COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

CONSTRUCTING "WOMAN": PROBING HOW THE CULTURAL PRACTICE OF *CHINAMWALI* AMONG THE SHANGAAN PEOPLE IS USED TO CONSTRUCT 'WOMANHOOD'

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Anthropology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

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August 2018

DECLARATION

This work is being submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the PhD in Anthropology in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College, Durban, South Africa.

I, William Muchono, hereby declare that this thesis is my own unaided work and has not been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other university. All references, citations, and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged.

Signed:

Date: 20/08/18

As the Candidate's supervisor, I agree to the submission of the thesis

Supervisor: Professor Maheshvari Naidu

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Date: 20/08/18

DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my late daughter, Jean Anopa Muchono. I know you are in a safe place. Rest in Peace my Angel. I owe this achievement to the Almighty God. To my mother Lilian Muchono, my wife Nyasha Muhono, siblings and in-laws, this is for you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe this success to God Almighty for the being faithful always. I could not achieve this without the grace that is upon me.

I also want to acknowledge the people of Mahenye community – the chief, the headmen, men and women who shared their lived experiences, knowledge and understanding of their cultural practice of *chinamwali/ khomba*. Thank you for spending so much time sharing this crucial information with me. The study findings will not only contribute to my academic achievements, but will help, I hope, in policy formulation and support the women of Zimbabwe in general.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of my supervisor, Professor Maheshvari Naidu. You are an honest, reliable and hardworking supervisor. We have walked together through this journey of my PhD studies since 2015 and I have found you to be a conscientious and courteous supervisor who was willing to assist and motivate me in my studies. The journey was tough but you were there for me always. It is your support that kept me strong in my studies.

I would like to thank Chief Mahenye for giving me the permission to do this research in his community. You were supportive during the period of my stay in your community. Thank you chief and your aides for the support and for believing in me as well. To my research assistant, Lingiwe, here is the outcome of our hard work. Thank you for your working so hard during fieldwork and data gathering.

I would like to thank my siblings and in-laws for having confidence in me always and for the continual support. You believed in me and supported me all the way.

To my wife, Nyasha Gloria Muchono, thank you sweetheart for the patience and for the love and encouragement. You always said you wanted to be the wife of the doctor and here it is for you, a doctoral degree in the family. I had some sleepless nights at home but you supported me throughout the journey.

To my mother, Lillian Muchono, thank you for the encouragement and support *Mama*. Here is the achievement from your last-born son. You are a loving and caring mother, a pillar of strength, God bless you. To my grandmother, this is for you from your grandson.

I would like to thank St Joseph's House for Boys, Belvedere, Harare, Board of Governors, Management and the children for giving me this opportunity to pursue my studies.

To my church (members), Harare City Central Church - United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (UCCZ), thank you for your prayers and support. May the dear Lord bless you all and your families. My heartfelt gratitude also goes to Belvedere Cellgroup for your constant prayers and encouragement.

I would also like to thank the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard Campus for covering my tuition fees, books and all study material that I used during my studies. I couldn't have made it in three years without this kind of support from the institution.

To all my friends, colleagues and classmates, thank you so much for the encouragement and support. I know some of you have been praying for my success and some are inspired with this great achievement. ***Aluta Continua guys!***

ABSTRACT

This study aims to probe how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* among the Shangaan people is used to construct 'womanhood'. The study probes the perceptions, understanding

and lived experiences of the men and women who reside in the Mahenye community of Chipinge District (south eastern Zimbabwe) where *chinamwali*, (cultural rite of passage for girls and women) is practised. The study was premised on the understanding that the practice of *chinamwali* socially constructs or defines women in a particular (Mahenye) culture. Interview questionnaires and focus group discussions as well as observations were used to gather data from people in the Mahenye community in Zimbabwe. The study reveals that if a woman is not initiated she is considered no longer valuable in the community and tends to be a social outcast or to be excluded from several cultural activities.

Keywords: *chinamwali*, social capital, female body, gender, womanhood, initiation, women and children's rights

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GLOSSARY

chichangana – the language spoken by the people of Mahenye

chihandani – head bands

chinamwali chachitsikana – Malawian female initiation

chinamwali/khomba – the cultural practice of the Mahenye community which transitions the girl from 'childhood' to 'adulthood'

hoko – male circumcision

Hunhu/Ubuntu – the social philosophy that embodies virtues that celebrate the mutual responsibility, mutual assistance, trust, sharing, usefulness, caring and respect for others among other ethical values

husanga – beads

kudonha mazha – respect that initiates show when they meet older people or men soon after initiation training

kutambirwa – the process of going through the initiation programme/*chinamwali*

Machangana – the people of Mahenye community.

mhandara – mature girl

mudzabhi – an initiate also involved in coaching young girls

ngomeni – initiation rites or rite of passage for boys and men

njemana – palm wine made by tapping the growing tips of the palms and fermenting the sap obtained

saila – annual fish drives

vatsvatsi – the elderly women who train or facilitate the training of other women and girls

zvichuta – non-initiates

zvikhombana – initiates

ACRONYMS

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Children
ACHPR	African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
CAMPFIRE	Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination and all forms of Discrimination against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DVA	Domestic Violence Act
GoZ	Government of Zimbabwe
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FGC	Female Genital Cutting
FICuHR	Foundation for the Integration of Culture and Human Rights
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HSSREC	Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MLPSLSW	Ministry of Labour Public Service and Social Welfare
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's and Education Fund
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
WHO	World Health Organisation

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the study

Rites of passage are practised as cultural norms that transition people from one stage of life to another. This study probes how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* among the Shangaan people is used to construct 'womanhood'. *Chinamwali* is the cultural practice which transitions a girl from childhood into adulthood. It is regarded as the rite of passage *(rite de passage)* for women and girls. It is also regarded as a means of grooming young women and girls for sexual activity. Research from anthropologists and more recently psychologists propose that rites of passage are primary in transitioning youth from adolescence to adulthood (Association for Humanistic Psychology 2007, 6). For *chinamwali,* some girls leave school and some women leave their homes to undergo this training or sex grooming in a secluded place or in the bush for a period of two to three months. They undergo certain cultural teachings where they are taught how to behave and become 'real women' that fit into the community where other women have also been initiated. *Chinamwali* or *khomba* practice is therefore attributed to instill a sense of identity and a sense of belonging amongst women in the community.

It has been noted that while there have been studies of *chinamwali* in different societies such as the Chewa, Ngoni, Venda, Tonga, Sena, Lomwe, Tumbuka and the Yao, the issue of the construction of 'womanhood' amongst the Shangaan women of the Mahenye community has not been thoroughly interrogated. Scholarship on *chinamwali* is largely limited to Zambia (amongst the Chewa people) and Malawi and some of the above-mentioned societies. In Zimbabwe, studies have been done among the Shangaan women of Chiredzi (affectionately known as *Machangana*), Chikombedzi, Mwenezi, the VaRemba of Mberengwa and the Nyau of Norton, including Malawian migrants into the country. This research considers the cultural practice of *chinamwali* amongst the Shangaan people of Mahenye community, how *chinamwali* functions as a rite of passage and the effects of this cultural practice on the community.

Chinamwali is regarded as a valued traditional practice amongst the people of Mahenye community. People use their traditions as a model for constructing life in a social network. With globalisation, new legislations and legal frameworks, many cultural practices are not considered legal and some have come to be regarded as harmful practices and

fundamentally, as human rights abuse. There is minimal written research about this cultural practice in Zimbabwe. Limited information can be found mainly in newspapers or via the oral tradition (as explained in the data presentation chapters). Other anthropological studies have focused on, among others, male circumcision and female genital mutilation/cutting or female circumcision (see Toubia 1994; WHO: An Inter-Agency Statement on Female Genital Mutilation 2008; Ahuja et al. 2009; Auvert et al. 2005). This study explores how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* plays a central role in the construction of the female body and in creating gender identity amongst women. During training sessions, leaders *(vatsvatsi)* teach trainees/ initiates about the responsibilities of caring, providing for their families, being humble, being good mothers, being obedient and how to please men and satisfy them in bed.

The Mahenye community practise traditional male circumcision *(ngomeni)* to a limited extent as a rite of passage for the boys, but there is more focus on their cultural practice of *chinamwali* which is meant to construct the female body. Medically, male circumcision consists of the removal of the foreskin from the penis (Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics 2012, 1). The procedure can be done traditionally as with the Mahenye community. However, in this study male circumcision is also regarded as a rite of passage which transitions boys to manhood. It also carries the imprint of the cultural identity and oneness amongst young men and boys in the community. Male circumcision can be seen as one of the cultural practices that fulfil certain cultural conventions. It is important as a symbol of religious and ethnic identity and has played a major part in the political social history of many people (Toubia 1994, 8). In the Mahenye community, uncircumcised Changana/Shangaan men and boys are obliged to spend a month in isolation from their families at remote secret bush camps or mountains, undergoing strict instruction and tuition as to the ways of adulthood and manhood. After the actual act of circumcision, each initiate spends some time recovering from the operation and taking further instruction while in the bush. The process of male circumcision, even though painful, is regarded as an important transition from childhood to adulthood/ manhood. The community then celebrates the coming out or graduation of these boys and men from the training camp some months later. The ceremony marks the transition from boys to men. However, the major focus of this study is the cultural practice of *chinamwali/ khomba* as a female initiation or rite of passage for women. While male circumcision is used as a reference point as one of Mahenye's cultural practices, this study largely focuses on the female initiation practice of

chinamwali which is widely practised and highly valued by the Mahenye community. This cultural practice has a significant impact on their lived experiences as well as on how women negotiate their identities in the community.

The study was conducted in Mahenye community, located in Chipinge district, in the south eastern part of Zimbabwe. The community traces its roots from the Nguni people of South Africa. People who belong to this community are called Xangani or Machangana. This community values the cultural practice of *chinamwali* as it defines who they are. Within this context, this study examined how this most valued cultural practice is used to socially construct women in this community. The study further probed how this cultural practice had an impact on the female body.

In Zimbabwe, the Shangaan people are one of the communities that practice *chinamwali* and sex education and grooming as part of the rite of passage that transitions the girl child into 'womanhood'. Of course, other societies around the world also practise this kind of initiation but the focus of this study is the Mahenye community. People in the community who value and respect the practice include the chief of Mahenye, elders of the community (both men and women) and the adolescents. As an elusive practice, *chinamwali* has a long history and some participants did not know how or when it had started. The majority learned about this practice from their relatives, siblings, friends and relatives through socialisation and cultural orientation. This cultural practice has been passed from one generation to the next over many years and has preserved the cultural identity of the people of Mahenye community. *Chinamwali* therefore integrates the community in general through cementing social relations and it grants the initiates acceptance, honour and respect when they graduate from the training camp. *Chinamwali* can therefore be regarded as a deeply embedded practice and it is celebrated every year in the Mahenye community.

1.1 Justification of study

This kind of research is potentially valuable as it considers how the initiation ceremonies or rites of passage in different societies and communities 'define' women. The research considers the construction of the female body by the so-called cultural scripts and cultural definitions of a woman or womanhood. It is within this context that the researcher has explored the so-called cultural definition and the construction of womanhood in the Mahenye community, having noted that there were gaps in the literature. Data collected

was intended to benefit the people of the Mahenye community where *chinamwali* is being practised and it highlights potential gender biased practices that could have an impact on human rights of the women. The findings of this study could shed light on how particular cultural practices may perpetuate cultural stereotypes of women. The social significance and value of the study thus lies in the study contributing to the discourse (and practice) around how some cultural constructions of women may contribute to forms of culturally sanctioned gender based stigma, discrimination or even (structural) violence against women.

The study argued that *chinamwali* is profoundly influenced by the cultural construction of women and cultural factors (taking care of the family, the children, husband, to be part of the larger group and to participate in other cultural functions) and is intended to fulfill cultural obligations (family honour and not being exempted from other cultural activities) and add to the body of knowledge regarding the female body. Therefore, the study attempted to understand why this cultural practice is highly valued (and by whom) and how it potentially perpetuates patriarchal gender relations in Mahenye community. The study of *chinamwali* is culturally embedded and therefore the study interrogates how culture plays a central role in defining the behaviour of the women and their bodies. It has been noted that failure to be initiated results in women being excluded from several cultural activities and not being able to participate in community functions since they are not regarded as 'real women' or as 'part of the community'. *Chinamwali* is therefore argued to assist women to negotiate their identities and feel a sense of belonging in the community. Men and boys are encouraged not to marry a non-initiate as they are considered 'minors' and 'immature'. Married women are seen to have a socially approved 'adult' status and are able to move from *an asexual to a sexual world.*

1.2 Female initiation to adulthood/ 'womanhood' (*Chinamwali/khomba*)

Zubieta (2009, 74) has defined *chinamwali* as the initiation school that all Chewa girls attend in order to graduate from childhood to adulthood or 'womanhood'. Van Gennep (in Munthali and Zulu 2007, 4) described *chinamwali* as an initiation rite or rite of passage for girls. This initiation rite constructs women sexually, and teaches them to fulfil patriarchal expectations. It is also the initiation process in which a girl is mentored into 'womanhood'. For the purpose of this study, as practised amongst the Shangaan people of Mahenye

community, *chinamwali* attempts to define how women should live and behave in the community. It creates a sense of oneness among women. For *chinamwali*, young women and girls must spend a month of strict isolation from village life, with teachers and elders guiding them and instructing on roles of motherhood, child bearing, traditional dancing, home building, food preparation and culture, everything that adult women are required to know. Upon completing initiation, they are supposed to wear beads and red caps with pins called *chihandani.* These will be worn at the initiation ceremony.

1.3 'Womanhood'

'Womanhood' in this study refers to the so-called behaviour, cultural identity or expectations of a woman (according to her particular culture) which must be demonstrated to her peers (male and female) or to the community. This so-called behaviour includes among others, taking care of the husband, respecting the elders and satisfying the man in bed (sexually), chief among them is *hunhu* or *ubuntu.* Women are also expected to be submissive, respect elders and/ or in-laws following the initiation training and coaching.

1.4 Initiation rites/ Rite of passage *(rite de passage)*

The term 'rite of passage' was coined in 1907/1908 by Arnold Van Gennep (1873 – 1957) who saw the life of an individual in any society as a series of passages from one stage to another and from one occupation to another (Rubin 2004, 10). Passage, journey, transition are some of the spatial images central to an understanding of rites of passage and to the method involved in applying the term to the past, present and future. In some societies, rites of passage entail baptism, confession and communion (for a Christian) and others include ordination, veiling and entry into political office (Rubin 2004, 17). Grimes (2000) highlighted that the primary work of a rite of passage is to ensure that we attend to such events fully which is to say spiritually, psychologically and socially. During initiation rites, one has to commit oneself fully during the training. The understanding is that these rites of passage are there to fulfil certain societal obligations and social conventions. Hence respect and honour is required when partaking or engaging in the training. Hoover and Pollard (2000) also mentioned that rites of passage are comprised of pro-social behaviours that build social relationships, understanding, empathy, civility, altruism and moral decision making. Rituals are a way to prove loyalty and dedication to the act of belonging to the initiating group (Association for Humanistic Psychology 2007, 10). *Chinamwali* is regarded

as a rite of passage for girls which transitions the girl from one position of life to another – that is childhood to adulthood or womanhood. In this study, *chinamwali* is interrogated as a rite of passage.

Issues of Patriarchy

The Mahenye community is patriarchal and male dominated. In a patriarchal system, men control women and children in the family and the society as a whole (Hartmann, 1976). The term 'patriarchy' often evokes an overly monolithic conception of male dominance, which is treated in an abstract way that obfuscates rather than reveals the intimate inner workings of culturally or historically distinct arrangements between genders (Kandiyoti, n.d). In a patriarchal society, men have access to and control over their wives. In this study, the cultural practice of *chinamwali* therefore serves to promote and reinforce patriarchy in an African community, in general, but in the Mahenye community, in particular. Like the Yoruba women in Lagos, African women tend to accept patriarchal rule because they want protection from men (Kandiyoti, n.d.). Kandiyoti (n.d.) noted that classic patriarchy is found in North Africa, the Muslim Middle East (including Turkey, Pakistan and Iran) and South East Asia (specifically India and China) which gives senior men authority over everyone else including younger men. The Shangaan people or the Mahenye community is patriarchal; women's engagement with the cultural practice of *chinamwali* is meant to please their male counterparts. In the Shona culture, patriarchal practices shape and perpetuate gender inequality and strip women of any form of control over their sexuality due to the fact that custom in Africa is stronger than domination, stronger than the law and stronger even than religion (Kambarami, 2000: 1). Kambarami (2000) noted that patriarchy is bred through socialisation processes which begin in the family and which infiltrate into sectors of society like religion, education, the economy and politics. It therefore leads to gender inequality and subordination of women to the extent that females do not have control over their sexuality. There are several factors which perpetuate patriarchy: chief amongst these is that the community protects the authority of men, compulsive masculinity, economic constraints and discrimination against women; also women fear the burden of child rearing, single parenting and the negative attitude to divorce and the traditional belief about the woman's role as wife and mother. This perpetuates male dominance including patriarchy, domestic violence and abuse.

1.5 Research questions

This research was guided by the following questions in probing how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* is used to construct 'womanhood':

1. How is a Shangaan 'woman' defined?
2. What are the so-called cultural features which define the womanhood of a Shangaan woman?
3. What is the perception of men towards the cultural practice of *chinamwali?*
4. What is the relationship between *chinamwali* practice and the construction of womanhood of the Shangaan women?
5. How does the practice of *chinamwali* potentially perpetuate patriarchal gender relations and what are the reactions or contributions of peer groups to this cultural practice?
6. How does the study of *chinamwali* contribute to the empowerment of women in the Shangaan community?

1.6. Research problems and objectives

This study probes how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* amongst the Shangaan community is used to construct "womanhood". The practice is culturally encoded or deeply rooted in the cultural beliefs of the Mahenye community which can be viewed as patriarchal. One of the main aims of *chinamwali* is sexual grooming and teaching women how to satisfy men's desire (through what the women are taught in the training camps). In this study, issues of initiation rites, ceremonies, practices, the related cultural practices, gender stereotypes, sexual womanhood and cultural identity have been interrogated, in addition to the social construction of the female body, gender, culture, femininity and masculinity. Much of the information was gathered from the women's lived experiences: their perception, their knowledge and understanding and experience regarding the cultural practice. The study looks at how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* gives women full membership and higher status and social standing in the community. Moreover, the broader objective of this study was to engage with the wider issues around the (structural) violence of the cultural practice and to probe the aspect of infringement of human rights by this practice.

1.7 Theoretical framework

The study was informed by two theoretical perspectives to probe how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* is used to construct womanhood amongst the Shangaan women. The theories utilised are: Social Constructivism and Radical Feminist Theory. These theories were relevant for guiding the methodology and interpreting the research findings. Bhattacherjee (2012, 11) defined a theory as a systematic explanation to the underlying phenomenon of behaviour or a set of systematically interrelated constructs and propositions intended to explain and predict a phenomenon or behaviour of interest, with certain boundary conditions and assumptions. This will be discussed further in the methodology and theory section of Chapter 3.

1.8 Research design and research method

Babbie (2010, 5) described methodology as a sub-field of epistemology and as a science of finding out. Strauss and Corbin (2007, 9) defined methodology as a way of thinking about and studying social reality while Creswell (2003, 4) described it as a strategy or plan of action that links method to outcomes and which governs our choice and use of methods (for example, experimental research, survey research and ethnography). Research method refers to the means required to execute certain stages (methods of definition, sampling, measurement, data collection and data analysis) in the research process. In other words, research design and methods describe the strategies used to carry out a study in order to achieve set objectives. The purpose of this research is to probe how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* among the Shangaan community is used to construct womanhood and to use the findings to understand the socio-cultural construction of the women in the Mahenye community. Research design helps to ensure that the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial questions as unambiguously as possible and in order to accomplish this purpose, exploratory, descriptive and analytical designs were used with the methods of interviews, observations and focus group discussions.

Semi-structured interviews, observations and focus group discussions were used to collect data on the cultural practice of *chinamwali* amongst the people of the Mahenye community. The instruments were structured with both open and closed questions to enhance the richness of data. Opportunities were provided to probe further, with questions on a focus group discussion template. Thirty women were selected from the three wards of Mahenye community (i.e. ten women from each ward) between the ages 25 to 50 years. For secondary

data gathering, twenty men also participated in interviews and focus group discussions. The thirty women who were interviewed also participated in focus group discussions as did the men who had participated in interviews. Details relating to data gathering procedure and tools are described in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

A purposeful sampling method was used to select the participants. Purposive sampling, according to Kuper, Reeves and Levinson (2008, 2), is a research technique in which research participants are chosen to represent a range of beliefs and experiences that the researcher believes will be relevant to the research question. Gray (2014, 320) noted that purposive sampling is used to collect data when a limited number needs to be chosen from a large set of choices. In this case, from the Mahenye community, only three villages were selected, those near Chief Mahenye's residence and identified as practising *chinamwali*.

1.9 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1: General introduction/Background to the study

This is the introductory chapter of the thesis and it has outlined the background and the study's problem statement, context, significance and the study setting. It also includes some definitions of concepts. Research aims, questions, the value of the study, and study limitations have been introduced in this chapter. The cultural practice of *chinamwali* and the women of the Shangaan people in the Mahenye community have been briefly described. This chapter has introduced the study and gives a detailed background to the research.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter reviews relevant literature, locally, regionally and globally. The relevant literature which outlines the definition of *chinamwali,* its impact on the communities and the women was reviewed. Issues of 'sex grooming' and social construction of the female body were also explored. Studies of related literature were reviewed and critically analysed to gain a better understanding of this cultural practice of *chinamwali* among the people of the Mahenye community. The chapter provides a broad overview of *chinamwali* culture as practised in different societies around the world, in general, and amongst the Shangaan community, in particular.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework and research methodology

This chapter focuses on the theories that inform the research: social constructivism and radical feminism. The research methodology is also explored and discussed in this chapter. This research methodology helped in the data gathering and exploring of data from men and women of the Mahenye community. The chapter briefly describes the Mahenye community as well as the study population that is their background, age and social position in the community. The chapter highlights the design, study population, the instruments and issues pertaining to validity, reliability, ethical consideration and data analysis. Interviews, observations and focus group discussions have been carried out to gather the information guided by the research questions and the research methodology.

Chapter 4: Shangaan culture, women's perception and understanding of chinamwali

This chapter considers the culture of the Shangaan people, their understanding of *chinamwali* and their perceptions on relationships of the people in this community. In this chapter, the researcher explores the perception and understanding of the women of the Mahenye community, towards their cultural practice of *chinamwali.* The background of *chinamwali*, its acceptance in the community and its significance to the people of Mahenye community (the women in particular) are explored.

Chapter 5: Male perceptions of the cultural practice of chinamwali

This chapter considers male perceptions of the cultural practice of *chinamwali* in the Mahenye community. Information was gathered through interviews and focus group discussions with men as a secondary sample population. The chapter therefore looks at the understanding of men towards marrying a non-initiate, male participation in this cultural practice, the derogatory names given to the non-initiates, reasons for marrying an initiate, among others. This was understood through a critical engagement with some men (elders and young men) in the community.

Chapter 6: Chinamwali practice and construction of the female body

This chapter looks at the cultural relevance of *chinamwali* in the Mahenye community. This includes looking at the construction of the female body and behaviours towards strengthening masculinity in the context of initiation celebrations. It also considers the societal belief system and perceptions towards the initiation rites. The chapter further looks at the women's understanding of this cultural practice which constructs them as women.

Chapter 7: Chinamwali, gendered practices and gender asymmetry

This chapter explores the relationship between *chinamwali* and gender relations and how it perpetuates patriarchy in the community. The chapter considers the issue of how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* is asymmetrical and how it is an oxymoron. The cultural practice of *chinamwali* is claimed as 'empowering' young women and girls traditionally, but, it is argued, it can also have a negative impact.

Chapter 8: Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter is the concluding chapter of the study. It outlines the key findings of the chapter, challenges that were faced during the study, potential future studies and recommendations, as well as provides a conclusion regarding the research findings and implications of the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Chinamwali or *khomba* is an old cultural practice that is practised in the Mahenye community. *Chinamwali* is practised in different communities and societies globally and this chapter reviews literature related to this practice. Historical and current contextualisation is difficult since the community is not aware of the exact origins of this cultural practice. The chapter reviews literature on *chinamwali* practice among the Shangaan people in general but the Mahenye community in particular. The main aim of reviewing literature in this chapter is to build an understanding of previous studies that have been done in other communities including the Chewa of Zambia and Malawi, Tete in Mozambique and other local communities such as Chiredzi, Chikombedzi, and VaRemba among others. The literature reviewed in this chapter includes the reasons why the Mahenye community engages in this cultural practice and why it values *chinamwali*. The literature shows that *chinamwali* is a culturally embedded practice which defines what a real (sic) woman is according to societal expectations. The review of this literature also revealed that the cultural practice of *chinamwali* constructs womanhood to such an extent that women feel they have to go through the training programme in order to earn respect and honour.

The available literature suggests that *chinamwali* among other cultural practices remains a very powerful tradition which is still practised in several African cultures. Zubieta (2009, 74) defined *chinamwali* as the initiation school that all Chewa girls attend in order to graduate from childhood to womanhood. According to Smith (2001, 5), *chinamwali* is the Chewa girls' initiation ceremony. Drews (1995, 101) described *chinamwali* or *chisungu*, the female initiation ceremony among the Kunda, a horticulturalist hunter group populating the Luangwa valley in Eastern Zambia, as a secret puberty ritual. The community practices this in order to equip young girls for a 'better' future. *Chinamwali* is also described as an initiation rite which constructs women sexually and attempts to fulfil patriarchal expectations of women as highlighted by Drews (1995, 104) in her Kanda studies where instructors were quoted saying that "…in *chinamwali* we teach the girl how to please a man (the cultural ideology that pleases men and devalues women) [Ortner 1972, 4], how to be a good wife and how to make a man enjoy sex with her…". In this process, women are not given the opportunity to discuss their sexual rights. According to Naidu (2009, 2), "culture in this case acts to prescribe behaviour and comes to construct the body as a social and

cultural phenomenon". Culture here tends to devalue women and value men as superior (Ortner 1972). According to the Foundation for the Integration of Culture and Human Rights (FICuHR 2014, 1), *chinamwali* is a traditional girl initiation process or ceremony practised in most Southern African countries and ethnic groups like the Chewa, Ngoni, Venda, Tonga, Sena, Lomwe and Tambuka. In some societies, it is viewed as the initiation process in which a girl is 'mentored' into womanhood. The older women instruct the young women how to cook and clean and how to have sex. Girls sometimes leave school to attend the ceremony for between one and six months. *Chinamwali* is viewed by some as the key to a successful marriage (Inter Press Service News Agency 2011, 1 and Mpofu 2014, 66). There is thus a critical need to probe how the practice of *chinamwali* is culturally embedded and how it is used to construct the women in the Shangaan community as it has its roots deep in the structure of the society. There is also need to critically analyse the impact on these girls when they miss long periods at school in order to attend the initiation ceremony using information gathered from the advocacy/peer groups and child rights organisations.

As practised amongst the Shangaan people, *chinamwali* attempts to define how women should live and behave in the community; thus it can be viewed as socially constructed and cultural (Ortner 1972, 9). *Chinamwali* can be viewed as a practice that is encoded onto the female body (see Naidu 2008, 4). Naidu (2008) noted that women's bodies and sexuality are culturally encoded and are constructed within cultural complexes and therefore identity and alterity come to be inscribed on the body of woman. The practice of *chinamwali* is culturally embedded/ deeply rooted in the culture; it is also used in transitioning the girl from childhood to adulthood. It carries a significant social meaning as its meaning is associated with what it means to be a 'woman' and a rite of passage from girl child to adulthood. Through social interaction, the cultural practice carries a significant meaning among the people of Mahenye community. Through the myths and taboos (see Chigidi, 2009), young women and girls tend to be initiated and look forward to the initiation rites with positive expectations as not being initiated is regarded as taboo in the society. This is thus an indigenous way of educating the community and coming to know some of the societal expectations. Adetola and Adenola (1985, 47), as cited by Chigidi (2009), highlighted that it is through socialisation that our behaviour becomes regulated since we now possess the values, goals and ambitions and live in an ordered environment.

2.1 Review of literature

Numerous studies have considered various cultural practices but to date, as far as the researcher is aware, no in-depth qualitative study has been done about the cultural practice of *chinamwali* and its relationship to the construction of 'womanhood' amongst the Shangaan community of Mahenye. A considerable amount has been written on initiation rites, *khomba* and *chinamwali* in various communities, but there is limited research that directly examines the issue of *chinamwali* or *khomba* among the Shangaan people specifically of the Mahenye community. There is a long history of speculation that *chinamwali* cultural practice started in South Africa while some argue that it started with the Shangaan people who are located in Tete, Mozambique.

The practice of *chinamwali* and young women and girls' initiation practices have also existed in East Africa for many years. Some of the countries where this is practised include East African countries such as Tanzania and Kenya (Jomo Kenyatta, in supporting FGM, called it *Ubuntu*). It is also being practised among the Nyau and Chewa of Zambia and present day Malawi and also in South East Asia, (Smith. 2008). In Zimbabwe, the practice is common in Bindura and Shamva among the Malawian migrants who have relocated to those provinces. It is also practised among the Shangaan communities of Save, Chiredzi, Norton, Chikombedzi, Nyabira and the Hlengwe people. Rites of passage are practised among the VaRemba of Mberengwa as well. However, each community is slightly different to the Mahenye community, though there are some similarities. The available studies on the related literature are as follows: Shoko's (2009) study of *Khomba* girls initiation rites and inculturation among the VaRemba of Mberengwa, Zimbabwe; Chikunda and Shoko's (2009) study on exploring the relevance and quality of the VaRemba initiation school curriculum and its impact on formal school in a rural district in Zimbabwe; Mpofu's (2014) study on growing up in a Hlengwe society, a social history of childhood in Zimbabwe in Mwenezi District, Southern Zimbabwe; Sibanda's (2011) study on child marriages in Zimbabwe; Kasomo's (2009) analysis of rites of passage and their relation to Christianity; Chikunda, Marambire, and Makoni's (2007) study on 'The impact of Khomba – A Shangaan cultural rite of passage – on the formal schooling of girls and on women's space in the Chikombedzi area in Zimbabwe'; Thabete's (2008) case of 'A culture gone awry: An investigation of female initiation ceremonies and *Nyau* dance vigils on the rights of teenage girls and education and sexual reproductive health amongst migrant communities in Norton Zimbabwe'; Maphosa's (2011) study linking African Traditional Education and the ethic

of identity through Shangani culture in Zimbabwe; Sibanda's (2013) study on reflections of the vitality of Shangani male circumcision in the context of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe; Muzingili and Taruvinga's (2017) study on culturally-inflicted violation of child rights: A case of Khomba practice of Shangaan people in Zimbabwe; and Mutanda and Rukondo's (2016) study on the impact of female genital mutilation of Shangaan women in Zimbabwe.

The study by Shoko (2009) explored the relationship of *khomba* to certain church sacraments. The focus of his study was the VaRemba people of Mberengwa in Southern Zimbabwe. The study attempted to address the problem of whether the rite of passage can be accommodated into Catholic sacraments such as baptism, confirmation and matrimony and argued for the possible inculturation of the *khomba* rite. This is because the church views it as paganism whilst VaRemba people practise it in good faith. The study found that the *khomba* rite is intended to move a mature girl *(mhandara)* from the state of girlhood to that of womanhood. The church was advocating for the community to do away with the cultural practice of *khomba*. However the VaRemba people see this cultural practice as a way of developing their community as well as maintaining their cultural integrity.

Kasomo's study (2009) focused on how rites of passage engenders one and enables one to be accepted according to societal norms. Kisomo's argument was for integrating these cultural practices or rituals into Christian beliefs. Rites of passage are accompanied by instructions and prohibitions that a girl is taught as she moves from one state of being to another. Initiates are therefore taught a special 'language' unknown to the majority of the community. This is how girls are socialised to be part of the community through learning the cultural practices. Kasomo analysed rites of passage that he adopted from Van Gennep's philosophy. He talked about the *rites of separation* which entail that an individual moves from the earlier group he or she belonged to; this may be by secluding the initiate in a place for a time, alone with others and according to him such rites include shaving of hair as a symbol of separation of ties with the earlier condition or position. He also considered *rites of passage* which are accompanied by instructions and prohibitions with a special language known only to the initiates. These include dietary and/ or sexual aspects. *Rites of incorporation* are actions the initiate is formerly made to enter the sacred world and they often include ceremonies like acquiring new names, changing of abode and changing of dress. In this regard, initiation is regarded as the criterion for growing up and binds the initiate to the community. He considered that the rites of passage are a way of expressing

the aspirations of the community and through them, the society targets changing a person's thinking, feeling, acting with a view of regulating his perception of reality to conform with that of society. Society makes initiates adopt and interiorise a set of values which constitute that society's world view. Kasomo argued that initiation schools teach about sexuality what the school doesn't offer. They are also an integral part of cultural and ethnic identity (Althaus, 1997, 131)

Thabete's study (2008) sought to investigate female initiation ceremonies and Nyau dance vigils as cultural practices which detract from women's empowerment by fostering early marriages and school drop-outs in Norton, Zimbabwe. Her focus was on the cultural Nyau dance which is practised to mark the transition women and girls from one level of life to another and from childhood to adulthood. Young women are involved in this practice as part of the norm of the community. They are secluded for a certain period of time, being taught so-called life skills and development. With this cultural practice, young women go through *chinamwari*, sexual grooming and education among other things. The practice, according to Thabete (2008), is most often ignored and thus continues to go unnoticed, perhaps because it is practised by a minority community and/ or is practised in secret. She further asserted that teenage girls can suffer harm in highly ritualized dance vigils and when forced into early marriages because of poverty. Human rights activists and feminists are often not aware of this. The practice is done to maintain male supremacy in the community. However, just like the female circumcision (Toubia, 1994), the practice is part of socialisation for young women and girls into womanhood. It marks the marriageability of women as well as creating social integrity and social control amongst women.

Mutanda and Rukondo's study (2016) evaluated the impact of Female Genital Mutilation among the Shangaan women. And Mpofu's study revealed the social history of childhood and its links to the practices of indigenous knowledge systems of the Hlengwe people of Mwenezi. These include practices of birthing, weaning, *khomba (yisamatin)* and male circumcision *(murundu).* The Hlengwe community also observes these cultural practices which are meant to educate young women and girls into respectable and accountable citizens. The cultural practice regulates marriage as well as prescribes the behaviours that predispose young women and girls into (arranged) marriages and human rights violations/abuse.

Maphosa's study (2011) looked at how traditional male circumcision transitions the Shangaan male of Chiredzi from childhood to adulthood/ manhood. Male circumcision among the Shangaan of Chiredzi is also a rite of passage/ *rite de passage*. It is also called *hoko* in the Shangaan community. This study intended to link the African traditional education and the ethic of identity through Shangaan culture of Zimbabwe. The study revealed with *hoko*/ male circumcision, boys will be taught the norms and values that govern the community. The study of *hoko* increases identity, integration as well as interaction amongst the Shangaan people. One basic means of societal integration is to generate the human psychological energy through the ritual (operation) in order to increase the social cohesion needed in order to bind people and social structures together (Maphosa 2011, 2). The study is therefore part of the indigenous knowledge system of the Shangaan people. It reveals that culture controls people's behaviour and attitudes in the community. It is also linked to human consciousness as well as the state of moral being.

Sibanda's study (2013) focused on male circumcision as a rite of passage which determines the personhood and identity of the Shangaan people. According to Sibanda, the Shangaan circumcision school is a miniature platform where values and skills are imparted to the initiate in order to educate the initiates on societal norms and values. His study showed how deeply rooted the cultural practice of male circumcision is. The study established that without undergoing the *khomba* initiation rite, a person, no matter what age, would not be considered a full adult among the Shangaan. The study however highlighted that male circumcision, besides being culturally embedded, has some disadvantages for the boys involved, though it is argued to help reduce HIV infection by 60%. Boys are also given manhood tasks while in the training camp. The cultural practice is however regarded as a form of human rights and child rights abuse. This is because of the teachings that the boys are involved in as well as the harsh environmental conditions to which the initiates are exposed. Sibanda highlighted that there are a number of (un)recorded deaths during the traditional circumcision; there is therefore a high risk to the initiates. The cultural practices are a prerequisite for a girl to be married and for a boy child to transition to manhood. However, male circumcision is part of the cultural rite of passage that is used to transition the male/boys to adulthood. Boys are pressured to participate in this cultural practice.

The study by Muzingili and Taruvinga (2017) revealed that *khomba* is part of culturally inflicted child rights violation among the Shangaan people. It is well documented that the

cultural practice of *khomba* is a violation of women and children's rights among the communities where it is practised. The study looked at how this cultural practice of khomba affects the human rights and human dignity of children, viz. human rights abuse. In many communities, child marriages are commonly the result of harmful practices (Mawodza, 2015, 12). There is a realisation that many cases of culturally inflicted child rights continue to occur because they are normalised under several customs and traditions, *khomba* being one of them (Muzingili and Taruvinga 2017, 3). The major thrust of their study considered human rights abuse of children through exposure to explicit sexual training; training sessions which they termed 'culturally inflicted child rights abuse'. Children are socialised to go through initiation training as part of growing up and being connected to the community as full members of the community. The study concurs with Chikunda, Marambire and Makoni's study (2007) on the impact of *khomba* on the formal schooling of girls' and women's space in the Chikombedzi area of Zimbabwe. In this regard, *khomba* ceremony seems to tell the initiates they are ripe for marriage and they thus divert their attention from formal education. It revealed that *khomba* restricts women's space, both in terms of their condition and position in society. In its application, the cultural practice is an oxymoron. The practice integrates the community, educates the young women and girls on societal expectations but at the same time, affects their behaviour. It shows that the practice is contextually shaped in each community. One form of femininity is defined around compliance with this subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men (Schippers 2007, 86). The study revealed that the cultural practice of *khomba* increases male dominance and infringes human rights abuse. Sibanda (2011) also looked at how cultural practices (initiation rites and rites of passage) play a central role in enforcing child marriages in Zimbabwe. This also infringes on the human rights of children.

These studies, however, did not focus on the Shangaan people of Mahenye and how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* is used to construct womanhood. It is for this reason that the study seeks to fill the gap by looking at how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* among the Shangaan people is used to construct 'womanhood'. The abovementioned communities assert that they have maintained their cultural identities through their cultural practices. Their identities are signified by traditional rites that are adhered to and practised on occasions such as death, wedding parties and other recognised festivals. To our knowledge, the studies on *khomba* are the only studies conducted to date that investigate the cultural practice of *khomba* among the Shangaan and other communities and how it infringes the

human rights of the child. No recent qualitative or quantitative data on *khomba* and *chinamwali* in the Mahenye community has been documented to date. This research should be of interest to policy makers, legislators, advocacy groups, civil society organisations, women and child rights organisations.

Studies of *chinamwali* portray women as victims of structural and socio-cultural factors that influence them to practise *chinamwali*. Feminists argue that the masculine concerns over feminine sexuality are only present when there is a male need to control female sexuality (Kamlongera 2007, 6). Some of the studies include Kachapila's study (2001) of gender, identity and social change among the Chewa of Central Malawi, Reynolds' study (2007) of the hidden sites and secret rites in rural Malawi, Drews' study (1995) on covering and uncovering secrets and the construction of gender identity among the Kunda of Zambia and Smith's study (2001) 'Forbidden Images: Rock Paintings and the Nyau Secret Society in Central Malawi and Eastern Zambia'. Women and young girls are forced into *chinamwali* by external influences including peer/group and parental pressures and societal norms of male supremacy and physical control. In this regard, much of the training and most of the symbolism of *chinamwali* is concerned with making the girl a sexually accomplished spouse and fruitful woman.

Zubieta (2006, 14), working with the rock art of Mwana waChentcherere II Rock Shelter in Malawi, looked at the proposed link between the rock art and girls' initiation or *chinamwali*. Her studies offer a small contribution to our knowledge of *chinamwali* itself. Zubieta (2006, 78) has described the different types of *chinamwali* which the Chewa women attended: instruction of young girls who have recently begun to menstruate, instruction of pregnant women and instruction for women who are about to get married. This study will however focus on the Shangaan women of the Mahenye community, specifically older women in the 25 to 50 years age group, who have participated in the initiation/training.

Some Chewa cultures in Zambia, Malawi and other parts of Southern Africa practise *chinamwali* and female genital mutilation/cutting as part of their rites of passage. Wadesango, Dembe and Chabango (2011) noted that female genital mutilation is an old practice perpetuated in many communities around the world simply because it is customary and the reason for the practice tends to be culture specific. In most communities, the practice

is done routinely to almost all girls, usually minors and is promoted as a highly valued cultural practice and a social norm (WHO Pan American Organisation 2012, 1). Like the Chinese culture of foot binding (Kenyatta, 1965), the idea is to integrate these young women and girls into the mainstream community which has socially constructed these cultural beliefs and practices. The practice is also celebrated in some Latin American countries and in the case of Peru, the fifteenth birthday of the Peruvian girls is celebrated to mark the transition into adulthood and it symbolises the end of childhood for girls. It also announces the time for marriage and marks the introduction into womanhood (see Covagnoud, 2011). In the case of Mexico, Steenbeck (1995, 128), as cited by Covagnoud, (2011, 3), saw the celebration as a stage where "the years of childhood are definitively over and the girl now has to start behaving like a decent woman".

Malawi is well known for practising *chinamwali* which is also known as *chinamwali cha atsikana*. In Malawi, girls as young as ten are being sent to initiation camps to be taught about how to have sex and in some cases lose their virginity (Reilly 2014). There is also the cultural practice called *fisi* which was studied by Kamlongera in 2007. Her study of the Malawian *fisi* reflects the true subordination of the women and the girl child involving pain to the body. While in the also training camp, young women and girls are given instructions on how to please men and exposed to various often vulgar details. The *fisi*, according to the Malawian culture (Kamlongera 2007, 3), is hired to have sex with the female initiates to mark the end of some of the initiation ceremonies. In some parts of Malawi, he is called the *hyena* which will come to 'cleanse the girls'. The process where young girls have sex after initiation is known as 'dust cleansing' or *kusasa fumbi.*

As for the boy's circumcision, they are also encouraged to go out and have sex with a girl after the practice – a form of *"kutaya mafuta"* (spilling oil) or *"kumitisa"* (blowing out) (Stuart, 2011, 11). Without going through the process, a girl is considered to be a child and is therefore illegible for marriage (Reilly, 2014). In the Yao culture, after *chinamwali*, the young girls have to be 'devaginated' by one old man who is paid to do this as part of the practical aspect of the rites of passage (Southern African Development Community, Malawi Press Release, 2012, 1). According to Stuart (2011, 11), in most parts of the country, the girls' rites of passage primarily revolve around preparing the young girl child for married adult life. Moreover, girls are taught never to deny their husbands sex except during their menstrual cycle. In studies of *chinamwali* in Malawi, Stuart (2011, 10) noted that both boys

and girls go through an initiation rite of passage during which they are taught about the values and norms respected in their communities. Children are taught about things such as manners and how to interact with others and respect elders in their village. Girls also learn about cooking, washing and gardening skills and other domestic obligations. Boys in this culture will undergo male circumcision. They are taught how to be a real man of the community. Boys' initiation practices however tend to be less elaborate than for girls. This research therefore considers the reasons for the emphasis on women initiation and the construction of their womanhood

2.2 Reflections on culture

Culture refers to learned, shared and transmitted values, beliefs, norms and life ways of a specific individual or group that guide their thinking, decisions, actions and patterned ways of living (Leininger 2006, 94). According to Fiere (1985), culture is defined as the set of learned behaviour, beliefs and attitudes, values and ideas that are characteristics of a particular society or population and these are learned and passed from one generation to another. Maphosa (2011, 9) highlighted that it must be noted the culturalist school of thought perceives culture as a way of doing things by an individual as a group of people who profess sharing common ideas, aspirations, interests and goals which anchor a particular human existentiality. Culture is a broad term that refers to the 'customs', institutions and achievements of a particular nation, people or group (South African Concise Oxford Dictionary, 2002) in Kambarami (2000: 2). Mazrui (1986), in Arhihenbuwa and Webster (2004, 3), defined culture as a system of interrelated values active enough to influence and condition perception, judgement, communication, and behaviour in a given society. Brody (1987), in Arhihenbuwa and Webster (2004, 3), posited that one's "cultural belief system influences one's social roles and relationships when one is ill or fit". Womanhood in this study refers to the so-called behaviour, sexual scripts or inscriptive practices on the female body, cultural identity or the cultural realities or cultural expectations of a woman. The female body, in addition to everything else it may be, is very much a socio-cultural "construct", which has been culturally "performed" upon for colonial, religious and other purposes (Naidu 2011a, 1). The so called '*appropriate'* behaviour by women includes taking care of the husband, fetching water and/ or firewood, respecting the elders and satisfying the man sexually. This control of women concurs with Grosz's 1987 theory of plasticity which argues that bodies are 'sites' that can be molded and shaped by

particular hegemonic discourses (see Naidu 2009, 2). The practice of *chinamwali* is patriarchal and can be considered as a cultural inscription on the female body.

Research by UNICEF (Innocenti Digest, 2005) highlighted that cultural or social conventions influence one's behaviour in the community. The research on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) reflects that women '*accept'* this harmful cultural practice because they want to fulfil cultural obligations and to be part of the society. The practice violates girls' and women's basic human rights, denying them physical and mental integrity, their right to freedom from violence and discrimination (ACRWC; CEDAW 1979; CRC 1989). The practice is seen as an important part of girls' and women's cultural identity. The procedure imparts a sense of pride, of coming of age and a feeling of community membership; not conforming to this practice stigmatises and isolates girls and their families, resulting in the loss of their social status (Innocenti Digest 2005). These social conventions are so powerful that parents are willing to let their daughters be cut because they want the 'best' for their children and because of social pressure within the community. Female genital operations occur in a variety of places, from Indonesia to the Middle East to Europe and the United States; however, the vast majority of female genital operations occur on the African continent in countries as diverse as Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Egypt, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, Togo, Senegal, and Mali. Practitioners include Muslims, Christians, Falasha Jews, and followers of indigenous African religions (Walley 1997). In Kenya, for instance, value is placed on the female circumcision/ female genital mutilation or cutting as a rite of passage/ *rite de passage.* The practice therefore marks the commencement of participation in various governing groups in tribal administration because all the 'real age groups' begin on the day of the physical operation (Kenyatta 1965, 134). In some societies, women stretch their labia minora as a cultural practice. Bagol and Mariano (2009) noted that, "on the internet, several websites publicise the elongation of the labia minora as an erotic asset. The practice is found amongst the Venda (Blacking 1967, 1998) and Lovedu (Kringe and Kringe 1980) of South Africa and amongst several groups and Northern Mozambique (Arnfred 1989, 2003, Ironga 1994, Enoque 1994, Bagnol 1996, 2003, Geister 2000). It is a common practice in the south of Tanzania amongst the Makonde speaking people (Dias 1998, Johansen 2006) and in Uganda among the Buganda linguistic group of the central region (Tamele 2005) and in some groups in the Western Region (Parnik 2005), Bagnol and Mariano, (2009:6). This study however focuses on *chinamwali,*

a cultural practice of the Shangaan people which also transitions the girl child from childhood to womanhood but in this case, the process doesn't involve genital cutting.

'Culture' plays a pivotal role in defining people in the community. According to Arhihenbuwa and Webster (2004, 1), culture plays a pivotal role in determining the health of the individual, the family and the community. They argued that the behaviour of an individual in relation to family and community is one major cultural factor that has implications for sexual behaviour and HIV/AIDS prevention and control efforts. Culture tends to define gender in the community. Everything that people do (in this case *chinamwali*) is culturally context specific. Lorber (1994) noted that most people find it hard to believe that gender is constantly created and recreated out of human interaction, out of social life and in the texture and order of that social life. Gender, like culture, is also a human construction and depends on everyone constantly 'doing gender'. Barker and Ricardo (2005) noted that many cultural groups in Africa have developed and continue to carry out initiation practices, or rites of passage, some of which include male circumcision as part of socialisation of boys and men. The rites may become particularly important for creating cultural and collective identities when more formalised public institutions such as schools, formal religion and political institutions are weak (Barker and Ricardo 2005, 9). This then justifies the proposed study on *chinamwali* which explores the social conventions of initiating girls. Lorber (1994, 61) argued that the paradox of human nature is that it is always the manifestation of cultural meanings, social relationships and power politics; not biology but culture becomes destiny.

2.3 Societal expectations of initiation ceremonies

Studies show that girls or women attend initiation training in order to fulfil certain societal and cultural obligations. Societies value their cultural practices such as *chinamwali* and consider it to be the rules that govern the society through socialisation; observance of these rules enables the individual or community to internalise his people's culture. In some societies, while in the training camp, girls are beaten by the elders and are not supposed to cry as a sign of strength and endurance. In some communities where initiation ceremonies are practised, girls are asked to dance naked in front of the whole community to showcase what they have learned and during the dance, the public is allowed to touch the girls and give them money which is placed directly on the vaginal area. Barker and Ricardo (2005,

9) also noted that many cultural groups in Africa have developed and continue to carry out initiation practices or rites of passage, some of which include male circumcision as part of the socialisation of boys. This also applies to women who are socialised to behave in a certain way. They are socialised into 'good citizens'. Research on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting also show that mothers organise the cutting of their daughters because they consider that this is part of what they must do to raise a girl properly and to prepare her for adulthood and marriage (UNICEF, 2005, Kenyatta 1965, Maphosa 2013, Sibanda 2011 and Sibanda 2013). This shows that these cultural practices are structural as well as socio-cultural.

In several societies, initiation rites are integral parts of cultural or peer or group behaviour. McDonald (2004, 10) in his studies on rites of passage noted that Van Gennep saw the life of an individual in any society as a series of passages, that is, from one age to another or from one occupation to another. Girls are seen as graduating from childhood to adulthood upon attending *chinamwali* ceremony. Grimes (2000, 5) highlighted that the primary work of a rite of passage is to ensure that we attend to such events fully (spiritually, psychologically and socially) and mentioned that the aim of ritual passages is to transform both the individual and the communities that perpetuate them. These rites of passage according to Grimes (2005), change single people into mates, children into adults, childless individuals into parents and living people into ancestors. Women are expected to practice what they have learnt from *chinamwali*. Rites of passage and their contribution to the construction of women is the focus of this research.

In terms of *chinamwali*, women do not benefit as much as 'others', especially men. For instance, on the study of Violence against Women on Female Genital Mutilation, the World Health Organisation Pan American Organisation (2011) noted that the major motivation was that the practice is believed to ensure the girl conforms to key social norms such as those related to sexual restraint, femininity, respectability and maturity. It can also be seen as a declaration of power in cultures and amongst women where women define themselves according to their viewpoint of other women after attending the initiation. According to the Foundation for the Integration of Culture and Human Rights (2014, 2), in the Nsenga community, when a girl is about to be married, the paternal aunts will advise her on how to keep her man happy in the bedroom and satisfy him sexually. The practice has a negative effect on the girl child and it is not the woman but the 'others' or men that benefit. Women

also suffer the long-term effect of cultural practices like female genital mutilation or female circumcision and genital elongation. The practice is performed in response to strong social conventions and is seen as normative as well as supported by key social norms; thus failure to conform often results in harassment and exclusion from important communal events and support networks as well as discrimination by peers. The practices can be seen as violent to the community in general but to the girls and women in particular. Some traditional African societies, such as various ethnic groups in Northern Mozambique, Zambia and Southern Tanzania, practise what is variously called labia stretching or labia elongation or enlargement in their female puberty and initiation rituals (Amadiume 2006). While parents or significant others often benefit from the training and this construction of women, Wadesango et al. (2011, 1) noted that these traditional practices can be harmful: "female genital mutilation" reinforces the inferior status of women in society and continues to violate their rights and effect on gender equality in society.

In the puberty ritual of traditional Ndembu society in Zambia, according to Amadiume (2006), older women widen girls' sexual organs with fingers and insert phallic objects into the girls' vaginas to teach them about sexual intercourse. The female body is subjected to all this with the intention that the young women become equipped to have intercourse with and please men. Women openly attend these initiation training programmes though some secretly participate in order to identify themselves with other women who have already been initiated, to satisfy their husbands and to fulfil certain cultural expectations. They also undergo this training so that they gain honour and respect from their community, husbands and their peers. They fear the risk of being left alone as men look for the well-trained women (who were initiated) outside marriage. This therefore creates unequal power relations between men and women which in turn can be seen to fuel HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence and abuse of women.

In the Kunda society, according to Drews (1995, 103),

> Every girl has to undergo the initiation ritual after menstruation and the ritual consists of three parts and the first part consists of seclusion that is a girl being locked up to three months in the house where she was instructed on matters concerning family relations, sex, marriage, health fertility and household activities. In this period, a *ndola* or the 'neophyte sits barely dressed with ragged cloth around her hips on the floor with her eyes cast down, while the participants perform their teachings'. On a Saturday, all

girls and women in the area gather to celebrate the final coming out of the neophyte. Many girls and women volunteer to demonstrate their aptness to perform sexually provocative dances and also the *Ndola* has to show what she learned in this respect during her time of seclusion. Songs and dramatized performances are then repeated in the presence of the mature, initiated women. This is also the time of public humiliation of the neophyte if she has displayed antisocial behavior in the past. People are asked to ventilate their complaints about the girl and if there are any, the neophyte will be reproached in a harsh way, water will be thrown on the floor of the mud house and she will be kicked in the mud by the other women. They will step on her, seemingly, mercilessly, even kicking her in the face.

There are arguments against the practice of teaching young women and girls how to act in bed. In some societies, sex is regarded as an art and not an act. Sharp objects are however sometimes used as threats and girls must tweak their hips to the tune of the instructions which ultimately amounts to cruel abuse. Many girls are forced to leave school for months to go for sex grooming or training; this combined with female genital mutilation is a violation of child and women rights. Mwambene (2004, 2) argued, however, that strong cultural support can pose a threat to any effort aimed at addressing human rights violations in African customary law as everything is culturally embedded.

2.4 Conclusion

The chapter has reviewed relevant literature and studies on initiation rites or rites of passage in general but the cultural practice of *chinamwali* or *khomba* in particular. The chapter presents a summarised overview of the studies that were conducted among the Shangaan community and other related literature on the study of *chinamwali/ khomba*. The chapter shows that the several countries and communities around the world practice and /or put value on rites of passage. They carry a network of meanings attached to and embedded in them. It has been noted that initiation rites are mostly practised in Southern African countries and societies such as the Chewa, Yao and Ndembu. Locally in Zimbabwe, some communities like the Nyau, VaRemba and the Hlengwe people also practise this cultural practice as a rite of passage. Initiation rites in general are meant to transition the girl child to adulthood (for women) and boy child to manhood. *Chinamwali* is therefore meant to transition the young women and girls to another level of life (adulthood). *Chinamwali* has

been argued to be a strong cultural convention which is practised in many cultures across the world for cultural purposes.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology and the methods employed in carrying out this research. It gives a brief background to the research site and discusses the study population, data collection techniques and methods of data analysis used. It describes the sampling procedure and looks at how data was analysed. The chapter outlines theories which were used, namely Social Constructivism and Radical Feminism. It further discusses ethical considerations carried out during the research, including informed consent and the rights of the participants and protection of their identities. The study was qualitative and explored real life behaviour of the participants, allowing them to speak for themselves (Kuper et al. 2008, 2). The study used data gathered through observation, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions.

3.1 Research site: Mahenye community

Chinamwali/ *khomba* is practised among the Shangaan people of Mahenye community. Fifteen villages make up this community but the research was only conducted among the three selected villages in Mahenye community where this cultural practice is dominant. Other villages in the community do not practice *chinamwali* to the same extent as the three selected villages. Mahenye is a community located in the Chipinge district, in the south-eastern part of Zimbabwe, close to Mozambique (people can walk to the border), Mahenye is classified as one of the remote areas in Zimbabwe. The community is still very remote, 'traditional' and predominantly patriarchal and the lineage system in the community is patrilineal, (ie transmission, succession and inheritance rights follow the male line). The patrilineal tie is associated with property, office, political allegiance, exclusiveness, as well as particularistic and segmentary interests (Turner 1969). This region also respects traditional cultural practices such as *chinamwali*/ khomba among others. Exogamous marriage and polygynous marriages are common in this community. Marriage ceremonies are charactorised by the husband handing over goods and money (called *lobola* – bride wealth) to the wife's family). Chipinge district is in the extreme south of Manicaland province and shares borders with Mozambique to the east, Chimanimani District to the north, Buhera District to the North West, Chiredzi District to the South and Bikita District to the West. The district capital is approximately 188km south of Mutare and only 48km from the border with Mozambique. The community consists of approximately 5 000 people of which 3548 are males and 1452 are females. People of Mahenye

are called the *Xangani* or Shangaan *(Machangana)*. It is claimed that these people were Nguni people who originated from North and Eastern South Africa in Limpopo and Mpumalanga Province and moved into Swaziland, into South Mozambique in Gaza province with some settling as the Mahenye community in Manicaland Province during the colonial era. Some are in Chikombedzi, Masvingo Province and are also called Mahlengwe or Matsonga/Tsonga. But there are many schools of thought with regard to the origin of *Machangana* or the Shangaan people and no one knows the true origin of these people. Some of these communities also practice *chinamwali* or *khomba* but this study focuses on the Shangaan people of Mahenye community.

Tourism is key to this area with nearby hotels including Chilo Gorge and Safari Lodge (a five-star hotel which attracts both national and international tourists). The lodge employs local people to work as managers, drivers, cooks, general workers, among others. It also employs people from outside the community (from as far as the capital city, Harare and cities like Bulawayo and Masvingo). However, employment opportunities are limited at the hotel and the environment is predominantly white. Only 15 locals/ residents are employed at the hotel. The community owns one of chalets called Nhambo as part of the community share ownership programme. The community share the proceeds from the Nhambo chalet as part of the community share ownership programme even though the proceeds are minimal. The available community's wildlife and forests are protected by both the community and the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) and Zimbabwe National Parks and Wildlife Management. The available forests create a safe haven for the wild animals as well as a 'conducive' secluded environment and wild fruits are available for the initiates during their initiation training programmes. Approximately 10 percent of community members are employed in the parks with some taking part in the annual festivals that are hosted every year by the chiefs surrounding Gonarezhou National Park including the Great Limpopo Cultural Trade Fair. The purpose of these festivals is to maintain and promote traditions and culture amongst the youth and to ensure that this heritage is passed on to future generations. Like *chinamwali,* these festivals play a central role in Mahenye culture. The festivals are culturally embedded and outsiders would find them difficult to understand. Like religion, they are experientially intimate to the believer and outsiders, in a sense, can have no real access to the experiences or ability to critique them (Naidu 2011a, 3). The community alone understands the importance of their cultural practices and beliefs and ensures that the festivals are held every year. Some of the community people prepare and sell traditional beer that is brewed from

sorghum. Others make palm wine called *njemana* by tapping the growing tip of the palms and fermenting the sap obtained. This process forms part of the Shangaan community's indigenous knowledge systems which are passed from one generation to the next. Many people in the Mahenye community raise money by selling traditional beer / *njemana*. It is one of the main sustainable income generating projects among the Shangaan people with some people claiming that they were able to raise their children and pay school fees with money raised from selling this traditional beer / *njemana.* The Shangaan / *Machangana* people are proud of their hunter gatherer culture which recognises the importance of respecting and maintaining the local environment including wildlife management and natural resources to such an extent that cutting down trees or unregulated hunting attracts a fine from both the chief and the National Parks. There are a few businesses and three shopping centres at the core of the Mahenye community. These shops belong to the locals and they also employ few people in the community as shop keepers, managers and drivers. These shops employ approximately 100 local people and some of them are being run by families as family businesses. Some of the people can take care of their families with these minimal salaries. Some can pay school fees for their children or medical bills or bridal payments or are able to proceed with their education). Children attend school at the nearby Mahenye Primary and Secondary schools. The primary school enrols approximately 300 pupils and the secondary school (with only 4 classes) enrols approximately 200 pupils. The community gets medication and treatment at Mahenye clinic. Teachers are well respected in the community as are nurses. Medication is subsidised by the Ministry of Health and Child Care and some non-governmental organisations which operate in the community. The community also promotes the rich and diverse traditions of the Shangaan/ *Machangana* people which include dress, beading, food and traditional hunting methods, music and dancing, poetry and storytelling, home building and wall decorations, *saila* (annual fish drives), male initiation to adulthood *(ngomeni)* and female initiation ceremonies *(khomba)* (wineandwilddogs 2017).

The researcher was fortunate to stay with a family which was part of the community. People in Mahenye practice initiation ceremonies as a rite of passage, transitioning the girls from childhood to adulthood. The practice is deeply embedded in the Shangaan culture. This cultural practice is Mahenye's social capital. The practice is held on an annual basis.

3.1.1 Introduction of female participants

The table below summarises details of the thirty female participants in this study, including age and background. Pseudonyms have been used to identify participants.

Table 3.1: Female participants

Name (Pseudonym)	**Age**	**Background**
Rose	27 years	Mother of 3 children
Mudhlayi	50 years	Grandmother with 5 children and 7 grandchildren Initiated very young and is now a trainer *(mutsvatsi)* Born into Mahenye community
Makhanani	36 years	Mother of 3 children, born in Mahenye community *Khomba* graduate
Nyembezi	50 years	8 children and 6 grandchildren An initiate who was also involved in coaching young women and *mudzabhi*
Elina	35 years	Recently married and was an initiate
Loveness	38 years	Married as a teenager soon after graduation from initiation Mother of 3 children
Tsatsawani	45 years	Mother of 3 children Not born but married into Mahenye community.
Thabitha	47 years	Married and a grandmother with one daughter and 4 grandchildren
Hlalati	35 years	Mother of two teenage girls
Sarudzai	30 years	Mother of 3 children
Chihlangu	25 years	Mother of 1 child
Maria	50 years	Mother of 3 children and 7 grandchildren Married soon after *chinamwali* training and couldn't go back to school after initiation
Chinyikwa	44 years	3 children, 2 died
Ngilazi	50 years	Grandmother with 7 boys and 2 grandchildren Trainer of *chinamwali*
Mhango	37 years	Mother of 3 boys and 2 grandchildren
Susan	40 years	Born and bred in Mahenye community Grandmother with 2 grandchildren and 4 children Was initiated while attending school
Junior	26 years	Born into Mahenye community
Sarah	32 years	Mother of 3 girls
Mary	50 years	Grandmother with 6 grandchildren
Nokase	41 years	Married and non-initiate. Widow Born into a 'well to do family' in Mahenye community

Muhlava	25 years	Orphaned and inspired by her grandmother to be initiated Married with one child
Laizah	43 years	Married woman with 4 children
Tarehwa	49 years	Teacher at a nearby school with 3 grandchildren
Tsatsawani Chirota	28 years	Recent initiate and recently married Initiated at 14 years old, after finishing Grade 7
Esther	26 years	Nurse at a nearby clinic
Esnarth	44 years	Mother of 6 children Only two initiates in the training camp when she was initiated at 17 years old
Murawu	37 years	Married with 3 children Graduate trainee of *chinamwali*/ khomba
Janet	42 years	5 grandchildren
Mutuki	27 years	Married with 1 child Has a human rights perspective
Chauke	29 years	Married with 3 children She had been in town with her relatives, interviewed when she came to the village for Christmas holidays

3.1.2 Introduction of male participants

The table below gives an overview of the male participants in this study. These men participated in the focus group discussion that was held in November 2016. Some of these men also participated in the interviews that were held in August 2017 as part of the secondary data.

Table 3.2: Male (focus group discussion) participants

Name (Pseudonym)	**Age**	**Background**
Jalasi	50 years	Grandfather with 5 boys and 2 girls His wife is a trainer of *chinamwali*
Malati	58 years	Married grandfather with 2 sons, 1 daughter and 3 grandchildren. His wife is a trainer of *chinamwali*
Muhlaru	36 years	Married with 3 kids. He was born in Mahenye community and he married in the same community
Mabhawu	39 years	Married man with 4 children, his wife was initiated He is a registered nurse at the clinic
Phibion	40 years	Grandfather of 2 girls and he claimed that his granddaughters were also initiated
Madokwenyu	29 years	Married man with 2 children. His wife was a recent graduate Registered state nurse at the clinic

Macina	38 years	Married with 3 children. His wife was a *chinamwali* graduate trainee
Mulago	30 years	Married with 1 child His wife was recently initiated
KC	25 years	Recently married to one of the initiates
Kedha	27 years	Recently married with 1 child. His wife was recently initiated

Male (interview) participants

Name (Pseudonym)	**Age**	**Background**
Sekuru (Khule)	49 years	Grandfather of 12 and father of 6 girls. He was the oldest amongst the interviewees
Dickson	39 years	Father of 3 girls. His wife was initiated
Kenge	45 years	He is the father of 3 girls and 1 boy
Nheredzo	26 years	He is recently married with 1 child. His wife was initiated and was expecting her child to be initiated as well.
Muketo	32 years	Married to an initiate. Father of 3 girls
Chinhamo	35 years	Married to an initiate
Kenny	37 years	Married to a non-initiate but she was initiated later when she got married. Was initiated due to pressure from the community and the family
Madhonora	30 years	Recently married with no children
Kingstone	27 years	Recently married and his wife was not initiated but intends to be initiated due to societal pressure
Mula	40 years	He is a grandfather of 3 and father of 4 girls. His wife was initiated later

3.2 Data collection techniques

Much of the information about *chinamwali* cultural practice was gathered through field work followed by intensive research on the available published and unpublished literature. In order to obtain rich data and a contextual understanding of *chinamwali*, the researcher used semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The researcher observed the behaviour and activities of the people in the community during the research process. This was done during the researcher's visits to the households as well as the time spent mingling with the community leaders and elders. Observation, as Mulhall (2003, 2) noted, is based within the interpretist/constructivist paradigm that acknowledges the importance of context and construction of knowledge between the researcher and researched. Silverman (1993 in Mulhall 2003, 2) noted that, "unfortunately, we have all become a little reluctant to use our eyes as well as our ears during observational work". The way people move, dress, interact and use space is

very much a part of how particular social settings are constructed. Observation is the key method for collecting data about such matters. Often the primary reason for using observational methods is to check whether what people say they do is the same as what they actually do. Observation also helped the researcher to gather other information that could not be gathered through focus group discussions and interviews. It therefore provides insights into interactions between dyads and groups and it captures context and process (Mulhall 2003, 3). These techniques helped in the exploration of behaviour, attitudes and experiences of the people of Mahenye community. The techniques complemented each other as some of the disadvantages of one technique were an advantage in another. Focus group discussions and interviews were conducted over a period of ten months from November 2016 to August 2017. The researcher compiled field notes throughout the period of data collection on naturally occurring interactions in public and private spheres. A brief description follows of the data gathering techniques and how they were utilised in this study.

3.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

The study used semi-structured interviews to gather data from the people of Mahenye community. According to Rugg and Petre (2007, 135), an interview is a conversation with a purpose. It involves two or more people interacting with each other, unlike direct observation which may not involve interaction between the researcher and the participants at all. It involves oral questioning of respondents either individually or as a group. In-depth and semi-structured interviews explore the experiences of participants and the meanings they attribute to them (Tong, Sainsbury and Craig 2007, 3). This study consisted of one-on-one/ face-to-face discussions with Shangaan men and women of the Mahenye community. Interview questions must be phrased and rephrased so that they are clear, unambiguous, and meaningful to the respondents and do not steer them towards an answer the interviewer wants because of some personal agenda involving advocacy as opposed to research. The qualitative research interview seeks to describe the meanings of central themes in the life world of the participants. They are particularly useful for getting the story behind the participant's experiences (Valenzuela and Shrivastaya 2000, 1). Semi-structured interviews in this study focused on probing how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* is used to construct womanhood among the Shangaan community. They provided the opportunity to explore reactions to findings such as those obtained from participant observation. As an interactive technique, semi-structured interviews helped the researcher to discuss with women their knowledge, understanding and beliefs about their cultural practice of *chinamwali.* They also helped in understanding the perceptions of men

towards the cultural practice of *chinamwali.* Face to face interviews were held with selected participants of this study.

An interview guide (for men and women) with a prepared list of questions was utilised to ensure consistency on the data being gathered (see Appendix A for the English version of the Interview Schedule for women and Appendix B for the Shona version, and Appendix C for the English version for men of the Interview Schedule and Appendix D for the Shona version). It therefore consisted of both closed and open questions (to give room for probing). Questions such as *"How long have you been living in Mahenye community," "Are you married?" and "Who controls this ceremony?"* were part of the closed questions while open-ended questions included *"What is your view towards chinamwali?", "What is your role in the sexual relationship"* and *"Generally, how do you compare yourself with your peers who have not attended chinamwali?"* The researcher prepared both English and Shona questionnaires so that participants could choose the language they were most comfortable with. All the participants chose Shona. Even though the researcher was not from the Mahenye community, he was able to converse easily in the local vernacular Shona or /Ndau which greatly assisted in gaining entry to the homes of many informants, both men and women. The use of the participants' vernacular language helped in minimising the communication barrier between the participants and the researcher. It also helped with those questions that needed probing and more explanation from the participants. Face to face/ one on one interviews were held with both men and women and they lasted between 45 minutes and one hour and 20 minutes. The research was conducted in three villages of the Mahenye community, and 30 women and 20 men were interviewed. Participants had varied socio-economic status. Some were from economically disadvantaged families while some were from well-to-do families. The idea was to include a sample of the whole community of Mahenye. During the interviews the researcher asked first about areas and topics of greatest priority and the interview schedule was used to guide the interview process. Questions were derived from literature, preliminary research and the research objectives. Conversing with the men and women during the interviews meant that even those who were illiterate could be included, which would not have been the case if written questionnaires had been used.

3.2.2 Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions involve participants sharing their views as a group. They involve people gathered together to discuss a topic of interest (Vaekevisser 1991, 175). A group of 6

to 12 persons is guided by a facilitator and group members are encouraged to talk freely and spontaneously about a certain topic. A focus group discussion guide was prepared both in English and Shona to ensure all the themes were covered in the research (see Appendices E and F). The focus group discussion was useful for gathering fairly in-depth information quickly and at little cost. Focus group discussions allowed exchange of information between the moderator, men and women of Mahenye community. The participants chose places that would be suitable for the focus group discussions which lasted for two to three hours. This was meant to create a comfortable environment for participants in the focus group discussions. Discussion length varied with some participants wanting to express their feelings regarding *chinamwali* while others were not willing to discuss their cultural practices openly.

Four focus group discussions were held in central convenient sites which ensured privacy: Mahenye School, the clinic, the community/CAMPFIRE hall and participants' homes. Participants included representatives of trainers, recent initiates, *khomba* graduate trainees, two school teachers and a nurse (for the female groups) as well as some of the husbands and/ or relatives of the initiates (for the male group). The idea was to have each group in the community represented. The researcher assured the participants of confidentiality. Focus group discussions comprised ten women and ten men per group. Some group members also participated in the interviews. Focus group discussions helped the researcher with gathering dominant themes of the research. This also helped in triangulation of data (see Validity and Reliability section in this chapter). The researcher worked as the moderator, guiding the research and the research assistant worked as the enumerator. The researcher was as neutral as possible when leading discussions and encouraged responses from all participants. One of the challenges faced by the researcher was that some of the women were not comfortable expressing their ideas in a group discussion. Individual interviews were therefore conducted with women who were shy.

3.2.3 Observation

The researcher first visited the community in June 2014 and during this visit and all future visits, he was able to observe how the community of Mahenye operated, how the people behaved and was able to develop an understanding and appreciation of their beliefs and attitudes towards the cultural practice of *chinamwali* as an initiation practice. According to Varkevisser, Pathmanathan and Brownlee (1991, 162), observation is a technique that involves systematically selecting, watching and recording behaviour characteristics of living beings, objects or phenomena. Rugg and Petre (2007, 109) noted that observation can be either direct

or indirect. With observation, the researcher can see how something actually happens including all aspects that respondents may not have thought of mentioning in an interview or group discussion. Observations allow for additional and sometimes more accurate information on behaviour than interviews and questionnaires. However, as *chinamwali* is a sensitive cultural practice, the researcher maintained partial observation and at the same time the male researcher could not take part in the cultural practice directly as it is strictly for women only. Observation was useful as the researcher was able to note some aspects of what the community does often as opposed to what they sometimes claim they do.

3.3 Data collection

The researcher spent various periods in the Shangaan community between 2014 and 2017 observing what people were doing in the community, interviewing people and conducting focus group discussions. The researcher visited the community twice before conducting interviews and discussions to spend some time observing and collecting rich data in the community. Naidu (2010, 3) commented that:

> Anthropology privileges "face to face encounters" and indeed as cliched as it might well sound, ethnography is still touted as the hallmark of the anthropological approach in the social sciences….and…while life is full of naturally occurring (multiple) face to face encounters, ethnography is the conscious seeking out and documenting of such encounters (which might well not otherwise have happened) as part of a disciplinary methodological praxis where social scientists attempt to probe and analyse and further refract these encounters through particular theoretical lenses in order to better understand people and the world views people construct and inhabit.

The first visit to the Mahenye community was in October 2014 when the researcher went into the community for other research on community projects and wildlife resource management programmes. The research project was being funded by a local research organisation which employed a team of data collectors to gather information from the community on the use, conservation and management of wildlife resources. This was the first time that this researcher became aware of the cultural practice of *chinamwali* among the Shangaan people of the Mahenye community. The researcher heard informal discussions about this initiation practice and became interested in exploring it further. Some women were willing to discuss this cultural practice and they were ultimately interviewed and became participants in focus group discussions when the researcher did his fieldwork. With a desire to study the female body in

Gender and Anthropological Studies, the researcher then chose this cultural practice as a focus for research. As a man who had grown up in a patriarchal society with women as subordinates, the researcher also wanted to consider this society from another perspective. Lock (1993, 6) noted that gendered relationships, sexual activity and flow of bodily fluids are culturally constructed and contained. The researcher was interested particularly in the social construction of the female body. A research proposal was therefore developed regarding the cultural practices of the Mahenye community, particularly how these are used to construct 'womanhood' amongst Shangaan women.

The researcher's fluency in the local language and familiarity with other community activities was a definite advantage when interacting with the people in the community during a visit in October 2014. In January 2015 the researcher registered for a PhD in Anthropology with the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard Campus), Department of Anthropology to pursue a doctoral degree. The researcher was fortunate enough to be allocated a supervisor (Professor Maheshvari Naidu) with experience in anthropological studies and the researcher was inspired by her writings about feminist anthropologies, female body construction and how the female body comes to be appropriated within sets of normative scripts. The researcher was also particularly interested in this area of study, specifically African Feminism(s).

The second visit to Mahenye community was in July 2015 when the researcher met with the chief to ask for a gatekeeper's letter. Since the chief knew the researcher from data collection for previous research, after a brief interrogation about the nature of the proposed research he provided the gatekeeper's letter (see Appendix F). The chief was careful to protect his people from strangers with unclear agendas. The researcher assured the chief that his interest was purely academic and that he intended to come back to the community with feedback after completing his studies to help the community with developmental projects that might benefit the community in general, and the women in particular. This was the beginning of a strong relationship with the chief and his community.

The researcher made some 'social' visits to the community before going to collect data specifically. During these visits, the researcher was able to observe how the community tackled several cultural aspects and how various people related to each other in the community. The community, as defined by Some (1993), cited in the Association for Humanistic Psychology (2007, 12), as a place of self-definitions with identity derived from participating in the

community culture. The research proposal was approved and the researcher was granted ethical clearance in October 2016 by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) of the University of KwaZulu Natal (see Appendix G). Field work and data collection began formally in November 2016.

The month of November was 'strategic' or rather opportunistic, since initiates traditionally 'come out of the bush' or so-called training camps around September and October depending on the time they spend in the training camp or the time they started camping. They can easily be identified by their dress (girls wearing beads and headbands/*chihandani*) and their behaviour (*kudonha mazha* – the respect that initiates show when they meet older people soon after the initiation training) (see Figures 5.3 and 5.4). Upon arrival in the community, the researcher met a friend who was now teaching at the nearby Mahenye Secondary School. This friend, being a teacher, was respected in the community and introduced the researcher and his assistant to the chief's aide. Strangers cannot talk to the chief directly but need to go via the chief's aides; approaching the chief directly will attract a fine or penalty and is not a correct procedure. As the researcher had met the chief previously, nothing further was required except *vhuramuromo* or a token of appreciation/ gift after presenting the reason for the visit. One is not supposed to meet a chief empty handed. Any visitor to the chief is supposed to bring the money or a token, and this is an established norm. Other rituals linked to meeting a chief, as would be expected from any visitor, were also observed.

The researcher was then assisted in looking for accommodation in the community and was introduced to another chief's aide who would accompany him in the field. We found accommodation in the community and the following day we began community visits and data gathering. The researcher was struck by how easy it was on some levels to be welcomed into the homes and intimate spaces of many people. The researcher was often treated as a member of the family. Despite November being a 'strategic' month for the researcher's visit and data collection, the initial days were challenging. When the researcher arrived in the community, there had been a tragedy in which an elephant had killed one of the community members. The elephant was killed by the relevant authorities (Parks and Wildlife Management of Zimbabwe) but investigations were on-going. We therefore needed to be clear regarding our agenda each time we met the participants. This was assisted by the gatekeeper's letter, the ethical clearance letter and the school identity as well as the presence of the chief's aide and wife. At first, some women thought the researcher was a donor who wanted to interview and would offer a donation to the community. It was relatively easy to obtain figures on the numbers of females who had

been initiated. We used word of mouth to invite the participants for the interviews and focus group discussions. The women in turn pointed us to other women who were initiated from their own and other villages in the Mahenye community. Some women were teachers and some worked at the clinic. Involving teachers in the research was a 'strategic' move because they teach some of the children who drop out of school in order to attend the *khomba* training. The idea was for them to share their experience of school drop-outs. Some of the teachers were non-initiates; it was important to consider different perceptions towards this cultural practice from the outsiders of the community as well. The same applies to the inclusion of the nurses from the local Mahenye clinic; some of them being non-Shangaan were able to share their perceptions and understanding towards child marriages and child birth. Men were interviewed in August 2017 – the researcher approached some of the men who had participated in one of the focus group discussions of husbands of the female initiates. In the process, the researcher would make notes on everything; part of his research methodology was to observe carefully before he became more accustomed and naturalised over time.

It was challenging to meet with the participants in the community since it was time for land preparation and many people would wake as early as 4 a.m. to go to the fields to prepare the land for farming. The women were, however, generally very cooperative and willing to participate. We held our meetings/ interviews/ focus group discussions from 10a.m. or 11a.m. onwards. The chief's wife and the chief's aide were key informants and helped considerably in selecting the participants who had been initiated. The researcher realised that going into the field alone, without a female assistant and the local assistance or the aides, would mean he would not get in-depth information from the community people since *chinamwali* is a respected and sensitive cultural practice in the Mahenye community. *Chinamwali* or *khomba* is a private cultural practice; in the training camp initiates swear not to divulge information to anyone. The female assistant encouraged the women to 'open up', something they may not have done with a male researcher on his own. The female research assistant also helped to avoid bias in selection (the chief's wife and aide otherwise may have selected only their friends and relatives to participate in the research). The female research assistant debriefed the participants about the research (see Study Description form presented to each participant in Appendices G and H) and highlighted that it was voluntary to participate in the research and that there was no monetary benefit for participating. They were informed that they could pull out of the discussion if they were not comfortable at any time. The female assistant also asked sensitive questions; the participants may not have felt comfortable responding to these to a man. The

research assistant played a central part in the research process and fieldwork since the researcher is a man who attempted to work with the women, among them elderly women who may not have been comfortable sharing information about their cultural practices.

The researcher chose the Mahenye community as he had been born in Chipinge, an area near the community, even though he was not currently staying in that area. The researcher speaks the *Ndau* language which is Mahenye's second language after Shangaan or *Chichangana.* It was thus easy for the researcher to understand terms that the Shangaan people used and there were no barriers in communication, since the researcher understood the Shangaan community in general.

The second field work visit to the community took place in December 2016 during the school and Christmas holidays. The aim was to interview some of the women and young men who had been away in towns for work during previous visits. Many women had gone to town and across the border to look for employment and were now exposed to aspects outside the community linked to modernity and globalisation. The researcher also wanted to hear about their experience in meeting other people who were not their neighbours who might or might not have been initiated or whose understanding of *chinamwali* was different from that of the Shangaan people. The researcher made another visit into the community in June 2017. Women attend *chinamwali* during the winter and so this was also a useful time for the researcher to observe and interview a few women. The month of June was also an ideal time for the researcher to visit the community because the researcher was able to meet some of the teachers of Mahenye School. They were also able to share information about their perception towards this cultural practice as well as provide information about school attendance and drop-outs.

The researcher made another field visit in August 2017. The researcher intended to interview men in the Mahenye community. The idea was to gain an understanding of the male perceptions towards the cultural practice of *chinamwali*. Some of the men who participated in the focus group discussion held in November 2016 took part in the interviews the researcher conducted in August 2017 as well as some men in the community. Some of the participants were the husbands and relatives of the women who were interviewed in November 2016. The research process went smoothly since the researcher had developed a rapport with the community in his previous visits. Moreover, being the month of August, there was not much of activity in the community. People were not as busy as during the farming/ rainy season. Therefore, it was

easy to meet the participants. The researcher managed to discuss issues pertaining to the male understanding of the female body, how they perceive the initiates and non-initiates, among other things. The community had experienced a bumper harvest in 2017 as well as support for farmers from the Government of Zimbabwe. By the time the researcher visited the community in August, people were seen enjoying traditional beer and some were also seen selling their farming produce. The researcher took advantage of these gatherings to meet some of the participants.

3.4 Data presentation

The researcher conducted 30 interviews during his first visit with the women in Mahenye community and four focus group discussions, three for women and one for men. All the groups co-operated well and were willing to share information. The researcher conducted another 20 interviews with men in August 2017 during his third visit into the community. Data presentation from both the interviews and the focus group discussions was done in the form of narratives and a thematic analysis approach was used in analysing the data gathered from these interviews and focus group discussions. Since the cultural practice under study is secretive, the participants were at ease with the use of pseudonyms and all the participants remained anonymous during the whole research process. In data gathering, the researcher noticed that there were a number of young girls below the age of twenty-five who were reported to have gone through the initiation programme. The informants for this research were, however, only women between twenty-five to fifty years old and some men whose relatives, children and wives were initiated. Some of the men who were interviewed had married non-initiates. This was done in order to gain a better understanding of their perception towards this cultural practice and how they view this cultural practice. The same age group (25 – 50 years old) was used for the men as well. The age group twenty-five years and above was selected because these people could be expected to understand the meaning of the practice since (for women) they had already participated in *chinamwali*/ *khomba*. For men, the majority was married to initiates but the idea was to get a balanced argument by interviewing those not married to initiates as well as those who were. The researcher decided to gather data from older men and women and also to hear narratives from the parents and those who provide guidance to the minors. The researcher also interviewed a few men to gain an understanding of their perception and knowledge of this cultural practice.

3.5 Data analysis

Data gathered from the interviews, observing the participants and focus group discussions was analysed using content analysis. Data analysis according to Babbie (2010, 11) looks at patterns in observations and where appropriate, compares what is logically expected with what is actually observed. Gray (2004, 326) noted that content analysis involves the process of breaking data down into smaller units to reveal their characteristic elements of the structure. It also makes use of inferences about data by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics within them. Bhattacherjee (2012, 49) also noted that content analysis is the systematic analysis of the content of a text (for example, who says what, to whom, why, to what extent and with what effect) in a qualitative and quantitative manner. Berg (2001, 240) explained that content analysis is any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages. In content analysis, the researcher examines artifacts of social communication and these are typically written documents, or transcriptions of recorded verbal communication. Thus, with the selected sample, coding was done through content analysis.

After collecting data from the community, the researcher transcribed all data recorded using an audio recorder. The researcher collated the data with field notes and developed themes from the participants' narratives for data analysis. Participants' narratives and quotations were utilised in the research study. The narratives of the participants' experiences and understanding were viewed as texts for gaining a window into the disciplining of women's bodies through inscription (Naidu 2009, 3), or as windows into how *chinamwali* defines the woman and how it constructs the female body. The researcher decided on the purpose, topic, nature and methods of analysis so that the data gathered would address the research objectives and questions. Narratives were gathered from the men and women of Mahenye community.

3.6 Delimitations

The study was geographically concerned with Mahenye because this is where *chinamwali* is practised most, compared to other nearby communities like Chiredzi and Save. Access to Mahenye villages was practical. This study was ethnographic rather than theoretical; the researcher explored cultural phenomena through systematic study of the cultural practices of the people of the Mahenye community. Therefore the research findings are as a result of ethnographic studies rather than theoretical underpinnings. The narratives suggested that men

and women have the knowledge and understanding of *chinamwali:* they know what it entails to be initiated, what is involved in the practice and what is taught in the training camps.

3.7 Reliability and validity

Marczyk, Dematteo and Fastinger (2005, 102) defined reliability as consistency or dependability of a measurement technique. Reliability is concerned with consistency and stability of the scores obtained from a measure or assessment technique over time and across settings or conditions. Gray (2004, 219) noted that for a research instrument to be reliable, it must consistently measure what it sets out to measure. In this case, the results from the interviews and focus group discussions must be the same if done again and again. Battacherjee (2012, 49) mentioned that reliability is the degree to which the measure of a construct is consistent or dependable and validity is the extent to which a measure adequately represents the underlying construct that it is supposed to measure. Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014, 38) highlighted that in reliability, the underlying issue is whether the process of the study is consistent or reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods. They viewed validity as the truth value, that is do the findings of the study make sense, are they credible to the people we study and to our readers, do we have an authentic portrait of what we are looking at? Reliability also extends to which measurements can be repeatable on different occasions, performed under different conditions and yield the same undoubted results. For this research, the information gathered from the interviews and focus group discussions was tape recorded and field notes were written. Photos were also taken in the research process. Permission to tape record and take photos was granted by the participants (see Appendices I and J for informed consent in English and Shona). The researcher used triangulation in data gathering whereby he observed the participants in the proceedings, used the interviews and focus group discussions (in gathering the information from the women) and another focus group discussion and interviews (in gathering data from the men). The researcher maintained a good rapport and convinced people to participate and not to hide information, to maintain consistency in and dependability of the information gathered. The researcher made sure that all the participants contributed (voluntarily), especially in the focus group discussions. The researcher visited the community several times in order to gather more relevant and rich data from the community – initially in 2014, in November and December 2016 and in August 2017. Gray (2004, 219) highlighted that there are tendencies of bias in reliability and validity and this can occur for a number of reasons: in the departure from interviewing instructions, poor maintenance of

rapport with the respondents, altering factual questions, rephrasing of attitude questions, careless prompting, biased probes, asking questions out of sequence, biased recording of verbatim answers. All this was avoided by the researcher in order to ensure consistency and to avoid bias in the research results. The researcher did not change the structure of the interviews and focus group discussion questions. The researcher recorded all the verbatim answers and other information gathered for the researchers was written down, as field notes, for data presentation and analysis.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethics refers to how values and moral principles are integrated in the actions and reflections of research (Stinge, Matterud and Midtgarden 2009, 9). Sieber and Stanley (1998) cited by Marczyk et al. (2005, 255) noted that these principles are intended to protect research participants from harm. In this regard, the researcher must clarify the aims and nature of the research to the participants before data gathering. When conducting research, there are ethical issues to consider. These aim at protecting those involved in the research, some who may not be able to represent themselves in the event that they may be misrepresented. It is important to always consider the possibility that we may inflict harm on others while carrying out research. This was particularly important since the target group consisted largely of women and the nature of the research is sensitive to the community. According to Varkevisser et al. (1991, 168), harm may be caused by violating informants' right to privacy by posing sensitive questions or giving access to records that may contain personal data and observing the behaviour or informants without their being aware or failing to observe or respect certain cultural values, traditions or taboos. Ethical considerations remained uppermost in the researcher's mind throughout the research study. In this regard, the researcher debriefed the chief of Mahenye community through his aide and his headmen about the intention, the nature, aims and objectives of the study before engaging into the research. The chief provided a gatekeeper's letter and permission in July 2015. Relevant authorities must be informed always. They are also available to protect the researcher if anything goes wrong in their community. The community belongs to them and one cannot simply visit or do anything without the permission of the leaders of the community. The researcher's full identity was also revealed to the chief, the headmen and his aide, including his name, surname, name of the institution in which the researcher is studying, name and surname of the research assistant, ethical clearance approval, details of the supervisor and the ethics committee and the nature and purpose of the

study. This greatly reduces the degree of suspicion and respondents talked freely in most cases. This was done bearing in mind the sensitivity of the study and that the natural resources and wild animals that are in the community may be poached or stolen by strangers. Participants were not coerced to take part in the research and through the research assistant; the researcher debriefed the participants about the research before starting the interviews and focus group discussions. Participants could voluntarily participate or withdraw. In the briefings, the participants were equally informed of the contribution that their participation would make to the study and that the research was solely for academic purposes. Voluntary participation was particularly important since the subject was a sensitive one and some women may not have been comfortable discussing it with men or 'strangers'.

Informed consent to interview, recording of interviews, focus group discussions and the right to publish information gathered (for academic purposes only) was granted by the participants in writing. Participants were asked to sign informed consent forms indicating that they were participating of their own free will and aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time (see Appendices I and J – Informed Consent Form in English and Shona). Permission was sought at the beginning of every interview and focus group discussion. Informed consent has been described as the cornerstone of human rights protections (Marczyk et al. 2005, 255). All the participants were aware of the research and its objectives. Coercion or forcing someone to participate in research is antithetical to the idea of respect for persons and is clearly unethical. The informed consent forms or letters contained necessary details of the school, the supervisor's details, the details of the student and the research assistant and the details of University of KwaZulu-Natal research office. The intention was to build trust and encourage honesty from the participants. Where required, the informed consent was read to research participants. All the interviews and focus group discussions were recorded and permission to record was sought from the participants as well. The researcher decided to record all the information digitally so that nothing got lost whilst compiling the data gathered and/or when transcribing data. It was done so that all the information is captured in data gathering. This was also important in focus group discussions where a number of participants were making contributions – recording their discussions was crucial. Anonymity and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study through the use of pseudonyms. Some participants decided to use their initiation or *khomba* names such as Makhanani, Njakeni, Mudhlayi, Hlalati and Tsatsawani among others, as their pseudonyms. Some men also used pseudonyms such as Kingstone, Kule, Dickson and Chinhamo. There were some areas where anonymity was not

possible, for example, reference to the chief of Mahenye and some places mentioned in the research. Any reference to the chief meant the chief of Mahenye. The researcher reassured participants that the data that he was collecting was going to be stored safely. All transcriptions were saved onto the researcher's computer and protected by passwords. All the field notes were kept in a safe place.

The researcher made sure that the participants were not harmed in the research. Berg (2001, 43) noted that if the amount of benefit outweighs the amount of potential risk harm, then the research may be seen from an ethical point of view as permissible. The researcher ensured controlled access for sensitive cultural information that had not been explicitly authorised for general distribution as determined by the members of the local community or elders of the Shangaan community. This included information on girls' initiation which was supposed to be exclusively shared among women. The researcher made it clear to the participants that the research was voluntary and no rewards were promised in the process. This was meant to avoid bias and maintain objectivity in research. The researcher always made appointments prior to the interviews and focus group discussions. The study was in compliance with all the requirements of conducting research as prescribed by the University of KwaZulu Natal Ethics Committee. The researcher gave the participants the opportunity to ask questions at all times during the research process.

3.9 Theoretical framework

The theories of Social Constructivism and Radical Feminism (theories) were used to guide this study. According to Babbie (2004, 33), theories shape and direct research efforts, pointing towards likely discoveries through empirical observation. He went on to say that theories, by analogy, direct researchers' 'flashlights' where they are most likely to observe interesting patterns of social life. Creswell (1999, 16) noted that a researcher should be able to describe a project's potential contribution to fundamental knowledge by describing how the study fits into theoretical traditions in social science or applied fields in ways that will be new, insightful and creative. The researcher used social constructivism theory throughout the research in analysing how the female body is socially constructed by social norms and socio-cultural practices. Radical feminist theory was used as well for giving voice to women who viewed culture as their main oppressor. Radical feminists believe that society plays a central role in constructing

the female body for the benefit of the men. Thus radical feminists see the need to fight and address those inequalities.

3.9.1 Social constructivism

Kuper et al. (2008, 4) defined constructivism as a belief about knowledge (epistemology) that asserts that the reality we perceive is constructed by our social, historical and individual contexts and so there can be no absolute shared truth. Creswell (2003, 1) noted that the assumption with social constructivism is that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. The subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. They are not simply imprinted on the individuals but are formed through interaction with others and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individual lives. These subjective meanings also highlight that women are not simply products of their culture, but they can also negotiate their socio-cultural meanings, socially. Social constructivism was deemed a suitable theory in this study since it revealed how a particular cultural practice (*chinamwali*) constructs identity and 'womanhood'. Identity and *chinamwali* in this case are not given but are constructed or learned through socialisation. *Chinamwali* is regarded as a social pillar in the Mahenye community. Both men and elderly women encourage young girls and women to be initiated as a cultural 'norm'; being initiated places people within groups in the community (*zvikhombana* or *zvichuta*). Culture is deeply rooted and culturally embedded. Thus, the theory seemed relevant for looking at how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* and its relationship to the construction of womanhood is learned through social and historical interaction and how it has come to have strong social meaning to the women in Mahenye community. It creates a sense of belonging and identity among the Shangaan people.

With social constructivism, the meaning is created by individuals through social interaction, and reality is constructed through human activity and human behaviour. Crotty (1998) in Creswell (2003) highlighted several assumptions associated with social constructivism. These are: meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting, humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspective – that is we are born in a world of meaning bestowed upon us by our culture and the basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community. The theory can be linked to August Comte's positivist theory: he argued that the social world exists externally to the researcher (mind of the individual is a *tabula rasa)* and that its properties can be measured directly through observation and that reality consists of

what is available to the senses, that is what can be seen, smelt and touched (Berg 2001, 8). The theory also works with Blummer and Mead's Symbolic Interactionist Theory which argued that what humans say and do are results of how they interpret their social world and that human behaviour depends on learning rather than biological instinct (Berg 2001, 8).

Social constructivism allows us to have an understanding of the manner in which identities come to be created and institutionalised in this case by *chinamwali*. With *chinamwali*, the definition of a woman emerges as the product of social encounters, conceived in this context of *khomba*/initiation ceremony. This theory is useful in understanding how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* is culturally embedded and is learned through interaction as it has been argued that the women participate in this cultural practice in order to fulfil cultural obligations or in order to fit into the peer group. This theory can also help to explain how the women strive to belong to a particular group, in this case the initiated one. Knowledge in this case is constructed through interaction with other community members. There are no classes to be attended for one to know about *chinamwali*. The idea is scripted for the women and is learned through interaction with other peers in the community as a way of creating the socialised female body. Thus, all meaningful accounts of the real worlds are mediated by the social contexts in which such accounts are constructed. Older women have taken their children to be initiated as a way of transitioning them from childhood to adulthood. They themselves participated in this practice because they were socialised to do this as *chinamwali* is culturally constructed. *Chinamwali* practice is thus an example of social construction. The theory is key in looking at how the female body is ascribed and socially constructed through interaction of the people in the community. Human life exists as it does due to social and interpersonal relationships. This theory was used in order to probe the cultural practice of *chinamwali* further and to prove that the world itself is socially constructed.

3.9.2 Radical feminism

Feminism, according to Kuper et al. (2008, 2), is a theoretical framework that is driven by an interest in women's experiences often focusing on power differentials with the goal of addressing differences in society. The definition of feminism has expanded from an early notion of challenging women's subordination to men and arguing for their equal rights, to seeing and understanding the social world from the vantage points of women, to changing systems of oppression based on Western masculine's relations of ruling (Winkler n.d.). Smith (1982), cited by Gaidzanwa (n.d), noted that feminism is the political theory and practice that

seeks to free all women of all colours, classes, abilities, sexual orientation and ages from all forms of oppression. Definitions of feminism are always changing and are never single, being subject to specific understanding of the theorist. Naidu (2010, 2) noted that feminist theory can be seen as having emerged from feminist movements as the questioning and explanation of the materiality of women's lives come to be mirrored in the scrutiny in the level of discourse; feminist scholarship worked to unravel how these experiences and even (the construction and understanding of) "woman" herself come to be articulated. Feminists have pointed out how patriarchy retards women's development in the community (Harris 2005, 30). It therefore tends to define women as the 'other'. According to Gray (2004, 14), feminism regards women as the oppressed class. He argued that because men come from a position of dominance their knowledge of the world is distorted. It therefore associates women with sex, birth, age, and flesh and these are the experiences of the women in their everyday lived and bodily experiences. Feminists argue that without gender as a central analytical category, social life – work, family, economy, politics, education, and religion – cannot be adequately studied. Women are marginalised by the cultural beliefs and patriarchal expectations which define what a woman must do in the community. Women have access to a deeper reality through their personal experiences (of oppression) and through their feelings and emotions. Arhihenbuwa and Webster (2004, 2) highlighted that culture plays a pivotal role in determining the level of health of the individual, family and the community. This is particularly relevant in the context of Africa where values of extended family and community significantly influence the behaviour of the individual.

Feminism views women as active agents of their own lives. It rejects the discourses that women are passive and suffer from oppression and victimisation. The use of feminist theory in this research will therefore help in exposing the vulnerability and oppression of women under patriarchal beliefs. Patriarchy tends to construct the woman in general but the female body in particular. Klu and Marwe (2013, 1) postulated that patriarchy is a common social system in Sub Saharan Africa and it has been instrumental in entrenching inequalities amongst men and women. Feminists give voice to the women, and they also vouch for the political, social and legal reforms of gender. The proponents of this theory include among others, Ama Ata Aidoo, Simone de Beauvoir, Bell Hooks, Filomina Chioma Steady, Harriet Manteneau and Marianne Weber, and these theorists have argued that women were either almost ignored, or briefly discussed and then dismissed, or located within specific social locations such as the family. A number of feminist theories have contributed to our understanding of women. Early

sociological theorists have added to the theoretical notion of feminism, such as Comte, who argued that marriage was the positivist discipline of the undisciplined, for which it was necessary for the feminine to be subordinated to the masculine, proving that "equality of the sexes, of which so much is said, is incompatible with all social existence. Durkheim saw women as "more primitive" but also necessary for their civilising and stabilising effect of men. Weber argued that from idealising the public/private split, both critiqued the older patriarchal household, where women were subordinated to men and analysed the changed domestic relations due to modern rationalisation processes.

Some (self-defined) feminists include among others, "familial feminists", "integral feminists", Christian feminists", "socialist feminists", "male feminists" "liberal feminists", "Marxist feminists", "African feminists", "radical feminists" and the "postmodern feminists". Liberal feminists argued for equal rights and a level playing field and critiqued but did not reject institutions that tended to discriminate against women, explaining that with relatively minor reforms women could achieve equality through their own efforts. Marxist feminists saw the primary source of oppression in the economic system that created systems of exploitation and wanted to do away with them. Socialist feminists had a real concern over race and class issues including welfare rights. Debates focused on sexism and racism and patriarchy and capitalism. This study uses the radical feminist approach in order to address challenges faced by women in a bid to address gender imbalances in male dominated communities.

Radical feminists believe that the primary contradiction or most important conflict is conflict between men and women. They have tended to reject all institutions (in this case *chinamwali*) as oppressive. They saw sex oppression as the primary and most basic structure that led to all other oppressions and exploitation. Radical feminists in this regard argue that sexual matters should not be confined to the private but also should be found in the public sphere. The radical feminists offer ways to expose women's vulnerability bringing what is considered as known to the public sphere. Feminists tended to create organisations that excluded men. In response to patriarchy appropriation and exploitation of the female body, radical feminist sociologists focused their attentions on it, in particular incest, health care and sexuality. Nachescu (2009, 1) argued that

> The dictionary says radical means root, coming from the Latin word for root… and that is what we meant by calling ourselves radical. We were interested in getting to the roots of problems in society…The roots of problems in society were to be analyzed in

> consciousness-raising groups, small women-only settings where women discussed the political dimension of their multifaceted experiences, covering a wide range of topics from early childhood to work, relationships with men, and feelings about one's body…

Brooke (1980, 3) noted that

> … to recapitulate, the main goal of the women's liberation movement is not: ending racism, capitalism, imperialism, militarism, or nuclear power, instituting goddess religion, matriarchy, or a female nation, making energy circles, or friends, having places to go, becoming a stronger or better person, or a lesbian, heterosexual, bisexual or pansexual. It is to end male supremacy: the domination by less than half of the world population of the rest…

The radical feminists believe in revolution to end the male supremacy. *Chinamwali* is 'patriarchal' in nature and the decision made by women to be initiated is influenced mostly by culture. The radical feminists tend to address negative societal perceptions towards the non-initiates by men and other women. Radical feminists name men as the oppressors and intend to end that male supremacy (Brooke 1980, 3). It is the bodies of women in the developing nations and the bodies of African women in the global-south that have been rendered 'docile' by a cluster of colonial and postcolonial historical entanglements, as well as by traditional and cultural scripts that hold sway over how body and in this case sexuality should be enacted and enjoyed (Naidu 2013, 4). Radical feminist theory was the most applicable theory to this study of *chinamwali* and to how women have to fight these cultural scripts and their entanglements in the community. They also seek to reduce male bias in research findings and the scholarly production of knowledge.

With *chinamwali*, all that the women were supposed to do was created and shaped by men in the community using patriarchal connotations. According to Simone De Beauvoir (1953, 106), women were dethroned by the advent of private property and their lot through the centuries has been bound up with private property, their history in large part involved with that of patrimony It is this discourse that the radical feminists sought to end/address. With patriarchy, women had to inherit their legitimate rights from men. Feminism therefore also seeks to reduce male bias in research findings. Women have the right to decide what they want to do in life, they have the right to not participate in the cultural practice of *chinamwali* which is scripted by men in line with patriarchal discourse. The notion of imprinting what describes or defines a woman is what feminists in general, but radical feminists, African feminists and Anthropological

feminists in particular, are fighting to end. Using feminist theory insights, this study has attempted to understand women's sexuality and gendered inequalities in the context of *chinamwali.*

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the methodologies and the methods that have been used in the research study. The research is qualitative and epistemological in nature. The tools that were used in data gathering (i.e. the semi-structured interview questionnaire and the focus group discussion guide) have been discussed as well. Ethical standards have also been discussed in this chapter. These include confidentiality, debriefing, avoiding harm among the participants, and informed consent. The chapter discussed data collection methods and techniques, data presentation methods, data presentation and analysis procedures as well as study limitations. The chapter also outlined the theoretical frameworks that have been used in the research in probing how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* is used to construct 'womanhood' in the Mahenye community. These are social constructivism and radical feminism.

CHAPTER 4: SHANGAAN CULTURE, WOMEN'S PERCEPTION AND UNDERSTANDING OF *CHINAMWALI*

4.0 Introduction

This chapter looks at the cultural complex of the Shangaan community, and the women's perception and understanding of *chinamwali* as an initiation practice. The chapter has four sections starting with the introduction as the first section. The second section is concerned with the women's knowledge and understanding of the cultural practice of *chinamwali* and how the Shangaan woman is defined by this cultural practice. The third section looks at the perceptions of the women towards *chinamwali* cultural practice. The argument is that *chinamwali* "defines" the woman; that is how she behaves, performs tasks and how she relates with the community – good behaviour in this regard is attributed to *chinamwali* training. It also appears to be discretionary and disciplinary to the female body. The chapter therefore explores the cultural features which define womanhood of a Shangaan woman, in the context of Shangaan 'culture'. This section will be followed with an analysis of the data gathered with regard to the female knowledge, understanding and perceptions towards the cultural practice of *chinamwali* as a rite of passage.

Women who participated in the research had previous exposure to and experiences and some had attended the initiation ceremony. Some were recent graduates, graduate trainees and some were trainers *(vatsvatsi / mudzabhi)* of *chinamwali*. The initiates were also known as *zvikhombana* in Shangaan, which means learners, and the trainers/elders of the community were also known as *vatsvatsi* or women who have been initiated and now have the experience to train the young initiates. The majority of the women noted that they participated in *chinamwali* to fulfil cultural obligations

4.1. Understanding *chinamwali*

The women who were interviewed were aged between 25 years and 50 years old. The majority of them were born in the Mahenye community and they had been observing and participating in this cultural practice of *chinamwali* for many years. They had an understanding of what initiation entails; as well as its pros and cons. According to them, failure to attend to these initiation ceremonies was taboo and showed disrespect to the cultural beliefs, norms, values and cultural practice. Only a few women were not born in Mahenye; some relocated to Mahenye and some were in this community because of marriage. Some were initiated because

they wanted to belong to the group and 'be like' other initiates and be part of the bigger group or the larger community. The narratives below are some of the explanations given by women in some of the interviews and focus group discussions.

Fifty year old Mudhlayi was one of the women who were born in Mahenye community and who had been initiated when she was 12 years old commented that;

> *Ini ndakazvarirwa muno mudunhu rekwaMahenye, ndiri Muchangani, ndakakura ndichingoona vanhu vachienda kudondo/ kusango kunotambirwa kubvira pandakazvarwa. Ndakakura ndichiudzwa nevakuru kuti tinofanira kutambirwa kana tave vasikana vaakutanga kuteera. Ndakazoendawo kundotabirwa ndava nemakore gumi nemashanu, munguva yechando. Ndakaenda nekuti ndakangokura ndichionawo vamwe vachindotambirwa ndichiudzwa kuti zvazvakanakira muupenyu hwedu kuti kana ukatambirwa unova mukadzi chaiye anoremekedzwa munharaunda mune vanwe.*
> *I was born in Mahenye community, I am a Shangaan. I grew up in this community as well. I decided to be initiated because I have been seeing young girls and women going through the initiation process. They would go into the training camp for some months, they would spend those months being initiated and trained to be real women. This is the practice that I have been seeing since I was born and it is a norm that at a certain age, girls must be initiated. I was then initiated when I was 15 years old with some of my school mates. I wanted to have an understanding of what other girls will be doing when they go through the initiation process. It therefore gives one respect if you are initiated and you are being seen as a 'real' or new woman.*

Forty seven year old Thabitha, a resident of Mahenye community, looking very shy, said to me with a soft voice,

> *...isu tiri vagari vemuno munharaunda yeMahenye, takaberekerwa muno. Vabereki vangu vari muno uye vakakurirawo muno. Kutambirwa kana kuti tsika yekhomba takakura tichikuona. Kutambirwa kana kuti kuenda kukhomba ndokunoita kuti unzi uyu mukadzi chaiye anoremekedzwa pane vamwe vakadzi munharaunda. Paunodzoka wakapfeka hembe dzakanaka uye dzakachena uchibva kudondo/ kundotambirwa, nharaunda yese inobva yaziva kuti uyu ndiye mukadzi chaiye asina kunyadzisa dzinza, akatambirwa, ane chiremerera uye anofanira kuremekedzwa munharaunda.*
> *I was born in this community and we grew up seeing this practice which transitions girls to womanhood. With initiation, one gains respect in the community. With*

chinamwali/ initiation one becomes a 'real' woman. Initiation therefore fulfills the sense of belonging and cultural identity amongst women in the community. The way you behave changes (positively) because of the lessons that were taught in the training camps. You will be respected for upholding the values of the Shangaan community.

Rose, a twenty seven year old initiate and a resident of Mahenye community echoed Mudhlayi, saying,

> *...ndakaberekerwa muno ndikakurira muno munharaunda yekwa Mahenye zvakare ndiri Muchangani ndakangoonawo vanhu vakuru vachindotambirwa ndichiri mwana mudiki asi paiuya zvikhombana tairambidzwa kusvika pedyo nekuti tainzi hatifaniri kuzviona. Tanga tichiri vana vadiki. Zvavaiita zvacho zvanga zvisiri zvezera redu isu tichiri vadiki asi zvakandipawo shungu dzekuti kana ndakura ndoda kuzotambirwa. Vabereki vangu ndovakazonditi enda undotambirwawo sezviri kuita vamwe vasikana pandanga ndatanga kuteera. Vakandiudza zvazvakanakira kuenda kunotambirwa tsika yekhomba iyi uye dzakanga dziri shungu dzavo kuti mwana wavo atambirwewo zvakaita vamwe vasikana vemunharaunda...*
>
> *I was born in this community; I grew up in this community as well. As I was growing up I have been seeing older girls being initiated. I couldn't join them since I was young. We were not allowed to mix with the initiates when they come back from the training camp. That's when I became interested in being initiated. My parents later on encouraged me to be initiated when I started menstruation. They argued that I was a grown up person and I was supposed to be initiated so that I become a real woman like any other women in the community. It was their wish for me to be initiated as part of growing up.*

The narratives given by the women show that the knowledge and understanding of *chinamwali* is passed from one generation to another through socialisation. The influence is also based on what the people in the community believe and put value in, in this case *chinamwali/khomba*. The researcher established that the practice can be seen as subordination of women. These women were born into a community where they saw other women and girls being initiated, hence reconstructing the female body and identity (Bagnol and Mariano 2012). They further stated that identity is built on relationships within the family and society and also a girl's growing perception of her body (ibid., 70). *Chinamwali* is therefore learnt as a social construct and it creates the socialised body (Lock 1993, 3). Durkheim noted that "the man is double",

that is a "universal physical body" and the higher morally imbued socialised body. Girls were eager to know what other girls were being taught in the training camp; they were able to go and learn as well and came back as the 'right women' who could fit into the group of other women who had been initiated. Radical feminists are against this form of socialisation whereby women and girls grow up knowing certain attributes which they assume are appropriate to them or their bodies. This is because they view women as an oppressed class already or as second class citizens (see Gray 2008, 14) and they have a sense of needing to fight vehemently against these preconceived perceptions about women.

The researcher realised that just like the dress of the female cleaner (see Naidu 2009) which was argued to imprint the "relations of domination" amongst the women, *chinamwali* also appears to do the same with the women or young girls who were not initiated not being respected in the community. *Chinamwali* also defines certain scripts onto the bodies of women who took part in this cultural practice, thus it plays a central role in defining and constructing women. According to Bagnol and Mariano (2012, 74), by (re)constructing her body, a woman is 'preparing' to take on her role as a sexual partner, guaranteeing the sexual satisfaction of her partner and "hanging on to him". However, some of the women interviewed were not initiated even though they had been born into the Mahenye community. Their understanding of life was also different from those who were initiated. Hence, there are different perceptions towards this cultural practice.

Forty five year old Tsatsawani, mother of two, who was not born in Mahenye community but was initiated, added that,

> *Ini handisi wemuno, handina kuzvarirwa mudunhu rino, ndakatouyawo mudunhu rino kubudikidza nekuroorwa kwandakaitwa muno mudunhu rekwaMahenye, kwedu kwandakaberekerwa hatiiti tsika yekutambirwa asi pandakaroorwawo mudunhu rino ndakabva ndanotambirwa nekuti ndizvo zvinotarisirwa kuti mudzimai wese aite kana achigara uye kana akaroorwa mudunhu rino reMachangana. Vekumhuri yandakaroorwa vanotarisira kuti mudzimai wese aende kukhomba achinotambirwa nevamwe vakadzi kuti azive zvaunotarisirwa kuita kana akaroorwa mudunhu rekwa Mahenye. Semuroora asina kukurira mudunhu rekwa Mahenye kana ukasatambirwa hauwani ruremekedzo rwakakodzera runopiwa mamwe madzimai.*
>
> *I was not born in this community and I come to stay in this community when I got married. In my culture and where I was born, we don't practice this culture of initiating*

women. When I got married into this family in Mahenye community and because I wanted to know what other women do in the training camp since they all kept it as a secret. I also wanted to be part of the community, not to be secluded in other cultural activities if I'm not initiated. If I was not initiated I wasn't going to be respected just like any other women who were initiated. More so the community looked upon me to be initiated just like other women in this community. In fact my relationship with other women and the family members changed positively when I was initiated.

From the above explanations given by the women, it is noted that the majority of the women were born in Mahenye community and initiation was like a traditional norm of their community which they observed happening as they grew up. They were expected to abide by the rules and follow this cultural practice too. It was meant to embody discipline amongst women and young girls. In their married life, women are expected to conform to the traditions and cultural norms; hence the need to be initiated. This is the same in the VaRemba tradition wherein every woman married is supposed to be initiated (Shoko 2009, 2). Amongst the Tete province of Mozambique, various vaginal practices that shape the female sexual identity are essential elements not only in differentiating between male and female, but also in differentiating between the woman who is "prepared", "has weight" and the woman who is "not prepared", "without weight" and is thus rejected. *Chinamwali* therefore tends to inform how the women negotiate their identities in the community and she also gains a social position and a socio-cultural body that meets the expectation of her group. This identity is cemented by processes they become involved in. Hence *chinamwali* tends to create group cohesion and identity. Even some of the women who were not born in Mahenye community were initiated because this was the norm and it created a sense of belonging amongst the women. The experience therefore tended to create social as well as spiritual support amongst the women in the community.

One of the women who was interviewed had not been initiated and she didn't see the importance of being initiated at all. Nokase, a 40 year old widow, was born in Mahenye into a 'well to do' family and during the time when she was supposed to be initiated, she was staying with her aunt in town. Nokase had this to say,

Ndaidawo kutambirwa asi ndakatadza nekuti ndanga ndisiri muno munharaunda pakanotambirwa vezera rangu. Ndanga ndichigara natete vangu kuchirungu mazuva acho. Pandakazodzoka munharaunda muno handina kuona zvakandikoshera kuti nditambirwe nekuti kuchirungu kwandaigara hazvisaikosheswa. Saka handina

kutambirwa. Murume wangu akashaya, uye anga asina dambudziko nazvo pamazuva okutanga. Nekufa kwaakatoita uku handisisna basa nekutambirwa asi anga akunetsa kuti nditambirwe zvakaitawo mamwe mudzimai emudunhu rino. Vana vangu vasikana vakatambirwa nekuti madzitete avo vaida kuti vatambirwe sezvavakaitwawo uye zvakaita vamwe vasikana munharaunda muno…

I was born in Mahenye community but grew up with my aunt in town. When the time was ripe for me to be initiated I was still staying with my aunt in town. Some girls of my age were initiated during that time when I was in town. When I came back into this community, I got married but I didn't see the importance of being initiated since it was not part of me. Unfortunately my husband passed on some five years back, early days into our marriage he didn't have the problem with me not being initiated but there was a time when he would talk about that subject and insist that I was supposed to be initiated. He would encourage me to be initiated so that I become like other women who were initiated. He would tell me that if I am initiated I will like other women and I will also attend some cultural activities in the community. However, my children are initiated. There has been pressure from the family, friends and relatives insisting that the girls were supposed to be initiated so that they become part of the family (of the initiates). I was sometimes accused of not encouraging my children to be initiated because I myself wasn't initiated. The whole clan would laugh at me citing that I was (chichuta) non initiate and doesn't know how to be a good mother to the children and a good wife to my husband.

It appears that not being initiated is not 'tolerated' in the Shangaan culture. It shows that social categories are literally defined on and into the body and everything that happens is a signifier of socially constructed local, social and moral worlds. Nokase's explanation shows that even though she was not worried about being initiated, she was not regarded as a 'real woman' in the community since initiation was significantly important among the Shangaan women. As a rite of passage, *chinamwali* is an integral part of people's cultural and social lives. The practice is the community's embodied cultural capital which is consciously acquired and both actively and passively inherited through socialisation, culture and tradition. It socially constructs what is supposed to be done and adhered to in the community. It defines what is 'normal' and what is not for failure to be initiated is not tolerated or socially accepted in the Mahenye community.

From the above narratives, it appears young women grew up seeing other women being initiated. They grew up with the understanding that for one to be a 'real woman', one has to go through the initiation programme. They saw themselves as 'not full' and not 'new' if they did not transition from one stage of life to another, from childhood to adulthood/ womanhood. The community therefore cements the cultural relations of the women in the community by emphasising passing through all the phases of life in order to graduate to adulthood. The interest to be initiated is therefore cemented by social interaction and social construction amongst the women in the community. This is also evidenced by Nokase's explanation when she mentioned that her children were initiated in order to fulfill the cultural obligations of being initiated. Hence Nokase somehow did not pass through the gateway to societal acceptance although her children did. Her children were able to participate in social and political activities in the community as they are part of the group which makes decisions in the community.

The majority of the women respondents claimed they had been seeing women and girls taking part in the initiation programme since they were born in Mahenye community and they regarded this as a mandatory cultural practice. A few women who were interviewed were not born into the village but had gone through the training in order to become part of the group of women who had been initiated. From the discussions, being initiated was about following cultural rules, which therefore dictate the way in which basic cultural norms are expressed. Therefore, *chinamwali* proved to be socially constructed as the women, through socialisation, were influenced to be initiated. Culture in this regard deals with meanings and symbolic patterning while society has been used to deal with the organisation of social relationships within groups.

Munthali and Zulu (2007, 1) noted that the deep significance of initiation ceremonies in some communities and attending these ceremonies symbolises that one is not a child anymore and therefore is able to engage in sexual activities. Young girls can then be married at a young age because they are now viewed as "old people" (after being initiated). The Shangaan women's bodies, like the 'Zulu bodies' (Naidu 2011b, 1), are positioned to meet men's or cultural expectations, that is satisfying men in bed and taking good care of the husband. Thus, *chinamwali* is viewed as essential for the Shangaan women; it is made for and done to the body, through cultural mechanisms. According to the WHO Pan American Health Organisation (2012, 3), "several practices are performed in response to strong social conventions and supported by key social norms, thus failure to conform often results in

harassment and exclusion from important communal events and support networks, as well as discrimination by peers…"

Initiation, as it marks the transition from childhood to adulthood, is one of the cultural practices that every woman was supposed to go through amongst the Shangaan women. The initiates generally go into a training camp for three months during the winter and initiation training assigns them responsibility of respecting elders, caring for their families, being good mothers, being obedient, caring and respectful wives to their husbands and the community in general. They are also taught how to satisfy a man in bed, the rules for taking care of families or clans, and cultural values.

Some women went to the training without knowing what was involved. Mhango commented that,

> *…ndakakura ndichingoona vanhu vachindotambirwa asi handisaiziva kuti zvinorevei uye kuti chii chinonzi kutambirwa chaicho. Ndaingonzwa kuti kudondo kunonakidza chete nevamwe vaiendako pandaivaona vachidzoka vachiimba nekutamba. Ndakatoenda kunotambirwa ndisingazivi kuti ndainoitei mudondo chaizvo asi shungu dzanga dziri dzekuda kuona zvinoitwako nevamwe vezera rangu pavaienda kudondo. Chandakanyatsoona chakachinja hunhu hwavo pavakabva mudondo. Ndakazoziva zvizhinji ndava kutodzidziswa…*
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> *I grew up seeing people going to the training camp for initiations only and I didn't know what chinamwali entailed. Other initiates were just telling me that the training was interesting but they didn't reveal more details as they were saying the teachings were not supposed to be told anyone for it kills the zeal to be initiated as well. I was so anxious to know what was happening and what they were being taught in the training camp. What I realised was the change in behaviour of these young women and girls when they graduate from the programme. I envied that. I knew more about the initiation when I was in the training camp already that's when I enjoyed the training and teachings as well since we were involved in singing and dancing as a group of initiates. I didn't even know the reason for me to be initiated.*

Mhango's explanation reflects that the reason why she was initiated was to gain an understanding of what was happening in the training camp based on what she had been seeing when she was growing up. Mhango wanted to gain an insight into what it entailed to be initiated as young women and girls are not allowed to divulge what they were taught in the training

camp. She therefore noticed the change in behaviour of the young women and girls after graduation. Girls would now respect the elders, the family members and the other community members. They would wear headbands and beads to attract men or boys. There is also an assumption that initiates tends to be smarter and more hygienic after the training sessions. As part of *chinamwali* training, girls are coached to be 'well behaved'. The teachings are meant to remove the so-called childish mindset amongst the girls and replace this with an 'adulthood mindset' that connects the girl with the society where she will share life with other initiates. From Mhango's explanation, the behaviour of the women appears to change after the training since the initiates are taught to practise what they were taught in the training camp. The woman also wanted to gain acceptance to the community as initiation is said to integrate women into the community.

Forty seven year old Thabitha, a married grandmother with one daughter and four grandchildren commented that,

> *...kutambirwa kana kuti tsika yeukhomba zvinoreva kuenda kudondo nevamwe vasikana uchindodzidziswa tsika nemagariro eupenyu hwedu. Unondodzidziswa kuchengeta, vana, murume, hama neshamwari dzekumba kwako nekwauchazonoroorwa, unondodzidziswazve kuti murume anochengetwa sei, anopiwa sei mvura yekumwa nekugeza, uye kuti anorarwa naye sei, nekuti uchengetedze imba yako yawakaroorwa. Kunenge kune mudzimai echikuru akatambirwawo kare nevana mbuya, (vatsvatsi) ndivo vanenge vachidzidzisa tsika vacho…"*
>
> *Chinamwali entails going into the training camp for three to four months of seclusion from the family and spend the whole time being trained on how to take good care of the children, family in general and the husband in particular. You will be accompanied by the [female] elders who will be teaching you those cultural practices. You are also taught how to respect the husband and how to perform 'well' in bed with the husband.*

Women are taught what Arhihenbuwa and Webster (2004, 2) highlighted, that beliefs and values regarding sexuality are built according to culture, for example, when to become sexually active and the number of sexual partners to have, and cultural definitions of sexual orientation in the context of HIV/AIDS. As culturally bound, women's actions are socially constructed by their cultural belief systems, *chinamwali* being one of them. It is argued that *chinamwali* makes young women and girls sexually active because of the teachings they are exposed to during the training period.

Thirty five year old Hlalati, mother of two teenage girls had this to say,

> *Kuchinamwali kana kuti kutsika yeukhomba unodzidziswa nekutambirwa semwanasikana kana munhukadzi, kudzidziswa nekutambirwa ndipo panoti mukadzi ipapo kana usina kutambirwa hausi mukadzi chaiye akakwana. Kana usina kutambirwa hauzivi zvinoitwa mudondo nekuti hapana anokuudza, hauzivizve kuti murume anobatwa nekuchengetwa sei. Zvatinodzidziswa kudondo hazvibvumidzwe kuudzwa munhu asina kuendako uye munhu wese wese. Kuenda kudondo kundotambirwa nekudzidziswa zvinofanira kuitwa ndozvinoratidza kuva mukadzi akakwana…Ini ndine vanasikana vatatu, vaviri vahombe vacho vakatotambirwa nekuti ndizvo zvinoita kuti vazogare nevarume vavo zvakanaka vachigona kuzochengeta mhuri dzavo zvakanaka.*
> *With chinamwali, as girls and women we will be initiated. Being initiated means one is now regarded as a 'real and full woman'. If one is not initiated you are not regarded as a 'real woman' in the Shangaan culture. The training that women engage in whilst in the training camp is what will then define a 'real woman' who can take care of her husband and the family as a whole…I am the mother of three teenage girls and two of them are already initiated. This is going to help them taking care of their families where they are going to be married and to sustain them.*

One of the participants, Sarudzai, a 30 year old woman mother of three, echoed Tabitha and Hlalati:

> *Munhu anonotambirwa kana achida. Kare ndipo pazvaimanikidzwa musikana wese kana achikura. Chinamwali zvinoreva kutambirwa, kudzidziswa kuchengeta mhuri, murume nevana. Amai vangu, vanataita vangu vose vakatambirwa. Ndingangoti mhuri yese takatambirwa. Kana usina kutambirwa unenge uri chichuta…*
> *It is your own choice to be initiated since initiation entails being taught cultural behaviour that is supposed to be performed in the community. It used to be mandatory long back but If you are not initiated you won't get the respect that other women are given in the community for upholding the cultural practice. You are therefore labeled chichuta meaning an uninitiated woman. All my family members and relatives are initiated, hence the need for me to be initiated as well.*

Based on the interviews and the understandings shared by the women, it cannot be ignored that initiation is socially constructed within the Shangaan culture as being essential for the

‘creation’ of an ‘honoured’ and ‘respected’ woman who can ‘fit in’ to the community without discrimination. It may not be their (women’s) choice to be initiated but being a socially constructed cultural practice, women tend to want to be assimilated into the so called wholesome cultural ideals and cultural practices.

Kamlongera (2007), in her study of the *fisi* culture of Malawi, commented that the instructions given are based on teaching the girl how to please her ‘potential suitor’. Initiates are also taught not to disclose any information regarding initiation to others. This encourages the other women, who become curious, to be initiated. Amongst the group of initiates, *chinamwali* creates ‘trust’ amongst themselves. While in the training camp, the initiates accumulate cultural knowledge that confers social status and power to them as women in the community. Those who are not initiated are called *chichuta,* a discriminatory word meaning ‘other’ or non-initiate. According to Klu and Morwe (2013, 2), in some Sub Saharan African cultures, these initiation and puberty rights involve girls being taught how to sexually respond to men and how to be submissive to them. The ideals of the cultural practices are what the radical feminists sought to address as a way of fighting against the male ‘oppression’ and subordination of women. Radical feminists believe in fairness in the treatment of men and women and not gender biased treatment defined by the community.

The participants shared that women who have not been initiated were excluded from many cultural activities such as brewing and drinking beer at the graduation celebrations upon arrival of the initiates from the training camp. They were also excluded from community gatherings of initiates. Even the husbands of the women who had not been initiated were not allowed to attend these celebrations or to drink the beer brewed specifically for welcoming the initiates back from the bush. The initiates therefore create their own social network through interaction and socialisation and the lessons they are taught in the training camps. *Chinamwali* can be viewed as a process in which the women who go through the training experience, enact culturally encoded behaviours.

The researcher therefore asked some of the women what had directly or specifically influenced them to attend this cultural practice of *chinamwali* or to be initiated. Twenty five year old Chihlangu, mother of one, confided that she didn’t want to be initiated but she feared losing her husband and being excluded from cultural practices, so she ultimately decided to be initiated. Parents often reinforce certain community and societal norms in their children, both

directly and indirectly as parents get family honour if their daughters are initiated. Chihlangu had to be initiated in order to safeguard her marriage. She had this to say,

> *Zvekutambirwa ndezvevanhu vekudhara isu tiri vana vachimanje manje hatichafaniri kuonekwa tichitevedzera tsika idzi. Ndanga ndisikatombodi zvekutambirwa izvi asi nekuti ndaitya kuzotizwa nemurume wangu achienda kune vakatambirwa achindisiya sezvo vakadzi vatkatambirwa varivo vanonzi vakadzi chaivo nenharaunda, uye ndaida kuzoendawo kumugidhi nekumuwacha kunoenda vamwe vasikana vezera rangu. Ndakati regai ndinotambirwawo sevamwe vasikana …*
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> *I didn't want to be initiated. The initiation practice is an old fashioned practice. I forced myself to be initiated because I didn't want to lose my husband and seeing him chasing after initiated girls; that motivated me to be initiated as the community values initiates other than non-initiates and men are willing to marry initiates. I also wanted to be involved in community activities such as singing and dancing at the graduation of the initiates. I wanted my husband to attend initiation ceremony as well.*

It can be noted that the idea of being initiated can be seen as a way to protect and safeguard relationships in the community and marriages. Women fear losing friends and relatives and they want a sense of belonging to the group of initiates. These rituals are a way to prove loyalty and dedication to the initiation group (Association for Humanistic Psychology 2007, 7). Cultural norms and values are learned in the training camp. These values are part of the social network and identity amongst the women.

Elina, a 35 year old, recently married woman commented, in a soft voice,

> *Takangokurawo tichiona vamwe vezera rangu vachindotambirwa tikati rega tindotambirwawo sezviri kuita vamwe.*
>
> *We grew up seeing other girls and women of my age being initiated and we therefore developed the interest on wanting to know what initiation entails. That's when I decided to be initiated.*

This explanation given by Elina illustrates that initiation is a social construct and is passed from one generation to the next through socialisation. The reason why Elina wanted to be initiated was to be like other women who were initiated. *Chinamwali* determines if one is seen as a 'child' or a 'woman' and/ or a 'minor' or an 'adult'. The teachings from the training camps qualify a girl to be a 'real or new woman'. These teachings keep alive the cultural practices and are passed from one generation to the next.

Fifty year old Maria, mother of three children and seven grandchildren, noted that,

> *…amai vangu, vanataita vangu, vanambuya vangu vose vakatambirwa, saka naizvozvo ndaitofanirawo kutambirwa sezvakaita vamwe vose vemumhuri nekuti ndizvo zvinodiwa mudunhu rino…*
>
> *All my relatives and siblings were initiated and I decided to be initiated as well. I wanted to be part of the family and part of the group. One can't be part of the group if you are not initiated. There is no way I wasn't going to be initiated since all my family members were initiated even my mother.*

Creswell (2003, 1) noted that the assumption with social constructivism is that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Socialisation is the key to why women like Maria want to be initiated. This is also supported by Courtenay (2000, 2), citing Pleak et al. (1994), who highlighted that from a constructionist perspective, women and men think and act in the ways that they do, not because of their role identities or psychological traits, but because of the concepts of femininity and masculinity they adopt from their culture. Initiation ceremonies are therefore being attended by young women who want to honour, respect, satisfy, please and obey their parents (who sometimes encourage them to be initiated).

For the women to be accepted in the community they have to be initiated or they might be rejected or excluded from cultural activities. Initiation therefore cements the social relations of the culture and has its own significance in the community. Women attain their 'real woman' status after going through the initiation process. During the second visit in December 2017, the researcher managed to meet some of the young women who had relocated to town. They said,

> *...kana waenda kudhorobha hapana anomboziva kuti wakatambirwa kana kuti hauna asi kana wadzoka kuno kumusha nharaunda yese inenge ichizviziva kuti hauna kutambirwa saka hapana anombokuremekedza nekuti unenge usina kutambirwa uye hapana anenge achida kutamba newe nekuti unenge usina kutambirwa sezvakaita vamwe. Varume havadiwo kukuroora nekuti unenge usingazivi kumuchengeta uye kuchengetedza mhuri yako. Unenge uchingonzi chichuta.*
>
> *When you are in town or when you are not in Mahenye community, no one knows that you are initiated or not but when you get back to the community, the whole village knows who is initiated and who is not. Therefore fitting into that group is very difficult because you don't share the same understanding of life. The initiates have their own understanding of life that is different from that of non-initiates. It's even rare for men*

to propose love and marriage to non-initiates. Hence chances of getting married in Mahenye community are very limited if one is not initiated.

With initiation there is social cohesion in the community since those who are not initiated are seen as not upholding the values of the community where they belong. Thus initiation is regarded as an integral social norm among the Shangaan community. Women take pride in participating in the training programme.

Some commented that,

> *Kana uri kudhorobha hapana anombozviziva kuti hauna kutambirwa asi hapana chaunenge uchiziva marerano nekuchengeta imba kana murume wako, saka unongogara usingazivi zvaunotarisirwa kuita kana wava mumba nemurume wako. Zvinogara zvichikunetsa mupfungwa dzako kuti handina kutambirwa. Pese panoitwa misangano haudaidzwe uye haufaniri kuvepo nekuti unenge usingakwani pane vamwe vakatambirwa. Unenge usinganzwisisi zvinenge zvichiitika panenge pakaungana zvikhombana. Ukaonekwa uripo panenge pakaungana zvikhombana unobhadhariswa mari kana mombe.*
>
> *If you are in town no one knows that you are not initiated but the point will remain the same that you don't know how to take care of the children and family in general but the husband in particular. You wouldn't have gone through the training which educates the woman on how to behave and how to take care of the family and being a responsible woman. Therefore, the point will remain the same, that you are a non-initiate. It keeps haunting you that you are not initiated and cannot fit into the other group where others belong to. Even in community gatherings, you are not invited. If you are seen in community gatherings without being initiated you will pay a fine or a cow for failure to adhere to community expectations. One has to be initiated in order to take part in all community activities that initiates are involved in.*

The narratives illustrate that initiation appears to be the backbone of the culture of Mahenye and failure to be initiated brings about social exclusion and rejection even to those who have relocated to towns. Returning for holidays to their community, they will be viewed as non-initiates. They don't have the legitimate right to be called 'real women' since they didn't go through what the other women had in the training. They wouldn't have experienced the same

pain and suffering. These are the embedded societal expectations that shape the behaviour of women.

The value given to this cultural practice is what compelled the women to be initiated even though they were not interested. *Chinamwali* thus tends to control the 'cultural body' of the women. Some of the women were initiated because of pressure from parents and the community. People tend to react to the cultural practice which guides their day to day living. Harris (2005, 9) in his study 'Gender, Change and Society: Messages Men Hear – Constructing Masculinities' highlighted that young boys become men by responding to situational demands and social pressures. Surrounded by expectations about how they as men ought to behave, boys have to sift through various demands placed upon them by their culture, their associates, their teachers, their friends and their family to construct their own gender identities. This also applies to women and girls in a given society where they are supposed to conform to the societal norms and values which define their womanhood. Failure to conform to these societal expectations will lead to seclusion from the community demands and activities. Harris (2005) went on to say that the behaviour of humans is governed by cultural rules (to be initiated and follow cultural practices) while all other animals have patterns of behaviour that are determined by their genetic make-up.

4.2 Women's perceptions towards the cultural practice of *chinamwali*

This section highlights the perception of women towards the cultural practice of *chinamwali.* The women's narratives in interviews and focus group discussions showed that this cultural practice can be regarded as the cornerstone of Mahenye community. Based on in-depth and careful questioning in both interviews and the focus group discussions, the researcher has come to understand how deeply *chinamwali* is culturally embedded; it is unlikely that it will end in the next hundred years. This is because the people in Mahenye community are very proud of their cultural practice and are keen to pass on the tradition to future generations. According to the Shangaan culture, an initiation ceremony symbolises a child's qualification into adulthood and most informants in the discussions felt that being initiated was culturally associated with being a "real woman". Women, whether aware of it or not, have been socialised to believe that the aim of sex is to please their male partners. The community view sex as an art more than an act, which must be satisfactory especially to the man. Moreover, men also expect the initiated woman to demonstrate what she has learnt from her training. These are preconceived cultural

expectations of the men regarding the women who suffer alone in the training process in the name of fulfilling the cultural expectations of "creating the body beautiful".

Both men and women shared in the discussions lessons learnt from their lived experience. See, for example, this response,

> *Chinamwali kana kutambirwa chiratidzo chekuti munhu akura. Kutambirwa kunoitwa munhu asvika makore gumi nemaviri kana mashanu ekuberekwa zvichikwira. Pazera iri mwanasikana anenge akufanira kudzidziswa zvinoita kuti azogona kuterera vabereki vake nevanhu vakuru vemunharaunda. Kutambirwa kunenge kwakuratidza futi kuti mwanasikana akugona kuroorwa, kuita nhumbu, kana kuita mwana…*
> *Initiation or chinamwali symbolises that the girl is old enough to get married, to get pregnant and to have children. Initiation happens between ages twelve years going upwards depending on the time one starts menstruation. Menstruation is one of the pre-requisites for one to be initiated. That is when young women will be taught manners, how to take care and respect the family and people in general.*

Most women and certainly all the women participants were very clear that the initiation defined a woman. They commented that,

> *The elderly saw it as a problem for the women to be married without knowing the rules of the land that is how to take care of the family and how to take care of the husband, how to cook and how to become a 'good wife', they then thought it was best for the women to be trained so that they know how to do all this. (Haungambonzika uri mukadzi iwe usina kutambirwa kana kuchineliwa). For example, if the husband says I want my meals to be prepared before sunset, the woman must know that that is what her husband wants and should never deny that…*

The need to be initiated is a social construction in itself. Almost all the participants felt very strongly that,

> *Munhu anofanira kutambirwa asati aroorwa kuitira kuti asazoite matambudziko kwaanenge aroorwa. Zvemumba zvinodawo kutanga wadzidziswa nevakuru vemudunhu vakadzidziswa kare.*
> *All the women must be initiated before marriage so that they won't encounter problems when they are in marriage. They must be equipped on how to be a woman who is able*

to take care of the family of where she is married to. One ought to be equipped before getting married. That's the role of the elders of the community.

Chinamwali in this case is said to integrate young women in the society. All the women participants knew the importance and the reasons for being initiated.

She added,

> *Kutambirwa ndokunoita kuti murume nemukadzi vachengetedzane, kubata murume zvakanaka nekunzwanana. Mukadzi anodzidzidziswa nguva yekurara nemurume nenguva yekusarara nemurume kana achiteera…*
>
> During initiation women are taught how to live well with their husbands when married. They are also taught when to and not to have sex before and after menstruation.

Chinamwali or initiation is regarded as keeping alive the cultural practices and social group identity/ solidarity. Women form separate groups; those who are not initiated do not interact with the initiates. This protects the interests and beliefs of a certain group of people with particular cultural beliefs. They also push the 'male agenda'. "…*Hatitambi nevakadzi vasina kutambirwa nekuti hapana zvatinokurukura navo…"* (We don't interact with women who are not initiated because they don't belong to the initiated group. We don't share anything in common with non-initiates therefore we don't interact with them), commented Chihlangu, a 25 year old mother of one. Uninitiated women are not accepted in the initiated group. They don't have the right to be called *zvikhombana* or 'real women' and instead are called *zvichuta* or non-initiates. Commenting on female circumcision, Toubia (1994, 6) noted that female circumcision has particularly strong cultural meanings because it is closely linked to women's sexuality and their reproductive role in the society. Like female circumcision, *chinamwali* carries a high social value amongst the women in the Mahenye community.

It appears that *chinamwali* shapes the behaviour of the women in the community by determining where they belong. Through their social networks, women who have been initiated have their codes to communicate and promote understanding amongst themselves. The women have a particular social identity and different understandings to the non-initiates. Those initiated have the knowledge that they acquire through socialisation in their culture and tradition. Mhango, a 37 year old grandmother with seven boys, commented that,

Zvikhombana zvine mafungiro nemaitiro akatosiyana nezvichuta nekuti zvikhombana zvakadzidziswa mitemo chaiyo yekuita kana vari mumba zivo zvinova zvisingadzidziswi zvichuta.

The initiates have a different understanding and handling of life which is different from that of the non-initiates since the initiates are taught how to handle life issues.

A follow-up discussion was made with some of the initiates to explore the value they put on this cultural practice as well as the process and procedures that they follow. According to Mudhlayi,

Hongu isu takadzidziswa kukhomba asi parizvino taakudzidzisawo vamwe vasikana nevakadzi kuti vave vari vanhu vanogona kuzogara zvakanaka mudzimba dzavo uye kudzichengetedza muupenyu hwavo…

We were trained yes, and now we train the initiates on good morals, values and discipline to follow in life.

Nyembezi noted,

Kuchinamwali tinodzidzisa zvikhombana kuti vave vari vanhu vanoteerera uye vanoremekedzwa varume vavo nemhuri dzekavanozoroorwa…

With chinamwali we train the young girls on good morals and behaviour when they are preparing to get married. We teach them to be submissive to their husbands and to respect the in-laws.

Ngilazi also commented that,

Kukhomba ndokwatinodzidzisa vasikana nevakadzi kuti vagone kugeza, kuchengetedza murume uye kuti azive kuti kana achiteera haafaniri kurara nemurume. Takangokurawo tichiona vanhu vachienda kunotambirwa kukhomba. Ukasangotambirwa chete hapana anokuremekedza uye haumisi imba yako zvakanaka nekuti hapana chaunenge uchiziva…

In chinamwali training we teach girls and young women what to do when menstruating, to abstain from sexual activities before marriage and not to sleep or share the bed with the husband when menstruating. We grew up seeing this practice being done, we were initiated and we are now training other initiates. It is the part or process of life that one has to be initiated when reaching puberty level or when one is about to get married. If the woman is not initiated, no one will respect her and she won't be part of the community network because initiates and non-initiates don't share something in common.

The above narratives show that initiation teaches women to be respectful, well-mannered and submissive. The teachings can be useful but are also designed to fulfill patriarchal expectations. The idea is to please men, to socialise and discipline the women and female body to be submissive to the husband and societal norms and values have been put in place by men. The narratives clearly articulate the gender roles of men and women in the community. Every woman strives to be an initiate and most then want to be trainers. Feminists argue that these norms and values instilled among women are there to fulfil hegemonic masculine behaviours. This is because the teachings confine the women in the home, or the private sphere, and treat the men as the ones to be satisfied and fend for the family in the public sphere. The narratives imply that non-initiates will 'pollute' the initiates who don't have anything in common to share with the initiates. During initiation, women create friendships and networks that last for the rest of their lives. By being initiated, one obtains social status, respect, power and recognition among the Shangaan community. Certain misfortunes are associated with non-conformity to this cultural practice. According to Chigidi (2009, 182), these include having difficulties in marriage, giving birth to a still-born, giving birth to a child who dies immediately after having a miscarriage, giving birth to a child who looks like a baboon, giving birth to a breech baby or never being able to conceive again. These taboos are associated with the fears instilled in the young women and girls who may not want to undergo training. Therefore, initiation can be viewed as a passport to join the social network of the initiated group of 'full/ real women' who have been initiated. A rite of passage, according to Kasomo (2009, 1), engenders one and makes one accepted according to societal norms.

4.3 *Chinamwali*, the human rights approach

In as far as the cultural practice constructs womanhood as well as transitions the girl from childhood to adulthood; it is attributed to violate the human rights of women. Whilst in the training camp, young women and girls are exposed to harsh conditions, starved, beaten, exposed naked to cold nights and are ill-treated as well. This violates women's rights in the name of culture and wanting to be called 'adults'.

Mutuki, a 27 year old woman, was also initiated due to societal pressure and not because she had an interest in being initiated at all. She had a human rights perspective and had this to say,

Zvekutambirwa ndakazviita nekuti ndiri mugari wemudunhu rino chete. Ndakaberekerwa muno uye ndiri mwana wemuno. Ndakazviita kuti vabereki vangu vagofara nekuti vakange vakundinetsa kuti ndiendewo kuukhomba kunotambirwa zvakaitwa vamwe vasikana vezera rangu. Tsika yekutambirwa haienderani nekodzero yevasikana nevanhukadzi. Zvimwe zvinodzidziswako zvinovaka asi zvimwe zvacho hazvienderani nekodzero dzevanhukadzi neyevasikana.

I was initiated only because I was born and am a resident of Mahenye community. I was initiated because I wanted to please my parents as they were pushing me to join other initiates in the training camp. They wanted me to be part of the initiated girls. They highlighted that misfortunes could befall the family wealth, relatives or even the entire family if I am not initiated. They were happy when I was initiated because they highlighted that they wanted that family honour and respect in the community, attained after undergoing the initiation training. However, in my view chinamwali cultural practice is against the rights of the children as well as the rights of the women. Of course some of the teachings are helpful but some of them are abusive to the women and children. There is no law that supports this cultural practice of chinamwali. Actually there is a high risk of competition for the girl and some tend to be promiscuous because they know that men compete for them because they are initiated. Some of the initiates are prostitutes and they brag about this.

For Mutuki, there was no difference between an initiate and a non-initiate in the community. She added that,

Handioni musiyano pakati pemunhu akatambirwa neasina. Munhu akatambirwa kare neasina vakafamba vese hapana musiyano waunoona. Vanhu vemunharaunda ndivo chete vanozotokuudza kuti uyu munhu akatambirwa kana kuti haana. Tsika yekutambirwa haienderani nekodzero yemwanasikana. Vabereki vanotofunga kuti vana vavo vakura vakutokwanisa kuzvionera asi ivo vanenge vasati vasvika Pazera rekuti vanzi vakura uye vachizvionera. Vabereki vanotoonekwa vachisarudzira vanasikana vavo murume anovaroora zvinova zvichikanganisa zvakare kodzero dzemadzimai nevanasikana.

I don't see the difference between an initiated woman and a non- initiate. The society is the one which can only identify that this one is initiated and this one is not, through social construction of the female body. The difference is internal and not anyone realise that this one is initiated and this one is not by mere looking. Initiation goes against women and children's rights through the teachings taught to the initiates whilst in the

training camp. Some of the teachings are abusive and harmful to the well-being of the women and children. Parents assume that their children have come of age yet they have not. They also take it upon themselves to decide whom their daughter will get married to. Given the opportunity, I would vouch to campaign against this cultural practice as it is against the rights of the women and children. You are only taught how to handle a man, so you should be dancing for a man in order to make him happy whilst I may not be happy.

Mutuki did not appreciate the cultural practices of this community from her modernist orientation/ perception that takes into account human rights. Mutuki shared the same sentiments with the feminist ideals that view certain aspects of culture as barbaric and oppressive to women even though she agreed that every society has its own ways of socialising its members so that they grow up sharing the same principles, norms and values with other members of the community. This is because many cultural practices including *chinamwali*, predispose girls to certain behaviours by making girls undergo the training. Mutuki shared feminist ideals that view certain aspects of culture as barbaric and oppressive to women. The fact that the training is compulsory goes against the ideals of human rights: one is not free to choose not to be initiated lest it discriminates against those who choose not to be initiated as cowards. The only reason she was initiated was to be identified with members of her group which would afford her the right to be respected and to be associated with other initiates in the community. According to Ahmed (2014), a woman's capacity to elicit change, to be powerful and empowered arises from her relative success in being a proper woman. 'Proper', according to the Mahenye community, is undergoing *chinamwali*/ *khomba*. Through this, she acquires the respect of her spouse and of the neighbourhood as a moral community. This is what a girl learns during her initiation into womanhood and what she is told during her wedding ceremony. These are some of the reasons why Mutuki decided to be initiated but main aim was to fight against human and child rights abuse.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how *chinamwali* is a strong social convention which constructs and transitions women from one position of life to the other. *Chinamwali* as a rite of passage (*rite de passage*) transitions the girls and women from childhood to adulthood. Sibanda (2013. 3) highlighted that without undergoing the *khomba* initiation rite, a person, no matter what age,

would not be considered as a full adult among the Shangaan. The chapter has looked at the Shangaan culture, women's perception and understanding of their cultural practice of *chinamwali.* The cultural complex of the Shangaan community was also explored in this chapter. The chapter interrogated the understandings and perceptions as well as the value and reasons which make women participate in the initiation programme. Data gathered from the narratives of both women and men from the community through interviews and focus group discussions show that *chinamwali* is a respected cultural practice in the community. The narratives from this chapter show that *chinamwali* appears to integrate the community through the interaction of the women which is socially constructed. *Chinamwali*, like a uniform (Naidu 2009, 2), is understood as a means by which women are 'disciplined' and objectified into subjects; hence, they are supposed to perform and please men, having attended the initiation ceremony and now having a 'symbolic' and 'new' body. Being an initiate in this case, one is supposed to "perform well in bed", know how to take care of one's husband and how to be a better woman. It is the bodies of women in the developing nations and the bodies of African women in the global south that have been rendered "docile by the cluster of colonial and post-colonial historical entanglements", as well as by "traditional and cultural scripts that hold sway over how the body and sexuality should be enacted and enjoyed" (Naidu 2013, 4). From critical engagements with the women in this research, this chapter shows that women's understanding of the cultural practice is learnt through socialisation; some highlighted that they were initiated only to conform to cultural norms. The understanding of the women is that failure to be initiated is like rebelling against the cultural or Mahenye belief system.

CHAPTER 5: MALE PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS *CHINAMWALI* CULTURAL PRACTICE

5.0 Introduction

This chapter explores male perceptions of the cultural practice of *chinamwali* in the Mahenye community. The chapter draws on narratives of men from the interviews and focus group discussions. The chapter describes *chinamwali* as a central aspect of the (female) body politics in the Mahenye community where *chinamwali* marks the entrance into womanhood. The men's narratives show how the women's bodies become cultural texts prescribed by societal perceptions and social interactions. Men push forward their patriarchal agendas by encouraging young women and girls to be initiated.

5.1 (Male) Cultural perceptions of the female body/ body politic

The researcher held interviews and focus group discussions with the men in the Mahenye community in a bid to understand some of the reasons why the community values this cultural practice of *chinamwali*. The idea was to gain this understanding from the male perspective since they form part of the community which places value on some of these cultural practices which benefits 'them' most.

Responses from the focus group discussion show that men wanted their women and children to be initiated:

> *kutambirwa zvinoreva kuti vasikana kana kuti madzimai akura, akufanira kuenda kusango kunodzidziswa zvakawanda zveupenyu zinosanganisira kudzidziswa kuti vachengete mhuri dzavo uye tsika nemagariro eupenyu hwemunharaunda yeMahenye. Chinamwali entails young women and girls are now 'old' and are supposed to be trained on how to take care of their husbands and their families and the expected behaviour in the community.*

Others pointed out that,

> *kutambirwa zvinoreva kuti mudzimai kana musikana adzidziswe kuti agone kuzotichengeta (isu varume) nekutibata zvakanaka kana tiri mumba.*
> *It entails women being trained on several roles and responsibilities of (married) life so that they learn how to take care of 'us' as well as satisfy us at home and in bed.*

Some said that,

> *Vakadzi vanoenda kunotambirwa kuti vagone kuzotichengeta, kuchengeta mhuri dzavo uye vana vedu.*
> *Young women and girls go through the initiation and training programme so that they know how to take care of us, (my) family and (my) children. One can't be a 'real woman' if she is not initiated and if she doesn't know how to take care of the family and the children.*

> *Vakadzi nevanasikana vanotambirwa kuti vave vachiziva tsika nemagariro emunharaunda pavanenge vachikura uye vachizoroorwa.*
> *Young women and girls are supposed to be initiated as they grow up so that they know how to behave and perform certain tasks at home in general but in the community in particular.*

> *Kutambirwa kunoita kuti vasikana vese vanoda kuroorwa vasanetseke kushaya vakomana vanoda kuvaroora kana nguva yavo yekuroorwa yasvika. Dunhu rose rinenge richiziva kuti mwanasikana uyu akatambirwa uye anoziva tsika nemagariro emudunhu rake.*
> *With the initiation programme, marriageable young women will have the opportunity to find men ready to marry them, they do not wander about looking for men to marry them since the whole community will be aware that they were initiated and they can fulfil the societal obligations, it is actually the passport to be married without any hassles.*

> *Zvekutambirwa zvinoita kuti varume vasazosiyawo vakadzi vavo vasina kutambirwa vachienda kunze kunotsvaga vakatambirwa nekuti vanenge vachiziva kuchengeta nekubata murume.*

> *The idea about initiation helps to enhance sexual encounters and orgasm. It also helps some men not to go out to look for other women who were initiated to have sex with them.*

The researcher established that *chinamwali* works as a '*tool'* that equips and constructs women to do certain prescribed tasks and services in the community. These include among others, home building, warming water for bathing for the husband and children and preparing meals,

(as part of the household duties) and sexual duties (satisfying the men in bed). Sexual duties, among others, are aspects of 'body politics' that the community values.

Forty-five year old Kenge, father of one boy and three girls mentioned that

> *Kutambirwa kunoita kuti vasikana vadzidziswe zvese zvemumba zvinosanganisira kubika, kuchengeta vana, kuchengeta murume wako uye kumubatawo zvakanaka nekurara naye. Zvidzidzo izvo tinozvikurudzira kuti vana vedu nemadzimai edu hazviite kuti vakure vachiziva uye vaine hunhu netsika nemagariro akanaka. Vasikana vese nevakadzi vemunharaunda muno tinovakurudzira kuti vaende kunotambirwa kukhomba nekudzidziswa hunhu hunotarisirwa kuti vaite. Kukhomba kunoitawo kuti musikana agadzirire kuroorwa nekuti anenge atokura zvekuti atangewo imba yake.*
>
> *Initiation equips young women and girls on several activities, tasks and duties that a woman be supposed to do. These include among others, household chores, how to take care of the children, the family, the husband and how to satisfy him in bed sexually. Issues of child birth (weaning) are also taught whilst in the training camp. The training is intensive and is assumed to equip women on all aspects of life. The idea is to come up with a well groomed woman in the community. We encourage all the young women and girls to be initiated so that they will be equipped and trained on how to behave as well as perform certain tasks in the community. The teachings equip the young women and girls into married life.*

Twenty-six year old Nheredzo, recently married with one child, also mentioned that

> *Kutambirwa zvinoreva kudzidzisa musikana akure achiziva tsika dzakanaka dzinokurudzirwa munharaunda. Kana mwana achikura pane tsika nehunhu hunotarisirwa kuve achiita. Tsika idzi dzinotodzidziswa chete kana vaenda kunotambirwa. Pandakange ndakuda kuroora ndaitotsvagawo musikana akatambirwa (chikhombana) nekuti ndiye anoziva tsika nemagariro emudunhu redu reMahenye uye zvinotarisirwa kuti ave achiita. Mudzimai asina kutambirwa anenge asingazivi tsika nemagariro nemararamiro edu.*
>
> *Initiation training grooms the women to be well versed with the culture and tradition of the Mahenye community. When children, especially girls, are growing there are other behavioural patterns that are expected to be imparted on them. This is learnt when they attend training programme or when they are initiated. When I was searching*

for a marriage partner, I was also looking for initiated girls. This is because initiates are well groomed and they have the knowledge of keeping and taking care of the family. Non-initiates do not know the qualities and responsibilities of a married woman because they would not have gone through the rigorous training programme that others go through when being initiated. Initiation therefore is like training and disciplining the young women and girls or the female body in line with the cultural and societal expectations. The female body is therefore supposed to be initiated so that it fits the societal expectations.

The narratives of men in the focus group discussion show that *chinamwali* constructs young women's simultaneous entry into adult womanhood and adult female sexualisation since the community looks up to the initiated woman to take up sexual and 'womanly' roles in the community. If a woman is not initiated, the transition to 'womanhood' will not take place properly as it is associated with many specific activities including celebrations and an initiation programme. Cultural experiences help to produce the (female) body and the women as cultural entities. Young women and girls are expected to perform practically all they are trained to do in the training camp. This idea satisfies patriarchal beliefs and expectations as the major aim is to satisfy men or husbands back home. It is also intended to satisfy the cultural and societal beliefs regarding which men determine what is supposed to be done in these patriarchal societies. Men made statements like "*Ndiani anomuda (Who wants her?)"* and *"Ndiani anoda kuroora musikana asina kutambirwa? (Who marries her?)"* during focus group discussions and interviews. These statements imply that if a woman is not initiated then no man will be interested in marrying or associating with her. This therefore differentiates between the initiates and non-initiates. It also shows that women are taught to live and discipline their bodies with the prescriptions of heterosexuality experiencing themselves as sexual objects of heterosexual male viewing, pleasure and also as the mothers of men's children (Lee, 1994:3). The idea is to satisfy male desires and this is attributed as 'grooming'. The men confirmed that *chinamwali* is part of a traditional ritual and is an initiation rite of passage which marks the transition to womanhood. *Chinamwali* is a valued cultural practice amongst the Shangaan community and it grants women acceptance and respect amongst other women as well as a 'passport to success/ marriage' (according to the Mahenye belief system). It therefore defines what a 'real woman' is and integrates her and her family into the community. Besides integrating women and the family as a whole to the community, it also integrates men who can now perform certain tasks as prescribed by the community because of their status or positions in the community. The

practice concurs with male thinking that a woman must be initiated and therefore get married at a young age and initiation comes to be seen as the passport to marriage. Men and boys are active agents in constructing and reconstructing these dominant norms of masculinity. The aspect of the 'us', 'my family' and 'satisfying me/us in bed or at home' emerged in discussions with men in the community. Men seem to be focused on their own personal satisfaction and not appear to focus on the community as a whole. It was important that male desires in the community were satisfied.

The researcher wanted to explore the perceptions of men towards this cultural practice. Responses from interviews included:

> *Tsika yechinamwali chinoita kuti mudzimai kana musikana aroorwe zvakanaka kana apedza kutambirwa uye kana nguva yake yekuroorwa yakwana. Zvinodzidziswa vasikana kukhomba zvinoita kuti musikana apinde mumba akagadzirira kuroorwa nekuzochengeta mhuri yake zvakanaka. Vasikana havakurudzirwe kuroorwa vasina kutambirwa uye vasina kudzidziswa tsika dzemumba. Tsika idzi vanotodzidziswa kana vaenda kukhomba kwavanopedza mwedzi muviri kana mitatu vachidzidza. Hazvikurudzirwe kuti musikana aroorwe asina kutambirwa.*
>
> *Chinamwali prepares the young women and girls into marriage at a certain age. The lessons they learn are in preparation for marriage life and for the future. No woman is supposed to get married without being initiated as this is the cultural norm and part of the Shangaan belief. Lessons are meant to groom young women and girls for marriage. Getting married without going through the initiation training is not respected and is not recommended in the community.*
>
> *Kukhomba ndokudzidziswa hunhu hunotarisirwa munharaunda hwekugona kuchengetedza mhuri yako nekudzidziswa zvekuita kana wakuteera. Vasikana vanodzidziswa tsika nemagariro emunharaunda mavo. Ndipo pavanodzidziswa kuti vasasatambe nevakomana nekuti vanenge vakutonzi vave vanhu vakura. Vanodzidziswa futi kuti vasarare nevarume kana vachiteera izvo zvinova zvinokonzerwa zvirwere nematambudziko mumba. Vanodzidziswa zvakare mazuva akakodzera ekurara nemurume pasina dambudziko kazhinji kacho vasati vateera kana kuti vachangopedza kuteera. Munhu anofanira kubvisira roora kuchikhombana kwete musikana asina kutambirwa. Chichuta chinenge chisina kudzidziswa zvinotarisirwa mumba saka chinenge chisina kugadzirira kuroorwa…*

With chinamwali, that's where young women and girls are taught manners, that is how to take care of the husband and what one is supposed to do when menstruating; that is one is supposed to abstain from sex when she is menstruating and also taught on the best days to engage into sex without any harm (before or after menstrual days/ period). The argument by men is that one cannot pay lobola (bride price) for a woman who is not initiated … one ought to be respected in the community for marrying an initiate or a woman who is 'groomed'. Non-initiates are regarded as premature to take up marriage roles and responsibilities and are not respected in the community.

The cultural meaning attached to *chinamwali* is particularly clear in this response:

Musikana kana mudzimai anofanira kutambirwa asati aroorwa, unobva wazivawo kuti waroora mukadzi chaiye akatambirwa. Vakadzi vakatambirwa vese vanoremekedzwa munharaunda ino.

The woman must be initiated at a certain age and in that regard you can rest assured that you married to a 'real woman' who transitioned from childhood to adulthood, who knows how to take care of you and your family (responsibilities). Initiated women have a high social standing and respect in the Shangaan community.

This is an example of "naturalising male dominance over women" (see Naidu 2011a, 4).

About half of the men felt similarly, as can be seen in the following comment;

Kutambairwa kunokosheswa nekuti kunodzidziswa zvakawanda sekuti kana mudzimai akatambirwa, kana akaita dambudziko nemurume wako kana hama yake hamufaniri kunetsana pachena pakazara vanhu. Kana makanetsana nemadzimai, iye anotoziva kuti munofanira kutaurirana muri vaviri uye mukadzi haafaniri kupopotedzana kana kutaurirana nemurume akamutarisa kumeso. Pamwe pacho anotofanira kutsvaga tete vako kana manetsana vouya motaurirana mokurukurirana. Kana mudzimai asina kuenda kunotambirwa anenge asingazivi tsika idzi zvekuti munogona kunetsana paruzhinji, ndokushaya tsika ikoko.

Initiation is a great (sic) programme where all the women are supposed to attend and are taught to respect and to be 'submissive' to their husbands. They are groomed to solve their problems and disputes in private. If there is a misunderstanding or a dispute in marriage the aunt or family relatives are encouraged to assist on those matters. Therefore, if one is not initiated, she may not be aware of how to resolve those disputes because they are not trained/ equipped to handle issues and marriage challenges.

Almost all the participants revealed that the sole purpose of the initiation was to prepare the girl child for marriage. It appears the community focuses on marriage in particular. For example, a typical comment was "*hazvibatsiri kubhadhara roora kumudzimai asina kutambirwa nekuti haana kudzidziswa saka hapana chaanoziva. (It is not worth it to pay bride price for a woman who is not initiated because she doesn't know anything about marriage, its requirements and the responsibilities that comes with it)".* In this regard, bodies (the female body) may well be viewed as a vehicle for staging cultural and sexual identities in the community with the perpetrators being men who push forward their patriarchal agendas in the community. With *chinamwali,* women come to be disciplined and inscribed by cultural meanings and beliefs that are instilled amongst them. Men eagerly wait to engage the recent graduates who will now be 'ready' for marriage and are ready to showcase what they have been taught in the training camp. Feminists oppose the idea whereby males are viewed as superior to the women in terms of their contribution and individual worthiness in the community.

Jalasi, a forty-four year old grandfather with two wives and seven children, revealed that:

> *Chinamwali kana kuti kuchineliwa kwachisati itsika yemunharaunda medu inofanira kutevedzerwa nevakadzi nevasikana vese pavanongokura hazvinei nekuti uri kubva kumhuri yakaitasei nekuti ndizvo zvinosimudzira nharaunda yeMachangani. Vasikana nevakadzi vese vanofanira kutombosiya mhuri dzavo vombonogara mwedzi miviri kana mitatu musango vachidzidziswa zvavanofanira kuita kana varoorwa sevakadzi chaivo. Pavanenge vari musango pese hapana anobvumidzwa kusvika kwavanenge vari. Anosvika ikoko asina kubvumidzwa anobhadhariwa mari, mbudzi kana mombe kuna mambo nekuti anenge atyora murairo wemunharaunda uye tsika yekutambirwa. Panoti kutambirwa ndopanoti mukadzi chaiye akadzidziswa tsika dzeusikana…*
>
> *Chinamwali or khomba, (female initiation) is the most valued traditional and cultural practice in which all the women in the society are supposed to take part regardless of their background. Women are supposed to go into the training camp, temporarily forgetting the comfort of their homes and spend three months in the bush being prepared for independence, 'life', for marriage, how to cook and that's when they spend some time being prepared for a marriage life and life as a 'woman'. In those months of seclusion, the public is not allowed near the initiates or near the training camp as intruding is a punishable offence under the Mahenye traditional customary law. If one is found intruding (especially men) you will pay a fine (beast or goat to the initiates and their teachers through the chief).*

In terms of his polygamous relationship and marriage, Jalasi commented that, *"Hapana chinoshamisa kuita vakadzi vaviri nekuti chinhu chakajairika munharaunda muno… (It's normal to be married to two wives and as 'Africans' it's not prohibited. In fact that's being African)".* He was happy and proud that both his wives had been initiated and felt they took good care of him, his children and his family. Jalasi spoke about being an 'African' and about polygamy but did not consider issues of HIV/AIDS associated with his polygamous marriage and what it entailed to be 'African'. The masculine and patriarchal ideals that are learnt through socialisation are used by men to justify their masculine behaviours. Feminists attempt to address this idea of being 'African', especially in African traditional societies where value is given to men and the boy child as compared to women and girls. One can conclude that societies and communities have constructed (through socialisation and symbolic interaction), perceptions and views towards *chinamwali.* These perceptions seem to be highly significant and valued among the Shangaan community. Initiated women in this case raise a man's 'status' in masculine and patriarchal communities such as the Mahenye community. A man is regarded to have power, status and respect in the community if he is married to an initiate.

The narratives of the men revealed that it was important to marry an initiate to the extent that marrying a non-initiate was regarded as a taboo among the Shangaan community. As a 'man' one has to find ways to encourage one's wife to be initiated and follow the societal expectations so that they belong to the community as this brings social identity and respect. Men would discriminate or mock those who were married to the non-initiates and who would then feel uncomfortable and excluded from cultural activities in the community. Courtenay (2000, 6) noted that "masculinities are configurations of social practices produced not only in relation to femininities but also in relation to one another". Masculinity is therefore enhanced by the way people are socialised in the community. Young men are socialised to marry initiates and learn not to value women who are non-initiates.. Men tend to control what the women should do in the community to the extent that they exclude those women who are not initiated *as well as* their husbands. This shows that *chinamwali* is a very strong social convention that is respected in the community. Women's bodies emerge as "owned bodies" (Butts 2007, 42). Men are the 'owners' of those female bodies since they construct and define what a 'real woman' is supposed to be. Like the Malawian traditional *fisi* culture, men determine who the *fisi* will be where the ritual involves men, who are involved in sex to mark the end of an initiation ceremony. These cultural practices remain because they continue to benefit men. The 'consumers' of female sexuality/labour and domestic labour are male themselves as the

practice mainly exists to serve men. Feminists argue that since it is the men who define, make and interpret laws using male values and male construction of female sexuality, they will not be interested in laws which would interfere with a practice which is for their benefit. Radical feminists offer ways to expose women's vulnerability by bringing what is considered as private to the public realm. The community creates the traditional woman/ female encoded in cultural terms through socialisation.

5.2 *Chinamwali* and the spirit of one-ness and brotherhood amongst the Shangaan men

The researcher established that *chinamwali* training creates a sense of brotherhood amongst men in the Mahenye community. Men see *chinamwali* as a cultural practice which binds them together as a whole. It is from the men's narratives that the researcher noted that, even though *chinamwali* is done *for* and performed *on* the female body; it creates a spirit of oneness and respect *amongst men* in the community. Men who are married to initiates have the opportunity to meet in private and public spaces to discuss community development. If one is married to a non-initiate, one is not involved in decision-making at community level. The narratives of men highlight this.

> *Kutambirwa kunoita kuti varume varemekedzwe munharaunda uye kunoitawo kuti varume vasangane vachitandara nekuvaraidza munzvimbo dzakasiyana - siyana vachikurukura zveupenyu uye zvekuchengetedza mhuri. Kana mukadzi wako kana vana vasina kutambirwa, murume haakwanisi kusangana nevamwe varume achizotandara navo nekuti panenge pasina nyaya dzekuvaka musha dzavanokurukura. Varume vane madzimai nevana vakatambirwa vanosanganawo kundari, kumisangano uye kunzvimbo dzekutandara kana mafaro. Ipapo vanokwanisa kukurukura vachipanana mazano angave ekuvaka kana kusimudza musha. Kana mudzimai wako kana vana vako vasina kutambirwa, haukwanise kusangana nevamwe varume muchiita hurukuro dzakadai.*
>
> *If your wife or your children are initiated, you earn respect and honour in the community. Women and girls' initiation creates a platform for men to interact and share ideas, whether in private and public spaces. If one's woman/ wife or children are not initiated, one is not able to interact with other men whose wives or children were initiated. The argument is that men with uninitiated women 'don't know anything about life in marriage' and won't be able to share ideas with other men whose wives were*

initiated. This is because the cultural practice is secretive and cannot be shared with men who are married to non-initiates or whose children are not initiated. That idea helps in grooming other men who may be having difficulties and challenges in their homes/ marriages and taking care of their families.

Along the same lines, forty-nine year old Sekuru (Khule), grandfather of twelve and father of six girls, who seemed to be the oldest and most talkative amongst the interviewees, had this to say:

Kutambirwa kunoita kuti nharaunda yedu yeMahenye ibudirire. Mudzimai kana musikana wese anofanira kutambirwa paanenge achikura. Zvekutambirwa zvakatanga kare kare uye takazviona zvichiitwa patakange tichikura uye zvinoitawo kuti isu varume vemunharaunda tisangane pamwe chete tichisimudzira nharaunda ino. Patinosangana padare, mumabiko nemhemberero tinenge tiri pamwe chete sevarume vane madzimai akatambirwa tichikurukura zvinobatsira kuti nharaunda yedu ibudirire.

Initiation training programme or chinamwali helps in cementing community and societal relations amongst men in the community. All young women and girls are encouraged to be initiated as they are growing up, as a cultural practice. This gives their parents and husbands opportunity to mix with other men whose wives were initiated as well. When we meet as men, we discuss issues related to family and community as well as survival strategies for men. We also meet in places where men who are married to uninitiated women don't meet or attend initiation celebrations. Not being initiated is like sabotaging the system or the societal beliefs and expectation. Therefore, seclusion from community functions works as a punishment to those who do not adhere to the societal norms and values.

The fact that men interact in regulated private and public spaces and share ideas on how to take care of their families and how to behave in these private and public spaces cements the societal relations. Even though one may argue that the idea is discriminatory and segregates the husbands of the non-initiates and boys, the fact that those married to initiates meet and share ideas, cements their relations. Men who are married to non-initiates are not given the opportunity to share ideas with those married to initiates since they do not belong to 'their' category and may not be regarded as 'real men' who can fit into the community. One is regarded as a misfit if married to a non-initiate. *Chinamwali* therefore becomes a symbolic form, upon which the norms and practices of the society are inscribed (Bartky 1992, Bardo

1989 and Haug et al, 1987) in Lee (1994, 1). Marrying an initiate seems to be the passport to attending several cultural programmes and activities and being part of the men's 'forum' where issues which affect the community are discussed or where men meet and share ideas.

It seems this cultural practice of *chinamwali* practice also creates bonding and solidarity among men in the community. In as far as the cultural practice is done to and for the women, men seem to perpetuate this cultural practice as they tend to benefit from it. Marrying initiates creates oneness and bonding among men in the community who see this cultural practice as a way of solidifying their societal relations. This is where differentiation and class status positions come into play; if one is not married to an initiate, one is automatically unfit to join a certain group of people, class or position.

The cultural practice of *chinamwali* (seemingly) stigmatises and discriminates the non-initiates and those men married to non-initiates as cowards. Those married to initiates seems to occupy higher positions and have a different class/ status in the community compared to those married to non-initiates and whose children are not initiated. This is evidenced by the narratives of some men from the interviews and in the focus group discussions who argued that "*kuroora chichuta kunokuparadzanisa nedzinza rako nekuti zvirongwa zvakawanda zvemumusha unenge usingazviite (marrying a non-initiate separates the man with his family since participation and involvement in other important family matters is restricted and limited to initiates only)*" while other men pointed out that, "*kuroora chichuta kunobva kwaita kuti usaverengwe pane vamwe varume (marrying a non-initiate secludes oneself from the community and family as a whole)"* and others noted that, "*kuroora chichuta kunobva kwaita kuti usarire pane zvirongwa zvese zvemumhuri nemunharaunda (marrying an initiate secludes a man from several if not all community activities which involves initiates and men who are married to initiates)"*. Others said, "*kuroora musikana kana mukadzi asina kuenda kukhomba kunoita kuti udzikisirwe munharaunda (marrying a non-initiate lowers your position and status in the community; one is actually segregated and discriminated)".* This idea segregates and discriminates men in the community as a whole since their community engagement rights are infringed if they are married to non-initiates. It is the mandate of the community to give respect to those married to initiates and segregate those married to non-initiates. This is because rites of passage are an important part of community beliefs. Maphosa (2011, 1) noted that the cultural practices on *rites de passage* (stages of life) constitute a repository of a pragmatic scheme of traditional education in Africa. Hence, failure to undergo this traditional form of

education which transitions the girl child into adulthood leads to discrimination and segregation.

Marrying an initiate seems to be an 'in thing' among men in the Mahenye community and marrying a non-initiate is seen as taboo in the community: one has to cope with, adjust to and manage humiliation. This is evidenced by some of the sentiments of the men who were interviewed in the research process. There was overwhelming evidence from the men who argued that it was a cultural norm for them to marry an initiate: *"handingambofari kuroora chichuta nekuti hapana anozomboziva kuti ndinoraramawo munharaunda muno. Hapana zvizhinji zvandinokwanisa kuita zvinoitwa nevamwe varume nekuti ndinege ndakaroora chichuta… (I won't be happy to marry a non-initiate as it defeats my existence in the community since I will not be able to participate in different societal activities which other men took part in)".* Men need to be visible and part of societal activities if their wives or children are initiated. The majority of those interviewed believed that marrying an initiate was the right thing to do. This is how men and boys are groomed in the community as well as the society as a whole. As boys and young men grow up, they grow up knowing that marrying a non-initiate is taboo. In this regard, men tend to perpetuate this patriarchal belief and understanding in the community.

Almost all men in the focus group discussion talked about how they were treated differently in the community depending on whether they had married an initiate or non-initiate. The level of respect given to those married to initiates differs from that given to those married to non-initiates. If your wife or daughters are not initiated, the father or husband is not allowed to participate in community functions and events or public meetings. This is one of the societal norms and obligations. Thirty-two year old Muketo, married to an initiate with three girls, highlighted that

> *Ini mudzimai wandakaroora chikhombana. Mukadzi wangu akadzidziswa tsika yeukhomba/ chinamwali kudondo. Akapedza mwedzi mitatu ari kudondo achidzidziswa zvaunotarisirwa kuti aite achikura uye ari mumba. Ndinowanawo ruremekedzo munharaunda nekuti ndakaroora chikhombana. Hapana anokuremekedza kana usina kuroora chikhombana nekuti zvichuta zvinonzi hazvina zvazvinoziva. Vose vanasikana vangu vari vatatu ndichatoita kuti vaendewo kunotambirwa kuitirawo kuti ini baba vavo ndirambe ndichiremekedzwa muno munharaunda. Zvinozovabatsirawo kana vakuda kuroorwa hazvivanetsi kuwana murume anovaroora.*

I am married to an initiate. My wife was initiated. She went through intensive three months training in the training camp. Being married to an initiate, I get much respect in the community. Those married to initiates are respected men because the community puts value on initiated women as well as the men who marry initiates. I will encourage all my three girls to be initiated so that I continue earning the same respect in the community. It doesn't bring shame to the community if my daughters satisfy these community obligations. They won't have challenges when they want to get married as men will be available to marry them (initiates). Those who fail to follow the tradition will be diminished of the social status and respect as well as participation in community events and activities.

Thirty-five year old Chinhamo, married to an initiate, also mentioned that

Kutambirwa kunoitawo kuti maonerwo aunoitwa nevanhu munharaunda ave akasiyana nemaonerwo anoitwa varume vasina kuroora zvikhombana. Maonerwo acho akasiyana nevasina kutambirwa vanenge vachinzi havana kuremeredza mitemo yemunharaunda mavakakurira.

The way society perceives you is different from the way they see those married to non-initiates. It goes with the level of respect given to those who would uphold the societal norms and values. Those married to initiates are most respected as compared to those men married to non-initiates. This is because chinamwali cultural practice is given much respect in the Mahenye community.

Kenny, thirty-seven years old with four children, was married to a non-initiate who later decided to be initiated:

Pandakaroora mudzimai wangu anga asina kutambirwa. Handisaikoshesa tsika yekutambirwa iyi. Tsika iyi ndaiiona seisina kukosha muupenyu hwedu. Ndakazoona kukosha kwetsika yekutambirwa pandakange ndisingachakwanisi kuita zvaiitwa nevamwe varume munharaunda uye mudzimai wangu aisakwanisa kuita zvaiitwawo nemamwe madzimai munharaunda. Ndakazenge ndakuudzwa zvakare nevedzinza rangu kuti ndakange ndisina kuita chinhu chakanaka. Zvakabatsirawo kuti mudzimai wangu aende kunotambirwa pamwe chete nevamwe vainotambirwa kusango.

When I got married, I married a non-initiate. I didn't take the issue of chinamwali seriously as I thought maybe it didn't have much value in the community. I realised the

seriousness of the matter as I was excluded from several community activities as well as from participating in community decision making process. I also faced pressure from the family and the siblings. Some were even threatening me for causing misfortunes in the community because I married a non-initiate. That pressure and threats pushed my wife to be initiated and to join the trainees in the training camp. This is because tradition forbids men to marry the non-initiates. Soon after the initiation things changed as I and my wife were oriented into the societal expectations and what was supposed to be done in the community as a whole. We now enjoy the benefits of this initiation training as it brings in 'positive benefits' in my family in general but in my marriage in particular.

Kingstone is twenty-seven years old and recently married. His wife was not initiated but he happened to be part of the focus group discussion. His contribution was interesting since he highlighted how the society shapes and construct the behaviour and thinking of the people in the community. His understanding of *chinamwali* originally differed from that of other people in the community but he admitted that he came to realise the importance of this cultural practice and had intentions of enrolling his wife for *chinamwali* training. Kingstone's explanation concurred with Kenny's who mentioned that:

Pandakaroora madzimai wangu akange asina kutambirwa uye hatina kumboita basa nazvo nekuti hatisaiona kukosha kwazvo. Hatina kunge taziva kuti nharaunda yedu yeMahenye inozvikoshesa zvikuru. Kusatambirwa kunoita kuti usarire pane zvirongwa zvese zvemunharaunda.

When I got married my wife was not initiated and we didn't realise the importance of going through that tough training programme for three months in seclusion from the community. We didn't realise that the community put great value towards this cultural practice of chinamwali to such an extent that not being initiated is like secluding yourself from the rest of the community as well as your family and your husband.

From the narratives of the men, those married to initiates receive different treatment as from those married to non-initiates. Society therefore creates classes of people based on what they prescribe must be adhered to by the people in that community; categories and classes include the initiates and non-initiates, those married to initiates and those married to non-initiates. *Chinamwali* therefore proved to be structural as well as determined by the people of the community for the people as well. It has been noted that even though men play a central role

in the construction of the female body and in determining what women in the community are supposed to do and how they should behave, women also play a pivotal role in socialising their children and the community to behave in a certain manner that, to some extent, oppresses and objectifies them. In terms of *chinamwali* as a respected cultural practice that is given much value in the Mahenye community, the researcher noted how people related and noticed that every natural expression of the people in the community was culturally determined (Lock 1993, 4) and that the community itself was socially constructed and defined. This is because even if men married non-initiates in the community, they were 'socialised' or influenced to push their wives to be initiated so as to become part of the group or community which defines how the community is shaped. With *chinamwali,* therefore, character is developed and fine-tuned for a 'sustainable lifestyle'.

Repeatedly, men in this study stated that *chinamwali* is the epitome of the 'real woman' and it works in cementing marriages and societal relations, from the perception of men. This evidenced by the way men responded to their treatment from the community upon marrying either an initiate or a non-initiate. Men with their wives, children or relatives who were not initiated felt secluded or sidelined from the programmes and activities of the community. Some men (from the narratives) highlighted that there had been (positive) changes in their marriages and relations when their wives were initiated. According to these men,

> *Pakanotambirwa mudzimai wangu zvinhu zvakabva zvangochinja mumba mangu (maitiro nemagariro). Mabatirwo nemachengeterwo andakange ndakuitwa pamwe chete nemhuri yangu akabva achinja. Zvinoenderana nedzidziso yavakasangana nayo musango pavakaenda kunotambirwa. Dzidziso yacho inobatsira kuti vasikana nevakadzi vadzidzire uye vagone kuchengeta mhuri dzavo nevarume vavo. Zvinhu zvakabva zvachinja zvakare munharaunda nekuti vanhu vakatanga kundipawo ruremekedzo nekuita kuti ndive ndichitawo zvakasiyana siyana zvinoitwa nevamwe varume vakaroora zvikhombana.*
>
> *When my wife decided to be initiated, everything changed. The way she treated me and my family totally changed (for the better). It goes without saying that the training assisted her to become a well groomed woman who knows how to take responsibility and how to take care of the family and me as well. Even the treatment that I got from the community was different as I was able to take part in community programmes and activities.*

Pakangotambirwa mudzimai wangu ndakazoona musiyano wakanyanyana pakugona kundichengeta nemhuri yangu. Mudzimai wangu akachinja mabatiro nemaitiro aakange ave kuita pabonde.

When my wife was initiated I realised a (positive) change in how she took care of me and the way she treated me in bed. She also worked very hard in order to satisfy me in bed, sexually.

Comments from Mula, a forty-year old grandfather and father of five girls, illustrated this:

Pandakaroora mudzimai wangu akange asina kutambirwa. Ndakaona musiyano pakati pemaonerwo neruremekedzo rwandaipiwa nenharaunda kuti rwakange rwakasiyana. Chikonzero ndechekuti mudzimai wangu anga asina kutambirwa. Zvakazochinja pavakazotambirwa nevamwe vemunharaunda.

When I got married, my wife was not initiated. The way I was treated before she was initiated and after the initiation training was totally different. I was also being treated with due respect by the community as a whole. This shows the gravity and/ or the value and respect given to this cultural practice of chinamwali.

The way men are treated in the community is based on the premise that they are married to initiates or non-initiates. *Chinamwali* is therefore associated with the following: fear, shame, embarrassment, humiliation, preoccupation, respect and dignity, among others. This depends on how one decides to follow which route is best for him or her and the position that they want in the community. Words such as fear, embarrassment and humiliation are attached to those who decide not to follow the principles of the society and words such as dignity and respect are associated with those people who decide to follow and respect the cultural practices and be part of the whole. This is part of the social interaction and how the society is constructed by certain dictates and cultural beliefs. The fact that one's treatment is different from another builds different classes in the community. *Chinamwali* has a bearing on the community as a whole but the recipients (the women) are the ones whose life is prescribed rather than the men. It also appears to be disciplinary to the female body whose behaviour and activities are shaped and prescribed from birth and is deeply embedded in a matrix of beliefs, values and attitudes of the people in the community. These beliefs and values shape and provide functional significance to the cultural practices of the people in the community.

5.3 Chinamwali and Ubuntu/ Hunhu/ Humaneness

It was established that men perceived that *chinamwali* created a sense of Ubuntu/ *hunhu* or humaneness amongst initiates *(zvikhombana*) in the Mahenye community. Ubuntu is the social philosophy that embodies virtues that celebrate the mutual responsibility, mutual assistance, trust, sharing, usefulness, caring and respect for others among other ethical values (Nziramasanga Commission 1999, 12). It is also a concept that denotes a good human being, a well behaved and morally upright person charactorised by qualities such as responsibility, honesty, justice, trustworthiness, hard work, integrity, a corporative spirit, solidarity, hospitality, devotion to the family and the welfare of the family.[1] It also reflects that one's identity/ sense of belonging to a group is shaped by other people and the environment, through socialisation and social interaction. Therefore, through socialisation, *chinamwali* socialises people into good citizens and this social practice is a useful indigenous way of knowing that can be used for sustainable development (Chigidi 2009, 182).

Ubuntu/ *hunhu* is instilled amongst the initiates whilst in the training camp. It is touted as denoting a 'true' or real Mahenye woman or girl who is also respected in the community. Bondai and Kaputa (2016, 10) highlighted that the epitome of Africanness is only ensured and guaranteed through Ubuntu/*hunhu* being mainstreamed in African curricula. Ubuntu/ *hunhu* philosophy inculcates harmony, a spirit of oneness and brotherhood into people through close and sympathetic social relations within the group of initiates (initially in the training camp) and later in the community as a whole. Hence, group solidarity and behaviour is instilled among the women in community through this initiation training programme as the philosophy is regarded as a panacea for unity, reconciliation, love, empathy among Africans. The curriculum is meant to create a respected and honoured woman and what a woman in the community is supposed to be as it transmits the values and belief systems and wisdom from one generation to another. It creates harmony through close and sympathetic social relations within the group of initiates (initially in the training camp) and later on in the community as a whole. The curriculum on the training camps is meant to create a respectable woman through various

[1] Ramose (1996), in Nebudere (2005), also noted that Ubuntu is at the root of African philosophy and being and that the African tree of knowledge stems from the Ubuntu philosophy. Mandova and Chingombe (2013), in Bondai and Kaputa (2016, 1), maintained that Ubuntu is a social philosophy which embodies virtues that celebrates the mutual social responsibility, mutual assistance, trust, sharing, unselfishness, self-reliance, caring, and respect for others among other ethical values. Mokgoro (1998, 1) further noted that Ubuntu has been described as a philosophy of life which in its most fundamental sense represents personhood, humanity, humaneness and morality; it is a metaphor that describes group solidarity where such group solidarity is central to the survival of communities with a society of resources, where the fundamental belief is that *motho ke moto ba batho ba bangwe/ umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* which, literally translated, means a person can only be a person through others

teaching on respect, dignity, cooking, fetching water and household chores. Women are also taught myths, riddles, folklore, poems, songs and legends which hold the moral values of the community. Initiates have to experience physical, educational, emotional, psychological, moral, spiritual metamorphosis in order to attain adulthood.

Dickson, a thirty-nine year old father of three girls, emphasised that

> *Chinamwali kana kuti kutambirwa kunopa mudzimai kana mwanasikana wese wemunharaunda ruremekedzo. Zvinobva zvasiyanisa vakatambirwa nevamwe vasina kutambirwa. Vanasikana vangu vese vakatambirwa. Amai vavo vakavakurudzira kuti vatambirwe. Zvinotondipawo chiremerera munharaunda nekuti vana vangu vese vakatambirwa. Kana wakatambirwa unotarisirwa kuti uve uchiteerera vabereki pamwe chete nekuita zvakanaka munharaunda yako.*
>
> *Chinamwali or khomba initiation gives all the women respect and honour in the community. That personality trait differentiates initiates from the non-initiates. It helps initiates to live a stable and happy life in the community where they also take part in community activities. My children are initiated just like their mother and my siblings. It also gives me respect and honour in the community since my children followed all the prescribed cultural 'norms and values'. If the woman or girl is initiated, she is supposed to behave and have the sense of responsibility, honesty and trust in the community where she belongs. In other words, chinamwali imprints that sense of Ubuntu among women and girls in the community.*

Remarks from thirty-year old Madhonora, recently married with a baby boy, illustrate this:

> *Tsika yekhomba inoratidza kuti musikana kana kuti mudzimai 'akura'. Musikana kana akura haachafaniri kutamba nevakomana uye kuita zvisina basa nezvisingakurudzirwe munharaunda. Kutambirwa kunoratidza kuti musikana akufanira kuita mabasa nehunhu hunoratidza kuti akura uye haasisiri mwana mudiki. Mukadzi anozonzi mukadzi chaiye kana atambirwa. Kana asati atambirwa anenge asina ruremekedzo rwekunzi mukadzi chaiye nekuti panenge 'pasina chaanoziva'. Nharaunda inenge yakukuona semudzimai chaiye nekuti anenge atambirwa.*
>
> *Chinamwali initiation/training stipulates that one is no longer a girl but is now a lady/ 'woman' and has to act like one, not to play with the boys and non-initiates anymore. It therefore signifies a child's coming of age. It also signifies that one is now a real*

woman for one is not born a 'woman'. One becomes the real woman after undergoing the initiation programme. It also means that she is now ready and comfortable to get married as she would have fulfilled the basic tenants of womanhood or being a real woman. The community (family and friends) through social interaction will regard her as a real woman.

One of the interviewees had this to say:

Vasikana nemadzimai kana vari kukhomba vanodzidziswa hunhu hwavanotarisirwa kuti vange vachizoita kana vadzoka kudzimba dzavo. Hunhu hunosanganisira kuterera vabereki, vanhu vakuru vemunharaunda, kugona kubika, kuchengeta murume nemhuri yake.

Whilst in the training camp initiates are taught in all round personality about what the Shangaan call 'vumunhu' – African philosophy as Ubuntu. This is the good personality that these initiates are taught and are supposed to showcase when they are in the community. It also represents tenants of child development, quality and discipline. The training is intensive to such an extent that the initiates are supposed to grasp all the training aspects which aid their societal development as well as ensuring the durability of the ideal marriage in the Shangaan society. Marriage cannot be considered ideal if the woman is not initiated because she is regarded as a child not an adult.

It was established that *chinamwali* is associated with developing the basic tenets of Ubuntu or humaneness amongst the women who undergo the training programme. Young women and girls are socialised to see *chinamwali* as fulfilling the societal expectations of a well groomed woman. It also seen as a means of preserving the girls and family honour as well as providing a form of protection. The researcher therefore noted that Ubuntu /*hunhu*/ humanness is 'gendered'. As with male circumcision among the Shangaan young men and boys, initiates, according to Maphosa (2011, 5), acquire the secret knowledge of their village through reciting family and village stories, recounting proverbs, exploring folklore and learning vocational skills. Hence female bodies are produced by or in the community through interaction and grooming as they grow up. Cultural expectations work to prescribe women's behaviour in a manner that is acceptable to the community. Young women and girls are groomed to see *chinamwali* as a pathway to success (in marriage). The practice also provides women with a sense of identity, self-respect and achievement upon finishing the training. Socially constructed cultural practices like *chinamwali* tend to control and regulate the female body. Young women

and girls are groomed to value *chinamwali* and to consider completing the training an important form of success. They are also taught about group solidarity, conformity, compassion, respect, human dignity, humanistic orientation, the norms and values and collective unity. Men in the focus groups seemed to value the lessons that the women are taught through *chinamwali*, both the practical (cooking, bathing, washing, and greeting) and the sexual aspects. Strong pressure to conform to tradition is evidenced by the societal exclusion of those women (and their husbands and families) who are not initiated.

5.4 Enhancement of sexual encounters

In the Mahenye community, girls grow up knowing or hoping that one day they will marry. They are therefore groomed according to certain rules and know they must be able to satisfy husbands in the future. As part of the *chinamwali* curriculum, young women and girls are socialised to attend to these teachings with great care as compliance with these rules means one is a good citizen of society. Experiences of sexual encounters by men with the initiates also played a central role in discussions between the researcher and the men who participated in the interviews and focus group discussions. The researcher asked about these men's experience of sexual encounters with initiates and almost all men in focus group discussions confirmed that they enjoyed their sexual encounters with the initiates. The argument was that initiates are taught according to strict rules of heterogeneity and sexual orientation and they learn how to enhance sexual pleasure.

According to Kule:

> *Ini handizivi musiyano pakati pemunhu akatambirwa neasina katambirwa nekuti mukadzi wangu wandakaroora ndakamuroora akatambirwa saka hapana musiyano wandinoona. Chinhu chimwe chete chandinoziva ndechekuti mukadzi wangu anogona kundibata zvakanaka pabonde sevaakadzidziswa kukhomba.*
>
> *I don't know the difference in sexual encounters between an initiate and non-initiate. I got married to my wife and she was already initiated and I have never had any sexual encounter with anyone to compare the two. One thing I am sure of is that my wife is good in bed and I enjoy all the sexual encounters with her as she drives me crazy. She strives so much to satisfy me in bed sexually in trying to fulfil what she was taught whilst in the training camp. These are positive results of going through the initiation training programme.*

Thirty-five year old Kenny, whose wife was initiated after they were married, commented:

> *Mudzimai wangu pandakamuroora akange asina kutambirwa nekuti aisazvikoshesa. Akazototambirwa mushure mekunge audzwawo kukosha kwekutambirwa nehama neshamwari dzangu kuti aifanira kutambirwa setsika nemagariro emunharaunda medu. Ndakaona musiyano pahunhu netsika dzake pavakaenda kunotambirwa nevamwe kukhomba. Mabatiro aakange akundiita netsika dzake zvakabva zvangochinja zvichiratidza musiyano nepaakange asati atambirwa, nokudaro ndinoti kutambirwa chinhu chakanaka kumadzimai edu. Mudzimai akatakbirwa anogona kubata murume zvakanaka pabonde. Mudzimai wangu akabva anochainjawo nehunhu hwake uye Mabatiro aakatanga kuita mhuri yangu neyake zvakabva zvangochinja zvichiratidza kukura maari.*
>
> *My wife was not initiated when I married her since she didn't put value on the initiation training. It was due to pressure from my family, siblings and her friends and colleagues that she decided to be initiated. I realised a difference from the way she used to treat me before and after she was initiated. My sexual experiences with her after she was initiated were so amazing because whilst in the training camp, they are taught, among others about how to take care of the husband and satisfy him in bed sexually. There was a great difference in her performance; hence I vouch for women to be initiated so that they are fully aware about how to do their prescribed tasks and duties in the household. Not only was there a change sexually, I also realised a great shift and maturity from her soon after the training as her behaviour changed as well. There have been some changes even in the way we conversed as a family as well as the behaviour and positive treatment towards my siblings and hers as well.*

The comments of Mula also illustrate this:

> *Handisaiziva musiyano pakati pechikhombana nechichuta kuzosvika musi wandakarambidzwa kupinda mumba kunoona zvikhombana zvichitamba mugidhi pazvakabva kukhomba. Ipapo ndopavaitamba mitambo vachiratidza zvavakadzidziswa kukhomba nezvimwe zvikhombana. Ndakarambidzwa zvakare kunwa doro raimwiwa nevarume vane vakadzi vakatambirwa. Pane musiyano pakati pemudzimai wangu asati atambirwa nepaakazotambirwa nekuti paakabva kukhomba anga akuziva kundibata zvakanaka pabonde.*

I didn't know the difference between the initiates and non-initiates up until I was secluded from the initiation celebrations where sexual dances were showcased by the graduates. There is a great difference between the initiate and non-initiate even from looking at how they perform the dances on the graduation day. I learnt that from my initiated woman who is now a 'real woman' as compared to the 'previous' woman in her (who was not initiated) and didn't know how to play several roles in the household or even knowing how to perform sexually in bed.

Jalasi commented that:

Vakadzi vangu vese vari vaviri vakatambirwa vachiri vasikana ini ndikazovaroora vatotambirwa kare. Vakange vakutoziva zvavaifanira kuita kana vave mumba sezvidzidzo zvavo zvekukhomba. Vese vari vaviri vakadzidziswa uye vanogona kundibata zvakanaka pabonde uye kundichengeta saka ndinoona zviri zvinhu zvakanaka chose.

All my wives, the two of them are initiated. They were initiated before marriage, and they really know how to satisfy me in bed as they were taught to do so in the training camp. My sexual encounters with them are amazing as well drawing this from the lessons that they learnt in the training camp. I wouldn't mind sending them for refresher lessons and even to encourage some of our relatives to be initiated because they will be equipped on how to be well groomed women.

Other remarks included:

Vakadzi vakatambirwa vanoziva kubata varume vavo zvakanaka pabonde zvichienderana nezvavakadzidziswa kukhomba mwedzi mitatu yavakange variko.

Initiated women know how to satisfy men in bed, sexually I line with what they were taught to do in the training camp.

Vakadzi nevasikana pavanenge vari kukhomba vanodzidziswa zvese zvinotarisirwa kuti vaite kana vari pabonde. Ndakamboita bonde nevamwe vasikana ndisati ndaroora asi pandakazoita navadzimai vangu, vakatambirwa, ndakaona musiyano. Zvikhombana zvinogona kubata murume zvakanaka mumba uye pabonde.

Whilst in the training camp, young women and girls receive all the sex grooming so that they will apply that when they are back home with their husbands. My sexual

encounter with the initiate/ my wife was awesome since I had to do this at home. I have had sex with other girls before marriage but that was different from the encounter that I had with my initiated wife. Whilst in the training camp, young women and girls are trained to satisfy their potential suitor and/ or the husband.

Clearly, while in the training camp, women are taught how to satisfy their husbands in bed. Sexual encounters are supposed to satisfy the men and women appear to try hard to apply what they have been taught in the training camp. Women are encouraged to accommodate male needs, understand themselves as others sees them and feel pleasure through their own bodily objectification especially being looked at and identified as objects of male desire (Connell 1987 in Lee 1994).

5.5 *Chinamwali* and bride payment (price)

As in the study by Naidu (2011b), the researcher became aware of how women were conceived in cultural terms, how they were constructed and reconstructed in cultural and popular terms and how the community values and respects the initiates. *Chinamwali* appears to play a significant part in bride prices too. Most of the men in this research explained that they would not pay a bridal payment or *lobola* for a non-initiate. As Kenyatta (1965, 132) noted in Kenya, no proper Gikuyu would dream of marrying a girl who had not been circumcised and the vice versa; it was a taboo for a Gikuyu man or woman to have sexual relations with someone who had not been circumcised. If this happens, those involved must go through ceremonial purification, that is *korutwo thahu, orgotahikio megiro* – ritual vomiting of evil deeds. Siblings do not welcome a relative-in law who has not fulfilled the ritual qualifications for matrimony. Taboos according to Chigidi (2009, 174) are avoidance rules that Shona people of Zimbabwe engage in as a way of influencing members to conform to society's values and norms. They are meant to guarantee conformity by threatening people with unpleasant consequences should they disobey the rules. The researcher therefore asked if *chinamwali* or initiation had a bearing on bride price or *lobola* payment in the Mahenye community.

Below are the excerpts of twenty-nine year old Madokwenyu who commented that,

Mukadzi akatambirwa chero roora rake rikadhura sei pakuroora hazvina basa nekuti anenge akakosha muupenyu hwemurume arikumuroora uye kudzidza rese. Tsika yekhomba iyi inokosheswa zvekuti kana munhu akatambirwa ndiye anenge achidiwa nemhuri.

An initiated woman is worthy to be married and at a higher rate when negotiating bride price because she is an asset to the family in general but to the husband and children in particular. It doesn't matter even if the bride price is way too high. It complements each other. This is because chinamwali is regarded to have enormous educational, social, moral and religious implications which men want their women to undergo.

Phibion's narrative typically reflects what most men and even women think as he explained that,

Mukadzi akatambirwa anoziva kuchengeta mhuri nemurume saka roora rake rinofanira kuve risingatyisi kune murume nemhuri irikuroora yacho.

An initiated woman is equipped and she knows how to take care of the husband and the family. Therefore the value for and the bride price is justified even if it is on a higher side.

According to Mabhawu,

Mukadzi kana musikana asina kutambirwa haafaniri kudhuriswa nekuti agara haapiwe ruremekedzo nerukudzo munharaunda yedu yeMahenye.

There is no value in charging exorbitant amounts for a non-initiate because they don't have much value in the community. The community do not put extreme 'price tags' to non-initiates since they are not valued in this community. They don't qualify to be charged more.

Similarly, thirty-six year old Muhlaru, married to a daughter of a resident of the Mahenye community, commented that:

Mukadzi asina kutambirwa haana chikonzero chekudhura nekuti haana ruremekedzo rwaanopiwa munharaunda medu. Ruremekedzo runopiwa zvikhombana kupfuura zvichuta. Ruremekedzo nerukudzo runopiwa kumadzimai kana musikana anenge akatambirwa nekuti anonzi ndiye aremeredza chivanhu.

One cannot negotiate for more bride price if the woman or the girl is not initiated. There is more value given to the initiates as compared to non-initiates. The value of the woman increases if she is initiated because she is attributed to have upheld the norms

and values of the society. Hence respect and honour to the woman as well as the ability to charge more as bride price.

Fifty-year old Malati, a married grandfather with two sons, one daughter and three grandchildren highlighted that:

> *Zvichuta hazvipiwe ruremekedzo munharaunda yedu yeMahenye. Dzimwe nharaunda zvinotonzi ndizvo zvinokonzeresa matambudziko munharaunda imomo. Ndinozviziva izvozvi nekuti mudzimai wangu akatambirwa uye anotodzidzisa zvikhombana (Mutsvatsi)*
>
> *Non-initiates are not even respected or given value in our community. Some surrounding communities argue that non-initiates cause misfortunes in their communities as they didn't adhere to the societal beliefs and expectations.*

Jalasi emphasised that:

> *Chinamwali chinoita kuti mwanasikana aratidzike nekuremekedzwa pane vamwe vasikana munharaunda. Kana wakatambirwa unowanawo murume chaiye akakodzerana newe anozokuroora. Murume iyeye anokwanisa kubhadhara mari yakawanda yeroora nekuti unenge uchitozivikanwa kuti une chiremerera munharaunda. Runako rwemusikana kana mukadzi runoonekwa nekunge akatambirwa kwete nechiso. Musikana kana mudzimai anooneka kunaka nekuvakwa kwake kana achinge akatambirwa.*
>
> *Chinamwali cultural practice constructs an 'attractive and mature female' and helps in finding a respectable husband who must be ready to pay enough lobola to that beautiful initiated woman. Beauty of the woman (according to the Mahenye community) is attributed to initiation and not physical attributes. Therefore as long as one is not initiated, she is not seen as a beautiful and she won't get respect in the community.*

Thirty-eight year old Macina reported that:

> *Hazviite kuroora mudzimai akatambirwa kwakurega kubhadhara roora kuvabereki vake nekuti mudzimai iyeye anenge akakosha kumhuri nekunharaunda yake kwaanobva. Tsika yeukhomba inoita kuti madzimai nevasikana vakosheswe munharaunda yeMahenye.*

> *It's not ethical to cohabit or not to pay lobola to an initiate since she is a respected woman both in her family and in the community where she comes from. Initiation gives the woman respect in the Mahenye community. Hence bridal payment has to be made without fail.*

Everyone in the community is socialised to value and respect this cultural practice. It is a group custom and a form of 'tribal psychology' meant to instil 'discipline' in the women in the community. *Chinamwali* appears from the outside, invading the self of the woman. This is because the teachings are imprinted on the female body which is where the beauty of a woman is believed to start from. Moreover, the inner beauty or the self is built from the maturity and self-actualisation stemming from the training. However, the female body is also seen as sexual and is valued in relation to initiation and *chinamwali* training. The body of a woman in this patriarchal context is only meant for marriage and to satisfy male desires. Hence value is given to women depending on whether they are initiated or not. The men in the focus groups and interviews illustrated that there is a direct link between *chinamwali* cultural practice and womanhood as well as the 'price tag' for *lobola* and marriage. However, in addition to women being regarded as 'objects' of male(s') desires, they are also seen as assets to the family if they have been initiated.

The researcher established that the culturally defined sexual efficiency expected of young women and girls can have a negative effect. *Chinamwali/ khomba* practice can contribute to child mortality, HIV and AIDS and maternal deaths. Explicit sexual training of initiates (that is, how to handle a man, including dancing for the man in bed while the man is on top for his satisfaction (Ahmed 2014)) can be harmful. Girls take their lessons into practice resulting in child marriages and teen pregnancies. In Malawi, as Reilly (2014) noted, girls as young as ten are being sent by their families to initiation camps to be taught how to have sex and in some cases, lose their virginity. Sometimes young girls engage in sex in the name of 'cleansing (child) dust'. This leads to high risks of teen pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. The *hyenas* invited by the families of the young girls may also infect them. Interviews with the Ministry of Health revealed information with regard to child mortality and maternal health/ death. A nurse at one of the community clinics described the rising numbers of child mortality, maternal death, and sexually transmitted diseases reported at the clinic. This was because girls engaged in early sexual activities, related to child marriages. After the training, girls are told they are now adults and they must behave like adults not as little children. This encourages involvement in early sexual activities. For Maphosa (2011, 1), the traditional forms of

education are motivated by what people believe in. The community justifies all these acts in the name of culture.

In some communities, families who are not financially capable of taking care of their children, sometimes send them off for initiation at young age. According to Musingili and Taruvinga (2017, 6), this makes them eligible for marriage and can remove the burden of taking care of those children. Some families believe in traditional culture to such as extent that they don't send their children to school (or may not have the resources to do so). They are concerned with cultural preservation and identity only. Cultural rites such as *khomba* contribute to cultural beliefs that children should pass through initiation before adulthood if they are to become good adults (Muzingili and Taruvinga 2017, 3). Respect and honour in the community and ensuring one's children are married, are deemed as essential. This contributes to preserving cultural identity and heritage. The challenge is, however, that these families are being honoured and respected at the expense of their children.

Chinamwali is attributed with instilling the concept of Ubuntu and/ or 'human-ness' amongst the women in the Mahenye community; this can explain why the elders of the community have a vested interest in the young women and girls undergoing the initiation training. From the narratives in Chapters 5 and 6 it is clear that the chief and the elders of the community (both men and women) have a role to pay in this cultural practice.

The chief

Being the leader of the community, the chief benefits from these ceremonies. Whenever the community holds an initiation ceremony in the Mahenye community, the chief benefits through tokens being paid by the parents of the initiates. The parents pay money, goats or cattle to the chief, honouring him and the 'ancestors' for the successful training held in 'his' community. This happens annually whenever the event is being held. Custom in Africa is stronger than domination, stronger than the law, stronger even than religion. Over the years, customary practices have been incorporated into religion (Lightfoot-Klein 1989, cited by Okome 2003 in Kambarami 2006, 1)

Community leaders and older women

Community leaders, *vatsvatsi* and *vadzabhi* facilitate the initiation training for young women and girls. They play a central role in organising as well as training the initiates in transitioning

from childhood to adulthood. While the initiation practice is argued to benefit men and 'young women', it also benefits these facilitators as they get tokens of appreciation from the parents of the initiates. Parents further benefit as they form part of the group or group behaviour/identity into which their children fit. Smith (2008, 10) highlighted that Islamic South Eastern Asia overwhelmingly adheres to the Shafi school of law, the only one to make female genital mutilation obligatory. This marks the entry of a woman into the faith, whether as an adult convert, or as a child born into the community. In more 'orthodox' areas, babies are circumcised, in a ceremony hidden from men. In less orthodox areas, it is more of a rite of puberty and may be publicly celebrated (Smith 2008). It is in these celebrations and ceremonies that elders as well as parents of the initiates are honoured. This therefore motivates older women, parents and community leaders to continue motivating for ceremonies like *chinamwali.*

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has described the perceptions of men towards the cultural practice of *chinamwali* which contributes to integration within the Mahenye community. Sexual education/ grooming form part of community integration and solidarity as men and women share common identities and perceptions towards their cultural practices. It can also be noted that *lobola* payment or bride price is embedded in the Shangaan rite of passage and initiates are more 'valuable' than non-initiates. *Chinamwali,* as a cultural practice, is claimed by the men as instilling a sense of Ubuntu amongst women who will be groomed to respect society as well as develop their own integrity. From the feminist perspective, the perception of men towards *chinamwali* cultural practice is aimed at pushing a visible male agenda and patriarchy.

CHAPTER 6: *CHINAMWALI / KHOMBA* PRACTICE AND CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE BODY

6.0 Introduction

This chapter looks at the cultural relevance of *chinamwali* among the Shangaan community by exploring the patriarchal connotations that are attached to this cultural practice. The first part of the chapter contextualises how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* creates the 'cultural body' and how it strengthens masculinity behaviours amongst the Shangaan community. The second part looks at the symbolic meaning of the beads, headbands/ *chihandani*, initiation celebrations, initiation sessions. *Chinamwali* defines the 'real woman' according to the Shangaan belief system. The societal expectations of the women who participate in this cultural practice will be explored in this chapter. The chapter will also look at the cultural relevance of the initiation ceremony as practised in the Mahenye community. The cultural and traditional practices tend to define what and how the society must function through interaction and socialisation. One of the questions to be answered in this chapter is: What is the relationship between *chinamwali* / *khomba* practice and the construction of womanhood of the Shangaan women?

Violence is often perpetrated by men against their female partners. Not only through violence, however, do men enforce their control over women. *Chinamwali* can be seen as a male initiative which only women go through to be schooled to satisfy their potential suitors. One could ask why men do not need to go through similar programmes to learn to care for and satisfy their women. Female rituals also create differences in the status among women as well as between men and women. Ratele (2008, 522) pointed out that among those aspects that need to be revised, is the global pattern of male domination of women as well as the notion of masculinity as a 'fixed' and static character type or set of traits. *Chinamwali* and male domination are still in existence in our day to day lives. Advocacy is required to expose some of these cultural practices which tend to discriminate or insubordinate women in the community. However, the task to achieve this is fraught with many challenges. Chief among them is the customary justification of some of these 'abuses'.

6.1 'Creation' of the 'cultural body/social body'

The researcher established that *chinamwali* creates the 'cultural body or social body'. It inscriptively renders the female body controlled by the so-called cultural beliefs and understanding. The 'cultural and or social body' includes the physical body of the woman who

has been initiated, as someone who is 'well mannered', who respects and interact well with people in the community, who can cook, wash, do gardening and fulfil other domestic obligations (Stuart 2011, 10). In some societies, aspects associated with the cultural or social body include among others, genital elongation, female genital mutilation/ female circumcision, singing and performing a dances that teach about sex. According to Ortner (1972, 7), we equate culture broadly with the notion of human consciousness or with the product of human consciousness, that is, systems of thought and technology. Under the guise of this culture, girls are also taught never to deny sex to their husbands except during their menstrual cycle. Rosman et al. (2009, 30) noted that some have focused on culture as a set of ideas and meanings that people use, derived from the past and reshaped in the present. In this view, historically transmitted patterns of meaning, embodied in symbols, are the means by which humans communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life. With *chinamwali*, there are several attachments to this cultural practice among the Shangaan community. Those who have participated in *chinamwali* are treated with more respect in the community than those who have not been initiated.

Girls and young women participate in *chinamwali* from the age of about twelve years depending on the time they start menstruating and are therefore ready to transition to adulthood. The girls spend three months or more at a secluded place being trained to be 'real women'. The justification for the seclusion was for the initiates to participate intensively in the training programme. They are then expected to have changed and to act differently compared to the non-initiates. Detailing what happens in the training camp as a way of creating the 'cultural body' and installing the real understanding of the cultural body amongst the women, one of the interviewees, Mudhlayi said,

> *….taimuka kuseni kwega kwega tichinopinda murwizi, mumvura inotonhora, kweawa imwe chete, zuva nezuva, hanzi kuti usimbe.Izvi zvaiitwa mashambanzou zuva risati rabuda mvura ichiri kutonhora. Zvaiita futi kuti tigare takagadzirira pane ripi zvaro dambudziko rataizosangana naro muupenyu. Izvi zvaiitwa nechikhombana chese chaive kudondo…*
>
> *We would wake up early in the morning and spend one hour or so in the river with cold water as a way of strengthening the (female) body ... This was normally done before the sun rises, when the water is very cold. It was attributed to making us stronger in each and every aspect of life that we may encounter. All the initiates were supposed to do that every day.*

When I asked if this was painful, she replied,

> *Zvairwadza, taitonhorwa, tichitonhorwa nechando asi pakange pasina zvekuita nekuti tainzi ndokuti musimbe uye hapana anga akatituma kuti tiende kunotambirwa. Taiudzwa kuti hapana akatimanikidza kuuya kunotambirwa saka taifanira kuterera nekudzidza zvose zvatainzi tidzidze nevakuru kuukhomba ikoko. Zvaipedzisira zvakunakdza nekuti zvikhombana zvese zvaipinda mumvura. Vamwewo vaiita musikanzwa wekubuda mumvura asi waiti ukaonekwa nevakuru wairangwa nekuti unenge usingateereri mumirairo yevakuru vaitidzidzisa…*
>
> *It was a difficult task but we had to endure the pain and suffering since we were told that that was the process for one to attain the 'real woman' status. We were told that pain enhances womanhood and instills strong responsibilities in women. We were taught secrets of successful motherhood. We were also reminded that we were not forced to attend the training so we were supposed to abide by the rules of the training practice and especially to the elders who were training us. Some would not do that but if found; you were punished by the elders. We would also sit together at the fire place every day in the evening being told stories by the elders (vadzabhi). That is when others would be reprimanded of bad behaviour among others.*

The argument was that women were supposed to become stronger, and spending time in the cold water was a sign of 'strength'. The idea was therefore to create a 'cultural/ social body' shaped by a painful programme in the training camp. Gilligan (1995, 5) noted that girls' initiation into womanhood has often meant an initiation into a kind of selflessness which is associated with care and connection but also with a loss of psychological vitality and courage. Like the Zulu dance narratives and Zulu bodies which are positioned to meet tourist expectations (Naidu 2011b, 1), *chinamwali* tends to construct the female body as well and it is produces and coaches females to meet male expectations. When one is initiated, one gets blessings from the family and clan. There appears to be a need to satisfy community and family expectations and the practice appears to unify the community of Mahenye.

Tsatsawani added,

> *Taimuka kuseni kwega kwega zuva risati rabuda topinda murwizi mumvura yaitonhora. Tanga tisingabvumidzwi kubuda tisati taudzwa nevakuru vedu, (vatsvatsi) kuti chibudai. Vaiti ndokuti tisimbe, nyangwe izvezvi kuchitonhora mumwedzi yechando anditopfeki juzi kana zvinodziya nekuti chando chose hatichachinzwi, takanzwa chando*

zvikakwana mudondo. Kutambirwa kana kuti kukhomba kwakatisimbisa zvekuti dambudziko rese reupenyu taakukwanisa kusangana naro tisingatyi…

We would wake up early in the morning before the sun rises and would spend some hours in the river, in very cold water. The idea was to 'make us stronger'. Even now if it's during winter time I would spend it without wearing a jersey because I am used to that. Chinamwali training strengthened us and made us strong women or warriors who can fight the challenges of life without hesitation.

The above shows how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* aimed to make women strong in all social and cultural aspects, in other words it is argued as constructing the female body to meet harsh / patriarchal or cultural demands. Naidu (2009, 2), in her study of female cleaners, highlighted that "the body is a site of social control and the uniform is construed as a means by which such relations of power and disciplinary control come to be exercised and experienced … the body comes to be invested with relations of power and domination". Similarly, *chinamwali* can also be viewed as creating a 'strong cultural and social body', and is seen as a site of controlling or dominating the female body through what women are exposed to. Women are disciplined and learn to control their bodies to meet cultural demands. The aim is to create the woman that society would want to see. In his study of the female circumcision in Kenya, Kenyatta (1965, 138) described how women would go up to their waists into the river, dipping themselves up to their breasts, holding ceremonial leaves in their hands, before shaking their waists and dropping the leaves into the river as a sign of withdrawing from their childhood behaviour and forgetting it forever. This practice was tough on the initiates as it exposed them to harsh conditions as a means of initiating them or transitioning them into adulthood. This was done in secrecy. Muzingili and Taruvinga (2017) noted that many cases of culturally inflicted children's rights abuses continue to occur because they are 'normalised' in customs and traditions. Geographic locations are remote and most of the practices are held in secrecy, thus the abuse is obscured and continues to gain permanence in the lives of the local people.

In order to strengthen and create the 'cultural/ social body', the elders encouraged every woman to be initiated as a way of respecting cultural beliefs and expectations. When asked why it was important to be initiated, Hlalati said,

Kutambirwa kwakanaka nekuti kunokupawo chiremerera pane vamwe vakadzi vasina kutambirwa, unenge watosiyana nevamwe vakadzi vasina kutambirwa. Unenge uri

mukadzi akakwana asingashooreki pamberi pevamwe vakadzi uye ndisu vanodiwa nevarume. Kana wakatambirwa unenge uchikwanisa kuita zvakawanda munharaunda pasina anokurambdza nekuti unenge wakaita zvinokurudzirwa kuti uite munharaunda zvinoitwawo nevamwe vakadzi…

Initiation is a very valuable and respected cultural practice in this Machangana culture. You gain respect in the community and you cannot be compared with non-initiates as they are not respected in the community at large. Men love the initiated women as compared to the non-initiates. A girl or woman attracts the admiration of several young men in the community. They would compete for initates as they are considered 'well-groomed'. When initiated, you can do a lot of community expectations because you would fit into the group of the initiates as compared to non-initiates in the society.

Janet had this to say,

Kupinda mumvura kuchitonhora usina kupfeka ndiko kuti kuukhomba kwacho nekuti kunoitwa kuti usimbe. Chese chikhombana chakabva kunotambirwa chinokuudza kuti kupinda mumvura ndozvinosimbisa muviri…

Spending time naked, in the river, in cold water is the pain the initiates are supposed to endure so that they are called 'real women'. All the initiates go through the same process. It's also a way of checking how strong the initiates are and will they be able to endure suffering be it in marriage or in life situations.

The women in this research described how they endured suffering in the training camp and this signifies they can withstand whatever life throws at them. Some of the women found comfort in having passed this test of strength. Feminists (and certainly radical feminists) would oppose making young girls and women go into cold water to prove their strength, and rightly view this as abuse of women and children's rights. From a human rights perspective, the women are at risk of contracting diseases such as influenza and pneumonia. Feminists have pointed out how patriarchy retards women's development (Harris 2005, 30) and benefits men and not women. *Chinamwali* is a tradition in the Mahenye community; no initiation means no respect. Patriarchy is a social order established and maintained by males to benefit them. Therefore women come to be disciplined and inscribed through the masculine gaze and are therefore culturally constructed.

Women participants were very clear that *chinamwali* meant 'real woman'. This is evidenced by the explanations given by Tsatsawani, Hlalati, Janet and Mudhlayi in the previous paragraphs which show that the idea behind the initiation sessions is to create the female body that society wants to see. Female initiation serves as a forum for female solidarity. It therefore creates ritual connections between successive generations of women and they acknowledge the value of traditional female knowledge that is distinct from male knowledge and from which men are excluded. Through the training programme, women gain respect, are expected to be stronger and they gain the credentials that society values.

6.2 Strengthening masculinity behaviours

The cultural practice of *chinamwali* comprises basic tenets of patriarchy, male dominance, culture and masculinity in its application. *Chinamwali* itself carries the imprint of the masculinised behaviours. Naidu and Ngqila (2013, 2) argued that "masculinised behaviours masquerading under the guise of 'tradition' and 'culture' are associated with different positions of power that work to extend various kinds of (sexual) privilege to men over women". It can be argued that *chinamwali* benefits men more than women and it is only the women who endure the suffering of the training camp. Male interests inform and dictate the shape of women's sexuality. Harris (2005, 9) noted that,

> All boys are born innocent, capable of becoming Charles Manson or Dr Martin Luther King Jr. With constant love and nourishment boys have the capacity to grow into cuddly teddy bears. With hatred, abuse, and abandonment they can become fierce grizzlies. Young boys become men by responding to situational demands and social pressures. Surrounded with expectations about how they, as men, ought to behave, boys have to sift through various demands placed upon them by their culture, their associates, their teachers, their friends, and their family to construct their own gender identities.

It is these gender identities which therefore influence how men ought to behave and label the women who do not participate in *chinamwali* practice. Boys are schooled to marry the girls who are initiated among the Shangaan community as a cultural norm. They are also encouraged to marry the girls who they see wearing head bands (*chihandani)* and beads and who behave like those who have been initiated. Naidu (2012, 10) noted that the female body and male body are differently constructed and bear different cultural meanings and reflections and these differently constructed cultural meanings are reflective of the power relations in the society. As in the Mahenye community, the VaRemba of Mberengwa are encouraged to marry initiates.

They are not encouraged to marry *vashenje* or non-initiates. They were also expected to conform to the VaRemba traditions and customs. Family rituals and all activities that take place in the training camps are kept secret. The secret is to be shared only among the initiates.

In terms of men and masculinity, Harris (2005, 21) also noted that,

> Concepts of masculinity, which provide beliefs about how men ought to behave, are constructed at many different levels both in society and in the minds of individuals. A masculine ideology generated by news media, artists, teachers, historians, parents, priests, and public figures dominates how men think about themselves. Because men in any country tend to share cultural histories, they may receive similar notions about how to behave. These common understandings of masculinity constitute dominant cultural norm.

These masculine behaviours work together with patriarchy as well as people's cultural beliefs. Women and girls' sexuality is a social preoccupation of the patriarchy and male interests inform and indicate the shape that this sexuality takes. Rosman et al. (2009, 30) commented that culture is learned and acquired by infants through a process called enculturation by anthropologists. The mental structures or schema are created in the individual as a result of the process of enculturation. Young women desire to be initiated to become like the other women in the community. *Chinamwali* benefits men more than women. Women are taught socio-cultural norms that uphold males and maintain machoism. *Chinamwali* has the goal of culturally defining women. As long as the interpretation of children's needs is gendered, our treatment of boys and girls will also be framed along those lines (Kehler 2003 in Kamlongera 2011).

In evidencing these inequalities, some of the conversations with men reflect what the men expect the women to do in the community. The researcher asked the men in one of the focus group discussions what it meant to be initiated and explored the value they placed on *chinamwali* compared to other cultural practices in that society. The general consensus was that all men want their women to be initiated. All men wanted to participate in the cultural activities linked to the initiates.

> *Tinodawo kupinda mumba munenge muchitambwa mugidhi nemuwacha nezvikhombana. Tinodawo kunwawo doro rinobikirwa zvikhombana pazvinobva kudondo kuukhomba. Hatidi kusarirawo pane vane vamwe varume saka tinoda kuti*

vakadzi vedu vanga vakatambirwa. Hapana chinorwadza sekusarirawo pane vamwe varume nezvikhombana pazvinenge zvichipembererwa…

We want to attend the graduation ceremony and celebration of the initiates when they come from the training camp. We want to take part in other activities where the initiates are involved in just like other men who married initiates in this community. Initiation ceremony is an interesting programme in which all men want to be involved.

They also mentioned that they didn't want to be labeled as men married to non-initiates (*zvichuta* – a discriminatory word). Jalasi commented that,

Isu tinoda vakadzi vakatambirwa, mukadzi akatambirwa anozivawo kuchengeta mhuri yake nekuchengetedza murume wake zvakanaka. Kana mukadzi akatambirwa anozivawo nguva yekugeza, mazuva ekurara nemurume nekuchengetedza murume wake nemhuri yake…takangokura tichiziva kuti mukadzi wese anofanira kutambirwa. Vana vangu vese vakatambirwa uye vakomana vakaroora vakadzi vakatambirwa ndizvo zvinopawo chirememerera mudunhu redu. Mukadzi asina kutambirwa anonetsa mumba nekuti anoita kuti dzinza risapiwe ruremekedzo rwakakwana. Mukadzi asina kutambirwa haagoni kuchengetedza murume wake, zvinomunetsa kuchengeta vana nemhuri.

We want to marry initiated women and we want the women to be initiated as part of the cultural norm. We encourage men to marry initiates and those who would have gone through the initiation training programme. An initiated woman knows how to respect the elders, how to respect the husband and the family. An initiated woman knows how and when to have and not to have sex with their husband. All my children and daughter in-laws are initiated and I encouraged all my sons to get married to initiates. This gives them and I the respect in the community since they all know how to take of my family or clan. If one marries a non-initiate his clan will be forsaken. The clan won't have pride in anything they do since they don't belong to a particular group or society. A non-initiate doesn't know how the norms and values of the community for they didn't take part in the rigorous training programme.

Malati highlighted that,

Kuroora mukadzi asina kutambirwa hapana zvaunenge waita. Unenge usiri murume pane vamwe varume nekuti hapana chinoitwa nemurume chaunokwanisa kuita.

Dzidziso inopiwa vamwe kudondo hauiwane nekuti unenge usina kuenda kunotambirwa...

If you are married to a non- initiate then you are 'not married'. One is regarded a "real man" if he is married to an initiate. If married to a non-initiate then you cannot participate in any of the cultural activities that 'real men' take part in. You won't enjoy the benefits that other men who married initiates enjoy.

As part of *chinamwali,* young women would be taken to an isolated place accompanied by elders/ trainers *(vatsvatsi)* to perform a dance that contains advice on how to offer the best sex to potential suitors. Muhlaru explained that

Mukadzi kana musikana wese anofanira kutambirwa, anofanira kupedza mwedzi mitatu ari mudondo, achidzidzira kugeza, kundichengeta mhuri nemurume, nekuzoremekedza vabereki vangu nevake, anofanira kugonazve kuzotamba kana ndarara naye…

All the women must spend all the three months in the bush/ training camp being initiated. The women must know how to take of themselves, the in-laws, siblings and relatives. They are supposed to know how to respect me and my family. Over and above they are supposed to take part in genital elongation as well as learning how to perform well in bed, through dancing, twisting and tweaking their waist.

This illustrates that women are the only ones engaged in the training and the lessons they are taught are specifically meant to make the men superior while the women remain inferior and subordinate. Cultural myths contain male messages that set forth prescriptions on how men ought to behave. Men do not regard each other as 'real men' if not married to an initiate. Harris (2005) noted that, at an individual level, a boy constructs his gender identity based upon his biology which influences messages he receives from his environment about how he ought to behave. Each man constructs his own identity in relation to specific gender notions deeply embedded in his culture – the culture that values initiation before marriage as a transition from childhood to adulthood and group identity. These notions are coded into messages with specific configurations that spell out specialised patterns of conduct. Male messages are like scripts that a player has to follow; they are like standard norms of behaviour of a particular culture.

From the discussion with the male group, there seemed to be consensus on what men believed to be the norms which govern their conduct in the community. All the men respondents claimed that their wives had been initiated and some of their children too. Men tend to create these patriarchal societies that grant privileges to those males who follow the dictates of classical

masculinity. As a cultural standard, norm and belief, all the men claimed they encouraged their children and grandchildren to be initiated as well so that they might have 'perfect' relationships/ families in the future. The ideals of a culture are passed on from one generation to another and changing them is a mammoth task. Thus, gender role messages, according to Harris (2005, 24), are like scripts that set normative standards men carry around in their heads and try to realise. Violating these roles leads to social condemnation and negative psychological consequences. Thus, Ratele (2008, 2) highlighted that male domination of females is structurally supported and fulfills hegemonic masculinities. Therefore, men grow up within cultures that have both implicit and explicit male messages that constitute masculine ideology. These classic messages socialise boys to be aggressive and they support patriarchal order even in modern societies. Boys and men with feminine traits risk being excluded from community activities. Marrying an initiate is regarded as acceptable masculine macho form of behaviour.

6.3 Symbolic meaning of the beads, head bands and initiation celebrations

Figure 6.1: Beads and headband (*chihandani*) worn by women in the training camp and after their graduation, a symbol that one is now an initiate (photo by researcher)

The parents and relatives of the initiates prepare presents and gifts for the initiates while they are in the camps so that when they pass out, they will wear and use them. These include beads and head bands (red caps with pins decorating the edges) (see Figure 6.1) and they buy new clothes for the initiates to wear when they finish training. The beads and headbands are a symbol that one is now an initiate. After initiation, initiates need to start wearing *chinhandani*, beads, change their clothing, do their hair in certain ways (following having shaved it in the training camp) and start paying attention to their appearance. The initiation ceremony or graduation ceremony is for those who have satisfied the requirements of the curriculum and

who are now expected to conform to suitable code of behaviour (Chikunda et al. 2007, 3). *Chihandani* is like a graduation uniform or symbol. This differentiates the initiate *(zvikhombana)* from the non-initiate *(zvichuta). Chihandani,* like the dress of the female cleaner, objectifies women into owned subjects – what Foucault (1982) in Naidu (2009, 9) referred to as "dividing practices" where women come to be divided from others who are not initiated and who do not qualify to wear *chihandani* and beads. Parents reinforce this cultural practice both directly and indirectly. According to Naidu (2009, 3), "the uniform is one means by which women are disciplined and objectified into subjects". The beads and headbands can be seen as a 'uniform' and symbol that plays a significant role in the community. It symbolises pain, suffering, endurance and adulthood. One is not allowed to wear these beads and *chihandani* if one is not initiated. Beads and headbands can carry the imprint of relations of domination since the community puts value on them. If anyone is found wearing the beads or headband without being initiated, she will face a penalty. All initiates wear the beads and the headbands proudly for some months before they return them to the elders *(vadzabhi).* Wearing the beads and headband symbolises that one is now "ready for marriage". They also symbolise that one had gone through three tough months of training and therefore one is no longer a child. If one is not married, this is the period when one is supposed to become engaged. Men know who have been initiated and are thus ready for marriage and they compete to 'get' these initiates. The teachings are sufficiently intense for these young women to now be regarded as adults ready for marriage.

Figure 6.2: The researcher with a Shangaan woman wearing the beads and headband (*chihandani* and *husanga*) worn during and after the training. The woman was comfortable being in the photo but chose to remain anonymous. (photo by researcher)

6.3.1 Headbands/ **Chihandani** *symbolise that one is no longer a child*

The researcher asked women participants to share their experiences about wearing headbands/ *chihandani* and the value attached to them. Rose described how the beads and *chihandani* are made and their symbolic meaning for the Shangaan community,

> *Chihandani chinogadzirwa nezvipeneti zvakawanda zvosungirwa pajira dzvuku kuti zvitaridzike. Chihandani chinoratidza kuti uyu munhu atambirwa uye haasisiri mwana mudiki. Avekutokwanisa kuchiroorwa nekuti zvaasangana nezvo nezvaadzidza zvakawanda ari mudondo. Zvemuhuro zvaiitirwa kuti vasikana nevakadzi vapfeke vachindotambirwa uye kana vapedza kutambirwa. Kupfeka zvemuhuro nechihandani kwaitoratidza musiyano pakati peakatambirwa neasina…*
>
> *Headbands and beads were made by the parents and relatives for us to wear after the graduation symbolising that we are no longer children and are now adults ready to get married and explore the world. It is part of our token and symbolic to the community, showing that we are 'ripe and ready' and have transitioned to adulthood. It shows that we have gone through the training process and are ready to face the tough world out there after the initiation. Men upon seeing the initiates wearing the beads and headbands they won't take long to propose for marriage.*

Butler (1993, 9) noted that bodies are in some way constructed. Through wearing headbands/ *chihandani* and beads, the woman's body tends to be constructed as well as controlled by the (patriarchal) community/ society. Women and girls are supposed to act in a way that is different from before being initiated. The beads and headband show that one is now an initiate ready to take up adult responsibilities as well as being ready for marriage. They also show that one is no longer supposed to be associated with non-initiates or 'children' in the community. Wearers of headbands and beads are considered adults and are no longer children. This is how culture tends to prescribe the behaviour and construct the body as a social and cultural phenomenon. No one is allowed to wear *chihandani* and the beads, the symbols of initiation, if one is not initiated. See the beads and the headband being worn by Rose, a recent graduate of initiation, in Figure 6.2.

The researcher noted that peer pressure is one of the reasons why young women wanted to be initiated. They want to be regarded as 'women enough' and 'women of honour' according to the Mahenye culture. All young women appear to want to wear the beads and headbands. They also want to make their parents happy, who encourage and arrange for their participation in the

training programme. According to Ahmed (2014), initiation is meant to establish the gender norms that boys and girls are expected to follow as men and women. After initiation, women attain a new status, condition or position that is improved. This conviction creates a state of aspiration for those who are not yet members and who wish also to "grow up" (Kasomo 2008, 3). According to Mudhlayi,

> *Ndakanotambirwa nekuti ndaidawo kupfeka chihandani nehusanga. Ndaidawo kuita sezvakaita vamwe vasikana nekuti kana usina kumbozvipfekawo unenge usiri musikana pane vamwe vasikana. Chihandani chinobva chaita kuti uwane ruremekedzo pane vamwe vasikana vezera rako kana vanhu vakuru…*
>
> *I was initiated because I also wanted to wear the beads and the headband like what other women of my age were doing in the community. I didn't want to be left behind. I wanted to be like them and being part of the group. I would get the same respect just like other women especially when wearing these beads and headband.*

The desire to be part of the group is how society tends to control women; they all want to wear the beads and headbands and therefore act in unison. This is why Muzingili and Taruvinga (2017, 2) defined *chinamwali* and *khomba* practice as indispensible to the Mahenye community. Society thus appears to have total control over their behaviour and the female body and is responsible for the creation of the cultural body or symbolic body in the process. *Chihandani* and the beads also define readiness and preparedness for marriage. In a community like Mahenye where men and the boys are encouraged to marry the initiates, when the celebrations are over, all the people in the community will know who has been initiated in that particular year in the community. This is therefore when the boys start to scout around for 'marriageable' initiates. Boys are encouraged to marry the initiates because they have learned how to take care of the family in general and the husband in particular during initiation. The initiates are also said to be 'real women' due to their training. Those who are not initiated are regarded as outcasts and they find it difficult to fit into the community as being initiated is the gateway to societal acceptance and creates a sense of belonging. The chances of getting married were very low for the non-initiates. Makhanani explained that,

> *… ini ndakangoti ndichibva kundotambirwa kwakutobva ndanoroorwa. Mukomana anga atoona kuti paita zvemukadzi apa (Achiseka). Pakanga pasisina chekumirira nekuti kudondo tanga tatozvidzidziswa zvose zvinotarisirwa kuti mukadzi aite kana akuda kutanga imba yake…*

I got married soon after the graduation from the training camp because I was ready for marriage. We were coached and were ready for marriage. The young men noticed that there comes a 'real woman' [laughs]. We were taught to be ready for marriage any day from the day of graduation.

The explanation by Mudhlayi shows that the community plans the stages of life for the women in the community through a process of social construction. The training therefore prepares the initiates for entry into the sexual world. They are prepared for sexual maturity and learn how to achieve sexual beauty and cleanliness. The community knows that at a certain age the girls start menstruation, after which they are initiated and soon after initiation, they get married. The community ultimately arranges marriages since the initiation teachings are in effect, marriage teachings. Boys and men wait eagerly to marry graduates who are argued to be the 'real women' of the community and who have fulfilled societal expectations.

Headbands/ *chihandani* differentiate initiates from non-initiates and indicate the level of respect a woman gets in the Shangaan community. This is because the *chihandani* is a symbol in itself and symbolises that a woman is now different from any other uninitiated women in the community. The practice is perceived as part of child and women socialisation and preservation of the cultural identity. Those who are initiated are regarded as cultural or social saboteurs. Construction of the female body takes place simply when women and girls wear the headbands/*chihandani*. When the researcher asked about the value of the graduation clothes (headbands/*chihandani* and the beads), all the women rated them highly, seeing them almost as 'Nobel prizes'. They highlighted that without initiation (clothes), one cannot be noticed and therefore cannot be socially integrated into the community. The initiation garments are a source of pride among the initiates. One of the informants noted that,

Tinofarira kupfeka hembe idzi nekuti ndidzo dzinoratidza kutsungirira kwatakaita tiri mudondo tichidzidziswa kuti tive vakadzi chaivo. Tinofara zvikuru kana takadzipfeka… We loved to wear clothes and beads since they symbolise the pain and suffering that we endured in the training camp, hence wearing them was symbolic and attractive to us and everyone else in the community. They were made in a way that they should appear attractive when worn with the pins glittering on the red cloth (of the beads). We take pride in wearing them. No one doesn't want to be rewarded for doing the right thing.

The women interviewed felt attractive in their *chihandani* and beads and enjoying wearing them. Elina revealed that,

… ndakanotambirwa nekuti ndaidawo kupfeka chihandani, ndipo panga pane shungu dzangu…

I was initiated because I wanted to wear the beads and headband. That was my only wish. I found it attractive when other women and girls were wearing them and I felt left out.

Like the beads and headbands, Lewis (2007), noted by Naidu (2009), referred to dress as an embodied practice, which is also very much a practice that is spatial and temporal; dressed bodies are given meanings through their location in specific times and places which have their own rules. The headband is almost like an academic graduation cap, a sign of achievement and endurance. Loveness said, *"…kupfeka chihandani nehusanga ndizvo zvinoita kuti munhu aremekedzwe… (There is more value and respect in wearing the beads and headbands as it symbolises that one is an initiate and she knows the rules of the land; that is how to sustain her family)*", while other women noted that wearing the headband is a symbol that one is initiated and is supposed to be respected and honoured in the community by both peers and elders of the community. Others noted *chinamwali* carries the imprint of social cultural practices and beliefs. *Chinamwali* creates cultural and social meaning and works as a panopticon governing how women should behave in the community. Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974, 14) therefore noted that culture obligates particular normative appearances and hegemonic codes of behaviour for women. Most establishments, authored texts, and rituals in the contexts of the Indian society, values even, are sponsored and managed by males.

6.3.2 The community prepares to welcome the initiates

Initiation ceremonies or celebrations are a key part of welcoming the initiates home after their initiation training programme. After three months of strict isolation in the training camp, the community prepares to welcome the initiates who will be coming home. The parents would have missed their daughters. Some men would have missed their wives and relatives as well since the initiates are not allowed to be seen by anyone during the initiation training programme, whilst in a secluded place. Thus parents, friends and relatives are all happy to welcome the initiates back home. For graduation, the parents of the initiates invite family and friends to come and witness the procession and graduation. The community brews (traditional) beer and slaughters animals in preparation for the initiation ceremony and celebrations. This shows honour and respect to the young women and girls who have upheld the Shangaan culture. The celebration is the community's way of showing appreciation to the initiates. Initiation is therefore driven by societal beliefs that, through socialisation, women are supposed to be

initiated. Culture, tradition and "honour" are regarded as justification for *chinamwali* training. There is social construction of what makes up an excellent woman in the community amongst the Shangaan people of the Mahenye community. The practice is perceived as part of girls' and women's cultural identity, ensuring status, family honour and marriageability of the women. On the day that the initiates return from the bush, a central place (normally the chief's residence) will be chosen for the initiation celebrations. The initiates will be accompanied by the elderly women and other recent graduates. The initiates all wear new clothes, new shoes and their heads are bald/ shaved. They also wear beads and headbands. Everything will be new, including the 'inner woman'. There will be singing and dancing. Some of the songs portray what the initiates were taught; some will be songs of praises to the women who have been initiated. The dances are also traditional and some dances showcase what they were taught in the training. The idea is to show the community what they were taught during the training programme. People feast; some drink traditional beer while others drink *maheu* and *njemana.* In the case of Malawian traditional *fisi* culture, on the graduation day, people will bring money placing it on the initiate's vagina as a sign of appreciating what the initiates would have gone through and the honour they have given to their society. Reilly (2014) noted that in Malawian cultural practices, girls are sent by their families to make sure they are accepted into their communities as adults. The initiates will then enter a house where they will sing and dance and showcase what they were taught in the training camp over the past three months. They will spell out their new *khomba* names in poem form and they promise the elders they will not share the secrets of the training programme. They must also swing or wriggle their waists to showcase what they were taught as a way of assisting men during intercourse. They have now moved from an asexual to a sexual world.

On graduation day, only initiates and women who have been initiated will be allowed to enter the house to give moral support to the initiates. Mabhawu explained proudly,

> *Haa kana usina kutambirwa musi uyu hausvike padhuze, isu ndisu chete vanobvumidzwa kuvepo pamhemberero dzezvikhombana (achiratidza kufara). Tinenge tichifarira vamwe vedu vanenge varemekedza tsika nemagariro dzenharaunda yedu…*
> *If one is not initiated, you are not allowed to attend the graduation celebrations as it is only initiates who are allowed to attend the graduation ceremony. We will be celebrating with our colleagues who would have made it. Our colleagues who would have uphold the societal norms because the training is intensive and it requires great commitment.*

Moreover, only men with initiated women are allowed to attend the ceremony and drink beer with the chief of the Shangaan people for the celebrations. If a wife has not been initiated then the husband is not allowed to drink the beer and to enjoy the celebrations and the woman is not allowed to attend the celebrations either. This is how the cultural practice is valued and socially constructed. Phibion (from the male focus group discussion) commented that,

> *Kana uri murume wechichuta hwahwa haufe wakahunwa nevamwe varume vanenge vauya kumhemberero…unongogumira panze chete nekuti ukada kupinda mumba mune zvikhombana unorohwa. Unotofanira kuudzawo mukadzi wako kuti atambirwe kana uchida kuuya kuzomwa doro remhemberero dzezvikhombana…*
>
> *If you are married to a non-initiate you won't be able to drink beer and enjoy with the initiates. If you force yourself to participate you will be beaten or pay something/ a fine for intruding. The celebrations are for initiates only and the community is fully aware of who is supposed to attend and who is not. If you want to be part of the initiation celebrations, one has to encourage his wife to be initiated first so that she becomes part of the group of initiates.*

When asked if they felt different soon after graduation, most women unhesitatingly said,

> *Tinotonzwa musiyano pakati pezvatakange tiri tisati tatambirwa naikozvino. Izvi zvinonyatsoratidza kuti hatisisiri vakadzi wemanga manga tavewo nechiremerera mudunhu. Taakukwana nekuverengwawo pakati pevamwe vakatambirwa. Chero mumba unotoona musiyano pamachengetero atinenge takuita mhuri nevarume vedu…*
>
> *We now see and feel the difference between what we were before being initiated and now (as initiates). It shows that we are now different women who are now being respected and given honour and respect in the community. The community in general and all the men in particular, respect us because of we were initiated. We are no longer associated with the non-initiates. Even at home, we now realise that we are different people in terms of behaviour and actions.*

While some women said, *"…tisu vanoremekedzwa vacho mudunhu muno, tisu tinozivikanwa kuti takatambirwa vacho, uye tinoziva tsika chaidzo dzekhomba…* (We are the most respected people in the community since we are initiated and the whole community knows that we are the respected ones)", others said, *"Kutambirwa ndokunotoita kuti varume vatide uye tigare pavarume nekuti takadzidziswa kuti tinovabata nekuvachengeta sei…* (We have managed to keep our marriages 'intact' because we were initiated and we know the rules of marriage. We were taught well how to keep and take care of the husband and his family and ours as well)".

Fifty-year old Nyembezi, a grandmother with eight children and sixteen grandchildren, retorted that:

> *Kana usina kutambirwa haufaniri kuuya kumabiko, murume wako haafanirizve kuuya kumabiko ezvikhombana. Kumabiko kunouyiwa nevakatambirwa chete ndiko kuti muitewo shungu dzekuda kuendawo kunotambirwa nevamwe…*
> *If one is not initiated, you are not allowed to attend the initiation celebrations as well as visiting to the initiation celebrations. This is done in order for those non-initiates to be eager to be trained and honour their cultural practice as well. It would be cowardice to attend the celebrations if you are a non-initiate.*

Further interviews were held with Nokase and Tsatsawani who were not born in Mahenye community. Nokase was not initiated and said,

> *Ini handivimbi nekutambirwa, hakusiri kunoita kuti munhu anzi ave mukadzi chaiye nekuti azotambirwa. Zvinhu zvakawanda chaizvo zvinoita kuti munhu azonzi mukadzi chaiye. Munhu anogona kuremekedzwa chero asina kutambirwa…*
> *I do not believe in chinamwali defining a 'real woman'. There are a lot of things which define what a real woman is. One can be a respectful person without being initiated. It all depends on who and how one sees the person. One is not supposed to judge others.*
>
> *Kereke yedu haikoshesi tsika yeukhomba iyi, saka ini handisisina basa nezvekutambirwa izvi. Ndinofunga kuti tsika iyi ndeyekare kusati kwave nemakereke atakutevedzera mazuvano…*
> Our church does not put value on those cultural practices and I do not put value in being initiated as well and chinamwali has nothing to do with keeping the marriage/ relationship with your husband or the community. I now believe in church doctrine and we no longer put value in this old cultural practice.

Tsatsawani was initiated, claiming that,

> *…Ndakatambirwa kuti ndichengetedze mhuri yangu chete nekuti nharaunda inoti kutambirwa kunochengetedza mhuri. Dai panga pasina zvinotarisirwa nenharaunda handisaitambirwa…*
> *I was initiated in order for me to keep my marriage only not because I aspired to be initiated or to wear the beads and head bands as others do. My idea was to make my family happy. Given the choice, I wasn't going to be initiated as I don't put value on*

the cultural practice. It didn't change anything on me. It was only the pressure that I faced from the family and siblings which drove me to be initiated. It was not my personal decision.

Tsatsawani said therefore that *chinamwali* cements societal relations and develops a shared understanding and societal capital among women. She agreed that *chinamwali* is culturally significant among the Shangaan community. She also agreed that with the cultural practice of *chinamwali,* one is educated and given necessary teachings about the true value of being a 'real woman' and the responsibilities that come with being an initiate which gives the women respect and honour in the community. Like health-related beliefs, *chinamwali* and other social practices are a means of demonstrating femininities and masculinities (Courtenay 2000, 1). Therefore, *chinamwali* is socially constructed and it also creates socially constructed relationships that are produced and reproduced through people's actions in a certain community. Women strive to be initiates in order to gain respect in the community and to live up to 'male' demands and expectations of initiated (real) women. Initiation does not reside in a person but rather in social transactions that are defined as gendered. Social experiences of women and men provide a template that guides their beliefs and behaviour in a certain area or community.

6.3.3 The initiates change their names

According to Roselyn Sachiti (2011),

> A name is a word or term which a person or thing is commonly or distinctively known for. It gives someone an identity that is different from one individual to the other. In some churches and apostolic sects, an individual attains a new name upon baptism to suit the beliefs of the religion. The name is usually of greater significance to the person and the church but for the Shangaan people of Zimbabwe, Chiredzi area, a name doesn't just end with being identified from the next person. It is not what a child was christened at birth or what is written on the birth certificate or national identity. A name is something that should run deep in the veins of the individual and means a lot to their culture. It is something that should be earned not given in a silver platter…every woman or girl in the area yearns to get that name but it is only the brave ones that undergo the female initiation who will be honoured and will proudly carry it for the rest of their lives. The names are one of the most effective ways of preserving their

culture and the way the Shangaan community values them shows it is likely to see the end of time.

It has been noted that when young women come out of the training camp, the assumption is that everything changes. Van Gennep (1977), cited in Kasomo (2008, 2), pointed out that "rites of incorporations are actions the initiate formally makes to enter the sacred world and this often includes ceremonies like acquiring a new name, changing abode and changing dress". Upon finishing the initiation programme, initiates will therefore be given initiation or *khomba* names. This signifies that they have passed the 'childhood' phase and can now be called by their 'adulthood' names. Changing of names forms part of what Holliday (2009) termed 'antilanguages' (when talking about sub languages created by the community which oppose the community/ mainstream language/vocabulary). Holliday coined his concept 'antilanguage or slang'. He highlighted that an antilanguage serves to create and maintain social structure through conversation just as everyday languages does, but the social structure is of a particular kind in which certain elements are strongly foregrounded. The role of the antilanguage is primarily to create group identity and to assert group differences from a dominant group (Hodge and Kress 1997, cited by Nyota and Sibanda 2012, 2). For Holliday, the simplest form taken by an antilanguage is that of new words for the old, or a partial language re-laxicalisation, that is same grammer, different vocabulary in certain areas. All the initiates therefore come out of the training camp with a new name which symbolises that they have undergone initiation. All the women in one of the focus group discussions highlighted that they changed names while undergoing *khomba* teachings. Most described how *"…Takachinja mazita edu ekuberekwa nawo tikapihwa mamwe mazita ekukhomba patakapedza kutambirwa nekuti tanga tave vanhu vakuru saka tanga takudawo mazita evanhu vakuru…* (We changed our names when we went through the initiation programme. We were given initiation names because we were regarded as old people or adults after the initiation programme…" One of the women commented that, *"…Pandakangopedza kutambirwa ndakabva ndakapiwa zita rekuti Mahiya…* (I was given the name Mahiya when I graduated from the initiation programme)". Names given to initiates have meanings attached to them. Initiates were given names in line with their behaviour or performance at the training camp. Names of honour are not given at birth but need to be earned; initiation names symbolise endurance and great commitment among the young women and girls. Names carry existential meanings and identities. Some of these names include, Tsatsawani, Mudhlayi and Hlalati among others. Some of these names reflect fear among the initiates, one who respects elders, one who gets prematurely initiated, one who judges, one who

is not easy to convince, one who gets initiated first, one who does not follow instructions and one who is not cooperative. The general perception, according to Maphosa (2011, 4), is that these names continue to shape the personality of the bearers. This is because the elders of the community will be aware of the meanings attached to these names; if other names are given which are associated with shame and misbehavior then the family of the initiate will be dishonoured.

Muhlava revealed that,

> *Pandakatambirwa ndakabva ndatopiwa zita rekukhomba. Vakuru vaitiudza kuti hatifaniri kuramba tichishandisa mazita edu ekuberekwa nawo nekuti tanga tatochinjawo…*
>
> *I was also given the initiation name when I went through the training programme. The elders said you cannot be called using childhood names since 'everything had changed' in our lives, hence, the change in names as well.*

All the women confirmed that they were given initiation/ *chinamwali* / *khomba* names after graduation. The researcher established that initiates lost their childhood names and received new names that signified their new position in society. These names symbolise endurance and commitment (to training) by these initiates. The names given to the initiates were a true reflection that one was now an initiate/ 'adult'. Names are ascribed to mark the transition of initiates to their new status that distinguishes them from non-initiates. It shows that children have been born again not as the children of an individual but of the whole community. Initiates will be welcomed as new members of the community. One is not allowed to call the initiates by their *khomba* names if one has not been initiated oneself. There is thus a kind of code that initiates use in communicating about their initiation training and teachings. With these names and codes of behaviour, a sub-group of women is created with a particular social identity. The crossover must leave an indelible mark or an imprint on both the body and the mind of the initiate that one has moved from one position to another. These initiation names signify that the woman has transitioned from childhood to adulthood and has successfully completed the initiation programme. A new name also comes with new responsibilities as an adult or full woman in the community.

6.4 *Chinamwali*: the initiation sessions

The researcher noted that *chinamwali* takes place when the girl has started menstruation and is in puberty. Parents start planning for the girl to be initiated. Arrangements will be made with an elderly woman called *mudzabhi*. That is where the relationship between the initiate, mudzabhi and the family begins. The girl will 'disappear' one evening to a secluded place where other girls will be camping. The rite is performed in a faraway place (the forest area) from the community. In this case initiation is done near Save river, in the forest area where people are not allowed to intrude. The place is secluded and not close to the community because initiates are not supposed to be seen by anyone whilst undergoing initiation training. It is noted that initiation is a woman's secret and men must not see it; they should only see the results when their women practice what they have learned at home. *Mudzabhi* will later inform the mother of the child that she has gone for initiation training. The same applies to married women whose husbands will be informed by *mudzabhi* that their wives have gone for training. These initiates spend the entire training period without seeing their families. *Mudzabhi* plays an intermediary role to facilitate the training of the young girls or women. This is done because the mother or the parents of these women and young girls cannot facilitate the training of their own children (that is the norm of the community). Since there are other sensitivities involved in the training process, the girls do not shy away from sharing the information with *Mudzabhi*. They can disclose whatever they want to her. *Mudzabhi* also cooks, prepares and sends food for the initiates while they are in the training camp. *Mudzabhi* will act the role of the mother to the initiates. *Mudzabhi* will be paid for her job to facilitate the initiation training attendance when the initiates graduate from the initiation training. In case of a girl child who is not married, the parents or the future husband will pay the money but husbands pay for married women. In the training camp, initiates swear that they will not divulge the details of whatever that happened in the training camp to anyone. They can only share the information with other initiates. The programme is secretive. When the initiation programme is complete, the initiates will heard for the graduation or initiation ceremony. This is when girls emerge from seclusion and return home triumphantly. They are treated with honour and respect as they would have successfully completed the (tough) training programme. At the ceremony, initiates are given a piece of cloth/ *zambia,* and special utensils such as plates, cups, baskets and clay pots as gifts or presents. These gifts become their belongings and are used by women when they get married. Women put on their *zambias* at home and for funerals and other ceremonies. A *zambia* represents a decent woman. Makhanani commented that, *"Taipiwa mazambia ekuzoshandisa kana takuenda kunoroorwa. Mazambia iwayo ndiwo ataizoshandisa pataienda kurufu…* (We

were given a piece of cloth as gifts by our parents. We would use them when we were about to be married as well as attending other community meetings or functions like meetings and funeral)". Hlalati also commented about the role of *mudzabhi* saying, *"Mudzabhi anofanira kubhadharwa nekuti unogona kusazoita mwana kana iye asina kupiwa mari yake…* (Muzabhi has to be paid otherwise one risks 'infidelity' if Mudzabhi is not paid what is due to her)". Goats, a piece of cloth (*zambia*) or chickens can be used as payment. Sarah said, "*Mudzabhi anongopiwa mbudzi yake yemubhadharo kana tabva kukhomba wobva watoziva kuti zvako zvaita…* (You just give Mudzabhi a goat as her payment and you are rest assured that you are done with her and you have settled your debt)".

All these arrangements will be done in advance in consultation with the chief and his headman. The chief needs to be aware of what is happening in the community and must be available during the ceremony as the guest of honour. The chief always receives some form of payment (the allowance is called a 'bush allowance' and is presented to him at the celebration day). This is being criticised by human rights activists who argue that the involvement of dominant and powerful people of the community such as the chief and headman will pose challenges for those trying to curb human rights abuse/abusers. The chief and the headmen benefit from cultural programmes and are therefore unlikely to encourage stopping them. Moreover, because *mudzabhi* receives payment each time initiates graduate, they are also responsible for perpetuating this cultural practice.

Problems associated with cultural practices therefore need to be dealt with at a structural level. Both men and women contribute to perpetuating this cultural practice. When initiates are about to graduate, the chief is given seven days' notice through his headmen. Preparations will be made to welcome initiates from the training camp. These include traditional beer brewing with parents and relatives buying gifts for their children, friends and relatives. The family of the initiates plays a big role in preparing to welcome the initiates from the training camp. On the celebration day *Mudzabhi* and *vatsvatsi* lead the procession proudly from the camp back to the community. Initiates will be dressed in new clothes. The chief and the whole community are familiar with the programme for the celebration day. When the community gathers, and before the initiates start their dances (showcasing what they learned while in the training camp), the chief and the headman will be given the opportunity to say a few words – giving honour to the new group of initiates. One representative from the family of the initiates will also give a speech to express their happiness in taking part in the celebration. They also congratulate and give

blessings to the initiates. It is clear that the initiates have become elevated within the community. A guest of honour will also be invited to give gifts and prizes and will give advice to the initiates regarding respecting their culture and their families. *Mudzabhi* and *Mutsvatsi* will also thank the families for allowing their children to be initiated. They will congratulate the initiates for finishing the training programme. They make it clear that from now they are women and no longer children. Life as a mother and wife becomes culturally possible. They will also thank the chief for allowing the function to happen in his community. *Mutsvatsi* and *Mudzabhi* will also thank the chief, the ancestors and the gods that no misfortunes or evil happened during the training period. A token of appreciation will be presented to the chief including payment (bush allowance). There will be separate beer and food for the chief and his team. Initiates will also be given money by the people in the community. In Peru, on the day of the girls' fifteenth birthday celebrations to mark the transition for a girl child to adulthood, the father of the child removes the shoes of their child and replace them with heels symbolising that she is now a woman (Cavagnoud 2011, 3). The act of separation from child status by removing the shoes is immediately followed by an act of aggregation (Van Gennep) symbolising the loss of childhood cultural attributes to acquire those of womanhood. This day is respected by the whole community. This is because the rite of passage is significant to both the individual and the community. This is the day when the initiates will be 'connected' to the community.

Chinamwali is valued in the community to such an extent that if one is not initiated, one is not respected and cannot expect a good marriage. The practice is a cultural norm; one must be initiated at a certain age and society expects this to happen. This normally happens annually in the community. Those who have attended the rites of passage feel elevated above the ones who have not and are not encouraged to associate with 'childish' non-initiates because they are now 'adults'. Usually there are about 10 to 15 participants in each training camp. These comprise of girls, young women, single and married women. This study focuses on the age groups of twenty five to fifty years and thus children were not participants but policy making and intervention strategies regarding this cultural practice will affect all age groups in the community including the men. It is important to consider the issue of the girls 'absconding' from school in order to attend these initiation ceremonies as a way of fulfilling cultural obligations and societal expectations (see Chapter 7). The training normally happens from May/ June to August/ September of each year during the Zimbabwean school calendar. Initiation usually takes place after harvesting and when there are many wild fruits in the forests.

Initiates need to eat while in the training camps and therefore this timing would be ideal. However, missing school affects the children's right to education and some are exposed to harmful cultural practices at a very young age. Thus it is important to consider the effect of this cultural practice on the younger girls despite the focus of this particular study not being on them. In some parts of Malawi, Stuart (2011) has argued that once girls undergo initiation rites, they no longer take school seriously. Following initiation practices, girls apparently perceive school to be a place for girls rather than women/ adults and following initiation, they are more interested in marriage than school.

Initiates are not allowed to 'escape' from the training camps. Initiates are indoctrinated according to cultural expectations of mature women. They are expected to adapt from childhood to adulthood status. Absconding the training brings shame to the family of the initiate. Even if the training is tough (as described further in Chapter 7), they are expected to endure. Women encourage each other to be initiated so that they will speak with one voice. Bourdieu (1979, 5) has called this *symbolic violence,* that which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity. In this case, symbolic violence is perpetuated through gender relations and the way women encourage each other to be initiated and to subordinate themselves to men. *Chinamwali* 'embodies' women and girls. Women in a sense agree that they are supposed to serve male interests and domination because the teachings are meant to uphold the masculine and patriarchal system/ mentality which associates women with sex, birth, and the flesh. Moreover, if an initiate decides to abscond the training, the parents will have to pay a goat or a beast to compensate for the time lost in investing in the initiate. The initiate's parents or husband will pay a fine to *mudzabhi, mutsvatsi* and the chief. This also brings shame to the family. Loveness explained that,

> *Kutiza hakusabvumidzwa nekuti vakuru vaida kutoziva chikonzero chinenge chaita kuti utize kutambirwa. Waiti ukatiza waishooresa mhuri yako uye waibhadhariswamari yakwanda…*
>
> *It was not allowed to abscond the training. Investigations would be done and if found that the initiate was wrong, they would pay huge penalty. It was a shame to the family to abscond from chinamwali training.*

Tarehwa agreed with Loveness, commenting that,

> *Isu takarwadziwa kukhomba asi taishingirira nekuti takaudzwa kuti tisatize kana kudzoka kuumba. Taitya kubhadhariswa kana tadzokera kuumba. Zvaitodhura kutiza*

kukhomba pane kugara ikoko nekuti mari yacho yanga yakawanda, vabereki vedu havasaigona kuibhadhara…

The training was tough in the camp but we endured because we were told not to abscond. We didn't have any means of paying the fine. It was expensive to pay the fine than to pay Mudzabhi and Mutsvatsi for their duty as trainers. Our parents were not able to pay the fine and they didn't have the means to pay as well.

Ngilazi concurred with Tarehwa and Loveness saying, *"Mari yacho yekubhadhara hapana kwataizoiwana yekubhadhara mudzabhi, chief nemutsvatsi…* (We didn't have money to pay fine to the chief, Mudzabhi and Mutsvatsi/trainers so we had to endure the training)". The narratives above reveal a strong social convention: one was not allowed to abscond from the training. For fear of secrets being revealed to the public, the fine was high and put off anyone considering absconding.

As part of the initiation ceremony and as mentioned in Chapter 1, initiation ceremonies are responsible for child abuse in some societies. There are some societies which mark the transition from childhood to adulthood through female genital mutilation (FGM) and female circumcision. Female genital mutilation is internationally recognised as a violation of the human rights of girls and women reflecting deep rooted inequalities between sexes (World Health Organisation: Pan American Health Organisation 2012). Girls are usually minors and these practices are intended to ensure that girls conform to key social norms, such as those related to sexual restraint, femininity, respectability, sense of belonging to a cultural group, social conventions, and maturity. Like *chinamwali*, the initiation sessions tend to be 'abusive'. All the women interviewed mentioned the 'pulling of labia' as part of the training sessions with the intention of pleasing men during sexual intercourse. This was also meant to improve male sexual pleasure and virility. Shoko (2012), cited by Mutanda and Rukondo (2016, 55), highlighted that as part of *khomba*, girls are taught various sex styles in order to please their husbands. During the training girls must lie on the ground, raising their bodies supported by hands and feet. Trainers sit on top of the initiates and assume the men's role during the sexual act ensuring the development of 'excellent' sexual skills. One of the participants noted "We would pull our labia almost every day so that they will become long by the time we graduate and we would compete to do that as a group whilst in the training camp". This was part of fulfilling cultural obligations and was what was expected. Like the practice of FGM, the perception was that these cultural practices were necessary in order to raise a girl 'properly' and prepare her for adulthood and marriage. Shoko also claimed the desire for men to control

female sexuality is part of men's general chauvinistic oppression against women which can be traced back to the overthrow of the mother's rite by their father's rite.

From the above discussion, it can be noted that the initiation sessions are there to fulfil patriarchal expectations. Pulling the labia, being taught how to act in bed and how to take care of the husband and the family, are all part of what men expect from women, hence a means of fulfilling masculine and patriarchal obligations and expectations. This goes with fulfilling male dominated cultural expectations. Initiation can be viewed as subscription into societal membership. This is evidenced from informal discussions held with men in the community regarding what men were expecting from the women and what value they put on initiated women. All the men agreed that they only wanted and married initiates and that they felt *chinamwali* groomed girls into fine and respectable women who could fulfil all duties expected by society. These include taking care of the family and husband, performing well in bed and pulling of their labia for the pleasure of men. Kachapila (2001) noted that women lived their sexual life and expressed their femininity in relation to the physical and emotional fulfillment of men. From the discussions with the men, the researcher realised that in as far as *chinamwali* may appear to appropriate the female body, all the men showed respect for the initiated women. Hence, being initiated is associated with respect and fulfilling certain cultural conventions of the society, in this case the Mahenye community. In Malawi, like in the Mahenye community, girls who are over twenty years old and are not married are generally disrespected and may be scorned by their peers. This is because the community expects girls to be married soon after initiation. Women also claimed they wanted to be trained in order to satisfy their husbands, especially in bed, and some claimed the idea was to strengthen their marriages. Twenty-seven year old Rose, mother of three children, noted that,

> *It is better to be initiated so that my husband will give me much respect as an initiate. This enhances happiness in marriage, we would be happy when we are together, I don't want to see my husband leaving me for other women since so many have been initiated and they are well known in this community.*

In contrast, as Kachapila (2001) noted, although men go through the Nyau initiation ceremony, they are not told how to please their wives sexually. Male initiation is about being taught how to be a 'real man' usually through circumcision and without any further teachings. Thus, one can argue that the initiation ceremony works to the advantage of men rather than women. Girls go through sex education that emphasises techniques of pleasing the future husband and

treating him like a king. However, this idea of sex education is against the basic tenets of human rights (to be discussed in the next chapter) and is being fought by radical feminists who are against female genital mutilation and other cultural practices which are harmful to the female body.

6.4.1 Cultural definitions of non-initiates

The researcher further established that initiation goes beyond the social well-being of the people in the community. Other issues included how one would be buried. The respect for initiates (for upholding cultural values) is extended to burial rituals when an initiate dies. The chief and the elders are involved both initiation process and burial arrangements at community level. They are the ones who determine how society is supposed to function and how one is supposed to be buried. Chinyikwa commented that,

> *Kana usina kutambirwa haumbovigwi zvakanaka sezvinoitwa vamwe vakadzi vanenge vakatambirwa munharaunda muno. Zvikhombana zvemunharaunda zvese zvinouya kuzobatsira panhamo nekuti mumwe wavo anege afa kana kufirwa…*
>
> *If you are not initiated you won't be given a decent burial. Other women who were initiated were given a decent burial. All the initiates will attend and take part at the funeral because they would have lost one of their colleagues.*

Fifty-year old Majuta echoed Chinyikwa,

> *Haukwanisi kubatana nevamwe mumubatanodzwa webheria kana usina kutambirwa. Haukwanisi zvakare kupinda mumisangano yacho kana usina kutambirwa. Izvi zvinotaurwa nekuti unenge usiri mumwe wezvikhombana…*
>
> *You cannot be a member of the community burial society if you are not initiated. You cannot join the meetings for the burial society if you are not initiated as well. This is because you won't belong to that group at all.*

The elders of the community who push for initiation programmes are the same people who push for decent funerals or burials. If one doesn't want to be initiated, one is almost forced to comply with the societal norms for fear of being excluded or sidelined. Women suffer what Naidu (2015, 7) called internalised oppression as the community has gendered expectations of beautiful bodies. The bodies of the women in this case will come to be constructed within the discourse of sex and the definition of real women.

In the Mahenye community, society places more value on the initiates than the non-initiates. *Chinamwali* therefore, like male circumcision, according to Sibanda (2013.3) is perceived as processural existential reality that determines personhood and identity. One who is initiated is called *chikhombana* meaning one has attended *khomba/ chinamwali* and is 'hardened' and has now reached social maturity (even at 14 years old). Naming of these initiates is done by elders who lead the teaching and coaching of the initiates. Fourez in Kisomo (2009, 3) called this a point of no return. Those who are not initiated are called *zvichuta,* a derogatory name meaning someone who is not initiated and hasn't gone through the cultural programme of maturity. Being a cultural practice and a strong social convention of Mahenye community, being initiated is highly respected. During population statistics and societal gatherings, non-initiates are not counted or given the opportunity to participate since it is regarded as a 'shame' not to be initiated. According to the women,

> *Ndinonzwa kufara chaiko kuti ndakatambirwa nekuti kana usina kutambirwa hausi mukadzi chaiye…*
> *I feel so happy and excited that I was initiated. You are not considered a 'real woman' if you are not initiated.*
> *…kana usina kutambirwa uri chichuta…*
> *If you didn't undergo the training you are regarded as a non-initiate/ chichuta.*
>
> *Vanhu vasina kutambirwa ndivo vanokonzeresa matambudziko munharaunda (Neinzwi rakashoshomera). Hauzozivi kuti nei mvura isina kunaya uye nei vanhu vakaita matambudziko munharaunda. Mumwe wakatouraiwa nenzou svondo rino. Hatizivi kuti zvinokonzerwa nei zvese izvozvo…*
> *Non-initiates cause misfortunes in the community… There are a lot of misfortunes that are happening in the community and we may not know the root causes. We attribute these to some of our community members who are not following the cultural practice of this community. We may wonder why it is not raining and why one of our community members was attacked and killed by an elephant few days ago.*

Women's narratives revealed that *chinamwali* is a respected cultural practice in the community of Mahenye and failure to participate brings 'shame' and disrespect to both the family (especially the mother of the child) and the community (the headman of that village). The argument will be that their children were not groomed well to respect the highly valued cultural practice.

Figure 6.3: Women demonstrating the cultural behaviour of kneeling and bowing down (*kudonha mazha*) when they meet other initiates or elders, soon after graduation. (photo by researcher)

Figure 6.4: How the hands of the initiates must be held when they kneel or bend down for elders, men and other initiates. Firsts are closed and thumbs inserted between the first and second fingers. This signifies that they are initiates and have undergone the training programme. (Photo by researcher)

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the relevance of the cultural practice of *chinamwali* to the Mahenye community. It looked at how this cultural practice creates the 'cultural body' and how *chinamwali* strengthens masculinity behaviours. It has considered the symbolic meaning of the beads, headbands and initiation celebrations as they shape the women and the cultural expectations of the Mahenye community. From the data gathered through observations, interviews and focus group discussions with the women and men, it has been noted that the cultural practice of *chinamwali* prescribes certain cultural behaviours that are socially accepted amongst the women. These cultural behaviours are the ones that are expected by the community where they are practised. *Chinamwali* therefore creates a sense of belonging, cultural identity, and societal acceptance amongst women. It has also been noted that this cultural practice tends to be abusive towards the girls and young women in the community. The chapter shows that *chinamwali* 'creates' the body of the woman who is respected in the community. However, this cultural practice is influenced by the masculine and patriarchal beliefs which guide the behaviour of the people in Mahenye community.

CHAPTER 7: *CHINAMWALI,* GENDERED PRACTICES AND GENDER ASYMMETRY

7.0 Introduction

This chapter explores the relationship between *chinamwali*, gendered practices and gender relations and considers how *chinamwali* perpetuates patriarchy and unequal gender relations in the community. This will be looked at through the lenses of how women are defined regarding how they should behave sexually and perform certain cultural aspects. The assumption is that male and female bodies bear cultural meanings and representations that reflect power relations within the society whereby the males are regarded as superior to females. The chapter explores the role of the peer groups and civil organisations in the fight against harmful traditional or cultural practices of Mahenye and other communities. The contribution of the Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) and the laws that govern gender equality and human rights are explored in this chapter.

7.1 *Chinamwali*: 'patriarchal gender relations'

For *chinamwali* or *khomba*, young women and girls are kept in seclusion from the community for a specific period of time, alone or with other initiates during the winter (from May to August or September) of each year. In the case of male circumcision, as noted by Shoko (2008, 3), winter was ideal since the wound inflicted during the circumcision would heal more easily in cold weather with very little bleeding. Also the initiates are taught to endure hardships of life by, for example, waking up early in the morning to bath in cold water and performing rigorous exercises. Exposure of minors to sexual situations, issues to do with sexual performance and being trained to be sexual experts, through explicit sexual demonstrations are also part of the *khomba* curriculum. While in seclusion, young women and girls are taught discipline, self-reliance, proper behaviour towards the husband or potential suitor, in-laws, good sexual conduct, menstrual care and skills of life. Camping out during the winter school term leads to a rising number of school drop-outs amongst young girls. After the initiation training, formal school is no longer the place for these initiates. Thus initiation negatively affects the rights of the child to education. Cage (2011) in Kanjanda and Chiparange (2016, 1) claimed that the status quo was exacerbated by the historical gender inequalities that continue to exist within family systems and place the girl child as an inferior citizen in her community or country. Women are valued primarily as sources or producers of children or procreation (Althaus, 1997, 131). They are oriented to see themselves as valuable, only at community level. Many children are not being prepared to participate in the modernised or global world. Feminists argue that for women's economic independence to become a reality, women need to become active participants in the wage economy yet women and girls are being confined to the private sphere. Patriarchy as a gendered ideology sees the father as the ruler of the family and tribe. It is also a system of domination of men over women which presents different economic systems, eras, regions and class (Boonzaaier and Sharp 1988) cited by Coetzee (2001). According to Laizah, in an interview,

> *Mwanangu ini zvaunoona ndakadai ndakanotambirwa pandakatanga kuteera, ndiine makore gumi nematatu. Pandakangoona kuti ndaakutanga kuteera ndakabva ndatoziva kuti nguva yakwana yekunotambirwa. Takakura tichiudzwa nemadzitete edu kuti kana ukangoona wakutanga kuteera chete wotobva wavaudza nekuti unenge watova musikana akufanira kunotambirwa nevamwe vezera rako. Tete vangu vakabva vatonditi ndiende kudondo kunotambirwa nevamwewo vasikana. Taiudza madzitete nekuti kuna amai kwakange kusingangoendwe. Pandakabvako*

handina kupedza nguva refu ndakabva ndatonoroorwa. Handina kuzombodzokera kuchikoro. Vamwe vatakabva navo kunotambirwa vakabva vatoroorwawo muno munharaunda yekwaMahenye. Vashoma chaivo vakadzokera kuchikoro patakabva kukhomba…

Look my son, as you see,, we grew up being told that when you realise that you are now menstruating, that's the beginning of puberty, you should therefore inform the elders especially the aunts then an arrangement will be made for you to be initiated. We were told that it is a norm for a young girl to go for the initiation training at her first menstrual period. I was therefore initiated as soon as I started my menstruation. I was 13 years old by then. I didn't even go back to school after the training because puberty shows that one is no longer a child and has to be initiated. The majority of girls I attended the programme with were also married soon after the initiation ceremony, only a few returned to school after the initiation.

According to Chauke,

Ndakaenda kunotambirwa pandakapedza gwaro rechisere. Ndakabva ndatoregedza kuenda kuchikoro. Pandakadzoka vamwe vangu vanga vatokumberi nezvidzidzo ndopandakaona kuti handaizombozvikwanisa zvekudzokera kuchikoro uye panguva yacho hapanawo akandikuruzira kudzokera kuchikoro. Handina kuzombodzokera kuchikoro. Paitova nemukomana aive akatomirira kundiroora. Ndopakaperera zvekuenda kuchikoro ndanga ndatove amai vemba…

I was initiated when I finished my grade 7; I never went back to school after that and no one encouraged me to pursue my education soon after the training. The community viewed me (us) initiates as adults who can take full family and marriage responsibilities, as we were no longer children anymore. Womanhood is defined by fulfilling the societal expectations of being initiated. Some of my colleagues were already ahead of me with the syllabus. I was then married soon after the initiation ceremony. There was someone already waiting to propose marriage with me. That's when my journey ended. I was now a wife not a school girl.

Janet said,

Takakura tichiudzwa kuti tinofanira kunotambirwa muchando ndokuti tisimbe. Saka ndakatobva kwandakange ndichidzidza kuuya kuenda kukhomba nevamwe vasikana vezera rangu vaienda nguva yacho. Ndakatosiya chikoro kuuya kuzotambirwa…

When we grew up we were oriented that every girl child or every woman was supposed to be initiated during the winter period, in order to strengthen us in each and every situation of life. So I had to be available for the training during winter period that is during school term. I dropped school in order to attend the initiation training.

Tarehwa, a teacher at a nearby school also revealed that the majority of girls drop out of school every year to attend the initiation training.

Unotoona kotoro yepiri painosvika, vanasikana vazhinji vanombosiya chikoro kuenda kunotambirwa. Vamwe vanozodzoka kuchikoro kana vapedza khomba asi zvizhinji vacho havaendereri mberi nechikoro. Unozongonzwa kuti varoorwa.

Most girls drop out of school during the second term of the year to attend khomba. Some of them will return after the training but the majority of them won't proceed with their education. It's painful to see a brilliant girl dropping out of school and never come back to school in the name of khomba. You will later hear that that girl got married.

The narratives reveal that girls absconded from school to attend the initiation programme. They missed lessons while others were proceeding with their studies. Separation from the family, school mates and friends during initiation programme can be viewed as abusive and against women and girl child rights. During training, women and girls are not free to interact with the community or peers or participate in community activities. Girls miss school for three to four months. At the initiation ceremony, the community in general and the men in particular will be waiting to view recent graduates so that they can propose and/ or arrange marriages. There will be a 'gold rush' for the initiates. In the eyes of the society, initiation is the criterion for growing up. Girls will be considered 'ripe' for marriage after the training even though some will still be in primary school.

Mulago commented that,

Varume vese vanenge vakamirira kuona zvikhombana zvichibva kudondo kundotambirwa zvakachena. Ndipo pavanotoona musikana chaiye anoita kuroora. Kwakutokurukura naye…

All men will be waiting to see these young women and girls graduating. That is when they spot which girls will be suitable for marriage. They then arrange or

propose love and marriage from them since they will be 'ripe and ready for marriage'.

Girls don't normally disagree unless their family disagrees on the marriage proposal. Marriage soon after initiation fulfils the Mahenye cultural practice. To the community, initiation is like social as well as sexual maturity. Girls are considered mature and marriageable after being initiated; the old (childhood) would have gone and the new (womanhood/adulthood) would be there. The girl child remains vulnerable and segregated, particularly in terms of educational advancement which is the key to self-empowerment. There is a high rate of girl child marriages. *Chinamwali* may be a valued cultural practice but it goes against the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and now the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which advocate for inclusive education for all regardless of gender. Millennium Development Goal number 2 was aimed at achieving universal primary education by 2015. The idea was that by 2015, children worldwide, boys and girls alike, regardless of race, class and ethnicity would be able to complete a full course at primary school. Sustainable Development Goal number 4 is aimed at ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promoting lifelong learning by 2030. However, with these massive drop-out rates in school by the girls, this goal will be difficult to achieve. Community engagement with the leaders and elders needs to happen in order for the country to achieve this goal.

Leaders and elders are thus a complicit part of the perpetrators of domestic violence, child abuse and child marriages. While enrolment in primary education in developing countries has reached 91%, 51 million children remain out of school (UNESCO Institute of Statistics). Among other reasons, harmful cultural practices (including *chinamwali*) and social conventions are argued to play a central role behind school drop-outs. This idea is also against the ideals of the Jomtien Conference held in Senegal in 1990 and the Dakar Framework of Action of 2000 (Tamatea 2005, 2), which aimed at ensuring education for all – collective commitments where Zimbabwe is a signatory. It also aimed at providing the same (education) facilities for men and women, and even special facilities where necessary (Tamatea 2005, 6). Because girls go into the training camps during the school term, their right to education is jeopardised. Girls must be urged to stay in school and empower female classmates to do the same and fight for the right to access sexual and reproductive health

services. Men and boys can work alongside women and girls to achieve gender equality and embrace healthy and respectful relationships.

Figure 7.1: Poster presented by children in a "Stop Early Marriages for Girl Child Campaign" held by Girl Child Rights Organisation Zimbabwe
Source:http://girltalkhq.com/child-rights-org-zimbabwe-launches-men-role-models-advocacy-campaign/

7.1.1 Chinamwali cultural practice enforces early and child marriages

Chinamwali cultural practice has been proved to enforce early and child marriages among the Shangaan women. It predisposes young girls to premature sexuality through the teachings from the training camp. Young 'stars' (sic) are trained for married life. From what was shared by the participants, it also appears to predispose young women and girls to teenage pregnancies as young girls want to 'practice' what they were have been taught in the training camps. Child marriage is any marriage carried out below the age of 18, before the girl is physically, physiologically and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and child bearing. Child marriages are found in every region in the world. Giddens (2009), cited by Kanjanda (2016, 2), noted that issues of poverty, cultural practices and political instability of gender inequalities have been noted as some of the major causes of girl child marriages in the developing countries. Tradition, religion and poverty continue to fuel the practice of child marriage, despite its strong association with adverse reproductive health outcomes and the lack of education for girls. Child marriages affect girls far more than boys and are a direct form of discrimination against the girl child since they deprive her of access to health, quality education, development and equality. Child marriage is therefore a violation of human and woman rights. Women bear the brunt

and stress in these cultural practices. At teenage level, gender disparities widen as well with much focus being put on social and puberty rites in the favour of men and boys. Girls will have to participate in social and puberty rites while boys remain at school pursuing their education. Marrying young girls also affects girls' education and self-esteem in handling life challenges (United Nations SDG, Goal Number 5). It decreases better opportunities for girls in education. Premarital sex and marriage without prior sexual experience has taken place in many countries amongst women and young girls (Mensch, Grant and Blanc 2005, 5). This section however criticises several pieces of legislation adopted in Zimbabwe in a bid to protect the rights of the girl child and the women as some seem to contradict each other as well as the National Constitution of Zimbabwe.

Child marriage or early marriage refers to any marriage carried out by persons below 18 years of age (Dziva and Mazambani 2017, 1). Anyone below 18 years is a child and is physiologically and physically not ready, either for child bearing or to shoulder the responsibilities that come with marriage. A number of girls get married very young as soon as they graduate from the initiation training. The girls' focus is diverted towards marriage and they develop an attitude that formal schooling is less important than marriage (Chikunda et al. 2006; Kasomo 2009; Thabete 2008). Families closely guard their daughter's sexuality and virginity in order to maintain family honour. The initiation training inscribes particular scripts onto the bodies of the girls and women who are initiated and *chinamwali* is a highly respected cultural practice in the community. The sexual instructions, teachings and prohibitions, the new language and other features, all play a central role in differentiating the initiate from what has been normal to her; girls have to develop the mindset of being mothers not girls. Also created is greater exposure to sex amongst girls in the community. From their narratives, some women highlighted that after initiation training they were ready to get married and wanted to be adventurous, putting theory into practice. The ceremonies are taken to symbolise that boys and girls are not "children" anymore and adolescents tend to take this transition to imply that they can start having sex. According to Banda (2008, 127), among the Chewas, the culmination of one's (ritual) education is to have the family and children. Therefore other things to do with life and production and pursuing their education are outside their vocabulary. At puberty, the girl child is seen as a woman in the eyes of the community and preparations for marriage begin.

Early marriages also lead to school drop-outs as previously mentioned. Initiates drop out of school and get married or get married then drop out of school. Many are married to people older than their parents. An average of 240 pupils have dropped out of school since the beginning of 2017 in Mbire District, Manicaland, Province, chiefly because of child marriages (Chipunza and Mawonda, 2017). Globally, nearly 15 million girls under the age of 18 years are married every year or 37 000 each day (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2015). According to the retrospective analysis of the Democratic Health Survey cited by Mensch et al. (2005, 6), 37 percent of women aged 20 to 24 years old in Eastern and Southern Africa and 45 percent in Western and Middle Africa were married before their eighteenth birthdays, compared with 53 percent and 58 percent of women aged 40 to 44 years in those areas. UNICEF estimated that globally 64 million young women aged 20-24 years are married before turning 18 years and one girl below the age of 18 is married every three seconds worldwide. Plan UK, in an article entitled *Breaking Vows,* cited by Sibanda (2011, 1), claimed that 10 million under 18 years old become child brides every year in developing countries in Southern Africa, North Africa and parts of Asia and one in seven of all girls under 15 are married. The Deputy Director of Gender in the Ministry of Women Affairs Gender and Community Development in Zimbabwe, Mr Steven Nyaruwata reported that there has been an average of 40 child marriages per month in those districts (Chipunza and Mawonda, 2017). Following the lessons girls are taught in initiation programmes, they engage in intimate relationships soon after the ceremony and are often married at an early age. Child marriages are common in Zimbabwe and 21 percent of children (mostly girls) are married before the age of 18. This, however, perpetuates inequalities in the community and women and girls are ultimately the ones who suffer and who are disempowered. While girls attend initiation programmes, boys remain behind proceeding with their education and becoming empowered. Therefore, child marriages affect girls more than boys. Child marriage is however outlawed as a violation of children's rights though communities turn a blind eye as they are such strong cultural conventions among rural and poor communities.

When asked what happened after the training and how long it was till they were married, this was one response:

> *Vazhinji vedu pano vakangoti vachibva kunotambirwa kwakutonororwa, vamwe vanga vachiri vadiki, vamwe vanga vasiya vakomana vaida kuvaroora pavakaenda kukhomba…*

The majority of us got married soon after the initiation ceremony. Some of us were still young but some left their boyfriends who were waiting to marry them when they went for the training. They then got married soon after the ceremony.

One woman added that,

Chero tisina kungodzoka tichiroorwa hedu patakabva kudondo, hatina kuzombopedza nguva yakareba tisati taroorwa nekuti vakomana vanga vakutotanga kunetsera kuroora nekuti kana watambirwa unenge wakutofanira kuroorwa...

Even though I was not married just after the initiation ceremony, I didn't spend much of the time before getting married because soon after being initiated, the assumption is that one is supposed to get married.

Another one said,

Ndakazongoroorwa ndapedza gwaro rechipiri kuchikoro. Ndanga ndisingachatofariri chikoro uye vamwe vezera rangu vanga vatoroorwa kare…

I got married soon after finishing Form 2. I wasn't feeling comfortable being at school as some of my colleagues were already married. I felt like I was the odd one out with 'children' in my class.

And another commented that,

Ukaona uchitadza kuroorwa paunobva kunotambirwa unenge une chakakugara. Kutotambirwa zvinoreva kuti watopedza wakutoroorwa nekuti panenge pasina chekumirira … [vamwe vakatotaura vachiseka].

If you don't get married soon after the ceremony it means you are or you have a problem, you might be possessed or have evil spirits. The moment one gets initiated it therefore means she is supposed to get married. There is no argument. One must not bring shame to her family as people will start to ask so many questions such as, why is she not getting married since she was initiated [laughing by others].

With a rite of passage, the rite is expected to modify the personality of the individual in a manner visible to all, in this case, marriage. In other parts of Malawi as Stuart (2011) mentioned, the idea of bringing a boy to have sex with the initiates is called "dust cleansing" or *"kusasafumbi"*. This gives girls a chance to practise what they have learned during initiation. Reilly (2014) reported that girls as young as ten years old are being sent to initiation camps in Malawi to be taught about how to have sex and in some cases lose their virginity. Girls are told that they must lose their 'child dust' as soon as they can. This is done soon after they graduate from the initiation training. In some Malawian traditions,

hyena or adult men are hired by the girls' own parents to 'cleanse' the girls. Without going through the process, a girl was considered to be a child and was therefore illegible for marriage (Reilly 2014). This idea is considered as gross child rights/human rights abuse/ rape because the majority of them do not consent to have sex with these *hyenas.* According to Mwambene (2004), in some societies the age of marriage is determined by attainment of puberty (twelve to fifteen years). When a girl starts menstruating, she is seen as ready for marriage and must be initiated as a rite of passage before getting married. Among the VaRemba society, a young girl who has not commenced menstruation cannot attend the ritual but can attend other levels of dance entertainment suitable for her age.

The majority of the women who were interviewed confirmed that they were married young soon after the initiation. They also mentioned that the majority did not return to school after the initiation. Some perceived themselves as 'adults', some couldn't fit in the class with 'children' and some were behind with the syllabus and couldn't catch up. Initiation teachings were specifically meant to prepare them for marriage and covered aspects of socio-cultural norms that included dating, sexual conduct, self-reliance, brewing beer, ritual and ceremonial duties and the use of African traditional medicines (Mabuwa 1993). All this is taught to the young girls who may be unable to understand these teachings because of their age yet the community regards them as "mature". Children are being married during the time when one could reasonably expect them in school. Thirty-eight year old Loveness, mother of three, commented that,

> *Ndakatambirwa ndava nemakore gumi nematanhatu. Ndakasiya chikoro ndichinotambirwa nevamwe vasikana vezera rangu, pandakapedza handina kuzombodzokera kuchikoro zvakare. Ndakazoroorwa ndava nemakore makumi maviri nerimwe chete…*
>
> *I was initiated when I was sixteen years old, I absconded school from May to August of that year to attend the initiation training and never went back to school again. I went with some girls of my age. I was married when I was twenty years old.*

Chinyikwa, a forty-four year old grandmother noted that,

> *Ndakaenda kuukhomba ndine makore gumi nematatu ndichibva ndangoroorwa pandakabva kunotambirwa. Vakomana vanenge vatomirirawo kuroora zvikhombana nekuti vanoti ndizvo zvinenge zvakanaka kuroora…*

I was initiated when I was thirteen years old and I got married soon after being initiated. Young men were waiting to marry not only me but the initiates or recent graduates. Men prefer to marry recent initiates for reasons best known to them.

There was never a question that she would not to be married and she was proposed to soon after the training. She had three children, two had died and one was already initiated and married as well.

Ndanga ndine vana vatatu, vaviri vacho vakashaya mutsaona. Mwana mumwe chete asara wandinaye akatoendawo kuukhomba akanotambirwa nevamwe vasikana vezera rake. Ndirikutofara kuti mwana wangu akatambirwa uye akagara zvakanaka mumba make nemurume wake handisati ndambonzwa kana dambudziko kubva kwaari…

I had three children, two of them died in an accident. The one who survived was also initiated. I am happy that she was initiated. That gives me happiness each time I think about it because I know that my daughter is safe in her marriage and as of now I haven't heard any problems in their marriage.

This explanation implies that she was happy that her daughter was initiated and had no problems in her marriage as men want to marry women who are initiated. Ngilazi, a fifty year old grandmother and mother of seven boys, mentioned that she was initiated at puberty, when she started menstruating at fifteen years old. She therefore dropped out of school and attended the initiation programme with other girls. The majority of the women in this research got married very young soon after the initiation programme. *Chinamwali* therefore appears to be a passport to marriage for the girls with teachings that equip them to be wives and not children. These girls may not even feel comfortable staying at home when they have become women, like their mothers and elders, and feel the need to have their own families. Chinyikwa, as a mother, highlighted how happy she was because her child was initiated and this brought joy and comfort to her life. Elders or parents therefore perpetuate gender inequality amongst women and violation of child rights. Leaders are supposed to help and protect children who are being abused due to strong social-cultural conventions and culturally embedded and deeply rooted practices.

There is need for harmonisation between the Zimbabwean marriage laws and the Constitution of Zimbabwe. In the various pieces of legislation, age of marriage and consent of marriage are left out or vary and some contradict each other. Some are intended to curb

early marriages yet these are still rampant in some communities where initiation holds significant value for both the women and the community. Goal number 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals also aims to address some of these challenges faced by girls because it is argued that when people are able to get quality education, they can break the cycle of poverty, both in the community and nationwide. Education helps to reduce inequalities and to reach gender equality; it also empowers people everywhere to live healthier and have sustainable lives. Lost opportunities in childhood cannot be regained later in life. However, quite a number of these pieces of legislation seem to be contradictory in their formulation and implementation and there is need to align them with the National Constitution of Zimbabwe of 2013. The Constitution defines the child as someone below the age of 18 years unlike previous laws which defined a child as someone below 16 years of age. However, arguing against these acts, the Acting Legal Advisor in the Ministry of Public Service Labour and Social Welfare (MPSLSW), Kudzaishe Havazvide was quoted saying that, "…although the Constitution has outlawed child marriages, there is no law which criminalises them…" (Chipunza and Mawonda 2017). Advocates of children rights also argue that there is a need to harmonise marriage laws in order to protect women from unfair treatment as there was no uniformity in the current legislation. Women were treated differently because of the dual legal system of Zimbabwe. Women Law in Southern Africa National Director, Sylvia Chirawu, blamed child marriages on weak laws arguing that there is need to quickly harmonise current laws with the National Constitution to protect young girls from abuse (Chipunza and Mawonda 2017). According to the Marriage Act (Chapter 5:07) of 1964 of Zimbabwe, the minimum marriageable age is 16 years for girls and 18 years for boys which contrasts with the stipulated 18 years for both girls and boys in section 81 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) (Dziva and Mazambani 2017, 4). The Marriage Act is inconsistent with the Constitution of Zimbabwe and it only extends protection against child marriages to boys. In section 21, the Marriage Act allows for marriage for minors by written consent of legal guardians. If the consent of the legal guardian(s) cannot be obtained for whatever reason, a judge of the High Court may grant consent to the marriage. Girls and boys experience all forms of poverty often more acutely than adults because of their vulnerability due to age and dependency. Children often look up to elders who sometimes take advantage of them and abuse them.

Section 20 (2) of the Marriage Act (1964) states that "The marriage of a minor shall not be solemnised without the consent in writing of persons who are in time of the proposed marriage, the legal guardians of such minor or where the minor has only a guardian."

In Section 21 (2): "Where the marriage of a minor which requires the consent of the legal guardian or legal guardians or the consent of a judge under (section 20) is contracted without such consent and is not side in terms of subsection (1), the marriage shall have effect in all respect as if it were of full age marriage contracted between both of whom were of full age."

In Section 22 (1) of the Marriage Act, the section on prohibition of marriage of certain persons under certain ages, the act is biased towards the boy child and offer limited rights or no rights at all to the girl child. In other words, the girl child can marry at 16 years. The section reads: "No boy under the age of 18 years and no girl under the age of 16 years shall be capable of contracting a valid marriage except with written permission of the Minister, which he may grant in any particular case which he considers such marriage desirable" (Marriage Act [Chapter 5:11] of 1964, Zimbabwe).

The Act discriminates in that girls are the ones who are mostly at risk of the consequences of early marriages yet they are the ones who can be married at 16 years old. Boys can only marry at 18 while girls can marry at 16 years and this exposes the girl child to manipulation and abuse by the community at large. It legitimises gender inequality between boys and girls and it even socialises men and boys to marry young girls, which is against their rights. The result is intergenerational sex and girls may not be able to negotiate for safe sex in these unequal relationships. Over 90 percent of all men marry women who are five years or so younger than them. Men are socialised to marry women who are younger than them. Thus marriage is used to legitimise a range of forms of sexual violence and discrimination against women.

The Customary Marriage Act (Chapter 5:11) of 2004 does not give an age limit for marriage for boys and girls. Hence children can marry at any age based on the Customary Marriage Act. The application of the Customary Marriage Act has been detrimental in the fight against child marriages as it does not stipulate the age of marriage (Dziva and Mazambani 2007, 5). Kanjanda (2016, 1) posited that girl child marriages in developing countries have caused

considerable suffering among girl children. The Children's Act (Chapter 5: 06) of 2002 defined a child as a person under the age of 16 and a young person as someone aged 16 but below 18. The same act included in the definition of legal guardian 'the husband of a girl who is under 18 years'. The act has loopholes but it also aims to protect children's rights by highlighting the best interests of the child in all aspects of life. These include all matters concerning care, protection, and well-being of a child. Every child has the right not to be subjected to social, cultural and religious practices which are detrimental to his or her well-being.

Another act inconsistent with protection of the rights of the girl child is the Maintenance Act (Chapter 5:09), which in section 11 states that maintenance for a child shall cease when they marry, meaning that the act recognises child marriages in its inception. Section 11 (4) of the Maintenance Act (Chapter 5:09) stipulates that "an order made in favour of a child shall, with respect to the child, cease if and when; (c) the child marries". Section 8 of the Matrimonial Causes Act states in section 4(1) b that a parent who is granted sole guardianship shall also have power to consent to the marriage of a minor child. Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) (Chapter 9:23) Act of 2007 has a definition of sexual activities that contradicts the definition stipulated in the Constitution of Zimbabwe. Section 70 (4) (a) (1) of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act stipulates that

> Provided that the apparent physical maturity of the young person concerned shall not, on its own, constitute reasonable cause for the purposes of this subsection…(4) For the avoidance of doubt, (a) the competent charge against a person who has sexual intercourse with a female person below the age of 12 years shall be rape, or, (5), Without consent of a female person or above the age of 12 years but below the age of 16 years, has sexual intercourse with that female person shall be rape… (Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23] of 2004, Zimbabwe)

The above Act reveals that any sexual act in the age category is a criminal offence yet the categories are below the age of 18. The act criminalises sexual activity with a young person (under 16) and a minor (under 12) is deemed incapable of consenting to sexual intercourse or a sexual act. Statistics reveal that children are most likely to be victims of incest. The Constitution of Zimbabwe supersedes all the Acts that may have been used as a justification for the rampant child marriages in many communities around Zimbabwe including Mahenye community. Thus there is an urgent need for harmonisation between these laws and the National Constitution of Zimbabwe.

Social cultural conventions and masculinity behaviours push the child marriage agenda with leaders of the communities perpetuating this idea. Chief Chiduku, Senator of Manicaland and a member of the African Apostolic Church, was quoted as saying there was nothing wrong with marrying off underage girls in a Parliamentary Portfolio Committee meeting: "You mentioned that people in Chipinge and the apostolic sects are breaking the law by marrying off underage girls … But it is their culture and religion that you are condemning…" (Newsday, 1 April 2011). He implied that at 16 years, most girls were unable to look after themselves and therefore needed to get married. In this regard, the chief, as he represents traditional leaders, supported the idea of child marriages which therefore has a negative impact on the rights of the children. Child marriages are also said to be prevalent among the Johanne Marange Apostolic Sect *(Vapositori)* which values polygamy and marrying young children within their church.

In the training camps, young women and girls go through a process called '*hardening'*, (Chikunda et al. 2006). The 'hardening' process is a socially constructed process whereby all the initiates spend the whole training period half naked and at times fully naked and sometimes in ice cold water for an hour or so in the river. They are not allowed to warm themselves up by the fire or bask in the sun. This hardening process is an attempt to create a strong/ 'real woman'. The process is said to prepare the individual to take any social responsibilities. The single and specific goal is marriage and women must be able to endure suffering when they are married. Girls are also given instructions that are often explicit and may be, arguably, unsuitable for the younger girls. The teachings can be shocking and confusing as revealed by the participants.

Additionally some of the dances are explicitly sexual and suggestive. The initiates are made to sing and dance naked at night. Banda (2008, 126) noted that "Chewa people, like most other societies in Africa and Zambia, believe that growing up is not a simple process of maturation but involves a thorough preparation for the role to be played in the adult life." Thus 'hardening' acts to remove the childhood mindset and replaces it with an adulthood ideology amongst the young women or girls. The idea is that marriage is full of ups and downs and if one is not initiated/ hardened, one will later divorce or fail to endure the suffering. Hence women are taught to be passive and submissive to their husbands, respect their elders, not argue with the husband and in-laws and remain quietly in the background.

The community at this point takes 'precedence' and a kind of proprietary control over the individual. Women are supposed to be the first to serve and the last to speak. This is taught through socialisation and grooming. Thus the female body is shaped with an appropriate set of behaviours prescribed by the community. This is an example of how gender roles are constructed and stereotyped. Social constructivism allows an understanding that bodies can be socially constructed through socialisation. Initiation teachings encourage women not to think outside the private sphere, make women second class citizens whose place is in the kitchen or doing minor jobs. The life skills required by a woman are linked to their reproductive roles and expected behaviour in the community.

Men, however, are not taught how to satisfy women. It is only the woman who is taught how to satisfy the husband and/or the potential suitor. This is an indication of unequal gender relations between men and women. It goes against Sustainable Development Goal number 5 which advocates for Gender Equality by 2030. The Goal is aimed to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Gender inequality stagnates women's social progress.

The idea of 'hardening', on a structural level, perpetuates domestic violence and abuse; women are trained to endure hardships and to persevere in marriage through bad or abusive treatment similar to what they may have been exposed to during an initiation programme. Young brides are particularly susceptible to domestic violence. Whilst in the training camp, like among the Gikuyu people of Kenya, initiates promise in an oath that they will in every respect deport themselves like adults and take all responsibilities in the welfare of the community and that they will 'not lag' behind whenever called upon to perform any service or duty in the protection and advancement of the 'tribe' as a whole (Kenyatta 1964, 134). Amongst the Shangaan, *chinamwali* is said to be the key to successful marriage. Marriage is not only the contract between the bride and groom but also with the kinsfolk or the whole community. Many of the lessons in the training camp involve etiquette, and knowledge on how to handle homes and husbands when they are married. Women should not cry, complain or protest when treated badly; they must simply endure any ill treatment from a husband without complaining. They are oriented to view men as superior and themselves as inferior. Women must associate themselves with the reproductive body, taking care of the home and hearth while men are rational, political and noble living in the larger world of commerce and politics. The consumers of female sexuality are men themselves.

Some of the cases of child abuse and domestic violence in the community go unreported for fear of being ostracised by their community. Some are not even documented and women and children continue to suffer silent abuse at home in the name of endurance. Children might choose to keep quiet because they are afraid to disobey the elders who encouraged them to go through initiation. Blind obedience to elders and culture can contribute to ongoing sexual abuse of children for fear of destroying community values and neglecting cultural and traditional values (Kamlongera 2007, 8). Women are socialised to view men as their godfathers and as heads of the household who must not be challenged. They even fear reporting cases of abuse because the majority of these men are bread winners and losing a bread winner would result in suffering and extreme poverty. Women prefer to suffer in silence.

Child marriage is one reflection of society's negative attitudes towards women revealing the fact that important decisions such as marriage, choice of partner and women's sexuality are all controlled by the community from an early age onwards. Everything about the female body is planned and controlled by the males who therefore dominate leadership positions and may therefore find it difficult to enact laws to fight against "themselves". Socialisation starts at birth and goes on to death (Van Gennep in Kasomo 2009, 2). At birth, when the community realises that the child is a boy or girl, a feminine or masculine name is given to the child and from then on the clothing and toys that the child will use will be determined by the child's gender. In Malawi, the birth of a baby boy is celebrated more than that of a girl. Children are socialised in line with their gender up to the time of death. There are traditional male and female roles and the aim in a patriarchal system is to perpetuate patriarchal dominance. Patriarchy is a direct deep-rooted structure of male domination. Thus, as long as the interpretation of children's needs is gendered, our treatment of boys and girls will be framed along those lines (Kamlongera 2007). Women can be sexually abused, beaten or slapped, forced to have sex even without their consent, threatened by their husbands (some regarded as 'sugar daddies') but cannot do anything as they are bound by culture. The paradox of human nature is that it is always the manifestation of cultural meanings, social relationships and power politics; not biology but culture becomes destiny (Lorber 1994, 3). Women, therefore, even if ill-treated in marriage are taught, according to Murawu,

> *Ndizvo zvinoitika mumba…varume vese 'imbwa', vakangofanana hunhu hwavo. Varume vese vanoita sevakazvarwa namai vamwe chete. Semukadzi chaiye*

unotofanira kutsungirira mumba mako. Unotogarira vana vako kana waona zvanetsa…haungaiti vana vane mitupo yakasiyana…

That's marriage, it is not smooth. The journey is rough but as a strong woman one has to be strong and endure the suffering. Men are like the same, they behave as if they are born from the same family. You cannot divorce your husband because he misbehaved, all men do that. You can't have children with different totems. Hence the saying [the devil you know is better than the angel you don't know].

Muhlava said,

Kutonhorwa kunosimbisa. Kunoita kuti kana wazosangana nematambudziko mumba haunetseke nekuti zvinenge zvisiri zvitsva. Takatozvidzidziswa kudondo kuti matambudziko anosanganikwa nawo mumba…

Being exposed into the ice cold water strengthened us. We were hardened, yes but it equipped us to be prepared for all the challenges of life because we were enlightened and ready to face any challenge that life threw us at.

The narratives show that women are groomed to socially value marriage and reproduction. They are also taught that marriage challenges are socially accepted and are viewed as part of life. As a well-groomed woman, it is taboo to divorce as the community value marriage even if it's not working out. One is encouraged to stick to one's husband since being married is respected and honoured. Women are taught to respect husbands as the head of the family. With initiation, one becomes social; without it, one is not social and one doesn't belong to the core group. In this regard, patriarchy plays a central role in all aspects of woman's life even in decision making. The messages women are taught reduces women's role in marriage to serving and satisfying the husband sexually. Challenges are expected in the marriage and are considered as part of life. For example, women are socialised that men cheat in marriage and this is simply being an 'African man" whereas women are not supposed to cheat in a marriage; if they do, men can divorce them. Endemic sexism, patriarchal attitudes and the force of blinding tradition bond African men in hegemonic systems that nourish and protect their interests (Azondo 1997, 7).

The idea behind initiation is to produce an ideal woman suitable for marriage, a woman who is humble, morally upright, voiceless and submissive not only to the future husband but to males and older women of the community as well. From the literature it can be noted that in modern day Zimbabwe and globally, the idea of teaching the woman to be

submissive and follow reproductive roles of the community is still rampant. However, *chinamwali* is deeply rooted and deeply embedded as a cultural practice and part of a patriarchal system that feminists argue oppresses women for men's benefit. Feminist theory has often been critical of naturalistic explanations of sex and sexuality that assume that the meaning of women's social existence can be derived from some fact in their physiology. It is the body of the woman which is rendered docile by the social and cultural conventions which define what is 'normal' to the community.

Some women today are now modernising *chinamwali* in the form of kitchen parties. There is little difference in the teachings but women don't go to training camps in winter for some months. Kitchen parties take hours while *chinamwali/khomba* training takes up to three to four months. These parties (like initiation training) are held for women before marriage (to train them on how to take care of the husband and family and to give them advice on married life) and prior to the birth of a baby ('a baby shower'). With kitchen parties, tendencies towards social and cultural constructs of male and female behaviours are evident. In the kitchen parties, women are educated to be submissive to their husbands and taught how to perform (sexually) in bed with the future husband. One cannot be married without being initiated; some form of training is required. Many women want to avoid the training camps for *chinamwali* training and therefore choose the kitchen party route. Like with *chinamwali*, kitchen parties create relationships between groups of people and people therefore create a network of rights and obligations. Butler (1988, 7) noted that to be female is a fact which has no meaning but to be a woman is to *have become* a woman. Gender identity needs to be inscribed among women.

Chinamwali training as a social demand instills a sense of social capital among the women in the community. Whilst in the training camp, young women and girls are taught cultural lessons through lectures and role modeling. Initiates are also taught through songs, parables and folklore. The elder women *(vatsvatsi)* need to be satisfied initiates have grasped the whole concept of initiation which elevates their position, making them more valuable, both individually and to society. Knowledge and understanding of *chinamwali* therefore trickle down from the elders to the young women and girls through modeling as well as tutoring and oral tradition. Butler (1993, 8) claimed that words alone have the power to craft bodies from their own linguistic substance. Ricardo (2005, 9) noted that the rites may become particularly important for creating cultural and collective identities when more formalised public institutions such as schools, formal religion and political institutions are weak.

Women and girls spends much of their time in the training camp learning about the household chores that a woman is supposed to do. The sexual scripts they are taught do not develop in a vacuum but are rather shaped by cultural scenarios, particularly those relevant to culture, gender, socio-economic class and ethnicity.

Research participant Nyembezi told me that,

> *Vatsvatsi ndovaibata basa rekutidzidzisa hunhu tiri mudondo kuti tive tiri vana vanoremekedzwa munharaunda. Vaizopihwa mubhadharo wavo nevabereki vedu kana tabuda mudondo kana kuti nemurume aizotiroora kana taroorwa…*
>
> *Elders would spend some time teaching us to be 'real women' who will be respected and honoured in the community. They would be paid for their job by our parents or husbands when we get married.*

Elders are assumed to be the educated ones in terms of the training and initiation practices therefore they take the responsibility for the young women and girls in the training camp for the whole two to three months. Tsatsawani also commented that,

> *Tiri mudondo taidzidziswa kutamba zvakawanda nevamwe vasikana. Zvidzidzo zvekutamba izvi zvaiitirwa kuti tizogona kutamba kana tave mumba nevarume vedu. Taidzidziswa futi matambiro ataifanira kuzoita kana tiri parufu kana pamabiko…*
>
> *We were taught to sing and dance with other women when we were in the training camp. Some of the dances resembled how we were supposed to act in bed with the husband. We were also taught how and what to sing and how to dance in public events such as funerals and at church.*

The training and dancing sessions were meant to equip the women and girls to be ready to act in bed. They were taught how to swing or wriggle their waists to assist men during intercourse. Some of the dances that women were exposed to include *mugidhi* and *muwacha*. *Mugidhi* is the private dance, not supposed to be seen by non-initiates, as it involves vulgar language and acts from training camps. *Muwacha* is for everyone to watch. Both dances contain some of the cultural capital of the Shangaan community and information is passed on through them.

7.2 *Chinamwali*: Women empowerment – an oxymoron

The Shangaan cultural practice of *chinamwali* is an oxymoron in its implementation. The practice is paradoxical and operates as a two-way process. On one hand, the practice is packaged by the community as 'women empowerment tool' – as a way of offering

education (indigenous knowledge) to young people, introducing the youth to adulthood and enabling them to face the 'realities' of life, gain societal honour respect and a sense of identity in the community, but on the other hand, it impinges on the human rights of the women and girls. The cultural practice of *chinamwali* ultimately does the opposite of what it seeks to achieve. The practice, through its teachings which confine woman to the private spheres of life, also carries the imprint of relations of domination of men over women. It is socially and culturally oriented, seeking to uphold societal norms which give the women honour and respect in the community but impact negatively on the rights and welfare of the women and girls. Simone de Beauvoir, cited by Butler (1988, 5), claimed that one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman; "she is appropriating and reinterpreting this doctrine of constituting acts from the phenomenological tradition". With *chinamwali*, the assumption of women empowerment is an oxymoron in that, on one hand, it implies family honour, integrity and respect, meaning the family is respected and community membership is granted. But on the other hand, it does not address women empowerment as women's rights are not upheld. The idea is ultimately not gender balanced but rather biased towards benefiting patriarchal and masculine behaviours. Bodies are in the same way constructed (Butler 1993, 9). The idea teaches women to internalise their own subordinate status, to view themselves as having lesser value and diminishes their sense of their own rights. Women are confined to the private spheres of life and are taught to view the husband and men as superior. Girls drop out of school in order to attend this cultural practice, thereby foregoing opportunities of education. They are taught to be comfortable being confined to the house and assume they have reached the climax of life. Protecting the woman and uplifting the rights of the women and girl child can be empowering. Initiation focuses only on the end, that is, constructed identity, family honour, satisfying the man in bed, fulfilling community obligations and therefore tends to exclude the means, which is the teachings that are imparted to the girl child, affect the female body through cultural scripts and cultural definitions of women. It therefore creates unequal gender relations in the community. However, the justifications given are all the mechanisms that maintain the social construction of the women and further perpetuate this cultural practice of *chinamwali* since the (female) body is the materiality that bears the cultural meaning. Moreover, (some) women are also complicit and part of the community which supports the perpetuation of this cultural practice and the abuse of their rights in a bid to conform to social cultural conventions. Men as perpetrators also push ahead their agendas in order to maintain their superiority in the community. An example is what some African feminists are trying to fight

against, that is defending female genital mutilation amongst the women in Kenya. Jomo Kenyatta's analysis and justification of the practice created conflicts for those African feminist nationalists who were against both colonialism and female genital cutting (Gaidzanwa).

Female Agency

Initiation is a strong social convention that communities strive for and wish to pass on to future generations. Initiation expresses people's culture and traditions, it also creates a sense of agency amongst women (those practising and the ones leading the cultural practice). From the interviews and focus group discussions with the women in the community, the researcher found that the women were very proud of their cultural practice. The narratives of the women proved that the practice is culturally embedded. The majority of women were proud to have undergone the initiation programme regardless of their bodies' "suffering" and coming to bear socially constructed cultural meanings. The practice brings joy to the family and would-be spouses. The practice is, however, in conflict with modernisation and development in society as it seriously undermines the girl child's opportunities because of restricted education. The girl child is impoverished through lack of education which can bring about understandings of development as well as health matters. (Patriarchal) societies view women as sexual beings more than as human beings (Charvet 1982, in Kambarami 2006); women in these societies also regard this cultural practice as important and for their benefit.

On the flip side, with *chinamwali* women exercise their sense of agency as they feel proud of the process they go through and the "wealth" and "weight" they have in the community. Mahenye women feel that they have "power", respect and honour after undergoing the training. In Northern Mozambique, a repeated exercise, gradually producing an elongation of the small lips of the vagina *(libae minorae*) is reported, by women and men alike, to greatly enhance physical pleasure in the sexual encounter, (Arnfred 1988, 1990, 2003 in Arnfred 2004. 13). Arnfred further asserted that, in Jola contexts, female circumcision is a strategy for women's empowerment. Women are empowered to take care and be responsible towards their own bodies even though their sexuality is controlled by discourse. As part of the initiation practice, vaginal labia minora elongation (Southern Africa) and practices aiming at tightening the vagina (Central and Southern Africa) show multivalent links between body, society, eroticism and health. Initiation practices are a "women's secret" and express an area of power that women have been developing and protecting

despite many forms of oppression over generations (Tamale 2005 in Bagnol and Mariano 2009, 1). To Bagnol and Mariano, initiation practices and the elongation of labia minora are an expression of female static power. Most women in the Tete Province of Mozambique practice vaginal and labia minora elongation *(kukhuna, kupfuwa or puxa puxa)* as part of the process of initiation into female sexuality, which includes the use of a belt of beads, scarifications on the body as well as the modification or alteration of the genital organs (Bagnol and Mariano 2009, 7). Some women have argued that the process may be pleasurable when girls or women do *puxa puxa,* as they feel an increase in sexual pleasure when grown up. Bagnol and Mariano (2009, 10) further asserted that feminine beauty is thus evaluated by the presence of *matingi* (elongated labia) and by their length. In the Tete province, vaginal practices constitute an institution in which women develop their knowledge of interaction with others and transmit it to younger women. It is therefore a female institution and a locus of expression of women's power over their own bodies and their sexual relationships (Tamale 2005). A report in Tete (1983) stated that lengthening of the vaginal labia is useful because during sex this increases the men's sexual pleasure and when the woman is older, the labia are used to strengthen the width of the vagina (Bagnol and Mariano 2012, 24). Therefore these cultural practices create a sense of belonging and identity and can be seen as an empowerment tool for the women who can also negotiate for their sexual rights and exposure. Some of the initiated elderly women who were interviewed had this to say:

> *Isu tinotodawo kuti vana vedu vatambirwe nekuti zvinovapawo ruremekedzo uye kuti vadiwe nevarume vavo zvakanyanya mudzimba. Kutambirwa kunoita kuti murume akude uye akuremekedze.*
>
> *We also want our children to be initiated just like any other girls in the community. Chinamwali also entails honour and respect from the men and the community in general but the husband in particular.*

In as far as *chinamwali* is related to patriarchy, it is further regarded as an empowerment tool for the women, by the men and even some women. Thabete (2008, 28) noted that the community maintained their cultural identity as signified by the traditional rites that they still adhere to and practise on such occasions as deaths, weddings, parties, initiation ceremonies and other festivals. Research participant Hlalati said,

> *Zvekutambirwa takazvidzidza kubva kuvabereki vedu avo vaida kuti titambirwe…*

We learnt about initiation from our parents who encouraged us to be initiated in order to be part of the community activities. My mother and all my sisters were initiated as well.

Parents of these women also wanted their children to conform to cultural practices as they are a source of pride in the community. A UNICEF report on the cultural practice of Female Genital Mutilation (Innocenti Digest 2005, 20) noted that social conventions are so powerful that girls themselves may desire to be cut as a result of the social pressure from peers and because of fear – not without reason – of stigmatisation and rejection by their own communities if they do not follow tradition. It has been reported that in some societies, some girls cut themselves for fear of being identified as not conforming with the despised cultural practice. This applies to the cultural practice of *chinamwali* too which is also influenced by socio-cultural conventions which do not consider a woman to be a real woman if not initiated. Esther commented that,

Varume vese vanoremekedza zvikhombana nekuti vanoziva kuti zvakadzidziswa uye zviunogona kuchengeta mhuri…

All the men in the community respect initiates because they know that initiates are trained on how to take care of the family.

Chauke revealed that,

Kutambirwa kunoita kuti uremekedzwe uye mhuri yako ipihwe chiremerera munharaunda saka vabereki vedu vaitoshuwirawo kuti isu vana vavo vese vatambirwe…

Being initiated makes the family and the whole community honoured. So every parent would wish if their children were initiated.

Sarah explained that,

Taipiwa zvinhu zvakawanda nevabereki vedu kana tabva kukhomba nekuti vabereki vedu vaifara kuti vana vedu vatambirwa kuratidza mufaro nekuti tinenge tatambirwa…

We were showered with gifts and presents at the graduation ceremony as my parents were happy that we were initiated and passed the training. We also got public recognition and rewards at the initiation ceremony.

The majority of the women in the focus group discussion highlighted that,

Takaudzwa kuti zvinoita kuti mudzimai awane murume anomuroora uye kana murume akaroora mukadzi akatambirwa haazombomusiye zvakare. Anongoramba achidzoka kwaari…

We were told that initiation ensures a girl or woman's status and marriageability and also if the husband meets a woman who is initiated he will come back to you and he won't cheat on you.

The narratives reveal that this cultural practice is highly valued and the parents of the children don't feel comfortable if their children are not initiated. Parents are willing to have their daughters initiated since they want the best for their children and because of social pressure from the community. Initiation imparts a sense of pride, of coming of age and a feeling of community membership. As with female genital mutilation, mothers organise the initiation of their daughters because they consider that this is part of what they must do to raise a girl properly and to prepare her for adulthood and marriage. The parents want honour and to be part of the community. This training therefore forms part of the women's social and cultural identity. Girls earn their mothers' approval by being initiates and for gender appropriate behaviours. Non-initiates are excluded from family gatherings and from being part of the decision making board of the family because the assumption is that they are not mature enough to make decisions among a group of initiates. The girl and her family are also stigmatised and isolated which results in loss of social status. Parents groom their children carefully in order to maintain their honour and respect.

The lessons that are taught in the training camp appear to have impacted both positively and negatively on the girls. Some women argue that the training is reformatory as one cannot call oneself a real woman if one doesn't possess the qualities of a woman that are acquired through initiation training. Rites of passage in general are of central importance in the life of the community where they are performed (Kasomo 2009, 3). They are the means by which society is regulated. In the training camp, the elder women check if the girls are virgins. This was meant to curb promiscuity and HIV/AIDS in the community. Girls are encouraged to preserve themselves for marriage. The teachings reinforce gender stereotypes and behaviour. Laiza illustrated this,

Patakaenda kunotambirwa taitariswa kuti hatina kumborara nevarume here nekuti tainzi hazvina kunaka kuti tirare nevarume tisati taroorwa…

When we were in the training camp elders would do the virginity testing amongst the initiates. They would check if we didn't engage in pre-marital sex. The elders discouraged promiscuity. We were taught to maintain our virginity until marriage.

Virgins wear white clothes when they graduate; non-virgins wear red clothes which symbolise that they are no longer virgins and that they have engaged in premarital sex. After the initiation, girls and women have a procession in the community where parents together with elders have a party celebrating their transition from childhood to womanhood. This is when the parents find out if their children are virgins and the whole community will know this at the same time. Chief Chiduku reported that girls in his community undergo virginity tests (Newsday, 1 April 2011). But virginity testing on young girls is regarded as a violation of child and human rights. In some societies, fingers are used to check if the girl is a virgin or not, which is regarded as child abuse. Section 7 (1) of the Children's Act stipulates that:

> Whenever the provision of the act requires best interests of the child standard to be applied, the following factors must be taken into consideration where relevant namely; (i) the need to protect the child from any physical or psychological harm that may be caused by subjecting the child to maltreatment, abuse, neglect, exploitation and degradation or exposing the child to violence or exploitation or other harmful behaviour.

Article 3 (1) of the Convention of the Rights of the Child states that:

> In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

Article 19 (1) of the Convention of the Rights of the Child states that:

> Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child. (UNICEF Convention of the Rights of the Child, 1989).

Moreover, according to the Child Act, every child has the right not to be subjected to socio-cultural and religious practices which are detrimental to his or her well-being. Genital mutilation and female circumcision is prohibited (Children's Act [Chapter 5:06] 2002).

Virginity testing of children under the age of 16 years is prohibited. Therefore, cultural practices that engage in virginity testing are violating the rights of the child and women.

Elders assume that the practice will curb promiscuity, but what girls are taught in the training can make them eager to engage in sexual acts. In as far as parents play a central role in encouraging their children to be initiated; they also play a role in child marriages. In many developing countries, the rationale given by parents for encouraging early marriage for a daughter is to preserve her virginity prior to the wedding date. The longer the interval between the onset of menstruation and first union, the more time the young woman has in which she may get pregnant or indulge in sexual activities and bring dishonour to the family. In a way, this encourages early pregnancies and early marriages.

7.3 International interventions

To address some of the challenges associated with this cultural practice, there are a number of legal frameworks and intervention strategies in Zimbabwe. Apart from the local interventions, Zimbabwe is also a signatory to international treaties and bodies with the aims of respecting, protecting and fulfilling children's and women's rights. These include the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), which was adopted on 11 July 1990 and came to force on 29 November 1999, the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, Convention of Elimination against all forms of Discrimination Against Women, (CEDAW), the 1952 United Nations Commission on Human Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Zimbabwe signed these treaties in a bid to fight against the strong cultural conventions which suppress women and girls. The idea was to bring equity and gender equality in the country. These laws were meant to address issues of child marriage, child abuse, children's access to justice, children's access to education, women and human rights violations, domestic violence and gender based violence, among other things.

Article 16 (1) of (CEDAW) states that:

> Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women; (a) the same right to enter into marriage, (b) the same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage

only with their free and full consent, (c) the same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution.

Article 16 (2) states that:

> The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.

There are several articles in the Convention of the Rights of the Child which are also meant to protect the rights of the child such as Article 19, 28 and 29.

Article 19:

> State parties shall take appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the children from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse while in the care of parents, legal guardians or any other person who has the care of the child.

Article 28:

> State parties recognise the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall in particular, (a) make primary education compulsory and available free to all.

Article 29:

> State parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to, (a) the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential, (b) the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the charter of the United Nations, (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is currently living, the country in which he or she may originate, and for civilisations different from his or her own.

The African Charter on Human Rights stipulates that:

> Discrimination against women means any distinction, exclusion or restriction or any differential treatment based on sex and whose objectives or effects compromise or destroy the recognition, enjoyment or the exercise by women regardless of their marital status of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all spheres of life

However, since cultural practices are deeply rooted and culturally embedded, contesting them is difficult and is often met with resistance since some of the perpetrators (usually men) are the ones who are supposed to advocate for these laws to be enacted. Information is often not disseminated as far as rural communities like Mahenye. Cultural practices are also difficult to fight as the whole community, including the women, upholds their ideals. Therefore *chinamwali* remains a dominant force in the community. Culture is one of the obstacles to the enjoyment of children rights in Africa as communities where children live don't always observe the relevant human rights instruments that protect children from harmful cultural practices or are not aware of them (Sibanda 2011, 10). Hence, through the performance of dramatised sexual acts and physical punishments, women's private parts and bodies are physically invaded and conquered for the desires of men in the society.

Even though African societies have been reported as not appreciating direct confrontation, especially on matters dealing with sex and sexuality, the Government of Zimbabwe and NGOs should be commended for some of the work they are doing in eradicating harmful cultural practices. There are several NGOs, human and child rights organisations and peer groups which advocate for women and girl child rights, complementing government efforts to protect these rights. These include, among others, United Nations Women, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Msasa Project, Women Lawyers Association, TAG a Life, Care at the Core for Humanity Zimbabwe, Justice for Children and the United Nations Children's and Health Fund (UNICEF), Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre Network (ZWRCN) and Shamwari Yemwanasikana (Girls not Brides). The latter organisation partnered with Women in Law in Southern Africa and embarked on a two-year programme aimed at mobilising community action against child marriages. The organisation provides for and supports the empowerment and emancipation of the girl child in Zimbabwe. The idea is to end child marriages and enable girls to fulfil their potential and move on with their lives in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Girl Child Network (GCN) led by Betty Makoni also made an effort to end child marriages in Zimbabwe (Moyo 2010). Girl Child Network is a civic organisation whose mandate is to shelter, educate and empower female victims.

Efforts are therefore being made in the country to fight against child marriages and challenges faced by women and children in the communities. According to Mawodza,

marriage before the age of eighteen is a fundamental violation of human rights, as well as a health hazard to girls, (Mawodza, 2015. 12).. It can also create domestic violence since young girls usually, are made to marry older men. Different stakeholders in conjunction with the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare came together in a four-day workshop in Nyanga in June 2017 in a bid to discuss the Children's Amendment Bill in order for the Child Act to be aligned with the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) (Nemukuyu 2017a). In this workshop, the Director of Constitutional Affairs in the Ministry of Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, Mr. Tapuwa Godzi, highlighted that they have put forward child rights concerns in the Children's Amendment Bill. Chief among them are child marriages; they sought to criminalise child marriages and propose a penalty of up to 15 years jail for those convicted of marrying children (Nemukuyu 2017b). The intention is to criminalise sex grooming practices like *chinamwali*, as a form of child abuse as well as the cultural and traditional harmful practices which are affecting girl child rights. The abovementioned organisations have a mandate to fight injustices and gender inequalities perpetuated against women in the country. The idea is to create an environment favourable for women and children in order for them to pursue their careers and life. However, organisations which are trying to address children and women's rights are being faced with challenges, chief among them, men who pretend the situation does not exist; yet they are the ones who perpetuate these gender disparities, claiming they are 'normal' to such an extent that the community doesn't see anything wrong in marrying a child.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings drawn from the women's understanding of the cultural practice of *chinamwali/ khomba*. The chapter has explored the patriarchal gendered relations associated with the cultural practice of *chinamwali*. Findings include how 'culture' influences people to conform to the societal ritual and traditional acts/dialects. *Chinamwali* is a socio-cultural practice and it influences women's behaviour and lives. It also helps women of Mahenye community to act in a certain way that identifies them with other women. It creates cultural identity and societal acceptance amongst women. The researcher also noted that there is a high rate of school drop-outs, child marriages and women rights abuse associated with *chinamwali*. *Chinamwali* can be regarded as a school where the values and skills of the community are imparted to the initiates. The society influences this process. Culture is thus collective and contributes to moral development. The chapter also

looked at how *chinamwali* is claimed to be empowering whilst still perpetuating gender inequality in the community.-The contributions of local and international treaties in fighting against gender inequality were considered in this chapter. Various NGOs and the Government of Zimbabwe were also commended in their bid to address gender inequality.

CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

8. 0 Introduction

This chapter considers the central findings and arguments of the study of *chinamwali* in the Mahenye community. The researcher used focus group discussions, observations and interviews to probe how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* constructs 'womanhood' among the Shangaan people of Mahenye community. The study worked through social constructivism, to explore the socio-cultural construction of the female body as well as to understand the lived experiences of the women of Mahenye community. The discussions in this chapter reiterate issues relating to cultural construction of the female body, the gendered construction of women, the human rights of women and girls and how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* socially constructs and defines women. The chapter, through revisting the analysis of the narratives from women (and men) of Mahenye community, discusses significant contributions of the study in relation to its key questions. Finally, the chapter provides a summary and recommendations for future research linked to the area of *chinamwali.*

8.1 Summary of the findings

The preliminary presentation chapters sought to analyse the knowledge, understanding and perceptions of the Shangaan women of Mahenye community towards the cultural practice of *chinamwali*. This was achieved through a critical engagement with the Shangaan people of the Mahenye community. The study showed that women were familiar with their cultural practice of *chinamwali* and that they place a significant value on the traditional practice. Only a few women who were not born in the community did not initially know about the initiation practice but were mentored through socialisation with community members. It can be noted that women were initiated in order to conform to the cultural norms and belief system. This was also done in order to seek societal and community acceptance. From the narratives, it can be noted that *chinamwali* is perceived as a strong cultural convention which binds women to the community and their peers. As a cultural practice, *chinamwali* brings joy and pride to the girls and their parents and community as well.

The study revealed that *chinamwali* is culturally embedded and that every woman in the community must undergo the training. Those who undergo the initiation programme then belong to a certain group of women in the community. Women create their social identity through this cultural practice. These women undergo strict seclusion where they are taught and

mentored on culturally acceptable behaviours. They are taught what it means to be a 'real woman' in the context of Mahenye culture. After these teachings and mentorship, young women and girls graduate to womanhood/ adulthood. Those who have not been initiated are seen as children, minors, weak and not 'real women' by those who are initiated. The narratives of the women revealed that non-initiates are called by derogatory names such as *chichuta/ zvichuta*. The non-initiates are excluded from cultural activities, such as the *mugidhi* and *muwacha* dances and may not take part in a number of societal activities. The ritual contributes and affirms unity between the community and the individual who takes pride in being accepted into an important age set of gendered adults (Mutanda and Rukondo 2016, 56).

The study revealed that the community put value on the cultural practice of *chinamwali* to such an extent that a group of initiates is called *zvikhombana*, and an individual is called *chikhombana;* a group of non-initiates is called *zvichuta* but one non-initiate is called *chichuta.* Non-initiates are not allowed to wear symbolic clothes such as the headband and beads *(hauna kumbopfeka chihandani nehusanga).* After the training in the camp, each initiate is given symbolic names related to their performance. Key elders who accompany the girls and contribute to training them in the camp give initiates these names. A name carries a significant meaning for both the initiates and the community. A new name comes with new status, maturity and commitment. One earns respect from undergoing the training and earns an initiation or *khomba* name. Names on birth certificates do not carry the same significant value as *khomba* or initiation names such as *Mudhlayi, Tsatsawani,* and *Hlalati*. These names are associated with listening, being proactive whilst in the training camp, adhering to rules of the training, coming early when going to fetch water and firewood, being the lead dancer, knowing how to make pottery and or how to cook delicious food. One cannot take a leadership position without an initiation name and one is forbidden from roles such as leading a group of women in community projects, burial societies or in beer brewing or even welcoming initiates from the training camp. When they graduate from *chinamwali*, young girls earn respect, more than a woman who is old but not initiated. Respect in the community is earned immediately upon being initiated.

Young women and girls are socialised as to the values and importance of being initiated. The study shows that the teachings give women little or no control over their own bodies. *Chinamwali* is a deeply rooted structure of domination against women. The decision to attend the training programme lies with the community or parents. Girls are initiated as soon as they

reach puberty. Among the Shangaan women of Mahenye, if one is married into that community, the community sees one as an outcast. Therefore in order to belong to the group, a woman is supposed to be initiated or participate in the cultural practice of *chinamwali. Chinamwali* is attended by women with the blessings of men who encourage young women and girls to be initiated and groomed according to cultural expectations.

Chinamwali /khomba training happens in a secret place/ environment or in the bush where no one may visit or intrude. Young women and girls must go to this training camp for several months following the initiation curriculum. Girls have to leave school in order to attend the *khomba* training programme. Some of the girls do not come back after the training, hence the rising number of school drop-outs. The findings also reveal that boys remain at school and proceed with their education whilst girls leave school for three to four months in order to attend the *khomba* initiation. In this regard, girls are most affected.

The study revealed that girls are the ones who are at risk from harsh conditions in the training camp in a bid to fulfil cultural obligations. The exposure to explicit sexual acts, a harsh environment, being beaten and spending some time in cold water also affects initiates in the name of endurance. This shows that girls are routinely valued less than boys. This therefore perpetuates gender inequality and differentiation between the boy and girl child. The differentiation in priorities given to the boy child *vis-a-vis* the girl child continues to oppress and suppress the girl child. This perpetuates gender stereotyping where a boy child is valued more highly when compared with a girl child. Therefore with *chinamwali*, gender equality cannot be achieved since the community values sex education and grooming of the girl child and formal education for the boy child. This is evidenced by the high rates of school drop-outs and child marriages in those communities that value sex grooming and education.

The study has shown that *chinamwali* is a culturally embedded cultural practice since women are initiated in order to fulfil cultural obligations and fit into the community which therefore values this traditional cultural practice. To be regarded as 'real women' and to attain 'womanhood', young women and girls are supposed to be initiated and to go through *khomba* training. The narratives from the men and women show that non-initiates bring 'shame' and misfortune to the family and community. All women are supposed to be initiated in conformity with the beliefs constructed by the community – which involve both men and women. *Chinamwali* therefore plays a pivotal role in transitioning the woman from 'childhood' to

‘adulthood’. Being a ‘real woman’ is socially constructed, fluid over time and in different settings, and plural as one is not born a woman but rather one ‘becomes a woman’. This can only be achieved if one is initiated. *Chinamwali* therefore becomes the key requirement to attain ‘womanhood’. The community or parents encourage young women and girls to be initiated so that they can attain ‘womanhood’ status. The status carries many expectations and responsibilities that a woman is supposed to showcase to the community. Behaviour of the initiate must be different from that of a non-initiate; with *chinamwali*, as a reformatory and guiding principle, one is supposed to behave as an adult and not as a minor or child.

In reviewing literature on the initiation rites and *chinamwali*, it is evident that *chinamwali* is a socio-cultural practice which carries profound significance for the whole community where it is practised. The community encourages women and girls to be initiated, through social construction and social interaction. The information is passed from one generation to the next and is part of the community’s social capital. Literature on the Chewa community of Zambia, and Malawi, the Nyau ethnic group and the Hlengwe people highlights that as a community, there are gatherings and encouragement for young women to be initiated so that they belong to the mainstream group of initiates. From the statistics, it can be noted that the majority of women in the community are initiated. Those who were not initiated were probably children who hadn’t reached puberty or those women who didn’t see the value of being initiated. However, these comprise the minority. The ceremony is ‘exciting’ as the whole community (initiated) gather together, to see and celebrate with the recent graduates. *Chinamwali* is practised in some cultures across the world for cultural purposes. This cultural practice is significant in societies and communities like the Chewa of Malawi and Zambia, the VaRemba people of Mberengwa (Shoko 2009), the Shangaan people of Chikombedzi (Chikunda 2006) and the Nyau Migrants of Norton (Thabete 2008).

The study revealed that *chinamwali* ‘defines’ the woman. Some of the thematic issues that emerged during the study reveal that *chinamwali* genders women and pushes forward the male agenda. *Chinamwali* therefore creates the cultural body and strengthens masculinity behaviours. The community, through parents, strengthens masculinity by putting pressure on girls so that they become initiates and are seen as respected women. Via the cultural teachings that young women and girls are exposed to during the initiation programme, *chinamwali* tends to construct the female body through so-called cultural scripts and cultural definitions. These cultural definitions and the construction of womanhood include, among others, the mentorship

offered to the initiates while in the training camp which therefore creates social pressure for young women and girls to conform to societal obligations. *Chinamwali* is socially constructed. The findings of this study show that even one's family can treat one as an outcast if one is not initiated. This is because not being initiated is regarded as a deviant behaviour which requires rehabilitation. Public endorsement is given at the initiation ceremony for those who undergo the initiation programme.

The study revealed that *chinamwali* cultural practice can be regarded as an 'oxymoron'. With *chinamwali* women undergo special instruction on real life situations. They are taught how to love and behave as married persons. Marriageable girls are exposed to the challenges of marriage and the responsibilities that go with it. This includes household duties such as preparing and serving food for the husband and family, waking up early, fetching firewood, drawing water from the river and cultivating the fields. *Chinamwali* is also argued to equip the woman to learn about household expectations of taking care of the family and husband. In addition, they are taught how to satisfy men in bed. Socially, at community level, the young woman would have been empowered. Initiates have status and are held in high esteem because they would have transitioned from childhood to adulthood. *Chinamwali* carries a complex network of meanings attached to and embedded in it. Errant behavior is punished with beatings at the training camps. This is coupled with exposure to harsh environmental conditions during severe weather conditions. The bottom line with *chinamwali* is to create a 'brainwashed' woman or 'oppressed' mind which is gendered. The practice intimidates young girls in instances where a girl child is found not to be a virgin whilst in the training camp. This brings shame to the family in the eyes of the community. Some blame the family for not watching out for their children.

The study revealed *chinamwali* has culturally significant symbolic meanings attached to it. One of the core beliefs held by some cultural groups is that initiation enhances and strengthens women to face the world and to endure the suffering. It brings respect and honour to the initiate. It therefore integrates girls into the community as 'real woman'. The 'hardening' process is associated with the imprint of preparing the woman to endure pain and suffering. The various studies on female genital mutilation among the Shangaan people, initiation practices among the VaRemba and the Shangaan of Chikombedzi, and the study of the Nyau initiation of Norton, have showed that the major thrust of this initiation is to equip women to face the world.

However the initiation practices leads to disadvantaged positions for women in the society through cultural norms and expectations which emphasise gender specific roles of women.

The Mahenye community is one of the groups which practice *chinamwali* as a rite of passage for a girl to become a woman. It is viewed as a societal norm that all girls have to go through, a rite of passage when they reach puberty. Non-initiates face rejection, shame, dishonour and insults from the community and the family. The consequences of not conforming to the cultural practice can be severe to the extent that one will not be given a decent burial if one is not initiated. Both the husband and wife are excluded from certain cultural activities if the wife is not initiated.

This study has value in that its findings help in addressing human rights of women and children. The findings show that with *chinamwali*, a number of cases of abuse go unreported. These include domestic violence and child abuse (through the hardening process, school drop-outs and child marriages). Women who are abused suffer in silence, not reporting cases of abuse because they fear being ostracised by the community. The beliefs concerning *chinamwali* are constructed by the community, including the women themselves. Feminists argue that since it is largely men who define, make and interpret laws using male values and male construction of female sexuality, they are not in a hurry to enact laws which will interfere with a practice which is for their benefit.

8.3 Contributions of the study

A significant contribution of this study is that it provides an understanding of the perception of both men and women towards the cultural practice of *chinamwali*. Mahenye community as a whole respects the cultural practice of *chinamwali* which is believed to instill a sense of oneness (*hunhu*) among the Shangaan people. The study has illuminated that the cultural practice of *chinamwali* is believed to be the source of peace and stable marriages by men, and even by women. From the understanding of men in the community, with *khomba,* an initiate fetches more in terms of bridal price as compared to non-initiates. Non-initiates are discriminated against they did not fulfill cultural obligations.

Maphosa (2014) noted that African traditional practices, in their cultural milieu, are the sources and resources of indigenous knowledge systems which sustain essential norms and utility values for the society. It shows that besides much criticism and some negative effects of the

cultural practice, the study of *chinamwali* constitutes societal integrity and solidarity through the teachings imparted to the young women and girls in the community. It therefore helps people to live a stable life as the practice carries societal honour and respect and shows how the people value the initiates and their families.

Several studies have been done on *khomba* in some Shangaan communities such as Chiredzi and Chikombedzi but none of them have looked specifically at the Mahenye community. The study therefore plays a central role towards understanding the cultural practice of *chinamwali* among the Shangaan community of Mahenye. A study of this nature has not been done in Mahenye community previously and data on the subject is scant.

In as far as the cultural practice has withstood global and modern trends; it is however condemned by the human rights advocates and experts who advocate for the protection and preservation of the rights of the women and girls. The argument is that, in as far as the cultural practice sustains the community; the process is against the rights of those involved in it (the initiates). In the training process, girls abscond from school in order to attend this cultural practice; this therefore leads to girls missing school for a period of two to three months whilst in the training camp.

The process of 'hardening' the initiates is claimed to help the initiates to endure the hardships of life either in marriage or in the community. It also help the initiates to 'live well' with others, obey instruction and to acquire the secrets of the community. The initiates are taught (household) duties such as fetching water and firewood, cooking, among other things which are meant to inculcate the spirit of hard work, endurance and persistence among the initiates. However, on the other hand, some of the training was against their (initiates) will and some of them conformed because this was the community norm. It also exposes the initiates to a harsh environment during training.

8.4 Conclusion

NGOs are actively addressing some of the challenges that women and girls are facing, but there is need for all stakeholders to prioritise the needs of the child while also realising the necessity of well-planned, thorough research that can help unravel the mystery of *chinamwali.* There is a need for massive child rights advocacy among the Shangaan community in addressing these challenges that are faced by young women and children. Organisations that address some of

these challenges are met with strong resistance from the community. The community (including women), through socialisation, shapes the belief system and creates the understanding of what a woman is supposed to be in the community, hence trying to fight these strong social conventions is challenging. One may find responses such as, "it's not happening here" or "it's no longer happening in this community" yet the community would still be practising it in secrecy. This is because some may fear being rejected or ostracised in their community since the cultural practice is highly valued by the community at large. Young women and girls are taught to not to divulge the secrets of the training and the community to strangers. Therefore, the involvement of stakeholders is crucial in addressing challenges faced by women and children in the community. In addressing some of these challenges, thorough research is essential.

From the narratives, some young women and girls showed that they were excited about being initiated; this is driven by how the community values and socially constructs and reconstructs the value and significance of *chinamwali* cultural practice and of the women who are initiated. It is therefore suggested that a critical engagement and a holistic approach is required to address these challenges faced by women. It would also be important to incorporate the views of the girls/children involved in this cultural practice. This study focused on women of the age group 25 – 50 years old. Studies generally have also focused on women of 18 years and above, leaving out the most vulnerable group of the community, the young girls (social construction of their body, the ones who are affected with high rates of school drop-outs and child marriages) and the young boys. Therefore, children's input would be of great significance in further studies. There are of course ethical issues involved in conducting a study on the minors.

There is also need for female researchers to do critical analysis and research on the cultural practice of *chinamwali* among the Shangaan community. The researcher was aware of being a man and felt there were some barriers in collecting and collating data on the lived experience of the women. In some situations, observation is only an option by a woman. The researcher noted that some questions were answered more comfortably to the research assistant who was also a woman. Hence it is also recommended that women engage in research with women. Women may relate better to other women and may be more open in discussing sensitive issues. A woman researcher may also be able to visit the training camps.

A further study on the construction of manhood is required in the community since men are viewed as benefactors of this cultural practice at the expense of the women. A study on men

(ngomeni) in the Mahenye community would be useful. Little has been written on the social construction of the male body even though one can safely conclude that it is men who define the community and gender issues and are the ones who 'control' the day to day activities of the community. Women and girls' sexuality is a social preoccupation of patriarchy and male interests inform and dictate the shape of female sexuality.

Chinamwali cultural practice has withstood the test of time and criticism locally, regionally and internationally. The reasons why it is still being practiced even though it is facing criticism is that the cultural practice is deeply embedded in the culture of the community. Intervention strategies are required to curb certain aspects of this cultural practice which inflicts pain and child and human rights abuse. As an intervention strategy, initiation sessions or a '*chinamwali* curriculum' could be incorporated into the formal school curriculum. It would be helpful if girls did not need to leave school in order for them to go into seclusion for them to be initiated. Moreover intervention strategies must focus on educating the young women and girls on the importance of girls exercising more choice in marriage and on the shortcomings of early marriages. This therefore necessitates a critical engagement with the elders as well as women and men who perpetuate this cultural practice.

There is therefore need for more research that highlights the extensiveness of the damage inflicted on young girls by these cultural practices. When young women and girls are in the training camps, they swear they will not share anything that happens (to them). The secrecy and the practice tend to abuse women and girls by inflicting pain on them in the name of training. Hence there is need for rigorous hands-on intervention in all communities that practice *chinamwali* or *khomba*. Shona elders take advantage of children's love for their future spouses, their love for children and their love for themselves, to instill in them fear (both in the family and in the training camp) that if they do not conform to societal expectations, unpleasant things will happen to those they love (see Chigidi 2009, 174). Fear drives young women and girls not to divulge what happens in the training camp and this leads to continuous abuse. This is a fundamental infringement of one's rights, and needs to necessarily change.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview schedule (English)
Appendix B: Interview schedule (Shona)
Appendix C: Focus group discussion guide (English)
Appendix D: Focus group discussion guide (Shona)
Appendix E: Gatekeeper's letter
Appendix F: Ethical clearance
Appendix G: Study description (English)
Appendix H: Study description (Shona)
Appendix I: Informed consent (English)
Appendix J: Informed consent (Shona)

Appendix A: Interview schedule (English)

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (ENGLISH VERSION)

Fieldworker: William Muchono

Assistant: Lingiwe Masuka

Supervisor: Prof. Maheshvari Naidu (031-2607657)/naiduu@ukzn.ac.za

Research Office: Ms P Ximba 031-2603587

- What is your name (Pseudonym)
- How old are you?
- How long have you been living in Mahenye community?
- What does it entail to be trained on *Chinamwali*?
- Who initiated your attendance to *Chinamwali*?
- What made you to attend the ceremony?
- What pressure did you feel (if any) to attend *Chinamwali*?
- What is your view towards the *Chinamwali*?
- Who controls this ceremony?
- How long do you spend in *chinamwali* training?
- Do you have any relative who attended the *chinamwali*?
- What value do you put on *chinamwali*?
- What benefits do you relate to the training?
- Are you married?
- What does the initiation mean to you?
- How often do you get trained or is it once off?
- Who decides your attendance to the ceremony?
- What is your role in the sexual relationship?
- How do men perceive the training?
- How free are you in the sexual relationship?
- Is there ever abuse in the relationship?
- Generally, how do you compare yourself with your peers who have not attended *chinamwali*? How do you identify with them?

Appendix B: Interview schedule (Shona)

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (SHONA VERSION)

Fieldworker: William Muchono

Assistant: Lingiwe Masuka

Supervisor: Prof. Maheshvari Naidu (031-2607657)/naiduu@ukzn.ac.za

Research Office: Ms P Ximba 031-2603587

- Unonzi ani (Zita remadunhurirwa)
- Une makore mangani?
- Wava nenguva yakareba zvakadii uchigara mudunhu rino?
- Zvinonyatsorevei kudzidziswa tsika ye*chinamwali*?
- Ndiani akaita kuti uende kunodzidziswa tsika ye*chinamwali*?
- Chii chakaita kuti ude kudzidzira tsika iyi?
- Chii chakanyanyokupa sima rekuda kudzidza tsika ye*chinamwali*?
- Ndeapi maonero ako maererano netsika ye*chinamwali*?
- Ndiani anotungamira tsika iyi?
- Munopedza nguva yakareba zvakadii muchidzidziswa ku*chinamwali*?
- Mune hama here yakadzidziswa tsika iyi ye*chinamwali*?
- Munoikoshesa sei tsika ye*chinamwali* iyi?
- Munobatsirika sei mukudzidza tsika ye*chinamwali* iyi?
- Makaroorwa here?
- Zvinorevei kudzidza tsika iyi?
- Munoidzidziswa kakawanda sei tsika iyi kana kuti munoramba muchidzidziswa here?
- Ndiani anosarudza kuti imi mudzidze tsika iyi?
- Imi basa renyu ndereyi mukudzidziswa kwetsika iyi?
- Ko varume vanoiona sei tsika iyi?
- Ko makasununguka zvakadii mumba menyu?
- Pane kusabatana zvakanaka here murudo rwenyu?
- Munozviona sei pakati pevakadzidza tska iyi nevamwe vasina kuidzidza?

Appendix C: Focus group discussion guide (English)

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE (English)

Fieldworker: William Muchono +263 773 493 948
Assistant: Lingiwe Masuka
Supervisor: Prof. Maheshvari Naidu (031-2607657/naiduu@ukzn.ac.za)

Research Office: Ms P Ximba (031-2603587)

Introduction

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you very much for coming to this group discussion meeting. My name is William Muchono and that of my colleague here is Lingiwe Masuka (Assistant/writing notes). I am a registered PhD student with the University of KwaZulu Natal (Howard Campus). I am conducting a research on, **"Constructing "Woman". Probing how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* among the Shangaan People is used to construct 'Womenhood'.** Your Community has been selected to participate in this research.

Because we would like to ensure that no one can link your answers to you personally, we will NOT write your name anywhere. During data analysis, information from all respondents will be combined and analyzed together and nowhere in the report will we include participants' names. Besides, the information that you will share with us will be treated confidentially. We are interested in everyone's view – therefore it is very important that, during the discussion, you all feel free to express your views. Now, to make it easy to refer to each other during the discussion, please think of a name (not your real name) by which you would like to be called during this discussion. I will call myself _____, and I will stick that name on me. Please do the same.

With your permission, I will ask you to allow me to record all the information that we will discuss in this focus group.

1. Name of Village	
2. Name of District	
3. Province	

Date:	*DAY*	*MM*	*YY*	
Name of Moderator				
Group Size				

<u>Question 1</u>

Understanding the cultural practice of *Chinamwali*

Let us start by discussing what is *Chinamwali/ Khomba*; **what is your understanding of this practice?**

<u>Question 2</u> (Relevance)

Now, let us talk specifically about your views regarding *chinamwali* in your community

<u>PROBES</u>

- *What do you like most about chinamwali?*
- *What attracts people to be trained on chinamwali?*
- *May you please explain what do you like LEAST about chinamwali?*
- *What has this training been offering you in terms of information related to Sexuality and your role/value as a woman in the community?*
- *May you please tell us about your experience in the training process?*
- *May you please tell us about your experience before and after being trained ie with regards to your interaction with your peers?*
- *What information do you get when attending the chinamwali?*
- *What's the relevance of the information in your day to day life?*

- *Is it possible to obtain the same information/training from other sources in the community, parents, elders and relatives, media, schools without joining the training itself?*
- *Is there any cost involved for one to be trained?*
- *If yes, what is the cost?*

Question 3

I would like us to now talk about who should benefit from the information from *chinamwali*

PROBES:

- *How did you get to know about this training?*
- *How does one get to be trained?*
- *How does the community encourage you to be trained and what value is put on the attendance of chinamwali?*

Question 4

How effective has this training/attendance of *chinamwali* been in your community?

PROBES

- *From what you know, are there:*

i. *Any benefits associated with the training?*

ii. *Any value attached to the training?*

- *Can you tell us more about any comprehensive social and behaviour change associated with the attendance of chinamwali/khomba?*
- *Is the information leaned disseminated or it's kept secret by women only?*

Question 5

Do you think that *chinamwali* has contributed positively to your Sexuality and that of your peers? (Probe)

Question 6 (Recommendations)

What could be done differently to improve *chinamwali* training effective and impact?

Thank you very much for coming to this meeting and sharing your views with us.

Appendix D: Focus group discussion guide (Shona)

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE (Shona)

Fieldworker: William Muchono +263 773 493 948

Assistant: Lingiwe Masuka

Supervisor: Prof. Maheshvari Naidu (031-2607657/naiduu@ukzn.ac.za)

Research Office: Ms P Ximba (031-2603587)

(Nhaganyaya)

Mangwanani/ masikati. Ndinokutendai nekuuya kumusangano uno. Zita rangu ndinonzi Wiliam Muchono. Mumwe wangu anonzi Lingiwe Masuka. Ndiri kuitawo zvedzidzo zvehudhokotera (PhD) kuyunivhesiti inonzi KwaZulu Natal (Howard Campus). Mutsvakurudzo yechidzidzo changu chine musoro unoti: **Kuumbwa kwemunhukadzi: kutsvagurudza kuona kuti mararamiro enyu e*chinamwali*/khomba anoshandisw sei kuumba munhukadzi munharaunda yenyu yemachangani.** Imi masarudzwa nokuti unoruzivo nezvirikuitika munzvimbo ino uye pamusoro petsvakurudzo iyi.

Nekuti tinoda kuchengetedza mazita enyu, hapana achashandisa zita rake chairo chairo pahurukuro ino.
Ndichakumbirawo mvumo yekunyora pasi zvese zvatichakurukura pano

1. Name of Village	
2. Name of District	
3. Province	

Date:	*DAY*	*MM*	*YY*	
Name of Moderator				
Group Size				

Mubvunzo 1

kunzwisisa *Chinamwali*

Ngatitangei nekukurukura nezve *chinamwali*/khomba. Chii chamunonzwisisa patsika iyi?

Mubvunzo 2 (Zvazvakakoshera)

Ngatikurukurei maonero enyu etsika ye*chinamwali* munharaunda menyu muno

PROBES

- *Chii chamunofarira patsika yechinamwali?*
- *Chii chinoita kuti vanhu vade kudzidza chinamwali?*
- *Chii chamusinganyanyofarira patsika yechinamwali?*
- *Chii chamunowana chinokubatsirai muupenyu kana madzidza tsika yechinamwali*
- *Zviri nyore here kudzidza tsika iyi?*
- *Zviri nyore here kusadzidziswa tsika iyi asi muchizogara zvenyu muchiwirirana nevamwe munharunda ino?*
- *Nderupi rubatsiro rwamunoona kana madzidziswa tsika iyi?*
- *Zvakakosherei kudzidza tsika iyi?*
- *Zvinoita here kuwana rudzidziso rwetsika iyi kubva kune vamwe vanhu vakaita sevabereki, vakuru vemunharaunda, vohukama, zvikoro imi musina kuenda kuzvidzidzo zvinoenda vamwe?*
- *Kunobhadharwa mari here kudzidza chidzidzo ichi?*
- *Kana kuchibhadharwa, imi munodhadhara marii?*

Mubvunzo 3

Ndoda kuti tikurukure maererano neanobatsrika nedzidziso inobva mutsika ye*chinamwali*/khomba

PROBES:

- *Makaiziva sei tsika iyi?*
- *Ko munhu anokwanisa sei kudzidziswa nezvetsika iyi?*
- *Ko nharaunda ino inokurudzira sei kuti vanhu vawane dzidziso yechinamwali uye vanoikoshesa sei tsika yechinamwali iyi?*

Mubvunzo 4

Chii chakakoshera dzidziso yetsika ye*chinamwali* iyi mudunhu rino?

PROBES

- *Mumaziviro enyu chii chamubatsirika nacho pakudzidza tsika iyi?*
- *Munogona kutitsananguririrawo here rubatsiro rwamunowana mutsika yechinamwali iyi rwakaita semaitiro, mafungiro nemataurirо?*
- *Zvidzidzo zvamunowana mutsika iyi zvinopfimbikwa muhana here kana kuti munogona kuzviudza munhu wese wese?*

Mubvunzo 5

Munofunga kuti tsika ye*chinamwali* inobatsira mue zvakanaka here kanakuti mune zvakaipa kuvanhukadzi vemudunhu rino. (Probe)

Mubvunzo 6 (Kurudziro)

Chii chinogona kuitwa kuti tsika ye*chinamwali* iyi irambe ichiitwa zvakanyatsonaka uye kuti inyatsobatsira vanhu mudunhu rino?

Ndinokutendai nekuuya kumusangano uno uye nekuzokurukura nesu

Appendix E: Gatekeeper's letter

Mahenye Sec School
Private BAG 7111
Chiredzi

12-07-15

The university of KWAZULU NATAL

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear sir / madam

REF: PERMISSION TO Mr MUCHANO TO DO A RESEARCH IN MAHENYE COMMUNITY

The above matter refers

1 Chief Mahenye has authorised the above mentioned named person to carry out a research in mahenye area.

Yours Chief Ti Mahenye

CHIEF MAHENYE
MWONAS
16 JUL 2015
P. BAG 7111
CHIREDZI

CHIEF MAHENYE
MWONAS
16 JUL 2015
P. BAG 7111
CHIREDZI

Appendix F: Ethical clearance

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

31 October 2016

Mr William Muchono 215079062
School of Social Sciences
Howard College Campus

Dear Mr Muchono

Protocol reference number: HSS/1228/016D
Project title: Constructing "Woman": Probing how the cultural practice of Chinamwali among the Shangaan people is used to construct Womanhood.

Full Approval – Committee Reviewed Protocol

With regards to your response to received 23 October 2016 to our letter of 10 October 2016, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the above mentioned application and the protocol has been granted Full Approval.

Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach/Methods must be reviewed and approved through an amendment /modification prior to its implementation. Please quote the above reference number for all queries relating to this study. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully

.....
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/px

cc Supervisor: Professor Maheshvari Naidu
cc Academic Leader Research:
cc School Administrtor: Ms Nonhlanhla Radebe & Mr Nqobizizwe Memela

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 **Facsimile:** +27 (0) 31 260 4609 **Email:** ximbap@ukzn.ac.za / snymanm@ukzn.ac.za / mohunp@ukzn.ac.za
Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

Appendix G: Study description (English)

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

STUDY DESCRIPTION (English version)

Dear Respondent,
Fieldworker: William Muchono
Assistant: Lingiwe Masuka
Supervisor: Prof. Maheshvari Naidu (031-2607657/naiduu@ukzn.ac.za)

Research Office: Ms P Ximba (031-2603587)

I, William Muchono, a Doctoral student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal wishes to invite you to participate in a research project titled: **Constructing 'Woman': Probing how the cultural practice of *Chinamwali* among the Shangaan people is used to construct 'Womenhood'.** You have been chosen to participate in this study because of your experiences of the cultural practice of *chinamwali* as well as your knowledge of the cultural practices of Mahenye Community.

This study seeks to probe how the cultural practice of *chinamwali* is used to construct the womanhood of women in Mahenye community.

Your participation in this whole project is voluntary. If you wish to stop from participating in the study at any point, you are free to do so. You may choose not to answer any question that you do not feel comfortable answering and you will not be penalised for doing this. The information that will be gathered from this study will be used to write my thesis and may be published in academic journals and presented orally. However, your identity will be protected in all these and will only be made public at your permission. Unfortunately, there is no reward or payment for your participation in the study. I will do an interview and the focus group discussion with you. The interview will all be semi-structured and will each last for one hour but can be more or less. These will be conducted at your community hall or any other place where you are comfortable. I hope you will decide to participate in the study.

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in this study, you may contact me, my supervisor, or the University's research office through the numbers listed above.

Yours Sincerely

William Muchono

Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix H: Study description (Shona)

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

STUDY DESCRIPTION (Shona version)

Kuna,
Fieldworker: William Muchono +263 773 493 948
Assistant: Lingiwe Masuka
Supervisor: Prof. Maheshvari Naidu (031-2607657/naiduu@ukzn.ac.za)

Research Office: Ms P Ximba (031-2603587)

Ini, William Muchono, mudzidzi wefundo yohudhokotera (PhD) paUnivhesiti yeKwaZulu-Natal ndinokukoka kuti ubatsire mutsvakurudzo yechidzidzo changu chine musorounoti: **Kuumbwa kwemunhukadzi: kutsvagurudza kuona kuti mararamiro enyu e*chinamwali*/khomba anoshandiswa sei kuumba munhukadzi munharaunda yenyu yemachangani.** Iwe wasarudzwa nokuti unoruzivo nezvirikuitika munzvimbo ino uye pamusoro petsvakurudzo iyi.

Isarudzo yako kubvuma kubatsira mutsvakurudzo iyi. Unobvumirwa kubuda zvako kana paunenge wanzwa kusada kana kusapindura imwe mibvunzo. Ukasarudza kuzviburitsa mutsvakurudzo iyi haisi mhosva uye hauna zvaunoitwa. Zvirikutaurwa apa zvichashandiswa mugwaro romudzidzi uyu kana kuzobudiswa mune mamwewo magwaro emunyika ezvedzidzo. Zvakadarozvo, zita rako richachengetedzwa kuti kusava neanoziva kuti wakabatidza mariri. Hausi kuzowana mubairo wemari kana chimwe chinhu somuripo wekubatsira pabasa iri. Tichazoita *interview nefocus group discussion*. Interview nefocus group discussions izvi zvingangoreba zveawa rimwe chete. Zvese izvi tichange tichiitira imwe nzvimbo yaungada yaunonzwa kusununguka. Chivimbo changu kuti uchasarudza kuve umwe wevanobatsira mutsvakurudzo iyi.

Kana unemubvunzo kana kusanzwisisa chimwe chinhu, ridzarunhare kwandiri, mukuru wangu kana yunivhesiti panhare dziripatsamba ino.

Ndini wako

William Muchono

Investigator's Signature_____ Date _____

Appendix I: Informed consent (English)

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (English Version)

Dear Participant;_____

My name is William Muchono and that of my colleague here is Lingiwe Masuka (Assistant/writing notes). I am a registered PhD student with the University of KwaZulu Natal (Howard Campus). I am conducting a research on, *"Constructing the "Woman". Probing how the cultural practice of chinamwali among the Shangaan People is used to construct 'Womanhood'.* Your Community has been selected to participate in this research. To gather the information, I am interested in asking you some questions.

Please note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member opinion.
- Your names as well as answers you are going to give will completely be anonymous and will not be linked to your behaviour and identity. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the study.
- The information we would like you to share with us is of sensitive, therefore extra caution is taken as some of you may not be cofortable in sharing it.
- The interview may last for about 45 minutes to 1 hour and may be split depending on your preference.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- There will be no payment or direct benefit to you for participating in interviews and focus group discussions of this study.
- If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		
Photographic equipment		
Video equipment		

My supervisor is Prof. M. Naidu who is located at the School of Social Sciences, Howard College, campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.
Contact details: email: naiduu@ukzn.ac.za

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the University of KwaZulu Natal Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Protocol Reference Number: HSS/1228/016D)
In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at (+263 773 493 948) or the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building, Private Bag X5400, Durban, 4000, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa
Tel: 27 31 2604557 – 27 31 2604609 Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

DECLARATION

I…… (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project. I have also been well informed about the role that I stand to play if I am to participate in this project, which is participating in a one to one semi structured interview and the focus group discussion. I am also aware that participation is voluntary and I can choose to withdraw from the process at any stage without any predijuce or consequences to my withdrawal. I am aware that all information obtained from me in the course of this project will remain confidential and that my identity will be well guided in the case of any publication of the obtained information.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT **DATE**

…… ……

I William Muchono state that I have fully informed the above participant of the nature and purpose of my research and the demands involved in her participation. I also state that I will do all in my power to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of the participant as I fully keep to the ethical conduct requested of me as a fieldworker.

Signature **Date**

..... ……

Appendix J: Informed consent (Shona)

Dear Participant; _____

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER (Shona Version)

Zita rangu ndinonzi William Muchono mumwe wangu wandinaye anonzi, Lingiwe Masuka (Achange achindibatsira). Ndiri kuitawo zvidzidzo zvehudhokotera (PhD) Anthropology kuyunivhesiti inonzi KwaZulu Natal (Howard Campus), Durban, South Africa. Mutsvakurudzo yechidzidzo changu chine musoro unoti: **Kuumbwa kwemunhukadzi: kutsvagurudza kuona kuti mararamiro enyu e*chinamwali*/khomba anoshandiswa sei kuumba munhukadzi munharaunda yenyu yemachangani muno maMahenye.** Imi masarudzwa nokuti unoruzivo nezvirikuitika munzvimbo ino uye pamusoro petsvakurudzo iyi. Ndakasarudzawo kuita zvidzidzo zvangu munharaunda ino yeMahenye. Mutsvagurudzo yangu iyi ndichakubvunzaiwo mubvunzo kana makasununguka.

Rangarira zvinotevera:

- Zvatichakurukura hazviudzwe mumwe munhu asi zvichangoshandiswa kuchikoro chete. Zvamuchataura hazvireve kuti ndizvo zvamuri, imi murikundibatsira kuti ndiwane ruzivo maererano netsika yekutambirwa/ *chinamwali* inoitwa mudunhu rino rekwa Mahenye.
- Hurukuro yedu inogona kupedza **maminetsi** makumi mana nemashanu kana kuti awa imwe chete. Inogona kuraudzira zvichienderana nehurukuro yatinenge taita.
- Hurukuro yatichaita haizoshandiswi zvisiri zvechikoro uye zvatichakurukura zvichangoshandiswa maererano nezvidzidzo zve hudhokota (PhD) chete. Hapana kumwe kwazvichashandiswa.
- Hurukuro yedu iyi tichaichengetedza paisingarasiki tozoirasa kwapera makore mashanu Tichachengetedza hurukuro idzi kuchikoro kwandinodzidza ndichibatsirwa nechikoro.
- Makasununguka kukurukura kana kusakurukura neni mutsvagurudzo dzangu idzi. Hamumanikidzwe kukurukura neni. Makasununguka zvakare kuti kana musingachadi kukurukura neni moregedza. Asi ndinokumbirawo kuti patinenge tichikurukura musununguke kutaura neni chokwadi chamunoziva uye chokwadi chezvazvinoreva zvekutambirwa uye tsika yekhomba ne*chinamwali*. Isarudzo yako kubvuma kubatsira mutsvagurudzo yangu iyi.
- Hurukuro yatichaita haina mubairo wemari kana chimwe chinhu somuripo wekubatsira pabasa iri. Makasununguka kukurukuraa kana kusakurukura neni.
- Kana makasununguka kukurukura nekutorwa mapikicha neni ratidzai nekunyora pabepa iri:

	Hongu	Kwete
Audio equipment (Kurekodha)		
Photographic equipment (Kutora pikic		
Video equipment (Kutora vhidhiyo)		

Chidzidzo ichi chakapiwa mvumo neUnivesiti yeKwaZulu Natal. Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Protocol Reference Number: HSS/1228/016D)

Kana mune zvizhinji zvamungada kuziva kana kuti zvamungada kubvunza. Munogona kufona panamba dzinoti (+263 773 493 948) kana kuti *UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee*, pakero inoti;

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu Natal,
South Africa
Tel: 27 31 2604557 – 27 31 2604609
Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

DECLARATION

Ini _____ ndinopupura kuti ndinonzwisisa zvizere netsvakurudzo iyi ino musoro unoti: ***Kuumbwa kwemunhukadzi: kutsvagurudza kuona kuti mararamiro enyu echinamwali/khomba anoshandisw sei kuumba munhukadzi munharaunda yenyu yemachangani***, nemudzidzi uyu. Ndaudzwa zvakara pamusoro pedonzvo rangu uye kuti ndine kodzero yokubuda mairi kana ndatadza kuwirirana nechimwe chinhu kana mubvunzo. Ndinonzwisisa kuti zvandichaita hazvina mubhadharo uye ndinopinda mazviri musarudzo yangu.

Siginicha **Zuva**

…… ……

Ini,William Muchono ndinopupura kuti ndaudza zvizere uyu achabvunzwa zvizere pamusoro pedonzvo retsvakurudzo iyi uye zvaanotarisirwa kuita. Ndinopupura kuti ndateedzera zvese zvinorehwa nemutemo wekutsvakurudza ruzivo kwandiri somudzidzi. Ndichachengetedza zita rouyu abatsira kuti risakanwa naani zvake.

Siginicha **Zuva**

…….. …….