Decolonization-oriented naming of selected 'satellite' schools in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: Since the attainment of Zimbabwean independence, the government has made efforts to redress colonially-induced land ownership imbalances. Of significance in this paper is the relationship between the decolonization processes as signified in the 2000 land occupations and the names given to the new satellite schools. The concerned communities in Shona, Shangaan and English name the selected schools and the choice is deliberate if language is understood as a tool that people of all cultures use to name their reality and define themselves. This paper then seeks to demonstrate the contribution of names of satellite schools to an understanding of the Third Chimurenga.
Keywords: decolonization, Zimbabwe, satellite, school names.

Land has always been one of the major aspects of Zimbabwean politics. Since the attainment of independence in 1980, the ZANU PF government has made various efforts to redress the land ownership imbalances created by the 1937 Rhodesian Land Apportionment Act. Most worldwide known among the efforts are 'people driven', politically charged 2000 land invasions/occupations that saw the seizure of land from thousands of white farmers. This had dire effects on the Zimbabwean politics, economy and international relations. Significantly, though, the land 'invasions' have resulted in the sprouting of 'satellite' schools in various regions of the country's new settlements to cater for the newly resettled farmers. In view of the above, this paper then seeks to demonstrate the contribution of the naming and names of satellite schools to an understanding of decolonization as couched in the Third Chimurenga[1], a political dispensation that resulted in the creation of most of the satellite schools under discussion. Beyond Independence, Zimbabwe continues to make concerted efforts in ensuring that the indigenes are liberated from all forms of colonial oppression. As a sequel to land reform program of 2000, newly resettled communities take it into their hands and name the space they inhabit; but this paper is limited to the discussion of school naming. All the identified and discussed schools are in Mwenezi and Gutu Districts of Masvingo Province. The approach to the study of the school names is multidimensional; such names are discussed from linguistic, historical as well as political

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[1]   Chimurenga is a Shona word that means 'war'. The war is a continuation of the other two wars (First and Second Chimurenga) and, like these two, is directed at undoing the effects of British colonialism in the Zimbabwean context.

standpoints. Names in general represent an important site to understand a society's social, economic and political dimensions. There are various categories of onomastics; and in this paper, the naming theory is narrowed to a discussion of place, especially school names. There is an important aspect to an understanding of toponyms; that is change, which is change in general. In this paper, we wish to demonstrate how political change has influenced the establishment and subsequent naming of satellite schools in selected parts of Zimbabwe. The satellite schools are symbols of significant change; the ceding of the old 'Zimbabwe' to a new one where the indigenous people are proud owners of their rightful land heritage. In other words, satellite school names and naming in Zimbabwe is closely related to the 2000 land reform programs.

Defining satellite schools

In Zimbabwe, most satellite schools are found on former white farms, which have since been redistributed, to blacks under the Third Chimurenga Land reform program. The satellite schools serve to provide education to children in the newly formed communities. The communities build the schools. They are not registered and hence are not examination centers; as a result, they are mostly attached to 'mother' schools as shown in the following table.

Table 1: Examples of satellite schools and their 'mother' schools in Gutu District

Satellite school	Mother school
Kaguvi	*Zoma*
Rusununguko	*Chiguhune*
Taigara	*Mushaike*
Tashinga	*Makomborero*
Tariro	*Chavarove*
Tatoraivhu	*Gondwi*
Zvivingwi	*Chavarove*

In most cases, enrolment at these schools is very low; the schools hence are very small in terms of student capacity. For most satellite schools the structures are built by communities and are "inadequate, and in appalling conditions" and hence they do "not meet international standards and government requirements" (David Coltart, *Herald* of 30 January 2013). The current Cabinet Minister of Education and Culture has indicated that "it is uneconomic for the government to fund satellite schools" (ibid.). This means that children in these schools will continue to receive 'substandard education'.

Zimbabwean policy on school naming

In post-independent Zimbabwe, communities establish and name their schools. Community members meet with the School Development Committee[2] and decide on a name for their school. The naming of a school is entirely the mandate of the community and the government does not have a say in the process, but there are ways in which the government regulates the naming process. In government policy, no school should have two

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2   Every Zimbabwean school has such a committee.

official names and communities are expected to find ways of differentiating school names. Nevertheless, all this is part of an unwritten policy and at times, it is very difficult to refer to such policy.

Language use in naming

It is important to note that the selected schools are named by the concerned communities mainly in three languages; Shona[3], Shangaan[4] and English. The new communities are largely populated by Shangaan and Shona speakers. Language choice here is deliberate; that is, it is understood as a tool that people of all cultures use to name their reality and define themselves. Naming their own environment using their own languages has permitted the newly formed communities to regain lost identity and naming authority when they lost the land to the new occupants. The new occupants named most schools established during the colonial period using mainly the English language. Hence, in colonial space, identity was imposed on the colonized communities and the spaces they occupied were detached from them through the process of naming. Therefore, the opportunity to name their space has allowed the new communities to reclaim lost identity, and this is the essence of most decolonization processes. Examples of schools named using the indigenous Shona language include *Bemberero, Budiriro, Tafara, Rusununguko, Shungirirai, Tagarika, Takadevhu, Takunda,* and *Zvataida.* Others are named in Shangaan and examples are *Hlumelelo, Lirhanzo, Matele, Mlilo, Tsakani* and *Nsimbi.*

Only five of the selected satellite schools are named in other languages that are not indigenous to Zimbabwe; examples are *Marriot, Rinnete,* and *Danny.* These three schools are named after the former white 'owners' of the farm where the schools are built. These three names are particularly interesting. In nationalistic terms, these names, even if they do not have any colonial connotations semantically, artificially, they remain "colonial" (Koopman, in Neethling 2005: xv) in the sense of the code used. In the same discourse, to talk of such names especially in decolonizing narratives is quite problematic. But there is need to note that using the names of the former white farm owners is significant in as much that it is an acknowledgement of history. Other names in the English language are *Valley* and *Alpha Joy*. The name *Valley* is descriptive of the physical geographical landscape where the school is situated. *Alpha Joy* relays a message of joy associated with land acquisition and has religious connotations. The semantics of the two names, *Valley* and *Alpha Joy*, can easily be coded in all the indigenous languages spoken by the concerned communities, but such a choice signifies a characteristic of most postcolonial societies. The use of the language of the former colonizer is no longer "an element of imposed identity" (Neethling 2005: 93). Insisting on the exclusive use of indigenous languages is tantamount to insisting on going back to a mooted past. Most importantly, the continued use of the English language in naming reclaimed spaces is representative of the complexity of postcolonial discourse: where some colonial aspects will remain part of the freed nations and forces the previously oppressed people to rethink their identities. The colonizer might have left but some aspects of the colonial ideology remain.

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[3] One of the two majority Zimbabwean indigenous languages.
[4] One of the many minority/marginalized Zimbabwean indigenous languages.

Naming of satellite schools using English in this case challenges "the project of cultural retrieval that insists on recovering a pure and authentic and unchanging identity for Africans" (Vambe 2004: 27). Such a recovery of a pure and authentic Africa is hinged upon the postcolonial concept of nativism that has been described as "the desire to return to indigenous practices and cultural forms as they existed in pre-colonial society" (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 143). Using indigenous languages and the English language in other cases implies the contradictory need to resist and the "other of… complicity" (Vambe 2004: 58). Stanford identifies the above as a conflict between modernity and traditionalism (2006). The need to resist modernity is a result of the understanding that "western modernity is inextricably tied to western colonialism" in the African context (Fredric Jameson cited in Stanford 2006: 426). Insisting on using indigenous languages as a decolonizing tool is very ambivalent: it is an available opportunity for the previously displaced communities to rename their spaces, yet insisting on just the use of indigenous is also an effort at a futile restoration of an imagined and often lost past.

Names as signs: land politics coding in names

Most of the selected names are semantically transparent and significant in that what is codified in them relates well to the people's feelings of achievement in land acquisition. For instance, the following school names are quite positive in orientation.

Table 2: Names expressing a sense of achievement (Shona)

Shona Name	English Translation
Budidiro	progress
Takadevhu	we chose land
Takunda	we have won
Tafara	we are happy
Zvataida	what we wanted
Tagarika	we have attained good living
Bemberero	celebration
Rusununguko	freedom
Tashinga	we have braved in taking the land
Tariro	we have hope
Tatoraivhu	we have taken land

Table 2: Names expressing a sense of achievement (Shangaan)

Shangaan Name	English Translation
Hlumelelo	development
Lirhanzo	love
Matele	plenty
Marhambo	bones
Tsakani	be happy
Nsimbi	steel
Viriviri	chili

All the names captured in the two tables above are in Zimbabwean indigenous languages (Shona and Shangaan respectively) and signify progress and everything positive associated with land redistribution and the subsequent need to have schools catering for the newly formed communities. However, there is need to note that what is echoed in the names of the satellite schools is the official assessment of the 2000 land reform program. Generally, "the fast track land reform was officially represented as a pinnacle of national history: the long overdue reclaiming of a key national and spiritual resource, and thus a glorious act of final decolonization" (Primorac 2006: 2). Nevertheless, for most critics the land issue had a strong bearing on the emergency and perpetuation of the Zimbabwean crisis of the last decade.

There is overwhelming evidence to the effect that, though the land invasions could be viewed as the reclamation of a national and spiritual resource, these were largely chaotic in a number of ways and could be viewed as one of the factors behind the Zimbabwean crisis. Hove (2002) bluntly refers to the fast track program as a "chaotic resettlement program" (6). Rather than representing progress, as can be discerned from the names of satellite schools, there are a number of retrogressive aspects associated with the land reform program that resulted in the formation of satellite schools among other things. The new farm occupants are referred to as invaders and are described as "reformed rustics … *who* rejoiced at the pieces of their ancestral land that were restored to them, at the little seed packs, thrift bags of fertilizers and itinerant tractors availed at them" (Chinodya 2003: 51). Though such a description is imaginary, it honestly paints a picture of dumped incapacitated land occupiers without enough necessary systems needed to allow them to make full use of previously productive farms. It is quite striking to realize that most of the dwellers on these farms have built matchbox-size houses, and on the other hand, the occupied land lays fallow.

Kanengoni particularly argues that "Though the intentions of the monumental land allocation were noble the implementation was fraught with corruption and rampant abuse" (2004: 50). Some of these contributing factors include the "near collapse of commercial agriculture following invasions as well as insufficient support to the newly resettled farmers under the fast track land reform" (Hammar et al. 2003: 4). Therefore, the names of the schools and what they signify represent the official position on the land reform program of 2000, which however was politically charged and is in some cases dismissed as a political gimmick not aimed at addressing land imbalances, but was a strategy for winning presidential elections.

What is also problematic is that the state of the occupied farms and even the mud hut structures of the schools do not carry the positive image coded in the names. These are just satellite schools and do not give an impression of permanence; they are not even examination centers. The impression of temporary existence also relates well to the status of the new farmers in terms of land ownership; most of them are yet to get title deeds for the land they are occupying. Minimal achievement in reality and great achievement intimated in the names then becomes ironic. However, there is also the need to rethink the celebrated achievement as couched in the names of the satellite schools. What is being celebrated is land reclamation. The success measurement that follows emanates from the foreigner's understanding of the significance of land. The new occupants grabbed the best land for themselves as an economic resource, yet for the colonized African land has a spiritual meaning; it's where "the living and

the dead meet" (Hove, in an Interview with Primorac 2008: 140), and the natives' forced removal from their birthplaces was tantamount to cultural dislocation. Such a dislocation is obviously regained through the land reappropriation process, hence the need to celebrate the success as shown in the names.

Commemorative names

Some of the satellite schools in Mwenezi District are commemorative and are named after well-known real personalities in the concerned communities and in the nation. Examples are *Kaguvi, Mlilo, Furumele* and *Masvayamwando*. *Kaguvi* School is named after the legendary figure Kaguvi, who alongside Mbuya Nehanda "could be made to encompass spiritual notions of cultural identity and militants to uprising against colonial oppression" (Christiansen 2004 cited in Christiansen 2012: 204). In addition, naming a school as such becomes a symbolic way of honor and commemoration. *Mlilo*, *Furumele* and *Masvayamwando* are individuals known and respected in their communities and are not necessarily national figures. *Mlilo* and *Furumele* Schools are named after important families in the respective communities. *Masvayamwando* is named after the late former Headmaster and Member of Parliament for the Mwenezi Constituency. *Mlilo* and *Furumele* are named after community leaders as a sign of honor. Naming a school after respected individuals in a community is a gesture of respect for the individual. Then, if not careful, this could be a mockery of such individuals because in most cases the "physical structures of the schools are in appalling conditions […] *and the schools do* not meet international standards and government requirements".

Conclusion

The establishment of satellite schools in Zimbabwe has been hailed in this paper as a significant sequel to the 2000 land reform program. What is particularly relevant in this discussion is the naming of such schools in the context of decolonization. The names given to satellite schools in Masvingo and Chiredzi Districts of Zimbabwe are significant in a number of ways. Names like *Takadevhu*, whose meaning is translated into "we chose land", encapsulate the history of the Third Chimurenga that was driven by the need to address land imbalances. It has also been demonstrated that language choice in the naming process is an important aspect of decolonization. It has also been noted that there is a problematic relationship between the reality and achievement referred to by names such as *Takunda* (we have won), *Tafara* (we are now happy), *Zvataida* (what we wanted), *Tagarika* (we have attained good living), *Bemberero* (celebration) and *Rusununguko* (freedom) and the reality of the fruits of the Zimbabwean 2000 land reform program. Couched in the names is the official representation of the land reform as a 'glorius act of decolonization", yet the same process has been highlighted as one of the contributions to the Zimbabwean crisis of the last decade. Such ambivalence in the names has been explored in this paper. It has been also noted that geographical features had influence in the naming of certain schools. Of the selected satellite schools, two names are descriptive of the geographical features of the school. *Valley* highlights the geographical characteristics of the school location, which is valley-like. *Bubi* School is named after the largest river close to the satellite school.

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