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**Advantages of the Nuclear Family Structure:
Strengthening Bonds and Fostering Stability as Depicted
in JC Buthelezi's *Impi YabomDabu Isethunjini***

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Abstract

Like any other family structure, the nuclear one too has its beauty or advantages among which one can count financial stability, less conflicts, less confusion, and strong bonds among family members. This article then examines the advantages of a nuclear family as depicted in JC Buthelezi's novel entitled *Impi Yabomdabu Isethunjini*. The discussion in this discourse focuses on the financial situation, relationship among family members and state of mind within this kind of family. The subtopics of the paper are introduction, financial stability, less conflict, less confusion and strong bonds among family members. Definitions of the concepts of 'family' and 'nuclear family' are included as part of the introductory section of the study. Lastly, a concluding remark will be included towards the end of the discourse.

Introduction

While JC Buthelezi presents advantages of a nuclear family in his novel entitled *Impi Yabomdabu Isethunjini*, so far, very little research has been conducted focusing on this aspect of his novel. Mabuza (2024), on whose doctoral study this article is based, is, hitherto, the only scholar who has done so.

‘Family’ is a broad and complex concept that refers to a group of individuals who are connected by blood relations, marriage, or adoption and who typically live together and/ or share emotional bonds and mutual support. It is a fundamental social institution found in virtually all human societies and plays a vital role in shaping the lives of its members. In the words of Ackerman (1964: 175), family is an elementary component of society, the component of development and practice, of fulfillment and failure. Family is also a component of sickness and wellbeing. As cited in Sonawat (1994: 12), Desai states: “family is a component of two or more persons united by marriage, blood, adoption, or consensual union, sharing a single household, interacting and communicating with each other.” Desai’s definition of family shows that there are different family structures wherein some are united by blood. Again, it shows that some are not necessarily joined by blood. So, family can be any structure where one finds pleasure to become part of, if accepted by members of that structure. Yet it is generally believed that one cannot choose family. Some people neglect their blood families and find comfort or pleasure in ones which they are not of the same blood with, simply because they receive the love they need and find a sense of belonging there. This is the very reason why some children who come from dysfunctional families live a successful life in their old age. Family is not only limited to blood relatives, but it also refers to those who are united by marriage, adoption, consensual union, sharing a single household, interacting and communicating with each other.

On the other hand, Panico (2012: 26) states that family is a structure to which individuals belong. As Panico mentions “a structure”, this moves the study to the next term (nuclear family structure) below.

The concept of ‘nuclear’ is derived from nucleus which, according to *Dictionary.com* (1995), is a vital or central part or thing around which others are clustered, or it is the center of development or growth. Bowen (1985: 376) therefore derives the definition of a nuclear family from the observation that families appear to have an emotional center or nucleus to which members are instantaneously attached. Walter (2020: 18) also concurs with Bowen’s definition by stating that a nuclear family is a “family consisting of two parents and their children, but not including aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc.” This is probably the most well-known family structure, which is also called the “intact couple family” (Quarmby, 2011: 21).

Drawing from the three definitions given above, one can conclude that the nuclear family is a European style of living. This family structure is defined by marriage,

which is the center of the development of the family that Bowen talks about above, wherein a male and female are interconnected or stay together with their legitimate children in a marriage. In defining marriage, Ogwuche and Ogwuche (2023: 25) allude to that:

It is two independent, self-asserting, whole and unique individuals (male and female) coming together in joint conjugal covenant and union seeking to gain improved familiarity of the next person by learning how-to live-in society with other people and with each other whilst, complementing one another.

The nuclear family structure probably forms what the two scholars label as the abiding marriage, which they define as:

Married couples who consummate lasting and enduring marriages they are not simply those who never had a reason to get divorced; they are the ones who decide that their commitment to each other is always more essential than their weaknesses and dissimilarities.

(Ogwuche and Ogwuche, 2023: 29)

Just because the family is intact, that does not always mean that it is functional. This is because there are a lot of things which happen in marriages and families. A family can be intact and yet still dysfunctional. This is normally because parents are sometimes always too busy to attend to their children. These children are left in the hands of total strangers such as the house helper, to raise them, and this might cause a lot of challenges in such families. The socio-economic status of this family structure can pose challenges in families, which may also lead to family dysfunctionalities. Personality and behavioral patterns are other issues which can negatively or positively impact on this family structure.

Looking at Buthelezi's *Impi Yabomdabu Isethunjini*, one can tell that it relates to this study. Bafana Ngubeni's family is a true reflection of a nuclear family, as it consists of Bafana (the man of the house), Poppie (Bafana's wife), their children (Euthanasia and Melody) and the maid, MaXakushe.

Methodology

According to Mason, as cited in Dlamini (2019: 6), the qualitative approach involves various methods such as interviews, tests, research, and the analysis of visual and written content, including oral art history. Similarly, Denzin (2002: 35) describes qualitative research as a process where the researcher examines the world through various sources such as books and observations of people's lives and experiences. Denzin's perspective aligns with Mason's, emphasizing that qualitative research encompasses the analysis of literature and literary texts, which

is the focus of this study. Mabuza (2024: 7) concludes that the qualitative research seeks to explore and deeply understand a subject, often from the viewpoint of those directly involved. The study then is qualitative research as it involves the analysis of a literary text.

Theoretical framework

This discourse is underpinned by the family systems theory. Kerr and Bowen (1988) describe family systems theory as an analysis of the interconnected relationships between humans and their environment, both human and non-human. This theory, developed by Bowen, emphasizes observing natural processes and understanding families as interrelated emotional systems. In this context, a change in one part of the system directly affects the entire system. Najah (2016: 7) notes that Bowen's theory offers a valuable framework for examining family dynamics and individual behavior within the family unit, which Bowen viewed as a single emotional system. According to Najah (2016: 7), the theory uses systems thinking to explain the interactions among family members.

Bowen particularly focused on patterns that families develop to manage anxiety. Brown (1999) highlights that a major trigger of anxiety in families is either excessive intimacy or extreme emotional distance in relationships. The level of anxiety within a family depends on external stressors and inherited sensitivity passed down through generations. If family members fail to approach relationship challenges rationally and instead react emotionally, chronic anxiety or tension may result (Brown, 1999).

As this discourse is about family structure and its dynamics, the family systems theory is relevant to underpin it.

Discussion

The nuclear family structure offers several advantages that contribute to its functionality and well-being. This includes financial stability, as resources are often pooled and managed more efficiently within a smaller family unit. It also promotes fewer conflicts, with fewer individuals involved, leading to more harmonious living. Effective parenting is another benefit, as parents can focus more on their children's individual needs, ensuring better guidance and support. Lastly, the nuclear family fosters strong family bonds, with closer relationships often formed due to consistent interaction and shared experiences. These are discussed further below.

Financial stability

In nuclear families, especially for the working class, parents can provide for their children, unlike in other family structures. When both parents put their money together, it becomes easier to supply all their children's needs. Parents can take their

children to good schools because they can afford to pay for the school fees, unlike when there can be other family members whom they would also be forced to support financially. Moreover, parents can drive their children from one point to another because they can afford to buy cars, so that their children will not experience the difficulty of being mishandled in public transport. This is reflected in Poppie's words below:

"Hallow Darling ... yes ... ye ... s. Sorry to disturb you ... Nothing important ... just rural mentalities with their complexities ... Please take the children to school. I can't do it today ... you are a darling."

(Buthelezi, 1996: 21)

Even though parents can provide for their children and make sure that they are comfortable wherever they are, this does not guarantee a functional family. Financial stability may sometimes come at the cost of children being neglected by their parents, sometimes, and this leaves some families dysfunctional. Parents may be able to do everything for their children, but this does not guarantee that they will perform as their parents expect them to and become what they wish them to be. This often creates problems in families when parents think that they can force their children to pursue certain careers, just because they support them financially. Conflicts may arise between children and their parents on this matter. One will realize that even though Bafana and Poppie are able to give their children what they want and need, but still things turn out to be the opposite of what they hope for. This is reflected in Melody's words below:

Ngiyazi ukuthi uzongithukuthelela futhi uzodumala ukuzwa ukuthi sengiphinde ngawa dadewethu. Njengoba ngakutshela ukuthi ukuwa kwami kokuqala kwenziwa ukuthi ngangingazi ukuthi ngenzani. Yayingekho indlela yokuthi thina noPeter Samuels sithandane.

(I know that you will be angry at me and disappointed to hear that I have fallen again my sister. As I told you, my first fall was because I did not know what I was doing. There was no way Peter Samuels and I could have stayed in love.)

(Buthelezi, 1996: 236)

Melody gets pregnant without finishing school. Though their parents drop and pick them up from school, she still gets a chance to be able to make kids. On the other hand, Euthanasia leaves home, meaning that he is also changing schools. Children do not always like the fact that their parents decide everything for them and, therefore, they fail to deliver. Melody reveals this in a letter she writes to Uzithelile:

“Saqala kahle esikoleni amathemba ephezulu. Sasethemba ukuthi kuzothi kuphela iminyaka emithathu, nathi soba sesiqedile sinezitifiketi zemisebenzi. Siqala, njengokujwayelekile kuyo yonke imfundo yami, ngazithola ngisekilasini labezizwe, kuyimi omnyama kunabo bonke, onezinwele ezimfushane kunabo bonke, ongowesizwe esidelekile kunabo bonke, futhi nobukelwa phansi kunabo bonke. Kumakilasi wonke engawathatha, abomDabu babeba bathathu noma babili. Ngenye inkathi sasiba babili abesifazane abamnyama noma kube yimi ngedwa.”

(We started well at school with high hopes. We had hope that after three years we would also be done and have work certificates. When we started, as usual, through all my education life, I found myself in a class of foreign nationals; I was the darkest of them all with the shortest hair. In all the classes I chose, there would be three or two black people. At times we would be two black females, or I would be alone.)

(Buthelezi,

1996: 234)

The excerpt reveals that what parents think is best for their children is sometimes what derails their destinies. It is the irony of life that those who do not afford to go to multi-racial schools wish to go there and some of those who afford and learn there wish for the opposite. Parents want the best education for their children. On the contrary, though the children may also want the best education, they are never ready to face some of the challenges it may come with, just as Melody complains about them. Moreover, the excerpt also reveals that Melody has not made it in her studies. This is because the lecturers are discriminatory and not that black children fail because they do not know. Melody further discloses this in the extract below:

“Wayengena uSolwazi Thomas axoxise amaNdiya nabeLungu abaziyo bese eqala ukufundisa. Amehlo akhe ayeseqa thina bomDabu uma efundisa.

Kwakuba khona amahlaya abanqakisana ngawo bebedwa, thina bomDabu singazi ukuthi kukhulunywa ngani, futhi kuhlekweni. Ngenye inkathi sasikucosha ukuthi kuhlekwa thina, ikakhulu abaholi bethu abathile. Wayethi uma ebuza imibuzo elula usolwazi ayibhekise kumaNdiya nabeLungu, asizibe thina noma siphakamisa izandla. Wayekhumbula ukuthi sikhona uma kunemibuzo ehlula abakhethwa bakhe. Sasithi uma siyiphendula kahle le mibuzo, athi akezwa ukuthi sithini. AbomDabu babemandla ekuphakamiseni izandla, belalela besonge izandla kanti abezizwe babevele bakhulume ngisho bengaphakamisile izandla bese bekhonjwa.”

(Professor Thomas would come in and have conversations with Indians and Whites he knew then start lecturing. His eyes would pass us, Blacks, while he lectured.

They would be exchanging jokes alone, without us the Blacks knowing what they would be talking about and laughing at. At times we would hear that they would be laughing at us, especially some of our leaders. The professor would be asking simple questions to Indians and Whites, and he would ignore us even when we raised our hands. He would remember that we were there when there would be difficult questions which his favorites failed to answer. When we answered these questions correctly, he would say he does not understand. Blacks were good at raising their hands, they would listen with their arms folded, while the other foreign nationals would just talk even without raising their hands, they would just be given the opportunity to answer.)

(Buthelezi,

1996: 234)

The excerpt reveals the emotional stress that children go through because of the choices and decisions of their parents. This can end up causing conflicts in families. This is because some parents often get feedback from their children lightly, while it might break the good relationship they have with them. Some parents force their children to accept the discrimination by white teachers, instead of fighting for their rights. This is disclosed in Melody's words below:

"Abelungu namaNdiya babebizwa ngamagama abo, bengoMiss Wilson, Miss Edward, Miss Therujibhai noma Miss Moonsay. Thina noZinhle Nhlapho wathi uThomas amagama ethu alukhuni. Wasetha amagama engasibuzanga ukuthi siyakufuna yini ukwethiwa. Wathi uZinhle nguMiss Zola Slabbo, wathi mina nginguMiss Melody Zambaan. Kwakuthi mangimtshela ukuthi angilifuni leli gama. Umama wathi ngingalokothi ngenqabe igama engiliphiwa ngabangifundisayo uma ngifuna ukuphasa."

(Whites and Indians were called by their names, they were Miss Wilson, Miss Edwards, Miss Therujibhai or Miss Moonsay. Thomas said our names with Zinhle Nhlapho were difficult. He gave us names without asking if we wanted to be given names. He said that Zinhle was Miss Zola Slabbo, and I was Miss Melody Zambaan. I felt like telling him that I did not want this name. Mom said I should not dare refuse the name given by those who teach me if I wanted to pass.)

(Buthelezi,

1996: 234-235)

This discrimination may cause children to hate school. Education is not about school but the willingness of the child to learn. If the school really mattered then children who go to public schools would result in nothing, but they often achieve good grades which qualify them to reach their destinies, as opposed to those who go to multi-racial or former Model C (White) schools and face challenges.

Fewer conflicts

Extended family members often cause conflicts when they join a nuclear family. Moreover, children in a nuclear family setting tend to be united and love each other, unlike when they stay with their cousins, for instance. In a nuclear family setting, members do not have a choice but to love and to have each other's backs, as they do not have anyone else. Buthelezi depicts this in his *Impi YaboMdabu Isethunjini*. In the novel, there is never a time when Melody or Euthanasia are with their friends. Nothing shows that they do have them. So, they share everything between themselves. This is disclosed in a conversation between Euthanasia and Melody:

"Ngiyakuzwa nje Melly ulokhu uzikhathaza ngoPrince ngoba uthathwa yicala elilodwa likaPrince. Wena wazi ukuthi uPrince ngumfundi eniqhuba kahle naye esikoleni, futhi enikade nathandana naye. Lelo cala lihle. Nina noPrince nikhaliphile esikoleni, futhi nothisha bavama ukuba banisebenzise ndawonye. Kodwa-ke ngane yakwethu, kunamacala amaningi engibona ukuthi kuhle uwabeke kule bhodi yokudweba, bese uwahlolisisa. Mhlawumbe amanye amacala ayokwembula inkungu, umbone kabusha lo Prince wakho.

"Uzama ukungitshelani Euthy?" kubuza uMelody naye esaphethe incwadi ukuze uma engena ugogo abone ukuthi baxoxa ngomsebenzi wesikole.

"Engizama ukukutshela khona ukuthi ungayithathi ngamawala into engazange ibekwe kubhodi lokudweba yabukisiswa nguwe, yimi nabanye abaseduze nawe ukuze kuthi uma usuyenza wazi ukuthi wenza into ehloliwe, amacala ayo onke aphenyendulwa."

(I hear you Melly that you keep on worrying yourself about Prince because you have been carried away by one side of Prince. You only know that Prince is a learner you are doing well with. That side is beautiful. You and Prince are brilliant at school and the teachers normally have you work together. But, my sister, there are many sides that I think you must put on the drawing board, then check them thoroughly. Perhaps, some sides will remove the mist from your eyes, then you will see this Prince of yours anew.

What are you trying to tell me, Euthy? Asked Melody while also carrying a book so that granny will see when she enters that they are talking about schoolwork.

What I am trying to tell you is that do not be haste on something that has not been put on the drawing board and checked first by you, me and the other people close to you, so that when you finally do it you will be sure that you are doing something that has been thoroughly checked from all sides.)

(Buthelezi,

1996: 92)

The excerpt reveals the love that Euthanasia has for his sister. He is giving her advice because he does not want her to fall in a trap of falling in love with Prince without really knowing who he is, then she regrets later. This helps them to develop a strong bond and to take care of each other. Though Bafana and Poppie are seldom there to spend time with their children, Euthanasia and Melody can let nothing get between themselves. This is unlike when there will be other extended family members, who sometimes gossip about each other. The bad thing about this is that siblings can turn against each other because of extended family members.

When children grow up together, they learn to protect each other, as is shown in the excerpt above. Euthanasia is seen trying to protect her sister from being hurt by Prince. The excerpt also reveals that he wants to take part in her decision making when it comes to intimate relationships. Members in a nuclear family setting do not experience fights between children and their parents that much. This is because an extended family may want to control the children and, if they refuse to be controlled by them, they feel disrespected, and this can create problems in the family when children are reported to their parents. When parents do not take what is reported into consideration, it can cause conflicts between family members. So, in a nuclear family structure, there are no conflicts caused by extended family members. They only have them among themselves and they are normally easily dealt with if all parties involved are willing to solve the conflicts.

Effective parenting

For children who stay with their parents, especially when the latter are involved in their lives, parents do not have to deal with unruly behaviors which might be taught or probably instilled by other (extended) family members in their children. The children often grow up to be what their parents want them to be. The good thing is that children only have their parents to teach them how they ought to carry themselves. Parents can easily reprimand their children if they go astray, because they have been taught how they should carry themselves. One mistake that parents make is harshly reprimanding their children for doing something wrong, when they have not taught them the right one to do.

It is very unfortunate for the Ngubane children because they never get a chance to be sat down and taught these things and, therefore, their parents cannot even reprimand them when they do things wrongly. This is the reason Poppie fails to put Euthanasia in order, after hearing about all the wrongs he has been doing to

MaXakushe. Instead, she opts to chase MaXakushe away because she does not want people to know that Euthanasia has been stealing MaXakushe's money. Even her son sees that she has failed to do the right thing and leaves home to stay with his grandparents. Sometimes, parents leave their children to do whatever they want to do, no matter how wrong it can be. As children grow up, they do realize that their parents have not done justice in raising them up and they end up hating them. Euthanasia also expresses his hatred and anger towards his mom by leaving home, as the former cannot confront the latter because they are never used to talking about serious issues.

Strong family bonds

When children grow up together in the same environment, they become very connected to each other. In this way, they can protect one another. Though conflicts may arise between them, they easily forgive each other because they understand one another's personality and character. One cannot say the same about children who are forever neglected by their parents for other things, as Buthelezi depicts it in *Impi Yabomdabu Isethunjini*. As few as the Ngubanes are in their family, parents still fail to create time to play and learn more about their children. The fact that children only stay with their biological parents is supposed to make things easier in the family, since their children do not get to share their parents' attention with members of the extended family.

When children share their parents' attention with other family members, they might end up hating those family members, because it would mean that whatever their parents bring must be shared in the house and they might not like that. It is a pity that in the Ngubane family, parents do not even bring anything to the house for their children, to show that they think about them when they are away. They neglect their parental duties and let the house helper do everything. So, the children do not really enjoy the benefits of staying alone with their parents. It is only in healthy and functional families where children enjoy this benefit. In healthy families, parents work together to make sure that their children's schoolwork is done. Having them involved gives the children the confidence and zeal of wanting to perform better, unlike in the Ngubane family, where they let the house helper do this. It is during this time when parents help their children with whatever they need to do that they get to know each other.

As discussed in this section, nuclear families could have financial stability, less conflicts, less confusion and strong bonds among family members, as advantages. However, due to the conduct of the members, these advantages may be disturbed, as is the case with the Ngubane family discussed above.

Conclusion

This article has discussed some of the advantages of the nuclear family structure, as depicted in JC Buthelezi's *Impi Yabomdabu Isethunjini*. Among the advantages are less conflicts, less or no confusion for children, as they do not have

a lot of people or family members trying to show them how they should live their lives.

While the nuclear family structure is depicted with advantages in the selected literary work, that does not mean it is without challenges. Challenges will be the subject of another research endeavor.

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