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Harmonising toponymic heritage: balancing standardisation
and local diversity

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ABSTRACT: Intricacies of the self and non-self in African toponymy

Space is intricately linked to human identities such as individual, ethnic, racial, clan, local and national identities etc. This nexus brings into space the politics that pervade human identities. The contestations are even robust on space because the persons live on the land, they own it and it owns them. Naming space has been identified as a mark of ownership and in this way; person-self identities play out on space. People recreate themselves on their spaces through toponyms and when other toponyms encroach into their spaces, human beings heighten their in-group particularism and become combative and devise strategies to exclude the non-self toponyms from their space. The problem however is on how human identities are expressed and demarcated on space. The other problem is which human identities and markers of identity should access space and mark it as part of their selves? Human identities are created along different self and non-self-dichotomies such as gender, nationality, political persuasion, locality, race, language etc. In Africa, contestations to naming space are compounded by pre-colonial, colonial and de-colonial discourses and other hegemonies. This paper engages with the intricacies that pervade African toponymy and how the self is created on space by employing strategies that create and prevent the non-self toponyms. It characterizes self and non-self-topo-namers and toponyms and the identity quagmire that is created by human selves and non selves on space. The paper utilizes the bodily image of immunity as a model to characterize how various selves deal with the envisaged non-selves. It engages with cross domain mappings between toponymy and the biological science domains of micro-biology and immunology. A healthy toponymscape is one that reflects the identity markers of its owners. Foreign toponyms are treated as disease causing political, social, spatial and heritage bacteria hence the strategies to arm the spatial immunity to deal with the non-self-intruders. The paper uses Zimbabwe as a case in point to explore how some toponyms are treated as non-self-pathogens that cause various political, social, and economic sicknesses to the land and its people. It further problematizes multiculturalism and multilingualism in the fight for self toponyms. Various hegemonies create problems of the self and non-self in African toponymy. The aim is to analyse the heightened particularism in toponymy and characterize the contestations and perhaps foreground further engagements on the topic with the aim to get scholarship and policy talking to each other on the topic and politics of toponyms in Africa. The hope being that this will eventually culminate in an identity rights-based model for space naming in Africa.



Biography

Prof. Sambulo Ndlovu is Associate Professor of linguistics at the University of Eswatini's Department of African Languages and Literature and a Research Associate in the Department of Linguistics at the University of South Africa. He is also a Humboldtian who did his research fellowships in the Department of Anthropology and African Studies at the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany. He holds a PhD in linguistics from the University of Cape Town, and his research areas are onomastics, socio- and anthropological linguistics, and cultural studies. He is the Editor-in-Chief of *Nomina Africana Journal of African Onomastics* and has guest edited journals in the Mouton De Gruyter and John Benjamins publishing houses. He sits in the Names Society of Southern Africa (NSSA) Executive Board and is also a member of the scientific board for the International Symposium on Place Names (ISPN). He is an editorial board member for *The Mouth Journal* (University of Cologne), and the *Journal of Cultural Heritage and Development*. He is also a research partner in the commissioned research on morpho-syntactic micro-variation in African youth language funded by DFG (German Research Council) and the University of Essex. He has organised NSSA conferences and was part of the workshop conveners on African youth languages for the 9th International Conference on Sintu/Bantu languages (Sintu/Bantu9) 2022, and the World Congress of African Linguistics 10 (WOCAL10). His latest books are *Naming and othering in Africa: Imagining supremacy and inferiority through language* (Routledge), and *Onomastic performatives: Names and naming from an anthropological linguistic perspective*, (Mouton De Gruyter).