

## The politics of renaming “colonial” streets in Francistown, Botswana

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### Introduction

Instead of calling our [Francistown] streets names like Blue Jacket, Francis Avenue, Francis Driveway, Moffat, there are our own role models like Rebecca Nshakazhogwe [and] Philip Matante. These are people who developed the community [...] Names should have a sense of identity and meaning.<sup>1</sup>

In February 2011, James Kgalajwe, the then councillor of Satellite North and the current (May 2014) mayor of Francistown, tabled a motion proposing a radical review of the city's streets names, especially in the central business district (CBD). The main/major streets in Francistown CBD owe their origin to the colonial period.<sup>2</sup> The motion was passed by the Francistown City Council (FCC) at its sitting in December 2013. It was probably the first time in Botswana's history that such a motion was passed. This historic motion was a culmination of a series of similar calls over the years by the FCC councillors.<sup>3</sup> They had repeatedly argued that the inherited colonial street names glorify colonial brutality and racism, which apparently obtained in this city, as is shown below. However, this renaming initiative was politicised, because most of the names the councillors put forward were those of their former colleagues, politicians either departed or still alive.<sup>4</sup> The 12 March 2011 editorial section of the *Mmegi*, a privately-owned newspaper in Botswana, argues that renaming streets is a “revolution” of one kind. The editorial qualifies this by stating that “It may not be in the tradition of the Libyan and Egyptian revolutions, but it involves revolutionary change nonetheless”.<sup>5</sup> Similar views are found in academic works.

A contentious history of the North East district (NED) in which Francistown is located, especially the failed struggle by Africans to reclaim their land from the Tati Concessions (Tati Company)<sup>6</sup> and rampant racial discrimination during the colonial period,<sup>7</sup> form the primary basis upon which the motion to rename Francistown's CBD streets is rooted. There is consensus among the FCC councillors to rename these streets after the individuals they describe as “our local heroes and heroines”.<sup>8</sup> A task force constituted to facilitate this initiative was busy working on the project at the time of writing this article (May 2014). Worryingly, the

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1. J. Kgalajwe, the Mayor of Francistown, quoted in *Mmegi*, 28 February 2011.

2. *Mmegi*, 28 February 2011; *Sunday Standard*, 22 May 2014.

3. See, for instance, *Mmegi*, 5 December 2008.

4. *The Voice*, 23 May 2014; *Sunday Standard*, 22 May 2014.

5. *Mmegi*, 12 March 2011.

6. See, for example, M. Mogotsi, “Failure to Reclaim Lost Land: The Khurutshe and British Tati Imperialism, 1890–1913”, BA thesis, University of Botswana, 1983; D. Hilton-Barber, *The Baronet and the Matabele King: The Intriguing Story of the Tati Concession* (Southern, Pinetown, 2013), pp 24–41 and 112–116.

7. See G. Winstanley, *Under two Flags in Africa: Recollections of a British Administrator in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Botswana, 1954–1972* (Blackwater Books, Kelvedon, 2000), p 234.

8. *Mmegi*, 4 December 2013.

extent to which the ordinary citizens in and around Francistown are involved in this sensitive process is unclear. However, it seems that the ongoing initiative is geared towards righting the colonial wrongs; reclaiming African identity. Critically, the FCC's initiative, wittingly or unwittingly, can be traced back to the ideologies of pan-Africanism and nationalism sown by the Botswana Peoples Party (BPP) in the 1960s in Francistown. This radical move also resonates well with the anti-colonial rhetoric intensifying in the region, especially after President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe overtly supported the grabbing of white-owned farms in February 2000.

Sandy Grant, a Botswana historian, contends that it is important to "preserve" history by leaving the colonial street names alone.<sup>9</sup> But politicians and some ordinary citizens in Francistown argue that their history was marginalised by the white settlers.<sup>10</sup> In their view, it is unwise to glorify settler history. Grant insists that "[s]treet names of the older 'colonial' settlements do reflect their history and therefore have value".<sup>11</sup> Similarly, for some commentators, "renaming streets may tell a new tale but the old street names also tell a story about the location".<sup>12</sup> There is a need to strike a balance. The ongoing renaming of streets in Francistown requires regional and international contextualisation. Internationally, countries have renamed their streets and continue to do so.<sup>13</sup> Globally, the renaming of streets and other landmarks has raised serious political controversies.<sup>14</sup> Some of Botswana's neighbours are renaming their streets for various reasons.

As a former British Protectorate, and not a colony, Botswana did not undergo harsh colonialism compared to her neighbours – South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe – which were settler colonies. Botswana gained independence in 1966. During the colonial period, the British used the policy of indirect rule in Botswana. The *dikgosi* (chiefs) were left to rule their own people, with minimal interference from the British. Since independence, the country has been ruled, uninterrupted, by the Botswana Democratic Party (BPP) which has won all the elections since 1965. In this article, the word "Botswana" refers to the citizens of Botswana. In the settler colonies, large-scale land-grabbing, systematic segregation and racial discrimination were institutionalised, which resulted in unprecedented dispossession and displacement of the black population. In response, indigenous Africans waged protracted and tumultuous wars of liberation.<sup>15</sup> It is in this context that the renaming of colonial streets names in many African countries has aroused heated public debate. In Botswana, the politics of street (re) naming has not gained prominence at the national level. Unlike the rest of Botswana, Francistown suffered under harsh colonialism because it was colonised by the Tati Concessions until 1969.

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9. *Mmegi*, 27 January 2011.

10. *Mmegi*, 28 February 2011; *Mmegi*, 4 December 2013.

11. *Mmegi*, 27 January 2011

12. *Mmegi*, 12 March 2011.

13. See L.D. Berg and J. Vuolteenaho, *Critical Toponymies: The Contested Politics of Place Naming* (Ashgate, Burlington, 2009).

14. See M. Azaryahu, "German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names: The Case of East Berlin", *Political Geography*, 16, 1997, pp 479–493; D.H. Alderman and J. Inwood, "Street Naming and the Politics of Belonging: Spatial Injustices in the Toponymic Commemoration of Martin Luther King Jr", *Social and Cultural Geography*, 2013, pp 1–23; S. Horsman, "The Politics of Toponyms in the Pamir Mountains", *Area*, 38, 3, 2006, pp 279–291.

15. R. Palmer, *Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia* (Heinemann, London, 1977), p 57; P. Stiff, *Cry Zimbabwe: Independence – Twenty Years on* (Galago, Alberton, 2000).

In this article an attempt is made to explain and critique the factors which influenced, wittingly or unwittingly, the FCC to pass the motion on street renaming. I situate my discussion within a historical and political context. I am inspired by a myriad of scholars who have placed the street renaming debate within this framework.<sup>16</sup> I also utilise Christian John Makgala's observation that history and culture "seem to matter when the general public feels that their heritage is facing danger from global forces."<sup>17</sup> In addition it is explained why history, culture and politics play a key role in the Francistown street renaming initiative and the ensuing debates. I also reveal how the "significance attached to a particular event in the past changes in relation to the politics of the present".<sup>18</sup> For instance, in the past the (re)naming of streets was hardly a public discourse in Botswana. The "lively" politics of street (re)naming in South Africa since 1994 has also influenced the debate in Francistown. Overall, I argue that the FCC exercise, flawed as it is, is geared towards righting colonial wrongs.

### The Botswana government policy and the naming of streets

Botswana has no clear policy document guiding the (re)naming of streets. It is only now (2014) that the government has instituted a task force to compile a clear policy document, a systematic guide to the (re)naming of streets and roads in Botswana.<sup>19</sup> Curiously, ordinary Botswana, and even politicians, argue that streets/roads cannot be named after people while they are still alive.<sup>20</sup> A closer look at the street names in Botswana would suggest that this applies to citizens only. For instance, the major streets in Botswana's towns and cities have been named after foreign presidents (some of whom are still alive). It is the responsibility of the relevant district, town and city councils to name any street in its jurisdiction (in consultation with the local communities).<sup>21</sup> The consultation to suggest names can take place through the village development committees, the *kgotla* (village gathering meetings) and any other forum. The names are then forwarded to the full council for vetting and approval. If the full council is satisfied, the names are forwarded to the Ministry of Local Government for final approval. Once approved, the relevant ministry and departments reproduce land-use maps showing the newly added street and place names. For physical and development planners, the names are simply for identification purposes.<sup>22</sup> But for the communities, the (re)naming should have innate value or significance.<sup>23</sup>

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16. See R. Rose-Redwood, "From Number to Name: Symbolic Capital, Places of Memory and the Politics of Street Renaming in New York City", *Social and Cultural Geography*, 9, 4, 2008, pp 431–452; Alderman and Inwood "Street Naming and the Politics of Belonging", pp 1–23; Azaryahu, "German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names", pp 479–493.
  17. C.J. Makgala, "The Historical and Politico-cultural Significance of Botswana's Pula Currency", *Pula: Botswana Journal of African Studies*, 22, 2008, p 53.
  18. P. Davidson, "Museums and the Reshaping of Memory", in S. Nuttall and C. Coetzee, *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002), p 160.
  19. Government of Botswana, *National Guidelines on Naming of Roads, Streets and Public Facilities* (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Gaborone, 2014) a working document.
  20. See T. Tlou, N. Parsons and W. Henderson, *Seretse Khama 1921–80* (Macmillan, Gaborone, 1995), pp 174 and 245.
  21. Republic of Botswana, *The Local Government Act of 2012* (The Government Printer, Gaborone, 2012).
  22. Interview conducted by the author with a physical planner employed by Gaborone City Council, 12 June 2014.
  23. See, for instance, *Mmegi*, 28 February 2011.

## The renaming of streets: A global perspective

In this section a discussion, albeit brief, is provided on street (re) naming from a global perspective. This assists in situating the Francistown debate within a global discourse. Scholars from various disciplines and regions have closely followed the street (re) naming campaigns and made valuable contributions. In most of the ensuing studies, the politics of street (re) naming occupies the centre stage.<sup>24</sup> These studies also show that streets, places and physical landmarks have been renamed following the change of governments, political and social revolutions.<sup>25</sup> No wonder Maoz Azaryahu, a guru who has written extensively on street (re) naming, contends that “renaming streets features prominently in revolutionary changes of political regime”.<sup>26</sup> Since the renaming often follows revolutions, Azaryahu symbolically calls this process “a ritual of revolution” and notes that “the renaming of the past is also an effective demonstration of the reshaping of political power structures”.<sup>27</sup> Some scholars have extended the toponym debate to the (re) naming of mountains. For instance, Stuart Horsman argues, like Azaryahu and others, that the political elite manipulate the landscape “in order to promote their own ideological and political objectives”.<sup>28</sup> He uses the Tsarist, Soviet and post-Soviet Pamiri toponyms to show the intimate “relationship between landscape and ideology”.<sup>29</sup>

Colonialism played a major role in “erasing” the identities of the conquered and colonised communities in many ways. For example, the colonisers got rid of the indigenous or local names of many places and streets. They replaced these with names that represented their (the colonisers’) identities, culture and ideologies. Derek Alderman and Joshua Inwood cogently explain this phenomenon when they submit that “explorers and mapmakers not only projected their Western values into the landscape but also excluded and devalued the naming systems of original inhabitants, in effect writing off native knowledge”.<sup>30</sup> When the colonialists were defeated, the indigenous or local names were restored. Moreover, the symbols of colonialism and oppression, such as statues and monuments, were destroyed. This is not a new phenomenon. It happened, for example, after the collapse of the Roman Empire and the end of colonialism elsewhere. In Africa, for instance, Africans renamed their countries, cities, streets and destroyed many of the symbols of colonial oppression.<sup>31</sup>

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24. A. Koopman, “The Names and the Naming of Durban”, *Natalia*, 34, 2004, pp 70–87; R. Rose-Redwood, “From Number to Name”, pp 431–452; Alderman and Inwood, “Street Naming and the Politics of Belonging”, pp 1–23; Azaryahu, “German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names”, pp 479–493.
  25. See S. Horsman, “The Politics of Toponyms in the Pamir Mountains”, *Area*, 38, 3, 2006, pp 279–291; A. Koopman, “The Post-Colonial Identity of Durban”, *Names and Identities, Oslo Studies in Language*, 4, 2, 2012, pp 133–159; Koopman, “The Names and the Naming of Durban”, pp 70–87; M. Azaryahu, “Hebrew, Arabic, English: The Politics of Multilingual Street Signs in Israeli Cities”, *Social and Cultural Geography*, 13, 5, 2012, pp 461–79.
  26. Azaryahu, “German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names”, p 479.
  27. Azaryahu, “German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names”, p 479.
  28. Horsman, “The Politics of Toponyms in the Pamir Mountains”, p 279.
  29. Horsman, “The Politics of Toponyms in the Pamir Mountains”, p 279.
  30. Alderman and Inwood “Street Naming and the Politics of Belonging”, pp 4–5.
  31. S. Guyot and C. Seethal, “Identity of Place, Places of Identities: Change of Place Names in Post-Apartheid South Africa”, *South African Geographical Journal*, 89, 1, 2007, pp 55–63; *The Guardian*, 9 August 2013.

Raento and Watson, like Azaryahu, contend that “naming and renaming are strategies of power”.<sup>32</sup> Little wonder then that Azaryahu repeatedly argues that political factors play a major role when the decisions to (re)name streets and important landmarks are taken.<sup>33</sup> In a corpus of intellectually stimulating articles, Azaryahu unravels the “politics of power dynamics” in the (re)naming of streets. Extensively appreciating the contributions made by his colleagues, he contends that “the critical approach to the study of street names draws attention to the power relations and ideological considerations underlying street naming as a potentially contested spatial practice”.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, in his 1996 widely cited article, “The Power of Commemorative Street Names”, Azaryahu claims that the French Revolution was a major political development which “set an example for the use of streets and squares for the purpose of political representation”.<sup>35</sup> He repeats the same argument in 1997 when he states that following the French Revolution, renaming of streets has “become a common feature of major changes in political regime and raptures in political history”.<sup>36</sup> This article relates Azaryahu’s observation to the Francistown debate.

In his article, “German Reunification and the Politics of Street Renaming: The Case of East Berlin”, Azaryahu brings in “ideological considerations”<sup>37</sup> as a key factor. East and West Germany represented sharply contrasting ideologies until 1989 when the Cold War ended. It thus follows that the street and place names in each territory represented the ideologies held by the political elite who controlled and administered that area. Similarly, Horsman brings in ideological considerations when discussing the politics of toponym in the Pamir Mountains under the Tsarist, Soviet and post-Soviet regimes.<sup>38</sup> More often than not, as Alderman and Inwood posit, “the political elites and public within countries use the toponymic process – particularly commemorative street-naming – to erase signs of earlier political and ideological regimes and to advance new notions of national identity and memory”.<sup>39</sup> It happened and is happening throughout the world and southern Africa is no exception as Koopman, Guyot and Seethal show in the case of South Africa.<sup>40</sup> *The Guardian* has documented the same process in Namibia in recent years.<sup>41</sup> In the view of many African leaders, the renaming of streets and places is to “further restitution of culture and land recognition for tribal people of ... Africa”.<sup>42</sup>

In the United States of America (USA), Derek Alderman argues that it has become common to name public schools after Martin Luther King Jnr. This is because King’s ideological and political beliefs inspire many around the world. Alderman calls this growing trend a “movement” of some sort. He elaborates that school names can be “cultural arenas for debating student and community

32. Quoted in Azaryahu, “Hebrew, Arabic, English”, p 475.

33. Azaryahu, “German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names”, pp 479–493.

34. Azaryahu, “Hebrew, Arabic, English”, pp 461–462.

35. M. Azaryahu, “The Power of Commemorative Street Names”, *Environment and Planning: Society and Space*, 14, 1996, p 313.

36. Azaryahu, “German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names”, p 481.

37. Azaryahu, “German Reunification and the Politics of Street Renaming”, pp 479–493.

38. Horsman, “The Politics of Toponyms in the Pamir Mountains”, pp 279–291.

39. Alderman and Inwood, “Street Naming and the Politics of Belonging”, p 2.

40. Koopman, “The Post-Colonial Identity of Durban”, pp 133–159; Koopman, “The Names and the Naming of Durban”, pp 70–87; Guyot and Seethal, “Identity of Place, Places of Identities”, pp 55–63.

41. *The Guardian*, 9 August 2013.

42. *The Guardian*, 9 August 2013.

identity”, and further notes that “naming schools for King is part of a larger refashioning of the urban cultural landscape as racial and ethnic groups increasingly seek public recognition of their historical achievements”.<sup>43</sup> In 2013, Alderman teamed up with Inwood and revisited the commemorative use of King’s name. They approach this from a social justice perspective. They argue that King’s name, as used commemoratively, helps the student community and many Americans to appreciate the role King played as a civil rights activist fighting against discrimination. Like many others, Alderman and Inwood argue that the conflicts over place and street names symbolise the dynamics of social and cultural power relations: “Because of the cultural power of naming, social actors and groups place great value on controlling the messages communicated on and through the place name landscape.”<sup>44</sup>

### The renaming of streets: The Botswana perspective

The discourse of the (re)naming of streets in Botswana is lukewarm, dull and localised. For instance, the Francistown debate is largely localised within Francistown and the FCC premises. Similarly, in June 2005, the then mayor of Gaborone (the capital city of Botswana), Nelson Ramaotwana, urged the members of the Gaborone City Council (GCC) to influence the renaming of the streets that had previously been named after dictators such as Mobutu Sese Seko (the dictator who ruled Zaire – the Democratic Republic of Congo – from 1965 to 1997). His motion became “confined” to the GCC premises. It had little impact outside the GCC gates. Street names in Gaborone are not as contentious (historically and politically) when compared to those in Francistown as shown below.

Ramaotwana, then a Law student at the University of Botswana (UB), wanted these names to be replaced with “Botswana heroes and heroines who dedicated their energy to democratise Botswana, develop the economy, empower Batswana politically, culturally, socially, economically and otherwise”.<sup>45</sup> Ramaotwana, well-known for his leftist politics, played patriotism by arguing that street names such as Mobutu<sup>46</sup> Drive are meaningless.<sup>47</sup> It appears that Ramaotwana was unaware that Mobutu was honoured by Sir Seretse Khama (the first president of Botswana, from 1966 until 1980) and his cabinet when he (Mobutu) and certain African presidents like Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara of The Gambia, attended Botswana’s tenth anniversary of independence on 30 September 1976.<sup>48</sup> The debate Ramaotwana had hoped to spark in Gaborone and at national level simply died a natural death. This is because in Botswana’s towns, except in Francistown, the major streets/roads have for the most part been named in honour of African freedom fighters/liberation heroes who later became statesmen. In South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia, before the radical renaming initiatives, street names glorified colonialism and marginalised Africans. It is in this context that in Botswana, there is no urgency to rename streets.

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43. D.H. Alderman, “School Names as Cultural Arenas: The Naming of US Public Schools after Martin Luther King, Jr”, *Urban Geography*, 23, 7, 2002, p 601.

44. Alderman and Inwood, “Street Naming and the Politics of Belonging”, p 1.

45. *Botswana Daily News*, 13 June 2005.

46. The correct spelling is Mobutu not Mobuto. It has been like this since 1976.

47. Quoted in *Mmegi*, 10 June 2005.

48. Tlou, Parsons and Henderson, *Seretse Khama*, pp 336–337.

In Gaborone, we find major streets named after Samora Machel, Haile Selassie, Nelson Mandela, Julius Nyerere, Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara, Kwame Nkrumah and Kenneth Kaunda. Importantly, Gaborone city is named after Kgosi (chief) Gaborone of the BaTlokwa, who arrived in the area in the mid-1880s from South Africa. Kgosi Gaborone had called his village Moshaweng. In the 1890s, Moshaweng was occupied by Cecil John Rhodes and his British South Africa Company (BSAC) following an agreement with the BaKwena *kgosi* since the land belonged to him. In 1895, Joseph Chamberlain, the British secretary of state for the colonies, brokered a deal with the three Batswana *dikgosi* (Khama III of the BaNgwato, Bathoen I of the BaNgwaketse and Sebele I of the BaKwena) to grant Rhodes the land – during their historic visit to England in 1895. They had gone there to protest against the “plan” by the British to “hand over” their country to the BSAC. Rhodes had wanted the land for his railway project (to fulfil his Cape to Cairo dream).<sup>49</sup> The railway line reached Francistown in 1897, the same year the town was “founded”. Rhodes had encouraged the influx of white settlers into Moshaweng. The settlers called it Gaborones – Gaborone’s village. Gaborone city is nicknamed GC, which originates from “government camp”, the name given to the colonial government headquarters.<sup>50</sup>

### A discourse of street renaming: A summary

This article argues that street renaming often follows revolutions of some kind. Experience shows that the renaming of streets usually results in the contestation over names – bringing in the “power dynamics” element. Kadmon figuratively calls this “toponymic warfare”.<sup>51</sup> Koopman, for instance, shows “toponymic warfare” in the case of Durban, South Africa. He argues that the coming to power of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1994 heralded a major political revolution. The ANC spearheaded the radical renaming of streets throughout South Africa. But the process has been engulfed by political controversy and conflict from a number of quarters.<sup>52</sup> In a 2012 article, to add to the debate, Azaryahu examines the multilingual nature of street names in cities in Israel. He sees language as a powerful weapon in the politics of street naming. The use of Hebrew, English or Arabic in street names in Israeli cities has ideological and political significance since “naming streets is an expression of power and authority”.<sup>53</sup>

The process of renaming places and streets will remain an ongoing exercise as long as there are social and political “revolutions”. The political elite and the public alike view renaming as righting the historical and colonial injustices; restoring dignity and culture; and promoting nationalism and nationhood. Using the South African case, Guyot and Seethal, and also Koopman, support these views.<sup>54</sup> Alderman and Inwood agree when they state that in the global context, “challenging historically entrenched patterns of racial segregation and marginalization is exactly the purpose of many street naming campaigns”.<sup>55</sup>

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49. M. Kebifetswe, “The Settlement History of Gaborone City, 1965–1990”, BA thesis, University of Botswana, p 1.
  50. P. Fawcus and A. Tilbury, *Botswana: The Road to Independence* (Pula Press and The Botswana Society, Gaborone, 2000), p 34.
  51. Kadmon quoted in Alderman and Inwood, “Street Naming and the Politics of Belonging”, p 5.
  52. Koopman, “The Post-Colonial Identity of Durban”, pp 133–159.
  53. Azaryahu, “Hebrew, Arabic, English”, p 461.
  54. Guyot and Seethal, “Identity of Place, Places of Identities”, pp 55–63; Koopman, “The Post-Colonial Identity of Durban”, pp 133–159.
  55. Alderman and Inwood, “Street Naming and the Politics of Belonging”, pp 1–23.

## Francistown in the context of Botswana

In this section of the article, a discussion is provided on the factors which make Francistown a good case study in street renaming. Francistown has a unique history in the context of Botswana. This is because it has experienced subjugation, racial discrimination, segregation, oppression and dispossession. The city is located about 90 kilometres from the international border with Zimbabwe. It was founded in 1897 by Daniel Francis, an Englishman who came to Botswana to prospect for gold. He later became the first director of the Tati Concessions – hence the name “Francis’ town”. It is the only town in Botswana with a name glorifying colonialism. The name evokes a happy colonial past for the white settlers, who pushed Africans to the fringes.<sup>56</sup>

Francistown is probably the only town in Botswana that boasts a plethora of informal nicknames such as “Ghetto”, “F-Town”, “Taffa”, “Toropo”, “S’thalala”, “Town”, “Capital of the North” and “Hub to the North”.<sup>57</sup> During the colonial era, the NED and Francistown resembled a colony within a protectorate. Thus, until 1969, the Tati Concessions was in total control of Francistown. The NED and Francistown’s colonial experience has been compared to the settler colonies of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia.<sup>58</sup> With regard to street names, Francistown differs from Gaborone. Unlike Gaborone, its main streets are named after former colonisers and white settlers, who used chicanery and force to grab the land and mineral resources belonging to indigenous Africans. Some of Francistown’s contested streets are Blue Jacket Street, Haskins Street, Baines Avenue, Francis Avenue, Francis Driveway, Moffat Street, Guy Street and Feitelberg Street.

Some BaKalanga, the dominant group in the area, have lived in today’s Francistown and its neighbourhood for centuries. They called their village Nyangabgwe.<sup>59</sup> According to Kalanga folklore, the name Nyangabgwe comes from a saying: “*Nda-nyanga-bgwe nditi e vumba*” (a Kalanga hunter is said to have approached a hill by tiptoeing, thinking that it was a wild beast/buffalo). In the 1860s, a German explorer, Carl Mauch, visited the area and rediscovered the ancient goldmining shafts.<sup>60</sup> These were worked by the BaKalanga.<sup>61</sup> Francistown’s only hospital is named Nyangabgwe. There is Nyangabgwe Primary School too. In 2008, the then mayor of Francistown, Peter Ngoma, argued that the name Francistown should be dropped and replaced with Nyangabgwe. He was quoted as saying: “I still argue that [Daniel] Francis found this area called Nyangabgwe and should not have changed it anyway. I would be very happy if the name could be retained at some stage”.<sup>62</sup> Francistown was the first place in southern Africa where gold was rediscovered by Europeans in the 1860s. It experienced the first “gold rush” before the Kimberley diamond rush (which began in 1867) and the Witwatersrand gold rush (1886). The BaKalanga had mined and traded gold with the Shona in Zimbabwe and the Portuguese at the coast of

56. *Mmegi*, 2 March 2011.

57. *Mmegi*, 5 December 2008; *Mmegi*, 15 February 2010; *The Voice*, 22 June 2013.

58. H.M. Tapela, “The Tati District of Botswana, 1866–1969”, PhD thesis, University of Sussex, 1976.

59. Hilton-Barber, *The Baronet and the Matabele King*, p 85.

60. For a discussion of Carl Mauch’s exploration work, see G.C. Mazarire, “Carl Mauch and Some Karanga Chiefs around Great Zimbabwe 1871–1872: Re-Considering the Evidence”, *South African Historical Journal*, 65, 3, 2013, pp 337–364.

61. Hilton-Barber, *The Baronet and the Matabele King*, pp 14–24.

62. *Mmegi*, 5 December 2008.



Mozambique long before the arrival of Mauch and later his kith and kin such as Francis.<sup>63</sup>

Francistown's contribution to the southern African liberation struggle, though it seems forgotten, is critical in understanding the anti-colonial rhetoric in the FCC. In the 1960s, Francistown became a breeding ground for pan-Africanism and nationalist politics as represented by the BPP. The town became a haven and meeting place for the diehard southern African liberation fighters in transit to the north.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, it was in Francistown that Sir Seretse Khama first landed from exile in the UK on 10 October 1956. He had been exiled by the British government because of his marriage to a British white woman. It was in Francistown that Seretse first addressed Batswana. George Winstanley, a former colonial officer, was tasked with overseeing his arrival. He recalls that Seretse "flew into Francistown from what was then Southern Rhodesia since he would not have been allowed to enter South Africa even if he had wanted to do so".<sup>65</sup> South Africa opposed interracial marriage and Seretse's marriage was seen as a threat to apartheid. Francistown is also unique in that the Tati Company, a former colonial syndicate, is still active in businesses, owning offices and a shopping complex.<sup>66</sup>

### Francistown and the North East district: A history of dispossession

A myriad of studies exist that focus on the land question in the NED.<sup>67</sup> Here I summarise, albeit briefly, the genesis of the land question in this district. The land question primarily forms the basis upon which the motion to rename Francistown's CBD streets is rooted. In postcolonial Africa, land is "an example of historical injustices colliding with demands for contemporary fairness".<sup>68</sup> When Africans rename streets and towns, they do so in the belief that they are also reclaiming their land, identity and dignity.<sup>69</sup> In Francistown and the NED, the struggle against the Tati Concessions began in 1895 when the BaKhurstshe and the BaKalanga returned to their ancestral land after fleeing the Ndebele predations in the 1840s. On their return, they found the company occupying their land.<sup>70</sup> The names of some of the Europeans who grabbed their land and mineral resources are still used as street names. Irked by this, Kays Phitshana, a councillor in the FCC,

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63. Hilton-Barber, *The Baronet and the Matabele King*, pp 14–24; C. van Waarden, *The Oral History of the BaKalanga of Botswana* (Botswana Society, Gaborone, 1998).
64. W.G. Morapedi, "The Dilemmas of Liberation in Southern Africa: The Case of Zimbabwean Liberation Movements and Botswana, 1960–1979", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38, 1, 2012, p 76.
65. Winstanley, *Under two Flags in Africa*, p75.
66. B.T. Manatsha, "Historical and Politico-Cultural Significance of Nswazwi Mall in Francistown", *Botswana Notes and Records*, 44, 2012, pp 70–80.
67. B.T. Manatsha, "The Politics of Tachila Nature Reserve in the North East District, Botswana: A Historical Perspective", *South African Historical Journal*, 2014, online version 10.1080/02582473.2014.954600; Hilton-Barber, *The Baronet and the Matabele King*; Tapela, "The Tati District of Botswana"; A.P. Woto, "The Tati District and the Scramble", BA thesis, University of Botswana, 1976; Mogotsi, "Failure to Reclaim Lost Land"; J. Mupindu, "Creation of the Tati Company and Land Alienation: The Case of North East District of Botswana, 1983", BA thesis, University of Botswana, 1983.
68. J.L. Gibson, *Overcoming Historical Injustices: Land Reconciliation in South Africa* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009), p 135.
69. *The Guardian*, 9 August 2013.
70. Mogotsi, "Failure to Reclaim Lost Land".

remarked that “it would seem as if Francistown originally belonged to Europeans and not Batswana”.<sup>71</sup>

In the 1860s, fortune-seekers, concessionaires, explorers and hunters arrived in the NED – then contested by Khama III and the Ndebele kings. Because of the Ndebele’s military might, the Europeans sought concessions from them, sparking incessant controversy throughout the colonial period. Gold was (re)discovered in the area in 1866.<sup>72</sup> Shortly thereafter, owing to the high costs of production, the concessionaires left the area for Kimberley, South Africa, where diamonds had been discovered. While they were absent, their concessions either expired or were revoked by King Lobengula of the Ndebele. In 1880, Lobengula awarded a new concession to the Northern Light Company (today’s Tati Company). However, Lobengula insisted that he only awarded it the right to mine the gold, and not relinquished the surface rights to the land.<sup>73</sup> His defeat by Rhodes in 1893/94 opened another contentious chapter in the politics of land in this district. In 1895, the BaKhurstshe, led by Kgosi Rauwe, reported the Tati Company to the colonial administration and the British government, but these two authorities most unjustly (but not unexpectedly) sided with the company.

In January 1911, the British government passed Proclamation No. 2 which granted “the Tati Concessions, its successors and assigns ... the full, free and undisturbed [rights] as owners of all the land within the Tati District”.<sup>74</sup> Absentee landlords used it to hold land for speculative purposes. Curiously, the government admits that the nationalities and whereabouts of some of the absentee landlords are unknown. It is “at pains to explain how certain private individuals [absentee landlords] and companies [e.g. the Tati Company] own ... chunk[s] of land in Francistown and the North East [district]”.<sup>75</sup> In August 2003, the NED land question was hotly debated in parliament. The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) legislators opposed a motion tabled by Robert Molefhabangwe, then of the Botswana National Front (BNF), who demanded a radical land reform in this district. He also argued that the Tati Company should compensate the victims of colonial injustices. The BDP vehemently opposed this and argued that such a measure would “scare investors away”.<sup>76</sup> In response, Omphithetse Maswabi, of the BNF, accused the BDP of “theft and betrayal of the nation by not supporting the motion”.<sup>77</sup> It is in this context that the “colonial” street names are seen as symbols of dispossession.

### **Pan-Africanism and nationalist politics in colonial Francistown**

The renaming of colonial streets in Francistown is also, unwittingly, rooted in pan-Africanism and nationalist politics sowed by the BPP in the 1960s and 1970s. The BPP’s formation in 1960 shook the colonial administration. In response, some colonial officials “sponsored” the formation of the conservative BDP.<sup>78</sup> The BPP was the first serious political party to be formed in Botswana and it had strong base in Francistown, Lobatse and Palapye. It “found in the townships a responsive

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71. Mmegi, 28 February 2011.

72. Hilton-Barber, *The Baronet and the Matabele King*, pp 14–24.

73. I. Schapera, “Native Land Problems in Tati District”, *Botswana Notes and Records*, 3, 1971, p 252.

74. Tati Concessions Land Act, Proclamation No. 2 of 21, January 1911.

75. Mmegi, 15 January 2007.

76. *Botswana Daily News*, 8 August 2003.

77. Mmegi, 8 August 2003.

78. See P. Fawcus and A. Tilbury, *Botswana: The Road to Independence*, pp 122–123.

audience for [its] message of ‘Africa for the Africans’.<sup>79</sup> Ironically, the FCC is in control of the BDP. But most of the FCC councillors grew up in that region. They witnessed the ferocious fight the BPP put up against colonialism. These councillors view Philip Matante, a founding member of the BPP, as a hero who deserves special remembrance. Politicians in Francistown and the NED largely subscribe to the then BPP’s pan-Africanist philosophy of restoring the African pride and reclaiming the land from the Tati Company and absentee landlords.<sup>80</sup>

The BPP was formed by Motsamai Mpho, who was an active member of the ANC. He was among the 156 people charged with treason in South Africa in the 1956 Treason Trial. After the trial, he was declared a prohibited Immigrant in South Africa and thus deported in 1958. In Botswana he was labelled a “communist” and a “dangerous element” by the colonial officials.<sup>81</sup> Due to his role in liberating South Africa, the ANC awarded him the Order of the Companions of Oliver Tambo.<sup>82</sup> The BPP demanded immediate independence; the Africanisation of the civil service; the abolition of the chieftaincy; and the nationalisation of land, especially in the NED and Francistown.<sup>83</sup> It had strong links with the ANC, Nyerere, Nkrumah and Ben Bela among others. A pan-Africanist at heart, Mpho maintained contact with the ANC and helped South African freedom fighters to cross into Botswana on their way to the north for military training.<sup>84</sup>

Kgalemang Motsete, an acclaimed educationist who composed Botswana’s national anthem, joined the BPP,<sup>85</sup> as did Philip Matante, a World War II veteran who grew up in South Africa, was schooled and later worked there. Matante was “associated” with the Pan Africanist Congress in South Africa. A staunch follower of Nkrumah, he became the leader of a BPP faction after its infamous split in 1962. From 1965 to 1979, the militant Matante was the MP for Francistown. He tabled frequent motions against racial discrimination and the ownership of land by the Tati Company and white settlers in the NED and Francistown. These efforts forced the BDP government to terminate the company’s total control over Francistown in 1969. Popularly known as PG (“Pack and Go”), Matante often told the whites to “pack up and go back” to Europe if they were not ready to live on an equal basis with Africans. He liked reminding them of Garvey’s often quoted slogan: “Africa for the Africans”.<sup>86</sup>

### Racial discrimination in colonial Francistown

When debating motions against the ownership of land by the Tati Company, some FCC councillors argued that the white settlers were racist and oppressive. Racism and racial segregation certainly obtained in colonial Francistown. George

79. P.T. Mgadla, “The North-East and South-East”, in F. Morton and J. Ramsay (eds), *The Birth of Botswana: A History of Bechuanaland Protectorate from 1910 to 1966* (Longman, Botswana, 1987), p 140.

80. See, for instance, B.T. Manatsha and K.L. Maharjan, “The Land Question and Colonial Legacy in North-Eastern Botswana”, *Journal of International Development and Cooperation*, 16, 2, 2010, pp 129–52.

81. E. Wayne, *The Autobiography of Motsamai Mpho* (Lobopo Publishers, Gaborone, 1996), p 89.

82. *Mmegi*, 7 February 2011.

83. Fawcus and Tillbury, *Botswana: The Road to Independence*, p 86.

84. Wayne, *The Autobiography of Motsamai Mpho*, p 89.

85. Fawcus and Tillbury, *Botswana: The Road to Independence*, p 86.

86. B.G. Bayani, “The Political Career of Philip Parcel Matante, 1948–1979”, BA thesis, University of Botswana, 1992, pp 52–56.

Winstanley, a former colonial district officer in Francistown in the 1950s, notes: “Around Francistown there was a farming block consisting of small farms owned by what were called ‘Europeans’ despite the fact that all of them were either Rhodesians or South Africans”.<sup>87</sup> That these whites were Rhodesians or South Africans was insignificant to Africans, who were dispossessed and mistreated in their own land. They only knew that the dispossessors were whites, originally from Europe just like Rhodes, Francis or even Winstanley himself. Winstanley narrates incidents of racial discrimination and segregation in Francistown in the 1950s. Upon his arrival in 1954, the district commissioner (DC) drove him around town for acclimatisation. Winstanley writes:

We first passed the Grand Hotel and my host had to drive very slowly because outside a hall that was attached to the main hotel building there was a large crowd of black people. Many were standing on tiptoe. I asked what was happening and was told they were trying to watch the Saturday evening film show which was being screened in the hall – the doors were wide open because it was hot. I asked why they didn’t go inside to watch because they could not have heard any sound outside. My host said the film was for whites only ... We stopped at the Tati Hotel and went in for a drink. There were quite a few people in the bar – all men, all white ...<sup>88</sup>

Although at first he was surprised by this, after acclimatising Winstanley made remarks tantamount to racism. For example he writes that his job included presiding over some cases of theft (because he sometime stood-in for the DC). He explains:

Some of the cases were very tedious especially those involving the theft of small stock-usually goats ... The courtroom was usually very hot and stuffy. The witnesses who had often come in from outlying villages had invariably brought many flies with them and pungent aromas. I would sit there suffering in coat and tie – essential elements of British dignity – brushing the flies away and patiently trying to unravel the squabble before me.<sup>89</sup>

On 11 November 1965, Ian Smith, the prime minister of Southern Rhodesia, in defiance of the British government and the international community, announced a Unilateral Declaration of Independence, sparking domestic and international outcry. Interestingly, the whites in Francistown “applauded this move and regarded it as a plucky show of defiance by Rhodesians of left-wing politicians in the UK”.<sup>90</sup> The whites in Bechuanaland and Francistown had earlier campaigned for the incorporation of the Protectorate into Southern Rhodesia.<sup>91</sup> Racial relations in Francistown remained corrosive throughout the colonial period, and even for a few years after independence. For instance, the former president of Botswana, Sir Ketumile Masire, explains that during the war of liberation in Zimbabwe, there was a serious racial problem in Francistown:

During the war in Rhodesia, tensions were high in Francistown. I went there and had the DC announce a meeting for everyone in the town hall. I spoke in English, and Mr Richard Mannathoko, the permanent secretary of local government and lands, translated it into Setswana. I made the point of addressing the Francistown community as a whole, not just the whites, although they were clearly the problem at the time. I talked in the strongest possible terms about the importance of being a

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87. Winstanley, *Under two Flags in Africa*, p 20.

88. Winstanley, *Under two Flags in Africa*, p 19.

89. Winstanley, *Under two Flags in Africa*, p 24.

90. Winstanley, *Under two Flags in Africa*, p 234.

91. Fawcus and Tillbury, *Botswana: The Road to Independence*, p 31.

non-racial state. The exhortation seemed to have worked, as the incident of racist behaviour decreased.<sup>92</sup>

Francistown's racial discrimination was also witnessed in the sporting clubs:

Race relations in Francistown were poor and the opposition party (the Bechuanaland People's Party) made much of this and it was probably his skilful exploitation of the issues which resulted in Philip Matante's success in winning a Francistown seat in the 1965 election [and successive elections until 1979].

Race relations were such that when an Egyptian doctor who was good tennis player expressed his desire to join the Francistown Club so that he could pursue his interest in the game, a special meeting of the club committee under its hard-line president met in an emergency session to "tidy up" the constitution. The result was that the constitution was amended to make it clear that membership was restricted to whites only.<sup>93</sup>

The Tati Company's rule was very exploitative. For instance, "Anyone living on Tati Company land had to pay tax, provide firewood and labour, and be subject to the rules of Company officials".<sup>94</sup> The company further monopolised trading licences, including the running of a beer hall. The BPP, as noted, exploited the racial question and made significant inroads. At first, the party appeared alien to Batswana, who saw it as an off-shoot of South African politics of defiance. Its leaders were often criticised for meddling in South African domestic issues. Peter Fawcus and Allan Tillbury, former colonial officials in Botswana, argue that "the climate in Africa as a whole was favourable to the party".<sup>95</sup> It thus cleverly exploited the situation in Francistown "where living and working conditions for Africans were extremely poor and racial tensions more marked than elsewhere in the Territory".<sup>96</sup> For political marketing, it skilfully used an emotive slogan: "Lefatshe" (meaning "Land" in Setswana, Botswana's national language) or "Shango" (meaning "Land" in Ikalanga, the dominant language in the NED).

Feeling abandoned by the colonial administration and later by the BDP, especially on the land question, "Africans [in Francistown and the NED] began to engage in overt political agitations against the [Tati] [C]ompany" under the auspices of the BPP.<sup>97</sup> The BPP's 2009 manifesto states that the NED was grappling with acute land shortage while most of its prime land was owned by a few expatriate companies (referring to the Tati Company). Bernard Balikani, the then BPP president, argued that "where ownership and use of land is in conflict with national interest, such ownership and usage of land shall be disallowed and such land taken over by the state for public use."<sup>98</sup> He has since ditched the BPP for the BDP. The BPP has lost its appeal countrywide, including in Francistown and the NED. The NED Council and the FCC are under the control of the BDP. The party has failed dismally to attract a charismatic and militant leader like Matante. Lack of resources contributed too. It failed to transform itself into a vibrant party churning out issues of national interest. At its formation, it became entrenched in opposing colonialism. When Botswana gained independence, the

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92. Q.K.J. Masire, *Very Brave or Very Foolish: Memoirs of an African Democrat* (Macmillan, Gaborone, 2006), p 47.

93. Winstanley, *Under two Flags in Africa*, p 234.

94. Mgadla, "The North-East and South-East", p 136.

95. Fawcus and Tillbury, *Botswana: The Road to Independence*, p 86.

96. Fawcus and Tillbury, *Botswana: The Road to Independence*, p 86.

97. C.A.S. Koveya, "The Origin and Development of Tati Town District of Francistown to the 1970s", BA thesis, University of Botswana, 1985, p 15.

98. *Mmegi*, 24 July 2009; *Mmegi*, 3 August 2009.

BPP remained stuck in the past. It also over-played the tribal card by exploiting BaKalanga's proto-nationalism. It argued that the BaKalanga were marginalised by the Tswana-speaking groups. It is true to say that the party committed "political suicide" when it opposed the chieftaincy.

The BDP however, copied the pertinent issues raised by the BPP in Francistown. It thus used the land question to canvass support. Its "negotiation for and purchase of land from the Tati Company ... won it further votes in that part of the country".<sup>99</sup> The pressure was from the BPP MPs like Matante and Kenneth Nkhwa. Knight Maripe, who became the BPP leader in 1982, also put pressure on the BDP. He played a critical role in trade union politics in Southern Rhodesia in the 1950s. Like Mpho, he was viewed as a "communist".<sup>100</sup>

### A history and the politics of colonial street names in Francistown

Humans name places to create a sense of order and they frequently choose names that give voice to their perspective. In doing so, people invariably silence other points of view and cultural identities. Naming also represents a means of taking ownership of places, both materially and symbolically.<sup>101</sup>

The *Mmegi* editorial of 2 March 2011 contends that "It would be wrong for a city [Francistown] to exist in a way that its street names do not reflect the history of its own inhabitants".<sup>102</sup> This view, as argued, is ubiquitous globally. In January 2011, the same *Mmegi* published an emotive article entitled: "Francistown CBD Street Names a Colonial Relic".<sup>103</sup> This "relic", the author suggests, needs to be corrected. James Kgalawe, who later became Francistown's mayor, complained that the CBD street names "are technical with some reflecting nothing but the history of the colonial master".<sup>104</sup> The FCC, in its politically inspired ambition to rewrite and remake history, distorts it. The exercise is biased towards politicians as if they are the only heroes and heroines.

Some of the contested street names are Blue Jacket Street, Haskins Street, Baines Avenue, Francis Avenue, Francis Driveway, Tainton Avenue, Moffat Street, Guy Street and Feitelberg Street. Curiously, it seems many Batswana, including the FCC councillors are unaware that there is also a Lobengula Avenue and Khama Avenue adjacent to one another. This is interesting because the two wrestled over the NED during the colonial era as has been shown. Francis Street and Francis Avenue need no explanation. Suffice it to note that they are named after Daniel Francis. Francis was born in Liverpool and as young man he migrated to Australia. He stayed there for ten years before migrating to Durban in 1868 and the Tati district in 1869.<sup>105</sup> Baines Avenue is named after Thomas Baines, who is "amongst the earliest explorers of British colonial southern Africa".<sup>106</sup> Baines accompanied David Livingstone during his trip along the Zambezi River. This places him among the very first few white men to have a close view of Victoria

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99. C. Colclough and S. McCarthy, *The Political Economy of Botswana* (Oxford University Press, London, 1980), p 43.

100. L.B.B. Tutwane, "The Life and Times of Dr. Knight Maripe", BA thesis, University of Botswana, 1998, pp 36–37.

101. Alderman and Inwood, "Street Naming and the Politics of Belonging", p 1.

102. *Mmegi*, 2 March 2011.

103. *The Botswana Gazette*, 12 January 2011.

104. *Mmegi*, 28 February 2011.

105. Hilton-Barber, *The Baronet and the Matabele King*, p 28.

106. Hilton-Barber, *The Baronet and the Matabele King*, p 62.

Falls. He was later dismissed from the expedition on charges of theft which he vehemently denied. An explorer and traveller, he toured the Tati district, Matebeleland and Mashonaland and also visited Chief Macheng of the BaNgwato in 1869. He is ranked among the most prolific “Victorian explorers in Africa”.<sup>107</sup>

Interestingly, Blue Jacket Street is said to have been named after Sam Andersen, the Australian prospector famous for travelling the western desert of Australia “with little more than his prospecting wheelbarrow. Yet he is immortalised in Francistown for the blue denim jacket that he always wore”.<sup>108</sup> This is the busiest street. It was here that the first supermarket in Francistown, apparently owned by the Tati Concessions, was built. Haskins Street is as old as Francistown. It was the first street to be tarred in Botswana. It is named after James Haskins, a Briton who came to Francistown as an independent fortune-seeker in 1897. Haskins ventured into several businesses; some are still operating across Botswana. He was a personal friend of Khama III, the grandfather of Sir Seretse Khama. One of Haskins great-grandsons, Jimmy Haskins, later joined the BDP at its formation, and became an MP for Francistown. He became very close to Seretse Khama.<sup>109</sup> Winani Thebele contends that “Francistown today boasts a Haskins street, an indication of the important role played by Haskins & Sons Ltd in Botswana’s history and its development”.<sup>110</sup> Guy Street and Feitelberg Street are named after “obscure” white settlers. These streets are found in the central area, the old white residential area.

Interestingly, Lobengula Avenue and Khama Avenue are adjacent to each other near the UB campus in Francistown. As argued, the NED was once contested by Lobengula and Khama III. It is, however, unfair that the local chiefs, especially Chief Rauwe of the BaKhurutshe, who took the Tati Concessions to task for grabbing his land, are not recognised. Instead, those who dispossessed and undermined his authority (Lobengula, Khama and the Tati Concessions) are honoured. This underlines the point argued above that street naming is a sign of power.<sup>111</sup> Chief Rauwe was systematically marginalised because of the power dynamics pervasive in street naming exercises.

In Francistown there was once a Sam Edwards Square – renamed as Central Park. The son of a missionary, Edwards became a hunter and trader. He escorted Robert Moffat to Matebeleland to meet Mzilikazi – making Edwards among the first white men to enter Matebeleland. He and Moffat, probably justifying the alienation of Africans’ land in the NED, remarked that “Nowhere can we see human habitation or the print of a human foot”.<sup>112</sup> Edwards signed a concession with Lobengula on behalf of the Northern Light Company (today Tati Company) on 24 February 1887. Hilton Barber tells us that:

In 1885 [Edwards] ... was an officer in the Bechuanaland Border Police, and was sent on a mission to Lobengula, being accompanied by Lieutenant E.A. Maud. In 1887, Lobengula appointed Edwards as his “magistrate” at Tati. Edwards, who was highly respected, was later appointed as manager of the Tati Company.<sup>113</sup>

107. Hilton-Barber, *The Baronet and the Matabele King*, p 62.

108. <http://www.safarilodges.com/index.php?route> (accessed on 4 June 2014).

109. W.W. Thebele, “J. Haskins & Sons’ Contribution to the Growth of Francistown”, BA thesis, University of Botswana, 1993, pp 4, 27.

110. Thebele, “J. Haskins & Sons”, p 31.

111. Azaryahu, “German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names”, p 479.

112. Mupindu, “Creation of the Tati Company”, p 2.

113. Hilton-Barber, *The Baronet and the Matabele King*, p 33.

Tainton Avenue is named after W. J. Tainton, a witness when Lobengula and Edwards signed the Tati Concession agreement. Tainton was a hunter, trader and interpreter. Lobengula granted Edwards and his friends the surface rights to mine gold between the Shashe and Ramokwebana rivers. According to Tainton, Lobengula insisted that the syndicate also had “the sole right of grazing stock and cutting wood within the said limits, reserving always all [his] sovereign rights in the area”.<sup>114</sup> As shown, the Tati Concessions somersaulted after Lobengula’s defeat by Rhodes in 1893/94.

Carl Mauch’s name is missing in Francistown. He (re)discovered gold in Tati leading to the first gold rush in Africa. Hilton-Barber argues that Mauch “hardly received the recognition he was due and in South Africa the mountain peak near Lydenburg that carries his name is the only acknowledgement of his achievements”.<sup>115</sup> Mauch became stranded in the area of Great Zimbabwe in 1867. He later married a Shona woman.

### Views from the Francistown City Council

Yeoh argues that the renaming of streets “embodies some of the struggle for control over the means of symbolic production in the urban landscape”.<sup>116</sup> The FCC councillors claim that the colonial street names do not reflect or represent the history of the real landowners, the Africans. The mayor, James Kgalajwe, explained that these names are traceable to the “scramble for Africa” when “foreigners discovered gold in Francistown ... Amongst these Europeans was a man called Daniel Francis, who Francistown is named after”.<sup>117</sup> The mayor is incorrect to say that the Europeans arrived in Francistown during the “scramble for Africa”. The scramble took place after the Berlin Conference of 1884/85 whereas the European travellers, explorers and hunters arrived in Francistown in the 1840s. By 1869, gold was mined; making Francistown the site of the first gold rush in southern Africa, fifteen years before the Witwatersrand gold rush. The mayor insisted that these Europeans leave Francistown undeveloped, and wondered why the streets are named after them. In an attempt to influence his colleagues’ opinions, he mentioned the names of Rebecca Nshakazhogwe and Philip Matante as apt replacements. He emphasised that “these are people who developed the community”.<sup>118</sup> Matante, as shown, played a critical role in opposition politics.

In 2009, a principal records archivist addressed the full council of the FCC on the need to archive history. Contributing to the lecture, a former mayor and BPP politician, Motlatsi Molapisi maintained that the most important step in this direction would be to rename the “colonial” street names. He also suggested Matante’s name as appropriate. This irked the archivist who had come to lecture to them the need to preserve history and collect information about the city. She emphasised that the FCC “is a custodian of the culture and history of the city and it should be exemplary in helping the Archives and Records Centre in acquiring and keeping the records”.<sup>119</sup> Unconcerned, Molapisi went further and said that the

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114. Quoted in Schapera, “Native Land Problems in Tati District”, p 253.

115. Hilton-Barber, *The Baronet and the Matabele King*, p 19.

116. B. Yeoh, “Street Names in Colonial Singapore”, *The Geographical Review*, 82, 3, 1992, p 313.

117. *Mmegi*, 28 February 2011.

118. *Mmegi*, 28 February 2011.

119. *Sunday Standard*, 2 June 2009.



city's name should be changed to Nyangabgwe "as this will maintain self identity and pride among Francistowners".<sup>120</sup> This alternative name for Francistown was also suggested by Peter Ngoma in 2008, then the mayor. Ngoma had begun his political career in the BPP before joining the BDP. As already argued, although the FCC is under the control of the BDP, Philip Matante's name, a BPP founding member, is close to every politician's heart in that region.

### **The proposed street names: Are politicians the only heroes and heroines?**

The FCC councillors proposed most, if not all, the new names to replace the colonial street names. They indicated that the suggested names were *were/are* our "local heroes and heroines".<sup>121</sup> It appears the community is expected to rubber stamp whatever these politicians have suggested. The participation of the residents of the city in making these changes has thus far been minimal, if not absent. The task force charged with overseeing this process has also recommended some names. The participants on this committee are members of the FCC physical planning department. Azaryahu is correct to argue that naming streets should not be the exclusive priority of those who have "administrative and political agendas" and are "vying for control over the public domain". In other words, naming streets should not merely be an "expression of power and authority."<sup>122</sup> This is precisely what had happened in Francistown – all the names suggested are of politicians (departed or still alive).

The late Rebecca Nshakazhogwe, one of the names proposed, was a BDP councillor and a former deputy mayor in the FCC. The late Paul Mincher's name was also suggested. He was the first mayor of Francistown. Another name was that of the late Mudongo Maswikiti, a former BDP MP for Sebina-Gweta constituency, not far from Francistown. His name was suggested by the task force overseeing the renaming process. Maswikiti's name was rejected by most councillors who argued that he contributed nothing to Francistown. Most councillors argued that Francistown has heroes and heroines, and Maswikiti is not one of them.<sup>123</sup> When rejecting Maswikiti's name, councillor Robert Mosweu argued that "It would make more sense to name that street after the city's first black mayor, John Bogatsu, who was the first Motswana to take the reins from the white settlers".<sup>124</sup> Shadreck Nyeku, a former mayor, sarcastically said that Maswikiti's name should, instead, be used for "a [dirty] road leading to lands in the area he represented".<sup>125</sup> The late James Ntuan's name, was also suggested by the committee. He was the longest serving mayor of Francistown thus far and a former customary court president.

The FCC debate on renaixance was then extended to renaming the Francistown National Stadium and Francistown International Airport. A specific motion on this was tabled by Reoboy Mpuang, a BDP Monarch East councillor, in December 2012. It was seconded by Nyeku. Mpuang, when tabling his motion, said "We have unsung heroes and heroines such as the late Philip Matante and many others who contributed immensely to the existence of Francistown".<sup>126</sup>

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120. *Sunday Standard*, 2 June 2009.

121. *Mmegi*, 4 December 2013; *Sunday Standard*, 10 December 2012.

122. Azaryahu, "Hebrew, Arabic, English", p 461.

123. *Sunday Standard*, 22 May 2014.

124. *The Voice*, 23 May 2014.

125. *The Voice*, 23 May 2014.

126. *Sunday Standard*, 10 December 2012.

Similarly, the names of politicians are dominant here. But some of the names suggested for the stadium and airport are of very insignificant people even in the politically sphere. Councillor Ignatious Moswaane proposed that the newly-built Francistown stadium be named after Peter Ngoma, another former mayor of Francistown. Ngoma once worked as a driver in a government department. He later joined the BPP, only to ditch it for the BDP. In recent years, he became embroiled in the chieftaincy fracas in his home village of Zwenshambe in the NED. Most councillors rejected his name on the basis that he was just “an ordinary person” except that he was “once the mayor of Francistown”.<sup>127</sup> The current mayor dismissed Ngoma’s name by arguing that the Constitution of Botswana prohibits the use of the names of people who are still alive for government structures. The constitution is silent on this. Furthermore, major streets in Gaborone have been named in honour of foreign presidents, some of whom are still alive.

The truth is that Ngoma’s contribution to the development of Botswana, and even Francistown, like many of his former colleagues suggested, is minimal to warrant such honour. Moswaane, when justifying Ngoma’s name, argued that whilst a mayor, Ngoma rejected the initial plan of the stadium which had a smaller capacity. One reader commented on this issue and argued that Nigel Amos’s name was appropriate for the stadium.<sup>128</sup> The young Amos was the first Motswana to win a medal at the Olympic Games. He continues to fare well as an athlete. Raised as an orphan by an aging grandmother, Amos inspires many of the youth in Botswana. The name of Thomas Chawilane, the former Notwane Football Club manager and Zebras player, who also contributed to Taffic Football Club based in Francistown, also surfaced.<sup>129</sup> But apparently the practice is that public buildings are not named after living citizens in Botswana. The official reason is not clear. But I borrow from the observation elsewhere that assigning peoples’ names to public buildings generates “controversy, as people may debate whether the commemorated individual merits that honour”.<sup>130</sup>

The Francistown International Airport was officially opened in September 2011. Mpuang proposed that it should be named after the late Tshelang Masisi. Masisi was a BDP MP for Francistown West from 1999 until his death in 2012. His younger brother is a cabinet minister in the current government. Their late father was once a minister too. Those who rejected Masisi’s name, especially opposition councillors, argued that it was too soon to use his name because the family is still mourning his death. Defending his motion, Mpuang argued that South Africa has named its airports after its heroes like Shaka Zulu and Oliver Tambo.<sup>131</sup>

Surprisingly, the FCC councillors conveniently forget that the chiefs were the first people to fight colonialism in the NED. Chief Rauwe, for instance, challenged the mighty and politically connected Tati Concessions. Dispossessed of his land and frustrated, Rauwe later left the NED and settled in Tonota in 1913. Yet, no one in the FCC even mentions his name. There is no street named after him in Francistown. Interestingly, he is immortalised in Tonota, outside the NED, through Rauwe Primary School. The name of Tymon Mongwa, a former mayor

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127. *The Voice*, 12 December 2012

128. *The Voice*, 12 December 2012

129. *Mmegi*, 27 November 2013.

130. J. Orill, “Reasons for Naming Buildings after Individuals”, eHow.com, 18 January 2011, (accessed on 15 February 2011).

131. *Mmegi*, 27 November 2013.

too, was also mentioned. The final vote on the motion proposing Masisi's name was eight against and six in favour.<sup>132</sup>

It is my considered opinion that all these names are inappropriate for a project of this magnitude. Their contribution does not go beyond being mayors. In Botswana, mayors are not elected by the people, but by their colleagues; a process always wrought in the politics of favouritism, lobbying, patronage and sabotage. The FCC councillors, apparently for political mileage, want to "localise" this initiative as if the project is not a national one. The initiative, it seems, is intended to reward former mayors or politicians in Francistown. Ford Moiteela, a BDP specially elected councillor in the FCC, rubbished the motion to change the airport and stadium's names. He reasoned that changing these names would not add any value to the city.

## Conclusion

In this article an attempt was made to situate the renaming of colonial streets in Francistown within a historical and political context. Good or bad, colonial street names have a history worth handling carefully. The FCC needs to document its history systematically before "erasing" them from the map. Due to contested history, anti-colonial rhetoric, pan-Africanism and political mileage, politicians do not see any value in these names. They want them arbitrarily removed.<sup>133</sup> Historian Grant argues that "street names of the older 'colonial' settlements do reflect their history and therefore have value".<sup>134</sup> The Francistown renaming initiative is an FCC affair with very little involvement from the wider community. It is used by politicians to reward their former colleagues. Trying to appeal to the masses, they recite, sometimes incorrectly, the colonial injustices. In principle, the initiative is a good one, but has the potential to distort history and cause confusion and discontent. All the names suggested are those of former mayors. Is the initiative "mayoral"? Most of these individuals do not warrant any heroic status worth celebrating or honouring. The FCC councillors tend to make biased suggestions, giving the names they prefer. In this case, the outcome is predetermined. Francistown has a population of 150 000 and the process of consultation has to be inclusive. The proposed names exclude important people who played key roles in the development of Botswana.

## Abstract

Francistown is located in the North East district (part of the former Tati district) in Botswana. It was "founded" in 1897 by Daniel Francis, an English prospector and the first director of the Tati Concessions (today called the Tati Company). The Tati Concessions administered the Tati district like a colony within a protectorate after annexing and effectively colonising it in the 1880s. It was not until 1969 that the company eased its total control over Francistown owing to pressure from the pan-Africanist Botswana People's Party formed in 1960. A former settler city, Francistown's street names replicate a typical European city. Since 2008, there has been pressure, mainly from councillors in the Francistown City Council, to change the city's name, rename colonial streets and some public buildings after local "heroes and heroines". In February 2011, the city's full council finally passed a motion to rename colonial streets. The proposed names are of politicians (some

132. *Mmegi*, 27 November 2013.

133. *The Botswana Gazette*, 12 January 2011.

134. *Mmegi*, 27 January 2011.

departed, others still alive). The initiative has not yet been executed, but the discussions and the so-called consultations are ongoing. The article examines and situates this initiative within a historical and political context, showing how politicians are manipulating this “noble” initiative by using their power and authority.

**Key words:** Francistown; Botswana; street naming; politics of identity; Daniel Francis.

### Opsomming

Francistown is in die Noordoos-distrik geleë (deel van die eertydse Tati-distrik) in Botswana. Dit is in 1897 deur Daniel Francis, ’n /Engelse prospekteerder en die eerste direkteur van die *Tati Concessions* (tans bekend as die Tati Maatskappy). Die *Tati Concessions* het die Tati-distrik soos ’n kolonie binne ’n protektoraat bestuur nadat dit die distrik in die 1880’s geannekseer en prakties gekoloniseer het. Dit was nie voor 1969 dat die maatskappy sy algehele beheer oor Francistown verslap het weens druk van die *pan-Africanist Botswana People’s Party* wat in 1960 tot stand gebring is nie. Synde ’n voormalige setlaar-stad, het Francistown se straatname ’n tipiese Europese stad nageboots. Sedert 2008 is druk, hoofsaaklik van die kant van raadslede in die Francistown Stadsraad, uitgeoefen om die stad se naam te verander, name van koloniale strate te verander en sommige openbare geboue na plaaslike “helde en heldinne” te vernoem. In Februarie 2011 het die stad se hele raad uiteindelik ’n mosie aanvaar om koloniale straatname te verander. Die voorgestelde name is dié van politici (sommige wat reeds oorlede is, ander wat nog lewe). Die inisiatief is nog nie ten uitvoer gebring nie, maar die besprekings en die sogenaamde konsultasies word nog voortgesit. Die artikel ondersoek en plaas hierdie inisiatief binne ’n historiese en politieke konteks en toon aan hoe politici hierdie “edel” inisiatief manipuleer deur hul mag en gesag uit te oefen.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Francistown; Botswana; straatbenaming; identiteitspolitiek; Daniel Francis.