

Rethinking Female Rites of Passage: The Chinamwali, Male Power, and African Feminisms

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Abstract

Engaging the African Feminist ideological framework, this paper explores the intersection between African female initiation rites and male power and privilege. The paper engages the *chinamwali*, a female initiation rite practised by the Chikunda of Zambia. The initiation rite involves the seclusion of the 'namwali', the initiate, in an informal learning process during which older and more experienced women, *aphungu*, pass on messages to her on what it means to be a woman in society. The data for the article were generated from a study undertaken in 2018 in Chief Mphuka's area of Luangwa District, in the Eastern part of Zambia, using narratives from 30 participants, including 15 women who have undergone *chinamwali*, who constituted the main research participants; 5 ritual instructors, *aphungu*, 5 men; and five uninitiated women. A thematic analysis of the findings led to the development of the 'Chikunda masculinity', which gives impetus to feminist scholarship regarding a new focus on women's sexuality as a source of legitimising men's dominant position over women. The article recommends the integration of transformative messages in the *chinamwali* curriculum that could empower the initiate to confront cultural practices that reinforce patriarchal hegemony.

Keywords

Chikunda;
Chinamwali;
Female initiation;
Masculinities;
Zambia;
Luangwa District

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Introduction

This paper examines the role of *chinamwali*, the female initiation rite of the Chikunda of Zambia and its influence on the construction of Chikunda

masculinity.¹ Initiation is a rite of passage performed by numerous ethnic groups to socialise a new member into an existing group. It is practised when there are marked changes in the lives of individuals to announce to the community that a young person is ready to make the transition from childhood to adulthood (Chikunda et al., 2001; Richards, 1982; Rasing, 1995; Kangwa, 2011; Kapungwe, 2003; Munthali & Zulu, 2007; Siachitema, 2013). Adolescent initiation is aimed at preparing young people for the roles and responsibilities of adulthood and officially declares that a young man or woman is now an adult (UNFPA, 2020). Barry & Schlegel (1980, p. 277) also note that for a ceremony to be considered an initiation rite, there must be a minimum of two people present: an initiate and an initiator. The initiation rites involve the transfer of knowledge and expertise from one generation to another through the preparation of initiates in sexual, familial, and broader social responsibilities (Richards, 1982; Drews, 1995; Jules-Rosette, 1980; and Rasing, 1995).

Van Gennep (1960) in *Rite de Passage*, explains that rites of passage are performed at significant life transitions such as marriage, birth, and death (Duckett, 1989, p. 23; Lamp 2009, p. 7). In the case of initiation rites, scholars such as Lamp (2009, p. 7); Kangwa (2011, p. 11); and Rasing (1995, p. 35) concur with Van Gennep (1960), pointing out that for both boys and girls, these rites are more or less identical and include phases of separation, ordeals, and integration, representing the process of symbolic death and rebirth. It is essential to understand that initiation takes many forms and that in many African societies, circumcision is the most commonly practised initiation rite for males (Munthali & Zulu, 2007, p. 155; Ntombana 2009, pp. 73–84; Gwata, 2009, p. 4; Venter, 2011, pp. 89–97). Nevertheless, in some cultures, in addition to the instruction given, girls are also subjected to circumcision (Matobo et al., 2009, p. 106; Chikunda et al., 2006, p. 146). This article focuses on female initiation rites that solely instruct young initiates and exclude initiation ceremonies that combine instruction with circumcision. Kangwa

1 I wish to confirm that the paper is derived from a dissertation by the author with the title: “The Influence of Female Initiation Rites and their Influence on the Social Life and Status of Women among the Chikunda of Zambia” (University of Johannesburg, 2018)

(2011: 4) observes that initiation ceremonies play a significant role in disseminating traditional knowledge about sexuality, sex and women's social and religious roles.

Initiation ceremonies are performed to socialise girls and boys into specific gender roles. In these rites, boys and girls are taught lessons and skills specific to the expectations of being a man or woman (Phiri, 2008, p. 449). A study of the initiation rites of a Mexican-American community in Southern Arizona shows that female initiation rites primarily promote cohesiveness within the family (Duckett, 1989, p. 67). On the other hand, male initiation rites are structurally linked to the community and serve as a doorway through which adolescent males become respected members of the community (Venter, 2011, p. 560). The connection between these initiation rites and the *Zambian* initiation ceremonies is that they teach young men and women culturally and socially accepted gender roles.

In Hammond-Tooke's (1958) study of the Bhaca people from the Eastern Province of South Africa, he observes that though circumcision for boys is no longer practised, the dangers and hardships faced by youth in the gold and coal mines provide the test for a boy's attainment of manhood. In contrast, the puberty rite for girls among the Bhaca, as in *chinammwali*, is characterised by several days of exclusion and marks a girl's entry into womanhood and prepares her for adult membership and marriage. Though the rite is primarily centred on celebrating women's fertility and imparting knowledge and skills required for a successful marital relationship, it also powerfully conveys that submission to men is critical to a satisfying and successful marriage and life, creating an avenue for gender inequality. The gender inequality argument of initiation rites is also discussed by Rasing (2002, p. 14) in her study of *Zambian* women's initiation rites, where she argues that gender differences express and serve power relations between men and women.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1995, p. 134) has argued against female initiation rites in Africa, saying that they are a space through which the subordination of women is maintained. Similarly, Mkandawire (2012, pp. 74, 106) explains that initiation rites play a significant role in gender socialisation. She claims they are a tool to socialise

women to submit to men. Contrary to these arguments, other anthropologists and sociologists like Rasing (2001, p. 23) have argued that the Bemba initiation rite defies the Western stereotyped view of the rite as an expression of oppression of women and that the rite is significant in the construction of female identity, pride, and autonomy. The relationship between the *Bemba imbusa* and *chinamwali* among the *Chikunda* is that they are both girls' puberty rituals designed to "turn girls into women". Kangwa (2011, p. 7) has argued that if retrieved, their values can empower women, particularly in the face of HIV/AIDS. Richards (1982, p. 115) describes how the puberty ritual among the Bemba of Zambia socialises young girls into specific gender roles, which binds them to undertake specific duties that define their womanhood. Though Kangwa's (2011) and Richards' (1982) work is valuable, it is merely descriptive. It does not examine how these rites impact the well-being of the women concerned and how they influence male power and privilege.

Generally, the putative submission serves to entrench gender norms that regulate their social interactions with men and, most importantly, reinforce gender stereotypes and the patriarchy (Udelhoven 2006, p. 87; Maluleke 2004, p. 3). A study by Thelma Maluleke (2004, p. 3) reveals that sex education in puberty rites for girls is limited to personal hygiene, maintaining virginity, self-control, and social morals. However, virginity is encouraged for male satisfaction, making it a gender issue because, on the contrary, males are not encouraged to be virgins (Mhlongo 2009, p. 29). There is a need, however, to empower girls with life skills such as financial education, and knowledge to address the challenges of early marriage and child-bearing, sexual and gender-based violence, unwanted pregnancy and the acquisition of sexually transmitted illnesses. The initiation ceremonies could serve as a platform for the transference of such skills.

Similarly, gender construction may be understood as how a person, a group of people or a whole society builds an understanding of what it means to be a man or woman (Lindeggar & Maxwell 2005, p. 9). As noted, early studies recognised the centrality of gender in puberty rituals. It is believed that among certain ethnic

groups, including the Dogon and Dowayo of West Africa, and the Xhosa of South Africa, the foreskin in males is seen as the feminine element of the penis. Thus, its removal is believed to make a ‘man’ out of the child and is symbolic of the feminine attributes to be de-learned among boys (WHO/UNAIDS 2007, p. 5). The societal norms of male dominance reflected in the attitudes that women and girls should be submissive to men are the actual behaviours that need to be unlearned. Interestingly, the interconnectedness between gender and traditional initiation practices seems to lie in the emphasis on the scope and content of the latter. Richards’ (1982) study of initiation among the Bemba in Zambia and a later study by Drews (1995) argue that initiation rites prepare the girls for marriage. Drews (1995, p. 104) questions whether this is an example of the dominant discourse on gender inequality where the ceremony is a powerful instrument of female subordination. In this way, the works of Richards (1982) and Drews (1995) make an essential contribution to understanding the gendered impact of traditional initiation rites.

Other studies show the gendered expressions of initiation on sexuality and reproduction. Beidelman (1997, pp. 19, 44), in his study on Kaguru initiation rituals, suggests that these rituals reinforce the power of sexuality, albeit in different ways for men and women. This study shows that, in male initiation rites, the focus is on stereotypical masculine traits designed to prepare them for their future role of protecting and providing for their families, which, in contrast to women, leaves them physically unattached to their children as they cannot give birth or nurse a child. This separation is done symbolically through circumcision and emphasis on the male’s reproductive role as primarily economic, not physical, like childbirth and breastfeeding support. The study also shows that in the women’s rituals, however, emphasis is placed on sexuality as a core component of the physical aspects of reproduction. It is celebrated as a highly valued aspect of femininity and the source of their social status within the community. According to Beidelman (1997, p. 19), these gendered expressions of sexuality and reproduction provide a means through which male domination is expressed and through which females “elude” that domination by empowering them with moral values and practical knowledge

that imbues them with a locus of power within their communities. This work is essential as it shows that initiation is a gendered expression of sexuality.

Feminist Theories and Masculinities

The nature of this study and my underlying assumption of the gendered expressions of initiation practices, in general, meant that I had to acknowledge the significance of feminist theorising. Feminist scholarship is said to have developed out of the United States of America's women's liberation movement in the early 1970s to understand the causes and impact of gender inequity by applying the concepts of domination, oppression and exploitation to women's experience and advancing anti-sexist theory and methods (Gardiner, 2005). In recent years, there has been a shift from confining feminism to the study of women only (Harding, 1993, p. 56) towards emphasising the study of men and masculinities within the overarching context of gender relations (Wiegman 2002, p. 330). Thus, the definition of feminism has expanded from an early notion of simply challenging women's subordination to men, arguing for their equal rights, to seeing and understanding the social world from the vantage points of men (Ishii-Kuntz, 2009, pp. 193-194). Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002, p. 7) add that since understanding power relations is critical to feminist research, the investigation of gendered lives by feminists includes the study of men and masculinity. Gardiner (2006, p. 36) further adds that feminist thinking has been fundamental to forming contemporary men's and masculinity studies as intellectual endeavours, academic subjects, and social movements. However, some scholars contend that the examination of men and masculinity has always been present in feminist theory and that the study of masculinity would not have developed without a direct contribution from feminism. As Hammer (1990, p. 446) writes, "to reduce women's studies to the study of women and the differences between us is to deny {its} origins within the women's liberation movement and its critiques of patriarchal contradiction of masculinity."

The feminist understanding of how female initiation rites impact masculinity has not been clearly articulated. This could be explained by the fact

that the experience is believed to be exclusively a women's affair. However, some researchers in masculinity, such as Connell (2013), say that culture plays a role in perpetuating gender inequality by influencing how manhood is perceived and performed. Connell (2013) further argues that culture and traditional beliefs shape men's understanding of appropriate gender roles and responsibilities. As the study focuses on a traditional African initiation practice, I sought an inspirational basis from an African perspective. Such practices must be examined within African cultural experiences and epistemologies, as this is the only way to understand African experiences. Such an undertaking has to consider Africa's specificity even while using Western paradigms.

Therefore, in order to offer a viable form of analysis and after reviewing the historical eras of feminism and the originating feminisms, namely Liberal, Radical, and Marxist feminisms, I looked to the African feminist approach and its relevant contribution to examining men and masculinities, and then analysed how this theory fits into the men and masculinities paradigm/praxis in female initiation, demonstrating how this practice can advance male hegemony. Specifically, African feminism challenges the public/private dichotomy of the first wave of feminism by scrutinising all areas of human social life previously thought of as private, such as the institution of marriage, motherhood, heterosexual relationships, and sexuality, which are critical elements in *chinammali* (Talakinu, 2018, p. iv).

Methodological Approach

The study employed a qualitative approach, an approach that is used to understand people from the way they experience reality (Taylor et al. 2015, pp. 7, 8). According to Kelly (1988, p. 6), this approach is a "feminist research practice" that includes reflexivity or locating oneself within the research question, drawing on one's experience as a woman, and acknowledging the problems of power and control. The methodological orientation was also preferred as it is concerned with developing explanations of a social phenomenon (Hancock 1998, p. 6). Data was collected through direct encounters with individuals (Hancock 1998, p. 2). Hence, to facilitate a deep understanding of *chinammali* and its influence on the

construction of masculinities, the data was derived from face-to-face interviews. A semi-structured interview guide was used during the interviews to undertake this exercise. The study sample comprising thirty (30) participants ranging from 19 to over 75 years was selected using purposive and snowball sampling methods: fifteen (15 women who have undergone chinamwali constituted the main participants. In order to fully address the knowledge gap regarding the role of initiation, five (5) ritual instructors, the *aphungu*, the initiates' advisors, were engaged. In addition, as no literature that compares non-initiated to initiated women could be found, and it is not known whether there is a difference between initiated and uninitiated women as experienced by men, five (5) uninitiated women and five (5) men were selected. The criteria for enrolling the participants in the study were that one should be above the age of 18 years, be a Chikunda, and reside in Chief Mphuka's chiefdom at the time of the study. To protect the identity of the participants, pseudo-names have been used in this paper. The study used thematic analysis to analyse the data. According to Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 70), "thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting themes within the data".

The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee, University of Johannesburg, reviewed the study. Everyone who participated consented freely, without being coerced or unfairly pressurised. In this regard, participants were required to sign a consent form which detailed what the study was about and what their participation entailed. To protect the data and confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms were used (Neuman 2014, p. 15). Furthermore, a register of the real names and contacts was kept apart from the transcripts. Tapes, notes and transcripts were kept in a secure place.

Construction of Chikunda Masculinities

Feminist research has analysed the concepts of femininity and masculinity in the context of gender power. According to Ampofo & Boateng (2007, p. 51), the focus of feminist theorising has been to examine and address how being male impacts the lives of social females. Parallel to the assertion, I realise that through socialisation, the girl learns to accept or internalise male superiority to the point

where these power relations are used as a framework to reinforce patriarchal hegemony – the hegemonic masculinity – in this case, the Chikunda masculinity. From the study findings, attributes of hegemonic masculinity among the Chikunda include headship, heterosexuality, and leadership. A ‘real’ man is the head of the household; his wife should obey him without question and hold a dominant position concerning women in the community. Agnes, aged 56, emphasised that *chinamwali* teaches a woman to be submissive to her husband – “when I was in seclusion, I was taught by my *aphungu* that I should obey my husband without question. This is how it should be because our culture demands it.” Censio, a man aged 42, added that there is a difference in the submissive behaviour between initiated and non-initiated women because, in his view, “those who are initiated are taught that the husband is the head – that is what a woman who has been properly instructed learns.” Adult women initiate girls in their private spaces; on the other hand, adult men initiate men in their respective private spaces. What creates the interface between these two exclusive secret processes is that, as Kangwa (2011, p. 11), Rasing (1995, p. 35), and Siachitema (2013) agree, initiation rites for both boys and girls represent the passage from childhood to adulthood.

The point of this debate on masculinities is not to side-track us from talking about *chinamwali*. This process primarily affects women but illustrates how women can affect male identity and masculinity via the *chinamwali* process, which affects their social standing. As Kaufmann (1993, p. 13) says, while masculinity is power, it does not exist as a biological reality but as an ideology that exists as scripted behaviour within gendered relationships. The Chikunda’s hegemony pattern is maintained through ideas about male superiority and female subordination transmitted in the *chinamwali* curriculum. The critical social dimensions that are utilised to create these gender identities are the attitudes, social norms and beliefs that are held by society to justify the power of the male/masculine over the female/feminine. Moreover, as Silberschmidt (2004) notes, concerning sexuality, what provides a man with social value does not give the same value to a woman. Contrary to Silberschmidt’s (2004, p. 239) assertion that women and female sexuality represent an active and threatening power to male identity and masculinity, one can understand from the

findings in this study that women and their sexuality can influence male identity and masculinity and that male honour is dependent on female behaviour. From the analysis of the data collected, it is evident that while *chinamwali* is empowering women with knowledge of their gender and sexual roles, it also offers possibilities to reinforce male power, at the same time disfavours women. As Connell (2010, p. 40) notes, masculinities do not first exist and then come into contact with femininities; they are produced together in a process that makes gender order.

Ideas about femininity are associated with the private sphere and with traits that suggest positivity and subordination, whilst those about masculinity are associated with the public sphere, authority, and dominance (Silberschmidt 2004, p. 243). The notion of masculinity is understood as a socially constructed collective gender identity that defines how boys and men should behave, be treated, dress, appear, what they should succeed at, and what attitudes and qualities they should have (Ampofo & Boateng 2007, p. 54). This is evident among the Chikunda community in the way boys and girls interact. For example, boys are encouraged to engage in more active and physical activities such as bird hunting, tending to goats, and fishing. In contrast, girls play closer to home, helping with household chores. It is through this gender segregation cycle that they learn gender-typed behaviour and attitudes. It has been said that diverse masculinities make it challenging to separate men into distinct categories (Ampofo & Boateng 2007, p. 53; Whitehead & Barrett 2001, p. 8; Connell, 2001, p. 10). However, these themes provide an essential opportunity to understand the social legitimisation in society for treating women as unequal to men. As such, there has been difficulty in giving a general definition of the term. Male stereotypes, which influence how men interact with women, are one of the aspects of life that contribute to forming these constructs. Another is the existence of gender inequality. They are also constructed by history and social norms, which create narratives of how one should behave (Jewkes et al., 2015).

However, in trying to find an appropriate definition of hegemonic masculinity, Whitehead & Barrett (2001, p. 15) say, "It is those behaviours, languages

and practices existing in specific cultural and organisational locations, which are commonly associated with males and cultural expectations of male behaviour.” The authors further describe this form of masculinity in a given society as a form of dominant masculinity that, in addition to being oppressive to women, devalues other masculinities that fail to live up to the cultural ideal of what it means to be a man. The social construction of masculinity deals with a gender order that privileges hegemonic masculinity, as it legitimises patriarchy, guaranteeing the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 2001, p. 38).

Unquestioned Authority of Men

On being asked whether there is a difference in the subservient behaviour between initiated and uninitiated women and men, stereotyped notions were shared by both male and female participants that a man is the head of the home. Since he is the head, the general logic is that he has more social value and respect. In response to the question on the difference in the subservient behaviour between initiated and uninitiated women to men, Maria, a ritual instructor aged 70, said, “Yes, you can tell a woman who has not been initiated there is a big difference – a woman who has not been taught has no respect – she talks to her husband anyhow – she has no respect.” Such female compliance is also illustrated in the case of Patricia, aged 43, who said, “A woman who has gone through *chinammali* learns how to respect a man and other people – those who do not shout at their husbands in public – they have no respect – when she quarrels with her husband, the whole compound will know.” What this implies is that initiation deprives the women or girls, of their ability to be assertive as it emphasises the message that men should be revered. As Protazio, aged 52, said, “there is a difference between those who have been initiated and those who have not. Women who have undergone *chinammali* have more respect for their husbands than those who have not because they are taught to respect men.” To be respectful to men confirms the male-constructed gender notions that females should be inferior to men.

Most participants referred to the man as the “tambala”, a male chicken symbolising power and leadership, which was repeated in the many sentiments

expressed. Others referred to men as the “head” and the “boss” and referred to women as “helpers”. Thus, Jane, aged 19, who was married at 18, said, “Because the man is the tambala, you cannot question him. You are supposed to cook for him and give him sex when he demands it. That is what a good woman who has been initiated should do.” From this narrative, the women’s inability to question men’s views or deny them their conjugal rights is considered being disrespectful to men. However, Chiwoni, aged 21, who has not undergone *chinammali*, said, “The only problem that I have with *chinammali* is that women are taught to respect men too much. This is why you find that men can treat women in any way they want, and women cannot question them.” Censio aged 42, said, “we men are taught how to be men, to provide for our families, and how to be leaders. We are also taught what to expect from women, and when they do not live up to these expectations, there are problems in the home.”

When asked about their status in the home, it was obvious that all the men interviewed believed they were ordained to be heads of the home because they used biblical references to justify this belief. Clement, aged 45, said, “A man is the boss in the home, and a woman should accept this fact. Even the bible says that a woman came from a man’s rib. You cannot dispute what the bible says – that is how it is written.” Maybin, aged 35, added, “We all know that the man is the head of the house – how else can it be? That is how it has been from time immemorial – even the bible says so – the woman is supposed to be the helper.” Censio, aged 42, said, “In the bible, we are taught that the man was the first to be created. You can interpret this whichever way you want, but that is true. However, how you understand this biblical teaching depends on your understanding and the family you come from. However, women need to remember this fact.” From the narratives, being head means that the final authority and decision-making rests in the men and that men lead without question, while women merely play a supportive role.

Furthermore, because men are considered heads, most participants said women should submit to them sexually. Thus, though they did not say it directly, the women seemed to accept that a man could stray if his wife did not satisfy him

sexually. From this point of view, the man is given power over the woman as she is expected to be sexually submissive to him. According to a man who worked at the local court, most cases related to men wanting to leave their wives because they did not meet this expectation because, as he said, “they were not taught.” A woman’s power is under threat here, and by implication, so is her identity and sense of self. She must give into a man’s sexual demands even when she is not ready – except, of course, during her menstrual period when this is allowed because, during this time, she may “contaminate” him. As Moyo (2004, p. 73) argues, sexuality is about power for those who determine the what, when, where, and how of sex, socio-economic status, or religion/culture. In heterosexual relationships, those who have power are men. Moyo (2004) explains that the teachings reinforce the gendered decision-making structure in female initiation rites where women are taught to serve men’s sexual needs.

During the interviews, no one said that men are likewise capable of or ought to give pleasure to women. I did not hear this from anyone. I learned that girls are expected to be virgins or prepare their bodies for men’s pleasure. Patricia, aged 43, who was married at 16, said, “It is your job as a woman to make sure that you prepare your body for your husband so that he enjoys you and to make him happy.” In my view, the *chinammwali* uses the body as a framework for reinforcing gender power imbalances, where the body is used to implant notions of submissiveness in young women. The “bedroom” dances, which some women alluded to, can also be understood in this way, as they are a form of social and physical control of women, mainly where they learn to internalise their status as being able to “give pleasure to men”. Hunt (1993, p. 4) shows how this results in a subordinate group accepting the control of the dominant group through a process where consent is imposed on the subordinate group by the dominant one. He adds that this male hegemony is incorporated through societal norms and values that contribute to maintaining the status quo. This is true in the case of the *chinammwali*, where older women, through the initiation rite, transfer knowledge on acceptable male hegemony, which can potentially reinforce the women’s inferior status compared to men. However, most women defended *chinammwali* as a tool essential for the continuity of the Chikunda

tradition. These women emphasised that *chinammwali* should continue as it is an integral part of Chikunda culture. In effect, what the *chinammwali* as a tradition lacks to be a positive and empowering process for women is the ability to reinforce messages that encourage the girls to take control of their sexuality and to invest in sustainable skills that will impact them in a meaningful way in the future. As Kangwa (2011) acknowledges the role of female initiation, he suggests that there are strategies that can be adopted in the female initiation rites to empower women to take control of their sexuality. Furthermore, Ekine et al. (2013) assert that rites limiting girls to play only specific societal roles directly contradict a rights-based approach to gender equality.

Women Accepting Gender-Based Violence

The narratives show that women are taught to accept violence from their husbands, where the notion of masculinity is seemingly challenged. Such behaviour seems to be a legitimate and accepted way of demonstrating masculinity. In this case, gender-based violence is justified, where a woman accepts to be punished because she has not lived up to the ideals of “womanhood” as perceived by men. Catherine, a ritual instructor, said, “Sometimes women do not follow the instructions given in *chinammwali*. That is why you hear that her husband beat her because of this rude behaviour. As a result, men think such women do not know what they are doing and are not ready to be wives. They will ridicule such a woman or beat you up.” As alluded to earlier, during *chinammwali*, messages of appropriate masculinity are transmitted, such as that a man is a *tambala* (the head of the home). Headship per se is not oppressive to women if it is used constructively. What is oppressive to women are headship practices equated to domination and those used to subjugate women, such as wife beating.

As Connell (1987) argues, some masculinities are more strongly predicated on dominance and control over women. This position over women teaches about gender hierarchy and punishes transgressors. The potential for men to control women is suggested here. This is because how men behave in their families is strongly influenced by what it means to be a man (Ampfo & Boateng, 2007, p.

55). Delphina, aged 23, who has not gone through *chinammali*, said, “In *chinammali* because the elders emphasise that women should respect men at all cost, men think that they can beat and control them. That is why women do not have a voice in the home.” Chiwoni, aged 21, who has also not gone through *chinammali*, said, “There is much emphasis on respecting men in *chinammali*. As a result, men feel they are mighty, and women do not have any say in the home. All this is done in the name of culture.” Jane, aged 37, said, “We are taught how to respect men too much. I do not think that that is the way it should be. As a result, men feel that they own women. The world has changed now – men must treat women respectfully.” What emerges is a picture of socialisation towards gender-based violence against women as an acceptable, approved and appropriate punishment for not being woman enough. From these narratives, we can conclude that women’s vulnerability to experiencing gender-based violence is exacerbated by the community’s norms of male dominance and acceptance of cultural ideologies that place women in subordinate positions.

The *chinammali* curriculum centres on distinct gender roles, with women expected to marry, bear children, keep the home and nurture children whilst being available sexually for their husbands. Several interviewees seemed to accept that gender-based violence towards women was justified when a woman refused sex with her husband. Patricia, aged 43, said that in *chinammali*, they are taught that the man is the head of the home, and as such, he must not be denied conjugal rights even when there is no harmony in the home. The fact that *chinammali* is used as a framework for reinforcing this patriarchal hegemony lends credence to the assertion of McNay (1992, p. 49) that “the body is rather to be thought of as the point of intersection... where sex is a cultural construct that is produced with the aim of social regulation, and the control of (women’s) sexuality.” From this brief perspective, I argue that men who are violent towards women are not “deviants” but conform to a particular aspect of female socialisation of what it is to be a woman. From the narratives, the acceptability of violence against women creates vulnerability for women and justifies their use of violence against them by their male partners. Patriarchal societies, as Venter (2011) says, impose expectations on

the behaviours of the members of society, and these expectations are prescriptions regarding how gender roles are played out in the power relations between men and women. These power relations give men advantages and privileges over women and are designed to maintain societal control over them. As can be seen from the findings in this study, women's socialisation includes accepting male superiority, unquestioned authority, and violence when one does not meet the expectation of her husband - this can keep her subordinated to her partner or husband.

Conclusion

This article has examined the role of *chinammwali*, the female initiation rite practised by the Chikunda of Zambia, and its influence in the construction of masculinity – what I call the ‘Chikunda masculinity’. The Chikunda masculinity in this context has been used to emphasise men's power over women's sexuality. The accepted euphemisms such as “tambala” (the male chicken) or the “head”, the unquestioned authority of men by women, and the seeming acceptance of gender-based violence taught to the *nammwali*, point to an aspect of female socialisation to accept and preserve male power and privilege. In addition, to redefine the meaning of “real men” by believing that real men associate with or marry women who have undergone *chinammwali* directly or indirectly assign all authority and power to control women, including their sexuality, to men. Overall, the findings suggest a linkage between women's sexuality and the notions of masculinity and give impetus to the feminist agenda to call for transformative messages to the initiate that will enable her to confront cultural practices that reinforce patriarchal hegemony.

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Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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