

# Personal Names, Naming and Identity (Re)negotiation among Zimbabweans in the Diaspora

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## Abstract

This article discusses how Zimbabweans in the diaspora name their children to think through the dynamics of diasporic identity negotiation. Using qualitative data gathered through virtual ethnography, I grapple with the question how names and naming strategies allow Zimbabweans in the diaspora to imagine and negotiate what it means to belong to home and being in the diaspora. I make two conclusions from this study. First, I argue that there is a tendency among first-generation Zimbabweans in the diaspora to name children in ways that are symbolic of how they remain attached to their homeland's ways of knowing the world. Second, I observe that others negotiate the balance between retaining their naming cultures and working towards the integration of their children into host cultures. This they do through a bestowal of names that highlight the children's intercultural and hyphenated identities – that is, a simultaneous connection to homeland and host country.

## Keywords

Personal names, Zimbabweans, diaspora, namesakes, indigenous names, indigenous Christian names

## Introduction

Danai Gurira, a *Zimerican* actress (born in the United States to Zimbabwean parents) popular for her role in the 2018 Marvel Comics Universe movie, *Black Panther*, said the following about her Shona name *Danai*:

I didn't know my name was Danai until I was five years old. Born in Grinnell, Iowa, to Zimbabwean academic parents, I was given a nickname, Dede, that stuck before I was cognizant enough to have a choice in the matter. I remember the day my mom decided to tell me I had another name, one folks in our tiny college town struggled to pronounce. [. . .] As a typical little girl with cool cred to uphold, I wasn't too into this other name. It sounded weird the way my mom pronounced it, [. . .] Everyone called me Dede. My teachers, my friends, my siblings, me. What was I to do with this new knowledge she imposed on me? I chose to do nothing. I retained Dede; it sounded close enough to a Western name and made me feel like I fit in, to some extent at least. Though I had a pretty joyous childhood in Iowa, we were one of only two

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black families in town, and Mom and Dad already talked differently from everyone else. A strong African name? Too much. (Gurira, 2018)

In this excerpt, Gurira articulates some of the challenges that immigrants face when it comes to their given names (see also Kohli and Solórzano, 2012; Pasura, 2013). Gurira's parents gave their child born in America a Shona name 'Danai' (love one another), but, for everyday use replaced it with the nickname 'Dede'. Use of nicknames or clipping of personal names, for endearment and other reasons, is a very popular practice in Zimbabwe. But what is illuminating in this case is that the nickname replaces the original name for the main reason that the original name was considered not easy to pronounce for folks in the college where Danai was born. According to Pennesi (2014), mispronunciation of non-English names in dominant Anglo-communities carries 'connotations of the name-bearer not belonging to mainstream society' (p. 44). Therefore, it follows that anglicizing the non-English name is a struggle for inclusion, what Danai calls fitting in. As a child, Danai embraced her 'new' name, her default American nickname, because, in her view, a 'strong African name', *Danai*, could have been 'too much and weird'. These impediments, so to say, centre around issues of difference that often attract diverse forms of othering. As an adult, she however interprets her actions as rejection of her people's cultural markers and as a sign of the dominating effects of Eurocentric culture. As an adult she learnt to embrace her name as well as the Shona language. She strove to regain lost cultural identity. This loss is common in diasporic experiences (see Clifford, 1994).

I begin this article with the anecdote involving Danai Gurira to introduce a discussion of personal names and naming patterns among Zimbabweans living in the diaspora. I employ the subject of personal names and naming as a method to understand the dynamics of diasporic identity negotiation. I ask how names and naming strategies allow Zimbabweans in the diaspora to imagine and negotiate what it means to belong and what home is. Further, I engage the question how the process of naming children allows Zimbabwean parents to think through what it means to be a foreigner and how to relate to the diaspora home. In this article, I interpret 'diaspora' in the Zimbabwean sense of the term to mean any place outside of Zimbabwe, to which many Zimbabweans have escaped in search of better opportunities, in response to their country's 'crisis' (see McGregor, 2010; Mangena and Nyambi, 2022). Using the concept of diaspora in this sense is testimony to an existence of what Brubaker (2005) terms 'diaspora "diaspora"' which represents 'a dispersion of the meanings of the term' beyond the paradigmatic case of the Jewish diaspora (p. 1). The Zimbabwean crisis has been instrumental in the formation of post-2000 Zimbabwean diasporas. Though I refer to the 'Zimbabwean crisis' in the singular here, there are submissions that 'what has been occurring in the country since the turn of the new millennium is a complex and inter-related multi-layered and pervasive catastrophe that can, perhaps, best be described as a series of Zimbabwean crises' (Mlambo, 2006 as cited in Ncube et al., 2022: 3–4). According to Muchemwa (2010), 'the new millennium has been harbinger to the age of the wandering Zimbabweans scattered to all corners of the world with great concentrations in South Africa, the United Kingdom and North America' (p. 134). The Zimbabwean crisis can be simplified as the period roughly between 2000 and 2009 and beyond. It is a period which has been marked by unprecedented economic, social and political problems (Nyambi and Mangena, 2020). I focus on the diasporas created following the crisis since all the respondents in this survey were born between 1970 and 1993 in Zimbabwe. They migrated as a response to the recent national crisis in Zimbabwe. However, I am aware that Zimbabweans have always migrated as attested in the example of Danai Gurira's parents referenced at the beginning of this article (see Muchemwa, 2010). In this regard, I am interested

in the ways in which the diaspora is not just a space that Zimbabweans escape to, but a site where they (re)negotiate and (re)construct personal identities through the names that they give to their children.

Beyond this introduction, the article is organized into four sections. In the first section, I discuss existing approaches to the study of personal names and naming in the Zimbabwean diaspora to outline the article's contribution. I invoke Pongweni's (2017) and Pasura's (2013) works on the embracing of African names by Zimbabweans in exile during the liberation struggle and by those in Great Britain post-2000, respectively. This is done to map the ways in which this article discusses how parents in the diaspora name their children to bespeak their relationships with both homeland and the diaspora. In the next section, I highlight the methods of data collection used in this study. Finally, I analyse the data focusing on how Zimbabweans in the diaspora actively (re)negotiate their children's identities through personal names and naming. I present data organized into two main thoughts: (a) the use of indigenous (ordinary and Christian) and English names, polyonomastics and namesakes as onomastic strategies of maintaining ties with home used by Zimbabweans in the diaspora and (b) the bestowal of names that speak to the hyper and hyphenated, otherwise 'intercultural' identities of the children to simultaneously retain the children's Zimbabwean identities as well as initiate their integration into host communities.

## Personal names, naming and migrant translational subjectivity

Interest in personal names and naming among Zimbabweans in the diaspora is low, but there is indeed interesting work by Pongweni (2017) and Pasura (2013). In a compelling discussion of the competing and complementary roles of English and indigenous languages in Zimbabwe in the domain of personal naming, Pongweni (2017) writes, 'young families in exile, before independence, not only gave their children Shona names, but dropped their own Christian first names and adopted Shona ones which were charged with political sentiment' (p. 104). He notes further that this was a politically motivated action with

its origin in two spheres of experience: the armed struggle at home and contact with fellow students and exiles from independent Africa, particularly West Africans, who always expressed surprise at *Zimbabwean exiles'* Christian names, and wondered why *they* did not take pride in *their* own culture. (Pongweni, 2017: 104, emphasis is mine)

Pongweni draws attention to an important stage in Zimbabwe's fight against colonial domination. While the broader liberation war addressed the political aspects of colonial domination and injustices, the struggle to rename oneself through dropping of colonial, especially Christian names, was aimed at a cultural revolution (see Adelman, 1975; Cisternino, 1977; Dunn, 2001 for similar examples from other African contexts). The use of Shona names in this case was interpreted as an expression of pride in one's culture.

Pasura's (2013) article on the other hand is on the role of mainstream churches in Zimbabwean migrants' maintenance of transnational ties and integration in Great Britain. He highlights that Zimbabweans in Britain strived for a connection with their homeland and culture, among other strategies, through adoption of African personal names. One of his respondents observed that 'judging by the number of people [Zimbabweans] [. . .] in this town, Birmingham, Coventry, Leeds, Leicester, and Wolverhampton, [. . .] probably say four in five Zimbabweans born in this country have Shona or Ndebele names' (Pasura, 2013: 209). In his analysis, Pasura goes further to demonstrate how indigenous names are 'not only difficult to pronounce' for host societies, but they

do potentially attract all forms of othering in terms of layered assaults (see also Pennesi, 2014). The personal name *Tendai* is given as an apt example. From Pasura's study, a respondent with a sister called *Tendai* recounts her experiences as follows:

I have a sister who qualified as a nurse and on her first job she worked in rural Essex. Then they said to her 'we can't call you by whatever your name because it is hard to pronounce', my sister quit her job when they continued to call her Tanduri Tanduri *instead of Tendai*. (Pasura, 2013: 209, emphasis is mine)

Tanduri reads like a new name that *Tendai* is given. Her identity is crossed out (Loichot, 2002) in this pervasive act of mispronunciation.

Pongweni (2017) focuses on the way the liberation struggle and contact with Africans from other parts of the continent led to the dropping of English Christian names by Zimbabweans in exile, while Pasura (2013) discusses the relevance of indigenous names in the Zimbabwean diaspora created post-2000. None of them focuses entirely on personal names and naming patterns among Zimbabweans in the diaspora in their articles. In this article, I expand on what is known and explore the ways in which names and naming are sites in which Zimbabweans in the diaspora negotiate their being away from home – their being in foreign space.

## Methods: participants and data collection

The personal names that I consider in this paper have been collected using a Google online survey between November 2021 and March 2022. In total, the study attracted 42 respondents and I collected 133 names. Where a child was given two or more names, these were counted as separate names. The respondents were born between 1970 and 1993 in different parts of Zimbabwe and are all currently based outside Zimbabwe. Theoretically, these, as first-generation immigrants, are closer to Zimbabwe than their children born in the diaspora. The children whose names make the focus of the study were born outside Zimbabwe between 1991 and 2021. The rationale in choosing virtual ethnography for data collection lies in how the survey targeted people outside Zimbabwe who are scattered in different parts of the world. The respondents live in Canada (1), Australia (2), the United Arab Emirates (3), South Africa (15), Eswatini (1), Namibia (2), Zambia (4), Germany (1) and the United Kingdom (13). In the data collection process, participants were informed of the purpose, and completion of the questionnaire was taken as consent for participation. Respondents were asked to provide information pertaining to their place of birth, current location, first names, their children's names and reasons for giving such names. Respondents were given space in the questionnaire to give information of up to three children. Other details like surnames were not asked in the questionnaire. I thus considered the data to be anonymous since there was not sufficient information provided to identify individuals.

The questionnaire contained nine short-answer questions:

1. What is your given name?
2. Why were you given this name?
3. Which year were you born?
4. In which city were you born?
5. In which country do you live now?
6. List the languages you speak in order of fluency
7. Please list the given name(s) of your child/children.
8. Why did your child/children receive this name or these names?
9. When and where was your child/children born?

## Indigenous, Christian and English names, polyonomastics and namesakes as symbolic ties to home

Most of the respondents in this study adhere to naming patterns that are familiar in Zimbabwe. Their identities while in the diaspora could thus be described as ‘hypercultural ethnic identities’ in which home country traditions and customs regarding personal names and naming remain important (Fernandez et al., 2011: 245). Personal naming patterns or ways of naming the self that are adapted from ‘home’ by Zimbabweans in the diaspora include giving meaningful indigenous (ordinary and Christian) and English names; giving children more than one name and the concept of namesakes. Indigenous Christian names, what Chitando (2001) terms ‘African Christian names’, are ‘names that are charged with Christian theological undertones . . . couched in vernacular idiom’ (p. 149). Namesakes are about recognizable relations of close identification between the involved persons (De Pina-Cabral, 2010: 323). According to De Pina-Cabral (2010)

Sharing a name with an older member of the family, whether alive or dead, involves more than simple remembrance (a quotation, so to speak) since it implies that the named person assumes in attenuated form the relational attributes of the eponym. (p. 326)

Most of the children’s namesakes stay in or are buried in Zimbabwe. The namesakes therefore speak to symbolic relations between diaspora and home. To the name givers, the namesakes will always call to mind relatives back home. They enforce remembrance of home.

### Use of indigenous (ordinary and Christian) names

As two of the respondents explained, indigenous names are particularly chosen out of the need to ‘reflect *the children’s* Zimbabwean identity’ and are ‘something to be proud of’. This is in line with Pasura’s (2013) observation that among Zimbabweans living in the United Kingdom, there is a trend towards the adoption of African names instead of European ones as affirmation of Zimbabwean cultural customs (p. 209). Kohli and Solórzano’s (2012) argument that personal names can connect children to their country of origin or ethnic group is useful in this regard. Such symbolic expression of ties with one’s home country for Zimbabweans in the diaspora takes other related forms. For instance, as Ndlovu (2010) notes, ‘most Zimbabweans who have made it *in South Africa* still hold a Zimbabwean passport or in a most symbolic manner, both a Zimbabwean and South African passport’ (p. 123). I find resonance in Pasura’s (2013) study where a respondent said: ‘Even if I was to get British citizenship, getting a red passport and taking an oath before the Queen, I will be British on paper and a Zimbabwean in my heart, I will never change my culture’ (p. 209). Through indigenous names, respondents make effort to retain an important aspect of their home cultures.

Some of the indigenous names that I encountered in this case study include Shona names *Kumbirai* (ask), *Kudzanyai* (respect each other), *Tendekayi* (be honest), *Munyaradzi* (the comforter), *Danai* (love one another), *Dadiso* (you make us proud), *Nyenyedzi* (star), *Gamuchirayi* (accept or receive); isiNdebele names *Nkululeko* (freedom), *Jabulani* (be happy), *Buhle* (beauty), *Busisiwe* (blessed) and Kalanga name *Hanani* (joy). The names go beyond referentiality to become meaningful labels. For example, in the case of *Munyaradzi*, the parents told the story that ‘God had given them comfort’ through the child. Another apt example from this survey is that of *Gamuchirayi* which was given to a child to explain how the parents received the child as a gift from God. The main point raised is that indigenous names are not treated as abstract labels, but they must at least mean something to the name giver and society more broadly (see Bariki, 2009; Herbert, 1997; Ngubane, 2013).

From the survey, indigenous Christian personal names occur with high frequency. These include Shona names such as *Rudairo* (the one who answers to the call from God), *Ndapihwa* (I have been given), *Akudzwe* (He should be praised), *Tatenda* (we thank you), *Munotipa* (you provide), *Matinatsira* (you have done us good), *Simbarashe* (God's power), *Nyasha* (Grace), *Tinodiwanashe* (we are loved by God), *Kunashe* (there is God), *Tanatswa* (we have been purified), *Anesuishe* (the Lord is with us), *Mukudzeishe* (Praise the Lord), *Panashe* (the Lord is there), *Maitaishe* (thank you Lord), *Atinzwaishe* (God has heard us) and *Akatendekaishe* (the Lord is trustworthy); and isiNdebele names *Bonginkosi* (thank the Lord), *Buhlebenkosi* (God's goodness), *Nkosilomusa* (the Lord is merciful) and *Ntandoyenkosi* (God's will). In this study, I invoke the Christian meanings of the names, but I am also aware of the fact that some of the names can have other meanings in different contexts. For instance, a name like *Tatenda* may be about gratitude shown to persons and not to God (see Chitando, 2001).

Most of these indigenous Christian names, just like ordinary indigenous ones, are meaningful, loaded names (Chitando, 2001) that archive experiences at birth and aspirations for the newborn as can be seen from the explanations offered in the case of the following names:

*Nkosilomusa*, 'the lord is merciful', was given to a boy child because the child 'had complications at birth and the mother spent time in the Neonatal ICU but the child survived by God's Grace'.

*Ntandoyenkosi*, 'God's will', was given to a third child in a family that had 'planned to have only two children' and the couple, through the name, interpreted the birth of the third child as God's will.

*Simbarashe*, 'God's power', was given to a child following six years of failing to conceive. The same applies to the names *Nyasha*, 'God's Grace' and *Tinashe* (God is with us). *Nyasha* was 'born after 14 years of waiting for a child' and *Tinashe's mother had difficulties in conceiving*.

*Samantha Tamiranashe* which mean 'God has heard' and 'we are one with God' respectively, were given to a child in a context where 'the pregnancy was difficult and God was with the family as the mother almost died. At seven weeks of pregnancy, she was wheelchair bound'.

In the case of the name *Atinzwaishe* (the Lord heard our prayer), 'the couple had lost a child who was a boy so they prayed for another boy' and 'the Lord heard their prayer'.

*Akatendekaishe* (the Lord is faithful) and *Atiropafadza* (God has blessed us) were names given to twins and the respondent gave the following explanation: 'it was just overwhelming to have these twins – we had had a miscarriage of twins and we got another set of twins and that was simply overwhelmingly gratifying so we gave them the two names'. Relatedly, Tsitsi Jaji (2019), a Zimbabwean scholar of African literature based in the United States explains her given Shona name *Tsitsi* as follows:

My name means mercy or grace, and it is the first word in the Shona version of the hymn 'Amazing Grace', a reminder that while my mother and I both came through a difficult birth by emergency C-section, we have not only survived but thrived. (p. 30)

The examples of indigenous Christian names listed so far represent onomastic narrations and expressions of gratitude to God's protection, love, grace and kindness following difficulties in child conception and complicated child delivery experiences. They thus reveal one's religious identity. With such names, the actual meaning of the name is often complemented by the explanation provided by the name giver.

### English names and the search for meaning

Elsewhere, ‘Aaron, Josh, Dana, Corey, Jack and Kathleen’ are listed as names that are given to children born to Zimbabwean parents in America, yet they do not mean anything to them beyond referentiality (Bulawayo, 2013: 247). In a Zimbabwe, and potentially other African contexts, ‘names that do not mean anything’ in themselves, but can serve to ‘address, to refer to, and to name’ (Ephratt, 2017: 90) would naturally be English-sounding words. I also found these English-sounding names common among the respondents. In this study, English names can however be further categorized into ‘names loaded with meaning’, typical English and trendy names. I have included a sub-category of ‘names loaded with meaning’ to demonstrate that English-sounding or typical English names do not always mean nothing in Zimbabwe. This also applies to the Zimbabwean diaspora as shown in the examples discussed below.

According to Herbert (1997), ‘European names [. . .] like other monomorphemic words of any language, are arbitrary labels. They may have history, but they generally have no meaning’ (pp. 6–7). Used by Zimbabweans, a significant number of what would qualify as typical English names are, however, considered non-arbitrary. This study reveals that quite a significant number of name givers look for meaning even in what would qualify as typical English names. This is the case since, in African communities, broadly, personal names are meant to be ‘semantic units’ (Herbert, 1997: 6). For instance, the name *Iser* was given to a child to reflect the name giver’s faith, hence the explanation, ‘I believe that a name should have a positive meaning as it is spiritual’. *Oriana* is said to ‘have a powerful meaning i.e., it means ‘The Golden one’’. *Liyana* was given because the name giver ‘wanted a name that has the characteristics of nature’. *Thadie* taken from Ireland was chosen for its meaning ‘loved one’. The name *Ethan* (strong) is biblical and the mother who gave the name to her child was just interested in the name’s meaning and how she could use it to archive her experiences during pregnancy hence the explanation: ‘I was so strong during pregnancy and I had complications at birth but *the child* was strong and made it’. In the case of the name *Kayla*, an explanation was offered by the mother that the child ‘looked so calm and precious when I first saw her’. The name *Sophia* was given because the name givers understood ‘the meaning for the English name to be important’, hence the explanation ‘we wanted our child to have wisdom so we named her Sophia’. The name giver thought the name Sophia was an English name, but it is Greek. This suggests that name givers sometimes have a limited knowledge of English. As a result, their interpretation of what is or what is not English is sometimes loose. From these examples, English names, in whatever form, are given by parents in the diaspora in ways that allow a retention of Zimbabwean personal naming cultures where names are not abstract labels (Makoni et al., 2007).

I encountered biblical names and discerned that these are not chosen randomly but are evidence of one’s rootedness in Christianity. Examples, with explanations by respondents, include the following:

<i>Christina</i> :	‘Rooted in our Christian faith’
<i>Dominic</i> and <i>Salome</i> :	‘I was after Christian names’
<i>Bethel</i> :	‘It means place of worship’
<i>Timothy</i> :	‘we gave the name because it means ‘in God’s honour’’

An intriguing scenario is when a child was given three names from the Bible; *Othniel*, *Arthur* and *Elliot* with the following explanation offered by the respondent:

Othniel is inspired by a man named Othniel in the book of judges he did what was right before the Lord and lead them as a judge and King, Arthur is inspired by the Legend of King Arthur and his knights.

The name giver is interested in the biographical details of the biblical figures. Biblical names were introduced to Africans by missionaries. Christianity itself was introduced during colonialism and it persists in contemporary Zimbabwe (Chitando, 2001). As shown in this study, the practice of giving names from the Bible is carried over into the diaspora by first-generation Zimbabwean immigrants.

Another category of English names, which of English 'trendy' names had the following examples from this survey: *Ethan, Kayla, Onabell, Oriana, Liam, Kourtney, Ian, Zoe, Leigh, Elise, Alana, Alexia, LeoJames, Shaun* and *Liyana*. Some parents do not seem to care about the meanings of these 'trendy' names. Instead, they like other aspects like the shortness of the names as in the parent who gave her children the names *Ian, Liam* and *Ethan*. Parents who named their children *Natalie, Camilia* and *Audrey* just liked the names. One parent gave her child the name *Tamika* simply because it is a name that they have always wanted to give their daughter. The name, according to the parent, 'does not mean anything'. It became apparent from this survey that even indigenous names may be chosen for the same reasons. One respondent indicated that they chose the Shona name *Tariro* (hope) for her child, not because of its meaning (even though it belongs to the category of indigenous loaded names), but because she simply 'liked the name'. This provides evidence to the idea that not all personal names have the potential to become images and narratives of one's life in Zimbabwe, and Africa more broadly.

Interestingly, from this study I did not encounter personal names that would belong to the category of what Mangena and Mitchell (in press) have called 'Zimbabwean English names' which are coined from ordinary English words belonging to different semantic categories. Herbert (1997) calls these 'meaningful English names' in the context of South Africa. Such names are very common in Zimbabwe (Makoni et al., 2007; Mangena and Mitchell, in press; Pongweni, 2017). Some of the respondents are bearers of Zimbabwean English names. For example, the name *Reward* (a name of a respondent born in Zimbabwe) would belong to that category. Therefore, in this case, there is a clear shift from what Ngoshi (2016) terms names in somewhat 'bastardised' or carnivalised English. This seeming shift could have been prompted by the fact that 'Zimbabwean English' names potentially attract all forms of othering (see Bulawayo, 2013 literary imagination of the idea) because they are funny (Ndlovu, 2022).

The rest of the examples show that there are other name sources and factors influencing name choice beyond life experiences. These other factors relate closely to the need to maintain contact with where one comes from and an appreciation of one's being in the world. In explaining the name choice *Mukudzeishe* (Praise the Lord), for instance, a respondent said: 'I always wanted to praise the Lord, but the name reminded me of Jah Prayzah'. Jah Prayzah, real name Mukudzeyi Mukombe, is a popular Zimbabwean musician. Music is an integral aspect of culture. A Zimbabwean in the diaspora names a child after a Zimbabwean musician based in Zimbabwe to negotiate a sense of belonging to home. Also, 'length and suitability with siblings' names' were given as reasons for name choice by a respondent whose children got the names *Ian Tanaka, Liam Tatenda* and *Ethan Tinotenda*. What the respondent calls 'suitability with siblings' names' is an attempt by the name giver to establish connectedness between and among the children. The linguistic playfulness central to such a creative exercise is something I picked in the names of some of the respondents, implying that such an onomastic practice is common in Zimbabwe. For example, one respondent explained that she was given the name *Prudencia*, because 'her parents wanted to name all their children with names that begin with the letter P'. Another parent chose the name *Liam* for her child because they loved the Irish actor Liam Neeson. Naming a child after an international actor bespeaks the name giver's cosmopolitan consciousness.



### *Polyonomastics: giving more than one name to a child*

Polyonomastics, according to De Pina-Cabral (2010), ‘allows for a sequential play on interpersonal referrals, which means that, because of naming, the person accumulates a number of identifications’ (p. 327). This accumulation of several identifications through personal naming is something that is so common in Zimbabwe. Bestowal of the first and second names is part of the current Zimbabwean naming culture (see Makoni et al., 2007) which can be traced to colonial encounter especially where the two names were African and European (Herbert, 1997). Bestowal of more than one first name, is, as this study shows, prevalent among Zimbabweans in the diaspora. The two names could be both English as in the following examples

Zoe Leigh  
 Natalie Joanna  
 Dominic Miguel  
 Salome Megan  
 Camilla Faith  
 Clare Natasha

In some cases, it could be that a child is given an indigenous and a non-indigenous (mostly English) name. These can be given in any order. For example,

*Courtney Nokutenda* (English and Shona)  
*Anesu Andy* (Shona and English)  
*Onabell Rudairo* (English and Shona)  
*Timothy Jabulani* (English and isiNdebele)  
*Joel Hanani* (English and Kalanga)  
*Andile Vladimir* (isiNdebele and Russian)  
*Joy Busisiwe* (English and isiNdebele)  
*Alana Akudziwe* (English and Shona)  
*Alexa Kudzo* (English and Shona)  
*Emma Rujeko* (English and Shona)  
*Nicholas Tendai* (English and Shona)  
*LeoJames Munashe* (English and Shona)  
*Ian Tanaka* (English and Shona)  
*Ethan Tatenda* (English and Shona)  
*Shaun Tanatswa* (English and Shona)  
*Vimbai Audrey* (Shona and English)  
*Liam Kutenda* (English and Shona)  
*Sophia Tadiwanashe* (English and Shona)  
*Ntombikayise Matifadza* (isiZulu and Shona)  
*Luise Matipa* (German and Shona)

In a few cases, children are given more than two names. For example, a child was given the names *Benjamin Samuel Wenkosi*. All the names are ‘Christian but the first one was given randomly by sibling, second prophetically, *Wenkosi* (of the Lord) complements the meaning of the second name’. The names *Wenkosi* and *Samuel* mean one and the same thing in this context. *Wenkosi* is a Ndebele Christian name while *Samuel* is a biblical name. The name choices locate a sense of the name giver’s ethnic (Ndebele) and religious (Christian) identities. Another child was given four names *Tinodiwanashe Tamika Francesca Chido*. The respondent explained the names as follows:

*Tinodiwanashe* means we are loved by God. This is a name that my husband and I chose together. *Tamika* is a name that I always wanted to give my daughter. It does not mean anything. *Chido* was a name picked by the child's maternal grandmother *Chido chemwoyo wavo* and *Francesca* was given by paternal grandmother this is her baptism name. The child's grandmother was a devout Roman Catholic.

From this narrative, it is clear how each name is formed. Using the last example, polyonomastics is a testimony to an existence of many name givers. There is a possibility that these different names also perform different functions. Herbert (1997) notes that the bestowal of two given names has its origins in colonialism in Africa. In that context the second, often a European name, was the school name (Herbert, 1997). In his autobiography, Nelson Mandela narrates how he was given the name *Nelson* as a school name (Mandela, 2008). This pattern of giving children two personal names or more persists in contemporary Zimbabwe and among Zimbabweans in the diaspora as highlighted in this study. I argue that if English language is treated as a legacy of colonial power, then giving a child two names where one is English is not only about multiculturalism but speaks to the prestige that the previously colonized peoples continue to attach to former colonial languages.

### *Namesakes, spectral fathers and grandparents*

Quite a sizable number of the respondents gave namesakes to their children born in the diaspora. One respondent said that she named her son *Nicholas Tendai*; '*Nicholas* after my husband's father and *Tendai* with my spelling. I wanted my son to have my name'. Ordinarily, in Zimbabwean, especially Shona cultures, namesakes are mainly father's and grandparents' names. Rarely do mothers give their names to their own children. So, the above example could be interpreted as a sign of a possible shift from the common norm. Namesakes, according to De Pina-Cabral (2010) normally take two forms:

one may be given the name of a live person, to whom one becomes a kind of double, or one may be given the name of the deceased relative of a third person, and assume some of the relational attributes of the deceased. (p. 326)

When one gets the name of a deceased relative, in Shona, that person, irrespective of age, gets the relational attributes of that person and as such, should be respected since they 'recall their namesakes' who are themselves respected individuals within their families (Mangena and Ndlovu, 2019: 257).

Other examples of namesakes from our survey include *Sipho Junior*, *Leojames*, *Nkosana*, *Sean*, *Benjamin*, *Lucy*, *Elliot*, *Nkululeko* and *Handson*. As De Pina-Cabral (2010) argues, 'the sharing of a personal name establishes an alliance not only between the two persons involved but also among their relations' (p. 323). Namesaking thus enables children born in the diaspora to maintain symbolic family connections with those departed and those staying in Zimbabwe. I add here that, namesaking is also one of the ways in which the children remain rooted in their ways of being in the world. This is apparent in an explanation offered by one of the respondents who gave his child the namesake *Sipho Junior*: 'I had to pass on my culture'. However, even in namesaking, name givers sometimes consider the importance of the meaning of the name, as in the following case: 'I gave my son *Tapiwa*, my own baptism name and it is a Shona name and something to be proud of. The name translates to 'given' and has a great meaning for someone from a Christian background like me'. Another example of a namesake from our study is that of an isiNdebele name *Nkululeko* which means 'freedom'. In Zimbabwe, it is one of the names which politically minded parents

gave/give to their children as celebration of political independence attained in 1980 (Makoni et al., 2007). The historical undertones in a name like *Nkululeko* are kept alive as the person named is remembered or quoted (De Pina-Cabral, 2010: 326). Personal names and their repetition, that is namesakes (De Pina-Cabral, 2010), is one way through which typical Zimbabwean naming patterns are passed from one generation to the next. Namesakes link past and future generations, and when given to children born in the diaspora, they connect them with their relatives, cultures and their homeland. I consider them as spectres in the Derrida (1994) sense of echoes of the past – in the literal sense of reliving the dead relatives and symbolically bringing into the diaspora homeland cultures.

## Intercultural children? Hyper and hyphenated cultural identities

I observed that some of the respondents bestowed to their children, names that speak to the ‘inter-cultural’ identities of the children – intercultural in the sense that over and above being born of Zimbabwean parent(s), the children have connections to other cultures especially that of host countries. This is apt in the explanation given in the case of the names *Elise Danai Oluwabukunmi*:

We gave her a first English name because we liked the meaning of the name and because we are a multi-cultural household so it was a middle ground. The Shona native name was chosen by her maternal grandparents and the Yoruba native name by her paternal grandparents.

From this explanation, I learnt that the child’s mother is Shona from Zimbabwe, hence the child’s Shona name *Danai* (love one another). The father is Yoruba from Nigeria, and from which came the name *Oluwabukunmi* (God has blessed me). This is an apt example of cross-cultural marriages possible in the diaspora space, which result in children getting names that speak to their multi-cultural identities. English is a popular source of personal names in Zimbabwe, but in the above example, it is taken to be a ‘multi-cultural’ linguistic tool that ties the family together. Giving a child three names like this can be considered as a strategy to partly ‘deal with the cross-cultural ambivalence arising from *having parents from different cultural backgrounds*’ (Fernandez et al., 2011: 259, emphasis is mine). In the case of cross marriages involving Zimbabwean men and host countries’ women, children are often given names from host cultures. One of the participants based in South Africa, who gave himself a second name *Lizwe* (isiNdebele name meaning ‘nation’), informed us that he gave his children Sepedi names because he is married to a Sepedi woman. His own ‘additional’ name *Lizwe* and his children’s Sepedi names are strategies of negotiating his, and his children’s South Africanness (see Siziba, 2015).

*Luise Matipa*, German, and Shona, respectively, were given to a child born in Germany to simultaneously connect the child’s identity to the country of destination and the country of origin. The names aptly capture the idea that one is a hybrid, has a hyphenated identity. The names can thus be taken as markers of bi-culturalism (Makoni et al., 2007). In other cases, this need to connect to both social worlds (of original home and what Mangena and Nyambi, 2022 call ‘diaspora’ home) is missing. Some of the respondents gave their children only names from host cultures. The names *Luthando*, *Ntombikayise* and *Bonginkosi* (Xhosa, isiZulu and Swati, respectively) were given to children in families that are based in South Africa and Eswatini to speak to the children’s diasporic identities. The reasons for such name choices are telling. For instance, ‘*Luthando represents the respondent’s Xhosa side*’ and they ‘*gave him the name Bonginkosi because he was born in Eswatini and they wanted something to reflect that as part of his identity*’. In the example of *Luthando*, the Xhosa name which means ‘love’, the name giver was born in Bulawayo and is competent in English, isiNdebele, Xhosa, Portuguese and Kiswahili, and by her ‘Xhosa side’, she probably

interpreted her Xhosa competency as something that had made her Xhosa. The name *Bonginkosi* is found in all Nguni languages, but the name giver here consciously connects the name to Eswatini to express her desire to see the child's 'intercultural' identity reflected in the personal name as a technique for transforming identity for integration into the host society.

Another interesting case of diasporic identity negotiation through personal names from this study is that of the children with Shona names *Tafadzwa* and *Anesu* who were born in Zimbabwe and are currently staying in South Africa. In South Africa, they have been 'renamed' or are known as *Fadzie* and *Anny*, respectively, because, according to their parents 'many people cannot pronounce *Tafadzwa* and *Anesu*. *Fadzie* and *Anny* are easy to pronounce'. In this case, the children were 'renamed' because people around them were not able to pronounce their real names. The new names sound like anglicized versions of the original. This is an illuminating way of identity negotiation akin to what Moji (2015) mapped as related to (re)naming which is a form of (dis)location. The form of identity renegotiation recorded in the story of *Tafadzwa* and *Anesu* calls to mind Danai Gurira's case evoked at the beginning of the article. Name clipping or shortening is popular in Zimbabwe. But the examples of *Fadzie*, *Anny* and *Dede* suggest that name shortening or altering is a diaspora strategy of anglicizing otherwise immigrants' indigenous names that sound unfamiliar to the host communities. In many contexts, anglicization is a survival strategy, what Clifford (1994) terms 'the skill of survival' (p. 312). As Simmonds (1996) submits, in the context of the US, 'many Black children will Anglicize their names to avoid playground taunts. . . and much worse' (p. 115). For Djadri and Hegarty (2021), anglicization of personal names by immigrants is a strategy to get to normalcy. However, such a tactic of survival has been described as a sign of 'having weaker cultural ties' (Pennesi, 2014: 46).

## Conclusion

Personal names are key indicators of identity. In diasporic spaces, personal names and naming play a huge role in shaping and reflecting the migrant's feelings about home and the host society. It is natural that first-generation Zimbabwean immigrants would feel more attached to their homeland than their children born in the diaspora. In naming their children the way they do, the parents negotiate their children's as well as their own personal (un)belonging to home on the one hand, and to the diaspora on the other. Sticking to the naming practices and traditions of the home country is a strategy of maintaining strong ties and attachments to their home cultures. In other instances, though, personal name choice is a way and strategy of initiating children's smooth integration into the host cultures. Faced with the dilemma associated with intercultural and hyphenated identities, others prefer an in-between position, of maintaining ties with home while negotiating integration into host cultures. Such parents envision that their children belong to two worlds, to their home in Zimbabwe and to the host land and they negotiate this kind of hyphenated identities by giving children two names, one from each of the social worlds. Preservation of cultural ties with home is particularly apt in the use of indigenous (ordinary and Christian), and meaningful English names. Namesakes somehow symbolically perpetuate family identity and as such remain a perfect way through which Zimbabweans in the diaspora use to remember their relatives buried in and those that stay in the homeland. Interestingly, English-sounding names are not easily associated with cultures in host countries, these are names already familiar in Zimbabwe. These were introduced through colonialism and persist to the present. The only difference in this case are the reasons for their choice. Used in Zimbabwe, such names are mainly chosen for their exotism, but in the diaspora, they at least enable integration into host cultures. The point of this study has been to discuss the diaspora as a space in which Zimbabweans actively think about their relationship to home and the host community. In that regard, I have argued that naming is not done arbitrarily but in ways that reflect the immigrants' complex relations to home and diaspora spaces.

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