

**RECLAIMING THE VALUES OF INDIGENOUS FEMALE INITIATION RITES AS A
STRATEGY FOR HIV PREVENTION: A GENDERED ANALYSIS OF CHISUNGU
INITIATION RITES AMONG THE BEMBA PEOPLE OF ZAMBIA**

By

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DECLARATION

This dissertation, unless specifically indicated in the text is my original work. I therefore declare that I have not submitted this work to any other institution for examination a part from this University.

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.....25/11/2011.....

Jonathan Kangwa

Date

As the supervisor I acknowledge that this dissertation is ready for examination



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..... 25/11/2011.....

Professor Sarojini Nadar

Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family and the women of the United Church of Zambia (UCZ) Tazara congregation who encouraged me to pursue my post graduate studies in theology. To you all I say bravo! *Mwabombeni!*

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ABSTRACT

Almost all African societies have female initiation rites to mark the process of growing up. Initiation rites signal the transition from one stage in life to another. Between the two levels is “the camp,” the liminal phase, in which the initiate is secluded in order to be initiated into the mysteries of life. Through female initiation rites, positions of power and social relations within the society are demonstrated. The Bemba people of Zambia perform the Chisungu female initiation rites in which young women are initiated into adulthood through the ritual process. Chisungu female initiation rites remain an important source of traditional education on sex and the social and religious leadership roles of women in Zambia although they are now being modified and performed in a shortened form.

This study builds on the scholarly work undertaken by African women theologians particularly in the last decade, to engage theologically with the subject of HIV and AIDS on the African continent. Their theoretical insights and analysis provide the critical lenses for this thesis. The objective of the thesis is to offer a gendered analysis of Chisungu initiation rites among the Bemba people, in order to retrieve the values of indigenous female initiation rites which can critique patriarchy in the context of HIV and AIDS.

This objective is achieved in the following steps. Firstly the function, the form and the practices of indigenous female Chisungu initiation rites are explained. Secondly, the gendered cultural values of indigenous female Chisungu initiation rites are demonstrated while simultaneously providing details of the symbolic meaning of the rites and the interpretation of the initiation songs and the sacred emblems (*imbusa*). Thirdly, how gendered cultural values of indigenous Chisungu initiation rites can be retrieved for HIV prevention is illustrated. Finally the importance of inculcating the values of indigenous female Chisungu initiation rites in the UCZ with regards to empowering women in the context of HIV and AIDS is explored.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
LMS	London missionary society
MOH	Ministry of Health
NAC	National AIDS council
UCZ	United church of Zambia
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations program on HIV and AIDS
ZDHS	Zambia demographic and health survey

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION

This study will offer a gendered analysis of the Chisungu initiation rites among the Bemba people of Zambia in order to retrieve the values of indigenous female initiation rites which can critique patriarchy and empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS. This chapter will introduce the research topic and locate it within current research by African women theologians. It includes the background information of the study, the relevance of the study, the research question and objectives, the theoretical framework, the methodology and the structure of the study. The chapter will also present a literature review of the research already done on female initiation rites and HIV and AIDS mostly by anthropologists and African women theologians.

1.2. MOTIVATION AND BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH TOPIC

Zambia is one of the countries hardest hit by the HIV pandemic in sub Saharan Africa (UNAIDS 2009 update). HIV prevalence is estimated at 14.3 percent in the adult population, the majority of whom are women at 56 percent as compared to men at 44 percent (UNAIDS 2010 update). More women than men are living with HIV, and young women aged 15-24 years are as much as eight times more likely than men to be HIV positive (MOH/NAC 2010:24). Further, about 60 percent of the people newly infected through heterosexual transmission are infected within marriage and cohabitation (UNAIDS 2010 update).

The distribution of the pandemic both geographically and amongst men and women is not even. It is higher in urban areas at 23 percent, as compared to rural areas with a prevalence of 11 percent (MOH/NAC 2010: 24, 25). The uneven landscape of the spread of HIV is also evident between different provinces-ranging from 6 percent in Northern Province to as high as 18 percent in Lusaka province (MOH/NAC 2010:25). This distribution of the epidemic in Zambia suggests that there are many localized, divergent patterns of the epidemic that need to be understood and tackled with different targeted interventions (ZDHS 2007: 22).

At the centre of the vulnerability of women to HIV infection is patriarchy. Women are more vulnerable to HIV infection than men due to gender inequalities and patriarchal socio-cultural practices which subordinate women to men (Moyo 2005:130). Research has shown that the teachings that are given to women during initiation rites contribute in perpetuating the subordinate position of women in marriage which makes them more vulnerable to the HIV pandemic (Kapungwe 2003:35). Phiri and Nadar (2010:19) have however rightly argued that there are also values in indigenous African culture which may empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS if retrieved.

Female initiation rites in Zambia were banned by both Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries who considered the rites pagan and immoral (Hinfelaar 1994:60, Rasing 1995:1). Initiation rites have however, persisted secretly and in a shortened form. As a minister in the UCZ, I witnessed women practicing the Chisungu initiation rites in their homes for which leaders of the mothers guilds (women Christian fellowship) were even disciplined by the church. Today there are debates in the UCZ as to whether initiation rites should be included in church sacraments. Women's church groups are demanding that female initiation rites be included in their programs, arguing that they are important in a woman's life and may empower women and girls in the context of HIV (Synod 2008:23).

The UCZ has however done little on the inculturation of female initiation rites. Not much has been done in incorporating the gendered values of indigenous female Chisungu initiation rites into church programs or sacraments (UCZ Synod 2008:22). The Church has inherited the teachings of the missionaries who condemned female initiation rites as pagan.

Research has shown that there are indigenous gender resources in African culture which are helpful in our response to the HIV and AIDS pandemic (Phiri and Nadar 2010:19). This is what has motivated me to undertake a gendered analysis of Chisungu initiation rites in order to establish the efficacy of the values of indigenous female initiation rites in HIV prevention. Given that there are both positive and negative elements in indigenous female initiation rites, reclaiming the good values and correcting the identified inadequacies can make initiation rites an effective traditional institution in HIV prevention.

1.3. LITERATURE REVIEW AND LOCATION OF RESEARCH

There have been a number of studies carried out on puberty initiation rites by anthropologists, historians and African women theologians. This research will build on this body of work. Richards (1982) in her dated, but excellent book *Chisungu: A girl's initiation ceremony among the Bemba of Zambia* has given a detailed record of female puberty initiation rites (*Chisungu*) among the Bemba people of Zambia. She argues that the Chisungu ceremony prepares the girl for marriage and for a change of status. Any woman who has not gone through the ceremony is considered to be uncultured (*Chitongo*) (Richards 1982:120). She further argues that the rite protects the girl from the dangers of adulthood making it possible for her to have safe intercourse with her husband and a safe delivery of her child (Richards 1982:123). She underscores that the rite bestows the power of fecundity upon the girl and removes the dangers of sex and fire (Richards 1982:123).

More recently, Rasing (1995) has worked on girls' initiation rites in the context of the urban Roman Catholic community in Zambia. Her main focus was to establish the meaning of the rites of passage for urban women (Rasing 1995:5). Rasing (2006:7) has also shown that during the rites, the girl is taught that she too can initiate sexual relations with her husband and actively participate in coitus. She has further shown that the Chisungu initiation rites still remain the main institution where teaching about sexuality is done in rural as well as urban settings and that many women in Zambia still claim that they have values which are helpful in HIV prevention (Rasing 2006:7). She laments that Catholic missionaries' efforts to include *Bana Chimbusa* (Tutors of initiation rites) in teaching young people about HIV and AIDS have not materialised (Rasing 2006:17). Although done from an anthropological point of view, Richards' and Rasing's works are a major contribution to the knowledge of traditional initiation rites in Zambia and will be a great resource for my study.

Oduyoye (2004) has shown how initiation rites in Africa mark the passage from childhood to adulthood. She underscores that female initiation rites are performed by women for women and that pregnancy is an abomination if the puberty rites have not been performed (Oduyoye

2004:80). Although her focus is on the Asante people of Ghana, her work will be a great resource to my study.

Phiri's (2000:62-79) book, *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy. Religious experience of Chewa women in central Malawi* has shown the status of women in Chewa culture and their struggles for full recognition in church. She has shown the attitude of the missionaries to initiation rites that led to its ban and to the introduction of Christianised initiation ceremonies highlighting the shortfalls as well as the positive aspects which must be upheld (Phiri 2000:62).

Longwe (2003) has also carried out a study of initiation rites among the Chewa Baptist women of Lilongwe. Her work focuses on the Christianisation of pre-Christian Chewa initiation rites in the Baptist convention of Malawi. Building on Longwe, Fiedler (2005) has worked on how Baptist women perceive traditional and church initiation in Southern Malawi. While she rightly argues that there are both liberating and oppressive elements in girl's initiation, her focus is only on the Christianised Baptist initiation rites in Malawi (Fiedler 2005:12).

Moyo (2009:5, 6) further makes an inquiry into the initiation rites for girls and women and how they influence their sexual beliefs and practices in rural Malawi. While she rightly argues that targeting the religio-cultural process of people in Zomba is important for making them more sexually safe and gender just, her work is only limited to developing a more empowering sexual education programme by inculcating the strengths of Chinamwali.

Kapungwe (2003) has shown that a study conducted by the University of Zambia in urban towns reveal that about 87 percent of women undergo initiation rites at puberty and about 78 percent prior to marriage. Further, 88 percent of young women between the age of 19 and 28 years said they would adhere to the teachings given during female initiation rites (Kapungwe 2003: 37).

Hinfelaar (1994) has written on the Bemba women of Zambia. He has shown that in indigenous Bemba traditional religion, women held social and religious leadership roles as enablers of the domestic cult (*Chibindawa Nganda*), initiators of public worship (*Kabumba wa Mapepo*) and tutors of the Transcendent (*Nachibunsa wa Chisungu*) (Hinfelaar 1994:12). He further argues that this religious and social role of women was sidelined by the missionaries and later by political leaders (Hinfelaar 1994: 29,180). Although he rightly observes that a great deal of today's problems among women in Zambia can be attributed to the past neglect of the original

tenets of Traditional Religion, he does not however give a detailed gender analysis of the leadership role of women and the efficacy of initiation rites in the empowerment of women against HIV and AIDS.

Drawing on Hinfelaar, Kaunda (2010) has delved into reclaiming the feminine image of God in Lesa (God) among the Bemba Christian women. He argues that when the white fathers came among the Bemba people, they replaced the local feminine image of God in Lesa with an all-male concept of God which side-lined women to see themselves as reflecting the Judeo-Christian God (Kaunda 2010:26). While Kaunda's work is a major contribution to the reclaiming of the feminine image of God in Lesa using a translatability theory, he does not make a link between reclaiming the feminine image of God in Lesa and the reclaiming of the values of initiation rites within which the feminine image of God and the social and religious roles of women were passed on from the older generation to the younger generation. Further, he doesn't make a link between the social and religious role of women, initiation rites and the empowerment of women against contemporary problems like HIV and AIDS.

Much work has also been done on Gender and HIV by African women theologians. Haddad (2008:49) has shown that continued cultural oppression against women has led to the death of thousands of women through AIDS-related illnesses. She (2006:89) adds that the traditions of the church and lack of analysis of patriarchy and gender injustices in society have seen issues of sexuality as a taboo making women more vulnerable to the HIV epidemic. Phiri (2003: 8, 9) has also shown how physiological differences, social and cultural norms, economic and power relations make women more vulnerable to HIV infection. She has further shown that such roles are emphasised through traditional initiation ceremonies where girls are given sexual education to satisfy the sexual needs of their husbands.

Siwila (2011b) has examined the response of the UCZ to traditional marriage practices that are harmful in the context of HIV and AIDS. She has argued that the UCZ is not doing enough to address cultural issues such as child marriage and widow inheritance which fuel the spread of HIV in Zambia (Siwila 2011b:53,82). She has therefore proposed cultural analysis as a model for the UCZ in its response to cultural practices that are harmful in the context of HIV and AIDS (Siwila 2011b:194). Although Siwila has not highlighted as to whether there are also cultural

practices in Zambia that can be retrieved in HIV prevention, her work will be a great resource to my study.

Previous research on gender and HIV in Zambia has shown that gender inequality and patriarchal cultural practices have contributed significantly to the vulnerability of women to HIV and AIDS in Zambia (Moyo 2007:2, 3; Masaiti 2007:5 and Siwila 2005). What goes almost unnoticed in this body of research however, is that there are also values in African indigenous culture which can be used to critique patriarchy and empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS(Phiri and Nadar 2010:9).

Much of the work done by African women theologians has contributed significantly to creating awareness about the liberating and oppressive aspects of initiation rites as churches embark on the inculturation of female initiation rites. But not much has been written from a Zambian context which will be my contribution. Further, this body of work does not analyse how the social and religious leadership roles of women which were passed on during puberty initiation ceremonies can be reclaimed for the empowerment of women in the context of HIV and AIDS. My research will make an inquiry into Chisungu initiation rites among the Bemba people of Zambia in order to retrieve indigenous gender resources which are helpful in HIV prevention.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES

1.4.1. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND STATEMENT

Given that research on gender and HIV in Zambia has shown that patriarchal cultural practices have contributed to the vulnerability of women to HIV while recent research reveals that there could be values in African culture that can critique patriarchy from within and empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS, this study will seek to investigate whether there are gendered cultural values in indigenous female Chisungu initiation rites that can be retrieved and inculturated to empower women in the UCZ in the context of HIV and AIDS.

1.4.2. THE RESEARCH QUESTION

What gendered cultural values can be reclaimed from indigenous female Chisungu initiation rites to critique patriarchy and empower women in the UCZ in the context of HIV and AIDS?

1.4.3. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis of this research is that indigenous female Chisungu initiation rites among the Bemba people of Zambia have cultural values which can critique patriarchy and empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS.

1.4.4. KEY QUESTIONS

The study will seek to answer the following key questions:

- What does indigenous female Chisungu initiation rites entail?
- What are the gendered cultural values of indigenous female Chisungu initiation rites?
- How can the gendered cultural values of female Chisungu initiation rites be retrieved for HIV prevention?
- How can inculcating the values of indigenous female Chisungu initiation rites in the UCZ empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS?

1.4.5. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are:

- To explain the function, forms and practices of indigenous female Chisungu initiation rites.
- To identify the gendered cultural values of indigenous female Chisungu initiation rites.
- To demonstrate how gendered cultural values of indigenous female Chisungu initiation rites can be retrieved for HIV prevention.
- To assess the importance of inculcating the values of indigenous Chisungu initiation rites in the UCZ for the purpose of empowering women in the context of HIV and AIDS.

1.5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In my study I will use feminist cultural hermeneutics developed by Musimbi Kanyoro. This will be necessary for my study because it enables the review of cultural practices and rituals to establish if they are valuable in the context of HIV and AIDS (Kanyoro 2002:18, 78.). It will

help me in analysing and choosing which values of the Chisungu Initiation rites can be useful and those that cannot be useful in the struggle against HIV.

Feminist cultural hermeneutics seeks to critique and reclaim aspects of African culture (Mutambara 2006:181). It seeks to expose harm and injustices that are in society and are extended to the practices of the church through culture. The church in Zambia is made up of people who dominantly come from African culture. African cultural values and beliefs have a bearing on how they perceive Christianity and how they interpret the bible. Putting culture to scrutiny in order to test its liberative potential is therefore necessary.

Kanyoro (2002:26) has shown that while we affirm the need for reclaiming culture through the theology of inculturation, we should ensure that the cultures we reclaim are analysed and are deemed worthy in terms of justice and support for the life and dignity of women. In the midst of the HIV epidemic Africans who value their cultures, look to cultural resources for answers. Building on indigenous resources that may empower women in the context of HIV, therefore, can be a good starting point.

Hence, a feminist cultural hermeneutics is important for my study in order to reclaim cultural values which can empower women and critique patriarchy in the church and African culture. A process of talking and testing out the things we hear in our pursuit for the empowerment of women is important.

1.6. METHODOLOGY

My study will be based on a literature survey. I will use inculturation as a methodology. I will bring the values of feminist discourse and African culture into dialogue as I retrieve valuable aspects of African culture and religion which are life giving to girls and women in the context of HIV. Fiedler (2005:45) has shown that it is important to analyse and inculturate the good values of initiation rites in order to empower women against male domination. She has shown that those elements which are oppressive to women should be left out as the church inculturates female initiation rites (Fiedler 2005:29).

Hinfelaar (1994:1,180) has argued that contemporary problems and illnesses which mostly affect women may be attributed to the past neglect of the leadership role of women in African

traditional religion. He has then proposed the inculturation of initiation rites where women serve as leaders and priestesses (Hinfelaar 1984:180). My research will follow this methodology in order to reclaim and inculturate the values of female initiation rites that may empower women.

Inculturation is a continuous process of dialogue between faith and culture. This process is motivated by what Africans perceive to be a situation of imbalance in the contact between African culture and the Christianity introduced into Africa by western missionaries (Ikechukwu2008). This is the biggest reason or stumbling block against seeing the gendered cultural values of initiation rites.

Bujo (1992:48) has shown that while there were elements in African culture which needed to be challenged by the Christian gospel, the failure by the Western missionaries to distinguish between the positive and the negative elements in African culture was disastrous. He rightly observes that initiation rites which were central to the religious and social structure in Africa were condemned (Bujo 1992:44). African medicine was also condemned (Bujo 1992:45). He argues that this move by the missionaries destroyed the fabric of African culture and the opportunity of incarnating the Christian message in Africa was missed (Bujo 1992:48).

Inculturation stresses Africa's religio-cultural realities. This process must however not ignore the contemporary African context. A theology which preaches the necessity of inculturation, but ignores the surrounding social misery like oppression and HIV is not life-giving (Bujo 1992:15, Martey 1993:124)

Inculturation is the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity into African culture. By inculturation, the church makes the gospel incarnate in African culture. The church assimilates African values which are not only compatible with the gospel but are also life-giving to people (Onsei-Bonsu 2005:20, Mutambara 2006:176). There must be a mutual and critical dialogue and integration. The gospel on being introduced into any new land must not destroy the good and life-giving cultural values. Inculturation therefore involves a critical selection of elements from a given culture. In my thesis I will propose that those gendered cultural values that can be helpful in the prevention of HIV needs to be taken seriously by the church.

1.7. OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

Chapter one will introduce the research topic and locate it within the current research by African women theologians. It will consist of the motivation and background to the research topic, literature review, research questions and objectives, the theoretical framework and the methodology. The chapter will give the conceptual framework and the design of the research.

Chapter two will explain the function, form and practices of indigenous female Chisungu initiation rites. The chapter will also show the position and role of women in Bemba matrilineal society. Chapter three will show the gendered cultural values of indigenous female Chisungu initiation rites. The chapter will also give details of the symbolic meaning of the rites and the interpretation of the initiation songs and sacred emblems (*imbusa*).

Chapter four will demonstrate how gendered cultural values of indigenous Chisungu initiation rites can be retrieved for HIV prevention. Chapter five will assess the importance of inculturating the values of indigenous female Chisungu initiation rites in the UCZ with regards to empowering women in the context of HIV and AIDS. Chapter six presents a conclusion by summarising and synthesising the findings of the research. The chapter will also highlight possible new questions for research which the study has raised.

1.8. CONCLUSION

In this introductory chapter I aimed to sketch the background of the HIV and AIDS pandemic in Zambia, the need to reclaim the values of Chisungu initiation rites and the position of the UCZ on the inculturation of initiation rites as a motivation to the study. Furthermore, I presented the body of literature on my research topic and showed that the gap that exists currently is a focus on the Chisungu initiation rites as a possible resource in dealing with the challenge of the HIV pandemic. Despite being banned by the missionaries, Chisungu initiation rites have continued to be practised by women in Zambia. Although practised in a shortened form as compared to the past, the rites continue to be an important and culturally approved source of information about sex education and issues concerning the roles and status of womanhood as it shall be shown in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FUNCTION, FORM AND PRACTICES OF CHISUNGU INITIATION RITES

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Almost all African societies have initiation rites around the process of growing up. Initiation rites mark the transition from one stage in life to another. All initiation rites show a responsibility to guide the young people from childhood to adulthood. Initiation rites remain an important feature of almost all African societies although they are now performed in a shortened form (Fiedler 2005:5).

Initiation rites are transition rites which take a person from a lower level in society to a higher level. Between the two levels is the camp, the liminal phase, in which the initiate is secluded in order to be initiated into the mysteries of life. La Fontain (1986: 11) has shown that initiation rites are events with a social meaning and symbolic actions. Through initiation rites, positions of power and social relations within the society are demonstrated.

The Bemba people of Zambia perform the Chisungu initiation ceremony in which a liminal period between the childhood and adulthood is definitely and dramatically created through the ritual process (Turner 1982:105). Given that female initiation rites are rites of transition which mark the transfer of an individual from one stage in life to the other, it is of interest to explain the function, form and practices of Chisungu initiation rites.

2.2. THE PURPOSE

The Chisungu initiation is organised to serve four purposes. The first purpose of the Chisungu initiation rites is to mark the transition of the initiate from childhood to adulthood (*Ukumukusha*). The initiate is secluded and is not allowed to wash or shave. The seclusion emphasises the difficulty of the new life and the tests of maturity that the initiate has to pass. The first purpose also involves preparing the initiate for safe sexual intercourse with the husband and

safe delivery of children (Richards 19982: 123, 125, Rasing 1995: 42). The lighting of fire or a candle by the paternal aunt symbolises the beginning of fertility. The initiate is painted with white powder to symbolise the removal of the danger of the menstrual blood which is represented by red marriage emblems.

The initiate is believed to go through a transition from a calm but unproductive childhood to a potentially dangerous but fertile womanhood. The danger of the changes is derived from the sanctity of life. It is believed that what is sacred is also dangerous and must be dealt with ritually (Turner 1981: 578, Rasing 1995: 35). Menstruation blood is therefore believed to be dangerous because life is sacred.

The second purpose of the Chisungu initiation rites is to teach the initiate (*ukufunda*). The initiate is given education on her marital, religious and social roles as a woman. While instruction on sex and motherhood dominate the initiation, the initiate is also given lessons on her religious and social roles (Richards 1982: 128). The sacred emblems and the songs sung during the rites convey these lessons.

During Chisungu initiation rites, the concepts of male and female are constructed and justified by reference to the norms emphasised by the Bemba society. Sexual orientation and the allocation of social roles are also covered here. La Fontaine (1986: 104, 116) has rightly observed that female initiation rites confirm the power and authority of women. Women react to male dominance and mock them. This is true of the Bemba society where the masterful husband and a submissive wife are depicted differently during the Chisungu initiation rites. The opposite portrayal of the social position of men and women confirm the dilemma of a matrilineal society in which men are dominant but the line goes through the woman (Rasing 1995: 41, Richards 1982: 50).

Oduyoye (1986:123) has argued that while matrilineity may give the impression of the structural dominance of women, no real power resides in the hands of women. Even in a matrilineal¹ society the ideas that are associated with masculinity are seen to be superior to those that are feminine.

¹ In a matrilineal society, the married couple lives in the wife's village or compound and children trace their descent through the mother's line. A matriarchal society therefore gives a women high status and some freedom as compared to the patriarchal society (Oduyoye 1995:134, 135; Phiri 2000:35, 36).

The third purpose of the Chisungu initiation rites is to mark the change of status and give identity to the initiate (Richards 1982: 130). It indicates the possession of knowledge concerning marital behaviour and social etiquette. The rites include lessons on sex education and notions on what is expected of a mature Bemba woman. The initiate is inducted into the company of taught women and assumes a position in the hierarchy of women in society. Given that what is considered to be taboo like sexuality is spoken about freely during initiation, Chisungu becomes a great resource in our response to HIV and AIDS.

The third purpose of the initiation rites is to give entertainment. Dancing and drinking beer characterises the Chisungu initiation rites. It is an occasion which includes entertainment and display of social status. Gifts and presents are given to the initiate at the end of the ceremony (Richards 1982: 133). Given that the purpose of the Chisungu initiation rites includes marking the transition of the initiate from childhood to adulthood and education on the marital, religious and social roles of women, it is important to explain the cultural setting of the Bemba people.

2.3. THE CULTURAL SETTING OF THE BEMBA PEOPLE

The Bemba people are a dominant tribe in the Northern part of Zambia. But Bemba is also a language spoken by the entire population of the Copperbelt and central provinces of Zambia (Garvey 1994:1). There is little specialisation in the Bemba economy. The making of pottery is the only craft which is exclusively for women (Richards 1982: 27). This demonstrates that gender hierarchy does not feature much in matters of economy in the traditional Bemba society.

The social, political and religious conditions of the Bemba peoples have undergone considerable change since the 19th century. More written information about the Bemba people come from the early missionaries and Western anthropologists like Audrey Richards who came to the area (Garvey 1994:8). However, the information written by these people has to be scrutinised if used to interpret the social and religious systems of the Bemba people. The social and religious life of the Bemba people was organised slightly different from that which is described by the early missionaries and anthropologist.

There is a significant religious dimension to all community activities in a traditional Bemba society. Marriage is regarded as a spiritual as well as a social institution. During Chisungu

initiation, the couple is given a small pot used for ceremonial cleansing after sexual intercourse. This demonstrates that sexual relations in marriage have a spiritual and a ritual significance among the Bemba people.

There are therefore taboos governing sex in marriage. Sex is forbidden during menstruation and at certain times of social significance such as a funeral. The wife is not allowed to do certain duties such as cooking during menstruation and pregnancy. These regulations are for both purification purposes and to give a woman enough time to rest during times of stress and sickness.

Adultery and polygamy are highly discouraged. It is believed that the death of the wife during child birth is caused by the adultery committed by one of the marriage partners. Once the guilty person has been established by divination, compensation has to be made to the innocent. In pre-colonial Bemba society, the husband was executed for causing death to the wife while pregnant (Garvey 1994:11, Rasing 1995:27). Polygamous marriage arrangements were only allowed where levirate marriage was deemed necessary. Levirate marriage involved ritual sex and inheritance of the surviving spouse by a member of a dead partner. This custom has however proved to be dangerous in the context of HIV and AIDS (Mbozi 2000:80).

In the Bemba society, succession follows the matrilineal line. The position of a woman in the clan structure is therefore much more favourable than that of a man. The birth of a girl is considered to be a blessing and an approval of marriage by the ancestors. In pre-colonial days women acted as guardians of the shrines (*babanye*) (Richards 1982:49). Some women also held positions as chiefs. This shows that women held high positions of leadership in the Bemba society.

It is evident from written information that Christianity and western anthropologists have contributed to the misinterpretation of the Bemba culture. The worldview and the values which are expressed in symbols have never been fully described or explored. Further, the ritual significance in Bemba marital relationships is still unknown to Christians.

Garvey (1994:15) has pointed out that in their anxiety to affirm the similarities between the Bemba God (Lesa) and the Judeo-Christian understanding of God, the missionaries overlooked the feminine traditional features of Lesa. He goes on to argue that in attempting to use some

elements of the Bemba consciousness of God, the missionaries made it hard for women to master the essence of a Christian God. Some missionaries mention the word *Lesa* being used in both curses and praises. Similarly, anthropologists like Richards and La Fontaine mention that vulgar language is used during the Chisungu initiation ceremony (La Fontaine 1986: 146). This however, arises from a misinterpretation of the Bemba system of honour and praises. Praises and songs among the Bemba people have a meaning beyond the actual words used.

Writing about the Bemba culture, Richards has stated that, “the father is the head of an extended family and whether he lives in his wife’s village, in his mother’s brother’s family or has managed to start a small community of his own” (Richards 1982:36). Contrary to Richard’s Eurocentric interpretation, the wife was the head of the family in a traditional Bemba society (Kaunda 2010:6). The first wife of the king in Bemba society has equal powers as the king. Further, women who are tutors of the initiation rites have powers and command higher respect than men.

Richards later alludes to this fact when she notes that Bemba princes acted as chiefs or village „headmen’. She notes that women in positions of power wielded political authority but were regarded as chiefs with feminine attributes such as gentleness and hospitality (Richards 1982:48). What goes almost unnoticed in her analysis is that in Bemba society any good leader including the king is expected to exhibit feminine attributes (Hinfelaar 1994:6, 7). Richards further notes that apart from political functions, women were also in charge of ancestral shrines and that the senior wives of chiefs (*Mukolo* or *Mwadi*) were highly honoured (Richards 1982: 49).

It is therefore evident that while there are some elements of patriarchy in the Bemba culture, Christianity and Western influences have largely contributed to the elimination of those elements in the Bemba culture which are life-giving to women especially in the context of HIV and AIDS. Furthermore, this has happened not only within the actual lived experiences of the Bemba people, but in the subsequent representation of the Bemba people and in the documenting of their cultural lives. Oduyoye (1985:183) has pointed out that,

It is still debatable whether or not the influence of Christianity has been beneficial to the socio-cultural transformation of Africa—and I am most concerned with its

effects on women. It seems that sexist elements of western culture have simply fuelled the cultural sexism of traditional African society. Christian anthropology has consistently contributed to this. African men, at home with androcentrism and patriarchal order of biblical cultures, have felt their views confirmed by Christianity.

Given that every community function has a religious and social significance in a traditional Bemba cultural setting, the form and practice of the Chisungu initiation rites confirm the religious and social leadership roles of women.

2.4. FORM AND PRACTICE

Chisungu initiation rites take place at two stages. The first one is when a girl reaches puberty. This is done immediately after the first menstruation. In modern days this lasts two to four days. The girl receives instruction on issues that concern a girl who has reached puberty such as how to dress up and on cleanliness during menstruation. The second one takes place prior to marriage. The initiate is instructed on matters pertaining to womanhood, marriage, sexuality and her social and religious roles (Richards 1982:110). The ceremony can be organised for one or more than one initiates.

In the Urban areas of Zambia Chisungu initiation rites performed prior to marriage incorporate a “Kitchen party”. This involves teachings on sexual matters, submission of the wife in the family, general cleanliness and industry (Kapungwe 2003: 45). Among the Bemba of Luapula province of Zambia, the initiation rite prior to marriage includes the bride and the bridegroom having sex on the night before the wedding. This is done to check that the woman is a virgin and whether the man is impotent (*Chibola*). On this occasion sexual intercourse between the engaged couple is done on a bed covered with white linen. The tutors of initiation (*Ifimbusa*) check this piece of cloth to determine the virginity of a woman and the potency of a man. The Chisungu ceremony therefore incorporates aspects of virginity and virility inspection.

The Chisungu initiation ceremony is considered to be preliminary to the wedding ceremony. In pre-colonial times, it lasted for almost six months. Currently it has been shortened to between two to seven days. The length of the initiation depends on the family interest, resources and other

demands on the initiate's time such as school. The lessons and the format of the ceremony follow that of an indigenous wedding ceremony but in a shortened form (Rasing 1995: 31). Whether performed at puberty or at the time of marriage, the teachings given to the initiates are the same.

Plans for the Chisungu ceremony are initiated by the parents of the initiate. The parents of the initiate provide for the expenses of the ceremony with the assistance of the relatives of the bridegroom (Richards 1982:56). The parents then invite the tutors of the initiation (*Bana chimbusa*) who arrange the ceremony and conduct the teachings. The Tutors of the initiation are women who are well schooled in Bemba culture and marriage customs. They have political power and are treated with great respect in the community (Corbeil 1982: 9). The senior tutor is assisted by the deputy (*nakalamba*) in ensuring that the ceremony is well organised.

The Chisungu initiation rites constitute a sequence of events. On the first day, the tutors of the initiation take the initiate and seclude her in the initiation house. Lessons are delivered through dancing and songs. On the second day the initiate is taken into the bush. The tutors instruct her to sit at the base of the *Mufungo* or *Mubwilili* tree facing the east. From sunrise to sunset women dance and sing special songs designed to instruct the novice (Cameron and Jordan 2006:239). The third or fourth day is used to design marriage or sacred emblems (*imbusa*) or „things to be handed down' (Richards 1982:55). Different designs of marriage emblems are drawn on the walls of the initiation house on the occasion of the ceremony. The presentation and explanation of the meaning of the emblems is done during the night on the last day of the initiation.

The sacred emblems are of various types, but they are all considered to be secret in the sense that they either have a secret name or a secret meaning according to the Bemba culture and traditions. At the end of the training the initiate is presented to the community where she displays dancing skills learned during the seclusion and receives gifts and presents(Cameron and Jordan 2006:238).

The tutors of the initiation teach the initiate on the essential roles of women as providers of life. It formally introduces the initiate to adult life. There are lessons on portraying good behaviour towards parents, neighbours and elderly people. There are also teachings that portray negative role models not to be emulated by women. The lessons are delivered through songs, dancing and marriage emblems.

The women are taught about the mysteries surrounding menstrual blood. Menstrual blood is handled very cautiously to protect the woman from infertility and witchcraft. The initiate is taught how to recognise that menstruation is over and sexual relations can be resumed. A menstruating woman is not expected to cook or put salt on food.

The initiate is taught to avoid premarital and extramarital sex. It is believed that premarital sex can cause a “slimming” sickness called *Ichifuba cantanda bwanga* (Rasing 1995:52). The symptoms of this illness are similar to those of AIDS. Addressing this issue may be a starting point in teaching women against the myths surrounding HIV and AIDS. Those who are married are taught to be faithful to their husbands. Much of the teaching during the initiation is related to marriage and sex education, although sex education is not the only theme or purpose of the rites. The initiate is also taught not to sleep with men especially those older than her. This can be a good starting point in the teachings regarding HIV prevention for women. Lessons on abstinence and delaying the sex debut can also be incorporated in the rites.

There are also more lessons on how a woman can satisfy a man during sex. Women are taught to be free to initiate sexual relations in marriage. This is demonstrated in the initiation songs and the initiation solo dance. Richards refers to this as “the dilemma of a matrilineal society in which men are dominant but the line goes through the women” (Richards 1982:51). The initiate is also oriented with the taboos governing sex in marriage. The initiate is advised to refuse to have sex with the husband when she is menstruating and when the child or herself is sick (Rasing 2006:6, 7). Fiedler (2005:31) has rightly argued that it is necessary to uphold cultural values that encourage women to have power over sexual affairs. In the context of HIV a woman can refuse to have sex with the husband if he is not ready to use a condom. Discussing when to have sex and how to have it should be a normal thing between husband and wife.

African women theologians have largely condemned the idea of women focusing too much on satisfying their husbands. They argue that women are turned into sex objects to satisfy their husbands thereby making them more vulnerable to HIV (Phiri 2003:10). Fiedler (2005:32) has however argued that men are also taught to satisfy their wives in sex during their initiation rites. She further argues that the dancing and the swerving of the waist during sexual intercourse satisfy both the husband and the wife. Similarly, Schmid (2005:7) has shown that sex is a gift from God which must be enjoyed as long as it is within a committed relationship.

The initiate is taught about the functions of her body parts during sex. She is prepared mentally on what to expect when the man is ready for sex such as the change in the size of his penis due to an erection. This is also important because in the context of HIV the silence about sex and anything related to it should be broken. As Schmid (2005:7) has rightly pointed out, talking about sex and our private parts should not be seen as a taboo as it is life-giving in the context of HIV and AIDS.

The Chisungu initiation includes inspection for the pulling of the labia. The initiate is inspected to see if she has pulled the labia. The pulling of the labia is encouraged so that the husband can play with them during sex and also to tighten the vagina. It is believed that the tightening of the vagina and dry sex adds pleasure to sex (Richards 1982:46). Fiedler (2005:36) argues that the pulling of the labia is important as it contributes to the stability of marriage. However, Phiri (2003:10) has rightly pointed out that the pulling of the labia increases the vulnerability of women to HIV due to the tears that occur on the surface of the vagina during sexual intercourse.

It is worth noting that there are songs and emblems that teach women not to ask for sex from their husbands. There are also songs and emblems that teach women not to condemn their husbands for immorality. These songs and emblems are however contested by other songs and emblems that empower women to rebuke their husbands for immorality and to have control over their sex life as it shall be shown in the following chapters (Rasing 2006: 6, 7). There are also lessons on the importance of hygiene.

Celebrating the attainment of sexual and social maturity, the Chisungu initiation reflects tribal attitudes to sex, marriage and fertility. Phiri (2000b:150) has shown that Initiation rites are important because they give identity to women. It is also the time when girls and women receive education on matters related to sex and marriage. She however points out that false teachings concerning the taboos related to menstruation and submission to husband in marriage should be discouraged. Fiedler (2005:47) adds that good elements in African culture which empower women should be upheld while those that make women vulnerable should be discarded.

2.5. CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown the purpose of the Chisungu initiation rites. It has explained the cultural setting of the Bemba people, the form and the practice of the Chisungu. The Bemba people conduct the initiation at puberty or at marriage or both at puberty and at marriage (Kapungwe 2003:47). The purpose of the rites include marking the transition of the initiate from childhood to adulthood, giving education to the initiate on matters of sex and on the social and religious leadership roles of a Bemba woman. A comparison of the past and the present reveals both continuities and discontinuities in the structure and content of the Chisungu initiation rites.

The lessons to the initiate during the initiation include emphasis on personal hygiene especially during menstruation, taking care of the family, maximising satisfaction during sexual intercourse, social and religious roles of a woman, sticking to one sexual partner and avoiding premarital and extramarital sexual affairs. If these lessons are taught to the initiate in relation to HIV and AIDS, Chisungu initiation rites can create a good window of opportunity for HIV prevention. In Zambia, Chisungu initiation rites is being reinvented and modified to represent and address contemporary social issues such as HIV and AIDS. Given that Chisungu initiation is being reclaimed and modified to address contemporary issues that are affecting women, it is necessary to interrogate the gendered values of the rites as it shall be shown in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

THE GENDERED CULTURAL VALUES OF CHISUNGU INITIATION RITES

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Initiation rites involve the construction and definition of gender roles and identities. This chapter will show the gendered cultural values of indigenous Chisungu initiation rites. The chapter will also give details of the symbolic meaning of the rites and the interpretation of the initiation songs and sacred emblems. The Chisungu initiation ceremony has symbolic meaning. The symbols and teachings presented during the ceremony embody social, political, religious and moral meanings (Cameron and Jordan 2006: 238). Given that the gender roles and identities constructed and demonstrated during the initiation can be either life-giving or life-denying to women, it is necessary to interrogate the gendered values of the Chisungu initiation rites.

3.2. GENDERED CULTURAL VALUES

There seems to be a tension between Christianity and indigenous African culture. Kanyoro (2002: 19) has shown that Christian women in Africa live in two worlds with a shared allegiance to both African culture and Christianity. This is true with women in Bemba society considering that in pre-colonial traditional matrilineal Bemba society women were the heads of the home. A married woman was in charge of all religious affairs and led prayers at the shrine (*imfuba*). Further women's leadership roles were demonstrated and emphasised during the Chisungu initiation rites (Hinfelaar 1994: xi).

The gendered values and elements of culture are still demonstrated during indigenous Chisungu initiation rites when a woman is taught about her original role and status in society. The initiate is taught about the clan's origin and destiny, the community's notion of God and her sacred and leadership position as a married Bemba woman. The rites affirm and demonstrate women's authority and leadership role in society.

On the second day of the ceremony, the initiate is taken into the bush for libation and initiation. Beer is poured on the Mufungo tree and the initiate gives a prayer after throwing white beads to the east and the west saying: *Twabusha impanga, mwe mipashi yesu mu twiminineko* (we have cleared the forest, spirits of our grandparents be with us). The woman is then told to get the beads hanging on the tree using her mouth. The East signifies the future, light and happiness. The west (*Kola*) signifies the past and the home of the ancestors (Hinfelaar1994:3). Beads are a symbol of marriage and purity (Rasing 1995: 51, 52). Getting beads with the mouth is the warning against premarital and extramarital sexual affairs which are believed to cause a “slimming” illness (*ukulepa iminwe*).

During the initiation the initiate is told to feel surrounded by the mother father God (*Lesá*). Kaunda (2010:7) has pointed out that connected to the roles of women is the belief in the mother/father God (*Mayo/Tata Lesá*). Although a Bemba God is believed to be both feminine and masculine as in *Mayo Tata Lesá/Mother father God* (Hinfelaar1994:6), during Chisungu initiation the feminine images of God are usually invoked as in *Lesá nankoko uwafukatila abana/God who is caring like the mother hen*.

It is clear from the above that God is perceived as having both feminine and masculine images among the Bemba people. Leaders are expected to possess feminine attributes as well. What this means for Christianity and its influence on Bemba women will need further interrogation. Poewe (1981:56) has pointed out that in the Bemba society leaders are expected to reach perfection when they acquire the characteristics of the opposite sex. Tutors of the initiation rites are considered to be ritual males. Further the names of the shrines are regarded as feminine. God can only be reached when one imitates the feminine. This shows that there are values in Bemba culture that can critique patriarchy from within if reclaimed for the empowerment of women.

Male power in society and violence against women that accompany it is usually reinforced in religious contexts by exclusive use of male language for God (Rakoczy 2004: 63). Reclaiming the “mother-father image” of God may empower women by promoting mutuality between men and women.

The initiate is taught that the three annual seasons symbolise male and female. The cold and dry season (May to July) which is also the time of harvest symbolises a woman (the feminine). The

hot season (September to November) symbolises a man (the masculine). The rainy season unites the two other seasons and symbolises the perfection union of man and woman. It also symbolises the divine gift of fecundity upon human beings which occurs when the feminine and the masculine meet during the rainy season. The earth is the symbol of the womb that waits patiently for the divine rains so as to become fertile. The sun is the symbol of the divine and the morning rays of the sun symbolise the male power of fecundity. Access to God is therefore only possible through the marriage union of husband and wife (Poewe 1981:56-57, Douglas 1966: 157). It is believed that access to God for the wellbeing of the community can only happen through marital sexual intercourse with a woman who should be approached with patience and reverence.

When a woman is menstruating, she is considered to be in cold season. She is therefore not allowed to cook or add salt to food. She is also not allowed to have sexual intercourse. It is believed that salt weakens the body. The husband is expected to do the cooking or someone in the family during this time. The woman is told to put on red beads to show the husband that she is having her periods (Rasing 1995:28). While this taboo is aimed at giving the woman time to rest, the idea of being unclean because of menstrual blood has been condemned by African women theologians. Oduyoye (1995: 176) has rightly argued that a collaboration between the Hebrew scripture and some elements of African religio-culture that portray menstrual blood as dangerous has disempowered women from leadership in the church and society.

During the lessons the initiate is taught about the importance and use of beads (*Ubulungu/chisasa*). The stringing of beads by women symbolises parenthood and purity in marriage. The saying: *Lesá bulungu, tapita paka fundo* (God is like beads through which no knot can pass) means that sexual purity should be maintained in marriage. Extra marital relations are not expected. The bridegroom is also advised on the importance of purity in marriage as in the saying: *sunga umukoshi ubulungu tabwayafya* (look after your neck properly, there will be no shortage of beads) meaning that the husband should be faithful to the wife in marriage and God will bless them with children (Hinfelaar 1994:11). The emphasis on fidelity and purity in marriage arises from the belief that the “mother-father” God can only be approached through marital sexual relations. It is for this reason that marriage is highly valued and celibacy is not admired (Richards 1982:50).

3.3. INDIGENOUS GENDERED ROLES OF WOMEN

Given that there are continuities and discontinuities in the way the Chisungu initiation is performed, it is important to evaluate the indigenous gendered roles of women which were passed on from one generation to the other during the rites in pre-colonial times. The initiates received lessons about their religious and social roles.

The first role of the woman was to be *Chibinda wa ng'anda* (Owner of the home). Hinfelaar (1994:12) has argued that this was a religious role of women as enablers of the domestic cult. Nonetheless this role emphasised both religious and social leadership position of women as owners and heads of the household. Chibinda means owner as in: *Lesa e chibinda wa myeo yesu*/God is the owner of our lives. The marriage home was a symbol of the wife's womb. The wife was responsible for the wellbeing of the marriage and the husband had to approach her with respect in matters of sex.

As I have already stated, Sexual intercourse within marriage was believed to have spiritual force and could be used for the benefit of the whole community if performed in the right manner. For this reason chiefs perform special acts of intercourse to bring fertility and blessings to the land or blessing to the community (Rasing 1995:27). Sex was therefore considered to be sacred and had to be done within a committed marriage relationship.

The initiate was taught to ensure that sex only happens when there is faithfulness in marriage. Any sexual irregularity between the married couple was believed to affect the marriage partner and children. In a traditional Bemba society, the wife is allowed to refuse sexual intercourse if she is not convinced of her husband's innocence (Hinfelaar 1994:13). This is because it is believed that extra marital affairs by the husband would cause the death of the pregnant wife (*Inchila*). If the wife dies in pregnancy, the husband is severely punished.

It is also believed that extra marital affairs by a pregnant wife will cause her death immediately after giving birth (*Incentu*). Fidelity in marriage is emphasised to both the initiate and the bridegroom as in: *wilasankanya umulopa*/ Never mix conjugal blood or *wilacila umukashi*/ don't step over your wife's spirit (Rasing 1995:29). Adultery and fornication are severely punished.

Incompatibility and ill-treatment of the wife would lead to the separation of marriage partners as this would spoil the role of the wife as the owner of the house (Garvey 1994:11).

The second role of the woman was to be the initiator of worship (*Kabumba wa mapepo*). *Kabumba* means creator as in *Lesa Kabumba* (God the creator). It is believed among the Bemba people that God is made present on earth by women during the initiation ceremony through marriage emblems (*Imbusa*). As Hinfelaar (1994: 15) has rightly observed, this was a religious role of women. It was the responsibility of the wife to take offerings to the family shrine and to lead prayers to God for the wellbeing of the family. Women were also in charge of territorial shrines where they conducted prayers to God through the ancestors for the wellbeing of the whole community. This shows that the function of the indigenous Chisungu initiation rites was beyond simply giving sexual education.

Richards (1982: 139) has observed that lessons on sex and motherhood were more emphasised than lessons on prayers to the ancestors and religious leadership of women due to Christianity and western civilisation. It is worth noting that Christianity reinforced by colonial authorities considered worship to the ancestors as idolatry. Secondly, the missionaries and the colonial powers did not recognise women as religious leaders as priests were predominantly male. Christianity and colonialism have therefore disempowered women from their religious leadership role leading to the gradual disappearance of this component in the Chisungu initiation rites.

The third role of the woman taught during the Chisungu initiation is *Nachimbusa wa chisungu* (mother of the marriage or sacred emblems). To have first menstruation (*ukuwa Ichisungu*) was celebrated as a wondrous event when the young woman received the gift of her sexuality from God. Hinfelaar (1994: 17) has argued that the title of *Na chimbusa wa Chisungu* refers only to the role of the tutor of the initiation (*Nachimbusa*). However, during Chisungu initiation women are reminded of their role as mother of the sacred emblems in the community (*ifimbusa*).

In other words, women are reminded of the values of the Bemba culture that safeguard the dignity of a woman and the importance of passing those values to the next generation. *Mbusa* means things to be handed down. The values that safeguard the dignity of a Bemba woman are expected to be handed down from one generation to the next like the stringing of beads.

Richards (1982:61) has noted that the tutor of the initiation “reckoned herself as of royal rank although she was only a member of a junior branch of royal clan. She had an unusual personality, great organising power, and a sharp tongue”. Although she depicts the role of the *Nachimbusa* using her western lenses, her observations points to the fact that *Nachimbusa* holds a recognised leadership position in the Bemba society. Given that the lessons and the gendered values are delivered to the initiate through marriage/sacred emblems it is necessary to explain the major types of the emblems and their meaning.

3.4. SACRED EMBLEMS

There are four types of sacred emblems which are used during the initiation ceremony. The first type of emblems consists of essential traditional food stuff of the Bemba people such as millet, beans, groundnuts, pumpkin seeds, game meat, fish and salt. Each type of food stuff has its interpretation. The second type of emblems consists of fruit bearing trees such as *Mufungo* and *Musuku* trees. Each tree used has its meaning and a song in the ceremony. The third type consists of pottery emblems usually painted in white, red and black. Each emblem has a name and its own song (Richards 1982:59). The fourth type of emblems consists of wall designs painted inside the initiation house. Each pattern has a name and the meaning.

The interpretation of the meaning of initiation songs and sacred emblems has evolved over time. This is due to the advent of (post)modernity and Christianity. This is depicted in Richard’s account in the way the initiation songs were interpreted by the old tutor of the initiation and Paul Mushindo a minister at a Presbyterian mission of the Church of Scotland (Now UCZ) (Richards 1982:75). In the urban areas where it is not possible to make pottery emblems the emblems are presented in the form of visual aids or wall designs (see appendix 3 on page 68).

Before the presentation and interpretation of the sacred emblems, the tutor of the initiation gives a marriage pot (*akalongo*) to the initiate. The initiate is then told to always remember to prepare a love meal called *akatamba cupo* (marriage holder) which the husband and wife should eat in the bedroom. The love aspect is brought out by the husband feeding the wife and wife feeding the husband (Hinfelaar 1994:15). The purpose of this special love meal is to promote mutuality and love in marriage.

3.4.1. EMBLEMS OF TRADITIONAL FOOD STUFF

After the presentation of the marriage pot, the initiate is presented with sacred emblems consisting of traditional foods. Lessons on traditional foods usually border on good nutrition to the family. Women are also taught about certain foods such as groundnuts which can be eaten to boost the sexual drive.

3.4.2. EMBLEMS OF FRUIT BEARING TREES

The initiate is introduced to the tree emblems such as *Mufungo* and *Mwenge* trees when she is taken into the bush. Tree emblems are fruit bearing (female) trees that represent fertility and the sacredness of the woman and male trees that represent the bridegroom (Richards 1982:94).

The women pour beer on the ground under the tree emblems. The making of beer is one of the married woman's important duties and is emphasised during the initiation. It is the beer that makes the ancestors to bless the occasion and the initiate. This is contrary to some Christian teachings that consider beer to be evil. The church often disciplines women who are reported to have been drinking during initiation or a wedding ceremony.

After the pouring of the beer, the initiate is introduced to the *Mulombwa* or *Nakabumbu* (male trees) which represent the bridegroom. The red pass of the *mulombwa* tree represents the menstruation blood and the danger of mixing marital blood through infidelity.

3.4.3. CLAY/POTTERY EMBLEMS

There are different clay/pottery emblems. The first clay emblem depicts the mortar and the pestle. The mortar and the pestle are symbols of the unity of the soul and the spirit between the husband and wife through marital sex (Rasing 1995:55). The second clay emblems is of a hoe. This emphasises the importance of industry for the woman. The hoe is also a symbol of the married woman as a cultivated garden through which another man is not allowed to pass. A man is not expected to signal sexual interest to a married woman.

The third emblem depicts a bracelet and the bead necklace. The bracelet represents the engagement price (*Insalamu*). It stresses the husband's duty to provide for the needs of his wife. A man is considered to be a fool if he is lazy and does not look after his wife. The necklace

emphasises the importance of the husband respecting the wife. Separation can be allowed in marriage if the husband is mistreating the wife (Richards 1982:103).

The fourth clay emblem depicts a man with a big head and a big penis but without arms. It represents a lazy man who is fond of finding faults in his wife. A good husband is expected to respect the views of his wife. The fifth clay emblem depicts a long snake (*Yongolo*) and it represents the man's penis. It is the warning to the husband not to cheat in marriage. The bridegroom is also warned not to have sex with a girl below the age of puberty or to have sex with a woman in the bush. The couple is encouraged to have sex in the house and whenever they want (Richards 1982:87, Rasing 1995: 66). It is worth noting that the couple is not encouraged to have sex in the bush because sex is considered to be sacred and it has to be done in an honourable way. Further, the bush is considered to be sacred as it is an abode for the ancestors. And so, improper sex can defile it.

The sixth clay emblem depicts a woman suckling her two babies and carrying two on her back (*Choshi wa ngoma*). This emblem teaches about good child spacing. The tutor of the initiation stresses the importance of refusing sexual intercourse with the husband before the baby is weaned. The common Bemba practice is to have child spacing of two to three years (Richards 1982: 210).

The initiate is then presented with the seventh clay emblem which depicts a woman carrying a basket on her head and another one in her hands. The basket is the symbol of marriage. The emblem emphasises the superior position of the woman in marriage and in her family. This emblem emphasises that the wife is the head and the pillar of the marriage (Richard 1982:104, Rasing 1995: 60).

3.4.4. EMBLEMS OF WALL DESIGNS

Lessons during the initiation ceremony are also delivered through sacred emblems drawn on the wall of the initiation house. The first wall emblem depicts a bean drawn on the wall. The bean design represents the clitoris which is the part of the woman's body that is responsible for sexual arousal. The initiate is taught to guide the husband with regards to her sexual arousal. Richards (1982: 50) has ignorantly pointed out that in Bemba culture men are always expected to take the

initiative in sex affairs. However, from the emblems it is clear that women are taught to take the initiative in sexual matters.

The second emblem depicts a naked brother and a sister standing flat against the wall. Richards (1982:83) suggests that this emblem may represent some form of brother-sister incest in Bemba indigenous culture. However, it shows the brother-sister bonding and equality which exists in the Bemba matrilineal culture. Children in the Bemba matrilineal culture belong to the wife and they are the possible heirs for her brother.

The third emblem shows a man and a woman standing with a stick between them and two animals resembling each other eating from one plate. This emphasises equality between the husband and the wife (Rasing 1995: 69). The husband and wife are united through marital intercourse.

The fourth emblem shows a rectangular bed without blankets. This teaches the woman that she must stay with her husband even if they do not have enough material possessions (*Chipuba chobe*) (Richards 1982:83, Rasing 1995: 71). Divorce is not supported on grounds of lack of material possession. The emblem also emphasises that a man should not seduce a woman to have sex with him in the bush where there is no shelter.

The fifth emblem shows a naked woman with a big red vulva. This emphasises that women should have long genitals to satisfy their husbands (Rasing 1995: 72). Long genitals are seen as a symbol of a woman's pride. Further, it emphasises that a woman should pull her labia and keep her vagina tight and dry.

The sixth emblem shows a drawing of hands and a razor. This means that the couple should clean each other after sex. They are also expected to shave under the armpit and around the genitals (Kabonde 1996: 197). Richards (1982) ignorantly points out that there is no intimacy in Bemba marriage. But the cleaning of each other after sex shows that there is intimacy in marriage.

The seventh emblem shows the drawing of a bird called *Mung'omba* which sings early in the morning. This teaches the initiate to wake up early in the morning and ask the husband to have

sexual intercourse. It is believed that the best time to have sex is early in the morning (Rasing 1995: 70).

The eighth wall emblem called *Mushintililo* (Mutual understanding) is presented towards the end of the initiation. The bridegroom or fiancée comes into the initiation house with the bow and arrow. The climax of the initiation rites occurs when the fiancé of the initiate, facing the East shoots an arrow into the target of the marriage emblem drawn on the West wall of the initiation house (Corbeil 1982: 17, La Fontaine 1986: 103). The emblem emphasises the importance of mutual understanding in marriage. The couple is taught that their success in marriage and life in general will depend on their mutual understanding. If the ceremony is performed at the time of marriage, the consummation of marriage sexual intercourse will follow.

The bridegroom is referred to as an indomitable lion (*Mundu*) or king in the initiation ceremony. He is the lion, the king because the initiation ritual is also connected to the potency of the king (*Ukukafya umushi*). The powers of the king are protected by the same marriage taboos. The king is responsible for the fertility and wellbeing of his people and he depends for the knowledge of the conjugal ritual of his wife (La Fontaine 1982: xxxi).

During the initiation, the initiate is taught everything concerning marriage and sex. Fiedler (2005:19) has noted that some people are against indigenous initiation rites citing obscene language, sexually suggestive movements in the dance and sexual demonstrations as the reasons. Nonetheless, sex has to be discussed openly in order to empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS. Given that each sacred/marriage emblem has its own song(s) and interpretation in the initiation, it is important to discuss some initiation songs and their meaning.

3.5. INITIATION SONGS

3.5.1. THE FIRST DAY

On the first day of the initiation, the initiate is brought into the initiation house crawling and covered under a blanket while women are singing:

Twingile shani?

How shall we go in?

Twingile mwi pempe; Let us go into the dark tunnel;

Twingile nga Kolwe let us go in like monkeys.

The song signifies a transition of the initiate from childhood to adulthood. She has to go through seclusion which is a dark and difficult place before she gets wisdom (Rasing 1995:55). The initiate is subjected to physical torture including the pinching of her thighs especially if she is known to be stubborn in the community.

They sing the second song:

Wakula nomba wansanga you are now grown up like me

We mwengele wandi my pine tree

This song emphasises the change in the status of the initiate. She is now expected to portray socially acceptable behaviour as an adult woman.

They sing the third song:

Ulelolesha Intanda ubushiku you gaze at the stars at night

Ulantuka ukukashika you insult me obscenely

This song teaches the initiate that however bad a man insults his wife, she must not answer back. A wife is not expected to answer back when they are quarrelling with her husband

3.5.2 THE SECOND DAY

On the second day in the bush the initiate is made to climb the *Musuku* tree with her legs up while women sing:

Fulwe tanina The tortoise does not climb

Lelo anina ku mukolobondo But today it is climbing the tree

This song means that a woman must learn to do impossible things. Even if she is not a man she must do things which men do if need be (Richards 1982:71, 192).

The second song is accompanied by a special dance for sex. The initiate dances with legs wide open holding her dress high up while women sing:

<i>Butanda ndeka</i>	Mat let me go
<i>Nakumbwa inama kwisano</i>	I have admired fresh meat at the chief's palace

The song means that a married woman has every right to enjoy sex. If the husband is impotent or does not satisfy her, she is free to get someone from within the family to help out sexually as long as it is done privately (Rasing 1995:81).

At night they sing:

<i>Kasusu tole nda</i>	little bat pick the louse,
<i>Leka ichungulo cise</i>	wait for the evening to come
<i>Tubike muleya pambali</i>	we will put amorous play aside

This song represents a woman who goes out to hunt for lovers at night in the dark. It teaches the initiate to avoid promiscuity (Richards 1982:85, 196). A woman is not also expected to expose her body in order to seduce a man she does not know.

3.5.3. THE THIRD DAY

Most of the songs sung at night on the third day are addressed to both the initiate (the woman) and the bridegroom (the man). When the bridegroom or fiancée arrives with the bow and arrow, women sing:

<i>Iseni mutambe</i>	come and see!
<i>Tuchitwale uko bachibashile</i>	let us take her to where she was made
<i>Napelwa no mulume wankalamu</i>	I have been given to my lion
<i>Iseni mutambe</i>	Come and see

The song means bringing the initiate to the occupation of married life. They are giving her to the husband who is as strong as the lion (Richards 1982: 189). This song reduces the responsibility of the married woman to only satisfying the husband.

The second song is addressed to the bridegroom:

<i>Nalonsha inama yandi</i>	I have tracked my game;
<i>Tabula mwine walasa</i>	I have shot one

The song teaches the initiate and the bridegroom that a man should be potent enough to satisfy his wife during sexual intercourse.

The third song is addressed to the bridegroom:

<i>Icikulu mwaume mu nganda</i>	the man is the head of the house
<i>Efyo twaumfwa</i>	that is what we have been told
<i>Na banakashi abapikula cisumpe</i>	women make the pinnacle also.

The bridegroom is told that both a man and a woman can be the head of the house. He should not think that it is only a man who can be the head of the house. While he is expected to solve problems at home, marriage will never prosper without the wisdom of the wife (Richards 1982:198). The tutor of marriage warns the bridegroom saying: *Umupini ukulangile umwanakashi libwelelo* (always pay attention to your wife's advice, if you don't you will live to regret).

The fourth song is addressed to the initiate:

<i>Mayo akabambe kambaba munda</i>	Mother a maggot is itching in my stomach
<i>Mayo akabambe kanshi kalababa?</i>	Mother so a maggot itches?

This song means that if the husband gives a wife a sexually transmitted illness (STIs), she should not hide it but share with someone she can trust (Rasing 1995: 78). This means that the husband is expected to respect his wife. He cannot treat her as he wishes.

The fifth song is addressed to the woman:

<i>Chibale chibale</i>	Chibale Chibale
<i>Kasambe umulume</i>	Go and wash your husband
<i>We chinangwa we</i>	you uninitiated creature

This song teaches that a woman should clean her husband after sexual intercourse. She should also ensure that pubic hair is cut. If a married man dies with long pubic hair the widow is mistreated by the relatives of the deceased (Kabonde 1996: 192). There are also songs that teach about hospitality, hygiene and having good relationships with in-laws.

Looking at Chisungu initiation, there are more songs and marriage emblems that emphasise the equality and the leadership roles of women. La Fontaine (1982: xxv) has noted that the emphasis on the subordination of the wife to her husband does not seem consistent with observed realities of women in traditional Bemba culture given that they have freedom of choice. Rasing (1995:26) adds that Bemba women were admired among the neighbouring peoples for industry and independence. Bemba royal women had a role in political and religious life and were in charge of ancestral shrines. Even a common woman commanded respect as a mother of the brother's heir. The current overwhelming emphasis on patriarchy in Chisungu initiation rites is therefore, I would argue, due to external factors such as Christianity, western civilisation and interaction with patriarchal African cultures.

3.6. CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown the gendered cultural values of Chisungu initiation rites. It has demonstrated the symbolic meaning of the rites and the interpretation of the sacred emblems and the initiation songs. The chapter has shown the indigenous gendered roles of Bemba women and the gendered cultural values. While there are teachings that promote the subordination of women to men, the rites have values that can empower women if reclaimed.

Given that Chisungu has both the good and bad elements, it is necessary to correct the wrongs and reclaim the good values. Phiri (2000b:150) has rightly argued that initiation rites are important as they are a valuable tool in the transmission of the mysteries of life to the next

generation. She has underscored the importance of being aware of the shortfalls in the initiation rites while upholding the positive aspects which may empower women especially in the context of HIV and AIDS. It is therefore necessary to retrieve the values of Chisungu initiation rites in order to empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS as it shall be shown in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

RETRIEVING GENDERED CULTURAL VALUES OF CHISUNGU INITIATION RITES

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Female initiation rites remain a socially and culturally approved source of information about matters of sex and the role of women in Africa (Kapungwe 2003: 38). The role of Chisungu initiation rites as a channel of sex education and issues concerning the role and the status of women in Zambia is therefore critical for HIV prevention strategies. This chapter will demonstrate how gendered cultural values of indigenous Chisungu initiation rites can be retrieved for HIV prevention. Given that the rites have both positive and negative elements in terms of gender equity, this chapter will propose elements and practices that may be revised or removed and elements that may be retrieved in order to empower women against HIV and AIDS.

4.2. PRACTICES AND ELEMENTS TO BE REVISED OR REMOVED FROM THE RITES

An initiation rite in Africa which has not been abandoned in response to Christianity and western civilisation must be based on a fundamental belief Richards (1982: 115) asserts. Chisungu initiation is one of the rites that have persisted despite the influence of Christianity and western civilisation. Given the changes in the contemporary society and the advent of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, I would argue, that these rites need to be revised so they can be life-giving to both men and women.

4.2.1. DEMYTHOLOGISING SEX AND MENSTRUAL BLOOD²

There are many myths about sex and menstrual blood in African Bemba culture. As I have already noted, it is believed that the couple can contract a disease when they violate taboos related to sexual intercourse. It is also believed that sex with the breast feeding mother can lead to the baby suffering from chronic coughing (Hastings 1976:45). Further, abstinence during breast feeding is used as a method for family planning. There is a belief that as long as a woman is breast feeding she cannot fall pregnant. This sometimes results in the husbands having extramarital affairs while waiting for the wife to wean the baby. This increases the vulnerability of the couple to the HIV infection.

The myths and taboos concerning sex which are taught during the initiation rites have a bearing on the people's perception on the use of condoms. The underlying reason for people's resistance to condom use in Zambia is largely the traditional African perceptions on how sex should be performed and what its functions are. In traditional Zambian culture, sex is largely linked to procreation which means that it has to be penetrative coitus involving the discharge of semen into a woman (Kapungwe 2003:45). The implication of this is that any physical barrier is considered to be immoral. It is this perception, and not the perceived reliability of condoms or fear to promote immorality which is responsible for the resistance to condom use in the Zambian society.

In the Chisungu initiation rite, the process of menstruation is regarded as dangerous and polluting (La Fontaine 1982: xxxiv). In African culture menstruation blood is believed to cause bad luck, contamination and death. Women are perceived to possess dangerous power during menstruation. The loss of blood is believed to render impotent or reduce the efficacy of a religious functionalist (Oduyoye 2004:87, Wamue 1996:172). Menstruation taboos therefore contribute in portraying women and their bodies as the source of pollution and this becomes problematic.

Oduyoye (2004: 87) has rightly argued that the emphasis on taboos concerning sexuality link women to evil and portray men as the innocent victims of sexuality. Further, premarital and extra

² To demythologize is to remove the mysterious and mythical aspects which are life denying to women. Landman (1998:138) has suggested that in liberating women, we need to demystify and deconstruct myths surrounding sexuality and the physical bodies of women.

marital sex is believed to bring bad luck, contamination and death. Oduyoye (2004:85) adds that the emphasis on purity of sexual behaviour shows the uneasiness that African people have about human sexuality. It is this uneasiness which makes parents in African culture not to openly discuss matters of sex with their children. There should however be openness about matters of sex. Kurian (2004:432) has shown that “sexuality needs to be recognised as one of the many precious gifts from God. It enables us to lead full and responsible lives-including a satisfying sex life within a relationship”. Demythologising sex and looking at it as a gift from God may therefore empower women in the context of the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

Given that the initiation ceremony is a major cultural source of information about sex matters, it is necessary that both men and women receive the same teachings to ensure mutuality and equality in marriage. Research has shown that too much emphasis on the submissiveness of women to men and on the duty of women to satisfy men sexually accounts for the disempowerment of women to negotiate for safer sex. It also forces women to resort to dry sex in order to please men (Moyo 2009:11, Mbozi 2000:80). Emphasising the initiative of Chisungu initiation to include lessons given to both the bride and the bridegroom may therefore promote mutuality and empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS.

Research has also shown that HIV prevalence is high where women have low status and have little say over the kind of sexual practice they want to engage in (Haddad 2003: 151, Moyo (2009: 16). Chisungu therefore becomes a resource in promoting mutuality given that both the bride and the bridegroom are instructed. Designing a pre-marital sexual education programme where both men and women are instructed to ensure that their marriage relationship is based on mutuality in sexual relationships and decision making is empowering to both men and woman in the context of HIV and AIDS.

The issue of menstruation has brought agony to many African women. In the Bemba culture, the wife communicates to the husband on matters concerning menstruation through the colour of beads she is wearing (Richards 1982: 50). Red beads mean she is menstruating and white beads mean that menstruation is over and sex can be resumed. Moyo (2009:11,112) argues that menstruation taboos where beads are used to communicate whether the wife is menstruating or not give women power over sex as they can decide when to stop sexual relations and when to resume sex.

While it is true that beads give women power over sex, it is more empowering to promote mutual respect and open communication between husband and wife. Indigenous Chisungu initiation encourages a woman to openly have control over matters of sex. She is encouraged to initiate sex relations or refuse if she sees it appropriate (Rasing 1995:70). This may be more life-giving to women if emphasised to both women and men during the initiation ceremony. It will also be life-giving to encourage open discussion about sex between husband and wife and between parents and children. The role of initiation rites as channels of sex education and issues concerning the status of a woman is therefore critical in HIV prevention programmes.

4.2.2. DEMYTHOLOGISING MARRIAGE³

Related to sex are the myths around marriage which have rendered women vulnerable to HIV in Africa. Marriage is considered to be good for the wellbeing of everyone among the Bemba people and celibacy is not encouraged. Impotence and barrenness are considered to be sufficient reasons for divorce or polygamy (Rasing 1995: 26, Oduyoye 1999: 113). Among the married couple sexual intercourse is expected to take place as often as they can except for taboo periods such as during menstruation or the funeral of a relative. Further, procreation is considered to be important to ensure the continuation of the clan. A woman who dies without having given birth to a child is buried with a maize cob so that the spirit of barrenness does not come back (Rasing 1995: 32).

While it is true that procreation is one of the purposes of marriage, too much emphasis on fertility becomes problematic. Gnanadason (1993:8) has rightly argued that a woman in African culture is conditioned from childhood into accepting that her only purpose in life is marriage. Culture prepares a woman for marriage so that she does not become useless in society or to the husband. Further, the purpose of marriage is reduced and limited to procreation. Too much emphasis on procreation during the Chisungu initiation makes women fall into this trap. Unmarried and barren women are alienated and assigned to the margins of the social strata. The problem of myths surrounding marriage and procreation goes beyond initiation circles to the church. Oduyoye (1999:114, 116) has pointed out that even Christians in the church follow traditions in African culture that uphold that you are not truly human if you do not bear a child.

³ To deconstruct and demystify myths surrounding marriage and fertility (Landman 1998:138).

This reduces the status of women and as Masenya (2003:123) has observed, it makes women more vulnerable to HIV and AIDS given that they are treated as property by their husbands and society and cannot negotiate for protected sex.

In a Zambian African Bemba culture a man is expected to demonstrate his power to bear children in marriage before he may approach ancestors (La Fontaine 1982: xxxiv). This becomes problematic where the wife is unable to bear a child. It contributes to some men looking for a second wife or having multiple sexual partners in pursuit of a child. Further an adult woman who is not married is considered to be promiscuous and is seen to be available for the pleasure of men. This also leads to many women being abused by men. It is therefore more empowering to women in the context of HIV and AIDS to view marriage as a place or institution of love, mutuality and commitment rather than a place for procreation.

4.2.3. INSPECTION FOR LABIA ELONGATION

The Chisungu initiation rites include inspection for labia elongation. There are also marriage emblems that emphasise the elongation of the labia and the tightening of the vagina (Rasing 1995:72). Labia elongation is done gradually before puberty. Among the Bemba people tightening of the vagina is achieved by using herbs that reduce vaginal fluids and increase friction during intercourse (Mbozi 2000: 80)). Labia elongation and the tightening of the vagina are believed to increase satisfaction during sexual intercourse. The extended labia are also seen as a symbol of pride in the matrilineal Bemba society (Bah 2005:32).

Writing about labia elongation among the Yao people in Malawi, Klaus Fiedler has argued that the practice is immoral, evil and designed to make women more desirable to men. He adds that the elongation is done by manipulating the labia (Fiedler 1996: 180). While it may be true that the elongation of the labia increases satisfaction during sexual intercourse, the tightening of the vagina is problematic for women in the context of HIV and AIDS.

Research has shown that dry sex increases the risk of women to HIV infection due to the small tearing around the surface of the vagina. Vagina tightening and labia elongation makes women more vulnerable to HIV infection if engaged in unprotected sex (Haddad 2003:151, Denis 2003: 90, Phiri 2003: 11). Given that the ability of many women to control their exposure to HIV may be limited by financial dependence on men and their subordinate position in society, labia

elongation becomes lethal to women as they cannot negotiate for safer sexual practice(Haddad 2003:151).

Further the socialisation during initiation where women are inspected for labia elongation may imply that the major duty of a married woman is to satisfy the husband sexually (Phiri 2003: 10). This reinforces patriarchy rendering women vulnerable to the pandemic. Given the likelihood that dry sex will cause tears and cuts in the vagina, the practice clearly increases the risk of HIV transmission and needs to be discarded. It is however worth noting that while there are many practices which make women more vulnerable to HIV infection, there are also practices and values which are more empowering to women.

4.3. PRACTICES AND VALUES TO BE RETRIEVED

La Fontaine (1982: xvii) has rightly observed that the values of Chisungu initiation rites are curiously neglected. The rites include social, political, economic and religious values which may critique patriarchy from within and empower women if reclaimed. It is therefore critical to explore the values that may empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS.

4.3.1. ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Women were economically independent in a traditional Bemba community. Touwen (1984: 38) has shown that in pre-colonial Bemba community the wife provided food for the family through gardening. The husband was usually the hunter and regularly assisted the wife in farming. Industry in an agricultural economy consolidated the position of the wife as the breadwinner of the family. The relationship between wife and husband was based on equality and their roles complemented each other.

Poewe (1981:55) has observed that matrilineal ideology among the Bemba people encourages separate but parallel participation of men and women in the economic and political affairs of the Bemba society. The political and economic contributions of women are given great importance and value. There is equality between the sexes. Christianity and western civilisation introduced the husband as the head of the household. The husband became the breadwinner and the wife had to do domestic duties and look after children.

Given that in the traditional Bemba society the husband lived with his wife's family and that the wife was the head of the household, assigning the woman to the private sphere weakened her economic position and status in society (Epstein 1981: 68, 70). Christianity and western civilisation have therefore disempowered Bemba women by enhancing the position of the husband and this is problematic in the context of HIV and AIDS pandemic.

Research has shown that HIV prevalence is high where women have low economic empowerment. Poverty and economic disempowerment force women to be involved in unprotected sex to earn a living (Idah 2005:1, Siwila 2011: 42). A holistic response to HIV and AIDS should therefore address gender inequalities and issues concerning the economic empowerment of women in society. Reclaiming the values of initiation rites that promote economic independence of women may be an important tool in HIV prevention.

4.3.2. LEADERSHIP ROLES OF WOMEN

In a pre-colonial matrilineal Bemba society the status of a woman was comparatively high. Their social, religious and political roles were emphasized during the initiation ceremony. They held positions equal to men (Rasing 1995: 30 Kaunda 2010: 6). The high leadership role of women in society were exhibited in their religious roles as initiators of worship, in their social roles as tutors of the initiation and in their marital duties as heads of the household.

First, it is emphasised during the indigenous Chisungu initiation that the wife is the head of the household. Kaunda (2010:6) has shown that in pre-Christian Bemba society the wife was the head of the house. The wife presided over all marital affairs. Mutuality was emphasised between the wife and the husband. In other words hierarchy in the relationship between the husband and the wife was not encouraged.

Second, the wife was in charge of all religious affairs. It is worth noting that in pre-Christian Bemba society God was conceived as *Mayo Tata*/Mother Father God. However, the missionaries changed this concept and replaced it with the Judeo-Christian masculine concept of God (Kaunda 2010:5). Given that the Bemba God (*Lesa*) was understood in relation to equality between men and women especially in marriage (Kaunda 2010:6), the concept empowered women to exercise leadership. Further, women were in charge of the family and territorial shrines (Kaunda 2010:7). At these shrines and during the initiation women had close contacts

with nature and the Mother Earth. God was made present among his/her people through the sacred emblems created by women during the initiation ceremony (Hinfelaar 1994:192). This created a web of relationship between people, nature and God.

It is worth noting that the concept of the „mother-father’ God was passed from one generation to another during the Chisungu initiation rites. By banning initiation rites, the framework within which religious values were passed from one generation to the other among women, the missionaries therefore technically eliminated the concept of the „mother-father’ God among the Bemba people (Kaunda 2010:12). Further, it diminished the contact of women with nature and the Mother Earth. Women were disempowered and transformed “from priestess and matriarchs to menstruating vulnerable women” (Moyo 2009:75). Reuther (1983:53) has pointed out that male monotheism reinforces the social hierarchy of patriarchal rule by empowering men as heads of the family and society and thereby relegates women to the margins.

Retrieving the „mother father’ concept of God may promote equality between men and women especially those in marriages (Kaunda 2010:25). Research has shown that patriarchal language and conceptualisation of God in religious circles contributes to male violence against women in society (Rakoczy 2004:63). Given the high prevalence of HIV among women in heterosexual marriages, reclaiming the religious leadership role of women in indigenous Chisungu initiation may be life-giving to women in the context of HIV and AIDS. Further, it may empower women to have a harmonious and holistic relationship with nature and the mother earth.

Third, women had a role of training and socialising young women and girls during the initiation. Moyo (2009: 75) has shown that in traditional African societies the matrilineal family system accorded women significant leadership roles as overseers of shrines and they had a role of socialising younger women into becoming acceptable members of society. Given the centrality of socialisation for women in Bemba culture, reinventing this value by including lessons on the HIV and AIDS pandemic may make the rites a good vehicle in prevention strategies.

4.3.3. PROTEST AND TALKING BACK

Masaiti (2007: 83) has asserted that,

“Zambian cultures such as Bemba maintain that women should be submissive and listen to their husbands. It is a cultural belief that women need not be educated as this may encourage the woman to rule over the husband in the house. This hinders women’s abilities to negotiate safer sexual practices”.

While it is true that Patriarchy and the lower status of women in society contribute to women failing to negotiate for safer sexual practices, this assertion seems to suggest that there is nothing in Bemba culture that may empower women to speak as equals with men. I would argue however that there are some values in indigenous Chisungu initiation rites that may empower women to protest and talk back.

La Fontaine (1986: 146) has shown that female initiation rites often have aspects of sexual license, obscenity and the mockery of men built into them. In the Chisungu initiation ceremony, this is shown through the emblems depicting the genitals of men in which sexuality is made explicit. The licentious behaviour of women is a reversal of a patriarchal construction of what a woman should be. In a patriarchal African society a woman is expected to be humble and submissive. But during the initiation ceremony they become outrageous and shout obscenities. La Fontaine (1986:164) further notes that the reversal is not a manifestation of resentment against men but an opposition to cultural values that subordinate women to men and the reordering of society.

It is worth noting that the indigenous Chisungu initiation contains elements which are meant for the future husband and he is always part of the rites. The climax of the initiation involves presentation and explanation of the marriage emblems to both the bride and the bridegroom. It is emphasised to the bridegroom that though he is a man the wife is the head and the pillar of the house. He is also told to always listen to his wife’s advice. Further the wife is told in the presence of the bridegroom to protest and share the information with others should the husband infect her with a sexually transmitted disease (Rasing 2005:78, Corbeil 1982: 17). The marriage emblems and the beads also give power to the wife to decide when to have sex and how to have it.

The Lumpa movement of Alice Lenshina in Zambia was a protest by Bemba women against the imposition of a patriarchal Christian religious system by both the Catholic and the Presbyterian missionaries (Hinfelaar 1994:194). Women protested against the ban of initiation rites and against the missionaries' decision not to involve women in major church responsibilities.

Given that there are marriage emblems in Chisungu initiation that teach the importance of equality between men and women and the need for the wife to protest and talk back, the current rampancy of patriarchy among the Bemba people has been fuelled by external factors as I have already pointed out. It also shows that women's protest against male domination does exist in some African cultures. Therefore Maluleke (2001: 238) is correct when he asserts that the call for equality between men and women by African women theologians is therefore not foreign to the African context as some male theologians have claimed.

Given the need for women to have power over their bodies and to negotiate for safer sexual practices, protest and talking back may be life-giving to women. Haddad (2003: 155) has rightly pointed out that the onslaught of HIV makes the cries of women more desperate. Phiri and Nadar (2010:10) add that culture has been used to keep women silent and that talking back is a protest by women against patriarchy to reclaim their voice and power to speak as equals with men.

4.3.4. VIRGINITY TESTING AND DELAYING THE SEXUAL DEBUT

Chisungu initiation rites include virginity inspection. Virginity testing has been a controversial issue in relation to HIV and AIDS. The purpose of virginity inspection is to promote virginity and to encourage the initiate to avoid pregnancy before marriage. Pregnancy before marriage is considered to be an abomination in most African cultures (Siwila 2011: 38, Oduyoye 2004:80).

The fact that virginity testing in most cases focuses on women, the practice becomes problematic in the context of HIV and AIDS. Society generally expects women more than men to be virgins and this becomes problematic (Bruce 2003:53). There is an underlying assumption that promoting virginity or abstinence would be too unpopular or doomed to failure. Safer sex is promoted instead (Bruce 2003: 46). However, behaviour change still remains an important tool in HIV prevention.

Bruce (2003:53) argues that although virginity testing is performed by African women who view it as a symbol of their African identity, the practice fits with the perceptions that the HIV and AIDS pandemic is a result of women being sexually out of control. It attempts to put more control on women and their sexuality. She further warns that there is need to resist the temptation of using the HIV pandemic to endorse patriarchal cultural practices (Bruce 2003:64). In a similar vein, Gomes (1996:226) has argued that linking the moral behaviour of a woman with the myth of virginity is problematic. The woman's sexuality is regarded as something for the satisfaction of a man and it becomes oppression to women.

Contrary to Bruce's and Gomes's views, Phiri (2006:126) has argued that virginity testing is a good indigenous resource for the empowerment of women in Africa. She has shown how the practice of virginity testing is used by Zulu female traditional healers to bring holistic healing to abused girls and women. Virginity inspection in Chisungu initiation is therefore a good value to reclaim in the context of HIV and AIDS. But as Bruce (2003:67) warns, it has to be done on grounds that do not turn women into objects for men's sexual satisfaction.

Virginity inspection may be a good tool for HIV prevention if used to encourage young women and girls to delay the sexual debut. Research has shown that early commencement of sex (sex debut) contributes to a high risk of HIV infection. Early initiation of sexual intercourse places young people in a high risk of contracting HIV. Delaying the sexual debut reduces exposure to the infection (Harrison 2005: 22, 29). Young adolescents are also likely not to use condoms due to lack of knowledge. Virginity testing may therefore be a good value to retrieve if lessons on HIV and AIDS are included in the rites to encourage young women and girls to delay the sexual debut.

4.3.5. FIDELITY AND MULTIPLE SEXUAL PARTNERS

The Chisungu initiation includes lessons to the couple to uphold fidelity in marriage and avoid extra-marital affairs. Marriage is believed to be based on mutual understanding and love of two people (Garvey 1994:10). As I have already pointed out polygamy and having multiple sexual partners was not encouraged in a pre-colonial Bemba society as this was believed to cause death and jeopardize the role of the wife as initiator of worship. The advent of HIV and AIDS has raised a number of issues concerning polygamy and multiple sexual concurrences.

Denis (2003:67) has argued that “Polygamy is not dangerous, from AIDS point of view, if the man limits his sexual contacts to his wives and wives have no sexual activity outside the marriage”. Given the high prevalence of HIV among women in Sub Saharan Africa including societies where polygamy is practiced, Denis’ assertions prove to be problematic. Masenya (2003: 116) has rightly observed that the expectations among men in many African cultures are that women have a duty to provide them with casual sexual gratification. Remaining faithful only to wives within a polygamous arrangement is therefore not usually practiced.

Phiri (2003: 12) has also rightly argued that heterosexual marriages in Africa be it monogamous or polygamous expose women to a high risk of contracting HIV. She further notes that reviving traditions in some African cultures where a man is not allowed to have sex with the wife if he has been away for a long time until it is certain that he has no sexually transmitted illnesses may be life-giving to women. Similarly, reclaiming the value of Chisungu where the wife is in charge of matters of sex and she has powers to refuse to have sex if she is not sure of her husband’s sex life may be life-giving to women in the context of HIV and AIDS.

There is needed to break traditional beliefs that hold that men are supposed to have multiple sexual partners. The HIV and AIDS pandemic also challenges traditional and cultural views that hold that men are ordained by God to have power in marriage and women cannot negotiate for safer sex practices (Masenya 2003: 119). It is therefore life-giving for the married couple to test for HIV regularly and if the husband has been away for a long time, the wife can refuse sex until they are tested for HIV.

4.4. CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that while Chisungu rites and practices such as vaginal tightening, inspection for labia elongation, taboos about sex and menstrual blood and myths about marriage that enhance the subordinate position of women in marriage and society, may be harmful in the context of HIV and need to be revised or discarded; Chisungu initiation rites also have values that may empower women against HIV and AIDS pandemic if reclaimed. Values such as economic empowerment of women, the leadership role of women, protest and talking back, virginity inspection, delaying the sexual debut and giving women power to negotiate for safer

sex practices need to be retrieved. These values critique patriarchy from within and empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS.

In view of the fact that tutors of initiation rites are traditional teachers, it is imperative that they possess adequate and correct information about HIV and AIDS. This will equip them to be aware of the risks inherent in certain practices in as far as HIV is concerned. Given that a gendered analysis of Chisungu shows that the rites have resources to empower women to reclaim their social, economic, religious and marital leadership, it is important to evaluate the importance of a church such as UCZ considering the possibility of inculturating the values of Chisungu initiation rites for the purpose of empowering women in the context of HIV and AIDS.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE INCULTURATION OF INDIGENOUS FEMALE CHISUNGU INITIATION RITES IN THE UCZ

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The question of inculturating female initiation rites has received much attention by African women theologians in the last two decades. Some African women theologians have condemned the dehumanising elements of female initiation rites while others have called for the Christianisation of the values of indigenous female initiation rites which are life-giving to women (Phiri 1997:72). While the inculturation of female initiation rites has taken place in countries like Malawi, there has been little effort to inculturate female initiation rites in Zambia particularly in the UCZ (Hinfelaar 1994: 191,192). In the UCZ there have been demands from women in the mother's guilds for the inculturation of indigenous Chisungu initiation. They argue that the rites may be helpful in empowering women in the context of HIV and AIDS (UCZ Synod 2008: 22). This chapter will therefore assess the importance of inculturating the values of indigenous Chisungu initiation rites in the UCZ in the context of HIV and AIDS.

5.2. INCULTURATION AS A THEOLOGICAL CONCEPT

The encounter between Christianity and African culture has put African women in a dilemma. While some traditional African practices seem to be compatible with Christianity, others are not (Kanyoro 2001:161; 2002:18). In responding to western ways of doing theology, African theologians started the project of inculturation. The initial motive behind the project of inculturation was to Africanise Christianity by affirming African culture as a basis for doing theology (Kanyoro 2001:167).

Martey (1993:67) has shown that adaptation, incarnation and indigenisation are used interchangeably by theologians to refer to Africanisation or inculturation. Onsei-Bonsu (2005:19) has also argued that inculturation is different from the social science concepts of acculturation and enculturation. He contends that acculturation refers to an encounter between

two or more cultures while enculturation refers to the process of learning about a new cultural tradition through the process of socialisation (Onsei-Bonsu 2005:19). He further argues that

inculturation involves not only the process of introducing elements from the indigenous culture into Christianity, making use of thought-forms and concepts pertaining to the given culture; it also involves Christianising the indigenous culture, injecting it with Christian values, thereby transforming and reshaping it to produce a new creation (Onsei-Bonsu 2005:122).

Inculturation is therefore the intimate transformation of the good cultural values through their integration into Christianity and insertion of the good values of Christianity into a particular culture. In other words the process of inculturation involves a dialogue between the Christian gospel and the local African culture. It involves the process of creative assimilation which begins with African culture and interprets those aspects that could enrich Christianity in order to make Christianity establish its roots in African culture (Kaunda 2010b: 9). While affirming the need for reclaiming culture through a theology of inculturation, African women theologians have argued that inculturation is not sufficient unless the cultures we reclaim are life-giving to women (Kanyoro 2001: 167, Mutambara 2006:180).

The critical question however is whether inculturating Chisungu initiation rites may be life-giving to women in the UCZ in the context of HIV and AIDS. It is worth noting that there are different opinions on the validity of inculturating female initiation rites. Rasing (1995:2) has argued that reclaiming female initiation rites is necessary because the rites were previously misunderstood as contributing to immoral behaviour, whereas today they are being recognised as contributing to good moral standards. It is assumed that initiation rites may help in HIV prevention strategies by empowering women and promoting good morals in society. Women continue to stress the importance of female initiations to guarantee and safeguard their own importance as transmitters of culture.

There are also debates around the validity of inculturating initiation rites in an attempt to empower women in countries like Malawi where it has been done before. Longwe (2003) has argued that while the Christian response to female initiation rites among the Baptist Chewa women attempted to respond adequately to the issue of puberty as a rite of transition, the rites

have many shortfalls. It does not reflect the Chewa sense of identity and history (2003:136). Further, the church has not empowered tutors of initiation by recognising their duties as part of the church ministry. The tutors of the initiation have therefore lost respect and command in the church and the community (2003:136). However, Moyo (2009:243) has shown that the inculturation of female initiation rites may empower women to get sex education, to have a safe space to exercise their leadership roles of initiating young women into adulthood in the community and to celebrate their womanhood in connection to the mother earth if properly done. Given that there are values in Chisungu initiation which may empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS if reclaimed and inculturated, it is of interest to interrogate the position of the UCZ on the inculturation of female initiation rites.

5.3. THE UCZ's POSITION ON INCULTURATION OF FEMALE INITIATION RITES

The UCZ was formed on 16th January, 1965. It incorporates the church of central Africa in Rhodesia (itself being a union of the Church of Scotland and the London missionary society churches with the union church of the copperbelt), the congregations of the copperbelt Free Church council, the church of Barotseland and the Zambia district of the Methodist church (Bolink 1967:363, UCZ constitution 2004:1). After the union, the UCZ continued with the doctrines and the practices introduced by the missionaries. Further, the church continued with the constitution of the Presbyterian church of Scotland making only few changes. The new church maintained the position of the missionaries on marriage, initiation rites and sexuality (Bolink 1967:363, Siwila 2011:33).

It is worth noting that the missionaries from the London missionary society (LMS) who worked among the Bemba banned Chisungu initiation rites together with other cultural practices. The missionaries at Lubwa, a Presbyterian mission (now UCZ) and Mulilansolo catholic mission exerted punishments on women for having performed initiation rites by withdrawing Holy Communion or suspension (Orger 1991:199). More emphasis was on the education of the young men whom they would use for technical skills. Although the LMS taught about the sanctity of marriage, they did not uphold the cultural leadership roles of women and the celebration of sex in marriage was undermined. All the Christians were expected to abandon African culture (Rotberg 1965:39, 40; Hinfelaar 1994:37, 60).

The failure of the LMS to inculcate the good values of African culture which were empowering to women resulted in the Lumpa uprising of Alice Mulenga Lenshina. As Bujo (1992:44, 45) has observed, initiation rites are important because they constitute an education institution for the society. Further, the destruction of ancestral worship and shrines disempowered women who were guardians of the territorial shrines. The protest by women in the Lumpa uprising challenged the mission church to inculcate traditional ceremonies such as the Chisungu initiation rites to the needs of the Christian community. However, the efforts died out soon after the uprising (Garvey 1994:177, 178). After its formation, the UCZ worked hard at reconciling the former members of the Lumpa church with the mission churches but not much has been done on the inculturation of Chisungu initiation (Hinfelaar 1994:154, 155).

Despite the UCZ maintaining the position of the missionaries on female initiation rites, women organise it outside the church arrangement. They organise it for girls who reach puberty and for those who are getting married. When it is organised prior to the wedding, they incorporate it with kitchen party (Rasing 1995: 2). Given the insistence of women for the inculturation of Chisungu initiation rites and the high prevalence of HIV among women in Zambia, it is worthwhile to assess the inculturation of Chisungu in relation to the empowerment of women in the context of HIV and AIDS.

5.4. INCULTURATION OF CHISUNGU INITIATION FOR HIV PREVENTION

The call by women for the inculturation of initiation rites suggests an attempt to reclaim the status of women in indigenous African Bemba culture. The demand shows that there is a gap between the church and the culture of its members particularly women (Rasing 1995:22). To bridge this gap, the UCZ needs to revisit its position on the inculturation of female initiation rites.

Phiri (2000b:150) has shown that inculturated female initiation rites are important because they give sex education to girls and women. Apart from teaching the roles of motherhood, inculturated female initiation rites give an opportunity to women to celebrate their womanhood. She adds that, “although the biblical teachings are meant to turn girls into submissive wives, certain good moral teachings can be sifted out and what empowers women should be passed on from one generation to the next”(Phiri 2000b:150). Given that there are also good values in

Chisungu initiation rites that may empower women in the context of HIV if retrieved; inculturation of Chisungu may be a good vehicle for HIV prevention. An inculturated Chisungu may empower women to reclaim their identity and the headship of the family. It is however worth noting that if the UCZ is to inculturate Chisungu initiation rites, it has to focus on the values of the initiation that empower women by promoting equality between men and women. In this way, an inculturated Chisungu initiation may become a good window of opportunity for HIV prevention.

The UCZ has a desk and a policy that coordinates HIV and AIDS programs (UCZ HIV/AIDS policy 2006:14). It coordinates prevention programmes through the HIV and AIDS committee and church groups such as the mother's guilds, the men's Christian fellowship and the youth Christian fellowship in its congregations (UCZ HIV/AIDS policy 2006:5-12). In its HIV policy, the church has noted that among the factors that fuel the spread of HIV are taboos on open discussion about sex, slow behavioural change and gender inequalities. In responding to the issues that contribute to the spread of HIV the church has employed the ABC (Abstain, be faithful and condomise) method in its HIV prevention programs (UCZ HIV/AIDS policy 2006: 12, 15). Looking at the HIV and AIDS policy, it's clear that the UCZ emphasises moral rules that may guard people against the risks. This however has frequently served only to heighten the shame and stigma associated with HIV and to promote judgmental attitudes on individuals, especially women. Further the church preaches abstinence to the unmarried and faithfulness to the married (Siwila 2011:36, 2011b:51).

However, promoting abstinence and faithfulness in a community where male headship is upheld makes women more vulnerable to the HIV infection as they cannot negotiate for safer sex. The UCZ therefore needs to empower women against the religio-cultural and social structures that promote gender inequalities (Heath 2009: 72). Van Klinken (2011:291) has shown that the notion of male headship is highly promoted by churches in Zambia. This concept of male headship has largely contributed in promoting male behaviour that makes women more vulnerable to HIV. As Schmid (2005: 7, 8) has pointed out, ABC is meaningless for women in Africa because they have no option to abstain when being forced into sex and due to the power gradient it is often not possible to suggest the use of condoms. It is therefore clear that in order to achieve success against HIV and AIDS the UCZ needs to address patriarchy and promote a

theology that enables women to celebrate their bodies as sacred. Further, the socialisation of men and women together, may be a good value for the UCZ to consider as it inculturates Chisungu initiation rites. Premarital socialisation and counselling targeting men and women who intend to marry may promote equality and empower women against the pandemic.

While women in the UCZ contribute in preparing young women who are entering into marriage, the church has not given them enough space to reclaim traditional values that may empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS. They are usually involved as matrons. Counselling is done by the minister and the marriage guidance committee (Siwila 2011:36). This has denied women an opportunity to practice their traditional roles as tutors of the initiation. It has also disempowered women from exercising their social and religious leadership roles. Siwila (2011:42) has rightly observed that while the church is doing its best to respond to social issues, there is need to address the real cause for the vulnerability of women.

One of the issues that the church may consider may be to inculturate the good values of Chisungu initiation. Given that Chisungu has good values that may empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS as demonstrated in chapter four, the women's guilds offer a good platform for sexual education and the empowerment of women if the UCZ inculturates Chisungu initiation rites. Moyo (2009:122) has rightly argued that the processing of inculturating and reclaiming the authority and leadership of women exercised in female initiation rites is necessary since Christianity has disempowered women from performing the roles they used to perform in pre-colonial matrilineal societies. Inculturating the good values of Chisungu will therefore give power to women to critique patriarchy in African culture from within and resist patriarchal Christian and western ideologies that perpetuate the subordination of women in both the church and the society.

Further, inculturating Chisungu initiation will also restore the religious and social leadership positions of women as guards of the territorial shrines. I have already pointed out that indigenous Chisungu gave women an opportunity to be in close contact with nature and the mother earth. Given that research has shown that the oppression and marginalisation of women and nature in Africa by patriarchal Christian ideologies are intertwined (Masenya 2010:51, Kaunda 2010:6, 7; 2010b:1), inculturating Chisungu initiation may enable the UCZ to come up with a theology that empowers women and foster ecological justice. It may restore the interconnectedness of women

with the mother earth (nature) while they express their power as embodied sexual beings through initiation songs, dancing and sacred emblems (Moyo 2009:127).

It is worth noting that the inculturation of female initiation rites has its own challenges. Fiedler (1996: 198) has argued that certain parts of female initiation rites like the elongation of the labia make African women struggle with the inculturation of female initiation rites where a male priest takes part in the ceremony. Moyo (2009:123) has also lamented about the failure of inculturated female initiation rites among the Man'anja and the Yao people in Malawi to give explicit lessons on sex which may be important in the context of HIV and AIDS. It is therefore important for the UCZ to maintain explicit lessons on sex in the inculturated version of Chisungu initiation rites given that the context of HIV and AIDS calls for a theology of sexuality that deconstructs the myths around sexuality and the physical bodies of women (Landman 1998:138). This will also provide teachings that educate women on the Christian and medical perspectives on menstruation that liberate women from the myths about menstruation.

Lastly, when inculturating the Chisungu initiation rites in the UCZ, the church would need to uphold the traditional role and status of the tutors of initiation (*bana chimbusa*). In other words the organisation and execution of the rites should entirely be entrusted to women. Many people in the UCZ send their children to indigenous Chisungu initiation because the church has not entrusted premarital counselling to *bana chimbusa* (Siwila 2011b:124). Fiedler (2005: 43, 44) notes that disregarding the cultural qualifications of the tutors of initiations has led to the failure of inculturated female initiation rites to empower women. This has made tutors to lose respect in the church and the community. Hinfelaar (1994:165) has also observed that kitchen parties and inculturated forms of Chisungu initiation rites should avoid the danger of limiting the initiation to marriage emblems that only teach about domestic and wifely duties of women. There should also be emphasis on the status and rights of women. The wish of women not to allow male ministers to be involved in organising initiation rites should therefore be understood as a way of maintaining their autonomy because the church leadership is dominated by men.

5.5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to assess the importance of inculturating the values of indigenous Chisungu initiation rites in the UCZ in the context of HIV and AIDS. The chapter has shown that maintaining the teaching of the LMS, the UCZ has not done well on the inculturation of Chisungu initiation rites. Given that women held leadership roles in the pre-Christian Bemba society the failure by the church to inculturate Chisungu initiation has disempowered women. Inculturating the values of indigenous Chisungu female initiation that promote equality and leadership roles of women will therefore empower women in the context of HIV as they will have power to negotiate for safer sex. Inculturating Chisungu initiation will enable the UCZ to promote a theology that deconstructs patriarchy and the myths about marriage, sexuality and menstruation while it promotes mutuality in relationships (Landman 1998:138, 139). It will also enable women to restore their religious roles as guardians of territorial shrines and heads of the family.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will offer a summary and a synthesis of the findings of the whole study. Through an analysis of the purpose, form, practice and the gendered values of Chisungu initiation I expected that the study would provide insights on whether reclaiming and inculturating the gendered values of indigenous Chisungu initiation in the UCZ would empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS. Hence I attempted to answer the question: *What gendered cultural values can be reclaimed from indigenous female Chisungu initiation rites to critique patriarchy and empower women in the UCZ in the context of HIV and AIDS?* This question was premised on the hypothesis that: *indigenous female Chisungu initiation rites among the Bemba people of Zambia have cultural values which can critique patriarchy and empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS.*

In this chapter I will offer a summary of the conclusions drawn from the research findings and highlight new research questions that are emerging from this study.

6.2. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this study I set out to analyse the Chisungu initiation rites among the Bemba people of Zambia from a gendered perspective in order to establish how the gendered values of female initiation rites can be reclaimed and inculturated in the UCZ for HIV prevention. This study has shown that reclaiming the good values of indigenous Chisungu initiation rites which can critique patriarchy from within may empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS

In chapter one I attempted among other things to introduce the research topic and locate it within the current research by African women theologians. Chapter one showed that many women in Zambia go through initiation rites and the prevalence of HIV is higher among women than men.

Further, many women have shown a desire to uphold the rites. The chapter also offered a literature review on the study, research questions and objectives, the theoretical framework and the methodology, the conceptual framework and structure of the study. I concluded the chapter by arguing that despite being banned by the missionaries, Chisungu initiation rites have continued to be practised by women in Zambia and continue to be an important and culturally approved source of information about sex education and issues concerning the roles and status of womanhood.

In chapter two I explained the cultural setting of the Bemba people as a matrilineal society. The chapter explained the purpose, the form and the practice of the Chisungu initiation. The chapter showed that the Bemba people conduct the initiation at puberty or at marriage or both at puberty and at marriage. A comparison of the past and the present reveals both continuities and discontinuities in the structure and content of the Chisungu initiation rites. In this chapter I have argued that given that Chisungu initiation includes lessons on the social and religious leadership roles of women, its purpose is not only limited to giving sex education. Thus, if lessons that promote equality and the leadership roles of women are taught to the initiate in relation to HIV and AIDS, Chisungu initiation can create a good window of opportunity for HIV prevention programmes.

Chapter three highlighted the gendered cultural values of Chisungu initiation rites and the indigenous gendered roles of Bemba women. The chapter demonstrated the symbolic meaning of the rites and the interpretation of the sacred emblems and the initiation songs. In this chapter I demonstrated that while there are teachings that teach about the submission of women to men, chisungu initiation rites have values that promote equality and the leadership roles of women. These values can empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS if reclaimed. In this chapter I argued that given that there are values in indigenous Chisungu initiation rites which promote equality and the leadership roles of women, the current overwhelming emphasis on the submission of women to men in Chisungu initiation rites is due to external factors such as Christianity, western civilisation and interaction with patriarchal African cultures.

Chapter four showed the importance of retrieving the gendered values of chisungu initiation for HIV prevention. In this chapter I argued that practices such as vagina tightening, inspection for labia elongation, taboos about sex and menstrual blood and myths about marriage need to be

revised or discarded since they promote the subordinate position of women in marriage and society. The chapter also showed practices that can be successfully retrieved to critique patriarchy from within and empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS. These values include the economic empowerment of women, the leadership role of women, protest and talking back, virginity inspection and delaying the sexual debut and giving women power to negotiate for safer sex practices. In this chapter I also argued that given the advent of HIV and its impact on women, tutors of the initiation need to be equipped with correct information on the pandemic.

Chapter five assessed the inculturation of Chisungu in the UCZ for the empowerment of women in the context of HIV and AIDS. The chapter highlighted that maintaining the teachings and doctrines of the LMS, the UCZ has not done much on the inculturation of Chisungu initiation rites. In this chapter I pointed out that while women held leadership roles in pre-Christian Bemba society, the failure by the church to inculturate Chisungu initiation rites has disempowered women. I further argued that inculturating the values of indigenous Chisungu initiation rites that promote equality and the leadership roles of women may empower women to negotiate for safer sex. It may also enable the UCZ to promote a theology that deconstructs patriarchy and the myths about marriage, sexuality and menstruation while it promotes mutuality in relationships. Chapter six has offered a conclusion of the findings of the study and the new questions it has raised for further research.

6.3. NEW QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE STUDY

This study has raised some new questions for future research. First, the study has demonstrated that Chisungu initiation has indigenous gendered values that may empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS if reclaimed. This suggests that there may be other cultural practices in African culture that can be used as windows of opportunity in HIV prevention. Second, the study has shown that indigenous chisungu initiation has a religious and social meaning hidden in songs and marriage emblems. This suggests that there is a lot that Christianity is yet to learn from the purpose and significance of marriage in African culture.

Third, the study has shown that women in pre-Christian Bemba society held religious and social leadership roles. This suggests that the inculturation of chisungu initiation rites in the UCZ also raises issues of the religious leadership roles of women in the church. It also raises issues concerning the ecological crisis as the disempowerment of women in Africa by the patriarchal Christian ideologies is linked to the marginalisation of the natural world as well. Lastly, the study has raised the question of a socialisation that negotiates gender roles between men and women as Chisungu initiation rites have lessons and marriage emblems that are presented to both the bride and the bridegroom. Related to this is the issue of creating a sexual ethic that is empowering to both men and women in the context of HIV and AIDS.

6.4. CONCLUSION

The study has achieved its objective demonstrating that there are gendered values in indigenous female chisungu initiation rites that can critique patriarchy from within and empower women in the context of HIV and AIDS if retrieved and inculturated. I have demonstrated this from chapter two to five. Given that indigenous female Chisungu initiation has persisted as a cultural source of education on matters of sex and social and religious roles of women in Zambia, it is better not to insist on legislating against it, but use it as a window of opportunity in HIV prevention strategies.

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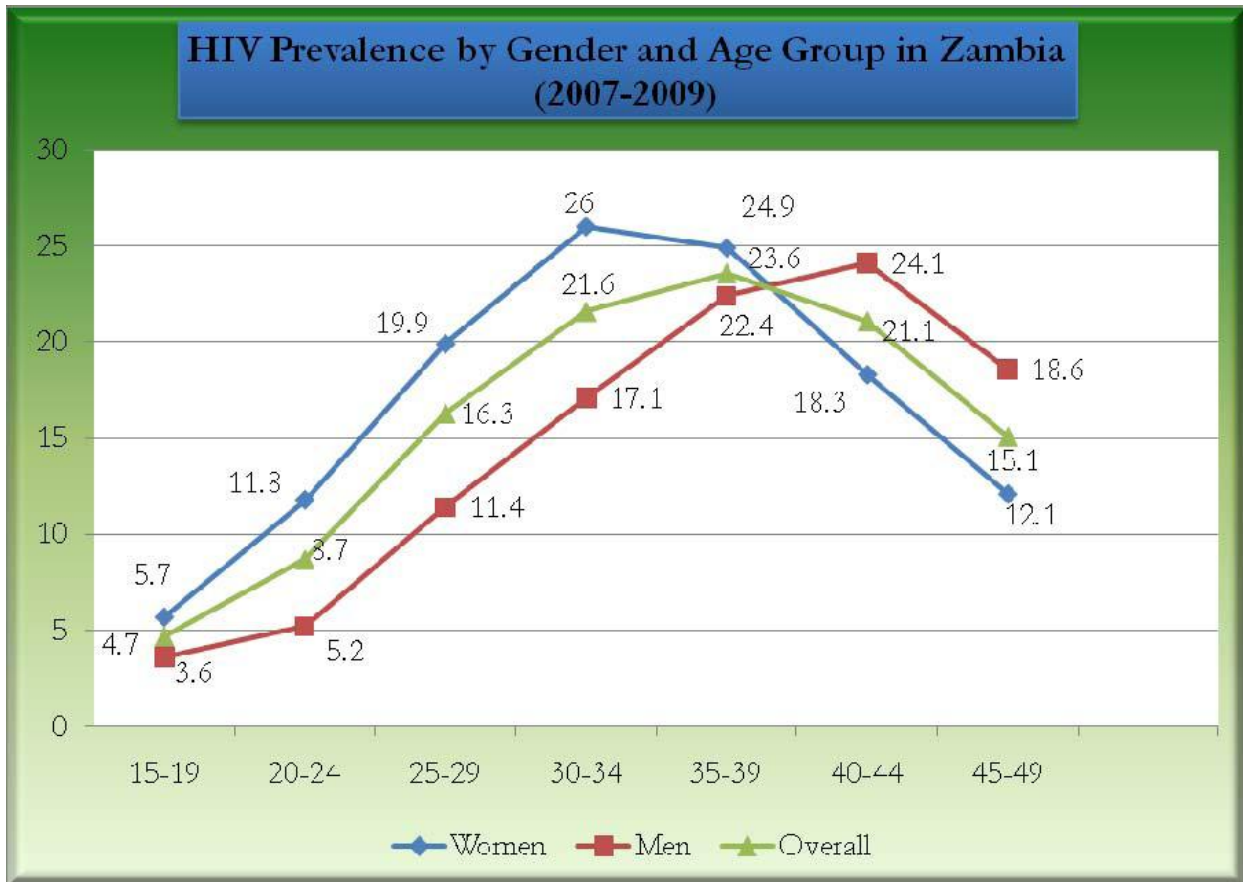
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APPENDIX 1

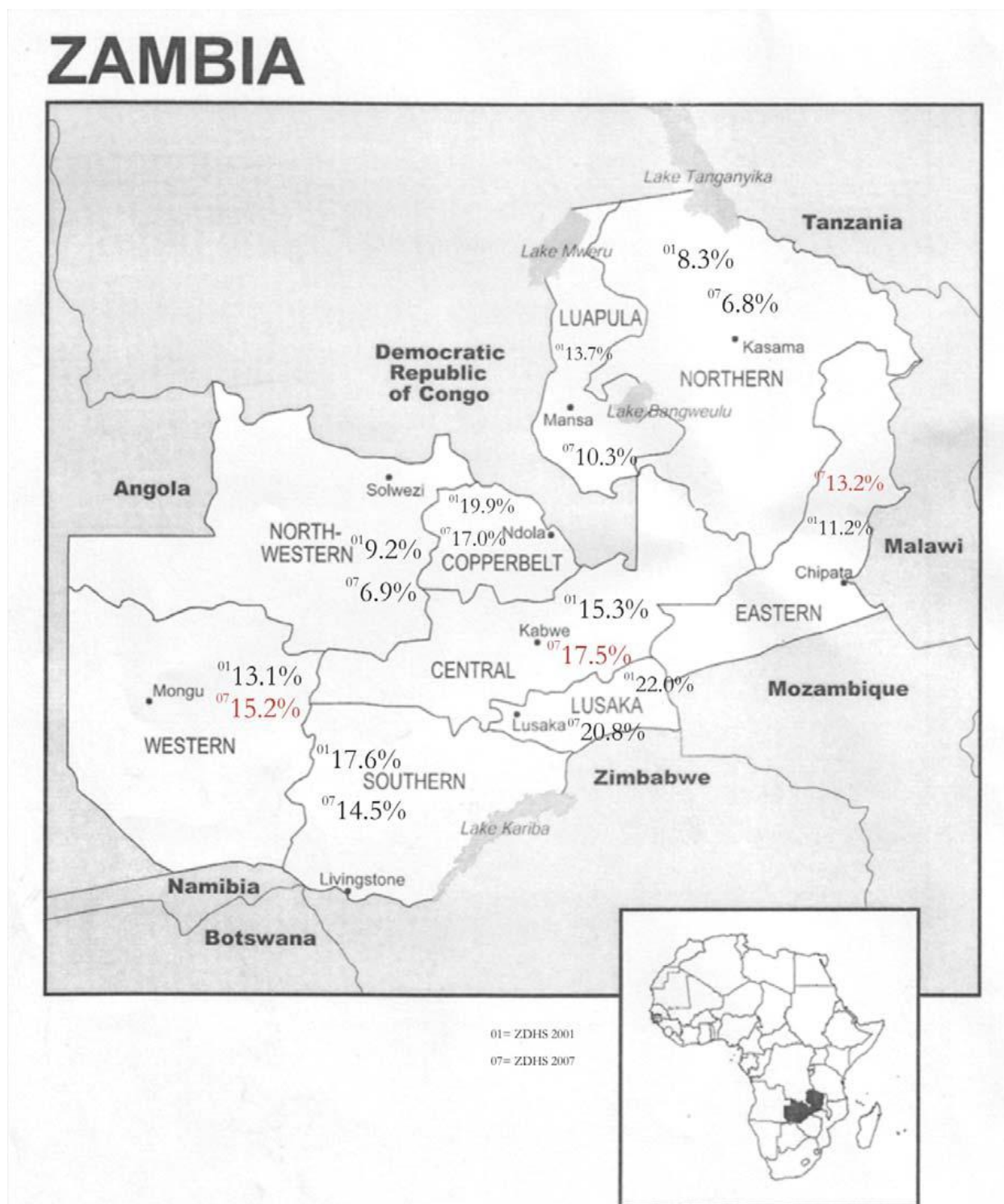


SOURCE: MOH/NAC 2010

APPENDIX 2

MAP SHOWING REGIONAL HIV PREVALENCE

SOURCE: MOH/NAC 2010



APPENDIX 3



Picture 1. The drawings on the wall

SOURCE: Thera Rasing (1995)

The picture shows Chisungu Marriage/sacred emblems (*Imbusa*) drawn on the wall of the initiation house. All the emblems (*Imbusa*) are drawn on the wall of the initiation house as explained in chapter three (page 26 and 27).