



# Chisungu: A Girl's Initiation Ceremony Among the Bemba of Zambia

*Audrey Richards*

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While there have been a number of descriptions and interpretations of boys' initiation rituals, Audrey Richards's classic study of initiation rites among the Bemba remains one of the few studies to deal in detail with the initiation of girls into adult life.

Dr Richards observed the entire *chisungu* or female initiation rite, an almost continuous series of complex ceremonies lasting for a month. Her detailed description of the elements of the ritual, and her analysis of it in terms of the culture of matrilineal society, have made this a classic ethnographic and theoretical text.

Celebrating the attainment of sexual and social maturity, the puberty rituals reflect tribal attitudes to sex, fertility, marriage, and the rearing of children. We see how women's ceremonies portray and try to enforce the social obligations of marriage and the setting up of the kinship group, and the conflicts of interest that are involved.

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