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Female Initiation Rites as part of Gendered Bemba Religion and Culture: Transformations in Women's Empowerment

Thera Rasing

Since the 1930s, female initiation rites have been a topic of interest for both anthropologists and certain White Fathers like Fr Corbeil and Fr Hinfelaar. Although the rites have been examined from various viewpoints, e.g. structural-functional viewpoints in the first half of the 20th century (Richards, 1940, 1956), and later by symbolic anthropologists (Rasing, 1995, 2001, 2004, and Simonsen, 2000a and 2000b), they are now mainly explained in terms of unequal gender relations and sexuality (Kamlongera, 1987; Kalunde, 1992). During my ongoing research (1992–2016), I was inspired by the interpretation of these rites by Hugo Hinfelaar, who, although not the first White Father who studied and attended these rites, was the first one who interpreted them in a primarily religious way, emphasising aspects such as transcendence, religion, matrilineity, fecundity and history. Moreover, by examining cultural and religious artefacts and symbols, including those used in initiation rites, Hinfelaar encouraged inculturation (which became a Catholic Church policy after Vatican II), contributed to the study of African Traditional Religion from a gendered viewpoint, and promoted Bemba female initiation rites. This paper will examine the resilience and transformations of female initiation rites in the past century from a gendered and religious viewpoint. It will claim that, in line with Hinfelaar's statement that Bemba women have lost their important socio-religious position due to bena ngandu rule, colonialism and Christianity, these female rites should be seen as a way for women to hold on to and exert their power in their families and in their communities while both initiation rites and equal gender relations are encouraged by the Catholic Church today.

Introduction

Since the 1930s, female initiation rites have been a topic of interest for both anthropologists and some missionaries. As these rites were foreign to European culture, it was difficult for European scholars and missionaries to interpret them. They have been looked upon in different ways. Initially, they were studied from a structuralist point of view, as part of indigenous culture. Later they were seen as pagan and obsolete, as oppressive for women (Geisler, 1997), and as 'degenerating' for women (Kamlongera, 1987). Today they are merely considered as a way to teach about sex (Kalunde, 1992; Kapungwe, 1997 and 2003) Yet, in all those interpretations, researchers emphasized predominantly one or a few aspects of these rites, but did not grasp their full meaning.

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It was Hugo Hinfelaar (1989, 1994) who convincingly showed that these rites were not only part of Bemba/Zambian culture, but predominantly of religion, claiming the important role the *nacimbusa* (ritual leader), as well as women in general, had in Bemba culture. Taking this point a bit further, this article will claim that initiation rites are a way for women to show their important position in family life and society. This is of particular significance today, since firstly, women have lost their important socio-religious position in the course of history, as Hinfelaar has claimed, and secondly, these rites are disappearing due to Western influence (Christianity, urbanisation, modernisation, e.t.c).

This article will start by providing an overview of interpretations of female initiation rites among the Bemba. It will then examine religious aspects of Bemba culture, including women's religious roles expressed in initiation rites, and the interpretation of these rites by Hugo Hinfelaar. Next, it will show how women have lost their important socio-religious roles. The article will conclude by claiming that by performing female initiation rites today, women may resume leadership roles in the family and attain gender equality.

Interpretations of Bemba female initiation rites

In 1933, Audrey Richards, the first anthropologist who studied Bemba culture and the Bemba political system, described and analysed female initiation rites among the Bemba in the Chinsali area. These rites were performed at the onset of menstruation, and soon after the girl got married (Richards, 1945 and 1956).

The first missionaries in the Bemba area, the Missionaries of Africa, popularly called the White Fathers, who entered Northern Zambia in 1891 and the Bemba area in 1895, were equally interested in Bemba culture. Labreque (1931–1934) was the first missionary who, at the same time as Richards, made an extensive study of Bemba culture, including initiation rites.

Richards analysed these rites from a structuralist viewpoint, as was common among scholars at that time. She described the roles of the *nacimbusa* (the ritual leader) and other important women such as the *nakalamba*, the first woman the girl referred to when she started menstruation. Further, the clay figurines and drawings, both called *mbusa* in Bemba, and songs used in these rites were described in detail. Although both Richards and Labreque described these rites in detail, they did not fully understand the meaning of all the clay figurines, drawings (*mbusa*) and archaic Bemba songs.

Richards claimed that *mbusa* means 'things handed down', which indicated that they were 'handed down' by the ancestors through tradition (*ntambi*), or culture, meaning that initiation rites including the *mbusa* had existed since time immemorial, had been passed on from generation to generation, and should be passed on to the next generation. Also, 'things handed down' refers to the

physical handing down of the *mbusa* in the rites: the *nacimbusa* would hold a clay figurine in her hand, start singing and dancing while showing the *mbusa* and passing it on to the women attending the rite, and would finally show it to the novice.

The word *mbusa* stems from the verb *ukubumba*, meaning 'to mould'. Hinfelaar (1989) explained this 'moulding' as an ancient religious role of women (see below). This moulding both refers to the moulding of the *mbusa*, and to the moulding of the girl into a woman. This explains the claims of women that girls are being changed during the rite, from girls to women, with the subsequent adult behaviour ensuing. Richards claimed that it was unclear how this change would take place. Yet, the long confinement and seclusion, in which the girl is usually on her own during several months¹ or weeks, not allowed to talk or to do anything by herself, as she is considered an unborn baby (see Turner, 1967 and 1969), the lessons learnt during the rites, the sometimes harsh treatment by the women attending these rites, and the fact that she is told that she is no longer a girl, but is now a woman with responsibilities and should behave accordingly, all account for these changes in behaviour. In addition, a young woman after her initiation rite is proud that she has become a woman, is considered mature and is believed to have gained wisdom through the rite (Richards, 1956; Rasing, 1995, 2001, 2014a, 2018).

It is interesting to note that sixty years after Richards conducted her research, in 1995, I conducted a study on initiation rites in villages near Chinsali, where Richards had conducted her study, and found that the same clay figurines and drawings were used and songs were sung, in the same way as Richards had described them (Rasing, 2001).

Others have also studied these rites, for example the White Fathers Etienne (1948), Doucette (1960s), Tanguy (1960s), Hinfelaar (1960s) and Corbeil (1982), and anthropologists such as Rasing (1995, 2001, 2004, 2014a/b, 2018), and Simonsen (2000a and 2000b, for the Mambwe). They all stated that the main aim of the initiation rites was to teach the novice and change her from girl into woman, meaning that she was supposed to learn all aspects of womanhood and motherhood. This includes many aspects of life, norms and values such as food taboos, how to dress properly, personal hygiene, menstruation, how to deal with her future husband and in-laws, sexuality, agriculture, and other aspects of society. Rasing (1995, 2001, 2004) emphasized in addition to these aspects the importance of equal and complementary gender relations, matrilineity and the line between ancestors and future children. In addition, Rasing (2001) emphasized the importance of the spirit of the initiation², i.e. the 'blood spirit of the Bemba', who is considered the first Bemba female ancestor who, through many generations, finally gives birth to the novice. Hence, the initiation rite is a

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way not only to change a girl into a woman and to establish ancestral lines, but also to establish tribal coherence.

Female initiation rites as part of Bemba religion and cosmology

During his forty-eight years in Zambia (1959–2006), Hugo Hinfelaar, a White Father, thoroughly studied Bemba culture and religion, including female initiation rites. He attended these rites and discussed them with local women. Most missionaries and anthropologists considered initiation rites as an aspect of culture, rather than religion. Moreover, the first missionaries considered Bemba religion merely as 'beliefs' or 'superstition' instead of a religion (ATR). Obviously, it is difficult to differentiate clearly between culture and religion, as they are intertwined.

Hugo Hinfelaar, however, examined Bemba religion and cosmology in their own right as a religion in which initiation rites were of great importance, and he claimed that women played an important role in this religion. In addition, he examined Bemba history, and showed how women had gradually lost their important position in society due to the overruling crocodile clan (*bena ngandu*), which became the dominant clan, and later on due to colonialism and Christianity, which emphasized the importance of men over women (Hinfelaar, 1989 and 1994). Some of women's ancient roles are shown in initiation rites, which have changed due to the altered position of women. The next sections will explain Bemba religion and cosmology, the important religious roles women had and religious aspects of female initiation rites.

Bemba religion and cosmology: concepts of a High God *Lesá*, Ngulu and Imipashi

The High God, *Lesá*, was regarded as the creator of all things. *Lesá* was both male and female, and the God of Heaven and Earth (*Lesá wa kumulu na panshi*). *Lesá* was called *Mayo na Tata*, my mother and my father. One of *Lesá's* main attributes was *Mufyashi wine wine* (a parent par excellence) and this perfection was evident in the ideal combination of the male and the female (Hinfelaar, 1989, 3). *Lesá* was a nurturing God, revealing matrilineal aspects. S/he was the provider, involved with humankind as a sustainer of people in food producing, and was thought to be omnipotent. A rainbow was a male image of *Lesá*, *buta bwa Lesá*, the bow of God. But it is also a female symbol. The word *buta* also means placenta, as in the proverb: *ubuta bumo tabwisusha ng'anda* (one placenta does not fill the house, meaning: one child is not enough³). Hence *Lesá* was also seen as female, e.g. the mother of all beasts. Other words for God are *Namulenga*, the creator (with the female *na*), *Kabumba*, the moulder, who moulds like a woman shapes her pot, *Namukungwe*, she from whom all things come.

Concepts of *Lesá* emerged in the second half of the first century. The idea of a High God might have become more visible as a result of contacts with a larger world (cf. Horton, 1971, 1975) due to trade with Arab/Swahili and European traders and missionaries. In the 19th and 20th centuries missionaries translated *Lesá* as 'he', but the gender of God in central Africa is not self-evident, as in Bantu languages the third person singular (just like the first and second person) is genderless, so translations as 'he' must therefore be questioned. Due to Christianity, *Lesá* has been stripped of her Mother-earth imagery, and was changed to a Father-sky God (Maxwell, 1983, 71).

There were different types of spirits in Bemba cosmology. The *ngulu* spirits were considered the early inhabitants of the land. They resided in natural phenomena, such as waterfalls, rocks, big trees, and large anthills. All territorial places of worship possessed the feminine prefix *na* (Hinfelaar, 1989, 4), meaning 'female' and were named after the deity. Some were associated with snake worship or were believed to be inhabited by a snake (Richards, 1939, 358). Snakes are still important figures in initiation rites today. Although they are either interpreted as male or as bad luck, I assume snakes also refer to this worship of the divinity associated with or manifested by a snake⁴, specifically associated with rain making and fertility, or blessings in a wider sense⁵.

Other types of spirits were the *imipashi* (sing. *umupashi*) or ancestral spirits. They were associated with the fertility of the bush and the gardens, and the lineage. The places to invoke the ancestral spirits were in an individual's house, at village shrines and in dead chiefs' villages (*ifibolya*). The priests in charge of the latter were called *bashimapepo* (from the verb *ukupepa*, meaning to pray). The house of the headman was the centre of the religious life of the village, but small shrines were also built outside. Headmen officiated as priests at these shrines.

Dangerous spirits, *fibanda* or *fiwa*, resided in the sphere of the cold forest. They were believed to be the spirits of the recently deceased who had left the world while bearing grievances and who needed to be placated. They would return to strike their descendants with misfortune or illness (Richards, 1956, 29).

Oger (n.d.) and Werner (1971) state that *ngulu* spirits at a certain point in time were believed to possess people, while initially only *ngulu* priests were mediums. This may be seen as a response to the ritual needs of the people after the establishment of the *bena ngandu* rule, in which they were denied full participation (Werner, 1971, 20-21). Missionaries condemned this *ngulu* possession as diabolical and superstitious, and excluded from the church those who followed the promptings of the spirits and became cult members and healers.

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However, it seems more likely that women, through *ngulu*, assumed their former religious position. When the authority of the chiefs diminished, women had the opportunity to act. It can be suggested that while men took over political roles and were being incorporated into the capitalist system, women were reclaiming their religious positions (Rasing, 2001).

The Bemba perceived the world as being divided into the village (*mushi*) and the bush (*mpanga*)⁶. The village represented an orderly way of life and the bush a more mysterious, dangerous environment which must be persuaded to yield its resources for the benefit of the people. This distinction between village and bush, between the untamed and uncultivated sphere of life and the domestic and cultivated one, is reflected in initiation rites (Richards, 1956, 27). Spirits moved about in the bush, and trees could be used for their supernatural properties. Spirits constituted a neutral presence that had to be asked to support the community.

The spiritual world and fertility

Ahmed (1998, 24) suggested that during 1000–1600 AD, sexual intercourse was of ritual importance. Female sexuality was celebrated, not restricted⁷. One finally had to become a *mupashi mukankala*, a generous ancestor that granted life and health to the next generation. Children were regarded as neutral and closer to the genderless ancestors. Especially from the 18th century onwards, elderly people were considered to have reached perfection through the ritual acquisition of one's opposite gender: the female as *mukabenye*, a wife of the sacred relics (ritual males); *nacimbusa*, a tutor towards female adult sexual and spiritual life; the male as *mwine mushi*, the head of the matrilineal village⁸; *shimapepo*, the male priest in charge of a female shrine (Hinfelaar, 1989, 15-16). The young man was taught to reach out towards the cavity of the womb and the young woman towards the protrusion of the phallus. For the young man this was symbolically expressed by the possession of the mortar, the home, the bored stone, and the cooking pot. For the young woman this was symbolized by the pestle, the snake, and the paddle.

The way to fertility was believed to be possible through the woman. In narratives of creation it was said that a young man managed to return to the divine state by going out into the forest and boring a tunnel through a small boulder. The bored stone (*ilibwe* or *cupo*, lit: marriage) was the symbol of traditional religion. It meant that access to the divine, to the life and health of the community, was through the woman who had to be approached with patience and respect (Hinfelaar, 1989, 5). All over south central Africa, the bored stone was used as an agricultural tool and was put on a digging stick to make it heavier. This stone was associated with femininity. When the sex of a newborn child was announced

to the community, the expression: *ce libwe* (is of the stone) was used for a female baby and the expression *ca nondo* (is of the hammer) for a male (Hinfelaar, 1989, 5). My informants claimed that for a girl also the expression 'a diamond' is used, which refers to the vulva and is a sign of fertility. A chevron or diamond is used in wall paintings in initiation rites. In initiation rites a ball of hard soil is made in the bush. This is called *ilibwe* or *cupo* and is regarded as one of the main relics whose meaning should be kept secret (Rasing, 2001).

The traditional symbol of the bored stone was also expressed by the word *bulungu* that signified both divinity and beads (which were originally made of stone). They decorated the waist of the women and were used as sacrificial objects to placate the ancestors (Hinfelaar, 1989, 6). These beads were given to a young woman by her *nasenge* (paternal aunt) at her wedding ceremony.

The stretching of the labia, a custom that is found all over south central Africa, enhances pleasure during the sexual act for both husband and wife and facilitates the delivery of a child. Hinfelaar (1989) remarked a similarity between the symbolical meaning of the bored stone and female parts of the body. The stretched labia might emphasize the tunnel through which the husband has to pass to come into contact with the divine, and also the channel through which a child has to pass to be born.

Access to parenthood and to the ancestors was through the woman. The importance of female sexuality is emphasized because the Bemba, like many other people in matrilineal societies, believed that a child was entirely formed from the physical contribution of the mother. It is thought that a woman has a child in her belly and only needs sperm for it to grow (Richards, 1956, 148). The father has limited rights over his children in this matrilineal system. The fact that descent was traced through the mother was also based on the belief that the couple had access to ancestral spirits through marital intercourse and that the spirit of the maternal ancestor was thought to quicken the child's development in its mother's womb. In addition, it was believed that men stimulate or nurture the unborn child by frequent intercourse.

The woman was the maker of the domestic shrine. According to the legends, it was the woman who taught man to make use of the clay of the termite hill to construct a house. It was a woman's task to finish the house by whitewashing the inner walls and the floor. Every month after her menstrual period a woman smeared the walls with new clay, which denoted a symbolic relation between soil and menstrual blood. It revealed a relationship between the purifying connotations of a woman's menstruation and the cleaning of her house. After this a woman constructed the family hearth.

The house of each householder was actually a shrine, since the ancestral spirits of the couple living there were supposed to linger. The *imipashi* were

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addressed at the birth, marriage, illness or death of a family member, or at any other event (Richards, 1939, 357).

Women's religious roles

Women, holders of the domestic cult and their home shrine, were called *cibinda wa nganda* (creators of the house), and officiated at all religious services that took place in the domestic shrine (Hinfelaar, 1989, 7). *Cibinda* had religious connotations and was related to *Lesá*. *Cibinda we sumbu* was the person who invoked the ancestors and blessed the fishing or hunting nets. In the home shrine the woman had to light the fire. It had to be started by friction and not be taken from a public fire. This is still taught during the wedding ceremony. The circular home was the symbol of the woman's womb. The word *lushinga* referred both to the band of twigs that held the roof together and to the string of beads around the woman's waist. During a rite I attended in town this was explained, which shows that this symbolism still remains important.

The woman was regarded as the main celebrant of marital life and held responsible for the proper performance of the rituals surrounding sexuality. During the day she fetched water from a running stream while she kept the sacred fire burning. After sunset her husband had to approach her home with reverence (Hinfelaar, 1989, 8). In order to be granted the gift of new life by the ancestors, mutual understanding had to exist between husband and wife. This was achieved by a conversation to which the ancestors were believed to listen. It had to be ascertained that neither of them had been in touch with spirits alien to their legal marriage, for instance by the adultery of one of the partners or even after having seen or touched blood that did not belong to either of them. The wife asked the husband to swear that he had been faithful to her (*Lesá anje nga na bepa*, God may eat me if I lie). If he did not dare to say this, she could refuse intercourse and take him to her *nacimbusa* (Labreque, 1931; Hinfelaar, 1989). In this way, the woman had a firm grip on her husband. During my fieldwork in a village in 1995 this was confirmed by some men and women. The women in town, however, said they did not know about this.

A religious title for women was *kabumba wa mapepo*. *Kabumba* referred to the moulder, the potter, the creator. *Lesá* was called *kabumba* and was shaped by the women who created houses, pots and the clay models used in initiation rites. *Mapepo* is derived from the verb *ukupepa* which means to worship, to honour the spirits. The area of the religious duties of women was in the forest (where the spirits were believed to linger), and extended from the woodlands to the village. The woman was in charge of taking offerings to the family shrine to obtain health, well-being and life itself from the ancestors. Her public position within the village community, with the men in the central men's

house and herself near the domestic shrines in the houses around it, was that of a mediator between the living and the dead (Hinfelaar, 1989, 10). Men in this matrilineal and matrilocal society, where particularly young married couples lived in the village of the young woman's mother, were seen as people who had scant knowledge of the divinities and their territorial cult.

Another role in the religious life of the community concerned the women's responsibility of having to coax the gift of parental regeneration from the peripheral sphere of the forest into the security of the village. The woman involved was called *na-ci-mbusa*. The word *mbusa* was associated with the word *mboswa*, the guardian spirit (White Fathers' Dictionary, 1991).

The initiation rites symbolized a difficult journey from the liminality of the forest into the warmth of the village. The *nacimbusa* would guide the novice on this journey. The *nacimbusa* had a high status and authority. She belonged to the original inhabitants of the land and knew everything concerning territorial rituals. The *nacimbusa* was in fact a chief (*mfumu*), or at least of the same rank as a chief (Richards, 1956). This is not only because she was related to the chief's family, but also because of her position as *nacimbusa*. She wore a feather head-dress, *ngala*, a sign of her status. She was considered a priestess whose function was hereditary, from grandmother to grandchild, and was also a healer (*nganga*). She selected a young woman who had shown great aptitude in grasping the deeper meanings of the *mbusa* to assist her on every occasion and eventually to receive knowledge about the sacred emblems and titles of her predecessor. The *nacimbusa* was the girl's councillor from the moment the girl became a young woman until well after she had given birth to several children. The *nacimbusa* was the diviner during the naming ceremony and acted as a mother to the couple; someone the woman could ask for help in case of marital problems. She would also be the young woman's advocate in court cases.

Associated but distinct from the role of the *nacimbusa* was the function of *nakalamba*, the senior mother. She was the first to meet the young girl at her menarche and usually she assisted the *nacimbusa* during the girl's rite. Many roles of the *nacimbusa* and *nakalmaba* continue to exist.

The belief that people in northern and northwestern Zambia come from the west Kola (*Luba*) and will go to the east (*Twafuma ku Kola, ku masamba, tukaya ku kabanga*) formed an important part of the initiation rite. The initiate had to face the rising sun and was taught the four corners of the earth. The east signified the future, hope and expectations, light and happiness. The west was the country of origin, the past, the place of the ancient ancestors (*ifikolwe*) and darkness. The east was upwards, towards the horizon. The west was from down below. The afterlife, death, is situated in the west. The initiate was told to throw ashes towards the west, then turn towards the east and pray to the ancestors

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(Hinfelaar, 1989, 2). In my observations of these rites, this is still done⁹.

Hinfelaar (1989) claims that during the initiation rite the novice was taught to feel herself surrounded by the spirits that were potentially benevolent and had to be courted into the service of the living. Trance¹⁰ (*ukuwilwa ingulu*) or communication with spirits was compared to the movement of the sun. It went down into its female sphere when setting, after which it was re-vitalized during its journey under the earth. Divinity could be present down below and distributed life like a good wife. It was present in the womb of the earth to which each person returned after his or her death. To be divine meant to imitate the feminine. This is still symbolised in initiation by the zigzag figures drawn on the wall (Rasing, 2001).

Initiation, menstruation and the moon

According to Hinfelaar (1989), the three seasons were symbols of divine creation. The dry, cold season was a manifestation of the feminine, while the hot and dry season was that of the masculine. Perfection and fertility occurred when both seasons merged as during the rainy season. Marital intercourse was seen as the interaction of these three seasons: the cold body of the wife was believed to be prepared for the divine gift of parenthood by the hot influence of the husband. For a man, access to the divine was made possible through the marital union with his legal wife (Hinfelaar, 1989, 4). Wilson (1971, 59) noted that the right season for conducting rituals, including initiation rites was the cold season, for it was the time when the women harvest the seeds. Food is plentiful then and beer can be brewed for the rites. Also, today the cash economy plays a role here. Rites are not performed in the hot season (Rasing, 1995, 2001).

Rasing noticed that initiation rites started when the moon was waning. This denotes a symbolical relationship between the moon and menstruation (Rasing, 1995, 2001; Creten, 1996). During the absence of the moon, sexual intercourse was not allowed, as this period refers to menstruation, the period during which women are infertile. Should they happen to become pregnant at this time, there is a high risk that the child would be handicapped. This is also explained in the initiation rites. In these rites the moon is drawn as a crescent in its last quarter, denoting the time that women start menstruating, expressed with the word for menstruation *ali no mweshi* (she is with the moon). In other words, her monthly period of fertility has gone, like the moon has gone, in its four-weekly cycle of rotation. This idea corresponds with the idea that the moon is the bearer of good things since menstruation is a sign of fertility. Soon after this period, a new monthly cycle will begin. The rotation of the moon, from the time when it is invisible, grows from a small crescent to being full, wanes, disappears and reappears, corresponds to the days of fertility: the preparation of the mucus of

the uterus towards the fertile period (waxing of the moon), the fertile period (just before the full moon), menstruation (failed conception, the waning of the moon), and the infertile days (no moon). Therefore the moon symbolizes the menstrual cycle but also the cycle of life and death.

Menstruation was considered the symbol of a woman's return to *Lesa*, the High God, and seen as a journey towards the cold fecundity of the previous generation. While menstruating she moved away from human intercourse in the village towards the liminality of the forest, the abode of her ancestors, where she received the gift of her sexuality through the intercession of her ancestors (Hinfelaar, 1989, 5). Menstruation is also called *ukuya ku mpepo*, to go to the coldness (of the forest), or being in a state of coldness (*ukuba ku mpepo*), to be on a mat or in a shelter (*ukuba mu butanda*¹¹) or as fearing fire (*ukutina umulilo*). This was not only symbolical but also physical: women were supposed to rest in a hut in the bush during these periods and not to come near fire as they were thought to communicate with a spirit during this period.

Concepts of blood, sex and fire

Richards (1939; 1940; 1950; 1956) demonstrated the importance in the Bemba world view of the interrelated concepts of blood, sex and fire¹². The sexual act is considered to make the body 'hot'. In this state the individual cannot approach the ancestral spirits or have contact with any sacred object unless he has been ritually purified. Intercourse between a man and his wife, followed by a purification ritual (*ukuwamya umubili*), was the means by which magic potency was conferred and a blessing of the ancestors invoked. For this aim, at marriage the girl was given a marriage pot (*kalongo, kapalilo*) by her paternal aunt. It was filled with water and placed on the fire, with the husband and wife both holding the rim. Water and warmth are symbols of the husband's part in the reproductive process. The couple poured from the pot on each other's hands while invoking the ancestral powers who have given them the gift of life (*cuma cakwa Lesa*). This was the essential act that removed the condition of hotness from their bodies and rendered them free to touch the fire (Richards, 1956, 31). Today, at every wedding ceremony the girl is still given a pot for this purpose. Although its meaning is explained at the wedding ceremony, it can be doubted whether this pot is still used.

If sex, blood and fire were brought into wrongful contact with each other, they were thought to be dangerous, in particular to children. All mature persons are likely to be 'hot' and could pollute a fireplace. Parents who did not purify themselves after intercourse ran the risk of killing their children by touching the family hearth (Richards, 1956, 30).

Adultery was believed to be very dangerous, for illicit intercourse cannot be

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followed by the purification that is possible between legally married partners. Husband and wife perpetually carried out the dangerous act of intercourse, which thereby put themselves in each other's power and dependent on each other for ceremonial purification. A man who had intercourse with two women united the three in a perilous relationship. Their blood was mixed (*mulopa wasankanya*). If the legal wife or husband saw the blood of her or his adulterous spouse from a scratch or menstruation, the innocent one was thought to die (*cilolela*), unless she or he was saved by the right medicine (herbs) which only *banacimbusa* knew (Richards, 1956, 32–34).

If a man committed adultery while his wife was pregnant (*ncila*), it was believed that the baby would be stillborn or would die soon after birth. He had taken the spirit of the child (*asendo mupashi wa mwana*). If the woman were unfaithful while she was pregnant (*ncentu*), then she herself would die in childbirth (Richards, 1956, 35). This is still an important lesson taught in initiation rites and wedding ceremonies. Even though this belief has waned, during my fieldwork in town I heard of some cases where men were punished because they were accused of having caused the death of their new-born child.

People who ate food cooked on a polluted fire, for instance cooked by a menstruating woman, would catch illnesses, mainly of the chest (*icifuba*) (Richards, 1956, 34). It was believed that when a woman added salt to food while she was menstruating, the ones who ate the food would fall ill. The punishment would fall on the innocent and not on the guilty. The adulterous woman who cooked for her husband caused him to become ill or die. I observed that during initiation rites and wedding ceremonies stories were told to warn novices about husbands who died because of their adulterous wives. At the same time girls were assured that while menstruating they can cook but cannot add salt to the food. Also, it was explained that women should stay near the fire when cooking to prevent it from being polluted by others. During their initiation, girls are kept away from fire. At wedding ceremonies girls were told to light a new fire every morning and not to 'borrow' fire from someone else.

The first intercourse with a girl after her initiation rite is considered to be a perilous act. It is carried out with special ritual precautions (Richards, 1940, 20; 1956, 33). In this act the ritual relationship between husband and wife is valued¹³. The couple has to learn how to perform the sexual act. As the wife is the most responsible one in the act, it takes more time to teach her compared to the husband.¹⁴ The virginity of the girl (valued and stressed by Christianity) was not important in the past. In contrast, becoming pregnant while unmarried is regarded as very dishonourable for the girl. Only then (or when there is real evidence that a girl has been abused) can damage money be claimed.

In the past, the pregnancy of a girl who was not initiated was a bad omen,

and the girl and her child were chased from the village (Richards, 1956, 33). Today, although it is considered shameful, such a girl is not rejected because of the influence of Christianity and modern law. In such a case, the girl is usually quickly initiated over a short period of time.

Initiation rites in their socio-religious context in the course of history

Initiation was a central rite in all matrilineal societies. Ancient signs of female initiation rites are animal drawings and abstract figures on rock shelters that date from the period between the fourth century AD and some centuries ago. It is evident that these paintings played a part in rituals and fulfilled certain religious functions, such as for initiation rites, as some of them are similar to drawings used in initiation rites in eastern and northern Zambia today (Ahmed, 1998; Roberts, 1976; Smith, 1998; Zubieta, 2006 and 2011). Rock shelters were used for religious purposes and were believed to be the abode of spirits. At the rites I attended, women referred to a certain spirit, 'the blood spirit of the Bemba,' and to *Lesa*. Maxwell (1983, 71) stated that reference to *Lesa* in initiation rites can be traced to a primordial Mother-earth spirit.

The word *cisungu* (or *chisungu*, initiation) spread into Zambia around 1000-1600 AD, and was used by all Bantu speakers. It is derived from the verb *ukusunguka*, to be astonished, to be overwhelmed, to be surprised, or to be knocked down (White Fathers' Dictionary, 1991). To have one's first menstruation, *ukuwilwa cisungu*, was celebrated as a miraculous, divine event, when the young girl received the gift of her sexuality from the ancestors.

In the distant past, the onset of menstruation and subsequently the initiation was the time of marriage. There were two female rites: one at the first menstruation of a girl and one at the showing of her pregnancy or at the birth of her first child. *Nacisungu* is the Bemba word for a girl during her initiation rite up to the delivery of her first child. Today, when a young woman is pregnant for the first time, the *nacimbusa* throws water on the woman's belly and gives her a bracelet of white beads. These are traces of this second rite.

Initiation at first menstruation is related to giving birth. Labreque (1931) claimed that when a young woman had to deliver her first child, she was taken to the bush by some women. On returning to the village, her parents would say: "Today you have come out of the tree". 'Climbing a tree' means that one is subhuman, and to come out of a tree means that she has become human, which refers to her becoming a mother or adult, and to delivery. In initiation rites today, giving birth under a tree is still symbolised while songs about climbing a tree are sung (Rasing, 2001).

These two rites at menarche and birth giving make sense in matrilineal, matrilineal societies where marriages were relatively unstable and the woman's

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value as a member of the clan was not determined by marriage but by the production of new clan members (Ahmed, 1996, 126). Sacks (1982) and Ahmed (1996 and 1998), showed that the roles of sisters and mothers in recent centuries were even more important than wives for men. The legal and ritual relationship between brothers and sisters was an important aspect of matrilineal descent¹⁵ (Labreque, 1931; Richards, 1940, 96-97).

Marriage has been weak all over central Africa, and was less important and less elaborate than it is today. In the past, the future husband played a role in the initiation rites (cf. Richards, 1940 and 1956), which indicates that initiation was the main aspect in the sequence of rituals surrounding the marriage process.

Richards, (1940, 23) described the lack of intimacy between husband and wife. There were contradictions within societies that made a strong marital bond unlikely. Marriages were matrilineal but after some years a man could take his wife to live in his parents' village. This often resulted in divorce. In addition, the fact that a young woman did not have a hearth fire on her own but cooked with her mother and sisters resulted in a less stable marriage. Divorce was easy, bride wealth did not have to be returned and children stayed with their mothers. If a Bemba woman felt that she had fulfilled her marriage duties and had presented her husband with a few children, she could leave him.

Social and religious changes from the 16th century onwards

From the 18th century onwards, immigrants of the *bena ngandu* clan introduced a royal cult, and changed the original religion. Women's veneration of territorial shrines was made dependent on the veneration of royal relics (Hinfelaar, 1989 and 1994). Initiation rites, as well as the *banacimbusa* as former chiefs, were incorporated by the reign of the *bena ngandu* chiefs¹⁶. Chiefs of the *bena ngandu* clan saw to it that the main *banacimbusa* belonged to their clan, either along matrilineal or patrilineal lines (Hinfelaar, 1989, 34). Indeed, all Bemba *banacimbusa* I interviewed claimed to be members of the royal clan. The traditional *banacimbusa*, the guardians of the land, were not ousted by the Bemba rulers, but served royal *banacimbusa* as *banakalamba* (the woman the girl addresses when she experiences her menarche and who assists the *banacimbusa* during the rite). Roberts (1976, 90) stated that: "In this matrilineal society such rites underlay the whole structure of rituals whereby the supranational powers of the Bemba rulers were maintained". The rites had to be reported to the chiefs, but they seemed to have little control over the rites.

It was mainly men who took over political and religious leadership. Consequently the public role of women in religion and politics diminished. With this, gender relations changed. The *banacimbusa* in their marginal position, however, preserved reverence towards the initiation rite and continued to

pass it on to the next generation. Thus, the Bemba did not alter the centrality of female initiation but changed aspects of it, such as preparing the novices for marital service and teaching them to be obedient to their husbands.

In addition, in the 16th century, contacts with Arab/Swahili and European traders and the subsequent penetration of mercantilism influenced domestic life and morality. The original equality and complementarity shifted and may have led to a change in sexual norms¹⁷. Hinfelaar (1989) claimed that lessons on 'how to please the husband' mainly originated during this period of trade with Arabs and Portuguese traders¹⁸, and refers to the husband who asks for his wife 'to be danced'. This is the common expression of 'to be initiated' *ukucindilwe cisungu*, and refers to the sexually stimulating wriggling of the waist, which is an important lesson during initiation rites.

In the 20th century, women's socio-religious roles further declined due to colonial rule and Christianity. Missionaries preached about a male God, who had male servants as priests, while women had no active role in Christian services. Missionaries sanctioned only Christian marriages in which male dominance was emphasized. Colonial officers saw men as heads of households. With these socio-religious changes, women's position in the house and in marriage also changed. Consequently, initiation rites have altered. This may explain women's ambivalent views towards themselves, claiming that they are both submissive and dominant.

Initiation rites in the context of the Catholic Church

Although the Catholic Church had a negative view on initiation rites and punished women who attended them from the late 1930s to 1960s¹⁹, the Church changed its attitude towards these rites during the Second Vatican Council. At the end of the 20th century, in line with the Catholic Church's idea on 'inculturation', described as 'the rooting of Christ's message in the culture of the people'²⁰ (Hinfelaar, 2015, 13) or, revaluing traditional rituals to combine them with Christian rituals, several priests became interested in initiation rites. Trials were made to combine these rites with Christian rituals, such as blessing the novice in church immediately after her initiation rite, or combining initiation with confirmation. Most of these efforts failed.

In 1953, the lay women's group *baNazarethi* was founded in Mufulira by the priest Mutale, who later became bishop. This group spread to almost all parishes in urban Zambia. Their aim is to discuss with and teach young married women about Christian family life and marriage (cf. their constitution *Icafwilisho ca Ba-Nazareth*, 1979). The teachings are done either during their regular meetings, in which the prolonging of the labia is emphasized and songs of initiation are sung, at special meetings or during initiation rites. However, women in these groups

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teach girls in the same 'traditional' way as in other parts of (urban) Zambia. This is the believed format in which the rites have been passed on by the ancestors. The only Christian aspect added is the Christian prayer at the start of the rite (Rasing, 2001, 204). Although these rites held for already-initiated women in this group may be regarded as folklore, the gatherings reveal that for women it is important to perform (imaginary) rites to repeat their songs and knowledge. This may be done in order not to forget their previously learned knowledge, but it is also an opportunity for the women to celebrate their culture and female identity, to express their unity and to party.

In the beginning of the 21st century, some White Fathers studied initiation rites, particularly by organising groups of *banacimbusa* from the lay group St. Anna, sometimes combined with the group of lay men, St. Joachim. Supervised by priests, they organise meetings to discuss and perform initiation rites among themselves, perform these rites for newly married couples and to initiate girls.²¹ By studying and annotating these rites in order to promote culture so that it will not be forgotten, priests promote these rites and subsequently try to enhance women's position. Obviously, in the process these rites are altered in a rather Christian way.

Moreover, Catholic priests and sisters of certain denominations are nowadays initiated at their ordination or before taking the vows, in the presence of a bishop or mother superior. It is said that despite their celibacy they are supposed to know about married life (see Rasing, 2004).

Initiation rites as women's empowerment

Contrary to the positive attitude towards these rites taken by priests today is the negative attitude towards initiation rites and other traditions by the UN and NGOs. They consider them as 'harmful cultural practices' claiming that they exist for the benefit of men, while maintaining the 'inferior status of women' (UN, 1995, 2). They are said to be discriminating for women and 'are despite their harmful character and their contradiction with international human rights – not discussed by the community' (UN, 1995, 2). Several Zambian newspapers have published articles that negatively depict initiation rites, particularly but not exclusively referring to the *fisi* practice in Chewa rites²².

Judging one's own (western) cultural practices as good and foreign practices as bad or harmful – viewed through the prism of one's own values – is based on limited knowledge and misinterpretation of these practices, without knowledge of the cultural context. Also, it means that culture is considered static instead of flexible and dynamic.

Moreover, the assumption that 'harmful cultural practices' mainly exist in Africa is a one-sided approach, in which non-western women are considered 'victims of tradition' and the assumed superiority of Westerners is established

(Leye en Longman, 2011). It seems there is a struggle against African culture, while imprinting western culture and norms on the African one (Gausset, 2001; Schoepf, 2004; Dilger, 2009).

Initiation rites are misunderstood partly because they are difficult to explain, but also because in the rites it is emphasized that nothing should be revealed of what happens and is taught in the rite; everything has to remain secret for non-initiated persons. This assumes a secret cult.

It is wrongly interpreted that it is emphasized that women should be submissive to their husbands. In today's initiation rites, lessons are mainly about how to behave and personal hygiene, while in the wedding ceremony girls are taught about married life, how to have sex in such a way that it will be pleasant for herself and her husband, how to deal with her future husband and in-laws, to discuss issues at a proper time, to avoid quarrels with the husband, and how to give birth in a decent way. Novices learn that adult and married life is not always easy, how to cope with difficulties, and to listen to advice from elderly and experienced women. This is more important than to be submissive to the husband. These are lessons for life. Moreover, in the rites women explain issues about men with laughter and in a way in which men are rather ridiculed (Richards, 1956; Rasing, 2001). Also, songs are sung that a man should be good to his wife²³.

It is a fallacy that all initiation rites would encourage girls to have sex. Although there are some ethnic groups in which sex is promoted, such as among the Chewa, many groups emphasize not indulging in sex before marriage. Although girls receive contradicting and confusing messages about sex, they learn about sexual taboos and increasingly more information is provided about avoiding HIV and AIDS (Rasing, 2014b). Moreover, many girls already have sex before their initiation (Rasing, 2001).

Certain aspects, such as the nakedness of the novice's breasts, are often criticized by westerners, who consider them denigrating for girls. However, other women attending the rites also uncover their breasts. This symbolises the unity of women and their unity with the female God *Lesá*, the creator, and the mother spirit from whose lineage all Bemba originate. In addition, it symbolises that the young girl will breastfeed her future child, just like all women attending the rite have done. In many African cultures breasts are associated with breastfeeding, and not with sexuality.

The initiation rite is still the most important forum in which a girl learns how to behave as an adult, while grandmothers and *banacimbusa* are still the most important people girls refer to concerning sexual matters (Rasing, 2014b). The knowledge that is passed on is still relevant, even in towns (Rasing, 2014a and 2018). Each woman has the right to gain this knowledge, while elderly

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women have the duty to pass on this knowledge to the next generation.

Obviously, changes and adaptations in the rites have been necessary to continue performing these rites in modern times and in urban areas (Rasing, 2004). Recent changes such as omitting lessons about sex and teaching about how to avoid pregnancy and HIV, show the reflexivity of women, and indicate that women are no 'passive victims of their culture', but actively act and reflect on it, assessing what is good for them in their cultural context, contrary to what the UN claims.

All so called 'harmful practices' deal with sexuality, predominantly with female sexuality. Ahlberg (1994, 226) states that the problem of analysing sexuality starts when it is considered from the point of view of one's own cultural and moral values. This is exactly what the UN does. They consider the rites harmful because female sexuality is a central part of them and is celebrated, as opposed to western ideas about sexuality.

In Zambia sex is considered a pleasure and a right of both women and men, and necessary for good health and wellbeing. It is surrounded by rituals and taboos (Richards, 1956; Rasing, 1995; 2001; 2007). Sex is the most important aspect in life, as it deals with fertility and procreation. Women learn that they should have an active role in sex, and have a central position in sexuality, family life and in the lineage. This gives them power.

To undergo a rite, being secluded, and gaining knowledge, makes women strong and persevering. In addition, the rite emphasizes solidarity among women, which is especially important in urban areas. Girls are proud after their initiation that they have gained knowledge and are accepted as young adult women in society. Hence, these female rites can be seen as a way of empowerment for women and a way to reclaim and exert their power.

Conclusion

In proto-Bantu societies, women had important religious and political positions in a matrilineal culture. These societies had female initiation rites that can be traced back about 2000 years, and were related to the spiritual world. Hinfelaar (1989, 34) argued that the ancient rites were merely a series of lessons in religious education whereby the young woman was trained to be the main celebrant of marital life.

In the course of history, this socio-religious culture has changed. With it, gender relations changed from gender equality to a gender inequality that favoured men and limited women in their religious and political positions. With these changes, initiation rites changed in a direction that strengthened the social sanctions of marriage and indicated the growth of male power.

Hinfelaar claimed that with this, initiation rites were stripped of their

religious significance. I agree that the focus in initiation rites today is on marital education, while the place of religious ideas has diminished. However, several religious aspects are still symbolized in these rites.

Unavoidably, in the long history of initiation rites, some of their parts have been omitted or altered, which leads to a loss of meaning and may subsequently contribute to misinterpretation or to considering the rites irrelevant. Yet, certain aspects of the ancient religion in which women were in charge are still valued today, albeit to a lesser extent, and are still taught in initiation rites, although some of their meaning has become unclear or is interpreted differently.

The centrality of women and their empowerment was related to the matrilineal system and the matrilineal settings. While this setting has largely disappeared, women still have a central role in the family and household. Also, the importance of sexuality and fertility, controlled by women, particularly by *banacimbusa*, is still shown in the wedding ceremonies. The young woman has an active and important role in sex, as sexuality and fertility are central in the matrilineal cultures in Zambia. Womanhood is still celebrated and unity among women is established. Moreover, the fact that nothing about the rite should be revealed to the non-initiated shows that they constitute a secret cult.

The performance of initiation rites in the setting of the Catholic Church today could be seen as a way to promote these rites and to assist women to reclaim their important position in married life and in the family, and to encourage equal gender relations. The study of these rites by missionaries during and after the Second Vatican Council might be regarded in this light. Also, it might well be that Hugo Hinfelaar studied these rites and demonstrated important socio-religious positions for women in order to deprecate the way women were treated by the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, it is thanks to Hinfelaar that women's ancient socioreligious positions were revealed.

As a conclusion, female initiation rites should be seen as a way to prepare women for a leading role in their families and society.

End Notes

- ¹ In the past, the rite used to be about six months long. In 1995–1996, I attended an initiation rite in Mufulira in which the girl was secluded for five months. This was exceptional, from the 1980s onward the seclusion usually lasts one to six weeks.
- ² Etienne (1948) also mentions the spirit at initiation rites, but in a negative way. During my personal interview with the now late Bishop de Jong in Ndola in 1996, however, the bishop asked me not to mention Etienne in my research because of his negative interpretation of the rites.
- ³ In some initiation traditions, the *buta* with which the husband shoots is made out of *mulombwa*, the female tree (while the penetrating arrow became the male symbol – like the pestle to the mortar).
- ⁴ At the start of the rites, the girl is brought inside while she and the *nacimbusa* move like a

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snake, while the women sing: *Akancindi kamana cindika bakupele mutonkolo mwe mwaice*: A small river shows respect for the knowledge, you child. Also, the act of sexual intercourse is symbolized above a string of white beads representing a snake, near the river, while the women sing: *Mu kashiba tupashana mayo, mu cilengwa na Lesa*: In the pool we drain water like our mother, created by *Lesa* (Rasing, 2001, 180). Also, a snake is drawn on top of the *mbusa* as the most important figure, while another snake is drawn around a house, indicating that one is not supposed to step over it or to trespass, otherwise it will bring bad luck, also explained as: one is not supposed to have extramarital sex, as sung: *Lyongolo lyapinda ng'anda lyongolo lyapinda ng'anda ee iyongolo*: A snake is the barrier of the house, yes, a snake is the barrier of the house (Rasing, 2001, 156–157). Another incidence in the initiation rites is the crawling through the *mupeto* (the house) – explicitly imitating the python, to the song *Samba tuikule, bwansato, ico utemenwe, cikoshe mbafu* – let us crawl in the way of the python. All these refer to snake spirits. In eastern Zambia and Malawi snake worship is still more prominent in initiation rites, and associated with rainmaking and fertility (cf. Zubieta, 2006 and 2011).

- 5 An example would be the *Makumba* cult in the Luapula. The snake becomes the manifestation of the divinity. But at other times, the divinity can also choose other animals to reveal itself – meaning it is not the snake exclusively. All prayers go to the divinity, not to the snake. Moreover, to kill a python was often a religious crime.
- 6 Cf. Comaroff (1985) who made a similar division between the female space of the forest and woodlands on the one hand, and the village on the other, for the Tswana in Botswana.
- 7 Abstention from sexual intercourse could be important in some social contexts, but celibacy was considered highly unnatural except for the celibacy of 'spirit wives'. During my fieldwork on the Copperbelt I heard rumours about a certain woman who was thought to be a 'snake-spirit's wife'. In addition, some of my informants claimed that the sisters of Chitimukulu also used to live a celibate life.
- 8 It should be noted that there are also many female heads of villages, just like female chiefs.
- 9 Honouring the spirits of the four corners of the world reveals an ancient religion, and is spread all over the world. e.g. it is common among Amerindians, Siberians, ancient Asian and other ancient religions. Also, traditional healers in many societies including Zambia apply this in their rituals and preparation of medicine (personal interviews with several traditional healers).
- 10 Hinfelaar (1989) calls this 'transcendence'.
- 11 A song about '*ukuba mu butanda*', translated as 'sitting idle on the mat or in a hut', is still sung in initiation rites today. Although this refers to being in a hut during the menstruation period, it is now explained by saying that a woman should not sit idle on a mat but should work hard.
- 12 As part of many rituals, such as those for the foundation of a new village, the installation of the sacred heart, and the blessing of seeds or objects used for cultivating, a chief, headman or priest needs to have ritual intercourse with his wife. The effects of such an act can be explained by ideas on sex, procreation, their effects on fire, sacred objects and on certain human beings (Richards, 1939, 364).
- 13 The couple were mysteriously linked. If one partner died, the other had to have ritual intercourse with a relative of the deceased to 'take the death off' the living partner and to fetch back the spirit of the deceased that was supposed to be around the living spouse to make him/her free to remarry (Richards, 1956, 43; 1984). This ritual was widespread across central Africa, and may have spread between 500-1000 AD (Ahmed, 1998, 24). It still remains, although there are some alternatives for this ritual intercourse due to the fear of contracting HIV (Rasing, 2007).

- 14 During my research, some recently married couples told me the *banacimbusa* was present in the bedroom during their wedding night to guide the sexual act. In the past, if a bridegroom was not able to perform coitus, the *shicimbusa* penetrated the woman to consummate the marriage and not to dishonour the bridegroom. This was kept secret by the new couple and the *shicimbusa*. Also, people told me that when the groom failed, he had to try again the next night. If he failed again, the couple were taken to the bush to have intercourse there and if he was not successful there, the marriage was cancelled. Hence, people are anxious about the virility of the man.
- 15 When a woman died in labour or during pregnancy, it was believed that her husband had committed adultery and therefore killed the wife. In this case, he had to kill his sister as a sacrifice to his wife's kin and ancestors to compensate the loss of their sister. This practice remained until the beginning of the 20th century.
- 16 In many societies in south central Africa, female initiation had connections with political institutions.
- 17 Schoffeleers (1979) and Van Binsbergen (1979) examined folk tales about relationships between local (Malawian) men and European women, and between local (Malawian) women and European or Arab men, that probably originated in this period. They claim that the penetration of mercantilism and capitalism may have led to an emphasis on the subservience of women and 'pleasing the husband' in exchange for extremely desirable prestige commodities, on which these stories hinge.
- 18 Some words for goods that were traded are of Arab-Swahili or Portuguese origin e.g. *findana*, beads, from the Portuguese *dona*, *musambashi* or *muzambazes*, *insapato*, shoes.
- 19 White Fathers Archives, and personal interviews with Hugo Hinfelaar from 1992 to 2001.
- 20 The Christian message should be expressed in the language, the images, the symbols, the music, the proverbs, the thought patterns and even the worldview of the Zambian people. Examples are the introduction of drums and tribal dancing in the liturgy. The Church, however, intended to go much further in this process.
- 21 This happens particularly in Lusaka (St. Laurent Parish and Fenza) and in Kasama (initiation team of Archdiocese Kasama, St Ann's Parish). Their initiation and *mbusa* are annotated in *Ifimbusa*, Kasama Fimbusa Group and Lafollie, P. (2018). I attended several of these meetings.
- 22 Some Chewa rites got a bad international press in the times of HIV because of the *fisi* practice (the appointed 'hyena') In this practice, the novice is supposed to have sexual intercourse with an elderly man who is specifically appointed for this, as it is believed that the first sexual intercourse is very important and has to be done with an experienced man. Today this is explicitly forbidden by major chiefs like Gawa Undi, often in response to NGO advocacy (cf. Kamlongera, 2007).
- 23 For instance the song: *Pa mwana wandi nkamena amasense kamena amasense nkaba nkalamo*: For my child I will grow manes, I will become a lion. This means that when a husband does not treat his wife well, his mother-in-law will be bad to him.

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