

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NAMING PRACTICES IN THREE CONTEMPORARY SPACES IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

Attention on public spaces (PS) and naming them after some individuals or at least keep them in neutral position seems to be gaining prominence in recent Ghana. This article seeks to discuss significance of naming public spaces and to examine the processes adopted in naming such spaces in Ghana. The paper also discusses some biases associated with naming these spaces and how that influences the thoughts of the citizens. The data was drawn from interviews of randomly selected individuals and some officers specifically in the municipalities and metropolises in the Greater Accra Region. The 50 respondents interviewed have acknowledged the fact that public spaces need to be named. Whilst 30 respondents were of the view that the naming should be particularly devoid of biases and favouritism and 20 think it does not matter exactly who a space is named after provided the person has diligently served and contributed immensely in the development of the nation. It therefore revealed after all that naming of public spaces is very relevant but what needs to be considered critically is the process adopted, which if well managed, will help rally the citizenry around to eventually back the positive intention of the initiating leader and the nation for that matter.

Keywords: Public space, Onomastics, Political Ideology

1.0 INTRODUCTION

When Ghana gained independence from Britain in 1957, history has it that the first President (Kwame Nkrumah) and one of his former political allies, J. B. Danquah agreed to change the old name, i.e., Gold Coast to Ghana. If the name: Ghana is semantically associated with "Warrior King" as Owusu-Gyamfi (2012) explained, then the renaming of the country has some connection to reconstruction of a certain identity of a people who are masters of themselves, that, no matter what level of oppression, they will still have a pyrrhic victory over their oppressors. Maintaining the name Gold Coast as a vestige may remind the generation of citizens of the many years of suffering from strangers and foreigners who sat on their freedom and that could hurt their mind and the nation as a whole.

Onomastic, specifically toponym or place name, concerns itself with study of history and origin of proper names, especially, personal names. Proper names may include naming practices of public spaces (PS), names of rivers, towns, brand names and others. It must be noted that since the process of naming PS is likely to be governed by law, naming of PS

cannot be perceived as neutral because of the inherent power and political underpinnings evident in it and at the same time the construction of identity that comes with it. It is for this reason that a number of PS has been renamed to either align with a cultural dynamism, ideology and power. What constitutes the general understanding of PS, the underlining theories and its functions in an intercultural context need to be unraveled.

In Ghana, research in the area of onomastics cannot be said to be deficient since a good number of studies have been conducted in this field in various forms and shades across the length and breadth of the country. Mention can be made of Dakubu (1981, 2000) who researched on personal names among two ethnic groups in Ghana (the Gas and the Dagombas) respectively, with different objectives. Agyekum (2006), just like Dakubu, has done some studies but also limits himself to Akans, focusing on typology of names. It is also worth mentioning Gyasi (1995), Ansu-Kyeremeh (2000) and Adomako (2017). While Gyasi's study bothers on Akan prevention names and their structural analysis, Ansu-Kyeremeh focuses on some aspects of Bono personal names. Interestingly, all these scholars and others have almost ignored research work on public space, another very important exercise in naming. We have surfed through most of the academic annals but found no empirical work on this all important topic of renaming of some key edifices in the country. What can be said to be available were virtually works of journalistic reportage or editorial columns that were prepared for media debates within the political space.

Given the significance of public space naming, this paper therefore proposes to examine the processes of engaging in name public spaces (PS). The paper also considers the biases in naming PS in general. This article will therefore seek to answer questions such as: What methodology is used in naming PS? Does naming PS connote political biases? Does the naming intend to satisfy the interest of the citizen and the nation? Do state authorities engage most citizens in naming PS? Are naming PS gender bias? These provocative questions would lead us to unraveling the import and significance of naming public spaces in Ghana.

1.1 Public Spaces in Ghana

The notion of public space (PS), in the first place, can be explained as a common place, such as parks, beaches, roads etc..., regulated by law, customs practices generally accessible to people. Naming PS is significant to social construct to space and how meaning is imposed on such names. Commemoratively, PS naming can serve the purpose of studying 'symbolic monuments' so as to remind citizen of public memory (Grounds: 2001). PS may not have the power of rhetoric or in plain language, persuasive language of monuments, museums, key institutions and other memorials, but the ideological effect and the manipulative designs and patterns behind them cannot be underestimated because the historical importance and what message they send across in the life of the people (Armanda:1998). Today in the 21st century with more washed and carved old democracies into modern ones, quasi-democracies and semblance of emerging democracies in most parts of Africa, there is a new political orientation and, thinking, new forms of communication to transform both political and public space, wrought under underlining motives.

It would be observed in Ghana that the power to name and rename public spaces lies in the hands of both the private individuals and those who either exercise traditional or political

authority. Most often than not, a lot of town names came from individuals who settle first in such locations. A typical example is Dansoman and Kojokrom which bear the names of Danso and Kojo. These names simply mean the town of Danso as in 'Dansoman' and that of Kojo in the case of 'Kojokrom' in Ga and Akan languages respectively. Nevertheless, naming of public space is in the hands of persons deemed to have been vested with certain power of the state as well as the right to exercise discretion. Most often than not, it is the biases that characterize the process which usually raise some alarm from different groups of people, including political activists, gender groups, religious bodies, academics, just to mention a few.

Since the advent of colonialism, umpteen vestiges of PS across the length and breadth of the period are still noticed at many places without any rigorous effort to rename them. Many of these PS are found within the religious institutions which in turn encapsulates many educational institutions because colonialism could not be devoid of religious activities.

Unfortunately, many of the PS are also gender bias with male domination almost always put on top, except where women themselves were typically involved in establishing some institutions. Even after independence, the treatment meted out to women with regards to PS has not seen any improvement, showing chauvinist patriarchal posture in the affair of the state. To this extent, one may be tempted to say that, in nation building, no woman is involved or in other words the country lacks women of industrial capacity who merits naming PS after them.

At all spheres of life, including education, politics, science, medicine, women have excelled and therefore skipping them in this very important national identification of edifices will be unfair and unacceptable. The recent renaming of some streets and major roads in the country saw names like J.J. Rawlings Highway, J.A. Kufour Highway, J.E.A. Mills Highway, with a number of other masculine figures glued to many streets and the likes. Further, you are greeted from the heart of the city with major roundabouts such as Tetteh Quashie Interchange, Ako Adjei Interchange (formerly Thomas Sankara), Kwame Nkrumah Interchange. In all these, the feminine figure is conspicuously missing except one children's park named after a female writer - Afuah Sutherland. What looks even disheartening is the fact that, sometime, a whole institution would be named after one male, then, a block or building within the edifice is charitably given a female name as observed in some hospitals. And this is how those at the helm of affairs have constructed the image and the identity of the nation by marginalizing women. Unfortunately, there has not been any identifiable female activists who have on any occasion agitated for such marginalization in PS naming. It is one of the bases upon which this study will like to draw the attention of those who hold power and at the same time create the awareness of the inclusivity of women in naming PS as a tool to close the disparity of gender discrimination in national issues.

The rhetoric, that women should be encouraged to get involved in political activism, the rhetoric to give affirmative action to women in the area of education to increase enrollment, that women be given opportunity to venture into male dominated professions are all lip service targeted at gaining international political favour in the eye of powerful and influential countries because it is one of the requirements Bretton wood institutions and other wealthy countries insist on in order to qualify and access loan facilities by including more women in

the governance system. So today, the political class have found a subtle way to go round some of these issues by employing the word *inclusivity* to persuade those who might disagree or oppose them. Fortunately, the women of today (in the Ghanaian context) are aware of the deceit of their male counterparts and are demanding their proper place in society as far governance is concerned. To kick against the appointment of women into high offices in any sector is to renege on the term *inclusivity*. When studies such this reaches the shelves of women advocates, it will empower and get them organized and engaged in events that lead them to the height qualifying them to be named after a PS in future.

Nonetheless, in the midst of barriers to women, they still engage in various development programs in those countries. As Riazi (2019) explains in her survey of names on the streets and other edifices in Tehran:

Of the names of the principal streets and plazas reveals that the majority are named after a man, dead or alive, religious or non-religious. Their names are governed by a hierarchical system that ranks them in terms of their religiosity, with the most religious ones at the top and less religious or more ancient Iranian ones at the bottom. Ostad Nedjatollahi, Motahari, Shariati, Taleghani, Saadi, Mir-Damad, Naser-Khosrow, Takhti and Sheykh-Bahai (these are the names of Iranian masculine figures) are commonly visited places in Tehran. Only one university in the city, Al-Zahra (Zahra is the most commonly used title of Prophet Mohammad's daughter, Fatima), bears a feminine name, and it exclusively accepts women. The other women's university, Shariati Technical College, is named after Ali Shariati, a famous male ideologue of the Islamic Revolution.

In Mozayan, (2016)'s critical observation for example, everybody in Iran is aware that, everything was wrong by calling a woman by her own name – an abomination if you want to call it. And until she has children where the name of the child's name is rather preferred to address her, the address term, according to Mozayan is, "Hey". That is the level of reduction into which women have been categorized into this part of the globe. If such behaviour was common phenomenon, then that could form the basis for which naming a street or building after a woman is abnormal. That though, patriarchy is not a new idea in Iran, the Islamic Revolution 'reinvented an expanded certain retrogressive gender and cultural practices', asserts Mozayan.

In dealing with North Africa's urban toponymy for example, East Africa Tourist Travel Association (EATTA) in the 1980s analyses Fes in Morocco. According to the magazine, the process of renaming was to discontinue with the French colonial regime and to point to the expansive toponymic expressions of nationhood in the post-independence time. Long before independence, Fes was split into two well demarcated districts: the Ville Nouvelle or New City, a hand work of the colonial masters, and then Medina, the old town, with its Muslim traditions and culture wrap in Arab architecture. After independence, Ville Nouvelle underwent changes in as far as naming of streets was concerned to reflect new political wave and social conditions, while the old town remained unchanged. This change was necessary because according to EATTA, in 1933 for instance, there was a map showing a good number of street names honoring French military heroes and a 1953 map also showing other street names commemorating French intellectuals. The exercise of augmenting Arabic street names

is to signal the waning of French power and political posture. The move to have an increased Arabic street names was to suggest that, the change was to symbolize a takeover of previously colonized space and to re-establish Moroccan –Muslim identity.

It is worth remarking that the international politics in special inscription has eluded many because the focus has always been within, forgetting the external interference. For example, EATTA also reports that, a street corner in New York is named after Kudirat Abiola, a female political activist who was assassinated in Nigeria to register the US disapproval of the act. In retaliation, the military regime at that time also renamed a Lagos street housing the US Embassy after Louis Farrakhan, an African-American anti-establishment activist. In order to remain in the good books of the US however, the next democratic government of Nigeria renamed the street after the US ambassador to forestall any form of reprisal in their international relations.

Renaming has the potential to reignite the nexus of the past with the present with the intention to take control of the power to construct an identity (Alderman, 2015). The argument here may confirm my earlier stance in the introduction that the business of naming or renaming could be politically motivated either within or by external forces who are likely to be allies. PS normally is identifiable by a word or a phrase to distinguish and recognize one place from another. They may also evoke typical concepts figuratively by contributing to the historical heritage of that community. According Berg and Kearns (1996), naming spaces has a social function of constructivism of space and the meaning attached to it is ideological. Whether written or spoken, naming spaces is both materially and symbolically representative to claim that landscape and using the inherent power behind it to project one world view over the other by grounding the past into the present thereby legitimizing its historical meaning.

Also, naming of places as Azaryhu (1996:331) asserts “permeates our daily vocabulary, both verbal and visual, appearing on the road signs, addresses, advertising billboards and maps. For example, there is a number of studies that has been proven how government elites in countries such Israel, Germany, Russia, Romania, and former Yugoslavia manipulated place name- especially, in commemorating street names in order to impose the idea of identity and history.

Critically, naming landscape research and that of place names were not just a mere passive embodiment of artifacts. Symbolically, these texts are embedded in more expansive semantic and ideological underpinnings that can be interpreted, and acted upon by the members of the society. The name itself appears does not carry so much emphasis as the cultural practice involved in the naming, and how individuals attempt to take control over the process of naming as they engage in socio-economic and political struggle.

1.2 Political ideologies in Ghana

Studies on PS cannot be said to be deficient in general. In Ghana, however, not much research has been done with respect to this area, for little studies have been conducted in the activities of naming public spaces. Meanwhile, the process and the practice of naming and renaming landscapes and PS has since been ongoing with some pronouncements. Sometimes, some verbal behaviour and engagement of naming PS comes with resistance from a section

of the public who might feel the ideology and the memory of their pass leaders is being downplayed significantly. Other times too, the resistance is seen from civil society groups (CSO) who more often claim to be neutral in their demand. Quite recently, when the idea of renaming certain key edifices such as the Seat of Government, the University of Ghana and others came up, there was lot of noise making and fierce resistance with a cross section of the public. But it should be reemphasized that, in the activities involving PS renaming, no individual or any organized groups can claim to maintain neutrality, not necessarily political.

In contemporary time, many of naming of PS in Ghana took place, with some still ongoing. Among them were the renaming of the seat of government, the draft bill to rename 4 public universities namely: University of Ghana (UG), University of Mines and Technology (UMAT), University of Professional Studies (UPSA), Accra, and University of Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS). Another consideration in the same bill included Mallam Tetteh Quashie Motorway. We recognize the fact that traditionally, there are two main political ideological groups in post-colonial administration in Ghana- the center left (social democrats) lead by Kwame Nkrumah whose offshoots today are believed to represent by National Democratic Party (NDC), People's National Convention (PNC). There are also others who all claim to be Nkrumahists; and the center right (the capitalists) lead by Danquah-Busiah. The center right which is the Danquah-Busiah side regroup themselves as National Patriotic Party (NPP).

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This research targeted a section of Ghanaian citizens and some key officers of municipal or metropolitan assemblies of the Greater Accra Region. Data for this research was physically collected as we went round the major roads, the streets and other important government's edifices to have a first-hand experience ourselves. Names of these spaces and other edifices such as institutions, monuments, parks and stadia were carefully noted down in a notebook. Meetings were held with those officers of the assemblies the for interviews on what informs and goes on in naming of PS in Ghana. In order to also test the knowledge base of the citizens, we interviewed some people to find out about their awareness and interest in PS. In this sense, we adopted a stratified sample strategy in order for the data to meet its set target. That is, people with at least high school background and an equal number of male and female participants. In all, 50 respondents interviewed have acknowledged the fact that public spaces need to be named. Whilst 30 respondents were of the view that the naming should be particularly devoid of biases and favouritism, 20 respondents think it does not matter exactly who a space is named after provided the person has diligently served and contributed immensely in the development of the nation

3.0 ANALYSIS

This study employs qualitative approach. "Gov't renames Flagstaff House, Jubilee House", that is how an Accra-based online radio station, myjoyonline.com captioned a naming activity of a very important PS in recent time. According to the media house, this is the third time in 9 years that the naming and renaming of this place has occurred. With the intention giving it an official status, the sitting President has signed an executive order and subsequently gazetted it, (a process that the former leader was alleged not to have followed). The old name -Flagstaff House shall therefore be known as Jubilee House. One sees the

power of language in this case that was used to achieve this calculated activity. The focus on the operative word being *gazette* as relied on by the new President.

The next explanation deduced from our respondents of that state performance was that the old name connotes the authority of the colonial power since it used to be a military installation where most West African colonies took their command. The perception still remains with the citizenry that the place was stained with blood and has become a memory pool where many atrocities were meted out to their ancestors. After independence, the first Ghanaian Leader maintained the place, an action which reminds the citizens of the pains of the past. The implication and the quasi-subterfuge ideological underpinning are that the memory of the then colonial masters still lingers on if the name is kept. The first renaming took place during the term of office of the then President, between 2000 - 2008, but more specifically, in 2007. That was the golden jubilee and the edifice was rebuilt to commemorate Ghana's attainment of independence. The language of power and ideology enacted in this process cannot be underestimated taking into account the theory of critical discourse analysis (CDA). The renaming even though seems justifiable by pinching the then colonial power memory against the freedom of the citizen, it sounded more of manipulative way of commemorating the memory of their political ancestral lineage and ideology and their contribution to the socio-cultural and economic struggles of the nation.

Even so, from the narrative of some of the chief officers contacted, we noted that many PSs were the works of those colonial masters. Notably among them are the Christiansburg Castle, James Fort Prison and others. Has there been any discussion concerning the renaming in future or it is only a few that catches the attention of influential people in government or could it also be that it is a deliberate methodology selection and stratification? A plethora of educational institutions at both secondary and college levels bare the names given by the colonial masters. The criticism against the then colonial power memory could have been justified if the seat of government was sited at a different location altogether in order to overshadow the pain, the bitterness and the brutalities of the past as a reason for the renaming. From one of the interviews, it revealed that rebuilding the infrastructure however at the same location by only uttering the name could easily remind citizens of the evil of the past, for the symbol is more attached to the location than the change of name. The ideological underpinning of the center right group is to register the importance of the achievement and also their monumental contribution to the national course during the 50th anniversary of Ghana – hence the change of name.

In what appears to be an avalanche of public spaces renaming in Ghana, the metropolitan chief executive of Accra informed that the government of Ghana had submitted a draft bill to the Parliament of Ghana for the consideration of renaming processes of four (4) public universities and a number of other analogous tertiary institutions including some polytechnics proposed to also go through renaming process. As a result, two arguments lead the discussion. While the President together with his ideological group defended this stance of renaming as inclusivity- base activity (that the process and the methodology will encompass past leaders across all political divides who contributed immensely to Ghana's struggle towards independence and modern democracy), an opposing group including some Members of Parliament (MPs) alleged that the move was politically motivated and inherent in ideology.

The opposition maintained that, renaming of these institutions, especially the universities, will take away the autonomy these universities enjoyed and that the idea of renaming was being done in bad faith. Taking the case of the University of Ghana (UG) for instance, some historians who were members of the university argued that, the President's motive to rename the institution was not convincing enough and that it was a channel through which the President wanted to use to eulogize his uncle, as the so-called doyen of the struggle to independence. Even within the President's own party, the opposition was also intense, not in terms of ideology but with the process which was seen as skewed and bias.

Throughout our discussion, some of our respondents seem to suggest that the opposition group (a political group) appeared to be advancing favourable argument and canvassing support for the academia whose space was being infringed upon, thereby pinching this very institution against the government. They indicated that the fact that both groups deliberately employed the terms; *inclusivity* and *autonomy* was not enough indication of their care for the ordinary people. At the end, it would be the ordinary people who are being manipulated through the use and employment of rhetorical words such as *inclusivity* and *autonomy*.

Furthermore, one of our interviews with some of the officers Greater Accra Metro centered on the renaming of Mallam-Tetteh Quashie Motorway. The participant revealed that, the road was funded by the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) (a United States of America (USA) monetary assistance given to some developing countries including Ghana) through the instrumentality of the former President of USA, George Walker Bush (GWB) 2000-2008.

The indication is that, Ghana secured the funds because of her enviable democratic credentials. The project was to deepen the economic empowerment of citizens. In appreciation, the Ghanaian Leader said, "The people of Ghana join me to express our deepest appreciation to the USA for continued strong bond of friendship between the two countries". "In appreciation to this kind gesture I have endorsed to name this motorway 'GEORGE WALKER BUSH'. Interestingly, the ideology imbedded in this language in naming of the road was that of the external power – playing the role of master servant relationship if we subjected the text to critical analysis. Further, the provision of those funds might be for the fact that Ghana's democracy is receiving credibility but there could be other hidden agenda (which could not be revealed immediately) of the donor country. The name could serve as a monumental memory in the minds of Ghanaians and the generations yet unborn. The President employment of the pronouns 'me and I' cannot be glossed over. For example, in "The people of Ghana join me to express our deepest appreciation ..., the speaker can be seen as exhibiting the share of political power with the people therefore persuading the citizens to see themselves as very important members of the society who also do partake in national decisions, therefore, bringing decision taking to the door step of ordinary citizens and finally, the blessing and acceptability of the ceremony. Critically speaking, there appear a hidden agenda here that the President was the one inviting the rest of the people for such important function, therefore signifying his position as the leader. The argument is that, why not put it this way? "We the people of Ghana express our deepest appreciation..." That way, even with all manipulative undertone, the suspicion would have been reduced. The other pronoun "I" was seen during the performance of the naming ceremony itself. 'I' as in "In appreciation of this kind gesture, I endorsed the decision to name the motorway GWB". Again, the linguistic element 'I' to a large extent explains the language of power of the President as in the

performance of the perlocutionary act to demonstrate the position theory. The President could have resorted to the use of the pronoun “we” to carry the citizens along as a way of saying that – together we have all agreed to name the road accordingly. He rather chose “I” to indicate that, he wielded a certain amount of power to make that single decision. Even if that decision was taken with unseen external power behind, it is one person with enough authority that did the performance. It is on this basis therefore that, this paper argues that, the use of the pronouns “me, I “could not be said to have assumed a neutral position. Even if we should be discussing any neutral PS, then such names bear no gender equivalence. Such PS take the name of the place (that is the city or the town) as in Accra Poly, Osu Presby School etc...

4.0 IMPLICATIONS

It is to be noted that naming of PS is good to conform to the current aspirations of the people. However, there should be more discussions on the topic to enable the majority of the people to partake in the process. It is only then that many citizens could align themselves with such activities for a good purpose. When such engagement fails, more people will resist any form of skewed agenda purported to achieve personal ambition against the majority of the public. The fairer manner in which naming of PS will be undertaken could prevent the unnecessary naming and renaming of such importance PS. It could also reduce the tension and the antagonism that characterize this function.

Further, the issue of gender is major one that could not be glossed over easily. Women form an integral part of society so that, discrimination against them in such important national exercise should not be taken for granted. Where lies the elements of “motivation, and inclusivity,” in the mantra of political actors? These women have critical minds with fantastic talents that if ignored could retard a nation of any progressive developments.

5.0 CONCLUSION

In critically examining the naming practices in Public Spaces, it has been observed that, in one breathe, it is to keep people and remind them of the construction of their socio-cultural identities as a unique group of people. The other side of these performances could translate into the act of use of language that signals the power and the ideology inherent in them.

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