

## ***Shikenge Yesterday Versus Shikenge Today: A Case of the Imilangu in Kalabo and Sikongo Districts in Western Zambia***

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**Abstract:** The study delved into shikenge (initiation) among the Imilangu in Kalabo and Sikongo Districts in Western Zambia. Shikenge is a crucial initiation rite performed among girls to mark their entry into adulthood. The concentration of the study was on the changes that have taken place in the manner in which shikenge was performed in the olden days compared to what is currently obtaining. The study has revealed that a lot of changes have taken place in the manner in which the ceremony was performed. Among the major changes are to do with its reduced duration, taboos followed, places where initiates are kept and many more. It has been revealed that a lot of changes have taken place because the value that people then attached to shikenge is no longer there. The study closed with a discussion of Christianity, formal education and exposure to urban life as key factors that have contributed to the changes in the manner in which shikenge is performed. The study argues that the old ways of shikenge performance were better than the current ones because the former prepared fully the initiates to get into the world as adults.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Every society in the world has some rites of passage performed to mark the entry of a person from one stage of life to the other. Among the *Imilangu*, *shikenge* was a crucial initiation rite performed among girls as it indicated that a girl was graduating from childhood to adulthood. Kapungwe observes that although there are different kinds of initiation ceremonies, the most common one is the puberty rite or puberty ritual which is performed for girls. Almost invariably, this rite marks a girl's attainment of sexual maturity and is considered a necessary prelude to marriage.<sup>1</sup> Simakando states that, "in the process of child upbringing, parents had a big task of ensuring that their children were prepared for adulthood. To facilitate smooth training of girl children so that they could graduate from childhood to adulthood, girls had to undergo initiation."<sup>2</sup> Sumbwa observes that *sikenge*<sup>3</sup> was an 'indigenous school' that Lozi people employ to educate their female children.<sup>4</sup> Gehman amplifies this by expounding that a child grows into adulthood not only physically, but socially and religiously. Therefore, rites and ceremonies are performed to mark the passage of the child from one stage of growth to another.<sup>5</sup>

Among the *Imilangu*, the mother was responsible for teaching good morals and other cultural values that were obtaining in the community to her children (both boys and girls) when they were below eight years. Mothers were responsible for child training because they were found at home with the children in most cases. According to Kennedy Namukulo, "Fathers were excluded from the task of child training when a child was below eight years because it was believed that their duty was to feed

<sup>1</sup>A.K. Kapungwe, 'Traditional Cultural Practices of Imparting Sex Education and the Fight against HIV/AIDS: The Case of Initiation Ceremonies for Girls in Zambia', *African Sociological Review*, 7, (1), (2003), p. 46.

<sup>2</sup>S.Simakando, 'A History of the Imilangu in Kalabo and Sikongo Districts of Western Zambia', Ph.D. Thesis, Zambian Open University, 2019, p. 227.

<sup>3</sup>*Sikenge* is Lozi for *Shikenge*.

<sup>4</sup> Nyambe Sumbwa, *Aspects of the Lozi-Luyana Culture* (Lusaka: The University of Zambia Press, 2014), p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> Richard, J., Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspectives* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd., 2000), p.52.

and fend the family.”<sup>6</sup> If a child behaved in a manner that society did not approve of, the blame was put on the mother and not the father. However, for a boy child, the father came in as soon as he grew up to teach him how to behave in society, build houses, look after animals, hunt, fish, and do other duties that were required to be done by a male in society.

Teaching or preparing girl children to enter adulthood with the necessary skills among the *Imilangu* was called *shikenge* (initiation). A girl who was not yet initiated was called *liungu*. Chuunga observes that in Africa most young people upon reaching puberty stage underwent some ceremonial rites to prepare them to meet the needs of adulthood. Boys and girls were initiated in many ways including that of managing their own homes.<sup>7</sup> Hall defines initiation as the process of induction into certain groups and societies, blood-friendship, oaths of secrecy, or commitments to a certain cause, and so on.<sup>8</sup>

Among the *Imilangu* boys never went through initiation. The *Mbundais* an example of an ethnic group in *Imilangu* area that initiated their boys through the *mukanda* ceremony. Strike confirms that, “boys have no initiation ceremony....”<sup>9</sup> There was no special training or teaching that boys went through. Instead, they learnt most of the activities needed for adulthood by observing and imitating what men did. For example, a boy learnt how to hunt, build houses and many more through observing his father. For example, when a parent made a mat, the boy observed what the father did and then he also made a small mat. Boys also learnt a lot of life skills from the stories shared by their fathers and other men.

Unlike boys who had no specified kind of training, girls, as earlier mentioned, underwent serious training (*shikenge*) for not less than one month. A girl in *shikenge* (an initiate) was called *mwalyasho*. Mundumuko defines *shikenge* as a period of seclusion for Lozi girls during which the girls receive instructions on all the things they learnt previously from their families and are introduced to womanhood as a final preparation for their entry into adult life.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. SHIKENGE YESTERDY

The *Imilangu*, just like many other ethnic groups in Western Zambia, valued the initiation of girls as it was key when one wanted to marry. With this in mind, women in the village ensured that as soon as a girl became of age, she was secluded from the public to prepare her for the next stage in life. A girl became a *mwalyasho* immediately after she had her first period of menstruation. Kapungwe confirms that, “among the Lozi people of Western Province, initiation of a girl started with her first menstrual period.”<sup>11</sup> According to Mulako,

as soon as a girl discovered that there was some blood coming out of her private parts, she immediately told one of her close female relatives who in turn informs the other female relatives especially the mother of the girl so that planning for her seclusion commences.<sup>12</sup>

As soon as she informed a friend, she went and hid herself in the bush near the village. When her absence from the village was noticed by her friends, they told the married women who went to look for her in the bush. Upon finding her, they ululated (*kuyeyumwena*), sang songs (*kuimba membo*), and danced (*kukina*). In the evening, when it was dark, she was brought back home to sleep, but at daybreak she was hidden again in the bush. Hall observes that:

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Kennedy Namukulo on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Chuunga, *Enjoying your Marriage: African Secrets on Marriage*, Vol. 1. (Lusaka: Zambia Adventist Press Ltd., 2012), p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Hall, *Zambia* (London: Pall Mall Press Ltd., 1967), p. 92.

<sup>9</sup> D.W. Strike, *Barotseland: Eight Years among the Barotse* (New York: Negro University Press, 1969), p. 66.

<sup>10</sup> S. Mundumuko, ‘The Decline and Change in the Milaka and Sikenge Institutions of the Lozi: 1886-1975’, M.A. Dissertation, University of Zambia, 1990, p. 86.

<sup>11</sup> Kapungwe, ‘Traditional Cultural Practices of Imparting Sex Education and the Fight against HIV/AIDS’, p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> Yvonne, M., Mulako, ‘Exploration of Sikenge Initiation Rite in the Promotion of Lozi Cultural Heritage: A Case of Mongu District’, M.Ed. Thesis, University of Zambia, 2015, p. 42.

At the beginning of the process of initiation, the initiates are usually physically removed from the mainstream of society and sent to a secluded place where they have practically no contact with the people from their community. This is a time of great physical and psychological stress as the initiates do not know their status in society. The community is telling them in a very radical way that without membership in a community a person is nothing.<sup>13</sup>

Training of the *mwalyasho* (*kubukwela*) was done at night in a secluded fence. Mulako highlights that initiation was conducted when it was dark to hide from men and children.<sup>14</sup> This went on for the whole period of seclusion. During *kubukwela* women put the initiate in a circle as they sang, danced and ululated. Meanwhile, the women also pinched and beat her with sticks to prepare her to be submissive to her husband when she would marry. Strike notes that the women beat the girl with sticks, not severe enough to do damage but hard enough to arouse the tears and lamentations of the novitiate.<sup>15</sup> During the daytime the girl was hidden in the bush. If she was not hidden in the bush, a fence (*lushoko*) was made for her behind the main house where she stayed to hide from men and children. Unlike it was among the Bemba where there was a woman called *Na Chimbusa* who was in charge of training the *Na Chisungu* (initiate),<sup>16</sup> among the *Imilangu* there was no specific woman put in charge. It was the duty of all the women in the village to ensure that the initiate was fully trained.

Throughout the period of initiation the initiate was given some taboos to follow. To start with, the initiate was not allowed to bathe or wear clothes. Simakando observes that the initiate was not allowed to bathe because doing so would make the lessons she had learnt during initiation to be washed away by the water. Wearing clothes was not allowed because it was believed that the clothes were going to block the lessons the initiate was to be taught.<sup>17</sup> The initiate was only allowed to put on two animal skins covering the private parts, one in front and the other one behind. Another small piece of animal skin was used to cover the breasts (*kaanga mele*, meaning breasts holder). The other taboo observed during the period of initiation was for the initiate not to eat with adults. It was believed that if she ate with adults, especially women on menstruation, she was going to be sick. An initiate could only eat with her *kahombelekeci*<sup>18</sup> and other young girls because they were believed to be clean. Moreover, an initiate was not allowed to finish any food she was served because it was believed that she would either become stingy or be a thief. Mulako supports this taboo by stating that if an initiate finished the food on the plate she would become stingy.<sup>19</sup>

An initiate was not allowed to meet or talk to men or boys. As soon as she saw or man or a boy, she run away to hide. Men and boys within the village had to hit the initiate with a piece of charcoal for her to stop running away from them. According to Simakando, a piece of charcoal was used because it was believed that charcoal removed bad luck from the initiate.<sup>20</sup> Despite having stopped running away from men and boys within the village, an initiate was not allowed to talk to them. On the other hand, if an initiate met with a man or woman, she had to sit down, cover her head with animal skin and then start clapping (*kukandelelela*) until they were gone. According to Mulako, clapping was a sign of respect for the person she met. Covering the girl with animal skin meant hiding her from being seen by men.<sup>21</sup> The essence of covering the initiate's head was to prohibit her from seeing or talking to men to prevent them from proposing love to her because if she accepted it was believed she would forever remain a prostitute.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Hall, *Zambia*, p. 93.

<sup>14</sup> Mulako, 'Exploration of Sikenge Initiation Rite in the Promotion of Lozi Cultural Heritage', p. 42.

<sup>15</sup> Strike, *Barotseland*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>16</sup> MulengaKapwepwe, 'The Young Trees are the Forest: Chisungu initiation Ceremony of the Bemba People', MulengaKapwepwe (ed.), *Celebrating Zambia's Cultural Heritage* (Lusaka: Celtel Zambia Plc., 2007), p. 161.

<sup>17</sup> Simakando, 'A History of the Imilangu in Kalabo and Sikongo Districts of Western Zambia', p. 231.

<sup>18</sup> Kahombelekeci was a young girl who had not yet reached puberty chosen to be a helper to the *mwalyasho*. Since the *mwalyasho* had restricted movements, whenever she needed something she sent her *kahombelekeci*.

<sup>19</sup> Mulako, 'Exploration of Sikenge Initiation Rite in the Promotion of Lozi Cultural Heritage', p. 44.

<sup>20</sup> Simakando, 'A History of the Imilangu in Kalabo and Sikongo Districts of Western Zambia', p. 232.

<sup>21</sup> Mulako, 'Exploration of Sikenge Initiation Rite in the Promotion of Lozi Cultural Heritage', p. 43.

<sup>22</sup> Mulako, 'Exploration of Sikenge Initiation Rite in the Promotion of Lozi Cultural Heritage', p. 42.

During *shikenge*, one of the major topics taught to the initiate was sex. Sex education was very cardinal during initiation to avoid embarrassments the time a girl got married. Men shared stories concerning how a woman was expected to perform in bed. Therefore, during sharing of such stories if a man discovered that certain bedroom performances other men were enjoying in their homes were missing in his home, he would go and castigate his wife and question the integrity of the people that trained her during initiation. To avoid such embarrassments, women made sure they trained the girls fully. Strike states that:

Married women taught the girl how to receive and how to comport herself during the conjugal embraces of her husband, one woman taking the man's part for the performance. Much advice is given her how to preserve her husband's affections.<sup>23</sup>

Other than sexual matters, girls were also taught a number of issues that helped them to live well with others in the community. Strike outlines some of them by stating that:

Everything of value to the life of the individual and society is imparted here: moral requirements; legal expectations; techniques for survival, such as farming and gardening; social and aesthetic requirements, more of which are not known to non-initiates and under strict embargo until this time. The wisdom of the community is imparted during this stage – the wisdom of the ancestors, religious wisdom, wisdom for living well and fully for one's sake and for the sake of the community.<sup>24</sup>

Unlike the Bemba who taught the initiate with the aid of wall and clay emblems,<sup>25</sup> *Imilangu* women did not use any of such. They instead used proverbs, wise sayings and songs to exude moral guidance. *Muyanjile mukapopo* (close the passage) was one of the common songs during initiation. The song went as follows:

***Imilangu***

*Muyanjile mukapopo molunapiti lwende,*

*Muyanjile mukapopo molunapiti lwende.*

**English**

Close the passage where the fish passed through,

Close the passage where the fish passed through.

The one leading the song above sang the two lines twice and then the others picked it from there. The words above were repeated as many times as possible. This song simply meant a woman who was attending her menstrual period was supposed to dress properly so that her menstrual blood did not come out in public. Hence, the 'passage' referred to in the song is the vagina whereas the 'fish' is menstrual blood. Such a song educated girls to ensure that they took care of themselves when attending their monthly period so that no one saw their menstrual blood.

*Shiuluulu shang'ange* was yet another key song during *kubukwela*.

***Imilangu***

*Shiuluulu shang'angee shang'angee,*

*Eshi munakwanga mwakaci,*

*mwalume mwiye.*

**English**

*A difficult anthill, difficult anthill,*

*where women have failed, let*

*men come.*

Just like the first song, the one leading here also sang the three lines twice and then the others picked it up and the song went on like that. This song meant an initiate who could not learn when being taught by women required men to teach her. The message in this song encouraged an initiate to follow whatever she was taught as it was a known fact that there was no provision for men to teach an initiate. Therefore, it was an insult to an initiate if she was proven to have failed to get lessons from women. The other crucial song used during *kubukwela* went as follows:

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<sup>23</sup>Strike, *Barotseland*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>24</sup>V.R. Dorjahn, 'The Initiation and Training of the TemnePoro Members,' in S. Ottenberg (ed.) *African Religious Groups and Beliefs: Papers in Honor of William R. Bascom* (Puri: Archana Publications, 1982), pp. 46-47.

<sup>25</sup>Kapwepwe, 'The Young Trees are the Forest', p. 161.

*Imilangu*

*Twaluyi twakola tuno tumwe,*

*Twashimono ngenda mukweendela.*

*English*

Please these mosquitoes are painful,

They can't see a person who comes to visit.

The above song prepared a woman to be faithful in marriage. The word *tumwe* in the first line means mosquitoes. An initiate was discouraged from behaving like mosquitoes that bites whoever they find, visitors included. Therefore, she was encouraged to stick to her husband and not to behave like a mosquito which sucks blood from any person they find.

After six months or even more, when all the necessities were put in place and the women were convinced that the girl was fully trained, a ceremony called *mukiti* was organised to graduate (*kuhupa*)<sup>26</sup> the initiate from initiation. Before the ceremony took place, the date when it would take place was communicated to the people in the village and the neighbouring villages. *Mukiti* was in most cases held in the cold or wet season. Despite most people not knowing the reasons for having it in the cold or wet season, Pelekelo Sitali said that “The reason for having *mukiti* in the cold or wet season was to make the initiate have a cool heart. Moreover, this was the time when there was plenty of food in the area since people had just harvested.”<sup>27</sup> Mulako adds that “if a *Mwalanjo* was brought out in the hot season, she would have a hot temper which is not good for a woman.”<sup>28</sup>

By the time when the *mukiti* was organised, the initiate's parents would have organised new clothes for her and her *kahombelekeci* to wear during the *mukiti*. Food and beer for people that would attend the ceremony were also reserved. Several *chitenge* materials (*mandembela*) were hung on top of mangos and other tall trees in the village. This was done to signify to the people that a *mukiti* would soon take place in the village. With *chitenges* hanging on trees, any passerby, even one who was not aware, could easily know that a *mukiti* would soon take place in the village.

When it was time for *mukiti*, people sang, danced and ululated the whole night while drinking beer called *sebene* (traditional beer prepared in seven days) until the following morning. *Kayowe* dance was performed during the night dance. The only musical instruments used were drums (*mangoma*). The same evening when the *mukiti* started (*kuungeka*), the *mwalyasho* was taken to the river, well or depression where she was bathed after she had stayed for months without bathing. Mulako confirms that before the start of the coming out celebrations the novice was taken by women to the stream or river ... for a ritual bath to remove the *Sikenge* dirt.<sup>29</sup> Her animal skins were soaked and left in the water. In addition, one of the adult women present cut a bit of some hair on the front and back of the initiate's head and soaked it together with the animal skins in the water. According to Pelekelo, “hair was cut from the initiate to help her easily get married and have children. If the hair was not cut from her head, some people with evil intentions would use charms to block the initiate from getting married and having children.”<sup>30</sup> The aspect of cutting an initiate's hair to enable her easily get married and have children cannot be left without questioning it. It is practically difficult to understand how cutting hair could help someone to get married or have children. If this was true, what about among other ethnic groups within *Imilangu* like the *Mbunda* where it was not done? In other words, why did *Mbundawomen* where initiates were not shaved get married and have children?

On the day of the *mukiti* the initiate and her *kahombelekeci* were made to sit on a new mat and then they were dressed in new clothes. New clothes and a new mat were used to signify the start of a new life by an initiate. After dressing them, they were decorated with beads of different colours around their necks and armpits. Sour milk fats were applied on their body and face as lotion. When the initiate was well dressed and decorated, around ten or eleven hours she was brought in public (*mungoma*), together with her *kahombelekeci* for them to dance (*kukobela*) in full view of everyone. Different dancing styles were exhibited to show the people that she was fully trained. As she danced, people gave her gifts (*minyembu*) in the form of beads, food, etc. When the dancing was over, *nshima*

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<sup>26</sup> *Kuhupa* is *Imilangu* which means “to bath”. The ceremony was called *kuhupa* because this was the only time a girl bathed since she became a *mwalyasho*.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Pelekelo Sitali on 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Mulako, ‘Exploration of Sikenge Initiation Rite in the Promotion of Lozi Cultural Heritage’, p. 45.

<sup>29</sup> Mulako, ‘Exploration of Sikenge Initiation Rite in the Promotion of Lozi Cultural Heritage’, pp. 42-43.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Pelekelo Sitali on 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2018.

with chicken was brought for everyone to eat. Beer-drinking continued and by fourteen or fifteen hours people were tired and most of them fell asleep because of breaking the night without sleeping. This marked the end of the initiation ceremony and the parents would now wait for men to approach their daughter for marriage. In short, the close of the initiation ceremony meant the girl was ready for marriage.

### 3. SHIKENGE TODAY

Despite the value that was attached to *shikenge*, with time it has lost value due to some changes that have taken place in the manner in which it is done today compared to the way it was done in the olden days. Below is a discussion of the major changes observed in the manner in which *shikenge* is done today. To start with, unlike in the olden days when a girl was initiated upon attending her first menstruation, today girls are initiated at anytime when their parents feel like doing so. This, however, is done some time after a year or so of one attending her first menstruation. One's first menstruation is no longer a factor to determine when one should be initiated. This shows that the time of initiating a girl is no longer a factor. Moreover, unlike it was then when a girl willingly informed her parents when she had her first menstruation so that she was secluded, girls are now forced to be secluded. Some of them refuse to be initiated to the extent where men have to be engaged to threaten them with beating if they refused to be initiated.

The duration for *shikenge* is yet another change that has taken place in the process of girls' initiation. For instance, in most cases the duration for training an initiate has been reduced from six months and above to a month or even a week. When asked to explain why the period of initiation has been reduced, Pelekelo explained that the duration is reduced because school going girls cannot be kept in seclusion for more than six months as this would make them miss classes.<sup>31</sup> Mulako adds that most parents today would want to seclude their daughters during the school holidays so that the initiation does not interfere with the school calendar.<sup>32</sup> The aspect of reducing the period of seclusion is not done among the *Imilangu* only, the Bembas also do it. According to Kapwepwe, the previously lengthy two – three-month long ceremony has been abbreviated to a week or even days by the necessity of school and other modern engagements.<sup>33</sup> The reduction in the period of seclusion has a serious compromise on *shikenge* because girls are no longer fully trained.

In addition, unlike it was then when women pinched and beat the initiates with sticks during *kubukwela* to make them to be submissive to their husbands when they would marry, only those found to be troublesome are pinched and beaten now. "If any woman tries to beat or pinch an initiate who appears to be humble, the other older women rebuke her. Some women even say that human rights do not allow anyone to be beaten."<sup>34</sup> Human rights were never heard of in the tradition of the *Imilangu* during *kubukwela*. This has seriously compromised discipline among the initiates because there is less discipline enforced on them by their initiators.

In addition, as observed earlier, previously *mukiti* used to be done in the cold or wet season. However, seclusion is now done at any time, especially during school holidays to enable school going girls to attend school normally. Moreover, instead of bathing the initiate in the river, well or stream, it is now done at home in a *lushoko*. Despite most of the informants not knowing the reason for bathing initiates at home, Pelekelo stated that bathing of the initiate in their homes was attributed to the availability of bath tabs and basins where an initiate can easily be bathed.<sup>35</sup>

The other change observed in the initiation of girls is the application of vaseline on the initiates instead of sour milkfats. Moreover, instead of shaving their hair, initiates are taken to saloons to have their hair made. Muzwamasimu stated that initiates are now beautified with artificial make-ups because they make them look attractive.<sup>36</sup> She added that if today someone used animal fats to apply on an initiate, no one would go closer to her because of the bad scent that would come from her body.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Pelekelo Sitali on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Mulako, 'Exploration of Sikenge Initiation Rite in the Promotion of Lozi Cultural Heritage', p. 42.

<sup>33</sup> Kapwepwe, 'The Young Trees are the Forest', p. 168.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Pelekelo Sitali on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2018

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Pelekelo Sitali on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2018.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Muzwamasimu Simakando on 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Muzwamasimu Simakando on 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2018.

Another change that has taken place in the manner in which initiation is done is to do with the kind of music played, the musical instruments used and the type of dances performed which are completely different from the original ones. As observed earlier, initially *kayowe* dance was performed with the aid of drums. However, drums were replaced by xylophones (*ilimba*). Xylophones have also been replaced by recorded music played on radios or any other modern musical instrument. The kind of dances performed by both the initiates and the people have also changed from *kayowe*, *kandemba* and *ilimba* to suit recorded music. The musical instruments used for *kayowe* and *kandemba* dances were drums. *Ilimba*<sup>38</sup> were danced with the aid of xylophones. Commenting on the demise of drums and xylophones in *Imilangu*, Headman Muhongo stated, “today even if you went round the whole of *Imilangu*, you can hardly find a drum or xylophone. People are now using radios as musical instruments for all their functions.”<sup>39</sup> Moreover, in most instances wine has replaced the traditional beer (*sebene*) which people used to drink during *mukiti*.

The other cardinal change observed in *shikenge* is that instead of keeping an initiate without bathing for the whole period of seclusion, initiators now encourage their initiates (those who are not school children) to bathe once a week. School going initiates are encouraged to bathe daily. To justify why initiates are now allowed to bathe, Pelekelo stated that, “it is not possible to keep an initiate without bathing because there are a lot of diseases nowadays.”<sup>40</sup> Contrary to Pelekelo who highlighted diseases as a reason for allowing initiates to bathe, Grace stressed that initiates are allowed to bathe because people have realised that keeping initiates without bathing makes them become used to a life of not bathing even when they are out of initiation.<sup>41</sup> Despite Pelekelo and Grace giving different views, both point at hygiene as a reason for allowing initiates to bath.

The other prominent change that is done during initiation is where only the grandmother, elder sister or aunt counsels the initiate. As discussed earlier, it was the duty of all women in the village to ensure that an initiate was taught all the important life lessons. According to Pelekelo, “This has changed because if other women are involved in teaching an initiate, they will need to be paid which might be a challenge to the parents of the initiate. Therefore, the grandmother, elder sister or aunt does the job to avoid costs”.<sup>42</sup> The aspect of only the grandmother, elder sister or aunt being the only ones to teach an initiate is a bad one. This is because it restricts the initiate from receiving counsel from a bigger pool of knowledgeable women in the village. Allowing all the women in the village to offer counsel to an initiate gave her more knowledge needed in her life.

Furthermore, restrictions on people to talk to have been eased in today’s *shikenge*. This is because initiates are now allowed to talk to their school teachers and other people they meet at school. They are only restricted from talking to people at home. This was not allowed in the olden days and hence the reason initiates were not allowed to go to school. Allowing initiates to talk to many people during initiation has its flaws. This is so because it does not help them to be submissive to their husbands. In short, allowing initiates to talk to other people encourages them to become talkative in life.

In addition, unlike in the olden days when initiates were not allowed to wear clothes, today initiators choose one of the dresses of an initiate which she wears throughout the process of initiation. Such a dress is never changed or washed no matter how dirty it becomes. However, school-going initiates are allowed to change and wash their clothes. Moreover, initiates then were not allowed to eat with adults or finish the food they were served on a plate. However, modifications have been done where initiates are now allowed to eat with members of their family. They are also allowed to finish the food they are served.

Other than the above adjustments in the manner in which *shikenge* was done, some people have completely done away with it. This was a taboo in the olden days as it was a taboo for an uninitiated girl to marry or even just have sex. A girl who never went through initiation could not be approached by any man for marriage. It was a serious offence for a man to marry or have sex with a girl who had

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<sup>38</sup> Ilimba was named after the musical instruments used – ilimba (xylophones)

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Moses Mutuso (Headman Muhongo) on 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2018

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Pelekelo Sitali on 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Grace Mutuso on 21<sup>st</sup> May, 2016.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Pelekelo Sitali on 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2018.

not yet gone through initiation (*liungu*). According to Mulako, traditionally, it was not right for a girl to fall pregnant before she entered *Sikenge*, it was believed to be a bad omen that could bring bad luck to herself or her family.<sup>43</sup> A man who impregnated such a girl or one who was found having sex with her was charged three animals unlike a man who had sex or who impregnated a girl who had gone through initiation and paid only one animal.

Changes in the manner in which initiation is performed have not only occurred among the *Imilangu*. The Bemba are also affected as observed by Kapwepwe who outlines that:

Women have skillfully appropriated modern ideas and manufactured articles into the ceremony. The *imbusa* clay models, as in the old days are freshly made for each occasion, which used to be painted afresh on the walls of the initiation hut for each occasion, are now conveniently painted on a white cloth which can be hung up, flip-chart style, and folded away when no longer required. The old-style gifts of chickens, beer, meal, and bark cloth have been overtaken by monetary payments and crates of beer, while the red crown of whydah bird feathers has been replaced by synthetic hair extensions or *chitenge* headgear.<sup>44</sup>

#### 4. THE WANING OF SHIKENGE

Despite being a very important institution, some people in *Imilangu*, as observed above, have stopped initiating their girls. The waning of *shikenge* has been instigated by a lot of factors. To start with, the spread of Christianity in the area has greatly contributed to the decline of *the* institution. Some parents who have accepted Christianity no longer initiate their children. Such parents argue that the training girls went through during initiation was not helping them in their social and spiritual lives. Such parents believe that girls become promiscuous in life because of the lessons they learn in *shikenge*. “Just after graduation, girls make sure that they put into practice, even if they were not married, the lessons they learnt during initiation”<sup>45</sup>, lamented a member of the Seventh - day Adventist Church (SDA). In addition, Kebby Kabutu observed that:

Initiation greatly contributed to fornication and adultery cases in *Imilangu* because initiates were encouraged during their training to have as many men as possible. Moreover, they were taught that a woman who was not proposed by men, despite being married, was not a real woman. With such lessons taught during initiation, Christian values could not be upheld by most women in *Imilangu*.<sup>46</sup>

Kapwepwe laments that:

Like many traditional rituals, the *Chisungu*<sup>47</sup> ceremony was banned by the Catholic Church and the colonial administration, and this practice was forced into secrecy for a number of decades. Much of what was taught in *Chisungu* was viewed with suspicion and distaste by outsiders and appeared at odds with colonial and Christian values.<sup>48</sup>

When asked to explain the disadvantages of initiation among girls, a Seventh-day Adventist Church Pastor, Japhet Fakazi, had this to say:

Initiation has greatly contributed to immorality in our societies. Some women teach the initiates a lot of bedroom issues such that at the end of the training the initiates have higher sexual expectations from their husbands to be. This has contributed to immorality because as soon as a newly married woman does not experience from her husband what she was taught during initiation, she decides to look for other men to satisfy her sexually in line with what she was taught during initiation.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Mulako, ‘Exploration of Sikenge Initiation Rite in the Promotion of Lozi Cultural Heritage’, p. 42.

<sup>44</sup>Kapwepwe, ‘The Young Trees are the Forest’, p. 168.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Raymond Lingoela on 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with KebbyKabutu on 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 2018.

<sup>47</sup>*Shikenge* is *Chisungu* in Bemba.

<sup>48</sup>Kapwepwe, ‘The Young Trees are the Forest’, p. 168.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Pastor JaphetFakazi on 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2017.



Other than Christianity, formal education has also greatly contributed to the abandonment of initiation of girls in *Imilangu*. With the introduction of western or formal education in *Imilangu*, the educated ones decided to do away with initiation because they believed that the curriculum covered during initiation was too narrow – the concentration was on sex and marriage only. Unlike formal schools where a lot of life skills were learnt, initiates were mainly taught how to take care of their husbands and their homes. Critics against initiation stated that girls had a lot of issues to learn other than sex and marriage.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, teachers also contributed to the demise of initiation because they discouraged most parents from initiating their children. The main reason given by teachers was that initiation greatly contributed to poor performance by girls in school because as soon as a girl was initiated, she was expected to reduce interaction with other pupils and teachers. Moreover, absenteeism was very high among initiates leading to their poor performance. According to Martin Mwiya, “initiates’ academic performance was affected negatively because they became inactive in school during initiation.”<sup>51</sup> Educated parents worked hand in hand with teachers to discourage others from initiating their children hence leading to the waning of *shikenge* in *Imilangu*.

Exposure to urban life was yet another factor found to have contributed to the abandonment of initiation in *Imilangu*. People who went out for labour migrations had a great impact on initiation leading to its demise. Labour migrants were exposed to western culture such that after interacting with other people in towns they saw initiation as a sheer waste of time. This perception was implanted in their minds because they never saw girls from other ethnic groups being initiated in towns. Their busy work schedules also contributed to their negative perception of initiation because no one who could be seated at home teaching an initiate. Workers spent all their time on productive economic activities which could earn them money and not on training initiates. In addition, traditional practices like initiation were considered to be for uncivilised people. “As soon as we got exposed to town life, we started downgrading initiation because we never saw people in towns initiating their children,”<sup>52</sup> said Charles Sinonge. To make sure that they matched with others in terms of civilisation, workers had to abandon initiation and went on to discourage people when they went back to their villages. Therefore, town life greatly contributed to the abandonment of initiation.

To further disregard initiation in Barotseland, a song composed by Sheddy<sup>53</sup> has the following wording:

<i>Silozi</i>	<i>English</i>
<i>Neniile kwa hae kuyopota kuluna,</i>	I had gone to my village to visit,
<i>Neniile kwa hae kuyopota kuluna,</i>	I had gone to my village to visit.
<i>Seniyo fumana basali bazusa</i>	I found women graduating
<i>mwalanjo mwa sikenge,</i>	aninitiate from initiation,
<i>Seniyo fumana basali bazusa</i>	I found women graduating
<i>mwalanjo mwa sikenge.</i>	aninitiate from initiation.
<i>Lipina zeneba opela nesi lipina,</i>	The songs they sang were not songs,
<i>neli matapa, neba lwahaka,</i>	they were insults, they were insulting,
<i>neli matapa, neba lwahaka.</i>	they were insults, they were insulting.
<i>Inge waka halutwi bukuba,</i>	My child can’t be taught foolish things,
<i>nanyawaka halutwi butanya.</i>	mine can’t be taught to become stubborn.
<i>Inge waka halutwi bukuba,</i>	My child can’t be taught foolish things,
<i>nanyawaka halutwi butanya</i>	mine can’t be taught stubbornness
<i>mwa sikenge.</i>	during initiation.

<sup>50</sup>SimangolwaMwalye, Nyambe Namushi, ImeboWamundiala and NasileleLiywali observed that there were a lot of issues initiates were supposed to learn than to teach them sex and marriage related issues only.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Martin Mwiya on 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2018.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Charles Sinonge on 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2018.

<sup>53</sup>Sheddy is one of the composers and singers of Silozi songs in Western Province, Zambia.

In the above song Sheddy condemned a scenario he saw when he went to his home village to visit where he found women graduating a girl from initiation. During the graduation ceremony, the songs sung were full of insults. Following the songs he heard, Sheddy says he cannot allow his daughter to go through initiation to be taught foolish and immoral things. However, despite Sheddy portraying initiation as a foolish and immoral institution, many are the reliable women in *Imilangu* who have passed through it. As observed by Grace, “A credible woman who could manage all the affairs of her home was one who passed through *shikenge*.”<sup>54</sup>

## 5. CONCLUSION

Initiation was a very important institution that prepared girls to face life positively because of the lessons they learnt during initiation. No girl could be sent for marriage without passing through this vital institution. The training that girls went through during initiation was crucial because it prepared them to show respect to adults, relate well with their husbands and in-laws, follow taboos, treat visitors well and dress decently. Girls were also taught hygiene, confidentiality, honesty, trustworthiness, truthfulness and other life virtues.

A girl who did not pass through initiation was easily known due to her inability to behave well in society. Such a girl was an embarrassment to her parents because when she got married she failed to perform according to her husband’s and society’s expectations. It was not normal for a man to think of marrying a girl who had not yet undergone initiation because such a girl was believed to know nothing about how to keep herself as a married woman. Being very important in the lives of women, *shikenge* should be encouraged and be done the way it was done in the olden days because the current manner in which it is done has some lapses that make girls not to be fully trained for marriage.

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