

## Research Report

# Historicity of personal names in Tanzania: the case of the names in the Rombo-Chagga community in Kilimanjaro

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**Abstract** - The history of African societies, which are mostly oral, could be deciphered through onomastics. This is possible because naming practices, which are elaborate, and personal names, which are meaningful, are cherished in African communities. In most cases, the circumstances at birth, which split into several strands, dictate the choice of the name by the name-givers. Naming practice is an elaborate phenomenon amongst the Rombo-Chagga people of Kilimanjaro in Tanzania on two grounds. On the one hand, clan names are associated with Chagga calendar and socio-economic activities, e.g. Mkenda ‘born during unlucky days’. On the other hand, home-names reveal circumstances at birth and historical events within the family and beyond, e.g. Ndekir’yo ‘I am cured’. In addition, amongst the Bantu speaking communities in Sub-Saharan Africa, naming practices have been influenced by Christianization, Islamicization and colonization. The personal names of the Rombo-Chagga people reveal the strands of religious (formal) names and foreign (English or Kiswahili) names, e.g. Barakaeli ‘God-bless’.

**Keywords:** Ethnohistory, Personal names, Language-in-contact, Rombo-Chagga, Tanzania.

## Introduction

The ethnohistorical techniques are required to investigate properly the culture of the Rombo-Chagga people in Kilimanjaro, Tanzania. The Chagga have been highly influenced by Christianity and European education in Kilimanjaro, Tanzania (Myhre 2018; Lyimo 2012; Mosha 2000). One of the cultural items is naming newly-born children, which was cherished in African communities (Swilla 2000; Akinnaso 1980). Apart from the eventful nature of the naming practices in Africa, the names are selected primarily from the circumstances at birth (Shigini 2020; Chipalo 2019; Asheli 2017; Azael 2013; Mashiri 1999; Muzale 1998; Katakami 1997). However, onomastic studies revealed that Christianization, Islamization and colonization of African continent caused the decline of the African naming traditions. Christian-cum-English and Islamic-cum-Arabic names replaced elaborately meaningful African names (Lusekelo 2018; Lusekelo & Muro 2018; Mutunda 2016; Resani 2016; Chauke 2015; Lusekelo 2014; Moyo 2012). In the pursuit of the change of the naming patterns in African communities, this paper looks into the naming practices of the Rombo-Chagga community which maintain both indigene and foreign names.

The Chagga people in Rombo District recall the history of their chiefdoms from 1837 (Fisher 2012). Their history is affiliated to the Gikuyu, Kamba and Taveta people of Kenya and Gweno people of Tanzania (Myhre 2018; Malya 2002; Philippon & Nurse 2000). This affiliation is true because the Bantu people spread from south-western Kenya into north-western Tanzania (Vansina 1995). Myhre (2018) found that these two groups practice similar sacrificial rites on the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro. These communities practiced African naming system (Lusekelo & Muro 2018; Katakami 1998; Dundas 1926).

Apart from naming practices, the Chagga people maintain home-gardens, traditionally known as *kihamba*-farms which grow mangoes, guava, avocados, lemons, pawpaw, coffee, bananas, beans, and vegetables (Mbwiga 2016; Pietilä 2007; Munger 1952). The products of the home-gardens formed the Chagga culture in terms of marriage and sacrifices (Myhre 2007). However, the shrinking of the *kihamba*-farms contributed to the increased need for money and mobility of the Chagga people (Misana *et al.* 2012; Pietilä 2007). The outcome of their engagement on off-farm activities and

trade adventures is the dispersal of the Chagga people throughout Tanzania (LoT 2009; Pietilä 2007). This has consequences to the penetration of many foreign names into Chagga communities (Lusekelo & Muro 2018). The dispersal of the Chagga outside of Kilimanjaro caused imposition of foreign culture in their naming practices.

Marriage and male-child bearing is central in the Rombo-Chagga families. The Rombo-Chagga people are a patriarchal community because at the heart of a family, male child bearing remains an important part of the marriage (Ohnishi *et al.* 2015). Naming practice is one of the evidences to exhibit the importance of the children in Rombo-Chagga families. Names are used to reckon events not only within a family but also the community at large.

The advent of foreign religious beliefs in the 1890s brought new naming practices. The majority of the inhabitants of Rombo District attend the Catholic Church services (Myhre 2018; Lyimo 2012; Mosha 2000; Lema 1973). Religion influences on both marriage and culture of the Rombo-Chagga people in the district (Myhre 2018). This paper provides evidence to substantiate the penetration of new personal names in Rombo District.

The Christian missionaries built schools in Kilimanjaro. Studies reveal that the Chagga people hold with high spirits the education of their children (Fisher 2012; Lyimo 2012; Stambach 2000). It will be highlighted in this paper that the consequence of formal education is the penetration of both English and Kiswahili cultures through schooling. Although Myhre (2018) suggests that inhabitants of Rombo District maintain their traditions and customs, including the use of Rombo-Chagga language, the penetration of Kiswahili culture is reported by Edward (2013) and Apolinari (2011). This is central in the penetration of Kiswahili naming system into Chagga culture (Lusekelo & Muro 2018).

## **Methods and the data**

The data analysed here is come from personal names in Rombo District in Kilimanjaro, Tanzania. Inhabitants of Rombo District speak Vunjo-Chagga and Rombo-Chagga dialects (Myhre 2018). Muzale and Rugemalira (2008) present 167,478 speakers of Rombo-Chagga in Tanzania. This estimate constituted 68.15% of all inhabitants of Rombo District in 2002 (URT 2002). Kiswahili is the secondary vehicular of communication in Rombo District (LoT 2009).

The demography of the research sites is displayed in Table 1. Statistics exhibit that Rombo District has the population of 260,963 persons: 124,528 males (47.72%) and 136,435 females (52.28%) (URT 2013).

**Table 1:** Demographic characteristics of selected wards in Rombo District, Tanzania

S/N	Ward	Male	Female	Total	Average household size
1.	Holili	3,673	3,626	7,299	3.8
2.	Kelamfua-Mokala	13,302	6,097	7,205	4.1
3.	Keni-Aleni	9,801	4,787	5,014	4.3
4.	Keni-Mengeni	8,719	4,253	4,466	4.8
5.	Kisale-Masangara	10,048	4,640	5,408	4.3
6.	Ubetu-Kahe	19,295	9,248	10,047	4.6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>64,838</b>	<b>32,651</b>	<b>39,439</b>	<b>4.3</b>

Two methods of data collections were engaged in this study. Firstly, ethno-historical approaches were employed to obtain information on the personal names of the Rombo-Chagga people. Naming practices are cultural matters which are primarily embedded in the whole culture of the given community. Therefore, ethno-historical approaches allowed obtaining a clear picture of the naming practices in the community under study. This is in line with [Axtell \(1979\)](#) who displayed that anthropologists and historians strive to understand the culture of the people. However, the history of East African is oral and non-written. It can be easily extracted through ethnohistorical approach ([Vansina 1962](#)). Thus, oral traditions, anthropological data, linguistic documents, archaeological materials become important sources of data.

Since ethnohistory begins in the second half of the 1950s ([Chaves 2008](#)), much of the information collected by missionaries and colonial administrators in East Africa are typically embedded within the realm of ethnohistory. The names of the Chagga people are described in passing by [Dundas \(1926\)](#) and [Charles \(1951\)](#). However, the former paper dealt with the names from Kiwoso-Chagga while the latter covered anthropological information from Kimochi-Chagga. This paper, therefore, examines contemporary naming practices of the Rombo-Chagga community in Tanzania.

In pursuit of the historicity of the personal names in Rombo-Chagga community, the second author employed ethno-historical approaches in gathering data for the first names of the elderly persons in Rombo District. The meanings of names were obtained through oral elicitation in Keni-Aleni, Keni-Mrere and Keni-Mengeni wards in Rombo District.

Secondly, methodological procedures in contact linguistics were employed by the second author. [Matras \(2009\)](#) argues that theories of language contact have been developed in order to understand the influence of one culture over the other. In African societies, number counts a lot because majority ethnic groups tend to influence minority ethnic groups ([Mreta 2000](#); [Nurse 2000](#)). In this line, examination of names from other ethnic groups in Kilimanjaro was conducted.

Evangelization is another contact situation which allows the penetration of foreign words from the language of religion to another language ([Ikotuni 2014](#); [Lusekelo 2014](#); [Swilla 2000](#)). Based on the existing names, the donor languages of the personal names in Rombo-Chagga community were identified.

Names of the Rombo people were also extracted from school children. [Table 2](#) provides primary schools from which names examined in this paper were collected.

**Table 2:** Names and locations of the selected primary schools

S/N	NAME OF PRIMARY SCHOOL	NAME OF WARD	NUMBER OF NAMES
1.	Holili	Holili	50
2.	Ibukoni	KelamfuaMokala	43
3.	Iburieni	KeniAleni	35
4.	Itembweni	KeniAleni	29
5.	Kahe-Usseri	UbetuKahe	56
6.	Keni-Aleni	KeniAleni	41
7.	Keni-Mengeni	KeniMengeni	24
8.	Kilesi	KeniMengeni	24
9.	Kisale	KisaleMasangara	45
10.	Kiseeni	KeniAleni	32
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>379</b>

The location in these schools is typical rural in Rombo District, except Holili which is a mixed ward. The assumption here is that the children enrolled in these schools come from Rombo-Chagga families who inhabit most parts of the district ([Myhre 2018](#)).

## Findings

### Arrangement of the names of the Rombo-Chagga

The meanings of fifty-one names of persons were gathered and analysed. The outcome reveals that circumstances at birth controlled naming system of the Rombo-Chagga.

- |     |                     |                             |
|-----|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| (1) | <i>Haikaruwa</i>    | ‘thank you Great Mystery’   |
|     | <i>Indoasha</i>     | ‘local brew’                |
|     | <i>Kiringa</i>      | ‘protector (of the family)’ |
|     | <i>Ndekir’yo</i>    | ‘I am cured’                |
|     | <i>Ndesambur’yo</i> | ‘I am the selected one’     |
|     | <i>Mkasaria</i>     | ‘loss maker’                |

The circumstances at birth which are primarily obtained in the personal names in (1) include the recognition of the supernatural power, named as **Ruwa** in north-eastern Kilimanjaro (Mosha 2000; Lema 1973). Other circumstances at birth related to supernatural powers concern such names as **Ndekir’yo** ‘I am cured’ which exhibits the treatment, say of barrenness by **Ruwa** ‘Mystery Power’. In addition, circumstances at birth concern the production of some products such as local brews, e.g. **Indoasha** ‘a local brew stored in calabashes’.

The foreign names obtained in the list of fifty-one names reveal that penetration is common (Lusekelo and Muro 2018). As exemplified in (2), some of the names are typically associated with Islamic and Christian religion.

- |     |                        |                                   |
|-----|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| (2) | <i>AlisiaWisso</i>     | ‘ <b>elisia</b> : God helps’      |
|     | <i>Baraka Shao</i>     | ‘ <b>baraka</b> <Swahili: peace>’ |
|     | <i>EliaMtenga</i>      | ‘ <b>elia</b> : Christian name’   |
|     | <i>ElisiaSwai</i>      | ‘ <b>elisia</b> : God helps’      |
|     | <i>IsayaTarimo</i>     | ‘ <b>isya</b> : Christian name’   |
|     | <i>NeemaUrasa</i>      | ‘ <b>neema</b> Swahili: peace’    |
|     | <i>Ronaldo Kimario</i> | ‘ <b>ronaldo</b> : English name’  |
|     | <i>Sofia Marandu</i>   | ‘ <b>sofia</b> : Islamic name’    |

School children provided an expanded data. As given in Table 3, the list indicates the columns for the first names, parents’ names and clan names.

**Table 3:** Selected full names of school pupils in Rombo District

First names	Parents' names	Clan names
Anjela	Sebastiani	Massawe
Baraka	Kishai	Shao
Denis	Egidi	Mtenga
Godfrey	Herman	Tarimo
Inosenti	Chispini	Tarimo
Irine	Christopha	Njau
Jackson	Wolter	Mrema
Luka	Peter	Njau
Neema	Hanomu	Temba
Patrice	Evarest	Kimaro
Rogate	Alex	Lyimo
Shangwe	Agapith	Kimario
Sofia	Muhdin	Ally

The names from these schools exhibit three major sources, vis-à-vis: (i) penetration of Christian-cum-English names, e.g. **Anjela** ‘angle’, **Denis**, **Rogate** ‘Rogat’, Patrice, Jackson etc., (ii) penetration of Islamic oriented names, e.g. **Sofia**, and (iii) the imposition of Kiswahili names such as **Baraka** ‘luck’ and **Neema** ‘grace’, **Shangwe** ‘celebrations’ etc. Quantitative accounts are discussed in detail in the next section. Both [Lyimo \(2012\)](#) and [Myhre \(2018\)](#) underscore that Rombo District is composed primarily of Christians of Roman Catholic clique, and to a very lesser extent Muslims. As a result, the penetration of Islamic and Christian names cannot be exaggerated.

### Clan names amongst the Rombo-Chagga people

The indigenous inhabitants of Rombo District occupied their settlements on the basis of clans. [Malya \(2002\)](#) states that earliest clans curved out of Kamba and Taita and settled in the present day Rombo District. The earlier clans include **Mboro**, **Kinyagha**, **Mongi**, **Mtui** and **Lyimo**. Findings show that the names of the school children from Rombo-

Chagga families manifest with the clan names<sup>1</sup>. Based on our data, the researchers found twenty-two dominant clan names in Rombo District. These dominant clan names constitute about 41.41 percent of all 379 formal names of the pupils. However, based on distribution of the pupils names used in this paper, the clan names split twice.

On the one hand, there are thirteen clan names which are more dominant in the research sites. They constitute 34.03 percent of the 379 names of the school children. Table 4 provides the list of these clan names with their frequencies.

**Table 4:** Dominant clan names in Rombo District

<b>Clan names</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Clan names</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Masawe	30	Mrema	7
Kimario	17	Mkenda	6
Shirima	12	Laswai	6
Shao	10	Njau	5
Moshi	10	Kavishe	5
Shayo	9	Mtenga	5
Tarimo	7		

On the other hand, nine other clan names in Rombo-Chagga community constitute 7.38 percent of 379 names of the school children. Table 5 provides the list of clan names with their frequencies.

**Table 5:** Other clan names in Rombo District

<b>Clan names</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Clan names</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Mtui	4	Marandu	3
Mtei	4	Lyimo	2
Mbinda	3	Mteti	2
Temba	3	Mremi	2
Maingi	3	Msui or Msue	2

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<sup>1</sup> Some dominant clan names contain slightly different morphologies which either emanated from orthographic misrepresentation, e.g. **Laswai** vs. **Lasway** and **Swai** and **Sway** or morpheme differences, e.g. **Mrema** vs. **Mremi**, **Shao** vs. **Shayo** and **Kimaro** vs. **Kimario**. Both cases may be treated as similar clan names.



The clan names indicate some possibilities in postulation of the historicity of the Rombo-Chagga people. In addition, these clan names allow making some comparative analysis between the many Chagga communities inhabiting the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro. Nonetheless, other clan names pose some challenge on their originalities.

The history of clan names in Rombo District is highlighted succinctly by [Malya \(2002\)](#). Nonetheless, only a couple of clan names mentioned in that book are exhibited by the names of school pupils. Specifically, the clan names of **Lyimo** and **Mtui** are pervasive in the data (Table 4). There are clan names of **Kinyagha**, **Mboro** and **Mongi** in our data. The demise of the name Mboro is articulated by [Lusekelo and Muro \(2018\)](#) as being associated with its meaning in Kiswahili. The word **Mboro** means *penis* in Kiswahili. Therefore, most Chagga families skip its use.

The second historical issue to be dealt with involves reckoning of events through names of months, weeks and days in the Chagga calendar. Using data from Kiwoso-Chagga, [Dundas \(1926\)](#) exhibits that the Chagga people reckon time through names, as exemplified in (3) below.

(3)	<i>rondoma</i>	‘second month in a year’
	<i>kukenda</i>	‘fifth month in a year’
	<i>kukumi</i>	‘sixth month in a year’
	<i>materi</i>	‘tenth month in a year’
	<i>saamuyaukombe</i>	‘first week in a month’
	<i>reema</i>	‘fifth week in a month’
	<i>kenda</i>	‘fourth day in the second week’
	<i>msuo</i>	‘a day in the third week’

The names of the calendar were reckoned when bestowing home names to children. Two main concerns here were the lucky and unlucky days. On the one hand, [Dundas \(1926\)](#) highlights the unlucky days in a week: “children born on the first and second day have no luck and die young”, “the fifth day is also known as the “closing” because it terminates the first week. People born on this day, are reticent, taciturn, mean and rude, “they do not return greetings”, and “for human beings it is an extremely unlucky day. The parents of children born on the seventh day die soon after.” On basis of this anthropological evidence, we suggest that the clan name **Mkenda** in Rombo-Chagga community is associated with unlucky people and births resulting to early deaths.

On the other hand, [Dundas \(1926\)](#) highlights the lucky days as follows. The moon provides lucky and “on the fourth day the moon is seen by all. This is a favourite day for meat feasting.” Most of the celebrations are conducted in the lucky days: “the next five days – that is to say the fourth week – are all extremely lucky and are spoken of as “the days of GOD.” Furthermore, during lucky days, sacrifices are made: “the last day of this is known as the “King of Days,” and is specially favoured for sacrifices to God.” ([Dundas 1926](#)). Perhaps the clan name **Msuo** is associated with the lucky days of the Chagga calendar.

The third historical fact about clan names in Rombo-Chagga is their association with meaningful events or activities, as exemplified by **Mrema** or **Mremi** and **Shirima** which is associated with cultivation or farm work. The verb **rema**(or **rima**), which is traditionally common in kihamba-farms, derives these names. [Munger \(1952\)](#) mentions the nominal **rema** to mean farmland in Kilimanjaro. Both **Mrema** and **Shirima**, which are clan names in Rombo District, derive from the word **rema** (or **rima**). In fact, this deduction is plausible because most personal names in Bantu communities derive meanings from socio-economic activities ([Chauke 2015](#); [Resani 2016](#); [Swilla 2000](#)), as is the case of Machame-Chagga and Uru-Chagga as highlighted by [Lusekelo and Muro \(2018\)](#) and [Azael \(2013\)](#), respectively.

Consonant to the name **Mrema** is the native name **Reema**, which is associated with days of darkness in the Chagga calendar ([Dundas 1926](#)). It is common in Kilimanjaro ([Lusekelo & Muro 2018](#)). The assumption here is that it is associated with the time-reckoning in Chagga.

The fourth historical fact exhibits contact of the Chagga speaking communities around the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. The name **Massawe** or **Masawe**, which means hailstorm in Rombo-Chagga language, is frequent in the data as it occurs thirty times (i.e. 7.91 percent of 379 names of the individual persons). However, the same name appears to be indigene in Machame-Chagga. Using Machame-Chagga names from the western slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro, [Lusekelo and Muro \(2018\)](#) found that “some of these clan names bear semantic content. For example, **Massawe** is associated with hailstorm, which might have been a common natural phenomenon on the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro.” Now the origin of the name remains an important piece of historical information to decipher.

Moreover, the names **Swai** and **Kimaro**, which constitute about 2.63 percent of the 379 names of pupils, are suggested to originate from Hai District (Lusekelo & Muro 2018). Based on contact theory of language as highlighted by Matras (2009), Nurse (2000) and Thomason (2001), it will be plausible to argue that interaction of the Rombo-Chagga and Machame-Chagga people had been a common phenomenon. Furthermore, while the Rombo-Chagga data reveals the name **Moshi**, the clan names **Mushi** is predominant in Machame-Chagga (Lusekelo & Muro 2018). Myhre (2018) mentions of the name **Moshi** in Chaggaland.

Another historical issue concerns the interaction between the Pare (Chasu) speakers and Rombo-Chagga and Machame-Chagga. This is also evident in the clan names in Rombo District. The name **Mbwambo** manifests in the Rombo-Chagga data. Lusekelo and Muro (2018) reported that “the clan name **Mbwambo** is a Pare name from Same and Mwanga Districts.” It is possible either the Pare and Chagga people have exchanged linguistic materials related to personal names or the Pare people migrated into Rombo District.

Lastly, it becomes apparent now that the Catholic Church, which dominated Rombo District (Myhre 2018), eroded the position of clan names amongst the Rombo-Chagga families. During baptism, the Catholic Church did not allow African names to be used. As a result, most clan names get eroded over a period of time. Compared to the clan names in another Chagga community dominated by Lutheran Church, a difference is apparent. Lusekelo and Muro (2018) found that “the family names of typical Machame-Chagga origin constitute about 88.35 percent of all the data.” Therefore, while the Catholic Church demoted use of native names amongst the Rombo-Chagga people, the Lutheran Church promoted use of the clan names in Machame-Chagga.

### **The essence of native first (home) names in Rombo-Chagga**

The bestowing of a name to a newly born child is elaborate in African societies. For instance, it is associated with elaborate ceremonies in Yoruba (Akinnaso 1980). With regard to Chagga communities of Kilimanjaro, bestowing of names to newly born children involved two strands of ceremonies. On the one hand, when the baby is born, the maid and mother of the child perform a dance. Charles (1951) describes it briefly as follows: “A Chagga ceremony employs significant play-acting. A nursemaid and the

child's mother are principal performers. Having been secretly instructed, the maid is the first person permitted to call the child by name.”On the other hand, both male and female relatives are introduced to the name of the baby. Charles (1951) describes it briefly as follows:

Upon the appearance of his first tooth, the Chagga baby's relatives and friends come for a feast, and he receives a personal name. A prayer is spoken to the ancestor after whom the child is to be called, and after the meal the women step out into the yard and shout: You men there, what is the child's name?' The child's father replies. The women answer with a trill and break forth into a hymn. (Charles 1951)

The first names in most African communities used to be meaningful, which is reported in many Tanzanian societies (see Shigini 2020; Chipalo 2019; Lusekelo 2018; Swilla 2000; Muzale 1998). In addition, first names exhibited the relations within families and between clans. Lusekelo (2018) found that personal names divided into masculine **mwa**-names and feminine **sa**-names amongst the Nyakyusa of Tanzania. Likewise, Azael (2013) found that personal names bear masculine morphemes such as **nde-** in **Nderambia** ‘on a journey’ and feminine morphemes such as **mka-** in **Mkamondu** ‘wife of a stubborn man’. This pattern is found in the data from Rombo-Chagga people. For instance, these names bear the prefixes **nde-** and **mka-**: **Ndekir**’yo ‘I am cured’, **Ndesambur**’yo ‘I am the selected one’ and **Mkasaria** ‘loss maker’. The underlined prefixes are commonplace amongst the Chagga people of Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

Data exhibits that the essence of the personal names of the members of the Rombo-Chagga community derives from circumstances at birth, the tradition attested in several African societies (Akinnaso 1980; Lusekelo 2018; Agyekum 2006; Swilla 2000; Muzale 1998). Technically, the supernatural power and two major strands of the circumstances at birth are discussed hereunder.

Based on the personal names in (4) below, the first category concerns personal names exhibiting deference (reverence, worship) of the supernatural power. The members of the Rombo-Chagga community bestow names related to **Ruwa**, who scholars treat as a superior being. While Lyimo (2012) insists that traditionally the Chagga people maintain religious (Christianity) lives, Myhre (2018) found that the Vunjo-Chagga, as well as the Rombo-Chagga, maintains both indigenous religious

beliefs on **Ruwa** ‘Supreme Mystery’. In addition, the Rombo-Chagga community has diviners (Myhre 2006).

- |     |                     |                           |
|-----|---------------------|---------------------------|
| (4) | <i>Ruwaichi</i>     | ‘the Great Mystery knows’ |
|     | <i>Ruwang’saria</i> | ‘God provide for me’      |
|     | <i>Aminieli</i>     | ‘believe in God’          |
|     | <i>Haikaruwa</i>    | ‘thank you Great Mystery’ |
|     | <i>Elisonguo</i>    | ‘God knows the way’       |
|     | <i>Eliangiringa</i> | ‘God protect me’          |
|     | <i>Ndelianarua</i>  | ‘I cry to Great Mystery’  |
|     | <i>R’uanishaeli</i> | ‘God is able’             |

In addition, the notion **Eli** ‘God, supernatural power’ penetrated into Rombo-Chagga community. This is evident in the many personal names whose morphology combines this element, as shown in (4) above. Lusekelo and Muro (2018) argue that while **Ruwa** is attested elsewhere in Chaggaland, the notion **Eli** is paramount in Machame-Chagga community. This is also suggested by Lema (1973) though the dominance of the former in eastern Chaggaland cannot be refuted and absence in western Chaggaland was not proposed by Lema (1973) rather by Lusekelo and Muro (2018).

The first names with the elements **Ruwa** ‘Mystery Majesty, God’ and/or **Eli** ‘God, Lord’ are pervasive in other Chagga communities. For instance, Azael (2013) found both elements in Uru-Chagga of Kilimanjaro. It is used in such native names as **Ruwaichi** ‘God knows’ and **Elihao** ‘God is alive’ in Uru-Chagga.

The second feature of native names in Rombo-Chagga is their essence is associated with some supernatural matters. In most cases, first names in this clan contain meanings which can be traced back to the wellbeing of the family, as exemplified in (5).

- |     |                  |                    |
|-----|------------------|--------------------|
| (5) | <i>Ar’ufusha</i> | ‘trouble maker’    |
|     | <i>Kaanasia</i>  | ‘be happy’         |
|     | <i>Kringa</i>    | ‘the protector’    |
|     | <i>Ktese</i>     | ‘the cause’        |
|     | <i>Mkir’e</i>    | ‘the loser’        |
|     | <i>Monyiachi</i> | ‘only God knows’   |
|     | <i>Msarie</i>    | ‘the forgiven one’ |

The meanings of the names in (5) display some connection to the circumstances surrounding the families in question. All these names have meanings associated with some misfortunes in the families. For example, the name **Kaanasia** ‘be happy’ is

bestowed to a child who is born as a relief for a family which had had difficulties bearing children. Likewise, the names **Monyiachi** ‘only God knows’ is bestowed to a child whose parents had had difficulties obtaining a child. The supernatural power is always assumed to be the saviour in such circumstances.

Moreover, further features of first names concern circumstances at birth amongst the Rombo-Chagga people. Many personal names amongst the members of the Rombo-Chagga community involve contexts of the family and clan at large. [Lyimo \(2012\)](#) argues that at the heart of the Rombo-Chagga family is marriage and children. Children belong to the paternal family hence the husband has a major say on the wellbeing of the family. Any imbalance associated with child bearing is indeed seen as a bad omen. To rectify the shortfall, personal names are used. Probably exemplary cases in (6) will help to make this point clear.

(6) <i>Ndeenengo</i>	‘the one I was given, awarded’
<i>Ndesar’io</i>	‘I am forgiven’
<i>Ndekir’io</i>	‘I am cured’
<i>Ndesanya</i>	‘I rested awhile’
<i>Mkel’wa</i>	‘the one who came late’
<i>Mandia</i>	‘an opener, the first one’
<i>Materi</i>	‘saviour’

The data in (6) above displays names related to circumstances related direct to pregnancy. Some first names will be used to emphasize this point. The name **Ndeenengo** ‘an award’ and **Ndeki’rio** ‘I am cured’ are bestowed to reckon the child born after having some difficulties with pregnancies. Likewise, the name **Mandia** ‘the first one’ is bestowed to the child who is born after a mother failed to obtain children for some reasonably long time.

Now it is obvious that the Rombo-Chagga family treats child bearing with family success. Any misfortune was assumed to be man-made, as also supported by [Myhre \(2006\)](#), [Hasu \(2009\)](#) and [Lyimo \(2012\)](#). Specifically, [Lyimo \(2012\)](#) highlights that all sorts of disease, barrenness or other misfortunes, are regarded as have been caused by human or spirit agencies. Spells, curses, amulets, and witchcraft were (and are today) commonplace, and are used both to defend and to harm.” As a result, when at last children are born in the families, personal names are bestowed to reckon such misfortunes.

More circumstances at birth surround the wellbeing of the family. Historically, the Rombo-Chagga people developed trade traditions since the penetration of the caravan trades (Rockel 1997) and it is maintained today (Misana *et al.* 2012). Consequently, misfortunes surrounding the wellbeing of the family are reckoned through personal names bestowed to newly born children. Perhaps the examples in (7) will help us have a better understanding of the essence of family wellbeing amongst the Rombo-Chagga.

(7)	<i>Kiringa</i>	‘the protector’
	<i>Ndesambur’io</i>	‘I am the selected one, a leader’
	<i>Msambur’ie</i>	‘He is selected’
	<i>Msue</i>	‘He is hatred’
	<i>Mkunde</i>	‘he is loved’
	<i>Indoasha</i>	‘local brew’

In each family, children are assumed to be the perpetuator of the clan. Children born are assigned responsibilities through the meaning of the names. Probably we should highlight this point using two exemplary cases. The name **Kiringa** ‘the protector’ is given to a child who is supposed to be the savior of the family, while the name **Indoasha** ‘local brew’ is given to a child whose birth was during preparation of local brew. Myhre (2018) mentions **mbege** ‘local brew’ as an important part of the divide of the Rombo-Chagga people in Kilimanjaro.

(8)	<i>Kiringa</i>	‘the protector’
	<i>Ndesambur’io</i>	‘I am the selected one, a leader’
	<i>Msambur’ie</i>	‘He is selected’
	<i>Msue</i>	‘He is hatred’
	<i>Mkunde</i>	‘he is loved’
	<i>Indoasha</i>	‘local brew’

The morphology of the first names in (5-8) above deserves further description. The elements **nde-**, **ki-** and **m-** are common to most names. Based on the analysis of Chagga names by Azael (2013), each of these forms provides some meaning during nominalization of names from verbs. Both the prefix **nde-** and **ki-** mark the state of being, as in **Ndesar’io** ‘being forgiven’ and **Kiringa** ‘being the protector’, respectively. The nominal prefix **m-** marks agentive nouns, mostly used for humans in Bantu languages (Katamba 2003), as in **Mkunde** ‘the loved one’.

### Penetration of alien names in Rombo-Chagga community

The inventory of the full names of 379 pupils from Rombo District exhibit abundance of Christian-cum-English names. This is obvious for the Catholic dominated areas in Africa. Table 6 provides exemplary cases.

**Table 6:** Selected full names of school pupils in Rombo District

First names	Parents' names	Clan names
Anjela	Sebastiani	Massawe
Baraka	Kishai	Shao
Barakaeli	Godlisten	Machange
Brayan	Felician	Mrema
Denis	Egidi	Mtenga
Ebenezer	Elihuruma	Shao
Faraja	Fraterni	Mtei
Godfrey	Herman	Tarimo
Inosenti	Chripini	Tarimo
Irine	Christopha	Njau
Jackson	Wolter	Mrema
Luka	Peter	Njau
Neema	Hanomu	Temba
Patrice	Evarest	Kimaro
Rogate	Alex	Lyimo
Shangwe	Agapith	Kimario
Wiliam	Adelin	Massawe

The data in Table 5 displays three columns of names which constitute the full names of school pupils in the study area. The first and second names of pupils in Rombo District exhibit some onomastic patterns.

An obvious pattern is the presence of the foreign names in the first and second columns, e.g. **Alex, Denis, Ebenezer, Godlisten, Herman, Peter** etc. These names penetrated into Rombo-Chagga through Christianity and formal (European) education. The clan names in the third column have not been replaced by Christian-cum-English names.

The second pattern involves a combination of Kiswahili and Rombo-Chagga names which is found in the list of 379 formal names. The amalgamated personal names



are exemplified by **Barakaeli** [<Kiswahili: **baraka** ‘blessing, prosperity’ and Rombo-Chagga: **eli** ‘God’] and **Elihuruma** [<Rombo-Chagga: **eli** ‘God’ and Kiswahili: **huruma** ‘mercy, affection’].

Another pattern involves borrowed personal names. The Rombo-Chagga data displays the typical Kiswahili names such as **Faraja** ‘comfort, mercy’, **Baraka** ‘blessing, prosperity, benediction’, **Neema** ‘prosperity, grace’ and **Shangwe** ‘rejoice, jubilation’.

Lastly, the majority of the first and second names are Biblical or English names, as exemplified by these names given in Bantu (Kiswahili) orthography: **Agustino** ‘Augustine’, **Inosenti** ‘Innocent’, **Kristofa** ‘Christopher’ and **Veronika** ‘Veronica’. It is obvious now that the Catholic Church, which permitted religious oriented names, had great impact on the naming system of the Rombo-Chagga people.

## Conclusion

This paper articulated the history of the Rombo-Chagga society by examining the essence of its personal names. The penetration of the Catholic Church, which prohibits the use of personal names in vernaculars, eroded the first names amongst the members of this community. Consequently, most names of the Rombo-Chagga people are Biblical in nature. Nonetheless, the clan names have maintained some typical Chagga names such as **Masawe** ‘hailstorm’, **Mkenda** ‘unlucky person’ and **Msuo** ‘lucky person’. These names derive their essence from time-reckoning and socio-economic activities of the Rombo-Chagga people.

Since the Chagga people maintain both Christian and native religious practices, as articulated in such works as [Hasu \(2009\)](#) and [Myhre \(2018\)](#), the presence of Biblical names does not rule out the use of native (home) names. Some of the home names manifest in the formal addresses, e.g. **Msambure** ‘He who is chosen, the anointed’. However, most of the formal names are made of Christian oriented names, e.g. **Barakaeli** ‘God-bless’.

The penetration of Christian-cum-English names is common amongst the Rombo-Chagga people. It appears that this trend is common in most Chagga speaking communities of Kilimanjaro. This is partly confirmed by some Kiswahili names in the appendix by [Azael \(2013\)](#) for the Uru-Chagga and the many names provided by [Lusekelo and Muro \(2018\)](#) for the Machame-Chagga.

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