



**PUBERTY RITES AS CULTURAL RESPONSES TO THE PREVENTION  
OF HIV IN ZIMBABWE: THE CASE OF VAREMBA CIRCUMCISION  
AND INITIATION RITES IN THE MWENEZI DISTRICT**

**By**

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## DECLARATION

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate Programme in Religion and Social Transformation.

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I, Onias Matumbu declare that


The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.

This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

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As the supervisor, I hereby approve this thesis for submission.

## **DEDICATION**

**I dedicate this work to my late parents, MISHECK and SARAH MATUMBU, for more reasons than I can name, and who sadly did not live to witness my achievement.**

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## **ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

ABC      Abstinence Be faithful and use Condoms

CVIR      Clinical Varembe Initiation Ritual strategy

AIDS      Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

HIV      Human Immunodeficiency Virus

ICT      Information and Computer Technology

SAVE      Safer practices, Available medication, Voluntary testing and counselling and  
Empowerment through education).

UNAIDS      United Nations AIDS

VMMC      Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision

WHO      World Health Organisation

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## **ABSTRACT**

The HIV and AIDS pandemic is ubiquitous and indiscriminate in its global onslaught and has caused untold suffering worldwide; the youth in particular are of great concern here. Research on HIV and AIDS has most often focused on heightening social awareness and the use of contraceptives, rather than addressing critical issues regarding this scourge. Research on the role of traditional institutions in socialising young people and improving their awareness of sexual health in the context of HIV and AIDS is currently minimal. Researchers have a tendency of focusing on the biological causes and effects of the pandemic, thus circumventing critical aspects such as the need for behavioural change. The purpose of this study was to determine how cultural traditions under the guise of initiation rites could constitute a body of relevant pedagogy required by young people at the onset of puberty, to develop positive behaviours and attitudes that will render them less vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. The goal of this study was also to establish how the circumcision and initiation ritual as a cultural resource could contribute to strategies aimed at the prevention of HIV and AIDS. Using the phenomenology of religion and social scientific methods, this study focused on the circumcision and initiation rituals of the Varembe people in Mwenezi district of Zimbabwe. In-depth interviews and observation were used to collect data. The participants who were from the Varembe ethnic group, therefore provided rich data. The participants were selected through non-probability purposive sampling and non-probability convenience sampling. Since the topic of this study was sensitive, the research depended on the availability and willingness of the participants to provide information. The findings revealed that lessons learnt by the initiates during the initiation rituals directly or indirectly constituted a relevant traditional pedagogy that has the potential to change the sexual behaviours of the individuals in the prevention of HIV and AIDS. Initiation rituals have the capacity to bring about moral and social transformation in the society by guiding the youth through the important stages of life and providing moral lessons on sex and sexuality. The study concluded that initiation rituals have the potential to contribute to intervention strategies to curb HIV and AIDS through the fostering of behavioural change in the youth. This study recommended that despite the differences between ritual strategies and the medical approach to the prevention of HIV and AIDS, a holistic approach should be adopted where the various strategies and approaches are encouraged to form a symbiotic relationship in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

This section focuses on the background to the study, the problem statement, the research question, the location of the study, research sub-questions, the objectives of the study, validity and reliability, the justification of the study and the thesis outline.

#### **1.1 Background to the Study**

Whilst the subject of HIV and AIDS and religion is topical, it is not new. However, the theme of the interaction between the two subjects has gained urgency in contemporary society where people are in dire need of solutions to the rampant spread of this scourge that has affected people worldwide. At the same time people have tried to maintain their religious beliefs and practices by incorporating these into HIV and AIDS concerns in order to make sense of their situation. Some members of traditional societies, for example, the Shangani people in Chiredzi, have opted to withdraw from HIV and AIDS programmes like voluntary counselling and testing that accuse their religion of fuelling the spread of the pandemic (Gono, 2015). Today new knowledge gained on the relationship between religious traditions and HIV and AIDS emphasise the urgency to reconsider inherent issues underpinning HIV and AIDS from a new and more inclusive perspective, which harnesses and redefines useful traditional rites in the fight against the pandemic.

Demographic statistics have clearly illustrated the effects of the prevalence of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. The Ministry of Health and Child Welfare (2008) established that out of twelve million people in Zimbabwe, 1.1 million were living with HIV and AIDS. Of the total population, 932 000 were people in the age group of fifteen to forty-nine. Although the prevalence of HIV and AIDS between 1981 and 1987 increased from 12, 048 to 1,438,456, it declined in 2008 to 914,614 and a further decline of 911,143 was noted in 2009 (HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe, August 2016). The decline in HIV and AIDS during this period was attributed to

different strategies implemented by the Government, for example, the campaigns on the use and distribution of condoms, reduction in casual sex, campaigns on abstinence as well as increased counselling and testing (HIV and AIDS, Zimbabwe, 2013). However, whilst there was a general decline of HIV and AIDS in the ages fifteen to forty-nine, the prevalence rate in the age groups fifteen to twenty-nine continued to increase from 3.2% in 2009 to 3,3% in 2010 and 3,6 in 2015 (HIV and AIDS, Zimbabwe, 2016). Some of the reasons suggested for the increase were high sexual risk behaviours and widespread unprotected sex.

Researches mostly focused on the role of male circumcision as a strategy to HIV and AIDS prevention. Male circumcision has been suggested in numerous researches as a protective cultural factor against HIV (Auvert, et al. 2005; Bailey, et al. 2007; Moses 2009). Approximately 400 ethnic groups in West Africa and people in Muslim countries have been practicing the ritual of circumcision for over 500 years (Bongaarts, et al. 1989; Weiss, et al. 2000). Current research suggests that circumcision could provide some degree of protection against HIV and AIDS (Moses, 2009).

Scientific research has proven that circumcision has a role to play towards the prevention of HIV and AIDS. The notion that circumcision may protect human beings against becoming infected by the HIV virus was introduced and developed by Professor Valiere Alcena in North America (Morris, 1999). The theory was promoted by Fink (1986) who argued that the removal of the foreskin and the subsequent hardening of the lining known as the keratinisation of the penis reduced the chances of contracting the HIV virus. The underside of the foreskin consists of thin langerhans cells which are vulnerable to the HIV virus (Ford, 2006). Thus, circumcision causes the penis to develop a new, hardened skin with fewer HIV target cells.

According to Auvert (2005), trials carried out in South Africa, Kenya and Uganda demonstrated that male circumcision was indeed effective in reducing HIV infection. Welbourne and Hoare (2008) concur that these findings substantiate the fact that male circumcision does provide some protection against the HIV virus. Basing their support on these findings, WHO and UNAIDS transformed a cultural practice into a preventive public health strategy (Moses, 2009). The suggestion was that male circumcision could reduce heterosexual transmission of HIV by 60 %. Therefore, countries were urged to adopt this practice in medical institutions through Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision (VMMC) (WHO/UNAIDS, 2015).



However, according to recent statistics on HIV and AIDS, Zimbabwe has the poorest coverage rate on circumcision despite being listed one of UNAIDS' priority countries for the scale up of Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision that was listed in the country's National Combination Prevention Strategy (HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe, August 2016). By 2018, Zimbabwe aims to reach 1.3 million males who would have undergone Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision (80% of thirteen- to twenty-nine year-olds). As of 2016, it has reached 46.3% of the target group. It was surprising to note that the prevalence of HIV and AIDS is higher among males who are circumcised, 14% higher than those who are not, and who are at 12%. Recent statistics show that Zimbabwe has the fifth highest HIV prevalence, that is, 14.7% in Sub-Saharan Africa. Approximately 1.4 million people are currently living with HIV and AIDS, including 77,000 children (HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe, August 2016). The findings obtained from these studies suggest that circumcision on its own, as an effective strategy, is a fallacy. At individual level, circumcision does not prevent the transmission of the HIV virus reliably (Mattson, et al. 2005). Males who claim to have surgical immunity after circumcision increase their risk of contracting the HIV virus.

The skewed statistics on HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe shows that circumcision on its own is not adequate as a prevention strategy against HIV and AIDS. Hence, there is need for behaviour change after individuals have undergone voluntary male circumcision. Auvert (2005) maintains that the risk of HIV transmission remains real among circumcised males who could increase their exposure by engaging in unprotected intercourse and risky behaviour. Circumcised persons may become promiscuous having learnt the benefits of circumcision in reducing the chances of contracting HIV.

Another observation obtained from the statistics is that positive behavioural change after circumcision is crucial in militating against the spread of HIV. Gray et al. (2007) observes that cultural circumcision and initiation have been useful in most African countries in preventing HIV. This study is underpinned by the view that religion and the strong adherence to religious principles could protect people against HIV transmission (Agha et al. 2006). Circumcision on its own cannot prevent the spread of HIV. After being circumcised, males need to undergo initiation where they receive instruction necessary to mould their behaviours and assist them to develop positive and less risky attitudes towards issues of sex and sexuality.

Circumcision is a religio-cultural practice used in scientific circles to pursue the problem of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe today. The adoption of traditional male circumcision for use by medical institutions omitted the initiation and its ritual aspects. The fact that certain rituals have been performed from time immemorial implies that it is of religious significance and is influential to those who practice it. Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision is non-religious, non-obligatory and nothing compels the individual to participate in the ritual. Again, nothing compels an individual to live according to the precepts of circumcision (Gono, 2015). There is no requirement to conform to social norms after the circumcision procedure has been carried out. It has become increasingly important to focus research on the current role of the initiation rituals and their effects on risk sexual behaviour and knowledge in the youths.

## **1.2 Overview of the Circumcision and Initiation Rite**

This study pursues the role of circumcision and the initiation ritual as an alternative strategy towards the prevention of HIV, with reference to the Varembe people of the Mwenezi district in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe.

*Varembe* or *Vamwenye* are the Shona-speaking ethnic groups indigenous to Zimbabwe and South Africa. According to Parfitt (2002), other Varembe minority groups are located in Mozambique and Malawi. The Varembe people speak indigenous languages spoken by the local people in their geographic areas. In Zimbabwe, they constitute the Shona speakers and most communicate in the Karanga dialect. However, it is significant to highlight that although the Varembe people speak Karanga language they themselves are not Karanga. Ethnic groups in Zimbabwe like the Tonga, the Varembe, the Shangani and the Yao migrants perform initiation rites, for example, puberty rituals of transition into adulthood (Maposa, 2011; Sibanda, 2013). Nevertheless, the religious beliefs and practices of the Varembe are closely related to that of the Jews and the Muslims (Parfitt, 2002). Although controversial, genetic theories pertaining to the history and origin of the Varembe people link them with Middle Eastern populations such as, the Arab traders, *vashavi* in ChiShona who migrated from Yemen and settled in Zimbabwe and South Africa (Le Roux, 2003). According to Varembe tradition, their male ancestors were Jews who left Judea approximately 2500 years ago and settled in Yemen. Most Varembe people are members of the Christian churches with some being Muslims (Parfitt, 2002). The Varembe are predominantly found in the Mberengwa districts of the Midlands province and other parts of

Masvingo, for example, Gutu, Chiredzi, Neshuro, Hwedza and Buhera (Mandivenga, 1989; Evans, 2015). The Varembe tribe has a long history of observing the initiation of boys into manhood through practicing traditional male circumcision among all the males. The Varembe circumcision and initiation rites form the basis of enriching lessons that equip young men to become more conscious about their lives.

Circumcision is one of the oldest and most widespread surgical and non-surgical procedures in the world. Cross-cultural reference to circumcision is found in traditional circles in most countries (WHO, 2009). Various meanings are attached to the cultural removal of the foreskin. For example, in most African countries circumcision is performed as a rite of puberty (WHO, 2009). Although some people practice circumcision for non-religious reasons, the Varembe, Yao, Tonga and the Shangani tribes practice it predominantly for religious and cultural reasons (Maposa, 2011; Daimon, 2013; Sibanda, 2013). People who practice circumcision for non-religious reasons do so in response to the announcement by WHO that circumcision reduces the risk of HIV infection by 60% in heterosexuals. Therefore, male circumcision became important in those areas in Sub-Saharan Africa which had high prevalence of HIV and AIDS (Sibanda, 2013).

### **1.2.1 Origin of the Varembe Circumcision and Initiation Rite**

The origin of the circumcision rite is controversial, but to some extent, its origin is attached to issues of sex and sexuality. The Varembe are believed to have acquired it from the Jews and Arabs to whom their ancestry and history is traced (Parfitt, 2002). Circumcision is also interpreted to have originated from fertility rites as a sacrifice to the gods in exchange for good harvest (Dunsmuir and Gordon, 1999). In the Bungoma Districts of Kenya, circumcision takes place after the harvest (Bailey and Egesah, 2006). Among the Balande in Guinea-Bissau and Senegal, circumcision ceremonies are performed in the rice fields in reverence to the ancestors and the earth (Niang and Boiro, 2007). Circumcision is also seen as a distinguishing feature between God's children and those who are not (Saucier, 1991).

Traditional male circumcision is practiced as a rite of passage and it is performed on pre-pubertal boys, adolescents and adults. The age at which circumcision is practiced varies from country to country as well as ethnicity, ranging from six years in Senegal and Indonesia, to thirty-five years

in Zambia (Niang and Boiro, 2007; WHO, 2009). In Zimbabwe, the Shangani circumcise their youth at the ages between thirteen and seventeen whilst the Varembe circumcise from the age of twelve (Sibanda, 2013; Evans, 2015). However, evidence gathered from most Varembe in Mwenezi shows that there are some who circumcise the youths from the age of seven. The age group fifteen to twenty-nine is the most vulnerable group for new HIV infection in Zimbabwe (HIV and AIDS, Zimbabwe, 2013). The Varembe and the Bukusu in Kenya, circumcise their youths yearly, while in South Africa it is done twice per year, but the Balante in Guinea-Bissau circumcise after every four to six years (Evans, 2015; Niang and Boiro, 2007; Bailey, 2006). In most cases, the circumcision rituals coincide with physical maturation and contribute to the development of the young people. Bailey (2006) found that about 47.7% of the young men in Kenya become sexually active before they were circumcised. The sexual debut was estimated to occur from the age of fourteen to fifteen years in those groups studied for traditional circumcision (Bail, 2006).

In tribes where traditional male circumcision is rooted in culture, it is not an optional procedure determined by individuals. Some societies have a specific age at which an individual should be circumcised for example the Wolof of Senegal (Niang and Boiro, 2007). Certain societies may have measures and customs in place to indirectly compel the individual to undergo the circumcision procedure. The Shangani and Varembe treat non-circumcised individuals as outcasts and are not given access to the privileges of the society. Such individuals are deprived of family rights and responsibilities (Maposa, 2011; Sibanda, 2013). On the other hand, it may be left to the individual whether to undergo male circumcision or not, but it depends on the strength of the compulsion. In societies with a fragile social fabric, individuals may be circumcised without the involvement of that society. In South Africa, there are incidences of Xhosa boys who fled from their families to become circumcised without the consent of their parents (Vincent, 2007; Mogotlane, Ntlangulela, Ogunbanjo, 2004). In some societies, forced circumcisions through abductions have been reported, particularly in Zambia, Malawi, South Africa and Uganda (Bailey, Neema, Othieno, 1999; Ncayiyana, 2003; Ngalande, Levy, Kapondo, Bailey, 2006; Lukobo, 2007).

### **1.2.2 Meanings Attached to the Initiation Ritual**

The circumcision ritual has meanings both at individual and social level as noted among the Varembe who believe that the circumcision ritual provides a person with an identity (Sibanda, 2013). It distinguishes those that belong to the Varembe culture and those who do not. Generally, circumcision is equated to health and cleanliness among traditionally circumcising and non-circumcising groups (Taljaard, 2003). Among the Wolof of Senegal, circumcision is equated with cleanliness and the metaphor, “to wash hands” is used to signify male circumcision and “the child who has clean hands can eat with adults,” means that he can join and share ideas with his elders (Niang and Boiro, 2007:24).

The belief in the protective role of male circumcision against disease has been widespread among traditional healers (Green, et al. 1993). Male circumcision is believed to have a protective effect against sexually transmitted infections by preventing the tearing of the foreskin and hence reducing the likelihood of contracting diseases (Taljaard, et al. 2003; Ngalande, et al. 2006). Some possible links between circumcision and HIV control has been drawn from the Balante tribe of Guinea-Bissau who believe that circumcision can protect people against the terrible disease Pusoonu which has symptoms similar to those of HIV and AIDS (Niang and Boiro, 2007). Similar findings were established in Kenya and South Africa, that traditional circumcision offers protection against HIV. However, contrary to this, studies in some countries such as Nigeria do not presume disease protection as a reason for circumcision (Caldwell, et al. 1997; Myers, et al. 1985). The Varembe do not practice circumcision primarily for health reasons or as a measure to control diseases, their reasons are purely cultural (Evans, 2015).

At socio-cultural level, circumcision is of significance to most traditionally circumcising communities because being circumcised is the only way of attaining manhood. Among the Varembe, an individual who is not circumcised is considered immature and is not held accountable for his actions, his parents are (Evans, 2015). In the Xhosa culture, when a boy is incapable of distinguishing between what is right or wrong, he is not held accountable for his actions (Vincent, 2007). Women refuse proposals of love from uncircumcised individuals because they are considered too young to start a family. Uncircumcised individuals are discriminated in many ways. They are given menial tasks, called names and rebuked for any trivial offences (Meissner, 2007). The boys who participate in social aspects of life are those who

are circumcised. In Kenya, among the Masai and the Bukusu people, circumcised men become warriors and they are referred to as elders once their children are circumcised (Marck, 1997). Male circumcision is seen as a condition of attaining full status in the society particularly, among the Meru in Kenya and Guinea-Bissau and Senegal (Myers, et al. 1985; Niang and Boiro, 2007).

Male circumcision is believed to reinforce masculinity with the removal of the foreskin, which is viewed as a symbol of femininity (Niang and Boiro, 2007). Male circumcision balances femininity and masculinity since the removal of the prepuce is taken to be correspondent with the loss of virginity in women (Niang and Boiro, 2007). Circumcision is believed to form new social relations by creating a strong bond among the circumcised men (Niang and Boiro, 2007). According to Niang and Boiro (2007), circumcision is done as a sign of commitment to God and as an offering of blood sacrifice to the ancestors and the earth. Taljaard, et al. (2003), in a study in South Africa established that an individual who is not circumcised causes misfortune. There is also a link between circumcision and symbolic dying. Initiation rites symbolize death through loss of blood, pain and isolation from society that brings rebirth, new life and a new man (Crowley and Kesner, 1990). These views are in line with Van Gennep (1909) who classified male circumcision as a rite of passage, which is a three-phased process of transition comprising separation from the society followed by a period of transformation leading to reintegration into newly defined social roles.

### **1.2.3 Features of the Initiation Ritual**

Scholars distinguished three phases of the circumcision rites that define its features; the preparation of the ritual that leads to the actual process of circumcision, followed by a process of seclusion and reintegration. Every stage of the circumcision ritual has ethics that are conveyed to the initiates. Van Gennep (1909)'s three-stage process commences with separation.

Preparation involves the initiate preparing his foreskin for easy retraction during circumcision. The members of the family in most instances take part in preparing the initiate for circumcision. Some ethnic groups slaughter animals for sacrificial purposes (Bailey and Egesah, 2006). Some prepare extensive feasts the night before the ritual (Evans, 2015). The Varembe perform ritual bathing, to dedicate the initiate for spiritual protection.

Seclusion of the initiates constitutes the most important part of the circumcision ritual. The time of seclusion varies from two weeks to three months, depending on the meaning attached to the ritual practice. The Varemba seclude themselves up to three months in the bush during the seclusion period. In Tanzania, traditional circumcisers perform circumcision but there is no seclusion after that (WHO, 2006). The period spent in seclusion after circumcision can be viewed as a period of “incubation” where new attitudes and behaviours are inculcated (Niang and Boiro, 2007). It is the period when cultural knowledge is transmitted to the initiates (WHO, 2006). During seclusion, the initiates are exposed to hardships and ordeals that are meant to toughen them in preparation for future life. The initiates often experience bullying, humiliation and starvation.

Education on issues of sex and sexuality constitute part of the education curriculum during seclusion, but it is not necessarily a general component of all initiation rituals (Niang and Boiro, 2007). In Zambia, the essence of circumcision is to develop the character of the boys but there is no sex education in the teaching after circumcision. In Malawi, male circumcision is followed by education on matters of sexuality, hygiene and good behaviour (Ngalande, et al. 2006). In Zimbabwe, among the Varemba, circumcision is followed by education on sex and sexuality issues and various moral values (Sibanda, 2013). However, studies from South Africa in the Eastern Cape have shown that the traditional education component of the initiation ritual has waned off (Vincent, 2007). Generally messages transmitted to the initiates during seclusion focus on sexual reserve and control, sexual education and guidance on marriage and relationships; such messages are common among the Varemba in Zimbabwe, initiates in Senegal, Guinea and Eastern Cape province of South Africa (Niang and Boiro, 2007; Vincent, 2007; Meissner, and Buso, 2007). In Zimbabwe, among the Varemba people, if one engages in sex before circumcision the belief is that misfortune would befall him and his wife (Evans, 2015). In Senegal and Guinea the belief is held that if one engages in sex before waiting for a very long time after circumcision, one’s foreskin grows back again and one would suffer from the pain of circumcision once more (Niang and Boiro, 2007). The Varemba have similar myths. In the Eastern Cape region of South Africa, promiscuity is forbidden and is viewed as something that boys do, not men (Wood, and Jewkes, 1998). Initiates are taught about ways of manhood, sexual health and hygiene (Meissner and Buso, 2007; Crowley, and Kesner, 1990). Conversely, different messages are taught to the initiates in Kenya, among the Kikuyu, where initiates are

encouraged to have sex to prove their manhood shortly after circumcision. The myths surrounding this is that if an initiate engages in sex he will be cleaning the “soot”, and this helps the wound to heal and prevents illness and death (Wood, and Jewkes, 1998).

After the period of seclusion, festivals to welcome the initiates accompany reintegration. Among the Varemba, reintegration takes one week and is accompanied by festivals and the offering of gifts (Evans, 2015). Among the Balante in Guinea-Bissau and Senegal, reintegration takes six days and is accompanied by ritual bathing and the giving of new names to the initiates. The initiates are not allowed to have sex with their wives within the first six days after initiation to demonstrate the newly learnt resistance to sexual attraction (Niang and Boiro, 2007). The Bukusu in Southern Kenya burns sleeping mats and spends nights seated around a very big fire where they are joined by young women (Marck, 1997).

There are variances on the rite of circumcision concerning specific procedures. The Varemba circumcise the initiates traditionally and disregard initiates who obtain medical circumcision as they do not want to mix the two (Evans, 2015). Some ethnic groups perform circumcision in a clinical setting before or after performing the traditional initiation. Initiates in some groups in Botswana are circumcised in a hospital and thereafter they attend an initiation ceremony at a traditional school (Marck, 1997). Therefore, there is a strong conviction that medical male circumcision should be linked with traditional initiation (Kebaabetswe, et al. 2003). The Yao of Malawi perform traditional initiation in their communities after the young people have been circumcised at medical centers (Ngalande, et al. 2006). Circumcision may be carried out at health centers with initiation done in the bush thereafter (Niang, and Boiro, 2007). The Sotho and the Pedi tribes in South Africa practice traditional fragmentation of circumcision and initiation, where initiation takes places several years after the medical circumcision (Marck, 1997). Most of the people in the Varemba tribe are not happy with this kind of fragmentation of the puberty ritual; they prefer circumcision to be done together with the initiation since the two together exert invaluable traditional influence valuable on the initiates (Evans, 2015).

It must be noted that the Varemba male circumcision and initiation ritual runs concurrently with the female ritual of *Komba*. Whilst this study focuses on the male initiation ritual of the Varemba, it is important to note that girls also receive formal teaching on issues of sex and



sexuality and other moral values expected by the society. Both rituals for females and males contribute towards moulding the behaviours of the initiates.

### **1.3 Location of the Study**

The study was carried out in the Mwenezi district of Masvingo province in Zimbabwe under the following Chiefs: Neshuro who is in control of the area from Neshuro Township to Chizumba through Rutenga, Chief Chitanga controls the area between the catchment of Lundi River and Bubi through Mufula, Chief Negari's area stretches from Matande to the Matibi Mission, Chief Maranda's area stretches from Dine to the Nikita Mangena Secondary School as well as Chief Mazetese who controls the area from Mazetese to Sovhelele.

#### **1.4.1 Problem Statement and Research Question**

Most strategies used in the fight against HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe focused on various campaigns against prostitution, encouraging abstinence, being faithful to one partner and the use of condoms (ABC approaches). Despite using the ABC strategy, critics argue that some women who are faithfully married became infected by their unfaithful husbands. Therefore, women who follow the ABC recommendations are at an increased risk of HIV infection. Zimbabwe has also moved beyond the ABC towards another proposed alternative referred to as the SAVE strategy, (Safer practices, Available medication, Voluntary testing and counselling and Empowerment through education). However, the strategy overlooks the social, political and economic aspects of the pandemic and the vulnerable populations such as sex workers and risk groups like drug addicts. Despite these strategies, the prevalence of HIV and AIDS between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine continued to increase (Zimbabwe AIDS, 2017). Puberty rituals, especially circumcision and initiation, have been widely explored but were rarely in line with behavioural change towards the prevention of HIV strategies. Where this was in line with HIV and AIDS, the focus was on circumcision and not on the initiation process. After extensive research on circumcision in many African countries, Zimbabwe has been encouraged by the World Health Organization to practice male circumcision as a measure to militate against the spread of HIV. This process is administered in medical centres as Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision. However, circumcision practiced in medical centres has been adopted from cultural practices. The thrust of medical centres is on the removal of the male foreskin and the initiation process of

the ritual is omitted. The medical process of male circumcision deals with the biological and physical aspects of the disease, neglecting the social and behavioural aspects of the people who are being circumcised. The premise is that the HIV and AIDS pandemic is more of behavioural than a medical problem. Therefore, this research seeks to discover the role and effects of the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual towards behavioural change and how that can be used as a strategy to militate against the spread of HIV in Zimbabwe. The research does not seek to take puberty rituals as an alternative to biological strategies of HIV and AIDS interventions but rather as part of the pool of strategies to deal with the pandemic. It is presumed to be a stand-alone ritual strategy to HIV prevention.

### **1.4.2 The Key Research Question**

The key research question is how can we harness and redirect initiation rituals towards behavioural change as a strategy for HIV prevention?

#### **1.4.2.1 Research Sub-Questions**

This research is guided by the following questions:

1. What is the function of the circumcision and initiation rite in the Varembe culture?
2. How can the Varembe male circumcision and initiation ritual become part of a solution rather than a problem in the fight against HIV and AIDS as perceived by medical science?
3. What is the perception of the Varembe on the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision?
4. How does the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual succeed in moulding an individual's behaviour into behaviours that are conducive to HIV prevention?
5. Is there a possibility of reformulating or redesigning the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual towards the fight against HIV and AIDS?

## **1.5 Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to:

1. describe the Varembe male circumcision and initiation rites
2. assess the perceptions of the Varembe regarding the role of initiation in HIV and AIDS prevention
3. discuss the perceptions of the Varembe regarding the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision
4. examine the implications of the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual on behavioural change and HIV prevention
5. examine how the Varembe initiation ritual could be redirected towards HIV prevention

## **1.6 Validity and Reliability**

Validity refers to the ability of the measuring instruments to instil confidence (Kwale, 1989). The instruments will be in a position to measure what they are supposed to measure. According to Terre Blanche, et al. (2006), a research can be measured in terms of its credibility. Validity may generally mean that the research is able to ensure confidence if its findings are credible. When a research is said to be credible it means it produces findings that are convincing and believable. The research being undertaken is credible because the researcher looks for discrepancies evidence in the proposition undertaken that circumcision rituals could be part of a solution to the problem of HIV and AIDS. In this research, discrepant findings were obtained by using varied data sources, such as people from different levels of life who went through the processes of initiation like chiefs, village headmen, young people and adults. This research also relied on various scholarly views, for example, Kippax, et al. (2011) who note that HIV and AIDS is a social disease and outlined its causes, consequences and human responses, which are deeply embedded in the socio-cultural processes. Yoder (1982) justified the need for a cultural approach to health and illness by noting that health is supernaturally given, therefore disease and illness are supernaturally caused. Bourdillon (1987), Gelfand (1965), Shoko (2007), and Makwasha (2010) justify the same position. Sibanda (2013), Maposa (2011), Malisha (2008), Daimon (2013) and many other scholars made similar researches about puberty rituals and HIV AIDS focusing on different societies. This is the reason why this research sought answers for HIV and

AIDS in the initiation ritual. Rappaport (1999), Van Gennep (1960), Bell (2009) and Victor Turner (1969) wrote extensively on the wide spectrum of ritual practices and their ideology. Wide researches have been made on the shortcomings of biomedicine, which this research seeks to complement. Ebron (2011) also notes the deficiency of medical science and technology in addressing certain issues of health and illness in African society. Chavhunduka (1977) observed that biomedicine is removed from the socio-cultural context of health and illness. Ntseane (2004) in the studies of HIV and AIDS strategies in Botswana notes that the best strategy is to engage people meaningfully in analysing their cultures to determine meaningful strategies to curb HIV and AIDS related problems.

Multiple perspectives were used to interpret data for this study. The research focused on the behaviour of initiates after the initiation ritual to identify its role as a preventive measure against HIV. Green (2007), Trinapoli (2009), Halperin and Baley (1990), Legarde (2000) and Ntseane (2004) believe that a successful prevention process is based on the premise that the HIV and AIDS epidemic is more of a behavioural than a medical problem. There is a need to emphasize that behaviour is socio-cultural. Wide scholarly research has been made in line with issues raised in this study.

To demonstrate that this research is credible and reliable multiple research methods have been used to study the problem under examination. Convergent evidence from different sources has been used from interviews and observation. The researcher interviewed initiates, who were about to go or had gone through the initiation ritual, to narrate their experiences and describe their feelings because their experiences could not be generalised. In-depth interviews were used where non-probability purposive sampling and convenience non-probability sampling were used to select participants who had requisite knowledge and experience about the initiation ritual under study. The methods used gathered rich and first hand information that was analysed in relationship to findings from literature.

### **1.7 Justification of the Study**

The rationale to devote this study to the role of initiation rituals in behavioural change towards HIV prevention in contemporary Karanga society is multifaceted. Empirical contributions on the interaction between puberty rites and HIV and AIDS aiming at arriving at a cultural intervention

strategy hardly exist. Most researches are often highly deductive and speculative. An acute need exist in the Karanga contemporary society for a wider recognition of the role played by culture and religion in relation to the empirical aspects of HIV and AIDS in society. This study hopes to ensure that religious considerations are included in HIV and AIDS policies, strategies, planning, and implementation. Most stakeholders have often neglected and ignored the roles of religion in fundamental issues of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe and beyond.

Research into the roles of traditional institutions in socialising young people and improving their awareness of sexual health in the context of HIV and AIDS is relatively poor. Studies that have investigated culture and its link to the epidemic have generally explored the determinants of sexual behaviour or have analysed the broad cultural context surrounding HIV transmission and sexual behaviour in most cases in a negative light (Caldwell, et al. 1989; Oshi, et al. 2005). The need for a dedicated investigation into the impact of puberty rituals and customs on the sexual behaviour of young people has become critical. Most researches have a tendency of demonstrating the positive association between formal education curriculum interventions and an improved awareness of HIV and AIDS and increased use of contraceptives (Tiendrebeogo, et al. 2003; Kirby, et al. 2005, Hennink and Mturi 2005; Oshi, et al. 2005). Stanton, et al. (1999) argue that there is a penchant of research on the impact of Western-based formal intervention models on sexual behaviour of young people, however, there is need to develop a scope for the investigation of traditional customs and practices and their compatibility with existing sexual behaviour interventions.

The subject on HIV and AIDS needs urgency to find appropriate strategies to militate against the pandemic that has decimated people throughout the world. Global statistics justify the need for fresh minds and fresh solutions to this problem. HIV and AIDS have provided an acute global challenge in the world. According to the UNAIDS (2014), about 36.9 million people lived with HIV worldwide in 2014. Since the discovery of the Virus in 1983, about 25.3 million have died of HIV and AIDS-related illnesses (UNAIDS, 2014). In 2014, about 1.2 million people died in similar conditions. Approximately 25.8 million % of people in Sub-Saharan Africa live with HIV. Approximately 77% died of HIV and AIDS-related illnesses in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNAIDS, 2014). About two million new infections existed in Sub-Saharan Africa, 220,000 victims were children (UNAIDS, 2014).

According to the UNAIDS (2015) report, Zimbabwe had the fifth highest HIV prevalence in Sub-Saharan Africa at 15%. Approximately 1.4 million people are living with HIV including 170000 children, which are equivalent to 4% of the global total (UNAIDS, 2015).

Young people who constitute the backbone of the country are the most vulnerable. Therefore, there is urgent need to search for ways of preventing the spread of the HIV pandemic in Zimbabwe. According to UNAIDS (2015), about 4.1% of young people aged fifteen to twenty four were living with HIV. Approximately 24% of young males and 45% of young females who were tested for HIV, the prevalence of HIV and AIDS is higher in this age group because only 52% of young females and 47% of young males had a comprehensive knowledge about HIV. This limits their ability to engage in safe sex. Young women in the age fifteen to nineteen are reported to have had sex with men ten years their senior. From these statistics it is clear that there is an urgent need for viable solutions concerning the problem of HIV and AIDS.

HIV and AIDS are all-pervading and arbitrary in their selection of victims; there is widespread scholarly research on biomedicine in an attempt to control the spread of the disease. Little research has been done on cultural traditions in Zimbabwe to establish their potential in curbing the spread of HIV. This research seeks to discover possible ways of tapping into cultural traditions particularly the puberty rites of circumcision and redefine them in combating HIV and AIDS. The focus of this study is on the role of the ritual of circumcision and initiation in shaping the behaviour of the initiates towards issues of HIV and AIDS.

## **1.8 Clarification of Terms**

This section clarifies the key terms used in this study.

### **1.8.1 Ritual**

No single definition of the term ‘ritual’ can adequately explain the true meaning of this term and delimit it from what ‘ritual’ is not, but for the purpose of this study, a working definition of this term as conceived by different schools of thought will be adopted. The word ‘rite’ or its Latin translation *ritus* is used as a synonym of ‘ritual’ and is used to refer to specific religious behaviour or action that is regulated by certain rules (Platvoet, 2006). William Robertson Smith uses words like “ceremony”, “sacred acts” and “practice of religion” as supplementary terms for

the word 'rite' (Stausberg, 2006). From the time the concept of ritual emerged, it was attributed with the sense of behaviour and action. These features make the phenomenon of ritual relevant in modern day to shape the behaviour of the youth towards the prevention of HIV.

The word 'ritual' first appeared in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and it was used to denote various concepts, for example, it was used to denote 'customs', prescribed order and performing religious duties. From 1852 to 1910, the word 'ritual' was used to refer to action and behaviour (Henrik, 2007). Ritual was regarded as a type of routine behaviour, no longer pointing towards the individual's consciousness and social organisation. Initially the word 'ritual' was used to refer to a book that was used in directing the manner to be observed when celebrating religious ceremonies and performing divine service in church (Henrik, 2007). Ritual was no longer used as a tool for regulating practice but was practice on its own that pointed beyond itself. Action and behaviour were key issues of the ritual from the outset. The term 'ritual' was also used at this time to refer to repeated and symbolic behaviour (Henrik, 2007).

In 1890, James G. Frazer's publication entitled *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*, used the word 'ritual' consistently. The use of the term by Frazer linked to its original usage and meaning, that of a 'script of behaviour' which had connotations of rules and prescriptions. Recognition of rules in religion was a separate category of behaviour. This could have motivated the use of the word *ritual* to refer to ordered sequences of religious acts or 'acts based on ritual', which were later referred to as 'ritual acts', and were later referred to as 'rituals' (Boudewijnse, 1995). Rules and prescriptions in the Varembe initiation ritual are the determinants of behaviour in an individual. However, none of the scholars mentioned in this discussion showed any interest in ritual as a symbolic behaviour that could be worth studying as a component on its own except Van Gennep (1909) in his book *Les Rites Depassage* [The Rites of Passage].

The study of ritual became more important through the works of Van Gennep (1960), *The Rites of Passage* and Victor Turner's *The Ritual Process* (1969). In the 1970s, the term 'ritual' was used to refer to more than religious behaviour it included an assortment of other secular actions, for example, the swearing in of a president (Henrik, 2007). Scholars attempted to distinguish religious and secular acts by using the word 'ceremony' to refer to secular acts, and 'ritual' to refer to religious rituals (Bell, 2009). In the 1971, the suggestion brought forward was that the

term 'rite' should be understood as the minimum significant unit of ritual behaviour and 'ceremony' as the smallest configuration of rites constituting a meaningful ritual whole and 'ceremonial' as the total configuration of ceremonies performed during any ritual occasion (Stausberg, 2006).

Grimes (1995) suggested that the usage of the term 'ritual' should be replaced by the word 'rite' as in the earlier sense. The emphasis on ritual as it was used in the earlier sense was that it was preoccupied with religious 'acts', 'action' and 'behaviour'. The fact that a ritual's main preoccupation is more on 'behaviour,' 'acts' and 'action,' is relevant to the study of the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual because it harnesses the individuals' behaviour to adjust to prescribed social roles.

Another dimension of ritual is its engagement with action and thought. Stausberg (2006) discusses the conceptual division of religion as phenomena composed of "belief" and "worship". This is similar to Tylor (1956) who views religion as constituting "beliefs and practices" taking practices to refer to "rites" and ceremonies, which constitute an outward expression and practical result of religion. Religious rites and ceremonies are considered dramatic utterances of a religious thought. This perception is in line with the thinking of Lang (1968) who argues that there is a relationship between action and thought in religious activities. The meaning conveyed is that what an individual expresses outwardly emanates from his thoughts. Platvoet (2006) singles out some phrases used by Tylor in his description of rituals and ceremonies, where he views them as, expressive and symbolic performances for practical purposes of intercourse with spiritual beings. These views suggest that every religious phenomenon has theoretical and practical components that are represented in religious ideas and religious acts (rites). This implies that to understand a ritual, there is a need to place it in the theoretical and practical, the expressive and the symbolic context. Roberson Smith (1969) and Andrew Lang (1968) divide religion into religious action and representation, belief and rites. Lang further argues that the concepts of "rite" and "ritual" has to be traced from the idea of thought versus action (Lang 1968). An observation made here is that every religion involves beliefs, observances, thoughts and actions.



From this discussion it could be observed that ritual does not only denote actions through which believers communicate with the meta-empirical realms and beings, but encompasses certain modes of expressive behaviour, which this research seeks to explore.

It would suffice to mention that no definition of ritual has been exhaustive since scholars hardly agree on one single dimension, but for the purpose of this research, some classical definitions are considered:

Turner (1967:19) defines a ritual as the “prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technical routine, having reference to belief in mystical beings and powers”.

Tambiah (1979:119) states that “Ritual is a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality) stereotype (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition). Ritual in its constitutive features is performative....”

Kertzer (1988:9) defines a ritual as, “symbolic behaviour that is socially standardized and repetitive...Ritual action has a formal quality to it. It follows highly structured, standardized sequences and is often enacted at certain places and times that are themselves endowed with special symbolic meaning. Ritual action is repetitive and often redundant, but these very factors serve as important means of channeling emotion, guiding cognition, and organizing social groups.”

Rappaport (1999) takes the term ritual to denote performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers.

All the definitions cited distinguish and sum up most of the characteristics that are typical of most rituals and this research employs these as guidelines in delineating, describing and analysing circumcision and initiation rites among the Varembe people. From these definitions, rituals are presented as culturally constructed phenomena with traditionally sanctioned behaviour, praxis, performance and speech acts. The ritual embraces aspects of human life in its totality, physically and psychologically. There is also an element of the ritual being a collective activity which is prescribed, rehearsed, repeated, patterned, standardised, formalised, rigid, and

redundant, creating and involving social groups which could act as own audience. This could mean that a ritual is symbolic but meaningful and communicative to the participants. The rituals take place in specific places and at specific times, therefore it is separated from the routine of everyday life and is capable of creating change, transition and transformation that are purposeful for the participants to channel emotions (Snoek, 2006).

The definitions underline that the society governs and regulates an individual's action through active participation in rituals. In this study, a ritual is taken to refer to a communal performance usually comprising expected ritual behaviours and prescribed actions that are repeated. The ritual activities are governed by traditions and by the purpose for which they are enacted. Every human being's life is marked by a series of passages, in which one has to pass through from one age to the next. This progression is also regulated by the society so that it will not suffer or have any discomfort caused by this progression (Van Gennep, 1960). Through rituals, society contributes towards shaping an individual's attitudes for the well-being of the society.

### **1.8.2 Rites of Passage**

According to Kyalo (2013) rites of passage are rituals that culturally mark and dramatize a person's transition from one status of life to the other. They are also referred to as 'life crisis' or 'life cycle' rites. These may include birth, marriage, death as well as initiation rites or coming of age rites. Such rituals are non-periodic and are cultural markers of significant changes in one's life. The changes have no link to one's hormonal or biological changes of maturation though they may loosely coincide. They are rather a depiction of socio-cultural order of transition, which may level towards the natural biological order (Bell, 2009). What is gathered from life cycle rituals is that biological order of life is less likely to determine the life cycle changes, which seem to be forms of social changes. What is significant is that the rites of passage provide an inner personal change within an individual. Similarly, the appearance of pubic hairs on one's body is not a sign that one is now deemed an adult. The community is responsible for conferring that recognition at an appropriate time.

According to Bell (2009) the tension between the cultural and the natural order that is sometimes recognised and disguised in life cycle rituals are integral to the values and ideas that shape the identity of an individual. Rites of passage were used from time immemorial and were conceived

as strategies to honour the value of life and to cope with life crises. They place emphasis on the comforting and life-affirming act of ritual. Rites of passage are therefore viewed as integral life affirming activities.

### **1.8.3 Male Circumcision**

Circumcision is one of the oldest traditions undertaken for socio-religious importance and cultural identity. Circumcision is defined as the removal of the foreskin or prepuce that covers the head of the flaccid penis, through surgical or non-surgical means (Mbiti, 1975; Auvert and Talijaard, 2005; Bailey, 2007; WHO/UNAIDS, 2008.). In male initiation, the foreskin is removed as a sign of graduating from boyhood to manhood. Boys undergoing this initiation remain in a secluded place for several weeks or months where community leaders teach them new manhood roles (Sibanda, 2013).

The word ‘circumcision’ is derived from the Latin word *circum*, which means ‘round’ and *cision* from the Latin *caesum* meaning to ‘cut’ (Doyle, 2005). Ancient Semitic such as the Egyptians and the Jews were known to practise circumcision (Johnson, 1993). The Egyptian paintings dated around 2300 BC depicted adult male circumcision. In Egypt, circumcision was linked to sex and sexuality as the Egyptians performed circumcision as a symbolic fertility rite and as a sacrifice to the gods.

The Muslims are the largest group practicing circumcision for religious purposes signifying their allegiance to God. According to Johnson (1993), the practice is known as *tahera*, which means purification. Whilst circumcision is regarded as traditional and strongly encouraged by other Islamic schools, there is no mention of circumcision in the Quran, though it is regarded as an obligation among the Shi’ite, the six Islamic schools of law (Tierney, 2006). The spread of Islam through other regions facilitated the spread of circumcision to non-circumcising groups of people although in some places it was already regarded as a cultural tradition before the arrival of Islam.

The Jews practise circumcision as justified in the Jewish Holy book, the Torah, in honour of the covenant made between God and Abraham (Genesis 17:10). Circumcision among the Jewish males seems to be universally accepted as an outward sign of the covenant.

One theory regarding the Egyptian origin of male circumcision is that some children were born bisexual, so to remove the female part of their organs was to cut the hood of the prepuce. Therefore, this practice was meant to change the boy's feminine attributes to a fully masculine being (Niang, 2006). Although religion is a major determinant of circumcision, it has also been practised for non-religious reasons in Sub-Saharan Africa. Among the Vairemba people, circumcision is regarded as an integral part of the rite of passage to manhood although some regard it as a test of bravery and endurance. Niang (2006) maintains that circumcision is associated with factors such as masculinity, self-identity and spirituality as well as the social cohesion of boys of the same age as they gather for the initiation ritual.

Circumcision for religious and traditional purposes takes place in non-clinical settings although in some cultures it does take place in clinics (Doyle, 2005). Among the Muslims, circumcision is done during neonatal stage, which is a safe stage unlike performed at an older age where there is an increased risk. There is no prescribed age limit for circumcision; it varies according to ethnic values. The most common way of circumcision is when the traditional circumciser pulls the foreskin in front of the glans (Niang, 2006). A sharp knife or razor blade is used for the excision. Among the Vairemba, males going through initiation rituals would leave in secluded places far away from the community for up to three months, where they are taught new manhood roles and societal values. Traditional circumcision is more painful than the clinical procedure because no anaesthetics are used; this, among other reasons, is meant for the initiate to display attributes of bravery and endurance (Doyle, 2005).

#### **1.8.4 Initiation Ritual**

According to Henrik (2007), the word 'initiate' is derived from the Latin word *initiare*, which means 'to begin' or 'to originate.' The word 'initiation' is used to refer to admitting someone into something. It is frequently used to mean admitting a member into a society or club and teach him/her the fundamentals of that society. The word 'initiation' is used synonymously with 'rite of initiation', which is also used by scholars as 'initiation ritual' or 'initiation ceremony' to mean admitting someone into an organisation (Bell, 2009). Although the words 'circumcision' and 'initiation' do not have links to becoming an adult, they convey a distinct sense of initiation into a new social group with a new spiritual stage of life. This perception makes initiation rituals similar irrespective of geographical boundaries, time, place and space. The rituals put the

initiates through ritual ordeals so that they are accepted into the new society, but these rituals are independent of the life cycle transitions. The initiate passes through symbolic stages and passages that redefine his social and personal identity (Bell, 2009). The initiation phase symbolises a period before initiation and after initiation, which marks the transformation of the neophyte. Initiation places emphasis on the training and lessons that the initiate undergoes after circumcision. The process of initiation involves the physical removal from the ordinary world and physical changes in appearance, such as shaving the hair and donning identical clothing. There are changes on one's perception of the initiate, which is achieved through training, teaching, or submission. When the progression into a different framework to achieve identity is established, the initiate is officially confirmed and socially recognised by others as having attained a new identity (Bell, 2009).

Eliade (1995) has three categories of initiation rites; the first category constitutes rites that are connected to the passing of an individual from childhood to adolescence. The second category brings the initiate into a secret or closed society. The third category is the Heroic or Shamanic initiation whose main characteristic is its psychological effects on the individual through ecstasy.

### **1.8.5 Behavioural Change in the Context of HIV Prevention**

According to Greenheart (2008), sexual behavioural change implies the adoption of protective sexual behaviours by an individual through reducing the number of sexual partners and using condoms; maintaining same behaviour or increase risk behaviour.

Coats, et al. (2007) notes that behavioural change involves having knowledge of stigma reduction, delay of the onset of sexual intercourse, decrease in number of partners, increase in condom use, and decrease in the sharing of contaminated objects.

Elvert (2008) notes that behavioural change is dynamic. He discovered that a circumcised man would not just adopt positive behaviours; he could reduce the number of girlfriends but may stop using condoms with his partner.

This research takes behaviour change to mean adopting positive and less risky behaviours that limit one's exposure to the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

## **1.8.6 Definitions of Anthropological Key Terms**

### **1.8.6.1 Ethnicity**

The term ethnicity refers to the way of life or traditions of a group of people. The Varembe or Mwenye people are an ethnic group, native to Zimbabwe, South Africa Mozambique and Malawi (Parfitt, 2002). They speak native languages of their geographic neighbours and physically resemble them. They have religious beliefs like those in Judaism and Islam (Le Roux, 2003).

The Varembe is a social group of people with a common national or cultural tradition of circumcision and initiation. They share the following characteristics; unique cultural traits and a secret language learnt during the circumcision and initiation ritual. They have a sense of communalism, which is learnt and enforced during such rituals. A feeling of ethnocentrism develops among them, that their culture is the best. To safeguard their culture the Varembe people do not allow outsiders to have access to their rituals, which are often performed in secrecy. Anyone who has not gone through the circumcision and initiation rite is looked down upon as an outcast. One who is Rembe has an ascribed membership from birth, which means one is born into the culture so there is good reason to protect it. However, there are few cases of people who become Varembe at a later stage in life.

### **1.8.6.2 Kinship Structures and Power Structure Hierarchies**

The Varembe people is an ethnic group with a particular kinship or power structure where the chief is at the top of the hierarchy, the headman acts on behalf of the chief and his rank is lower and next to the Chief. Below the Headman is the village head who controls the village and in most cases there could be many village heads under each headmanship and chieftainship. The ritual leader is the head of the circumcision and initiation ritual. The traditional positions are hereditary, people who belong to the same lineage are considered most suitable to hold such positions. However, all the positions below the Chief are selected with the consent of the chief and village elders.

## **1.9 Thesis Outline**

The thesis pursues the following outline, Chapter 1, Overview of the Study; the chapter provides a background to the Varembe circumcision and initiation rituals. Chapter 2, Literature Review; the chapter reviews key scholarly contributions related to this study for example, scholars such as Van Gennep, Turner, Eliade and Durkheim were presented in this chapter. Chapter 3, theoretical Framework; the chapter provides the frame upon which the study is based and could be comprehended. Social learning theory is proposed as a theoretical basis for understanding the significance and role of the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual; Chapter 4, Research Methodology and Design of the Study; the research adopted a qualitative research paradigm. The phenomenological and the social scientific methods were selected to explore the experiences and meanings attached to the initiation ritual of the Varembe. Chapter 5 provides the history of the Varembe People; Chapter 6, analyses the Varembe male circumcision and initiation ritual; Chapter 7 provides the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

## **1.10 Summary**

This chapter presented the background to the study, which forms the backbone of this research. It also exposed the problem statement and research questions this research seeks to pursue. The location of the study was delineated, followed by an outline of the objectives of the study. A discussion on the validity and reliability of the research was provided, followed by a presentation on the justification of the study. The next chapter reviews the literature relevant to this study.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented an overview of background information relevant to the understanding of the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual. The chapter formed the basis of the chapters to follow. This chapter explores scholarly views about male circumcision and initiation rites in the context of HIV and AIDS and behavioural change. Scholars such as Van Gennep, Turner, Eliade and Durkheim were presented in this chapter. These Western scholars discussed theories of ritual and rites of passage concisely and it is in this context that the Varembe ritual was interpreted. The theories were useful in forming the basis for the etic perspectives where emic approaches could not provide all the inside information for the Varembe initiation ritual. This chapter reveals the lacuna left by such classical scholars and other modern scholars highlighted in this section and how the gaps had been addressed in the study. The literature of modern scholars such as Anusa Daimon and Richard S. Maposa were reviewed to provide a comparative background of initiation rituals between the Varembe and other ethnic groups in Zimbabwe, such as the Yao and the Shangani.

The research seeks to illustrate how the traditions of African culture, particularly that of the Varembe of the Mwenezi District, have the potential to promote life, health and well-being and reduce the prevalence of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. The goal of the research is to propose a ritual strategy towards HIV and AIDS intervention. The focus of the current research is on the initiation aspect of the male puberty rites, which provides lessons necessary for the lives of the initiates. Circumcision is a component of the larger initiation framework. The study seeks to discuss the role of male initiation rituals as a source of indigenous knowledge that equips the initiates with skills and appropriate attitudes towards behavioural change, useful in HIV and AIDS intervention strategies. McGrath, et al. (1992) point out that initiation rituals provide a platform for discussions on sexual issues with the initiates. The instructions given to initiates



during initiation rituals directly or indirectly constitute the relevant traditional pedagogy required by the youth at the onset of puberty that could be useful in moulding positive attitudes and averting risky behaviours that render them vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. The position this research adopts is that there is a need to work on behavioural change and develop new cultural strategies towards the HIV and AIDS mitigation processes. Most intervention strategies are biological and most discussions on HIV and AIDS focus on biological interventions as key to mitigation strategies (Granich, 2010). Junglebet (2003) notes that circumcision and behavioural change are at the centre of the reversal and prevention initiatives against HIV. He also notes that more vigorous effort is needed to change the behavior and attitudes of males and empowering females at the same time. This contribution is vital in highlighting the need for behaviour change in HIV prevention, which this research wishes to pursue. However, research that places emphasis on circumcision only leaves out other important dimensions of the initiation ritual that deal with initiation and instruction.

The study seeks to discover to what extent the Varembe initiation rituals can provide a resource for HIV prevention and to what extent can this be used as a solution to the problem of HIV and AIDS rather than viewing them as problems contributing towards the spread of the disease. The initiation rituals provide a platform for instruction to convey appropriate virtues, morals and ethics relevant to society. According to Driver (1991), puberty rituals are relevant because they target the most vulnerable group of the society, the youth and initiation rituals have the potential to bring about moral and social transformation to the society.

The role of initiation and the extent to which it can influence adolescence sexual behaviour form the linchpin of this research. Research in this area is limited; therefore, the current study seeks to fill this gap with information gathered from the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual. Initiation rituals could be of paramount importance in changing the attitudes of the young people, especially in heterosexual transmissions of HIV.

## **2.1 Arnold Van Gennep's *Rites of Passage* (1909)**

French anthropologist, Van Gennep (1909) made major contributions to the anthropological understanding of the logic and rationality of ritual through his book *Les Rites de Passage*, translated in 1960 to *Rites of Passage*. Van Gennep's attention was on the social value of ritual

rather than on its value in the era of HIV and AIDS, which this research seeks to establish and close the gap. His research is valid in that it classifies different rituals into two categories, namely the sympathetic and the contagious. Sympathetic rituals have as background Tylor's animistic theory that is based on the concept of power, such as *mana*. The belief that natural species and objects had souls or power. Van Gennep (1960) argues that the rituals themselves are not necessarily animistic but they are based on an outside power for them to produce results, for example a spirit or deity who intervenes on behalf of the performer to produce the desired effects. Contagious rituals according to Van Gennep (1960), could be direct rituals, which produce results immediately without the intervention of an outside agent, for example, a spell produces imminent results. This research intended to find out how the Varembea people's circumcision and initiation rites could be both sympathetic and contagious and to what extent do they believe that behind the ritual practice there is a supernatural force and some internal structures that make the ritual effective without relying on external power.

Contrary to Van Gennep, Kyalo (2013) argues that there is no agreed typology on rituals, the reason being that rituals overlap in form and meaning. However, Kyalo identified two groups of rituals, periodic and non-periodic rituals. Periodic rituals are based on calendar-fixed seasons, for example those connected with the Jewish Passover or the birth of Jesus in Christianity: non-periodic rituals are connected with the human life cycle or rites of passage. These rituals are associated with events like initiation into adulthood, marriage, and death. This research espouses the cultural value of the initiation rituals as discussed by Van Gennep. However, Gennep's focal point was not on the function of rituals and their relationship to HIV prevention. The goal of this research is to go beyond Van Gennep and propose a cultural strategy towards HIV and AIDS intervention.

However, Van Gennep interpreted all rituals as rites of passage, with a three-tier phase of which the structural denominator is marked by a transition from an earlier state to a new one (Van Gennep, 1960). According to Henrik (2007), Van Gennep did not exclusively base his research and findings on rites of initiation only but on various kinds of rites which signified the passage of an individual from one state of life to the other. He paid attention to events that ritualised events such as pregnancy, birth, puberty, marriage, and death that are referred to as life-crisis or life cycle events. Like Eliade (1995), Van Gennep distinctly distinguished the sacred from the

profane, which humans cannot pass without going through intermediary stages. Heinrich Schurtz in 1902 and Hutton Webster in 1908 had already divided initiations into two groups, puberty rites and initiation into secret societies (Henrik, 2007). Van Gennep distinguished physiological puberty and social puberty and argued that the phrase 'puberty rites' is not appropriate and should be dropped because these events are performed at social rather than at physiological puberty (Henrik, 2007). Van Gennep observed that the various types of rituals maintain one structure, in that they all signify the transition of an individual's life from one state to the other in a three-phased scheme progression. Victor Turner was influenced by the work of Van Gennep and developed the concept of transition in (1964) in an essay 'Betwixt and Between'. Van Gennep (1960) noted that rites of separation, rites of transition and rites of incorporation mark the three phases. In line with this view Bell (2009) points that the life of any human being is a series of passages that is accompanied by special acts that are not free of sacred ceremonies. Like Eliade (1995), Van Gennep points that every change in any person's life is accompanied by actions and reactions as a person progresses from the profane to the sacred. This is essential as it necessitates transition from one stage to the other. Van Gennep shows that each human being move from one level of growth to another which could be physiological, spiritual or social and no human being can be extricated from this natural reality.

According to Van Gennep the first phase is separation (preliminal) (Latin, *limen*) from an earlier state of being and social position or from the familiar environment. In the rites of passage, the initiates will symbolically and physically be removed from their day today world to which they belonged. Separation is a feature of the Varembe initiation rituals that culminate in circumcision and initiation; therefore, Van Gennep's theory is useful in the study of the Varembe initiation ritual as it helps in delineating what happens at every stage of the transition during the ritual performance. However, this research contextualises Van Gennep's ritual theory and goes beyond to show how such transition could mould behaviours of the initiates towards HIV prevention.

Van Gennep observed that the second phase is transition or marginal (liminal) in which an individual is between the old and new states. The erstwhile identity is destroyed and the new one is formed. The initiate is 'neither here nor there.' The individual is not in the old state because he has separated himself from the old social position, but at the same time he is not yet transformed to be in the new social position, he is just in between. It is at this stage that the initiate in the

Varemba initiation rites receive teaching and instruction in the responsibilities of the new role. The initiates are equipped with skills to solve and avoid the risks they may encounter in life. The research shows how such states and skills obtained during initiation could be channelled towards the prevention of HIV in Zimbabwe.

Lastly, Van Gennep's classification ends with aggregation or incorporation (post liminal) of the initiate into a new state or reintegration in the society with a new role. In this final stage of the tripartite ritual process the initiate's new status he would have achieved or crossed is confirmed. The initiate's new image is conferred publicly by some acts, for example ceremony giving the initiate some new clothes or gifts. This is a way of announcing that the initiate has achieved a new status or that he now belongs to a new group in society.

What is significant about Van Gennep's phase process is that an individual leaves his social group and its identity, and then he passes through a stage of no identity or affiliation to join another new social group, which confers a new identity on him (Bell, 2009). According to Van Gennep, such rites of passage provide a model of initiation into special groups whose members are not closely tied to any formal age group or any stage of life. Commenting on Van Gennep's three-phased scheme of a ritual, Gluckman (1962) points that the liminal period is sacred and there is a distinction between the sacred world and the profane world as an individual transfers between the states.

The division between the sacred and the profane is popular in the works of Mircea Eliade, discussed later. However, there is no clear-cut demarcation between the two states signified by the sacred and the profane (Gluckman, 1962). Henrik (2007:32) notes, "The problem with Van Gennep lies in the fact that he uses the term "initiation rites" ambiguously. On one hand, he uses it explicitly to refer to puberty rites; while on the other, he uses it from time to time for all *rites de passage* where the object concerned is a person".

Van Gennep's work was selected for this study because of its three-phased program that provides a framework of analysis of the Varemba circumcision and initiation ritual. Van Gennep's approach to ritual is important because it attempts to study ritual in terms of what it accomplishes than what it expresses. The Varemba initiation ritual is analyzed following Van Gennep's three-phased progression and what is important is the transition from one state of social life to another,

which is responsible for transforming or changing an individual's personality. This study endeavours to show how such transformation could be used as a tool towards fighting against HIV and AIDS scourge. The transition is literal and metaphorical, literal in the sense that the initiate leaves a specific territory passing through a defined threshold into another new distinct territory. Metaphorically, they denote the transition from one social state to another. The Varembe initiation rites involve the same sequence of phases suggested by Van Gennep: separation, transition, and incorporation however, this research would go further to fill the gap left by Gennep on how the rituals could be tapped as a useful resource in the prevention of the spread of HIV.

## **2.2 Victor Turner on Rites of Passage Among the Ndembu of Zambia**

Turner provides an important contribution to the understanding of initiation rites through his study of rites of passage on the Ndembu people of Zambia. He was influenced by Van Gennep's (1909) work and preferred to use the term 'initiation' to refer to puberty rituals. Turner (1969) focused on the marginal phase, which he calls the *liminal* (Latin *limen* meaning 'a threshold'). According to Turner, the most decisive position of initiation ritual is when an individual is between the old and the new states, which he referred to as the "Betwixt and Between" states. It is a stage when the ritual leaders transmit sacred knowledge to the initiate (the neophyte). This sacred knowledge is expected to transform the initiate's innermost being. The effect could be psychological or sociological, depending on the nature of the initiation process. According to Henrik (2007), the effect could be equated to rebirth or resurrection after a symbolic death. In his study on the Ndembu people, Turner points out the following:

"Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon" (Turner, 1995:95).

Death is symbolised by the separation of the initiate in the first stage of the initiation ritual. Rebirth and resurrection are represented by the transformation of states during the liminal period and reincorporation into the society in a new state. Turner's views are supported by Mircea Eliade (1995), who argues that the initiatory death is the key aspect in every initiation rite, which symbolises the death of the novice and the return to normal life as a new man, being a new man with a new mode of being. Eliade (1995: xii) notes:

The central moment of every initiation is represented by the ceremony symbolizing the death of the novice and his return to the fellowship of the living. Nevertheless, he returns to life a new man assuming another mode of being. Initiatory death signifies the end at once of childhood, of ignorance, and of the profane condition.

The behaviour of the initiate during the initiation ritual is central; the initiates are passive receptors of knowledge. They obey instruction and arbitrary punishment without complaint or questioning (Henrik, 2007). The initiates also develop an intense feeling of togetherness and unity, which bind them together beyond the normal bond created by society. The question this research asks and answers is, how does such unity become useful as a tool against the prevention of HIV and AIDS?

Turner (1969) explains the significance of separation to the initiate, as that of letting the old knowledge supersede the new knowledge. The initiate must separate himself from the erstwhile state because the new knowledge is viewed as changing his *persona*, therefore his former knowledge should be replaced (Turner, 1995). This view approximates Van Gennep's transformation processes.

In the study on the Ndembu initiates, Victor Turner (1969) notes that separation is a phase which results in all vestiges of personal identities and social status being obliterated completely. Among the Varembe people, retreat or seclusion is the most significant part of the circumcision ritual that culminates in the changing of the individuals' social status (Sibanda, 2013). The initiates live in a 'camp' for several weeks up to three months, this depends on the meaning, and practices attached the procedures (Sibanda, 2013). In Kenya, the Babukusu initiates are secluded for about six months before the actual initiation ceremony (Niang and Boiro, 2007). Niang (2006) argues that the time spent in seclusion could be viewed as a period when the initiates would be breeding new attitudes, practices and behaviours.

Turner (1995) argues that during the liminal the initiate is a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate on which his new status, knowledge and wisdom of the group are inscribed (Turner, 1995:103). Turner (1995) argues that liminality does not only resort to the normal social structure of the initiation ritual, but can also apply to other phenomena that reside on the fringes of the social structure or form the basis of the anti-structure. The phenomena that form the anti-structure could be comprised of principles or people who are on the margins of the social structure. These are the

phenomena which are useful to the liminal but which are not part of it. This research seeks to establish how the Varembe, the role-players in the initiation ritual, such as people like chiefs, village heads and elders in the community, have a bearing on the transition and transformation of the initiate and form part of this anti-structure. Through forming the anti-structure, the liminal phenomena assist in strengthening the social-structure. That which is not liminal is normal and therefore part of the social structure (Turner, 1995). What can be deduced from Turner's argument is that the community of the initiate has a role to play in the transformation of the individual during liminality, and although Turner was not pre-occupied with behaviour that mitigates HIV and AIDS, he provides a valuable entry point for this research to find out how such behaviour could be useful in the prevention of the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

Turner (1995) does not limit his discussion of initiation to life-crisis rituals only, he goes further to include another category of different rituals, which he referred to as rituals of status elevation. According to Turner, these rites are concerned with entrance into a higher achieved status, a political or secret society. Turner also argues that the rites can be either collective or individual but the tendency is that they are performed for individuals. Another category that Turner adds is the rituals of status reversal. These rituals are enacted collectively for large groups of people; they are connected with calendar rituals or group crises. Whilst this research does not trace all rites of passage, the rituals of status elevation and rituals of status reversal in Turner's discussion are useful in showing how an individual can move from one status to the other in society, going either up or down to lower ranks with the community contributing towards his development. The study would show how such status elevation has an effect in moulding an individual's behaviour towards the preclusion of HIV.

### **2.3 Mircea Eliade on the Sacred and the Profane, Myths, and Ritual**

Eliade made a significant contribution to the understanding of initiation rites in his study about Western esoteric initiation rites. He divided initiation rites into three categories and this division is probably the most used (Henrik, 2007). The first category in Eliade's division comprises the rites that are connected with passing from childhood to adolescence. Turner referred to the same rituals as 'Life crisis rites'. According to Eliade (1995), such initiation rites are in the form of rites of passage. The second category of initiations brings an individual to a secret or closed society. These initiations are voluntary and initiates are invited to join society by the society

itself, which makes them different from those in the first category that are exclusively an integral part of the society and leaves no room for objections (Henrik, 2007). One characteristic of the secret society is that they claim to possess some sort of secret knowledge about the deeper understanding of the religion practiced by the secret society (Henrik, 2007). The secret societies are often restricted to a single gender. Similarly, the Varembe initiation rites are limited to a single gender; there is *komba* for females and *chirembe* for males in which both enter into some secretive seclusion like the secret societies, for being in contact with the sacred. In explaining the notion behind secret society, Eliade points out that:

What, in my view, is original and fundamental in the phenomenon of secret societies is the need for a fuller participation in the sacred, the desire to live as intensely as possible the sacrality peculiar to each of the two sexes (Eliade, 1995; 74).

Just like in the Western esoteric rituals of initiation, the reason for the Varembe to go into seclusion and secrecy is to participate more fully in the sacred.

As in the Western esoteric rituals of initiation have two types of rituals connected to the initiatory societies. There is a ritual which marks an admission into the secret society which makes the individual 'one of us' as opposed to 'one of them' (Henrik, 2007). Whilst a secret society could refer to groups of people who seclude themselves for various reasons for example, social, political, economic and religious reasons, this research focuses on the religious secret society which, according to Gist (1940:20), may be defined as,

Any social grouping not based on blood relationship which possesses some ritualistic element of secrecy, the knowledge of which is confined to initiated members.

The secret society separates an individual from his family and the profane world (Henrik, 2007). This is similar to Turner (1969)'s argument of death and the renewal of one's past when an individual goes into seclusion.

The second category of rituals in Eliade's classification move the individual through a system of degrees within the society, which determines the relationship one has with fellow initiates. This category echoes Turner's rites of status elevation. This category has little connection with the profane world (Henrik, 2007). As the individual progresses within closed society, he is expected to take part in more closely guarded secrets of the society.



The third category of the initiation rituals in Eliade's classification is the Heroic and Shamanic initiations. These have little bearing on the current research; however, the psychological impact on the initiates is relevant to understanding the Varembo initiation rituals. According to Eliade (1995), the main characteristic of the group is a change of psychological states that sets the group apart from the other two categories. The initiation ritual leads the individual through some ordeals, which connect him to an ecstatic state that enables him to be recognised as a Shaman. The ordeals in the Varembo initiation rituals do not necessarily conduct an individual into ecstasy, but they are meant to mould an individual's dispositions in accordance with the requirements of the society. According to Eliade (1995), an individual is recognised as Shaman through receiving instruction on ecstasy, for example, about dreams, visions and trances. There is also instruction about Shamanic techniques, names and functions of the spirits, mythology and genealogy of the clan and their secret language. The spirits and Old master-Shamans are responsible for the initiation (Eliade, 1995). The type of instruction Eliade alludes to, provides insight into the type of instruction which the Varembo initiates receive. Henrik (2007) argues that most initiations have as goal the influencing of the psychological states of the initiates, but that of the Shamanic initiation is extreme. Whilst the Shamanic rituals provide a framework of analysing the Varembo initiation ritual, there is no demand for the initiate to reach an ecstatic state in order to be recognized as an initiate. However, the change of an individuals' status entails a change in one's psychological states that are responsible for influencing one's behaviour.

Eliade presents a theory regarding the sacred and the profane that helps to explain certain elements of the Varembo circumcision and initiation ritual, for example, how they comprehend and respond to aspects of the sacred and profane. The question arise as to why the Varembo go into seclusion away from the community to a place they regard as sacred. Eliade considers myth and rituals to be symbols of the sacred, which are understood from the believers' point of view (Cox, 1992). He distinguishes the sacred from the profane by noting that the sacred is defined by the absence of the profane. Eliade (1995) argues that there is a profane space and time that is distinguished from sacred space and time. Myth and ritual operates as key features in the life of religious human beings (Flood, 1999). The manifestation of the sacred is narrated in myth and re-enacted in ritual, and as they do so the lives of the believers are transformed. The initiation sites for the Varembo people attain meaning when placed into the context of Eliade's theory of

the sacred and the profane, since it explains how and why they have chosen these and the position they hold in society.

According to Cox (1992) the ritual is performed in a sacred space which is discernible through the use of symbols and distinguishes the space from any other space and makes it appropriate for a ritual to occur. Through symbol and ritual performance of primordial times, Eliade notes that the believers identify the historical past with the here and now and through this re-enactment, the participants consider themselves to be truly human, they can sanctify the world and render meaningful the activities of their lives (Studstill, 2000). Eliade relates ritual to cosmogonic myth, and emphasises that the ritual recreates creation. This relationship evokes the themes of birth, death, rebirth, degenerative chaos and regenerative order (Bell, 2009). Eliade's view is useful in understanding the Varembe initiation ritual and why they perform the initiation ritual in a secluded place away from the community. Part of the reason for seclusion is keeping the information about the ritual from outsiders. The Shangani people and Yao migrants in Zimbabwe perform initiation rituals in secluded places for secrecy and to distinguish themselves from the rest of the world (Daimon, 2013; Maposa, 2011). The initiates inside the circle are conceived as sacred and those outside are viewed as existing within the profane realm (Sibanda, 2011). The initial stages of the initiation serve as admission of the individual into the secret society, to make him feel part of the group. The notion of the sacred renders all symbols, the initiates and the cultural leaders sacred. The sacred creates a bond between the initiates and the spirit world; religious proscriptions become binding and obligatory. However, Henrik (2007) encourages that the distinction between the sacred and the profane should be treated with caution since no clear demarcation can be made between the two spheres (Henrik, 2007).

Eliade provides an immense contribution towards the understanding of myths and rituals in society. This debate is necessary in this study since it sheds light on the Varembe people's perceptions about the myth and rituals associated with Mazhou and Songogwe Mountains. These are places where the Varembe perform the initiation rituals. The myths around the initiation sites make the ritual that is performed at such places meaningful and credible.

In 1889 in *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, William Robert Smith (1846-1894) placed much more emphasis on ritual than on myth. The implication is that when studying ancient religions, the starting point is ritual and not myth. Myth provides explanations for rituals thus

they are secondary. Robertson points out that myths are derived from ritual. Myth and ritual are two main components of religious practice (Segal, 2004). Eliade (1907-1986) tended to minimise the importance of ritual in comparison to myth and symbol, though he did not dismiss it (Sharma, 2001). According to Eliade, myth and symbols expresses clearly the various experiences of human contact with the sacred than what the ritual can do (Cox, 1992). A ritual cannot reveal what a symbol reveals. Myths narrate the sacred history and the deeds of supernatural beings particularly in the creation of plants and particular kinds of human behaviour. They explain how something began and symbols express the awe and the incredible encounter with the sacred.

Walter Burkert believes that myths and rituals were originally independent and when they come together, they do so to reinforce each other (Segal, 2004). Myths that tell how the gods established a ritual reinforces the ritual by giving it a divine status (Segal, 2004). Some things that people do get acknowledgement from the Divinity. Although the discussion in this research is not about myths, the myth helps in understanding the origins of the Varembe initiation ritual and gives it divine status and credibility. The fact that the Varembe initiation ritual is performed in mountains that have many mythical stories retold about them, explains why the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual has persisted until now. People continue to create myths and revive the ancient myths that keep the ritual meaningful and continue to retain its meaning.

Eliade (1963) notes that an important function of myths is that of explaining a ritual. He asserts that the reason why rituals were considered important in some societies was that they were established by the gods. Myths relate the deeds of supernatural beings and the stipulated behaviour would be an exemplary model for all human actions. Traditionally humankind viewed mythical figures as models to be emulated and imitated (Eliade, 1963). Eliade affirms that societies use myths to sanction certain kinds of activities (Segal, 2004). The myth serves to explain why the Varembe travel to get into secret society during initiation in places that are associated with myth and taboos. Whilst the Varembe do not question issues regarding the discrepancies between myth and ritual, their practices reveal that they associate the circumcision and initiation ritual with the myth surrounding the Songogwe and Mazhou mountains. The ritual carries an individual back to the time of the myth thereby bringing one closer to the spirit world. Eliade points out that;

When ritually re-enacted, myths act as a time machine, carrying one back to the time of the myth and thereby bringing one closer to god (Eliade, 1963; 7).

However, for Eliade, myth and ritual do not necessarily have to coexist; a myth can still be retold without any ritual re-enactment. Therefore, a myth cannot confer the importance given to it by scholars like Malinowski, who argued in his essay *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (1926) that myths provide fictitious accounts pertaining to the origin of rituals. Therefore, myth provides justification for the existence of those rituals and sanctions them (Segal, 2004). According to Eliade, traditional man conceived both myths and rituals as vehicles for the “eternal return” to the mythical age (Segal, 2004). Whilst the debate on myth and ritual provides a clear understanding of the role of myth and ritual in society, for the Varembe, myths act as a reminder of the acts of the spirit world. As they recount their adventures, they detach themselves from the profane world, time and space and supernaturally re-enter the sacred time. Recitation of myths and enactment of rituals are two different meanings that serve a common purpose of remaining in the sacred time. However, whilst the ritual is fixed, myths could be versatile. The ritual is obligatory and faith in the myth could be at the worshipper’s discretion (Stausberg, 2006). That quality of the ritual makes it effective in behavioural change, as it leaves no room for the ‘I can’ or ‘I cannot’ option to the adherence, but to just conform to its precepts. In that case, the myth reinforces behaviour promulgated by the ritual. However, religion in ancient times was not a system of beliefs with practical applications, but was just a body of fixed traditional practices that required all members of the society to conform. Myths are important because they place religious practice into the context of long-term social traditions thereby disconnecting religious practice from individual mental states and placing them in the context of social collectivity (Stausberg, 2006). The characteristic of ritual being collective makes it important in modifying group attitudes and behaviour. The Varembe initiation ritual is a collective enactment that is desirable for group solidarity. The order that exists in the Varembe society after enactment of a ritual emanate from myths. Myth, like ritual imposes order in society, and accounts for the origin and nature of that order. It is also responsible for shaping an individual’s disposition to experience that order in the world (Bell, 2009).

The controversy emanating in scholarly debates about the relationship between myths and ritual as posed by Eliade is useful in shedding more light on the role of ritual in the Varembe society.

The relationship helps to explain the effectiveness of the ritual in modifying the human consciousness towards that which is virtuous.

The myth and ritual theory was introduced to solve the problem of the relationship between myths and rituals. Their relationship caused controversy in scholarly circles. The myth and ritual school represent a group of scholars whose focus was on the ritual purpose of myths. Scholars like W. Robertson Smith, James Frazer and Jane Ellen Haron represented a group of scholars known as the Cambridge School, which holds that myth does not stand on its own but it stands as part of ritual (Segal, 2004). They ascribed primacy to ritual, pointing out that myth reproduces ritual. Their view was that myth does not stand on its own but is attached to the ritual (Segal, 2004). The belief is that myth is a production of successive sequences of a ritual. The theory is disputed because some scholars believe that the two components share common paradigms but do not necessary mean that one developed from the other (Meletinsky, 2000). The later view had been supported by scholars like Turner and Bill Stanner who after studying the semantics between myth and ritual established that there is a connection between ritual and myth and they did not support the view that one precedes and produces the other, but their similarity can be explained in that they share common paradigms (Segal, 2004).

Conversely, Tylor's view is that myth is distinct from ritual since ritual is derived from myth. He held the view that myth is an attempt to explain the world and ritual is an application of the myth where it attempts to produce certain effects (Tylor, 1956). Myth explains the world as an end in itself and the ritual uses this explanation and applies it to the control of the world (Meletinsky, 2000). A ritual presupposes myth existing before. Therefore, for Tylor, myth gives rise to ritual.

Tylor traced religion from the belief in souls and spirits which he called animism, a view refuted by William Robert Smith (1846-1894) who argued for the supremacy of ritual over the notion of souls when explaining the origins of religion and society (Cox, 1992). Smith traces religion from activities that cemented the bonds of the community like ritual, and viewed religion as a series of acts and observances that existed to preserve the welfare and unit of the society (Bell, 2009). This means that for Smith ritual is the primary and fundamental aspect of religion and serves the function of creating and maintaining the community. Another observation is that Smith accorded myth a secondary place by arguing that myth originated as an attempt to explain the meaning of ritual. In that view, it is the ritual that existed first and the myth was derived from the ritual and

not vice versa. From this perception Jane Ellen Harrison (1903) cited in Bell (2009) presume that myth arose as spoken and secondary correlates to the activities performed in a rite. What can be derived from this analysis is that ritual is a concept, which found its deep roots in society from time immemorial. Although this view is controversial, the argument justifies why it is necessary to study the ritual conception in matters affecting the welfare of the society.

The perspectives provided by the scholars in this discussion suggest that there is coherent and meaningful unity to the diversity of religions, culture and histories. The myths suggest that all human beings take part in the powerful socialisation imposed by the sacred. The common experience proves that there is unity in human diversity. The myths attempts to delineate the broad outlines of what is it that constitute meaningful human experience in general (Bell, 2009). The key issue for this study is that myth and ritual patterns continue to speak to the imagination of new generations, making them conscious about events in life.

#### **2.4 Emile Durkheim, *the Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912)**

This research draws on Emile Durkheim's concept of collective consciousness and the idea of the sacred and the profane as distinguishing features of the ritual phenomena. However, Durkheim was not preoccupied with the behavioural change of the individuals or HIV prevention, his concern was social solidarity and moral conviction imbued in ritual performance that has an indirect effect on the behaviour of an individual.

The phenomenon of ritual is a key concept in the sociology of religion. Sociology assumes that ritual has a number of latent social functions that promotes social cohesion and order. A key mechanism towards achieving this is through 'collective effervescence', a concept, which was introduced by Emile Durkheim (1912) in the context of ritual. Durkheim's contribution to this study is vital, especially the relationship between ritual behaviour and adherence to social order. Collective effervescence contributes to the emergence of collective consciousness that establishes social solidarity through collective veneration of the sacred, which binds the community together and conveys meaning to individuals. Veneration of the object that the community regards as sacred constitutes a powerful affirmation of collective consciousness and a call to obey communally defined morality (Von Scheve, 2011). Durkheim in his work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1912, analysed moral life based on collective life rather

than on the private inner conscience of the superego. He understood the fundamental beliefs shaping human life to be essentially social phenomena. Durkheim argues that individuals who form a social group are bound to one another because of their common beliefs. He affirms that belief is not a matter of private religious experience or personal opinion but belongs to the group and unites it. Durkheim argues that “it is primarily through ritual that collective representations are enabled to persist with some measure of authority in the minds of individuals. Insofar as a number of persons share ideas of collective identity and organisation, they feel the need periodically to infuse new life into these ideas. They do this by means of ritual and especially through the agency of ceremonial gatherings” (Greenwald, 1973:166).

Durkheim based his views on Robertson Smith’s ideas on rites of sacrifice. Smith had observed that the rites of sacrifice make provision for reinforcing the bonds of fellowship among members of a primitive community and Durkheim view rites as a means for the making and remaking of society (Greenwald, 1973). Durkheim felt that participation in rituals integrates individuals into a social order through collective celebrations and enactments. According to Collins (2004), emotional energy takes the form of collective emotions that are produced in face-to-face encounters and contribute to the emergence and production of social solidarity in the way suggested by Durkheim (Jones, 1986; Von Scheve, 2011). These views explain collective intention, collective action, and collective behaviour, which are useful in interpreting the role of the Varembe ritual in behavioural change.

Durkheim is indebted to religious practices of the Australian Aborigines for his explanation of the role of collective emotions in which he sought to unveil principles of religion and religious experience (Olaveson, 2004; Cariton-Ford, 2005). Durkheim was preoccupied with the question of how religious beliefs and belief systems emerge and reproduced in the community. He argued that the mere acquisition of religious beliefs was not sufficient to generate a sense of community solidarity and to foster the emergence of collective consciousness. The obstructions in everyday life and the profane world are too strong as impediments for collective identity and collective consciousness (Von Scheve, 2011). The grounding of religious beliefs according to Durkheim was found in rituals in which members gathered collectively to perform various rites (Greenwald, 1973). The feature of these gatherings is that they are effervescent assemblies that are capable of generating heightened and mutual emotional arousal from the collective

performance of various ritual practices (Pickering, 1984). “It is the collective effervescence stimulated by assembled social groups that harnesses people’s passions to the symbolic order of society” (Shilling and Mellor, 1998:196). Durkheim presumed that the collective effervescence in rituals produces conditions in which individual psyches could be transformed and channelled towards collective consciousness. According to Shilling and Mellor (1998), collective effervescence and its component collective emotional arousal are experienced mentally and physically thereby binding individuals to the ideals considered valuable by the social group. Rituals provide a platform for emotional processes and generate symbols of group membership. They assist individuals to experience a shared sense of exaltation and group transcendence. The argument presented is that a feeling that is only experienced through ritual veneration is collective effervescence.

The uniqueness of participating in the ritual lies in that the individuals systematically conceive the emotional energy they experience in the ritual process as having a supernatural origin. The supernatural feeling conveyed by ritual helps this study to explain why the Varembe people make the initiation ritual imperative and why the feeling continues to become incumbent. According to Durkheim (1912), religious beliefs and group symbols observed during ritual enactment effectively convey the meaning and function of the ritual to the group or community in the absence of the actual ritual performance. Apart from conveying emotionally laden meaning, the symbols may activate traces of emotional memory related to the experience of collective emotions in ritual contexts. Normative beliefs and moral convictions derive their effectiveness and compelling attributes partly from effective arousal (Forgas, 2000; Labar and Cabeza, 2006; Von Scheve, 2009).

Stark and Finke (2000) go beyond Durkheim by focusing exclusively on religious rituals rather than on repeated social interactions. Their argument is that confidence in religious explanations increases with ritual participation. They also note that rituals follow customs and traditions and their reinforcement follow central ideas and ideals of the group. Rituals form every part of social life because they are the basis of common cultural knowledge that provides participants with information on how others will act. This helps in the coordination of members and enhances effective collective action as members commit themselves and mutually orient their actions to one another without the need for organization (Chwe, 2001; Jones, 1986).



According to Durkheim, rituals persist because they provide a basis to voluntary collective action, evident in most religious groups (Von Scheve, 2011). Durkheim acknowledged the repetitive effect of rituals, by pointing out that a religious group was not merely for ritual precautions but a diverse system of rites, festivals and ceremonies, which appeared periodically. They affirm and strengthen the believer at regular intervals and secure his bond with the sacred being (Von Scheve, 2011). Giessen (2006) acknowledged Durkheim's perception that ritual enactments provide space for collective identity. He goes further to show that such enactments link present to past rituals. Commenting on collective status of the ritual, Mauss, Hubert, and Hertz (2009), argue that ritual helps to constitute moral boundaries, exclude strangers, provide access to goods and privileges, and define a sacred citizenship that operates across social distinctions status. Collins, (2004) gives emphasis on the repetitiveness of social encounters; he contends that the strength of rituals lie in that they initiate social interaction based on bodily co-presence and mutual emotional adjustment. When individuals engage in rituals, they develop a feeling of solidarity with one another as they recognize themselves to be members of a common undertaking. They reinforce collective symbols, the moral representations of the group that need to be defended and to be reinforced. They also react against the profanation of these symbols.

Durkheim also highlighted another important role of ritual that is significant to the current study. The ritual plays an essential role in maintaining the separation between the domains of the 'sacred' and the 'profane' which according to Durkheim, constitute the defining essence of religion (Greenwald, 1973). In his analysis of moral life, Durkheim highlighted three features that he feels constitute the fundamental structure of every religious group. He argued that any religious group has a system of beliefs that express the sacred and define the sacred and profane; a moral community (or "cult"), such as a clan or tribe that develops in line with these beliefs and enforces the norms and values of a believing society; and a set of collective behaviours defined by rituals (Giesen, 2006). Norms are attitudes and behaviours that are considered normal and values are beliefs about what is deemed moral or immoral, desirable or undesirable.

According to Durkheim, human beings in the world are organized in relation to categories of sacred objects and the tendency of regarding particular objects as sacred persists. Durkheim, like Turner, and Eliade pays much attention to the sacred symbolism of these rituals (Kyalo, 2013). The idea of the sacred is key to the Varembe initiation ritual. Kyalo (2013) asserts that an

individual passes through the natural mode by going beyond the mode of a child; he gains access to the cultural mode where he is introduced to spiritual values.

The sacred could be defined as that which people take to be unquestionable and responsible for societal moral realities. A 'sacred ritual' could then be anything that people do, reminds them and renews their identification with these deep moral realities. In that sense, Durkheim's theory of the sacred is perhaps best understood as a theory of a particular kind of public communication of what is expected by the society and how individuals should respond. It directs attention towards social acts that convey powerful moral meanings. Durkheim's concept of the sacred and profane is valuable to this study as it determines how individuals relate, behave and respond to those aspects considered sacred by the community. However, Durkheim's perception of the sacred and the profane could not be juxtaposed in simple terms with that of Eliade. Sacred space incarnates sacred essence for Eliade; Durkheim's analysis of the sacred and the profane is viewed from a social-constructivist perspective. He would not perceive the ritual as unchanging, but focus on ways in which it is performed in new ways within new contexts, for example in the age of the internet and information and technology, HIV and AIDS. This means that for Durkheim the ritual can be adjusted to suit the new societal roles. In this research, Durkheim's views would make the ritual applicable to the current situation and efforts of mitigating the spread of HIV.

Durkheim (1912)'s *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* continually provides a graphic illustration of how the sacred is made real through what people consume, the material objects (including living things) that they venerate, the way people demarcate out special spaces and what they do with their bodies (Jones, 1986). What matters in this research is the real physical outlook of the sacred witnessed in people through collective moral emotion.

## **2.5 Anusa Daimon (2013), Circumcision among the Yao Migrant Communities**

Anusa Daimon (2013) in his paper '*Yao Migrant Communities, Identity Construction and Social Mobilisation against HIV and AIDS through Circumcision Schools in Zimbabwe*', examines the Yao practice of male circumcision, arguing for its importance as a platform for social mobilisation and AIDS activism. The Yao are people of Malawian origin who reside in the Mashonaland West province of Zimbabwe. Daimon focuses on how the Yao established their

identity through the rite of circumcision and how it benefited them in the fight against the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The reason for reviewing Daimon's work is his concern about the ritual of circumcision and its role in instilling a strong sense of identity in the Yao people, which plays a key role in shaping an individual's thoughts and behaviour. The paper sheds light on the reasons why and how individuals in some local cultural groups practice circumcision and initiation rites. The information gathered by Daimon helps to support the findings on the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual and its role in guiding the behaviour of the initiates towards the prevention of HIV.

Daimon highlights the importance of circumcision among the Yao people; he notes that the quest for self-conscious collective group identity drives the Yao people to practice circumcision. The practice symbolizes their identity as a minority migrant community in Zimbabwe. Loygren (2005) argues that most men in Africa are circumcised as part of their religious and ethnic affiliation. Initially, the Yao people viewed circumcision as a platform for cultural expression as it is a way of initiating young people into adulthood combined with teaching them cultural values (Kubik, 1978).

Daimon examined how the Yao transformed from an ethnically defined community into repositioning their male circumcision towards political and health discourses. The debate is a revelation to the Varembe in that there is a possibility of transforming and redirecting their cultural practices towards the prevention of HIV.

Daimon's analysis of the Yao draws on Melucci (1996) who maintains that cultural processes engender collective identity and are an important concept in contemporary social movements because people make sense of or seek meaning in their experiences. Collective identity is created as people interact, influence each other, and negotiate meanings which emanate from their actions (Melucci, 1996). Daimon shares Durkheim's views that collective interaction is responsible for collective emotions as people network and mobilise each other towards a common goal. Daimon (2013:295) points out that; "Melucci's ideas can be used to better understand how the Yao circumcision rite creates an identity rooted in the meanings of their ritual." What is important in Daimon's discussion is his emphasis on the cultural significance of the Yao circumcision ritual. He established that the Yao could use circumcision as an indirect form of cultural resistance against erosion of their culture which Scott (1990:295) referred to as

“hidden transcripts.” Daimon (2013:297) acknowledged Melucci’s observation of the relevance of collective solidarity and action by maintaining that Melucci observes that;

Collective identity defines the capacity for autonomous action; a differentiation of the actor from others and this ability to distinguish from others must be recognized by these “others”. The Yao have used circumcision (both its ritual and the physical outcome) as a means to distinguish themselves from other non-Yao, particularly the indigenous Zimbabwean groups of the Shona and Ndebele.

This means that the practice instils certain attributes in the individual that make him distinct from others who are non-Yao. The views raised in Daimon’s findings inform the current study on the effects of collective action in shaping the attitudes of the initiates during and after the Varembe initiation ritual.

In his study, Daimon’s attention was on how the Yao create identity and unity, an attribute useful in the collective fight against HIV and AIDS. He maintained that the Yao circumcision ritual involves the surgical act of cutting the foreskin, the pain and the spilling of blood are important in the creation of identity and maintenance of unity by those who went through the process. “This shared experience of pain, loss, and the required stoicism that accompanies the surgery has the capacity to create a bond that helps the Yao men to mobilize against various constraints” (Daimon, 2013:297). “During the cutting of the foreskin, the initiate is not expected to wail, cry out or flinch in pain so that his manhood is not stigmatized” (Daimon, 2013:297). Although Daimon was not primarily concerned with how the ritual moulds behaviour, the process of circumcision instils certain attitudes and behaviour in the initiate that are useful in analyzing the role of the Varembe initiation ritual. Nyathi (2008) argues that the blood that spills during initiation is a symbol of sacrifice that connects the circumcised person to the land. A similar view is obtained from the Balande in Guinea-Bissau and Senegal where circumcision ceremonies are performed in the rice fields as a sign of reverence to the ancestors and the earth (Niang and Boiro, 2007). Daimon’s findings were that the Yao view the blood as representing the individuals’ connection with the soil or the spiritual land of the Yao ancestors.

Mixing the initiates’ blood with soil is a necessary recipe for a successful initiation and transformation into manhood because soil/land is a life-giver that acts as a platform for fertility and fecundity, and so this sacrifice guarantees success in reproductive life as the

process ensures a symbiotic connection with nature and the spiritual realm (Daimon, 2013:297).

The symbolism of blood binds the initiates together thereby creating a Yao collective identity that makes them distinct from the local majority of the Zimbabwean people comprising the Shona and Ndebele as well as other minority groups who do not practice circumcision.

The discovery of the role of circumcision in HIV prevention consolidated the cultural efforts of the Yao people in resisting the pandemic. It is the same social movement that was “reinvented in the fight against HIV and AIDS in a new donor-funded context.” (Daimon, 2013:300). The Yao circumcision obtained sponsorship from the government and donor community upon realising its health benefits towards HIV prevention.

Daimon (2013) identified other reasons why the Yao perform circumcision rites apart from practicing it as a means for collective identity against all forms that deprecate their social fabric. The rite of circumcision is celebrated as a rite of passage from boyhood to adulthood. Circumcision opens up other privileges, for example, a circumcised individual would have access to inheritance and family possessions. A non-circumcised individual has no responsibility and cannot officiate in ritual ceremonies because he is viewed as a child not yet transformed into adulthood. A non-circumcised male would not have access to sex; girls would mock anyone who sleeps with such a man, that is, for sleeping with a child. Funani (1990) adds that an uncircumcised Yao is described as a boy, dog or an unclean thing. The Yao have a mechanism of forcing an individual to undergo the circumcision rite so that he would enjoy the benefits that goes with it. Melucci (1996) asserts that circumcision is a way of accepting members into the group before they participate in collective community action and contribute to the decision-making processes within the Yao community. Such people cannot take part in social mobilisation against threatening situations of marginalization and AIDS in Zimbabwe. Therefore, it is up to the individual to make himself suitable to take part in collective action by conforming to the dictates of the society.

The Yao have circumcision schools known as *ndagala*, which are platforms for mobilising and carving out their identity as foreigners to Zimbabwe and provide collective effort against HIV and AIDS. The circumcision school resembles a village or lodge because the Yao construct

shelters out of twigs and grass. The camp is usually located in the forest away from the rest of the community. In his findings, Daimon notes that the boys attend the circumcision school at the age of eight and the rites last for about a month. He points out that the school is held during the winter months from June up to September. Winter is appropriate as it provides a more suitable condition for the healing of the circumcision wound than in summer. He also indicates that winter is suitable because it is devoid of rains that may affect the smooth running of the initiation process.

Pertaining to the Yao curriculum, Daimon states that “Systematic indoctrination about Yao culture and identity is accomplished through various activities, songs and sacred teachings on sex, sexuality, health, hygiene, death, marriage, and procreation. This curriculum is meant to inculcate a sense of belonging towards a common and collective Yao identity”. (Daimon, 2013:303). The type of instruction the Yao people have and its indoctrination is necessary to this study since they provide the fulcrum to establish the reasons why the Varembe people indoctrinate and what benefit does it convey to the initiates in terms of moulding individual dispositions conducive to HIV prevention. Daimon seems to be preoccupied with the Yao identity and its role in providing a collaborative tool against fighting HIV and AIDS; he is not concerned about finding out how the Yao curriculum changes an individual’s attitude and shapes his behaviour towards HIV prevention.

Whilst Daimon’s argument is on the role of the Yao identity in fighting HIV and AIDS, he does not show how behavioural change could be achieved through cultural systems. He is concerned with strategies that reduce HIV and AIDS at secondary level, such as the use of condoms, which may reduce the spread of HIV. Referring to initiation schools, Daimon found that part of their curricula was teaching the initiates about why and how they should use condoms. The Yao initiation school provides a platform to urge initiates to pursue abstinence and discuss ways of limiting exposure to multiple partners, discouraging dry sex that is prone to exposing one to the risk of HIV infection. Daimon also emphasises that the Yao initiation school provides the youth with instructions on the principles of marriage like monogamy and endogamy that act to mobilise people for HIV prevention. The initiates are encouraged to respect their marriage institutions. Therefore, from these findings, the Yao school of initiation has a way of spreading information about HIV and AIDS. Nonetheless, the Yao seem not to have implemented measures that make it

obligatory for individuals to follow the teachings on HIV and AIDS but use an approach similar to the ABC (Abstinence, Be faithful, Use Condoms) strategies towards HIV prevention. The current research is concerned with primary prevention of HIV and AIDS, that is, how to reduce the number of people who are newly infected by HIV.

Part of the teachings the youth are exposed to during initiation are about the possible dangers of circumcision. Circumcision could promote negative sexual behaviour in circumcised males who could engage in highly risky sexual practices by having a tendency of wanting to experiment with unprotected sex. Sex education in the Yao initiation school equips the youth with knowledge to make safe choices against the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Through collective identity, the Yao could share collective knowledge and hence collectively mobilise against HIV and AIDS. The knowledge gathered could be spread to outside groups through interaction.

## **2.6 Richard S. Maposa (2011), *‘Going under the Traditional Knife’***

According to Maposa (2011), the traditional education system is a key factor in initiation rituals, which act as a source of values that the society recognises. The ritual leaders who take the initiates through the curriculum during initiation are responsible for conveying this traditional education. Maposa (2011) discusses the circumcision rite [*hoko*] of the Shangani people of Chiredzi who occupy the Southern parts of Masvingo Province. Whilst Maposa focused on the Shangani people of Chiredzi, he was aware that the rite of circumcision is not limited to the Shangani people but it is also common to other ethnic groups of Zimbabwe like the Ndebele who live in the Western parts of Matabeleland and the Vairemba occupying the southern parts of Masvingo Province and Mberengwa District in Midlands Province.

Maposa focused on the traditional education system found in the Shangani circumcision rite. He highlights major aspects of the ritual where he draws on some educational components. He maintains that the pedagogical setting of the ritual is the forest, where personality attributes [*Vumunhu*] are conveyed to the initiates through exposing them to hardships in the bush. Whilst Maposa might be applauded for identifying ethical teachings around the initiation ritual of the Shangani people, his aim was not to establish the value of the indigenous knowledge system as a strategy towards the prevention of HIV, but to focus on the general attributes that constitute virtuousness in a human being.

Maposa's work is relevant to this study because it provides justification for the need of traditional education in society. However, he is not explicit as to how this traditional education is imparted to the initiates, but his work merely provides an assumption that the rite of circumcision is infused with traditional pedagogy. Maposa shows that circumcision is a process that cannot be separated from initiation and vice versa.

The other reason for choosing Maposa's work is that he discusses some of the key features and processes of initiation rituals that are relevant to this study. Maposa based his study on male circumcision known by the Shangani people as *hoko*. However, Sibanda (2013) uses the word *hoko* to mean circumcision lodge, but both used the word in the same context of the Shangani people of Chiredzi. Sibanda (2013:3) uses the word "*murundu*" and "*ngoma*" alternatively when referring to Shangani male circumcision. Maposa's work is appropriate for this research because it offers justification for the essence of the traditional education system obtainable in initiation rituals. This research pursues this type of education to find its role in building positive behaviours towards the prevention of HIV. His concern is only limited to traditional pedagogy, he does not consider it as a strategy to prevent the spread of HIV, but he discusses the role of indigenous knowledge systems showing how it has survived the influence of globalisation and new technology.

In his justification of the effectiveness of the Shangani circumcision ritual, Maposa indicates that the rite of circumcision is performed in a strict socio-religious setting. Wiredu (1996) acknowledges this view by arguing that the basis of traditional cultural systems is the life experiences of the people. Maposa's view is supported by Fafunwa and Aisiku (1982) who argue that the traditional ethnic communities have unique cultural beliefs that endure through initiation and traditional education. The views expressed are that the circumcision rite has an impact on the society that performs it and that makes it live and endure by incorporating it in their daily life experiences. Although Gorman (1990) in *The Ideology of Ritual* made an extensive research on priestly rituals, which is outside the scope of this research, he made an important observation that supports Maposa's views as invaluable. He stresses that rituals are best understood in terms of their socio-cultural context. The existence of rituals in the society means they can influence the environment in which they exist. Therefore, according to Grimes (1982), to understand a ritual one has to delve into the hermeneutics of ritual action. Gorman (1990) states that the analytic



perspective should probe into the nature, function, goal, and interpretation of rituals, which is useful to this research. The current study deciphers and brings into scrutiny certain elements of the initiation ritual and show how they can influence people's response to the HIV and AIDS pandemic, an issue that is outside the context of Gorman's research. The focus of this research is to show the effect of circumcision and initiation rites in the behavioural change of the initiates.

Like Daimon (2013), Maposa highlights the importance of identity; he notes that it is a cultural emblem that distinguishes one group from the other. The zeal to maintain identity helps cultural groups to resist foreign ideas destined to erode African cultural practices. In connection with this view, Hammond-Tooke (1962) argues that circumcision must be abandoned because it is cruel and hazardous to health. The missionaries and travellers rejected traditional forms of life like ancestors [*mikwembo*] and belief in esoteric spirits [*mandlozi*] as fetishist (Maposa, 2011). In support of these views, Banana (1992) contents that the Westerners perceived traditional education forms as valueless. Amanze (1998) points out that the Westerners felt that by destroying African traditions they would have achieved the destruction of Satan whom they were engaged in battle with. Maposa notes that the missionaries sought to uproot all forms of traditional education so that they could replace them with the western type of education. Maposa's quest was to have a restoration of indigenous education systems enshrined in rituals. He criticised western education for being superficial and theoretical by failing to provide practical solutions to the problems faced by the indigenous people (Maposa, 2011). Maposa emphasises that western education is "abhorrent" and the cultural and traditional forms of education are pragmatic. He aligns himself with other writers who advocate for the de-colonization of the African mind, for example, John Dewey (1944) who campaigned for the revival of cultural and traditional education forms. The importance of such an education system is to foster collective identity, integrating the people into a moral social fibre. Maposa, like most other scholars, identified the value of cultural forms of education such as bonding people together and addressing the problems that they face in their everyday lives. Culture is a way an individual or group of people share common ideas, aspirations, interests and goals (Maposa, 2011). According to Maposa, rituals provide social cohesion that is necessary to bind people together. Hirst and Peters (1970) perceive education as a process of initiation by which society imparts norms and values. Peresuh (1996) claims that a society that does not educate its people does itself a disservice which may lead to its destruction.

The views Maposa raises in this discussion are pertinent to the current study in that they point towards a collective identity and group solidarity, which are important facets in motivating concerted efforts against issues that destabilise the unity and stability of the society, such as HIV and AIDS. However, this study goes further to discuss the importance of such structures in influencing behavioural change that could be useful in the context of HIV and AIDS. If culture has a link with human consciousness as Maposa suggests, it means that through collective representations the individual psyche can be transformed into a positive disposition that represent collective moral development and identity.

Apart from providing justification for the need of traditional pedagogy, Maposa discusses the key features of the rite of circumcision. He argues that the Shangani circumcision rite is performed in a secluded forest [*enhoveni*] far away from the community. This makes the rite similar to the Varembe initiation ritual, but differs in that the Shangani people erect temporary huts much like the Yao (Daimon, 2013). The seclusion provides a conducive atmosphere where the initiates and the ritual elders can freely discuss those subjects considered secretive and taboo in African society. The secluded environment equips the boys with skills to manage their own affairs independent of their parents. Maposa argues that the forest provides a suitable pedagogical setting for the ritual because it is secluded and regarded as sacred. The forest embodies the religious consciousness of the people and it is for this reason the ritual is considered sacred. The Shangani initiates are taught the moral attributes of humanness, which they call *vumunhu* which Ramose (1996) refers to as *unhu/ubuntu*. Maposa also notes that the seclusion camp teaches the boys gender roles, how to care for people of the opposite gender and avoid unnecessary misconduct. The *hoko* provides a platform for traditional education that develops the initiates into persons with acceptable patterns of behaviour and who uphold the moral values of the society.

Maposa indicates that when the boys are at the forest camp they are referred to as *madzenga* and the accompanying elders are known as *Vadzabi* (equivalent to the *Vadzabhi* in Varembe culture). Most ethnic groups have traditional elders or ritual leaders who are responsible for providing instruction to the initiates and to ensure the sacredness of the place of initiation.

Maposa believes that the circumcision rite among the Shangani people used to be during winter months, between May and July, but it has since been shifted to summer during August and

September because there would be adequate food for the initiates during this time and most people would have completed their harvesting. Sibanda (2013) notes that the Shangani people are circumcised between the ages of thirteen and seventeen. According to Maposa the Shangani rite of circumcision lasts for about three weeks. He states that a traditional unsterilized knife is used to remove the foreskin. Maposa concurs that the circumcision process is painful and initiates are not allowed to shed tears or run away, instead, they are mandated to bear the pain of circumcision like men (Maposa, 2011). He maintains that the pain and loss of blood are symbolic of a triumphal spirit that accords the initiates access to the privileges and responsibilities of courageous adulthood.

The agonizing loss of blood though a 'guarded secret', ultimately manifests itself as the cultural symbol of masculine identity in the Shangani society (Maposa, 2011:481-482).

Sibanda (2013:3) states that a non-circumcised person is considered an outcast, and among the Shangani people, "the uncircumcised men are stigmatized as cowards and given the name *maxuvuri*, a label loathed by the uncircumcised." Maposa posits that circumcision creates a mystical union between the initiates, the ancestral spirits and the creator, "Xikwembu or God." This study is an attempt to find the significance of such attributes of the ritual and their effects in the transformation of initiates. However, Maposa (2011:483) indicates that some initiates pass away as "victims of careless surgery." The implication is that measures should be taken to prevent death at all costs.

Maposa (2011) probes issues of how the circumcision rite contributes towards the psychological and physiological transformation of the initiates. He highlights the events that take place after circumcision and argues that they contribute towards shaping the personality of the individual. Maposa mentions that the initiates join society after their seclusion, clad in new white shorts and white shirts, their heads are shaven and they are presented with wooden sticks referred to as *thuba*. Maposa acknowledges these as symbols of identity and newness in Shangani culture. This newness is also represented by new names conferred on the initiates. He claims that these names have meanings that are aligned to the existentiality of the initiates. Names shape the personality of the individual as he is constantly reminded that he is distinct from other boys who did not undergo the rite of circumcision. The dropping of the childhood name is symbolic to the boys akin to leaving childhood behaviour behind and identify with behaviour that signifies adulthood.

The Varembe have similar practices and this study discusses the significance of the adoption of new names by the initiates and society. From his research findings, Maposa has established that the initiates return home as *tikhomba*, that is, “as different people, full people and responsible people” (Maposa, 2011:482). The impression that Maposa creates of the events during and after circumcision is that they signify a deep transformation in the lives of the boys. This is what Mbiti (1991) means when he maintains that the rite of circumcision separates the individual from the passive, earlier stages of life and propels him into more productive social stages later. Maposa perceives that the completion of the circumcision ritual is marked by a social celebration that comprises brewed traditional beer intended to invoke and invite the spirit world to the cultural activity.

Maposa raises some of the key issues the current study pursues, these being the question of the identity of the initiates and the traditional informal education curriculum to be explored to determine their role in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of the initiates in the context of HIV and AIDS. The significance of the rite of circumcision according to Maposa is that it is a mark of identity. The initiate has a permanent mark of identity, the scar on his penis, which indicates that the initiate is a bona fide Shangani in personality and identity. Maposa echoes Daimon (2013) in noting that the rite of circumcision entitles one to rights, responsibility and inheritance. Sibanda, (2013) in a similar study of the Shangani people also established that regardless of age, a person who has not undergone the circumcision rite would not be considered as fully adult. This means that the rite ascribes status to the individual. “One would be considered unfit for family and community responsibility no matter how old he may be.” Atkinson (1999), points out that the rite of circumcision provides a broad framework of traditional education in which knowledge about cultural values of the society is imparted to the young people through an informal curriculum that manifests through myths, folklores, proverbs and songs. Maposa rarely mentions the exact role of *hoko* in shaping the behaviour of the initiates, but he implicitly considers its value. Commenting on the *hoko* rite, Maposa (2011:483) notes:

The *hoko* rite constitutes a vital socio-religious syllabus of existential life for the initiates to develop a wholesome pattern of behaviour through education, which enables them to live a stable life in society.

Sibanda (2013:5) studied the circumcision rite of the same Shangani people of Chiredzi, and comments on the value of the traditional education as follows:

This was a holistic approach and an integrated experience to learning that combined physical training with character-building and manual activities with intellectual training. Similarly, the completion of the Shangani MC [male circumcision] rite saw the initiates acquiring Shangani culture, behaviour patterns, beliefs, practice, norms and values, ritual practices as well as survival skills based on *unhu/ubuntu* (humanness).

Peresuh (1999) points out that education occurs formally and informally from the early stages of life throughout one's lifetime. Ter Haar (1990) claimed that education conveyed through initiation contributes towards the development of latent physical skills in the child, respect of elders and peers, intellectual skills, character building and promotion of cultural heritage.

Despite the relevance of circumcision rite to the Shangani people, Maposa seems to be aware of some of the challenges faced by the *hoko* from medical perspectives that condemn the ritual for being responsible for the spread of the HIV virus via conditions that are deemed unhygienic (Maposa, 2011). Maposa states that the ritual is criticised for being outdated in its reclusive tendencies that provides a possibility for the transmission of HIV to the initiates. However, this research deems the role of the indigenous knowledge system in initiation rituals as provided by Maposa as possible solutions towards HIV prevention. It pursues the view that circumcision and initiation rituals do not entirely contribute to the problem of HIV and AIDS, but may provide solutions to the problems as well.

## **2.7 Scholarly Contributions to the Stages of the Initiation Rites**

This section presents the views of various scholars on the stages of the Varembe initiation ritual.

### **2.7.1 Initiation into Adulthood**

The initiation rituals do not only include transition into adult status but also entrance into a secret society and admission into a special vocation after completing the ritual process. Niang and Boiro (2007) notes that whilst the details on initiation rituals vary from one society to the next, the underlying issues are that these rituals are transformational. Initiation rituals guide the individual from one stage of life to the next. The ritual coincides with the physiological onset of puberty, and in most cultures, they are performed for either males or females who are between the ages of six and nineteen. However, individuals who have passed this stage may still opt to undergo initiation. Anyone who has not yet undergone initiation is labelled a "boy" regardless of

age (Thandisizwe, 2010; Green, 1997). The words ‘boy’ ‘young man’ ‘adolescent’ are loosely used in this research to refer to an uninitiated male, regardless of age.

### **2.7.2 Purpose of the Initiation Ritual**

Most scholars made useful contributions in providing excerpts of information that direct this research. Initiation rituals have a purpose of moulding individuals into productive and community oriented-adults (Maposa, 2011). They are meant to guide the young people through the important stages of life. According to Munthali and Zulu (2007) initiation rituals are a socio-cultural forum in which adults convey community-held attitudes and beliefs about sexuality to young people and a code of behaviour deemed appropriate for transition into adulthood. Munthali and Zulu (2007) discourse on the necessity of engaging the youth in life teachings, which mould their behaviours. They argue that initiation is a period when the young people would be furnished with advice and instruction expected of them in society. It is the time marked with the transition into the world of sex. The initiation ritual coincides with the physiological stage of puberty at which the boys develop. The adolescents are vulnerable to the risks of HIV infection because at this stage of life they become experimental with the onset of sexual debut (Turner, 1990, Kalipeni, et al. 2004). Appropriate advice about life is needed by the youth at this stage. If they fail to be advised on matters of sexuality, they become vulnerable to reproductive health problems, which include sexual transmitted infections (Vundule, et al. 2001, Tiendrebeogo, et al. 2003). Van Gennep (1908) argues that initiation rituals denote a transition from the asexual life to the sexual life. It is at this time that the young people would require initiation rituals to furnish them with adequate teaching in preparation for adulthood. Mutambirwa (1989) offers views that are useful in understanding some key concepts of the Varembe initiation ritual. He notes that initiation is a process that is determined by a series of rites to mark the beginning of new life that Weiss, et al. (2000), refer to as a process of annihilation of the old life. According to Mutambirwa, life is cyclical it passes from birth to growth and to death. As one passes through the phases of life, one progresses through rites of passage. Initiation fundamentally goes hand in hand with transformation and is key issue in many African cultures. In his studies of health in rural communities of Zimbabwe, Mutambirwa (1989) comments on the relationship between religion and illness, which this research takes as an entry point. He argues that in the Karanga culture, religion is inseparable from illness and health,

and health problems are viewed from a religious-physical position. Religious beliefs and concepts of health, disease causation, human growth and development and the hereafter are all intricately interwoven into a comprehensive approach to health in Karanga religion. Mutambirwa significantly points out that life has phases, but he does not delve into a detailed discussion of the ritual *per se*. Weiss, et al. (2000) also notes that initiation ceremonies usher the child into adulthood. After the performance of the initiation ceremony, the young man would be allowed to perform certain acts which were initially out of bounds.

This study discusses some structures found in the Varembe society that act as motivational factors for individuals to realise the need to go through the initiation ritual and as a result benefit from the process. Initiation is important to traditionally practicing communities because they regard it as a way of attaining manhood.

Male circumcision by the Varembe people is viewed as a mark of identity (Shoko, 2007; Thandisizwe, 2010). An individual without identity has no access to societal responsibly and is treated as an outcast (Green, 1993). Maposa (2011) holds the same view on the Shangani people. The Nyau of Zambia are similarly motivated to obtain an identity by undergoing initiation (Ministry of Gender and Child Development: Zambia, May 2012). Daimon (2013) holds a similar view on the role of circumcision to the Yao migrants who used identity as a cohesive force against the problems of HIV and AIDS.

According to Mbiti (1986), the cutting of the foreskin is symbolic of shedding one's previous life and making oneself ready for adult life. Adult life means having access to sex and marriage and other masculine privileges (Ntozini and Ngqangweni, 2016). The initiate bonds with his people and truly become like them by entering into concurrence through shedding his blood (Mbiti, 1986:94). Mbiti also notes that circumcision is a bridge between the erstwhile passive, unproductive life and the new, active and productive adult stage of life. The permanent scars of initiation are a way in which the identity of a person is engraved on his body and blood (Sibanda, 2013). The ritual permanently affects the person and his physical attributes. Apart from this, the initiation ritual is the only way the boy can attain manhood and adulthood.

After circumcision, the initiate obtains full privileges of the community. Thandisizwe (2010) discusses various other reasons that motivate individuals to get initiated; for example, individuals

who are not circumcised are labelled cowards, boys or dogs. They suffer from social rejection and ostracism. They are not entitled to any responsibility because they are viewed as young and immature. Some of these factors have a psychological drive that contributes towards motivating individuals into undergoing initiation and adopt behaviours that are consistent with the benefits and privileges entitled to such behaviours.

### **2.7.3 Preparations for the Initiation Ritual**

In most African societies, young initiates, both boys and girls, are taken out of society to a secret and secluded place away from everyday aspects of life (Malisha, 2008). Initiation sites may differ depending on the needs of the ethnic groups. Some prepare shelters whilst some just stay in selected mountains or open spaces. Before they move out the initiates engage in certain preparatory rituals. Whilst Van Gennep (1908) lists separation as the first phase of the ritual process, Green (1993) views preparation as an additional phase, which is valuable in understanding the Varembe initiation ritual and forms the first stage of ritual. Green (1993) points out that preparation leads up to the actual procedure of circumcision. For Green, the focus of the ritual lies in circumcision, but the focus of this research is on the instructional aspects of initiation that conveys major lessons about life to the initiate. Green (1993) argues that preparation has physical, social and spiritual dimensions. Physically, the fore-skin of the penis is prepared for removal and this is done by opening the tissue covering the glans of the penis. Niang (2007) states that socially the initiate's family prepares the boy for the pain that he will experience during circumcision through animal sacrifice or through extensive feasts the night before the circumcision ritual. Spiritually, some communities perform ritual bathing, meant to protect the initiate from evil spirits, since the belief is that initiates are vulnerable to attack by evil spirits during the initiation period (Green, 1993). In Zimbabwe, the Varembe prepare home rituals at the onset of the ritual (Shoko, 2007). In Zambia, the Makishi who are believed to be representatives of the ancestors, announce the coming event from village to village (Caldwell, et al. 1997). The initiate is placed in a sacred space for transformation. The study reveals that the Varembe initiation ritual has an inherent control over the behaviour of the adherents through engaging them with sacred discourses.



#### **2.7.4 Activities at the Initiation Camp**

During the initiation rites, the Varembe initiates camp at a secluded place away from the community for period of up to three months (Evans, 2015). During their stay at the camp, the initiates undergo circumcision and receive instruction on the norms and values of the society. Cultural groups use different objects for circumcision for example; the Varembe use a sharp knife (Sibanda, 2013). The Shangani and the Xhosa use a spearhead (Maposa, 2011; Green, 2007). During the time of Moses, the Jews used flint knives to perform circumcision on males who had reached puberty (Burton, 2001). The Jews adopted circumcision from Moses who left Egypt with Hebrew slaves (Zoloth, 2003). According to Gollaher (2001), Jews adopted circumcision from the Egyptians through Moses, where it was used as a ritual that transformed the youth into adulthood and allowing them access to divine mysteries. Egyptian circumcision was a method of purification (Dunsmuir and Gordon, 1999). The body openings were regarded as portals through which impure and malignant spirits could enter the body. The Shangani and the Varembe circumcise as a symbol of unity with the spiritual realm (Mateveke, 2011). Ntseane (2004) links sexuality to spirituality through the spilling of blood during circumcision. According to Lightfoot (1989), the blood that spills is a symbol of procreation and fertility, safeguarded by the ancestral spirits. The shedding of blood is significant in showing that the initiate is entering into an agreement with his people as he sheds his blood. He joins the society of his people and becomes truly one of them (Mbiti, 1986). Nyathi (2008) notes that the blood spilled by the initiate connects the individual to the land. Daimon (2013) held a similar view about the Shangani people, that the blood of circumcision unites the initiate with the land and the spirit world. The fact that sexuality is accepted as a link connecting the dead and the living makes it more sacred and respectable. This is the reason why some cultural groups impose stringent regulations and develop myths on issues regarding sexual behaviour (Niang, 2007). According to these views, the traditions of African culture can be viewed as having the potential to promote life, health, and well-being and could be used to curb the prevalence of HIV and AIDS (Ebron, 2011). These views are derived from Niang, et al. (2005) who argues that the circumcision ritual has a religious dimension where the circumcised young man shows allegiance to God by offering a blood sacrifice to the ancestors and the earth. Taljaard, et al. (2003) aver that not being circumcised is viewed by some cultures as a cause of misfortune. Circumcision is a symbolic death through pain and isolation from society, from which springs new life and

rebirth as a man. Makwasha (2010) and Shoko (2007) hold a similar perspective about the Karanga people, that they consider the spiritual world as responsible for all the events of the universe. Placide Temples' claim that there is a vital force operating in animate and inanimate objects, which they cannot do without (Magesa, 1998). Gelfand (1987) notes that *Mwari* (God) and ancestral spirits are believed to be in charge of everything in the universe. They operate a system for support of their descendants and they may withdraw their support in accordance with their behaviour. Therefore, religious commitment and engagement with divinity during the initiation rituals involve both rules of restraint and commitment in one's conduct, which are necessary in life.

Sexual and reproductive health is part of the education curriculum at the camp. Taljaard (2003) points out that initiates are taught ethics intended to develop character and genital hygiene during the period of seclusion and after the initiation rite. Sexual control and reserve are encouraged in some communities. In Senegal initiates are advised not to engage in sexual activities until after a period of not less than a month, lest the foreskin grow back, which could result in having to go through more painful ordeals of circumcision (Niang and Boiro, 2007). The views assist in shedding light on why the Vairemba have such similar practices. They are prohibited from marrying up to a period of one month due to the fact that the wound is not yet healed (Sibanda, 2011). Promiscuity is discouraged as something that boys do rather than 'real' men. Such views support the central ideas of this study; however, the research reaches beyond into the application and derivation of meanings conveyed by the ritual acts, applying their relevance to the prevention of HIV.

At the initiation camp, initiates are taught ways of adult life, taboos, avoidances, moral life, and social responsibilities (Green, 2007). Everything taking place outside the context of daily life is that which Van Gennep (1908) refers to as transition from one status to another through a ritual process. In his view, the rite of passage introduces the initiate into the social group or tribe together with a new status. The views raised by these scholars are significant in highlighting some important teachings that the initiates go through, as they develop into adults and how they progress in behaviour transformation towards the risks of HIV and AIDS. The initiation ritual imparts a certain kind of attitude, behaviour and reverence towards the ancestors. The ritual also

instils positive attitudes towards sexuality that indirectly benefits issues of health and procreation.

Part of the traditional instruction in the circumcision and initiation ritual conveys qualities of humanity and manhood to the initiate. According to Tutu (1999), an individual with humanity [*unhu*] derives self-confidence and self-assurance from the fact that he/she belongs to a greater collective. The Vairemba initiation ritual teaches the initiates to become human together with others and not alone (Sibanda, 2013). The concept of *unhu* helps this research to establish how the group concept of solidarity engendered through ritual brings about behaviours expected by the society. The Nziramasanga Commission (1999) describes the philosophy of *unhu* as a concept characterised by good humanity, moral uprightness, responsibility, honesty, justice, trustworthiness, hard work and integrity, a cooperative spirit of solidarity, hospitality and devotion to family and the welfare of the community.

Green, et al. (2009) confirm that the period at the camp is not for fun but rather time when the initiates experience toughening up through hardship, humiliation and bullying, so that they will be able to cope with hardships in future life. It is a preparation for future challenges; character building is not taught directly, but is enforced through exposing the initiates to hardships. Despite such treatment, the general attitude displayed by the initiates is that of acceptance of the physical punishment as part of the process of the transition to manhood (Wood and Jewkes, 1998). The initiates become people with no status, they are stripped naked, they have no identity and personal names become invalid. They are treated as dark and invisible but remain sacred and untouchable (Whitehead, 2004). The painful ordeals the initiates go through during the initiation ritual bonds the initiates together and build characteristics of endurance.

The instruction during initiation has some educational features that aim at building certain character traits like fortitude, self-control, forbearance, strength, chastity and manliness, which are conveyed to the initiates through implicit teaching but also through exposing the initiate to deprivation, punishments and criticism. Maposa (2011) reporting his findings about the Shangani of Chiredzi in Zimbabwe claims that during initiation the initiates are not treated gently. They are exposed to harsh weather conditions, ridiculed and beaten for trivialities. Sibanda (2013) confirms this view in the study of the Vairemba and Shangani people of Masvingo Province. Koyana (1980) argues that initiation does not only involve circumcision but it also has an

accompanying process of instruction. The Varembe initiation rites have been chosen for this study because of the educational value that is superimposed in the initiation procedure of the ritual that could be effective in reducing the prevalence of HIV and AIDS through behaviour modification.

Koyana (1980) notes that circumcision teaches the initiate what it means to be a man and an adult. The initiation camp for the Varembe people is meant to provide sexual instruction and guidance towards married life and the dignity of humanity (Maposa, 2011). Sibanda (2013) emphasises that the initiate is taught the traditions, beliefs and history of his people. Circumcision schools could also be used to spread the message on sexual health, safety and responsibility on matters pertaining to HIV and AIDS. Circumcised men are expected to show great social responsibility in their communities, solving conflicts amicably and weighing up decisions. Men are encouraged to consider long-term, stable relationships and eschew multiple sexual partners (Wood and Jewkes, 1998:33).

This research upholds views by Skinner, et al. (2013) that initiation rituals are socio-cultural constructs through which the society conveys expected behaviours, norms and values of the society. Since socio-cultural factors influence adolescent behaviour, it implies that the solution to assist the adolescent should be socio-cultural. The role of ritual in society is as John Mbiti (1969) notes, 'I am because we are, we are, therefore I am'. This is a philosophy of African tribes that I am what I am because of who we all are. The implication is that whatever happens to the individual it has a bearing on the group and whatever happens to the group has a bearing on the individual. Rituals therefore act as reinforcements of both individual and group behaviour through periodic repetition. Kertzer (1988:9) maintained that ritual is:

Symbolic behaviour that is socially standardized and repetitive. Ritual action has a formal quality to it. It follows highly structured, standardized sequences and is often enacted at certain places and times that are themselves endowed with special symbolic meaning. Ritual action is repetitive and, therefore, often redundant, but these very factors serve as important means of channeling emotion, guiding cognition, and organizing social groups.

Rituals help members to give meaning to their lives and order of existence. They act as a propelling force towards revitalising the forces of life that are under threat of degradation. Puberty rites are a means of expressing the societal views and its aspirations. Cultural values,

belief systems and aspirations of the community are therefore transmitted to young people from generation to generation to help them to solve the challenges of life.

Bell (1992) provides a framework of ritual analysis that this research incorporates in the discussion of the Varembe puberty ritual. Bell discusses the function of rituals in society; the question that she raises is whether ritual is associated with action rather than thought. According to Bell, ritual is strategic in that it intertwines the two ends; it brings together the mind, the body and the emotions at the same time. Driver (1991) views ritual as having a transformative quality. Moreover, ritual has the propensity to evoke moral and social transformation in human beings. Durkheim (1965) aptly summarises the central position of ritual in religion by stating that ritual and belief constitute religion. This infers that the initiation ritual plays a central role in many cultures and religions in enabling social transformation of the society. Social transformations and behavioural change are interlinked. What is significant in this discussion is that ritual is capable of transforming an individual, which could be useful in the modification of behaviour towards HIV. Most initiation rites have as their goal to transform individuals, for example, after circumcision the Xhosa initiate shouts, “I am a man” (WHO, 2008). The Shangani and the Varembe initiates are given new names with notions of identity to acclaim their new dispensations (Maposa, 2011; Evans, 2015). The Shangani return home as “*tikhomba*” (different people/ full people) (Maposa, 2011).

Appraising the importance of initiation rituals, Kuzburn and Neuburg (2005), point out that the ritual provides a basis for some psychological adaptations necessary for social interaction. Dunbar and Shultz (2007) argue that rituals provide some mechanisms that prepare groundwork for increased social cohesion, cooperation and problem- solving among the members. The members are provided with an understanding of each other, which may help to augment coalition and co-operation among them. In his findings about the Yao migrants, Daimon (2013) notes that circumcision is associated with dominance and resistance. The Yao have a collective identity towards autonomous action against forces with the potential of destabilising their solidarity. What these scholars suggest is that rituals solve problems by identifying group members, convincing their members to show commitment by making them conform to group values, thereby facilitating and increasing group coalition and cohesion (Rachel, et al. 2016). This view yields to character building and modification that leads to positive behaviour. If people are

familiar with each other, there is a reduction of aggression and an increase in co-operation. In connection with this view, Durkheim (1915) emphasises the role of religion in creating social cohesion and promoting shared beliefs that lead to the creation of unity (Rappaport, 1999). People who belong together or who grew up together are likely to be similar in thought and they would show some commitment towards their behaviour. Rachel, et al. (2016) also affirms that rituals provide salient evidence of behavioural commitment to groups. Rituals are costly to perform in terms of time, commitment, energy, pain and sacrifice, yet group members continue to keep on performing them. This signifies that the members are committed to protect group values. It is evident that the rituals have a long-lasting effect on the participants. There is the potential of extended co-operation and networking of group members when participating in certain ceremonies, which possibly yield into positive attitudes about life. This shows that individuals share similar beliefs and values. Rituals identify those members of the group who are trustworthy and display commitment to future interactions, those who can contribute towards the success of the group (Rachael, et al. 2016).

The scholars discussed in this section were chosen for this research because they shed light on communal living, which is necessary for the group to share and solve problems, especially those that threaten their well-being. Boyer and Lienard (2006) argue that rituals can be used to avert, mitigate and address perceived threats and dangers by activating mental security systems, which in turn produce security -related behaviour. Shared beliefs produce strong bonds and increases affiliation to the group in times of stress (Jong, et al. 2015). Legare, et al. (2015) confirm that adolescents are sensitive to social conversions such as rituals; they imitate ritual action in earnest and with a higher degree of fidelity. This in turn motivates other people to engage in ritual or be affiliated to social groups (Watson, et al. 2014). Initiation rituals provide a platform for common knowledge, which makes individuals mutually commit and orient their actions towards one another. The group is therefore responsible and accountable for the behaviour of every individual.

Nevertheless, research findings by Jeannerat (1997), Hennink and Mturi (2005) on the initiation schools in South Africa downplay the general roles of initiation schools. They maintain that the traditional schools do not educate participants about safe sex and the dangers of HIV and AIDS, and may encourage risky sexual behaviour. Traditional surgical practices have been identified as

potential sources of HIV infection especially when performed amongst a group of people (Feldman, 1990). If the serial use of unsterilized equipment features prominently, it may as well place the initiates at risk of HIV (Ajuwon, et al. 1995). This current research seeks to discover whether the Varembe initiation rituals can be accused of transmitting HIV and which elements in these rituals may be responsible for the spread of the disease instead of its prevention.

### **2.7.5 Views about the Process of Reintegration**

An initiate's new role and identity is confirmed by the society through 'welcome home ceremonies'. The society acts as a public eye to reprimand stray behaviours in the initiates. After a long period in seclusion, the initiates break from privacy. The period of privacy and seclusion is concluded by performing a 'ritual of coming out' (Wilson, et al. 1952; 214). To signify the new and transformed life, the initiates are welcomed back into the society by festivals and rituals of reintegration. Initiates in some communities like the Varembe initiates are conferred with new names (Shoko, 2007). In order to demonstrate their resistance to the sexual allure of women, initiates are not allowed to sleep with their wives during the first few weeks (Sibanda, 2013). This is contrary to the Nyau initiates of Zambia who are encouraged to have sex soon after the initiation ceremony (Ministry of gender and child development, 2012).

## **2.8 Cultural Ideology of Ritual, Illness and Disease in a Karanga Society**

This research is underpinned by the function of circumcision and initiation rites in the prevention of HIV. This section discourses on the philosophical position of different scholars on ritual, illness and disease in a Karanga society.

### **2.8.1 Circumcision and Initiation Rites in History**

Various scholars like Lawson and McCauley (1990) discuss the history and meaning attached to rituals. Lightfoot (1989) argues that rites of circumcision are linked to purification, fertility, and reproduction in some African societies like Sudan and Kenya. The Middle Eastern population, which has an ancestral link with the Varembe people, provide historical evidence that such rituals were used to appease and regulate deities and spirits, apart from being used as strategies for the treatment and prevention of disease. The Varembe trace their ancestry to the Jewish and Islamic people and their cultural practices reflect this interconnectedness (Johnson, 1993; Parfitt,

2000; Mandivenga, 2003; Doyle, 2005; Tierney, 2006). Ancient Semitic people such as the Egyptians and the Jews were known for practicing circumcision around 2300BC (Johnson, 1993). The Egyptians performed circumcision as a fertility symbol and as a sacrifice to the gods. Initially circumcision was a religious ritual reserved for the elite both men and women, although other people performed it (Lightfoot, 1989). The Muslims also practice circumcision for religious purposes and mostly to signify their allegiance to God (Johnson, 1993). According to Johnson, the practice is known as *tahera*, which means purification. Whilst circumcision is regarded as traditional and strongly encouraged by other Islamic schools, there is no mention of circumcision in the Quran though it is regarded as an obligation among the Shafiite, the six Islamic schools of law (Tierney, 2006). Axel (2006) expounds on the persistence of ritual which requires that they serve some adaptive functions. Ritual is thus viewed as an adaptive response to the social and physical environment.

### **2.8.2 Functionalist Explanation of Ritual.**

Many leading authorities on religion and ritual have taken functionalism as the most adequate approach to explain rituals. Most anthropologists such as Bronisław Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard, Clyde Kluckhohn, Talcott Parsons, Edmund Leach and Levi Strauss, adopted a functional approach to explain ritual and religion (Collins, 2004). Most functional explanations of ritual attempt to explain it in relation to the needs and maintenance of the society. Society functions adequately only if necessary requirements are satisfied and it is further asserted that ritual satisfies needs (Collins, 2004).

Lawson and MacCauley (1990) suggest that if rituals were devoid of any function it would be unnecessary to transmit them. Therefore, the fact that rituals are transmitted means that they are of importance to the society. It is this recurrence of the Varembe initiation ritual that makes it effective in conveying norms and values of the society. Axel (2006) views rituals as creating an auratic sphere or arena of timelessness and immortality. Being timeless means that rituals are not lifeless relics of the past, but can be useful to infinity to transform societies in the fight against HIV and AIDS pandemic.



### **2.8.3 Downplaying Indigenous Religions**

African traditional religions were looked down upon in scientific circles due to the perception that traditional religions had nothing of value to contribute in providing solutions to problems of health. Mbiti (1996) maintains a similar stance by arguing that African religions and philosophy must admit defeat, because they have failed to provide solutions to human loss, immortality and death. Therefore, according to Mbiti, African traditional religions cannot remain tribal and nationalistic since they provide no message of redemption or escape from human predicament. This research turns to Mbiti's views to show contrary views about indigenous religions and to use such views as background to provide valid link to the role of religion, on issues of health and well-being. The premise is that African traditional religions, puberty rituals in particular, could be a possible resource in the fight against HIV and AIDS and should not be viewed with negativity.

### **2.8.4 Shortcomings of Scientific Strategies**

Moreover, this study builds on the shortcomings of scientific strategies to HIV prevention. Ebron (2011) affirms the inadequacy of medical science and technology in addressing certain issues of health and illness that afflict African communities. According to Chavhunduka (1977), biomedicine failed because it is removed from the socio-cultural context of health and illness. In a similar view, Ntseane (2004) in his studies of HIV and AIDS strategies in Botswana notes that the best strategy is to engage people meaningfully in analysing their cultures to devise meaningful strategies to curb HIV and AIDS related problems.

There is a consensus among scholars that biomedicine on its own is inadequate in HIV prevention strategies. Several scholars for example, Mburu (1991), Ranger (1981) and Good (1987) agree that biomedicine was introduced in Africa in a patronising and imperialistic manner with the aim of compelling indigenous people to abandon the so called 'unscientific' medical ideas and to advance colonial economic interests and subordinate Africans to the interest of capitalism. According to Barbee (1986), this is the reason why modern sciences have negative views towards the African people's understanding of HIV and AIDS, creating the impression that the traditional and modern approaches to the epidemic are undesirable. In his research on biomedicine and ethno-medicine, Barbee (1986) notes that a vast number of researchers and

practitioners from the modern science fraternity and biomedical schools of thought tend to dismiss traditional beliefs on HIV and AIDS as inaccurate and false. A study of the Vairemba initiation rituals could show that traditional religions and cultural beliefs have positive contributions to make towards the health and well-being of the people. This research shows that biomedicine on its own cannot complete the puzzle, there has to be mutuality, with both sides complementing each other in the prevention of HIV.

Jackson (2002) avers that modern medical practitioners are deeply opposed to traditional healers because they are often faced with the problem of treating patients traditional healers have failed to assist. This research shows awareness of some alleged harmful effects of religious practices that may exacerbate the possibility of spreading HIV as alluded to in the “*Men, HIV AIDS*” report (2004), that both traditional culture and some religious practices have contributed to the spread of HIV. Berer and Ray (1993) who studied traditional practices in most African countries point out that culture and some religious practices contribute to the spread of HIV. Among these practices are tattooing, incisions, ritual scarification and circumcision, all of which are associated with HIV infection. Conversely, this study engages the cultural practice of circumcision and initiation to establish the possibility of working contrary to that and to find out how it can help to prevent the spread of HIV by harnessing and reformulating it in the fight against the pandemic.

Although modern sciences blame Africans in general, their traditional religions and ethno-medicine as observed by Pretorius (1991), and Neuman, and Lauro (1982) that African indigenous religions have much to offer, for example, through puberty rituals. A phenomenological investigation may show that the Karanga people have many different ways of explaining health and illness, particularly HIV and AIDS, and they provide solutions to the prevention of the disease. It follows therefore that a constructive dialogue and an effective collaboration with African culture can achieve far more than either side working in isolation.

### **2.8.5 The Value of Health to the Africans**

The subject of HIV and AIDS is important because the lives of people matter. Mutambirwa (1989) stresses that the immense value placed on life by the Africans determine the value they place on health. He observes that perceptions of health, the cause of disease and the management thereof all emanate from the people’s views of life. The question of the aetiology of disease

shows that the Karanga people's intrinsic conviction about issues of health and well-being emanate from their beliefs, which make it plausible to search for solutions to the problem of HIV and AIDS in their religious traditions. The strong adherence of the Varembea people to the divine through initiation rituals is because they perceive that they are powerless, helpless and vulnerable to the natural and supernatural forces of the universe (Mutambirwa, 1989). The main characteristic of the Varembea initiation ceremony is the effort to immerse the initiate into the sacred reality for full protection. Shoko (2007) maintains that the provision of healthcare among the Karanga people is inseparable from their philosophy of life. His research places issues of health, illness and the rites of circumcision in a religious and cultural context by arguing that the Karanga people find solutions for health issues in their culture and religion. This research finds justification in Shoko's arguments to pursue cultural responses to the prevention of HIV, especially when understanding the need for health by the Karanga people includes the need to comprehend their perception of health problems and concepts of life.

The acceptability of puberty rituals on HIV and AIDS intervention strategies is one reason for harnessing spiritual favours through performance of rituals. The reason is to seek divine favour and protection from those events that threaten the existence of humanity. In his research on health and well-being, Shoko (2007) opines that the cause of disease is witchcraft, spirits, socio-moral and natural causes. In a discussion of the cultural traditions of the Varembea people of Mberengwa, Shoko points out that the Karanga people find solutions for diseases and illness in their religion. The major cause of illness is witchcraft. Witches and sorcerers are the major instigators of disease (Shoko, 2007). This view is supported by Yoder (1982) who notes that the Karanga people believe in the natural and supernatural causes of illness. Yoder (1982) suggests that religious healing is based on the premise that health is supernaturally given and maintained and that disease and illness is supernaturally caused. This implies that the spiritual realm plays a major role in the lives of the Karanga people (Bourdillon, 1987; Gelfand, 1965; Shoko, 2007; Makwasha, 2010).

The strict adherence and the imperativeness of ritual in an African society emanate from their view of the world (Bourdillon, 1987). In the Karanga culture, witches are a threat to the health and well-being of every human being. One may perform acts of witchcraft ignorantly, meaning that one may unwittingly injure others. When one becomes conscious of acts of witchcraft he/she

may cause injury out of malice, aimless viciousness or envy, even to those whose health and well-being he/she has interest in (Gelfand, 1965).

Shoko (2007) and Gelfand (1964) stresses that the Shona people's health and well-being is at the mercy of witches who are believed to be insidious and who possess charms to harm anyone. According to Bourdillon (1987), witches and sorcerers are malicious people who may cause the illness and death of their victims for no valid reason. Their acts emanate from pure and unjustified malice. Gelfand (1964) holds the same opinion in his studies about the witches and sorcerers in the Karanga culture; he notes that both witches and sorcerers are capable of harming others through magical means. The concept of the numinous and strict adherence to the ritual in the Varembe initiation ritual emanate from the fear of such malicious forces. This knowledge informs the current research that the Karanaga people have a strong conviction that the source of disease and illness is in their beliefs and religion. It is therefore reasonable to search for solutions to the problems of HIV and AIDS from within their belief system. These scholars focused on disease in general. However, this research uses this valuable information to justify the need for religious and cultural solutions to the problem of HIV and AIDS in an attempt to harness traditional religious practices towards HIV prevention strategies. The views are summarised by Mbiti (1996:73) who observes that:

For Africans, this world is a religious universe, an invisible cosmos of spiritual beings presses hard upon them and African people see the universe, than they look at or feel the visible and tangible world.

The evidence provided shows that the Shona people are in constant confrontation with their religious universe, therefore, they always refer back to it for disease and illness. Whilst most of the scholars attempt to find explanations for disease and illness from the religious worldview of the African people, they fail to ponder on the rites of puberty. Shoko, when researching circumcision among the Karanga people, does not focus on HIV and AIDS prevention, but on the components of the ritual in general. It is this lacuna in knowledge, which this research seeks to fill. The current study is informed by the question whether there is a possibility of redirecting puberty rituals and practices towards HIV and AIDS prevention.

### **2.8.6 Morality in African Indigenous Religions**

Magesa (1998) and Mutsvairo (1996) raise important views that offer fresh ideas about the Varembe initiation ritual. They argue that aspects of morality are intimately connected to the religious beliefs of the Africans and every stage of puberty rituals has ethics that are conveyed to the initiates. The perspective that health is supernaturally determined points towards the maintenance of essential moral norms guarded by various spiritual agents. Reward and punishment mediated by spiritual entities always occur in Karanga religion (Shoko, 2007). It follows therefore that health and well-being among the Karanga people should be understood in the context of the view that Africans live in a world enthused by spirits who uphold moral order. For that reason, illness does not just occur; it has to be explained from the Karanga people's worldview. Therefore, the Karanga people's view of the world should be the starting point to understand HIV and AIDS and the possible solutions. The affected person could have offended the supernatural powers by neglecting his ritual duties or by breaking taboos or exhibiting anti-social behaviour.

On a similar note, Magesa (1998) holds the view that it is very difficult to grasp the religion of an African without understanding the position occupied by the ancestral spirits. After all, they are believed to be the watchdogs of moral behaviour, anti-life attitudes of the individual, family, clan and the society as a whole (Magesa, 1998). African indigenous religions have a role to play in shaping the moral values of the society. The views raised are useful in showing the value of the spirit world in determining the behaviour of the individual and instilling moral order in society.

Mutambirwa (1989) and Gelfand (1987) maintain that the concept of morality and immorality and the Karanga traditional beliefs correlate. They agree that morality and purity of mind go hand in hand with good health; immorality is associated with ill health. This view means that illness in the Karanga worldview is inextricably connected to socially approved behaviour and moral conduct. This view is conversely different from biomedicine, which seems to operate externally from the social relations that produce it (Chavhunduka, 1977). Yoder (1982) posits that with its positivist roots and neglect of its own history, medical science and technology has ignored the socio-cultural context of its own theory and practice. This research in determining whether HIV and AIDS is caused by moral or immoral behaviours would be linking disease and

illness to the socio-cultural context of the people. This position assists to show whether rituals are determinants of moral and immoral behaviour and provide therapeutic solutions to the problem of health and illness that is prevalent in society.

Consequently, understanding the morality of the Karanga people and their perception of the spiritual cosmology that enforces their emotional and behavioural commitment require an examination of their view of the world and ethos contained in their religious symbols such as rituals. This creates a caveat through which this research could coerce the African people to appreciate the controlling motivations of their values and attitudes.

The Karanga people believe that the sky is filled with a plethora of spirits arranged in a hierarchical order and responsible for immoral retribution. Makwasha (2010) states that the hierarchy in the sky is understood by the Karanga people to be the origin and meaning of values, norms, health, misfortune, family and good life and good health. When the universe is not in order, there is disharmony on earth and the universe may respond by summoning thunder, drought, diseases, and plagues in pursuit of justice (Mbiti, 1991). This retributive justice shapes attitudes and dispositions of individuals to adjust to the dictates of the universe. The punitive role of the universe and its ways of inspiring certain ethics in the individual is useful in moulding the behaviours of the initiates.

Gelfand (1987) discusses at large the Karanga people's perception of the religious cosmos and this study resonates with his examination of the attributes of the Supreme Being, which helps this study to explain the autonomous solidarity and the obligatory nature of the Varemba circumcision and initiation rites. Gefand (1987) states that at the apex of the Karanga concept of the universe is the sky where the supreme deity is believed to reside, which the Karanga people call by an assortment of names that determine their attitudes towards him. They call him *Mwari*, *Wokumusoro*, *Nyadenga* (one who resides in the sky), meaning that he is sovereign, everything emanates from him. The Karanga people do not lose sight of an influential, potent and creative force whose origin and destiny is never known. *Mwari* is regarded by the Karanga people as *Musikavanhu* (the creator) and the owner of the world and everything in it. He is regarded as the ultimate court of appeal of all spirits and human beings. *Mwari* is also understood to possess the supreme power that binds all things existing in the universe in solidarity. It is evident therefore that in the Karanga world view, any profound event, illness or anything that goes beyond their

scope of understanding is attributed to *Mwari* or other spiritual entities. The research aims at discussing the Varembe ritual and explains how such beliefs determine individuals' attitudes regarding the ideals of their society. It is the strong belief in the Supreme Being that determines moral proscription and the efficacy of the Varembe initiation ritual as a vehicle of culture.

In the initiation ritual, the Varembe people link circumcision with sexuality, all of which are derived from the Supreme Being (Maposa, 2013). This view is based on Bourdillon (1979)'s argument when he affirms that *Mwari* in Karanga culture is referred to as the provider of life, *Dzivaguru* [great pool] a word with connotations of fertility. *Mwari* is the provider of rain, which nurtures all living things on earth. The Karanga people rely on *Mwari* for happiness and security through his rain. Rain in Karanga religion is also a symbol of spiritual well-being and a manifestation of a smooth social order. This means that the Karanga people rely on *Mwari* on all matters affecting their lives and well-being. The idea links with the fertility symbols of the Varembe initiation ritual that this study pursues for strategies towards the prevention of HIV.

The Karanga worldview depicts a plethora of religious objects, which influence their lives, health and illness. Gelfand (1987) provides an analysis of the Karanga worldview with a slant to justify the reasons why the indigenous people cannot do without their religion in all matters affecting their lives. Gelfand metaphorically traces the name of the Karanga Supreme Being *Mwari* from the word *mweya* [air]. This could mean that the people cannot do without *Mwari* in as much as they cannot do without *mweya*. On the other hand, human beings have within themselves part of the life force of the Supreme Being, *mweya*, who makes an individual a living person. The spiritual bond of *mweya* existing between human beings and the supreme power provides a bond that cannot be broken. This compels the Karanga people to keep on relying on *Mwari* and their religion as the source of life and health. The power of the Supreme Being is all-pervasive; if one breaks taboos or violates some prohibitions, he is liable to punishment through illness or bad luck (Owomoyela, 2002). The concepts of punishment and reward, which are prevalent in the Varembe initiation ritual, are useful in explaining some restrictive measures imposed on people who disobey norms and values of the society. This explains how the Varembe society minimises mischief in individuals. The retributive measures act as a guide towards societal expectations. The Varembe society has structures to control group behaviour. According to Bourdillon (1987), the contravention could be intentional, unintentional, or unknown to the

violator, but the violator will still evoke punishment, harm or illness and its effects may spread to other members of the society. This therefore means that illness in Karanga religion does not only affect the individual but the whole family or society, in as much as a ritual act is not an individual act but a group phenomenon.

Nevertheless, the Karanga people do not discard the modern health system completely, they infuse it with traditional health. This view paves way for a holistic discussion of the two medical approaches. The Karanga people are not troubled by the natural or physical causes of illness and death, for example, when old age or insects cause illness. Ordinary illnesses are treated with home remedies or are taken to medical doctors. Thorpe (1996) states that only prolonged illnesses are referred to traditional healers. Chavhunduka (1977) similarly maintains that the Karanga people consult modern healers as precedence; when the illness persists, it is no longer natural. Jackson (2002) draws a similar argument by noting that serious ailments are attributed to antisocial or unspiritual behaviour or to ancestral spirits who would have withdrawn their protection allowing the victim to become prone to evil spirits. Such ailments require the attention of the traditional healer. These scholars seem to agree that whilst the Karanga people do not discard modern healing practices completely, they recognise its role up to a point, but on intricate health issues, they turn to their religion. These scholars maintain that the Karanga seek solutions to their health and illness issues from within their indigenous religions.

Green (2009) further highlights the gap this research seeks to fill in the study of HIV and AIDS in Southern Africa that most HIV prevention programs focus on risk reduction technology, for example, the use of condoms, rather than on sexual behaviour. This means that sexual behaviour should be the focal point of most interventions. Since behaviour occurs in a socio-cultural context, cultural factors such as rituals will be explored in this research in an effort to establish ways of reducing the prevalence of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. A successful prevention program is based on the premise that the HIV and AIDS epidemic is a behavioural rather than a medical problem. Behaviour is determined by socio-cultural and moral factors (Green, et al. 2006).



## **2.9 Summary**

The chapter reviewed existing literature on the topic under study and explored scholarly views about the circumcision and initiation ritual in the context of behavioural change, aimed at preventing the spread of HIV in Zimbabwe. The study centres on the religious and cultural dimension of the Varemba initiation rites to determine how they create meaning and assist in the quest for solutions to the issues affecting their health and well-being. The intention is to interpret the ritual elements and subject them to close scrutiny in order to detect those elements that are capable of moulding the individual's behaviour into positive and less risky behaviours. This study attempts to find possible ways of utilising cultural traditions such as those of the Varemba initiation rituals and redefine them towards HIV prevention strategies. Chapter Three presents the theoretical framework guiding this research.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented scholarly views on initiation rituals and how these views could be useful in shaping the discussion on the influence of initiation rituals on behavioural change towards the prevention of HIV and AIDS. This chapter outlines and explains the theoretical framework that informs this study. Social learning theory is proposed as a theoretical basis for understanding the significance and role of the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual in HIV prevention through the behavioural change of the individuals. It is used to interpret the meaning and significance of the circumcision and initiation ritual from the perspective of the Varembe people. Social learning theory explains how behaviour is learnt, reinforced, maintained, and diffused to other members of the society.

#### **3.1 Social Learning Theory**

The social learning theory is used in this research to interpret how behaviour is learnt and acquired by the initiates during the Varembe initiation rituals. The theory is used to show how behaviour, attitudes and values are transmitted to the initiates. The social learning theory is also referred to as the social cognitive theory, the roots of which are embedded in the work of the psychologist, Albert Bandura (1986).

The social learning theory represents the social construction of reality. The view is that human beings are capable of creating reality which then produces itself. The social learning theory has as its core the conception that what people know and believe about how the world is constructed is true because they are responsible for its creation (LeComte, 2000). The social learning theory is about the reality we make, not what we find. This means that human beings do not search for reality but contribute to its creation. This view is useful in understanding the Varembe initiation rituals as acts that are created by human beings who perceive meaning in them. The rituals in

return influence the human beings by creating meaning, which they understand. Initiation rituals are a result of the society's creation and the Varembe people have their reasons for creating these. Initiation rituals are a reality that conveys meanings which the indigenous people can understand and which help in changing their mindsets. Rituals are primarily forms of human association that result from shared ideas (Wendt, 1999). Wendt (1999) states that meaningful behaviour or action is possible only within a controlled and predetermined social context. Humanity is responsible for shaping its behaviour in line with societal and cultural expectations. The social learning theory considers how rules and norms condition people's behaviour, preferences and understandings (Babbie and Mouton, 2001).

According to Bandura (1986), the interaction between human beings and their environment produces learning. This means that the continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural and environmental determinants contribute to the shaping of an individual's behaviour (Smith and Berge, 2009). The continuous interaction of the Varembe people in the circumcision and initiation ritual influences the behaviour of the individual. Therefore, a platform is created in the group to influence group behaviours in which individuals copy the behaviours of other group members. An individual's behaviour is best explained in the context of the interaction of these variables. The social learning theory has its foundation in the behaviourists' theories, which emphasise on stimulus responses (Callery, 1990). Any observable behaviour does not emanate from internal determinants such as thinking and emotions, but they are a result of environmental stimuli.

The social learning theory is also known as the social cognitive theory because it introduces concepts of cognitive response (Tutuska, 2006). Social learning may take on different dimensions that include behaviour patterns, rules of creating behaviour, cognitive competence and judgemental standards. According to Bandura, most behaviour is learned by observation through modelling (Bandura, 1986). The theory is useful in explaining the role of the mentor and ritual leaders in the Varembe initiation ritual, in shaping the behaviours of the initiates. Modelling has been defined as doing what others do or imitating others (Smith and Berge, 2009). Individual people are responsible for modelling the behaviours of other people.

The social learning theory is useful in explaining the forces behind the Varembe initiation ritual that influences individuals to behave in certain ways. This helps to understand the effectiveness

of the Varembe initiation ritual in moulding an individual's behaviour. There are factors that influence individuals to behave in a certain way; these determinants are referred to as positive and negative reinforcements (Strand and Smith, 2008). They produce feelings of adequacy and efficacy to enact new behaviour. The reasons for the uninitiated male in the Varembe culture to feel compelled to undergo the initiation ritual could be explained in the sense that society has structures which provoke a feeling of inadequacy, for example, through labelling the uninitiated individuals as "boys", regardless of age, and treat them as outcasts by depriving them of societal rights and responsibilities. Therefore, the social learning theory provides groundwork through which one can interpret and understand the Varembe ritual clearly.

According to Strand and Smith (2008), social norms, suggest that people do things to please or follow people they admire. There is vicarious learning in which human beings learn through observing the effects of the environment or other peoples' behaviour. They learn what is expected of them through their behaviour via the experiences of others, especially if those behaviours or experiences have been reinforced.

The social learning theory is useful in helping to understand the behaviour of the initiates and that which influences their change of behaviour towards HIV prevention. In the framework of social learning, the Varembe circumcision and initiation rites could be taken as a form of communication that transmits certain character traits considered valuable by the society. Initiation rituals provide humanity with a framework of interpreting and understanding the world. Therefore, they could be understood as interpretive tools that are used to correct and guide people towards appropriate behaviour. The initiation ritual prohibits the individuals from displaying the kind of behaviour that might demean the cultural worldview and the world of the ancestors.

In as far as the Varembe initiation ritual is concerned, there is a need to consider the degree of its impact on the people and the extent to which their behaviours are governed by rules and regulations governing rituals. If any influence is exerted, this indicates that the Varembe initiation ritual has a transformative character; it has the capability to transform people's attitudes towards HIV and AIDS.

Human beings seek objective meaning of their experiences and the objects in the world they inhabit. Therefore, human beings are capable of socially defining and finding meaning on issues concerning their health, disease, illness and treatment. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), the culture of a society is responsible for creating how people think and feel about sickness and healing. The Varembe people as a cultural group have norms and values that govern their understanding of sickness and disease. Healing is possibly derived from their worldview, if they hold the belief that sickness is caused by the supernatural world. This means that individuals make decisions about whether to consult an ethno-medical or biomedical practitioner. The implication of this regarding this research is that if conceptions of disease, illness and healing are socially and culturally constructed, it therefore means that solutions to health problems are also socially and culturally constructed. Kleinmann (1995) posits that healthcare systems are socially and culturally constructed and form part of social reality. This implies that solutions to the problems of HIV and AIDS can be culturally constructed and culturally imparted.

According to Gergen (1985), social learning discourse is a process whereby people describe, account and explain the world they live in. In this study, the Varembe people explain their worldview within the context of the initiation ritual and HIV and AIDS. Knowledge is not something that people possess but something they construct. For this reason there is a need to explore cultural practices in order to interpret initiation rituals into meaningful solutions towards HIV prevention strategies. This research is an attempt to create knowledge from the Varembe initiation ritual and to show how this knowledge can become useful in addressing the problems of HIV and AIDS pandemic. Initiation rituals disseminate cultural values that are embedded in society and legitimise information, behaviour, and knowledge about norms and values of the society.

Social learning provides a framework for this research because enables insight into the value of the Varembe initiation ritual and how meaning is constructed and understood by the society. In brief, social learning sheds light on how the rituals are used symbolically to provide an explanation of the narratives behind peoples' daily practices and experiences.

The social learning theory is used in the current study as it assists in determining the meanings ascribed to the initiation ritual by the Varembe people. The social learning theory provides this research with insight into the meaning and interpretation of the Varembe initiation ritual phases

and procedures, such as the meaning of seclusion, circumcision and the reintroduction of the initiates and society. The theory is useful in interpreting how the Vairemba understand and interpret sexuality issues in line with behavioural change.

Much of the social learning takes place when an individual observes the actual performances of others and sees the consequences their actions. The Vairemba society provides a cultural environment that reinforces and punishes individuals who stray. If for example, a young person changes from the group of non-circumcised people to join the other group of the initiates, the chance of him being accepted by the new group is high and thus reinforced by that group. Smith and Berge (2009) notes that a self-regulatory process occurs when an individual has his own perception about what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and acts accordingly (Bandura, 1985). This is dependent on the society as there are certain customs that are acceptable and some that are not acceptable, such as performing an initiation ritual publicly or mingling with people who do not belong to the same cultural group during the initiation ceremony. One who does this becomes an outcast and is liable to be punished. The theory explains how different forms of behaviour are acquired and maintained, which is important in understanding the Vairemba initiation ritual. The ritual regulates behaviour and actions; if the behaviour results in rewards it will be reinforced, however, if it results in punishment, it will be discarded. Certain behaviours are refrained from if the individuals see their models being punished for exhibiting them.

### **3.1.1 The Concept of Social Diffusion and Innovation in the Social learning Theory**

Social diffusion explains the transmission of ideas and behaviours from a central power to the rest of the society. Bandura (1986) introduced the concept of social diffusion to explain how ideas and social practices spread from one society to another and how they influenced social change. He also introduced the concept of innovation, which is conceived as any idea, practice, or service perceived to be new (Bandura, 1986). Smith and Strand (2008) note that innovation, be it technology or behaviour, spreads to the other parts of the community, beginning with early adherents.

Bandura (1986) also explains that when new ideas and practices are introduced the rate of absorption and acceptance is very slow; customs resist change because they are uncertain of the outcome. Similarly, in the case of using male circumcision, rituals as a strategy for the

prevention of HIV might gradually be accepted. The rate of acceleration only increases when more information is supplied about the application of new approaches and their potential benefits. The theory helps this study to interpret and understand the role of the Varemba initiation ritual in the diffusion of information considered valuable in the Varemba culture.

### **3.1.2 Social Cultural Diffusion**

To improve the quality of life, some societies are pressurised into changing some of their traditional practices. Improved benefits can only be achieved by displacing some entrenched customs and introducing new social organisations and technologies (Bandura, 1986). King (1999) contends that societal norms, religion and gender power relations help to infuse meaning into behaviour, enabling positive and negative change. Similarly, in the case of the Varemba initiation ritual, an individual member identifies with peers who may have gone through a similar initiation ritual. The one whom he identifies with has the most will have had contributed significantly to his behaviour. According to Bandura (1986), these are called social incentives. When people act in certain ways, they do so to gain approval from others and they generally desist from actions that would incur disapproval.

### **3.1.3 Status and Power Incentives**

According to Bandura (1986), social power also provides a measure of control over the behaviour of other people. Through the power some members exert over others, they enjoy the jurisdiction over people's lives; they enjoy material rewards, social recognition and privileges associated with high rank. Social changes are resisted when they conflict with the entrenched societal values.

### **3.1.4 Relevance to the Current Study**

The social learning theory explains how people copy and reinforce behaviours. In the context of the Varemba initiation ritual, modelling is thought of as an effective mode of transmitting values, attitudes, and patterns of thought and behaviour of the initiates and the society. Modelling can influence moral thinking and moral judgement and can have an impact on the development of what is deemed right or wrong and therefore can influence the choices one makes about life, especially in the context of HIV and AIDS.

After the performance of the Varembe initiation, chances of deviating from the cultural values of the group are limited because one's behaviour is always influenced by the behaviours, attitudes and moods of the peers. An individual is inclined to live according to the dictates of the ritual and the likelihood of being contrary are unlikely because of those who have authority, for example, cultural leaders who act as overseers and always enforce the values of the society. Observational learning is very effective in transmitting values, attitudes and patterns of thought behaviour in the Varembe culture where learning is achieved by observing others and by going through the same initiation ritual with others. Through observing the behaviour of peers, the individual would consider reinforcements for enacting certain behaviours. The reinforcement would only be effective if it is positive and avoided if it were negative. The social learning theory is significant in this study to explain how the individual's behaviour is moulded, reinforced, maintained and transmitted.

### **3.2 Summary**

This chapter discussed the theoretical framework which underpins this research. The social learning theory explains how human beings act as agents of the society's creation, and the reasons they have for creating worldviews. The theory provides an objective platform of interpreting the influence of the Varembe initiation ritual to the society as they attempt to ascribe meaning to the world they live in. Humanity shapes one's behaviour in line with societal and cultural expectations. The meanings they produce are transferred to the rest of the group through the social learning theory. By observing the behaviours of peers, an individual would consider reinforcements for enacting certain behaviours and therefore is motivated to change his behaviour and behave like his peers. The next chapter outlines the research methodology.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN OF THE STUDY**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

The previous chapter discussed Albert Bandura's social learning theory that examines how human beings are capable of creating meaning from their worldviews and how an individual's behaviour is influenced by his environment. The current chapter discusses the methodology and the research design. This research focused on establishing the significance of the circumcision and initiation ritual among the Varembe people as a tool to militate against the spread of HIV by influencing behavioural change in the initiates. The research exposes the perception of the Varembe people on issues of illness, and the function of circumcision ritual in society. Apart from that the research sought to establish how the Varembe initiation ritual could assist in moulding individual behaviour into useful behaviour in curbing the spread of HIV. To achieve this, the research adopted a qualitative research paradigm. Terre Blanche, et al. (2006) note that paradigms refer to all that which encompass systems of interrelated practices and thinking that benefits the researcher in defining the nature of the enquiry. This is achieved through epistemological, ontological and methodological dimensions. Epistemology specifies the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the knowledge sought. Ontology refers to that which is to be studied and the meanings derived from it. Methodology refers to how the researcher intends to practically go about studying the phenomenon.

The phenomenological and the social scientific approaches were selected to explore and to understand the experiences and meanings attached to the initiation ritual of the Varembe. The methodology used in this research, which includes the selection of the population, method of sampling and methods of data collection and analysis were outlined. Ethical considerations for this study were discussed in this section. The reasons for choosing the qualitative research methodology was discussed and justified including the qualitative methods used in the research.

#### **4.1 Research Design**

A research design, according to Babbie and Mouton (2001), is a plan that guides the course of the research. It is a blueprint of how the study will be conducted. It refers to procedures of approaching problems and obtaining answers. Research design also provides control over those factors that could influence the outcome of the research. This research used qualitative, descriptive, explorative and contextual research designs to explore and describe the experiences of the Varembe initiates who undergo the ritual of circumcision and initiation in the Mwenezi district.

A phenomenological investigation of consciousness follows three steps. The first involves gathering the descriptions of experiences from the population being investigated. The second involves the analysis of these descriptions to understand the elements that constitute the phenomena experienced. Lastly a research report is generated containing a clear and articulate description of the experience.

#### **4.2 The Qualitative Research Method**

The qualitative research method is defined as a multi-method that involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the subject matter under study (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). The implication is that qualitative research studies phenomena in their natural settings so that meanings are interpreted in terms of what the people involved have experienced. Qualitative research makes use of various materials, ranging from case studies, observation, personal experiences, introspective biographical interviews and visual texts that offer descriptions of the experiences and their meaning of the respondents under study.

Cresswell (2005) asserts that a qualitative research enquiry uses distinct methodological traditions to explore the social problem of humanity. The researcher conducts the study in a natural setting, analyses the data supplied by the respondents. The premise of qualitative research is naturalistic, holistic and inductive. Naturalistic entails studying actual world events and situations as they unfold naturally. Holistic means that the phenomena being studied should be understood as a complex phenomenon that is more than the sum of its parts. Inductive research, according to Terre Blanche, et al. (2006) means immersing oneself in the details and specifics of the data to discover important categories, dimensions and interrelationships. Qualitative research

is understood as an interpretative study of a specific problem or issue where the researcher is central to the interpretation obtained. Qualitative research involves exploration, elaboration, systematisation and the provision of an illuminative representation of the issue set aside for the study (Banister, et al. 1994).

This study uses a qualitative research enquiry, the rationale being that the research investigates the experiences of people, their conceptions and their descriptions of the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual. The intention of the research is to find the underlying cause of the rich and complex social phenomena being studied. According to Merriam (2002) the qualitative research approach attempts to discover how people in different contexts behave, feel, think and express themselves in response to given contexts. Polkinghorne (1992) argues that qualitative research methods are useful to generate categories for understanding human phenomena and for investigating the interpretations and meanings that people attach to the events they experience. The qualitative research method allows the researcher to seek opinion on the findings, the purpose of the Varembe initiation ritual and how it could be useful in HIV and AIDS mitigation strategies. The qualitative research method uses the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection. Analysis relies on the feelings, impressions, and interpretations of judgments obtained from studying the phenomena (Punch, 2004). In this study, the qualitative method afforded the researcher the opportunity to interact with the respondents and obtain accurate data. According to Merriam (2002), reality is constructed by the individual interacting with his social worlds. This means that qualitative research is interested in understanding the meaning constructed by the people about their world and how they make sense out of their experiences. The researcher's interest in the current study was to extrapolate meaning ascribed to the ritual of circumcision and initiation by the Varembe, how they interpret the ritual to suit their daily experiences and how their interpretations of the ritual could contribute towards behavioural change that is conducive to the prevention of HIV.

#### **4.2.1 Social-scientific Method**

The study, being a qualitative research, employs insights from the social-scientific method to the study of religion, considering that religions operate in society. This method is also called sociological criticism; it emerged in the early 70s and was pioneered by scholars such as the sociologist, Max Weber (1864-1920), historian Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) and biblical scholar

William Robertson Smith (1864-1924). The social-scientific method is broad and includes an assortment of other fields of study for example, history, anthropology, archaeology, psychology and sociology. The method analyses the social aspects of a community as well as its ideological and social dimensions. The social-scientific approach attempts to explore the original social and cultural settings of the phenomenon under study in this case the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual.

John Elliott (1993) a Professor of Religious Studies applied the Social scientific method to the study of Biblical texts. According to Elliot, this method studies the social aspects of the form, content, the conditioning factors and the intended purpose of communication. It also studies the correlation of the text's linguistic, literary, ideological and social dimensions. Lastly, Elliot notes that the method studies the manner in which this textual communication is both a reflection of and a response to a specific social and cultural context. The implication is how it was designed to serve as an effective vehicle of social interaction and an instrument of social, literary, and theological consequence. All these are aspects of the social scientific method which complement other methods of study. Its strength lies in the appreciation of the correlation between the different factors.

#### **4.2.1.1 Rationale for Using the Social Scientific Method**

Religions express themselves in a socio-cultural context as it involves a group of people who are engaged in some type of collective action and who are related to one another in various ways such as organizations, institutions and values (Elliot, 1993). The social-scientific approach presupposes an analysis of the social and cultural dimension of ritual and its environmental context as well as how these interrelate. The method could assist in demonstrating the correlation between belief, behaviour and notions on the Varembe ritual of circumcision and initiation. Social scientific theories provide empirical frameworks of evidence, which this research could use to study and interpret the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual.

The approaches also provide a platform for an exegetical analysis of the social-cultural dimension of the phenomena in their environmental context, the intended purpose, consequences and its effectiveness as a vehicle of social communication (Elliot, 1993). This research employs the method to understand the structure of the ritual and its ideological meaning and how the

Varemba use the ritual as a vehicle to communicate the norms and values of the society. The social scientific method helps in comprehending the social dimensions of human experience (Elliot, 1993). This means that the study of the initiation ritual provides a possibility of understanding the value ascribed to the ritual by the society practicing it. For Elliot (1993) the social scientific method is a component of the historical critical method. This implies that studying the historical background of the ritual and the society practicing it may uncover useful information from time immemorial regarding the ideology of the initiation ritual which in turn will provide valuable information that could be utilised in this study.

Wayne Meeks, one of the contributors to the social-scientific method, in his book, *The Social World of the First Christians*, discourses on the morals, ethics, culture related to the early church and other religious activities (Esler, 1994). This research also supports the same notion of probing the morality, ethics and cultural issues related to the Varemba initiation ritual. The research extends to include the Jewish and Islamic history behind the Varemba initiation ritual in order to determine its original use and function in the early societies for a clearer understanding of the phenomenon. This research demonstrates how the beliefs, behaviour, ideas, material conditions, religious symbols and social relations surrounding the ritual of initiation generate new perspective, which Elliot refers to as pivotal values (Esler, 1994). These are cultural values which include concepts of honour and shame entrenched in males and females respectively: dyadic rather than individual personality, perception of 'limited good', kinship and marriage structures, and the controlling codes of purity and pollution and how these are implied and expressed in the Varemba initiation and their relevance to the issues of HIV and AIDS.

#### **4.2.1.2 Strengths and Limitations of the Social Scientific Method**

The social scientific method is multifaceted; it consists of many domains that are useful in the understanding of the Varemba initiation ritual. This research explores cultural anthropology, a tool in the domain of social-scientific method. As a social science, it studies human societies and their social systems comparatively. It delves into cross-cultural comparative studies to show how certain cultures are different from others. In this case, the social scientific method helps us to understand how the culture of the Varemba people differs from other cultures. The central concern of anthropology is human behaviour, viewed from a critical perspective.

The Social scientific method uses disciplines from other domains like psychology and sociology. According to Theissen (1987), psychological exegesis seeks to describe and explain human behaviour and experience in a given social context, which is relevant to this study. Sociology describes typical social attitudes and behaviour towards the circumcision and initiation ritual. It also analyses how typical behaviour is attributed to society and considers behavioural patterns determined by society. The social-scientific method questions the practice of the circumcision and initiation ritual whilst seeking answers within the social structure.

However, the social scientific method was criticised for its overemphasis on the study of society at the expense of the divine, which is useful in this study to understand how and why people behave in a certain manner. Furthermore, the approach has a tendency of putting phenomena in historical contexts and views them in retrospect. Nevertheless, the social-scientific approach is useful in the study of the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual. It helps to show the perceptions of the society practicing it and the value they ascribe to this rite as tool for moulding the personalities and behaviour of the initiates.

#### **4.2.2 Phenomenology as Methodology**

The phenomenology of religion, which is sometimes known as the comparative study of religions, is a qualitative research method originally pioneered by philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) (Werts, 2006). Husserl's was concerned with discovering meaning and essences in knowledge. Phenomenology describes the structure and experience evident in consciousness (Wertz, 2006). Husserl rejects the view that objects of the external world exist as independent entities and he also reject the notion that information about the objects is reliable. He argues that people can only be certain about how objects appear and present themselves to consciousness.

The word 'phenomenon' is derived from the Greek word '*phaenesthai*', which means to show up, to flare up or to appear. The word is a construct of the word '*phaino*' meaning to bring to light. Philosophically the word 'phenomena' is used to describe the real appearance of things as they are. In this context the phenomena to be described is the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual itself exactly as it is presented, without adding or subtracting from that which is given or presented. The phenomenological method originated from within the Western circles as a reaction to the perception that human behaviour can be controlled by scientific methods. The

goal of phenomenology is to return to the concrete and pure object. According to Kensit (2000), the researcher should allow the data to emerge by capturing rich descriptions and their setting; that is to capture lived experiences through thick descriptions so that one gets close to the phenomena (Kensit, 2000). The premise of phenomenology is that all human beings are in the process of making sense out of the world they are living in. According to Giorgi (1985), phenomenology explores and describes the phenomena as individuals experience it. The idea is that the researcher should experience the phenomena objectively by paying attention to the descriptions made by people close to the phenomena as they explain and envision the world they are living in. The notion is to understand the world in their own terms free from any preconceived ideas of the researcher. Phenomenology achieves this by studying conscious experiences, which range from perception, memory, imagination, thought, emotion, and social activity as they are viewed from the subjective first person point of view. Subjecting conscious experiences to investigation lies at the heart of all phenomenological enquiry (Fischer, 2006).

The key aspect of the phenomenological method is to “describe”, the researcher is urged to describe the phenomenon accurately and faithfully free from preconceived frameworks (Cox, 1996). By using phenomenology, this research is interested in understanding how people interpret their own ritual experiences and grasp meanings they ascribe to these experiences. This method is the most appropriate as it helps in comprehending lived experiences. Phenomenology encourages researchers to prevent value judgments and premature decisions from entering into the research as this might distort the meaning of the phenomenon. This is an attempt to practice what Husserl called phenomenological reduction or ‘epoche’ which means putting all of one’s assumptions and preconceived ideas about the subject into abeyance. Bracketing is a way of encouraging scholars to refrain from evaluating religious traditions (Chitando, 2005). Academic theories about the natural function, purpose and meaning must be suspended (bracketed) (Cox, 1996). Stewart and Mickunas (1990) argue that phenomenology rejects the quantitative methods of science as inadequate to treat the nature of consciousness because it is not perceived as an object like other objects in nature and there are conscious phenomena, which cannot be dealt with in science.

Phenomenology also has empathy as one of the tenets, where the researcher is urged to enter into the experiences of the believers and approach reality from their point of view. Empathy implies

getting into the shoes of the believer and viewing the world from his vantage point. Primacy in this case is given to the believer's point of view. The researcher should observe what the believer observes and see what the believer sees. Phenomenology may be regarded as an attitude, which prompts one to see and understand something that is hidden in the phenomenon at his disposal.

#### **4.2.2.1 Rationale of Using Phenomenology of Religion**

The rationale for using the phenomenological approach in this study is to determine the meanings of experiences as they have been acquired and described by the people under investigation. Those who have experienced the initiation ritual among the Varembe people have shared their lived experiences and the meanings they construct from it. Human beings attempt to make sense of all their lived experiences. Through the phenomenological approach, the researcher strived to understand the ritual of circumcision in the same manner it has been understood by the participants.

In this research, the Varembe people were given priority to describe and explain their experiences and their view of the world about the ritual of circumcision. Phenomenology helped the researcher to understand the concept of the initiation ritual among the Varembe people in the context of plurality as a unique phenomenon that is irreducible. The researcher was urged not to raise questions of truth or falsity, considering that there is a plethora of these rituals in other religions and societies. The attitude maintained was, as stated by Scheler (1973:137-138) that of letting the phenomenon showing itself as itself.

The phenomenological method is exclusively descriptive in nature which Cox (1996) refers to as, describing relationships and processes. Its credence is the intuitive experiences, which can be analysed in the pure generality of their essence and not as experiences empirically perceived as real facts (Hurrell, 2000). Phenomenology helps to describe the ritual in terms of their essential concepts and governing formulae of concepts that make them known in intuition.

#### **4.2.2.2 The Strength and Limitations of the Phenomenology of Religion**

Applied in the study of the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual in African traditional religion, the phenomenological method in the study of religion has created significant opportunities that are important in developing an emphatic understanding of the rich complexity



of religious phenomena. Certain aspects of phenomenology may be utilised profitably in this research; the emphasis on description, with the attendant caveats worthy of emulation. The avoidance of reducing religion is a goal to strive for since all too often when examining other religious phenomena, we are prone to limit our explanations to one field of study or to over-generalise our explanations. The ability to bracket questions of truth for the sake of understanding the phenomena at hand is helpful, as long as there is an ultimate drive beyond bracketing towards the evaluation of the Varemba initiation ritual in the light of HIV and AIDS.

The phenomenology of religion offers invaluable insights into interaction between religion and, HIV and AIDS. Furthermore, worthy of emulation is its comparative component, which helps to find areas of agreements and disagreements arising from cultural beliefs and values of the Karanga people's religion, HIV and AIDS. Phenomenology does justice to the inner meaning of religion to its adherents (Chitando, 1998).

Although valuable to this research, phenomenology has come under attack from scholars in Western Europe and North America (Chitando, 1998). The reason for these attacks is fundamental principles are flawed because of being a theology in disguise and ecumenical in approach (Wiebe, 1999:4; Fitzgerald, 2000:20). It is alleged to perpetuate the fault it claims to fight in the study of religion, for example, that of reductionism. However, phenomenology has gained ascendancy in the study of African traditional religion because it has proved useful in studying religion in the pluralistic world without questioning its veracity with emphasis on the believers' experiences (Chitando, 1998). The method is also applauded for eliminating most problems associated with studying religion and the elimination of most forms of injustice from the inner meaning of religion.

Cresswell (1994) points out that phenomenology relies on other methods of data collection such as participant observation, discussion and interviews. The main idea is to obtain the rich experiences under study and the meaning attributed to those experiences as perceived by the respondents. This means that phenomenology differs from empirical research, which is deductive, and often starts with a hypothesis and from that basis attempts to accept or refute the phenomena being studied. Phenomenology is different in that it is inductive and discovery oriented. According to Groenewald (1994) and Moustakas (1994), the slogan "back to the things

themselves” summarises the phenomenological enquiry that has as its goal the return to the original and concrete things.

Phenomenology is linked to other disciplines described in socio-scientific methods for example, sociology, psychology, and history. The nature of religion is that it is not one thing, but a network of different things that are viewed differently, by different people. Phenomenology therefore should have interplay with other methods used in this research. In the study of ritual, phenomenology submits to the material from history, from which it derives and classifies its data. All religious data is historical and no phenomenon can be understood outside the context of its history. The phenomenologist needs to know the social, cultural and historical contexts upon which religious phenomena may appear. History attempts to uncover precisely what occurred and how the facts came to be, but does not provide a deeper understanding of what happened or the sense of the religious phenomena, this deeper understanding is derived from phenomenology. Phenomenology endeavours to make the implicit explicit. When a phenomenologist fails to understand the work before him, his work ceases, but when a historian fails to understand, he can still continue cataloguing and recording for the sake of others. Phenomenology therefore relies on the work of other disciplines, though it should be careful to intercept such work from infiltrating and influencing the study. Through sociology, phenomenology understands the interaction of people in groups and discerns how these groups influence human behaviour and other social institutions. When phenomenology describes processes and relationships as summarised by Cox (1996), it will be like sociology studying and describing different groups in society, how they function and change. The group formations evident in the Varembe initiation ritual provides groundwork for both phenomenology and sociology. Sociology provides the phenomenologist with a living context of his data and thereby prevents him from abstract interpretations of the phenomena. Phenomenology works with other methods as co-workers since all of them are an attempt towards obtaining the essence of the phenomena of the Varembe ritual of circumcision and initiation.

If phenomenology is used as intended, it may prove to be a useful tool in understanding the bewildering variety of religious experiences endemic in the Varembe initiation ritual and will promote insight into the thinking of the religious believer and his experiences. Phenomenology, according to Chitando (2005), could be useful in recovering lost African identity and culture that

was often denigrated and ignored by western scholars. Phenomenology requires that African religions be respected and not viewed as barbaric and superstitious, but as a worthy and enduring heritage that could be useful even in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

### **4.3 Population**

All the respondents interviewed were drawn from the Mwenezi District in Masvingo Province under the following chiefs: Chief Neshuro, who controls the area from Neshuro Township to Chizumba through Rutenga; Chief Chitanga controls the area in-between the catchment of Lundi River and Bubi through Mufula; Chief Negari's area stretches from Matande to Matibi Mission; Chief Maranda's area stretches from Dine to Nikita Mangena Secondary School and Chief Mazetese controls the area from Mazetese to Sovhelele. The district largely comprises the Karanga and components of Shangani speaking people who migrated from the South Eastern provinces of Zimbabwe, Tsonga in Mozambique, around the 1930's. Most people residing in Mwenezi district are Varembe who migrated from areas like Great Zimbabwe, Chivi and Mberengwa in the late 1960's.

Whilst this research focuses primarily on the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual, it is important to note that Shangani people will sometimes join the Varembe during the initiation ceremonies, since they perform rituals that are similar. This explains why some terms used in this research in explaining the Varembe ritual are also common among the Shangani people.

The age range of the respondents selected for this study is between seven and eighty two years. The age range caters for the seven to fifteen year age groups upon which circumcision takes place among the Varembe people. The age range also considers the fifteen to twenty-nine year-old people who have a high prevalence of HIV and AIDS. All other age groups that fall in this range were necessary in order to harness valuable and rich information from the people who had undergone the circumcision and initiation ritual; this includes the ritual leaders, chiefs, headmen and village heads.

### **4.4 Sampling and Sampling Procedures**

Sampling is the process of selecting a portion of the population to represent the entire population in a study as the population may be too large or too costly to study in its entirety (Frey, et al.

2000). The subset selected is referred to as a sample and the selection of the subset required needed for the research questions is the act of sampling (Babbie, 2005). In this study, sampling involved the selection of respondents from the entire population and this involved decisions about which people, settings, behaviours and social processes to observe. In this study, the units of analysis were the experiences of the Varembe people in the context of the circumcision and initiation ritual.

To gather data, the researcher selected information-rich cases. These respondents participated in or had undergone the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual. According to Valle and Halling (1989), the respondents selected should be people who are capable of providing rich descriptions of the phenomena and experiences under study. The respondent should have knowledge and experience of the topic under research and could provide complete and sensitive descriptions of the experience under examination.

This research used non-probability purposive sampling and convenience non-probability sampling. These methods depended on the availability of the population, their willingness to participate and their characteristics being studied (Blanche, et al. 2006). They also depended on those cases that are typical of the population in terms of the characteristics being studied.

The non-probability purposive sampling was used in the current study to select the respondents the society viewed as the custodians and cultural reservoirs of the Varembe traditional values. The research also targeted those who were about to be initiated or who were about to go for initiation. To identify and obtain access to information-rich subjects, the researcher relied on a male local villager (aged 46) from Rinnete village Nine under Chief Maranda. The debutant belonged to the Varembe culture and he was a former school head at a local primary school. The former students and local villagers who formed the thrust of this research had confidence in the debutant and provided links to other necessary respondents. The researcher himself was a former high school teacher at the local schools under chiefs Negare and Mazetese. He also had a matrilineal uncle who is a *mudzabhi* [ritual leader] in the Mazetese area. Therefore, the researcher was known to his former students and some of the villagers who had gone through the Varembe initiation ritual knew him too. Most cultural leaders referred to the researcher as *mwana wevhu* [son of the soil] meaning he was not a stranger but one of them.

The debutant was son to a local village head. He was also cousin to two chiefs, Neshuro and Chitanga through totems and matrimonial relationships. It therefore became easy to identify individuals who had undergone the initiation ritual, most who happened to be the researcher's and the debutant's former students. Therefore, local people had confidence in the researcher and the debutant when it pertained to discussions of their cultural secrets, which they are not usually at liberty to divulge to outsiders. The debutant knew the respondents who were information-rich. Being known to the respondents, the debutant helped them to build confidence in the researcher. Consent had already been sought through the chiefs and the researcher was granted permission to carry out the research in their areas.

The research focused largely on male respondents except in one case where a female traditional healer was selected, primarily to provide an unbiased view of cultural practices. However, the traditional healer had undergone the *komba* initiation for women.

Five chiefs, each one of them representing his area, were chosen for this research. Fifteen village headmen, at least three from each chieftaincy formed part of the research. Five indigenous health practitioners were selected, one from each chieftaincy. The ritual leaders selected were, ten *Nyamukanga* and ten *Vadzabhi*, at least two of each from each chieftaincy. Traditional elders who had participated in the circumcision ritual were selected from the age group of thirty years and above. One hundred male respondents were selected within the age group seven to twenty-nine and those who underwent the Varembe initiation ritual or those about to take part in the initiation, were potential research subjects for the study. Respondents were chosen based on their relevance to the research questions and theoretical positions. Informal conversational questions were asked to determine the suitability of the respondents in line with the data that was to be gathered.

Non-probability purposive sampling was used since it offered respondents who could provide data that could help in the understanding of the role of the circumcision and initiation ritual of the Varembe people. To avoid bias associated with purposive sampling techniques, simple random sampling was used to select the actual research respondents from the potential subjects.

Convenience non-probability sampling was used to gather information from male respondents and caregivers or those respondents who could be sensitive to the questions and who wanted to

neither disclose too much about their culture nor answer the questions honestly. This sampling method was suitable since situations could arise when ethical concerns would keep the researcher or the respondents from speaking to every member of a specific group. Convenience sampling relies on respondents who are readily available and those who had agreed to participate in the study. This included visiting the areas and surveying places where the initiates had gathered before going out for initiation and when they returned after initiation. It also involved visiting the areas where initiation rituals had taken place, that is, at Mazhou and Songogwe Mountains in Mwenezi. Individuals who went through the initiation ritual were preferred for the research.

#### **4.5 Research Procedure**

This study used unstructured and semi-structured interviews in data gathering. Respondent and non-respondent observation methods were used to understand the Varembe initiation ritual processes.

##### **4.5.1 Interviews**

Interviews are the most commonly used forms of data gathering in qualitative research (Terre Blanche, et al. 2006). The investigation involved field research to obtain primary data for this study. In this latter endeavour, it employed unstructured interviews. According to Creswell (2005), qualitative research interviews are grouped into three categories which are structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews.

Interviews provided groundwork information used by a phenomenologist. This research used unstructured interviews to collect data. These interviews are suitable when unique, non-personalised and non-standardised data are to be collected (Cohen, et al. 2011). Unstructured interviews have very little or no structure, because they are day to day informal conversations, which are free flowing and open ended. Unstructured interviews exercise independency in wording and in explaining questions to respondents (Kumar, 2007). In this research, the interview questions were used as a guide and the procedure to follow them in their order was therefore not rigid. According to Minichiello (1990), unstructured interviews are those in which neither the question nor the answer categories are predetermined. They strongly rely on the researcher and the respondents' social interaction to extract information.

Unstructured interviews help to understand the complex behaviour of the people being studied without invading their privacy, which might limit the field of enquiry. They encourage a spontaneous generation of questions in the natural flow of the conversation. In unstructured interviews, the respondents are free to discuss certain issues if they feel that the researcher is sympathetic and understanding (Patton, 2002).

The unstructured interviews used in this research presented the researcher as one who engages with respondents on a person-to-person basis. This is the hallmark of the phenomenology of religion. Moreover, to maintain the natural course of the conversation, to aid clarity, depth and validity, it was necessary to check on apparent contradictions, imbalances, implausibility, exaggerations or inconsistencies by searching for opinions, asking for clarification and explanations, seeking comparisons and pursuing the logic of arguments and asking hypothetical questions. Unstructured interviews also enhanced the interaction and interest of sustaining rapport and encouraging more discussion from the respondents. In this sense, the unstructured interviews were useful to this research as a process of constructing reality.

Unstructured interviews were used to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and feelings of the Varembe people in their practice of the initiation ritual, their words, actions, and behaviour. The interviews were conducted face-to-face involving one participant that is interviewed per time unless in those cases where the interview involved a minor or when it was a safety issue, a caregiver and a debutant were engaged. During the interviews, questions were posed to the respondents in a neutral manner; this was followed by listening carefully to responses given, and asking follow-up questions: further probing could be based on responses given by the respondents. Preconceived notions were avoided and respondents were encouraged to provide particular answers without approving or disapproving any of the answers they gave.

Interviews were useful in this research to understand the depths of reality of the Varembe initiation ritual, and discover meanings on how and why local people understand the ritual in a particular way. Interviews are advantageous in that they are an effective qualitative tool used to gather information about people's personal feelings and getting an insight on how they interpret and order the world. This could be obtained by getting the respondents to provide causal explanations about relationships and connections in the phenomena, events, and beliefs being explained.

In this study, interviews gave the respondents an opportunity to discuss sensitive issues freely, as they would not want discussed in-group setting. During the course of the interview, the researcher was taking down notes and where necessary, with the consent of the respondent, the information gathered was recorded. The interviews were carried out in an environment that protected the respondents' privacy at all times.

#### **4.5.2 Observation**

Observation is a qualitative research design, which involves a systematic data collection approach. Through this method, researchers use all their senses to observe and examine people in their natural settings or social situations. Observational research is non-experimental. In this research, respondent and non-respondent observation methods of research were used.

Bernard (2011) defines respondent observation as a process of establishing a rapport and blending with the community members under investigation so that they behave naturally. After removing oneself from that setting, one immerses one's self in the collected data, to gain a deeper understanding. Respondent observation involves maintaining an open, non-judgmental attitude by being a careful observer (DeWalt and DeWalt, 1998). According to DeWalt and DeWalt (2002), this type of observation helps to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena being studied as objectively and accurately as possible.

In this current study, respondent observation enabled the researcher to understand the Varembea people's outlook and experiences, since he was close to the individuals and to groups constituting the local community of the Varembea people. The type of observation assisted the researcher to view the world through their viewpoints, see them in various situations and in various moods, appreciate the inconsistencies, ambiguities and contradictions in their behaviour explore their interests, understand their relationships among themselves and with other groups. This helped in the determination of attitudes and behaviour towards their religious practices.

As a respondent observer, the researcher attended two reincorporation ceremonies held at Chigara Village under Chief Maranda for a graduation ceremony for the initiates who had come from the initiation site at Mazhou Mountain. The researcher also observed a graduation ceremony at Tomu Village under Chief Chitanga for the initiates who had come from Songogwe Mountain. The ceremonies were held at different times; the graduation ceremony for initiates



from Mazhou Mountain took place three weeks prior to that of the initiates from Songogwe Mountain.

The objective of an observation in this research was to determine the proceedings and the significance of the welcoming home ceremony to the community and the initiates who had returned from seclusion. The researcher's attention was directed towards the processes and activities of the ceremony and the lessons conveyed to the Varembe initiates during the initiation ceremony. This assisted the researcher to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of the circumcision and initiation ritual and its effects on moulding the behaviour of the initiates. The initiates were observed and interacted with during the ceremony, upon obtaining their consent or that of the parents or caregivers in the case of minors.

The researcher also used the non- respondent observation method to observe situations of interest in the village, but not participating or interfering with them to obtain raw information for example, how do the Varembe people interact and how much of their religious ideas are incorporated into their daily life and practices. The non- respondent research method helped to eliminate the risk of the respondent being affected by the presence of the researcher and that they could carry out their activities as usual.

As a non- respondent observer, the researcher attended the preparatory events at one ritual leader's (*Vadzabhi's*) homestead where the initiates had gathered before leaving to enter into seclusion at the sites where the initiation ritual would be performed. The researcher also visited the places of initiation at Mazhou and Songogwe prior to the commencement of the ritual and soon after the ritual, to determine the nature of the ritual objects at the site and to establish whether the camps had provided shelter for the initiates during the ritual. The chiefs and the ritual leaders granted the researcher permission to visit the sites. Initially the researcher had intended to become a respondent observer throughout the Varembe initiation ritual, but the religious leaders refused to grant him permission because the Varembe people regard the ritual proceedings closed and secretive to non-members. Therefore, the researcher was only allowed to observe certain aspects of the ritual. The data for the initiation ritual from the period the initiates left for seclusion to the camp, to the period they returned were covered through interviews.

The debutant accompanied the researcher during the observation of cultural sites and preparatory processes. The researcher observed the incorporation ceremony using the respondent observation tools, which had been prepared to gather the necessary information.

#### **4.6 Data Collection**

The process of the research could not be accomplished without permission from the chiefs, headman, village headmen, and ritual leaders in the Mwenezi district. The permission was granted after explaining the objectives of this research. Administrative issues were finalised before the commencement of the research and the respondents signed consent forms before they were interviewed. The researcher explained what would be required of them so that they could give meaningful and relevant answers from an informed position.

At the beginning of the process, the interviewer introduced himself and gave the respondents adequate time for rapport building. The aims and objectives of the research were explained. The benefits of the research were explained in the context of the HIV and AIDS mitigation processes. The respondents were informed of their rights to participate or not to participate if they felt uncomfortable.

The respondents were interviewed at a time that would suit them. The language used during the research was either Karanga or English, depending on the requirements of the respondents. The researcher had a set of similar research questions for the various age groups that were simplified in the process of interviewing to suit specific ages where necessary.

During the interviews, the research respondents provided subjective accounts of their experiences in line with the principles of phenomenology. In-depth interviews with open-ended questions were used. During the process, the researcher was writing notes and audio-taping the responses with their consent of the respondents. Most respondents used Karanga in their responses; the researcher was cautious in translating Karanga into English during the transcription process so that meaning would not be distorted.

The traditional elders granted permission to observe some of the ritual components, for example, the ritual preparation and the incorporation of initiates into the society. Focus was on the details regarding the intention of the actions and the behaviour of the initiates and the ritual leaders

during these performances. These details were useful for the purposes of this research to develop knowledge about the Varembe initiation ritual, which could be useful in militating against the spread of HIV.

#### **4.7 The Data Analysis Procedure**

The analysis of data was an ongoing process to avoid repetition, to remain focused and to have adequate time to process the large volumes of data gathered. In the process of data analysis, Merriam (2009) and Cresswell (2014) suggest that the researcher has to prevent his personal ideas, experiences and pre-conceived ideas from filtering into the study. The phenomenon should be allowed to manifest itself. Suspension of ideas helped the researcher from not imposing what he knew about circumcision, but to let the believers express themselves and their knowledge about the events. Data analysis required conversion of the notes into write-ups to fill missing links and gaps. Visual data was conveyed into small categories of information. Data was coded into different relevant themes of concern before analysis. Interpretation and analysis of the data was based on the allocated codes. The researcher maintained objectivity throughout the work by not recording what he anticipated or wished to see.

Interpretive analysis has several qualitative analytical traditions that are under its jurisdiction, for example grounded theory, phenomenology and thematic content analysis. According to Terre Blanche, et al. (2006), interpretive analytical traditions vary along a continuum from quasi-statistical styles to immersion or crystallisation styles. In quasi styles, predetermined categories and codes that are applied to the data in quantifiable ways to yield quantifiable indices are employed. Conversely, immersion or crystallisation styles entail that one has to thoroughly understand and familiarise oneself with the phenomena and reflect on it carefully. The interpretation that has to be written should be based on one's intuitive grasp of the phenomena and not on any analytic techniques.

Blache (2006) outlines steps to be followed in interpretive data analysis.

## **Step 1**

### **Familiarisation and immersion**

All the texts where data was recorded were read several times, to become familiarised with the data captured (immersion) and to understand the kind of interpretations which were most likely to be supported by the data.

## **Step 2**

### **Inducing themes**

Inducing themes means inferring general rules or classes from specific instances. It is also called the bottom-up approach because it starts with that which is presented to the inference of new rules. This is different from the top-down approach where one would use readily-made categories and find instances that suit these categories. It deals with the ‘whatness’ of the ‘thatness’, meaning, what is it that underlies the material.

## **Step 3**

### **Coding**

During the process of developing themes, data was also coded. This involved marking different sections as subsets of, or relevant to one or more of the themes. This involves breaking a body of data into small units and labelling them into meaningful parts to cluster the coded data under the code heading and analyse them as a cluster in relationship to other clusters.

## **Step 4**

### **Elaboration**

During the collection of material for interpretive purposes, one may encounter information that is said to be in linear or chronological order, where familiarisation, immersion, and inducing of themes would be necessary to break the chain so that events that are far apart are brought together.

## **Step 5**

### **Interpretation and checking**

This is the final stage when the researcher presents his interpretations in a written account of the phenomenon under study. At this stage, the researcher adjusts the interpretations, looking for over inflated interpretations, and moderates areas where the researcher made a big deal out of trivial issues and prejudices. The researcher at this stage reflects on his role in data collection and over the interpretations made.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Research ethics points towards the interaction between the researcher and the people under study. Research ethics is meant to primarily protect the welfare of the research respondents. The following guidelines were adhered to;

#### **The respondents' rights were observed.**

The respondents were informed of their right to participate or withdraw from the study at anytime without any repercussions.

The respondents were requested to read and sign a written informed consent if they agreed to participate. This document states the aims and objectives of the research and the respondent's right to participate.

The researcher requested the permission of the respondents to be audio-taped and to allow the researcher to write notes during discussions and interviews.

The researcher assured the respondents that the research is confidential and no publication of names in any report will be done.

The research respondents were informed of their right to access the research report after the research was completed.

The researcher also informed the respondents that if the research has had any negative effect on them he would be prepared to refer them to a psychologist for assistance.

#### **4.8 Summary**

This chapter discussed the design and methodology of the research used in this study. It also explored into the tools for data gathering and showed how they were used. Qualitative data collection tools were discussed which comprised in-depth interviews and observation. The chapter also outlined the phenomenological and social scientific methods used in this research study. The next chapter focuses on the history of the Varembe people.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **THE HISTORY OF THE VAREMBA PEOPLE**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

Chapter 4 discussed the research methodologies used in this study, which are the Phenomenology of Religion and the Social-Scientific methods. Methods of data collection and analysis were also presented. This chapter provides a brief history of the Varemba people to determine whether they had any links with Jews or Muslims. The chapter traces the Jewish and Islamic history behind the Varemba circumcision and initiation ritual to determine its original function in the early societies. This paves the way for a clearer understanding of the phenomenon. The history of the Varemba initiation ritual will provide the researcher with an objective interpretation and analysis of the cultural practices of the Varemba people, to determine how much they have acquired from the Middle Eastern people. The Jewish and the Islamic ancestry contribute to making the cultural practices of the Varemba people comprehensible, for example, it could clarify the motive behind this practice and the benefit derived from cultural practices such as circumcision, endogamy, the use of holy mountains, the practice of seclusion and isolation and the role of Ngomalungundu [the sacred Ark] or the drum that thunders.

#### **5.1 The Islamic Ancestry of the Varemba People**

The history of the Varemba people of the Mwenezi district in Masvingo, like any other Varemba in Zimbabwe, can be traced back to the Jewish people of Israel who were dispersed to many parts of world and Islamic ancestry who migrated from the Middle East to the Southern and Eastern parts of Africa in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Century. The Lemba, Varemba, or Vamwenye are Zimbabwean and South African ethnicity groups, found in Mozambique and Malawi. The Varemba speak African languages of the people in their neighbourhood and in most cases, they are similar in most aspects of life, but their religious practices resemble that of the Jews and the Muslims.

According to le Roux (2003), the word ‘Varemba’ could be used to mean people who refused to associate with others, probably in the context of refusing to eat with others perhaps because of dietary regulations. The word ‘Lemba’ could be derived from the Swahili word *Chilembi* which means a form of turban worn by the Varemba, or it could have been derived from the African word ‘*Lembi*’ which means a respected foreigner or a non-African (Shimoni, 2003).

The word ‘Va-remba’ is also equivalent to ‘Ba-Lemba’, which is an African corruption for “Arabs,” “Alaba” for Arabs. The prefix “Ba” is in the plural form and there was a gradual change from Ba-Laba to Ba-Lemba. The Bantu people preferred to refer to the Ba-lemba as white people, BA-Lungu, perhaps pointing towards their ancestry. The Varemba are referred to as the great traders of Rhodesia, the good people with good skills of making anything. The acronym ‘traders’ may signify how and why the Varemba migrated to Southern Africa. However, the words reveal the influence of the relationship with the Arabs.

The whites who once occupied Rhodesia were referred to as the Aberlomba meaning man who had everything; perhaps because of their prowess in building stonewall structures. These seem to have been the same people identified by the Shona people as “Abbalomba” (Atzmon, et al. 2010). What seems feasible is the suggestion that the Varemba had Arabic ancestors and the name “Abbalomba” could have gone through modifications to become Varemba. Some Shona people in Zimbabwe call the Remba with the title, Mulungu, which means a white person, perhaps because of this Arabic ancestry (Atzmon, et al. 2010).

Some Arabs fled from their homelands in Yemen and Hadhramaut due to the persecution that ensued against Zaid the founder of the Emozaid sect and Muhammad’s relative who was slain on the East African Coast during a conflict with his enemies (Atzmon, et al. 2010). Zaid was Ali’s grandson, nephew, and son-in-law of Muhammad whose religious understanding was contrary to the Quran the way it was interpreted by the Arabian teachers. He was banished together with his followers, the Emozaid and they moved south, building temporary settlements along the way, avoiding conflict with the local black people but incorporated many until they become indistinguishable. Mandivenga notes that, the Arabs penetrated Zimbabwe from the East African coast around 1500 CE (Mandivenga, 1983).



Some of the Arabian trading posts were located in the area known as the Mutapa Empire, which stretched from the source of the Sabi River up to the source of the Zambezi River. According to Alpers (2000), a small Muslim community established itself in the area in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Islam began to take root in the interior around the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Arab Muslims were engaging in barter trade, offering cloth and beads in exchange for ivory and gold. The presence of the foreigners in the “gold bearing area” has been supported by the presence of exotic fruits and trees that were from Asian origin (Brelvi, 1969: 319).

There were intermarriages between the Arabs and the coastal people as well as the people from the interior. The establishment of the Portuguese in the Sofala area in 1505 had a gradual effect on the Muslims whose activities had monopolised trade with the people from the interior (Mudenge, 2011). The Muslims’ derision of competition led them to murder a Muslim and a Jesuit priest from Mozambique Island, Fr. Goncalo da Silveira, in 1561. Goncalo was viewed as a spy operating on behalf of the Portuguese traders (Mandivenga, 1984). The Portuguese used the word *mouro* for any Muslim practice without distinguishing ethnicity including the wearing of the fez (Beach, 1980).

Mandivenga (1983) points out that there were some Swahili, Shona and Sena-speaking people who were Islamised by the Muslim Arabs. Such groups of people could have spread to Great Zimbabwe before 1000CE, their presence affecting the customs of the local people. As they were moving south of Rhodesia, the Arabs intermarried and an allegiance to the rulers of Southern Africa was born. The Arabs become indistinguishable from the indigenous people. Islamic influence of the whole area could have been strong because the local tribesmen adopted Muslim names such as Yusuf, Kassim, Hamisi and Adam. These indigenous people with Islamic roots are today known the Varembe. Some Varembe people with Arabic ancestry inhabit the Great Zimbabwe area in Masvingo (Mandivenga, 1989).

Mandivenga (1989) noted that the ‘reintroduction of Islam’ took place in the Buhera district of Masvingo province in 1961 and in Gutu in 1974. This was a reintroduction of the religion of the ancestors to the tribesmen who were regarded as having been Muslims in practice. The Varembe of the VaMwenye are scattered around the Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe in places such as Mwenezi and Bikita. Those living under Chief Mposi in Mberengwa are indistinguishable from the Shona tribes among whom they dwell. The Mposi are linked to the Swahili people who

descendants of Chief Sahiti who lived on the East Coast (Beach, 1980). Sahiti could as well be Saidi, Said, or Zaid.

## **5.2 The Jewish Ancestry of the Varembe People**

Another theory pertaining to the ancestry of the Varembe people was proposed by Tudor Parfitt, a British anthropologist who provided evidence for the possible Jewish ancestry of the Varembe people. These Jews are referred to as the lost tribes of Israel (Parfitt and Semi, 2002). The theory of the ten lost tribes of Israel under the Assyrians (8<sup>th</sup> Century BC) helps to explain the ancestry of the Lemba (Remba) people, that there were some Jewish tribes that vanished and never returned.

The Jews entered Israel in 1200BC and since then, major dispersions occurred, for example in 586BC, the Jews from the Middle East migrated resulting in the formation of various Jewish communities outside Israel. King Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the Jerusalem Temple forced the Jews to disperse. He even deported some Jews as captives to Babylon in Mesopotamia, present day Iraq. Even after deportations and captivity, some Jews remained in Babylon (Hammer, et al. 2000). Another major migration during the period of Alexander the Great (334 BC), dispersed the Jews into Egypt, Syria, the Balkans and South Africa (Atzmon, et al. 2010). The second destruction of Jerusalem in AD70 dispersed the Jews throughout the Roman world. However, the dispersion of the Jews should not be seen as only an outcome of the AD 70 events but was an ongoing process due to the Roman policy that extended over a long period. The Romans facilitated the dispersion of the Jews from inception. A Jewish colony was established in Rome around 139BCE because there is a record of the Jewish citizens who were expelled at that time (Atzmon, et al. 2010). The implication is that some Jews in Rome became citizens of the state. After the conquest of Jerusalem in 63 BCE Pompey transported many Jews as hostages to Rome. In 6CE the Romans annexed Judea. Emperor Tiberius exiled approximately 4000 Jews to the Island of Sardinia in 19CE. During the revolt of AD70 the Romans killed many Jews but others were sent to Italy as slaves. Other Jews fled to Babylon and others to Jewish colonies in Cyprus, North Africa and Egypt.

This marked the foundation of Jewish settlements in Spain, France, Germany and Italy and North Africa (Hammond, 1993). According to Behar, et al. (2010), the fundamental aspect of these

migrations is that the Jews maintained their culture wherever they went and contemporary Jewish communities formed clusters scattered in Asia, Europe, America and Africa.

According to Hammond (1993), the Varembe tradition traces their ancestry to those Jews who left Judea around 2500 years ago after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and settled at Senna, which is located in the Arabian Peninsula, the present day Yemen. Parfitt (2000) argues that the city had a Jewish population from ancient times. Hammond (1993) notes that the Jews later migrated into southeast Africa in search of gold when the economic situation began to deteriorate. The group split into two, one group settled in Ethiopia and members of the other groups settled in Tanzania and Kenya, others apparently moved to Malawi and Mozambique, eventually migrating to Zimbabwe and South Africa. They became known as Ba-Lemba, having mixed and intermarried with the indigenous people. The Lemba are alleged to have contributed to the construction of Great Zimbabwe (Parfitt 2000 and Le Roux 2003). However, the works are also attributed to the ancestors of the Shona people who were the first people to displace the San people from the region.

### **5.2.1 Genetic Evidence for Jewish Ancestry of the Varembe People**

Genetic studies of the Varembe people indicate a possibility of a link with people from Southern Arabia. According to Parfitt (2002), the DNA samples of Jews from the Hadramaut where Sena is located and that of the Varembe exhibited similar features. The Varembe people have Y-chromosomes, which are similar to the male descendants of the Jewish Priesthood in Israel. However, it is not possible to prove a time frame as to when the genetic link to the Varembe was established although there is no evidence of white Jews entering the interior until recently (Parfitt, 2000). In his research, Parfitt (2000) argues that the gene entered through the male rather than the female, owing to the origin of the Varembe from ancestors in the Middle East.

### **5.2.2 Varembe Tradition and Culture**

The Ark of the Covenant which is believed to have led the Jews out of Jerusalem by the Israelites after destruction by Babylon in 586BC was another aspect that signifies a link between the Varembe and the Jews. According to the Varembe tradition, there was a sacred object referred to as *ngoma lungundu* or drum that thunders, which they brought from Sena. *Ngoma* is claimed to be the Biblical Ark of the covenant made by Moses. Parfitt (2003) notes that the *ngoma* is related

to the Ark of the Covenant, which was lost after the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon. In his theory, Parfitt notes that its priestly guardians carried the *ngoma* to Africa. In 2007, the *ngoma* was discovered in the Museum of Human Sciences in Harare, Zimbabwe. It was last exhibited in Bulawayo in 1949 by colonial officials. The belief is that it was taken to Harare for security reasons during the drive for political independence and it became misplaced. The radio carbon dating of a portion of the artefact showed it to be 700 years old. In 2010, the *ngoma lungundu* was displayed in the Museum for the celebration of its history and that of the Remba (BBC, 2010).

The *ngoma* was carried by the Jews with them during battles. It would be rebuilt with the remains when it broke. The Varembe considered the *ngoma* as too sacred and too holy to be touched. Poles inserted into the rings that were on each side of the *ngoma* were used to carry it from place to place. The people who were allowed to come close to the *ngoma* were the members of the tribe who were heirs to the priesthood who guarded it. The people feared that if any one touched the object, fire would come from God and erupt from the *ngoma* to strike the individual down. The Varembe people continue to venerate the *ngoma* as a very sacred object (Parfitt, 2008).

The Africantarot (2012) discusses the history of the *ngoma lungundu* that is found in oral history. Another version of the Varembe oral history links the *ngoma lungundu* to a powerful Karanga-Rozvi clan known as Singo who migrated to the south from central Zimbabwe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. They crossed the Limpopo River and settled in the land of the Vhangona in South Africa. The Singo are believed to have been a Karanga splinter group that broke away from Changamire Rozvi.

In the Venda oral tradition, the Singo had a very large and heavy sacred drum referred to as *ngoma lungundu*, which implied that *Mwari* was the great God of the Singo (Africantarot, 2012). The belief was that the Varembe were tasked by *Mwari* to carry the drum towards the south. As in the Jewish tradition, the drum was not supposed to touch the ground. Therefore, at night they would hang the drum from a tree. There was also a belief that *Mwari* could at times beat the drum by himself. *Ngoma lungundu* was believed to be used in the same way as it was used by the Jews to protect them during their journeys. The drum was used by the king to work miracles since the drum was believed to have some magical powers. The king could beat the drum when

confronted by enemies to defeat them and to drive them away. The drum was feared and revered as a sacred object and it could be used during the times of drought to bring rain. During the reign of Thohoyandou, the Varembe people achieved prosperity due to the control of the sacred drum and other sacred artefacts (Africantarot, 2012). The proof of the DNA proposed by Parffit, which links the Varembe to the Jewish ancestry, is used as evidence for the relationship existing between the Ngoma Lungundu and the Ark of the Covenant, which among other things was a sacred box brought out of Jerusalem by the Israelites during the Babylonian invasion in 586 BCE.

However, the link between the Ark of the Covenant and the Ngoma Lungundu is marred with inaccuracies. The sacred drum is connected to the Senzi people who are the present day Venda of South Africa (Oxford Reference, 2017). They migrated with it from the North to settle in South Africa. They passed through Zimbabwe, mingling with the Karanga people who acquiesced to their culture and traditions. The drum was regarded as the drum of the ancestor god of the Senzi and the Karanga.

The problem lies in finding the relationship between the Senzi and Jews. According to Parfitt (2000), the Varembe people disdain the non-Varembe as *Vasenzi* (*gentiles*) the way Jews do. The word *Senzi* is derogatory, meaning uncircumcised and unclean. According to the Jewish Talmud, the male Jew prayed every morning thanking God for not making him a Gentile or sinner (Malina, 1981). The Gentiles were grouped together with sinners, and the Jewish purity code dictates a complete disengagement with sinners. If the Senzi represented this group of people referred to as Vasenzi, it is not clear how the gentiles took control of the sacred covenant and made it their revered object, and use it the manner it was used by the Jews. Therefore, the association of the Varembe with the Jews based on the history of the sacred Ark of the Covenant and the *ngoma lungundu*, is flawed.

However, the Varembe people shared some cultural traits found in both Judaism and Islam. They have endogamous marriage patterns, which discourage marriages to non-Varembe people. Endogamy is common to many Orthodox Jews who recognise the matrilineal descent as determining Judaism from birth. Patrilineal descent was once the norm among Israelites, where individuals were identified as descendants of one of the twelve sons of Israel. The restriction on intermarriage makes it difficult for non-Varembe males to become Varembe since a Varembe

woman would not be allowed to marry a non-Varemba. Any one from the Varemba people who married a non-Varemba woman was expelled from the community unless the female agreed to follow the Varemba traditions, religion and customs. Initially the woman was supposed to shave her head. If the Varemba had Jewish ancestors, this requirement may date back to the ritual of converting the first Varemba woman to Judaism. It was a Jewish custom way in which males could acquire females.

Other beliefs and practices of the Varemba linked to Judaism and Islam are dietary regulations, ritual slaughter and circumcision. According to Parfitt (2000), ritual slaughter is a foreign practice to Africa, but it could be either Jewish, Islamic or Middle Eastern. The Varemba do not eat any meat that is not ritually slaughtered by a Muremba. They also forbid members to eat other foods like pork.

The Varemba practice circumcision just like the Jews and the Muslims, the only difference is that whilst the Jews circumcise their children at infancy the Varemba circumcise their children at the age between seven and fifteen like the Muslims. There is evidence of constructions of the male sex organs at Great Zimbabwe's great enclosure, and the introduction of circumcision in Southern Africa is attributed to the Varemba people. The basis for the practice of circumcision for the Jews is found in the Bible (Genesis 17, 10-14). It is performed as a religious obligation in which a covenant was made between Abraham and his descendants. Jews and Muslims constitute Abrahamic religions and it is on that basis that they perform circumcision.

### **5.3 Jewish Circumcision**

According to the Torah, circumcision was part of the Covenant of man's promise to God. Through circumcision, God ensured the promise of fertility to the Jews. Circumcision was also a tribal sign, without which one could be banished from the tribe. The ritual was applied to all Jewish men. Circumcision was seen as an indicator as to how the penis was to function as God intended. Many Jews believed that circumcision was healthy and natural.

The origin of male circumcision is not known with certainty. However, there is certainty gathered in that the Varemba trace their ancestry to Semitic tribes, the problem found in the construction of their history lies upon the use of oral tradition, upon which most evidence is gathered. The fact that the Varemba culture has a Middle Eastern origin also lies in the theory

that it is embedded in Abrahamic traditions. Abraham was assigned by God to circumcise himself, his household and his slaves as an everlasting covenant through their flesh (Genesis 17<sup>10-17</sup>). Nevertheless, the disagreement is from which house of Abraham they emanated; Isaac (Jewish) or Ishmael (Arabian). Evidence for Semitic orientation is found from similarities with many known Arabic and Semitic words for example, Sadiki, Hasane, Sharifo, Adam, Bakeri, Haji (Mandivenga, 1983).

According to Gollaher (2001), the Jews adopted circumcision from the Egyptians. A tomb artwork believed to belong to the Sixth Dynasty (2345-2181 BCE) has been thought to be the oldest documentary evidence of circumcision. An Egyptian named Uha in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Century BCE describes mass circumcision where he boasts of his ability to stoically endure the pain. In Egypt, circumcision was a ritual that transformed the youth into manhood, allowing him into divine mysteries. Egyptian circumcision was a method of purification (Gordon, 1999). The body openings were viewed as portals through which impure and malignant spirits may enter the body. The Jews probably adopted circumcision from Moses who left Egypt with Hebrew slaves (Zoloth, 2003).

During the time of Moses, the Jews used flint knives made of stone, to perform circumcision on males who had reached puberty (Burton, 2001). This was before the Jews turned to circumcise infants to force them to conform to Jewish dictates. The stone blade was viewed as important because the stone symbolised the connection of the individual to the earth and its elements.

The Varembe teach their children to honour their mothers and fathers and subscribe to the *Mwari* cult, which is similar to the Semitic connotations of the Supreme Being. The Semitic cult is monotheistic, they believe that they are the chosen people.

#### **5.4 Islam and Circumcision**

The tradition is not explicitly mentioned in the Quran; it is practiced as a matter of cleanliness and purification but is obligatory. In Islam, the tradition is mentioned in the Hadith and the Sunnah. Circumcision is mentioned among some Islamic practices known as *fitra* where circumcision, shaving pubic hair with a razor blade, trimming the moustache, paring one's nails and plucking the hair from the armpits are mentioned (Gollaher, 2001).

## 5.5 Sacred Mountains

Sacred mountains are central to most religions; they are associated with divinity. The most symbolic aspect of a mountain is its peak that is believed to be close to the heaven and the numinous. It is the centre of creation (Olsen, 2008). The Jewish people have traditions surrounding certain mountains such as Mount Sinai. According to the Bible, Mount Sinai is the place where Moses received the Ten Commandments directly from God (Exodus, 19:18). It is where Moses entered into a covenant with God that forms the pillar of the Jewish faith. There is a link between the Varembe people and the Jewish conception of mountains, in that the Varembe people associate the mountains with ancestral worship. Sacred mountains in Varembe culture provide a symbol of cultural identity.

The Varembe, like any other member of the community have allegiance to natural objects. The mountains are viewed as the final resting place of the spirits of the dead. The connection of the mountains with cultural identity makes people who do not even live close to mountains treat them with reverence because the view is that the events taking place in such mountains affect them too. Certain restrictions are put in place to prohibit people from performing certain activities that could be destructive to the sacred mountains.

Sacred mountains are viewed as centres of revelation and inspiration by the Varembe people (Masuka, 2016). In Islam, Prophet Muhammad is believed to have received his revelation in a remote cave at Mount Hira, where he often sought solitude. He visited the site to practice meditation and spiritual reflection to escape from the corrupt urban life (Alam, 2003). The mountains as sources of revelation and transformation attract religious pilgrims. The Varembe link to the Middle Eastern population is evidenced through the significance they attach to certain mountains. In most places, the Varembe people perform the circumcision and initiation rituals in mountain areas or close to them, for example, the Domboshava Mountain in Harare and the Songogwe and Mazhou Mountains in Mwenezi are believed to be sacred and the Varembe residing in the local area perform ritual activities in these mountains with the belief that they are sources of purity, blessings and healing (Masuka, 2016).



## **5.6 Summary**

This chapter provided evidence as to why the Varembe people in Zimbabwe may be said to have a Jewish or Islamic ancestry. The evidence is based on the migrations of the Jewish and Islamic people to Southern Africa from the North, where they encountered the indigenous people. The intermarriages resulted in the formation of the people who acquiesced to the tradition and culture of the Jews and the Muslims. The product of intercultural fusion was the emergence of the people known as the Varembe whose culture and traditions are like those of the Jews and Muslims. The following chapter presents and discusses the findings from the fieldwork.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **THE VAREMBA MALE CIRCUMCISION AND INITIATION RITES: AN ANALYSIS**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the history of the Varembe in an attempt to establish their link with the Jewish and Islamic people. The connection between the Middle Eastern people and the Varembe people was necessary to shed light on the Varembe initiation ritual. The current chapter presents the findings and analyses the data collected from the fieldwork. The data is presented in terms of the themes that emerged from individual respondents as a reflection of the meaning attached to the circumcision and initiation ritual among the Varembe people of Mwenezi. The data is also part of the observations of the initiation sites made by the researcher before the commencement of the ritual. The Varembe are quite secretive about the proceedings at the initiation camp, and no outsider is allowed to observe or come close. Therefore, part of the data is from interactions and observations of the initiates before they left the villages for the initiation camps and when they returned to the village after the initiation ceremony. The time gap between when the initiates left the village and when they returned was covered through interviews with the initiates and other participants specified in this research. The word 'respondent' is adopted in this study to signify the people who took part in this research, i.e. those people who provided information for the study and at the same time were part of the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual. Therefore, the respondents were the 'insiders', which includes the recent initiates and those who were initiated some time ago. There are two sites where the Varembe initiation rites are performed, Mazhou and the Songogwe Mountains under Chief Maranda and Chief Chitanga respectively. It was easy to collect data from the two sites since the rituals were held at different times. This presentation is in line with the phenomenology of religion and the social scientific methods. Pseudonyms are used in the presentation of data because most participants did not want to be identified for fear of victimization by the people from their culture. Real names used are only for places and chiefs who had no problem with having their real names published, so that it became easy to identify areas where the fieldwork took place. Analysis and

presentation of findings run concurrently to avoid repetition of the arguments and to maintain coherence.

The findings are presented under the following themes; age group of the participants; time of the ritual; sacredness of the initiation sites; the main characters in the initiation ritual; reasons why the Varembe people perform the initiation ritual; the phases of the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual and the significance of the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual. The last section is a discourse on the implications of the Varembe initiation ritual in terms of HIV prevention.

Analysis of the research findings is guided by the perspective of the following theorists on ritual, Van Gennep (1909), Durkheim (1912), Turner (1969), Eliade (1985) and Bandura (1989) and his theory of social learning. Van Gennep identified three phases of the ritual process, which are separation, transition and incorporation. The analysis also hinges on Durkheim's sociological perspective of the ritual, Turner's concept of liminality and Eliade's views on the sacred and profane. The Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual is a socio-cultural forum in which adults in Mwenezi convey community-held attitudes and beliefs about sexuality to young people and a code of behaviour deemed appropriate for the transition into adulthood.

### **6.1 The Age Group of People who Undergo Initiation**

Most respondents had an understanding that someone who has reached the age of understanding the significance of the ritual was the one who could undergo the initiation ritual. They also held the view that the initiates should be people who appreciate that the ritual is a traditional initiation ceremony intended to transform boys into men; that it is removing the old uncivilised sheath that gives way to the dawning of a new civilized scabbard. Therefore, according to the participants, one who has reached the age of taking part in the initiation ceremony is one who acknowledges the rite as a way of transition from childhood into manhood.

Most research respondents from villages under Chitanga, Negari, and Maranda maintained that the rightful age for the Varembe initiation ritual was from seven up to fifteen years, which differs from the age of twelve suggested by Sibanda (2013) and Evans (2015). On the other hand, the exact age varies according to geographical and ethnic differences. Some Varembe in other parts of Zimbabwe practice initiation rites for young men who are aged twelve (Sibanda, 2013; Evans,

2015). The Shangani circumcise between the ages of thirteen and seventeen. However, the respondents indicated that male adults who could have passed this age without being circumcised could still undergo the initiation ritual. It is within the age group fifteen to twenty-nine which is the most vulnerable group for new HIV infections in Zimbabwe (HIV and AIDS, Zimbabwe, 2013). Therefore, the traditional male circumcision and initiation ritual is practiced as a rite of passage and it is performed on prepubescent boys, adolescents or adults. The age at which circumcision is practiced also varies from each country and ethnicity, ranging from six years, in Senegal and Indonesia, and up to thirty-five in Zambia (Niang and Boiro, 2007; WHO, 2009).

In most cases, the initiation ritual coincides with the physiological stage of maturation at which the boys develop pubertal changes and are useful in the growth of the young people. Pubertal changes bring with them excitement, anxiety and distress. Bailey (2006) established that about 47.7% of young men in Kenya become sexually active before they are circumcised. The average age of sexual debut was estimated to be fourteen to fifteen years in those groups studied for traditional male circumcision (Bail, 2006). At this stage, the adolescents are vulnerable to the risks of HIV infection as they become experimental with the onset of sexual debut (Turner, 1990; Kalipeni, et al. 2004). Lack of appropriate advice exposes the youth to a variety of risks which range from sexual reproductive health problems, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (Vundule, et al. 2001; Tiendrebeogo, et al. 2003). It is at this stage of adolescence that the Varembea circumcision and initiation ritual becomes valid in altering and controlling the behaviours of the youth. It is important to understand how the Varembea circumcision and initiation ritual could be useful in influencing positive sexual behavioural changes in the youths towards the prevention of HIV and AIDS.

## **6.2 Time of the Ritual**

Most participants in this study confirmed that the Varembea circumcision and initiation ritual is performed in winter, especially June and July, but it could extend to the months of August and September, depending on the prevailing circumstances. Chief Negari emphasised that the initiation ritual is timed to coincide with the immediate post-harvest season. Most of the respondents indicated that the Varembea people prefer the wintertime because the weather would be conducive to the healing of the circumcision wounds of the boys. Moreover, during winter, most people would have completed their harvesting and that there would be enough food for the

initiates. Zinake (aged 66) a ritual leader from Chief Maranda's area, in support of the view notes that the process of initiation involves shedding a lot of blood, therefore the initiates would be obliged to take in a lot of food.

Chief Mazetese established that the initiation ceremony was performed every year and the number of initiates is not limited. The Varembe, just like the Bukusu in Kenya, circumcise every year. In South Africa it is done twice by most tribes and the Balante in Guinea-Bissau circumcise every four to six years (Evans, 2015; Niang and Boiro, 2007; Bailey, 2006). The frequency of the circumcision and initiation ritual makes it effective in ensuring that most young men who would have reached the age of the ritual are initiated on time which reduces their chances of engaging in risky sexual activities.

According to Eliade, there is a profane time and space, which is distinguished from the sacred space and the sacred time (Flood, 1999). The time set for the Varembe initiation ceremony is sacred because it coincides with the time in August when other rituals are performed. For example, Chief Maranda alluded that the initiation rites coincide with other ceremonies such as the *kurova guva* ceremony (bringing home the spirit of the dead) that is held during this period. Therefore, the profane time for the Varembe people is the past and the experiences of the individual before he reached the appropriate age of going through the puberty ritual. It is the time in which the young man was deemed to be a neophyte, a social outcast, stateless, useless, without identity and any privileges. The sacred time for the Varembe people is the time of expiation, a new beginning, a renewal, rebirth and enlightenment, achieved by undergoing the rite of initiation.

### **6.3 Sacredness of the Initiation Sites**

The Varembe people are responsible for the construction of reality associated with the initiation sites. The social learning theory represents the social construction of reality and it maintains that human beings are capable of creating reality. What people know and believe about the construction of the world is conceived to be true because human beings are responsible for its creation (Le Comte, 2000). The social learning theory is about the reality that people create and not what they find. This means that the Varembe people do not search or question the reality of the sacred initiation sites, because they all contribute to its creation.

In line with this view, most respondents in this study acknowledged that the initiation sites for the Varembe ritual are sacred and they are treated with awe and reverence. Chief Chitanga confirmed the sacredness of the initiation sites by emphasizing that no one is allowed to visit these places during the ceremonies except the initiates and the ritual leaders. Misfortune befalls any culprit who dares to intrude. After the initiation rites people may visit these places but they should observe the taboos linked to such places. Most respondents from Rinnete and village Nine under Chief Maranda, confirmed this view. Some Varembe initiates noted that terms like, *kuMusasa* (bush camp), *kuChiremba* (a place for circumcision), and *kuGomo* (mountain) are frequently used when referring to the places of initiation with the connotation of sacredness.

All the chiefs interviewed agreed that the reasons why the Varembe people chose secluded places that are far away from the community for the initiation rites is that they want to maintain privacy and secrecy. The other reason mentioned by the chiefs was that the initiation sites are places where the ancestral spirits reside, so by being at such places the initiates are well-positioned within the spiritual realm of the divine.

Every religious society has a system that defines and expresses the sacred and profane, a moral community that enforces a set of collective behaviours, rituals, norms and rules of the believing society (Giessen, 2006). Durkheim notes that, rituals are a means of bringing individuals together as a collective group. He also conceived religion as a phenomenon that is founded on the ritual separation of the sacred from the profane in which the sacred and the social collectivity were insulated by ritual prohibitions (Turner, 2006). During the field study, the researcher observed that the Varembe circumcision and initiation rites were performed at two different mountains, which the respondents considered as sacred. According to Durkheim, the sacred could be defined as that which people take to be unquestionable and responsible for societal moral realities (Giesen, 2006). The Varembe people in the view of Durkheim do not question the sacredness of their initiation sites. The initiates from areas under Chiefs Maranda and Neshuro mainly use Mazhou Mountain for the initiation rituals while initiates from areas under Chiefs Chitanga, Negari and Mazetese mainly use Songogwe Mountain. The Mountains are several kilometres away from the villages and they are located near major rivers. Mazhou is close to Bubi River and Songogwe is close to the Mwenezi River. Eliade (1995) made a distinction between the sacred and the profane in which he argues that the sacred is defined by the absence of the profane. In the

case of Mazhou and Songogwe, the Mountains are distinguished from the profane world by virtue of being secluded and by the existence of the numinous, which deeply influence the belief and the lives of the Varembe people. Mountains were associated with divinities, for example, the Jews and the Muslims held a similar belief about the sacredness on certain mountains, which they linked to the receiving of divine revelation by prophets in their religions. Therefore, the Varembe initiation ritual is performed in a sacred space distinguished from any other by virtue of the sacredness that makes it appropriate for the initiation ritual to occur.

Six village heads interviewed from these areas emphasised that both rivers are perennial and are sacred because they are believed to be inhabited by the mermaid spirit. Village head, Chikapa (aged 43); from Chizumba village under chief Neshuro confirmed that:

*Makomo iwayo anoera . Gore rega rega tinoona moto uchipfuta mugomo imomo munaMazhou kana mvura yave kuda kunaya. Iro Songogwe unonzwa maungira evanhukadzi vanenge vachitswa zviyo muduri, kana kunzwa mabhero emombe dzamusingaoni. Ukaenda mugomo imomo ukataura zvinyadzi, kuita tsvina, kana kutuka haudzoki zvakare.*

[Those mountains are sacred. Every year we witness the whole Mazhou Mountain engulfed in flames of fire towards the rain season. In Songogwe Mountain, you could hear sounds of women pounding grain in a mortar. You could as well hear bells of invisible cattle grazing in the mountain. If you get to the mountain and defecate or if you utter words of profanity you risk disappearing forever.]

The myths surrounding the initiation sites serve to authenticate the beliefs about the Varembe initiation sites. The magnitude of sacredness surrounding these places of initiation is influenced by the enormity of the belief held by the Varembe people about the myths and rituals defining the places. The mythical stories narrated about the Mazhou and Songogwe mountains symbolise the presence of the sacred. Eliade supports this view by pointing out that, myths and rituals act as symbols of the sacred and that they are understood from the believers' point of view (Cox, 1992). In the Varembe ritual, the manifestation of the sacred is told in myth and re-enacted in ritual. As they do so, the lives of the believers are transformed by coming into contact with the sacred world. The Varembe initiation ritual is powerful in conveying moral obligations to the initiates because it exists in myths that stipulate what is expected from the individual. Myths are important because these make the ritual meaningful. Without myths the Varembe ritual would have ceased to have meaning and would have become extinct. Through ritual, believers can

retrace myths back to the origins of the world where there was chaos and disharmony, and in so doing they find themselves renewed (Bell, 2009). Eliade relates ritual to cosmogonic myth, and emphasised that the ritual recreates creation. This relationship evokes the theme of birth, death, rebirth, degenerative chaos and regenerative order (Bell, 2009). In Eliade's view, the identification of human acts with divine models are preserved in myths and enables people to experience the world morally, authentically, meaningfully and consciously (Studstill, 2000). The sacredness of the Varembe ritual sites explains why the Varembe go to secluded areas for the rituals. The ritual transports the individual to the time of the myth, thereby bringing him closer to the spirit world (Eliade, 1963). The myth and ritual patterns of the Varembe people continue to speak to the imaginations of the new generations, making them conscious about life events. Through symbol and ritual performance of primordial times, the believers identify the historical past with the here and now and through this re-enactment, the participants consider themselves to be truly human, can sanctify the world and render meaningful the activities of their lives (Studstill, 2000). The myths are important among the Varembe because through rituals they convey certain ethics valuable to the existence of the society. The Varembe people continue to create myths and revive the ancient myths that keep the initiation ritual meaningful.

The sacredness of the mountains and their significance among the Varembe people epitomises their link with the Jewish ancestry. The Jews associated the Supreme Being (Yahweh), the promulgation of the Covenant and its renewal, new beginnings, new life, health and wellbeing with high places such as Mount Horeb. Similarly, according to Chief Chitanga, the sacred mountains Mazhou and Songogwe are places of cleansing and renewal of individuals' lives. When the Israelites sinned against Yahweh, they were expelled from Canaan into the wilderness, where they would suffer as a way of purging them for their sins. In the wilderness, the Israelites were sanctified and made righteous as God's people (Hosea 9:9). The Varembe initiation ritual compels the individuals into the secret and closed society to dedicate them to the transcendent and purge them of their previous lives. The sovereignty of the sacred at the initiation places provides a platform for the Varembe initiates to move from the state of 'nothingness' into the state of 'somethingness.' This action symbolizes a new beginning and a change of the states of consciousness of the initiates.



Commenting on the rivers at the initiation sites, one traditional healer named Hakata (aged 53) from Rinette village Nine, confirmed that the Varembe initiates use water from the nearby rivers for bathing and cooking. During the time when initiation is not taking place, the initiates would be taught how to catch fish in the nearby rivers. He also emphasised that these places preserved some religious consciousness of the community enshrined in the sense that the mountains are sacred and that they are places of residence of ancestral spirits. However, Hakata maintains that these places are also preferred because they have dense forests which are suitable for privacy required during the initiation ritual. The Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual is sacred because it is performed in a highly sacred environment of revered mountains and rivers.

Terms used by the Varembe people point to the key issues of the ritual. Whilst they use terms like *musasa* or *chiremba* for the sacred sites of initiation, the few Shangani people interviewed refer to the sites as *hoko*, meaning ‘where circumcision takes place.’ Maposa (2011:483) in the study of the Shangani people used the word *hoko* to mean the same. To the Varembe of Karanga origin, *hoko* means a circumcised and pointed penis without a foreskin. The word has sexual overtones, derived from *hoko*, which refers to a wooden peg. The earth signifies the female sex organ and the drawing of the peg into the earth symbolises sexual intercourse. The Varembe people treat sex as sacred because of its association with the earth and fertility, and the metaphor is a symbol of the relevance of the ritual, to deal with issues of sexuality.

#### **6.4 The Central Role-players in the Initiation Ritual**

There are three main role-players in the Varembe initiation ritual namely, *Nyamukanga*, *Vadzabhi* and the initiates.

##### **6.4.1 Nyamukanga**

*Nyamukanga* is an individual who controls and oversees all the activities at the Varembe circumcision and initiation camp. He is the master of circumcision who serves as a traditional surgeon responsible for cutting the foreskins of the initiates during the circumcision rites. The respondents indicated that, there is no formal training for his duties and he could have had mentoring from his descendants and other traditional circumcisers. In the Eastern Cape, in South Africa, the traditional circumciser is referred to as “lingcibi”, in Ghana: “wanzam”, in Nigeria: “olula” and in Zambia he is called “chikenzi”. Their roles are handed down from generation to

generation (Mogotlane, 2004; Vincent, 2007; WHO, 2009). In the Varembe culture, the office of the *Nyamukanga* is hereditary and can be passed on to family descendants from one generation to the next. Chief Maranda noted that in most cases, it is the duty of the father to train the eldest son to become the *Nyamukanga* so that he takes over when the father retires due to old age or death. However, before one assumes the post of *Nyamukanga*, he has to be a *Mudzabhi* (ritual elder responsible for training the initiates) so that he would be equipped with the necessary skills expected of his duties. An individual whose descendants occupied the position of *Nyamukanga* is the only one who can become the *Nyamukanga*. The cultural leaders including chiefs, traditional healers and experienced *Nyamukanga* take part in the selection of those *Vadzabhi* whom they feel qualify to hold the post of *Nyamukanga*. Promotion is based on maturity and character. Maforo Tachiva (aged 80) who is the *Nyamukanga* residing at Bubi River defined *Nyamukanga* as a qualified, elderly person who has overseen the Varembe initiation processes for more than twenty years and has served as *mudzabhi* for at least ten years. He should be an elderly person of good repute whose astuteness in preserving the Varembe cultural values is proven beyond doubt. *The Nyamukanga* is similar to the ritual elder referred to as the master of circumcision in Guinea Bissau and Senegal. The master of circumcision is selected from among the elders of the villages and their duty is to supervise the circumcision procedure (Niang and Boiro, 2007).

Maforo Tachiva notes that *the Nyamukanga* occupies the most senior position after the post of *mudzabhi*. Such a person carries the duties of a traditional healer (*n'anga*) as well. He is endowed with knowledge of traditional medicine and healing. Some of the respondents confirmed that, the *Nyamukanga* provides the herbs to treat the circumcision wounds of the initiates. Whilst *Nyamukanga* is the chief initiator responsible for shedding the foreskins of the initiates, he may delegate some of his duties to his assistants, the *Vadzabhi*. One recent initiate affirmed that the other duty of the *Nyamukanga* is to preserve the sacredness of the initiation place with traditional medicine that is believed to ward off evil spirits. The *Nyamukanga* is a manifestation of the sacred on earth and is a custodian of the Varembe traditional culture, norms and beliefs.

#### **6.4.2 Vadzabhi**

The respondents described the *Vadzabhi* as traditional teachers responsible for training and providing instruction to the initiates at the initiation camp. These duties distinguish them from

the *Nyamukanga*. The *Vadzabhi* are expected to mould the young men in accordance with the values of the society. It is in this context that the traditional initiation schools become agents of traditional African morality. Most participants stressed that the office of *Vadzabhi* is inherited, obtainable through one's family descendants. One whose descents were *Vadzabhi* cannot rise to the post of *Nyamukanga* but will remain *Mudzabhi*. For one to qualify to be the *Vadzabhi*, one should have undergone the processes of the Varembe circumcision and initiation in not less than ten years previously. One who is expected to become the *Vadzabhi* should be someone who is upright, mature, of high integrity and with high moral astuteness. Such a person should be the guardian of the norms and values of the Varembe culture.

The respondents described the *Vadzabhi* as people who have the knowledge of cutting the foreskins of the initiates during the initiation rites, but that duty is reserved for the *Nyamukanga*. Whilst it is the duty of the *Nyamukanga* to circumcise, he may delegate this to the *Vadzabhi* if necessary whilst he plays a supervisory role. The researcher observed that on the day of going to *Chiremba* (circumcision) the boys are accompanied by the *Vadzabhi*. Like the *Nyamukanga*, the *Vadzabhi* are the custodians of the Varembe culture who preserve its norms and values. The emphasis for both posts of *Nyamukanga* and *Vadzabhi* is on the quality of one's character, which the initiates should emulate. According to Smith and Berge (2009), the continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental determinants, contribute towards the shaping of an individual's behaviour. Bandura (1986) argues that, the interaction between human beings and their environment produces learning. Any observable behaviour does not emanate from internal determinants but from environmental stimuli. Behaviours are learned by observing and copying the significant people (Bandura, 1986). The characters of the *Vadzabhi* and *Nyamukanga* should therefore be a reflection and a response to the Varembe's social and cultural context, so that the initiates can copy their behaviours that reflect the societal expectations.

#### **6.4.3 The Initiate**

The respondents referred to an initiate as any male who has reached the age and time of participating in the circumcision and initiation ritual. Respondents from Chitanga, Negari, and Maranda affirmed that the rightful age for an individual to be initiated is from age seven to fifteen years.

In those tribes where traditional male circumcision is cultural, such as the Changani, it is not an optional procedure determined by individuals but by the family members and the society (Maposa, 2011). The researcher established that among the Varembe, the parents or family members determine the suitability of an individual to undergo the initiation ritual. Most participants indicated that, before the boys go through the initiation ritual, a consultation process is done involving the parents or family members and the local traditional circumciser on the suitability of the young man to participate in the initiation ritual. The family members would also seek advice on what should be done in preparation for the ritual, and when the ritual is going to be carried out.

Some societies have a specific age that determines the time, at which an individual should be circumcised, for example, in the Wolof of Senegal, the young men are circumcised at the age of thirteen (Niang and Boiro, 2007). Certain societies like the Ndembu of Zambia and the Shangani of Zimbabwe have measures and customs to indirectly compel the individual to go through the circumcision procedure when they feel that the time is ripe for him to be initiated. The participants unveiled various titles used to refer to the initiates. They mentioned that, before the initiates leave for the initiation camp they are referred to as *shuvuru* (valueless) and all those who have not yet gone through the Varembe initiation are called by that derogatory name. Hanga (aged 38) from Chief Negare explains the word *shuvuru* as a word full of sarcasm, meaning a useless and helpless person who is still at an infantile stage. Any male whose sex organ is still covered in its sheath or who has reached an age before being circumcised is referred to as *shuvuru*, and is regarded a boy regardless of age. None among the respondents interviewed for this research appreciated such a pejorative ellipsis to their name. During the process of initiation, the initiates are referred to as *varundu* [undergraduate].

The Shangani and Varembe societies treat uncircumcised individuals as outcasts who are not afforded access to privileges of the society. Such individuals are deprived of family rights and responsibilities (Maposa, 2011; Sibanda, 2013). On the other hand the research respondents indicated that among the Varembe people, it could be up to the individual whether to undergo circumcision or not, but this depended on the strength of the compulsion from the community one lives in. In the Varembe culture, the research respondents confirmed that some of the boys are also influenced by their peers to be initiated. In societies with a fragile social fabric,

individuals could be circumcised without the involvement of the society. In South Africa, there are incidences of Xhosa boys who fled from their families to be circumcised without the consent of their parents (Mogotlane, Ntlangulela and Ogunbanjo, 2004; Vincent, 2007). In some societies, forced circumcisions through abductions have been reported, for example, in Zambia, Malawi, South Africa and Uganda (Bailey, Neema, Othieno, 1999; Ncayiyana, 2003; Ngalande, Levy, Kapondo, Bailey, 2006; Lukobo, 2007).

The initiates obey the ritual leaders, take instruction, and grasp all the lessons provided at the camp without any option for resistance (Vincent, 2007). They are also expected to tolerate the circumcision and initiation procedure without showing any weakness (Niang and Boiro, 2007).

## **6.5 Reasons why the Varemba People Perform the Ritual**

The respondents identified several reasons why the Varemba people perform the initiation ritual. All the chiefs and other respondents interviewed have deemed the circumcision and initiation ritual indispensable for them and their people because through it they gain entrance to manhood which in turn affords them status, respect, privileges, rights and responsibility in the community and all the other benefits that goes with manhood. The reasons provided were as follows; the ritual marks the transition from boyhood to manhood, it bestows cultural identity, individuals do not want to become outcasts, disassociating the young men from their mothers to instil discipline, to inhibit aggression between circumcised and uncircumcised individuals, to convey important life lessons.

### **6.5.1 The Ritual Marks the Transition from Boyhood to Manhood**

Circumcision is of significance to most traditionally circumcising communities because being circumcised is the only way of attaining manhood. Most respondents interviewed for this study generally agreed that the initiation ritual marks the passage from boyhood to adulthood. It is a demarcation of childhood from adulthood. It is a way of initiating the young people into adulthood that is combined with teaching them cultural values (Kubik, 1978).

The boys who participate in most social aspects of life are those who are circumcised. Most participants indicated that a circumcised individual is responsible and accountable for his actions because he is viewed as someone who has attained manhood and can stand for his actions. The

participants confirmed that any male person who is not circumcised is not accorded respect and given responsibility in the society because he is considered too young. As a young man, an uncircumcised individual acts irresponsibly and he cannot account for his behaviour, but it is the duty of the parents to do that (Evans, 2015). In the Xhosa culture, when a boy is not able to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong, he is not held responsible for his actions (Vincent, 2007).

A respondent (aged 20) maintained that one who has not attained manhood cannot own any property and cannot even marry. Regardless of age, an uncircumcised man remains a boy and unfit to carry out the duties of the community. The village headman, Njeru (aged 76), from the Matande area under the chieftainship of Negari stressed that such a person is unfit for family and community responsibility because he is still a child (*shuvuru*). There were respondents who indicated that most women ridiculed them as young and unfit for marriage. Meissner (2007) notes that the Xhosa women of South Africa deny proposals of love from uncircumcised individuals because they consider them too young to start a family.

Male circumcision is seen as a condition of attaining full status in the society. Among the Meru in Kenya, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal, uncircumcised individuals are discriminated against in many ways, for example, they are given menial tasks and they are called names and rebuked for any trivial offence (Niang and Boiro, 2007; Myers, et al. 1985). In Kenya, among the Masai and the Bukusu people, circumcised men become warriors and they are referred to as elders once their children are circumcised (Marck, 1997). A key component of this transition is access to marriage and sex. It is an entry into the sexual world of the adults, which brings with it other societal privileges, and duties of the community. Daimon (2013) avers that in the Yao tribe, an uncircumcised man would not have access to sex. Girls would mock anyone who sleeps with such a man, for sleeping with a child. The deduction that from this is that the Varembe society has a system that makes the initiation ritual imperative and obligatory.

### **6.5.2 The Ritual Bestows Cultural Identity**

The respondents explained that an uncircumcised person has no identity and has no social status, thus he cannot be aligned to any culture as he is cultureless, stateless and he is 'neither here nor there' and therefore, cannot enjoy the benefits of the Varembe culture. One ritual elder

(*Vadzabhi*) (aged 53), from Chitombogwizi Village in Bubi, referred to an uncircumcised person as, “*mombe yamashanga*” meaning “a wandering animal without an owner.” One village headman (aged 47) noted that traditional circumcision distinguishes one who is a *Muremba* from those who are not. From his findings about the Yao tribe, Daimon (2013) stated that, circumcision was taken as a form of identity that distinguished the Yao from the indigenous Ndebele and Shona people. The rite of initiation is a way of accepting individuals into the group and its activities. Loygren (2005) argues that, most men in Africa are circumcised as part of the religious and ethnic affiliation. The ritual links the individual to the community and from the community to the spiritual world. Daimon (2013) established that the Yao people viewed circumcision as a platform for cultural expression. The importance of identity among the Varembe people is equivalent to the significance given to it by the Yao tribe. These rites link the individual to community development. According to Melucci (1996), circumcision is a way of accepting members into the group before they participate in community collective action and contribute to the decision-making processes within the Yao community. Daimon (2013) stressed that, the significance of Yao identity is that of providing a collaborative effort against HIV and AIDS. Those who are not circumcised cannot take part in this collaborative work. Among the Varembe people, circumcision and initiation is a motivation towards conformity to their culture. A person without identity cannot have access to the material aspects of the society.

The Zimbabwean youths today have multiple identities because of continuously drawing on the varied cross-cultural divide (Nyanga, 2011). Their life-styles, because of this exposure, are now divorced from the adult world they physically reside in. They are secluded and detached from the real Zimbabwean cultural society. However, through a commonly instituted identity, foreigners and their culture cannot easily enter into the territory of the tribe; their intention should be discerned first by going through the initiation ritual. Besides that, such individuals are treated as unimportant and more as outsiders in the Varembe culture. Only those who underwent the initiation ritual can enjoy the privileges. Social exclusion acted as a motivating factor for individuals to have no option but to join others going through the initiation. The Varembe culture makes it possible for an individual to realise the need for initiation.

### 6.5.3 Preventing Individuals from Becoming Outcasts

The respondents stated that it is imperative for one to go through the Varembe initiation to be considered part of the group. According to a participant named Mbokodho (recent initiate from Matibi, aged 15), the boys should go through initiation so that they would not become outcasts. He notes that uncircumcised young men are looked down upon as useless; they are stigmatised and labelled cowards (*makwara*). The young men are blamed for being irresponsible and they are treated as suspects when anything goes wrong in the society. No one would want to be associated with such individuals whom the Varembe society views as pollutants and who have the potential to bring misfortune to others through contagious means. This treatment of boys who are not circumcised is also common among the Yao migrants in Zimbabwe who describe an uncircumcised Yao as a boy, a dog or an unclean thing (Funani, 1990). Similarly, Thandisizwe (2010)'s study of the Xhosa males in East London, South Africa, established that the uninitiated men are marginalized and referred to as dogs. Demeaning and trivial duties are reserved for people who are not initiated and who are not part of the social union.

Among the Varembe there are various uniting acts that fit Van Gennep's (1960) classification of rites of incorporation, such as marriage ceremonies. The rites have a mutual transference of personality and there is the mechanics of being tied to one another and covered by the same "veil". The Yao initiates, after going through the initiation ritual are incorporated into the group to contribute to the society's collaborative work (Daimon, 2013). The Ndembu initiates of Zambia become new creatures after the shedding of the past and are socially integrated into the tribe to enjoy its full privileges (Turner, 1969). This act creates a continuous social bond. Similarly, the Varembe initiation rites leave 'strangers' at the periphery of social life and the individuals who go through the initiation ritual are knit together. The respondents stated that people who are not initiated are not allowed to marry because they are more like strangers. An uninitiated man is regarded as an outcast who cannot start a home and no woman would take an outcast for marriage. Women are therefore influential in the decision-making process of motivating men to be initiated. In Lagarde (2003)'s study of South Africa, men who reported partner request as the reason for being traditionally circumcised were 13.1%. On the other hand, Crowley, et al. (1990:19) observed that, "no self-respecting Xhosa girl would marry a Xhosa male unless he had submitted to the Umkhwetha (circumcision)." The impression given is that



any man who is circumcised goes through the initiation lessons that help them to develop maturity and to be able to be responsible towards their families when they get married. In the Varembe ritual, the initiation aspect is critical in providing moral lessons to the initiates.

Therefore, the Varembe circumcision and initiation is a rite of incorporation that takes those individuals who are outside the tribe's sphere of influence and make them full members of the group. Among the Meru in Kenya and Bendel State in Nigeria and in rural Guinea-Bissau, male circumcision and initiation is considered essential for an individual to become a full member of the society (Grant, 2004; Niang and Boiro, 2007; Myers, 1985). The individual is first introduced to a limited group, then to other restricted groups and at the same time to the society. The individuals are separated from the outside world by performing prescribed rites. Rites of incorporation give emphasis on physical union that could be more permanent and long lasting (Van Gennep, 1960). The individuals who feel secluded by not being engaged in community activities would be encouraged to connect with others through the rite of initiation. This state of affairs would motivate the individuals to go through the initiation ritual because they are consistently reminded of their inferior status. The fear of rejection leads to a low self-esteem and such individuals strive to avoid potentially threatening situations by going through the initiation ritual (Link and Phelan, 2001). Labelling affects the individual psychologically and emotionally and this influences his decision to take action. The society around one is useful in shaping the decisions one makes in life. Therefore, individuals are placed under enormous pressure to go through the initiation to avoid victimisation and ridicule.

#### **6.5.4 Disassociating the Young Men from their Mothers**

The circumcision and initiation ritual has a way of defining roles in society by separating male from female roles. Maposa (2013) notes that during initiation, the boys are taught gender roles and how to relate to people of the opposite sex and avoid unnecessary misconduct. Niang and Boiro (2007) show that male circumcision reinforces masculinity, since the removal of the prepuce is viewed as the removal of the feminine element. The ritual also balances the social roles of men and women by making a man lose his foreskin, which is symbolically equivalent to the loss of virginity in women (Niang and Boiro, 2007). Respondents affirmed that in the Varembe culture, uncircumcised boys have a tendency of not isolating themselves and fail to distinguish themselves from their mothers because they view themselves as young. Pondombiri

(*Vadzabhi* from Lundi, aged 61) noted that, some boys are attached to their mothers most of the time, so much so, that there would be only a few boys to take up some masculine chores. He pejoratively described them as *pwere* meaning that they view themselves as infants. Some of the boys use this as an excuse to be excluded from tough tasks.

Most of the respondents therefore view the Varembe initiation ritual as a necessary mechanism to detach the boys from women so that they can take part in manly duties. A respondent from Mazetese (aged 17) points that the only way to force such individuals to detach themselves was, for example, through name calling, subjecting them to culturally constructed stereotypes, treat them as lazy, immature and subject them to ridicule. Niang and Boiro (2007) argue that separating an individual from their mothers was a symbol of dying and rebirth. Therefore, male circumcision and the initiation ritual could be perceived as the source of a new personality and new social relations. It was evident among some ethnic groups in Senegal and rural Guinea-Bissau, that men who are initiated are bonded together far more than they are bonded to their parents (Niang and Boiro, 2007).

Detaching boys from their mothers is a way of instilling discipline. Boys need to be independent of their mothers so that they can develop self-discipline and become responsible for their lives. The researcher gathered that the Varembe initiation ritual instils discipline into the initiates by teaching them to be morally responsible for their actions. Chitombogwizi (the *Vadzabhi* from Bubi aged 46), commented over the indiscipline of the boys who have not yet undergone the Varembe puberty ritual, notes:

*Vakomana vasina kuenda kuChiremba vanonetsa kuti havana tsika nekuti vanenge vasina kudzidziswa unhu hwakanaka kuburikidza nezvidzidzo zvekuChiremba.*

[There is increasing indiscipline among the boys who have not yet gone through the initiation ritual because they would not have gone through moral lessons provided at the Varembe initiation camp.]

Respondents used the word *nhundiramatsime* (one who urinates in a well of water) to refer to people who display a lack of discipline and low morals. The respondents shared the same view that the Varembe initiation ritual conveys morals to the initiate and that is the reason why it is necessary for the young man to be initiated. Tongofa, (a participant from Negare, aged 41) indicated that individuals who did not go through the initiation ritual would not be aware of the

rules and regulations expected of them by the Varembe culture. Chances of misbehaving were high and it was a sign that one is still immature. Immature people want to experiment and engage in risky activities like having sexual relations at an early stage. According to Koyana (1980), initiation is a conferral of responsibilities on the initiate. Before the circumcision and initiation ritual, the boy is said to be immature to the extent that he cannot distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. As long as the individual was not initiated, he is said to be in this stage regardless of age. Gono (a participant from Matibi, aged 31), argued that during initiation the reason why the period of confinement and transition takes place through specific teachings of moral virtues cherished by the society, is to make the Varembe initiates responsible. Virtues such as respect, obedience, self-control and tolerance that are vital in the fight against HIV and AIDS are instilled in the youths. Ngoni (participant aged 17) held a similar view that the Varembe culture offers the opportunity to exercise moral authority that has an immense influence on the lifestyle of individuals which ultimately brings about behavioural change.

#### **6.5.5 To Inhibit Aggression between Initiated and Uninitiated Individuals**

Aggression was cited by most respondents as existing between young and older boys who have not yet undergone the Varembe 'traditional knife.' Ngoni (participant (aged 17) points out that males who had successfully gone through initiation are referred to as *vamwenye*. The title functions as an accolade that defines anyone who successfully went through the Varembe initiation ritual. Respondents reflected that altercations usually exist between the *vamwenye* and the *shuvuru* over rights and responsibilities. The reason for the conflict was that the uninitiated want to enjoy similar privileges as those enjoyed by the initiated. Momoti (2002) highlighted some of the privileges gained by those individuals who would have successfully gone through initiation, which include the right to inheritance, the right to take part in either family courts or communal courts and the right to act on behalf of his father during his absence. Momoti also highlighted that an initiated man has the right to attend and participate in family feasts and ceremonies freely without being pushed aside by being considered a child. Chitombogwizi (aged 46) confirmed that the *shuvuru* are not given responsibilities for any duties at home. For example, they cannot be entrusted with family property, and when they do so, they are supervised by those who are initiated. They also do not take part in any family gatherings or ceremonies, for example, the *kurova guva* rituals (bringing home the spirit of the dead rituals), if

they do so, they would be responsible for menial duties like fetching water, cooking and skinning the goat or animal that would have been killed for meat (*kuvhiya mbudzi*). The time of initiation prepares the initiates emotionally to enable them to cope with problems they encounter in life (Drain, 2006; Niang and Boiro, 2007).

Initiation is believed to bring about behavioural change in the initiate, since the type of education they receive teaches them how to be responsible with family property and duties assigned to them. The time spent in seclusion after circumcision is the period of developing new attitudes, practices and behaviour (Niang and Boiro, 2007). The distinction between the *shuvuru* and the *vamwenye* made by the Varembe society causes quarrels due to inferiority that sometimes end up in fights. The *shuvuru* were viewed as aggressive and uncultured people. Such behaviours were corrected by going through the process of initiation that gives the initiates the tools and experience with which to approach life. Uncircumcised boys agitate to go through initiation so that they could enjoy the privileges of being a 'real man', like taking positions of honour deserved by the circumcised people. However, it is the entire initiation process that has the potential to alter an individual's behaviour.

#### **6.5.6 To Acquire Important Life Teachings**

The research respondents highlighted the views that are important in distinguishing circumcision (in a surgery at medical institutions) and initiation that include teaching and sharing of knowledge. The Varembe curriculum during initiation is similar to that of the Yao migrants in Zimbabwe, which Daimon (2013,303) confirms has systematic indoctrination about the Yao culture and identity that is accomplished through various activities, songs and sacred teachings on sexuality, health, hygiene, death, marriage, and procreation. During this study, most respondents agreed that the Varembe initiation ritual provides many enriching lessons, which are valid for life. Reflecting on the importance of the Varembe puberty ritual, village heads from the Dine area under Chief Maranda and two traditional healers named Mabhodhi (aged 43) and Mawere (aged 54), from the Rutenga catchment area, expressed their discontent over the Zimbabwean Government's introduction of the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision in hospitals. One village head notes that:

*Ruzivo netsvagurudzo itsva rwuri kubva kudanho rehutano, nekumaNon- Governmental  
Organisatiosn rurikuunzwa kwatiri tichiudzwa kuti kudzingiswa kunochengetedza utano*

*panhengo dzedu nekudzivirira mukondombera we HIV ne- AIDS. Hatitambiri zvakadero nekuti dzidziso iyoyo inokakangisa vanakomana vedu. Vanopedzisira vasingazivi zvinotarisirwa kwavari mutsika dzedu nemagariro. Havadzidziswi dzidziso dzeChiremba dzinotarisirwa mukukura kwavo. KuChiremba tinovadzingisa nekuvadzamisa muunyanzvi hunotarisirwa mutsika dzedu. Muzvipatara vanongodzingisa zvatopera hapana kana dzidziso dzeunhu dzavanombopiwa. Isu kuVaremba tinodzingisa tapedzezvo todzidzisa. Vakomana vese vanopfuura nemumaoko edu vanoita varume chaivo vanenge vaibva, vaumbika kuve vanhu vanetsika.*

[Modern information and researches by the ministry of Health and Non-Governmental Organizations is brought to us informing about the benefits of circumcision as that of increasing hygiene on sexual organs and prevention of sexually transmitted infection such as HIV and AIDS. We do not accept this practice because it corrupts our boys and they end up not knowing what is required of them by our culture. They are not trained to become full members of the Varemba culture who have grasped the life teachings expected of an adult. Our rituals equip them with the necessary mandatory skills. Hospitals just cut off the foreskin and the boy leaves without being imparted with any moral lessons. Yet, in our culture, we offer proper training and initiation so that all the boys who pass through the process of initiation ritual become real men, ripe and moulded into pure morally upright human beings.]

The interviewed respondents shared a similar view, for example, Takavafira Edmon (aged 17) from Lundi, indicated that they are not willing to participate in the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision because it has proven to be a bad practice that weakens their ritual practices. Gondo (participant, aged 19) indicated that the Varemba initiation ritual is not an ordinary process of just shedding the foreskin, but it imparts some skills, which are relevant to the individuals. The initiates are taught ethics that bind the society, for example respect of elders and peers, courage and fortitude. In the study of the Thonga initiates of South Africa, Momoti (2002) discovered that the initiates are sometimes exposed to hardships to harden them for future challenges of life. The Varemba initiates are also trained to endure hardships like men and to have problem solving skills through exposing them to harsh conditions such as remaining naked throughout the period of initiation.

Another aspect of instruction given to the Varemba initiates is similar to what has been highlighted by Koyana (1980) that the initiation education curriculum is meant to teach the young man the lifestyle of an adult and the dignity of manhood. The initiates are taught guidance pertaining to married life and sexual instruction, the traditions and beliefs about their culture (Wilson, et al. 1952). Loygren (2005) argues that most men in Africa are circumcised as part of

their religious and ethnic affiliation. The Yao people like the Varembe people, viewed circumcision as a platform for cultural expression. Kubik (1978) points out that circumcision is a way of initiating the young man into adulthood combined with the teaching of cultural values. In the study of the Shangani people, Maposa (2013) points out that the *hoko* (circumcision) provides a platform for traditional education that develops the initiates into people with strong patterns of behaviour and who uphold moral values of the society.

*Nyamukanga* (aged 63) from Sovhelele, under chief Mazetese, indicated that they still perform circumcision as a cultural and religious practice, not just for removing the male foreskin as medical institutions do during circumcision, but the initiatory aspect forms the crux of the Varembe ritual. The respondents envisage the Varembe initiation ritual as outweighing the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision in terms of the provision of requisite life skills instead of turning out unskilled boys.

## **6.6 The Phases of the Varembe Circumcision and Initiation Ritual**

The Varembe initiation ritual follows some distinct phases. Van Gennep (1908) identified a pattern of initiation that includes three phases: rites of separation from the asexual world, followed by the transition (liminal) from childhood to adolescence, and lastly, rites of incorporation into the world of sexuality. Although there are different phases in Van Gennep's classification, the sacred is the ritual pivot that conforms to the Karanga people's worldview (Shoko, 2007). This implies that the rites of passage are purely religious and they fulfil some social and psychological roles, which could be useful in the prevention of HIV. The presentation of data in this section follows Van Gennep's three-tier phase of ritual process. However, Green, et al. (1993) and Cheikh, (2007) included the fourth phase, that of preparation, which forms the initial stage of the ritual and it is merely assumed in Van Gennep's phases (1989), which discusses the role of puberty rituals as marking distinct phases in the life of an individual. Each of the phases has defined activities and regulations, which all the initiates adhere to at each given time as they pass through the stages of life.

### **6.6.1 The Preparation Stage of the Ritual**

The first phase of the Varembe initiation ritual commences with preparation, which is meant to prepare the initiates ready for the initiatory event to come. This first stage is common in most

ethnic groups such as the Shangani, the Yao migrants of Zimbabwe, the Xhosa of South Africa (Green, 1993; Maposa, 2007; Daimon, 2013). However, at times the preparation stage is not achieved since there are reports of some initiates who run away from their parents to join others during the initiation ceremony, for example the Xhosa. This happens especially when pressure is placed on the boys by the society for them to be circumcised (Mogotlane, Ntlangulela, Ogunbanjo, 2004; Vincent, 2007). Whilst there is separation in the Varembe ritual, the word as used in Van Gennep (1908)'s theory of ritual gives the impression of abruptness and force, implying that the initiates are forcibly and violently taken to the sacred ritual sites where they face unknown action. However, whilst forced abductions have been reported in some ethnic groups in Malawi, Zambia, South Africa and Uganda, such practices are now very rare (Bailey, et al. 1999; Ncayiyana, 2003; Ngalande, et al. 2006; Lukobo, 2007). The involvement of the police and other law enforcement entities could be the reason why there are limited cases of abduction in most countries. The Varembe initiation ritual displays none of these abductions; instead the initiates prepare to participate in the ritual willingly although there could be some degree of motivational factors behind the willingness to participate.

The researcher observed that on the day of going to *chiremba* (initiation camp) the boys were accompanied by the *Vadzabhi*. Among the initiates who were preparing to leave for the ritual, no one was forcibly drawn into the ritual; rather, the interest stemmed from an enthusiastic desire to go through the initiation ritual. According to Shoko (2007), in Zimbabwe, the Varembe prepare home rituals at the onset of the ritual. Most circumcision participants, for example Shuro (aged 13), held the same view that some home rituals had been performed for the Varembe initiates before they left their homes for the *Vadzabhi's* places where they would gather before they leave for the initiation camp.

Niang (2007) states that the initiate's family prepares the boy socially for the pain that he is going to encounter during circumcision through animal sacrifice and extensive feasts the night before the circumcision ritual. Ndoro (initiate aged 14) affirms that the families prepare home rituals from a period of one to two weeks and lasts up to the night before the initiate leaves for the initiation ritual. He also pointed out that the family preparations involve the killing of a goat for meat to be eaten during the mini-ceremony. Throwing traditional snuff (*bute*) on the ground (*kukanda fodya pasi*) was confirmed as a common feature of the preparation procedures. Every

stage of the Varembe ritual has certain ethics that are conveyed to the initiates, which become useful in their future lives, for example, respecting traditional customs, norms, and values. Mhototi (participant aged 61) highlighted that, spiritually, a ritual bathe is performed where the boy is washed in water that is mixed with some herbs to ward off evil spirits. The bathing is accompanied by brewing millet beer and throwing traditional snuff on the ground (*kupira*). The purpose of the rituals is to dedicate the boys to the ancestral spirits and to appease the ancestors to protect the initiate from evil spirits, since the belief held by the Varembe people is that the initiates are vulnerable to attack by malicious spirits.

The significance of the Varembe home rituals was meant to introduce the initiate to the spirit world so that he begins to view himself as part of the cultural framework. The initiate subsequently develops cultural concepts that are relevant in moulding his behaviour. He begins to define himself as an individual who is influenced by the broader cultural framework. This defining system of reality is shared and learnt through socialisation (Bailey and Hutter, 2006). Other individuals motivate the initiate to self-reflect on how to behave, act, or develop new behaviours in accordance with what is expected in society. The respondents like Chief Negare stated that it was necessary to have home rituals because if they were not executed, some misfortune in the form of mental illness and even death during the ceremony could befall the initiate. Preparations are necessary to protect the initiates from evil spirits since they would be engaging in risky activities that could lead to their deaths. Initiations are like a dangerous journey into the abyss with its entire vicissitudes; therefore, all the initiates need spiritual protection. Green (1993) argues that during the period of initiation the initiates would be vulnerable to attack by evil spirits, and thus would need to be shielded. In Zambia, the Makishi people believed to be representatives of the ancestors announce the coming event from village to village and the process is alleged to be protective (Caldwell, et al. 1997).

Preparation also involves the physical retraction of the penis to assist the boy get used to the opening of his foreskin before he is circumcised. Some parents indicated that the fathers take part in monitoring if their boys are doing it properly. The fathers also provide instruction to the boys on the rules and regulations of the conduct expected during and after the initiation.

According to the *Vadzabhi* (aged 56, from Rinnete village Nine), all the initiates prepare very long sticks/whips (*Shamhu*). Some of the Shangani initiates who were in the group that was



observed called these *thumba*, made from thin saplings. The researcher observed that the initiates carry the sticks on their shoulders as they proceed to the place of initiation with their heads cast down. An initiate (aged 16) explained the purpose for the sticks by commenting that the initiate should screw up his courage like a warrior. He must surmount his fears by convincing himself that he has the strength and valour to overcome the ‘enemy’ (circumcision). The sticks symbolise a warrior, intimating that the future life of the initiate is full of vicissitudes and therefore he should prepare to face the challenges of life like a warrior. According to one participant, Gwave (aged 21, from Magara village), the strength referred to, is not of power, but of purpose:

*Shamhu mucherechedzo wekuti uzikanwe kuti uri Muremba uye kutaridza kuti uri murume. Unoitsegamba riri kuenda kuhondo, kureva kuti unofanirwa kunge une hushingi hunenge hwegamba uchigadzirira zvichaitika kuChiremba. Unofanira kuzvipira kuenda kunodzingiswa nekudzanirwa.*

[The whips are used as a symbol of identity and masculinity. They are like as if they are going to war, reminding you of the need to have the courage of a warrior to prepare for what is to come when you get to the place of initiation. You need to have the audacity to go through the initiation ceremony.]

The attribution of male violence is greatly lauded in masculine discourses of the Vairemba people and the carrying of sticks according to some initiates interviewed at Rutenga in Maimba Village defines manliness. One ritual elder from Bubi (aged 69) dispels the notion that the sticks are used to beat the people whom the initiates meet along their way, although the sticks could be used to discipline the initiates themselves when they misbehaved.

The Vairemba initiation ritual has a link with the spiritual realm predicated on what the initiates do before and during preparation. Home rituals are performed before the *shuvuru* leave home that are meant to plead with the ancestors for the protection of the boy in his journey. They go through the ritual bathing and the pouring of snuff on the ground to dedicate them to the world of the ancestors. The spirit world exerts an influence upon the initiates from the beginning and throughout the stages of the ritual and even in his life. The emphasis on preparation in the Vairemba ritual is on making the initiates ready for the ordeal to come.

### **6.6.2 Seclusion and Break from Privation**

The first phase of the Vairemba initiation is represented in Van Gennep (1908)’s separation stage, which is the second phase in this analysis of the Vairemba initiation ritual. In Van Gennep’s

separation phase, the individual leaves his social group and its identity, and passes through a stage of no identity or affiliation to join new social group, which confers a new identity on him (Bell, 2009). The Varembe initiate is metaphorically introduced to other special groups whose unity is not linked to any formal age group or stage of life. The initiates are mixed members of different age groups since the Varembe people allow individuals who have gone past the age of initiation without being initiated to go through the puberty ritual. In the Varembe initiation rite, separation entails movement of the initiates from their usual villages and the environment where they lived, to go to the sacred sites at Mazhou and Songogwe which are completely new environments. However, separation is both literal and metaphorical; it is literal in that the initiates leave their home environment and metaphorically joining new social groups of people. The new group is metaphorical in the sense that it would be the same people from the same society but would have acquired a new social status. Most participants for example Motora (aged 14) viewed separation as implying leaving everything behind and becoming disconnected from the ordinary world. It is a transition of individuals from one social status to the other. According to Van Gennep (1960), the significance of the transition from one state of social life to another is that, it transforms or changes an individual's persona. Turner (1969) argues that the significance of separation for the initiate is that it allows past knowledge to be superseded by new knowledge. The initiate must separate himself from the past because the new knowledge changes his persona, therefore his former knowledge should be replaced (Turner, 1995). In that process of separation, the Varembe initiate acquires a new personality. In the study of the Ndembu initiates of Zambia, Turner (1969) notes that separation is a phase in which all signs of personal identities and social status is obliterated. Among the Varembe people, it is a time of seclusion that starts when the *shuvuru* leaves his family to gather at a *Vadzabhi's* home and ends when they leave for the initiation camp (*musasa*). The home rituals that they perform during the course of initiation are a move towards obliterating the past lives.

Gluckman (1962) points out that the liminal period is sacred and there is a distinction between the sacred world and the profane world as an individual moves between these states. The Varembe initiate is expected to symbolically die away from his past life and receive a new birth with new information of life inscribed in mind. Sibanda (2013) emphasises that retreat or seclusion is the most significant part of the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual that culminates in the change of the individuals' social status (Sibanda, 2013).

The respondents interviewed for this research maintain that before the *shuvuru* arrives at the site of the initiation they confess all the wrongs and misdemeanours they would have committed and promise not to repeat them. After that, their heads and pubic hairs are shaven by the *Vadzabhi* using a razor blade each one of the initiates would have brought along for that purpose. Apart from the view that the human hair harbours evil spirits, Tombo (aged 47) avers that the removal of the hair symbolised newness and the implication ushered is that, the initiate should now focus on transforming to become a new creature. One initiate (aged 19) confirms these views by noting that:

*Tinoreurura tisati tapinda panzvimbo inoitirwa mutambo wechiremba. Kana wakamborara nemukadzi, kana wakaita mabasa akaipa sekuba kana kuita musindo unotofanirwa kureurura kuti ucheneswe. Tinokurudzirwa kureurura nekuti nzvimbo yemutambo uyu itsvene uye inoera. Ukapinda munzvimbo iyi usina kureurura unokwanisa kurwara kana kufa. Unokwanisa kurwara zvakaipisisa, kana kupenga. Hapana manzvingero unotosungirwa kureurura. Munozogerwa mushure mekureurura.*

[We confess before getting into the ritual space. If you once slept with a woman or if you were engaging in any anti-social activities like stealing or being violent, you confess so that you are cleansed. Emphasis is on ritual cleanliness because the ritual place is clean and sacred. If you get into the ritual space without confession, you will not be able to complete the initiation ritual because you may die. You may become very ill or mentally disturbed. There is no other option besides confessing. After confession, the head and the pubic hairs are shaven by the *Vadzabhi* as part of the cleansing process.]

The participants indicated that after the confession and the shaving of hair, the initiates bathe in the nearby river, then the *Nyamukanga* sprinkles them with water mixed with some herbs (*muti*). Separation from the past life is symbolised by the shaving of the head and pubic hairs. This means that the boys are leaving the erstwhile person behind and dress as a new being. Shaving and nakedness is a sign that the boys are all of the same status without any distinction. This notion instils a feeling of unity among the initiates and encourages them to have one purpose in life. Levi Strauss calls this the transformation process of one's personhood (Bell, 1989). Most of the participants indicated that the initiates remove all their clothes and everything to become completely naked and that is when the *Nyamukanga* permits them to tread on the 'holy ground', where the entire process of initiation will take place. The initiates remain stark naked for the entire duration of initiation, which may be up to three months. This is different from other ethnic groups such as the Shangani, the Xhosa and the Sotho, who wrap their naked bodies with blankets during the period of initiation (WHO, 2006). The Vairemba initiates use blankets only

during the night to cover their bodies when they are asleep. The initiates live in a 'camp' for several weeks or up to three months; this depends on the meaning and practices attached to the procedures (Sibanda, 2013). In Kenya, the Babukusu initiates go into seclusion for a period of about six months before the actual initiation ceremony takes place (Niang and Boiro, 2007). In Tanzania, traditional circumcisers perform the circumcision but there is no seclusion after that (WHO, 2006). Niang (2006) states that the time spent in seclusion can be viewed as an incubation period, when the initiates would be generating new attitudes, practices, and behaviours.

Ceremonies that occur at the first stage of the Varembe initiation ritual have as goal to establish an initial sense of separation from the immediate family as well as introducing taboos, avoidances and ideas about appropriate and modest behaviour expected from every initiate. Cohen (1964) views the first segment of initiation into puberty as particularly conducive to the inculcation of societal values and attitudes. He argues that the first stage is more important to a society than the last stage of the initiation ritual where an often-elaborate ceremony completes the social transition through public recognition. The first stage of the initiation ritual sets the tone and pace for all events that are to follow in the Varembe initiation ritual.

In the separation stage, there is transition that starts from the moment the initiates leave their homes. They enter into a state of disconnection and decomposition of the previous life. Matope (participant, aged 21) points out that, the period at the camp is not for pleasure a time when the initiates experience toughening up through hardships, humiliation and bullying, so that they would be able to cope with all manner of hardships in their future life. Individuals are separated from social pressures where they have been treated less than human or even worse than dogs. Separation signifies the result of intense pressure imposed on the non-circumcised young man. The Varembe culture has a strong compulsion towards making uninitiated individuals go through the initiation process.

The participants reported that those males who are not initiated are disrespected; they suffer rejection by their families and even by their peers. They are ostracised and treated as social outcasts without any identity or rights. They are subjected to culturally constructed stereotypes, as lazy, dishonest and as thieves. The uninitiated are ridiculed, treated as people who are immature and inferior. Women also stigmatise them as 'boys' who are still not ready for adult

relationships. Separation for the Varembe people means detachment from the ordinary world. The neophyte must be isolated from all the social networks that corrupt him. He must be withdrawn from marginalisation, ostracism and the demeaning stereotypical world that distorts him. Therefore, the Varembe initiation ritual should be construed as a re-socialisation process where the initiates are re-established in the society. The boys are given a new identity and a sense of responsibility. Their mothers played a critical role in the greater part of this socialisation, now the society takes over the process by re-socialising the boys. Therefore, initiation rituals are involuntary and integral to all members of the group (Turner, 1969).

Separation in the Varembe initiation ritual means that the uninitiated boys are removed from social pressures and marginalisation to which they were exposed. Gaertner and McLaughlin (1983) argue that the stereotyping that exists in the conscious and subconscious minds may affect the individual and may threaten the individual to go through initiation. The social learning theory focuses on the interaction between the environment and the factors, which are hypothesized to determine behavioural change (Bandura, 1989). It asserts that the environment elicits certain behaviours and responses in the individual. Such labelling exposes the uninitiated and triggers responses that culminate in individuals having a motive to join others for initiation. The subsequent emotional attacks on the individuals have the ability to shape their subsequent behaviour. Other members of the community who are significant to an individual act as a propelling force that compels the individual to undergo the initiation ritual.

On the other hand, separation signifies a journey into another world that allows the young men to demonstrate their survival skills as part of the rite of passage into manhood (Oomen, 2002). The initiates are breaking away from the ordinary life of the commoners into a revered life of men of valour who face the challenges of life courageously like warriors, symbolised by the ‘sticks of masculinity’, which the initiates prepare before they set off for the initiation camp (*musasa*).

### **6.6.3 The Varembe Circumcision and Initiation Camp**

Chief Neshuro states that the place where the Varembe initiation takes place is referred to as a camp (*musasa*) because there is no construction of houses or shade. At the camp, the initiates do not construct any shelters. They will be staying and sleeping at an open space where a very big fire is made for everyone to keep warm. However, the participants pointed out that the initiates

use blankets to cover their naked bodies at night. The researcher was given the opportunity of visiting the sacred initiation sites before and after the ritual through the permission of the chiefs and local ritual elders. He made a similar observation that the initiates constructed no shelters at Mazhou and Songogwe mountains for use during the period of the initiation ritual. This is a sign that when the initiates are at the camp they are exposed to hardships in order to mould certain dispositions. Makari (headman, aged 61, from Mazetese) states that at the camp, the initiates wake up early in the morning every day, regardless of the weather conditions, to bathe in the cold water from the nearby river as a measure of perseverance and courage. When it is raining, the initiates consider it as a blessing from *Mwari* who would be authenticating and approving all the events at the initiation camp. The initiates would just hide under the bushes and trees until the rain is over. This view rests on Bourdillon (1979)'s argument that *Mwari* in the Karanga culture is referred to as the provider of life, *Dzivaguru* (great pool), a word with fertility connotations. *Mwari* is the provider of rain, which nurtures all living things on earth. The Karanga people rely on *Mwari* for happiness and security through his rain. Therefore, rain in the Varembe culture is a symbol of spiritual wellbeing and a manifestation of a smooth social order. This means that the Varembe people rely on *Mwari* for all matters that affect their lives and spiritual wellbeing.

Most participants have described the Varembe place of initiation as a very sacred place. According to Cox (1992), the ritual is performed in a sacred space which is discernible through the use of symbols which make the space distinguishable from any other space and renders it appropriate for a ritual. Commenting on the preservation of the sacredness of the place of initiation at Songogwe, Chokufeya (aged 71), the *Mudzabhi* from Dungire village under Chief Chitanga, points out that the whole area where the ritual is performed is sacred and it is the duty of the *Nyamukanga* or local traditional healers to protect and preserve its sacredness with traditional medicine. The place in its entirety is ritually prepared by using indigenous herbs. The *Nyamukanga* draws traditional wooden pegs into the ground to demarcate the area of the initiation ceremony and to placate the spirits before they occupy the area so that they protect them from dangers associated with the place, which might disturb the ritual proceedings.

According to Chokufeya, the initiation space is sacred because it is located near the sacred Mwenezi River, the sacred Songogwe Mountain that the local people view as domiciles of the

ancestral spirits. The initiation site and the initiation ritual are all linked to the divine realm of ancestors, which connects them with the Supreme God (*Mwari*).

The *Nyamukanga* from Mushava, Matanda, Chirindi and Chimbudzi in Mwenezi also approve of the link between the place of initiation and the spiritual realm. They held the view that all initiates who come to the initiation ceremony should have sought consent from the ancestors to avoid unnecessary problems during the ritual. If one's ancestors are against him participating in the ceremony, they may manifest by making the initiate physically or mentally incapacitated. Ndove (Nyamukanga aged 61, from Chirindi) supported this view by stressing that being possessed by spirits during the initiation ritual is a sign that the ancestral spirits are showing disapproval. If this happens, the initiate's parents would compensate the *Nyamukanga* with a black cow. For the process of initiation to proceed well at the camp, family ancestral spirits should be informed before one leaves home.

The Varembe people hold strongly onto what they conceive of as the modalities of the sacred and the sacred phenomena. According to Eliade, what defines religion as religious is the intentional relation between the believer and the sacred (Sharma, 2001). Intentionality in Husserl's view is a way of directing how consciousness constitutes phenomena (Studstill, 2000). The Varembe ultimately construe the sacred as real with respect to the profane material world or the spiritual world. This explains what the Varembe believe and how they believe what they believe, and how they are supposed to respond to that belief when exposed to a situation.

According to David Moyo (participant, aged 25), during the period when the initiates (*varundu*) and the ritual leaders (*Vadzabhi*, *Nyamukanga*) are at the sacred place, they are not allowed to engage in sexual activities. Anyone who does that should confess to other ritual leaders and revise his mistakes and should make a vow that he would not transgress again. Failure to do that leads to the contamination of anything that he touches. His ritual duties are forfeited for a long period of up to three years. Such persons are accused of harbouring the rebellious spirit of individualism, which needs exorcism before polluting the sacred space. Therefore, the Varembe society has what Durkheim (1912) describes as a system that defines a moral community and that enforces collective behaviours and rules of the society. Durkheim notes that rituals are a means of bringing individuals together as a collective group. These systems are designed to create arouse intense feelings of consternation that represents the supernatural (Giessen, 2006).

The Varembe people have an unconscious communal identification of the innermost with the larger reality, which shape their attitudes and beliefs.

The notion of a sacred space (*musasa*) displays a conception of the Varembe existing in a 'secret society' with new religious practices closed to the group members and fervently binding the members together, withholding the ritualistic practices and religious teachings, doctrines and symbols to those not in their portal. In his discussion of the different types of rites of passage, Eliade (1995) highlights the features of the secret society as that of bringing members into a closed society. The scenario of going into a secluded place makes the Varembe initiation ritual similar to that of having a closed society where members are drawn into possessing some secret knowledge about the deeper understanding of the religion that is practiced by the secret society. The initiations in the secret society are voluntary and the initiates are invited to join the society (Henrik, 2007). However, whilst the Varembe initiation could be voluntary, at times it is exclusively an integral part of the society that does not brook objection. The purpose of being drawn into the secret society is for the initiates to be in contact with the sacred. Eliade (1995) notes that involvement in a secret society is because of the need to have a fuller participation and live a sacred life. The Varembe initiation ritual makes the individual become what Henrik (2007) refers to as being 'one of us' as opposed to 'one of them'. This means that the Varembe are bonded together in unity through participation in the ritual. The new lives influence the initiates positively and instil a sense of belonging and protectiveness of all the religious instruction that reflects group values. This process is like forming a binding covenant in which the Varembe people agree on a set of principles that are mandatory to the members. According to Fricke (2003: 473), "The dilemma of culture is that, unlike those causal relationships in which an external force or agent moves an object, culture is a context of understanding and motivation that must be inside of the person." The Varembe initiation ritual is capable of arousing innate and unconscious forces in an individual's psyche that are capable of moulding individual dispositions to assist the initiate to remain attached to the sacred realm. Whilst other groups could seclude themselves for various reasons, for example, social, political and economic, the Varembe secret society is purely for religious reasons. The Varembe secret society is best described in Gist (1940:20)'s definition which highlights that the grouping does not depend on blood ties but on the ritualistic element and the knowledge that is confined to the members. The secret society separates an individual from his family and the profane world (Henrik, 2007). This is similar to



Turner (1969)'s argument of death and the renewal of one's past. When an individual goes into seclusion, he is severed from his past life, from which he will emerge born again and renewed.

The Varembe have set aside the *Nyamukanga* and the *Vadzabhi* ritual elders who are treated as revered people in charge of enforcing collective behaviour, rules and conduct on behalf of the society during and after the initiation. According to Durkheim (1912), religious beliefs are a representation of the nature of sacred beings and objects, whilst rituals express rules of conduct about how people should act when they are in the presence of the sacred realm. What is significant about the Varembe initiation ritual is that it conveys some ethics and morals to the initiates at each given stage. The initial stages of the Varembe initiation ceremony are the admission of the boys into the secret society of the supernatural, which makes the initiates feel part of the sacred realm and the new society. When initiates are in the presence of the sacred, they feel that the locus of control lies beyond them, therefore risk assessment, behaviour and decision-making are influenced by the views they hold about the ultimate Being. Makwasha (2010) and Shoko (2007) held a similar perspective when they indicated that the Karanga people consider the spiritual world as responsible for all the events of the universe. This is collaborated by Placide Temples' claim that there is a vital force operating in all living and non-living things which the people cannot do without (Magesa, 1998). Therefore, religious commitment and engagement with divinity during the initiation rituals involve both rules of restraint and commitment in one's conduct in life. The Varembe initiation ritual serves as a positive form of social control that helps the initiate to incorporate new information and ideas about his existence.

The Varembe 'closed society' and isolation system derives from the Jewish religious practice, from which the Varembe people draw their ancestry. The Varembe people disparage the non-Varembe people as *Vasenzi*, in the same manner which the Jews belittle the gentiles. The word *Senzi* is derogatory, meaning uncircumcised and unclean. In the Jewish world, the gentiles were dismissed as sinners. The idea of having a closed society derides all non-Varembe people as unclean. The Jewish purity code dictates a complete disengagement with sinners (Parfitt, 2000). The Varembe people also treat all members outside their society as *Vasenzi* and they are not at liberty to socialise with them. Contrary to this view, the Yao migrants are despised and accused of practicing paganism by the local Shona and Ndebele people, who have a dim view of the circumcision ritual. According to Daimon (2013), this mentality was adopted from the

Westerners, foreign travellers and missionaries who viewed the circumcision ritual as barbaric and ‘fetishistic’. Conversely, the Yao have a negative perception about uncircumcised people among the indigenous people. Taljaard, et al. (2003) avers that being non-circumcised is viewed by some cultures as a cause of misfortune. Makura (aged 16), an initiate from the Shangani culture, points out that the Shangani people despise the uninitiated and non-Shangani people as cowards and illegitimate. The idea of purity and impurity is a key tenet of most traditionally circumcising groups.

The most significant aspect of the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual is the sacred, which is designated by the holiness of the ritual sites, the ritual processes and proceedings that are treated with consternation. The characters in the Varembe initiation ritual for example, the initiates and the ritual leaders create a profound feeling of attachment and affection towards the numinous. The ritual exhorts the participants to abide by the rules and regulations of the ritual to please the spirit realm, which they represent. The Varembe ritual is therefore embedded in the daily lives of the adherents and would undeniably become a very potent motivator of the behaviour of the initiates.

#### **6.6.3.1 ‘Going Under the Traditional Knife’**

‘Going under the traditional knife’ refers to circumcision using a traditional knife. Traditional circumcision is a mark that symbolises that one has been initiated and has gone through the phase of transition from boyhood to manhood. The initiates are detached and distinguished from the world by that process. However, this does not apply to those who went through medical circumcision because it does not make them become a ‘man’ since there is no initiation. The initiation ritual was conceived by most participants as key among the Varembe people since it marks the transition of a boy (*shuvuru*) into manhood, or a real man (*murume chaiye*). The initiates affirmed that the process of circumcision or shedding the male foreskin is a way of admitting the boys into manhood. The initiates (*varundu*) agreed that the initiation ritual is an inevitable aspect of one’s life.

There are certain procedures that are followed at the camp before the boys are placed under “the traditional knife.” Magaisa (participant aged 14) from Matande, under Chief Negari held the view that after about two weeks of instruction, the heads and pubic hairs of the initiates are

shaven once more the night before circumcision takes place. The hairs are associated with immorality and are believed to be the habitat of evil spirits. Magaisa also mentioned that most of the time during initiation the *varundu* operate naked to disguise identity.

Most participants shared the view that the events during initiation are secretive to the outside world; outsiders are not allowed to have access into the secret and private nature of the ritual. Sabiya Jairoso (aged 9) from Nehosho village under chief Negari and Hamisi (aged 19) from Dine and Chikova (aged 23) from Mufula under chief Chitanga supported this view confirming that, no outsider is allowed into the camp or even to communicate with the novices. The initiates severely beat anyone who breaks this rule. Initiates who disclose the secrets of the ritual are brought under severe disciplinary measures where they are reprimanded and made to confess before the *Vadzabhi*. Secrecy and confidentiality of the ritual proceedings is also common among the Yao and the Shangani (Maposa, 2011; Daimon, 2013). Among the Sotho and the Xhosa, it is forbidden to discuss the ritual itself with outsiders. Anyone who breaches that code suffers severe sanction by the community. Outsiders are not even allowed to obtain access to the secrecy and privacy of the ritual (WHO, 2008). In these ethnic groups, it is taboo for women and uncircumcised boys to have access to the information about the rites. According to Nyamukanga Chigariro (aged 58), the reasons for this stringent secrecy were to obstruct those people who intend to discredit the ritual practices. Before the commencement of the circumcision ritual, the participants affirm that the initiates take a vow in front of the *Vadzabhi* (elders) declaring that they would not disclose anything to the outside world about what happens at the circumcision camp without authority from the ritual leaders.

Concerning the procedures before circumcision, most participants from Matibi, for example, Dzadya Rafinos (aged 13) and Simbiso Jeremani (aged 18), mentioned that a night before the *varundu* go through circumcision, they are served with millet *sadza* (thick porridge). The reason for serving such food is that, it is the traditional food for the ancestors which has some spiritual relevance of boosting male sexuality (*kusimbisa musana*).

All the recent initiates interviewed shared a similar view about how the foreskin is shed. Whilst cultural groups use different objects to circumcise, most participants indicated that the foreskin is cut off with a traditional knife. This view is supported by Sibanda (Sibanda, 2013) who stated that the Vairemba prefer a sharp knife. The Shangani and the Xhosa use a spear head (*assegai*)

(Green, 2007; WHO, 2008; Maposa 2011). During the time of Moses, the Jews used flint knives from stone flakes to perform circumcisions (Burton, 2001). Chongogwe (aged 64), *Nyamukanga* from Bubi maintained that, the *Nyamukanga* uses one traditional knife during circumcision to cut off the male foreskin and no other knife is expected to be used for that purpose. He acknowledged that the knife is not an ordinary knife but it has been sanctified and consecrated for that sacred purpose. Explaining why the knife is ‘traditional’, he said that his great-grandfather who got it from a traditional ironsmith a long time ago passed it on to him. He explained that, before using the knife, family descendants should perform some rituals. A traditional beer feast that is meant to appease the ancestral spirits and to dedicate the individual who would be using the knife accompanies the ritual of the handing over of the knife. *Nyamukanga* Chigariro added that there are risks encountered in using the traditional circumcision knife without performing proper rituals, which may include chopping the initiate’s sex organ. The participant noted that initiates upon which the knife has been used would have difficulties in healing. The wound would become malignant. This implies that the sacredness of the circumcision knife is preserved and perpetuated generation after generation. The traditional knife and the ritual elders *Nyamukanga* and *Vadzabhi*, are sacred symbols of the numinous on earth, facilitating the formation of the binding covenant between the *murundu* and ancestral world (*nyikadzimu*).

The researcher gathered from most participants that the process of circumcision requires courage and a sense of purpose, which the initiates gather through song and dance that is accompanied by drumbeats as they extol each other to defy the challenge they are facing like warriors. Most participants, for example Chikwaya Mombe (aged 21) from Matibi, pointed out that not more than three initiates are circumcised per interval. Circumcision is performed three times a day, very early in the morning, in the afternoon and in the evening. One *Nyamukanga*, Ngarava Tafara (aged 62), from Zinake village, explained his experiences of initiation rituals at Mazhou Mountain. He notes that:

*Mukomana anenge ave pachinhanho chekudzingiswa ndiye anovamba rwiyo vamwe vachibvumira. Nziyo dzinoera dzinoshandiswa kuburitsa zvakadzama zvirimupfungwa nemumanzwiro emunhu. Nziyo idzi dzakatisiyanei nedzimwe dzese pakuti dzine panoimbwa nemuvambi ari ega achiita achichinjana nevanomubvumira. Dzimmwe dzenziyo dzinoimbwa ndedzine mukurumbira, dzimwe dzinongofungwa ipapo. Nziyo dzinoimbirwa kupa hushingi kune arikunodzingiswa. Ushingi uhu hunoonekwa*

*kuburikidza nekudzana kukuru kwaanoita. Vamwe vake vanenge vachimukurudzira kutamba nesimba uye kubatirira pasimba iroro. Hushingi hwemukomana hunoonekwa paanoche kwa asingavhinyuki. Tinokurudzira mukomana arikuchekwa kufemera mukati, kuregedzera tsinga dzake dzepadumbu. Hautenderwi kutsunzunya, kana kuvhinyuka kutaridza kutya. Maitirwo acho anotoda kutozvipira.*

[Before the boy is circumcised, he will have to lead others into a song. The songs are themselves sacred and they evoke and express the feelings and intentions of the initiates. The circumcision song has a distinct form that is comprised of a solo verse that alternates with the chorus that is sung by the boy's followers. There are popular songs that are sung. At times, the songs are freely improvised and elaborated upon. The purpose of the song is to eulogize the boy's courage, firmness and readiness for the coming ordeal. The determination of the boy to go through the ritual is displayed in the vigour of the dances. The other boys keep exhorting their counterpart to dance with conviction and to hold on to the strength. The firmness in the song should be displayed when the boy stands for the cutting of his foreskin. We instruct the boys being circumcised to breathe in and to relax their stomach muscles. No twitching! No trembling is allowed. No involuntary movements to be displayed during the process of cutting the foreskin. The initiate should not even blink his eyes portending fear. Circumcision is a process that requires total commitment.]

In other societies, short phrases are used to help the boy to cope with the pain and to reduce the tension between the circumciser and the initiate. Among the Serer of Senegal, the circumciser is expected to ask for forgiveness from the initiate, who in turn acknowledges that he has forgiven him (Niang and Boiro, 2007).

About cleanliness of the knife and treatment of the circumcision wounds, one participant, Gore Hukwe (aged 26) from Ndambi Village under chief Negare, stated that the knife is rinsed in cold water after its use on each initiate. The wounds are treated with herbs by the *Nyamukanga* and the *Vadzabhi* immediately after the foreskin has been cut. It is only after the treatment of the circumcision wound that the *Nyamukanga* circumcises the next person. Circumcision was considered by most of the participants to be a very painful process that results in the loss of a lot of blood, but they viewed it as a symbol of the masculine route to manhood. In South Africa, every Xhosa initiate declares "*Ndiyindoda*" meaning, "I am a man," at the time of being cut. The initiates are not supposed to show any sign of pain or weakness, rather, they should display their strength and courage (WHO, 2008). The pain of shedding the foreskin has some salutary effects upon the mind of the initiate. If an initiate cries or runs away, he would have brought humiliation upon his family. Therefore, during circumcision the initiates should bear the pain of non-

anaesthetic circumcision bravely. They should show their stoic courage even if there is a severe loss of blood (Lightfoot, 1989).

The recent initiates from Mazhou and Songogwe confirmed this view. An initiate Tokurasei (aged 16) from Mufula in Chief Chitanga, commenting on the pain of circumcision acknowledged that:

*Kudzingiswa kunorwadza, asi haabvumidzwi kudonhedza misodza, kana kutiza nokuti kudzingiswa uku kunomubatanidza nemidzimu yake uye naMwari. Anenge awira pasi panguva yekucheudzwa igwara rinounza rushambwa nerushavashava kumhuri nekudzinja rake rose.*

[The traditional surgery is very painful but the initiate is not expected to shed tears or run away because the process is a form of unification with the ancestors and the creator himself. One who falls down during the circumcision process is labelled a coward that brings misfortune to his family and all the descendants.]

Initiates from Gwenya Village under Chief Negari confirmed the severe loss of blood during the process of circumcision, but felt that it was very necessary because it distinguishes boys (*shuvuru*) from men (*vamwenye*). One of the initiates, Gomwe (aged 14) metaphorically described the process of circumcision and the bleeding wound, likening it to a bull that fights viciously, “*Bhuru rinorwa rinoonekwa nemavanga*”, meaning, “A bull that fights is recognized by having bruises.” He maintains that the circumcision wound is a significant mark that shows that one has participated in the initiation ceremony. Severe pain was significant and necessary to accomplish the spiritual and physical journey into adulthood. Circumcision is a symbolic death through pain and isolation from society, from which springs new life and rebirth as a man.

The Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual opens significant doors into the world of mysteries. This view becomes clear when analogies are drawn between the Varembe and the Jewish circumcision. The Jewish people are presumed to have learnt about circumcision from Egypt through Moses in the days of captivity (Gollaher, 2001; Zoloth, 2003). In Egypt, as in the case of the Varembe, circumcision was a ritual that transformed the youth into manhood, allowing them into divine mysteries. Egyptian circumcision was a method of purification that allows one to have access to divine blessings (Gordon, 1999). The body openings were regarded as portals through which impure and malignant spirits could enter. What is significant about traditional circumcision is that it has the promise of rewards for those who would have managed

to successfully go through the process. In Egypt, circumcision was viewed as sacrificing a part of the body to the spiritual world and in so doing, the well-being of the whole human being was thought to be safeguarded (Lightfoot, 1989). Commenting on the role of the circumcision ritual, Shoko (2007) notes that the provision of healthcare among the Karanga people is inseparable from their philosophy of life and their worldview. The principles guiding the Varembea people in the practice of circumcision are similar to those of the Middle Eastern populations since their history has a link to Jewish and Islamic ancestry.

The basis for practicing circumcision for Jews and Muslims is found in the Bible, Genesis (17, 10-14). Circumcision was practiced as a religious obligation in which a covenant was made between Abraham and his descendants. God ensured the promise of fertility to the Jewish people. Circumcision is a key feature in the Varembea initiation ritual, which has fertility connotations. According to Lightfoot (1989), when a part of the reproductive organ is sacrificed, fertility and the entire process of reproduction and health are ensured. In the Jewish history, circumcision among the Varembea people is attached to spirituality. Ntseane (2004) links sexuality to spirituality by noting that the blood that drops on the soil is a symbol of assurance about one's fertility. It is a binding symbol of unity with the world of the ancestors and the whole community. Nyathi (2008) notes that the blood spilled by the initiate connects the individual to the land. The fact that sex is accepted as something connecting the dead and the living makes it more sacred and respectable. This is the reason why some cultural groups impose stringent regulations and develop myths on issues regarding sex and sexual behaviour (Niang, 2007). Circumcision could be viewed as a bridge between the initiate's earlier and more passive stage of life and the more active and productive adult stage. This process ensures the productiveness of the initiate's sperm in procreation. This conviction has an impact on how the Varembea conceive sexuality. Sexuality is related to sexual attraction, intimacy and relationships. The Varembea people regard sexual intercourse as sacred and therefore all matters regarding sex are treated with respect. This is the reason why some cultural groups impose stringent regulations and develop myths on issues regarding sex and sexual behaviour (Niang, 2007).

The Karanga people treasure beliefs that link the individual with the earth, the spirit world and *Mwari* (God). At birth, the child's fontanel (*rukuvhute*) is 'buried' in the ground; as when one dies, he would be buried in the ground. Through the blood from the circumcision wound that

splatters and sinks in the ground, the Varembea people have a strong conviction that the initiate is dedicated to the ancestors for protection, procreation, health and well-being.

According to Chief Neshuro, the loss of blood shows the intensity of the bond created between the initiate and the sacred world. The shedding of blood is significant in showing that the initiate was entering into an agreement with his people. As he sheds his blood, he joins the stream of his people and becomes truly one of them (Mbiti, 1986). According to Huruva (participant aged 37), the loss of blood was necessary to provide a sacred bond between the initiate and the ancestral world (*nyikadzimu*). Daimon (2013) held a similar view about the Shangani people when he mentioned that the initiates would be sacrificing their own blood to establish a strong connection with the ancestral world. Chief Neshuro confirms that the loss of blood signifies the creation of a bond between the initiate and the world of the spirits. As one's blood spills to the ground, mixing with the soil, it ensures reproduction and good health. Chief Neshuro pointed out that:

*Hatitye kurasika kweropa nekuti zvinotaridza chisungo chinenge chagadzirwa nenyikadzimu. Rangarira kuti mitemo yacho inoenderana nekuva murume akashinga. Uyewo ropa rinoteukira pasi mucherechedzo wekuti mbeu yemurundu ive nezvibereko. Agone kuita kuti rudzi rukure.*

[We are not afraid of any loss of blood because it shows the intensity of the bond that is being created between the initiate and the sacred world. This also ensures the productiveness of his sperm in procreation. Remember also that, the condition of initiation goes hand in hand with the privileges and responsibilities of a courageous adulthood. Apparently, the loss of blood is also a cultural symbol of masculine identity.]

The researcher understood that the participants had different explanations of the words used to refer to a circumcised person. One participant (aged 22) from Nikita indicated that a boy whose penis has had the foreskin removed is called *hoko*. The word *hoko* is derived from the shape of the penis when the foreskin is removed. Without the foreskin, the penis would have a sharp point resembling a traditional wooden peg. Maposa (2011) whose study was based on male circumcision alludes that the word *hoko* was used by the Shangani people to refer to circumcision. On the other hand, Sibanda (2013) used the word *hoko* differently to mean circumcision lodge, but both used the word in the same context of the Shangani people of Chiredzi. Sibanda (2013:3) uses the word “*murundu*” and “*ngoma*” alternatively when referring to Shangani male circumcision. Hamunakwadi Jeffius (aged 31) of Shangani origin gave a different explanation of the word *hoko* contrasting what Maposa suggested. For him *hoko* is a



word used by the Shangani people in Mwenezi to refer to a place where the initiation ceremony is performed. However, he accepted that although the word is used differently, its meaning emanates from the structure of the circumcised penis, which links the subject with sexuality.

Different answers were obtained from the participants pertaining to how the foreskin is disposed of after initiation. Recent initiates from Chizumbira displayed ignorance as to what happens to the foreskin after circumcision, claiming that it is was a secret of the ritual leaders. Chongogwe (*Nyamukanga*) maintains a similar view:

*Hapana murundu anobvumirwa kutarisa ganda rabva panhengo yake, anofanirwa kungofuratira osuduruka oenda kunevamwe vatochekwa kare.*

[No initiate is allowed to look at the removed foreskin, he just has to turn his back and move off to join the other group of boys already gone through circumcision.]

However, responses gathered from the *Nyamukanga* at Mushava, Matanda and Chirindi areas were that the foreskins are incinerated because they carry the feminine curse of childhood. Cutting the foreskin off and burning it to ashes disconnects the boy from all feminine influences.

Most participants from Matande, Chizumba and Mufula highlighted that what defines masculinity is that, during the circumcision and initiation ritual each initiate goes through various ordeals and trials, which include being beaten, ridiculed or ill- treated, starved and exposed to harsh weather conditions. Most participants emphasised that the boys do not have any option to evade the traditional knife since it is part of the process of the transition from boyhood to adulthood. It is part of the Varembe curriculum to teach the boys to endure the hardships of life and to condition them towards certain temperaments.

According to Mutambirwa (1989), there are rituals and ceremonies at every stage of human life that form part of the life cycle, its purpose and meaning. African cultural traditions have the potential to promote life, health and wellbeing and reduce the prevalence of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe.

#### **6.6.3.2 The Varembe Circumcision and Initiation School**

Circumcision is not the only phenomenon of the Varembe initiation ritual but there are some lessons that accompany the ritual to provide relevant life teachings to the initiates. This is the

most significant aspect of the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual that help to mould the behaviour of the initiate. The Chiefs and the ritual leaders view the Varembe circumcision and initiation camp as a modern day school with a specific curriculum designed to instil in the youths some moral values, physical skills, intellectual skills, communal spirit, preservation of cultural heritage and character building. Taljaard (2003) points out that the initiates are introduced to ethics that are meant to develop character and genital hygiene. Sibanda (2013) highlighted that, the Varembe initiates are taught the traditions, beliefs and history of their people. The Varembe, just like the Xhosa and the Sotho initiates in South Africa, are taught about taboos, avoidances, moral life, social responsibility and attributes of humanness (WHO, 2008; Green, 2007). The Varembe curriculum does not always have direct content that conveys certain attributes to the initiates, but at times lessons are learnt indirectly through the experiences that the initiates go through; for example, hardships, humiliation and bullying. The initiates are prepared for future challenges and this means that character building among the Varembe people at times is not taught directly. Koyana (1980) asserts that the initiation curriculum is meant to teach the initiate what it means to be a man and an adult. The Varembe curriculum is designed in a way that is meant to guide the young people through the important stages of life. Initiation schools are socio-cultural forums in which adults convey community-held attitudes and beliefs about sexuality and a code of behaviour that is appropriate for transition into adult (Munthali and Zulu, 2007). The Varembe curriculum is conveyed in a manner referred to by Daimon (2013:303) in his discussion of the Yao migrants of Zimbabwe, that it is comprised of systematic indoctrination about culture and identity, accomplished through various activities such as songs and sacred teachings on gender, sexuality, health, hygiene, death, marriage and procreation.

The different forms of education provided during the puberty ritual indirectly reflect upon the forces impinging on the young generation brought by modernity, especially the interplay between information and computer technology [ICT], multi-media, music, business migrations, religion, socio-economic despair, peer pressure and society's focus materialism and individualism. While information technology has succeeded in putting the world in a global village, it may be accused of complicity as far as it has facilitated the demise of traditional morality and its authority. It has become imperative for the initiation schools and cultural leaders to help in the restoration of African values.

Based on the information gathered from the field, the Varembe traditional education system can be classified into three broad aims: distinguishing the initiated from the uninitiated, building certain character traits in the initiates and moulding an individual's ability to have self-control.

#### **6.6.3.2.1 Distinguishing the Initiated from the Uninitiated**

The participants emphasised that, instruction during initiation is designed to teach the initiates the life style of adulthood and the dignity of manhood. The education system is meant to make the initiates realise that they are distinct from those who are not initiated by having access to sexual intercourse. Orientation about the sex life and guidance pertaining marriage life forms the focus of the Varembe initiation lessons. Chokufeya, *Vadzabhi* (aged 71) notes that sexuality issues are very different from other ordinary human activities. This is why the Varembe forbid those who have not gone through initiation rituals to marry because they are still considered young, regardless of age.

Participants agreed that there are certain processes of marriage that the initiates are taught whilst they are still at the camp. According to Chokufeya, the initiates are taught that when an individual who is already circumcised and has gone through the initiation process decides to marry, he should inform the *Vadzabhi* in his home area who in turn will endorse the appropriateness of the marriage and give proper guidance with regard to marriage and other sexuality issues. Homosexuality is not tolerated at all; the Varembe describe it as obscene and profane. The word used to describe such an act is *makunakuna* (abomination). Anyone who indulges in it is ostracised from the society.

A *mudzabhi* from Rutenga (aged 56) added that, part of the Varembe instruction involves encouraging initiates to marry women of their culture who have also gone through *komba* initiation rituals for ladies. He notes that, alternatively if one decides to get married to a woman who is not of the Varembe culture, he is supposed to let the woman go through the *komba* rituals to make her conform and be acceptable to the family and culture. Most respondents noted that anyone who violates the Varembe marriage rules and regulations is treated as an outcast. He is even beaten severely and mortified in public when the chief or the headman has approved it. Therefore, the lessons learnt during the initiation ceremony and the fear of the repercussion of breaking the regulations alters the behaviour of the initiates.

The Varembe initiates are not allowed to engage in sexual activities soon after initiation. The waiting period for such activities is up to a month. This waiting period is longer than that of the Balante in Guinea Bissau and the Wolof in Senegal who wait for six days before having sex with their wives, to determine the resistance they offer on sexual desire and sexual attraction as learnt during initiation (Niang and Boiro, 2007). Chokufeya described some myths and taboos existing in the Varembe culture about breaching regulations about sex preserve:

*Vakomana vachecheudzwa havatenderwi kurara nevakadzi, nokuti zvinoera. Ani nani anenge adimbira muko uyu anokonzera rufu rwemukadzi wake kana kuti anoita kuti asvodze mimba dzese dzaanenge abata. Vakomana vanenge varara nevakadzi nhengo dzavo dzinomera rimwe ganda rekunze. Murau waanopiwa ndewekuchecheudzwa nebanga rakagomara, kuti asazvipamhidzeve. Hatisati tambonzwa munhu akamera ganda pakare, zvichireva kuti vakomana varikugona kuzvibata pavanenge vabva kuchiremba.*

[Initiates are not allowed to have sex soon after initiation because it is taboo to do that, any breach of the regulation would result in the death of the perpetrator's wife or she would have continuous miscarriages. Boys who have sex soon after initiation would risk their penis growing the foreskin back and the punishment to that is circumcision with a very blunt knife. This is a form of punishment so that one would not repeat the same mistake and to his peers, that would be a clear lesson learnt from him. The fact that we have not heard anyone who grew his skin back after circumcision means that most initiates become obedient after the initiation ritual.]

However, the Varembe regulations about not engaging in sexual activities soon after initiation are not universal. Very different messages are conveyed to the youth in other ethnic groups. Among the Kikuyu in central Kenya, it is compulsory for the initiates to have sex soon after circumcision to prove their manhood. They refer to this early post- circumcision sex as “*kwi hura mbiro*” which literally means, “cleaning the soot.” The myths they have about this process is that it helps the wound to heal faster and prevents illness and death (Niang and Boiro, 2007). The Meru boys believe that they should have sex soon after the procedure to avoid the penis from remaining flaccid forever (Grant, 2004). The Nyau initiates of Zambia are encouraged to have sex soon after the initiation ceremony to demonstrate what they were taught during the initiation ritual (Ministry of Gender and Child Development, 2012). Sexual relations immediately after circumcision exposes the initiates to the risk of sexually transmitted infections since the wound is still in the process of healing. The Varembe's inhibitive access to sex is a way of teaching the initiates to have sexual reserve and control which could be useful in the era of HIV and AIDS.

The Varembe have ways of making the initiates delay in engaging in sexual activities by introducing and reminding them of the taboos and prohibitions anchoring their society. A significant number of participants aged between 15 and 20 years acknowledged the role of the initiation ritual in making them distinct by reducing their involvement in sexual activities through the education they receive and the stringent restrictions that prohibit initiates to engage in sex, until they marry. Dapi Desmon (aged 19), an initiate from Mazetese notes:

*Vakomana vachangobva kuchiremba havabvumidzwi kurara nevakadzi kusvika varoora. Anenge achida kuita bonde anokurudzirwa kuti aroore. Anemge agura mutemo uyu anonzi anotyora musana waamai vake.*

[The initiates are not allowed to have sexual activities for several months. If they intend to have sex, they are encouraged to get married. Anyone who does that would cause the backbone of his mother to break.]

Most Varembe initiates would abstain from having sex up until they were married because they would be afraid of the negative effects this could have on their mothers if they breached the taboos regarding early sex. Despite that, some of the boys who viewed the traditional initiation ceremony as a sign of physiological maturity that marks the onset of adulthood and wisdom on reproductive health and marriage issues would have self-motivation to abide by the Varembe regulations governing sexual matters. To them it meant they are now responsible, they could marry, have children, and enjoy independence from their parents. Ndaguta Chikore (participant aged 24), from Chirindi affirmed that, part of the lessons during *chiremba* are that the initiates are taught how to handle and fulfil their wives holistically. They are not supposed to beat or harass their wives. They are forbidden from engaging in pre-marital and extra-marital sex. The initiates are taught the sanctity of marriage, and sexual permissiveness is abhorred because it is not according to the Varembe culture, which is exemplary. According to Mbiti (1986), the initiate joins his people and he has to truly belong to them, having entered into a blood covenant during circumcision. Initiation ceremonies ushers the child into adulthood. The Varembe treats anyone who behaves contrary to that as a boy, and unfits to enter the adult world.

Ndawira Vurayai (aged 22), from Chirindi notes that, it is prerequisite that one who is going through the initiatory ritual should not mix or come into contact with women up to a certain time. He confirmed that *Komba* for girls is held at the same time with *Chiremba* for men. One who does that becomes contaminated and polluted. The initiates stay in the same area as the girls but

they never meet. Most boys noted that in the case of medical circumcision meeting with women is not avoidable and to the Varembe it is taboo. A recent initiate (aged 18) described women as weak, temptresses; contaminating and responsible for the fall of humanity, and that any contact with females during the initiation ritual should be avoided at all cost. This sexism and antiquated gender philosophy of the Varembe smacks of gender discrimination.

To show the impact of the sexual lessons learnt at the initiation camp, Tofara Mavedzenge (aged 29) from Zinake Village, confirmed that his sexual life changed after going through initiation at Songogwe Mountain, he mentioned that:

*Ndaifarira kudanana nevakadzi vakasiyana- siyana vane zvimiro zvakasiyana. Chero mukadzi ari pamoyo pangu ndaibata. Ndaita senyati inofura chero payada.*

[I was fond of falling in love with many different women of any texture, body shape whatever you may think of. I used to grab any woman of my choice. I was like a buffalo that grazes everywhere it desired without any limits.]

The initiate explained that, he changed his immoral behaviour due to the knowledge he acquired during initiation, especially on issues of dignity, health, and hygiene. Mutambirwa (1989) and Gelfand (1987) hold the view that the concept of morality and immorality, and the Karanga traditional beliefs correlate. They agree that morality and purity of the heart goes hand in hand with good health; immorality is associated with ill- health. This view means that illness in the Karanga worldview is connected inextricably with socially approved behaviour and moral conduct. In Tofara Mavedzenge's view, reforming his behaviour was a way of averting misfortunes associated with breaching the Varembe norms and values and to maintain his health and hygiene. There is a strong belief that all issues related to health and well-being are controlled by the spirit world, which has a way of punishing individuals who misbehave by summoning incurable diseases and rewarding those who behave well.

According to Gorman (1990) when interpreting a ritual there is need to probe the nature, goal, function and meaning of every component in order to gain an objective understanding of its overall meaning. Grimes (1982) calls this process the hermeneutics of interpretation. Part of the instruction at the Varembe initiation school comprised songs, dance, folklore, which had meaning, ethical and moral lessons for the initiates. All aspects of the traditional school are highly ritualised (McLaren, 1997). According to Mhosva Regedzai (aged 82) from Nikita, the

Varemba initiation ritual is a platform for sexual orientation. Sexual orientation involves learning how to control one's sexual urge and how to have sex properly. Mhosva notes that through sex-dances the initiates are taught sexual prowess, how to use their waists skilfully and flexibly to please their wives during sexual intercourse. The drum used during the ceremony is called *ngoma* and the Varemba associate the word *ngoma* with the songs and rhythmic dances of teaching the male how to wriggle their waists during sex. Malisha, et al (2008) notes that, sex dances performed during initiation rituals provide a platform for sex allure to the individuals, which put them at risk of HIV. Nevertheless, the dances epitomise the sacredness of sex and the Varemba ritual dances, to the extent that the sex dance has nothing more to it than being religious and enabling negotiating for sex in a sacred trajectory. Sexual enjoyment between married couples lessens the chances of either partner seeking sexual gratification outside marriage, which exposes individuals to the risk of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV and AIDS.

Traditional songs during initiation are not taken as mere appendages to the various occasions they accompanied, but they serve specific social functions mostly being instructive, moralistic, and didactic. The songs convey some social ethics and satirises ill-gotten behaviour. Thomas (participant aged 40) indicated that, traditional songs that are used during the Varemba initiation ritual are meant to facilitate body movement; they are thus supposed to be performed by everyone, except for solo songs and lullabies. The participants viewed traditional songs as vehicles of instruction at the Varemba initiation camp for example:

*Sayi Sayi woyee vakomana!* (Sayi Sayi)(name of person and exhortation).

*Waramba kutumwa ndibaba* (Do not refuse to take orders from your father).

*Sayi Sayi woyee!* (You Sayi) (Exhortation).

*Zvibatewee* (Control yourself).

*Waramba kutumwa ndimai* (Do not refuse to take orders from your mother).

*Sayi woye!* (You Sayi).

*Kutumwa navakuru woramba sayi vakomana* (Do not refuse to take orders from elders).

*Usimbe regera Sayi Sayi vakomana* (Stop laziness Sayi Sayi).

*Meso meso regera* (Do not be promiscuous).

*Gumbo mumba gumbo panze Sayi Sayi* (Be satisfied with your wife Sayi).

The song reinforces social hierarchy and the need for respect of parents and elders who are reservoirs of cultural knowledge and whose wisdom should not be undermined. The initiates interviewed indicated that the songs sang during the initiation ceremony were intended to convey some moral lessons like exhorting them to work hard, to be honest, and to be good husbands who respect their wives by not cheating on them for sex. The initiates are always reminded of the importance of faithfulness in marriage. Ndanga Gondo (aged 14), an initiate from Mazetese, confirmed that the songs emphasized morals expected, and warned against ill behaviour and moral lassitude:

*Mazwi anoshaurwa nguva yekuchiremba anenge achitukirira uye kusvora vanhu vanoita zvakaipa, uye vane unhu hwakashata, kuedza kuvatsiura. Undihindini hunosvorwa nekurambidza. Nziyo dzepasichigare dzaidzidzisa unhu hwakanaka, kubatana nekudzidzisa varikucheudzwa tsika nemagagariro anotarisirwa netsika dzedu.*

[Utterances during singing at *chiremba* were satirical with the aim of rebuking people against immoral behaviour, and to reprimand those who would have erred. Human depravity was discouraged by putting them to ridicule. Traditional song fostered good relations, unity and social cohesion and correction by re-educating the initiates about accepted norms as well as conveying a code of good conduct.]

The Varembe initiation ritual takes up to three months of vigorous instruction at the *musasa*. This process leads up to the final transition of the boys into adulthood. The Varembe initiation school is similar to others found in other parts of the world, for example, the youth dormitories among the Muria tribal groups of Bastar in India where young people live together away from their families as they are taught important moral lessons (Mutsiya, 1986; Mawar and Kumar 1986).

Views emerging from most participants about the rationale for attending the Varembe initiation school were to distinguish the genuine Varembe from those who were not. A genuine Muremba was distinguished by having a circumcised penis and having knowledge of the secret codes of the bush language, the norms and values enshrined in the Varembe cultural heritage. A genuine Muremba could be distinguished from a *shuvuru* by having access to sex and developing an attitude to sex that is different from those who are not initiated. It is this attitude that distinguishes true Varembe men from the rest. They develop a certain understanding of sex that makes them refrain from having it indiscriminately. However, there are rules and regulations



governing one's access to this privilege. Taljaard (2003) points that initiates are taught ethics meant to develop character and genital hygiene during the period of seclusion and after circumcision. Sexual control and reserve are encouraged in some communities, for example among the Wolof in Senegal where initiates are discouraged from engaging in sexual activities until it is appropriate, or would have waited for a period of about six weeks, lest their foreskins grow back and they would go through more painful circumcision (Niang and Boiro, 2007). Promiscuity is dismissed as something that mere boys do and was not for real men. The Varembe hold similar values like those of the Wolof in that the young men are not allowed to have sex before they go through initiation, because they are considered too young to please a woman. Even after initiation, recently initiated individuals who are married are prohibited from engaging in sex soon after circumcision up to a certain time, which goes up to one month. The initiates who are not married are not allowed to engage in sexual activities until they get married. Therefore, chances of maintaining one's virginity after circumcision are high, which could reduce early exposure to the HIV virus. It is a punishable offence to break such rules and it is everyone's responsibility within the Varembe society to safeguard the rules and regulations. Moreover, the ritual elders are responsible for monitoring the individuals so that they will not break these rules. Myths and taboos associated with the initiation ritual play a significant role in controlling the behaviour of the individuals. The myths and the rituals are symbols of the sacred realm that continue to live in the midst of the people (Cox, 1992). As such, ritual performance revives the myths and brings people close to the spirit world. Segal (2004) argues that, the myth sanctions certain kinds of activities. Therefore, myths are responsible for the creation of taboos, which sanction certain human activities. The myths revive and remind people about their experiences during the ritual even if the ritual is out of performance. Through myths, the ritual continues to survive in the midst of the people and remind them of their experiences of the ritual and at the same time continue enforcing societal moral standards.

The Varembe people encourage endogamous marriages, which mean that their marriages are restricted to people of their culture. However, they can also practice exogamous marriages where marriage is not confined to the immediate family but the partner should convert to the Varembe culture. During instruction at the camp, part of the lessons is to encourage the initiates to practice endogamous marriages, thereby discouraging marriages to non-Varembe people. The Varembe endogamous marriages could have a link with Jewish and Muslim culture that has similar

practices. Hokweni (participant aged 52) avers that women are not allowed to get married outside the Varembe culture and a man who marries a non- Murembe is expelled from the community unless the woman is prepared to convert. These measures may contribute towards the prevention of the spread of HIV virus as sex is confined within the sacred and conservative group of people who treat sex as sacred.

The advantages of endogamous marriages are that the desired moral end may be achieved easily by exerting social pressure on someone of the same group. There are common rules that bind both partners over right or wrong behaviour in marriage. Endogamous marriages could be useful in some instances in the prevention of HIV because individuals would strive to maintain social relations intact. The consequences of breaking them could be clearly defined. Identification with religious organisations and traditions that promote faithfulness to one partner through endogamy, conceivably decrease the likelihood of participation in risky sexual behaviour.

The Varembe initiation school also provides instruction on issues of sexuality. The Varembe people are free to discuss issues of sexuality in a secluded place outside the scope of parental supervision. The transition (liminal) stage of the Varembe initiation ritual is conducted in an isolated venue, which provides a platform for a fuller discussion of issues difficult to address within the context of the immediate family unit. Issues of sex and sexuality that are considered improper for parents to discuss with their children are addressed. The fact that in the Varembe worldview issues of sexuality are treated as mystical and sacred, is crucial in guarding against casual sex. This view is essential in the prevention of the spread of HIV. According to some participants like Kajengo (aged 21), sexual issues are very different from other ordinary human activities. This view is corroborated by the fact that couples have sex at night with their doors closed or locked, and they do it in the dark with lights off. These views show that sex is sacred and this could help to promote abstinence and faithfulness in matters related to sex. Individuals therefore could develop a respectful attitude towards the sexual act.

During the initiation ceremony, the *Vadzabhi* and *Nyamukanga* (initiators) transmit sacred knowledge to the initiates, which is useful towards behaviour change. Individuals who acquire this knowledge and practice it become distinguished from the rest. The initiates inside the circle are conceived as sacred and those outside are viewed as existing within the profane realm. This is one reason why the initiates would not want to fall back into boyhood (*pwere* or *shuvuru*)

when they graduate to become *mwenye* (real *Muremba*/initiated person). Once a person enters the sacred circle he will not wish retract to the profane sphere thinking about the degrading social environment, the incentives, rewards and punishments attributed to the action. The profane space is emptiness and worthlessness, as it is full of deprivation of the benefits of the sacred sphere, which include sex, rights and privileges and which bring enlightenment about life and worldly issues. In many ways the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual has some positive psychological effects on the initiates that could be useful in inculcating certain values in an individual.

The Varembe initiation ritual is a form of communication that transmits certain temperaments to individuals as expected by the society. The performances during the initiation ritual places emphasis on the proper ways of behaving in any given situation. They convey proper moral dispositions and spiritual aptitudes aimed at producing and developing appropriate virtues. The Varembe initiates are taught to become disciplined which entails learning appropriate skills and emotions that distinguish them from the rest.

#### **6.6.3.2.2 Building Certain Character Traits in the Initiates**

The participants state that virtues are not taught overtly through the Varembe forms of instruction but are inculcated into the initiates through exposing them to certain conditions, which help to regulate and shape their ways of thinking and behaving. According to Chief Maranda, the initiates are exposed to harsh conditions such as being stripped naked for the rest of the initiation period. They are made to bathe in cold water every morning, and they are exposed to punishment and criticism for any form of ill- behaviour, regardless of its triviality.

In the study of the Ndembu people of Zambia, Turner notes that the initiates are stripped naked, they remain with no identity, personal names are obliterated and they are people of no status (Turner, 1969). The Varembe initiates have no identity because during this process they are being formed. They are neither boys nor men, they are neither *shuvuru* nor *mwenye* but they are in between. According to Turner (1969), such initiates are said to be in the marginal (liminal) stage, they are on the fringes of life. They are in the process of transformation. The ‘boy’ in them is dead, but the man is not yet born. They are between the past and the new states which Turner (1969) refers to as the “Betwixt and between” states. Turner argues that during the liminal, the

initiate is a *tabula rasa* and a blank slate on which his new status, knowledge and wisdom of the group are inscribed (Turner, 1995:103). The initiate has no control over what would be happening to his life during the ritual. It is a stage when the ritual leaders transmit sacred knowledge to the initiate (neophyte) that in turn transforms his personhood. This sacred knowledge is expected to transform the initiate's innermost being to become renewed. The initiates are treated as dark and invisible but would remain sacred and untouchable (Whitehead, 2004). At this stage, the Varembea initiates are as good as dead, symbolised by their separation from the society in the first stage. According to Henrik (2007), the effect could be equated to a rebirth or a resurrection after a symbolical death. Rebirth and resurrection is symbolised by their transformation of states during the liminal stage. Johannes Chengeto (aged 16) from Mbwebwe village affirms that the forms of training and deprivation, which the initiates go through, convey qualities of chastity, resilience, forbearance, manliness and respect. However, the character and form that the new person takes depends on the effort made to form them. Character building is not taught directly, but is enforced through exposing the initiates to hardships. Despite such treatments, the general attitude displayed by initiates is of acceptance of the physical punishment as part of the process of transition to manhood (Wood and Jewkes, 1998). The action has an effect on the feelings and emotions of the individual, affective responses are bound to occur rapidly and automatically for example, anger, fear, and death that in turn influences one's judgement (Slovic, 1989). The painful ordeals that the initiates go through during the Varembea initiation ritual cement the initiates together and build character traits of endurance, fortitude, and forbearance. The Varembea initiation ritual provides a platform for common knowledge, which makes individuals mutually commit and orient their actions towards one another. The group is responsible and accountable for the behaviour of each individual. Some of the relationships created during initiation last for the rest of the lives of the initiates. The ordeals through which the Varembea initiates go through provide powerful mechanisms capable of changing an individual's dispositions.

Circumcision is not of the penis only, but of the 'heart' as well, which leaves an indelible mark on the individual's psyche. Therefore, significant changes to one's approach to life become inevitable from the early stages and throughout his life (Sibanda, 2013). The internal transformations of the initiate are important in determining the attitude and emotions of the participant. Marcel Mauss (1950-1973) a student of Durkheim notes that, religion should be

studied as a total social phenomenon and analysed in terms of its linkages to every aspect of society (Bell, 2009). Durkheim (1912) points out that a ritual that is organised around the sacred brings collective consciousness to the group, and through that, the individuals find meaning which binds them into a community (Giessen, 2006). According to Kyalo (2013), ritual is symbolic in the most profound sense, for it brings together the mind, the body and the emotions and at the same time binds them to a shared community of values.

#### **6.6.3.2.3 Moulding an Individual's Ability to Have Self-Control**

In their definitions of ritual Tambar (1979) and Keizer (1988) describe it as a phenomenon consisting of culturally constructed systems of symbolic communication and symbolic behaviour, which are systematic and standardised. From their definitions, the ritual consists of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts that are expressed in multimedia such as song, dance, riddles and folklore. During the Varembe initiation ritual, initiates are taught the “language of the bush” “the mark of the cobra” which is only found on the courageous and distinguished “hunter” (Rameki aged 63, headman from Chigara). According to Jairosi (participant, aged 42), the language is marked by secret codes discernible only to the insider or only by those who went through the initiation process. He highlighted that the language is a preserve of the sacred institution not to be disclosed to outsiders. No one among the people interviewed during field research was at liberty to disclose the real ‘words of the bush’. According to Hlengani (participant aged 23, from Maguranhende Village under Chief Neshuro), the secret language is marked with restricted codes understood only by those taking part in the initiation ritual. The codes are used to distinguish the genuine Varembe from those who are not real. Hlengani declared that it is the “ten commandments of the bush” engraved into the heart and no one is at liberty to disclose them. The practice of the secret language is prevalent among the Xhosa and it is one of the ways they are able to identify someone who has been initiated (WHO, 2008). The initiates are asked to decipher riddles which anyone who has not gone through the initiation ceremony will fail to explain them. The language is meant to make sure that the ritual process is conserved as a secret and outsiders would not have access to its secrets.

Most participants noted that the rules and codes of the language are committed to memory through recitation and rote learning. It is interesting to know that the major pillars of transmission of knowledge are still being observed and preserved in the rituals. There have been

radical changes on how information is transmitted with the advent of information technology but these forms are still maintained in the rituals of this nature. The initiation ritual plays a significant role in social and emotional learning of the initiates (McLaren, 1999). Since the codes of the 'Ten Commandments' are committed to memory, the initiate is trained to have self-control, discipline and to remain focused towards the noble goal of becoming a distinguished adult (Moses, participant aged 17). Such attitudes and discipline are useful in controlling the mindset of an individual against risky behaviours that contribute towards the spread of HIV. The secret codes of the Varembe initiation ritual have an indirect bearing on moulding the ability of the initiate towards self-control. Therefore, the initiation school creates a productive context for learning (Sarason, 2004). Kuzburn and Neuburg (2005) points out that rituals provide a basis for some psychological adaptations that are necessary for social interaction. The Varembe mode of instruction is characterised by extreme indoctrination extended in the various tasks to be accomplished during the ritual. The prescriptive nature of the ritual produces profound changes in one's attitude to life.

The Varembe initiation school curriculum is designed in a way to inspire the initiates to develop positive behaviour and a strong sense of cultural identity. Individuals contribute to this sense of identity by building and influencing the attitudes and behaviours of others close to them. According to Bandura (1997), the interaction between the human being and his environment produces learning through modelling. Modelling is doing what others do or imitate others (Smith and Berge, 2009). This means that the continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural and environmental determinants contributes to the shaping of an individual's behaviour (Smith and Berge, 2009). The implication is that an individual's behaviour is explained in the context of the interaction of these variables. Any observable behaviour does not solely emanate from internal determinants like thinking and emotions but they are a result of environmental stimuli.

Meaningful behaviour, or action, is possible only within a prescribed social context. There are social norms which suggest that people do things to please or follow people they admire (Strand and Smith, 2008). This is one way the Varembe society monitors the action of individual members. The implication is that a true human portrait is more a product of society than of nature. The society determines the type of person one ought to be by influencing behaviour.

Humanity is shaped and moulded by meanings that result from the processes of social interaction. Upon interpretation and reinterpretation, these meanings change, and in response, the individual's action changes as well. Human behaviour is interpreted in terms of the meanings by which the society understands the world around. Human behaviour is understood or considered right or wrong depending on the patterns of beliefs and values of society. Individuals therefore make efforts to mould their behaviour to suit societal expectations. The *Vadzabhi*, *Nyamukanga* and other cultural leaders are among the people responsible for modelling the behaviours of the initiates. Modelling is an effective mode of transmitting values, attitudes and patterns of thought and behaviour (Bandura, 1986). It can influence moral thinking and moral judgments, which can have an impact on one's sense of right and wrong. In the light of HIV and AIDS, peer pressure and foreign culture that contributes in influencing risky sexual behaviour in the youth could possibly be averted. Despite the complexity of behaviour, it is not negotiable and it is an essential component of life. Therefore, educations that uphold moral values remain important in society. The education system should endeavour to produce youths who can face the rapid changes in the socio-economic environment without losing their identity and integrity.

#### **6.6.4 Transformation and Reintegration of the Initiates**

After a period of three months, the Varembe initiates will break from privacy. The period of privacy and seclusion is concluded by performing a 'ritual of coming out' (Wilson, et al. 1952; 214). In the final stage of the tripartite ritual process proposed by Van Gennep (1960), the initiate is confirmed of the new status he would have acquired. Van Gennep calls it a phase of reincorporation. The initiates rejoin the society and incorporate in their day-to-day living what they learnt during the initiation.

Most participants indicated that the successful completion of the Varembe initiation ritual implies a holistic transformation of the individual. The individual is viewed as a new person, socially, physically, emotionally and psychologically. There are three issues emerging from the responses gathered during field study pertaining to the phase of incorporation. Firstly, the initiates as new and distinct people; secondly, real men should not degenerate or renege on their promises; thirdly, upholding the norms and values of the society. The expectation is that since they have become adults they will contribute positively to their families and community.

#### 6.6.4.1 The Initiates as New and Distinct People

Ngarava Tafara (*Nyamukanga* from Zinake village, aged 62), pointed out that after the initiation ritual, before the initiates leave the camp, their heads and pubic hairs are shaven and their old clothes and old sticks are burnt, together metaphorically with their past lives. The initiates bathe in cold water after which they are sprinkled with water that is mixed with herbs; they wear new clothes comprised of white shorts and white shirts; they are given new names; they also prepare long conjoined sticks which they carry back home. The initiates are not allowed to look back as they leave the initiation camp. If they do that misfortune will befall them. The Varembe reincorporation process takes up to a week. After reincorporation, the initiates will be known as *Vamwenye* (the initiated). There are minor variations on reincorporation in other ethnic groups. Reintegration among the Balante in Guinea Bissau and the Wolof in Senegal takes six days. It consists of activities such as ritual bathes and the giving of new names to the initiates (Niang and Boiro, 2007). Among the Bukusu in Southern Kenya the retreat is characterised by the burning of the sleeping mats and the initiates spend the night around a fire with women around them to demonstrate their sexual resistance to sexual attraction (Shaffer, 2007). The Shangani in Zimbabwe burn their temporary huts and the initiates are conferred with new names (Sibanda, 2013). The Xhosa initiates also burn their temporary dwelling and their contents on the final day. They wash off the clay that they would have applied to their bodies, and their faces are painted with red ochre. They put on new clothes as a symbol of a new identity. When they leave the initiation camp, they are not supposed to look back (WHO, 2008). The process of bathing and the burning of the camp and the belongings imply that the boys are symbolically washing away as well as burning their boyhood as they prepare to re-enter the society as new people (WHO, 2008).

The Varembe initiation ritual is also marked with mini-ceremonies at the most important stages of its phases. The mini-ceremonies show that the initiates are new people, signified by the new clothes and new sticks. They burn old clothes, which is symbolic to burning of old life. It is the extinction of one's old life that gives birth to a new person. The white clothes signify sanctity and purity. The stick is an external symbol that reflects the attainment of new status. It is the recognition by initiates of their transition to new status of manhood. The initiation ritual engages



the initiates in ways that unveil the potency and importance of life marks. They have the opportunity to publicly demonstrate their newly acquired competences.

Chief Negare indicated that new names given to the Varembe initiates are a sign that they have been transformed into new people who have left behind their old selves. Names that he mentioned had some Islamic or Jewish background, for example, Hamisi, Sharif Moses, Adam and Seremane. The new names conferred on the initiates have a bearing to Islamic and Jewish names. This confirms the possible Middle Eastern ancestry of the Varembe people (Mandivenga, 1983). The view was supported by Parfitt (2002)'s findings about the genetic correspondence of the Varembe and the Jews. The adoption of Muslim names shows the brevity of the Islamic influence on the local tribesmen who adopted the Muslim names. Other names mentioned by Chief Negare conveyed meanings related to hope, joy and protection, for example, Tafara (Happy), Rukudzo (Respect), Ishewakatipa (God Gave us). Ngarava Tafara, supported these views and went further to show that it is forbidden to call the boys by their old names after the ritual. Anyone who violates that rule is fined by paying with a goat. Lawrence (recent initiate, aged 10) affirm that the initiates are offered the freedom to choose names they would want especially from members of their clan or ancestors. Anyone who addressed the initiates using the old name was compelled to pay fine in the form of a goat. The participants gave the impression that they feel honoured if they were called by their new clan names because it was a sign of status to walk in the footsteps of family achievers. However, some of the initiates preferred modern names as their new names.

Levi Strauss's contribution in anthropology is valid in understanding transformations during the Varembe initiation ritual. Strauss argues that a ritual may be understood by studying group transformations that are regulated by a common principle of invariance (Bell, 1997). Common invariance is visible in what all the initiates go through in unison during the ritual, for example, singing, dancing, burning old clothes and the shaving of hair. All these are external relations, which invoke the internal transformation of the individual. Invariance produces bodily discipline, which is similar to meditation when performed in unison by a group (Bell, 1997). Internal transformations in the Varembe initiation ritual are crucial in moulding the 'inner man', who is important in determining the character and moods significant in shaping the behaviour of an

individual. The ritual assumes a type of purification and sanctity that represents the passage from one life to another in the individuals' life cycle.

To the initiates incorporation implies that they have become distinct from others. They are now men and no longer boys. They have attained access to social privileges and responsibilities. Access to sex is the main distinguishing feature between men and boys. The Varembe initiates have been empowered on how to have sex appropriately. However, access to sex does not mean that the initiate should have sex arbitrarily; rather, they can now have dignified marriages and dignified sex sanctioned by the Varembe cultural values and this is what distinguishes a Murembe from one who is not.

According to Van Gennep (1908), puberty rituals mark a transition from the asexual into a sexual life. This view is in line with how the Varembe teach issues of sexuality. Those who have not gone through initiation rituals are not expected to become sexually active. They cannot marry because they are still 'boys' who have no knowledge of managing a wife. . The fact that girls in the Varembe culture cannot marry men who have not gone through the initiation ritual forces most young men to go through the puberty rituals so that they can benefit from this privilege. In so doing, the initiates are taught moral virtues of sexual behaviour, which could be useful in the era of HIV and AIDS. The Varembe initiation ritual is a powerful force influencing positive sexual behaviour.

However, research moderates the role of initiation in the prevention of HIV, for example, the contents of the traditional school were acknowledged as responsible for encouraging young people to have sex (Malisha, et al. 2008). They are accused of diffusing the message that the young people are ready to engage in sexual relationships immediately after the initiation (Malisha, et al. 2008; Skinner, et al. 2013). Nevertheless, in the case of the Varembe initiation ritual, abstinence is practiced primarily as a religious conviction rather than as a cultural necessity or health consideration. The individuals are not necessarily driven by the need to maintain their health but are driven by the zeal to fulfil religious obligations (Mandere, aged 16). The strength of the Varembe initiation ritual is that even in the absence of HIV and AIDS the Varembe people still practice abstinence.

The general view held by the participants is that, after going through the initiation process, an individual who was once a neophyte, living on the fringes of the society, is accepted as part of the community. According Amos Machokoto (14) from Nikita, initiation defines one who is in the group and one who is not. Those who are not identified with the community are taken as outcasts and are socially unacceptable. Members who go through the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual are proud to be accepted by the community. The ritual brings the community together as members gather to celebrate one who has successfully completed the coming of age act of bravery and courage. This view has been supported by Mhosva Regedzai (aged 23), who notes that the community is brought together through the act of sharing and socialisation during the reincorporation celebrations. This act of togetherness helps people to create meaning in their lives in relationship with others around them. The views emphasised in the responses from the participants focus on the issue of re-rooting the youths back into the community and cultural values. This is not a problem for traditional leaders alone to act separately from others, but it needs holism and interconnectedness enshrined in the value ethic of humanness as people think and act together. Durkheim notes that the fundamental tenet is that the society as a collective entity exerts an external constraining force upon individuals to conform to its requirements (Stausberg, 2006). The compelling force can be achieved as well by the sense of proximity to which the members establish themselves when they are in the group. Members of the society transform the external objective force into internalised dispositions that are useful in making them follow the norms of the society.

Durkheim understood the fundamental beliefs shaping human life to be essentially social phenomena. He argues that individuals who make a social group are bound to one another because of their shared beliefs. He affirms that belief is not a matter of private religious experience or personal opinion but belongs to the group which unites it. Durkheim argues that ‘it is primarily through ritual that collective representations are enabled to persist with some measure of authority in the minds of individuals. Insofar as a number of persons share ideas of collective identity and organization, they feel the need periodically to infuse new life into these ideas. They do this by means of ritual and especially through the agency of ceremonial gatherings’ (Greenwald, 1973:166).

Durkheim based his views on Robertson Smith's ideas on the rites of sacrifice. Smith observed that the rites of sacrifice have a provision for cementing the bonds of fellowship among members of a primitive community and Durkheim saw rites as a means for the making and remaking of society (Greenwald, 1973). Durkheim felt that, participation in rituals integrates individuals into a social order through collective celebrations and enactments. According to Collins (2004), emotional energy takes the form of collective emotions that are produced in face-to-face encounters and contribute to the emergence and production of social solidarity in the way suggested by Durkheim (Jones, 1986; Von Scheve, 2011). These views explain collective intention, collective action and collective behaviour, which are useful in interpreting the role of the Varembe ritual in behaviour change.

#### **6.6.4.2 Real Men should not Relapse**

The incorporation phase means that the behaviour patterns of the initiates are expected to change. The initiate is not expected to behave like a boy anymore, but should prove that he is now a man. Chief Negari reiterated that

*Pakupedzisira kwezvidzidzo varundu vanenge vave kunzi vave varume, havafanirwi kudzokera kuujaya zvekare kwavanenge vachiita sepwere. Wese anosvonesa tsika dzeChiremba nekuita misikanzwa anorohwa zvakanyanya. Muremba anezvinhu zvinoramba zvichimuyeuchidza tsika dzedu kuti asarasike zvakaita senhengo yake yakachekwa uye ninga yemoyo wake.*

[At the end of the initiation school, their manhood is confirmed and they are not going to return to boyhood again by behaving like little children. Anyone who subjects the Varembe culture to deprecation by misbehaving is exposed to the 'stern whip' of the elders. One has to benefit from the reminder he has with him, the circumcised penis; his heart is his closet loaded with all the expected cultural values.]

The participants affirm that completion of the initiation ritual meant that the initiates had acquired what was expected of them by the Varembe culture in terms of behavioural patterns, beliefs, norms and values, survival skills and humanness [*unhu*]. In support of this view, a participant, Hamisen Zhou (43 years old) notes:

*Vamwenye vanotarisirwa kugona kubate pamwe nevamwe, kuve netsitsi nevamwe, rukudzo nekuremekedza vamwe.*

[The initiates are expected to adopt a way of life that gives emphasis to cooperation, compassion, community and concern for the interest of collective personhood, dignity and respect for others.]

The initiates are not expected to regress into boyhood. The Varembe people have put in place structures to avert people who relapse. There are punitive measures taken against those who backtrack from the Varembe teachings into pre-circumcision behaviour. The elders usually bring them up for public disciplinary action. Apart from the discipline instituted on them, the initiates are always reminded of the Varembe cultural values by their scars of circumcision. They are constantly cautioned for their bad behaviour and are always reminded of the positive sexual behaviours expected of adults.

Completion of the circumcision and initiation ritual also means that, the initiates are expected to practice what they have acquired in terms of behavioural patterns, beliefs, norms and values of the Varembe culture. This is what it means to be an adult. These attributes are enshrined in the Varembe philosophy of *unhu* (humanness). The initiates are expected to live like real men with dignity who has acquired the principles of *unhu*, whose behaviour pattern has changed and now lives in accordance with the norms and values of the society.

The *unhu* is an African philosophy of life and belief systems in which people's daily lives are reflected (Makuvaza, 2008). The Varembe affirmed that *unhu* is a way of life that gives emphasis to co-operation, compassion, respect for community and concern for the interest of collective personhood, dignity and respect for others. This term is aptly summarized in the Karanga phrase *munhu munhu nevanhu*, (Louw, 1998), meaning that a human being is human because of others. The Varembe initiation rituals act as provisions of common focal points and common cultural knowledge, which bequeath 'actors' with information about how others should act. The initiates learn this togetherness and sameness by being subjects exposed to lack of status through staying naked, and the shaving of their heads during the initiation ritual.

The philosophy adopted by the Varembe means that the initiates are taught values of wholeness; oneness and collectivism which stand in stark contrast to western ethics which often promote individualism, stress independence, self-reliance and individual pursuit of goals and desires.

The initiates acquire humanness summed up by the Nziramasanga Commission (1999:62) as, "a concept that denotes a good human being, a morally upright person, characterised by qualities

such as responsibility, honesty, justice, trustworthiness, hard work, integrity, a cooperative spirit of solidarity, hospitality and devotion to family and community welfare”. According to the Varembe people, this is what it means to be a real man. The familial and the communal are stressed over individual goals, which the Varembe refer to as *chindihindini* (selfishness). Through the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual, the youth acquire some specific orientation, which enables them to realize that their service to the entire community forms part of the initiation process.

According to Tutu (1999), an individual with *unhu* derives self-confidence and self-assurance from that sense of belonging to a collective whole. The Varembe initiation ritual teaches the initiates to become human together with others. In the study of the Yao migrants of Malawi in Zimbabwe, Daimon (2013) notes that the people are united by the common identity from the common experience of circumcision, which distinguished them from other indigenous ethnic groups, like the Shona and the Ndebele. He notes that the collective identity defines the capacity for autonomous action against HIV and AIDS. Through this solidarity, the Yao people could confront the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The Varembe people display similar collective solidarity that is of utmost importance in the collective fight against the HIV and AIDS pandemic. This could encourage individuals not to engage in risky sexual behaviours that could threaten social solidarity. Therefore, endemic social problems will never show in ritual, for they might threaten the fabric of the ritually induced harmony. The dispositions cultivated into the initiates encourage the individuals to be trustworthy and become faithful to their partners. This may go as far as helping those people who are affected and infected with HIV and AIDS, by giving them support. The Varembe initiation rituals are geared towards harmony and unity by controlling manifestations of disunity. The Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual is a period of reflection on one’s personal values, actions and beliefs. In their endeavour to develop *unhu* in initiates, the *Nyamukanga* and *Vadzabhi* ritual elders engage in the teaching of life skills and wisdom that could help the youths in making informed decisions about HIV and AIDS.

The use of technology such as phones and the internet has destroyed the solidarity enshrined in *unhuism* as people no longer value social gatherings such as rituals. Important issues are discussed through the phone and internet conversations. *Unhu* philosophy negates this notion; one cannot be human by oneself and cannot exist as human in isolation when one has acquired

the concept of *unhu*. Technology has quantified people into social groupings and they now see themselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas they are connected. As summarised in Samkange (1980)'s three maxims, unhu philosophy favours civility and civilised dialogue premised on mutual tolerance, unity and considerations of other people as human.

The Varembe initiation ritual conveys the morality that determines social rules and norms intended to guide the conduct of people in society. Much is expected from the indigenous knowledge systems of education, especially cultural leaders, in transmitting African value systems deemed appropriate by the society. Post-colonialism and post modernism have brought a new moral imperative on traditional education in Zimbabwe. Of significance is the emancipatory role and insatiable drive to re-root the youths to correct all wrongs superimposed by Western value systems and modernity on the Zimbabwean traditional way of life.

#### **6.6.4.3 Upholding the Norms and Values of the Society**

Participants stressed that the reincorporation phase serves as a public acclamation of the initiates' new dispositions in society. At this stage, the initiates are welcomed back into the society through festivals and rituals of reintegration. The phase marks the end of the initiation ceremony. Initiates are expected to adhere and to uphold norms and values of the society.

During the study, the researcher was afforded the opportunity to attend the graduation ceremony held at Chigara Village under Chief Maranda for initiates who had participated in the circumcision and initiation ritual at Mazhou Mountains. The researcher also visited Tomu Village under Chief Chitanga to meet the initiates who had attended the ritual at Songogwe. The Graduation Ceremony for the Mazhou initiates took place three weeks before that of the initiates from Songogwe.

As part of public acclamation of the initiates, the researcher observed that all of them had their heads shaven. The initiates walked to the village in single file, with heads down, whips on their shoulders, singing the song whose meaning was a secret to the initiates:

*Hule hule zamukela,*

*Hule hule*

*Zamukela hule hule.*

*Hule hule zamukela hule (translation unavailable)*

One *Vadzabhi* was leading the procession; some were in the middle, while some were at the back of the procession. What transpired during graduation was almost similar for the initiates from the two sites except for the size of the sticks. In the group of initiates from Mazhou, some initiates had very long sticks joined together by strings extracted from the *musasa* tree bark. These initiates were said to be of Karanga descent. Some had very short sticks and they were said to be of Shangani origin. The initiates had the same perception about these sticks. Most of them said that the sticks were not ordinary, but venerated and no one was allowed to hold the sticks because they would defile them. Images of sacrality and profaneness are extensive in the Varemba moral view. The researcher observed that the sticks were kept on top of the kitchen huts at the initiate's homestead and the sticks were returned to the *Nyamukannga's* home after two weeks where they are bundled together and burnt. According to Gwati (participant aged 33), the sticks are burnt bundled together as a reminder to the initiates of the need for unity and collectiveness. Another meaning held by the participants such as Hoto (aged 22) is that all members of the group contribute to the wellbeing of the group by uniting in case of challenges. The significance of putting the stick on top of the kitchen hut was interpreted by Chugudu (participant aged 30), as having some feminine connotations. The hut in African culture is associated with femaleness therefore keeping the sticks on top of the kitchen hut is a symbol of power over woman, meaning that the boys are now capable of taking responsibility over family issues and can even marry when they are ready. Some recent initiates for example Chitsa (aged 15) indicated that the seclusion period taught them to be responsible through being away from parents and relatives on whom they have always depended for support. Mathonsi (participant aged 17) mentioned that, when the initiates are away from the rest of the community at the initiation camp, they would learn to share ideas and survival skills with others. They are



prepared to be ready to take responsibility of their own families assuming the roles of fathers and being ready for marriage. Therefore, they are supposed to be able to manage their families and act as role models to the community. The view derived from this perception is that, after going through the initiation process, an individual who was once a neophyte, living on the fringes of the society, is now identified as part of the community and contributes to the wellbeing of the group members. According Amos Machokoto (14) from Nikita, initiation defines one who is in the group and one who is not. Those who are not identified with the community are taken as outcasts and are socially unacceptable. Members who went through the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual take pride in being accepted by the community. The ritual brings the community together as members gather to witness one who has successfully completed the act of bravery and courage. This view has been supported by Mhosva Regedzai (aged 23), who notes that the community is brought together through the act of sharing and socialisation during the reincorporation celebrations. This act of togetherness helps people to create meaning out of their lives in relationship with others around them. The views highlighted in the responses from the participants were on the issue of re-routing the youths back to the community and to their cultural values. The fundamental tenet of society is that it exists as a collective entity that exerts an external constraining force upon individuals to conform to its requirements (Durkheim 1912; Stausberg, 2006). The constraining force can be achieved as well by the sense of proximity at which the members establish themselves when they are in the group. Members of the society transform the external objective force into internalised dispositions that are useful in making them follow the norms of the society.

The proximity of members was witnessed during the Varembe graduation ceremony which was a public ceremony attended by the *Nyamukanga*, the *Vadzabhi*, the initiates, their parents and relatives and any local people were welcome despite being of the Varembe culture. The ceremony was first held at one *Vadzabhi's* homestead, and then they went to each one of the initiates' homes. Gifts in the form of goats, cows or money were presented to the graduates. The effect of performance during celebrations causes the members to renew their moral commitment to the norms and values of the society thereby reinstituting the order of society (Stausberg, 2006). Durkheim (1912) understood the fundamental beliefs that shape human life to be essentially social phenomena. He argues that individuals who make a social group are bound to

one another because of their common beliefs. Belief is not a matter of private religious experience or personal opinion but belongs to the group and it unites it.

Durkheim argues that

It is primarily through ritual that collective representations are enabled to persist with some measure of authority in the minds of individuals. Insofar as a number of persons sharing ideas of collective identity and organisation, they feel the need to periodically infuse new life into these ideas. They do this by means of ritual and especially through the agency of ceremonial gatherings (Greenwald, 1973:166).

The collective value of the society helps the Varembe to remind each other of the norms and values of their society, and those who stray learn from others the benefits of solidarity in life. The Varembe initiation ritual has a provision for reinforcing the bonds of fellowship among members of the community. The rituals are therefore a means for the making and remaking of society (Greenwald, 1973). Participation in rituals integrates individuals into a social order through collective celebrations and enactments. Emotional energy takes the form of collective emotions that are produced in face-to-face encounters and contribute to the emergence and production of social solidarity in the way that Durkheim (1912) suggested (Jones, 1986; Collins, 2004; Von Scheve, 2011). These views explain collective intention, collective action and collective behaviour, which are useful in interpreting the role of the Varembe ritual in behaviour change, destined to maintain norms and values of the society.

Most participants affirmed the significant change in behaviour and conduct when the initiates reintegrates with society. Chinosengwa Ramushu (aged 42), a village headman from Nikita points out that a person who goes through *chirembe* is very different from the rest of the boys who have not yet gone through the same process. One becomes respectful to elders and community leaders and such change in behaviour is attributed to the teachings one received during the initiation ritual.

The initiate's new image is conferred publicly at a gathering where gifts such as new clothes, money or some domestic animals like goats, chickens and cattle are presented. Publicity has a role to play in influencing an individual to become what has been acclaimed of him at the graduation ceremony, to be a good role model in society. However, in the light of the Varembe culture, the term 'reincorporation' used by Van Gennep (1908) does not define the initiation

phase fairly and holistically. Reincorporation gives an impression that the initiate moves from the sacred space back to the world of profanity physically. The word expresses the physiological reintegration that would occur after initiation but does not express the psychological state of emotion that has been transformed.

The Varembe initiates become typical of the Shaman whose psychological states have been transformed. Eliade (1995) states that the Shaman receives instruction about the spirits, mythology, genealogy of the clan and their secret language. The Varembe initiations have as goal to influence the psychological states of the initiates in that manner. The Shamanic initiation is extreme because according to Henrik (2007), it engages the initiates into ecstasy. In the Varembe ritual, the initiate becomes an embodiment of the numinous living as a subset of the profane, but whose structure remains unchanged to sanctify the world and render meaningful the activities of their lives. It juxtaposes the operations of the profane and the sacred spheres. Whilst the initiate should stick to religiously inspired behaviour, he has to interact with the secular and contribute towards the change of its internal structure.

This is the implication when the *Nyamukanga* announces at the graduation ceremony that the initiate has achieved a new status or that he now belongs to a new group of men, it means there is another group of men, existing side-by-side. In the Varembe culture, one cannot be a real man if the initiation ritual is not performed successfully. Being a real man would mean that the initiate would possess the transformative power to initiate change of behaviour and attitude in other individuals. To be able to initiate change in other people's behaviours means one's own behaviour should have changed as well. The initiates reproduce society by redefining it, negating some of its basic premises. According to Bandura (1986), behaviour is learnt by observing other members through modelling. This implies that the Varembe initiation ritual guarantees mutual assurance, hence making it possible for the society to solve coordination problems that could possibly hamper collective action. During the ceremony, the researcher witnessed that the initiates were attached to a mentor referred to as *Maseve* (friend). These traditional elders of renowned repute are responsible for mentoring and guarding against any negative behaviour of the initiate for a period of a year. The initiates interviewed at Chigara Village (aged 11), pointed out that apart from copying behaviour from the mentors, they can also copy their peers, elders or senior members of the community who were initiated before them. Bandura (1997)'s social

learning perspective notes that people learn from their models by way of imitating their behaviour. People imitate a behaviour that is vicariously reinforced. If the initiates view their models as successful and responsible people in society, they will have good reason to imitate them, consequently improving their own moral behaviours. The *Maseve* are therefore entrusted with the transmission of a specific value system to the young people on behalf of the society. After all, they are believed to be watchdogs of moral behaviour, anti-social attitudes of the individual, family, clan and the whole society (Magesa, 1998). The *Vamwenye* are consistently reminded of the lessons they went through during *chiremba*. The mentor is expected to mould the initiates in accordance with societal value expectations; therefore, they become agents of the Varemba traditional morality. The *Maseve* are held responsible for any moral lassitude shown by the youths. This explains why the Varemba ritual elders are very strict with anyone who misbehaves after going through the initiation ritual. The Varemba rebuke all social ills that are likely to demean their cultural practices.

The religiosity and the psychosocial support provided by the Varemba culture influences social behaviour and stimulate behavioural change in the youths. The follow up on the youths is necessary to mould them into individuals responsible for their behaviour in risky situations regarding HIV and AIDS.

### **6.7 The Significance of the Varemba Circumcision and Initiation Ritual**

This section presents responses of the participants on the importance of the Varemba initiation ritual in their life experiences, its effects on them or others as a determinant of behavioural change. The modern education system has failed to achieve what traditional education has achieved in the view that the Zimbabwean education system has remained Eurocentric, well after independence. Nziramasanga (1999) echoing Makuvaza (1996)'s sentiments proposes that the education system in the country should be at the forefront in strengthening traditional institutions such as family, customs, beliefs, norms and values. It is the duty of the teacher to shoulder the demands placed on education and be a vehicle to return modern education to its traditional source. Traditional education transforms the society far more than what modern education can achieve. Varied answers were obtained from the participants about the significance of the Varemba initiation ritual, which include change in one's personhood, correction of misbehaviour and preservation of cultural heritage.

### 6.7.1 The Circumcision Ritual Changes One's Personhood

According to Chief Chitanga, an individual who has gone through the Varembea circumcision and initiation ritual is different from one who has not, in that the individual emerges a changed person. He is completely new and is rarely found on the wrong side. He notes that:

*Unotokwanisa kuona kuti uyu Muremba chaiye akadzanirwa uye uyu haasi, kana kuti haana kudzanirwa. Unotoona nemhosva dzinomhangarwa kudare kwangu, zhinji dzacho ndedzevanhu vasiri Varembea.*

[You can actually tell that this is a pure *Muremba* who went through initiation and that this one is not *Muremba* or did not go through the initiation ritual. You can attest to this by the number of cases that are reported through our community courts. Most cases are of people who are not *Varembea*.]

Chief Maranda made a similar observation that a genuine *muremba* is one who has become a new creature from inside and out, he is cultural to the core. Chinosengwa Ramushu, a village headman from Nikita reiterates that a person who goes through the *chiremba* initiation process is very different from the rest of the boys, who have not gone through the same process. One becomes respectable to elders and community leaders and does not engage in adultery; he lives peacefully with others in the community. He does not find pride in engaging in illicit sexual relations. Johannes Gozho (initiate) from Maranda confirms this change of behaviour after initiation:

*Pandaive ndisati ndaenda kuChiremba taiita kurwirana vakadzi. Unyanzvi hwekugona kupfimba hwaionekwa kuburikidza nekuita vasikana vakawanda uye kurara navo. Ndakazoona kuti hazvibetseri, zvinobvisa chiremera.*

[Before I went through initiation, I used to compete for women with my friends. Prowess in sexual matters was seen by having multiple girlfriends and sleeping with them as well. Now I have a fresh mind, it is useless I tell you, and you just achieve nothing but lose dignity.]

Most participants emphasised the change in behaviour and conduct when the initiate reintegrates with his society. The responses attributed change in behaviour to the teachings one goes through during the initiation ritual. An initiated person displays values of the Varembea culture, and he is viewed as different from one who is not initiated. Reference was made to the holistic transformation of an individual, as one could change his attitude towards sex and general

conduct. By limiting the number of girlfriends, one would thus be reducing his vulnerability to sexual transmitted infections, including HIV and AIDS.

In the Varembe traditional education system, a holistic approach is used to develop the youth mentally, physically and spiritually. This is contrary to the Information and Computer Technology (ICT) era where most young people get their education from a source where an individual is taught what he wants to know or is interested in. The Varembe initiation ritual counteracts information and computer technology that has caused an outcry and distress in Zimbabwe, especially through moral decadence, loss of sound discipline, appropriate cultural and religious values, lack of role model teachers, leaders, family and society (Nziramanga, 1999). ICT has the power to alter habits, feelings and the mindset of the young people by exposing them to different countries in the global village, which exposes the Zimbabwean youth subculture to a diverse spectrum of lifestyles (Isambi, 2004). However, even if in this global village where the effects of information technology are strongly felt, young people should not allow themselves to be consumed and uprooted but should endeavour to maintain their culture and identity (Makuvaza, 2009). The Varembe puberty ritual provides a necessary force towards re-establishing the young people.

#### **6.7.2 The Varembe Circumcision and Initiation Ritual Corrects Misbehaviour**

Participants described the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual as a platform to correct misbehaviour in the boys. Tichaona Mabhandi (aged 19) from Matibi notes that the Varembe initiation process corrects misbehaviour through some restrictive measures imposed on the initiates during the ritual. He notes that a boy who misbehaves shows the need to go through the corrective intervention of the initiation ritual. Someone who has gone through the initiation process knows what it means to have *unhu* and dreads the penalty for misbehaving. The initiation ritual teaches humility, unity and the need for respecting everyone. An individual is kept reminded of what he went through during the initiation process.

Some of the participants whose children went through the Varembe initiation ritual confirmed the benefits of the ritual to their children in terms of their behavioural change. Behavioural change in terms of respect, obedience, courage, uprightness, assiduousness and peacefulness were recurrent in the responses. The society around the family and the cultural leaders provide a

basis to change one's attitude towards antisocial behaviour. Irresponsible behaviour humiliates the individual, who risks being taken to the Varembe traditional courts to answer charges of disparaging their cultural tradition.

The Varembe society provides structures that inhibit and control the youth from engaging in antisocial activities. Youths in most cases imitate practices they see on the internet, television or in other social media. Some of these portray role models of ill-gotten affluence, violence, corruption and dishonesty. Most youths in this group see clothes as a way of marketing themselves to prospective suitors and creating an identity of westernized, elite and 'civilised' youths. Many of these models promote promiscuous behaviour and the trafficking and consumption of illicit substances. Some youths try to lengthen their kinky and unkempt hair so that it resembles that of their white models, whilst others tend to be Eurocentric by speaking through their noses. This means that youth have models whom they view as successful people in society which gives them the reason to imitate them, consequently eroding their own morals.

### **6.7.3 The Varembe Circumcision and Initiation Ritual Assists in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage**

The participants note that the benefits of the Varembe initiation ritual exist in its recurrence. Mbuya Gwande (aged 60), a female traditional healer from Rusambo village under Chief Mazetese notes that the ritual is performed every year following similar processes which helps in the protection and preservation of the Varembe culture. People are constantly being reminded of how the ritual has been performed from time immemorial. According to Julius Shoko (aged 77); *Nyamukanga* from Chifamba Village in Chizumba, the initiation ceremony is beneficial in passing the Varembe cultural heritage from one generation to the other. Hakata (aged 53), a traditional healer from Rinette village Nine, adds that the initiation ritual unites the initiates with their ancestors, which may be a blessing or a curse.

The Varembe initiation rituals have the characteristic of being repeatable according to a fixed pattern, using symbols derived from their culture; this enables the passing on of moral traditions from one generation to the other. There is follow up and reinforcement procedures for certain behaviour appropriate for the perpetuation of cultural values. The traditional education offered through the Varembe initiation ritual has value that moulds an individual who could have been

uprooted from his cultural traditions by post-modernism. Post-modernism exposes the young people to diverse cultural sources through technological advancement and urbanisation. The post-colonial period, from 1980 onwards is the period when Zimbabwe attained its independence from Britain; this saw the youths exposed to negative cultural influences that eroded their culture, for example through mass media, urbanisation, and massive rural-urban migration. These developments culminated in youths carving their space and culture independent of adult dominated institutions (Takupiwa, et al. 2011). Post-colonialism and post-modernism created a complex socio-cultural and political space that requires a powerful force to remould the young people into people with the knowledge and understanding of the virtues of the African value system. The Varembe initiation ritual is at the forefront in strengthening traditional institutions, norms and values eroded by modernism. The Varembe initiation ritual provides distinct cultural education relevant and suitable for the youth. Modern education appears to be drifting from traditional forms of education towards an obsession with modern technology characterised by the internet, information and technology that expose the youth to sex prematurely through free access to pornographic videos and other obscene content.

### **6.8 Perceptions of the Varembe about the Role of the Circumcision Initiation Ritual on HIV and AIDS**

Most participants stated that the strength of the initiation ritual in moulding behaviour towards the prevention of HIV lies in its repetitious character. Kaitzer (1988:9)'s definition of ritual highlights that the ritual constitutes "symbolic behaviour that is socially standardized and repetitive". It has structured and standardised sequences of words and actions. Participants who found the initiation ceremony beneficial pointed out that the ritual is repeated every year with similar processes and actions, therefore it has the potential to emphasise key HIV and AIDS messages to the youth and the general population. HIV and AIDS messages are passed on to the next generation together with the Varembe traditional culture. The way their culture is preserved is the way important messages about HIV and AIDS could be preserved.

Boyce (participant, aged 23) revealed that the Varembe initiation ritual could be a good platform to spread the message about HIV and AIDS. Awareness campaigns can be held at the initiation camps and during ceremonies. The traditional education curriculum could be combined with absolute messages about HIV prevention. Cherry (participant, aged 31) affirms



that the initiation leaders, *Mukanga* and *Vadzabhi* could be used as resource persons to teach the initiates issues on HIV and AIDS. They are respected people in society that could make their lessons about HIV and AIDS more acceptable.

Ntseane (2004) in the studies of HIV and AIDS strategies in Botswana notes that the best strategy is to engage people meaningfully in analysing their cultures and offer meaningful strategies to curb HIV and AIDS- related problems. However, some traditional leaders had a different perspective about providing lessons to the initiates from the non-Varemba groups. The reasons provided were the desire by these cultural leaders to preserve their culture that is under threat of modernisation and has as its aim to culturally uproot the Africans consciously or unconsciously and immerse them in Western culture (Makuvaza, 2008; Gono, 2015). Takavarasha (village headman) responded that they do not wish to be used by people whose aim is to destroy their cultural practices under the guise of bringing civilisation and enlightenment to the indigenous people. This could be the reason why the Varemba people were not comfortable with the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision because participants like Huni (aged 61) alleged that it produces cowards who run away from traditional culture to seek refuge in modernity, where circumcision without initiation is not enough to produce the ideal man. The weakness of biomedicine is that it is removed from the socio-cultural context of health and illness (Chavhunduka, 1997). However, most of the ritual leaders showed that they do not have problems with including in their initiation curriculum HIV and AIDS education, but they indicated that what they do not want is to train cowards who run from traditional culture to seek refuge in modernity, where circumcision is not enough to produce real men. These are some of the flaws of medical science and technology, which lies in its failure to address certain issues of health in African society (Ebron, 2011). Michael (*Vadzabhi*, aged 67) stipulated that they do not want to be drawn into training youths from medical institutions which will result in weaklings. The responses from most participants imply that the Varemba people doubt the efficacy of Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision because it does not expose the patients to lifetime lessons that are found in initiation rituals.

Hove (participant aged 19) stated that the indigenous cosmology of the Varemba people has concepts of healing, protection and prevention that are useful in the prevention of HIV. The Varemba traditional approach to illness helps in changing attitudes and behaviours towards HIV

and AIDS. Duve (traditional healer, aged 65, from Maranda) explained that the Varembe people make a distinction between natural and supernatural illness. Natural illness is curable and responds to indigenous medicines. Supernatural illness cannot be cured because it resists treatment and it is attributed to negative spirits like witchcraft and discontented ancestors. Ngwenyama (aged 43, from Mbwebwe) highlighted that HIV and AIDS are in the category of supernatural illnesses because it is conceived as mysterious. The Varembe distinguish natural from supernatural in that natural illness is short-lived and supernatural illnesses are prolonged. The Varembe, like any other Karanga society, have concepts of healing and treatment. The *Nyamukanga* is a specialist in treating and protecting the initiates against ailments during initiation. The participants shared a strong belief that illness can be defeated and life can be reaffirmed. According to Joramu Gutu (aged 33 from Nikita), the Varembe culture has traditional people who know how to treat and prevent various ailments with herbs. Cultural leaders like the *Nyamukanga* know about herbs and methods of protecting individuals and the society from harmful forces which cause ailments. The Varembe people's understanding of health and illness makes the circumcision and initiation ritual an appropriate platform for prevention strategies for HIV and AIDS.

Generally, the Karanga people are not worried about the natural or physical causes of illness and death, for example, when old age or insects cause illness, they know it is going to pass, or it is just a passing phase of life. Ordinary illnesses are treated with traditional home remedies or by medical doctors. Thorpe (1996) avers that only prolonged illnesses are taken to traditional healers because they are interpreted to have spiritual causation. Chavhunduka (1977) similarly maintains that the Karanga people consult modern healers as precedence; when illness persists, it is no longer natural. The impression gathered is that the Varembe people do not have problems in consulting medical science in the event of illness, however, they want the health system to be determined by their own pace and strategy. Jackson (2002) draws a similar argument by noting that serious ailments are attributed to antisocial or unspiritual behaviour or to ancestral spirits who would have withdrawn their protection, allowing the victim to be prone to evil spirits. Such ailments require the attention of the traditional healer. These scholars seem to agree that, whilst the Karanga people do not discard modern healing practices completely, they recognise its role to some point, but on intricate health issues, they turn to their religion. The point these scholars seem to make is that the Karanga people seek solutions to health and

illness issues from their indigenous religions. In terms of circumcision and initiation, the Varembe aspire to have a dialogue between the two systems, traditional circumcision and initiation, and the medical system of circumcision. Circumcision is generally equated to a health and disease protective role in traditionally circumcising groups (Green, et al. 1993; Taljaard, 2003; Ngalande, et al. 2006). Among the Balande of Guinea-Bissau, the protective role of circumcision against HIV has been drawn from the belief that it protects people against a terrible disease called Pusoonu that has symptoms that are similar to HIV and AIDS (Niang and Boiro, 2007). The Varembe use indigenous methods to ensure health and wellbeing in the society. Magesa (1997; 210) notes that, “medicines for good fortune, love, success, security of person and prosperity, and so on, and there are also medicines against sorcery and witchcraft.” The view that the Varembe have preventive measures against ailments means that they could find ways of protecting themselves against HIV. If they regard the epidemic as mysterious and incurable it means they will become vigilant and will correct their relationship with the supernatural world. Therefore, initiation rituals could be understood as a way of appeasing the spirit world, based on the sacred value of the context of the ritual performance.

## **6.9 Perceptions of the Varembe on the Support for the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision**

Most ritual elders pointed out that they are reluctant to support the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision because it does not meet their cultural expectations. Initiation transforms the individual into becoming a man. Mombera (participant from Matibi, aged 17) acknowledged that individuals remain *shuvuro* after going through the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision and they are good examples of cowards who run away from traditional circumcision in fear of pain. They would remain boys who are looked down upon by their peers, who are laughed at and who are not trusted by anyone in society. Mombera claimed that such individuals are not equipped with adequate life skills.

Gonzo (participant from Mazetese, aged 21) maintains that hospital circumcision does not expose the youths to rigorous moral lessons such as those obtained during the Varembe initiation. The boys remain raw and in terms of behaviour, they cannot compare with individuals who went through the Varembe initiation ritual because they do not have anything to preserve their manhood and identity. Gonzo affirmed that if an individual from the Varembe

culture receives medical circumcision, he would remain an outcast who despises his culture. Speaking negatively about voluntary medical male circumcision, Joaramu Gumbo (aged 22, from Lundi) states that it is better to remain uncircumcised than to go through hospital circumcision which demeans one's manhood. The responses given could suggest that the support of the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision could be low among the Varembe, who are strong adherents to their cultural traditions.

Some participants indicated that the Varembe initiation ritual has prohibitions that protect initiates from being vulnerable to sexual transmitted infections. It is a prerequisite that one who goes through the initiatory ritual should not mix or come into contact with women up to a period of one month after initiation. Jacob (participant, aged 15 from Matibi) noted that, with hospital circumcision, meeting with women is unavoidable because women are involved in circumcision at medical centres.

The participants gave examples of local people who went through the voluntary medical circumcision and they said that they did not notice any change in the attitude and behaviour of the patients. John Huni (aged 28) from the Varembe culture who went through the voluntary medical male circumcision two years ago attests to his experiences and regrets;

*Pandakachecheudzwa hapana chakashanduka kusara kwekuti ndaive ndisisina ganda panhengo yangu. Kuchipatara hakuna tsika neunhu zvinimbodzidziswa kusara kwedzidziso ye ABC. Unongaramba uchingove shuvuro. Ndirikutambudzika nenzira yandakatora iyi nekuti vamwe vezera rangu vanonditora sechinhu chisina basa. Ndinoitwa imbwa chaiyo. Havavimbi neni. Handisisina tariro yekuzove murume sevamwe zvakare, ndichangofa ndakadero.*

[After the removal of the foreskin, nothing has changed because I was not offered any form of initiation. What only changed is that I no longer have the foreskin. In terms of morals and humanness, one remains a half backed boy. Medical centres do not offer instruction to the patients except that one should follow the ABC (Abstinence, Be faithful and use Condoms) approaches to prevent HIV and AIDS. Am suffering because of the decision that I took. No one accepts me as part of the Varembe culture even if my parents belong to this group of people. My peers treat me as if I were a dog. I suffer rejection and mistrust. I have lost all the confidence of being like a man anymore, and I will live with this label until I die.]

John Huni also points out that there is nothing religious about hospital circumcisions and the process is voluntary. He claims that the process has some health benefits but no religious

benefits are received at these medical centres to initiate the young people to become responsible adults. Huni avers that the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision could have a role to play in the prevention of HIV. He referred to the statistics found in the various researches about the success of the method. Conversely, he points out that hospital circumcision omits the cultural dimension to which all human beings are attached. However, he mentions that voluntary circumcisions in hospitals are 'smart' because they use anaesthetics and it is hygienic because they use sterilised equipment for the process, which could inhibit the transmission of HIV virus.

There are social cultural factors that impede the support of the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision. Zimbabwe is known to have the poorest voluntary medical male circumcision coverage in Sub-Saharan Africa besides being listed as one of the UNAIDS priority countries for the scale up of Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision. According to statistics for HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe (2017), Zimbabwe's target for 2018 aimed at 1.3 million men to be circumcised, but by 2016, it had managed to achieve a 46.3% target. Religious factors contribute towards the participation in the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision although other reasons such as fear of pain and fear of having to be tested for HIV first could be other reasons for the weak response. The Varembea feel that their cultural traditions are under threat and they discourage members from seeking medical circumcision.

Whilst it is obligatory for all boys who belong to the Varembea culture to go through initiation, some lacked confidence with the process of incision. Recent initiates interviewed at Chigara and Tomu village stated that they had fears with regard to the Varembea circumcision and initiation ritual. They shared that circumcision could have complications if not properly done. One initiate states, "*Unogona kuchekwa musoro welapidas kana midzimu ikakurasa.*" Meaning, the head of the penis (*lapidas* slang) could be wounded if the ancestors forsake you. The failure of the initiation process is attributed to the spirit world, meaning that one has no control over the process. The Varembea strongly believe that all the processes of the puberty ritual are influenced by the spirit world. Tongoono (aged 17) notes that one could have problems in healing or the wound might develop an infection if traditional medicine is not properly administered. However, no participant reported such mishaps.

## **6.10 Implications of the Varembe Circumcision and Initiation Ritual on Behavioural Change and HIV prevention**

Most respondents of the Varembe culture who participated in this research did not accept that they perform the ritual to prevent HIV and AIDS but the performances are purely cultural and religious. However, the discussion focuses on the role of the Varembe initiation ritual in the prevention of HIV and AIDS. The Varembe people do not have any primary intention of having the ritual influence the exterior world or outside their own experiences that is the reason why their initiation ritual is closed to outsiders. According to Robertson Smith, certain subconscious forces shape behaviour (Bell, 2009). The implication is that, it is not in all cases when believers are conscious of the main purpose of a ritual, the significance of a ritual could be different from what the believers believe.

In analysing taboo, Sigmund Freud notes that the ritual is used to control internal psychic conflicts (Spinelli, 1989). Freud views ritual as a phenomenon that exists in a person's individual psyche and provides a psychological function that guides the inner development of a human being (Sharma, 2001). The view that ritual exists in the individual psyche determines how ritual can influence individual behaviour towards the HIV and AIDS mitigation processes, since behavioural change is intrinsically motivated. The Varembe initiation ritual is comprised of both the manifest and latent functions, which should be realised to determine the efficacy of the ritual in HIV prevention. Bourdillon (1990) focuses on the issue of function and intentionality when discussing the problem of ritual efficacy. The question which seems to be addressed by anthropologists is the intention and effect desired by the ritual performers. Bourdillon (1990) notes that there are manifest and latent functions, which rituals seek to achieve. Manifest functions are open, evident and acknowledged by the actors, whilst latent functions are concealed, unintended and are not recognised by the actors. This could be the reason why Staal (1979) referred to the meaninglessness of ritual by which he means that there is no semantic reference in ritual symbols and that the ritual acts have no intentional direction beyond their performance. Staal's oversight is that he did not acknowledge that a ritual has a plethora of meanings and functions which are invisible but meaningful. Seen in the context of HIV and AIDS, the Varembe initiation ritual, besides having manifest functions, has latent functions that are buried underneath the surface. Such functions, if exposed, could be useful in

the prevention of HIV. The unconscious motive forms the basis for a ritual and guides the inner development of the individual. Ritual thinking brings meaning to human beings in the face of emptiness and contradictions in their experiences (Spinelli, 1989). It is only that the intended effect is often not directly evident.

The Varembea circumcision and initiation ritual is significant for HIV prevention because it imparts a sense of unity in the people that could be maintained after the ritual performances and is useful in bringing them together in the fight against the pandemic. Moses Moyo (participant, aged 21) points out that, “*Makudo ndimamwe musi wenjodzi anoonerana*” meaning, Baboons are the same, on the day of trouble they fight for each other. This emphasises unity of the people when reacting against issues causing despondency in the society. The implication is that the Varembea initiation ritual instils a sense of communal solidarity towards problems that affect the community. Collective solidarity is achieved in the initiation ritual through a mechanism which Durkheim (1912) calls collective effervescence. This refers to the excitement that people produce during the enactment of a ritual. The effect of collective effervescence is that it contributes to the emergence of collective consciousness that brings social solidarity as people participate in collective veneration of the sacred that binds the community together and creates meaning for individuals (Greenwald, 1973). Veneration of the object that the community regards as sacred powerfully affirms collective consciousness and a call to obey communally defined morality (Von Scheve, 2011). Collective performance can generate emotions that could transform individual psyches and channel them towards collective consciousness (Pickering, 1984). The collective excitement produced in such groups harnesses people’s passions to maintain order in society (Shilling and Mellor, 1998:196). These views bring a sense of oneness and togetherness to group members. When individuals engage in rituals, they develop a feeling of solidarity with one another as they recognise themselves to be members of a common undertaking. They reinforce collective symbols, moral representations of the group that need to be defended and reinforced; they also react against their profanation. When one is experiencing problems, he must get assistance from others because his problem is also shared by the community through this solidarity the Varembea people have shared values, they develop a sense of ‘no one owns it, it’s for all of us’, mentality. In the context of HIV and AIDS, this kind of mentality is useful in helping those individuals who are affected and infected by the disease. Individuals would be willing to intervene and offer assistance and care giving. Mombe (initiate

aged 30) reinforced; “*Chawana mumwe hachisekanwi, vakuru vakati seka urema wafa.*” Meaning, one’s problem should not induce laughter because tomorrow you will have a similar problem. The kind of unity instilled by the ritual act makes it possible for the people to come together and help each other in the struggle against the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

The Varembe initiation ritual promotes a communal way of living and discourages individualism as the initiates gather during the performances. This is evident on how the initiates remove their clothes, shave their heads and stay naked to show that they are all equal in terms of status. The common adage used to support this is, “I am because we are, we are, therefore I am” (Mbiti 1969). Ceremonies are designed to promote group coherence and identification that provide a strong sense of belonging and self-confidence. An individual life has meaning when it is in the context of others. Whatever happens to the individual has a bearing on the whole group and whatever happens to the group has a bearing on the individual. Therefore, there is a relationship between ritual behaviour and adherence to social order. Social solidarity is engendered by collective veneration of the sacred. Ritual engagement provides people with sense of solidarity with one another and with a common undertaking in defending and reinforcing collective symbols and group moral representations (Melucci, 1996). Ritual enactment binds the Varembe people together as a family, they treat each other as relatives, and they protect each other from the HIV virus. This attitude inhibits engagement in risky sexual behaviours, as members protect the welfare of others who are part of the family. It becomes difficult for an individual to have indiscriminate sexual relations with those individuals whose well being he or she should be protecting. Members react angrily to insults or to anything that yields in the profanation of the symbols of their culture.

Participation in the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual helps to integrate the individual into the social order and in one’s relationship with life. Stark and Finke (2000) points out that, adoration of an object held to be sacred by a community is a powerful confirmation of collective consciousness and a call to obey communally defined morality. Therefore, the sacred object and the community are powerful symbols among the Varembe people, which shape their ethical standpoint. HIV and AIDS could be viewed as a cultural issue whose spread is being attributed to foreign cultural invasion that has a negative impact on the youth (Asamoah, 2001). Since sex and sexuality are portrayed as social constructs, the Varembe people through circumcision and



initiation rituals have norms which are in place to regulate and control the sexual behaviours of the members, for example, the ritual elders discuss potential sex partners with the initiates, sex and health issues and when to engage in sexual activities.

The Varembe initiation ritual encourages youths to delay their sexual debut. Koyana (1980) viewed the role of initiation as a conferral of responsibility to the initiate, a variety of social responsibility and privileges are made available only to the initiated men, for example, the Varembe initiation is a gateway to legitimate marriage and sex. However initiation does not only involve circumcision, but has an accompanying process of instruction which has an educational feature aimed at building certain character traits like chastity, fortitude and forbearance necessary for the prevention of HIV. Sex is a major privilege attained by someone who went through the Varembe initiation ritual. In that framework, sexual behaviour is shaped by personal experiences and influenced by cultural assumptions, expectations, roles, and practices (Boyce, et al. 2007). Culture does not only determine sexual relations that are acceptable, but also times and circumstances that are appropriate (Hrdy, 1987; Nkwi 2005). The Varembe initiates are taught how to make right choices at the appropriate time. They are not encouraged to marry before they have gone through puberty rituals. Marriage is permissible when one has gone through initiation. In the Varembe culture, those recently initiated are not allowed to marry or engage in sexual relations up to a period of a year. Those who are married are not allowed to have sex up to one month. The practice could protect individuals from early exposure to sexually transmitted infections. Bruising of the still healing circumcision wound during sex can cause bleeding which increases exposure to the risk of HIV virus. This is contrary to other ethnic groups, for example, the Nyau initiates of Zambia who are encouraged to have sex soon after the initiation ceremony to prove their newly acquired sexual prowess (Ministry of Gender and Child Development, 2012). Among the Kikuyu in central Kenya, Sex is compulsory to all the initiates soon after initiation to prove their manhood (Niang and Boiro, 2007). The Balante in Guinea Bissau and the Wolof in Senegal wait for six days before having sex with their wives. Early resumption of sex before wound healing exposes the individuals to the risk of HIV transmission. However, there is evidence that some participants from the Varembe ethnic group changed their behaviour after going through initiation to pursue safe sexual habits. Jemutias Gonzo (aged 58), from Rinnete village confirmed that his son changed his attitude towards sex after initiation. The conditions outlined encouraged the initiates to delay

marriage and sex. Those not yet gone through initiation would maintain primary virginity, which is virginity for one who has never engaged in sex before. The married people who attended the initiation ritual having had engaged in sexual relations were forced into secondary virginity. After initiation, they were forbidden to engage in sexual relations up to a period of a month. Such ideas could encourage the initiates to delay their sexual debut that could be necessary in delaying risky chances of being exposed to contracting the HIV virus. Delayed debut could be made effective by the vigorous moral lessons on sexuality learnt by the initiate that could make an individual not to engage in risky sexual behaviour. Studies have shown that vulnerability to HIV and AIDS risk increases with early sexual debut (Hallett, et al. 2007; Ghebremichael, Larsen and Paintsil, 2009). An early onset on sexual activity in or outside marriage put the individual at risk by extending the period of potential exposure to sexually transmitted pathogens and immaturity of the sexual reproductive organs further enhances the chances of the individual's biological susceptibility to sexual transmitted diseases because of increased penile injury (Ghebremichael, Larsen, and Paintsil, 2009). Culture helps to determine the sexual relations that are acceptable and those that are not, the times and circumstances (Hrady, 1987; Nkwi, 2005). The Varembe people encourage initiates to delay having sexual activities directly through the teachings offered at the initiation camp and indirectly by forbidding men who are not initiated to marry. Mhosva Regedzai (aged 82, from Nikita) confirms that the initiates are not allowed to have sex for several months that goes up to a year after initiation. If they intend to have sex, they are encouraged to get married. The recent statistics on sexual debut in Zimbabwe stands at 54.6% HIV positive rate for those with early debut and 38.2% for those with late debut (Hallett, et al. 2007). Greater vulnerability to HIV is high in people with early debut outside the context of marriage. Therefore, sex education obtained during the Varembe initiation rituals is a useful tool for effective HIV prevention since it encourages delayed sexual debut.

The circumcision wound, the scars, the spirituality coupled with the lessons provided during the Varembe initiation rites provide adequate groundwork for behaviour change. The ritual provides approaches that may lead to a strong health education focusing at instilling knowledge as a means of promoting attitudinal shifts that promote behaviour and health outcomes (Harrison, 2008).

However, research findings by Hennink and Mturi (2005) and Jeannerat (1997) on the initiation schools in South Africa led to the conclusion that the schools do not educate participants about safe sex and the dangers of HIV and AIDS, and may encourage risky sexual behaviour. These views only help to understand that the initiation schools' curriculum about issues of HIV and AIDS is not manifest but latent. The Varembe initiation school does not discuss issues of HIV and AIDS explicitly and it is not on their agenda to discuss such issues. Nevertheless, they provide lessons that are relevant towards a change of behaviour in the youths who benefit from lowering the risk of contracting HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

Religious commitment and engagement with the divinity during the Varembe initiation ritual involves both rules of restraint and commitment in one's conduct. The belief in the divinity is so innate that it conveys a sense of 'I ought to' and 'I can' in the people. An individual has the mandate to follow all the ritual's prescriptions and regulations without question. Adherence is far from being optional in that case. Such feelings could be of benefit to the individual when it comes to making choices about life and when discerning the meaning of any course of action one pursues.

The Varembe people are capable of creating meaning out of the initiation ritual in line with the divinity and world in which they live. According to Makwasha (2010) all meanings in the universe, values, norms, health, misfortune, good life and good health and diseases falls in the realm of the spirit world. This argument hinges on Bandura (1986)'s theory of social learning which states that human beings create meaning out of their worldview and model behaviours and attitudes out of their interpretation of it. Le Comte (2000) observes that in social learning, people know and believe how the world is constructed. The observation made from this study is that, African worldview has to be taken seriously to have an effective HIV and AIDS awareness and prevention strategies. Any strategies that ignore the social construction of the HIV and AIDS pandemic cannot be effective. The Karanga people consider the spiritual world to be responsible for all the events of the universe (Makwasha 2010; Shoko 2007). Placide Temples says there is a vital force operating in animate and inanimate objects (Magesa 1998). Gelfand (1987) notes that, *Mwari* (God) and ancestral spirits are believed to be in charge of everything in the universe, they operate a system of support for their descendants, and they may withdraw their support in accordance with their behaviour. The Varembe ritual inscribes virtues required

for a pure *Muremba* in the minds of the initiates. Therefore, religion is an emotive matter for the Varemba people. The initiation ritual imparts a certain kind of reverence and behaviour towards the ancestors as well as a positive attitude towards sexuality, which has an indirect benefit for the issues of health and procreation. Ntseane (2004) argues that in the absence of cure, behavioural change is important in the prevention of HIV transmission. Transgression of sexual boundaries is limited since the Varemba believe that this may lead to retributive punishment from the invisible world. The Varemba initiation ritual has an inherent control over the behaviour of the adherence through engaging them in sacred discourses. Through Bandura's social cultural diffusion, members in the Varemba society have pressure imposed on them in their attempt to change some of their traditional practices to suit those that result in a higher reward. Great benefit is achieved by displacing some entrenched customs and introducing new social organisations and technologies (Bandura, 1986). Similarly, individuals in the Varemba culture strive to modify their behaviours so that they benefit in the process. The Varemba culture has ways of incentivising them by allowing them access to social status, rights and responsibly commensurate with initiation, some of which are significant in moulding their behaviours and attitudes through restrictive measures. The Varemba culture provides conditional rewards that are fortified with rigorous moral proscriptions, but are useful in reducing the spread of the HIV virus.

The Varemba initiation ritual has mechanisms that make it obligatory and involuntary for the initiates to follow its rules and regulations. There is little room for 'I should or should not'. All aspects of the Varemba life have strong link with the numinous. The strong conviction is evident in the structure of the ritual. Before the initiates leave for the initiation camp, they perform home rituals. Before they enter the initiation camp, the initiates are purged and sanctified. The place where they perform the initiation ritual is sacred and set apart from the whole community by the sacred mountains and rivers. The place is enthused with *mweya* (air) signifying the omnipresence of (*Mwari*). The initiate is placed in a highly sacred space for transformation in the midst of highly sacred ritual personnel. He becomes sacred from 'within and without' as an embodiment of the numinous. The knife for circumcision is sacred; the process itself of shedding the foreskin, the spilling of blood symbolically connects the initiates with the spiritual realm. The environment is conducive to and provides limited options for resisting the rules and regulations provided in that setting.

Moreover, the fact that the Varemba accept sex as something connecting the land, the dead and the living makes it more sacred and respectable. The Balande in Guinea-Bissau and Senegal, perform circumcision ceremonies in the rice fields as reverence to the ancestors and the earth (Niang and Boiro, 2007). The Varemba people view sex as a symbol of procreation ordained by the spirit world. This is the reason why the Varemba people impose stringent regulations on issues regarding sex and sexual behaviour. The people have a strong conviction that they are obliged to obey the regulations of their culture. This motivates them to develop positive behaviours on matters regarding sex. The point alluded to, is the relationship between religion and religiosity that could have a significant role in lowering the prevalence HIV and AIDS, through determining behaviours expected at each given time. Trinatopoli (2009) observes that identification with religious institutions that promote abstinence may conceivably reduce the likelihood of risky behaviour.

However, research in Africa has a tendency of minimising the role of religion and religiosity in HIV and AIDS mitigation. From Legarde, et al. (2000)'s research on communities in rural Senegal, the data suggests that religiosity was negatively correlated with preventative behaviours. Takyi (2003) from a study of Ghanaian population about behaviours affecting HIV transmission he claimed that there was no consistent correlation between religious affiliation and actual preventative behavioural change among Christian woman. Muula, et al. (2003), failed to find correspondence in HIV prevalence based on religious affiliation. From an analysis of Zambian data, Agha, et al. (2006), concluded that there was an uncertain effect of religion on HIV prevalence. The conservative religious sects promoted some hazardous behaviour while lowering others. From this research, there is doubt that religious affiliation is only sufficient to explain the pattern displayed in HIV prevalence and religiosity. However, with the Varemba people, it is not a matter of religious affiliation that changes one's behaviour, but what matters is what the religion does to attain a rigorous transformation of the followers. As in the case of the Varemba of Mwenezi, it is not a question of affiliation but of immersion into the religious phenomena, that has a profound effect on the initiates' behaviour and attitudes. The researcher observed that the Varemba achieve religious immersion witnessed by how they manage their day-to-day lives, most aspects of their lives are linked to religious import, for example their marriages and food regulations.

Gray (2004) from a study of thirty-eight countries in Sub Saharan Africa meant to compare Muslims in the population against the confirmed rate of HIV prevalence found that Muslims in national population correlates with lower HIV prevalence. He notes that most Muslims circumcise and appear to engage in less risky sexual behaviours. The Varembe's Islamic link has a bearing on understanding the effectiveness of strong adherence to some cultural practices in HIV prevention. Since there is less risky behaviour in Islamic communities, the perceived link between the Varembe and the Muslims helps one to understand the Varembe initiation ritual as effective. Male circumcision has been identified as a protective cultural factor (Auvert, et al. 2005; Bailey, et al. 2007; Moses, 2009). The prevalence of HIV and AIDS in African societies that traditionally circumcise has been discovered to be low; particularly in West Africa and Muslim countries (Bongaarts, et al. 1989; Weiss, et al. 2000). Differences in circumcision status may help to explain discrepancies in HIV prevalence (Halperin and Bailey, 1990). It is not circumcision only which matters, but circumcision coupled with initiation makes the Varembe people distinct.

Moral religious proscriptions often trace their sources to religious teachings; religion complemented by a strong adherence to religious principles may prevent HIV and AIDS transmission (Lagarde, et al. 2000; Agha, et al. 2006; Trinitapoli and Regnerus 2006). The link between the Varembe initiation ritual and the spiritual realm makes the ritual effective and binding, as the participants strive to please the spirit world by adhering to its precepts so that they can gain the favours of fertility and procreation. Behavioural change towards sexual relations is therefore achievable as people understand and conceive the fertility benefits of sex. The Varembe traditional sex education is useful in providing an understanding of the underpinning issues of health and sexuality, which could be used to mainstream HIV and AIDS.

The impact of the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual on HIV prevention can be observed via statistics about the prevalence of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. Skewed statistics on HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe show the need for behavioural change after individuals have gone through voluntary circumcision. According to recent Zimbabwean demographic statistics and information of on HIV and AIDS (August 2017), despite the fact that Zimbabwe has been among the countries given precedence in UNAIDS' priority countries for the voluntary medical male circumcision, and being listed in the country's National Combination Prevention Strategy,

its coverage rate has been observed to be the poorest. Zimbabwe aims at reaching 1.3 million men with voluntary medical male circumcision (80% of 13 to 29 year olds) by 2018. Nevertheless as of 2016, it has reached 46.3% of the target. HIV and AIDS prevalence is higher among men who are circumcised, being at 14% higher than those who are not circumcised who stands at (12%). It is of concern to note that whilst the country is promoting circumcision as a measure to militate against the spread of HIV, the prevalence rate in the circumcised population is increasing. Some of the reasons for these a statistics could be in line with what the research gathered in the field survey, which points to uniformed risky compensation behaviours. According to Doyle (2005), there is need to work more directly on aspects of behavioural change in all ages and develop new cultural markers. Circumcised persons may become promiscuous having learnt the benefits of circumcision in reducing their chances of getting HIV and AIDS and partially safe person will increase their sexual activities. The statistics could also mean that c certain groups of people do not accept medical circumcision that is why the coverage rate has been poor. Dr Parirenyatwa, the minister of Health and Child Care in Zimbabwe, made a similar observation at the launch of the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision in Marondera; he notes that support for male circumcision is still very low in the country although the service is offered for free at government institutions. (Taruvunga, 2015). Most of the Varembe participants in Mwenezi show that they were against medical circumcision because of the need to protect and preserve their cultural heritage. This study, however, sounds a warning that people who are circumcised should not bask in false security because chances are that they can still be infected with HIV, and any campaigns should suggest that a religious motivated behavioural change could be an alternative strategy towards reducing the prevalence of HIV and AIDS. Gray, et al (2007) observed that cultural circumcision has been useful in most African countries in preventing HIV and AIDS. Another observation obtained from the statistics is that, positive behavioural change after circumcision is crucial in militating against the spread of HIV. Agha, et al. (2006) notes that religion and a strong adherence to religious principles could protect people against the HIV and AIDS transmission. The strong adherence witnessed in the Varembe initiation practices could be useful in HIV prevention strategies.

Traditional surgical practices have been recognised as potential sources of HIV infection, especially when performed amongst a group of people (Feldman, 1990). If the serial use of

unsterilised equipment features prominently, this may place the initiates at risk of HIV (Ajuwon et al. 1995). During the Varembe initiation ritual, the *Nyamukanga* uses one knife that they rinse in cold water after using it on each initiate. According to Ajuwon, et al. (1995), the process of using one knife during circumcision places the initiates at the risk of contracting HIV. An unsterilised knife subsequently exposes initiates to the bodily fluids of the previous initiate (Hrdy, 1987). The ritual leaders may spread the HIV virus if someone is infected and have open wounds (Feldman, 1990). The findings of the research should not necessarily be construed as representative of what transpires in Sub-Saharan Africa. Researchers have not established that traditional surgical tools are vectors of transmission of HIV (Ajuwon, et al. 1995). Packard and Epstein (1991) argue that a small number of initiates underwent incisions sequentially. In the case of the Varembe initiation ritual, Chikwaya Mombe (aged 21, from Matibi) pointed that not more than three initiates are circumcised at each interval, in the morning, afternoon and in the evening. There is a significant time lapse between initiates that makes the transmission through unsterilised object unlikely because the virus does not survive long after it has been exposed (Packard and Epstein, 1991; Ajuwon, et al. 1995). Based on the response of Gore Hukwe (aged 26, a participant from Ndambi Village under chief Negare), during the Varembe initiation ritual there is considerable time lapse for treating the wound and the washing of the knife before the next initiate is circumcised. Gausset (2001) argues that most incisions are performed on adolescents who have a lower prevalence to HIV and AIDS. Razor blades for use during shaving seemed affordable and accessible since each initiate could manage to bring one for use during the Varembe initiation ritual. According to Brightman (1995) the initiation practice has a low potency towards transmission of HIV virus and therefore has an insignificant contribution towards the spread of HIV virus. Evidence gathered from the field shows that the Varembe ritual elders and the initiates are aware of the risks of spreading HIV and AIDS and each one of them is encouraged to bring his razor blade, for use in shaving the head and the pubic hairs.

The ordeals that the Varembe initiates go through have a positive effect on instilling positive and less risky behaviour in the youth. However, there are some who engage in risky behaviour after undergoing circumcision, for example, the Nyau in Zambia, and the Kikuyu in Kenya who engage in sex soon after initiation to prove their manhood (Niang and Boiro, 2007). Humanity is responsible for shaping its behaviour in line with societal and cultural expectations. Physical punishment, to which the initiates are exposed, is accepted as part of the process of the



transition to manhood (Wood and Jewkes, 1998). The ordeals that the Varembe initiates go through are expected to transform them to be able to control themselves. What the Varembe initiates go through during the initiation ritual is derived from the norms and values of the society. Asamoah (2001) laments the moral laxity of the youth; he opines that the vulnerability of the youth to HIV and AIDS lies in their inability to control their sexual drive. According to Munthali and Zulu (2007), the growing curiosity is usually associated with vulnerability to unplanned pregnancies and sexual transmitted infections, which include HIV and AIDS. Resorting to initiation rituals is appropriate in the management of HIV and AIDS. Culture is responsible for socialising the youth and impart to them the requisites of humanness (*unhu/ubuntu*). Ntseane (2004:4) notes, “Sex is culturally regulated, and accepted types of sexual behaviour are learnt through socialization.” Through song and dance, the youth are furnished with sexual advice and instruction on what is expected of them by the society. The Varembe ritual offers an opportunity of re-engagement with religious and ethnic groups in HIV prevention. Such practices carry major religious, social and cultural meaning for the groups, some who were not comfortable with HIV prevention. The Varembe initiation could be a ritual with a strategy for HIV prevention, which can provide new avenues for dialogue.

Researchers have a tendency of focusing on biological strategies in terms of HIV prevention. Most explanations regarding the HIV and AIDS pandemic are biological. According to Granich, et al. (2001), most discussions on issues of HIV and AIDS focus on biological interventions as the primary key towards HIV transmission (Granich, et al. 2001). Nonetheless, such discussions circumvent the behavioural factors that have acted as impediments towards successful strategies. Granich, et al. (2001) argue that biological technologies are seen as the main method of treatment and prevention strategies, for example the use of highly active antiretroviral drugs, microbicide gels, prevention of mother to child HIV-transmission and the use of condoms. All these require behavioural change. Kippax, et al. (2011) notes that AIDS is a social disease, its causes, consequences and human responses to it are deeply embedded in socio-cultural processes. The Varembe initiation ritual could be a valuable addition to the strategies towards prevention of HIV because it is culturally appropriate and locally relevant, targeting a specific group of people putting into cognisance their social context. The ritual strategy could contribute to the type of behaviour to be changed for successful action and results.

The Varembe initiation ritual is capable of producing and modifying attitude and behaviour positively towards that which is considered valuable. According to Durkheim, a ritual gives people an opportunity to assemble as a social group and project sacred images that represent the community (Bourdillon, 1989). For one to exist, one should be connected to others. Such an approach is useful in facing the challenge of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. It calls for solidarity in militating against the disease; communities should come together to fight the epidemic. The social ecological perspective notes that individuals exist in a system of socio-cultural networks influenced by as well as influence their physical environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The researcher established that when the initiates are reintegrated into the society, they are capable of participating as adults in an adult world, particularly in terms of sexual activities. Rituals are designed in such a way that they promote group coherence and identification as well as providing a strong sense of belonging and self-confidence. The Varembe initiation ritual should therefore be viewed as an act of reinforcement of both individual and group behavioural beliefs, which guide the behaviour of the youth through periodic repetition.

### **6.11 Summary**

The strength of the Varembe initiation ritual in moulding positive behaviour towards HIV and AIDS lies in the fact that it is not voluntary and solitary but obligatory and a group phenomenon. The divine sanctifies the behaviour of the youth and makes it imperative for everyone to accept and follow the moral virtues of the society without question. Voluntary medical male circumcision is solitary and intentional; it removes the individual from the social, cultural and public domain that stands as witness to the new person's status in the community. The Varembe initiation ritual is viewed as an event where the community is engaged in the processes which are transformative to the youth, and which provide transition to health. It provides vigorous lessons, which equip the initiate with skills of reflection and adjustment towards his behaviour. There is always a public opinion concerning one's behaviour. Chokufeya, (*mudzabhi*) from Dungire village under Chief Chitanga, pointed out that, "anyone who violates sex and marriage regulations is treated as an outcast. He is beaten severely and mortified in public..." The youth need a public eye to verify, certify and acclaim their entry into puberty. Public celebrations are necessary in strengthening the bond of the community. Being public means that everyone in the society checks on individual's behaviour and therefore an

individual is obliged to be responsible for his actions so that he does not become a disgrace to the community. The next chapter proposes a strategy towards the prevention of HIV and provides a conclusion based on the achievement of objectives of the study.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **TOWARDS THE ADOPTION OF A CLINICAL VAREMBA INITIATION**

#### **RITUAL STRATEGY (CVIRS)**

##### **7.0 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented data and analyzed it through the thematic approach. The chapter focused on how the Varembe initiation ritual could mould the behaviour of the initiates towards the prevention of HIV. It was gathered that through the various lessons and ordeals the initiates undergo at the initiation camp, they develop certain character traits that help them to face the challenges of life like adults and reduce their vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. The rules and regulations about sexuality issues help them to have sexual preserve and develop prolonged sexual debut that help the boys to prevent early exposure to HIV infection. This chapter proposes a strategy towards HIV prevention that hinges upon the Varembe initiation ritual and the medical system of health and healing. The reason for such a strategy is to have an effective way of initiating the youth into adulthood at the same time reducing the problems encountered during the ritual by engaging the medical approach to health.

The research discovered that the circumcision and initiation ritual of the Varembe people of Mwenzezi district stands as an effective, independent cultural strategy that helps in reducing the prevalence of HIV and AIDS, however it has its medical flaws that need to be addressed. Therefore, for it to be more effective it has to draw on the medical systems of circumcision and healing. These ideas motivate the study to formulate a theory referred to as Clinical Varembe Initiation Ritual Strategy (CVIRS). It should not be viewed as an alternative to the ABC options (Abstinence, Be faithful and Condomise) which are more of a harm reduction service in the HIV and AIDS management. At the primary intervention level of HIV and AIDS, the Varembe initiation ritual is useful in reducing the incidence of transmission where fewer people could become HIV infected. Individuals may have knowledge about HIV and AIDS transmission, but it is not a sufficient predictor of safe sexual behaviour. The CVIRS has intrinsic influence that

makes the ritual obligatory to the members and at the same time being safely executed. Change in behaviour is mandatory and motivated by the external and internal structures within the Varembe worldviews. Whilst the Varembe initiation ritual is useful, for it to be more feasible, there should be an adoption of the clinical surgical system for the initiates. Therefore, the CVIRS is a strategy that fuses the initiation and the clinical surgical procedure.

### **7.1 Reasons for Adopting the Clinical Varembe Initiation Ritual Strategy**

The Clinical Varembe Initiation Ritual Strategy infuses both the medical and traditional system of health that focuses on the spiritual, emotional, and medical needs of the people. The theory focuses at both the traditional initiation and medical circumcision as a fulfilment of human life. Medical circumcision, to be effective, cannot work in isolation from the needs of the people. Medical circumcision lacks the ritual and initiation components, therefore, it fails to address the existential problems of human life. The health care system is socially constructed as people define meanings of health, sickness, illness, and disease and find ways of treatment in which they incorporate medical solutions. However, as they do so, they encounter situations that go beyond their ability to provide solutions that require the expertise of medical health. Medical sciences complement the desires of the people. Human beings have a social construction of the reality of health, illness, and disease: all of which are culturally specific. The psycho-spiritual aspect of disease and illness should be addressed before seeking medical attention. According to Hewson (1998), the psychological and spiritual forces that relate to African cosmology might cause illness. Simwaka (2007) points out that all social communities rely on norms of behaviour that emanate from their worldview. However, in time, human interaction and processes of technology modify the socially constructed reality. When human beings enter into this stage, they begin to think and understand that, the health system is a result of the combination of social cultural forces and bio-medical forces. Healthcare is not only a combination of worldviews, norms and values, there is also the bio-medical component. This view is explained by the fact that the Varembe people consult medical institutions for treatment, but as they do so, they do not eschew their worldviews and the social constructs of their lives. Medical refers to both ethno-medical and biomedical. An individual first seeks the assistance of ethno medicine when attacked by disease and illness. When that fails, he seeks the attention of biomedicine (Chavhunduka, 1977). The Varembe are comfortable in prioritising their cultural values but they also accept that there

is the medical side of life. The CVIRS infuses and combines the two worldviews. Medical science should not distort the human worldviews but should come to complement these. The CVIRS means that the Varembea can receive medical solutions for some aspects of their lives whilst retaining the traditional key components of the initiation ritual. The CVIRS has the potential to promote life, health and wellbeing in African communities and reduce the prevalence of HIV and AIDS by bringing together the traditional and the modern aspects. It brings biomedicine close to the socio-cultural context of health and illness. The CVIRS is an approach that engages people meaningfully by analysing their culture to offer meaningful strategies to prevent HIV and AIDS. Kleinman (1995) states that healthcare system is culturally and socially constructed. The social reality of the people determines how they make healthcare-related decisions. The CVIRS views the duality nature of human life as the starting point. Life is both socially and biologically determined; the social aspect involving the physical and spiritual. The theory provides a basis for some psychological adaptations that are necessary for social interaction. This view means that the strategy provides some mechanism and prepares the groundwork for increased social cohesion, cooperation and problem solving. As the Varembea participate in the initiation ritual, they fulfil those conditions. The CVIRS hinges upon the shortcomings of medical science and technology in addressing certain issues of health and illness that concern the African community. When medical science operates in isolation or is removed from its socio-cultural context, it fails to fulfil its mandate of addressing the needs of the people that it seeks to serve. The CVIRS engages the people meaningfully in analysing their cultures to provide meaningful strategies that may curb the HIV and AIDS problems. The CVIRS is modelled on the traditional forms of the initiation ritual, combining them with the medical systems of health and healing towards HIV prevention.

## **7.2 Principles for the Clinical Varembea Initiation Ritual Strategy**

The CVIRS theory has five principles that govern its effectiveness, which are principles for behavioural change, target audience, effective setting conducive to learning, latent tools useful in the prevention of HIV transmission, scope for collaborative work and the adoption of the clinical approach. These principles are modelled in the context of the Varembea initiation ritual.

### **7.2.1 Principles for Behavioural Change**

The Varembe ritual provides principles for effective behavioural interventions that could be useful in the prevention of HIV and AIDS. Interventions designed to modify people's behaviour should be based on sound principles of behavioural change. Many behavioural theories have been applied to the understanding of HIV risk behavioural. However, no single theory sufficiently explains individual behaviour changes or provides the essential tools to change behaviour (Coates, 1993). As a result, current thinking calls for a complementary combination of theoretical approaches that incorporate the key principles of behavioural change into program design. The research observed that the Varembe initiation ritual incorporates the key principles of behaviour change that could be useful in HIV prevention. The Varembe initiation ritual has effective intervention strategies, the components of which are capable of encouraging individual acquisition of skills that may help to prevent the transmission of HIV. In addition the Varembe initiation ritual is capable of providing the necessary support for the initiates through group solidarity. The initiation ritual has potential HIV prevention and intervention strategies that may foster the maintenance of behavioural change over time. The initiation ritual has a system of structures that monitors, reminds and reinforces positive behaviours that could be essential in the prevention of the spread of HIV. The Varembe initiation ritual has a scope for collaborative work that could be useful in the provision of synergies with other stakeholders working in HIV and AIDS programs.

### **7.2.2 The Target Audience**

Targeting means the initiation ritual intervention focuses on well-characterised, specific audiences. This research concluded that the Varembe initiation ritual is useful because it focuses on a specific group of the population, in this case the youth who have reached the puberty stage. The ritual coincides with the physiological stage of puberty at which adolescence is most vulnerable to the risks of HIV and AIDS and they are at the onset of their sexual debut. The youth at this stage are in a state of insecurities and turmoil. They are keenly experimental and therefore are at risk of various sexual health problems, which may include sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). The ritual is useful at this stage of the adolescent's development because it provides a religious complement to his physiological growth needs which could influence

positive sexual behavioural change among the youth. The youth at this stage hungers for healthy advice to help them achieve a smooth transition into adult life.

### **7.2.3 Effective Intervention Strategies**

The Varembe initiation ritual has effective intervention strategies and concomitant components which are capable of encouraging individual acquisition of skills and tools that may help to prevent the transmission of HIV. The Varembe initiation ritual provides a platform that motivates individuals to join the initiation ritual and acquire requisite skills that could be useful in life and in the prevention of the spread of the HIV virus. The initiation ritual has structures that make it imperative for the youth to realise the need to undergo the initiation ritual as a mark of transition from boyhood to adulthood. Those who underwent initiation gain respect from their society because they are no longer viewed as ‘children’, but as adults. There is a reward for the initiated individuals in that they obtain access to societal privileges and responsibilities. Marriage and sex are some of the privileges attained by those who go through the initiation process. Such privileges are closed to those who are not initiated. The none initiated individual remains ‘young’ and is labelled a “boy” regardless of age and many psychologically suffer from ostracism, regarded as outcasts, stateless and people with no identity. Therefore, the Varembe initiation rituals has motivating factors, which make it imperative for any male in the society to participate in the initiation ritual at some point in his life. The meaning is that all males in the Varembe society pass through the initiation and instructions provided at *chirembe* and they become equipped with skills necessary for adult life. Therefore, the Varembe cultural society provides a system of structures that make the initiation ritual imperative and obligatory; it is a duty that every male should undertake in his life. This sets the ritual strategy apart from strategies like the ABC, which are voluntary and intentional. It is the severity and compelling stringent measures provided in the ritual that makes it distinctive. The Varembe initiation ritual provides a framework which makes it obligatory for male individuals to participate and benefit from the instruction provided, which could be useful in making choices about life in the era of HIV and AIDS.



#### **7.2.4 Effective Setting Conducive to Learning**

The Varembe initiation ritual is effective in its strategy of isolating and separating the initiates from ordinary life into a private and secluded space, away from parents, to discuss matters of sexuality without any inhibitions. This psychological approach separates the youth from the influence of society and Western culture that corrupts them. The ritual furnishes the initiates with the necessary skills, which could be useful in the prevention of the spread of HIV. The Varembe initiation ritual's strength lies in the immersing of the initiate in the sacred realm. This impacts on the instruction provided, its acceptability and its use in the future. The ritual is underpinned by the concept of the sacred, which makes the initiates religiously adhere to the precepts of the ritual. The initiates are involved in rituals and ceremonies at each stage of the ritual phase that introduces them to the spirit world and makes them feel part of it. They shave their heads and pubic hair and are introduced and reminded of the requirements of the sacred world. This austere contact with the numinous influences the initiates to adhere to the prescribed conditions of the ritual without question. When information about HIV and AIDS is imparted under these conditions the chances of it being effective are very high. Nowhere in current literature is there evidence of any strategies that have reached this extent of mobilising the youth towards issues of HIV and AIDS. The initiates conjoin with the spirit world through the place of the ritual performance that is believed to be sacred. The environment elicits certain behaviours and responses in the individual that are positive. The initiates are introduced to a sacred sphere which has everything within it recognised as sacred. The ritual leaders are sacred as well. The site is ritually prepared using indigenous herbs to make it secluded and distinct from the profane world. Such an environment is effective in making the initiates accept and abide by the requirements of the transcendent. Any form of teaching about HIV and AIDS could become relevant since it would be sanctioned by the sacred.

#### **7.2.5 Latent Tools Useful in the Prevention of HIV Transmission**

The Varembe initiation ritual has latent tools that are useful in the prevention of the transmission of HIV. The process of initiation is sanctified as the initiates are circumcised with a traditional knife believed to be sacred. The initiates form a binding covenant with the spirit world through the blood that is spilled during circumcision. Cultural circumcision was scientifically proven useful in the prevention of HIV infection (Ajuwon, et al. 1995; Auvert, et al. 2005). In the

Varemba circumcision, culture is religious and obligatory. It conveys a strong religious meaning of adherence to the numinous, which makes initiates respect and obey it. It signifies a binding covenant of obedience between the initiate and the Supreme Being. The Varemba people have a strong conviction that the initiate is dedicated to the ancestors for protection, procreation, health and well-being. Any ritually circumcised man treats the initiation ritual as valuable and religiously follows the rules and regulations imparted during the ritual. A circumcised penis, in the Jewish history was designed to serve its ordainly-deserved purpose only. This means that one should not engage in intercourse before or outside marriage. This perspective helps the initiates to evade risky sexual behaviour that renders them vulnerable to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Circumcision is an external symbol of the inner transformed man. Therefore, the cultural circumcision supersedes voluntary medical circumcision in that manner. Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision is not obligatory, and there is nothing binding to make the patient obey and change his behaviour. Abstinence is a matter of personal conviction for someone who has not undergone the traditional initiation ritual.

Another observation made during this study is that the initiate accepts the teachings provided during initiation without question, because they represent the desires of the numinous. Skills development for the initiates obtained through instruction provided by the sacred ritual leaders *Vadzabhi* and *Nyamukanga* during initiation discourages an early sexual debut, which might put the initiates at the risk of the HIV infection. Individuals who are not initiated are not allowed to have access to the privilege of sex because they are considered too young. Those who have been initiated are allowed to have sex only after a lengthy period of abstinence, to allow healing of the penis. This prolongs the initiates' exposure to the risks of HIV and AIDS. The Varemba people regard sex as sacred and sanctified, therefore, indiscriminate and risky sexual behaviour is not tolerated. The fact that in the Varemba people's worldview, issues of sexuality are treated as mystical and sacred, is crucial in guarding against casual sex which could spread the risk of HIV. The Varemba initiation ritual determines the internal transformation of the initiate that is important in determining the attitude and emotions of the participant regarding sexual activities. Endogamous marriages could also contribute to the prevention of HIV since people of the same religious affiliation would strive to maintain sanctity required by their religion and would pursue positive sexual habits that may not put them at the risk of HIV and AIDS. The Varemba initiation mode of instruction has a strict indoctrination and restraint found in the various

activities accomplished during the ritual. The prescriptive attitude of the ritual produces profound changes in the initiate's attitude and towards life in general.

Skills obtained by the initiates during instruction are effective in moulding positive behaviours, which are conducive to the fight against HIV and AIDS. The secret codes of the Varembe initiation ritual have an indirect bearing towards moulding the ability of the initiate towards self-control. Part of the instruction at the Varembe Initiation School is comprised of songs, dance and folklore, which steep the initiates into the cultural provisions of the Varembe culture, ethical and moral undertones useful in life situations. The performances emphasise appropriate ways of behaving in any given situation. Some virtues are not overtly taught through the Varembe forms of instruction, but are inculcated indirectly through exposing the initiates to certain conditions that help to regulate and shape their ways of thinking and behaving. For example, being naked for three months and bathing in cold water every day is useful in character building. The forms of training and deprivation which the initiates go through convey qualities of chastity, resilience, forbearance, manliness and respect that are useful attributes of non-risky sexual behaviours.

The Varembe initiation ritual creates a social environment that is useful in fostering HIV prevention interventions, and reinforces individual behavioural change. The Varembe society has structures which could be useful in fostering efforts for prevention. Revered people are referred to as *Nyamukanga* and *Vadzabhi*. *Nyamukanga* is the chief initiator and *Vadzabhi* provides instruction to the initiates; both are custodians of the *Varembe* culture. They are the point of reference for incorrect behaviour in the society. Individual people are summoned to them for public disciplinary action if their behaviours are disreputable, and cause deprecation of the Varembe norms and values. Individuals are always reminded of the instruction they underwent during initiation. The circumcision scar is also a permanent reminder of what one went through. The view that ritual exists in the individual psyche helps in determining how ritual can influence individual behaviour towards the HIV and AIDS mitigation processes, since behavioural change is intrinsically motivated. The Varembe initiation ritual has a system of structures that could remind and reinforce positive behaviour that could be essential in the prevention of the spread of HIV pandemic.

The Varembe initiation ritual is capable of creating group solidarity. The initiation ritual is capable of bringing individuals together as a collective group and forming a binding covenant in

which the people agree on a set of principles, which are mandatory to the members. The initiation ritual has a system that defines and expresses the sacred and the profane, a moral community, which enforces a set of collective behaviours, norms, and rules of the believing society.

The Varembe initiation ritual has potential HIV prevention and intervention strategies that may foster the maintenance of behavioural change over time. After a period of seclusion, the initiates are reincorporated into the society as transformed people, with new identities and the new image is conferred through public acclamation. The initiates are presented with gifts, as a sign that the society appreciates them as newly transformed persons. The process publicity forces one to live up to the expected standards of the society thereby maintaining behavioural change of the initiate for a long time without reverting to the pre-initiation behaviour. A mentor is assigned to the initiate for a period of one year and monitors his moral behaviour for this period, providing guidance in line with the norms and values of the society so that the individual does not relapse into previous patterns of behaviour. The initiate's behaviour is moulded through copying the behaviour of the mentors and elders. The Varembe initiation ritual is capable of exercising tremendous moral authority that has immense influence on the lifestyle of individuals and could bring about behavioural change conducive to the prevention of HIV. The idea of a mentor could suggest the availability of potential members in the society who could monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention and integrity of the ritual strategy in moulding the behaviour of individuals towards the HIV and AIDS mitigation.

The Varembe initiation ritual has excellent prospects of success as a strategy against HIV and AIDS because it is culturally appropriate and locally relevant, in targeting a specific group of people and recognising their social context within which they are embedded. The strategy could present suggestions regarding the type of behaviour to be changed and could identify impediments to successful action.

#### **7.2.6 Scope for Collaborative Work**

The initiation ritual has scope for collaborative work, which could be useful in the provision of synergies with other stakeholders working on HIV and AIDS programs. The view stems from the notion that the ritual provides individuals with an opportunity to assemble as a social group and

project sacred images that represent the community. The initiates are connected as a group and for one to exist one must be connected to others. Such an approach is useful in facing the challenges of HIV and AIDS. It calls for solidarity in militating against the disease where communities should come together to fight the epidemic.

### **7.3 Adoption of the Clinical Approach**

For the Varembe Initiation Ritual Strategy to be effective it must adopt a clinical approach towards circumcision and initiation. What is needed is an improved structure, trained medical personnel and adequate medication for use during initiation.

### **7.4 Reasons for the Adoption of the Clinical Approach**

The clinical approach addresses concerns that hamper the effectiveness of the traditional male circumcision in the context of HIV and AIDS. Circumcising boys with unsterilised instruments may result in fatalities; improperly performed circumcision by unskilled traditional surgeons may result in removal of excessive skin; lacerations of the skin and the amputation of the sex organ may occur that could lead to haemorrhage and death (WHO, 2008). There is a risk of HIV infection when repeatedly using a single instrument to circumcise many boys by incompetent traditional surgeons. The issue of hygiene and sterilisation of the equipment that compromises aspect of hygiene and sterilisation is a primary reason for the adoption of the CVIRS.

### **7.5 How the Initiation Ritual and Clinical Approach Intersect**

The Varembe circumcision should be performed by trained medical personnel who are of the Varembe culture and who underwent the initiation ritual. The medical personnel should be responsible for post-operative wound care and should be in a position to prescribe the appropriate diet and rest conducive to the healing of the wound. Such a traditional nurse should provide lessons on sexual transmitted infections and how to prevent them. Most people who perform traditional circumcision have no formal training (Vincent, 2007). There is a need for the Varembe community to identify a ritual elder with the assistance of the Government to ensure that the incumbent receives training and certification. The goal is to have personnel with basic surgical skills performing the circumcision ritual. The Ministry of Health should supervise such

personnel. The stages of the Varembe initiation ritual remain unchanged in this approach. Circumcision that is medically done at the camp should be followed by the initiation lessons.

The Varembe initiation ceremony is held in winter, which could cause problems in the healing of the wounds. The timing of the ritual is necessary to facilitate the healing of the wound. Therefore, a proposal is that the initiation ritual is carried out during summer when the environment would be conducive to healing. Summer time provides adequate and clean water for bathing, cooking and drinking to avoid dehydration. The Varembe initiation ritual starts with home rituals where the boys are introduced to the rules and regulations of the rituals and how they are supposed to behave during the ritual. They are also introduced to the sacred world. Part of the transformation of the initiates involves shaving the heads and pubic hairs. During circumcision, the traditional elders use blades or stone flakes to circumcise. The clinical environment provides suitable equipment that is sterilised. In most cases, the blades used during the initiation ceremony are not sterilised. The clinical approach involves making sure that the initiates live in a hygienic environment and that sterilised equipment is used. Anaesthesia could be used to reduce pain during circumcision. The process should avoid the use of the same blade to shave all the boys. Latex gloves should be used to prevent the transmission of fluids from the circumciser to the initiates or from one initiate to the next. There is a need for continuous nursing of the wounds to facilitate healing by trained medical practitioners from the Varembe culture.

## **7.6 Benefits of the Clinical Varembe Initiation Ritual Strategy (CVIRS)**

The initiates are conferred with special education and skills about issues of sexuality and health. Most sexuality issues are explored during initiation to help the initiates make informed decisions as they enter into the adult world of sexual encounters.

The strategy provides sound collaborative work between traditional circumcision and medical health system through the training of traditional circumcisers to promote general hygiene and safe circumcision and initiation practices. Related to that is the addressing of both the religious and the medical problems encountered by the initiate during circumcision. A holistic approach to health and healing would be achieved where the social and medical needs of the people are addressed. The initiates are circumcised by qualified personnel and at the same time, they receive ethical lessons relevant for life situations that mould the individuals' behaviour.

The strategy leads to the reduction of circumcision complications such as, wound infections that are related to the use of non-sterilised equipment; pain is reduced through the use of anaesthesia; excessive bleeding that could result in trauma and death. Moreover, the strategy ensures the provision of adequate medicines to heal the wounds instead of relying on traditional substances such as cow dung, cow urine and tree leaves that could contaminate the circumcision wound.

## **7.7 Conclusion of the Study**

This section concludes the entire study by looking back at the achievement of objectives that were set for the study initially.

### **7.7.1 Objectives of the Study**

As highlighted in Chapter 1, this study is underpinned by five objectives.

- Describe the Varembe male circumcision and initiation ritual
- Assess the perceptions of the Varembe regarding the role of initiation in HIV and AIDS prevention.
- Discuss the perceptions of the Varembe regarding the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision
- Examine implications of the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual on behavioural change and HIV prevention
- Examine how the Varembe initiation ritual could be redirected towards HIV prevention

#### **Objective 1- Description of the Varembe Male Circumcision and Initiation Ritual**

The study managed to describe the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual. The intention of the description was to highlight the key aspects of the ritual and show how they could be useful in modifying the behaviour of the initiates towards HIV prevention. The Varembe circumcision and initiation was described as a ritual that marks the transition of an individual from boyhood to manhood, socially, physically and psychologically. It is a process that enables the boys to have access to the privileges of the family and society that go with adulthood such as sex and honour. During the Varembe initiation ritual, circumcision is complimented by initiation as it is during initiation that the boys are taught important life lessons. The Varembe people of Mwenezi

perform the initiation ritual on the youths between the age of seven and fifteen. However, the age of initiation varies according to geographical differences.

It is the duty of Chief Neshuro to announce the dates and days of the initiation ritual a month before the commencement of the ritual. He does that through consultation with other chiefs from other areas. The information is then cascaded to village heads, then to the ritual elders [*Nyamukanga* and *Vadzabhi*] in all the villages. The dates are proposed after the chiefs and the ritual elders have convened a meeting. The public is warned not to trespass or pass through the sites where the initiation will be performed.

A week before, up to the night when the initiates will leave their homes for initiation. It is expected that individual families should perform home rituals to dedicate their children to family ancestral spirits for protection during the ritual. The belief is that if such home rituals are not performed, the ancestral spirits may become angry and retributive. The initiate might become mentally disturbed, become very ill or even die during the ceremony.

The Varembe initiation rituals are performed at sacred places that are secluded from the rest of the community. This is done to maintain privacy and secrecy. The Varembe are very secretive when it comes to their ritual practices. No outsiders or anyone who is not part of the initiation is allowed into the place or learn what is taking place at the site. Two mountains are used for the circumcision and initiation ritual, Mazhou and Songogwe. The Varembe from villages headed by Chigara and Maimba uses Mazhou Mountain. Songogwe is used by the Varembe from villages under the headman-ship of Tomu, Ngwenya and Zinaka. The two mountains are believed to be sacred. The rivers close to the mountains are revered as sacred because they are believed to be hosts to mermaid spirits. Mazhou Mountain is close to the Mwenezi River. Songogwe Mountain is close to the Bubi River. There are mythical stories associated with these places of initiation that enhance their sacredness.

When they leave the village for the ritual sites, the *Vadzabhi* lead the boys to the sacred mountains for initiation. Before the boys leave for the mountains, their heads are shaved, and they carry long sticks on their shoulders. This symbolises their separation from the rest of the community, socially, spiritually and physically. The stick is a symbol of a warrior. The boys behave like courageous warriors going to war. Before they enter the holy place, the initiates



perform ritual baths and confessions guided by the *Vadzabhi*, to purge them of all crimes committed previously and to ward off evil spirits.

The initiates remove all their clothes and remain naked throughout the three-month period of their stay at the camp. This is a way of toughening them into becoming men. During their stay, the initiates do not eat any meat; their food comprises *sadza* (thick porridge) and vegetables without salt. Salt is prohibited because it hinders the smooth healing of the circumcision wound. Circumcision is performed by *Nyamukanga* who is the chief initiation leader. The *Vadzabhi* are responsible for providing moral lessons to the initiates. The initiates are taught Varembe norms and values. The adult lessons enshrined in the Varembe curriculum have as goal to develop the latent physical skills of the initiates, their intellectual skills, the communal spirit and the preservation of cultural heritage, issues of sexuality, respect for elders and peers and character building. Anyone who behaves in an untoward manner to the Varembe cultural values is summoned for public disciplinary action by the Chief or the Village head.

During initiation, there are ethics that are conveyed to the initiates through myths, folklore proverbs, songs, and dance. The dances are meant to train the boys' sexual body movements so that they satisfy their wives. Lessons on issues of sexuality are conveyed to prepare the youths for the sex world they are about to enter when they graduate. The initiates are taught not to behave like little boys [*shuvuru*] by being promiscuous and engaging in indiscriminate sex. Promiscuity is believed to be what boys do, not men. Individuals who had not gone through the Varembe initiation ceremony are not allowed to marry. Initiates are not allowed to engage in sexual activities soon after initiation, but they should wait for a one-month period if they are married and a one-year period if they were not married. Marriage among the Varembe is endogamous, women are not allowed to marry outside their culture; males may marry from other cultures, provided their wives are prepared to convert.

Transformation from boyhood to manhood is symbolised by the shedding of the foreskin. The cutting of the foreskin is done by the chief ritual leader, (*Nyamukanga*) who uses a single traditional knife to sever the foreskins of all the initiates. The initiates experience cutting of the foreskin without the use of anaesthetics. This is intended to make the initiate bear the pain of circumcision stoically like a man. Pain is associated with masculinity and the blood is believed to enjoin the initiate with the spirit world. There is no sterilization of the traditional knife; only cold

water is used to clean it before its use on the next initiate. This makes the Varembe male circumcision different from Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision where anaesthetics are used to reduce pain. Medical circumcision is voluntary and solitary whilst the Varembe circumcision is obligatory and is a group phenomenon. It places emphasis on the initiatory and religious aspect that lacks in medical circumcision.

The fact that medical circumcision removes the ritual from a sacred traditional setting makes most of the Varembe people of Mwenezi avoid Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision. Moreover, the fact that medical circumcision is solitary and does not provide moral lessons which shape the behaviour of the initiates to live up to the ethical expectations of their society, causes the Varembe to avoid medical circumcision.

The last phase of the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual is marked by a ceremony to incorporate the initiate back into the community having attained a distinct form from other villagers. The initiates burn all their belongings like old clothes and sticks before they leave the camp. The initiates would be easily recognisable because when they enter the village they wear new white shorts and shirts, their heads are shaven and they carry sticks that symbolise masculinity. Apart from that the initiates are conferred with new names to symbolise the new social status achieved. The graduation ceremony is a public event where gifts in the form of money or domestic animals such as goats and chickens are exchanged. The initiates are assigned to a mentor who guides and monitors him for a period of one year. It is only after the graduation ceremony that the initiates are recognised as *Vamwenye* or pure Varembe. A transformed person is recognised by how much he has changed physically, emotionally and behaviourally after reintegrating with the community.

## **Objective 2- Perceptions of the Varembe People about the Role of Initiation on HIV and AIDS**

This objective was achieved since the respondents expressed their views on the role of the initiation ritual in HIV prevention. The intention of the objective was to gather the actual views and experiences of the respondents about the efficacy of initiation in reducing the prevalence of HIV and AIDS.

The respondents confirmed that the strength of the Varembe initiation ritual lies in its recurrence. The ritual is performed every year which makes it effective if it is used as a tool for HIV prevention. Its recurrence has the advantage of emphasising key HIV and AIDS messages to the youth and the public. The respondents perceived that HIV and AIDS messages together with the Varembe cultural practices could be passed on to the next generation effectively. The respondents highlighted that the Varembe initiation ritual could be an excellent platform for spreading messages about HIV and AIDS. The respondents shared similar views about the positive role of circumcision and initiation ritual in HIV and AIDS discourses. Some of the views raised are that HIV and AIDS awareness campaigns can be held at the initiation camps and during ceremonies. The traditional education curriculum could be combined with information on HIV prevention. Initiation leaders, *Nyamukanga* and *Vadzabhi* could be used as resource persons to teach the initiates issues on HIV and AIDS.

Other perceptions which emerged were that the ritual leaders were not comfortable to train individuals who prefer to attend medical centres for their circumcision. Their views could suggest that circumcision could be incorporated into the ritual so that they take control of the circumcision. According to the respondents, medical circumcision is not enough to produce 'men' because it does not prepare the boys adequately to face life's challenges realistically like adults.

### **Objective 3- Perceptions of the Varembe Regarding the Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision**

This objective was designed to establish the views of the Varembe about the Voluntary Medical male Circumcision, and the reasons for not considering it as an option. Most ritual elders highlighted that they were reluctant to participate in the voluntary medical circumcision because it does not fulfil their cultural expectations. Views gathered were that the Varembe initiation ritual transforms the individuals into becoming adults who are mature and responsible. This is contrary to those individuals who undergo Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision as they remain in the state of boys without identity and are looked down upon by their peers as inferior and cowards.

Other perceptions gathered were that medical circumcision does not engage the patients in vigorous moral lessons after circumcising them. The underlying issue is that traditional circumcision exposes the youth to moral lessons whilst medical institutions merely circumcise without offering any initiation. Medical circumcision is not religious or cultural and it is not mandatory. Initiation is not an individual's decision most of the time, but the society has measures that encourage an individual to conform. The fact that medical circumcision is voluntary means that behavioural change becomes the individual's responsibility and not the medical institution. There is no external motivating factor like that of traditional initiation where the whole society is responsible for moulding the behaviour of the initiate. Respondents indicated that the Varembe initiation ritual has austere prohibitions that indirectly protect initiates from being vulnerable to sexual transmitted infections. Whilst some respondents accepted that there are some health benefits associated with medical male circumcision such as the use of sterilised equipment and medicines, there are no religious and cultural benefits that are useful in moulding the attitude and character of the patient.

#### **Objective 4- The Implications of the Varembe Circumcision and Initiation Ritual on Behavioural Change and HIV Prevention**

This objective was very important because it formed the cornerstone of the research. This objective was a determinant in the value of the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual on behavioural change and its use in HIV prevention. This research established the effects of the Varembe initiation ritual on behavioural change that could be useful in informing the individual against risky behaviours that put them at the risk of acquiring the HIV virus.

The Varembe initiation ritual has mechanisms in place that make it obligatory and involuntary for the initiates to follow its rules and regulations. All aspects of life of the Varembe people have strong links with the divine transcendent evident in the structure of the ritual. Before the initiates leave for the initiation camp, they perform home rituals. Before they enter the initiation camp, the initiates are purged and sanctified. The place where they perform the initiation ritual is sacred and set apart from the community by the sacred mountains and rivers. The initiate is placed in a sacred environment in the midst of sacred ritual personnel. The initiate becomes sacred wholesomely as an embodiment of the numinous. The knife for circumcision and the process itself of shedding the foreskin are sacred; the spilling of blood symbolically connects the initiates

with the spiritual realm. The Varembe initiation ritual provides an atmosphere that provides limited options for individuals to resist the rules and regulations expressed during initiation. The main characteristic of the Varembe initiation ritual is that it immerses the initiate into the sacred realm that is distinguished from the profane world. The Varembe initiation ritual has an inherent control over the behaviour of the adherents through engaging them in sacred discourses. The moral teachings that the initiates go through are respected because they are spiritual in nature. The lessons are conveyed to the initiate in a sacred environment; the ritual leaders [*Nyamukanga and Vadzabhi*] are sacred because they represent the sacred world.

The initiation ritual conveys a sense of identity, unity and solidarity among the Varembe people as they take part in the ritual. The blood that spills during circumcision is a symbol of unity between the initiates, the society and the ancestors. The Varembe ritual imparts a sense of unity among the people that is necessary in the fight against HIV and AIDS. The ritual instils a sense of communal solidarity towards problems that affects the community. The veneration of the object that the community regards as sacred gives powerful affirmation of collective consciousness and a call to obey communally defined morality. Collective performance can generate emotions that could transform individual psyches and channel them towards collective consciousness. When the Varembe engage in rituals, they develop a sense of solidarity with one another as they view themselves to be members of a common undertaking. In the context of HIV and AIDS, the kind of mentality is useful in helping those individuals who are affected and infected by the disease. Individuals feel obliged to intervene and assist those members of the group that are affected and infected by HIV and AIDS by providing care and assistance. An individual life has meaning when it is in the context of others. Whatever happens to the individual has a bearing to the group and whatever happens to the group has a bearing on the individual. The Varembe people are bound together as one family; therefore, they treat each other as relatives and protect each other from the problems of HIV and AIDS. This attitude inhibits engagement in risky sexual behaviours, as members would respect each other as one family. It becomes difficult for an individual to have illicit sexual relations with those individuals whose well being he or she should be protecting. Members react angrily to insults or to anything that results in the profanation of the symbols of their culture.

*Mwari* (God) and the ancestral spirits are believed to be in charge of everything in the universe, they operate a system of support of their descendants, and they may withdraw their support in accordance with their behaviour. The Varembe initiation ritual imparts a certain kind of reverence and behaviour towards the ancestors as well as a positive attitude towards sexuality, all which have an indirect benefit in the issues of health and procreation. The fact that the Varembe accept sex as something connecting the dead and the living through the blood of circumcision makes the ritual sacred and respectable. Sex is the symbol of procreation ordained by the spirit world. This is the reason why the Varembe people impose stringent regulations on issues regarding sexual behaviour. The people have a strong conviction that they are obliged to obey the regulations of their culture. This motivates them to develop positive behaviours on sexual matters.

The Varembe ritual inscribes in the minds of the initiates the virtues required for a pure *Murembe*. Transgression of sexual boundaries is limited since the Varembe believe that this may lead to retributive punishment from the invisible world. The link between the Varembe initiation ritual and the spiritual realm makes the ritual effective and binding as the respondents strive to please the spirit world by adhering to its precepts so that they gain the favours of fertility and procreation. Behavioural change towards sexual relations is feasible as people understand and conceive its fertility benefits. The ritual is a gateway to legitimate marriage to those who have been initiated.

The Varembe initiation ritual encourages youths to delay their sexual debut through various regulations and proscriptions. It determines which sexual relations are acceptable and what times and under what circumstances are they appropriate. The Varembe initiates are taught how to make the correct choices at the appropriate time. The initiates are not encouraged to marry before they have undergone the puberty rituals. Marriage is permissible when one has gone through initiation. The recently initiated individuals are not allowed to marry or engage in sexual relations up to a period of a year. Those who are married are not allowed to have sex up to a period of one month. The practice could protect individuals from early exposure to sexually transmitted infections. These conditions outlined encourage the initiates to delay marriage and sex. Those not yet initiated would maintain their primary virginity, which is the virginity of one who has never engaged in sex. The married people who attended the initiation ritual having had

engaged in sexual relations, are forced into secondary virginity where after initiation they are forbidden to engage in sexual relations up to a period of one month. Such ideas could encourage the initiates to have a delayed sexual debut that could be necessary in delaying risky chances of being exposed to contracting the HIV virus. The delayed debut could be made effective by the vigorous moral lessons on sexuality learnt by the initiate that could make an individual disengage in risky sexual behaviour. Studies have shown that vulnerability to the HIV and AIDS risk increases with early sexual activities because of probability of penile abrasion on immature sex organs and unhealed circumcision wounds.

The ordeals that the Varembe initiates are exposed to during the initiation ceremony have a positive contribution towards instilling positive and less risky behaviours in the youth. The ritual leaders are responsible for shaping ones' behaviour in line with societal and cultural expectations. Physical punishment, to which the initiates are exposed, is accepted as part of the process of transition to manhood. The ordeals that the Varembe initiates go through are expected to transform them to be able to control themselves and face the challenges of life where they are equipped to make informed decisions.

#### **Objective 5- How the Varembe Initiation Ritual could be Redirected Towards HIV Prevention**

This objective was intended to discover how the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual could collaborate with medical circumcision in reducing problems encountered in both health systems. Redirecting implies that the Varembe initiation ritual compromises some of its risky principles for the initiates to benefit and on the other hand medical health systems compromising its systems to become part of the society and all its cultural forms, rather than to work in isolation.

In the process of re-evaluating, the Varembe initiation ritual, the ritual leaders need to receive professional medical training on safe and hygienic methods of circumcision that prevents the spread of HIV. There is a need to improve on the equipment used during initiation which must be safe and hygienic. Wounds should be treated with appropriate medicines to avoid complications in healing. Whilst the Varembe initiation is of value, it needs to be complemented by medical science to avert unsafe methods of circumcision. Conversely, whilst medical science is effective

in providing safe and hygienic method of circumcision, it needs the services of traditional initiation to develop the behaviour and attitudes of the initiates.

### **7.8 Limitations of the Study**

Whilst the study was successfully completed, it was marred with challenges. The phenomenological approach's *epoche* entails bracketing preconceived ideas from infiltrating into the subject under study; this was difficult to maintain since interpreting phenomena has to start from a certain point and comparisons should be made from the researcher's previous knowledge. As a solution to that problem, the researcher remained conscious of the existing knowledge and bias he had and attempted to temporarily ignore these.

Another problem encountered during this research was harmonising etic and emic perspectives. The phenomenological approach used the emic approach to investigate how local people think, perceive and categorise the world, their rules of behaviour and how they view and explain those things that have meaning to them. Problems encountered were especially from those individuals of the Varembe tribe who felt the necessity of preserving their religious privacy and it was therefore difficult to obtain all the necessary information required for this study. The Varembe people are a closed society that does not want outsiders to gain access to what happens to the insiders. Some research respondents were not willing to disclose some confidential information about their culture on aspects of circumcision and initiation; especially issues they deemed to be of a sensitive nature. Most were not willing to open up or even participate in this study. To solve the problem the researcher used the etic approach by shifting the focus of the research from local observation, interpretations, and explanation to secondary sources. The etic approach is a realisation that the members of the Varembe culture were too involved in what they were doing to give impartial explanations. The research had to rely on theories of ritual analysis from western scholars that generalised human behaviours that are considered universally true and that commonly links cultural practices to factors of interest to the researcher that cultural insiders may not consider as important and relevant. To uphold the tenets of phenomenology the etic account used in the research attempted to be culturally neutral, limiting any ethnocentric, political, cultural bias or any alienation by the observer. The etic perspective enabled the researcher to see more than one aspect of one culture and to apply the observations to cultures around the world.



Another problem faced in the research was that the researcher was denied access to observe the real initiation ritual in progress, and had to rely on interviews from the initiates before and after the initiation ceremony. However, the researcher was allowed to observe certain aspects of the initiation ritual that the respondents felt less sensitive. The researcher relied on a local villager, the chief informant during the field study, who had to introduce him to the local people who did not know him. Those villagers who knew the researcher since he was a former high school teacher in the local area introduced him to their colleagues so that they could gain confidence. The researcher obtained the consent of the traditional leaders to interact with the local people so that they gained confidence in the researcher.

## **7.9 Recommendations**

In mapping the strategies for intervention for HIV prevention, medical practitioners in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and Childcare should focus on the behavioural change of the people who go through circumcision by engaging the Varembe ritual leaders to provide lessons that contribute towards positive behaviour. They may have medical practitioners go through initiation training so that they would be equipped with moral lessons to assist the patients who visit them for circumcision. There is therefore a need for a holistic approach to the prevention of HIV.

Redirecting the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual is recommended. Traditional ritual leaders who circumcise the initiates should get professional training on safe and hygienic methods of circumcision that prevent the spread of HIV. The cultural leaders interviewed agree that the two health systems could work together. According to Lagarde, et al. (2000) and Garner (2000), religion provides an increased access to HIV and AIDS-related information and protective behaviour. The implication is that the ritual leaders can be trained to spread the message on HIV and AIDS during initiation ceremonies and even to the greater society. This implies that a successful approach entails training the ritual leaders on the safe processes of circumcision such as the use of sterilized instruments for circumcision.

Awareness campaigns involving medical practitioners should be held to sensitise initiates over some risky practices found in the Varembe circumcision and initiation rituals, such as using one unsterilised instrument to circumcise all the initiates which places them at risk of infection by

HIV and other sexual transmitted infections. Initiates should be encouraged to bring their own safe equipment like new razor blades for use during their initiation, rather than sharing.

The Zimbabwean Government should promote awareness campaigns to inform men and empower women that circumcision on its own is inadequate as a strategy against HIV and AIDS. Circumcised men are still at the risk of contracting and spreading HIV and AIDS. Circumcision should be coupled with other strategies like changing one's behaviour towards risky sexual activities. Circumcision can lead to women engaging in unprotected sex more frequently with circumcised men believing that they are safe. Nonetheless, this needs to be addressed through community sensitisation programs in order to prevent the danger of having people engaging in high-risk sexual behaviour.

The creation of a community based culturally appropriate and developmental rite of passage is recommended. This creates a dialogue that is necessary to address issues concerning youths. Community based initiation rites should be introduced to incorporate community dialogue. It is a cross-cultural conception that children should grow into upright people. As it takes the whole community to develop a child, the implication is that the initiators should be people who have gone through the same initiatory experiences and processes, because one cannot take someone where he himself has not been.

One way is to engage the youth in the training of initiators about initiation so that they help influencing decisions of their peers to avoid indulging in risky sexual behaviour. Through initiation, the young are oriented to realise the need for becoming full and worthy members of the society.

Despite the differences highlighted between the Varembe initiation ritual and medical science, medical practitioners and the ritual leaders can collaborate to improve the safety and acceptability of male circumcision and initiation, reduce complications, and enhance the health education content of circumcision and the initiation rituals. Preservation of the socio-cultural importance of male circumcision and initiation process is necessary so that it should not be taken as a problem but as a solution to the problems of HIV and AIDS. Examples of collaboration may be ensuring adequate supply of necessary equipment for use during circumcision to reduce complications. Training traditional ritual leaders on safe methods of circumcision and co-

operating on the information given to Varembe initiates during puberty rituals to maximise on good health. There should be a rapid response and transfer of initiates needing medical services if there are complications during traditional circumcision. Models of co-operation should be developed in which medical and traditional providers share responsibility for the tasks involved in the circumcision process, respecting the different skills each side can provide. There is a need to understand the socio-cultural significance of circumcision and initiation performed by traditional providers.

### **7.10 Summary**

The chapter has proposed a ritual strategy that could be used in the prevention of HIV. The strategy is the middle way between traditional forms of initiation and medical system. The goal of the strategy is to reduce the problems encountered in using both methods of circumcision and initiation. The chapter also concluded the study by revisiting the objectives set at the beginning to establish if they were achieved.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **THE CHIEF'S CONSENT**

**Study title:** Puberty rites as Cultural Responses to the Prevention of HIV in Zimbabwe: The Case of Varembe Circumcision and Initiation Rites in Mwenezi District

**Researcher:** MR Matumbu Onias

Morgan Zintec; College, Box 1700, Harare, Number 1 Alamein Rd, Braeside.

**Cell:** 0772637112      **Email.** [tiyananematumbu@yahoo.com](mailto:tiyananematumbu@yahoo.com)

Date; 29 January 2016

**Dear Chief**

I am a PhD student in Religion and Social Transformation with the University of Kwazulu Natal. I am asking for permission to undertake a research study in your area to explore the role of initiation ceremonies particularly circumcision ritual in militating against HIV and AIDS. I would wish to gather your peoples' experiences and perceptions regarding rites of passage particularly circumcision. I would be grateful to make you one of my selected respondents.

The study is aimed at finding ways of redirecting cultural rituals towards HIV prevention. The study also seeks to find out how traditional rituals in your area could be part of a solution to the problem of HIV and AIDS rather than being a problem. Respondents are free to withdraw from participation at any time they feel like doing. The exercise is voluntary; no monetary or rewards of any kind should be expected from this research. All information collected from respondents would be treated as confidential and no publication of names will be done in the research findings.

The study is a requirement for the completion of my course of study and it could be useful in mitigation processes against HIV and AIDS.

Thank you for your cooperation

Yours sincerely

Matumbu Onias

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **THE HEADMAN'S CONSENT**

**Study title:** Puberty rites as Cultural Responses to the Prevention of HIV in Zimbabwe: The Case of Varembe Circumcision and Initiation Rites in Mwenezi District.

**Researcher:** Mr Matumbu Onias

Morgan Zintec, College, Box 1700, Harare, Number 1 Alamein Rd, Braeside.

**Cell:** 0772637112 **Email.** [tiyananematumbu@yahoo.com](mailto:tiyananematumbu@yahoo.com)

**Date:** 6 January 2016

**Dear Headman**

I am a PhD student in Religion and Social Transformation with the University of Kwazulu Natal. I am asking for permission to undertake a research study in your area to explore the role of circumcision and initiation ritual in militating against the spread of HIV. I would wish to have permission to access all village heads and ritual leaders for my study. I also wish to gather your peoples' experiences and perceptions regarding circumcision and initiation. I wish to make you one of my selected respondents as well.

The study is aimed at finding ways of redirecting cultural rituals towards HIV prevention. The study also seeks to find out how traditional rituals could be part of a solution to the problem of HIV and AIDS rather than being a problem. Respondents are free to withdraw from participation at any time they feel like doing. The exercise is voluntary; no monetary or rewards of any kind should be expected from this research.

The study is a requirement for the completion of my course of study and could be useful in mitigation processes against HIV and AIDS.

All the information gathered in this research would be treated as confidential.

Yours sincerely

Matumbu Onias

### **APPENDIX 3**

#### **THE VILLAGE HEAD'S INFORMED CONSENT**

**Study title:** Puberty rites as Cultural Responses to the Prevention of HIV in Zimbabwe: The Case of Varembe Circumcision and Initiation Rites in Mwenezi District.

**Researcher:** Mr Matumbu Onias

Morgan Zintec; College, Box 1700, Harare, Number 1 Alamein Rd, Braeside.

**Cell:** 0772637112      **Email.** [tiyananematumbu@yahoo.com](mailto:tiyananematumbu@yahoo.com)

**Date:** 6 January 2016

#### **Dear Village Head**

I am a PhD student in Religion and Social Transformation with the University of Kwazulu Natal. I am asking for permission to undertake a research study in your area to explore the role of circumcision and initiation ritual in militating against the spread of HIV. I would wish to gather your peoples' experiences and perceptions regarding circumcision and initiation. I would also wish to make you one of my selected respondents.

The study is aimed at finding ways of redirecting cultural rituals towards HIV prevention. The study also seeks to find out how traditional rituals could be part of a solution to the problem of HIV and AIDS rather than being a problem. Respondents are free to withdraw from participation at any time they feel like doing. The exercise is voluntary; no monetary or rewards of any kind should be expected from this research

The study is a requirement for the completion of my course of study and could be useful in mitigation processes against HIV and AIDS.

All the information gathered in this research would be treated as confidential.

Participant's Signature.....Date.....

Researcher's signature.....Date.....

## APPENDIX 4

### RITUAL LEADER'S INFORMED CONSENT

**Study title:** Puberty rites as Cultural Responses to the Prevention of HIV in Zimbabwe: The Case of Varembe Circumcision and Initiation Rites in Mwenezi District.

**Researcher:** Mr Matumbu Onias

Morgan Zintec; College, Box 1700, Harare, Number 1 Alamein Rd, Braeside.

**Cell:** 0772637112

**Email.** [tiyananematumbu@yahoo.com](mailto:tiyananematumbu@yahoo.com)

**Date:** 6 January 2016

**Dear Ritual Elder**

I am a PhD student in Religion and Social Transformation with the University of Kwazulu Natal. I am asking for permission to undertake a research study in your area where I would interact with the initiates to explore the role of circumcision and initiation ritual in militating against the spread of HIV. I would wish to gather the initiates' experiences and perceptions regarding circumcision and initiation. I would also wish to make you one of my selected respondents.

The study is aimed at finding ways of redirecting cultural rituals towards HIV prevention. The study also seeks to find out how traditional rituals could be part of a solution to the problem of HIV and AIDS rather than being a problem. Respondents are free to withdraw from participation at any time they feel like doing. The exercise is voluntary; no monetary or rewards of any kind should be expected from this research

The study is a requirement for the completion of my course of study and could be useful in mitigation processes against HIV and AIDS.

All the information gathered in this research would be treated as confidential.

Participant's Signature.....Date.....

Researcher's signature.....Date.....



## APPENDIX 5

### PARTICIPANT'S INFORMED CONSENT

**Study title:** Puberty rites as Cultural Responses to the Prevention of HIV in Zimbabwe: The Case of Varembe Circumcision and Initiation Rites in Mwenezi District.

**Researcher:** MR Matumbu Onias

Morgan Zintec; College, Box 1700, Harare, Number 1 Alamein Rd, Braeside.

**Cell:** 0772637112

**Email.** [tiyananematumbu@yahoo.com](mailto:tiyananematumbu@yahoo.com)

**Date:** 6 January 2016

#### Dear Participant

I am a PhD student in Religion and Social Transformation with the University of Kwazulu Natal. I want to undertake a research study to explore the role of initiation ceremonies particularly circumcision ritual in militating against HIV and AIDS. I would wish to gather your experiences and perceptions regarding the Varembe circumcision and initiation ritual. Information would be gathered through unstructured in-depth interviews.

The study is a requirement to the completion of my course of study. The study is aimed at finding ways of redirecting cultural rituals towards HIV prevention. The study also seeks to find out how traditional rituals could be part of a solution to the problem of HIV and AIDS rather than being a problem.

You are one of my selected respondents. I therefore seek permission from you to participate in this study. There is no wrong or right answers, you would be giving your experiences and your opinions. Your name would not be used or appear anywhere in this reports that I will write and the information would be handled with confidentiality. Participation in this research is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any stage of the research. This research does not entail monetary or benefits of any kind to the respondents. Your willingness to participate in this research study would be appreciated.

Participant's Signature.....Date.....

Researcher's Signature.....Date.....

## APPENDIX 6

### PARENT/ CAREGIVER'S INFORMED CONSENT

**Study title:** Puberty rites as Cultural Responses to the Prevention of HIV in Zimbabwe: The Case of Varembe Circumcision and Initiation Rites in Mwenezi District

**Researcher:** MR Matumbu Onias

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**Date:** 6 January 2016

#### Dear Participant

I am a PhD student in Religion and Social Transformation with the University of Kwazulu Natal. I want to undertake a research study to explore the role of initiation ceremonies particularly circumcision ritual in militating against HIV and AIDS. I would wish to gather your child's experiences and perceptions regarding circumcision.

The study is aimed at finding ways of redirecting cultural rituals towards HIV prevention. The study also seeks to find out how traditional rituals could be part of a solution to the problem of HIV and AIDS rather than being a problem.

The study is a requirement to the completion of my course of study.

Your child is one of my selected respondents. I therefore seek permission from you to allow him to participate in this study. Information would be gathered from him through unstructured in-depth interviews. There is no wrong or right answers, he will be giving his experiences and opinions about the initiation ritual. His name would not be used or appear anywhere in this report that I will write and the information would be handled with confidentiality. Participation in this research is voluntary and you are free to withdraw the child at any stage of the research. This research does not entail monetary or benefits of any kind to the respondents. Your willingness to allow the child to participate in this research study would be appreciated.

Researcher's signature.....Date.....

Caregiver' signature.....Date.....

## **APPENDIX 7**

### **CONSENT FOR AUDIO TAPING THE INTERVIEWS**

**Study title:** Puberty rites as Cultural Responses to the Prevention of HIV in Zimbabwe: The Case of Varembe Circumcision and Initiation Rites in Mwenezi District

**Researcher: Mr Matumbu Onias**

I am Matumbu Onias, a PHD student in Religion and Social Transformation with University of Kwazulu Natal. In my research, I need to talk about the experiences and perceptions regarding the Varembe circumcision and initiation in the context of HIV prevention. The information will be gathered through unstructured in-depth interviews. Therefore, I am asking for permission to audiotape the interview.

The recorded information will be stored in a safe place. Your name will not appear in any of the reports that I will write and all the information will be treated in confidentiality.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you reserve the right to withdraw at any stage of the ritual when you feel it is necessary to do so. Your willingness to participate is appreciated.

Participant Signature.....Date.....

Researcher's signature.....Date.....

## **APPENDIX 8**

### **RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS**

**Study title:** Puberty rites as Cultural Responses to the Prevention of HIV in Zimbabwe: The Case of Varembe Circumcision and Initiation Rites in Mwenezi District

#### **PART A: BIOGRAPHICAL DATA SHEET**

**Gender**.....

**Age**.....

**Home Language**.....

**Residential Area**.....

**Religious orientation**.....

#### **PART B: INTERVIEW GUIDE**

I am Matumbu Onias, who is a registered PhD student in Religion and Social Transformation with University of Kwazulu Natal.

The purpose of the interview is to hear your experiences, thoughts, feelings about the initiation rituals. The focus would be ritual of circumcision and initiation.

1. Explain the reasons for taking part in the initiation ritual.
2. What is the meaning of the initiation rites to you?
3. Which age groups are involved and why?
4. Explain the conditions for qualifying to go through the initiation ritual.
5. Who determines that the time is ripe for one to go for initiation?
6. How many people are involved in the ritual acts?
7. Explain how you prepare for the initiation ritual?
8. Which time of the year do you perform the initiation ritual and why?
9. Explain how the places for the ritual are selected and prepared and what are the reasons for selecting such places.

10. Give a description of characters (ritual leaders) who are in charge of the initiation ritual and who select them? How and why?
11. Describe the duties of the ritual leaders.
12. What equipments are used during the ritual?
13. Describe how circumcision is done.
14. Explain the function of the ritual to you and the community.
15. How do you distinguish the circumcised and the uncircumcised individuals?
16. How can the initiation rituals be responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS?
17. Describe the components of the initiation school curriculum.
18. Explain the lessons that are taught at the initiation school.
19. What benefits do the initiates get for going through initiation?
20. What are your perceptions about the role of initiation in HIV prevention?
21. What do you understand by Voluntary medical male circumcision?
22. How do you compare Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision with Varenba traditional male circumcision?
23. Which form of circumcision do you prefer between Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision and traditional initiation, and why?
24. Explain the benefits of Varembe initiation over Voluntary male circumcision?
25. Describe the benefits of the circumcision and initiation ritual.
26. In what ways can the rituals be tapped as strategies towards the fight against HIV and AIDS?
27. Is there a possibility of redirecting traditional circumcision and initiation ritual practices towards HIV prevention?
28. Can the initiation rituals have an influence towards attitude and sexual behavioural change?
29. Does the initiation ritual have any contribution towards behaviour change that is related to the prevention of HIV?
30. In what ways can the ritual create preventive awareness of HIV and AIDS through attitude knowledge and behaviour?
31. How can rites of passage be part of solutions than problems in the fight against HIV and AIDS?

32. How does the ritual practice contribute to plans and strategies that inhibit the spread of HIV?
33. What is your view on the fact that rituals can be repackaged as a tool to fight against the HIV and AIDS pandemic?
34. What is your response to the allegation that some cultural practices are responsible for fuelling the spread of HIV? How and Why?
35. Explain your beliefs about sex and sexuality?
36. Is there any relationship between morality and puberty rites?
37. Please comment on anything you feel is important to know on the Varembe of circumcision and initiation ritual that you feel has been left out.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!

## **PART C**

### **OBSERVATION GUIDE**

I am Matumbu Onias, who is a registered PhD student in Religion and Social Transformation with University of Kwazulu Natal.

The purpose of this exercise is to observe how you perform the ritual so that I identify practices which could be channelled towards the prevention of HIV in Zimbabwe.

#### **What to observe**

1. Time of the day at which the initiates leave the village.
  2. What happens at the meeting place at *Vadzabhi's* home before the initiates recede into the secluded area.
  3. The place of initiation before and after the ritual performance.
  4. Activities done in preparation for the ritual.
  5. People involved in the preparation of the ritual.
  6. Attire/ dress code.
  7. Equipment used.
  8. How the initiates interact.
  9. Identify activities of the ritual that are related to issues of HIV and AIDS.
  10. Activities before the initiation camp and after initiation.
  11. Activities during reincorporation of the initiates.
  12. Graduation ceremony for the initiates.
  13. The response of the community and interaction with the initiates after the initiation ritual.
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