The rock art of Mwana wa Chentcherere II rock shelter, Malawi
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A site-specific study of girls’ initiation rock art

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Dedication

To my family
for their unconditional support
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Introduction

Mwana wa Chentcherere II, or Chentcherere\(^1\) Rock Shelter II the name by which it was more generally known when it was excavated by Professor J. Desmond Clark during August and September in 1972, is one of the largest rock painting sites in Malawi. It has been a national monument since 1972 and been the subject of extensive archaeological research (Clark 1973; Robinson 1975; Crader 1984). Despite occurring alongside one of the best-understood archaeological contexts in Central Africa, the rock paintings of Mwana wa Chentcherere II have never been fully studied or published.

As a major national monument, even appearing on a national stamp in 1972, Mwana wa Chentcherere II has been much visited and, in recent years, its rock art has been badly damaged by graffiti. This project will draw together unpublished recordings from the 1960s through to the 1990s so as to make a comprehensive record of the rock art of this important shelter.

These recordings will then be considered in the context of recent advances in our knowledge of Central African rock art (e.g., Smith 1995, 1997, 2001), local ethnography (e.g., van Breugel 1976; Yoshida 1992; Morris 2000a, 2000b) and detailed knowledge of the archaeological context (e.g., Clark 1973; Mgomezulu 1978; Crader 1984). This diverse contextual material provides an exceptional glimpse into the social production and consumption of rock art at Mwana wa Chentcherere II.

\(^1\) Originally spelling: Chencherere
Objectives

The general aim of this project is to record the rock art of Mwana wa Chentcherere II and interpret it in the context of excavated archaeological finds and local ethnography in order to understand how rock art sites in this area were made and used.

At a more detail level, I seek:

1) To collect all unpublished tracings from the last three decades. Use old photographs in combination with tracings to produce a detailed accurate redrawing of the site.

2) To tie the art to the excavated sequence so as to give a better chronology to the rock art of the site than the one suggested by relative degrees of fading. For this purpose I will analyze the data provided by the archaeological evidence (e.g., Clark 1973; Robinson 1975; Mgomezulu 1978; Crader 1984).

3) To explore the proposed link between this art and girls’ initiation or Chinamwali (Smith 1995, 1997). I will take account of:
   3.1 Current and past uses of art in the Chinamwali Chewa ceremony (Winter bottom & Lancaster 1965; van Breugel 1976; Yoshida 1992; Smith 1995).
   3.2 The broad uses of art in girls’ coming-of-age ceremonies in central Africa amongst other groups, such as the Nsenga and Yao.
   3.1 and 3.2 will facilitate understanding of how art is used in its ritual context.

4) Finally, consider the symbolism of the rock art through ethnographic analogy and ‘body theory’:
   4.1 By looking at the possible range of objects depicted (mostly animal forms such as snakes, chameleons, crocodile and lizards, etc.).
   4.2 The symbolism of the creatures within the Chewa beliefs.
   4.3 The way such symbolism might take on specific, focused meanings within the ritual and social context of Chinamwali.

Following Victor Turner’s (1967) method of analysis of Ndembu ritual symbolism in Zambia, the significance of symbols will be inferred from three classes of data: observable characteristics; interpretations offered by local women and ritual specialists; and ethnographic accounts in which girls’ initiation rituals have been described by anthropologists. These three classes of data provide a framework within which to analyze the relationship between the interpretations offered by informants and the behaviour that arises from the meaning of symbols. The recovered data will thus be meaningful as an object of scientific study.
Rock art research in Central Africa

Central Africa has been an area of controversy and puzzlement in rock art research: Later Stone Age; Iron Age; Batwa; the entrance of Bantu speakers; the interaction between populations; stone tools: pottery traditions; iron and glass beads occurring in the same cultural sequence; two, three and four different rock art styles identified depending on colour, subject matter and superimpositions have all been part of the challenges that archaeologists have faced since David Livingstone thrilled the British nation with his experiences in Central Africa in the 19th century (Wilson 1959).

Central African history is an amalgamation of different populations in different times and spaces, of mobility and interaction. Thus, researchers have, for a long time, debated which sections of the rock art are related to each other and how these can be linked to particular cultural groups.

Rock art research in Central Africa cannot be separated from research into the Stone Age and Iron Age in the region. It is, therefore, necessary to review briefly both the rock art and archaeological research, in order to understand how our present knowledge of the rock art of this region has been affected by these research contexts and also to prepare the reader for the following discussion on Mwana wa Chentcherere II (Chapter 2).

*Early understanding of Central African rock art*

In the early 1950s archaeological evidence showed both Iron Age and Stone Age populations living together in the landscape throughout much of the last two millennia. Problems arose when researchers tried to relate this evidence to the rock art. Researchers’ efforts to place rock art in a chronological framework led them to associate the rock paintings with the broader archaeological sequence and, moreover, to separate and categorize the art into different styles based on colour, superimposition, subject matter, weathering and the position and location of the paintings within the panel (e.g., Clark 1959a; Phillipson 1976). Whether we call these categories ‘styles’ or ‘traditions’ is merely a question of semantics; the importance is to understand the crucial role they play for our interpretative analysis. Once we have differentiated styles, the research faces another complex issue: the need to relate the styles to human populations.

Clark (1959a) stated that Iron Age people were ancestral to the present-day Bantu-speaking inhabitants, and that the majority of the painted sites were probably associated with the end of the Nachikufan Industry of the Later Stone Age. The Nachikufan Culture was the name given to the Later Stone Age people in the Zambia area (Clark 1959a). Clark stated that colour sequence was not as important as the stylistic sequence when determining the age of the paintings
(Clark 1959a: 208). For Clark, then, the succession was indisputable: the Nachikufans were hunters and gatherers and although no clear chronological division was possible between the deposits containing the latest Nachikufan and the earliest Iron Age Industry, the change was considered to be a watershed. Clark saw the division in the cultural material as evidence of two groups of people living alongside each other.

Excavations undertaken by Phillipson (1969) showed that both Early Iron Age and Later Stone Age peoples inhabited the northern and eastern regions of Zambia at the same time (e.g., Nakapapula rockshelter).

Variations in stone tool types enabled Phillipson to recognize regional groupings in the Later Stone Age: Zambian Wilton (Southern Province), Nachikufan (Central-Northern Province plateau) and Makwe rock shelter (East). It was an open question whether these variations depended on territorial boundaries of socio-political population units or on economic or behavioural factors subject to local environment (Phillipson 1972). He also recognized major changes mid-way through the Iron Age sequence and therefore divided the period in two: Early Iron Age characterized by what he termed Chifumbaze-tradition pottery and a Late Iron Age characterized by what he termed Luangwa-tradition pottery (Phillipson 1976, 1977).

Clark stated that the art of metal working was introduced by Bantu-language speakers, however ‘there is reason to suggest that some of the Later Stone Age hunting groups may have acquired the art of working iron from immigrant, food-producing metal workers with whom they came into contact’ (Clark 1959a: 211). Clark was the first to argue that some of these hunter-gatherers were represented by people who were still living in northern Zambia and who were called the Batwa (Clark 1959a; see Smith & Blundell in press for further discussion).

Excavations in Malawi yielded an interesting mixture of Later Stone Age and Iron Age artefacts, the same as in Zambia. Juwayeyi and Phiri (1992) asserted that the Later Stone Age people, the Batwa, were the ones who executed the red paintings. The explanation of the obvious break between the red and the white paintings was that the Batwa were completely displaced by the farmers.

Phillipson (1969), on the other hand, divided the paintings into three stylistic groups: Naturalistic, Stylistic and Schematic. He believed that the latter were more recent than the naturalistic because, most of the time, the naturalistic images were superimposed by the geometrics, although there were some exceptions (Phillipson 1969). He stated that the earliest period to which any of the paintings was attributed was the Later Stone Age, which began more than 15,000 years ago. Phillipson argued that the naturalistic and schematic rock art traditions belonged to two distinct economic groups: the Later Stone Age hunter-gatherer people and the food-producing Iron Age people respectively (Phillipson 1976).
Moreover, he felt that the evidence at that time suggested that the Early Iron Age People executed schematic rock art and that there was continuity between the prehistoric schematic art and paintings executed in the last hundred years. Therefore, it was clear to him that the naturalistic art was made in the Later Stone Age (Phillipson 1976: 185).

A number of people’s early pioneering work in this region influenced much of the rock art research of recent years. Margaret Metcalfe (1956) visited Mphunzi in central Malawi in the early 1920s and published the first sketches of the site. Clarence van Riet Lowe visited Nsalu site, Zambia in 1936 and attempted to provide a sequence and some insight into the meaning of the rock art. William H.G. Rangeley’s interest in oral history has made his account important in terms of ethnographic and historical sources.

In the late 1970s, Matthew Schoffeleers (1976), emphasised the similarity between the white paintings of Malawi and costumes and objects that were used in the dances of the Nyau secret society of the Chevwa speaking people as well as to mark hiding places of Nyau structures and to indicate meeting places (see Smith 2001 for a different interpretation). At the same time David Phillipson (1976), in Zambia, recognized Nyau designs in the rock art.

Lindgren (1978) divided Malawian rock art into two general categories: the Red schematic paintings and White series. He suggested that the red paintings were the work of the Batwa/Akafula pre-Bantu inhabitants in Malawi, and some of the red paintings on Skull Rock Hill (three small handprints) were associated with these people and showed them to be of short-stature. The white paintings, on the other hand, were the work of the Chevwa people who ‘began arriving in Malawi in the early part of the 2nd millennium A.D.’ (Lindgren & Schoffeleers 1978: 10). The absence of a change in style from red paintings to white paintings suggested two distinct painting societies, which stayed well separate (see Crader 1984 for a different interpretation).

Yusuf Juwayeyi and Mathias Phiri (1992) also divided Malawian rock art into two main divisions:

1) The Red paintings characterized by basic geometric designs and
2) The White paintings which were naturalistic and which they divided in three styles: the Bantu style, Nyau style and Schematic style.

Present understanding of Central African rock art
This brief review of some of the assumptions made by previous researchers leads us to our present understanding of the populations who are and were related to Central African rock art. Our current understanding of Central African rock art is based on Benjamin Smith’s (1995) doctoral research in Zambia and Malawi,

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2 One of their conclusions was that the red paintings were older than the white ones.
particularly on the link between *Nyau* closed associations and the rock art (Smith 1995, 1997, 2001). His analysis led him to divide the Central African rock art into four traditions (Smith 1997):

*a) The Red Animal tradition*

This tradition, expressed in both paintings and engravings, comprises the depiction of animals, and some human figures always in red. Animals are usually outlined and filled completely, but some are only partially filled. The bodies of animals tend to be naturalistic in style, but there is usually an extreme stylisation that impedes recognition of the species of animals. The distortion of the size of animals’ stomachs creates the visual effect of them having tiny legs, tails and heads. A head is sometimes not even present, a stump takes its place. Although antelope are the most common animal depicted, the tradition also includes elephant, rhino, lion, leopard, giraffe, hyena, warthog, wild pig, ostrich and buffalo (Smith 1997: 12-13; Figure 1.1).

*Figure 1.1  Paintings in the Red Animal tradition, Kasama District, Zambia  
(Taken from Smith 1997: fig. 31)*

*b) The Red Geometric tradition*

Simple geometric forms characterize this tradition made up of paintings and engravings. Common motifs are ‘circles, concentric circles, divided circles, circles with radiating lines, ladders, lines and sets of parallel lines’ (ibid.: 13). Red and white pigments were employed for painting but the white has disappeared in most of the sites because of its ephemeral nature (Figure 1.2).

The animal and geometric traditions both belonged to the people whom the farmers encountered when they arrived in Central Africa during the first millen-
niunm A.D and who practised a hunter-gatherer way of life (Smith 1997). These
groups continued to live in the area and to use Later Stone Age technology (e.g.,
microlithic tools) through the Early and much of the Late Iron Age. Some of
these hunter-gatherers survived until a century or two ago and became known as
the Batwa; others became farmers and took up farmer cultural practices (Smith &
Blundell in press).

Although I do not address the meaning on the geometric and animal traditions
in this thesis, recent studies (Smith 1997; Smith & Blundell in press) have
pointed out the cross influences on artistic practices between these two popula-
tions living in the same area for a long period of time.

c) The White Zoomorphic tradition
Executed by finger-painting, this tradition comprises stylised animal forms and
human figures (Figure 1.3). The paintings are frequently executed in white but
sometimes in charcoal (see Smith 2001 for further discussion).

Figure 1.2  Paintings in the Red Geometric tradition
at Mphunzi I, Malawi
(Photo: Leslie Zubieta)
d) The White Spread-eagled tradition

The most common figure in this tradition is that which has been termed the spread-eagled design – a figure that resembles a stretched hide seen from above. These figures are almost always accompanied by snake-like motifs and other geometric designs such as circles and lines of dots. The primary colour used is white but black and red were sometimes also used (Smith 1997: 13; Figure 1.4).

Of the later traditions, the white traditions cover an area almost identical to the extent of spread of the modern Chēwa people (Zambia, Malaŵi and Mozambique), and some elements of the rock art symbolism relate directly to symbols
used in their rituals today. Even though the painting tradition has now ceased, it is universally accepted that these later white traditions were made by ancestors of the Cheŵa (Clark 1959a, 1959b; Chaplin 1962; Phillipson 1972, 1976; Lindgren & Schoffeleers 1978; Juwayeyi & Phiri 1992; Smith 1995, 1997, 2001).


The symbolism of the White Spread-eagled tradition will be more extensively discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, as it is the central topic of this research. It must be noted that some researchers have argued that the designs were used as mnemonic devices in girls’ initiation ceremonies (Yoshida 1992; Smith 1995, 1997, 2001). Moreover, the themes of this rock art are related to gender perceptions of sex, fertility and sexuality and thus related to the most intimate womens’ secrets.

Justification

Mwana wa Chentcherere II is one of the most recent Later Stone Age sites that provide archaeological evidence of how hunter-gatherer groups were able to persist long into the Iron Age and establish a relationship of mutual exchange of commodities with food producers (Clark 1973; Crader 1984). Mwana wa Chentcherere II is also an exceptional example of an art related to women.

Currently there is serious graffiti at the site and many paintings are almost destroyed; thus it is important to produce an accurate record of the site before the paintings are completely lost. Nevertheless, the core of this project and most significant aspect is that the recovered data provides invaluable information on the association between the rock art and girls’ initiation rituals. Therefore, this important aspect will be discussed in this thesis and the analysis will focus on three topics: the context of the use of the image, the subjects chosen, and the purpose of the art.
Mwana wa Chentcherere II

Location

The rock shelter known as Mwana wa Chentcherere II is located 13km north of the town of Dedza in Dedza District, central Malawi (Figure 2.1). The shelter is recessed beneath a large granite gneiss boulder that sits at an altitude of some 1680m next to Chentcherere Hill. Chentcherere area is on the top of a ridge that comprises the Dedza Hills (Dedza, Chongoni, Mlunduni, Dzenza and Mlanda mountains) and lies midway between the escarpment of the Malawi Rift to the east and the lower lying area of the Linthipe drainage to the west (Clark 1973; Crader 1984).

The Chongoni and Dedza mountains are part of what is known as the High Altitude Hill Zone (Brown & Young 1965: 5) in which the landforms form dissected areas with moderate slopes that range usually from 5 to 15 degrees and the relief of which ranges between 30 and 120m. The Dedza Hills comprises hill areas rising above 1350m with considerable agricultural value because they are characterized by wide valleys with rich reddish brown soils and sandy clay loams with grey alluvial sediments. These form a landscape in which people principally plant maize, beans, and potatoes nowadays.

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3 This name translates ‘the child of Chentcherere’. According to Robinson (1975: 9) “Chencherere means in Chichewa ‘to stand up on end, as the mane of the animals’ therefore it probably refers that the main hill stands up as a rocky isolated peak”. However, none of my informants were able to give me a meaning for this word. B.W. Smith refers to this shelter as Chencherere I in his publications. I follow J.D. Clark’s original name of the site.

4 Malawi was known before as Nyasaland (nyasa meaning lake).
Figure 2.1 Location of Mwana wa Chentcherere II
(Drawing: Leslie Zubieta)

Mwana wa Chentcherere II is currently protected in the Chongoni Forest Reserve, which is one of the richest areas of rock art in Central Africa, containing 126 recorded rock art sites (Smith 1995). Indeed, the area is of such importance that it was proposed for the UNESCO world heritage list, in November 2003.

Mwana wa Chentcherere II is a 28m long rock shelter facing southwest. Its overhang ranges from 4-6 m in height, protecting the 7m deep deposit from the dripline to the backwall of the shelter (Figure 2.2). However, the granite boulder of which the shelter is a part has an overall height projecting 14m from the original floor level of the rock shelter.

Site setting

The site is surrounded by *Brachystegia* or “miombo” woodland and savannah woodland (Table 2.1). The area has moderate slopes and stony soils (lithosols) in

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6 The identification of the vegetation species took place at the site with the assistance of Mr Hector Banda from the Malawi College of Forestry and Wildlife. When possible, the local name in Chichewa is given followed by the English name.
which quartz stones are numerous. These soils are frequently covered with short
trees and a sparse grass. The *Brachystegia* vegetation community is represented
by trees that keep their leaves almost until new ones appear before the rain. The
new leaves are brilliant crimson for their first week ‘making a most splendid
sight notably on the road to Chikwawa and in the region of Dedza in September’
(Topham 1952: 12). Desmond Clark (1973: 30) wrote, referring to the surround-
ings of Chentcherere, that ‘the colours of the new *Brachystegia* leaves – reds,
russets, browns, yellows and orange – off-set by the green foliage of other
species against a background of pale brown grass, is one of the most beautiful
and unforgettable impressions of south Central Africa’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin name</th>
<th>local, vulgar name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Brachystegia bohemmi</em>, <em>Brachystegia</em></td>
<td>miombo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>woodiana</em>, <em>Brachystegia longifolia</em>,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Brachystegia apertifolia</em> and others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Brachystegia floribunda</em> and <em>Brachystegia</em></td>
<td>tsamba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>hockii</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Brachystegia appendiculata</em></td>
<td>kamponi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Brachystegia bussei</em></td>
<td>mzeza (Topham op. cit.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Brachystegia floribunda* is particularly common in the Dedza Hills. Another
specific tree that grows southwest of Mwana wa Chentcherere II rock shelter is
*Brachystegia bohemmi* characteristic of poor soil and dry woodland.

The *Brachystegia-Julbernardia* genera are of great ecological importance as
certain animals and plants have evolved to live in this environment. For example,
‘the *Brachystegia sepciformis* is the food plant of 20 different species of cater-
pillars. *Brachystegia* is valued as a source of honey from wild bees and for
different types of fungi that grows under the trees. Roan antelope, sable antelope
and Lichtensteins hartebeest, are rarely found outside this woodland type’
(Shorter 1989: 50). According to Robinson (1975: 10) some people remembered
that Dedza upland game included large animals such as eland, elephant and
rhinoceros. Other animals such as lions were numerous while leopards and
hyenas are still commonly found.7

*Brachystegia* is commonly encountered along with *Uapaca kirkiana*, locally
know as *msuku* (*msuko* is the edible fruit), a combination which is an indication
of stony thin soils (Shorter 1989). The *msuku* trees are found just 300m down
slope of the rock shelter and they completely cover the lower flat areas that

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7 One day I encountered a small group of people surrounding a dead hyena that had been killed by a car
just a 100m outside the guest-house in Dedza. By the time I got there, the people had already removed
its sexual organs, mouth and tail for *mankhwala* (medicine).
surround the site (Figure 2.3). *Brachystegia* is confined to the higher altitudes in which the site is located.

Within the *Uapaca* woodland there are some other species of trees and bushes (Table 2.2).

![Image](image_url)

*Figure 2.3 Uapaca woodland, looking from Mwana wa Chentcherere II to the southwest (Photo: Leslie Zubieta)*

The vegetation that currently encloses this site is characterized by *Brachystegia* spp. and a variety of shrubs and grasses. Some of the species, within 50 meters of the site, were *mwimbi* or quinine tree (*Rauvolfia caffira*) used for malaria medicine and love potions; *Antidesma membranum*; *Brachystegia speciformis*; *Brachystegia floribunda*; *ntatu* (*Rhus spp.*); *Cassiona spicata*; *chisese* or broad-leaved beechwood (*Faurea speciosa*); and *kachere* or common wild fig (*Ficus natalensis*).

This transitional vegetation has replaced the commercial pine plantation that used to rest on the slope and that was felled cut in 2000 (Figure 2.4).
**Figure 2.4** Looking from the south-west across to Mwana wa Chentcherere II to the north-east  
(Photo: Leslie Zubieta)

**Table 2.2** *Uapaca* woodland vegetation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin name</th>
<th>local, vulgar name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Dichrostachys cinerea</em></td>
<td>chipangala or sickle bush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Syzygium cordatum</em></td>
<td>nyowe, katope, mchisu or water berry the purple fruit of which is edible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lippia spp.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ficus natalensis</em></td>
<td>kachere or common wild fig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ficus capensis</em></td>
<td>mkuyu or cape fig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Protea spp</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Philippia benguelensis</em></td>
<td>common tree philippia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Brachystegia longifolia</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Vanqueria infausta</em></td>
<td>machende akalulu or wild medlar, also with edible fruits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Maytenus putterlickiioides</em></td>
<td>large-flowered maytenus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Indigofera spp.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lannea discolour</em></td>
<td>sidyatungu or live-long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Faurea saligna</em></td>
<td>chandimbo or transvaal beechwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Faurea speciosa</em></td>
<td>chisese or broad-leaved beechwood, which is a protected species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mistotolle loranthus</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ficus verruculosa</em></td>
<td>waterfig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Asparagus spp.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ozoroa reticulate</em></td>
<td>currant resin tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Monotes glaber</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dissotes spp.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dombeya burgessii</em></td>
<td>chisutu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rhus spp.</em></td>
<td>ntatu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Acacia sieberana</em></td>
<td>paperbark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Patinari curatellifolia</em></td>
<td>muula or mobola plum, the fruit of which is edible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Combretum molle</em></td>
<td>velvet bushwillow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The transition zone between the miombo and the *Uapaca* woodland, which rests on the slope, is characterized by a variety of shrubs (Table 2.3).

**Table 2.3** Transition zone vegetation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin name</th>
<th>local, vulgar name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Grewia</em> spp.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Solanum gigantea</em></td>
<td>(specific of disturbed land)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dolicahus</em> spp.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lannea edulis</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Veronia amygdalina</em></td>
<td>tree veronia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rubus ellipticus</em></td>
<td>raspberry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ochna schweinfurthiana</em></td>
<td>brick-red ochna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Syzygium cordatum</em></td>
<td><em>nyowe, katope, mchisu</em> or water berry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The montane evergreen forest grows as patches on the plateau crests of Chongoni and Dedza mountains and is characterized by humid ferrallitic soils (Brown & Young 1965; Clark 1973) in which some species such as *Pygeum africanum*; *Apodytes dimidiatus*; *mlanje cedar* (*Widdringtonia whytei*) and trees of the Rubiaceae and Flacourtiaeae families are present (Topham 1952).

The lower areas that surround the Chongoni mountain, in all directions, are occupied by the most extensive vegetation community in central Malawi: *Brachystegia-Julbernardia* plateau woodland and savannah woodland. The Dedza mountain is surrounded from north, east and south by montane grassland consisting of short grassland, usually with scattered short trees and shrubs.

The Dedza Hills experiences a cool, wetish climate with a mean annual temperature of 17-19°C and a mean annual rainfall of 1000-1250mm, which contributes to making this an area of great agricultural productivity (Brown & Young 1965). Rainfall occurs from December to March with light rains continuing into April, constituting the moderately hot wet season. The cool season is from May to August, dry and with relatively low temperatures. The hot season is from September to November and early December with progressively increasing temperatures. Mwana wa Chentcherere II is surrounded by small permanent supplies of water situated in depressions. Only the larger streams are permanent; most streams flow only during the rainy seasons (Clark 1973).

**Previous research conducted at Mwana wa Chentcherere II**

During the period between mid-July and mid-September of 1972, Professor J. Desmond Clark organized a training excavation with students from the University of Malawi and the University of California at Berkeley to add new data to the archaeological knowledge of the area. It was the first time that an Iron Age
A survey was conducted in central Malawi (Clark 1973; Cole-King 1973; Robinson 1975; Crader 1984). Clark attempted a multidisciplinary view using a large team with varied skills and a large-scale excavation technique aimed at uncovering spatial variation in behaviour patterns. In line with the processual framework in which Clark worked, the aim of the project was to understand the adaptive processes and pressures over the past 2000 years in Central Africa.

The team consisted of a large group of people, some of whom later became well known archaeologists (Clark 1984): Jonathan Karoma, Hiro Kurashina and Karla Savage from Berkeley; Gadi Mgomezulu from the University of Malawi; Mr Chisambi, an oral historian from the Department of Antiquities of Malawi; James Denbow, archaeologist from Botswana; K. Hazel, a fine arts student and Keith R. Robinson who previously excavated in Malawi for his study on the Early Iron Age and who undertook a survey in central Malawi during the time that Clark and his team were excavating this site in 1972.

The excavation of Mwana wa Chentcherere II was carried out from the first of August to September 15th in 1972. Suzanne Riess recorded some of Desmond Clark’s memories of this particular excavation in 2002. He recalled the weather to be extremely cold – “perishingly cold”. Nevertheless his memories on Mwana wa Chentcherere II were recorded as follows:

… really quite an extremely interesting site because it covered what was in the time, I suppose, one of the latest Stone Age sites. I can't remember what the dates were that we got from it now. They were fairly recent, I think. And it was quite clear that these people were sort of foragers who were in contact with Iron Age food producers (Riess 2002: 375).

It was in these cold conditions that the students were trained with excavation techniques, drawing and mapping, classification and study of artifacts and site catchment analysis so as to understand the economic base of the inhabitants of the rock shelter (Clark 1973). Following Clark’s profound interest in food habits and environmental analysis, Diana Catherine Crader undertook a detailed examination of the bone assemblage recovered from the Later Stone Age layers of Mwana wa Chentcherere II. She sought to explain and reconstruct the subsistence activities. The publication of her study (Crader 1984) is one of the most detailed publications on an archaeological site in Malawi.

Cultural evidence

In order to establish relations between people and paintings, we need to understand where these populations were located in time and space. The archaeological evidence allows us to understand, in general, the distribution of past societies. Even more, the nature of archaeological evidence permits us to make inferences about population mobility and interaction.
• **The excavation**
The excavation of the 7.50m by 7.50m deposit in the central section of the rock shelter was chosen because of its more regular topography compared to the western section, which gradually slopes upwards, and to the less protected sector of the east. Some large boulders fell from the cliff above, partially covering the western section of the rock shelter. Some big rocks from the roof were found within the excavation, resting on the lower layers.

Clark (1973) and his team excavated 25 squares of 1.20m by 1.20m separated by a 0.30m baulks (Crader 1984: xiv). The excavation technique consisted of digging down in natural levels and when possible by 10cm spits. The maximum depth reached during excavation was approximately 1.11m in the far back and approximately 0.75m along the dripline.

The excavation revealed 5 natural layers that were comprised of debris consisting mostly of fine ashy deposits with a gradual transition from grey to light brown in the upper levels to darker colours in the lower ones. This colour change was disrupted only where hearths and silt lenses occurred. During the excavation, evidence of some roof spalling was found mainly in the upper levels, perhaps an indication of winter frost (Clark 1973: 33, 1984: xvii). However, the silt lenses operate as indicators of periodical abandonment, which Clark uses as evidence to propose seasonal occupation during the wetter and warmer seasons.

• **Materials**
Of the finds, the most common material was bone waste and, in some upper and protected levels, there was still evidence of vegetable remains. Ceramic material was found throughout the sequence. Within the deposit next to the backwall, beneath the top level, an extensive ash lens covered an area of 0.90-1.20m long in which most of the charcoal was mixed with animal bone remains. Beneath the hearths, a yellow-brown deposit contained remains of the early occupation of the site characterised by stone tools and fewer bone fragments (Clark 1973, 1984; Crader 1984). The back-wall of the shelter is covered by a sequence of rock art traditions, reflecting the presence of different populations in the site.

**Lithics**
Karla Savage undertook the lithic analysis of the site (Clark 1984: xix). Lithic debitage, mainly white and crystalline quartz, occurred throughout the deposit particularly in the lower levels and there seems to be continuity in the technology from beginning to end of the occupation. Retouched tools in quartz consisted of microlithic lunates and small convex scrapers. Larger tools comprised three edge-ground axes; a fragment of a talc-schist bored stone; quartz hammerstones, several combinations of pestle and rubbing stones and five grinding stones found
on the lower levels of which only one showed intensive use. Two flat large blocks showed evidence of pitting, probably used for cracking nuts or working bones (Clark 1973).

Ceramics
A total of 2187 potsherds were studied by Hiro Kurashina (Clark 1984). These potsherds were present throughout the excavation except in the lower layers, which comprised the earliest occupation. They belonged to all of the main traditions of ceramics recognized by Robinson (1975) in the southern Malawi Iron Age, with the exception of Kapeni ware.

The three pottery traditions found at Mwana wa Chentcherere II were (Clark 1973, 1984; Crader 1984):

1) The Nkope tradition: characteristic of the Early Iron Age and has dates ranging from the middle of the 3rd century A.D. to the A.D. 800 (Clark 1973; Mgomezulu 1978). According to Mgomezulu (1978: 212) the latest date of this ware comes from DZ6A site, which is dated back to the early 10th century A.D. This tradition appears to have been replaced in central Malawi around A.D. 800-1000 by Kapeni ware (Phillipson 1977: 175; Mgomezulu 1978: 218).

2) The Mawudzu tradition: The first temporal correlation of this ware was based on Robinson’s (1970) previous excavations in southern Malawi which indicated that it probably started during the 15th and 16th centuries A.D., or perhaps later, and occurred in sites traditionally associated with the Maravi peoples, ancestral to the Nyanja, Mang’anja and Chewa (Clark 1973; Cole-King 1973; Robinson 1975). Later on, Robinson’s (1975) excavations in central Malawi showed that this ware was typologically similar to the one at the Mawudzu Hill site in southern Malawi although it differed in its decorative motifs. ‘The herringbone pattern, incised or stamped, dominates Dedza variant’ (Robinson 1975: 43), while in the south the common patterns were incised geometrics, dragged meanders and cord impressions. These variations might indicate local ‘fashions’ or maybe a development over a period of time.

It was not until Mgomezulu’s (1978: 213) excavation at DZ40 on Chongoni Mountain that an early date for Mawudzu was confirmed. Sherds dated to A.D. 1160 show the presence of this ware near the start of the Late Iron Age. This

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8 Kapeni ware is infrequently found in the EIA pottery of Malawi. However, Robinson (1975: 43) associated it with the 12th to the 14th century in southern Malawi, and it has been found in Dedza District. Mgomezulu (1978: 210) has pushed back this dates at least 2 centuries and has related this ware to the 8th-14th century in central Malawi. He states that Kapeni sherds occur in rockshelters in larger quantities than the Nkope – but this was not the case in Mwana wa Chentcherere II.
ware thus has a long time range at Mwana wa Chentcherere between the 12th and the 18th century A.D (Clark 1984: xix).

3) The Bichrome Nkudzi Bay tradition: Dates to the mid 18th centuries leads into modern Chewa pottery. It appears that this ware directly follows the Mawudzu tradition and is ‘invariably associated with the long blue, white, or Indian red-on-green, cylinder beads belonging to the Arab slave trade period’ (Robinson 1975: 43). The archaeological evidence in southern Malawi points to the introduction of this tradition during the late 1700s and early 1800s. Mgomezulu (1978: 213) argues that the inception of this ware dates to about the mid 1700s and some of its characteristics can still be observed on the ceramics today.

These wares were found throughout the upper, middle and lower levels of the grey and brown natural levels of Mwana wa Chentcherere II. Although some disturbances occurred in a few places where fluvial erosion and animal nests produced a material mixture, in general the sequence is clear. Estimated dates from the ceramic traditions agree with those obtained from radiocarbon dating (Clark 1984: xix) and give us an important first insight into the people who inhabited the rock-shelter (see Table 2.5 below)

Bones
Bone tools in the form of fine, circular-sectioned bone points and bone awls were present throughout the deposit except in the upper levels. These would have been used for working hide and were made from a splinter of a long bone (Clark 1973). According to Clark (1984: xix), bone-working and the activities related to these bone tools appear to be concentrated in the northern part of the excavation.

A large number of animal remains provided evidence for an extensive catchment and shows the large range of animals hunted and the techniques for butchering and preparing food in the Later Stone Age (Clark 1973; Crader 1984). The species represented were antelope, zebra, warthog, bushpig, a single hippo bone, hares, rodents, monkey, bats, birds and a mud turtle. These bones were either burned or broken into small pieces: evidence of different food preparation methods.

The primary prey of the Later Stone Age inhabitants of Mwana wa Chentcherere II were various small bovids such as duiker, klipspringer, oribi and grysbok and infrequently Thomson’s gazelle. This general pattern has also been described in three other rock shelters located in the Linthipe/Chongoni area (Crader 1984: 169). A secondary concentration on large bovids such as wildebeest, hartebeest and sable/roan contributed large amounts of meat to the diet as did bushpigs, warthog and zebra.
On the last day of the excavation, a human burial was uncovered in one of the western bulks at the left end of the excavation. The bones were of a young male and were covered by some large stones. The weight of which had broken some of the bones. Given its position within the lower levels, its association with the earlier part of the Iron Age and its small stature (between 1.20m and 1.50m), the body was thought to be representative of the hunter-gatherer inhabitants of Mwana wa Chentcherere II (Clark 1973, 1984). Besides the burial, 21 separate human bones, representing at least 7 individuals (3 adults, 3 children and 1 infant) were present in the bone material remains (Crader 1984: 199).

Iron and copper
Iron was found in small quantities: fragments of a possible razor were found in the top layer and a thin double-ended point occurred in the middle layer. Copper also occurred in the form of wire in the Light Brown Earth (Clark 1973, 1984).

Plants
Plant remains such as fruits, leaves, flowers, roots, seeds, mushrooms, a gourd, a cucumber, msuko fruits (*Uapaca kirkiana*), cut fragments of reeds, knotted bark string were found, mainly in the upper layers. A wooden stake fragment was found in the middle layer (Clark 1973, 1984). Nevertheless, there is no evidence to suggest that inhabitants where involved in farming or agriculture and the few maize cobs found in the upper layers are thought to have been obtained through contact with agriculturalist (Crader 1984: 169).

Beads
A few beads were found (Clark 1973: 35) in the middle occupation layers, with one or two punctures and were made from freshwater molluscs (*Unio* sp.) and large African land snails (*Achatina* sp.). Clark (1973: 33, 1984: xvii) mentions also the presence of glass beads, iron and copper in the topmost layer as indicative of contact with Iron Age farming groups. Robinson (1975: 28) points out that no glass beads were recovered from any Iron Age site excavated in the Dedza area, with the exception of sites containing Nkudzi Ware or recent pottery. According to Robinson (1975: 45) the rareness of glass beads, in southern Malawí, ‘does not seem to indicate a considerable trade with the east coast’ before the 1700s-1800s although some contact is possible before those dates.

*Rock art*
Although little was said about the rock art in the previous research on the site, the backwall of Mwana wa Chentcherere II (Figure 2.2) is covered with rock paintings. It is this that gave the site its National Monument status. The oldest paint-
ings are a series of geometric designs painted in red and linked to the former hunter-gatherer inhabitants of this region (Clark 1959a, 1973; Lindgren & Schoffe-leers 1978; Juwayeyi & Phiri 1992; Smith 1995, 1997; but see Phillipson 1972, 1976 for a different opinion). These belong to what Smith (1995) has termed the Red Geometric tradition. The condition of the red paintings is very poor and they are faded almost beyond recognition. Just a few geometric designs (e.g., concentric circles and parallel vertical lines) are still visible and there is evidence of smudged red pigment under other paintings in many sections of the panel.

The Red Geometric tradition designs are overlain by a massive assemblage of what Smith (1995) termed the White Spread-eagled tradition. This tradition has been linked to the ancestors of the present Chewa inhabitants of the region (Metcalfe 1956; Clark 1959a; Phillipson 1972; Chaplin 1962; Lindgren & Schoffe-leers 1978; Juwayeyi & Phiri 1992; Smith 1995, 1997, 2001; Figure 2.5).

The spread-eagled motifs appear like stretched animal hides viewed from above (Smith 1997) and some are over a meter in length. The central body of these motifs generally runs vertically, often with various protrusions from its head and with “tails” (Lindgren & Schoffe-leers 1978). These characteristics have led researchers to suggest that spread-eagled motifs depict subjects such as chameleons, lizards, genet cats, tortoises and so forth (e.g., SchoFFE-leers 1978; Smith 1995). The subject and symbolic meanings of the White Spread-eagled designs are of great interest for this research.

![Figure 2.5 Paintings in the White Spread-eagled tradition at Mwana wa Chentcherere II (Photo: Benjamin Smith)](image)

The width of the body of the spread-eagled motifs varies greatly in proportion to their length, making some appear fat and others thin. Some show fingers on
their extremities, but other have rounded limbs. Four limbs protrude from the side of the body and they can extend outwards, upwards or downwards. The most common colour is white, although sometimes the pigment looks yellowish. Spread-eagled figures are often decorated with dots (Clark 1973). In Dedza District the dots are usually black, whereas in eastern Zambia white dots are sometimes used to fill-in the body (Smith 1995). Spread-eagled motifs have been found in massive superimpositioned sequences (e.g., Milonde, Kampika and Chongoni). They account for over two-thirds of images in the White Spread-eagled tradition in the Dedza area and eastern Zambia (Smith 1995). In Mwana wa Chentcherere II these paintings are the most common motif, and many occur painted on top of one another. However, I did not find more than two layers at any place within these white paintings.

The White Spread-eagled tradition not only comprises spread-eagled designs, but also a range of geometric designs such as circles and snake-like motifs (Smith 1995). At Mwana wa Chentcherere II geometrics include stars, concentric half ovals and lines of dots. It must be noted that although white is the principal colour used, it does not mean that red was not used. Mgomezulu (1978), for example, found a number of white paintings with red superimposition in the Chongoni/Linthipe area (e.g., a white painting in DZ40 with red dots on top of the body). Although the paintings at DZ40 were not of the White Spread-eagled tradition, they do indicate the use of red pigment by the Iron Age farmers. Smith (2001: 206) has published some examples of Nyau paintings made in red and has recorded a few examples of red daubed spread-eagled designs (Smith 1995: 104). We thus need to be careful of making assumptions with colour; not all red paintings relate to the hunter-gatherers populations.

The paintings at Mwana wa Chentcherere II were located as far down as a few centimetres above the cultural deposit and Clark (1973) stated that they did not occur under the debris unless they have been removed by soil acids or other interventions. I found that most of the paintings on the lower section of the panel are poorly preserved and difficult to observe because they are covered by dust, principally as result of the excavation that was never backfilled, as well as by insect residues such as cocoons and webs. The area where the excavation took place is still visible and erosion has affected the perimeter making the area longer. The worst obstacle to observing the paintings is the extensive graffiti at the site.

White pigment is fugitive because of the nature of its components, and it is the first paint to disappear in poorly protected rock shelters. Lindgren writes that ‘the white paint contains calcium carbonate (lime) and effervesces in hydrochloric acid’ (1978: 9). This suggests that no very great age can be ascribed to these paintings.
Some pigment samples taken from White Spread-eagled tradition designs in the Dedza area (Smith 1995: 215) revealed to be purely white riverine clay and no organic component, or binder, was obtained with which they could be dated. The maximum age ascribed to White Spread-eagled paintings, in the Dedza District, is around 1400 years based on the link that exists between the people ancestral to the Che’wa and the first appearance of Luangwa and related pottery in the 5th and 6th centuries A.D. (Smith 1995, 2001). White Spread-eagled tradition sites were documented in Dedza as early as 1920 (Metcalf 1956; Smith 1995, 2001). Clark (1973: 32) pointed out that these paintings cannot be very recent as some exfoliation of the rock has occurred since the motifs were painted in the site.

Beside the White Spread-eagled tradition and the Red Geometric tradition, Clark (1973: 31, 1984: xvi; see also Cole-King 1973: 46) also mentioned the existence of a ‘third style’ on the east section of the shelter, which consists of charcoal drawings representing Nyau costumes and which appeared to be of recent age. Unfortunately these images are no longer visible and they were not recorded on his unpublished tracing of the site in 1972. If there was any presence of black charcoal it is now completely erased because this eastern section of the back-wall is the worst preserved; even the white pigment has been badly eroded. Only two of the four Central African rock art traditions, therefore, occur at Mwana wa Chentcherere II and, of these, the bulk of paintings can be assigned to the White Spread-eagled tradition.

All four rock art traditions (the Red Animal; the Red Geometric; the White Zoomorphic and the White Spread-eagled) occur at Mwana wa Chentcherere Hill (Clark 1973; Smith 1995). Besides Mwana wa Chentcherere II, there are four other painted sites: two higher up to the northwest and two down the slope to the west. All of them have been affected by graffiti especially the ones down the slope which are the most accessible as they are just a few meters away from a dirt track.

The panel at Mwana wa Chentcherere II is 14 m long and I divide it into six arbitrary sections (see below, Figure 2.7) for the sake of convenience. Therefore, I will describe each of the figures in the panel taking into account these divisions. Each figure will be taken as such when they stand on their own or when there is some kind of superimposition that unifies them as a group under the category of figure. The panel will be discussed from west to east [It is recommendable for this section to check the Appendix].
### Table 2.4 Description of the images in the panel at Mwana wa Chentcherere II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ![Image 1](#) | White- yellowish | **Section 1-1**  
This is the first figure in the panel (left-west section). It is one of the largest spread-eagled designs at Mwana wa Chentcherere II.  
It is also a figure that stands alone. This figure is severely faded by the wash out area that is on its right. It is possible that this figure had some kind of head and two lower limbs but they are faded off. The yellowish pigment of this figure shows to be thick in the middle section. It is covered by graffiti. |
| ![Image 2](#) | Red         | **Section 1-2**  
Compared to other figures, this one is located on the highest part of the panel. It corresponds to the Red Geometric tradition of the hunter-gatherers. It is a figure composed of 6 straight vertical lines. It stands next to the washed-out area; though fortunately not close enough to have been damaged. It was probably part of another, bigger figure. |
| ![Image 3](#) | Red         | **Section 1-3**  
This concentration of red pigment is located in the washed-out area. It is impossible to make out any probable figure that was depicted. It is now covered by graffiti. |
| ![Image 4](#) | White       | **Section 2-1**  
This concentration of white pigment is probably related to the next figure (section 2-2), however, the distance between the two makes it difficult to determine with certainty if there is a connection. It is now covered by graffiti. |
Table 2.4  Description of the images in the panel at Mwana wa Chentcherere II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ![Image](image.png) | White | **Section 2-2**  
There are some interesting superimpositions between these figures. On the far left there is a figure in the form of an inverted L. It was probably part of another figure that is now completely faded by the washed-out area. On top of this figure there is a small snake-like figure which seems to be divided in two sections. The right section lies on top of a spread-eagled design that shows severe fading on its right section and the tail(?) is faded. The head of this spread-eagled design probably had another protrusion on the right side to match the one on the left. It should be noted that on this small section there is evidence of red pigment underneath the spread-eagled design.  
Below these figures there is another spread-eagled design with for limbs and a tail(?), the right lower limb and tail are broken into two parts. On the far right there is a small blob of paint, apparently, with no connection to the other figures. These last two figures are above a big flake. Interestingly, the blob on the right is painted over the flake scar. Graffiti impedes the visibility of the images. |
| ![Image](image.png) | Red | **Section 2-3**  
This is one of the best examples of the Red Geometric tradition at the site. Some sections of the circle are faded, while others such as the left and bottom sections are still clear. It is a circle formed by two concentric fine-line circles. It is now covered by graffiti. |
| ![Image](image.png) | Red | **Section 2-4**  
This concentration of red pigment is located under the previous figure. The connection between them is not certain. No identifiable figure was observed. It is now covered by graffiti.
Table 2.4 Description of the images in the panel at Mwana wa Chentcherere II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="white_black.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>White/Black</td>
<td><strong>Section 3-1</strong>&lt;br&gt;This thin spread-eagled design was painted next to a vertical ledge. It has four limbs and a tail(?) and the body of the figure is covered with small black dots. This figure is severely faded. It is covered by graffiti.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="white.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>White</td>
<td><strong>Section 3-2</strong>&lt;br&gt;This small blob has no apparent relation with the figures next to it. It is also standing close to a vertical ledge. No identifiable figure was observed. It is covered by graffiti.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="white_black.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>White/Black</td>
<td><strong>Section 3-3</strong>&lt;br&gt;This spread-eagled design has no head. The four limbs and the tail are covered with small black dots. It is severely faded. It is covered by graffiti. Next to this figure there is a small trace of red pigment. It too is covered by graffiti.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="white_red.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>White/Red</td>
<td><strong>Section 3-5</strong>&lt;br&gt;This figure presents sections of five different spread-eagled designs. It is almost impossible to distinguish anything in this area of the panel because of the repetitive superimpositions of images that today makes it look as if the whole area is covered with white pigment. Thus, it is probable that there were different figures here. Nevertheless, from left to right, the first figure was probably the upper section of a spread-eagled design; number two and three, in the middle, seem to be also the upper sections of spread-eagled designs (the left is on top of the right one). The fourth figure is almost complete, but the head is faded. It should be noted that there are traces of red pigment around it. The figure in the lower section represents the lower half of a spread-eagled design. What is interesting is that these images respect the ledge above them and they are all in line with the ledge. This section is covered with</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.4  Description of the images in the panel at Mwana wa Chentcherere II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>graffiti and the vegetation that grows close to the paintings is affecting the preservation of the pigment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Section 3-6 This group of figures follows the previous one to the right (east). The first image on the left is a spread-eagled design the head of which has now flaked off. To the right there is another spread-eagled design, the head and right upper limb of which are missing. Above this spread-eagled design there is a snake-like form. Underneath these figures there are some traces of red pigment. Some geometric designs, also part of the White Spread-eagled tradition, are visible below the spread-eagled designs: the first one is a long, thick, white vertical line next to which there is another smaller line-figure with black dots on it. To the right, another big line-figure has both extremities looking like the lower section of a spread-eagled design. The smallest figures to the right are four circles, one star-like shape and a complete and diminutive spread-eagled design. This group is massively covered by graffiti.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White/Black/Red</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Section 3-7 This spread-eagled design is located between two ledges. Its head and a small section of the left upper limb are missing. There is also a small white line, between the upper and lower right limbs, that perhaps belonged to another figure but it is hard to be certain since it is also faded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Section 4-1 This spread-eagled design is one of the few exceptions without graffiti. It is located high up in the panel. It is also a good example of a complete spread-eagled design covered with black dots, which are distributed in the middle and lower limbs. The surface of the rock where this figure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.4  Description of the images in the panel at Mwana wa Chentcherere II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White/Black/Red</td>
<td>was painted is convex starting from the ledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Section 4-2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>From left to right, the first spread-eagled design has a unique protrusion on its head: the top of the head has three protuberances. A thin, snake-like form crosses over its left shoulder. Three white blobs are situated below its left upper limb. An extremely faded circle with internal divisions is painted over this spread-eagled design, placed between its left lower limb and the tail(?) A wide flake cuts across the lower section of the body. A small area in the right-middle, inside this figure, has no pigment. Underneath the right upper limb of this figure a line has been projected to the right. This line seems to connect this figure with other two spread-eagled designs. To the right of the large spread-eagled design is a smaller one wearing a type of head-dress. This figure also has some black dots on its body. Underneath the line and this small spread-eagled design, there are traces of red pigment. Next to this figure there is a larger spread-eagled design that has some black dots on the body. Most notably, it has a big black, vertical line on the tail(?) section. The tail(?) is divided by a flake. Nevertheless a small portion of the end of the tail is still visible. This figure is on top of a thin vertical line, which is positioned underneath the upper and lower right (east) limbs. This line with three projected divisions on the upper section is similar to the ones in section 3-6. A small spread-eagled design is slightly separated by a small step on the rock; the singularity of this figure is that both arms are lifted up. Separated again by a small ledge there are 4 small geometric designs: a circle divided in two, and three star-like forms. This group is covered by graffiti.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.4  Description of the images in the panel at Mwana wa Chentcherere II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ![Image](image1.png) | White/Black/Red | **Section 4-3**
Next to the right (east) section of the previous figure four spread-eagled designs are located. The biggest one is on top of the other four and has some distinctive characteristics: all four limbs of the figure are four-fingered. This is the only case in the whole panel. It also has black dots on the body and it is probable that it had a thin, black, vertical line on the tail(?) (*cf.* section 4-2). The first, smaller, spread-eagled design to the left of the large one has a small rounded head and four limbs, the lower ones are unusually thin. The tail is beneath the lower limb of the bigger spread-eagled design. The next spread eagled design to the right also has four limbs, though, the right, upper one is underneath the lower right limb of the bigger spread-eagled design. The last figure is complete except for part of the head that is located underneath the upper right limb of the biggest spread-eagled design. Underneath these four spread-eagled designs there are traces of red pigment. This section is covered by graffiti. |
| ![Image](image2.png) | White/Red | **Section 4-4**
Below section 4-2, these figures are located. From left to right there is a thin curved live on the upper part, below this line there is a cross made out of very small white dots (*according to Lindgren (1978: 9) a ‘Maltese cross’*). A snake-like form with two protrusions is below the cross. Underneath these two images there are traces of red pigment. Below the right protrusion of the snake-like form there is a line with a circular design on one end and a series of short horizontal lines on the other. There are three small blobs of pigment clustered around the circle. A series of small geometric designs are below the snake-like form: one |
### Table 2.4  Description of the images in the panel at Mwana wa Chentcherere II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>blob, seven circles (two of them forming an 8-like shape) and four star-like spread-eagled figures. The last two figures in this section are: a long and thick line figure that is slightly inclined to the right and, the bottom section of a spread-eagled design, the head of which is faded. This section is completely devastated by graffiti.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Red</strong></td>
<td><strong>Section 4-5</strong> Below section 4-3 and right (east) from section 4-4 there are traces of red pigment around some of the ledges on the rock surface. No figure can be made out of this section. It is covered by graffiti.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>White/Red</strong></td>
<td><strong>Section 5-1</strong> From left to right there is a small white blob and underneath it there is trace of red pigment. Two spread-eagled designs are next, to the right, the left on top of the right one. Underneath the head of the left figure there are traces of red pigment. These two figures are badly preserved and they show several flakes. Below these two, there is another thick spread-eagled design that was depicted on top of the previous, left, one. It must be noted that the area of the tail(?) is flaked off. Next to this tail there is another white blob which probably was part of another figure, perhaps part of the spread-eagled(?) design that is next to this blob. The last figure of this group is a circle with an interior inverted ‘Y’ shape. This group is covered by graffiti.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>White/Black/Red</strong></td>
<td><strong>Section 5-2</strong> This group is below the previous one. There are several geometric designs: six star-like spread-eagled figures, a circle with an interior inverted ‘Y’ shape, a circle with an interior dot, a filled oval lying horizontally, a wavy line, three concentric arcs and two tiny half circles with small protuberances. The exterior arc is thicker and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.4  Description of the images in the panel at Mwana wa Chentcherere II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>in one of it ends there is a small circle on top of this and another internal arc. At the other end there is an elongated shape and a small interior dot. On the middle section of this elongated shape there are two black dots. The last figure is a long spread-eagled design that was painted on top of the outer arc. The lower section is flaked off. Underneath this group there are traces of red pigment. The group is covered by graffiti.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Section 5-3</strong>&lt;br&gt;This group is to the right (east) of the previous one. The main shapes are two white oval figures. The first one has a small interior flake. Below this oval there are seven white dots that are distributed in two horizontal, slightly diagonal, lines. A white blob crosses these two lines. The next oval is bigger than the first, and it is partly flaked off. A star-like spread-eagled figure is above this shape. Two small blobs are parallel to each other and were painted on top of the flake that destroyed part of the bigger oval. Next to this oval, there is another white blob. This group is covered by graffiti.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White/Black/Red</td>
<td><strong>Section 5-4</strong>&lt;br&gt;This long spread-eagled design is next to the group in section 5-1. It is almost complete and is covered by black dots that are mainly distributed on the middle section of the body. A flake cuts through part of the left lower limb and tail(?). Underneath this figure there are traces of red pigment. On top of the left upper limb, there is a thin, small, spread-eagled design in a more pinkish colour. It is covered by graffiti.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.4  Description of the images in the panel at Mwana wa Chentcherere II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>White/Black</td>
<td><strong>Section 5-5</strong> This group of three spread-eagled designs is located right (east) of the previous one. From left to right, the first figure is an inverted ‘L’ that probably was part of another figure. Next, to the right, there is a thick spread-eagled design, the tail of which was depicted in two different levels because of the surface morphology. The tail (?) is flaked-off at the end, and part of a blob is next to this flake. This spread-eagled design is on top of another spread-eagled design to its right, the limbs of which are hardly visible because of the superimposition on top of it. The head is faded off. The third spread-eagled design is almost complete, except for its head that is faded. This figure is the third example of a spread-eagled design that has not only black dots on the body, but also a vertical black line on the tail (cf. section 4-2, 4-3). Below the right upper limb of this last figure, there is a small white line that has some black dots on it, and that was probably part of another figure. This group is covered with graffiti.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>White/Black/Red</td>
<td><strong>Section 5-6</strong> This group is below the previous one. From left to right there is almost a complete spread-eagled design except for a small flake on top of the right lower limb. The tail has two small black dots. The next figure is another spread-eagled design, which has some sections flaked off and the tail is slightly curved. Underneath this second spread-eagled design there are traces of a fine-line white figure but is not distinguishable. I suspect it was an animal on profile. Underneath this group there are traces of red pigment. It is covered with graffiti.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.4  Description of the images in the panel at Mwana wa Chentcherere II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><strong>Section 5-7</strong>&lt;br&gt;This group is next, to the right (east) of the previous one. A long and faded pinkish spread-eagled design is on top of a set of five rows of white dots (35 dots in total). Two white blobs are above the set of rows. A small ledge below the pinkish spread-eagled design cuts-off three additional rows of white dots (8) next to which there is a spread-eagled-like shape and next to it in turn, the upper part of a spread-eagled design. There are some sections where there are traces of red pigment. This group is covered by graffiti.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><strong>White/Red</strong>&lt;br&gt;<em>Section 5-8</em>&lt;br&gt;This group is below the previous one, slightly to the left (west). From left to right there is a thick white line on top of a spread-eagled design, which is complete. Next to this there is a spread-eagled-like design. Between these last two, there are traces of red pigment. At the bottom of this group there is a small circle. These images are severely faded and covered by graffiti.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><strong>White/Red</strong>&lt;br&gt;<em>Section 6-1</em>&lt;br&gt;This group is at slightly above the level of section 5-5. It is a small White Spread-eagled-like form; two concentric circles in red – related to the Red Geometric tradition – and a small, white, filled circle is below these two concentric circles. This group is covered by graffiti.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><strong>White/Black/Red</strong>&lt;br&gt;<em>Section 6-2</em>&lt;br&gt;Next, to the right of the previous group, there is a big spread-eagled design. It must be noted that all the images in section 6 are the worst preserved in the panel. This spread-eagled design is severely faded as it is standing next to a washed-out area that is on the right (east) and that effects all the other figures below (<em>cf.</em> section 6-4 to 6-8). This spread-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.4 Description of the images in the panel at Mwana wa Chentcherere II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>eagled design is flaked-off in different sections of the body. It also has black dots on the body, which are covering most of it. At the inferior section of the figure, to the left (west), there are two additional lower sections of spread-eagled designs, which are also faded. Underneath the bigger spread-eagled design there are traces of red pigment. This group is covered by graffiti.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|         |        | **Section 6-3**  
This figure is below the previous one, slightly to the left (west). There is a small, long, white blob above the ledge. Below the same ledge there is perhaps another spread-eagled design, but the state of preservation is poor. Most parts of the limbs are missing and the interior area is flaked-off. There are traces of red pigment around this figure. It is covered by graffiti. |
|         |        | **Section 6-4**  
Next, to the right of the previous figure, there is another spread-eagled design, the head and a section of the lower right limb of which is flaked-off. The right upper limb is faded. A small circle is next to the left section of the spread-eagled. There are traces of red pigment on this side. It is covered by graffiti. |
|         |        | **Section 6-5**  
These small figures are placed slightly below and to the right (east) of the previous group. There are two figures: the first one is a fine-line geometric figure made out of ten short vertical red lines which are crossed by an horizontal red line. Next to this figure there is a filled white circle that is flaked-off in the interior. Next to the circle there are traces of red pigment. The area surrounding these figures is completely flaked-off. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ![Image](image1.png) | White/Red | **Section 6-6**  
This group is above the previous one. There are two figures that were probably part of spread-eagled designs. There are traces of red pigment next to the first figure on the left. |
| ![Image](image2.png) | White/Red | **Section 6-7**  
This figure is next to section 5-7. The main figure is a spread-eagled design, the head of which is faded. A small section of the tail was painted on top of a step of rock. There are traces of red pigment on this section of the spread-eagled design. A small circle is below the left section of the spread-eagled design. This group is covered by graffiti. |
| ![Image](image3.png) | White | **Section 6-8**  
This figure is to the right (east) of the previous one. A long line runs vertically; next to this there is probably the lower section of a spread-eagled design, but is hard to be certain since the upper section is faded. There are some traces of red pigment on the upper area of this group. These figures are badly preserved. |
| ![Image](image4.png) | White/Red | **Section 6-9**  
The last figure on this panel is to the right (east) of the previous one. It is hard to tell if there were two or just one spread-eagled design here. There are some traces of red pigment around this figure. Small blobs of white paint above it suggest that all of them where part of the same figure. This image is completely faded and, in my opinion, is the worst preserved of the panel. |
Table 2.5  Correlation of materials, levels and dates in Mwana wa Chentcherere II  
(Based on Clark 1973, 1984 and Crader 1984).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Temporal Association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Upper layer</strong></td>
<td><em>Grey Powdery Earth (GPE) (0-10.2cm).</em>&lt;br&gt;<em>Light Brown Earth (LBE) (10.2-30.5cm)</em></td>
<td>Dates to the period of the Ngoni raids in the 19th century A.D. The local Cheŵa, according to informants, took refuge in this shelter with no other possession but their goats (Clark 1973: 33). The LBE may be no earlier than the mid-12th century A.D. (Mgomezulu 1978; Clark 1984). Therefore, this layer dates from the 12th century until late 19th century A.D. UCLA 1852 A (20.3-30.5cm) 800±50 b.p. (LBE).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vegetable remains (GPE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nkudzi ware (GPE &amp; LBE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mawudzu ware (GPE &amp; LBE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nkope ware (disturbance)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Glass beads (GPE &amp; LBE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flat iron fragments (probably razor)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wound copper fragments (LBE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shell beads (LBE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stone tools (GPE &amp; LBE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Middle layer** | *Brown Earth (BE) (30.5-81.3cm)* | On the basis of pottery this layer might date between the 2nd and 10th centuries A.D. (Clark 1984: xvii). UCLA 1852 B (40.6-43.2cm) 1250±50 b.p. UCLA 1852 C (71.1-81.3cm) 2410±50 b.p. |
|                  | Mawudzu ware                               |                                                            |
|                  | Nkope ware                                 |                                                            |
|                  | Fresh mollusc and land snail beads         |                                                            |
|                  | Stone tools                                |                                                            |
|                  | Percussion flaked and ground-stone axes    |                                                            |
|                  | Thin-double ended iron point               |                                                            |
|                  | Human burial (started on lower part of BE) |                                                            |

| **Lower layer** | *Dark Brown Earth (DBE) (81.3-111.8cm)*<br>*Yellow Brown Earth (YBE) (Above bedrock)* | UCLA 1825 D Combined sample from depth of: (101.6-106.7cm) and (106.7-111.8cm) 2480±200 b.p. (Clark 1984: xvii). This layer’s dates start at 500 B.C. |
|                | 1 Nkope sherd (DBE)                        |                                                            |
|                | Stone tools                                |                                                            |
|                | Faunal remains                             |                                                            |

- **Dates**

Prior to radiocarbon dating, the dating of Mwana wa Chentcherere II was based on ceramics. These confirmed a recent occupation of the shelter as well as a Stone Age occupation extending back to 500 B.C. It was not until 1984 that radiocarbon dates were published for the site (Clark 1984: xvii). Four radiocarbon dates were obtained during the excavation and confirmed that the occupation began around 2500 b.p. and continued until recent times (Clark 1984: xvii⁹; Table 2.5).

⁹ The dates on this publication are uncalibrated.
Unfortunately, there is no date for the deposit between 43.2 and 71.1 cm, as it appears to be the contact period between the hunter-gatherers and Early Iron Age farmers (Clark 1984: xvii), before 1250±50 b.p.

**Discussion**

In order to analyze the cultural evidence at Mwana wa Chentcherere II it is important to consider the limits of conventional archaeological terms such as Later Stone Age’ or ‘Early Iron Age’. In our attempts to understand the context of interacting groups these terms restrict our interpretations by assuming that one is earlier than the other, thus, as obvious as it may seem, we are always trying to fit the evidence within temporal frameworks.

This dating and the sequence throws up terminological challenges as traditional labels such as Later Stone Age and Iron Age are used as temporal frameworks and to differentiate ways of life. Thus, these terms are not helpful when we want to explain how hunter-gatherers from the Later Stone Age interacted with farming people during the Early Iron Age. Phillipson argues that the term Later Stone Age has ‘few implications other than reference to the more recent groupings of stone tool industries in each respective area, and carries an unfortunate mixture of typological and temporal implications’ (Phillipson 1977: 23). Therefore, I believe that our archaeological mind needs to be prepared to understand interactions in a more flexible way than is possible with the traditional labelling. I will therefore try to talk of specific population groups (e.g., Batwa-hunter-gatherers). I use Later Stone Age and Early Iron Age to refer to specific periods of time: Later Stone Age (before 2000 B.P.); Early Iron Age (A.D. 0-1000) and Late Iron Age (A.D. 1000-1900); as they may still be useful to present and give some order to the cultural evidence.

The understanding of populations’ mobility and interaction comprises different types of data, such as environmental analysis, archaeological evidence and historical accounts, which, together, help to present a stronger argument for different questions such as authorship and meaning of the cultural material. Moreover, conclusions sometimes change when more data becomes available or when the previous data is analyzed in a different way. I will therefore reconsider some aspects of the existing sequence from Mwana wa Chentcherere II as well as introducing my new findings.

- **Inhabitants**

Keith R. Robinson who was surveying for Iron Age sites in central Malawi in 1972 postulated that agriculturalists settled in this area, around Dedza Hills, just before the 16th century or perhaps later (Clark 1973: 30): the upland area was occupied until recent times (Robinson 1975: 10). The early farmers were few in
number and they did not live in the mountains because the lower riverine areas, such as the one next to the Linthipe River, were of far greater agricultural potential than the rocky-soils next to Chentcherere.\textsuperscript{10} The earliest village known from the Early Iron Age in the riverine area in the Dedza District is Tambala, 27km north from Mwana wa Chentcherere Hill, dated to the 6th century A.D. (Robinson 1975: 15-18).

The lands around Mwana wa Chentcherere II were perfect for hunting and gathering. The site itself provides an extensive view of the \textit{Uapaca} woodland and the related fauna, thus making it ideally suited for hunter-gatherer habitation (Figure 2.6).

Based on both temporal and material associations, Mwana wa Chentcherere II was first occupied by hunter-gatherers in the middle half of the first millennium B.C. More recently, between the 8th-10th century A.D., contact with farmers began and intensified from the 13th century onwards at least until the 18th century A.D. In spite of this clear chronology of interaction, the overall picture of contact between different populations in central Malawi is a complex and varied one.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure_2.6.jpg}
\caption{View from Mwana Chentcherere II across to the southwest; the hill on the left is Chentcherere. (Photo: Leslie Zubieta)}
\end{figure}

Farmer groups seem to have migrated into the area and then moved around and other groups were displaced by the arrival of new people. Thus, according to Clark (1984) the occupation of Mwana wa Chentcherere II can be divided in two parts: 1) a pre hunter/gatherer-farmer contact period and 2) a post hunter-gatherer-farmer contact period.

From the material culture evidence it seem clear that Mwana wa Chentcherere II was never occupied by early farmers and that it remained a hunter-gatherer site throughout the Early Iron Age period. This means that the White Spread-eagled tradition must have been made in the Late Iron Age. Although Crader and Clark should have realised this, there is no discussion of this in their site reports. The rock art was treated as an ‘optional adjunct’. I seek here to make it an integral

\textsuperscript{10} It is possible that because the nature of the soil ‘no occupation deposit of more than a few centimetres in thickness was located on or near the two hills [referring to Chentcherere]’ (Robinson 1975: 19).
and crucial part of the archaeological interpretation (Lewis-Williams 1990: 126) of the site.

While there are no hunter-gatherers left in this region, memories of them remain fresh. Clark (1973: 40) wrote that ‘an old informant spoke of meeting a group of five Batwa men camped at Mlanda near Bembeke in the later years of the last century’. Mlanda is only 30km from Chentcherere, so there were Batwa living in this area until the late 1800s. The ancestors of these last Batwa had inhabited Central Africa for thousands of years (Smith & Blundell in press), and their late survival in the Dedza hills is probably explained by the poor agricultural potential of the area. Even today, much of the area remains a forest reserve.

The processes of contact between hunter-gatherers and farmer people have been addressed in central Malawi by various researchers (Clark 1973, 1984; Robinson 1975; Mgomezulu 1978; Crader 1984). However, Gadi Mgomezulu’s work is most pertinent to this thesis. Mgomezulu explained the lithic continuum within the Chongoni/Linthipe area as evidence of a process in which the hunter-gatherers instead of being ‘displaced’, ‘co-existed’ with Iron Age farmers. This process ended with the gradual assimilation of hunter-gatherers into the food-production economy (Phillipson 1977: 252).

Mgomezulu (1978) used three key pieces of evidence to support his hypothesis (Crader later used the model to discuss the cultural sequence of Mwana wa Chentcherere II; Crader 1984: 175):

1) There are no observable breaks in the cultural record from the Nkope ware until the Nkudzi ware.
2) The presence of small number of sherds as well as bone remains of domesticated animals.
3) The stone technology continued uninterrupted to the end of the 17th century A.D.

Based on this evidence Crader argued that the hunter-gatherers and farming groups integrated very slowly; both recognized their wide cultural and social divergence (Crader 1984: 176). Farmers remained on the rich soils of the river valley and the hunter-gatherer Batwa remained in places like Chentcherere in the hills. The contact became more imminent when Iron Age farmers had to look for new places to farm and hunter-gatherers moved during the dry seasons to areas with permanent water resources, where farmers were already settled.

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11 It is interesting to note that in DZ40 (Chongoni Bible Training School); DZ6A and B (Mwala wa Chitese); DZ12 (Phanga la Ngoni) and DZ126 (Muzi Rockshelter); five of the six rockshelters excavated by Mgomezulu (1978) had the presence of white paintings. Just DZ50 (“Hand-Paintings” Rockshelter) was particularly characterized by the presence of white paintings of hands, which might perhaps have been made recently by children (Mgomezulu 1978: 111).
But, who were the farmer people? We are not concerned here with the Early Iron Age farmers as they play no part in the Mwana wa Chentcherere II story and only have a small presence in upland central Malawi as a whole. My emphasis is on the Maravi/Cheŵa peoples, who we know from both historic sources and archaeological research, inhabited central Malawi and who, along with people ancestral to them, made the White Spread-eagled rock tradition of Mwana wa Chentcherere II.

The earliest possible date for the arrival of the western matrilineal Bantu-speaking groups in Central Africa is placed in the 5th or 6th century A.D. based on the appearance of the Luangwa pottery in the archaeological record (Smith 2001: 194). The arrival of matrilineal groups is linked to the Luangwa and related pottery traditions (Huffman 1989). Moreover, Luangwa pottery is still made by the women from various groups such as the Cheŵa, Bemba and Nsenga (Phillipson 1993; Huffman 1989; Smith 1995). A number of clans continued to arrive from the west after A.D. 1000, suggested by the appearance of the Mawudzu tradition. According to Mgomezulu (1978: 32) by the 15th century A.D. the Cheŵa peoples, were settled in central Malawi.

The Cheŵa people were not, however, the first inhabitants of Malawi. On arrival they encountered hunter-gatherer people, the Akafula/Batwa/Amwandionerapati/Nlukuwewe who were said to be short, but very astute people, ‘little people’, with no permanent homes (Werner 1925: Chapter IX; Metcalfe 1954; Ntara 1973: 98; Cole-King 1973; Nurse 1974; Mgomezulu 1978; see Stannus 1915 for same legends amongst the Yao and Nyanja).

The historical accounts indicate that from the 15th century A.D. central Malawi was under the control of a powerful central Chieftainship. Portuguese reports refer to the “Maravi Empire” and its Chief Kalonga (Ntara 1973). By the 17th century A.D. extensive trade was taking place between Kalonga’s kingdom and the Indian Ocean. The Maravi/Cheŵa Empire spread from Zambia to Moçambique (Mgomezulu 1978). During this time the Portuguese were involved in slave-raiding and trading, which also constituted a part in the breakdown of the Maravi Empire (Nurse 1974).

During the 19th century other groups started to move into Malawi (Mgomezulu 1978: 214-215) and threatened the power of Kalonga: the Ngoni from South Africa, the Yao from east of Lake Malawi and the Lomwe from Moçambique.

The first Ngoni group crossed the northern part of Malawi in the 1840s heading towards Tanzania and then split into different groups one of which, the M’mbelwa returned to Malawi and settled among the Tumbuka in northern Malawi in 1855. The second Ngoni group crossed the Zambezi around 1835 passing through Dedza on their way to Songea in Tanzania. There they encountered the Zulu Gama group who forced the Ngoni people, led by Maseko, to go
back to Malawi where they settled in 1871 amongst the Chewa in Ntcheu and Dedza area (Mgomezulu 1978: 32-36).

During the patrilineal Ngoni invasion Chewa people had to leave their villages and seek refuge in the mountains (Robinson 1975). The bichrome potsherds, glass beads and wound copper fragments found in the topmost layers of Mwana wa Chentcherere II probably date to this period. Mgomezulu (1978: 215-216) states that Nkudzi ware and Mawudzu ware are probably related to the Chewa people. These two pottery traditions were found at Mwana wa Chentcherere II. According to Clark (1973: 33) local informants remember the Ngoni raids and stated that the Chewa took refuge in the Mwana wa Chentcherere II ‘with no other possession but their goats’. According to Hodgson (1933: 127) the Chewa living round Dedza and south of Dowa were known as Achipeta (chipeta, long grass), a nickname given to them during the raids because they ran away and hid themselves in the long grass (Schoffeleers [1992: 28] states that Chipeta was used long before the Ngoni raids to designate people who lived in ecosystems consisting of tall grass).

More or less at the same time as the Ngoni raids (1850-1870) the Yao, who were originally settled east of Lake Malawi near the Ruvuma River, also moved into Malawi due to the conflicts with the Ngoni and the Lomwe. They arrived in the southern part of Malawi and began active slave trading (Robinson 1975: 10; Mgomezulu 1978). Although Yao settlement occurred in the c. 1850s, Yao slave traders had been operating amongst the Chewa and Mang’anja inhabitants of southern Malawi before this date (Robinson 1975: 45).

The Lomwe moved in large numbers into the south-eastern part of Malawi around 1897-1907 and more recently the Sena have been migrating from the Zambezi into the south of Malawi (Mgomezulu 1978).

In consequence Dedza District’s present inhabitants are a combination of different populations particularly Chewa, Yao and Ngoni. However, according to Phillipson (1977: 176) it is safe to say that there has been a much greater continuity of populations during the past eight or nine centuries than a literal interpretation of the oral tradition indicates. I believe it is important to note the interactions between different populations here as they are not only reflected in the trade of artefacts, but also had a profound effect on the ideology of these groups. Moreover, some ceremonies have been adopted, changed or fused. Therefore in linking any kind of ritual with the rock art we need to be aware that it is possible

12 Two aspects support this assumption: it dates between 12th-18th century A.D., ‘a period that almost coincides with the coming of the Maravi peoples, the height and the decline of the “Maravi” Empire’ (Mgomezulu 1978: 216) and the geographical distribution corresponds well with the Maravi/Chewa peoples.

13 An elderly woman from Mpalale village told me the same thing during my visit to Mwana wa Chentcherere II.
that we will find relevant information amongst the neighbour groups of the Cheřa.  

According to Clark (1973: 40) the excavated deposits of Mwana wa Chentcherere II represent occupation by hunter-gatherers and not cultivators. He suggests the potsherds show evidence of interaction with farmers (Mgomezulu 1978; Crader 1984 for further discussion). However, the massive presence of farmer authored white paintings suggests the contrary: farmers regularly used the shelter at some point in time. There are three possibilities for the presence of the white tradition in Mwana wa Chentcherere II, the first two are:

1) The paintings were depicted after the hunter-gatherers abandoned the site or were pushed to leave the site, when the Cheřa occupied the shelter at the time of the Ngoni raids.  
2) The paintings were made after the hunter-gatherers abandoned the site or were pushed to leave the site by Cheřa people who used the shelter for other purposes, than just to inhabit it, in a time before the Ngoni raids.

On the basis of the superposition sequence and level of fading of the white painting tradition in Mwana wa Chentcherere II I would put the last hunter-gatherer occupation of this site back to at least 200 years (at least the last painting of Batwa group). Moreover, I think the few maize cobs found in the upper levels, the Nkudzi pottery and the glass beads are related to the most recent inhabitants of the site who were undoubtedly agriculturalists and who were Cheřa.

By saying this, I am not stating that these Iron Age people had to live in the site. As Crader writes, we would expect to find an artefact assemblage not essentially different from those found in Iron Age settlements to state that Iron Age people inhabit the rock-shelter: ‘we would expect to find at least several more iron tools, especially in the upper levels, since these would be useful for hunting and butchering game’ (Crader 1984: 174).

The type of occupation I will argue for on the basis of the paintings is one which does not need tools to butcher animals: an occupation based on a ritual use

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14 For example, Rangeley (1949: 35) has described the adoption of Nyau by other groups such as the Yao and the Ngoni. Phillipson (1977: 177) wrote that the Ngoni language has been almost entirely superseded by those of the Cheřa and Nsenga. Smith (2001: 190) wrote that the Nyau is a closed association of the Cheřa, Nyanja and Mang’anja people of central and southern Malawi, eastern Zambia and neighboring parts of Mozambique (cf. Linden 1974: 117). Hodgson (1933: 128) states that during the last four decades the Ngoni and Cheřa intermarried and now there are just a few pure Ngoni living in the Dowa District c. 100km north from Dedza. Stannus (1910: 285) comments that the people living south of Lake Nyasa, the Nyanja, has been mixed with the Yao and the Ngoni (cf. Mair 1951b).

15 However, Robinson (1975: 12) states that although the Maseko Ngoni are unlikely to have impacted upon the area much before 1870, the presence of MaWudzu ceramics (earlier to the Ngoni raids) in other sites such as Big Tree, north of Dedza Mountain, stands as evidence of an occupation of Cheřa ancestors prior to the Ngoni; meaning that it is possible that Cheřa people occupied areas near to the hills independently of the Ngoni raids.
of the site. Based on our present knowledge of the connection between rock art and girls’ initiation (Smith 1995, 1997: Chapter 4), Mwana wa Chentcherere II was an area secluded from people’s eyes, especially men, and this is why the analysis of the cultural evidence needs to be re-read with such a view: as a site used for ritual purposes. In this scenario, a third possibility for the date of the white-paintings becomes possible:

3) The white paintings were executed at a time when the relations between the Cheřa and the Batwa were good, and when there was ‘co-existence’. During the wet and warmer seasons the shelter was inhabited by hunter-gatherers and during the dry season Iron Age people used it for rituals purposes: the time of the year of girls’ initiation rituals16.

Research conducted at Mwana wa Chentcherere II in 2003

Thanks to the permission and support of the Department of Antiquities of Malawi I was able to conduct research at Mwana wa Chentcherere II in November and December 2003. My research involved no direct contact with the paintings. I neither removed any cultural material nor excavated any cultural deposit.

My research would not have been possible without the consent of the chiefs, elders and women of the local community. I thank them for their support (Acknowledgements).

The Department of Antiquities provided me with a female interpreter. It was absolutely necessary for the interpreter to be a woman because the research related to girls’ initiation ceremonies amongst the Cheřa, and the knowledge of these ceremonies is restricted to women.

During the fieldwork I produced several maps of the site, such as a ground plan (Figure 2.2) as well as six cross-sections of the shelter, which correspond to the six sections in which I divided the redrawing for practical reasons (Figure 2.7), and an elevation map (Figure 4.21). All of these were done with the help of a compass, two 50m tapes and a 3m tape with the assistance of Mr James Chiwaya and Mr Noah Siwinda from the town of Dedza. I also photographed (with slide film ASA 50 Fujichrome Velvia) the paintings to document their present state of preservation. These photographs will become part of the Rock Art Research Institute photograph archive in the University of the Witwatersrand.

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16 According to van Breugel (2001: 189) Chinamwali takes place usually during the season after the harvest (June-November). Schoffeleers (1999: 154) comments that the final stage of the initiation ceremonies ‘coincided with the time of the great rain prayer and seems to have been part of them’. Werner (1906: 124) comments that amongst the Yao, the initiation takes place every year, during the dry season before the grass is burnt.
Copies of all recordings and this thesis will also be housed by the Department of Antiquities of Malawi.

Figure 2.7 Cross-sections of the shelter, from west to east, corresponding to the area where the paintings are located. The separation between each section is c. 2.3m.
(Drawing: Leslie Zubieta)

Another crucial phase for this research was to talk to Chewa women about different aspects of the site and the Chinamwali ritual. I interviewed some women at Mwana wa Chentcherere II in order to record their comments and points of view about the paintings of this important site (Chapter 4). In this
thesis, I record those matters they were happy for me to write about; I will protect the secrecy of other things that they requested not to be reported.

The criteria I used to select the informants for interview, was based on age and title, following Turner’s (1967) method of analysis (see Chapter 1, Objectives). Mainly, they were ladies between 40-80 years old who have the title of namkungwi and phungu (ritual specialists). These women are the ones who have a detailed knowledge of the Chinamwali and who I thought would know more about the paintings at the site. The ladies were taken to the site in two separate groups because those from one village could not join us on the same day as the other group. It proved a valuable experience as it allowed me to record the differences in opinions and knowledge between the ladies of the two villages (Chapter 4).

Redrawing process
The reconstruction of the painting sequence in Mwana wa Chentcherere II required, prior to interpretation, the production of an accurate drawing; one of the reasons for my visit to the site.

In order to produce a final drawing of Mwana wa Chentcherere II rock art I had to proceed through various steps. First I used different sources of information such as old unpublished tracings from the last three decades in combination with old and recent photographs from the Rock Art Research Institute (RARI) photographic archive, to produce a single combined tracing of Mwana wa Chentcherere II. I then took this master tracing to the site and contrasted it with the original paintings. This was necessary in order to verify the accuracy of previous tracings and to compare it with the present preservation of the paintings at the site. I corrected the tracing in the field and with every detail determined, brought the tracing back and redrew it in the laboratories of RARI. It should be noted that I did not re-trace the site not only because of a time constraint but also because some of the paintings that were previously traced are no longer visible. The purpose of my drawing is to offer a ‘reconstruction’ of the paintings of the site; if the purpose was to show the degrees of fading of the paintings then it would have been necessary to undertake an adequate and preciseness tracing of the site.

The most important source for my drawing was the site tracing of Miss K. Hazel who used 2m x 1m plastic sheets and different coloured chinagraph pencils to record the sites in 1972 (Clark 1973: 32). However, these tracings were never transferred to paper or reduced for publication as intended. Copying and reducing the tracing onto a single sheet took Jasmin Vincent, a fine art student from Wits, more than four months in 2001.
However, this reduced copy was a true copy of the original tracing and as such had its own problems. Some of the figures were fused with others, and by looking at photographs I realized that sections of the site were not accurately traced. I therefore compared every traced figure with photographs so as to ease out and correct all errors in the original tracing. Since there was no point in using ink for this first step, I unscrambled the different motifs using a 0.35mm clutch pencil to delineate the contours of each figure on tracing paper. This analysis constituted the longest task for the production of the master tracing that I took to the field.

Drawing directly from photographs has certain disadvantages because a picture usually does not reveal details of the real painting or give a precise detail of faded paintings (Schoonraad 1965; Pearce 2003). However, the White Spread-eagled tradition does not consist of fine details like the Bushman paintings in South Africa. I was able to overcome these difficulties by combining the previous tracing of Mwana wa Chentcherere II with photographs taken in different periods of time (Pearce 2003) to produce a master tracing. Moreover, the final step consisted of comparing the master tracing with the paintings at the site.

Tracing not only comprises an ability to see different silhouettes and colours on a rock surface but also patience and a capacity for interpretation, and as such, each person has a different perception of what they are observing. To overcome this problem I asked a series of experienced rock art recorders to comment upon my tracing and check for areas where they saw things differently.

With this master tracing on paper, I was able to improve the record further by spending long hours looking at the paintings at the site, hampered constantly by the extensive graffiti and the covering of dust and diminutive insect webs adhered to the rock surface (Figure 2.8).

Thirty-two years have passed since Desmond Clark excavated the site. Unfortunately he died recently, before the rock art had been studied and interpreted. This is therefore a good opportunity not only to finalise the rock art record of Mwana wa Chentcherere II (Appendix) but also to contribute to the interpretation of the paintings at this exceptional site.

The White Spread-eagled tradition is interpreted in this study as the expression of the ideas and values of countless generations of Cheŵa women. This art is a rare example of an art exclusively associate with women, and this study will provide invaluable information on one of the most intimate of women’s practices: girls’ initiation. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that we shall ever fully understand all of the painted motifs since we are unable to examine them in their functioning context (Smith 2001: 207). However, through both ethnographic analogy and recent social analysis of the body, I intend to provide some new insight into the meaning of this rock art tradition.
Figure 2.8  Graffiti and dust covering the paintings at Mwana wa Chentcherere II
(Photo: Lesie Zubieta)
The theoretical framework and methods

Theoretical framework

The social construction of a Chewa woman’s body and the specific gender perceptions of the Chewa community will be analyzed using “body theory” (e.g., Synott 1993; Turner 1996) so as to understand the meaning of the paintings connected to girls’ initiation ceremonies at Mwana wa Chentcherere II. My work on perceptions of the body will incorporate a number of discourses on sex, gender, sexuality and identity, following other studies on identity and the body (e.g., Meskell 1999). The category of gender is a powerful and fundamental historical process and structuring principle within society: it is a dynamic cultural construction. Gender has been one of the most controversial topics in rock art research.

As I will discuss below, it is highly probable that some components of the Mwana wa Chentcherere II rock art reflect statements about gender relations, but these aspects need to be understood within social relations and a framework of belief; in this case the beliefs and social relations of the Chewa because we know that the White Spread-eagled rock art tradition is linked to this cultural group. This gender theoretical framework will allow me to explain how gender perceptions articulate with the rock art and how the art was used to reinforce gender roles within Chewa society. Furthermore, this theoretical framework will be used along with ethnographic analogy to lay the foundations for the parallels I will propose in this research between the ritual and the rock art.

The academic study of gender is not restricted to feminism. Gender centres on the social construction of masculinity and femininity and the social values invested in the sexual difference between women and men (Gilchrist 1991). I believe that body theory and gender theory will prove valuable in this study because Mwana wa Chentcherere II rock art is directly linked to female concerns.
Body theory and gender

Social and cultural analyses of the human body have grown in popularity in recent years, becoming known under the name “body theory”. This theory has offered us a new way to consider and handle some of the problems that previous social analyses did not solve. Body issues have been successfully used in social theory and have had a great impact on and contributed to the way we understand the past in both archaeological and rock art research.

As Margaret Conkey and Janet Spector (1984: 2) point out there is no systematic work in the archaeological study of gender or field manuals with titles like “Methods for Examining Gender through the Archaeological Record”. However, this does not mean that archaeologists have not written about gender, gender structures or gender behaviour; there have been a few publications that attempt to engender the study of African rock art (e.g., Mazel 1992; Solomon 1994; Stevenson 1995) and to contribute to gender issues in African and southern African archaeology (e.g., Kent 1998; Wadley 1997).

Gender can be perceived in different ways, as an expression of behaviour, role, identity and sexuality. Gender is a cultural construction of femininity and masculinity, and has been seen as separated from biological sex (male or female) with which we are born (Nelson 1997; see Meskell 1999: 86-87 for a different opinion). As researchers we need to recognize that what is ‘natural’ (biological) for us is defined differently in various cultures and therefore different discourses and produce different understandings about gender and the body.

In this study I will refer to gender as a set of roles, and I will focus on the ways these are constructed, both at the individual level and at a cultural level through the recognition of the body functions and behaviour. Gender roles in this sense are the set of tasks that a human being fills within society based on social expectations deeply rooted in stereotypes of how a person of a particular sex should act, think or feel.

There are different ways to construct the roles that men and women socially perform: one is through initiation rituals in which gender takes centre stage, as will be discussed in detail further on. Nevertheless, it is vital for this study to appreciate that gender is not only a dichotomy between female and male issues, it is more about connections and relationships involving these two human spheres (Stevenson 1995).

The body

When people are asked “what is the body?” the answer often relates to the physical features of it. It is inevitable to think about ears, eyes, hair, lips, legs, vulvas, penises, et cetera. Nevertheless, the body is more than just flesh and bones: it is the conceptualization of the being, in the sense that a person knows that he or she
is alive when they feel their own body. The body is not only the materialization of a cluster of feelings it deals with profound psychological issues in which identity and sexuality are involved (Meskell 1999; Yates 1993).

However, there is no final consensus on the meaning of the body. The construction of the body not only reflects the values of different cultures but also of the individuals within a society, and they are ever-changing (Synnott 1993).

For example, differences on how sexual identity is conceptualized can be seen in the example of some Sambia people of the highlands of Papua New Guinea. They do not regard sexual organs as directly indicative of the sexual identity of a child. Maleness depends on the acquisition of semen and femaleness on the creation and circulation of blood (Yates 1993: 49-50). Therefore, sexual identity is a social construction that we have to understand in order to comprehend gender concerns amongst different societies (Meskell 1999) and which are interrelated with the perception of the body and its components (e.g., body fluids, body organs, etc.).

• Sociology of the body: ‘Body theory’

Analysis of the new sociological literature on the body provides an introduction to the most important traditions of thought, which have informed social theories of human embodiment. The body itself has often been ignored, and it has not been the central concern of sociology until recently (Martin 1992, Turner 1996, Meskell 1999). Only some attributes such as gender and sex have been carefully studied.

In contemporary western culture, the body is seen as malleable and this is true to the extent that now it is possible to change different aspects of the body, including the transformation of our sexual organs through surgery. Such a change has influenced feminist and gay literature that tends to emphasize the transformation and malleability of embodiment in modern societies.

The body has been an issue in other spheres such as politics and women’s movements for a longer period of time. Feminist theorists have criticized the patriarchal social organization that has transformed the role of women. Bryan Turner (1996), on the same lines, states that the benefits of domestic technology and contraception have contributed to a profound change in the status of women in society.

Turner (1996) in his book The Body and Society goes against some theories that understand society in terms of abstractions such as structure, class, and function that sociologists such as Anthony Giddens (1993) and Pierre Bourdieu (1977) used in their analysis of modern societies. Instead, he argued that the body should be the axis of sociological analysis and his panoramic discussion of social theory explores and develops a discussion on specific issues such as the problems
of defining the relationship between disease and health; the history of anorexia as a social sickness in Western societies; the critique of human sexuality in Christianity (religion and the body); and the management of sexuality in modern human societies. Thus, he provokes much of the interest in the social and cultural analysis of the body in contemporary culture. He also provides some insights into the growing interest in the social and cultural analysis of the human body that has taken place in recent years. This insight prepares the field for discussion in future sociologies, especially within debates in feminism, technology, ecology, post-modernism, medicine and ethics, fields of study which take the body as the central analytic issue in the questioning of established paradigms.

Turner states that our current interest in the body is a consequence of the long-term transformation of Western industrial societies: ‘there is a specific focus on the body beautiful and the denial of the ageing body’ (Turner 1996: 3). He considers that there have been various approaches to the body within which the contemporary debate has evolved:

1) The notion that the body is a set of social practices: the human body has to be systematically produced in everyday life and is socially regulated;
2) The body as a system of signs: the body is the carrier or bearer of social meanings and symbolism; and
3) The body as a system of signs which stand for and express relations of power (Turner 1996: 24-27).

Emily Martin (1992: 129), in the same vein, argues that as time changes, one kind of body ends and another emerges; thus a new mode of being has emerged in the 20th century, a body facing day to day stresses and constantly changing in a context of continuing fear of loss of employment, status, housing and health (such as the threats of AIDS); a context deeply rooted with notions of race, age, sex and gender and even more with racist, homophobic, classist and misogynistic sentiments.

Martin (1992) provides a complete panorama on how the body has been seen by biologists in terms of reproduction during late capitalism when technological innovations affected the immune systems of the body. The body has become important as a consequence of major changes in the nature of medical practice and medical technology. On the other hand, the access to cheap, and sometimes free, contraception has allowed a wider range of sexual relations and thus affected the given value of sexual relationships (Turner 1996: 6). The body is crucial to these new patterns of intimacy because the body is the carrier of these new emotional intensities. Medical changes and technological developments are all part of what Turner called the somatic society, ‘a society in which our major political and moral problems are expressed through the conduit of the human body’ (Turner 1996: 6).
However, although this is how concerns about the body have impacted modern sociology within modern societies, this approach has opened a new panorama for archaeology as well as ethnology to explore and understand the past and the way non-western societies conceptualize the body and this is why it is relevant for this study on girls’ initiation ceremonies as the ceremony deals with a girl’s body and the role that her body plays within society; creating an understanding by that girl of her body.

- **Repercussions of ‘body theory’ and the break from previous social analyses**

Recently, with the advent of post-modern analysis, social scientists have started to question different aspects of contemporary societies in new ways and to analyze the prejudices and impacts that our western point of view has produced in different disciplines.

The prioritizing of the body by theorists such as Turner has made us realize that social changes are reflected in different cultures by people’s awareness of their own self-identity and their own body. The body is part of the individual and the latter can be referred to as a ‘single person, as the fount of agency, consciousness, interpretation and creativity in cultural and social life, by virtue of his or her ownership of discrete, corporeal, sense-making apparatuses’ (Meskell 1999: 9). Thus, the term ‘individual’ a concept that has always been in flux and has continually taken new forms in social changes, refers to a unique embodiment: an individual body.

This new approach concerned with the individual’s body is one of the most important advances brought by the recent body analysis because it has permitted a break from our archetypal notion of the body as related to sex, gender, age and colour. It has allowed us to integrate other aspects thrown up by sociologists, such as feelings, desire, risk and behaviour.

This discussion takes us to the next point: the recent emphasis on the human body has made us appreciate the role of the body within social relations; ‘body theory’ offers a different way to understand and analyze the changing nature of societies. Therefore, if we are aware of the profound repercussion of the body in understanding individuals in the past, there is a need to develop questioning that allows us to explain both how individuals were shaped through their embodied experience of everyday life and how they challenged their society and culture as agents of change. Thus, analysis of the body has helped to overcome rigid understandings of the individual’s nature.

‘Body theory’ provides a different perspective from previous social analysis such as structuration theory. Anthony Giddens (1993), as the formulator and major exponent of this theory, states that humans are social constructs: all the institutions and practices performed in a society are considered structures and
within these are some specific norms and rules that allow these structures to operate properly. Individuals are a product of structure and, at the same time, are always helping in its reproduction.

Structuration theory asserts the role of the individual as a norm fulfilling being responsible for the construction of social reality by the individual’s articulation with the structure. Giddens proposed an ‘analytical framework’ in which the individual – the social actor – was supposed to know the way in which society operated – norms and rules – and was said to be capable of manipulating and transforming these in a specific social situation. The social actor, however, could only pursue these actions in terms of a pre-existing structure (Johnson 1989). ‘Body theory’, on the other hand, approaches the role of the individual in a different way because individuals have reflexive power and motivation within the structure (Meskell 1999).

Regarding the body, Giddens perceives the individual body as a practical mode of coping with external events and situations. The individual then becomes a competent agent who is able to ‘join with others on an equal basis in the production and reproduction of social relations’ (Giddens 1999: 56) by exerting a continuous and successful monitoring of face and body. Nevertheless, this notion of the individual’s body is closely related to the idea of the persistence of structure over time, which is caused by people drawing on and participating in these structures and constantly recreating them. Furthermore, according to Giddens (1999) to be a competent agent means that the individual is expected to have control over their body in all settings of social interaction and to maintain this control while he or she is with other individuals; in other words, to know the rules of society.

The control of the body is crucial to understanding the individuals ‘cocoon in situations of day-to-day interaction’ (Giddens 1999: 56). Even more, when the individual is vulnerable to stress, their ontological security, a sense of continuity and order in events of everyday life including those not directly within the perceptual environment of the individual, is threatened (Giddens 1999).

I agree with Giddens that, as individuals, we are part of a social structure and we have to follow and obey some rules of behaviour, however, Giddens fails to reconcile his structuration theory with the phenomenological experience of embodiment as Meskell (1999) argues. His agents’ bodies are shaped according to the dictates of the mind, but emotions and the sensual nature of individual agency are absent – a binary mode of thinking: body and mind. Thus, the body might represent a core feature for structuration theory, but it exerts a predominantly constraining influence on both the exercise of human agency and on the reproduction of structures. Giddens erases notions of irrationality, contingency and sensuality in the process (Meskell 1999).
We need to realize that Giddens’s image of the individual body is attached to modernity and western culture, expressed in the changing relation of individual identity to health, sexuality and bodily image. This image is perhaps one of the most criticized aspects of Giddens’s structuration theory by archaeologists and anthropologists: it is not useful to understand other social structures, various cultures and more over ancient societies.\(^\text{17}\) This criticism is the reason why the new approach of the sociology of the body has changed the way in which we perceive, as archaeologists, how ancient cultures operated because it recognizes the embodiment of social actors and their multiplicity as populations (Turner 1997: 37): this provides a new setting to discuss issues such as gender, sexuality and identity.

Although archaeology and anthropology have been seduced by notions of power and control, and, even more, in embedded binary, dichotomous, and rigid notions of the ascendency of the mind over bodily or emotional experience (Meskell 1998), ‘bodies have all the explanatory power of minds’ (Grosz 1994: vii). This false dichotomy has provided the anchor to perceive and explain the body in a more subjective and malleable way.

However, the understanding of the importance of the body in contemporary societies has permitted us to explore how our every day life is dominated by the details of our corporeal existence (Turner 1996: 37). This simple and obvious assertion has allowed deeper analysis of the human past and has offered a new research potential in archaeology and to this specific study on girls’ initiation rituals, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

Lynn Meskell (1999: 107), for example, provides an extensive analysis in which she shows how Egyptian archaeological data from Deir el Medina, particularly rich in terms of bodily preservation, has offered us a better understanding of a well-defined ideology surrounding corporeality, selfhood and death. Moreover, the mummy portraits from Roman Egypt had a function to record how the deceased appeared in life and some of these portraits provided individuals’ names, age, professions, place of residences, etc. (Meskell 1999: 16), data that helped the analysis of social process and individual agency. Furthermore, her work in the New Kingdom Egypt provides numerous instances where individuals are the authors of their own destiny (Meskell 1999).

This is an extraordinary example, one in which ‘body theory’ has offered helpful insights into how people in the past perceived their bodies, however; we are

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\(^{17}\) Nevertheless, it is a useful theory to understand how modern society performs and, although I will not discuss this aspect in this research, I consider that some of the mechanisms he suggests to analyze the relationship between the individual and the social structure could be employed to discuss some issues of the Che’wa’s contemporary society because the changing nature of social processes has led this society to interact with western technology and religion and therefore people have been incorporated into a kind of mechanism different from their original one.
not always fortunate enough to find archaeological data that provides this kind of information. Meskell’s work is one of the most important examples of how ‘body theory’ has offered a new way to understand the past within the archaeological inquiry in which arena the body brings together a broad variety of disciplines such as anatomy, law, psychology, physical anthropology, art, gender, sex, ethics, etc.; and although some of the topics that have been related to the body are not novel, the difference derives from the way these are approached.

To conclude, this theoretical framework is a useful analytical tool not only for contemporary societies but also for ancient ones. Turner (1996: 38), in his recognition of four tasks in ‘every society’ has provided a starting point for social enquiries about the past that I have incorporated in my analysis of the relationship between Chinamwali, in its social and ritual contexts, and the rock art of Mwana wa Chentcherere II:

1) The reproduction of population in time;
2) The regulation of bodies in space;
3) The restraint of the ‘interior’ body through disciplines; and
4) The representation of the ‘exterior’ body in social space.

This corpus of tasks will allow me to pose specific questions as I consider that the rock art in Mwana wa Chentcherere II deals with all of these aspects based on the nature of its articulation with girls’ initiation.

The main contribution of ‘body theory’ to rock art is that, when we realize how human bodies and related issues are represented within a culture, researchers can break out of the quantitative studies they sometimes forcefully hold. What is the point of measuring length, width, and making interminable tables of data if we cannot interpret anything from them? Tim Yates (1993) states that quantitative studies in rock art research help us to understand differences between geographical areas and sometimes to explain relationships or diffusion of the images but in their final form these are ‘depressing’ because of their lack of interpretation and theorization.

The research at Mwana wa Chentcherere II, incorporates on one hand ‘body theory’ as a framework of inquiry and on the other ethnographic accounts, which will allow me to search for data into past societies. These two strands provide an insight into the meaning of this specific rock art: the White Spread-eagled tradition.

Methods

Ethnographic analogy
The ideal research program for rock art interpretation would be to know the belief system of a specific group from an explicit theoretical standpoint, and then
try to elucidate the code in which those beliefs are expressed in the art. This methodological approach is not always possible. These concepts, beliefs and values are as unfamiliar to westerners as is the code employed to suggest or convey them. In many parts of the world a dearth or total absence of relevant ethnography has unfortunately led researchers to start with the art, to seek the structure of the code and finally to try to infer the content or message (Lewis-Williams & Loubser 1986: 265).

However, to distinguish between plausible and improbable explanations of the past it is necessary to make a distinction between good and bad ethnographic analogies. Analogy is more than just a comparison of inferred similarities or an account of accumulative resemblances. It is a process that goes beyond common sense or intuition and which requires background knowledge that will make the analogical inference more plausible (Wylie 1988; Lewis-Williams 1991). This background knowledge plays a crucial role in the extent that it functions as general premises concerning the existence of determining structures from which conclusions about other specific similarities follow deductively.

In philosophy, logic of analogy has taken two extreme positions: one that states that any resemblance that can be shown to exist between two compared sources allows us to expect further resemblances (Lewis-Williams & Loubser 1986; Wylie 1988; Lewis-Williams 1991) and another that rejects analogical inference because it directs us to fallacious statements; thus there is controversy concerning how to apply analogy.

Archaeologists have been sceptical of analogical interpretation not only because it is susceptible to error, but also because of concern that our contemporary background can influence the ways to relate past and present and which will mislead our explanations concerning social changes, beliefs and behaviour in past societies.

An ethnographic account sometimes stands as a universal explanation and as if there were no changes in time. However, an ethnographic account is in fact a record made in a specific time and space and we have to comprehend this in order to understand a society’s behaviour (individuals) in its particular history. Another problematic issue is that these accounts are inevitably rooted in the ethnographer’s personal prejudices, but nevertheless ethnography is useful for interpretive analysis. Therefore, it is important to take in consideration the socio-political and historical context of the ethnographer’s background when reading ethnographic accounts.

Even when analogies are used in archaeological interpretation, the process of association is not automatically a conscious one. Archaeologists try to understand their data by relating them to an already known circumstance. This kind of inter-
pretation can lead to erroneous interpretations if we presume a radical uniformity of past and present cultural forms (Wylie 1988).

It is important to realize that observed similarities, between the compared source and the subject of the inference, have to be understood in terms of relevance not only in a sense of similar characteristics between the compared objects. The relevance of the similarities have to be regarded as associations between the observed and the inferred properties as non-accidental, so that the shared properties are grounds for assuming the presence of the specific additional properties cited in the conclusion (Wylie 1987: 136; see also Lewis-Williams 1991).

For San rock art it has been stated that ethnographic analogy has difficulties relating specific visual and verbal accounts to the art, especially when it presumes consistencies over space and through time (Solomon 1998: 268); nevertheless, David Lewis-Williams and Loubser (1986: 264) state that ethnography (referring to San ethnography) is essential but it is ‘by no means a foolproof step in understanding southern Africa rock art’. It is the way in which we use ethnographic analogies that allow us successfully to reach the underlying meanings of the paintings.

There is a growing body of work that recognizes the importance of interpreting rock art not only within the context of the site but within a holistic approach that includes a more accurate view of different societies, landscape, information from local peoples, motifs and styles, historic and ethnographic accounts and archaeological material (Chippindale & Taçon 1998). There is no alternative but to fall back on analogous argument if we wish to achieve some idea of the meaning or social context of the art (Lewis-Williams 1991) and contrary to what some archaeologists believe, analogical arguments are not necessarily inconclusive or, worse, misleading, though some undoubtedly are (Lewis-Williams 2001: 344) and this is why scrutiny of ethnographic analogy is a key part of our interpretations of rock art: we must demonstrate the relevance.

There are almost no rock-art traditions that continue into the present, and there are just a few for which there is a good ethnographic or ethnohistoric record available (e.g., as for San rock art). For much prehistoric art, we have no informed knowledge and thus we have to rely on formal methods of analysis. Some aspects, such as age and authorship, require archaeological methods but, to penetrate the meaning of rock art, we need to rely on informed methods such as ethnography.

Fortunately in central Malawi the rock art is not yet as old as to completely be forgotten and it is related, in some intimate ways, to the people who still live in the area. The rock art of Mwana wa Chentcherere II is an exceptional case, in which certain Chewa women claim to have familiarity with the artists of the
paintings and to know the meaning of some figures as this was passed to them via oral tradition.

Consequently, I rely on three principal strands of evidence to address specific problems of authorship and meaning: ethnographic accounts, modern traditions and archaeological evidence. The relationship between these strands builds up a strong relation of relevance (following Lewis-Williams 1991: 152-153) because some aspects of Cheŵa’s society are demonstrated to evolve from the past in knowable ways. Even though the White Spread-eagled tradition is no longer made, the knowledge of some Cheŵa women of the meaning of some of the figures stands as evidence of the authorship of the paintings and is supported and given history by the archaeological evidence from the upper levels (e.g., recent potsherds, beads and plant remains). Although the upper levels have been linked to the hunter-gatherers, they are explained in this research as the result of the performance of the Chinamwali girls’ initiation ritual at Mwana wa Chentcherere II.

The rock art shows some continuity challenges as it can’t be stated that the Chinamwali nowadays is necessarily performed in the same way as when the paintings were depicted. However, the use of archaeology gives history of change and development to what is an undeniably relevant ethnographic record.
Mwana wa Chentcherere II in its ritual context

Listen! Nothing that you will see inside this place you can reveal. If you do you will die!
Chewa woman, Dedza District 2003.

The study of initiation rituals is crucial to our understanding of farmer’s rock art symbolism of Central Africa. There are several different groups in this region that still perform initiation rituals – the Chewa, the Yao and the Nsenga, for instance. I will focus, however, on Chinamwali – the girls’ initiation ceremonies of the Chewa because this ceremony is related to the White Spread-eagled tradition (Chapter 2).

The oral tradition of the Chewa people is extraordinarily rich; within this tradition lie the clues we need to gain insight into their rock art. The Chewa social structure is matrilineal and uxorilocal, which means that the husband must live within his wife’s village, where he is called mkamwini (a borrowed rooster) (Mvula 1986: 266), and that inheritance passes through the female line (Lindgren & Schoffeleers 1978; Yoshida 1992). The Chewa people also used to practise polygamy but nowadays is less common.

I will analyze the literature existent on Chinamwali and will supplement this with information gathered from my own experiences in the field. As a Mexican, a foreigner in Malawi, I was unsure how best to collect information on Chinamwali, especially given my minimal knowledge of the Chichewa language and (what I consider to be) the brevity of my stay in Malawi (too short to allow for detailed and extensive anthropological research). I was happily surprised to find that people from the Dedza community welcomed me into their village, shared their food with me and, most importantly, allowed me to participate in and bear witness to their secret and sacred Chinamwali ceremony. I was, moreover,
able to live for a day inside the *tsimba* (that special place in which the teachings are held) and to participate in the *Chingondo* ritual.\(^{18}\)

I think that the Chewa women who helped me were pleased that I recorded the ceremony. They often paused to give me time to take notes, and helped, moreover, by dictating the ritual songs to my interpreter. I was told that I would die if I disclosed the secrets revealed to me inside the *tsimba* – I was cautioned, in particular, against disclosing the secrets of this women-only ceremony to men. I am therefore obliged to present here only such data as the Chewa women gave me permission to make public. I shall, in particular, refrain from reproducing the ritual songs, as these are very intimate to the Chewa women.

I was unable to capture every detail of the ceremony as – I feel it is important to emphasize – when one is participating in a ceremony of this nature, people are unlikely to explain the meaning of every aspect of the ritual; mainly because there is insufficient time and simply also because certain aspects of the ceremony are so familiar to the participants that they assume these are not worthy of mention; sometimes the participants are not aware of every single aspect of the ceremony. It was therefore valuable that I had read previous works on *Chinamwali* (e.g., Hodgson 1933; Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965; van Breugel 1976; Yoshida 1992; Smith 1995) as I could compare these accounts with what I was witnessing and preformulate certain questions that I felt might prove pertinent.

Although I asked to be treated in the same way as other *anamwali* (initiates) I was aware that I was given special consideration (e.g., I was not asked to shave my head). Nonetheless, this special treatment also worked to my advantage, as I was allowed to eat with the *mfumu* (chief) after *Chingondo*, to witness a *maliro* (funeral) and to go into the *manda* (graveyard).

My greatest disadvantage was my lack of knowledge of the Chewa language. This was compounded by the attitude of my interpreter, who, despite her invaluable help, would all too often consider my questions to be irrelevant, remarking “you are not a Malawian, you do not need to know this”. It was difficult to ensure that she was not withholding information from me. There is a price (in knowledge) that must be paid in the field for one’s ignorance of local language and for the simple fact of being a foreigner. This is a fact that archaeologists and anthropologists often have to deal with.

Nevertheless, I am genuinely satisfied with the data I collected, data which I feel to be more than sufficient for this work on Mwana wa Chentcherere II rock

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\(^{18}\) I believe that the single best word to describe *Chingondo* is “hierophany”. Mircea Eliade (1959) uses this word to refer to a physical manifestation or revelation of the sacred. I posit *Chingondo* to be the symbol that embodies all the teachings and experiences within the initiation. It is the physical manifestation of *Chinamwali*. 
art. It is not necessary that I disclose anything, which the women told to me in secret. I will therefore restrict myself to considering the pertinent similarities and differences between data I recorded on my visit to Dedza District and such information as may be obtained from previous research. The complexity of Chinamwali religious ceremony is a source of extensive research in its own right, and this thesis offers, therefore, just a small contribution to our knowledge of the relationship between Chinamwali and the rock art of the Cheŵa.

Before embarking on an analysis of the rock art of Mwana wa Chentcherere II, it is necessary that the Chinamwali ceremony be explained. Although much of the ritual proceedings cannot be directly deduced from the art, it is crucial that one have a clear understanding of the events of the ceremony if one is to understand how these are linked to the rock art. Although many authors have written about Chinamwali, they have often omitted to connect their writing to considerations of the body; I will therefore, in the next section, when pertinent, centre my attention on the relationship between the ceremony and the body.

**Chinamwali ceremony**

Many people have recorded the Chinamwali ceremony over the past century (e.g., Hodgson 1933; Rangeley 1949, 1952; Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965; van Breugel 1975; Yoshida 1992; Smith 1995).

Although various authors refer to the same ceremony (Table 4.1), there is some variation due to the location in which these accounts were recorded. This variation is useful in distinguishing differences in the ways in which the ceremony has been performed across time and space and may prove useful, perhaps, in tracing its continuity. It is crucial, however, to recognise both the flexibility which the ritual performance allows, and that such changes as it displays across time and space provide evidence of a reaction to its social context (e.g., at present, poverty and disease). It is also imperative to keep in mind the interaction of different populations in time and space (Chapter 2) as the differences in Chinamwali are related also to this proximity between groups.

The Chinamwali is the initiation school that all Cheŵa girls used to attend in order to graduate from childhood to women (Van Gennep 1960: 65-115 for further detail on initiation rites); it is of great significance within the matrilineal society of the Cheŵa; some people would say is the most important of all Cheŵa ceremonies. There are two kinds of Chinamwali:19

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19 Certain Cheŵa women told me that there were 4 different steps to the Chinamwali: the first comprises instruction for young girls who have just had their period; the second is Chingondo; the third is concerned with the instruction of pregnant women; and the fourth is a ceremony conducted for women who are about to get married. I was told that women often get pregnant without being married.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author &amp; year</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Social group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Werner 1906</td>
<td>Malaŵi, Zambia, Moçambique</td>
<td>Cheŵa, Ngoni, Yao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.H. Stigand 1907</td>
<td>Malaŵi, Zambia, Moçambique</td>
<td>Cheŵa, Ngoni, Yao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Stannus 1910</td>
<td>South Lake Nyasa, Malaŵi</td>
<td>Cheŵa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.G.O. Hodgson 1933</td>
<td>Dowa District, Malaŵi</td>
<td>Cheŵa, Ngoni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.G. Lancaster 1934</td>
<td>Lundazi Province?, Eastern Province, Zambia</td>
<td>Cheŵa, Ngoni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy Mair 1951a, 1951b</td>
<td>Dedza District, Malaŵi</td>
<td>Yao, Cheŵa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.H.J. Rangeley 1952</td>
<td>Lilongwe, central Malaŵi</td>
<td>Cheŵa</td>
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<tr>
<td>R. Apthorpe 1962</td>
<td>Petauke District, Eastern Province, Zambia</td>
<td>Nsenga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.M. Winterbottom &amp; D.G. Lancaster 1965</td>
<td>Chipata and Petauke District, Eastern Province, Zambia</td>
<td>Cheŵa, Nsenga</td>
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<tr>
<td>J.W.M. van Breugel 1976, 2001</td>
<td>Central Malaŵi</td>
<td>Cheŵa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. Yoshida 1992</td>
<td>Chadiza District, Eastern Province, Zambia</td>
<td>Cheŵa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.W. Smith 1995</td>
<td>Eastern Zambia and central Malaŵi</td>
<td>Cheŵa, Nsenga, Yao, Bemba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Morris 2000b</td>
<td>Malaŵi</td>
<td>Cheŵa, Yao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Mtuta 2001</td>
<td>Dedza and Lilongwe Districts, Malaŵi</td>
<td>Cheŵa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Boucher, unpublished</td>
<td>Dedza District, Malaŵi</td>
<td>Cheŵa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) *Chinamwali Chaching’ono* (“little initiation”): An initiation for girls who have just had their first period (Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965: 347; Smith 1995: 229; van Breugel 2001: 189). Hodgson (1933: 131) reported that sometimes the girl is married before even attending the initiation. According to Hodgson (1933: 135) writes that girls are usually married a few months before puberty (*cf.* Stigand 1907: 121). Winterbottom & Lancaster (1965: 347) write that the neophyte is often betrothed a few months before puberty (*cf.* Mair 1951b). I think that as women marry later nowadays (due, perhaps, to the influence of Christianity and school systems), the ceremony has had to adapt to this social circumstance – this is why, in some accounts of *Chinamwali* (*e.g.*, Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965), there are elements of the ceremony, such as the role played by the betrothed during the ‘little initiation’ (Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965: 349), that nowadays take place at a different time other than *Chinamwali*. 
Mair (1951a), amongst the Cheŵa the girl is ready to go through initiation as soon as her breasts begin to form.

2) *Chinamwali Chachikulu* (“great initiation”): This takes place at first pregnancy (Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965; Smith 1995; van Breugel 2001) and is also known as *Chisamba*²⁰. I was told that *chisamba* refers, in addition, to a dance that only women are permitted to perform. During this ceremony, the woman is taught about her pregnancy, the birth of a child and how to be a mother.

Cheŵa custom requires that certain rules be followed prior to the *Chinamwali* ceremony (Hodgson 1933); if these are not followed, *mdulo* will occur. *Mdulo*²¹ is ‘the causing of illness in oneself or another person by indulging in sexual intercourse at prohibited times, or, more rarely, by abstaining therefrom when it is prescribed’ (Hodgson 1933: 129). Moreover, by observing these taboos, each person contributes to the welfare of the community (van Breugel 2001: 207).

There are two concepts in Cheŵa cosmology that are crucial to understanding the effect that *mdulo* has in Cheŵa society; the concepts of ‘hot’ (–*tentha*) and ‘cool’ (–*zizira*). According to Van Breugel (2001: 175) the notions of ‘hot’ and ‘cool’ are ‘everyday concepts in Cheŵa village life. It is important to note that the conditions of being ‘hot’ or ‘cool’ are not thought of as moral categories, as something good or bad’. The risk of causing *mdulo* is deeply rooted in the fault of following certain rules with respect to the ‘hot’ and ‘cool’ notions (ibid.; Fr. Boucher personal communication, November 28, 2003).

There are several activities which are considered to be potent and mysterious and thus dangerous such as sexual activity (Schoffeleers 1992: 63), sexual fluids, particularly menstruation which makes someone to be ‘hot’. The notion of ‘hot’ can have different degrees.

On the other hand people who do not engage in sexual activity (e.g., old people and children) and people who abstain from sexual intercourse are regarded as ‘cool’. Ancestral spirits and the body of deceased people are also ‘cool’. Sexual abstention is therefore a prerequisite for attending initiation ceremonies, burials and rain sacrifices ceremonies because any person who is ‘hot’ would ‘spoil’ and put in danger the ritual. During *Chinamwali*, for example, the *mfumu* (chief), the parents of the initiate, the women involved in the ceremony and the *Nyau* (who have a close contact with the spirits) are obliged to follow this rule.

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²⁰ According to Winterbottom & Lancaster (1965: 347) the Nsenga people in Zambia, do not have *Chisamba*, although there is an important ceremony called *Nsongwe* after the woman has one or two children ‘a complete woman must therefore have passed through several ceremonies of initiation and instruction and must have borne at least one child’.

²¹ On the complexity of *Mdulo* extensive research has been made by various people such as van Breugel (1976); Drake (1976) and Drews (1995).
In general, prior to the *Chinamwali* ceremony some of the rules to follow are:

- The headman of the village refrains from sexual intercourse with his wife (Hodgson 1933; van Breugel 2001).

- The parents of the initiate refrain from intercourse during the first menstruation of the initiate and during the *Chinamwali* ceremony (Hodgson 1933; Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965; van Breugel 2001).

- The initiate refrains from eating salt (Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965). This prescription against the eating of salt applies also to menstruating women (Hodgson 1933; van Breugel 2001). Johannes Wilhelms Maria van Breugel (2001: 175) explains that the Chewa believe that salt is a ‘medium by which the mysterious power emanating from someone who is “hot” can reach out to other people and cause serious *mdulo’*; this refers to the fact that a woman who is menstruating is considered to be “hot” (*wotenthal*). An important note on this matter was told to Van Breugel by one of his informants:

  The blood of a woman during her periods is like poison, it can kill people. While a woman has her periods she is bad, she can harm people. Salt is like the life or the blood of the *ndiwo* (side dish eaten together with *nsima* the main dish of stiff maize porridge). When such a woman puts salt in the food, it is as if she puts her bad blood in the food and so she kills people. Salt is like blood, and in these circumstances, it is like her bad blood. In a remedy against *mdulo* people add some salt in order to give back the child its life. Because, they think, perhaps the mother has given to the child bad salt in its food, i.e salt that the mother has made bad because of disregarding the important law concerning her monthly periods.

- The initiate refrains from speaking to or approaching elderly men – in particular, the father of the initiate – and women (Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965). Except when stated otherwise, the following discussion concerns itself with *Chinamwali Chaching’ono* rather than *Chinamwali Chachikulu*. A Chewa girl, upon first menstruating, is required by tradition to inform not her mother, but another woman of the village – usually the aunt or grandmother (Hodgson 1933: 131; Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965: 347). According to Hodgson (1933: 131) the phrase used to report the girl’s condition is *watyola bano* (“she has broken the reed arrow shaft”). Usually *Chinamwali* takes place when a small group of girls are ready to go through initiation.

  Prior to the ceremony, the girls – or *anamwali* (initiates) – are kept secluded from their community and receive special instruction from older women – or *namkungwi* – who teach them everything they will need to know for the purposes of their future life as an adult. This period of instruction nowadays lasts but a few days; previously, the *anamwali* were secluded for longer periods of time – usually five days (van Breugel 2001; see also Stannus 1910). Each girl is,

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22 During the ceremony women told me not to eat salt during menstruation.

23 *Namkungwi* is also the name given the male instructors (Rangeley 1949: 39).

24 Yoshida (1992: 248) comments that the period of seclusion depends on how fast the *namwali* learns...
importantly, assigned a phungu (tutor) who will be in charge of looking after her during the initiation (Hodgson 1933).25

Chinamwali involves much more than the learning of songs and dances; it prescribes, in particular, the special places in which the rituals are to be performed. One of the most important of these is the tsimba (the hut in which the initiates are secluded); another is the mtengo26 (a special gathering place in the bush under a tree). Winterbottom & Lancaster (1965) make reference to a tsimba, a hut which tradition requires that the initiate build for herself in the bush. Hodgson (1933: 132) writes that the initiate, on the second day of the ceremony, is taken into the bush, along with a mat and drums, to be instructed, and that she is then taught secret songs and made to strip naked and climb a tree (etc). Father Boucher (personal communication, December 16, 2003) was informed that sometimes the women take the initiate to the bush to examine her. Some manipulation of the vulva and the sexual organs then takes place in order to verify that the girl is not pregnant. Van Breugel (2001: 194) writes that on the second day of the initiation the girl is examined, and if she is found to be pregnant a big fuss (mlandu) is made because she has endangered the mfumu’s life.

This constitutes a very important moment for the namwali because it is during this period of seclusion in the bush that she is also taught about the sexual aspects of her body. Her perception of her own body then changes as she comes to regard it as the body of a grown woman, capable of bearing children and of engaging in sexual activity. The girl is then called namwali. Previously she had another status: she was a mwana (child) (Stigand 1907: 121).

Much of the training and most of the symbolism of Chinamwali is concerned with making the girl a sexually accomplished spouse a fruitful woman (Yoshida 1992). Yoshida (1992: 246) had divided the teachings given in Chinamwali in two types: ‘training of womanly manners and practical instruction in sex life’. According to Mtuta (2001) it is inside the tsimba that the initiate is taught about

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25 Lucy Mair (1951a: 60) witnessed the public rituals performed at Chiputu, in particular, a Yao girls’ initiation in Dedza District but she states that the ceremony ‘cannot be regarded as typical of these rites amongst the Yao, since in this region of mixed tribes there has been much assimilation of neighbouring cultures; in particular the Nyau dances which played a prominent part in the proceedings, belong to the traditional culture of the Cewa’. She did not, however, witness a girls’ initiation amongst the Chewa (Mair 1951b). Nevertheless, her comments on the Chiputu (1951a) suggest in many ways the steps of the Chinamwali ritual: The Yao also have two periods of instruction, one during the first menstruation, the other at first pregnancy; the initiates are called anamwali, and have a namkungwi and aphungu but instead of the tsimba they construct a hut made of grass called a masasa; and the ceremony requires that they sing, dance, and clap; but Mair did not comment on Chingondo — perhaps because she left the District before the end of the ceremony. She writes, however, that no circumcision is performed — although one of her informants told her that sometimes it is.

26 Mtengo means tree in Chichewa.
the purpose of her body. Winterbottom & Lancaster (1965: 348) write that women dance naked inside the tsimba and sing songs such as:

a) Acembele mwaniyenga  
ele ndi dzulo bwenzi ndasosola  
(You women have lied to me  
If you had done so yesterday, I should have pulled down my hair)

b) Kusauka kwanji kotele pano  
Kamwele nkanyanda  
(What kind of misfortune is this here  
The [little] penis is of a bark-cloth)

All these and similar ritual elements ultimately fuse together into a ceremony which becomes a specific mechanism, a source of power and knowledge that profoundly impacts upon the lives of those who take part in it.

Once the period of seclusion ends, the ceremony itself begins and there follows a series of prescribed steps, the order of which varies according to circumstance. This flexibility is important because it ensures that the overall result of the ceremony is not jeopardised by small complications. Regardless of the sequence in which they occur, the Chinamwali must comprise the following elements:

- **Chingondo**

This takes place after the namwali has learnt the ritual dances and songs. The phungu and namkungwi collect material at some point before dawn to create the chingondo, although it is said to be found in the river. The chingondo is a representation of an animal (van Breugel 2001: 196-197 for further discussion). Generally this animal figure represents kasiyamaliro but I was told that it can be also other animals such as or other animals represented at the Gule Wamkulu (The big dance where Nyau masks perform). Kasiyamaliro signifies that the namwali will become mother as ‘it is from the womb that future generations will come’ (Fr. Boucher, Kungoni Art and Craft Centre, Mua Mission). Morris (2000b: 107) comments that these figurines, in central Malawi, represent the figures of the Nyau: hare (kalulu), elephant (njovu), snake (thunga) and kasiyamaliro – all of them animals of the woodland (m’chire).

The anamwali are taken early in the morning to the mtengo where the chingondo is placed on the head of the namwali and is covered with flour. The women then decorate it with red and black dots and add a small feather as a tail

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27 It is worth noting that ngondo means hartebeest (Ntara 1973: 7).
28 In the Chingondo in which I participated, the mtengo was a big Kachere or Common wild fig (Ficus natalensis). Muta (2001) writes that Kachere tree signifies the presence of the ancestral spirits and it is planted by the mfumu. When this tree grows the people build a shrine underneath it to indicate that it is a sacred place.
for the figure (Figure 4.1). Women told me that if the mfumu has sexual intercourse with his wife during Chinamwali, the chingondo will fall.

Figure 4.1 Chingondo  
(Photo: James Chiwaya)

The anamwali are covered with flour or dots of flour and they are dressed with a new chitenje (long piece of cloth that women use around their waist as a wrap-around to cover the lower half of the body, as a skirt). Hodgson (1933: 133) mentions this day as tsiku la chingondo and describes the covering of the girl with flour but he does not describe the figure placed on her head, nor does he state that this takes place at the mtengo – he writes, instead, that this is done in the bush. However, it is interesting to note that in Hodgson’s account, the women make a headdress (known as a timbwidza29) for the each of the girls the following day. This consists of ‘a mud cast held into position on the head with a cloth until dry, with a row of long feathers such as the tail feathers of the mkurukuru (Livingstone’s turaco) or nyoni (black whydah bird) sticking out along the centre from back to front’ (Hodgson 1933: 133); thereupon each girl is adorned with beads and dressed in new clothes. Mtuta (2001) writes that at some time during

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29 This is also the name of a Chinamwali dance and interestingly it is also a word used for the death of the headman (B.W. Smith, personal communication, March 15, 2004).
the final days of the ceremony, the namkungwi makes a thimbwidza or chingondo, which is then decorated in red, black and white. These two names are therefore apparently used to refer to the same thing.

Winterbottom & Lancaster (1965: 348) write that the women, after dancing around pictures drawn on the ground (see section on Mnemonic devices below), then see to it that the namwali is ‘smeared with flour, red earth and oil and her head is decorated with pumpkin seeds. She wears only a loin-cloth, called thewera, constructed on the principles of a sanitary towel’.30 Despite these variations in time and space, I think that these rituals constitute essentially the same ceremony. Nonetheless, further study of this ritual variation is warranted; such study should take particular care to address the differing regional socio-political circumstances in which the ceremony is performed.

Chingondo is the time when all the community goes to witness the announcement of the initiate’s maturity after she has left the mtengo. It is said that the initiate is now a woman. Chingondo has a great aesthetic value for contemporary Cheŵa; people frequently told me that “the girls look beautiful”. In Dedza, after the anamwali dance at the bwalo (communal open space) with the chingondo on her head, the chingondo is thrown away in a place known only to the namkungwi. The namkungwi told me that this must be done because the chingondo has great power and it can be used by people (witches) as an instrument of witchcraft. Van Breugel (2001) comments that the girl is the one who breaks the chingondo by knocking her head on the ground. I asked about this to the women but I was told that this does not take place.

• Kumeta
This is the ritual shaving of the anamwali. Shaving is an extremely important component of various Cheŵa ceremonies – such as initiation and funerals.

The anamwali shave their heads;31 the hair32 is then thrown away lest evil people use it for malevolent ends, such as witchcraft; to destroy the hair is also a sign that the initiates are no longer children (Fr. Boucher, Kungoni Art and Craft Centre, Mua Mission). This shaving takes place at a river or stream; each namwali is taken there by her phungu.

30 Van Breugel (2001: 191) states that on the first night of seclusion inside the tsimba, the girl is left naked, with only a small cloth that he calls a thewera. This indicates that the neophyte is passing through a moment of transition between girlhood and womanhood.
31 A lady from Chipazi told me that the neophytes shave their pubic and underarm hair as well (Cfr. Hodgson 1933: 134).
32 I found it interesting that – according to Rangeley (1952: 30) and van Breugel (2001: 55) – during rain ceremonies the priestess and headman do not cut their hair because – given their control of the rain – this might result in their ‘cutting the rain’.
Yoshida (1992: 248) comments that the anamwali are given a vessel called mkhate, which is used by the husband and wife to wash and shave each other’s genital area along with another vessel called njondo, which contains vegetable oil that the wife applies to her genitals before sexual intercourse. The tutor gives practical training in sex life having the initiate playing the role of the male and shows the initiate various sexual postures.

According to Winterbottom & Lancaster (1965: 349) during Chinamwali another kind of shaving is performed. The bridegroom and his bride will go into the bush and, after having intercourse, will shave each other’s genital areas and arm-pits. I was told that if married women shave before their husbands return from a trip, this is therefore considered a sign of adultery.

Nyau participation
Cheŵa communities and their ceremonial performances were affected in different ways in Zambia and Malawi by the arrival of new peoples. Yoshida (1992: 246) in his study of Kaliza village, Zambia, suggests that Chinamwali has passed through three phases:

1) Older phase: the Nyau dances took place during the girls’ initiation ceremony.
2) Second phase: The banning of the Nyau in the colonial period of Zambian history. This saw an end to their performance in the Chinamwali ceremony;
3) Third phase: Chinamwali became influenced by elements of the Nsenga girls’ initiation ceremony (Chisungu) following colonial independence, which dramatic elements ‘appealed to women who had been dissatisfied by performing cinamwali without nyau’ (Yoshida 1992: 246).

Yoshida also points out that some of the songs sung during the Chinamwali were in Nsenga rather than Chichewa; thus, in Zambia, Chinamwali has incorporated external elements through interaction with other groups.

In Dedza District Nyau is still performed at Chinamwali, and the songs are kept in the original language. The performance of the Gule Wamkulu (big dance) (Figure 4.2) is fundamental to the success of Chinamwali, which is then known as Mkangali (respectful initiation) (Kubik 1987, 1993; van Breugel 2001; Mtuta 2001).

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33 Audrey Richards (1956) notes that the girls’ initiation of the Bemba of Northern Zambia is also called Chisungu. Nsenga girl’s initiation ceremony is also referred as Ndola.
34 Van Breugel (1976: iii) who conducted field studies in central Malawi, also states that Nyau dances form part of the girls’ initiation rites.
Prior to the ceremony, the Nyau get together to discuss the program for the dance. Hodgson (1933: 132) writes that the next day (the first day of the ceremony) they collect materials and go to the dambwe (the place of Nyau initiation instruction; secluded place where only initiates can go). Hodgson is the only author who writes about the creation of a figure called nkhandwe (jackal),35 made of a gourd, a skin and a piece of a palm leaf. When the cry of this creature is heard, the namkungwi know that it is time to proceed to the hut.

Various Nyau masks perform in Chinamwali – such as kasinja and njovu (elephant) (Hodgson 1933: 132-134; Yoshida 1992 for further details). Mair (1951b: 107) states that Nyau is the name given to the dances performed by men at the girls’ initiation and at the end of a period of mourning.

Nyau also perform around the tsimba trying to scare the girls who are inside (Rangeley 1949: 44-45). The noises and screams around the tsimba create such an atmosphere that they are kept by the girls as an important memory of the initiation (van Breugel 2001).

• Ritual intercourse

At the end of the ceremony a man known as fisi (hyena) was selected to have intercourse with the initiate. Hodgson (1933: 135) writes that the identity of the man was not disclosed prior to the ceremony, and that the girl could, if she wished, refuse the fisi selected for her in favour of another of her own choosing. Mair (1951b: 107) notes a special feature of the ceremony: the requirement that a girl – if she was already married – had to be deflowered by a man other than her husband. Van Breugel (2001: 197) writes that on the last day the anamwali who are married, are reminded to have intercourse that night. However if ‘things did not go well’ then the fisi is called in.

In Dedza District in the past, the end of the initiation ceremony would see the initiate taken into the bush so that the namkungwi could witness the ritual deflowering. If the man ejaculated it meant that the girl learnt well. Nowadays ritual intercourse is no longer practised in the Dedza District, a result, so I was told, of heightened awareness of “strange diseases” (HIV).

This is an example of Turner’s (1996: 6) concept of somatic society aiding an understanding of how society’s problems are expressed through the conduit of the human body. Following this concept, modern diseases such as HIV have led women to change the ways in which the Chinamwali ceremony is performed. These women are agents of change and it is through their embodied experience that they challenge their own culture. Transformation, therefore, cannot be

\[35\] I did not see any such figures.
studied without reference to individuals and to their power to change social practices.

Figure 4.2  Gule Wamkulu, Dedza District 2003  
(Photo: Lesie Zubieta)

- New name given  
Although I was told that this practice did not occur in the village neighboring Chentcherere; this does still happens almost everywhere. Authors (Werner 1906; Hodgson 1933; see Garbut 1912; Stannus & Davey 1913 for a note on the Yao) write that a new name is given to the initiate by her *phungu* upon completion of the ceremony. This seems crucial as it marks the beginning for the girl of a new life as a grown woman, a transition emphasized by a new name conferring a new status and identity.

- Beer brewing  
The brewing of the beer is an important activity during ceremonies (e.g., initiation, funerals) and the women begin to brew the beer as soon as they know that *Chinamwali* is going to take place. When the beer is ready, usually corresponding to the last stage of the ceremony, the beer will be drunk by the women and the men involved in the initiation (Hodgson 1933; Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965). The women in charge of brewing the beer are required to be ‘cool’ thus older women are in charge of this task (Schoffeleers 1992; van Breugel 2001).
• Singing, clapping, drumming and dancing

Singing, clapping and drumming accompany almost every ritual performed during Chinamwali, the rhythms of which I found quite hard to follow. The rhythm of the clapping was cut out at the last phrase of the songs, whereas the drums did not stop playing throughout, mainly because this helped the teaching to be memorized and allowed the anamwali to keep their rhythm in the dances. This drumming serves also to prevent men from overhearing the secrets of the tsimba. These activities constitute an essential part of Chinamwali, as I shall discuss below (see the section on Meaning and symbolism of the White Spread-eagled tradition below).

As I have previously mentioned, there are special places in which the rituals are performed. The anamwali are secluded at night inside the tsimba and during the day the teachings proceed at the mtengo. Originally this would continue day after day for many weeks as the ceremony constituted a longer process than nowadays.

Once the activities inside the tsimba have concluded, the women and men engage in a dance called mjedza (Hodgson 1933: 132). In Dedza District nowadays, this dance is performed by men and women dancing inside a circle, surrounded by all the community. (In the past, apparently, only the initiates could attend these dances.) Half the circle is made up of men; the other half is made up of women. Inside the circle, the anamwali are called to join the mjedza and dance counter clockwise following the aphungu in a crouching attitude. Some of the anamwali will be pinched by the onlookers if they do not put sufficient effort into the dance. In the mjedza, which I witnessed, it was obvious that not all the anamwali were keen to participate as some of them refused to uncover their breasts in front of all the community.

On another occasion, I was fortunate enough to arrive in a village in Dedza District in which a Chinamwali ceremony was already underway. Because I knew some of the women, and I had already been initiated, I was invited to see the mjedza (unfortunately I arrived too late to witness the chingondo and the kumeta). The 20 anamwali were wearing vibrant outfits. Strings of colourful plastic beads36 were hung across their naked chests; cloths covered their heads; and each initiate wore a new chitenje. One of the ladies that I knew from before informed me with pride that two of her daughters were being initiated. I asked her if I might take a photograph of them, but she refused my request.

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36 Beads will always be part of a woman’s life in Che’wa culture, as they are seen as a symbol of womanhood. Women told me that during intercourse, they wear beads to ensure that the man remembers that he is with a woman. Van Breugel (2001: 203) writes that a woman, on the first day of her period has to remove the mkuzi and hang them on a nail on the wall as a sign for her husband to understand that they should stop having sexual intercourse.
The public dances of the ceremony are accompanied by drums played, always, by men. It is only inside the *tsimba* – or at dawn outside the *tsimba* – that the drums are played by the women. The same drums are used as the ones played by the men in the public spaces (Kubik 1987; Figure 4.3).

During *Chingondo* the *mfumu* plays as well, and he is the only man allowed to dance with the initiates. The *mfumu* plays a special ceremonial role: it is believed that by dancing with the initiates he opens the wombs of the girls (Smith 1995; van Breugel 2001). Hodgson (1933: 134) writes that after the initiate is left with her husband the *anamkungwi* go to the *mfumu*’s house and uncover their private parts ‘while the headman gazes at them, his wife is present, and feels his penis. If he is excited, it is a bad sign, for all his people are as his children, and he should be able to look at them without carnal desire. If he is not excited, they know that he is a father worthy to superintend initiations’. Hodgson’s remark has been interpreted differently by Van Breugel (2001: 195), who has interpreted this as an erotic dance performed by the women of the village in front of their ‘symbolic husband’ who is supposed to bring them fertility.

![Figure 4.3 At dawn. Drums played by women](Photo: Lesie Zubieta)

- **Returning of the namwali**
  On the last day of the *Chinamwali*, the girl, if she is not married, is returned to her parents. This is an exciting moment, and the girls are usually carried back on the shoulders of their *aphungu* and accompanied by women singing, clapping and shouting with joy (*nthungululu*) (Figure 4.4.). The girl has completed initiation and is regarded as a woman.

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37 These are *Nyau* drums called *mbalule* (Kubik 1987).
Mnemonic devices

Having reviewed the main events that take place during Chinamwali, I want to draw attention to the kind of art that is made and used in initiation ceremonies. The Cheŵa, amongst other groups in Central Africa – the Yao, Bemba and Nsenga for instance – still use various forms of plastic art as mnemonic devices to warn or give advice to the initiate (Smith 1995). Mnemonic devices help the learning process and they consist of different strategies such as the use of images and/or words (see Richards 1956).

It is important to address the plastic art because it is similar in appearance to the White Spread-eagled tradition designs (e.g., Phillipson 1976; Lindgren & Schoffeleers 1978; Yoshida 1992; Prins & Hall 1944; Smith 1995). Thus it is probable that some of the figures used by the modern Cheŵa make use of the same symbolism as the rock art (Smith 1995). I shall describe in general terms the ways the plastic art is used within initiation ceremonies amongst the Cheŵa and their neighbouring groups because, as I have discussed earlier, there has been a strong interaction between these groups in this region leading to the adoption, changes and fusion of initiation ceremonies. I will focus on figures that resemble the White Spread-eagled traditon.

- Cheŵa

The first report of plastic art used amongst the Cheŵa is by Alice Werner (1906). She writes that during Chinamwali the initiates dance around ‘figures of animals that are drawn on the smooth ground with ashes or flour’ (Werner 1906: 127). She does not provide any detailed description of such figures.
Yoshida provides the most important account of plastic art in eastern Zambia. He (1992: 245-252) writes that amongst the Chewa, clay figures used to be made in the woodland and decorated with ufa (corn flour), mwaye (soot) and katondo (red clay). These figures represented nsato (python), thunga (snake), fulu (tortoise), ng’ona (crocodile), kulu (hare), kacifulu (vessel to draw water) and wangala (male and female couple). The clay figures were called vilengo and were made in the bush on the last day of the ceremony. The anamwali were taught how to dance around them. Yoshida asked the ladies of the village to reproduce them after 40 years of not making them (Figure 4.5).

Although Yoshida (ibid.) does not make any further comment on the meaning of such figures, he notes that he was told that the dots that covered the bodies of the figures were designed to imitate the dotted pattern of pythons. Moreover, the women sang a song related to the python figurine. The song was interpreted by Yoshida as having a sexual connotation. The clay figures were buried on completion of the ritual.

Figure 4.5 Vilengo figures
(Taken from Yoshida 1993: fig. 14)

- Nsenga
The Nsenga people are located in eastern Zambia and they make figures out of mud that they call vilengo and used for their Ndola ceremony – girl’s initiation. In 1925 Martin Drourega (1927: 620-621) witnessed a Ndola ceremony. Despite the brevity of his note, he provides useful information about the initiation: the

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38 In central Malawi, such vilengo have not been recorded. However, there are mentions of clay figures modelled on top of the namwali’s head (chingondo) (Van Breugel 2001).
initiate (moye) is secluded for a period of four months; a time in which she can’t speak and look at other people, especially men. On the last day of seclusion she engages in a dance around various vilengo representing animals, such as crocodiles, hyenas, antelope, snakes and birds (Figure 4.6).

The initiate ‘dances on each of these designs shaking her body and sitting down and standing up, and is assisted by the medicine-women, who sing ceremonial songs full of devil-veneration and sensuality (Drourega 1927: 621). Drourega does not provide any more information on the meaning of the figures.

Raymond Apthorpe (1962: 13) comments that vilengo are an essential part of this ceremony. In his paper, he illustrates an example of the Nsenga’s plastic art and interprets it as the representation of the genet cat (nsimba), which stands as the male principle and potency (Figure 4.7). It is important to note that this figure is stuck to a tree – a position that resembles the one of the paintings on a rock shelter wall. The figure is covered with white and red dots, colours that ‘commonly connote, roughly speaking, the female and male principle’ (Apthorpe 1962: 13).

Apthorpe also gives and account of a schematic figure in slight relief in clay covered with flour and called chilengo. The initiate would go around it carefully to not step on any marking (Figure 4.8).
The symbolism of this schematic design is complex. Apthorpe was told that some parts of it resemble the *mons pubis*; others resemble crocodiles, a woman and a man. However, the purpose for the design was to warn the initiates against having sexual intercourse while menstruating and to avoid adultery. Phillipson (1976: 183) was told by local Ngoni inhabitants that the white paintings at Thandwe site in eastern Zambia were related to the Nsenga girls’ initiation ceremony. Moreover, the Nsenga women who were shown some ‘copies of the subdivided circle motifs from the main rock-shelter … identified them as schematised ‘diagrams’ used for the sexual introduction [instruction] of female initiates’ (*ibid.*).
D. Gordon Lancaster (1934: 199) describes a very similar ceremony amongst the Cheŵa people from eastern Zambia: at sunrise, at the end of the Chinamwali, the women create a large mud figure by the chilengo tree: a ‘leopard, large lizard or crocodile is placed, the image is daubed over with red, white and black spots to make it look a very fierce animal’. Although, Lancaster gives no details of the size and appearance of the figure, it is interesting to note the purpose of this mnemonic device in the ceremony: the husband of the namwali appears with his axe or bow and pretends to throw or shoot these at the chilengo tree (in Figure 4.7 the woman is holding an axe in her right hand); if he fails to hit it, it is believed that the man is impotent and the woman, his wife, will be seen as unfortunate. According to Lancaster the husband does this in order to warn other men to stay away from his wife. With the completion of the ritual, the figurine is broken by the namkungwi.40

Winterbottom and Lancaster (1965: 348) described certain ‘pictures’ drawn on the ground where the women danced. Winterbottom witnessed this part of the ceremony in Petauke District, Zambia. These ‘pictures’ resemble those, which Lancaster (1934) described some thirty years before. They write that:

The pictures were set in a small circle of mud and were in low relief. There were a crocodile and a snake and these are the most usual, though not the only, things represented .... The women dance all over these pictures, which sometimes are drawn with sand or maize flour (Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965: 348).

These authors state that the animal representations refer to various folk stories in which a girl marries such creatures; these stories ‘are in the nature of a caution, as to what will happen to a disobedient initiate’ (ibid.). Nevertheless, Winterbottom & Lancaster (1965) do not specify the dimensions or give any further detail about these representations of animal bodies.

I have included some accounts of the Cheŵa girls’ initiation ceremony in this section to address the similarities in eastern Zambia between the Nsenga and the Cheŵa girls’ initiation ceremonies. It is important to note that most of these accounts come from a region where both Nsenga and Cheŵa people have extensively interacted. It is also a land where the Nsenga are now the predominant population (Phillipson 1976; Smith 1995) although before the Ngoni raids, in the late 19th century, it was populated by the Cheŵa. Little has been published on Nsenga mnemonic devices, but it is likely that the published accounts reflect a

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39 The colours not only make the figure look impressive but carry a deep symbolic message.
40 Van Breugel (2001) describes a ‘symbolic hunting’ in central Malaŵi: the day of the Chingondo, while the girl walks towards the bwalo (communal open space), the namkungwi, who carries a bow and arrows, tries to shoot the namwali while singing Nyama yanga ma ye (my animal). Van Breugel also comments that on the final day of the ceremony the husband will carry a bow and an arrow and act as if he was defending his wife.
41 This is a region populated by Cheŵa and Nsenga peoples. Winterbottom & Lancaster (1965: 348) point out that “the people there call themselves Nsenga today, but are of Chewa origin”.

fusion of Chewa and Nsenga girils’ initiation ceremonies. However, in this thesis I will not elaborate on this interaction.

- **Bemba**
The Bemba (Cory 1956; Richards 1956; Corbeil 1982) of northern Zambia, employed animal figurines that were accompanied by songs (Richards 1956: Appendix B for further detail on the songs) to give instructions to initiates. Audrey Richards, who attended the Chisungu (girls’ initiation), in 1931, called these clay figurines ‘pottery emblems’ (*mbusa*), some of which represent animals, such as crocodiles, lions and human figures (Richards 1956). These figurines serve as mnemonic devices: girls will associate animal figurines with specific teachings (Cory 1956, Corbeil 1982).

  Richards also comments on a clay figure created on the floor of a hut: ‘The whole was decorated with white, red, and black earth and stuck all over with marrow, castor-oil and bean seeds set carefully about two inches apart’ (Richards 1956: 82). According to her informants, this figure was a snake (with legs), a symbol of womanhood which was used specifically to teach the girl about her duties as a wife.

  Corbeil (1982) published some of the figurines used during Chisungu and has argued that each of the songs related to the figurines has a secret meaning that only the initiate can comprehend. Corbeil divided the figurines in eight categories according to their instruction: pre-marriage warnings, husband’s obligations, wife’s obligations, mutual obligations, motherhood duties, social duties, domestic duties and agricultural duties. I provide some examples of these figurines and the associated interpretation according to Corbeil (Figure 4.9). Each figurine has different interpretations depending on the song being sung.

- **Yao**
Mnemonic devices are also made in connection with the Lupanda – boys’ initiation ceremony of the Yao (Werner 1906; Stannus & Davey 1913; Stannus 1922; Sanderson 1955, Kubik 1985; Smith 1995). As early as 1906, Alice Werner comments on the creation of figures ‘traced by scattering flour on the smooth ground of the bwalo (communal open space), representing animals, usually the leopard, the crocodile, and, strangely enough, the whale’ (Werner 1906: 97).
**Figure 4.9** Emblems of the Bemba’s *Chisungu*  
(All taken from Corbeil 1982)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Marriage warnings</th>
<th>Husband’s obligations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kalulu</strong> – the rabbit</td>
<td><strong>Nwena</strong> – the crocodile (royal totem of the Bemba)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction: If the girl is obedient to her husband, he will respect her.</td>
<td>Instruction: If the wife is pregnant the man should be proud and not looking for other women.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mushintililo – the target</th>
<th><strong>Cilume cipuba</strong> – the stupid husband</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Left to right:  
1st column: black & red  
2nd column: white & red  
3rd column: white & black  
4th column: white & red  
5th column: black & red. |
<p>| Instruction: each colour has a meaning. | Instruction: The man is a fool who does not look properly after his wife. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wife’s obligations</th>
<th>Motherhood duties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| *Liyongolo* – the snake  
Instruction: The girl must be faithful to her husband. | *Ngombe naimita* – the pregnant woman  
Instruction: Warning to the future mother who has yet not been initiated and still is going to bear a child. She must be faithful to her husband. |
| *Canakashi cipuba* – the stupid wife  
Instruction: the woman has to be discreet in married life. |  |
| *Cupo walemene nkata* – the pad-head marriage  
Instruction: The girl will carry her marriage on her head, which is a place of honour. | *Napela* – the grinding woman  
Instruction: The girl must offer the best possible food to her husband. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fulwe – the tortoise</td>
<td>the girl should have a generous heart and to be hospitable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanaya – the good cook</td>
<td>the girl must be an expert in cooking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolwe – the monkey</td>
<td>the girl should stop stealing. The girl should just desire her husband.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural duties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Kalonde – the little hoe | the girl should cultivate her garden to feed her family.  
|                     | She is also urged to have children.                                         |
An account of a ceremony witnessed in Zomba District, Malawi (Stannus & Davey 1913) gives testimony on ‘mounds of earth outlined in flour’ (*inyago*) (*ibid.*: 121). These are representations of animals and schematic designs that are shown to the initiate at the end of the ceremony. Each figure is related to a specific song that gives advice to the initiate on different aspect of his adult life. Some of the animals represented are zebra (*mbunda*), hyena, elephant, and eland (*mbunju*) and most important a large water animal said to be a whale (*namungumi*) (Stannus & Davey 1913: 122). The whale is an important symbol of fertility amongst the Yao (Smith 1995: 225): ‘the Water-Mother of mankind’ (Sanderson 1955: 37).

A circle design resembles what they call *Nyasa ja litanda*, the water of a big pool, presumably Lake Nyasa (Stannus & Davey 1913). Another figure that is always present is the *Ching’undang’unda*, a mound of earth representing the traditional birth place of Yao people (Sanderson 1955: 37). However, this is an important symbol for ‘an embryo in the womb of a pregnant woman’ (Smith 1995: 225) related to the taboo that men must not step behind a pregnant woman (Kubik 1985; Figure 4.10).

Sanderson (1955) comments that *mwesi* (the moon) and *ngwena* (the crocodile), are generally seen together as symbols of fertility and menstrual cycles (Smith 1995: 226) (Figure 4.11).

A large variety of *inyago* figures have been recorded, such as: *lundandambuli* (the spider’s web) (Figure 4.12); *likoloto* (the scorpion); *Sato* (the python); *Wakongwe wacitumbalala* (the woman who died in child-birth); and *Cisyungula* (the man who became impotent) (Sanderson 1955). These figures are made relatively close to each other. Sanderson points out the relationship of the figures with the asking of riddles and songs. Moreover, she has noted that these figures ‘appears to be to give added point to the instruction (*maundo*)’ (Sanderson 1955: 38).

There is a clear relationship between songs, riddles and dances and various mnemonic devices: for the Bemba every *mbusa* has a song; for the Nsenga every *vilengo* are accompanied by dances and singing; for the Yao every *inyago* is accompanied by riddles and songs; for the Che’wa the *vilengo* were related to songs and dances and moreover there is an obvious relation between each of the *Nyau* masks with a specific song. It is possible that some of the paintings in Mwana wa Chentcherere II, similar in shape as the mentioned mnemonic devices, were also related to songs and riddles in order to memorize the instructions given during *Chinamwali.*
Figure 4.10  *Inyago*

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>Namungumi ‘The Whale’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>Namungumi ‘The Whale’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>The Zebra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>Ching’undang’unda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>Nyasa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a, c, d, e* taken from Stannus & Davey (1913: figs. 1, 4, 3, 2) and *b* from Sanderson (1955: 40)
Meaning and symbolism of the White Spread-eagled tradition

Most recent studies have proposed a link between the White Spread-eagled tradition and the Chinamwali ceremony of the Cheŵa (Smith 1995, 1997; see Phillipson 1976: 187 for general discussion). It has been argued that the White Spread-eagled designs were used as mnemonic devices within this ceremony (Smith 1995). Nevertheless, the ways in which the ceremony and the paintings were connected remain uncertain. One reason for this is that previous researchers were male, and were, therefore, prohibited from properly observing women’s ceremonies. Clark (1973), for instance, was unable to obtain any understanding of the meanings of the paintings at Mwana wa Chentcherere II from the local Cheŵa inhabitants.

I shall start by saying that there is an apparent separation between what has been termed the White Zoomorphic tradition (linked with the Nyau men’s closed association of the Cheŵa) and the White Spread-eagled tradition (linked to Chinamwali). These two arts were done in different shelters although they have been recorded occurring in the same shelter (Schoffeleers 1978; Smith 1995). However, it must be noted that the Nyau rock art was only depicted for a shorter
period of time, the last few hundred years, comparing to Chinamwali presumably with a 1,500 year potential antiquity (Smith 2001: 193). It is also necessary to mention that the Nyau was said to be stolen from the women (van Breugel 2001: 132).

Chinamwali and Nyau, two important ritual institutions within Chēwā society express social, economic and gender role concerns in their own way by singing, dancing and acting at the performances of different ceremonies. The depiction of the paintings was an important part of rituals thus and expression of such concerns. Moreover, if we look at these arts as the creation of women and men respectively; we need to keep in mind the social construction of the ascribed categories of men and women in Chēwā society and their assumed gender roles to understand the mechanism between these two spheres at a social and ritual level.

I argue that the conception of gender is a complex one within Chēwā society and although there are gender restrictions on participation in the ceremonies: there are women’s ceremonies and men’s ceremonies and only the members of each association are privy to all secrets of their respective ceremonies; it is necessary to understand the mechanism of interaction between these two spheres in a flexible way. I am not negating the distinctive gender concerns represented by the Chinamwali and the Nyau and the necessity for Chēwā society to reinforce the separation of gender roles in both ritual and social context. I am arguing that it is in such differentiation and separation that Chēwā society finds the mechanism to deal with their political, economic and social circumstances. I am also arguing that in order to understand the multiple symbolisms of the paintings at Mwana wa Chentcherere II it is necessary to understand how Nyau and Chinamwali interact.

Although Nyau used to be an association only for men (e.g., Rangeley 1949; Yoshida 1992; Smith 2001; but see Rangeley 1949: 44 for discussion on the admittance of female namkungwi in Nyau), there are some women in Dedza District who have been initiated into Nyau. I was told that a woman could, by her own choice, be initiated in both Nyau and Chinamwali but not the other way around: men do not go through Chinamwali. 42 Most of the time a woman is initiated into the Nyau is because she has to cook for men or because she was accidentally in the bush when the boys were initiated. 43 I consider that this

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42 However, Benjamin Smith (personal communication, March 15, 2004) was told that men could go through Chinamwali but that none has ever dared. Moreover it is important to note that the reason why women cannot go into Nyau initiation is because women are ’hot’ and dangerous because of their menstrual period. Thus, it is probable that the women who are mostly allowed to go into initiation are the ’older women beyond child-bearing’ who no longer represent any danger (Van Breugel 2001: 174).

43 These women are accorded a special status within the initiation ceremony and are not chased away by the Nyau dancers. The fact of their having been initiated into the men’s secrets gives them a special
demonstrates to the researcher the great importance of not assuming that men and women interact at a ritual level in a rigid way. Some women know the secrets of Nyau and some men know some of the secrets of the women – they, however, keep these secret. Rangeley (1949: 44) comments that ‘this occurs in only the most degenerate areas in the hills’.

To understand the relationship between Chinamwali and the paintings of the Chewa, it is necessary therefore to regard Chinamwali not as the counterpart of the Nyau but to consider these two ceremonies to comprise a single unit as previous research has noted (Yoshida 1992; Smith 1995; Schoffeleers 1999; Kubik 1987; van Breugel 2001). People in Dedza District told me “it is impossible to have one without the other” and it appears, as I have noted before, that they were once one tradition. Therefore I think that it is through a gender analysis (Chapter 3) that we may best make clear how these two sets of rock art stress the centrality of male and female actors in kinship, public discourse and in rituals based not on opposition but on connectedness. As Mvula (1986: 266) comments, ‘the Chewa kinship system puts stress on the bond between men and women within the same matrilineage’.

Smith (2001: 191) writes that women play a ‘pivotal and symbolical’ role in Nyau activities because they are the ones that provide the materials needed for the ceremonies and lead the performances by singing, clapping and dancing. According to Father Claude Boucher (personal communication, December 16, 2003) the same is true of Nyau performance at Chinamwali. It is through specific masks (e.g., Chiwekuweku, Chinkhombe, Namwalitye-Klanamwalli Kayera, etc.) that some advice related to sexual behaviour, body preparation and hygiene are given to the initiates.44

Nonetheless, these teachings, advice and even warnings are concerned with issues specific to the female body – the body, therefore, takes the principal role in the initiation ritual because Chinamwali not only deals with the social behaviour of women but with such intimate matters as their sexual life and hygiene.

_Sex, sexuality and the body: Chewa perception_

Sexual identity is not guaranteed from birth as we are used to thinking in western societies, and there is no such thing as a universal category of natural sexual identity: ‘natural identity is produced as a cultural discourse, allowing the role played by ‘natural forces’ to be conceptualized and implicated in different ways’ (Yates 1993: 51). Sexuality can then be understood as “the socio-cultural con-

---

44 I think that the Nyau role (e.g., dance performances, meanings of masks, etc.) in Chinamwali is an aspect that needs to be further understood and studied.
struction of sex, as shaped and defined in specific human communities” (Morris 2000b: 69).

Sexual difference in Malawī is taken for granted as something that is natural, in the sense that humans are born as sexual beings. However, “neither our humanity, nor our gender identity, nor our sexuality is given at birth; they are something that is acquired in the course of one’s life” (Morris 2000b: 70).

Malawian views of, and attitudes to sex are positive and open. Having intercourse with a member of the opposite sex is seen as a “wholesome, enjoyable, and necessary activity and essential for general wellbeing” (ibid.). Moreover, to repress sexual desires, or to choose celibacy is seen as an attitudinal problem because people are intrinsically sexual and no-one in their right mind does not want to enjoy sex. Brian Morris states that sexual desire is described by the term ku ludzu (being thirsty) – powerful desires are often expressed within Cheŵa society through metaphors related to meat and food.

Interestingly eating meat is one of the things that initiates are allowed to do only after going through initiation and a special song is sung on this respect – I have recorded this song but for respect to Cheŵa women I cannot disclose it. This is crucial in terms of understanding the role of some of the songs during Chinamwali because the message of this song, in particular, is reaffirmed by the act of eating meat after the ceremony. On the other hand, it is obvious that eating meat stands also for the capacity of initiates to engage in sexual intercourse now that they are seen as fully-grown women.

- **Human bodies and animal bodies**

Our western viewpoint has limited our interpretations of the different ways in which the body is conceptualized within other cultures. Sometimes, archaeologists just impose their own morality and conception of their own culture: women have breasts and men have penises and therefore, the representation of bodies in other cultures must be similar (Meskell 1999; Yates 1993). In this particular case, the insight that Cheŵa ethnography provides, assists us to explain the possible ways in which the body is represented in the rock art.

There is a difference between a girl’s body and a woman’s body within Cheŵa thought. A woman’s body besides being one that menstruates, has larger breasts and bigger hips; is one not only capable of having sexual intercourse – which is not dependent on puberty, but marked by the ability to bear children. Moreover a woman’s body has a special quality because it fluctuates between ‘cool’ and ‘hot’ due to her menstrual period thus this brings danger. A woman therefore has to be careful all her life and refrain especially from having sexual intercourse, putting salt in the food, and attending certain ceremonies while ‘hot’.
A woman’s body is also imagined by the use of metaphors, such as the earth (symbol of female reproductive parts) (Mvula 1986: 269). The parts of a pot can also be seen as metaphors for women’s bodies as they are often used to talk about the female organs in a veiled way (Father Boucher personal communication, December 16, 2003).

Therefore, before engaging in the interpretation of the rock art at Mwana wa Chentcherere II, it will be useful to formulate some questions that rise from Cheŵa perceptions of a woman’s body and the subject matter of the White Spread-eagled tradition. How can we understand the spread-eagled figures? Could these images be animals because they seem to have a “tail”? Could these be images representing animal-human entities? If either of the above is possible; how are the designs represented in the White Spread-eagled tradition related to women’s bodies and concerns and their acquired gender role through Chinamwali?

I propose that the representation of animal bodies in the White Spread-eagled tradition is a reflection of Cheŵa cosmology and traditions that are related to the animal world. The link between the animal world and the human world is not represented physically in the paintings but in the way the Cheŵa perceive the world. The use of metaphors is essential to any understanding of these representations.

Metaphors are models to understand the world that operate not only in language but also in thought and action (Stevenson 1995). Animal bodies are used as metaphors for the human body and human body behaviour.

Ways of perceiving the body inevitably play a part in the construction of metaphor. Metaphors are used to connote dilemmas and solutions relevant to Cheŵa daily life, and are embedded in a cognitive system that defines the Cheŵa world, and which has proved very difficult for Westerners to understand. I argue that some of the spread-eagled designs represented in rock art can only be understood through such metaphor-based analysis.

The Cheŵa perceptions of, and metaphors relating to the animal world have mainly been studied by Brian Morris (1995, 2000a, 2000b), Kenji Yoshida (1992) and Schoffeleers & Roscoe (1985); my analysis of Cheŵa representation of the body draws largely upon their work.

There is a strong link in Cheŵa cosmology between humans and animals. Humans are transformed into animals in three different ways: masking (Rangeley 1949: 42; Smith 2001: 196-197), spirit possession, and sorcery (Yoshida 1992: 45). The body is also a holder of other things such as odour. Stannus (1910: 286) gave an example of the Cheŵa relationship between sex and odour: the women possess greater sexual desire if they emit odour before, during and after sexual intercourse respectively. Stannus article is appropriate to this study because, despite its Eurocentric tone, he describes the body language of different emotions amongst the Cheŵa, such as fear, pleasure, indignation, happiness, etc.
Animals, it should be noted, are present in Chewa creation myths (van Breugel 2001), folk tales, such as ‘A hunter and his game pit’, ‘Nkaka and his pretty wife’ and the ‘wagtail saves man from extinction’ (Schoffeleers & Roscoe 1985; see also Werner 1906) and proverbs (Morris 2000a: 237-242). On the other hand, animals are important as meat and for their use in medicine (Yoshida 1992; Morris 2000b).

The Chewa consider certain animals – specifically baboons, hyenas, and dogs (Morris 2000b) – to be representative of powerful human sexual passions (*chilakolako*). Bodily representations then make use of these animals. Some of the animal bodies represented in the White Spread-eagled tradition, I posit, take on a particular – a sexual – aspect. Human beings and animals interact and fuse and therefore, clearly, the images were created as intentional signifiers and hold considerable meaning, particularly in this case, for Chewa women.

**Songs**

To understanding the function of metaphors used to refer to the human body, it is necessary to discuss one of the most important venues for the construction of such metaphors: the songs. Little has been said about the crucial role of song in girls’ initiation or of its power and significance in general for the Chewa people – especially Chewa women. Enoch Selestine Timpunza Mvula (1986, 1987) has studied women’s folklore in depth, particularly the ways in which this folklore is expressed in, for instance, poetry and song. As a Ngoni, his research has focused on this particular group. He has, however, analysed the meanings and purpose of songs from other traditions – for instance, the pounding songs prevalent amongst the Chewa and Ngoni women. Pounding songs are verbal strategies intended to manage intra-family tensions. It is through the songs that Chewa women find not only a sense of group cooperation but also

... reduce the physical agony of pounding corn, the verbal messages in the songs highlight mental agonies and domestic quarrels that are safely manipulated and managed through the artistic conduits of sarcasm, ridicule, and indirection (Mvula 1986: 265).

Following this analysis, the initiation songs assist women to remember not only the teachings of the initiation but also to express their tensions at home and to laugh about the male behaviour and his body (van Breugel 2001). They also give a means through which women express their daily life experiences and in which both women and men are actors (Mvula 1986). The songs have a particular flexibility that impressed me. While we were waiting at the *mtengo*, the women started singing a song sung inside the *tsimba* although on this occasion the leader was using my name instead. They laughed.
The following example of a riddle song, sung during Chinamwali Chachikulu helps us understand how these songs are used, through the play of words related to the male’s sexual organs, to describe sexual intercourse and the condition of the girl who is pregnant and ready to go through Chisamba:

\[
\text{Takhazike anamwali,} \\
\text{Takhazike panutu wa mbolo.} \\
(\text{Let us place the maidens,} \\
\text{Let us place them on the head of the penis})
\]

\[
\text{Awo a kambolo kakang’ono napite kunja,} \\
\text{Awo a kambolo kakakulu adze kuno.} \\
(\text{Let those with a small penis go outside,} \\
\text{Those with a big one come here})
\]

\[
\text{Wadya msakasa, wadya msakasa wa mbolo.} \\
(\text{She has eaten the cold, she has eaten the cold of the penis})
\]

(Winterbottom & Lancaster 1965: 349).

Perhaps the greatest difficulty faced in interpreting such songs results from the multitude of possible meanings which women may give to them; it thus becomes necessary for women to not only translate but to explain such songs – and even then the message which the song was intended to convey may remain far from clear. As Father Boucher told me (personal communication, December 16, 2003) “it is not enough to be fluent in Chichewa, it is necessary to ask the meaning of the songs to people” thus it is not sufficient to translate the songs but to understand them. In western society, for example, the symbolism of Christian songs sung during the mass requires a much deeper understanding of the subject and its contextual symbolism.

Van Breugel (2001: 190) states that the only evident differences between the rituals of the localities which he studied were contained in the Chinamwali songs. Their meanings were identical across localities but they displayed certain local variations. As an example, a song published by Van Breugel, is nearly-identical to one that I recorded in Dedza District in 2003. He reproduced it as ‘one of the most important songs concerning the taboo on relations during the menstrual periods. This song is supposed to be sung each night before sexual relations’ (van Breugel 2001: 192–193):

\[
\text{Mnzako akati ndaima ndaimandaima} \\
\text{When your companion says: I am standing} \\
\text{Pholokoto wa mtengo wa pa dambo} \\
\text{Standing like a tree upright at the dambo (brook\textsuperscript{46})} \\
\text{Kubala akuti wirira} \\
\text{The women says: it is rough with long grass} \\
\text{Kagwa akuti lakata}
\]

\textsuperscript{46} Van Breugel translated \textit{dambo} as brook but a better word is wetland according to Steve Pass (ed.) (2003) \textit{English-Chichewa-Chinyanja Dictionary}. 
The women during her periods says: it fell down

Tandiuza chidalakata
Tell me why it fell down

Idalakata ndi nkhole
What fell down is menstrual blood

Nhole ikana ukuulu
Menstrual blood refuses pregnancy (here intercourse)

Phungu ndati miyambo tsiling’inthu
My tutor told us the miyambo of intercourse

Kafunde kafunde miyambo

(van Breugel 2001: 192-193)

What is most interesting is that 28 years after Van Breugel did his fieldwork in Malawi from January 1975-June 1976 (van Breugel 1976: iii), the songs have not changed much. I find this heartening, as I believe these songs have been kept alive via oral tradition from one generation to the other.

Chinamwali songs can be divided in two types and these songs find their expression also in Mwana wa Chentcherere II rock art.

1) Advising songs. Metaphorical songs that deal with and offer advice (mwambo) about different aspects of women’s lives. Symbolic language and plays on words are used to refer to sexual organs.

2) Riddles. These are songs that the Nyau dancers will ask each woman as they encounter her. The woman must give the correct answer to each riddle, these answers being a secret privy only to the initiated. The answers to these riddles are given by words with two or more meanings – a play on words. These riddles then serve as a means by which women may distinguish the uninitiated. So, for instance, when two women first meet they will often sing these riddles in order to determine if the other has been initiated.

Some of these songs are used to punish a namwali; others to give advice, others are related to the Gule Wamkulu and some others refer to specific masks of the Nyau.

The anamwali learn and memorize ritual teachings through memorising these songs. One of the purposes of the songs, according to Van Breugel (2001: 191) is that ‘every time a woman is with her husband in their house at night, she has to sing these songs which will remind her of what she has to do and what she should not do, according to the custom laid down by the ancestors’. Therefore, songs play a crucial role in a woman’s life because she is reminded constantly, through the learnt songs, on her ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ fluctuation.
Mwana wa Chentcherere II rock art

Having described the images of the panel at the site, discussed the Chinamwali ceremony and the uses of metaphors to express body perceptions and human behaviour, I have provided the reader with the essential background for the next phase: to propose an interpretation of the White Spread-eagled tradition at Mwana wa Chentcherere II.

My first insights into the relationship between the Mwana wa Chentcherere II White Spread-eagled tradition and the rituals of the Chinamwali derived from: the ways and means (e.g., singing, dancing and washing ritual) by which the anamwali are instructed; and some of the Cheŵa women knowledge of the meanings of the paintings at this site.\footnote{I must emphasize, however, that these hypotheses are based on contemporary knowledge and Cheŵa cosmology, which may differ from the ones that the original painters had at the time that the paintings were created.}

The analysis of the relationship between the teachings and local Cheŵa knowledge, however, depends on two different sets of data that consequently lead to different levels of analysis:

- **Accounts given by informants**: The data obtained from informants gives some insight into the meanings of the paintings. Nevertheless, such data typically proves problematic. People accustomed to performing the rituals under investigation are unlikely to share the same interest in the ritual as the researcher and will often consider the questions asked by researchers to be overly trivial. Moreover, people performing rituals as a matter of habit are often found to be unsure of the significance of the rituals. This is a phenomenon familiar to all cultures.

- **Literature**: The symbolism of the art is best understood by contrasting the data provided by informants with that drawn from the existing literature on the subject.

The contemporary meanings of the paintings are connected to the means of teaching used or the advice (mwambo) given during the ceremony. There are two sets of Chinamwali teachings: those which are imparted inside the tsimba, using song, dance and theatrical performance (acting) as a medium of instruction; and those imparted outside the tsimba (e.g., at the mtengo, bwalo, etc.), which follow the same procedures.

One of my informants, the eldest namkungwi from Chipazi village, still remembers when her grandmother took her to Mwana wa Chentcherere II and told her about the relationship between the paintings and the ceremony. Unfortunately, this rock shelter is not used presently. The namkungwi told me “things
have changed” and that the relationship between the paintings and the ceremony is no longer taught to the youngsters. She remarked that in older times, some time ago, women went to this site to discuss issues of *Chinamwali* and its instruction. I believe this is both because Mwana wa Chentcherere II is no longer hidden from the eyes of non-initiates; and because social change has seen women modify aspects of the ceremony – the site therefore no longer serves as a useful means of instruction.

Despite this, the *namkungwi* and her daughter were able to give meaning to three specific figures on the panel. I believe the information they gave is crucial not only to interpreting each figure on the panel but as to understanding some of the issues represented in this specific rock art tradition. I will discuss and analyse these three figures separately:

*The baboon*

The first figure was said to represent one of the answers to a riddle, a short song that I will not reproduce (in accordance with the wishes of the Chewa women) but whose underlying meaning is contained in the figure of a baboon (Table 2.4: section 5-4; Figure 4.13; Figure 4.16 A). This figure has a superimposition of another small spread-eagled design. This was omitted in the tracing done by Mrs. Hazel in 1972. It is hard to see. However, my informants, when they were pointing it out, said it was a baboon (*nyani*) also because they carry their children in the same way as represented in the painting.

According to Morris (2000a: 201) baboons are recognized as humans ‘both in the care of their young and in their use of medicines, and it is widely believed that the males [male baboons] may have forced sexual relations with Malawian women’.

At a deeper level, animal metaphors are used as a means of keeping secret certain teachings – and although this was not revealed to me, it has been argued by Morris that the baboon is related to sexual passions (as mentioned above). Therefore, I contend that one of the purposes served by animal metaphors is to make reference to sexual behaviour: one of the teachings of *Chinamwali*. Animal behaviour is used to make statements about the human condition (Schoffeleers & Roscoe 1985). The word *nyani*, is a word that modern Chewa women in Dedza District use to refer to a man when they are making fun or are angry with him.

The *nyani* (baboon) is also a *Nyau* structure that dances in the ceremonies also known as *nkhwere* (*ku-kwera* – to climb) (Morris 2000b: 148). According to Morris, these *nkhwere* explicitly show sexual behaviour towards women when they approach them. Father Boucher (Kungoni Art and Craft Centre, Mua Mission) writes that a night mask called *mataka alingana* (both cheeks of the
buttocks are similar) represents a baboon with a red backside. This mask shows that ‘all men and women are physically and anatomically similar. What differentiates them is their individual behaviour. A happy married life does not depend on the external appearance or being well endowed, but on the ability to understand and care for one another in the daily happenings’.

The representation of the baboon in Mwana wa Chentcherere II, following its sexual connotations and individual behaviour, was perhaps a representation of human sexual interaction. According to Mvula (1986: 268-269) a woman expresses her dissatisfaction through her body. She will use her body to sanction men by denying sexual intercourse as a mean to control men’s behaviour.

It must also be noted that both female and male ceremonies express similar things (e.g., sexual education, taboos). Moreover, I recorded songs in which women express issues related to women’s concerns and in which they also take into account what is expressed during the Nyau dances. Therefore, I propose that women employed certain animal bodies within the spread-eagled designs not only to represent men and women’s behaviour, but as an expression of the relation between women and men in the social, economic, political and ideological structures of Cheŵa society (e.g., the power derived from secrecy within the
Nyau closed association ‘provides men with a counterbalance to the dominating position held by women in the matrilineal Cheŵa society’ (Smith 2001: 191))

In Chinamwali the teachings are dictated through the mwambo, rules that become a deep part of a woman’s life. However, it is during the ritual that women can joke about their own role in society and transform it. The paintings were part of a complex mechanism in which singing and dancing gave life to the two-dimensional images that expressed their familial situation, their conflicts and their condition of being, women, within Cheŵa society. Through this mechanism women expressed interpersonal problems and shared these with other women.

Washing ritual
The second figure was related to the ceremony in a different way. My informants told me the figure represented the time when they take the anamwali to the river (Table 2.4: section 5-1; Figure 4.14; Figure 4.16 B).

![Figure 4.14](Photo: Benjamin Smith)

The washing is an important part of the ceremony. There is where girls are taught how to wash their sexual organs when they have their menstruation. They are also taught how to use the chitenje as a sanitary towel. I was told that women, at least in the rural area, do not have access to buy sanitary towels thus they have to wash their chitenje (Mvula 1987: 105-111 for further discussion on Ngoni ritual bath). According to Yoshida (1992: 246) this piece of cloth must never be seen by men. Again, the danger of menstrual blood is expressed in this
painting, and the instruction given must have been related to the risk the girl represents during her menstrual period.

The washing becomes a private ritual where only women can be present. Mtuta (2001) points out that the *anamwali* are accompanied by the mask *Kachule*, symbolising that a frog is always clean in the water and therefore that the girls should be aware of their physiological make up and how to wash themselves during their menstruation. This part of the ceremony is when the girl’s head, pubic and underarm hair is shaved; marking the transition from girl to woman.

**Dances**
The third figure relates to the ritual in another sense. During the *Chinamwali* women dance inside the *tsimba* and my informants told me that this figure (Table 2.4: section 5-1; Figure 4.15; Figure 4.16 C), in particular, was a *gule* (dance). Dances are an important part of *Chinamwali*, they generate an interaction of bodies in space and constitute a media of non-verbal communication between the participants that originates a complexity of feelings (Blacking 1977: 18). Through the body movements the *phungu* instructs the *anamwali* upon some important teachings. Moreover, the ritual dances unify women but do more than focus on the exclusiveness of women: they mobilize women in opposition to men, confronting them, for the women will sing songs taunting the men and, for a time, will not let the men dance in their circle.

*Figure 4.15* The *gule*  
( Photo: Benjamin Smith)
These interpreted meanings are intriguing and informative but each relates to spread-eagled designs that, in formal analytical terms, are nearly identical.

I pointed out to the women the fact that there are similarities between figures (e.g., the four limbs, the tail). I wanted to know what were the causes of such similarities and why they were able to tell me that one of the figures was a baboon while other was a *gule* if they looked alike. They told me that the meaning they know now is the one that came from their grandmother. It seems to me that they were not really worried or interested by this question.

*Figure 4.16* Location of the paintings identified as (A) the baboon, (B) the *anamwali* taken to the river and (C) the *gule*, on the general panel (Drawing: Leslie Zubieta)
Moon and stars
The namkungwi commented that on the panel there were representations of the moon and stars. She said that these represented statements about the times that women went to Mwana wa Chentcherere II. The girls were taken into the bush and to this site. Moreover, my informants told me that special teachings and rituals are performed at night, the secretive nature of which required a special place in the bush away from men’s and children’s eyes (Table 2.4: section 5-2; Figure 4.17).

Circles, filled circles and crescents have been suggested to be representations of the relation between the cycle of the moon and female menstruation (Smith 1995: 240). Even more, it is possible that the filled circles (e.g., Table 2.4: section 5-3) refer to the egg as representation of life. Both suggestions however would have served as useful instructions during Chinamwali.

Dots
Generally, the dots in the panel at Mwana wa Chentcherere II are in black and painted on top of the body of the White Spread-eagled figures, or as a series of white dots. Women told me these were related to Chingondo. The single series of
white dots distributed in rows were said to be flour (Table 2.4: section 5-7; Figure 4.19). The basic colour symbolism is the following:48

1) White (as the white spread on top of the chingondo): According to Mtuta (2001) signifies the kasiyamaliro – the queen mother of society. Morris (2000b: 144) points out kasiyamaliro as the most important Nyau. It means to ‘leave (referring to follow) the funeral’, the Nyau that parts from the funeral (Rangeley 1950: 21; Smith 2001: 190; Figure 4.18).

This structure dances during both day and night during Chinamwali. I witnessed one at a night performance in the bwalo (communal open space). Early next morning I saw three kasiyamaliro outside the village near the manda (graveyard). Women told me there was one for each namkungwi. Kasiyamaliro is the representation of the eland (ntchefu) (Yoshida 1992: 239, 1993: 39). Father Boucher (personal communication, November 28, 2003) observes that the white flour symbolizes the maturation of the sexual organs.

2) Red: Means blood, in this context menstrual blood. It also reminds that human beings are not eternal (Mtuta 2001). Red is also the colour associated with ‘hotness’ (van Breugel 2001).

3) Black: symbolises the fecundity of humans especially women. According

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48 For colour symbolism see also Welling (1999).
to Rangeley (1952: 45) black also symbolises the thunder clouds containing rain.

My informants explained the absence of other colours such as black and red, in these series of dots, by saying that it represented that the girl was not in her menstrual period. However, I think that perhaps, in general, the absence of red colour in the panel is related to its ‘hot’ connotation. I consider that the space used for initiation needs to be as ‘cool’ as possible; otherwise some danger could occur to the women involved in the ceremony or, even more, would have some disastrous effect on the fertility of the namwali.\footnote{Schoffeleers (1992: 63) comments that on a rain ceremony he witnessed, no one was allowed to wear red clothes because it would work against the ‘coolness’ of the ritual and make it ineffective.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{dots.jpg}
\caption{Dots\newline(Photo: Leslie Zubieta)}
\end{figure}

\textit{Snake-like figures}

Long lines, sometimes laying horizontally and other times vertically (e.g., Table 2.4: section 2-2, section 4-4); have been interpreted as snake like motifs. Smith (1995) states that a single line design (snake-like) is found at a significant percentage of sites but that this has no obvious parallel in eastern Zambia.

Snakes also are said to play an important role in female initiation ceremonies, as they did in rainmaking (Smith 1995). My informants commented that there were representations of snakes at Mwana wa Chentcherere II, but did not comment on their meaning.
Van Breugel (2001: 194) describes a dance during Chinamwali that lasts an hour in which the girl is covered with a cloth as is done for a corpse. The dance symbolised the transition of girlhood to womanhood. The women dance around her and sing:

\[ Mwana thunga \] 
\[ Mwana thunga \] 
\[ Mwana thunga \]

*Mwana thunga* means child of the sacred snake. The snake, according to Van Breugel, is a symbol of the male, and the whole of this dance symbolizes sexual intercourse.

*Thunga* (god in python form) had a real wife, a priestess and prophetess: Makewana (Mangadzi Phiri), ‘the mother of children’ (Rangeley 1952: 32). She presided over the Msinja rain complex shrine in central Malaŵi. Because she was the wife of god she did not have sexual intercourse with men. Only the *nsato* (python) or *thunga* (the sacred serpent) – the manifestation of Chiuta (god) in a snake form would have sexual intercourse with her on ritual occasions. According to Morris (2000b: 197) *thunga* is associated with mountains and hills in central Malaŵi and controls the rain. There were even pythons kept at shrines in baskets. The snake called *thunga* was the central cult object associated with the shrine and the sacred pool (Schoffeleers 1999: 153).

*Thunga* and the python are also linked to the rainbow. It is believed amongst the Cheŵa that a python always lies underneath (Yoshida 1992: 243) and that the rainbow is the breath of the python (Smith 1995). A python is related to curing and rain rituals (*ibid.:* 241-245).

Makewana played an important role in Chinamwali, at the time of the conclusion of all Chinamwali ceremonies; she would have ritual intercourse with *thunga*, an act referred to as ‘a snake having entered the hut of Makewana’ (Rangeley 1952: 33). As Morris concludes, this act is the union of the sky and the earth, with ‘the snake being associated with the male principle, and the prophetess with the female’. By coming down to the earth *thunga* gave fertility to the *anamwali* (Schoffeleers 1992). Thus it is highly probable that the symbolisms of the snake: rain, fertility and maleness were part of the Chinamwali. The initiates seek, at the end, fertility through the initiation (Smith 1995).

**Discussion**

Mwana wa Chentcherere II, because of its secluded nature in the past, was used as a sacred and ritual place for girls’ initiation rituals. The White Spread-eagled tradition figures are concentrated in the middle section of the back wall of the rock shelter; the painted panel is 14m long. There are 48 visible spread-eagled
designs and they are located mainly in the upper half of the wall while the lower level is characterized by snake-like forms and geometric designs (e.g., circles, stars and lines of dots; Appendix; Figure 4.20; Figure 4.21). The White Spread-eagled designs are more numerous than the geometric forms. The site is at an appalling state of preservation due to graffiti that cover 95% of the paintings.

Figure 4.20  Paintings at Mwana wa Chentcherere II  
(Photo: Benjamin Smith)

Figure 4.21  Elevation map of Mwana wa Chentcherere II with painted panel superimposed  
(Drawing: Leslie Zubieta)
Some spread-eagled designs are isolated but they are also found in relation to other spread-eagled designs, circles and snake-like forms (e.g., Table 2.4: section 4-2; Figure 4.22). The association of figures perhaps was also an association of symbolisms. For example, the association of snake-like forms and spread-eagled designs, given the significance ascribed by the Cheŵa to the python, which is the messenger of God and is invoked to both stop and provide rain, was probably fertility. It had both a positive and negative effect.

The White Spread-eagled tradition displays some interpretative challenges. I have discussed the meaning of some of the images in the panel, based on the oral tradition that some Cheŵa women still remember. I have also discussed the difficulty of interpretation presented by each figure having various levels of meanings.

The difficulty is increased by the convention of depicting the spread-eagled designs that makes it difficult to recognize exactly which species of animals is represented. Smith (1995) writes that a picture can often depict a non-material subject; therefore a painting is not recognisable to people who are not involved with the local conventions of depiction. It has thus been through a contextual analysis of the links between Chinamwali and the rock art tradition that some of the meanings have been suggested.

Nevertheless, it is important to consider Chinamwali ceremonies in their historical context to understanding the symbolism of this rock art tradition. We know that Chinamwali has been practised for hundreds of years and we cannot deny the link girls’ initiation once had with rain ceremonies (Schoffeleers 1992, 1999). Schoffeleers (1999: 154) writes that the final stage of the girls’ initiation ceremonies ‘coincided with the time of the great rain prayers and seems to have been part of them’. Moreover, Makewana, the priestess and prophetess at Msinja rain shrine, was never allowed to marry or to have sexual intercourse, unless with thunga (God). Makewana had servants (the matsano) (Rangeley 1952) who were young girls before the age of sexual activity (van Breugel 2001: 174).

Although it is difficult to know when the White Spread-eagled tradition started to be depicted as part of initiation ceremonies, the symbolism of the tradition is set within Cheŵa cosmology. The meanings of the rock art have a restricted semantic focus: a focused polysemy (following Lewis-Williams’s 1998 terminology). The symbolism of the rock art in Mwana wa Chentcherere II revolves around themes of fertility, taboos and women concerns.

The paintings were used for instruction purposes. I have discussed the importance of the mnemonic devices amongst both the Cheŵa and neighbouring groups during initiation ceremonies and the significance of the songs to understand the symbolisms of each of the figures represented. I have also pointed out
the importance of the songs sung within Chinamwali initiation ceremony and their link with the paintings at Mwana wa Chentcherere II.

The instructions related to the paintings had different categories associated with sexual life, married life, respect to the elders, respect to the husband and the special relationship between a woman and her child. The paintings also made a strong emphasis on the dangerous phases of a woman when she fluctuates from ‘cold’ to ‘hot’. Although there are specific instructions given only during the Chinamwali Chachikulu (when a woman is pregnant) there are some instructions overlapping with the Chinamwali Chaching’ono, such as the relationship of wives and husbands, not only in sexual life but in daily life happenings, as well as instructions that emphasize the special link between a mother and her child. I recorded some songs on this matter during Chinamwali Chaching’ono. Women are also the ones who know the secrets of birth; men are never told how a child is born (Yoshida 1993: 44).

I propose that some of the relationships between spread-eagled designs in Mwana wa Chentcherere II stresses the link between women, men and children (Figure 4.22).

The circle with internal divisions, which resembles the mnemonic device recorded by Apthorpe (1962) amongst the Nsenga must also be noted (Figure 4.8). I discussed the strong link between the Chewa and Nsenga peoples, and I propose that the schematic design at Mwana wa Chentcherere II also has a
complex symbolism such as warning the initiates against engaging in sexual intercourse while menstruating because of the harm that she could do to her child and husband. This interpretation could be possible, considering the association between this schematic design and the bigger spread-eagled designed on the left and their association with the spread-eagled designs to the right. It must be noted that the smaller figure in the middle (a child?) has characteristics of both spread-eagled designs on left and right sides: the shape of the head is similar to the left spread-eagled design (mother?), while the dots are similar to the right spread-eagled design.

The conventional depiction of the spread-eagled designs has other interpretations besides those relating them to animal bodies. Two of the three figures that I have discussed in this chapter (the gule and the washing ritual) are representations of human beings engaging different activities related to Chinamwali. I argue that the spread-eagled designs were also employed as a way of keeping veiled the secret meanings of the paintings to the non-initiates.

On the other hand, the spread-eagled designs in Mwana wa Chentcherere II resemble the mnemonic devices that I have previously discussed. For example, I have noted that three of the larger spread-eagled designs located in the upper middle section of the wall, which have black dots on their bodies, have a similar pattern to the figures illustrated by Yoshida (1992) in eastern Zambia. A particularly clear example is illustrated in Figure 4.23 (Table 2.4: section 5-5). Note in particular the vertical line in the tail section.

![Figure 4.23](image-url)  
*Figure 4.23* Similarities between mnemonic devices. a) painting at Mwana wa Chentcherere II taken from Appendix); b) vilengo taken from Yoshida (1993: fig. 14)
Yoshida (1992: 249) pointed out that most of the *vilengo* figures represented by the Cheŵa women in Zambia, had something to do with water. The time of the year in which *Chinamwali* usually takes place is at the end of the dry season, thus the connection of rain rituals and initiation rituals is stressed – while the community waited for the rains to bring new life to their fields also the young girls also waited for *Chinamwali*, which was to deliver them their own fertility. Reinforcing this link, the body of the *anamwali* is decorated with dots just as the paintings and vilengo are (Yoshida 1992, 1993).

The black dots depicted on the bodies of some spread-eagled designs were also used to resemble the dotted pattern of the python. The python is believed to bring rainfall and fertility to the land and to humans (Yoshida 1993: 44). Black is related to rain and fertility, it is the colour of the cloth that covers the sacred drum of the Cheŵa used in rain ceremonies and it is also the colour in which Makewana used to dress (Rangeley 1952; Schoffeleers 1992; van Breugel 2001; Smith & Blundell in press).

Another animal probably depicted in the White Spread-eagle tradition is the chameleon because of its role in Cheŵa myths as the symbol of life and origin (Schoffeleers & Roscoe 1985; Smith 1995; Morris 2000b; van Breugel 2001).

Although the meaning of each of the figures in the panel is unclear, in order to interpret any of the associations of the figures it is important to keep in mind that the figures are linked to the *Chinamwali* ceremony.
In the preceding chapter I discussed the ways in which the White Spread-eagled tradition is related to the ritual context of Mwana wa Chentcherere II, a site used for Chinamwali. However, the total picture has not been complete. This is the goal of this chapter. I will focus my attention on this rock shelter across time and space in order both to reconstruct the ways in which it has been used by the different populations of Dedza District: from the first hunter-gatherers to the last farmers; and to determine Mwana wa Chentherere’s II changing role, value and importance through time.

Mwana wa Chentcherere II was, according to the excavated data, first inhabited around 500 B.C. by a hunter-gatherer people known in the oral history of the Che’wa as the Batwa. Archaeological evidence indicates that over the 2,000 years in which the shelter was used, it was only ever occupied for short periods. Analysis of faunal and plant material remains from the site point to seasonal occupation by hunter-gatherers who used the site in the warm and wet summer months (Clark 1973: 38, 1984; Crader 1984: 168).

The first people to occupy the shelter (Robinson 1975; Crader 1984) used it, in particular, for working animal hides and for cooking and drying meat. Clark suggests that this involved roasting and drying the animals over a fire. He argues that this was done by the back wall of the shelter, as this part of the cave offered the best protection against the elements (Clark 1973 op. cit.). Small ungulates seem to have been taken to the cave and butchered and prepared with chopping tools and knife-like tools that the hunter-gatherers then discarded. There is evidence that some of the larger bones were split open to get at their marrow. Certain animals appear, moreover, to have been cooked on top of large fires close to the back wall (Crader 1984: 171). This would have caused the back wall to
flake and this may explain why there is only fragmentary hunter-gatherer rock art left in this part of the shelter.

These hunter-gatherer groups were small in number, comprising, perhaps, 10-15 people – men, women and children (Crader 1984: 169) – whose nomadic life made them seek shelter in the hill country during rains. These rains were a mixed blessing for the Batwa – they replenished the semi-permanent water supplies of the area but dispersed the game widely across the landscape. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Batwa used arrows and poisoned bone points to hunt and made use of awls to sew hides and clothes. The Batwa women were in charge of preparing vegetable foods: they used digging sticks to unearth roots and tubers. The food was prepared using grinders, pestles and pitted stones. Batwa men hunted with arrows; boys and elderly men trapped and snared small game (Crader 1984: 172).

The Batwa found that the Mwana wa Chentcherere II rock shelter offered a suitable surface for their finger-paintings: geometric forms in shades of ochre ranging from red to purple. Chunks of ochre, haematite and graphite were found throughout the main occupation layers (Clark 1973: 35) suggesting, perhaps, painting throughout the sequence.

For perhaps a thousand years, the nature of the human interaction around the site appears to remain stable. Things began to change in the 6th century A.D. when contact took place between two technologically and economically different populations: the hunter-gatherers and the first food-producers.

Given the long sequence of farmer art I believe that it was not too many centuries after their arrival that farmers started to use Mwana wa Chentcherere II during the dry season for a new purpose: the performance of their secret and sacred girls’ initiation ritual. It is possible that the rock art related to Chinamwali was painted as long ago as when the first western Bantu-speaking groups arrived to the area. The exact time when farmers began to use the shelter is still unclear.

Perhaps as today, most of the ritual teachings took place in the village, where girls were secluded inside the tsimba for several days. This would have been an exciting time of the year – while the community waited for the rains to bring new life to their fields, the young girls awaited a ritual, which was to deliver them their own fertility. Other girls, no doubt, feared the initiation or felt that they did not need the advice of their elders. These girls, in particular, were probably chased at night as today and forced through initiation (van Breugel 2001).

However, we should imagine that not all the ritual instruction took place in the village. At night, when the darkness was defeated by the moonlight, the anamwali, accompanied by the namkungwi and their aphungu, would journey into the bush where the men could not see them dancing naked, singing and drumming through the night (Figure 5.1). Clapping and singing secret songs, the
women would make their pilgrimage to the rock shelter, laden with such items as would be needed the following day: food, pots, mats, and so forth.

This was a time for women to laugh and rejoice, to relate their sexual experiences, and to discover their bodies. The women found that Mwana wa Chentcherere II rock shelter provided good surfaces on which to paint figures of their own: they painted animal body figures, concentric half-circles, ovals, dots, and stars on top of the red finger-painted designs of the Batwa, using, for the most part, a white pigment. For centuries, each subsequent generation added designs of its own, painting over those of previous generations. Sometimes they no doubt made use of old figures. These figures, devastated in the last decade by graffiti, provided, until recently, a vital means by which the anamwali might be taught each important lesson (mwambo) of Chinamwali.

The celebrations continued through the night, with singing, clapping and dancing, the girls receiving praise from the namkungwi making nthungululu (shouting with joy) when their performance was good. Later the exhausted anamwali were left to sleep on the reed mats. Perhaps some of the women lost or broke their mkuzi during the ceremony, the beads falling to the ground, where the earth eventually covered them; this is a possible explanation, for the presence of glass beads in the archaeological deposit (Clark 1973, 1984; Chapter 2). The older women, veterans of the ceremony, having reached that state of exhaustion.
in which tiredness is confused with dizziness were the only ones still awake at sunrise.

Nonetheless, it was a good night and the teachers were happy to have taught the girls the manner in which they were expected to conduct themselves as grown women. They were pleased, moreover, to have been given an opportunity to punish the ruder, more forthright girls of the community. For some of the initiates the ceremony proved a life-changing experience; others, were reprimanded in front of the other girls and given notice that they would have to change their behaviour as the mwambo dictates. There was no other option; women who were not initiated were said to have no children and, if they did, these could die young (van Breugel 2001: 198). Moreover, if a woman was not initiated was excluded from society.

It is possible that for many years the Cheŵa and the Batwa occupied the same shelter in different seasons and established, thereby, a relationship based on mutual respect – of co-existence – a relationship strengthened by a trade in commodities between the two peoples (Clark 1973, Crader 1984). While we know that some Batwa intermarried with the farmer people; others were killed (Mgomezulu 1978; Crader 1984; Schoffeleers 1992 for further discussion).

In the last part of the 19th century the arrival of new people in the area forced the Cheŵa women to stop painting and using the rock shelter. The reasons are somewhat unclear. Perhaps it became dangerous for women to visit the shelter alone at night and they preferred to keep instead to the security of the tsimba. The ritual specialists had therefore to make use of means of instruction other than the rock paintings. The Chinamwali continued, nonetheless, to be performed, and the ingenious Cheŵa women found new ways of overcoming whatever difficulties they may have faced. Mwana wa Chentcherere II fell into disuse as a place of ritual instruction.

In the 1860s (Mgomezulu 1978) the Cheŵa people were forced to use Mwana wa Chentcherere II and other rock shelters in the hills as places of refuge from the Ngoni raids and the Yao invasion (Clark 1973). The sacred paintings came, thus, to be viewed by people other than the anamwali, the namkungwi and the aphungu, and knowledge of their ritual meaning and use began to disappear (or be carefully forgotten so as to protect it).

This was a difficult period for Cheŵa women as they were forced by the Ngoni patrilineal group, for the first time, to move away from their own village and move into the man’s village. The Chinamwali tradition survived this period,

50 Perhaps, what we now know as chingondo had its origin in two dimensions (in paintings); thereafter certain women may have represented the figures seen in the paintings as mud figures in low relief; subsequently, other women may have replaced these low reliefs with the small clay figures that the anamwali nowadays use in the headdress of the Chingondo ritual.
mainly because the newcomers who had children with Chewa women did not realize the resilience of the Chewa’s mother tongue. The new progeny learned Chichewa, the language of the Chewa people, and with it their oral tradition and they went through Chinamwali according to the matrilineal principle.51 The Ngoni, with time, adopted some of the Chewa customs and respected others, and at the same time influenced Chewa social structure. Chewa women, however, were not only forced to leave their village but also their sacred places; Mwana wa Chentcherere II was no longer in women’s control.

Also in the last part of the 19th century, the presence and influence of western culture played also an important role. The first missionary expedition of the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) (named after the association of Cambridge, Oxford, Dublin and Durham universities) arrived in Malawi in 1861 (Winspear 1965: 12) and from the 1870s missionaries introduced Christian teaching and European techniques (Phiri 1983: 258). The encounter between missionaires and Chewa people affected Chewa ceremonies seriously. The Catholic Church had to overcome especially the opposition role that Nyau played because missionaries were trying to impose a rigid moral code and to stop the ‘obscene and immoral ceremonies’ (see Linden 1974: Chapter 6 for further discussion). Mwana wa Chentcherere II was an abandoned site and the Chinamwali ceremonies, that survived the Ngoni raids, were now subjected to Catholic Church scrutiny.

In the 1890s, with the advent of the Protectorate over what was then known as Nyasaland Districts by the British Government, the Chewa were subjected to colonial rule and drawn into a capitalist economy (Phiri 1983: 258). A few years later, the name of the Protectorate was changed into the British Central Africa Protectorate and later, in 1907, into the Nyasaland Protectorate. Chewa people started to interact not only with western religion but also with other aspects of the culture (e.g., modern dancing in western style and gramophones began appearing in villages for the first time in the 1930s [Linden 1974: 120]).

In 1953, the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was formed despite African opposition. However, it was not long before Nyasaland became an independent country. Malawi gained independence on the 6th of July, 1964. With Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda in the presidency, Malawi became a Republic in 1966.

The new Republic wanted to reform the country and to elevate and recognize Malawian culture and heritage. In this scene the Malawian government declared

51 Smith and Blundell (in press) state that women’s rock art dominates the region because of the local understanding of the importance of women’s knowledge in Central African Bantu-speaking farmer groups and especially because they are matrilineal societies in which all of the traditional knowledge gets passed down the women’s line.
Mwana wa Chentcherere II a National Monument in 1972 and the site acquired a new value – as a tourist attraction.

The area surrounding the site, which in the 1960s was replaced from native vegetation to commercial plantation pine forest ensuring thus, that the site kept the secluded character it had historically known, first as a ritual space and then as a refuge; became protected by law and a fence was build around the site to impede the access. However, local people took apart the fence and used the components for other purposes.

In the year 2000 the pine forest was cut down, so that no vegetation nowadays conceals the site. Local people – in particular the women living in the villages near Chentcherere still go there occasionally to collect firewood and msuko fruits (section on Site setting in Chapter 2). Carrying their babies in their mbereko (cloth fastened round a mother’s neck or shoulder and slung on her back, in which she carries her baby), they return laden with many long pieces of wood atop their heads on their nkata (pad on head) but just a few local people visit the site.

“School children”, some women say, are responsible for the graffiti that nowadays cover the paintings. The women regret this desecration, as many of them still feel a special link to Mwana wa Chentcherere II. Children are taught at school that the Batwa created the paintings and lived in Chentcherere for centuries. Little is said, however, about the link between the rock art and the Chewa people – perhaps because of the secret nature of this link: paintings that played an important role in girls’ initiation ceremonies.

It was particularly interesting to note the range of explanations, which the women gave for the origins of the paintings. The first group of women that I interviewed at the site (Chapter 2) told me that God painted the rock art; as they told me this, they pointed to “paintings” in areas in which the wash-out had produced black vertical lines. The oldest lady in the group remembered that the shelter was occupied during the Ngoni raids of the 19th century. Women eventually started dancing and singing in Mwana wa Chentcherere II. The interview took place during a celebration of my initiation (I had been initiated two days ago).

The second group of women, living in a village closer to the site, proved better able to discuss the relationship between the paintings and the ceremony (Chapter 4). I asked identical questions to each groups trying not to force or prejudice their answers. My first question to both groups was intended to draw out their knowledge of the paintings and the site; after a little while, the conversation just flowed.52

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52 I am unsure why such radically different accounts of the origins of these paintings should exist.
The Chinamwali and Nyau ceremonies remain an important aspect of contemporary village life in Dedza district, despite the poverty and malnutrition endemic to the region. It is common to see villagers walking barefoot in old torn clothes. It is particularly disheartening to witness both the poor sanitation facilities with which the villagers make do, and their lack of concern for basic hygiene: dozens of children run around playing with dirt and sucking on whatever pieces of plastic they chance to find on the ground – as a result, most of these children are constantly sick. Usually their grandmothers take care of them while their mothers are working at the garden (Figure 5.2).

![Figure 5.2 Agogo (grandmother) and the grandchildren](Photo: Leslie Zubieta)

Women typically perform a host of domestic chores – collecting water and firewood, preparing food, etc – and usually do not attend school. It is rare to find a woman in these communities for whom submissive labour is not the daily norm – nonetheless, the women take pride in their ability to perform their duties.

The local women typically give birth, from the age of about fifteen, to between five and ten children; a woman who does not have children is treated with pity. Given that not every child survives the disease, poverty, and malnutrition of their childhood, a large family is, to an extent, an economic imperative, an investment. Children will stay with their mothers if their parents get divorced (Mvula 1986: 266). Moreover Chewa women being part of a matrilineal society have a special link to the land because it is here that their ancestors lived. In this
social context, the secretive nature of Chinamwali, gives women a degree of power – although, it should be noted that even the men folk of the community are far from ignorant of the nature of the ceremony.

In social terms, Chinamwali lends importance to the Cheŵa women, as it makes clear to the villagers that it is the women who are responsible for raising subsequent generations and for administering domestic affairs. The women’s bodies are shaped over time by the duties which the ceremony teaches them to perform; moreover, the skills which the ceremony teaches helps the women cope with problems that may result should their husbands leave them for an extended period to work or study far from home; as Mvula notes (1986: 266-268) in this eventuality, the wife effectively becomes ‘the head of her immediate family’: while waiting for their partners to come back; women, alone, deal with the various daily activities and a house full of family. This in an area where many husbands left to work in the South African mines. Sometimes they were away for decades.

Chinamwali prepares women for their prescribed role and responsibilities in Cheŵa society. The ceremony is of fundamental importance to the community: it lends resilience and cohesion to the community, and it ensures the reproduction of population in time (Turner 1996). Moreover the ceremony has almost a ‘magical’ (mysterious) aspect in Cheŵa cosmology because without Chinamwali there would be no children and no rain.

The social utility of Chinamwali results directly from the nature of the ritual instruction – instruction which requires that the bodies of the initiates be inspected and which impresses upon the girls the social importance of the female body as a fully grown-up woman, and which teaches them customs intimate to relations between husbands and wives. In particular, according to Van Breugel (2001: 192) one of the most important aspects of the mwambo ‘concerns the days when they [man and wife] are not supposed to have relations’ – lest this give rise to mdulo.

The ritual establishes and reproduces, moreover, a set of social rules to which women and their bodies are expected to adhere – regulations of the body in space; certain clothes – such as the chitenje and the mbereko – must be worn at certain times; wives must kneel before their husbands and their elders, and must treat them at all times with respect and deference. Women have to behave quietly in the presence of the elders and look at the ground. These rules also prescribe when women should or should not engage in sexual activity. Body fluids – especially menstruation and intercourse are seen as powerful and dangerous (hot) and these could cause mdulo.

Nowadays, the Chinamwali is both a source of rivalry and cooperation between villages – this is because detailed knowledge of certain aspects of the
ritual (e.g., the manufacture of *chingondo*) is possessed by no one woman in its entirety. Therefore, it is sometimes necessary to ask the *namkungwi* of other villages for help with the ceremony. Perhaps this was not needed in the past when each village had its own ritual specialists who knew precisely how the ceremony should be conducted. This is no longer the case today, mainly due to the influence of Christianity: although some of the villagers still participate in *Chinamwali* and *Nyau* ceremonies others no longer attend, preferring instead to go to church.

Material circumstance often impels cooperation between villages – there may not, for instance, be enough food in one village to allow the ceremony to be performed. The *anamwali* from different villages then band together to perform the initiation, strengthening, thereby, the linkages between the villages. According to Van Breugel (2001) several girls will typically be initiated at once in order that the high cost of the ceremony be minimised. Lucy Mair (1951a) writing of the Yao people, states that *Chiputu* is performed only when the parents of the girl to be initiated are able to afford the ceremony. For the Cheŵa in Dedza District, *Chinamwali* requires that a fee be paid to the *mfumu* and to the *namkungwi*; that sufficient maize-meal for the people and *nkuku* (chicken) for the *mfumu* be bought; and that proper tips be given the *aphungu* and the *Nyau* dancers (van Breugel 2001).

Nonetheless, these all happen in the village. Although the local people maintain a connection to their ancestral places, crucial details to do with the identity of the original occupants and the authorship of the paintings at Mwana wa Chentcherere II are difficult to track down. Just a few of the elders still remember when the site was used to hold *Chinamwali* rituals.

The local women do not know why the tradition of painting in rock shelters was abandoned but they are aware that the *Chinamwali* ceremony has changed; it will not be long now before the people forget completely that this rock art tradition was once linked to such an important ceremony.
Conclusion

Archaeology and anthropology have established a set of cultural beliefs around what is meant by “masculine” and “feminine” – beliefs about the capabilities of men and women, about their power relations and their roles in society. The range of meanings which the word gender may assume can prove particularly challenging for archaeologists: our Western, dualist understanding of gender is often an encumbrance to our comprehension of non-Western conceptions of gender. It is permeated with assumptions and statements of fact about gender roles, and, thereby, sometimes our understanding of gender is an obstacle to penetrating the meaning of rock art (Chapter 3).

Some gender researchers have used dichotomies to construct a basis for rock art analysis (Solomon 1994). Others have gone into a deeper gender analysis from a feminist theory perspective and used ethnographic accounts to emphasize women’s role within the shamanistic explanation for San rock art (Stevenson 1995).

Amongst the Cheŵa, the way (or ways) in which men and women acquire status is based on initiation rituals that enable them to be recognized by the society and to assume their prescribed social roles (for example ‘a young man is not considered to have become an adult member of society until he has completed the initiation’ (Smith 2001: 190).

The use of Cheŵa ethnography alone cannot allow us to understand the meanings of the White Spread-eagled tradition. Despite this limitation, ethnography is necessary and useful because it provides information that cannot be recovered by archaeological methods; archaeology and ethnography should be used in tandem. It is necessary to understand the means by which the nature of relationship between different disciplines is negotiated (Anthropology/Archaeology). Furthermore, it is essential that we challenge our own assumptions and preju-
dices and recognize that we may, perhaps, never be able to guarantee the applicability of certain of the analogies by which we attempt to comprehend specific aspects of the archaeological evidence; we should not, however, succumb to pessimism – we should, instead, hold fast to reason, evidence, argument and perseverance to uncover the true meaning of any particular instance of rock art.

I have followed a three step approach in my research, attempting first to gain an understanding of the history of the region under investigation, then proceeding to examine the rock art itself and, finally, turning my attention to regional ethnography.

Cheŵa society has, throughout its history, experienced constant change. Its rituals have changed in line with changes in its political, religious and economic circumstances (Chapter 5). Cheŵa women’s perceptions of their bodies must be seen not merely as a component of their individual self-identity, but as being embedded in a specific historical and social context. The complex social-body relationship can be better understood by researchers as not merely rooted in over-arching theories that explain societies in broad terms such as Anthony Giddens’s (1993) structuration theory or Michael Foucault’s (1979) analysis of the body in relation to mechanisms of power, but through the notion that individuals change, flux and mutate through their life experiences and their own manipulation of their destinies (e.g., Meskell’s 1999 work as an example).

The interpretation I offer here is based, not on our contemporary conceptions of sexual identity and morality, but on a reflexive discourse that accounts for other cultures’ perceptions of sexual identity and the body – the major contribution of “body theory” to sociology, anthropology, archaeology and rock art studies, and the way we understand the past.

Concern for the body and its representation helped me to understand both how Cheŵa people conceptualize gender systems and how these systems were represented in the archaeological data. This in turn aided my understanding of the mechanisms by which gender roles in Cheŵa society interact in both social and ritual context. This offers a good example of how borrowing from other fields of research – such as anthropology – may offer fresh approaches to the study of rock art.

In the time when rock art was still being made, the paintings at Mwana wa Chentcherere II had a special function: to tell girls how to behave in society. It is through initiation ceremonies that society is regulated. The prohibitions of certain activities (e.g., sexual intercourse during menstruation, sexual intercourse during ceremonies, preparation of food during menstruation and so forth; Chapter 4) and the danger of mdulo to society are important instructions in Chinamwali. The Chinamwali ceremony is a means by which Cheŵa society deals with different social problems, such as adultery, and prevents girls getting pregnant before
marriage. When girls get pregnant before Chinamwali, *mdulo* will affect the chief and this will have a negative effect on the whole society. Moreover, the paintings at Mwana wa Chentcherere II were also very powerful: the figures represented dealt with the *namwali*’s fertility, marriage, and child bearing capacity. It was crucial for the *namwali* to attend the Chinamwali for her own sake as well as for Chewa society.

In previous chapters I analyzed the ceremony based on body and gender theories (Chapter 4). It must be noted, however, that I found it difficult to engage in the interpretation of the White Spread-eagled tradition without undertaking a detail analysis of the Chinamwali ceremony based, as well, on those theoretical frameworks.

Moreover, when local women told me the meaning that they ascribe to the paintings at Mwana wa Chentcerere II, I did not only rely on the straight forward answer the women gave me (Chapter 4). I attempted to understand the ways in which these paintings were related to the Chinamwali ceremony.

Through my discussion I have argued for the interpretation of Mwana wa Chentcherere II art and analyzed the symbolism of the paintings in their ritual context (Chapter 4). I have attempted to recreate the way or ways that the site was used within the lives of the people of Dedza District (Chapter 5). Mwana wa Chentcherere II rock art tells the story of women who shared their feelings, their disappointments and tensions acquired through their role in society. A story of women who, some time ago, were given, through the White Spread-eagled tradition, advice and specific knowledge about their body and its fluids. Instructions that comprised a whole set of regulations, knowledge on the functions of male bodies and rules dictated to the *anamwali* by the traditional teachings (*mwambo*). Although this set of rules weighs heavily on Chewa women, they have had the power to change and manipulate some aspects of the ceremony through action.

It is through the *Chinamwali* rock art that women reflected autobiographies as well as biographies of other women by expressing, in the two-dimensional images, their gender role concerns, their familial situation and their conflicts and pleasures of being a woman in a matrilineage society. The paintings were also a means to account for the important role of ancestral spirits and to keep in mind that not only elder women but other women in the past, who are no longer present, were once in charge of the ceremonies and thus the new generations need to respect the ancestors and the knowledge passed through them. Mwana wa Chentcherere II tells a story of women who at the same time play the part of daughters, mothers and wives. Women who all went through a transcendental experience in their lives: *Chinamwali*. 
Appendix
## Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Azamba</strong></td>
<td>Elderly women helping at child birth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bwalo</strong></td>
<td>Communal open space in the village used as a meeting place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chimamwali</strong></td>
<td>Girls’ initiation ritual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chingondo</strong></td>
<td>Ritual performed at the end of the <em>Chinamwali</em>. A clay figurine is put on top of the girls head as a symbol of womanhood. The Chewa women refer to this figurine as <em>chingondo</em>. Therefore, I make a distinction between <em>Chingondo</em> and <em>chingondo</em> to refer to the ritual and the figurine respectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chisamba</strong></td>
<td>Dance and rituals associated with a woman’s first pregnancy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chitenge</strong></td>
<td>Long piece of cloth that women use around their lower half of the body as a wraparound, as a skirt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dambo</strong></td>
<td>Marsh, valley glades/grassland, wetland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dambwe</strong></td>
<td>The place of <em>Nyau</em> initiation instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>— dika</strong></td>
<td>To abstain from sexual intercourse for a ritual purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fisi</strong></td>
<td>Hyena.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gule Wamkulu</strong></td>
<td>‘The big dance’ where <em>Nyau</em> masks perform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kalulu</strong></td>
<td>Hare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kudula</strong></td>
<td>To cut; often used to indicated that by transgressing a taboo on sexual intercourse during certain particular circumstances a person causes some disaster.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kumeta</strong></td>
<td>To shave the hair (at an initiation or a burial).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kundabwi</strong></td>
<td>Medicine made out of ashes and burnt roots.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kutenga mwana</strong></td>
<td>The ritual performed some weeks after the birth of a child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kutukwana</strong></td>
<td>To swear; to course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Makewana</strong></td>
<td>Priestess at the Msinja rain shrine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Makolo</strong></td>
<td>Ancestors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manda</strong></td>
<td>Graveyard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mankhwala</strong></td>
<td>Medicine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mberekolo</strong></td>
<td>The cloth (previously skin) fastened round a mother’s neck or shoulder and slung on her back, in which she carries her child until is weaned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mdulo</strong></td>
<td>Disease related to sexual taboos and hot/cold symbolisms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mfuti</strong></td>
<td>Witch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mfuti yeni-yeni</strong></td>
<td>A witch who is believed to eat the flesh of his victim.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mfumu</strong></td>
<td>Chief or village headman. pl. <em>Amfumu</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mfunde</strong></td>
<td>Storm. Rain sacrifice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mkazi wachitengwa</strong></td>
<td>A married woman living in the village of her husband.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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53 Plural generally, but not always, takes the prefix A: *Anamwali, aphungu, anamkungwi* and so forth.
| **Mkhate** | Vessel given to women during *Chinamwali* to wash and shave her and her husband’s pubic hair. |
| **Mkuzi** | String of beads round the waist. |
| **Mpheranjiru** | A sorcerer who kills out of malice or upon demand. |
| **Mphongozi** | Mother-in-law; father-in-law. |
| **Mtengo** | Tree (under which some rituals take place during *Chinamwali*). |
| **Mwambo** | Tradition, custom, advice, wisdom. |
| **Namkungwi** | Elderly woman in charge of the initiation of girls. pl. *Anamkungwi*. |
| **Namwali** | Initiate, pl. *Anamwali*. |
| **Nkata** | Grass ring or pad used in carrying loads on the head. |
| **Ng’anga** | Traditional doctor. |
| **Njondo** | Small vessel with oil given to women during *Chinamwali* to put on her genitals before having intercourse. |
| **Njovu** | Elephant. |
| **Nkhole**: Menstrual blood. |
| **Nkhoswe** | Marriage counsellor (one or two for each husband and wife). |
| **Nsengwa** | Shallow basket, a symbol of womanhood. |
| **Nsima** | Stiff maize porridge, the staple food of the people. |
| **Nlhungulu** | Shriil shout of joy made by women. |
| **Nyama** | Animal flesh –cross section. |
| **Nyama ya mulungu** | Animals of god (do not come close to people). |
| **Nyama ya antu** | Animals of humans (attack people and destroy crops). |
| **Nyau** | Men closed association. |
| **Phungu**: The *namwali* tutor. |
| **Siwa** | Abandoned hut because of the owners deceased. |
| **Tsima** | Hut in which the girls are confined during initiation. |
| **Ufiti** | Witchcraft and sorcery in general. |
| **Ulemu** | Sign of respect shown to chiefs and elders. |
| **Zolaula** | Songs that mention the male or female parts. |

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