

Shifting Boundaries in Respect of Perceptions Governing Women and the Burning of *Impepho*

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Abstract

Within the Zulu people's belief system almost all ritual and or traditional ceremonies require ancestral intervention if the occasion is to be accorded a status befitting it. The summoning of and or libation to the ancestors are closely linked to burning of *impepho*, a type of an indigenous African plant which is well-known to the majority of Sub-Saharan Africans. Depending on the nature of the rite in question or affordability by the family wanting to offer a sacrifice, chickens, goats or cows are presented as food for the ancestors. Males, albeit of particular standing within the family are charged with presiding powers at such ceremonies. Ordinarily, women have no place in these matters. However, there is a growing power shift which sees women in female headed households perceiving themselves as much of custodians of culture as their male counterparts. The article reports on the recently completed study whose aim was to find out why women were not allowed to preside in undertakings necessitating the burning of *impepho*. Furthermore the study is ground breaking in that the responses of women, who actually preside over ritual practices requiring the burning of *impepho*, deconstruct the myth that women should not handle *impepho* on such occasions. One of the key questions answered in this article is whether the prayers of such women and their needs go unheard by the ancestors.

Keywords: Ceremonies, indigenisation, gender, *impepho*, ancestors

Introduction

This study attempts to redress certain discriminatory practices within the Zulu culture with specific reference to the burning of *impepho*, a type of an indigenous African plant that, once dried, is burnt in order to communicate with one's ancestors. This herb is well-known to the majority of Sub Saharan Africans as it is used by various sectors of society to communicate with ancestors in a number of ritual ceremonies and traditional feasts, where, depending on the nature of the ceremony and the circumstance of the family, a particular animal is slaughtered as an offering to the ancestors. Amongst the ceremonies and traditional feasts in which *impepho* is used are *umemulo* (the ceremony to celebrate girls' puberty rights), *isifo* (death), *ukubuyisa* (the bringing back home of a dead relative's spirit), and occasions of thanksgiving. Nyawose (2000: 41) provides a worthwhile explanation of the use of *impepho* during each of these ceremonies.

From the onset it is worth remarking that the subject of *impepho* under review is more known as far as it relates to its use at ritual ceremonies. Moreover, whatever literature there is on this topic it does not go beyond family rites to question women exclusion in the practise. In this sense, therefore, there is lack of feminist literature in the development of the argument since whatever literature exists is written by men; as it will be evident as the study progresses. Furthermore most of the male fraternity who have written on the issue are against women inclusion in the handling of *impepho* at ceremonies requiring its usage as the article will demonstrate (Ntshangase 2011). Zulu literature written as recently as in the 2000s reflect a mentality of maintaining a status quo as far as women exclusion in the *impepho* activities is concerned. Hence the scarcity of up to date debates in the area under investigation.

We, the authors of this article, are of the opinion that the subject of our research is a thought-provoking one and a valuable area of research as it will help clarify guidelines surrounding the use of this plant specifically with regard to women. Nearly all Zulu people have burned *impepho* at some point in their lives in order to communicate with their ancestors. Even amongst those who claim that they do not burn it, this research discovered that most of them do adhere to the practice even though they request the diviners not to divulge that information. According to the interview we held with one diviner, for example, some of the people who say that due to their religious

orientation do not burn it, have sought diviners' intervention when tradition calls and they have asked not to be revealed that they subscribe to it (Interview held on 10 February 2011). The secrecy might lie in the conventionally held notion that ordinary women ought not to be allowed to use *impepho* nor to be permitted to go to *umsamo* (the sacred sanctuary in the home reserved for ritual activities and which involve the burning of *impepho*) to speak to the ancestors. Due to changes in society which see women increasingly heading families, we are beginning to question the notion of women not being allowed to handle *impepho* on their own. Since women constitute a significant proportion of those who take part in this practice (whether openly or secretly) the study hoped that women's concerns will be addressed through this study. These anxieties are to do with why women are restricted in terms of burning *impepho* and how their needs in this regard can be accommodated. The research was guided by the following questions:

- What is the symbolic meaning of the practice of burning *impepho*?
- Do prayers go unheard by the ancestors if an ordinary woman burns *impepho*?
- What is it that actually makes a woman's sacrificial prayers unacceptable?
- Why do men put their foot down about women lighting *impepho*?
- How can this tradition be amended so as to accommodate women in general and those in female-headed families in particular? (see Ntshangase 2011).

Background and Rationale of the Study

The authors of this article come from families which have been, for more than three decades, headed by their mothers- both their fathers having died when the authors were still young. One author comes from a semi-urban area while the other is from a rural area. They found common grounds in locating the study in areas similar to their backgrounds; hence a semi-rural and a rural area. The authors shared stories of how their mothers always found themselves in a dilemma when rituals calling for burning of *impepho* had to be performed. In the absence of a male head of the household their mothers

had to invite an uncle or a neighbouring man bearing the same family name to preside over a required ritual. At times this created a problem especially when the mothers preferred to burn *impepho* privately and without an ‘outsider’s knowledge. Another concern was that the families experienced difficulties if these men were not readily available at the time requiring the ritual; and this happened quite regularly. There would be long delays before the ritual could be performed. What if the circumstances were life threatening? Rather than go through all that emotional anxiety our mothers felt that as part of the family they were better suited to enter the *umsamo*, the sacred space and preside in the ceremony lest the worse happens. Consequently when they got frustrated from waiting for a ‘saviour’ or a total stranger to perform the rite on their behalf they went ahead and performed the rite on their own. Amongst other concerns it is this ground-breaking practice that lead to the conception of this study. In addition, the study went beyond accepting that women had as much right as men to perform official rituals in their households but collected sufficient data to prove that such beliefs were social constructions rather than taboo. This article reports on the overall impression of the study, presents results emanating from it as well as offer recommendations for what further research could be conducted in this area.

Context of the Study and Setting

The data for this study was collected from two places, namely KwaNyuswa, which is a rural area and KwaNdengezi, a semi-urban area. Both places are in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Participants consisted of married Zulu women over the age of fifty and who, due to absence of their husbands, be it through death or other circumstances, are viewed as heads of their families. This is an age when women could be considered mature enough to understand issues on the use of *impepho*. Some of the women were diviners and as such there were two sets of questions. The interviews took a form of five focus groups in each area with each group having a number of between six and ten women. These were followed up by ten one-on-one interviews in each location. All communication was in isiZulu, our mother tongue as well as the language of the respondents.

Research Methodology and Methods

Methodology refers to the general principles by which we investigate the

social world and also how we demonstrate validity of knowledge. On the other hand a research method refers to the more practical issue of choosing an appropriate research design (Henning 2004: 4). In the social sciences there is a distinction between method and methodology. Methodology is a combination of the choice of which aspects of the social world to research, the choice of which method to use for collecting the data, and the chosen way to then interpret that data. All these aspects are informed by the broad theoretical framework within which one's research is carried out.

The present study employed the qualitative research method. Silverman (1997:8) argues that the qualitative method of research is well suited to the collecting of data when it comes to finding out about the lives, views, values, culture and traditions of a people. The inquiry was about finding out the real reason(s) behind women being restricted from the practice of burning *impepho*. Data was collected by way of interviews, focus groups and/or participant observation. These methods of data collection enabled us as researchers to take into account the feelings of the participants, which involved paying attention to their body language. In that way we were able to consider the feelings of the participants and gain accurate information on a sensitive topic such as the burning of *impepho*. During the interviews and focus group discussions a tape recorder was used to record the conversations. The recorded discussions were then transcribed at a later stage for analysis purposes. Handwritten notes were also used in order to facilitate the writing up of the dissertation. All communication was in isiZulu, our mother tongue as well as the first language of the respondents.

The study was also ethnographic in nature. Johnson (2000:111) defines *ethnography* as 'a descriptive account of social life and culture in a particular social system based on detailed observations of what people actually do'. This study examined the Zulu people and their culture and considered how this culture discriminates against and marginalises women. It investigated Zulu people's culture, practices and beliefs whilst also comparing such aspects with those of other groups living either in South Africa or beyond its borders.

Theoretical Framework

Gender oppression being one of the problems faced by women the world over, the study adopted feminism and social construction theories as its

theoretical underpinnings. This was because the research wanted to find a way to accommodate women into the cultural practices that have been historically reserved for men. Hannam (2007: 3) defines feminism as a set of ideas that recognises, in an explicit way, that women are currently in a subordinate position to men and its adherents therefore seek to address this imbalance of power between the two sexes. Furthermore feminism aims to find a balance between men and women so that the latter can enjoy equal rights and have access to the same activities as men in both the public and private spheres. Central to feminism is the view that the position of women is socially constructed and is therefore open to change. Feminism has various branches, such as radical, Marxist, African feminism and liberal feminism. While all of these branches deal with empowering women, they differ in the thrust they put on how to achieve these objectives. For the purposes of this study liberal feminism, which advocates that women be given equal rights to men in the home, in the workplace, and in politics was adopted.

According to liberal feminist theorists the rights that women deserve include the right to have equal access to cultural practices, of which the use of *impepho* is an example in this, our current study. The use of *impepho* in traditional or cultural practices, we argue, should accommodate women of befitting status without trying to change the norms of our Zulu culture and tradition. By extension, social construction states that society constructs the different gender roles and makes them seem natural, whereas they can in reality be changed according to race, place and need. In the past, women and men have been subjected to certain norms and standards, but lately many people have become aware that these norms and standards were created by society to give men an upper hand in societal matters while disadvantaging women.

As has been shown by Buikema (1995:15), women of all races and cultures have historically been denied certain rights, have been excluded from certain occupations and roles, and have been marginalised. Magezi (1996:13) aptly calls for equal treatment of women by society. If feminists of the 1960s and 1970s were opposed to the unequal division of roles between men and women, should not feminists of the twenty first century be even more vociferous on these concerns? Should societies still be upholding views that claim that when the head (meaning male) of the family dies all is lost? What with contradictions in male perceptions on the issue of *impepho* in the twenty first century? The problem is that, within the Zulu culture, powers for the use of

impepho are generally vested with the *umnumzane* (head of the family) and then with close male relatives. In many homes women are deprived of this authority. This restriction constitutes one of the major forms of discrimination against women, as women are also part of the family and should be treated as equal members. Ntuli (2010: 19) writes in uncompromising terms:

Abantu besifazane abakaze babe nelungelo lokushisa impepho. Ngisho nasemandulo ngokwesiko lwesiZulu noma ngabe ilapho agcagcela khona noma ngabe uyisalukwazi sakhona. Kodwa akanalo ilungelo lokushisa impepho.

(Women have never had a right to burn *impepho*, even if a woman is married into that family, or even if she is an old woman within that family. But she still has no right to burn *impepho*).

On the contrary Mkhize (2009: 19) is of the opinion that a man and his wife be both allowed to go into the sacred shrine, *umsamo* and speak to the ancestors by burning *impepho*. He also states that both the father and the mother are needed to communicate with the ancestors and that the female is known to the ancestors, whether she is a wife or a daughter. On the issue of *umsamo*, which is closely linked to the use of *impepho*, Mkhize (2009: 19) writes:

Le ndawo ubaba nomama wasekhaya beya khona befike khona bakhulume nabadala abangasekho Ngakhoke ukuthetha emsamo kudinga usokhaya ubaba, kudinga umama ikakhulu kuyiwa nokudla kuyiwe notshwala kubekwe

(The father and mother go to this sacred place and they speak to the elders who have passed on. Therefore to communicate with one's ancestors you need both the father and the mother, as she is mostly needed to supply the food and Zulu beer).

Mkhize (2009: 45) also remarks that the wife will be known to the ancestors as the wife, as well as the one who makes *umqombothi* (Zulu beer) for them. She is also known as the caretaker and the mother who can communicate with them, because when a woman marries, *impepho* is lit for her, she is introduced to the ancestors, and she then forms part of the family. Mkhize

argues, and we concur, that it would therefore be better to allow those females who are known to the ancestors as family members to burn *impepho* rather than insist on that some other male – who may well be a stranger to them and their ancestors – do it on their behalf simply because he has the same surname and there is no other male in the family to do it for them.

Data Analysis

In this section we discuss the concept and nature of data analysis as well as the different methods that can be used to analyse information. We then describe thematic analysis which is the method we chose to analyse our data. The themes are first listed followed by a discussion section where the literature and the study's findings are compared.

Data analysis is the most important part of a person's research as it is where the information collected from the participants is reconciled with the key questions of the research. Mouton (2001:108) explains that the aim of analysis is to understand the various constitutive elements of one's data through an inspection of the relationships between concepts, constructs and variables to see if there are any patterns or trends that can be identified or isolated, and/or to establish themes concerning the data. Levine (2002: 1) further describes data analysis as a body of methods that helps to describe facts, detect patterns, develop explanations, and test hypotheses. In our study all interviews and focus group discussions were recorded and the data was then transcribed into notes so that it could be easily analysed. We listened attentively when conducting the interviews so that we could not only hear the interviewees' responses first hand but also take note of how they responded in terms of the tone of their voices, their gestures and body language.

Methods Selected

Doing data analysis is the most important and exciting part of the research as this is when one finds answers to one's problem and can see oneself coming closer to attaining one's goals. There are different kinds of methods that can be used to analyse data, but due to limited space, we only discuss thematic analysis; a method we opted for in this study after several considerations. Often used in conjunction with other methods, it is a widely used method in qualitative research. Rubin and Rubin (2004: 225) point out that thematic

analysis is exciting because ‘you discover themes and concepts embedded throughout your interviews’. Taking the point forward, Rice and Ezzy, in Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) view thematic analysis as a method that identifies, analyses and reports patterns (or themes) within data. This means that the researcher looks at the responses received, tries to find the common ideas in them and then divides those into more specific themes. In this sense thematic analysis is a search for themes contained within the collected data. Proponents of thematic analysis argue that its flexibility allows for better handling of massive data. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that one must not be misled into thinking that anything goes. Furthermore, the researcher should focus on details that are relevant to the research’s aims and objectives. This is what we endeavoured to do in our analysis through applying caution where our discretion was concerned. We were still able to establish what was more important and valuable in the findings we arrived at. For instance, something could be mentioned by all the participants yet not be relevant to the research. Such an opinion should thus not count as a theme.

Themes Identified in the Study

The topic researched has not been adequately researched from the female point of view and we thought our study would be ground breaking in this regard. The broader themes that emerged from the data are listed in bold capital letters below. Verbatim statements are offered so as to demonstrate why we felt identified themes were legitimate. These speech marks are given in IsiZulu first, the language of the respondents as well as the language in which the data was gathered. Each quotation is then translated into English for convenience. Our translation and transcription approach is in line with descriptive translation theorists, Toury (1980) and Lefevere (1982) in Zondi (2008) who suggest that the socio-cultural context in which translation take place should be considered when translating. According to these scholars, translations are never produced in a vacuum but they are part of a larger system and therefore should be described in that context. We now list the themes as they emerged from the data.

Many Women do Burn *Impepho* to Communicate with Ancestors

Nearly all the women that were interviewed stated that they burn *impepho* in their homes because they feel that the ancestors should accept them since they legitimately belong to the family. The fact that they are old merits them the right to do things for themselves. What follows are verbatim extracts from some of the participants that justify this theme.

- *Kwami ngiyazishisela impepho angibizi muntu, hawu, ngingaze ngibize umuntu ngingazo izandla.*
(In my house, I burn *impepho* myself. I don't call anyone. Wow, why do I need to call someone else when I have my own hands?).
- *Ngiyayishisa uma sisodwa ekhaya kodwa uma kunemicimbi ishiswa umfowabo womenyeni wami.*
(I burn it if we are alone [i.e. she is alone with her children], but when there is a ceremony my brother-in-law burns it).
- *Abantu besifazane sebeyazishisela impepho manje, phela izikhathi sezashintsha.*
(Women do burn *impepho* on their own now that times have changed).

Women are Allowed to Burn *Impepho*

Times have changed and due to circumstances (such as relatives living far away and male family members having died) women are now allowed to burn *impepho* so as to call upon their ancestors in order to ask for help or to honour them. The participants stated that they do in fact burn *impepho* in their homes, and that whatever they ask for does come true, even though they are females. Some quotes that justify this theme are as follows:

- *Mina la kwami ngiyazishisela impepho futhi engikucelayo kuyenzeka.*
(Here in my house I do burn *impepho*, and whatever I request I get).
- *Umamezala wami wathi angizishisele impepho ngoba yena nobabezala bahlala kude kunami kodwa uma kunomsebenzi omkhulu bayayishisa bona.*

(My mother-in-law told me that I could burn it because she and my father-in-law stay far away from us. But if there is an important ritual ceremony they burn it).

- *Kwashona umyeni wami ngazishisela mina impepho, izihlobo zikhona eduze angithembi umuntu. Indodana yami isencane.*
(When my husband passed away I started burning *impepho* on my own. My relatives live close by but I don't trust anyone. My son is still too young to assume this role).
- *Ngiyayishisa impepho ngicele emadlozoni engikufisayo noma uma kuhlatshiwe.*
(I burn *impepho* and ask the ancestors to grant my wishes or when we slaughter animals as offerings).

There are Conditions that Forbid Women to Burn *Impepho*

Although women are allowed to burn *impepho*, there are certain conditions that forbid them from burning *impepho*. These conditions are as follows.

- A. If there is a male figure in the family such as a father or a brother.

These are the quotes that led to this statement:

- *Ngeke umuntu wesifazane ayishise impepho uma esekhona ubaba wekhaya noma indodana endala, kodwa uma sebengasekho kumele azishisele.*
(A woman cannot burn *impepho* if the husband is still alive or if there is an old son, but if they have passed on she must burn it).
- *Uma indoda yomuzi isekhona kumele kube yiyona eshisa impepho ikhulume emadlozini, umama aguqe ngemuva kwakhe alalele.*
(If the man as the head of the house is still alive, it is his duty to burn *impepho* and speak to the ancestors. The woman kneels behind him and listens).
- *Umuntu wesifazane angayishisa impepho kodwa uma umuntu wesilisa esaphila kuba nguyena oyishisayo noma acele isihlobo simshisele.*

Perceptions Governing Women and the Burning of Impepho

(A woman can burn *impepho* but if there is an older male in the family, he can burn it too. She can also ask a male relative to assist her).

B. If the woman has had intercourse. One needs to be pure to burn *impepho*.

These are the quotes that led to this statement:

- *Uma kade uselawini awukwazi ukushisa impepho noma ungowesilisa noma owesifazane.*
(If a person, be it male or female, has indulged in sexual act just prior to the activity that requires burning of *impepho*, he or she may not burn *impepho*).
- *Uma kade wenza ucansi awukwazi ukushisa impepho, phela emsamo kunabantu abadala esibahloniphayo, indawo engcwele esiyihloniphayo.*
(If you had sex, you cannot burn *impepho* at the sacred corner where our ancestors reside and we need to respect them).
- *Umama angayishisa impepho kodwa hhayi uma kade eselawini noma esendaweni yakhe. Lokhu kufana nokusebenzisa imithi. Ngeke imithi isebenze uma uzoyixuba nocansi.*
(A mother can burn *impepho* but not when she has been having sexual intercourse or when she is menstruating. This is similar to using traditional medicine. It will not work if you use it simultaneously with sex).

C. If she is menstruating.

These are the quotes that led to this statement:

- *Umuntu wesifazane angayishisa noma yinini impepho kodwa hhayi uma esezinsukwini zakhe, phela umsamo ufana nendawo engcwele.*
(A female can burn *impepho* anytime but not when she is having her period. *Umsamo* is like a sacred/holy place).

- *Angayishisa kodwa hhayi uma esezinsukwini zakhe, akangeni nasemsamo uma kunjalo.*
(She can burn *impepho* but not when she is having her period. She cannot enter *umsamo* like that).
- *Umuntu wesifazane angayishisa impepho kodwa hhayi uma elapha.*
(A woman can burn *impepho* but not when she is there [said while touching her private part]).
- *Ngiyayishisa impepho ekhaya kodwa angiyishisi uma ngisezinsukwini zami.*
(I do burn *impepho* at my home but not when it is my days [i.e. when I am menstruating]).

It is not Safe to Call a Relative (Third Person) to Burn *Impepho* on Your Behalf

The interviewed women said that they feel it is better for them to burn *impepho* on their own rather than call a relative to help them, as there is a great deal of witchcraft that goes on, albeit from jealousy or some other ulterior motive. These women were of the opinion that it is best to connect to your ancestors personally rather than have a stranger do it for you.

To this effect here are some of the verbatim responses:

- *Khona abantu besifazane kuthiwa bangayishisi kodwa ngathi kungcono ukuzishisela wena kunokucela omunye umuntu ozofika akuphambanisele izinto. Bakuthakathe bakuqede.*
(They say women must not burn *impepho* but it is better that way than having a stranger who could in the process bewitch you).
- *Kungcono nje umuntu azishisele impepho phela sekukuningi ukuthakathana nomona ezihlobeni. Umuntu uthi akazokusiza kanti yena usekuvalile emsamo wakhe.*
(It is best to burn *impepho* yourself since people are jealous and they will bewitch you).
- *We ukubiza umuntu wangaphandle kwekhaya azokushisela impepho akulungile ngoba abantu bayaphambaniselana futhi izinto zakho zingalungi. Kungcono nje ukuzenzela.*

Perceptions Governing Women and the Burning of Impepho

(It is not good to ask an outsider [i.e. a non-family member] to burn *impepho* for you as they can mess things up for you and your plans will fail. It's better to do it for yourself).

Ancestors Cannot be Separated, they are Seen as One

Ancestors cannot be separated. In other words, the ancestors are seen as being one person. Women cannot therefore call upon only female ancestors, thereby leaving out male ancestors. A person can only call upon all the ancestors of a family.

The quotes that led to this theme are as follows:

- *Idlozi lilodwa ngeke ukwazi ukulihlukanisa.*
(The ancestors are one. You cannot separate them).
- *Ngeke ukwazi ukulihlukanisa idlozi, ubabiza bonke kanye kanye.*
(You cannot separate ancestors; you have to call all of them together).
- *Uma usushisa impepho ubabiza bonke abakini abangasekho abayidlozi elihle, abangalungile awubabizi.*
(When burning *impepho*, you call upon all your ancestors but you do not call upon evil/bad ancestors).

This last participant raised the issue of calling upon only the good ancestors within one's family. The point here is that one needs to be aware that there are both good and bad ancestors. Another participant also made mention of a bad/evil ancestor (*idlozi elibi*). This issue will be further discussed in the discussion section below.

Diviners (*Izangoma*) have Ancestors who Possess them Therefore they are Allowed to Burn *Impepho* so as to be able to assist their Patients

The quotes that led to this theme are as follows:

- *Uma uzoba yisangoma ungenwa yidlozi, ilona elikusizayo uma usulapha ngakho- ke impepho uvumelekile ukuyishisa noma ungakanani uma nje usuphuthulile.*
(When you are going to become a diviner, an ancestor enters you, it is the one that helps you when you are healing, therefore you are allowed to burn *impepho*. It doesn't matter how old you are when you have completed your training, you may burn it).
- *Phela isangoma sihlukile kwabanye abantu besifazane ngoba singenwa abantu abadala. Uma sisebenza silekelelwa abantu abadala.*
(Diviners are different from other women because we have supernatural powers within us. When we are healing, they help us).
- *Mina ngangenwa abantu abadala ngisemncane, ngakho-ke ngasheshe ngazishisela impepho. Uma nje usuqede ukuthwasa usungashisa impepho ubize amadlozi akho ukuthi akukhanyisele uma usulapha.*
(I got my calling when I was very young, so I burnt *impepho* at an early age. Once you finish your training, you call upon your ancestors to help you in your healing).

Diviners Suggest that you Get an Older Male who Shares your Surname if you do not have Relatives

Diviners always advise women or young people who need to be introduced to the ancestors (or need to undergo a name-changing process) to bring along at least one male relative or a man with a similar surname to them when they want to burn *impepho*.

The quotes that led to this theme are as follows:

- *Uma ushintsha isibongo sakho, sithi abantu abafike nomuntu omdala wesilisa ozomshisela impepho ambike emadlozini. Kudingeke*

Perceptions Governing Women and the Burning of Impepho

umuntu onesibongo esifana nesakhe ukuthi ambike emadlozini.

(When a person changes his/her surname, we tell them to come back with an old male who will introduce them to the ancestors. We need a person with the same surname as theirs to introduce his/her to the ancestors).

- *Kungcono ukuthi umuntu eze nomuntu wesilisa omdala ozomsiza uma ezongeniswa esibongweni sakubo.*

(It is better if a person comes here with an older male person who will introduce him/her to his/her surname).

- *Ngeke umuntu wesifazane azishisele impepho, udinga owesilisa ikakhulukazi uma engeniswa esibongweni sakhe.*

(A female cannot burn *impepho* for herself, she needs a man, especially if she needs to be introduced to her surname).

- *Umuntu wesifazane angazishisela impepho kwakhe kodwa uma esemncane noma edinga ukushintsha isibongo sakhe kudingeka umuntu wesilisa ozomsiza.*

(A female can burn *impepho* at her home but if she is young or needs to change surnames, she will need a male to help her).

There were many other comments that were similar to these and nearly all the participants were of the same view about women being able to burn *impepho*, but it was not possible to quote every participant's view due to space limitations. The results and a comparison of these results are provided below.

Conclusion

The article has demonstrated that the role of women is socially constructed and that society or tribes have to accommodate the changing times. From the discussion above it would seem that nobody knows for sure why women have been discriminated against in the practice of burning *impepho*. If there is no consensus as to whether it is legitimate or not for women to burn *impepho* then drawing from the responses provided above and those that have been, for brevity, left out in this article, we are of the opinion that women be allowed to occupy roles traditionally set aside for men. From the responses above it is evident that each of the women interviewed consider the practice of burning *impepho* as 'sacred', and as such would not handle it if they were

not in good standing-as per rudiments for burning *impepho*. Therefore the authors recommend that more women embark on a similar study so as to avoid this secrecy on the question of *impepho* and in that way contribute to women emancipation. In ending the discussion the words of Einstein (1983: XIV) are apt:

I think that culture and tradition can change to accommodate women and I believe that women, like men, are socially produced beings and can change.

In other words woman's role in society, that is, what she can and cannot do—is simply what men or the male leaders of her society say is the case. There is a need for women to be able to light and use *impepho* and they should be given the opportunity to do so. This is what liberal feminism tries to achieve: equal opportunities for both men and women. As we can see, there is a need to change the rules with regard to this cultural practice as there are now many more female-headed homes in Zulu society as a result of a high rate of male deaths or absence.

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Perceptions Governing Women and the Burning of Impepho

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