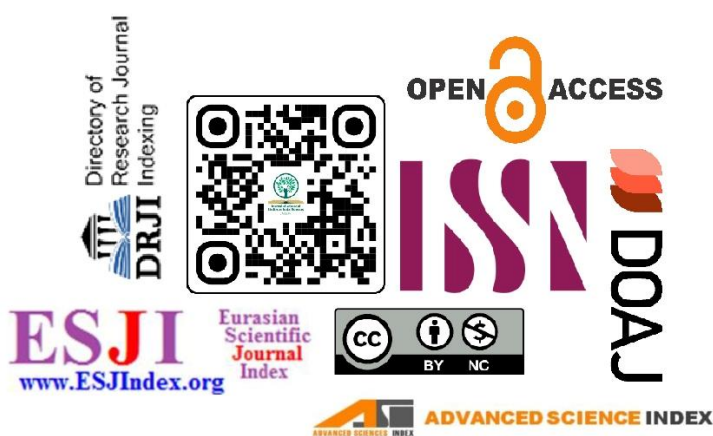
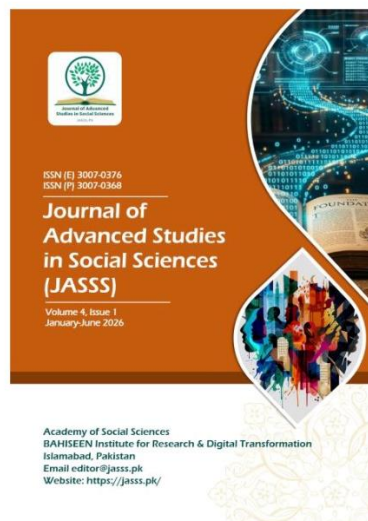


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# Beyond the Chalkboard: A historical inquiry into the naming of schools in the Dukuduku area, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

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## Abstract

Naming is a significant social and cultural practice through which communities articulate identity, memory and power. Names are far from being neutral labels. They encode historical experiences, political struggles and collective aspirations of families, groups or communities. What drew me to this study is the particular history of Dukuduku, a place where schooling emerged not from state provision but from communities fighting to remain on their land. This article examines what the names of those schools reveal about that history and the symbolic work that naming performs in a community shaped by forced removals, land dispossession and sustained resistance. It uses a qualitative interpretive-historical approach and draws on secondary historical literature, place-based analysis and oral historical knowledge derived from the author's long-term involvement with the Dukuduku community to interpret and analyse the meanings embedded in school names. The analysis foregrounds naming as a political and cultural practice by colonial and apartheid legacies, post-apartheid negotiations and local assertions of identity. What emerges from the analysis is the striking contrast between two naming worlds. Schools rooted in the forest carry names born from struggle, resistance and local leadership. Those built in Khula village, the resettlement area, speak a different symbolic language, one of light, progress and nature, reflecting the ideological work of conservation and relocation discourses. These schools do not simply provide education; they have become spaces where history is inscribed, contested and transmitted across generations. This article speaks to ongoing conversations in post-apartheid South Africa about decolonisation, memory and education justice. I argue that school names in Dukuduku are not administrative trivialities. They are living historical documents authored not by the state but by the people themselves and deserve recognition as such.

**Keywords:** Dukuduku forest, dispossession, naming, identity, resistance, heritage

## 1. Introduction

In post-apartheid South Africa, the naming and renaming of public facilities and institutions has emerged as a powerful site of symbolic struggle over history, memory and identity (Chavez-Norgaard, 2024). The high-profile changes, such as the renaming of Piet Retief to Mkhondo, Grahamstown to Makhanda and Port Elizabeth to Gqeberha, have sparked intense public debate, underscoring broader efforts to confront colonial and apartheid embedded in South Africa's cultural landscape (Bezuidenhout, 2021; Taylor, 2024). These

are not simply bureaucratic name changes. Each name carries the weight of a community insisting that its history matters, that names imposed during colonial and apartheid rule do not belong to them and that public space must reflect the identities and memories of those who were long excluded from it. However, the scholarly conversation has largely remained focused on cities and high-profile cases. What happens in rural communities, in schools built from mud and reeds, in forests where people fought simply to remain, has attracted far less attention (Bass & Houghton, 2018; Mkhize & Naidoo, 2023; Yankson, 2023; Mkhize et al., 2025). This gap is of great concern because it is precisely in these overlooked spaces that naming often carries the heaviest historical load.

Schools are among the most intimate public institutions a community possesses. Children encounter them daily, wear their names on uniforms, grow up inside the histories those names carry. For this reason, school naming is not a peripheral concern; it sits at the heart of how communities understand themselves and transmit that understanding to the next generation.

Anyone who has spent time in South African schools understands, even intuitively, that their names are rarely accidental. A school name chosen by a community that has survived eviction threats, state hostility and conservation-driven displacement is a statement about who they are, what they have endured, and what they refuse to forget. In rural and marginalised settings, especially, schools often carry burdens that go well beyond the curriculum. They become reference points for community identity, places where collective memory is anchored and where the experience of struggle finds permanent, public form. Nowhere is this more visible than in areas where communities have had to fight for the right to exist on their own land. Dukuduku is one such place. Here, education, land and naming do not sit in separate categories, they have always been entangled, shaped by the same histories of dispossession and the same insistence on remaining.

Dukuduku's position in South Africa's history has never been straightforward. For decades, the people of Dukuduku were portrayed as illegal squatters, encroachers on land conservation authorities regarded as ecologically precious and inconvenient for humans. These representations were not neutral descriptions. They were political constructions that erased a much longer, more legitimate history of African settlement in the forest and conveniently ignored the economic and political forces that shaped where and how people lived. Against this backdrop, building a school was never simply about education. In Dukuduku, every school that was established represented a claim to permanence, to legitimacy, to the right to belong. The names chosen for those schools carried the same insistence. They were not labels assigned for administrative convenience; they were declarations.

The existing scholarship on Dukuduku has largely focused on land claims, conservation conflicts and forced removals (Nustad & Sundnes, 2013; Sundnes, 2013a; Sundnes, 2013b; Nustad, 2019; Aardenburg & Nel, 2019; Nyathi & Ajani, 2023; Nyathi, 2025), little attention has been given to educational institutions as sites of historical meaning. There is minimal scholarly focus on the symbolic importance of school names in this contested area. However, in Dukuduku, school names embody various layers of history, representing resistance, resilience, hope and ideological struggles. Names such as Vezobala, Mzabalazo and Nkombane are directly linked to the struggle, leadership and collective mobilisation within the forest. In contrast, names such as Silethukukhanya and Ubuhlebemvelo, located

in the resettlement area of Khula village, reflect different symbolic orientations shaped by displacement, conservation discourses and state interventions.

My central argument is that school names in Dukuduku constitute a form of archive, one assembled not in government offices or university libraries, but in the memory, language and symbolic practices of a community that had few other means of recording its own history. In instances where communities have been marginalised from formal historiography, naming becomes a powerful means of recording experiences and transmitting meaning across generations (Alderman, 2016; Dzimiri et al., 2014). Every time a child pulls a school uniform bearing the name Mzabalazo or Vezobala, that history is quietly reaffirmed. School names move through daily life, on letterheads, signage, registers, making particular readings of the past ordinary, routine and enduring. Therefore, they provide valuable insights into how communities understand their history, articulate their political struggles and negotiate their relationship with the state.

This focus on school naming is not incidental to wider debates about decolonisation; it is directly relevant to them. Renaming in contemporary South Africa has become a prominent mechanism for pursuing symbolic redress. Streets, towns and public buildings have been renamed in an attempt to dismantle colonial and apartheid legacies (Ndletyana, 2012). Mphela et al (2021) argue that renaming South African universities is likely to help Africans develop a stronger sense of identity and belonging in these institutions. However, these processes have rarely been clean or straightforward. Renaming has been uneven, politically loaded and frequently contested, exposing just how unresolved the struggles over memory and longing remain in South Africa.

Schools sit at the centre of this terrain precisely because they shape how young people come to understand the past. The names on the gates and the walls are part of that shaping, present every day, absorbed gradually, rarely questioned. Therefore, examining school names in Dukuduku offers a lens through which to explore how decolonisation is imagined, enacted or resisted at the local level.

The approach to this study is historical and interpretive. Rather than treating school names as data points, I read them as texts, situating each within the specific social and historical circumstances that produced it. It is informed by existing historical literature on Dukuduku, oral histories documented in secondary sources and the author's involvement in the area. The questions that guide this study are questions of meaning: Why was this name chosen? What did it communicate to the community that chose it? What does it continue to say about power, memory and identity in a post-apartheid landscape that is still negotiating its colonial inheritance? This approach is appropriate in this context, where archival sources are limited and where symbolic practices constitute an important repository of historical knowledge.

From a theoretical point of view, I draw on postcolonial perspectives, not as a rigid framework imposed from outside but because they offer genuinely useful tools for understanding how power works through language, symbols and institutions, including schools. These perspectives foreground the persistence of colonial logics within the postcolonial and post-apartheid societies, particularly in education and public memory. By reading school names as cultural texts shaped by both domination and resistance, this study situates Dukuduku within the broader intellectual discourse on identity, memory and decolonisation in postcolonial Africa. The analysis remains grounded in the specificities of

place, recognising Dukuduku as a unique historical landscape shaped by struggles against forced removals, conservation imperatives and sustained community struggle.

Three objectives guide this study. Firstly, it aims to document and interpret the meanings embedded in the names of schools in Dukuduku, situating them within their historical and political context. Secondly, it seeks to demonstrate how school naming functions as a form of community-authored historiography in the face of marginalisation and displacement. Lastly, it contributes to scholarship on education and postcolonial memory, highlighting rural schools as sites of symbolic struggle. These objectives point toward a single organising question: in what ways do the names of schools in Dukuduku reflect the community's experiences of struggle, displacement and negotiation and what do they tell us about the role that education plays in shaping memory and identity in post-apartheid South Africa?

## 2. Literature Review

### **What is a name, why does it matter and how do people come up with names?**

Across African cultures, naming has never been a casual or incidental act. The names attached to places, people, homesteads and institutions carry accumulated knowledge about lineage, historical events, what a family or community has survived and what it values (Udechukwu & Nnyigide, 2016; Völkel et al., 2023). This extends to rare and significant events given in each community or family (Ndimande-Hlongwa & Dlamini, 2015). This paper section draws on the available literature on the meanings and significance of names and naming. Names are not given for the sake of naming; globally, it is widely recognised that names are not merely referential labels without embedded meanings.

Within families and communities alike, names are crafted with intention. They mark significant moments, express grief or gratitude and announce what a family hopes for or has endured (Mheta et al., 2017). They are carefully crafted to identify with a particular incident, family hope, aspirations, etc. In the Zulu culture, for instance, names are used to identify and express feelings among the people (Ndimande-Hlongwa & Dlamini, 2015). In Sotho tradition, names carry deep emotional and social meaning, but naming can become problematic when a child is born out of wedlock. Such births are traditionally viewed as disgraceful and the child's name often reflects family shame, pain, or social tension, revealing how naming can express stigma as well as identity (Possa-Mogoera, 2023). Helleland (2002) states that there are two types of naming: spontaneous or popular naming and baptism, contending that the majority of recent place names fall under the first category, namely spontaneous or popular naming.

Place names occupy a particularly important position in cultural heritage. They accumulate layers of meaning over time, recording not just geography but the events, conflicts and human stories that have left their mark on a landscape (Pfukwa & Maganga, 2023). In short, they provide significant supplements to the history of where people settled. Place names can be seen as reflections of the interplay between humans and nature across different periods (Helleland, 2002). Over and above all that has been said, "names represent an important part of our linguistic heritage" (Helleland, 2002). This is an integral part of cultural heritage.

In other cultures, naming extends to the spiritual domain (Udechukwu & Nnyigide, 2016). Generally, names are understood to carry divine significance, connecting individuals to their ancestors and expressing a sense of calling or destiny that transcends the purely

social. They tell a story of who we are, what we have become and who we will soon become. As widely believed across cultures, these names have definitions (Aguboshim, 2021). However, colonialism and the spread of Christianity significantly shaped the naming processes. Pongweni (2017) observed that Shona naming practices reflect Zimbabwe's political history. The colonial missionaries introduced and encouraged the use of Christian names over traditional ones. They viewed traditional names as signs of backwardness and Christian names as signs of civilisation. During the nationalist period, many Africans rejected these imposed names and adopted Shona, which expressed resistance, cultural pride and political identity, especially among families in exile before independence.

### **3. Methodological approach**

The approach taken is qualitative and interpretive-historical. School names are not treated here as data points to be tabulated or measured. They are read as historically produced symbols, each one shaped by a particular moment, a particular set of power relations and a particular community's understanding of its own experience. Postcolonial perspectives inform the analysis and draw on education history, cultural geography and memory studies to interpret naming as an expression of power, resistance, heritage and identity.

The study draws on two primary sources of knowledge. The first is the existing body of secondary historical literature on Dukuduku, covering land dispossession, conservation conflicts and educational history. The second is oral historical knowledge, gathered over years of personal engagement with the Dukuduku community through conversations, personal communications and locally shared accounts that do not always find their way into formal archives. Informal conversations, personal communications with community members and locally shared historical accounts are used illustratively to contextualise interpretations, rather than as systematically coded interview data. This approach aligns with established historical methodologies that recognise oral memory and lived experience as valid sources, particularly in contexts where formal archives are limited. All participants who contributed oral historical knowledge and participated in interviews during fieldwork conducted in the Dukuduku area between 2019 and 2021 provided written informed consent prior to their participation. Participants were informed of the nature and purpose of the research and their right to withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Geography matters enormously in this study. Where a school stands, whether inside the contested forest or in the state-built resettlement area of Khula village, shapes what its name means and what history it carries. Place-based analysis is therefore central to the methodology, allowing the spatial dimension of naming to be read alongside the historical and political dimensions. Each school name is examined from multiple angles, its linguistic meaning, its historical origins and its political implications, always with the specific history of Dukuduku as the interpretive foundation. The study contributes to understanding how education functions as a site for memory making and political negotiation in post-apartheid South Africa.

#### **3.1 Theoretical Framework: postcolonial perspectives, naming and educational memory**

Postcolonial perspectives provide the theoretical foundation for this study. Drawing particularly on the work of Bhabha (1994) and Spivak (1988), this framework is useful precisely because it refuses to treat the end of formal political domination as the end of

colonial influence. Colonialism persists, in language, in institutions, in the systems of representation that determine whose history is visible and whose history is not. Schools are among those institutional structures. They do not simply transmit knowledge; they transmit particular versions of the past and in doing so, they reproduce or contest power relations that shaped them.

In South Africa, education has historically functioned as a site through which colonial and apartheid authorities' ideologies were spread and reproduced (Heleta, 2020; Makhado & Tshisikhawe, 2021). School names, like other public symbols, were often imposed to legitimise colonial authority, erase indigenous histories and normalise the oppression of Black people and other racial groups deemed inferior by the former regimes. Postcolonial perspectives are therefore useful for interrogating naming practices, as they help foreground the relationship between power and representation. They also help expose how names function not just as merely identifiers but also as instruments of historical narratives and political authority.

Reading school names in Dukuduku through a postcolonial lens means insisting that they are never innocent. Each name is embedded in a specific historical moment, in a decision made under particular pressures, by people navigating dispossession, resistance or negotiated survival. Names such as Vezobala and Mzabalazo can be read as counter-hegemonic interventions that challenge the dominant narratives of illegality, conservation and development imposed on forest residents. On the other hand, names such as Silethukukhanya and Ubuhlebemvelo, located in Khula village, reflect a different ideological orientation that aligns more closely with the discourses of enlightenment, progress and environmental preservation. The contrast between these two sets of names is not simply a matter of different community tastes or cultural orientations. It reflects the uneven distribution of power, who was building schools under state duress and who was naming them from within a sustained struggle for survival.

Bhabha's (1994) concept of cultural hybridity is useful for understanding how communities in Dukuduku navigated imposed structures while retaining elements of indigenous identity. School naming emerges as a hybrid practice through which local meanings, political aspirations of the Dukuduku residents and dominant state discourses intersect. On the other hand, Spivak's (1988) concern with recovering subaltern voices provides a framework for recognising how school names preserve local histories and leadership figures that are absent from official archives (in this instance, Nkombane Msweli and Nyamazane Mgenge). In this way, the naming of schools in Dukuduku functioned as a form of community-authored historiography, ensuring that marginalised knowledge is transmitted to generations.

What postcolonial perspectives make visible, perhaps most usefully, is the contested nature of naming in post-apartheid South Africa. The 1994 political transition did not settle the question of whose history belongs in public space. If anything, it made that question more visible and more contentious. Although the 1994 political transition created opportunities for redress, it did not resolve deeper structural inequalities or competing interpretations of history. The transition involved significant structural compromises, providing political freedom while largely ignoring the structural roots of inequality (Adonis, 2025). This has resulted in ongoing racial and economic disparities. School names in Dukuduku, therefore, reflect these ongoing tensions, revealing how communities continue to negotiate recognition, legitimacy and moral authority in educational spaces.

School naming in Dukuduku, I argue, is one of those critical spaces where memory, power and educational meaning are actively produced and actively contested, not as abstract processes but through specific acts of naming by specific communities at specific historical moments. It foregrounds the role of schools as sites of memory and political inscription. In doing so, the study contributes to scholarship on postcolonialism, education and public memory and supports calls for a decolonial approach to school naming that recognises local histories, honours community struggles and challenges the lingering colonial imprints on educational institutions.

### **3.2 Background of the study area**

This area has been hotly contested by the state and indigenous inhabitants since the early 1930s, following its designation as state land (Ndlovu, 2013; Sundnes, 2013b; Nustad, 2015; Nyathi & Ajani, 2023; Nyathi, 2024; Nyathi, 2025). Situated within the Inkosi Mtubatuba Local Municipality, not far from the town of St Lucia, Dukuduku falls within what is now the iSimangaliso Wetland Park. It is impossible to discuss Dukuduku in isolation from the contested history of that Park, a history in which conservation and dispossession have been deeply intertwined. The region is marked by persistent poverty, limited infrastructure and high unemployment. Subsistence farming along the uMfolozi floodplain remains a critical source of livelihood for many families, even though the state and environmental authorities have consistently classified these activities as illegal. The gap between what the law permits and what survival requires has defined daily life in Dukuduku for generations. For many families, however, this farming remains a crucial source of income (Nyathi, 2024).

The conflict between the state and the people of Dukuduku is not recent. It stretches back to the 1930s and has unfolded through successive waves of forced removal, legal reclassification and conservation-justified displacement (Nustad, 2015; Nyathi & Ajani, 2023; Nyathi, 2025). The forest's history is layered, disputed and deeply scarred. The communities that lived in Dukuduku before the arrival of European settlers were not squatters or encroachers. They were the forest's original inhabitants, with histories of settlement and stewardship that long predated colonial intervention. As Bryant (1929) observes, these communities had firmly established themselves in Dukuduku well before European incursions into northern Zululand.

During the pre-Shakan era, the Mthethwa polity held significant authority over the northern part of present-day KwaZulu-Natal, stretching from the northern coast to Hlabisa and Hluhluwe. Dukuduku was allocated to the Ncube people by Inkosi Jobe (1790–1807) of the Mthethwa chiefdom (Nyathi & Ajani, 2023). From the early 19th century, the Ncube people lived in Dukuduku, maintaining their allegiance to the Mthethwa chieftaincy. Historically called KwaNcube (Z Mncube, personal communication, 29 December 2019), the forest was not the centre of an independent Ncube chiefdom but remained under the broader authority of the Mthethwa polity.

The moment that changed everything came in August 1930, when the Government Notice No. 1479 declared Dukuduku a state forest (Ndlovu, 2013). Overnight, people who had lived in the forest for generations became, in the language of the law, squatters on their ancestral land. That legal reclassification set in motion a cycle of evictions and resistance that would continue for the rest of the century (Sundnes, 2013a; Nyathi, 2025). It marked the start of systematic evictions, with efforts to remove the indigenous population occurring at least four times between the 1930s and 1990s (Africa Resource Centre for

Housing, 2018; Nyathi & Ajani, 2023).

The state's persistent interest in Dukuduku is inseparable from its ecological value. As part of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park, the forest holds recognised significance for biodiversity and environmental conservation and that significance has consistently been used to justify the removal of the very communities that sustained it. Dukuduku is a rare and highly fertile indigenous forest that has supported local communities for over two centuries. The neighbouring uMfolozi floodplain, cultivated for sugarcane since the early 20th century, further links the forest to the history, heritage and ecological story of KwaZulu-Natal's North Coast. In the 1960s, increased awareness of Dukuduku's ecological sensitivity and uniqueness led to growing advocacy for its conservation (Nyathi, 2025; E Mlambo, personal communication, 23 December 2019). This attention emphasised the forest's dual importance: as a lifeline for its indigenous inhabitants and as a crucial part of South Africa's natural legacy.

## 4. Discussion and analysis

### 4.1 Schooling in the Dukuduku

The apartheid state provided no schools in the forest. This absence was not accidental; it was a direct consequence of the state's refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of the community's presence in the forest. To build a school would have been to admit that people lived there and the state was not prepared to make that admission. Nxumalo, a community leader and activist, asserted that the people themselves built all the schools in the forest from mud and reeds (J Nxumalo, personal communication, 26 September 2019).

What is remarkable about the schools that communities eventually built for themselves is how deliberately their names were chosen. Each one encodes a specific chapter of Dukuduku's history, including Vezobala High School (meaning to expose), Mzabalazo Primary (the struggle), Nkombane Primary, named after the instrumental Nkombane Msweli, who led the fight against removals and Khiphinkunzi Primary and Kwanyamazane Primary, named after Nyamazane Mgenge, who was also instrumental in returning the people to the forest in the late 1980s. For years, the state refused to recognise these schools at all. The compromise that eventually brought state-employed teachers into the forest classrooms came only after 1994, and even then it was a reluctant concession rather than a genuine acknowledgement of the community's right to be there. As Nxumalo puts it plainly, the state could hardly build schools for people whose presence it was simultaneously trying to erase. Every brick laid would have been a contradiction of the state's own position (J Nxumalo, personal communication, 26 September 2019). In addition, the mobile clinic served people; no proper clinic was built for the people in the forest. To date, people in the Dukuduku forest have not had a clinic; they are served either at the Ezwenelisha clinic or at Khula village (J Nxumalo, personal communication, 26 September 2019).

In Khula village, the dynamic was different. Two schools were constructed there with funding from British donors and several community members I spoke with were clear about their view of those schools' purpose; they were built, at least in part, to draw people out of the forest. Education was being used as an incentive for relocation. Silethukukhanya High School and Ubuhlebemvelo Primary School, which translates to 'we are bringing light' and 'the beauty of nature' respectively, were meant to provide both primary and secondary education for the children in the new settlement. One person I spoke with made



and symbolic positioning next to the historic *uMdoni* tree, which has long been regarded as the village centre, anchors the school within a landscape of collective memory, resistance and community deliberation.

Vezobala, meaning to expose, to bring into the open, is a name that carries unmistakable moral weight. It speaks of revelation, of insisting that what has been deliberately hidden be seen. In a community whose experiences the state had consistently rendered invisible, that choice of name was anything but coincidental. In the historical context, the name can be interpreted as a deliberate political and moral statement by a community whose experiences of dispossession, marginalisation and resistance had long been rendered invisible by the state. At the moment this school was named, the apartheid government was still refusing to acknowledge that people had any right to be in the forest at all. Calling the school Vezobala was a direct response to that refusal, a community's insistence that its history, its suffering and its presence would not be buried under official silence.

The proximity of the school to the *uMdoni* tree is especially significant. For generations, this site served as a communal gathering place where meetings were held and strategies discussed during the prolonged struggle against forced removals. The subsequent construction of a community hall near both the tree and the school further strengthens this spatial continuity between political mobilisation, collective decision-making and education. In this sense, Vezobala Secondary School is not just situated close to a historic site; it is embedded within a living political landscape where education, resistance and community identity intersect.

Within a postcolonial framework, Vezobala is a counter-narrative, a direct challenge to the official framing of Dukuduku residents as illegal squatters or environmental hazards. The name does not politely engage with this framing. It exposes it. By foregrounding "exposure," the name challenges the moral authority of the state and conservation agencies, implicitly drawing attention to the historical injustices underpinning displacement and exclusion. The school thus becomes a site where subaltern histories are preserved and communicated across generations, even in the absence of formal archival recognition.

That the school has since grown into the only fully fledged secondary school serving the Dukuduku forest community and is now recognised as a centre of excellence adds to the meaning of its name. What was once an act of defiant exposure has, over time, become a symbol of endurance and educational achievement against considerable odds. What began as an assertion of visibility and protest has come to symbolise endurance, aspiration and educational achievement under conditions of structural marginalisation. The continued use of the name Vezobala reflects the community's refusal to detach education from its historical struggle, instead allowing the school to stand as both an academic institution and a monument to collective memory.

In this way, Vezobala Secondary School exemplifies how school naming in Dukuduku operates as a form of historical inscription. Vezobala is a neutral label. It is a pedagogical and political text that continues to do what its name promises: expose the layered histories of dispossession, resilience and hope embedded in this forest. Every generation of learners who pass through its gates inherits that history, whether they know it or not.

#### **4.2.2 Mzabalazo Primary School**

There is no ambiguity in the name Mzabalazo. Drawn from the isiZulu term for the struggle, "umzabalazo", it announces its political meaning without any softening. This is a school that was named to remember and to ensure that the children who attend it understand

from the outset what their community fought for. The establishment of Mzabalazo Primary School should be understood within the context of the prolonged conflict between the state and the inhabitants of the forest. The state refused to recognise Dukuduku as a legitimate settlement and the community's creation of schools in an area where their presence was unrecognised was a bold statement against depoliticising education. This name links education closely to the broader struggle for land, dignity and recognition. The name places a particular obligation on the school to be not only a place of learning but a place of memory. Children attending Mzabalazo are reminded, simply by speaking the name of their school, that what they are being educated within was built on sacrifice and collective endurance. Through this naming, the community has embedded its political awareness into the educational landscape, turning the school into a living record of defiance. From a postcolonial perspective, Mzabalazo illustrates a form of institutional appropriation, a marginalised community claiming an educational space and inscribing it with a history that official narratives have consistently minimised or erased. The 1994 political transition did not retire this name. The struggle it commemorates did not end with democracy. For the people of Dukuduku, it remains foundational.

#### **4.2.3 Nkombane Primary School**

Nkombane Primary School is named after Nkombane Msweli, a local leader who played a significant role in mobilising resistance against forced removals in the Dukuduku forest and was initially built a few meters away from his homestead. Nkombane Msweli is not found in national history books. He was not a celebrated liberation figure in the conventional sense. His authority came from the forest itself, from his presence among the people, his role in organising resistance and his commitment to a community that the state had labelled as having no right to exist where it did. Naming a school after him was a deliberate act of historical reclamation. In places like Dukuduku, where official records often marginalise or exclude local actors, naming becomes a vital means of preserving community-led histories.

Naming an educational institution after Nkombane elevates local memory into a durable public record, helping pass down history across generations that might otherwise remain undocumented. It also questions traditional modes of public remembrance. Most South African institutions, including schools, have historically been named after colonial figures, politicians or lofty ideals dictated from above. In contrast, Nkombane Primary School is named after someone whose legitimacy was earned from below. This makes the school a site of what postcolonial scholars call subaltern remembrance, where marginalised groups control their own narratives and recognise their contributions.

There is something quietly powerful about naming a school after a local leader. Every child who attends Nkombane Primary School encounters, beyond the formal curriculum, a lesson about what leadership can look like when it is rooted in community rather than authority and what courage costs when the state is determined to remove you from your own land. In this way, the school name serves an educational purpose that extends beyond the classroom, embedding historical awareness within the everyday life of the institution.

#### **4.2.4 KwaNyamazane Primary School**

KwaNyamazane Primary School takes its name from Nyamazane Mgenge (Bab'Zwane, personal communication, 31 December 2019), a figure remembered for his instrumental role in facilitating the return of people to the Dukuduku Forest in the late 1980s. During evictions, some individuals managed to hide and stayed in the forest (Z Mncube, personal

communication, 29 December 2019). One of them was Nyamazane Mgenge, along with others. Mgenge stayed in the woods and made *izingoko* (curved wooden trays). He collaborated with Thethwayo, Shikishela Mkhwanazi, Nkombane Msweli and others to help people return to the forest (Bab' Zwane, personal communication, 31 December 2019). Mbhele et al (2025) observed that communities in the Dukuduku area traditionally lived in harmony with nature. They relied on it for their livelihood. Their activities included fishing, hunting, harvesting grass for hut construction, gathering firewood and medicinal plants and practising field cropping and other activities.

The significance of this naming goes beyond honouring one individual. In a context defined by repeated displacement and the deliberate dismantling of community bonds, to name a school, KwaNyamazane, was to declare that the story of Dukuduku was one of permanent exile. It was a story of return. The name situates the school within a process of reclamation, connecting education to the revival of presence on ancestral land. There is a shift in political register here worth noting. The other school names, Mzabalazo and Vezobala, are names of struggle and exposure.

KwaNyamazane speaks of putting down roots again, of rebuilding a communal life repeatedly dismantled. Education, in this context, is not separate from that project of rebuilding. It is central to it. From a postcolonial standpoint, KwaNyamazane illustrates how naming can reaffirm indigenous authority over both space and memory. Where state-imposed names sought to normalise displacement, to make it seem inevitable, even beneficial, this name asserts continuity and belonging. Land, leadership and learning are presented here not as separate concerns but as dimensions of the same struggle.

#### **4.2.5 Khiphinkunzi Primary School**

A symbolic interpretation of *Khiphinkunzi* concerns Shikishela Mkhwanazi, a key figure in relocating Dukuduku residents to Khula village in the early 1990s. Mkhwanazi was seen as an *inkunzi* (bull), a dominant figure working with authorities to justify forest removal in the name of protection. His departure with followers was viewed by many as a victory for those remaining in the forest, though ambiguity lingered: those who moved to Khula still depended on Dukuduku's forest for farming and food (Nyathi, 2021). *Khiphinkunzi* Primary School holds deep historical and political significance in Dukuduku's history, situated near the former homestead of Induna Mthembu, a traditional leader who was forced to flee after community accusations of colluding with government and conservation agencies for forced removals.

Oral histories suggest his perceived alliance with the state branded him a traitor, leading to calls for his expulsion and death threats. His departure became a symbol of community resistance against internal collaboration. *Inkunzi*, the bull, is a potent image in the isiZulu culture, associated with power, dominance and the capacity to be either a protector or a threat. *Khiphinkunzi*, meaning the expulsion of the bull, carries a moral verdict; those who aligned themselves with state authority against their own community forfeited the respect and belonging that such authority requires.

The school name preserves that judgment. What makes *Khiphinkunzi* particularly interesting is the moral complexity it encodes. Most of the other school names in the forest commemorate resistance to the state. This one turns inward, reserving a community's reckoning for those within its ranks who chose differently. That complexity is part of Dukuduku's history, too, and the school's name ensures it is not forgotten.

#### **4.2.6 Monzi-uloa Primary School**

In contrast to the politically charged symbolism embedded in Khiphinkunzi Primary School, Monzi-Uloa Primary School reflects a different aspect of Dukuduku's history, shaped by labour, agricultural capitalism and administrative displacement. Originally established to serve the children of farmworkers in the Monzi farming area, the school was located within commercial farming spaces where workers lived in compounds and were systematically excluded from broader social services. The school's initial purpose was therefore closely linked to the needs of a labouring population situated at the margins of both the forest and formal settlement. The name Monzi-Uloa grounds the school within a landscape historically associated with plantation agriculture and farm labour, emphasising the connection between education, economic exploitation and spatial segregation.

Monzi-Uloa primary does not carry the politically charged symbolism of the forest schools. It came into being for more immediate, practical reasons, to provide schooling for the children of farmworkers living in the Monzi farming area, in conditions shaped by agricultural labour and social exclusion rather than by organised political resistance. A significant change occurred in 1998 with the creation of Ezwenelisha village, another state-led effort to relocate residents from the Dukuduku forest. As part of this process, Monzi-Uloa Primary School was moved from its original position in the farms to Ezwenelisha village, where the state rebuilt it into its current form. This move demonstrates how schools, like communities, became targets of administrative reordering within the broader project of forest conservation and population management. The school's transfer echoed the displacement of people, showing how education infrastructure was used to support resettlement programmes.

However, Monzi is not without significance for this study. Its quieter history is a reminder that naming and schooling in Dukuduku were not shaped only by political mobilisation. They were also shaped by the more mundane but no less consequential processes of labour, economic dependency and state-directed spatial reorganisation. Not every act of naming announces itself as political, but power is at work in the understated cases too. The school's name thus acts as a reminder that not all acts of naming are overtly political; some reflect quieter yet equally impactful processes through which power reorganises space, labour and daily life.

#### **4.2.7 Silethukukhanya Secondary School**

Silethukukhanya Secondary School is located in Khula Village. It occupies a different symbol from the schools situated in the forest. Silethukukhanya, we are bringing light, is a name that sounds generous and hopeful on the surface. However, read within the history of Dukuduku, it carries a more troubling resonance; the metaphor of bringing light has a long colonial genealogy, associated with missionary and state discourses that framed African communities as existing in darkness until the arrival of "civilisation", Christianity and conservation.

Khula village functions as a resettlement area for those displaced from Dukuduku forest. The establishment of schools there should be viewed within the broader framework of relocation and social dynamics. In the context of Khula village, a resettlement area built to receive people displaced from the forest, the name performs a particular ideological function. It frames relocation as upliftment. It suggests that those who moved made the right choice, that they are now in the light, while those who stayed behind remain in something less. This is not resistance naming. It is accommodation naming and it reveals

how deeply the discourses of conservation and development shaped the symbolic landscape of Khula village. It suggests that education in Khula symbolises more than access to schooling; it signifies moral and intellectual upliftment. This symbolism aligns with narratives of conservation and development that depict resettlement as beneficial and necessary, often masking the violence and loss involved.

From a postcolonial perspective, Silethukukhanya is a reminder that naming is never ideologically innocent, not even when it presents itself as purely aspirational. The school serves a genuine educational function. However, its name also does more; it embeds a particular story about the value of compliance and the rewards of relocation into the daily fabric of the institution. Compared to schools like Vezobala or Mzabalazo, the name underscores different political meanings embedded in educational spaces across Dukuduku.

#### **4.2.8 Ubuhlebemvelo Primary School**

Ubuhlebemvelo, the beauty of nature, sounds, at first, like a straightforward celebration of the environment. However, placed within the history of a community removed from its land in the name of conservation, the name becomes something far more complicated. The celebration of natural beauty encoded in this name aligns, whether intentionally or not, with the conservationist logic that was used to justify evicting people from the forest. By placing the celebration at the centre of a school's identity, the name subtly endorses the idea that the forest's ecological value outweighs the human claims of those who live within it. It suggests that protecting nature sometimes requires human displacement, which Nkombane Msweli (personal communication, 05 January 2020) and Joshua Thethwayo (personal communication, 23 December 2019) argue is unjust to Dukuduku's black residents, who lived harmoniously with nature even before white settlers arrived.

The name effectively depoliticises dispossession. It shifts attention away from land rights, injustice and forced removal, redirecting it towards an appreciation of nature that asks nothing difficult of those who experience it. In an educational setting, that shift has consequences; it embeds a conservation narrative in the everyday life of the institution and, over time, helps to normalise a version of history in which indigenous displacement appears as environmental necessity rather than political violence. From a postcolonial perspective, Ubuhlebemvelo illustrates one of the subtler mechanisms by which ideological reconciliation operates. The displaced community is not simply told to accept its displacement; it is given a school whose name asks it to find beauty in the very landscape from which it was removed and to pass that appreciation on to its children. The contrast between this school and those within the forest underscores the uneven ways in which power, memory and identity are negotiated through education and naming practices in the Dukuduku area.

### **4.3 School naming, space and power in the Dukuduku area**

Across all the schools examined in this study, a clear spatial and ideological pattern emerges. The schools inside the forest, Vezobala, Khiphinkunzi, Nkombane, Mzabalazo and KwaNyamazane, share a naming logic rooted in struggle, local leadership and the refusal to be erased. The schools in Khula village tell a different story. Silethukukhanya and Ubuhlebemvelo draw on the language of light, progress and environmental appreciation, a symbolic vocabulary that aligns closely with the conservation and development discourses that framed the resettlement of Dukuduku's communities as beneficial and necessary. These schools symbolically reorient education toward acceptance, accommodation and ideological reconciliation with dominant narratives of conservation and development.

This contrast is not merely interesting; it is analytically significant. It demonstrates that school naming in Dukuduku cannot be reduced to cultural preference or community taste. Names were shaped by geography, by historical moment and by the particular power relations that communities found themselves navigating when those names were chosen. Naming processes became a counterhegemonic practice through which communities asserted their visibility, honoured local leadership and claimed historical legitimacy in an area where the state had labelled them as squatters. In Khula village, naming functioned as a persuasive and normalising mechanism, encouraging displaced communities to internalise and accept values that legitimised their forced removal from the Dukuduku forest.

The schools of Dukuduku form a symbolic map of a contested history. They did not emerge as neutral educational providers. They emerged as terrain, places where memory, identity and power were worked out, negotiated and inscribed into the everyday landscape of a community fighting to define itself on its own terms. School names, therefore, functioned as archives that preserved the narratives of resistance and dispossession, while others reflected ideological aspirations of conservation and resettlement. They reveal the complex ways in which communities navigate survival and meaning under challenging conditions.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has examined what the names of schools in Dukuduku reveal, not only about education but also about the historical and political forces that shaped a community under sustained pressure. The analysis has shown that naming is never merely administrative, treating school names as texts embedded in specific places and moments. It is one of the primary ways communities articulate who they are, what they have endured and what they refuse to forget. Although this study focused on Dukuduku schools, the analysis suggests that naming practices across public institutions such as clinics, community halls and settlements may similarly function as sites of memory and ideological negotiation. Future research should extend this analysis to other public institutions to further illuminate the politics of naming in post-apartheid South Africa, with a specific focus on rural settings.

The analysis makes it unmistakably clear that these schools are not merely places where children learn to read and write. They are sites of historical inscription. Names such as Nkombane and KwaNyamazane preserve local figures and narratives of return that would otherwise be absent from the official record. By contrast, schools in Khula village, Silethukukhanya and Ubuhlebemvelo illustrate how naming can align education with conservationist and developmental ideologies, subtly reframing displacement as enlightenment and environmental responsibility.

While this study did not draw on formal contemporary fieldwork or structured interviews with current students and teachers, the author's lived experiences within the Dukuduku community offer a partial but meaningful lens through which the enduring resonance of these school names may be considered. I grew up in the Dukuduku forest community, attended one of the forest schools analysed in this study and continue to conduct historical research in the area. From this positionality, it is possible, with scholarly caution, to reflect that these names have never been merely administrative labels for those who inhabit the area. They remain embedded in everyday community consciousness, so that the schools' names carry the story of survival. The author's considered reflection is that future research employing oral history methodology and ethnographic engagement with current learners and teachers would richly deepen the findings presented in this study and remains an identified avenue for further scholarly inquiry.

The divergence between forest schools and Khula village schools ultimately reveals that colonialism and apartheid did not simply end in 1994. Their legacies continued to shape educational spaces through the names chosen for schools, the ideologies embedded in those names, and the histories rendered visible or invisible as a result. Struggles over land, memory and legitimacy did not conclude with the political transition. They continue in everyday institutions like schools. Naming remains one of the few instruments available to marginalised communities for asserting historical presence and moral authority in the face of stubbornly persistent structural barriers. This study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on decolonising education and public memory by arguing that school names deserve recognition not as administrative labels but as meaningful historical artefacts, part of South Africa's living heritage and worthy of the same scholarly attention given to monuments, archives and official commemorations.

Moving beyond the chalkboard, as this article's title suggests, means recognising that schools are never just about what happens inside the classroom. The name on the gate matters. It carries history and shapes identity. Moreover, in communities like Dukuduku, it ensures that the people who built those schools in defiance of a state that refused to acknowledge their existence are not forgotten.

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*The author reports no competing interests.*

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### **Data availability statement**

*The data that support the findings of this study include interview transcripts, fieldwork notes, informal communications from the fieldwork conducted in the Dukuduku area between 2019 and 2021, archival records and published academic literature. Interview data cannot be fully shared due to ethical and privacy obligations to participants. However, data may be made available upon reasonable request, subject to ethical clearance requirements. Archival and published sources referenced in this article are available through the respective repositories and journals cited herein.*

### **Ethics statement**

*This study received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa (Protocol Number: H19/10/31). The ethical clearance was obtained in connection with a broader research project on the history of conservation and dispossession in the Dukuduku area. This article draws on the interview data and archival material gathered during that fieldwork and falls within the scope of the original ethical clearance. All procedures were conducted in accordance with national and international guidelines for research involving human participants.*

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