

Ubuntombi (Virginity) Among the Zulus: An Exploration of a Cultural Identity and Difference from a Postcolonial Feminist Perspective

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Abstract : The cultural practice of ubuntombi (virginity) among the Zulus is not easily understood from the outside of its cultural context. The empirical study that was conducted through the interviews and focus group discussions about the retrieval of ubuntombi as a cultural practice within the Zulu cultural community indicated that there is a particular cultural identity and difference that can be unearthed from this cultural practice. Being explored from the postcolonial feminist perspective, this cultural identity and difference is discerned in the way in which a Zulu young woman known as intombi (virgin) exercises her power and authority over her own sexuality. Taking full control of her own sexuality from the cultural viewpoint enables her not only to exercise her uniqueness in the midst of multiculturalism and pluralism but also to assert her cultural identity of being intombi. The assertion of the Zulu young woman's cultural identity does not only empower her to stand on her life principles but also empowers her to lift herself up from the margins of the patriarchal society that otherwise would have kept her on the periphery. She views this as an opportunity for self-development and enhancement through educational opportunities that will enable her to secure a future with financial independence. The underlying belief is that once she has been educationally successful, she would secure a better job opportunity that will enable her to be self-sufficient and not to rely on any male provision for her sustenance. In this, she stands better chances of not being victimized by social patriarchal influences that generally keep women at the bottom of the socio-economic and political ladder. Consequently, ubuntombi (virginity) as a Zulu heritage and cultural identity becomes instrumental in the empowerment of the young women who choose this cultural practice as their adopted lifestyle. In addition, it is the kind of self-empowerment with the intrinsic motivation that works with the innate ability to resist any distraction from an individual's set goals. It is thus concluded that this kind of motivation is a rare characteristic of the achievers in life. Once these young women adhere to their specified life principles, nothing can stop them from achieving the dreams of their hearts. This includes socio-economic autonomy that will ensure their liberation and emancipation as women in the midst of social and patriarchal challenges that militate against them in the hostile communities of their residence. Another hidden achievement would be to turn around the perception of being viewed as the "other"; instead, they will have to be viewed differently. Their difference lies in the turning around of the archaic kind of cultural practice into a modern tool of self-development and enhancement in contemporary society.

Keywords : cultural, difference, identity, postcolonial, ubuntombi, zulus

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