

# Chapter 18

## Depicting the Vhavenda Women Initiation Schools and Their Cultural Practices in Limpopo Province

**Rendani Tshifhumulo**

*University of Venda, South Africa*

### ABSTRACT

*Growing up for many African people has been marked by rites of passage. Vhavenda girls attend various initiation schools that served as rites of passage from one stage to another. The purpose of this study was to explore the initiation schools attended by Vhavenda girls for knowledge preservation. The study is qualitative where data was collected from 15 traditional knowledge holders purposefully using interviews as a tool to collect data. The study revealed that girls attended different schools at various stages from Musevhetho, followed by Vhusha then Domba, which is divided into Tshikanda, Ludodo, and Tshilalandoima. All these schools served a critical purpose on the development of a girl child through to adulthood stage. Knowledge shared in the school covered mostly life skills and human physiology. With the introduction of formal schools, the former was discarded and labeled barbaric leaving a void and opening a door to many social challenges faced by girl children within the Vhavenda community members.*

### INTRODUCTION

Growing up for many African people has been marked by rites of passages. VhaVenda girls attend various initiation schools that served as rites of passage from one stage to another. The purpose of this study was to explore the initiation schools attended by VhaVenda girls for knowledge preservation. The study is a qualitative where data was collected from 15 traditional knowledge holders purposefully using interviews as a tool to collect data. The study revealed that girls attended different schools at various stages from Musevhetho, followed by Vhusha then Domba which is divided into Tshikanda, Ludodo and Tshilalandoima. All this schools served a critical purpose on the development of a girl child through out

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7492-8.ch018

to adulthood stage. Knowledge shared in the school covered mostly life skills and human physiology. With the introduction of formal schools the former were discarded and labelled barbaric leaving void and opening a door to many social challenges faced by girl children within the VhaVenda community members.

## **INTRODUCING MUSEVHETHO, VHUSHA AND DOMBA INITIATION**

The rituals and rites of initiation play an important educational role in all Southern Africa people and cultures. The change of the individual is a progression of times, with puberty and marriage marking important stages. Moving from one stage to the next is only possible with the consent of various outside forces, such as ancestors, good and evil spirits, and witches, both male and female. These external powers might have a good or a bad influence on people.

This chapter is an exploration on initiation schools of VhaVenda girls. It documents the different types attended, the nature and composition of the curriculum. Initiation schools give instruction and guidance to the initiates as to how to behave and what to expect in the next stage. Using ceremonies and dances the initiates need to make a break from the mistakes and faults of their pasts, and welcome their futures. During these ceremonies, the support and blessings of the ancestors are asked for and the initiates are strengthened through magic.

Vho-Singo (2015) alluded that Muvenda girl attends three major initiation schools namely *musevhetho* before puberty; *vhusha* at puberty; and *domba* which is a pre-marital school for adults who are ready for marriage. She added that initiation schools are defined as traditional learning institutions used to pass on knowledge from one generation to the next. During the rite of passage Vhavenda children are taught values, norms and cultural rules to lay the foundation on which the basic education of the Muvenda child is based. She further indicates that these traditions are performed in a sacred way in accordance with the Vhavenda culture and the curriculum is full of rituals that were not exposed to the non-initiates. The myth passed from generation to generation claims that should an initiate expose or reveal the rituals to a non-initiate, the tongue of the culprit will swell and enlarge until it touches the ground. The fear of knowledge extension resulted in documenting the syllabi there of.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The data was collected using face to face interviews. Respondents were interviewed individually for 2 hours with the options of follow ups in case data was not sufficient. 15 women from around Thohoyandou and Nello area were interviewed and purposive sampling was used to select respondents. Chief informants were targeted, especial people from the chief's kraal as they are knowledge holders in the field study but in some cases the chief referred researchers to community members who are custodians of the schools. The first initiation school to be discussed is *Musevhetho*.

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