

**Butler University**

---

**From the Selected Works of Margaretha Geertsema-Sligh**

---

2015

# Framing of Jacob Zuma and Polygamy in Die Burger (2008-2013)

Margaretha Geertsema-Sligh, *Butler University*



Available at: [https://works.bepress.com/margaretha\\_geertsema/22/](https://works.bepress.com/margaretha_geertsema/22/)

This article was downloaded by: [Butler University]

On: 18 August 2015, At: 09:57

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London, SW1P 1WG



## Communicatio: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcsa20>

### FRAMING OF JACOB ZUMA AND POLYGAMY IN DIE BURGER (2008-2013)

Margaretha Geertsema-Sligh<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Associate Professor, School of Journalism, Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Published online: 18 Aug 2015.



CrossMark

[Click for updates](#)

To cite this article: Margaretha Geertsema-Sligh (2015) FRAMING OF JACOB ZUMA AND POLYGAMY IN DIE BURGER (2008-2013), *Communicatio: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research*, 41:2, 175-191

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02500167.2015.1054851>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

# FRAMING OF JACOB ZUMA AND POLYGAMY IN *DIE BURGER* (2008–2013)

**Margaretha Geertsema-Sligh**

Associate Professor

School of Journalism

Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

mgeertse@butler.edu

## ABSTRACT

The traditional practice of polygamy, whereby a person is married to more than one spouse at the same time, entered the public discourse in South Africa primarily through President Jacob Zuma's weddings in 2008, 2010 and 2012. This article aims to reflect the discussion of Zuma's polygamy in particularly the Afrikaans communities of South Africa from 2008 to 2013, as the Afrikaans language newspaper *Die Burger* targets this segment of the broader society. Drawing on framing theory, three major themes emerged from this analysis. First, writers in *Die Burger* want Jacob Zuma to be a modern head of state instead of a traditional man. Second, they believe that the particular cultural right to practise polygamy violates women's human rights. Third, they see Jacob Zuma and polygamy not as a private but as a public issue, since taxpayers are supporting his family financially.

**Keywords:** *Die Burger*, culture, framing, Jacob Zuma, media representations, polygamy, South African press

UNISA  
university  
of south africa

Routledge  
Taylor & Francis Group

Communicatio  
Volume 41 | Number 2 | 2015  
pp. 175–191

DOI: 10.1080/02500167.2015.1054851  
Print ISSN 0250-0167 | Online 1753-5379  
© Unisa Press

## INTRODUCTION

South African President, Jacob Zuma, is a controversial figure for many, both locally and abroad. From a rape case in which he was acquitted, to fraud charges that were eventually dropped, to his embracing of traditional Zulu culture, Zuma often dominates the news. Issues of culture, such as Zuma's polygamous marriages, seem to be especially difficult for the news media to cover. In fact, some believe that South Africa's journalists are mostly ignorant of Zulu culture and can therefore not represent it fairly.

As a public figure, Zuma's polygamous relationships have garnered much media attention – not always favourable. While the news media create meaning, they also reflect public opinion on important issues. This research aims to reflect the discussion of Zuma's polygamy in particularly the Afrikaans communities of South Africa, as the Afrikaans-language newspaper *Die Burger* targets this segment of the broader society. As president of South Africa, Zuma is a well-known figure and his actions are potentially of interest to all citizens. Thus the aim of this article is to show how *Die Burger* framed Zuma's polygamy from 2008 to 2013. This article presents the dominant themes arising from a qualitative content analysis of the very public debate surrounding Zuma and polygamy.

Some historical background may provide context for the time period of this study. While active in the African National Congress (ANC) during the apartheid years, Zuma became widely known in South Africa when he assumed public office as deputy president of the country in 1999. In June 2005, then-President Thabo Mbeki asked Zuma to resign when Zuma's financial advisor, Schabir Shaik, was convicted on corruption charges. At this time, Zuma himself was charged with corruption, but charges against him were dropped in April 2009. Zuma became president of South Africa in May 2009 and was re-elected in 2014.

His private life has also been eventful. In December 2005, Zuma was charged with raping the HIV-positive daughter of a family friend, but was acquitted in May 2006. Zuma, who has been married six times, is currently married to four women. In 1973, he married Gertrude Sizakele Khumalo. In 1976, he married Kate Mantsho – a union that lasted until her suicide in 2000. In 1982 he married Nkosazana Dlamini, but they divorced in 1998. It was after Zuma became president of the ANC in 2007 that his polygamy became a public issue: he married Nompumelelo Ntuli on January 8, 2008; Thobeka Stacie Madiba on January 4, 2010; and Gloria Bongekile Ngema on April 20, 2012. This study focuses on the time period from his marriage to Ntuli in 2008, and includes his marriages to Madiba and Ngema.

## MEDIA FRAMING

This article draws on framing theory to show how the news media create and construct meaning in a multiracial and diverse country. Framing theory originated

in the work of sociologist Erving Goffman, who shows in *Frame analysis* how people organise and make sense out of their everyday experiences by using frames. These frameworks help people to 'locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences' (Goffman 1974, 21). Drawing on the work of Goffman, Gitlin (1980, 6) describes frames as 'principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters'.

While framing studies have, since the 1980s, become popular with communication scholars, it appears as if framing is not very well defined (Weaver 2007). For the purpose of this article, framing is defined as the process of selecting and highlighting certain aspects of news while downplaying others (see Borah 2011; D'Angelo 2002; Domke 1997; Entman 1993; Gamson 1989; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Gitlin 1980; Pan and Kosicki 1993; Reese 2007). D'Angelo (2002, 876) adds that critical scholars believe 'news organizations select some information and intentionally omit other information'.

Scholars also describe frames (or themes) as organising principles or ideas that construct meaning and influence public debate. For example, Reese (2001, 11) defines frames as 'organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world'. Gamson (1989, 157) suggests a frame is a 'central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue'. Similarly, Carragee and Roefs (2004, 217) state that 'frames construct particular meanings concerning issues by their patterns of emphasis, interpretation, and exclusion'. Frames may change over time, and conflicting frames may appear in stories on the same issue (Carragee and Roefs 2004). Framing theory, then, will make it possible to determine what contributors to *Die Burger* consider as the most important aspects to focus on in the public debate surrounding Zuma and polygamy.

## POLYGAMY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Polygamy, defined as the 'practice whereby a person is married to more than one spouse at the same time' (Zeitzen 2008, 3), is a versatile kinship system that appears worldwide, across cultures and in various religious groups. Anthropologists differentiate between polygyny, where one man is married to several wives, and polyandry, where one woman is married to several husbands. Polyandry is rare in 'traditional African cultures' (Mbatha 2011, 31). A third form of polygamy is group marriage, in which several husbands are married to several wives. In this article, the term polygamy is used throughout to refer to polygyny. Polygamy could serve a political function through alliances, be a marker of power and prestige, could help with the division of labour in the household, could ensure the production of children (especially sons) as future workers, and could lead to the accumulation of

wealth (Cook 2007; Nasimiye-Wasike 1992; Zeitzen 2008). Polygamy also makes it possible for every woman in a village to have a husband, for children to have an acknowledged father, and for a man to take a second wife if his first wife is unable to give him a son (Cook 2007). Yet, Westerners often see the practice as primitive.

In South Africa, polygamy is legal under certain conditions, and at the same time the constitution is committed to gender equality as set out in the Bill of Rights. The *Recognition of Customary Marriages Act* (RCMA), 120 of 1998, ‘recognizes customary marriages which are “negotiated, celebrated or concluded according to any of the systems of indigenous African customary law which exist in South Africa”, including polygamous marriages’ (Vincent 2009, 58). Proponents of the RCMA believe it is ‘an important milestone on the road to gender equality in South Africa’ (Andrews 2007, 1493). Andrews (2007) points out that the main purpose of the act is to ensure legal protection for women and their children within polygamous marriages. However, widespread poverty, violence against women and associated cultural attitudes are obstacles to the goal of gender equality for these women (ibid.).

Feminists in general are concerned with achieving gender equality. Globally, women’s rights are today considered to be human rights and not something marginal to human rights discourse. Thus, feminists critique polygamy for gender inequalities and for the violation of human rights that is perpetuated by this form of marriage. For example, Nasimiyu-Wasike (1992, 107) writes that ‘the whole system supported and enhanced men’s power and domination over women’. Gender Links, a southern African non-governmental organisation (NGO) that works on gender and media issues, states that it is against polygamy because of its own human rights-based approach. It states that ‘the practice does not promote full and equal enjoyment of rights for both parties (women and men)’ (Policy Brief, 1) and that it instead leads to great gender inequities. Murray (1994, 39) similarly cites human rights, saying that ‘we cannot abandon our commitment to human rights because of our deference to the idea of cultural relativism’. Andrews (2007, 1294) writes that women’s advocates are concerned about the unequal status of women and the ‘symbolic manifestation of patriarchy’ in polygamous marriages. A significant risk identified by women in polygamous marriages is that they may contract HIV/Aids if the partner is unfaithful, since they often cannot insist on condom use by their husband (Mbatha 2011). However, according to Mack (2011), even though polygamous marriages are often forced and allow sexist behaviour, one should not oversimplify polygamy as necessarily a source of oppression for women.

The RCMA has also been criticised for its view of culture as fixed and unchangeable, and traditionalists see the law as an interference. Vincent (2009, 64) argues that the ‘RCMA is a conservative piece of legislation which untenably calcified a dual legal order in which a certain array of choices is afforded to some citizens but not others’. In particular, Vincent (ibid.) takes issue with ‘the assumption that cultural membership is a timeless and essential characteristic of people, rather

than being socially constituted and historically contingent'. According to Herbst and Du Plessis (2008, 14), traditionalists argue that the 'Recognition Act interferes with traditional practices and customs'.

## JACOB ZUMA AND POLYGAMY

Zuma almost singlehandedly brought the issue of polygamy into the public discussion through his marriages and other relationships with women. According to Gordin (2008, 27), 'Zuma likes women a great deal and he likes making babies; he is the proverbial family man. He is also an unabashed polygamist.' Zuma told a television interviewer in 2007 that while many politicians have mistresses and children they hide, he prefers to be open: 'I love my wives and I'm proud of my children' (ibid.). As shown above, Zuma has been married six times, and is currently married to four women. He is estimated to have 20 children. Zuma has paid the bride price (*lobola*) to two fiancées. He has also had relationships with other women over the years. In 2010, Zuma paid damages to Irvin Khoza because his daughter, Sonono Khoza, fell pregnant out of wedlock. In 2006, Zuma was acquitted in a rape case. Much research has been published about the rape trial, but not about Zuma and polygamy.

Zuma's polygamy has been divisive in South Africa: it has courted both controversy and elicited approval. When he married for the fifth time, the *Economist* reported that the Reverend Theunis Botha, the white leader of the Christian Democratic Party, had 'been quoted disparaging the event as a "giant step back into the dark ages" of South Africa's supposedly superstitious, ancestor-worshipping past' ('A president who promotes tradition' 2010). On the other hand, Commey (2010, 61) points out that some South Africans felt Zuma's polygamous marriages were the right thing to do, as they 'formalise' relationships and allow for 'transparency, social stability, and security for children'.

Publicly, Zuma has used culture to defend his personal life, arguing that polygamy is part of his Zulu heritage. Zeitzen (2010, 1) writes that Zuma's defense of his culture is no accident: 'For Zuma, practicing polygamy marks him clearly as a Zulu and connects him to pre-colonial African traditions, giving him an identity that could otherwise be lost in a globalized, Westernized blur.' In fact, Hitchens (2009, 1) writes that Zuma makes 'no pretence of being Westernized, and delights in wearing traditional Zulu dress, leopardskin, loincloth and all'. Some fear that they will be seen as racist if they criticise Zuma's polygamy. However, in the case of Sonono Khoza's secret child, journalist Mark Gevisser (2010, 1) commented that the criticism of the president was not from 'white racists, but rather, because of the disquiet and outrage of black South Africans, who understood that he was abusing traditional customs to justify his own goatishness. There is no question that he had broken the very strict rules of traditional African polygamy by impregnating the daughter of Irvin Khoza.'

Issues of culture have been front and center in the media coverage of Zuma, whether related to his rape trial or his polygamous marriages. It appears as if the media struggle with how to cover these issues. Sesanti (1998, 375) writes that

because of our colonial history, many in the media are ignorant of African culture, and this includes Africans themselves who are media practitioners. As a result of ignorance of African culture, many media practitioners have found themselves ill-prepared to deal with the task of engaging those who seek to invoke culture to justify their actions.

According to Davies-Laubscher (2014, 103), ‘much of the media’s framing of Zuma’s sexual exploits can be explained by media practitioners’ general ignorance of African culture’. Khumalo (2010, 1) accuses reporters of lacking an appreciation for and knowledge of the ‘finer nuances’ of Zulu culture. Robins (2007, 163–165) writes that culture became the

keyword in popular and media understandings of ‘the Zuma affair’ ... The problem with analyses by ... media commentators is that they failed to recognize that the former Deputy President could represent himself as both a diehard African traditionalist as well as a modern revolutionary and former trade unionist ...

According to Du Plessis (2006, 61), the public debate surrounding Zuma’s rape trial was set up around the ‘tradition/modernity’ divide – a divide, she argues, which is false and does not leave room for discussions about ‘culture, ethnicity, and tradition and their role and place in the society we are making and shaping’.

Exceptions also exist. For example, on March 4 the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) ran an article titled ‘How do Zulus explain polygamy?’ (Diffin 2010) – an article which is unique in its efforts to reflect how Zulus view polygamy. Sesanti (2009) singles out the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper for its news coverage of the Zuma rape trial in which two black African women, Nomboniso Gasa and Vuyo Sokupa, were asked to write opinion pieces. As Sesanti (ibid, 210) argues, the two women were able to engage with issues from ‘African cultural perspectives’.

## ***DIE BURGER* NEWSPAPER**

As stated above, this research aims to reflect the discussion of Zuma’s polygamy in particularly the Afrikaans communities of South Africa, which the Afrikaans-language newspaper *Die Burger* targets. While Zuma’s actions are potentially of interest to all citizens, Afrikaans people have a specific interest in minority rights, as their language is protected in the constitution just as Zuma’s polygamy is. In fact, *Die Burger*’s editorial policy supports not only a multiparty democracy, a free-market economy, personal freedom and press freedom, but also full and equal status for the Afrikaans language (Media24 2014).

*Die Burger*, a daily newspaper distributed in the Western and Eastern Cape provinces, is published by Media24, part of the Naspers media company. It is often



described as the company's flagship newspaper. Based in the parliamentary capital, Cape Town, it shares editorial content with its sister newspapers, *Die Volksblad* and *Beeld*. *Die Burger* has a combined readership of 459 000 (AMPS 2013) and a total circulation figure of 59 895 (ABC Jan/March 2014) ('*Die Burger* generic presentation'). Of these readers, 49 per cent are coloured, 49 per cent are white and two per cent are black (ibid.).

It is well known that the mainstream Afrikaans press in South Africa, including *Die Burger*, was a proponent of the National Party (NP) and apartheid through the years. Du Plessis (1998) writes that Afrikaner nationalists who formed the NP were also involved in founding *Die Burger* in the second decade of the previous century. As such, *Die Burger* acted as the mouthpiece for the NP (Wasserman and Botma 2008). According to Wasserman (2010, 21), the development of the Afrikaans press as a whole was 'closely linked to the ideology of Afrikaner nationalism and [it] provided support for the white minority regime during its reign'. Indeed, even though Afrikaans papers sometimes differed from the NP, the relationship remained strong over the years (Du Plessis 1998).

Since the first democratic election in 1994, the Afrikaans press has, however, undergone a remarkable transformation. Wasserman (2009, 61) writes that the Afrikaans media have 'attempted to rid themselves of [their] ideological baggage, and instead embraced a free-market ideology in which race has ostensibly disappeared'. The Afrikaans press repositioned itself 'within the discourse of liberal democracy, especially with regards to the interpretation of this democracy as a system that guarantees the rights of individuals and minorities, proscribes hate speech and racism, and protects freedom of speech' (Wasserman 2010, 23).

In fact, in his 2004–2005 study of *Die Burger*, Botma (2006, 141) calls the transformation of Naspers in terms of its political point of view 'surprising' and 'radical'. Botma (ibid.) writes that since 1990, 'Naspers has exchanged its official association with the National Party and the promotion of (ethnic) Afrikaner nationalism for an outspoken, complete participation in the transformation process that led to the new inclusive South African democracy in 1994 and the Constitution in 1996'. According to Botma (2006), *Die Burger* asked readers in 1994 to vote for the NP, but in 1999 it asked readers to vote for democratic opposition parties, thus against the ANC. In 2004, editor-in-chief Arrie Rossouw went further than his predecessor, Ebbe Dommissie, by steering *Die Burger* away from specific political parties and 'encouraging participation in the democratic process', which in theory could also include support for the ANC (ibid, 141). It is clear from the above that while *Die Burger* once served as the mouthpiece of the NP, the relationship between *Die Burger* and the NP changed as the newspaper placed its focus on embracing the new constitution, multiparty politics, and cultural rights for minorities – including that of the Afrikaans-speaking community.

## RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHOD

Drawing on the literature discussed above, the aim of this article is to study how the Afrikaans newspaper *Die Burger* framed the issue of Jacob Zuma and polygamy, using qualitative content analysis. A search of *Die Burger*'s web archive (<http://www.koerantargiewe.media24.com/>) on January 16, 2014, using the terms 'Zuma' and 'poligamie' delivered 79 articles published between 2008 and 2013. This time period was chosen to include Zuma's marriages to Ntuli in 2008, Madiba in 2010 and Ngema in 2012. The year 2008 was also the first time that articles with the two keywords appeared in the search.

After duplicates were eliminated, the data set consisted of 54 articles, the majority published in 2010 (44), followed by 2012 (4), 2008 (3), 2013 (2) and 2011 (1). No articles were found in 2009. The data included news articles, opinion articles, columns, editorials and letters to the editor. Throughout the analysis, the author pointed out what kind of news piece was used to obtain quotations. News articles were typically quite straightforward, while strong opinions were expressed in opinion articles, columns, editorials and letters to the editor. These opinions were crucial for showing how readers and writers of *Die Burger* framed issues. The archived articles did not include the names of the writers, so PDF files of all the relevant pages were obtained from an employee of Media24. The PDFs made it possible to determine who the writers were and also what kind of piece was analysed (news article, opinion article, column, editorial or letter to the editor). Articles were closely read and coded for emerging themes. The author translated quotes from Afrikaans to English for use in this article.

## RESULTS

Throughout the media coverage of Zuma's polygamy, *Die Burger* presents this issue as one that must be debated publicly. For example, the commentator Dawie (2010, Jan. 9) states in a column that 'the acceptability and admissibility of cultural practices like polygamy must be discussed and weighed, exactly because we have a constitutional democracy'. Dawie invites Zuma to join the debate over polygamy in general and his multiple marriages in particular. Yet, in this debate, *Die Burger* discusses Zuma and polygamy frequently in negative terms. For example, columnist Martie Retief Meiring (2008, Feb. 21) refers to Zuma's wives as his 'harem' and his children as a 'kindergarten'. Polygamy is variously described as 'criminal', 'politically charged', 'controversial', 'a thorny issue' and an 'embarrassment'. In fact, columnist Max du Preez (2010, Feb. 6) states that '[t]oo many regular people are ashamed that the president is acting like a dog in heat'. Zuma is said to be 'bewitched' and his sex life is deemed 'frivolous' and a 'scandal'.

Overall, three frames emerged from the analysis: Zuma as a traditional man or a modern head of state, polygamy as a cultural right or a violation of women's

rights, and Zuma's polygamy as a private or a public issue. This analysis will show that writers in *Die Burger* want Zuma to be a modern head of state, that they view polygamy as a violation of women's rights, and that they view Zuma's polygamy as a public issue.

## Traditional versus modern

The first frame that emerged from this analysis is that of the traditional versus the modern. On the one hand, reports in *Die Burger* state that Zuma is traditional, but then argue that his tradition is in conflict with modern values. Columnist Zelda Jongbloed (2010, Jan. 4) states: 'Zuma makes no secret that he is a traditional Zulu, and that polygamy is his tradition.' Zuma's polygamy is often discussed in terms of his weddings, one of which is described in a news article as 'traditional' and 'colorful' (Sapa 2008, Feb. 18). Meiring (2010, Jan. 7) writes in a column that Thobeka Madiba, Zuma's third wife, wore a 'traditional leopard skin ... modernized with feather trappings, bling and a glittering wig' at her wedding to Zuma. The bridal party, Meiring writes, danced without bras – 'at least this is a repetition of a so-called old tradition'. Columnist Blouwillem (2010, Jan. 12) jokes about Zuma's own traditional wedding gear: 'We hear that the Zumpis (Zuma's impis) have to go hunt leopards for the wedding suit for number 6.'

The question that arises in *Die Burger* is whether the tradition of polygamy can be reconciled with modern, progressive values. Most authors do not think so. Meiring (2008, Feb. 21) asks in an opinion column whether US President Barack Obama, when on a state visit to South Africa, would be impressed with something as 'anachronistic (and uneconomical) as a polygamous head of state in a modern state'. In another column, Meiring (2010, Jan. 7) writes: 'The acceptability of polygamy is still questioned in this modern world in which Zuma is eagerly participating (planes, houses, shoes, silk suits, speeches in a large font with simple words written out for him). The answer is that this is a traditional custom and must be accepted as such.' Du Preez (2010, Feb. 6) argues in his column that 'president Zuma is acting more and more like a traditional African king or chief instead of like a president in a modern state ... We do not want to have a king, we see ourselves as a modern democracy and we want to have a modern, sophisticated and capable head of state.' In a letter to the editor, Malcolm de Roubaix (2010, Jan. 9) writes that he would not call 'these unacceptable cultural practices (such as polygamy) ... primitive, but they are certainly not in step with mainstream ethical thinking in a progressive state'. A news article by Leopold Scholtz (2010, Jan. 6) cites an overseas newspaper as saying that 'young blacks think polygamy is outdated and does not belong in modern society'.

Authors in *Die Burger* emphasise the last point, namely that some think polygamy is out of place in South Africa. Columnist Rian van Heerden (2010, Jan.

16) writes: ‘Many South Africans find it strange, even ridiculous, that our president is married to three women at the same time. And it takes us back to dark Africa, as one opposition politician said.’ Jongbloed (2010, Jan. 4) writes in her column that Zuma is represented as a ‘typical primitive African’ overseas. In a column about whether Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma should be referred to as ‘the former wife of pres. Jacob Zuma’, Tim du Plessis (2012, July 26) writes that ‘perhaps she realized by 1998 that polygamy was an obsolete, archaic practice that has no place in a modernizing community’.

Despite all the negative descriptions of Zuma’s polygamy, it may still be acceptable for some, but his extra-marital affair is not. Du Preez (2010, Feb. 6) states in his column that

we can still tell foreigners you should not say our president is primitive just because he is having more than one wife, this is how we do things around here. But Zuma has now crossed the line [with his affair]. There are now too many South Africans who think he is an embarrassment.

A front page lead news article by Philda Essop (2010, Feb. 2) cites Mosiuoa Lekota, a leader of the Cope political party, saying that ‘polygamy is not promiscuity and that Zuma has to act like the head of a state, not like a gigolo’.

Despite Zuma having ‘crossed the line’, *Die Burger* asks for an understanding of the variety of cultures in South Africa. Several articles state that South Africans should be tolerant and sensitive to issues of culture. For example, columnist Jongbloed (2010, Jan. 4) states that she ‘strongly believes that in the multiplicity of cultures in South Africa, tolerance and sensitivity must be practiced. ... Like it or not, we live in a country with quite a few cultures (some even clashing).’ Dawie (2010, Jan. 9) warns against racism when dealing with cultural practices: ‘much of the criticism against Zuma’s practice of polygamy has a racist undertone that judge black people as backward and primitive. This should be rejected as we need understanding among different races.’ In another front page news article, Neels Jackson (2010, Jan. 22) cites Prof. Christina Landman, a theologian from the University of South Africa, saying that Zuma should actually be admired for moving effortlessly between cultures:

We need to try and understand Jacob Zuma and respect the ease with which he moves between his identities. He is the head of a state governed by a secular constitution, and he is a bishop of an African church, and he honors his Zulu culture. He maintains rights and marries more than one woman. And for him there is no tension between these. We can envy him.

Even so, Scholtz (2010, Jan. 15) writes in an opinion column: ‘In principle, cultural property, even if it is different from your own, must be accepted and respected. But there are limits. In my humble opinion, ... polygamy violates those limits.’

## Cultural rights versus women's rights

The second frame that emerged is tension between particular cultural rights and women's rights. The only time that *Die Burger* reports on the cultural right to practise polygamy is when it cites Julius Malema, former leader of the ANC Youth League and now leader of the Economic Freedom Front (EFF), in news articles. Marietie Louw-Carstens (2010, Sept. 18) writes in a news article that Malema believes 'President Jacob Zuma has the right to be a polygamist. ... Polygamy is a culture and each culture is protected in this country.' Malema is also cited in a news article by Anesca Smith (2011, June 15) as stating that 'there is nothing wrong with president Zuma if he chooses to practice polygamy as a cultural right. It is a right that is protected by the Constitution.'

The view that Zuma (ab)used culture to justify his relationships was expressed frequently. The front page news article by Essop (2010, Feb. 2) reports that Lekota said Zuma's 'sustained smokescreen that polygamy is an African custom is not acceptable anymore. He [Zuma] has for a long time been a "very weak" role model.' *Die Burger* reports that even black South Africans find Zuma's relationships distasteful. Columnist Du Preez (2010, Feb. 6) states:

[Zuma] overestimates the role and influence of South Africans who are still living a traditional life and who accept all his excuses of 'this is our culture.' I have in the last few days heard from too many black people, including Zulus, that Zuma's most recent escapades are reprehensible and humiliating. Even a few experts of traditional Zulu culture declared in public that Zuma is taking a chance.

Similarly, columnist Rhoda Kadalie (2010, Feb. 16) states that she is 'encouraged by the countrywide protest, especially by young black men and women for whom such behavior by the head of state is unacceptable. Zulu men and women castigated the president because "he did it in the Zulu name".' Kadalie further states in her column that 'it is sad that the effort to make culture an excuse for such relationships has become a national pastime'. Alicestine October (2010, Feb. 16) cites Helen Zille in a front page lead article on the same day, saying that 'Zuma defended his actions as cultural polygamy, even though it has been proven that extra marital relationships are not part of Zulu culture'. Dawie (2012, May 26) states in a column: 'Zuma pledged loyalty to each of his current four wives. Random promiscuity is also frowned upon in traditional black culture.' In a news article, Alet Rademeyer (2010, July 21) cites Dr. Kgosi Letlape as saying that people have to talk about the misrepresentation of culture: 'We have to confront this and something like polygamy must be placed in context. Polygamy mixed with promiscuity is a recipe for disaster.' Finally, columnist Christi van der Westhuizen (2010, Jan. 23) describes culture as a 'popular cloak for the subversion of women's rights, because white and black progressives can be silenced with it'.

In fact, several authors in *Die Burger* state that anyone who criticises Zuma could be accused of being culturally insensitive. Columnist Amanda Gouws (2010, Jan. 7) writes that ‘nobody wants to interfere with Zuma’s polygamous marriages because criticism against cultural groups is seen as racist or subversive’. Dawie (2010, Jan. 9) justifies criticism of polygamy:

Zuma’s supporters defend his cultural right to have more than one wife and they accuse critics of cultural intolerance ... But if you criticize Zuma, you are seen as racist, culturally insensitive, you deny the Constitution’s inclusion of cultural rights and are acting in a Western ethnocentric way ... but it is a mistake to say you are judging the entire Zulu culture or you trample the Constitution if you criticize the president’s practice of polygamy.

Regardless, columnist Jongbloed (2010, Jan. 4) writes: ‘For me it is totally unacceptable that a man, and ... the president of a country, thinks it is necessary to be married to so many women at the same time. Go ahead and call me culturally insensitive.’

Several writers in *Die Burger* consider whether polygamy violates women’s rights. Columnist Gouws (2010, Jan. 7) states: ‘We can ask whether the right to gender equality clashes with the practice of polygamous marriages ... [It highlights] the conflict between universal human rights as contained in the Constitution and the particular nature of culture.’ In a letter, reader De Roubaix (2010, Jan. 9) calls polygamy ‘repulsive’ because ‘it relegates the woman to a third-class “instrument” and thus sustains a patriarchal system’. Dawie (2010, Jan. 9) states:

There is a very strong argument that the practice of polygamy interferes with the principle of gender equality, as guaranteed in the Constitution. ...Dawie would for example like to hear how he [Zuma] decided that his cultural rights weigh more than gender equality. Does he think his brides should have the right to marry other men?

Other authors echo the question whether women should be able to marry several men. Some also ask whether white people can have polygamous relationships. Scholtz (2010, Jan. 15) states in a column: ‘Polygamy means similarly inequality and unfreedom of women. Why can a woman not have more than one husband?’ On the next day, columnist Van Heerden (2010, Jan. 16) writes: ‘And if men are allowed in terms of the [law] to marry more than one woman, a woman must of course have similar rights (which is not the case right now). As well as us whiteys (which is also not the case right now).’ Only Gouws (2010, Jan. 7) asks what Zulu women actually think of polygamous marriages: ‘The question is whether Zulu women find polygamous marriages damaging. It is difficult to determine because many of them are in the rural areas, but there is a lot of literature indicating that women in other cultural groups experience polygamy as discriminatory.’

The issue of minority rights for other cultural and racial groups in South Africa also emerged in *Die Burger*. A reader, Daryl Swanepoel (2010, Jan. 8), asks in a letter:

Why should the ANC protect the cultural rights of the Afrikaner or the interests of the brown community or other minorities, but tell its president that he must give up his Zulu traditions as negotiated in the constitution ... You either support the protections of indigenous cultural group such as those of the Zulu and the Afrikaner, or you are against it.

In an opinion column, Gouws (2010, Oct. 18) states that white (as well as brown and Indian) South Africans experience an underlying sense of unfairness, because compromises are not being made for their cultures.

Concern was expressed about Zuma's behaviour and the issue of HIV/Aids. In a news article, Essop (2010, Feb. 2) cites Lekota as saying that '[Zuma's] actions in a country with high HIV/Aids presence are "highly irresponsible and scandalous".' In a news article, Scholtz (2010, Feb. 4) states that the international media focused, throughout their coverage, on the 'desperate HIV/Aids situation in South Africa and the wrong message that Zuma is sending out with his sex life'. Yet, columnist Du Preez (2010, Feb. 6) writes that 'Zuma ... indignantly denied that his promiscuity ... undermines his government's campaign against HIV and AIDS'.

## Public versus private

The third frame that emerged from this analysis is whether Zuma's polygamy is a private or a public matter. Some argue in news articles that it is a private matter, but most writers indicate that it is, in fact, a public issue. Essop (2010, Feb. 2) states in the front page news article that Pat Stevens wrote on the 'Friends of Jacob Zuma' website: 'It is time for people to stop looking into another's sex life. If the president wants to share his bedroom with multiple women, it is his own, private matter.' In the same article, Essop quotes Malema as saying that journalists must keep their noses out of Zuma's sex life: 'You should be ashamed of yourself for asking such a question, especially because it is about an elder. You don't interfere with the business of elders. Zuma is our father and we are not qualified to talk about this [his sex life].' A news story by Rajaa Azzakani (2010, Jan. 12) states that 'more than half the participants [in a survey] felt a leader's private life must be kept out of the public eye'.

News pieces analysed most often make the argument that Zuma's polygamy is a public matter. Columnist Jongbloed (2010, Jan. 4) writes that 'with each additional wife that he marries, there are consequences for the regular tax payer. They have to get houses, must be protected 24/7, must get access to health insurance, get transported to where they want to go, and so on. These things cost money and Zuma will not have to pay for them himself.' Similarly, Gouws (2010, Jan. 7) writes in a column about the economy of polygamy: 'Zuma's wives and 18 children must be dealt with in accordance to the status of the family of the head of state. The extensions at the presidential complex, Nkandla, cost R65 million. Who pays for this and for the wedding receptions? ... the taxpayers.' In another column on the same day, Meiring

(2010, Jan. 7) states that people want to know who pays for the tennis shoes (worn at the wedding), skins, dances, the herd of slaughtered cattle and ‘rivers of beer and whiskey’. And Dawie (2010, Jan. 9) writes: ‘The government has unequivocally indicated that all three his wives are entitled to state subsidies, and as long as the taxpayer’s money is used to support Zuma’s cultural practices, his weddings are public matters.’ Finally, columnist Gouws (2010, Oct. 18) writes that ‘groups (such as white people) in South Africa who are not polygamous, are dissatisfied because pres. Jacob Zuma uses taxpayers’ money to sustain his marriages. According to their perceptions it is unfair and backward.’

## CONCLUSION

This article has used a qualitative analysis of content in the Afrikaans newspaper *Die Burger* to study news frames related to Jacob Zuma and polygamy. Overall, it found that polygamy was frequently discussed in negative terms. Three main frames emerged: in the first place, a debate arose about whether Zuma’s traditional Zulu culture is acceptable in a modern country such as South Africa. Most authors stated that the tradition of polygamy cannot be reconciled with modern, progressive values. The second frame that emerged was a tension between Zuma’s particular cultural right to practise polygamy and the violation of women’s human rights through this practice. The only time *Die Burger* reported on the cultural right to practise polygamy was when Malema was cited in news articles. News pieces examined for this article frequently stated that polygamy violates women’s rights, and some also questioned whether women may marry multiple men, and whether white people may also practise polygamy. A final frame presented Zuma’s polygamy as a public matter. The argument that it is a private matter is only made in news article where reporters cite Zuma supporters. Zuma’s polygamy is seen as a public matter because of the cost to the taxpayer.

As only two per cent of *Die Burger*’s readers are black, questions inevitably arose as to how *Die Burger*’s Afrikaans reporters and writers cover a culture they do not belong to. This analysis shows that content in *Die Burger* sends a mixed message: on the one hand, *Die Burger* advocates tolerance and understanding of different cultures, but on the other hand some of the reporting is condescending towards Zuma, with certain writers ridiculing and trivialising him with regard to polygamy. This most often happened with regard to Zuma’s promiscuity (not a cultural issue), but polygamy was also represented in a negative light. One may even argue that *Die Burger* symbolically annihilated Zuma through its condemnation and trivialisation (Tuchman 1978). What is of concern is that in this sample of articles, *Die Burger* never approached anyone who practises polygamy, nor cultural experts, to explain it – neither men nor women. The most sensitive writing was shown by Gouws (2010, Jan. 7), who asked what Zulu women thought of polygamous marriages. However, she



did not pursue this question further by asking cultural insiders. Indeed, the analysis shows that *Die Burger* had great difficulty in writing in a fair and informative way about this cultural issue as it relates to Zuma, perhaps because of his violations of the rules of polygamy. This makes one wonder how *Die Burger* will remain relevant and connected in a multicultural South Africa, if it lacks insight into other cultures.

A limitation of this study is that the data set only included items containing both the words ‘Zuma’ and ‘poligamie’. It is quite possible that some articles were published on the topic of polygamy, but without specific reference to Zuma. Future studies can consider the themes or frames developed in the English or black press, to arrive at a comparison with this study. As frames change over time, a future study could compare the findings of this study with the findings of a later study. Journalists can also be interviewed to see how they view issues of culture. Finally, other pressing cultural issues, such as traditional initiation ceremonies, can be studied to see how the news media create and construct meaning in a diverse country such as South Africa.

## REFERENCES

- ‘A president who promotes tradition’. 2010, Jan. 9. The *Economist* 394(8664), p. 49.
- Andrews, P. E. 2007. ‘Big love?’ The recognition of customary marriages in South Africa. *Washington and Lee Law Review* 64(4): 1483–1497.
- Borah, P. 2011. Conceptual issues in framing theory: A systematic examination of a decade’s literature. *Journal of Communication* 61: 246–263.
- Botma, G. 2006. Sinergie as politiek-ekonomiese strategie by *Die Burger* 2004–2005 [Synergy as political-economic strategy at *Die Burger* 2004–2005]. *Ecquid Novi* 27(2): 137–158.
- Carragee, K. M. and W. Roefs. 2004. The neglect of power in recent framing research. *Journal of Communication* 54: 214–233.
- Comme, P. 2010, February. New year, new wife ... another one in waiting. *New African*: 60–61.
- Cook, C. T. 2007. Polygyny: Did the Africans get it right? *Journal of Black Studies* 38(2): 232–250.
- D’Angelo, P. 2002. News framing as a multiparadigmatic research program: A response to Entman. *Journal of Communication* 52: 870–888.
- Davies-Laubscher, N. 2014. The role of the media in framing President Jacob Zuma’s multiple or concurrent relationships as cultural polygamy. Master’s thesis, Stellenbosch University.
- Die Burger* generic presentation. <http://widget.ads24apps.co.za/img/web/downloads/Die%20Burger%20AMPS%202013AB%20ABC%20Jan-Mar%2014.pptx> (accessed December 15, 2014).
- Diffin, E. 2010, March 4. How do Zulus explain polygamy? The BBC. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/magazine/8549429.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/8549429.stm) (accessed July 14, 2014).
- Domke, D. 1997. Journalists, framing, and discourse about race relations. *Journalism & Mass Communication Monographs* 164: 5–55.

- Du Plessis, I. 2006, September. What was at stake in the Zuma trial? Tradition/modernity. *Rhodes Journalism Review* 26: 61.
- Du Plessis, T. 1998, Winter. Newspaper management keeps quiet about its role in apartheid: In the Afrikaans press, some reporters decide to testify. *Nieman Reports* 52(4): 55–56.
- Entman, R. M. 1993. Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication* 43(4): 51–58.
- Gamson, W. A. 1989. News as framing. *American Behavioral Scientist* 33(2): 157–161.
- Gamson, W. A. and A. Modigliani. 1989. Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: A constructionist approach. *The American Journal of Sociology* 95: 1–37.
- Gevisser, M. 2010, March 4. The politics behind Zuma's polygamy. *The Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/mar/04/zuma-polygamy-south-africa> (accessed January 29, 2014).
- Gitlin, T. 1980. *The whole world is watching: Mass media and the making and unmaking of the New Left*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Goffman, E. 1974. *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gordin, J. 2008. *Zuma: A biography*. Jeppestown, South Africa: Jonathan Ball.
- Herbst, M. and W. du Plessis. 2008. Customary law v common law marriages: A hybrid approach in South Africa. *Electronic Journal of Comparative Law* 12(1): 1–15. <http://www.ejcl.org/121/art121-28.pdf> (accessed June 26, 2013).
- Hitchens, P. 2009, April 22. He has four wives and he faced 783 counts of corruption. *MailOnline*. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1165473/He-wives-faced-783-corruption-charges-PETER-HITCHENS-South-Africas-president.html> (accessed June 26, 2012).
- Khumalo, F. 2010, Jan. 6. One man's 'fall' is another's civilization. *TimesLive*. <http://www.timeslive.co.za/opinion/columnists/2010/01/09/one-man-s-fall-is-another-s-civilisation> (accessed July 14, 2014).
- Kruger, F. 2007, March 4. Zuma is the victim of a media witch hunt. <http://www.journalism.co.za/blog/zuma-is-the-victim-of-a-media-witchhunt/> (accessed July 24, 2014).
- Mack, J. 2011, Sept. 26. One feminist asks: 'Is polygamy inherently bad for women?'. *Ms. Magazine Blog*. <http://msmagazine.com/blog/blog/2011/01/05/one-feminist-asks-is-polygamy-inherently-bad-for-women/> (accessed January 5, 2012).
- Maclean, S. 2012, April 21. Sixth time's the charm: Polygamist South African President Jacob Zuma beams with delight as he marries Gloria Ngema (while his other three wives look on). *MailOnline*. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2133220/Polygamist-South-African-president-Jacob-Zuma-marries-Gloria-Ngema-wives-look-on.html> (accessed January 24, 2014).
- Mbatha, T. 2011. In and out of polygyny: A case of black South African women's experiences of marriage. *Agenda* 25(1): 29–37.
- Media24. 2014. <http://www.media24.com/en/newspapers/dailies/die-burger.html> (accessed January 30, 2014).
- Murray, C. 1994. Legal eye: Is polygamy wrong? *Agenda* 22: 37–41.

- Nasimiyu-Wasike, A. 1992. Polygamy: A feminist critique. In *The will to arise: Women, tradition and the church in Africa*, ed. M. A. Oduyoye and M. R. A. Kanyoro, 101–118. USA: Orbis Books.
- Pan, Z. and G. M. Kosicki. 1993. Framing analysis: An approach to news discourse. *Political Communication* 10: 55–75.
- Pillay, V. 2010, Jan. 4. All the president's women. *Mail & Guardian*. <http://mg.co.za/article/2010-01-04-all-the-presidents-women> (accessed January 24, 2014).
- 'Policy Brief: Polygamy – the heart of the matter.' Gender Links, received through personal communication with Saeanna Chingamuka on 11/08/2011.
- Reese, S. 2001. Framing public life: A bridging model for media research. In *Framing public life*, ed. S. Reese, O. Gandy and A. Grant, 7–31. Mahwah: Erlbaum.
- Reese, S. D. 2007. The framing project: A bridging model for media research revisited. *Journal of Communication* 57: 148–154.
- Robins, S. 2006. Sexual rights and sexual cultures: Reflections on 'the Zuma affair' and 'new masculinities' in the new South Africa. *Horizontes Antropológicos* 12(26): 149–183.
- Sesanti, S. 2008. The media and the Zuma/Zulu culture – an Afrocentric perspective. In *Power, politics and identity in South African media: Selected seminar papers*, 364–377. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Sesanti, S. 2009. Reclaiming space: African women's use of the media as a platform to contest patriarchal representations of African culture – a womanists' perspective. *Critical Arts* 23(2): 209–223.
- Tuchman, G. 1978. Introduction: The symbolic annihilation of women by the mass media. In *Hearth and home: Images of women in the mass media*, ed. G. Tuchman, A. K. Daniels and J. W. Benet, 3–38. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Vincent, L. 2009. Polygamy in the *Recognition of Customary Marriages Act*. *Agenda* 82(23): 58–65.
- Wasserman, H. 2009. Learning a new language: Culture, ideology and economics in Afrikaans media after apartheid. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 12: 61–80.
- Wasserman, H. 2010. 'We're not like that': Denial of racism in the Afrikaans press in South Africa. *Communicatio* 36(1): 20–36.
- Wasserman, H. and G. J. Botma. 2008. Having it both ways: Balancing market and political interests at a South African daily newspaper. *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies* 22(1): 1–20.
- Weaver, D. H. 2007. Thoughts on agenda setting, framing and priming. *Journal of Communication* 57: 142–147.
- Zeitzen, M. K. 2008. *Polygamy: A cross-cultural analysis*. Oxford and New York: Berg.
- Zeitzen, M. K. 2010, March 12. The many wives of Jacob Zuma. *Foreign Policy*. [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/03/12/the\\_many\\_wives\\_of\\_jacob\\_zuma](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/03/12/the_many_wives_of_jacob_zuma) (accessed January 29, 2014).