

Literature, Naming And Tradition: Literary Anthroponomastics In Mabuza's Nyuku Wa Mbyana

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Abstract

Names have been used for centuries to communicate various messages to the world around. Among the Vatsonga, names have been considered critical badges that communicated the circumstances around a child's birth, the behaviour or idiosyncratic tendencies of an individual, the descriptions of one's physical stature, among other things. Naming in the real, concrete world, is an enormous, but critical undertaking that when done in a professional manner, speaks volumes in the provision of cultural and historic reservoirs. Naming in literature is equally relevant since it is the transfer of real world traditions into written forms, but still portraying the same values honoured and cherished by the people targeted for readership. This paper explores the significance of some of the names found in Mabuza's drama text, Nyuku wa Mbyana. Purposive sampling has been used in the choice of names that the writer felt would better unravel the literary naming traits and patterns adopted by the author – in respect of Tsonga general-cum-literary naming traditions.

Keywords: Mabuza, Tsonga, name, culture, literature, characters.

Introduction

Naming is a human instinct culturally inseparable from his/her everyday drives and exploits. Chosen names are usually not only effective for what they are chosen for, but technically 'alive' and powerful enough to affect and effect possible influence in the named entity. Name givers are propelled, under the influence of nominal pushes' to study the situation under which a person or any entity has to be given a name

before they associate a name with the denomination. Carefully given names usually speak volumes about the history surrounding the named person or item, the cultural beliefs of the name-givers, their religion or even to give a name as a descriptive nickname that denounces certain unwelcome behaviour in society. In that regard, names have, for years, been esteemed as special archives for a nation's history, culture, beliefs as well as its understanding of the role of names in society. Neethling (2000:209) in Chauke (2004: 3) echoes the same sentiments in the following way:

The study of names can therefore not be isolated from the societies in which those human beings live, nor from the study of their minds, their mental and emotional processes and their behavioural patterns. Where different communities interact, it stands to reason that influence of some sort would take place, also at the level of naming.

Accordingly, names given to literary characters are highly influenced by the activities, philosophies and social nuances obtaining in the real world. A text is therefore, a world in miniature, composed of all administrative structures that are necessary to run a nation. It therefore reflects the ideologies and diurnal activities conducted in the real world and offers a smart platform to ridicule and re-direct the crooked propensities of leaders and society members of communities in the real world. Behaviours that may not be shunned or disapproved publicly in the real world may be diplomatically displayed for everyone to see how horrible they are in the literary compression of a text.

Literary naming in one way, acts as a guide for humanity. A teacher for those who would want to listen to, and follow the recommendable deeds that human beings are meant to follow. It reminds leaders, civilians, Tom and Dick, on the expectations of their people, societies and fun enough, their consciences. It reminds them of their follies, on how they walked their life paths and where they erred, and how they should explore their future endeavours. This literary platform also displays how communal artists view their communities and how they anticipate reconstructing them. Wamitila (1999: 35) sums up the above in the following way:

Characters' names ... can be used artistically to achieve a number of goals like encoding a central trait in a particular character's signification, embracing crucial thematic motifs, ideological toning as well as even showing the particular writer's point of view.

In a sense, the above citation compressively gives a hint to the notion that literary names can parade a multiplicity of perceptions surrounding the communities from which the literary writer emanates – opinions, aspirations, conflicts, philosophical nuances and the like. Silly conducts noticed in human beings are best associated, using the instrument of a name, with a literary character and successfully condemned as a way of communicating with the living that such behaviours are do not list under the expectations of their society.

Tsonga Naming Traits and Patterns

Among the Vatsonga, names form a critical inheritance inherited from times past. They are the reserves of important information which the communities concerned require for their day to day living. Seen this way, names among the Vatsonga are scarcely given for the reason of giving. Those responsible for giving names go through a serious process of situation analysis before they are fully convinced that the name they are giving judiciously spells the nature, actions, histories and idiosyncratic fashions of the named entity. Thus, given names are, under normal circumstances, bestowed “following certain observable, felt and/or uprising situations and circumstances in the social setting at issue” (Chauke and Mapindani, 2016: 1).

Names among the Vatsonga emanate from diverse conditions encompassing but not limited to social, economic, political, or legal and even though on occasion the import of these names may be disremembered, it can be distinguishable through a track of the situations which conditioned their naming, since they are condition bound (Chauke, 2015). This means that the Vatsonga will not give names that speak nothing to them or to those who either, reluctantly or willingly carry the name. It is therefore essential to point out that names among the Vatsonga are of great significance since they are social ‘books’ that carry the essentials information of society.

Literature review

Mapindani (2014) addresses onomastic issues among the Vatsonga people in Zimbabwe. In his study, he analyses nicknames given to various categories of humankind. The analysed nicknames portray various individual traits and behaviour of those nicknamed and how such nicknames affect them. The study makes it clear that nicknames spell out clearly the specific idiosyncrasies of those who carry the nicknames, and even go beyond to chronicle the undesired habits and characteristic features of the people nicknamed. It is, however, noteworthy that some nicknames are instruments meant to

energise and spiritually promote the nicknamed to continue in their good and recommendable deeds. However, of note is the fact that Mapindani's study was centred purely on nicknames as given among the Tsonga people outside the confines of literature, unlike the present study which is a literary appreciation of names given to characters. Nevertheless, it can be conceded that Mapindani's study will give enough inspiration to the present paper on how Tsonga names are given, as well as the critical role that they play in communicating and unpacking a array of socio-interactive concerns.

Wamitila (1999) in a literary analysis of Kiswahili literary characters' names, begins by recalling the Shakespearean adage to nomenclature, "What's in a name?", as nuanced by Juliet to Romeo in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Wamitila posts that, "in reading creative works we tend to identify characters basically by the names given to them", and basically informs some literary critics to analyse characters or texts through the analysis of names bestowed to characters. Wamitila points to the importance of character names by signifying names as, "linguistic or semiotic signs that play a very crucial role in the overall linguistic structure of a literary text or its signification". The ensuing quotes gives a vivid picture of the above sentiments thus:

There is an interest among critics in the names of characters that tends to go beyond the narrow limits and confines of seeing them as mere tags that distinguish one fictional character from another into the broader figurative import and implication of those names. Character names can be used as expressions of experience, ethos, teleology, values, ideology, culture and attitudes of varying shades (p. 35).

Wamitila also posits that names given to characters play a long list of roles besides individuating the named character. That is names can have semantic, pragmatic and symbolic meanings. Wamitila also makes mentions of the sense theory of proper names which sees names a naming by describing the entity that is being named. Emphasis is also added by saying that, "names in Kiswahili literature are not just merely deictic but rather have specific meaning that integrates character into its fictional life, and that can also imprison it there" (Wamitila 1999: 36, in Bal, 1985: 73). This paper will also play a critical role in informing the present study, especially in the semantic analysis of chosen names.

Makaudze and Naidoo (2016) analyses names of characters in Shona literary writings. In their analysis, they make it clear that naming practices among the Shona people are not new-panged

phenomena but are “as old as Shona society itself”. They especially point to the efficacy of pre-colonial Shona naming practices as evidenced by the naming of characters in the analysed texts, mentioning that in olden days, before their handshake with the Western form of civilization, naming was a very meaningful exercise. According to them, naming:

Conveyed a wealth of experience, and in most cases expressed the physical, moral, historical and spiritual experiences, aspirations and worldview of the people. (p. 87)

Makaudze and Naidoo, however, notes with concern that the naming of female characters during both the colonial and post-colonial periods has shifted from the original way of naming among the Shona to display a falsified imaging of the female characters. The writers also urge Shona writers to reconsider how early naming practices were carried out so as to carry out naming practices that display the reality of the Shona society. The present study will tape massively from the textual and socio-onomastic appreciation of names given to characters and how they inform contemporary African realities as portrayed in Makaudze and Naidoo’s paper.

Mapara (2016) explores naming among the Shona with reference to what he terms “grief names”. In his analysis, Mapara considers that names given to personalities are at times critical in lessening stresses, by consoling those affected by the contemplations of world problems. He also notes that such names are normally a result of happenings like divorce, rejection or even death, and that the names serve to lessen the pain and assist the affected to cope with the situations. Though the names chosen by Mapara are from a different ethnicity, the paper will serve critical posts in informing the present researcher in the critical analysis of chosen character names.

Summary of the Text

The drama text, *Nyuku wa Mbyana*, is about the struggle by teachers to win the principal post for Zamani School. This struggle involved teachers like Minkhenso (a wife to the drunkard Manoca), Xiculu, Phutuma among other unspecified applicants. Among these, Xiculu is pitied as the most victimised applicant since he strived to spent his all, and even went beyond his financial limit by borrowing money from Bazela, the most pronounced money lender, to bribe Xiphongo in the hope that all will be well when he is finally employed. Minkhenso also suffers a moral loss at the hands of both Xiphongo and Diza in expectance of the eventual attainment of the same post. After all the toils and sufferings, the post was won by Phutuma who bribed Xiphongo at the eleventh hour. On discovering this,

Xiculu was especially angry in view of how he lost his all to Diza and Xiphongo, and how he made his family suffer promising them eminent wealth and good living. The text ends by the arrest and legal punishment of both Diza and Xiphongo for their corrupt deeds.

The Naming of the Text

The text *Nyuku wa Mbyana* was named following the actions and fates of the characters who are found in the text. In naming her text, Mabuza used a proverb in its brevity, 'nyuku wa mbyana' (a dog's sweat) chronicling the toils suffered by the characters in the play but yielding nothing at the end. In the play, character suffer harassment, moral degeneration, family wrangles, humiliation and more, but the end of it all is as dark and painful as not having taken a step in the struggle for success. The full version of the proverb goes, "nyuku wa mbyana wu helela evoyeni" which means 'a dog's sweat disappears into its fur'. This proverb is generally used to describe someone who would have toiled in expectance of something beneficial but gets nothing at the end. This would be like a dog's fur that is never seen outside because it is gets into its fur and disappears.

Noteworthy in the text is the fact that characters, with the exception of one, Phutuma, are filled with either remorse or regrets when the play's curtain finally closes. Mikhenso suffers morally because she painfully succumbs to womanisers like Xiphongo and Diza on the precincts that she will get the post at Zamani School. Xiculu also regrets having made his family to suffer and got himself into debts to enhance his bribery mission in preparation for his anticipated post. Bazela's borrowed monies were either not paid at all or not paid in time, and Diza and Xiphongo finally saw the law takes its toll on them for deceiving so many applications, and for having taken bribes. These regrets throughout the text makes is the supposed sweat that comes out of the dog, which is never seen because it disappears into its fur.

The Naming of Characters in Mabuza's *Nyuku wa Mbyana*: A Literary Analysis

The naming of human characters in Mabuza's *Nyuku wa Mbyana* is a practice that involved a careful tracking of the characters behaviour throughout the play, before the playwright bestowed the names. Characters have been created to suit the very names that they were given, giving credence to the fact that names are not given for their own sake, but are carefully crafted (Mapindani, 2010) to match the predestined propensities of the characters to whom they are given. Names

are living badges principally crafted to align characters to their meanings, suggestive connotations and prophetic nuances hoped to achieve some constructive or didactic service in the lives of the living. It is believed that names are powerful constructs that do not only act as indicators of the already transpiring actions in a named being, but go on to manipulate and redirect the actions and long term plans of the named character.

The name Diza, derived from the verb 'ku Diza' being to bribe someone in expectance of something that one cannot get through normal routes, fits perfectly well to the actions of the named character in the play. In the play, Mabuza creates the character of Diza and position him as the chief examining offer who is close to the commission overseeing the recruitment of employees. This executive position gives him enough room to manipulate the governmental system on the criteria to be used in the choice of those desperately applying for jobs. In this regard, as is evident in the text, many of those flocking to Diza for mercy appear to be hopeless civil servants – largely teachers who anticipate to be placed at Zamani School as school principals.

It is pathetic that Diza takes advantage of the applicants' plight to accrue wealth for himself. In excess of the various gifts Diza accumulates through his subordinate Xiphongo, he further ventures into other people's kraals, by wooing married women who also desperately anticipate being promoted to the level of a school principal. A clear example given in the text is that of Minkhenso who eventually yielded to Diza's continual advances despite the fact that she was Manocha's wife. All this proves how Diza abused his position by expecting and accepting bribes from various individuals who thought he was the key to their success.

Another character, Phutuma, is realistically presented as a genuine human who is endowed with tricks, diplomacy and astute behaviour that physical beings possess. In Xitsonga, 'ku phutuma', and especially in the context of the text under consideration, means to astutely grab something from someone without their realisation. This could be something tangible or intangible. The victim who may be naive or just putting an excessive trust on the one playing tricks can only realise it when it is too late to recover it. In the text, Phutuma is Xiculu's close friend. The two often share matters to do with life, its challenges and successes. When Xiculu, after having spent himself off through bribes to Xiphongo and Diza, indirectly or otherwise, was fully convinced that he is the one who won the post, he goes public telling everyone of his near-

future status and even hold celebratory farewell parties with his colleagues.

It was this success breakthrough obsession that triggered his friend Phutuma to enquire how he managed to get at so high a pinnacle as to be a school principle. As a close friend, Xiculu gladly explained how he bribed Xiphongo until he assured him of the post. This unveiling of the hidden truth became the key that unlocked Phutuma's machinations to trick his friend. Phutuma made up his mind to go and see Xiphongo so that he convinces him to reverse Xiculu's deal and direct it to him. This he did and he was successful. This action blends well with his name Phutuma 'he who astutely grabs away other people's possessions'. This also shows how names can be instrumental in giving a brief but summative recap of a person's character, which unveils the wisdom of the Vatsonga people, in particular, and the expediency of the science of naming in general.

Minkhenso, being the only lady identified among the applicants, she suffers moral abuse from both Diza and Xiphongo, and in some measure, gets tempted to succumb to their advances in expectation of a better post at Zamani School. Though the two authorities know very well that they are only interested in abusing her, Minkhenso looks so desperate that she can yield to anything, including driving out at night with Xiphongo. In one dialect of the Tsonga language, the verb 'ku khensa' from which stems the name 'Minkhenso' means to agree with someone on something negotiated upon. In the context of the play, Minkhenso agrees, though with heaviness, to fall in love with Diza, despite the fact that she is a married woman who is supposed to be faithful to her husband Manoca. In one scene, Minkhenso is also seen in the dark with Xiphongo as Xiphongo devises to divert the affair from Diza to him. These love narratives makes Minkhenso a weak character who complies with any proposal by men. In a sense, she is someone who can accept any love proposal without rejection, hence Minkhenso.

Bazela is also one character found in the text. Bazela, as a noun, is derived from 'ku bazela', which means to give something to someone on top of what they have bought. The naming of this character suggests that there are what people received in the text after having made efforts to attain what they desired. In the context of the text, Bazela is a money-lender to whom people flock for assistance. He is presented as a very strict and malicious men who will take any callous measure to recover his money. This is evident in his harsh words accompanied by sjamboko beatings applied to those who default the payments. Xiculu faces a similar denouncement when he goes to borrow

money. Bazela's inhuman stature is evident in the fact that he scolds Xiculu the moment he gives him the money – before there is a slightest sign of defaulting. This gives a clear picture of how strict he is when it comes to matters to do with his business. The name Bazela herein suits his behaviour of 'ku bazela' because he gives someone money and gives a 'bazela of' by reprimanding the borrower. This way of naming characters gives credence to the fact that names are not given for the sake of naming but heralds the behaviour or character of the one who is being named.

Mabuza also artfully creates the character whom she names Xiculu. In normal, everyday language, Xiculu is a Tsonga word for 'stew'. In his exploits in the texts, Xiculu is an adventurous man who risks his family members by denying them the pleasure of living the standard of life they were entitled to live. He borrows money from Bazela, a renowned money lender, and takes it straight to Xiphongo in the hope that Xiphongo will push him through to the post of a principal at Zamani School. It is painful to note that Xiculu's struggles in accumulating riches for other people makes him a 'provider', a philanthropist who owns nothing, being milked almost daily but deceits who lie to him that they will pave way for him to the commission thought to be responsible for recruiting people. His unfortunate end of failing to get the post makes him more of 'stew' prepared to nourish other people to his and his family's disadvantage. This nominal attachment of the character and his deeds makes naming a significant and symbolic phenomenon that serves to communicate the life, traits and outlook of a given character.

Recommendations

- This study recommends that creative writers employ names as symbolic tags to signify what is going on in the real world as well as to herald how names are employed in the concrete world. People use names for various reasons like communicating circumstances around the 'falls and rises' of an individual.
- The study also recommends future researchers to consider the naming of female characters in the same drama text, as a way of discovering how female writers view and interpret other females. This will help to compare and synchronise the naming traits and patterns exuded in the psychological interpretation of both female and male literary writers.

Conclusion

Mabuza's play, *Nyuku wa Mbyana*, presents a typical contemporary reflection of what is taking place in the world today. Across the board matters to do with corruption in all its forms are being reported with very minimal attempts to curtail its contagious and harmful venom. Wedded women are being harassed and shamefully bedded against their vulnerable consciences in work places and offices where they desperately seek, either to be employed or promoted. Men also suffer at the hands of other men by being asked to pay huge sums of money in order for them to get jobs. This culture is a clear reflection how naming is done among the Vatsonga, to name in order to illuminate what is going on in the real world, to communicate what is happening in the world around as well as to reflect upon the dignity of a valued culture.

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