

Cleansing Rites: An Erstwhile Practice or an Imperative? A Revisit of the Novel *Umshado* (The Wedding)

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Abstract

The custom of mourning and cleansing is neither new nor unique to South Africa. It is a longstanding practice that exists in many African countries. This is a custom that has been handed down from one generation to the other. Every widow is expected to mourn a loved one for a year. This article intends to interrogate the mourning rites as practised in the novel authored by Nelisiwe Zulu titled *Umshado* (The Wedding). The question to be asked is, should women shun some of the beneficial rites that have been handed down from generation to generation in the name of women's emancipation? Scholars like Gumede and Mathonsi have conducted research on the novel *Umshado*. They applied a feminist approach in the analysis of the novel. In this article, I build on that scholarship but argue that feminism should not be used to disrespect some of the cultural practices that are held in high esteem by society, such as the cleansing ritual. Neglect of such important practices may uproot society from the cultural mores that stabilise it.

Keywords: African feminisms; cleansing rite; indigenous knowledge system; widow; Zulu culture; Zulu novel

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Explain Umshado Novel

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