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**GENDERED SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST ADOLESCENTS.  
A CASE OF GAURURU AND MASARIRA VILLAGES IN MBERENGWA,  
ZIMBABWE**

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**BY**

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## **Abstract**

**This study explores the reasons behind what has made “rite to passage” initiation schools so resilient despite the fact that some of its practices have been outlawed. The writer felt prompted to investigate the law that applies to and ought to protect adolescent initiates. The most serious questions the research poses are (1) what happens to the ‘best interests of the child’ principle in the pursuit of this cultural practice? Does the practice silence the rights that the law has awarded the children, or do they co-exist? And (2) Does the cultural practice take precedence over the child’s best interests or is it a violation waiting to be exposed and challenged? Major strides have been made to protect the child and these have been pursued through article 23 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child which mandates that all State Parties eliminate harmful traditional practices which affect the health and welfare of children. This has been reaffirmed by the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. In its efforts to combat such practices, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) prohibits child marriage, virginity testing, labia minora elongation and unsafe circumcision, among others. Such practices are believed to be prerequisites for marriage demanded by traditional leaders who are their tribe’s cultural gatekeepers. This research seeks to unpack who and what drives and sustains the harmful cultural practice of adolescent initiation. In carrying out this research, a combination of methodologies was adopted which include the grounded women’s law approach which is informed by several feminist theories. This methodology was convenient because it aims to place women on an equal footing with men concerning the law. The feminist theories used include liberal feminism and feminist jurisprudence. Dominance theory and the human rights approach also helped to unearth the human rights violations perpetrated under the guise of culture and revealed the extent to which domination plays a role between the genders involved in the harmful cultural practice. Sources of data for the research included in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations, document analysis and case law. The focus of discussions with respondents was guided by the research assumptions formulated at the outset of the research. To address the problem at hand, recommendations relating to the rights of children are offered for considered adoption. In particular, it is recommended that initiation only be offered to adolescents when they reach 18 years of age, which is the legal age of majority. All initiation teaching and procedures should be beneficial and safe for initiates. Also, potential initiates must have the choice to participate based on the giving of their free and fully informed consent of everything that initiation entails. Instead of their being full of secrecy, fear, force, lies and harm, initiation practices should be transparent, voluntary, safe, sound and beneficial to initiates and their community in general.**

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**Declaration**

I, SHUMIRAI NYARADZAI SHARON GUMBO, do hereby declare that this is my original work and has not been submitted nor currently being submitted for a degree in any other University.

**Dedication**

*I dedicate this dissertation in memory of my late mother Mrs. Tererai Gumbo who was a great inspiration to my life. I will continue to strive towards excellence just so that I make you proud. Love you forever.*

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### **List of abbreviations and acronyms**

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
FGA	Female genital mutilation
HCP	Harmful cultural practice
IWHC	International Women's Health Coalition
Maputo Protocol	Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa
MWSLS	Masters in Women's Socio-Legal Studies
NORAD	Royal Norwegian Development Agency
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SEARCWL	Southern and Eastern Regional Centre for Women's Law
TTS	Traditionally Trained Surgeon
UHDR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UZ	University of Zimbabwe
WHO	World Health Organization

### **List of international human rights instruments**

African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC)

Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in  
Africa (Maputo Protocol)

United Nations Charter

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

### **List of local legislation**

Children's Act [Chapter 5:06]

Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act, 2013 (the Constitution)

Criminal Law (Codification & Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23] (the Criminal Law Code)

Domestic Violence Act [Chapter 5:16]

Education Act [Chapter 25:04]

General Law Amendment Act [Chapter 8:07]

Marriages Act [Chapter 5:11]

Customary Marriages Act [Chapter 5:07]

Health Professions Act [Chapter 27:18]

### **List of cases**

*Mudzuru and Tsopodzi v Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs N.O. and  
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*Daphne Kugara v The State (Zimbabwe)* 2018

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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Background of the study

I grew up in Mberengwa, a rural area in the heart of the Midlands province in Zimbabwe (Figure 1). It is populated by people from different tribes who speak different languages, the main ones being Karanga and Ndebele. As a result of the experiences I had while I was growing up and going to school in a community dominated by the vaRemba tribe which is a secret community, I developed an interest in finding out more about their secret cultural practices, especially those concerning the initiation of girls into women.

**Figure 1: Map of Zimbabwe showing the research site of Mberengwa**



Initially, when I was asked to pick a dissertation topic, I thought of investigating the issue of virginity testing only. Virginity tests are “tests conducted to determine whether a woman has had sexual intercourse. This is done by “examining a woman’s hymen, testing the laxity of her vagina or both” (UN Women 2018). After I visited the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, however, I decided to change my topic to Sexual Violence against Women. Then after I went into the field and conducted interviews, my findings forced me to change my topic again owing to the many issues which emerged during that process. In particular, I realized I

needed to cover sexual violence against adolescents of both sexes, not just girls, since I found out that the rights of boys were also being violated.

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) contain legally binding obligations that relate to the elimination of harmful practices which mainly affect women and girls. When I was growing up, the issue of virginity and labia minora elongation were taken very seriously. There is no biological definition of virginity, but the dictionary definition is “the state of never having sexual intercourse” (Oxford English Dictionary). Labia minora elongation is defined as “a vaginal practice which involves the manual stretching of inner folds of the external genitalia, the labia minora or clitoris with the aid of certain oils to the desired length ranging between 2 to 5 inches” (Perez et al, 2013).

When I attended secondary school at a boarding school in my rural area, my friends and I discussed these things. I tried to make further inquiries about them with my mother but she was never comfortable about doing so and I became more curious about the topic. Instead, she allowed a very close relative to discuss it with me. As a result, I was compelled to go through some of the practices under unclear circumstances, although I did not belong to that cultural group.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to note is the fact while a girl’s virginity receives much attention, little or no concern is shown for the virginity of a boy. If anything, boys are expected to lose their virginity at a young age while girls are expected to keep theirs until marriage. It is indeed an unfair cultural contradiction for girls that while boys are allowed and expected to go about experimenting sexually with girls, girls are unfairly expected to keep their virginity until they marry because men insist on marrying only virgins. This shows the gender imbalance in the manner in which cultural beliefs, norms, and values are structured and enforced to the disadvantage of women and girls owing to patriarchy. What troubled me the most is the negative change in attitude and behavior which occur in girls after they return from the initiation school. Such observations intrigued me and inspired me to want to know more about what occurs in initiation schools. An initiation school is:

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<sup>1</sup> The Women’s Affairs official indicated that virginity testing did not fall within jurisdiction. Virginity testing is the two (2) - finger test.

“a cultural school which young males and females attend to be taught the values, principles, hardships, respect, and accountability within their cultural tradition. Attitudinal change is defined as “the modification of an attitude when change occurs when a person goes from being positive to negative, from slightly positive to very positive or from having no attitude to having one.” (Petty et al., 2003).

I discovered that boys are compelled to go to an initiation school where they get circumcised and undergo several mysterious experiences. Circumcision is “surgery that removes the foreskin covering the glands of the penis and is performed for religious, cultural or health reasons” (<https://www.medicinenet.com>). Since boys, like girls, are not immune to behavioral change, I also wanted to investigate what brought about the change in behavior of boy initiates. I found that initiation schools for both boys and girls are surrounded by myths and rumours since there is no one prepared to confirm that they have first-hand knowledge of such schools and information about them is based on second-hand or hearsay evidence. A myth is defined as a widely held but false belief or idea (Oxford English Dictionary). What we know as outsiders is the fact that upon return from the initiation schools, there is a great negative change in the attitude and behavior of most children who attend them.

Growing up, I had a lot of friends, schoolmates, and relatives who belonged to the ‘VaRemba’ cultural group but whenever I tried to investigate their cultural practices, which I found to be both mysterious and intriguing, it always caused a lot of tension because they never felt comfortable discussing their practices. After enrolling in the Masters in Women’s Socio-Legal Studies, I came to learn and realize that women as well as children are still victims of oppression in the hands of men who hide their power and control under the blanket of culture. It is important to note is that these oppressed groups of people have been socialized to accept abuse as the norm and most of the so-called norms and values are put in place to oppress them either directly or indirectly. This is due to the fact that men want to continue dominating their societies. In order to do so they have put in place various controlling mechanisms for that purpose and as a result they remain entrenched on top of their societal ladder.

Some of these controlling mechanisms include harmful cultural practices (HCPs) which are mainly targeted at disadvantaged groups, including women and children. Coram International (2017) defines HCPs as forms of violence, which are accepted as part of cultural practice in specific countries and contexts. These are the most prevalent ways in which children’s rights

are violated. The knowledge that I have since acquired from this course contributed to my quest to conduct this research to change the status quo. I realized that this was possible after studying and seeking to apply to the situation on the ground the international legal frameworks including, e.g., the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as well as the domestic legal frameworks including Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act, 2013 (the Constitution), the Criminal Law (Codification & Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23] (the Criminal Law Code) and the Domestic Violence Act (DVA).

Until I studied at SEARCWL I could not see the problem behind such cultural practices but now having studied there I am grateful for the knowledge I have acquired which has not only given me legal awareness but also understanding about how to tackle family, cultural and social problems and issues.

By applying the skills I have gained, I appreciate for instance the provisions of section 25 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act, 2013 (the Constitution) which protects the family and attacks on it through domestic violence. Furthermore, section 27(2) provides that the State must take measures to ensure that girls are afforded the same educational opportunities as boys. My purpose in conducting this research is ultimately not only to expose and help eliminate harmful cultural practices, but all forms of cultural discrimination and to raise sufficient awareness to ensure that all children are afforded all the opportunities they need to pursue their education in order to realise their full potential. I also wish to change the perceptions that I had in that regard to have an informed position while at the same time making a positive contribution towards the elimination of sexual violation against adolescents regardless of gender which is perpetrated in the name of culture.

## **1.2 Origins of the vaRemba tribe and the initiation schools**

Since this group of people claim that their male ancestors were Jews who left Judea about two thousand five hundred (2,500) years ago, they are also known as black Jews. They claim to be the descendants of Leviticus and were exiled from Judea because of their insubordination. They settled in Sena and some time later moved to settle in Mberengwa. Some believe them to be the lost Jews. DNA tests conducted on them in 1996 by Professor

Tudor Parfitt, an archaeological expert from the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London in England whose specialty is the study of Jewish communities, revealed that the vaRemba do indeed have Jewish blood (The Sunday Mail, 2015). What differentiates them from the Jews in Judea is their manner of worship for they believe in Messianic worship. Members of this community are found mainly in Zimbabwe, South Africa and a few of them are found in some parts of Malawi and Mozambique. They follow religious practices which are very similar to those of Islam and Judaism.

An article published in the government-owned national newspaper, The Herald (2010), revealed that at a colloquium held in Harare, Tudor Parfitt claimed that there is a mystical star which is an ancient replica of the Biblical Ark of the Covenant. The vessel looks like a drum that contained the tablets of stone on which Moses inscribed the 10 Commandments called “*Ngoma lungundu*” (‘the drum that thunders’ or ‘the voice of God’). The vaRemba hold claims of the mystical object and it is said to have been found in a cave in Dumbwi Mountain in Mberengwa, a place which is dominated by this tribal group and their ancestors kept it safe in the village as it protected the people. It is also believed that some Jews from Judea have visited Dumbwi Mountain on countless occasions because of the link they have with the vaRemba tribe.

In Zimbabwe, the vaRemba are mainly found in Mberengwa, a rural district of the Midlands province. They are known as vaShavi of the Zhou (elephant) tribe. They are also found in smaller numbers in other parts of Zimbabwe including Gutu, Buhera and Chiredzi where they are called vaMwenye or Musoni of the *mbeva* (rat) totem. The majority of the people belonging to this tribe reside under chief Mposi (Mberengwa) but are also scattered all over the district.

The tribe’s initiation schools were established to initiate young girls into womanhood and young boys into manhood. According to the elders of the tribe, this is a very important development for it is meant to ensure that these young boys and girls are made aware that they are entering adulthood. The girl initiates are called “*komba*”<sup>2</sup> which means ‘ripe’ denoting that these girls are considered mature and of marriageable age. They are expected to enroll in the initiation school when they have their first menstrual period. The boy’s initiation

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<sup>2</sup> “*Komba*” means ripe and it is the name given to the girl initiates. “*Murundu*” is the name given to boy initiates.



passage rite is known as the “*murundu*” initiation passage during which these boys are circumcised and initiated into manhood. The initiation schools enroll young boys from the age of twelve (12).

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

Several international, regional and domestic legal instruments have been established to ensure that children are protected from any kind of abuse. This vulnerable group has fallen victim to all forms of abuse and inequalities owing to the view that they are minors subject to adult control. Section 81 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe provides for the rights of children in various areas of life. The Education Act [Chapter 25:01] covers issues about the education of children while the Children’s Act [Chapter 5:06] provides for the protection, welfare, and supervision of children. Zimbabwe is also a signatory to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) which was drafted to accommodate certain unique socio-cultural realities which affect children in African which are not considered by the Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC).

Lived realities of those belonging to the vaRemba tribe have proved that culture takes precedence over the law in most instances contrary to what is provided in section 81 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe. This is evidenced by what the children are subjected to which exposes them to security vulnerabilities which include coercion to enroll in initiation schools where they are subjected to virginity testing, labia minora elongation, circumcision, very cold weather conditions and child marriages among others. Child marriage is “a marriage of a girl or a boy before the age of 18 and refers to both formal marriages and informal unions in which children under the age of 18 live with a partner as if married” (UNICEF).

This has resulted in a culmination of unpleasant results, which include but are not limited to, the violation of the rights of children to education, health, life, privacy, dignity as well as freedom of choice, among others. Some cultural practices have damaging consequences to the health of children and cause unwanted pregnancies. They involve child and forced marriages which have long term affects on the future of these children. Most children participate in these practices because they are forced to do so or out of fear of being treated as outcasts if they refuse to do so. Therefore children participate in them against their own free will.

The aim of my research is to help transform the patriarchal domineering mindset (which is characteristic of most cultural groups) to allow both their male and female adolescents the right to safely refuse to participate in any HPCs yet still feel confident that they can enjoy being a valuable member of their rich tribal culture and its other practices.

#### **1.4 Aims and objectives of the research**

To evaluate the nature of initiation schools and their impact on the rights of adolescent girls and boys.

##### **1.4.1 Objectives of the study**

1. To understand the roots of the vaRemba tribe and what has sustained its practices over the years.
2. To have an informed perspective on the initiation schools established for adolescents in the vaRemba tribe and the impact it has on them.
3. To examine the initiation school curriculum and the impact it has on the formal school curriculum.
4. To evaluate whether these initiation schools harm the sexual behaviour of the initiates.
5. To assess whether these initiation schools have any positive attributes which can be maintained.
6. To investigate the level of human rights violations perpetrated by the establishment of initiation schools.
7. To assess the notion that initiation schools promote school dropouts, the spread of diseases and infections, early pregnancies and marriages among adolescents.

## 1.5 Research Assumptions and Questions

**Table 1: Showing the research assumptions and questions**

ASSUMPTIONS	QUESTIONS
Sexual violence is a gross violation of the rights of girls and boys.	Is sexual violence a gross violation of the rights of girls and boys?
Sexual violence has promoted male dominance over adolescents.	Has sexual violence promoted male dominance over adolescents?
Sexual violence is driven by traditional women and men.	Do traditional women and men drive sexual violence?
Initiation school attendance is not a consensual practice.	Is it the case that initiation school attendance is not a consensual practice?
Acts of sexual violence are done to please men and some practices are a prerequisite for marriage.	Are acts of sexual violence done to please men and are some practices a prerequisite for marriage?
The initiation curriculum causes attitudinal changes in initiates.	Does the initiation curriculum cause attitudinal changes in initiates?
Initiation ceremonies affect the academic attendance of adolescents.	Do initiation ceremonies affect the academic attendance of adolescents?
The subjugation of children lies at the heart of the continuing practice of bad culture.	Does the subjugation of children lie at the heart of the continuing practice of bad culture?
Sexual violence is a health risk for adolescent boys and girls.	Is sexual violence a health risk for adolescent boys and girls?
Sexual violence is more beneficial to men than women.	Is sexual violence more beneficial to men than women are?

## **1.6 Justification for the selected area of study**

When I initiated this research, my main interest was about addressing human rights violations against women and girls. Upon commencing the research, however, I realized that boys were also victims of similar violations and their voices also needed to be heard since their rights and interests are often overlooked by international and local human rights organizations. The CRC was drafted to protect boys and girls alike since they are both vulnerable and neither should be given preferential treatment over the other.

Drawing conclusions from the information revealed during my interviews, I realized that it was necessary to include young boys in this study hence the justification of my selected area of study. My thrust is to create awareness to eliminate the oppression of adolescents through empowering them with knowledge of their rights as well as giving them a voice of liberation, which was not there in the past, which will bring forth ownership over their bodies resulting in the emergence of a progressive generation. An adolescent is “any person between the ages of ten (10) and nineteen (19)” (World Health Organization).

## **1.7 Significance of the Study**

This research attempts to expose gendered sexual violence perpetrated on adolescents in Mberengwa by the gatekeepers of its culture. The research aims to increase awareness of research in this area, to enrich its foundation and to contribute to improvements to the its evolving cultural practices in relation to the rights of children regardless of gender.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **2.0 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Before going into the field, all optimism had been knocked out of me owing to the negativity I had faced from the Ministry of Women's Affairs whose representatives convinced me that I was unlikely to find any respondents prepared to co-operate since I was researching a secret community whose members rarely divulge any information about themselves or their practices. Upon embarking on the research, however, I was overwhelmed by the eagerness of the respondents to partake in the discussions. They were very cooperative and were more than willing to participate without being coerced or prompted.

This research was informed by the Grounded Women's Law Approach methodology, which is a parasol theory, which explores the lived realities of women and then interrogates and investigates the law from that angle. This encompasses the operationalization of theories within the parameters of the law (Bentzon et al., 1998:25). It was the most suitable to apply for this research owing to the nature of the study and the results intended to be obtained. This approach adopts a very broad spectrum of methodologies which enable the study to embrace the practices of women, men, and children irrespective of their gender.

This chapter discusses the theories supporting this methodology of this study and the methods employed to capture the required data to answer the research questions. This research was also informed by other women, children and human rights discourses other than the women's law approach where it was necessary. A child is "every boy and girl under the age of eighteen" (Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment No.20 of 2013).

The theoretical paradigms published by other researchers underscore social structural correspondence. The methodology is defined as a body of methods, rules, and postulates engaged by a branch of knowledge (Merriam Webster dictionary). It forms and fashions how research is to be tackled.

#### **2.2 Grounded Women's Law Approach**

This methodology, which is regarded as the mother theory of feminism, is all encompassing and views law from the perspective of women, putting into consideration their lived realities,

which are often ignored. Dahl (1987:17) notes that the purpose of this approach is to describe, understand and explain the position held by women with the view to improving their legal status and position in society. In my quest to optimize the use of this methodology in the process of bridging the gap between inequalities of genders, I made use of various complementary feminist theories. According to Dahl (1987:19) inequalities and equalities may be viewed differently by different theories meaning that what may be termed an inequality by one feminist theory may be viewed as a strength by another. Dahl (1988) notes that it is the versatility of the women's law approach to embrace numerous relevant theories which makes it so attractive since it is able cut across disciplines, is pluralistic and "calls for the free use of available material wherever it can be found." In the same vein, Stewart (1997) credits the women's law approach with the ability to look at women together with their lived realities with the express purpose of eventually reform the law for their benefit.

To this end, I used the under listed feminist theories.

### **2.3 Liberal feminism**

This theory is arguably the most accepted feminist theory across the board owing to its liberal characteristics. The argument is that society has the strong belief that women have a lower value than men in all spheres of their life, which a misconception. Since society is structured around this lie about women's intellectual and physical attributes they are subject to unfairly treated compared to me. They are blocked from rising in many spheres owing to the subordination to which they are subjected and this is what the proponents of this theory strive to address. Tong (1989:2) notes that:

"Gender justice, insists liberal feminists, requires us first to make the rules of the game fair and second to make certain that none of the runners for society's goods and services are systematically disadvantaged."

Legislation that is currently in place both locally and internationally strives for equality between genders. Although equality in education and employment are examples of what liberal feminists have promoted, their efforts have proved to be in vain as such rights have remained unrealised and trapped on paper. This has largely been due to the fact that the playing field is still very much designed in favor of males over females. So, for example, while both boys and girls attend separate initiation schools, it is the girls who are the most harmed by them as they, not the boys, who most commonly drop out of school after their

initiation experience. Therefore, while legislation puts in place laws to ensure equality between the sexes, initiation schools are still teaching male dominance in the initiation camps thereby defeating the whole purpose of such laws.

#### **2.4 The Feminist Legal Theory/Feminist Jurisprudence**

Dahl (1988) propounds this theory against the backdrop of inequality of the sexes in the political, economic and social spheres with a view to effecting a change in the standing of women through an overhaul of the law and its attitude towards gender. She aims to interrelate the law based on women's lived realities bearing in mind that originally the law had been formulated to accommodate men and their world and their realities while ignoring the reality of women. Dahl's (1988) thrust was for the law to be gender-sensitive rather than biased at the expense of another gender (female).

I therefore opted for this theory in order to bring out the gender inequalities and biases which have favoured males since time immemorial. This has been further perpetuated by culture which has been used by me to oppress women and children in the name of "preserving our cultural identity." The cultural demands made of women which give rise to social expectations and standards are often discriminatory against them as well as children. In fact men use culture to keep them on top of the societal ladder from where they dominate and control women and children, the most vulnerable groups within their society.

In the context of this research, I found out from women leaders in the community that about the cultural practices which hold the society together. They confided that the main reason why young girls attended initiation schools was so that they can become good wives according to the standards and expectations of men which means that the driving factor behind compelling them to become initiates had nothing to do with benefiting girls and ultimately women but everything to do with benefiting men. Likewise, the young boys are compelled to enrol in the initiation schools so that they are socialized to rule over women. In the end, everything revolves around men.

#### **2.5 Human Rights Perspectives and Frameworks**

Although general and human rights law which seek to protect the rights of women and children overrule (and therefore should take precedence over) culture and outlaws its harmful cultural practices, grounded evidence reveals that such practices continue. Therefore, even

though labia minora elongation is categorized as a group four type of genital mutilation and virginity testing is a criminal offence, they continue to be inflicted as cultural practices on children for the ultimate benefit of men regardless of the criminal penalties they attract if an offender is arrested and successfully prosecuted. Unsafe circumcision is also a gross violation of one's human rights as it not only traumatizes the initiate but it also poses a serious risk to their health. There have been many reported cases of amputation and fatalities across the globe due to this practice.

There are thirty human rights recognized by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in his research I will focus on eleven of them and they include the rights to equality (article 1), education (article 26 ), life (article 3), freedom from torture and degrading treatment (article 5), freedom of expression (article 19), freedom from discrimination (article 2), play (article 24), participate in the cultural life of the community (article 27) and the right to be heard. No one has the right to take away another's right to exercise the rights listed above.

This research inquires into the cultural practices of the vaRemba tribe. It seeks to evaluate whether or not certain of its practices are compatible with the law and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The truth of the matter is that men are biased against the rights of children and even some women are also at fault for it is through them that men violate the rights of children. Some are ignorant of the fact that children also have their rights, which include "the right to be heard", but society has decided to render them voiceless just because they are children. Irrespective of the fact that virginity testing was criminalized by the Criminal Law Code, the men behind culture have decided to ignore that positive step and insisted on continuing the practice.

Our neighboring South Africa also practices virginity testing like the vaRemba. They went much further in their attempts to oppose violations of women's rights by initiating a scheme offering University Scholarships for virgins known as the "maidens Bursaries", which was ruled unconstitutional by the country's Commission for Gender Equality. The ruling triggered outrage among the Zulu tribe who wanted the practice to continue. The argument was that boys were not subjected to such conditions and humiliation thereby perpetuating patriarchy besides the fact that virginity testing was a human right violation. The awarding of bursaries was not supposed to be based on one's sexuality but merit was to take precedence. The rights



to dignity, privacy, and education following the fundamental Human rights were being violated (Chisale, 2018).

I conducted interviews with initiates aimed at unearthing their views about the violations perpetrated on them as well as their views as to what they think should be done to ensure the protection of their rights.

## **2.6 Dominance Theory**

This theory, propounded by Cummins, (2005) a psychologist, relates to hierarchies in society in which one group dominates over others who remain subservient to it. It interprets specific cognitive functions as adaptations to the exigencies of living in a dominance-based hierarchy. The tenets of the theory emphasise the discrepancy between a certain group of people known as the high ranking who enjoy priority access over those of lower rank (who are known as subordinates) to resources and fertile mates in competitive situations. Aristotle (348-322BC) quoted by Boyman (2015) supports this line of thinking in his work when he postulates:

“The male is by nature superior and the female inferior; the male is the ruler and the female is the subject...the slave has not got deliberative reason at all and the female has got it, but without full authority.”

This view is evident in the dominance theory. Dominance theory is appropriate for this research because it clearly shows how these young boys are socialized to dominate girls from a very young age. It also outlines how adolescents, in general, are dominated by their elders to the extent of being coerced to enroll in initiation schools where they are made to partake in activities against their will. The adolescents comply because the high ranking in their tribe dictate the direction the lives of these young people should take and they are shamed into or forced to comply.

## **2.7 Data Collection Methods-Qualitative Methods**

I adopted qualitative research methods which I found suitable for this type of research. Qualitative research is “an effective model that occurs in a natural setting and enables the researcher to develop a level of detail from high involvement in the actual experiences” (Creswell, 2009). Brink (1993) notes that qualitative research excludes statistical or empirical calculations and is characteristic of great involvement of the researcher who goes into the field. I made use of both primary and secondary data collection methods. For primary

methods, I used interviews, focus group discussions and observational methods (Cibangu, 2012). Qualitative research also includes various secondary methods, which include document analysis, which I also used in this research.

## **2.8 Focus group discussions (FGDs)**

FGDs were designed to elicit information from my target group under study. This type of data collection worked for me especially with the youths and adolescents who contributed freely when they were in groups with their colleagues since I ensured that none of the old guard was included in their focus groups. I made sure that the environment was relaxed and informal because I realized that people felt more comfortable talking in a less formal environment. I held two focus group discussions. One was with the group under study whose participants were between 11 and 18 years of age, while the other was with men and women who were around 20 years old and over. I guided all the discussions and allowed participants to talk freely but made sure that they did not become too side-tracked from the issues under discussion.

## **2.9 In-depth-Interview**

This method is appropriate to use when you want to know individual perspectives concerning a research topic. When I engaged the respondents, I gave out the assumptions and research questions, which were guiding this research (Appendices 1 to 3). I explained to them the reason for choosing theirs as my research area and what I aimed to achieve in relation to human rights laws about which most of the respondents knew little or nothing. I emphasized that my aim was not to seek to have their cultural practices abolished, but to ensure their compliance with the various laws which exist to prevent violations which occur as the result of certain harmful cultural practices. My grandmother and the area women leader for the vaRemba tribe assisted me to identify and recruit informants and interviewees assisted me as well. I managed to conduct in-depth interviews with key informants including three (3) teachers from the local schools, about four (4) elders from the tribe under research who promote the practice and former initiates and neighbors. Initially, I had prepared a questionnaire to guide me during the interviews but I must admit that I hardly referred to it as I noticed that once one question was asked, it would trigger the next question and I found it more interesting to go with the flow. All in all, the respondents totalled about twenty-two (22). Table 2 gives some details of the respondents.

**Table 2: Showing details of the respondents interviewed**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Respondent 1	F	60	Married	Housewife
Respondent 2	F	52	Married	Housewife
Respondent 3	M	40	Married	Teacher
Respondent 4	M	37	Married	Teacher
Respondent 5	F	28	Married	Teacher
Respondent 6	F	11	Single	Student
Respondent 7	F	12	Single	Student
Respondent 8	F	14	Single	Student
Respondent 9	F	13	Single	Student
Respondent 10	F	15	Single	Dropout
Respondent 11	F	16	Married	Dropout
Respondent 12	F	18	Married	Dropout
Respondent 13	F	22	Married	Dropout
Respondent 14	F	28	Married	Dropout
Respondent 15	F	58	Widowed	Never attended
Respondent 16	M	12	Single	Student
Respondent 17	M	15	Single	Dropout
Respondent 18	M	17	Single	Shop keeper
Respondent 19	M	14	Single	Student
Respondent 20	M	36	Married	Peasant Farmer
Respondent 21	F	10	Single	Student
Respondent 22	M	53	Married	Peasant Farmer

### **2.10 Observational Methods**

I lived with my grandmother whose home is within the community I researched. This helped me to observe and understand the people I was researching more accurately. I noticed behavior among the group members which confirmed my assumptions. Since I was actually living among them during the research process some of them felt comfortable with me and I felt they gave a genuine impression of who they really are and how they live their ordinary daily lives. I also managed to socialize with some of them who felt at liberty to demonstrate to me some of the things they do while enrolled in the initiation school.

## **2.11 Document Analysis**

Bowen, (2019) notes that document analysis is used in qualitative research to interpret documents to give voice to and meaning around a topic. I accessed many documents which provided quality and relevant information related to the study. I found them to be reliable and used then in the manner proposed by Bowen and O’Leary (2019: 2014):

“It is of paramount importance to evaluate and investigate the subjectivity of documents and your understanding of their data to preserve the credibility of your research.”

## **2.12 Case Law**

I found two court cases which were useful to this research. They helped me to understand and interpret the law in matters concerning virginity testing and forced marriages in Zimbabwe. The Constitutional Court case of *Mudzuru and Tsopodzi v Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs N.O. and Others* Constitutional Court Judgment No. CCZ 12/2015 (unreported) involved Loveness Mudzuru and Ruvimbo Tsopodzi, two former child brides, who were forcibly married off at the age of sixteen (16). The court held that child marriage is now illegal in Zimbabwe. In a case published by an online newspaper, New Zimbabwe, *Kugara v The State* (2018), the accused had originally been sentenced to 12 months in prison for inserting her fingers in a juvenile’s private parts to check whether she was still a virgin after suspecting that she was having a sexual relationship with her husband. The Magistrate, Lucy Mungwari, suspended the jail term and Kugara was ordered to perform two hundred and eighty (280) hours of community service at a school in Waterfalls, Harare.

## **2.13 Challenges I encountered during the research**

The biggest challenge I faced was obtaining getting fuel to travel from Harare to my research site owing to the current state of the economy in Zimbabwe. My research site is about 500km from Harare and I also faced setbacks trying to access homesteads owing to the great distances between them. I had to walk for many kilometers between homesteads because I did not have enough fuel to use my vehicle. I could not rely on the single unreliable bus which serves the area as it runs erratically owing to its poor roads. As a result, I spent many hours walking during the research process which meant that the process took longer than I expected.

### **2.14 Ethical Considerations**

I ensured that before embarking on the research I made the gatekeepers of the community aware of my presence. I therefore approached the headmen of the two villages selected for the study. I ensured that I sought consent from the women area leader as well as the chosen informants and respondents who participated and I did not coerce them into doing so. We reached a mutual understanding that I would not infringe the rights of the participants nor expose them to any harm while observing respect for their dignity and privacy.

### **2.15 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the methodologies which guided the research outlining the violations of human rights in the context of the theories which guided the research. Also included in this chapter are the methods which were used to gather the data which were best suited for this type of research. I also refer to court cases which helped to improve understanding of the research.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **3.0 FINDINGS**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

When I was in secondary senior school, my friends and I often tried to inquire into the initiation school curriculum because we were curious to know exactly what transpired in the schools. Although our discussions would start on a good note they would become emotional and end rather unpleasantly as some of the girls who belonged to the vaRemba felt that the questions would become too inquisitive especially when the myths surrounding the practices came under the spotlight.

The initiation schools infringe several human rights of children and it is sad to note that none of the children I spoke to were aware of their rights. All they know is that they have to obey what their parents say and comply with all the cultural expectations of their tribe even though they may feel they are being unfairly treated. This is so because a child who tries to express his or her opinion is considered deviant by the leadership. The boys for example are forced to endure harsh and unsafe conditions to ‘enhance’ the cultural practice of circumcision. Most of the boys are forced to attend the initiation school as the result of decisions made on their behalf. The children are never consulted when decisions affecting their lives are being made about them; only the consent of their parents is considered necessary and this violates the human rights of the children.

When I examined the curriculum of initiation schools in relation to the children’s human rights I realized that several of their human rights were being violated and they were interconnected. In other words, the violation of one right was the direct link to the violation of another and so on. The harm inflicted on children by forcing them to attend initiation school and be educated according to its curriculum is discussed in other chapters. Such harmful cultural practices fall foul of article 5 of both CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol which cover violations of the right of girls to education and sexual reproductive health. Evidence of the harm they suffer in these schools is also reflected in the negative change in their behavior after they return from them. Their rights to privacy and dignity are also violated when they are forced to undress in front of strangers who then insert their fingers into their vaginas to test their virginity. Virginity tests are “tests conducted to determine whether a woman has had sexual intercourse.” These tests are also known as “two-finger tests”. This is done by looking

for a woman's hymen, testing the laxity of her vagina or both through inserting a finger or two. These traumatic experiences coupled with the curriculum breaches their right to formal education, their right to play (as they are forced to behave like adults, not children) as well as their right to health which would have already been compromised while they were still in the initiation school, the consequences of which may lead to death, thereby violating or threatening to violate their right to life.

The people who are responsible for violating these rights at home are the adults in their lives, their parents and guardians. While they are in the initiation schools, the elders who are responsible for the initiation of schools violate their rights. For example, in the case of girls, the violation starts at home when their guardian or parent forces them to enroll in the initiation school. Then once in the school, the women elders violate their rights by conducting virginity tests on them, exposing them to corporal punishment, harsh conditions and forcing them to elongate their labia minora.

Boys, like girls, are also forced to enroll in the initiation school and coercion is a clear violation of the fundamental right of any human being, including a child, to exercise their free choice and to refuse to attend. Then while they are in the camps, they are also exposed to very harsh conditions; many fail to cope and some even lose their lives. This means that these cultural practices are so harmful that they may not only violate an initiates right to health but their life as well. The situation can become so extreme that even adult men have been forced to undergo such practices against their will. I heard of a case of a doctor (name withheld) who had refused to submit to the practice. He survived being rejected by the clan and excluded from important gatherings. Then one fateful day when he visited his rural home, he was abducted and taken to the shrine where initiation schools are run and was forcibly circumcised against his will. The clan leadership justified such actions against one of their own as a legitimate defence to what they consider is the weapon of human rights wielded by the "white man" to dominate the "black man" by eroding their rich African culture.

During the research, I noted the view that while the world order is pursuing non-discrimination and gender equality between sexes, the vaRemba's cultural practices are promoting the opposite. This is so because the initiation camps teach young girls that they are inferior to men, are subordinate and should allow themselves to be dominated. These girls are expected to kneel, bow or throw themselves on the ground in the presence of men or women

elders as a sign of respect. They are taught to take care of their future husbands, to be respectful and submissive as they are taught feminine roles. They are also prepared and conditioned for abuse by being forced to endure harsh conditions under the pretext that men are generally abusive hence they should be prepared to endure such treatment because men are allowed to abuse their wives without being questioned. Accordingly, when they are subjected to corporal punishment, they are not allowed to protest nor complain. There is the belief that women are 'the other' and are inferior and abusive marriages should not be abandoned but endured.

Young boys, on the other hand, are encultured to rule over and dominate women. They are socialized to be men. The curriculum is designed in such a way that by the time they return, the young boys become completely different people. They are taught to be heads of the family, leaders and hunters, to provide for the family and rule over women. They are also taught to be strong and this is achieved through harsh conditions they are exposed to while they undergo their training which includes hunting wild animals which are their only food while enrolled in the school, bathing in cold river water, and, most important of all, they are circumcised. This distinguishes them from other men. The elders of the tribe believe that this custom has helped in training solid, cultured, hardworking men who are leaders because every man who has gone through the initiation school is believed to have acquired leadership skills and is a confident individual; above all, he knows how to rule women because that is what he is also taught.

Shumba (2016) establishes that the vaRemba also conduct fertility tests for the initiates using traditional means. He notes that elders take young boys to the river and ask them to masturbate and place their semen in the water. If it sinks, it is a sign that the boy is fertile but if it floats, it is a sign of infertility. In such instances, the elders will then give the boy some traditional herbs to make him fertile. This science originates from the philosopher, Aristotle (384-322 BC), as noted by Boyman (2015), who observes 'the water test' fertility test for males. This is when semen is placed in a tub of water. If the semen floats then it means that it is not concocted enough and it spreads over the surface of the water, which means it is infertile, but if fertile, it sinks because of its density and heat.

The girls are also forced to drink eat a raw egg. Shumba (2016) observes that if the girl vomits out the egg this is a sign that she is infertile and it prompts the women elders to



prepare porridge with herbs which they believe will make her fertile. Proper medical fertility tests of a woman are conducted through blood tests that determine her levels of anti-mullerian hormone (AMH) which also measure levels of follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) (Macmillan, 2018).

### **3.2 Myths**

The English anthropologist Tylor (1871) notes that ‘a myth may be said to explain the physical world and to do so exceedingly well until science arises and does it better.’ Eliade (1971) notes that myths have always existed and will continue to exist as they are tied to religion. The myths, which characterize the vaRemba culture, are mostly influenced by their traditional beliefs from the past which have been brought to the present to influence today’s reality. To date, it is debatable whether any of these myths have any sense of reality since they are mostly overruled by facts.

- There is a general belief among the vaRemba that the passage of rite initiation schools curriculum teachings are very rich and help in preserving marriages. The elders of the tribe strongly believe that the divorce rate among their tribal members is very low and they credit this to their practices.
- For the girls, there is the belief that virginity can only be lost through penetration, which is not true. These tests are conducted by looking for a woman’s hymen, testing the laxity of her vagina or both. These have been proven highly inaccurate because hymens are sometimes broken by sports activities and the laxity of vaginas is not uniform in every vagina as it is also affected by activities other than sex. Some women do not bleed on their first encounter. Medical doctors have also concurred with this notion.
- There is also the belief that in order to protect girls, they should be ushered into womanhood while they are still young. This is the “catch them when they are still young” slogan. The evidence of the behavior of these young girls subjected to such treatment proves that they experiment sexually at a very young age and this has a negative effect on their educational progress. Unfortunately, the elders of the tribe do not seem to grasp this truth.
- There is also a strong belief that the pulling of the labia is pleasurable to men owing to the view that it grips the penis while inside the vagina and ensures that it does not

accidentally slip out during sexual intercourse. It is also believed that an elongated labia minora makes a woman complete and reduces the chance of her husband being unfaithful and finally divorcing her in his search of women who have elongated labia minora.

- There is a belief that “initiation is the gateway to marriage,” a notion documented by Mbiti (2017).
- Regarding the boys, there is also the myth that a boy is incomplete if he is not circumcised and therefore does not qualify to be called a man. There is the myth that an uncircumcised boy/man is unclean and incomplete. There is the myth that if an uncircumcised man/boy slaughters an animal (e.g., cow, goat, chicken) for consumption he makes all the meat unclean and the vaRemba will not consume it. They only consume meat which has been slaughtered by their circumcised tribesman.
- There is also the myth that the activities of what transpires in the initiation schools should not be divulged to a person who is not from the tribe nor has attended their initiation school and the person who divulges any such secrets will be cursed. This is the reason why obtaining information about initiation rites is difficult since the activities of this tribe are sacred and jealously guarded by a high level of secrecy.

### **3.3 The initiation school curriculum**

The girls are expected to enroll in the initiation school when they experience their first menstrual period and that usually occurs when they are between 10 and 12 years old. They are then initiated into womanhood. As part of the curriculum, they are taught how to take care of themselves, how to bath, how to clean their linen and all the other does and don'ts of managing themselves during this period. One elderly woman I interviewed explained that this is the most important phase in a girl's life owing to the fact that she is now physically 'ripe' (*kukomba*) for marriage since she is now capable of conceiving.

The girls are also taught how to take care of their future husbands and family. This includes a girl having to respect and submit to her future husband by accepting him as her and the family's head (master) by kneeling in submission to him. She is also taught how to do household chores. Girls are also taught how to have sex with their future husbands in order to satisfy them so that they prevent them from having extra-marital affairs which may lead to divorce. For example, they are taught how to move their waist and conduct themselves while

having sex with their husbands and do whatever they ask or demand, even if it is abusive, in order to satisfy them sexually. In other words, the curriculum prepares girls or grooms them to submit to sexual violence at the hands of men in marriage or otherwise. Violence against women is defined as "any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (United Nations, 1993).

The curriculum for the girls also covers labia minora elongation. This is the pulling of the labia minora so that it can be much longer than it is naturally. This is justified on the basis that a man enjoys having sex with a woman whose labia minora has been elongated because he loves to play with the two elongated sides during foreplay or sex. It is also believed that an elongated labia minora aids in gripping the man's penis so that it does not continuously accidentally slip out during sex so that the act becomes more pleasurable for both parties. The elderly women explained that if a woman does not elongate her labia minora and if her husband has an extramarital affair with a woman who has elongated labia minora, then the chances of his returning to his "plain" wife<sup>3</sup> are very slim.

Virginity testing is also covered in the curriculum. This is done to ensure that the girls remain virgins and pure for their future husbands. The fear of being discovered not to be virgin invokes tremendous fear of humiliation among the girls. The elderly women present in the initiation school use various methods to test virginity. The woman area leader said that, in most cases, it is the parents who bring forward and offer their daughters to her so that she and her team of elders can guide and educate them. As part of the guidance, the council conducts involuntary virginity tests of the girls, among other things. She underscored the fact that virginity tests were one of the major highlights of the initiation school as they consider a girl's virginity to be sacred and should be preserved until marriage. Upon the return of an initiate from the initiation school, a family slaughters a goat for her if she has been found to have kept her virginity. There are three methods which she said are used to test the girls virginity, some which of course are not medically approved:

- (1) The women in charge of the initiation camps insert their fingers to check if the hymen is still in tact to determine whether or not the girl has had sexual intercourse. If it is

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<sup>3</sup> A "plain" woman refers to a woman who has not modified her labia minora.

not in tact then, according to their belief, they decide that she has lost her virginity. A statement issued by the WHO, UN Human Rights and UN Women on 17 October 2018 called for the elimination of this practice since it revealed that there was no scientific or clinical basis for virginity testing. The statement emphasised that no examination could prove whether or not a girl has had sex and the appearance of a girl's hymen cannot prove the same. The mythology of virginity testing is also dispelled in an article published by Vaught (2013) who quoted a feminism writer and sex educator Fabello, (2013) who states that "there is no medical or biological definition of virginity; the only definition is the one in the dictionary that says the state of never having had sexual intercourse ... Because virginity can't be quantified, it seems likely that calling attention to the hymen is just an attempt to support a social construction with fake biology."

- (2) Another test is to insert a crushed egg into the girl's vagina. The egg is slippery like male sperm. If the egg flows right through and produces bubbles, the assumption is that the girl has lost her virginity; but if the egg does not flow right through easily the girl's virginity is still in tact. This test cannot be scientifically justified and is also a social construction. It therefore rules itself out as an accurate method of testing virginity.
- (3) They also claim to be able to judge whether a girl/woman is sexually active or not merely by inspecting her vagina. They claim that a sexually active girl/woman has an overstretched vagina whereas a virgin has a tight vagina. So in the camps, all the girls are commanded to open their legs wide open for inspection and they cannot refuse to do so.

Breast examination was also part of the procedure. Breasts are expected to be firm and not soft. The breasts of a virgin are also expected to have 'a path' between them and not be too close together; if they are soft and too close together, that is a sign that someone has been playing with them and the women examiners demand to who closed this path. The women area leader said:

*"Tinotsvaka zhira pakati pemazamu saka tikaona isipo tinoda kuziva kuti, akavhara zhira yambuya ndiyani?"*

(Meaning, “We look for a path between the breasts for there should be a gap between them. If we do not find it, then we do not hesitate to ask who closed our path.”)

Futrelle (2018) notes that the breasts of a woman who has had sex loosen and wave while she is running, while those of a woman who has never had sex remain stable even when she is running. This shows that it is not only the vaRemba who have a misconceived perception in this regard. Both the International Women’s Health Coalition (IWHC) (2010) and Bersamin et al. (2007) dispel that notion as just but a myth which has no scientific support. The former authority adds that valuing virginity in this manner does not protect girls and women as is believed by some cultural groups; in fact; it does the exact opposite by actually putting them at risk of violence, abuse, and assault by members of the society that is morbidly obsessed with the erroneous belief that a women’s worth lies solely in her sexual behaviour.

Four other women who claimed to have gone through the initiation school when they were teenagers agreed that this was the process. After completing the initiation training the girls are gathered together to be presented to and returned to their families. This is done partly in private and partly in public. Each girl is separated in turn from the group of girls and taken into a private room where the initiation teacher/s tell their family member/s whether or not, according to their judgment, the girl passed because she is a virgin or failed because she is not a virgin. Although the giving of their decision is made in private, its outcome becomes publicly known based on the reaction of the family members in that private room and it immediately sends a message to everyone including the other girls who remain outside.

If a girl is found not to be a virgin, her family is presented with a clay pot which is half filled with water as a symbol of the absence of her virginity and her father is given a big stick with which to beat her publicly as a punishment for shaming her entire family. It is tragic that a girl is treated in this way. This physical assault is an act of domestic violence in terms of section 4(1) of the DVA which provides that any person who commits an act of violence shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding level fourteen or imprisonment. Yet girls are not expected to protest or file any complaint against such abuse. It is also an assault in terms of section 89 (1) of the Criminal Law Code which provides that:

“Any person who commits an assault on another intending to cause bodily harm or realizing that there is risk or possibility that bodily harm may occur

shall be guilty of assault and liable to a fine up to or exceeding level fourteen or imprisonment for a period not exceeding ten years or both.”

In other words, the actions of the father of a girl who is found not to be a virgin are not warranted and they are even criminal because they break the law.

After the girl is assaulted her father he demands her to tell him the name of the person who has had sexual intercourse with her which means that her privacy is invaded as well. The women’s council of the cultural group also asks the family of the girl to pay a penalty in the form of compensation (i.e., a goat) for their having found that she is not a virgin. Therefore, they have a direct motive or interest in deciding that she is not a virgin.

If, at the end of the initiation training, a girl is found to still be a virgin, her family is presented with a clay pot full of water to show that she is still whole and her father and other family members ululate in celebration and go outside to the crowd celebrating that they expect to be paid a significant number of cows when their daughter marries which include a cow for her virginity (*mombe yechimanda*) as a token of appreciation that she has kept herself pure (Appendix 4). This means girls who undergo the initiation ritual do not enjoy any privacy about their marriageable status. This is because their family’s reaction to whether the girls are virgins or not reveals their status. In other words, everyone finds out about every girl’s status based on the reaction of her family members. An additional penalty suffered by girls who are found not to be virgins is that most parents demand that their daughters break off all communications with them because they are considered a bad influence on others.

I asked the female area leader the main purpose of this custom and the initiation school and she said that it set their tribe apart from others and helped to preserve marriages within their tribe and curb the spread of HIV and Aids infections among members of the tribe.

### **3.4 Elderly women driving traditional practices**

An initiation school is established at the home of an elderly woman (usually in her early fifties or older) who is part of the tribe and has gone through the initiation school herself. Elderly women are the gatekeepers of this culture and therefore have the most knowledge about the initiation curriculum, what ought to be done and how. This has enabled elderly women to consolidate substantial power in the tribe over the years and they are feared by the

younger generation. As a result, they are in charge of the initiation schools. One elderly tribesman explained very clearly that these elderly women are considered sufficiently mature and wise to run these schools and the fact that they have managed to sustain their own marriages for the longest number of years in the tribe means that they must be doing something right. Therefore, the tribe has chosen to give them the responsibility to initiate their young girls so that they do not go astray. Nowadays, owing to modernization, there are many divorces among young people and the tribe is trying to fight this unacceptable trend. In view of the fact that the statistics on the spread of the deadly HIV and Aids virus are increasing daily the tribe is trying to ensure that their children are safe. To achieve that goal, the girls have to be put into the hands of someone firm and someone who has been around long enough to be able to impart the right knowledge to the girls which will lead in the right direction in life.

### **3.5 Perspectives of the women and girls on the initiation schools**

There were mixed feelings among the women and girls regarding the initiation schools. A young girl who was present at the focus group discussion expressed her unhappiness and discomfort at how the practice was conducted. She said that while she understood the fact that culture identifies a particular tribe because it reveals its uniqueness, she had always felt unfortunate to be part of her clan because she was convinced that its cultural practices which protect men are cruel towards women. She also felt that forced virginity tests are acts of cruelty against women. She emphasised that she had no intention of being promiscuous. Her concern were for girls she knew who had failed the tests but had never been sexually active; therefore she questioned the credibility of such tests. A few other girls who were present also concurred with her. She said:

*“Ndinodemba kuti dai ndisina kuberekwa murudzi rwevaremba nemhaka yokuti zvinhu zvizhinji zvinoitwa zvinodzvanyirira madzimai nevasikana huye zvine kahutsinye kwatiri vasikana asi zvakarerukira vanhurume. Umwe munhu akandinzwa ndichitaura kudai anofunga kuti dzimwe nhambo ndoda kuita misikanazwa; handitorina pfungwa idzodzo uye nditori mhandara asi kuti kune vasikana vazhinji vakaongororwa humhandara vakaonekwa vasisiri asi vakanga vasati vamborara nevakomana. Nekudaro, tinemivhunzo mizhinji nemaitirwo azvinoitwa nekuti ndinofunga kuti nzira dzacho dzinoshandisiwa kungorora humhandara hadzivimbike.”*

(Meaning: ‘I regret that I was born in the Varembe tribe because a lot of things which are done oppress women and girls and make life extremely difficult for

us but much easier for men. If someone hears me speak like this they will think that I want to be mischievous/rebellious, yet I don't have such thoughts and I am actually a virgin; it's just that there are lots of girls who went through virginity testing and were found not to be virgins but they had not slept with any boys. Therefore we have a lot questions about how it's done because we think that the methods of the virginity testing are not trustworthy.')

Another girl who was present also concurred with this girl's opinions. She also shared her views saying that she does not support this practice as it has tarnished her image in the community. She became very emotional when she disclosed that she had also gone to the initiation ceremony and that she had failed the tests even though she had never been intimate with a man. This resulted in her being beaten by her father and brother as well as being labelled promiscuous by her community. She added that the experience was very traumatic as she has never had sexual intercourse with any man before but she is a very active sportswoman at school where she is an athlete and netball player. She stressed that the elderly women as well as her father did not believe her when she tried to explain to them that there were many ways in which a girl can break her hymen other than through sexual intercourse. This is proof that sexist ideologies surrounding virginity, the hymen and sexual intercourse still exist.

Some surveys conducted revealed that "virginity testing posed an injustice, a threat of ostracism or reprimand to all women found not to possess a hymen and also an infringement of one of the rights in the Constitution which is the right to bodily integrity" (Le Roux, 2006:15-18; Dlamini, 200: 27, 37; Mabusela, 2000: 29). Blank (2007) observes that "virginity never existed and it cannot be weighed on a scale; neither does it reflect any biological backing." Addison, (2010) demystifies virginity and describes it as a fogged and obscured concept by superstition, folklore, false science and the fear induced by repressive 'honour' societies.

A few other girls also concurred with the above views emphasising that it was not easy to convince their parents regarding how some women lose their hymen other than through sexual intercourse because of the fixed notion that virginity is only lost through penetration. To this end, she said their mothers always stressed that they should never use tampons for menstruation for it had the potential to break the hymen thereby compromising a girl's chance of remaining a virgin. The issue of virginity in this discourse has no physical



equivalent for males, making the whole custom a discriminatory harmful cultural practice against girls and women.

An elderly woman who was present commented that this idea of losing the hymen through means other than sex was just an excuse used by girls of today who are promiscuous and who just want to hide behind 'fake science' stressing that what is written in books surrounding the issue of virginity was not true and was only meant to mislead today's young generation. She wondered out loud how come it is now a statement which is common to this young generation and yet that problem was not there in the past, adding that the young girls have been struggling to keep their legs closed. In other words, she suggested, young girls want to go around sleeping with boys and then falsely blame the loss of their virginity on playing sport. As a result, she said, they (the older women) do not accept any such excuse when they are at the initiation school and they dismiss such excuses as nonsense. She said:

*“Nyaya yokunzi munhu haasisiri mhandara nokuda kwemitambo yaanoita kuchikoro ndeyekunyeba. Hakuna munhu anomborashikirwa nehumhandara nekuda kwekumhanya kana kutamba bhora. Inyaya dzinogadzirwa nevechidiki nekuda kwekuti varikukundikana kugara vakavhara makumbo avo kuti vasarara nevakomana vasati vawanikwa. Vanofunga kuti hatina kudzidzanokudaro vakuda kunyepera kuti zvirimo mumagwaro. Zvino isu sevakuru vavo hatitobviri taterera nyaya dzakadaro.”*

(Meaning: 'Issues over someone losing their virginity because of sports at schools are all lies. No one loses their virginity because of athletics or playing ball (netball). These are stories that these young girls make up because they are failing to close their legs so that they don't sleep around with boys before marriage. They think that we are not educated that is why they want to lie to us about such things being written in the books (textbooks they read). We as adults are not going to listen to them.')

Another elderly woman present said that these practices have kept their tribe unique and distinct from other tribes for centuries and they will not make room for changes to their curriculum. She said that the major advantage of it all is that marriages have been secured because of these cultural practices and as a result, the tribe has had fewer divorces which is something of which she is very proud. She said that it has also curbed the spread of HIV and Aids as they teach the young girls to be good wives and to be faithful to one partner through preserving their virginity; while the boys are taught to be leaders, to rule over women and are taught nothing about preserving their virginity. She added that this custom works especially

well when a Zhou marries another Zhou and when both of them have attended the initiation school and are made fully aware of the expectations of the custom coupled with the circumcision of the boy/man. Their main aim as elders is to make sure that there is no divorce in their tribe and that their culture is preserved. Therefore, they encourage their children not to marry people from other tribes although it is difficult to control and many are now marrying outside the tribe.

A female teacher from one of the local schools said that though she concurs with the sentiments expressed by the male teachers; she has also noted that the change in attitude is not only sexual but also the initiates do not interact well with other female classmates who are not part of their cultural group. She mentioned that initiates are very withdrawn, shy and they prefer interacting with other girls from their own cultural grouping and this change in attitude has caused many problems in schools. She also said that the major problem is the lack of respect for non-initiated teachers. The girls have no respect towards teachers who are not from their cultural group; they only respect those whom they know are from their cultural group and who have been initiated. She added that most of these girls find themselves dropping out of school due to early pregnancies and never get to finish school and that is worrisome. Girls are expected to go for initiation when they experience their first menstrual period or the winter immediately following their first period.

I also interviewed a female elder who said that this practice should continue forever because of the benefits it has for both boys and girls. She said:

*“Vamwe vana vanogunun’una nokuda kwechiitiko ichi asi tinozviitira vana ivava kuti vange vakachengetedzeka kuitira remangwana ravo, asi vazhinji vavo vanozotitenda kana vachinge vawanikwa kana kuwana.”*

(Meaning: “Most of these children grumble because of the initiation school but the truth of the matter is that the program is designed for them and it is meant to secure their futures. Most of them come back to thank us when they get married /marry.”)

Speaking about the boy child, she said that circumcision ensures that the boy child lives a healthy life since dirt collects in the foreskin, which in turn causes cancers in his wife. She added that circumcision also helps in controlling the spread of HIV and Aids. While male circumcision is a National Policy, the manner in which it is conducted is a cause of

disagreement. She added that the teachings given to the boy child enable him to fend for his family when he marries hence it is important to maintain these teachings. About the girl child, she mentioned that they are taught about labia pulling for every girl is expected to pull her labia to a sizeable length which will be pleasurable to men. This, according to her, is done to ensure that when a girl gets married, her husband will not leave her for other women for it is believed that men, especially those who are traditional, enjoy women who have elongated labia minora. She also said that virginity tests are conducted to safeguard the girls' virginity. Medically, labia pulling is said to cause the narrowing of introitus whereby the vaginal canal becomes very narrow leading to a condition called vaginal stenosis (Nel, 2015). Perez (2014) notes that "pain at the beginning of the practice, nuisances related to the use of caustic herbs and stigmatization in failing to comply with the practice are health risks associated with LME."

She added that if the girl child knows that her virginity is constantly checked, she will abstain from sexual intercourse because she will not want to be caught on the wrong side of the judgment call when she goes to the initiation school where every girl is expected to be a virgin. She added that the fact that no girl wants to face humiliation for not being a virgin encourages her not to indulge in sexual activity. This also helps to curb unwanted pregnancies, early marriages as well as the spread of HIV /Aids. She also explained that the family finds pride in marrying off a virgin (though science has proved that it is not something that can be reliably determined) hence the need to continue with this custom emphasizing that the curriculum also reduces the divorce rate as girls are also taught how to respect their future husbands as well as how to have sex with them apart from elongating the labia minora. As part of the teachings, she said they do not encourage marriage outside the tribe.

### **3.6 Cultural barriers to the right to privacy and dignity**

Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides for freedom from interference with a person's privacy. Section 57 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe provides for the right to privacy while section 51 provides for the right to dignity. Section 63(b) provides that:

"every person has the right to participate in the cultural life of their choice, but no person exercising these rights may do so in a way that is inconsistent with this chapter."

While the Constitution has given a green light to participate in the cultural practice of one's choice, it also goes on to prohibit the infringement of rights provided in that chapter in the name of culture. However, most cultural practices are in infringement of human rights not only under the Constitution but also in terms of international human rights statutes. There is a need to strike a balance between the law and culture and therefore the need to discard negative/harmful cultural practices which put children and women in a position which makes them vulnerable to abuse.

### **3.7 Cultural practices, an impediment to the right to education**

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides for the right to education. This is buttressed by section 27 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe which provides that the State must take measures to provide education and equal opportunities to both boys and girls. Some of the vaRemba cultural practices are an infringement of the rights in this chapter owing to the view that the adolescents are indirectly pushed into abandoning formal education and pursuing other things like early marriage or forced marriage in the case where a girl is believed to have lost her virginity or is impregnated before completing her education. In the meantime the government is advocating for education for all which means that there is a contradiction between the law and some cultural practices. The law was amended in a bid to align the Education Act of 2006 with the 2013 Constitution to accommodate girls who fall pregnant by enabling them to return to school after giving birth. Most girls, however, decline the opportunity to return to school because they fear being humiliated by fellow students. They also refuse to return to school because of poverty; as a result, they become stay at home mothers or they get married.

### **3.8 Emerging issues**

Some issues emerged while I was in the field which I had not anticipated. These issues were in no way related to my initial assumptions. As mentioned earlier, when I went into the field, my thrust was on investigating issues relating to women and girls and how culture was being used to dominate them and violate their rights. I already had both my research assumptions and questions lined up in that regard. As the study progressed, the issue of circumcision for boys continued to pop up and I realized that I also had to include it in my study and pursue the issue with a much broader mindset, since it also revealed human rights violations perpetrated against boys, another vulnerable group. As a result, I found myself recasting and

reformulating my assumptions to be able to also accommodate the initiation curriculum of the boy child. This is the subject of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **4.0 COMPLEMENTARY PRACTICES ON INITIATION FOR MALES**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Initially, when I went into the field I had no intention of investigating initiation for boys because I felt that if I were to do so the research might end up being too broad and unmanageable considering the limited period I had to carry out the entire research project. Upon realizing that no matter how hard I tried to avoid the issue, the inseparability of the evidence connecting initiation schools for boys as well as girls became increasingly evident to the point that I finally concluded that not only was there was no harm in collecting the data that was being offered to me, I rapidly came to understand that such data actually enriched my original research. I became convinced that the two were indeed intertwined and boys as well as girls were also having their rights violated and it was crucial to include them for they are also a vulnerable group. I wondered that if I did not include the initiation of boys in this research, who would do so. In any event, I was already in the research field and equipped to expand my research and therefore decided to do so. Focus has always been exclusively on women and girls while ignoring the fact that even young boys are victims of unfair practices which violate their rights and, owing to stereotypes and societal expectations, they are expected to suffer in silence because boys are socialized and expected to be strong, i.e., not complain about the abuse they suffer.

#### **4.2 Curriculum of the male initiation school**

A village elder in his sixties said that when the boys go to the initiation camps, they are taught to be men. The curriculum is designed in such a way that, by the time they return, they are completely different people; they are given new names and their heads are clean-shaven as a symbol of the beginning of a new phase of their life. They are taught to be the head of their family, to hunt animals, to provide for their family and to rule over women. They are also taught to be strong and this is achieved through the harsh conditions to which they are exposed during their training which includes hunting wild animals which are their only food during the period of their training, bathing in cold river water and, most important of all, they are circumcised. He said:

“Circumcision is the major highlight of the initiation schools because we believe that it helps in thwarting the spread of HIV and Aids among our

people. While they are there, they are only allowed to eat meat [of animals] which they hunt, and peanut butter only for the course of the training and this helps the wounds to heal faster. This custom has helped us in training solid, cultured, hardworking men who are leaders because every man who has gone through the initiation school is a leader who is confident because it is also among the things we teach. It is easy to identify a muRemba man through the way he talks and conducts himself which is distinct.”

The boys change their names while they are there and will only be called by their new names upon their return into the community. This is a reflection of the new person into which the young boy would have been transformed and therefore he has a new identity. Usually, a cow is slaughtered for the boy initiate upon return when celebration ceremonies are held.

### **4.3 Male perspectives on the practices**

I was also curious to know whether or not the educated men also observed the cultural practices and a man who was in his early fifties said that most of them observe the practices because it is mandatory to do so in their culture. He said there have been cases when men have not willingly participated. In one case, a member of the tribe who was a doctor who refused to participate was kidnapped one day by a group of men and taken to the mountains where the initiation school had been set up and there he was forcibly circumcised. The elder continued and said that attending the initiation school used to be forced upon members in the past but nowadays the pressure to do so is no longer as blatant. Some men may choose not to attend but, he explained, one is indirectly forced to do so because if he does not he will be barred from attending traditional ceremonies and being part of some major rituals. Therefore, the threat of being excluded from the community in this way indirectly forces members to become initiates and attend the initiation school.

On the perspectives of men towards the initiation schools for girls, a man in his early thirties and still single said that it was the women who had chosen to oppress themselves by the practices they had decided to enforce themselves in the initiation schools; and it is something which he has never had to understand. In his view, it was the elderly women who had insisted on maintaining the cultural practice of conducting virginity tests to please the men and it was no longer the initiative of the men as it was in the past. He said that since he was no longer a virgin, there was no way he was expecting to marry a virgin because when he broke his virginity he also broke someone else's and therefore he continued it was not fair for him to expect something of his future wife which he no longer had himself and which he had taken

away from another woman as well. Taken at face value, this shows that women have misconceptions about what pleases men and they create practices with which men do not really agree.

He said that he had a different view from the belief that this custom had helped in securing marriages and curbing the spread of HIV and Aids. He completely disagreed that the initiation school curriculum could still work for this new dynamic generation. He believed that the success of a marriage had much more to do with the character of the spouses rather than the observation of customs. He said that there are some marriages which have survived the test of time even though the parties are from different tribes. Then he said he also knew of friends of his in his tribe who had followed all its customs, married women in the tribe but had still gone through bitter divorces. In a nutshell, he said, preserving a marriage has nothing to do with following a particular formula or custom. His view was very different from what the elderly women believe.

Another man commented that he is still to notice the difference between sexual intercourse with a woman who is said to be plain and that one whose labia minora is elongated. According to him, sex is the same and he will not put pressure on his daughters nor his son's wife to elongate her labia minora because whether or not it is elongated, it does not change the shape nor taste of the vagina. So, according to him, this practice is insignificant and a waste of time and resources. He feels that it is too ancient and the people from his tribe should move with the times.

Another respondent said that, according to their culture, for a woman to earn respect she should be a virgin when she marries, should have elongated her labia minora, should know how to please her husband in bed, should know how to take care of the family through doing all her household chores properly and she should be respectful towards her husband and his relatives, among other things. As a result, they as men had their ancestors influence women elders to include all those expectations in their initiation curriculum because it sexually pleases them as men to have sexual intercourse with a woman who would have elongated her labia minora because it arouses men when they play with the elongated labia minora during foreplay. He added that when a woman has elongated her labia minora, it grips the man's manhood inside her vagina so that it does not accidentally slip out during the act. He, therefore, said that if one of their sons marries a woman who is not from their tribe and is



plain (not having elongated her labia minora), she will be forced to go to the initiation school and have her labia minora elongated there. Therefore, he wants this practice to continue.

I then interviewed two male teachers who both expressed concern about the behavior of the girl initiates upon their return from the initiation school. One teacher said that there was usually a significant change in the character of the majority of the girl initiates who start resenting formal education and develop a very positive or forward attitude towards the opposite sex. He said most of them start behaving in a seductive manner, which has made outsiders question the initiation school curriculum over the years and triggered suspicions and a desire to know exactly what is taught there. He emphasized that the temptation of teachers to sleep with the girls is strong because they know that the girls are fresh from training. These initiates act in a seductive way towards the teachers who struggle to fight the temptation not to sleep with them because, if they do so, they, as custodians of these initiates (who are still children), risk losing their jobs. They also fear being prosecuted for statutory rape since these girls have not reached 18 which is the age of majority. He, therefore, feels that this practice should be a preserve of the mature initiate so that it does not lose its intended purpose.

Another male teacher (who also asked for his name to be withheld) said if he were a member of this tribe, he would have mixed feelings about sending his daughter to the initiation school. He said that he does not mean to be judgmental but, while he commends that the initiates are respectful to their elders specifically girls which is a plus, he has also noticed with concern that most of them exhibit loose morals upon their return from the initiation school. This is the case save for a few because of the teachings to which they are exposed in the school largely contradict the curriculum of the formal school. As a result, most of the young girls drop out of school or fall pregnant a few months after returning from the initiation school.

He also added that the boys who attend the ceremony become very rude, bullies, and have no respect for anyone who is not from their tribe. He emphasized with concern the fact that when they return from the initiation camps, the boys have a tendency to move around in a group intimidating other people and there have been many reports of bullying made against them. He said these boys refuse to take instructions from anyone who has not attended the initiation school or is not from their tribe. Their attitude compromises their formal school work with the result that the majority of them fail or drop out of school. He added that the

truth is that no teacher is keen to discipline these boys because of their extremely rebellious and threatening attitude.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

I note that the idea of enrolling in the initiation school is received with mixed feelings in this tribe. While the younger generation boys feel that these practices are outdated and are no longer necessary, the older generation feels that they should continue with them and are not prepared to give them up. This chapter also revealed that not only is the girl child a victim of harmful cultural practices but so also is the boy child because he is also coerced into participating in some of these harmful activities against his will.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **5.0 DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This research was an eye-opener not only to me but also to some of the respondents who had at some point engaged in the practices but upon reflection realised that they did not know what motivated the practices nor what they were intended to achieve. The reason for their ignorance is that such things were not fully and truthfully explained to them and they were not given an opportunity to ask questions about them. The fact is that the entire initiation process was a shock to them, forced on them, traumatic and painful; it was not designed to respond to their genuine concerns and give them an opportunity to refuse to participate. The findings presented above unearthed and answered several questions as to why and how things are done in the vaRemba secret cultural community. This chapter will now analyse and discuss the findings with a view to formulating a possible way forward.

#### **5.2 Myths and their impact**

- The fact that the initiates are threatened with curses if they divulge the secret activities of the initiation school to non-initiates and are sworn to secrecy is what has kept the group and its activities going and shrouded in mystery. Such secrecy has also ensured that most people are ignorant of just how serious the violations perpetrated by the initiation schools actually are. Therefore, criminal prosecution proceedings to end harmful cultural practices are not possible to initiate.
- There are two conflicting opinions about the myth that labia minora elongation has sexual advantages for marriages and helps to curb the divorce rate as it is believed to be very pleasurable for men. This belief is the direct cause of the gross violation of the rights of girls who are forced to submit to the excruciatingly painful procedure of having their labia minora elongated. On the other hand, some women testified that this procedure is what has preserved their marriages. So nothing definite can be said about this finding.
- The myth that a girl's virginity can only be lost through sexual intercourse is misguided and untrue. It has been medically proven that virginity can be lost through other means including playing sport, doing gymnastics and inserting tampons. The hymen is easy to break owing to its fragility and the condemnation of a girl based on

the presumed evidence of it having been broken only by sexual intercourse – and without giving the girl the benefit of a fair hearing - is highly problematic. It also has consequences because the rights to dignity and privacy are then also violated during and under this so-called testing of virginity.

- The myth that all husbands are potentially abusive and therefore the girls are taught endurance by being exposed to very harsh conditions is perpetuating male dominance and inciting domestic violence which is largely going unreported in these marriages. This probably prevents such girls/women from seeking to leave abusive relationships.
- The myth that the young girls should be enrolled in the initiation schools while they are still very young according to the “catch them while they are young” slogan so that they abstain from sex now so that they can make use of their skills later when they are older and ready to marry is also misguided. This is so because experience has shown that such timing is wrong. After they leave the initiation school, most girls experiment with sex and end up having early unwanted pregnancies forcing them to drop out of school. This not only harms their future it also exposes them to immediate extreme poverty.
- The myth about boys being unclean and incomplete if they are not circumcised has driven them to enrol in initiation schools against their will for fear of being rejected by their fellow tribesman. This has exposed them to serious health risks as some boys have suffered health complications as the result of circumcision and some of them have even died as a result of the procedure.
- The myth that boy initiates must be exposed to very harsh conditions so that they can be made into men and leaders has had serious negative effects on their health and their emotional and psychological wellbeing. Instead of becoming confident, mature and eager to improve themselves, such initiates become disrespectful, arrogant, unteachable and rebellious bullies and delinquents and often fail and drop out of school.
- The myth that girls who do not attend the initiation school are not marriageable is the reason behind the continual violation of their rights for they are then forced to enrol to fulfil the expectations of their parents. This is so because every parent in the village wants their daughter to get married.

### **5.3 Attitudinal change of initiates**

There is a significant change in the attitude of the initiates upon their return from initiation school and this was confirmed by the teachers I engaged with during this study. This is mainly caused by the new “knowledge” and pride they learn at the initiation schools, which they seem unable to control. The boys are taught to be men, to have a strong, firm or inflexible attitude, to be heads of their family and to provide for them. They are also taught to rule over women. As a result, their change in character and behaviour endures beyond the initiation. Such teachings have contributed to making these young boys arrogant and rude towards those not from their tribe including teachers from the formal school they attend who confessed to being afraid of them.

Following their return from the initiation school, the boys are alleged to be move around in groups or gangs intimidating people. In response, their school teachers started neglecting and many of them failed or dropped out of school. The reason could be that they lose interest in formal school as they feel mature enough to look for employment to fend for the families they are taught to take make, rule over and take care of while they are in the initiation school.

The attitudes of the girls also change upon their enrolment. Their teachers revealed their major concern that these girls develop a desire to engage sexually with men while developing a negative attitude towards their formal schooling. This sadly defeats the very purpose for which the initiation school was designed which is to preserve their virginity and stop the spread of HIV. The male teachers indicated that the girls’ attitude changes drastically and sooner or later they start tempting the male teachers to have sexual relations with them. This occurs among all female initiates even the very young ones.

Unfortunately, most of them fall pregnant before completing their schooling, while others drop out of school and never manage to complete their studies for reasons unknown to their teachers. All three teachers who participated in this study commended these girls for being very respectful especially towards teachers from their tribe and which they attributed to the initiation curriculum. Yet after their attendance at the initiation school, they become shy and reserved and avoid interacting with other students who are not from their tribe. They also become disrespectful towards female teachers who are not from their tribe. One female teacher said:

*“Vazhinji vacho unototyana kana kumutuma basa rechikoro nekuti anongokuratidza kuti haasi kuda asi akatumwa newe dzinza rake watinenge tichidzidzisa naye, anoita achimhanya nekudaro takungovaregawo vakadaro. Ukamutsiura semwana anogona kutokupindura zvinopedza simba”.*

(Meaning: “We are afraid to give tasks to most of these girls because of the attitude they towards us when we do. We have however noticed that they do not behave in that manner when a teacher whom they know is from their tribe sends them. Even if you rebuke them for doing wrong, they will behave with a bad attitude toward you and call you names. As a result, we have resolved to just leave them alone.”)

#### **5.4 Cultural expectations which work against the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC)**

Culture enforces many expectations especially against women and children. There are quite a few cultural practices which expose them to the risk of contracting diseases and even death. Some cultural practices also prevent girls from receiving or completing their education. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides for civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights which are designed to protect children. UNICEF states that while this is the world's most ratified treaty, it is, arguably, also the most violated one owing to the lack of value placed on children by their parents and society who treat and view them as their property. Be that as it may, the CRC and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) still provide an international and African legal framework to protect all children. Sadly, UNICEF has reported that children continue to suffer violations in the name of culture and, owing to their vulnerability as dependents, they are not able to express their concerns or opinions. This means that they continue to suffer in silence. Since the CRC is still not widely implemented (despite being widely ratified), it remains for most children no more than a hopeful paradise confined to paper.

Culture is the biggest violator of children's rights since its numerous beliefs and practices harm the security, health, life, education and well-being of children. This cycle of harm which is handed down from one generation to another continues as cultural groups are not prepared to let go their beliefs regardless of the harm they cause to their children and society because the entrenched attitudes on which their culture thrives are very hard to change. Therefore, information exposing the harm created by certain cultural practices has to be used to help educate societies that if certain of their beliefs are erroneous and harmful they need to

adapt or eliminate them in order to protect their children and ultimately all members of their community.

The vaRemba tribe is not alone in their beliefs. For example, in Swaziland, a chastity ceremony is held as young virgins lay reeds at the feet of the King Mswati III and he watches the topless maidens dance with other delegates. They sing songs inviting him to inspect whether or not they are still virgins. One of the songs says:

“I am a virgin, please come and inspect whether I am still pure.”

This shows the extent to which some cultural practices strip young girls of their rights to dignity and privacy.

### **5.5 Practices in the initiation school impact the health of initiates**

I did not receive permission from the Ministry of Health to research any of their health institutions. Therefore, the health issues I investigated were those limited to members of the vaRemba cultural group. I asked them to share their views about this as well as other sources of information apart from the research site. WHO claims that virginity testing can lead to harmful mental as well as physical, sexual and reproductive health consequences as well as social well-being.

In response to my concern about the health of initiates, one female respondent mentioned that after returning from the initiation school, they often suffer from vaginal thrush, which often goes untreated. They suspect that this is caused by the foreign objects which are inserted into their vaginas including fingers which are not protected by sterilised gloves as well as eggs that are poured into their vaginas. Since the vagina is a very sensitive organ, it is prone to infections and even the very young initiates complain of the same problem. Blatt (2017) says that the Manhattan Centre for Vaginal Surgery’s Medical Director and Gynaecologist observes that inserting dirty fingers into a vagina may lead to the transmission of fungal infections and disturb the vaginal environment. He adds that long nails can tear the vaginal mucosa which lines the vagina resulting in an infection called staph, which causes itchiness, nausea and might even eventually lead to death if left untreated. Krajewski (2017) a gynaecologist and Professor at the University of Pittsburgh states that if fingers wander among different people, there is a risk of transmission of Sexually Transmitted Infections

(STIs) among them. Therefore, there is a need to put necessary protective precautions in place because 17% of people do not wash their hands after using the toilet and the majority of them do not wash their hands correctly.

The female respondent also mentioned that because of the pressure surrounding virginity tests, some young girls have invented ways of evading embarrassment if they have already lost their virginity before entering the initiation school. She said they insert pieces of meat into their vaginas to fool the elderly women conducting the virginity tests into thinking they are still virgins. This however also exposes these girls to many diseases that can be caused by such practices. For example, a piece of raw meat contains bacteria and the insertion of such food into the vagina can cause contact dermatitis which is a skin rash according to Dr. Dweck, a gynaecologist and the author of *The Complete A to Z for your V*. My private gynaecologist whom I consulted for verification of this concurred with the above, adding that the insertion of dirty fingers can disrupt the vaginal environment, which can cause the growth of harmful bacteria. In other words, these young girls are exposed to health risks in the name of culture.

I was also curious about the health risks to boy initiates in view of the fact that some boys die at the initiation camps. Cultural leaders always distance themselves from such deaths by blaming the boys' parents, especially their mothers, whom they accuse of failing to confess their involvement in witchcraft and/or adultery before enrolling their sons in the initiation school. What harms and/or kills these children, however, are the harsh conditions to which they are exposed and forced to endure. For example, they suffer dehydration because they are forbidden to drink water in order to prevent them from urinating, which is a painful experience and stalls the healing of the circumcision wound. Also unsterilized razor blades may be used on them. Some boys have bled to death due to unprofessional circumcision procedures. The boys are also exposed to harsh weather conditions by being forced to bathe in cold river water during the winter which increases their exposure to pneumonia if their immune system is weak which it is likely to be the case in view of the severe conditions of the camp in general.

The elderly tribesman I interviewed said that there was too much false talk about young boys dying in the initiation camps. He said that such incidents occur when parents enrol their sons in the initiation school without first confessing their own misconduct (e.g., their involvement



in witchcraft and/or adultery) and it is therefore the boys' own parents, not the elders in charge of the initiation school, who cause the deaths of their own sons. He was of this view he said because, according to their beliefs, the initiation shrine is a sacred place, so if someone has committed adultery or has engaged in any witchcraft, be it himself or the initiate, it ought to be confessed. He also said that there was a lot of talk about the elders using unsterilized blades for circumcision. He confirmed that that used to be the case in that past before the HIV and Aids pandemic when they used one blade for all the initiates. He said times have since changed and they have now started making initiates pay a fee which is used to cover the expense of buying razor blades for each of them as well as a white uniform which they have to wear during the period. He also added that at some point, they had decided to engage the PSI to assist them with safely and the properly circumcising the boys as they wanted to calm fears that they were exposing these young boys to diseases through sharing the same sharp instruments. The challenge which they faced as a tribe with that move is that the members of PSI went around exposing the secrets of the tribe since they had access to their shrines and as a result the tribesman decided to discontinue their services.

Crossing to South Africa, President Cyril Ramaphosa is quoted in an article published by SABC (2020) as urging traditional leaders to end the abuse of cultural practices that violate human rights. He said that while customary initiation is a rite of passage for young people, which ushers them into manhood and adulthood, unscrupulous people were infiltrating groups who practise circumcision and costing young men their lives. He is quoted as saying:

“While some were being maimed, others were losing their lives and this ought to be addressed through engaging police to prosecute those found on the wrong side of the law.”

He was very concerned about forced abductions of young men into initiation schools, which he said, was a gross violation of their human rights. This is evidence that boys in some parts of South Africa also suffer such serious violations relating to harmful cultural initiation practices and they are so serious that they have attracted the concern of their President. In other words, these violations do not occur in Zimbabwe alone.

## **5.6 Sections 51 and 57 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe versus Cultural practices and expectations**

In an article published in The Sunday Mail, (2016) entitled “The traumatized virgins of Hurugwe,” a Harare lawyer, Davison Kanokanga is quoted as saying:

“There is no section in the Constitution of Zimbabwe which addresses virginity testing per se. Chapter 4 on the declaration of rights is however closer which covers sections 51, 80, 81 which also speaks on the rights of women and children.”

The above sections cover the rights to dignity and privacy. Both rights are violated by those conducting the initiation. For example, the virginity of a person, girl or woman, is a deeply personal, private and confidential matter. Therefore, if a girl is forced in public to open her legs, remove her clothes and submit to a humiliating invasive bodily inspection of her vagina by a stranger that is a violation of and attack on her private person, bodily integrity and security, dignity and privacy, on her health and possibly, if she dies, her life. Every female, regardless of her age, has the right to protect her body from any abuse or attack, including the insertion of any objects into her vagina without her consent and such is a gross violation of her human rights. This is also the case with harmful initiation practices which are forced on boys. Harmful cultural practices have placed young boys and girls in vulnerable and risky positions.

## **5.7 Violation of section 75 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe**

The above section provides for the right to education for every citizen. The Child Rights Act (CRA) (article 28) also provides that every child has the right to be educated. Initially, I assumed that initiation schools are conducted during the school term and affected the initiates would have to miss school, but after embarking on the research, I learned that the initiation schools were run during the holidays. However, the major negative effect these initiation schools have on the initiates is the negative change in attitude towards formal schoolwork *after* their return from the initiation school. The teachers whom I interviewed raised concerns over the negative change in attitude which distracts the girls from their formal schooling and turns their attention towards men while the boy initiates become bullies and refuse to follow any instructions from teachers who are not from their tribe. These results in school dropouts depriving these children of their right to education as provided in section 75 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

Chikunda and Shoko (2009) reveal that the majority of the school dropouts in Mberengwa comprise children from the tribe under study. I managed to confirm this by verifying the surnames of the dropouts who all turned out to bear the surname “Zhou” and upon conducting further inquiries it was revealed that most of them had dropped out of school a few months after returning from the initiation school. This reaction speaks volumes about is on the initiation curriculum.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

This chapter discusses the myths surrounding the cultural practices of this tribe and their impact on young initiates of both sexes. It discusses the violations against these children in terms of the various relevant legal frameworks. Their human rights which are violated include their right to education, security, health (sometimes life, if they die), privacy and dignity.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

Since not all culture is bad, there is a need to critically analyse and evaluate what of culture should be affirmed and what, if possible, should be eliminated. This means that culture, which is a guiding principle of life, has a definite positive role to play in the life of a family, organisation, community and society at large. There is always something positive about anything if you just choose to look at it from a positive perspective. When communities such as tribes hide under the blanket of their culture to justify their infringement of the rights and dignity of others within their culture, those aspects of culture ought to be discarded. The reason for this is that although everyone has the right to practise the culture of their choice, they ought not to do so if it means violating the rights of their neighbour. I am not of course proposing to dismiss all cultures and say they are all bad just because they may have some negative aspects as that would be unfair. I accept that culture is what defines a people and is of paramount importance to them. What I am saying, however, is that any culture should be beneficial to all its members and those aspects which are not good should be eliminated for the good of everyone it influences.

#### **6.2 Positives of culture**

The vaRemba culture also has some positive aspects. These are some of the reasons why its people have survived and their culture has stood the test of time. The people from this tribe are proud of their cultural practices because they claim that it as a result of them that the rate of divorce is very low in their tribe as compared to other tribes. They claim that their practices have endured over the years because they preserve marriages and build healthy families. Since they encourage marriage between members of the tribe, they say that this has aided in a better understanding and tolerance in marriages resulting in long-lasting marriages.

Chisale (2016) notes that it is high time human rights advocates accept that the indigenous mechanisms, such as virginity testing and male circumcision, which Africans have put in place to curb HIV have worked. The vaRemba also take pride in the positive practice of their initiation curriculum for boys, including male circumcision, which complies with the Ministry of Health's safety standards and has health benefits that are also encouraged by PSI Zimbabwe. It has been medically proven that circumcision reduces the risk of both

contracting and transmitting sexually transmitted diseases. It also reduces the risk of cervical cancer, protects against penile cancer and reduces the risk of urinary tract infections.

The initiation camps have also been very helpful in teaching young girls about cleanliness, household chores and how they should take care of themselves during menstruation. Such life lessons are very critical at this stage of the lives of young girls and are sometimes not taught at home although they are now being introduced in schools.

### **6.3 Revamping the initiation school curriculum in fulfilment of the human rights approach**

Section 63(b) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe provides that “every person has the right to participate in the cultural life of their choice, but no person exercising these rights may do so in a way that is inconsistent with this chapter.” According to the Joint General Recommendation with CEDAW on harmful practices, there is an urgent need to eliminate harmful practices in whatever form they may occur. It is not only the girl child who is affected; the boy child also often falls victim to manipulation, control and abuse in the name of culture. Harmful practices are machinations emanating from stereotyped roles driven to justify and qualify gender-based violence. Such harmful practices are perpetuated as forms of control of women and children in the tribe under the pretext of protection. It is against this background that there is a need to revamp the initiation school curriculum to eliminate any form of violation.

CEDAW acknowledges the significant role played by culture which may be both negative and positive. Article 2(f) urges States Parties to “take all appropriate measures, including legislation to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations customs, and practices which constitute discrimination against women.” Article 5(a) also provides that State parties are supposed to act appropriately to eliminate prejudices perpetuated by culture and all other practices which are driven by inferiority or superiority of either sex through the modification of cultural patterns.

The initiation school curriculum should be aligned with the laws in place to protect women, girls and boys and it should not oppose or undermine these efforts. This means that the ‘best interests of the child’ principle should be observed. For example, the curriculum should exclude harmful practices that include virginity testing, labia minora elongation, unsafe

circumcision and gendered chores, which are stereotypical and promote male dominance and violence against women. The conditions to which initiates are subjected during their training should be improved and become part of a friendly environment in which initiates suffer no negative impact to their physical or psychological health and general well-being. The curriculum should take cognizance of the fact that we are living in a time when HIV and AIDS is prevalent; therefore their initiation process should be used as a platform to educate the children on the pandemic in order to protect the younger generation from falling victim to it. There is also a need to stress the importance of formal education to curb the high rate of school dropouts within this tribe; if this is not pursued, infected children will be more likely to become unemployable, thus increasing the already high unemployment rate. To this end, the curriculum should include lessons on HIV and AIDS and the best methods to avoid falling victim to the disease. Coping mechanisms include abstinence, the correct use of condoms (if they fail to abstain) and remaining faithful to one partner. It is a plus that the current curriculum includes menstrual management (how a girl should take care of herself during menstruation) and general hygiene and this should be retained in the curriculum. Lessons on how to have sex should not be included as this entices young people to want to put what they have learnt into practice.

On the SABC News in 2020, Cyril Ramaphosa (the President of South Africa) urged traditional leaders to take back the practice of circumcision and improve it since they are the custodians of culture. This will help curb the high number of complications associated with the procedure. The Marriages Act permits a girl to marry at the age of 16 but this was overruled by the *Mudzuru* case (above). According to section 78(1) as read with section 81(1) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe 2013, the age of 18 is the minimum age for marriage and any person under 18 may not enter into a marriage union. The Customary Marriages Act was therefore ruled unconstitutional in so far as it was inconsistent with the Constitution and permitted marriage for anyone below the age of 18. Therefore, in accordance with this law, the initiation enrolment age for girls should be increased from 10 to 18 years of age in order to ensure that young girls are not taught about how to have sex at a tender age; they should be allowed to wait until they are more mature and ready to marry.

In a bid to properly revamp initiation schools, health personnel should be involved in setting up the initiation shrines for boys. In order to avoid any health-related complications, environmental health technicians should also be involved to ensure that the shrines meet the

safety health standards. This also means to say that the PSI should be re-engaged as well to protect the health and lives of the young boys.

The issue continuously raised on coercion to enrol should also be addressed so that each initiate makes their own independent decision on whether or not to be a part of it. The rights of the child should be considered.

#### **6.4 Concluding remarks**

Culture is what defines and identifies people and it is wrong to be judgemental about other peoples' cultures. At the same time however, there is still a need to critically analyse all aspects of culture and eliminate what is bad about it, meaning those aspects which infringe the rights of other people. Museveni (2000) notes that human rights groups struggle to accept that most African practices are valuable; therefore, they label almost all practices as harmful. This research has revealed that under the blanket of culture, children have been forced to suffer certain forms of harmful, discriminatory treatment and it is such treatment that has attracted the opposition of several human rights organizations.

##### **6.4.1 Consent**

Culture has rendered children voiceless. They are not consulted on decisions that affect them. Consent is granted on their behalf. They are forced to do things that only adults are mature enough to do and consent to do, if they so wish. This means to say that culture contradicts itself. Giving consent for a child to violate that child is a gross violation of that child's rights and it is high time these rights start to be observed and implemented and not just remain stuck on paper and go no further. In other words, 'the best interests of the child' principle ought to be robustly observed in practice and not just in theory.

Most of the interviewees revealed that they are never given an opportunity to consent to anything. The girls are forced to enrol in the initiation school and they are expected to allow virginity tests to be conducted on them unwillingly. This is against the law, which stipulates that virginity tests can only be conducted on a person who is 18 or older who can consent and must therefore be given the opportunity to do so. Section 12 of the Children's Act provides that virginity testing of children who are below the age of eighteen (18) is prohibited and may only be performed on persons over 18 with their consent. However, the consent of children (below 18) is not sought from them regarding whether or not they want to be taught about

how to have sex, about labia minora elongation and virginity tests, among others. All these practices are forced on them. Some girls are also unfortunate enough to be forced into marriage in the event that they are found not to be virgins.

Boys are coerced to enrol in the initiation school where they are circumcised. They are also forced to endure conditions that leave them with no choice but to enrol in the school. There is a lot of discrimination against the uncircumcised as they are subjected to social exclusion, which is a very painful, traumatising and embarrassing situation. The uncircumcised are also called demeaning names “*mushenji*” which means “uncircumcised” or “unclean” and it is very demeaning in their culture because one is regarded as second class citizen. Mbiti (1986:94) notes that when blood is shed during initiation, it means that the initiate joins the stream of life of his people and he becomes one of them as it is a bridge between the living and their dead ancestors. The uncircumcised do not have the right to inherit nor take part in important family court convocations because they do not possess this culturally important identity mark.

The negative aspects of culture as revealed by this research outweigh those that are positive. Attitudinal changes are of great concern for they result in the violation of many other rights.

#### **6.4.2 *The Health Professions Act [Chapter 27:18]***

The Health Professions Act’s objective is to protect, educate and provide guidelines for proper medical conduct and it is mandatory for cultural elders and custodians to take cognisance of the requirements of the law guiding the health fraternity when executing cultural practices. This includes circumcision and virginity testing.

Section 121 of the Act provides that any person who is not registered as a medical practitioner but practices, conducts business and holds a title as one shall be guilty and liable to a fine not exceeding level ten or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding five years or to both such fine or such imprisonment. This means the traditionally approved “surgeons” are liable to prosecution. Section 53 of the same Act also covers the establishment of the Environmental Health Practitioners Council of Zimbabwe. The Council should be made responsible for establishing the initiation schools in order to ensure that health standards are not compromised.



## 6.5 Recommendations

In view of the above, I, therefore, recommend that:

- The first and most urgent matter is to educate the gatekeepers of culture on issues to do with virginity, rights of children and safe circumcision since they are the drivers of culture among the vaRemba. There is an urgent need for them to shift their thinking so that they can positively influence the rest of their tribesmen. There is a need to correct the misconceptions surrounding virginity and marriage. The laws which protect their children should be exhaustively and clearly unpacked, i.e., explained to both the children and their elders so that they become knowledgeable and empowered by the truth.
- Cultural practices should align with the laws that protect children and the prosecution of those who do not comply should be enforced without compromise.
- The Government should ensure that the laws specifically put in place to protect children are enforced and monitored bearing in mind that, in their innocence, children are most unlikely to initiate compliance.
- There should be a partnership between the vaRemba tribal group and the government represented by nurses and doctors who are qualified to circumcise boys in order to avoid circumcision-related complications, which include amputation and fatalities that have occurred over the years.
- Health standards should be applied to the VaRemba's form of circumcision so that it ceases to be a random practice. There should be proper guidelines that govern the practice.
- The initiation curriculum should be changed to prevent children of a tender age from being taught about how to have sex; rather they should be encouraged to avoid it in order to protect their well-being and future.
- The enrolment age for initiates in the initiation school at which marriage and marriage-related issues are taught should be increased to 18 which is the legal age of majority.
- The children who are also human beings and equal to adults should not be coerced to do things or to submit to having things done to them against their will since such forceful practices compromise their dignity, health, education, and life.

- Professional health workers should run the initiation school for boys to avoid health complications, amputations, and fatalities.
- The Health Professions Act should be taught to traditional leaders so that they learn the requirements of the law relating to the establishment of initiation schools and the execution of some practices so that they do not compromise the health of their children.
- Environmental health technicians should be involved in the setting up of initiation shrines to ensure compliance with health and safety standards.
- There is also a need for the involvement of professional psychologists to counsel initiates for their experiences that can be traumatizing and some patients require counselling and/or other treatment in order to recover.
- The involvement of PSI should be mandatory to ensure that circumcision is done properly.
- The girl child initiation curriculum should include issues to do with empowerment so that the girl child may learn how to stand up for her rights, realise the importance of education and pursue it so that she can empower herself rather than focus solely on seeking to get married and bear children as her single ultimate achievement in life.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the investigations I conducted during this research revealed mixed feelings among the respondents toward the cultural practice of initiation rites against adolescents. The adolescents themselves criticized the practice especially on the ground that they are coerced to participate. The elders of the tribe, on the other hand, emphasized the advantages of their cultural practices and their intention to ensure that this culture is not eroded by globalization. There were major objections to the harmful practices aimed at preserving virginity and elongating the labia minora as they violated the right to privacy and dignity. While the girls are taught to be respectful, submissive and hardworking, some of their teachings promote the continuous oppression of women.

The methods used to test virginity are not medically proven, unsafe and inaccurate. The dubious methods used to test virginity include the insertion of fingers (“two finger test”), the pouring of a raw egg into the vagina as well as breast examination to check if the breasts are still firm and whether there is a visible path between them to ascertain whether or not they

have been touched. Therefore, girls are prone to be singled out and stigmatized on inaccurate and dubious testing processes. Most of the girls revealed their discomfort at the elder women's refusal to accept that virginity can be lost through means other than sex. Another danger of the current curriculum at initiation school is that it tempts the girls to experiment what they have learned and this has led to unwanted pregnancies and early marriages among other things hence violating their right to education as they often have to drop out of school. Those who are found not to be virgins are subjected to corporal punishment administered to them by their fathers which is against the Domestic Violence Act and the Criminal Law Code.

This is contrary to what the elders intend to achieve for they say that they conduct such tests to ensure that young girls do not indulge in sexual intercourse before marriage and they conduct teachings so that when these girls get married, they can take care of their husbands and families as well as satisfy their husbands sexually. This is also done, they say, to reduce the divorce rate as well as the fight against HIV and AIDS. The custodians of this culture boast of low divorce rates in their tribe which they credit to these teachings. George (2007) quotes a traditional healer in his research on virginity testing who said that they should continue to conduct it because that is the only solution they have found to be efficient in Africa to stop HIV and limit abortions.

On the part of boys, the major activity of their initiation school is circumcision. They are forced to enroll in the school at the age of twelve. In the school, they are taught to be men, to rule over women, to provide for the family, to be brave and to be a leader. However, some unfortunate boys do not make it out of the initiation school because some die while they are there due to the harsh conditions to which they are exposed such as bathing in cold river water during winter which makes them prone to pneumonia and being circumcised with unsterilized blades, etc. Educationally, the teachers I interviewed also raised concerns about the high numbers of school dropouts resulting from the initiation school curriculum, including the rudeness, rebelliousness and stubbornness of initiates towards teachers who are not from their tribe.

However, not all aspects of culture are bad. Hence, it should not be entirely abolished. The research revealed that there is also something good that comes out of culture and that is what ought to be adopted. There is, therefore, a need for a change in the manner in which these

schools are run and it has to start from changing the mindset of the gatekeepers of culture so that they are accommodative of the rights of children and feel encouraged to promote an overhaul of the initiation curriculum both for the good of their children and their tribe as a whole.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1: Sample of open-ended questions asked for initiates and prospective initiates**

- (1) What is your name?
- (2) How old are you?
- (3) How many are you in your family?
- (4) What is your level of education?
- (5) Have you enrolled in the initiation school yet?
- (5.1) If yes, how old were you when you did? And, did you enroll willingly?
- (5.2) If not, do you have any intentions of enrolling?
- (6) What were you taught in the initiation school?
- (7) How do you feel about your experience?
- (8) Do you think your behavior changed when you returned?
- (9) Would you want your children to enroll in the initiation school?

## **Appendix 2: Sample of open-ended questions for the elders of the tribe**

- (1) How old are you?
- (2) What is your level of education?
- (3) Are you employed? If yes, what do you do for a living?
- (4) What is your marital status?
- (5) What is your role in the initiation school?
- (6) What kind of lessons do you teach initiates?
- (7) Do you think your curriculum has a positive contribution to the lives of the initiates?
- (8) What enrolment methods do you use?
- (9) What sort of punishment do you administer to those who do not comply?
- (10) Is enrolment voluntary?

### **Appendix 3: Sample of open-ended questions for the teachers of initiates**

- (1) Which tribe are you from?
- (2) How many students are in your class?
- (3) Of the students in your class, how many are from the vaRemba tribe?
- (4) What sort of challenges have you faced from your students?
- (5) Out of 100%, how is the performance of students from the vaRemba tribe?
- (6) Have you had any school dropouts? If yes, from which tribe is it more prevalent?
- (7) Have you ever encountered any cases of bullying or violence in the school?
- (8) If yes to seven, who are the main perpetrators?
- (9) What is the percentage pass rate of the school on public examinations?
- (10) What is your advice regarding the practices of the vaRemba tribe?

#### **Appendix 4: Sample of the songs sung**

*Hee huya uone pakafira mai vedu*

*Nyamukanga akatigura mushenji*

*Pachimwenye chedu*

(Celebratory songs of acknowledging and celebrating their culture)