



## The Onomastic Significance of the Name ‘Nomeva’ in S. A. Dazela’s *Izono Zakho Ziya Kujukikela*

Zilibele Mtumane

Professor, Department of African Languages, Faculty of Humanities, University of Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa

E-mail: [zmtumane@uj.ac.za](mailto:zmtumane@uj.ac.za)

<http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v6i5.1423>

---

### **Abstract**

This paper analyses the significance of the name ‘Nomeva’, which belongs to a character in S. A. Dazela’s novel *Izono Zakho Ziya Kujukikela*. The meaning of the name and its derivation are commented on. The insects associated with this name, especially the wasp and its behavior, are illustrated in the paper. The role played by the character, who is the bearer of this label, as association with the behaviour of the wasp, is discussed. It is then concluded whether the character acts according to this name or not in the narrative. Incidents, where the behaviour of the character resembles that of the wasp, are pointed out and commented on. Subtopics of this article are introduction, literature review, analysis, and conclusion. The conclusion of the paper provides its summary and evaluation, commenting on Dazela’s success in the use of the name in her novel.

**Keywords:** *Onomastics; Nomeva; Dazela; Izono Zakho Ziya Kujukikela*

### **Introduction**

While S. A. Dazela’s novel *Izono Zakho Ziya Kujukikela*, has characters whose names talk to the roles they play in it, up to now, no research has been conducted considering this aspect of the novel. The writing of this article then, has been motivated by the creative way Dazela includes names of characters in her novel and the scarcity of studies focusing on this topic in the text. Names that depict the roles of the characters who bear them in the narrative are ‘Thandiwe’, ‘Mpumlo’, ‘Maqatha’ and ‘Nomeva’. This study then is an effort of revealing how this author employs the label of a character to depict her role in the prose work. Only the name of Nomeva is discussed in this discourse. Others will be considered in other research works.

‘Onomastics’ is a concept that is generally considered to refer to the science of names and their origins. It is also regarded as the study of the origins and forms of proper names. It focuses on the derivation and employment of these labels as used in specialized fields (Answers.com, 2011: 1). Merriam-Webster (2011) also has the view that onomastics is:

The science or study of the origins and forms of words especially as used in a specialized field, the science or study of the origin and forms of proper names of persons and places and the system underlying the formation and use of words especially proper names or of words used in a specialized field.

(p.1)

While the foregoing definitions cater for “... words especially used in specialized fields ...”, as pointing to onomastics as well; in this discourse, ‘onomastics’ is viewed as pertaining to the study of “proper names of persons”.

Onomastics features in various linguistic fields, like semantics and lexicography. In semantics, it focuses on the etymology of names, that is; their origins and how they have become their current form and meaning (Rooney, 1999). In lexicography, it focuses on the origin and history of proper names. As this research deals more with the origin and meaning of the name of a character, according to its origin and form, and the part played by the character in the novel under study, it is related more to semantics than lexicography. However, there is some interrelationship between these linguistic fields, regarding the study of onomastics.

When onomastics deals with personal names, it is viewed as “anthroponomastics” (Schneider, 2009). On the other hand, where it involves the study of place names, it is referred to as “toponymy” or “toponomastics” (Cacciafoco *et al.*, 2015). Besides personal and place names, onomastics also focuses on names of natural and man-made phenomena. Because this study is more about the name of a character, who is found in Dazela’s narrative, it fits more with anthroponomastics.

### **Literature Review**

While there is scarcity of works conducted on Dazela’s labeling of characters in the text under study, some scholars have undertaken research works on naming, scrutinizing texts by other authors. Among them is Ennin and Nkansah (2016) who produced the research ‘A Literary Anthroponomastics of Three Selected African Novels: A Cross Cultural Perspective’. Schneider (2009) authored the article “‘What’s my Name?’” Cacciafoco, Cavallaro and Kratochvil (2015) produced the study ‘Diachronic Toponomastics and Language Reconstruction in South-East Asia According to an Experimental Convergent Methodology: Abui as a Case-Study’. Mtumane (2019) discusses names of characters in GB Sinxo’s *UNomsa*. While he has also undertaken research on Dazela’s *Izono Zakho Ziya Kukujikela*, Mtumane (2010) deals with dialogue as a device of characterization. He does not discuss the naming of characters. While these discourses do not touch on naming in Dazela’s *Izono Zakho Ziya Kukujikela*, they will be significant theoretical sources for this discourse. The conclusions drawn from them will guide the content of this study. The forthcoming section is an analysis of the label ‘Nomeva’, as it is found in the narrative under scrutiny.

### **Analysis**

The name ‘Nomeva’ is derived from the noun *ameva* (thorns/stings). The thorn and sting give a painful feeling when they prick into one’s body. Thorns are found on trees while stings are parts of the bodies of poisonous insects such as bees, scorpions, and wasps. It is with these stings that these insects

inject poison into their victims. The noun 'unomeva' is also an isiXhosa name for the wasp which attacks very painfully with its sting. As it is stated earlier in this section, the name 'Nomeva' is derived from *ameva* by replacing the prefix *a-* with the morpheme *No-*. Mtumane (2019) views this formative as a shortened form of *unina* (mother of). In this case, Nomeva could be analyzed as *unina wameva* (mother of thorns/stings). Mtumane (*Op cit.*) also views this prefix as the female gender marker among amaXhosa, as it is common practice to give names that begin with *No-* to females among these people.

In the text, the character by the name of Nomeva is Mpumlo's mother and is a widow. She is presented pampering and spoiling Mpumlo very much. She does not discipline him, nor does she allow anybody to train her son. Even when her in-laws (Mpumlo's paternal uncles) want to guide Mpumlo in the chores of manhood, Nomeva does not allow them. Instead, she quarrels with anybody who bothers about his son. These relatives want to play this role because Mpumlo's father is no more. Among amaXhosa, it is normally the duty of the uncles to guide a boy when the biological father has passed away. Nomeva is then violating this norm.

Nomeva even fights for Mpumlo against other boys. This is depicted as follows:

*Unina wayebhinqa omfutshane ehamba ewanyola amakhwenkwe axabene naye. Andithethi ngenkwenkwe embethileyo, yayigujululwa kowayo ngesiqwayi sikaNomeva ngaphezulu engafuni nomntu othethayo.*

(His mother would put on short skirts and go around poking boys who quarreled with him. It would be worse with a boy who has beaten him up. He would be beaten at his home with Nomeva's stick and she would not want to hear anything from anybody.)

(Dazela, 1991, pp. 12-13)

These words indicate how strongly Nomeva reacts towards boys who quarrel with and beat Mpumlo up. What is surprising here is that Nomeva does not give Mpumlo any opportunity to face his own challenges with his peers. Instead, she faces the challenges for him. This makes Mpumlo unable even to face real life confrontations when he grows older. He becomes irresponsible, jealousy of people who are progressing in life and ultimately destroys his own family, as he gets deserted by his wife and eventually gets divorced.

Note should be taken of the idiom *wayebhinqa omfutshane*, which literally means she would put on short skirts. This enunciation is generally used to refer to someone who is ready for action, especially fighting. The depiction of Nomeva in this state then illustrates how prepared she would be to engage in feud against Mpumlelo's peers that clashed with him. This is further confirmed by her going around *ewanyola amakhwenkwe axabene naye* (poking boys who quarreled with him). Poking someone in the manner Nomeva does, is generally a sign of undermining the person. It is thus a gesture of challenging them to a fight. This action by Nomeva then reflects how she often confronts the lads who clash with Mpumlo. It is interesting that Nomeva moves around challenging, not a boy but boys. This is like the action of the wasp which flies around stinging everyone in the vicinity, when it is provoked.

In the above citation, the narrator reports that Nomeva would challenge Mpumlo's adversaries *engafuni nomntu othethayo* (not wanting to hear anything from anybody). Very often, people who say something when there is a fight are those who intervene in the situation. Sometimes, even those who want to take sides do say a word. Nomeva then does not allow anybody to either intervene or take sides when she beats these boys up. She would probably thrash even these people. This practice is also like the action of the wasp as nobody can stop it from stinging people around. Instead, people should protect themselves by running away.

When Mpumlo is due to start at Selelekela High School after completing primary schooling, two days before the new school opens, he leaves home for Johannesburg without the knowledge of his mother. He takes this step as he does not want to attend school anymore. After Nomeva receives a letter from Mpumlo explaining that he is working in Johannesburg, with the intention of saving money for starting a business, her reaction is described as follows:

*Wavutha ngumsindo uNomeva akuva okuthethwa ngunyana wakhe. Incwadi zange ayiphendule koko wabhalela umLungu ophetheyo kuloo fektri yayinoMpumlo efuna umntwana wakhe ingaphelanga eyesibini inyanga.*

(Nomeva raged with fury when she heard what her son was saying. She did not respond to the letter but wrote to the White manager of the factory where Mpumlo was, demanding her child back before the end of the second month.)

(Dazela, 1991, pp. 14)

Nomeva's reaction to Mpumlo's letter is emphasized by the hyperbole *Wavutha ngumsindo* (She raged with anger). *Ukuvutha ngumsindo* literally means to be hot with anger. It is an uncontrollable condition one finds oneself in because of annoyance. In this condition, one may act in an unreasonable and insensible manner. No wonder then that, instead of responding to Mpumlo's letter, Nomeva writes to Mpumlo's employer demanding her son back. What she does not consider is that it is Mpumlo who decided to leave home and seek employment from the White man. The latter did not take him out of school to give him a job. The decision for Mpumlo to come back home then lies with himself not with the employer. Even if the hirer may release Mpumlo from his employment, he cannot force him to return home. Nomeva's pouring out her anger on Mpumlo's boss is like the action of the wasp that stings anyone it comes across, even if the person is not the one who offended it.

The wasp, with which the name Nomeva is associated, is believed to be a very irate insect when it is provoked. It is also supposed that it is this irritation that makes it attack with its sting. Because of this belief, a person who becomes very violent and easily gets ready for a fight, is often referred to metaphorically as *unomeva* (the wasp). In the text, Nomeva's personality of getting furious and ready to fight where Mpumlo is involved makes the name befit her.

## Conclusion

This article has examined the name of Nomeva, who is a character that is found in S. A. Dazela's *Izono Zakho Ziya Kukujikela*. The origin and form of this designation have been deliberated on. From the discussion, this name is not a name for name's sake, as it is a symbol that signifies the personality traits and the role of its bearer in the novel. This makes onomastics relevant to base the study on. Besides, this label has a bearing on the plot of the novel, as the events the character is involved in have some association with her designation. It gives the reader a clue as to which direction the plot will take.

Dazela's use of the name 'Nomeva', for the character, points to her acquaintance with the wasp and its actions. It also reveals her skill in handling the naming technique.

The personality traits and role played by the character that bears the name discussed in this discourse are further made more vivid by the literary devices the author employs. The literary devices include idioms, symbols, and hyperbole.

Since characters often represent people in real life, the naming of Nomeva in the novel under study is an important phenomenon. This name is like that of some people in real life, as the novel is a miniature world created by the author. The personality traits and role this character plays in the text make people to either identify with or dissociate themselves from her. This depends on the taste of people regarding her behavior. Those who like it may associate with her, while those who do not may dissociate from her. A need then is there for scholars of literature who have interest in onomastics to analyze names found in fiction works.

### References

- Answers.com, (2011). Onomastics. <http://www.answers.com/topic/onomastics>. Accessed on 11/2/2023.
- Cacciafoco, F. P., Cavallaro, F. and Kratochvil, F. (2015). Diachronic Toponomastics and Language Reconstruction in South-East Asia According to an Experimental Convergent Methodology: Abui as a Case-Study. <http://hdl.handle.net/10356/80488>.
- Dazela, S. A. (1991). *Izono Zakho Ziya Kukujikela*. Pietermaritzburg, Shutter & Shooter.
- Ennin, T. P. and Nkansah, N. B. (2016). 'A Literary Anthroponomastics of Three Selected African Novels: A Cross Cultural Perspective.' *International Journal of Society, Culture and Language*. 4(1).
- Merriam-Webster,(2011).Onomastics. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/onomastics>. Accessed on 11/2/2023.
- Mtumane, Z. (2010). 'Dialogue in S. A. Dazela's *Izono Zakho Ziya kukujikela*'. *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*. 47(2), 69 – 78.
- Mtumane, Z. (2019). Some Names of Characters in GB Sinxo's UNomsa. *Ponte: International Journal of Science and Research*. 75(10), 2–28. DOI: 10.21506/j.ponte.2019.10.1
- Rooney, K. (1999). *Encarta World English Dictionary*. London, Bloomsbury publishing Plc.
- Schneider, M. (2009). 'What is My Name? Towards a Generative. Anthroponomastics.'" *Anthropoetics – The Journal of Generative Anthropology*. 15(1).

### Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).