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THE ROCK ART OF CHINAMWALI: *material culture and girls' initiation in south-central Africa*

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Science, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Johannesburg, 2009

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own, unaided work unless otherwise acknowledge or referenced. It is being submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

(Signature of the Candidate)

15TH day of OCTOBER 2009

Abstract

In this thesis I examine the material culture of initiation in central Malaŵi, eastern Zambia and central-western Mozambique.

The White Spread-eagled tradition is a rock art tradition that has been linked to the Chewa girls' initiation ceremony: *Chinamwali*. Women no longer paint as part of the initiation but they continue to make other objects that they use as mnemonic devices in this ceremony. I explore the parallels between these objects and the paintings, based on ethnographic accounts and data collected in my fieldwork.

Rock paintings are interpreted in this study as part of a range of material culture that had a specific purpose: to create a dynamic cognitive process with which the initiate learnt the important rules of society. I explore how the material culture of initiation is used to help in the recall of instructions alongside the intangible aspects of the ceremony such as songs, dances and music.

I explore the ways in which the objects are created, used and disposed of, in the light of memory and secrecy. I discuss various aspects of the use of symbolism in the context of initiation. Lastly, I explore why the women choose particular images as symbolic carriers of the instructions based on their perceptions of the animal world, the woodland and the village.

Dedication

I have met many people in the past four years who have made an impact on the way I view life, thus, it is difficult to dedicate this work to a specific person. I have been very privileged in this land and I have experienced amazing and intense moments on the African continent, especially during my fieldwork. Many people helped me in this journey and without their help I would not have been able to enjoy my PhD as much as I have. I dedicate this work to all those people who received me in their homes in Malaŵi, Zambia and Mozambique. I felt very welcomed and I treasure the interest they all expressed in my research and the time they took to explain different aspects of their culture to me. Thanks all of you for allowing me to learn from you.

My family has been extremely supportive and although I have not seen them as much as I would have liked to, I feel their love all the time. Most especially this thesis is dedicated to Mamá, Papá y hermanito.

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Some of the pictures that I used for this thesis were taken from the South African Rock Art Digital Archive (SARADA) website http://www.sarada.co.za that is part of the Rock Art Research Institute (RARI). I also thank Hans-Georg Michna allowed me to use his genet cat picture from his website http://www.michna.com/kenya2005. I want to thank JSTOR http://www.jstor.org for making my life easier because many old materials are available now on the internet and in convenient PDF file format. I am grateful to SULB Fotostelle

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Chapter One: Introduction

The White Spread-eagled tradition: implications

This thesis is a study of the White Spread-eagled rock art tradition of south-central Africa: eastern Zambia, central-western Mozambique and central Malawi. Although I shall discuss this tradition in more detail in the next chapter, I think that it is important for the reader to have a basic understanding of why this tradition is named as it is. This label was first formally given by Benjamin Smith (1997) to a set of finger painted images that appear together but, in which, the most prominent figure resembles a stretched animal hide seen from above. Thus the name: the spread-eagled design (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Spread-eagled design

The body of these motifs generally runs vertically, often with various protrusions from its head (Lindgren & Schoffeleers 1978) and with an extension from the bottom that appears to be a tail. These characteristics have led researchers to suggest that spread-eagled motifs depict subjects such as chameleons, lizards, genet cats and tortoises (*e.g.*, Schoffeleers 1978; Smith 1995). This design is almost always accompanied by snake-like motifs and other geometric designs such as circles, stars-like and lines of dots. The primary colour used is white, but black and red was sometimes also used. Often, the spread-eagled design's body is covered with dots (Clark 1973; Smith 1995, 1997; Zubieta 2006). There is a distinctive distribution of use of dots: In Dedza District, central Malawi, and Macanga District, Mozambique the dots that cover the body are usually black, whereas in eastern Zambia white dots are most commonly used to fill in the body. None the less, regardless of their specific regional attributes, the spread-eagled designs account for over two-thirds of the images in the White Spread-eagled tradition in the Dedza area and eastern Zambia (Smith 1995). Spread-eagled designs have been found in massive

superimpositioned sequences (*e.g.*, Chentcherere and Chongoni, central Malawi and Campala, Mozambique).

The White Spread-eagled tradition is fairly recent and perhaps one of the last painted traditions in sub-saharan Africa. In Zambia, for example, Jim Chaplin recorded that one of the zoomorphic figures at Sakwe A rock shelter received a "new coat of clayey buff paint shortly before his visit in 1958" (Phillipson 1976:186). Chaplin was, however, not present when this new coat was given; thus the context (*e.g.*, activities, interactions) in which the clayey buff paint was added to the original image is unknown. However, the importance of Chaplin's record is that it records the practice of painting in rockshleters and shows that it was still present in the middle of the 20th century.

This tradition has been linked by early researchers to girls' initiation ceremonies (Phillipson 1976; Lindgren & Schoffeleers 1978; Prins & Hall 1994; Smith 1995, 1997; Zubieta 2006). David Phillipson (1976:183), for example, was told by his male Ngoni informants that some of the paintings in Thandwe rockshelter (Figure 2) were related to the Nsenga women; but they could not give more precise information on the paintings because women's issues are secret: men are not allowed to know about them.



Figure 2. Thandwe shelter, north–west facing rock wall, eastern Zambia (after Phillipson 1976:fig 124).

Thus, although the informants have indicated to archaeologists that these paintings are related to women and their ceremonies, the meanings of and present knowledge about the paintings have been strictly guarded by women. Thus male researchers have had access to only vague and fragmented information. Based on archaeological evidence and ethnographic and historical accounts, this painted tradition was made by the ancestors of the people we know today as the Chewa for the purpose of their girls' initiation ceremony *Chinamwali* (Metcalfe 1956; Clark 1959a; Chaplin 1962; Phillipson 1976; Lindgren & Schoffeleers 1978; Juwayeyi & Phiri 1992; Smith 1995, 1997; Zubieta 2006; Chapter 2).

Given the recent date and known link of these paintings to initiation ceremonies, this is a rock art tradition for which we should be able to gain a uniquely detailed understanding of how it functioned in society. However, there are different facts that make such an objective complex and difficult to achieve. These difficulties and their solutions are discussed in the following chapters and, by the end this thesis, I seek to present a comprehensive understanding about the White Spread-eagled rock art tradition.

Rock paintings are no longer made today but similar designs are still moulded out of clay and used in modern ceremonies throughout the Chewa realm. Anthropologists have described this kind of material culture related to initiation for the last hundred years and some of the Chewa's neighbours in south-central Africa, such as Bemba and Yao speakers have been the subject of intense anthropological research. This work has provided a good understanding of the importance of material culture for the performance of initiation ceremonies in this region (*e.g.*, Richards 1956; Rasing 2001 for Bemba people).

The use of clay figurines and wall paintings in initiation schools is a well-known practice in south-central Africa. They are used to instruct the initiates in secrets and traditions (*e.g.*, Cory 1953, 1956). Today there is no certainty that the Chewa employ paintings during *Chinamwali* girls' initiation ceremony; however, the formal similarities between the White Spread-eagled tradition and the material culture

employed in this ceremony have led researchers to establish some possible uses of and meanings for this rock art tradition (Phillipson 1976; Lindgren & Schoffeleers 1978; Prins & Hall 1994; Smith 1995, 1997; Zubieta 2006).

Although it is known that wall paintings and a diverse set of objects are used for initiation ceremonies there has been hardly any archaeological or anthropological work amongst the Chewa on the use of what I will term the material culture of initiation (MCI); most of the literature vaguely describes the attributes of such material culture and gives as a fact their role as mnemonic devices (*e.g.*, Lancaster 1934; Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965; Yoshida 1992; Smith 1995), but no detailed explanation has been given as to how these mnemonic devices operate during specific ceremonies — how and what they represent and how they are used.

In this research I will therefore draw specifically on this material culture of initiation (objects and images) of *Chinamwali* girl's ceremonies to explore how the MCI operate in society. The present MCI in this research is a means by which I explain and suggest the possible uses and meanings of some of the paintings that comprise the White Spread-eagled tradition; more specifically the spread-eagled design.

Moreover, I acknowledge in this research that both the MCI and this rock painting tradition have not been static in time; through the different layers of superimpositions in some shelters, for example, we have come to recognize a temporal sequence in rock painting depiction (see Phillipson 1969, 1972a). Smith (1995:223) notes that "more complex examples give the suggestion of being later in date". Various groups settled in this area thus material culture and the rock paintings might have changed due to interactions between groups or due to internal development. These changes did not occur at the same time throughout the area of research but they took place in different phases and thus their reconstruction is essential to understanding change and variation in the images. The complexity and difficulty of recognizing change through time are discussed in the following chapter.

Many of the descriptions and studies of MCI done in the last century in south-central Africa are contemporary with the last record of the making of the White Spread-eagled tradition paintings. Thus, this is a rare archaeological case where the anthropological records are of direct relevance to rock art, as we know that the practice of painting was still performed until recently by people with a very similar indigenous knowledge system to the painters. This relative chronological proximity between the archaeological evidence and the anthropological accounts allows us confidence in connecting the two so as to understand the role played by rock paintings during initiation ceremonies in the past. Moreover, these combined sources can allow us to gain a detailed understanding of the last White Spread-eagled tradition paintings and perhaps to explain why the tradition stopped in the area of research.

Objectives

This research seeks to understand the production and consumption of White Spread-eagled tradition rock art through reference to relevant recorded uses of MCI over the last hundred years by previous researchers and from first hand data from my own fieldwork.

This research is concerned with the role that the paintings played during the initiation ceremonies. The role of this painted tradition has been assumed because of their resemblance to modern initiation material culture: they both portray noticeably similar attributes such as shape and colour. Consequently, the role of the paintings has been assumed to follow the function of the present MCI and yet this has been done with only a very superficial understanding of Chewa MCI. There has been no publication specifically related to Chewa MCI. I argue, therefore, that to penetrate the function and symbolism of the rock art we must have a more thorough understanding of the use and role of the MCI in Chewa society.

In the present, we have a good understanding from the literature of the uses and meanings of the MCI by groups surrounding the Chewa: we have a sense of the shapes and the songs that go with those shapes. The combination of objects (images) and songs (words) play an important role in the learning process within girls'

ceremonies. Thus I make use of cognitive sciences to understand the ways the material culture helps memory and knowledge to intertwine during *Chinamwali*. Cognition is seen as a result of the interaction between humans and external devices (Hutchins 1995) thus allowing an approach in this study of mnemonic devices and their relationship with people in light of a cognitive theoretical framework.

We have also come to understand that the MCI works in sets: the association of objects communicate specific instructions; thus understanding the present associations provides hints into the past meanings and uses of MCI. Associations of motifs have also been noted in the White Spread-eagled tradition. It has been mentioned earlier that this tradition not only comprises spread-eagled designs, but that it is associated to circles, snake-like motifs, star-like motifs, lines of dots and so on. Phillipson (1976) and Smith (1995) reported that, sometimes, a divided circle accompanies the spread-eagled design and that full circles usually accompany snake-like forms.

Some aspects, such as temporal relations, memory, secrecy and the formal characteristics of the MCI are incorporated in order to explore the links between images and objects. Moreover, because of the nature of the *Chinamwali* ceremony and the uses of MCI; my study will incorporate different aspects such as gender roles (*e.g.,* Conkey & Spector 1984; Gilchrist 1991) and body perceptions (*e.g.*, Meskell 1996, 1998, 1999; Turner 1996; Synott 1993) to situate such aspects within women's knowledge.

The knowledge and meaning behind the practice of the girls' initiation ceremony, is situated also in a particular social and cultural context. Situated knowledges[1] caution us to be aware of how knowledge is produced: "contextualizing knowledge production involves considerations of gender, race, ethnicity, class, location etc." (Engelstad & Gerrard 2005:3). The use of this concept for this study

[1] Dona Harraway (1988, 1991) proposed this concept, originally, to talk about feminist perspectives in science and technosciences. 'Situated knowledges', in the last decade, has been adopted by social scientists (see Engelstad & Gerrard 2005 on the practicalities of the usage of this concept in social sciences).

will help to break down boundaries between different aspects of the research (natural, cultural, social, cognitive etc.) and will allow a more fluid and flexible communication between the different spheres that I will discuss.

Rationale

The White Spread-eagled tradition has been related to the girls' initiation ceremonies of the ancestors of the Chewa people (Phillipson 1976; Lindgren & Schoffeleers 1978; Prins & Hall 1994; Smith 1995, 1997; Zubieta 2006). This is an art exclusively associated with women and women's practices, issues and concerns making it highly significant as it reflects on a specifically gendered knowledge system. However, we have not yet fully understood the roles that this art played during initiation.

An exceptional aspect of this rock painting tradition is that some Chewa women inherited stories about the meanings of the images in the research area (*e.g.*, central Malawi; Zubieta 2006). Local knowledge, nevertheless, is changing rapidly and people are adapting to new circumstances (*e.g.*, Christianity, urbanization). This is the time to record what remains of the material culture related to initiation as this can give us a better clue as to understanding the art of many generations of women in south central Africa.

Chapter Two: South-central Africa: the area of research

Setting

The study area for my research is divided between three countries: Central Malawi, the central-western portion of Mozambique and eastern Zambia (Table 1).

Table 1. Main districts, cities, towns and villages visited during my fieldwork.

Country	Province/ Region	District	Principal towns/villages visited
Malawi	Central Region	Dedza	Dedza, Chipazi, Mpalale, Dzololo, Chinkonda, Kadule, Namkumba, Chamadenga, Mkopoka, Mkoto, Mwanzimba, Mkwanda, Mnjere, Tambwandira
		Lilongwe	Lilongwe, Bunda, Khombe
Mozambique	Tete Province	Macanga	Furancungo, Chincumba, Kambedza, Kachere, Chiomba
		Chifunde	Bene
		Maravia	Fingoe, Kachombo
Zambia	Eastern Province	Chipata	Chipata, Masinja
		Chadiza	Kaliza, Chimtanda, Mbangombe, Chitobwa
		Katete	Katete
		Petauke	Sinda, Chipala, Sewakesala
	Northern Province	Mbala	Mbala
	Lusaka Province		Lusaka

The White Spread-eagled tradition is located in the central region of Malawi, the Tete Province of Mozambique and the Eastern Province of Zambia, and it follows the extent of the ancestors of people we know today as Chewa.

The regional ecosystem, in general terms, is comprised of valleys with grasslands where hills protrude from the undulating plain interspersed with rivers that nurture the valleys during the wetter seasons of the year, making them highly valuable for the agriculture and economy of these countries. The rainfall in most of the plateau in which the Chewa live is moderate (800 – 1000 millimetres) but in some areas in Mozambique the rainfall can reach more than 1500 millimetres per year (Langworthy 1969:4).

The main characteristic of the research area relevant to this project is that the rock painting distribution follows the High Altitude Hill Zones above 1600m such as the Ngurunguru and Nyamfinzi Hills in Zambia, the Tete and Angonia Highlands in Mozambique (*e.g.*, Kaplan 1984:77) and the Dedza and Chongoni mountains in central Malawi (*e.g.*, Brown & Young 1965:5). Higher ground gets more rain and is thus better watered than other areas. This, in turn, makes it more suitable for agriculture.

Three important rivers flow in the research area (Figure 3):

1. The Zambezi River, one of the longest rivers in south-central Africa, enters Zambia from the west to form the border between Zambia, Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe. Then, the Zambezi runs into west Mozambique close to the small port of Zumbo (Jarret 1966:312) and then flows into southern Mozambique.

2. The Luangwa River, from its source in north-east Zambia, flows 800 km south-southwest. It occupies a deep fault channel in the Eastern Province of Zambia and merges with the Zambezi River in the Luangwa town, in the Lusaka Province of Zambia. East and south-east of the Luangwa River the ground elevates to form the rift valley highlands in Malawi and the Angonia Plateau along the Mozambican border.

3. Running out from the southern end of Lake Malawi, and flowing approximately 400km southwest-south, the Shire River joins the Zambezi in central Mozambique.

The south-central African climate is broadly tropical, but three overall periods can be recognised: 1) **hot season** that runs from September till November; 2) **rainy season** that follows from November to April and 3) **cold season** that extends from May to August (Jarret 1966; Coysh & Tomlinson 1970).

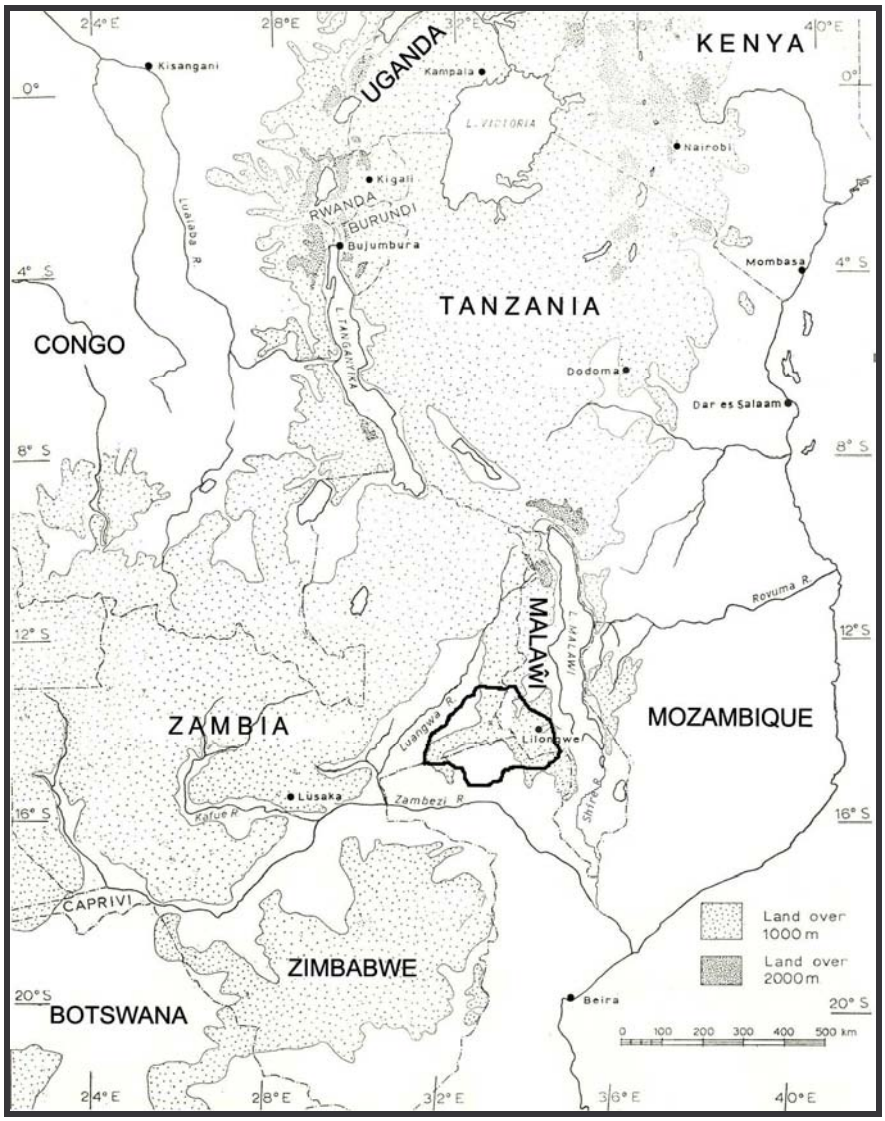


Figure 3. South-central Africa map showing research area (after Phillipson 1976:fig 1).

The vegetation varies with altitude; however *Brachystegia* 'miombo' woodland and savannah grasslands characterize the region (Topham 1952). The fauna has changed through time; traditionally the region was home to various kinds of antelope (kudu, duiker, bushbuck, waterbuck, reedbuck, eland, sable), and hartebeest, buffalo, rhinoceros and zebra (Angus 1898b; Shorter 1989). Elephants were found in many areas up to a hundred years ago (Hubbard 1928; Langworthy 1969), and were crucial for the extensive ivory trade that took place between the Indian Ocean and south-central Africa. Baboons, hyenas and monkeys are still found nowadays and leopards and lions were important also for their magical properties and the skins were given to the chiefs. Even today, the Gawa Undi (the King of the Chewa people) sits on top of a lion and a leopard skin and ivory tusks (Figure 4). Some of the historical accounts (*e.g.*, Gamitto 1960) note the presence of all the above mentioned animals and the absence of others such as the giraffe.



Figure 4. Gawa Undi of the Chewa at the Kulamba Ceremony, a revival of a ceremony that was banned in the 1930s (see Chapter 2: Last two centuries), Katete, eastern Zambia2007. Note the lion and leopard heads and the elephant tusk.

Historical background

The ancestors of the Chewa people

Maxwell Marwick in his study of the history and tradition of south-central Africa wrote: "my excuse for presenting this summary of Cewa tradition and history is that the Cewa are a numerous and important people" (1963:375). Indeed, the Chewa make up two-thirds of the "Nyanja-speaking" population; the other groups are the Nyasa, Mang'anja, Ntumba and Mbo (*ibid*.:377).

My 'excuse', however, is different. My interest lies in the fact that the original painters of the White Spread-eagled tradition were the ancestors of the Chewa-Nyanja speaking peoples of Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique. Thus in this section I provide an historical background for the Chewa-Nyanja speakers and neighbouring groups.

The modern distribution of the Chewa-Nyanja speakers covers central Malawi, the central-western portion of Mozambique and eastern Zambia. The term Chewa, as I use it, is a general term that refers to a group of matrilineal people that nowadays live in a specific geographical region, speak the same language and have similar customs. However, I explain below how this term came to be and how it is understood for the purpose of this research.

Language is an important part of how identity is defined. According to Michael Mann and David Dalby (1987) "differences of language are one of the means by which a people asserts its separate identity; even clans or lineages representing subdivisions of a people may cultivate small differences of speech between themselves and members of other lineages in order to emphasise their identity" (Mann & Dalby 1987:1). This is not different for the Chewa-Nyanja speakers who consider language as one of the features that identify themselves from neighbouring groups.

In the area of research, all indigenous languages belong to what has been termed "the Bantu language family". The basic unity of this language was suspected

as early as the 17th century by the Portuguese and later by the British in the 18th century" (Alexandre 1972:12). It is now known that the Bantu language family has, in the present, over 240 million speakers in 27 countries. These communities live "south of a line from Nigeria across the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC: formerly Zaire), Uganda and Kenya, to southern Somalia in the east" (Nurse & Philippson 2003:1). Some authors, such as Malcolm Guthrie (1948) from London, have suggested the origins of these languages; the "Bantu ancestors left the Chad-Cameroonian confines and followed the valleys of the Logone, Chari, Sangha, and the Congo to install themselves at the sources of the Congo, near lake Mweru" (Alexandre 1972:70). This is known as the Niger-Congo area and the Bantu languages are one of the groups that originated from there.

After three thousand years ago, the Bantu language speakers split into western and eastern branches and each group expanded both eastwards and southwards (Alexandre 1972). It is known that the western branch shows higher diversity than the eastern group (Phillipson 2005:262).

Many systems have been employed for the classification of the eastern and western Bantu-languages (*e.g.*, Greenberg 1963; Guthrie 1967-71; Fivas & Scott 1977; Mann & Dalby 1987; Nurse & Philippson 2003). Current classifications (*e.g.*, Nurse & Philippson 2003) have divided Bantu-speaking Africa into 16 zones (A,B,C,D,E, F,G, H,J, K, L, M,N,P,R. S), which in turn divide into decades (*e.g.*, A10, A20, A30, B10, 20) that represent a group of languages. Specific languages within each group take a consecutive number within the group (*e.g.*, A11, A12, A13, and so on). This system is based on Malcolm Guthrie's system (Nurse & Philippson 2003: Chapter 31).

The Bantu languages of south-central Africa, pertinent to this study, are classified and grouped according to the following table:

***Table 2*.** Languages pertinent to the research followed by the country in which they are spoken (after Smith 1995:45; Kashoki & Mann 1978:table 2.2 and table 2.4; Mann & Dalby 1987).

1. Nyakuyusa (Tanzania), Ngonde (Malaŵi).
2. Lungu (Tanzania, Zambia), Mambwe (Tanzania, Zambia), Nyiha (Tanzania, Zambia), Iwa (Zambia), Lambya (Malaŵi), Tambo (Zambia).
3. Senga (Zambia), Tumbuka (Zambia, Malaŵi), Yombe (Zambia, Malaŵi), Tonga (Zambia, Malaŵi), Sisya (Malaŵi), eastern Bisa (Zambia).
4. Bemba (Zambia, DRC), Tabwa (DRC, Zambia), Shila (Zambia, DRC), Lunda (Zambia), Chishinga (Zambia), Ng'umbo (Zambia), northern Bisa (Zambia), Lamba (Zambia, DRC), Aushi (Zambia, DRC), Kabende (Zambia), Lala (Zambia, DRC), Unga (Zambia), Ambo (Zambia).
5. Nyanja (Malaŵi, Zambia, Mozambique), Chewa (Malaŵi, Zambia, Mozambique), Mang'anja (Malaŵi), Nsenga (Zambia, Mozambique), Kunda (Zambia), Sena (Mozambique), Rue (Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Malaŵi), southern Bisa (Zambia).
6. Makua (Mozambique, Tanzania, Malaŵi), Lomwe (Mozambique, Tanzania, Malaŵi), Lolo (Mozambique, Tanzania, Malaŵi).
7. Yao (Tanzania, Mozambique, Malaŵi), southern Makonde (Mozambique, Comoros).
8. Ngoni (Tanzania)

From these groups, Mubanga Kashoki (1978) states that 1, 2 and 3 have some similarities and are related to eastern Bantu-language groups. Groups 4 and 5 are from the western Bantu group and are closely related and Nsenga more properly would be between 4 and 5. Groups 6 and 7 are related and broadly similar to 4 and 5, and related to other western Bantu-language groups. Group 8 is no longer spoken in the area of research as the Ngoni have adopted the language of the people they conquered such as the Nsenga and the Chewa. Ngoni survives as a language in Tanzania. Thus, the Chewa and related groups discussed in this research are clearly part of the western Bantu-language speaking branch and extremely historically closely related.

While I was working in Mozambique in July 2005 a Chewa friend from Malaŵi said to me: "the Chewa are Chewa here (Mozambique) and in Malaŵi; it is the same" thus I thought, at that time, that the overall feeling for Chewa people was of belonging

to the same group despite the current political boundaries and language has played an important factor in shaping their identity. A year later, however, when I was working in central Malaŵi in September 2006, the people that I met in Lilongwe District told me that *they* were the real Cheŵa: "this is the heartland of the Cheŵa, not like the hybrids that you met in Dedza". Then in 2007 when I met people in Katete in eastern Zambia, they told me that I had come to the real Cheŵa area because the Gawa Undi was staying there. I realized then that Cheŵa people have also internal divisions and different perceptions of other Cheŵa people throughout the region.

In modern ethnographic literature these divisions amongst the Cheŵa population have been addressed. For example in 1963 Maxwell Marwick published a paper based on his fourteen months of fieldwork from 1946-1953 in Zambia. He wrote that there were three different groups of Cheŵa: Two of them located in the then Fort Jameson District (now Chipata District) and the third one in Lundazi District. The difference between these groups according to him was the 'loyalty' they practised for the Paramount Chief Undi; however he stated that:

> For convenience, I refer to the people I studied as 'the Northern Rhodesian Ceŵa', especially since my few visits to areas outside Kaŵaza's chiefdom left me with the impression that the differences between his people and other Northern Rhodesian Ceŵa are not fundamental (Marwick 1965:19).

All Cheŵa people, whatever their differences, share important things in common: they have *Chinamwali* girls' initiation ceremonies and *Nyau*. The latter is a closed association strictly for men that involves masked dancing (Rangeley 1949; Yoshida 1992; Smith 2001:190). The masks, which portray ancestors and animals, perform at dances during the funerals and the girls' initiation ceremonies and these are known as *Gule Wamkulu*; the big dance. These reasons are perhaps why my Malaŵian friend, while in Mozambique, said "we are all the same". Kings Phiri (1975:89) has pointed out three ways in which the Cheŵa people distinguish

themselves from their neighbours: their language, their special tattoo marks called *ndembo*[2] and their *Nyau* association.

However, despite the convenience of addressing the similarities between people who called themselves with the same name, I suggest that acknowledging internal divisions within the Chewa can help us to explain regional variations in the way ceremonies are performed. Such a suggestion follows from the knowledge that the Chewa have been in a constant state of change caused by internal factors and by interaction with other populations.

Although interaction has happened for centuries between the Chewa and other populations, it is in the last two centuries that we can see how Chewa groups were forced to move or to make alliances with other groups and thus to change and transform their traditional practices in various ways. However, this does not mean that before the 19th century the ancestors of the Chewa were a homogenous group.

The Chewa distribution has changed through time for a number of reasons, such as political disruptions, wars, environmental changes and so on. This movement has inevitably had an impact upon society because people react, reject or absorb traits from others with whom they interact. To understand these interaction processes it is important to combine archaeology and history so as to visualize Chewa settlement, mobility and interactions in the landscape through time.

In this section I provide various maps to show the distribution of Chewa and neighbouring groups through time. This understanding is important so that we can explore the borrowing/adoption of certain cultural traits between various populations. Thus, an analysis of the historical background will allow us to explore the internal developments and outside influences that have impacted on different aspects of Chewa culture.

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[2] J. Bruwer (1949:164) mentions that *ndembo* are the scarifications marks on the face. He recorded a song when the initiate proceeds to the open space of the village in which these scarifications are mentioned and the beauty of the initiate is praised. Gamitto (1960) also mentions the scarifications but with the name of *nembo* that also means paintings. He describes the ones of the Maravi looking like stars.

In particular, my aim is to explore the ways the Chewa have been influenced by internal and external processes specifically connected to their ritual performances: their girls' initiation ceremony. However, this is not possible without understanding the religious institutions within Chewa society and their early history.

During the course of Chewa history there are various groups such as the Nsenga, Bemba, Yao and Ngoni whose influence has been recorded in various degrees. The first two groups for example are matrilineal and also have girls' initiation ceremonies and through the course of history it is possible that they adopted, modified or influenced Chewa rituals. On the other hand, some Yao and Ngoni have adopted aspects of the Chewa girls' initiation ceremonies. Ngoni people, being patrilineal and having arrived during the 19th century, adopted the girls' initiation from Chewa people. These are a few examples to demonstrate the variability and multi-directionality of Chewa influence.

Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique have gone through their own particular historical events, circumstances and processes, and the degree of interaction between various populations has been different. Chewa people interacted with some groups but not others; for example the ancestors of the Chewa people interacted more with the Bemba people in Zambia that they did in central Malawi because the Bemba are confined to Northern Zambia. Thus, alliances, interactions and confrontations between Chewa and other groups have been diverse in these three countries according to their own social, historical and economical circumstances. The pertinent question, for this research, is how and in what degree such interactions had an impact on Chewa girl's initiation performance through time. I think however, that we can only answer this to some extent; there will always be gaps due to the lack of data that deal with such aspects in the oral traditions, the historical accounts and the archaeological research.

Chewa-speaking people settled in the research area before the laying down of the current political boundaries. However, to discuss the historical processes I have

opted to analyse these countries individually, mainly because the literature available on the subject is very localized.

The reasons why people, in general, have a feeling of belonging to a group, to share an identity are varied. One of the most powerful bonds between people comes from the understanding of where they come from.

Chewa Origins

Little is known historically of how the Chewa came into this territory before the Portuguese entrance (Langworthy 1969). The present Chewa people in the research area, among other groups in central Africa, have their own narratives about how they arrived and who came before them. However, in a society like the Chewa, where knowledge passes through word of mouth, some details get lost. Nevertheless, this way of passing knowledge and history contains rich information that we can still retrieve and we shouldn't dismiss its value.

The Chewa have two important origin traditions and a third one which is less known:

1. Luba myth of origin: Some of the accounts say that they came from the East Chewa people often state that their ancestors came from the West, from the Luba (*Uluwa*, *uLuwa*) country in the southern part of the present Democratic Republic of the Congo[3] (Marwick 1963:378; Phiri 1975; Newitt 1982; Phiri 2004).

2. The Kaphirintiwa myth: There are different variations of this myth but I give the one from Schoffeleers and Roscoe's book *Land of Fire*:

> In the beginning there was Chiuta (God) and the earth. Chiuta lived in the sky. Below him was the earth, waterless and lifeless.
> One day dark clouds built up and covered the sky. Lightning flashed and claps of thunder rent the air.

[3] Bruwer (1950:32) states however that Uluwa might be in the area of the Great Lakes: Tanganyika and Victoria.

> The sky opened and, in a great shower of rain, down came Chiuta, the first man, and woman, and all the animals.
> They landed on Kaphirintiwa, a flat-topped hill in the mountains of Dzalanyama. Afterwards the ground where they landed turned to rock, and the footprints and the tracks of many animals can be seen there to this day. The man's footprints are larger than the woman's, and you can see also the imprints of a hoe, a winnowing basket, and a mortar.
> Plants and trees grew on the earth, yielding abundant food, and God, man, and the animals lived together in happiness and peace.
> One day man was playing with two sticks, a soft one and a hard one. He twirled them together and by accident invented fire.
> Everyone warned him to stop, but he would not listen. The grassland was set alight and there was great confusion.
> Among the animals the dog and the goat ran to man for protection. But the elephant, the lion, and their companions ran away full of rage against man.
> The chameleon escaped by climbing to the top of a tree. He called to God to follow him, but Chiuta answered that he was too old to climb. When the spider heard this he spun a fine thread and this lifted God to safety.
> So God was driven from the earth by the wickedness of man, and as he ascended into the sky he pronounced that henceforth man must die and join him in the heavens (Schoffeleers & Roscoe 1985:19-20).

This account is full of symbolic meaning and has been analysed in detail by Schoffeleers (1971; see Boucher 2002a, 2002b) emphasizing its relationship to the *Nyau* secret association and the life and reproductive cycles of the Chewa and their environment. Most importantly, this myth of origin has a very close relation with the landscape. The symbolism of this myth is also attached to fire and flames that are related to the annual bush burning ceremonies. I will discuss fire symbolism below.

3. The Great Lakes: There are some traditions that indicate an origin from Eastern Africa. According to Schoffeleers (1992:284) the tradition about a homeland in Uganda is found in published accounts of Chewa oral history (see Ntara 1973). Some people from the Banda clan seem to have this type of migration story. Some of the accounts say that they came from the East, from the area of the Great Lakes (Phiri 1975).

One of the most important books on oral traditions concerned with the history of the Chewa is Samuel Ntara's (1973) book *Mbiri ya Acewa*. However, Ian Linden

(1975) has expressed his concern on Ntara's 'objectiveness' and its neglect of other sources such as those Matthew Schoffeleers collected from the Mang'anja people. The most important critiques of Ntara's book were the poor quality of the translation and that it deals mostly with the Kalonga's and excludes other minor groups (Linden 1975).

Proto-Chewa & the Maravi

The ancestors of the Chewa were not the first inhabitants of south-central Africa. On their arrival in Malawi they encountered hunter-gatherer people who have been given various names, such as *Akafula, Batwa, Amwandionerapati* and *Nlukuwewe*. They were said to be short, 'little people', very astute, with no permanent homes (Werner 1925:chapter IX; Metcalfe 1954; Ntara 1973:98; Cole-King 1973; Nurse 1974; Mgomezulu 1978; see Stannus 1915 for similar traditions amongst the Yao and Chewa) and who are most often called Batwa today. These varied accounts provide us with a sense of the spread of these hunter-gatherers in the Chewa region. These hunter-gatherers had lived in the region since the Later Stone Age, from which time we see that the "earliest true backed-microlithic industry yet discovered had developed by about 19,000 years ago" (Phillipson 2005:109) such as at Leopard's Hill site near Lusaka in southern Zambia and in other sites in northern and eastern Zambia.

However, the Batwa were more than just people with whom the ancestors of the Chewa interacted. They were perceived in a more complex way: they were associated with the mountains and with the location of important shrines (Schoffeleers 1973:51; Schoffeleers 1992:26).

The role of the Batwa is significant because they are an "important channel through which the present day society retains its links with its preagricultural past" (Schoffeleers 1992:26). Schoffeleers (*ibid.*:262) reported that in Nsanje, Malawi, the Batwa were associated with spirits and received names such as *zinzimu* and *zinyau* meaning "powerful spirits".

Besides the Batwa, we know, from the archaeological evidence, about another group of people who inhabited the region prior to the ancestors of the Chewa. From the presence of Nkope ware pottery (from the Chifumbaze tradition, Phillipson 2005) this population has been identified as a patrilineal Bantu-speaker group who migrated from the east and north of Africa and settled in the region in the Early Iron Age.

Nkope ware has dates that range from the middle of the 3rd century A.D. till 800 A.D. (Clark 1973; Phillipson 1977; *cf*. Mgomezulu 1978:212 where he states that the latest date of this ware comes from DZ6A site, central Malawi, which is dated back to the early 10th century A.D). Katanekwa (1994; see Smith 1997:19) argues that these people arrived in Zambia as early as the end of the 1st millennium B.C. Schoffeleers (1992:26) mentions that "the earliest cultivators and metal workers appeared about the middle of the second century". According to Phillipson the distribution of Nkope ware "extends westwards across the watershed into the greater part of south-eastern Zambia, while it spread into adjacent parts of Mozambique is attested by material collected by Carl Wiese and now in the Museum für Völkerkunde [today Ethnologisches Museum] in Berlin" (Phillipson 1977:111; see Staudinger 1911; see Santos Júnior1938:8).

We know that these early farmers were crop cultivators who had domesticated goats, sheep and cattle, lived in villages and used iron (Phillipson 1977; Huffman 1989a, 1989b). However little is known about these early patrilineal cultivators and metal workers and little attention has been given to any possible rock art tradition left behind by these societies. In the 1970s Phillipson (1972b:24) stated that Early Iron Age sites were known from areas where the geometric rock paintings occurred thus suggesting a link between them; furthermore he suggested that the red schematic art was connected to the religious beliefs and practices of the earlier Iron Age populations . Smith, while allowing that some geometric rock paintings may have been made in the Early Iron Age Period, argues that the schematic art can be associated with certainty to hunter-gatherers rather than farmers (Smith 1995:250-251).

These eastern Bantu patrilineal groups interacted at the end of the first millennium A.D. with incoming groups of matrilineal western Bantu-language speakers. Judging by the pottery, this interaction lasted a few centuries, but ultimately the numerically fewer eastern Bantu-speakers were absorbed into western Bantu-speaker culture (see Huffman 1989b:173). Western and eastern groups have significant differences and a belief about biological descent is a fundamental distinction. Western Bantu-speakers emphasize the importance of the mother's blood (see Richards 1939) while the eastern Bantu-speakers emphasize the father's blood (see Hammond-Tooke 1974). Thomas Huffman (1989a, 1989b, 2007) demonstrated that there are certain traits from which it is possible to identify, broadly, eastern patrilineal and western matrilineal groups. Amongst these he recognizes the village layout and the shape of the houses. Western Bantu-speakers have villages consisting of rectangular houses arranged in a linear street pattern in contrast to the eastern Bantu-speakers who have circular houses arranged around a central cattle kraal; what he defines as the Central Cattle Pattern. Cattle are the central symbol for wealth for patrilineal people and metals for matrilineal people. Marriages amongst western Bantu-speakers are arranged by service instead of by payment. These differences demonstrate significant variations in worldview.

This is absorbtion is confirmed archaeologically by the decline of Chifumbaze pottery around the 1000 A.D. (Phillipson 1977; Katanekwa 1994; Smith 1995). Thus, I agree with what other authors have expressed (see Phiri 1975) that it is possible that some of the Chewa oral traditions that refer to an East African origin are attesting precisely to these early patrilineal populations who were first settled in the region and then intermarried with the matrilineal population. However, this absorption happened to different degrees throughout the landscape. Some ceramics similar to Chifumbaze are still used by a number of patrilineal groups in western Zambia (Katanekwa 1994; Huffman 1989a; Smith 1995:52).

The oral traditions confirm that the ancestors of the "Chewa" were not an homogenous group but in fact an amalgamation of separate clans who shared a common language, customs and traditions. These clans included the Banda, Phiri, Mwale, Mbewe and others who came together probably under the chieftainship of

Kalonga. Subtle differences amongst people in the area were also reported in pre-colonial literature (*e.g.*, Gamitto 1960). Portuguese reports refer to the "Maravi Empire" and its Chief Kalonga (Karonga in some texts) who had a powerful Chieftainship in central Malaŵi from the 15th century (Ntara 1973; Marwick 1963).

Although most of the oral traditions on the early history of the Chewa have been collected in central Malaŵi; some accounts from Zambia have been published. J. P. Bruwer (1950:32) collected evidence that the Chewa of eastern Zambia remember that they are a section of a "once powerful tribe" the aMaravi or aMalawi. No matter where the oral traditions come from, recurrently two clans are mentioned: the Banda and the Phiri.

There are many stories about how the Banda and the Phiri came together. D.D. Phiri (2004) points out that when the ancestors of the Chewa left Luba land, they travelled in small caravans under clan leaders and they reached a place where:

> Some of this people and their clan leader slept on top of a hill during the night. Another group slept at the bottom of the hill but inside temporary grass and wattle shelter called *banda*. From that time people at the bottom of the hill nicknamed the hilltop people as *aPhiri* or hill people. The people at the summit of the hill referred to those in the shelters at the bottom as *aBanda* people of temporary shelters (Phiri 2004:13; see Probst 2002:188; see Ntara 1973:6).

Although we do not know exactly where these nicknames started; this account refers to the differences between the two main clans and probably is providing us a clue to other aspects of society as I explain below.

From an initial reading of the oral traditions we have the impression that the Banda and the Phiri came into the region at the same time. However, various authors (Langworthy 1969; Linden 1972; Phillipson 1974; Schoffeleers 1973; Phiri 1975; Lamba 1985) have recognized an early period in Chewa history, long before the period known as the "Maravi Empire". In particular, the work of Matthew Schoffeleers (1973, 1974, 1985), has introduced us to a different reading of the oral

traditions and to an understanding of the relations between various clans. Using this evidence we can get a sense of how clans were socially formed and structured in the past.

The identification of a dual origin in Chewa oral traditions has aroused discussion about the early history of the ancestors of the Chewa. The discussion has suggested that the Phiri newcomers, adopted 'the Gods' of the Banda (Lamba 1985:74; Langworthy 1969:122; Linden 1972); meaning that the cult to the High God Chisumphi existed in proto-Chewa times and was adopted by the Phiri later on.

Schoffeleers (1973) identified institutions that were related to the people who first settled in the area before the Phiri. I summarize some of these characteristics in a diagram and compare them with what the Phiri had later on (Table 3).

***Table 3*.** Proto-Chewa and Maravi characteristics**.**

Proto-Chewa		**Maravi**
Main clan: Banda, Mbewe		**Main clan**: Phiri
Chisumphi cult (Higher God). Territorial cult. Rain shrines: female sacred priestess married to God. Female secular authority. Sacred pool rain ritual. Religious institutions: • *Nyau* (Special link to subclan Mwale [Schoffeleers 1999:Footnote 11]); they used to participate in the initiation ceremonies and act in the shrines and had political force). • Initiation ceremonies. Location of shrines: mountains.		Royal cult (secular rulers who penetrated the proto-Chewa religious organizations and altered them considerably). M'bona cult (the clansmen are officials). Grave shrines. Burning of bush rain ritual. Religious institutions: • *Nyau* (divorced from shrines). • Initiation ceremonies. Location of shrines: mountains and later on the plains. - Introduction of blood sacrifice.

Thus Chewa history can be divided according to Schoffeleers (1973:47) in four periods:

a) Proto-Chewa history (known also as proto-Maravi), *c.*1200–*c.*1400.
b) Maravi formation, *c.*1400–*c.*1600[4].
c) Flourishing of the Maravi Empire, *c.*1600–*c.*1750.
d) Foreign intrusions and decline, *c.*1750–*c.*1892.

In 1973 Schoffeleers estimated that the proto-Chewa period started *circa* 1200 AD–1400 AD. However, more recent archaeological research pushes back considerably these dates based on the timing of the arrival of Luangwa pottery and related traditions (Katanekwa 1994; Huffman 1989a). The western matrilineal Bantu-

[4] Lane Poole (1949:38) states that the Chewa arrived 'almost certainly before the year A.D. 1500'.

speaking people, whose arrival is dated tentatively to the 5th or the 6th century A.D, came into the area through Congo and Zambia. The ancestors of the Chewa reached Malawi's lakeshore *c.* 8th century A.D. (Smith 1995:53; 2001:194). These dates correspond to a matrilineal migration, most likely related to the Banda clan who have been identified as people who migrated before the Phiri clan. The Luangwa pottery has been associated to the matrilineal groups and is still made by the women of most matrilineal groups such as the Bemba, Nsenga and Chewa (Phillipson 2005; Huffman 1989a; Smith 1995). From the archaeological point of view, the Chewa and related groups are clearly part of the western Bantu-language speaking branch and might even have a common origin.

From the physical anthropological evidence, George Nurse (1977) has found that the Banda and the Phiri were, in fact, two distinct moieties. The Phiri clan was physically different from the Banda who were already settled in the region. These differences cannot be extrapolated back in time because it is unlikely that "there has been no Phiri contribution to the ancestry of the Banda intramoiety, mating pairs and *vice versa"* (Nurse 1977:403).

Nurse, puzzled about the fact that there are still characteristics that can be discerned between the two main clans, concludes that there was some degree of endogamy to preserve these distinctive physical characteristics. The endogamy evidence is indeed important to address because, in the oral traditions, it is stated that the intermarriage between the Phiri and the Banda was always symmetrical. This is certain if we remember that "the Kalonga, the main secular authority, was always Phiri, and that his principal wife, the Mwali, was concerned with the rain rituals and was always Banda" (Nurse 1977:404; see Langworthy 1972). However, the fact that these moieties are reflected in the present populations proves that there was some degree of endogamy among the Maravi meaning that while this dichotomy was practised in the higher levels of the society, the common people practised fewer cases of intermarriage.

From the archaeological evidence people continued arriving in the region as shown by the appearance of Kapeni ware which Mgomezulu (1978:210) identified from the 8th-14th century in central Malaŵi. A number of clans arrived from the west after A.D. 1000 (Smith 1995:54), suggested by the appearance of the Mawudzu tradition in central Malaŵi (Robinson 1970, 1975). Mgomezulu (1978:215–216) states that Mawudzu ware and Nkudzi ware are probably related to the Cheŵa people. Two aspects support this assumption: Mawudzu dates between 12th-18th century A.D. "a period that almost coincides with the coming of the Maravi peoples, the height and the decline of the 'Maravi' Empire" (Mgomezulu 1978:216) and the geographical distribution corresponds well with the Maravi/Cheŵa peoples (Table 4). Although the information we have is general and at this point it is difficult to associate each pottery tradition with a specific group of people (*cf*. Huffman 2006:99-101), it is possible to suggest that if Mgomezulu is correct, the dates for Mawudzu could correspond to the coming of the Phiri clan (*i.e*. the Maravi) as I explain below. Desmond Clark found Mawudzu and Nkudzi wares at Mwana wa Chentcherere II in Dedza District Malaŵi (Clark 1973; Crader 1984; Zubieta 2006), an important site in central Malaŵi because of its long evidence of occupation.

Table 4. Malaŵi ceramic sequence.

Early Iron Age (0-1000 A.D.)	Late Iron Age (1000-1900 A.D.)
Chifumbaze Complex: Related to patrilineal groups. • Nkope 3rd-10th century.	Luangwa Complex: Related to matrilineal groups. • Kapeni 8th-14th century. • Mawudzu 12th- 18th century. • Nkudzi 18th century – onwards.

The general theory then is that the autochthonous populations retained sufficient power to resist complete domination by the newcomers. Adding to Schoffeleers' (1973) power relation analysis, it is possible that the newcomers, who also originated from a matrilineal society and who were from a similar religious and social framework, recognized/respected the importance of the earlier clans who were settled in the region before them. Nurse (1977:398) in this respect suggests that it is not unlikely that "a common substratum of social belief and practice could have facilitated and strengthened the accommodation" between the Banda and the Phiri.

In the beginning of the journey to south-central Africa the Banda and the Phiri clans probably did not have fully fledged chiefs but rather leaders (Langworthy 1969). Later on, the newcomers, who had a stratified political system, expanded and acquired more control. Thus the Phiri have been related to chieftainship and power and the Banda to the land and rainmaking (Marwick 1963; Schoffeleers 1992; Probst 2002). Phiri (1975) tends to support the same idea that when the Banda and the Phiri interacted, they borrowed certain essential characteristics: the Phiri were in charge of political offices and the Banda were associated with ritual functions (*e.g.*, fertility rituals and rain calling). The combination of political strategy and ancestral worship helped to the give strength to the Maravi Empire.

Although the date is not known when these groups arrived in the region, the oral traditions provide different explanations for the name Malaŵi (Schoffeleers 1972:91-92):

1. The newcomers looked down from the mountains to Lake Malaŵi or 'land of fire', which shimmered like flames in the sunshine.
2. The newcomers found the grasslands that were surrounding the Lake afire.
3. The hot air coming from the land next to the lake looked like flames of fire.

Thus the people who inhabited this area were called 'People of the Flames' (Bruwer 1950:33). Schoffeleers (1971), however, provides a more detailed understanding of the name. He discusses the importance of the annual bush burning, linked to the Phiri clan (Schoffeleers 1972:91). This burning is used today to help farming (known as slash and burn method) but it is also deeply rooted in a religious belief system in which fire plays an important role. Fire has varied symbolic meanings and is strongly related to transition periods in various rituals (*e.g.*, funerals, girls' initiation). Fire is also related to the myth of creation, as men invented fire and this caused the separation between animals, humans and God. Fire and smoke are linked symbolically and cosmologically with clouds and with rain. Fire is also related to earth cycles and the human reproductive cycle (Schoffeleers 1971). In September

2006 I drove from Blantyre to the central region in Malawi and it was difficult to breathe the air, I had to be extra careful when I drove in the afternoons as the vision was obscured because of all the smoke along the highway. Thus burning is a practice that one can experience even nowadays.

Having discussed the symbolic meaning of fire I turn now to the roots of the name Malawi itself. Malawi means 'fire flames' and "it was originally used as a name for the ancestral spirits, the people under their tutelage, and the places at which they were worshipped" (Schoffeleers 1971:281). Malawi, as a name, was used by the Phiri to designate various topographic forms in the landscape (Figure 5): mainly the south-western lake area; ancient settlements (*e.g.*, Kalonga's headquarters), hills and shrines (*e.g.*, Msinja and Khulubvi) (Schoffeleers 1972:93).

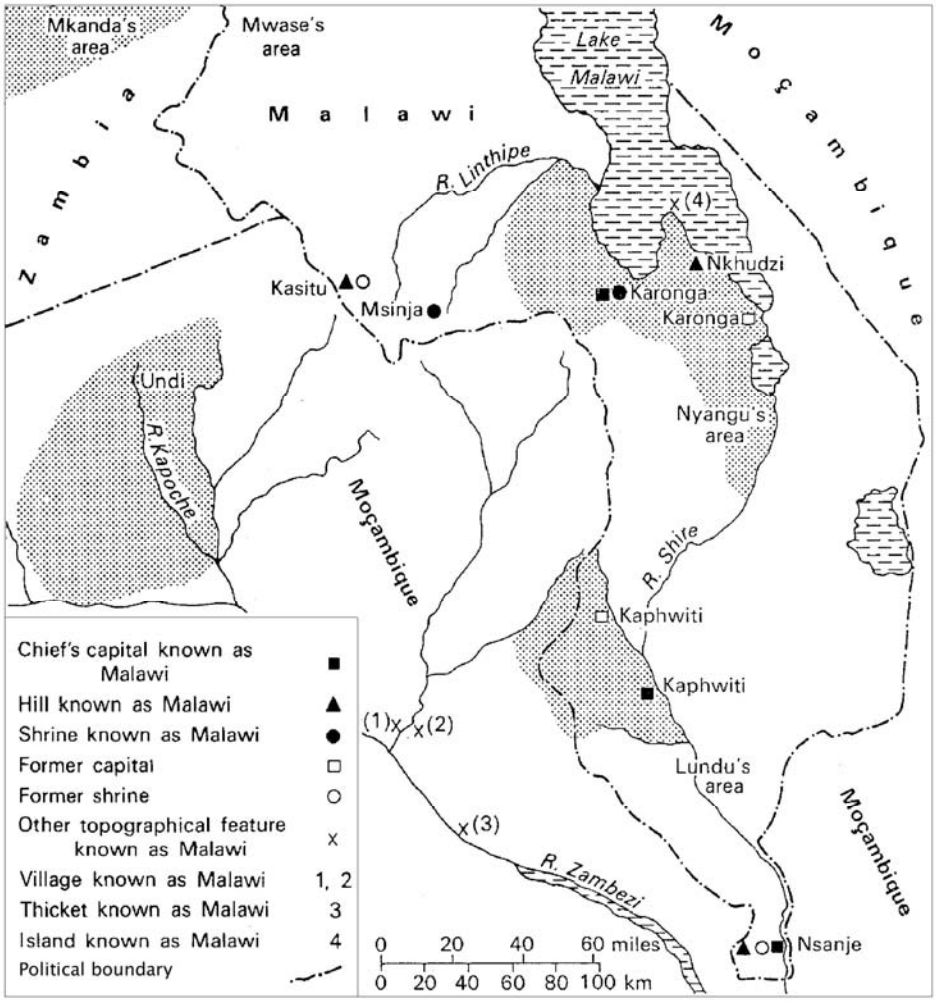


Figure 5. Malawi name occurrence in the landscape (after Schoffeleers 1972:94).

It is believed that the arrival of the Phiri occurred sometime between the 13th and 15th centuries (Alpers 1975; Phiri 1979:6). The popular accounts say that the first chief appointed by the Phiri was installed at a place called Choma[5] or Hora mountain and he was given the title *Kalonga* (which means king) (Linden 1972:14). According to Linden (1972:11) Kalonga derives from *kulonga Mfumu*, to install someone as a chief.

The first chief Kalonga according to traditions was Chinkhole but others say that it was Mazizi (Langworthy 1969:118). He was the son of Nyangu Phiri who is remembered as the Great Mother[6]. The first Kalonga married the daughter of the Mangadzi, the Great Mother of the Banda (Phiri 2004), and the wife of Kalonga got the official name *Mwali*; she was always chosen from the Banda clan shrine leaders (Linden 1972; Langworthy 1972; Phiri 1975:53). This also attests the dual origin that prevails in the region and is indicative of how these two clans dealt with power and social relations. It also indicates that the Phiri imposed chiefs over the Banda by marrying the key shrine leaders so as to cement their authority; these became the Kalonga's who were later recorded by the Portuguese as the Maravi Empire.

The significance of Mwali differs in importance in the Maravi polity. According to Linden (1972:11) some descendants of the last Kalonga state that Mwali was only an honorary title while others, who trace their ancestry to Mwali say that she was the real *mwini dziko*, the owner of the land and whoever married her became Kalonga. Moreover, Linden (1972) points out briefly that the remnants of the Chewa oral traditions gives an importance to Mwali that has not been fully addressed (but see Schoffeleers 1999). Mwali was said to be an *mfumukazi*, a female chief, and a priestess[7].

[5] It is unclear where Choma is located. According to Langworthy (1969:110, 119) some informants believe that the Choma mountain is in northern Malawi while others say that it is in Zambia's Southern Province (see also Phiri 1975:46-47).

[6] Even nowadays 'mama Nyangu' is an important figure in Chewa society and resides at the Mkaika headquarters in Katete, eastern Zambia.

[7] Mwali was referred as sister of Chauwa of Chirenje and Makewana of Msinja: two important priestesses. Moreover Linden writes that 'the testimony of Village Headman Chitule near Mankhamba that 'Mwali's real husband was said to be a snake, thunga' (Linden 1972:12). The Luba have a similar designation as Mwali called Mwadi (Linden 1972:15)

Kalonga Chinkhole was followed by Kalonga Chidzonzi who led the people south of Choma until they settled near a hill called Chewa (*cf*. Linden 1972:13). We do not know the exact location of this hill (Phiri 2004) and we do not know exactly when and where some of the people who were part of the Maravi decided to separate and create their own identity as the Chewa[8] (Marwick 1963:378). Indeed, the name Cheva or Sheva is first reported by Antonio Candido Pedroso Gamitto in the 19th century when he describes that the Mkanda, the leader of the Chewa, was the most powerful leader between the Zambezi and the Luangwa (Gamitto 1960; Lane Poole 1949:34).

Because of the many groups moving through the landscape, there are various stories related to the route of migration. Some traditions say that they stopped at a place called Kapoche in Mozambique and from there, according to Phiri (2004), they reached the hill they called Kapirinthiwa in the Dzalanyama range in Lilongwe, Malawi. Bruwer (1950:33), on the contrary, writes that the Maravi first settled west of Lake Malawi[9] then they went to Mozambique and then westwards towards the Luangwa and Muchinga escarpment in Zambia.

It is possible to question if the White Spread-eagled tradition should follow some chronological appearance in the landscape according to the path of the proto-Chewa migration; that is if the proto-Chewa were painting for the initiation ceremonies before the arrival of the Phiri. At this point in time we do not have specific information and only speculation on a general level is feasible.

The Mang'anja, Nyanja and Chipeta

Following the oral traditions, Kalonga Chidzonzi decided to settle down and gave some of the land to his followers who had to pay him tribute. It is said by some informants that Chidzonzi was deposed when while visiting his relatives in Msinja, Mwali married Karonga Kamcewere (Linden 1972:11). He had several brothers; some

[8] Bruwer (1950:33) explains that the name Chewa comes from *cewa* 'to look back' as *cheuka* is used today; because it is told that the Chewa used to climb the hills and look back to see where they came from.

[9] We know the existence of a Portuguese map from 1546 that shows a lake called 'Lake Maravi' in the position of the present Lake Malawi (see Crawford 1923:335; Stokes & Brown 1966:xvi).

of them were Changamire, Mpinganjira, Khuthe and Undi. At a place called Maere-a-Nyangu the Kalonga told his brother Changamire to go to the east. Changamire was supposed to go with his brother Kaphwiti but they quarrelled and the latter, accompanied by others, went south and settled in Chikwawa in the Lower Shire; they were accompanied by a prophet called M'bona. Kaphwiti and his followers assumed the name Mang'anja which, according to Phiri (2004), is a variation of Nyanja or Nyasa meaning people of the lakes.

Kaphwiti, the first paramount of the Mang'anja, broke away from the Kalonga, according to Schoffeleers, sometime before the sixteenth century (Schoffeleers 1972:93). This is corroborated by the excavation of Kaphwiti's shrine near Chapananga's in western Chikwawa, which produced a carbon date of 1420 (± 18). The site was excavated by Desmond Clark in 1968 (Schoffeleers 1973:47). It must be noted, however, that this date was never published by Desmond Clark and unfortunately it is not clear if the date has been calibrated. A date of 1420± 18 produces a calibrated date (Pyramid Radiocarbon Calibration Programme) of 657 A.D. This is a date very early for what Schoffeleers is proposing.

Changamire settled in Ntcheu, central Malaŵi and was accompanied by Mchochoma. The people who settled near the Lake Nyanja (Nyasa) became known as aNyanja.

Phiri (1975) mentions that the lineage of Kalonga, according to the oral tradition, follows this order: Chinkhole, Chidzonzi (probably 16th century), Mpunga, Chinthenga (Kanthenga), Khute (who was deposed), Kampini and Sosola (killed by the Yao of Pemba in the 1860s).

Other clan names that are constantly mentioned in the oral traditions and the historical accounts are Zimba and Chipeta. Marwick (1963) points out that some of the Chewa people in central Malaŵi were known as the *Chipeta* and in Mozambique as *Zimba* (see Rita-Ferreira 1966). Cullen Young (1950a:29), a Scottish missionary, mentions that south of the Buwa River in the Malawian uplands is where the Chipeta,

Chewa who "live in the long-grass country" are located; people whom Livingstone encountered in 1860 around Dedza. Schoffeleers (1992:22) writes that some ethnic groups known as Zimba are found in various places such as Congo in the Katanga province where they belong to the Luba cluster while others are in Zambia and central-western Mozambique who are related to the Chewa. There are other Zimba in Nsanje District, southern Malawi, who are related to people south of the Zambezi and who have no cultural ties to the Chewa. These latter Zimba, I think, are the people that Newitt (1982) refers to as the authors of the attack on the Portuguese in 1580 and that gave rise to the legend of cannibal people. Phiri (1975:47, 81) points out that when the Kalonga settled in the Dzalanyama mountains they found Batwa and Zimba; he thinks that these Zimba were most likely a proto-Chewa group, who were conquered by the Maravi.

A.G.O Hodgson (1933:127) writes that the Chewa living in the vicinity of Dedza and south of Dowa in Malawi were known as Achipeta (*chipeta*, long grass), a nickname given to them during the raids because they ran away and hid themselves in the long grass (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Long grass in Dedza District, central Malawi.

Schoffeleers (1992:28), however, states that the word Chipeta was used long before the Ngoni raids to designate people who lived in ecosystems consisting of tall

grass. Moreover he states that the Chipeta arrived in central Malaŵi before the Mang'anja people. This is confirmed by the present Mang'anja people located in the Shire Valley who claim they encountered the Chipeta and the Batwa on their arrival in this area (Schoffeleers 1992:27).

Gamitto describes, in 1831, that the 'Chipeta district' occupied by the Chipeta (Chupeta) people was located in the middle of the Maravi land. These people had the same habits and costumes as the Maravi but lived independently in villages with only one supreme chief; something that Schoffeleers (1992) later on recognized as an acephalous organization. These organizations did not recognize political superiors and preferred to be annihilated rather than to pay respect to anybody else. Internal wars seemed to have been quite usual and quarrels were solved by paying a price. Gamitto refers to them as people:

> …much more warlike and industrious than other Marave, but are also bigger liars and thieves. The land of the Chupeta is flat, with few trees, and those that exist are very small. Hence they lack firewood, and use instead millet stalks, dry shrubs, and particularly cattle dung which they are careful to keep dry. They have peat, but do not know its use. They keep many cattle, sheep and goats, and in other respects they are like the Marave (Gamitto 1960:67).

The account of Gamitto reflects the perceptions that the Portuguese had about the indigenous populations in the region and provides us with important information of that time. It is possible to suggest that the Chipeta was a population that was settled in the region before the Phiri because of its acephalous structure similar to the way proto-Chewa populations were organized before the coming of the Phiri. Another point that Schoffeleers stresses is that the understanding of the existence of such independent populations within the Maravi territory, gives us also a different perspective from the usual idea that the Maravi land was divided into kingdoms and chiefdoms. I think this is extremely important as it gives us a perception of the diversity of populations living within the Maravi land. A pertinent question is why these acephalous organizations were respected and left to have their own political

structures. I would suggest that it is, perhaps, because of the ties to the Banda. According to Schoffeleers (1992:27), in the present, the Chipeta people are concentrated in Dowa, Dedza and Ntcheu Districts in central Malaŵi; in northwestern Mozambique and eastern Zambia.

Undi

In about late 1600, a brother of Kalonga, Undi, was sent to colonize the area next to the Kapoche and settled there at a place called Mano (Maano) south of the present Katete town in Zambia (Lamba 1985:63, Langworthy 1969:215-216, Phillipson 1976:10). Some traditions suggest that Undi left because of a major fight with the Kalonga at Manthimba[10] (Phiri 1979:12) and motivated partly by the establishment of trade links with the Portuguese (Langworthy 1969:216). Cimwala, Undi's brother, assumed a sub-paramount position to the west of Undi who became an independent Paramount chief (Marwick 1963:379)[11]. It is recognized amongst the Undi (who are Phiri clan [Lane Poole 1949:34]) that the Banda, Phiri and Mwale were the major Cheŵa clans (Bruwer 1950:32). According to Bruwer (1950:33), it is known that Undi wanted to go back to his motherland Luba (Uluwa), and travelled northwards to the country of the Lala-Lenge across the Luangwa River and reached where Choma is in Zambia. Then he returned to Mano in the Kapoche River in Mozambique after staying with the Lala-Lenge for a time.

Desmond Clark (1973:25) suggests that around the 16th century the competition for land resources instigated the conflict between various populations of Malaŵi; especially between hunter-gatherers and agriculturalists. However this did not happen to the same degree in all areas. For example, Schoffeleers (1992:27) points out that one of the reasons that clashes between the Maravi and the Batwa did not happen in the Shire Valley is because the agriculturalist populations lived along the rivers leaving the forested upland hill areas to the descendents of the original populations.

[10] Manthimba and Mankhamba west of Lake Malaŵi were designated as the headquarters of the Kalonga (Phiri 1979:8).
[11] Marwick (1963:380) points out that the Cimwala and Undi of a later period managed to resist the Ngoni attacks.

The rest of the territory between the Lake Malaŵi and the Luangwa River was divided among various territorial chiefs (Figure 7).

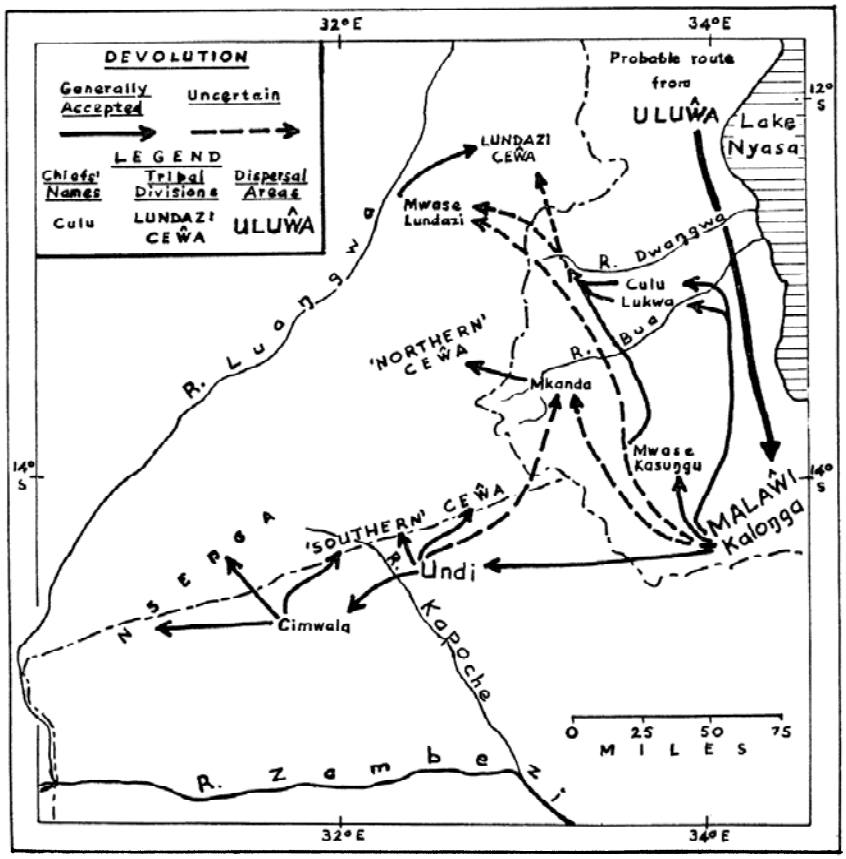


Figure 7. Chewa chieftainship devolution according to Marwick (1963:map 2).

Lukwa (or Culu in some accounts) received lands within the Kasungu District in central Malaŵi. Chief Mwase Kasungu settled first next to Bunda in the Lilongwe District of Malaŵi (Lane Poole 1949) and Chief Mkanda obtained the land immediately north of Chipata in eastern Zambia. However, the Mkandas have been independent from the Undis from a long time. Even Francisco José Maria de Lacerda e Almeida, who passed through Mozambique and Zambia in 1798 (see Lane Poole 1949; Phiri 1975), makes reference to the King Mocando (Mkanda) as "the king Mocando, the most powerful in people, and dreaded Maravi chief of these parts" (Lacerda 1873:76).

Years later, in 1831, Gamitto wrote that next to the Ruareshe river (which Lacerda called the Ureze) was "the residence of Mukanda, the Mambo of the Chevas,

the most powerful between the Zambezi and the Luangwa" (Gamitto 1960:117). This interests us because Gamitto is very explicit on the affiliation of Mukanda to the Chewa. This indicates that the Chewa developed their distinctive identity before the end of the 19th century. As Bruwer (1950:33) mentions it appears that "the name Chewa is of later origin than Maravi".

The traditional histories are complex to disentangle because the term Kalonga is used to refer to any past chief. Kalonga might have been the name of the first king but it was later adapted to refer to any Phiri king (Phiri 2004). Among the Chewa the succession to headmanship and chieftainship involves name-inheritance (Marwick 1963:378). Thus, for some events recorded in oral history, it is not really clear which of the Kalonga's was ruling. It is important then to note that much oral history comes from the chiefly line of the Phiri, but that various clans inhabited the land at the same time and data on most of the others is slim (see Phiri 1979).

The Portuguese accounts

Besides the traditional history on the Chewa we also have early documents from some Portuguese expeditions. Most of these accounts have been summarized and studied by various authors (*e.g.*, Axelson 1973; Alpers 1975; Newitt 1982) especially by Antonio Rita-Ferreira (1982, 1999).

At the end of the 15th century Vasco de Gama discovered the sea route to India around the South African Cape and established a settlement in Sofala, Mozambique in 1505 (Axelson 1973:38). In the mid 16th century the Portuguese built forts at Sena and Tete in Mozambique along the Zambezi River (Phiri 1975). According to Marwick (1963:381) almost a century passed after the Portuguese settled at Sofala, before they started to pay attention to the northern tribes of the Zambezi; this is because they were too busy looking for precious metals and the gold of Monomatapa in Zimbabwe (Lane Poole 1949:iii; Phiri 1979:15).

In 1616 Gaspar Bocarro made a journey overland from Tete to Kilwa, on the Tanzanian coast, and recorded, for the first time, the existence of the Maravi (Lane

Poole 1949:38). During Gaspar Bocarro and Manuel Barreto's writings in 1667, Kalonga was ruling the country from Quelimane (Quilimane) in Mozambique to as far north as Mombasa in Kenya. According to Phiri (1975:55) Bocarro was the only one who visited the heartland of the Malawi country.

The geographical limits of the Chewa distribution in the 17th century in south-central Africa seem to have been: the Luangwa River in eastern Zambia to the west; the Zambezi River in Mozambique to the south, the Shire River in Malawi to the east and the Kasungu District to the north (Marwick 1963:376; Phiri 1979:8; Figure 8).

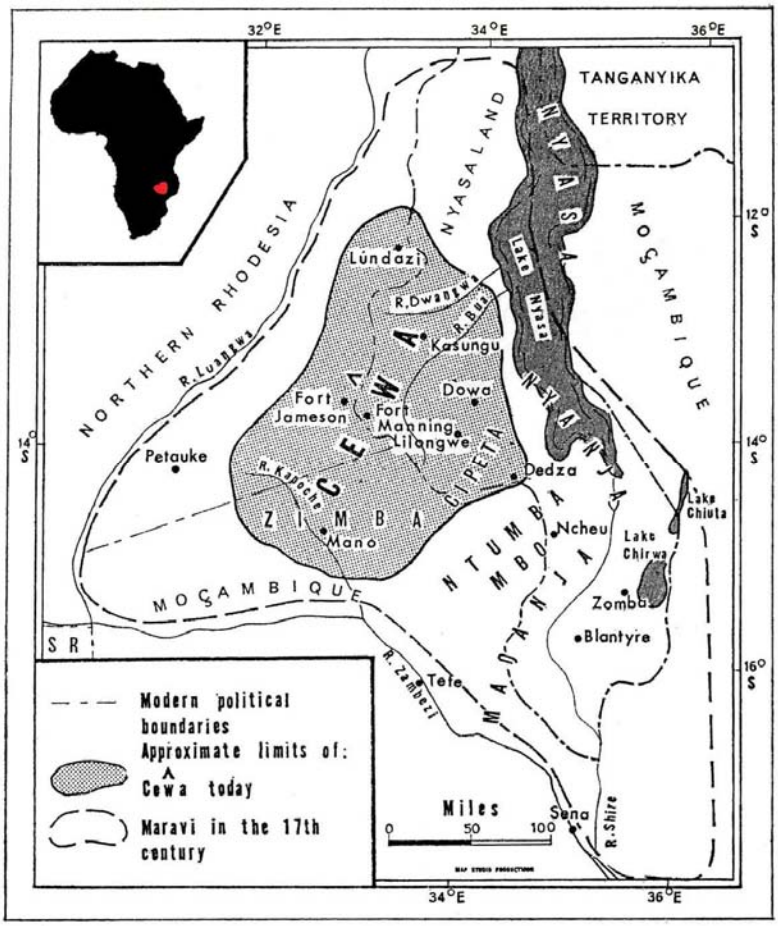


Figure 8. Map showing Chewa distribution in the research area in the 20th century and the Maravi Empire approximate expansion in the 17th century (after Marwick 1965:map 1).

By the 17th century A.D. extensive trade was taking place between Kalonga's kingdom and the Indian Ocean. The Maravi/Chewa Empire spread from Zambia to Mozambique (Mgomezulu 1978). During this time the Portuguese were involved, indirectly via the Yao and Makwa, in slave-raiding and trading; these raids caused

considerable disruption within the Maravi Empire (Nurse 1974). But, from historical accounts, we can see that during the 17th century the relationship between the Maravi and the Portuguese was of mutual benefit through trade; ivory and ebony were of primary importance (*cf*. Newitt 1982). Phiri (1979:13) records various occasions in which the Portuguese sought the help of the Maravi to campaign against local enemies or to accompany them on precious metal expeditions. This political union started to decline towards the middle of the 18th century and the Portuguese tried to establish contact with the King Kazembe in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The decline of the Maravi Empire started in the middle of the 18th century with many revolts against the Kalonga: the Kalonga was confronted by the chiefs from the Lilongwe area; Chief Lundu was attacked by the Lolo and the Makua in the east and Chief Undi was attacked by Biwi and other subordinates and also by the Portuguese who were trying to obtain the gold that was discovered in Undi's kingdom between 1744 and 1790 (Phiri 1979:14, 16; Roberts 1973:109)[12]. Moreover the power of Makewana, the priestess of the Msinja shrine in Lilongwe District, declined[13]. The role of early Makewanas was crucial for the religious unity of the Maravi but, by the 18th century, Makewana is said to have developed secular ambition and once even set warriors to raid in Kalongas domain (*ibid*.:15; Figure 9)

[12] The ivory commodity that was so essential in the trading system in the 17th century, changed hands from the Portuguese to the Yao people at the end of the 18h century. Gamitto (1961) on their excursion through Mozambique crossed Bar do Mano and Bar do Missale; places where the gold mining was done by black women. Mano, was the Undi's capital, as I have pointed out, however Gamitto does not mentions or acknowledge this fact. It is apparent that the Portuguese in the early 19th century took control of these gold areas.

[13] Langworthy (1969:185) agrees on the accounts that Makewana was controlled by Undi and not Kalonga in Msinja (see also Phiri 1975:63). Schoffeleers (1971:95) mentions that Msinja is ascribed either to the second Kalonga or the first Undi. I think that further archaeological evidence in Msinja area is needed to corroborate possible dates of Makewana's establishment in this important shrine.



Figure 9. Maravi Empire and its neighbours in the 18th century (after Phiri 1979:19).

Francisco José Maria de Lacerda e Almeida Lacerda in 1798, in his journey from Tete, on the shores of the Zambezi River, to the Luapula region, where King Kazembe was ruling, writes that the Lupata region was the place where Undi's rule stopped (Bruwer 1950:32). Lacerda died in the land of Kazembe.

In 1810 two *Pombeiros* (messengers) Pedro João Baptista and Amaro José, of whom Baptista kept a diary, crossed successfully from one ocean to the other, from Angola to Mozambique, but according to Lane Poole (1949) they did not add any more information to what Lacerda had reported. In 1831 Major José Manoel Corrêa Monteiro and Captain Antonio Candido Pedroso Gamitto were sent by the Portuguese Government to follow Lacerda's route (Figure 10).

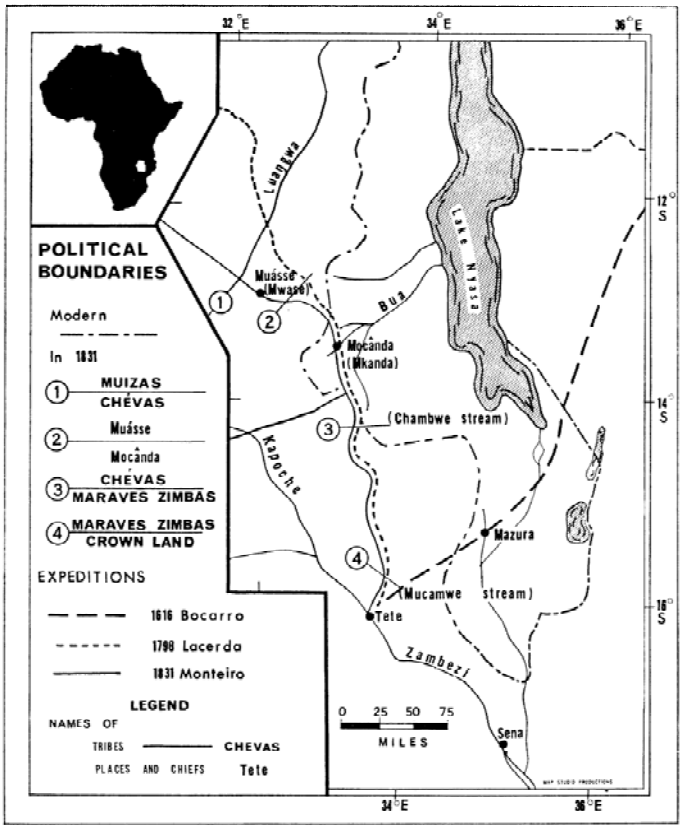


Figure 10. Some Portuguese expeditions (after Marwick 1963:map 3).

Both expeditions, Lacerda's and Gamitto's did not achieve their goal. They both wanted to find a route to Angola from Mozambique and the only route was to pass through Kazembe's territory. Kazembe, at that time, was the key for the trade route between the two oceans. Unfortunately, Kazembe did not agree to let them pass. The *Pombeiros* were the only ones who made it, but they were travelling from Angola down to Mozambique. These Portuguese diaries have an exceptional value as they are accounts of the long journeys and the people and landscape that the expeditions encountered. Both Lacerda's and Gamitto's journeys took place during the dry season and they both departed from Zumbo, Mozambique in July. I find it interesting and intriguing that Gamitto, for example, in his detailed narrative about the Maravi (Marave) and Chewa (Cheva) people, did not mention any encounter with public celebrations of girls' initiation ceremonies, especially since this is the time of year that these ceremonies are held. In the past only initiated people were allowed to see those celebrations in contrast to the present where everyone can attend, even the children. Thus, it is possible that past celebrations were more hidden and less public.

Gamitto, however, describes other interesting aspects of the people in the area such as the processing of iron, gold mining, tattoos, funerals and some beliefs. Gamitto's detailed account of the rivers and mountains allows us today to follow closely the route of his expedition. He describes that the land known as Maravi was:

> bounded in the west by the Shombwe stream, which divides it from the Cheva; and in the east by the Mukakamwe torrent, which separates it from the Portuguese dominions of Tete district which extend on the left bank of the Zambezi as far as the Lupata. In the north, the boundary is with the Bororos[14] and the Maganja; and in the south the boundary is the Zambezi, which divides it from the Munhaes of Monomotapa and Portuguese territory of the district mentioned. (Gamitto 1960:63).

From this account we have some idea of the extent of the Maravi Empire but also some of the names given to various features of the landscape. It also shows the variety of people who were living together in the same land.

The neighbouring groups

Having discussed Chewa history I now turn to their neighbouring groups to consider the influences and interactions between the Chewa and other populations. Although the difficulty of addressing the history of the Chewa and other groups is similar I include this short account of their related histories in order to understand the similarities in girl's initiation ceremonies in future chapters.

The Bemba

The Bemba are one of the largest groups in Zambia and they occupy the present day Northern Province. According to the oral traditions the Bisa, led by the *Bena Ng'ona* (the mushroom clan), left Lubaland before the Bemba people led by the *Bena Ng'andu* (crocodile clan) and settled in Mpika District in the north of Zambia. Like other groups in this region the Bemba claim to originate from the Luba and Lunda

[14] The Bororos was a name given by the Portuguese to refer to the people who lived north of the Zambezi (Schoffelleers 1972:95).

states of the Congo basin (Roberts 1973:xxv). The Bemba who left Lubaland about the mid 17th century became very powerful in two hundred years (Phiri 2004:12).

The Paramount Chitimukulu[15] is the only reference to estimate the antiquity of Bemba chieftainship but according to Roberts (1973:56) the oral tradition of the Bemba migration is uncertain especially to "use it as evidence for estimating the antiquity of the Bemba chieftainship"; however there is a mixture of Luba and Lunda elements in the Bemba court culture (*ibid*.:54), which reinforces their claim of origin. During Undi's expedition through Zambia and Mozambique it is claimed that Undi met with the Bemba king Chitimukulu and they agreed on the borders between the Bemba and Chewa people. The Bemba nowadays are the largest ethnic group in the Northern Province of Zambia covering: the whole Kasama District and much of Mpika, Chinsali, Luwingu, and Mporokoso Districts.

Bemba groups have been the object of intensive anthropological study in the last hundred years (*e.g.*, Richards 1956). They were the first group in the region to be studied in a detailed way (Roberts 1970; 1973). By the 19th century the Bemba raids and trade with the Swahili gave them power through the acquisition of guns in exchange for ivory (Roberts 1970:221). At this point in time we do not have many references or much evidence of direct contact between the Bemba and the Chewa:

> The Bemba legend of migration relates that Chitimukulu I was killed somewhere near the Luangwa valley by a chief called Mwase. This is probably the Chewa chief Mwase, who came from Kasungu near Lake Malawi to the lower Rukusi valley near the Luangwa. But we do not know when this migration took place (Roberts 1970:231).

When Gamitto crossed the region in 1831, he encountered a group of Bisa people on his way to the land of Kazembe. Bisa people at that time were known for their trade skills; however when the Portuguese reached the Bisa country they found only a few deserted villages. The Portuguese asked the Bemba what was the cause of

[15] According to Richards (1956:37) the Chitimukulu 'traced descent through some thiry-one generations.

the wars with the Bisa and the answer was that the Bemba wanted to trade with the Europeans but that the Bisa did not allow them to sell them their ivory so the Bemba attacked them and "would not finish until they reached the Luangwa" (Gamitto 1960:165). Thus the Bemba seem to have gained power and political control of the area during the 1800s and they displaced, and assimilated, the Bisa to the south.

The Nsenga

The origins of the Nsenga of Petauke District, Zambia and *Circunscrição* (district) of Zumbo in Mozambique are still uncertain. Some authors suggest that they are related to the Maravi people, but differ because of interaction with the Lala-Lenje peoples who are located to the west of the Luangwa River (Marwick 1963:377). Lane Poole (1949:39-40), the first writer on the Nsenga, explains that sometime between Lacerda (1798) and Livingstone (1860) a significant event took place: Undi is said to have explored the country north of the Kapoche River, where he crossed the Luangwa into Lala-Lenje territory under the control of the matrilineal Mukuni Paramount Chief.

Apparently, Undi was trying to reach the land where his ancestors came from, but at some point was discouraged because of the rumours of the Bemba (Wemba) raids (*cf.* Apthorpe 1961:51). The story says that Undi quarrelled with Mukuni and, on his way back from the Luangwa, he found a land uninhabited and left Chief Kalindawalo[16] to occupy it. Thus, from this account, it is explained that the Nsenga were a result of a mixture between the Chewa and Lala-Lenje people. However, chiefly oral traditions assert control over neighbours by telling a convenient history, which might not be exactly factual as I explain later on.

Similarly, Bruwer (1950) explains that after Undi's expedition from Mano to the north across Zambia, he was in contact with the Lala-Lenje peoples and from here the Nsenga formed. Moreover, Bruwer writes about the Nsenga:

> Undi left one of his councillors, Mundikula, in the area of present Petauke district to keep the place for the chief (Kalindabwalo). From this emerged the

[16] Kalindawalo is the Paramount Chief of the Nsenga people.

> name Kalindawalo, the name of paramount chief of the Ansenga. They too therefore are of Maravi stock (Bruwer 1950:33).

Lane Poole (1949:38) also states that the Maravi are the parental tribe of the Chewa and the Nsenga and moreover he writes that one of the traditional stories for the origins of the Nsenga people is that they came from Undi's second wife. However, the Chewa and Nsenga do not share clan banes; the Nsenga clans are known as Mwanza, Lungu, Tembo and Nguluwe (*cf.* Rita-Ferreria 1982:123).

The Nsenga claim though, as all the other matrilineal western Bantu-language speakers, that their ancestors came from the Luba[17] country beyond the Luapula River and that when they occupied the land west of the Luangwa River they encountered a group of hunters, who used to perforate their ear lobes. The Nsenga called these people Katanga and Mwambonela (Lane Poole 1949:36). The Nsenga eventually expelled or absorbed them. Lane Poole concludes that:

> [t]he expedition to Mukuni took place in the first quarter of the nineteenth century and that Mundikula founded the colony in the Mbala [*sic*] between 1825 and 1830. The greater part of the present Petauke District was populated with Nsenga between 1825 and 1845 (Lane Poole 1949:42).

The first mention of the Nsenga by the Portuguese was in the early 17th century and it refers to the Basonga (BaNsenga) who were settled in the Zambezi valley above Tete. Lane Poole (1949:38) points out that the importance of this account is the early date in which the Nsenga adopted a distinctive name.

Not all the historians agree that the Nsenga were descendents of the Maravi (*e.g.*, Langworthy 1969; Apthorpe 1961; Phiri 1979; Rita-Ferrerira 1982) and moreover the date of Undi's expedition to the north of the Kapoche is placed at different times by different authors. Raymond Apthorpe (1961) does not agree that the Nsenga people were descendent of the Maravi and contests the little credit that Lane

[17] According to Phiri (1975:92) some informants state that the Nsenga migrated from Luba under the leadership of Kalonga.

Poole gives to the Nsenga oral traditions that they also came from the Luba region, apparently under chief Cawalamakumba. He criticises Lane Poole because he "entertains no possibility other than 'the Nsenga' all originated in the Petauke region in one single way" (Apthorpe 1961:51). For Apthorpe the Nsenga have a complex origin and have more of an affinity with the Lamba-Lala-Bisa people than to the Maravi.

On the other hand, Langworthy (1969:v) refers to the Nsenga as a non-Maravi group and notes that "some of the traditions of the non-Chewa people, such as the Nsenga and the Kunda, that they migrated with Undi, can probably be discounted, as their tales are probably inventions to relate their own history to the dominant history of the Chewa" (Langworthy 1969:181). The Kunda settled to the northwest of the Nsenga and they intermarried with the Nsenga, some of whom adopted the Kunda language, customs and totems.

Although the present Nsenga do not have a strong tradition of chiefly history (Apthorpe 1961:47, pers. comm. 2006) it is known that the Nsenga are constituted of various clans and these clans, as well, have their own histories of migration. Thus, a social group will have various versions and perceptions of their own past depending on who passes on the knowledge and to whom.

History is thus dependent on politics amongst these groups. This is something that we need to keep in mind when we take into account oral traditions. Apthorpe suggests that Lane Poole was not aware of the tendency of each clan "among the Nsenga to boast a history of its own, with elements of both validity and exaggeration" (Apthorpe 1961:63). This is something that we also have to remember regarding the Chewa.

Kings Phiri (1979:6, 12) refers to the Nsenga as part of the matrilineal cluster of Central Bantu speakers, but who were established already in the Lower Luangwa when Undi and his followers invaded their country in the mid 17th century[18]. Phiri

[18] Lane Poole (1949) places this event between the end of the 18th and mid 19th century.

(1975:99-101) notes that the Nsenga were absorbed through trade and famine and that Undi and his nephew Chimwala expanded into the areas of the Nsenga rulers of Chifombo and Chifuka in the late 17th century. It is claimed that the Nsenga introduced the skill of cotton weaving among the Chewa. The Nsenga adopted the Maravi system of chieftainship later on. It is only in 1856 that Livingstone found the Nsenga in the country that they now occupy, that is Petauke District. It is also known now that the Nsenga genealogies do not go beyond the fifth or seventh generation; which probably tells us of the lack of political authority of their chiefs.

The Ngoni

During the 19th century other groups started to move into Malawi (Mgomezulu 1978:214-215) and threatened the power of Kalonga: the Ngoni from Swaziland and South Africa, the Yao from east of Lake Malawi, the Lomwe from Mozambique and the Swahili from the Indian Ocean coast (Probst 2002).

The first Ngoni group reached the Zambezi at Zumbo on the 19th of November 1835, at about two o'clock in the afternoon. It was led by Chief Zwangendaba. We know the precise date as this event as it was marked by a total eclipse of the sun and this is recorded in the historical accounts. The Ngoni migration started in Natal, South Africa and Swaziland and moved into Mozambique then spread to Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and then Tanzania as far as Lake Victoria (Lane Poole 1949:1; Linden 1971).

This first Ngoni group crossed eastern Zambia and the northern part of Malawi in the 1840s heading towards Tanzania and then split into different groups one of which, the M'mbelwa returned to Malawi and settled among the Tumbuka in northern Malawi in 1855 (Mgomezulu 1978). Zwangendaba died from syncope around 1845 in a place called Mapupo between Lakes Tanganyika and Malawi (Lane Poole 1949:7; see Read 1956).

Although it is not clear if a second Ngoni group crossed the Zambezi at the same time or later; a second group passed through Dedza in Malawi on their way to

Songea in Tanzania. There they encountered the earlier Ngoni group under the leadership of the Zulu Gama who forced them, under the leadership of Maseko, to go back to Malaŵi where they settled in 1871 amongst the Cheŵa in Ntcheu and Dedza area and at Domwe Mountain in Mozambique (Mgomezulu 1978:32-36; Linden 1971).

At the same time that the first Ngoni were raiding in Malaŵi, Dr David Livingstone entered Malaŵi and reached Lake Malaŵi on 17th September 1859. Later, in 1865, he surveyed the course of the Rukuzi River in the Luangwa valley[19].

During the patrilineal Ngoni invasion, Cheŵa people had to leave their villages and seek refuge in the mountains (Robinson 1975). According to Clark (1973:33) local informants in central Malaŵi remember the Ngoni raids and state that the Cheŵa took refugee in Mwana wa Chentcherere II "with no other possession but their goats". During my fieldwork in 2003 I visited this site with a group of local women from Mpalale village and the oldest lady in the group remembered that the shelter was occupied during the Ngoni raids of the 19th century. This is also the case for many other sites like Panga la Ngoni in the Chongoni Forest Reserve in central Malaŵi.

Marwick gives an account of a hunter named Hugo Genthe who was passing by a Cheŵa village in 1897; 26 years after the Ngoni came into contact with the Cheŵa:

> On my arrival I found the male population all under arms, and the women crying. A raiding party of Mpezeni's [Ngoni] people had attacked them suddenly that morning. Ten women were killed in the gardens and twenty-two were taken away as prisoners. An old man and one of the headman's children had been severely wounded. Their entrails hung out of frightfully torn wounds, inflicted most likely by barbed spears. It was a pitiful sight — the groans of the

[19] Lane Poole (1949) writes that Livingstone stayed in Masumba village, which was located in the same spot 60 years later during the time of Poole's writing. I found this interesting as it talks about the continuity of some settlements in the area.

> wounded, the women crying over their dead, whose bodies were brought from the gardens, the men standing about helplessly and depressed…(Marwick 1963:345-345).

Hodgson (1933:128) states that, during the early 1900s, the Ngoni and Chewa intermarried in central Malawi and now there are just a few pure Ngoni living in the Dowa District *c*. 100km north from Dedza. The Ngoni incomers were almost exclusively male and they married Chewa women. Their children therefore learned their mother-tongue, Chichewa, and with it Chewa rituals and oral traditions. This explains why the Ngoni language is almost extinct north of the Zambezi. Chewa women, however, were forced to leave their villages and their sacred places. The Ngoni, with time, adopted dominantly Chewa customs but at the same time influenced Chewa social structure.

According to Schoffeleers's reading of various sources (1992:262) the interaction of the Ngoni with the Chipeta was not the same everywhere. In Dowa, the Chipeta were able to keep their distance from the Ngoni; in Dedza they became labourers and in Ntcheu they intermarried with the Ngoni.

This account is important as it gives us an idea of the degree of impact that the Ngoni had on the Chewa throughout the Central Region of Malawi. For example, when I was passing a village near Namzeze rock shelter in Dedza District, I was discussing the Ngoni raids with a young man who was the son of the headman's representative. For him, the fact that he was a product of the mixture between the Ngoni and the Chewa made him understand the Ngoni raids in a different way: not just as brutal raids. For me, it was important to realize how historical accounts are also a result of people's perceptions about their ancestors and thus, as researchers, we need to consider this when we read historical accounts. We need to be equally aware when we read material culture (see Vansina [1960] for discussion on reading oral traditions).

At the beginning of the 20th century the Ngoni destroyed the sacred shrine at Msinja. The officials of the shrine managed to rescue the sacred drum, which is one the most important objects at the shrine (Probst 2002).

The Yao

The Yao, in the 18th century, were known for their trading covering the area from the Mozambican coast through Malaŵi and eastern Zambia. Phiri (1979:17) writes that the Chewa were ivory suppliers but "by about 1750 they had linked their commercial activities with those of the Bisa who traded ivory on behalf of the Lunda Kingdom of Kazembe on the Luapula River of northeastern Zambia". This development also led them into internal wars and raids for commodities characterized the 19th century. This was exacerbated by the slave trade. By 1855, when Dr Livingstone encountered, for the first time, the Victoria Falls in Zambia, the Arab slave trade was a part of the regular activates of the area (Jarret 1966:372).

More or less at the same time as the Ngoni raids (1850–1870) the Yao, who were originally settled east of Lake Malaŵi near the Ruvuma River, also moved into Malaŵi due to conflicts with the Ngoni and the Lomwe. They arrived in the southern part of Malaŵi and began active slave trading (Robinson 1975:10; Mgomezulu 1978). Although Yao settlement occurred in the *c*. 1850s, Yao slave traders had been operating amongst the Chewa and Mang'anja inhabitants of southern Malaŵi before this date (Robinson 1975:45). Stannus (1910:285) comments that the Chewa became very mixed with the Yao and the Ngoni after they were overrun by the invasions.

In 1878 Rev. Duff Macdonald, from the Blantyre Mission, became one of the most important ethnographers of the Yao people. Because of their close relations with the Arabs, the Yao were progressively Islamized. In the 1880s the Yao Chief Makanjira was converted to Islam; there are accounts that still in 1875, when the Scottish Mission arrived in Malaŵi, the Yao were practising their own religion.

The Yao bought Chewa slaves who were prisoners of wars and, according to Lamba (1985:72), these captives were treated well and were free to marry local Yao

people thus "in such situations foreign elements found their way into the Yao culture". However, it is more probable that the slaves were raped and forced to marry local Yao. It is not surprising then to find Chewa ritual practices such as *Nyau* and *Chinamwali* amongst some Yao groups.

At the same time, in the 1870s, the last Karonga and Mwali were killed by the Mangochi Yao chief Nenula (Linden 1972:11). It seems that between 1863 and 1878 the last remnants of the Maravi Empire were destroyed.

Last two centuries

The last part of the 19th century witnessed various events that further impacted Chewa culture such as the coming and influence of western European culture. The first missionary expedition of the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) (named after the association of Cambridge, Oxford, Dublin and Durham universities) arrived in Malawi in 1861 (Winspear 1956:12) as a tangible outcome of Livingstone's appeal to British universities (Lamba 1985:62).

From the 1870s missionaries introduced Christian teachings and European medical techniques (Phiri 1983:258). The Dutch Reformed Church Mission (DRCM) had the earliest contacts with the Chewa in parts of central Malawi (Dedza, Lilongwe, Dowa and Kasungu) (Lamba 1985:68). The arrival of missionaries had a serious effect on Chewa traditional ceremonies. The Catholic Church had to overcome strong opposition from *Nyau* because missionaries tried to impose a rigid moral code and to stop "obscene and immoral ceremonies" (see Linden 1974; Probst 2002). Thus the *Chinamwali* and the *Nyau* ceremonies, that survived the Ngoni raids, were now subjected to Church scrutiny and attack.

At the same time in Zambia in 1885 and 1888, Kambwiri from the Bisa descended the Muchinga escarpment and expelled the Chewa from the Chiwande area of the Eastern Province of Zambia (Lane Poole 1949:31). After the full entrance of Europeans in the area around 1888, Malawi and Zambia became part of the British Protectorate while Mozambique formed part of the Portuguese Colony.

In the 1890s, with the advent of the Protectorate over what was then known as the Nyasaland Districts by the British Government, the Chewa were subjected to colonial rule and drawn into a capitalist economy (Phiri 1983:258; Smith 2005a). In 1893 the name of the Protectorate was changed to the British Central Africa Protectorate and later, in 1907, into the Nyasaland Protectorate. The British suppressed slavery at the end of 1895 when Sir Harry Johnston defeated the Arab chief, Mlazi, at Karonga northern Malawi (Jarret 1966:372). The British South Africa Company (BSAC) occupied the territory north of the Zambezi by 1889 and they gained control of the Eastern Province, Zambia in 1898 and the Bemba area in 1899 (Rasing 2001:38).

The Lomwe moved in large numbers into the south-eastern part of Malawi around 1897–1907 followed by the Sena who migrated from the Zambezi into the south of Malawi (Mgomezulu 1978). Northern Rhodesia was established in 1911 when Barotseland, North-Western Rhodesia and North-Eastern Rhodesia were amalgamated. In 1923 the first Governor of Northern Rhodesia was appointed and the responsibility was transferred from the British South Africa Company to the Colonial Office.

In the beginning of the 20th century the British defeated the Ngoni and the Yao and the Chewa regained some authority in the area (Probst 2002:189). Chewa people started to interact not only with Western religion but also with other aspects of Western culture (*e.g.*, modern dancing in western style and gramophones began appearing in villages for the first time in the 1930s [Linden 1974:120]).

By 1952, there were a million Chewa: 77 percent of the Chewa population was located in central Malawi, 14 percent in eastern Zambia and 9 percent in the Tete Province in Mozambique (Marwick 1963). In 1953 both Zambia and Malawi along with Zimbabwe (formerly Southern Rhodesia) came together within the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, despite African opposition. The Federation collapsed ten years later and in 1964, was dissolved. The Bemba and the Chewa were prominent in

their opposition to the Federation. Zambia gained independence in 1964 and Kenneth Kaunda became the first president.

Malaŵi also gained independence in 1964 with Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda in the presidency. Malaŵi became a Republic in 1966. Banda reintroduced the *Nyau* ceremonies as a moral icon important for Malaŵian identity (Probst 2002). Even nowadays *Nyau* performs every year at the Kulamba ceremony in Katete District, eastern Zambia. This ceremony is a revival of an old ceremony that was banned in the 1930s. In 1986 the Cheŵa traditional authorities of Zambia, Malaŵi and Mozambique, in an attempt to revitalize their culture, agreed to reestablish the Kulamba ceremony (Guhrs & Kapwepwe 2007:176). Every year, during the last weekend of August, Cheŵa from Mozambique and Malaŵi go to Mkaika, the headquarters of the Cheŵa in Zambia, to pay respect to the Gawa Undi, Paramount Chief of the Cheŵa. In 2007, the three presidents of these countries attended the Kulamba ceremony and the Catholic Church sent a representative; their presence confirms the significance that this ceremony has gained in the larger political, social and economical scene (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Church representative paying respect to the Kalonga Chief Gawa Undi at the Kulamba Ceremony 2007, eastern Zambia.

Around the same time, in 1963, the liberation war started in Mozambique and Portugal sent troops to fight the popular resistance but after 470 years of colonial rule, Mozambique gained independence in 1975. The first president, Samora Moises Machel, was head of the *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (National Front for the Liberation of Mozambique) (FRELIMO) during its ten-year war for independence.

In 1985, after a decade of independence, the government became locked into a paralyzing civil war with antigovernment guerrillas, the *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (Mozambique National Resistance) (RENAMO), backed by the white minority government in South Africa. In 1992 a cease-fire agreement was signed between the government and RENAMO.

Discussion

Based on the oral traditions, the arrival of the two main Chewa clans, the Banda and the Phiri, is separated by several centuries. However, the presence of matrilineal groups, as early as the 8th century in Malawi, has important implications for the reading and the interpretation of local oral traditions. The existence of early ceramics related to the Luangwa pottery tradition indicates a long period of contact between various matrilineal groups who, apparently, all came from southern Congo. However, we need more archaeological data to understand better the spread of the pre-Maravi peoples (see also Langworthy [1969] for discussion on the lack of archaeological data to corroborate Undi's migration).

Despite the availability of information, little research has been done into the links between the region where Chewa rock art is concentrated and the area that the oral traditions name the Chewa origin point. Although some engraved spread-eagled designs have been reported (Geoffroy Heimlich pers. comm. 2007), I urge for an archaeological survey in the southern Democratic Republic of the Congo to search for the origins of the White Spread-eagled tradition; and even if no sites are found this would still usefully indicate that the practise of painting in rockshelters was a local regional development. It is not only the oral traditions that suggest this origin, the archaeological evidence also points in the same direction. The possible antecedent for

the Kapeni ceramic tradition, the first Luangwa pottery in Malaŵi, probably lies in the Katanga region in south-eastern Congo (*cf*. Huffman 1989a; Phillipson 2005).

Other evidence for the link between south-central Africa and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are found in ritual ceremonies. For example, Langworthy (1969) noted similarities between the Luba's *Bumbudye* secret society and the *Nyau* of the Chewa; however, he also points out the difficulties of tracing Luba origins (Langworthy 1969:111-126). Phiri (1975:44) mentions that certain words in Chewa and Luba have a similar meaning such as the word for God (*Leza*) and chief (*mulopwe*). More work on such similarities still needs to be done as this would give us a better sense of the origins of Chewa beliefs and ritual.

Although some oral traditions are difficult to relate particular periods of time, the rich oral tradition from south-central Africa is of great importance to my research. Vansina (1960:43) points out that oral traditions are testimonies of the past that pass from mouth to mouth and that they are different from rumours. It is undeniable that most African populations preserved their history not on paper but in stories, songs and poems. The last two have helped women to deal with the tensions of daily life (Mvula 1986, 1987). This rich evidence is that which we need to use as researchers if we want to understand how African populations operated transmitted knowledge through the centuries.

In order to make good use of oral traditions it is important to understand why people remember certain things. Langworthy (1969:109) points out, for example, that the reason why people like the Chewa do not remember the details of origins and migrations is because detailed history is connected to its functional relation to a "well-developed political structure, especially a centralized kingship". Langworthy explains further that, at the moment of the migration, the ancestors of the Chewa did not have kings, just some minor leaders and followers, and this is why they do not remember in detail their historical events. Although his point is valid in terms of understanding the function of the production and reproduction of history, as a way of reinforcing the authority of a dominant group, I think that this assumption gives an overly narrow

view of the complexity of the interactions between various groups in a specific region and gives little value to the complex reasons behind the preservation of historical events in oral traditions.

According to Phiri (2004) the Luba were located in the Shaba (Katanga) region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo between the Lualaba and Bashimai rivers. By the 13th century there were three important chieftainships in the Lubaland region and the population had increased. Accusations of witchcraft and quarrels between the chiefs are said to have motivated some to look for new lands to the southeast.

At the same time, the Arabs were trading various commodities along the coast of Mozambique. The earliest coins in Kilwa, Tanzania, date from the flourishing era of the Shirazi dynasty under Ali bin al-Hasan at the end of the 12th century. According to Linden (1972:14) it is likely that the Arabs arrived during the 13th century through the Lake Tanganyika-Malaŵi corridor and established contact with the Maravi people and trade of ivory with them. If Linden is correct, this suggests that the Maravi would already, by the 13th century, had a powerful vehicle for increasing chiefly power and authority.

During the 15th century the Luba merged with their Lunda neighbours to their west. They both traded copper and iron. Some traders went to Angola where they met the Portuguese and gained maize, cassava, groundnuts and other crops introduced from South America. This was also the time of the start of organized slave trading.

If this information is correct the pertinent question is: why do the Chewa remember their origin from the Luba country, when the Luba kingdom only became powerful in the 15th century? What happened between the 6th to the 15th centuries in south-central Africa? Is it possible that the ancestors of the Chewa started to collect and transmit migration stories only once they became the Maravi Empire? If so, then maybe Langworthy is correct. An alternative but similar explanation is that, as Kings Phiri (1975) notes, oral traditions sometimes come from royal families and tend to

justify their status, thus they become the stories that are accepted. In this sense, narrative of the migration from the Luba country would be reinforcing the political power of the Phiri who may have arrived after the establishment of Luba power. The lack of detail related to the origins and migration is not just true of the Chewa; most of the people who claim to come from the Luba-Lunda region in southern Congo have the same lack of detail as can be seen from the accounts of the Bemba and Nsenga people.

Stories of migrations, settlements, occupations and interactions then, need to be decoded. In this sense I agree with Vansina (1966) that the early population's mobility in this region (although he is mainly talking about the Congo region) needs to be seen in terms of clans or segment of clans; these would have been very mobile and would have dispersed in all directions. Vansina mentions that "Lunda immigrations and expansion did not consist of mass movements but applied only to ruling clans, so that the number of actual Lunda immigrants may have been very small" (*ibid*.:88). Thinking along this line it is sensible to imagine the Pre-Maravi migrations from the Congo taking various routes, with different groups that varied in the number of their members. The Banda, certainly, migrated before the Phiri and only later established relations with the Phiri based on mutual need or Phiri coercion. An interesting question is whether the Banda brought with them some kind of girls' initiation ceremonies. Some authors (*e.g.*, Rasing 2001:39) believe that the female initiation rites, amongst matrilineal societies, may go back 2000 years and would always have been central for the people of this area.

No oral traditions talk about the practice of painting in rock shelters, however Kings Phiri (1975) points out something that is relevant to understand the presence of paintings in central Malawi, especially in the Chongoni area. Phiri collected his data from various informants and some of the Banda informants stated that the Banda were already settled in central Malawi before the Kalonga arrived in the area, and moreover that they practised a political organization based on ritualised female leadership. Of particular interest are the oral traditions from eastern Dedza in central Malawi. Phiri explains that they "indicate that there were initially two separate systems of authority

there. The Banda maintained one at Mankhamba (near Nthakataka) and the other one was maintained by the Phiri at Manthimba (near Sharpeville)" (Phiri 1975:53).

Mankhamba has been located close to Nthakataka, where the Mua Mission is today, close to the lakeshore (Phiri 1975; Linden 1975). Yusuf Juwayeyi is presently excavating this site and commented that Mankhamba was a village: the headquarters of the Phiri (Juwayeyi pers. comm. 2007). Kings Phiri (1975) writes that, from the oral traditions, the leading shrine organizers were all women who were descended from Mangadzi. Mwali at Mankhamba is one example. It is this possible that this Banda centre only later became the centre of Kalonga's kingdom (Phiri 1975:53).

Chongoni Forest Reserve is located not only near Mankhamba but also close to other important shrines such as Kaphirintiwa, Tsangoma, Msinja and Bunda. It is thus in the heart of the Banda system. I think that these facts explain why the largest accumulation of paintings is found in this region of central Malaŵi: because the paintings are related to the Banda who were originally in charge of initiation ceremonies and rain calling. Moreover, it is known that one of the changes between the Proto-Cheŵa and Maravi period is that the location of the shrines changed from the mountains to the plains (Schoffeleers 1973).

Apart from the shrines, early evidence of ritual practices, such as girls' initiation ceremonies are poorly mentioned in the oral tradition compared to other aspects of life. Phiri notes (1975:15) that the Cheŵa oral traditions describe mostly political events and only make reference to the economic, religious and other aspects of social life incidentally. The details that we know of the way of life of the Cheŵa come mostly from the records of foreigners, such as the Portuguese. These records became the historical accounts of the region. In 2006 I had the opportunity to visit the Arquivo Nacional da Torre Tombo in Lisboa where I searched for documents that accounted for any information on initiation ceremonies. Most of the archives were related to the Churches in Mozambique and the Missions but I could not find any mention of initiation ceremonies in early Portuguese documents.

In the present, central Malaŵi is a predominantly Chewa-inhabited region, in contrast to Zambia and Mozambique (Phiri 1975). This has an impact on the predominance of ritual performances as it seems that, in central Malaŵi, some aspects of the *Chinamwali* ceremony still remain that do not survive in neighbouring countries (Drake 1976). However, my experience in 2007 in eastern Zambia attests to the contrary as I recorded complexities in *Chinamwali* ceremonies that show some important variations from the ones in central Malaŵi. I will discuss these variations in the following chapters, but a full comparative analysis cannot be given because of the lack of detailed regional studies on the subject. A particular lacuna in our knowledge is Mozambique where anthropological research has been very limited amongst the Chewa and Nsenga (Kaplan 1984:93).

Another challenging aspect is our present understanding of the degree of interaction between populations. Regarding the Nsenga, for example, even if they did not originate from the ancestors of the Chewa (perhaps the most evident difference is the lack of *Nyau* amongst the Nsenga [*cf.* Apthorpe 1961:56]), strong interaction undoubtedly occurred at the end of the 18th century.

The Nsenga, coming also from the Congo region, might have also brought their own initiation ceremonies just as did the Bemba in the Northern Province of Zambia. In the present, all these matrilineal groups have basic similarities in their girls' initiation ceremonies. However, some of these groups, by further and continuous contact, exchanged and absorbed aspects, making it difficult to know where traits originally started. The ceremonies of the Nsenga and the Chewa, for example, are very similar and this is probably due to their interactions at the end of the 18th century. A detailed discussion of the similarities and differences between performances of girls' initiation amongst various groups is also part of following chapters.

In Mozambique, Antonio Rita-Ferreira (1966) is one of the only authors to have published a detailed account of the Chewa group in his work *Os Cheuas da Macanga*. He also refers to various other authors who contributed to our knowledge of the Chewa in Mozambique, people such as Pereira Cabral, Sousa e Silva and

Santos Júnior. Nonetheless, despite the lack of anthropological research in Mozambique, the Arquivo do Património Cultural (ARPAC) has recently started a project to record oral traditions from the people in the area of Macanga District in Tete Province.

Based on my own personal experience in Furancungo, Mozambique and neighbouring villages in 2006, the general feeling of the people that I talked to is still of 'coming back'; of resettling the areas that they used to inhabit before the civil war. While talking to the women in the region about their initiations and their knowledge of the paintings, I had the impression that there is a gap in the information precisely because the people of this area had to run away from war and reside in neighbouring countries. I was told by a couple of women that some of those who left came back to their original villages and resettled in the same spot. Even so, the returnees had been strongly influenced by their period in exile. I was told, for example, that the people who left, learnt from the people in Malaŵi how to do "some things" during the girl's initiation. In general the people from Furancungo referred to central Malaŵi as the place where they went during the war.

In September 2006 I had the opportunity to meet Don Antonio Rita-Ferrerira in his residence in Portugal and to discuss with him some personal experiences amongst the Chewa and the period of the civil war in Mozambique. We also discussed the girls' initiation and what he remembered about it. He suggested that I should go to Mano in search for oral traditions amongst the Chewa people in that region. According to him, this area had been less disturbed than others such as Furancungo. Unfortunately, on my visit to Tete Province, Mozambique in 2006 I could not reach Mano. It was only the following year in 2007 that I had the opportunity to cross from Zambia into this remote region of Mozambique for a few days. Unfortunately, I spent little time in this region, but I met various Chewa chiefs thanks to Mr Chikuta's advice (speaker of the Gawa Undi in Katete, Zambia) who gave me a list of Chewa chiefs from Tete Province.

The people in the area know about Undi, and that he once resided in a place called *Msitu Mano*, described by one of the chiefs as "a place with so many trees that you can only see the shade". Mano, however, is a general name given to a large area between the Kapoche River and the border with Malawi. Little is known of where the last residence of Undi was and it has become a sort of a legend; some people say that the place where he used to stay had many banana trees, others that it had many elephants. Rita Ferreira mentioned to me that the last capital of Undi was at the confluence between the Kapoche and Loatize Rivers (Figure 12).

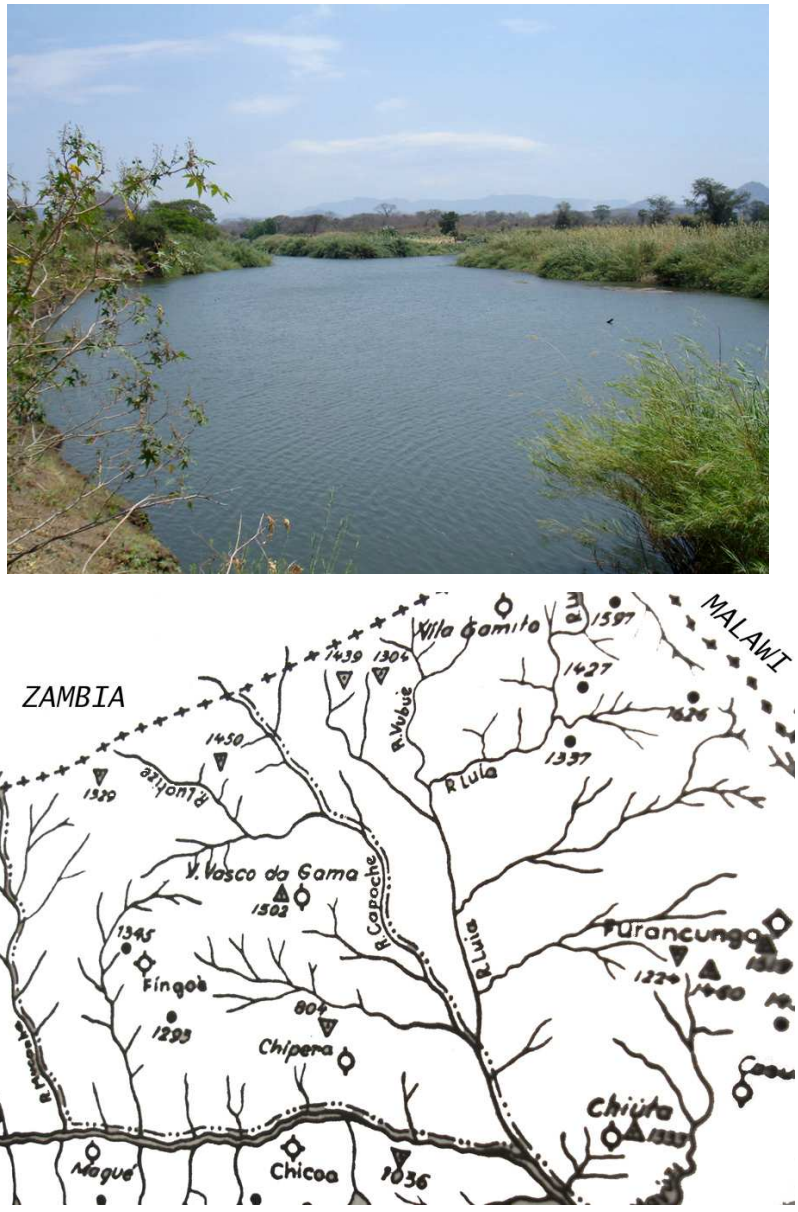


Figure 12. Top: Confluence of the Loatize and Kapoche rivers, Mozambique 2007. Bottom: Map of the location of the confluence of the Loatize and Kapoche (Capoche) rivers in Mozambique (after Santos Júnior 1944).

I went to this area, but I could not find any archaeological evidence on the surface; just a few recent scattered pots and the stories of some people who live in the area and who say that Undi used to stay in that area. I thought that by going there I would find testimonies that would direct me to rock paintings. Although the people in the region seem not know about any paintings or their location, I would encourage researchers to spend more time in this region and to conduct surveys.

Regarding girls' initiation ceremonies, I only had the chance to talk to one of the chiefs about it and, from what he told me, the *Chinamwali* ceremony in this area sounded more similar to the Zambian ceremony than the one performed in Malaŵi. However, I must state that I didn't participate in any *Chinamwali* ceremonies in Mozambique and although I had the opportunity to talk to many women in Macanga District in 2006; I did not have the same opportunity in the Maravia District the following year (Table 1).

What I realize is that the Chewa in the present are a product of interaction and intermarriage; a combination of different populations particularly Yao and Ngoni in central Malaŵi; Nsenga and Kunda in eastern Zambia and Chewa and Shona in central-western Mozambique. However, according to Phillipson (1977:176) it is safe to say that there has been a much greater continuity of populations during the past eight or nine centuries than a literal interpretation of the oral tradition indicates. By this he means that while chiefly clans have shifted, risen and fallen, the bulk of ordinary households have remained relatively stable in place over many centuries. In consequence, some ceremonies have been adopted by other groups, changed or fused but we can expect much continuity as well. Therefore, in order to link the girls' initiation ceremonies with the rock art, we need to be aware of the rich information that we will find amongst the Chewa and their neighbouring groups. Thus, it is crucial to understand and visualize the borders between populations in this region as flexible frontiers that have changed through history.

Chapter Three: Rock art research in south-central Africa

The rock art traditions of south-central Africa

Many authors have contributed to our knowledge of south central African rock art — Zambia, Malaŵi and Mozambique — in the past hundred years (*e.g.*, van Riet Lowe 1937; Santos Júnior 1955; Metcalfe 1956; Clark 1959a, 1959b; Chaplin 1960, 1962; Roza de Oliveira 1975; Phillipson 1976; Lindgren and Schoffeleers 1978; Juwayeyi and Phiri 1992; Smith 1995; Saetersdal 2003).

In the early 1990s Benjamin Smith conducted his PhD research in Zambia and Malaŵi, and based on an analysis of the existing literature and his own fieldwork data, he suggested that south-central African rock art should be divided into four rock art traditions (Smith 1995, 1997):

- The Red Animal tradition art (RA)
- The Red Geometric tradition art (RG)
- The White Spread-eagled tradition art (WSE)
- The White Zoomorphic tradition art (WZ)

The first two traditions — the Red Animal and Red Geometric (Figure 13) — have been associated by most researchers with the hunter-gatherer people known as the Batwa (Clark 1959a, 1973; Lindgren & Schoffeleers 1978; Juwayeyi & Phiri 1992; Smith 1995, 1997, 2006; but see Phillipson 1972a, 1972b, 1976 for a different opinion), who inhabited the area before the arrival of Bantu-language speakers.



Figure 13. Top: Red animal tradition, Mwela Rocks site, northern Zambia (left: central animal approx. length 40cm; right: central figure approx. length 5cm). Bottom left: Red geometric tradition, Katolola B site, eastern Zambia; bottom right: redrawing from Katolola B site (after Phillipson 1976:172).

The Red Geometric tradition in south-central Africa is located in Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Smith 1997; Le Quellec 2004). It is an engraved and painted tradition in which common motifs are circles, concentric circles and divided circles, circles with radiating lines, ladders, lines and sets of parallel lines (Smith 1997, 2006).

Dating evidence shows that this tradition was still practised after the arrival of the Bantu-speakers in the area. This is confirmed by the presence of a fallen block in Nakapapula shelter, Zambia where Phillipson (1972a:37) comments that red geometrics were painted around this block after it fell in the second half of the first

millennium A.D. This is the only dated site in Zambia that confirms the recent practice of the Red Geometric tradition.

The Red Animal tradition is less common and it comprises paintings and engravings of animals and humans always in red or purple pigment. Often the animals are outlined and other times they are completely or partially filled. A characteristic of these paintings is that the animals have a distorted stomach that makes the legs, head and tail look tiny. Most often animal species are unidentifiable but when they are recognisable, the antelope is the most common animal depicted though there are also elephant, rhino, lion, leopard, giraffe, hyena, warthog, wild pig, ostrich and buffalo (Smith 1997:12-13).

The later two traditions have been associated with the western matrilineal-line of farmer groups that came into the area towards the end of the first millennium A.D.: specifically, the ancestors of the people I introduced in the previous chapter under the names Chewa, Nyanja or Maravi (Metcalfe 1956; Clark 1959a; Phillipson 1972a; Chaplin 1962; Lindgren & Schoffeleers 1978; Juwayeyi & Phiri 1992; Smith 1995, 1997, 2001). Of the four rock art traditions that have been recognized in south-central Africa, this chapter discusses only the later traditions, those associated with the matrilineal people, as they are the subject of my research.

The White traditions

Previous research conduced in the area of research

This section is intended to give an overall view of past and present research into the farmer rock art of south-central Africa. I include the White Zoomorphic tradition because these paintings sometimes occur in the same sites as the White Spread-eagled tradition. It is important to address both traditions for further discussions because they have been ascribed to two important institutions within Chewa society, as I shall explain.

The White Zoomorphic tradition and the White Spread-eagled tradition follow a geographical distribution in south-central Africa that corresponds with the area that we know, from the historical accounts, the oral traditions and the archaeological evidence, was inhabited by the ancestors of the Chewa before groups, such as the Ngoni and Yao, came into the area in the middle of the 19th century A.D (Chapter 2). This area comprises central Malawi, central-western Mozambique and eastern Zambia.

These two traditions started to gain attention in the early decades of the 1900s. According to Phiri (1975) the first Nyasaland Colonial Administration District officers started to collect oral traditions among the Chewa between 1907 and 1914. More over "this was done at a time when the Nyasaland (Malawi) Government was keen to gather the oral history of the different 'tribes' in the country before such history could be lost under changes brought by the introduction of colonial rule" (Phiri 1975:15).

In the late 1920s Margaret Metcalfe recorded, for the first time, not just the 'claret-coloured paintings' that were the centre of attraction, but also the white paintings of Mphunzi and Chiwenembe in Dedza District, Malawi. Later, in 1956, her drawings were published in *The Nyasaland Journal*. In her text, the red paintings still received great attention and were linked to the Nachikufan man[20]. The white paintings, Metcalfe writes, were "modern and seem to me of little interest. At some time, however they must have been made for some reason as it meant taking the trouble to fetch the white pigment to the spot in order to do them" (Metcalfe 1956:60). Thus, she was interested in the paintings but apparently not impressed by them, perhaps because they were not as old as the red paintings.

One of the rock art sites that she describes with the name *Cankombe* is a site that I visited in 2003 and later in 2006. These sites are open to the public. There are several points that I want to mention; the distinctive big boulder is located in the foothills of the Mphunzi Mountain and it is known today as Mphunzi 3. This boulder

[20] Nachikufan was borrowed from the archaeological research that was growing in Zambia and that pointed out the existence of a distinctive stone industry in the Later Stone Age (Clark 1959a).

has two big niches where the paintings are located; Metcalfe describe them as caves (Figure 14). Today the site is very accessible as it is just a hundred metres from the road. Trees used to surround the site but now it is an open area where people plant maize. When I visited the site in 2003 I met the local people who lived next it and tried to encourage them to protect the site and to refrain from planting so close to it as this attracts people and animals. However, apparently this is a practice that has been there at least 30 years as we can see from the pictures that Anati (1997:230) published of this site. The paintings, however, remain more or less protected, fortunately, because the niches are more than a metre high from the ground. It is a bit ironic to think how the value of sites changes from sacred places to public open sites: in the present there is little or no attention paid to these paintings.

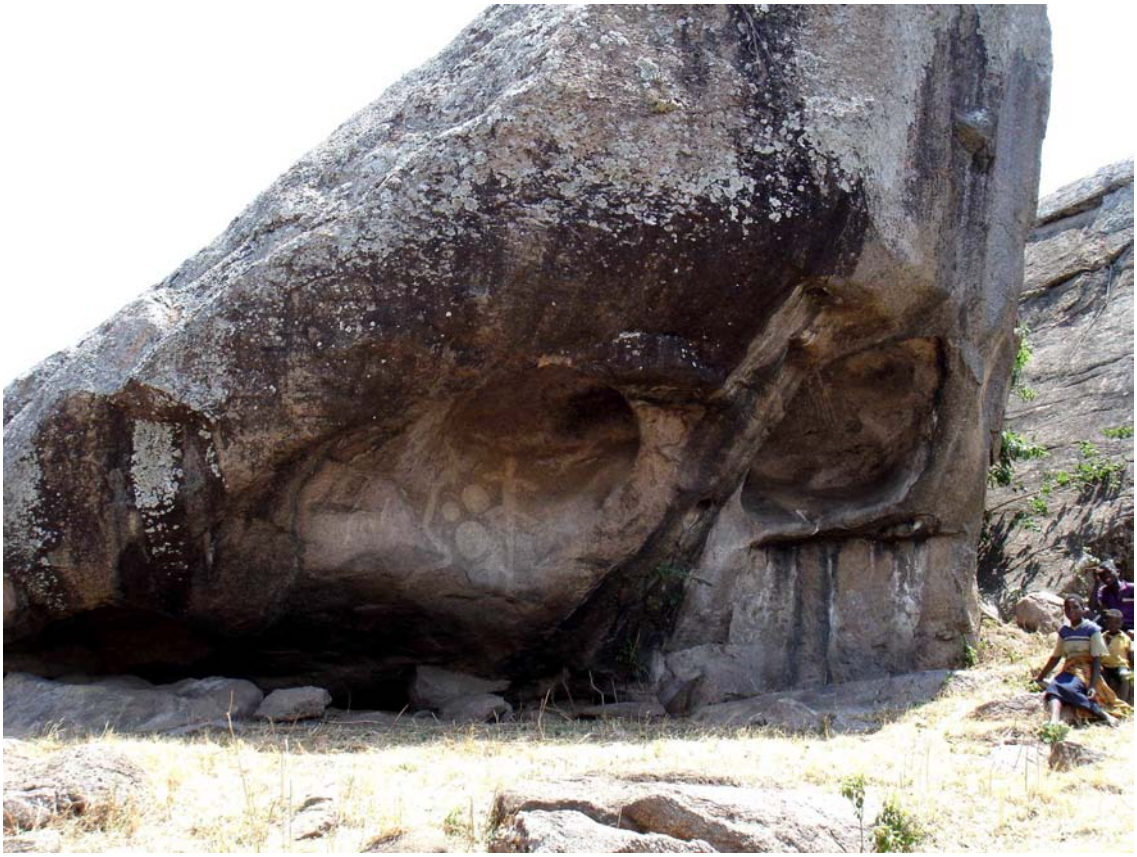


Figure 14. Paintings at Mphunzi 3, central Malaŵi 2006.

Metcalfe shows in her redrawing that a red painted line is next to a white spread-eagled design and three circles (Figure 15). However, the red line is located in the right hand niche and the spread-eagled design and three circles in the left one, they

are separate from each other. Thus, these have to be considered more as sketches than accurate redrawings: there are some paintings that were not described or included; she did not include the snake-like figure on the left and did not notice the spread-eagled design with the black dots on the body.

There are two possibilities for this: lack of attention or that the paintings that we can see in the present, although unlikely, were added later to the composition that she recorded. Metcalfe pointed out, however, that the published illustrations were rough sketches not to scale or accurate facsimiles. She also mentions that she made accurate copies but at the time of publication they were no longer in her possession — she gave them to a museum in South Wales (Metcalfe 1956:61). I have tried to find them and, after dozens of electronic mails and the help of various people (National Museum Wales, Swansea Museum [Royal Institute of South Wales], National Museum in Cardiff, Department of Archaeology & Numismatics, Glynn Vivian Art Gallery and the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth) I have not been able to locate them.





Figure 15. Mphunzi 3 paintings showing a composition of a spread-eagled, circles and a snake-like. Below, Mphunzi 3 sketch (after Metcalfe 1956:diagram II).

In the early decades of the 20th century, anthropological research was becoming popular in the area. Audrey Richards conducted work amongst the Bemba people in Zambia during the 1930s (*e.g.*, Richards 1936, 1939, 1945, 1956). In Malaŵi, William H.G. Rangeley, a colonial officer, started to collect historical accounts on the cultural practices of local people (*e.g.*, Rangeley 1949, 1950, 1952). Between 1948 and 1960 Rangeley conducted fieldwork and archival research in order to prepare a general history of Malaŵi (Phiri 1975). Little by little (*pang'ono pang'ono*), people started to become familiar with the rock art of the region and wondered about its meanings and authorship.

Malawian rock art received more attention in the 1950s thanks to J. Desmond Clark who attempted to divide the rock art of this region in 2 groups: 1) the Naturalistic and Semi-naturalistic styles and b) the Schematic series. The white paintings were part of the second group.

In the 1970s Paul A. Cole-King, director of the Department of Antiquities of Malaŵi, published for the first time, a report on the archaeological sites known in the country (see Cole-King 1973) and a monograph on Mwalawolemba, Mikolongwe rock art in central Malaŵi (Cole-King 1968).

In 1978 Lindgren and Schoffeleers contributed importantly to the rock art of Malaŵi. They also divided the art in two groups: a) the Red Schematic Paintings and b) the White Paintings. Lindgren attributed the white paintings to the Cheŵa people and, together with Schoffeleers, argued the connection of a set of paintings to the *Nyau* secret society.

In 1986, Emmanuel Anati was appointed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the Government of Malaŵi to identify rock art sites to be included on the World Heritage list[21] and to evaluate the condition and conservation of the paintings. Anati wrote a report on the rock art of Malaŵi and formulated recommendations for the training of specialists. In his schedule he devoted 20 days to visiting rock art sites. He visited a total of 49 sites in various districts although he compiled 116 sites in his report to UNESCO. Anati divided the rock art in 4 groups: a) the *Nyau* style, b) the Bantu White style, c) the Red Schematic style and d) the Early Hunters figurative style. Of this four I comment on his interpretations for his "Bantu White style" later.

In the 1990s Yusuf Juwayeyi and Mathias Phiri (1992) also divided Malaŵian rock art into two main divisions:

1) The Red paintings characterized by basic geometric designs.
2) The White paintings which were naturalistic and which they divided in three styles: the Bantu style, *Nyau* style and Schematic style.

The bulk of known rock art sites are within Dedza District, central Malaŵi, where rocky hill formations have shaped protected shelters. The Chongoni Forest Reserve in Dedza District is one of the richest areas of rock art in south-central Africa, containing at least 126 rock art sites (Smith 1995). Thus, for central Malaŵi, I draw on Smith's work (1995) for Dedza District, where he recorded approximately

[21] It was only in 2006, 20 years later, that the Chongoni Mountain in Dedza was appointed as a World Heritage site.

fifty-three sites that correspond to the White Spread-eagled tradition during the course of his doctoral fieldwork.

Zambian rock art sites have been described in a number of publications (*e.g.*, Clark 1959a, 1959b; Chaplin 1962; Phillipson 1972a, 1976; Smith 1997) and much archaeological research has been undertaken. For example, just in Kasama, Northern Province, 200 hundred sites were located by Miss Elizabeth Hodgkin and the pupils of Kasama Girls' Secondary School (Phillipson 1972a:317). Later on 700 rock art sites were located between 1992 and 1995 during Smith's doctoral survey (see Smith 1997:29) but no white tradition paintings were found in this area. The other major area for White traditions, beside central Malaŵi, lies within the Eastern Province of Zambia. James H. Chaplin (1960, 1962) reported a number of sites and Phillipson compiled (1972a, 1976) and added to this. He published fourteen White Spread-eagled tradition sites in Chipata, Katete and Chadiza Districts in Eastern Province, Zambia (see Phillipson 1976).

In Mozambique, the White traditions have also been found but attention has focused on the Red Geometrics. In 1905 the Portuguese adopted the theory that the Chifumbaze paintings, in central-western Mozambique, were attributed to the Phoenicians (Santos Júnior 1938:7). Later on, in the 1930s, others took up this idea such as Raymond Dart (1931) and Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos Júnior. Dos Santos Júnior, head of the Anthropological Missions in Mozambique (Missão Antropológica de Moçambique), reported and photographed the red geometric paintings of the sites of Chifumbaze (Santos Júnior 1938) and Chicolone (*muala ulemba* written rock) (Santos Júnior 1940a, 1940b) in Macanga District close to the Malaŵian border.

Santos Júnior (1940a:370) states that white people were forbidden from approaching Chicolone (Figure 16) when he visited the site in 1937 in his 2nd campaign of the Anthropological Mission (Missão Antropológica). He almost died from a bee attack that made him fall to the ground; he was taken to Furancungo and transported by airplane to Maputo to be operated on. Fortunately, despite the accident, his work and tracing of the site was not lost (Santos Júnior 1940b).



Figure 16. Tracing at Chicolone site, Mozambique (after Santos Júnior 1940b:fig 94).

As was the practice in those days, he took all the material he collected (*e.g.*, ceramics and lithics) to Portugal and they are now housed at the Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical in Lisbon. I had the opportunity to visit this place and to see some of the collection in 2006 (Figure 17).





Figure 17. Collection of Mozambican material in Lisbon, Portugal 2006.

Although these early reports are of historical interest, archaeology really began in Mozambique after independence in 1975 as a part of nation-building (Sinclair *et al*. 1993:428-429; Macamo 1996:813-814). "Independence brought a major drive to establish a history for the new nation that stressed origins deep in the past rather than its servile status to a colonial power" (Hall 2005:180).

Because of the political and social context of this country, archaeological research has been scarce (Sinclair 1987) and only a few rock art sites have been studied in any detail (*e.g.*, Roza de Oliveira 1971, 1975; Santos Júnior 1955) particularly northern Tete Province. Furthermore, anthropological research has also been very limited: "although the Chewa-Nyanja peoples in Malawi and Zambia have been well studied, little is known of the Mozambican components of these peoples or the Nsenga" (Kaplan 1984:93).

In 1996, Solange Macamo noted, at the 10th Congress of the Pan African Association, that the list of Stone Age Sites in Mozambique was about 200, there were 252 Iron Age sites and only 20 rock paintings (Macamo 1996:813). Recently, an international group of archaeologists and rock art researchers headed by Tore Saetersdal from Bergen University, Norway, surveyed Macanga and Angonia

Districts, Tete Province in central-western Mozambique. A good sample of rock art sites was recorded. However, this sample cannot be compared to the number of sites recorded in Zambia and Malaŵi. The Mozambican sites that I will refer to in this research come from Saetersdal's surveys. I was fortunate to have participated in one of these in July 2005; I am grateful to Saetersdal for letting me use his material.

Authorship and interpretation

After giving a brief review of previous rock art research in south-central Africa, I shall now discuss the ideas and interpretations that people have raised concerning the White traditions. All have noted that the paintings are generally located in the mountainous regions (Phillipson 1976; Lindgren & Schoffeleers 1978; Smith 1995). In central Malaŵi they are located in areas between 1000-1800masl. In Macanga District in central-western Mozambique the altitude where the paintings are found ranges between 900-1300masl and in eastern Zambia, the mountains where the rock art is located range between 1100-1200masl (Figure 18). I discuss in Chapter 6 the possible reasons why these shelters are found within the mountain areas.







Figure 18. South-central African landscapes (from top to bottom): view from Chongoni Mountain, central Malawi 2006; Furancungo Mountain, central-western Mozambique 2006 and Kalemba Mountain, eastern Zambia 2007.

The White traditions are always daubed or finger-painted (Figure 19). The white pigment sometimes looks slightly pink or yellow and it is thanks to these variations in colour that in some shelters it is easy to discern the superimposition of images (*e.g.*, Chongoni 25, Campala).



Figure 19. Finger painted White tradition, central Malaŵi 2006.

The White Zoomorphic tradition

The identification of the authorship of the White Zoomorphic tradition has been based on subject matter recognition: some of the painted motifs clearly represent some of the structures and masks used for *Nyau* performances (Figure 20) — a man's closed association of the Chewa (Schoffeleers 1976; Phillipson 1976; Smith 1995, 1997, 2001). This identification was reached independently in Malaŵi and Zambia in the late 1970s by different authors (see Schoffeleers 1976; Phillipson 1976). The Chewa are a matrilineal society and residence is uxorilocal thus, besides the younger boys who have been initiated, all members of *Nyau* are outsiders who come to reside in the village of their wife.

Nyau is a Chewa secret association for men and it was only later that people such as the Ngoni, adopted and influenced this ritual practice (Chapter 2). Anati (1997:235) has stated confusingly that *Nyau* was developed by the Zulu (*Zoulous*) with links to South Africa. However, he states that he uses the word *Zulu* to refer to "farmer people". It is difficult to understand the point he is trying to establish. Southern African groups, like the Zulu, have no masking traditions. These are

particular to matrilineal western Bantu-language speakers. It is therefore demonstrably wrong to link *Nyau* to the Southern African Zulu. I thought it pertinent to note Anati's confusing authorship linkage because some of his interpretations have reached hundreds of people.



Figure 20. *Nyau* mask depiction (approx. length 50cm), Namzeze shelter, central Malaŵi 2006.

The White Zoomorphic sites are almost non-existent in Zambia (Benjamin Smith pers. comm. 2007); these white paintings occur more frequently in Malaŵi and in Mozambique. The only two sites in Zambia that are mentioned to have some white paintings related to this tradition are Thandwe and Chipwete in Chadiza District, eastern Zambia (Phillipson 1976:187). In Thandwe there is a depiction of a car very similar to one at Namzeze in central Malaŵi. However, I have visited Chipwete and it is my opinion that, although these motifs might represent zoomorphs, they are not as diagnostically *Nyau* as the ones we find in Mozambique and Malaŵi. Today, this site is much faded and Phillipson's redrawing (1976:172, figure 108) is thus the best source that we have for the site (Figure 21).

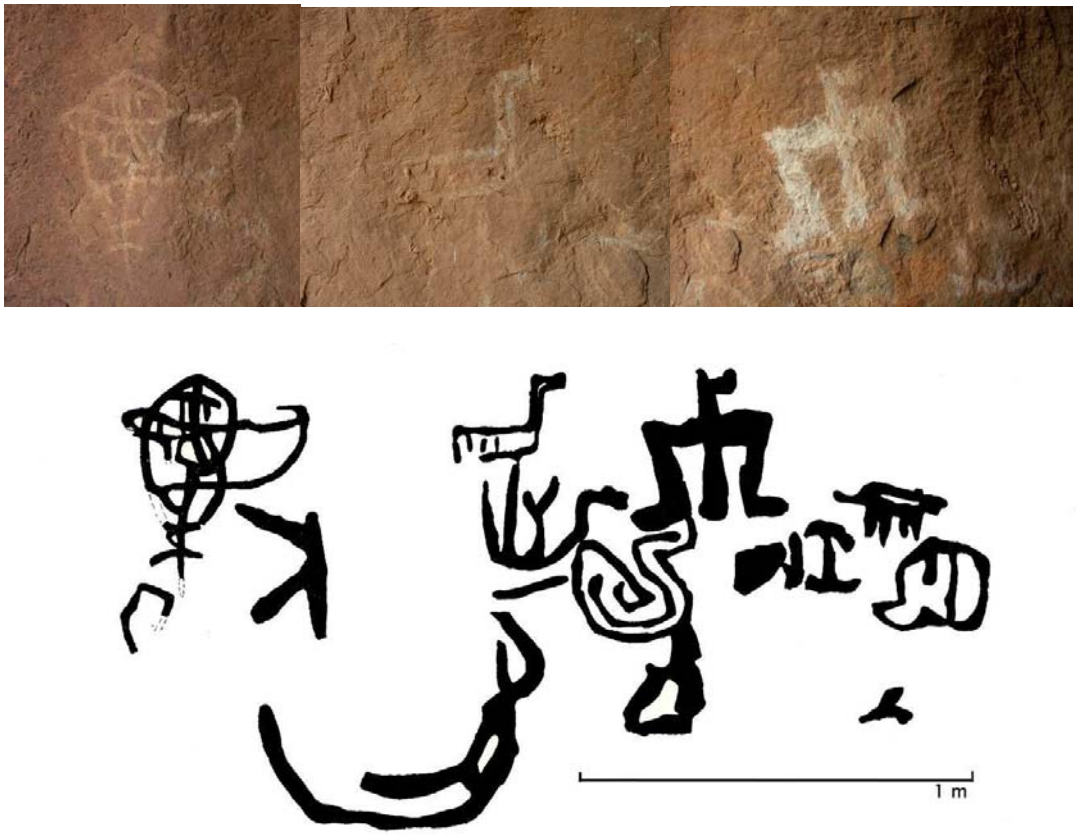


Figure 21. Chipwete site, eastern Zambia 2007. Bottom: redrawing of the site (after Phillipson 1976:fig 108).

A recent variation of this tradition occurs not painted in white, but in black charcoal and, rarely, in white chalk. Thin fine black-lines were used to make these paintings and they are more recent than other paintings in the area. Fine *Nyau* charcoal drawings are found in eastern Zambia at Makwe (Phillipson 1976:figure 116) and more often in central Malaŵi at sites such as Namzeze, Mwana wa Chentcherere I & II (Clark 1973), Chongoni 16, Chongoni 17 and Nthulu 5 (Figure 22). Although my site sample in Mozambique is smaller; elaborate *Nyau* charcoal motifs have also been found in sites such as Campala in Macanga District, Tete Province.

These black paintings of *Nyau* have been interpreted as modern expressions of a changing society. Sometimes these charcoal drawings are related to the scribbled names of the teenagers who made them. Smith (2001:197) proposes that the 'graffiti', along with the *Nyau* drawings, expresses the behaviour of teenagers who want to

demonstrate that they had access to the secrets of the initiation — thus are adults — but also their literacy gained at school.









Figure 22. Recent *Nyau* images: top Chongoni 16 (figure in the middle approx. length 15cm), middle Chongoni 17 (left: approx. length 19cm; right: approx. length 15cm), central Malaŵi 2006 and bottom Campala (approx. length 35cm), central-western Mozambique 2005.

Tore Saetersdal and his team found an interesting exception to the charcoal paintings that depict *Nyau* at Khiwisula site, Macanga District, Mozambique, in July 2005. Very small motifs made in charcoal were found in a low shelter 1.5 m in height that resembled, curiously, the Red Geometric tradition (Figure 23). So far this is the only exception among the charcoal drawings that I know that depicts motifs other than *Nyau* motifs. It is the subject of further research by Saetersdal's team.



Figure 23. Charcoal drawings resembling the Red Geometric tradition (charcoal top-right oval approx. length 3cm) (photo: Andrew Salomon 2005, RARI © SARADA).

The White Spread-eagled tradition

The White Spread-eagled tradition (referred by Phillipson [1976:184] as the *white stylized* paintings) follows the same broad distribution pattern as the White Zoomorphic tradition. The main motif of this tradition is the so-called spread-eagled design and this motif is almost always accompanied by snake-like motifs and other geometric designs such as circles and lines of dots. The spread-eagled design has various forms: sometimes the body is slim, others fat. Sometimes it has more than four limbs and often it is decorated with black dots.

These black dots are distributed on different parts of the body, sometimes on the head (*e.g.*, Chiwenembe 3), other times on one half of the body (*e.g.*, Kampika) and so on. I think this varied patterning is of great importance and that it reflects meaning. These dots are found more regularly in Malaŵi and Mozambique than in Zambia. In Zambia it is common to see the spread-eagled motif filled in white (*e.g.*, Kalemba, Mkoma) but there also exists a variation in which the body is made out of white dots (*e.g.*, Thandwe, Chaingo); only one example of this has been found in Malaŵi at Mwala wa Njuchi (Chapter 6).

Some of the White Spread-eagled tradition motifs have been related to initiation symbols by different authors (Lindgren & Schoffeleers 1978:44; Phillipson 1976; Prins & Hall 1994) and more specifically to the *Chinamwali* girls' initiation ceremony (Smith 1995, 1997). The most common figure, the spread-eagled design, is a figure that resembles a stretched hide seen from above (Lindgren & Schoffeleers 1978; Smith 1995, 1997; Chapter 1). Its varied features have led researchers to suggest that this motif depicts subjects such as chameleons, lizards, genet cats, tortoises and so forth; animals that are important to women in Chewa cosmology (*e.g.*, Lindgren & Schoffeleers 1978; Smith 1995; but see Apthorpe 1962 for the Nsenga).

According to Smith (1995) the WSE is found secluded in shelters away from places of settlement such as in high hill areas. The location of these rock shelters, however, is not always in high mountains; it is possible to find these paintings very close to the foothills of the mountains or in rocky outcrops situated close to the

valleys (*e.g.*, Chongoni 32, Kampika 1, Mkoma, Chaingo, Thandwe) and in areas where nowadays the access to the sites is very easy though, indeed, the contrary happens as well: the access is difficult and requires several hours of walking and searching in the mountains (*e.g.*, Chongoni 25).

In Malaŵi, there are many isolated mountains sitting in plains and it is quite common to find big boulders, whose sides create good confined spaces: Mwana wa Chentcherere II is one of many sites that are found in this kind of area. I think, however, that the vegetation cover is the key to explain which rock shelters sites were painted. Vegetation plays a role in the accessibility; it encloses the secret venues for ritual practices. The second factor is, or was, the distance from the villages to the rock art sites.

The location of the shelters and the superimposition of images, sometimes hundreds of designs, suggest a very specific and repeated use of these places as ritual venues. However, one can find isolated images in remote places, but this is not common (*e.g.*, Chongoni 38). Although the tradition of painting is no longer performed, some of these shelters are still used in central Malaŵi up until the present (Smith 1997:26), or at least were in 1995. They are used as secret places were instructions are given in the *Chinamwali* girls' initiation ceremonies, such as the *tsimba* and the *mtengo*. Phillipson (1976:197) comments that some of the rock shelters in eastern Zambia are known to "have been used temporarily by Iron Age peoples for initiation and other ceremonies". Chaplin comments that when he wanted to visit a site:

> Although prepared to show this site, my guide was quite adamant in refusing to show me an area close by where he said there were stones with similar marking to those we had seen, but supported in the branches of trees; to take me to them would get him into great trouble with the women, and this was all the information I could gather. (Chaplin 1960:47)

During my fieldwork in 2006, I heard from people in central Malaŵi about the old uses of the rock art sites for initiation ceremonies (*e.g.*, Mpata wa Milonde) but I never heard that they still use them for this purpose.

In 2003 I followed up some of these tentative links to *Chinamwali* in my masters' research. For this purpose I chose Mwana wa Chentcherere II rock shelter, Dedza District, central Malaŵi, as a case study, because of its well-known White Spread-eagled rock painted panel and because it had been professionally excavated and reported (*e.g.*, Clark 1973; Crader 1984). Mwana wa Chentcherere II plays an important role in the chronological framework for rock art in the region as the only rock art site professionally excavated in central Malaŵi and fully reported. This shelter is an example of a long-term occupation site that started around 500 B.C. and which was occupied until recent times. Thus, this shelter was used for two thousand years both by the hunter-gatherer and the farmer populations (Clark 1973; Crader 1984). I reconstructed the social and ritual uses of this site and its changing use through time and provided some insights into the meaning of the rock art.

My understanding of the paintings was not constructed in isolation. From various authors I knew about the possible relationships with *Chinamwali* (which I confirmed ethnographically) and that the paintings were possibly used as mnemonic devices (Smith 1995). This last aspect was a key factor as it allows us to understand that the paintings are part of a bigger pattern of material culture. Thanks to various people who have done ethnographic research in the area (*e.g.*, Werner 1925; Lancaster 1934; Yoshida 1992, 1993), we know about objects that are produced during *Chinamwali* and thus about the formal similarities that some of these objects have with the paintings (*e.g.*, Apthorpe 1962, Phillipson 1976, Smith 1995, 1997). Smith (1995), however, emphasised the importance of the links between this material culture and the paintings.

Understanding and explaining the similarities between various material cultures also opens other avenues for interpretation. However, conferring a function to the rock art as an instruction device does not mean that we know the meanings of the images or how they were used, and that is the purpose of this research.

One of the questions that I had in 2003, concerned the appearance of the paintings — my appreciation was, and still is, that most of the spread-eagled designs

look very similar to each other. Although some of the spread-eagled designs have specific characteristics that make them different from others, such as protrusions from the head or fingers in their hands (Figure 24), the spread-eagled designs are in general all simple figures with four limbs, a head and a 'tail'.



Figure 24. Spread-eagled design with fingers at Chongoni 15 (arm approx. length 10cm), central Malaŵi 2006.

In my Masters research, through the use of body theory, I advanced an idea using my field data and published literature that suggested that some paintings were used as metaphors to express certain human behaviour relevant to initiation ceremonies (*e.g.*, passion, lust). I argued that others represented events that happened during the ceremony, such as the various dances that were performed and so on. These metaphors were only understood by the initiated women and thus the images, so similar in appearance, were also depicted in that way so as to keep veiled the intention of the painting: to give out a secret teaching (Zubieta 2006).

An alternative interpretation of this tradition was given by Emmanuel Anati (1997). He names this style *Bantu White style* (1986) or as *Early White Bantu* (1997) and he reckons that it depicts, at some level, mythological characters of Bantu-speaker cosmology and totemic animals. For example, he states that some of the images at Mwana wa Chentcherere II could be a group of ghosts or a procession of spirits (Anati 1997:233; Schmidt 2000:51; Figure 25).



Figure 25. Spirit procession at Mwana wa Chentcherere II, central Malaŵi (Anati 1997:233).

Anati is correct to state that the answer to the interpretation of these images lies in oral traditions; however, I think that his interpretation is simplistic. He explains that in Bantu mythology there is emphasis on ancestral spirits and, although this is true, we have to be cautious of the way we relate the oral traditions to what we observe in the paintings. Anati's suggestion would be stronger if he could explain which story of ancestral spirits talks about a procession or explain how he arrived at this conclusion. He also assumes a scenic relationship in the art which needs careful consideration.

It is common to try to find ways in which to relate oral traditions with paintings, this is normal rock art practice, but we have to refrain from imposing our own interpretations on the art. Whilst it is true that similar white paintings have been found in Tanzania (Fosbrooke *et al*. 1950), Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Zambia, we have to be careful to associate the white paintings in all these countries with their specific authors and not assume that all were made for the same purpose. It is important to take into account the diversity of Bantu-speaker populations and rock art. Thus, although there are similarities between Bantu-speakers even within my area of research there is also variation and change as I have explained in Chapter 2.

Another aspect that influences our interpretation is the way we observe and document the paintings, thus it is important also to mention that Anati's illustration of the 'procession' is highly inaccurate. The process of tracing and redrawing a site is a subjective interpretation of the paintings (see Dowson *et al.* 1994); and I suspect his illustration is derived from the photograph he took in 1985 of the site. To make a

good recording it is necessary to go to the site and spend time teasing out the superimpositions and the outlines of the paintings, because different light during the day helps us to see some colours better than others. Anati missed lots of details in the so-called 'procession' that can be seen in the copy I have published (2006). I spent a month at the site checking Desmond Clark's original tracing, old photographs and redrawings so as to produce as accurate a copy of the site as possible (Figure 26).

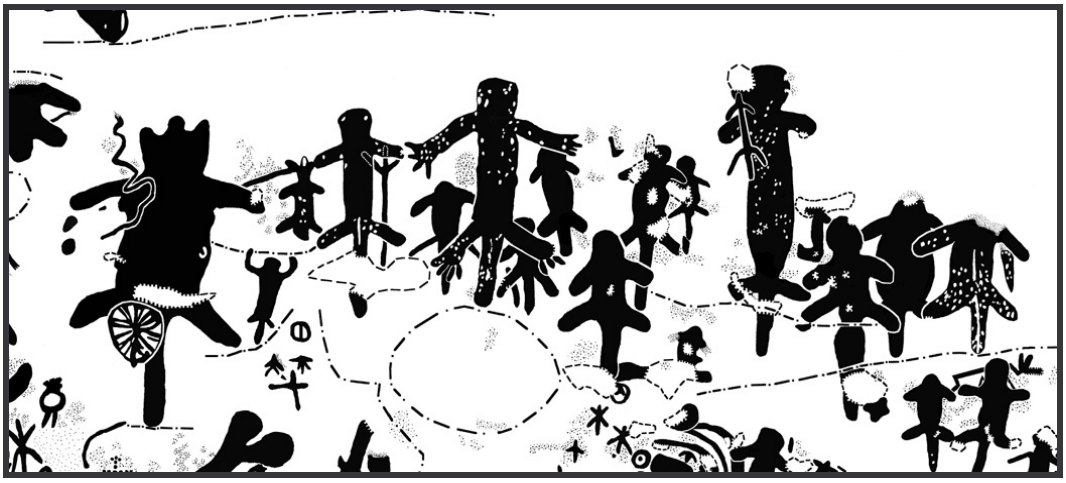


Figure 26. Section of the redrawing at Mwana wa Chentcherere II, central Malaŵi (Zubieta 2006:121).

Moreover, according to the information that I collected from women at this site, Anati's suggestion is wrong. Two of the images that he shows as part of the procession have been described to me as a baboon and a scene where the initiate is taken to the river (see Zubieta 2006:94–108). This interpretation was based on the data collected during my fieldwork and participant observation during an initiation ceremony in 2003; however, some of the things that I witnessed are part of secret knowledge that is very intimate and secret for Chewa women. Thus, I commented only on what I was given permission to make public. Ethically, it is important to know the extent and purpose for which one intends to use the information that people provide in the field.

Some Chewa women, in Dedza District in 2003 used to tell me: "you will die if you tell what you saw inside the hut of initiation". Although I do not necessarily believe this, I respect the women's wishes to maintain some of their secret

knowledge. Perhaps in future years Chewa women will change their minds and will want to share some of their secrets with a larger audience.

Methods and fieldwork: rock art sites

Part of my present analysis is based on published accounts of data collected by past researchers. However, for much of this research the data that I need has never been published in detail. Therefore I undertook fieldwork in order to collect data for comparison.

I decided that the best way to get information about the paintings was to visit the areas where White Spread-eagled rock art sites have already been recorded and published but I also wanted to look at the sites in detail and in the light of my own research questions.

The ethnographic data that I needed was only available during the dry season because the initiation ceremonies only happen during this time, thus my fieldwork was divided into various seasons from 2005-2007. Also, in terms of logistics, it is easier to navigate dirt roads and to walk to the rock art sites during the dry season. In each country, I applied for a research permit and gained these from the Arquivo do Património Cultural in Mozambique, the Department of Antiquities of Malawi and the National Heritage Conservation Commission in Zambia. The University of the Witwatersrand also granted me a Human Research Ethics Clearance (Protocol Number 60416) to do my work and to approach people in the communities.

In order to visit the rock art sites I asked for official letters from the various government authorities to approach the District Commissioner and the Traditional Authority of each locality. Next, I visited the headman of the villages close to the sites to greet them and to talk to them about the research. I found that this approach was necessary so that people were comfortable with my presence and with the fact that I was searching for sites in the mountains. Word about my presence in the area spread very fast and the people, whom I met while looking for the sites, did not look surprised when they encountered me. It worked also for my own safety, as sometimes

when we came back late from the sites people told me that they had started to get worried. It was also useful as people often volunteered to guide me or to accompany me to the sites.

The first season took place from September-December 2006 and the second from August-November 2007. In 2003 I went to some rock art sites in central Malaŵi that I revisited in 2006 (*e.g.*, Mphunzi, Mwana wa Chentcherere II). In 2005 I had the opportunity to participate, as mentioned above, in Saetersdal's research and it was then that I visited the rock art sites in Mozambique that I mention in this work; I feel very privileged as I was lucky enough to discover the Chiumombusi site in Macanga District. I went back to Macanga District in 2006 but rain stopped me from revisiting the rock art sites as it was the beginning of the rainy season. However, despite the rains I managed to collect anthropological data.

In 2006 I drove from Johannesburg through Mozambique to reach Malaŵi. Thus, I dedicated most of the time to Malaŵi as it is where the bulk of rock art sites are concentrated. Because of time constraints I could not visit Zambia on that occasion. For the second season in 2007 I drove from Johannesburg through Botswana to reach Zambia.

Although Mr James Chiwaya and Mr Noah Siwinda acted as my field assistants, the people from the community almost always accompanied us with enthusiasm and wanted to know why we were so interested in the paintings. The groups consisted mostly of men and the groups varied in numbers from 3 to 15 people (Figure 27). This was a good opportunity to talk to men about the paintings and ask them what they thought about them and to involve them in the protection of this cultural heritage.



Figure 27. People who accompanied us to Manje A site, Eastern Province, Zambia 2007. George Nyangulu, the boy standing on the right, led us to the site.

Women spend their time working at home, collecting wood, drawing water or taking care of the children. I arranged sometimes for women to come with me to visit the sites and to talk more about the meanings of the paintings. For this reason I informed the headman first: so as to be able to talk freely with the women (Figure 28).



Figure 28. Chewa woman at Chongoni 25, central Malawi 2006.

It was interesting to share with local people what we do to record the rock art sites. Most of the times I had to explain what the GPS was used for and how the

compass worked. Our activities at each site included: photographs of the rock art panel with both slide (Nikon FM-10; Kodak ISO100) and digital (Sony DSC-W7) cameras to document their state of preservation; GPS location of the sites, ground plan, and sketch of some of the panels and images. These photographs will become part of the Rock Art Research Institute photograph archive in the University of the Witwatersrand and a copy of the thesis will be sent to the three institutions from which I received permits.

I include a list of the sites that I visited during my fieldworks from 2005 to 2007 (Table 5) and at the end of this thesis I include the site-forms of the new sites that have not been reported or published before (Appendix).

Table 5. Sites visited during my fieldwork in Mozambique 2005, Malaŵi 2006 and Zambia 2007

COUNTRY Site & Reference*		
ZAMBIA Kalemba (Ph) Chipwete (Ph) Kavumo A (Ph) Kavumo C (Ph) Sakwe A (Ch; Ph) Sakwe B (Ch; Ph) Manje A (Ph) Manje B (Ph) Thandwe (Ph) Chaingo (Ch; Ph) Mkoma (Ch; Ph) Katolola A (Ph) Katolola B (Ph)	**NEW** Musinda A (**) Mlangafiti Tagandala (Amjonde) Manje D Chizuzu A Chizuzu B Chikanga B	**MOZAMBIQUE*** Campala Mwenzi Chimwala Chiumombusi Maungo 1 Maungo 2
* Ch (Chaplin 1962), Ph (Phillipson 1976). ** Fr. Toon Van Kesel led us to site.		* Saetersdal's project 2005.
MALAŴI Bunda 2, 4 & 7 (L & S; A; S) Mwana wa Chentcherere 1 to 5 (CK; L& S; A; S) Chigwenembe 2 & 3 (L & S; S) Chigwenembe 3 (L & S; S) Chongoni 2 (S) Chongoni 4 (S) Chongoni 5 (L & S; S) Chongoni 6 (L & S; S) Chongoni 7 (S) Chongoni 8 (S) Chongoni 15 (S) Chongoni 16 (S) Chongoni 17 (S) Chongoni 22 (S) Chongoni 25 (S)	Chongoni 32 (S) Chongoni 33 (S) Kampika (L & S; S) Milonde (Mpata wa) (S) Mphunzi 4 (L & S; S) Mphunzi 3 (L & S; S) Mphunzi 7 (L & S; S; CK) Mphunzi 8 (L & S; S) Mtusi 1 (L & S; S) Mtusi 2 (L & S; S) Mwala wa Njuchi 1 (S) Mwala wa Njuchi 2 (S) Namzeze (L & S; A; S) Nthulu 4 (A; S) Nthulu 5 (A; S)	**NEW** Chiwenembe 5 Chongoni 38 Chongoni 39 Chongoni 40 Chongoni 41 Chongoni 42 Chongoni 43 Chongoni 44 Chongoni 45 Chongoni 46 Mtusi 5 (L & S?) Mtusi 6 (L &S?) Mtusi 7 (L & S?) Nthulu 6
* CK (Cole-King 1973); L & S (Lindgren & Schoffeleers 1978); A (Anati 1986); S (Smith 1995).		

Chapter Four: Initiation**:** secrecy, memory and cognition

Initiation ceremonies and farmer rock art

In previous chapters I mentioned that the White Spread-eagled rock art tradition in south-central Africa has already been related to girls' initiation ceremonies. Thus, in this chapter I provide a more comprehensive view on initiation to set the context in which this rock art tradition operates. This research aims to understand how these paintings were used in the past and to contribute to knowledge of their meaning.

The study of initiation rituals is crucial to our understanding of farmer's rock art symbolism in south-central Africa. In Chapter 2, I discussed the relationship and interactions that the ancestors of the Chewa have had with other peoples for many centuries. This interaction has influenced the Chewa ritual practices and thus I refer in this chapter, not only to the initiations that take place in Chewa society, but also the ones that their neighbouring groups practise and that are pertinent for this research (such as the Yao and the Nsenga). I will focus mainly on *Chinamwali* — the girls' initiation ceremonies of the Chewa — because of its relationship with the White Spread-eagled tradition.

Various authors have discussed initiation ceremonies across cultures (see Eliade 1958; La Fontaine 1986). However, the seminal work on the topic is Arnold van Gennep's work in 1909: *The Rites of Passage*. He states that there are three universal stages during initiation: separation, liminality and incorporation.

The topic of initiation, however, has been studied from different perspectives and several of its aspects have been discussed. Mircea Eliade (1958) focused on the religious aspect of initiation and tried to compare different types of initiation amongst cultures. He states that the meaning of the initiation is always religious because the change of status in the novice is produced by a religious experience (Eliade 1958:1).

Eliade divided initiation ceremonies into three types: 1) the ones that take place during the transition from childhood to adulthood and that are obligatory for all

members; 2) initiation into a secret society that is not obligatory and generally limited to one sex only 3) initiation in connection with a mystical vocation (*e.g.*, medicine man). Eliade writes that "the puberty initiation represents above all the revelation of the sacred — and, for the primitive world, the sacred means not only everything that we now understand by religion, but also the whole body of the tribe's mythological and cultural traditions" (Eliade 1958:3).

Although Eliade offers an interesting analysis of examples of puberty rituals from around the world (*e.g.*, Australia, New Guinea, Africa, South America), he tends towards generalisations such as that girl's initiations are not as widespread as boy's initiation and are less developed than those of boys and that girl's initiations are for individuals (Eliade 1958:41). What is more interesting is that cultures from around the world have similar ways of trying to emphasize the change and transition from one phase to another. In my region of study, various matrilineal societies share similar initiations as we will see in the following sections, but each initiation has particularities and it is these differences that provide a framework of reference for this study.

Pierre Bourdieu (1992) uses the term 'rites of passage' to analyse the process of transformation that most important schools in France accomplish to separate and aggregate a selected number of people who then become the elite. Research on drama has found its interest in initiation by the way dramatization plays a role in the adolescent developmental process to help the individual to reach his/her new status and become independent (Hoerr Charles 1946). Initiation, through a psychoanalytic theory (Bettelheim 1955), has been dealt with in terms of how sexual maturity is reached and how conflicting sexual desires are resolved.

Bruno Bettelheim (1955:106) relates initiation rites to the context of fertility because these occur in an age where procreation becomes possible and thus, he argues, this is the main factor that motivates these ceremonies. Van Gennep (1960:65), however, states that there is a difference between physiological puberty and social puberty and he urges us to stop calling initiation rites 'puberty rites'

because initiation is often independent of puberty. This difference ties closely with more recent work on 'body theory' (*e.g.*, Synott 1993; Turner 1996) which indicates that what is 'natural' (biological) for us is defined differently in various cultures and therefore different discourses produce different understandings about gender and the body. Consideration of this can help us understand why initiation ceremonies take place in various cultures at different times and why they are not strictly related to physical bodily changes. This line of thinking, moreover, urges us to understand the perceptions of the body in various settings and cultures that helps us to comprehend the nature and reason for a rite of passage.

Bourdieu (1992) argues that the notion of a rite of passage does not adequately force us to ask questions such as the social function of the ritual and the significance of crossing the boundary between two different stages. Bourdieu proposes another concept: rites of consecration or *rites of institution*. These rites serve to legitimize the dividing line and boundary, in Bourdieu's words "to institute, to give a social definition, an identity, is also to impose certain limits" (1992:83) and they have the power to transform the **real** through acting on the representation of the real. I think, however, Bourdieu's concern is more with modern societies; he states that his analysis' results are based on the functioning of elite schools, and I wonder if his idea of 'functionality' of the rites applies in the same way to non-Western societies.

It is true that initiation ceremonies have a purpose and that they go through various stages that can be recognized in various cultures, but we cannot generalize the way the individuals, who are involved in the ceremonies, perceive these purposes and stages. My concern is that we tend to try to generalize how these concepts work, but at the end we conclude that they have their own specificities. It would be better to start by taking these into account when analyzing cultural practices. An interesting point that Bourdieu raises is the way these rites have an impact on the identity of the participant: through the completion of the rite, a new identity is expressed. The rite itself also imposes the identity by installing certain rules that are to be followed in the new status that he or she has come to be part of. Thus the rites of passage function as

a way of discouraging transgression, desertion and resignation from the new status (Bourdieu 1992:85).

More specific to the area of my research, Victor Turner (1967), in his well-known work in western Zambia, divided Ndembu rituals into two kinds: life-crisis rituals and rituals of affliction. Initiation, in this sense, refers to the first kind of ritual as "it is an important point in the physical or social development of an individual, such as birth, puberty or death […] there are a number of ceremonies or rituals designed to mark the transition from one phase of life or social status to another" (Turner 1967:7). The rituals of affliction, on the other hand, are the ones that deal with the spirit of the deceased who 'appears' or interferes in the world of the living, causing misfortune in hunting, reproductive problems in women and various types of illness. For all these misfortunes there is a specific ritual to remove them.

Audrey Richards (1956) who was initiated in the *Chisungu* ceremony amongst the Bemba people of Northern Zambia in 1931, explains that nubility, fertility and motherhood (*ibid*.:18) tend to be the focus of interest in initiation ceremonies for girls in matrilineal societies. Moreover she explains that, in these societies, sex maturity notions are related to the time when the individual is ready to adopt certain social duties be they political, economical or legal; meaning that he or she has reached social maturity as well as sexual maturity.

She divides puberty rituals among Bantu-speaking peoples into five types (Richards 1956:52-55):

1. **Puberty ritual proper**: individual rituals that happen when the first signs of sexual maturity.
2. **Nubility ritual and fertility cults**: prepares for marriage and protects from the danger of the first legal intercourse.
3. **Puberty ritual associated with initiation into age grades**: mostly for boys who are initiated into an adult status or into a system of age sets. The social maturity of the individual is more important in this case than sexual maturity.

4. **Puberty ritual linked with the joining of special associations**: the individual joins an age grade but also a secret society. Entrance is limited to certain sections of the community.
5. **Maturation rites dissociated from puberty**: These are seen in societies where the puberty rite happens independently of the social maturation one. In some groups one will follow the other.

The initiations that I relate in this chapter fall, according to her division, within the nubility rituals and fertility cults. Most mark both a new stage and the ending of a stage in the life of the initiate: the change from girl to woman. Victor Turner (1967) points out something that it is important to keep in mind when considering the learning process during initiation. He writes that in Zambia, amongst the Ndembu, the life-crisis ceremonies do not only involve the initiate. He explores the relationships between all the people connected to the ceremony and to the initiate and shows how these change. He explains that, for example, when a woman bears her first boy she "may be presenting her brother, a village headman, with an heir, while [her] husband becomes a father and her mother a grandmother, with all the changes in behaviour and status involved in these new relationships" (Turner 1967:7). Thus, initiation ceremonies are not solely about the person who is being initiated but about the effect that the ceremonies have on the relationships between the people who are involved in them and who have various types of ties.

As an archaeologist, a social scientist, my aim is to explain how material culture relates to the cultural practice of initiation. However, this research led me not only to the material culture itself but to the people who still practise this living heritage. Thus, I have been exposed to anthropological research as I attempt to understand the cultural practices that gave life to the rock paintings. Considering the recent date of the paintings and their relationship with a ceremony that is still practised, this is research in which anthropology and archaeology cannot be separated.

In initiation ceremonies different actions give us clues to the meanings and intentions, such as: songs, dances, clapping, objects, details of dress code, and so on.

In this section, however, I want to focus on the generalities of these ceremonies to give an overall understanding of what happens during these ceremonies. The material culture involved in the ceremonies is important for this research, but I leave a detailed description and discussion of this until chapter 5.

Method

Ethnographic analogy

Analogical reasoning, specifically when it is combined with ethnography, is the standard method used by archaeologists to explain past human beliefs, social and political structures, cultural practices and ritual performances. However, the manner in which specific ethnographies are used to read past societies determines the strength of the analogy in each instance (see Wylie 1985, 1988, 2002; Lewis-Williams 1991, Hodder *et al*. 1995; Hodder & Hutson 2003). Here I explain and justify my use of analogy in the interpretation of the paintings of the White Spread-eagled tradition.

Archaeology uses ethnographic data to construct analogical arguments to explain archaeologically known societies and the challenge, as Paul Wason explains, is "using the familiar to help us understand the unfamiliar, without so domesticating it as to miss the genuinely other" (Wason 1994:26). In other words, ethnographic data, if used appropriately, can help us to achieve an understanding of the past but, when used inappropriately (see Wylie 1985 for further discussion), it can produce flawed explanations. The key question then is what is an 'appropriate' use of ethnographic analogy?

Alyson Wylie has pointed out that there is "an increasingly acute concern that analogy seems to be both indispensable to interpretation and always potentially misleading" (Wylie 1985:81). The reason for this is that when archaeologists relate their data to an ethnographically recorded circumstance that is similar in form, it is all too easy to presume uniformity between past and present cultural forms and this can lead to erroneous interpretations (see Wylie 1988). In consequence, it is misleading to assume that there is an unbreakable continuity between past and present as this favours an erroneous idea of static cultures. It therefore seems that, to some

archaeologists, the concept of ethnographic present has “little or no value because it does not accommodate and emphasize change” (Huffman 1986:85).

The concern over the uses of analogical inferences is grounded in the ways these are constructed. Wylie (1988, 2002) states that, at its simplest, the comparison supporting an analogical inference is purely formal and this is merely a mechanism in which similarities between archaeologically observed and ethnographically reported instances are pinpointed. Formal analogies use this mechanism to set the primary ground for analogical inference. David Lewis-Williams (1991) suggests a division within the formal analogies: **ethnographic precedents** and **ethnographic parallels**.

Ethnographic precedents are simple look-alike analogies in which there is a simple association made between the features of a single ethnographic source (A) and the archaeological context (B). The main flaw in this kind of formal analogy is that the relationship between the source and the archaeological context is a singular look-alike relationship (A = B). This kind of inference is often intuitive and the use of ethnography in this way is “simply the citing of ethnographic precedents” (Lewis-Williams 1991:151). The citing of precedents cannot be the basis for any strong archaeological explanation.

The ethnographic parallels are slightly more elaborate in the sense that they seek multiple correspondences between the ethnographic source (A) and the archaeological context (B). Thus, the more features A & B have in common the more likely the explanations will follow, in other words, “the more extensive the parallel, the more convincing the inference” (*ibid*.). This argument, however, also poses problems because counting common features between A & B does not indicate that these are significant for the feature that requires explanation. Therefore, both these kinds of formal analogies are based on the same principle and, as Lewis-Williams demonstrates, both are equally flawed. Therefore, another kind of analogical is needed. I come back to this point.

Hodder (1999:45-46) mentions that there are, generally, three purposes for the use of ethnographic analogy:

1) "As a source of ideas in order to broaden the horizon of possibilities about how the past might be interpreted".
2) "As a buttress to an argument about what happened in the past in a particular case".
3) "The ethnographic present may be used to 'test' ideas about the past".

In all three cases there is a constant, and that is that information is being transferred from the two comparable sources based on their differences and similarities (see *ibid.*). Ethnographic knowledge contributes to stimulate new perspectives and alternative theories that we may not have considered (see Wason 1994) but when used in combination with analogy this means that "the past is interpreted in the light of the present because of some similarity between them" (Hodder & Hutson 2003:194).

Perhaps the way forward, as some authors have argued (Wylie 1985; Hodder 1982, 1999; Hodder & Hutson 2003), is to assess similarities and differences between contexts in order to use analogies, and to discern if the information can be transferred from one to the other. David Fischer (1971) mentions that the **fallacy of perfect analogy** consists in "reasoning from a partial resemblance between two entities to an entire and exact correspondence" (Fischer 1971:247) it is incorrect to pretend that the two sources of inference will be the same and more over "an analogy, by its very nature, is a similarity between two or more things which are in other respects unlike. A 'perfect analogy' is a contradiction in terms." (*ibid.*) The word "similarity", however, has to be taken with caution. How many similarities do we need in order to have an appropriate use of analogy?

Rather than the quantity of contextual similarities, of greater importance is the relevance of the differences and similarities from the two compared contexts. As David Lewis-Williams (1991) argues, a good analogy is one with a **strong relation of**

relevance. Therefore, analogy is more than just a comparison of inferred similarities or an account of accumulative resemblances. It is a process that goes beyond common sense or intuition and which requires an essential background knowledge that will allow the kind of demonstration of relevance that will make the analogical inference plausible (Wylie 1988). The problem is when the "abuse of analogies underlies investigations which may be inappropriate and misleading" (Murray & Walker 1988; see Wylie 1985 for further discussion).

Two aspects have received special consideration in ethnographic analogical inference: the spatial and temporal dimensions of the comparison. Thus, archaeologists are more confident with analogies in which the temporal and spatial gap between the two sources of comparison is slight and historical continuity is then felt to be plausible (Huffman 1986; Hodder & Hutson 2003). Demonstrable direct historical continuity is then the relation of relevance. This is more difficult when cross-cultural analogies are made in which a greater distance and temporal gap exists; in this kind of generalising analogy it becomes difficult to know whether the "relevant relationships in the present were equally relevant in the past" (Hodder & Hutson 2003:194). Cross-cultural analogies are therefore best avoided because they rarely have a clear relation of relevance.

David Lewis-Williams points out that an argument "based on a strong relation of relevance starts by demonstrating the existence of some causal or otherwise determining mechanism that links two features in the source of an analogy" (Lewis-Williams 1991:152). Relevance in analogy, therefore, is the most important aspect to consider for analogical comparison. Allison Wylie (1985) notes that "the real value of relational forms of analogical inference is not just that they offer potentially stronger forms of interpretative argument but they can be a source of strikingly creative insight about the cultural past" (Wylie 2002:152).

My relation of relevance is therefore one of historical continuity but I emphasise here that I do not assume that the present ceremonies are exactly the same as those in the past. I have confidence that the degree of change will be limited

because the symbolism is constrained by it being anchored to an object that has not changed: the female body. Chewa girls' initiations are dominated by teachings relating to the bodily concerns of women: menstruation, bodily hygiene, childbirth, fertility and the practicalities of marital relationships. Whilst many aspects of Chewa culture have changed much in recent times, such as in the social, political and economical spheres, these fundamental gender concerns, and the societal ways of managing them, show great stability for as long as ethnographic records allow us to see.

Where Chewa ethnography is limited, I draw as well upon the ethnography of neighbouring groups. Again I restrict myself to ethnographies related to the specific context of girls' initiation ceremonies. Whilst I acknowledge that the degree of relevance of these ethnographies is less than that of the Chewa, they can still have relevance because I draw mainly from those western Bantu-language speaking groups that show such linguistic and archaeological similarities that they are assumed to have, if not a common origin, then at least extremely closely related historical roots.

However, even given the demonstrated relevance of the ethnographic sources that I will draw upon in this thesis there is still need for some caution in the reading of these ethnographies. An ethnographic account is a record made in a specific time and space and we have to comprehend this in order to understand a society's behaviour in its particular context. These ethnographic accounts are inevitably rooted in the ethnographer's personal prejudices. Therefore, it is important to take into consideration the sociopolitical and historical context of the ethnographer's background when reading ethnographic accounts.

Michael Shanks and Ian Hodder (Shanks & Hodder 1995; see Preucel & Hodder 1996:13) have emphasized that archaeologists, and all social scientists, deal with a **double hermeneutic**. This is a concept taken from Anthony Giddens (1984) who applied it in sociology. This notion states that sociologists attempt to understand a world of meanings (society) but, at the same time, sociologists form their own community with their own specificities that also need to be understood. Thus, the idea

of a double hermeneutic "derives from the double process of translation or interpretation which is involved" (Giddens 1984:284) in the attempt to understand social phenomena through concepts derived from social sciences which in turn "are not insulated from 'their world'" (*Ibid*.:350). In archaeology, the double hermeneutic comes from our trying to read meanings in our social context that come from another place and another time: the archaeological 'other' with its own different contexts and different meanings.

The fact that archaeologists deal with physical remains that come from a past that is no longer clear to us, raises questions about how we conceive of past interpretations and meanings (see Hodder *et al*. 1995), and this leads me to two concepts that I regard as important for this research: polysemy and multivocality. These concepts relate to the idea that interpretation of a single object can be multiple because meanings of an object change in different contexts and are "related to interpersonal practices, aspirations, strategies of people" (Shanks & Hodder 1995:9) and thus they are negotiated among various actors.

Lewis-Williams (1998:88) has dealt with these concepts in the context of San rock art research and they are pertinent to use in this research:

- Polysemy: almost all symbols have more than one association for the people who make and use them. An eland, in San society, for example was used as a central symbol and it was associated with girls' initiation, boys' first-kill rituals, marriage ceremonies, and shamanic practices (*ibid*.). Furthermore, Lewis-Williams introduced the notion of **focused polysemy** in which the symbolism of an image is focused by its specific context of use. Thus, even if an image has multiple associations — in this case the eland in San rock art — these are restricted because of the context in which it is employed: the rock shelter, a place where the San believe that the material and spirit worlds meet. So, the polysemic symbol of the eland is focused as soon as it is placed in this context of the rock face. It is further focused when placed amongst other rock paintings that, for example, may show the taking on of eland potency in San

dances. The rock painting becomes a concrete piece of material culture embedded in a "physical, graphic, social and cognitive context" (*ibid*.:89) thus, the embodiment of a painting of an eland in a context restricts its symbolic associations. The focus comes because the context "highlights one segment of the symbol's associative spectrum" (*ibid*.).

- Multivocality: Literally means "having many voices" and is referred to "the art in general in the sense that many people and groups of people 'spoke' though distinct categories of images" (Lewis-Williams 1998:88). This means that some images might, for example, hold different meanings for women in society than for men, or for children as opposed to adults, and so on.

These points have a double impact on my research and how I approach material culture. On one hand, as I discuss in following chapters and in the conclusion, I am aware of the fluidity of meanings. This fluidity has not been taken for granted by the inclusion of concepts such as polysemy and multivocality but moreover it has been attested in the field. The challenge is that if meanings are so complex now and depend highly on how they are negotiated among the actors; it must be expected that the meanings will also have been as complex in the past. This leaves us with a feeling of uncertainty about the certainty of the conclusions that can be achieved. However, this does not mean that the meanings are/were infinite in number and this is something that the concept of focused polysemy helps me to recognize in this research. This complexity of meanings has enriched my investigation because it is through the course of this project that I have come to understand that material culture, through its production and consumption, lies at the core of the construction of meanings (plural is emphasized) in past and present societies.

Moreover, I think that in order to construct a strong argument that deals with possible explanations of the past, the use of ethnographic analogy needs to be accompanied by an interdisciplinary approach in which anthropology, history and archaeology are combined. I have used an ethnographic approach for the reasons that I have discussed above and moreover because of the demonstrated elements of

historical continuity between the source of analogy and the archaeological context. To summarize, I have drawn on Chewa ethnography and related groups, as will be discussed in the following chapters, because:

1. Of the important historical link that exists between the Chewa and the paintings.
2. Of the recent nature of the paintings.
3. Of the context in which the paintings were made in the past is still practised nowadays: girls' initiation.
4. The potential for information retrieval from people about their living heritage and the comparison of this knowledge to early ethnographic accounts.
5. Despite their differences, the matrilineal groups that I refer to in this research, have substantial cultural similarities, in particular a similar cognitive system, a linguistic affinity and they form part of the matrilineal belt of Africa.
6. These groups have similar girls' initiation ceremonies.
7. These groups have similar ways to pass on knowledge during girls' initiation ceremonies through mimes, songs and dances.
8. These groups use a range of material culture to present similar teachings, mainly about the dangers of menstruation and sexual intercourse.
9. These groups have been in constant interaction.

Fieldwork

Before I describe the ceremonies that are relevant to this research, I shall explain the method I followed to collect my data in the field. Although I am not an anthropologist, I have a background in this discipline coming from a Latin American system in which Archaeology is seen as part of Anthropology. I opted to employ a participant observation method for the following reasons:

Because I had the advantage of already having undertaken research in Malaŵi in 2003, before I started my PhD I was aware of the need to be initiated in order for women to feel comfortable when explaining to me various aspects of the ceremonies. Women often feel uncomfortable talking about issues relating to initiation to an uninitiated person. I sought the experience and advice of teachers at the University of the Witwatersrand who are anthropologists and historians to clarify certain methodological issues. I have tried to cross the orthodox boundaries between disciplines and to establish a bridge between them as best as I can, taking into account that my research priority has been always the rock art. Having been in Malaŵi previously, I knew how to 'do things', although seemingly superficial and simple but still crucial, like greeting people in an appropriate way. This time, however, my scope was larger as I included Mozambique and Zambia in an attempt to make a regional study of the White Spread-eagled tradition.

The University of the Witwatersrand has a very strict policy about working with people and thus requires a proposal to be submitted to the Ethics Committee of the University stating the objectives of the research and how the information is going to be used. This is fundamental to ensuring that the information given by the informants is protected and respected if their wish is to keep it secret.

The culture and the customs of this region are not strange to me; I know by experience that having a questionnaire is not a useful enquiry tool. People often feel uncomfortable when they think they have to answer questions listed on a piece of paper. Thus I opted for other ways of approaching people; I suggested to the Ethics Committee that instead of using formal questionnaires I should use in-depth and open-ended free flow structured conversations. The importance of this approach lies on its flexibility to explore a topic and to cover other topics as they arise.

Another aspect that I took up with the Ethics Committee was their requirement for a written contract or consent form with every interviewee. I argued that although consent is absolutely necessary, most people in rural Central Africa do not know how to read and write English and they are not happy signing something

that they do not understand. Thus, I proposed that I would seek oral consent: first of all to introduce myself and to explain the project; second, to explain the material that I would record and how I would record it (*e.g.*, video, camera) and to explain how the material was going to be used (*e.g.*, thesis, publication). For this purpose I took several articles into the field, to show people what the output would look like at the end. I started by telling people that whatever they did not want me to publish I would respect their decision. I would also respect their decision if they did not want to participate or to talk to me about certain issues or if they felt the need to withdraw from any conversation. In this way, after following this procedure, I would record their verbal consent. I did this with each individual or group of people that I interviewed.

During my fieldwork I intended, as much as possible, to engage only with women because of the nature of the particular links between the rock art and the girls' initiation ceremonies. Women are secretive about some aspects of initiation thus I tried to make women feel comfortable when talking to me about the paintings and the initiation. Some aspects of these ceremonies are open to the public and others are only for women. However, during my work I realized that men were also important to include because they hold different perspectives and knowledge about the ceremony and about women's practices. The Traditional Authority Kaphuka in central Malaŵi pointed this out to me specifically in October 2006.

The way I approached people about initiation was no different from when I asked about the paintings (Chapter 3). First I approached the relevant authority at national level (*e.g.*, Department of Antiquities, Malaŵi), who always provided me with a letter of introduction. Then I went to the District Commissioners and Traditional Authorities to introduce myself.

Having introduced myself both nationally and regionally, I then went to the headman of each village to talk to them about the project and my reasons for visiting their village. It was only when I went to the field that I could contact the headmen of the each village; never in advance. Some of the villages are found on the map, but

some are not, thus it was only when I was in the area that I decided where to go depending on the accessibility. The only village that I visited intentionally was Kaliza in eastern Zambia, and even then it was difficult to get there.

I want to emphasize that I did not attend an initiation ceremony in every village that I visited. It is impossible to arrive at the precise moment that a ceremony is happening, even during the dry season, and I did not want to commission special ceremonies even though some people wanted to do this for me. The initiations, funerals and funeral remembrances that I attended during my fieldwork were all ceremonies that were already taking place or about to happen.

Thus, I must say that I have been initiated twice: once in 2003 (one part of the ceremony took place in one village and the other part [the *Chingondo*[22]] in another village) and the second one in 2006, both in central Malaŵi. My motives to be initiated were multiple: I wanted to understand more about the ceremony that is related to the rock paintings; I wanted to understand more about the initiation practice that for me is completely unfamiliar; I wanted people to take me seriously in the area of research and the uninitiated may not discuss the matters I wanted to discuss. The challenge was that, even as an initiated woman, I was not sure if women from other villages, who barely knew me, would agree to talk to me about initiation ceremonies. In the following sections I narrate some of my personal experiences merely because I think it is important to give a sense of the challenges I experienced when I approached people about initiation and the various contexts in which I collected ethnographic data.

I realized that going first to the headman of the village was important because the headman of the community is the one who gives the orders and everyone needs to follow his rules. The headman is highly respected. When I attended the first ceremony at the first village, the women allowed me to participate, but I never met the headman of the village. I arranged the ceremony with the women who invited me to participate; in particular there was a lady who was supposed to play the role of my surrogate

[22] See the Glossary.

mother but she never completed her role and in fact was not present during the ceremony. There were some irregularities in the ceremony that I think happened because the headman was not aware of my presence and I think it was my own fault because I did not introduce myself first to the headman of that village. This first experience in 2003 was very interesting but after that I systematically approached the headman first.

My experiences were not always easy. People did not always open up to me immediately. Although it is true that I have been very fortunate that people have been open with me, I also had tough experiences. Talking to people is part of a long process and it gets tedious when you have systematically to do the same with all your informants over and over again, even when the conversation is intended to have a free-flow structure.

The power relations were also not as I had imagined. I see myself as a post-graduate student from a disadvantaged background, but this was not other peoples' perception of me. As I mentioned in my acknowledgements I was sponsored by Nissan South Africa with an Xtrail for this project from 2006-2008. The reaction of people towards the vehicle was a factor in my research: people in the communities thought I must have plenty of money and sometimes, in need of financial assistance, they asked me for money. I wanted all to go smoothly but 'bad' experiences are inevitable.

During my first initiation in 2003 people took some of the food that I brought for the initiation without consulting anyone; I had to deal with women gossiping about the fact that women from other villages came uninvited and I also had to negotiate with some of the ladies in charge of the ceremony, who wanted more alcohol. However, all these circumstances that happened in my first fieldwork in Malaŵi were also part of the anthropological research I was undertaking. These things happen in all ceremonies whoever is present and, in fact, they were enriching. Some of the women were suspicious of me and very worried that I was going to reveal what happened inside the initiation hut. Other women have become friends whom I visit

every time that I go to Malaŵi and with whom I have discussed my memories of the first initiation in 2003 (Figure 29).



Figure 29. Visit in 2007 to women that I met in 2003 in central Malaŵi.

The second phase of my first initiation took place in a neighbouring village to the first one. This time I made sure first to talk to the headman. The experience was different in the sense that, during the ceremony, I could see how the food that I contributed was used for the people involved in the ceremony and the people involved knew me well and so the feeling was more relaxed.

I became aware of certain more hidden aspects of the initiation and some ties between women from different villages. Knowledge is kept by specific people who create specific objects for an initiation ceremony and sometimes women from another village need to 'hire' their services or to pay for the knowledge of that person.

The criterion that I used to select my informants followed Turner's (1967) method of analysis in which he inferred the significance of symbols in ritual life from three classes of data: observable characteristics; interpretations offered by local women and ritual specialists and ethnographic accounts of girls' initiations that were recorded by anthropologists. Mainly, I chose on the basis of the age and the title of the women. Most were between 40 and 80 years old and were either instructors or tutors of the initiation (ritual specialists). These women are the ones who have knowledge of

the ritual and whom I thought would know most about the relationship between the ceremony and the paintings. Sometimes, when I was having meetings with the ladies, some other women came into the house or just approached the conversation. However, not all the women contributed or engaged in the discussion, thus I include a table showing the villages I visited and the women who formally assisted as informants (Table 6). I shall use only the initials of the person when a direct quote is cited in this thesis.

Table 6. List of the villages where meetings were held with women about initiation in the area of research.

Country	Province/ Region	District	Villages where information was collected
Malaŵi	Central Region	Dedza	Chipazi (2 women), Mpalale (6 women), Chinkonda (1 woman), Kadule (4 women), Chamadenga (7 women), Mkopoka (4 women), Mkwanda (5 women), Tambwandira (7 women)
		Lilongwe	Khombe (2 women)
Mozambique	Tete Province	Macanga	Chincumba (1 woman), Kambedza (2 women), Kachere (4 women)
Zambia	Eastern Province	Chadiza	Kaliza (6 women)
		Chipata	Masinja (2 women)
		Katete	Mkaika (6 women)
	Northern Province	Mbala	Mabala (12 women) (on Bemba initiation)

Some of the villages were in areas close to the paintings; but some of the villages were relatively far away. I visited almost every village close to a rock art site around the Chongoni Forest Reserve in central Malaŵi in 2006. Although initially I planned to talk only to ritual specialists, I also talked to women who were not instructors because in some of the villages the old people have passed away and the new generations were knowledgeable about some aspects of the initiation. It happened as well that some of the old ladies were not able to remember certain things as they were too old. Talking to women in various villages proved a valuable experience as it

allowed me to record different opinions between women of different ages and status. Some of them were converted Christians and Protestants and they had various points of view about the instructions and the origin of various practices.

Thus, a typical process was that every time I went to a village the headman would then choose and call the appropriate women after I had introduced my proposal. Some of the ladies would come immediately as they had been called by the headman. Other times I had to come back the following day to talk to them because they were too old to come the same day or because they were not available. I constantly had the experience that one of the ladies within the group of selected women would be the headman's mother. Most of the times the headman himself would walk with me to meet the ladies at some place of convenience or in some instances the meeting with the ladies would happen in the headman's house. In one of the villages in central Malaŵi I met the ladies without seeing the headman first. That time I had met the headman the day before and asked for permission; however, when I came back he was not around. The women said to me that he had sent a message that I should start. It was only later that I heard from people that he was upset because I did not park the vehicle next to his house and that I started without him. I went to apologize, but then I realized that when I met him the first time he was inebriated. This is a pity because the women who came with me to visit one of the rock art sites subsequently felt intimidated. I was supposed to meet with them at 8 am and when I got there I heard the headman was upset. The women did not want to come with me because they said that the headman would make them pay some fee because he believed that I was giving them money. After I apologized to the headman the ladies came with me, however the incident was a bad omen for future work in this village. Thus I thanked the headman for his permission, but I did not feel comfortable to return.

My experience was very different from village to village. Sometimes I met the ladies outside or inside a house but most of the times the headman was not present. Most of the times the headman would come to introduce me and then he would leave (Figure 30). The children and other men who were around would also leave the place;

only on one occasion in Macanga District, Mozambique in 2006, the headman stayed with us because he had been initiated in *Chinamwali*. To this, I must add that although the secrets of the ceremony are for women only, there are some headmen that have also been initiated. Almost all the literature talks about how men are not allowed in some places, and although this is true, I have seen men inside the initiation hut in central Malaŵi. I think this might be a recent thing, but we cannot be certain of this. Nevertheless, every meeting that took place with women happened in secrecy.











Figure 30. Meetings with various groups of Chewa women in Zambia, Mozambique and Malawi in 2006 and 2007.

In all meetings, usually there was a chair for me to sit on and, all of the times, the women would sit on a mat. I rarely used the chair, firstly because I did not feel comfortable being treated differently, although this is just a polite gesture, and second because it was easier for me to interact and to hear the ladies if I was sitting on a mat with them. I would then need to explain to the women that I had been initiated in *Chinamwali* in central Malawi. This was important and I had to explain this in advance because otherwise the women would not feel comfortable talking to me about initiation. Some of the women were open and could not stop telling me how *Chinamwali* operates. Other women looked at me with suspicion, perhaps wondering why I wanted to know about this topic.

In Macanga District, in Mozambique in 2006, I had an experience where one of the ladies asked me: "so, you have been initiated…prove it". I tried to avoid that experience because my accent in Chichewa is 'funny' according to some people and it is not fluent; however, I had always thought that the day would come when I would have to prove my knowledge. I was afraid that the initiation in central Malawi was different in Mozambique, but I gave it a try. I stood up in the main room inside the house where I was conversing with the four women. I started to sing a secret song of initiation. I was timid and my voice was very low. One of the women said "sing louder, it is fine" then I kept singing the song and started dancing. The expressions of the women changed completely and while I was still on my feet and the rest were sitting; one of the women stood up and started clapping. It started to rain heavily; it

was November and the rainy season had just started in the region. The other women stood up as well and the rain suffocated the singing and dancing inside the house. That is something that all the women that I met shared: when they start singing, they just want to keep going.

My meetings with the women of the various villages lasted hours. I told them that I was not there for their secrets, but I wanted to know more about the old ways of doing initiation. I wanted to know, for example, if the women were taken in the past to the mountains and to the shelters in the bush. I wanted to know if they painted in the rockshelters. However, to get to that point I had to be admitted first, accepted by the women and the only way to be admitted was to let them know that I been initiated, as I mentioned earlier.

Sometimes, the meetings went on for hours because the women wanted to know more about my own background and they asked me various questions about sexuality, hygiene and initiations in my own culture. I think that when the women engaged in the conversation the meeting became a dialogue. It was not only me who asked questions. Other women would not talk at all, they were very timid and maybe they did not trust me.

I consider that it would have been more difficult for me to be accepted if I had asked the meanings of the songs in every village I visited. Although the songs are an important component of understanding the interaction of the women with the material culture of initiation (MCI), I did not ask because I know that the songs that are sung during initiation are perhaps the most secret and sacred element in the initiation. I did record some songs, but I was not allowed fully to transcribe them. My aim was to know more about their knowledge of the paintings and on certain aspects of the ceremonies such as the creation and usage of objects for the initiation. Also, I wanted to hear from them about the paintings without asking leading questions. I asked them first if they had seen them and if they knew anything about them. I did not want to imply that they were related to initiation in the past.

Another interesting point is the way people reacted to me depending on their perception of how knowledgeable I was on initiation. Sometimes it has advantages to let the person explain to you certain things without exposing your own knowledge and sometimes you have to let them know that you already know, to some extent, the procedures and some of the things that happened during the ceremony.

I had an experience, for example, in a village in central Malaŵi where women did not know about the paintings but they just wanted financial gratification for their services. This is an independent topic on how we, as researchers, show appreciation to people who help us in the field. Some people do not expect anything but others do. I decided that the best way to compensate the people who helped me was not with money but with a food parcel (*e.g.*, sugar, soap, cooking oil). However, I did this only with people who became field assistants for more than two days. The women who became my tutors, and who I met more than twice, were given a *chitenje* as well. However I did not give presents to every single man or woman I met.

Another thing that I became aware of is that when women do not know the meaning of the paintings they will either say that "God painted them" or that their ancestors did. I will comment on this in the following chapters, but I want to address the issue that sometimes when they look at the paintings, the women try to relate them to what they know or are familiar with. This does not mean that they wanted to trick me, but it made me concerned about the relevance of their testimonies to the original meanings of the art.

I tried my best to record everything I could with the help of my interpreters. Sometimes I could not move freely as I had a Sony digital camera, a Nikon 35mm camera, a Sony video-camera and a Sony digital voice recorder. I tried also at the end of the day to write in my diary whatever happened during daily conversations or in the ceremonies. I think that some things escaped me. I also tried to take as many digital pictures as possible in a medium-size resolution and then, when I had the chance, I would go to the vehicle and download them onto my laptop. I tried to be fast as I did not want to attract more attention than necessary.

The audio material, the pictures and the video clips that I took in the field will be housed by the Rock Art Research Institute. I have placed certain restrictions on access to the material because of its sensitive nature. People who want to look at this material need to write a letter of motivation explaining why the information is needed. I shall decide if access is appropriate. In the event that I am not available, people can write a letter of motivation to the Director of this Institute. No use of any material will be granted without permission.

Initiation ceremonies in the area of research

Various groups in Malaŵi, Zambia and Mozambique have initiation ceremonies but this section only deals with the ones that are performed by the peoples who I discussed in Chapter 2. However, not only the Nsenga, Yao, Ngoni and Bemba have had interaction with the Chewa; some elements of Chewa ceremonies have been adopted by people such as the Kunda from Zambia and the Tumbuka in Malaŵi (Pam Carr pers. comm. 2007; Vail 1972). I have opted to take my sample from the peoples from whom I have more information in terms of ethnographic sources, historical accounts and archaeological evidence. The main groups that I discussed in Chapter 2 are the dominant groups, but by no means have I thought that the comparison between initiation practices should be restricted to dominant groups. I think that each region should be analysed in detail and the study should be local. My aim in this chapter is to give a sense of the similarities and the differences between various groups who have been in constant interaction for many centuries.

In this section I will refer mainly to *Chinamwali* of the Chewa. I will then briefly discuss *Chisungu* of the Bemba; *Chiputu* and *Lupanda* of the Yao and *Ndola* of the Nsenga. However, I do not review extensively the steps of the initiation in the neighbouring groups, but I think it is important to have in mind a general overview of these ceremonies before I move to more detailed consideration of the material culture associated with them.

I comment in most detail about *Chinamwali* since this is the ceremony most directly linked to the rock art and one that I have attended and participated in. The

information on the rest of the ceremonies comes from published literature. However, I also attended a ceremony for people who are going to get married amongst the Bemba and this contains elements of *Chisungu*. However, the results of that experience will be incorporated in the following chapter as they deal mostly with the creation and use of MCI. I now describe the initiation ceremonies in the area of research.

Cheŵa

Chinamwali is the initiation school that all Cheŵa girls used to attend in order to graduate from childhood to womanhood (Van Gennep 1960:65-115 for further detail on initiation rites). According to Johannes Wilhelmus Maria van Breugel (2001:189) *Chinamwali* takes place usually during the season after the harvest (June-November). Schoffeleers places the girls' initiation in a bigger context and comments that the final stage of the initiation ceremonies "coincided with the time of the great rain prayer and seems to have been part of them" (Schoffeleers 1999:154). However, it seems that nowadays the ceremony is independent from rain ceremonies.

The first written account on *Chinamwali* was published by H. Crawford Angus in his 1898 work *The 'Chensamwali' or initiation of girls, as performed in Azimba Land, Central Africa* (1898a). Angus spent eleven months in 1895 in what it is now the central-western portion of Mozambique; a region that he refers to as Azimba and Chipitaland: "north as far as Téte in the Zambizi; I penetrated into Chipitaland as far as the Kapochi River at its junction with the Luia River, a tributary of the Zambizi, returning to Katusa and Kasitu to the Revubwe and thence to Bantyre". He describes this land as to settle by various groups: Chikmenda, Azimba, Chipita[23], and so on (see Angus 1898b).

Chinamwali has captured the attention of various people and has been recorded by various authors (*e.g.*, Hodgson 1933; Rangeley 1949, 1952; Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965; van Breugel 2001; Yoshida 1992; Smith 1995). From the different accounts that various authors report, it is clear that some variations exist in the performance of *Chinamwali* across the region. Thus, considering the

[23] I think it is possible that he is referring to Chipeta (see Chapter 2).

various ways in which the ceremonies are performed has helped me to explain why these variations exist. I have also realized that there is strong continuity in the ceremonies because, despite the different means of passing on the instructions, *Chinamwali* has very specific goals that vary little in space or time in the published records. The variety of the performances also tells us a story of adaptation to changing social contexts. This variety reflects that which I discussed in Chapter 2 concerning specific regional circumstances.

Researchers refer to two kinds of *Chinamwali*:

The first one is *Chinamwali Chaching'ono* ("little initiation") when the girls have their first period (Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965:347; Smith 1995:229; van Breugel 2001:189). Hodgson (1933:131) reported that it often happens that the girl is already married before even attending the initiation. Following past discussions on which elements or factors give rise to an initiation, various authors have different opinions. Lucy Mair (1951a) points out that amongst women initiation is performed as soon as the breasts begin to form. Audrey Richards notes, although not specifically for *Chinamwali*, that once the girls have been 'collected' they go through initiation together. It is "obviously impossible for the rite to coincide with the attainment of physical maturity of each" (1956:18). This means that in most cases the initiation happens some months after the first menstruation.

A Chewa girl, upon first menstruating, is required to inform not her mother, but another woman of the village — usually the aunt or grandmother (Hodgson 1933:131; Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965:347). According to Hodgson (1933:131) the phrase used to report the girl's condition is *watyola bano* ("she has broken the reed arrow shaft"). Bruwer (1949:154) recorded similar expressions: *mwana wanu watyola bano* (your child has broken the bow string), *wapona m'lupsya* (she stepped in the burnt grass), or *wakula msinkhu* (she has grown up). Usually *Chinamwali* takes place when a small group of girls are ready to go through initiation.

The second initiation, the *Chinamwali Chachikulu* ("great initiation") takes place during the first pregnancy (Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965; Smith 1995; van Breugel 2001) and is also known as *Chisamba*. I was told that *Chisamba* refers also to a dance that only women are permitted to perform. During this ceremony, the woman is taught about her pregnancy, the birth of a child and how to be a mother.

There is some variation in the names that are given to the different phases of *Chinamwali*, for example, J. Bruwer (1949) in his MA thesis on Chewa female initiation *Die gesin onder die moderregtelike Acewa*[24] in eastern Zambia; states that when the girl has her first menstruation she undergoes an individual initiation and this is called *Cinamwali* or *Cinamwali caiwaye*; later when a group of initiates are ready then they undergo the *Cinamwali Cacikulu* or *Cinamwali ca Mkangali* and then, a third initiation happens to women who are about to have their first child and this is called *Chisamba*.

However, prior to the ceremony of initiation, the Chewa custom requires certain rules to be followed (Hodgson 1933); if these are not followed, *mdulo* will occur. *Mdulo* is "the causing of illness in oneself or another person by indulging in sexual intercourse at prohibited times, or, more rarely, by abstaining therefrom when it is prescribed" (Hodgson 1933:129). Moreover, by observing these taboos, each person contributes to the welfare of the community (van Breugel 2001:207). *Mdulo* is an illness that cannot be understood outside of the conditions of 'hot' and 'cool' (see Bivar Segurado [1986] for discussion on *mdulo* in Mozambique). These two conditions do not have to deal with temperature. Thus when a person, whose condition is not appropriate, participates in a ceremony it is thought that he or she pollutes or spoils the ceremony, normally with fatal outcomes for the whole community (Table 7). In central Malawi people referred to this as "to be cut, but not outside with an axe but internally".

[24] I want to thank Alex Schoeman for her impeccable translation of the initiation section of Bruwer's thesis.

Table 7. Elements regarded as sources of contamination**.**

Contamination according to circumstances	
HOT (-Tentha)	**COLD** (-Zizira)
▪ Sexual activity or potentiality ▪ Menstrual blood ▪ Relish ▪ Salt ▪ Adultery	▪ Relative absence of sex ▪ Infants ▪ Unusually sick person ▪ Neophyte ▪ Corpse-death ▪ *Nsima* (flour pap) ▪ Ancestral spirits ▪ Children yet to born ▪ Sterility

Ann Drake (1976) who did her PhD on illness among the Chewa, comments that these concepts help us to understand Chewa ritual. The initiate (*namwali*), as well as a widow during the funeral, are ritually cold and are susceptible to contamination by hot people. However, it is also the case that the *namwali* can be a source of contamination if she does not follow the rules. The initiate can "cut her parents should she cook for them" (Drake 1976:70) presumably if she is in her monthly period. Bruwer (1949:153) mentions that the monthly period is referred as *kusamba* (to wash) or as *kukhala ndi mwezi* (to be with the moon). Thus it seems that some elements can be regarded as dangerous depending on the context. The initiate is in a transitional state and thus is regarded as dangerous.

There are different opinions on what the status of the young girl shall be before she goes through the ceremony. Hodgson (1933:135) writes that girls are usually married a few months before puberty (*cf.* Stigand 1907:121). Winterbottom & Lancaster (1965:347) write that the neophyte is often betrothed a few months before puberty (*cf.* Mair 1951b). Thus it is possible that women of today marry later due to modern influences such as Christianity and the fact that girls are attending school. People in Malawi told me that sometimes they arrange *Chinamwali* on the weekends so the girls shall not miss classes. The ceremony has adapted to social circumstances — this is why, in some accounts of *Chinamwali* (*e.g.*, Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965) we can see that elements of the ceremony that used to be part of the *Chinamwali Chaching'ono*, such as the role played by the betrothed (Winterbottom &

Lancaster 1965:349), nowadays take place at a different time when the woman is going to get married.

Prior to the ceremony, the girls — or *anamwali* (initiates) — are kept secluded from their community and receive special instruction from older women — or *anamkungwi* — who teach them everything they will need to know for the purposes of their future life as an adult. This period of instruction nowadays lasts a few days; previously, the *anamwali* were secluded for longer periods of time — usually five days (van Breugel 2001; see also Stannus 1910). I attended a ceremony in 2006 that lasted five days; it was a very important ceremony that people told me was called *Chinamwali Mkangali* (see Boucher 2002:39). The ceremony was opened with the *mjedza* dance in which women and men dance together (see Hodgson 1933:132; Video 1. *Mjedza* dance at *bwalo*).

The Chewa in central Malawi have various kinds of *Chinamwali* (Boucher 2002b). There is a *Chinamwali* that happens at the same time as a funeral and the resources that are used for the funeral are also used for *Chinamwali*. I was told that this happens when the parents of the girl do not have much money and it is regarded with less excitement. There is another distinction between initiations if *Nyau* accompanies it or not. I thought that *Nyau* always accompanies *Chinamwali* but it does not. It depends in a great part on the resources available for the ceremony. For example, in the few times that I have seen *Nyau*, every time that a mask performs people stands up and give money to the mask; it is almost an obligation for people to show this kind of appreciation.

Bruwer (1949:159) comments that this appreciation was shown with gifts such as sleeping mats, picks, beads, baskets and so on. Rangeley (1949:44) however, doubts that originally *Nyau* had anything to do with the female initiation ceremonies and he argues that it has only been recently that this takes place. On the other hand Schoffeleers (1976) mentions that *Nyau* and the shrines used to form one institution and that *Nyau* was responsible for the initiation of girls at the shrines. Thus, according to Schoffeleers (1976:62-63), the history of *Nyau* goes back into the first millennium

A.D. Legends around the drowning of neophytes also impacted because after that incident *Nyau* were told to leave the shrines. This story is still told even nowadays at the Msinja sacred pool in central Malaŵi (Figure 31).



Figure 31. Msinja sacred pool, central Malaŵi 2006.

I agree with Schoffeleers that these stories are reflecting historic tensions and moreover conflicts between the autochthonous clans, such as the Banda, and the incoming political power of the Phiri.

Nyau participation in *Chinamwali* has changed through time. In eastern Zambia, for example, Yoshida (1992:246) mentions that it has passed through three phases: a **Precolonial** phase in which *Nyau* performed for the initiation; a **Colonial** phase in which *Nyau* was banned and thus stopped performing and a **Postcolonial** phase in which Nsenga elements of their *Ndola* girls' initiation ceremony made their way into the Chewa's girls initiation. According to Yoshida (*ibid*.) this is because the Chewa women found the Nsenga's *Ndola* "full of dramatic elements" and because they were dissatisfied with not having *Nyau* performing during *Chinamwali*. He also mentions that the songs for the initiation were sung in Chinsenga instead of Chichewa. Yoshida does not explain which dramatic elements are the ones that the Chewa incorporated from the Nsenga. However, it is clear that the Chewa interacted and borrowed elements from other groups across time and space and depending on circumstances.

Another mention of this interaction comes from George T. Nurse's review on Gerhard Kubik's 1987 publication on *Nyau* masks in southern Malaŵi (Nurse 1988; Morris 2000b:131). Nurse was intrigued by the mask of the *nangumi* or *namungumi*, an image, amongst many others, that the Yao people create for initiations and call *Inyago*: "mounds of earth outlined in flour" (Stannus & Davey 1913). Nurse asks the question if the appearance of this figure in a Chewa context means that they borrowed it from the *Inyago*? However, it is important to remember that all these groups interacted and exchanged ideas, thus it is up to the researcher to deduce these aspects.

In central Malaŵi, *Nyau* has faced similar situations but *Nyau* has more or less continuously played a big part in the ceremony (van Breugel 2001) and even nowadays the songs are kept in Chichewa. In Mozambique the war created a condition of mobility (Chapter 2). Nowadays *Nyau* performs for the ceremonies in Mozambique, such as in the Furancungo area, although I met people in a very small village next to the Capoche River who said that they undertake *Chinamwali* without *Nyau* participation, just because they are too isolated.

As I have said above, when the *Chinamwali* is accompanied by the *Nyau* there is a big celebration and the *Chinamwali Mkangali* (respectful initiation) (Van Breugel 2001; Mtuta 2001) that I participated in central Malaŵi had the presence of one of the most important masks: the *njobvu* (the elephant) (Rangeley 1950). My purpose was to participate in *Chinamwali*, but, the second day after my arrival I was called by the headman who told me that it was also important for me to see how they make the elephant structure. I entered the *dambwe*, a secret place inside the *manda* (graveyard), where the masks are prepared in the company of five headmen. The *dambwe* where the elephant is kept has restricted access even for the young initiated men. I was told that only the headmen are allowed to be there and solely the headmen create the mask; for me was a very privileged moment. Rangeley notes that (Figure 32):

> The senior *dambwe* is *dambwe la Njobvu* (*dambwe* of the elephant), also known as *dambwe lalikulu* (the great *dambwe*), and at this *dambwe* only *Njobvu* (the elephant) and *Ajere* or *Abwenzi* (the hunters) are made. Membership of *dambwe la Njobvu* is open only to old men who have

graduated from the ordinary *dambwe* at which all the other *vinyau* are made (Rangeley 1949:43).





Figure 32. *Njobvu* mask and the headman of village who is the only one allowed to hold the tusk. Bottom, the *njobvu* entrance into the village; note the *Ajere* at the front, central Malaŵi 2006.

Before I entered the *dambwe la njobvu* I was symbolically initiated. I know this because an important part of the initiation into *Nyau* consists of crawling into the animal mask (Boucher pers. comm. 2003; Smith pers. comm. 2003; Birch de Aguilar

1996; Kaspin 1999). I was invited to do the same. However, I did not attend a proper initiation and I did not learn any songs or dances. I am not allowed to show pictures of the creation process of the elephant.

I believe that it was important for me to be initiated because that was the only way I could be accepted within the public performance of this senior mask. Women are not allowed to go next to the *Nyau*; in fact they run away from the masks. Only a few elder women and women who have been initiated in *Nyau* can get close to and even tease the masks as they sing and clap around them. Often they call the masks to come closer. The first time I attended a *Chinamwali* in central Malaŵi I ran away from *Nyau* with the other women. I wanted to show respect by following the behaviour of other women, although I do not know if people were expecting me to run. However, as I was running away, some of the women came to me to tell me "it is all right". Women know that the masks are not real spirits thus it is interesting to understand why they play their part of this act (on this interesting topic see Pernet [1982]).

I had the opportunity to follow the elephant when it performed at the *bwalo* (open space of the village; see Lamba 1985:68; Video 2. *Njobvu* mask at the *bwalo*) and also when it was taken to the headman's house to be protected with medicine. Before the elephant is ready to makes its appearance, other masks perform for *Chinamwali*. The first night some night masks will dance at the *bwalo*. To take pictures of these masks is very difficult. Many men follow the masks and each mask dances according to its character. Dust is an important element in the display of motion; these are said to be animals that come to the village and they behave as such. It is impossible to take a picture without getting big blurry spots and for this reason I present some of the pictures that I took at night to show the environment in which these animals perform (Figure 33).



Figure 33. *Nyau* structures performing at night, central Malawi 2006.

Another structure that plays an important role is the *kasiyamaliro*, a mask that represents fertility and rebirth. *Kasiyamaliro* signifies that the *namwali* will become a mother as "it is from the womb that future generations will come" (Fr. Boucher, Kungoni Art and Craft Centre, Mua Mission; Figure 34). I was told in central Malawi in 2007 that this mask always closes the ceremony (Video 3. *Kasiyamaliro* closing the girls' initiation ceremony). All the structures that dance for the initiation are later destroyed (Rita-Ferreira 1968; Nurse 1988; Birch de Aguilar 1996).



Figure 34. *Kasiyamaliro* performing at the end of *Chinamwali,* central Malaŵi 2006.

As soon as the headman and the village know that *Chinamwali* is going to take place, the brewing of beer starts. This is an important activity that is done for initiations, funerals and commemorations of funerals such as the *Bona* ceremony in eastern Zambia, which I attended in 2007. It is very important that the women who are involved in the preparation of the *mowa* (beer) are 'cool', thus post-menopausal women are involved in this task (Schoffeleers 1992; van Breugel 2001).

Beer preparation requires a long procedure and usually the beer will be ready at the end of the ceremony and will be drunk by the women and the men involved (Hodgson 1933; Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965). However, it is common that men are the first to taste the beer in the *bwalo*. Sometimes men will filter the remains of the maize but more often people just drink it as it comes. Beer is shared, and by that I mean that everyone will pass the same cup around. This beer is not very strong in alcohol but the fact that people sip it together is what is of importance. Women and boys guard the production of the beer and keep the animals away, thus they build a fence around the pots of beer (Figure 35).



Figure 35. Beer brewing process: Top left: women collecting water. Top right: boiling the maize. Bottom left: final stages of the beer. Bottom right: beer ready (please note the fence around the pots), central Malaŵi 2006.

Each girl is, importantly, assigned a *phungu* (tutor) who is in charge of taking care of her during the initiation (Hodgson 1933). *Chinamwali* involves much more than the learning of songs and dances; it prescribes, in particular, the special places in which the rituals are performed. One of the most important of these is the *tsimba* (the hut in which the initiates are secluded), another is the *mtengo* (a special gathering place in the bush under a tree) (Figure 36). At Khombe village I was told that there are two different *mtengo*: one known as *mtengo Chaching'ono* and the other as *mtengo Chachikulu*. Bruwer (1949:160) mentions the *mtengo waung'ono* "a normal opening into the forest without any divisions of any kind. This, however, is forbidden territory, and the paths there are closed with branches". Bruwer (*ibid*.:162) also mentions the *mtengo waukulu* and he recorded that the *phungu* gets undressed, and the initiate also is made to get undressed. One after the other each initiate and her *phungu* is lifted into a tree where they sit naked while the rest dance around the tree. While this is happening, the *namkungwi* verbally abuses the initiate.

Winterbottom and Lancaster (1965) make reference to a *tsimba* hut which the initiate builds for herself in the bush. However, I have also seen the women using the headman's own house as a *tsimba* or another house in the village. *Nyau* also perform around the *tsimba* trying to scare the girls who are inside and sometimes the *Nyau* are hired specifically to chastise an initiate who has been rude (Rangeley 1949:44-45, 1950:31; Rita-Ferreria 1968:23). The noises and screams around the *tsimba* create such a tense atmosphere that the girls keep this moment as an important memory of the initiation (van Breugel 2001).



Figure 36. Left: *tsimba* (headman's house). Right: *mtengo* and women protecting it from non-initiated eyes. At the back we can see the graveyard, central Malawi 2006.

Thus, it is obvious from these accounts that the instructions are given in two different spaces: one that is immersed in the village and the other one that happens in the bush. Hodgson (1933:132) writes that the initiate, on the second day of the ceremony, is taken into the bush, along with a mat and drums, to be instructed, and that she is then taught secret songs and made to strip naked and climb a tree and other activities. Father Claude Boucher Chisale (pers. comm. 2003) was informed that sometimes the women take the initiate to the bush to examine her. Some manipulation of the vulva and the sexual organs then takes place in order to verify that the girl is not pregnant.

Angus (1898a) mentions that, as soon as other women know that the girl is menstruating, she is taken to the bush where a grass hut is built specially for her and where she is instructed in various sexual positions. He mentions that the vagina is

freely manipulated and enlarged by means of a horn or a maize cob, which is inserted and secured in place by bands of bark cloth (Angus 1898a:480). Women allowed Angus to be present at a dance where only women were allowed to be. Angus explains that the women examine the menstrual blood (previously collected in a gourd) while they are singing.

In Chadiza District, in eastern Zambia, the women told me that the *phungu* will look at the private parts of the initiate to check if she has been pulling her labia; this is something that apparently the older sisters will teach the younger ones how to do before the initiation. If the girl comes to the initiation and the *phungu* finds that she has not pulled her labia the girl is dismissed. The only mention that I have read on this regard for Malaŵi was at the FENZA (Faith & Encounter Centre Zambia) archive in Lusaka. Father Noel Salaun (1970) explains for Lilongwe area that this manipulation of the body is to quicken the process of physical development. It consists of stretching with the hand the exterior genital organs (*labiae minora*) and, sometimes after having mollified the area with herbs prepared for the purpose, enlarged the opening of the vagina by frequent introduction of the finger or some other object (cassava root or maize- cob). He explains that this practice, done alone or two doing it to each other, is carried on over period of years starting from seven to just before puberty.

Salaun writes that the mother usually will say "go and play with your friends" and old women invite them to continue because they will tell them that if they do not start then they will not get married or that their husbands will abandon them. At the archive, I found also notes from concerned priests who thought that this practice was sinful because of the pleasure that this gave to the women. Similar practices, pulling the labia, are done by the Bemba of northern Zambia and I will discuss this below. In Mozambique I did not have the opportunity to ask the women about this aspect.

If a girl is found to be pregnant after examination, a big fuss (*mlandu*) is made because she has endangered the headman's life (Van Breugel 2001:194). Angus (1898a) mentioned that the family then had to pay for two slaves to the chief or else he could claim her and the child.

The period of seclusion constitutes a very important moment for the *namwali* because it is during this period in the bush that she is also taught about the sexual aspects of her body. She is told about the new capabilities of her body, such as bearing children. Her perception of her own body changes too as she regards it as the body of a grown woman. She is not longer regarded as a *mwana* (child) (Stigand 1907:121). She is given a new name: *namwali*.

The initiate is also instructed about personal hygiene and how to use a piece of the *chitenje* (wraparound) as a menstrual cloth (Yoshida 1993; Zubieta 2006). Angus (1898a) mentions that the girl is taught how to close her vulva with a pad of fibre that is covered with a piece of goat's skin fastened to the waist. This she will have to hang on the wall to alert her husband that she cannot have sexual intercourse. Similarly, van Breugel (2001:203) reports the same practice but he mentions that women indicate this by wearing beads around their waist, these beads are called *mkuzi*.

A woman, on the first day of her period has to remove the *mkuzi* and hang them on a nail on the wall as a sign for her husband to understand that they should stop having sexual intercourse. Some of the women in central Malaŵi told me that these beads are worn to please the husband, that a man will like the feeling of the beads while they have sexual intercourse. Women wear many strings of colourful beads and I found that the Chewa women in Zambia and Mozambique also wear beads. In Zambia, a woman showed me her beads and attached to them she had a little sack with medicine apparently to enhance lust. I asked the women in Zambia if these beads were passed to them by their mother or grandmothers and they said no, they buy them at the shop.

Women are very careful not to show these beads to anyone. It is difficult to know that women are wearing these beads because, if you look at them, you cannot see that they are wearing them. In central Malaŵi I got to a village where the women told me that they had stopped wearing beads because, at some point, flees made their nest in the beads so this is something they do not practise anymore. This was

interesting to me as it made me realize the hygiene issues of keeping beads around the waist all day long; however it is very unusual to find a Chewa village where women do not wear the beads around their waist.

While the initiate is inside the *tsimba* she is given the instructions she needs to learn in order to become a woman. Although I am not allowed to repeat specific instructions and songs that were given, I want to comment on the behaviour that I could see. Girls are not allowed to move an inch; they have to rest their back on the wall, but their limbs need to be extended. In case you need to use the toilet the *phungu* will lead you to it and she will make sure that you are covered with a *chitenje*: no one can see you in this transition time, especially at night. The teachings go on and on. First the instructors dance in front of the initiate, who is most often looking at the ground as a sign of submission. Then, after the women dance, the initiate has to do the same, showing that she is paying attention. These dances go on until the morning. Once the teachings are done and the secret knowledge is given, the initiate is allowed to rest for a while. The secret knowledge is guarded rigorously. This is the part where an old *namkungwi* will whisper a secret question in the ear of the initiate and the initiate needs to give the right answer. If she gives a wrong answer, or if she gives the answer in a loud voice, she will be slapped or made fun of; however, she can always have another try. The girl has to perform in public, at the *bwalo*, the things that she has learned inside the *tsimba*. The *namkungwi* and other women will perform first and then the initiate and her *phungu* will follow (Video 4. Girls' public performance at the *bwalo*).

The girls then are ready to go through *Chingondo* (Figure 37) which is the phase in which the initiate will wear a clay figurine over her head and be decorated with dots. This is an important part of the ceremony because *Chingondo*, I have posited, is the embodied representation of all the teachings and experiences that are given through the initiation (Zubieta 2006:16). I will discuss this material representation in more detail in the following chapter and I will talk about the different names that this stage is given.



Figure 37. *Chingondo* ceremony, central Malaŵi 2006.

Some Chewa women in central Malaŵi told me that there were four different steps to the *Chinamwali*: the first comprises instruction for young girls who have just had their period; the second is *Chingondo*; the third is concerned with the instruction of pregnant women; and the fourth is a ceremony conducted for women who are about to get married. Thus, it would seem that *Chingondo* is regarded as one of the crucial steps of *Chinamwali*. I was told that the initiates often get pregnant without being married. I have seen initiates in *Chinamwali Chachikulu* who were already mothers. However, although these girls were allowed to feed the baby during the ceremony, they were not treated the same way as the rest: they could not wear the *chingondo* on their heads.

Towards the close of the *Chinamwali*, the initiate is allowed to wear new clothes as a sign that her transition from child to woman is almost over. On the last day, the girl's head is shaved and this is called *Kumeta*. I heard in Chipazi, central Malaŵi, in 2003 that in *Kumeta* they also shave their pubic and armpit hair (*cf.* Hodgson 1933:134). In 2006 I witnessed the *Kumeta* or the ritual shaving of the initiates. The hair is carefully collected and then disposed of or as Angus (1989a) describes, it was given to the chief. In 2006, while I was at Khombe village, this

ceremony was preceded by a small ceremony where some men and women gave their views on the ceremony by commenting on the initiates and their new role in society. The headman gave a speech thanking everyone for their presence; however the audience consisted only of the headmen of various villages who came to attend the *Chinamwali*. The initiates were covered with a *chitenje* the whole time that the appreciation was given and, when the headmen left, the women removed the *chitenje* and started to cut the hair of the initiate with the use of scissors. While I was taking pictures I saw that some hair was not collected and I was going to pick it up and give it to the *phungu* when I stopped and remembered what women think about witches and people who want to hurt the initiate. It would probably have been fine if I had picked it up, as I am regarded not as part of the group and I do not share the same taboos, but I preferred not to take the chance and I decided to tell the *phungu* that the piece of hair had not been collected and she thanked me with a serious and grateful look. After the initiates were shaved the mothers of the initiates showed their appreciation by leaving money underneath the scissors. This shaving usually takes place at a river or stream, but the *Kumeta* of the head that I witnessed was performed at the *bwalo* (Figure 38; Video 5. *Kumeta*).







Figure 38. Top left: initiates covered with a *chitenje*. Top right: initiates being uncovered. Bottom left: *Kumeta* (ritual shaving). Bottom right: showing appreciation to the *aphungu* by leaving money under the scissors, central Malaŵi 2006.

Shaving is important for various ceremonies amongst the Cheŵa, such as initiation and funerals, although there are some reports where cutting the hair is a bad sign: Rangeley (1952:30) and van Breugel (2001:55) describe that during rain ceremonies the priestess and headman do not cut their hair because — given their control of the rain — this might result in their 'cutting the rain'.

There are some intimate aspects of the *Chinamwali* that are very seldom found in the published literature. For example according to Winterbottom and Lancaster (1965:349) during *Chinamwali* in eastern Zambia, another kind of shaving is performed. The bridegroom and his bride will go into the bush and, after having intercourse, will shave each other's genital areas and arm-pits. I was told in central Malaŵi in 2003 that if married women shave their genital area before their husbands return from a trip, this is a confession of adultery.

Kenji Yoshida (1992:248), when he did his fieldwork between 1984 and 1986 in Kaliza village and neighbouring villages in eastern Zambia, comments that, when the girl goes through *Chinamwali*, she is given a vessel called *mkhate*. This is used by the husband and wife to wash and shave each other's genital area along with another vessel called *njondo*. *Njondo* contains vegetable oil and the wife applies this to her genitals before sexual intercourse. When the tutor gives these objects to the initiate, she also gives practical training in sex life by having the initiate play the role of the

male and by showing the initiate various sexual postures. The girl needs to keep these objects secret and no one else, besides the husband, is allowed to see them.

At the end of the ceremony the girl is no longer a girl but has become a woman. She has been covered in new clothes, has been shaved, has danced in front of the community and now she receives a new name (Werner 1906; Hodgson 1933; Bruwer 1949; see Garbut 1912 for a note among the Yao). The *phungu* is the one who gives the girl the new name. After the ceremony, and before ritual intercourse, the *namwali* is returned to her parents or to her husband if she is married. Women are followed by the community and the women clap, sing and shout with joy. The girl has grown up (Figure 39).



Figure 39. The *namwali* is taken back home (after Yoshida1993:fig 15).

Some authors provide insights about old practices and others aspects that they witnessed and recorded that are not longer performed today. For example, a ritual intercourse happened at the end of the ceremony: the girl who was not already betrothed had to sleep with a *fisi* (hyena) an anonymous man. Angus (1898a) mentions that this man was hired by her father to sleep with her and deflower her *ka chatoa massita* (take away fat). Bruwer (1949:157) also recorded something similar: the father in consultation with the grandmother chose a *fisi* who slept with the initiate; this is called *kudya chinamwali* (to eat the initiate). The identity was kept secret except from the *fisi's* wife from whom he had to get permission. Hodgson (1933:135) writes that the *fisi* remained anonymous and that the girl could, in fact, refuse him and

was free to select whomever she wanted. Lucy Mair (1951b:107), on the other hand, records something quite different: that the girl is required to be deflowered by a man other than her husband if she is already married. At the end of the ceremony the girls, the headmen and the whole community need to have sexual intercourse. Van Breugel (2001:197) writes that on the last day the *anamwali* who are married, are reminded to have intercourse that night. However, if "things did not go well", in other words if the girl does not get pregnant, then the *fisi* is called in. From the villages, where I collected my data, women said that they do not do this anymore, but that it is possible that it is still occurring. I heard that this was still done sometimes in Lilongwe District, central Malaŵi.

Anther aspect of the ceremony that is not performed anymore is recorded by Yoshida (1992:246). He says that spirit mediums (*mgwetsa*) used to take part at one stage of the ceremony. Yoshida states that a spirit medium is always a woman who is possessed by a python, an animal that does not eat humans and it is not eaten by humans and that has the power of rain calling, thus "by taking part in the girls' initiation ceremony, the medium has charge over the birth of humans, while at the same time directly controlling the maintenance of human life by regulating rain' (Yoshida 1992:204). This reference will be important to keep in mind when we reconstruct how *Chinamwali* was performed when it was still linked with the rain ceremony in Banda times. As Yoshida comments, the medium of the python is solely found among the Banda clan.

Yao

Alice Werner (1906:124) comments that, amongst the Yao, the initiation takes place every year during the dry season before the grass is burnt. When considering Yao practices one must take into account the long period of Yao interaction with Arabs, "at least 200 years before the Europeans came" (Mitchell 1956:22). This contact came about because the Yao were active members of the ivory trade and slave trade between the interior of east-central Africa and the east coast (Msiska 1995:49).

Mircea Eliade (1958:44) points, out that the female initiation amongst the Yao "begins with the first menstruation, is repeated and elaborated during the first pregnancy, and is only concluded with the birth of the first child". Indeed it appears that, among the Yao, girls and boys go through three and two initiations respectively: the *Chiputu* and *Msondo* during the first menstruation and the *Litiwo* at first pregnancy for the girls (Mitchell 1956:134) and the *Lupanda* and *Jando* for boys (Abdallah 1973; Lamba 1985). *Msondo* and *Jando* combine traditional elements of the Yao ceremonies with external influences from Islam and have a baptismal climax that is performed by a Sheik or Malamu (Lamba 1985:69; Msiska 1995). *Jando* involves circumcision. According to Msiska, (1995) *Jando*, a word use also for the place in the bush where the boys spend a period after circumcision, used to take place at anytime of the year but these days people wait until the schools close and instead of taking three months they now use the period of the summer holidays.

Meredith Sanderson (see Abdallah 1973) points out that before the introduction of Islam only a slight incision was made during circumcision. Augustine Msiska (1995:73) mentions that, in the traditional *Lupanda*, there was a partial circumcision in which the males had the outermost skin of their penis cut off and the inner one left. Circumcision is practised among the Yao and apparently clitoridectomy was also performed on the women. Stannus (1910) mentions that this practice amongst women stopped in the beginning of the 20th century, but people in Dedza in 2003 mentioned that Yao people still do it. Lucy Mair (1951a) writes however, that no circumcision is performed — although one of her informants told her that sometimes it is.

During *Lupanda* the boys were secluded for six months but by the time of Stannus's accounts, boys were secluded only for four to eight weeks. All the wounds after the circumcision needed to be healed before the candidate returned home; some boys died in the process and the mother is only notified after the seclusion is completed. The boy will be told how to behave in married life (*e.g.*, intercourse, food taboos such as salt consumption). This is a group initiation and varies from three boys to thirty or more. The boy is dressed in new clothes and given a new name. He will

have to sleep with a girl at the end, otherwise he is not allowed to eat food prepared with salt.

Cartmel-Robinson's (1962) short account of a *Lupanda* that he witnessed near Zomba, Malaŵi, adds that while the boy is in the camp he is beaten and subjected to harsh treatment. Also he mentions that the hut where the boys were secluded was burned to ashes after the ceremony. At the end of the ceremony the boys wear "coloured beads round their heads, skirts of barkcloth and were carrying black and white striped sticks, on top of which were dried pods and red and black feathers" (Cartmel-Robinson 1962:22). Various authors have commented on the earthern designs made on the ground during such ceremonies; I discuss these in the next chapter.

Stannus (1910) gives, in contrast, little detail on the girls' initiation. He mentions that after the initiation the girls wear a string of blue beads around the neck. Mair (1951a) writes that *Chiputu* only takes place when the parents of the girl can pay for the ceremony. She witnessed the public rituals performed at *Chiputu*, in particular a Yao girls' initiation in Dedza District, but she states that the ceremony "cannot be regarded as typical of these rites amongst the Yao, since in this region of mixed tribes there has been much assimilation of neighbouring cultures; in particular the *Nyau* dances which played a prominent part in the proceedings, belong to the traditional culture of the Cewa" (Mair 1951a:60).

Mair did not witness a girls' initiation amongst the Chewa (Mair 1951b). Nevertheless, her comments on the *Chiputu* (1951a) in many ways suggest the steps of the *Chinamwali* ritual: the initiates are called *anamwali*, and have a *namkungwi* and a *phungu* but, instead of the *tsimba*, they construct a hut made of grass called a *masasa*. Like *Chinamwali* the ceremony requires that the initiates sing, dance, and clap, but Mair did not comment on *Chingondo*, perhaps because she left the District before the end of the ceremony. It is said that in *Chiputu*, women start with the "twirling dance wearing red fruit as beads and the next morning is the *Manawa*, when they dance the *Chamba*" (Abdallah 1973:17).

Bemba

Audrey Richards (1956) was the first anthropologist to publish an extensive work on the initiation ceremony of the Bemba. The *Chisungu* is, according to her, a nubility rite that is preceded by a short puberty ceremony. Richards states that when the girl knows that she has had her first period she has to tell an older woman and she has to bring the girl to the hearth or show her fire because her condition has made her cold (Richards 1956:54). In *Chinamwali* we have seen that menstruation is regarded as something that makes women hot, but an initiate can have an ambiguous status perhaps since the initiate is not yet considered a woman then she is ritually cold. Richards (1956:30) mentions that, amongst the Bemba, all persons of sexual maturity are called by the term *wa kuboko* and excluded from certain ceremonies because they are 'hot'.

Chisungu can be organised for one or three girls together; the girl will be called *nachisungu*. Formerly the girl would already be betrothed when she went through *Chisungu.* Richards states that the *Chisungu* she witnessed lasted for a month but that she was told that traditional ceremonies used to take six months. During this time she says that she witnessed 18 small ceremonies and recorded over 40 pottery emblems. The parents of the girl provide the beer and food for the ceremony. The *nacimbusa* (instructor) is in charge of the initiate and she leads the dances and the songs during the initiation. She is usually a woman who has "proved herself to be a successful midwife" (Richards 1956:57).

Bemba initiation ceremonies have been influenced by elements from the Catholic Church, especially in the urban areas, but they have maintained much of their original structure. According to Thera Rasing (1995, 2001), who has written about the *Chisungu* initiations that take place in the urban areas of Zambia, after 1965 the Church tried to reevaluate cultural customs and tried to combine girls' initiation with ceremonies in the church. When I went to Mbala in the Northern Province of Zambia, I met with a group of women and men who called themselves the *Mbusa Club*. This club works at the Moto Moto Museum. I went to the Moto Moto Museum to see the collection that Father Corbeil had made of *mbusa* figurines and that he

published (1982). I arranged a meeting through Mr Sosala, the director of the Museum, with the club a week in advance. I explained to them the purpose of my visit and told them that I had been initiated in *Chinamwali*. The women expressed the view that since I wanted to see how the *mbusa* were used for initiation, I had to go through the initiation into married life since they thought that I already knew the basics. The women who taught me were Christians although the old *nacimbusa* was said to have been in charge of traditional *Chisungu*. Thus, I had the experience of interacting with the women and with the *mbusa* as I shall explain in the next chapter.

Nsenga

We know little of the initiation ceremonies amongst the Nsenga people. Winterbottom and Lancaster (1965) comment that the Nsenga people in Zambia, do not have *Chisamba*, although there is an important ceremony called *Nsongwe* after the woman has one or two children; they write that "a complete woman must therefore have passed through several ceremonies of initiation and instruction and must have borne at least one child" (Lancaster 1965:347).

The Nsenga are located in eastern Zambia and they make figures out of mud that they call *vilengo* and use these for their *Ndola* ceremony — girl's initiation. In 1925 Martin Drourega (1927:620-621) witnessed a *Ndola* ceremony and despite the brevity of his note, he provides useful information about the initiation and that we can compare to the *Chinamwali*. In this sense, he writes that the initiate (*moye*) is secluded for a period of four months, a time in which she cannot speak or look at other people, especially men.

Although little is written on the Nsenga initiation, I have been fortunate to correspond with Raymond Apthorpe who attended the ceremony and who talked to both women and men about different aspects of it. Although Yoshida (1992, 1993) has used the word *Cisungu* to refer to the girls' initiation among the Nsenga people, the correct word for their girls' initiation is *Ndola* (Apthorpe pers. comm. 2008).

Cognition, memory and secrecy

After reviewing these initiation ceremonies, there is no doubt that passing the knowledge from one set of people to another: initiated people to non-initiated, is one of the most important processes. The ways the initiates successfully acquire the knowledge is crucial for the success of the ceremony. Such matters deal with the cognitive aspects of the ceremony.

Cognitive studies have a wide range of areas (*e.g.*, psychology, neurology, philosophy, etc.) though recently the understanding of **how** we think and how thinking operates has changed radically from classic cognitive approaches. In the past decades we have seen the progression from non-linear mathematics in the 1980s to fuzzy logic, chaos theory, and so on. Cognitive approaches have changed from classical to dynamic (van Gelder 1999).

Dynamicists see cognition as an essentially temporal phenomenon; as something that happens in the flux of change. Cognition is regarded "not as having a sequential cyclic (sense-think-act) structure but a matter of continuous and continual coevolution" (van Gelder 1999:244). Dynamicists see cognitive processes as embedded in bodies and with specific contexts, considerations that classicist views put aside. This approach had most impact in computer systems, synergetics and neural net research, but it can be applied also to this study of rock art. I believe that van Gelder's (*ibid*.) statement that "representations tend to be seen as transient, context-dependent stabilities in the midst of change, rather than as static, context-free, permanent units" is an accurate way to perceive images in the White Spread-eagled tradition. I have explained my interest in the cultural exchange between the Chewa and neighbouring groups and I think it is appropriate to look at the paintings in the same light: as symbolic representations during the initiation ceremonies that fluxed in time. Images sit in fluxing society, in a fluxing sense of Chewa identity and in fluxing social relations between villages and individual women.

During *Chinamwali*, teachings are given in various ways using different mnemonic devices, which help the learning process (see Belleza 1982; Baddeley

[1988] for discussion on mnemonic devices). Mnemonic learning is "learning that is dependant on the conscious use of learning strategy and typically involves the extensive use of visual imagery mediation" (Belleza 1982:301). This learning process is a cognitive phenomenon in which people associate a conceptual structure with a material one (Hutchins 2005).

Mnemonic devices have been employed all around the world. Greek orators, for example, studied these devices for the first time; they were used over the years by people known as mnemonists (Segal 1971). Later this became known as the art of memory — nowadays mnemotechnics — which is a technique of impressing 'places' and 'images' on memory.

Memory stands as one of the most important aspects of the learning process during *Chinamwali*. Memory is the basis for the oral culture (Carruthers 1993:16) upon which Chewa ritual and tradition are constructed (Phiri 1975) and the use of oral knowledge recalled for *Chinamwali* — passed down through the women's line — lies at the core of this study. I posit that studies such as Edwin Hutchins (2005) *Material anchors for conceptual blends* can help us to understand why some choices are made and not others in the learning process during *Chinamwali*. In his recitation of the results of a series of reasoning experiments he mentions that "it appears that premises that lack cultural coherence cannot be held stably in memory while the transformations required to make the inferences are performed" (Hutchins 2005:1558). Thus, in the same sense, I think that it is through the understanding of the cultural models in the area of research that we can understand the representations that were used in the past to pass knowledge from one generation to the other. Hutchins (*ibid*.) in this sense expresses that "cultural models are not only ideas that reside inside minds, they are often also embodied in material artefacts".

Memory and secrecy are involved not solely in the creation of MCI. The MCI evokes memory passed on in riddles, songs and performances and serves to maintain a direct link with the ancestors and the land and to remind people about their identity

and origin. *Chinamwali*, moreover, recalls a collective memory of past events as generations of women have gone through the same process.

Memory and secrecy, therefore, play an important role in how instructions are transmitted and recalled. Presumably this process is more effective the more vivid the mnemonic devices are (see Belleza 1981; Rogers 1983); attributes such as rhyme, repetition, attention, contribute also to the effectiveness of the learning process. The effectiveness of the learning process during initiation, nonetheless, depends not solely on the use of mnemonic devices. The emotional impact that this secret and sacred ceremony has on women's lives is also crucial for the whole outcome. Emotions and feelings, thus, are an important attribute of the whole learning process (Rogers 1983).

Secrecy is the other part of the equation in the learning process: the use of metaphors (Zubieta 2006), the periods of seclusion and the specific behaviour towards the non-initiated make an impact on the initiate and how she learns. The meanings of the initiation images are hidden to non-initiated women and to outsiders. In the case of rock art, it was placed in specific places far away from the villages (Smith 1995). Secrecy provides alliances between people who share hidden knowledge; nevertheless the paradox of secrecy is that secrets get told (Bellman 1981).

As Beryl Bellman writes "…secrecy must be viewed as a method for handling concealed information. Because, any information can be the content of a secret, it is only by the methods actually used for containing and transmitting such knowledge that secrecy can be isolated as a phenomenon for analysis" (Bellman 1981:8). Therefore I contend that secrecy is another aspect to be considered when analysing the different mnemonic devices involved in the learning process in which the initiates are told the secrets of initiation. The mnemonic devices need to remind of the secret teachings, but must not be in a form that exposes the secret knowledge to outsiders. Moreover to go through initiation, and survive it, is itself a secret that "no one could possess without undergoing it" (Beidelman 1993:43).

To gain access to secret knowledge, as an outsider, is a challenge that researchers have to face all the time. My personal experience in central Malaŵi is that one will never have full access to all secrets for a number of reasons. An advantage that I had is that, as a woman, I was allowed to participate in the *Chinamwali* and bear witness to some events that are kept secret from men and non-initiated people. I want to mention that getting information has never been easy, but also never impossible. Before my first visit to Malaŵi in 2003 I remember asking McEdward Murimbika, then a PhD student at Wits, if he thought that people would accept me. I asked him this question because I knew he was also doing ethnographic research in the Limpopo Province in South Africa. He said: you will be more accepted because you do not share the same taboos. Back then I did not understand what he meant. Then, when I visited Zambia in 2007, I was told that people saw me as an 'honorary male'. I think that being a female has granted me the trust of women but also the fact that I am a foreigner also helped. In the beginning I doubted this, but as a foreigner, I do not share the same taboos and I am not implicated in any power relationships with anyone in the community.

In my masters' research report I only commented on the data that Chewa women gave me permission to make public. Nonetheless, many of the secrets of *Chinamwali*, have already been published and are therefore open to discussion (*e.g.*, Hodgson 1933; Rangeley 1952; Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965; van Breugel 2001; Yoshida 1992; Smith 1995). I mainly draw only on this published data to elaborate on secret aspects, unless the community has allowed me to disclose any other matter.

In this sense, another aspect that restrains access to knowledge is that secret knowledge gives power to people, thus only a section of the community are allowed to know some secrets. As a Dangme elder from southern Ghana remarked to an anthropologist: "What I know, that you ought to know but do not know, is what makes me powerful" (Quarcoopome 1993:114).

Chapter Five: Material culture of initiation

Introduction

I discussed in previous chapters the characteristics of the White Spread-eagled tradition and how it is related to the girls' initiation of the ancestors of the Chewa. The objective of this chapter is to look at the material culture of initiation. The formal resemblance between the material culture of girl's initiation ceremonies and the rock paintings of the White Spread-eagled rock painted tradition will be explored. Mostly, I am interested in how the paintings were used in the past and for this reason this chapter analyses the process of creation, usage and disposal of the material culture of initiation (MCI) among the Chewa people and the neighbouring groups that I have previously introduced.

I posit that it is possible to elaborate more on the creation aspects and usages of the paintings once it is understood that the paintings are only a part of a wider set of material culture related to initiation. The formal similarities between the paintings and the material culture lie in certain images that are used for initiation; these images are full of symbolic meaning. However, the creation process, usage and disposal of the MCI lead us as well to the symbolic aspects of the chosen images. In this chapter I offer a glimpse into the symbolic meanings of some of the images so as to understand how figurines, clay reliefs, and so on (3D) can be compared to the rock paintings (2D) in order to analyse how MCI is used in society.

It has been noted that different western Bantu-language speakers, and other African societies, use similar sets of symbols represented in a wide range of media: wall murals, figurines, beadwork, and so on, and yet the basic symbolism remains the same (*e.g.*, fertility) (Prins & Hall 1994:197; Chaplin 1962:5; see MacEachern 1994:211 for Mandara societies in Cameroon). We have to be careful, however, not to expect that the same symbols occur all the time or that they will mean the same thing if they do recur. Most likely, we will find two scenarios: the first one in which a set of symbols on a specific material (*e.g.*, ceramics) might not have the same meanings as one represented on another material (*e.g.*, on textiles). Or, the second scenario in

which the symbols can be represented in various materials and still retain the same meanings. This leads us to various ways in which to understand the meanings of a particular set of symbols and helps us to realize the flexibility of the uses of symbols. Following this line, I argue that if it is possible that a set of symbols retain their meaning even if they are used in a range of media; then it is possible to say that the same happens if the set of symbols are represented in various forms: as three-dimensional objects (3D) and as images (2D).

Thus, I suggest that we should look closer at different art expressions so as to move towards interpreting the rock art of south-central Africa. Jim Chaplin recommended that the designs painted on huts can be used to help us understand the rock art: "It is my firm conviction that we shall be a good deal closer to the interpretation of much of the symbolic rock art of this part of Central Africa if a comprehensive record is made of the designs on huts in different areas" (Chaplin 1963:71).

David Phillipson has also suggested that some of the motifs in the White Spread-eagled rock art tradition such as the circle with internal divisions and the spread-eagled design "can be shown to be depicted in various media, at puberty ceremonies over a wider area" (Phillipson 1976:187). In this sense, I posit that it is through the understanding of the present MCI that we will be able to get insights into the meanings and uses of the rock paintings in the past. Therefore I will describe some of the MCI that I have recorded in the area.

Material culture of initiation

For this research I have borrowed Daniel Miller's (1994) concept of culture and its relation to material culture:

> not in the narrow sense of some particular element of the human environment, but in the more general sense of the process through which human groups construct themselves and are socialized, then material culture

> becomes an aspect of objectification, consisting in the material forms taken by this cultural process (Miller 1994:399).

The material culture becomes the media "through which people conduct their constant struggles over identity and confront the contradictions and ambiguities that face them in their daily lives" (*ibid*.:417), thus, it is through the understanding of the relations between people and material culture that we are able to understand the way people and cultural forms relate and how one influences the other.

In this section I describe the MCI that various groups have used to instruct the girls during the initiation ceremonies. I have divided this MCI in five types:

1. **Figurines**: objects that are usually made of clay. These are three dimensional objects that are manipulated and used by the initiate during the initiation.
2. **Floor clay reliefs**: figures on the ground that protrude from the surface sometimes slightly and sometimes forming high mounds.
3. **Wall paintings**: images are painted inside the house of initiation, on the wall, on a black board or a cloth that is hung on the wall.
4. **Floor drawings**: these are made on the ground but they do not have any volume. These are considered in this study as artefacts because they play a specific function.
5. **Floor sculptures**: I take this name from Deborah Hoover (2000), although she also uses the term *floor sculptures* to refer to clay reliefs. However, I think it is an appropriate name for the three-dimensional erected structures attached to ground and that are seen mainly amongst the Bemba.

The formal characteristics of the MCI play a role in the way the instructions are given and learnt; thus I describe in this chapter the specific characteristics that 3D objects possess and that they do not share with other representations, such as images. Visual and tangible mnemonic devices potentially bring together all the senses: they evoke smell, taste, touch and sight — "clearly objects relate to wider perceptual functions than do words" (Miller 1994:407). The tactile characteristics of a 3D object permit an interaction with people in a different way to that of an image (Bailey 1996).

Thus, depending on these formal characteristics the MCI gets to be manipulated in specific ways. Such handling starts when the object is created: it involves the physical manufacture and a careful selection of materials that carry symbolic meanings and purposes.

One of the specific attributes of the relation between material culture and people, in this specific context of initiation, is that a temporal relation is established between them. Thus in this chapter I discuss some theoretical aspects of time, related to objects, with the intention of further understanding the relationship between the floor clay reliefs, clay figurines, wall paintings, floor sculptures and floor drawings with the overall initiation ceremony and its participants.

Temporality not only refers to the lifetime of objects in terms of their durability, according to Daniel Miller (1994), this relationship can also be organized into three different situations and these situations will be discussed once the MCI has been introduced:

1. *Longevity*: the artefact outlasts people and thus becomes a way to transcend temporal limits. Objects are perceived as icons of identity that stand for a cross-generational continuity (Miller 1994:410).

2. *Temporal identity*: the artefact and the person are more or less temporally equivalent. Changes observed in the objects correlate with the person's own changes. Miller points out that "it is appropriate to consider the possibility of using changes in the materials as a means of investigating cultural change" (Miller 1994:412).

3. *Transience* is the last category in which artefacts are ephemeral, compared with people and the focus is then "on the manner in which identity is carried along by the flood of transforming things" (*ibid*.:409).

The use of MCI has been reported amongst the Chewa (*e.g.*, Werner 1906; Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965; Yoshida 1992) and neighbouring groups such as the Nsenga (*e.g.*, Drourega 1927; Apthorpe 1962), the Bemba (*e.g.*, Richards 1956; Cory 1956; Corbeil 1982) and the Yao (*e.g.*, Werner 1906; Stannus & Davey 1913; Sanderson 1955). My interest in other groups' material culture related to initiation ceremonies is because such groups have interacted with the Chewa as I have discussed in previous chapters, thus, possibly, adopting and sharing different aspects of their own MCI. These groups form part of what has been called the matrilineal belt of Africa and their girls' initiation ceremonies are characterized by "an absence of any physical mutilation but an emphasis on mimes, singing and dancing and the showing of various sacred objects" (La Fontaine 1986:171). They are thus relevant for comparison so as to understand the uses of material culture in this specific context.

In this research there are three aspects that we know are related to the materialization process of MCI: creation, use and disposal. Women solely are involved in the creation process of MCI. We know the formal characteristics of this material culture and many details of its use, symbolism and discard. I will discuss these aspects when addressing each group.

I recorded the MCI using digital and film photographs, video and audio. This was very useful because once I arrived back from the field I was able to use the audio, photographs and the notes in my diary to write up my analysis of the data I collected. I mentioned in previous chapters that I did not use a formal questionnaire but my questions had a structure. I asked about the materials used, who made the figures and who was allowed to touch them or to wear them. I also asked the reason for their disposal. These questions led the conversations and the outcome was varied. Some women were inspired to talk about other issues and show me other things; and I think this was an extraordinary opportunity to record some other aspects of the knowledge of the people. The enthusiasm varied but, as I said before, once the drums started it was impossible for women to stop dancing and singing.

I want to stress again that I did not attend any initiation in Zambia or Mozambique so I did not see how the initiates used the MCI but the tutors and teachers explained to me how they were used. To some extent, although I considered this to be a disadvantage, I now think that the fact that these object were created for me created a more relaxed environment because these objects were not used by any initiate and I was able to ask and stop the ladies if I had any question. In the following section the information is sometimes repetitive but I want to give an idea of what the women told me across the region.

Chewa

The use of MCI amongst the Chewa for their girls' initiation ceremonies has been reported since the end of the 1800s. Angus (1898a) mentions that there is a third 'dance' after a woman is pregnant and this dance is only for women who have borne children. Regarding material culture, he mentions that "a peculiar feature of this dance is that a clay or wooden model of the virile organ is usually to be seen in the hands of the dancer; also a like model is placed upon a small mound, and the dancers appear to worship it" (Angus 1898a:481-482).

In the early 1900s some objects were described as figures of animals drawn on the floor with ashes or flour (Werner 1906:127) but no more detail in terms of the meanings and the use of these animals was given. Later, other authors (Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965) described similar figures in eastern Zambia: large mud figures covered in red with black and white spots or low relief mud figures drawn with sand or maize flour made and used for the initiation. However, these authors did not record these figures in detail or explain their meanings. Most of the ethnographic literature related to Chewa girls' initiation lacks description and insights into the material culture used during these ceremonies.

My experience with Chewa women in Malawi, Zambia and in Mozambique has been varied. Many times, once the topic of initiation had been introduced by the headman of the village (Chapter 4) and the women knew the reason for my visit, they

were comfortable with the situation. In most of the experiences that I narrate, I analysed if my behaviour had any impact on the informants, although it was often hard to tell. It is possible for people to feel familiar with the researcher, but there will always be an aspect that is added to the atmosphere when an outsider is present. Chewa people are very hospitable and part of their education is to know how to treat guests, and the best way to show appreciation is by offering food. I became a guest on many occasions and I am thankful that women shared their food with me: usually a plate of maize porridge (*nsima*) and relish (*ndiwo*). Thus, being a guest also brings an element of pressure because people tend to want to please the guest even if they are not foreign. I recorded the MCI in the area of research in various contexts and circumstances.

I want to indicate that there are some secret aspects that I am not allowed to publish, but I am allowed to use the pictures of the MCI that I recorded. T.M from Kaliza village in eastern Zambia in 2007 stressed that to me: "people can see the picture but not understand what it means; the importance are the secrets".

The secretive parts of the ceremony have shaped this research greatly because I have always needed to bear in mind the wishes of the people as well as my responsibility to pass the information on to other researchers. Thus, I think that for the purpose of this research I do not need to fully disclose the knowledge that people have on specific intimate matters, but I do fully describe and provide pictures of the objects.

In this section, I present a summary of what various authors have said about the MCI that the Chewa use during *Chinamwali* and I provide the examples that I was allowed to record in the field and to publish in this thesis.

Chingondo/Timbwidza

In previous chapter I have talked about c*hingondo* and the phase of the *Chinamwali* ceremony in which this object is created; however, I will discuss in more detail the creation process of this distinctive feature of Chewa practice during initiation.

Chingondo takes place once the initiate has learnt the dances and songs of *Chinamwali*. The *chingondo* is a representation of an animal (van Breugel 2001:196-197 for further discussion). This animal varies according to the area but it generally represents *kasiyamaliro*, although the women in central Malaŵi in 2003 told me that it can take the shape of other animals that perform in the *Nyau*. When initiates wear *kasiyamaliro* on their head, this signifies that the *namwali* will become mother as "it is from the womb that future generations will come" (Claude Boucher pers. comm. 2007). Brian Morris (2000b:107) also comments that these figurines, in central Malaŵi, represent the figures of the *Nyau*: hare (*kalulu*), elephant (*njobvu*), snake (*thunga*) and *kasiyamaliro* — all of them animals of the woodland (*m'tchire*).

During *Chingondo* the initiates are covered with flour or dots made out of flour and they wear a new *chitenje* (long piece of cloth that women use around their waist as a wrap-around to cover the lower half of the body, as a skirt). Hodgson (1933:133) mentions this day as *tsiku la chingondo* or *tsiku lopola* and describes the covering of the girl with flour but he does not describe the figure placed on her head, nor does he state that this takes place at the *mtengo*. He writes, instead, that this is done in the bush and then the girl is taken to the *bwalo* to dance in front of people. Hodgson, however, does mention that on the following day known as *tsiku loshambula*[25] or *tsiku la timbwidza* the girls will be carrying a headdress known as *timbwidza*. Smith (pers. comm. 2008) commented that *timbwidza* is the name of a dance during *Chinamwali*. The same dance happens when the headman dies. It comes from the verb meaning swaying movement of the grass and the body.

Hodgson describes *timbwidza* as:

> a mud cast held into position on the head with a cloth until dry, with a row of long feathers such as the tail feathers of the *mkurukuru* (Livingstone's turaco) or *nyoni* (black whydah bird) sticking out along the centre from back to front (Hodgson 1933:133)

[25] Hodgson (1933) give the impression that *tsiku loshambula* is an earlier name for *tsiku la timbwidza*.

According to his account, this headdress is made on the day that the *njobvu* (elephant) mask is finished and left outside the village for the women to bring gifts of beer. The girl is adorned with beads and dressed in new clothes. The tutors are said to do the same: they wear a new attire and a smaller *timbwidza*, but I did not see the tutors wearing similar headdress during the initiations that I witnessed.

J. Bruwer in his thesis *Die onder de moderregtelike Acewa* (Chapter 4) mentions that the *timbwidza* is made at the big tree where the *phungu* comes with clay that she has collected. He mentions that the *timbwidza* are:

> [l]ong clay strips with the appearance of an elephant's trunk. The clay strips are wrapped around the head of the initiates, and tied down with bark rope, and then their bodies are decorated with spots. After this the *anamkungwi* shout: "*Nyamayo*! *Nyamayo*!" (Wild! Wild!) (Bruwer 1949:163 translated by Alex Schoeman)

They perform at the *bwalo*, dancing for the public. He records one of the songs for the occasion:

Taonani ndembo! *Chawa de*!
Ndembo chawa!
Taonani ndembo! *Chawa de*!
Ndembo! Chawa! *Ndembo Chawa*!

Although he does not give a specific translation for this song it is important to state that *ndembo* also means elephant and this is the most senior of the *Nyau* masks (Rangeley 1950:19). *Ndembo* is also the *Chinsenga* name for rock painting and body scarification (Apthorpe 1962:13). Thus the initiates symbolize this animal, when they say "look at the elephant!" When the women have danced at each hut, they go back to the *mtengo* and the *namkungwi* break the *timbwidza* off the heads of the initiates. The pieces are carried in a basket and taken to the headman. The following morning, the *namkungwi* takes the basket to the headman's house and then they take it, according to Bruwer (1949:164), to "the *bwalo* of the men". After the public proceedings in

which men and women talk about the initiates, the *namkungwi*, the *aphungu* and the initiates go back to the bush where the initiates are shaved and then *the namkungwi* throws the *timbwidza* into a river.

Mtuta (2001) writes that, at some time during the final days of the ceremony, the *namkungwi* makes a *timbwidza* or *chingondo*, which is then decorated in red, black and white, but he did not describe the figures. These two names apparently refer to the same thing and it appears that they are interchangeable because they refer to the spots that are made on the headdress and on the girls' bodies. Winterbottom & Lancaster (1965) write that after the women have danced around the pictures drawn on the ground, the initiate will be "smeared with flour, red earth and oil and her head is decorated with pumpkin seeds. She will be wearing only a loin-cloth, called *thewera*, constructed on the principles of a sanitary towel" (1965:348). Father Salaun (1970) mentions, for the Lilongwe area, that on the 4th day *Tsiku losambula mowa la Cingondo* around noon, the women get together at the *dambo*. The women mould a type of headdress of clay and put it on the girls. This is painted white with flour upon which are made red and black spots. The faces, shoulders, arms and chest are also painted. The breasts are adorned with painted spots and covered with stripes (*kutowaka*). They wear a new cloth around the waist with a red belt and then at around 4 pm they go to the *bwalo* carried on the shoulders of the *phungu*. Laurel Birch de Aguilar (1996:175) mentions that, in central Malaŵi, the initiate wears a clay figure placed on her head and that her hair is covered with clay and white and red dots are drawn on her upper body. She provides a picture of this (Figure 40).



Figure 40. Initiate wearing the clay headdress (after Birch de Aguilar 1996:photo 26).

These different accounts taken at different times and in separate spaces within Malaŵi refer to the same ritual. It is important to mention that this regional variation also gives us an idea of the range and variety of MCI that is used for the same purpose.

Chingondo, at a social level, is the time when all the community goes to witness the announcement of the initiate's maturity after she has left the *mtengo*. It is said that the initiate is now a woman. *Chingondo* has a great aesthetic value for contemporary Chewa; people frequently told me in Dedza in 2003 that "the girls look beautiful".

There are two places where I have witnessed this *chingondo* or *timbwidza* ceremony. The first was close to Mwana wa Chentcherere II rock shelter, in Chipazi village, Dedza District in 2003 and the other in Bunda at Khombe village, Lilongwe District in 2006. In my original proposal I stated that I was going to measure these objects and now it appears that this was a very naive idea. When these figures are being made in the context of initiation, the secrecy that goes around the creation process is powerful and dangerous, thus I could only take pictures of the creation process, but I could not come close to touch them or measure them.

Chipazi:
I had the fortune to participate for the first time in this part of the ceremony at Chipazi village in 2003. This information was recorded while I was doing my Masters and, at that time, I did not have the same questions that I do now. I did not see how they moulded and collected the materials to create the *chingondo* — and many questions were not asked — but the two women, mother and daughter, who were in charge of the ceremony told me that they collected the material before dawn and made the *chingondo* inside the house but that people believe that the *chingondo* is found in the water (Zubieta 2006). The mother, an old *namkungwi* and a respected member of the community, had also been initiated into *Nyau*. She told me once, during another visit, that when she dies the women will not come for her body but the *Nyau* will come for her; she also said that on one occasion she rode on a *kasiyamaliro* for a ceremony (M.J. pers. comm. 2007). This is very unusual; only specific women members of the

community are allowed to do this; most women have to run away from *Nyau* and are not allowed to go close.

Later, the *chingondo* was brought to the *mtengo*: a big *kachere* or common wild fig (*Ficus natalensis*). Mtuta (2001) writes that the *kachere* tree signifies the presence of the ancestral spirits and it is planted by the *mfumu*. When this tree grows the people build a shrine underneath it to indicate that it is a sacred place. Williamson (1975:115) mentions that the bark is used to induce lactation.

While we were under the shade of the big tree, the daughter (who is also a *namkungwi*) covered the *chingondo* with a mix of water and flour using the leaves of the fig tree to smooth the surface; then she covered it with black dots and red dots but she was not satisfied with the red colour so she asked someone else to bring a red brick to get a more intense shade. The other women helped her to carry it outside to dry and the young *namkungwi* covered it with red dots and with leafy branches to let it dry. The shape was of a *kasiyamaliro*. The *mtengo* in this village is a secluded place but the agricultural field comes very close to the tree so the women had to chase away inquisitive people. All the ingredients that were brought to the *mtengo* were covered. The *kasiyamaliro* form of *chingondo* that I present in this section was made for me because the headman of the village thought that it was important that I went through the experience even though I was 'old'. I told him that I was already grateful to be allowed to be present at this part of the ceremony but he insisted and I thought this was a privilege that I could not refuse.

The *kasiyamaliro chingondo* that was made for me was already sitting on top of a helmet[26] that was later attached to my head. While the women were fixing this headdress to my head with scarves, I did not realize that my head was slightly twisted and when I had to walk with the *chingondo* and go out, I was very afraid of dropping it and felt uncomfortable. The two *anamkungwi* walked beside me and I walked very slowly from the *mtengo* to the road because the headman wanted to see me wearing it. I felt ashamed of being so slow and I kept telling the ladies '*pang'ono pango'ono*'

[26] This helmet symbolizes the maturing of the sexual organs (Boucher 2002:43).

(little by little). Once the headman and the rest of the people saw me, they were very impressed; I am not sure if it was because I was a foreigner wearing the *chingondo* or because the size of my *chingondo* was extraordinarily big and heavy. I did not dance with it; after a while they made me go back to the *mtengo* and they took it off and put it in a bag and I never saw it again (Figure 41).










Figure 41. *Chingondo* creation process, Chipazi village, central Malawi 2003.

I waited for the two initiates to be ready: the *namkungwi* followed the same process for them but their *kasiyamaliro chingondo* was the regular size. First the women started by putting a helmet made of clay on the heads of the initiates and then they added the *kasiyamaliro chingondo* on top and decorated it. Once they had finished, they fixed it with a scarf to the head of the initiate.

The initiates were wearing new clothes and beads were also put around each of their breasts in a cross, but the women had to be careful because the *kasiyamaliro chingondo* was already in place. Before we left the *mtengo* I saw the women giving the initiates something in their mouths; I did not ask but I think it was special medicine for the initiation: *kundabwi*. We walked in procession from the *mtengo* to the *bwalo* (the meeting place in the village) and the women never stopped singing until we got there (Figure 42).



Figure 42. Initiates walking to the *bwalo* wearing the *chingondo*, Chipazi village, central Malawi 2003.

The audience was waiting for us and they had made a circle. The drums started playing and I was asked to join the dance inside the circle where the other initiates danced and the only man allowed to dance with the initiates was the headman of the community. The headman plays a special ceremonial role: it is believed that by dancing with the initiates he opens the wombs of the girls (van Breugel 2001; Boucher 2002b; Figure 43).



Figure 43. *Chingondo* performance with the headman, Chipazi village, central Malaŵi 2003.

Hodgson (1933) writes about the role of the headman during the initiation; he comments that after the initiate is left with her husband, the *anamkungwi* go to the headman's house and uncover their private parts "while the headman gazes at them. His wife is present, and feels his penis. If he is excited, it is a bad sign, for all his people are as his children, and he should be able to look at them without carnal desire. If he is not excited, they know that he is a father worthy to superintend initiations" (Hodgson 1933:134). Hodgson's remark has been interpreted by Van Breugel (2001:195) who states that this erotic dance, performed in front of the headman, is equivalent to dancing in front of their 'symbolic husband' who will bring them fertility. Women in Malaŵi told me that if the *mfumu* has sexual intercourse with his wife during *Chinamwali*, the *chingondo* will fall. Thus there is a relation of trust where the headman is responsible for the girls and moreover this relation needs to be maintained according to the rules otherwise *mdulo* will occur. The *chingondo* cannot fall; the consequences of this would be great danger to the *namwali*'s fertility and a

fine in the form of the payment of a goat. It is also believed that if it falls the girl can get ill and die (Birch de Aguilar 1996:175).

After the *namwali* danced at the *bwalo* with the *chingondo* on her head, the *chingondo* was thrown away in a place known only to the *namkungwi*. The *namkungwi* told me that this must be done because the *chingondo* has great power and it can be used by people (witches) as an instrument of witchcraft. Van Breugel (2001) comments that the girl is the one who breaks the *chingondo* by knocking her head on the ground. I asked about this in Chipazi but I was told that this does not take place.

Khombe:
I attended a five day *Chinamwali* at Khombe village. At Khombe, *chingondo* is known as a dance when the girls are covered with white dots; the girls for this occasion had white dots on their face, their chest and back and the tutors were carrying them on top of their shoulders (Figure 44).



Figure 44. Initiates being carried on the shoulders of their tutors. This is known as *chingondo* and the initiates are covered by white dots on their face, chest and back. Khombe village, central Malaŵi 2006.

However, when the clay figure is worn on top of the head of the initiate this is known as *timbwidza* and this will mark the end of the ceremony. On the occasion when I witnessed the *timbwidza* making process I was asked to join the women at the *mtengo* close to the village. This tree has medicine, they crushed it and they put it

under the tree. This is different from the medicine known as *kundabwi* that is given by the *namkungwi* to the initiates. They say that it helps the learning process for the initiate and for them to sleep well after going through initiation. I tried to find out the name of roots that they use and I wanted to take some with me, but that knowledge was not shared with me because I was told that the chiefs are the ones who control this knowledge. Women mentioned that they can rub the medicine on the initiate, but they can also cut and apply the medicine so that the power can enter the body. This was explained to me only after I noted that I could see some marks on the initiate when I was inside the *tsimba*: the initiates had marks in the back of their necks. The women said that they did not want to do the same to me: to cut me.

The tree at Khombe was smaller than the *kachere* of Chipazi. Because it was so crucial to the occasion of *Chinamwali* it was covered with reed mats that served as a wall around the tree. The initiates were already sitting inside this wall looking always to the ground in a submissive position. I recognized the leaves next to the bottom of the trunk of the tree. The women of Chipazi called it *mwimbi* or quinine tree (*Rauvolfia caffra*) and said they used it for love potions and that it was associated with women. The bitter bark of the *mwimbi* is used in the treatment of malaria and an infusion of the bark for abdominal pains (Morris & Msonthi 1996:220). Brian Morris and Jerome Msonthi (1996:219-220) mention that this tree is also known by the name *mvumbamvula* (rain falls) and is used by the market herbalists under the name *mulilira*, a general term for 'rain trees' (*ku-lira*; to weep). In Chipazi in 2003, the women used *mwimbi* branches to cover the *chingondo* when it was being dried. Thus, it was under the *mwimbi* tree that the materials were prepared already, the charcoal was already mixed with water inside a broken pot and the clay was already mixed; the red earth was made out of a brick and the flour was already in a container. At all times I remained outside the wall with the rest of the women; only the initiates, the *anamkungwi* and the tutors were inside. The women sang around the tree and if strangers wanted to take a look they would either chase them away or shout at them.

The *namkungwi* started to mould a clay helmet which was placed on top of the head of the initiate. One of the girls, the one who had menstruated first but who was

younger in age, was given the *njobvu* (elephant) *timbwidza* and the other one who was older in age but was regarded younger because she menstruated later, was given the *chimkoko*.

The woman moulded the elephant separately with the use of sticks to hold it together. Once it had been created it was placed on top of the clay helmet. The *namkungwi* then started to paint it black and she used first her fingers but then a small feather to apply the black pigment. The initiate that was going to be wearing the *chimkoko timbwidza* had to wait a little for the women to fasten a small scarf around the helmet to hold it in place.

The lady, who was in charge of finishing the elephant, painted the helmet black as well and added the last details by using a small stick to paint the face and the tusks in white. Then she used a scarf around the helmet to hold it in place. The *chimkoko timbwidza* was covered with a thick layer of flour mixed with water and then red dots were applied on the whole body of the figure (Figure 45).




















Figure 45. *Timbwidza* creation process, Khombe village, central Malaŵi 2006.

The two initiates then stood up carefully and the mats were removed from the small shelter created to protect from non-initiated eyes. Later, the girls were made to kneel down to wait for the headman to arrive at the *bwalo*. The women sang a song inviting Mr Khombe to see the initiates. Once the community gathered, the initiates walked to the *bwalo*, the drums started to sound and the initiates had to dance (Video 6. *Chingondo* performance at the *bwalo*). Their moves were fast but also very smooth. Next they had to perform some dances while they were kneeling down. At some point, towards the end of the dance in the *bwalo*, the tutors covered the animal figures by using another scarf. This act was later explained to me: the women said it was to protect the object from people who might want to have a piece of it and use it for witchcraft. The initiates, along with the teachers and the tutors, proceeded to dance in front of each house for people to show appreciation by offering money (Figure 46; Video 7. *Chingondo* performance in front of a house).



Figure 46. Performing with *timbwidza*. Khombe village, central Malaŵi 2006.

Later, we had a break to eat and I asked some questions to the *anamkungw*i who were appointed to me by the headman, but a curious man was trying to listen to my conversation with them and we had to stop talking about *timbwidza* because he came into the house to eat food and the women had to attend to him. We had to wait a few hours until we could continue our conversation.

I asked them if the clay that they use for *timbwidza* can be collected from anywhere or does it have to come from a special place. They replied that they can collect it from any *dambo* but that once it has been mixed with other materials, like medicine, the *namkungwi* is the only one that can handle it. After the initiation the *timbwidza* is given to the mothers of the initiates for them to destroy. I asked if I could take a *timbwidza* with me (I wanted to see their reaction) but they said that if I took it, the airplane would crash, and after the lady said this all the other women laughed strongly. I was told that if someone attempts to go where the *timbwidza* is destroyed they will also die.

Based on the data collected in these two villages, the access to and interaction with the *chingondo* or *timbwidza* is controlled in terms of who touches it, who wears it and who destroys it. For example, based on written accounts and my personal experience in central Malaŵi, the *namkungwi* (teacher) and the *phungu* (tutor, who is under the instruction of the teacher), exclusively control the creation of the *chingondo* or *timbwidza* — although later this object is attributed to a sacred origin: there are various versions as from where this object is created but in general it is stated that it is found in the river or *dambo*.

Only women involved in the manufacture are able to touch the *chingondo*; there are no accounts where initiates are said to touch the *chingondo* (as distinct to wearing it) and I did not witness any such event when I participated in the ceremony in central Malaŵi in 2003. The women told me that the initiates cannot touch the headdress.

Chilengo/Vilengo

In 1934 Gordon Lancaster briefly described a *Chinamwali* ceremony at Mwandauka village north of Chipata, eastern Zambia. He mentions that "a large mud image of a leopard, large lizard or crocodile is placed" (Lancaster 1934:199) at a tree that the Cheŵa called the *chilengo* tree. As the women sat around the tree, Lancaster says that this animal was then covered in white, red and black spots so as to look like a very fierce animal. This is a very simplistic explanation of the dots that surely women were trying to hide from him because he was a man. In 1949, J. Bruwer also recorded in Zambia some figures on the floor of a hut. I think Bruwer was allowed to witness these figures because of the same reason that I was allowed to be at the *dambwe* and to be initiated in *Nyau*; we do not share the same taboos as I have discussed in the last chapter. He writes that the figures are made by the *phungu*:

> The only case I witnessed myself, appeared to me to be triangular patterns laid out in red and white maize pips, as well as an animal figure that resembled a leopard. According to one female informant the pattern is a representation of the different phases of the moon, as well as a representation of the sun. She drew the moon figures for me on the ground, full moon, the first quarter, the

> last quarter and new moon, as well as a circle with "beams" that represented the sun. The exact meaning of the sun could not be established, but it can be placed as the image of the "heat" (kutentha), and may link with the idea that some people are warm (otentha or amoto), in other words they can have physical intercourse. The phases of the moon represent when a woman is pure, and when she is impure. The red figure indicates blood, in other words a representation of the period of flow, whilst the white figure indicates purity. It was also said that flour and charcoal are sometimes used, the white for purity and the black for blood (Bruwer 1949:155-156; translated by Alex Schoeman).

The description is not very detailed but it gives us a sense of the meanings and the images portrayed. However, I think that the meaning of the sun might be the other way around since the ideas that surround 'hot' are dangerous. So this would be the time when the initiate cannot sleep with her husband. Bruwer mentions that this practice had almost ceased and it was difficult to obtain detailed information about it.

Kenji Yoshida (1992) provides one of the most important accounts of MCI for Chewa people in eastern Zambia. He (1992:245-242) writes that amongst the Chewa, clay figures were made in the woodland and decorated with *ufa* (corn flour), *mwaye* (soot) and *katondo* (red clay). These figures represented *nsato* (python), *thunga* (snake), *fulu* (tortoise), *ng'ona* (crocodile), *kulu* (hare), *kacifulu* (vessel to draw water) and *wangala* (male and female couple). The clay figures were called *vilengo* by the women and were made in the bush on the last day of the ceremony. The *anamwali* were taught how to dance around them. Yoshida asked the ladies of the village to reproduce them after a gap of 40 years of not making them (Figure 47).



Figure 47. *Vilengo* (after Yoshida 1993:fig. 14).

Although Yoshida (*ibid.*) does not make any further comment on the meaning of these figures, he notes that he was told that the dots that covered the bodies of the figures were designed to imitate the dotted pattern of pythons. Moreover, the women sang a song related to the python figurine. The song was interpreted by Yoshida as having a sexual connotation. The clay figures were buried on completion of the ritual. Yoshida comments that the most important of these figures is the python and he recorded the lyrics of a song that he thinks refers to sexual intercourse between a woman and a python:

> *Nsato yalem ba ambuye, yalem ba*
> *Yalemba pakati pa ambuye*
> *Yalem ba nsato, yalem ba*
>
> A python glides, grandmother, it glides
> It glides through the central part (genitals) of
> the
> Grandmother's body
> A python glides, it glides
> (Yoshida 1992:249)

Yoshida is the only anthropologist who has published pictures of the *vilengo* amongst the Cheŵa, thus I followed his directions to get to the village where he obtained his information: Kaliza village in Eastern Province, Zambia. In this regard, it is important to mention that *vilengo* have not been reported in Malaŵi or Mozambique. The only possible mention is given by Birch de Aguilar (1996) who writes that one of the chief's wives in central Malaŵi told her that objects are made during the girls' initiation and these include "the same row of objects as the men's initiation, though I have not seen this, and other women pretend to have no knowledge about it" (Birch de Aguilar 1996:172). It is difficult to know what kind of objects her informant was referring to. I believe that the informant might have been referring to *vilengo* because Birch de Aguilar mentions later in the text (1996:175) that the unfired clay are figurines placed on the head of the initiate. Unfortunately it is not certain that the informant was talking about *vilengo*.

I was surprised however, to learn from the women in eastern Zambia that they still create *vilengo* for their initiation ceremony. Thus, it is possible to get valuable information about this practice in the present. Jim Chaplin (1963) asserts that African crafts, although said to be dying, are still alive today as ever before. Yoshida's (1992) work has been inspiring and useful for my research because his *vilengo* picture (1993:fig 14) has constituted one of the foundations for various authors to suggest the mnemonic use of the spread-eagled designs in the rock paintings (Smith 1995; Zubieta 2006). I am not certain why women told Yoshida that they had stopped making this MCI for 40 years since this is clearly not the case. Yoshida spent three years in Kaliza village and was able to record and learn a great deal from the people about animal symbolism and animal consumption. I use his findings in this study. Mariko Yoshida was involved in *Chinamwali* at Kaliza and the surrounding villages (Yoshida 1993, 2005). It is unfortunate that she has not published, as far as I know, any of the work she did in eastern Zambia.

In a recent article, Yoshida (2005) makes a mention that in 1985 his wife was in charge of recording *Chinamwali* but no more insights into the ceremony are provided; moreover, he comments that women no longer make clay figures for

initiation and that *Chinamwali* has been influenced by the *Chisungu* ceremony of the Nsenga people[27]. I believe that the assertion that women have stopped making clay figures for initiation is incorrect based on the examples that I provide in this section; however, I agree that Nsenga and Chewa people have interacted and shared different elements of their girls' initiation.

After Yoshida's work in 1985, this is the first attempt to gain insight into the MCI related to the girls' ceremony of the Chewa people in eastern Zambia. In 2007 I visited Zambia and, after introducing myself to the director of the National Heritage Conservation Commission of Zambia in Livingstone, Mr Donald Chikumbi, I visited Katete in the Eastern Province to introduce myself to the Nyangu, the traditional mother of the King Gawa Undi and the Queen mother of the Chewa. I told her the purpose of my visit and the study I was doing in the region. She was with her sisters at the time and busy with visitors who were coming for the Kulamba ceremony. She asked me to come back to explain to them in detail why I wanted this information. I went three times to visit them in Katete — I was staying in Chipata — and after our meetings one day I was appointed to come back the following morning to see a *chilengo*. Thus, I went to Mkaika, the headquarters of the Chewa people for this purpose.

The second place where I recorded this MCI was Kaliza village. I am grateful to Yoshida's (1992) mention of Chief Mwangala[28] in his text because that is how I initially found the area. I went to see Chief Mwangala at his palace to greet him and tell him the purpose of my visit. He is equivalent to what in Malawi is called the Traditional Authority (T.A.) and Chief Mwangala is one of the three chiefs in Chadiza District. It took me three hours from Chipata to find where he was staying. I will never forget the first impression: he was sitting on his chair and his advisors (*indunas*) around him sitting on the mat. I approached him and told him about the project and why I was interested to talk to women about initiation and *vilengo* in his region. He remembered Yoshida and he personally took me to Kaliza. I stayed there for 8 days

[27] Although we know that it is not called *Chisungu* but *Ndola* ceremony amongst the Nsenga.
[28] There is a reference to Mwangala's area in Langworthy (1969:map 4) early map of Undi's Kingdom in the 1700s.

and I am very grateful to Kaliza's and Chimtanda's headmen for their hospitability and especially Kaliza's wife for having been so helpful during my stay there. I was allowed to camp inside the Kaliza headman's compound and everyday my assistant Mr James Chiwaya and I were looked after by his wife.

The third place where I recorded this MCI was at Masinja village, very close to the rock art site of Chaingo in Katete District. The headman invited me to see the *vilengo* after my first visit to the rock art site. He accompanied us to the site and I explained to him the purpose of my visit. I returned two days later and had a difficult experience with a mentally disadvantaged man who wanted to hit the headman and destroy the car; he was the headman's brother. Although my initial reaction was to leave as soon as possible, the headman was able to control the situation and I was invited to one of the huts where the women allowed me to see the *vilengo* that they make in this village. All three villages where I witnessed these objects declare themselves to be Chewa but the last, Masinja, had a strong influence from Ngoni as I explain later.

Before proceeding to explain the creation process of these objects, I want to comment that in all instances before the women showed the process to me I spent sometimes hours explaining and answering questions from women about why I wanted to gain this knowledge. I was never granted immediate permission to see these objects. It is important to point out that in all three villages the women made these objects for me, there was no initiation happening at any point. When I talked to the women of these three villages I did not know what I was going to see, I was expecting something similar to what Yoshida recorded, but this was not the case. Not once did I see the animals that he published, but the women generously shared the knowledge of what they do nowadays for the girls' initiation.

Mkaika:
I arrived at the village in the morning and waited for the lady who had agreed to help me. She was appointed by one of the Nyangu's sisters who had in the past been District Commissioner of Katete and who assisted me greatly when I asked about the creation process of this MCI.

We first collected the materials: charcoal, red earth, white flour and dirt to make mud. We collected all the charcoal that we could see on the surface just around the huts. This was then pounded in the mortar. We then went to a small nearby pit and one of the ladies came and started to collect some of the dirt with a shovel (Figure 48). Some women went to get maize flour and we entered into a hut with all the ingredients.



Figure 48. Left: pounding the charcoal and right, digging for red earth, Mkaika village, eastern Zambia 2007.

In the beginning, we were only four women inside the hut but then other women joined us out of curiosity. By the end, there were 18 women inside the hut.

The woman in charge first made a spiral on the floor of the hut with her finger, and then the women mixed the dirt with water to make clay. Next to this spiral, the shape of a crescent moon was made and a sun on the other side, which looked like a flower with six petals. The spiral was then covered with clay. The woman who was in charge added small white dots, small mounds of flour, on top of the spiral. There was a small circle in the centre. Then she added red mounds and, at the end, black ones. The moon was covered with red earth and then white on top, thus it was difficult to see that the moon was covered first in red. The sun was covered with red as well and, at its centre, she put a white dot made of flour. Once these objects were made on the ground, a sort of structure was constructed around them: they arranged four branches making a square and on top they put a mat. They explained to me that these images have to be covered before the initiates come into the hut: they only see them at the right time. One of the women mentioned that they show the figures to the initiate the night before she leaves the initiation hut. On top of the mat they placed a cloth and

four women took one corner each and sang a song for the initiate to put some money so the clay relief could be exposed.

It is a very important moment when the *chilengo* has been uncovered. Women will recite the *mwambo* (tradition, advice) accompanied with *nthungululu* (sing of joy) and the *phungu* will tell the initiates about the secret of the dots and the significance of the sun and the moon. All of the images are accompanied by a song. The *phungu* will sing a song while she puts her fingers on each of the dots of the spiral until she finishes with all of them; she also puts a finger on top of the white centre of the sun. The initiates have to do the same after the *phungu* to understand the meanings of the dots (Figure 49).

It was difficult to document these objects without a flash because they were made inside the hut with very little light. However, flash tends to disrupt the moment thus I used a tripod. At the same time that I was taking pictures, I was taking notes and I could hardly move inside the hut because of the 18 ladies. Although this clay relief was made on my request and I could ask as many questions as I wanted, I tried as little as possible to interfere with the creation process, thus I did not try to measure it or interrupt constantly. However, I think with the pictures that I am including one can get a good sense of the scale of these objects.














Figure 49. *Chilengo* creation process and usage, Mkaika village, eastern Zambia 2007.

Once the instruction has been given, the initiates and women make a circle around the *chilengo* and sing a song that deals with the respect that the initiate has for her mother and her knowledge. The women then come down and they, not the initiates, destroy the *chilengo*, putting their hands in a specific position with the palm facing the ground. Specific songs accompany this action. The initiate's relatives need to offer some money for this action. Once the women have finished removing everything from the floor, the aunt comes and erases the image with her buttocks; the *namwali* do not take part of this process. The aunt remains seated on the ground until she receives a tip to show appreciation; that is the end of *chilengo*. The remains of the *chilengo* are put in a container and given to the mother of the initiate and she throws them into a latrine (Figure 50). They said that if someone has access to the remains that person can harm the initiate and she may not be able to conceive. The *chilengo* is made inside the hut of initiation and it is only for women to see. The instructions are important because a lack of knowledge can harm people around the girl, especially the husband; he will cough insistently. Women need to know to wear their beads and to be careful when adding salt to food; it is only the *phungu* whom the initiate can talk to about any problems in married life (Chapter 4).

At the end of the demonstration, other women brought drums into the hut and we remained there singing and dancing for a long time, they said this was to summarize everything. The ladies played the drums for a long time, but once in a while they stopped to make a comment or to rotate. At the end (after one hour), the drumming started to be less frequent. They wanted me to try to dance the same way as them, and I did, but not with the same skill.











Figure 50. *Chilengo* disposal, Mkaika village, eastern Zambia 2007.

An interesting thing that the women told me was that, when the initiate is going to get married, the *namkungwi* will reveal more secrets related to the moon and the sun. This is particularly interesting because this set of symbols not only has different meanings but these meanings, are given at different times.

When we finished, I asked them if they used to have other figures in the past. They said that they used to have tortoises and crocodiles that they do not use anymore, but that if they did they would mean the same: to teach the dots. One of the women stressed that the importance is in the dots. The *Chinamwali* is said to last from one to two weeks and it can be done for one initiate or for even more if they come from different villages.

The lady who was in charge commented that she attended a *Chinamwali* amongst the Ngoni people and that she saw how they take the *namwali* to the bush and paint similar things on the rocks and then they rub them off. I am not certain about this practice or the figures she saw being painted on the rock, but I suspect that if the Ngoni ever did or are still doing this, they took it from the Chewa. It also would be interesting to know what my informant meant by Ngoni because there are many Chewa who are perceived as 'hybrids' (Chapter 2).

Kaliza:
After Chief Mwangala left, I stayed in Kaliza for several days. Mr Dickson Phiri, who was the Chiefdom Secretary of Chief Mwangala at the time, stayed because he needed to attend an *mbona* ceremony (see Yoshida 1992) on behalf of Chief Mwangala. Mr Phiri was very helpful in the process of negotiation with the women.

As the days passed I heard that the women who made the *chilengo* for Yoshida had all passed away. It was also inevitable that I would get to know the politics of the village. I heard some complaints about the family who worked with Yoshida, but I did not make any comment on this. I also wanted to deal with the women in my own way, but I could not do this because of the presence of the representative of the chief. I had to follow stated procedures. The chief had sent a message to the old ladies to help me with whatever I wanted to know. The women, in the beginning, said that they did not know about *chilengo* but then they said that they wanted to help me and once I had a positive reaction from them, everything shifted. I still do not know the cause. The women said they did not know how to create *chilengo* and gave the same response as some women in Mkaika: that the dots were just decorations and the animals were useless.

From the comments of the women, I realized that some information is kept strictly by one person and that this is not passed to other women. On this specific occasion, in Kaliza, I had Yoshida's information and I presumed that these figures were well-known but, after spending time talking with the *agogo*, I realized that these ladies did not know how to make the exact shapes that Yoshida published in 1992 so, in the end, I rephrased my request and asked them to show me whatever they wanted to share with me. After all, Yoshida spent three years there and women told him that they stopped making *vilengo* 40 years ago (this was in 1985). Thus, the ladies said that although they did not know how to make those specific images that Yoshida published, they could show me what they knew. I asked many questions at the meetings that I had with the women before I was actually allowed to see the *chilengo*.

A common situation that I faced is when women wanted some kind of payment and, as I have said in previous chapters, I found difficult to deal with this issue. Some women will not expect anything and they are proud to share their knowledge but others, who are equally proud, see this as an opportunity to get some economic benefit. I believe that showing appreciation for the time of the informants is important, but that is different from paying an extraordinary sum of money; which I never did.

In our meetings, the women looked at Yoshida's pictures and one of them said that what Yoshida calls a python (Figure 47) is what they call *kafunde*. This is when the initiate is 'on the other side', and has not been initiated. If she wants to come to this side (the initiated side), she needs to respond to some questions to prove that she has been initiated. This process is what they call *kafunde*, a word that I have also heard in central Malaŵi. Interestingly, Lamba (1985:67) points out that *Funde* is the name of the institution of rainmaking.

The women explained that the dots are an instruction to the initiate. The tutor will come to the parents of the initiate and ask them if they want their daughter to learn more about the meanings of the dots. If the parents wish this, then they have to pay more for their daughter to see the *chilengo* because it requires more elaboration and time to prepare. The tutor will instruct the initiate and will point at certain things on the *chilengo* and then the initiate will have to point as well. These figures were said generally to be made in the 'bush' and then brought into the initiation hut, but there are some instances in which they can also be made inside the initiation hut.

After five days, I was allowed to see the *chilengo*. They also use the word *chingondo* for these MCI. The dots that are painted on the initiate and the dots on the figures, are also called *chilengo* because of the dots that are also painted on the animal. They also use *chingondo* to refer to the beads that the initiates wear during the ceremony and these ensure that the initiate is not recognized by people.

The day that the women made the *chilengo*, I met them inside a hut. They explained that these figures are created the night before the initiate leaves the initiation hut. The lady who said that she did not know anything about these figures was later said to be the 'expert' on animals.

There are different *vilengo* and some of them can be made in the bush and others inside the *tsimba*, but before the initiate comes into the hut they will cover them with lots of *chitenje* and then they will call the relatives of the initiate to come inside. Before the initiate can see *vilengo* she needs to pay money as appreciation. Then they will sing a song to uncover the *vilengo*. The *phungu* and the *namkungwi* are the ones who will go to the parents to ask them what *vilengo* they want for their daughter. The women told me that not all the *Chinamwali* are accompanied by *vilengo*.

One of the ladies said that there is no special difference between animals because they are all covered with dots and the dots have the same meanings attached. Each dot has a meaning and each one comes with a song. The women expressed their ideas that in the past, the tradition, the *mwambo,* was more intense and that the objects were charged with more instructions. They said that nowadays the traditions are changing and things are done more loosely and a lot of the knowledge that was attached to these figures in the past was not passed to them, but they also make up new songs.

I told them about my experience in Malaŵi, and how the women there told me to keep certain things secret. To this, they said that I should not reveal anything because what I know is money, thus if someone ask me if I know, I have to say "no". If that person wants to know about the tradition that person can also be initiated and thus pay for it.

I also shared with them one of the songs from Malaŵi in order to compare it with the ones they sing in Zambia and the women mentioned that although it is similar, it is not the same. They said that the beginning and the end was the same. I

also asked them if it was correct for me to share this song from Malaŵi with them and they said it was fine because it was the same tradition.

I entered the house and the old lady who was known to be the expert on animals started to mould her own figurine. They said that they were going to do for me what they knew. I did not collect any of the materials with them; everything was already inside the house: clay chunks, the black charcoal, the flour mixed with water and the red soil. The clay that the *agogo* used was not of very good quality, and the women were complaining that it had too much water and when she started to add the legs to the main body of the animal they kept falling apart. I realized that they had to call the *agogo* because she had the knowledge of how to make this animal. Some other younger ladies were explaining things to me but they could not make the *chilengo* themselves. The figure that they made for me was an elephant. This surprised me because I was not expecting this animal, but they said this is the most common *chilengo* they make in this region.

Once they finished the body they added dots on top of the animal, they called this *chingondo*: first the white, then black and finally red. Although there was no special order as to how they placed the dots, every time that there was a spot that was missing then the other women would point to that space and tell the woman in charge to add an extra dot. The meanings of the dots are the same as the ones that I recorded in Mkaika. I had the overall feeling that the figure was not made carefully or as carefully as the one that the women made for me in Mkaika, but then again the experiences and contexts differ.

I also asked if they added anything to the clay, like medicine, but they said that they do not put anything and when they finished creating the *chilengo* they started to perform an informal pantomime. One of the women acted as if she was the initiate. They covered the *chilengo* with various *chitenje* and then, after singing, they uncovered it stressing again the importance of giving money at this stage (Figure 51). After that, the woman who was playing the role of the initiate laid facing down next to this animal while the other women sang. Then she did the same on the other side of

the animal. At this stage they told me that before the initiate sees the animal her tutor will make sure that she has been pulling her labiae. If she does not do this in advance she cannot leave the initiation hut. This is something that the grandmother has to tell the girl long before she comes for initiation.

Although this figure was not moulded on the ground as a clay relief, in the manner of the ones that Yoshida published in 1992, it had the same effect: when I saw how this *chilengo* looked from above it resembled the shape of some of the spread-eagled designs that have many protrusions or limbs in their bodies (last picture of Figure 51). After the *chilengo* has served its purpose, it is destroyed and given to the grandmother of the initiate so she can get rid of it. If someone gets a piece of this figure the initiate can get hurt.



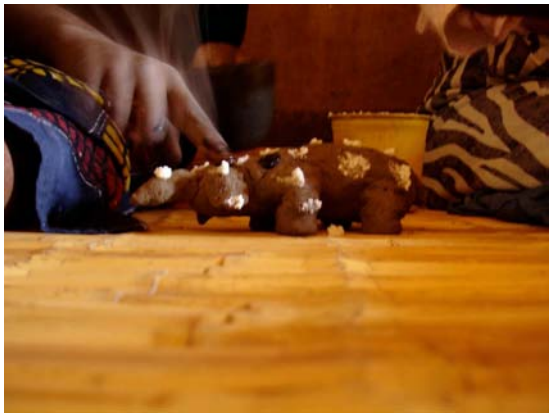









Figure 51. *Chilengo* creation process, Kaliza village, eastern Zambia 2007.

The women also mentioned another kind of *chilengo* that they make. One of the ladies drew a circle with her finger on the ground and she said that then the tutor will ask the initiate: "What brought you to the *tsimba*?" The initiate then has to point to the white, red, and black dots that are inside the circle.

While we were talking about the *chilengo* the women came with other two small pots. These were recorded by Yoshida (1992:248) in 1985 as I mentioned earlier in Chapter 4. The relationship of these objects with the *chilengo* is important because the instructions are given at the same time. I recorded three different pots: two of these pots are called *mkhate* and the third one was called *kamkwele*. The women said these pots always come in threes. The small *mkhate* (which has a lid and it is covered with a web made out of beads) and the *kamkwele* (which has incisions around the lip) fit inside the third pot (a plain pot with a lid) — these are hidden from other people and kept in the bedroom. Only the wife and the husband are allowed to see them. These objects play a role in the most intimate aspects of marriage. The small pots symbolize the woman and the man respectively.

They also explained that when the husband dies the small *mkhate* will be put inside the husband's coffin. Then they will prepare beer and will put it in the big pot from which they drink the beer. If it is still good then it means that the spirit is happy. The first one to taste this beer is the *nkhoswe* who is their marriage advisor and after him everyone else drinks.

When I left the village the women called me to meet them inside the hut where they made the *chilengo* for me. To my surprise they made another elephant for me, but this time they wanted me to take it. This is the first time that women took the initiative to give this kind of figure as a present, and I think that refusing would have been an offense. I asked them if this was right and they said it was fine because it has not been used. I asked them if I could show it to people and they said I could, but that I could not reveal the meanings of the dots. This elephant, in contrast with the other one, had details such as tusks and genitals (Figure 52) and was slightly fired. I donated this piece to the Origins Centre at the University of the Witwatersand in 2008 because I think this piece is fragile and I would like for it to be preserved and displayed as an important component of living heritage and African practice.



Figure 52. *Chilengo* donated to the Origins Centre (approx. length 18cm), Johannesburg, South Africa 2008.

Masinja:

I visited Masinja village in September 2007 for the first time, with the intention of visiting a site that was previously recorded by Chaplin (1962) and Phillipson (1976): Chaingo. I visited the site with the headman of Masinja and his son. I told him the purpose of my research and what I was trying to record in Zambia. The headman mentioned that he had seen the *chilengo* and this is something that I

have noticed in other places: the headman of the village has access to knowledge of the girls' initiation ceremonies.

He said that he had seen a 'lion' made by women inside the *tsimba* and explained that the initiates have to dance around it. He also mentioned that this is not a common practice but the *chilengo* is made on the parents' request and that they decide on the shape of the *chilengo* and for this they have to pay extra money. He said that sometimes they pay four chitenje, 20,000 Zambian Kwacha and a chicken. Moreover, if the initiates at the end of the instructions fail to say the meanings of the dots they have to pay a fine. I asked him if he could describe the *chilengo* to me and he took my notebook and made a drawing of it. I wanted to know how he would represent a 3D object that he had seen. My line of thinking was that the spread-eagled designs are representations of the animal seen from above. The headman drew an animal in profile (Figure 53):



Figure 53. *Chilengo* drawing made by the headman of Masinja village (length 5cm), eastern Zambia 2007.

We walked back to the village; the headman asked two ladies if they could show me the *chilengo*. Compared to Kaliza, these ladies were extremely open about the subject. Right away they started to draw things on the ground in order to explain to me what was *chilengo*. When I asked them about the size of these objects, they said that the size was depending on how big you wanted them to be. They made a circle on the ground and told me that it was the moon (Figure 54). These ladies were extremely enthusiastic, both of them were *namkungwi* and I asked them if I could come back to see the real thing, thus we set a date.



Figure 54. Chilengo drawn on the floor, Masinja village, eastern Zambia 2007.

I went back to Masinja after two days and the two *anamkungwi* were in charge of explaining these objects to me. These objects are said to be made on the day before the initiates go back to their house and are made only by the *namkungwi*. I did not see how they collected the material for the *vilengo* but I was surprised to see that they did not form a clay relief on the floor; rather they made a drawing on the floor: a red circle with four divisions and a red centre and on each internal division they put dots of different colours, some black, red and white. Around the circle they placed various 3D objects that they made very fast: first an object that looked like a pot and inside they put small balls made out of clay. Next to this object, they made a 3D cow, covered with white dots on top and a small spear. After this cow they made a drawing on the floor, a crescent moon, and inside of it they put dots: one white, one red, one white and the next red. After the moon was a leopard with white dots on top and after the leopard came the snake. The sixth element that was added was also a drawing on the floor and this was a line with black and white dots inside. It was supposed to represent the initiate. The women said it was a small snake. The divisions within the main circular shape were said to be divisions inside the womb. I asked them if the circle could have more than four divisions but they said not. They said that there was a specific order in which they teach the instructions to the initiates: first they will point to the representation of the initiate (small snake), then the leopard, the womb, the moon, the snake and finally the cow. They also explained that the earth that they use to make the objects out of is mixed with some medicine to protect the *chilengo*

against witchcraft. At the end they gave me a drawing that they made for me to understand the order of the objects (Figure 55)

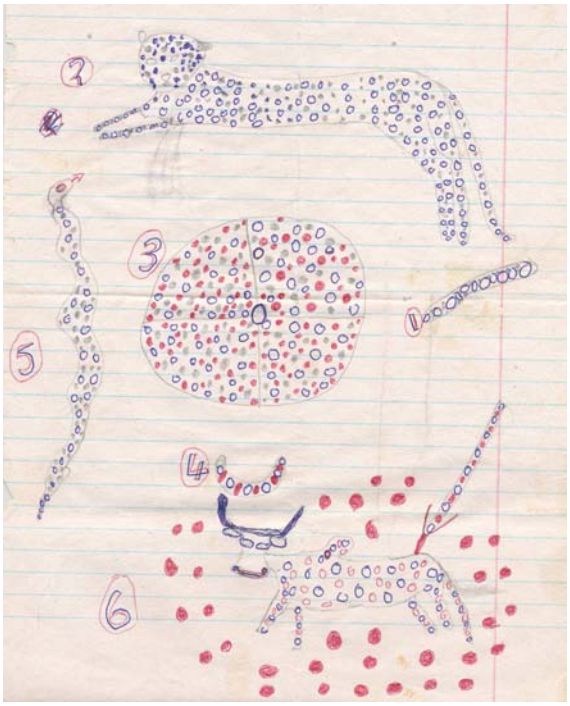


Figure 55. Drawing made by the women of Masinja village to illustrate the order of the instructions, eastern Zambia 2007.

They use the same drawings and objects to show *Chinamwali Chaching'ono* and also *Chachikulu*; thus the detail of the instruction that the initiates can get is given at different levels. For example, the girl will learn the instruction for the leopard only if she had born a child before initiation and this is to explain to her that she can die because of an unwanted pregnancy.

When the ladies were explaining the symbolism of the cow, they said that this is the money that the parents of the groom need to pay for the bride. It is important to remember that Masinja village is in the land of the Ngoni Chief Nzamane. This is a very important example of the influence of the Ngoni people on Chewa *Chinamwali* and how some Ngoni cultural traits such as *lobola*, which is the bride payment in patrilineal societies (Read 1956:18), is reflected on the material culture at Masinja village (Figure 56).

The explanation process that the women offered for *vilengo* in this village consisted of two parts: the first one was related to the explanation of each object and

the drawings that they made on the ground inside the hut. The second part consisted of a performance that they put together for me: a representation of what happens when the girls come into the hut to be initiated. The women in this village took the initiative to do a theatrical performance for me because they wanted me to see how the girls interacted with the *vilengo*. They mentioned that there are words that are related to each figure and there are different ways of expressing these words: singing is one of them but they did not specify the others.



Figure 56. Creation process of vilengo, Masinja village, eastern Zambia 2007.

Once the figures were made, the ladies sang some of the songs that are related to the figures (the one related to the snake and to the womb) and then proceeded to explain how they were used. First they have to cover the *vilengo* with a *chitenje*. Before the initiates can see what is under the *chitenje* they have to put some money on top of it. The two *anamkungwi* arranged for some women to play the drums and others to act as the initiates. The girls entered the house while the women were playing the drums and singing a song that is used to call the relatives of the initiates to come forward. This is an important moment for a mother and daughter as it means that they both have attended the same ceremony.

When they lift the *chitenje* the mother has to give some money and this was stressed again. The advice will be given only if there is a financial contribution; the initiate has to wait until the *aphungu* lifts the *chitenje* and she cannot try to lift it without permission (Figure 57).



Figure 57. Women around the *chitenje* while they are singing a song to uncover the *vilengo*, Masinja village, eastern Zambia 2007.

The women explained that the girls can be secluded for a month in order for her to learn the instructions properly. They spend the nights singing and in the mornings other women will come to ask the initiate what she had learnt. One important thing she needs to learn is the use of water; women have to wash themselves during menstruation.

Women also make scarifications on their body and I noticed a deep horizontal line on the chest of one of the *namkungwi.* She explained that it is for men to love a

woman and they put some medicine inside the cut. There are medicines for various purposes. They also wear beads around their waist and one of the ladies showed me hers. They explained that when the girl menstruated she has to hang a red string on the wall and when she finishes she has to hang a white one.

The *vilengo* has to be destroyed at the end of the ceremony because someone can "take the colours" and thus the initiate will not have children. I asked who could do this harm to the initiate and they explained that when they have *Chinamwali* lots of people are invited and those people can try to hurt her. If it happens that some girls do not have children then they know it is because someone took "the things from the *tsimba*". Thus, when the ceremony ends, the *namkungwi* will give the remains of the *vilengo* to the girls' relatives and then they will throw them in the river or the latrine.

After the teachers reveal the secrets of the *vilengo* to the initiates, they dance and sing while they point out some of the things that were instructed by her *aphungu* but the initiate will not touch the objects on the ground. Once the instruction is given, the women kneel down around the *vilengo* and while they sing, they will take all the 3D objects and put them on a small cloth and while they keep singing, they will put their hands facing down and will bring them to the centre to remove the image from the ground. The remains will be put with the other objects inside the cloth. Later they will spill some water on top of what was left of the images. Then the *namkungwi* took her top off and she rubbed the image on the ground with her buttocks. The mother of the initiate will have to pay some money to the *namkungwi* after this. They do this because when the girl is going to have a child, she will have to show her body and she cannot be shy. They also do this because they said that if they rubbed it off with her hands some of the remains of the *chilengo* will remain in the fingers and some people can make medicine with that. I asked them if the *namkungwi* can hurt the initiate but they said that a *namkungwi* prefers to rub it with the buttocks because if something happens to the initiate people can think that it was her fault (Figure 58).



Figure 58. Chilengo disposal, Masinja village, eastern Zambia 2007.

After a while, it was mentioned that they also put an animal on the head of the initiate and put dots on top of it. The *namkungwi* put the initiate on her shoulders and then the animal is placed on top of the head of the initiate. In order for me to understand this they made a pantomime (Figure 59). The initiates have to concentrate because if the animal figure breaks, it is believed that their parents will die. In case it falls, some secret words have to be told to the initiate in order for her to be safe. The shape of this figure (also called *chilengo* by them), that is worn on top of the head,

can be a cow. They said that this performance can be seen by the community so the parents will know that the initiate had been advised properly.

It was mentioned that the *chilengo* that is shown to the initiate inside the *tsimba* is the same as the one that they will put on top of her head. In this way, the parents will know which *chilengo* was made for her inside the *tsimba*. Thus, the parents are the ones who choose the *chilengo* that will be made. They said that the cow is an important one because the cow will go to the parents. Although apparently they make other figures on the ground, they insisted that the leopard is an important animal because it is stronger than other animals and if the initiate does not understand the advice it is said that she must fear the elders; like fearing the leopard.



Figure 59. Initiate dancing with *chilengo* on top of her head, Masinja village, eastern Zambia 2007.

They stressed that the parents need to pay the *namkungwi* for her daughter to be initiated; an initiate cannot just walk into the *tsimba*. Thus only the initiates who have money can see the *chilengo*. I asked how the girl can grow up if she does not see the *chilengo* and was told that the girl will be matured but that she will not know the meanings of the objects. Some of the *chilengo* are more expensive than others, the initiate needs to pay a fee between 2,000 and 5,000 Zambian Kwacha or a chicken.

During the initiation women help each other and if someone forgets an instruction then other woman help. They also shared with me some memories of their own *Chinamwali* and they said they were happy ones. They did not mind all the things they had to do because they wanted to be knowledgeable on *Chinamwali*. The only thing they disliked is that they wanted to share the experience with their friends when the initiation was happening, but they were not allowed to do that. They were only allowed to talk to the *aphungu* or the *namkungwi*. It is only when the *Chinamwali* was over that they could share the experience with each other.

When I asked them permission to use the material I recorded; I explained that a varied audience would have access to this research and they said that their tradition does not differ (this was referring specifically to the knowledge of having babies) from what has been taught in schools. Thus, it is possible to find various opinions about the importance of keeping the teachings secret and I think this is because of the influence of schooling programmes and modernization.

The *chilengo* that women made for me in these three different villages had different shapes, but all of them were covered with dots. Interestingly, the women from the different contexts said to me that what was important were the dots. The shape is important too, as some instruction comes with it, but at the end this object is made for one purpose: to teach the women about their menstrual cycles. Unfortunately, I am not allowed to say what each of the colours represents. Other people have talked about the colour symbolism (*e.g.*, Turner 1967; Jacobson-Widding 1979; Welling 1999) and I shall discuss this topic in the next chapter. When a woman knows what each colour represents, it means that she has been initiated, that she has paid the fee to be part of this knowledge system.

In Mozambique no material culture related to *Chinamwali* has been recorded but when I visited Macanga and Maravia Districts in Tete Province, I talked to a few people. The women in Macanga told me that they make the animal headdresses and when I asked them about the floor clay reliefs they said they had not seen them. When I went to Maravia, I did not have the opportunity to meet with the ladies of the

villages but I talked to one of the Traditional Authorities, Chief Kachombo, and he told me that he had seen the *chilengo* as a figure on the ground. My visit to Maravia was very brief and I was more interested in rock art sites. I did not find anyone who knew about any paintings in the area. However, it is possible that there might be some rock art in the region and knowledge about *chilengo*, but will be necessary to spend more time in the area than I had available.

Bemba

The largest repertoire of collected data concerning objects used for girls' initiation ceremonies in south-central Africa has been recorded amongst the Bemba of northern Zambia.

Audrey Richards called these clay figurines 'pottery emblems' (*mbusa*) (Richards 1956). These figurines have different shapes but they all serve as mnemonic devices: for example, girls will associate animal figurines with specific teachings (Cory 1956; Corbeil 1982). The Bemba also have wall paintings but I discuss these in the next chapter as I shall consider them in relation to the rock paintings.

There are two main works that deal with these figurines: Audrey Richards published work *Chisungu: a girl's initiation ceremony in Northern Rhodesia* of 1956 and Father Corbeil's book *Mbusa: sacred emblems of the Bemba* of 1982.

Among the Bemba the range of objects also varies; some of the *mbusa* represent animals, such as crocodiles, lions and others human figures (Richards 1956) and the girls will associate animal figurines and other objects with specific teachings which are usually accompanied by songs (Richards 1956: Appendix B for further detail on the songs).

Richards also comments on another kind of object that she calls a "large pottery emblem", a clay figure created on the floor of a hut:

> The next morning's work began at about eleven o'clock. Great piles of clay had been collected outside the hut and Nangoshye and a few helpers set to work to model what looked like an enormous snake coiled to cover the whole of the hut floor. When it was finished, legs were added round the outer coil. The whole was decorated with white, red and black earth and stuck all over with marrow, castor-oil and bean seeds set carefully about two inches apart. The work was very heavy. (Richards 1956:82)

The interpretation of this clay relief had different levels: first, a woman told Richards that it meant: "'rays of the sun' *(amashindo eyav itengo)* and said it was to teach the girl that the sun was high and she must get on with her work. Later, she admitted it was also a snake. It was manhood *(bwaume)*" (Richards 1956:82). These multiple meanings have to be looked at carefully. It is known that women, when they do not want to talk about certain things, will explain things in a veiled way, but it is possible also that the two explanations that Richards recorded were in fact true depending on the level of explanation that the women wanted to give the initiates (*banacisungu*). A colour picture of a clay relief has been published by Deborah Hoover (2000; Figure 60) who has written about the *mbusa* as works of art. I think it might serve as an example to illustrate Richards's description.

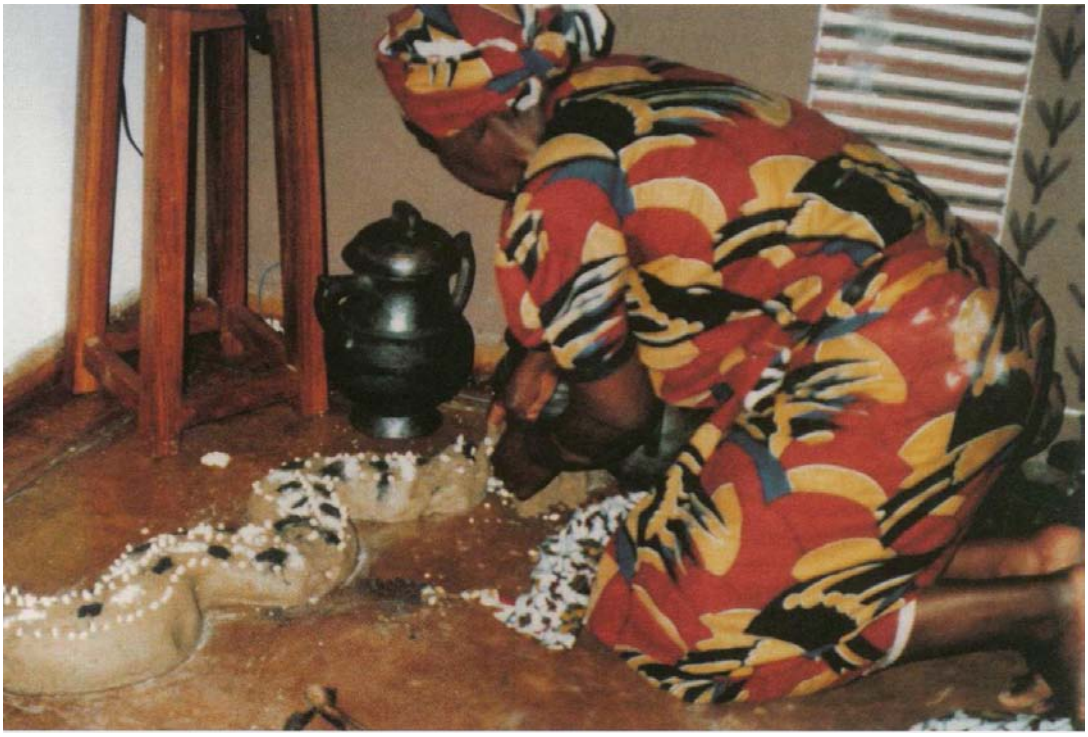


Figure 60. Snake clay relief, *Chisungu* ceremony (after Hoover 2000:fig 16).

Father Corbeil (1982) published some of the figurines used during *Chisungu* and argued that each of the songs related to the figurines has a secret meaning that only the initiate can comprehend. Corbeil divided the figurines in eight categories according to their instruction: pre-marriage warnings, husband's obligations, wife's obligations, mutual obligations, motherhood duties, social duties, domestic duties and agricultural duties. Each figurine has different interpretations depending on the song being sung (Figure 61, Figure 62). Richards (1945), on the other hand, classified them in five categories: moral and legal aspects of marriage, economic aspects of marriage, procreating functions of marriage, *mbusa* connected with the ceremony itself and other dramatic aspects of life.

Pre-Marriage warnings

Kalulu — the rabbit

Instruction: If the girl is obedient to her husband, he will respect her.



Husband obligations

Nwena — the crocodile (royal totem of the Bemba)

Instruction: If the wife is pregnant the man should be proud and not looking for other women.

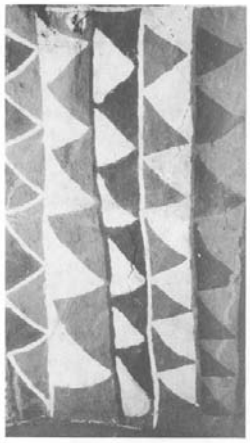


Cilume cipuba — the stupid husband

Instruction: The man is a fool who does not look properly after his wife.



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Mushintililo — the target

Left to right:
1st column: black & red
2nd column: white & red
3rd column: white & black
4th column: white & red
5th column: black & red.
Instruction: each colour has a meaning

Wife's obligations

Liyongolo — the snake

Instruction: The girl must be faithful to her husband.



Canakashi cipuba — the stupid wife

Instruction: the woman has to be discreet in married life.



Motherhood duties

Ngombe naimita — the pregnant woman
Instruction: warning to the future mother who has not been initiated and still is going to bear a child. She must be faithful to her husband.



Social duties

Cupo walemene nkata —
The pad-head marriage
Instruction: The girl will carry her marriage on her head, which is a place of honour.



Fulwe — the tortoise
Instruction: the girl should have a generous heart and be hospitable.



Domestic duties

Napela — the grinding woman
Instruction: The girl must offer the best possible food to her husband.





Nanaya — the good cook
Instruction: the girl must be an expert in cooking.

Kolwe — the monkey
Instruction: the girl should stop stealing. The girl should just desire her husband.



Agricultural duties

Kalonde — the little hoe
Instruction: the girl should cultivate her garden to feed her family.
She is also urged to have children.



Figure 61. Emblems of the Bemba's *Chisungu* (all after Corbeil1982; Zubieta 2006:fig 4.9).



Figure 62. Some *mbusa* from Corbeil's collection at the Moto Moto Museum (central figure, *Cilume cipuba*, approx. height 18cm), northern Zambia 2007.

In the late 1990s Thera Rasing (1995, 2001) did research on the *Chisungu* ceremony in an urban setting in Zambia, amongst the Roman Catholic Community. Rasing (2001) has published the songs that accompanied the *mbusa* objects: 110 *mbusa* and 490 songs in *Chibemba* with translations in English followed by the

interpretation of each song. It is important to keep in mind that sometimes there are two or three songs that accompany the instructions for certain objects thus each object is not restricted to one song only. I had the opportunity to visit Thera Rasing in Lusaka in 2007 and to talk to her about her knowledge and experiences. She explained to me that, although most of the *mbusa* are destroyed, there are some others that are kept by the *nacimbusa* (the instructor) to use in other initiations. This is a big contrast with the objects made by the Chewa where all are destroyed. Richards (1945:444) writes that the *mbusa* remains the property of the *nacimbusa* and some others are "thrown into the river at the final bathing of the girl after the ceremony, and another buried with the after-birth of the first child of the marriage". Although many of the meanings of the *mbusa* are published and the songs that accompany the objects have been widely recorded and published (Richards 1945, 1956; Rasing 1995, 2001), my interest is in the creation process and the interaction of the initiates and the *mbusa*. It is important to note that the name *mbusa* also has various meanings: as 'things handed down' (Richards 1945, 1956; Hoover 2000) or 'sacred emblems' (Richards 1956; Corbeil 1982) but as Rasing expresses "it also refers to the vagina, the house and seeds. All these have the connotation of procreation that has to be dealt with carefully and secretly, since it is a 'sacred' act" (Rasing 2001:165).

In October 2007 I visited the Moto Moto Museum in Mbala, which is located in the Northern Province of Zambia. My original intention was to see Father Corbeil's collection and to get any historical material and notes related to this material culture. Although some material has been kept by the museum and they allowed me to take pictures of the objects on display; some of his material is housed in Lusaka at FENZA (Faith & Encounter Centre Zambia), which is the largest archive of material related to Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers). Father Corbeil was a Missionary of Africa. I found some of his notes in Lusaka on *mbusa,* notes that were later incorporated in his 1982 published work.

The *Mbusa Club* members, 11 women and two men, are Catholics and are interested in preserving the initiation ceremony for further generations. As Rasing (2001) points out in her conclusion, her data shows that the modern ceremonies hardly

touch on modern gender ideas. She also writes that "these rites, as part of Zambian culture, have existed for centuries and modern town life has only slightly altered them. In the rites, traditional concepts are still expressed because they remain of value" (2001:254). I think this is an important statement because even nowadays we can be confident that parts of the *Chisungu* ceremony are given, in general, as in the old days. This allows me to take the experience that I had in Moto Moto as an important source of comparison since this ceremony has not been changed by Christianity. In other words: "The influence of Christianity has been insufficient to fundamentally change the symbolism of these rites" (Rasing 2001:254).

The oldest *nacimbusa*, and head of the ceremony I attended, is Christian but she was instructed in traditional *Chisungu* in the past. When I asked them what aspects of the ceremony has changed with Christianity they said that the traditional ceremony was a bit rough on the initiates thus some of the things that they did in the past are omitted in the present. For example, for one of the instructions the girl used to put stones inside her mouth to instruct her not to talk but now they will not do that to the initiate. Specifically, the *Mbusa Club* is concerned about HIV AIDS and are trying to incorporate this message and give warnings through the *mbusa*.

My initiation took place in the Museum, not in a village or in the bush. It was a brief ceremony but lasted long hours in which the women demonstrated some *mbusa* and related songs. Many things were explained to me and I got a sense of how the women use the *mbusa* during an initiation. We made use of the collection (Figure 63) they have at the Museum, thus new *mbusa* were not made for me. However, I explained to the women that I would like to see the creation process of the *mbusa*, thus they created for me a few of the larger ones.



Figure 63. Mbusa collection, Moto Moto Museum, Mbala, northern Zambia 2007.

Before the ceremony I had to buy a chicken, two *chitenje*, white beans and bread for the lunch break of the people who were going to be involved. I went with one of the ladies to the market to buy these things. We went back to the Museum and they asked me to accompany them outside to collect the dirt that was going to be used for the large *mbusa*; I was also asked to join them to dig for dirt. This was mixed with water and put in buckets and before we entered the place where they were going to create the *mbusa* we had to make a line and pass the chunks of mud to each other until they reached the last woman who was inside the place (Figure 64).







Figure 64. Collecting dirt and passing it to the initiation place, Mbala, northern Zambia 2007.

During my stay in Mbala I saw a lot of dances related to the objects and I will not describe every object and every song; other authors, as I said before, have done this already in detail. My intention is to explain the creation process of these objects. I use the example of two large *mbusa* that the women made for me and I will describe them separately: the *mutepo* and the circular *mbusa* (*Mbusa akankokwa*). The first one is a floor sculpture and the other one a floor clay relief.

Creation process

Mutepo or jumping hoop (name from Richards 1945:445. 1965:95):

While we were collecting the mud, other women collected the branches of specific trees and brought them back to the Museum covered in a *chitenje*. Richards mentions that the *mutepo* is formed "with two crossed hoops made from two branches with both their ends planted in the ground, the one being taken from the *Mulanbwa*, or male tree, and the other from the *Mwenge*, or female tree" (Richards 1945:445). Elsewhere Richards (1956) refers to the male tree as the *mulombwa* tree. I was showed the reason why they are considered to be female and male: one of them exuded a white latex and the other one a red juice. The red represents "the male, the lion and in some cases the chief" (Richards 1956:94) and the female tree represents fertility and the pliancy of the woman (*ibid*.).

These branches are originally supposed to be stuck into the ground but the place where they were making this floor sculpture (see Hoover 2000) was made of concrete and the women needed to bring metal containers strong enough to hold the

branches. Thus they made an arch with one branch on top the other one and started to cover the branches with layers of mud until they were covered completely. I asked the ladies if they added anything to the clay but the answer was negative. At the end, a protrusion from the centre was made. Once the branches were covered with mud, white beans were added to the sculpture. The *nacimbusa* will put the first bean with her mouth on the protrusion on the top of the sculpture and later the initiate has to do the same; she cannot use her hands. The main *nacimbusa* collected the bean from the floor with her mouth and I was asked to follow her. While this is happening the women will keep singing and then if the initiate makes a good effort the women will sing with joy (*nthungululu*). This part is very important for the initiate because the first bean symbolizes that it is the first child of many: it talks about the household. The beans are related to seeds and seeds to fertility. The *mbusa* was covered completely with white beans and, at the end, the woman added some red colour on top of the protrusion. The *nacimbusa* told the other women what to do but in the end everyone helped (Figure 65).











Figure 65. *Mutepo* creation process, Mbala, northern Zambia 2007.

Circular *mbusa* or *Mbusa akankokwa* (name after Rasing 2001: photo 9):

Across the room, next to the *mutepo*, other women started to create a clay relief on the floor. This is one of the most elaborate *mbusa* and it consists of a circle of mud with

vertical and horizontal divisions that run irregularly to the centre. In the centre there is a protrusion made out of clay. Rasing (1995:60) mentions that the divisions are the difficulties that women will have in marriage and the protrusion in the middle symbolizes the husband.

The women were working in a fast way and they did not need to make a pattern first on the floor; the clay was very malleable. The beans were divided into small mounds; some for the *mutepo* and the others for the circular *mbusa*. The women stopped for a while or they shifted places for drumming. Sometimes one of the drummers would start to play for the others to follow and at other times a woman would start singing a different song and the drums would follow her. The circular *mbusa* was then covered with white beans in a random order until it was completely covered (Figure 66).





Figure 66. Circular *mbusa* creation process, Mbala, northern Zambia 2007.

Use & Disposal

Before the *mbusa* were revealed to the girl the women covered all the *mbusa* that were created on the floor with a *chitenje*. So, when I came into the room, I had to first offer some money to show appreciation so as to be part of this knowledge (Figure 67).



Figure 67. The *mbusa* are covered with a *chitenje* before disclosing it, Mbala, northern Zambia 2007.

For each *mbusa*, the *nacimbusa* starts to sing a song and then the other women join the choir. The *mbusa* then has to be used first by the *nacimbusa* and then by the

initiate. This might take a long time if there are many brides to be initiated. The teachings are passed by repetition of the songs and the movements that the initiate has to imitate from the *nacimbusa*. The drums seldom stop playing and the girl has to engage with every object by handling it, touching it with her mouth or trying little by little not to step on it. The circular *mbusa*, as I explained previously, signifies that the girl will go through many problems. The *nacimbusa* started first; she tried to step on every single open space without touching the edges. Then it was my turn and I found it very difficult not to step on the clay parts. Then the *nacimbusa* joined me and they said that sometimes the girl will find problems but she will always find someone to help her on the way (Figure 68).









Figure 68. Usage and disposal of circular *mbusa*, Mbala, northern Zambia 2007.

For the *mutepo* it was different, this is an *mbusa* that will be made for both the bride and groom to use (Rasing 2001). Richards (1956) describes that once the *mutepo* is ready, the girl has to jump over it otherwise she will not grow up. I did not witness this. First the *nacimbusa* will crawl on her stomach underneath the *mutepo* and, once on the other side, she will keep crawling on her stomach around the floor sculpture. Then the initiate and the groom have to follow. I found it physically challenging as your body scrubs into the floor and you have to be careful as not to hit it with your arms and your hip. At the end, the *mutepo* will be destroyed and the beans are also collected separately (Figure 69). All of these actions are accompanied by constant drumming and singing. Richards also mentions that in the *Chisungu* she recorded, the *mutepo* was carried by two candidates who uprooted the whole structure and carried it off to the river and threw it in (Richards1956:98).





Figure 69. Usage and disposal of the *mutepo*, Mbala, northern Zambia 2007.

Although I will not go through all the objects that were used, I want to mention that once the *mutepo* was disclosed, many *mbusa* were underneath it. I did not see when they put them underneath, so for me this was also a surprise. Some are worn on top of the heads of the initiate for her to balance and others have to be held with both hands while dancing. For others the initiate needs to touch them with her mouth[29] and yet others are used as the initiate performs a pantomime that will involve interacting with the other women (Figure 70).

[29] Richards (1956:94) was told that picking up objects with the mouth was and act that honoured the *mbusa*. Another woman just remarked that the girls need to learn to do unusual things.



Figure 70. Left: *mbusa* found under the *mutepo*. Right: an example of the usage of an *mbusa* figurine, Mbala, northern Zambia 2007.

There are some similarities and differences between the Chewa and the Bemba that I will discuss at the end of this chapter.

Nsenga

In the literature we find a similar practice among the Nsenga people. However, there is very little research on the role of material culture amongst the Nsenga. It is a pity that publication on Nsenga MCI is so scarce because according to Mapopa Mtonga (pers. comm. 2007) the Nsenga people are more prolific with the figures than the Chewa: there is a greater variety and complexity within the Nsenga.

The Nsenga make figures out of mud that they call *vilengo* and they used these for their *Ndola* ceremony — girls' initiation (Apthorpe 1962). As I mentioned in Chapter 4, in 1925 Martin Drourega (1927) witnessed a *Ndola* ceremony and provides a few details about the initiation: the initiate (*moye*) is secluded for four months and during this time she cannot look at or speak to other people, especially men. On the last day of seclusion she engages in a dance around various *vilengo* that represent animals, such as crocodiles, hyenas, antelope, snakes and birds (Figure 71).

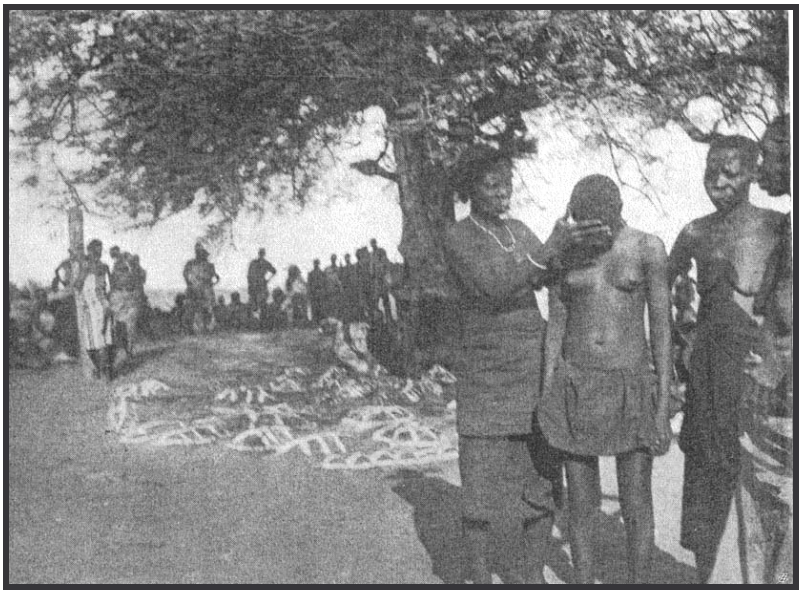


Figure 71. *Ndola* ceremony. Note the various designs in the background and the relationship with the tree (after Drourega 1927:only picture).

The initiate "dances on each of these designs shaking her body, sitting down and standing up, assisted by the medicine-women, who sing ceremonial songs full of devil-veneration and sensuality" (Drourega 1927:621). Drourega does not provide any more information on the meaning of the figures. However, his picture reveals that the *vilengo* are made in front of the whole community at the gathering place and that they surround a tree. These are floor clay reliefs that have considerable height and that are decorated with white lines but is difficult to see if any spots have been added to the figures.

Raymond Apthorpe had the opportunity to talk to some women and men about some aspects of the ceremony (Chapter 4) and he attended four initiation ceremonies (Apthorpe 1962). He describes that, during the initiation, the Nsenga have a small-decorated pot that is used for both spouses to shave and wash and this pot should be hidden from outsider's eyes. He says that it is "about 2 ½ inches high, with slightly concave or convex lid, all made of fired clay glazed with graphite, and profusely decorated with beadwork and strings of beads" (Blacking & Apthorpe 1962:2). This small pot symbolizes the woman and the hut which is cared for by the women and constructed by men is a womb.

Apthorpe (1962:13) states that *vilengo* are an essential part of this initiation ceremony. He illustrates an example of the Nsenga's MCI and interprets it as the representation of the genet cat (*nsimba*), which stands as the male principle and potency (Figure 72). He did his fieldwork in Petauke between 1958 and 1961 (Apthorpe pers. comm. 2006) and unfortunately he did not publish these figures in more detail. I have been fortunate to correspond with him and his comments have been very useful. He mentioned that he has various colour-pictures of the Nsenga *vilengo* but they are kept somewhere in England where he no longer resides.



Figure 72. Representation of a genet cat at a Nsenga girls' initiation ceremony (after Apthorpe (1962:plate IIB).

In 1996, Smith had the opportunity to talk to Nsenga women about the mnemonic devices in an area close to Katete in eastern Zambia (pers. comm. 2008). Unfortunately his material has not been published but he has granted me permission to use his images. The following picture shows the creation process of the mud figure that is made on the tree (Figure 73).



Figure 73. Creation process of *chilengo* on the tree (unpublished photo: Benjamin Smith 1996)

It is important to note that the animal figure in Apthorpe's picture from 1962 and Smith's picture from 1996 is stuck to a tree —a position that resembles the paintings on a rock shelter wall. The figure is covered with white and red dots, colours that "commonly connote, roughly speaking, the female and male principle" (Apthorpe 1962:13). Apthorpe also gives an account of a schematic figure in slight relief in clay covered with flour and called *chilengo*. The initiate would go around it carefully so as to not step on any marking (Figure 74).

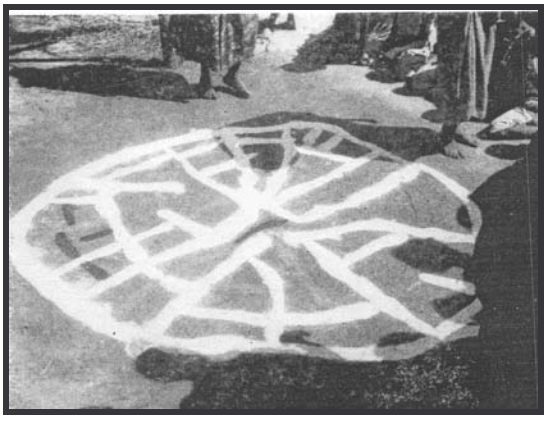


Figure 74. Schematic design at a Nsenga girls' initiation ceremony (after Apthorpe 1962:plate IIC).

The symbolism of this schematic design is complex. Apthorpe was told that some parts of it resemble the *mons pubis*; others resemble crocodiles, a woman and a

man. The purpose for the design was to warn the initiates against having sexual intercourse while menstruating and to avoid adultery.

Smith (pers. comm. 2008) also witnessed the creation process of one of the schematic designs: a drawing on the ground in the bush made out of white maize flour and then covered with black and red dots. Once the instructress finished creating the figure the women chanted before the initiate was instructed. The initiates then were covered with white and red dots on their upper bodies and two circles were drawn around their breasts. Next, each initiate was told certain teachings in which she had to point at the image as part of the learning process. At the end of the instruction, the image on the ground was destroyed in a very similar way as the example I recorded amongst the Chewa (Figure 75).



Figure 75. Creation, use and disposal of a schematic image amongst the Nsenga (unpublished photos: Benjamin Smith 1996).

Apthorpe published another *chilengo* (Blacking & Apthorpe 1962) but he did not comment on its meaning; however I am including it because it is one of the few examples that are published of this MCI (Figure 76). It is clear that there are two main figures in the middle and the woman at the back is finishing it.



Figure 76. *Ngwena,* finishing the *chilengo* at Mulipa Zambia (after Blacking & Apthorpe 1962:3).

Apthorpe also mentions that some *vilengo* were not solely made in the bush as the pictures that I have discussed reflect; he states that:

> The figurines and designs made on the ground and on the hut walls during the girls' puberty celebration in Petauke, should be executed with artistic skill, and good results are admired in themselves for their beauty. The colours used are red, which represents blood and the feminine principle, white, which stands for semen and the male principle, and black, which seems to have two references — male-exercised authority, on the one hand, and emptiness, exhaustion or death on the other. These meanings are manifold, not single or absolute, and interpenetrate with each other (Blacking & Apthorpe 1962:2).

This account, although brief, is an important insight into the MCI because it tells us about the range of objects that are created for the initiate inside the initiation hut and it is the only mention that talks about designs made on the wall inside the hut.

There are some references that relate the Nsenga people with the White Spread-eagled tradition based on their MCI. Phillipson (1976:183), who worked at Thandwe shelter in eastern Zambia, was told by local Ngoni inhabitants that the white paintings were related to the Nsenga girls' initiation ceremony. Moreover, the Nsenga women who were shown some "copies of the subdivided circle motifs from the main rock-shelter … identified them as schematised 'diagrams' used for the sexual introduction [instruction] of female initiates" (*ibid*.).

However, it is important to note that most of these accounts come from a region where both Nsenga and Chewa people have extensively interacted. It is also a land where the Nsenga are now the predominant population (Phillipson 1976; Smith 1995) although before the Ngoni raids, in the late 19th century, it was populated by the Chewa. Little has been published on Nsenga mnemonic devices, but it is likely that the published accounts reflect a fusion of Chewa and Nsenga girls' initiation ceremonies.

Yao[30]

Floor clay reliefs are not solely for women, mnemonic devices are also made in connection with the *Lupanda* — boys' initiation ceremony of the Yao (Werner 1906; Stannus & Davey 1913; Stannus 1922; Sanderson 1955; Kubik 1985; Smith 1995; Morris 2000b). As early as 1906, Alice Werner comments on the creation of figures "traced by scattering flour on the smooth ground of the *bwalo* (communal open space), representing animals, usually the leopard, the crocodile, and, strangely enough, the whale" (Werner 1906:97).

[30] This section is mainly based on my Masters (Zubieta 2006)

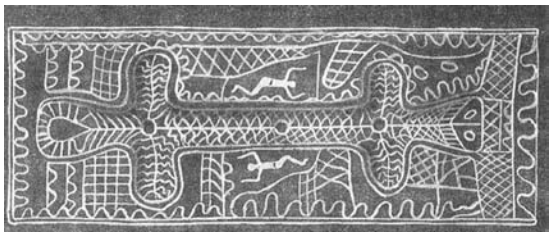
Cartmel-Robinson's (1962:20) account says that next to the fire there was the *ching'undang'unda* "a large white circle in the dust inscribed with weird designs, where parents and friends of the initiates had been praying to their forefathers. The lack of detail is disappointing when he describes the three symbols that he and his group were shown during the ceremony. He describes them as "the first symbol, which looked like a long reptile, was said to have been responsible for causing floods in Nyasaland. The second was a crocodile raping an African woman and the third was a leopard stealing a goat" (Cartmel-Robinson 1962:22).

An account of a ceremony witnessed in Zomba District, Malaŵi (Stannus & Davey 1913) gives testimony on "mounds of earth outlined in flour" (*inyago*) (*ibid*.:121). These are representations of animals and schematic designs that are shown to the initiate at the end of the ceremony. Each figure is related to a specific song that gives advice to the initiate on different aspect of his adult life. Some of the animals represented are zebra (*mbunda*), hyena, elephant, and eland (*mbunju*) and, most important, a large water animal said to be a whale (*namungumi*) (Stannus & Davey 1913:122). *Namungumi* is an important symbol of fertility amongst the Yao (Smith 1995:225): "the Water-Mother of mankind" (Sanderson 1955:37). However, it is not a whale but a conjugal bed (Kubik 1985).

A circle design resembles what they call *Nyasa ja litanda*, the water of a big pool, presumably Lake Malaŵi (Stannus & Davey 1913). Another figure that is always present is the *Ching'undang'unda*, a mound of earth representing the traditional birth place of Yao people (Sanderson 1955:37). However, this is an important symbol for "an embryo in the womb of a pregnant woman" (Smith 1995:225) related to the taboo that men must not step behind a pregnant woman (Kubik 1985; Figure 77).



a *Namungumi* 'The Whale'



b *Namungumi* 'The Whale'



c The Zebra



d *Ching'undang'unda*



e *Nyasa*

Figure 77. *Inyago*. a,c,d,e (after Stannus & Davey 1913:figs.1,4,3,2) and b (after Sanderson 1955:40) (Zubieta 2006:fig 4.10) .

Sanderson (1955) comments that *mwesi* (the moon) and *ngwena* (the crocodile) are generally seen together as symbols of fertility and menstrual cycles (Smith 1995:226) (Figure 78).

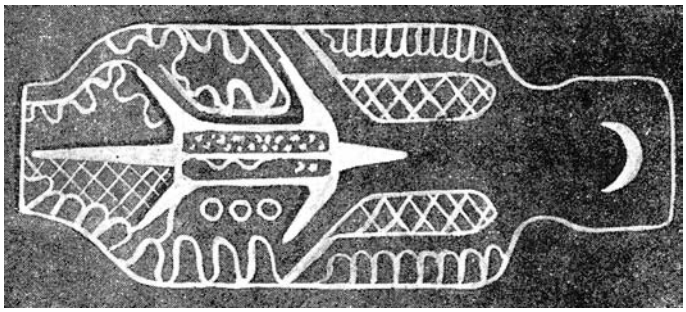


Figure 78. *Ngwena* and *mwesi* (after Sanderson 1955:39).

A large variety of *inyago* figures have been recorded, such as: *lundandambuli* (the spider's web) (Figure 79); *likoloto* (the scorpion); *sato* (the python); *wakongwe wacitumbalala* (the woman who died in child-birth); and *cisyungula* (the man who became impotent) (Sanderson 1955). These figures are made relatively close to each other. Sanderson points out that a relationship exists between the figures, the riddles and songs. Moreover, she has noted that the figure "appears to give added point to the instruction (*maundo*)" (Sanderson 1955:38).



Figure 79. *Lundambuli* (after Sanderson 1955:52).

I have not had the opportunity to attend any Yao ceremony but according to Fr. Boucher (pers. comm. 2007) these earth reliefs are no longer made. However, I would not be surprised if some villages still have knowledge of how to make them.

Discussion

I have drawn attention to the material culture that is used by the Chewa and neighbouring groups for girls' initiation because I am interested in the links between the MCI and the paintings of the White Spread-eagled tradition. My aim is to understand the possible uses in the past of such paintings. It is important to remember that these matrilineal groups share things in common such as the way the instructions are given during initiation (La Fontaine 1986) thus the comparison is relevant.

We are fortunate that this MCI is still in use today and that it is possible to capture its uses. We can therefore still place this material culture in its context, which according to many authors who have been studying clay figurines, is crucial for further interpretation and research (see Joyce 1993; Bailey 1996; Kujit & Chesson 2005).

In this thesis, I refer to the context of female initiation. It is a transitional state in which girls are no longer regarded as children but have not yet become women capable of bearing children. They must learn the traditional ways of behaving in society. I will now comment on some general aspects of these objects in the context of the *Chinamwali* of the Chewa and I will address some specific differences and similarities between the Chewa and the other groups that I have introduced in this and previous chapters.

The objects that are used for *Chinamwali* have specific characteristics that other objects do not have. For example, both *vilengo* and *chingondo* are not objects that "may change hands several times over its [their] life history" or which can "be used in many different and differently charged context" (Kujit & Chesson 2005:155). These are objects that have a specific lifetime. They are not made to last. They are made out of raw unfired clay. This intentional fragility is a characteristic of the south-central African MCI that is made for a single ceremony.

In the beginning of this chapter I discussed Miller's (1994) ideas of the life-time of objects and their temporal relationship with people. Thus the *vilengo* and

chingondo fall into the transience category because they are ephemeral compared to the person but also stand as an icon of the identity of the participants. In this case this is a transitional state in which the transformation of the initiate into an adult is facilitated by the destruction of these objects at the end of the transition. However, the destruction is not only due to the fact that these objects are created with ephemeral materials. Rather, it is related to the object itself. I was given an important hint about the nature of these objects during an interview with Mapopa Mtonga[31] in 2007. Mtonga was a Chewa man who was initiated in *Nyau* at the age of nine in 1953 and he got to be a drum master; I had the privilege to see him playing at the Kulamba ceremony in 2007. He granted me a long interview in which I learned that we shared an interest in the clay figures. I was very fortunate to hear his ideas on the topic and to share mine with him.

One of the most interesting aspects that we discussed was the meaning of the words *chilengo* and *vilengo*. *Chilengo* is a word that in Chichewa is used for something that is created; *chilengo* is the singular form of *vilengo* which derives from *zilengo*, the plural form for a group of created things (Mapopa Mtonga pers. comm. 2007). Moreover, Mtonga said that the word *vilengo* denotes animated things, which have a "soul" (energy and life). Thus, I think that when Lancaster (1934) refers to the *chilengo* tree he refers not to the name of the tree itself but to the name given to it because of the mud figure that is created on it in the form of a leopard, lizard or crocodile.

Vilengo is therefore a name that gives us an indication of the nature of these objects and how they are perceived by the Chewa. It is a name that denotes a power in the material culture. Thus, *vilengo* are not just objects; they are powerful entities that have energy and life. However, I argue that this power is stressed through the usage and interaction with people; in other words with the enactment of the initiation. To give an example, I have mentioned that I was allowed to take the *chilengo* from Kaliza village, eastern Zambia, but I was not allowed to keep the *chingondo* from

[31] Professor Mtonga passed away in May 2008. Mtonga motivated for *Nyau* to be proclaimed as the Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2005.

Chipazi village, central Malaŵi and the difference is that the former was never used and that I wore the second one: it was used. The power conferred to these objects seems to be one of the reasons why women destroy them at the end of the ceremony.

Another aspect that I recorded in some villages (*e.g.*, Khombe, central Malaŵi; Masinja, eastern Zambia) was that medicine was mixed with the clay used to make the objects. This is another element that adds to the reasons why these objects are destroyed; the medicine is meant to protect the initiate. Some of the women are not even allowed to touch the object when they are destroying it (*e.g.*, *chilengo* at Masinja and Mkaika villages). One of the women expressed, as I have discussed before, that the medicine can get stuck into the finger nails and later, if something happens to the initiate, the *namkungwi* can be blamed.

The Chewa tend to destroy objects that are considered powerful in other contexts besides initiation. Lancaster (1934:198) describes how people, during a funeral, take their bark headbands or mourning bands (especially used for the funeral) and they dig a hole next to a *msolo* tree where they deposit the bands and then the *mwini maliro* (the owner of the funeral) pours beer on them before they are buried. The pot in which the beer is carried to the cemetery gets a crack and it is placed on the mound and then the mound is covered with stones.

All the matrilineal groups in this region tend to do similar things and have similar ideas about the construction and the disposal of the objects: only the instructors of the ceremony are the ones who get involved in the creation process of these objects. This circumstance was consistent throughout the literature and the examples that I recorded in the region. The instructors add a personal touch to their creations and that is recognized by the other women in the community. I do not doubt that the rest of the women are capable of making their own figures but it is only the women who are appointed for this, who are allowed to make them: women who have a special knowledge.

Presumably, I posit, the *namwali* does not take part in the production of these objects (*vilengo*, *chingondo*) not just because of her status as a pupil but more importantly because she is in that transitional period between 'cold' (*-zizira*) and 'hot' (*-tentha*)[32] and thus dangerous; however she is allowed to touch the *chilengo* with the permission of the *namkungwi* (*e.g.*, Mkaika). The *chingondo* on the contrary cannot fall and will never be touched by the initiates. Both *chilengo* and *chingondo* are mnemonic devices that work in different ways: both are made on the last day of the ceremony and they are symbols of the initiate's changing status.

There are, however, some differences among the MCI of the matrilineal people in the region. One of these differences is recognizable amongst the Bemba. I have described the different objects that they use for the *Chisungu* and the *Ubwinga* ceremonies. Some of these objects are made out of raw clay but some others are fired. Richards (1945:444) comments that some *mbusa* are "fired in a slow fire made of undried chaff, set to smoulder all night". This property makes these objects have a different nature; they will be used on a specific occasion but they are not as ephemeral as the *vilengo* or the *chingondo*. Rasing (pers. comm. 2007) mentioned that the *nacimbusa* will not destroy all the *mbusa* but will keep some of them for later initiations. Richards (1956:92) writes that on the 17th day of the ceremony, some of the women covered the fired pottery "with red, black and white and some of those kept permanently hidden away for use at chisungu ceremonies were brought out for re-painting". Thus, some of the MCI of the Bemba people have the same kind of ephemeral life-time and are destroyed (Richards 1956:60) but some others are fired and kept hidden and even repainted[33]. Interestingly, the raw clay figures amongst the Bemba and Chewa are the ones that get destroyed.

I want to draw attention to another aspect: the secrecy in which these objects are made and used. Women generally do not talk about issues that are related to

[32] 'Hot' and 'cold' are two phases in which a woman will fluctuate all her life. Menstruation, specifically, will make her hot, thus a dangerous person. Women who are 'cold' are in charge of the ceremony: usually women who are not menstruating or who no longer menstruate. Sexual intercourse is prohibited during the ceremony.

[33] Hoover (2000:footnote 9) notes that there is circumstantial evidence that *mbusa* are sold by the *nacimbusa* to the young women after *Chisungu* or *Ubwinga*, but I am unsure if this is a recent development.

initiation in front of non-initiated people. I had the preconception that older women (*agogo*) would be more difficult to approach but in the end it depended on the individual personality of the women that I met. As I discussed in Chapter 4, sometimes there were no *agogo* in some of the villages and sometimes the younger girls had knowledge of some aspects of old ceremonies and others did not. In Zambia, I felt that women were stricter and more secretive in sharing their knowledge with me. That was the case with an old *agogo* in Kaliza village in eastern Zambia who, in the beginning, said she did not know how to create some figurines but, at the end, she did. Getting the trust of people depends on many factors and there were occasions in which I could sense I was not welcomed as the example that I gave in Chapter 4 where I had a difficult experience with the headman of a village in central Malaŵi and decided to not go back.

Secrecy is related to specific circumstances and various scenarios are possible according to the MCI that is disclosed to the initiates. One of the things that all the women that I met agreed on is that they will make the *vilengo* before the initiate comes into the house. By the time she gets inside the hut she will see a mat or a *chitenje* covering the figures on the floor. The creation process is not revealed to the initiate.

On the other hand, *chingondo* is said to be found in the river but in fact the *namkungwi* will either:

a) Make it in advance, and then place it on the head of the initiate so it can be decorated (*e.g.*, Chipazi).
b) Make it in front of the initiates and the other women, and then place it on the head of the initiate to be then decorated (*e.g.*, Khombe).

Either way, secrecy towards outsiders happens during the creation process by keeping the initiates in the *mtengo* until the figure is finished. This situation is similar to the creation process of *Nyau* structures: these are made at the *dambwe* and non-initiates do not know how they are created because for them they are spirits.

The secrecy also depends on the usage of the MCI. It varies from the *chilengo* that is used inside the hut to the *chilengo* that is used in front of the community (I explain this below). The *vilengo* that I witnessed in eastern Zambia were all made inside the *tsimba*. Initially, I thought that this part of the initiation was done in front of a large group of people because most of the pictures that I have seen of floor clay reliefs appear to have been made outside in the bush. As I have mentioned previously, the only published picture of *vilengo* amongst the Chewa (see Yoshida 1992) shows some animal figures on the ground outside in the bush, but I am not sure if it is because they were supposed to be made in the bush or because the women decided to do them in secrecy for Yoshida. When I talked to the women in Kaliza I tried to find the people who made these MCI for Yoshida in 1985 and I was told that all the ladies had passed away and that they did go with Yoshida in secret. The tone that the women used was accusative; thus I wonder if the *vilengo* that were shown to Yoshida were originally made in the bush or inside the hut of initiation; I do not have more evidence.

Another assumption that I had is that *vilengo* were supposed to be used only in the presence of other women and people that women would allow to become witnesses. But if we look carefully at the pictures published by various authors this is not the case. For example, Apthorpe has published a few examples of Nsenga *vilengo*: one is of a clay figure resembling a genet cat that is placed on a tree (Figure 72) and the other one of a circle drawn on the ground (Figure 74). I asked Apthorpe if the *vilengo* he saw were made for the public and he replied that these "can be, and were, enacted before anyone who would care to watch, regardless of gender and age. Some, however were for the more or less exclusive benefit of the *ndola* — and the *anyaphungu* — and where that was the case they were indoors, in the house (hut), for no men or for that matter anyone else — perhaps save for a female relative or two of the *ndola* — to see" (Apthorpe pers. comm. April 2008). In this sense, I think it is possible that the *vilengo* that were prepared in Lancaster's account were also made for public consumption since he was allowed to see them. However, he does not describe the context of the ceremony. Drourega's (1927) only picture (Figure 71) shows a big

audience at the back of the *vilengo*, under the tree, and I presume that the members of the audience were both women and men. The Yao figures are public.

Thus, it seems reasonable to propose that *vilengo* have various categories depending on the nature of the instructions that are given to the initiates and to the consumption of such figures. I propose three categories of *vilengo* according to their consumption:

1. **Public consumption**: *vilengo* that are prepared for the community to watch.
2. **Initiate's consumption**: *vilengo* made inside the *tsimba* or *mtengo* in a remote place in the bush.
3. **Tutor's consumption**: this *vilengo* is made for the *aphungu's* society or circle. Apthorpe mentioned that during the *Ndola* that he witnessed another category of *vilengo* "which involved I think only one 'installation' — was very private indeed, held at night or in the very early morning, for the *anyaphungu* only. The actual 'model' was made the day before, but then covered with a cloth to keep it from prying eyes. As to what I was able to find out about that from one of the *phungu* it had to do with not the *ndola's* 'initiation' but that of a *phungu* into *anyaphungu's* circle or 'society'". (Apthorpe pers. comm. 2008).

The idea of having a category only for the *aphungu* is interesting because it shows that some of the *vilengo* are never seen by the initiate. Although, this does not necessarily mean that they are not the same *vilengo* that later are showed to the initiate, I think this element can have some implications for the rock paintings as I discuss in the next chapter.

Another aspect that is important to emphasize is the existence of various levels at which teachings are given. Women can use the same *chilengo* to teach certain things to the girls during the *Chinamwali Chaching'ono* and then the same *chilengo* will be made for the *Chinamwali Chachikulu* but the meanings are more complex and more detailed. I found the same amongst the Bemba, where some of the *mbusa* are

used in both *Chisungu* and *Ubwinga*, but during the former the *nacimbusa* will explain things in a more simple and general way while during the *Ubwinga* the instructions will be more detailed.

I have found an intriguing and repetitive element in the accounts related to the use of the *chilengo* that possess a spread-eagled form and the *chingondo* that women wear on their heads: the symbolic hunting. Lancaster mentions that the *chilengo* that is made on the tree serves a specific purpose in the ceremony because the husband or husband to be, or any man who is appointed for this part of the ritual, must come into the circle and pretend that he is killing the animal on the tree. This man carries an arrow and a bow and he needs to aim at it, otherwise the men will be impotent and the woman will be regarded as "unfortunate" (Lancaster 1934:199; see also Boucher 2002:38). What is unfortunate indeed is that Lancaster does not explain further the ceremony or if this part of the ceremony was a public or a private ritual where only the *anamwali*, the *aphungu*, and the *namkungwi* can be present.

Various authors refer to a symbolic hunting amongst other groups. Apthorpe (1962) shows a genet cat on the tree and a woman with an axe approaching the *chilengo* on the tree. He explained to me that this was performed publicly, men and women were present, but he also said that he could not assume that it was the same before the fifties. The only time that I had the opportunity to witness a similar demonstration of a symbolic hunting was amongst the Bemba. In October 2007 the man who played the role of my husband was holding a tiny bow and arrow. I was sitting on the floor inside a hut that was decorated with the typical wall-paintings that the Bemba make to instruct during initiation (Figure 80). Usually, I was told, the initiate sits down with her back touching the painting while the man jumps from side to side and performs the symbolic hunting (see Richards 1956:106).



Figure 80. Covered initiate with her back to the wall painting. See the man holding the bow and the arrow on the right, Moto Moto Museum, Mbala, northern Zambia 2007.

The hole in which the man has to shoot an arrow is known as *mushintililo* and the women told me that *mushintililo* represents a mat where the couple is going to sleep; it represents the union between a man and a woman. Richards (1956:107) describes this part of the ceremony and mentions that the round spot on the wall represents the vagina. The hole is placed at the top of the wall painting, very close to the roof of the hut. The man must shoot straight otherwise people will laugh at him because it means that, if he fails to shoot straight, he will also do the same in bed (Figure 81). The arrow represents the penetration and fertilisation of the woman (Smith 1997:45). Richards comments that, when the groom has effectively aimed at the spot, the women make comments such as: "See, he has shot her! He has wounded her!, He has got the mark" (Richards 1956:107; see van Riet Lowe 1937:411 footnote for an interesting note from the District Commissioner from Mpika, Zambia on this topic).



Figure 81. Left: man trying to aim at the hole on top of *mushintililo*. Right: a closer look of the hole. Moto Moto Museum, Mbala, northern Zambia 2007.

I have never seen a man shooting arrows into animal figures in the *Chinamwali* ceremonies that I have attended, but similar performances have been recorded in central Malaŵi (*e.g.*, Van Breugel 2001). Van Breugel describes a symbolic hunting that takes place on the last day of the *Chinamwali*: the day of the *Chingondo* (*tsiku la chingondo*). The girl carries an animal-like figure on the head and will walk with it to the *bwalo* and:

> While the girls are on their way to the *bwalo* they are stopped by the *namkungwi*, who carries a small bow and arrows. She stands on one side of the path, and the girls on the other. While she aims at one after another, she sings *Nyama yanga ma e*. *Nyama yanga ma e* (my animal). After that each girl jumps to the other side of the path. Then they proceed together to the *bwalo* (Van Breugel 2001:196).

Van Breugel mentions also that, on the last day of the ceremony, the husband carries a bow and an arrow and he acts as if he is defending his wife from on-lookers. However, by that time the woman is not wearing a headdress. Similarly in Zambia, Bruwer (1949:156 footnote 1) writes that according to one of his informants, a leopard figure is made by the *namkungwi* over which the man (the future husband of the girl) has to jump and pierce it with his arrow to show that the initiate is his wife and that other men should stay away.

The symbolic meaning of the hunting probably has multiple layers. However, the meanings are deeper than simple hunting and claiming of the bride. In Malaŵi, when I attended the creation process of the *chingondo*, while the initiates were sitting at the *mtengo* and the women prepared the clay figures, two girls went to the *bwalo* and with a fake voice announced to the public "*Nyama, nyama*" (the animal, the animal) (Figure 82; Video 8. Girls announcing the initiates as *nyama*).



Figure 82. Girls announcing the *Chingondo* at the *bwalo*, central Malaŵi 2006.

These girls act as messengers to announce that the initiate is coming out of the bush to dance with the *chingondo* in front of the community. Bruwer (1949:163) also mentions that when the girls wear the *timbwidza*, the *namkungwi* will refer to the initiates as "*Nyamayo*! *Nyamayo*!", which alludes to wild animals. This leads to an important point that I want to raise: the initiates are symbolically transformed into animals and this realization is important if we are to understand another aspect of why animal bodies were used in the White Spread-eagled tradition as I discuss in the next chapter.

There are a variety of signs that show that initiates are symbolized as animals. First, the *namwali* wears a headdress resembling a wild animal, second she is symbolically hunted and lastly she is announced to the community as an animal. Moreover, the initiate's bodies are covered with dots and this spotted pattern is the same as the one that is painted on the MCI. Mtonga told me that, in Lundazi, eastern Zambia, the dots used by the Chewa to decorate the girl, marks her as a young leopard. Then, she will leave the forest and enter the village and other women will walk with her. Sometimes she will be put on the roof of a house and will dance there (Mtonga pers. comm. 2007).

Furthermore, the place where the *chingondo* is created is also important. The *chingondo* is made in the bush not in the village; wild animals reside in the bush and the initiate remains there also (see Kaspin [1999] for further discussion). Boucher (2002b:44) points out that the helmet and spots on the body make a "symbolic connection between the girl and the animal to be hunted (by men) through betrothal".

Although it is difficult to know when the Chewa started using these animal headdresses for the first time for the initiation, there is a legend about this that Yoshida recorded in eastern Zambia. This legend is known to *Nyau* members and it says that the *Nyau* animal masks were originally created "to imitate the clay animal figures made by the women at the *chinamwali* ceremony. *Nyau* members proudly say, "The women's figures do not move, but the *nyau yolemba* we make can be worn and made to dance" (Yoshida 1993:45). However, I think that, in a way, *chingondo* dances too, but on the head of the *namwali*. A similar story has been recorded in Malawi. This myth states that women originally owned the masks and then men took them for themselves (Schoffeleers 1976:62; Birch de Aguilar 1996:34).

I agree with Yoshida that it is difficult to say if this legend refers to an historical process in which the masks started to be made. It is safe to say that by making masks and controlling the secrets of death, men position themselves in the life cycle and take over another life realm to that controlled by women: fertility, reproduction and rain.

The initiates learn the secrets of birth and the rules of the tradition when they interact with the *chingondo* and the *vilengo*. This interaction varies as the *namwali* has to wear the object or dance around it. But in these two cases, a direct relationship is established between the person and the object. Mircea Eliade writes for girls' initiation in general that:

> The girl is *shown* to be adult, that is, to be ready to assume the mode of being a proper woman. To show something ceremonially — a sign, an object, an animal, a man — is to declare a sacred presence, to acclaim the miracle of a

> hierophany. [...] perhaps even before articulate language, solemnly showing an object signified that it was regarded as exceptional, singular, mysterious, sacred (Eliade 1958:43).

In the case of *Chinamwali*, the objects have their own power but the objects would not be as powerful if they were not associated with words. The objects are regarded as exceptional, but in the context of initiation they are full of symbolism because of the associated elements such as signing, drumming, clapping and dancing. The words activate the power of beliefs through repetition and constant rhythm. Initiation is a context in which meanings are agreed and this process is strongly related to language because it is through language that knowledge is coded and passed on. In *Chinamwali* it is through songs and riddles that the meanings of the artefacts are passed on to the new generations. It is the combination of words and objects that make *Chinamwali* to be successful as memory operates better with repetition and thus instructions are better remembered. These objects are still made today but are slowly disappearing. Some girls are going to school and not all girls attend initiation (see Banda [2008] for further discussion on education amongst the Chewa of Zambia).

Human cognitive abilities deal not just with the words and mental aspects of reality but through our interaction with objects, with the real world and "in general upon interaction with symbolic artefacts which operate within the prevailing social world" (Renfrew 1998:3). At the same time "material culture is not only reflective of social relations and of cognitive categories: it is to a large extent constitutive of these also" (Hodder & Hutson 2003). To be able to understand the importance of these objects within the initiation context it is necessary to consider them both as operating in the social world and to be reflective of it. *Chingondo* and *vilengo* are objects that stand for the transition stage of the initiate and thus are destroyed. Moreover, the power of these object transfers into the girl who is expected to become pregnant shortly after the ceremony.

Chapter Six: Rock art of girls' initiation

Bringing the data together

In previous chapters I demonstrated that the group of images Smith (1997) termed the White Spread-eagled tradition were made by women and served as mnemonic devices. The rock art was a part of material culture that had a specific function during girls' initiation ceremonies. This chapter combines the data and information introduced in previous chapters and explores how the present material culture of initiation (MCI) helps us to understand the ways the paintings were used in the past.

In Chapter 5, I used published sources to discuss how modern MCI is created, used and disposed of in the context of girls' initiation. I also introduced new data that I recorded during my fieldwork in 2003, 2006 and 2007. As I have shown, little was previously known about the MCI of the Chewa. A few reports (*e.g.*, Werner 1906; Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965; Yoshida 1992) claim that Chewa people made various clay figures for initiation purposes; such as figures of animals drawn on the floor (Werner 1906), large mud figures covered in white, black and red spots and low relief mud figure drawings with sand or maize (Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965). However, nothing detailed has been written about them until recently. In the 1990s, Yoshida (1992) acknowledged their symbolic importance for the first time. Nevertheless, Yoshida's (1993, 2005) statement that women no longer make figures for initiation is incorrect. I was fortunate to record three examples of clay reliefs in three different villages of eastern Zambia (Chapter 5).

The *vilengo* that Yoshida published in 1992 and some of the spread-eagled designs in the rock paintings are very similar in shape. Although similarity is not enough to make symbolic correspondences between images, a point I discuss below, this similarity helps us to envisage the paintings as also full of symbolic meaning. As I discussed in the last chapter, matrilineal people of the area of research use their own set of symbols represented in various media: paintings, clay reliefs and figurines. The importance of the repeated use of spread-eagled designs in the clay figures and in the paintings, amongst the Chewa, lies not just in their formal correspondence but also in

the possibility that three-dimensional objects (3D) and paintings (2D) went through a similar procedure of creation, usage and disposal and were used in similar symbolic ways for initiation. I shall come back to this point.

Another element that I have emphasized is that Chewa people have interacted over long periods with neighbouring groups. This means that the rock art must be understood in an historical context (Chapter 2). This historical interaction, however, needs also to be understood as a complex chain of relationships established through time. Such relationships impacted on the ways in which traits of the girls' initiation were adopted and passed on.

To explain how the rock art was used in the past, I have combined various sources of information, such as the historical and ethnographic accounts of the region, the oral traditions, contemporary knowledge and archaeological evidence. Although there are no historical accounts of rock paintings being used in initiation, I have drawn on historical accounts and recorded oral traditions to highlight certain features relating to the ancestors of the Chewa — the people who created the rock paintings.

I have principally used Chewa ethnography to consider the uses of the paintings in the past because of the strong historical link that has been established between the Chewa and the paintings. It is important, however, to stress that I have also used other ethnographies from neighbouring groups because the Chewa are part of a larger group of matrilineal, western Bantu–speaking people.

Matrilineality is an organizing principle in the social life of the Chewa, Yao, Nsenga, Bemba and Mang'anja people and, as Brian Morris points out, the village is focused around a "group of matrilineally related women under the guardianship of a senior relative, usually an elder brother (*mwini mbunma*), and residence is uxorilocal" (Morris 2000a:18). Cullen Young called these people "people of one stock", stating that the Chewa, Nsenga, Undi, Mbo, Makua, Nyanja and Mang'anja are "*practically* one people" and, further, that "all, with the possible exception of the Nsenga, were at one time, we believe, sharers of a common name, Maravi" (Young 1950b:37).

Authors like Jean Sybil La Fontein (1986) have argued that these and others people constitute what is called the **matrilineal belt of Africa.**

The matrilineal people all commonly use mime, song, dance and sacred objects for their girls' initiation ceremonies (*ibid.*); however, this does not necessarily mean that the symbolic meaning given to their objects is the same. It is the similarity in the ways of instructing amongst these matrilineal peoples of south-central Africa that I find most helpful for my work because it gives insight into the means by which they pass on knowledge during their girls' initiation ceremonies. For the Bemba, every *mbusa* has a song; for the Nsenga every *vilengo* is accompanied by singing and dancing; for the Yao every *inyago* is characterised by riddles and songs and for the Chewa the *vilengo* and *chingondo*/*timbwidza* are related to songs and dances. Also the Chewa each *Nyau* masked performance is related to a specific song.

Despite the challenges of using ethnographic analogy (see Chapter 4) I am confident that it is useful to use accounts from neighbouring matrilineal groups and with a degree of linguistic affinity to gain insights into the ways the ancestors of the Chewa may have used the paintings in the past. I explore this possibility by using a specific example drawn from the material I recorded in Mbala, Zambia amongst the Bemba people.

Using an ethnographic approach I therefore now discuss some of the possible ways in which the paintings may have been used in the past. Further, I consider some of the symbolic aspects of the material culture so as to understand why women chose, principally, a white spread-eagled design to instruct the girls in the important teaching of the *mwambo*.

Understanding the links

Material culture can be studied within different theoretical frameworks, but it is possible to state, in general terms, that objects must have a specific purpose once they have been transformed by humans (Buchli 2004). For the White Spread-eagled rock art tradition of south-central Africa the specific purpose was to instruct. Material

culture (*e.g.*, rock paintings, ceramics, stone tools, and so on) not only reflects society (Hodder & Hutson 2003:6) but also allows for the creation and reinvention of society through its interaction with people. Thus, it is possible for archaeologists to reveal certain aspects of these interactions through the analysis of archaeological material. Rock paintings and engravings are part of a wider set of material culture, and they are one of the ways in which people express themselves.

The Chewa no longer paint as part of initiation. There is, however, an historic link between the paintings of the White Spread-eagled tradition and the modern girls' initiation ceremony. David Phillipson had some hints from the local people, with whom he worked, that women made these paintings and he wrote a brief but significant section on his ideas (Phillipson 1976: chapter 18). Smith (1997) suggested for the first time the specific link between the *Chinamwali* ceremony of the Chewa people and the paintings.

The links between the paintings and the ceremonies is still part of the memories of some of the women in my area of research. In Dedza District, central Malawi some women still remember that rock paintings at Mwana wa Chentcherere II rock shelter played a role in *Chinamwali* ceremonies; this was the first time that this link has been orally confirmed by Chewa women (Zubieta 2006). Most of the women that I have talked to during my research, however, claimed not to know about the meanings of the paintings and sometimes not even about the relationship with initiation. In the few villages that I visited in Mozambique, women did not know about the paintings at all. Fortunately, some crucial information was retrieved: one of the women that I talked to in 2006 at Mkwanda village, central Malawi, said that she remembered that she was told that some of the paintings were accompanied by songs.

I was expecting people to know about the paintings and that is why I had initially planned to visit the villages that were closest to the rock art sites. The Chongoni Forest Reserve seemed an ideal place to start my research because I had been there in 2003 and thus knew the area and some of the people. Also, Smith (1995) had already located sites in the area and this provided me with a base from which to

work. Although I presumed that the women would be familiar with the meanings of the paintings, most were not. Young boys who tend goats or who hunt for birds in the mountains are the ones who have seen the paintings. Women also collect firewood in the mountains and some of them knew about the existence of the paintings.

Women in general know that the paintings were done for initiation ceremonies, but that is the extent of their knowledge. It is difficult to find people who know about the meanings of the paintings. Mwana wa Chentcherere II is a special case because the old *namkungwi* of the village remembered her grandmother telling her the meanings of some of the images in the painted panel at that site: a baboon, a dance, the initiate taken to the river, stars and the moon (Zubieta 2006:94–100).

In Mkopoka village, central Malaŵi, I was told that the paintings were related to *timbwidza* and that old women used to go to the mountain in the past, but they also emphasized that the paintings were made by God so people should learn the rules of their culture. They said that when the women found these paintings they took this knowledge back into the village. I think that this statement has various implications: first, perhaps they did not know who made the paintings; second, that they knew but they did not want to tell me; or third that this is in fact what they knew — that the rules for initiation came from the mountains. It is possible to posit that the secrets of the initiation were once given only at the shelters. This would be in line with what the old *namkungwi* told me at Mwana wa Chentcherere II: special teachings are given in a secretive place at night.

My expectations were raised one morning in 2006 at the Chongoni Forest Reserve when I heard a man in Dzololo village saying that some of the paintings were related to *Chinamwali*. Although I do not deny that men are knowledgeable about some of the women's secrets it surprised me that he was so open about it. I asked him how he knew, and he said it was "all in the book". I wondered what he meant by 'book' so when we went to his house, he brought two sheets of paper written in ChiChewa that said that the local people were to be proud of their heritage and to

protect the paintings of Chongoni because some were related to *Nyau* and others to *Chinamwali*.

Later, I found that the Department of Antiquities had recently started (I do not know exactly when) an awareness campaign. Thereafter I was very careful when I recorded knowledge that people had about the paintings. I think it is important to create awareness of the paintings. Every time that I went to the villages and talked to the women I discussed with them the importance of protecting the paintings, mostly because they were made by their ancestors. However, the awareness campaign increased the need for me to distinguish between what people knew because of what they had read and what was information coming from their oral traditions (see Henige [1973] for discussion on feedback and oral traditions; Linden 1971:62). Fortunately, I found some remote areas where the Antiquities information had not reached yet, like Mkwanda village. The information that the lady gave me about the relationship between the paintings and songs is something that she could not have learned from the so-called 'book' or pamphlet. The relationship of songs to paintings is an aspect that has not been researched or published, thus I knew that I was dealing with original data. Unfortunately, the lady did not know the songs, but the fact that she knew that paintings were related to songs supported a hypothesis that had been previously presented (see Smith 1995; Zubieta 2006).

Although the practice of painting in rockshelters, in some areas such as eastern Zambia, continued into the second quarter of the twentieth century (see Phillipson 1976); I realized that people in general seem not to remember the connections between the paintings and the ceremonies for a number of reasons. The nineteenth century was a troubled period for south-central Africa because the ancestors of the Chewa were not only raided by various local groups but also suffered the impact of the newcomers, the Western world, through colonization by missionaries and the imposition of a new religion. In Mozambique, for example, Angus reported in 1898 that the people who used to live in the area of research, left because of the constant attacks of the Ngoni people. However, he also writes that after a while, the people returned to settle their ancestral land and that intermarriage in the central-western

portion of Mozambique had "produced a race very different in language and customs from the old Manganja tribe"(Angus 1898b:318).

The importance of Angus's account is that people intermarried and changed. Nevertheless, we must remember that the circumstances and the variables might have been different across the land and across time. Much later, in the same region, during the civil war in Mozambique, people also fled to other countries to find refuge but then, I was told when I was in Furancungo, returned again to their ancestral land after many years. I have discussed (Chapter 2) the impact that the Ngoni and the Yao had on Chewa life in central Malawi and that the people who inhabit the region in the present are a mix of cultures in which *Chinamwali* has survived.

The rock paintings: creation process, use and disposal

I argue that the core of the initiation instructions will not have changed drastically over recent centuries because the rules which the girls have to learn are more or less fixed: respect the elders, be a good wife, be a good mother, abstain from sexual intercourse while in the menstrual period, and so on. However, to pass on the knowledge and the rules of society effectively means that the instructor — the *namkungwi* — had to find a way for these instructions to be understood and remembered throughout women's lives. For this purpose, women devised various aids. One of them was the use of a specific set of objects that made those rules easier to remember and that also added an element of drama.

I have divided the MCI into five groups based on the literature and my own data: figurines, floor clay reliefs, wall paintings, floor drawings and floor sculptures. I discussed them in the previous chapter. Some of the matrilineal people that I have introduced in this thesis use some of these MCI to instruct the girls. In this light, rock art can be regarded as a sixth group of MCI, even though women do not paint in the shelters anymore. In this chapter I follow the same structure as Chapter 5 and discuss the creation process, uses and disposal of the rock paintings. I base my conclusions on the evidence that I introduced in the last chapter from the published ethnographic

accounts, the ethnographic data that I collected, and also from the archaeological evidence.

The creation process of rock paintings

There is some consistency in the ways different kinds of material culture are created for initiation purposes. These objects, as I have discussed, are full of power. Moreover, as Mtonga's comment on *vilengo* shows, these objects have a "soul" because they have been created: and are thus animated. Therefore, these characteristics confer on the *namkungwi* a special role as she is the only one who is allowed to create the MCI for the ceremony. Using the modern parallels, and assuming these are relevant, it is possible to suggest how the paintings were produced: the *namkungwi* would have been in charge of the selection of materials used for painting and of appointing the people who were to be involved in the creation process. Sometimes other women would have helped her to paint the designs on the rock shelter wall but only with her approval. This was the work of women and no men would have been allowed nearby.

It is highly possible that the shelter was spread with special medicine to protect the initiates, as happens with the *bwalo* or the *mtengo* nowadays. The techniques that women would have employed to apply the pigments varied; one can see that they sometimes used a thick brush to make crude strokes but other times they just dipped their fingers in the white paint and spread the pigment on the rock. It is still possible to see the traces of fingers in the rock paintings (Figure 83).



Figure 83. Traces of fingers on the rock paintings at Chongoni 25, central Malaŵi 2006.

As I have shown, some MCI such as the *chingondo* are made in front of the *namwali*, and I think this happens because these will be shown in front of a big audience at the end of the ceremony. I think that for the rock paintings, however, the convention was to keep the creation process secret from the initiate, as happens with the things inside the *tsimba* nowadays, but, if for some reason the instructress had to paint a new one, in the presence of the initiate, she could do it because of her status. I have seen that when the instructress faces technical difficulties, for example not getting the right colour for the dots on the *chingondo* or some unexpected event happened, the women always make a plan to overcome the situation.

Therefore, I believe that probably the *namkungwi* and the *aphungu* went beforehand to the shelters to paint the new images or retouch the ones that were going to be used for that specific *Chinamwali*. The girls were not supposed to know how the paintings were made. By the time they reached the place of initiation the girls found a shelter covered with spread-eagled designs, dots, circles and snake-life forms amongst others. The *anamwali* were probably told that the paintings were made by God. I think this is a possibility that I have to consider. The women nowadays think that God made

the paintings for them to learn the tradition as I have discussed. Thus, it is possible that these were the last memories they heard about the paintings.

Some of the paintings were made carefully, the painter trying to apply the white pigment evenly inside the spread-eagled designs. If the body was made out of dots, the dots were placed evenly. Sometimes the white pigment had so much water, that when it was applied, the outline of the design was not smooth. This did not reflect negatively on the skill of the painter. The primary concern would have been whether or not the painting served its purpose.

The most vivid example of the creation process of paintings that I witnessed is the one I recorded amongst the Bemba. I did not discuss the wall paintings that Bemba women use for the initiation in the previous chapter because I want to introduce them in this section: they are the closest MCI to the rock paintings made on the walls of the shelters. When I visited Mbala in 2007, I asked the women if I could see how they create the *mbusa*. The wall paintings are also called *mbusa*. Using this example it is possible that the rock paintings in the past were also called *vilengo* or something similar to refer to various images on the rock, or *chilengo* to refer to one image. Nevertheless each image no doubt had its own name as happens with the names of the wall paintings amongst the Bemba.

The ladies whom I met are part of the *Mbusa Club*, and they teach people about initiation. They are allowed to use the Corbeil *mbusa* collection at the Moto Moto Museum and they had an already prepared blackboard (3m x 1.5m) showing some of the images (Figure 84). These paintings look very similar to a photograph and a video of a *Chisungu* ceremony that Mtonga showed me in Lusaka in 2007 (Figure 85). Rasing (1995) published a panel of similar drawings and discussed in detail their meaning. She also mentioned that, once the women finished making the drawings, they were covered with a mat. Mtonga also mentioned that the paintings are covered with a mat so the girls will not see the paintings beforehand (pers. comm. 2007).



Figure 84. Images that are drawn on the wall for initiation purposes amongst the Bemba people, Mbala, Zambia 2007.

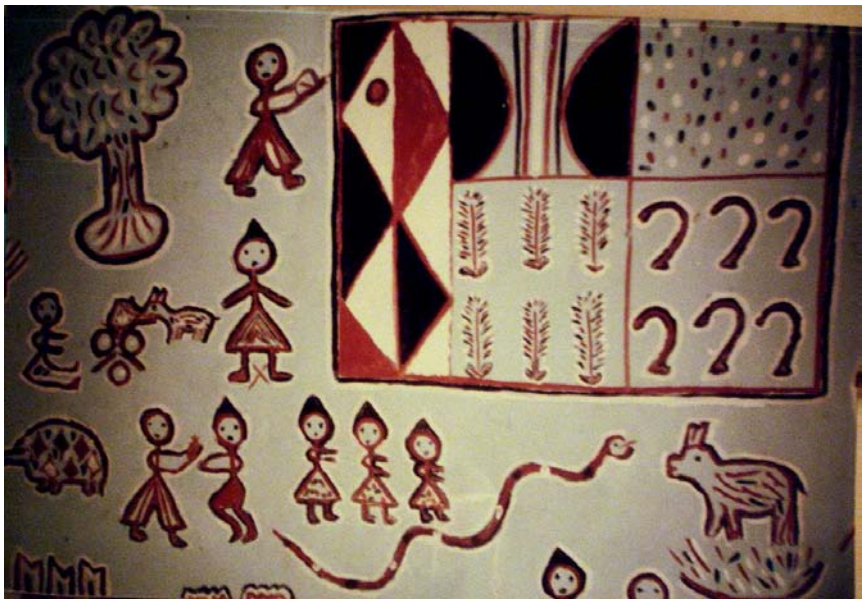


Figure 85. Example of wall paintings used for *Chisungu*, (unpublished photo: Mapopa Mtonga 2007).

At the Moto Moto Museum, there is a reproduction of an initiation hut with yet another kind of painting inside, different from the ones that are painted on the board. These are the geometric designs that also serve to instruct the girls. I mentioned them briefly in Chapter 5. Richards (1956) states that most of the *mbusa* wall designs have a name and a secret interpretation. She recorded nine of them at the *Chisungu* that she attended in 1931. They were made out of black, white and red

pigments applied with grass brushes. She believed that these *mbusa* wall designs and their names can be "reckoned as the most esoteric part of the chisungu" (Richards 1956:81); she uses 'esoteric' here to denote the "information that is so detailed that only very intelligent members of the society, or ritual specialists, are able to verbalize it in answer to a question" (*ibid.*:113). Unfortunately, Richards did not have much time to discuss these designs with the *nacimbusa*.

At the Moto Moto Museum there are eleven *mbusa* wall paintings inside the initiation hut. I shall give three examples of what some of these represent according to the staff members of the Museum and some members of the *Mbusa Club* (Figure 86):

Likumbi (clouds): 	If a girl wants to have a good marriage she needs to be prepared in advance: she needs to know how to cook, clean, respect elders and so on. The cloud is thick and rain will fall. The first signs of rain start with a cloud. If the girl does not know how to cook she is in trouble. This painting tells girls to prepare for the future life as a wife.

***Kasengele*:** 	This painting instructs the woman to be ready if the husband wants sex. She should not disagree. However, if she is suspicious, she should discourage the husband because he might have been with another woman. This teaches about adultery.
***Ntanda*:** 	This painting has various meanings. The representation of the star means that women need to keep the fire burning and that it is up to the woman to control the temperature in the house (*i.e.* hot and cool taboo). The house should be clean and the woman should be prepared to have sex with her husband and should not put conditions. She has to be beautiful and she should smell nice thus she needs to wash properly.

Figure 86. Examples of *mbusa* wall paintings, Mbala, northern Zambia 2007.

These geometric images are always painted in red, black and white colours. They give us an idea of the complexity of the teachings that can lie behind geometric designs and the symbolism that can be associated with them. It also shows that in order to know the meanings of these paintings it is crucial to go through the initiation. Because I expressed my interest in the creation process, the *nacimbusa* reproduced for me what the Bemba women do when they paint. She used the blackboard to show me what happens in this process. This was one of the most important moments for me during my fieldwork because I could see how various elements were combined in the creation process of the paintings.

The *nacimbusa* took a container with white paint and a brush while the other women were playing the drums. The *nacimbusa* started to dance and move her hips at the rhythm of the drums and she began singing. She opened with the first verse of the song on her own and then the other women followed her and sang the same verse with her; they repeated the verse four times. Sometimes the women ululated after the verse was completed. Next, the *nacimbusa* started the second verse and the other women followed the same procedure. While the *nacimbusa* was dancing and singing, she painted on the board: a circle with internal divisions. Some of the other women who were looking at the *nacimbusa* while she was paintings were also dancing. The following photographs are a static representation of the activities that I recorded in which drumming, singing and dancing were involved (Figure 87; Video 9. Creation process of *mbusa* drawings).







Figure 87. Creation process of *mbusa* drawings. Mbala, northern Zambia 2007.

This occasion helps us to think about how it must have been when the ancestors of the Chewa women painted in rockshelters. The process of creating the paintings was probably something that did not happen in silence. The act of painting must have been accompanied by other elements of the ceremony: singing and dancing were probably two of the most important components of a successful creation process.

Drawn from the examples in Chapter 5, for example amongst the Bemba and the Chewa, the one who creates is also regarded as a special person with special knowledge that is recognized by the women who participate in the ceremony. She creates the object using her own skills and personal touch, however, she will not create something that is far from the general principles that she has been taught to follow. This surely was the same with the rock paintings. Deborah Hoover has argued that amongst the Bemba "the craftsmanship of a particularly skilled *nacimbusa* is recognizable, and families will pay more for the services of one who is both a talented artist and a gifted educator. The knowledge she imparts, not the objects themselves, is considered both secret and sacred" (Hoover 2000:42).

Pigments and colours

It is important to realize that preparing the materials prior to the creation process is also a collective work. For the rock art, the pigments were probably collected in advance by the ladies who were in charge of the ceremony at the rockshelter. The common colours found in the paintings are white and black. Some of the pigments come from the banks of rivers where the soil is white. Smith (1995:95) mentions that

in Dedza district, central Malaŵi, close to the Linthipe 2 road-bridge, suitable white clay deposits were noted and are still used by the local people to make whitewash.

The black pigment most probably came from charcoal chunks. I have seen that women use mostly what is handy and they improvise if something is not the right colour. On occasion women might have used special medicine mixed with the pigments. Unfortunately, this is difficult to test. One possible way would be if we knew the composition of the medicine they use today and could cross-check it against the remaining organic material in the pigment. However, we do not know if the way they prepare medicines is the same as it was in the past (*e.g.*, the same ingredients). To know if they added anything to the pigments is also very difficult as the Chewa have various kinds of medicines and the preparation of these medicines is secret knowledge and therefore cannot be discussed.

Colours can mean various things at the same time. Apthorpe (1962:13), for example, comments that the colours red and white connote the female and male principle amongst the Nsenga. In the correspondence that I maintained with him, we discussed issues of symbolism and he mentioned something that highlights the complexity of meanings attached to colours:

> However, I used to go mad with intellectual confusion when talking with the anyapunghu because almost as soon as they assured me that white [was] for man, they'd add that white was for woman; red yes definitely was for woman, but also, you've guessed it, man… black though was for death, or was it power....my confusion, their confusion, or their or my knowledge, ignorance, secrecy....could really have been any or none of these things, or just the ambiguities of symbolism (Apthorpe pers. comm. 2006)

These warnings made me think about how the same colours are used by the various matrilineal groups in the area of research; people who share similar ideas and practices. However, this does not necessarily mean that they attach the same meanings to colours, although some overlap is likely.

The significance of colour is a complex research focus on its own. Therefore in this section I mention only general discussions of the topic and, more specifically, of the significance of red, black and white. The study of colour deals not just with the simple identification of colours that are used for different purposes by the people we seek to learn from but also, more profoundly, with the recognition of colours as symbols that stand for ideas or concepts.

The most comprehensive study of colour symbolism in central Africa is that by Anita Jacobson-Widding (1979). She studied the colour symbolism used in the rituals of the peoples of the Lower Congo and her aim was to relate a coherent system of symbols (the use of colours) to a coherent system of cultural values. Taking a stand in opposition to structuralist analysis, she concluded that Lévi-Strauss's approach (1963, 1966) omitted something important. According to him, the world is seen in oppositions: black-white, good-bad, hot-cold and so on. However, in some instances there is no straightforward binary equation.

She also refers to Turner's work (1967:59-92) on the Ndembu people of Zambia and their use of red, black and white. She states that the only difference between Lévi-Strauss and Turner is that the latter concluded that there is a difference between white and black as opposites but at the end he 'swept' red under the carpet by incorporating it into white (Jacobson-Widding 1976). Turner's analysis, however, is more than just a simplistic conclusion. He realized that the classic structuralist and dualist point of view does not do justice to the complexity of the tripartite mode of classification that he was identifying amongst the Ndembu people. Indeed, Turner (1967:80) arrived at the conclusion that red and white falls under the general rubric of life as opposed to black which represented death. However, he also thought of red as a mediator and acknowledged that red, for the Ndembu, is an ambivalent colour that simultaneously posses two contrary values or qualities and he states "redness acts both for good and ill" (*ibid*.: 77).

Turner also came to the conclusion that there was no fixed correlation between colours and sexes because this depends on the context or situation, although red and

white may be "situationally specified to represent the opposition of the sexes" (Turner 1976:61). He also arrived at the conclusion that the critical situation in which these three colours appear together is initiation because "they epitomize the main kinds of universal human organic experience" (*ibid*.:88). He means that many societies use these colours to refer to fluids, secretions or waste products of the human body. Amongst the Ndembu, he mentions, the *muakula* tree secretes a red gum thus it symbolizes blood and is used at the post-circumcision phase of the *Mukanda* boys' circumcision ritual. On the other hand, the *mudyi* tree or 'milk tree' is related to matriliny, tribal custom and breast milk. The tree itself is noticeable because it exudes white latex and it is used at the *Nkang'a* girls' initiation but also during the process of circumcision of the boys (*ibid*.:20-21, 31). Thus the complexity of associations lies in the way colours (red, black and white) are represented in various situations.

The MCI of initiation of the people to whom I have referred, such as the *vilengo* of the Nsenga, the *mbusa* of the Bemba and the *chingondo* and *vilengo* of the Chewa is always covered with red, black and white colours with the exceptions of the elephant at Khombe village (Chapter 5) and the *inyago* of the Yao which do not include the colour red. Jacobson-Widding observes in reference to this triad that:

> It is the most overt manifestation of classification in central-African cultures, it is concrete and palpable as a symbolic system, and the ritual combination of these colours has been observed by many authors, which facilitates comparison of the evidence (Jacobson-Widding 1976:16).

The main problem that she noticed is that the mode of classification into oppositions reduces cognition to a two-value logic and does not really take into account the third element in its own right. Furthermore, she questioned whether this binary way of thinking is a universal feature of human thought. To discuss the third element she therefore employed the work of Roland Barthes (1972[34]) in which he divided the relations of signs into three levels of consciousness (talking about the analyst not the user of the sign):

[34] Jacobson-Widding, however, refers to the Swedish edition of 1967 *Kritiska Essäer*.

1) **Symbolic relation**: refers to the relation between the meaning of the sign and what the sign stands for. Barthes (*ibid*.:206) mentions that this is a profound way of looking at the sign, almost geological, because it looks at the relation of the signifier and the significant which constitutes the symbol.

2) **Syntagmatic relation**: the relation of the sign to other signs within the same system. It is important to note that Barthes deals mostly with language, thus the name *syntagmatic* alludes to the words that are united in a sentence in a sequential order; this is "the level of syntagm" (*ibid*.).

3) **Paradigmatic relation** (or that of a system): Barthes argues that this relation "implies the existence, for each sign, of a reservoir or organized 'memory' of forms from which it is distinguished by the smallest difference necessary and sufficient to effect a change of meaning" (Barthes 1972:205); this happens because when two signs are compared a paradigmatic consciousness appears. Barthes' cryptic writing about the paradigmatic relation is interpreted by Jacobson-Widding as "a relation between two symbols, which correspond to each other, although they belong to different symbolic systems" (Jacobson-Widding 1979:18).

Based on this premise, she then proceeded to analyse each colour on its own — the symbolic relation —, and then in relation to each other using both the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations. Jacobson-Widding brings to our attention that the signs have **specific** meanings in different contexts and that when we get to know them they lead us to more **general** meanings. Moreover, for her own purposes she makes a distinction between a **sign** and a **symbol** in which the former is a representation of rather specific phenomena according to a specific situation *e.g.*, white can signify milk, semen, man, and so on; while a symbol relates to a more general principle of value, for example, white can represent goodness, social order and so on. This classification is important to my research because it is necessary to

understand that colours can signify various meanings in the context of initiation, which might be different in various contexts.

Methodologically, another important aspect is that the symbolic meanings are usually difficult to discover. To secure a correct interpretation of the use of colours in the rock art it is necessary to know the symbolic system of the society who created the paintings. The information on this system that I employ comes from published ethnographic accounts and from my own fieldwork. However, Jacobson-Widding again mentions something that strongly relates to my experience:

> Native informants (members of the culture examined) seldom explain the meaning of a symbol in terms of general concepts or principles. They rather tend to stick to the level of the sign, by explaining its specific meaning in a given situational context. It is the task of the anthropologist (a stranger to the culture) to reveal the general level of meaning by applying methods of analysis which embrace both the intuitive, functional and structural elements (Jacobson-Widding 1979:22)

Drawing on Jacobson-Widding's distinction, what is important to keep secret in the context of *Chinamwali* is what she calls the sign. In the initiations that I attended I was told of meanings for the colours at a sign level and I was denied permission to reveal them. Specific signs (*e.g.*, semen, blood, and so on), however, at the same time stand for symbols: values and concepts. I have also noticed that, in the context of initiation, knowing the specific meanings of the colour as a sign is crucial because it is through remembering this specificity that the initiate acquires the general concept and meaning of the instruction. For example, if red stands for menstrual blood, the initiate will connect that idea to a general meaning of personal hygiene through a specific instruction that is given to her. However, it is only through the analysis of the data, as Jacobson-Widding emphasizes, that we can reveal the symbolic meanings of colours. I shall discuss, then, the symbolic meanings of colours in the context of *Chinamwali* drawing mostly on material that has been published and to a lesser extent on the ideas that I was permitted to comment on.

Various authors in south-central Africa have stated that red symbolizes menstrual blood as well as hunting; that black is related to death and white to fertility and purity (Richards 1956; Turner 1967; Corbeil 1982; Rasing 1995; see also Welling [1999] for discussion on colour symbolism). However, the meanings of colours, as I mentioned, are context dependent and each colour might have various meanings even within the same context. The following section is a proposal for colour symbolism in the context of *Chinamwali* and is not intended to be a definitive conclusion.

In considering use of colour in *Chinamwali* it is important to take into account that *Chinamwali* is connected to various realms in Chewa society such as the spirit world, rain-making and the woodland. The associations between realms also have an impact on colour symbolism because these realms and their symbols intertwine and get combined in explicit situations during the initiation ceremony. For example, we know that during the initiation the girls perform certain dances or acts, such as covering themselves with cloths (Boucher pers. comm. 2003) to symbolize their own death and their rebirth as adults. In this sense the sprits, along with the community, work together to teach the girl her new responsibilities.

Other crucial aspects are the concepts of 'hot' (*wotentha*) and 'cold' (*wozizira*) and the idea of *mdulo* or *tsempho* (Chapter 4). The Chewa have a very rich vocabulary to describe and give names to diseases (Morris 1985, 1996). However, there are four alleged causes for diseases: God (natural), the spirits, witchcraft and moral or ritual transgression (Morris 1985:17-18, 1996:103-142). *Mdulo* falls into the last category.

Mdulo is not only related to *Chinamwali* but to any ritual time, such as the mourning period, in which there is a transgression of a sexual taboo. *Mdulo* can affect women, men and children and also various bodily parts such as the *mimba* (womb), *mpheto* (the genitals) or *kamoto* another word for pubes that indicates the close link in Chewa thought between sexual intercourse and 'heat' (*moto*) (Morris 1985:26). However, it refers to two main medical conditions: pulmonary tuberculosis (loss of weight, coughing up of blood and fever; Drake 1976:59-61) and malnutrition (swollen

hands and feet, sores and pale coloration). Morris recorded one of his informants remark about *mdulo*:

> Is a serious disease which is very common in Malaŵi. The patient may become pale, his hair loses its pigment, he becomes thin and light, and sometimes his body swells. Unless immediate treatment is given the patient might end up vomiting blood followed by death. It is therefore very essential to follow customs (Morris 1985:29).

The idea of *mdulo* deals with notions of 'hot' and 'cool' and the necessity to keep them apart. For example, during the period of pregnancy, the woman and child are considered 'cool' but the 'heat' generated by illicit sexual intercourse can be transmitted to the child and can kill the foetus (Marwick 1965:66; Morris 1985). It is believed that the disease will 'cut' the individual; the word *mdulo* derives from *ikudula* (to cut). An innocent person in a 'cool' state can get *mdulo* if the person comes in contact, physically or through the medium of salt with a person who is in a 'hot' stage (Marwick 1965; Drake 1976; Morris 1985; van Breugel 2001). Colours stand also for 'hot' and 'cool'. Generally 'hot' equates to black and 'cool' to white but the ways these colours are used during any ceremony is not always straightforward. The rules to avoid *mdulo* make reference, according to Marwick (1965:68), "to the fertility of the soil and the fecundity of animals and men" and this aspect is a crucial component in *Chinamwali*.

Therefore, during *Chinamwali*, the girls learn the rules to avoid *mdulo*. Drake (1976:50-54) has called this *mdulo wa namwali* (*mdulo* of a *namwali*) because this *mdulo* is closely related to the ceremony and to the people involved in it. The ceremony has then to be performed in ritual cleanness. Turner (1967:97) mentions that what is socially contradictory tends to be regarded as ritually unclean and thus polluted. This is extremely important as it is, in the stage of transition, that the girl is regarded both as a source of pollution and susceptible to contamination (she cannot be in contact with people in a ritually impure state) and I think this has repercussions on the symbolism of colours that is given in the ceremony. The initiate is regarded as 'cold' and fragile (Marwick 1965:67) because sex has not begun (Drake 1976:68).

That is why at the end of the ceremony she needs to be reintroduced to the village through defloration. At the same time she is also 'hot' because of her menstrual period (*cf*. Drake 1976:68 for the opinion that menstrual blood is cold because the lack of sexual activity), thus she is in between, she is 'warm' (*wofunda*).

White

In general the colour white, in the context of initiation, refers to coolness and to various body fluids such as semen. In its association with *mdulo*, white represents the cleanness of the ceremony and the innocence and fragile stage of the initiate. The initiate is in a transition period, she is moving from 'cool' to a 'hot' state and she needs to learn to control her heat and the effects of her heat. Therefore she must learn certain rules. Salt, although white, is not regarded as a 'cool' substance because it has dangerous connotations when it is activated by women who are menstruating.

During *Chinamwali* the girls wear the *chingondo* as a headdress and this is covered in white, red and black colours. According to Mtuta (2001), white is related to the *kasiyamaliro* — the queen mother of society (Figure 88). Some of the *chingondo* are made in the shape of the *kasiyamaliro*. Father Boucher (pers. comm. 2003) observed that the white flour symbolizes the maturation of the sexual organs and that *chingondo* means that new generations will come from the girl's womb (Chapter 5). I have pointed out elsewhere that *kasiyamaliro* is the representation of the eland (*ntchefu*) (Yoshida 1992:239, 1993:39) and has been identified as the most important *nyau* (Morris 2000b:144). The word *kasiyamaliro* means to 'leave (referring to follow) the funeral', the *nyau* that parts from the funeral (Rangeley 1950:21; Smith 2001:190).

The *kasiyamaliro* mask although important in funerals is a crucial component of *Chinamwali*; it is the one that closes the ceremony. There are important connections between various domains during the initiation and *kasiyamaliro* reminds us that there is a ritual cycle of birth, death and rebirth that is played out. Spirits, represented by the presence of *Nyau*, are regarded as 'cool'. The presence of *kasiyamaliro*, in the initiation ceremony, probably also therefore symbolizes the

blessing of the ancestors. Some women in Dedza district mentioned that there is a *kasiyamaliro* for each *namkungwi* of the headman; these are *anamkungwi* that have been chosen by the headman to perform as his female advisors and I was told, in central Malaŵi in 2006, that these women are also initiated in *Nyau*.



Figure 88. *Kasiyamaliro*, Khombe village, central Malaŵi 2006.

Black

The colour black is related to heat and to the things that might hurt the initiates because they are impure and dangerous. Turner (1967:82) mentions that black has auspicious connotations in many African societies. Black is related to rain and fertility. Among the Chewa it is the colour of the cloth that covers the sacred rain drum, the *mbiriwiri*, and it is also the colour in which Makewana used to dress (Rangeley 1952; Schoffeleers 1973, 1992; van Breugel 2001; Smith & Blundell in press). Morris (2000b:218) notes that rain rituals emphasize water, coolness, blackness and the fertility of the land. In this sense, blackness is emphasized in rain making because the earth is heated up thus the rain will fall and cool the land. Thus, black can also represents storm clouds containing rain (Rangeley 1952:45). I have pointed out that the girls' initiation ceremonies and the rain-making ceremonies were once one. It is possible that some older symbolism of the colour black is still retained in *Chinamwali*. Black attracts clouds with rain that will fall onto the land and cause new crops grow. In this sense, black might be used also to attract the fertility of the girl.

On the other hand, heat is also dangerous and black is related to death, witchcraft and evil and I think that black colour, in the context of *Chinamwali*, might be used as a mnemonic device to teach the girls about the dangers of being 'hot'. A woman can kill her husband and her children if she is not aware of the dangers of her menstrual blood and of moral violations against the *mwambo*. It is important, however, to note that 'hot' and 'cool' are not thought of as moral categories, as good versus bad. Van Breugel (2001:175) mentions that "what is wrong is to disregard the rules determining one's behaviour with respect to these conditions and so to risk causing *mdulo* to someone".

Red

The colour red in *Chinamwali* stands for menstrual blood. This could be regarded as bad blood but, because of menstruation, the initiate is also in the position to give birth, so I think that this blood is regarded as important. Thus, red is an ambiguous colour in the context of *Chinamwali*. Red is also the colour that represents the transitional phase of the girl.

Turner (1967:97-98) mentions that girls during the initiation are 'invisible' because although they have a physical reality they do not have a social one thus they must be hidden. Transitional beings are dangerous and polluting since they are betwixt and between. Mary Douglas (1966:112) mentions that pollution "transmits danger by contact" thus pollution rules prohibit physical contact and they tend to be applied to "products or functions of human physiology, thus they regulate contact with blood, excreta, vomit, hair clippings, nail clipping, cooked food, and so on" (Douglas 1968:340). In Chewa society menstrual blood is highly feared and, following Douglas's ideas (1966:133), I think that pollution beliefs help to give order to the ambiguous social stage of the initiate because they are related intimately with the moral code (see Drake 1976:11 discussion on pollution and *mdulo*).

Because of her transitional status, the initiate is regarded as 'warm' and it is in this state that she needs to learn about the consequences of her acts as they can

propitiate *mdulo.* She can harm her parents and also the headman of the village if she does not inform him that she has had her first period (van Breugel 2001). Pollution beliefs, in this sense, play into and reinforce the cultural and social structures (Douglas 1975:54).

Regarding material culture, Kaspin (1999:91) mentions that the red and black dots that decorate the *chingondo* represent the blood from menstruation and from the spearing in the symbolic hunting (Chapter 5). Red is also a colour associated with 'hotness' (van Breugel 2001) and thus symbolizes danger and caution. However, this hotness is not the same as the type represented by black; red is in between, it evokes liminality and mediates between 'hot' and 'cool'.

After briefly discussing the symbols of red, black and white colours it is evident that these general meanings could and should relate to the rock paintings in some manner and that they link to the big overall purpose: to teach the *mwambo*. However, this is also a challenge because red, black and white colours can stand for various things at different levels of instruction, as I explain below. However, if we take a close look at the paintings we can observe that the triad of colours is not present. Red is missing. This is one of the most striking differences between the rock paintings and the MCI that I discussed in Chapter 5.

The images painted on the rock do not follow exactly the same pattern as the *vilengo* or *chingondo*. Although the *chingondo* in the form of an elephant that I recorded at Khombe village did not have dots, every other *chingondo* was decorated with black and red dots. The *chilengo* that I recorded in Zambia were decorated with all three colours. In the case of the rock paintings, the dots are either only white or black.

Generally the body of the spread-eagled designs, the geometrics, the snake-like forms and the rows of dots are white, although sometimes the pigment can be slightly pinkish or yellow. This variation is caused by soil intrusions in the white clay. Some

of the spread-eagled designs are also covered with dots and there are four types of dot placement and colour:

1) Black dots over the spread-eagled designs (Mwana wa Chentcherere II, Chongoni 25, Maungo 2, Mphunzi 3, Chongoni 39). This is the most common type and examples of this are found in central Malaŵi and in Mozambique. On a few occasions a black line is placed in the middle of the body (Bunda 6, Kampika, Mwana wa Chentcherere II) and a few examples have tails made of lines that run parallel to each other. However, I have noticed that the black dots are not always evenly distributed over the body of the spread-eagled design but maybe concentrated in a specific part of the body. A few examples only have dots on the head (Mphunzi 7, Chiwenembe 3; Figure 89) or on just one side of the body (Chongoni 15, Kampika). At the moment I do not know what this means but it is relevant for further interpretations of the images.

Another thing to mention is the possibility that the black dots that we see on the paintings were made from ash containing medicine which was painted on certain parts of the body for a magical or symbolic purposes.



Figure 89. Black dots on head. Left: Mphunzi 7 (approx. length 10cm), Malaŵi 2006. Right: Chiwenembe 3 (approx. height 68cm), central Malaŵi 2006.

2) The spread-eagled design is made by a white outline and then the body is filled with white dots (Chaingo, Chizuzu A; Figure 90). This type occurs occasionally and is more common in Zambia. It may be a regional variant (Smith 1995:181)



Figure 90. Left: Chaingo (spread-eagled height 135cm), eastern Zambia 2007. Right: Chizuzu A (spread-eagled approx. height 55cm), eastern Zambia 2007.

3) The spread-eagled design is made of solely dots; no outline is used (Mwala wa Njuchi, Thandwe; Figure 91). This type is rare.



Figure 91. Left: Mwala wa Njuchi (spread-eagled approx. height 50cm), central Malaŵi 2006. Right: Thandwe (dotted spread-eagled, next to car, height 1m), eastern Zambia 2007.

4) There is another regular use of dots in relation to the spread-eagled design: dots that emanate from the armpit of the spread-eagled design, usually from the upper limbs downwards (Chongoni 25, Maungo 2, Chiwenembe 2, Chongoni 33, Mkoma; Figure 92).



Figure 92. Some examples of dots emanating from the armpit of the spread-eagled design. Top: Chiwenembe 2 (spread-eagled approx. height 12cm) and Chongoni 25 (spread-eagled with dots emanating from armpit approx. height 40cm), central Malaŵi 2006. Bottom left: Maungo 2 (spread-eagled approx. height 50cm), Mozambique (photo: Andrew Salomon 2005, RARI © SARADA). Bottom right: Mkoma (spread-eagled approx. height 70cm), eastern Zambia 2007.

Occasionally, the dots are distributed in rows with no obvious association with a single spread-eagled design, such as in Mwana wa Chentcherere II (Figure 93).



Figure 93. Rows of dots at Mwana wa Chentcherere II (panel approx. length 2m), central Malawi 2003.

In Mwana wa Chentcherere II women told me that dots are related to *Chingondo*. The single series of white dots distributed in rows at this site was said to be maize flour. The reasons why there are only two colours in the paintings in general could mean a number of things. My informants explained that the absence of other colours such as black and red, in these series of dots, was due to the fact that the girl was not in her menstrual period (Zubieta 2006). Turner mentions that the absence of a colour [he was referring to black] does not mean it is absent from thought: "Indeed, its very absence may be significant since it is the true emblem of the hidden, the secret, the dark, the unknown — and perhaps also of potentiality as opposed to actuality" (Turner 1967:81). In this respect, the absence of the colour might be pointing us to the simple fact that the initiate is red by nature because of her ambiguous stage thus, although the colour red is not present in the paintings, it is present through the girls own bodies within the ceremony.

Bearing Turner's observations in mind I argue that red was not used in the shelters because red mainly stands for the girl's menstrual blood. This is the cause of the pollution and the reason for the ceremony. The initiate is symbolically red, betwixt and between, and thus there is no need to use red in the shelters. The whole initiation is focused on menstrual blood: how to behave in its presence and how behaviour can affect the life of a woman throughout her life if she does not take care.

In this case, the specific meaning of the colour red for initiation leads to a more general concept, as I have discussed before. However, the colour red is used in other MCI and a further reason is needed as I explain below. If we follow the idea that the rain ceremonies and initiation were once one (as I have explained with the black colour; Chapter 2), I think it is also possible that the Chewa did not use red in the shelters because of a factor that Schoffeleers (1992:63) writes about for a rain ceremony he witnessed. He mentions that no one was allowed to wear red clothes because the colour would work against the 'coolness' of the ritual and make it ineffective. I believe that the convention of not using red in the paintings might come also from this association. Today red can be used in the MCI as the link to rainmaking is now broken. Thus material culture, specifically the rock paintings, is seen in this study not solely as a product of the manipulation of certain resources, but rather as something of broader societal importance.

This topic of colour exclusion can provide us with interesting theoretical debates. Jacobson-Widding (1979) explains some issues related to the associations of colours and why the three are not present in every context. Although I do not discuss the **specific** signification that colours have for the people of the Lower Congo, I shall address her conclusions in **general** terms relating to the colours as symbols. She found that some of the significations of each colour seem to be mutually inconsistent at the level of the symbolic relation (*e.g.*, white can mean reason and simple-mindedness at the same time) but these different significations of each sign prove to be mutually consistent when the sign is analysed in relation to other signs at the level of syntagmatic relations. Thus, it seems that when a colour is combined, it represents a more general principle than the specific quality when it is standing alone.

Another rule she found was that "when white and black are contrasted as mutually opposed elements, red is left out of the picture" (Jacobson-Widding 1979:357). Moreover, she states that all three colours are present only in the initial phase of a ceremony or ritual. She gives an example in which the ritual officiant uses all the colours because he wants to transmit a message concerning the principles available, but that as soon as he starts manipulating these principles "the triadic

structure begins to be transformed into a dyadic structure of oppositions" (*ibid*.:362). I think that this is not very different from what Turner (1967:79) explained about white and black as a binary system.

I argue that, in general, the absence of red from the panels is related to its 'warm' and ambiguous connotations. The space used for initiation (*e.g.*, *tsimba*, *mtengo*) needs to be as 'cool' as possible, otherwise some problem can occur for the women involved in the ceremony or, even worse, it can have a disastrous effect on the fertility of the *namwali*. Another important clue is that white is the main colour used in the paintings and white stands for 'cool'. This fits with what I recorded in the *Chinamwali* ceremonies I attended: both the *kachere* or fig tree (*Ficus natalensis*) and the *mwimbi* or quinine tree (*Rauvolfia caffra*), that were used as *mtengo*, exude a white sap (Williamson 1975; Morris & Msonthi 1996; Palgrave 2002) thus they are both 'white trees'. Therefore, women are still choosing 'cool' places for *Chinamwali*.

There are many rules that need to be followed in order to keep out contaminating elements and situations and I think that the rockshelters in the past also needed to be ritually clean spaces. However, the absence of the red colour from the paintings does not mean that the women did not employ other objects that possessed red and that were destroyed at the end. The use of the rock paintings may not have been exclusive in the sense that their presence did not stop women from using other types of MCI. Women use the symbolism of different media to have a fuller impact on the initiates. It seems therefore, that red was simply not applicable in the art. It is possible that the shelters may have been seen as red-warm (even sometimes the rock is actually red in colour) and as places of transition as I shall discuss.

We have seen that the instructions during the initiation ceremonies, amongst the matrilineal groups in the area of research, are given through a range of objects that I have divided into five groups (Chapter 5). Sometimes it is possible to employ more than one of these groups in a ceremony. Thus, it is possible that the women made other kinds of objects in the shelters, but that these were made on the ground and not on the wall of the shelter. Smith (1995:216) mentions that in some shelters that Gadi

Mgomezulu (1978) excavated in Dedza District he found white clay layers. Mgomezulu points out that this was the same white clay that was used in the paintings (1978:71). It was not a natural deposit, but something that was brought into the shelters. At Chongoni 33 (DZ40 for Mgomezulu; Figure 94) this deposit, 15.5 cm from the surface, was restricted to the western area of the shelter close to the drip line. It looked like a partial level. A radiocarbon date was obtained from the layer immediately above, a burnt compact earth layer. This layer had a reddish/orange colour and produced a black charcoal area that had observable organic materials in it. This layer was perhaps the result of an extended hearth although no ashes were observable above it. The date that Mgomezulu ascribes to this clay layer is of A.D. 1850 ± 40 years (*ibid.*) but no more detail about the nature of the sample is given. It is possible thus to tie the practice of painting to this period, or later, if it is correct to associate painting with this clay deposit.



Figure 94. Chongoni 33, central Malaŵi 2006. Excavated by Gadi Mgomezulu (1978).

These clay deposits, although not conclusively, may have been the remains of floor *vilengo* that were destroyed in the shelter. It is feasible that if the rock paintings were made with white clay, the women would have employed the same material for making the *vilengo*, although I suspect that the *chilengo* would also have had black and red dots. Another possibility should be considered, that I have also seen in some photographs of the MCI amongst the Kunda and amongst the Nsenga (Pam Carr pers. comm. 2007), is that women make clay reliefs fixed to the wall. It is possible that, in the past, women fixed clay figures on the wall of the shelters, figures that were

covered with white, black and red, but that were later destroyed. There are some shelters in which I have seen traces of plastered mud that I have not been otherwise able to explain (Chongoni 25, Chipwete). Another explanation could be that women prepared some of the panels before they painted them and this is why we can sometimes see the remains of plastered mud. However, most sites do not show this kind of remains and the floor of the shelter would thus be the most likely place for any clay reliefs. This is a topic for further research.

The use of rock paintings

We do not have any records of how the rock paintings were used for initiation. One of the reasons is that girls' initiation has always been a sacred practice guarded forcefully by women. Gamitto (1960), for example, who passed through the research area a few years before the Ngoni leader Zwangendaba crossed the Zambezi in 1835, does not mention this ceremony, although he notes many other aspects of the people he encountered (see Chapter 2). Given this lack of oral and historical accounts, I am forced to address this matter through another kind of evidence: the MCI that is still used nowadays amongst the Chewa and neighbouring groups.

As I have already pointed out, there are public and private sections of the *Chinamwali* ceremony (Chapter 4). The public ones are performed in the open communal space (*bwalo*) and the private ones in places such as the hut of initiation (*tsimba*) and a special place in the bush, (*mtengo*) usually a tree. Even on the rare occasions when men are initiated in *Chinamwali* inside the *tsimba*, (I have seen this couple of times) they are not allowed to go to the *mtengo* (Chapter 4). Whatever happens in the bush is more secret; there are accounts of women getting naked in the bush and scrutinising their private parts (Father Boucher pers. comm. 2003). Thus, considering that the location of the paintings are in places that were secluded in the past (Chapter 3), it is possible to suggest that whatever happened in the rockshelters was equally guarded from outsiders, as happens with the *mtengo* of today.

The paintings are not 3D objects that the girl can touch or dance around as happens with the *vilengo*. However, the fixed position of the *vilengo* on the floor resembles the fixed position of the image on the wall of the shelter. The Chewa seem

to be very particular about making the girls touch some of the objects. In Chinkonda village, central Malaŵi, the *namkungwi* told me that the initiate cannot touch the *chingondo* because "she has just matured". However, in Mkaika I was told that, after the *namkungwi* touches the *chilengo*, the initiate has to touch it as well and imitate the instruction that the girl has just received from the instructress. This is true also among the Nsenga (Smith pers. comm. 2008; Chapter 5). Amongst the Bemba, some of the initiates have the chance to touch and hold some of the *mbusa* while they are being instructed (*e.g.*, Richards 1956; Cory 1956).

Although the paintings cannot be manipulated or danced around, they can be pointed at, as are other MCI in, order to pass on the instructions. Also the initiates could have danced in front of them. I have pointed out in Chapter 5 how the *anamwali* are asked certain questions during the ceremony that they need to answer by pointing at the objects on the ground. It is possible that this was also done with the rock paintings. In the instances where the paintings are located high in the panel, the women probably have made use of a stick to point out something about them, but in general they would have just pointed at them with their fingers (Figure 95).



Figure 95. Distribution of the paintings on the wall of the shelter, Chongoni 25, central Malaŵi 2006.

I have pointed out the great variety of wall paintings and designs on the wall that the Bemba use for initiation (see Richards 1956; Rasing 1995). Some of the

images are a combination of geometric forms while other forms depict houses, mortars, grass, snakes, birds and sometimes people.

I now use the example that I recorded amongst the Bemba because, as I have explained, it is the closest example that I have to the rock paintings. I was told that the *nacimbusa* points to the images on the wall with her finger or with a stick during the initiation. She explains each instruction to the initiate. She shows the initiate how some of the images have a meaning of their own while others, by association to each other, tell a story in which the instruction is given (Figure 96). The *nacimbusa* dances and sings a specific song for each of the images. I had also the opportunity to see a *Chisungu* video at Mr Mtonga's house in Lusaka in 2007 in which the *nacimbusa* also used a stick to point at the images. From this experience I realized that, for a non-initiate, it would be very difficult to connect the images to each other. When the initiate is finally allowed to see the paintings, she sees only a group of disconnected images until they are explained through the process of initiation. The same must have happened with the rock paintings.



Figure 96. *Nacimbusa* pointing at one of the images while she instructs about its meanings. Mbala, northern Zambia 2007.

In the context of Bemba initiation, the teacher paints with a specific purpose, but the learner does not know what the painting means until she has gone through the initiation. Therefore, there are different feelings towards the paintings because the knowledge of those viewing them is not the same. The teacher knows the symbolism

behind the image she is painting, and the challenge is for the girl to understand and learn that symbolism.

It is possible that the rock paintings worked in the same way with some of them associated with others around them, and some standing alone and giving a message on their own. The vivid experience of the uses of images that I witnessed during the Bemba *Ubwinga* ceremony is pivotal in my research. The occasion made me think of the importance of the use of words, and thus language, to connect images with one another; it is only through verbal communication and constant repetition that the initiates understand that two images are connected. Huffman's assertion, here accepted, expresses that "language is the principal vehicle for thinking about the world and transmitting those to others, there is a vital relationship between worldview, language and material culture" (Huffman 2006:101). If we think about the rock paintings, even if the images are close to each other or on top of one another, the initiate would not know their meanings or links without the use of language. The association of language and images thus has a great impact in the learning process.

Another important point in understanding how the images were used in the past is to realize that the images in the rock shelters and the 3D objects were used to give much of the same instructions; they were symbols represented in different media but with the same symbolic connotations. The importance of these symbols derives from both the instructions attached to them and also from the role they play in the ways the instructions are given. I address this aspect below.

The Chewa unfortunately, in the present, do not have *Chinamwali* wall paintings. It is therefore difficult to understand how 3D and 2D MCI were used in the same symbolic system. However, the Bemba still use both wall paintings and objects in the context of initiation. I was therefore able to ask Bemba women about the symbolism of the images represented in these two different media. When they were telling me about the meaning of the wall paintings (the ones made on the black board), I was able to identify some of the objects that I had seen earlier in the *Ubwinga* ceremony that I attended.

Although not everything in the wall paintings and the blackboard had a counterpart in 3D objects, some of them did. The Bemba women told me that the object and the image meant the same thing. The lady who was explaining the parallels between the paintings and the 3D objects, said to me: “they are the same”. This seems a very straightforward and simple answer, but it is based not only on the similarities in shape of the objects. Her answer also involves knowledge of the context in which objects and paintings are used and what they are used for: the only difference was that they were employed in different ways, but with the same aim. I give two examples: the grass and the mortar (Figure 97).



Figure 97. Interchangeable symbolism, objects and images in the Bemba *Ubwinga* ceremony. Mbala, northern Zambia 2007.

The first object is made of a small clay cube in which some black feathers have been inserted; these feathers stand for grass. Although I did not ask about the symbolism behind why feathers can stand for grass in this specific case, the women simply said it was grass. The second example, the mortar, was easier to identify. The point that I am making here is that the object and the image have the same specific and general meanings (following Jacobson-Widding's distinction) in the context of initiation.

There is, however, a crucial point that demands attention: each image can have various meanings, as I have briefly pointed out earlier. For example, amongst the Bemba, Richards (1956:164,165) noticed that a symbol can represent, at the same, time, the thing that must be done, and the action that must be avoided. Moreover, she mentions that the interpretation of the songs that she provides in her appendices shows that there are, in every case, at least two meanings for each symbol: the hoe, for instance, represents a woman's gardening duties, but it also represents the husband who makes his wife fertile. Thus, the songs are an important component to understanding the meanings of the MCI. Unfortunately we do not have the songs that were sung for the images in the rockshelters, but we do have memories that they were indeed associated with the songs, as I explained in Chapter 5.

Another interesting factor is the way in which various meanings are given to a single sign. Despite the fact that the 3D and 2D MCI have the same symbolic meanings, these symbols stand for different things according to the level of initiation. I pointed out earlier that colour symbolism works in the same way; meaning changes according to the knowledge that needs to be passed on to the girls. The Chewa women told me in Mkaika, Zambia, that the symbolism of the moon and the sun was different in the *Chinamwali Chaching'ono* from that in the *Chinamwali Chachikulu*. The meanings given in the later ceremony are deeper than the ones given in the small initiation. The same is true amongst the Bemba. The women told me that, because I had already been initiated in *Chinamwali*, I was allowed to know more, to get a deeper knowledge of the meanings of the symbols. They therefore initiated me in the *Ubwinga* ceremony. Thus, it is not just that the symbols are multivocal, but also that

they are multilayered according to the level of knowledge that the girl is being allowed by the elders to obtain. In this sense knowledge giving is like our Western concept of school and, although I did not ask, I wonder if the name *namwali* means not only neophyte but also student.

Mtonga (pers. comm. 2007) once told me that *Nyau* was like a university, not all the knowledge is given at once. Men are constantly learning new things and levels of knowledge are recognized by the people in this closed association of men. Not surprisingly, the same happens in *Chinamwali*; the first level of initiation is the one at which simple symbolism is given to the girl, because in some ways the women think and feel she is not yet ready to know more. Next, when the woman goes through a different phase in her life (*e.g.*, marriage, motherhood) she will get to know more and the knowledge that she will acquire about the images will be more complex.

I posit then that the rockshelters, as venues, and the paintings were similarly used for various levels of initiation. The teachers, knowing what stage of life the girls were in, also knew how much knowledge they should give away during the instruction. According to the Chewa women that I met and with whom I discussed the MCI, the same image will be presented again to the *namwali* although this time more meanings will be attached to the image. The rock paintings, then, not only have a specific meaning in a specific context; they also have a multidimensional meaning in which the level of complexity increases with a person's age. The challenge of fully understanding the meanings of the paintings can be addressed through the analysis of the usage of the MCI.

This multidimensional aspect of the MCI is also reflected in what I have termed the consumption of the MCI and this is connected to the designated spaces in which the MCI is used. In this context, I use the term **consumption** not to define a mechanism for satisfying needs, such as in our modern and industrialized world, but, in the words of Jean Baudrillard, I take **consumption** to mean "an active form of relationship (not only to objects, but also to society and the world)", "an activity consisting of the systematic manipulations of signs", "a total idealist practice of a

systematic kind which goes beyond relations to objects and interpersonal relations and extends to every level of history, communication and culture" (Baudrillard 1996:199, 200, 203).

Thus, in order to understand how symbols are manipulated and how they engage in the relationship between the initiate and the object or the object and the community, I divide the MCI, especially the *vilengo*, into three groups according to the audience involved in that consumption: public consumption, initiate consumption and tutor's consumption (Chapter 5). However, the paintings were almost certainly not publically consumed. Although some of the MCI amongst the Chewa are publically used, such as the *chingondo/timbwidza* and some of the *vilengo* amongst the Nsenga (Chapter 5) the paintings were made in secluded places outside the village contrary to the MCI that is used for public consumption that is shown at the *bwalo* inside the village.

The paintings were therefore used for the initiate's consumption and for her to engage with the signs and the meaning of the symbols. Almost every MCI is covered to stop the initiate from seeing it. It is almost impossible for women in the past to have covered the rock faces. Most probably they performed a special ritual before the girls could see the paintings on the walls of the rockshelters. I think this is probable because most of the MCI, even though they are made and used in secluded places, have to be revealed to the initiate through a ritual.

It is possible that, after an introduction by the instructress, the rock paintings would have been revealed to the initiates and pointed at, while a song was repeated to link the image with the instruction. I do not think that the initiates were allowed to touch the paintings because, in general, girls do not touch the MCI, but also because the nature of the pigment is so fragile that I do not think that the rock paintings would have lasted until the present if they were touched. It is possible that they engaged directly with other 3D objects that were made in or brought into the shelter. Drumming, singing and repetition would have brought an element of drama and climax that would have helped the girls to learn the teachings.

Another context of consumption that I have introduced is the tutor's consumption. Some of the Nsenga MCI, according to Apthorpe (pers. comm. 2008), was for the exclusive use of the tutors. I know that to become a *namkungwi* amongst the Chewa is something a woman needs to be appointed to or she can put herself forward. It is possible that some of the paintings in the rockshelters were used only by the *namkungwi* to initiate other *namkungwi* or *phungu* into their circle. At this point it is difficult to say if the *namkungwi* initiation involved other images besides the ones that were commonly painted for the girls' initiation. I do not have evidence to say that they show any different shapes to the *namkungwi*. Certainly we cannot see two types of rock art. Rather, I strongly suspect that they used the same shapes, although charged with a deeper meaning.

I have seen some isolated images, sometimes in remote places high up in the mountain, and I wonder if these places would be suitable for the *namkungwi* to have their own initiation. None-the-less, I do not see any impediment to the use of the shelters where the girls went through *Chinamwali*. This question is linked to the usage and perception of the landscape by the ancestors of Chewa women. The motivations to use some shelters and not others were multifaceted. Landscapes are constructed and are full of memories belonging to people of various cultural affiliations and who engage with them in a specific time. Landscapes are reinvented through time, and although they might change in appearance, they are valued in different ways, this is why landscapes become enculturated, in other words, adapted and modified by people according to a specific need (see Zubieta [2006] for discussion on Mwana wa Chentcherere II rockshelter). Therefore, landscape is "more than an academic exercise — it *is* about the complexity of people's lives, historical contingency, contestation, motion and change" (Bender & Winer 2001:2).

Thus, it is necessary to acknowledge that socially constructed secret spaces are related to the cosmologies of the people in the area of research and that these have changed over time for a number of reasons (*e.g.*, interaction with other groups). The ancestors of the Chewa had specific ways of perceiving their material world and these

were embedded in explicit landscapes. Moreover, the shelters that were used for initiation ceremonies were also placed far away from the village, a dynamic that is important to understand (see Yoshida 1992, 1993; Morris 1995) in order to explain some of the images used in this tradition as I explain below.

The disposal of rock paintings

One of the most difficult questions to answer is: if the paintings had the same function as *vilengo* and *chingondo/timbwidza*, why were the paintings not destroyed in the manner of the *chingondo* and *vilengo*? I think there are various factors that help us to understand why they were not destroyed.

First, the location of the paintings: they were made in the shelters far away of the village; only people who knew the location of the shelter were able to find it.

Second, the colours employed: one of the differences between the paintings and the objects is that the paintings were not covered with red dots. I think that part of the power and danger of the object comes from the red colour which denotes ambiguity, transition, menstrual blood and an in between stage that brings potential harm. I argue that the paintings did not need to be completely destroyed because they did not possess this colour.

Third, the reuse of the images: from the examples that I have shown in the last chapter, the MCI made in the *tsimba* and the *mtengo* are destroyed, and new 3D objects are always made for a new initiate. It is almost essential that each initiate has her own object. However, women tended to use the rockshelters again and again and thus the old paintings were reused rather than destroyed and new ones added. The Bemba wall paintings today are also reused sometimes. When not in use they are hidden in the room of the *nacimbusa* (Smith pers. comm. 2008; Smith 1995:226-228). The presence of paintings in the shelters is the only evidence that we have in the present that these ceremonies took place in the past and in such spaces.

Following Miller's classification of temporal relation between objects and individuals, the images are not as ephemeral as the *vilengo* or the *chingondo* because they are not destroyed so they do not fall under his *transience* division. They fall under his *longevity* division because the paintings become a cultural icon of identity that stands for cross-generational continuity. Although the paintings are not destroyed, they share the same quality as the rest of the MCI within Miller's *temporal identity* division. This is because the paintings are temporally equivalent to the initiate. The initiate is going through a period of transition and thus the paintings are used during the temporal identity process of the girl as an initiate.

Another factor to think about is the superimposition of images. Some of the shelters that correspond to the White Spread-eagled tradition have a complex superimposition of images. In particular there are a few examples where the black dots of a previous image have been covered by a new image (Chongoni 25; Figure 98). Some of the paintings appear to have been repainted and retouched (Anati 1986; Smith 1995). David Phillipson suggested that the use of spread-eagled designs in initiation ceremonies would "explain the evidence, noted at several [rock art] sites, for their frequent re-painting" (Phillipson 1976:187). Thus, the constant overpainting and, occasionally, repainting and retouching of some images were part of the continuous use of the site for a ceremonial activity.



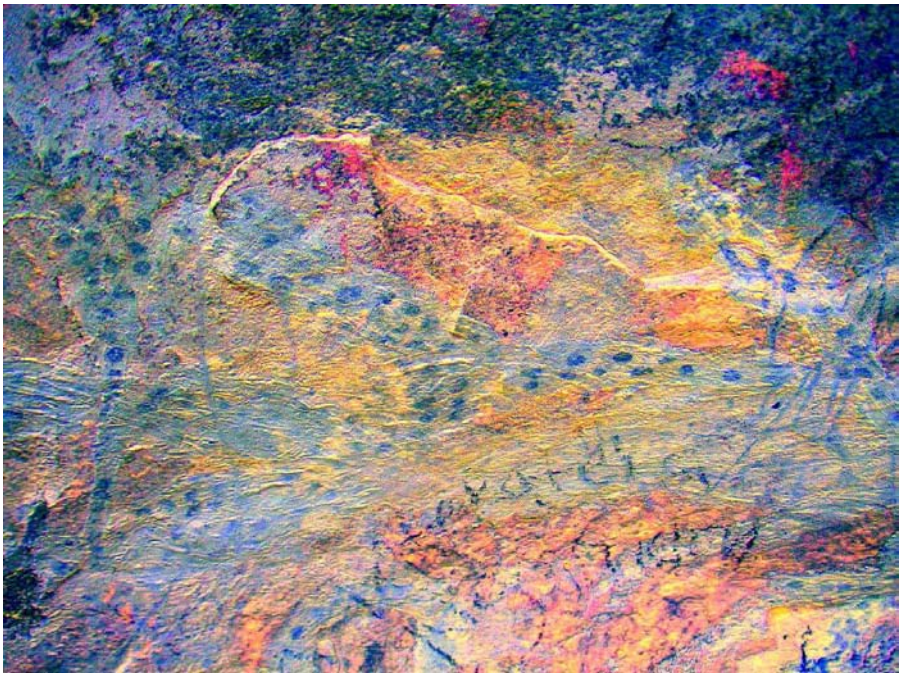


Figure 98. Top: in this image we can appreciate the superimposition of an image in a yellowish pigment on top of one with black dots; however some of the dots can still be seen in some sections. The bottom picture is an enhancement of the same picture using D-Stretch to appreciate the number of dots that have been covered. Chongoni 25, central Malaŵi 2006.

I argue that the women, who went back to the shelter, were making specific choices: 1) **reuse**: either use an old painting, 2) **revive**: repaint an old painting, 3) **disposal**: paint over an old painting. Thus, this gives us a new perspective on the superimposition of images in a shelter. It suggests that the making of new images was more frequent than reusing old ones. This idea links clearly to the creation process of the paintings and their role as mnemonic devices: the image has to become part of the set of symbols used by the instructress. She has the ability to follow the convention of images used to pass on the *mwambo* but, at the same time, she can add a little of her own personality and skill in the overall performance of the part of the *Chinamwali* in which the paintings took part.

I think that each shelter follow its own pattern of creation depending on the character of the *namkungwi*. I have seen paintings that have not been repainted and which may well have been used many times. However, as I have said previously there are various factors, not only superimposition, to consider in the reasons why the paintings were not destroyed. Most probably, while repainting or reusing the images a

continuous drumming and singing would also have accompanied these actions and the *aphungu* of the initiate would have had to give some money or gifts to the instructress for doing this; just as happens nowadays with the MCI (Chapter 5). However, these actions did not happen at the end of the use of an image, but at the beginning, when the painting was created or reused. An image would have ceased to be useful when it had become too faded or covered over and not clearly visible.

Choosing symbols and spaces

I have discussed how the rock paintings were possibly created, used and disposed of by the ancestors of Chewa women. However, one issue is still pending besides the task of understanding the meanings of the images. The question is why these sets of symbols were chosen to fulfil the task of passing on the knowledge of the *mwambo*.

Hutchins (2005) points out that in order to facilitate reasoning, people tend to stabilize the way they represent various ideas by using familiar cultural models — another way to say they create a set of symbols. He argues that these models are shared and thus supported and reinforced by the thinking of others, more over:

> Cultural models are also systemic in the sense that they exist in a complex nexus of models that mutually constrain one another. Most cultural models are closely related to many other models. This inter-linking contributes to the conservatism of cultural beliefs over time and to the stability of cultural models as resources for individual and groups reasoning processes (Hutchins 2005:1558).

Hutchins' explanation is not very different from what Jacobson-Widding expresses about the relations between symbols. However, he explains further that this inter-linking is the reason behind the long-term survival of these cultural beliefs and their transmission to new generations. I think that if we follow this idea it is possible to get to know the reasoning behind why the ancestors of the Chewa used mainly animals to express the cultural beliefs encoded in the girls' initiation ceremonies. However, this is only possible thanks to the ethnographic accounts that we have available.

In the same vein, but specifically referring to objects, Miller argues that our decisions about how we make artefacts are influenced by other artefacts that have come down to us from the past. This means that the artefacts that we have received influence the ones we choose to make and moreover "the alternatives from which we choose, and the strategies which inform our taste in objects, are usually derived from larger historical forces" (1994:398). I posit that we can use this reasoning not just to understand the creation process, use and disposal of the range of MCI that I discussed (figurines, floor clay reliefs, wall paintings, floor drawings, floor sculptures and rock art) but also the reasons as to why certain symbols, the spread-eagled designs in particular, were chosen — *i.e*. older images exercising a conservative force on the art tradition.

The spread-eagled design is a sign that has been used and reused through time. When women decided to create objects with similar forms they were basing these new objects on an idea of a shape that, following Miller's argument, was relevant in the past and was one that those women found important to pass on to the next generations. I shall now discuss the possible circumstances surrounding the choosing of certain symbols.

Animals, geometrics and artefacts as symbols in the rock paintings

The most common feature of the White Spread-eagled tradition is the spread-eagled design that I described in Chapter 1 and discussed in Chapter 4. Various authors have argued that these designs depict animals (Schoffeleers 1978; Smith 1995). The spread-eagled design can take multiple forms with various limbs, protrusions, and so on. The problem is that this design does not have a resemblance to a single specific animal. Smith (1997) decided then to name this tradition the *White Spread-eagled tradition* as the name refers to the most frequent shape of this tradition but without suggesting a link to a specific animal and thus risking an erroneous interpretation.

I have argued that some of the spread-eagled designs are animal bodies that are used as metaphors to express human behaviour (Zubieta 2006). Thus, the images were created as intentional signifiers to instruct the initiates on certain aspects of how

to behave properly. It is difficult to know why and how the idea of using spread-eagled designs started. I want to stress, however, that there are two ideas that are linked to this argument: the first is to understand why animal bodies were chosen to instruct the teaching of girls' initiation and the second is why the shape of the spread-eagled design became the ultimate symbol.

I explored the first idea, why animal bodies were used for initiation, in my Master's research (Zubieta 2006). I argued that animals are important for Chewa people, not only for their meat and medicinal uses, but also because they are useful in reinforcing Chewa cosmology (Yoshida 1992; Morris 2000a, 200b). Animals are seen as having certain characteristics in their behaviour that humans share; animals are regarded as wise, lazy, greedy, fast, and so on. Animals appear in songs, sayings, myths, and folk tales and there is always something to learn from their behaviour in such stories (Schoffeleers & Roscoe 1985; Chimombo 1988; see Douglas [1975] for her discussion on this topic amongst the Lele from Congo). Thus, animals are used to teach about proper behaviour during the *Chinamwali* ceremony. However, it is necessary to explain why particular animals were chosen for this task and why they were depicted as seen from above. I will start with the latter.

In one of the conversations I had with Father Boucher in 2007, we discussed the conventions in which the ancestors of the Chewa depicted animals in the White Spread-eagled tradition. The convention is to look at them from above. Paintings of animals in profile, however, rarely occur in the White Spread-eagled tradition (Smith 1995:100; Chongoni 25; Figure 99) but are commonly found in the White Zoomorphic tradition. Moreover, sometimes is possible to find paintings of the White Zoomorphic tradition and the White Spread-eagled tradition in the same shelter (Chongoni 15, Chongoni 25, Chongoni 33, Chongoni 39, Mphunzi 7, Mpata wa Milonde; Figure 100). Animals seen from above, however, dominate in the White Spread-eagled tradition.



Figure 99. Animals in profile that are a rare part of the White Spread-eagled tradition. Chongoni 25 (left panel approx. length 1.5m; right panel approx. length 3m), central Malaŵi 2006.



Figure 100. Animals in profile belonging to the White Zoomorphic tradition depicted in the same shelters of the White Spread-eagled tradition. Left: Chongoni 39 (animal in the bottom left approx. length 15cm), central Malaŵi 2006. Right: Chongoni 25 (approx. length 25cm), central Malaŵi 2006.

Some of the animals seen from above are clearly suggestive of reptiles such as chameleons and lizards. I shall comment further on their importance. Reptiles are usually seen walking on the ground, walls or the branches of trees, thus the perspective that humans have of them is from above. This rather obvious point, however, does not determine how people depict animals.

Various attempts to understand why and how conventions are used have been made (Clegg 1995, Smith 1998; Deręgwoski 2005). Jan B. Deręgowski (2005) suggests that humans tend to draw animals and people from a lateral view because the human eye perceives this as the typical way to view them. However, Smith points out that the choice of viewpoint does not have to do with the nature of the shape itself but

"is rather the choice of a view that includes a collection of features which will allow a correct identification of the subject" (Smith 1998:215). This is important, as to understand that the ways people depict an image has to do more with a practical choice by the painter rather than just a simple observation of the subject (Clegg 1995; Smith 1998).

Thus, we have to think of other reasons why the Chewa women in the past used animals seen from above rather than assuming that this choice was only based on observation. There may be some practical aspects about making things flat on the ground and on the walls of the rock shelters. Smith mentions that making a picture is also a question of showing what it's needed to be shown in order to employ an intended symbolism. Moreover, "choices are determined by the wishes of the artist along with the intended purpose of the picture" (Smith 1998:213). Sometimes there are some traits that give away the subject-matter of the spread-eagled (*e.g.*, chameleon, lizard, elephant and so on) but most of the time the spread-eagled design is a symbol that was only understood after completing initiation (see Zubieta 2006).

Reptiles seem to be depicted very often in the White Spread-eagled tradition. Smith argues that some of the designs are chameleons because some images show "the distinctive character traits of the chameleon are its bulging eyes and human-like hands" (Smith 1995:237) and moreover because the chameleon is represented in the myths of origins of life (see Schoffeleers & Roscoe 1985). Smith (1995:239) also made an interesting connection between the lizard and the paintings, specifically with the monitor-lizard, which is an important animal related to rain and fertility. The skin of the monitor lizard covers the sacred drum for rain calling ceremonies in the Msinja shrine in central Malawi (Morris 2000b:196).

Various authors have mentioned that, in the past, *Chinamwali*, *Nyau* and the rain shrines were united (Rangeley 1949, 1952; Schoffeleers 1973, 1992; Schoffeleers & Roscoe1985; Smith 1995). We know that Makewana 'the mother of children' (Rangeley 1952:32; Chapter 2) and wife of God (*Chiuta*) was only able to have sexual intercourse on specific occasions, with the manifestation of God — the sacred serpent

thunga, God in python form, to bring fertility to the land after the rainmaking ceremony (Rangeley 1952; Yoshida 1993:44). She presided over the Msinja rain shrine complex in central Malaŵi (Chapter 2). Morris (2000b:197) comments that *thunga* is associated with the mountains and hills in central Malaŵi and controls the rain. It has been also recorded that pythons were kept in baskets in the shrines. *Thunga* was the central cult entity associated with the shrines and the sacred pools (Schoffeleers 1999:153). The snake-like forms in the paintings may suggest this connection of the importance of *thunga* to the fertility of the land and to the girls' own fertility. Smith (1995:100) recorded 16 snake designs from 9 different sites in close association with the spread-eagled designs (*e.g.*, Mwana wa Chentcherere II & IV, Chongoni 25, Chongoni 6, Chongoni 39, Kampika, Mphunzi 3, Mphunzi 7; Figure 101); sometimes the snake-like forms are also covered with black dots. Thus, the snake-like designs probably stand for fertility: an important theme in girls' initiation.





Figure 101. Snakes related to spread-eagled designs. Top left: Chongoni 6 (panel approx. length 3m), central Malaŵi 2006. Top right: Mphunzi 3 (panel approx. length 1.5m), central Malaŵi 2006. Middle left: Kampika (panel approx. length 3m), central Malaŵi 2006. Middle right: detail of snake-like with black dots, Kampika (panel approx. length 15cm), central Malaŵi 2006. Bottom left: Chongoni 39 (panel approx. length 4m), central Malaŵi 2006. Bottom right: Mwana wa Chentcherere IV (spread-eagled approx. height 30cm), central Malaŵi 2006.

The MCI that I discussed in Chapter 5 also points to the use of certain animals. Yoshida (1992:249) mentions that most of the *vilengo* made by the Chewa women in Zambia were to do with water: *nsato* (python), *thunga* (snake), *fulu* (tortoise) and *ng'ona* (crocodile). However, it has to be indicated that he mentions the presence of other shapes such as *kalulu* (hare), *kacifulu* (vessel to draw water) and *wangala* (male and female couple) but he did not publish pictures of them. This demonstrates that there are other animals, besides the ones with strong links to water which are part of the range of animals that women use in the initiation ceremonies. Other animals have also been recognized such as the genet cat amongst the Nsenga (Apthorpe 1962). The ladies who helped me during my fieldwork in 2003 in central Malaŵi recognized a baboon in the paintings at Mwana wa Chentcherere II. Lancaster (1934) and Bruwer (1949) mentioned that one figure used by the women was a leopard. The women in Masinja village also made a leopard for me as one of the *vilengo*.

Some animals such as the chameleon are important because of their connections to the myth of origin but, as Morris points out, "the creation myth is not the basis or 'source' of the 'symbolic order', but rather an aspect or exemplification of it. It is unhelpful to equate myth or religious conceptions with symbolism" (2000b:163). Thus, I think that the animals that were chosen have to be seen not as drawn from myths, but from the various realms in Chewa cosmology that are

connected to the girls' initiation ceremony. Myths help us, however, to understand the symbolism of the animal once it has been identified. I discuss later the reasons I think that women chose certain animals for their paintings.

An explicit example of another animal that appears in myth and is portrayed in the MCI, and which I recorded in central Malaŵi and eastern Zambia, is the elephant. This was made in 3D but in a spread-eagled form. Fortunately, we have detailed information on the meaning of the elephant amongst the Chewa and can make further associations and think about what elements of this polysemic symbol the women were trying to emphasize. For the Chewa, the key aspects for the elephant are the ears, the trunk and the tusks. Boucher (2002b) notes that the initiates are taken in the evening, blindfolded, to meet the *njobvu* mask. At the *bwalo*, they are asked to touch the trunk. The symbolism of this action has various levels. The girls will be given "the power of the chief, who is the spiritual head of the community and the representative of the spirits. The elephant trunk symbolizes the male, the penis. Handling it helps to remove fears the girls may have about their first sexual encounter" (Boucher 2002b:44). Birch de Aguilar (1996:173) mentions that when the girls are allowed to grasp the tusks of the *njobvu* it represents that they have come to learn about the sexual opposite and it also shows respect for the chief. Thus, it is possible that the spread-eagled design of an elephant helped the *namkungwi* to portray what she wanted in order to teach the initiate certain lessons (Chapter 5; Figure 102). It is possible that this angle was chosen to keep the true subject matter veiled from outsiders and non-initiates (see Smith 1998). Smith (1998:215) argues that it is also important to consider that artists might not want to reveal the immediate subject matter they wish to portray.



Figure 102. Left: charcoal drawing of the *chilengo* at Kaliza village seen from above. Right: original *chilengo*, eastern Zambia 2007.

An example of a possible representation of an artefact in the paintings is the depictions of circles with internal divisions. These occur at many sites including Campala, Mphunzi 8, Chentcherere II, Chaingo and Chiwenembe 2 (Figure 103). They have also been found in an isolated site called Namolepiwa (Namelépia) in the Nampula Province of Mozambique (Roza de Oliveira 1971:62; Duarte & Duarte 1988; Figure 104).





Figure 103. Circles with internal divisions. Top left: Maungo 2 (circle approx. length 30cm), Mozambique 2005. Top right: Chaingo (circle approx. length 13cm), Zambia 2007. Bottom left: Chiwenembe 2 (right circle approx. length 9cm), central Malawi 2006. Bottom right: redrawing of Mwana wa Chentcherere II (circle approx. length 15cm), central Malawi 2003 (after Zubieta 2006:fig 4.22).



Figure 104. Note the association between the circle with internal divisions and the spread-eagled at Namolepiwa site, Mozambique (after http://www.macua.org/rupestre/foto52.html).

These circles have a very similar appearance to some MCI. I discussed this association briefly in my Masters and noted at Mwana wa Chentcherere II, the close relationship with spread-eagled designs (Zubieta 2006:106). However, in this thesis I have discussed the ethnographic accounts related to the use of some of these circular MCI with internal divisions amongst the Nsenga and the Bemba. It is significant that Nsenga women identified some copies of rock painted circles with internal divisions, that Phillipson (1977:183) showed them, as diagrams used for the sexual introduction

of the girls at their initiation. Similar circles are also still made by the Bemba in their wall-paintings and clay reliefs as I have discussed. I have also, for the first time, provided examples of MCI amongst the Chewa people that resemble circles with internal division such as the one used in Masinja village.

It is important to keep in mind that there are differences in the way that these circles are portrayed and this must be regarded as a reflection of regional variation. However, it is undeniable that the matrilineal groups consistently use circles with internal divisions to instruct the girls during initiation and the modern MCI may therefore give us insight into how the rock paintings were used in the past.

I note at this point that there are also depictions of ovals, filled circles and crescents (Kalemba, Mphunzi 3, Mwana wa Chentcherere II) in the White Spread-eagled tradition. Smith has suggested that they are representations of the relationship between the cycles of the moon and female menstruation and that the filled circles also may be representations of eggs that stand for the concept of life (Smith 1995:240). I reported a *chilengo* with the shape of a crescent moon in Mkaika village and although I am not allowed to talk about the specific meaning of the crescent moon as a sign, I can mention that the symbolism is more complex than just associating the moon with a single thing such as menstruation. The moon represents multiple things at the same time and the meaning given to the initiate depends on the level of instruction as I discussed previously.

Another category of physical objects is hoes and axes. In the rock art these are outnumbered by the animal designs. Hoes are mostly associated with spread-eagled designs (Chaingo, Mkoma, Thandwe, Maungo 2; Figure 105).



Figure 105. Hoe pictures. Top left: Chaingo (hoe approx. length 50cm), Zambia 2007. Right: Maungo 2 (hoe approx. length 20), Mozambique (photo: Andrew Salomon 2005, RARI © SARADA). Bottom: Mkoma, (upper hoe approx. height 16cm) eastern Zambia 2007.

Morris (1995:311) reminds us that the matrilineal people in the region were hoe cultivators, thus a representation of a hoe can be referring, at a superficial level, to the link with agriculture subsistence. In oral traditions leopard skins and iron hoes are mentioned as tributes to the chief, along with other items such as animal medicated tails and knives (Phiri 1975:61). It is possible that women depicted hoes in the paintings, and in the context of *Chinamwali*, to represent the chief in a symbolic way. We cannot forget that the headman is also "the one who invites the Nyau to his

village, who sends boys to the graveyard for initiation, and who provides for each girl initiated in his village" (Kaspin 1993:36). I have pointed out previously that, for the Bemba, a hoe represents the husband who makes his wife fertile. For the Cheŵa, the chief is also regarded as a symbolic husband who will open the womb of the initiate after resuming sexual intercourse with his own wife at the end of the ceremony (van Breugel 2001).

Hodgson provides a unique account of the use of hoes in a specific ritual during the girls' initiation:

> Finally, after the men have gone to bed, one of the women takes two *nsengwa*, covers them over with clean cloths, and pulls her own cloth over her head [the girl's head]; some of the other women go to bed, but the *anamkungwi* and the older ones gather round her. They hold up hoe handles round which they have tied pieces of rag, and sing to the girls:
>
> *Chitamba, chitamba, elele lele,*
> *Chimatmba m' chimati m'mawa*
> *Chitamba chochembere.*
>
> *Chitamba* means the trunk of an elephant, which is symbolized by the hoe handle; and the song is an instruction to the girls to use regularly at certain periods the cloth worn by a woman capable of bearing children (Hodgson 1933:133).

I discussed in previous chapters the importance of the elephant and its association with the headman of the community. Smith notes that there are some symbols, such as the concentric circle, that "have become associated with chieftainship but this seems likely to be a more recent product of their traditional association with fertility" (Smith 1995:284; Prins & Hall 1994:179). Deborah Kaspin also mentions a song that the *anamkungwi* gives as advice to the girls:

> Sharpen, sharpen, sharpen.
> Even if he is an ugly man, sharpen the hoe blade,
> He can hoe the anthill,
> He can hoe the potato in the anthill.
> Even if he is ugly, sharpen it.
> Scrub, scrub, scrub the potatoes,
> And let him hoe the anthill
> (Kaspin 1996:572)
>
> This song systematically substitutes garden images for sexual images-hoe blades for male sex organs, hoeing for intercourse, the anthill for the woman's

> body, and potatoes for babies- and veils in poetic imagery advice to the initiate that even an ugly or disagreeable husband can impregnate her.

Thus I propose that the hoe was probably used in the context of girls' initiation rock art to make multiple symbolic associations between the elephant, the chief and his role as the symbolic husband, and also to fertility.

So far I have discussed the possible material culture represented in the rock art and at some extent some of the animals that could have been represented. However, I want now to discuss a few issues around the complexity of identifying animal species in the paintings. Douglas points out that the first thing we do as humans to understand our environment is to classify the apparent chaos so as to give order. Nonetheless in her analysis of the Lele people from Congo she realized that "under any very simple scheme of classification, certain creatures seem to be anomalous" (1975:32), but it is crucial to understand that this anomaly is not inherent in nature but is culturally constructed (Douglas 1990:25). This understanding constituted Douglas's groundwork for her pangolin cult analysis and her explanation of why animals were chosen as food under specific situations by Lele women. Although I do not intend to discuss the findings of her study in detail I want to draw attention to her analysis of the animals that she classed as *spirit animals*, because I think that this analysis serves as a useful comparison for my study.

According to Douglas (1975), animals related to the spirits are linked to water and fertility and the pangolin is seen as an important animal because of its anomalous characteristics. However, as Morris (2000a:230) notes about Douglas's work, the pangolin is not the only animal related to the spirits and the forest. Many other animals, as Douglas points out for the Lele, are related to the spirit and the forest such as the bush pig, water-chevrotain antelope, monitor lizard, duiker, giant rat, ant bear and porcupine. Lele women link various species of animals with the spirits based on their singularities of breeding habits, sleeping, watering and feeding habits and so on. I point this out because in the same way I want to be cautious when interpreting why only a few animals were portrayed in the rock paintings. Douglas's work is important to my analysis because it shows the complexity of how animals are classified by the

people we want to learn from. In this sense, Douglas mentioned that when talking to Lele women they "would merely reiterate the characteristics of the animal in question, as if its oddity would be instantly appreciated by me and would provide sufficient answer to my question" (*ibid*.:32).

Some other characteristics might have influenced the choice of animals to depict. Some of the spread-eagled designs have dots and it is possible that animals with spots on their bodies acquired special significance. Turner, in his discussion of colour symbolism mentions that "animals and birds acquire ritual significance because their feathers or hides are these hues [talking about red, white and black]" (Turner 1967:69). So, it is not strange that the ancestors of the Chewa chose some animals because of the spotted pattern on their bodies such as the genet cat (Figure 106; Chapter 4 for discussion on the genet cat amongst the Nsenga).



Figure 106. Possible depiction of a genet cat. Left: Underneath the white quadruped (approx. length 15cm), there is a slightly yellow body with black spots on it and a long tale with black lines across. Chongoni 39, central Malawi 2006. Right: genet cat, Kenya (photo: © Hans-Georg Michna).

However, trying to identify the species of animal depicted just based on the spots on the body can be a misleading. The spots are more than just depictive. I was told by the women in Mkaika and Kaliza villages, regarding the MCI (Chapter 5), that

although the specific animal represented gives a specific teaching, the importance lies in knowing the significance of the dots. In this sense, and going back to the example of the elephant, a real elephant is not covered with dots and yet the women make the elephant *chilengo* and cover it with dots. Thus, an elephant represented as a spread-eagled design in the rock art might still have dots despite the fact that an elephant does not have spots. There is thus a very complex relationship between what is naturally depictive and what is not naturally depictive, at least to my mind as an outsider. Thus, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which women have conveyed their knowledge in order to understand the conventions of representation in the rock art.

Another example that helps us to clarify the symbolism related to dots comes from something Yoshida reported at the end of the ceremony: the girls will be covered with dots which are "designed to resemble the pattern on the body of the python" (Yoshida 1992:252). This does not necessarily mean that the girls have incorporated the python into themselves but it means, according to Yoshida that, by having the power of reproduction, the girls have been initiated into a condition that connects her with the python "which is thought to be in control of the fertility of the land and the human beings". Thus, the spots on the body of the *namwali* and the MCI connect them to the concept of fertility through the association with the python. Douglas (1975:28) would call these connections *implicit connections* between one set of facts and another and these are the ones we need to understand in order to make further associations.

Douglas's work on the Lele people brings an important point for this research that it is necessary to discuss at this point. I want to emphasise, however, that I am not suggesting that the same animals that Douglas interpreted amongst the Lele mean the same things for the Chewa. However, I think that the animals that the Chewa women use in the context of initiation were also chosen because of their anomalous characteristics. It is important to keep in mind that the girl is in an ambiguous position during *Chinamwali*, thus I think that the animals that are chosen also reflect this condition.

Although I will not discuss the symbolic meanings of each animal that I have mentioned, I shall, as an example, focus on the python. I have discussed why the python is important in the context of girl's initiation; however, there are other points to bring forward. According to Kaspin the girl is identified with the python in the context of initiation because of its ambiguous characteristics:

> It is not a poisonous snake like the cobra and puff adder, which are considered predators (*zilombo*). Nor is it one of the harmless snakes that some people eat as meat (*nyama*). The python is in a class of it own. As the python child, the girl has great reproductive power — she can shed her own skin, and renew herself. But she neither draws blood nor bleeds herself (Kaspin 1999:91).

The python, therefore, is one of the animals that reflect the ambiguous state of the girl during *Chinamwali* in which the transformation from a child (who does not menstruate) to a woman (who does menstruate) is incomplete until the ceremony has ended. Morris notes that the python, as other snakes (see Morris 2000b:199), sheds skin and "its structure has an androgynous quality, that it coils around itself, and that, like the monitor lizard it moves between land and water" (Morris 2000b:219).

Also the python, as I have discussed, is God in animal form — *thunga*. This is the form that gives fertility so it is exactly appropriate to use on the girls. The breath of the python is the rainbow (God's bow). The lizard is the lightning. They work as a pair to bring rain and fertility to the land.

It is possible that some other animals (*e.g.*, baboon, elephant, chameleon, lizard, tortoise, genet cat and the leopard) are also used in the initiation because they are regarded as ambiguous. I think that animals with the capability of moving between the land and the water, or earth and sky, reminded women about the transitional condition the initiates. However, we also need to consider the possibility that at the same time these animals were linked to fertility and rain just like the python and the monitor lizard are.

Important research on animal symbolism has been undertaken by various researchers (see Yoshida 1992; Kaspin 1999; Morris 2000a, 2000b), however, I think that further investigation and data collection should be carried out on the specific ways Chewa women think and perceive of various animals in the context of initiation. Thus, even though we currently have indications that some of the paintings depict chameleons, lizards, snakes, tortoises, crocodiles and so on, I posit that there are probably others that depict leopards, baboons, genet cats, elephants and other animals. It is possible, nonetheless, to envisage that all the animals are linked to the spirits, water and the woodland, as I shall explain below.

Symbolic conventions would be a mystery for us if we did not have direct ethnographic data, because in order to know how symbols operate we need to know the belief system of the people who made them. In this sense, the women chose certain shapes to represent various concepts that they believed crucial for initiation and these shapes or forms are derived, as I have explained, from a larger historical force: the *mwambo*. We are fortunate that for the White Spread-eagled tradition much of the *mwambo* survives.

The spaces of symbols: the woodland and the village

I believe that women decided to use animal bodies to transmit their messages not only for the reasons that I have discussed, but also because of their symbolic and cognitive conceptions the woodland and the village and how these linked to various domains in Chewa cosmology such as to hunting and agriculture activities and the concepts of wild and domestic.

While I was analysing the production, use and disposal of the MCI, I realized that the MCI goes through a cycle that follows a similar dynamic to that of the woodland and the village domains. In order to understand the importance of such dynamics in the context of *Chinamwali*, I base my analysis on the understanding of the animal world in relation to these domains. I have taken most of my data from Kenji Yoshida's (1992) and Brian Morris (1995, 2000a, 2000b) extensive work on the symbolic aspects of the animal world.

According to Yoshida (1992, 1993) and Morris (1995) there are two main distinctive spaces that are used for various rituals: the village and the woodland/bush. Morris in Malaŵi and Yoshida in Zambia found a similar behaviour thus I think their analysis is applicable for the region of study as a whole. Yoshida (1992, 1993) focused essentially on the initiation of boys into *Nyau* and the *Nyau* participation in funerals and its movement inside (*mkati*) and outside (*kunja*) the village, especially for the zoomorphic masks which are known in Zambia as *nyau yolemba*. These masks are representations of wild animals and are instrumental in sending to God back the spirit of the deceased (Yoshida 1992:237). However, there are certain times in which the wild animals can come into the village, but the distinction between the village and the bush has to be rigorously observed.

Morris (1995), on the other hand, has analysed the woodland and village dichotomy including other aspects of Chewa life. In order to facilitate the discussion Morris outlined the following schema. He stresses, however, that it should not be interpreted as totalizing Malaŵian culture (Table 8):

Table 8. Comparisons between the woodland and the village

Woodland	**Village**
(*Thengo*)	(*Mudzi*)
Hunting	Agriculture
Dry season	Wet season
Affinal males	Matrilineal kingroup
(semen)	(blood)
Sprits of the dead	Living humans
(*mizumu ya makolo*)	(*anthu*)
Wild animals	Domestic animals
(*chirombo*)	(*chiweto*)
Graves	Houses

(after Morris 1995:302)

From this structure, women should be expected to relate to domestic animals and to the village. Women, however, perform various daily-life activities in the woodland: they collect firewood, plants and water. Moreover, women use the bush and depict wild animals in their rock paintings as part of their girls' initiation. Thus, following Morris's schema, I would have expected to see paintings of domestic

animals, plants and artefacts related to agriculture and fewer representations of wild animals. However, this expectation is based on a preconception of how the symbolic world should work and upon a strict division between male and female domains. This kind of structural analysis tends to overly systematize the cultural domain as Turner and Jacobson-Widding have acknowledged in their work on colour symbolism. Morris's analysis reveals that two primary domains, although opposite to each other, are complementary and reflect "less the gender division than the opposition between affines and kin" (Morris 1995:308). In this respect, Yoshida makes an important point to understand how various things come together at a ritual level. He mentions that the world of *Nyau* consists of three parts (Yoshida1992:237):

1) The zoomorphic structures (or wild animals) standing for those which live outside the village.
2) The masks (or spirit of the deceased) which enjoy dual existence both inside and outside the village.
3) The women, who brew beer for the ceremonies, and who stand for those who live inside the village.

Thus, I think that in order to understand the way *Chinamwali* works in relation to the village and woodland dichotomy it is important to analyse the various elements of the ceremony as a complete mechanism and the ways they complement each other.

Interestingly, Morris points out that the "initiation of girls always take place in the village, close to the hut of the headman, and that the initiation essentially involves the incorporation of the girl into the collectivity of women" (Morris 1995:312). Although it is true that the girl will join the collectivity of women, Morris did not consider the important role of the *mtengo* for the initiation ceremony and the activities that happen in the bush as opposed to the village. This is essential in order to understand the choosing of animals as symbolic carriers for many instructions during *Chinamwali*.

Although the woodland is a place where women collect plants, firewood and water, the woodland is mainly regarded as equivalent to hunting ('hot') and wild animals and the village ('cool') to agriculture and tame animals. Morris deduces, after a thorough review of various scholars (see Morris [1995] for further discussion), that there is a specific attitude towards animals depending on whether the society has a hunter-gatherer or agricultural background. He explains that in hunter-gatherer societies animals are seen as equivalent to humans, while people who practise agriculture tend to think of animals as opposed to humans and a threat to their livelihood. Morris concludes that these processes in Malaŵian culture are complementary, rather than being dialectical oppositions between hunting (wild) and agriculture (tame), because they are both an important part of the Malaŵian socio-economic life (Morris 1995:302). There is thus a mix of attitudes towards animals within Chewa society because of their combined hunting and agricultural background. It is important to keep this in mind for any further interpretation of the animal symbolism amongst the Chewa.

I propose, based on Morris's analysis, that the answers for the selection of animals in the rockshelters, lie in the way the Chewa conceptualize the woodland and the village domains, and more specifically in the meanings that women give to these spaces and the creatures that live in them (see Morris 2000b).

Morris (1995) describes the Malaŵian perception of the woodland as the external source of life-generating powers. Mammals, fundamentally identified with the woodland, are regarded as a source of meat, as essentially opposed to humans and as medicine. They are also seen as being close to the spirits of the dead and affinal males, "as the essential source of fertility, and thus the continuity of the kin group (and village). Wild mammals, then, form a crucial part in the ongoing cyclical processes of life and of social reproduction" (Morris 1995:302). However, when it comes to animal behaviour, this affects both men and women. On the other hand, it is possible that women used certain mammals in the art not only because of their character traits, but also because their skin, horns and tails are associated with activating medicines, with the spirits of the dead, and with affinal males (*ibid*.:308).

Following this idea, women might use the woodland for the *Chinamwali* ceremony in order to connect with the spirits of those male affines and to give the girls more power related to fertility as they seek for male affines who are sexually powerful. It is important then to make a distinction between how the husband is perceived by the community; he is seen as an outsider and a hunter, while the headman of the village represents the matrilineal core of the community. As Morris says "[i]deally he should be a male mother" (*ibid*.:310). Thus, it is in this space — in the woodland — that the women seek to connect with the hunters, the outsiders and ultimately their husbands who will come and claim them as their brides.

At some point at the end of the ceremony, as I discussed in the last chapter, the initiates symbolize animals by wearing the *chingondo/timbwidza*; furthermore they are wild animals of the woodland, the *nyama* that the husbands claim through symbolic hunting. Schoffeleers (1971:279 footnote18) also mentions that the groom is portrayed as the hunter and the bride as the game killed by him (see also Kaspin 1999:85). Boucher (2002b:44), similarly notes that, by wearing the headdress and the spots on the body the girl is symbolically connected to "the animal to be hunted (by men) through betrothal". According to Morris (2000a:76) there are three different meanings for *nyama*: game animal, meat and edible animal. The term *nyama*, which also is the word for wild quadruped mammals, is used in this context to mean flesh (Yoshida 1992:210). The woman becomes an edible animal and this is why the act of having intercourse with the girl after the initiation is known as *kudya chinamwali* (to eat the initiate; Chapter 4).

Eating meat is something that the initiates can only do after the ceremony. I heard songs related to sexual intercourse and eating meat in central Malaŵi in 2003 (Zubieta 2006:89). Sexual desires are expressed through metaphors related meat and food in Chewa society (Morris 200b). Moreover, as Kaspin (1999:89) notes, "girls become women and meat by spilling their own blood in menstruation". I think this is ultimately one of the most important meanings of the symbolic hunt: the man, a hunter, not only is hunting for edible meat, for sexual intercourse, but for a woman

who had just acquired her first menstruation knowing that it is from her womb that future generations will come.

In addition, it is from God but through men (regarded symbolically as affines and spirits) and the woodland that "fertilizing power is derived for the procreation of children" (Morris 1995:308). It is important, however, to acknowledge female spirits as well. These are constantly remembered in songs during *Chinamwali*. I have heard during *Chinamwali*, in central Malaŵi, the songs that refer to old women and their knowledge as women who have also been through the initiation and that have shared their knowledge with younger generations.

Thus, it is no surprise that the girls are prepared for *chingondo*/*timbwidza* at the *mtengo* because wild animals belong in the bush and not in the village. In this regard I think that the manufacturing of the *chilengo* is something that, in the past, was exclusive to the bush domain and later, because of the impact of various historical events (*e.g.*, raids, Western religion; Chapter 2) was moved into the *tsimba*, inside the village, because seclusion is also equivalent to safety and secrecy. Nowadays even the *mtengo* that I reported in Malaŵi in 2003 and 2006 (Chapter 5) are not far away from the village, but that is also because most of the forests have been cut down.

According to Morris, the woodland is also regarded as a 'cool' place (Morris 1995:312). It is important, however, to understand that the woodland goes also through a cycle throughout the year. The woodland is a place of transformation. It is 'cool' during the wet/rainy season when it is green (white) and also because the spirits of the ancestors, which are regarded as 'cool' (Boucher 2002b:27), live in it. The woodland, however, also becomes 'hot' during the annual bush burning ceremonies in the dry/hot season (black; Chapter 2). Fire is regarded as an active component in the transition periods of various rituals, such as funerals and girls' initiations. It is a marker that separates the periods before and after the transition (Schoffeleers 1971:276). It is possible that the burning of the bush symbolizes also the girl's first menstruation and her time to attend *Chinamwali*. The usage of the woodland for the

girls' initiation happens when the girls are in a liminal stage, a stage of transition in which the girl is in between the 'hot' and 'cool' phases. Probably, it was in this stage of transition that the girls, in a 'warm' phase (red), were taken to the rockshelters. This supports my discussion on the avoidance of the usage of the red colour in the paintings to keep the place cool.

Another fact to consider in Morris's schema is the implications of the season of the year related to the woodland. *Chinamwali* takes place at the end of the dry season (mainly in October) just before the rains when the leaves appear and the trees start to blossom. This is also a liminal time. According to Morris, the dry season is related to hunting activity and the woodland. Schoffeleers (1971:275, 1992:33) also notes that hunting is an activity of the dry season. The burning of the bush was traditionally used for hunting and rain calling (Schoffeleers 1971:273). Thus, I believe that the dry season is probably conceptualized as the period in which the *anamwali* are allowed to transform symbolically into animals by wearing the *chingondo/timbwidza* and allowed to be in contact with the spirits of the woodland. The girls are in an ambiguous stage in which they also move between the woodland and the village. This season of symbolic transformation into animals is therefore when the husband also symbolically hunts the girl. Having the initiation during the dry season, also adds to the important past link of the girls' initiation to the rainmaking ceremonies. The girls were offered up to God to make him come down and bring the rain and fertility to the land (the earth's puberty) and to the girls (Schoffeleers 1971:277).

Our understanding of the connections between the wild animals, the woodland, the spirits of the dead, the male affines, the hunting activities, the burning of the bush and the rain making ceremonies with the girls' initiation would not be complete without addressing the Kaphirintiwa myth (Chapter 2) and the *Nyau* closed association. In this myth we are told that in the beginning God, animals, men and women lived together in peace until man invented fire and in turn made the wild animals run away and God ascend into the sky. This brought death to the world. Yoshida (1992:236) recorded in eastern Zambia a similar account to why animals and

humans were separated although Yoshida emphasize is that this division was due to jealousy and sorcery.

The invention of fire, according to Schoffeleers, should be interpreted also as a transition from an asexual to a sexual condition given that, in the myth, man made fire with two twirling sticks: one soft and one hard. The soft stick, with a hole in its centre, was laid on the ground while the hard one was placed vertically in the hole, a common symbol for sex (Schoffeleers 1971:279). Fire is also represented as red and it related to 'warm' or 'hot' depending on the context. The importance of fire in the context of girls' initiation, however, should be regarded not solely as a symbol of sexual activity but, most importantly, for its reproductive connotations. The initiate, after having her first menstruation, falls into a new condition in which she is not only ready to have sexual intercourse but most importantly to bear children.

Another aspect of the myth which interests us in this discussion is the original relationship between humans, animals and spirits. Schoffeleers mentions that the French traveller Edouard Foà (1900:40-44), who in 1894 witnessed a Chipeta *Nyau* performance in Chikwawa District, Malaŵi, described the performance as a dramatization of a "temporary reconciliation between spirits, men, and animals, followed again by their separation" (Schoffeleers 1992:40, 1976; see Yoshida 1992, 1993). Thus, according to Schoffeleers, the *Nyau* performances in the village recreate the primal condition of the Kaphirintiwa myth in which men and animals lived in harmony and, moreover, this insight of the myth establishes a link "with the institution of the sacred forests" (Schoffeleers 1992:40). The Chewa need to recreate the specific conditions that are mentioned in the myth of origin such as a reconciliation of people and animals, the reconciliation of fire and water, earth and sky (an upward and downward movement), life and death, (Schoffeleers 1971:274) in order to allow God to return to earth so as give rain to the land and fertility to the girl.

The animal structures of *Nyau* are representations of the spirits in animal form and reconcile human, animals, the living and the death (Morris 1995:311). Interestingly, the women choose *Nyau* structures to use as headdresses during the

chingondo/timbwidza nowadays (*e.g.*, *kasiyamaliro, chimkoko, njobvu*; Chapter 5). I do not know how ancient the *chingondo/timbwidza* practice is, but I agree with Smith (1995:233) that it is more recent than *vilengo*. I think that the increasing influence of *Nyau*, on the choices that women make in the shapes they use as headdresses, might be expressing the strength that men have acquired over time in this matrilineal society. It has been noticed that *Nyau* provides the men, who are outsiders in the village of their wives, with the means of banding together (Schoffeleers1976; Smith 2001). But we know from oral traditions that *Nyau* started as a part of *Chinamwali* and was later separated so Nyau symbols must always have played some part in *Chinamwali*.

The performance of *Nyau* in girls' initiation ceremonies symbolizes the entrance of the wild animals and spirits of the woodland into the village domain. I believe that it might also be part of a broader scheme in which men and women demonstrate, at the *bwalo*, that these two ceremonies bring together the male affines and kin. It is only during these ceremonies and funerals that the spirits and animals are allowed into the village with the *namwali* and allowed to dance at the communal space of the village, the *bwalo*. Like *Nyau*, the girl is an animal as she has an animal headdress and spots on her body. The animals are only allowed in the village in the afternoon and at night during the liminal time. I saw three *kasiyamaliro* outside the village near the *manda* (graveyard) early in the morning at the *Chinamwali* that I attended at Mpalale village in 2003; they were not allowed to come close.

In recreating the 'perfect' world of the Kaphirintiwa myth the woodland, where the spirits of the ancestors reside, should be a place where no hunting and no burning is permitted (Schoffeleers 1992). But, in fact, it is burned in the dry season. Similarly, the *chingondo/thimbwidza* is destroyed after the ceremony and the *Nyau* zoomorphic masks are burned after use (see Yoshida 1992; Kaspin 1999). By these acts, as Schoffeleers correctly adds, "man repeats what happened at the time of the great cataclysm" (*ibid.*:40) with the purpose of reactivating the life cycle.

According to Morris (1995:309) the forests in the hills are particularly associated with rain shrines. I think that some of the rock shelters (Chongoni 25) are located in these forests in the hills because these mountains were thought of as places to be in contact with the spirits of the ancestors and also to be close to the rain shines. There was, for example, a rain shrine located in the river valley only a few kilometres north of Chongoni Mountain. I believe that the woodland was burned, almost at the same time of the girls' initiation ceremonies, not only to establish a clear connection between the preparation of the land and the girls' bodies and bring new life, but also for a practical reason: to avoid the union of 'hot' and 'cool'. Boucher points out that the most dangerous thing about the 'hot' and 'cool' phases is for them to meet. He gives the following example: "like a cool pot in the heat of the fire, it is thought that the contact results in breakage" (2002b:27). Especially, in ritual context, the union of these two phases must be avoided. I have mentioned that the woodland is regarded, in general, as a 'cool' place thus, its primal condition, offers a secure place to hold part of the girls' initiation ceremony. However, the girl, in the context of initiation is 'warm' and I believe that in order to protect her entrance to the woodland in this transition stage, the land needs to be warmed up as well.

According to Morris, the woodland is also connected to the past through the ancestral spirits but also with the original inhabitants of Malaŵi "the Batwa hunter-gatherers, who are believed still to frequent many mountains forests in Malawi" (Morris 1995:313). As I discussed in Chapter 2, the role of the Batwa is significant because they are an important channel "through which the present day society retains its links with its preagricultural past" (Schoffeleers 1992:26). The Batwa are also associated with the important rain shrines and received names such as *zinzimu* and *zinyau* meaning "powerful spirits" (Schoffeleers 1992:262 footnote 26). The word *zinyau* is the plural of *nyau* and that reminds us of the men's association of the Cheŵa, Nyanja and Mang'anja people (Smith 2001). Moreover many of the shelters where we find the White Spread-eagled tradition have old underlays of red geometric designs made by the Batwa (*e.g.*, Chentcherere I, II, Chiwenembe 2, Chongoni 25, Chongoni 15, Mphunzi 3 & 4, Thandwe; Chaingo). I think these spaces may have

been used because they had special and powerful associations with the Batwa and now I will now explore this further.

Thus, I want to close this chapter with something that needs further research. I have discussed why animals and their associations are so important for the understanding of the White Spread-eagled tradition but, I also mentioned the need to explain why the spread-eagled design became the ultimate symbol. The ancestors of the Chewa were highly influenced by the Batwa and I think that the former possibly assimilated some designs of the Red Geometric tradition, such as the spread-eagled design, for various reasons:

1) **Fertility and weather divination**:
   I mentioned earlier that the common motifs of the Red Geometric tradition are "circles, concentric circles, divided circles, circles with radiating lines, ladders, lines and sets of parallel lines" (Smith 1997:13; Chapter 3). It is also possible to find vertical ovals with internal divisions and depictions of penises. The hunter-gatherers, although less often, used spread-eagled designs in their paintings. Smith (1995:104) reported 3 sites in Malawi with the presence of daubed red spread-eagled motifs related to the Red Geometric tradition (Figure 107). Similar red spread-eagled designs have been reported in Mozambique (*e.g.*, Riane; De Oliveria 1971).

   Another set of spread-eagled designs, although only made as a red outline, were included by Phillipson into his **red schematic** paintings (Phillipson 1977:184; *e.g.*, Chafisi, Chikanga A [Phillipson 1976:172], Rukuzye B, Mlangafiti, Musinda A; Figure 107) and, according to him, they are earlier than other red outlined spread-eagled designs located in eastern Zambia that are covered with buff paint (*e.g.*, Sakwe A, Manje A, B and C, Thandwe, Kavumo C, Musinda A, Tagandala). Other examples of red outlined spread-eagled designs, but without the buff filling, have been found in places such as Uganda where no farmer rock art has been found up to the present day (Catherine Namono pers.

comm. 2008). Thus it is suggested that those spread-eagled designs were linked to the hunter-gatherers.

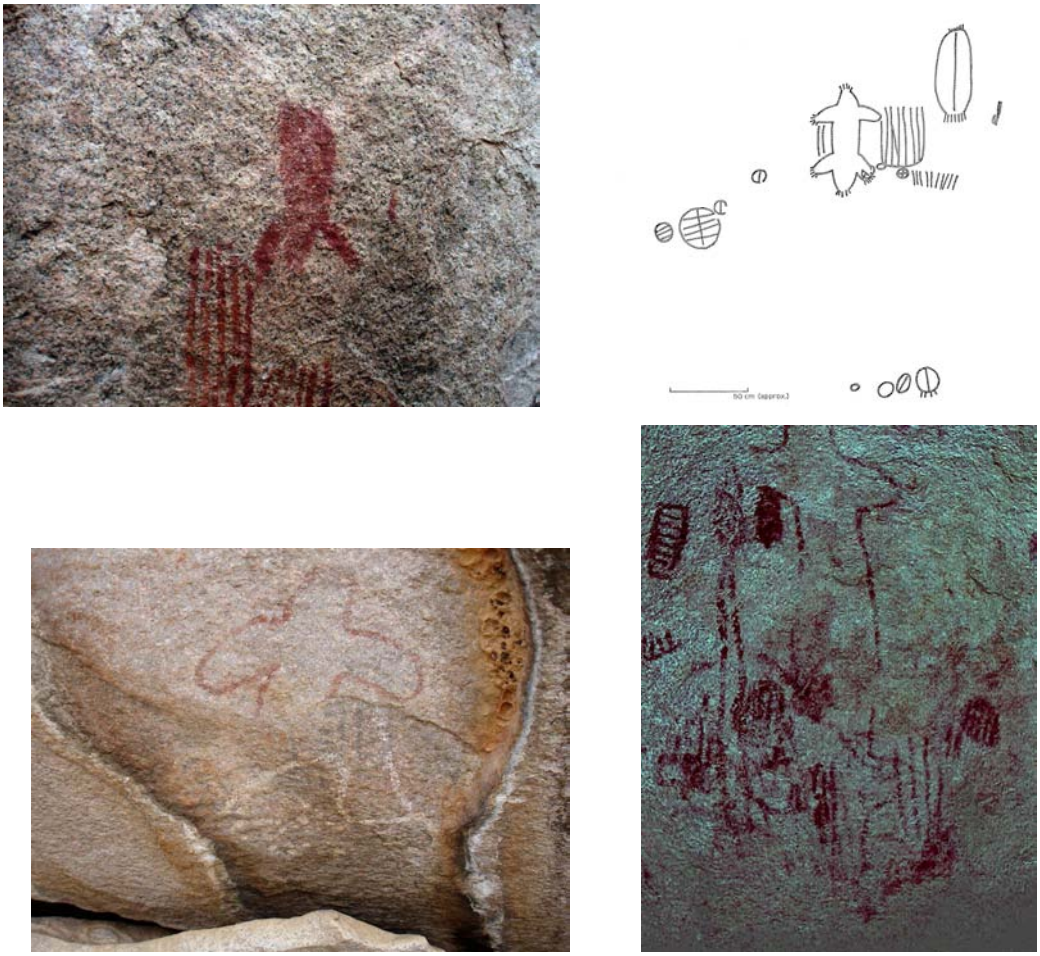


Figure 107. Top left: incomplete spread-eagled design (approx. height 25cm), Bunda 4, central Malaŵi 2006. Top right: spread-eagled red outline associated with other red geometrics, Chikanga, eastern Zambia (after Phillipson 1976:fig107). Bottom left: incomplete spread-eagled design outline (approx. length 25cm). Musinda A, eastern Zambia 2007. Bottom right: long spread-eagled red outline (approx. height 60cm). Mlangafiti, eastern Zambia 2007.

Smith (1997) and his team suggested, after analyzing the data, two possible themes for the Batwa red geometrics: weather divination and fertility. Smith suggested that some of the forms represented a range of meteorological phenomena such as rain, rainbows, clouds and suns and so on (see also Clark 1959a; Lindgren & Schoffeleers 1978; Phillipson 1976) and that these were used as part of weather divination practices. Katolola B in eastern Zambia has visible chip marks due to people throwing stones at the paintings as part of rain making ceremonies (Phillipson 1972b, 1976; Smith 1995, 1997; Figure 108).



Figure 108. Marks of chipped rock at Katolola B (panel approx. length 1.5m), eastern Zambia 2007.

Regarding fertility, Smith (1997:45) has argued that the concentric half circles opened at the top might represent the vulva. It has been suggested that a spiral is another form of concentric circle. However, shapes such as triangles and spirals are absent in the rock paintings (Smith 1997:41). Furthermore recent and ongoing research suggests that "the central African Batwa were related physically and culturally to modern-day Pygmies" (Smith 2006:89; see Smith 2005b). On this basis, the Red Geometric tradition has been related to women on the basis that similar geometric designs are made by the Pygmies hunter-gatherers of the Congo region. Pygmy women, exclusively, decorate bark cloth and decorate (through scarification) their bodies with these designs (Smith 1997; Smith & Blundell in press).

Spirals have been found also in Bantu-speakers symbols related to rainmaking and chieftainship (Harding 1961). Makewana, the priestess of the Msinja shrine, used to wear a conus shell ornament (Rangeley 1952). She was the provider of the rains and fertility. Even nowadays, spirals are present in the MCI amongst the Chewa (*e.g.*, Mkaika village; Chapter 5).

2) **Interaction:**

We know that when the farmers arrived in the area of my research they found hunter-gatherers who, according to the archaeological evidence, had lived in the region for more than 15,000 years and survived into recent times (Chapter 2; Smith 1995). Clark (1973:40) mentions that "an old informant spoke of meeting a group of five Batwa men camped at Mlanda near Bembeke in the later years of the last century". Thus, there were Batwa living in central Malaŵi until the late 1800s and their late survival in the Dedza hills is probably explained by the poor agricultural potential of the area. Even today, much of the area remains a forest reserve.

The processes of contact between hunter-gatherers and farmer people have been addressed, by various researchers, in central Malaŵi (Clark 1973, 1984; Robinson 1975; Mgomezulu 1978; Crader 1984) and Zambia (Phillipson 1976; Musonda 1987). However, Gadi Mgomezulu's work is most pertinent in this regard. Mgomezulu argued through the analysis of the stone tools that the continuum within the Chongoni/Linthipe area was evidence of a process in which the hunter-gatherers instead of being 'displaced', 'co-existed' with Iron Age farmers. This process ended with the gradual assimilation of hunter-gatherers into the food production economy (Phillipson 1977:252) and mostly with the exchange of ideas and symbols.

Diana Catherine Crader (1984:176) argued, based on Mgomezulu's evidence and her own work at Mwana wa Chentcherere II in central Malaŵi, that the hunter-gatherers and farming groups integrated very slowly; both recognized their wide cultural and social divergence. The evidence indicated that the farmers remained on the rich soils of the river valleys and the hunter-gatherer Batwa remained in the hills. The contact became more strained when farmers had to look for new places to farm and hunter-gatherers moved during the dry seasons to areas with permanent water resources, where farmers were already settled.

Moreover, the Chewa claimed to have taken their rainmaking practices from the hunter-gatherers, even taking their sacred drum (Rangeley 1952; Ntara 1973; Schoffeleers 1973; Smith 1997). Smith suggests that the Batwa "were employed to carry out rain calling rituals for farming communities as part of the relationship of exchange and interaction that existed between the two groups in certain places" (1997:44). Similarly San people were employed by farmers to call the rain in southern Africa (Jolly 1986). The Batwa became associated with the mountains and with the location of important shrines such as Kaphirintiwa and acquired sacred connotations (Schoffeleers 1973:51, 1992:26; Chapter 2).

3) **Incorporation:**

For many years the ancestors of the Chewa and the Batwa occupied the same landscape and established, thereby, a relationship based on mutual respect strengthened by a trade in commodities between the two peoples (Clark 1973; Crader 1984; Zubieta 2006). Some Batwa intermarried with the farmer people but others were killed (Mgomezulu 1978; Crader 1984; Schoffeleers 1992 for further discussion).

Recent studies (Smith 1997:48; Smith & Blundell in press) have pointed out the cross influences in artistic practices between the Batwa and Bantu-language speakers living in the same area for a long period of time. Even though these groups were culturally distinct, their contact lasted for almost a millennium if we take into consideration that the ancestors of the Chewa arrived in central Malawi around 800 AD.

Therefore, although we know that there were some exchanges of ideas, it is difficult to know the processes in which some of these designs were assimilated or incorporated by the farmers before further research. I am not suggesting that the spread-eagled design is the only design of the Red Geometric tradition that might have been assimilated by the farmers. However, I believe that there is a connection between the spread-eagled design of the RG and that of the WSE. But, I believe it is

also possible that the ancestors of the Chewa had already a spread-eagled design as part of their own set of symbols.

Similar white spread-eagled designs have been found in other places, as Smith (1995:179-180) has pointed out, such as in the Limpopo Province, South Africa; central and southern Zimbabwe; Tsodillo Hills, Botswana; western Angola; eastern Zambia; central Malawi; the central-western portion of Mozambique; Singida, Dodoma and Kondoa districts in central Tanzania and south-west Kenya and Lake Victoria basin. Other authors have tried to understand the links between the similar shapes in a wider geographical region (Prins & Hall 1994). However, we cannot say that all of them have the same meanings but maybe, as happens with the concentric circles that are also widely distributed, they carried similar symbolic connotations (see Smith 1997:45)

It is undeniable, therefore, that the Batwa were practising rituals related to fertility and rain making before the arrival of the farmers. I argue that probably the ancestors of the Chewa took aspects of Batwa fertility symbolism into *Chinamwali*. The Spread-eagled design was one (but not necessarily the only) aspect of this. The circles might be another. *Chinamwali* remained loosely linked to rain though the connection became increasingly distant and poorly understood with time, once the *Chinamwali* split from the rain making ceremonies. Thus, I believe that is possible to say that some of these concepts were borrowed and perhaps not only on the farmers side, but may have gone both ways. The fertility of the women and the reproductive cycle of the land were important concepts for both groups although through different cosmological systems but, after contact, some concepts that were complementary and compatible were exchanged, integrated and adapted. The practice of making rock art for fertility purposes was just one of these concepts and it was continued within *Chinamwali* ceremony into recent times.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

In this thesis I have proposed a new way of understanding the past uses of the White Spread-eagled rock painting tradition of south-central Africa through the analysis of the present uses of material culture in girls' initiation ceremonies amongst the matrilineal groups of the area of research. I have provided a general overview of the history of the research area so as to contextualize the ancestors of the Chewa people, the authors of this rock art tradition, and their relations and interactions with neighbouring groups. My objective has been to place the White Spread-eagled tradition in a dynamic view of history in which the initiation ceremonies were implicated in the borrowing and sharing of traits between various populations. Even if we do not know the specifics of these processes; these have taken place in different degrees across time and space in the area of research. I have considered the Yao, Bemba, Nsenga and Ngoni.

The White Spread-eagled tradition of south-central Africa was made by the ancestors of the present-day Chewa women. This link is suggested by archaeological evidence that shows us that this region (eastern Zambia, central Malawi and central-western Mozambique) was inhabited by the ancestors of the Chewa people. Oral traditions and historical accounts confirm this conclusion (Chapter 2).

From the archaeological evidence and oral traditions is clear that the ancestors of the Chewa found other people settled in the land: the original hunter-gatherers and the patrilineal farmers who migrated before them. Much contact was established and various researchers have argued that the relationship between the matrilineal communities and the hunter-gatherers in some places took the form of commodity exchange (Crader 1984). However, this is not the only thing that they exchanged. They also exchanged ideas and perceptions of the landscape and the creatures that live in it.

It is unsure when the ancestors of the Chewa started painting for the initiation ceremonies; moreover, we do not know if the ancestors of the Chewa had female

initiation ceremonies before they arrived in the region. Nevertheless, dozens of rock shelters in the area of research attest to an important practice that happened in secluded places far away from the villages. Some of the shelters have a long superimposition sequence that allows us to think that people in the region used these spaces often and over a long period of time.

Although we do not know if the ancestors of the Chewa had girls' initiation on their arrival, we do know that the political organizations of the earlier Banda clans were based on ritualised female leadership and that the leading rain shrine organizers were women (Phiri 1975; Chapter 2). The Banda clan are thus likely to have practised girls' initiation and this pushes the practice back at least 400 years. Later, the Phiri arrived in the area bringing a strong political and administrative force, and they settled and interacted with the earlier clans. They combined their political skills with the Banda's ancestral knowledge of rainmaking.

The Maravi Empire, as we know it from the Portuguese accounts, was one in which these two main clans had come together. From the early accounts we have an idea of how this empire was constituted by various clans, some of which were acephalous and not tied to political rulers. This explains much about the political organization of the time in which some of these independent and acephalous clans probably had strong Banda ancestry. During this period *Chinamwali* would have served to further Banda political interest. Conflicts between Phiri and Banda clans is demonstrated by an oral tradition recording the drowning of Phiri girls during an initiation (Schoffeleers 1976; Chapter 4)

Part of the girls' initiation was to make rock paintings in the bush. However, this practice stopped because of the impact that raids, especially from the Ngoni and the Yao, had on nineteenth century life. After this the links to sacred sites were gradually forgotten. The women were no longer able to go back to the rockshelters where they used to pass the secret knowledge to initiates. However, some of the material culture that the women used still survives and continues to be made by the Chewa women today. Some of this modern MCI resembles, in shape, the paintings in

the shelters. It is thus through present-day MCI that we can approach the uses of the paintings in the past, and some of the painted symbolism.

While little is known about MCI amongst the Chewa, we have many records of the use of objects for girls' initiation ceremonies amongst neighbouring matrilineal groups, such as the Bemba, Yao and Nsenga. I have also recorded, for the first time, detailed examples of the MCI amongst the Chewa. MCI have different characteristics and thus they have to be considered in their own context. Drawing on the ethnographic accounts and my own fieldwork, I have divided the MCI into five groups: figurines, floor clay reliefs, wall paintings, floor drawings and floor sculptures. I have, however, added a sixth group: the rock paintings. All these objects are representational media that work as a set in the specific context of girls' initiation.

In particular, I have introduced a method to analyse the various groups of objects through recording their creation, use and disposal. I have undertaken this task with the idea that there is a pattern in the various ways the MCI is manipulated. The matrilineal groups that I have included in my analysis are part of the matrilineal belt and have certain common practices in the way they instruct during girls' initiations (*e.g.*, mimes, songs, dances and the use of sacred objects). This does not mean, however, that the meanings of the symbols that they use are all the same. Moreover, because these sets of symbols are used in the context of girls' initiation, I have given special attention to initiation ceremonies and discussed and explained them in Chapter 4. However, this is a study of specific situated knowledge amongst the Chewa people and their *Chinamwali* girls' initiation.

Through this methodology I have noted how some matrilineal groups in south-central Africa, especially the Chewa, use objects in their initiation ceremonies. There are certain rules as to who creates these objects, how the girl interacts with them and also special rituals for their disposal. I have employed this knowledge to understand the ways in which the ancestors of the Chewa women used the paintings in the past but also taking into account the limitations of using this approach (Chapter 4). However, this is not a straightforward process of analysis. By comparing these objects

with the paintings I have been able to reach important insights such as the flexibility of the uses of symbols in various media by matrilineal people in the area of research.

Thus, from my analysis of the data, I proposed that the symbols that are represented in various media have the same, or very similar, meanings and that their representation in different media (*e.g.*, wall paintings, figurines, floor clay reliefs, and so on) served specific purposes. The difference lies not in the meanings of the symbols but in the ways the objects are used to help the initiates to understand, learn and memorize the instructions that are given to them throughout the initiation. The imagery employed helps the memorizing process. The impact of the images would, however, not be the same without language and the use of words. It is through repetition and rhythm that the girls associate certain songs and stories with the images that they see. This cognitive process is dynamic as it involves many elements to pass on the knowledge.

There are various ways in which the images are used to impart specific teachings. Sometimes one image, on its own, can give the whole set of instructions to an initiate. Other images, as a group, give a specific teaching through their relation to each other. It is difficult to understand these associations because it is only through the initiation that these associations can be understood. Thus, although from observation and statistical analysis we can realize that some images are repeatedly associated with each other, such as the snake-like forms and the spread-eagled designs, it is difficult to understand completely the message that they were intended to give. However, this does not mean that we cannot try to understand their individual symbolism, as I showed in Chapter 6.

It is wrong to envisage a static symbolic schema. Rather a diverse and shifting reality has to be acknowledged if we are to arrive at a reliable analysis of the data (Morris 1995:313). A shifting understanding of this kind fits in with current cognitive research in which learning is seen not as a linear process but as the result of various facts and parameters, such as context, emotions, and so on. In this case memory and secrecy are added to the equation. Realizing that symbols do not have single meanings

is fundamental to understanding the paintings and any other object in the set of symbols used in the Chewa MCI. Through my conversations with the women, I realized that the same symbol represented not just one teaching but many things at the same time.

More importantly for this research, I have concluded that the symbols are also multidimensional in the sense that different meanings are given at specific stages of a woman's life through the same symbols. Women are aware that girls need to learn slowly to be able to comply with all the various instructions. For example, an instruction on how to wash the private parts during a menstrual period can only come when the girl experiences her first period; how to care for a child can only come with the first-born child.

It is crucial to understand how meanings were attached to rock paintings. I have proposed that each image, or group of images, had multiple meanings and that the complexity of these meanings increased at the different stages through which a woman passed during her life and which required a different initiation.

Although I have based my ideas on data collected by various authors and sometimes on their own recollections of their experiences, most of my conclusions are based on my own participant observation of these ceremonies. I had the opportunity to share ideas with some of the women, not only during the initiations that I attended, but also in their own homes. I know, however, that although I was able to achieve most of my goals in the field, the deeper meanings of certain symbols and Chewa perceptions of certain aspects of their environment would not have been possible without the ethnographic accounts that are available. It would have taken me many years to understand some of the animal symbols and the woodland/village perceptions without the work of many people who I have repeatedly cited throughout this thesis, not only amongst the Chewa but also from neighbouring groups. In some cases the information recorded has since been forgotten and could no longer be collected today. The value of good ethnographic work is therefore beyond measure.

Each *Chinamwali* is complex in its own ways and although nowadays they last mostly only for a few days, I was told that some can still last for a few months. Although these initiations have a similar structure of events, there are variations in the ways people perform dances, and even the songs they sing are slightly different. Despite the differences, however, women in Zambia and Mozambique recognized the songs that I learned when I was initiated in Malaŵi. I do think that the variations that we see in the paintings in the research area (*e.g.*, specific ways in which the spread-eagled is depicted) are a function of the different ways in which Chewa women pass on their knowledge. They are simply a function of localism in manner of depiction.

During her initiation, a girl goes through a set of challenges that, at the end, will give her a new status in society and also pride to be part of a knowledge system that only a strong woman can achieve. This is a time when the girls are not allowed to talk, to sleep, to sit loosely or to eat whenever they want. It is a time of discipline and constant learning accompanied by public demonstrations to show how much the girls have learned. Thus, *Chinamwali* is not only about the individual cognitive process in which secret knowledge is acquired by the initiate but also about how the transfer of this knowledge operates as part of a network in which many individuals, their songs, dances and artefacts take part.

I was interested to learn of the experiences of women who went through this learning process, with the help of memory, secrecy and the repetition of songs and dances. I asked women in Khombe village in Malaŵi why they chose this way of teaching. From my perspective, I was concerned that the initiate did not sleep and was still expected to pay full attention to the teachers while performing and then was asked to imitate the same acts and dances. I wondered if the teachers thought that initiates were going to be able to remember all that was given to them in the *tsimba*.

The women replied that they thought it was a good way of learning, and they added that the initiate can attend other initiations and thereby remember through further repetition of the event. They said that all the women know the same songs so the girls have a chance to practise what they have learned when they attend another

Chinamwali. I also asked them what would happen if the *namwali* needed to ask questions; I was concerned that during the ceremony the initiates cannot talk to anyone and wondered what would happen if the learning process was not effective. The women said that the initiates are not allowed to ask inside the *tsimba* but they said that later the initiates can ask their tutors.

Although the answers to these questions were short, or perhaps my questions were inadequate, I was told that the initiate is not left alone and that her tutor will answer her questions even after the ceremony has ended. It made me think that although the instructions become the rules that the girls will follow throughout their lives, the ceremony itself has other aims besides the one of instructing the initiates. The ceremony has the purpose of being a dramatic performance. It brings people together and provides a bonding experience for the women as they participate and discuss the issues important in their daily lives (Zubieta 2006).

My brief experience as an initiate made me feel excited but also extremely tired as I had to do the same things as the other initiates throughout the night. However, there is so much that is expected from the initiate that my personal feeling was of challenge and of proving to the other women that I was capable of following the instructions. Finishing with the other girls was a true accomplishment, and I was rewarded with the ululating of the women.

Thus, I think that a wide focus on the actions that take place during *Chinamwali* (*e.g.*, singing, dancing, shaving, performing, food preparation, and so on) and the relevant material paraphernalia related to it (*e.g.*, beads, flour, seeds, clothing, and so on) opens a new way to analyse the relationships between the material culture and the rock art that is embedded in an enculturated landscape (see Jordan 2001). Moreover it makes us understand that the visual aspect of the paintings helped initiates to remember their instructions — but only with the help of the rest of the activities practised at the rock shelters. The use of the rock art as a mnemonic device made history tangible for generations of women who recreated over and over again their link with their ancestral land and traditions. Moreover, this approach allows us to

bring together the paintings and the objects and to analyse them as a multicomponent unit.

It was in the course of my analysis of the cycle through which the MCI passes today, that I realized that these object are made and used in specific places that correspond to the ways the Chewa perceived their landscape. Therefore, after suggesting a similar reconstruction of the life cycle of the rock paintings (Chapter 5) based on the analysis that I made about the MCI (Chapter 6), I feel able to propose some reasons as to why the spread-eagled design, the ultimate symbol depicted in the paintings, was linked to animal bodies.

Women, because of the reasons that I have discussed, used animal symbolism in their initiation ceremonies. Animals are important as a source of meat and medicines, but they also feature in myths, folk tales and sayings. Thus, in the initiation instructions, animals allude to certain proper or improper behaviour. The older women use animal behaviour as a metaphor to teach the initiates. These instructions are given in this metaphorical way to keep the true meaning of songs and teachings veiled. The meanings are comprehended only by attending the initiation.

Women also employed animal bodies in their rock art images because wild animals are related to the woodland domain as opposed to the village. Rock shelters are located in the woodland, and women see this domain as the one in which the animals and spirits of affines are present. The Chewa perceived this domain as part of their pre-agricultural background that was also inhabited by Batwa hunter-gatherers, whom they consider some of the most powerful spirits. The perception of the shelters as part of the woodland, was moreover related to rain, rain shrines and thus to the rainmaking ceremonies of which the *Chinamwali* was once a part. I propose that the Batwa had an important influence in the girls' initiation ceremonies of the Chewa. In fact, just as the Chewa claim that they stole the rain drum from the Batwa, I think they also took aspects of the Batwa ideas about fertility and also some of the symbolism they used in their paintings (*e.g.*, spread-eagled design).

Animals in white and black colours were depicted in these shelters probably because these were regarded as 'cool' places and because the white pigment helped to maintain that condition. Red pigment was not present because it was inappropriate as it is a colour of ambiguity, menstrual blood and potential harm. The use of colours was also related to *mdulo*. *Mdulo* is the consequence for transgressions against moral beliefs related to ritual times. *Mdulo* is related to the concepts of 'hot' and 'cool' in which the Chewa world operates. 'Hot' and 'cool' phases are not regarded as good or bad, but their union is regarded as disastrous. Certain life situations make people shift from one state to the other and women, especially, are susceptible to change from one state to another because of their menstrual blood. It is through *Chinamwali* that a woman learns about the rules so as to prevent catastrophic consequences to the group as a whole. Each individual's behaviour is essential to the overall well-being of the collective.

Many questions remain unanswered. There are also many sites still to discover in eastern Zambia and Tete Province of Mozambique. Much more time needs to be spent with women to understand how they use their sacred objects and thereby to explore in more detail their perceptions about various animals related to both the girls' initiation and the woodland.

I want to emphasize that the White Spread-eagled tradition, although no longer made, is still associated with the initiation ceremonies by some of the women even though memories of the meanings of the paintings are almost completely lost. Nevertheless, the fact that the people still have initiation ceremonies, as part of a living heritage, brings an outstanding opportunity to combine anthropology and archaeology and to realize how the creation process of objects helps us to understand how symbolism works in society, as I discussed in this thesis.

We have to keep in mind, however, that the accessibility to this knowledge is only available to the women who go through *Chinamwali* and who pay the fee to be part of this knowledge. The women feel strongly that certain things must not be revealed because the answers are part of a long process that women have to go

through first. I feel that I do not have to reveal the answers to the riddles or the contents of the secret songs to get to major and important conclusions in this research about the White Spread-eagled tradition and also because it is through my own initiation that I know that this knowledge is what makes the Chewa women proud of their *mwambo*. Maybe someday the Chewa will choose to share some of this information with the public as times change.

Glossary[35]

Achembere: Women who have borne children.
Akulu-akulu: Respected elders.
Azamba: Elderly women helping at child birth.
Bwalo: Communal open space in the village used as a meeting place.
Chilengo: Object use at the initiation ceremony. Plural is *vilengo*.
Chinamwali: Girls' initiation ritual.
Chingondo: Ritual performed at the end of the *Chinamwali*. A clay figurine is put on top of the girls head as a symbol of womanhood. The Chewa women refer to this figurine as *chingondo*. Therefore, I make a distinction between *Chingondo* and *chingondo* to refer to the ritual and the figurine respectively.
Chisamba: Dance and rituals associated with a woman's first pregnancy.
Chitenge: Long piece of cloth that women use around their lower half of the body as a wraparound, as a skirt.
Dambo: Marsh, valley glades/grassland, wetland.
Dambwe: The place of *Nyau* initiation instruction.
— dika: To abstain from sexual intercourse for a ritual purpose.
Fisi: Hyena.
Gule Wamkulu: 'The big dance' where *Nyau* masks perform.
Kabuthu: Girl near to be matured.
Kalulu: Hare.
Kamwana Kabadwa Lomba: Infant born recently.
Kudika: To abstain from sexual intercourse for a ritual purpose.
Kudula: To cut; often used to indicated that by transgressing a taboo on sexual intercourse during certain particular circumstances a person causes some disaster.
Kumeta: To shave the hair (at an initiation or a burial).
Kundabwi: Medicine made out of ashes and burnt roots.
Kutenga mwana: The ritual performed some weeks after the birth of a child.
Kutukwana: To swear; to course.
Makewana: Priestess at the Msinja rain shrine.
Makolo: Ancestors.
Manda: Graveyard.
Mankhwala: Medicine.
Mbereko: The cloth (previously skin) fastened round a mother's neck or shoulder and slung on her back, in which she carries her child until is weaned.
Mbeta: Nubile young woman.
Mchembere Kamodzi: one child.
Mchembere Kawiri: two children.
Mdulo: Disease related to sexual taboos and hot/cold symbolisms.
Mfiti: Witch.
Mfiti yeni-yeni: A witch who is believed to eat the flesh of his victim.

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[35] Plural generally takes the prefix A: *Anamwali*, *aphungu*, *anamkungwi* and so forth. I decided to use a capital letter for the names of the ceremonies. For example I distinguish between *Chingondo* (ceremony) and *chingondo* (object).

Mfumu: Chief or village headman. pl. *Amfumu*.
Mfunde: Storm. Rain sacrifice.
Mkazi wachitengwa: A married woman living in the village of her husband.
Mkhate: Vessel given to women during *Chinamwali* to wash and shave her and her husband's pubic hair.
Mkuzi: String of beads round the waist.
Mpheranjiru: A sorcerer who kills out of malice or upon demand.
Mphongozi: Mother-in-law; father-in-law.
Msungwana: Youthful girl, until being married or having children.
Mtengo: Tree (under which some rituals take place during *Chinamwali*)
Mwambo: Tradition, custom, advice, wisdom.
Mwana wopitiira: Neonatal death.
Mwna wa khanda: Infant, up to a few months or a year.
Mwaniche: Young baby.
Namkungwi: Elderly woman in charge of the initiation of girls. pl. *Anamkungw*i.
Namwali: Initiate. pl. *Anamwali.*
Nkata: Grass ring or pad used in carrying loads on the head.
Ng'anga: Traditional doctor.
Njondo: Small vessel with oil given to women during *Chinamwali* to put on her genitals before having intercourse.
Njobvu: Elephant.
Nkhole: Menstrual blood.
Nkhoswe: Marriage counsellor (one or two for each husband and wife).
Nsengwa: Shallow basket, a symbol of womanhood.
Nsima: Stiff maize porridge, the staple food of the people.
Nthungululu: Shrill shout of joy made by women.
Nyama: Animal flesh –cross section.
Nyama ya mulungu: Animals of God (do not come close to people).
Nyama ya wantu: Animals of humans (attack people and destroy crops).
Nyau: Men closed association.
Phungu: The *namwali* tutor.
Siwa: Abandoned hut because of the owners deceased.
Tsimba: Hut in which the girls are confined during initiation.
Ufiti: Witchcraft and sorcery in general.
Ulemu: Sign of respect shown to chiefs and elders.
Unifomu: Maternity dress.
Zolaula: Songs that mention the male or female parts.

Note: The letters "r" and "l" are interchangeable in Chicheŵa when reading the literature.

Glossary taken from Werner 1906; Hodgson 1933; Scott & Hetherwick 1957; van Breugel 2001; Drake 1976; Yoshida 1992; Morris 2000b; Smith 2001 and my personal experience in 2003, 2006 & 2007.

Appendix



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Chikanga B**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG: RG

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and James Chiwaya

Visited: 06-09-2007

Access: Difficult

UTM:
36 449220 mE
8438782 mN

Elevation: 1169masl
Error: 14m

Country: Zambia

District: Chadiza

Province/ Region: Eastern Province

Map Reference: 1432B1 1:50000

Description:
The road to get to the site is in bad state and it is only doable to drive at 30kph. It is possible to leave the vehicle at Chairman's Farm and from there to walk to the site. Mr Foloma Tembo took us to the site. Mr Derek Phiri and Mr David Banda, from Chitobwa village, wanted to come with us to the site because they are both working for the National Heritage Conservation Commission of Zambia and looking after Kalemba site. Phillipson (1976:170) mentions a site in Chikanga Hill, what he calls Chikanga site, but we were unable to find his site. I have opted to follow Phillipson's system and called this site Chikanga B because it is also situated on what is known as Chikanga Hill. The red geometric paintings include a handprint. The paintings are located in a small shelter that faces east. Length: 11m, depth: 4m, height: 3m.

Conservation: The site is isolated and thus protected from vandalism.
Associated material: None.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Chiwenembe 5**

WSE/WZ/RA/RG: WSE

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and Noah Siwinda

Visited: 28-10-2006

Access: Easy

UTM:
36 629529 mE
8411658 mN

Elevation: 1477masl
Error: 14m

Country: Malaŵi

District: Dedza

Province/ Region: Central Region

Map Reference: 1434A3 1:50000

Description:
This small shelter is on the eastern slope of Chiwenembe hill a 100 metres north of Chiwenembe 2 and Chiwenembe 3 sites that Lindgren and Schoffeleers (1978) and Smith (1995) reported. This small shelter is a 100m north of Chiwenembe 2. Chiwenembe 5 is not visible because it is covered with vegetation. The small shelter is southeast facing. Length: 8m, depth: 2m, height: 1.4m.

Conservation: Poor. Only two white images are visible.
Associated material: None.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Chizuzu A**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG: WSE & RG

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and James Chiwaya

Visited: 13-09-2007

Access: Easy

UTM:
36 414105 mE
8470967 mN

Elevation: 1738m
Error: 18m

Country: Zambia

District: Chipata

Province/ Region: Eastern Province

Map Reference: 1332C3 1:50000

Description:
The site is on the east side of Chizuzu hill close to the road to Chaingo site (Chaplin 1962; Phillipson 1976). Mr Ofred Banda accompanied us to the site. The shelter is visible from a distance. There are three white spread-eagled designs with dots on their bodies. One of them has limbs and fingers. These white paintings are on top of traces of red geometric paintings. The shelter is southeast facing. Length: 7.20m, depth: 5.80m, height 3m.

Conservation: The site is well preserved despite the fact that is easily accessible. No graffiti and no excavations.
Associated material: Lithic material and ceramics on the surface.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Chizuzu B**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG: WSE & RG

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and James Chiwaya

Visited: 13-09-2007

Access: Easy:

UTM:
36 414332 mE
8471048 mN

Elevation: 1091m
Error: 15m

Country: Zambia

District: Chipata

Province/ Region: Eastern Province

Map Reference: 1332C3 1:50000

Description:
This small shelter is on the same hill but approximate 400m northeast from Chizuzu A. Mr Ofred Banda accompanied us to the site. The paintings at the site are barely visible. There are traces of a small white image and traces of parallel lines in red colour. The shelter is southeast facing. Length: 7.50, depth: 2m, height 3m.

Conservation: The site is poorly preserved. People are using the space as a shelter and they are making fire very close to the paintings.
Associated material: None.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Chongoni 38**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG: WSE & RG

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and Noah Siwinda

Visited: 12-10-2006

Location: Very high in the mountains. The access is difficult.

UTM:
36 629327 mE
8426713 mN

Elevation: 1715m
Error: 11m

Country: Malaŵi

District: Dedza

Province/ Region: Central Region

Map Reference: 1434A1 1:50000

Description:
The site is on the highest slopes of the western side of Chongoni Mountain. Mr Diston Sikeliamu and Mr Matolina Zotsiriza took us to the site. The shelter is on the western face of a 6m high boulder. The white paintings are unusual and they are on top of red geometric designs. The site is west facing. Length 8.50m, depth: 3m, height: 1.7m.

Conservation: Good. The bottom section of the paintings is fading of but the paintings close to the ledge of the internal wall are well protected. No graffiti.
Associated material: None.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Chongoni 39**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG: WSE, RG & unidentified white tradition.

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and Noah Siwinda

Visited: 24-10-2006

Access: A small shelter in the western part of the Chongoni Mountain. It is located in the higher part of the mountain. Difficult access.

UTM:
36 628096 mE
8428254 mN

Elevation: 1625m
Error: 14m

Country: Malaŵi

District: Dedza

Province/ Region: Central Region

Map Reference: 1431A1 1:50000

Description:
The site is on the west side of Chongoni Mountain. The shelter is used nowadays as a place to cook bats. A simple structure was found inside the shelter to hang the meat. The entrance of the shelter is covered 80% by thatching. The back wall is covered with paintings. The first paintings of the sequence are concentric circles in red covered by big spread-eagled designs with black dots. A possible genet cat was identified. On top of these paintings there are some white paintings that do not correspond to the traditions that have been identified. I believe this is contact rock art. Patrick Chakanika and Godwin Tofam took us to the site. This site was reported by Father Herbert Franzen initially, but the location was unknown. Some pictures of this site are on display at the KuNgoni Centre. The shelter is north facing. Length: 6.70m, depth: 4.70m; height: 1.60m.

Conservation: The paintings are covered with soot because of the constant use of the site. However, it is one of the most impressive sites of the Chongoni Mountain because it is well preserved.
Associated material: There is no deposit in the shelter and no archaeological material was observed. However, modern artefacts were found inside such as a big bundle of reeds used possibly to build the fence in front of the shelter and a pot.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Chongoni 40**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG: Unidentified white painted tradition

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and Noah Siwinda

Visited: 26-10-2006

Access: Difficult.

UTM: (approx.)
36 627850 mE
8427900 mN

Elevation: *c.* 1750m
Error: GPS failure

Country: Malaŵi

District: Dedza

Province/ Region: Central Region

Map Reference: 1431A1 1:50000

Description:
The site is on the top of the west side of Chongoni Mountain. It requires several hours to get to the site but the path, although steep, is clear because the Cheŵa use it every year to get to the site, but, not because of the paintings. Mr Mabuto Baulen and Mr Masowutso Kaning'a took us to the site and they did not know anything about the authorship of the paintings. This is a site that men use to catch bats, cook them and sell them. On one of the walls of an enormous boulder (approx. 30m high), that is north facing, we found several paintings all in white. The length of the wall is 13.60m and the paintings are distributed in two sections 5 metres apart from each other. There are two spread-eagled designs, one covered with white dots and the other one filled in with white. There is one anthropomorphic figure and four 'animals' in profile; one of them covered with white dots. A section of the wall is covered only with white dots. It is possible that the paintings are related to the WSE but further research is required.

Conservation: Well preserved although there is not enough shelter to protect the paintings.
Associated material: Ceramics and a variety of material culture related to the modern occupation of the site.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Chongoni 41**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG: Unidentified white painted tradition

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and Noah Siwinda.

Visited: 26-10-2006 & 3-11-2006

Access: Very difficult. Hidden in thick bush.

UTM: (approx.)
36 627760 mE
8427900 mN

Elevation: *c.* 1700m
Error: GPS failure

Country: Malaŵi

District: Dedza

Province/ Region: Central Region

Map Reference: 1434A1 1:50000

Description:
This site is directly 100m below Chongoni 40 at the west side of Chongoni Mountain. To get to this site we used the same path but it is slightly more difficult because it is surrounded by thick vegetation thus it is well secluded. The images at the site are all white and represent animals in profile and a long white snake-like image. I believe these are images of a contact period with the patrilineal groups that arrived in mid 1800s but at this stage it is difficult to know who made these paintings. One of the striking images at the site is a white snake-like covered with red dots. The red dots seem to have been applied with some tool because they are perfectly circular. We visited the site with Mr Baulen and Mr Kaning'a but then we went back again with some of the women from Chinkonda village. The site is north facing. Length: 5.30m, depth: 3.30m, height: 4m.

Conservation: Well preserved. The paintings are well protected and secluded. A few paintings that are close to the ground are slightly rubbed off and I think this is because of animals that use the site as a shelter.
Associated material: None.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Chongoni 42**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG: RG

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and Noah Siwinda

Visited: 4-11-2006

Access: Moderate

UTM:
36 627384 mE
8427798 mN

Elevation: 1432m
Error: 11m

Country: Malaŵi

District: Dedza

Province/ Region: Central Region

Map Reference: 1434A1 1:50000

Description:
The paintings at this site are located on the wall of a big boulder on the west side slope of Chongoni Mountain. We found the site when we were walking back from Chongoni 5 site (see Smith 1995). The only thing visible at the site is a few red dots.

Conservation: Poor. The site is not well protected.
Associated material: None.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Chongoni 43**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG: Unidentified white painted tradition

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and Noah Siwinda

Visited: 4-11-2006

Access: Difficult

UTM:
36 627683 mE
8427663 mN

Elevation: 1550m
Error: 9m

Country: Malaŵi

District: Dedza

Province/ Region: Central Region

Map Reference: 1434A1 1:50000

Description:
Mr Baulen and Mr Siwinda found this site when we went to the Chongoni 7 site (see Smith 1995). The shelter is on the west side of Chongoni Mountain. The paintings are slightly pink and represent animals in profile. The paintings are on the wall of a deep shelter and two other animals were depicted on a rock that is lying on the floor. It is a difficult site to find because it is well secluded and the slope to get there is quite steep. Many rocks are covering the floor of the shelter and thus I do not think that it was inhabited. The small shelter is south facing. Length: 7m, depth: 4.10m, height: 1.6m.

Conservation: Well preserved. The paintings on the wall of the cave look recent and well preserved but the ones on the floor rocks look faint.
Associated material: None.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Chongoni 44**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG: Unidentified white painted tradition

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and Noah Siwinda

Visited: 2-11-2006

Access: Very difficult

UTM:
36 627714 mE
8426916 mN

Elevation: 1800m
Error: 7m

Country: Malaŵi

District: Dedza

Province/ Region: Central Region

Map Reference: 1434A1 1:50000

Description:
The site is on top of the west side of Chongoni Mountain. It requires several hours to walk to the site. It is a place where the Chewa cook and dry bats. It is a big boulder completely covered with a fence made of grass. Inside the shelter we found structures to dry the bat meat. Mr Mabuto Baulen and Mr Junior Liukas took us to the site. The paintings are covered with soot and are hard to see. I distinguished a circle with a cross inside and a thick white line covered with black dots. The site is west facing and the landscape from the site is magnificent. Length: 11m, depth: 6m, height: 5m.

Conservation: Poor. The paintings are in constant contact with modern activities such as the fires that the men make to cook the bats.
Associated material: Ceramics and modern material culture associated with the catching and cooking of the bats.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Chongoni 45**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG: RG

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and Noah Siwinda

Visited: 14-11-2006

Access: Moderate

UTM:
36 627350 mE
8427614 mN

Elevation: 1440m
Error: 15m

Country: Malaŵi

District: Dedza

Province/ Region: Central Region

Map Reference: 1434 A1 1:50000

Description:
The boulder is in a small stream valley on the western side of Chongoni Mountain. Close to Chongoni 6 site (see Smith 1995). The red paintings are hardly visible but the wall is covered with red paintings. One of the red geometric designs is a concentric circle with internal dots. The site is west facing. Length: 6m, depth: 2.30, height: 5m.

Conservation: Poor. The site offers little protection to the paintings.
Associated material: None.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Chongoni 46**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG: RG

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and James Chiwaya

Visited: 23-10-2006

Access: Difficult

UTM:
36 628091 mE
8428663 mN

Elevation: 1339m
Error: 30m

Country: Malaŵi

District: Dedza

Province/ Region: Central Region

Map Reference: 1434 A1 1:50000

Description:
The site is on a steep slope on the west side of Chongoni Mountain. The red paintings are located on the wall of a big boulder. Some of them are thick red parallel lines. The site is north facing. Length: 5m, height: 5m (approx.).

Conservation: Poor. The site is not protected.
Associated material: None.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Manje D**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG:WSE & RG

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and James Chiwaya

Visited: 08-09-2007

Access: Easy

UTM:
36 448890 mE
8457326 mN

Elevation: 1106m
Error: 19m

Country: Zambia

District: Chadiza

Province/ Region: Eastern Province

Map Reference: 1332D3 1:50000

Description:
The site is on Manje Hill which is close to the highway. I met Mr S Z Banda, a man 80 years old, who Phillipson (1976) recorded meeting. A group of nine men from the village helped us to get to the site but no one had ever been to the sites.
The site is very exposed. One of our guides located the site as we were coming down the hill. It is a wall where traces of red pigment and one white image are still visible. It is only a few metres below Manje A and B (see Phillipson 1976:176). The site is northwest facing. Length: 5m, height: 6m (approx.)

Conservation: It is possible that in the past there were more paintings but it is very exposed thus poorly preserved.
Associated material: None.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Mlangafiti**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG: RG & WSE

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and James Chiwaya

Visited: 04-09-2007 & 06-09-2007

Access: Easy although driving there is complex

UTM:
36 446884 mE
8434196 mN

Elevation: 1179m
Error: 20m

Country: Zambia

District: Chadiza

Province/ Region: Eastern Province

Map Reference: 1432B1 1:50000

Description:
The site is far away from any village. It is only possible to get there by dirt road. Mr Derek Phiri and Mr David Banda from Chitobwa village took us to the site. It is a cave made by 3 big boulders. The paintings are located on the south entrance of the cave. On the outside wall it is possible to see traces of red geometric designs, a big spread-eagled outline in red and circles and rectangles with internal divisions. Inside the cave, on the southern roof, there are traces of white paintings but they are faded The southern entrance, where the paintings are located, is 3.70m long, 1.60m high and it is 9m deep. The inside of the cave is suitable for habitation. Once inside it is possible to stand up.

Conservation: No graffiti. The red paintings are faint because they are exposed.
Associated material: No material was visible. We were told that a man who was hiding from the police stayed in the cave for a while.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Mtusi 5**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG: WSE

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and James Chiwaya

Visited: 18-10-2006

Access: Moderate

UTM:
36 627261 mE
8421887 mN

Elevation: 1463m
Error: 10m

Country: Malaŵi

District: Dedza

Province/ Region: Central Region

Map Reference: 1434A3 1:50000

Description:
This shelter is approximately 400m south of Mtusi 2 site. Mtusi 2 was excavated by Gadi Mgomezulu in 1976 (Mgomezulu 1978; Smith 1995). Mtusi 5 is a small boulder on the southwest side of Mtusi hill. Two white spread-eagled designs and possibly two smaller ones are visible. It is a small, but comfortable shelter and it is well secluded. The shelter is west facing. Length: 9m, depth: 5m, height 3m.

Conservation: In general it is well preserved but one of the spread-eagled designs has traces of very fine graffiti.
Associated material: Many pieces of modern ceramics and a mouse trap. The traps usually consist on a 20cm rock and one of the corners is lifted up with a stick.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Mtusi 6**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG: RG

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and Noah Siwinda

Visited: 21-10-2006

Access: Moderate

UTM:
36 626912 mE
8423054 mN

Elevation: 1368m
Error: 8m

Country: Malaŵi

District: Dedza

Province/ Region: Central Region

Map Reference: 1434A3 1:50000

Description:
The site is in a very remote place on the east side of Mtusi hill. We found this site when we were trying to look for Kampika site (Lindgren & Schoffeleers 1978; Smith 1995, 1998). Mr Pociano Legodi took us to Kampika. The red paintings at the site are barely visible. Although the big rock does not create a shelter, it offers good shade. The site is east facing. Length: 5m, height: 4m.

Conservation: Poorly preserved.
Associated material: Many pieces of ceramics were found on the surface in front of the wall.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Mtusi 7**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG: Unidentified.

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and Noah Siwinda

Visited: 19-10-2006

Access: Moderate

UTM:
36 627727 mE
8422477 mN

Elevation: 1420m
Error: 8m

Country: Malaŵi

District: Dedza

Province/ Region: Central Region

Map Reference: 1434A3 1:50000

Description:
This site is on the east side of Mtusi hill. It is a cave that is made by two big boulders placed one on top of the other. The paintings at the site are recent. The pigment is made out of grass and a clay-like substance. There are two anthropomorphic figures. One of them has a 'face' made out of two eyes and a 'nose' in black. The paintings are at the entrance of the cave. The cave is east facing and the entrance of the cave is 4m long, 4m high and 12m deep.

Conservation: Although it is well preserved I believe that the pigment could be washed off easily.
Associated material: Ceramics.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Musinda A**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG: Possibly related to the red and white bichrome series.

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and James Chiwaya

Visited: 29-08-2007

Access: Easy

UTM:
36 461052 mE
8481206 mN

Elevation: 1168m
Error: 10m

Country: Zambia

District: Chipata

Province/ Region: Eastern Province

Map Reference: 1332D1 1:50000

Description:
This big boulder is 200m from Chipata-Chadiza highway in the middle of a maize field. Father Toon van Kesel took us to this site. The site is exposed but the local people do not know about the paintings and if they do they do not who made them. Most of the paintings are red outlines filled with buff paint. There are some paintings in white that resemble the RG. The shelter is well protected from the rain. Length: 8.80m, depth: 3m, height: 3.5m (approx.). These are possibly related to the red and white bichrome series (Phillipson 1976).

Conservation: Well preserved.
Associated material: Pieces of iron but no other material was found on the surface.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Nthulu 6**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG: RG

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and Noah Siwinda

Visited: 28-10-2006

Access: Difficult

UTM:
36 625367 mE
8416110 mN

Elevation: 1512m
Error: 11m

Country: Malaŵi

District: Dedza

Province/ Region: Central Region

Map Reference: 1434A3 1:50000

Description:
The site is on the east slope of Nthulu hill below the well known sites of Nthulu 4 and Nthulu 5 (Anati 1986; Smith 1995). Mr Espoliano Njele, the headman of Njele village (closest to the site), accompanied us to visit the sites with a group of 10 men and children. On the way down from Nthulu 4 a member of the crew found Nthulu 6. It is a cave and the red paintings inside are almost hidden. The cave floor is covered with big blocks that fell from the roof, I presume even before the paintings were made. Some of the designs are red 'u' shapes with small white dots on top of them. The cave is almost invisible because its entrance is covered with vegetation and also because the entrance is small. The cave is northeast facing. Length: 9.70m, depth: 5.80m, height 1.5m.

Conservation: The paintings inside the cave are very well protected and have not been vandalized.
Associated material: None. It might be possible that the shelter was inhabited in the past thus the material could be underneath the rocks that cover the floor of the cave.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.



SITE INFORMATION SHEET

Site name: **Tagandala (Amjonde)**

WSE/ WZ/RA/RG: WSE, RG and red and white bichromes.

Recorded by: Leslie Zubieta and James Chiwaya

Visited: 06-09-2007 & 07-09-2007

Access: Easy

UTM:
36 443971 mE
8435758 mN

Elevation: 1119m
Error: 22m

Country: Zambia

District: Chadiza

Province/ Region: Eastern Province

Map Reference: 1332A2 1:50000

Description:
The site is on top of a very small hill close to Kasabwe village. The site consists of two big boulders contiguous to each other and thus they create a big space in front of them that is suitable for various activities. This space is in the open because the boulders do not offer much shelter. At the site we found traces of material typically used for *Nyau* masks thus we were really privileged that the headman allowed us to go to the site. Mr Derek Phiri and Mr David Banda, from Chitobwa, came as well. We had to go back twice to the site because the first time the sun was shining directly on the paintings and thus were difficult to see and photograph. Most of the paintings at the site correspond to what Phillipson (1976) called the red and white bichrome series. The designs are red spread-eagled outlines with a long body and tail that are filled in with 'pale buff paint'. Behind these paintings there are some red lines that possibly correspond to the RG. In the south part of the site there are traces of white paintings that look recent and I believe they correspond to the WSE. In the past the site was known as Amjonde but they changed the name after a man who hung himself at this hill. The site is west facing. Length: 27.40m, height: 7m (first boulder), 5m (second boulder).

Conservation: Although there is no graffiti, the major danger for the paintings is that there is no overhang to protect them. Water and dust are major issues at the site.
Associated material: Besides modern material for *Nyau* masks some recent ceramics are also found on the surface.
Pictures: See appendix folder on DVD.

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