

Personal Names as Social Protest: The Status of African Political Names

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An earlier study noted a sharp rise in the incidence of “political names” given to South African children, especially boys, born 1990-1992, compared with those born earlier and suggested that this increase reflected a history-keeping function of personal names. Other interpretations are offered and it is suggested that such names may be more profitably classed with names offering social commentary, especially social friction. These names are then seen as oblique messages sent by muted name-givers and their decreased frequency around and following majority rule follows from the achievement of social voice by the African community.

The literature on personal names and naming practices in Africa is among the richest for the non-Western world. In addition to descriptions by linguists, anthropologists and missionaries, mainly in the form of fragments and anecdotes about “curious native customs,” there are often baptismal registers, school records, and government registrations. These sources provide complementary data sets for the early contact period. There are certainly important warnings to be made about the reliability of both types of data, but they nevertheless provide us with reasonable information about personal names and naming practices in the African past.

There is, of course, enormous diversity—onomastic and otherwise—on the African continent, but one good generalization is that African names have meaning, i.e., the relationship between the name and its lexical meaning is typically a transparent one, at least in terms of providing a translation of the name into a European language.¹ This semantic transparency has been reported for virtually all the geographic regions of Africa, though there are some interesting exceptions. Even in the latter cases, however, subsystems of opaque and transparent names typically co-exist and serve different functions. Individuals may bear several names, e.g., there may be both an everyday name, the meaning of which is readily apparent, and a restricted-use name, owned by the clan, whose linguistic origin and meaning is not recoverable.

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Throughout much of Africa, personal name typology has been further complicated as a result of missionary and colonial intrusions. Most obviously, the latter superimposed a new name stock, drawn from European languages (notably English, French and Portuguese) and from Arabic, upon the indigenous ones. The meanings of these new names were certainly not readily apparent, with some few exceptions, to either colonizers or colonized. Throughout much of postcolonial Africa, these two systems of naming continue to coexist, though again there are interesting exceptions.² Infants typically receive one or several names in the indigenous language as well as a "foreign name." In the same way that early missionaries and colonial bureaucrats unsuccessfully sought to supplant indigenous names with Christian/civilized names, some latter-day political regimes have sought to outlaw foreign/barbarous names and to "authentimize" the naming system. In most countries, however, individual families and name-givers choose whether to bestow a foreign name or not. The relative prominence of African names or European names varies widely from one national setting to the next. The centrality of names in the popular consciousness of identity, individual and corporate, should come as no surprise to onomastic scholars and social scientists, but lay persons, particularly North Americans, are often struck by personal name legislation in the postcolonial world or, indeed, in historic European nation-states such as Denmark and Poland.

Our written records of naming practices in Africa are limited to the contact period, but socio-onomasticians have attempted to reconstruct traditional patterns of indigenous naming, based on available records. Restricting our attention to the Bantu-speaking peoples of southern Africa, we can discern two broad systems of naming. In the first of these, personal names have meaning, and it is most common for the name selected for a child to refer to conditions or events surrounding the time of birth, to physical features of the newborn, to social conditions within the family, or to any subjective state of the name-giver. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that any word, phrase or sentence may serve as the basis for an individual's birth name. This type of naming was traditionally observed among the Nguni peoples (Zulu, Xhosa, Swati, and Ndebele) as well as many other groups in southern Africa, including the Tsonga-speaking groups. Personal names often referred to salient circumstance around the time of birth. For example, Guye (1945) cites Thonga names such as *Ndeleni* 'on the path', *Nkuweni* 'under the fig tree', *Ndaleneni* 'during the famine', *Munwini* 'during the drought', *Dambi* 'flood', *Nympini* 'during the war' as names of this sort. These names served a history-keeping function in some part, for instance by recording

the circumstance of birth or by marking a prominent event such as the appearance of Halley's comet in 1910 (*Nyeleti* 'star') or the flood of 1915 (*Dambi, Matini* 'in the water'; *Murini* 'in a tree'). Although there is some evidence of name recurrence, most names are unique within their respective communities. Names of this type still occur in many rural communities, though the history they record may be quite different, e.g., a Zulu family in rural KwaZulu whose four children are named *Nomvula* [f] 'in the rain', *Madumela* [m] 'one who attacks' (so named because there had been a fight between the father and his brother), *Boshiwe* [m] 'arrested' (so named because the father was in jail at the time of birth), and *Msombuluko* [f] 'Monday'.

The major exception to this pattern of circumstance-related naming was traditionally found among Sotho-Tswana groups, who bestowed an infancy name of the above sort which was replaced by a commemorative /family name when the child was ritually incorporated into the patrilineal group. The choice of family names here was an intricate one. An eldest son should name his first son after his father and his first daughter after his mother. A second son should be named after the wife's father and a second daughter after the wife's mother. Later children should be named, alternately, after the father's and mother's senior relatives. New names are not invented; everyone is named after a particular relative.³ With migrant labor, urbanization and the concomitant nuclearization of African families, the traditional Sotho-Tswana practice of naming has declined.⁴ In both systems of naming, the prominent name-givers were most often senior members of the husband's family. The absence of these senior relatives from nuclear family residence has shifted primary responsibility for infant naming to parents.

Political Names in South Africa

This report is part of an ongoing onomastic research program in South Africa which seeks to understand the ways in which naming practices have responded to changing social, cultural and political organization over the past 150 years. In an earlier paper (Herbert and Bogatsu 1991), a shift in urban naming was described wherein the earlier (near-)unique names bestowed upon individuals at birth were being replaced by a "name stock" or repertoire of recurrent names. In place of individual names relating to events and circumstances surrounding the birth of a child, two major categories of names seemed to emerge in the urban data. The first celebrated the emotional state of the mother (*Thokozile* 'happy', *Thandiwe* 'loved', *Siyavuva* 'we are joyful',

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Themba 'hope', *Thandeka* 'loveable', *Thembelihle* 'beautiful hope', *Nomusa* 'mercy', *Nonhlanhla* 'lucky') and the second celebrated the role of a Christian god in family life (e.g., *Nkosinathi* 'God is with us', *Bonginkosi* 'praise the Lord', *Sibongile* 'we are grateful', *Bongani* 'thankful', *Siphiwe* 'gift [from God]', *Mandlenkosi* 'God's power'). Both of these name types were associated with maternal name-givers. The rise of fashionable names, which recurred with high frequency, represented a major typological shift from the unique naming of earlier, traditional systems. The same direction of change from rural, unique names to an urban stock of names was reported by Xaba (1993) for the Zulu communities around Pietermaritzburg.

The rise of name repertoires meant that the history-keeping function of personal names declined and individuals are no longer located within temporal, cultural or familial contexts when their name merely records the mother's happiness in having a child, her recognition that a child is a gift from God, or that the mother "liked the sound" of a particular name. In this regard, urban naming became more like its European counterparts, although the criterion of name-meaningfulness continued to differentiate sharply between the two. This urban system is not "traditionally African" in the sense that it continues historical patterns; it is, however, uniquely African since the formatives are taken from African languages.

On the other hand, names that actively reflect conditions and social relations operative at the time of birth are certainly bestowed today. In an earlier study (Herbert 1997) the vitality of the history-keeping function of personal names through an examination of the subtype "political names" was examined. Based on the prominence of political events in South Africa since the 1970s, it was hypothesized that this salience would be reflected in personal names. To test this hypothesis, a data base of personal names for children born in two periods was collected: 1980-85 (n=178) and 1990-92 (n=203). The latter period was selected since the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) and other political organizations in February 1990 initiated a period of political discussion that set the stage for the eventual transition to democracy.

For each name, the following information was collected: linguistic/cultural group of the father and mother, date of birth, sex, child's name, English name (if any), reason(s) for name choice and identity of the name-giver. A preliminary categorization separated names into two categories: political and non-political.⁵ Political names were often easy to identify as such; for example, various forms, such as *Tokologo* and

Nkululeko, translated as 'freedom' in the local languages; also *Comrade*, *Khululisizwe* 'release the nation', and *Lungelo* 'rights', though the explanation for name choice was often determinative, e.g., *Nqobile* 'conquered' may refer to political victory or to a family's triumph over some social conditions. In these latter cases, information collected from the respondent (usually the mother) determined whether the individual name was classed as political or non-political.

Perhaps not surprisingly, an increased incidence of political names was found in the latter sample. Almost one-fourth of the post-1990 names (24%) were political as opposed to less than 8% in the earlier sample. Further, the distribution of political names was strikingly sex-based. Boys were significantly more likely to bear political names in both periods (71% and 90% in the two periods). In the second period, almost 40% of the names bestowed upon boys were political. Although fathers and mothers acted as name-givers in roughly equal proportions, there was a general association between the sex of parental name-giver and the child's sex. Fathers were more likely to choose names for boys, and mothers to choose names for girls. Three-quarters of political names were bestowed by fathers.

This earlier research viewed the heightened prominence of political names bestowed between 1990 and 1992 as evidence of the vitality of traditional history-keeping functions of naming in the African languages. That is, the interpretation was a simple one: political names continued the traditional association between the name bestowed on a child and some local circumstance, salient to the name-giver, which "explained" the name choice. This time frame was a dynamic one in South Africa's history; no one doubted that the country had embarked irrevocably on a new course and that those who sought to oppose the change would be swept away. It seemed logical, in this light, that this vast social and political reorganization would be recorded in children's names.

One might expect that the incidence of political names would increase further following the successful negotiation of a planned transition to democracy, to the establishment of universal suffrage, to the first democratic elections, and to—in the words of an often-cited phrase during this period—"the euphoria of national reconciliation." Certainly, the past five years in South African history have witnessed fundamental changes.

Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were formulated with regard to the bestowing of personal names around the period of the first national election in 1994:

1. The general incidence of political names would increase among the African populations, and

2. Mothers as well as fathers would participate in bestowing of political names.

The second hypothesis derived from a belief that the introduction of women's issues into election campaigns by the African National Congress and other progressive political organizations moved women into political arenas and debates. Following the previously established association between sex of parental name-giver and sex of child, a corollary of hypothesis 2 is:

3. There would be a sharp increase in the incidence of political names for girls.

In order to test these hypotheses, an additional database of names was collected. These names were given from January 1, 1994 through April 30, 1995. This sixteen month period was chosen because it includes the period of intense political activity and negotiation leading up to the first national election in April 1994 and the twelve month period thereafter. The data were collected in May 1995 at infant immunization clinics in a variety of urban and rural locations.⁶ This setting was chosen as one in which large numbers of mothers and young children would be present. The data base includes 333 names, representing 173 boys and 160 girls.

Results

Hypothesis 1 was not confirmed; there was no significant increase in the incidence of political names in this period. Indeed, to the contrary and most surprisingly, there was a sharp decrease in such names (table 1). Recall that in the earlier period, almost 25% of given names were political. For the present data, only 11.7% of the names show any political significance (n=39).

Table 1. Political and Nonpolitical Names at Two Time Periods

| Period | Name Type | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|------|--------------|------|-------|
| | Political | | Nonpolitical | | Total |
| | N | % | N | % | |
| 1990-1992 | 48 | 23.6 | 155 | 76.4 | 203 |
| 1994-1995 | 39 | 11.7 | 294 | 88.3 | 333 |

$$(\chi^2=13.21; p < .0005)$$

In the earlier period, 79% of political names were bestowed by father; the 1994-95 frequency is 69%. In the later data, 8 political names were bestowed by mothers: 4 boys and 4 girls. Thus, there is some slight support for hypothesis 2, but it is not statistically significant.

Of the 39 political names found in the present sample, 25 were borne by boys (14.5% of boys' names) and 14 by girls (8.75% of girls' names). About 64% of the political names are borne by boys in the 1994-95 data as compared to almost 90% of political names from the 1990-92 data (table 2).

Table 2. Political Names by Gender

| Period | Boys | | Girls | | Total |
|-----------|------|------|-------|------|-------|
| | N | % | N | % | |
| 1990-1992 | 43 | 89.6 | 05 | 10.4 | 48 |
| 1994-1995 | 25 | 14.6 | 14 | 08.6 | 39 |

$$(\chi^2=8.18; p < .0005)$$

The increased representation of girls in the inventory of political name-bearers in the more recent data is statistically significant.

Discussion

A more detailed analysis of these data remains to be completed. But the question is already clear: how do we reconcile the claimed history-keeping function of personal names with the sharp decrease in political naming during the most momentous period in South African history? There is a socio-onomastic puzzle here that requires solution.

The basic idea to be put forward is that the previous analysis of political names as serving a history-keeping function cannot be accurate. That is, the interpretation of political names advanced in Herbert (1997) is simply wrong, or at best incomplete. In order to understand the decline of political names immediately before and after the transition to democracy, we need to re-consider our understanding of what these names "do" within the fabric of everyday life. If the function of these names is not primarily to record events that are prominent in the consciousness of the name-giver at the time of birth, what function do they serve for the name-giver?

The suggested focus on the name-giver follows from the onomastic model, developed originally by Lévi-Strauss, in which a dichotomy

between two sorts of naming systems is established. In the first type, illustrated by Sotho-Tswana naming in southern Africa, names classify their bearers within a sociocultural framework. Individuals in these societies are born into a place, a status which is marked by the name bestowed. What is significant is that the names exist “before the individuals who bear them and they are assigned to them on account of the position which is objectively theirs but in which other individuals may find themselves, and which the group regards as charged with significance” (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 180), i.e., in such systems, there is a fixed repertoire of names, and name bestowal consists in matching the future bearer to a pre-existing name. This system is opposed to what Lévi-Strauss calls “immediate” naming, in which names classify the name-giver, i.e., the person who creates the name. In these instances, the name reflects something about the name-giver’s subjective and transitory state, and in this regard the names classify the donor rather than the bearer.

Friction Names

In place of a view of political names as marking history, it is suggested that political names should be viewed as examples of another subtype of traditional names, occasionally called “protest names” or “friction names” in the onomastic literature. These names encode criticism or complaint by the name-giver. The most common examples of these names in the literature are directed at another family member, occasionally a neighbor. For example, in a previous study of name-giving among rural Tsonga-speakers in the Eastern Transvaal (Herbert 1995), 27 friction names were recorded. Half of these were complaints by the infants’ mothers about their treatment in the husband’s homestead, such as the conduct of the mother-in-law, e.g., *Xihundla* ‘Secret’, *Swohemba* ‘False’ (both complaints about the mother-in-law) or the husband, e.g. *Humisa* ‘Neglect’ (“My husband neglects me when I say something”) *Xihoxo* ‘Mistake’ (“I found that I made a mistake when I married this kind of man who comes from a beer family and we are fighting”). Names given by the mother’s mother are also critical of the father or his family, for example for not paying *lobolo* (bridewealth). The other half of these names, given by the paternal grandmother (n=7) or other paternal relative, note complaints about the mother of the child, e.g., *Nyelani* ‘Shit on me’, *Ndzisukeleni* ‘Leave me’. The most interesting aspect of these friction names is that they are almost exclusively

bestowed by women, i.e., by individuals whose public voices are muted in traditional southern African societies.

Several points need to be made about this name type. First, these names are communicative acts *par excellence*; they are intended to send a message to a spouse, to one's in-laws, to neighbors, etc. It is expected that the target will understand the message and recognize the name-giver's intent. The African onomastic literature is replete with mentions of such naming among widely diverse peoples, e.g., Beattie (1957, 103-104); Finnegan (1970, 470); Jackson (1957, 116-117); James (1978, 129); Kasongo (1988, 149); Kimenyi (1989, 96); Middleton (1961, 39-40); Tonkin (1980); Wieschhoff (1941, 220-221). What these names have in common is that they carry a social message intended for a particular person or set of persons. The bearer of the name is incidental, serving merely as a vehicle for the name. It is interesting to note in this regard that dogs are often used for this purpose; dog names are frequently a channel for the expression of social tension, e.g., Hauenstein (1962, 117-120), Kimenyi (1989, 111), Koopman (1986, 77-79), Retel-Laurentin and Horvath (1972, 108-109), Samarin (1965), Schottman (1993), Tonkin (1980, 657).⁷ As Samarin (1965, 58) noted, Gbeya dogs have names "not to facilitate communication between the master and the dog, but for the sake of the human community." His emphasis on communication is a key one, which takes the study of personal names in Africa beyond Lévi-Strauss' emphasis on categorization.

The analyst needs to ask why speakers resort to naming in order to serve this simple communicative function of expressing complaint, ridicule, warning, and so on. The answer depends on our understanding of the value placed on *indirectness* in such potentially confrontational interactions. To return to the Tsonga case cited above, a wife is not in a position to challenge her mother-in-law's authority or her treatment of the wife. Similarly, the wife may not complain to her husband or to other members of the patrilocal homestead. However, the bestowal of a friction name on an infant offers the wife a channel to communicate her frustrations to members of the husband's family. She may, via her child's name, answer their accusations, criticize their treatment of her, or simply make public her unhappiness amongst them. Likewise, according to Koopman (1986), the intended targets of Zulu dog names are typically neighbors rather than family members. Rather than exacerbating social tension, such names seem to reduce potential conflict, an argument which is made explicitly by Wieschhoff (1941,

220-221), Beidelman (1974, 289) and Beattie (1957, 106), who claim that recipients of a name's criticism or warning accept the name as having settled the matter. However, Schottman (1993, 552) and James (1978, 129) note that such names may also provoke open confrontation. The essential element in all treatments of friction names, applied to persons or to animals, is the indirectness of the communication, which explains why such messages flow both from status inferior to superior and vice-versa. At the same time, names are *public* documents: their use, particularly in public address, communicates the donor's message to the community as a whole. Precisely because they are acts of address, rather than acts of direct complaint, criticism, etc., their message is heard and understood by all.

It is striking that this channel of communication in some groups, e.g. among the Tsonga, is exploited most often by those whose voices are otherwise muted within the society, i.e., women. In the Tsonga data, twenty-three of the twenty-seven friction names were bestowed by women. In about one-half of these names, the infant's mother complains about her treatment in the homestead. Names given by the maternal grandmother are also critical of the father or his family and names given by the paternal grandmother are critical of the infant's mother. Of the four names given by men, three were bestowed by fathers and one by a paternal grandfather. The latter name *Ndzisukeleni* 'leave me' was a directive to the infant's father, who was causing trouble in the homestead. Of the three names given by fathers, one is directed to a wife, *Hlamusela* 'translate', "because the wife became pregnant with some other man." The other two names, *Duna* 'headman' and *Vonani* 'look', were given to male and female twins. Both names are complaints that refer to the father's brother having sold his cows while the father was working away from the homestead: *Vonani*, "See what the headman did: he sold my cows." It should be noted that the strong association between women and this name type is not mirrored anywhere else in the data, i.e., no other name type is preferentially associated with either male or female donors.

Friction names of this sort occur relatively infrequently in urban data, reflecting the reduction in residential tension that accompanies nuclear family organization as opposed to the large, patrilocal residence of traditional society where a homestead included a patriarch and his wives as well as his sons and their wives. The position of women was not enviable, for they were outsiders, brought into the homestead by

marriage and their loyalty was always suspect. Friction names presented one venue in which wives and mothers-in-law could express otherwise inexpressible tensions. Such names do occur in the name sample collected in 1994-1995 in Johannesburg, e.g., the Swazi name *Nokuthula* 'be quiet/shut up' bestowed by a maternal grandmother as a directive to the birth father's family which had complained about the birth mother's earlier failure to conceive; *Mamarutla* 'destroyed' bestowed on a girl by a Northern Sotho maternal grandfather to remind his own daughter that she had destroyed the family by marrying (and now bearing) a Ndebele.

Political Names as Friction Names

The view of political names as friction names or protest names is compatible with the notion that such names provide an arena for individuals and groups who are denied public voice and venues. Until the completion of the transition to democracy, the voice of Africans was necessarily muted in South Africa despite the obvious prominence of several black politicians. The view of political change as unstoppable was certainly not universal, and the tensions among even liberal factions was intense and dangerous. The position of South Africa's black population was something like the position of women in traditional homesteads; they were numerically strong, but politically and socially weak.

In the same way that friction names directed toward other family members tend to decrease in urban settings as mothers gain power and some independence from the husband's family, political protest names declined in the period before and after the 1994 election as Africans achieved political self-determination. The need for protest names from the earlier period such as *Shayimpimpi* 'kill the spy', *Ginyibunu* 'swallow the Boer' disappears when political power is achieved; indeed, the only one of the 39 political names that fits the protest profile is *Kwanele* 'it is enough (we want freedom now)', which was bestowed one month before the April 1994 election. Similarly, the fact that political names are often ambiguous in the sense that only the explanation of the name-giver identifies them as political is compatible with the present view that names are a vehicle of expression for individuals with muted voices. More recent political names are celebratory, meaning 'freedom' (*Nkululeko*, *Tokoloko*), 'peace' (*Noxolo*), 'promise' (*Tshepiso*), 'reward' (*Nombuyiselo*), and names pointing to/hoping for a good future, such as

Lindokuhle 'waiting for good things', *Siyaya-eNkululekweni* 'we are going for freedom', *Khulekani* 'we must pray', *Sobanangaye* 'we will see the fruit' and *Sinenhlanhla* 'we are lucky (Blacks to be in power)'. Compare also the names bestowed upon twins born two weeks after the election, *Nomkhosi* 'celebration' (f) and *Khosi* 'celebration' (m).

The analytical difficulty here is to find further support for the view of political names as social commentary or protest. Simply put, what external evidence might be brought to bear on such a determination? Pongweni (1983) discusses the very interesting case of *noms de guerre* adopted by Zimbabwean freedom fighters during the war for independence in the 1970s. These names differ in an important regard from all of the other name studies mentioned above; they are names adopted by bearers in adulthood. There are several reasons why a citizen might adopt such a new name; the most often cited by Pongweni's subjects were to protect the identity of their birth families, which might have suffered retribution, and to announce the bearer's sense of political awareness. Politically, Zimbabwe was seeking to negotiate a new political dispensation in the 1970s just as South Africa did twenty years later. The major difference, of course, had to do with the peaceful means through which the dispensation was achieved in South Africa as opposed to the civil war in Zimbabwe.

Pongweni's data include many names that are obviously like South African political names: *Rovai Mabhunu* 'destroy the Boers', *Gariraneo Mabhunu* 'ambush the Boers', *Teurai Ropa* 'spill blood', *Farai Tichatonga* 'be happy, we shall rule', *Yeukai Chimurenga* 'remember the revolution', *Mabhunu Muchaparara* 'Boers, you will perish', *Mbumburu Kupisa* 'how hot my bullet is', *Amerika Mudzvaniriri* 'America Oppressor', and *Zvido Zvevanhu* 'the people's wishes'. These names, despite their superhero tone, are clearly messages that are addressed to the political opposition. Their primary function is not to record history; rather, they give voice to freedom fighters, to guerillas who did not control mass media and other public venues. After the people's victory and transition to a new political order, the need for these names disappeared. Pongweni noted that at the time of his data collecting, several years after independence, the bearers were returning to their civilian names, i.e. their birth names (1983, 53-54).

As noted earlier, a more detailed comparison of the 1990-1992 and 1994-1995 data remains to be undertaken. However, the parallels

between Zimbabwean *noms de guerre* and South African political names prior to the transition to democracy are striking. In the same way that Zimbabwean freedom fighters returned to their birth names after independence, political names are no longer being bestowed with the same frequency since the South African transition to democracy. In both cases, name donors used the act of naming (self or infant) as an opportunity to send a social message. The key to understanding political names lies in an understanding of the sociopolitical context within which they were bestowed.

There are some intriguing hints of differences within the sampled groups of the 1994-1995 data. It appears, for example, that political names are more common among Xhosa speakers than other ethnic groups; President Mandela is himself Xhosa, and the ruling party, the ANC, is popularly perceived to have a Xhosa base. What is clear at this point, however, is that the incidence of political names declined during the period around the transition to democracy. Here I have suggested an explanation for this decline, one which ties political names not to a history-keeping function as previously suggested but rather to an interpretation as friction or protest names. More detailed qualitative study of the name tokens may find support for a finer analysis in which both the history-keeping and social protest functions of such names can be accommodated. One limitation in this regard, however, arises from the nature of the data, including the rather brief interviews in which they were collected. Another issue concerns the nature of analytical categories that researchers impose upon their data. Perhaps categories such as "history-keeping" and "protest" are not as discrete as we suspect, and the challenge for onomastic scholars is to disentangle the web from an insider's point of view.

Finally, it remains to note the interpretive centrality of the context of name bestowal; naming a child *Nelson* or 'freedom' in 1990 may have been an act of social protest, but it was not in 1995. Personal names are not merely classificatory as Lévi-Strauss (1966) demonstrated; they are dynamic social texts. Cross-cultural researchers need to determine the frequency with which the bestowal of personal names offers a channel of communication to an individual whose public voice is otherwise muted.⁸ In the meanwhile, these data show once again the complex links between personal naming and social, cultural and political organization.

Notes

This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Names held in Ottawa in May, 1998. I am grateful to members of the audience for their comments.

1. It is useful in this context to distinguish lexical meaning and name significance. The latter term has to do with the meaning of the name within the sociocultural fabric, in other words, why the name was chosen. The significance may or may not be readily apparent. It is likely that a Zulu girl named *Nomvula* 'in the rain' was born on a rainy day. The lexical meaning of the Zulu name *Sindile* 'have survived ~ escaped ~ recovered' is lexically transparent, but the hearer cannot know the name's significance. It was bestowed by the girl's father to commemorate the parents' escape from a hostel dwellers' attack in Soweto and the family's relocation to Natal prior to the 1994 elections.

2. One such exception has to do with Mobutu Sese Seko's outright banning of foreign personal names in Zaire under the guise of a return to African authenticity. Virtually overnight, French and other foreign names disappeared from the onomastic landscape in 1972 (Agomatanakahn 1974, 14). It is worth noting, however, that drastic interference with the traditions and habits of personal naming during the colonial period has impaired the ability to reconstruct anthroponymic structures. Two prominent examples serve to illustrate this fact. First, surnames are not traditional in sub-Saharan Africa, but new "traditional" patterns in several countries require surnames of its citizens. Second, modern-day bureaucracies do not allow for name changes, several of which typically occurred during each individual's life. In fact, the so-called authenticized systems are little more than European systems with exclusively African formatives.

3. A more detailed comparison of the two types of traditional naming in southern Africa is presented in Herbert (1998).

4. Also, government bureaucracy and record-keeping was not amenable to name changes during an individual's life. The birth name thus assumed increased importance in the colonial period.

5. The data were collected for children born in/around Johannesburg, a multilingual, multiethnic city. For this reason, the names were not sorted by ethnic identity or by home language of the parents.

6. I am grateful to my graduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand for their assistance in the collection of these names, and especially to Godfrey and Evelyn Mothibe and to Zodwa Vilakazi for discussion of the data.

7. There is some difference from group to group in the actual details of this name type, e.g., whether it is more commonly exploited for social comment within the extended family or directed to neighbors. Also, there are undoubtedly significant differences in the relative frequency of this name type from one society to another. Jackson (1957) reported that approximately one-half of personal names among the Shona bore testimony to family quarrels; the figure is certainly much lower for other southern African groups; e.g., among the rural Tsonga, Herbert (1995) reported an

incidence of less than nine percent. The incidence is seemingly even lower for other groups, e.g., Zulu, who preferentially use dogs as the vehicles for such social commentary (Koopman 1986). Further research is required to discern whether there are also differences in the name type applied to persons and to dogs or other animals.

8. There are certain difficulties with a larger cross-cultural study of this type. Most notably, such exploitation of personal names "to send messages" is presumably limited to societies in which donors have freedom to coin names freely. These are most likely to be unique naming societies. As might be expected, this characteristic is most common in small, kin-based societies (Alford 1988, 72).

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