

(Re)naming patterns, initiation names and their significance among the Lemba people of Mberengwa, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The Lemba people (vaRemba) of Mberengwa are one of the Zimbabwean cultural groups that are well-known for their unique traditions and practices. Their personal naming system is one of the traditions and cultural practices that distinguish them from other cultural groups in Zimbabwe. At birth, boys are bestowed names, but they are later conferred other names after completing the initiation rite of passage. Using the Afrocentric principle of nommo, this qualitative study explores the patterns and significance of names that are given to Lemba males at initiation. Data for the research was extracted from interviews. The study proceeds from the premise that Lemba names communicate important cultural information and that the Lemba people exercise their agency, in part, through renaming, as this provides them with an opportunity to celebrate their cultural practices and customs and define themselves. The study concludes that Lemba names are a reservoir of Lemba history, traditions and ways of life.