'What's In or Not In a Name'?: The Untold Story of Canoe Naming among the Basubiya of the Chobe District in Botswana

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Abstract

As a broad and multidisciplinary study on the socio-economic activities, ethno-culture and indigenous communities' social ecology of the Chobe District, the focus of this paper is the Subiya onomasticon (a vocabulary or lexicon of proper names) in general, and the names of canoes in particular. The paper aims to unpack the untold stories behind the naming of canoes, an important feature of Subiya culture, and the fishing culture in particular. The paper reveals that while names are assigned primarily to identify, and therefore, distinguish one item among a collection of nameable items, canoes are assigned names to, among other things, reflect people's personal experiences/aspirations/fears, places from which items were sourced, the items' quality, appearance, size, and capacity to carry out appropriate tasks to the satisfaction of human society. More subtly, canoe names are also rhetorical tools in society's surreptitious communication which, among others, provides a therapeutic avenue for members to vent out their feelings in a more diplomatic way without any direct and violent confrontation that is likely to undermine social cohesion and order.

Introduction

This paper explores Subiya names in general, and names of canoes in particular. Dugout canoes in Subiya culture are an important asset, largely on account that the Basubiya are a riverine people who have for centuries occupied and adapted to the Chobe-Zambezi River systems from which they have eked out a living (Ndana 2011). This environment provides the people with food such as fish species, game meat from large herbivores such as hippopotamus, red lechwe and crocodiles with whom they have lived in this lacustrine environment. Rivers also provide starchy foods such as the staple water lily and other tubers, besides the obvious supply of the basic necessity of life –water. From the river, the inhabitants also obtain building material for their shelters as well as recreation through swimming and canoeing competitions (Ndana 2011).

Such an environment, therefore, requires appropriate technology with which people engage 'in one of their fundamental pursuits in search of subsistence' (Malinowski 1923:310). For instance, transporting either the foodstuff and building material, or even sheer navigation will require appropriate means of transport. The dugout canoe, called *vwaato* (singular) and *maato* (plural) by the Basubiya is such an important device. However, the canoe is more than a utilitarian tool for transport and navigation. It is also an art form whose production or making engenders several discourses from artisanship, through human-environmental relationships to religion and spirituality. Canoes are therefore symbols in all senses of the word. As Gray (1996) puts it, 'looking at the relationship between canoes and culture, it is apparent that the canoes themselves become symbols…of the history, culture, and life itself of the people'.

Given its utilitarian and symbolic value, it was necessary to explore how its primacy is captured in the people's imagination, and the Onomasticon is one important starting point. Onomasticians have pointed out that names can be studied from a wide variety of different angles. Names can be looked at morphologically, phonologically, syntactically, orthographically and etymologically. They can also be looked at from a political, theological, historical, cultural and economic angles (Koopman 2005). Therefore, the

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art of naming is not a disinterested, innocent or depoliticised act of assigning labels to items or articles. Rather, in names, as Pongweni (2015:1) opines, 'the messages…include the name bearers' and the name givers' hopes, fears, and ambitions' and 'they are thus stubbornly culture-bound and make sense only to those who are fluent in the language in which they are couched'. Consequently, names and the languages that bear them are not immune to discriminatory, xenophobic and other negative and derogatory tendencies. For example, *Sihindinguvo* (one who never carries a blanket), to describe a traveller who is always empty-handed in spite of his/her frequent travels, is while both a nickname and a praise epithet, potentially derogatory and demeaning.

To accomplish its mandate, the paper proceeds as follows: first, it outlines the theoretical framework that informs it and then proceeds to describe who the Basubiya are, their location and some of their cultural aspects. This will provide the necessary backdrop on which to anchor the paper. It will then state how the data was collected before proceeding to analyse it and thus highlighting the socio-cultural experience contained in the stories that gave rise to the selected names. It concludes by pointing to the density of the naming system and justifies the need for further inquiry. Coming out as it does in 2016 during Botswana's celebration of 50 years of independence and the year of the long term vision of prosperity for all, this paper asks as to how much prosperity has been achieved.

Theoretical Context

Naming in human societies, and African societies in particular, is an existential imperative. It is difficult to imagine any human society devoid of names, be they of people, objects and ideas, to mention only these. For example, the Basubiya have names for domestic animals such as dogs (*Kalwiinamaano,* meaning 'it has no cleverness'), settlements (*Naandavwe*/ mother of lions), ploughing fields (*Shamukombo*/father of Mukombo) and hunting areas (*Zivalyaanja*/the lake of the red lechwe) among others. There are also suggestive names such as for a gun (*Nderavashazi*/I feed strangers), trade name for a shop/business (*Vaambazaangu*/they talk about my affairs and a vehicle (*Kweramahala*/ride free of charge (denoting the police vehicle where you ride for free and pay by being in jail later)). And why are human beings fascinated by names and naming? In a paper that unpacks *jamuldi*, a name given to a black cow, Koopman (2005) suggests that the primary function of names is 'to identify, to single out' and secondarily, 'to convey indirect messages'. Similarly, Mangulu (2014) states that with a name one can reconstitute the sociology, history and nature of the language of a people. Thus naming can reveal a family history and even its socio-economic status.

This fascination, obsession even, with names and naming reflects in part, the human beings' desire and instinct to appropriate, conquer and control their surroundings by among other things inscribing/ assigning names on such phenomena. Thus, naming establishes an inalienable relation of possession between a person and his or her world of existence, and the community and its environment (Mangulu 2014). Trees, hills and forests are named to mark territories (Retel-Laurentin and Horvah 1972), reminding us of a practice by animals both wild and domestic in which they mark territory and claim it as their own by implanting on it their scent, and therefore, their memory. Albeit not always explicitly political, and therefore, requiring an attentive reader, naming is through and through an ideologically charged act of assigning labels to things. For example, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2003) notes how naming was an accomplice in the global capitalist enterprise. In his words, 'in incorporating the colonial world into the international capitalist order and relations with itself as the centre of that order and relations, the imperialist West also went about subjecting the rest of the world to its memory through a vast naming system' (wa Thiong'o 2003:11). He continues, 'it planted its memory on our landscape by renaming it', so that 'Egoli or whatever was the original name, becomes Johannesburg', and 'the great East African lake, known by the Luo people as Namlolwe, becomes Lake Victoria'.

Two points are worth highlighting from Ngugi's remarks. Naming, read as refashioning, rebranding and even translation, manifests a complex web of relationships. For instance, the name giver as the Western metroples assumes a position of power (the centre) which is the overlord on the name receiver (the periphery and other) in a process that reconfigures and redefines the latter by obliterating its earlier identity in a manner that it can ultimately be conquered and controlled. Secondly, this dis-membering and subsequent re-membering, re-memorialisation or translation take on literary/imaginative proportions where the object of naming is fictionalised, and linked to human beings' interminable fascination with naming, we can appreciate humanity's penchant to storify and memorialise experience. Names are, therefore, not mere tags but condensed stories, mnemonic forms that are used to aid memory and store vast ethno-data for daily and future discourse/use.

'What's in or not in a name'? is the general theoretical question that underpins this paper. In imaginative literature, William Shakespeare in *Julius Caesar* (1985) poses and answers this question albeit in a deceptively sinister tone through Cassius, the conspirator par excellence:

> 'Brutus' and 'Caesar': what should be in that 'Caesar'?
> Why should that name be sounded more than yours?
> Write them together, yours is as fair a name;
> Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well.
> Weigh them, it is as heavy. Conjure with them,
> 'Brutus' will start a spirit as soon as 'Caesar' (Shakespeare 1985:142-147).

In this contrastive analysis of two prominent Roman figures and their names, Cassius associates Brutus's with 'fair, sweet sounding/pleasantness, and magic' qualities that Caesar's name lacks. There is therefore, simultaneously something and nothing, presence and absence, in and outside in a name. This onomastic paradox is taken up in Fugard (1993:184-185) where the character Sizwe insists that 'I don't want to lose my name' and more emphatically and resolutely, 'I cannot lose my name', only to be told that 'you don't want to lose your bloody passbook!' and 'your bloody name' because names in apartheid South Africa were less valuable than the 'bloody passbook with an N.I. number'. Therefore, the pass-book violated and eroded in significant ways the cultural and social practice of a name and calling someone by a name (Mangulu 2014). Sizwe's apprehension of the prospects of losing his name is understandable because as Pongweni (2015:2) advises us 'a person's name is the quintessential aspect of their identity'. Losing his name, therefore, amounts to dying both literally and metaphorically.

Be that as it may, we contend as Mbiti (1982:24) does that 'many African names of people and places have meanings'. It is against this background that we explore the meaning and stories contained in the names of canoes of the Basubiya. Thus, we seek to answer three specific theoretical questions, with the first two borrowed from Gray (1996): 'why are boats given names?' 'What do these names mean?' and 'under what circumstances are such names assigned?' Our hypothesis is that these names distil the people's experiences by historicising them, and therefore, preserving them as stories for posterity. Stories which lie at the centre of African epistemology and social consciousness are worth preserving because in Achebe's words:

> It is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story, not the others, that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us (Achebe 1987:124).

In exploring the stories contained in these canoe names, this paper is heeding Achebe's advice. Studies have demonstrated how personal names and those of domestic animals and equipment are useful communication strategies as alternatives to silence (Koopman 2005; Schottman 1993; Samarin 1965; Ndana 2007 and Pongweni 2015). Research on some central Africa languages, to which Basubiya have maintained socio-historical links, shows that naming allows to establish three semiology-pragmatic roles as follows: 1) referential or index functions; 2) iconic or predicative function; and 3) symbolic functions (Mbandi 1993). In Africa in general, and among the Basubiya in particular, names are not just address tags for people, but as Essien (2009:129) observes, names are 'serious mental, emotional, psychological, linguistic and cultural matters' that establish the relations between a person carrying the name and his or her world of existence. In some instances among the Basubiya, passing a name from one person to the other is passing a spiritual and intrinsic link in the existence of an individual.

In spite of all this Subiya onomastics, and many other aspects of Subiya ethno-culture, remain-largely unremarked. With a twin mandate, this paper attempts at clogging the epistemological gap in Subiya ethno-cultural studies in general, and canoe onomastics in particular to bring to the fore the stories contained therein. We believe that when told these stories will not only reveal the density of Subiya culture but also shed light on the multiple discourses that arise from its naming system. Let us now appreciate who the Basubiya are.

The Basubiya/Veekuhane

To answer the question as to who the Basubiya/Veekuhane are is to enmesh oneself into the study of names and the stories they tell. In the literature, the term Basubiya is commonly used to refer to the people, with the *ba-* prefix for plural and *mu-* for singular. The term Subiya is presumed to have two sources, the first of which is the term "*subira*" to mean brownish or light in complexion (Shamukuni 1972). Accordingly, the Basubiya derive their name from their brownish and light complexion. With regard to the second source of the word Subiya, Pretorius (1975) credits the Lozi/Luyi (Subiya's neighbours across the border in Zambia) who he believes derived the term Subiya from the expression '*subiya nokusubalala umulonga'* meaning that the Subiya are trying to push the kingdom because of their active role in administering Lozi political affairs.

The Subiya identify themselves by various names. First being, Veene-Teenge, which could mean the people of Iteenge Kingdom that encompassed parts of present day Namibia, Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana and having its centre as the Chobe-Zambezi river system (Ndana 2011). Veene-Teenge could also mean the followers of King Iteenge who is believed to be their first ruler (Masule 1995 and Ndana 2011). They also refer to themselves as Veekuhane, which could mean the people of or followers of King Ikuhane (Masule 1995; Ndana 2011 and Ramsay 2002), or the people of the Ikuhane River (Gumbo 2002; Samunzala 2003 and Shamukuni 1972). Shamukuni (1972) claims that the name Veekuhane is preferred by the section of the tribe that lives along the banks of the Chobe River, which they call Ikuhane. It appears from Shamukuni that those who live on the northern banks of the Zambezi River call themselves Basubiya or Masubiya. Clearly, the names by which these people are known tell stories about them.

Fish and Fishing Culture

Nswi (fish) is both singular and plural depending on the context. It could be used to denote a single fish or even a single fish species such as tilapia or cat fish. In its plural sense, it is used to refer to many fish as well as being a generic term for all fish species. *Ihene* (the smell or aroma of fish) is sometimes used as a synecdoche for fish both affectionately and pejoratively. Fish is a staple diet for the Basubiya and provides the necessary protein for a healthy life. But fish is more than a dietary requirement. From its very existence up

to the dinner table, fish engenders a whole gamut of discourses in the form of mythology, economics, spirituality, religion, medicine, culture, science, art, culinary skills and cuisine, class, diplomacy, human-environmental relations, identities, politics and culture. For example, how the fish came to inhabit its present habitat is the subject of myths in which as the legendary tongue-wager and slanderer, it had its tongue cut out. In shame and without the very instrument of speech, it settled in rivers (Ndana 2006).

According to local mythology its habitat is sacred and has unique sounds and signals that require accurate interpretation lest the fisherman's life is endangered. Accurate interpretation of these environmental signals coupled with navigation skills that enable one to discover virgin fishing ground, and therefore, healthy catches contribute to the creation of masculine-feminine identities and in some cases suspicions of using witchcraft to beat other fishermen. As a result, fish and fishing have implications on human character as those who are suspected of witchcraft and unethical conduct have their fish shunned and become the subject of village gossip and stories. When men are out on fishing trips, certain taboos come into force. For example, the Basubiya believe that a wife whose husband has gone fishing cannot scold, let alone beat their child because that will translate into the environment not 'smiling' on the husband, and therefore, endangering his life and that of other fishermen. The Chobe River, also known as Ikuhane, is partly praised as *kachaye mpuhu* (the transmitter of messages), thus giving the river mystical telecommunication qualities beyond being a mere fishing ground. Linguistically, fish and its associated discourses contribute to the Subiya vocabulary. It is through fishing and its economics that the term *masorosi*, a 'subiyalisation' or indigenisation of the English word 'sales' entered the lexicon (Gumbo 2012).

Similarly, eating fish is more than sustenance. For the Basubiya, eating fish with all the dangers posed by its bones is a skill, and eating the head is not only the ultimate stage in eating fish but a requirement in improving one's intellectual ability. There is an extant belief that a fish is clever and when one eats its head and the brain in particular, one becomes intellectually gifted, and so should not fail in school. Consequently, a Subiya who struggles in school is suspected of not having eaten fish and if they did, then their Subiya identity is suspect, bordering on bastardy.

This delineation of the fishing culture is necessary first to hint at the crucial fact that fish and fishing are not only food and survival undertakings respectively, but symbols of a myriad of discourses and a cultural encyclopaedia needing sustained academic inquiry. Connected to the symbolism of the canoe, they represent a unique cultural identity. Ultimately, this discussion provides a necessary foundation on which canoe names can be appreciated as more than labels of differentiation, but rather as signs to infinite cultural knowledge that this multidisciplinary study is merely the scratching of the surface and demarcating a rich area of intellectual discovery.

The data used in this paper is gleaned from an on-going large field study entitled 'Research on the Socio-Economic Activities, Ethno-Culture and Indigenous Communities' Social Ecology of the Chobe District, Botswana'. Given the central role that fish and fishing play in the lives of the Basubiya, we were interested in part, in finding out the discourse arising from fishing. Specifically, we sought to find out the naming system of key fishing equipment, and canoes in particular, what informs it and its significance to the people.

We interviewed seven informants (all aged between 62 and 86) consisting of six males and one female in September 2015. These interviews took place in Satau, Kavimba, Mabele and Kasane, all in the Chobe District. We asked informants to give us names of canoes they knew, either assigned by themselves or by other people. In total we collected thirteen names: *Choove, Kasiisi, Katima Mulilo* (pronounced as Katima Mulyiro in Subiya)*, Kazuumbalwiizi, Lyivalala*, *Makopokopo, Mamboovwa (Mumboovwa), Mapopota, Mbakisa, Mutendewa, Munteenteke, Vuloombe (Muloombe), and Vukusi (Mukusi)*.

Relying on our informants and one of the researcher's knowledge of the language and culture we proceeded with the analysis of these names by first devising a functional taxonomy which includes the fol-

lowing aspects of canoes: source/origins; quality; capacity; appearance/looks and the owner/namer's experiences, aspirations and fears. Except for one name, all these names were recollected by our informants as names of canoes whose owners had long died. We therefore, lost an opportunity to hear from all but the owners as to why their canoes were thus named. From the analysis it is clear that although the various names point to different categories/aspects, common to all is that they are also praise epithets by which the various canoe owners praised their valuable assets.

Source/origin

Source/origin encodes at least three ideas: source as in material or name of tree from which the canoe is made, secondly as the place from which the source tree is found, and lastly as the circumstances under which the canoe was acquired. In our data, the following tree names suggest or give indications of source/origin: *choove*, *katima-mulilo*, *mambovwa* (*mumboovwa*), *vuloombe* (*muloombe*) and *vukusi* (*mukusi*). *Muloombe* (*pterocarpus angolencis*) and *mukusi* (Rhodesian teak tree) are some of the tree species found in the Chobe District and were central to at least two industrial timber production cycles in the 1940s to 1950s and the late 1980s to early 1990s (Gumbo 2002). Of the two, *mukusi* is heavier and therefore, easily sinks in the event that the canoe capsizes. Thus, a fisherman or rider is likely to lose their life as they cannot use the heavy sinking boat as a life saver. However, its heavy weight makes it stable in turbulent waters, a quality that *muloombe* lacks under similar circumstances. *Muloombe* on the other hand is lighter, and therefore, floats easily. In the case of an accident, *muloombe* could save lives on account of its lightness. In the praises of the hippopotamus, the Subiya praise singer refers to the animal as follows:

> *Ilomo lya Mwale ituumba*/The bigmouth of Mwale is a large winnowing tray
> *Matuumba masefa*/the large winnowing trays are sieves
> *Kusefa zikusi*/where it sieves *zikusi*
> *Ziloombe vu nyinazaala*/*ziloombe* are mothers-in-law (Ndana 2011:33)

Besides being a source of delicious meat for the royalty, the hippo is a danger to people. With its large mouth (*ituumba*) and sharp canine teeth, the beast can sever a human being and split a canoe into pieces. Thus, it is imagined as a winnowing tray in which canoes, like grain, are tossed up and down with dexterity as if to test their weight, strength and therefore ability to withstand its power. This large mouth is a yardstick by which canoes are tested for their versatility, resilience and ability to withstand certain hydro-dynamics and endurance tests imposed by this riverine giant. Split into several pieces the *mukusi* will immediately sink given its weight and density and like the fine particles of grain, go through the sieve down to the river bed and never to resurface. Thus *mukusi* would have succumbed to defeat.

On the contrary, *muloombe* is defiant, and like a parent-in-law, and mother-in-law in particular, it does not succumb to the whims of the son-in-law. No matter how many times the *muloombe* canoe is split, every piece or debris floats and thus earns the hippo's respect just as a mother-in-law is respected by her son-in-law. Appropriately, *muloombe* is thus referred to in the poem as *nyinazala* (mother-in-law).

Choove, *katima-mulilo* and *mambovwa* are place names all of which were part of the Iteenge Kingdom. Chobe is the name of the district in Botswana where the Subiya speakers are concentrated, Katima-Mulilo is the capital of the Zambezi (former Caprivi Strip) Region of Namibia where too the Subiya speakers are concentrated and *Mambovwa* is the name of a village in Zambia. How then do these names become canoe names? *Mumbovwa* or *lyimbova* (singular and *mambovwa* for plural) is also the name of a tree from which a canoe could be carved. This particular village in Zambia derives its name from the *mambovwa* trees that grow in the area. Matengu Sankwasa, of Satau village and now deceased had his canoe named *Mambovwa* neither to denote its origins from the *mumbovwa* tree nor coming from the village itself.

Instead it acquired its name from its regular destination of *Mambovwa* village where it delivered consignments of fish. The delivery also extended to *Lyivingi* (Livingstone) –a town after which the canoe could also have been named. The Zambia connection should not surprise because according to our informants, Zambia was a good source for both canoes and fishing nets. The Totelas, who are linguistically related to Veekuhane, are some of the most accomplished canoe and drum carvers. Even before Botswana's Independence, cross-border trade in various commodities was an important economic activity that subsists to date. *Masorosi* became the major buyers of fish from the Chobe District.

On the contrary, the canoe of one late Rungwe Zambo, grandfather to the lead author, was named *Choove* not because it was sourced from the Chobe District. In fact, it was sourced from a place named Musanga in Namibia's Zambezi Region and from the *ikonkamokota* tree. Carved around 1947, it lived up to the 1980s before it disintegrated due to disuse in part on account of receding water bodies. Two related stories account for its naming. First, with its length of around five metres it was big enough to load up to seven people. Equally, it could also load a significant amount of cargo. With such capacity, one informant told us in his words that the canoe was deemed as '*ke mothusi mo Chobe*' ('it was a helper in the Chobe District').

During heavy floods the Chobe Enclave villages of Satau and Parakarungu and their environs are not accessible by road. Canoes, are therefore, an alternative means to connect these villages to Kachikau where vehicles could be boarded to the rest of the district and Kasane as the administrative centre in particular. *Choove* was, thus, handy in this regard. One of the important commodities this canoe and others transported was fish, both dried and fresh. The destination then was Serondela (sometimes pronounced Chirondera in Subiya) where the Chobe Timber Concession was based before it closed down in 1955. Serondela was thus commonly referred to as 'Choove' and the employees of the Chobe Timber Concession provided a lucrative market for fish. Zambo's canoe, therefore, picked its name from its regular destination as well just as Matengu Sankwasa's.

Rungwe Zambo's younger brother, Nawala Zambo had his canoe named *Katima-Mulilo.* Oral evidence has it that the two brothers had gone to Musanga around 1947 to source the canoes. Due to its proximity to *Kooya*, where both brothers lived before they moved to present day Satau in the 1950s, Katima-Mulilo was an important market for various commodities including fish. As an emerging urban centre, it also provided job opportunities and a source of much needed goods such as bicycles, ploughs and iron pots to mention only these.

Quality/feature/characteristic

The data shows that some canoes acquired their names on account of certain features or characteristics. These include size, physical appearance, capacity, speed and even value. *Makopokopo*, *Mapopota*, *Muntenteke*, *Kazumbalwiizi*, *Kasiisi* and *Lyivalala* will be used to illustrate this section. *Makokopoko* derives its name from a noun *ikopokopo*, a twenty litre metallic container or gallon which contained cooking oil donated by the United States of America as part of food aid to various famine stricken countries of which Botswana was part. Emptied of its original contents, the gallon was used as unit of measure in the sale of corn. A sack could take up to four twenty litre containers. Using this unit of measure, Nkwaazi Ntumbwa named his canoe *Makopokopo* in view of its capacity to load large quantities of corn. *Ikopokopo* is, therefore, a metaphor for the sacks of corn that were ably ferried by this canoe.

Another Subiya canoe owner Ozias Mushuwira named his canoe *Kasiisi*, after a type of thatching grass, *isiisi*, to which is attached the diminutive prefix '*ka*'. According to an informant, the canoe was big enough to load ten bundles of thatching grass from wherever it was sourced to any preferred destination. The use of the diminutive prefix instead of the augmentative which would be consistent with the canoe's size is a discourse strategy that deserves pausing over briefly. The use of the '*ka*' –prefix to suggest tininess

is consistent with socially acceptable conduct of humility in which one does not blow their own trumpet. Anything to the contrary will suggest boastfulness and arrogance. The owner, therefore, is believed to see his canoe as a small thing in spite of its physical size, which in its tininess is capable of great deeds as in loading large amounts of cargo and, therefore, a valuable asset to himself and society at large. Further, in spite of having a visibly large canoe, the owner remains humble and, therefore, approachable –some of the qualities that society greatly espouses.

The tininess-greatness dialectic is evident in yet another canoe name, *Kazuumbalwiiz*i, which is a contracted form of a phrase *ka+zuumba+lwiizi* (it+cross/traverse+rivers). Rivers are not only wide but treacherous as well. A canoe that traverses such treacherous terrain is, as such, a great asset. *Kazuumbalwiizi* is, therefore, an appropriate name for such an agile canoe which in spite of its humble size and appearance is able to register great feats. This dialectic is the subject of a Subiya proverb, *kacheehe ka mane keena musiinza* ('no matter how small it is, it has substance'). It is, therefore, an injunction to society to go beyond physical appearances as they can be deceptive.

Canoes are not only utilitarian objects produced solely for transportation. They are also works of art with aesthetic qualities. Not every person could carve a canoe, let alone a good looking one. Whether canoes among the Basubiya are elaborately decorated as is the case in West Africa and Ghana in particular (Gray 1996), the naming of canoes among the Subiya remained conscious of their appearance. Kamwi Manze's canoe was named *Lyivalala*, (*lyi+valala*=it+shine) meaning 'the bright/shiny one'. In Subiya, a bright lamp is also called *lyivalala*. According to an informant who knew this canoe in its lifetime, it was a long, bright, shiny and nicely made canoe. This name combines size and appearance: '*Lyi*' –is an augmentative prefix for bigness and in some cases connote ugliness. In this case, the suggestion is that while size could indeed rob something of its aesthetic beauty, Manze's large canoe was tolerably good looking. The canoe represented a balance between size and good looks, a symmetry only possible in the hands of an accomplished and experienced artist/carver.

In yet another example where bigness/enormity is aesthetically beautiful, is the name given to Nshimwe Ramokonki's canoe, *Mapopota*. This derives from the verb *popota* ('talk a lot or too much'). Augmentative in some cases, the '*ma*' –can also be a plural noun class marker to form *Mapopota* to denote a talkative person. While talking too much may be intolerable, in this case it is a praise epithet given to this valuable possession. In fact, the name ideophonically suggests the sound that the canoe produced as it traversed water bodies. As with all canoes when in motion, ripples (*mbwabwalyizi*) are produced. With its size and the speed at which it would be travelling, the bubbles are likely to be more pronounced and hence announce its approach from a distance. Thus like a talkative villager whose approach will never be missed, the canoe was thus uniquely named in view of its qualities.

If *Lyivalala* and *Mapopota* are names of relatively large canoes, *Munteenteke* is a name assigned to a small and usually light canoe. Sentential, the name is a contracted form of mu+ni+teenteke (you+me/I+perch), a plea that one be allowed to squeeze or perch on an already overloaded and small canoe. As such, the hitchhiker does not expect any comfort and is even aware of the risk they are taking by asking to be given a ride, a risk that may lead to the canoe capsizing and possible drowning. Out of desperation not to be left behind the hitchhiker is ready to take the risk, and so is the canoe owner who wants to extend a helping hand to a fellow human being. This name also implies that while the canoe is small, it should not be undermined because it is capable of loading cargo larger than its size.

Personal experience of a canoe craftsman

In the previous section we have focused on names that speak to certain features of the canoe itself either in terms of source or appearance. In our data, there is a name which has no bearing at all on the canoe itself, but rather on the owner. That name is *Mbakisa* and belongs to Kavimba resident Dickson Sinka Kanyevu

who was 86 years old at the time of research and was one of the surviving skilled manufacturers of Subiya traditional fishing equipment. At the annual Subiya cultural festival, Sinka Kanyenvu was always present to demonstrate how the various traditional fishing tools were used. As the only canoe owner we were able to talk to, the story of how he named his canoe is worth summarising as it provides useful insights into some of the naming practices of the Basubiya.

Briefly, he told us of how he had previously depended on another Subiya man's canoe for the conduct of his fishing. When the floods came in one season, as usual, he cast his nets but only for his benefactor to take away his canoe. Thus, he could not access his nets and the family which depended on his fishing enterprise was without its source of livelihood. Frustrated by this, Kanyenvu was spurred into action. In the company of his brother-in-law they set out into the forest, felled a huge tree that was deemed suitable for making a canoe. A skilled canoe carver was contracted to show him how to go about doing it. And within four days, the canoe was completed and Kanyenvu resumed his fishing. He appropriately named the canoe *Mbakisa*, a contracted form of '*wa ni vakisa*' (loosely translated as 'you sorted me out'). Kanyenvu went on to inscribe the name on his canoe in white paint. Subsequently, *Mbakisa* became Kanyenvu's nickname, a name popularised by his nephews.

Kanyenvu Sinka's situation is important for a variety of reasons. First, it accorded us with a rare opportunity to hear from a name-giver the circumstances in which a name could be assigned. In all the cases stated above, the informants were not the canoe owners, and so the circumstances of naming were their recollections of what the canoe owners might have said or what was common knowledge. Secondly, it helps us to appreciate how naming is not an event, but rather a process in which names are continuously gained and even lost. Under such circumstances, a person acquires in addition to the official names, other names which could in fact eclipse the former. At the heart of naming, is an underlying attempt at forging stories/narratives by which our existence could be recorded and treasured for future generations. *Mbakisa* in this case, is a mnemonic label whose mention will bring to memory a series of experiences that helped shape Kanyevu and family's identities. Thirdly, this experience and many others bring about some of the key functions of names. While the primary function of these labels is 'denotative… to identify, to specify, to single out' (Kopman 2005), the secondary or connotative functions are equally revealing and more nuanced in terms of their role in human discourse. Names of equipment, dogs and livestock serve useful purposes as carriers of indirect messages necessary in dealing with potentially explosive and tense social situations (Samarin 1965; Schottman 1993; Ndana 2007 and Koopman 2005).

Coming out in 2016 when Botswana celebrates 50 years of independence and the year of her long term vision of prosperity for all, this paper is modest contribution to the debate as to how much Botswana has prosperity we have attained. While she has undoubtedly achieved major economic, social and political milestones worth celebrating as is the case through the 50th anniversary of Independence, other areas of development have tended to lag behind. For instance, the country's ideals of being an educated, united, tolerant, democratic and prosperous nation would have been better realised by harnessing its inherent multiculturalism and multilingualism as resources for sustainable development. When other languages and their cultures (see Chebanne in this volume) are not present in any official policy then the construed concept of tolerance and prosperity can be questioned (Nyat-Ramahobo 1997).

However, this can be redeemed, among other means, by having a codified and overarching languages policy through which the richness of the various languages and cultures such as the one we are discussing in this paper, could be preserved as each culture's contribution to a national culture at whose core would lie pride and unity. But alas, 50 years on this policy is yet to see the light of day, as current language practices privilege English and Setswana to the exclusion of other languages. This has raised concerns of possible death of marginalised languages and cultures raising feelings of being left out in national discourse by other ethnic groups of which the Basubiya are one. Subiya culture, and names in particular

would disappear, causing a shift towards English and Setswana names because of their social capital. This is already under way and further research is necessary to determine its extent.

Conclusion

Taking the names of canoes as its focus, this paper set out to explore among other things, the stories and their meanings, stories and circumstances of naming and cultural data that are embedded in names. It made the conclusion that canoes acquire names considering various aspects such as source, features and even the social circumstances of the owner. Consequently, like all other names, they are not mere tags intended to help distinguish one object from others, but telling embodiments of the life of a people. This is made more necessary because as some onomasticians have claimed, 'onomastics is one of the broadest of disciplines in that it is multidisciplinary…names can be looked at from political, theological, historical, cultural and economic angles' (Koopman 2005:159).

The names we have used in this paper allude to some of these angles, a good example being economics in terms of cross-border trade and cultural organisation of the Basubiya as a riverine community. Another dimension in the naming of objects and persons among the Basubiya is that this practice establishes a history of the people and their socio-economic activities in the Chobe-Zambezi River system. This paper was, therefore, an intense and panoramic excursion into Subiya cosmology, albeit a brief one.

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