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TRACING THE HISTORICAL EXPERIENCES OF  
THE NAMBYA PEOPLE THROUGH THEIR  
TOPONYMS AND ANTROPONYMS



# INTRODUCTION

- The paper narrates the historical experiences of the Nambya people through scrutinizing their names and naming system.
- Focus is particularly on toponyms and anthroponyms.
- The history of the Nambya people is not adequately recorded.
- Study was done through interviews with the Nambya people who are in the Nambya Development Organisation Trust (NDOT).
- The history of the Nambya people begins from what is today known as Great Zimbabwe where they originated from.

# Historical Background of the Nambya Reflected Through Naming

- It is believed that the Nambya people came from Masvingo after they left with Sawanga the King's son who had angered his father.
- They left Great Zimbabwe around 1737.
- When the king was angered he set down with his advisors to map the way forward and it was agreed that the king's son should be killed.
- The King's son had hidden under a huge basket when the decision to kill him was made and he heard it all so he ran away with those who loved him.



## Contd

- When Sawanga left with his followers at that time they were called *Abenyayi*.
- They went to Gokwe where there are Shangwe people today and then proceeded to Kariba and then followed the Zambezi river.
- They went and settled at a place that they called *Dobolo* in Binga where one of Sawanga's sons was born.
- *Dobolo* in Nambya is a swamp, so this area where they had temporarily settled was swampy so they named it *Dobolo* because it had swamps.



## Contd

- They proceeded to another place which they called *Phashu* and at *Phashu* another King's son was born.
- At that time there were too many locusts and in Nambya a locust is called *mhashu* in Tonga *impashu* so this place was named after these too many locusts that they witnessed.
- They moved a little further and King Sawanga's third son was born.
- In what is today known as **Hwange** at a place now called *Shangano*, Sawanga's group met other groups who included Bashale, Baleya, Bahaka and Bahumbe.



## Contd

- This place was called *Shangano* because it is where different groups of people met and is derived from Nambya where *sangano* means meeting.
- The kind of houses that they built was the as the Zimbabwe ruins that are found in Masvingo.
- The Nambya people never fought other groups, they lived peacefully with them.
- At this place the name *Nyayi* of their group was changed to **Nambya**. *Kunambisa* is to make peace and that is where the name **Nambya** was derived from.
- Peace was emphasised amongst the Nambya people.



# Contd

- Sawanga changed his name to Dembetembe.
- After the death of Dembetembe, Nyanga the brother of Dembetembe took over as king and he built his kingdom which is today called Matowa.
- When Nyanga died, Shana the son of Dembetembe took over as king and he built what is today known as *Bumbusi* ruins.
- There are four of these ruins that have been discovered in the Nambya area of Hwange.
- Shana had a daughter, Kwinde, who was the eldest and three sons Mplazhu, Chilisa and Chilota.
- Kwinde had an oldest son by the name of Lusumbami who was older than his brothers.

# Contd

- Structure of leadership amongst the Nambya:
  - **HWANGE (chief of chiefs)**



- **MASHE (*izinduna*) Chiefs**



- **SADUNO (*sabhuku*) Kraal Heads**





## Contd

- Hwange means chief of chief so there was Hwange Dembetembe; Hwange Nyanga and so on.
- After the death of Shana, Lusumbami (a son to the eldest daughter of Shana) was chosen to take over as hwange of the Nambya people.
- This did not go down well with Chilisa the son of Shana and he went to Mzilikazi (who had settled in Bulawayo) and told him that the Nambya people were living under a great king who had two hearts.
- Mzilikazi felt threatened and sent his army to collect Lusumbami so that he can see this great king



## Contd

- When they were at a place now called *Siphaziphazi*, Lusumbami refused to proceed and said *ndofilapano pasipasi* (I will die down here) and because the Ndebele did not understand what he was saying from then on up to today the place is called *Siphaziphazi*.
- A bull was brought to Lusumbami as a rite and it licked him. When he was asked about the act he said '*iyanginanzwa*' (It is licking me) hence an ethnic slur was bestowed on them and they are today known by their ethnic slur as **AmaNanzwa**.



# Contd

- Lusumbami was killed and it was realised that he never had two hearts and Chilisa took over as king.
- Mzilikazi sent his army to pursue Chilisa but he ran away and crossed the Zambezi river to Zambia with some of the Nambya people and he was helped by Mapeta a Tonga man.
- As a sign of gratitude, Chilisa gave Mapeta his daughter Nechilisa. The name Mapeta was bestowed on this man by Chilisa.
- Mzilikazi's soldiers saw them when they crossed the Zambezi river and those who tried to cross were swept away.



# Contd

- The place where Mzilikazi's soldiers failed to cross is now called *Takona* which in Nambya means we have failed.
- Mzilikazi and Lobengula died when these people were still in Zambia and Chilisa also died there in Zambia.
- Chilota one of Shana's sons who had remained in Zimbabwe took over as hwange in 1896 after the war between the Ndebele and the colonial settlers.
- Chilota was at *Sinamathela* a place where there is mu that sticks to the extent that it can trap even an animal. To *namathela* is to stick hence the toponym *Sinamathela*.
- Chilota ruled for a very short time.



# Contd

- When there was no king the elders went to look for Lusumbami's son Mchengwa who had been incorporated into the Ndebele by lobengula and had become a warrior and had assumed a Ndebele name Gebhuza and his ears were already *klekliwe*.
- He became king but ruled for a very short time because he was too brutal, he married many women by force and his people reported him to the police and he was arrested and died in prison in the years around 1903 and 1904 near where there is now a veterinary building in Hwange.
- From 1904 to 1948 there was no hwange.



# Contd

- In 1948, the elders so it difficult to live without hwange because there were other ceremonies that needed to be presided over by hwange.
- After the death of Gebhuza, the elders Mashangwa Nekatambe and Nemananga divided Hwange into two; Mashangwa Nekatambe took over Dinde and Nemananga took over Jambezi.
- This is the time when people were told to leave the game park.
- These two were just chiefs and not hwanges, because they had made an oath that they will never be hwanges.



## Contd

- Mashangwe, the eldest in the Nambya community was asked to choose a chief and he chose Solomon, the son of Lusumbami and he led the Nambya people between 1948 and 1975.
- He was nicknamed Ndundule because he was very short.
- In 1975 it was declared that all abalisa become chiefs.
- Mvuthu, Shana, Hwange, Nekatambe and nenkoba became chiefs.



# Nambya Anthroponmy

- There are very few pure Nambya surnames, the rest are Ndebele.
- The registry employees were responsible because they change people's surnames, i.e. Shoko to Ncube; Zhou to Ndlovu etc.
- The common Nambya surname is Chuma which means reared domestic animals.
- Some people came to Hwange for economic reasons, some through intermarriages and eventually assumed Nambya language and culture.





# Contd

- There are many other Nambya first and these include the following:
  - Tashama
  - Taboka (We thank you)
  - Tarilwa (We have lost one of us)
  - Lamwani (give up)
  - Chido
  - Rudo
  - Vimbani
  - etc



# Nambya Toponymy

- *Chgengehari*- A name of a dam in Kamativi. The dam is shaped like a calabash and *hari* in Nambya is a calabash.
- *Chakabika*-Name of an area with salty soils in Hwange. *Bika* in Nambya is to cook. People would get their salt for cooking from the area hence they named the place *Chakabika*.
- *Chinotimba*-name of a place in Victoria Falls. To *timba* is to hit. The place is called *Chinotimba* because of the sound that is produced by the falling water as it hits the surface.
- *Matetsi*-derived from the name of a river. Corrupted version of *Mateji* in Nambya from the verb *kutejemuka* meaning to slip. The river is slippery because of some deposits that form on the surface of the river.



# Conclusion and Recommendations

- Toponyms and anthroponyms are an embodiment of a people's history.
- This study was carried out as an attempt to unearth the history of the Nambya people through scrutinising their toponyms and anthroponyms because their history is not yet well documented.
- There is a lot that still need to be studied about the Nambya history, antropology , culture, etc.