

ZULU NAMES, POLYGYNY AND GENDER POLITICS IN TRADITIONAL SOCIETIES

by EVANGELINE BONISIWE ZUNGU

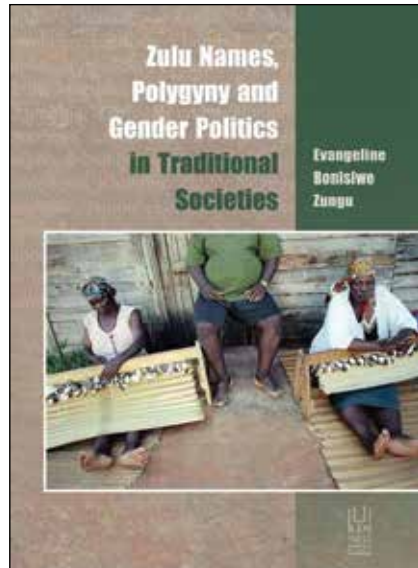
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IN this book, Evangeline Bonisiwe Zungu outlines the context of naming in polygynous Zulu culture and the gender politics that govern these naming practices.

Chapter 1 establishes an understanding of the study context and the research method undertaken. The study is rooted in Zungu's first-hand knowledge of naming practices in Zulu society. It is developed through fieldwork, namely interviews and participant observation of families in the rural context of KwaMambulu, a monolingual, rural and traditional Zulu society.

Chapter 2 provides the reader with a perspective on gender dynamics, power and polygyny in traditional societies. Zungu provides a broader understanding of these concepts while relating them specifically to Zulu culture and the integral link between the (dis)empowerment of women as wives and daughters and their position in polygynous marriages and families. Zungu contextualises power dynamics in polygynous Zulu marriages within the discourse while returning to the particularities of South African Zulu polygynous marriages in relation to rural contexts.

Chapter 3 contextualises ancestral veneration as a characteristic spiritual practice in African society. The ancestors are viewed as intermediaries between the living and God. They retain a status as active family members respected for their position in the family history. Occurrences of happiness or misfortune are attributed to the level of respect and attention afforded to the



ancestors within African societies. The influence of the ancestors is viewed as relevant as revering the ancestors acts as a protection measure against witchcraft, which can influence the vitality of individuals within traditional Zulu society. Naming practices can aid these protective measures by warding off evil spirits.

Chapter 4 describes the process of naming in Zulu culture and the ways in which names provide clues to social identity. Zungu asserts that African names indicate status, the mind-set of the name-giver, and occurrences at the time of the child's birth. The name-giver is usually the child's mother. In the context of polygynous marriages, the power dynamics, as cause for conflict, have an influence on the state of mind of the mother as name-giver, persuading the name of the children born within these

marriages. Examples of Zulu names and the meaning associated with the birth of children and the dynamics within society are provided.

Chapter 5 delves into the role of conflict in naming practices in Zulu polygynous marriages. The reflection of disgruntlement is expressed in the naming of children. This conflict, with co-wives and husbands, is reflective of power dynamics in polygynous marriages and expressed as grievances through the naming of a child. Categories of names arise such as those that communicate love and hatred; gossip; jealousy; witchcraft; conflict over inheritance; the husband's inability to provide financially; favouritism; promiscuity; love potions; or the inadequacy of the wife. Traditional Zulu names are a reasoned decision that are reflective of the state of mind of the name-giver at the time of the child's birth and may have positive or negative meanings.

Chapter 6 presents naming practices as indicators of social behaviour patterns related to the circumstances of a child's birth. These may be reflected in the name. Other spiritual meaning may also be intended in naming practices. This includes naming to protect the child from witchcraft, for death prevention, to exceed the life span of others, and to reflect survival. These names are

carriers of messages, communicating sentiments from one family member to another as well as to dissuade evil spirits.

The book concludes with a synthesis of the concepts of ancestral prominence in Zulu culture, the gender dynamics involved in polygynous traditional Zulu society, and the naming practices of children within this context. An appendix records and categorises a list of Zulu names from KwaMambulu.

This book makes a valuable contribution to knowledge of South African Zulu culture. The cultural connection between the author and the subject is continually established, privileging the reader to a nuanced insight into naming practices in traditional Zulu polygynous society. The concepts of naming, polygynous marriages, gender dynamics and traditional Zulu culture are synthesised and relayed through interview excerpts and positioned within relevant discourses. These cultural particularities are recorded and made accessible to a broad audience of academics and the public. The study can platform further understanding into universal concepts of marriage, gender politics and naming through comparative studies concerning other traditional and contemporary societies.

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