The Perception of Identity through the Street Nomenclature of Nairobi CBD

Melissa Wanjiru[1], Matsubara Kosuke[2]

Abstract:

Nairobi Central Business District is the commercial and administrative hub of Nairobi City, Kenya. Its status and influence is not limited to Nairobi City only but the whole Nairobi Metropolitan Region. This study is based on the premise that the identity of Nairobi CBD affects the identity of the whole Nairobi metropolitan region due to its centrality in function and geographical location. The study is focused on the identity of the CBD as reflected by the street nomenclature.

Street names are as old as the city itself beginning with the oldest plan of the city in 1900. A historical chronology of the names and name changes over time, followed by an analysis of the meanings of names and categorization of the names depending on their meanings for the purpose of interpretation. To achieve this, the available data on the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial names of streets are collected and grouped using a street name categorization table. The main categories include: people (statehood, culture creators and artistes); geography (names of towns, regions, localities, traits of physical features): historic events and institutions (social and political movements and national days).

According to the findings of our study, a major shift in naming of streets in Nairobi's CBD occurred since the end of the colonial period and this change has given the CBD an indigenous character which the people in the whole Nairobi metropolitan region can identify with.

Keywords:

Nairobi, CBD, Identity, Perception, Colonial, Indigenous

[1] PhD Candidate, Doctoral Program in Policy and Planning Sciences, University of Tsukuba.
Email: s1430163@sk.tsukuba.ac.jp

[2] Associate Professor, Department of Policy and Planning Sciences, University of Tsukuba.

1. Introduction

Naming is essential in the manipulation and management of public images and impressions essential to the social construction of place identity. This paper focuses on street nomenclature, otherwise known as street naming. Naming is one of the definitive aspects of a people in time and space in an urban context and speaks to the irrepressible urge within mankind to assert identity.[1] Thus, as street names reflect the uses of particular spaces and the importance of our cultural luminaries, they also thereby reveal our deepest values to the world. A city in its spatial and social dimensions describes a physical space for habitation (urban space) and *civitas* (civic or community life) in which its citizens participate. This commonality or communal life which is in one way expressed through names, transforms a technical space into a social space.[2]

Nairobi CBD has undergone name changes over the years and so its identity has been changing as well. Changing of street names has three functions: to serve as a vehicle of commemoration, to constitute a form of symbolic reparation for human rights abuses, and to construct a politicized version of history. Old names preserve the memory of the people that chose them, while the contemporary ones perpetuate the memory of great people and their grand gestures. This is what makes urban space an artifact, a vehicle of the citizen's culture, an art-form like song and dance or literature.[3]

Naming and renaming of streets is an example of the connection between political and cultural processes. This is what happens when streets are renamed following radical changes of political regimes.[4] Further renaming of streets in post-colonial societies has been interpreted as an ideological tool to divest the landscape of its colonial associations and achieve political legitimization.[5] In Kenya, in the post-independence period, there has been a change in political regimes over time as follows: From colonial to independence period (1920-1963), from Kenyatta regime to Moi regime (1964-1978), from Moi regime to Kibaki regime (1978-2002), from Kibaki regime to current government i.e Uhuru Kenyatta regime (present). Most of the name changes occurred between 1964-1978 immediately after the end of the colonial rule. Other changes also occurred between 1978-2002 during the Moi regime, most notably the change of Government Road to Moi Avenue. Each of these regimes represented a different political value system, and the name changes are a reflection of this.

Typically, the transformation of the named urban landscape after political independence has been achieved following three alternative routes. Those who follow the first route erase all street and building names of a colonial nature, and they pull down colonial monuments in order to signify a complete break from the colonial past. Singapore provides an example of this approach. In their case, street naming served to erase the colonial past and assert national independence.[6] Conversely, a second route leaves colonial commemorations in their place. In Abidjan, the capital city of Côte d'Ivoire, streets were still named after French colonial heroes up until 1982, over two decades after gaining political independence,[7] something which was interpreted by some as a sign of cultural alienation. This notion is supported by Akpan and Akpan[8], who assert that in order for names to serve as memorials, they must have a certain degree of fixity. They further aver that if change occurs, it must be gradual. Lastly, a

middle way selectively undertakes a de-commemoration of the colonial past. This implies that some names are kept while others are removed.

This background serves to show the importance of urban nomenclature in defining the identity of urban spaces. It is in this context that this study will seek to reveal how the social and political processes in Nairobi CBD have served to shape the identity of the CBD through the naming and renaming of streets over time. The paper will summarize the methodology used, the street naming policy of Nairobi CBD, the street name changes that have occurred over time in the CBD, meaning of street names both in 1960 (representing the colonial period) and 2013 (representing the independence period), and based on the meanings of street names in both periods, group the names into categories for identification and interpretation.

Many studies have been done on naming and its importance but this study is the first of its kind to be done on Nairobi's CBD.

2. Methodology

2.1 Name collection in the study area

Data on names of buildings and streets was obtained from existing maps. However, some names were missing and therefore field data collection in the CBD was done to fill in the remaining names. During the field work, the CBD was divided into three zones as shown in figure 1. The researchers worked in pairs, taking the spatial location of the missing street names and recording them on a base map. In total 73 street names were recorded.
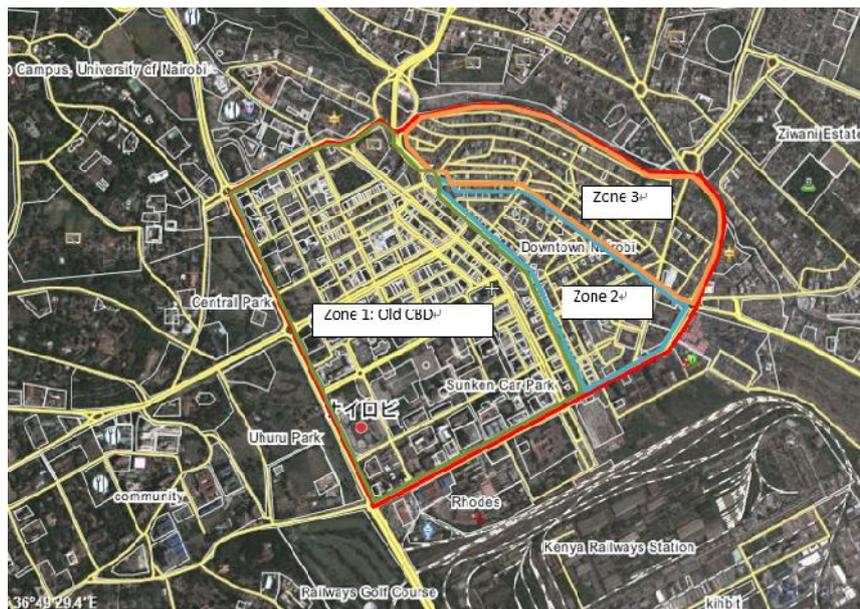
Figure-1: The data collection zones in Nairobi CBD

Source: Googlemaps, 2013[9]

2.2 Method for name classification

After recording the names of streets the next step was to put them into various categories. The street names were divided into two: those at 1960 for the colonial period, and at 2013 to represent the independence period. Thereafter, the classification method shown in table 1 was used to classify the names in order to infer on the pattern of naming.

Table-1: Categorization table for street names

Categories	Groups	Explanation
People	Statehood	Presidents, politicians, freedom fighters, and army leaders
	Culture creators and artists	Poets, writers, painters, musicians
	Religion	Saints, Bishops, church leaders
	Ethnicities	Any of the 42 Kenyan tribes.
	Academics	Professors, Doctors, teachers among others
	Entrepreneurs	Entrepreneurs, Business people, crafts people
Geography	Geographic names	Towns, Regions, countries, rivers, and mountains
	Localities	Vicinity to a station, market, river, statehouse, church, hospital
	Appearance(traits, nature)	Narrow, steep, wide, long, hilly etc
Historical events, institutions	Same as category	Social and political movements, and national days
Others	Same as category	The names which cannot fit into any of the above categories

Source: (Stiperski et al., 2011)[10]

3. Street Naming Policy of Nairobi

In an attempt to understand how the need for local identity and nationalism is ingrained in the city's policy and legislative structure, the City County of Nairobi Street Naming Policy (1982) is outlined below.

The name selection procedure requires that street names should not be of living personalities except in the case of a president, first lady or vice president, international personalities or heads of state. The criteria employed is as follows: Historical names of places, people events from Kenya and the rest of black Africa, names of African insects, birds, animals and plants in Swahili or other local languages, geographical names e.g Kenya and African rivers, mountains, towns, villages, market places and countries (black African), departed freedom fighters with substantial life contribution, important cultural artifacts e.g attires, customs, social events in Swahili or local languages, roman numerals and other abstract names in Swahili.

In the process of changing street names the following are considered: street hierarchy (a road should retain the name as opposed to a lane), street naming procedure (uniformity should be maintained in each area), the frequency in which a name is used for the main street and its tributary streets (frequent use saves on costs), the location of the street in terms of area and land use (a street named after the area where it is located retains the name).

Once street names have been proposed and the relevant maps prepared, they are discussed at the technical officers meeting before being tabled at the street naming sub-committee. The names are further tabled at the works and town planning committee for adoption before onward transmission to the Ministry of Local Government for final ministerial approval. The streets whose names may be rejected by the minister remain unnamed to again undergo the whole naming procedure. The street names are put up either by the developers or city commission as the case may be only after the granting of the ministerial approval. Plans of streets to be named should be displayed at the relevant technical and commissions meeting. Upon receipt of the ministerial approval, the street names should be printed on the relevant maps and survey sheets.

4. Street Name Changes in Nairobi CBD

There has been a significant change in street naming patterns in Nairobi CBD from the pre-colonial to the colonial and the post-colonial period. In the pre-colonial period as shown in "The Uganda Railway Plan of Staff Quarters, Nyrobi" and dated 29/10/1899 (figure 2) the streets were named numerically with an exception of station road. They are: First and Second Street; First to Fifth Avenue.
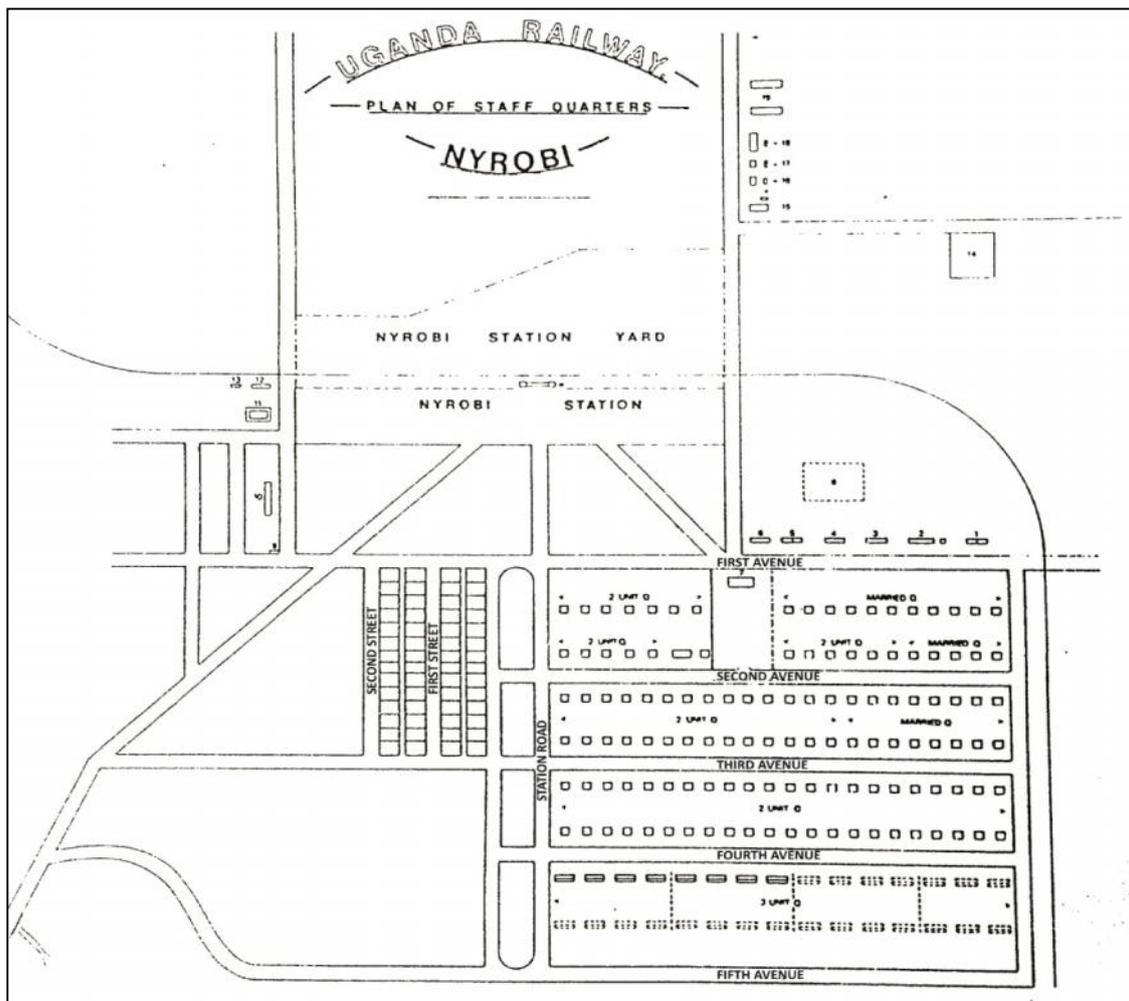
Figure-2: The Uganda Railway Plan of Staff Quarters (Nyrobi, 1899).
Source: Nairobi Township Plan No.56. Obtained from Railway Museum, Nairobi.

Table 2 below shows important periods in the history of Nairobi CBD. Each of the 5 periods shown in the table below represent different political and administrative authorities. Representative streets are also shown in the table and it is observable that the names change with each period. In the period between 1898-1902, the town had the identity of a railway town and also a colonial town, periods 2 and 3 were the peak of the colonial governance and the street names represent this too. Periods 4 and 5 represent the independence period and in a similar way, the street names are African and Kenyan in nature. These two periods therefore mark the transformation from a colonial to an indigenous CBD.

Table-2: Important periods of history in the development of Nairobi CBD

Date	Period 1 1898-1902	Period II 1902-1919	Period III 1920-1963	Period IV 1964-1978	Period V 1979-2002
Governing Authority	Railways	Colonial Government	Municipal council under the Colonial Government	1st African Government Regime	2nd African Government regime
Prevailing Physical Plan	1898 Plan for a railway town		1927: Plan for a Settler Township 1948: Nairobi Master Plan for a Colonial City	1973: Nairobi Metropolitan Growth Strategy	1984–1988 Nairobi City Commission Development Plan 1993 - Nairobi City Convention
Streets	Whitehouse Road Station Road Duke Street Victoria Street	Sadler Stewart Government Road Eliot Hardinge	Coronation Connaught Queensway York Delamere Kingsway	Kenyatta Harambee Avenue Kimathi Wabera Muindi Mbingu Koinange	Moi Avenue, Kaunda Street, Banda Street, Tubman Street, Moktar Daddah, Monrovia Street, Monrovia Lane

Source: (Muthuma, 2013)

The major changes occurred immediately after independence under the then mayor of Nairobi, Charles Rubia, who was focused on renaming the city of Nairobi and especially, streets in Nairobi CBD.

The number of named streets has increased since the colonial period and according to the field study conducted the street names as at 1960 were 41 and as at 2013, have increased to 73 inclusive of highways, roads, lanes, drives and crescents. Therefore some of the streets were created and named in the post-colonial period. However, even with an independent government and the optimism that came with freedom, there was a glaring imbalance in recognition of women and other non-political heroes who played a significant role in the fight for independence. Up to now there is only one street in Nairobi CBD which is named after a woman, the first First Lady of Kenya, Mama Ngina Kenyatta. Table 3 also shows the transition in names for the streets that existed since 1960.

Figure-3: First Mayor of Nairobi, Charles Rubia.

Source: mashada.com[11]

In table 3 below, the names as at 1960 are shown as well as the names as they are presently in 2013. However, the name changes have occurred at different times between 1963 and 2013.

Table-3: Street name changes in Nairobi CBD

Name as at 1960	Name as at 2013	Year of Change
1. Princess Elizabeth Way	1. Uhuru Highway	1964-1970
2. Whitehouse Road	2. Haile Selassie Avenue	1964-1970
3. Coronation Avenue	3. Harambee Avenue	1964-1970
4. Conaught Road	4. Parliament Road	1964-1970
5. Jackson Road	5. Posta Road	1964-1970
6. Delamere Avenue	6. Kenyatta Avenue	1964-1970
7. Kingsway	7. University Way	1964-1970
8. Sadler Street	8. Koinange Street	1964-1970
9. Standard Street	9. Standard Street	Name retained
10. York Street	10. Kaunda Street	1964-1970
11. Stewart Street	11. Muindi Mbingu Street	1964-1970

12. Government Road	12. Moi Avenue	1978
13. Mark Street	13. Monrovia Street	1964-1970
14. Gulzar Street	14. Moktar Daddah Street	1964-1970
15. Bazaar Road	15. Biashara Street	1964-1970
16. Market Street	16. Market Street	Name retained
17. Portal Street	17. Banda Street	1964-1970
18. Hardinge Street	18. Kimathi Street	1964-1970
19. Eliot Street	19. Wabera Street	1964-1970
20. Queensway	20. Mama Ngina Street	1964-1970
21. Sergeant Ellis Avenue	21. City Hall Way	1964-1970
22. Luciard Avenue	22. Nkrumah Avenue	1964-1970
23. Fort Hall Road	23. Muranga Road	1964-1970
24. River Road	24. River Road	Name retained
25. Victoria Street	25. Tom Mboya Street	1969
26. Duke Street	26. Ronald Ngala	1964-1970
27. Jeevanjee Lane	27. Mfangano Lane+ Luthuli Lane	1964-1970
28. Jeevanjee Street	28. Mfangano Street	1964-1970
29. Campos Ribeiro Avenue	29. Luthuli Avenue	1964-1970
30. Reata Road	30. Accra Road	1964-1970
31. Hasrat Road	31. Munyu Road + Uyoma Street	1964-1970
32. Gurdwara Road	32. Gaberone Road	1964-1970
33. Saldanha Road	33. Sheikh Karume Road+Price Road	1964-1970
34. Race Course Road	34. Race Course Road	Name retained
35. Latema Road	35. Latema Road	Name retained
36. Bohra Road	36. Lagos Road	1964-1970
37. Grogan Road	37. Kirinyaga Road	1964-1970
38. Khan Road	38. Kumasi Road	1964-1970
39. Cross Road	39. Cross Road	Name retained
40. Varma Road	40. Duruma road	1964-1970
41. Imtiazali Road	41. Keekorock Road	1964-1970

Source: Authors construct, 2013

5. Meaning of Street Names in the Colonial Period

The meanings of names of streets and buildings in Nairobi CBD, both the colonial and post-colonial periods give a picture of the societal values in each of the periods.

The main streets in the colonial period were named after important events and people in the British Monarchy. Princess Elizabeth way was named after the current Queen Elizabeth the second while she was still a princess. Her father died while she was visiting Kenya and had to be crowned Queen in Kenya. The street is now referred to as Uhuru (freedom) highway. Whitehouse road was named after George Whitehouse the Chief Engineer of the then Uganda Railways. Coronation Avenue was named after the accession of King George the Fourth in 1937. Connaught Road was named after the duke and Duchess of Connaught as the first royal couple to visit Kenya in 1906. Victoria Street was named after 19th century Queen Victoria who reigned between 1836 and 1901.

The secondary streets at the time were named as follows. Kingsway Street was named after the Kingship of the Royal British monarch, and Queensway was a collective honour to the queens of all generations of the British Monarchy and Duke Street was also named in honour of all the Dukes. York Street was named after the Duke of York. Hardinge Street was named after the first Administrator of the Kenya Protectorate, Sir Arthur Hardinge; Sadler Street was named after the one of the governors of the time, Sir J. Hayes Sadler and so was Stewart Street, which was named after Sir Donald Stewart.

The less significant streets at the time mainly bore Indian names. These include: Jeevanjee Street named after A.M Jeevanjee, a well-known Indian business man and entrepreneur, Bazaar road was named in reference to an Indian Bazaar or business zone. Hasrat Road was named after a romantic poet of Urdu language, journalist, politician and parliamentarian of British India. Kirpa Ram road was named after an Indian entrepreneur who came to Kenya in 1880 and Gurdwara Road was named after the place of worship for the Sikhs.

The other category of street names were for streets named in reference an important physical feature, building or place nearby. These included: Race Course road named after the former horse racecourse which was located near Kariokor (*Carrier Corps*) before it was relocated to another part of Nairobi along Ngong' road. River Road was also named after Nairobi River that runs along the Eastern edge of the CBD. Finally Market Street could have been named as such since it is next to Nairobi City Market. Interestingly, all the three streets have retained their names since the colonial period.

6. Categorization of Street names

6.1 Categorization of street names in 1960

In the research methodology, a categorization table was included to show more elaborately the criteria used to name streets. This table has been adopted to show the various categories of street names in Nairobi CBD whose meanings are known. Table 4 shows the categories for street names in 1960.

Table-3: Categorization table for streets in 1960

Categories	Groups	Explanation	Street in Nairobi CBD
People	Statehood	Presidents, Royalty, politicians, freedom fighters, army leaders etc	Princess Elizabeth Way, Whitehouse Road, Connaught Road, Jackson Road, Sadler Street, Stewart Street, Mark Street, Hardinge Street, Eliot Street, Sergeant Ellis Avenue, Luciard Avenue, Victoria Street, Duke Street, Hasrat
	Entrepreneurs	Entrepreneurs, Business people, crafts people	Delamere Avenue, Jevanjee Street and Lane, Grogan Road, Kirpa Ram Road
Religion			Gurdwara, Bohra
Geography	Geographic names	Towns, Regions, countries, rivers, mountains etc	York Street, Fort Hall Road
	Localities	Vicinity to a station, market, river, statehouse, church, hospital	Bazaar Road, Market Street, River Road, Racecourse Road
Historical events, institutions	Same as category	Social and political movements, national days	Coronation Avenue, Queensway, Kingsway
Others		The names which cannot fit into any category	Standard Street, Portal Street, Cross-Road

Source: Authors construct, 2014

6.2 Categories of street names in 2013

Table 5 below shows the categories for street names in 2013. The character of street names has changed tremendously since that time. People representing the state still remain the highest named after even in 2013. However, the category of geographic place names is highly populated in the 2013 street map. This is because Kenyans are attached to their places of origin.

There are several categories for street names in Nairobi CBD. The old CBD is dominated by streets with nationalist/statehood names while the downtown area i.e West of Tom Mboya Street is variegated. In the downtown area, streets with geographic place names and native Kenyan (Swahili and other local languages) names seem to domineer. These names can therefore go on to define the functional

characteristics of the parts of the CBD. The old CBD is dominated by nationalist names and hence its functions could be deduced as more formal and in the public domain. In the downtown area of the CBD there are many street named after other towns and regions in Kenya. This is because Kenyans feel attached to their hometowns and this is reflected in the street names. This part of the CBD is dominated by small-scale semi and informal businesses. This categorization table covers a total of 73 street names collected during the field study.

Table-5: Categorization table for streets in 2013

Categories	Groups	No.	Explanation
People	Statehood-Kenyan	12	Kenyatta Avenue, Koinange Street, Muindi Mbingu Street, Moi Avenue, Moktar Daddah Street, Kimathi Street, Wabera Street, Mama Ngina Street, Tom Mboya Street, Ronald Ngala Street, Sheikh Karume Road, and Tumbo Avenue.
	Statehood – African	6	Haille Selassie Avenue, Kaunda Street, Banda Street, Nkrumah Avenue, Luthuli Avenue, and Mondlane Street
	American anti-slavery activist	1	Tubman Road
	Religious leaders	2	Ram Lane, Agakhan Walk
	Ethnicities	1	Duruma road and Rendille Road
Geography	Geographic names - Towns and regions in Kenya	17	Muranga Road, Uyoma Street, Kirinyaga Road, Maragua Lane, Taveta Road, Timboroa Lane, Nyakatch lane, Kilome Road, Voi Road, Ndumberi Road, Ukwala Road, Mwatate Road, Yatta Road, Gwasi road, Solai Lane, Hakati Road, and Nginda Street
	Geographic features	3	Tsavo Road, Athi Lane, and Mfangano Street
	Towns, regions in Africa	5	Monrovia Street, Accra Road, Gaberone Road, Lagos Road, and Kumasi road
	Towns, regions and geographic features in India	2	Ambala Road, and Nilgiri Road
Localities	Near building, park, river public facility etc	9	Parliament Road, Posta Road, University Way, Market Street, City Hall Way, River Road, Race Course Road, Fire-Station Road, and Temple Road.

Appearance	Traits, nature	3	Biashara Street, Cross Road and Short Street
Historical events, institutions	Social and political movements, national days	1	Uhuru Highway
National Slogans		1	Harambee Avenue
Swahili Names		5	Taifa Road, Fundi Lane, Watalii Street, Nyota Lane, and Njugu Lane
Animals and Birds		2	Keekorock Road, and Simba Street
Others	Plain English names	2	Standard Street, and Price Road
	Indian name	1	Arya Lane

Source: Field Study, 2013

7. Conclusion

Names in Nairobi's CBD are a reflection of the political and societal value system of particular periods in history. The most apparent change as revealed by the study is the change from colonial to indigenous names. At the city's inception naming was mainly for the function of identification. This was when Nairobi was mainly a railway town. However, naming patterns changed in the colonial and post-colonial period as shown by the study. Street naming in these latter periods can be deduced to be a way of asserting political power.

According to the findings, in the attempt to decolonize the CBD, a lot of emphasis was placed on eliminating colonial street names because the streets function as public spaces, with which the CBD users can identify with. Currently, street names are predominantly indigenous with the exception of a few English general names. Re-naming was therefore an attempt to erase an oppressive past especially in public spaces such as streets.

The study revealed a minimal representation of women and other national non-political heroes in the naming of streets in the CBD. Only one street is named after a woman (Mama Ngina Street – the wife of the first president of Kenya). This shows that naming of streets took a more political rather than nationalistic role. However, national leadership is not limited to politics but extends to other areas such as academics, sports, arts, religion etc. These should be reflected in the naming pattern of the CBD as well.

The study revealed the socio-political processes that have over time influenced the naming culture in Nairobi's CBD. The names in turn bear a significant representation of how the city and its governance has evolved. Through names local citizens recognize and identify with the city and visitors get a clear image about what the city is all about. The street names in Nairobi CBD impact the image of the whole Nairobi Metropolitan Region, since the CBD serves as the central core of the region.

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