



UNIVERSITY OF TSUKUBA
GRADUATE GENERAL EDUCATION COURSE (GGEC)
INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT

**RESEARCH TOPIC: Toponymic inscriptions and the urban identity of Nairobi,
Kenya**

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Introduction

I undertook my international research project from January 29th to February 18th in the United Kingdom. This was in order to collect data related to my doctoral research. My research topic is titled: *Toponymic inscriptions and the urban identity of Nairobi, Kenya*.

The purpose of my research is to investigate the origin, meaning and political processes behind place names (otherwise known as toponyms) and how these can be used to interpret the cultural landscape of Nairobi city.

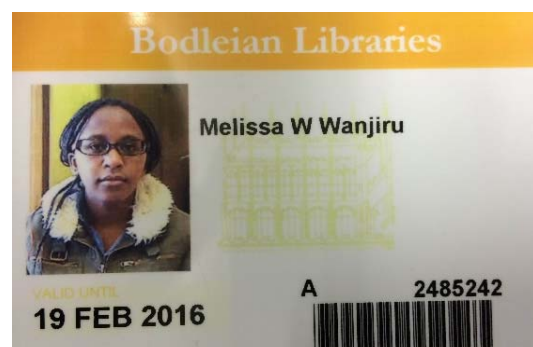
Kenya was colonised by the British from 1896-1960. During this time, the country was inscribed with British names. The toponymic landscape was thus, largely British and not Kenyan. The British names were reflective of places in Britain such as: Gloucester, London, Oxford among others. They also celebrated British personalities such as the Monarchs (Queen Victoria, Princess Elizabeth, King George) and colonial administrators in Kenya such as: governors (Sadler, Coryndon and Mitchell). Soon after Kenya gained independence in 1963, one of the urgent endeavours was to decolonize the toponymic landscape of Nairobi and re-inscript it with names of Kenyan nationalists and other leaders. This toponymic shift led to a change in the overall identity of the city. Place name changes are still occurring in the city, and this will continue as the city expands.

Therefore, toponymy which has been given sparse attention as an area of research, will become increasingly necessary to consider, not only for the cultural interpretation of the city but for other functions such as street and property addressing.

Purpose of visit to the UK

As mentioned earlier, Kenya was colonized by the British. Consequently, there are still many historical records kept in the British National Archives, the British Library and University libraries such as SOAS (School of oriental and African Studies) and Oxford-Weston University Library.

As a methodology, I applied historical analysis to examine the changing toponymy of Nairobi. I obtained archival



Access card for Weston Library-
University of Oxford

records from the above mentioned libraries, particularly on the personalities behind the colonial toponymic landscape of Nairobi (the namers and the named). Books, letter correspondences, newspaper articles, biographies and maps were the main sources of data. The information is well preserved and the library system in the UK is well organized which made my work quite easier to undertake. I also gathered primary data (through observations and photographs) as I walked through the cities of London and Oxford and saw the contrasts, and similarities of the building, street and neighbourhood names with those of colonial Kenya. Both the primary and secondary data collected in the UK will be used to complement the information I had collected earlier on in Kenya, in the months of August and September 2015.

Some field work results

The field work observations will provide a basis of comparing with UK cities with Nairobi city.



The sign for Park-End Street is set-up almost on the ground. Very different from Nairobi, where street signs are mostly at eye-level.



Victoria Street in Gillingham Town. This name is found in most UK cities. It was also a street name in Nairobi in colonial times.

One difference between UK cities and Nairobi is where the street signs are put up. In Nairobi we mainly have street sign posts which are long enough to be at people's eye-level. But in the UK, there are located on buildings, close to the ground etc. The British brought along their names to Kenya during the colonial period. There was a Victoria street in Nairobi central area during colonial times. Up to now, we still have Lake Victoria, shared between Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

Seminar Presentation

During my research visit, I was officially hosted by Professor Angelique Rajan of the Department of Real Estate and Planning at the University of Reading. I was given a chance to present some of my findings to a group of lecturers and PhD students on 17th February 2016. I received valuable comments which I will use to improve my research.



With a group Ph.D students after the presentation at Reading University (Department of Real Estate and Planning). 17th February 2016.

Future tasks

The main task ahead is to analyze the data collected in the UK so as to incorporate it into my doctoral thesis. I would also like to use the information gathered to compile a paper for publication in an international peer-reviewed journal.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank GGEC for the opportunity to carry out this international research project. It has served to provide good data for my research. I was also able to meet other researchers in the UK and build networks as a researcher. I also wish to thank Dr. Angelique, who officially hosted me, organized a seminar presentation and assisted me during my stay in the UK. Lastly, I thank my professor, Dr. Matsubara Kosuke for encouraging me to do archival research in the UK to improve my on-going doctoral work.