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Mutale Mulenga-Kaunda

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Absent Fathers and Child Maintenance Rights in the Copperbelt Province of Zambia: The Dilemma of a Postcolonial Bemba Matrilineal practice

Mutale Mulenga-Kaunda*

Being matrilineal and matrilocal, the Bemba people believe that “children belong to the mother”. This cultural belief and practice is so resilient that even in the event of divorce men have lost paternity rights to their children. Colonisation shifted Bemba women’s status as men were forced to migrate to work in the mines on the Copperbelt, leaving women to raise children as single mothers often without support from their absent husbands. Yet, even though Bemba people believe that children belong to the mother, the responsibility of raising children was traditionally shared with the father of the child. In postcolonial Zambia, the practice of abandoning children with women without maintenance from the estranged father has continued. Further, the Bemba endorsement that children belong to their mother has also influenced urban dwellers in Zambia. This article employs an African feminist jurisprudence framework to critique this pervasive cultural belief and practice of “children belong to the mother”, arguing that it promotes male irresponsibility and acts as a social driver of increasing the numbers of absent fathers, feminization of poverty and the vulnerability of children. Furthermore, the laws favour the rights of men over women. The article concludes this Bemba matrilineal practice and the current legal system undermine efforts to promote child maintenance rights in Zambia.

Introduction

The struggle for women-friendly laws is critical, particularly in African nations that often have statutory and customary laws that both put women’s lives in jeopardy. In dealing with the issue of child maintenance rights in Zambia, there is a dichotomy between statutory law and customary law. There is a divide between the law and the people’s worldview and due to this dichotomy many men choose to not financially support their children if not married to the mother of their child.

Hugo Hinfelaar in *Bemba-Speaking Women of Zambia in a Century of Religious Change* discusses how the impact of Christianity among the Bemba people changed the political, social and economic lives of Bemba women, leading to changes that were a dislocation of the Bemba worldview. The Bemba people’s worldview is that a child belongs to the mother. This cultural belief and practice is so resilient that in the event of divorce, men lose custody of their children.

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* Mutale M. Kaunda is an independent researcher. Her research focuses on African women's experiences, *Imbusa*, ecumenism, women's work and culture.

However, custody is not all that children need; there are financial, social and other needs. As a matrilineal people, Bemba women had economic standing and possession rights that enabled them to raise their children. However, the contact with the White Fathers¹ and the colonial regime changed Bemba women's status as men migrated to work in the mines. This promoted a form of separation in which women were left to raise children without support from their estranged husbands. Paradoxically, even though Bemba people believe that children belong to the mother, the responsibility of raising children is traditionally shared with the father of the child.

Research conducted by anthropologists and missionaries on Bemba people's culture noted changes that came with Christianity and colonialization (Hinfelaar, 1994; Audrey Richards, 1982; Ault, 1983). The position of Bemba women began to deteriorate as the Bemba interacted with missionaries and other cultures. Bemba women who historically held many prominent societal, community, religious and family positions began to lose out as men were the desired workers for both the colonial administration and missionary institutions. This shift in women's status coupled with the Bemba belief that children belong to their mother contributed to a pattern of men abandoning their children and not providing financial maintenance. Children born out of wedlock or those that have experienced their parents' divorce are often left in the care of their mother who may not be financially able to provide for her children's basic needs. This pattern of estranged and negligent fathers has continued in postcolonial Zambia. This article employs African feminist jurisprudence to critique how this cultural belief and practice of "children belong to the mother" is promoting male irresponsibility in the context of increasing numbers of absent fathers, feminization of poverty and the growth in poverty rates among children. My argument is that men have been leveraging a cultural practice to abandon their children and take no responsibility over the children they fathered.

This paper does not in any way suggest as a solution that the Bemba belief should convert to 'children belong to their father' as both men and women are responsible for raising children. Rather we need to interrogate the consequences and impact of this burden on women and children and the need for men to take more responsibility. How can the state law of Zambia engage with this customary law that currently denies women and children the wellbeing that gender activists are bringing to discussion in various settings? The law has often tended to side with men rather than women and therefore women have continued to suffer at the hands of the law that should be protecting them.

African Feminist Jurisprudence: Theoretical Framing

In discussing feminist jurisprudence, Silvia Tamale (2011:4) wrote:

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the largely uncharted territory of gender and sexuality began to be more deeply explored by African feminists, led in the main by social scientists. Anxious to deepen our own understanding of the link between women's sexualities and their subordinate status in society, in 2003 the African Gender Institute (AGI) at the University of Cape Town in collaboration with the Institute of African Studies (IAS) at the University of Ghana organized a pan-African workshop on "Mapping African Sexualities".

Discussion about child maintenance rights and absent fathers is inadvertently a conversation about women's sexuality. Women have continued to face oppression and marginalization even though there have been years of trying to counter this. African women have to contend with many issues and for Bemba women the role of raising children weighs heavily on their shoulders. While the law is not a magic wand that would automatically reset women's experiences and make them better, it plays a critical role in the transformation of certain aspects of their lives. Feminist jurisprudence according to James Fieser and Dowden Bradley (Undated) seeks to bring "the law and its practitioners to recognize that the law as currently constructed does not acknowledge or respond to the needs of women, and must be changed." It further seeks to interrogate whether a male centered law can legitimately frame women friendly laws. There is a need for the law to be able to be responsive to women's experiences and for the processes of adjudication to be women friendly. As James and Bradley argue the law has to engage with "how women and men are 'located in society' with regard to issues, norms and rules." This is vital because when adjudicating, norms and rules have historically been hostile toward women. Underscored by the belief that children belong to their mother, these adjudicating laws have often placed women in difficult situations. The African feminist jurisprudence framework takes into consideration the culture in which Bemba women find themselves. The law therefore has to take into account worldviews like children belong to the mother in times of divorce, at the death of a husband or for a child born outside of marriage. In addition, the law should take into account the fact that men are breadwinners in most Zambian families, resulting in women and children being impacted negatively at divorce or even during an unfortunate death of a husband. This means the law needs to critically engage child maintenance responsibilities in order to ease the burden on women's shoulders. Men have to accept that sexual relations that produce a child are not free but come with responsibility for child maintenance.

In cases where there is no marriage, women are expected to care for that child or children alone. The law has to critically engage with this cultural belief and enforce maintenance rights. African feminist jurisprudence is concerned with women's position in society and how the law engages with women. This implies that the law has to engage critically with many factors surrounding women in its adjudicating process. Silvia Tamale (2011: 3) highlights that in Africa:

Legal feminist activism on the continent came of age during the late 1980s when women lawyers who doubled as gender activists organized to pursue gender equality. Prominent among such national and regional organizations/networks were the various country chapters of FIDA (Federacion Internacional De Abogadas or International Federation of Women Lawyers), Associations of Women Jurists (Francophone Africa), Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA), Women and the Law in Eastern African (WLEA), Women and the Law in West Africa (WLWA), Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) and Women in Law, Development for Africa (WiLDAF)

African feminist jurisprudence engages with the cultural experiences of women in order to promote gender equality. Tamale (2011: 3) notes that "The starting point for legal feminists... is women's lived experiences with the law". Any form of feminism in Africa has to engage with cultural beliefs in order to be relevant, because culture is pervasive in all aspects of African life. Mohd Aqib Aslam (Undated) argues that "feminist legal theory is dedicated to changing women's status through a rework of the law and its approach to gender." The law has to take seriously women's struggles with culture, which consequently means struggles with the law. The law has had unfavorable impacts on women and children as it has sided with the men and left women and children in desperate circumstances. Women's economic base is lower than men's and that can place women in circumstances where they are unable to provide sufficiently for their children. Tamale (2011: 1) argues that "Not only are legal feminists on the continent actively lobbying for women-friendly laws but they are also filing test cases designed to achieve social change. Legal advocacy for women-friendly legislation goes back several decades in post-independent Africa".

Precolonial Bemba Matricentric Notion of Children

In the precolonial era Bemba people lived in a matrilineal society in which women owned property. Bemba women were admired and honored for their industry and assertiveness (Richards, 1982: 48; see also Rasing, 1995). Matrilineal custom privileged women's ownership of land and family property and after marriage, the Bemba man moved to the woman's village or community

(Richards, 1982; Chondoka, 2001; Rasing, 1995; Kaunda, 2017). Bemba cosmological belief was informed by the creation myth that Lesa gave the women agency over their sexuality and economic independence. Hinfelaar (1994: 9, see also Kaunda and Kaunda, 2016: 161) described the Bemba myth of creation thus:

In the beginning, Lesa created two genderless beings. Lesa gave to one of them two parcels with the command to open them only after they had reached mutuality and oneness. In the unfolding of time, one of the parcels started to emit a bad odour. The being that was carrying the parcel threw it away and opened the other. Immediately thereafter, the disobedient being was endowed with ubwaume (maleness). Seeing what had happened, the second being returned to Lesa and was bestowed with female sexuality.

With this endowment, *Lesa* also gave the woman three further presents: *imbuto* (seeds), *ishiko* and the *ilibwe* “the knowledge of the Bored Stone (*Libwe*) as symbols of agriculture, domestic science and productivity” as Hinfelaar (1994: 9) has shown. These three gifts from *Lesa* point to the woman being given the power of industry. *Lesa* is empowering the woman to be in charge of all that she needs to fulfil her responsibilities as a woman. The three gifts would translate in contemporary times to being able to work the land and corporate careers and working in partnership with the man.

Ishiko or the hearth is a very important part of family and community among the Bemba. In a home it is not just a fireplace, it is used for cooking, for marital sexual purity and keeping the family warm during cold or stormy weather, as well as a place where family disputes are discussed, resolved and decisions made. At the community level, there are similar uses of *ishiko* as in the family. *Lesa* gave a woman agency and decision making capacity when she was given *ishiko*. *Ishiko* gives women a place at the decision making table. A woman was endowed with power of creation as a co-creator with *Lesa* and the ability to be economically independent. This worldview has both protected children from maltreatment after divorce and remarriage, and shielded Bemba women because they had the means to take care of their children.

Karla Poewe (1981:iv) argues that matrilineal people follow a sexual parallelism pattern that is different from the central “relationship of dominance-dependence that characterize the West”. Being matrilineal, couples consisting of Bemba women and men made a living without one depending completely on the other, with each contributing to the family’s wellbeing. Women and their children used to work for themselves and hire other people to work for them if there was a need, because they understood this worldview very well. Poewe (1981:16) suggests that matrilineal systems fitted with

industrial contexts. However, the robustness of matrilineal systems was not demonstrated during colonial times.

Bemba women's agency means that girls and women were trained to be self-reliant and to never totally depend on men for their economic wellbeing. Furthermore, women are taught how to be responsible for children. Women in the Bemba community as in many African societies, are seen as custodians of culture and also as 'the home' as evident in the emphasis on *imbusa*² teachings before a woman gets married. If a woman gets married without this teaching, she is ridiculed and always carries the stigma of the "untaught" wherever she goes. Rasing (2004:280) has succinctly asserted, "Initiation rites express and confirm solidarity and unity among women. Norms and values concerning gender, production and reproduction, and cosmological ideas are passed on" during these rites. This situation begins for most Zambian women from the time they are young. From a young age, girls are taught how to take care of their siblings as this will translate in how well they will take care of their own children later in life. Women therefore grow up with a responsibility for children which often men do not have. Tamale (2015: 16) is right in stating that "Sexuality and gender go hand in hand; both are creatures of culture and society, and both play a central, crucial role in maintaining power relations in our societies." Bemba women are culturally constructed to be chaste and therefore an unplanned pregnancy is a shame to the family because that demonstrates that the girl or woman has not received instructions in her home from her parents.

Colonialism and Christianity and Bemba Women

With the dawn of colonialism and Christianity, the tables began to turn. In relation to women, while anthropologists and other scholars (Richards, 1939; Hinfelaar, 1994; Poewe, 1981) have argued that the shift in the Bemba culture occurred before the arrival of missionaries and colonialists, it is important to note that missionaries and colonial officials endorsed patriarchal standards because they preferred to work with men. Bemba women lost out on so much with the advent of Christianity. Hinfelaar (1994: x) explains "I became slowly convinced that somewhere something had gone amiss in the proper transmission of Christ's message of liberation". Hinfelaar's observation is that the Bemba women had come to accept the missionaries because they sided with the poor and marginalized and hoped the "new way" that was being taught by the missionaries would eventually lead them back to regaining the power and position they had previously held. By the time the women realised that the missionaries had preference for men it was too late (Hinfelaar, 1994; xi). All these changes were leading to Bemba women being stripped of their power, the religious, political and economic positions that they had held. The religious change that Hinfelaar discusses in his book: *Bemba-Speaking Women of Zambia*

in a Century of Religious Change (1892-1992) affected various aspects of Bemba people's life. The change in the religious wellbeing inadvertently means the change in Bemba women's economic, social and political position. Bemba women held three positions: *chibinda wa ng'anda*, *nacimbusa wa cisungu* and *kabumba wa mapepo* (Hinfelaar, 1994; Kaunda and Kaunda, 2016; Kaunda, 2017). Elsewhere I have argued that "In her social and spiritual status as both *cibinda wa ng'anda* (head of the house), and of *kabumba wa mapepo* (priestess), the woman mediates between the man and the Supreme Being, *Lesa*." (Kaunda and Kaunda, 2016:165). Matrilineal worldview had the needs of women, men and children at the centre of decisions that were made. The patriarchal texts, both biblical and cultural, undermined women who were not accepted as priests or even as workers in copper mines for wages. Hinfelaar is insightful as he observes that "trying to adapt some of the traditional religion to the teaching of Jesus Christ was believed to ask for trouble. Nothing good could come from African culture" (Hinfelaar, 1994:185).

According to Arie Nicolaas Ipenburg (1991:33) Bishop Joseph Dupont "believed sincerely that he had been appointed, at least temporarily, king of the Bemba by the dying Chief Mwamba.... He expected to include all the Bemba in the White Fathers' sphere of influence." The White Fathers and the colonial officials were the ones who undermined matrilineal systems by bolstering men. The paramount chiefs of Luba Lunda would have found cultural ways of diving into the division between women and men much more cautiously. White Fathers and colonial officers viciously forced themselves into the Bemba women's *imbusa* space. The colonialists and missionaries were not only colonizing the nation of Zambia, they colonized *imbusa* as well (Corbeil, 1982:6). For example, the White Fathers wanted to know and witness the *imbusa* rite in order to know how to teach the Bemba regarding Christian marriages. The colonization of *imbusa* contributed to the distortion of Bemba indigenous beliefs, which also contributed to the change in the discourse and how it was taught. *Imbusa* as a womanhood-centered rite was changed by a patriarchy facilitating a focus on the submission of women and pleasing the husband sexually (Kaunda, 2013: 43). The transformation of that space catalyzed the transformation of marital relationships and impacted related beliefs including children belonging to their mother. Jonathan Friedman (1992:837) asserts that people's realities are formed out of specific socio-historic contexts that should be taken into account when interpreting a culture different from one's own. James Ault (1983:181) discusses the shift in marital relationship between women and men as well as "the effect of modernization on the status of women". This shift in marital relationships inadvertently meant the belief that children belong to the mother began to work against the women and children.

The discovery of minerals caused the migration of men from their homes to the Copperbelt. Women were not able to join their husbands in the work camps

and as Hinfelaar (1994:57) shows, women needed to produce marriage certificates in order to visit their spouses on the Copperbelt and could only stay for a limited time. Away from their spouses, men were more able to start relationships with single women who had migrated into the Copperbelt province (see Hinfelaar, 1994 and Ault, 1983). The matrilineal worldview believed that male sexuality was destructive and put in place checks and balances in case a man became sexually active outside his marital home. Bemba women had the agency to seek clarity from their spouse if they suspected an extramarital affair and had every right to discontinue sexual relations with him until there was certainty regarding his sexual activities (Hinfelaar, 1994; Rasing, 2001). Indeed, the belief that a man's sexual misdemeanors can cause havoc was one of the contributing factors to the women's agency.

These relationships could result in men having children in town as well as children from their matrimonial homes. In the era when Bemba women owned property in the village and they worked together with their spouses for the family wellbeing, there were no child maintenance rights complexities. Scholars agree that there was a shift in the way of life for the Bemba women due to the migration from rural Northern Province to the Copperbelt (Richards, 1939; Hinfelaar, 1994; Ault, 1983). Bemba women were left with a huge and strenuous responsibility of taking care of children alone (Richards, 1939).

With wage labor in the Copperbelt Province and men involving themselves in multiple sexual relationships, children that resulted from these relationships were often left to be raised by their single mothers. Unfortunately, this trend has continued. Children belong to their mother whether the mother has income or is able to provide for the children or not. Whether a man and woman have a child together as an unmarried couple or at divorce, women are left with the responsibility to raise these children and the burden is now worse because it is men who have economic standing. Currently, men occupy decision making spaces in both private and public spheres. These are fathers who are alive and well but offer no financial support towards their children. Many women still have little or no awareness of how they can demand child maintenance for children from their spouses or former husbands.

Patriarchal Laws and Social Change Regarding Bemba Women's Status

African women theologians (Isabel A. Phiri, 2008/9; Sarojini Nadar, 2009; M. Oduyoye, 2001) have argued that heterosexual marriage is dangerous for African women because that is where most women suffer some injustices. The unfairness is deepened by legal judgement at divorce that leaves women to raise children without an established economic stand while the men go on to remarry and start their lives over.

African feminist jurisprudence has to critically engage with African culture in order to be relevant. Tamale and Bennett (2011:1) argue thus, “Feminist struggles in Africa are fought from various fronts, with the law representing but one of them. While law and judicial reforms are not a panacea for gender inequalities, the legal front is a central plank in this struggle as both shield and sword – a shield to protect women against discrimination and the violation of their fundamental rights, and a sword to challenge and overturn unjust sexist practices and to effect fundamental change to the status quo.” The notion that children belong to the mother would require the law to intentionally engage with culture for justice to be reached for mothers caring for children with absent fathers. Feminist jurisprudence seeks to explain ways in which the law has played a role in women’s subordinate status and is dedicated to transforming the status of women through revising the law and its approach to gender (Tamale and Bennett, 2011).

The state law that came with the Western jurisprudence was patriarchal in nature and as a result favored men over women. With the legal courts there have been instances where the cultural courts, *insaka*³ (See Tembo, 2012 and Kaunda, 2017 on *insaka*), have been sidelined and overlooked, and yet at other times families are asked to settle their disputes within cultural customary courts. Both neglecting the customary courts or asking disputes to be settled at customary courts completely are a recipe for disaster. The legal courts need to find a way of engaging and working with the customary courts for relevance. This means often calling on *bashi bukombe*⁴ and *banacimbusa*⁵ to assist in settling disputes. However, “feminist legal academicians on the continent are especially critical of the sexism, patriarchalism, stereotypes and ethnocentricity that is part of the received law, imported with colonialism. They also analyse the position of African women within the multiple legal systems that are a direct legacy from the continent’s colonial history.” (Author Unkown: The Status of Legal Feminism in Africa). The existence of these dual courts has continued to negate women’s experiences and often women just assume responsibility for their children because of the worldview that children belong to their mother.

The fact that almost all African countries adopted two or more legal systems at independence presents complex questions and contradictions for women’s rights. The majority of countries operate under a dual system whereby statutory formal laws (based on British, French, Portuguese, Roman-Dutch legal systems) operate side-by-side with uncoded customary laws. Others have three systems operating simultaneously: for example, Cameroon (English law, French law & custom), Guinea (French civil code, customary law and Sharia – Islamic law) and Nigeria (English law, custom and Sharia). The application of universal rights under international law further complicates the

equation. (Author unknown "The Status of Legal Feminism in Africa: Gains & Limits")

Silvia Tamale (2015: 24) argues that these draconian statutory laws have negated African women's rights and instead have been "an elaborate system of control". As demonstrated in this article, contemporary African cultural discourses have largely drawn their construction from the colonial systems that are patriarchal in nature. Women found themselves vulnerable under these laws that continue to marginalize them and their voices are often not heard. The idea that children belong to their mother is a patriarchal assumption which leaves women and children vulnerable.

Currently with men being the breadwinners, this notion needs to be reconceptualized in order to have shared responsibility for children between mother and father. It should be noted that these fathers are not only absent, some are unknown by or undisclosed to the children. Whether a woman has custody of a child or children after divorce or the child was born out of wedlock, there are many children who are raised by single mothers in Zambia and coopted into new families when or if the mother remarries. The men move on and remarry or begin new families and often times never mention that they have a child elsewhere. This becomes problematic when that child begins to want to know her/his biological father, threatening the man's new family or the mother's current marriage. Suspicions of the mother wanting to destroy and sabotage this man's life are always part of the discourse.

Most of these single mothers have no jobs and may find it difficult to remarry as a focus on virginity of the bride is still rampant and a woman who has a child out of wedlock is perceived to be unreliable and unable to take care of her home/ marriage. This is a situation that most men leverage by denying responsibility for the pregnancy and or by asking the woman to go for an abortion because the man is either married to another woman or he is not interested in having children yet. Therefore, the cycle of feminization of poverty continues.

How can the practice of children belonging to the mother be taught differently to include the father in the financial affairs of the child? Often divorce is seen as failure on the woman's part because she was after all the one who received instructions on how to care for her home and family. The burden of bearing the stigma of a failed marriage and becoming a single mother who receives nothing in terms of financial child maintenance is overwhelming for women. The legal system in Zambia has to find ways of assisting single mothers who cannot access financial help for their children from men who refuse to provide for their children. The fact that there has been a shift from the times when Bemba couples lived in matrilineal spaces and women had land in order to care for family, calls for critical engagement with the law in order to have men

take responsibility. Currently men have become breadwinners in families, own land and receive better salaries than women often with the same qualifications and therefore they need to have responsibility for their children.

James Fieser and Bradley Dowden (undated and un-paginated) succinctly explain that “In general, the feminist concern with equality involves the claim that equality must be understood not simply as a formal concept that functions rhetorically and legally. Equality must be a substantive concept which can actually make changes in the power structure and the relative power positions of men and women generally.”

Postcolonial Bemba Matrilineality and Child Maintenance

Musimbi Kanyoro (2002:14) explains that African culture is viewed as a cord that holds the community together and to be critical of cultural practices is a threat to the community “for there are elements in these cultures, which are the very veins through which the solidarity of communities is nurtured”. The concept of matrilineal systems, especially concerning the understanding that children belong to the mother, has been utilized in ways that have left single mothers behind in terms of making absent fathers accountable. In contemporary times this cultural worldview perpetuates patriarchy and gives absent fathers leverage. Matrilineality is a concept that has been perceived as bringing equality between women and men (Poewe, 1983), but the practice that children belong to the mother fails to ensure that men take responsibility for the lives of children that they have fathered.

Men have got away with leaving children in the custody of single mothers without financial support for a long time. Women and children can end up in abusive relationships due to the negligence of the men who are supposed to be involved in the lives of their children. Children may not know who their father is or where he is or a father may never be talked about in the home for various reasons. There is a need for an African jurisprudence that is able to re-engage, reformulate and resituate culture to give women an opportunity to call absent fathers to account. In the context that continues to change within modernity, culture can easily become a tool for perpetuating patriarchy or it can be navigated and used as a tool to negate patriarchy (Obiomma, 2003).

Conclusion

The Bemba cultural belief and practice that children belong to the mother embedded within the matrilineal Bemba worldview is critiqued in this article as perpetuating patriarchy and contributing to current injustices faced by single mothers in Zambia. Tracing back this practice to pre-colonial times exposes the corruption and dislocation of the relationship between husband and wife through colonialism and mission enterprise. This concept of a child belonging

to the mother is underpinned by Bemba cosmology. The migration of rural Bemba men to the urban Copperbelt to work in the mines left women to stay to care for children without their spouses. The interdependent work done between men and women was completely disrupted and destroyed the economy of rural dwellers especially women. Feminist jurisprudence has to engage in the culture of the society in order to be relevant and helpful to women and children.

Endnotes

- ¹ The White Fathers were the first missionaries among the Bemba people in Northern province of Zambia. Specifically, French Catholic Missionary Bishop Joseph-Marie-Stanislas Dupont who was nicknamed Moto Moto by the Bemba people, he was the pioneering White Father to do mission work in Northern Province Zambia. He joined forces with the British South African Company to penetrate the heartland of Northern province.
- ² *Imbusa* are traditional teaching aids (symbols) carrying moral teachings for family and social harmony.
- ³ *Insaka* has numerous functions ranging from a factory where carving household implements such as axes, mortar, pestles and stools to weaving reed mats and baskets is done to a court of law where families and communities share, hear, attend and make decisions about village disputes such as dowry amount. Issues of adultery are settled in this space (it operates as a court of law in that sense) as well as approval of potential marriages and children's wellbeing are discussed.
- ⁴ *Bashi bukombe* is a man who negotiates on behalf of the groom during the time the groom asks for the hand in marriage of the woman he wants to marry. *Bashi bukombe's* duties continue throughout marriage.
- ⁵ *Banacimbusa* are women who instruct young brides regarding marriage and how to take care of their marriages.

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