Naming practices in colonial and post-colonial Malawi

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In African societies naming practices invariably reflected an important rite of passage as a cultural practice, which was always in sync with each society's ordinary citizens' socio-cultural and historical conditions. These were ideological conceptions inherent in each society, reflected as a powerful force in naming practices, either of individuals or places. However, naming practices have been in contact with colonialism in Malawi and the rest of Southern Africa, with the result that this has affected the socio-cultural ideologies which were traditionally embedded with naming practices. They have had to change with the times. The result is that such names bestowed on individuals or places changed with the historical times. At times they remained indigenous, were Westernised or fused indigenous and other African names. This changing pattern has thus had to change with socio-cultural, economic, education and political influences prevailing at each time.

The discussion indicates that social issues, which traditionally indicated physical and social environment, beliefs of a given sub-culture, were essentially a barometer of meanings and moral codes of a society. However, this tended to change with the attitude and prevailing conditions at specific historical epochs, of how such names were conceived and assigned. Malawi is given as an example, but this could be applied to the entire Southern African region which has been affected by the advent of colonialism and post-colonialism.

Keywords: Naming practices, Malawi, anomastics, ethno-linguistics

Introduction

The sub-fields of linguistics onomastics and ethno-linguistic normally feature research into naming in southern Africa. This article explores change from colonial times to post-independent Malawi, following a number of cultural historical and political influences. Largely, this has been a result of contact Black Africans have had with colonialism, Christianity and Western education in the early part of 20th C. (Dube *et al.* 2007).

The linguistic practices of ordinary citizens have had to change with the times, where language has had to express historical epochs, cultural, religious and political freedoms. Citizens have responded to these aspects (De Klerk and Bosch 1995, Lubisi 2002, Moyo 1996). For example, in Malawi children that were born after Malawi had attained its independence from Britain on 6 July 1964 are popularly referred to as 'born free'. We can see that language practice and naming practices tend to reflect the historical ideology of the times and have tended to play a symbolic function of meanings that they carried.

The paper, therefore, concentrates on the sociolinguistic aspects of personal and place names at each time. Personal names, in particular, could be humorous, idiosyncratic and at times nonsensical to native speakers of English and weird to most people, e.g. *Spoon*, *Hinges*, *Bywell*, *Goodness*, *Loveness*, *Whisky*, *Advocate*, *Gift,* etc. However, they may tend to be consistent with social and linguistic formations of New Englishes (see Kachru 1988).

Background and ethno-linguistic profile of Malawi

In order to situate the analysis of naming in Malawi, a brief history of Malawi is presented. A linguistic profile of languages of communication will be provided. The land now referred to as Malawi, which became a British protectorate in 1891, attained its independence on 6 July 1964 and changed its name from Nyasaland to Malawi. Malawi is the modern spelling of 'Maravi' the name that was used in ancient times, not only geographically to denote a large area in Central Africa, but also sociologically to describe the widespread group of closely associated Bantu peoples whose domain it was. This area included all that used to be Nyasaland, together with present day Zambia to the East and Mozambique. Etymologically, the word Malawi is associated with the general meaning of reflected light or bright haze, which is an appropriate name of a dawn that is reflected and sprawled on the lake which is to the East of the country (Pike 1968).

The country Malawi has an area of 45,747 square miles, of which one quarter is water. Lake Malawi as a whole covers an area of 11, 650 square miles, while waters belonging to Malawi cover an area of 9,250 square miles. The main religions are Protestant, Roman Catholic and Islam. The formal education system consists of seven years of primary education and five years of secondary education and then three (diploma) or four to five degrees of higher education.

Archaeological evidence indicates that it was occupied by people of succeeding Stone Age cultures from about 50,000 B.C. in the Northern part of Malawi and from considerably later elsewhere. The earliest settlement by Bantu-speaking

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peoples appears to have been about the first century and there was a further influx of these people in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Apart from the odd mention of the region in early Arab writing, the first written records of Malawi come from the Portuguese's journals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This is also indicated on several early maps.

Malawi's early history is said to have been with the visit of David Livingstone to Lake Nyasa in September 1859. British interest in the area was sustained by missionary work and the work of the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), which was Anglican, from 1861; the Free Church of Scotland from 1875, and the established Church of Scotland from 1876 respectively. During these years, however, the country was disturbed by warlike invaders, who comprised Arab and Portuguese slave dealers, who took advantage of the confusion to involve warring parties in slave trade. The missionary pioneers were followed by traders, hunters and planters. British interests steadily grew and began to demand support from the home government. This resulted in in the first step which was taken in 1833, when the British consul was established in Blantyre, who was then accredited to the Kings Chiefs of Central Africa.[2]

A lot of administrative work was accomplished, with the result that the establishment of Nyasaland (now Malawi), as a British Protectorate was declared on the 15th of May 1891. The areas that were still affected by wars and slave trading were pacified. Later on, the Consul-General, Sir Alfred Sharp, was succeeded by Sir Harry Johnstone.

Language profile

The languages of Nyasaland, now known as Malawi, have changed their status from colonial times (Nyasaland) to independence (Malawi), just as the country has changed its names. Owing to the colonisation of indirect rule adopted by Britain, which allowed space for indigenous languages to flourish, Nyasaland had three official and functional languages, viz: ciNyanja in the southern and central provinces and ciTumbuka as the lingua franca in the entire Northern province, where five other languages are spoken (Moyo 1995). English, however, has enjoyed the most prestigious official role since colonial times to date. CiYao, a melodious indigenous language which is spoken in central and southern regions, would have been the third language, but was abandoned since the Scottish missionaries viewed it as a hindrance to their proselytising and civilising efforts (see Kishindo 19989). English has, however, enjoyed a prestigious official role as a result of colonisation, particularly in education and in mass communication. However, the orthographies that missionaries and colonists created of indigenous languages were markedly different from what the people spoke. The colonised were trained by missionaries in the orthographies which were introduced to them. This often led to the distortion, disturbance and fragmentation of existing power structures of the various languages and dialects (Cluver 1992, Chiuye and Moyo 2008).

With the dawn of independence, ciTumbuka survived from 1964 to 1968 as the lingua franca in the Northern province. However, Dr Banda, Malawi's first president of the independent Malawi (1964-1994), dictatorially debased ciTumbuka and stripped it of its official role as a medium of instruction in the north and replaced it with his minority dialect of ciCewa, which he subsequently promoted to a national language, even where learners and teachers did not attain proficiency and competence in the language. Cicewa, which is the same language as ciNyanja, came to symbolise the country's national identity, linguistically, culturally and politically (Chirwa 1994/95). Effectively ciCewa pushed other languages into relative obscurity (Mchombo, 1998). It was seditious to be seen with any publication in ciTumbuka, with the exception of the Bible and a hymn book in the language.

In Bakili Muluzi's time as Malawi's second president (1994-2004), six indigenous languages and English were pronounced official languages. CiTumbuka was reinstated as an official language. Other indigenous languages were ciTonga, ciCewa (ciNyanja), ciYao, ciLomwe, ciSena; these four apart from ciCewa play a token role in the ten minute news broadcasts on the national radio and are never functionally used in other programmes or the press media, other than ciCewa and English. English is the only language used on TV Malawi. This practice clearly sends out strong messages about the lack of functional use and recognition of indigenous languages. Kingonde speakers, surprisingly, demanded that the national radio station also broadcast news in their language in the ten minutes news broadcast, but kiNgonde is not constitutionally an official language.

In a way, Malawi's linguistic profile follows a description of its colonial and historical tradition, in that it is a political act with a slight freedom given to indigenous languages, Interestingly, English still remains the most prestigious language of learning and communication. It has appropriated indigenous languages as an imposition of European variants of African languages, under the guise of promoting indigenous languages. Codification of indigenous languages has been limited to

2. The Kings Chiefs of Central Africa were all the Native Authorities of the entire Central Africa. Central Africa referred to Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, where chiefs were all under the influence of Britain's colonial influence in the 'scramble for Africa.' The thinking was that if the Natives were controlled by their own Chiefs first, it would then be easier for Britain as a colonial power to pacify and rule the colonised natives through their Chiefs.

ciCewa (ciNyanja) as instructional languages nationally in early education. The rest of the indigenous languages are not codified or standardised. English remains the supremacist and most prestigious language from top to bottom.

Place names

Names of places, particularly towns, have changed from being non-African and non-Malawian to being Malawian, again depending on the ruling power. For example, during the colonial times, the few towns which were known by non-African names to remember missionaries or colonial administrators, were renamed. These were renamed as follows:

Deep Bay	Chilumba
Fort Hill	Citipa
Fort Manning	Mchinji
Fort Johnstone	Mangochi
Port Herald	Nsanje

Deep Bay was so named because the first ship or boat that sailed on Lake Nyasa, *Vipya*, unfortunately sank in the deepest waters of the lake, with a lot of passengers, at a very close place to the shore and people saw it sink. Attempts to recover it failed miserably, hence the name.

There was an orthographic change from *Cholo* to *Thyolo* after 1964. In a similar vein *Que Que* was changed in Zimbabwe to *Kwe-Kwe* after 1980. One has to note, however, that these words are pronounced differently, depending on the speakers.

Personal names

Authorities have written considerably on the development of Christian and colonial naming traditions in Africa. The adoption of English names among Black Africans has been attributed to the coercive power of Christianity and colonialism (Dube *et al.* 2007, Neethling 2003). In South Africa, among Xhosa speakers, Neethling (2003:47) observes that:

> With the introduction of Christianity and education as practiced by mission schools to Xhosa speakers in the early 19th century, came a new development. English names were bestowed upon Xhosa children by the missionaries (at baptism) and by teachers (at school). These were often referred to as 'church' and 'school' names.

Neethling (2003) above identifies teachers and missionaries as name givers. In Malawi, a similar situation occurred owing to colonialisation since missionaries were effectively forerunners of British colonialists. However, there is also an indication that community members acted as original name givers as Suzman (1994) observes that this was 'varied and extensive' and 'pointers' to historical events and social circumstances within the larger family units (Moyo 1996).

With the advent of Christianity and colonialism in Malawi and southern Africa as a whole, this meant that the colonised had to be absorbed in the establishment. Consequently, employees renamed Black Africans indiscriminately with certain European names (Dube *et al.* 2007). One other reason for this was that Whites found African names rather difficult to pronounce. These were names like *Qabaniso, Gomezga, Hluphekile,* in Northern Malawi. In South Africa Machaba (2002) wonders why such names as *Nkosinathi* (God is with us) could not be continued to be used. Indigenous African names were also associated with sins, backwardness, darkness, etc. (Machaba 2002; Moyo 1996). The adopted names, it would appear, suited the prevailing socio-cultural, economic and political environment and this is nothing new in African history (Mphande 2006).

The act of naming oneself, therefore, reveals that names serve as indicators of broader social change and names are a device which explains and classifies patterns of domination and submission (Alia 1984).

With individual names there is a distinction between personal names and surnames (Mphande 2006). Mphande (2006:109) sums up the difference:

> While surname may refer to collective and more historical experiences, first, or given, names comment on more temporary social issues and are thus more relevant in deciphering the social atmosphere at a given time. Apart from indicating an individual's relationship with a physical and social environment, names are also statements about religion and the beliefs of speakers and their relationship with the supernatural.

Personal names thus provide a barometer for measuring changes in attitudes and moral codes at specific historical epochs.

On the other hand, personal names provide unique details and circumstances surrounding the birth of a child (De Klerk and Bosch 1995). In addition they give more information about the natural conditions that were prevailing and the social context in which the individual was born. Naming in African societies has this significant role in identity marking, which makes the language of the name crucial. For example, a child would be named *Ndaipamo* in south Malawi; the name is a short form of the full name *Ndaipamo m'mudzi muno,* which means 'I am hated in this village.' Another name in

southern Malawi is *Limbanazo*, which means 'be strong and bear the consequences.' A polygamist bestowed the name *Limbanazo* on his son and named his wife *Aseka akayenda*, (*Aseka*), in short, meaning that she would only laugh when she is away from her household. She would not talk to the co-wife and her children. On the other hand, she would be jovial, talk or joke with people outside her home area, when she went to another place.

In Northern Malawi, among the Ngoni, *Mtwalo* is another name of the writer's traditional chief. The name was bestowed on the traditional chief as a child as a result of the difficulties which the chief's mother had during childbirth, hence the name that was bestowed on the child. In this case both names describe the circumstance that prevailed at the birth of the child. The name *Tafwaci*, also in Northern Malawi, means 'What is wrong with us? The message from the name-giver is to implore the powers that be, with the implication that many may have passed away as a result of witchcraft or some evil spirit. A similar name to *Tafwaci* is *Mapopa*, which means 'we are now in the wilderness'. It is a name that is usually given to a boy upon the departure of a relative, whereas *Tafwaci* could be bestowed on either a boy or girl. On the other hand, a name such as *Chiembekezo* from the central region means 'hope and expectation', meaning parents or the village people hope that the newly-born will give a renewed life and hope for the future to come.

The prevalence of Malawian names in the post-colonial period

We noted earlier on that children who were born after 1964 were popularly referred to as 'born-free.' The argument was that Dr Banda had singularly brought freedom and therefore independence to Malawi. 'Old' names resurfaced and became more pronounced than colonial, Western or English names. Evidence of such names come from political leaders like Dr H. Kamuzu Banda, Malawi's first president (1964-1994). He preferred to have his name, Hastings, appear as an initial only and allow the projection of his indigenous Malawian name, Kamuzu, prominently spelt in the press, as Dr H. Kamuzu Banda. Banda's original name was *Kamunkwala,* a Tumbuka word which means 'a small dose of medicine' but he later changed this himself to *Kamuzu*, which symbolised the dawn of a new era. Others were called *kwacha. While the meaning of Kamuzu* is a medicinal, herbal root, the meaning of the names 'Kamuzu' or 'Kwacha' meant 'freedom' or 'dawn' of a new era, because it was the president, Kamuzu Banda, who brought the freedom or dawn of a new era. Kamuzu Banda was thus named because this ended his mother's by seeking assistance from a medicine man (Lwanda 1993:14). Banda later came to project this name, *Kamuzu,* to symbolise his African-ness and the African identity.

Short (1974:06) also noted that Banda's name, Kamuzu means 'little root' and that the name was bestowed on him to commemorate the ending of his mother's infertility by a potion prepared from the root herbs by a *sing'anga* (medicine man). At school he was christened Hastings by the Church of Scotland, the faith that he was converted to. It would appear that these indigenous names have aesthetically appealed to individuals, particularly after Malawi's independence in 1964, with an added political robustness about them. The aesthetic reasons tended to relate to individuals' appearing to be somewhat original, like Banda himself. The common understanding is that they have given them political identity.

What we observe after the period in 1994 is that people used both names in full, as in Hastings Kamuzu Banda, but after 1994 the Christian or English name only appeared as an initial: Dr H. Kamuzu Banda. Thus before 1994 one would be known as in Column A and after independence the English name would only be initialed as in Column B.

Column A	Column B
Bywell Vusi Jere	Vusi Jere or Vusi B. Jere
Kingdom Muzipasi Mkhaliphi	Musipazi K. Mkhaliphi
Beauty Balekile Nyirenda	Balekile B. Nyirenda
James Mgontha Moyo	Mgontha J. Moyo
Collins Gulengwachi Chimaliro	Gulengwachi C. Chimaliro
Angeline Tawene Phiri	Tawene A. Phiri
Kingsley Kaithaze Hara	Kaithaze K. Hara
Chaonaine Mercy Sapangwa	Chaonaine M. Sapangwa
Mwinimuzi Grace Chiuye	Mwinimuzi G. Chinye
Chisanzo Robert Ngulinga	Chisanzo R. Ngulinga

As pointed out, with the dawn of political freedom, many children, who were referred to a 'born-free' after 1994, adopted political names regardless of where they were born throughout Malawi. There were many children who at birth were named *Kamuzu* or *Kwacha,* which has the same meaning as 'freedom' in ciCewa. In ciTumbuka, a child would be called *Wanangwa,* which has a similar meaning to 'freedom' in ciTumbuka. Some children were given the name *Unika,*

which means 'shine' with the freedom that the country had attained. Others still were bestowed Malawian names without political connotations. Examples are Onani which means 'look' in ciCewa, and *Dziko* in ciCewa, which means 'the world.' A similar name in ciTumbuka would be *Caro*. Others still were called *Kwende* in ciYao, which means 'let us go.' In all, the circumstances surrounding a child's birth would be explained by name givers, and children who were born after independence in 1964 largely symbolised 'a new dawn' in independent Malawi.

Discussion

One of Dr Banda's first ministers after Malawi's independence, who were referred to as 'rebel ministers' after being dismissed by the president in less than a year after being appointed, was initially known by all his names in the press, as Murray William Kanyama Chiume. Upon becoming a forefront minister of Foreign Affairs (the only one to hold the foreign service post in Dr Banda's rule), he presented his name to the media, which appeared and read only as M.W. Kanyama Chiume. Following his president, Chiume identified himself with what was then politically fashionable; in other words, he also fronted his western names, which only appeared as initials, as M.W.

Elsewhere in Africa, one of Africa's greatest novelists in English, whose novel *Things Fall Apart* brought African literature to the world, changed his names to Chinua Achebe. He was born in a Christian family; his father was Isaiah and his mother Janet. Both his parents had religious names. Their son's baptismal name was Albert Chinualumoga. He later abandoned his baptismal name of Albert after realising that it was a tribute to Victorian England (*Africa Today*, 2001). He obviously must have felt very insulted when we consider that he espoused a great sense of African-ness through the Igbo idiom and voice rendered in English to reach a world-wide audience.

James Ngugi too, a world-renowned Kenyan novelist, known for his motif of 'return to the roots', rejected his Christian education name, James, and returned to the past. He adopted his father's name and made a symbolic return by reclaiming his father's name. This symbolised a breakaway for what he described as a tortured relationship with colonial education. He called himself *Ngugi wa Thiong'o* which means, *Ngugi, the son of Thiong'o*. In a similar fashion, Mphande, now Lupenga Mphande, a political activist from Malawi, changed his name. Throughout his secondary school education, however, he was known as John Lupenga Mphande. Since his university education he totally abandoned the name *John* as totally meaningless to him. He is a poet of rare intellect and of deep humanity. Professionally, he is a phonologist by training and an academic. He is now known as *Lupenga* Mphande, for political identity reasons, where *Lupenga* means 'the horn that rallies people to some urgent gathering.' In this sense he finds his name bearing a symbolic sense, in view of his key role in the demise of Dr Banda's political fortunes in 1994. He also contributed considerably toward multi-party elections in Zambia after Dr Kenneth Kaunda's rule.

De Klerk (1999) has noted that former controversial secretary-general of the Pan African Congress (PAC) in South Africa, Ben Alexander, later changed his name to *Khoisan X*. He argued that 'X' symbolised a search for his identity, ethnically, with regard to the search for his original roots, as he is believed to have been of the Khoisan stock. With the advent of the new dispensation, his political identity remained unclear if he continued to be known as Ben Alexander.

A former South African Minister of Sport, Arnold Stofile, changed his name to *Makhenkesi* Stofile, and the politician of Congress of the People (COPE) and former Defence Minister, Patrick 'Terror' Lekota, changed his name to *Mosioua Lekota,* dropping the two English names. In Zimbabwe, a famous literary scholar changed his name from *European* to *Tafadzwa*, a name drawn from *chiShona* (Dube *et al.* 2007).

Names as expressing people's political and cultural pride

Names tend to embody some of the deepest feelings that language can express. In this regard, names therefore tend to reflect the bearer's origin and context at the time, where the tendency is to follow and be guided by custom, fashion and what they see as expediency.

Machaba (2002), in South Africa, has observed that the notion of change in a people's name and place names reflects 'an unnecessary revenge for colonialism and Apartheid.' Others view this as a long-awaited move. The precise variables or reasons for name bearers who decide to change their names in the course of their lives are varied. We can only speculate that these fuse aesthetic, religious, socio-cultural and political factors. There is thus a complex fusion of factors leading to one's change of name(s). This indicates a shifting allegiance from having an English or European name and an indigenous African name for identity on political platforms.

At the University of Botswana, Arua (2009) reports on a study in which he investigated whether Black African students are loyal to names that are given to them at birth and to what extent this pattern of naming affects their first names. Data was collected among a student population of 164 first year and final year undergraduate students (95 females and 69 males). The student population presents extremes of freshness and experiences of learning in a university. The findings showed a response of 82% (46 females versus 36 males), roughly. It would appear that was largely because first

names were Tswana. These were names like *Boitumelo*, meaning (joy or happiness), *Malebogo*, meaning (thanks), *Gaone* meaning (His God's), *Kabelo* (Gift), *Keamogetse* (I have received), *Kelebogile* (Thank you), *Keoreapetse* (I prayed to Him), *Lorato* (Love), *Motlalepula* (One who comes with a rain), etc. European names like *Martin* might be meaningless to an individual and more importantly to the family where the individual belonged. In a similar vein, it could be argued that most children born after Malawi's independence had more African names, unlike their parents who were born in the colonial era. Children's parents in Malawi tended to project their Malawian names and only initialed their Western names. Arua (2009), however, showed that there was no indication of sexist undertones and it should be noted that the common underlying reason seems to have been the circumstances which prevailed at the time that the child was born, hence the similarity and relevance of Malawian and Botswanan names. It can be argued, therefore, that among Malawians, Tswanas and in southern Africa generally, naming seems a strong ideological tool, where names give loyalty, esteem and show respect to ancestors and religious values that are inherent in each society (Arua 2009). Children felt that they should not change their names when they became adults. The 82% result shows that many students in the study preferred the retention of Tswana names, which was significant.

A different observation was made by De Klerk (1999), who observed that English names are in some contexts still upheld and that there is a positive attitude among Black African name bearers. The idea may not be to abandon Western, colonial or Christian names entirely for cultural or political identity reasons. It could be argued that shaking off these initial names is tantamount to individuals being stripped or eroded, as they have all along being identified and known by these names since they arrived in this world.

Concluding remarks

It is yet to be established whether future name-bearers will be totally known by their indigenous African names or by a fusion of both Western and African names. In an African context, it might be worth reiterating that the notion of domination is a metaphor and languages do not dominate people; people dominate each other. Paradoxically, even though the metaphor of languages dominating people is meant to be a clarion call to political action, framing the discussion in such a political manner renders it more difficult rather than easier for political intervention to take place, exactly in those contexts in which active social intervention is warranted (Dube *et al.* 2007:27). The state cannot control names in public life. It is within individuals' power to conceptualise and project their names according to how and what they think is best for them.

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