



Onomastics Online
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17:00-18:00 (UTC+2)
Microsoft Teams

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Moderator: Chrismi-Rinda Loth (University of the Free State, South Africa)

Offspring of an Outcast: The Cultural Significance of Naming Among the Basotho

Abstract: This study explores the cultural context of naming practices among the Basotho, using onomastic theory to analyze the socio-cultural meanings embedded in names. Names in Basotho society are not arbitrary; they reflect social status, historical events, and communal values. The research investigates how individuals labeled as “outcasts” are named and how these names carry social implications that influence identity, belonging, and social interactions. Through qualitative methods, including interviews and textual analysis, the study examines the semantic, morphological, and sociolinguistic features of names associated with marginalization. Onomastic theory provides a framework to understand how names act as social markers, reinforcing or challenging societal norms. The findings reveal that names associated with social exclusion often carry a historical and emotional burden, reflecting broader societal attitudes toward marginality. Additionally, the study underscores the dynamic nature of naming practices, as shifts in social perceptions influence the redefinition and reclamation of once-stigmatized names. The research contributes to the understanding of identity construction through language, offering insights into the relationship between naming practices, cultural heritage, and social cohesion within Basotho communities.

Keywords: Onomastic theory, Basotho naming practices, social identity, cultural heritage, marginalisation.

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Biography: Prof Rethabile Possa is Head of African Languages and Literatures, Senior lecturer, a member of the Language Policy Committee and a Student Registration Advisor in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Cape Town. She is the appointed Residence Warden for Fuller Hall and a Deputy Warden at Forest Hill. Prof Possa is a published author with several academic publications and Sesotho Drama book, children's story and poetry. She is currently a Sesotho editor for AVBOB poetry competition. She is the Chairperson of Sesotho National Bodies in South Africa. She is recognized internationally as a keynote speaker for academic forums. She is the Principal examiner for the

International Baccalaureate Organisation. Her research focuses on Folklore, Onomastics, Poetry and research studies in intellectualisation of African languages particularly Sesotho language with the advantage of knowing two Sesotho orthographies. She has an in-depth background in Sesotho communications teaching, translation, editing and writing.

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Onomastics Online lecture series:

Onomastics Online is a series of online lectures dealing with important timely topics related to names and naming. Given by distinguished scholars from various academic backgrounds, the lectures demonstrate the importance and the multidisciplinary nature of onomastic research. To see the list of upcoming and past lectures, please visit our webpage at: <https://icosweb.net/onomastics-online/>.

Next lecture: 2026 schedule to be announced

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