

Aspects of Violence Reflected in South African Geographical Names

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Abstract. The toponymic landscape of any country is a window that reflects the historical, cultural, political and most social variables of society. This article is based on one aspect of society, namely violence, that is detectable in the place names of South Africa. While the country is in the process of building a nation with a diverse collection of building blocks due to the different languages and cultures present in the country, there exists a vast number of place names that directly or indirectly by association not only reflect this diversity, but have the potential to divide and obstruct efforts to obtain the social cohesion necessary to form a South African nation. However, history cannot be erased by the mere changing of a place name to another name which is more acceptable to a certain community. Aspects of violence in names reflect the ordeals and suffering of people who were exposed to wars and other forms of violence like natural disasters and environmental dangers. In this article a few examples are shown to illustrate that toponyms are not meaningless, but are rich in historical data that is often overlooked when the names of these villages, settlements, towns, historical sites, post-offices, etc. are used in everyday communication. The discussion on aspects of violence will finally be contrasted by a short discussion on aspects of peace and well-being also reflected in other South African place names.

Keywords: South African toponymic landscape; linguistic and cultural diversity; descriptive and associative meaning; categories of violence; historical conflict; natural disasters; names with positive association

1. Introduction

The study of geographical names in any country involves the exposition of many factors that gave rise to the choice of these names. Naming is a basic human activity and reflects how people see the world around them, how they exper-