



*Editorial*

*Preservation of indigenous African cultures, identities, and knowledge through toponyms, symbols and artefacts.*

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## Introduction

The study of toponyms has developed into an established academic tradition among historians and geographers (Donaldson, 2025; Elisifa, 2024). For many individuals within communities, toponyms serve as cognitive maps enriched with encoded knowledge, historical legacies, and symbolic significations (Randell-Moon, 2024; Savage, 2020). However, the challenge over the years is that not much studies have been conducted to examine the historical and geographical significance of place names across many communities in Africa. In most cases, while inhabitants of communities do not understand the historical antecedents of the names of their communities, landscapes, and landforms, they are also often not involved in the renaming and naming processes of these places (Mphasha et al., 2024). Toponyms signify a profound relationship with the landscape and encompass substantial information that are beneficial to scholars, the academic community, and the society from which the information originates (Porter et al., 2025). A recent study described toponyms as embodying indigenous epistemologies that also represent ecological histories and profound connections among indigenous groups, habitats, land, and time (Porter et al., 2025). Likewise, the publication by Kahn (2024) concerning the topographical lists of Thutmose III, Ramesses II, and Ramesses III and the location of Ya'qob'el stimulates both intellectual and historical discussions around ancient records and the interpretation of scholars about these records.

The history, traditions, and cultures of different ethnic groups in Africa are rooted in naming practices that serve to safeguard the values and heritage of the diverse ethnic groups. To this end, toponyms are essential for fostering a feeling of cultural and social continuity between historical and contemporary contexts. The written forms of place names reflect power dynamics among the colonised, postcolonial nationalism, and changing political affiliations (Elisifa, 2024). To Chavez-Norgaard (2024), a deeper understanding of place-naming and jurisdictional reformulation as valuable measures for addressing disparities from for example the colonial and apartheid era. The connection between toponyms and issues of power and identity, particularly in multilingual and multicultural societies, sometimes complicates historical and power dynamics (Andersson, 2020).

The colonisation of Africa indeed altered the traditional values and cultures that defined naming practices. For instance, place-naming in the colonial context represented the racial hierarchical structure and spatial segregation that was created by the colonial authorities. It was a common practice during the colonial era to find streets that were named after the colonial monarchs, colonial administrators, settler farmers and businessmen. Colonial naming conventions have predominantly used anthroponyms and toponyms, both historically and currently. In Zimbabwe, many toponyms were assigned in commemoration of the homeland



and as tributes to conquest, while personal names originated from colonialists, particularly missionaries, notably Anglicans and Catholics, who bestowed the names of their saints upon perceived pagans, especially those who had embraced Christianity (Mapara & Siamena, 2024). Notwithstanding the seeming erosion of African place names, traditional Indigenous place names hold substantial linguistic and cultural significance as they encapsulate spatial, temporal, and cultural connotations, including knowledge intended for transmission alongside the name, such as culturally important narratives, songs, and hunting territories (Donaldson, 2025; Porter et al., 2025).

Today, despite the departure of the colonial authorities, cities, streets, symbols, and other artefacts in African Countries still bear the vestiges of colonialism while streets that were constructed post-independence bear “western” names. In response to conventions around the use of anthroponyms and toponyms, there have been several conversations and initiatives across African countries to reposition toponyms, symbols, and artefacts to reflect the culture of groups that were previously colonised. The rationale behind these discussions and initiatives is to push for the decolonisation of the names of places, artefacts, and symbols across the continent. Some of these initiatives have also been prompted by collective memories of colonialism. The current issue of the *Advances in Adult and Development Education Journal* focuses on the preservation of indigenous African cultures and knowledge through toponyms, symbols and artefacts by assembling scholarly discourses from various African authors. These empirical, review, and conceptual articles offer critical insights into the conversations around the preservation of the African identity and heritage through the (re) naming of places, symbols, and artefacts.

### Scholarly discourses on African identity

The first article by Chijioke Azuawusiefe “Communication and Culture: Igbo Names as Media of Everyday Language and Articulations of History” explores how names serve as media through which the Igbo of Nigeria articulate and communicate everyday realities of their culture and history. Chijioke indicates that to fully comprehend an Igbo name, one must consider the circumstances surrounding the individual's birth, the significance of that birth to the parents, and the message that the parents aim to convey through the name. Therefore, for the Igbo, names not only reflect individual, familial, and communal ambitions and perspectives but also convey culture, cultural values, and the history of the people. The study concludes by arguing that Igbo names typify the cultural values, and histories of the people.

The second article – “Digital preservation of artifacts and symbols: the role of technology driven education in West Africa” focuses on how technology-driven education can contribute to digital artefact and symbol preservation. The authors, Abigail Ayorkor Aryeh-Adjei and Robert Lawrence Afutu-Kotey argue that by equipping conservators, curators, professionals, students, and the public with the necessary knowledge and skills to safeguard cultural heritage a deliberate process of preserving digital artefact and symbol could be achieved. The study further argues that infrastructural limitations, ethical dilemmas related to ownership and representation, and cultural sensitivities in digitizing artifacts calls for global collaboration, sustainable implementation strategies, and culturally relevant approaches to ensure the longevity and accessibility of historical artifacts and symbols for future generations. Abigail and Robert Lawrence recommend the use of digital training programs, virtual workshops, and community engagement initiatives as means to create accessible learning opportunities that enhance expertise in artefact conservation.



Yaa Essah Armah and Yaa Oparebea Ampofo discuss how decolonised educational leadership in Ghana could serve as a “symbol” for the preservation of indigenous African cultures, identities, and knowledge. Their work “Re-imagining decolonized educational leadership in Ghana” contribute to the discourses on decolonisation by showing how school leadership in Ghana continuously perpetuates its colonial lineage through practices that are antithetical to the preservation of the African culture and identity. The study concludes that educational leaders should be culturally sensitive to staff, students and the communities where schools are situated.

Article 4 – “Are Street Names in sub-Saharan Africa Gender-Biased? A survey of the literature on the Frameworks, Issues and Structures” by Jonathan Odame investigates gender biases in the naming of streets in Ghana. The author argues that gender biases in street naming is prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa with male names often used more frequently than female names. Similarly, the author argues that female street naming is often associated with stereotypical feminine roles. To Jonathan, the underlying causes of gender bias in street naming include male dominance in the decision-making processes and the lack of women representation in decision-making bodies. The study suggests that to address gender biases in the street naming processes, there is a need to develop a multi-faceted approach that involves increasing the representation of women in decision-making processes and promoting more inclusive and equitable street naming practices.

The article by Oge Samuel Okonkwo explores some reflections on the validity of memory and the contributions of oral traditions to the development of historical knowledge and the (re)construction of African historiography. The study which is titled “Memory and oral tradition: perspectives on advances in African Historiography” argues that oral tradition in Africa transcends mythical stories and represents a vast learning environment because it relates to essential human traits and are linked to human memories. Oge concludes that oral tradition helps to maintain and spread collective memory by providing a means for individuals to retain information and transfer the information to future generations through various media.

The article “Mystery of numbers and the epistemic gaps within the Boran(a) Tradition” emphasises the importance of numbers as symbols within the Boran(a) Tradition in Ethiopia. Guyo Doyo Guyo argues that the Borana use number Three and Nine as sacred entities for multifaceted veracities tied to objective/subjective realities. The study further explains how numbers play significant roles in events such as birth, child naming, marriage and funerals. While Guyo projects the preservation of African culture through numbers, he also highlights some epistemic gaps within the Boran(a) Tradition. To Guyo, the first epistemic gap relates to how the conception of numbers is highly esoteric and makes the process of validating their originality very challenging. Secondly, like the challenges facing many African communities concerning the preservation of their identity, values and history, Guyo shows how the numeration system is not well addressed by existing literature. The study highlights the need for further epistemic and hermeneutic investigation especially on symbols and in particular numbers to improve knowledge generating system in Africa.

The article – “Institutional transformation and the significance of renaming buildings in a South African University: the narratives of support and academic staff” by Maroyi Mulumeoderhwa and Yaw Owusu-Agyeman examines the perceptions of academic and support staff concerning the processes of renaming buildings in one of the historically white South African higher education institutions. The study concludes by arguing that for a socially welcoming



environment to be established, there is a need to create a space where everybody is accommodated and feel belonged. Additionally, the authors argue that the renaming of buildings must reflect the names of individuals who have contributed to knowledge production in the university and community.

The study by Olushola Ayodeji Akanmode “The Relevance of Indigenous Toponyms in Preserving the Culture and Heritage in Igbomina-land” focuses on the cultural significance of toponyms in Omu-Aran, Nigeria, and how toponyms shape the cultural identity and heritage of the indigenous people. Olushola argues that the complex dynamics of colonialism, religion, civilization, and modernization of the town's cultural landscape have contributed to the current culture and identity of the people. However, while settlement expansion and fragmentation has led to toponymic adaptations, war and colonization have had a minimal impact on the naming of places. The study concludes by arguing that when communities integrate indigenous toponymic values to preserve cultural heritage and make conscious effort to strike a balance between tradition and modernization, they could promote their rich cultural heritage and identity through toponyms.

## Toponyms and sustainable development

The current issue highlights the fact that the preservation of African heritage can be done through the naming and renaming of spaces and objects including commemorative streets, national assets, symbols, statues, and artefacts that represent the traditions and cultures of the diverse groups of people. Along this line and in relation to global discussions, toponyms could contribute to the achievement of the global sustainable development goals (SDGs). For example, in relation SDGs 11, 13 and 15 a prior study on how people live in Madagascar's ecosystem, especially in the grasslands without trees, showed that local knowledge, often seen in place names, could provide clues about past plant life (Randriatsara et al., 2024). The findings of Randriatsara et al., (2024) and many others represent the expansive scope of toponyms and how scholars could explore landforms, languages and artefacts to support the achievement of the SDGs.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the (re)naming of places and other artefacts must include a complex set of social and political linkages as well as cultural values that symbolise the traditions and identity of the diverse groups people in Africa. However, while the renaming of places, symbols and artefacts in Africa could help preserve the cultural values and heritage of the diverse groups, if not managed properly could create tension and division among individuals and groups. To help address possible challenges in the (re)naming process, there is a need for increased scholarship on the definition of what constitutes the African identity, heritage, and values without compromising modernity and globalization. Of course the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) also calls for further debate on how African identity, history, ethics, and values could be preserved without digital manipulations and distortions. We hope that future scholarly works would expand the discussions on how AI could either help preserve the indigenous African cultures, identities, and knowledge through toponyms, symbols and artefacts or erase African cultures and traditions.

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- Volume 1, Issue