

Retaliatory Rights in the Naming of Children in a Zulu Family: A Narrative Analysis

Evangeline Bonisiwe Zungu

Abstract

In Zulu society, naming is seen as a family business where not any member of the family can be a name giver, but any member of the family can give a child a second name in response to first name, if the first name carries connotations which are seen as negative. Anger and bitterness, with an intention to get revenge, is sometimes a strong force behind naming, and other family members have rights to give second names which may neutralize the potential conflict expressed in a first name. There are, however, occasionally exceptions to the norm of naming freedom in a family, and this article is a case-study of one such exception. Using narrative analysis techniques, the research behind this article examines how the cultural tradition of the male head of a household holding the final authority can prove to be detrimental to names given to children in a particular family. The article looks at how such an authoritarian position can affect family members who have no retaliatory rights in the naming of the children.

Keywords: Retaliatory rights, naming, narrative analysis, Zulu family, dialogue.

Boni Zungu *Amalungelo Okuziphindiselela Ekwethiweni Kwamagama Ezingane Emndenini WamaZulu: Kuhlaziywa Ngendlela Ebikayo*

Isifingqo

Emphakathini wamaZulu, ukwetha igama kubukwa njengomsebenzi womndeni lapho kungabi yinoma iliphi ilungu lomndeni elingavele lethe igama, kodwa noma yiliphi elinye ilungu lomndeni lingetha igama lesibili kuwumphendulo wegama lokuqala uma kubonakala ukuthi igama lokuqala linohlalwana. Intukuthelo nokuphatheka kabi, ngenhloso yokuziphindiselela, kwesinye isikhathi kuba yikhona okunomfutho ekwethiweni kwamagama, futhi amanye amalungu anamalungelo okwetha amagama esibili okungathela amanzi enxushunxushwini engaqubuka elethwa igama lokuqala. Kukhona, nokho, okungavamile ekukhululekeni kokwetha amagama emndenini, futhi le athekili iwucwaningosiboniso salokhu okungavamile. Sisebenzisa amaqhingasuka okuhlaziya izingxoxo, ucwaningo lwale-athekili luhlola ukuthi ngokwesiko inhloko yekhaya enezwi elingumnqamulajuqu kungenzeka kanjani ukuthi lokhu kube nomthelela ongemuhle emagameni aqanjwa izingane emndenini othile. Le athekili ibuka lesi simo somnqamulajuqu ukuthi siwathinta kanjani amalungu omndeni angenawo amalungelo akuziphindiselela ngokwetha amagama ezingane.

Introduction

Retaliatory rights in the Zulu naming system imply that every member of the Zulu family has a right to give a child a name in response to the first name. This becomes a dialogue within the naming system. The dialogue that goes on within the family through names is a reflection of how each parent longs to be heard and have the last say in the matter. As long as there are children being born, the dialogue continues, e. g. in the name *Qondeni* (what are your intentions?) a name which was given to a girl by the father because his wife was always disrespecting him and *Cijimpi* (preparing the regiments) was a response given by the wife to her son who came after the girl. This name, (*Cijimpi*) was aimed at telling the husband that the wife was prepared for war if it ever came to that. *Hletshiwe* (the one they gossip about) was a name given to the first born girl by the mother who believed that her co-wives were insinuating that she was barren because she could not conceive for the first three years of her marriage and *Zwabethini* (what did you hear them say?) was a name given to a boy who came after the girl by the father who put the burden of proof on the mother of the child.

Table 1: Further examples of dialogue:

Name given first	Name given as a Response
<i>Thangithini</i> (what do you want me say?)	<i>Khulumakuhlezi</i> (people are always talking)
<i>Zibuyile</i> (the lobola cattle have returned)	<i>Shongaziphi</i> (which cattle are you referring to?)
<i>Funonjani</i> (what kind of a wife do you want)	<i>Mtomuhle</i> (a beautiful person)

In these combinations the name given first is airing a particular grievance and the second name is directly responding to it. The second name may be a sarcastic comment, a justification or a boastful utterance directed to the family members/s concerned. Suppression of these rights is detrimental to peace and harmony within the homestead as the family members have no other means of retaliation except in venting their pent up emotions through names. Retaliation is important to the Zulu people who cannot confront each other within a homestead because of the respect they have for their ancestors.

The article is centred around a man who was born in the eNothweni village in kwaMaphumulo area. In this article he will be referred to as the storyteller. He has four siblings, two brothers and two sisters. His elder brother died when he was in his mid-twenties. His father suffering from mild epilepsy so, he had to rise to the challenge of being the storyteller. He had to drop out of school before completing his matric. He got a clerical job working in the Court in his area to support his family and his then fiancé whom he had made pregnant in her Form I year. The challenge he was faced with proved to be unbearable for him. He decided to start building his homestead a kilometre away from his parents' and named the homestead 'eNkonza' (the place of veneration). He then moved to work as a clerk in the mines after breaking up with his fiancé. It was a messy breakup and he was bitter about it. Years later, he met a younger woman and married her. She bore him six children whose names form the primary data of this article. These names are oral versions of his personal experiences as he perceives them. Ordinary people tell their stories of their lives on a daily basis. These stories told and re-told through personal narratives and names. These narratives give a narration of their experiences and incidents which take place

in their lives. This type of narration makes them feel that they are in control of their lives. Langellier (2001:700) reiterates this point:

Embedded in the lives of the ordinary, the marginalized, and the muted, personal narrative responds to the disintegration of master narratives as people make sense of experience, claim identities, and 'get a life' by telling and writing their stories.

The story is being told through names. Names are bestowed on the children to tell the story about the family background and the relationships the members of the family have with the storyteller. They share their perception of what really took place in their lives from their perspectives. The storyteller is the primary name-giver in this case-study. Contrary to what usually happens in the Zulu naming system in this case the storyteller believes that other family members have no retaliatory rights in the naming of the children. The mother is specifically barred from naming her children. Zulu culture dictates that when a woman marries and bears children, the children belong to their paternal family. The rituals that are performed for them are that of their paternal family. This translates to the father having more say on their upbringing than the mother. On this article the father pushes this a little further by dictating that he is the only one who can name the children.

The grievances that family members have with each other are discussed as and when they happen within the family. The family is, however, not allowed to have any kind of confrontation as such behavior may upset harmony and anger the ancestors. Ngidi (2012) mentions that:

The living descendants use names to express their dissatisfaction with one another. The families perform rituals to appease the living-dead. The living-dead are perceived as guardian angels who are closer to God. They are believed to be able to reward good behavior and reprimand those who are not behaving in an acceptable manner.

Names connect people to their living-dead. It is therefore important that this relationship with the living-dead is maintained. Avoiding confrontation is important to people who want to appease their living-dead, who control their lives. Personal names act as a deterrent to angering the living-dead. In a situation where getting even is not an option, opting for a name to voice your

disapproval is the easy way out. Names become communication channels between members of the family and the community at large Bhengu (1975:52).

The storyteller seemed to have suppressed issues he might have had with his family and only brought them up when it was time to name his children. The names paint a vivid picture of what happened earlier in his life. They give a full description of the type of relationships his family members have with each other from his perspective.

Research Methods and Narrative Analysis

It is important to note that a narration is a one-sided story and only the storyteller's perspective is brought into light. In the case study the viewpoint of the storyteller is the most important one. The people who these names are directed to do not have a right to voice their dissatisfaction or disapproval with the names given to their children. Labov (1997:12) comments thus:

One feature of oral narratives of personal experience that distinguishes them most sharply from literary narrative is that in literature, one can switch viewpoints, take an impersonal viewpoint, and enter into the consciousness of any or all of the actors. In oral narratives of personal experience, there is only one option. The events are seen through the eyes of the narrator.

There appears to be a relationship between the development of an individual's voice as an essential component in the development of their sense of self. The learners' talk allowed them to begin to think about what had happened in the past in their school and family lives, in their current practice in the education programs and the community, and to predict what the future might hold. A narrative is developed or constructed in the telling.

McAdams (1993) believes that each person constructs the core themes of a life story that is revised throughout life. The stories people compose define who they are and they can identify with them. Narrative analysis gives coherence to experience, and unity and purpose to life. A life story may cause storytellers to view themselves as victims of circumstances, survivors of misfortunes as is the case in our case study. Narrative research

may obtain information not usually available by other methods, such as in-depth understanding of the subjective experience of particular individual.

Narrative analysis in this article provides descriptive knowledge of names collected which must be understood within the context within which the names are found. The context within which the name functions is as important as the reason for giving the name. Griffin (1993:1097) mentions that narrative analysis focuses on the ways in which people make and use stories to interpret the world. It views narratives as social products that are produced by people in the context of specific social, historical and cultural locations. Narrative analysis views narratives as interpretive devices through which people represent themselves and their worlds to themselves and to others. The fact that storytellers make these stories is the most important aspect of narrative analysis.

The storyteller in this article gives his interpretation of the world and his experience in it through names he bestowed on his children. Redwood (1999:663) states that:

Stories are told about stories and narratives thus become a form of social interaction. Although narrative can be regarded as both phenomenon and method, the term ‘story’ is usually used to describe what the actor tells and the ‘narrative’ is the researcher’s account.

Narrative analysis enables the researcher to study ‘how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves’ (Connelly & Clandinin 1990:14). The more they tell these stories the more storytellers believe that their conviction is the only truth. Their belief about the injustices is almost a re-victimisation of themselves. Storytellers strongly believe that they have a just course to revenge. Revenging through names is a permanent reminder of the wrongdoing.

A life story as Lauritzen & Jaeger (1997:35) states, can be a work of fiction, but can also ‘be factual, as in telling of an event that has happened in your personal life’. Narrative analysis provides an organizational structure designed to be responsive to analysis. The author of this paper adapted a typical narrative framework which focuses on the ‘core narrative’ through four categories from Mishler (1986:236-237):

- Orientation – describes the setting and character
- Abstract – summarizes the events or incidents of the story

- Complicating Action – offers an evaluative commentary on events conflicts and themes
- Resolution – describes the outcomes of the story or conflict.

The resulting analysis moves towards a reduction of the narration to answer the question ‘what is the point of this story?’ (Mishler 1986:236). This type of analysis is quite formal and structured and its ‘power lies in its generalizability’ (p. 241). As each narrative unfolds it is contextualized by the purposes of the interview and the interviewer in terms of the research and of the storyteller in terms of self-presentation. Murray (1986:277-278) refers to this as:

‘life construction’ where the story may not represent ‘truth’ or reality but is an attempt...at information reduction, in which the large variety of life events is reduced to a set of narratives. This representation convinces the listener or the reader [of its trustworthiness], if it is coherent, whole and if the emplotted events conform to the conventions of comedy, romance, tragedy and satire.

Critical Reflection on the Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is not without limitations. Richmond (2002) suggests that some of the limitations of the narrative methodology are related to: ‘the illusion of causality, the significance of repeated patterns, and the possibilities and potentialities of transferability’.

The Illusion of Causality

In this case study the patterns of the storyteller’s self-identity, his culture, socialisation, community and any transformations that take place over time are scrutinised by the storytellers in the telling of his story. As a researcher, I had to be mindful of the difference between ‘the events as lived and the events as told’ and to avoid ‘the illusion of causality’ (Connelly & Clandinin 1990: 6). The storyteller's identity remains the same although the story may change with facts being added or subtracted. The lapses in memory may also have a contributing effect on the way in which the story is told.

The Significance of Repeated Patterns

The interviewing of the people to which names are directed allows for some comparison between story cases, which in turn can be used to understand how these people are affected by the constant reminder of things which took place. No single response provides a full understanding of the misrepresented facts journey toward literacy, but each provides 'pieces for a 'mosaic' or total picture of a concept' (Marshall & Rossman 1995:88).

Transformability: The Mutability of Stories

There is the possibility that storytellers tell you just what they think you want to hear in order to support their viewpoint. In order to reduce this, the author interviewed other members of the family who are family with the lives and the kind of a relationship the people concerned have. In this way the author hoped to verify the narrative. These narratives allow transformations to occur; and the interviewing of family members allow the storyteller and the people to which names are directed, rather than the author relying solely on her own interpretations.

In Zulu society, naming is seen as a family business where not only any member of the family can be a name giver, but any member of the family can give a child a second name in response to first name, if the first name carries connotations which are seen as negative. Anger and bitterness, with an intention to get revenge, is sometimes a strong force behind naming, and other family members have rights to give second names which may neutralize the potential conflict expressed in a first name. There are, however, occasionally exceptions to the norm of naming freedom in a family, and this article is a case-study of one such exception. In the research conducted, the storyteller is the only one who can bestow names which could be used as first names, any other name (given by other members of the family) can only be used as a second name. This is due to the fact that the storyteller believes that a lot of people wronged him and that they have to pay him.

A narrative links the past to the present although the account of occurrences are not always unbiased. The essence of these narratives is to make connections, to link events, feelings and experiences into logical sequence. It causes the storyteller to make sense of what happened to him and this can give him some feeling of control. When the storyteller was asked to

tell his story, he was afforded an opportunity to create an identity. His story is told through names in different ways, linking different events and experiences, leaving different gaps in order to fit specific contexts. These names are arranged in the order of birth (eldest to youngest).

Zakithi (my sisters)

Full narration: *Ntombizakithi ezithanda amadoda* (my sisters who are always chasing men)

The name is aimed at showing the women of the household that their promiscuous behaviour is disapproved of. The storyteller says he was embarrassed by his sisters' promiscuous behaviour. None of his sisters were getting married, instead, they were falling pregnant out of wedlock and moving in with their boyfriends. To air his frustrations and to show that he does not condone their behaviour, he gave this name to his first born daughter.

Bacebile (they are rich)

Full narration: *Bacebile oMaChamane ngezinkomo zami* (MaChamane and her family are rich because of the *lobola* I paid)

This name is directed at the storyteller's former mother-in-law. It has less to do with the *lobola* money that was never paid back and more to do with demeaning the person who gave birth to someone who broke his heart. In Zulu culture, the *lobola* money is never paid back to the husband's family unless the woman remarries. The man, well aware of this, was still bitter about being dumped that he had to make his feelings known. At the time his second daughter was born; twenty years after the breakup; his fiancé was still unwed. He, however, felt that his mother-in-law was enriching herself with the money he paid.

Ntandoyeningi (democracy)

This girl's name is to air disapproval for the way his siblings defied him and left home. The storyteller is a staunch believer in discipline and believes that democracy is taking away his authority, and that is to the detriment of his family values. He is blaming the new political dispensation which gave birth to democracy. Democracy gave people in his community, his siblings, his wife and his children, choices. Having choices, in his opinion, is the reason why people do wrong things and make wrong choices.

Bhekekhaya (looking after his home)

The anger seemed to have subsided the moment the wife gave birth to their first born son. The storyteller had somebody who was going to carry the family name. Somebody, who would become the storyteller one day. The name was an instruction for this boy to look after the homestead.

Bhekokwakhe (looking after his own)

There was hope that this boy would do better and make a good life for himself and will achieve stuff that he will have to look after.

The Function of the Names Collected

Names forge a relationship between the name-giver, the name-bearer and the society. They sensitise the society about the intimate affairs of that particular family. In this case study, they are a narration of daily occurrences experienced by family members. Most commonly, any senior member of the family can bestow a name on a new born child. It is then up to the mother to choose the name she prefers for official documents like birth certificates. The primary function of the names discussed here to identify the referent. The secondary function is to air discontent – (communicative function). The aim is to voice that which the name-giver perceives to be a challenge or problem in his/ her life.

The hierarchical status of the family within which these names are found is a one-man-show, authoritarian kind of a relationship. The storyteller is voicing his concerns, venting his anger and hoping that those who wronged him might change their ways or be condemned by the airing of their wrongdoings in public without allowing them to respond. This idea is reiterated by Gumede (2000:51), he mentions that names function as:

Accurate barometers of the equilibrium within a social group, and provide sensitive access to understanding relationships and status hierarchies operating within the group.

The conflict upon which these names are based are incidents and misunderstandings which happened decades before the children were born. The conflict is about the history of the storyteller's life. These names are his recollection of the injustices which happened to him. As Richmond (2002:3)

puts it, 'in this approach to narrative analysis, the narrator may tell the story as a tragedy and describe self as a tragic hero or heroine, or as a myth, with self-described as a mythic survivor or victim'.

The storyteller's intentions were to let the people who 'wronged him' know that he has not forgotten the unfair things they did to him and that he disapproves of their actions up to this day. Narrative functions to reflect back on events and retelling them can provide meaning and coherence to, and perspective on, experience and one's social traditions. It can construct a person's knowledge including a person's sense of self or identity. It also produces an organizing principle for human action. It alters the teller's way of thinking about events, and/or sense of identity. It also brings about emotional adjustment and healing.

The patterns of a storyteller's self-identity, their culture and community and any transformations that take place over time are telescoped by the storyteller in the telling of his/her story. As a researcher, I had to be mindful of the difference between 'the events as lived and the events as told' and to avoid 'the illusion of causality' (Connelly & Clandinin 1990:6). In this case, the storyteller is forever the victim. Through each name the storyteller's past is revealed in a peculiar way. Names collected function in an oblique way to point out any injustice a person might have experienced. They do not necessarily give a person time to change his or her ways although the suggestion comes out strongly. The main aim of bestowing a name is to voice the name-givers concerns.

A narrative is almost always a one-sided story, it is therefore important to get the perspective of the people names are directed to and the name-bearers themselves.

The Wife

On my conversation with his wife it became clear that she feels helpless about the situation and totally disapproves of the names given. The names she (the mother) gives to her children end up being their middle names. She can't protest against the names given to her children even though she feels that they are crude and provocative to people in the same family and in the community. Initially, each time she had to call her child's name out loud it frightened her, thinking about people referred to in names, who might think that she is also in on this ploy. She feels that the names are demeaning to the people, especially because these things happened decades ago, if at all.

The Children

Three of the five children are teenagers and in High School. They made it clear that they did not notice anything bizarre about their names because their mother always shortened their names. It was not until they started school and other kids made fun of them. They expressed that though they do not mind bearing the names, they do not appreciate the sarcasm people use when they say their names in full.

The Sisters

The storyteller's older sister has since passed away. She was at loggerheads with the storyteller because she had two kids out of wedlock. She left them at home with her mother and left to live with a man in the nearby town. His surviving sister is not on speaking terms with him because of these names. She says she has gotten over the names themselves but not the shame her brother brought her and her late sister by hanging their dirty laundry in public.

The ex-Fiancé

The woman the storyteller was engaged to said, she was disgusted when she first heard of the name which implied that her family benefitted from the *lobola* money. She says she was more surprised especially because it had been over a decade since their breakup when he named his second daughter. She wanted to make it clear that, the *lobola* money was in no way beneficial to her family because he paid R650-00 all inclusive (in the late 70s). They were traditionally married because the *lobola* and *izibizo* had been sent to her family. She was spending half the time at his house as they were making preparations for the wedding. She says the names are a constant reminder of a past she chooses to forget. She feels the bestowal of name is a continuation of the abuse she suffered at the hands of the storyteller when they were together.

Living Up to the Name

Most African people give positive names to their children because it is believed that names can determine the name-bearer's future. Parents bestow names that show their feelings and make known their wishes about their

children's future, e.g. *Mpumelelo* (success) for a boy and *Nomfundo* (mother of education) for a girl. Usiaghan (2006) states that:

... your name is more than your identity, your name can influence your character, your name can either make or mar your future, and your name is manifestation of your destiny, some people's problems as a result of their names. Names without careful consideration bring shame and reproach.

Concerns expressed by the mother of the children discussed in this article concur with what Usiaghan points to. She is afraid that these names might shape the behavior and the future of her children in a negative way. She is a Christian and would prefer names which reflect their belief and trust in God. Most African people who are Christian believers do believe they cannot use names that are not about blessings and praising God.

Members of the family who are Christians felt that these names are not good for the children and their future. The belief that names shape the future of their bearers is deeply rooted in the minds of the family. The fear that if these children live up to their names that might impair their future.

Conclusion

The storyteller is of the opinion that boys make better children than girls. He thinks that girls might end up like his sisters and be promiscuous. He expects very little good to come from them. As for the boys, he expects them to make something of their lives and have prosperous lives. These names reflect what happened in the storyteller's past and to him they are a direct antidote to his pain and injustice he believe to have suffered as a result of his family.

It happens sometimes that the name-giver perceives the situation in a wrong way, in which case the members of the family feel compelled to respond. The dialogue provided by retaliatory rights in name-giving neutralizes the situation with the homestead, because each member of the family can voice his or her opinion. In this article family members are not allowed to respond or to air their feelings as it usually happens within the Zulu naming system. This narrative is authoritarian in nature. It is the storyteller's voice and feelings that are heard. Names discussed in this narrative are perception-based, which means that if the perception is wrong

than the name given is not justified. That is unfair to the person whom the name is directed to, especially because a name is a constant reminder of the wrongdoing. Another important factor to consider when looking at names, is that they are unforgiving entities. Even when the ‘wrongdoer’ changes his actions, the name is still a reminder of what once was. As family members narrated their stories, they concealed themselves in a particular way. The process became, as Connelly & Clandinin (1990:5) put it, ‘in part a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through the inquiry’. The storyteller chooses a particular way to connect events and make them meaningful for others. This became useful in this research because the storyteller gave his interpretation of his past rather than a mere reproduction. Reissman (2003:06) mentions that:

The ‘truths’ of narrative accounts are not in their faithful representation of a past world, but in the shifting connections they forge among past, present and future. They offer storytellers a way to re-imagine lives.

What Reissman emphasizes is the fact that storytelling is a way in which storytellers may at times tell stories to support their viewpoint on the occurrences since passed. These narratives may not always be the truth that everyone involved in the storyteller’s past life agree with, it is the truth as storyteller remember it. It is possible for the storyteller to have memory lapses which may lead to the storyteller filling in the gaps to make the story more credible. The methods reviewed in this article are suited to different kinds of texts, but each provides a systematic way to study narratives of each storyteller.

References

- Bhengu, SME 1975. *Chasing Gods not our Own*. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter.
- Connelly, FM & DJ Clandinin. 1990. Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry. *Educational Researcher* 19, 5: 2-14.
- Griffin, LJ 1993. Narrative, Event-structure Analysis and Causal Interpretation in Historical Sociology. *American Journal of Sociology* 9, 5: 1094-1133.

Retaliatory Rights in the Naming of Children in a Zulu Family

- Gumede, MA 2000 *Compliments and Caveats: An Implicated View of Zulu Naming as a Retaliatory Function in the EmaQwabeni and eMathulini Areas of KwaZulu-Natal*. Unpublished Masters Dissertation. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Labov, W 1997. Legacy for Narrative Research and its Ironies. *Journal of Narrative and Life History* 7, 1-4.
- Langellier, J 2001. *Storytelling in Daily life*. CA:Temple University Press.
- Laritzen C & M Jaeger 1997. *Integrating Learning Through Story: The Narrative Curriculum*. New York: Demar Publishers.
- Marshall, C & GB Rossman 1995. *Designing Qualitative Research*. 2nd Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- McAdams, DP 1993. *Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*. New York: William Morrow.
- Mishler, E 1986. The Analysis of Interview Narratives. In Sarbin, T (ed): *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*. New York: Praeger.
- Murray, M 1986. Levels of Narrative Analysis. *Journal of Health Psychology* 4: 33-46.
- Musere, J & R Redwood 1999. *Narrative and Narrative Analysis*. London: Sage Publications.
- Ngidi, EB 2012. *The Use of Personal Names in Respect of the Living-dead in Traditional Polygamous Families in KwaMambulu, Kranskop*. Unpublished Doctoral thesis, Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Redwood, R1999. Narratives and Narrative Analysis. *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 8: 663-674.
- Reissman, CK 2003. *Narrative Analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Richmond, HJ 2002. Learner's Lives: A Narrative Analysis. *Qualitative Report* 7: 39-49.
- Usiaghan, ME 2006. *Dictionary of Names Featuring 1000 English and Christian Names with Origin, Meaning, Gender Including Bible References*. Benin: El-Shaddai Ventures.

Evangeline Bonisiwe Zungu
African Languages discipline
University of the Witwatersrand.
boni.zungu@wits.ac.za