

## Death rituals among the Luhya Part II

By Nandemu Barasa, January 24, 2011



In the last article detailing the traditions, myths, culture and practices associated with death and burial in Western Kenya, we had explored activities undertaken after burial and traditional preaching commonly known as *khuswala kumusee* which is usually conducted on the third day after burial among Bamasaba people of the larger Bukusu community.

It is also very important to note here that besides age and initiating a grandson borne of a son, there are also other issues that need to be fulfilled.

After the deceased man has been buried, the very day at night, there are certain rituals that need to be performed to pave way for the traditional preaching; at night while sitting at the fire place lit outside the house in the open, clan elders will strangle a cock and roast it using that fire and then consume it.

Note that that cock is roasted when it is still with feathers and only elders eat it while offering traditional prayers.

The strangling and consuming of the cock signifies the death of the head of the home, in this case, the father. Among Bamasaba people there are a number of things that signify the head of the home such as the cock, a pointing stick on the house called *Lusuli* and one of the cooking stones and these must be removed immediately the head of the home passes on.

There is also a believe that if a cock stands on one leg in the homestead then it is inviting the death of the head of the home and therefore, it must be slaughtered and be eaten the very day or the man will die.

Back to the fire place and after strangling of the cock, the elders will discuss on whom will remove *Lusuli* (the stick erected on the roof top of a traditional hut) and one cooking stone at probably mid night when people are not around.



Removing *Lusuli* and the cooking stone is mostly done by a relative who is a widow or a grandchild in the absence of the widow. If both of them are not there then they will look for a non relative normally called *Omukulo*.

The person who will carry out the ritual must be the most trusted as he or she can use the cooking stone and *Lusuli* to kill everybody remaining. That also

explains why he or she is paid heavily.

The cooking stone and *Lusuli* are removed and hid very far where relatives of the deceased will not reach because they will die if they ever reach them.

We always have three cooking stones, one for the father, another one for the mother then the last for the children. If the father dies, his is removed same with the mother only that in the woman's case *Lusuli* is



not removed but if a child dies neither of the two is removed.

Bamasaba people believe that if the cooking stone is not removed after the death of the father and food is cooked on it for the family, it will lead to a curse and even death the same way with *Lusuli*.

If *Lusuli* is not removed and

someone climbs the house scratches it and pours wood chippings in water and family members drink it, then they will all die because there is no medicine or cure for it.

So for the traditional preacher to conduct preaching ceremony he must first confirm if *Lusuli* and the cooking stone have been removed because he cannot do it if they are still intact.

Have you ever asked yourself when and how the tools that are used during burial are removed from the grave?

According to Bamasaba culture, those tools are removed after the third day in which traditional beer or fermented porridge is used to cleanse them.



Every clan member will come with all farm equipment and they are mixed with those tools used during burial then members take beer or porridge sprinkling some on the farm tools and there after go to the farm to plough. Bamasaba people call the whole ritual

*Khubita kimiini* and it signifies new beginning. If it is not done, they believe that all the crops on the farm during that time will dry up and cause famine.

After burial and mourners return to their homes, the widow is left with some other rituals to perform on her own.

There is a very interesting ritual that one has to go through before he or she can continue with his or her sexual life after the death of the husband.

The widow will be required to travel a far place and find a male stranger whom she will accept to make love to her in the nearby bushes without revealing to the man that she is a widow.

The woman will accept the normal foreplay with her new lover and do everything that love entails, but when it comes to the act, the woman will scream saying something has bitten her on her back or that somebody is coming then they will all run away before engaging in the act.

This tradition is called *Khukhala kumulindi* and it is done the same way among men. It symbolically frees the woman from being a wife back to the free market to find a sexual mate.

By so doing the woman will have cleansed herself and therefore she is now free for a new sexual life. If one does not adhere to it then her sexual life will not be good as she might give birth to unique creatures.

Nowadays elders are strongly opposed to lodgings because they believe that sexual cleansing is mostly done there especially after clearing all the bushes.

And after a woman has successfully run away from the sexual act, she will go straight to her house and be served with roasted bananas or bananas cooked with pills signifying new beginning as bananas are seen to portray a new life and continuation of life.

If you realize that you have been used by a man or a woman to accomplish the tradition of *Khukhala kumulindi*, you have to cleanse yourself or else you will have brought death to your family.

What is normally done is that you take a rooster and go to the exact place you were just about to make love with the widow, strangle, roast and leave it at the scene. You can also slaughter a sheep there.

Think about this, if you were lured into it in a room in these big hotels, will you carry a cock or a sheep to strangle or slaughter it over there or will you just leave it and die or make your family perish?



On the other hand note that there are two types of the tradition of *Khukhala kumulindi*, the one we have looked at and another one of the living that is conducted after getting a baby.

It is done after three months after the woman gives birth and unlike the first one, in this one, a man will finish the sexual act.

This ritual is done to cleanse the baby as Bamasaba people believe that if it is not done, then the baby will not be blessed and therefore will not live for long.

In the next article we shall be looking at wife inheritance among the Bamasaba people.

Source: Westfm