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Indigenous Place Names: A Literary Toponomastics Study of Suburb Names in Cape Coast

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Abstract: Most toponomastics research has ignored the importance of indigenous places as sites for identity and other cultural and social significance. Using Cape Coast as a historical site of the transatlantic slave trade, this study explores the origin, meanings and relevance of indigenous place names in the suburbs of Cape Coast, Ghana. Through an interdisciplinary approach that synergizes an interview with a chief, who is a prosopographer, historical documents, and literary sources, this study traces the city's evolution from its ancestral hunting origins. The findings revealed that Cape Coast's identity is encapsulated in the indigenous names, which point out the complex dynamics of culture, geography, identity and power. The names reference landmarks, events, environment and communities, transforming the city itself into a living archive with historical relevance. The literary interpretations uncovered metaphorical meanings encoded in some toponyms. Tracing connections across people, events, geography and time, these names reveal an interconnection often obscured by colonial ruptures. Based on these findings, there is a need to preserve the indigenous place names to foster intergenerational connections to the city's storied landscape. The study contributes to Critical Toponymy theory and empirical insights into using indigenous toponyms to decolonize urban heritage.

Keywords: Cape Coast, indigenous names, literary, metaphor, toponomastics

Introduction

From time immemorial, humanity has been driven by a profound impulse to make sense of our experiences and existence through stories, symbols, and meaning--making practices. As Ivanič (1998) states, scholarship always represents a delicate negotiation "between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, on the one hand, and the requirements of convention, the history of a discipline, on the other" (p. 86). Behind the methodical veneer of academic research lies a fundamentally human yearning for purpose, understanding, and continuity in the face of life's flux. Nowhere is this delicate dance between the personal and disciplinary more

evident than in practices of place naming. Toponyms, whether conferred through oral traditions or institutionalized nomenclature, reveal the complex interplay between official conventions and vernacular creativity in inscribing meaning onto local landscapes. Azaryahu (1996) argues that the commemorative naming of the cityscape is intended to shape group consciousness through cultural ideals, civic virtues, and historical memories. However, dominant historical narratives intertwine with folk stories and community perspectives (Berg & Vuolteenaho, 2009). Rose-Redwood et al. (2010) propose the value of critical toponymic research in elucidating the contested politics of place naming across different social groups and periods of history. This study's literary analysis of indigenous Mfantse place names in Cape Coast represents one such quest to trace personal and ancestral attempts to consecrate meaning amid rapid change. This research aims to address this gap through a literary toponomastics study of indigenous Mfantse (Anglicized as Fante) place names in the suburbs of Cape Coast, Ghana.

Cape Coast, originally named *Cabo Corso* by the Portuguese in the 15th century, has a long and complex history of colonialism and transatlantic slave trade. Toponyms in Cape Coast today reveal layers of Mfantse, colonial Portuguese, Dutch, Danish and British influences. The outskirts of Cape Coast are home to many towns and villages, likely retaining indigenous Mfantse heritage through their place names. The Mfantse people are part of the Akan ethnolinguistic group, speaking the Mfantse dialect of Twi (Allman, 1990). Under successive Portuguese, Dutch, Danish and British colonial rule from the 15th century onwards, the original Mfantse presence and perspective in Cape Coast was increasingly suppressed and erased (Anquandah, 1982). More broadly, affirming indigenous Mfantse place names recognizes and honors Mfantse perspectives within Cape Coast's complex multicultural heritage. In the face of extensive cultural destruction under colonialism, preserving and celebrating Mfantse toponyms becomes an act of cultural reclamation and empowerment. Scholars have called for greater attention to Akan place names as windows into folklore, history and culture (Anquandah, 1982).

In this study, we conduct a literary toponomastics analysis of indigenous place names in primary indigenous suburbs of Cape Coast. Through literary

toponomastics, we examine indigenous place names through the lens of oral narratives, supported by literary interpretations, moving beyond literal meanings to explore imaginative and symbolic connotations (Tent & Blair, 2011). We aim to identify and analyze Mfantse toponyms, associated stories and meanings. The study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, including oral history, literary studies and qualitative ethnographic methods. The study contributes to decolonizing African toponymy and demonstrates the value of literary toponomastics for illuminating cultural meanings within indigenous place names. Against this backdrop, the study is guided by two research questions:

1) What is the origin and literary relevance of the indigenous names of prime suburbs in Cape Coast?
2) How do the indigenous place names of the prime suburbs contribute to the identity and sense of place in Cape Coast?

Literature Review

Previous Studies on Toponomastics

Studies on toponomastics have explored a variety of issues, including the relationship between place names and language attitudes, the impact of language contact on place names, and the role of place names in identity construction and maintenance. For instance, Ryder (2011) analyzed place names in the American West, finding that descriptive names like Long Valley or incidents like Battle Creek were common. Surnames like Washington and Jefferson became widespread in cities as against the countryside. Ryder (2011) argues that place names thus encode cultural history. Meanwhile, Guyot (2017) examined the indigenous origins of place names, such as Mississippi, which derives from the Anishinaabe language. He reported that the meaning is "Great River" or "gathering of waters". The name, Misi-ziibi, was then changed to Mississippi following the French colonialist settlements (Guyot, 2017). Toponomastics interacts significantly with linguistics in analyzing the phonology, morphology, semantics, and grammar of

place names. De Felice (2012) examined the phonological adaptation of place names spread through migration, colonialism, and globalization. Sung (2013) explored the morphology of toponyms, finding suffixes like "-ville" productive in creating new names. On semantics, place names may refer to people, geography, events, activities, or qualities (Berezkina, 2016).

Scholars have applied diverse theories and methodologies to study place naming. Drawing on social identity theory, Guyot and Seethal (2007) argue that renamings of places reflect identity shifts at personal, community, and national levels. Azaryahu (1996) uses critical toponymy to expose how place names transmit dominant historical narratives and ideologies. Similarly, Erikha (2021) adopted the critical toponmies theory to investigate the renamings between Javanese and Sundanese. Guided by the aim of examining the connections between naming, place-making, and power, she found that renamed cities and localities were opposed by several people despite the positive intentions of the government. Meanwhile, Berg and Vuolteenaho (2009) critique quantitative computational approaches and call for richer qualitative, interpretive methods focusing on meanings and contexts.

A major area of critical toponym research is examining how place naming intersects with power and politics. Light and Young (2015) argue place naming is an act of textual authority; naming or renaming places is an instrument for social control. Algeo and Algeo (2012) investigated how place names in the southern U.S. reflected the power of White supremacy through segregatory toponyms. Meanwhile, Rose-Redwood and Alderman (2011) studied processes of decolonization through the widespread renaming of places across Africa. Current developments in toponomastics include studying changes under globalization, digitization, and the growth of unofficial place names. Azaryahu (2018) proposes studying toponymic conflict and interaction at globalized borders. Gao et al. (2017) map how internet technology and crowdsourcing are generating unofficial place names like hashtags. As well, some scholars argue for greater interdisciplinarity, connecting place name research more firmly with geography, GIS, ecology, and public policy (Boucher & Bonn, 1995).

The ongoing review highlights four key areas that are addressed in the present study. First, much of the current research is in Anglo-American

and Asian contexts and other major urban centres (Boucher & Bonn, 1995; Gao et al., 2017; Wu & Young, 2022). Less attention has been paid to intermediate cities and smaller settlements. This study focuses on the suburbs of Cape Coast, a mid-sized coastal area. This adds to how place naming in suburbs differs from major cities and urban areas. Second, there appears to be no study that has investigated the literary dimensions embedded in place names. Most studies have focused on socio-political and linguistic perspectives (Azaryahu, 1996; De Felice, 2012; Light & Young, 2015; Sung, 2013). In this study, we explore the issues of identity, relevance of names, and sense of place within the socio-cultural geography of Cape Coast. We argue that the indigenous place names carry rich metaphorical and symbolic meanings that can be uncovered through literary analysis. Third, this study addresses gaps in examining the interconnected nature of place identities and meanings. Existing research often examines place identity and sense of place separately (Rose-Redwood, 2008). This study provides a more holistic perspective on how naming practices shape cultural imagination and belonging. Cape Coast's unique history enhances this place identity dynamics as both a European colonial hub and centre of the transatlantic slave trade (Potter, 2019). This study's focus on indigenous place names reveals African cultural resilience despite colonialism's disruptions (Mahoney, 2009). Finally, echoing Ingold's (1993) concept of landscape "tempos", Cape Coast's place names embody a community's dwelling within their ecosystem through seasonal mobility, economic adaptations, and the imprint of lives, deaths and dreams along ancestral paths (De Certeau, 1988). This intergenerational fusion of nature, culture and memory contradicts assumptions of rigid borders between societies and environments.

Critical Toponymy: Exploring Indigenous Place Names

Toponomastics, the study of place names and their origins, is a fascinating interdisciplinary field that straddles linguistics, geography, history, anthropology, and other areas. The naming of places and geographic features is a universal human phenomenon that provides insight into language, culture, landscape, and identity. According to Stewart (1975), place names generally originate

from descriptions of the physical environment, incidents that occurred there, the names of individuals, or pre-existing names used by indigenous inhabitants. Critical toponomy is a pluralistic theory that is open to new ideas and experiments (Rose-Redwood et al., 2017). Critical toponymy adds value to the diverse naming practices of different languages, cultures, and social groups as part of the complex pluralistic meanings embedded in the names. It fits into the larger field of toponomastics.

Critical toponymy examines the intersection between place naming, power and ideologies that shape naming practices (Erikha, 2021; Rose-Redwood et al., 2017). Although this theory is still in its emergence, it offers a critical perspective to explore indigenous place names in Cape Coast, Ghana. Place names reflect social constructions rather than neutral labels. Rose-Redwood (2011) explains that places and their names do not have inherent meaning; however, they acquire meanings through complex social processes and power relations. In the context of the present research, names become a viable site where cultural meanings and social hierarchies are produced and negotiated. Hence, the names reflect the values and worldviews of the people who named the place (Rose-Redwood, 2011). This connects to the issues of power and colonization in Cape Coast. The issue of power in critical toponymy presents an effort to decolonize the place name systems associated with Eurocentric notions of space (Carter, 2004). The theory aims to centre indigenous naming practices in an urban space, recognizing the names as important sites of communal identity and belonging (Vuolteenaho & Berg, 2009).

Scholarship on critical toponymy has analyzed how the naming of places is interconnected with politics, power, and spatial meanings (Alderman, 2000, 2003; Hui, 2019; Marin, 2012). As argued by Berg and Kearns (1996), the process of naming places plays a role in how places are socially constructed and contested. Place naming is part of how the symbolic and material order is produced and reproduced, serving as a way of normalizing or legitimating dominant power relations. According to Rose-Redwood et al. (2018), the act of naming places constitutes a performative expression of authority over how spaces are organized and understood. Within the complex pluralism of the theory, place names reflect and reproduce power structures and social hierarchies (Berg &

Kearns, 1996). More importantly, critical toponymy facilitates the adoption of an ethnographic, community-based approach that engages local knowledge and perspectives to understand place naming holistically. This grounds the analysis of lived realities and the naming traditions of indigenous communities. In practice, we adopt this theory to examine the etymologies, semantics, and contributions of the indigenous place names in Cape Coast, tracing history, language, and identity from a literary perspective. Second, through this theory, we aim to unravel how certain names became dominant through colonial processes and indigenous interactions. Finally, it offers a robust perspective for rediscovering and foregrounding Cape Coast's diverse indigenous place names and heritage.

Materials and Methods

Design and Approach

Meanings emerge from the unknown depths of life, before fading away again into mystery. The study of place names represents an ongoing effort to capture those fleeting moments of insight and local meaning before they disappear. This quest is especially evident in the literary analysis of place names. Based on this assertion, this study adopts an interdisciplinary qualitative design to explore indigenous place names in the suburbs of Cape Coast, Ghana. Situated in the interpretivist paradigm, this study endeavors to provide the meaning of the indigenous place names. As noted by Creswell and Creswell (2017), the qualitative research design targets narratives, texts, and lived experiences for interpretation and meaning. Rather than just asserting political views or tracing population changes, critically examining place names tries to uncover the imagination, symbols, and essential awareness of communities that get embedded into Cape Coast's history, which is linked to several parts of the world. Berg and Vuolteenaho (2009) argue that qualitative interpretive methods are better able to grasp the subtle shades of meaning and background that quantitative computational approaches miss. Beyond numbers and charts, literary place name analysis seeks to crystallize the profound yet elusive ways communities perceive existence and infuse

the places they inhabit with layers of significance. As such, the study aims to determine the meanings and significance of the names in a specific cultural setting rather than quantify their occurrence. Within the qualitative design, the study dwells on the case study approach, focused on Cape Coast, Ghana, as a case. The case study allows for a rich localized interpretation of the indigenous place names (Yin, 2009).

The case study of Cape Coast is fitting given its unique history with the transatlantic slave trade and the complex colonial influences on toponyms. The case study allows for other investigations in other contexts that share similarities with Cape Coast. The study has an exploratory purpose to reveal the cultural and historical relevance of the indigenous place names. This aligns with the purpose of Critical Toponymies theory, which reveals perspectives from the names (Rose-Redwood, 2011). Based on the case study approach, the study synergizes cultural geography, literary studies, and ethnography (interview). This provides a holistic lens on place names (Boucher & Bonn, 1995). The study's literary toponomastics connects the indigenous place names to oral narratives and symbolic interpretations, moving beyond literal meanings (Gardiner, 2012). In this regard, the qualitative exploratory case study facilitates cultural analysis of indigenous place names of prime suburbs in Cape Coast, serving the goals of Critical Toponymies research.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The nature of the study was subjective, which required careful data collection and analysis procedures. For a start, the primary data source was an in-depth interview with a chief who is knowledgeable about the city's history and place name origins. The chief's role as *Tufohene* (a term in Akan culture that means advisor of the chief) in the Oguaa traditional area makes him the custodian of oral traditions and histories, providing insightful perspectives. He symbolizes self--assurance, and confidence, and is the overseer of the Asafo (warriors) company in the traditional area. He maintains peace, unity, and development. The interview with the chief provides a rich context for interpreting the indigenous place names. However, to achieve data triangulation and enhance the trustworthiness of

the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), we compared the interview data with histories crafted in literary texts and other historical documents and publications (such as *Cape Coast Castle* by Opoku-Agyemang and *The Healers* by Armah). Using multiple sources validates the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview focused on uncovering the meanings and significance behind prime suburb names. The literary analysis, based on the texts and documents, helped situate the names in a cultural and historical context. The suburb names were compiled into a table (see Table 1).

We conducted a thematic analysis guided by a constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2017) in coding the data to reveal patterns for discussion. We undertook a thematic analysis because it is a standard technique for qualitative studies to discern patterns and critical themes (Nowell et al., 2017). Paying close attention to the interview data, we iteratively examined the data, in tandem with the other sources, to construct the themes. The themes were grouped under the research questions formulated in the introduction. The literary perspective of the analysis unearths allusions, metaphors, indirections, and symbols to uncover hidden historico-cultural ideologies in the names. Concerning ethical considerations, the chief was fully informed about the nature and purpose of the study and he expressed his enthusiasm for the research. After the analysis, we did a member-checking with the chief to verify the findings. His responses in the interview and the checking were impersonal as well.

Table 1. Indigenous place names and commentaries

Indigenous Names	Commentaries
Oguaa	A name derived from the first settler.
Amamoma	The name evolved from the indigenous name of the rubber plant because there was a rubber plantation there.
Amanfu	Amanfu means 'new settlement'. It evolved as a result of increasing economic activities.
Anaafo	Anaafo means 'south of Amanfu'. It was created by some young men of Bentsir Asafo Company.

Brofo ye Dur	The name translates as 'English is heavy'. The name is from incessant sayings that the whiteman's language is heavy to the ear.
Tromu	Tromu means 'garden'. Currently, it is the place where the Methodist Mission is located opposite NIB Bank in Cape Coast.
Abeadze	This means 'palm plantation'. It was close to Tromu.
Kawanopaado	The name translates as 'close your mouth'. This follows a call to urge the natives to keep quiet and not disturb the Europeans.
Bakaano/ Bakatsir	These mean 'the mouth of a lagoon'/ 'the end of a lagoon'. This was a busy battleground in Cape Coast as that marked the entry point for people to enter Cape Coast.
Victoria Park	It has been renamed to 'Jubilee Park'. It was named after one of the British monarchs. Her bust is erected here.
Coronation Street	It evolved out of the coronation of late Queen Elizabeth II.
Lighthouse	It is a hill overlooking the sea from Coronation Street.
Jerusalem Street	It is a place with leafy canopy falling from lighthouse.
Ntsen	Literally, it means 'linear barrier'. It was a settlement for Ntsen Asafo (warriors).
Bentsir	The name means 'behind the boundary'. The name emanates from the fact that it is beyond the barrier of the Ntsens.
Kente Ekyir	This literally means 'after weaving kente'. The place had its name from the activities of the people who rushed to the place to gather the remnants of the weaving to make fire.
Krutown	It is located opposite the Ntsen stretch; on the top of the hill. It was a forest.
Asante Road	This is the prime suburb of the Asantes who migrated to Oguaa because of the booming commercial activities.
Gyegyemu/ Gyegyeano	These names mean 'within the stretch' and 'the tip of the stretch'. It was believed to be a calm serene space for reflection.
Kotokoraba	This name is a corrupt version of 'Kotoworaba' which means 'a swamp with crabs'.
Siwdo	It means 'on top of the hill'. This is inhabited by another set of migrants from the northern part of Ghana.

Ewim	This means 'the skies'. It got its name from its geographical features.
Mfantsepim/ Kwabotwe	This means spirit of thousands of Mfantses. It reflects a deity that inhabited the hill on which the school is situated.
Aboom Wells	Literally, it means 'well in stones'. This is an offshoot of Bakaano; between Siwdo and Abeadze.
London Bridge	The place was a stream that drew its source of water from the Kotoworaba, Krutown Hills and Jerusalem Hills.

Source: Interview data (2023).

The names in Table 1 are the prime suburbs of Cape Coast that can link to its emergence and rise to fame. After these, there were other novel settlements such as Abura, Esikafo Ambatsem, Apewosika, Ankaful, Akotokyer, Adisadel Estate, Ayifua and so on. Though these are also part of Cape Coast, they did not have a direct bearing on the emergence and rise to fame of Cape Coast. The next section discusses the indigenous names under the two objectives guiding the research.

Discussion

This study is motivated by the rich tapestry of linguistic and cultural diversity embedded in the names of places. Focusing on the toponymic suburb landscape of Cape Coast, this study discusses the literary dimensions of indigenous place names to reveal the profound significance they hold in shaping the cultural identity and historical tapestry of this coastal city. We discuss the origin and literary relevance of the names of the suburbs in the first part of the discussion.

Origin and Literary Relevance of the Names of Suburbs

The names of suburbs, often taken for granted, are far from arbitrary; they are the product of historical, cultural, and linguistic factors that reveal implicit

meanings to the places they represent. We examine the origin and literary relevance of the names based on the evolution and growth of Cape Coast, the significance of the names, and the literary and cultural relevance. These subthemes are intertwined.

Evolution and Growth of Cape Coast

Cape Coast, a name heavily linked to the transatlantic slave trade, transformed from a small indigenous hunting settlement into a thriving commercial centre and strategic British colonial port city. At first glance, the suburb names of any city may seem like innocuous administrative demarcations without greater meaning. However, a careful analysis reveals that these names offer vital insights into the historical identity of a place and its people. The interview unpacks how Cape Coast's suburbs encapsulate different eras and facets of the city's maturation. From the interview data, Cape Coast is traced to the arrival of Egya Oguaa and the small community of *Amamoma*. This early place name, evoking local figures and landmarks, represents the city's ancestral origins as a modest hunting village before the fishing activities. The interview thus grounds Cape Coast's foundational identity in these early settlements predating European contact. The interviewee highlighted that:

> His [Egya Oguaa] hunting expeditions landed him at the place where the Methodist Cathedral is (now) situated and he erected a hut and settled there. Others from where he traded his games followed him and established themselves there. The community gained its name from the first settler. However, prior to the arrival of Egya Oguaa, a community called Amamoma (a community swallowed by the University of Cape Coast) was in existence where workers in the nearby mining site lived. The name Amamoma evolved from the indigenous name of the rubber plant because there was a rubber plantation there (Interview data, 8th October, 2023).

A critical look at the name of the originator of Cape Coast, *Egya Oguaa*, points to the traditional name of Cape Coast, *Oguaa*. The name is derived from *gua*,

which means market (uncorrupted). His settlement led to the establishment of small markets that predated the arrival of Europeans and British colonial power. However, contact with the Europeans recategorized the name as the slave trade (market). The other suburb names, such as *Amamoma*, *Amanfu*, and *Anaafo*, then act as a map charting Cape Coast's rapid growth and transformation into a thriving port city following the arrival of European traders, missionaries and colonists. The names compress centuries of lived experiences into linguistic markers dotting the cityscape. They bear witness to Cape Coast's complex history and identity. The discussion shows how Cape Coast expanded from a small hunting village to a major commercial centre and seat of British colonial power on the Gold Coast, as reflected in names like *Victoria Park* and *Coronation Street*. We discuss the significance of the names in the next section.

Significance of the Names

As stated earlier, Cape Coast's suburb names are more than just administrative labels; they form a living archive of the city's richly layered history and identity. In this section, we reveal how these suburb names encapsulate complex dynamics of language, culture, geography and power within the urban space. Rose-Redwood et al. (2017) argued that street names are enmeshed in the social and individual dynamics of place-making through signification. The interview highlights names like *Brofo Ye Dur* that linguistically capture the friction between English and local Mfantse dialect during the colonial rule. This nature of language politics is etched into the fabric of the city. The interviewee commented that:

> ...As part of the colonial territory, information from the castle were sent to them in English and their difficulty in comprehending it made them exclaim "Borofo ye Dur"; hence the name (Interview data, 8th October, 2023).

Similarly, names like *Bakaano* and *London Bridge* stand as poignant reminders of Cape Coast's pivotal role in the exploitative transatlantic slave trade centred on Britain. The brutal shadow of colonial capitalism manifests in these innocuous indigenous names. For instance, *Bakaano* was a busy battleground

on Cape Coast, as that marked the entry point for rival people to enter Cape Coast to trade with Europeans. This place plays a major mythological role in Armah's novel, *The Healers*.

Meanwhile, names like *Kente Ekyir* and *Siwdo* point to the imprint of the local Mfantse industry and migrant communities on Cape Coast's evolving character. For instance, *Siwdo* embodies the presence of migrant groups like Frafras, Mossis, Dagombas and Dargartis from the northern part of Ghana who contributed their skills and culture to Cape Coast's cosmopolitan activities. The name encapsulates how the assimilated identities of newcomers reshaped the city. Other names offer glimpses into specific neighborhoods flavour and character: *Aboom Wells* as an elite locality, *Kotokoraba* as a bustling migrant market hub, and *Brofo Ye Dur* as a site of local-colonial linguistic tensions. Over time, streets like *Anaafo*, *Tromu*, and *Coronation Street* became imbued with memories of events, families, trades and lives that took root there.

Each suburb name tells the story of a particular epoch, community, or socio--cultural dynamic that left its imprint on Cape Coast. This reiterates the fact that place-making practices, memory, and lived experiences surround street names in a specific socio-cultural geography (Azaryahu, 2011). Together, these multi-layered names reveal the complex symphony of people, occupations, traditions, power relations and moments gone by that have been woven into the fabric of the city throughout its eventful history. In the next section, we explore the literary and cultural relevance of the indigenous place names.

Literary and Cultural Relevance

In this section, we discuss that the suburb names are not simply labels for identifying the various places (Gardiner, 2012). The suburb names render space into a dense memorial landscape through literary, cultural, and historical remembrances (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008). Interestingly, most of the names have been woven into the literary works of Ghanaian writers such as Ama Ata Aidoo and Ayi Kwei Armah. Considering place names as an aspect of traditional knowledge, the names of the suburbs hold crucial literary and cultural relevance that give meaning and structure to Cape Coast.

From the analyzed interview transcript, the suburb names of Cape Coast act as vivid repositories of history and cultural memory rooted in locality and space. These names elucidate the profound interweaving of lived experiences within the urban landscape. *Jerusalem Street*, *London Bridge*, and *Kente Ekyir* are among the names that have literary and cultural relevance. For instance, the name *Jerusalem Street* invokes biblical connotations as a holy site, suggesting divinity and sanctuary. Referencing Jerusalem creates a metaphor for the suburb as a sacred, protected space for its inhabitants, especially during the upheavals of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. The name asserts a sense of dignity and spirituality even when facing brutal external forces (Mazrui & Wondji, 2010).

London Bridge also carries profound literary relevance in marking the suburbs as a liminal space, a point of transition and separation. In Cape Coast, this name denoted where slaves were ritually bathed before being imprisoned, signifying their transition into commodified human cargo heading into the horrors of the Middle Passage (Lawrance et al., 2022). The name signifies the loss of identity, the death of a previous life, and rebirth into bondage under British imperial power. *London Bridge* potently invokes this spatial passing over, while asserting persistent connections between Cape Coast and Britain. Finally, *Kente Ekyir* powerfully condenses cultural philosophies into their proverbial meaning – "after weaving the illustrious Kente cloth, little is left". This metaphor asserts the ephemeral nature of material creations and achievements in life and their ultimate irrelevance after death. The name evokes the vibrant local kente weaving traditions while mapping them onto society's existential struggles for purpose and legacy (Asante, 2022). The sobering message woven into the suburb's name conveys both cultural pride and philosophical reflections on life's fleeting nature.

In essence, the suburb-scape doubles as a living archive inscribed with traces of the past. The names reveal how streets soaked up countless lived experiences that cumulatively shaped the suburb's character. Cape Coast's suburbs resound with echoes of the lives, communities and events that have transpired within them. The names render the suburb-scape into a rich historical, socio-cultural and literary text. They reflect how people and place intertwine to forge communal heritage and identity.

Identity and Sense of Place through Suburb Names

As has been consistently stated, suburb names are not mere labels but serve as powerful expressions of a community's identity and sense of place. We seek to unveil the influence the suburb names exert in shaping the identity and deep-rooted sense of place within these neighbourhoods. We discuss the intricate interplay between names and community, revealing how these toponymic symbols ascribe meaning to Cape Coast.

Local and Historical Landmarks

Several suburb names in Cape Coast directly invoke local historical landmarks that link the city's contemporary identity to its roots. These indigenous names serve as time portals connecting modern neighbourhoods back to their ancestral antecedents and origins anchored in the local landscape. For instance, as we previously discussed, the name *Amamoma* reaches back to an old settlement that predated the arrival of European colonists. It immortalizes a rubber plantation that once defined the area's rural beginnings as a Mfantse hunting village before growing into the port city of Cape Coast. More importantly, another indigenous suburb name is *Bentsir*, which signifies a barrier beyond the *Ntsens*. "*Bentsir* hosted one of the earliest and most famous slave markets in Oguaa, called *Anaafo Market*" (Interview data, 8th October, 2023). The need to create space for the development of infrastructure (GCB Bank, Atta Mills Memorial Library, Cape Coast Castle, the Court Complex, Ministries and SSNIT Office Complex) saw the Bentsirs relocate to *OLA* (Our Lady of Apostles), a location between the Atlantic Ocean and the University of Cape Coast.

Similarly, *Aboom Wells* references a unique landmark of marble-like stone wells that became a notable community fixture in a neighbourhood that emerged in the late 1800s. The name etches this local water source into the city's living memory. The interview mentioned that "it is a place where marble-like stones are giving pure crystal water. "It happened to be the street of the affluent/elite community of Oguaa" (Interview data, 8th October, 2023). Another example is

London Bridge. More broadly, this name signifies the neighbourhood's role as a passage for the transatlantic slave trade. The name links modernity to traumatic history. The interviewee revealed that the bridge was over a stream that "happened to be the last place of ritual bath for the slaves before their final arrival at the Cape Coast Castle and onward journey to the Americas" (Interview data, 8th October, 2023). *London Bridge* is significant in connecting Oguaa (now Cape Coast) to London and the slave trade. More significantly, in connection to the transatlantic slave trade, *London Bridge* is discussed as the point of the final ritual bathing for the slaves after the *Assin Manso* spiritual bathing. Just like the Ohio River in the Americas where slaves who could swim used the Ohio River as a route of escape from slavery, the London Bridge provided choices for the slaves. The London Bridge events provided meaning in both spiritual and physical contexts. During the ritual, those who knew how to swim and were 'smart', swam off the stream into freedom. Such escaped slaves became the inhabitants of Amanfo. Those who could not escape were washed ashore and exported to the Americas as slaves. The stream which is the aggregate of all streams in Cape Coast was symbolic in either baptizing the slaves into slavery or self-emancipated freedom.

Cape Coast's suburb names tangibly tie the present-day cityscape back to its historic building blocks. Places, streets and identities shape each other over time. The names act as imagined maps, tracing the geographic and socio-cultural contours of the city across time. They transform Cape Coast's neighbourhoods into an open living museum imprinted with traces of the past awaiting discovery.

Migration

Migration, whether driven by economic, social, or political factors, has been a transformative force in shaping urban landscapes and their nomenclature. According to Klugah (2013), migration narratives constitute a symbolic historical genre that can be mapped to place names. Cape Coast evolved into a tapestry of diverse cultures as different migrant groups arrived from across Africa and beyond to stake their claims. Many suburb names in Cape Coast directly encapsulate these migrant experiences and imprints on the urban space. For example, the suburb names reflect the spatial organization of a group or region

in response to migration, such as Krutown. Per the oral account, "*Krutown* is a location opposite the *Ntsen* stretch, on the top of the hill. During the expansion of *Oguaa*, migrants from the West African sub-region, such as Liberia, travelled to *Oguaa* to seek greener pastures. A group of Liberians, known as Kru, settled on top of the hill (now the Social Welfare Centre). "This group helped with the construction of Cape Coast" (Interview data, 8th October, 2023). They were the workforce used by the British to build Cape Coast castles and other settlements. Similarly, there is *Amanfu* (which means a new settlement). This suburb's name emerged after *Amamoma* in the east of the Cape Coast Castle as a result of the migration of people to *Oguaa* due to the booming commercial activities following the arrival of the Europeans.

Also, the settlement of migrants in suburbs can have a profound impact on the social and economic dynamics of an area. The indigenous suburb names reinforce inter-ethnic activities that were facilitated through trade, such as *Asante Road*, signifying migrant communities from the inland Gold Coast. *Asante Road* is a community of Asantes who migrated to Oguaa because of the booming commercial activities spearheaded by the Europeans. *Asante Road* is at the north end of Krutown Hill. This is where most of the feud between Asantes and Mfantses ignited. Similarly, *Kotokoraba* signifies the area inhabited by Hausa, Fulani and other migrants from northern and sub-Saharan Africa. The migrants settled there and they are still there at the heart of Oguaa. They controlled the commercial activities of Oguaa. The name immortalizes this community's lasting economic and cultural influence on Cape Coast. Interestingly, the place is now a major socio-economic centre in Cape Coast, Central Region.

Together, these names point out the presence of new cultures within the geography of Cape Coast. Such indigenous suburb names enable migrant groups to inscribe their identities and contributions into the social fabric of their adopted city. The names weave diversity into Cape Coast's story and signal the assimilated belongings of these communities. The migrants and their descendants planted firm roots and helped shape Cape Coast's cosmopolitan outlook. The suburb names on the city map testify to their participation in the making of a dynamic trading hub enriched by its myriad of origins. Cape Coast upholds its identity as an amalgam of cultures rather than the product of

any single group. The names collectively narrate a story of adaptation, fusion and multiculturalism – a reminder that diversity strengthens society.

Evocation of the Environment

Place names have a remarkable ability to evoke the aesthetics of their environment, allowing individuals to conjure mental images and emotional connections to specific locales. Certain suburb names in Cape Coast provide vivid descriptive snapshots of the city's distinctive environment. Names like "Tromu" (garden), "Abeadze" (palm plantation) and "Ewim" (skies) linguistically capture floral abundance, avian melodies, aquatic rhythms and celestial vistas unique to this coastal geography. More than just labels, these linguistically evocative names distil the ambience, landscape and 'spirit of place', of different locales into poetic toponyms. For instance, *Tromu*, meaning 'garden', perfectly captures the greenery and fertile nature of a riverside suburban grove that became a verdant community garden. This name employs metaphor to evoke the aesthetics of the environment. The name highlights its leafy essence. Historically, "the place was very fertile, so there were a lot of trees. The European settlers converted it into a garden of many exotic flowers and it became a European settlement" (Interview data, 8th October, 2023). To complement *Tromu*, there is *Abeadze* (palm plantation). This is a community close to *Tromu*. The place was full of palm trees that added to the greenery of the "tromu". "It fell off *Tromu* because of its unique vegetation (palm trees)" (Interview data, 8th October, 2023).

Furthermore, *Ewim*, meaning 'the skies', crystallizes the lofty, celestial vistas overlooking Cape Coast from the highest point on the surrounding hills. *Ewim* is on the highest hill in Oguaa, and when one stands on the hill, one sees every part of Oguaa. It used to be one big hill, but due to "the construction of the road between Kotokoraba and Tantri, it became two parts" (Interview data, 8th October, 2023). These suburb names reveal the geographic features, such as rivers, mountains, or valleys, that immediately bring to mind the physical characteristics of the environment. Other suburb names reveal the essence of hills and lagoons. For instance, there is *Siwdo* (which means on top of the hill), which also highlights the geographic features of the place. The place provided space for farming and

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the rearing of livestock. The interviewee stated that "there is a well at Siwdo where the chiefs are ritually bathed during the celebration of the annual Oguaa Fetu Afahye" (Interview data, 8th October, 2023). Concerning the names that signify lagoons, *Bakaano* translates literally to 'mouth of the lagoon' and *Bakakyir* as 'end of the lagoon', conjuring images of a serene coastal suburb located along a lagoon's estuary. The name echoes both the landscape and aquatic rhythms of the area.

Finally, there *is Lighthouse*, a hill overlooking the sea from Coronation Street and opposite St. Francis De Sales' Cathedral. "It served a navigation purpose, though it added to the European presence in Oguaa. *Lighthouse* was (and still is) very vegetative, and its trees provided a canopy for the places beneath the hill" (Interview data, 8th October, 2023). One such place is called *Jerusalem Street*, as the canopy of the hill metaphorically protects the people as mountains protect Israel. Through such descriptively imagistic names, Cape Coast's suburbs come alive with personality and regional flavour. The names render tangible places in the realm of the literary imagination. Echoing the famous line by author Thomas Hardy (2021), "If a way to the better there be, it exacts a full look at the worst", these names compel us to envision the full-lived experience of Cape Coast's distinctive communities. These names paint poetic portraits, capturing the essence of locations.

Commemoration of Personalities and Circumstances

Suburb names often serve as poignant commemorations of personalities and circumstances. They reflect historical figures, events or the unique characteristics of a place. Cape Coast's suburb names form a living memorial to personalities, events and institutions that have shaped the city's collective memory and identity. Through commemoration in toponyms, the city etches selective history into its mapped landscape. From the data gathered, three important names were attributed to this subtheme: *Mfantsipim*, *Victoria Park* and *Coronation Street*. Evocatively, *Victoria Park* and *Coronation Street* immortalize cultural ties with Britain and the monarchy that once ruled Cape Coast and Gold Coast. The names function as linguistic monuments linked to the British colonial era. The interviewee distinguished between these names:

Victoria Park (now Jubilee Park) is named after one of the British monarchs. It is adjacent to the major European settlements and a reminder of the imperial presence in Oguaa (Interview data, 8th October, 2023).

Coronation Street is named so because history has it that when Elizabeth came to Cape Coast to erect the bust of Queen Victoria, Elizabeth was driven through the present-day Coronation Street. She was coroneted not long after her return to England, hence the name Coronation Street (Interview data, 8th October, 2023).

While *Coronation Street* commemorates a significant historical event, *Victoria Park* is named after prominent historical figures and their imperial presence that contributed to Cape Coast's development. This historical continuity connects the present community with its past. However, *Mfantsipim* enshrines an esteemed school, almost assuming the chorus of Alma Mater from its halls. Its name signifies the value Cape Coast places on education and its pioneering role in Ghana's school system, carrying this as its motto "Dwen Hwe Kan" (Think ahead). Through commemoration in suburb names, locales transform into sanctuaries of collective memory. Layers of meaning accrue, such that places become repositories of the shared past. The city finds continuity and relevance in what and who it honours across its storied landscape.

Conclusion and Implications

This study set out to conduct a literary toponomastic analysis of indigenous place names in Cape Coast, Ghana. Guided by two questions and drawing on critical toponymy theory, we analyzed indigenous place names collected through an interview and oral narratives. The findings reveal the critical role of indigenous place names in shaping communal identity, evoking history, commemorating figures and events, and capturing the essence of local environments. Relating to previous scholarship, this study supports arguments by scholars like Rose-Redwood (2011) that place names are social constructions reflecting the values

of their namers rather than neutral labels. The analysis shows how Cape Coast's indigenous suburb names encapsulate diverse lived experiences, power dynamics, communities, and moments that have collectively shaped the city's identity. The study also aligns with Azaryahu's (2011) view that place names are enmeshed with memory and place-making. Cape Coast's indigenous toponyms transform the city into an open archive inscribed with traces of the past. These names map constellations of significance across Cape Coast's suburbs that bind spatial sites with cultural identity. Likewise, through trade networks, migration trails and colonial encroachment, waves of Asante, Fante, Danish and British cultures have collided and coalesced, successively inscribing their worldviews into Cape Coast's soil. Each place name signals the assimilated belonging of newcomers, from "Asante Road" to "Kotokoraba" (Hausa) to "Amanfu" ("new settlement"). These interwoven diversities strengthen communal resilience (Azaryahu, 2011; Berg et al., 1996). At root, the city's prime suburb names highlight an ongoing journey toward interconnection and understanding that bind the land, people and past across generations.

Concerning the practical implications, these findings underline the need to preserve and promote indigenous place names as vital cultural heritage reflecting local histories, languages, and identities. A constellation of intimate connections binds all aspects of existence into an intricate cosmic web, though the strands often elude perception. As Eco (1989) explains poetically, "The universe is a sphere whose exact center is any given point. The circumference nowhere" (p. 41). In few domains is this elusive interconnectivity more evident than in exegesis of place and its names, such as Cape Coast. Indigenous suburb names in Cape Coast offer sites where strands of communal experience crystallize, momentarily tangible as "places make memories cohere in space" (Azaryahu & Foote, 2008, p. 183). Hence, the study recommends participatory naming policies that democratize toponymy by engaging local communities. Cape Coast's municipality could collaborate with residents, especially elders and chiefs, to officially recognize the longstanding indigenous names alongside colonial era names. This can be achieved through heritage signage, oral histories, and educational initiatives that nurture intergenerational connections to the place.

For future research, a holistic research could explore more suburbs in the Central Region as a whole to develop a comprehensive indigenous place name inventory. Studies could also examine toponymic shifts over time through spatial mapping and longitudinal analysis. Toponomastic research could be extended to other coastal towns to understand regional place naming practices. For the limitation of the research, we relied on a single interview with a chief, who is a prosopographer. Further studies could complement this approach with archival data, such as documents or newspapers. Nonetheless, as a learned custodian of tradition, his inputs enriched the perspectives on the significance of indigenous place names in encoding cultural meanings.

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Data Availability Statement

The data for the research is available upon request from the corresponding author.

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