The Most Popular Shona Female Anthroponyms¹

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KEYWORDS Anthroponyms. Approximation. Onomastics. Shona. Female Names

ABSTRACT This multidisciplinary qualitative ethnographic article discusses the most popular Shona female anthroponyms the Shona people of Zimbabwe's seven out of ten provinces prefer. Popular Shona names are those that are widely used in the Shona society. Through the use of insights from realist theory and sociological concepts of structure, culture and agency, this study established that the most popular Shona female names are an embodiment of diverse factors that the namer (primary agent) or namers (corporate agents) had to come to terms with within the prevailing structures (Shona societal hierarchies) and ethos (culture). It emerges that the most popular female names the namers coined were meaningful and charming names similar to the meticulous branding of products to enhance marketability. Also, the study asserts that the bulk of Shona names are shortened versions of the 'principal' name that could appear in variant forms that captures the prevailing context that gave rise to such nomenclature.

INTRODUCTION

This study follows an earlier one that explored the most popular Shona male anthroponyms preferred by females and males (Makondo 2013). The study notes that the formerly predominantly patriarchal Shona society (structure) respected one who had many girls as the people regarded him/her as the provider of daughters-in-law (varoora). Girls were highly respected as almost everyone of marriageable age amongst the Shona people was expected to marry (Kabweza et al. 1979). Marriage was also significant, as, when girls got married their families of origins received bride wealth. Marriage between families meant that they became relatives who would support each other whenever the need arose. In other words, daughters became diplomatic ambassadors of their respective families to their married families. This explains why they needed to conduct themselves well so that they would not bring reproach to their families of origin. As a result, girls were not casually named. The namers, among other things, had to make sure that they coined meaningful and charming names. Naming of girls was like the branding of whatever product which has to be meticulously done so as to augment its marketability (Makondo 2009). Notwithstanding this, instances abound were frustrations and gloomy-laden names were given because of the pressing status quo (Makondo 2008).

Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to:

i) Identify the female anthroponyms Shona females and males prefer.

ii) Examine the meanings attached to the most popular female Shona personal names.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire of ten questions was used to gather data for this ethnographic and multi-disciplinary study. Taking a cue from Miller and Brewer (2003), David and Sutton (2004) and Walliman (2004), a questionnaire with ten questions was developed. Data was gathered from 500 respondents chosen through purposive sampling method. Furthermore, insights from Jankavic (2000) and Pfukwa (2007) informed the decision to validate the gathered data through semistructured interviews held with 250 respondents. Question seven requested information on a Shona personal female name that is popular or most familiar in the locality (seven Shona-speaking provinces of Zimbabwe) of the respondents. This was followed by question eight which required the meaning of the identified name followed by question nine which implored respondents to state why they think that specified name is popu-

The exploration of the most popular female names amongst the Shona people is informed by the realist social theory (Archer 1995). This theoretical framework asserts that the social world is comprised of the 'parts' namely culture and structure and the 'people' or agents. Archer (2003) argues that the structural and cultural contexts in which individuals find themselves shape the situations which they confront which in turn influence their preferred personal names. Archer (2003) proceeds to assert that people respond

to the objective constraints and enablements from these contexts depending on the nature of their subjective concerns, personal properties and power. Furthermore, Archer (2003) notes that for something to exert the power of constraint or an enablement, it has to stand in a relationship such that it obstructs or aids the achievement of some specific agential enterprise.

Archer (1996) takes structure as being about material interests, primarily dependent on physical and human material resources. To use the Archerian discourse, it means the material relations prevalent among the Shona people are often legitimated and maintained by ideas from their cultural system. This relationship then suggests that changes in the Shona structure might culminate in changes in the Shona naming culture. It is within this milieu that the Shona patriarchal system (structure), this discussion asserts, play significant roles in influencing the resultant naming patterns.

Furthermore, the term 'culture' is used to describe the ideas, beliefs, theories, values, ideologies and concepts which are manifest through discourses used by particular people at particular times. Therefore, from a realist perspective, the Shona marriage discourses, religious discourses, naming discourses and respect for elders' discourses among others, are part of the cultural system with enabling and constraining causal powers to affect things in the world (Archer 2000).

With reference to agency, Archer (1995) asserts that the most important property possessed by people is that they have 'intentionality' which enables them to 'entertain projects and design strategies to accomplish them'. It also emerges that the systemic context shapes the situations in which individuals find themselves and creates 'strategic guidance' (Archer 1995) for people which predisposes them to act in certain ways as shall be exemplified by events that gave rise to diverse names discussed in this study. It also suffices here to note that Archer (2000) identifies primary agents as collectivities sharing the same life chances while corporate agents, as groups who are aware of what they want, can articulate it to themselves and others and have organized in order to get it (Archer 1995). This study discusses the elements of 'articulate' and 'organized' within the preferred popular female names meant to convey concerns of the heart as put across by the name givers (agents). Furthermore, the ability of primary agents to transform into corporate agents (exemplified when preferred names are honorific or plural in nature) and the ability to exercise their power is either enabled or constrained by the nature of the systemic (cultural and structural) context in which they find themselves in.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Female Naming Trends

The Nyoro people of Uganda who name boys and girls after four and three months respectively, use first names to express the namer's (agent) 'state of mind'. The Nyoro personal names, just like the Shona most popularly given names are allusive and their understanding demands some knowledge 'of the web of thought, imagery and metaphor' (Beattie 1957). To add, from Angola, it emerges that Angolan Ovimbundu women's names convey thought patterns of a people as in the name Vihemba that denotes a child whose birth was difficult and required the use of charms. Similarly, the Huli and the Wiru people of New Guinea use penthonyms (sorrow names) (Glasse 1987) to capture distressing moments they could have gone through or would be surrounding them. Furthermore, Moyo (1996) observes that the Ngoni-Tumbuka-speaking people of northern Malawi prefer names with historical importance like *Mapopa* (Wilderness-named after the death of several children) and Tafwachi (What is wrong with us) that respectively comment on the familv and clan condition.

In addition, the dominance of Christianity was observed by Saarelma-Maunumaa (1996) in Namibia who studied ten thousand nine hundred and twenty Ovambo personal names from Elim, Okahao and Oshigambo congregations who abandoned their traditional names for biblical and Finnish ones. It emerges that the phonotactics of the Ovambo written languages namely, Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama, affected the European and biblical names hence the name Mary appears as Martta, Marta, Martha, Maartha (the popular female name). Additionally, Skosana (2005) studied names and naming stages in Southern Ndebele society with special reference to females. The study by Skosana (2005) brings out interesting observations about the five naming typologies of the Ndebele women namely birth name (*ibizo lokubelethwa*), Christian name

(ibizo lokubusiswa), initiation name (ibizo lokuthomba/lokudluliswa), bridal name (ibizo lobulobokazi/lokwenda) and motherhood name (ibizo lobumma).

Popular Female Names Among Shona Female Respondents

The top five most popular Shona female personal names the study got are *Chipo* (Gift), *Tendai* (Be thankful), *Tsitsi* (Mercy), *Chiedza* (Light) and *Vimbai* (Trust) (see Table 1).

Table 1: Popular female names from female respondents

Name	Tota
Chipo	218
Tendai	171
Tsitsi	143
Chiedza	113
Vimbai	107

The overall most popular first name amongst female respondents is Chipo (Gift) as testified by two hundred and eighteen votes it got. It emerges during this study that the name Chipo is a shortened version of *Chipochangu* (My gift), Chipochedu (Our gift), Chipochedenga (Heaven's gift), ChipochaMwari (Gift from God), Chipochatapihwa (The gift we have been given), Chipondechedu (The gift is ours) and Chipochake (His /her gift) among others. The name Chipochangu connotes a namer (agent) being censured of what has happened hence this declarative response. The namer(s) is/are here declaring ownership and acceptance of the child they have given birth to. As some respondents note, this occurs mostly when the child was born with some deformities and the extended family or community (structure) were censuring the parents hence the name *Chipochangu*. This understanding seems also applicable to the names Chipochedenga, ChipochaMwari, names that identify God or Chipochemidzimu (Gift from ancestral spirits) thereby identifying ancestral spirits as the source of the child thereby exonerating the namer(s). The names therefore indirectly tell the accusers that they are missing the point as the Creator saw it fit to give them such a child and they have made peace with it. It also suggests mishaps like successive deaths of the children which might result in the surviving one being named such to convey the namers' acceptance of the preceding mishaps and the status quo.

Similarly, *Chipochatapihwa* ought to be understood within the preceding context and it passively presents the parent(s) or namer(s) (agent(s)) as beings who could not influence the type of gift they ought to have received. The namers are also identified as a united front (corporate agency) against those prepared to question their experiences. Furthermore, respondents suggest that the name might have been given because the couple has given birth to child having severe physical challenges and the namers are voicing their acceptance of the status quo at the same time warning the 'enemies of the marriage' that no one knows what the future holds. The Shona people say seka urema wafa (Laugh at someone's shortcomings when dead for you never know what tomorrow holds) as a way of discouraging people from deriding each other. This is so as the Shona society before the advances in medical sciences, regarded such births as indicative of a mother who was adulterous or a witch. This background information is necessary for the name reader to approximate the milieu that gave rise to the name and first language speakers usually are privy to this extra requisite background one needs to fully comprehend personal names. Similarly, on this point, the observation by Beattie (1957) is apt that 'it is well known that African names have meaning and that speakers readily identify' such meanings as they are part of the prevalent structure and culture.

On the other hand, the name Chipochangu, other informants note, connote a divorced mother (agent) who gave birth to a child whose father denied responsibility. In this context the name captures an event that had occurred in her life and becomes a statement to the community that is coming to terms with the rejection that had occurred to her. In this context, as Herbert (1999) observed from the South African Tsonga people, personal names are used to keep a people's history and, or, protest. In other words, the name Chipochangu becomes the summary of that whole episode. Yet, as respondents further note, the name might be the father's voice (agent in Archerian discourse), as the head of the family in the patriarchal Shona society (structure), who is declaring ownership of the predicament his family might be in. Through the name, the father then is telling his family members to distance themselves and give him the required space to manoeuvre his way without their undue interferences.

Chipondechedu speaks of a couple that has taken a united (corporate agency) protective stance against nameless people who are saying a lot about either their marriage and, or, the child. Through this name then, the namers are accepting responsibility and, are declaring such to those who might be against them. Respondents note that this seems prevalent especially when the couple had given birth to a child of another gender which the immediate family members seem to dislike. It seems to have been commonly accepted during yester years by the Shona people that a woman who gave birth to a boy child was more secure in the marriage than one who gave birth to girls only. Within this context, the name then rebuffs such perceptions thereby standing for the equality of humanity and protection of the girl child.

In contrast, the name *Chipochake* clearly suggests that the namers are not the parent(s) of the named child but interested family members or the midwife (nyamukuta) (corporate agency) who used to oversee her delivering process. Also, respondents assert that the name might suggest that the mother usually have difficult pregnancy periods or give birth in complicated ways or always gives birth to children of the same gender. Within this context, one would have *Chipochake* conveying contemptible sentiments the namers have for the couple or the concerned mother of the child.

The second most popular first name is *Tendai*. The name is also a shortened version of names like TendaiMwari (Be thankful to God), Tendai-Musiki (Be thankful to the creator), Tendaimupi (Be thankful to the giver), Tendaizvose (Be thankful for everything), TendaikunaShe (Be thankful to the Lord) and Tendainhasitawanda (Be thankful to day we have increased) among others. The name conveys thanks to beings and forces that are believed to be responsible for having given the parents the procreative power thereby identifying God in the names TendaiMusiki, Tendai-Mwari and TendaikunaShe. The first two have been expounded on in (Makondo forthcoming) and it suffices here to mention that /-She/(Lord) identifies God amongst the Shona people. In addition, the name Tendaimupi declares that children are a gift from God just as prophet Isaiah declared in Isaiah 8.16. This suggests that some people might be congratulating the mother or couple that eventually suggests to them that in essence, thanks should be given to God who gave such a gift. In fact, one notes the spirit of humility in those who are saying people should thank the actual giver of children not fellow recipients who in this case are the parents.

In addition, the name Tendainhasitawanda connotes the couple's position (corporate agency) as their immediate family has increased as well as the extended family stance that now the clan has increased. This speaks to the Shona perspective that marriage was meant to facilitate. Family growth hence they welcomed much those who gave birth to many children. This was during the time when birth controls were not yet readily available to many or not known to them. Also, many children were a form of security during wars as well as being sources of the much needed labour for agricultural purposes. Within this milieu, one would comprehend that the name was a statement declaring joy of the addition as well as celebrating on the expected future roles the added child should execute.

Attention now shifts to the third name Tsitsi (Mercy) that was given by one hundred and fortythree respondents. Tsitsi is a shorter version of TsitsidzaMwari (God's mercy), Tsitsidzedenga (Heaven's mercy), Tsitsidzake (Mercy of God), TsitsidzaShe (Mercy of the Lord), TsitsidzeMusiki (Mercy of the creator), Tsitsidzamuponesi (Mercy of the Saviour) and TsitsidzaJesu (Mercy of Jesus) among others. Tsitsi declares that the namers are in their present situation due to the provisions of the Lord. As discovered in this study, the shortened seven versions of Tsitsi are used to denote as well as connote God. For instance, the name TsitsidzaMwari connotes that something was not well (constraint in Archer discourse) hence retrospective implied reference is being made to such occurrence(s). This suggests that the namers (corporate agency) cannot fully account for how they sailed through threatening challenges except to say it was through the mercies of God or of heaven as in Tsitsidzedenga. Also, Tsitsidzedenga connotes God's dwelling place as Jesus Christ taught his disciples to say in their prayer "Our father who art in heaven..." (Matthew 6.9-13) (Thompson 1988).

Furthermore, *Tsitsidzake* should have been inspired by a reading of Psalms 139.14 in which David declares that he will praise God for being fearfully and wonderfully made. Respondents further reckon that the name might be because of diverse comments people will be passing to the family hence consolation is driven from the

realization that one is made in the image of God as Genesis 1.27 declares. In fact, the name implies concerted efforts in having evil things inclusive of the demise of the namers' marriage happen. The name also calls the alleged enemies to be merciful and give them chance so that they prove their innocence and importance in the family. It suggests one being ill-treated for reasons beyond her/his making and comprehension. *Tsitsi* almost echoes similar sentiments with the name *Vimbai* (Trust).

The three names Tsitsidzake, Tsitsidzamuponesi and TsitsidzaJesu all refer to the redemptive role Jesus Christ executed on behalf of humanity as recorded in Colosians 1.14, Ephesians 1.7; Galatians 3.10-13 and Romans 3.24-26 (Thompson 1988). Respondents assert that the names draw from the Christian exposure afforded the majority of the Shona people by missionaries (Mutswairo 1988). It emerges here that one who does not fully understand the Shona culture will only get a surface reading and understanding of Shona names that convey a plethora of meanings. In fact, this study established that many name bearers seem not to have fuller understanding of their names, a gap that can be approximated or closed by interviewing the name giv-

The anthroponym Chiedza (Light, Understanding) was the fourth most popular female name identified by one hundred and thirteen respondents. Chiedza is a shorter version of Chiedzachedu (Our light), ChiedzachaShe (Light of the Lord), Chiedzachangu (My light) and Chiedzachemoyowangu (Light of my heart) among others. Chiedza is a call for surrounding significant people to appreciate how others, here represented by the namers (agency), should be handled. Chiedzachedu suggests that the birth of the child brought joy here referred to as light to the couple or family. This might be due to delay in pregnancy (constraint) which almost resulted in marriage breakdown. Shona tradition has it that if a couple failed to have a child, the first person to be blamed was the woman and the man would be pressurised by family aunts to get another woman. The name then implies that the marriage was precariously positioned hence the future was gloomy. Informants pointed out that failure to conceive is one of the reasons why Shona marriage might be confronted with such formidable challenges as the society believes that marriage is for procreation. With reference to the Zulu society of South Africa, Koopman (1990) concludes that givers and bearers (corporate agency) are always aware of the meaning of the name and the literal meaning of the name is always directly related to the reason for giving it. It is within this context that within the first six weeks to six months of marriages the concerned Shona families will be expecting to see pregnancy symptoms. In situations when this takes long to materialize, people begin to talk negative things like 'we paid bride wealth for someone who has nothing to show for it' among others.

Also, if the Shona woman fails to conceive, she knew that the husband was to be polygamous in his quest to raise children, one of the risky moves within the prevalent HIV/AIDS epidemic. This perception is confounded by the expectation that married Shona people ought to be called by names of their children and failure to have one is the last thing Shona people can stomach. Within this context, when conception occurs and a child is born, the name *Chiedza* became apt as the child brought the much needed light which equates to joy. In essence, informants note that children afford spouses and their family joy as they perceive that even if death strikes the children may carry forward the family ambitions and name.

Furthermore, the names Chiedzachangu and Chiedzachemoyowangu are symptomatic of one (agent) who had gone through challenging times (constraints in Archer discourse) in life and the birth becomes his/her reason for survival. Some respondents submit that their initial marriage days were rocked with challenges inclusive of people calling for the end of the marriage. Some of the reasons given were that the woman was not fit for the man concerned, allegations that the pregnancy was not for the man concerned or denial due to family feuds or because one had married someone from a certain region or family. Within these trying moments, the coming of the child becomes one's light or motivation for survival. A reading of this name makes it clear that Shona naming is serious business as names convey matters of the heart that Shona societal structure seems to prohibit.

Vimbai (Trust) was the fifth most popular given name that was given by one hundred and seven female respondents. Vimbai is also a shorter version of VimbainaShe (Trust in the Lord), VimbainaMwari (Trust in God), VimbainaYe (Trust in Him), VimbainaJesu (Trust in

Jesus) and VimbainaTenzi (Trust in the protector) among others. As disclosed by the interviewees, the name Vimbai was given to a child whose biological connection with the father was doubted. This problem usually occurs when the mother falls pregnant before marriage and later settles for a particular husband. If the child has some looks or features regarded as unique and foreign to the father's family, suspicion would arise leading to the name Vimbai. Also, in instances when the husband was working and staying away from the wife and pregnancy occurs, especially if the wife was suspected of being promiscuous, the name Vimbai might be given by the accused spouse. The name becomes her call for trust to prevail as she would be declaring her innocence. The name also becomes a diplomatic weapon within the HIV/AIDS epidemic which calls for faithfulness to one's married partner to avert the scourge (Makondo 2009). Also, in instances that the son-in-law might not have paid bride wealth as stipulated by the Shona culture and the father-in-laws are insisting that he pays up, the name becomes a call for restrain and patience. The name is a call to have the father-inlaws respect his pledge to pay up when his material position improves.

In addition, the names VimbainaShe, VimbainaMwari, VimbainaYe, VimbainaJesu and VimbainaTenzi all are a call for the couple or family or community members to put their trust in God who can see them through whatever challenges they might be having in life. Respondents note that these names are suggestive of people embroiled in family wrangles, deaths, poverty or other diverse mishaps which have reduced life into meaninglessness. In such predicaments, the names call those involved to persevere in their trust in the Lord, Jesus and God. This speaks to the Shona people's belief in Mutangakugara (The one who existed before anyone) whom they regard as the all-powerful and knowing thereby highlighting the centrality of religion (culture in Archerian discourse) in Shona naming system.

Popular Female Names Among Male Respondents

The discussion now focuses on the popular female names as given by male respondents. The most popular names from this gender are *Chipo* (283), *Tendai* (206), *Rudo* (Love) (136), *Tatenda* (We are thankful) (125) and *Nyasha* (Grace)

(121) (see Table 2). The genders agree only on the first two names *Chipo* and *Tendai*.

Table 2: Popular female names from male respondents

Name	Total
Chipo	283
Tendai	206
Rudo	136
Tatenda	125
Nyasha	121

The explanation of names *Chipo* and *Tendai* has already been given and focus is now on the third name Rudo. Rudo (Love) is a call to have this principle cherished and demonstrated so that the marriage can be enjoyable. The name Rudo can appear as Rudorwake (His love), Rudorwa-Mwari (God's love), RudorwaShe (The Lord's love), Rudorwamuponesi (The love of the Saviour) and Rudorwavo (Their love) among others. Rudorwake can be taken to refer to the love of the other couple though some respondents reckon that it implies the love of God. In addition, the names RudorwaMwari, RudorwaShe, Rudorwamuponesi and Rudorwavo are explicitly making reference to God. The names connote namers who are making reference to lack of support from significant family members and friends except God. The names are therefore declaring that the couple have enjoyed whatever they have because of God's provisions. Also, these names are feminine for love in the Shona culture seems epitomized by females. In fact, the Shona culture taught girls to be always attractive to men.

The personal name *Tatenda* mentioned by one hundred and thirty-six male respondents is ranked the fourth most popular female name by male respondents. Tatenda is shorter version of TatendaMwari (We have thanked God), TatendaiShe (We have thanked the Lord), TatendaMusiki (We have thanked the Creator), Tatendanechipo (We are thankful of the gift) and TatendaMuponesi (We are thankful of the Saviour) among others. Tatenda denotes that the family births gave boys and girls hence the namers and their families are jubilant. This achievement is important for Shona people were prepared to do almost anything to have a child. Musengezi (1998) elaborated on the ridicule a woman endured for giving birth (constraint) consecutively to four girls while the husband's family was expecting a boy child. With the improvements in

education, science, acceptance of religious teachings like the Christian view that children are a gift from God (Isaiah 8.18) and the teaching of equal rights that became topical in this era, the Shona people are gradually accepting whatever child they give birth to.

The idea of thanking is also put forward in the diverse versions of *Tatenda*. For example, children are regarded as gifts as in *Tatendanechipo* that one must give thanks for. The Lord in *TatendaiShe*, Creator in *TatendaMusiki*, Saviour in *TatendaMuponesi* and God in *TatendaMwari* are all mentioned as beings that need to be thanked for the gift of procreation. The names here therefore identify two agents namely the namer(s) who are executing their role of thanking the other agency that facilitated procreation within the prevalent religious culture. This speaks also to the identification of structures of power that controls human life.

The fifth most popular female name given by one hundred and twenty-one male respondents is *Nyasha* (Mercy). The name echoes the namers' acceptance of the role of God or ancestral spirits that enabled them to have the child. The submissiveness and acceptance of the name comes out predominantly. The name can appear as *Nyashadzake* (His mercy), *NyashadzaMwari* (God's mercy) and *NyashadzaShe* (The Lord's mercy) to name a few. These names identify the owner of the good tidings as God hence He is thanked for such provisions.

Composite Popular Female Names

This section identifies the top female names from female and male respondents. The overall top five names are Chipo (501), Tendai (477), Rudo (375), Tatenda (258) and Tsitsi (254) (see Table 3). One notes that these names are statements that seem to be precise and straight to the point especially to people who are not the first language speakers. Yet, in essence, all the five names have their diverse longer and more complicated versions which require readers' reading in-between the lines for them to get at the denoted and connoted meanings. This can be achieved through approximation of the milieu that gave rise to each name and the use of deconstructional approaches (Makondo 2009, 2010). The readers need to decompose the denotative and or connotative meanings of names through use of historical, semantic, pragmatic and semiotic tools among others.

Table 3: Composite popular female names from questionnaire

Name	Total
Chipo	501
Tendai	477
Rudo	375
Tatenda	258
Tsitsi	254

It emerges that the values and attitudes the most popular female names advocate for are open, supportive and caring. Therefore, Shona people name usage presumes a continuing discourse a name reader/hearer must approximate to make sense of the denotative and connotative import of given names.

CONCLUSION

This study established that male and female respondents agree that *Chipo* and *Tendai* are the most popular female Shona personal names. It also surfaced that one must be aware of the fact that most of the Shona female personal names are shortened versions depending on the context that gave rise to them and the context of their usage. The pragmatic benefit of the realist social theory as an analytic tool as well as sociological concepts of structure, culture and agents as organisational framework tools for a study of personal names also came to the fore. Also, the idea that Shona female names convey multilayered meanings that need a competent reader to decipher them cannot be overemphasized. This speaks to the point that name readers need to deconstruct and approximate the cultural milieu to get at the reasons that gave effect to the names at their disposal as such names are statements and embodiments of lifetime experiences as experienced by the namers (corporate agency).

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that, at a comparative level, a similar study needs to be done aiming at establishing popular female names among Ndebele speakers of Zimbabwe. Also, a similar study can be done to establish emerging regional naming trends.

NOTES

Data for this study partly draws from a UNISA Financial Aid Bureau 2009 funded doctoral study that

was ably promoted by Professors D.E. Mutasa and D.M. Kgobe.

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