

HISTORY OF ZURULAND AND ITS PEOPLE

By
U.S. Machika

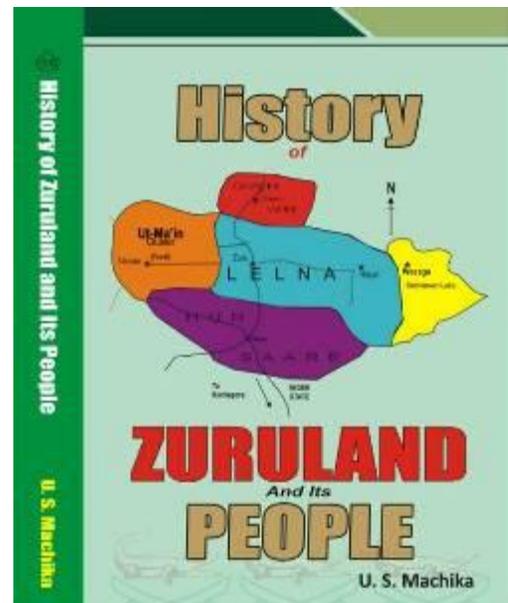
Choosing a Name for the Territory

After understudying various representations, it is common to identify the limitations of such terms used to depict the vast 'Nameless' Territory without the general consent of the people. Unfortunately, up to this point, the people have not come together for the purpose of giving their ancient Territory a common acceptable name. Equally one is confronted with the dilemma of having an acceptable name for the entire Territory without slighting such ancient powerful Kingdoms and Chiefdoms. Of importance is the fact that to a certain extent, the minorities in the Territory are quick to disagree with any term that will subsume them.

Thus, naming the entire Territory remains a great challenge. However, out of many of the names in use, "Zuru" is more palatable to the author. The choice of Zuru is not only because it is the name the colonialist adopted, but because in today's setting, it is the headquarters of the Emirate representing the largest portion of the ancient Territory. It is true that many ancient settlements like Rijau in the ancient Territory have been carved out of the present setting. However, with the exception of Kumbashi, the present five out of the earlier six Districts created by the colonialists are still intact today under Zuru as the Emirate headquarters.

The term "Zuru" is actually not a colonial creation. It was one of the small portions of the ancient Territory, amongst the Lelna settlements. As a settlement within the neighbourhood, Zuru town has less ancient historic importance. For instance, Zuru was not as significant as Ahoh which holds a prominent place in the annals of the Lelna as the ancestral dynasty of the people. Neither was Zuru as significant as Dabai a historic population centre for the Lelna. Dabai was generally accepted as the headquarters of Lelna and the accepted inheritors of the ancestral dynastic shift of power from Ahoh. The position of Dabai was enhanced by its role or control over the religious practices of the pre-eminent and revered rain-maker. Zuru was also not in the tick of battles like Senchi, Manga, Kele, Gele, and others. It was not a centre of transahara important commercial hub like Rikoto, Isgogo, Bena and Sakaba. In the larger territorial setting, Wasagu, Fakai and Karrison were of more prominence than Zuru.

The word 'Zúúru' is the bastardisation of the name of a lion in C'lela (Zúúru – singular, Zúúrnu – plural). The area was known as a den of lions. The ditch within the habitation of the lions was called the ditch of lions in the native C'lela – '*Waakan Zúúrnu*'. Reference is made to an area where the people used to dig clay for building. The continual excavation of the clay for building resulted in a large popular ditch. Since the ditch accommodated a body of water, it gradually



became the type of terrain that provided easy access to the large animals. The straggled vegetation of stunted trees, bushy area of low vegetation and a pool of water became ‘waakan Zurnu’ – the ‘ditch of lions’. The ditch was given special reference because lions were frequently sighted roaming around it.

The lions invariably turned the ditch into a habitat, hence, the ditch of lions, “*Waakan Zúúrnú*”. There were also other wild animals like the leopards. In fact, the area up to the 1920s was still inhabited by a lot of wild animals as captured by the first missionaries of the United Missionary Society – Paul and Phoebe Ummel. Paul Ummel lived among the Lela people at Zuru from 1925 until 1955. Boettger and Boettger reports that the Ummels – Paul and Phoebe learned C’lela and used it extensively in their communication with the people.¹⁰⁴ It is on record that the natives associate Paul more in preventing the lions from attacking livestock or harming the human population at the early stages of the mission. He had killed and chased away wild animals that threatened the people and their livestock. It was common for the people if a hyena was causing unrest to them or havoc to their livestock to hire Paul. He was said to always go on rescue missions with a huge trap and made small huts, where he used goats as baits for wild animal.¹¹⁴

Gradually, reference was also made to the people who inhabited the area of ‘Waakan Zúúrnú’ as they were called ‘Zugru’ – ‘the people of or surrounding the ditch of lions, (*Waakan Zúúrnú*)’ and the place became ‘Azugru’. It can clearly be noted here that the word Zuru emanated from the bastardisation of both the misspelling and mispronunciation of ‘Zúúrnú and Zugru’. Today the wild animals are gone, and the name pronounced and spelt as ‘Zuru’ which actually started with the colonialists, remained. While Zuru as a term was indeed not the creation of the colonialists, Zuru town was upgraded over and above Karrison, Sakaba, Wasagu, Fakai, Danko and even Dabai the ancestral dynasty of Lelna after Ahoh by the colonialists. The seat of power of Dabai is today answerable to that of Zuru. So also are all the Chiefdoms, (Districts in the colonial period), with the exception of Kumbashi which was also under Zuru.

It is with these diligent considerations that the author settled for Zuru as a name to represent the vast ‘Nameless’ and ‘Stateless’ ancient Territory under the study. The author believes that adopting Zuru does not hamper the ancient history of the Territory and its multi-ethnic composition or limit the history of the vast Territory to only colonial and post colonial era.¹¹⁵ Thus, Zuru would be used as a name to represent the vast Territory in this book.

U.S. Machika, pp.80-81