

## Dog Names: A Conflict Resolution Strategy

Livingstone Makondo

*Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT), Midlands Centre, Durban,  
University of Technology, P.O. Box 101112, Pietermaritzburg, 3209, South Africa  
E-mail: livingstonemakondo@gmail.com or livingstoneM@dut.ac.za*

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**ABSTRACT** Since time immemorial dogs have played significant roles in the life of humanity. The Shona speaking-people of Zimbabwe have kept dogs for hunting and provision of security to people and domesticated animals among others. They predominantly give their dogs Shona and English names that convey diverse meanings. It is against this background that this ethnographic paper investigates in greater detail thirty-one dog names popularly used in Wedza district of Mashonaland East province of Zimbabwe. It emerges that dog names are used to implicitly or explicitly address divergent marriage and societal challenges.

### INTRODUCTION

With reference to zoonomasticon, Leibring (2009) submits that in Sweden, some domesticated animals like dogs, are given names that have been borrowed from other language areas and other cultures during the last two or three centuries. This naming trend; could have been done to keep the animals' original names; a desire to reflect an animal's origin or descent; a wish to praise the animal (or enhance its status) by giving it a name from a high-status language; a taste for the exotic; and a concern to give an animal a unique name (Leibring 2009).

Furthermore, Othén (2008) quoted by Leibring (2009) argue that nowadays, it can be quite hard to tell, as dogs and children will often have identical names. In addition, the most popular dog names in Sweden are Ronja, Molly, Wilma, Fanny, Tindra and Alice, all of them have been girls' popular names during the last decade (Leibring 2009). Opposite to it, Leibring points out that in Swedish culture for male dogs there seems to exist a more permanent dog onomasticon, with the names Bamse, Ludde, Charlie, Zorro and Rocky on top for the dog population as a whole. It is worth noting that none of these male dog names are used as regular boys' names in Sweden, though some are borrowed from popular culture. Similarly, Abel and Kruger (2007) analyzed names taken from a website of the most popular Golden Retriever names in English-speaking countries and concludes that male and female dogs had names ending in letters and phonemes characteristic of their respective hu-

man male and female counterparts. Besides, their study concludes that female dogs had more syllables in their names than male dogs and a higher percentage of male dogs had one syllable names. Yet, the pervasiveness of dogs is highlighted in the expression 'black dogs' image that, according to Bartley (2008) has haunted literature and folklore in England and continental Europe. In these cultures, Bartley (2008) argues that the idea of black dogs representing depression capitalizes on their sinister folkloric history and provides an expressive metaphor for the ghostly, shadowy and tenacious presence of depression in a person's life.

Peace is a virtue that ought to characterize human life in marriages and communities. In essence, people who cherish tranquility seem to live and enjoy the serenity of life. On the contrary, life seems to become a burden in marriages and communities deprived of love. The present paper investigates that how the Shona speaking-people of Zimbabwe use dog names to convey their tranquility desires. Dogs have been part of the Shona people since the time immemorial. The animals have been used for hunting wild animals thereby providing the much needed relish in the form of meat. Those renowned for hunting were known as *vadzimba/vanahombarume*. These people were known for their bravery as shown by their venturing during day or night in forests with spears, knobkerries and dogs only. Within this context, dogs were treasured animals by individuals in this profession hence they were well looked after. Hunting has drastically diminished due to appropriation of

land to farms, game reserves, and unabated deforestation for settlement and agricultural purposes among others.

In addition, dogs would provide security buffer in case of pending danger to their masters. This perspective of dogs has prevailed amongst many communities inclusive of the Shona people. This seems slightly different from the predominantly western perspective in which dogs are used as pets to the amusement and provision of companionship to their owners. In the earlier context, for hunting purposes, dogs were given names related to that role. Names in this realm were more of desire-projection and enhancement names as they were calculated to try and foster preferred attributes in the dogs so that hunting escapades will always be successful.

### METHODOLOGY

The researcher has used ethnographic approach in the present paper. Firstly, this approach ensures that the researcher allows the phenomena to speak to him thereby mitigating the subjective element that might have compromised on the findings. The nature of the study meant trying at all cost to hear from informants who had dogs and those around people who rear dogs. This method was preferred as people were believed to hold first-hand information on what happens in the dog rearing practice and the accompanying naming. Also, building on the pioneering work of Hunt (1952) and Tatira (2004), the present paper explores potential information on delineation of its scope. The paper by Hunt is worth revisiting as the researcher was not a first language speaker of the community he studied.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section is devoted to the discussion of eight dog name categories namely witchcraft derived, death-derived, rhetorical, animal, commanding, institutional commentary, declarative and derogatory. These categories shall be exemplified by a closer examination of thirty-one dog names this research established.

#### Witchcraft-derived Dog Names

This category examines names *Matipedza* (You have finished us), *Tsvakaunaho* (Look for

one who has it), *Muroyindishe* (A witch is king), *Pihwai* (Be given), *Gashirai* (Receive) and *Zvevanhu* (Of people).

The name *Matipedza* (You have finished us) could be understood to suggest namers who have been left vulnerable by a people they have least expected such behavior from. Further, mishaps like constant quarrels, accusations and gossip might have been characteristic of their lives hence the conclusion that *Matipedza*. *Belief in witchcraft; informants submit was rife amongst the Shona people during the era when education and its scientific knowledge were not yet dominant. During these days, the research established that talk of witchcraft was a people's way of coming to terms with a phenomenon they could not easily comprehend like series of misfortunes, miscarriages or deaths. But, with the mushrooming of predominantly missionary schools since the 1890s, scientific explanations came to the fore and talk of witchcraft seems no longer widespread.* The name further become a sign of capitulation, at which moment in the Shona culture one must not continue to be subjected to suffering which has led to a rhetorical name *Matizvidii*?

The name *Tsvakaanaho* (Look for one who has it) suggests a call to look for one with witchcraft. The suggested context is that the accused might be innocent yet some people have wrongly concluded that whatever success they experience is because of aid of witchcraft. The accused might be succeeding in farming endeavors primarily due to his/her proper land management and usage of agricultural inputs like fertilizers and pesticides when need be against some who do agricultural activities without precise information. Within the Shona culture, there used to be a predominant understanding by some that s/he who succeeds in farming is because one uses *divisi* (farming concoction believed to aid farming by taking produce from the fields of other people to the benefit of its owner). The successes accompanying neighbours' children in whatever they do may be taken to be the reason why they may be hated and regarded as having witchcraft.

Within this context, the accused person/people are talking back to the community by naming their dog *Tsvakaanaho*. *This name has also been given to Shona male children in Manicaland province as established by Makondo (2009). In this context, the Manicaland province has*

some areas alleged to be known for causing lightning. People with witchcraft prowess were feared and 'respected' for such. Informants suggest that the namer(s) seems to be accused of being witches hence through this name are sarcastically referring to those purporting to desire having witchcraft to look for those with 'better' witchcraft concoctions for them to be feared like them in the community. Some informants reckon that personal names *Pihwai* (Be given) and *Gashirai* (Receive) were also given to dogs to perpetuate the dialogue. On a related note, some informants note with regret that witchcraft claims have predominantly been used by those who have been outdone by their neighbors as a leveling tool that has seen some people killed during the protracted Zimbabwean war of liberation that ended in 1980. The name is also shortened to an imperative *Tsvaka* (Look), a forceful command to the accusers to do whatever they want to match what they say s/he is.

*Muroyindishe* (A witch is king) denotes a tense polygamous marriage environment in which women attach each other for various reasons. This name in particular suggests that one is being accused of witchcraft. This seems rife in polygamous marriages when women married by one husband have a tendency of linking the source their mishaps as results of witchcraft. The Shona culture provided a fertile ground for such as the belief was rampant that anything that happens would be due to the forces of an evil spell cast by a witch. From inputs from informants it became clear that witchcraft was popularly associated with women. The narrations indicate that witches can travel by night to far away areas in mysterious ways and if one would be married the husband would only wake up when she returns from her errands. The mysteries associated with witches include having them entering closed doors, riding on hyenas among others, things that contribute to them being feared. Some informants' also disclosed that witches cannot be seen by naked eyes of 'ordinary' people. Some informants reckon that only dogs and donkeys have the ability to see witches. According to some research respondents, this explains why some dogs make uncontrolled barking during night. The name *Zvevanhu* (Of people) was given to aptly explain the wickedness of human heart which leads to the prevalence of this practice. Within this context, the

call of the dog name, *Zvevanhu*, to one in the know of the context is a loaded action.

The name then declares that a witch is a king as people end up fearing her hence one becomes untouchable just like the recognition accorded kings by their subjects. The subjects in this context become any one afraid of being bewitched by the person supposedly regarded as possessing the bewitching powers. The informants' note that the name is given by the owner of the dog as her statement targeted at her adversaries. Besides, the name becomes a label or tag and a fossilization of an ongoing battle for recognition by the husband. The later perspective draws from views that a particular wife might be appearing to be much loved in a polygamous marriage as the husband's calculated move to protect self from the wife regarded to be a witch. Also, the name subtly solicits peace as instead of direct physical confrontation when people directly calls one a witch, the same effect is achieved through a dog that becomes a moving symbol of seemingly pacified protest.

### Death-derived Dog Names

Discussed here are five death-derived dog names namely: *Vapera* (Are finished), *Hunyendove* (Defecating manure), *Wavapedza* (You have finished them) and *Hamadzapera* (Relatives have been finished by death).

The name *Hamadzapera* (Relatives have been finished by death) was seen to be dominant in polygamous marriages and in communities where people reside according to family blood-relations. Similar names given are *Vapera* (Are finished) and *Wavapedza* (You have finished them). These two names become an open-ended statement and answer to one who has lost children through death who are referred to by prefix /va-/. The additional prefix /wa-/ refers to an alleged known person who is thought to be behind the resultant deaths. Moreover, *Hamadzapera* suggests that a clan has lost many people through death yet someone remains alive hence this dog name addresses him/her. The name might also be a mere reference to a truth. The name *Hamadzapera*, reminds of humanity that life is ephemeral (Makondo and Makondo 2011). This culture sees some Shona people holding fast to the view that after death strikes their family they go and consult mediums of the supposed causes. This be-

lief is fast getting obliterated by the scientific enlightenment and biblical teaching in Ecclesiastes (9: 5-6) that the dead know not anything as “neither have they any more a reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun” (see also Psalm 89.48, Job 14.12, 21, Ecclesiastes 9.10, 1 Corinthians 15.51-54).

The name *Hunyendove* (Defecating manure) connotes that the namers have been affected by consecutive deaths hence now equate giving birth(s) to defecating as the new births end up buried in the ground. This speaks to death that comes to little ones when it is least expected. The name is premised against humanity expectations that people should die when old having been looked after by their children as captured in *chirere chigokurerawo* (Look after it now so it shall do likewise later). Besides, the name seems a capitulating statement of namers who have realized that death is their portion. On the other hand, the name seems a subtle attack to whoever might be perceived to be behind the deaths. The sympathizing emotions are hereby evoked so that the affected people may be spared death so that they may raise their children, their supposed inheritance. The name is reminiscent of *Mabweazara* (Stones are full), a name suggesting that many have died hence stones are full. The name is to be understood against a culture that used stones to build graves and the locality ends up without stones because they all have been used during several deaths and burials that have occurred. It therefore came to the fore that the names in this section seem to suggest, more than serenity, the tension associated with the fatal witchcraft.

### Rhetorical Dog Names

The dog name *Matizvidii?* (What have you said it must be?) conveys a rhetorical question to the hearers. The prefix /*Ma-*/ makes it clear that the addressee is a respected individual(s) or, within communal setting, reference is being made to communal people. The question is being asked the respected or communal people in pursuance of their untoward behavior toward the namer(s). The name indicates that the affected are failing to make sense of the rationale of their supposed victimization. This means any

calling of the dog name draws the implicated to reconsider their behavior towards the owners of the dog who are now talking back through its name. In fact, informants reckon that one would create situations that warrant him/her to call the name of the dog in a way that is clear that one is not talking to the dog but to those around. This would leave those not involved in the matter asking questions on what exactly would be going on amongst the community members and if need be they could intervene by suggesting redress mechanisms so that harmony could be restored.

*Zvigodii?* (So what shall happen?) is a dog name that asks further questions based on the sequence of unfolding unwelcome events. The name sustains the questioning of the status quo. Conversely, it emerged that the perceived trouble instigator could give his/her this dog name, a bulbul and seemingly an uncaring attitude to those whom she/he is trampling upon. The rhetorical dog names call for reformation by asking deep questions on what one benefits by seeing a fellow human being suffering. The names here have also been used as a weapon of social control.

### Animal-derived Dog Names

In addition, Lion was also found to be popular in the Shona language as *Shumba*. This name is another popular dog name that draws from the animal world. Informants note that this name is popular maybe because of the namers' desire to have the features of a Lion exuded by the dog. Dogs names similar to Lion, the paper found were Cheetah, Leopard and Tiger. Respondents note the quest to have the attributes of a Lion, Cheetah and Tiger like speedy, intelligence and bravery among others blended with those of the dog. Also, some of the namers pointed out that through these preferred names they want their adversaries to perceive them as imbued with the attributes of the names they have given their dog(s). The namers are making unequivocal statement(s) about their preparedness to claim their space as *Shumba is the king of the jungle*. It also emerges that the namers might have now resolved to claim their space after realizing that a lot has happened to their detriment. Therefore, the name would contribute towards peace by sending uncompromising signals about their preparedness to get favorable treatment.

### Commanding Dog Names

The present research establishes that three dog names *Tamai* (Relocate), *Idyaimukore* (Eat so that you become fat) and *Zviregwe* (Let it be stopped) that send commands to their hearers. *Tamai* (Relocate) is a bold statement to the supposed detractors to relocate from the vicinity of the namer(s) if they regard him/her as tempering with their space. The name indicates that a lot has been happening before then and this firm and seemingly radical response is of an individual left with limited options. Informants submit that this name speaks to the perpetrators as the respected individual(s) to mind their business and it further suggests that relations are beyond redemption. This is an approach one would chat in one's quest to safeguard tranquility in the community. Notwithstanding the context, the name also subtly calls for change of attitude towards the affected for the nurturing of acceptable relations. Within this context, *Tamai* is a call to discard confrontational approaches that are detrimental for serenity. Also, as relocation is a physical act that people can witness, the name calls the supposed perpetrators to live a life that publicly demonstrates that they are changed people so that they could be forgiven and accepted by those they hate. The name has undertones for reconciliation, acceptable moves towards sustenance of *Ubuntu*.

The name *Zviregwe* (Let it be stopped) speaks of the need for ceasefire. The name, as respondents note, suggests that there were problems being faced by the namer(s). Within a polygamous context, one notes the namer(s) calling for peace. In monogamous marriages, respondents argue that the name might be indicative of problems that might be characteristic of a marriage. The problems might be from unsupportive spouse, significant family or communal members (Makondo 2010). To that end, the name is indicative of known problems through the prefix /zvi-/ a plural prefix referring to many things. This subtle yet seemingly veiled approach of seeking peace is in line with the Shona people preference of peace. This approach advocates settling of grievances in subtle ways as younger people were from discouraged assuming direct confrontational stance against senior citizens. The fact that a name heralding existence of conflict as well as peace-seeking strategies is

given to a dog is testimony of the innovativeness of the Shona people.

*Idyaimukore* (Eat so that you become fat) is a dog name that addresses those regarded to be having 'a lot' yet they are not prepared to share with their neighbors who are supposedly languishing in poverty. Informants regard this name as a reprimand of someone regarded as not prepared to share with fellow community members as the Shona people cherish the idea of *kugarahunzwana* (Staying together is because you understand each). Some respondents pointed out that they know of situations when death have occurred and were attributed to lack of food. In a polygamous set-up, the senior women with grown-up children who could help their mother with life basic needs like food and clothing among others might see their mother being lambasted through such a name given to a dog that would be calling her to share with the underprivileged. The respondents argue that competitive spirit is prevalent in many polygamous marriages especially due to the desire to reap from what people have not sown. Some informants argue that between siblings even in monogamous marriages this has been seen as the cause of jealousies that have destroyed some families when it went unchecked. Therefore, the name becomes a sarcastic remark that eat and get fat while we do not eat so we could slim or starve maybe to death.

### Institutional Commentary Dog Names

The dog names *Nyachide* (The most loved one), *Paguru* (In polygamy) and *Zvepanondazvikoniwa* (I have failed things of this family) were given by *research respondents as ones that suggest the act of castigating the marriage institution*. *Paguru* (In polygamy), is a name given by some people to dogs seemingly to castigate the polygamous marriage institution. Some informants reckon that the mere placement of the name *Paguru* on a dog denotes that the particular marriage is characterized with petty fighting that defines the meeting of dogs. Within this context, the research found that some dogs were named *Nyachide* (The most loved one), an indication that the dog is most liked. The name is usually given to the most beloved wife in a polygamous context. The name then is given by one who is not the most loved in the marriage and is now mocking the most beloved one. The name becomes a way of sustaining a confronta-

tion as one is venting out frustrations of being treated last or second after other wives. The name becomes a call for fair treatment in a marriage set-up for the nurturing of love among family members.

A name related to the preceding one is *Zve-panondazvikoniwa* (I have given up on this family) a loaded statement. The prefix /*Zve-*/ alludes to the happenings in the particular monogamous or polygamous marriage or communal context in which the namer finds her/himself in. The name is therefore declarative of an intention to maintain a non-aggressive approach in one's attempts to redress the prevailing challenges. One is signaling, if it's the wife, her preparedness to walk out of the marriage as all her efforts seem to have failed to attain truce. The informants reckon that wives in trying marriages especially advocate for such mild confrontational name as they are the ones who would have come into a new family where they would have hoped to get protection which seems not to have materialized. The call to have been accepted in the husband's family might have fallen on deaf ears hence this last drastic move of making a public statement of her preparedness to confront those perpetrating her misery. Informants pointed out that such a name would draw the attention of senior members to intervene so that serenity should reign in their family or else their neighbors would mock them of having banana backbone as well as orchestrating misery of a fellow human being.

### Declarative Dog Names

Three declarative dog names namely *Tigozviona* (Let us see), *Kusanyara* (Not being ashamed) and *Matipfuvisa* (You have interfered with our peace) are scrutinized here. *Matipfuvisa* (You have interfered with our peace) is a dog name that informants note it spoke to respected or a group of people identified as the cause of the challenges facing the concerned family. The people might be the bride's or bridegroom's families that might be perpetrators of the destabilizing influences. This might happen if some were not prepared to accept either the bride or the bridegroom to be a bona fide family member. Similarly, significant communal neighbors might be the source of strife but within the Shona culture that discourages direct confrontation, the affected husband and wife might opt to talk back

through the dog name. Whenever the dog name would be called out, it will be out for everyone to hear it for themselves that they are being reprimanded as well as being called to reform from their now known dirty tricks. Some informants argue that this achieves a lot as it becomes a tag and moving sign that your ill-intended machinations towards the family have been read. Some informants reckon that the source of rivalry might be due to someone's livestock having devoured the neighbor's plants and had not repaid in acceptable ways. The name then becomes a perennial reminder that the affected couple's ambitions were derailed by such happening.

The name *Kusanyara* (Not being ashamed) is a public shaming exercise to everyone perceived to have orchestrated the suffering of the affected people who have now resorted to using a dog name as a reprimanding medium. As dogs in Shona communal areas move from one homestead to the other as almost all homesteads are not fenced, all the places the dog visits and when anyone asks of its name, the mention of *Kusanyara* calls the hearers to self-introspection. Amongst the Shona people, *Kusanyara* points out that the addressee should have known better and the remark calls someone to order in a way one can only answer by behaving in an acceptable manner. The namer(s) in this context uses the dog name to reflect the particular social tie one wishes to exploit (Beidelman 1974). Therefore, if a marriage partner, significant family member or community member was the instigator of misery, the name *Kusanyara* subtly calls them to book so that tranquility can see the light of the day. It therefore emerges that the Shona people's love for harmonious family relations saw them devising and using whatever strategy to safeguard peace.

The name *Tigozviona* (Let us see) denotes an ongoing dialogue within the concerned family and is a firm stance being taken by the other part challenging a fellow challenger. The contexts given by informants that may give rise to this name are when threats would have been hauled to the effect that some misfortunes shall befall the addressee. The affected person now retaliates by putting across this challenge that if the said misfortunes would come to pass then the alleged causer would see the true colors of the then intended victim. Some of the threats might include sickness of children or failure to have bumper harvest or having children suc-

ceeding in school or workplaces. The name, some informants note, proves to be a peace seeking instrument as it now remind the 'aggressor' that if s/he continues with the intended course of action, people would take him/her to task. This would follow as through the name the namer(s) have already warned that for anything that might go wrong they would apportion blame to him/her for s/he would have already intimated such.

### Derogatory Dog Names

*Rwashinga* (It has persevered), *Rwuchaenda* (It shall go), *Rumwaya* (The spreader), Stupid, *Zvichapera* (It shall come to an end) and *Muzvipfidze* (You must come to regret your move) are the derogatory dog names examined closely in this section.

The name *Rumwaya* (The spreader) was found to be popular in communities where envy and jealousies were rife. The informants submit that the name might be speaking to community gossipers whose acts have had serious repercussions on the lives of some community members. Similarly, in marriage context the name might be suggestive of some family member(s) who thrives on gossiping thereby leading family members to despise and in worst moments to fight each other. In polygamous context, the name might be an address to a certain wife or wives regarded as the hub of all turbulence that comes by gossiping. Through the prefix */Ru-/* in Shona class 11 the name also derogatively makes reference to the identified target, in this case, suggesting that the gossipier is despised for such unwelcome behavior.

*Rwashinga* (It has persevered) is a name taken by some respondents to generally refer to death while others take it to refer to slim physical appearance of the person under scrutiny. In the first instance, reference connotes that death has struck more than once within a short span of time.

The name then is an acceptance of the unfortunate and sad reality caused by death. */Rwa-/* is a derogatory reference to death as no one is prepared to be associated with death and its resultant misery. The Shona culture calls for the disparagement of death as a way of registering humanity's repugnance of it and its effect (Makondo 2007). Furthermore, */Rwa-/* is also a derogatory reference to someone the accuser seeks

to undermine in an argument context. */Rwa-/* comes from Shona noun class 11 with the prefix */ru-/*. This suggests that reference is to an individual of small body stature and the speaker is castigating the person because of his/her small body stature as well as insinuating that people of that stature are deemed to fail. The name becomes a means of venting out the hate harbored by the speaker in a way that mitigates direct physical confrontation. The *dog name Rwuchaenda* (It shall go) has been taken by the research informants to be referring to almost similar phenomenon as *Rwashinga*. Implicit and explicit references are here being made to death and the target person. It is also worth to point out that the name does not directly mention the targeted person. This means that name readers can best get at the name meaning if they are privy of the context of operation which gave rise to such name preference (Makondo 2013). This realization, as informants note, was calculated to subtly sustain verbal attacks of the identified enemy in ways outsiders will not be aware of. Instances were given when the other part would respond by going to an extent of acquiring a dog if s/he did not already have one and proceed to give telling names like Stupid, *Zvichapera* (It shall come to an end) and *Muzvipfidze* (You must come to regret your move). A closer look at these names, this study established, has nothing to do with dogs but the animal has been burdened by carrying dispute armory used to sustain the war of words. The name *Zvichapera* proceeds by declaring that normalcy shall be restored. On the other hand, *Muzvipfidze* sternly warns that the perpetrators shall regret having taken such an unacceptable stance towards the namer(s) who are now determined to see retribution done.

### CONCLUSION

Dogs play a pivotal role in the life of Shona people of Zimbabwe; they have been used for hunting and as security alarm systems. Besides, dogs have also been used as mediums for peace as they would bear names that propagate reprimanding and rebuking messages meant to safeguard tranquility amongst family and communal members. The research realized that some dogs names are used to subtly as well as directly advocate for restraint. The study explores that the perpetrators and the circumstances that gave

rise to the name are implied through most of the dog names.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

It emerges that more insights could be gained by doing comparative studies of dogs' names in various parts of Zimbabwe and the region. Also, valuable insights could be gained through the study of cattle names as the Shona speaking people of Zimbabwe seem to use cattle names to dialogue and communicate diverse meanings.

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