

Indigenous Onomastics in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*: Anthroponymic and Toponymic Practices in a Postcolonial Context

Pule Seabi¹ ✉, Edward Montle², Mj Mogoboya³

^{1,2,3}Department of Languages (English Studies), School of Languages and Communication Studies
Faculty of Humanities, University of Limpopo, South Africa

Article Info

Article History:

Received

05 January 2026

Approved

26 March 2026

Published

30 April 2026

Keywords: *Afrocentricity, anthroponyms and toponyms, decolonization, Onomastics, Postcolonial*

Abstract

The continuous usage of colonial languages in Africa during and after colonisation creates an identity crisis in onomastics. Severe consequences on African languages might occur due to linguistic imperialism and through the erosion of indigenous languages can cause a language shift. Speakers of indigenous languages gradually abandon their native languages in favor of a dominant one when a dominant language that is often associated with power and prestige infiltrates a community. The loss of linguistic diversity affects cultural heritage and identity causing the minority languages to face extinction or endangerment (Moghadam and Barani, 2025: 04). African indigenous names have been polluted and replaced with colonial names due to the influence of colonial languages. The practice of place naming on non-European landscapes through colonialism aimed to impose significance and order (Danaldson, 2025: 193). Colonisation impacted the names of places and people in the African space, language played a major role, and black people started to adopt the colonial language and named themselves with this foreign language. Thus, this paper analyses Zakes Mda's novel titled *The Heart of Redness* (2000) to investigate African identity-crisis through the onomastics of people (anthroponyms) and places (toponyms) of the indigenous (South) African people. The paper uses a qualitative research methodology to probe the colonial undertones within the names of people and places in the present day (South) Africa through prism of Mda's selected literary text.

© Copyright 2026

INTRODUCTION

The year 1884, November 15 to 1885, February 26, marks the final nail to the coffin. The African continent was never the same again as the inhabitants of the continent lost their History, Legacy, and Identity to the Berlin conference. Resources were found in South Africa, mainly the discovery of diamonds in 1867 and gold in 1886. The discovery gave the European nations the urge to be interested in Africa. After discovering minerals in Africa, the European nations started to fight over these

resources, and a war was about to break out. This tension led to 14 European countries meeting in Berlin to create a rule and division of Africa to have a piece of the African continent and retract some resources out to Europe. In 1914, the Scramble of Africa was the invasion, occupation, division, and colonisation of African territory by European powers, primarily Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, and Italy. After post-colonialism, the African writers started to write about all the effects the African people had to go through since colonialism and the impacts of post-colonialism (Seabi, 2022: 23).

✉ Corresponding author:
Email: Seabi.pule@gmail.com

Montle (2020, 85) asserts that the intertwining of the two cultures was “brought into question and eventually identity-crisis in the postcolonial era when European powers in the 1870s developed a tremendous attraction for Africa. As a result, Europeans competed against each other for colonising different states of Africa. The rivalry for control in Africa culminated at the Berlin Conference between 1884- 1885. The conference was hosted to plan the colonisation of Africa and reach an agreement to share the states of the continent and it was concluded that Africa would be divided and shared, and this became known as the Scramble for Africa”. The colonial settlers designated names to every city, town, mountain, river, and other geographical features they encountered upon anchoring off the coast of South Africa. During its rule, the apartheid administration also started the process of renaming important monuments and locations (Rammile and Matamanda, 2022, 3).

Before colonisation, African people were naming themselves and spaces using their native languages. After colonisation, the language of the colonisers was used as a means of communication and leaving out the native languages. The irony is that the African languages were used first to name places and people but after the colonisers settled, they started infiltrating the indigenous African names which were used for thousands of years only to be renamed again using the dominant languages. African people were guided by nature during their naming ceremonies. Nature told African people the time of the day, months of the year, stars and time were all given names looking at nature. Indigenous people gave out names based on the character of that object like rain, mountains, months, and names of places. Motupa, Rakgogo, and Majola (2024,1) Like any other African nation, South Africa does not give individuals names just so they would have a way to be referred to and known. Names, on the other hand, are much more than just a collection of letters or syllables.

The widespread transfer of culture traits from one society to the other resulted in cultural and biological interaction between different people (European settlers and indigenous African people. Language contact and shift occurred during the

interaction, which also had an impact on the region's toponymic landscape. New names were devised, certain existing names were altered, and some were translated, either entirely or in part. Additionally, hybrid names—comprising elements from various languages—were employed. Furthermore, some less prominent locations were referred to by different names in different languages (Raper, Möller, and Du Plessis, 2014).

Names serve as a means of narration, preserving the legacy of both individuals and their communities. Through names, people plausibly trace their heritage, commemorate significant events and honour relationships with the supernatural (Diko 2025, 12).

Names reveal the situations and circumstances that surround one's birth, parental hopes, and aspiration. Hence, an African name divulges one's origin, identity, religion, belief, and history (Adeyefa, 2022: 54). Names can tell the origin of a person normally names are usually classified by language. When a person mentions his or her name, people can then tell the language and culture of that person especially surnames in (South) Africa. Due to modernisation a lot of black people started to have western names, and this clash of languages created an identity crisis in present South Africa.

The name assigned to an individual in a typical African traditional society serves as an identifier of lineage, encompassing family background, cultural and socio-economic characteristics, economic and political class, family occupation, and place of origin (Tarus, 2025: 26).

According to Adeyefa (2022: 58) “African names are meaning-associative and this semantic logicity (of African names) is crucial to onomastic translation. The reality of this signified-signifier arbitrariness is questioned among African names”. Diko (2025, 2) states that the “amaXhosa names serve as containers of memory, crystallising moments of joy, hardship, or ancestral intervention. Names become linguistic footprints imprints of lived experiences that trace the emotional landscapes of their communities”. Motupa, Rakgogo, and Majola (2024,4) asserts that:

Naming connects indigenous people to their African traditions and history. Naming can mean different things to different people, but what gives a name meaning is the message attached to it. To many cultural groups in South Africa, names are more than tags of reference, they are more like prophecies to the name-bearers from the name-givers. For instance, a name-giver can name a child, Khumo (Wealth) with the hope that their child would grow up to be very rich or successful. African people attach different notions to their names, it can be hope for the future, emotions, and feelings, which can be negative or positive, depending on the state of the relationship between the mother and the name-giver. Therefore, it can then be argued that naming cannot be separated from culture and identity.

According to Motupa, Rakgogo, and Majola (2024, 1) "Names are much more than just a collection of letters or words; they have a far deeper meaning. As they were deprived of their identity, culture, and land, South Africa suffered the atrocities of white cruelty, just like every other African nation. The freedom to express who they were was denied to Africans. Despite numerous changes following South Africa's 1994 freedom, the Eurocentric and Western naming epistemologies persisted as part of the so-called African Renaissance. According to the authors, Europeans recognised that the pride and sense of identification of the indigenous peoples stemmed from their African heritage, which also fostered a feeling of belonging. If that were to be removed from them, the African people would consequently entirely forfeit their identity and authority. Upon anchoring off the coast of South Africa, the colonial settlers designated names to every geographical features, river, mountain, town and city.

The toponyms that were already in use and the associations that native communities had formed with them were completely disregarded when naming "newly discovered" locations during colonialism. Names that were derived from locals were given to several of the regions. According to Muhammad, Isah, Banki, and Ahmed (2020), quoted in Rammile and Matamanda (2022, 4), "yet many of those were written in alignment with the English dialect, which meant they were misspelt

and distorted the meaning associated with the original words."

Rammile and Matamanda (2022, 4) argue that place names have historically served as markers of divisions based on race, ethnicity, economics, or culture. Montle (2021, 526) suggests that the interaction between African indigenous peoples and Europeans during the colonial period contributed to the identity crises seen in the post-colonial era. The colonised people no longer have a distinct identity in this diversity. Essentially, during the period of colonialism, African traditional communities continued to practise their own customs and values, but the European decree introduced a wave of modernity that introduced new voices that spread western culture, religion, and medicine among African traditional civilisations.

The influence of the apartheid regime, modernisation, and enslavement has resulted in the alterations to the naming customs of African communities makes a significant contemporary issue in the study of African personal names. According to Anastasiya, onomastics offers a valuable perspective for analyzing human societies. Names are not arbitrary; rather, they are deeply ingrained in systems of meaning related to language, authority, identity, and memory. Scholars can access the profound mental and ethical frameworks that influence both individual and communal identities throughout time and location by analyzing names. The study of names continues to be a crucial field for comprehending how people relate to their history, languages, and themselves as global interconnection increases and linguistic landscapes change (Anastasiya, 2025, 152).

According to Donaldson (2025, 191), name changes are frequently viewed as a concrete and symbolic attempt to remedy the past injustices and effects of colonization on indigenous peoples. It represents a larger effort to recognize and address the detrimental effects of colonization. By renaming places with indigenous names or names that hold cultural significance, there is an attempt to reclaim and preserve indigenous languages, cultures and histories. European invaders attacked and contaminated African names and naming systems in an effort to suppress and eradicate

African identity. Names not only aid in the formation of identity but also serve to concretise a people's collective memory by retaining the circumstances of their experiences. Conquerors either gave Africans new names or left them unidentified in order to subjugate them and condemn them to life in service in order to destroy African communal memories and identities (Fitspatrick, 2012).

Motupa, Rakgogo, and Majola (2024,3) assert that the renaming of South African geographical features using Eurocentric names, western epistemologies, and practices lacks any significance that Africans can identify with. In Western culture, names are mostly given for reference, therefore their meaning is irrelevant. Even if a name has a significance, the person who gave it does not care to learn it because they do not recognise it. Since there is no relationship or connection between a person and their name, they are seen as distinct entities. Colonial names given to African people do not have meaning to Africans, and they lack origin unlike the indigenous African names which Africans can connect to and claim.

The naming custom is also influenced by marriage. In Africa, culture serves as a form of identity and is a diverse phenomenon with a wider range of meanings and applications. African culture appears to be a threat to women since it subsumes their identity under that of men.

The wife is usually given a name by the husband's family. For instance, the appellation 'mother of' (Ma_go) is given to the newly wedded wife and represents the names of her children born into the family; this label indicates that she had a name and surname before she got married and when she arrived her husband's family gave her a new name (identity) based on the children she birthed after being married. African people are motivated and encouraged by this article to uphold their heritage and oppose the injustices they persist in confronting. Therefore, rather than advocating for all Africans, whether on the continent or in the diaspora, to adopt African names, the study's goal is to highlight the significance of names and naming customs among Africans and their enduring importance. Adopting African names can therefore be seen as either a blatant rejection of Eurocentric domination or as a positive acknowledgment of African origin.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The exploration of decolonisation in literature requires a robust theoretical framework to analyse and interpret the cultural, social, and political contexts embedded in literary texts. This study will employ a postcolonial theory to address specific objectives and aspects of the research. The use of this theoretical lens enhances the depth and breadth of analysis, particularly when studying complex subjects like decolonisation, identity, and representation in post-colonial African literature. Understanding the complex nature of identity in Zakes Mda's work as well as the larger socio-political environments they portray requires a theory like post-colonialism. With an emphasis on the effects of decolonization on gender, race, culture, and power relations, this theory will add to a thorough knowledge of the process.

Post-colonial theory

Colonialism is not satisfied with snaring the people in its net or of draining the colonized brain of any for or substance. With a kind of perverted logic, it turns its attention to the past of the colonized people and distorts it, disfigures it, and destroys it. Today, this attempt to demonize pre-colonial history assumes a dialectical significance (Fanon 1963, p. 149).

Seabi (2022:22) asserts that Edward W. Said is considered the founder of post-colonial theory. His theory of Orientalism (1978) believed that the consequences of colonialism are persisting in corruption, civil wars, bloodshed, coups, and chaos. Furthermore, he believes that a powerful coloniser has imposed a language and a culture. In their quest to subjugate these people and plunder their resources, colonialists have neglected and even corrupted the oriental people's culture, history, values, and languages (Said, 1978). The post-colonial era in African literature deals with Africans who try to re-order and re-organise their lives and identity after years of colonialism (Mogoboya, 2004). Post-colonial theory serves as the foundational theoretical framework for this study, offering a critical lens through which to examine the lasting impacts of colonialism on formerly colonised societies, particularly in Africa. Post-colonialism emerged as a response to the cultural, economic, and political legacies of

European colonial rule and aims to interrogate how colonial power dynamics have persisted in the post-independence era.

Postcolonialism is the study of how colonialism affected cultures and societies. It focuses on how European countries invaded and subjugated "third-world" societies, as well as how these societies reacted to and fended off such incursions (Seabi, 2022: 22). Post-colonial theory emphasises the importance of understanding the mechanisms through which colonial powers marginalised and subjugated colonised populations. It critically analyses how colonial systems of representation distorted the identities of non-White people by portraying them through homogenised, often stereotypical lenses. As Bhati (2023) points out, post-colonial theory questions the depiction of colonised peoples as possessing a single, collective hegemonic identity, challenging these monolithic representations and encouraging a more nuanced understanding of the identities of colonised individuals and communities.

African literature was at its peak, with writers aiming to write for their people and rewrite the history told from a European perspective. The African literature was committed to resisting the issues of the colonial and post-colonial effects. Led to post-colonialism, different literary critics such as Homi K. Bhabha developed several key concepts, such as Hybridity, Mimicry, difference, and ambivalence. Many African writers, novelists, poets, and critics such as Chinua Achebe and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Wole Soyinka are trying to show us a clash of cultures and where the Africans lost their identity. The black characters experience these challenges in the African novels (Seabi, 2022: 23).

According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2007), Post-Colonialism is "the study and analysis of European colonialism, the discursive operations of empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and resistance of those subjects, and most importantly perhaps, the differing responses to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre-and post-independence nations and communities. Major theorists in post-colonialism include Homi k Bhabha *The Location of Culture*, Edward W. Said *Orientalism*, and Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak *Can the Subaltern Speak?*

Theoretical concepts of mimicry, ambivalence and hybridity are used to define this complicated controversial phenomenon through Homi k Bhabha's Concepts

- Hybridity

According to Childs and Fowler (2006), Hybridity "emerges specifically from colonial encounters that have resulted in today's "multicultural" or "diasporic societies".

- Mimicry

According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2007), mimicry is "when colonial discourse encourages the colonised subject to 'mimic' the coloniser, by adapting the coloniser's cultural habit, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a 'blurred copy' of the colonizer that can be quite threatening. This is because mimicry is never very far from mockery, since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics".

- Ambivalence

According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2007), ambivalence is "adapted into colonial discourse theory by Homi k Bhabha, it describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterises the relationship between colonizer and colonized".

Post-colonial theory plays a crucial role in analyzing how colonial and apartheid systems dehumanized black South Africans and sought to eradicate their cultural identities in the setting of Zakes Mda's novel. Perceptions of African identity in the post-apartheid era are still shaped by the colonial characterization of African nations as "primitive" or "backward," which was used to validate European dominance.

Montle asserts that "after taking control of Africa, the colonizer reconstructed a newly-fashioned African identity inspired by European undertones that immobilized the aboriginal African identity that Africans embraced prior to the emergence of colonialism," according to Montle (2020, 85). By emphasizing the experiences and viewpoints of black South Africans, Mda's novels, like *The Heart of Redness*, provide a counter-narrative to these colonial discourses and recover African voices and identities.

Additionally, post-colonial theory sheds light on the process of cultural decolonization,

which entails reclaiming and honoring indigenous cultures, languages, and lifestyles in addition to rejecting colonial representations. The conflict between tradition and modernity in post-apartheid South Africa is highlighted by Mda's work, and post-colonial theory enables an examination of how these conflicts mirror larger struggles for identity and cultural autonomy following colonial domination.

METHODS

Research Design

The study will focus on Decolonising Indigenous Onomastics in *The Heart of Redness*: Anthroponymic and Toponymic Practices in a Postcolonial Context as primary data.

The researcher will use the qualitative research method, content analysis to answer the research questions. Qualitative Content Analysis is defined as the orderly decrease of content, taken apart with exceptional respect for the setting it was made, to distinguish themes and concentrate significant understandings of the data (Roller and Lavrakas, 2015). Content analysis is based on answering a research topic by finding themes in selected information relevant to your area of interest (Terrell, 2015). QCA is suitable for the study since the data will not be gathered directly from the research participants but rather through the codes created from the primary and secondary data mentioned below. The data will be read, and words, phrases, or statements used by the author will be marked. The result will be qualified by totalling the number of consistent opinions or observations within each of the transcripts (novel). An overall summation should result in the development of themes followed by a report (Seabi, 2022: 5).

Sampling

The significant consideration in purposive sampling is the researcher's judgement to consider who can provide the best information to achieve the objectives of the study. The researcher will only focus on the onomastics and toponyms of the people (characters) who are likely to have the required information. The researcher chose to analyse Zakes Mda's novel because of what happens when two cultures intersect (English and

African culture). The text precisely examines the social, cultural and spiritual transformations that resulted from European influence, portraying Main Characters as a symbol of resistance and criticism against Colonial Rule. Mda represents these conditions through the characters in *The Heart Redness*. Through the application of the concept of Post-colonial theory in the analysis of Mda's text, the theory will support this paper and its significance because what is prescribed in this novel is not only about criticism and resistance to violence committed by colonialists against the colonised, but about Mda's ability to build complex characters. The setting of the novels is post-colonial South Africa.

Data Collection

The primary data designated for this study comprises one novel by Zakes Mda, namely: *The Heart of Redness* (2000).

The secondary data has included related works on the novels, and this information will be gathered from the internet and libraries.

Data Analysis

According to Polat (2025: 8) a qualitative inquiry aims "to identify, to interpret, and to understand meanings not numbers. Thematic qualitative analysis intends to uncover embedded meanings and develop themes that encapsulate the core features of the phenomenon." The study will employ thematic analysis to analyse the data qualitatively. The thematic analysis acknowledges that the recorded messages themselves (i.e., texts) are the data. The researcher makes codes during the comparative assessment of the texts as notable themes emerge inductively from the texts (Neuendorf, 2018). The study will focus on the contemporary South African text (novel) mentioned above in the Primary data. The novel will be scrutinised to create codes and themes from the data.

Mwita and Mwilongo (2025: 52) asserts that thematic analysis is a method of qualitative data analysis that involves careful examination of collected qualitative data followed by identifying, classifying, analyzing and reporting patterns observed in the data. Thematic analysis is a multipurpose analysis that can help researchers in various occasions. Firstly, it is relevant in

exploratory studies. Studies that seek to discover or understand a particular phenomenon are inquisitive in nature. This in turn makes it easier to answer research questions because only themes with essence to the study are put into the spotlight.

Reading collected data which is in form of texts and listen to the audio recorded (if any) the researcher will go through the text several times to contextualize and familiarize with the data to avoid misinterpretation of data or overlooking important insights that might distort the meaning of collected data to make the identification of theories easier. Breaking down research data into units and assigning codes for each group. Coding is the grouping of data to reduce lots of data into small chunks of meaning. These codes emerge from texts prepared in terms of notes. Deductive coding comes from theories, frameworks, models, assumptions and general knowledge from the discipline. Codes help to identify patterns of data and identity themes.

Using codes to learn similar patterns provided by certain codes when combined. Codes are made to break down data into a more understandable form but may not offer insightful information. Assessing obtained themes and confirming whether they represent the actual collected data. Writing related data under each theme for comparison purposes. This stage allows researchers to modify or remove a theme if it is noticed that the theme is not consistent with available data.

Giving themes meaning that are consistent with collected data, codes and sub-themes. Define the themes by assigning meaning to them. Definitions of the themes should be consistent with the sub-themes, codes and actual data to make the whole exercise of data analysis valid. Going through collected data and identify quotations that significantly explain respective themes than others. Each theme may have one or several quotations in some themes if there is no essence to do so. Preparing the final document in a precise and analytical manner while considering the audience and other rules of writing research works. The quotations identified in step six can be inserted under each theme written in the paper. (Mwita and Mwilongo, 2025: 57)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Decolonising the Anthroponyms in The Heart of Redness (2000)

In *The Heart of Redness*, Zakes Mda uses the theme of naming to explore the complex intersections between colonial power, indigenous resistance, memory, gender, and cultural preservation. Naming, often perceived as a mundane administrative act, is revealed to be an ideological battlefield where African identities are shaped, repressed, and reclaimed. It is through names both their retention and subversion that Mda highlights the legacy of colonial violence and the continuing effort of post-colonial societies to decolonise cultural memory.

Decolonising the War names

P70 'I am looking for her, I hope that some of you may know her,' he tells them. NomaRussia is a very common name, one of the teachers explains. The people of this region began giving their valued daughters this name – which means Mother of the Russians – when the Russians killed Sir George Cathcart during the Crimean War in 1854.

This act of naming is a gendered and political decision: naming daughters after geopolitical events signifies the cultural agency of the colonised. The significance of a name as a means of remembering and resistance is captured in this quotation. The name "NomaRussia" honors the historical cooperation between Russians and Africans, signifying the joy of an enemy's defeat and the elevation of resistance. "Names adapt to mirror contemporary realities while maintaining their foundational role in identity formation," according to Diko (2025).

Decolonising the name calling and spelling

Cathcart, the teacher further explains, was the much-hated colonial governor who finally defeated the amaXhosa in the War of Mlanjeni... The colonists called the amaXhosa Xhosas, or even Kosas!"

According to Ndlovu (2017,119) When the sound play and the name twisting are done for convenience, usually the speakers would be failing to pronounce a foreign phoneme. The same process can be done due to lack of effort to get it right and to derive amusement. Furthermore, the

colonial renaming of the amaXhosa as “Xhosas” or “Kosas” illustrates how imperial powers manipulated language to erase or distort indigenous identities. As a result, naming becomes a location of cultural resistance as well as imposed identification.

Rammile and Matamanda (2022,4) asserts that though the difference may seem small and insignificant, one letter changes the meaning of a word in many native South African languages. Considering that people attach community identity to toponyms, this mistake can be monumental. Consider a settlement on a mountaintop with a breathtaking view; the people name it Bheka (Look) as an optimistic sign to look ahead or focus on and observe the beauty. Without the “h”, the settlement is referred to as Beka (Put down, set aside), which can raise a dejected community.

It is most feasible that the people of Bheka and Beka will not carry the same sense of pride in their location or have equal place attachment. Below are other examples of misspelt words; some change meaning, some lose meaning, and some simply do not make grammatical sense.

The technique of adapting sounds through transphonologisation may offend phonological owners. An out-group's incorrect pronunciation of an in-group ethnonym or toponym may be interpreted by the in-group as a sign of a lack of effort or as open arrogance that damages their ethnic ego (Ndlovu, 2017, 119).

Decolonising the naming tradition through modernity

P76 “Competition for prime land by the sea has intensified. The white folks now bribe the chief with cellphones and satellite dishes. Haven’t you heard? The chief has even named one of his daughters NoCellphone. His wife is pregnant. If the baby is a boy he will be named Satellite. A girl will obviously be NoSatellite.”

This satirical passage reflects a degradation of traditional naming practices under the influence of capitalist modernity and materialism. Due to materialistic ideals and neo-colonial reliance, the titles “NoCellphone” and “Satellite” mock the loss of cultural meaning in naming. It also critiques how African leadership may be co-opted or corrupted by external pressures, leading to the erosion of indigenous cultural practices. From an

intersectional perspective, the passage also exposes gendered impacts female children being assigned names based on consumer objects indicating the commodification and trivialisation of black female identity.

Technological developments also affect onomastic patterns, according to Anastasiya (2025, 152). The emergence of odd or invented names among younger generations, who are often influenced by pop culture, branding, or digital aesthetics, suggests a shift towards individualism and personal branding.

Decolonising the derogatory names in the African space

P218 “‘You cannot teach us about the abaThwa and the KhoiKhoi,’ says the first elder dismissively... We called them ama-Lawu or amaQheya.’ Bhonco sighs appreciatively at the elder’s use of these derogatory isiXhosa names... It is the next best thing to laughter.”

Internalized bias among indigenous groups is revealed in this instance. The use of derogatory names like “ama-Lawu” and “amaQheya” for Khoikhoi and mixed-race peoples reveals how colonial ideologies of racial and ethnic hierarchy were absorbed and perpetuated within African communities. According to Kotze (2024,5), many people are still haunted by racist, negative previous classifications that pertain to Khoe and San people, to the point that they have opted to distance themselves from their indigenous heritage and adopt the Apartheid classification label “coloured.” People of colour are still marginalised on the basis of race using the same classification and categorisation under the current administration.

Decolonising the naming tradition through marriage

P280 “‘Indeed it is an irregular marriage,’ agrees the uncle. ‘when we take this girl to your house, son of cesane, you know that a goat known as tsiki must be slaughtered. Then our daughter has to be given a new name by the eldest daughter of her new family. But in your case, who is going to give our daughter a name?’ ‘yes,’ adds an aunt, ‘and who will give the bride the leg of a goat?’

This passage shows the importance of women and their power in the matrilineal role in naming reveals the authority of women in traditional practices. Despite centuries of

westernisation and Christianisation Mda displays the resilience of indigenous naming customs.

Montle and Moleke (2021,590) asserts that “For instance, in the Sotho tribe, Lobola is referred to as Mahadi, Rooru in Shona, Magadi in Setswana, Lovola in Xitsonga and Mamalo in Tshivenda. Similarly, the tribes above in most cases prefer the uncles of the bride to be to the head or be an important part of the negotiations”. The African process of negotiating is between two families normality the elders. Camagu went to Bhoncu house accompanied by a white man called John Dalton who is not related to him. what makes this an irregular marriage is that he went there alone accompanied by a friend.

In the African space the uncles and aunt must be the one who carry out this negotiations because in their culture the eldest aunt has to give the bride a new name but because camagu did not follow the right channels he recreated a clash. The wife will not be given a new name upon their arrival because John Dalton is only a friend to Camagu and camagu can to the village alone he does not have contact with his family hence he decided to ask John to accompany him to marry.

Toponyms

Simungala and Banda, (2026: 3) asserts that “downscaling and erasure are critical in maintaining unequal power dynamics because they perpetuate systemic marginalisation, leading to the obscuration or elimination of certain groups’ histories, practices, voices, and experiences”. The colonisers rewrote the African history by naming toponyms and gaining access to control over both the meaning and space. The passage reveals the enforcing of Eurocentric authority and diminishing African worldviews by naming practises that served to overwrite indigenous memory systems.

Decolonising place names has been a current issue in post-colonial Africa. Similar identity crisis can be traced in Zambia with a colonialist named “David Livingstone, a Scottish missionary, renamed a waterfall local people had already named as Shungu Namutitima or Mosi-oa-Tunya ‘The Smoke that Thunders’, Victoria Falls after Queen Victoria of England” Mufuzi (2011) and Jimaima and Banda (2019) cited by Simungala and Banda (2025: 4). When the colonist came to Africa and settled, African people were already

living in communities that had civilisation. European missionaries named every thing they came into contact with exploring. The clash of the two languages created a clash in toponyms.

P95 “The Man Who Named Ten Rivers was Sir George Grey... He had even given names to ten of their rivers, and to their mountain ranges. It did not matter that the forebears of those natives had named those rivers and mountains from time immemorial.”

All indigenous place names on public entities were removed by the oppressors, who then substituted Eurocentric names that reflected their identities, culture, and beliefs (Rakgogo, Majola, and Motupa, 2024,4). The removal of indigenous geographical names and their replacement by colonial figures like Sir George Grey portrays a colonial naming practise that results in a cultural dispossession. According to Mufuzi (2011) and Jimaima and Banda (2019) cited by Simungala and Banda (2025: 4) asserts that “the act of (re)naming by David Livingstone does not only reflect British Imperialism; it also represents the power to erase local memories of the falls and replace them with a colonial British heritage that still lingers to date. Interestingly, the colonial town that emerged near the falls was named Livingstone, displacing the Toka-Leya people and their histories to the margins or to obscurity in the process”. Chilikure et al. (2014) offer additional perspectives on erasure and downscaling, emphasizing the Europeanization of African landscapes—the imposition of European names on African towns, rivers, and mountains like the Vaal River, Lake Victoria, and the Drakensberg Mountains (Simungala and Banda, 2026: 4).

Discussion

The colonised persons who speak the language of the coloniser are ipso facto assuming the latter's culture. A primary function of language in the colonial situation is, in other words, facilitate and promote cultural and political domination Fanon (1952: 55).

Anastasiya (2025, 151) asserts that the formation of character and setting in literature depends on onomastics. Authors often use names to create irony, evoke specific associations, or strengthen symbolic resonance. In postcolonial

literature, for example, names may carry traces of both indigenous and colonial languages, highlighting the hybrid nature of identity in such contexts. African people are naming their children using names that are influenced by modernisation. Montle (2020,84) asserts that “the colonialists capitalised on their command to manipulate Africans into adopting Western identities and this altered the landscape of Africa from African-traditionalised identities to Africanwesternised identities. This instigates a cultural upheaval that poses a threat to the authentic Africanism, thus, paving a way for the manifestation of African identity-crisis in the post-colonial era”.

The adoption of contemporary practices in (South) African societies has led to a significant change in attitudes, perceptions, and identities, frequently marginalising traditional systems. Like the majority of cultures worldwide, South Africa is gradually eschewing indigenous customs in favour of modern ideology (Montle and Moleke, 2021, 587). Since the arrival of the colonisers, Africans have lost their indigenous traditions and practises for naming. A decolonisation of the current names must be revisited and renamed with the aim of Africanising the whole names. According to Igboin (2011, 6) “as part of the erosion of the African cultural values, Africans now bear at least a European or Christian name. This means that African names, arts, music, religion, etc. are inferior of pagan in orientation and value. The acceptance of this by the Africans has continued to have serious negative effects on the postcolonial Africa and its values”. According to Diko (2025, 2), “the linguistic footprint of the amaXhosa was distorted by colonialism and apartheid, as systems of oppression.” Like unrelenting winds, these destructive forces worked to erase the rich tapestry of indigenous names that held cultural identity and ancient wisdom.

In their place, Western names were imposed, silencing the indigenous narratives that amaXhosa names so powerfully convey stories of resilience, kinship and spiritual connection”

This study found out that names are divided into languages. One being the colonial names and the other being the tribal names. South African black people have abandoned their tribal names and adopted colonial names. While some people use both tribal and colonial names, others only

have one name that is tribal or colonial. These results suggest that tribal names are the only names that can be traced and linked to the African history which can tell a person’s legacy. While western names do not carry nor have a link with the African history, these names do not connect nor link with Africans.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the evolution of naming practices in relation to shifting historical, social, and religious contexts. These examples show how naming is an important part of cultural identity, as Mda points out. Whether used to commemorate resistance, assert colonial control, mark familial transition, or expose internal prejudice, names carry the weight of history, power, and meaning. *The Heart of Redness* shows that to decolonize African identity is also to take back the right to name things in order to bring back their original meanings, honor memory, and fight against outside notions of selfhood. Naming becomes not only a cultural act but a political and spiritual one, essential to restoring dignity and self-definition to historically marginalised groups.

REFERENCES

- ADEYEFA, D. E. (2022). A Postcolonial Insight into African Onomastics in Europhone Translation: A study of DO Fagunwa’s Selected Yoruba Narrative Names. *Yoruba Studies Review*.
- Anastasiya, V. (2025, May). The Role of Onomastics in Cultural and Linguistic Identity. In *CONFERENCE ON THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF SCIENCE IN THE MODERN WORLD* (Vol. 2, No. 5, pp. 150-152).
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2007). *Post-colonial studies: The key concepts* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Routledge.
- Bhati, A. (2023). *What can postcolonial theory contribute to the study of social equity?* *Public Administration Review*, 83(1), 203-209. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13523>
- Childs, P., & Fowler, R. (2006). *The Routledge dictionary of literary terms*. Routledge.
- Chirikure, S., Manyanga, M., Pollard, A. M., Bandama, F., Mahachi, G., & Pikirayi, I. (2014). Zimbabwe Culture before Mapungubwe: New Evidence from Mapela Hill, South-Western Zimbabwe. *PLoS ONE*, 9(10).

- Diko, M. (2025). Identity forged through names: Drawing parallels between biblical and amaXhosa naming practices using cultural onomastics. *Nomina Africana: Journal of African Onomastics*, 39(1), 1-13.
- Donaldson, R. (2025). 'If you name a child and then change the name, it is someone else': opinions of Graaff-Reinet residents on the proposed name change of their town to Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe. *South African Geographical Journal*, 107(2), 190-217.
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*. (Richard Philcox, Trans.). Grove Press.
- Fanon, G (1952). *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove press.
- Fitzpatrick, L. A. (2012). *African names and naming practices: The impact slavery and European domination had on the African psyche, identity and protest* (Master's thesis, The Ohio State University).
- Igboin, B. O. (2011). Colonialism and African cultural values. *African Journal of History and Culture*, 3(6), 96-103.
- Jimaima, H., & Banda, F. (2019). Multilingual memories: Artefactual materiality of erasure and downscaling in linguistic and semiotic landscapes of Livingstone Town, Zambia. In R. Blackwood & J. Macalister (Eds.), *Multilingual memories: Monuments, museums and the linguistic landscape* (pp. 89–112). Bloomsbury.
- Jimaima, H., and F. Banda. 2019. "Multilingual Memories: Artefactual Materiality of Erasure and Downscaling in Linguistic and Semiotic Landscapes of Livingstone Town, Zambia." In *Multilingual Memories: Monuments, Museums and the Linguistic Landscape*, edited by R. Blackwood and J. Macalister, 89–112. London: Bloomsbury.
- Kotze, A. (2024). Khoe, San, Coloured, controvert or conform: Physical attributes influencing the formation of cultural identity in "" Coloured"" women of the Western and Northern Cape.
- Mda, Z. (2000) *The Heart of Redness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mogoboya, M. J. (2004). Identity in African literature: a study of selected novels by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (Doctoral dissertation).
- Montle, M. E. (2021). Depiction of post-apartheid identity in South African literature: An examination of Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. *Palarch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 18(7).\
- Montle, M., & Moleke, H. (2021). Exploring the Commercialisation of Lobola in South Africa. *Palarch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 18(17), 587-606.
- Montle, M.E. (2020). Who is African? Reconceptualising identity-crisis as a threat to African unity: A post-colonial analysis approach. *Journal of African Union Studies*, 9(1), 83- 99.
- Motupa, F. M., Rakgogo, T. J., & Majola, Y. L. (2024). Investigating the Onomastic necessity of using Afrocentric names over Eurocentric ones in the renaming of South African Geographical Features.
- Mufuzi, F. (2011). Establishment of the Livingstone Museum and its Role in Colonial Zambia, 1934–1964. *Historia*, 56(1), 26–41.
- Muhammad, I.B., Isah, A.D., Banki, M.B. and Ahmed, S. (2020)' Toponym and evocation of cultural landscape heritage: A case of an African community', *Pertanika Journals Social Sciences & Humanities*, 28(3), p2427 – 2440.
- Mwita, K., & Mwilongo, N. (2025). Thematic analysis of qualitative research data: A seven-step guide. *Available at SSRN 5200939*.
- Ndlovu, S. (2017). Transphonologisation as ethnophaulism between the Ndebele and the Shona of Zimbabwe in selected toponyms and ethnonyms. *Nomina Africana: Journal of African Onomastics*, 31(2), 117-125.
- Neuendorf, K. A. (2018). *Content analysis and thematic analysis*. In P. Brough (Ed.,) *Advanced research methods for applied psychology: Design, analysis and reporting* (pp. 211-223). Routledge.
- Neuendorf, K. A. (2018). *Content analysis and thematic analysis*. In *Advanced research methods for applied psychology* (pp. 211-223). Routledge.
- Polat, A. (2025). Thematic analysis in qualitative research: Common pitfalls and practical insights for academic writing. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 24, 16094069251372835.
- Rammile, S., & Matamanda, A. (2022, October). A place called home: Understanding Toponyms. In *Unpublished paper, 58th ISOCARP world planning congress, Brussels, Belgium*. https://isocarp.org/app/uploads/2022/11/ISOCARP_2022_Rammile_ISO397-1.pdf.
- Raper, P. E., Moller, L. A., & du Plessis, T. L. (2014). *Dictionary of Southern African place names*. Jonathan Ball Publishers.
- Roller, M. R., & Lavrakas, P. J. (2015). *Applied qualitative research design: A total quality framework approach*. Guilford Publications.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism: Western concepts of the Orient*. New York: Pantheon.
- Seabi, P. (2022). THE PRETEXTS OF IDENTITY CRISIS IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICA: A STUDY OF SELECTED NOVELS OF KOPANO MATLWA. In University of Limpopo, University of Limpopo [Thesis; Text].

http://ul.netd.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10386/4361/seabi_p_2023.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

- Simungala, G., & Banda, F. (2025). Names of public memory spaces as sites of coloniality, cultural erasure, and downscaling in linguistic landscapes of Northern Zambia. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1-14.
- Simungala, G., & Banda, F. (2026). Monuments in linguistic landscapes and the semiotics of public memory in northern Zambia. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 1-16.
- Tarus, R. J. (2025). *An Analysis of Nandi Anthroponyms: An Onomastic Approach* (Doctoral dissertation, Kisii University).
- Terrell, S. R. (2015). *Writing a proposal for your dissertation: Guidelines and examples*. Guilford Publications.