

THE CHINAMWALI: A CONSTRUCTION OF SUBSERVIENT FEMININITIES? - AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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This article interrogates the construction of femininities which underpin female initiation rites in most African societies. Following African feminist scholars who advocate for research that explores the influence of such cultural practices on the women who engage in them, this article draws on a study I conducted on chinamwali, the female initiation rite of the Chikunda of Zambia. Given that a large portion of the curriculum content of this initiation rite is intended to prepare the namwali, the initiate, on her future role as a woman, it is useful to examine the role it plays in the construction of femininities. Using the narratives of 30 participants, the study reveals that the chinamwali is a traditional means through which education on the cultural mores and tradition is passed on to the initiate. However, the rite has the potential to influence the social life and status of the women concerned in such a way that they accept notions of inferiority in relation to men throughout their lives and lead them to accept a lower position within the community. Uterine fibroids are non-cancerous growths that develop in the muscular wall of the uterus. They are more rampant in women of African origin, particularly among those 25 years and above. (Sealy, 2012, Godwin, Spices, Worthington-Kirsch, Peterson, Pron, LiS-Myers, 2008, Oguniyi and Fasuba, 1990). Literature has shown that women who are sexually inactive or nulliparous, are more predisposed to the risk of fibroid than sexually active women (Aamir, Manjeet and Janesh, 2014, Ogedengbe, 2003, Aboyeji and Ijaiya, 2002). This study, therefore, examined how Celibate-women who are nulliparous and supposedly sexually inactive perceive their vulnerability to fibroid.

Introduction

Initiation rites are an important moment in the socialisation process of individuals and the acquisition of gender and sexual identities, and a vast critical literature exists on the subject (see: Jules-Rosette 1980: 390; Rasing 1995: 340; Moore et al 1999: 26; Rasing 2003: 6; Siachitema 2013: 1). Most, if not all initiation rites distinguish between the two sexes, as in these rites girls are taught what makes a woman, and boys what makes a man (Jules-Rosette 1980: 390; Moore et al 1999: 26; Rasing 2003: 6; Siachitema 2013: 1). Most of

these rituals and ceremonies have a deep meaning and are designed to invoke memories of the transformation from childhood to adulthood. Richards (1956, 1982), in her elaborate account of the female initiation rite among the Bemba of Northern Zambia, notes the importance of these rituals and ceremonies in the moulding of a “girl” into a “woman”.

In many African societies, initiation takes many forms. Several studies in Southern Africa show that circumcision is the most commonly practised initiation rite for males (Munthali & Zulu 2007: 155; Ntombana 2009: 73-84; Gwata 2009: 4; Venter 2011: 87-97). However, literature shows that in some cultures, circumcision is also practised for girls in addition to the education provided (Chikunda et al 2006: 146; Matobo et al 2009: 106). In Zambia, young girls from a few parts of the country, especially in rural areas, undergo traditional initiation ceremonies (Kuwema 2009: 1). The most common is the puberty rite or ritual which is performed at the onset of menstruation, almost invariably marking a girl’s attainment of sexual maturity and is considered a necessary prelude to marriage (Richards 1982: 18; Rasing 1995: 101; Kapungwe 2003: 36). According to Rasing (1995: 101), reaching sexual maturity implies that the girl has also reached social maturity and is now fit to assume adult roles in society. The focus of this article is on initiation for females that does not include circumcision and is an ideal case to study, because as Kangwa (2011: 4) notes, it remains an important source of traditional education on sex and the social and religious roles of women.

The Chikunda, a matrilineal ethnic group found in the Luangwa District of Zambia, emerged from the slave armies of Portuguese *prazos* or estates first established in the late sixteenth century (Isaacman et al 2004: 36). They practise an initiation ceremony for girls interchangeably called *chinamwali* or *chisungu*, a customary practice performed when a girl receives her first menstrual period. The aim of the ceremony, through the symbolism of menstruation, is to transform a young girl into a woman (see: Drews 1995: 103; Richards 1982: 52; Udelhoven 2006: 87). There is no difference between the terms *chinamwali* and *chisungu* as they both refer to one and the same practice hence, for uniformity, the article will use the term *chinamwali* to refer to the initiation practice. It has been speculated that any woman who has not gone through the ceremony is uncultured (Richards 1982: 120), and that men prefer a wife who has gone through the rite and has as a result become more docile (Udelhoven 2006: 86).

The *chinamwali* ceremony requires a *namwali*, or girl initiate, to be confined in the house for a specific period, though the training aspect is normally kept a secret and is conducted by experienced elderly women, known as the *aphungu*. These are the personal advisors to the initiate, whose knowledge of *chinamwali* has been passed on from generation to generation, and are normally the first women initiates go to when they first menstruate (Drews 1995: 108). Girls’ earlier socialisation of submissiveness to men is reinforced during the rite, the bulk of which is a heavy sex-

ual content which teaches her the techniques of giving sexual pleasure to a man to ensure that he does not stray to another woman (Siachitema 2013: 4). Personal hygiene and general good behaviour, in particular paying due respect to elders, are also encouraged (see: Drews 1995: 104; Munthali & Zulu 2007: 160; Siachitema 2013: 4).

Issues of identity and sexuality are prominent themes explored by the *chinamwali*, as it is through this process that one makes meaning of what it is to be a woman in the Chikunda community. Similarly, Mabasa (2018: 1-3) has examined the *ulwalako*, a rite of passage for boys among the Xhosa of South Africa and the way it is experienced and participated in by those who do not necessarily fit the dominant male identity. As with *chinamwali*, the initiates attempt to reconcile what they see and how they feel about themselves with the demands that the family and community have over them. Mabasa (2018) notes that this identity is under threat when the perception of what it is to be a man is in conflict with their sexuality, as in the case of individuals in same sex relationships. There is limited research on the role of the Chikunda female initiation process. Therefore, my motivation for undertaking the study, is as much as it fulfils certain academic requirements, a personal one, and one that also relates to my interest to engage meaningfully with the subject matter. In this article, I investigate the specific role of the *chinamwali* curriculum, paying particular attention to the teachings on respect, sexuality education, and lessons on sacred emblems and food taboos, to examine the role played in the construction of femininities.

The Chikunda

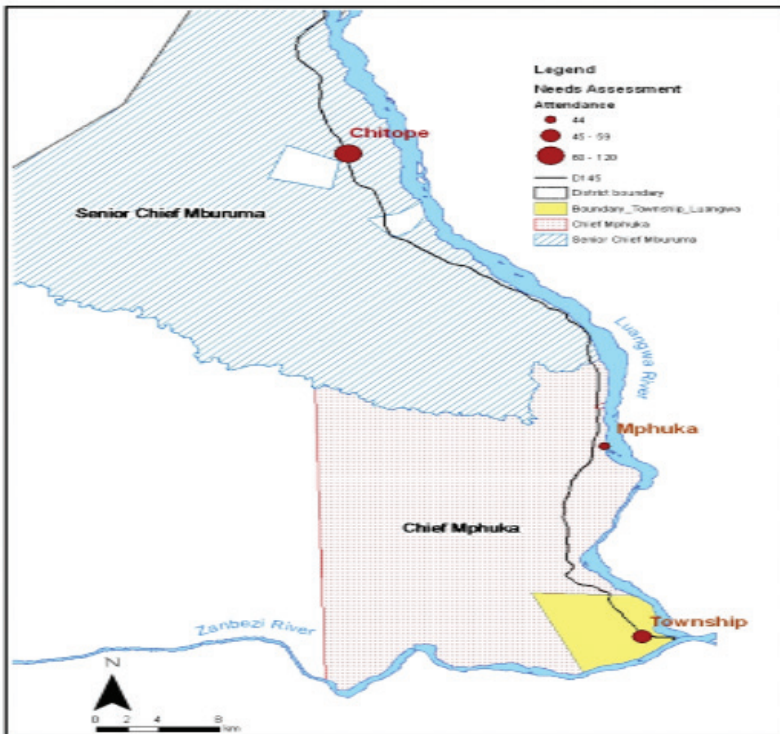
The Chikunda are found in the Luangwa District, in the Eastern part of Lusaka Province of Zambia, bordering Chongwe District to the West, Mozambique to the East, and Zimbabwe to the South. The district is located approximately 350km from the capital, Lusaka, lying at the confluence of the Zambezi and Luangwa rivers at altitudes of below 600m above sea level (Luangwa District Council 2000: ii). The District is part of a National Park and Game Management Area (GMA), and therefore forms part of the animal corridor for the GMA. The population of the District is mainly concentrated along the Zambezi and Luangwa rivers and is sparsely populated with an estimated population of 26, 650 in the year 2007, and a population density of approximately 6.5 people per square kilometre, with an annual growth rate of 11% according to the 2000 census (Luangwa District Council 2007: 2).

It is important to note that in Zambia, despite efforts made by early missionaries and colonialists to eradicate initiation rites for girls, they are still practised today, especially in the rural areas of the country (see: Kuwema 2009: 1; Kangwa 2011: 2; Siachitema 2013: 2). It is also important to note that several studies have been undertaken on the practice, though the focus has been mainly from an anthropological standpoint and on their implications for

reproductive health and social responsibility for those concerned (see: Richards 1982; Drews 1995; Rasing 1995, 2003; Kapungwe 2003; Kangwa 2011). These studies are useful in revealing on-the-ground debates around initiation ceremonies; however, they cannot show how they impact on the women concerned. Furthermore, the Chikunda community is generally perceived as progressive in the context of civilisation, with modern and well-functioning political, administrative and social institutions. The recent developments in the District, in particular the recent infrastructural development and expansion of the road networks, have also opened the area to new ideological and cultural norms from outside. Thus, the survival of female traditional practices albeit done at a smaller scale, defy not only the changing sound, social, political and economic times, but also the increasing prominence of human and people's rights agenda; this calls for a close interrogation of the *chinamwali* practice.

The map below is the map of Luangwa District showing the two chiefdoms: Senior Chief Mburuma's area, and Chief Mphuka's area, which is home to the Chikunda under study.

Fig 1: Map of area covered by the research



Pursuing a Feminist Methodology for Data Collection and Analysis

This article is based on a study I conducted between 2016 and 2017 with the Chikunda in the Luangwa District of Zambia. I located the study within a feminist epistemological framework to examine the *chinammwali*, in the context of the lived realities of the women concerned. The feminist perspective is based on the premise that prior to feminism, Sociology ‘systematically privileged male knowledge, experience and interests’ and ‘propagated masculinist notions of reason and science’ (Ramazanoglu 1992: 208-209). Thus, this perspective puts the social construction of gender at the very centre of inquiry with the ultimate aim of addressing women’s unequal social position in relation to men, and to make gender a fundamental category for understanding the world from a woman’s point of view (Lather 1991: 71-72; Reinharz 1992: 18-19). Moreover, feminist methods of research are best suited for research on sexuality as they are said to foreground the experience of participants as well as the meanings that they attach to these experiences (Maynard & Purvis 1994: 11). As Tamale (2011: 29) also notes, this aspect is important as it allows the researcher to appreciate the issues being studied within the framework of lived experiences and life situations and allows for the actual voices of the participants to be part of the knowledge creation process. Feminists such as Wadsworth (2001: 1) and Reinharz (1992: 18-19) have also consistently emphasised the importance of social context, insisting on using methods that avoid focusing on the individual in isolation, cut off from interactions and relationships with other people. To emphasise this point, Fine and Gordon (1989: 159) note:

.....do not put us in a laboratory, or hand us in a survey, or even interview us separately alone in our homes. Watch me with women friends, my son, his father, my niece or my mother and you will see what feels most authentic to me.

Working from a feminist perspective in the field entailed having face-to-face interactions with participants, directly hearing their stories and recording the verbal information (Moore 1986: 92; Reinharz 1992: 18-19; Wadsworth 2001: 1; Reid 2004: 9). In order to meet the objective of the study, a sample of thirty (30) participants was selected as follows: fifteen adult women who have undergone *chinammwali*, and who constituted the main research participants. In order to fully address the knowledge gap regarding the role of initiation, five ritual instructors, the *aphungu* who are the personal advisors to the initiate were engaged. In addition, no literature could be found that compares non-initiated to initiated women, and it is also not known whether there is a difference in the submissive, obedient and subservient behaviour of the initiated and uninitiated women as experienced by men, therefore, five uninitiated women and five men were selected. Data was collected using the narrative approach

which relies on participants to directly narrate their experiences and feelings of a given phenomenon. The narratives of participants were obtained through the use of in-depth interviews.

In terms of analysis, the study used a qualitative thematic analysis of transcribed interviews to investigate how the *chinamwali* initiation rite influences the social life and status of women among the Chikunda. The thematic analysis method is built upon the theoretical positions of Braun and Clarke (2006: 77-101) who define it as a method used for, ‘identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data’. I found that the method was useful in providing a comprehensive analysis to the investigation of *chinamwali* because as Braun and Clarke (2006: 97) argue, it is a ‘rigorous thematic approach that can produce an insightful analysis that answers particular research questions’. This method of analysis was also used as the inductive nature of the study demands that voices of participants are heard (Wuest 1995: 132). Braun and Clarke (2006: 86) further explain that themes in the data can be identified in an inductive “bottom up” way or in a theoretical, deductive “top down” way. Braun and Clarke (2006: 86) however caution that using data collection questions such as those from the interview schedule are the ‘worst examples of thematic analysis’ because they are entirely deductive and fail to take into account the emergent themes based on an induction process. Accordingly, an inductive approach to the data was taken as it allowed me to develop themes that were linked to the data; this ensured that the themes were not driven by my interest in the subject, but rather by the data.

Furthermore, the aim of the study was to gain participants’ understanding of a female initiation practice. Thus, because analysis of the data was subjected to a qualitative analysis of commonly recurring themes in the data, it allowed me to gain an understanding of the practice rather than testing this understanding against a preconceived theoretical framework (Braun & Wilkinson 2003: 30). In this way, this method is similar to the grounded theory approach (Benzton et al 1998: 25; Glasser & Strauss 1967: 4-7; Wuest 1995: 132; De Vos 1998: 282; Strauss and Corbin 1994: 46). However, though the method shares similarities with the grounded theory approach as well as other approaches, it differs from them because it is not tied to any pre-existing theoretical framework, and as such can be used within different theoretical frameworks; therefore, it is a more accessible approach (Braun & Clarke 2006: 77,79).

The Chinamwali Curriculum

A large portion of the *chinamwali* curriculum is intended to prepare the *namwali*’s future role as a woman. The importance of the girl’s adolescence teachings in

the *chinamwali* curriculum correspond closely to how women are expected to behave in their homes. This education is the responsibility of the girl's social network, which includes the *phungu*, the mother, aunts, grandmothers and all women who volunteer to share their knowledge. These lessons are conveyed through songs and emblems. When the women were asked to describe the teachings in *chinamwali*, teachings on respect, sexuality education, sacred emblems and lessons on food taboos were the most highlighted.

Teaching on Respect

Respect is one of the cardinal themes addressed in *chinamwali* – respect for oneself and to others, especially males and elderly people. The advice given to initiates centres on respecting and obeying parents as well as other adults. For example, Mary from Chiendende aged 29, informed me that she was taught not to open her mother's cooking pot, especially without her permission. She was also taught to assist elderly women in carrying their pots from the river, and to give way to elders whom she meets on the path or road. She was also taught to obey instructions and not to question elders and was taught about self-respect. Catherine, a *phungu*, explained that men were afraid to approach a girl that had undergone *chinamwali* because they knew she had been taught to respect herself. She stressed that this was important because how one treats oneself attracts respect from others as well. Clement, a man aged 43, added that *chinamwali* was useful because it taught a woman how to respect herself and other people. This mirrors findings of other studies on female initiation that have shown that respect for others occupies an important place in the *chinamwali* curriculum (see: Jules-Rosette 1980; Drews 1995; Rasing 1995, 2003 & 2011; Kapungwe 2003; Kangwa 2011; Siachitema 2013).

As she is not married yet, Paula, a ritual instructor, explained that the *namwali* is taught how to respect her future husband; how to receive gifts from him, not with an outstretched hand, but to kneel before him as a sign of respect and to express her gratitude for gifts in the confines of the marital space. The *namwali* is also taught how to receive her husband when he returns from work or the field; she must stop whatever she is doing to receive him, *londela*, (receive) whatever he has brought home properly, by kneeling no matter how big or small the parcel is. The girl is also taught to remove his shoes and to and prepare water for him to bath. Reflecting on her experience, Patricia, aged 43, said that she was taught the customary behaviour of kneeling in the presence of males or older women. As a sign of respect to her father, or any father figure, she was also taught not to sit in the seat that her father occupied. This is consistent with the emphasis on respect for males in particular. In

summary, it is clear from the above that the *chinammwali* curriculum places a lot of emphasis on respect – respect for self, and for others, particularly males and the elderly.

Sexuality Education

In Zambia, the role of initiation rites as channels of education on sexuality is well documented (Richards 1982; Rasing 2003, 2011; Kapungwe 2003; Kangwa 2011; Siachitema 2013). Patricia, aged 43, an elder in the Bible Gospel Church in Africa (BIGOCA), explained that in *chinammwali*, women were taught how to look after themselves and not indulge in premarital sex to prevent early pregnancy, or extramarital sex if they were married to avoid contracting illnesses such as HIV. She indicated that at this stage most of the girls are of school going age and that sex education is taught mainly to discourage premarital sex and early pregnancy. This confirms a study done on traditional cultural practices of imparting sex education and the fight against HIV/AIDS in Zambia, which found that initiation ceremonies for girls were the main channels through which the only socially approved sources of information on sex matters were communicated (Kapungwe 2003: 48). Kapungwe (2003) further reports that in the past, initiation concentrated on sex education since the initiate was married immediately after the initiation ceremony. Richards (1982: 139) also notes that lessons on sex were more emphasised in female initiation rites than other lessons. However, in contradiction, Chiwoni, aged 21, who has not undergone *chinammwali* was of the view that sexual education was not appropriate for young girls because:

I think they should wait until the time to get married – that is when they should teach these things otherwise they just cause problems because girls get excited that they know everything, and they want to experiment what they are taught exposing them to HIV.

This confirms another study that concluded that while initiation training discouraged teenage pregnancy due to virginity testing, there was a contradiction within the training, because whereas girls were trained to maintain their virginity, the opposite was true of boys who were encouraged to be sexually aggressive, thus defeating the whole purpose of the training, calling for an inclusive training curriculum in initiation rites (Ramabulana 2004).

Lessons on Sacred Emblems, Food Taboos and Hygiene

Sacred emblems contain the secrets of wifely responsibilities (Jules-Rosette 1980: 392). In *chinammwali*, lessons on sacred emblems centre mainly on the use

of clay pots (*nongo*) and beads (*ulungu*). Each of these is considered to have meaning in the married life of a woman. With regards to the pots, Jane, aged 30, explained as follows:

I was instructed to keep two pots: one is for the razor blade which I must keep at all times to shave my husband's armpits and private area. I was taught that a man should be clean in these areas at all times – it is my duty. I was told that when a man dies and they find that he is not “clean”, the wife will be severely punished and ridiculed because it will be seen that she has not been taught well, and has not performed her expected duty as a wife. This pot therefore, has symbolic meaning – it teaches the *namwali* on her role to keep her husband clean. The other pot is for the cloth that she must use to clean the husbands private area after each sexual encounter. These pots are supposed to be kept in the marital room, in a secret place which is only known to herself - these days, even a plastic bowl is allowed to be used for this purpose. The pots are very important in a marriage.

The importance of beads is also emphasised as they are believed to play an important role. Beads are encouraged to be worn around the waist. The reason for this I was told was that they “shapen” and “soften” a woman's waist – a woman's waist should be different from that of a man I was told. The beads are also said to be attractive to men as they “excite” them. This is similar to findings in Zimbabwe, where the beads are believed to make sexual intercourse pleasurable (Batisai 2013: 106). When a baby girl is born, I was told that beads are also put around her waist for the same reasons mentioned above. Thus, as can be seen, the need to make a woman pleasurable to her husband by ensuring that she has a well-defined waist which is considered a desirable attribute begins from the time she is very young. The beads also play another role. Faustina, aged 35, narrated that she was instructed to use beads to convey a message to her husband thus:

I was instructed on how to signal to my husband when it is safe for us to sleep together – you use beads to tell him that you are okay, or no am on my periods – because when you are on your periods you have to make sure that you do not meet – it is dangerous.

Patricia, aged 43, explained that the red beads put on the bed or pillow when a woman is menstruating were meant to warn her husband that she is in danger – she is not clean and may not be touched, as to do so will cause the man to be sick, *chifuba cha mdulo*. When she is ready to resume sexual relations, she is required to signal to the husband by removing the red beads and replacing them with white ones. Thus, the role of beads are symbolic in that being *ku mwezji* (in the moon) or *ku muliro* (fire) stresses the power of a woman to control

her sexuality, because for sex to take place, it must as Udelhoven (2006: 87) contends, depend on the “rhythm” of her body and not the man’s.

I was told that in *chinammali* there are several taboos that are taught to the initiate and these include the dangers of salt and fire and the sacredness of menstrual blood. The Chikunda believe that salt and fire are mediums through which “mysterious” powers can cause illness or bring suffering. When a woman is menstruating, she is in the moon, *ku mwezi* and she is “hot”, *ali ku muliro*. I found out that being “in the moon” explains the fact that her menstrual cycle happens periodically – hence “she is in the moon” because that event happens periodically. And when she is in this state, *ali ku muliro*, she is “hot” and she must not go near fire and may not cook. For this reason, Grace, aged 35, explained that, “menstruating woman is not allowed to put salt in food that she is preparing, as to do so will cause illness, *chifuba cha mdulo*, severe chest problems which is like Tuberculosis”. Similarly, Concillata aged 40, told me that, “a woman who has just miscarried must not touch salt or put salt in the food that she is preparing because she will invite illness”. During this time, Catherine, a *phungu* aged 49, said that, “a young girl who is not menstruating or in the case of a married woman, the husband may put salt in food, or even prepare the food as the woman is not clean and can bring problems to other people”.

During the seclusion, the girl is instructed not to touch salt or eat food with salt. She is also not allowed near the fire or to cook as it is believed that she will suffer from a prolonged cough and could die. This, as has been explained may cause those who eat her food to suffer from *chifuba cha mdulo*. The initiate is also advised not to put salt in food whenever she menstruates as this will cause illness and sometimes death. Maria, aged 24, explained that, “*her husband, or a girl who is not menstruating should put salt in the food, not her*”. Most of the participants mentioned that they were instructed not to put salt in food that they were preparing whenever they were menstruating because doing so would make the people who would eat the food to be sick. In some cases, they were instructed not to partake in any cooking during this period. These restrictions as Agyekum (2002: 367-387) mentions, have been made in many other African cultures for example, in Ghana where a girl who is menstruating is seen as unclean and elsewhere, among the Hindus where woman who are menstruating are treated with such sensitivity. In most African cultures, menstrual blood is seen as dangerous as it is believed to cause among others, contamination and death. Among the Bemba culture Kangwa (2011: 37) notes that the myths of menstrual blood centre on its perceived possession of dangerous powers. Among the Chikunda as alluded to, the belief in the power of menstrual blood

is very strong as it is believed that it can cause sickness and, in some cases, death. The administration of *kalusapo* or *shaumbwa*, herbs when a girl first menstruates points to the strong beliefs in the myths surrounding menstrual blood. This sacredness attached to menstrual blood is initiate is emphasised in the instructions that the young girl receives. For example, Juana, aged 47, told me, that she was cautioned not to keep the menstrual cloth carelessly, as it is believed that *mfiti*, witches can use it to bewitch her or other people. This fear is so strong and was echoed amongst all the participants.

The girl is also instructed that sexual intercourse may not take place when she is menstruating as to do so, would be to put her husband in danger. Although as Rasing (2003: 1) argues, this prohibition is for purposes of hygiene, the main reason given is the fear of witches as blood in most parts of Zambia is believed to be linked to ancestral world. The husband is therefore, supposed to be warned when the woman is in this “dangerous” state by putting red beads on the pillow or bed notifying him that she is “unclean” and because of the blood, may cause him harm. When we looked at the symbols and their meanings in a previous section, the role of beads was explained in greater detail. The sacredness of menstrual blood and the mysteries surrounding it are so intense that sometimes, a woman may not sleep on the same bed or cover the same blanket for fear of “contaminating” him. Although the reasons were not clear, one can conclude that menstrual blood is considered sacred amongst the Chikunda for the power it has to cause harm, and also due to the belief that *mfiti*, witches, are particularly fond of this blood because of the power it has in wizardry

Lessons on food usually boarder on how food should be prepared, and a woman’s role in food preparation during menstruation. Timely preparation of food for the family, in particular, for the husband is emphasised. In some cases the girl is advised to serve her husband food first before herself and the children. Other lessons on food relate to how to serve a chicken. The initiate is taught how to serve a chicken and the chicken pieces that are the preserve of the man only. The back and the gizzard are for the man. The back I was told symbolises the sexual act - the back is the woman - a woman lying on the back for the man. This I was told is because the woman sleeps on her back during the sexual act. The gizzard symbolises the testicals. The neck and the thighs which are reserved for the man symbolises the male organ and the thighs, the woman, respectively. I interpreted this to mean that the neck which symbolises the male organ cannot be eaten by the woman, because it is his part. I was however, left wondering as to why the thighs should also be a man’s preserve because they symbolise a woman’s body part – not a man’s. In my view this

could be understood as a message to reinforce female subordination to men. I was not told what would happen if a woman ate these chicken parts. The only reason given was that it was taboo for a woman to eat them.

Several studies such as Siachitema (2013), Rasing (1995), Richards (1982), Matobo et al (2009) and Munthali & Zulu (2007), have mentioned how female initiation serves as an avenue to teach initiates lessons on cleanliness and hygiene. In the *chinamwali*, the young girls are also taught lessons on cleanliness and hygiene, especially during menstruation. Most of the participants mentioned that a girl at initiation is instructed on how to wash the menstrual cloth and also how to ensure that she takes her bath regularly during this period to ensure that she is fresh and to avoid menstrual odour. I sensed here that the reason was more to do with the fear of witches, as explained earlier, who will be attracted to the smell of blood which may put the girl or woman in “danger”. The *aphungu* use various techniques, mainly dance and song to convey these messages to the *nammali*. They are important means through which knowledge is transmitted and carry messages about different themes of womanhood; cleanliness, maturity, and wifehood.

Findings

Gender Identities

Initiation rites involve the construction and definition of gender roles and identities (Kangwa 2011: 21; Siachitema 2013; 22; Jules-Rosette 1980: 390), and they can be either “life-giving” or “life-denying” to women (Kangwa 2011; 21). First of all, it is clear from previous chapters that *chinamwali* like other female initiation rites is a rite of social maturation where a girl is transformed into an adult through a process that legitimises her “new” gender and sexual roles. What is also clear is that, *chinamwali* teaches a young girl how to internalise her gender and sexual identities through a process of enculturation, because it is through this process that a young woman learns what is culturally acceptable behaviour of what it means to be a woman. Thus, while authors such as Rasing (2001); Kangwa (2011); and Siachitema (2013), describe the female initiation rite as a process through which a girl’s gender roles and identity as a woman are constructed, they do not show whether, or how this impact on her status. What is required then, is an interrogation of what impact this “new identity” has on a woman’s status.

My interpretation of *chinamwali* is that it reinforces women’s collective identity as women because for a young girl to be initiated means to be allowed membership in the group of knowledgeable women. Generally, what the

narratives expose is that chinamwali plays a role in shaping a woman's identity, firstly as a Chikunda, and secondly, as a Zambian. This is perceived from two points of view: first, that one becomes a woman because she is different from those that have not undergone this initiation rite and second, that she becomes a woman because of the knowledge that she acquires or gains from the process. On the question of the role of chinamwali in shaping a woman's identity, most participants agreed that it is going through chinamwali that differentiates them from other women because, as Patricia, aged 45 said, "... every Chikunda woman should undergo chinamwali to show that she is different from other women." Another response that was common is that from Anna, aged 24, who said, "that is our sign [as Chikunda] – it shows that you are now a [real] woman." Maybin, a young man aged 25, supported this view but went further to explain that it did not matter that one did not go through the chinamwali rite in particular, to become a woman; what mattered is that for one to qualify as a woman, one should have gone through an initiation rite. He explained that, "my wife is not a Chikunda – she is Soli by tribe – she went through the Soli initiation rite - because to be a full woman, one has to undergo initiation." Another man, Censio, aged 43, was of the opinion that, "yes, any woman who passes through this tradition is a real woman – every tribe has their own traditions – we have our own and they should respect it."

Another view expressed was that, one's identity as a woman is dependent on the knowledge that one has acquired as a result of having gone through the rite. Faustina, aged 35, said, "a real Chikunda woman is taught – she goes through these things – for her to be a real woman she must know the mwambo wa achikunda (Chikunda tradition)." She further told me that the reason one becomes a woman is that, "because you know the miyambo (traditions) of a real Chikunda woman." Other common views were such as the one raised by Juana, aged 47, who said, "I feel that I am a true Chikunda woman – chinamwali made me into a real woman - I feel proud that because of chinamwali, I am a real woman". Today, Jane, aged 37, laments the fact that she is no different from the women that have undergone chinamwali, though she is not knowledgeable of some chinamwali teachings and traditions. She says, "I belong here, so even if I have not undergone chinamwali I am still a Chikunda woman – maybe there are just some things that I do not know – I don't know."

What I find problematic is the emphasis that for one to become a 'woman', a "full woman", a "full human", one must undergo the rite. Most of the participants intimated that a Chikunda woman needs to go through chinamwali to become a woman. Thus, aside from attaining an identity, chinamwali also serves to fulfil a social obligation to belong to the "women's membership".

As Jane, further said, “to tell you the truth, I feel that I am not a full woman because of the things that I do not know.” Delphina aged 23, told me, “it is my identity – if you do not go through it you are not complete – you are not a complete Chikunda woman – that is how I feel.” It may also be true that chinamwali like other female initiation practices offers a woman respect and acceptance in the community (Matobo et al 2009: 105-113). Though these examples show that the initiation rite plays a role in shaping a woman’s identity, they have an impact on a woman’s status, and as will be seen, will have a bearing on the constructions of power and social relations.

Construction of Subservient Femininities

Another theme in the narratives constructed around the issue of power and social relations within the chinamwali process. It is therefore, apparent that the different forms of power need to be examined in relation to their social and gendered implications. Here, this power is looked at from two levels: power in relation to the social relations between women, and with men. Firstly, most of the literature on female initiation depicts the ritual leadership as a female prerogative (See: Drews 1995; Rasing 2001; Richards 1982; Kangwa 2011; Munthali & Zulu 2007; Jules-Rosette 1980; Chikunda et al 2001). These authors describe the women as the ones that direct and control the ceremony, and as Drews (1995: 105) indicates, they are the ones that know the secrets of the ritual.

In the chinamwali process, the leadership role is held by the aphungu, the ritual instructors, who wield power because of the knowledge that they have on the chinamwali tradition – which knowledge they pass on to the initiate. As in the case of the anamalaka, older, professional women in charge of initiates in Northern Mozambique, described by Arnfred (2011: 145), the aphungu have the “power” to turn a young girl into a woman and through ritual and song, passing on their secret knowledge. With regards to the power relations in the making of a woman, the role of aphungu is that of seniors, leaders who command a degree of respect in the community. As men have no place in the rite, except in the open, the seniority of the aphungu plays an important role here.

The selection of these ritual leaders is based on their “power” of knowledge of the chinamwali tradition, and their position in the community as a result of this knowledge. This leadership role is however, merely situational and contextual in the sense that once the aphungu are outside the context of ritual leadership, they must return to the home where they are forced to take a back seat and “submit” to their husbands. This corresponds to the observation that relations

of authority more often follow seniority than gender which are context bound (Arnfred 2011: 150), Similar to the *aphungu* in *chinamwali*, the *Bolokoli-Kalaw* and the *magnonmakanw* are designated gate keepers of traditional practices and rites of initiation in Mali, entrusted with carrying out female circumcision. These “practitioners” enjoy social approval for their activities and are sought after for the services that they provide (Diallo 2004: 176).

The other issue of power which I observe, is in relation to the perceived power assumed by the young woman which will be discussed in detail in the next Section. My interest here therefore, is the gendered implications of the messages in the *chinamwali* ceremony that “confer” power to the male gender and has the potential to create hierarchies. On the question, “what role does *chinamwali* play in perpetuating or undermining the power relations between men and women?” the common response was that, a woman who is taught knows her place in the home,” that, “a woman who has been taught knows how to respect a man. I do not in any way wish to belittle the importance of the teachings on respect in *chinamwali*, but to draw attention to the impact that this may have on women’s social life and status. Catherine, a ritual instructor answered, “what power? She is a woman – she must listen to her husband, she must show respect, not just talking to him anyhow or sharing secrets in the home to outsiders.” Phenia, aged 56 said to me, “a woman who has been taught knows how to respect a man – not just treating him as if he is a child – with no respect.” While the young woman is taught to respect the elderly, as well as other people in the community, the emphasis seems to be on respect for men, or future husbands.

This view was also shared by the male participants. Clement, aged 45 said, “for me and my wife, we plan together, we work together, but she was taught that I am the head of the home – that is what she knows”. This narrative emphasis on respect for men is indeed curious as it is also believed to foster harmony and peaceful relations with others, particularly in the home. Clement added that, ‘the head of the home is the man as he is the head of the home – otherwise there will be no peace.’ In addition, Censio, aged 42, said,

You can only have one “boss” in the home, otherwise things will not be okay in the home. If you follow the teachings (of *chinamwali*), there will be harmony in the house – otherwise there will be problems – there will be no peace in the home.

Interestingly, when asked about his views on circumcision as an initiation rite for both men and women, Protazio, aged 52, said that for men, it was a symbol of power as it, “teaches you how to be a man – without it you are a nobody – you are just like a woman – no one will respect you.” From this view

point, one can conclude that respect is not expected to be mutual, as it is women who must respect men, and not the other way round. From the foregoing, one can conclude that positions of power have gendered implications which have the potential to create hierarchies – in particular hegemonic masculinities which are discussed in the following Section.

Construction of Chikunda Masculinities

Feminist research has analysed the concepts of femininity and masculinity in the context of gender power. That said, according to Ampofo and Boateng (2007: 51), the focus of feminist theorising has been to examine and address the ways in which being a social male impact on the lives of female. Therefore, parallel to this assertion, I realise that through socialisation, the girl learns to accept or internalise male superiority to the point where, as has been shown in chapter 5, these power relations are used as a framework to reinforce patriarchal hegemony – the hegemonic masculinity – in this case, the Chikunda masculinity. Agnes, aged 56, emphasised that chinamwali teaches a woman to be submissive to her husband, “it should be like this - that is how things are supposed to be.” Censio, aged 43, added that there is a difference in the submissive behaviour between initiated and non-initiated women to me because, “those who are initiated are taught that the husband is the head – that is how they are taught.”

The discussion on masculinities is not in any way intended to divert us from the discussion of chinamwali, a process that concerns women, but to show us how women can through the chinamwali process, influence male identity and their masculinity, and in the process impact on their own status. While masculinity is power, it does not exist as a biological reality, but as an ideology that exists as scripted behaviour within gendered relationships (Kaufmann 1993: 13). Male honour is seen to be dependent on women’s appropriate behaviour. From this, one can understand that women influence male identity and their masculinity. Moreover, as Silberschmidt (2004: 243) notes, in relation to sexuality in particular, what gives social value to a man does not give the same value to a woman. Contrary to the author’s assertion that women and female sexuality represent an active and threatening power to male identity and masculinity, one can understand from the findings in this study that women and their sexuality can influence male identity and masculinity. These findings show that it is in the women’s relationship with men that they are exposed to male dominance and power. My own assumption is that while chinamwali is empowering women with knowledge of their gender and sexual roles, it also offers possibilities to reinforce male power at the same time disavouring women. As Connell (2010: 40) notes, masculinities do not first exist and then

come into contact with femininities, they are produced together in a process that makes gender order. Ideas about femininity are associated with the private sphere and with traits that suggest positivity and subordination, while those about masculinity are associated with the public sphere, and with authority and dominance. The notion of masculinity is understood as a socially constructed collective gender identity that defines how boys and men should behave, be treated, dress, appear, what they should succeed at, and what attitudes and qualities they should have (Ampofo & Boateng 2007: 54). It has been said that there are diverse masculinities that make it difficult to separate men into distinct categories (Ampofo & Boateng 2007: 53; Whitehead & Barrett 2001: 8; Connell 2001: 10), but that these themes provide an important opportunity to understand the social legitimisation in society for the treatment of women as unequal to men. As such, there has been difficulty in giving a general definition of the term.

However, in trying to find an appropriate definition, of hegemonic masculinity, Whitehead and Barrett (2001: 15) say, “it is those behaviours, languages and practices existing in specific cultural and organisational locations, which are commonly associated with males and thus culturally defined as not feminine. In short, hegemonic masculinities are social and cultural expectations of male behaviour. The authors, further describe this form of masculinity in a given society as a form of dominant masculinity that in addition to being oppressive to women devalues other masculinities that fail to live up to the cultural ideal of what it means to be a man (Connell 2001: 10); it is clear that the social construction of masculinity has to do with a gender order that privileges hegemonic masculinity, as it legitimises patriarchy, guaranteeing the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell 2001: 38). In this Section, I examine narratives that point to some ways in which messages on hegemonic masculinities in chinamwali affect women’s space and gender relations.

Gender-Based Violence

The narratives show that women are taught to accept violence from their husbands where the notion of masculinity is seemingly challenged. In this case, gender-based violence is justified, where a woman accepts to be punished because she has not lived up to the ideals of “womanhood” as perceived by men. Catherine, a ritual instructor, said, “that is why you hear that so and so was beaten by her husband – because they think that you don’t know what you are doing – that you are not ready to be a wife – or they will ridicule you.” During chinamwali, messages of appropriate masculinity are transmitted – a

man is the *tambala*, (the head) of the home. The potential for men to control women is suggested here. This is because how men behave in their families is strongly influenced by what it means to be a man (Ampofo & Boateng 2007: 55). Delphina, aged 23, who has not gone through *chinamwali* said, “because they emphasise that women should respect men – that is why men think that they can beat women anyhow - control women anyhow so that women end up not having a voice in the home.” Chiwoni, aged 21, who has also not gone through *chinamwali* said, “they stress too much on respecting men – they make men to feel powerful – the women don’t even have any say in the home all because of culture – what is this? Jane, aged 37, said, “they teach women to respect men too much – I don’t think it should be like this – as a result they think they own women – the world has changed – men should treat women with respect.” What then emerges is a picture of socialisation towards gender-based violence against women as an acceptable, approved and appropriate punishment for not being woman enough.

Patricia, aged 43, said that in *chinamwali*, they are taught that the man is the head of the home, and that as such, he must not be denied conjugal rights, and thus, “you must not deny him sex even when you quarrel.” The fact that *chinamwali* is used as a framework for reinforcing this patriarchal hegemony lends credence to McNay’s (1992: 49) assertion that, “the body, is rather to be thought of as the point of intersection..... where sex is a cultural construct that is produced with the aim of social regulation, and the control of (women’s) sexuality.” From this brief perspective, I argue that men who are violent towards women are not “deviants” but are conformists to a particular aspect of female socialisation of what it is to be a woman. A woman’s socialisation includes accepting male superiority, unquestioned authority, and violence when she does not meet her husband’s expectations, which has the potential to keep her subordinated.

Conclusion

In this article, I examine the *chinamwali* curriculum and its role in the construction of femininities among the Chikunda. The findings reveal that the lessons and rituals in the *chinamwali* curriculum are mediums through which a girl is prepared for the role that she is expected to play as a woman. These include how to look after her home and her husband, and how to perform sexually. The lessons also include information on taboos and their meanings. These lessons are passed on to the initiate by the *aphungu*, who have authority and knowledge to transfer traditional knowledge during the rite. However, a valuable contribution of the findings is that through these lessons, the rite has

the potential to influence the social life and status of the women concerned, in such a way that they accept notions of inferiority to men throughout their lives, and to assign them to accept a lower position in the community. In as much as the aphungu have authority to transfer traditional knowledge to the namwali during the rite, I find that it is the gendered implications of the messages that have the potential to perpetuate notions of male superiority over women. From the examples that I was given, I find that patriarchal values are instilled and strengthened in the initiate, mainly through the lessons taught and messages conveyed. These examples demonstrate an acceptance of vices, such as gender-based violence which is seen to be justified in some instances. Another significance is the creation of male hegemony through seemingly accepted norms of compensation and submissiveness. Such attitudes demonstrate possession of men over women and denote a gendered order that reinforces what I call Chikunda masculinity. Taken from another viewpoint, the namwali is socialised to accept male superiority as the norm, to the extent that this creates a framework where notions of patriarchy are embraced. The lesson learned is that although the initiation rite has potential for sexuality and health education, the process could have the opposite effect if not handled properly.

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