sup>18</sup> Critical toponymies have expanded to include its contested cultural politics, political economy, and the affective dimensions of naming and renaming. The critical turn so far, is not notable in Chinese studies of place naming, although a few studies (mostly in Chinese) have paid attention to the power relations, cultural memories, and commercialisation of place renaming.<sup>19</sup>

The researchers are aware of the political power dynamics both at a national and local level, with the latter often infused with the patriarchal dynamics, as was the case in some rural areas where the study was conducted. This framework enabled the authors to navigate these different power dynamics and thus ensure that justice and fair representation are achieved in proposing the replacement of gender-derogatory toponyms to combat gender inequalities in the study areas.

### **Socio-onomastic Theory**

Socio-onomastics, which is a subset of the larger field of onomastics, is the study of names through a sociolinguistic lens. Through techniques that highlight the social, cultural, and situational factors that influence name usage, socio-onomastics “examines the use and variety of names.”<sup>20</sup> In a study of socio-onomastic traits in Basotho racehorse names, Khotso used Socio-onomastics as a framework to explore each name’s originality, history, and cultural insights, as well as any linguistic traits that each name revealed.<sup>21</sup>

Babane and Chauke used the Socio-onomastic theory to examine dog names in the Xitsonga community, where dog names are used to communicate social problems in society.<sup>22</sup> The authors further suggested that dog naming should continue as it is a means through which socially unacceptable behaviour can be reprimanded. The Socio-onomastic theory enabled the present authors to investigate the use of gender-derogatory toponyms and the impact thereof on societal relations.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The concept of ‘onomastics’ as a branch of sociolinguistics**

In his study of paradigmatic types of onomastic within the Czechoslovak (Czech and Slovak) languages, Odaloš explains that onomastic is the study of proper names. Machaba in Rakgogo and Zungu define

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<sup>17</sup> Mihai S Rusu, “Street Naming Practices: A Systematic Review of Urban Toponymic Scholarship,” *Onoma Journal of the International Council of Onomastic Sciences* 56 (2021): 269–92.

<sup>18</sup> Reuben Rose-Redwood, Derek Alderman, and Maoz Azaryahu, “Contemporary Issues and Future Horizons of Critical Urban Toponymy,” in *The Political Life of Urban Streetscapes* (Routledge, 2017), 309–19; Melissa Wangui Wanjiru and Kosuke Matsubara, “Street Toponymy and the Decolonisation of the Urban Landscape in Post-Colonial Nairobi,” *Journal of Cultural Geography* 34, no. 1 (2017): 3.

<sup>19</sup> Xiaomei Ji et al., “Review and Prospect of Toponymy Research since the 1980s,” *Progress in Geography* 35, no. 7 (2016): 910–19.

<sup>20</sup> Terhi Ainiala and J A Östman, “Socio-Onomastics and Pragmatics,” *Gender and Methodology in the Ancient Near East, Barcino Monographica Orientalia* 10 (2018).

<sup>21</sup> Palesa Khotso, “Socio-Onomastic Traits in Basotho Racehorse Names,” *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation* 2, no. 4 (2019): 137–49.

<sup>22</sup> Morris T Babane and Mkhacani T Chauke, “The Sociocultural Aspects of Xitsonga Dog Names,” *Nomina Africana: Journal of African Onomastics* 31, no. 1 (2017): 59–67.

onomastics as a branch of sociolinguistics that goes beyond the study of linguistic features but also looks at the sociocultural and psychological factors that influence the name given to an entity.<sup>23</sup>

Ainiala, Saarelma and Sjöblom define onomastics as a branch of linguistics that studies proper nouns and can be classified into various groups, such as the study of place names (toponymy), the study of personal names-anthroponyms (first names, surnames, family names, character names, praise names and names nicknames), zoonyms and topographical objects.<sup>24</sup>

In the article, the authors assert that naming and renaming practices occur within a societal context. Sociolinguistics, which focuses on the interplay between language and society, examines how language is used for communication within a community. Consequently, renaming cannot be considered independently of societal perspectives and interpretations of the names being assigned. The article explored the presence and implications of gender-derogatory toponyms in South African geographical features.

### **The significance of naming and renaming in an African context**

Mandende believes that African societies employ proper names to reflect the cultural values and traditions of their daily lives.<sup>25</sup> In African societies, names were employed as a means of preserving major events before people could read and write, and they were part of the oral tradition, making them an inherent part of every cultural system. Against this backdrop, it is clear that the significance of naming cannot be overstated or taken for granted in an African setting. It should be noted that this is why the matter under consideration has always been a source of political and onomastic conflicts caused by a lack of openness when naming places in Section 6 (1) of the South African Constitution.<sup>26</sup>

Rakgogo postulates that although the renaming process can occasionally be hijacked and exploited to fit political objectives with the ultimate goal of expanding the supremacy of a specific group, the naming of entities in an African environment is still a very fascinating and interesting topic.<sup>27</sup> The renaming of places is mostly used to correct the previous injustices or wrongs that were perpetrated during the original naming of those places. The case in point is the renaming of towns post the democratic dispensation in South Africa to correct the apartheid injustices and errors or omissions to recognise other denominations. Various reasons can influence the renaming of toponyms:

#### ***Naming as an act of control, political power and influence***

The researchers observed that during the colonial regime (prior to the democratic rule), significant toponyms were often chosen to commemorate and showcase the prevailing political power. Major cities were named using the dominant language of the era. As Mokgokong reports, even the names of homelands reflected this pattern.<sup>28</sup> This practice not only reinforced the political dominance but also marginalised indigenous languages and cultures, embedding a legacy of linguistic and cultural hegemony that continues to affect contemporary society.

#### ***Naming as an act of identification***

One of the major reasons for renaming places as observed by the researchers is the residents' identification of that place. The language a person speaks or the place that they are from generally forms the identity of that person. Suffice it to say that people generally identify with the place that they are from either by birth or upbringing. The naming of places then creates and grants confidence to the people residing in those places. For instance, a place, such as Soshanguve, a Tshwane township, is named thus to demonstrate the different cultural people who live in that place.

<sup>23</sup> Mbali Aldromeda Machaba, "Naming, Identity and the African Renaissance [Sic] in a South African Context" (2004); Tebogo Jacob Rakgogo and Evangeline B Zungu, "The Onomastic Possibility of Renaming the Sepedi and Sesotho Sa Leboa (Northern Sotho) Language Names to Restore Peace, Dignity and Solidarity," *Literator (Potchefstroom. Online)* 42, no. 1 (2021): 1–14.

<sup>24</sup> Kirsi Sjöblom et al., "Training in 21st Century Working Life Skills: How to Support Productivity and Well-Being in Multi-Locational Knowledge Work," *Creative Education* 10, no. 10 (2019): 2283–2309, <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2019.1010164>.

<sup>25</sup> Itani Peter Mandende, "A Study of Tshivenda Personal Names" (University of South Africa, 2009), 1.

<sup>26</sup> Republic of South Africa (RSA), *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa No. 108 of 1996*.

<sup>27</sup> Tebogo Jacob Rakgogo, "Investigating the Onomastic Principles of Naming an Official Language: The Case of the Sepedi and Sesotho Sa Leboa (Northern Sotho) Language Names" (University of the Witwatersrand, 2019).

<sup>28</sup> S. R. Mokgokong, "Knowing and Understanding the World through Naming: A Case of the Capricorn District" (University of Limpopo, 2004).

### ***Naming as an act of de-colonisation***

Decolonisation gained prominence during the apartheid era, a period marked by systemic oppression. This oppression was manifested through the imposition of various elements, including toponyms, that did not reflect the identities of the actual residents. Gender-derogatory toponyms, in particular, continue to colonise current residents, perpetuating stigma and negative connotations against them. As a result, these toponyms reinforce a legacy of marginalisation and hinder efforts towards achieving a more inclusive and respectful societal landscape.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The article strictly adopted the qualitative research strategy as the most effective and appropriate way to reveal the research problem. By using the qualitative technique of inquiry, the study sought to illuminate the social links and relationships that may exist given the topic under consideration. This study employed a qualitative research approach to gain insights into the onomastic need to replace gender-derogatory toponyms.

To elicit gender-derogatory names in South Africa, a crowd-sourcing methodology was adopted. Crowd-sourcing methodology is a data collection methodology that is used to get data or information from the crowd, either through the internet or otherwise. This methodology is used within the research world. Niu and Silva articulate that crowd-sourced data are widely used in urban research studies.<sup>29</sup> For this study, current students at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), colleagues within the corporate sector and ordinary members of societies were requested to provide toponyms with gender-derogatory features or those that they deemed derogatory. The elicited data were compiled and verified to confirm their gender-derogatory nature and those that were not gender-derogatory were removed from the list. The filtered list was verified to ascertain if the toponyms indeed existed and were not fabricated or imagined. This was done by using online tools such as Google Maps and other online geographical tools such as Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates to ascertain the existence of such toponyms. Those that were validated were captured in the form of screen shorts and added to the final list of gender-derogatory toponyms.

### **Data analysis**

For this article, different documentation such as policies and legislations were reviewed and analysed to solicit insights for the study. Content analysis was also used to find patterns in texts and the patterns were categorised into words, concepts, and themes. Lastly, for easy analysis and discussion, the following theories: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Critical Toponymic, Socio-onomastic and Feminism were also used to help in analysing and discussing the collected toponyms.

### **PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The article sought to determine how gender-derogatory toponyms could be addressed to ensure an inoffensive naming and renaming of places in South Africa. Different types of toponyms that were considered gender-derogatory were collected using the content analysis methodology. The collected toponyms were further grouped into two categories so that they could be easily discussed and analysed thematically, logically, and sequentially.

#### **First Category: Toponyms Associated To Private Parts**

This section focuses on toponyms that have associative meanings related to human private parts. Five such toponyms were identified and are discussed below:

##### **1. *Mathangetshitshi* ‘thighs of a virgin’**

This toponym, *Mathangetshitshi*, is the name of a public secondary High School located in Mahashini. The school falls within the Zululand District Municipality of KwaZulu-Natal Province. In this article, it is submitted that *Mathangetshitshi* is an isiZulu word that means ‘thighs of a virgin’. One of the objectives of the article under attention was to explore how society resonates with toponyms that are associated with

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<sup>29</sup> Haifeng Niu and Elisabete A Silva, “Crowdsourced Data Mining for Urban Activity: Review of Data Sources, Applications, and Methods,” *Journal of Urban Planning and Development* 146, no. 2 (2020): 04020007.

toxic masculinity and feminism. The authors, therefore, submit that the toponym that has been given to this high school is quite problematic. The reason for this postulation is that this toponym can bring and have some negative connotations in a school environment and community surrounding the school.

In support of the foregoing view, the feminism theory advocates gender equality and women's rights. In alignment with this theory, it can be argued that there is no good resonance between the name of the high school and the theory that has been used to guide this article. The researchers further argue that in a country (i.e. South Africa) that can be categorised by having a high rate of GBV, this kind of a toponym has the potential to perpetuate GBV in a school environment. Similarly, CDA resonates with the Feminism Theory in that they both advocate for the marginalised. In addition, issues of language, gender, status, dominance, politics, power dynamics, etc., are noticeable in the aforementioned toponym. Hence, the study submits that the toponym *Mathangetshitshi* is disputed by the two theories for its characterisation of girls and ultimately women.

*Mathangetshitshi* is considered inappropriate for transformation and decolonisation efforts in South Africa due to its negative connotations and demeaning nature towards female staff and learners associated with the school. Therefore, as part of a study or initiative focused on renaming places for transformation purposes, it is recommended that *Mathangetshitshi* be replaced with something more appropriate and respectful. This aligns with the efforts to promote the spirit of inclusivity, respect, and sensitivity in naming practices within the South African context.

CTT examines the socio-political significance of place names and their role in shaping power dynamics, identity, and representation within society. It explores how naming practices reflect and perpetuate historical inequalities, colonial legacies, and cultural biases. Gender-offensive names, such as those that are demeaning or derogatory towards women, are an example of how toponyms can reinforce gender stereotypes and contribute to the marginalisation and discrimination of certain groups.

Within the framework of CTT, gender-offensive names such as *Mathangetshitshi* are seen as manifestations of broader power structures and ideologies that prioritise one gender over another. These names often reflect historical attitudes towards women, which can be rooted in patriarchal norms and discriminatory practices. By analysing and critiquing such names through a critical toponymic lens, scholars and activists aim to raise awareness about how language and naming perpetuate gender inequality and contribute to the erasure of women's experiences and contributions to society.

In the context of renaming initiatives driven by CTT, addressing gender-offensive names is essential for promoting gender equity, inclusivity, and respect within public spaces. Renaming these places is not only about replacing offensive terms with more neutral or positive ones but also about challenging the underlying power dynamics and biases that gave rise to these names in the first place. It involves recognising and valuing the diverse experiences and identities of all individuals, regardless of gender, and ensuring that place names reflect and honour this diversity.

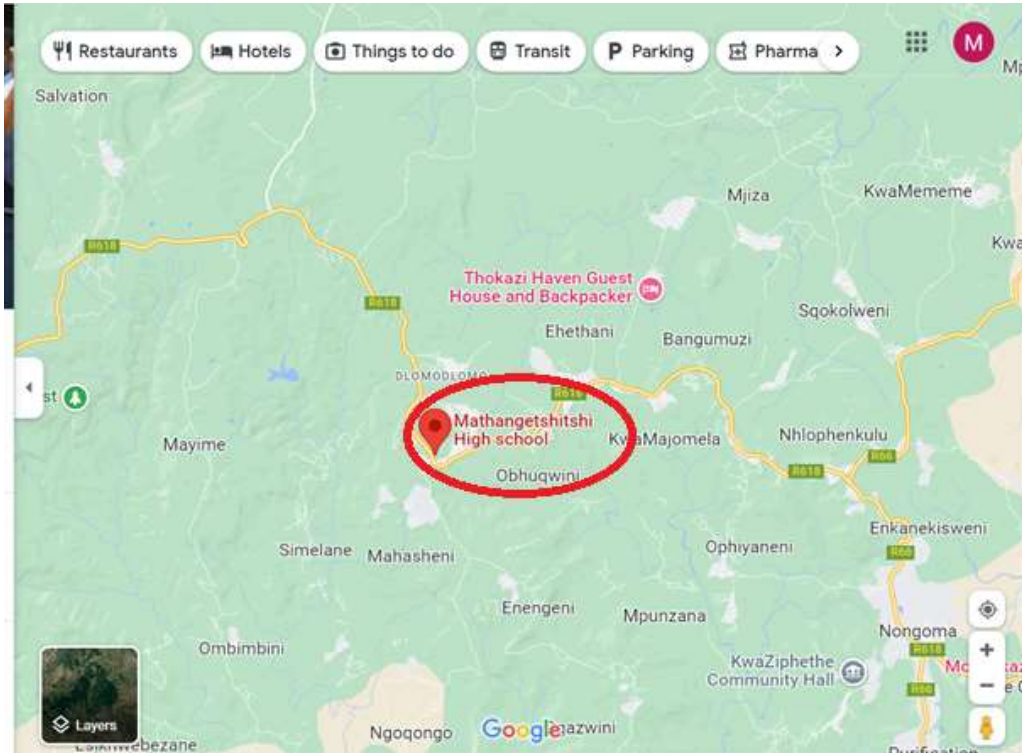


Figure 1: Mathangetshitshi High School

**2. Ingquza Local Municipality “Woman’s private part”**

Ingquza is the name of the Local Municipality in the Eastern Cape Province that encompasses the Lusikisiki and Flagstaff areas. The word “Ingquza” is an isiXhosa word that means a woman’s private parts. This municipality was named after the local mountain, which is a heritage site. The word is problematic as it derogates and is demeaning to women.

This naming technique is not supported by CDA, Feminism, CTT, and Socio-onomastic theories, as the name does not promote Africanism and gender equality. This toponym has a negative connotation, especially to women in general and those who reside in those areas. In light of the historical background of South Africa, where gender oppression was practised without impunity and where the country’s Constitution regards all citizens as equal and not oppressed by another, this toponym is extremely problematic. While the historical element of the place is acknowledged, its naming is nonetheless derogatory to women. Such toponyms should not be allowed, as they do not promote the dignity of women. Therefore, the toponym should be replaced with one that has a positive connotation.



Figure 2: Ingquza as a residential place

**3. Esinqeni ‘at the buttocks’**

Esinqeni is a public and rural primary school that is managed by the Department of Education in the KwaZulu-Natal Province. This school is situated in the Uphongolo Local Municipality under the Zululand District Municipality. Esinqeni is an isiZulu word that means “at the buttocks”. In the context of this study, this refers to round fleshy parts of the human body that form the bottom. This naming is extremely problematic because it dehumanises the school populace and ultimately insults the schooling community.



The language spoken by any person and the area in which a person was born, or grew up, or the schools they attend, form part of that person’s identity and heritage. However, it is morally incorrect and inappropriate to associate a person’s identity with dehumanising and derogative toponyms. Learners at a school that is identified with a derogatory name are likely to be stigmatised throughout their growth, primarily by being referred to as children from “the buttocks” or forever associated with being at the “buttocks”. This toponym has a negative connotation and is thus deemed problematic.

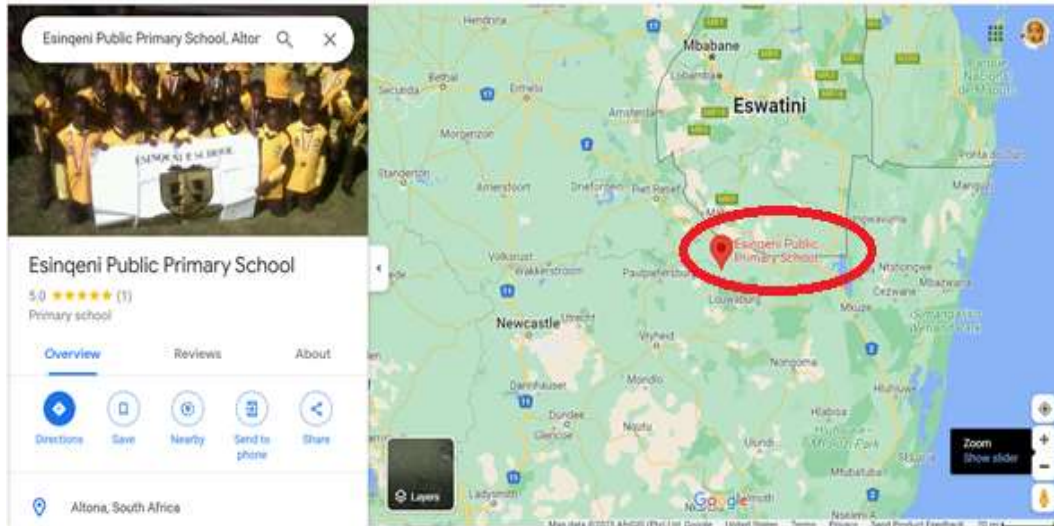


Figure 3: Esinqeni Primary School

**4. eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality ‘testicle of a bull’**

eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality is situated in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. This municipality encompasses cities and towns such as Durban, Clermont, Berea, etc., and is the third largest municipality in the country. The word ‘eThekweni’ is an isiZulu word that means “testicle of a bull” in English. The place was named thus because of the shape of a Durban Bay that ‘looked’ like this organ.

In South Africa, patriarchy has always played a huge role in naming places and women were never part of that process. The naming of this huge and popular metropolitan after the male organ is a demonstration of such a process and does not demonstrate fairness and a sense of belonging for women in that region. One may argue that women do not feel comfortable with “living” in a place called by a male organ. This toponym is deemed problematic because of its reference to a male organ, this will have a negative connotation to women when their identity is linked to a “male organ”. The name does not promote Africanism and a sense of balance and is insensitive to the female gender. Thus, the toponym should be replaced with one that represents the different gender groups and drives a positive connotation to the residents.

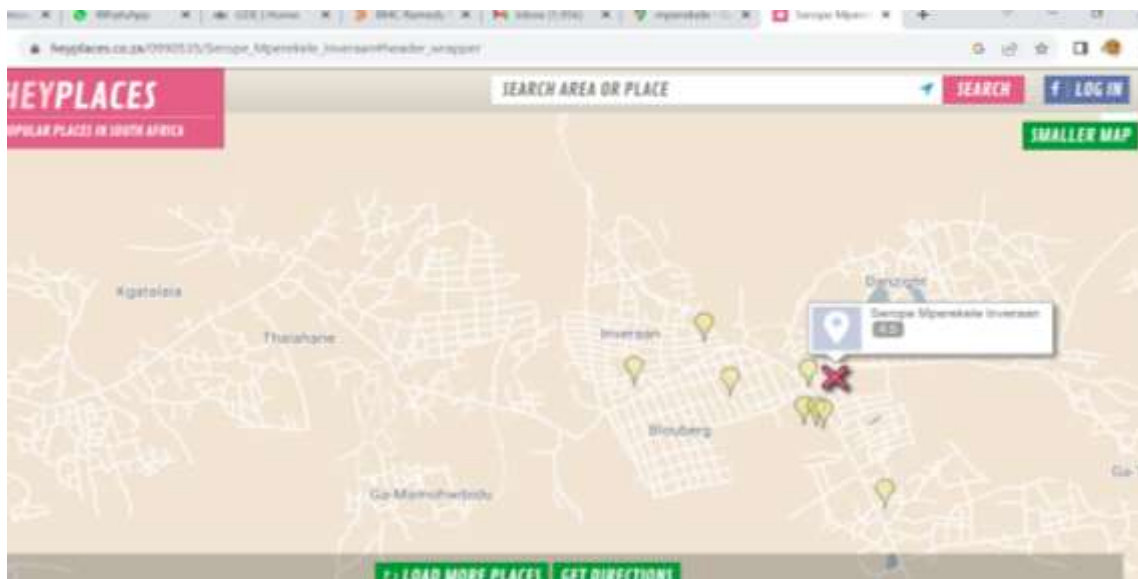


Figure 4: eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality

**5. Serope Mpererekele ‘thigh work for me’**

The significance of this location always elicits laughter and giggles, as well as humiliation among newcomers. *Serope Mpererekele* is a Sotho (Sepedi, Setswana and Sesotho) word that refers to “a situation

in which a person, usually a woman, uses her sexual prowess to get a leg up, literally and metaphorically”. *Serope Mperekele* literally means “thigh work for me” or “thigh do my bidding”. It is derogatory and insinuates that women from the area may use their “thighs” to attain anything they desire and thus depicts girls and women as sexually promiscuous. According to Feminist Theory, this toponym is considered derogatory in every respect, as it conveys a negative and misleading connotation of women’s identities. The toponym undermines insinuates that women’s successes are solely attainable through the commodification, objectification, exploitation and or sexualisation of their bodies. This perpetuates harmful stereotypes and diminishes these women’s labour in society. Renaming this place is essential to eliminate its negative implications and to uphold the dignity and respect of the women from this region. This change would not only reflect a commitment to gender equality but also contribute to a more inclusive and respectful societal narrative.



**Figure 5: Serope Mperekele**

**Second Category: Toponyms Associated To Violence**

This category focuses on toponyms that have associative meanings related to human violence. Five such toponyms have been identified and are discussed as follows:

***Mgwazeni Secondary School ‘stab him’***

Mgwazeni Secondary School is a public school in the **Mtubatuba** area, within the due restriction of Hlabisa Local Municipality under the Umkhanyakude District Municipality in the KwaZulu-Natal Province. *Mgwazeni* is an isiZulu word that means “stab him/her” in English. In terms of meaning, the toponym may encourage or promote violence within the school. According to the South African Police Service (SAPS), Crime Statistics report for Quarter 1 (April 2023 – June 2023); 55 rape cases and 7 murders were committed and reported to have occurred within the vicinity of schools in South Africa. The same SAPS crime Statistics further highlighted that the tool or weapon used to conduct these horrendous crimes was a sharp object like a knife. Schools are meant to be places of teaching and learning, not places that encourage or perpetuate any form of violence.

Socio-onomastics and CDA dispute the use of this toponym as schools are meant to play a positive role in shaping young minds, play a critical role in nation-building, and should never be seen to be perpetuating nor encouraging children to fight or partake in any form of violence. This toponym has the potential to perpetuate negative connotations. The Department of Basic Education has legislative rights to intervene and change the naming and or renaming of public schools. The South African Geographical Names Council (SAGNC) can also be involved for further guidance.

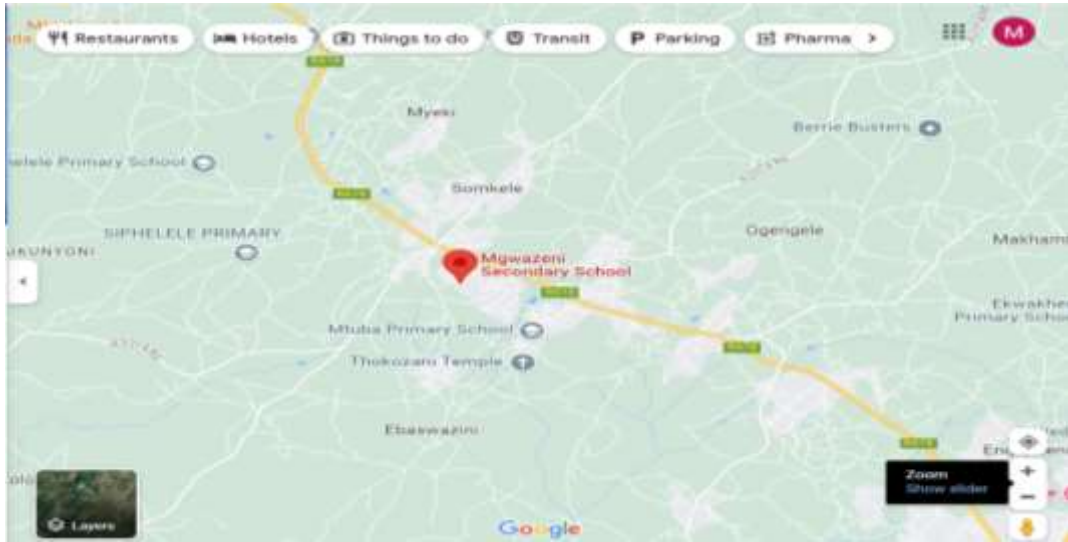


Figure 6: Mgwazeni Secondary School

## 2. Khalambazo ‘crying axe’

*Khalambazo* is a section in Mamelodi, as depicted in the below “Property 24 advert”, which means “Crying Axe”. It is a township that is located on the east side of the Pretoria Central Business District (CBD) in Gauteng Province. *Khalambazo* was named based on the criminal activities, mainly murderous ones that were occurring many years back. The violent activities in this area were mainly those of men demonstrating their masculinity either to fellow men who were weaker than them or to the women in the area. This trend of violent activities was such a norm that people living in the area were not bothered by the violence meted out against women in the area. The name given to this section of Mamelodi does not resonate very well with the study.

According to the theory of Socio-onomastics, names are used to communicate or to send a particular message, especially in African culture(s). Therefore, *Khalambazo* neither sends nor communicates a positive message. CDA and Feminism Theories advocate the quality and protection of women’s rights as equals to men’s rights to safety. This notion supports the view expressed above that this name has negative connotations in society.

The toponym ‘*Khalambazo*’ may be problematic, especially for young boys and girls growing up in the area as they might develop violent attributes or behaviours. In addition, this name may also have a negative connotation and can further perpetuate GBV, which is currently high within the South African context.

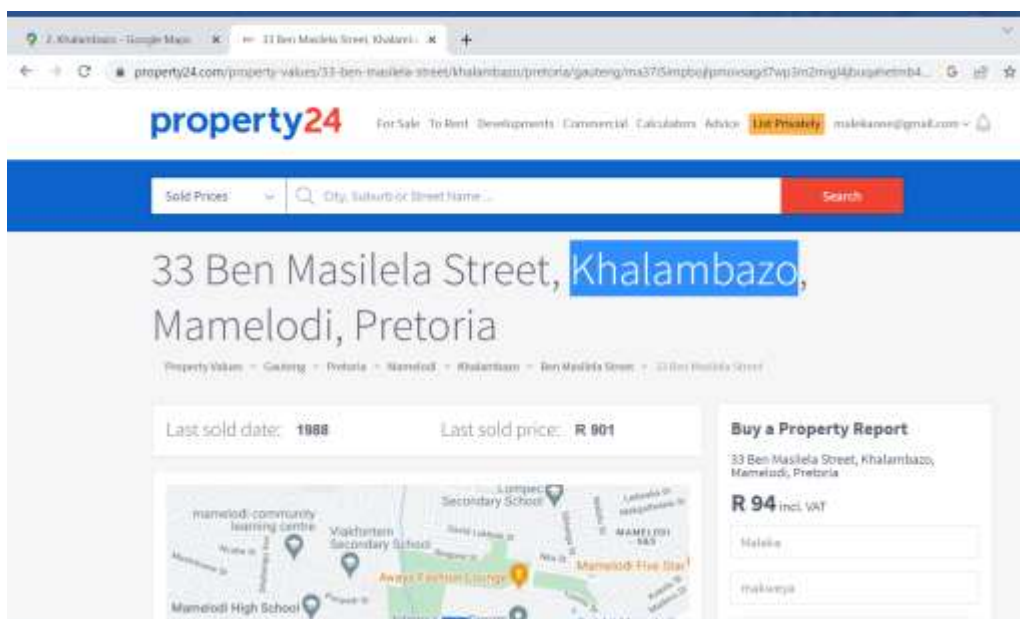
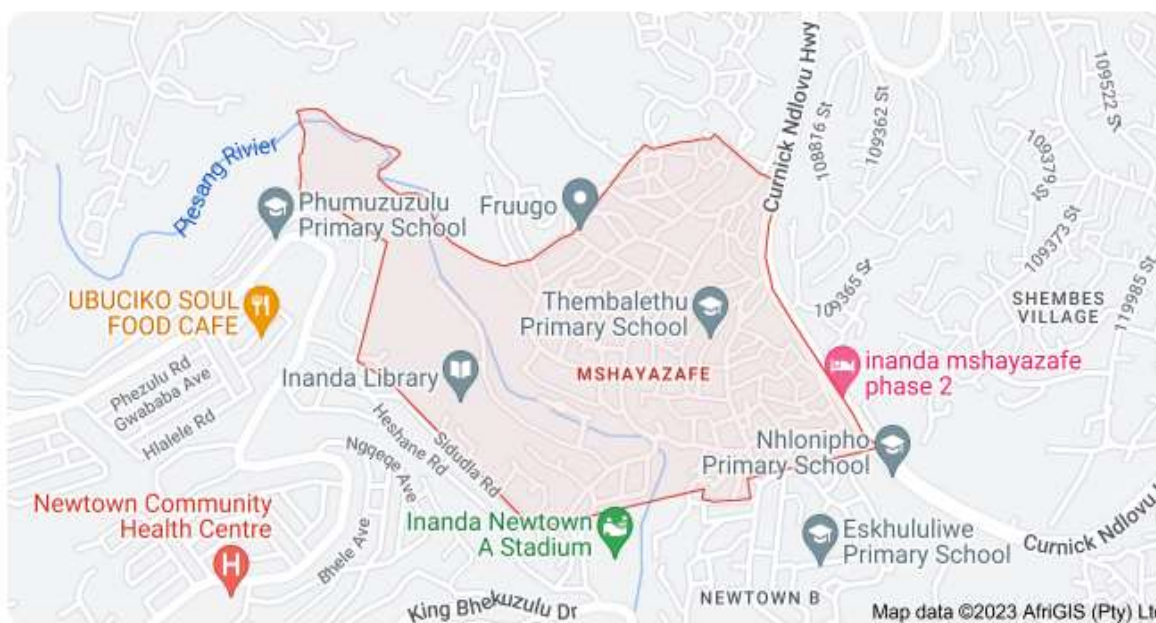


Figure 7: Khalambazo Residential Area

### 3. *Mshayazafe* “Beat until death”

*Mshayazafe* is a rural area in KwaZulu-Natal, within the eThekweni District Municipality near the suburb of Inanda as depicted in the map below. *Mshayazafe* means “Beat a person until they die”. *Mshayazafe* refers to a situation where people fight or engage in a physical altercation. It encourages the other person to hit the other until they die. This naming is extremely problematic, especially within the Southern African context where the rate of murder, especially GBV, is so high. This naming has a negative connotation, and it is supported by the CDA and Feminism Theory, which advocates equality and the stoppage of the oppression of women in society. In the South African context, toxic masculinity cannot be ignored. Using this toponym can perpetuate GBV against women in particular and people in general.

Another critical argument that comes to the fore is the relationship between *Mshayazafe* as a toponym and its meaning in society. It can be reasoned that the name has some negative connotations, which are quite problematic, especially when taking into consideration the high rate of crime statistics, particularly, on murder and attempted murder. In terms of this study, this kind of toponym may have serious negative implications on the character formation of a boy and girl child growing up in the area. The argument is that children will grow up to normalise violence because of the toponym given to their area. This toponym should be renamed so that the mind of a young boy, girl, or individual can be positively influenced.



**Figure 8: *Mshayazafe* Residential Area**

### 4. *Tilongo* ‘prison’

*Tilongo* Primary School is a rural public school that is located in the village of Mpangisa, within the Mkhambathini Local Municipality under the administration of the Umgungundlovu District Municipality of KwaZulu-Natal Province. In terms of meaning, *Tilongo* is an isiZulu word that means “prison”. A prison is a location that is meant for people who are deemed unsuitable to inhabit communities due to their illegal activities. A school can never be classified as a place that is inhabited by such people or one that is identified as a habitation of prisoners.

The Socio-onomastic theory deems the term prison as a name for a school as inappropriate. In this study, prison as a toponym is quite problematic since it bears negative connotations within a school environment. Renaming authorities should both discourage and replace these types of names for schools. The literature consulted in this study argued that so far, the attention has been on the toponyms associated with the apartheid regime. However, the current study submits that it is high time the same attention be given to the language and meaning of toponyms that are derogatory.

A school represents a beacon of hope and a means out of poverty for a majority of the people living in this area. As such, a toponym that inspires hope should be used to identify this school to inspire the

young minds from the area. There is a need to consult SAGNC to replace ‘prison’ with a more positive toponym.



Figure 9: Tilongo Primary School

### 5. Tlhalampya “kick or throw a dog out”

Tlhalampya refers to the men who moved in with their bond-holding female companions. These males are subsequently persuaded to purchase furniture and other household essentials; however, they are thrown out like dogs upon finishing the payment for the items. Tlhalampya basically means ‘to kick out’ or ‘throw a dog out’. This place is in Atteridgeville, West of Pretoria CBD in Gauteng Province.

The name of this area is problematic as CDA, Feminism and Afrocentricity regard them as dissuading social cohesion. The theories advocate the equality of women and men in society. The toponym negative connotes women from the area as inhospitable and ungrateful. The name portrays women from the area as “parasites” who use men rather than promote independence. Women can prosper in their own right, but this toponym does not recognise this fact.

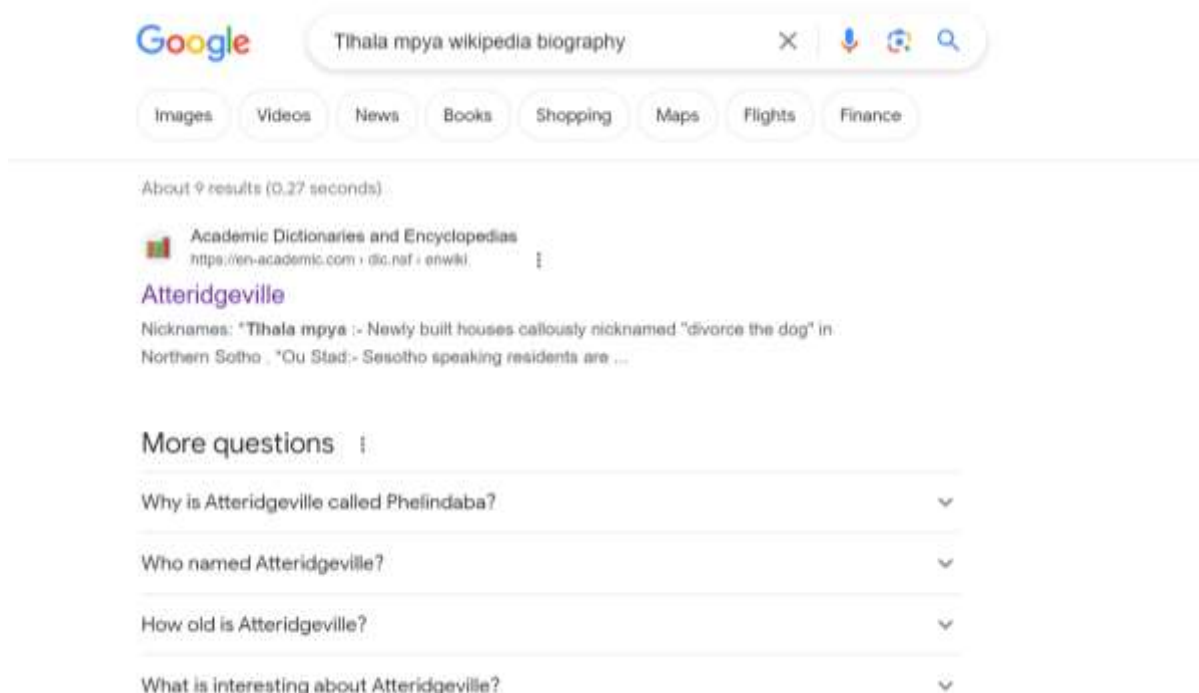


Figure 10: Tlhalampya: Atteridgeville

### **Qualitative variables emerging from the findings**

The discussion of the toponyms analysed in the first and second categories was dominated by the following five qualitative themes.

#### **Qualitative Theme One: Interface between renaming and transformation agenda**

From the names presented above, it is quite evident that there is a dire need to promptly rename places whose names are derogatory or do not promote Africanism. Moreover, transformation through renaming should not only focus on replacing “apartheid” toponyms or street names but also toponyms of any kind should be changed to represent the identity dynamics of societies. The SAGNC should play an active and strict role in the naming and renaming of toponyms in rural areas. Most of the toponyms identified in this study were found in black rural areas.

#### **Qualitative Theme Two: Intersection between naming and identity construction**

Toponyms play an important role in the identity of the people from those areas and certainly play a huge role in the construction of the girl and boy identity. Toponyms play a positive role in the construction of an identity, in shaping a positive future and promoting a sense of belonging among residents of a given area. Toponyms are an integral and important symbol of societal identity. People’s future and identity are linked to where they come from, and as such, a toponym is a trait that remains attached to individuals’ identity for the rest of their lives. Therefore, toponyms should bring pride and a sense of belonging to the residents. Negative and insulting toponyms should be used to better influence a positive identity construction.

#### **Qualitative Theme Three: Toponyms and perpetuation of GBV**

Naming and renaming play a huge role in society, including articulating the identity of a people. Naming then is an essential socio-cultural tool for a people. Negative toponyms, especially those with nuances of toxic masculinity or GBV, are likely to influence societal ideology and behaviour. This is worth noting, considering that South Africa is currently experiencing a prevalence of GBV, and negative toponyms tend to characterise this phenomenon.

Toponyms, irrespective of whether they are positive or negative, can be linked to one’s identity and reputation for their lifetime. For instance, in expressing the identity linked to a toponym, a boy might act out the meaning of a toponym, even where it means violating women’s rights. Hence, this article advocates the assignment of positive and inspirational toponyms as opposed to negative ones. Such names might encourage both a positive ideological outlook and lifestyle among the youth and ultimately adults in society. In this way, the intersection between GBV and gender-derogatory toponyms, for instance, would be erased.

#### **Qualitative Theme Four: Renaming as an act of nation building**

Toponyms, like languages spoken by individuals, play a critical role in the identification of people residing in a given area. The current South African dispensation that came into power in 1994, has adopted the concept of nation-building and the ideology of building one country, one person made in the image of God. Hence, the current government strove to rename places that were not inclusive of black leaders. Schools play a positive role in building communities of people from different customs, cultures and backgrounds. Therefore, it is imperative that the names that are assigned to schools not only reflect diversity but also advocate social cohesion. The SAGNC must urgently see to it that negative toponyms are not assigned to schools.

#### **Qualitative Theme Five: Interrelatedness among renaming, language and political ideology**

The current renaming process in South Africa arguably focuses more on the language used to name an entity rather than its meaning. Toponyms are often linked to the languages spoken in certain areas or the identity of people’s local leadership. The article identifies that many gender-derogatory toponyms are found in African languages. It is concerning that, out of all the toponyms identified through content analysis, only one is in Afrikaans. Had the majority of these names recorded in the Afrikaans language, the outcome would have been different. This prevalence of African language toponyms cannot be

attributed to the previous undemocratic government. The article expresses concern that the renaming project has so far been directed primarily at Eurocentric names, without necessarily considering the meanings of the toponyms. Therefore, the article argues that renaming should not only align with political ideology and language but also focus on the meanings conveyed by the toponyms.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. An urgent need to address gender-derogatory toponyms**

Naming is a significant aspect of history and identity in the African context. Therefore, derogatory toponyms should not be standardised and must be rejected. Various stakeholders, particularly local residents, must advocate replacements of gender-derogatory toponyms to promote positive attributions of African identity. Residents whose areas have been assigned negative and stereotypic toponyms should issue a clarion call for the renaming of their residential areas.

### **2. Synergy and alignment between political power and transformation agenda**

The renaming of places should not only focus on political or apartheid-driven toponyms but also prodding the SAGNC and other role players to swiftly address the use of gender-derogatory toponyms in South Africa. Thus far, replacements of toponyms are notable in previously White and Coloured areas. In this article, more gender-derogatory toponyms emanated from African rural communities, showing that not much has been done by the SAGNC to transform the identities of these places, and subsequently of the people living therein.

### **3. Induction to communities on renaming and its significance**

The article argues that the people who are residents of places identified by gender-derogatory toponyms might not be aware of the significance of replacing these toponyms. In some cases, communities are not aware of the process to officially initiate the renaming process. Therefore, the study recommends that communities should be inducted on the significance and process of naming and renaming places. This induction can be done through community outreach programmes, media awareness campaigns, etc. Noteworthy, gender-derogatory toponyms were predominantly found in previously oppressed areas of South Africa compared to suburban residences. This discrepancy underscores the urgency with which toponyms in these areas must be replaced to reflect the dignity and identity of the residents. The use of gender-derogatory toponyms must be discontinued and replaced with names that honour and respect the communities they represent. Immediate action should be taken to rectify this issue, ensuring that all place names are inclusive and reflective of the true spirit and identity of the local population.

### **4. Involvement and co-option of academics in the SAGNC**

The article postulates that the role of the SAGNC is not only to “approve” the renaming of toponyms but also to contribute towards social upliftment by endorsing toponyms that ascribe dignity to the residents of the named and or renamed areas. In addition, the academic world must be involved or co-opted into the SAGNC to contribute intellectual perspectives to the naming and renaming discourse. Academics in fields such as history, onomastics and indigenous knowledge systems can be approached in this regard. This would capacitate the SAGNC with the academic knowledge, and the socio-analytical view required to undergird the assignment of toponyms. This will further improve the ideological engagements when adjudicating the renaming of toponyms and the social impact thereof.

### **5. Renaming should be based on ideology, not colour, race or language**

The study noted that many toponyms emanate from the language dynamics and history of each community. In some communities, toponyms reflect racial and political affiliations. Renaming these places should be viewed as an opportunity to positively influence the lives of community members and inspire hope in the youth. Therefore, renaming places should be based on ideology rather than race, language, or skin colour, primarily because thus far, the renaming process in South Africa has focused mainly on toponyms created by colonialists whereas toponyms recorded in African languages have hardly been considered for replacement or transformation.

## CONCLUSION

The article has highlighted various key findings on the injustices and gender derogations perpetuated by toponyms. The article also made recommendations on how to replace derogatory toponyms to redress this naming practice. Future research should focus on the dynamics associated with gender-derogatory toponyms. Furthermore, the posture of the SAGNC towards replacing gender-derogatory toponyms should be explored, and their strategy to address such toponyms should be interrogated within scholarly circles.

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