

## Naming Practices Among Vatsonga: The Case of Naming of 'Characters' in Some of Thomas Hasani Chauke's Songs

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**ABSTRACT** Thomas Hasani Chauke, affectionately known as Shinyori by his fans, has been at the forefront of Xitsonga Music for over 33 years. From his flagship, he has released 33 albums under his Shimatsatsa series. In some of his music, he narrates stories about issues that affect people in their everyday life and tries to spread positive messages. In those instances, he uses characters and gives them names. The aim of the paper is to investigate and pinpoint the naming of characters in Chauke's songs. Through the paper, one will realise that when Chauke names the characters in his music, he does not give names for the sake of naming, but instead, a careful consideration is made. The names have both, semantic and semiotic meanings attached to the characters depicted in the songs. Some songs, which have names of characters will be analysed showing their contextual and semiotic meanings.

### INTRODUCTION

Vatsonga is a tribe concentrated mostly in South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. It should also be noted that in both Mozambique and Zimbabwe, Vatsonga are better known as Shangaans/Machangana or 'the descendants of Soshangane'. The use of Shangaans to refer to Vatsonga is mostly taken as derogatory in South Africa. In South Africa, Xitsonga is one of the eleven official languages and it is spoken mainly in the Limpopo Province in which it shares linguistic space with Tshivenda and Northern Sotho (Babane and Mapindani 2012: 9). Mathebula (2013: 9) asserts that Vatsonga are mainly concentrated in the provinces of Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Northern KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. The language that Vatsonga speak is called Xitsonga; 'Xi-' being the prefix to indicate a language that the Vatsonga speak.

Xitsonga is grouped as S50 in Guthrie's classification (1967-71) and is thus, not closely related to any of the other Bantu languages spoken in South Africa, like Sesotho (S30) or IsiZulu (S40). However, in light of the synchronic similarities that the different Xitsonga dialects share with the Nguni and Tekeza languages, Baumbach (1987: 2) suggests that Xitsonga be classified under the Tekeza cluster of the Nguni group (Zerbian 2007: 65).

Vatsonga are very rich in traditional dance and music. Their traditional dances include mu-

chongolo, xincayincayi or xigubu, kuthawuza, mukhinyavezo na makhwaya. They regard music as a vehicle through which one can understand them (Chauke 2004: 1). Mahunsi (2006: 65) draws attention to the fact that Vatsonga traditional music, amongst other things advises, appreciates, protests, teaches people to be humble, entertains and builds a good relationship. These roles make music a part and parcel of Vatsonga.

One of the legends of Vatsonga traditional music is Thomas Hasani Chauke. This artist is arguably one of the Xitsonga musicians who spreads positive messages through music. In his music, he sings about burning issues that affect people in their everyday life. His music has been recognized by a number of organizations such as the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)'s Munghana Lonene FM (MLFM), South African Music Awards (SAMA), South African Traditional Music Awards (SATMA), the government, and churches.

One important aspect that cannot go unnoticed is the names of the 'characters' that he usually sings about. When one looks at the names that he usually uses in his songs, one can conclude that Chauke does not deviate from the Vatsonga naming practices. One can boldly say that Chauke understands the cultural attachments with names and naming among African people, which Sheppard (2012: 56) believes to bear spiritual, psychological and physical significance.

## METHODOLOGY

Theoretical criticism is the method explored in this paper in order to answer the question that the researchers had. This methodology, as Morne and Rauch (1997: 121) put it, involves the identification of general principles of literary excellence and establishes theories and methods for studying literature. Practical criticism puts such insights, theories, and methods to use in the analysis and evaluation of individual works. In this paper, some songs where personal names are used were selected. These names together with the lyrics of the song were described, interpreted and evaluated in order to determine their importance in the song.

## OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers found that names that are used in some of Chauke's songs were not used just for the sake of using them. The names have some social meaning, the expression of gratitude and far and foremost, have significant meaning of the action performed by the name-bearer.

### Naming Practices Among the Vatsonga of South Africa

The study of names is a fertile area for investigative research, especially into how African names and naming practices have been disrupted by the inhumane and unjust systems of slavery and colonialism, which were instituted on the African continent and throughout the Diaspora by the Europeans; taking into consideration the fact that African names, typically, have spiritual reverence (Fitzpatrick, 2012: 2). Hlungwani (2015) critically analyses the music of *Matshwa Bemuda*. The main objective of Hlungwani's study is to describe the manner in which the values of the Vatsonga society could be imparted through *Matshwa Bemuda*'s songs, the themes and language usage in an acceptable way. Hlungwani further describes the extent to which *Matshwa Bemuda* uses language in his music to put the message across to the society. Chauke (2015) examines the use of personal names and naming practices used by the Vatsonga. He also discusses the significance attached to Xitsonga personal names. According to Chauke (2015: 305), 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 of the child, or the expression of gratitude to a deity.

Most African cultures believe that when one bestows a name upon a child, that person is not simply naming the flesh of the child, but rather the name is for the person's soul (Bernhardt 2001: 7). This belief also applies to Vatsonga. Traditionally, when a boy or girl is born within the Vatsonga family, the child gets his or her name from the paternal aunt. This aunt is the very same person who will be called to perform traditional rites when the child goes for initiation school to enter into manhood or womanhood, when he or she gets married, and even if he or she dies. If the child does not have an aunt, the father, mother and grandparents also play an important role in bestowing a name.

Junod (1912) in Chauke (2015: 306-307) states that the Vatsonga use five traditional naming practices, namely:

1. 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 chief will emulate the chief in deeds. Examples of names of chiefs that can be given to children include, *Soshangane*, *Nghunghunyana*, *Mawewe*, *Xikundu*, *Mhinga*, and *Muhlava*. Because of their roles in their respective communities, chiefs are regarded as symbols of unity and respect.
2. The second naming practice that the Vatsonga may use is to give children the names of their ancestors. The parents sometimes visit *tin'anga* with the aim of consulting the divine bones to help them find suitable names to give their children. The ancestral names that may be given to children are as follows: *Nyakwavi* (the one who takes care of ancestors), *Xinyori* (of Cawuke clan), and *Malenga* (of Maluleke clan).
3. A traveller or visitor may be given the opportunity to name a newly born child. He will then be bound to visit the child once a year and will have to bring along gifts to consolidate the name that he gave the child.

4. The fourth naming practice that the Vatsonga may associate with is the circumstances surrounding the birth of the child. Junod (1912) in Chauke (2015: 306-307) maintains that experts in pregnancy matters always observe the pregnant woman. If a woman does not behave herself according to the norms and values of the society, the elderly women may give the child names such as *Mona* (rudeness), *Swicele* (quarrels), *Rivengo* (hatred), *Vulolo* (laziness) and *Vukwele* (jealousy). If a 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).
5. The last naming practice is that the Vatsonga may name their children according to the birthplace. For example, if a child is born on the way to a hospital or under a fig tree may be named *Ndleleni* (on the way) or *Nkuweni*, derived from the noun *nkuwa* (fig tree).

Besides these five naming practices mentioned, Chauke (2014: 307-3011) states that 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. Table 1 shows some categories of Xitsonga names.

It is very important to also mention that some names can be bestowed on a child not only for the sole benefit of the family but also for the society. Guma (2001: 269) asserts that "to name children after events may serve psychological and emotional needs of the society."

### Naming as a Form of Identity

The bestowal of a name to any child is not only a form of common practice in every culture, but it is also important, as names are a form of identity of individuals in a society. The name that every person is given is used, firstly, to differentiate the person from the rest of the family or society that he or she belongs to. Through a name, an individual becomes the history of the society. The future generations might know the name and then attach personality and deeds without knowing the physical person.

Sheppard (2012: 57) quoted Gerhards and Hans (2009) when they say, "it has long been noted that a person's first name can often convey ethnic membership". Traditional names can be used as a form of ethnic identity. A practical example of such cases is the use of the prefix 'No-' in names such as *Nomthandzazo*, *Nonzamo*, *Nozipho*, and *Nonkululeko*. These kinds of names are given to girls who speak Nguni languages in South Africa. Any person in South Africa knows that once a girl goes with one of these names or an equivalent to it, that person is a Nguni speaker. The same goes to the Sotho language groups, names such as *Mmathapelo*, *Mmamotwa*, *Mmadjadji*, and *Mmamokone*, are associated with the Sotho girls.

A name may indicate the linguistic structures and phonological processes found in a language, the position of the name's bearer in society, and the collective history and life experiences of the people surrounding the individual. A name tells a lot about the individual that it signifies, the language from which it is drawn, and the society that ascribes it (Mphande 2006: 107).

During the apartheid era in South Africa, most of Vatsonga and other ethnic groups were given "better and good names" by their white bosses and teachers. This was made to ensure that Africans look inferior to their counterparts, not only in terms of intelligence but also to despise their cultures and traditions. A famous example of this is, according to Fitzpatrick (2012: 70), the South African President and anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela, who was born *Rolihlahla* Mandela. Mandela was Xhosa with Khoisan ancestry on his maternal side. His Xhosa name *Rolihlahla* means "to pull a branch of a tree" or more colloquially, "to stir up trouble", is very telling of what young Mandela would do as he actively resisted white domination and apartheid in South Africa, which reinforces the concept of *izibongo*. Mandela being the first member of his family to attend school received an English name "Nelson" from his teacher Miss Mdingane.

### Names Found in Some of Chauke's Songs *Ximatsatsa/Shimatsatsa (The Beautiful Girls)*

Before the critical analysis of the names of the characters in some of Chauke's songs, the researchers explore the name of his series albums- *Ximatsatsa*. Madalane (2011: 14) explains

**Table 1: Categories of Xitsonga names**

<i>Names</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Masculine/Feminine/Unisex</i>
<i>Politically Inspired Names</i>		
(i) Xitereko	“Strike”: The name can be used for children born in 1976, related to June uprisings.	Masculine
(ii) Ndzivalelano	“Reconcile, Forgive”: The name Ndzivalelano can be used to mark a special occasion, for example, the sitting of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1995-2000) whereby South Africans despite their extremely difficult past were able to sit down and relate the horrible acts of terrorism and apartheid. 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.	Unisex
<i>Commemorative Naming</i>		
(i) Xithlavangoma	The name is given to the first initiate who in many cases is the son of the chief or headman. It is the first boy to be circumcised at the circumcision school.	Masculine
(ii) Xirilele	This 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	Masculine
<i>Ancestral Names</i>		
(i) Bangwana	Of Cawuke clan. This name is an ancestral name given a male Cawuke offspring.	Masculine
<i>Christian/Religion-Based Names</i>		
(i) Nhlamulo	“Answer”: When a child is born after many years of marriage, his name may indicate that God has heard the prayers of the parents. The name shows gratitude to God for giving them “a new lease” after such long, barren years.	Masculine
(ii) Vongani	“Be grateful”: The name indicates that the parents are grateful to God since a child is viewed as a precious gift from God.	Feminine
<i>Family/Birth Circumstances</i>		
(i) Maxangu	“Sufferings”: This may be given to a child whose mother was sick during her pregnancy.	Unisex
(ii) Masirheni	“From or of the graves”: A child born on the day of the death or during the mourning of a family member or relative may be named Masirheni to remind the family of the day on which they buried their loved one.	Unisex
<i>Names Which Describe the Child or the Family's Background</i>		
(i) Vusiwana	“Poverty”: A child born to a family living in abject poverty. 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.	Feminine
<i>Protective Names</i>		
(i) Telakufa	The name may thus be considered as a form of prayer in desperation. The parents wholeheartedly hope that the name will protect the child from all the evil spirits and expect the child to survive.	Unisex
(ii) Mafanato	A child born out of wedlock may be named Mafanato. The name refers to the one who does not disclose a secret, as the mother would rather die than reveal a secret.	Feminine

the meaning of *Ximatsatsa* better when she says, “*Ximatsatsa* is an affectionate Tsonga word implying ‘sweetness,’ ‘darling,’ or ‘beauty.’”

Chauke has been psychological when naming these series albums. By simply calling his series albums *Swimatsatsa* (plural of *Ximatsat-*

sa) changes the mindset of his music fans. Before they could even listen to the actual songs in an album, their minds are filled with the *Swimatsatsa* that he called his albums, and their judgment of the album will be clouded by the 'beauty' and 'sweetness' that the albums talk about.

It is fundamental to highlight that from his albums, one reached diamond, two of them gold, six reached platinum, eleven achieved double platinum and nine reached triple platinum. One can be made to believe that the names of these albums contribute to their success and sell like hot cakes. The *Ximatsatsa* name could be playing a very psychological impact in the mind of his music fans. Basically, one can say Chauke understands that names have a psychological impact on Vatsonga and used that as a fostering element for his fans to 'fall in love' with his music.

***Tlevulani (She who never stays in one place)***

This name has been used three times in three different albums, *Ximatsatsa* #10, #21 and #27. In the first song, *Tlevulani* is presented as a young teenager who never stays home. The girl is running after bad boys, some of who are gangsters. The following lines in his song support this assertion:

*Langutani lexa' nhwana a xa ha tshami la kaya,*

Take a look at this young girl, who never stays at home,

*A xi nyumi na ku ndzi kombeta vafana ni ri tatana wa xona.*

She is not ashamed to introduce me to her-boyfriends even though I am her father.

*A wa ha tshami la kaya u tshama kwihhi?*

You no longer spend time at home, where exactly do you stay?

*Tolo ku fikile na lavo xeweta hi Xitsotsi na Xizulu.*

Yesterday there were people who greeted us in Tsotsitaal and IsiZulu looking for you.

In this song, the singer is a worried father who is trying to show his young teenager how she should behave herself. The name of this young girl resembles her personal lifestyle. In the song, Chauke is also bringing out the issue that a name that is bestowed to a person represents the name bearer. In the very same song, there are lines that say:

*Mina no puta ra wena vito hi ku ri ta onhaka,*

I just pity your name that is being tarnishing,

*Loko u nga tshami la kaya khegu a wu swi tivi leswaku u onhaka vito.*

When you don't stay at home my girl, you don't know that you are tarnishing your name.

Chauke does not say that the girl's actions will lead her into trouble, but he says her actions will tarnish his name (*onhaka vito*) (referring to the parent or father of the girl), thus highlighting the importance of a name in Vatsonga culture.

In *Ximatsatsa* #21, *Tlevulani* is now a changed person as this time around she is presented as a Christian. She is now a repentant person. The singer here is a happy father who is delighted with the behavior of his daughter and encouraging her to hold on to her new lifestyle. This is shown by the following lyrics in the song:

*Tlevulani hi loyi i muzalwana.*

Here is *Tlevulani*, a Christian.

*U ndzi tsakisa njhani i muzalwana lonene-masiku lawa.*

She makes me happy now that she is a Christian.

*Vuzalwana byi kahle Tlevulani*

Being a Christian is good.

*U nga tshiketi n'wanangat iyisela.*

Do not backslide my daughter just hold on.

The song also tells one of her old lifestyle which is never heard about in *Ximatsatsa* #10. For instance, the readers are now told that she used to drink and smoke. *Tlevulani* is being appreciated by her father and encouraged to hold on to her Christianity.

Lastly, in *Ximatsatsa* #27, *Tlevulani* has gone back to her old ways of running after boys, drinking, smoking and all other bad activities that are usually done by girls at her age. Previously, *Tlevulani* was doing these bad things but she was lucky to receive salvation before bad things happened to her. But this time around she was not lucky as the Xitsonga proverb puts it, "*mpfundla a wu khani swivandleni swimbirhi* (The hare does not dance in two places) (Junod 1990: 42-43), meaning one will never get lucky twice after committing the same mistake. She comes home with scars all over her body. In the song, the singer even says:

*A ni hembang mi nga vona, eka Tlevulani a swi vhikeki swa tika.*



I have never lied; just look for yourself, life is hard for Tlevulani.

*Ndzi te u ta vuya na mukwana emakatleni n'wananga wo tsandza vahlomuri.*

I told you that you will come back being stabbed at the back and fail to get assistance.

The singer, who acts as a father in this song, reminds *Tlevulani* of her Christian days when she was able to cast demons and heal the sick. The pastor, mother pastor and other church deacons tried to beg her to come back to church but she was not interested.

In short, *Tlevulani's* actions in all the three albums resemble that of her name. She is a person who does not stay at home, run after boys, even to go as far as KwaZulu-Natal where the Zulus are concentrated.

The fact that she does not stay in one place is also shown by her lifestyle; she is depicted as a bad girl, who then accepts Christianity, and after that reverts to her notoriety. Taking into account, the lifestyle of the girl and the meaning of her name, one cannot shift all the blame to the girl but also the parents who named her *Tlevulani*. As Guma (2001: 267) puts it, a given name does not only serve as an identity but also determines the type of person the individual will be. Names have influence on the character of the bearer. In Sotho there is a proverb that says, *Bitso lebeke seromo*, meaning, "a bad name is ominous." Whereas in Xitsonga there is an old adage that goes to say, "*vito ra landzelela*", literally meaning that a name follows its bearer. This means that the name reflects the behavior or character of the bearer.

### ***Roza (Rose, a flower)***

The name of *Roza* is found in two albums, *Ximatsatsa* #17 and #20. As it is known, a rose is a well-known flower. While every flower has a wonderful story to tell, the rose stands alone in its abundant history and color meaning. From the Tara Florist Twelve Oaks website (21/08/2014), a rose represents happiness, love, hope, joy and enchantment, and is the ambassador of love.

*Roza* in Chauke's song is a talk while a man is crying for his wife. From the lyrics of the song, one can conclude that *Roza* is not just an ordinary wife who can be replaced by any other woman. In the song he even mentions one of the names of his previous wives, *Pholina* (Pauli-

na). The singer does not paint a very gorgeous, lovely and beautiful picture of *Pholina* as compared to *Roza*. He does not even get worried when other men take *Pholina* away and he is finally hooked to the beautiful and angelic *Roza*. The following lines from the poem show that *Roza* is a woman of her kind:

*Loko mo tshivela ndzilo ni tima, yoo Roza wa mina.*

If you lit the fire I will put it out, oh my *Roza*.

*Loko mo tseleka poto ni to phula, yoo Roza wa mina.*

If you put a pot on fire I will remove it, oh my *Roza*.

*Loko mo tseleka poto ni to raha, yoo Roza wa mina.*

If you put a pot on fire I will kick it, oh my *Roza*.

*Loko mo vulavula ni ta mi rahetela, yoo Roza wa mina.*

If you start talking I will kick you, oh my *Roza*.

*Loko ko ndzawuta munhu ni ta n'wi pfutsekisa, yoo Roza wa mina.*

If someone knocks I will chase him/her away, oh my *Roza*.

*Loko mikuku yi ringa ni ta yi tlhuvu, yoo Rozawa mina.*

If a rooster cries I will take it down, oh my *Roza*.

*Roza's* husband is prepared to do anything to get back his wife, even to go to the man who took her away and boldly claim his adorable wife whom he calls *mapfluxamuti* (she who makes a home to shine). The reason the man in question will fight for *Roza* is because *Roza*, like her name, is beautiful, she brings joy, love, hope and enchantment to the man.

In *Ximatsatsa* #20, the readers are further told about the adorable *Roza*. This time around his family is advising the man to marry Violet. It is very fascinating to note that these two names, *Roza* and Violet are all names of beautiful flowers. It should also be noted that even though they are all beautiful, a rose would never be compared with a violet. A rose is known and frequently shared among people who are in love, mostly on Valentine's Day, more so compared to violets. In *Ximatsatsa* #20 are the following lyrics:

*A vandzifanelivotshukana?*

Are the lighter girls does not suit me?

*Khomboranga.*

My bad luck.  
*U kwihi Roza wanga?*  
 Where is my Roza?  
*Mi nga ndzi kombeti Vhayi,*  
 Do not show me Vhayi (shortcut for Violet)  
*U kwihi Roza?*  
 Where is Roza?  
*A ndzi n'wi lavi Violet.*  
 I do not want Violet.  
*Roza u kona.*  
 Roza is there.

Based on the lyrics above, the man does not want Violet. He further shows that he adores Violet by even calling her Vhayi, but that's it, he only adores her as a woman. In the song, the man is even told about other women all over the street that he can choose from but the man does not want them. The fans do not know this *Roza* but by just checking the meaning and what a rose is associated with, they create an imaginary *Roza* in their mind. Basically, the researchers can conclude that Chauke was careful and took into consideration the naming practices of Vatsonga and Africans, in general.

#### *Matendla (She who cursed mischiefs by herself)*

The name *Matendla* has been used in *Ximatsatsa* #18. This name can be given specifically to a woman who cursed the mischiefs that she has all by herself. In the song, *Matendla* has also brought mischiefs by herself. She decided to leave the man whom she loved and instead cared for a young energetic boy who presents himself as caring. Now *Matendla* is struggling with the boy and she remembers all the good things that her previous husband was doing for her. The husband is now telling *Matendla* that she is the one who brought all mischiefs upon herself. Below are the lyrics:

*Ndzi hlayile wena Matendla ndzi ku vhaya u ta ndzi khumbula,*

I warned you that leave but you will remember me,

*U nga ndzi twi, haa, na nkani.*

You didn't listen to me, haa, you are so arrogant.

*Mina ndzi ku byerile wena Matendla ndzi ku tshama u ta dyela hi le ka Madlisa la,*

I personally told you that Matendla, stay you will enjoy because I have everything here,

*Wena u nga swi twi, wena wo tifambela khat-sa!*

But you never listened, you just vanished.

*Matendla* seems to have left her husband for a man whom she thought is her 'Mr. Right', only to realize later that the young man will provide her better than the one she was in love with. In the song, the husband is even reminding her that young men do not know how to take care of women, 'they do not know tender care'. The husband is telling *Matendla* to come back to him if she wishes to, as he hasn't remarried.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, names and naming among Vatsonga have a social and cultural significance. A name, whether attached to emotions during the birth of the child or religious influence is very important because it can influence lifestyle, behavior, and destiny of the person bestowed with that name. Therefore, people who are entrusted to name children must also take that into consideration. Names in Vatsonga, like any other tribes, can be used to identify the ethnicity of a person. Other names that Chauke uses in some of his music include, *N'wa-Magezi*, *N'wa-Mahuza*, *Tintswalo*, *Karlina*, and *Reginah*, wherein some of them are colonial names that have infiltrated the Vatsonga.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Xitsonga singers or musicians employ different naming practices to name "characters" in their songs. This will help the listeners of their music have a better understanding of the message(s) and significance of their respective songs.

### NOTE

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