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Renaming as representation of community onomastic interests: A case study of Alfred Duma Municipality

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The renaming of places is a multifaceted phenomenon that reflects the dynamic interplay between historical, cultural and sociopolitical forces within a community. This article examines the renaming process as a lens through which to study the onomastic interests of communities at the Alfred Duma Local Municipality, in uThukela District Municipality, post-apartheid South Africa. The renaming of places considers a wide variety of elements that determine which places need to be renamed and why. Drawing upon social identity theory as the theoretical framework, this article investigates the motivations, mechanisms and implications of renaming initiatives at the Alfred Duma Local Municipality. This study also focuses on delineating an array of elements and backgrounds regarding the renaming of places. It addresses the topics of the deconstruction of a colonial legacy through place naming, the politics of renaming and the identity of a place in the post-apartheid era. This is a qualitative study with data collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Twenty-six participants were selected to partake in this study. The findings of the data were thematically analysed.

Contribution: The findings of the study revealed that the community members were pleased with the renaming of places to isiZulu. However, they recommended implementing a more transparent process, as some members were not informed about the renaming process. The new place names represent the onomastic interest of the community as they are the place names the community relates to and are recognised for their historical significance and meaning.

Keywords: onomastics; post-apartheid; renaming; social identity theory; toponymy.

Introduction

Naming is the process of identifying an item or thing as belonging to a specific class or category, either individually or within a given context. Names are an integral part of culture and often serve as expressions of heritage. A person, place or thing can be given a name. According to Mandende and Cekiso (2022), place names reflect meanings that are connected to the realities of a society, with the purpose of distinguishing one world from another. Basso (1996:xiii) says, 'Naming also promotes patriotism and restores dignity'. Moller (2012:v) avers, 'The names people give are expressions of their language and thereby of a certain cultural tradition and identity'.

Language is an important tool in the understanding of a people; it tells of their culture and history, their association with each other and with other people. Thus, language is an example of an intangible heritage that should be protected through place names. The names that people give to places can be clues to the history of the name-givers or aspects of national and world history. There is a great need to preserve our indigenous place names as living heritage and promote African indigenous knowledge systems in South Africa. Place names constitute linguistic heritage, which is priceless and should be preserved. According to Raper (2004), place names constitute an essential part of the cultural heritage of a nation. Renaming is influenced by a variety of issues, some of which are profoundly significant, including cultural, social, economic, political and historical factors.

The renaming process in South Africa was motivated by the need to restore the dignity of those who had been subjugated during the country's colonial and apartheid regimes. When Europeans took over the country, Guyot and Seethal (2007) write:

> [T]hey declared English to be the language of the schools, churches, and government. Prior to the establishment of the first governing authority for place naming in South Africa in 1939, Europeans named a large number of places in English and Afrikaans. (p. 57)

Language is a crucial tool for understanding each other given that it reveals our history, culture and connections to other people and groups of people. The names people give to places can provide insight into their own histories as well as parts of local, national and global history. Our native place names must be preserved as a live cultural legacy. Place names make up priceless linguistic history that should be conserved.

According to Ainiala, Saarelma-Maunumaa and Sjoblom (2016), place names have a cultural functionality that encompasses preservation and transference of tradition and beliefs, sending messages and allowing people to recount the events that happened at the place in conjunction with the stories associated with them. Therefore, for a social group that occupies a particular region, they arouse a feeling of belonging to it (Matiza & Dube 2020). Similarly, Abdikhalikovna (2020) indicates that communities frequently utilise their territory names to emphasise their validity and sense of belonging and to show that the place is still occupied.

In the post-apartheid era, South Africa has witnessed an upswell of academic interest in the naming and renaming of places (Koopman 2002; Machaba 2004; Meiring 2009; Zungu 1998). Mudau (2009:1) realises that immediately after South Africa became a democratic country, people felt a strong need for name-changing. Ntshangase, Mandende and Van Huyssteen (2024) mention that:

> … since 1994, the democratic government in South Africa deemed it necessary to empower the black people of South Africa by giving them opportunities to rename their places to reflect their ideologies, histories, languages and cultures. (p. 28)

The approach was aimed to shift from colonial names to those that were regarded as being more African in nature. In the context of the current study, it is necessary to review how the processes of renaming places at the Alfred Duma Local Municipality in uThukela District Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), have represented the communities' onomastic interests.

Objective of the study

The objective of this study is to examine how the processes of renaming places at the Alfred Duma Local Municipality have represented the onomastic interests of the communities.

Perspectives on onomastics in neighbouring African countries

The experiences of South Africa have echoed broader trends throughout the African continent, where toponymy has often been a contested site of cultural memory and political power. The examples of Botswana and Zimbabwe offer important comparisons of the dynamics involved in renaming processes within post-colonial contexts.

In this respect, the change of place names in Botswana does reflect the continued influence of colonial power relations.

Manatsha (2014) examines the politics related to changing colonial street names in Francistown and reveals that there does not exist a single uniform policy to guide this process. The lack of public participation in the process and the presence of political agendas result in fragmented renaming. As noted by Manatsha (2014), colonial toponyms often stick, which literally implies that the pace of development during decolonisation has been quite slow. The case of Botswana shows how important institutions and community participation are in ensuring the authenticity and wholeness of efforts towards renaming.

The experiences in the renaming process in Zimbabwe give yet another angle to the challenges that decolonisation presents. Ndlovu (2021) examines the linguistic dynamics of renaming in Zimbabwe, revealing how colonial language hegemony continues to structure the toponymic landscape of this country. Despite efforts to change the names from English and Afrikaans to indigenous names, the persistence of colonial naming conventions shows a deep-seated effect of colonialism on Zimbabwean identity. Ndlovu (2021) argues that the process of renaming has been constrained by the omission of minority languages and the lack of a comprehensive strategy aimed at decolonising geographical nomenclature. This shows that there is a real need for more inclusive and participative methodologies in relation to renaming within African contexts.

Perspectives on onomastics in South Africa

There has been a growing scholarly interest in recent years in the country's place-naming and renaming practices since the end of apartheid (Koopman 2002; Meiring 2009; Mudau 2009). The renaming process is therefore considered to be very important in the reclaiming of indigenous identities and in the correction of symbolic erasure under colonialism. Guyot and Seethal (2007) argue that the renaming is part of a larger effort to forge a shared national identity in the post-apartheid era, despite the challenges posed by entrenched historical narratives.

The colonial and apartheid governments systematically replaced indigenous toponyms with names that reflected the identities, ideologies and linguistic characteristics of the colonists. As Guyot and Seethal (2007) note, this strategy served to legitimise colonial authority while erasing the cultural and historical identities of indigenous peoples. Language, as part of the integral aspect of cultural heritage, was used as an instrument in entrenching colonial domination, where Afrikaans and English names were dominant in South African society. The process of renaming aims to counteract this erasure by restoring indigenous names that embody the cultural and historical contexts of the local communities.

In this regard, renaming, in the post-apartheid case of South Africa, has been documented as a means to restore dignity and promote unity among diverse communities. According to Chauke (2015), the process of renaming offers an

opportunity to affirm the history, culture and values of groups that were previously marginalised. The South African Geographical Names Council (SAGNC), founded under the *South African Geographical Names Council Act of 1998*, is mandated with standardisation and change of geographic names. Nevertheless, as revealed by Mudau (2009), the implementation of renaming programmes is often riddled with the lack of community participation and politicising during the process.

Across South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe, the renaming of places serves as a tool for reclaiming cultural and historical identities. However, the processes are framed by distinct sociopolitical contexts and challenges. While South Africa has admirably institutionalised renaming through the SAGNC, the cases of Botswana and Zimbabwe reveal the weaknesses of piecemeal policies and the marginalisation of subaltern voices. These experiences show how important standardised, participatory frames must be in countering the post-colonial complexities of identity reconstruction.

Citizen participation in the renaming process in South Africa

Citizen participation is at the heart of democratic governance, ensuring that legitimacy and inclusiveness are infused into public decision-making processes such as renaming geographical places. The SAGNC in South Africa points out the critical need for effective participation by local communities in renaming initiatives (Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology 1998). The SAGNC has in place procedures that ensure public participation in the form of consultations, submissions and voting on proposed names to ensure that the newly named places reflect the values, identities and histories of the local population. As indicated by Chauke (2015), such steps are aimed at democratising the renaming process to make the community members feel a sense of ownership. Despite these designs, the effectiveness of citizen participation varies significantly from one municipality and region to another, often hampered by barriers that range from poor communication to limited outreach efforts and sociopolitical resistance.

The case of the Makhado Municipality is one of the many vivid examples of these challenges. Musitha (2016) reports that the naming process in the municipality was characterised by a lack of involvement from the community as well as dominance by political motives. Such marginalisation undermined the credibility of the process and sparked much conflict. To reduce these conflicts, the use of double-barrelled names has been indicated as a possible intervention which will bring harmony to these divergent perspectives in the community. Yet, this approach has not always met its objective of reconciling the deep-seated differences between different groups, thus highlighting the complex dynamics of identity and power that underlie processes of renaming.

Sengani (2011) offers more insight into the contentious issues surrounding the renaming process in Makhado, formerly known as Louis Trichardt. He argues that power dynamics, especially those crystallised by historical legacies of white settler domination, have had grave impacts on this process. The lack of mutual concession between the African and white communities has created a polarised environment in which both parties view the discussion on name changes as a battle for whose historical narrative gets legitimised. In this vein, Africans see the retention of colonial names as a continuance of white supremacy, while white settlers often view the renaming process as an erasure of their historical heritage. This reciprocal opposition has preserved pain and prevented the establishment of a shared sense of belongingness.

These controversial features of renaming processes are discussed in more detail by Musitha (2016), who notes that the proposed names are often turned into symbols of different group identities in a way that fuels polarisation rather than unity. Moreover, Guyot and Seethal (2007) point out that the main objective of the renaming process in South Africa is the restoration of peace and harmony after the apartheid era. In so doing, the nation seeks to redress past injustices and celebrate the diverse cultures that make up the South African identity. Yet, Guyot and Seethal (2007) also point out that this objective is often undermined by resistance from sections of the white population, who oppose the change of names and challenge the ideals of the so-called 'rainbow nation'. This resistance mirrors a broader social conflict and complicates processes through which place naming might be used as a tool of reconciliation.

The process of renaming in South Africa thus epitomises the complex dynamics characteristic of reconciling democratic engagement, historical justice and national cohesion. Despite the SAGNC's policy guidelines towards inclusivity, actual circumstances reveal many challenges, such as political meddling, disparities in power and cultural opposition. Examples such as Makhado reveal that, in the absence of true participation by the community and mutual compromise, place-renaming exercises can further cleave society rather than promote a common nationhood. These challenges show that there is a need for more effective and inclusive mechanisms to guide the renaming process so that it becomes an avenue for reconciliation and unity rather than a source of dispute.

Theoretical framework

This study is underpinned by social identity theory. Social identity refers to the way that people's perceptions of themselves are shaped by their affiliation with particular social groups (Tajfel & Turner 1986). Social identity theory recognises that each person belongs to a specific group, which is the crucial component. According to this theory, sports teams, religions, nationalities, occupations, sexual orientations, ethnic groups and gender are examples of social groups. As a result, groups can be recognised by a variety of characteristics, including a name, a language or a dress code. According to Rwodzi, Mphela and Mogoboya (2020), social identification makes people adopt the identity of the group

that they belong to and act according to the way they perceive members of that group. A South African from the Zulu tribe is expected to act according to the dictates of the Zulu culture. The tribal name Zulu collectively accounts for homogeneity in terms of beliefs, values and practices (Rwodzi et al. 2020). Social identity theory is relevant in this article to review how the renaming processes of places at the Alfred Duma Local Municipality in uThukela District Municipality, KZN, South Africa, have represented the onomastic interests of the communities. This article is of the view that renaming places will help Africans identify themselves with the place name in that it gives them a sense of belonging.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach, which is a form of social inquiry that assesses how people construe and make sense of their experiences and the world they live in. This view is succinctly supported by Ramesh (2008), who asserts that:

> The qualitative research approach was established in the social sciences to allow researchers to explore social and cultural phenomena, such as feelings, thoughts, behaviours, and beliefs of the general public. (p. 11)

Data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews. It is against this backdrop that we used this approach so that communities and officials in the Alfred Duma Local Municipality could share their experiences and thoughts regarding the renaming process that took place in their localities.

This paper was gathered using face-to-face semi-structured interviews administered to 26 participants, comprising community members, community leaders, government officials from the Alfred Duma Local Municipality, uThukela District Municipality, the KZN Provincial Geographical Names Committee (KZNPGNC), the South African Geographical Names Council, the KZN Department of Arts and Culture, and the National Department of Sports, Arts, Culture and Recreation (NDSACR). Evaluating the roles and responsibilities of the officials involved in place renaming was significant to this study because it enabled us to understand how each department and its officials contributed to the renaming of places in Alfred Duma Local Municipality. During the interview process, the researcher took notes so that the data gathered could be referenced later.

Codes were used for participants to protect their anonymity and confidentiality. We coded participants PT1 to PT26. All 26 participants were selected for this study to compare the similarities and contrast the differences among them as information on the renaming process cascaded to community members. These engagements enabled the researchers to identify any inconsistencies that could have occurred as a result of misinformation, either from communication breakdown in this renaming process or from flawed processes.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used thematic analysis to capture the findings. Thematic analysis identifies themes in the gathered data. Data were coded and sorted into their meanings, and later themes were developed (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas 2013). The study adhered to all the recommended practices of qualitative research in order to enhance the study's trustworthiness. Dependability was established through recording a detailed audit trail of data collection and analysis, and conformability was achieved through reflexivity, where the researcher critically examined their influence on the research process and findings. These measures collectively strengthened the reliability and validity of the study.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) Research Ethics Committee – Humanities (FCRE/APL/STD/2018/07).

Findings and discussion

Multiple themes that emerged during the data presentation process are discussed to understand the implications, complications and occurrences in the renaming process at the Alfred Duma Local Municipality, KZN. The four themes that emerged from the data are as follows: (1) the importance of community involvement in the renaming process; (2) understanding the importance of names and their meaning in the renaming process; (3) the lack of transparency in the renaming process; and (4) restoring people's identity and dignity through the renaming process.

The importance of community involvement in the renaming process

This theme assesses how information on the renaming process was conveyed during the meetings that were held with community members. Furthermore, it highlights the criteria used to select place names in the renaming process in the Alfred Duma Local Municipality in uThukela District Municipality in KZN. This entailed consultations with community members on how the renaming process was carried out and how community members were involved in this process. Mudau (2009) recommends that government officials should conduct the renaming process by engaging everyone concerned to avoid unnecessary problems afterwards. Thus, in this study, some community members concurred that there were meetings held by their respective traditional leaders, local counsellors and government officials to deliberate on the renaming of place names relating to them. One participant said:

> 'There were meetings held by our traditional leaders, local councillors and government officials to deliberate on the renaming of place names that related to us'. (PT3, female, 56 years old)

This form of participation fosters progress, as such engagements allow community members to raise questions and concerns during renaming process meetings. However, some community members, including traditional and local political leaders, indicated that these engagements did not

take place in their areas, and they were not involved in the renaming process.

Some meetings on the renaming of places took place in other communities, and the purpose of these meetings was to encourage them to take part in this renaming process. Furthermore, the participation of the traditional leaders ensured a somewhat acceptable, smooth process, as traditional leaders were actively engaged. Community members believed that it was a form of deconstructing the colonial and apartheid place names and a way of reclaiming their land. Therefore, the new names were to reflect who they were to restore their identity and dignity.

While information is cascaded from the relevant department to the local authorities, senior leadership at the Alfred Duma Local Municipality confirmed that the renaming process meetings were held successfully. Another participant mentioned that:

> '… the participation of the community members played significant roles during this process'. (PT12, male, 68 years old)

However, this has not always been the case, as in the renaming process of the Makhado case, the Makhado Municipality experienced minority participation from the residents. This, in turn, prevented the renaming process from being concluded accordingly (Musitha 2016). Therefore, getting community members' involvement seemed to have worked at the Alfred Duma Local Municipality, contrary to Makhado, where there was a court case involving some groupings who wanted to block the renaming process.

In other instances, the findings revealed that other local political leaders and traditional leaders confirmed that these meetings were facilitated accordingly, as the KZN Department of Arts and Culture facilitated this process of renaming of places. They revealed that these meetings entailed reviewing the place names currently being used in their respective places. In understanding this renaming process, the researcher attempted to determine from the KZN Department of Arts and Culture, the NDSACR and the KZNPGNC how the information on the renaming process was communicated to community members. According to the KZN Department of Arts and Culture, community members could apply for their proposed name, vote and use their preferred names. The Department of Arts and Culture would facilitate this process. A participant said:

> 'Community members could apply for their proposed name, vote, and use their preferred names. Then we, as the Department of Arts and Culture, would facilitate this process.' (PT16, female, 57 years old)

Thus, the NDSACR ensured a follow-up meeting where members were thoroughly guided on this process to ensure that there was further discussion on the names they had applied for. This finding, that the process of renaming should be facilitated to implement relevant rules to ensure no power relation dominates unevenly, is in line with Chauke's (2015) view.

As further found during the interviews, the KZNPGNC stipulated that there should be meetings held to facilitate the renaming process, in which community members would either accept or reject the proposed names. This process entails involving community members to submit and vote for a name before agreeing to it. Another participant said:

> '… meetings were held to facilitate the renaming process, where community members would either accept or reject the proposed names. This process entails involving community members to submit and vote for a name before agreeing to it.' (PT17, female, 41 years old)

Once that preferred name has been voted for, community members would then apply for it by following specific procedures and processes outlined by the relevant departments and the KZNPGNC as part of the renaming conditions. Similarly, Mudau (2009) recommends that municipalities should engage members to participate in this process and highlights that naming should be undertaken to infuse harmony, thereby resorting to neutral names. Thus, in the Alfred Duma Local Municipality, community members were well informed and involved in this renaming process and felt that these places must be renamed to restore their culture. According to this finding, the renaming was conducted in some other communities despite others denying being fully informed. This finding is similar to the finding by Chauke (2015), who emphasises that members should fully participate in this process to exercise their freedom of expression without feeling that they are forced to adhere to names that are not in their interest.

Understanding the importance of names and their meaning in the renaming process

This theme assesses understanding the importance of toponym (place name), which forms part of this study, along with the criteria used to select names in the renaming process at the Alfred Duma Local Municipality in uThukela District Municipality, KZN. According to the Handbook (Department Arts, Culture, Science and Technology 1998), the SAGNC is responsible for standardising names that fall under its jurisdiction and for ensuring that they apply to each geographical feature.

It is important for place names to have meaning as they form part of the place's identity and history. Place names could have cultural and historical connections. The findings in this study show that the renaming process of these place names at the Alfred Duma Local Municipality in the uThukela District Municipality, KZN, followed and considered both the identity of these places and the physical features around these areas to retain the historical or actual semantic sources of each place. In this study, these historical sources provide the natural and cultural phenomenon as they exist in all these places to represent the people living there. This theme supports the adoption of social identity theory, as:

> The basic idea is that a social category (e.g., nationality, political affiliation, sports team) into which one falls, and to which one feels one belongs (in this case amaZulu), provides a definition of

who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of the category – a self-definition that is a part of the self-concept. (Hogg, Terry & White 1995:259)

It can be noticed that the places were renamed for Zulu people by Zulu people to reclaim their pride and restore the place names that embody their historical background and culture.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that although the specific place can be renamed, it is essential to understand what constitutes the approval of those place names, origins and meanings. Such place names include *eMibuzweni* [the questions that people were asked when they wanted a piece of land] and *eZikhonkhwaneni* [devices used to mark land]. The study also found that some of the renamed (gazetted) place names were motivated by the landscape of the areas, such as *kwaNtababomvu* [red mountains], or the structure of the places, such as *eMahhukwini* [a place of hook mountains].

Similarly, the Handbook (Department Arts, Culture, Science and Technology 1998) explains that the renaming of places should also be carried out to correct the historical use of names. Thus, this historical use of names conveys the origin of a place name and the geographical elements attached to it. Furthermore, Magudu, Muguti and Mutami (2014) believe that the deconstruction of colonial names in Zimbabwe was beneficial in preserving their original history. As a result, the renaming of colonial place names at the Alfred Duma Local Municipality in uThukela District Municipality, KZN, has benefited the Zulu people, amaZulu, in restoring their history in these areas.

Lack of transparency in the renaming process

When asked the question, 'How did the officials communicate with you when a new name was being proposed at Alfred Duma Local Municipality?', some community members and traditional leaders claimed that they do not recall hearing about the renaming of places from the officials, while some claimed that they do not recall hearing of the process at all. This is evident in a participant stating:

'Some of us were informed through other members of the community who passed the information on which they had received from the community leaders and the local municipality about a meeting to be held on issues concerning place renaming. It was not a formal invitation.' (PT5, male, 63 years old)

Another participant asserted:

'I was never told nor informed about place renaming. I heard that the local places were being renamed, such as eMihlwaneni and eNkuthu, but did not have information on the renaming of eNtantane.' (PT7, male, 69 years old)

Contrary to this, some officials said they indeed did communicate with the community members at large. One participant said:

'I engaged with community members to discuss this process of renaming where members were given the platform to ask questions regarding this renaming process.' (PT8, male, 62 years old)

Another participant added:

'Once we receive an application on the renaming of places, we communicate with the community and the traditional tribal leader of that place so that he or she liaises with the community members through scheduling meetings where the KZNPGNC will further discuss the name(s) applied for.' (PT15, female, 47 years old)

Based on the above information, it is clear that some community members and local leaders had no clue about the meetings where the place-renaming process was discussed. Perhaps one would conclude that all the discussions occurred at a political level and failed to filter down to the level of the community members, resulting in the politicians manipulating the process.

Restoring people's identity and dignity through the renaming process

The other objective of this study was to investigate the perception of community members at the Alfred Duma Local Municipality in uThukela District Municipality, KZN, in the renaming process. This investigation was conducted to assess their understanding and participation in the process, how it has impacted them and whether this process helped them restore their dignity and identity. Most of the participants believed that these places should have been renamed to regain their history and culture. They felt that it was irrelevant for these places to bear names that were a stark reminder of their oppression, considering that white people no longer resided in those places. Magudu et al. (2014) also examine how the renaming of places in Zimbabwe has the power to deconstruct colonial names and influence and rebrand the indigenous people's identity, as this might have adverse effects on the next generation. Similarly, a participant shared:

'We felt that colonialism, imperialism, and apartheid segregated us from our history, culture and heritage'. (PT1, female, 72 years old)

Furthermore, community members regarded this renaming process and naming as a token of honour and reparations because the land had been redistributed to them. According to Chauke (2015), the naming process is a powerful tool that promotes democracy because pride and dignity were restored in those significant places where people felt the need to rename. This theme also supports the adoption of social identity theory, as Tajfel (1978) states that social identity theory begins with the premise that individuals define their own identities with regard to social groups and that such identifications work to protect and bolster self-identity. Thus, community members at the Alfred Duma Local Municipality felt empowered because this process was facilitated fairly, which enabled them to exercise their rights, claim their dignity and inherit their places back.

Discussion

Places that were renamed using the isiZulu language portray much about the culture, heritage, history and dignity as a symbol of unity in the community of the Zulu people residing in the Alfred Duma Local Municipality. Even though some

community members were not happy about the way the renaming process was handled by those in authority, they suggested a more transparent way of handling the process as they did not know about it. The suggestion that renaming should be handled with care was observed by Chauke (2015), adding that otherwise, it could divide the nation.

Despite this, the study found that some community members felt that in order to guarantee that the onomastic needs of everyone were accommodated, some place names that were previously used should be considered during the renaming process. This concurs with the reflection made by Magudu and colleagues (2014) that the retention of the previously used names before Zimbabwe's colonisation affected the dignity of the citizens.

The study further finds that the renaming process at the Alfred Duma Local Municipality in uThukela District Municipality, KZN, would heal the wounds incurred during the colonial apartheid times when black people were evicted from their forefathers' lands. Therefore, black people would have been able to rename these places to their preferred names that represented their culture, identity and freedom. In aligning with this view, Chauke (2015) views that people rename their significant places with names that resemble their beliefs and values. Therefore, given the opportunity to rename places such as Kleinfontein, Roodepoort, Skoeman, Driefontein, Doornhoek, Kirkintulloch and Watershed, community members believe that this process implies the conquest of the colonial and apartheid regimes. This opportunity also reflected freedom, as indigenous place names contributed towards the people's identity both as linguistic expressions and identifiers of the landscape (Ndimande-Hlongwa 2015).

Historically, it was deduced that some community members were not consulted when these names were renamed, especially when white people vacated these places. Therefore, this renaming process seemed like an essential process in restoring their autonomy.

Furthermore, the traditional tribal leader held meetings with community members to discuss the renaming of places. During these meetings, community members were afforded opportunities to nominate and vote for the names of their choice. These meetings were also attended by the officials from the local municipality, traditional leaders and local political leaders, who provided consultation and collaboration between stakeholders. The officials facilitated the process of renaming places to ensure that community members adhered to the public naming guidelines as proposed by the SAGNC. These public naming guidelines include identifying the names that should be avoided, considerations to be taken into account when choosing a name, and the reasons for renaming these place names. Thus, community members were given an opportunity to ask questions regarding the proposed names and the renaming of places at the Alfred Duma Local Municipality. It can be concluded that the renaming of places was undertaken by the people in their communities.

Building on these observations, the findings of the renaming processes of the Alfred Duma Local Municipality shed light on important lessons to be shared with policymakers and local government authorities trying to drive inclusive and transparent renaming processes. The findings not only reveal the cultural and historical importance of place names but also demonstrate the challenges and opportunities involved in the management of such processes in ways that are respectful of the values, identity and dignity of the different communities.

Policy implications

The following policy implications provide guidance for future initiatives to enhance inclusivity, transparency and community participation in the naming and renaming of places by policymakers.

Recognition of cultural identity and heritage

The act of renaming entities using indigenous languages therefore puts onomastics at the forefront in the facilitation of bringing back cultural dignity and fostering unity among communities. A municipality can right the historical wrongs and strengthen communal identity by associating newly named places with the linguistic and cultural heritage of its residents. This view agrees with Ndimande-Hlongwa (2015), who asserts that place names are markers of the linguistic and cultural landscape.

Transparent and inclusive processes

The dissatisfaction expressed by some community members about the lack of awareness and involvement in the renaming process emphasises the necessity for clear protocols. Chauke (2015) warns that renaming can be a divisive activity rather than nation-building, if mismanaged. This therefore calls for keeping all stakeholders informed and involved in each step to ensure legitimacy and build public confidence.

Balancing historical continuity and change

Specific contributors indicated that, for specific communities, already existing names should be put into consideration in the renaming to fulfil the onomastic needs of every community member. This agrees with the assertion by Magudu and colleagues (2014) that the retention of specific historical names can provide a sense of continuity and respect while averting the erasure of collective memory. Policymakers need to balance between confronting colonial vestiges and promoting inclusiveness through the incorporation of names carrying diverse histories and identities.

Healing historical wounds

Results indicate that renaming is seen as a symbolic process of reclaiming autonomy and redressing injustices perpetrated by both the colonial and apartheid regimes. This view resonates with the argument made by Chauke (2015) that

renaming important places represents beliefs and values, enabling feelings of freedom and cultural pride in previously marginalised groups. Policymakers are called upon to take renaming as one of the mechanisms for achieving reconciliation and social cohesion, especially within highly aggrieved settings.

Recommendations for more inclusive renaming processes

The following recommendations should provide clear, practical steps to promote inclusivity, transparency and active community involvement in renaming processes. The recommendations would be helpful to policymakers and local authorities in handling renaming initiatives.

Education and capacity building

Public education campaigns should accompany renaming initiatives to raise awareness about the historical and cultural significance of place names. This will help reduce resistance through a shared understanding of the purpose and benefits of the renaming process.

Interdisciplinary collaboration

Local authorities should team up with linguists, historians and cultural experts to ascertain that the proposed names are culturally applicable, historically sensitive and linguistically meaningful. Such a strategy could effectively yield more credence and greater acceptability of new names.

Institutionalising feedback mechanisms

There is a need for post-renaming evaluation through institutionalisation in order to check community satisfaction and areas where improvement might be needed. These can influence future initiatives and offer the public more confidence in governance processes.

The findings from Alfred Duma Local Municipality also point out the potential that naming and renaming processes might hold in reclaiming dignity, cultural heritage and inclusiveness. Striking a balance between community involvement, transparency and cultural concerns helps local governments anchor their renaming projects as opportunities for reconciliation and empowerment. If executed throughout South Africa, such lessons have the capacity to turn renaming what has often proved a cause of conflict into a binding force in celebrating the diverse identities of people and their common history.

Conclusion

In summary, the renaming process in the Alfred Duma Local Municipality represented the onomastic interests of the community, as community members felt that their places should be renamed to reflect their identity and restore their dignity. This presented a positive perception of the renaming process followed.

Traditional leaders, political leaders and officials made attempts to involve the local communities in deciding on the names of the new places that should be given to these places. In the end, places were named according to the wishes of the ordinary people from different communities within the Alfred Duma Local Municipality and not the wishes of the leaders and the politicians. This approach should be emulated by other communities, especially the urban areas where residents may struggle to agree on how the naming of public places should be carried out. Therefore, this renaming seemed like an essential process in restoring the African indigenous autonomy of the community concerning heritage, culture, history and language. Conclusively, the findings reflect that community members gained a positive onomastic perception of the renaming process, which was procedurally followed to rename place names at the Alfred Duma Local Municipality in uThukela District Municipality, KZN.

Limitations of this study

The purposive sampling method has limitations in that the results could not be generalised to other populations than the ones selected. Furthermore, several of the participants refused to engage in the interviews for fear that their responses would be used against them in the larger community in the official domain of onomastic committees. This research was conducted on a limited scale, and as a result, the findings cannot be generalised to other communities, municipalities or district municipalities in terms of renaming places. However, this study may provide some onomastic suggestions for enhancing renaming procedures.

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