

## Personal Names and Naming Practices among the Vatsonga

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**ABSTRACT** The present paper examined use of personal names and naming practices among Vatsonga in South Africa. Xitsonga names are not just mere tags but provide more insights into important social, cultural and political events at the time of birth. Furthermore, the paper also discusses the significance attached to Xitsonga personal names.

### INTRODUCTION

Names have a specific meaning to every nation since names convey the history and culture of that particular nation while also evoking memories of love or bitterness within members of that nation. Names reflect the way in which people think and see the world around them (Meiring 1994: 67).

Finnegan (1970: 472) mentioned that names are of great significance in that they can express joyful sentiments and a sense of personal aspiration for oneself or others. She further averred that names may also contribute to the literary flavour of formal or informal conversation, adding a depth or succinctness through their meanings, overtones or metaphors.

In African societies, the birth of a child is an event of great magnitude (Mbiti 1975: 125). Great significance is, therefore, attached to the naming of a child. This is also applicable to the Vatsonga where naming is considered to be of profound significance in that the name-giver chooses a name that truly identifies the child as a person. A name is considered a precious and marvellous gift while a person without a name is regarded as a non-human being.

To the traditional African people, naming practices are very important since names are often given to mark the testimony of what a society holds dear in a given community. In other words, names bear testimony to the history and culture of a particular nation or people. The Vatsonga as a people have a tendency to enshrine any event that is considered memorable in a name. Names are, therefore, chosen for their beneficial influence on the life and character of the bearer, as Golele (1993: 85) mentions that names reflect the society or community in which they are found.

They originate in different circumstances which may be social, economic, political, or legal. Although, at times the meaning of such names may be forgotten, it is traceable to the circumstances which gave rise to them, as they are situation-bound. Traditional Africans believe that by naming the offsprings after dead relatives they are protected from all evils, as Feldman (1989: 24) states that “the name, which is inherited from the dead, enters into and emerges with the child at birth and protects it”.

Mbiti (1975: 125) concurs with Feldman (1989) when he expanded “the departed are also remembered by naming children after them, especially if their features have been inherited by these children”. Thus, in African societies, the dead or the ancestors are not readily forgotten but are recalled and respected through names. They are considered to be still alive because their great grandchildren will use their names for many years to come.

### METHODOLOGY

This paper is mainly a semantic analysis of the Xitsonga personal names by bringing to the reader's attention the circumstances that led to the names given to the name bearers. Mouton (2001: 57) commented that “the research design is a blueprint of how one intends to conduct research and the direction it will take”. This paper mainly used the qualitative approach as it is located in the interpretative paradigm. According to Scale (1998) in Ndlovu (2014: 19) interpretivists tend to favour qualitative rather than quantitative methods because people's worlds provide greater access to their subjective meaning than do statistical trends.

## RESULTS

Since the names serve as pivotal roles in societal reformation and transformation, this paper will help to bridge the gap whereby the members of the Vatsonga communities were longer taking their naming practices into consideration when naming the newly born babies.

## DISCUSSION

### Naming in Xitsonga Culture

The Vatsonga often name their children after their dead ancestors so that the latter may be near the child and protect him or her from all evils. They even visit traditional healers to find out which name is suitable for a child. Some Vatsonga think that by naming a child after their ancestors they will receive blessings while others think that the child will be an outstanding member of the society, as Kahari (1990:282) maintains that “the name belongs to the family lineage, that is, the family wishes the child to bear the name of the outstanding members of the dead ancestors”.

Naming in Xitsonga culture is thus not an arbitrary exercise but a practice that is carefully thought out in advance. The most interesting feature is that the Vatsonga people do not regard a name as an ordinary label provided for the sake of convenience in distinguishing one person from another but that names come through the machinery of naming, determined by a variety of factors beyond our control. As such, there is a strong belief that a name-giver should consider the close ties between naming and identity, as Dickens (1985:01) opines that it is reasonable to expect that a nation’s names will come from the language of the nation. One does, of course, make allowances for the odd names, taken from a language other than the bearer’s. However, when a large proportion of the names come from another language, one is inclined to wonder why there is such a widespread use of “foreign names”.

It should, nevertheless, be borne in mind that the colonial bureaucracy did not take into account the importance attached to African names since the colonial rulers were not concerned that the use of “foreign names” would retard the development of African languages and their respective speakers. In reality, the use of a language in

naming enhances the status of that particular language.

The use of Afrikaans and English names in national monuments was detrimental to the recognition of the other languages in the country. Although with the demise of apartheid and democracy now firmly in place, the wealth of African names has not yet come to the fore strongly enough in all areas of social life, but it has already begun to exert its influence on other cultural groups (Neethling 2000:208). Moyo (1996:13) strongly supported this view when he avers that as part of the movement towards self-rule, resistance grew towards “colonial” names when English or Christian names were equated with a colonial mentality. The thinking was that the mind needed to be decolonised by shaking off what was considered to be a state of mental colonial domination.

### When is a Child Named?

There is little evidence to indicate the exact period the family members usually spend in deciding on a name for a newly born child. In some parts of the world, the child’s name is chosen before the birth of the child while in others it is given immediately after birth. According to the informants, a newly born baby might be given a name which could serve as a birth name or maternity home name/forename/childhood name (*vito ra vuhlangi*) for a certain period, namely *Butana* (derived from the Afrikaans “*boetie*”) (little boy), *Khegu* (little girl), and *Sesana* (derived from the Afrikaans “*sussie*”) (little girl). Kahari (1990:282) defines the maternity home name as “. . . a name given to a new born baby. It does not follow that the child will necessarily be known by this name throughout its life”.

### By Who is a Child Named?

It is interesting to note that during the colonial and missionary eras paternal and maternal grandparents played a leading role as name-givers of children. However, there is a strong belief that women were the most active participants in name giving. Alia (1989:22) supported this assertion by saying that “research on the naming traditions of many cultures . . . has revealed that women often control, [name-giving] even where they have few other powers”.

Further, research reveals that women have fought unflinchingly for their right to participate in the process of naming. This fact confirms that women were not always in charge of the naming process, as Alia (1989) points out that "... women in many parts of the world have sought greater control over the right to name".

The above assertion meant that women were not the most common name-givers. Due to the migration labour system men as decision makers were forced to work far away from their tribal homes. Women thus assumed the role of name-givers. When the mother gave birth to a child, she would give the child a name designated as a birth name or forename. The name would serve for a certain period. However, it is said that the family members would then be given the responsibility to give the child a name that would be used for the rest of his life. In spite of shouldering the responsibility of having to name the child, the family members would finally allow the head of the family, namely, the father and his sister to decide on the name of the child. In this regard, Herbert (1992: 5) mentions that initial childhood names are typically bestowed a short time after birth, with the name usually chosen by the mother although it "will finally have to be decided on by the family of the father, and particularly by his sister".

To a Mutsonga family, steeped in tribal customs and beliefs, for the most part, grandparents had the privilege of giving names to the newly born children. Dickens quoted Nel (1970: 17) when he reinforces this viewpoint: *The naming of a child is a shared family experience, in which the grandparents took a leading role with the assistance of the parents and aunts.*

One may thus conclude that the naming process is nowadays open to any person irrespective of his family standing. However, Xitsonga traditional naming conventions stress that the most qualified people, as far as naming is concerned, are the elderly people, especially the paternal and maternal grandparents. Herbert (1992) confirmed this viewpoint when says that the vast bulk of names are given by family members, especially parents and grandparents. Parents are the most common name-givers, followed by paternal grandparents and then maternal grandparents, especially the grandmother.

Another interesting trend is that in the past, in public hospitals and clinics, nurses bestowed names, like *Dumisani* (praise), *Vutomi* (life), *Xa-*

*niseka* (suffer), *Mona* (rudeness), *Vunene* (goodness), *Hlayiseka* (be safe), *Nsovo* (mercy), and *Xikombiso* (example). Naming, in this instance, has both positive and negative connotations depending on the behaviour of the mother. Nowadays, the naming trend is characterised by enormous change in that even children are allowed to participate in naming activities. It is no longer taboo for children to participate in family matters such as naming newly born babies.

### Types of Naming Practices

The Vatsonga, like other African people, make use of different naming practices to give names to their children. They often bestow names according to certain circumstances. In Xitsonga culture, for instance, names are typically bestowed upon children according to the circumstances surrounding the birth of the child, social aspects of the family, hopes, traditional beliefs, and wishes for the child, or the expression of gratitude to a deity.

Xitsonga names are often bestowed upon children with the purpose of remembering their late relatives. Parents may name a child after their late parents because of the love they had for them, thereby feeling as if their parents were still alive. Sometimes children are named after their paternal or maternal relatives because of resembling their physical appearance.

Xitsonga names also reveal the profound influence Western encroachment has had on African life. Experience shows that the Vatsonga, as a people, cannot be completely free from Western cultural taints. Naming practices are in one way or another characterised by an acceptance of a hybrid culture in which transcultural forms have become the norm. In such a hybrid culture, the Vatsonga draw on both the indigenous resources and Western cultural distinctiveness or uniqueness. Koopman (1986: 23) quotes Nsimbi to support this fact that there are many good traditions and customs which the African ought to keep and be proud of. At present many tribes are losing much of this inheritance in an attempt to adopt Western culture wholesale.

Junod (1938: 53) stated that there are many ways of giving a child a name when he states that everyone who has studied a Bantu tribe knows that in olden times there were definite rules about naming a child and that the name

itself was, in many cases, a kind of a proverb. A mother will often give her child a name like “Vuloyi”, that is, “witchcraft” as a challenge to public opinion, showing that she defies the verdict of the witch doctor.

One peculiar naming pattern found among the young Vatsonga generation is that the name goes against the expected and the name-giver explicitly aims at being unique and creative. Modern parents prefer to cultivate a spirit of onomastic individualism or creativity and search for a special, perhaps unique name for their child, like *Vulombe* (honey), *Nsuku* (gold), *Nhlango* (togetherness), and *Ndzalama* (gem). They prefer to choose names for aesthetic appeal or to satisfy a personal whim. Koopman (1976:16) supported this view by saying that the values to which the parents subscribe and to which they wish their children to subscribe, are also well reflected in names.

Indeed, a name should be appealing and something that the people should be proud of. A name should also bear testimony to the history and culture of the people, like *Xihluke* (shoot of plant signifying the continuation of the family), *Xinyori* (of Chauke clan), and *N'wanati* (of Maluleke clan). The social processes and reasons underpinning manifestations of onomastic creativity reveal that this naming process is inextricably linked to events within a given community. This means that the names parents give to their children provide a unique source of information about the family's history, beliefs, and values.

Junod (1912: 38) states that the Vatsonga use five traditional naming practices:

- (i) Junod (1912: 38) maintains that the Vatsonga may give children names of their chiefs. They are guided by what that particular chief is doing to uplift the standard of living of his subjects. They firmly believe that the child named after a certain chief will emulate that particular chief. This shows that parents are very proud of their offspring and hold them in high esteem.

Names of chiefs that are usually given to children are as follows: *Soshangane* and *Nghunghunyana*. Because of their roles in their respective communities, chiefs are regarded as symbols of unity. They are also highly respected for their roles in settling family disputes and other family related matters. Junod (1912) further main-

tains that by naming their children after their chiefs parents endeavour to flatter their chiefs' vanity. Many of the Vatsonga may name their children after Soshangane as he is regarded as the first person to unite the Vatsonga under one rule (Mathumba 1993: 56). He is regarded as the first chief of the Vatsonga.

Nghunghunyana was the son of Muzila. In 1884 he succeeded his father as chief of the Vatsonga in Mozambique (Mathumba, 1993:50). According to Mathumba (1993: 50), after staying at Musapa for about five years, Nghunghunyana went to Bileni where he built his capital at Mandlhakazi. The Vatsonga thus name their children after Nghunghunyana as a way of remembering and honouring him because he was the descendant of Soshangane.

- (ii) Junod (1912: 38) asserts that the second naming practice that the Vatsonga may use is to give children the names of their ancestors. The parents sometimes visit *sangomas* (diviners) with the aim of consulting the divine bones to help them find suitable names to give their children. According to Junod (1912), “the parents like to recall a name of the old times (*pfusha bito dja khale*), the name of one of the ancestors ...” and continues to assert that a name is proposed, and if the bones in falling do not give a favourable indication, another is tried till they feel sure that the dice “has spoken.”

The divine bones can also be consulted when a child cries incessantly or is seriously ill. It is believed that the name to be suggested by the *sangoma* will restore the child to happiness or good health. The child will no longer cry incessantly and will recuperate from his illness.

- (iii) Junod (1912) mentions that even a traveller or a visitor may be given the opportunity to name a newly born child. He is then bound to visit the child once a year and must bring along some gifts to consolidate the name that he gave the child. In the same vein, the mother and the child are expected to visit the traveller when the child is old enough to get out of the homestead. This fact will establish a special relation between this person and the child. In other words, the relationship between the name-giver and the child will be established and consolidated.



- (iv) Junod (1912: 39) states that the fourth naming practice the Vatsonga may associate themselves with is the circumstances surrounding the birth of the child. He maintains that the experts in pregnancy matters always observe the pregnant woman. They study whatsoever she does, such as her eating habits, her reaction to questions, her execution of family chores, and her behaviour in general. If the woman does not behave herself according to the norms and values of the society, the elderly women may give the child names such as: *Swicele* (quarrels), *Rivengo* (hatred), *Mona* (rudeness), *Vulolo* (laziness) and *Vukwele* (jealousy).

If the woman, however, behaves according to the norms and values of the society, the child may be named: *Tintswalo* (mercy), *Munene* (goodness) and *Khensani* (be thankful).

- (v) Junod (1912) remarks that the Vatsonga may name their children according to the birthplace as well. For instance, if the child is born on the way to a hospital the name-giver may name the child *Ndleleni* (on the way). The name *Ndleleni* is a locative, formed from *ndlela* (way) + *ini* (locative prefix). If the child is born under a fig tree, the child may be named *Nkuweni*, derived from the noun *nkuwa* (fig tree). The name *Nkuweni* is also a locative, formed from *nkuwa* (noun) + *ini* (locative suffix). If the child was, for instance, born during a war waged by the chief bearing the name *Mawewe*, the newly born child would be given the name of that chief.

Besides, these five naming practices mentioned by Junod, Xitsonga speaking people may use a number of naming practices such as names reflecting the politics of the day, names which describe the child's or family's background, protective names, celebrated names, commemorating names, and religion-based names. In this paper nine categories of classifying different types of Xitsonga names are examined below.

### Types of Names

There are many naming customs or practices. In some cultures the name is chosen before the arrival of the child. Others prefer to choose a name immediately after the arrival of the baby. Since the birth of a child is regarded as a *nyiko*

(gift) there is a special ceremony in Xitsonga called *ku dya hojahoja* (the traditional ceremony of introducing a newly born child to the general public). In this ceremony the child is open for viewing by the general public. People sing and run around a hut and throw mealie seeds at the child. It is on this special day that the sex and name of the child are made known to the general public.

Given the importance of choosing a name, it is appropriate in this study to scrutinise names according to their different categories.

### *Politically Inspired Names*

Politically inspired names are names that are related to the politics of the day in the country. These names may relate to political incidents or the activities of politicians. Name-givers may choose names of some prominent political leaders whom they wish their children to emulate. As far as political incidents are concerned they name their children after such occurrences in order to mark their involvement or record them as the most important dates in their lives. Examples of such names follow below:

#### *Xitereko (Strike)*

In South Africa many children who were born in the year 1976 bear names related to the June 16 uprisings, the day on which Soweto students took to the streets to protest against the introduction of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction at South African schools by the former apartheid government. In similar vein, many children who were born in 1976 bear names related to the June uprisings. Such names include *Xitereko* that is derived from the English word "strike". This name is, therefore, pertinent to issues and situations in which some form of rebellion has taken place.

#### *Ndzivalelano (Reconciliation)*

The name *Ndzivalelano* can be used to mark a special occasion, for instance the sitting of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (1995-2000) whereby South Africans in spite of their extremely difficult past were able to sit down and relate the horrible acts of terrorism and apartheid. This name is derived from the word *rivalela* (forgive) and acts as a unifying force or a sym-

bol of unity. It calls upon people to work together regardless of colour, race or language while also forbidding people to retaliate for the evil deeds inflicted upon them in the past. As such, the name is a symbol of hope. By giving a child this name the people externalise the hurt, pain, and bitterness of the past by building a fortress of forgiveness within themselves.

Political names are, in essence, expressive of the rejection of colonial rule and its attendant practices. These new naming practices are also indicative of the rejection of English and Afrikaans names in favour of African names (Meiring 1994: 67). He indicates that examples of this new trend are the first names by which former premiers of Mpumalanga, Gauteng, Eastern Cape, and the Free State became, which were 'traded in' for African names: Johannes (Mahlangu) became *Ndaweni* (Mahlangu), Sam (Shilowa) became *Mbhazima* (Shilowa), and Arnold (Stofile) became *Makhenkesi* (Stofile), Terror (Lekota) became *Mosiou* (Lekota). Bennie Alexander, former Secretary General of the Pan African Congress, changed both his first name and surname to *Koisan !X*. African political leaders who are regarded as outstanding and as political heroes seem to be the "in-thing" in naming nowadays. Hence there are children named after, like Kwame Nkrumah, Robert Mugabe, Samora Machel, Steve Biko, and Seretse Khama (Thipa 1983 in Raper 1986: 287).

### *Commemorative Naming*

In Xitsonga culture, boys and girls are made to attend circumcision/initiation schools as a passage to adulthood. The initiation school is a school characterised by hardship or harsh treatment. Initiation is a public act of recognition that the individual is now passing from childhood to adulthood.

The chief aim of attending the initiation school is to cultivate courage, endurance, perseverance and obedience amongst the young people. In this initiation school, boys are taught different laws pertaining to manhood and how to behave themselves as the fathers of the future. They also learn how to handle cases in tribal courts. When a boy graduates, he is given the opportunity to give himself a name such as *Mkhacani*, *Magezi*, *Risimati* or *Mzamani*, to commemorate his bravery despite hardships or harsh treatment. However, graduates from the

royal family, especially first-borns, are given names as a special treatment or honour.

Although some of the initiation names are not easy to define or assign a meaning to, some of them have significance, for instance *Xithlavangoma* and *Xirilele*. Upon completion of their initiation school, the young people return home. Mbiti (1975: 96) sums up their return to their homes as follows: *Returning home is like being born afresh into a new life. They go home as new people. ... they are given new names following their initiation, to show the radical change they have undergone* As indicated earlier, women do attend their special initiation school, which is set up at home. Special names are used for the graduates of this school as well, such as *Mphephu*, *Mamayila*, *Tsatsawani*, and *Mujaji*.

Another feature which needs attention is that affluent Xitsonga speaking people in some villages, no longer have interest in the so-called initiation schools. In the light of the above development, circumcision names are discarded because the most rural and traditional Vatsonga are no longer interested in initiation or commemorative naming.

The following serve as examples of names bestowed at initiation schools:

#### *Xithlavangoma (The First Initiate)*

*Xithlavangoma* is a name given to the first initiate, who in many cases is the son of the chief or *induna*. In this instance, the name-bearer is not given the opportunity to give himself a new name according to the rules and regulations governing the circumcision school. The chief, the *induna* or the person in charge of the initiation school often gives the name.

#### *Xirilele (The One Who Cries For Something)*

*Xirilele* is a symbolic name given to a boy who forces his way to a circumcision school without the prior consent of his parents or elders. After graduating from the school the elders may name the boy *Xirilele* (the one who cries for something).

Sometimes a child who is not yet old enough to attend the initiation school may cry and long to go there so much that the parents may sympathise with the child and allow him to attend. After the graduation ceremony, the boy may be given the name *Xirilele*.

### *Ancestral Names*

Ancestral names are names which people believe link their present lives to their ancestors. Such names are given when the child, it is believed, cries for the name. The name is usually determined by the throwing of divining bones. It is alleged that the discovery and bestowal of the right name restores the child to health.

In most cases the paternal ancestors' names are given because the paternal family is closely involved or is in association with the child. It is further argued that the names of the dead and the living should be the same. A name is, therefore, ageless, standing for an endless number of persons so that when one intones the name of an ancestor or even of the living, one could be invoking a large number of spirits (Beidelman 1991: 287).

Ancestral names are associated with families who still believe in rituals or are tied to traditional beliefs. There is thus such a close relationship between a person's name and ancestral beliefs that a child is only named after an ancestor following revelations made to the parents in, for instance, dreams and divining bone throwing. But one can deduce that giving a child an ancestor's name is considered as the reincarnation of the ancestor. This view is also buttressed by Saarelma-Maunumaa (1996: 35) when he said that in many societies, it is common to name children after living or dead relatives. Sometimes the idea is simply to show respect to the person in question or to help preserve his or her memory. Besides, sharing can also be a symbol of a belief that a child is a re-incarnation of a departed member of the family.

In addition, the ancestors are believed to form a bridge between the living and the dead.

### *Nyakwavi (The One Who Takes Care of Ancestors)*

*Nyakwavi* is an ancestral name which is given specifically to a girl who looks after the "ndhumbha", a special hut meant for the ancestors. If she happens to get married, the family must make sure that there is another girl who has to carry out the ancestral obligations. Her duties include, inter alia, the cleaning of the *ndhumbha* and seeing to it that it is kept alight in the evening by placing some burning brands on a potsherd since the ancestors should not come and find their hut in darkness.

### *Xinyori (of Chauke Clan)*

*Xinyori* is an ancestral name given specifically to a boy born to the *Chauke* family as it is associated with the patriarchal ancestry of the *Chauke* clan.

### *Christian Names*

Christian names are given to children in accordance with their parents' religious beliefs. These names are in most instances currently associated with the parents who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour and who believe that their offspring will follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and avoid all the evils of the world. Both maternal and paternal families do participate in giving a child a Christian name. Children may be given names such as *Nhlamulo* (answer), *Nyiko* (gift), *Tshemba* (trust), *Rivoningo* (light), and *Musa* (mercy). These names can be bestowed regardless of the sex of the name bearers. In this regard it should be borne in mind that the emotions and feelings of name-givers are very strong at certain stages of life, especially during birth, especially since people usually associate God with the continuation of life.

### *Nhlamulo (Answer)*

When a child is born after many years of marriage, its name may indicate that God has heard the prayers of the parents. The name *Nhlamulo* may thus show that the parents have waited for a long time for the child. This name is derived from the verb *hlamula* (answer). In other words, the name shows gratitude to God for giving them "a new lease of life" after such long, barren years.

### *Xikhongelo (Prayer)*

The name *Xikhongelo* may be given to a child whose parents have longed for a child and have frequented the church to ask for a child. In the long run their prayers were answered, hence the name *Xikhongelo* that is derived from the verb *khongela* (pray). The name is a constant reminder to the couple that they should never cease praying to and praising God.

### *Family/Birth Circumstances*

According to the informants birth circumstance names reflect the very wide range of cir-

cumstances recorded or observed during and after the pregnancy of the mother.

A child can be named in accordance to family circumstances if the name bestowed upon a child has to do with the advancement of the family. Names such as *Mfumo* (government), *Akani* (build), *Miyelani* (be quiet), and *Nhlanhla* (luck) serve as examples of such names.

It is interesting to note that specific events which prevail at the time of birth are also recorded in names, like an invasion of locusts, war, famine, and floods. Mbiti (1975:88) concurs that the state of the weather is often in people's names. Some are named after thunder, rain, drought, famine, harvest, and weeding, hunting, and other seasons of the year. *Mpfuleni* (the one born during the rainy day) and *Nyimpini* (the one born during the war) are examples of names related to specific events.

#### *Maxangu (Suffering)*

This name may be given to a child whose mother was sick during her pregnancy. In order to remember the period during which she was ill, the mother could name the child *Maxangu*. The name *Maxangu* means suffering.

#### *Tintswalo (Mercy)*

A child born to a woman whose kindness was outstanding may be given the name *Tintswalo* since the name-giver recognises her immeasurable kindness or generosity. The name also calls upon the mother to continue the good work she has done. This means that her good work was not in vain, as it has been noticed.

#### ***Names Which Describe the Child or the Family's Background***

Xitsonga names may reveal a vast degree of information about the Vatsonga as a people. For instance, certain names describe the child's or family's background; mark the activities of the family, record unusual events or the place where the child was born. Names may also mark the interests of the parents, social relationships, and economic life, like *Vusiwana* (poverty), *Rifumo* (riches), and *Xaniseka* (hardship).

#### *Vusiwana (Poverty)*

A child born to a family living in abject poverty may be given the name of *Vusiwana*. The

name-giver may also give the child this name due to the failure of the head of the family to properly look after his family. This may be caused by a variety of reasons such as the negative effect of the migration labour system. By naming the child *Vusiwana* the mother may be trying to alert the other family members to her plight in the hope that they will come to her rescue.

#### *Xaniseka (Suffer)*

If a family is living under difficult conditions such as experiencing a lack of money or unemployment a child born to it may be named *Xaniseka*. The name is associated with suffering and agony to remember the trying times in which the child was born while also constantly reminding them to work harder.

The name may also be given to a child who has been born to a single parent since it means that the child has come to face a world of suffering.

#### ***Protective Names***

In traditional Xitsonga culture, when death or illness strikes, a supernatural cause is suspected. This unfortunate situation is, therefore, enshrined in a name. According to the informants, experts in name-giving can give children protective names such as *Telakufa*, *Nyamayavo*, *Rifumuni*, and *Mafanato*. Protective names serve to publicly encode complaints to the members of the family and are also known as sarcastic names. In other words, protective names are often given with a slightly teasing tone.

#### *Telakufa (Come to Die)*

Parents who had lost a number of children and are blessed with a newly born child could name the child *Telakufa* because they may have little hope that the child will survive. The name may thus be considered as a form of prayer in desperation. They wholeheartedly hope that the name will protect the child from all the evil spirits and expect the child to survive. Nkondo (1973:72) indicates the significance of this name by saying that this is given to a baby born to parents who have lost a number of children before it. Like the others, it too, has come for death.

In this instance the belief exists that the dead children were bewitched and that the witches will feast on the newly born baby too.



*Nyamayavo (Their Flesh, Their Meat)*

A mother who has lost many children may also give her newly born baby the name of *Nyamayavo* as Junod (1938:54) remarks that when a mother has lost many children, if another is born, a name which is often chosen to protect the child against witches, such as *Nyamayavo*, which means "Their Flesh", is given.

The name *Nyamayavo* is considered a protective name in that the witches will realise that their evil deeds are known since the namegiver has a strong belief that the child will survive because the witches will shy away or distance themselves from the child's family.

**Western Names**

The Vatsonga also give Western names to their children.

*Circumstances of Giving Western Names*

Cultural contact with colonial values, power, and languages and the demands of colonial bureaucracy have resulted in the introduction of Western names to Africans. Many "colonised" inhabitants of Southern Africa acquired European names as a symbol of Christian conversion, which resulted in bestowing two names instead of one name at birth (De Klerk and Bosch 1998:8; Dickens 1985:66). The Western influence on the Zulu personal naming system, in the period 1840-1899, was a direct result of the evangelisation campaigns of the missionaries.

The above situation was also prevalent among the Vatsonga. According to the informants, the adoption of Christianity and European influence, especially Swiss missionary work, has led the Vatsonga to use Western names. Western names were adopted with the ultimate aim of meeting the demands of westernisation, namely baptism, schooling and employment (Dickens 1985; De Klerk and Bosch 1998).

The following Western male names are familiar among the Vatsonga: Thomas, John, George, Peter, Wilson, Patrick, Elvis, Samuel, Simon, James, Abel, Ernest, and Paul.

The following Western names female names are well-known: Mary, Sarah, Doris, Grace, Victoria, Carol, Patience, Mavis, Marble, Vivian, Anna, Elizabeth, Ruth, Rachel, Joyce, Brenda, Yvonne, Mercy, Prudence, Petunia, Rose, Ivy,

Connie, Margaret, Lucy, Patricia, Lydia, Beauty, Nancy, Jane, and Norah.

**CONCLUSION**

The paper has focussed on personal names and various naming practices among the Vatsonga. It has been stressed that naming an individual is considered an important event; hence names are sometimes determined by the need to perpetuate the names of some family members. Both the living and dead members' names are considered in naming a newly born child. The choice of such names is equally influenced by the desire to honour the family members. This indicates that the living and the departed have a special place in the family's history.

From a traditional point of view, naming a child after some outstanding or revered person is regarded as an honour to the child in that it is believed that the name-bearer would grow to emulate that particular prominent figure. The paper has also shown that by perpetuating the name of a family member, the family concerned is in one way or another trying to create a positive and mutual relationship among its members.

The paper has also shown that naming a newly born child is not independent of the society in which events occur. The circumstances surrounding a child's birth account for a variety of reasons behind the naming of children.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the name-givers should make use of naming practices with the ultimate aim of enhancing the Xitsonga tradition, culture and custom. This will make sure that the young generation will know and be proud that their tradition, culture and customs are of paramount importance.

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