

**Part 2.**

**Education and African Tales in a New Jacket:  
Health and Advertisement**

**Éducation et contes africains dans une nouvelle veste:  
la promotion de la santé et les discours publicitaire**

# **Learning to Say “no” in New Chisungu Initiation Rituals**

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## **ABSTRACT**

How would one draw on traditional oral education to complement and improve the HIV prevention campaign in the specific case of girls' initiation as practiced in Northern Zambia? Audrey Richards alludes to the eventual disappearance of the girls' initiation in the Bemba-speaking region of Northern Zambia, in “*Cisungu*”, her classic work about the ritual she observed in 1931. Two surveys (1989 and 1998) proved the ritual to be still alive, and adapted to the new context of AIDS epidemics. Following a short presentation of the traditional initiation described by Audrey Richards, this article deals with the changes effected in the ritual and in the UNICEF project for HIV prevention in the “Copperbelt” region of Northern Zambia. Two types of production are presented: songs composed by a group of women in relation to the UNICEF project and the evolution of the ritual conceived by women as a possible answer to the objectives defined by the project for the HIV prevention towards young girls.

*Keywords:* girls' initiation, *Cisungu*, gender, North of Zambia, HIV, AIDS.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Chisungu rituals of the Bemba (Zambia) were studied by Audrey Richards who, in the second preface to her book « *Chisungu* », republished in 1982, stated: « This book is [...] a record of what may now be quite extinct » (1982: xiii). And yet, in 1989, I attended a part of the final ritual of an initiation in the same region as Audrey Richards did in 1931; and, in 1998, I attended the final ceremony in the Copperbelt, near the Nkana mine, where, in 1934, she had refused to attend the same ritual (1982: xiii).

This article presents some of the data that I gathered on fieldwork and brings testimony that the Bemba girl's initiation rituals have not completely disappeared, although the initiation has evolved throughout the last century. When I came back in the Chisungu region and in the Copperbelt, respectively in 1989 and 1998, I met a few mistresses of initiation and I was given access to the ceremonies because I knew fairly well the ritual, especially the initiation songs, and I could be considered a future mistress of initiation as I had four children. Previously, I had spent three years in the Luapula province together with my husband, who was involved in a information program on rainfed rice culture. In this first period, I collected about one hundred folktales which, transcribed and

translated, constituted the material of my dissertation on the culture of the area. I also discovered the existence of the girls' initiation and Audrey Richards' study, but I could not attend the rites because I was young and childless. In the first part of this article, I introduce the cultural context of the initiation rituals; in the second part, I present the data gathered in 1989 and 1998.

The different rites comprise the presentation of objects, songs and dances, along with some rare explanations, in accordance with this comment from Claude Levi-Strauss, in 1971: « Les gestes exécutés, les objets manipulés sont autant de moyens que le rituel s'accorde pour éviter de parler » (600)<sup>1</sup>. However, what these women want to convey will only make sense after the analysis of the characteristics of the performance. This understanding requires a detailed knowledge of the traditional context, even when it is thought to have evolved or even disappeared. Rather than communicating through speech, the mistresses of initiation say something about the women's condition and their struggle for life through symbols taken from the myths and ancient rites.

## 2. THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

Before independence, in 1964, the administrative divisions of the particular region consisted of a double partitioning in « clans » and in « tribes ». The « clan » is exogamous, with matrilineal succession and its members have a duty to provide assistance (a woman may only cook for someone of her clan or her husband). According to Richards (1964) and Roberts (1973), the « tribe » is a community that is in principle endogamous, characterised by a common culture and history, associated with a particular language (dialect) related to *cibemba*. The administration consists of a two-level network of chieftanships, inside the « Native Reserves »; lacking any infrastructure before independence, these regions were forbidden to any unauthorised person, with the exception of a few state employees and catholic or protestant missionaries.

The concept of a human being is made explicit in several myths stating how a woman acts as an intermediary between her husband and the Creator God Lesa. The first important myth tells the story of the origin of mankind: Lesa has three sons and several daughters, who build specific relations with him: the first son is Lucele, living in the East, who brings felicity; the second son is Mulenga, living in the West, who brings infelicity; the third son is the lion Shingo, who moves along a North-South line and becomes, through his marriage with one of his sisters, the man<sup>2</sup>. The second myth details how Lesa introduces sexuality to mankind<sup>3</sup>. The third myth relates to the introduction of death; Lesa offers to choose between two objects, the woman makes a choice and brings in death, but

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<sup>1</sup> Performing gestures and handling objects are all means for the ritual to avoid speaking out.

<sup>2</sup> English version in Munday (1942: 47-54).

<sup>3</sup> Bemba versions in Hinfelaar (1989: 2-6).

God gave her fertility to comfort her, allowing her to renew the generations<sup>4</sup>. The role of the woman enables the married couple to establish a rationale for life, on the way from a savage world (that of the Lion) to a more civilised world (acknowledgement of sexuality and the appearance of successive generations of human beings). Furthermore, the foundation myth of the *Bemba* tribe presents unmarried men taking possession of the territory. It denounces adultery and modifies the social structure with the replacement of the husband/wife couple by a brother/sister couple, with a view to ensuring the continuity of generations<sup>5</sup>.

Two systems are juxtaposed and face each other everyday: the older structure (that of the clans) pertains essentially to a society without chieftanships, with short matrilineages, where the woman, responsible for life and death, enables the relationship with *Lesa*; the second structure is the result of the recent historical and political evolution of the region during the last two centuries, and introduces elements limiting the power of women to the profit of men.

## 2.1 STAGES OF LIFE AND GIRLS' INITIATION

Men and women follow fairly different life course, and these interact with one another, revealing, among other things, the importance of girls' initiation as a complete ritual in the context of the village and the absence of a definite boys' initiation.

The most complete ritual descriptions are those from Audrey Richards (1956, 1982). Otherwise, one may at most read commentaries and look up a list of the different potteries used during the ritual.<sup>6</sup> In fact, it is difficult to take part in those rituals, strictly reserved for already initiated women.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bemba versions in Tanguy collected in 1912 (1982, 57-58) and Garrec collected in 1916 (1982, 2-3).

<sup>5</sup> Bemba and French version in Labrecque (1933: 633-648).

<sup>6</sup> Comments on initiation and marriage are found in Gouldsbury and Sheane (1911: 157-175). Descriptions of the fiancé's rites and the marriage rites are found in the writings of the White Fathers: Tanguy (1982: 74-81), Garrec (1982: 70-82), Ragoen (1982: 17-34), Labrecque (1982: 29-57), Etienne (1950: 27-55) from the first half of the twentieth century. A list of the different kinds of pottery reveals a pottery scheme associated with the songs' lyrics and the explanations given by the women outside the ritual; it is written in German, by Father Hoch and duplicated copies were published in 1980.

<sup>7</sup> As indicated above, knowing the ritual and the initiation songs fairly well and as mother of four living children, I was given access to the ritual and could gather the fieldwork data reported in this article.

## 2.2 BEFORE INITIATION

The arrival of a child, always a joyful event, especially the arrival of a girl, is accompanied by two series of rituals (just after the birth and at the weaning) controlling the sexual life of the parents through strict prohibitions. Thereafter, the child lives most of the time at his/her maternal grandmother's house. The child gets gradually accustomed to the different tasks that will behove him/her, the girl under the guard of her mother, then under the guard of a woman of her matrilineage, the boy, during his childhood, under the guard of his father, who will often remain a friend and adviser.

Under the aegis of a third person, an agreement between two families marks the start of the « betrothal », as Audrey Richards terms it (1940, 1956), between a boy (16 to 18 years old) and a girl (12 to 15 years old); some low-value presents are exchanged. Following the agreement, the boy leaves his parents, and often his village as well, to live at his fiancée's village. This turning point is underscored by a strict two-way speech prohibition: the young man must not talk to his future mother-in-law; he may speak, only for work purposes, with his future father-in-law and the other members of the family; the fiancée and her maternal grandmother often act as intermediaries between the young man and the other adults; he will only find some support from among the other young men who undergo the same trial.

Under the responsibility of his future father-in-law, the young man starts a difficult apprenticeship (building the framework of the house, which he must inhabit, clearing trees, helping his fiancée in crop maintenance). In addition, he shares the life of his fiancée under the friendly supervision of her maternal grandmother (common meals and, only before the puberty of the girl, sexual play).

## 2.3 INITIATION TIME: DANCING THE « CISUNGU »

At the puberty of the girl, a ritual in the forest glorifies her. As indicated by Richards (1982, p. 54), from that moment on, the fiancés must not share their lives any more; sexual intercourse would indeed lead the couple into the « hot » world of *Lesa*, and the couple must come back into the « cold » world of the village. Thus, the girl's initiation (*cisungu*) must be prepared as soon as possible in order to get the girl ready to perform the purification ritual<sup>8</sup>. As soon as the economic conditions allow, several families, often helped by the village chief, participate in the preparation of the ritual for their daughters. The girl is at this time entrusted by her mother to a group of women, under the responsibility of a mistress of initiation.

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<sup>8</sup> The spelling of *Cibemba* has evolved; the old word was *chisungu*, the new one is *cisungu*.

The organisation of the actual initiation ritual comprises a long preparation period, possibly fragmented over a period of several months, or sometimes reduced to a few days, followed by a final ceremony, summarising all that has been expressed during the preparation time. The rites are distributed between four locations : an environment outside the village, representing the savage world, in the forest and by the edge of a river ; a transitional environment, in the village, in front of a house chosen as the « initiation house » (usually that of the mistress of initiation or of the girl's mother) ; a first inside environment, inside the initiation house, in the company of all the women, representing the civilised world of social life ; a second inside environment, where the chicken will be sacrificed, and the girl washed in a clean water bath, a ritual marking the transition towards a new life, in the company of at least the girl(s), her/their paternal aunt(s) and the mistress(es) of initiation. In the meantime, during the whole ritual, the fathers leave their house; the other men stay in the village, watching from a distance what is happening.

During the ritual, the girl is treated as a plant, under the care of the group of women; this concern will last several years, until the young woman is able to control the course of her life. The education is rather more a first discovery of new notions than real teaching; it is primarily directed at the girl, but also includes the group of women. As any *Bemba* woman, the girl must personify the three functions identified by Hinfelaar (1989: 7–12). As a future « person in charge of the household », she is taught work in the fields and how to gather food, while some objects representing this level of skill are given to her. As a future « prayer builder », she is lead through a reflection on incest, sexuality and the relations with *Lesa*; it is in this regard that the paternal aunt(s) intervene(s) and introduce(s) for the first time the purification rite following sexual intercourse. As a future « mother of *mbusa* », the girl memorises this teaching so that she may relay it to other girls in the course of their lives, while she attends initiations on a regular basis.

According to Audrey Richards (1982), the initiation enables the girl, through her mastery of the adult way of speaking, of the vocabulary related to her future life as a wife and mother, and of socially acceptable attitudes, to comply with the social laws of the traditional world : respect for the clans and the tribe, prohibition of incest, especially between brother and sister, a sense of being part of the women's world to ensure the survival of the next generations and to provide for their education, casual acceptance of male domination in order to keep the men (??) until menopause, rejection of adultery in order to preserve children's health, especially the younger ones.

It is first and foremost the personality of the mistress of initiation (representative of the third function, as demonstrated by her name of *nacimbusa*, « mother of the *mbusa* ») and her communication skills that lead to the success of this education. She has a strong personality, has at least four living children and has attended multiple initiations, as a simple participant, then as an assistant to other mistresses of initiation, before she starts organising rituals. She also acts

as a « village midwife » (follow-up of the pregnancy and support during the delivery). Whenever possible, she takes care of the young women she initiated, especially for their first delivery, as traditional marriage is a stage in the initiation process. As a result, she remains in contact with medical professionals and, nowadays, she will often act as an intermediary between a dispensary, where she is an assistant, and womens' groups.

Within the initiation, the information is transmitted by a specific entity, the « *mbusa* », translated as « sacred emblem » by Audrey Richards (1982). She identifies approximately fifty *mbusa* in the 1931 ritual. This is a group of representations comprising an observed object (paint, natural object or pottery), a song and a gestural production (posture, dances), a given time and a given place in the ritual. Combining these elements, the mistress of initiation adds a commentary that evolves according to the context of production. The signification of the pattern stems from the consistency of the signification of each element, yet sometimes different meanings may induce more complex significations. After the initiation, when a young woman faces a difficult situation, it is often enough to remind her of the song and place to revive the advice given during the preparation period of the initiation. Whereas the women, in such circumstances, only express themselves through songs, the mistress of initiation gives an explicit speech. With the final speech, in the fourth environment, she develops her view of life, and then organises at her convenience the chicken sacrifice.

The fiancés participate, although intermittently, as is recounted in a well-known tale about a young woman who, after having rejected all her suitors, marries a lion briefly turned into a man, follows him in the forest, and refuses to come back until, with the help of her brother, the lion is accepted into the village as a human being (Dauphin-Tinturier, 2001: 210–224). The fiancé is first linked to a branch representing the lion at the stage of animal-son-in-law; in the middle of the ritual, he is linked to the rat representing a transitional metamorphosis, and is invited to a series of rites in front of the initiation house; at the beginning of the final ceremony, he is linked to an elaborate figurine representing the lion become a human-son-in-law. At the end of the final ceremony, he is invited to reveal his skills as a hunter, then he is presented with his rights and duties as a future husband (supplying salt, meat and fish; giving and maintaining clothes; felling trees; building up the framework of the house; sharing the cost of children's education...). Finally, he is present as a symbol, during the chicken sacrifice. According to Audrey Richards (1982: 107–109), at the end of the night rites, there starts the rite of the chicken sacrifice. The girl sits on a mat, she is given a chicken, whose head she will turn until it dies; a few hours later, it is eaten by the women and the young girl, served with a dish made of all the seeds used during the ritual. Audrey Richards' informants compare the chicken to the young husband, with whom his wife « plays » (understatement alluding to sexual intercourse) during the wedding night. The association of two songs addressed, one to the chicken, the other to the lion, corroborates the analogy

between lion and chicken and the danger associated with sexual intercourse after the girl's puberty. The clean water of the bath is linked with the water for cleaning the dead, as demonstrated by a tale (Dauphin-Tinturier, 1983: Annexes, 114–124) expounding both the conditions of a successful married life and the results of the excessive dominance of the woman over the man, through his castration. The castration is not a solution for the husband who will thereby refuse any responsibility, nor for the woman who will not have access to sexual pleasure, procreation and will remain incomplete, living, ahead of time, the life of an ancestor.

## 2.4 THE TRIAL « MARRIAGE »

At the end of the ritual, the fiancés are declared suitable for « marriage » and may have children, but they are not yet regarded as adults. The gift of a first meal by the mother-in-law to her son-in-law is one of the highlights of this phase; now the mother-in-law may openly cook for her son-in-law. It demonstrates her accession to the status of person in charge of a household, at the head of a future matrilineage.

The wedding night ritual (*ubwinga*) follows the initiation<sup>9</sup>. After some episodes, the newly-weds find themselves in the house built by the groom. The guests wait for one or the other of the newly-weds to go out: if the bride goes out first, the couple were not able to have three successive episodes of sexual intercourse and the groom is regarded as impotent; if the groom goes out first and throws embers, the marriage is consummated. After a bath in clean water, the couple comes back into the house where the paternal aunt gives her niece a little pot (*kanweno*), heats some water in it and shows her once more the gestures of the purification rite (which had been explained before during the initiation)<sup>10</sup>. If the rite is not performed after each bout of sexual intercourse, the participants cannot come closer to the fireplace without polluting it: any food cooked in these conditions is liable to causes diseases, delivery difficulties, or even deaths; the family runs the risk of *masho*: the child or the parents going mad (Labrecque, 1934: 72). It should be reiterated that the husband is treated as a « domestic lion » and the formidable energy he develops may only be overcome within the context of marriage. Adultery is perceived as inherently dangerous, because the purification rite may only be performed by two persons

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<sup>9</sup> Several descriptions exist: Garrec (1916: 80-81), Ragoen (1922), Labrecque (1934: 37-44), Richards (1940), Etienne (1950: 98-100). The personal conversation with a young woman during fieldwork conformed such descriptions.

<sup>10</sup> A few days earlier, the paternal aunt had gathered scrapings from her own pots, had mixed them up with clay and several medicinal plants to model a new pot fired as a kitchen utensil. This *kanweno* belongs to the young woman who must use it after each bout of sexual intercourse with her husband and who will, if the pot broke, model a new one with the scraps of the old one.



joined by the *ubwinga*. The killing of the chicken institutionalises an irrevocable break between the village world and the forest world; the purifying bath re-establishes the connection between the two worlds; while each act of sexual intercourse reintroduces the division, the *kanweno* rite reconnects them. The women act as priests and allow men to come into contact with Lesa during sexual intercourse, thanks to the mediation of women. The initial sacrifice, performed by a woman, fulfils the connection between her husband and Lesa.

The first pregnancy extends the initiation process. As from the fourth month, the foetus is treated as a living being. The delivery happens if possible outside the village, under the care of the mistress of initiation. When the mother and baby come back, once the fire of the children is lit, the young woman is declared an adult; her husband will wait until the third birth to become an adult.

Meanwhile, the young man finishes his education under the responsibility of his father-in-law. The couple work more and more for the young woman's mother. The parents-in-law regularly give their son-in-law presents to help him with his trial; the lack of such presents may cause the return of the young man to his home village. Besides, if the young man is considered lazy, the final decision concerning his dismissal is taken by his mother-in-law.

## 2.5 THE FINAL DECISION

The *kwingisha*, « bring into a house », is a private ritual which determines a new direction in the life of the couple. For the first time since he came to the village, the son-in-law comes into the house of his mother-in-law to eat with his father-in-law; now, the son-in-law may share a meal with older people (Labrecque, 1934: 56). The reciprocal prohibition to talk to each other is removed.

At that time, the couple decide their future life: husband and wife may leave the village or settle permanently; they may also decide to separate, in which case the husband leaves alone. The two lineages in some ways record the decision of the couple. If the couple persists, reinforced by further births, and if their personalities are strong enough and are recognised by other couples, they may earn a dominant position in the village. The wife may become a mistress of initiation once she has four living children, while her husband may consider regrouping around him some other couples, more or less related, to found a new village and become its chief. If the couple separates, any ensuing unions are tied and untied at the behest of the protagonists. It is enough for a woman to make it known to the village that she feeds a particular man and that they live together (no ritual marks a second marriage, the woman's word suffices). The woman retains the purifying function she gained during the *ubwinga* ; she may use it as she wishes, thus the appearance of a kind of polyandry (*nsangi*) misinterpreted by the missionaries as prostitution, whereas it is rather a succession of husbands. Polygyny causes in this respect more difficulties; the man may only be purified

by a second wife if he is given permission by his first wife during a specific ritual (Labrecque, 1934: 71–76)<sup>11</sup>.

### 3. ZAMBIA AND AIDS

During the twentieth century, the economic situation of the country has changed. At the time of its independence, Zambia was the second largest copper producer in the world. Yet, as the use of copper has decreased and as it was necessary to dig deeper and deeper, the mining companies lost their competitiveness. In 1998, the mines were sold and closed one after the other, causing significant unemployment<sup>12</sup>. Concurrently with this decrease in economic returns, the HIV epidemic has worsened the situation<sup>13</sup>. The epidemic has spread very fast; while the 1989 statistical data are concentrated on the capital city, no genuine investigation covers the country, and no data is provided to the relevant organizations<sup>14</sup>. The figures expressed at that time come from outside NGOs and their physicians who have tried to get a general idea of the scale of the epidemic<sup>15</sup>. But the families did not entertain any illusions; none are immune and the official line according to which there is no contagion is rejected, at least informally. Thus, in the villages, womens' groups wonder whether and how they may regain control over young people's sexuality.<sup>16</sup>

#### 3.1 THE RITUAL OF 1989

During the seventies, the initiation ritual was more and more denigrated and rejected by educated people; it was considered to have died out. In 1989, however, I could observe the performance of the ritual in a village from the Chingola region, near the place where Audrey Richards had observed the ritual in 1931. The final ceremony showed that the initiation was still existent, in the sense that the ritual structure and the lyrics were mostly retained, but the purpose had changed, as revealed by the new commentaries that accompanied the songs (Dauphin-Tinturier, 2003). Similarly, the trial marriage remained, but male domination diminished. The goal of the initiation focused on the notion of

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<sup>11</sup> Polygyny is rare and usually corresponds to secondary marriages of chiefs.

<sup>12</sup> The copper prices have since rebounded and the situation is not as difficult.

<sup>13</sup> Zambia is among the hardest hit countries; according to clinical observations from the seventies, one may speculate about the presence of HIV in a latent state.

<sup>14</sup> The only widely accepted figure was a sero-prevalence rate among the pregnant women of 20 % in Lusaka.

<sup>15</sup> The physicians of the bush hospital of Chilonga, who consistently test their patients without their knowledge, acknowledged a sero-prevalence rate of 50 %.

<sup>16</sup> On the topic of sentimental relationship, sexuality, and sexual diseases, see Cole and Thomas 2009 and McNeil 2011.

« good husband » (while the « bad husband » is dismissed) and on the acceptance of death (as a few AIDS cases are diagnosed).

### 3.2 THE CHEP AND OTHER PREVENTION PROJECTS

After years of complete silence, the disease was finally acknowledged and, in 1996, it was conceded that there was a significant prevalence among adults, yet the death toll was still underestimated<sup>17</sup>. Eventually, the officials ask for help both medically and in terms of prevention. Since children were also affected, UNICEF was among the first international organisations to generate projects including all dimensions of life, in order to ensure the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. The projects were devised first and foremost for the more urbanised areas, but should also be adapted to other parts of the territory. The most significant project (the CHEP), still active today, was established in Kitwe, in the « Copperbelt » province, populated by eighty percent of people native of Northern Zambia<sup>18</sup>. It was intended for children and adolescents as well as adults of both sexes. The activities proposed to the local people are typical of those commonly proposed by this kind of organisation, trying to be adaptable to all kinds of cultural background: the intervention consists of drawing or discussions following ball games for children and adolescents, while the adults are presented, during single gender meetings, with mimes and sketches accompanied with songs and dances, combined if possible with a common reflection on the issues under discussion. The recommended methods of approach include grouping volunteers by sex and age, around leader personalities. The teams are meant to relay a message to target groups composed of same sex and age individuals. No local language is favoured, but the primary participants must all understand English, so that they are able to more easily digest the theoretical data, usually written, conveyed to them in the course of training sessions, focusing mostly on venereal diseases prevention, the treatment of chronic and opportunistic diseases, and general health information.

The results of the CHEP programme as observed in 1998 were not yet significant as to the impact of the recommended approach. Regarding adults, the teams group mostly women; adult men seldom volunteer to intervene<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> In 1996, the declared sero prevalence was: 13 % in rural areas, 25 to 30 % in urban areas, including 33 % in Livingstone. Besides, in 1993, 6556 deaths were reported to the WHO, while at the same time, Uganda reported 33611 deaths and the nearby country of Malawi 22300.

<sup>18</sup> In its presentation leaflet, the CHEP introduces itself as a set of projects “to help people to break the vicious circle of poverty, ignorance and disease through the development of knowledge, values and life-skills that enable creativity, responsibility and healthy life-styles”. Indeed, it is involved in reducing tuberculosis, in the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS, and in medical follow-up for patients and their relatives, especially at a social level.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, in a Copperbelt town, the team involved in the project comprised a majority

Likewise, it was very difficult to reach girls, since their parents consistently forbid them to visit mixed groups. Yet, a higher HIV prevalence is found among young women than among young men. Part of this is that male adults seduce young women by offering them « a meal for sexual relations ». The project struggles with providing sex education to young people and especially girls (Dauphin-Tinturier, 2008), which is precisely what women carry out traditionally through initiation, thus there is a need for an analysis of their action, regarding their involvement within the project (designing and performing a series of mimed songs) as well as outside (resumption of the initiation ritual and adaptation to the project).

### 3.3 THE INITIATION IN 1998

My first observation relates to the creation of a team of women, from a nearby mining town (Chilabombwe), on the border of the former Zaïre and mostly populated by *Bemba* people, who performed a short play composed of a group of ten songs.<sup>20</sup> The team was set up around the presence of three mistresses of initiation, associated with two drummers and a few other women in variable numbers (eight at the time of the recording, November the 12th, 1998, in Chilabombwe). Most of the time, they performed during casual womens' meetings, but very fast, seeing how difficult it was to reach young people, they decided to perform in high schools, and even once in a confirmation class at the Catholic mission.

The performance (see detailed description in Dauphin-Tinturier, 2005) comprises ten short songs, taken from the traditional repertoire (initiation, marriage, funeral) or composed on request according to the classical structure of the initiation songs (a mistress of initiation starts singing, then the other participants sing along, use of specific mimes and dances etc.); each song is accompanied by explanations understandable by girls as well as boys, with an invention comparable to the work of the mistress of initiation. The performance is shrouded in an « ambiance of initiation », which constitutes a significant responsibility for the women group. The songs, dependent on one another, raise the issue of girls' education, faced with the threat posed by the virus. The first four songs reflect the difficulties related to the new social forms of behaviour: the stone (complaint of a young girl who feels alone, directed at her mother instead of her father, as per the tradition); the bass (the mother's answer who recognises that she is unable to take care of her daughter, but who questions the women's community, in the modern world); the stranger (the women's answer who remind her about the goals of life and the role of men in the village,

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of women, a few high school adolescents and one man.

<sup>20</sup> Although I observed the CHEP programme in 1998, my participation to the initiation ritual was independent from it.

speaking now to boys); *nacisebele* – the call (traditional initiation song raising the issue of prostitution). The three following songs describe the disease and the impossibility to find the necessary drug: the genitals (song accompanied with a mime of sexual intercourse); the disease (consequence of the intercourse); the impossible treatment (lack of drug). Finally, the last three songs expound the consequences of these behaviours on life and society: the hen – destruction (initiation song that appears nowadays in the new variants of the ritual, talking about death and the inability to have children); the dead husband (wedding song expressing the end of marriage); the lover (after the end of the traditional marriage, the succession of lovers is not a solution).

Some simple patterns of the initiation retain their significance. Thus, the « stone » represents the sexual difficulties, initially marital, encountered during a lifetime, the « path » represents its evolution and the « hunt » represents the separation from the husband; as for the song about *nacisebele*, the performance is focused on prostitution. At other times, the patterns get more complex and play on possible ambiguities. The genitals, for example, appear in various forms. Associated with the « stranger », avatar of the husband, who needs feeding, they are represented in their positive aspect of « stomach »; associated with the dominated figure of the husband, they are represented in the form of the « egg », that is destroyed; associated with the disease, there is no more representation. New patterns are therefore created and included in the traditional layouts. Thus, « be in the yard » is opposed to « be on the path » and expresses the inability for the mother to take care of her daughter, as per the tradition.

During initiation, the mistress of initiation speaks to the fiancés; likewise, the womens' group now intends to speak to boys, and this in a place that recalls the sacred context, to ensure the effectiveness of the speech. The initiation brought up the problems of a monogamous sexuality, in accordance with the traditional purity norms; while it was restrictive, the problems could always be solved in the context of the village. In the present case, the information is such that at least women now know how the virus is transmitted and how to protect themselves. So, they find themselves obliged to caution young people, and even to oppose a high sexual permissiveness as long as there remains a doubt concerning the behaviour of the potential partner. Moreover, they aim to give a sense of responsibility to the young women faced with the irresponsibility of male adults, who have rarely been reached by the UNICEF programme; thus, women groups also intervened more and more in bars.

### 3.4 THE RESURGENCE OF INITIATION

In parallel, in the « township » of Kwacha, in Kitwe (Copperbelt), a few mistresses of initiation started to rethink the project and to take advantage of the initiation ritual to reach girls. During three months, the mistresses organized a weekly teaching session pertaining to health, clothing, respect for adults, life

issues etc. and the final ceremony, which I was able to observe, ended this long process summarising all that was said during the preparation. The girls (four identifying as *Bemba* and one as *Ngoni*) had each lost their father due to AIDS (one had also lost her mother). The mistresses of initiation tried to convey a message rather than reproducing formal rites (framework of the *Bemba* ritual combined with a few songs in *Ngoni*). For example, they introduced a fictitious paternal aunt responsible for feeding, with simple meals (maize flour), as well as symbolical food (fish and meat, always offered by the paternal family) or festive sweets. Some thirty people were present during the whole ritual (19 hours). The other objects demanded (mat, loin cloths and soaps) occurred in the purification rites and attested to the ability of the paternal aunt to play the role of the « prayer builder » for her niece.

A close observation of the final ceremony revealed to me that the significance of the ritual has been entirely reshaped. Some « *mbusa* » are retained, often accompanied by the same songs, but with different commentaries on the importance of the family, the relationship with the ancestors, self-transcendence, the necessity to remain faithful, the importance of work, the acceptance of suffering and even of complete annihilation. Some rites were removed, such as the production of the husband-animal and the rites allowing the mother to feed her son-in-law or those related to the trial marriage. New rites were created, such as one for the new mistress of initiation, when she helped the girls to integrate the hierarchy of women, based on assistance rather than on supremacy; another rite which demonstrated the risk associated with erogenous zones during the forest rites; and another one in the initiation house on the realisation that no knowledge is conclusive. New symbols appear to be in direct relation with AIDS: an elephant represents the virus, revisiting an old representation of death caused by an epidemic, and the ritual includes funeral songs. A new speech, given in a small group, concentrates on the search for a husband and the danger of AIDS. The chicken rite is different from the 1931 description and it does not imply the same leeway in the young woman's love life. In the 1998 ritual the young woman did not kill the chicken. It was the mistress of initiation who killed the chicken, thus sharing the responsibility with the young woman, and retaining a supervision role regarding the young woman's love life. In 1931, the fiancé was imposed on the girl, but she was free to act with him as she wished, while now the young woman may choose her lover. Another relevant difference is that the extended family has mostly disappeared. However, it must be replaced; the girls are therefore introduced to a hierarchy of women, which integrates them into a complete system of living and dead generations which creates safeguards to protect them against an excessive sexual permissiveness as long as there remains a doubt concerning the behaviour of the potential partner. The goal is to give the young women a sense of responsibility when faced with the irresponsibility of male adults, in other words, to teach them, as in the new initiation ritual, how to « say no ».

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In the conclusion, I present some observations concerning the differences between the rituals described in the 1930's and those that I could attend myself. However, it is important to consider that whichever is the observed ritual, it appears as a unique entity, composed by the mistress of initiation through the choice of different *mbusa* and their presentation in a given order, that expresses a significance consistent with the cultural context of the time. Victor Turner compares it to a dramatic performance; it is indeed a form of variable play, a framework wherein *mbusa* are introduced in a way akin to the *comedia del arte*.<sup>21</sup>

In 1931, the *Bemba* chieftanship was still significant and the traditional distribution of genders was crucial. The mistress of initiation wanted to ensure that the daughter of her brother, one of the initiated girls, would become a woman successfully integrated in the chieftanship; thus she emphasised the duties of respect and obedience to men and chiefs. Indeed, Audrey Richards, from within the colonial system, distinguishes barely the husband from the chief. The man raises his sons and, after his daughters' puberty, his sons-in-law, while his sister, who offers chicken for sacrifice and *kanweno* for the purification rite, allows her nieces to access sexual activity and procreation, while controlling for adultery. In this way, the following generation (the nieces) get authority over impurity matters as long as there is no adultery. Retaining this authority is well worth asserting obedience to men.

In 1989, the situation had deeply changed. The « tribe » chief role had lost its significance, the actual authority was held by the one-party state. The women from Kopa got organised for survival in rural areas, and would not let their husbands spend the money required for sending children to school, so they dismissed them and were very critical of the choice of an husband. The husbands were still present, but they had fallen from their perch. Furthermore, since the diffusion of AIDS, women could observe the connection between sexuality and death; their initial answer was limited, even derisory compared to the scale of the problem, but they were the first to speak out and to raise the issue of its awareness. With this action, they revived their authority over sexuality.

In 1998, the observed initiation complements the project from UNICEF. The observed changes reveal the women's ability to assume responsibility and evolve, to learn and communicate new knowledge in accordance with traditional codes. The man is viewed as redoubtable and the husband issue is only tackled in the final speech, to be reduced to a joint choice by the women, with a duty to control the health of the potential husband. The chicken ritual is entirely supervised by the mistresses of initiation, who may reserve the right to allow or temporarily forbid access to sexuality. The process of exchange of lineages is no

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<sup>21</sup> Turner 1972: 300-303.

longer under discussion, where one generation prepares the following; for the women to survive, the process is temporarily stopped.

According to the myth, women have introduced death in the world, but – as the initiation rite shows – they drew the consequences in assuming responsibility for it, attempting to delay it, and, where that was impossible, accepting it. The attitude of the mistresses of initiation and the young initiated women shows how well they know how to adapt to new situations and to create hope for a better life.

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