


# Chapter 18

## Umtfwalo: The Traditional Load

**Jabulani Sabelo Jarreth Pato**

*Examinations Council of Eswatini, Eswatini*

**Remah Joyce Lubambo**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1990-0984>

*University of South Africa, South Africa*

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter discusses the significance of ‘umtfwalo’ (traditional load) in the culture of emaSwati. Umtfwalo is witnessed in diverse cultural events within the society of emaSwati, and it presents different meanings at the different times. In each of the instances, it has its symbol. This study, therefore, seeks to explain the concept of ‘umtfwalo’ (traditional load) in the society of emaSwati. It is underpinned by Afrocentricity theoretical framework which advocates for traditions and practices of African societies such as emaSwati. The study uses a qualitative research method of data collection and analysis. Interviews and textual analysis are the types of tools used in this study to collect data. The study’s findings explain the concepts of umtfwalo. Moreover, the study discusses the instances where umtfwalo is expected in the society of emaSwati. The study concludes by pointing out that emaSwati and their umtfwalo are inseparable.*

### INTRODUCTION

Members of the emaSwati society have seen, in certain cultural events, person(s) carrying ‘umtfwalo’ (cultural load) which is a grass mat, wooden pillow and a blanket (sometimes with a calabash), and really ask themselves why that is done. Even the load-bearers sometimes are ignorant of the importance of the load they carry. Not that they are afraid to ask but it is a known thing that you never ask adults why certain things are done in the culture of the people of Eswatini (Dlamini & Masuku, 2013). Why does a young maiden carry the ‘umtfwalo’ (load) and walk in front of the bride when she (the bride) leaves her parental home for her in-laws’ home? Women have been reminded several times that if they misbehave in their in-law's home, they shall have their ‘load tied up’ *kuboshelwa umtfwalo* (load tied up / being chased) and, what is the significance of all that? This is in line with that Gumede cited in Times of Es-

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-4124-8.ch018

watini dated 12/08/2012, who notes that divorce exists in the Swazi Law and Custom. “Every marriage can be divorced, what is why even according to Swazi Law and Custom, a wife can be referred back to her parental homestead if has committed adultery or witchcraft.”

EmaSwati (in funerals) again wish to know why someone is carrying an *umtfwalo* (load) when there are burial proceedings in a home? Again, when a male, usually, a young warrior wants to join a Swazi regiment, he comes with *umtfwalo* (load), the question is, why? What does this cultural load have to do with the people of the culture of the people of Eswatini? It is argued that there is a great cultural significance in the people of Eswatini having their ‘*umtfwalo*’ (load) in certain traditional events. It is not merely done but there is a great meaning in having and doing it religiously (though in some quarters certain aspects of it have been forsaken). Dlamini and Masuku (2013) mention that the bride’s family should prepared and provide a maiden to carry the bride’s load before the dispatching of ‘*umtsimba*’ (bridal party), and this shows the significance of the traditional load.

*Umtfwalo* is part and parcel of the culture of emaSwati. Culture is, according to Valera (2016), the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts. Pato (2018) says that culture is the similar traits displayed by people in the way they live. Culture

...is shared by a group of people who embrace common aspects of life. It is transmitted from generation to generation. Because of this scenario, culture tends to be followed by a group of people for a long time (Mtumane, 2014).

The foregoing definitions make it easier for one to understand why the Swazi people treasure this cultural aspect. EmaSwati are a particular group that has their religion still intact in some parts of their society, and they embrace their way of living despite the changing times they are experiencing. They have inherited this cultural practice, and they are transmitting it to the next generation.

While the practice of carrying the load in the above manner is noticeable among emaSwati, so far, no study has been conducted to reveal and express the motivation of the practice. This is probably the first attempt at doing that. This study, therefore, seeks to explain the concept of ‘*umtfwalo*’ (traditional load) in the society of emaSwati. It discusses the instances of ‘*umtfwalo*’ in the traditional setting of emaSwati as means to appreciate the culture of the people.

## **BACKGROUND OF RELEVANT STUDIES FROM OTHER SOCIETIES**

The subject of traditional load is prevalent in African societies. The Zulu traditional people practiced Umhlanga long before King Shaka’s reign. This ceremony was discontinued, although emaSwati continued to practise it without disruption. The purpose of this event was to urge young ladies to remain pure while also acknowledging and accepting their fragility (Nxumalo, 2014). In these ceremonies, the young maidens carry their own “*umtfwalo*,” or reed. It is mandated that the reeds be handled with care because they are fragile and easily broken.

The Umhlanga festival is thought to be one of the tourist attractions in South Africa, hence the impact of closing it during the COVID-19 pandemic was felt by many (Ndaba,2022). *Umtfwalo* is also realised in AmaZulu marriage ceremonies, where the young girl carries *umtfwalo* in the form of a 'Kist'. The Kist is purchased by the bride's family as a symbol of her coffin, indicating that they acknowledge that the young lady is no longer theirs own but belongs to the family she is marrying into. When the young girl arrives at the groom's family, she checks to see if her *umtfwalo* (Kist) is with her. If the girl is having

18 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

[www.igi-global.com/chapter/umtfwalo/379014](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/umtfwalo/379014)

## Related Content

---

### Models and Frameworks for Digital Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Sundari M. Shanmuga, Sri Harshini Jupallyand Nainika Reddy Vempalli (2025). *Revaluation and Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Modern Society* (pp. 511-534).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/models-and-frameworks-for-digital-preservation-of-indigenous-knowledge-systems/379124](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/models-and-frameworks-for-digital-preservation-of-indigenous-knowledge-systems/379124)

### Outsourcing in Knowledge-Based Service Firms

Ingj Runar Edvardssonand Gudmundur Kristjan Oskarsson (2011). *International Journal of Knowledge-Based Organizations* (pp. 39-55).

[www.irma-international.org/article/outsourcing-knowledge-based-service-firms/55600](http://www.irma-international.org/article/outsourcing-knowledge-based-service-firms/55600)

### Navigating the Digital Divide: Preserving Indigenous Knowledge in the Information Age

Methembe Melusi Mhlope (2026). *Indigenous Knowledge Management in the Open Science Framework* (pp. 49-76).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/navigating-the-digital-divide/389089](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/navigating-the-digital-divide/389089)

### Autopoietic Approach for Information System Development

EI-Sayed Abou-Zeid (2008). *Knowledge Management: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 1035-1041).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/autopoietic-approach-information-system-development/25156](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/autopoietic-approach-information-system-development/25156)

### The Comprehensive Evaluation of Innovation Capability of Police Protective Clothing Enterprises Based on Entropy Weight-Gray Correlation Analysis

Yinghua Zhang, Qilei Wang, Yixin Wangand Xiaoming Zhang (2025). *International Journal of Knowledge Management* (pp. 1-13).

[www.irma-international.org/article/the-comprehensive-evaluation-of-innovation-capability-of-police-protective-clothing-enterprises-based-on-entropy-weight-gray-correlation-analysis/389741](http://www.irma-international.org/article/the-comprehensive-evaluation-of-innovation-capability-of-police-protective-clothing-enterprises-based-on-entropy-weight-gray-correlation-analysis/389741)