Tshwane, a San Name for Pretoria, South Africa

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Tshwane is the Tswana name for the Apies River. This name has been used by Tswana speakers for many years also to refer to the city of Pretoria. In the process of the transformation of geographical names in South Africa, the name *Tshwane* has been proposed as a replacement for the name *Pretoria*. Various explanations of the meaning of the name *Tshwane* have been suggested, but most have been discarded on linguistic grounds. On the basis of the river name being primary, this article argues that *Apies* is synonymous with, or has the same meaning as, an ancient Bushman (San) name of which *Tshwane* is an adaptation.

Introduction

Pretoria was founded on the farm Elandspoort in 1855 and became the capital of the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* (South African Republic) in 1860. In 1902 a town council was constituted, and city status was acquired in October 1931. Pretoria was named in honor of the Voortrekker leader Andries Wilhelmus Jacobus Pretorius (1798–1853; Raper, 2004: 312).

  Pretoria was laid out on the banks of the Apies River or 'little monkeys river', said to have been so named on account of the large number of vervet monkeys living in the trees along its banks between the Fountains Valley and Daspoort (Raper, 2004: 12). The Apies River is known to the Tswana-speaking people as *Tshwane*, and this name was 'subsequently extended to embrace the Voortrekker town of Pretoria' (Boeyens and Cole, 2005: 61).

  Under the South African Geographical Names Council Act, one of the functions of the South African Geographical Names Council (SAGNC) is 'the transformation and standardization of geographical names'. What is meant by 'transformation' in this context is the replacement of names given in the past with indigenous names perceived to be derived from African (Bantu) languages (Mathenjwa, 1999). In the process of transformation the boundaries of some municipal or metropolitan areas have been changed to incorporate former municipalities and residential areas. Thus the metropolitan area of Pretoria has been extended to incorporate Akasia, Atteridgeville, Laudium, Mamelodi, and Saulsville, and given the name *Tshwane*.
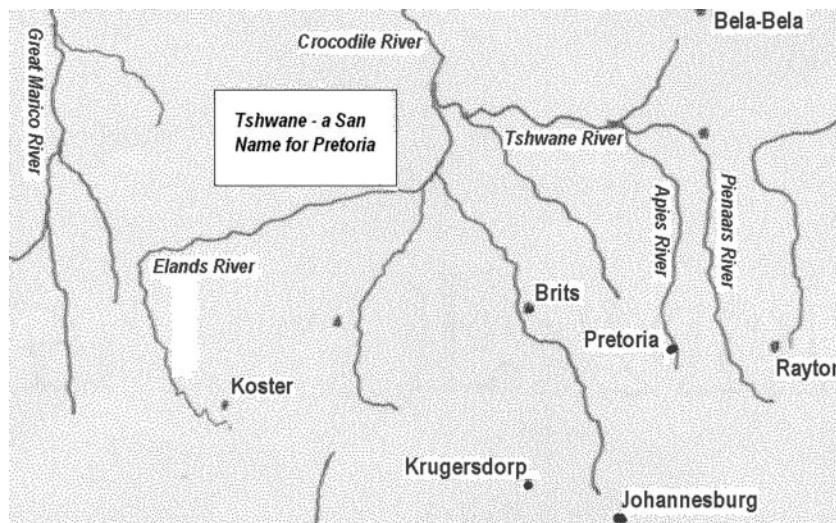
FIGURE 1   Pretoria on the Apies

The application of the name to the inner city of Pretoria, however, is ongoing and controversial. An appeal lodged by the Freedom Front political party to prevent the name *Pretoria* from being changed to *Tshwane* was submitted to the High Court in the year 2008 (Lourens, 2007: 1).

With a view to replacing the name *Pretoria* with *Tshwane*, the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality commissioned a task team to investigate and report on the matter. In 2004 a report was tabled (Sirayi et al., 2004), of which Boeyens and Cole (2005: 60) wrote: 'The recent report on the renaming of Pretoria [. . .] is, unfortunately, of little help. The oral and linguistic evidence on the origin of this toponym, which is presented in chapters three and four of the report, is superficial and, as often as not, misinterpreted.' Boeyens and Cole (2005: 54) further state that the 'proposed new name of the Pretoria metropole is *Tshwane*, and this is being advertised in local administration documents as meaning "We are the same".' However, they reject this explanation, pointing out that the tone pattern of the name precludes such an interpretation (2005: 54).

The question of tone is not a simple one. All African (Bantu) languages spoken in South Africa are tone languages, with two basic tones, high (H) and low (L). There are also falling tones, from high to low, and rising tones, from low to high (Boeyens and Cole, 2005: 54). This means that two words written in exactly the same way, with identical vowels and consonants, may have different meanings if they differ in tone.

Doke and Vilakazi (2005: xi) point out: 'Care must be taken over words of different meanings, phonetically alike, but differing in tone.' Boeyens and Cole (2005: 54) warn: 'If the tones are not taken into account, there can be serious misinterpretations, some of them quite embarrassing. Of course there can also be misinterpretations of place names.'

In rejecting the explanation 'We are the same' for the name *Tshwane*, Boeyens and Cole (2005: 54) point out: 'The tones on *Tshwane* are LL, whereas the tones on the

verb-stem *-tshwana* "to be the same, resemble one another" are HL. Thus *Tshwane*, LL, is almost certainly derived from *tshwana*, tones LL, the adjective stem for "black, female, e.g. of a cow".'

Louwrens (1994: 6) states:

> Although tone has always been a useful tool when doubtful cases [...] are to be distinguished from one another, it has very little or no value when it comes to place names, since tone can, for reasons which are obvious, not be indicated on place names in gazetteers, atlases, etc.

Another reason why tone is of little or no value when it comes to placenames is that in many cases placenames are opaque, derived from words for which the meaning is no longer known, from words derived from extinct San (Bushman) languages, and so forth. The tone patterns of these lost and forgotten name components, subject to natural phonological change, and also subject to the application of different writing systems, to changes in orthographic rules in extant languages, and the like, cannot be interpreted on the basis of current tone patterns.

If tone cannot be relied on for the explanation of placenames, there can be recourse to other considerations, such as the antiquity of names of watercourses, the probable language of origin of the name, and similar considerations.

Oral traditions concerning the etymology of the name

According to Hwaduba oral traditions, the Tshwane River was named for Tshwane, the son of the Ndebele chief Muši, said to be the founder of the Southern Transvaal Ndebele (Van Warmelo, 1944: 24). Boeyens and Cole (2005: 60–61) point out that Van Warmelo is highly sceptical about the historical reliability of this genealogy, and add:

> Since 'Tshwane' is a Tswana word (and NOT of Nguni derivation), and the Magaliesberg region had been settled by Tswana speakers well before the first Ndebele arrived, it seems far more likely that the early Ndebele ruler was named after the river, rather than the other way round. Based on naming strategies that are commonly applied in Tswana, it seems reasonable to infer that the geographic ambience of Tshwane, the Apies River's original Tswana name, was subsequently extended to embrace the Voortrekker town Pretoria, which was established on its banks in 1855.

In concluding that *Tshwane* is 'almost certainly derived from *-tshwana*, "black, female, e.g. of a cow",' Boeyens and Cole (2005: 54) state that

> precisely this origin is hinted at in the oral traditions of the Lete, according to which the toponym *Tshwane* is supposedly derived from the ritual slaughtering of a black cow in a rain-making ceremony during a period of severe drought several centuries ago, after which 'copious rains' fell in the area and the famine was relieved (Ellenberger 1937, 33).

Perhaps the ritual slaughtering of a black cow to relieve the drought may have been sufficient reason for the river to acquire the name *Tshwane* or 'Black Cow River', but Boeyens and Cole are not stating this to be the case, since they write that this origin is '*hinted at*' (my italics). These authors (2005: 60–61) further write that the

Magaliesberg region had been settled by Tswana speakers well before the first Ndebele arrived. In view of the uncertainty of the etymology of the name *Tshwane*, and the fact that it is the name of a watercourse, the question arises whether this name could predate also the Tswana, in which case oral tradition may not be sufficiently reliable to provide the meaning of the name *Tshwane*.

Antiquity of watercourse names

It is a fact recognized by onomasticians worldwide that the names of natural features, and especially those of watercourses, are the oldest of all names. Nicolaisen (1976: 172) notes that the vast majority of settlement names in Scotland are 'all transferred from their primary designation of natural features'. And, as in the case of the river name *Tshwane* that was transferred to the town of Pretoria, it is particularly the names of rivers and other watercourses that have been transferred. In view of the important roles that such features have always played in the lives of human beings, it is not surprising that their names 'should have had a special power of survival when names of other natural features did not, and [...] that the names of larger rivers should go back to the earliest "stratum" of settlement and therefore also to the earliest language spoken' (Nicolaisen, 1976: 173).

The earliest languages spoken in Southern Africa were those of the Bushmen or San, who 'covered the whole of southern Africa from the Zambezi Valley to the Cape' for thousands of years (Lee and DeVore, 1976: 5). The Apies River may not be comparable with the large, navigable rivers of America, Europe, or Asia, but to the early settlers along its course, and certainly also to San hunter-gatherers, it was an important source not only of water but also of the game that must have been drawn to it for water, grazing, or browsing. Such an important natural feature would have had a name in their language, and we may therefore seek a San origin for the name of this river.

It is not unusual for a name to undergo a series of developments involving several languages. Names of watercourses, being among the oldest of placenames, have been transmitted from language to language. In the process, they have 'tended to become semantically opaque lexical terms, not containable, with meaning other than their onomastic denotation, by the vocabulary of any one language' (Nicolaisen, 1976: 173). In the case of the Apies, no fewer than five languages were involved, namely: the original San language, now extinct in the area; Tswana, in which the name *Tshwane* is an adaptation; Ndebele, from which is derived the name of Chief Tshwane; Dutch, in which the name *Aapjes* appeared in the nineteenth century; and Afrikaans, from which came *Apies*, the most recent name.

The name *Tshwane*, too, has become semantically opaque, leading to attempts at explaining its etymology only in terms of the latest of the discernible language strata, namely Tswana and Ndebele, but these attempts have hitherto not been satisfactory. A different strategy is required to determine the etymology of this name — a strategy that takes cognizance of the antiquity of the name and of possible changes that could have taken place in its development.

The naming process, begun when man first acquired speech, has continued uninterrupted since then. Successive waves of immigrants and settlers gave names to the

features in their environment, and adapted, translated, and supplanted the names given by previous inhabitants. The student of placenames must therefore look upon the map 'as a palimpsest of layer upon layer of toponymic writing, some of it very faint, half obscured or half erased, and all of it still being written upon by new generations of name-givers' (Nicolaisen, 1976: 47). In dealing with ancient names involving different language strata over a long period of time, the name scholar has several approaches open to him.

> He can either try to reconstruct toponymic history as it happened, starting from the earliest known stratum and working his way towards the present, or he can begin with the contemporary evidence and, removing layer after layer from the map palimpsest [. . .] gradually move backwards through history into prehistory until he reaches the last layer of meaningful, interpretable name material. (Nicolaisen, 1976: 47)

Of course, a third method is possible — looking simultaneously at the various layers and seeking correlations between them, like a forensic expert looking at fingerprints or mug-shots. In the present case we shall be looking simultaneously at the names we have, and attempt to find a San cognate.

A San origin of the name *Tshwane*

The Bushman languages, also called San languages, belong to what has traditionally been known as the Khoisan language family, which also includes the Khoikhoi or Hottentot languages such as Nama, Griqua, and Koranna (Traill, 1978: 137). Bleek (1956) has included in her *Bushman Dictionary* words from 29 San languages and dialects. On the basis of similarities in the roots of words and grammatical constructions, these languages have been categorized as the Northern, Central, and Southern languages, and are referred to as S1, S2, S3; N1, N2, N3; C1, C2, C3, etc. (Bleek, 1929: 1–6; 1956: iii). When referring to a San language, the present author uses the name of the language and includes the reference number in brackets: for example, /Xam (S1).

Many of the Southern San languages are now extinct. The extinct languages were spoken in the Cape Province, the Free State, Lesotho, and KwaZulu-Natal, while surviving languages are spoken in south-western Botswana, the Gemsbok Park area of the southern Kalahari Desert, and in the vicinity of Lothair in Mpumalanga Province (Traill, 1978: 143).

We know that the San formerly occupied the Transvaal, now Gauteng Province, North-West Province, and Mpumalanga. Bleek (1929: 1) states: 'Across the Vaal there was formerly another tribe, now extinct [. . .] A remnant of a further tribe has survived at Lake Chrissie on the Swaziland border.'

The San also inhabited the area along the Apies River, and they had a name for it of which *Tshwane* is an adaptation. The similarity of roots of words in different San languages has been noted. As Traill (1978: 145) points out, words in some 'obviously related' dialects are 'overwhelmingly and obviously similar'. In the case of the name *Tshwane*, a cognate San word meaning 'monkey' needs to be demonstrated. That word is *//k"warre*.
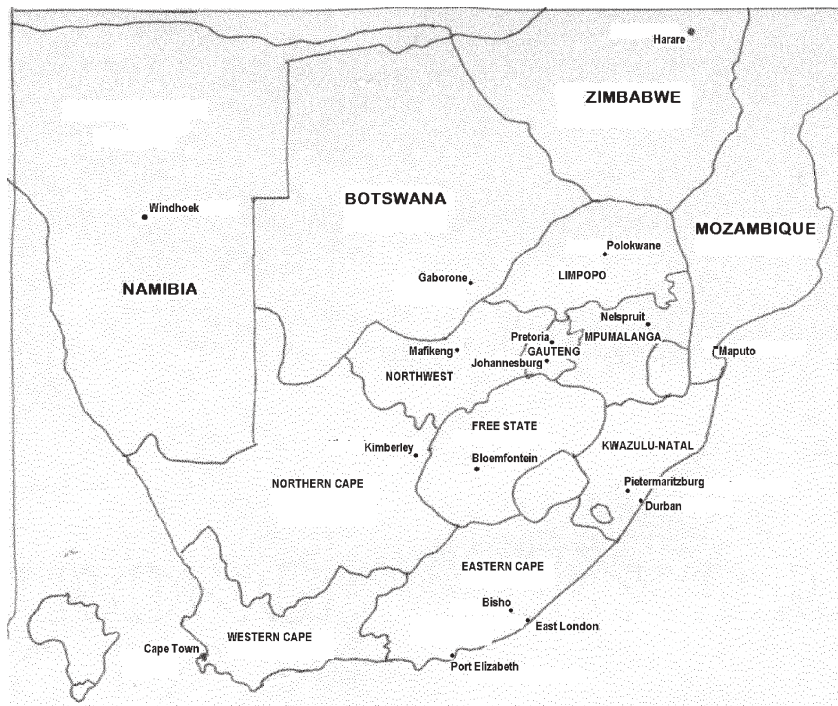
FIGURE 2   New Provinces of South Africa

It is well known that the San languages are characterized by clicks. These have been standardized in writing as:

- /, the dental or alveolar fricative click, pronounced by placing the tip of the tongue against the upper front teeth or alveolus and withdrawing it rapidly
- //, the retroflex fricative click, made by spreading the tip of the tongue against the front palate and withdrawing it gently backwards, with a sucking sound
- !, the cerebral or palato-alveolar click, pronounced with the tongue-tip placed firmly on the point of division between palate and alveolus, the back of the tongue placed against the velum, and the sides of the tongue against the side upper gums, and releasing the tongue-tip sharply downwards, with the resulting click resembling the sound of a cork being drawn from a bottle
- ≠, the alveolar click, formerly called the palatal click, pronounced with the upper part of the tongue behind the tip pressed firmly against the gum-ridge behind the central upper teeth, the back of the tongue raised to touch the velum, and the sides of the tongue raised to complete the space of rarefaction between velum and alveolus, and bringing the front of the tongue sharply down, the resulting click resembling the sound made by a child when tasting something sweet
- the labial click, or lip click, usually represented in writing as a circle with a dot in the middle
- the retroflex click, variously represented in writing as !! or /// (Bleek, 1929: i; Bleek, 1956: 640; Traill, 1978: 137–138)

- the symbol ɛ following a vowel, indicating that the vowel is 'pressed'
- :, indicating that the preceding vowel is a long one.

The clicks are often pronounced together with the next sound, also called a 'release' or 'efflux', for example an aspirated, voiced, nasalized, ejected, fricative, or other efflux (Traill, 1978: 138). In the process of adaptation of San words and placenames into African languages, these clicks have in many instances fallen away, or been replaced by other sounds, often sounds similar to the relevant clicks.

The name *Tshwane* is not pronounced as it would be in English; the components are *Ts-hwa-ne*. The name starts with an unvoiced alveolar affricate, *Ts-*. This sound approximates the San click //, which is 'the retroflex fricative click, made by spreading the tip of the tongue across the palate and withdrawing it gently backwards, with a sucking sound' (Bleek, 1929: 13). If the flow of air is reversed with the tongue in this position, the similarity in sound between *ts* and // can be discerned. The aspirated *h* in the component *hwa* of the name *Tshwane* is an adaptation of the ejective *k*, of which Bleek (1956: 117) states:

> The ejective k or glottal croak which I write *k"* is one of the most difficult sounds of the Bushman language to explain [. . .] The throat is closed by pressing the back of the tongue against the epiglottis, then suddenly opened creating a croak, an ejective *k"*, but with hardly any air behind it.

The nasal *n* of the name *Tshwane* approximates the San *r̃*, a sound between *r* and *n*, found in the /Xam (S1) language (Bleek, 1956: 160), also written as *n* with an *r* over it, or, as in this word, as *rr*.

Thus 'reconstructing the reconstructable', as Nicolaisen (1976: 48) puts it, shows *Tshwane* to be phonologically compatible with //*k"warre*, the /Xam (S1) word for 'baboon or monkey with a long tail' (Bleek, 1956: 609). The semantic link between //*k"warre* and *Apie* 'little monkey', together with the topographical link between *Apies* and *Tshwane*, allows a semantic link to be postulated between *Tshwane* and //*k"warre*. In other words, *Tshwane* is a phonological adaptation of //*k"warre* and means 'monkey (river)', translated as *Apies (river)*.

The /Xam (S1) word for 'monkey' is, as has been pointed out, //*k"warre*, with an intervocalic voiced alveolar vibrant *r*, whereas the Tswana placename *Tshwane* has an intervocalic alveolar nasal *n*. This seeming anomaly may be explained in terms of the antiquity of the word preserved in the name of the river. As Boeyens and Cole (1995: 24) point out when discussing Tswana placenames which 'most certainly date back several centuries, allowance must be made for the possibility of some structural and/or semantic changes in the language'. An extinct word for 'monkey' that is cognate with both the /Xam (S1) word //*k"warre* and the Tswana name *Tshwane* presumably contained an intervocalic nasalized *r*, now represented in writing as *r̃*, that developed as a voiced vibrant *rr* in the /Xam language and as an alveolar nasal *n* in Tswana.

As noted, the extant San word that is seen as a cognate form of *tshwane* is the /Xam (S1) word //*k"warre*. According to Bleek (1929: i), the /Xam were found in the Old Cape Colony, while Bleek (1956: iii) informs us that the /Xam (S1) were found in the 'Northern part of Cape south of Orange River east and west'. The question may be asked: how did a word from a language restricted to the Old Cape Colony

or the Northern Cape south of the Orange river come to be used for the name of a river north of Pretoria in the old Transvaal, the present Gauteng and Limpopo provinces? The answer again lies in the antiquity of the languages concerned. The recording of San languages and words, and of the distribution of San tribes and clans, began only with the arrival of literate European missionaries, travellers, scientists, naturalists, and others, from the seventeenth century and subsequently. What happened in the thousands of years of San occupation of vast areas of the sub-continent south of the Zambezi prior to that, what physical and language contact took place, and what the influence of these was on the vocabularies of the peoples concerned, we do not know. That such movements took place is evidenced in Bleek (1929: 6):

> These differences [in the various Bushman languages] seem to me to group the languages as I have done, but of course the dividing lines are not sharp. S5 and S6 are much nearer N1 and N2 than S1 and S2 are, and C1 is a veritable link between the Northern Group and C2, which again is a step nearer Nama. And Nama becomes even more interesting by the comparison. A study of the vocabulary shows that it shares a number of its roots with one or more of the Bushman languages. Nor is it always with the same one; though most frequently the likeness is to words in C1 and C2, yet sometimes one, sometimes another language shows the Nama root, even that spoken by dwellers at Lake Chrissie, who do not seem to have been in contact with them. [...] The distribution of races and the distribution of languages does not necessarily coincide.

Generic term or demonstrative locative

It may seem strange that a word like *//k"warre* 'monkey' can occur as a placename, particularly as the name of a river, without any generic term or feature designator being included overtly as part of the name. A comparable example seems to be *Komati*, thought to be cognate with the Hadzapi (C3) word *k"omati* 'eland' (Bleek, 1956: 125). However, in the latter case a synonym for 'eland' is *k"oma*, which leaves the component *ti* of the name *Komati* free to be regarded as perhaps a generic term meaning 'river', since the Komati is a river. However, there seems to be no similar chance of the component *ne* of the name *Tshwane* being a generic term, since no word *//k"wa* has been found that means 'monkey'. An examination of numerous such examples may show the existence of 'embedded generics' or 'embedded demonstratives', where a homophonous name component serves also as feature (type) indicator, the distinction being that the generic indicates the type of feature to which the name refers, while the demonstrative indicates the specific entity, 'that (one) there'. Where the final component of a San word is identical to the generic term or locative demonstrative morpheme, the distinction between them is not always immediately obvious and the terms 'embedded generics' and 'embedded demonstratives' have been coined to refer to them.

The distinction just drawn between 'embedded generics' and 'embedded demonstratives' touches on what may prove to be a new insight into the syntactic pattern of San placename formation, or the grammar of San placenaming. One is inclined to take for granted that the San (and other peoples), although their language structures differ from ours, would form their placenames in the same way as we do, with either simple or composite names, the latter frequently comprising a generic term or feature

type indicator, and a specific term that distinguishes the entity from other features of the same class or category. However, that may not be the case. Recent insights into names derived from San languages, for example *Lephalale*, *Palala*, *Modimolle*, *Zebediela*, *Chuan*, *Mangaung*, and *Taung*, have prompted a detailed investigation into placename morphemes such as *la*, *le*, *n*, and *ng*, hitherto thought to be adapted generics, but which are now believed, at least in some instances, to be demonstrative locatives. This topic warrants a separate publication.

Conclusion

The name *Tshwane*, primarily the Tswana name of the Apies River but also applied by Tswana speakers to the city of Pretoria, is officially replacing the name *Pretoria* for the metropolitan area, and perhaps eventually also for the inner city. Attempts to find a Tswana or Ndebele origin having proven fruitless, current research suggests that *Tshwane* is an adaptation of a much older San name with which the name *Apies* is synonymous. Although, of course, new evidence may in time prove otherwise, indications at this point are that, in changing the name of Pretoria to *Tshwane*, the Metropolitan Council is, perhaps unknowingly, restoring an ancient San name.

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