

‘Parakarungu chishovoonzi’: The Politics of Toponymy in the Chobe District, Botswana

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Abstract

This paper examines the etymologies and the historical and cultural significance of, and changes over time in toponyms or place names in the Chobe District in northern Botswana. Drawing largely on oral interviews, the paper reveals that the construction of toponyms in general, and the Chobe District in particular, speaks to local communities’ lived experiences and subsequent understanding and appreciation of the intricate interconnectedness between people, the ecology, natural landscapes, and the economy. It argues that besides being practical navigational tools in the people’s geo-locational system, toponyms are also tropes of significant historical contestations which have shaped communities’ socio-economic livelihoods and their spiritual wellbeing. As such, most toponyms also serve as repositories of historical events in and around the district, and cultural heritage which continue to be cherished by these riparian communities. Other than being denotative and connotative in function, toponyms are also contested spaces, resulting in toponymic warfare which can be confrontational or symbolic, where major ethnic groups want to leave their ethnonyms imprinted all over the country.

Keywords: toponyms; warfare; exorcism; co-existence; marginalization; Veekuhane; Chobe District

Introduction

Asked what ‘Parakarungu’ means on 20 September 2017, an informant animatedly asked back: ‘*Parakarungu chishovoonzi?*’, and perhaps noticing our bewilderment and therefore not expecting any answer from us, let alone a satisfactory one, he continued, ‘*ka heena Chiikuhane*’. Translated, his remarks are: ‘what language is Parakarungu; it is not Chiikuhane/Subiya’. Later in the interview, he made similar remarks with regard to other place names, ‘*Kachikau*’ and ‘*Barangwe*’. ‘Parakarungu’, ‘*Kachikau*’ and ‘*Barangwe*’ are official toponyms in the Chobe Enclave that consist of five villages of Mabele and Kavimba and Satau and Parakarungu on the north and west of Kachikau respectively, with Kachikau as the midpoint settlement. ‘*Barangwe*’, a cattle post-cum extension of Kachikau, lies about 15km south of the village. Although lying about 30km apart in oppositional locations, Parakarungu and Barangwe and their surroundings serve as the last human habitations on the south-westerly fringes of the wildlife-rich Chobe National Park. With the largest population and therefore the *de facto* headquarters of the Enclave, Kachikau is the gateway to either Savuti, Mababe and Maun (in the North West District) past Barangwe in a straight southerly direction or to the marshy flood plains surrounding Satau and Parakarungu in a westerly direction.

Our informant’s reaction raises two related points in critical name studies with which this paper is framed. First, that toponyms - their creation and subsequent designation to specific places/landscapes -are, while denotatively a navigational aid in the people’s complex geo-locational systems, also assume a decidedly symbolic significance as sites of enduring contestation that mirrors the prevailing socio-political conditions. Toponyms, therefore, engender identity politics, evident in among other things, the choice, pronunciation, and designation of names. This is because behind every toponym lies the name-givers who wield not only the power over the landscapes they name, but also the influence to create and

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designate such names and for the landscapes to remain under such labels. Thus, toponyms in the Chobe, linguistically and culturally reveal dynamic ethno-relations often eclipsed by the flora-fauna dominated tourism to the neglect of the extant social dynamics. At the linguistic level, our informant's remarks reveal a contest between languages, and Chiikuhane and other languages, with the consequence that the latter are responsible for the phono-morphological variations to some toponyms, Parakarungu, Kachikau, and Barangwe being cases in point. These transformations result not only in dislocating the toponyms from their language (*Kaheena Chiikuhane*), but also compromise their semantics and therefore divesting them of their linguistic and cultural significance.

Second, the contestation, read toponymic warfare, literally and symbolically, can lead to toponymic exorcism, where offensive names are expunged and replaced with those deemed neutral and less offensive. The case of *Ditimamodimo* ('those which do not give god/God) for Block-7 in Gaborone which was in 2018 found to be unpalatable partly for the alleged lack of consultation in its designation and was replaced by the less offensive *Peolwane* (swallow), is telling. Contestation, we contend is an enduring phenomenon, becoming intense at times and only to go into a lull at others, thus creating a semblance of toponymic co-existence. Toponymic co-existence has also been attempted through the use of two or more names for a particular place, for example Palla Road or Dinokwe, Village or Extension 15 (Otlhogile, 2020). No wonder in the case of the Chobe, some places carry two names, used interchangeably by different people depending on the prevailing circumstances ranging from officialdom to show of patriotism, nostalgia, praise, defiance and reinscribing the lost glory of toponyms.

A sequel to one on canoe names, titled 'What's in or not in a Name: The Untold Story of Canoe Naming among the Basubiya of the Chobe District in Botswana (Ndana, Gumbo & Chebanne, 2016)', and staying within the general area of onomastics, this preliminary survey seeks to explore broadly, human interaction with their surrounding landscapes, and specifically, how toponyms reflect human experience, and their politics in particular. As part of the people's imagination, names in all their manifestations, provide a window into a people's culture, and place names 'reflect the experience of the people who use them ... [and that] names are given intentionally, to impart a certain meaning' (Redding and Western 2010). The paper argues that while the toponyms retain the basic function of spatial orientation, the phonological and morphological transformations to the lexis, while obscuring meanings; also confirm the semantic dynamics of toponymy. They are, therefore, a site of social and cultural power struggles between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses resulting in what Jansen (2018), has appropriately called toponymic warfare and its corollary and desired toponymic overhauls and exorcism, and possible co-existence or marginalization.

Theoretical Framework

The study of place names, or onomastics is critical in cultural anthropology's analysis of ethnic communities' identity and existence as they situate their habitation and their geography of cultural operations (Batoma, 2006). It is, therefore, a truism that names serve two basic functions, denotative and connotative (Pongweni 1983, Koopman, 2005; Aldermann, 2008 and Jansen, 2018). In their denotational function, names identify and, therefore, discriminate or sort out things. Without this primary function, there would be chaos and disorder (Manatsha 2014 citing Alderman 2008). Names also have a connotative or symbolic function through which subtle and indirect meanings such as ideology and power dynamics are revealed. These two functions, Jansen (2018) rightly observes, tend to overlap and blur. Batoma (2006:1) explains this blurring by noting that 'In order for toponyms and ethnonyms to refer unambiguously many linguistic, pragmatic, socio-cultural and intercommunicative conditions must be met. In the case of African onomastics, the satisfaction of these conditions is sometimes hindered by many obstacles, some of which are due to the colonialism'.

Onomastics within which toponyms fall has received significant scholarly interest. Deriving from the Greek word *'onoma'*, which means *'name'*, onomastics is the study of processes of naming phenomena, while toponym, also of Greek origin *topos*, refers to *'place'*, hence *'place name'* (Masalha, 2015). The primary function of toponyms is a practical one, namely, to distinguish one landscape from the other. Like a compass, they provide spatial orientation as navigational tools in the people's interaction with their environment. For example, Kachikau has to be understood in terms of its spatial relation to other places and to facilitate discussions around such landscapes, with each of them known or valuable for certain existential significance. In addition to their navigational value, toponyms also take on complex and symbolic meanings. This is particularly so if we consider naming and the people involved not only in the creation of names, but also in deciding on what names to assign to specific landscapes and for how long those names remain in use. In their heterogeneity, these people command various levels of interests which are reflected in their choice of names.

According to Jansen (2018:1), *'the very act of naming conveys power over the...landscape which is named'* and for Yeoh (1996:299), *'the power of nomination is an integral part of the power possession'*. Jansen provides three categories of social actors/agents who wield the power of nomination and designation of toponyms: i) colonial/imperial forces; ii) local hegemonic regimes; and iii) marginalized and minority populations. Marked by their power differentials, creating and designating toponyms becomes a dynamic and contested undertaking leading to a range of responses from bloody confrontations to indifference, subtle and enduring resistance, acceptance and marginalization. As (Jansen 2018:1) contends, *'the choice to use one name over another makes a decisively political statement'*.

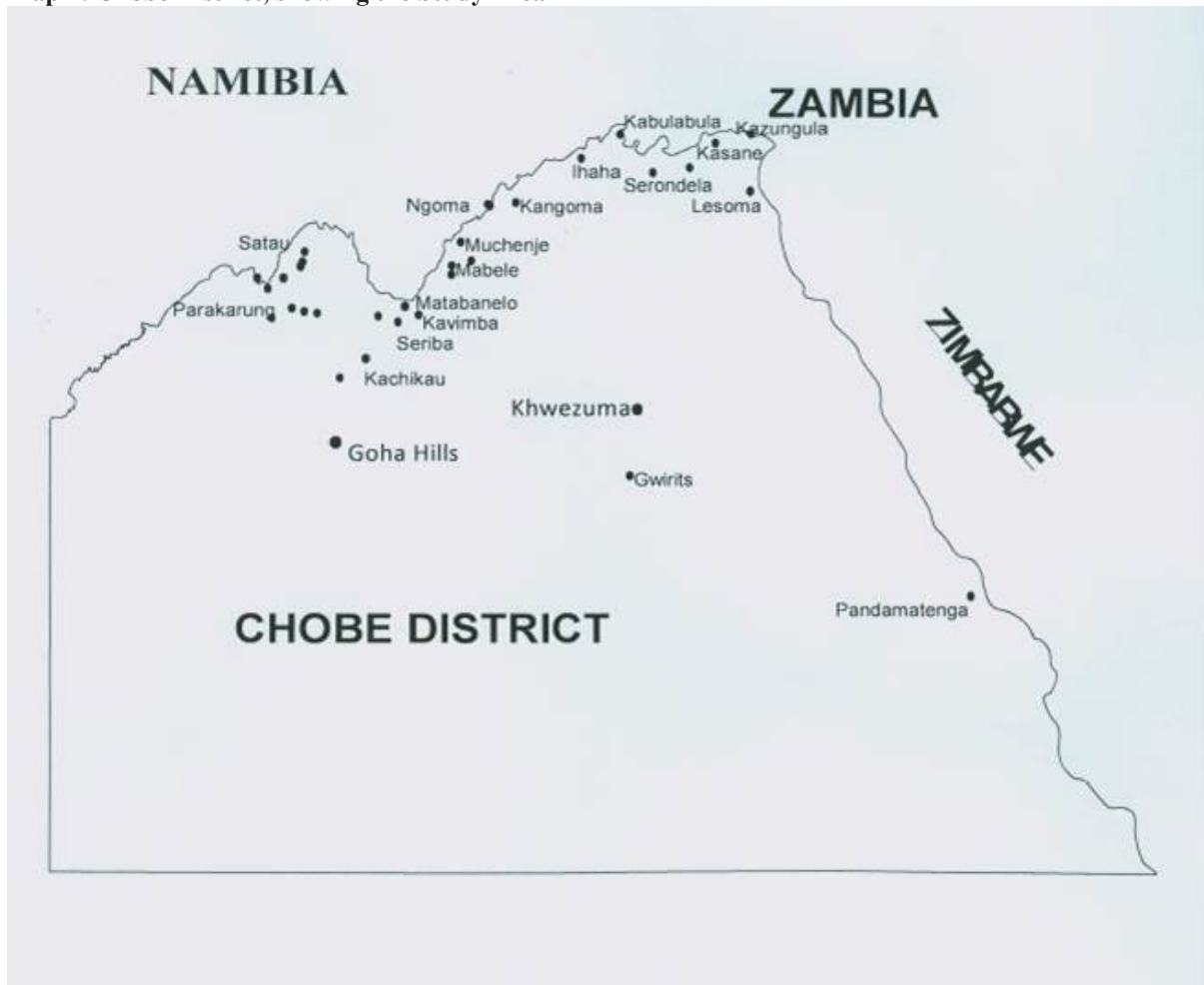
Methodologically, Tent (2015) provides two basic ways of conducting toponymic research. First, that research could focus on etymology, meaning and origins of toponyms. Second, toponymic study can examine regional toponyms to appreciate the underlying naming patterns. Obviously not mutually exclusive, these approaches coalesce in their fundamental mandate of revealing among other issues naming practices, regional distribution of toponyms, their language and their influence on property or boundaries (Tent 2015). With its exploratory approach, this paper benefits from Tent and will focus its analysis, not only on etymologies, semantics and taxonomy, but also reveal how such etymologies and language remain embedded in the social contestation of which the toponyms are only partial evidence.

Study Area

The Chobe District, affectionately known as *Iteenge* to its Subiya inhabitants, is situated in north-western Botswana and occupies an area of approximately 22,039 square kilometres. Prior to colonialism in 1885, after which the land space shrunk to the current size, *Iteenge's* frontiers extended to include parts of today's Zambezi Region in Namibia, Western Province in Zambia, Zimbabwe's *Chungwe Namutitima* (Victoria Falls), and the present Chobe District, as far as Nata (*Naanta, uko ka tusiki/no, that side we do not reach*) and Sakapane in Botswana (Ndana *et al.* 2016). The district extends as far south-easterly to include one of the major villages, Pandamatenga, historically famous as a meeting place for European traders in animal trophies in the late nineteenth century and currently one of the country's breadbaskets with large arable commercial farms (Gumbo 2010).

To the north and east, the Zambezi River forms the boundary with Zambia and Zimbabwe respectively, while the Chobe River (Map 1 below) is the official boundary between Botswana and Namibia on Botswana's north-western front with the *'enclave villages'* of Mabele, Kavimba, Kachikau, Satau and Parakarungu, toponyms that form part of this analysis. This mosaic state structure is home to centres of political authority, strategic venues and revered religious centres of the kingdom's spiritual shrines. Historically, this area constitutes the symbol of the Veekuhane kingdom, the *Iteenge*, over which the Munteenge or king rules.

Map 1: Chobe District, showing the Study Area



Source: Gumbo (2002).

Methodology

This is a qualitative study that utilises both primary in the form of oral interviews and newspapers, and secondary sources. More than other sources, interviews were the mainstay of data collection, done mainly at the annual cultural event that takes place every September in Kavimba. Informants, individually or in a group were asked open-ended questions related to Chiikuhane culture in general, and toponymy in particular. Ranging from local inhabitants to state officials, informants provided valuable data on indigenous knowledge systems, and the historical, cultural, economic and political issues associated with naming, including contestations over some of the toponyms. A recurrent feature in the interviews, albeit often derailing progress, was the human-wildlife conflict that has made local people to be sceptical about the state sponsored tourism that they believe privileges wildlife over people. While not directly relevant to the paper, the narrative on human wildlife conflict could not be ignored given its impact in changing livelihoods where hitherto agricultural land and other communal resources such as natural pans are progressively being turned into exclusive tourist enclaves that the local citizenry can only admire from a distance. Add to this the seemingly negligible but symbolic marginalization that comes with toponymic modifications or distortions, making our informants' remarks with which we inaugurate this paper, poignant.

Some of the prominent toponyms and from which a sample will be gleaned for analysis, include

Iyaambezi, Barangwe, Huhuwe, Mathabanelo, Nyuungwe, Parakarungu, Satau, Kachikau, Mabele, Kavimba, Sedudu, Kazungula, Lesoma, Pandamatenga, Savuti, Kasane, Serondela, Victoria Falls and Matetsi in Zimbabwe. The list includes the names of the nine official villages in the District.

Two general observations on the data are worth pointing out as a prelude to the analysis. First, and obvious to a native speaker of (Chiikuhane), is that in their current orthography, the toponyms have undergone phono-morphological transformation and this in Mathangwane's (2005) words, means that the meanings are no longer transparent leading to the loss of valuable ethno data. Given the various social agents involved in the production and designation of toponyms, these transformations evince toponymic contestation and its associated power differentials. Our informants' passionate yet uneasiness in the characterization of the names as not Chiikuhane is thus understandable. Second, the data provides insights into naming patterns; that is, how landscapes acquire their labels. The data illustrates the practice of naming-after-something which could be an event/occurrence, geomorphological feature, plant or animal. This pattern provides a working taxonomy as illustrated in the following section.

Categories and Glosses

The selected toponyms derive from: plants; event/period and geomorphology.

Plants

Several toponyms are associated with certain plants or trees which occur in abundance in the District. Examples include Kasane (*isaani/musaani*, 'woodland water berry tree'), Lesoma (*isuma*, 'jackal berry tree'), Sedudu (*muuduuduudu*), Kavimba (*iviimba/muviimba*, 'leadwood tree'), Kazungula (*kazuungwe/izuungwe*, 'sausage tree'), and Zivozu/Mavozu (*ivozu*, 'baobab tree'). Below we provide glosses to demonstrate the transformations in the lexes, their meanings and value not only in recording experience but also the power struggles over the landscapes. This is in addition to the underlying function of toponyms to provide a general sense of spatial orientation and geolocational capability.

Kasane, the Chobe District's administrative centre lies 100km north-west of Pandamatenga and 135km from Parakarungu, the last village in the south-west. According to our informants, it derives its name from *isaani/musaani*, a local woodland water berry tree found along the Chobe River on whose banks Kasane is situated. The prefix *-ka* is diminutive to denote a small woodland berry tree. The diminutive prefix could also denote something special, remarkable or conspicuous and, therefore, an expression of affection for or attachment to it. In their geolocation scheme, Kasane is therefore that place of many woodland water berry trees and this will differentiate it from say Kavimba, which is named after *iviimba/muviimba* ('Leadwood tree'), therefore a place of lead wood trees and considering the diminutive prefix, it could suggest a place of only one small leadwood tree. Similarly, Sedudu, the famous island over which tension brewed between Botswana and Namibia and the subject of litigation at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1999, is also named after *nduudu* trees found around the island, and a favourite of various herbivores such as elephants and giraffes.

The preponderance of toponyms derived from vegetation raised the question of why that was the case. In response, the informants pointed to the intricate connection between humans and their environment from which they derive basic necessities for survival. For example, vegetation provides building material, food as in fruits from *isuma* and *muchenje* trees, shade and protection from the elements, source of tools in axe and hoe handles, and dugout canoes which were useful means of transport (Ndana *et al.* 2016), firewood, medicine (*izuungwe*, sausage tree notorious for male member enlargement), ash from leadwood used in preserving grain and navigation where certain plants especially large trees and peculiar vegetation types were used and even engraved as useful navigational aids.

Events

Events or historical periods are also sources of toponyms. Consequently, these toponyms commemorate or record social history and serve to remind society of its past. The sentential Parakarungu, Barangwe and Pandamatenga illustrate the point. Our informant's remarks make the point that Parakarungu is not Chiikuhane and is somewhat nonsensical because it is a corruption of the familiar name *Mbalakaluungu*, (*mbala* + *ya* + *kaluungu* = 'year of the small bead necklace'), where *mbala* means 'year/period/time', *ya* is the possessive pronoun 'of', and *kaluungu* 'a small bead necklace/bracelet'. According to our informants clothing, beads, food and others were used to mark certain historical events such as the arrival of western traders and even pandemics. The beads, therefore, probably marked the arrival of European bead traders in the nineteenth century. The necklace/bracelet could have also coincided with a major pandemic where it identified those infected or affected and for having taken treatment or demonstrating solidarity respectively. This is the equivalent of the modern red and pink ribbons for HIV/AIDS and cancer respectively.

Similarly, Barangwe is a variation of *Mbalayongwe*, (*mbala* + *yo* + *ngwe* = 'year/period/time of the tiger'). Barangwe is a natural pan that stores rainwater for a better part of the year and, therefore, an important watering hole for both wild animals and livestock. Oral evidence attests that one of the early Greek traders from Cyprus, Savvas Eripeduo Loizides also known as Savvas had a cattle post at Mbalayongwe. With its water supply, it was a hunting spot and may have, therefore, derived its name from a rare or frequent appearance of a tiger that the locals found worthy of committing to memory.

Like other toponyms, Pandamatenga, the first village into the district on the A33 highway from Francistown, is a distortion of *MpaandayaMatengu*, (*mpaanda* + *ya* + *Matengu* = 'provision of' Matengu'). It identifies the place where Matengu's *mpaanda* ('provision or food taken on a journey') was eaten. The provision may not necessarily have been food prepared prior to departure but could have been obtained in the area as in an animal that was hunted there. Where Matengu and his companions were going is not certain, but our informants point to the following possibilities. First, that Matengu and crew could have been hunting within the then huge Iteenge kingdom which included parts of the current Zimbabwe. Evidence of this is the toponym Matetsi, a river in Zimbabwe which derives its name from the Chiikuhane word *-vutezi* to mean slippery. The name suggests a slippery place on account of muddy soils and, therefore, to be avoided or frequented for its potential as an animal or enemy trap. Secondly, Matengu could also have been travelling to Francistown to seek employment at the gold mines, and given the long journey, Pandamatenga must have served as their 'Cape of Good Hope' or a halfway station. With open grasslands, the area must have provided good grazing areas for livestock which at Botswana's independence in 1966 numbered over twenty thousand and the reason for the then Colonial Development Corporation (CDC) agricultural project for breeding native type cows in Pandamatenga (Mabure 2001).

Geomorphology

This last category illustrates toponyms derived from certain geomorphological features. Kachikau, Iyaambezi, Satau and Nunga illustrate our point. According to our oral sources, Kachikau is *Kachekavwe* to Veekuhane. There are two possibilities in appreciating this name. First, read as *kachekavwe* (*kache* + *kavwe* = small + 'small stone for a small stone') or (*kavwe* + *ka* + *cheka* = small stone + which + sharp, for a whetstone). The name was in recognition of a rock outcrop on the fringes of the village where Veekuhane either collected pieces of whetstones or literally stopped by to sharpen their implements (axes and spears) en route from their headquarters of Muunga (flood plains) to hunt, collect firewood or building material, and carve canoes in the adjacent forest reserve. Due to the gradient, as they returned from the forest reserve, the central place assumed another label, *Ntendereka* (from the verb *tendereka* meaning slide).

Between Kachikau and Parakangu lies the village of Satau. Its Chiikuhane name is *Nandavwe*, a derivative of *Nandavu* (*na* + *ndavu* = mother or owner + lion) to refer to a place of lions. Legend has it that the forest around present Satau was the abode of many lions which gradually retreated following human

encroachment. The Batawana, a Tswana speaking group, who came into the area around 1912 and colonial officials who found Nandavwe a mouthful to pronounce, settled for a translation, Satau, a contracted form of *sekgwa sa ditau* ('forest of lions'), which is now the village's official name.

About 5km west of Satau village lies the iconic Lake Yambezi, sometimes written as Liambezi (known among the indigenous people here as Iyaambezi) which one informant referred to as *chishete cha Veekuhane* or the granary for Veekuhane. Communities from both Botswana and Namibia have historically subsisted on the lake for farming and fishing. Albeit less known and talked about, during the uncommon dry spells (sometimes after 30 years), the lake's fertile soils provided for excellent crop yields which lasted until the next cropping season. Stories are told of how maize cobs were used as firewood to open space for fresh harvest in the silos. To commemorate the provisioning capabilities in the bumper harvests the lake provided, the people coined some of the memorable aphorisms such as '*muuntu uvuuswa, chilyo ka chivuuswa*' ('a person can be woken up, but food cannot') and '*maziinza malyambwa, ne yasa kusuni ukuha chilyo*' ('autumn [harvest time] time of plenty when even your enemy gives you food').

It is for fishing that the lake was commonly known, evident in a thriving fishing industry and market through the Yambezi Fisherman's Cooperative Society (YFCS) from 1973 to 1977 (Gilmore 1979). This attracted demand from local communities as well as fishmongers from the then Caprivi Strip (now Zambezi Province) in Namibia, Malawi, Zambia and the then Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Opinion varies as to the origins of Yambezi with one informant stating that there lived a person by that name and when the floods came, he and his family moved to higher ground, and thus the lake was named after him. For another informant, a linguistic approach is helpful in deciphering the meaning. *I + yaamba + ezi* (*yaamba* - ('fill up, cover or inundate a large area, *ezi* from *meenzi* -water'). In his words, *meenzi a yaambite nkaanda* to mean water is all over the place. Iyaambezi, therefore, refers to a large body of water, lake or ocean, with the first letter '*I*' and '*ezi*' being augmentative.

Staying with fluvial toponymy, Nunga is a small river that crosses the Nata-Kazungula highway about 30km before Pandamatenga from Nata. *Nunga* derives from the verb *nuunga* which means extend, connect, link or join. This small river flows in a westerly direction from Matetsi River in Zimbabwe to Savuti in the Chobe National Park. It is thus appropriately labelled because it connects the hinterland to the major Zambezi River system. Another informant provides a historical account of how the name came about. The story is told that upon reaching Nunga, some weary followers of Nkonkwena to Boteti around 1876, decided to abandon the trip and retraced their steps back and settled at Mwaandi in Zambia. However, those determined to go on decided to *nuunga musipiri* meaning extending the journey/migration, or continuing with the march. It, therefore, symbolizes a crossroad, a point at which major decisions had to be taken.

Toponymic Warfare and Exorcism

In the preceding section, we have demonstrated the etymologies of selected toponyms and their meanings. On the surface it will appear that toponyms are an unproblematic phenomenon. However, as some scholars have indicated, place names can be contentious as they embed 'place attachment', 'place identity', and 'emotional attachment' with a place due to historical and cultural connections. As Kostanski (2014) writes:

a general description of place attachment defines it as an affective bond or link between people and specific places... [and that] place identity is linked to emotional and symbolic nature of person-place relationship. It enhances self-esteem...increases feelings of belonging to one's identity. Thus, personal identity is intrinsically linked to place identity, as part of a larger emotional or cognitive experience of sense of place.

Social agents involved in the production and designation of names, represent specific power dynamics

and socio-political interests. As Manatsha (2014) has demonstrated, Francistown in northern Botswana, and a former settler town bears toponyms that honour and commemorate British colonial authorities who administered the then Bechuanaland Protectorate (colonial Botswana from 1885 to 1966). According to our oral sources, at the local level, outside British colonialism, the power dynamics of toponyms are evident, for example, in the Central District where Ngwato dominance is manifest in, among other things, such names as Mathangwane and Matsiloje. Both are *tswanalised* versions of a Kalanga question and statement respectively for *ma thangwani?* ('what has been done to you when you come in such fright') and *ma dzi logwe dzi tjuluke gwizi* ('drive the cattle so that they cross the river'). This so-called 'major tribes' dominance over smaller minority groups was the subject of resistance by the latter, leading to pressure on the government to set up a Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the controversial sections 77-79 of the Botswana Constitution in 2000. Chaired by Patrick Balopi, the Commission popularly known as the Balopi Commission, sought to investigate the inequalities between domineering Batswana groups and minority ethnic groups. Though a few changes were made, the eight 'major' ethnic groups still dominate the minority, and the perception of the homogenization of the minority languages and culture still persists. (*Weekend Post* 2020).

The Chobe District, a former British crown land and state land or 'non-tribal' land after independence, albeit bearing few colonial toponyms such as Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe and Zambia, has witnessed its fair share of toponymic contestation. This is as a result of historical power relations involving mainly Veekuhane who are believed to have settled in the area as early as the 1400s on the one hand, and Setswana speakers, specifically the Batawana section of 'baSekgoma' who settled in the area from 1911, and to some extent, officials of both the colonial and republican governments who sought to 'standardise' names.

The *baSekgoma*-Veekuhane conflict deserves historicization or contextualization to appreciate its symbolic manifestation in toponymic jostling. According to historians, Sekgoma's arrival in the Chobe area in 1911 was a consequence of a chieftainship dispute with his brother Mathiba (Ramsay, Morton and Mgadla, 1996). Shamukuni (1972) for example, states that following his banishment from Ngamiland and subsequent detention in Gaborone in 1912 he was allowed to settle in the Chobe in 1912 where he was later joined by his supporters. Dying in 1914 at Kavimba where his mortal remains are interred, Sekgoma was succeeded by his son David who being not yet of age was under the tutelage of his uncles Manna-a-Maburu and Pula Meno with whom 'in 1924 the *baSekgoma* left Kavimba and made a village at Kacekavwe (Kachikau) about five miles west of Kavimba' (Shamukuni 1972:175). Contact between the *baSekgoma* and Veekuhane was less than cordial, evident in among other things conflict over land, the former allegedly not being civil and wanting to subjugate the latter as they did with Wayei (so called Makuba or Bakoba) in Ngamiland where they came from, and the Veekuhane resisting. The youthful David even had the audacity to summon Liswani III and after David's death, courtesy of a lion allegedly after a spell by the gods of Iteenge, his uncle Manna-a-Maburu continued his disrespect for the Veekuhane even after the Acting Government Secretary had earlier cautioned:

I told them that if they had any idea that the Government had any intention of allowing the Ba-Sekgoma to turn the Basubia into servants after the manner of the Bakoba, they were wrong, what was meant was some slight recognition of the Ba-Sekgoma suzerainty, otherwise the Basubia were to remain in possession of all cultivated lands, fish-traps etc. which they had had before the Ba-Sekgoma arrived. And I warned the Ba-Sekgoma that any influence they acquired over the Basubia would only be obtained by kindness and forbearance and even then, by gradual degrees, than to allow a youth like David to attempt to ride rough shod over them was all impossible policy and must be stopped (Shamukuni 1972:175).

Kachikau as the major settlement and its environs illustrate our point as the site of an enduring historical contestation between the Basubiya and the *baSekgoma*, a conflict that has played out in among other things, differences in the creation and designation of toponyms. Nowadays, the village boasts of modern landscapes, such as a secondary school known as Liswani I Junior Secondary School, a referral clinic with a maternity ward in the whole Enclave, and now a bigger and well-resourced police station that was relocated from Lungara, Kavimba, the royal headquarters of Veekuhane after they left Munga in the 1950s and a privately owned holiday resort that sits on Barangwe Pan. As indicated the original name, *Kachekavwe*, was assigned by Veekuhane in recognition of the utility feature - the stones on which they sharpened their tools. The whetstones and therefore the name, were cherished and revered because of the provisioning role of the stones in securing livelihoods. The arrival of the Batawana in the areas adjacent to Parkarungu as early as around 1826 and the subsequent influx of the *baSekgoma* from 1911 resulted in the Setswana hegemonisation of culture and names, leading to *Kachikau*, and therefore triggering a toponymic ‘warfare’. The impasse has endured to date, often re-emerging in other forms such as the naming of landscapes such as schools and health facilities and visitation to Sekgoma’s burial site. *Mmegi Monitor* of 20 April 2015 carried a story in which Kgosi Mmualefe of Kachikau village and a descendant of Sekgoma Letsholathebe was barred from accessing the latter’s burial site allegedly for failing to consult his Subiya counterpart, Kgosi Sinvula.

According to Radding and Western (2010), changing names has the potential to obliterate the history and the culture of a given locality depriving posterity of the heritage associated with the place. Hence, ‘A new name for the place could ignore the story completely, and most people would not care because they do not know the story, but to those people with roots in... who do know the story, changing the name destroys something about the place’ (Radding and Western 2010),

The conflict between the Veekuhane and the *baSekgoma* did not only attract the attention of the colonial government but also assumed occultic dimensions (Shamukuni 1972). Angered by the *baSekgoma* leadership’s contempt of the Veekuhane as in the cocky young David’s entry into the Veekuhane’s kgotla on horseback and the near confrontation at a meeting with Sekgoma at *Ikaanda lya Vakulu* (‘ground for elders’), the present Mathabanelo, Veekuhane are alleged to have invoked the invisible powers of Iteenge deities to mete out appropriate justice for such intransigent disrespect. When Veekuhane rose to beat up David, Muniteenge (the King) appealed for calm, and promised his followers that Iteenge would deal with the young man in the most appropriate way without them soiling their hands with David’s blood. It is told that he was subsequently killed by a lion which dislodged him from his horseback, the very place and symbol of his bad behaviour which the Acting Government Secretary had disapproved in his remarks cited above (Shamukuni 1972).

Kachikau stuck as the official name, temporarily, a lull before a storm. But in the 1980s, when Enclave village clinics were issued with vehicles/ambulances, the normal practice of labelling these vehicles by the names of the respective village brought to life the conflict over names into the public domain. At the instigation of some Veekuhane who wished to restore original Chiikuhane names, the Kachikau vehicle was inscribed ‘Kachekavwe Clinic’, to the chagrin of the *BaSekgoma* villagers who threatened violence and insisted on a name-change to Kachikau. For Veekuhane activists who had instigated *kachekavwe*, this was an act of not only restoring the original name and the cultural symbolism it stood for hitherto to Setswana hegemony on Veekuhane and their culture, but also a symbolic act of reclaiming the land and its associated ‘place attachment’, ‘place identity’, and ‘emotional attachment’ they had lost or were alienated from through name change or distortion. This was indeed a period of fervent Ikuhane cultural and political activism manifest in restoring Chiikuhane names, calls on government to recognize the Muniteengeship and admit it into the then House of Chiefs, Chobe to be a stand-alone district and constituency, and that Chobe Land Board should be renamed Ikuhane Land Board as was the case with Ngwato, Tawana, Rolong,

Ngwaketse, Kweneng style. Not surprisingly, some of the activists were transferred from Kasane to far flung places such as Lobatse and Maun for they were deemed to be rubble rousers bent on destabilizing an otherwise compliant district. For the descendants of *baSekgoma*, *kachekavwe*'s return, after being 'Tswanalised' and 'buried' into *kachikau* was a case of the past returning, like a ghost, to haunt the present. With its religious connotations, exorcism was the only appropriate remedy, culminating in the authorities relenting and the name literally erased from the vehicle, an act of triumphant restoration of *kachikau*, an anathema to some. Thus, Tswana hegemony and Ikuhane inferiority were confirmed by the actions of the invading BaTswana and the support they got from the government.

This conflict resurfaced in 1988 at the naming of the junior secondary school that was allegedly earmarked for Kavimba, but was finally built in Kachikau, less than 2 km from the *kachekavwe* site, place of whetstones. Located at the centre of the Enclave villages, a neutral name PAKAMASA, [**Pa**/rakarungu, **Ka**/vimba, **Ma**/bele and **Sa**/tau) formed from the first two letters of the participating villages (*minus Kachikau*), was proposed as a counter to Liswaani, the name of Munteenge Liswaani. According to Shamukuni (1972:165): 'It was Liswani I who rescued Sekgoma I, son of Kgari of the bamaNgwato and Letsholathebe son of Moremi I of the baTawana from Sibitwane, chief of the maKololo at Kazungula. Sibitwane was from Mababe on his way to the north. Liswani I was later treacherously killed by Sibitwane at Naliele'.

The naming of the school was a case of opening old historical wounds. In the words of someone who was close to the action, for Veekuhane, this was another naming and cultural symbolism battle they were not ready to lose after the clinic vehicle saga. For the *baSekgoma* to even dare oppose the 'Liswani', their forebear's saviour as Shamukuni shows, was the height of unbridled ingratitude. After a protracted battle, Liswani finally won the day, and a triumph for Veekuhane.

The final name in this section is Barangwe, a natural pan east of which is a man-made small pan with a trench connecting the two. When the main pan fills up, water flows into the small one around which there is an immaculate tourist facility consisting of a camping site, accommodation facilities, a bar which faces both pans and is hardly twenty metres away from the man-made pan. From an observation counter of the bar (itself on a raised platform) one can enjoy a sundowner watching scores of animals among them elephants which are prevented from touching the bar by an electric fence.

With its luxurious facilities to lure tourists, Barangwe represents what sociologists call 'symbolic capital', a theme that recognizes how place names are evoked to bring distinction and status to landscapes and the people associated with them" (Aldermann). Barangwe now symbolizes the triumph of modern tourism over the local livelihoods by alienating them from the pan and its associated resources over which they have subsisted over time. For those people who used to enjoy bathing, and watering their animals from the pan, that is no longer guaranteed, and an attempt is likely to result in conflict as an informant intimated. The alienation which includes the nonsensical appellation of 'Barangwe' and the reality of its being a world class tourist facility culminates in the devastatingly changed livelihoods to create poverty. While evoking feelings of comfort and prestige to those closely associated and benefiting from the tourist venture, Barangwe also functions as a form of symbolic violence or marginalization to those who hitherto benefited from it and those to whom *mbala yo ngwe*, (*year/period/time of the tiger*) represented a culture they will not want forgotten. As Radding and Western (2010) suggested above, 'changing the name destroys something about the place'. To locals, Barangwe is therefore inflected with disdain, and little wonder the incessant intrusion of human-wildlife conflict. It is against this alienation that Masule (1989) and Shamukuni (1985) among others, called for changes in place names into Chiikuhane.

Toponymic Co-existence or Marginalisation?

In spite of the enduring conflict, both Kachekavwe and Kachikau; Nandavwe and Satau; Mbalakalungu and Parakarungu remain in currency albeit in different domains. Officially, it is the latter that are preferred to the continued chagrin of others, clearly, indicating that the power dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are far from over albeit as an undercurrent. The seemingly peaceful atmosphere, therefore, creates an impression of both co-existence where names are used interchangeably, and marginalization in the preference of one over the other. This, therefore, blurs in some instances the ethnic polarities associated with each preferred label. That is, if the Veekuhane felt marginalized by the hegemony of tswanalised toponyms, the reverse is also possible where those that came up with Kachikau, Parakarungu, Pandamatenga, Barangwe and Liambezi equally feel marginalized when the original names are preferred and even used with pride and exuberance.

According to Batoma (2006:) the reconstruction or restitution of the correct linguistic structure of names becomes a methodological pre-requisite for recovering past socio-cultural meanings. However, it remains to be seen how the social history of the community resolves this marginalization going forward at other levels of the existence of the community. In his words, ‘At the symbolic level, names constitute a cluster of signs used by community members to engage in verbal acts such as (de)nomination, invocation, evocation and commemoration. The relationship between the linguistic and the symbolic dimension of the onomastic meaning is an intricate one, and its exact nature depends on the onomastic tradition under consideration. In the case of most African traditions, these two dimensions are complementary’ (Batoma 2006:2).

It is this clustering of significance and symbolism of names which makes this marginalization a complex issue. An attempt at achieving co-existence by allowing the use of both names in all domains, and the official one in particular, is tempting and deserves further theorization. A good example of a negotiated toponym is today’s province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Between 1910 and 1994, during racialized South Africa, Natal Province for whites and the homeland of KwaZulu (the place of the Zulu people) existed as separate and polar entities. However, post-1994, the province was renamed KwaZulu-Natal in order to assuage both whites and the Zulu people in the area. The Zulu hierarchy had made it a condition for Inkatha Freedom Party joining the historical 1994 general elections. It is against this successful reconciliation in this case that there is a need for a similar attempt, *mutatis mutandis* in the Chobe District. Acceptable, this will produce Satau-Nandavwe, Kachikau-Kachekavwe, and Parakarungu-Mbalakaluungu.

As Batoma (2006) would suggest, the use of names brings about complex pictures of events that are often accompanied by fictional or documentary narratives. Those narratives can be written or oral. In Africa the oral aspect is more prominent and the landscapes and where events took place become the material surface where names are recorded. As Batoma (2006) further submits, this conjunction of time and space is sanctioned by humans through the giving of a name which functions as a verbal picture of the event. Indeed, there are no memorable events without names.

Conclusion

This paper set out to explore place names in the Chobe District in general, and their politics in particular. This is a legitimate undertaking because the production and designation of names is a dynamic social process that involves multiple social agents and their associated power dynamics. Thus, as human beings interact with landscapes, primarily to earn a living, they simultaneously engage in multiple social discourses making toponyms a contested social enterprise that avails itself to sustained inquiry.

The paper has shown that the seemingly innocuous labels are tropes of identity politics which manifest in ‘toponymic warfare, exorcism and possible existence or marginalization. Further research is needed to explore the cultural density encoded by these names in view of their multiple academic, economic, and

social potential. This far, the contribution of this research has significance in ethno-geography, history and culture. This mapping is important for future studies.

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