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Gendering Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Exploring the Kulamba Traditional Ceremony and Gender Roles in the Chewa Culture, Zambia

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Abstract

This paper explores initiation ceremonies that are known by different names and are commonly observed in many traditions both in Africa and beyond. In keeping up with tradition and heritage, many communities in Africa practice initiations as a rite of passage to adulthood for their youths. In Zambia, the ceremony is known as Kulamba for the Chewa people. Contextually, it is a thanks giving festival for the harvest in a particular year; no wonder it has survived many years as a traditional practice for the Chewa people.

This paper postulates that there are gender issues that have been undermined and need to be interrogated in order to strike a balance between indigenous practices as well as gender equality advances. This is a qualitative phenomenological paper, designed with the quest to

engender and understand the meaning of individual women lived experiences about the Kulamba initiation ceremony of the Chewa people of Zambia. The paper concentrates on exploring the meaning of the Kulamba ceremony (embedded with it the Indigenous Knowledge System) to women's lives in Zambia only. In support with Gerring on case studies: "as a systematic process of analyzing a particular person, group or detailed description of setting and situation" is found appropriate for this paper. Whilst, normally; findings from case studies are not generalizable to the larger population, here, the situation is different because the interpretation and meaning of gender embedded in the Kulamba initiation ceremony is applicable in different contexts to people that speak and practice the same culture.

Keywords: Gendering, Womanism Intersectionality, *Kulamba*, Indigenous Knowledge System

1. Introduction

In many cultures, traditional initiations take different forms for both girls and boys. Among the *Chewa* people of Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique, *Kulamba* is a practice of passing on cultural values, beliefs and artefacts from one generation to another (Mchombo, 1999). For example, among the *Chewa* people are many indigenous practices which the youths are taught in terms of beliefs and values (Mchombo 1974). Without mentioning all, in the *Chewa* culture, boys and girls are initiated on various values such as how to respect elders (Banda, 2009) ^[15]. Equally, during the *Kulamba* initiation festivals, boys and girls, are taught how to be productive, to be good citizens as well as to understand issues of marriage, hygiene and how to nurture children and layer livestock. Whilst, these indigenous practice have contributed to the boys' and girls' distinctive association with other ethnic groups in Southern Africa, it has also helped to maintain social bonds among the youths (Banda, 2002). Equally, The *Kulamba* has survived for many years because it is an indigenous resources of knowledge that if properly harnessed, would promote gender equality in *Chewa* culture. Equally, *Kulamba* is synonymous with the *Nyau* secret society. There is no *Kulamba* without the *Nyau*, commonly known in *Chewa* language as *Gule Wamkulu* (the big dance). The *Nyau* has been around for centuries and is closely related with *Chewa* people who came to Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique originating from the *Congo* area.

Historically, the *Nyau* have survived because they are a resource for knowledge transmission from generation to another. The *Nyau* lead secluded lives and no one really knows who they are. The *Nyau* embodies the cosmology and religion of the *Chewa* people in Southern Africa. The *Kulamba* ceremony has existed beyond the colonisation of Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique.

1.1 The history of initiation ceremonies in Africa and Beyond

Initiation ceremonies constitute an important aspect of many cultures in Africa and beyond. For example, in Australia, the Aboriginal people have lived for well over 40 000 years on the Australian continent and their descendants still enjoy the wonderful spectacle of the Milky Way galaxy directly overhead (Brennan, 1992). In that long period they built an astronomical knowledge system that they absorbed into their social, cultural and religious life. They passed this down in oral form from one generation to another as a living system of knowledge which they still cherish and enjoy. In India, the *Tripura* culture is enjoyed by the *Tripura* people who are blend of various tribes who follow different customs and traditions. Unlike the *Chewa* people whose customs are similar and enjoyed by all. This contextual significance is important to mention why the *Kulamba* plays an important role to women's lives. Therefore, in Africa, particularly Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique, initiation ceremonies take many forms which include circumcision schools (which, according to Gerhard Kubik, is "an old Central, Western and Southern African institution" [1983]) and secret societies for males as well as seclusion for females. In Southern Africa, these are considered as social transition rites for girls and boys involving not only marriage but formal schools for knowledge transmission and skills training. Nevertheless, in spite of traditional ceremonies being common in many parts of the African continent, such as South Africa (*Umemulo*), Eswatin (the reed dance), Ethiopia, Nigeria and Morocco, Zambia (*Chinamwali*, *Chisungu*), Malawi (*Chinamwali*) and Mozambique, These rituals signifies the gender role they play to women's lives despite their long historical existence. Of concern is the inequalities these rituals permeate to the boys and girls at *Kulamba* ceremony in Zambia is the focus of this paper. Nevertheless, committed to the full implementation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other universally recognized legal instruments, such as the two International Covenants of 1966 relating respectively to civil and political rights and to economic, social and cultural rights, the UN in 2009 declared the *Gule Wamkulu* as a master piece of intangible cultural heritage enjoyed by indigenous *Chewa* people of Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique (UNESCO, 2012). Equally, the National The Heritage Conversation Commission Act 173 of 2011 declares the protection of cultural values and traditions of the laws of Zambia. This infers that initiation ceremonies are protected by the Act 173 and the Chiefs Act chapter 287 of the laws of Zambia. This signifies clearly the cultural, social and economic importance it has on gender roles. Further, this paper confirms the significance of the *Kulamba* ceremony to women's lives because the ceremony brings dramatic life changes for both men and women socially, culturally and economically. It is also true that the ceremony perpetuates, the growing division between them in the quality of life between men and women, boys and girls. This infers that that most women even those in the royal clan experience segregation from men, spiritually and economically.

1.2 Problem statement

While many researchers put emphasis on the need to focus on the role of initiation as an indigenous knowledge system

that has survived for many years, as it plays an important role for the youth's rite of passage to adulthood in most African cultures, such as *Chewa*, Xhosa, Luvale and others, it is significant to note that gender issues have been neglected and undermined in these cultural fabric spaces. This neglect is worrying, because *Kulamba* as a ceremony affects the lives of women and men too. While, it is important to note that *Kulamba* plays an ameliorating role for teaching young boys and girls the ways of living and being good citizens of Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique, little effort has been made to incorporate gender into its analysis. Therefore, it is no secret that the *Kulamba* initiation rituals constructed by popular media are conceived as distressing to women's lived experiences. The media portrays women as "ethnically others", with weak images and marginalized people. Well, for those who deploy this homogenizing discourse, there is absolute impunity in the perception of women's lives at the ceremony, with the constant derogatory and stereotypical words used against them (such as "lazy", "talkative" "untrustworthy" and so forth). Therefore, does this social construction of women as "lazy", "ethnically others" and "silent beings" embedded in the *Chewa* word "*Mkazi*" (meaning a silent being) reinforces the suggesting that "women get what they deserve" and justifiable during *Kulamba*, hence their socio-cultural marginalization? Therefore, this paper focused on the historical meaning and the gender roles played by women in *Chewa* culture. This implies that the paper interrogated the historical meaning of *Kulamba* traditional ceremony embedded with *IKS* of the *Chewa* culture. The focus was the conception that in *Chewa* culture, gender or sex intersect with other social cultural categorizations such as race, ethnicity, class, age and nationality that have perpetuated women marginalization at the ceremony. Briefly, the paper explored and documented how different categorizations of gender roles are interwoven with other social categorization of class in *Chewa* culture to perpetuate gender inequalities.

1.3 Aim of the paper and research questions

This research paper aimed at engendering *Kulamba* ceremony and the roles played by women and girls. In order to achieve such aim, the following objectives were used:

1. To explore the historical and cultural background of *Kulamba* ceremony with regards to its teachings on gender roles and culture.
2. To investigate the roles played by women and girls and how they promote egalitarian gender roles.
3. To explore the *Kulamba* ceremony in relations to gender empowerment advances in *Chewa* culture.

In order to answer the research questions and meet the above aims and objectives, the paper was assisted by the following questions:

- What is the historical significance of the ceremony to women's lives in *Chewa* culture?
- What underpins the *Kulamba* cultural values relating to teaching gender roles in Zambia, Mozambique and Malawi?
- How do the gender roles played by women and girls in *Chewa* culture promote egalitarian principles at micro and macro social equilibrium?
- What impact does the *Kulamba* ceremony have with regard to gender empowerment advances within the *Chewa* society and a country at large?

- What are the socio-culture impacts of globalisation to women's lives at *Kulamba* ceremony?

2. Theoretical framework

This paper was guided by a poststructural¹ feminist theory anchored on two feminist concepts namely Ogunyemi's "womanism", and Kimberle's "intersectionality". Feminism is a belief that women and men are inherently of equal worth (Freedman, 2012:11). This is based on the understanding that most societies privilege men as a group, therefore, a social movement with fundamental beliefs in equality is necessary to enhance equality between the two genders. The poststructuralist feminist lens was applied for this paper because it helped question the meaning of *Kulamba* and gender roles to women's lives. At the heart of poststructural feminist theory is the questioning techniques which other methods of inquiry do not have leading to biased theories on women and gender. The two theoretical feminist concepts discussed below are:

2.1 Intersectionality

Intersectionality theoretical concept was used for purposes of framing this paper. There are many interpretations of intersectionality in the field of feminist studies. For example, in agreement with Lykke, (2010) ^[87] "intersectionality" in this paper was interpreted as a way of understanding and analysing the complexities in the world, in people, and in human experiences". In this paper intersectionality considered as a theoretical and methodological tool to analyse historically specific kinds of power differentials and constraining normativities, based on discursively, institutionally and structurally-constructed sociocultural categorizations such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality age, disability, nationality, mother tongue and so on, interact, and in so doing produce different kinds of societal inequalities and unjust social relations. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways of behaving by people in different localities (Collins, 2010). When it comes to social inequality, people's lives, and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race, gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other (Collins, 2010). This means that intersectionality in this paper was used as an analytic tool for the purpose of analysing how women have access to the complexity of the ceremony, the world and of themselves. One core premise of intersectionality concerns the relationships between ideas and practices. Simply, intersections between gender, sex and power differentials premised on age, class, sexuality, violence and other social division by locating it in the "African womanist feminist" concept. The paper borrowed ideas and practices espoused by intersectionality theory, namely gender, sex and culture and locate them in "womanism" to explore the meaning of the *Kulamba* traditional ceremony to women's lives in *Chewa* culture. In line with Collins *et al.* (2019), we argued that intersectionality as a concept is everywhere because it has helped to unfold the long feminist debate between sex and gender across languages and boundaries forever. Therefore,

¹ See Foucault whose focus on poststructuralist was based on power relations and strategies.

we used feminist intersectionality as an analytic tool to help us have a critical poststructural feminist gaze on the ceremony relating to concepts that intersect with gender and sex in *Chewa* culture. For example, in using "intersectionality" as a concept our approach was to understand the complex "life world" of women's perspectives on *Kulamba* ceremony, regarding its historical values and meanings.

To begin with, our critical gaze was on the *Kulamba* festivals, as a thanksgiving annual event for the *Chewa* people. We questioned its meaning to women's lived experience since without their participation at *Kulamba*, the ceremony cannot take place at all. However, a closer look at the participants at the ceremony reveals that certain women are excluded from the proceedings based on their ethnicity, namely coloured women² (born of Chinese and Asian background and not those born of European heritage). The paper questioned the reasons why the coloured women are excluded from taking part in the ceremony. This exclusion helped us unearth the intersections between sex, gender, social class, ethnicity, and power. Therefore, intersectionality theoretical concept helped us answer what meaning the ceremony has to some coloured women's lives in *Chewa* culture. Through womanism, the paper questioned if the intersectionality of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and power are especially evident within the *Chewa* culture. Of concern was about what matters once you are at the ceremony to enjoy the festival in material terms. Additionally, women are affected by corruption-violence³ during their Chinamwali dances. In short what gender are you and what power do you have to be revered at the ceremony? Therefore, by using intersectionality theory as an analytical tool to women's live it highlighted the multiple natures of individual identities at *Kulamba* in varying combinations of class, gender, race, sexuality, and citizenship categories differentiate power and position for each individual woman. Simply, intersectionality theory lead us to use Ogunyemi's womanism as argued below.

2.2 Womanism

This paper agreed with Walker's observations that womanism is equally a multiple authored feminist perspective. But for Ogunyemi, it is defined from the "Afrocentric", perspective based on healing, embodied, and spiritual concept of it (Razak, 2006:100). The authors agree with Alice in Collins (1996) that "womanism" as a feminist concept to black women helps them to address gender oppression without attacking black men, which, unfortunately, is core by Walker's intersectionality theory. Despite this weakness, the paper anchored its discussion on both Ogunyemi's "womanism" (1991) and Kimberle's (1986) intersectionality feminist theoretical concepts, to guide it as follows: The "womanism" concept proposed by Ogunyemi (2007) is woman centred in an African context. It was used to analyse women's lives in scared places commonly known as *Kudambwe* in *Chewa* language and in the household. The figure of "*Amama*" (meaning mother in *Chewa* language) in womanism is very important in this

² People racially categorized as half white and black, a derogatory classification in the United States but revered in Zambia at *Kulamba* ceremony.

³ Corruption violence is a structural violence exploited by populist ideologies.

genre. The application of the word *Amama* in womanism helped to unearth different types of relationships that occurs among women and between women and men premised on gender, sex and power which is absent under intersectionality theory. Despite, Ogunyemi's womanism resembling Walker's womanism (1983: 67) in many respects, in this paper used it in terms of underpinning detail. For example, Ogunyemi's womanist feminist concept was used anchored on meaningful union between men and women (based on love) that is absent under intersectionality. Her womanist approach goes beyond the classification of feminism into gender, race ethnicity and sexuality to include historical conditions under which women at the ceremony have been subjected to. The Ogunyemi's womanist idea brings itself an everyday woman into the environment she enters with a different voice (Arndt, 2011) at *Kulamba*. Therefore, Ogunyemi's "womanism" was of value to help in identifying how different forms of subjugation such as economic exploitation, sexual oppression and complementarities that exist between different genders intersect and mean to women's lives in *Chewa* culture, Zambia. Fundamentally, this confirms that the African womanist approach as a poststructural feminist theory guided this paper in the context of explaining women's oppression based on sex, class and ethnicity in *Chewa* society. The paper used the African womanist to questioning notions of a group to explaining the individual interpersonal dynamics between them and social groups (Frost and Elichaooff, 2014:43). This shows how Ogunyemi's "womanism" was important for this topic because enabled us to incorporate complex power relations between men and women during *Kulamba* rituals. In support with Arndt (2001) on womanism, he argues that in African cultures, when it comes to the organization of power, different people find themselves encountering different treatment regarding which rules applies to them and how those rules will be implemented. The young girls for instances, are chosen based on their masculine physical appearance at *Kulamba*. This imply that the young girls who lack masculine physical fitness and inexperience in *Chewa* society is critical for their participation at *Kulamba* as women? Succinctly, the paper explored the meaning of the *Kulamba* ceremony and gender roles in women's lives in feminist lens through "womanism". This womanism theory of African poststructural theoretical frameworks guided this paper in establishing the meaning of *Kulamba* and gender roles centred on women's lives in *Chewa* culture, Zambia

3. Literature review

Here, the literature is a review of literature about the *Chewa* people and their culture. It offers an epistemological starting point with a critique of knowledge production that marginalize women through *Kulamba* rituals. Therefore, who are the *Chewa* people? Briefly, at the pinnacle of colonial administration in Africa, the area known as Zambia was known as Northern Rhodesia and home to a number of tribal kingdoms namely the Lozi of King Lewinski, the Lunda of Mwata Kazembe and the *Chewa* under Kalonga Gawa Undi. Contemporary Zambia is a landlocked country in Southern Africa, formerly colonised by the British before it gained political independence on 24th October, 1964. Apart from Zambia, the *Chewa* people are found in three other neighbouring countries namely Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, and continue to pay allegiance to Paramount

Chief *Kalonga Gawa Undi* (Langworthy, 1969) ^[81]. Historically, the *Chewa* people used a dual leadership style which reflected the two main clans that is comprised of the Phiri and Banda (Boucher, 1989). The dual leadership style meant the two leading clan leaders were held accountable for the decisions made on behalf of the *Chewa* people.

Culturally, the *Chewa* people are a matriarchal⁴ *Bantu* speaking ethnic group. Today, they predominately live in Malawi, but are also in Zambia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. Their language is similar to the *Tumbuka* and *Nsenga* people found in Tanzania and Zambia. Speaking *Chichewa* as their home language (Mchombo, 1989), the *Chewa* are alternatively referred to as the *Nyanja* people, especially in Zambia. Banda (2008) and Mchomba's (2015) arguments on this issue is that the underlying structure mystifies women as wives and mothers and that the structures expose hierarchical divisions that generate struggles within families.

The National Heritage Conservation Commission (NHCC) Act chapter 173 of 1989, a statutory body under the Ministry of Tourism and Arts is charged with the responsibility of conserving Zambia's natural and cultural heritage of all the people now and in the future. Despite the introduction of the national heritage commission Act of 1989, very little is mentioned about the meaning of *Kulamba* to women's lives. In agreement with cultural heritage commission of Malawi (2011) stating that culture must be examined in the context of specific historic phases and events of the country has experienced, for Zambia, there is dearth literature and policy guidelines clarifying meaning of *Kulamba* to women's lives. The *Chewa* people have administrative structures, called the *Chewa* Royal Establishment (CRE) and the *Undi* Traditional Council (UTC). The majority of chiefs in the *Chewa* kingdom are male, with a title, *mambo* which is masculine. All *Chewa* people in Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique are under the authority of Paramount Chief *Kalonga Gawa Undi* whose headquarters being at *Mkaika* village in *Katete* district, Zambia (Mwale, 1974) ^[97]. Among many distinctive cultural practices, the *Chewa* people are widely known for their traditional dances namely the *Gule Wamkulu*⁵, for men and *Chimtali*, for females. These dances are visibly performed at the *Kulamba* ceremony. The *Kulamba* ceremony as a thanksgiving festival draws upon *Nyau*⁶ dancers not only from Zambia, but from Mozambique and Malawi (Banda, 2008). Ngobeka (2007:12) ^[101] describes the ceremony as one which derives its name from a *Chewa* word, *Kulamba*, meaning thanksgiving. Beyond its literal meaning, the *Kulamba* ceremony has acted as a socially-unifying factor for the people of three countries, in both traditional and cultural values to include economic and social domains.

4. Research methodology

This paper is a phenomenological or ethnographic qualitative inquiry that helped us explore the *Kulamba* ceremony by analysing women's lived experiences in phases. Phase one was anchored on indigenous principles of

⁴ See Diop (1999:87) who defines matriarchy as the perpetuation of clans through mothers' daughters.

⁵ See UNESCO defines *Gule wa Mkulu* as an intangible cultural heritage performed during funerals by male in the *Chewa* secret societies,

⁶ The *Chewa* word *Nyau* means mask and the ritual practice.

collectivism and reciprocity. It was known as the “*Kulamba Research Process design*” (*KRPd*). The *KRPd* was connected to the *Chewa* philosophy commonly referred to as “*Myambo ya a Chewa*” (Mukumbi, 1983). The paper was phenomenological and ethnographic method research because data was gathered concurrently, in phases with more weight given to qualitative data. The qualitative data came first and weighted more because it helped authors understand women narratives by exploring the historical meaning of the ceremony to their lives.

The hallmark of this paper was fieldwork; whose purposes was to help people working with people in their natural settings. In agreement with Creswell (1997:25) on qualitative data in research, our intention was to explore the topic with participants at the site. Then we expanded the understanding of the problem through a second phase in which data was collected from a large number of people (typically a sample representative of a population). The idea was to collect data concurrently (qualitatively and quantitatively) at the same time implement and analyse it simultaneous. The phenomenological approach made us use concepts such as “reflexivity,”⁷ and self-determination through cultural and elderly mentorship that is appropriate, relevant and exclusive to the indigenous *Chewa* people. Reflectivity was also anchored on feminism standpoint. In agreement with Gurung, the use of feminist standpoint approach is that it helped us to understand the lives of women and their gender roles at the ceremony.

The *KRPd* was a qualitative research methodology, with minor numerical precision thus; as a way of organizing research groups, incorporating ethical procedures and way of giving voice to marginalized women and a way of debating ideas and issues that affect them as lived experiences at the ceremony in terms of numbers. In short, the *KRPd* helped us to narrate (a story) relating to women lived experiences backed by numbers. For example, quantitative data was yielded from women feelings towards finances that the male and female dancers are given during the *Kulamba* that are unequal. Here, the *Chewa* concept *Kathumba* (money) was examined to determine if its gender specific or neutral. Therefore, numbers in terms of percentages, in this paper was used to strengthen an interpretive and constructivist feminist epistemological perspective. The diagram below attempts to tell a story in numbers how women have been marginalized compared to men in percentages, ratio, and frequencies using figures:

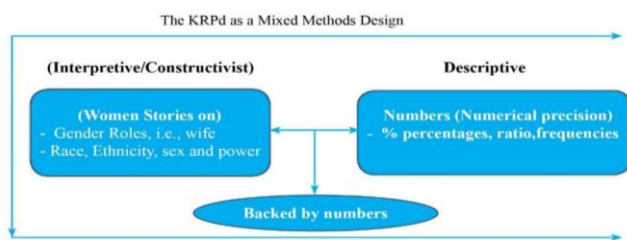


Fig 1

⁷See the feminist researcher Katherine Carroll (2013, pp. 550–551) who writes: “being reflexive requires the researcher to situate her personal, political, intellectual, theoretical and autobiographical selves during all stages of research (Doucet, 2008: 34), and interactional process of growing self-awareness that occurs in relation to the environment and seeing the self from the perspective of others (Rosenberg, 1990; Turner & Stets, 2005).”

4.1 Ethnographical⁸ approach to the study

In a nutshell, by applying the *Chewa* philosophical underpinnings, this paper implies it is an ethnographic/phenomenological research design. Key to this approach is the *KRPd* that was anchored on feminist standpoint (poststructural feminism) and post-structuralist ethnographical stance. Therefore, a variety of techniques anchored on *Chewa* philosophy was used. The *Chewa* philosophy, is simply personal knowledge that was used to interview women and have a conversation with them. In short, in the first phase of data collection it was an ethnographic model involving conversations, participant observation, focus groups and analysis of personal texts and tape recordings from individuals who were part of our sample. This helped us to describe the situation based on personal knowledge of the ceremony. These methods were effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of women from their own perspectives (Stanley, 1993) [121]. Therefore, *KRPd* helped our paper to challenge structural normative assumptions in the *Chewa* culture.

A persistent use of ethnography helped us identify women identities at the ceremony, textual analysis and offer a critique of binary oppositions in men and women backed by numbers as illustrated in Fig 1 above. In reality, this translated into gathering “detailed” information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods, through women narratives (story telling) discussions and oral history representing it from the perspective of those involved.

A minor part of the *KRPd* data collection in phase one was the *Chewa* people’s epistemological and ontological approach to feminist knowledge building. This helped towards evaluating the *Kulamba* ceremony axiology, ethics and aesthetics as illustrated in Fig 2 below.

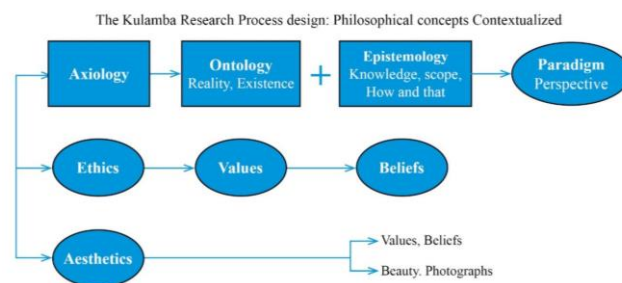


Fig 2

This paper also used axiology as a branch of philosophy that deals with quality or value of life. For Chapra (2005), axiology is a branch of philosophy that examines judgment and values. In this paper axiology meant that permission from participants, data through interviews, tape recording and observation was collected by examining values of what is good or bad, moral and immoral in *Chewa* culture to determine the meaning of *Kulamba* ceremony to women’s lives. In short, this approach explored the life experiences of women and the scope of feminist knowledge at the ceremony. The recording included ethics, beliefs and aesthetics (e.g, pictures) that are the domain of the adult *Chewa* women.

Epistemology and ontology, implied how men and women think, and their cultural ways of being in the world.

⁸ Methods used in qualitative data in social science research. Data is collected by focus group discussions or interviews.

Specifically, the epistemological approach to data collection on *Chewa* people's reality was by listening to indigenous *Chewa* women stories through their songs and dance through *Chinamwali* and *Nyau* rituals. These rituals helped the authors to probe how the *Kulamba* ceremony affects their lives as a strong indigenous practice. This typical ethnographical approach to research facilitated the exploration of the *Kulamba* and gender roles within its context using a variety of data sources. Therefore, in order to reflect an indigenous context, the authors used an indigenous paradigm known as the *KRPd* to confirm the fluidity in knowledge collected qualitatively with numerical numbers in some instances during the *Chinamwali* and *Nyau* rituals at the ceremony.

4.2 Population and sampling technique

The phase two research process enable us to come up with population size. The target population of this study were some *Chewa* women and men participating at the *Kulamba* ceremony. This included traditional leaders and midwives known as (*anamkhungwi*), girls who have reached puberty (*anamwali*), boys (*anyamata* commonly known as *omwela* in *Chewa* culture), counselors, gender focal persons, and research departments, universities and government departments. This meant the understanding of the problem was expanded through a second phase in which data was collected from a large number of people (typically a sample representative of a population, tentatively 230 people. This was based on the sampling frame. The target population of this study were some *Chewa* women and men participating at the ceremony. These were 20 traditional leaders 50 midwives known as (*anamkhungwi*), 50 girls who have reached puberty (*anamwali*), 100 boys (*anyamata* commonly known as *omwela* in *Chewa* culture), 5 counselor and 5 gender focal persons, and research departments, universities and government departments.

This means having sample size and come up with a Focus Group Discussion to be formed with women and initiate leaders during the ceremony. To do this, purposive sampling and snowball sampling was employed. All 20 traditional leaders were interviewed due to their practical knowledge of the *Chewa* customs. The main reason for adopting this interview method is the sensitivity of this topic The traditional leaders helped to resolve contentious issues about the *Chewa* AIKS, where in one case it is assumed the *Chewa* AIKS is shared by all in a given setting, while at the same time there are other people who are perceived to know more than others. Perhaps what will be more of importance is age, where it will be assumed that the older the traditional leader, the more knowledge he holds about the *Kulamba* ceremony. The structured will be used to gather data from traditional leaders due its flexible manner for this study. Structured interviews are used because of their ability offers clear guidance via a planned question list Gioia *et al.* (2012).

A Focus Group Discussion was conducted with women and initiate leaders during the *Kulamba* ceremony. A sample was arrived at in such circumstances is what Patton (1990:173) calls "a homogeneous sample." The women leaders and counsellor who constituted the focus group, in this case belonged to the same social group of the chief's *Indunas* (counsellors). In determining the number of people to constitute a focus group, I did not just look at the average number of people that participate in *Kulamba* but as suggest considerations given by Krueger *et al.*, (2000: 71) who say:

"The focus group is characterized by homogeneity but with sufficient variation amongst participants to allow for contrasting opinion. Should constitute a focus group alone".

This implies that four focused groups were employed in this study. These were traditional councilors and chiefs, girls-initiates (*anamwali*), midwives and boys (*Anayamata*). This was done in order to collect in-depth information on particular gender issues to understand the historical meaning of *Kulamba* to women's lives in Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique purposive sampling and snowball sampling was be employed. This was the main activity that took a representative sample units between male and female participants, develop a checklist for observation, administering questionnaires among these representatives of different samples of participants at the ceremony. The reason for applying non-probability sampling instead of probability sampling is because the former depends on theoretical criteria, but the latter relies on statistical ones, therefore the latter is not applicable to qualitative research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)^[64]. Therefore, we came up with a sampling technique from the number of female and male participants at the ceremony using probability⁹ and non-probability¹⁰ sampling technique which helped us to come up with a sample size through a simple random sampling technique for the sample size required since the population of the participant is not known. With a combination of purposive sampling technique and snowball¹¹ sampling, we interviewed certain categories of women during the *Kulamba* ceremony meaning to their lives. This lead us to other important women that take part in the ceremony namely; the women marriage counselor known in *Chewa* as *Alangizi*. Here, we used purposive sampling technique to purposefully choose the women that we included in the sample, based on a checklist of characteristics such as ethnicity, age and language that they speak. The participants sample was determined by the size of traditional structures and entailing positional sampling¹² of women in particular position of responsibility in the *Chewa* structures. This means that a positional sample was used to collect the required data. Women, holding most authoritative positions in the *Chewa* structure were approached to participate as respondents. The principle governing the selection was power and influence in the tradition. Where reputable and well-established organisations have been used to collect data on women's marginalisation in traditional ceremonies, their sampling methodology was not considered as an alternative technique due to suspicions of inconsistencies in data

⁹ Probability sampling refers to whether or not each unit (whether an individual or social artefact) in the population has an equal opportunity to be a part of the sample. In this study it will be used for the purposes of producing unbiased results.

¹⁰ Non-probability sampling is used when it is nearly impossible to determine who the entire population is or when it is difficult to gain access to the entire population. It will be necessary for this study because of my subjective experiences with the ceremony.

¹¹ This method of sampling is often used in qualitative research and the results obtained from such a sample cannot be generalised to the larger population.

¹² This is a sampling technique based on position of authority and power women hold at the ceremony. It is necessary to use this method of sampling as purposive technique to selected women based on their levels of influence at the ceremony.

collection and sampling procedure. For example, Banda's (2009) ^[15] sampling technique in his PhD dissertation is oblivious of numerical precision. For this study, the sample was drawn separately from each participating *Chewa* women groups namely *Alangizi* and *Anamwali* using a combination of probability, non-probability and positional sampling techniques. This is necessitated by the need to cover different generations as they share different norms and values (perceptions) about the ceremony (Longwe, 1998) ^[84]. In other words, under phase two, we used a significant interaction of methods which allowed to have a thicker description of the situation and representation analysis during the ceremony. We collected data from selected women samples using structured questionnaires which had questions on the following variables: Power and level of authority, income distribution, Ritual practice (Number of women participating), sex, and age, Level of education and Ethnicity.

We were an instrument of data collection, able to gather words or pictures, analyze them inductively, focus on their meaning to participants, and describe a process that is expressive and persuasive in language" (Creswell, 1998:14) ^[44]. This is for the purposes of helping us understand how social order is created through talk and interaction in a naturalistic setting. In short, was anchored on mixed research design research technique. This infers that the *KRPd* was used as a methodology based on poststructuralist feminist research. It helped us understand the extent in meaning of the *Kulamba* ceremony to women's lives in *Chewa* culture, in Zambia.

4.3 Data Collection

Data was collected using an interview guide, tape recordings, oral history recordings ¹³ as well as other feminist interpretive approaches. Oral history recordings was used because it helped us better understand how women from various viewpoints and different *Chewa* kingdoms encountered the full range of their lives from everyday routines to catastrophic events. Carefully preserved, the recordings carry the witness of the present into the future, where through creative programs and publications, they can inform, instruct, and inspire generations to come. Equally, Charlton (2006:34) states that: creating an oral history requires two people, one who questions and one who narrates responses to the questions. Two strengths distinguish oral history interviewing. One is the subjectivity, which allows interviewers to ask not only, what happened, but also, how did you feel about what happened? Further, oral history was used because it provided the partnership of co-creation, which invites narrators to interpret and analyse their personal experiences through their own points of view and in their own words. To do this, we immersed ourselves in women's lives by audio tape recording their activities during *Chinamwali* rituals. WE selected and ask one participant based on age and power relation among *Chewa* women to help in tape recordings. Tape recordings eroded the power divide between ourselves (as male) and the participants (females). The oral history tape recordings was value laden and not value free agreement. At the heart of this feminist ethnographic technique was an "engaged"

approach through open ended-questions to women's lives and gender roles at *Kulamba* ceremony.

We positioned ourselves as an ally, black male feminist researcher and *wa Ng'oma* (drummer) in this *KRPd* in a feminist standpoint interpretive study as opposed to the "objective normative position in positivism" (Harris, 2019). The data collected represented female ways of knowing and meaning about the *Kulamba* ceremony in *Chewa* culture. This stance was confirmed the ethnographic approach to research as a guiding paradigm and methodology. In agreement with McMillan and Schumacher (2001), who contends that qualitative research is based on constructivist philosophy, implies that reality was multi-layered, interactive, and a shared social experience interpreted by individuals at the ceremony. This paper used an interpretive qualitative approach to help us understand the social phenomena from the participant's perspective and show context sensitivity".

Although this paper emphasizes the use of qualitative approach, simple statistics and percentage techniques was used for the assumption that research without resorting to measurement, knowledge usually lacks precision and is often hopelessly vague (Crenshaw, 2014), which was avoided. For example, statistical descriptions (i.e., mean) for initiates was used to help us to define rates of phenomena by exposing inequalities to accessing economic resources. As simply put by Derick Chapman *et al.*, (2014) quantitative research helps feminist scholars recognize patterns of inequalities and the world around them. For this paper these simple descriptive statistics (i.e., ratios, rates and percentages) further told us how they are impacted by a number of factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, identity and age in order to tell a complete story of *Kulamba* to women's lives.

Briefly, we collected data by placing the concerns and experiences of girls and women at the center of the *KRPd*, through "reflexivity" and story narration. According to Harris (2019), reflexivity requires researchers to be mindful of the context of discovery where they account their own role in the research process as embodied social actor. In short, we attended to small groups at individual level and gather information that is not only in numerical form but also in narrative format by recording their "voices" as a lived experiences. This infers that we engaged in reflexive practice by being attentive to issues of voice for women. We obtained informed consent from women and groups that were present at the ceremony by sending text messages inviting them as participant on their mobile phones through a process known as coding of their mobile numbers. For example, the frequency of what is morally good and bad narratives for women and girls about their experience in the ceremony was coded and analysed- simply put as an axiological data technique.

4.4 Data analysis techniques

The genesis of data analysis for this paper was in the data collection itself. The clean of the data and transcribing was done at every interview verbatim as soon as it is completed because verbatim transcription, according to Halcomb and Davidson (2006) ^[68], is thought to be central to the validity, reliability and veracity of qualitative data collection characterized in phase one. In short, this was a process of rewriting certain words, proverbs and songs such as those from an audio-taped recording interview, into written text,

¹³ See Alessandro Portelli (2012) is a sound recording of historical information, obtained through an interview that preserves a person's life history or eyewitness account of a past experience.

including nonverbal cues such as silences and body language and emotions.

The secondly phase of data analysis, was anchored on post-feminist structure theories. We used the grounded approach to theory to come up with themes and concepts that make compare data from one participant to another and between concepts. We also compare stories that are told by participants and later analyze those using numbers to describe the distribution and relationships among variables such as age and sex that determined priority of importance to this topic on indigenous studies. In short, this was a convergent data analysis in terms of qualitative and quantitative technique to describe data such as mean and mode, and link them to stories being told. We used mathematical expressions such as percentages (%), ratios and frequencies to examine the concepts being used to determine the validity of stories being told. The various patterns, categories and themes that emerged from the data were be assigned different codes (coding) and analyzed for their content in tabular format. This procedure according to Babbie (2004:76) is referred to as descriptive analysis. Moreover, the usage of descriptive analysis is premised on the understanding that ideologies are typically, though not exclusively, expressed and reproduced communication, including non-verbal semiotic messages such as masks, pictures, photographs and movies. According to Rogers *et al* (2005), descriptive analysis is a set of approaches to answer questions about the relationships between language and society. In this indigenous research paper, descriptive analysis in masks, language and all non-verbal cues was used as a way to make sense of the meaning of *Kulamba* to women's lives in political, economic, social and power contexts.

Simply, we collected data and analyze it through a research process known as the *KRPd* we coined embedded in it is the *Chewa* act of "spirituality" (*Kuombeza*,) which is a form of communication to our ancestors. We listened to spiritual women (*Ba Mizimu*) stories in *Chewa* at the graveyard to look out for deviant cases, and contradictions of the meaning of *Kulamba*. This helped us to compare stories with numbers to understand its meaning to women's lives with numerical precision that is absent in many *Chewa* culture studies, namely Banda (2009)^[15], Mchombo (1989), Phiri (2019) and Posner (2005).

5. Discussion of Findings

5.1 Mapping Initiation Ceremonies in Africa and Beyond

Data in this paper revealed that initiation rituals play and important role in the cultural process of any society in Africa and beyond. In Zambia and Malawi the *Kulamba* rituals have provided meaningful context through interpretation of power and how to resist it by woman through the *Chinamwali* and *Nyau* practices (Probst, 2002). Phiri, Musonda, Sompa *et al.* (2022) when searching on women stated that interviews results with inmates is noted that power when given to women privileges them comparable to men. This is exactly true with the women situation at *Kulamba* traditional ceremony in Zambia. While, in Ethiopia, the government gives no consideration to the importance of initiation rituals and to the loss of traditional practices or to the possibility of reconciling tradition and development, but clearly privileges modernisation, in this case formal education (Zannetti, 2003). Nevertheless, issues concerning initiation and women's rights have become a

major concern by most women organizations in Zambia. For example, the Forum for African Women Educationalists of Zambia (FAWEZA) contained that initiation in girls has contributed to early girl child marriages. Despite various concerted efforts in policy changes, such as introduction of re-entry policy for girl-child education (Banda, 2019) millions of children in Africa, majority being girls, continue to be out of school due to various cultural and social factors (FAWEZA 2021). Initiation as rite of passage for girls and boys are widely discussed in politics but rarely are the effects a major concern to stakeholders. For example, there is dearth of literature on the *Kulamba* rituals except being portrayed as a thanks giving annual festival event for the *Chewa* people of Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique. Most feminist literature on *Kulamba* has succeeded in making women invisible in terms of their experience and perspective that contribute to the ceremony. For instance, the *Nyau* dances are the most important activities for the holding of *Kulamba* festivals. There can never be *Kulamba* ceremony without the female *Nyau* dances and initiates. The *Chewa* people call *Nyau, Gule wamkulu* (the great dance) (Rita-Ferreira, 1968; Schoffeleers *et al.*, 1972; Mwale, 1973) in stack opposite of the other dances that are performed by women. All those who have been initiated in the *Nyau* dance or *gule wamkulu* are called *Omwera* initiates. Participation into the *Nyau* is gender neutral. Initiating is the most important ritual and an indigenous practice that has been transmitted from one generation to another. It is against this background that this paper is conceived in order to explore gender aspect within this traditional practice and gender roles embedded with Indigenous Knowledge System.

The *Nyau* forms part of the ceremony such that without the *Nyau*, there would be no ceremony at all. The *Nyau* has religious origins and its chief functions are to venerate ancestral spirits (Taylor, 2006)^[127]. The spirits are depicted in the masks that all-male and female *Nyau* members wear in the course of their performance which historically are conducted at events such as funerals and girls' initiation rituals, called *Chinamwali*. As such, the indigenous knowledge system (IKS) embedded in the *Chewa* beliefs are about the *Nyau* secret practice guided this paper's exploration, investigation and analysis of the meaning of *Kulamba* traditional ceremony to women's lives in the *Chewa* culture. For example, were a *Chewa* girl undergoes a ritual known as *Chinamwali*, a traditional initiation ritual reserved for girls guided this paper as cultural ritual embedded in *Chewa* culture. *Chinamwali* is undertaken soon after a girl experiences her first menstrual period as a sign of entering puberty where pubescent girls are secluded from their families for seven (7) days while they are counseled by elderly women (known as *Anamkungwi* in the *Chewa* language) on a number of issues believed to prepare her for adulthood. The issues discussed during confinement of girls by elder women include sexual abstinence, respect for elders, carrying out household chores and respect for her husband when married (Chanock, 1985). This confirms that the life experiences of women at the ceremony places them as important knowers of gendered knowledge systems of the *Kulamba* ceremony. From Chanock's (1985) observation, one would argue that it brings to bear the social gender norms and a gendered division of labour.. In this paper, women are central to the *Chewa* culture and performances. For example, the initiation is finished when the girl leaves

the house after all hair, including pubic hair, are shorn off. There are other roles performed by girls who have reached puberty at the ceremony, such as singing and dancing in a masked dance called Maria¹⁴. Dancing as Maria is gender specific. Maria is the fusion of Western notion where pubescent girls dances in masks locally known as *namwali*. (See Photo 1 below). According to the *Chewa* people, *Chinamwali* is viewed as an acceptable cultural practice, which has been maintained and preserved as an ancestral tradition yet ignored by the Western media, branded as “primitive” and presented in negative terms. The colonial administration banned the *Chinamwali* ritual at the ceremony, without precisely understanding its meaning to women’s lives (Aguilar, 2007). Mbiti (1991: 89) asserts that culture is a phenomenological concept through which people retain their self-identity. We agree with Mbiti’s observation that culture helps people to retain their identity. As for the *Chinamwali* rituals are embedded in the life of women and men at *Mkaika* village but have no knowledge about their metaphorical significance connected to gender IKS. *Chinamwali* ritual practices are evident in painted masks by women with special features only unique to *Chewa* material culture. For the *Chewa* women, *IKS* is embedded in their mask painting as shown in Photo 1 below.



Photo 1 1: Douglas Curran (1999) on Female mask, Maria

The wooden face mask above under photo (1) one is a common female mask form in *Chewa* culture. Maria represents a senior, respected female initiate in the *Nyau* society. She is the wife of the chief and is regarded as the mother of the community. Typically, Maria masks are painted in bright pink or red and have fake fur fabric for the hair and eyebrows.

5.2 The *Chewa* cultural values

The paper documented how the continuity and change of *Kulamba* is fundamental to *Chewa* people’s existence premised on the gendered *IKS* and post-structural feminism theories. For example, while existing values of the *Chewa* culture are enshrined in the *Kulamba* practices in terms of sharing and thanksgiving being fundamental to the *Chewa* cultural existence but the gendered *IKS* at *Kulamba* ceremony says very little about its meaning to women’s lives. Therefore, this paper explored the *Chewa* culture, from these feminist theoretical tools. The *Chewa* culture

helped us to understand how opportunities for males and females lie in the interplay between gender relations with indigenous knowledge systems. It is argued that gender issues (Male and female) in *Chewa* culture do not lie in the set of knowledge and ideas about them, devised by Europeans in the context of imperialism coined as African discourses (Miller 1999: 58), but in the IKS from African feminist perspective. For example, the negative western perceptions of gender problems in *Chewa* culture do not exist because the interplay with it and power did not exclude women from taking a leadership role either. For instance, the title *Mfumu* (Chief) in *Chewa* lexicon is gender neutral and can be male or female. Therefore, the paper interrogated the ways in which the western assumptions about gender and sex role differences are used to interpret *Chewa* society and, in the process, creating a local gender system perpetuating women’s subordination in today’s Zambia.



Photo 2: Banda (2008:78) Members of the male Nyau society at Mkaika village in Katete district

5.3 Culture, Tradition and Gender Roles in Zambia

In Zambia, nearly at every forum, the words culture and tradition are used interchangeably to mean one and the same thing. Yet, there are vast bodies of literature explaining the two words from vantage point. Jenkins (2001:5) notes in William Raymond (1976) that ‘Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language to define. From anthropological views, culture is symbolic representations that constitute human knowing in their various groupings, classifications, and manifestations of it (Jenkins, 2001). The very idea of culture implies a concept that lead to the unification of peoples of the world linked by space, time and technology across vast land masses (Taylor, 2021). Nevertheless, the concept of tradition means holding on to knowledge, music or dance that is passed on from one generation to the other (Green, 1997). For example, the *Nyau* dancers as shown on Photo 2 above is practiced from one generation to another. Fortunately, though used interchangeably in Zambia, these words are different in meaning and application. Taylor (2020: 78) explained that “when we talk about the various forms of women’s oppression and the need for gender transformation, someone (usually male) tells us that some values and practices will be difficult to change because it’s our tradition”. In Zambia, the words culture and tradition are often perceived, by many people, as being backwards and uncivilized (Longwe, 1995). This has also been reinforced by the male-authored, male-biased history texts books. Which means that, historically women’s past contributions to indigenous knowledge

¹⁴Maria in *Chewa* language is the name referring to Mary the mother of Jesus Christ in the Christian faith.

systems in most African societies has been ignored, including that of Zambia. Recently, a growing body of literature has aimed to correct the record, by highlighting the important roles of African women in indigenous knowledge production as actors in the pre-colonial period (for example, Staudt, 1989 and Agorsah, 1990). This scholarship seeks to document certain structural features of pre-colonial African political economy that provided specific roles for women (Tamale, 2019). By implication, from Tamale scholarship on gender specific roles for women, even though women in the *Chewa* culture have contributed significantly to its political economy, they have remained undocumented; which this study has unlocked. Further, there is a dearth of literature on the meaning of the gendered African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) embedded in the *Kulamba* traditional ceremony to women's lives politically and economically in Zambia. The version of this multiple methodological feminist research was a focus on the *Kulamba* traditional ceremony and gender roles, enshrined with the IKS, which provides a clear historical gender background in Zambia. This is because, historically, the participation of women in governance has long been hindered by the cultural assumption that their proper place is in the "private" sphere (Longwe, 1985). Similarly, Banda (2009:7)^[15] confirms the "private sphere" notion for women in Zambia that their proper space is the kitchen. This is a culturally accepted norm in the Zambian society. However, the question to ask is to what extent does patriarchy shape normative gender roles through the *Kulamba* rituals in the *Chewa* culture? And where are these patriarchal norms derived from? Are they precolonial and embedded in *Chewa* culture or are they influenced by colonialism? In a nutshell, is patriarchy the cause of gender inequalities amongst the *Chewa* people at *Kulamba*? Gera Lerner (1986)^[65] traces the history of patriarchy from the unrecorded history of women's involvement in the western civilization. Instead, historically women's involvement in western civilization focus on women's reproductive capacity and motherhood as the chief goal in life. For Lerner (1986)^[65], sexual asymmetry is derived from essentialist and taken-for-granted biological factors imposed on women. Therefore, it is wrong to assume here that God created the sexual differences which in turn determine the sexual division of labour. For instance, African feminist scholarships (that is., Emeagwali, 1993; Shizha and Oyerunke; 1997, and others) locate the genesis of patriarchy to colonial categorization of gender and sex roles. For Koenig (1997) on a similar issue stated that gender roles between men and women in most African cultures are complementary to one another and not premised on biological determinism. Anecdote observations at the ceremony on gender roles have always reviewed as complementary to one another and are equal. Yet, according to Longwe (2009), women's access to resources in Zambian societies have always been unequal. This shows how the *Kulamba* ceremony of the *Chewa* people and it's embedded IKS from a feminist intersectionality perspective shapes women's intrinsic and underlying value system reinforces inequalities. Even though this is a biased view regarding gender equality, because inequality does not only originate from traditional cultural and social norms but also from the western feminist interpretation. For example, according to JICA (2015: 42) women's rights in Zambia which are supposed to be protected under statutory law, are not necessarily observed resulting in their being unfairly treated

in marriage and distribution of property. However, JICA says very little on IKS and gender roles in Zambia which is the core subject to this paper. At policy level, positive developments through the establishment of an independent Ministry of Gender, the introduction of specific gender policies and revision of certain provisions of the Constitution, epitomize gender inequality in Zambia. Indeed, there are many arguments for and against establishing a Ministry of Gender in Zambia, mainly anchored on essentialism¹⁵ and sexism¹⁶. For example, the 6th Republican President Edgar Lungu's constant use and attribution of certain women characteristics in proverbial *Chewa* language "Azimai" (for mothers) is illogically argued to have been the reason for establishing the Gender Ministry in Zambia. This confirms the intersection between power and language which perpetuates inequalities in Zambia. The United Nations (UN) protocol on gender equality, as part of international human rights law by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December (1948:34) is a milestone document in the history of human rights recognized that"

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" and that "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, birth or other status."

Unfortunately, for Zambia, when the *Chewa* word "Azimai" is used it becomes a variant concept essentialising women as vulnerable and not human beings born equal. Probably, this is understood in this light hence the creation of the Gender Ministry in Zambia which is wrong argument. This is because, essentialism privileges one kind of group identity over others assumed to be more important, and obscuring the dynamic ways in which group boundaries are drawn and redrawn. Nevertheless, Philipe (2012) in support of essentialism states that it is part of social reality and therefore real at *Kulamba* ritual as well. Further, Psychologist Janet Shibley White (2005) on essentialist thinking argues that it might just be part of the human condition. This infers that it is part of the way human beings process complex information. Surely, establishment of independent gender ministries is justified in Zambia because equality is premised on the notion that gender is part of all issues. However, one may still questions what the establishment of gender ministry means to women's lives in *Chewa* culture, in Zambia. This is because even though the gender frame work policy in Zambia provides a clear guide to reducing poverty and promoting women and adolescent girls' empowerment is silent on the meaning of *Kulamba* to women's lives. Equally, the government of Zambia general legislation known as the Gender Equity and Equality Act No. 22 of 2015 is equally silent on the meaning of *Kulamba* to women's lives apart from aiming to domesticate regional and international treaties, conventions, and declarations. This Act only gives effect to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women

¹⁵ Essentialism is a feminist philosophical concept which examined women as victims rather than agents of development as stated by an American philosopher, William Bagley in the 1900s.

¹⁶ Sexism is purely biases based on sex. It's an act of discrimination especially based on sex of a woman.

but nothing specific on cultural ceremonies significance to women's lives. It is also envisaged that through this Act, women's empowerment targets that meet the international standards set by the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as those of Zambia Vision 2030, will be effectively released.

5.4 Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and Globalization

Globalization means different things to many scholars and researchers. Mazrui (2001: 56)^[89] interprets globalization in three divergent ways: firstly, as an economic interdependency across vast distances of land. Secondly, as information availability and movement across vast distances of geographical areas. Thirdly, it is the reduction of the world into a global village. He further identifies two forms of globalization namely economic and cultural. The main players in the economic globalization being the transnational and multinational corporations seeking to extend the horizons for their markets for raw materials. Cultural globalization on the other hand contributes to the erosion of indigenous cultures and indigenous languages. In a similar manner, Moahi (2007) views globalization as the opening up and interconnectedness of the world. He argues that when this opening up is all about empire building, search for raw materials, and new markets. For Mazrui, (2001)^[89], this implies a process of globalization that has its roots in colonialism. Noteworthy, colonialism had the same driving forces as those stated above.

The fears expressed by some academics (Mazrui, 2001^[89], Odora, 2002^[104] and Moahi, 2007) are that just as colonialism displaced many people from their cultural lands, plundered cultural objects and many artifacts has adversely diluted the rich cultures of the colonized people. There is dearth of literature about the meaning of alternative globalization enshrined in IKS to women's lives in *Chewa* society. With reference to the *Chewa* culture, an alternative globalization¹⁷ (glocalization¹⁸) was used to define concepts that are embedded in the ceremony to understand women's roles in a natural environment. Simply, we analyzed tenets of alternative globalization embedded in *Kulamba* ceremony to understand its meaning to women's lives. For Phiri (2018) stated that Globalisation is interpreted in many ways by various scholars and researchers. In this paper, cultural globalization is the transmission of ideas, meanings and values from around the world in such a way as to extend and intensify social relations at *Kulamba* (Phiri, 2018). The assumption here is that it is possible that glocalization can make women's voices visible in *Chewa* culture. For instance women's IKS in artifacts such as masks stone tools and beads threaded with wood helped to raise their voices as a sign of communicating to God (*Chiuta*) an important ritual part at *chinamwali*. In agreement with Kaumba, Daka and Phiri *et al.* (2023) who postulates that globally, women's equal participation and leadership in decision-making processes at every level of the organizations and in every sector is a fundamental reduce attempt to reduce gender-based poverty. Globalization at *Kulamba* according to Phiri (2020) has revealed that “ *Kulamba* festival is sufficient

enough to provide an idea about the most dramatic events that have contributed to the women's subordination among *Chewa* people.” These events reveal that gender inequalities among *Chewa* people are socially constructed through the *Kulamba* ritual practices. Therefore, the argument is that socioeconomically changes, which the author calls ‘globalization’, have had a profound effect on women's lives at Mkaika village. This infers knowledge without the interference and impositions of external dominating forces. This implies that *IK* is the culturally informed understanding of values, beliefs, and norms inculcated into individuals from birth onwards, structuring how they interface with their environments. We agreed with Emeagwali *et al.* (1993), who contends that Indigenous Knowledge (*IK*) is the cumulative body of strategies, practices, techniques, tools, intellectual resources, explanations, beliefs, and values accumulated over time in a particular locality. From observation of the ceremony, *IK* distribution is fragmentary. Equally, it is shared locally on the whole than specialized knowledge with no one person, authority or social group knowing it all. For Sillitoe (2002:2) IKS exists nowhere in totality with no grand repository of it. Chika (2019: 6) on indigenous knowledge observed that it is often region specific and orally transmitted through experience and long-time intentional practice. This confirms our observation that *IK* at the ceremony is transmitted through skill expertise and language excellence. Ordinarily, it transcends several generations and is a by-product of the very lives of its adherents. It does not subscribe to rigid interpretations due to the changing nature of people's interaction with their environment. In Zambia, *IKS* is often contrasted by knowledge taught in institutions of higher learning that cover the jurisdiction of the local communities which usually is Euro-centred knowledge system.

For Masoga (2007), *IKS* involve the technologies around communities indigenous to a particular space and context. We understand *IKS* to include spirituality and the material with complex links between the two domains. The complex link is the process at which *IKS* is interlinked and produced by indigenous people of a place and locality relating to the technological, pedagogical¹⁹ approach and processes that is unique to the people in the creation and production of material and non-material culture.

Our argument is that indigenous knowledge systems are embedded in the practices of the *Chewa* people at *Mkaika* village through *Kulamba* rituals associated with artefacts (i.e., masks and Nyau dances as indicated in photo 1 & 2 above). This means that the *Kulamba* ceremony is a source for indigenous identity construction for the *Chewa* people. We are in agreement with Masoga (2007:17) who describe indigenous knowledge system (IKS) as the “complete body of knowledge of technologies in a culture of people in a specific geographical area, to a particular space and context.” This knowledge system has enabled the *Chewa* people to utilise their natural environment productively. For example, despite Sarah Longwe (2002) when addressing “gender issues of empowerment” completely ignores IKS as an emphatic practical tool to help in understanding the meaning it has to women's lives in Zambia's rural areas. For Masoga (2007) *IKS* is more than local as it is also traditional in terms of orality and transmission between consecutive

¹⁷ See de Jong Wilma (2012) on alternative globalization as social movement which is anti-trade and gender and proposals the localization of policies

¹⁸ Glocalization is an alternative to globalization which means the local knowledge being transformed into global knowledge for the consumption of those who are its recipient of it

¹⁹ Pedagogy as a gradual act of imparting knowledge and skills in practice and theory to the learners

generations which makes them informed about their worldview. The worldviews on *IKS* are most often a subconscious phenomenon and not usually explicit. This means that *IKS* production processes at *Kulamba* festivals involves revelation, intuition, inspiration as well as experience. The main difference between *IKS* and modern Science ostensibly is that *IKS* deals with the “how” and “what”, while Science deals with the “why” (Bhola, 2000)^[22]. For our understanding, *IKS* is an important asset for rural communities as it includes means of food production and shelter construction, equally described by Shizha (1993:13) as “the social and cultural capital of an indigenous population, providing a means of survival, but also identity and a sense of belonging.” Other scholars, Silitoe (2002) and Chika Ezeanya (2019) on this issue argue that *IKS* is no longer the systematic body of knowledge regarding all the segments of it. This implies that it is not just all-encompassing body of knowledge, but can be regarded as an empathetic theoretical tool that includes spiritual and material aspect necessary to help in resolving life problems for women’s lives at the ceremony. Therefore, in this paper has argued that *IKS* is a theoretical tool that provides solutions to understand the material dynamics including the political economy²⁰ for the *Chewa* women in Zambia. *IKS* It will is a technical tool and a primary means of survival and economic empowerment theoretical strategy for the women of *Mkaika* village at the *Kulamba* ceremony. *IKS* in dance, chinamawali formation are all strategies used by *Chewa* women to economically liberate themselves.

5.5 The Gendering of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in the *Chewa* Culture

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2020: 12) describes the concept of “gendering” as integrating the gender perspective into the understanding and construction of persons, phenomena, reflections, things, relationships, sectors of action, societal subsystems and institutions. The EIGE definition implies an approach to understand gender in society from a micro, macro and meso level (Adkins, 2018). For example, the *Chewa* concept “*Kulamba*” is invisibly gendered in a consequential and patriarchal ways despite the general public belief of gender equality at the ceremony, yet observed data at the ceremony shows that it is not. Mazonde (2005) states that *IKS* plays an important role in community life for women at *Kulamba* ceremony in terms of both spiritual and material possession. Yet, Longwe (2003) grosses over *IKS* as one other factor necessary to help in analysing its meaning to women’s lives. In short Longwe (1999) mentions very little about gendering the indigenous knowledge systems embedded in the *Chewa* culture without understanding what it means to women’s lives. From observation, it is clear what the ceremony means to women cultural identity. The ceremony is a process which internalises inferiorisation of women’s identity as insignificant others. Therefore, gendered *IKS* has been used as a theoretical tool that has been used in this paper to analyse *Chewa* women’s ways of living, personal relations to the understanding of material possessions at the ceremony. This means that gendered *IKS* is a continuous process of interrogating women’s lives at *Kulamba*

ceremony in terms of how they are disadvantaged by it through personal experiences in their daily lives. This shows how important the gendered *IKS* means to women’s lives in terms of access to materiality and spirituality in *Chewa* culture. Briefly, this paper interrogated the nature of gendered *IKS* among different types of women namely, the coloured women and those in positions of authority in the *Chewa* culture. The argument is that *IKS* space though invaded and occupied by the Western scholarships (i.e, Harris, 2003; Hooks 1982 and Fiorenza 1992) it plays an important role in helping to enhance women’s quality of life in *Chewa* society when applied from an African feminist perspective. This is because the gendered *IKS* as an appropriate theoretical tool to helps to reconceptualise gender roles amongst *Chewa* people in order to understand its meaning to women’s lives in terms of spirituality and material access in *Chewa* culture. At best, by gendering *IKS* and exploring it in the women’s lives of the *Chewa* culture through the *Kulamba* ceremony it helped the authors to understand the complexities of *Chewa* women’s daily lives from a phenomenological perspective anchored on mixed research methodology. For example, *IKS* helped us to understand how social relations at *Kulamba* ceremony for women’s are transformed in terms of how to have ease access to food, traditional medicine, artefacts, and materials that are necessary for quality of women’s lives in *Chewa* culture.

Of concern in the interrogation of *IKS* at *Kulamba* traditional ceremony, is anchored on our positionality as authors raised up in *Chewa* culture, where we took note of gendered power differentials exposed to. We observed that the agenda for *Chewa* women themselves is to emancipate themselves in their quest to expose the invisible gendered undertones in *Chewa* language and masks. Therefore, this paper explored the gendered *IKS* in the context of the *Chewa* culture with particular reference to the normative gender roles enshrined in the *Kulamba* ceremony to understand women’s lived experience. Specifically, the paper aimed at exploring the *Chewa* culture and gender roles and how the intersectionality with other sociocultural relations render women’s role unequal to their male counterparts thereby perpetuating inequalities in women’s lives at the *Kulamba* ceremony. In agreement with Alexander Floyd (2012) on intersectionality as a “metaphor” originally invoked by an African American scholars Kimberle Crenshaw (1995:17) describing it as: “multiple oppression that are experienced by those who are affected like traffic light at an intersection” cross point. We were concerned about how individual women negotiate the power-laden social relations and conditions at the *Kulamba* ceremony in which they are embedded. Through intersectionality women experiences of labour is interwoven with sociocultural relations such as sexuality, class, age ethnicity and mother-tongue interact, thereby producing different kinds of social inequalities and unjust social relations experienced by them at the ceremony. Through Catherine Obianuju Acholonu’s feminist concept of “Motherism”, and Kimberle’s intersectionality theoretical and methodological tool, was used for the purpose of understanding how power produces different kinds of inequalities in women’s lives at *Mkaika* village. In agreement with Phiri (2020) who observed that women’s inequalities at the *Kulamba* ceremony can be explored from two constituencies, namely gulewa-Mkulu (for men) and

²⁰ Political economy is a scientific study of how power and wealthy are distributed in the real world, including trade laws and policies. See Keefer Philip (2004) Political economy of Aid.

Chisamba (for women). This is further confirmed by Banda (2008) and Mchombo's (2015) arguments on this issue is that the underlying structure mystifies women as wives and mothers and that the structures expose hierarchical divisions that generate struggles within families.

5.6 Africanisation of the Research process.

The argument in this paper is the Africanising the research process, designed as the *Kulamba* Research process design (KRPd) usually ignored on this topic by most scholarships. From observation, the authors designed the *KRPd* which was closer to what the majority of researchers on *Chewa* culture would agree with. The *KRPd* was a way of giving voices to different sections of *Chewa* people, a way of debating ideas and issues that impact on gender roles in *Chewa* culture. The *KRPd* was an identified aspect of precolonial and modern times, not based on an individual approach to the conception of knowledge in *Chewa* culture but on collectivism and colonial disruptive ways of inquiry. For example, through audio-tape recording women stories, the *KRPd* helped the authors of the paper to engage with women's experiences in terms of reciprocity and relational stories to the community in Zambia. Further, the *KRPd* combine multiple feminist data collection techniques for the purposes of triangulation such as observation, focus group discussion, archival of artifacts and visiting archeological sites such as graveyards known as "*Kudambwe*" in *Chewa* language. The authors interviewed participants communicating with our ancestral spirit (*Mizimu*) at the graveyard accompanied by elderly women and men to gather data about women marginalization and the meaning of *Kulamba* ceremony to their lives. Therefore, this *KRPd* was the intersectionality feminism through what was known as a cognitive and reflexivity approach. In agreement with Crenshaw (1991:42)^[43], intersectional feminism was a focus not only on the concerns of women but on race, class, disability, and geography. For this paper, intersectionality feminism focused on women and girls life experiences during *Chinanwali* and *Nyau* rituals at the ceremony (graveyard). For example, through audio-tape recordings (after obtaining informed consent) and listening to women stories we ask questions about the lived experiences of *Chewa* women during the dances and rituals. The main reason for the feminist intersectionality methodological approach on this paper is that, it normally examined oppression and marginalization rooted in gender without looking at class, race and other conditional positional ties (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013). Further, in agreement with Phiri, Inonge, Musi *et al.* (2023)^[107] patriarchal power has material effects on women bodies at the ceremony.

6. Conclusion

This paper is firmly placed on *IKS* in the feminist poststructuralist debate empirically engaging with the *Chewa* culture and its effects on women's lives at the ceremony. It is a contribution to African Studies, with a strong focus on gender and *IKS*. The argument is that even though in practice the *Chewa* culture embraces the notion of providing for equality for all but nothing real has been documented to explain what it means to women's lived experience in Zambia. This was the the focus of this paper thus to explain its embedded meaning to women's lives at *Mkaika* village.

Theoretically, the paper was anchored on feminist intersectionality concept and African feminist theories, namely womanism and motherism. The argument was that human experience is gendered which is crucial to the *Kulamba* ceremony impacting on gender roles experienced by women in *Chewa* culture. In agreement with Phiri, Kalumba, Kalimaposo *et al.*, (2023)^[96] on a similar topic, not only are women's participation and leadership position an essential element in poverty alleviation and tackling gender inequality, but it is also a basic human right issue anywhere in society. Therefore, this paper interrogated the meaning of *Kulamba* ceremony embedded with indigenous knowledge system (*IKS*) to the lives of *Chewa* women. Of concern was the application of African feminist theories to interpret women narratives that a form of class experiences, history and biography to determine the meaning of *IKS* has on their lives and gender roles.

The methodology to be employed in this paper was mixed. The rationale for using mixed rather than quantitative was to create a more inclusive understanding of men and women's lives impacted by the ceremony (*IKS*). It should be clear that the paper was designed to apply the use of qualitative approach, with simple statistics and simple percentage techniques was also used as clarified by (Patton, 1990). Furthermore, a general overview of the research design, methods and techniques, sampling methods for the selection of research participants, triangulation techniques and data collection was adopted. The triangulation techniques was used to allow these various methods to complement one another and provide additional insight to the paper. The paper analyzed the "why" traditionally indigenous knowledge on men are considered normal. Finally, the paper explore the reason "why" including women in *IKS* should be part of the narrative to explain the meaning of the ceremony to the lives in *Chewa* society.

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