

**Davie Simengwa**

**The Lambya Traditions: Customs,  
Beliefs, Rituals, Dances & Rites**

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# The Lambya Traditions

## Customs, Beliefs, Rituals, Dances & Rites

An ethnographic presentation of the Lambya ethnic group of Chitipa district of northern Malawi

Davie Moses Simengwa



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**Dedication**

This book is dedicated to Josephine Toliness Simengwa, inspiring mother, generous mentor, my hero and good friend. To all the Lambya community of Chitipa district remember your traditions as your identity.

**About the author**

Davie Moses Simengwa was born in 1986 at Queens Central Hospital in the city of Blantyre. Both his parents were teachers. He went to Mzuzu Demonstration and Chitipa C.C.A.P primary schools from 1994-2001. He was selected to Chaminade Secondary School where he did his secondary school from 2002-2005. In 2006 he was planning to join the Marianist brothers a Catholic religious society in Karonga but the plan failed. He graduated with a bachelor of social sciences degree in anthropology at the Catholic University of Malawi in 2011. Currently he is the founder and managing consultant at Lanujos Social Research & Consultancy Services firm, based in Blantyre Malawi and affiliate member of International Committee of Archaeological Heritage Management (ICHAM) and Southern Africa Research & Innovation Management Association (SARIMA). Davie is also the interim dean of admission and lecturer in Community Development at Central Christian University in Blantyre; currently he is pursuing a master's degree in health and behaviour change communication.

Davie has grown up mostly in Chitipa, where he has spent his early childhood life. Much of his life has been influenced by her mother, whom he was staying with. Her mother, who was a primary school teacher at Kawale FP School, she is a single parent who raised him up to adulthood, now retired. He is both a research archaeologist and cultural anthropologist locally trained.

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**Preface**

This book is mainly based on the intangible heritage of Malawi, from cultural anthropology to archaeological studies. The book describes the Lambya ethnic group, who are based in the northern tip of Malawi, particularly in Chitipa district. It mainly outlines their customs, traditions and values. It is based on the live observation and participation of their daily values, customs and traditions. In some cases direct participant observation, which I carried out for a period of January 2008 – December 2012. The first part of this book is thus a description of what was observed and told to the author by the key informants for a period of five years. The accounts recorded in the early chapters of the book are mainly for the Lambya ethnic group, who in Chitipa largely resides in traditional authority Mwalumbya and Kameme, in which I have chosen to call the region as Lambya region as it used to be, before the name Chitipa came into use. This book is written for any reader who is interested in culture, history, anthropology, theology, tradition region, literature, folk knowledge and sociology at all levels. It can be used in primary, secondary and at tertiary level.

Some chapters making this book are part of my major research studies I conducted in different parts of the southern Malawi mainly with focus on anthropological and archaeological studies. In these chapters I try to expose the knowledge of the local people through use of ethnography methodology. In these chapters I have exposed various issues that need attention to the department responsible for of cultural resources management. It specifically conveys problems and loopholes that need further attention by those in authority of looking after heritage of Malawi. Therefore, I prefer to view this book as an example of basic approaches to typical ethnographic studies that could be used in related studies; it is not a review of the Lambya customs, but a description of the Lambya ethnic group. Hence it is not the history of the Lambya ethnic group as people confuse between traditions and history, anthropology and history, but at least showing the connection of history and culture. But all this does not limit readers or other researchers not to use these simple basic elements in their studies related to the Lambya and anthropological studies in Malawi and surrounding areas.

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I also extend my special heartfelt gratitude to Senior Chief Mwabulambya (late), Chief Kameme, the Mtambo's (Mkombanyama and Mwene-ishalikira), Mwenebanda (Ng'ambi's) the Sizumwa's, Mwamswelo's, the Sikwese's, the Chizumu's and all chiefs in Chitipa for allowing me several times to interact with their people in local settings “*kukwane nkhusalifya bulo*”. The following people were also helpful in giving me important advice during my visits in Chitipa, and I felt that they need to be acknowledged for humbling themselves in associating with a young man like me. Mr. B. Sikwese (retired veteran officer at Lufita trading center), Mr. Simwagha in Mukombanyama village (experienced *mufusya*) I cannot finish thanking everybody but be proud that your ideas are valuable in this book.

## **Glossary**

**Akaya;** is an ascertainable locality in which one or more groups of persons reside in separate house, subject to the authority of a village headman (*mwene kayaya*)

**Abakaya;** strangers who occupy land in the village with the consent of the village headman and live as co- villages

**Abajeni;** non animilated strangers who do not occupy land in the village, from outside the village

**Abaluko;** relatives related by blood, can be elders for the clan or family

**Ubaba/Utata;** refers to the Father

**Umama/Unyina;** refers to the Mother

**Umwanavule;** a man who is an adult in the community, it is used to refer to grown up men in the village

**Umulumendo:** responsible adult youthful grown up boy, it can be used interchangeable with *umwanavule* in the village

**Umukolo;** a woman who is an adult in the community, referring to women

**Umulindu:** this is responsible adult youthful grown up girl in the community, can also be used interchangeable with *umukokolo* in the village

**Kayemba:** Father in law

**Mukolima:** Mother in law

# *Chapter 1*

## **Introduction**

### Introduction

Ethnography is an English word that is derived from Greek word known as *ethno*, it simply means folk or people, while *graph/y*, means write. This is a qualitative research method aimed to learn and understand cultural phenomena which reflect the knowledge and system of meanings guiding the life of a cultural group (Ember and Ember 2006). It was pioneered in the field of socio cultural anthropology but has also become a popular method in various other fields of social sciences- particularly in sociology, anthropology, theology, history, and communication studies that study people, ethnic group and other ethnic formations. For instance like ethno-genesis, composition, resettlement, social welfare, characteristics as well as their material and spiritual culture; it is often employed for gathering empirical data on human societies and cultures (Kottak 2005: 45).

In this case data collection used in this book was often collected through participant observation, in depth interviews, focus group discussion and questionnaires. The main aim of this ethnography was to describe the nature of the Lambya people through writing. The data collections that were employed meant to capture the social meanings and ordinary activities of people in natural occurring settings, which are commonly referred to as the *field* in anthropological language. Therefore, what is published here is what informants considered to be true about their social settings not the views of the author. In fact the goal was to collect data in such a way that the researcher doesn't impose any of his own bias on the data. A multiple methods of data collection were employed to facilitate a relationship that allows for more personal and in depth portrait of the informants and their community. These included participant observation, field notes, focus group discussions, and survey interviews by recording into the voice recorder. These were conducted in a period of five years of field season to Chitipa, which were transcribed and translated later. Secondary research was also employed by widely reading a number of districts and historical texts of Chitipa district (by then was known as north Nyasa districts, covering Karonga and Chitipa) and the manuscripts of Livingstonia mission which are found at Society of Malawi archives library, Kondowe, Rumphu and Malawi National Archives (Zomba and Mzuzu branches). These were the main sources of secondary data collection. However,

another important source of data collection that was recommended while in the field was clan heads. There are many clans in Chitipa, and every clan has a head that, among other things, is expected to know the traditions of the clan and pass them on to his heir. Most of these clan heads are small chiefs or connected to chieftaincy. Clansmen are often keen to know the details of how their ancestors came to settle in their present area, of the people they found there, and of the development of their clan since settling in the area. Some people are interested in their clan history in order to be able to tell their friends about their ancestry, others are interested in their customs and culture in general. In the field what I found was that the Lambya are historically conscious which made the collection of oral traditions and customs relatively easy. Although many traditions collected appear reliable, as might be expected, reliability decreases the further back one goes in time, particularly in the period before the mid- eighteenth century. In scenario like this studying artefacts (material culture) was used to track the social meanings of the Lambya group, despite that the archaeological research was under designed for further analysis.

Traditionally the researcher focused his attention on communities by selecting knowledgeable informants who knew the activities of the community well. These informants were typically asked to identify other informants who were typically asked to identify other informants who represent the community often using chain sampling. These informants ranged from chiefs, clergies, old men and women, teachers, farmers, parents and friends of different religious groups.

My goal for this research study was to describe everyday customs and traditions of the Lambya ethnic group in Chitipa district and perhaps lay a foundation of a formal inventory of traditions found in Chitipa district. The author wanted to know everything he could about the Lambya traditions and customs, perhaps and other parts of heritage in other districts in Malawi. To the other side of the coin he wanted to know what it felt like to be a Lambya. For being locally trained in archaeological and social anthropological way, I wanted to tackle both issues together and see the outcome of the study by typically employing anthropological methodologies. Studies like this one are hardly accepted by many Malawians as part of their heritage. This is evidenced in tertiary education whereby few or none of the students are willing to study such issues like culture, sociology, archaeology or anything doing with heritage or culture. Therefore, to come up with the

above goals it required not only an understanding of research methodology but also a particular mind set, being passionate of heritage or culture, traditions, being conservatives and having a desire to see the world from insider perspective of anthropology.

### **Importance of Heritage**

Many Malawians and descendants adhere to their traditions as a philosophical school of thought with traditions of folk religion or syncretism practiced alongside other adherent's traditions. The essence of this school of thought is based mainly on oral transmission which is written in people's heart, mind, oral history, customs, temples, shrines and religious functions, while generalization is difficult due to the diversity of cultures. The role of humanity is generally seen as a harmonizing relationship between nature and the supernatural faces. Therefore in this book heritage is treated as anything that was passed from one Lambya generation to the other orally or in any modes of transmission. Hence the focus is paid at the traditions which the author had an access to.

Malawians have a very rich heritage of what past generations of Malawi; people thought did, experienced and transmitted on to their children. This heritage forms along line which links Malawians fore- fathers and mothers with their descendants who now feel proud of it. A study of such a rich heritage makes it possible to see and understand something of the people who lived not only a short while ago, but several years. It is worth studying and describing such heritage, because the urban populations forms minority and still has its cultural roots firmly planted in rural areas. In Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu and Zomba, urban life seems to play a very minor role in the lives of the indigenous people. What it comes to, is that the cities provide certain industrial and secretarial jobs. The general attitude seems to be I came here to work, because my skills and services are needed, but my home is in the village, where I derived my cultural satisfaction. Again when a person living in urban areas dies they usually say the burial of the funeral is to take place at the village (*maliro ndi onyamula tikasunga kumudzi/umuvimba tukunyamula twaya pakusyira kukaya*). This shows that the village is the most important place to be no matter what. If someone misses the village they miss the whole essence of culture, either as Malawians or being a real diehard of particular ethnic group. If someone misses the village life, often times, it is easy to change their ethnic group or clan; because they don't know their roots and they cannot be proud of their culture.

In this case heritage plays a silent role in people's lives both in urban and rural areas. Therefore the importance of preserving ones traditions or heritage cannot be overemphasized. A nation or an ethnic group is identified by their cultural values, customs, and their beliefs. The loss of these makes one identity being unidentified. Hence the loss of originality of our cultural heritage today is being manifested in so many ways in our children. The way they speak, dress, believe, sing, dance and associate definitely shows that our customs and values are overlooked; by either parents not taking their children to the village or the parents changed their ethnic group because they don't know their roots or clan.

In our society where we live today elderly people are dying every day, thereby taking with them important cultural knowledge. We need to preserve our heritage for the sake of the future generation who have never, will never have the opportunity to come into contact with the authentic aspects. Otherwise they will go extinct without leaving any vestiges. In describing the Lambya there was a thought of providing the public with a variety of the cultural aspects of the Lambya ethnic group who have never been in the region and hence provide public awareness on the importance of cultural heritage preservation, documentation and socio and political development.

To be a real Lambya or to belong to the Lambya ethnic group marriage (*inyegha*), rituals, rite of passage and birth rites have to be known to the youth in diasporas and the general community of the Lambya's. Besides the spatial and geographical separation, the Lambya living in different parts of the country due to work and intermarriages are not knowledgeable enough of some of the cultural values, customs, beliefs and traditions those have to be in Lambya identity. The worst being crowning new traditional chiefs who are also ignorant of what the Lambya traditional have to observe. This is due to overstaying in cities, and the other worst mistake, they are chosen to chieftaincy while living in cities; therefore they cannot know all the required beliefs and traditions which are important to their clan or ethnic group because their knowledge most of times is diluted by western life which is fully manifested in cities and town across the country. It is in recognition of this need that I embarked on a project of describing the traditions of the Lambya ethnic group, in which I, belong and advocate for heritage in southern region. This will serve the

following purposes; (1) will add knowledge on already existing academic literature of the Lambya archaeological and anthropological data which is already a few<sup>1</sup>. This will increase awareness of the heritage of the Lambya who live in urban cities of Malawi and elsewhere in the world (2) it will safeguard the traditions of the Lambya ethnic group for national identity. As one of the strategies used in preserving culture, writing this book will be used to document cultural heritage of the Lambya traditions on district, national level and thus aid in promoting and disseminating important cultural traditions of the society (3) an inventory of different heritage from southern and northern will be documented to assist researchers in related studies, (4) will add to awareness campaign that the government of Malawi through its office of department of antiquities find it had to advocate the public on heritage issues. Finally the writing of this book will definitely assist the Lambya custodians to be proud of their own traditions, which I hope later they will transfer it to their future generations.

---

<sup>1</sup> Malawi has stayed for a number of years without archaeological and anthropological research due to lack of personnel specializing in such studies, this time due to the establishment of the Catholic University of Malawi local archaeologist and cultural anthropologist were being trained locally than a decades of years ago. Though this time the Catholic University of Malawi has also stopped offering programs in archaeology, due to shortage of staff

# *Chapter 2*

## **General description of the Ulambya area and its historical overview**

### **Introduction**

One of the ideas developed in the introductory chapter was that human school of thought is based mainly on oral transmission which is written in people's heart, mind, oral history, customs, temples, shrines and religious functions; the purpose of this chapter is to characterize the area setting of Chitipa plain with its traditions. Perhaps describe the history attached to the Lambya ethnic group and their culture; how it got mingled into the European or missionaries. So, I am to show how the European and the Lambya's interacted together in the early days of their establishment in the northern Malawi. Therefore, this chapter describes in brief form the Ulambya region, historical overview, first missionaries to work in Chitipa district, altitude of local people at Ncherenje outstation and problems encountered at Ncherenje (problems of enculturation). By the end of having an overview of this section we hope to get how the Lambya's safeguarded their traditions after they interacted with the western culture. The main emphasis of this chapter is to show how culture fuses itself in the history of clan or ethnic group through its traditions.

### **Description of the name "Chitipa" and its present location**

Chitipa district is the north most district in northern region of Malawi (formerly known as fort Hill during the colonial times). The present name Chitipa means big mud (*i-chitope*). By investigating its etymology in the 40 oral traditions that were collected it shows that the most common and repeatedly word was great mud. In Lambya and other dialects languages mud are known as *I-tope*. When the mud's of big value they call them *i-chitope*. In Lambya to show that something is of great value or it's big a noun has to start with letter "T" or "U". Now the story behind the name Chitipa comes in, because the time when missionaries were working in the area, one of their vehicles got stuck in the mud. Upon realizing that they were not able to get out of the mud, they called some Lambya's and Mambwe ethnic group in a village (the name of the village is not mentioned in the oral saying) but it was very close to the road where the car got stuck. The Lambya and Mambwe men were asked to assist pulling out the car out from the mud as the missionaries

were failing. After pulling the car out, one of the Lambya old man who came late to the place where the car got stuck, he started mocking the missionaries and he had to say this, “*imotoka ipatiye pa-chi-tipa mwebaya!*”, (the car has been stuck at the big mud); since after saying this, the place was nicknamed as Chitipa, meaning a place of big mud. Other oral tradition suggests that this action happened where there is present stream of Nachitipa on the main road to Chitipa central business area, while other oral tradition suggest that the place was at Ibanda close to Lufita primary school. Previously Chitipa was known as Ulambya region prior to first missionaries and colonial times as the district was always fused in the northern nyasa districts which was comprising of Nkhamanga, Ungonde and Ulambya region (present Rumphu, Karonga and Chitipa) the headquarters being Karonga. The name Chitipa perhaps dates back during the time when Europeans or missionaries came into contact with the Lambya, roughly this should be around mid or late 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The name of Chitipa possibly came into use during the political era of Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda. Since after this incident people started calling the Ulambya region as Chitipa, meaning the area of great mud. This was one of the common oral traditions that almost repeatedly it in 38 oral traditional those were corrected in different villages across the traditional authority Mwabulambya and Kameme. It was not my objective to oppose what the local villagers think happened in their village, if I could try to do that it could meant violating the law of ethnographic under anthropological studies; anyway this is what they think happened, anthropologically, it has to be treated the way the local people think.

The district covers an area of 4, 288 kilometers and has a population of roughly 126, 799. Chitipa borders fellow districts of Karonga and Rumphu, as well as neighboring countries of Tanzania and Zambia (Chitipa district 2006; NSO 2009). The district is divided into five main areas known as Misuku to the east, Kameme to the north, Bulambya right at the centre and Wenya and Nthalire areas are situated to the south. The Lambya in Malawi, most of them are found within the traditional authority Mwabulambya and Mwene-kameme in Chitipa district. The most common surnames of the Lambya’s are Nyondo, Muyila, Mwamuswelo, Kalagho, Silavwe, Munkhondia, Simengwa, Simwinga, Mwazembe, Malokotela, Chizimu, Sibale, Silungwe, Panja and among the Kilembe’s. The people usually speaks Lambya language (*I-chi-lambya*) in which most of the nouns either start with letter *I* or *U* and they are surrounded by 12 of dialects languages which some

include Sukwa, Ndali, Nyiha, Mambwe, Tumbuka, Swahili, Namwanga, Weta, Wandya, Chewa and Bemba.

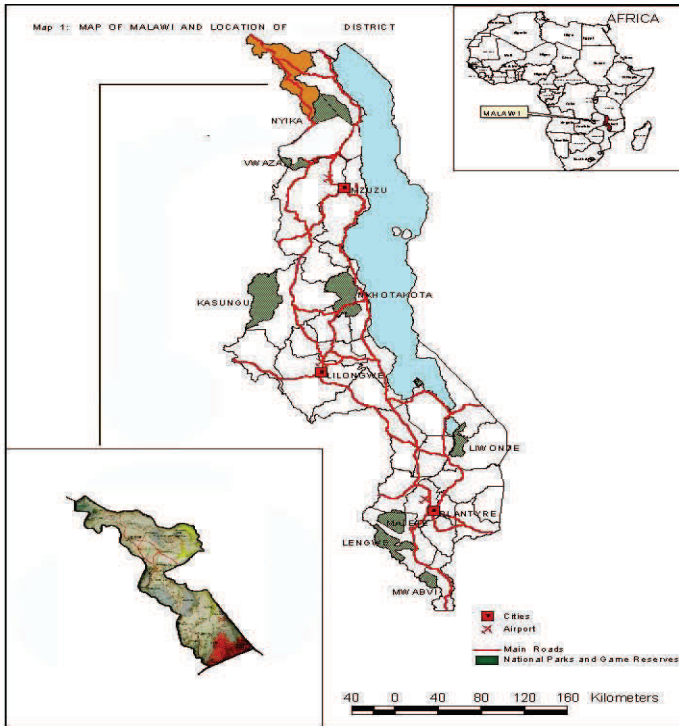


Figure 1: Map of Malawi showing the location of Chitipa district and its Map inserted (courtesy Chitipa district Profile, 2005)

### The Lambya migration

The Lambya are Bantu speaking people who came from the Bukinga in Livingstonia Mountains, south east of Tanzania. They are said to have migrated into Malawi after 18<sup>th</sup> century in search of more land and probably because they were running away from slave trade by the Arabs and Portuguese (Kalinga 1985). Two groups entered Malawi independently, one headed by Mwabulambya- Mulelebwa and the other one headed by Sikwese. The Sikwese's are one of the relevant clan when it comes to the chieftaincy of Mwabulambya (Kalinga 1985). The early history of Lambya's surrounds the traditions of the rulers. According to popular oral history in the district, a family led by the first Mwabulambya left their homeland, Ukinga, and settled in Rungwe. After sometime they

left Rungwe and traveled further west to *Kasasa*-also known as *Mwapelo*-at which point they crossed the Songwe River south into the present-day Malawi. Not far from the banks of the river, on the southern slopes of the Misuku Hills, they found a settlement of the Sikwese clan.

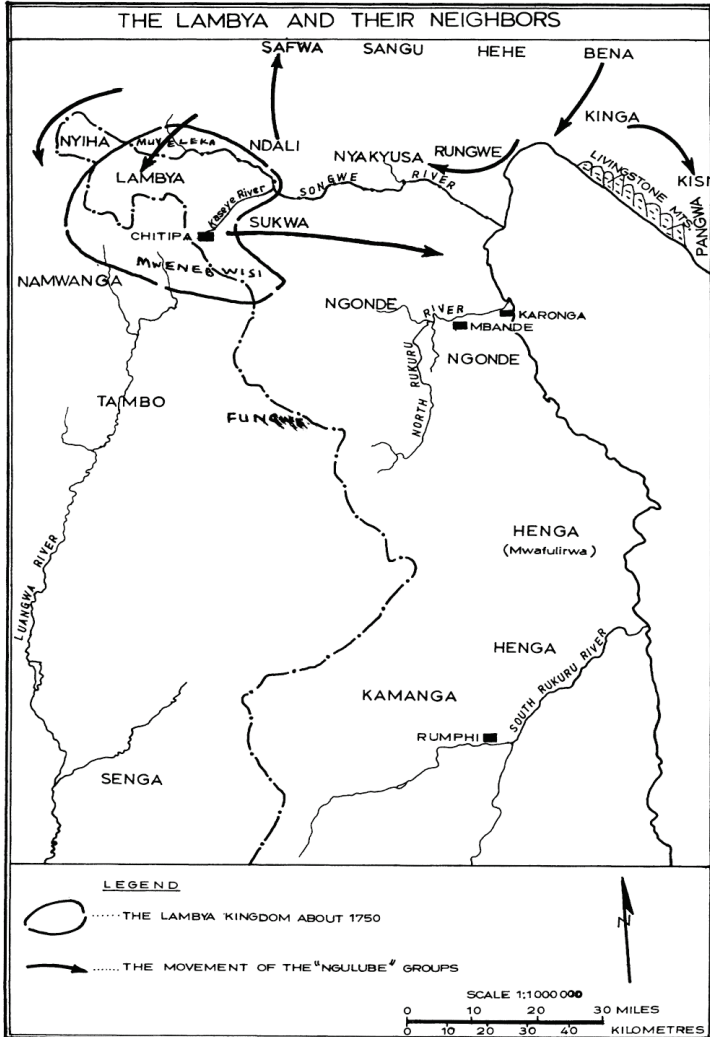


Figure 2: Map showing the Lambya and their surrounding ethnic groups ( Ref: Kalinga 1974)

The Sikwese's, who also trace their origins to Ukinga, had lived in the area for some time and claim to have ruled it. Not long after the Mwabulambya arrived a quarrel broke out between him and his followers and their hosts over who should rule the less hilly lands, the area which later came to be called Ulambya. According to oral traditions the dispute was resolved by a competition in fire-making by the friction method known as *ulupekeso*. The contest was won by the Mwabulambya's who thereupon assumed political authority over the area. The head of the Sikwese family and his descendants became the chief advisers to Mwabulambya and played the important role of crowning new chiefs (*awa-mwene*) (L.H.T. 2, 6, 4 and 10). According to retired Reverend Sikwese, the Sikwese's<sup>2</sup> clan presently continues to act as counselors of the chief Mwabulambya; today the Lambya clan cannot crown their chief without the presence of the Sikwese's.

However the oral traditions of the Sikwese clan that I was exposed to, claim that they were rulers of the area south of the Songwe which is close to Misuku hills, no other clan are mentioned to which they were ruling or looking after. Their oral traditions suggest that no other clan or people lived in the area they claim to have been rulers before Mwabulambya's time period. This is not either mentioned in Kalinga (1978) doctoral thesis. However, according to Kalinga (1978) the Lambya ventured into the land roughly around the seventeenth to eighteenth century, however when we trace the genealogies of some few families does not go beyond six generations. This is unbelievable to say that Mwabulambya's settled first in Misuku hills according to some traditions, where they found two families, the Sikwese's and Chilima's. This explanation however doesn't tell whether other clans were also living in the areas where the Sikwese's and Chilima settled or these other clans their culture, customs and other traditions were assimilated in these two dominant clans (L.H.T). This question cannot be answered by historians, but it can further be tackled by archaeologists who could trace some artefacts related to this oral history which could assist historians to further explain what happened. So far no archaeological research has been done in Ulambya region and Songwe area with special focus on such history.

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<sup>2</sup> Retired Reverend Sikwese is part of the leader of Lambya heritage, he is a custodian of the Lambya and history of the Sikwese's in Chitipa district he is currently based at Lufita trading centre in Chitipa district,

## Historical overview

Kalinga (1978) in his doctoral thesis described Bulambya plains as one of the major migration route for people entering northern Malawi, from the north and north south, referring to Zambia and Tanzania countries, this is because of its location at the border of Tanzania and Zambia. It is an open country and it's accessible to Misuku, Wenya, Nthalire, Karonga and even the areas further south which are today inhabited by the Tumbuka speaking people, this is around Rumphu district. Most of the clans that surround the Lambya ethnic group show that their ancestors passed through Bulambya (Kalinga 1985). This can be traced in their artifacts, culture and some language which carries identical characters that depict a great relationship that existed amongst the clans. Chitipa was previously shared between the Kameme and Mwabulambya chiefdoms, according to the northern district books (NDB). Currently these divisions still exist, Mwabulambya being the senior chief and seconded by chief Kameme.

The Lambya ethnic group dates back to c. 1570- 1600<sup>3</sup> which are the dates that have been established relatively by reconstructing the structural regnal list of the three chiefdoms of Kyungu, Kameme and Mwabulambya (Kalinga 1985, 1974). These dates have been used because it is confidentially believed that these were the three founders of the loyal lines clans which perhaps could have contemporaries the Kyungu and Kameme being brothers and it is believed that the first Kyungu passed through Chitipa plains during the reign of the first chief Mwabulambya according to oral history gathered and perhaps confirmed in Kalinga doctoral thesis which is the first scholar to publish well researched papers on the Lambya of Malawi, particularly who reside in Chitipa district (Kalinga 1978). I tried to imitate Kalinga's methodologies on the regnal lists however some of the knowledgeable people were not available who could have given names of their clan members. This was the major limitation that I was faced with. However, three quarters was done thorough that could be trusted.

In Chitipa most of the clans their surnames starts with *si*. It is believed that most of this *Si* clan came from the northern eastern side of Lake Malawi (Kalinga 1978). Obviously that is Tanzanian side. These groups are said to have migrated from the fact that many of the clans names of these people begin with *Si*. For example the Sikwese, Silumbu, Simwaka,

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<sup>3</sup> Dates used in this book are extracted from Owen Kalinga's doctoral thesis 1974.

Simwayi which probably means that they came from what was known as the Nyiha area and perhaps they could have associated with the Nyiha, Namwanga, Tambo and the Mambwe group which are many in Mwabulambya region (Kalinga 1985). According to the views of Sikwese all these immigrated clan in Ulambya the Sikwese's on the plains of Chitipa are said to have been one of the dominant clan.

There is said to be a great relationship of the *Si* clan that migrated in Chitipa plain and those from Karonga. The great and important relationship is that the first Mwabulambya (1565 – 1568) Mulelebwa, the first Kyungu (Mkinga and Syola) were contemporaries furthermore the oral history says that the sister of the first Kyungu was the mother of the first Mwabulambya (Kalinga 1978). In a general sense the Lambya ethnic group is believed to have migrated in Malawi, Chitipa district roughly around c. 1600 century.

#### **Conflict of interest: relationship of Mwabulambya and Kyungu of Karonga district**

The most common oral traditions from senior traditional authority Mwabulambya, says that, the time Mwabulambya had lived at Ibona for some time, there arrived two men-the Kyungu, his brother Kameme (Mwenembako) and a woman, their sister Ngabo-who spent some time with the Mwabulambya before proceeding eastwards to look for land. They finally settled in what was later to be known as Karonga District. Kameme returned to Ulambya, asked for a place to settle, and was directed westwards to a cave, (*impako*), in the present-day Kameme area hills, Chitipa north. Ngabo was pregnant and too tired to continue the journey. She was left with the Mwabulambya with specific instructions that should the baby be a boy it should be given the name Nyondo, should it be a girl it should be given the name Chiluba. Ngabo gave birth to a son, Nyondo, whom Ngonde traditions claim to have been the founder of Ulambya (N.H.T.: 28, 24, 12; L.H.T.: 11, 1). The Lambya tradition argues that the son of Ngabo was given the name Mwamuswelo and that some land within Chitipa was set aside for him. The tradition also points out that, although respected, Mwamuswelo never became a chief. This claim in Ngonde traditions may be the reason why in some publications like Wilson, (1939: 40-41) reference is made to the Kyungu of the Ngonde kingdom as having had supremacy over the chiefs of the upland territories in pre-colonial times. The ruling clan of Ngonde regards the royal family of

Ulambya as stemming from them (personal communication)<sup>4</sup>. These Ngonde traditions are not accepted by the Lambya who stress that at no point before the coming of the Europeans was a Lambya chief subordinate to the Kyungu. This contradiction in traditions raises problem of the exact relationship between the Kyungu and the Mwabulambya's today.

Furthermore, what emerges in contrast to the founding of the Ngonde kingdom around the same time is that the Mwabulambya assumed power through compromise with, and accommodation of the owners of the soil and previous rulers. On the other hand, the Kyungu of Ngonde seized power violently (Kalinga 1974). In the latter state the Kyungu forcibly took over power from the former rulers, the Simbowe, and all major offices in the new kingdom were given to the clan heads who had accompanied the first Kyungu and his family on their journey to the northern shores of Lake Malawi. The indigenous people continued to be respected and were consulted on some matters, but real power lay with the *makambala*, the six court officials whose forebears had accompanied the first Kyungu and whose offices became hereditary (Kalinga 1974). Contrary to this monopoly of power in Ngonde, the Mwabulambya who appears to have achieved authority through diplomatic manipulation depended on the indigenous people for advice. Thus the heads of the Sikwese and Chilima clans became influential title holders in the Lambya state.

### **The arrival and work of missionaries in Chitipa (Ulambya region)**

It was not easy to search information about the written source of the Lambya customs or traditions on the internet or in the Portuguese or Arabs traveler's accounts. There are no written sources relating to the early history of the Lambya's like some parts of country. The accounts of Portuguese and Arab travelers' I went through do not mention the Lambya or their immediate neighbors. However Joseph Thomson (1881) whose journeys took him through Nyiha just north of the Songwe River was the first known European to pass near Ulambya, but though he describes the Nyiha and their country, he makes no mention of the Lambya. The first written reference to Ulambya is that by Dr. Kerr Cross (1890: 228), a medical missionary of the Free Church of Scotland who worked at the short-lived Mwenewanda mission (some- times called Ncherenje) in the present-day Chitipa District in the 1880s. Kerr Cross described the Mwabulambya (king) of the time as "an infirm man, who is living on the greatness of the name that has long its glory." He also describes how

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<sup>4</sup> I was told this by Chief Karonga of Karonga district during oral traditions gathering on what was the main cause of the earthquake in 2008-2009.

his "guides led him reverently to a small hut inside the village raised over the spot where the late Nyondo (Mwabulambya) sleeps. The villagers constantly make offerings of food and beer to the spirits of the departed", though these days they rarely do this either due to culture being dynamic or influenced by modern Christianity.

The northern Malawi district comprised of the present Karonga, Chitipa and most of Rumphi district. The headquarters in early days of the colonial era were at Karonga (Kalinga 1985). Today our knowledge of the area Chitipa has hitherto been dependent upon the work of the missionaries the majority of whom have dwelt on aspects that have most interested them. Missionaries had a mission to fulfill, they brought message of good news. It is easy to understand this, generally implied that they considered their messages superior to the customs, beliefs and values they found in far way places they went.

Neither Kerr Cross nor the other missionaries who worked in this part of Malawi seems to have recorded traditions and customs of the Lambya as D. R. Mackenzie (1925) and Cullen Young (1932) did for the Ngonde-Nyakyusa and Henga- Khamanga, respectively. No published works exist on the Lambya such as Y. M. Chiwambo (1949), Ntara (1965) and (Kagwa 1971). No manuscripts written by the Lambya have been discovered so far. However the first scholar to start following the history of the Lambya of Malawi, particularly those of Chitipa systematically is Dr. Owen Kalinga, who did his doctoral research on the Lambya and Ngonde (Kalinga 1974, 1978), before and after him there has been no literature specifically written about the Lambya ethnic group about their culture, history or norms, until the project of this book was embarked. A number of Lambya family heads possess single page outlines of their history which usually consist of clan genealogies. The Lambya do not feature prominently in the North Nyasa District Note Books in which early colonial administrators recorded the traditions and customs of the people they governed. In these notebooks large sections are devoted to the Ngonde and the Henga of Mwafulirwa, but little attention is paid to the other people of the then North Nyasa Districts ( especially Karonga and Chitipa). The Lambya are discussed in passing and, even then, they are treated as part of the Ngonde and their history because previously what is known as Chitipa and Karonga were one district. As there are no written sources for the early history of Ulambya, therefore, a researcher has to depend on oral traditions,

customs, and rituals and combine anthropological and archaeological evidence to describe the Lambya customs or culture. Currently the author is planning to conduct an archaeological research in Ulambya region to back up the historical evidence that have been written about the Lambya's.

The northern Nyasa district comprised of the present Karonga, Chitipa and most of Rumphu district. The headquarters in early days of the colonial era were at Karonga. Today our knowledge of the area Chitipa has hitherto been dependent upon the work of the missionaries the majority of whom have dwelt on aspects that have most interested them. Missionaries had a mission to fulfill, they brought message of good news. It is easy to understand this generally implied that they considered their messages superior to the customs, beliefs and values they found in far way places they went.

#### **First missionaries to work in Chitipa district**

Europeans residents at the northern end of Malawi included JB Yale an official of the British administration and Dr David Kerr Cross, a missionary who worked in Ulambya and Karonga areas (Kalinga 1985). Most of the foundation of this book is based upon the work of these missionaries. However, neither of these seems to have written own memoirs. Another notable contributor to the understanding of northern Malawi history and traditions is Reverend T. Cullen Young. Young was one of the missionary who was based in northern and central Malawi for over thirty years and served at a number of stations including Karonga. He was one of the few missionaries of his time who took an active interest in studying African customs, traditions and languages. He published several papers and books on these subjects, the most important of which is his notes on history of the Tumbuka- Khamanga people in the northern region of Malawi (Young 1932).

In 1881 when Robert Laws succeeded Stewart as head of Livingstonia, mission moved the headquarters to Bandawe in Tonga country- now (Nkhata-bay) and a year later an outstation was established at Ncherenje in Mwenewanda village in Chitipa district- close to present Lufita market and bottom of the Misuku hills. The site seems to have been chosen by James Stewart who was by then trying to construct a road connecting Lake Malawi and Tanganyika since this station was designed to offer services for the whole of the northern extremity of Lake Malawi.

### **Ncherenje outstation**

Dr David Kerr Cross was one of the missionary to work at Ncherenje station in Mwenewanda. Upon arriving at Mwenewanda, the Ncherenje station was beset by problems. There were the usual problems of health, the station was constructed near Ncherenje stream and in a swampy area (*umwikombe*) and at the head of the marsh that was a breeding ground of mosquitoes. This marsh today can be seen from newly build Ncherenje primary school just after some few kilometers from Lufita trading centre by taking a path leading to Ncherenje. Currently, it is occupied by few individuals, who cultivate into the area. Within three years of their arrival, two members of the party had died of malaria. These were Mrs. Kerr- Cross who died on 31<sup>st</sup> December, followed by Mr. Hugh Mackintosh. They were buried close to Ncherenje stream below the hills and crosses erected. These are still there they can be accessed as you take a path that passes through Ncherenje to Chisansu village. The stone bears the inscription IBANDA 1883, UKUKUMBUKA INTUMI IZYA KWANDA IZYA LIBANGELI MU BULAMBIA ZIZYO ZIKAFIKA KUNO 1883 UKUFUMA KU SCOTLAND NU KULONGIZIWA NU DR. J. KERR CROSS 31<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 1886, HUGH MACKINTOSH 1<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY 1887 (see Fig 3).



**Figure 3: The stone inscription at Ncherenje**

Secondary the inhabitants of the area were indifferent to the missionaries (Macpherson 1960). The Lambya had never experienced the pressure from foreign forces as had the Ngonde's (Kalinga 1978). For the first the Lambya ethnic groups were once invaded by Merere in northern side of Kameme for a short time and the Bemba made some incursions into the western borders of Ulambya and Chifungwe but these were by no means severe.

The inhabitants of Misuku are reportedly to have developed a skill of defending themselves against enemies from outside. Many villages by then seems to have stockade to the steep hills such as Misuku where perhaps they hid themselves in caves, so while in places such as Bandawe, the Tonga were receptive to the missionaries than the Lambya's (Kalinga 1985). In these other groups the missionaries were welcomed because partly they expected help against their former conquerers the Ngoni. In this regards these people in Chitipa didn't view the missionaries as possible defenders against aggressors.

### **Altitude of the Lambya people at Ncherenje**

The local villagers at Ncherenje welcomed the missionaries at first. They were willing to sell food to the station and occasionally to assist in minor duties; however, as life continued the local people were not excited by the presence of missionaries and later often complained of the lack of enthusiasm on the part of resident of Mwenebanda and their neighbors. This was exacerbated by the language question. Most of the early Livingstone missionaries whether based at Bandawe (Nkhata-bay), Njuyu (Mzimba) or Mwenebanda (Chitipa), learned Chichewa which was spoken in the southern and central region of Malawi but not in the north. To solve the problem of communication, African like Pemba and Aliko trained at Bandawe and Cape Maclear were posted to Mwenebanda to assist in mission work, but once these assistants went to Mwenebanda they often found it uncomfortable and begun to indulge in what the missionaries regarded as sin, drinking local brews (*ukataalipele*) the most common offence and associating too closely with the local population (MLM). Another difficulty was that there were in the uplands several ethnic groups each with its own dialect (Kalinga 1978). Even though Chilambya seems to have been chosen as the main language, it was not easy for the missionaries to communicate with people who spoke a dialect unrelated to it. Almost all the missionaries who worked at this station commented on the number of local languages and the difficulty of learning them.

### **Problems at Ncherenje**

Kerr –Cross as a leader at Ncherenje station was much dedicated missionary. He loved his work, as a missionary. As his friend he did not see why he should suffer at Ncherenje outstation in Mwenebanda. What he did upon arriving at the place is that he complained of the poor conditions, inadequate salary and of attempts to make him feel that missionaries

ought to sacrifice some of the essential needs of life the results of all this was uncertainty and frustration on the part of missionaries at Ncherenje. Ncherenje was never developed as it is today when visited no infrastructures were planted at the site to show that it was an outstation. Hence little contact was made with the local people. The missionaries were uncertain whether to stay or to find another site. For instance on 7th February 1888, Kerr Cross wrote to his superior, Dr. Laws, saying that after some consideration he had decided not to leave Mwenewanda. A few days later he wrote another letter<sup>5</sup> stating the contrary. During the period of 1888- 1891 the Ncherenje missionaries, moved to three different places, Ichinga in Ifumbo, northern Ulambya, Kwatiti, Kalalamuka in Unyakyusa possibly Tanzania and Ukukwe (Kerr Cross 1890).

### **Conclusion**

The outstation of Ncherenje marks the first place where the Lambya and missionaries encountered their culture shock. It is through this contact that lays a foundation of what is heritage and who is supposed to care about heritage. The work of missionaries in Ulambya and surrounding areas is a good example of how the Africans and missionaries were staying together. The missionaries at Ncherenje however didn't leave any records with regards of local traditions due to numerous numbers of problems. It was not the intention the author to write the history about this but because in such way it helps to reveal cultural elements that were mixed or copied from one another.

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<sup>5</sup> A full detailed letter can be found in the national archives of Malawi under Livingstonia mission papers.

# *Chapter 3*

## **Culture**

### **Introduction**

The word culture has many different meanings, for some it refers to an appreciation of good literature, music, art and good food, however for anthropologists and other behavioral scientists culture is the full range of learned human behavior patterns. Therefore, this chapter is about describing some elements of culture that are practiced amongst the Lambya. It is the core area of the Lambya traditions. These shall include;

### **What is culture?**

Culture is a complex of learned behavior patterns; it is different from the society which is a group of interacting organism (Geertz 1973). The whole of culture that we mean here includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society, of course, it is not limited to men. Women possess and create it as well. Culture is a powerful human tool for survival, but it is a fragile phenomenon. It is constantly changing and easily lost because it exists only in our minds. Our written languages, governments, buildings and other man-made things are merely the products of culture. They are not culture in themselves. For this reason, archaeologists cannot dig up culture directly in their excavations. The broken pots and other artefacts of ancient people that they uncover are only material remains that reflect cultural patterns- things that were made and used through cultural knowledge and skills.

Different societies in Malawi have different cultures; people are part of culture as portrayed by their beliefs, values, customs and institutions. Culture binds people together and gives them a sense of identity, dignity and security. Culture is passed on from one generation to another. However, culture changes overtime through various influences, the most influential being technology, globalization, intermarriages and migration. The elements that constitute a peoples culture in most ethnic group in northern districts include language, dances, social organization, religion, dressing, housing, social organization, norms and traditions. The Lambya ethnic group has all the elements listed above.

Cultural traditional determine the social organization of various ethnic groups, for instance the Lambya ethnic group are the patrilineal, and their succession and inheritance is traced through the father's side. They speak (*chi*) Lambya as their original language. Language is important in that it allows people to pass on cultural ideas; beliefs and values from one generation to the next without language culture wouldn't exist.

The Lambya are very hospitable, usually they slaughter a chicken as part of welcoming a visitor. Most would be offended if a person refused to have a meal with them. If one insists that they are satisfied, the best approach is to eat very little. Complete refusal to eat their food might give them a picture that you stingy so you, yourself want them also to refuse to eat when they visit you or you suspect that they have included some medicine in the food (*ukukutegha*).

It is cultural to quickly prepare *ubughali* (thick porridge) made from maize flour eaten together with their favorite relish beans (*a-malima*) for a visitor so that they should replenish the energy. Normally food is eaten after washing hands from a common dish (elderly wash first in order of age) all the participants will eat from the same plate. It is expected that the elder should stop eating where a small piece of food remains for the younger children at the table. Evening left over are delicacy the next morning especially when the relish is boiled beans. The Lambya people also cherish gourd (*a kapale*) soured milk. All these will be explained in the chapters to follow.

The elements that constitute the Lambya culture are many. In this book there has been a selection to the only ones the researcher were exposed to, with regards to the specified time of study. In this case some of these are less detailed, as the researchers didn't get the first hand information, for those which are detailed the author participated and had direct information. As such this book will take a detailed of customs, values, norms, traditions and social organization.

### **The Lambya marriage custom - *Inyegha***

In Chitipa as in most part of Malawian districts, it is a man who proposes a woman into marriage. Marriage is very important among the Lambya it marks the beginning of a family, which is the structure unit of a society. The Lambya ethnic group respect marriage

procedures and they respect a person who is married and has a family. Disrespecting marriage procedure could cost someone to imprisonment or pay a huge fine.

The Lambya ethnic group follows patrilineal system of marriage, whereby succession and inheritance is traced through the father's side. In patrilineal marriage system one of the procedures demands the payment of lobola (*ivyuma*). For the Lambya *ivyuma* ranges from livestock to money, which are usually transferred from the husband's family to the family of the wife, as a way of saying thank you? It is regarded as the way of appreciation for the care, support and attention provided to their daughter in the course of caring her when she was young. The bride worth is settled to the Lambya to cement the marriage. Lobola is strictly observed among the Lambya to embrace their heritage, which is passed from one generation to the other. When the Lambya observes this tradition, they don't imply buying and selling of female children. In this study a focus group discussion with women who got married to the Lambya men discovered that they belong to some southern and central region ethnic groups, which most follow matrilineal system. The study showed that they were respected to the families and relatives of their husbands, after they lost their Lambya husbands. The widowed mothers who were studied came from Mkombanyama, Kasisi, Kasinde, Lufita, Yamba, Chinunkha, Ifumbo, Kasinde, Titi, Kasisi, Mwamukumbwa, Chisankwa, Nasato and Kameme areas respectively. Most of them said that they were not subjected to any violence or denied opportunity in the village after they lost their husbands. This could perhaps clearly show that lobola system is not the excuse of violating or buying as interpreted by other ethnic groups, but a respect of customs as it was passed from their ancestors. These women have got big maize field for cultivation that used to belong to their Lambya husbands. It is from this that the author want to take a closer look to what we know about the Lambya and what we need to know, by studying their traditions through closer interaction. This will help to answer many questions which are poorly understood by the development organization, human rights groups, civil society groups and institutions that are implementing their projects in the area. From anthropological perspective lobola could be regarded as a custom that strengthens marriage among those ethnic groups practicing the system in most of the northern region districts. This strength comes in due to the protocol of thanks giving that brings relatives from both side who cement the relationship of both the children marrying and the relatives themselves.

## **Procedures to Lambya marriage**

The protocol behind the Lambya marriage can be well understood if one decides to participate in their traditions and customs. It is upon this participation that can lead to a good description and deeper understanding of what it means to marry or get married to the Lambya. The author at least took some six years of observing and participating in the Lambya marriage customs, which were taking place during summer season. From this observation and participation, to come to what is referred to as Lambya marriage one has to go through three broad procedures. Namely, formal proposal (*ukusipa*), lobola charges (*kubika ivyuma/ukwimala*) and thanks giving (*kuzimya amakato*), if someone is married and hasn't gone all these three stages then it is not a fully recognized Lambya marriage. These are described in details in the next chapter. These are very crucial areas when it comes to Lambya marriage. No marriage took place without going through the three procedures. If one of the procedures is skipped it becomes a violation of their customs and heritage or else one face problems when a person whom they have married dies. You can skip one and there will nothing that the relatives of the person whom you have married will do, but when you are faced with serious sickness or when the person whom you have married has died you face it. The other side may demand the protocols of marriage to apply in such situation. We will see these further in the paragraphs to follow.

## **Observing the Lambya marriage**

Like any other group in northern Malawi, the Lambya are patrilineal, that is descent passes through the male line and on marriage a woman goes to live at husband home.

### *Phase 1; man proposes to woman (u-kusipa)*

The first and foremost what happens is that a man proposes to a woman, without parents knowing. In most Lambya marriage it is the man who proposes to a woman. In this case a boy (*umulumendo*) looks for a girl (*umulindu*) whom he thinks he can marry. When the two have agreed to marry, then a man carefully finds himself a go-between (*umufusya*). This go between is usually a man who associates well with him and his father. He then explains the issue to him. It is this go between who carries the message told by the man who wants to marry to his parents, specifically the message is told to the father who is regarded as owner of the land (*mwenekaya*), and the mother hears it from the father. The message that is told is that, "one of your sons wants to marry" if in the house there are a

number of boys (*umulumendo akulonda pakusenda*; that is how the father report to her wife). The mother is not taught first because he is regarded as a stranger in the village of her husband. He and the mother seats down together and discus further about the newly received message, before they give a go ahead to their son and spread the message to relatives. After some few days then they calls back their son for a sitting. This is done to confirm with him either they accept or reject the message brought by the go between. In this time the parents usually asks a lot of the questions, some of them includes; where he met the woman, if he knows well the family background of the woman and her relatives. From a number of case studies in many villages this is done in this way because the parent's wants to have good basic information to the family their son wants to marry. Because the Lambya believes that if a man marries a wife he even marries the relatives of the woman. This is done in a different way to the female parents of the woman who wants to get married. For a girl she tells her mother only or sometimes she just keeps it as a secret until a symbolic hoe (*i-kasulijembe*) has been shown or discovered in the house of her parents. This will be explained later in bottom paragraph.

If there are no any objections to such questioning then the parents gives a go ahead to their son. He then go to the village of the identified woman together with his relatives to confirm that they are proposing their daughter this process is called *kuzingirila* so that the woman is tied up that she can no longer accept any other proposal from other men. However, when both parents from man's side of woman's side are not satisfied with the either of the behavior of the two family or the children who wish to marry, they sometimes suspend their relationship. *Kuzingirila* is a step where a man makes some serious approach by taking few of his relatives whom he takes them to the relatives of the woman who he wants to marry. During *kuzingirila* a man can give some cash or some gifts to the parents of the woman. *Kuzingirila* happens when either a man stays in another district, country or when he is committed with school or some work somewhere or within the village to show that he is serious of marrying. This is to symbolically tell the wife to be and her relatives that they should not allow any man to propose the girl.

In order to have a deeper insight of the woman family the elders from grooms side usually sends some spies to the village where the family of the woman resides. They usually go to find out more information about how the family is doing their behavior and the general

welfare how they relate with fellow neighbors. When they go into that village they usually buy local beer or go to nearby place and play local games like Bawo (*insolo*) where they ask questions pertaining to the family of the woman their son wants to marry. If they don't find any discouraging stories they recommend and if it's opposite they totally discourage it. If this is done, then it concludes the first proposal a man can do in Lambya tradition, the author regards this as the first propose.

*Phase 2: symbolic proposal to a woman*

Just after doing preparatory, the man meets the woman to formerly propose her. In this meeting it's where a man buys a metal hoe (*ikasu*) and he hand it to a woman. A woman receives it and she secretly hid it in her parents' home/place. She receives it without anybody from her side knowing. The hoe is hid at a place where her parents like working or doing households chores, but this is always within the household, such places include under the parents bed, in places where they keep washed dishes, and close to where they keep a basket that holds maize flour. The metal hoe is given to the woman without anybody knowing a part from the two and no any ceremony is held.

Symbolically, the metal hoe among the Lambya has got some social meanings. It perhaps means that a man is not lazy; but he practice agriculture and grows foods. It tells the parents of the woman that they should accept his proposal, because their daughter is getting married to a man who isn't lazy, such that their daughter won't stay in poverty or starve. To some extent this could be an equivalent to what some ethnic group in central and southern Malawi do, by calling the ceremony as, *chinkhoswe* (engagement ceremony). In typical Lambya marriage there is no engagement ceremony as special part of marriage. However, it could be related to symbolic metal hoe giving, which formal proposal is done to a woman in present of her parents, relatives and friends. Though it is like this due to globalization, migration, religion and intermarriages, this custom is being dissolved little by little. Only those with keen interests of heritage among the Lambya's, practice and preserve it. To the Lambya who live in urban cities of Mzuzu, Lilongwe, Blantyre and Zomba some do not follow the procedure, as a result of the above mentioned reason and as a result their identity is totally lost because they lack uniqueness as other ethnic do. There is no authentic practice of the typical Lambya custom in urban Malawi. This has

contributed to regards the Lambya ethnic group as a minority and a sub-ethnic group belonging to the neighboring Ngonde ethnic group.

In many cases when a woman hid the hoe it is usually discovered by the female parent. This is so because, female parents relates well with their daughters when it comes to discuss issues of marriage than Lambya fathers. When she discovers it, she just knows that one of her daughter has been proposed or found a man to marry. She keeps a secret too, by only telling the father without other household's members knowing. After some 2-3 weeks then both parents calls all their daughters and questions them, who has brought the hoe in the house. This perhaps can be done in absent of the father sometimes. When this has been done the woman reports to the man about how the situation has been discussed amongst her relatives and parents. Sometimes during this stages some parents they invite the man before further stages are considered to see him if he has good manners.

After this, then the fathers of the man who want to marry intervene in the process of helping his son in settling down the lobola. Now the father sends message to the relatives related by blood who in Lambya are known as *a baluko*. This comprises of all blood relatives who traces descendants through the male line. At this time the father chooses a formal go between whose function is to represent the two sides. This go between can be chosen at first or during this time. The first go between is chosen for a short period of time, then the second one as well.

When the go between has been officially declared among *a baluko*, he usually be advised to further process of paying the lobola (*ivyuma*). He is usually sent to meet the relatives of the woman on regular basis. With him carries a hoe (*ikasulijembe*) which is the second hoe and some money that is usually paid when meeting the parents of the woman and her relatives (*a baluko wa ku chikolo*). The second hoe that is carried becomes a little bit bigger than the first one, it is usually called *ifosholo*. The amount that presently is given ranges from MK 6000 – 8000. The second hoe is also accompanied by the ornaments which are attached to it; the ornaments are commonly referred to as *uwambo*, (see Fig 3) which most of the time consist of the different colors. These beads usually give some meaning to the man and relatives of the woman. It simply means that the boy who will marry is a respecter of marriage and he tells the parents of the woman that he did not find

their daughter in a bar (the go between say like this, “*tutamwaghite umwana winyu mu chilabu*”). This is the meaning behind attaching the beads to a hoe. However there is need to research further on symbolic meaning of beads in Lambya to deepen our understanding of the ornaments cross culturally. In addition to this the beads also tell the parents of the woman that their daughter is not a prostitute (*umwana winyu te- wemalaya*).

The first hoe that is given to a woman is not returned back to the man. The second hoe is returned to the go between, so that it will be formally handed in presence of a *baluko* in time of paying lobola. In presence of a *baluko* he is welcomed by songs, dances and ululations by women. This time is when he hands in the second hoe which is accompanied by money to the parents of the woman. The handling in of the second hoes follows some traditional. The hoe from the hands of the go between is placed in the middle of the woman to be married and her relatives while watching. Putting a hoe in the middle, gives a message to the relatives of the woman that the man wants to marry their daughter has got manners and that he will be capable breadwinner. The putting of the hoe on the middle goes with words of respect by the go between to the woman and her relatives. He usually says, “sorry we, from the grooms side want to start drinking water in this house” meaning the house of the parents of the bride to get married. He says this to mean that the side of the groom wants to establish a strong relationship to the family through marriage that is to happen. “*Pepa, pepa nkhumonda tungw’elaghe a minzi munyumba umu*”, these are words of traditional respect among the elders usually said by the go between so that the man’s and the brides families wants to establish a good relationship between them through their children. After the go between has said these words to the relatives of a woman, they respond by saying, “we have never rejected you from drinking water at our house”, then ululations follows, which is a sign of acceptance of proposal (they answer like this, “*tutakulesiyze lumo hagma pakungw’ela a minzi munyumba muno*”). These are positive words of accepting the formal proposal in present of the woman herself and relatives. The elders representing the woman side are the ones who respond like that. In responding like this they accept that their daughter can proceed marrying the man. Instantly, when they have responded the go between reply that, “they need a good relationship with the elders from bride’s family” (*a baluko wa- ku chikolo*). Then *a baluko wakuchikolo* accept this by responding that they have accepted the relationship (*twitikizya ubukamu*).



Figure 4: Some of the tradition ornaments (Uwambo) captured

This is a formal way of proposing a woman in Lambya ethnic group. After this has been done then the go between is sent back to prepare the hearing of lobola that is being prepared by a *baluko* from brides family. When the go between has been sent back the relatives from the woman side are left with the duty of charging the lobola. The moment he is sent back he is usually told a particular date and month when he has to report and hear how much they have charged for the lobola to pay. The time period is set to make sure that the other side gets prepared for the payments. Despite that some smaller payments are paid prior the big lobola, the things paid first include hoes, shoes for the father, a cloth (*ichitambala*) a dress (*idilesi*) for the mother.

Another important point to make about the Lambya marriage customs of marriage is that the uncle (*mujomba*) or aunts (*nasenje*) are very important. They are regarded as guardian and counselor of the female and male children in their marriage. Whenever the woman or a man is facing problems in their marriage the first person who is supposed to know is the uncle. Therefore the uncles and aunts in Lambya ethnic groups play a big role of a counselor when it comes to solving family affairs problems. Children cannot get married without their uncle or aunt knowing, doing so is against their customs. The uncle and aunt of the children getting married also receives a special portion of lobola when paid, specifically when it is a girl child getting married.

### **Lobola hearing (*U-kwimala*)**

When the go between goes for the second time the hoe and the ornaments are returned back to the go between, this is done to show that the bride relatives doesn't have anything against the man who is to marry their daughter. This time again, the daughters are called if they are more than two in the family. They appear in presence of relatives and the go

between. This is done to formally confirm that their relatives have nothing against the relationship that is to take place. The relatives of the woman then ask the go between to identify the girl behind all the protocol (*tulangizye yo mwatungula kuno*). He then directly point out the woman, usually the go between and the girl must have met somewhere before all such events, for him to know her name and familiarize himself to her. When the go between mentions and identify the girl, instantly she is called out by her relatives to confirm it in presence of them. If she accepts the calling of the go between, she is then questioned by her relatives if at all she knows the go between and the man he represents. This is the groom who is in relationship with the daughter being questioned. This custom is done for formality sake, despite that everyone knows that so and so will get married. Later the bride acknowledges the go between and whom he represents in the midst of her relatives. The relatives usually asks questions like; what is the name of her groom (*ingamu yache ni zina*), where did they meet (*ko wakakomana nu mulumendo uyo*), in what ways does he knows the man (*amumenye mwinzila yoni umulumendo uyo*), where does he live (*akwikala kwi*) and questions dealing with the grooms personal profile. In fact these questions are not meant to be answered in audible voice in presence of the relatives, but they are meant to represent some acceptance by the woman who gets married. When she has been asked these questions, she now brings the two hoes together, the smaller and bigger one. The bigger one being on top and the smaller one down, symbolizing that she has accepted marrying the groom. This is an acknowledgement done symbolically to responds to the questions she has been asked. In doing this she tells her relatives that yes he knows the groom whom is to marry her, of course after this, some sought of probing takes place to the bride by her relatives just to be much sure about the groom. This is done by asking some questions to the bride, if at all they should accept the relations and start using lobola that has been partly paid. The leader of the woman's elder says, "Should we start using the paid lobola" (*twande pakulya ivyuma ivyi*). If she says yes (*inga*), then they decide charging *ivyuma*. The hearing of *ivyuma* is done only by the go between and absolutely without the relatives of the man who wants to marry.

### **Ivyuma inclusive**

For the Lambya lobola consists of the following;

- ~ Opening fee ( *indalama iya kwiulira ivya kunena*, usually paid by the grooms relatives)
- ~ Closing fee (*indalama iya kwighalirira ivya kunena* also paid by grooms relatives)

If the two fees are not paid then, there couldn't be any proceeding of telling the go between how much have been charged or else the relatives of the bride will only be talking without a go between contributing something. The two fees allow the go between to negotiate the lobola. The ranges of these two fees currently are at Mk 500 to 1000. This money is shared among the elders of from brides side (a *waluko wakuchikolo*). This fee however, is not fixed, as it depends on how much the other side has, specifically how wealth a groom is. If this fee has been paid, then the elders from female side starts dictating *ivyuma*, from a written piece of paper, previously they were just orally said, every elder from the side of the bride could mention what they feel could be charged for their daughter, this has been changed over time.

When the charging has been finished all the lobola is written on a piece of paper and the leading elder from brides side read it loud in presence of the go between and the elders from the side of the groom. In many cases observed *ichuma* among the Lambyas is an inclusive of the following things

- ~ Livestock which include minimum of six cattle's (*ing'ombe*) and goats (*imbuzi*). Cattle's includes two male that's *inkhambako* and four female known as *inkhusi*.
- ~ Special gifts for the bride's mother *,intoba/nthoba*, which is payment consisting of two female cattle's, dress (*idilesi*), cloth (*ichitambala*), money (*amakopala*) for the mother's bride known as *inkwamba* and a goat.

There is no other than *ivyuma* apart from these that makes the Lambya's lobola. If the go between is prepared sometimes he could instantly pay the money charged and live other things for another day. If not prepared he begs an extension of days so that he can prepare for the charged lobola. In current urban areas all that is said above has been replaced by money, when children are getting married they settle lobola by paying the relatives of the woman money. This is fueling the loss of Lambya customs as their heritage.

### *Phase three: delivering ivyuma (Lobola)*

This is time period when the side of the groom together with the elders and the go between delivers what they have been charged. This is when all the lobola has been sourced. They usually go to the particular date they gave them through the go between. The protocol to be followed is that first livestock have to be handed in, before the rest charged lobola. Usually this is done by following a particular traditional whereby a late evening ceremony is done.

What happens is that the groom side elders and relatives assemble together in the evening and they start the journey to the brides place. If where they are going is very far away they hire cars, however most couldn't afford this as a result many walk towards the woman's place. They carry food, sweet beer (*ubala*), sour milk (*ulukama ulutoni*) and all the charged lobola. All relatives of the groom side and elders escort the lobola. Doing this late evening is to respect the custom of their ancestors (*mwiho*). When walking, they start around 2-3 pm so that they can get to their destination around late afternoon. That is if the place is very far away. Upon arriving at their designated place they are deliberately stopped by elders from bride's side, while they ululate (*kumogha*). The stopping is done so that some payments should be done (*indalama iya kwiulira ivya kunena*), to allow them talk with the elders of the brides side. All this is done on the road before reaching the exact place or home. When they get home the people from groom's side are not welcomed, deliberately. This is to tell them that the establishments of relationship of not yet over until *ivyuma* are fully paid; often times many do not finish paying lobola at once. The fees that are paid in this tradition are also referred to as opening and closing fee (*indalama iya kwiulira, ni-indalama iya kwighalirira*). As usual this fee is based on arbitrary and is fully negotiated. When the people from the grooms side arrives at the home of the bride after passing through the obstacles of paying; the aunt of the bride stands on the cattle kraal door trying to resist the cattle not to enter in the kraal when elders from grooms side are trying to bring them inside. Later at the moment she asks them, if the ropes (*inkhusa*) should be taken "*tusende ninkhusa zyene*". If they say no then some payment are made to the aunt as her gift, if she says yes then no charges are due. This marks the paying of great lobola in Lambya traditions. This is accompanied by the relatives from both side together to witness the livestock and comment about them. If the relatives of the bride are not satisfied with the livestock, they sometimes reject the livestock so that what is given is in good condition, that is shouldn't be sick. When they have agreed, they assemble together for feasting and dancing (*kumogha*), until late evening to celebrate the lobola giving. This happens at the home of the bride, when the feasting and drinking is over, the bride relatives also pays back some sort of reciprocal by going back to the grooms place with food, same day, where they also host another tradition feasting and tradition. All these traditions are done in late evening and very early in the morning- to respect their *mwiho*. The going of elders to the grooms place after they have paid lobola is referred to as *ukupiilira* also known as *kuzimya a makato*, which means, clearing off the foot prints of men who brought the

lobola. It's one way of saying thank you for the lobola, it's a sought of unbalanced reciprocal process.

***Kuzimya a makato --- Kupiilira (unbalanced reciprocal)***

*Kupiilira* means the happiness that is shown by the relatives from bride's side to the groom's side for their kindness in paying the lobola charged and a way of saying thank you. In Lambya they say; "*twahowoka uswe wakuchikolo pakuti mwabika ivyuma*" (we are happy for paying us this lobola). Therefore, this is done to show happiness of the delivered lobola. The ceremony to celebrate this is called lubing off the footprints (*kuzimya a makato*). A *makato* are the footprints on of men and relatives of the groom who brought the livestock of lobola to the village of the bride. Therefore, food and local drinks are prepared to comfort and show happiness at man's place. The elders from female side when going to lab off the footprints they carry baskets (*i-vitundu*) special for the father in law (*awakayemba wa ku chanavuli*) aunt (*mwina-senje*) a fee is charged for bringing food to the side of the bride which is paid by elders from grooms village. After doing all a man and a woman can now get married, despite unfinished lobola. The type of marriage depends on the two. Either to have a holy matrimony in the church or the bride goes straight to the home of her groom and begins their marriage. The church is not involved in any process of lobola payment. However this is not the interest of the author to discuss how holy matrimony is done.

**Marriage tradition in Chitipa: Lobola**

Each ethnic group in Malawi has got its value, customs and traditional those identify them and make them different from others. Often times the ethnic groups of the northern Malawi have been criticized with the tradition of lobola. This book is written to show the importance of heritage amongst the Lambya ethnic group of Chitipa district. Lobola here is not considered as a way of doing financial transaction but as a value part of the Lambya ethnic group and those ethnic group that practice it, in the northern Malawi.

Often time's people have raised critiques and others have interpreted the practice of lobola as the buying and selling of women, which is not true. People have advised their children not to marry or get married to the northerners, reason being ethnic groups from the north buy women through lobola, which is not true. This is the perspective of anybody who may

not be practicing the system. Perhaps many who criticize this are ethnic groups from central and southern Malawi; the likes of Chewa, Yao, Lomwe among others. The coming of several human rights activists have concluded that the practice of lobola as trade too which is not true at all. Most of those who argue about this perhaps they may be lacking an interest in cultural preservation as most of their arguments are based on the focus of the human rights. This argument comes in without the solid base of culture or heritage. Lobola is not the trade but an act of showing gratitude to the parents of the woman, which is done formerly by giving some special gifts to the parents of the woman. This kind of appreciation varies from one ethnic to another, just as lobola gifts varies from ethnic to ethnic. The argument of lobola being trade was not welcomed to many women belonging to other ethnic groups in Malawi, who got married to the Lambya men but currently living amongst the lobola practicing ethnic group. They refuted any association of lobola as trade. The following was revealed in the focus group discussions with some old women in Mwabulambya village:

- ~ One of the woman from Chikombwe in Ifumbo village said, “*ivyuma vikung’anamula, kusalifya ko abapapi wakabika kwa mwana umulindu*” –Lobola is done just to show an appreciation to what parents of the woman did in raising their daughter.
- ~ Na Nyondo of Nkhonje village expressed her views by saying that in giving lobola the side of the man wants to appreciate the good work they did to their daughter, so it’s not buying (*pakubika ivyuma awakuchanavuli, wakulonda pakusalifya abapapi, pa mbombo inyiza yo bakaionba pakukuzya umwana wawo mulindu*).
- ~ *Kubika ivyuma kukwavwa abana na bapapi kuti wakokhaye akayilo akinza po vyatamya nyegha yabo* (paying lobola assist to use the procedure as a channel for counseling the couple in marriage).

Within these expressions by elder’s women to women it simply shows that lobola is not interpreted as buying of the bride, rather it is an appreciative way done traditionally to the two concerned families.

### **Lobola as opposite of commercial transaction**

Lobola the provision of gifts to the parents of a bride, usually in form of cash or livestock is an entrenched part of marriage in Lambya community. Lobola is an old tradition

commonly found throughout northern Malawi and some parts of the southern Malawi. This system requires that a price be paid for the right to marry a woman.

Over the past nearly two centuries of European involvement in northern Malawi lobola has been interpreted by western observers in many ways. These engaging interpretations relate in part to the changes which have taken place in the nature and the way in which lobola is practiced and understood has changed over time. This must be interpreted in the light of wider economic and social context, or do functions remain constant across time and space. Northern region of Malawi districts bride wealth system varies and even where they are structurally similar. Their individual functions and meanings cannot be read as identical.

### **Role of lobola in Lambya society**

Lobola arguably serves a multiplicity of purposes within the northern districts, materials in terms of the distribution of both productive and consumable resources, symbolic transition of adulthood and establishing the nature of relationships between people. It is impossible amongst the Lambya and other ethnic groups who practices Lobola northern Malawi to isolate the material or economic aspect of lobola transfer from their cultural aspect and ascribe priority to one or the other. Lobola is culturally amongst the Lambya in that it affects resolutions of personal identity with reference to the transactions and they also rationalize such transactions retrospectively. Lobola is also economic in that transfer in livestock and cash which are substantial items of income and expenditure in the household budgets. Materially lobola serves to redistribute both scarce consumption resources (cattle's as meat and cash) and rights over reproductive resources, land cattle and labor.

To the Lambya lobola is payment that a groom pays so that the bride's family can allow to create relationship between the two families and their ancestors. This also helps parents from both sides to use the proper procedure as a channel for counseling the couple on marriage matters. It's an African culture that dates back centuries and still alive in the contemporary society. Basically what happens is that as soon as the groom realizes that he wants to marry his bride he then sent her uncle's to talk to the bride family. Once the date of the visit has been arranged and the bride family explains how much they want their

Lobola, money or livestock then payments are made. It all depends on who the bride is, so daughters are pride of their family in Lambya.

Lobola being an old custom which is still alive today as it was in old days ago is a very important custom to the lambya and those that follows it. Both families of the bride and groom would be scandalized if they didn't adhere to this custom. On the surface lobola is complex and very formal process of negotiation between the two families to come to a mutual agreement of the price that the groom has to pay in order to marry the bride. This may seem like a purchase and scale, but this is very opposite of a commercial transaction.

What makes lobola so important for the Lambya marriage is that it is based on process that brings the two families together. Mutual respect and dignity are woven into the process and the love between the man and woman is expanded to include the immediate and extended families. But like all traditional customs, it is open to abuse and distortion in the modern society.

The lobola process is often complicated and often sometimes confusing for the modern couple. The process is very formal and traditional and has certain protocols that have to be adhered to. For example although the two families concerned might have lived next to each other for years all negotiations between the parents must be conducted in writing. This is done to know each other on the level of lobola, seriousness and sanctify of marriage.

The arrangement for the meeting between the families involves endless formalities. Often negotiations are not conducted by the parents of prospective groom, at all, but can be conducted via relatives, usually uncles and aunties of the groom. The reason for this is that extended family is an important element in Lambya culture especially in the institution of marriage. Many people do not realize that there is no a sense of personal enrichment in lobola. The money received by bride's family is used to help the young bride set up house. Lobola is also a gesture of gratitude on the part of groom's family for looking after and bringing up the young bride.

The modern usage of lobola does not always have a happy outcome. However, there are many instances when families use lobola to acquire money to pay their debt. Worse still

some men see women as goods that have been paid for. This creates a marital climate that is not conducive to trust and love. These are aberrations and do not detract from the essence of lobola itself. It remains a custom that is still popular because it promotes harmony between married couples and their families, as well as promoting a sense of dignity and supports that can aid the marriage and promote a harmonious union.

After paying lobola a bride can go back home, if there are problems in marriage. Centuries ago there was no way this could happen, for a bride, no matter how much hardship she encounters in marriage. There was no way she could go back home. Now things have changed, the situation has changed so much on what I explained elsewhere. The existence of democracy and human rights in our country means that the bride can do what suits.

The wide sentiment is that lobola is part of the Lambya culture and doing away with it is tantamount to rejecting the Lambya cultural heritage.

#### **Unlawful marriage (*Kusemya / Kuposola*)**

When a man has impregnated a girl and later marries her unlawfully, it is referred to as *kuposola/kusemya*. It simply means no protocols of lobola have been adhered to. In doing this a man is supposed to pay a fine which is filed by elders or parents from impregnated woman. A court is not involved in this early stage. When a fine has been issued a man pays it straight to the elders from woman side. The moment the fine has been paid, and then all the above protocol is supposed to be followed formally. In this case a man pays a fine in form of cash. In going back again to the protocols of lobola there is usually a ceremony that the side of the woman observes. What they do is that elders or parents of the impregnated woman pretend that their daughter has gone missing. In normal case they know that she is at the home of a man who impregnated her. They usually go to the place of a man, and report that their daughter is missing. In addition to this they tell them that they have been searching for her in nearby bushes because they thought that maybe she has been lost. Now they later say, in the cause of searching her in the bushes, they have been pierced by thorns and bushes, “*mwewayaya, umwana witu umulindu asobela, potwayiye munthundu pakumulonda, loli tutamwaghite, po pakumulonda twalasiwa na muwva*. These words are harmonious in many villages, in fact they are said because the parents of the woman wants to force the man who impregnated their daughter to pay *intoba* which is part

of lobola. When the man goes back in following the protocol the wife stays with him and lobola is paid while the two are already in marriage.

### **Inheritance (*Impyanika/ Impyana*); Levirate marriage**

This is when a brother or sister of the deceased takes over the house of the deceased in form of marriage. This has changed because of the diseases that are cropping the world. However, in some few places people have resisted to modify it the practice, and they still practice the old way of inheritance (*impyanika*).

Inheritance comes in after death of deceased man/woman. If the protocol of lobola was adhered, the relatives of the man/woman don't want to let the woman leave the village where she was staying with the deceased man/woman and they want the woman to raise and look after the children of the man/woman left. In this what happens is that the brother/sister is supposed to take over the house of the deceased. Previously this was happening in contemporary society this rarely.

The process starts just after burying the deceased. People spent the mourning period at the deceased place, with an inclusion of the elders and relatives. Before they start to select a person who shall inherit they first report the issue to the chief in the village (*umwene*) that they will be on inheritance ceremony (*impyanika*) on a particular date. This is formally reported to the chief so that on particular set date the chief should have mobilized people to attend and witness the traditional marriage.

### **Levirate marriage**

The woman of the deceased is brought at the present of the people together with the aunt of the deceased man. Then the elders of the man (*baluko*) make a line while seated on the ground on a small mat (*akatefu*). The mother of the deceased also seats together with the elders. Then the aunt of the deceased is asked to pick anything that belonged to the deceased. Usually they choose one thing that a dead person liked. When the things have been found, they give it to the woman (*umufwile*) who later gives it to the chief (*umwene*). Then she starts choosing amongst the elders/relatives who formed a line, whom she think can inherit her. These days women restrict select the responsible man with at least good characters. Previously it was automatically a brother who was supposed to inherit widow. The woman crawls on the courtyard searching for the man to inherit. If she finds one then

she takes the things given earlier to put where the chosen man is seating. The moment she put the items down ululation starts like it's a weeding. Immediate after this has happened then counseling is given as a newly weeded couples. They counsel them about their welfare, behavior they denounce all unnecessarily behaviors observed in the couples. However in contemporary society a man/woman are not supposed to sleep together or engage in sexual practices, but only providing social support.

Levirate marriage; at the hair shaving ceremony which terminates the mourning for the deceased husband, the widow marriage guardian ascertains whether there are any close relatives of the deceased willing to contract a levirate marriage with the widow. If there are, they may be requested to put sticks in the courtyard of the deceased house in the presence of the widow. When a suitor has been selected, the widow sometime may brew a special beer to mark the conclusion of the negotiation. Therefore, on the same day the levir and the widow may commerce cohabitation. Inheritance protocols are done because of the death of a man. This type of procedure currently across the Lambya's has changed drastically to suit the presence human rights and democratic world the two do not get married due to the dangerous of HIV/AIDS.

### **Divorce (*Ukusoka*)**

This happens when a married man/woman are in disagreement between them. It is not an easy thing for a Lambya man to divorce his wife, than a way a woman can do it. If a woman is divorcing because of the reasons like a man is a drunkard, violent and any sort of abuse a woman goes to court, but before court she meets her guardian, elders and the chief. If all agrees with her she goes to court to open a case to her husband. The procedure for divorce is that the aggravated spouse complains to his/her marriage guardian. The guardian tries to reconcile the partner. If this attempt fails, a further attempt at reconciliation takes place before the village headman. If either party is adamant in the desire for a divorce, the headman refers them to local court. The local court to which the disputes are referred again tries to reconcile the spouses. Normally, divorce will be granted if no amicable settlement can be reached, but the court may refuse to make an order for a divorce unless a serious matrimonial offence has been established against the defendant. The local court may also refuse a divorce if man divorces before little children are grown up; if this happens he is

financed to support the children he has left. He does this by paying an amount ranging from 20,000- 30,000 Mk/ per month.

### **Pre-arranged marriage (*Kupimbira*)**

*Kupimbira* is the exchange of material wealth for young girls for marriage in advance. A practice that has faced large criticism from the public and the human rights bodies in Malawi. It has been regarded as a bad practice which is fueling the spread of HIV/AIDS, because material wealth was given to young girls while still young. In modern world this is against human rights and democracy. This kind of practice is still being practiced in some parts of Chitipa district though heavily modified to suit the present generation. When I was in the field I spoke to a number of women and men who entered into marriage through the practice. They gave different views about the practice which we will see them later below. According to many human rights activists based in Chitipa and across the country have appealed to the chiefs to end the practice, however it is very difficult to cut the people from their heritage.

From anthropological perspective I would argue that the practice should not end but the involved parties should modify the practice as it has been with other traditions like inheritance whereby no real marriage happens but only sponsorship and other kind of activities happens to show care to the children and wife who has been left as a widower and widow. Therefore, the tradition should be there to symbolize its existence and importance to the people who practice it as part of their heritage.

### **Pregnancy and birth (*ulwanda, nu kupapa*)**

Pregnancy is a joyful period for the woman and her family. If it is the first pregnancy for her, it definitely assures the community that she is able to bear children. Once that is known, her marriage is secured and both relatives treat her with respect. In traditional Lambya village there are always women who are called upon to act as traditional birth attendants when the time of delivery arrives. In Bulambya traditions varies concerning expectant mother. In some Lambya villages the expectant mother has to return to her parents to give birth at their home, while in some places they don't. This is done to prevent

any other accident that may be caused during the delivery which may be attributed to the man; hence being regarded as strangers in the village of the man.

### **Naming the baby (*Kumwita izina umwana*)**

The naming customs for the Lambya, the name is chosen after the baby is born surrounded by a ritual of naming. Among the Lambya there is a naming ritual, which is done when babies are born in a new family. This ritual is attended by members of the family, relatives, neighbors and friends. The ritual varies when the child is the first born to a new family or when just a child has been born to already established family. The first born children in Lambya families are named by their grandmothers (*unyinakulu*) from paternal side and when it is not the first born child the grandmother from maternal side. If either of these is not alive then one of the grannies from one side takes the responsibility of naming the child. When naming a child the grandmother prepares a gift to give the mother of the newly born baby, congratulating her for bringing life on earth. This is a ritual that is observed amongst the Lambya villages across Chitipa and among other ethnic groups in the district. It takes place soon after the mother has been discharged from the health centre. She is not allowed to take the baby out of the house until a name has been given. The message of the newly born baby is carried out to the village by guardians and friends who escorted the pregnant mother to the health centre. The first to receive this kind of message is the father of the baby and the grandparents of the baby in the village; the moment this message has reached the grandmother quickly rushes to see the baby. To see the baby she prepares a gift by cooking some traditional foods like sweet beer. In naming the baby the grandmother takes some water in her mouth. This water is then split to the baby who lies on the small mat (*ichinyasi/akalutefu*) naked. When she starts splitting the water from her mouth she then starts mentioning the name of the child that she has given the baby; (for example, if she wants the name to be Davie she says, *kufuma isiku ili izina lyako we Davie, Davie twakupokela mu chisumuno*; from today your name is Davie, Davie we have welcomed you in this world). Often times the names that are given are names of somebody within the clan or lineages. In some Lambya parts this custom is accompanied by some traditional medicine to protect the child from witches. In Chitipa north, a cockerel accompanies the announcement of the birth of a baby boy while a small hen accompanies the announcement of the birth of a baby girl.

### **Moral beliefs (*Umuchinzi*)**

We should take note that many of the Lambya tradition customs concerning moral beliefs and the time of youth have been severely influenced by western ways of life which have been introduced to Chitipa through various developments like technology. However, these customs have not died completely, and in some parts of Chitipa they are still observed. Customs connected with growing up of girls in Chitipa is still been practiced, though in many villages where the data was collected the custom died sometime back due to the influence of western culture, which is considered as a great loss. In some villages amongst the Lambyas the customs still exist. Girls who have reached adolescent stage go through advices from elder woman which includes aunts (*nasenje/nge*) of the girls on how they can handle their adolescences. This practice is different from many ethnic groups who practice jando, nsondolo, and ndagala.

### **Transition (*Ugeza umwali/Usungu*)**

In Lambya traditional village all girls underwent a mark of transition between childhood and adulthood. The transition is known as *ugeza umwali or usungu*. The primary principal purpose is instruction or counseling for girls. *Usungu* begins with attainment of puberty, that is, it begins when a girl experiences first menses. In Ulambya, on attaining puberty, the girl usually informs an aunt or grandmother about her new experience. The girl is then taken for confinement for the entire period of her menses (usually a week). Elderly women, especially aunts counsel the girl in many matters including how she should take care of herself every time she menstruates, for example, she is advised not to put salt into food (*imbeya/iweya*); to regularly wash herself and her underclothes, and on the proper way of sitting in the presence of other people. The girl is counseled on good manners especially when interacting with adults. She is expected to show respect for elders. She is told to avoid sexual relationships with men and boys before marriage or risk pregnancy out of wedlock. She is also told to stop playing with girls that have not yet attained puberty to show that she is now grown up and must therefore begin behaving like an adult by associating with fellow grownups. These practices as of now are no longer common in many villages where this study covered, as the people do not consider this important to their culture and privacy life.

In addition, the initiates are taught how to carry out household chores such as cooking, washing, gardening, maize pounding, fetching firewood, smearing and smoothing the floor of a house. They are also taught about etiquette and good behavior towards their husbands once they are married, and to dress respectfully by wearing clothing that covers their bodies, particularly from the knees up. These are typical information of advises that are found in typical Lambya families and villages amongst the Lambya's of Chitipa district.

### **General Lambya beliefs**

- ~ It was indicated in Chitipa that a Lambya man who commits adultery while his wife is expectant, is expected not to use hands but feet when adding firewood to a fire to avoid causing birth complications for his wife.
- ~ In Chitipa among the Lambya, when a chief dies, elders bury him at night. He is buried in a sitting position. A white chicken or sheep is buried with him previously they were buried with live person. Ordinary people are not told about the death till the next day. People dance *sendemule* (a royal dance) and mourning for the chief by the general populace takes place then.
- ~ Amongst the Lambya of Chitipa bereaved women wear their ordinary clothes with *inkhusi or inkwamba* (a piece of cloth) and *ichitambala* (woman's headgear). Women friends bring in the *inkwamba*. The bereaved wife can get as many as over 20 *inkwamba* from friends. These pieces of cloth are a form of debt because the woman is expected to buy similar pieces for her friends when they find themselves in the same situation. She wears the *inkhusi or inkwamba* and *inkhiya* for about a month.
- ~ In Chitipa, since being a chief was a big responsibility and people intending to harm the chief are many, many chiefs-to be run away from the responsibility. The royal guards and his *ndunas* persuaded the heir apparent to accept their nomination for the chieftaincy. The chief to be was beaten up together with his wife. If he ran away, he was followed and pestered until he accepted the position. Interviewees indicated that it was fun to beat him up because the opportunity to rough up a chief would never present itself again since after installation, the people were at his mercy. *Chisekeresko* (a celebration that includes dancing, beer drinking and eating) took place at the installation of the new chief.

### **Lambya traditional dances**

Cultural dances are so precious to many ethnic groups, as they often contain pieces of their history and livelihood that would otherwise be lost. The Lambya of Chitipa is an example of this. As for the Lambya's and related ethnic group found in the district look at the traditional dances as a way to convey joy, mourning and even times of the battles and war. The same is true as at the roots of many people groups, as dance is a common language that unites us all on some level. Below are just a few of the cultural dances that are still in existence amongst the Lambya ethnic group.

### **Sendemule**

*Sendemule* is a traditional dance performed by the Lambya people of Chitipa during chief funerals, chief installation ceremonies and for entertainment. When *Sendemule* is performed at funerals it is performed by women only, the songs are appropriately mourning songs, and when it is performed at a chief's installation ceremony or when a dangerous animal like a lion is killed, the songs depict triumph. Today *Sendemule* is performed at most social gatherings where the dancers usually dress casually.

### **Indingala**

*Indingala* is a highly emotional and expressive dance performed by the Nyakyusa, Ngondes of Karonga and Lambya's of Chitipa districts. It is also performed in Tanzania where the Nyakyusa and Ngonde lived before immigrating to Malawi. *Indingala* is a special drum which was used for sending messages about the death of a chief, the presence of dangerous animals or an attack by enemy tribes in the neighborhood. Strong men would rush to the scene armed, and if the message was about the death of a chief, a fight would break out. This used to be the case because they suspected foul play and custom demanded that a chief must be laid to rest accompanied by a number of his subjects. *Indingala*, therefore, developed as a warrior dance out of this practice. But today it is a peaceful dance in which people participate to express their emotional feelings either to release tension or simply to relax. Sometimes *Indingala* groups compete with each other. When it is performed for entertainment, women and children participate. The men wear a long piece of cloth around the waist and adorn decorations of beads. They paint their bodies with clay

and use flywhisks when dancing. There is very little singing in Indingala otherwise the only music is provided by three drums and whistles. The dancers throw their bodies in different directions gracefully and majestically. In Indingala it is important to keep the movements of the arms and the legs co-ordinated.

### **Mwinoghe**

In the Chisukwa dialect, the word *Mwinoghe* literally means; *za twilaghe mwe waya* ('let us enjoy ourselves thoroughly'). Mwinoghe is an instrumental dance that is popular among people especially school children in Chitipa district of the northern region of Malawi. It is believed that the dance has been derived from a ceremonial dance of Karonga district called Indingala which was originally performed by men brandishing fly-whisks during either the enthralment of a chief or feast over a dead marauding lion. Mwinoghe is a relatively recent dance, having been modified from Indingala between 1953 and 1955. In its original form, Mwinoghe was performed during inter-school competition of traditional dances and as a form of entertainment for distinguished visitors to schools. These days it is also danced on days of international significance like the annual Independence Anniversary celebrations. Mwinoghe has been developed to its present form and made popular since the attainment of independence. The main percussion instruments used in the dance are one big drum called *ing'ina* and two smaller ones called *twana*, but sometimes a whistle is used. The dancers line up in two straight lines, boys on one side and an equal number of girls on the other, facing one another. While the girls continue dancing in a standing position with their hands raised up, the boys squat down wringing and twisting their bodies, all to the rhythm of the instruments. Mwinoghe is therefore a celebration dance. The girls wear a piece of cloth tied around the waist and reaching down the ankles with a blouse on top, preferably orange or yellow in colour. The boys wear short sleeved shirts and short trousers on top of which they also wear a piece of cloth tied around their waists. They dance bare foot.

### **Vimbuza**

Vimbuza, a popular dance among the Tumbuka of northern Malawi, is a healing dance. It is performed to cure a number of mental and psychological illnesses. The name Vimbuza also signifies the disease which is mostly widespread in the northern is very common among the women folk. It is performed by both men and women usually at night in the

vicinity of the afflicted person. However, Vimbuza Dance is also performed purely for entertainment.

# Chapter 4

## Burial rites of the Lambya

### Introduction

For the Lambya's life does not end with death, but continues in another realm. The concepts of life and death are not mutually exclusive concepts and there are no clear dividing lines between them. This chapter outlines in detailed manner how the Lambya organizes funeral when it has occurred amongst them.

### Death among the Lambya's- (*imphungo*)

Death among the Lambya traditional is respected. Whenever death takes place whether of a man, woman or a child a series of funeral rites lasting a month or more begins. The first of the series is the burial (*kusyira umuvimba*) which in the case of most adults last three or four days, though for a rich man it may continue for a week and for a child it is over in a day.

As soon as death occurs most of the time women who are present begins wailing and messages are sent to the chief first, the village headman and the dead man's kinsmen and affine to announce the fact and bid them to the burial. The first message is sent to the father or to a senior brother or sister if one is still alive, or calling them to heir of the dead person. The fact about the dead man is announced in the village by the chief, who usually get the consent to do so from the deceased family. In sending the passage to the chief the deceased family also asks the chief permission of a drum which is kept by the chief. This drum is used to send message further in the village and it acts a symbol of funeral. The drumming of the drum has got its rhythm that tells the people about the funeral as a result they easily differentiate the funeral and the entertainment drum styles. To get all these permissions the deceased family basically presents a hen or cock to the chief (*umwene*) and then the message spread.

The dead man is usually buried at his own home village. However, the choice is rest with the elders of the family (*a baluko*). A married woman is usually buried at her husband home that is if her parents received lobola from the husbands otherwise the body is buried at her village. The message must be sent to all the father in law and all the sons in law both

of the dead man's and the senior kinsmen's who buries him to all the dead man's full and half-brothers to the husbands of his sister, to any classificatory brothers with whom he exchanged cows, to his mother- father or brother, to the full and half-brothers of his fathers, and to his sons. If any one of these is forgotten he will be angrily. Deliberately, to refuse to come to a burial for no good reason is symbolic breaking of the bond of kinship and no one ever does either unless there is a serious quarrel and all economic and social relations are being broken off between the two families concerned. The village neighbors are also obliged to come to every burial in the village. They normally wish to do so but even if they do not they still come for shame or for fear of being accused of witchcraft if they stay away.

### **The Message behind Lambya drums (*ing'oma*)**

Drum is one of the commonly used instruments used in music and dances in many societies. In Lambya society drums have got different kinds of message. There are drums of many shapes, size and purposes. Some drums are used only in connection with chiefs, these are royal drums, and these are often considered sacred and may not be played commonly or by anybody. Death is announced through beating of a drum, which is acquired from the village head after giving her/him a cock as a way of condolence. If the village head is not informed then access to the graveyard is denied and there is no support from neighbors. The traditional authorities (T/As) do not attend funerals and are not accepted to see the dead body. They will only come days after the burial to condole the bereaved family. However if they attend burial ceremony they are kept far away from the grave. There are drums connected to chief burial ceremony and drums of dances and general burial rites. In Lambya a drum acts as an instrument of communication specifically, spreading message of funeral in a community. A drum can stimulate dances and entertainment among the Lambya's. The message of funeral that is concerned in drum differs in the way of beating it.

### **How Lambya drums are made;**

The cow skin is used to make the drum membrane, this is also known as *i-chikwela*. The skin is chosen for its durability due to its thickness. Some Lambya drums are made of antelope or goat skins so that they can produce a loud, projected sound. Before fixing it on the drum frame, the skin is left to dry for some days, usually a week, to make it sturdy. It is

then soaked in a well for one night to soften it and make it pliable. Afterwards, it is left in the sun for a short time to allow the water to evaporate completely. The drum maker then cuts off a section of the skin that is slightly bigger than the drum head and fixes it on to the drum frame using wooden pegs. This time the drum frame is partially dipped in the ground and supported by a number of stones. The sculptor then removes the fur on the section of the skin that will form the drum membrane using a locally made knife. When an antelope skin rather than a cow skin is used, the fur is not scraped off by a knife; the drummers hands naturally remove the fur in the process of playing – in this case, the older the drum the better its performance.

The two common type of the drum found in Lambya society are cylindrical and double headed drum. Most Lambya cylindrical drums have tar (*phula*) fixed in the centre of the drum head. The *phula* is made from special tree sap or honey comb. The purpose of the tar is to make the drum head heavier for desired resonance. The drum maker then tunes the drum by passing it above fire flames several times. In the process, he keeps checking whether the drum is properly tuned by beating it at intervals. The tuned drum is sometimes smeared with castor oil for preservation. According to oral traditional this is how the Lambya's make their drums.



Figure 5: The cylindrical drum and the double headed drum found among Lambya ethnic group

### **The role of a Lambya chief at the funeral**

The chief has got a very big role in Lambya funeral rites. It is the chief who act as a mediator, between the deceased family and the society in spreading the message to the church and far wide; the chief act as a leader who give directions and permission to where they can bury the dead. They open the gate of the graveyard and disciplines people at the funeral. The chief provide announcement that are important to the community during the funeral rites and after. The chief also act as a counselor to his people who have immoral behavior in the society.

### **Burial in Lambya society**

It is the custom for the Lambya to bury the dead. There is a ritual concerning the preparation of the corpse for disposal. For the Lambya's the corpse (*umuvimba*) is washed with water, in some cases with combination of some traditional medicine. For all these there are ritual leaders who direct these in each village, of which most of them are women. The preparation for burial may be done ritually or without formality. Usually the disposal of the corpse takes place either same day or three to four days depending on the place where somebody has died. Hence the disposal of the body normally happens in the morning hours. However, these days the burial may be delayed because others keep the corpse frozen in the mortuary, to wait for relatives who live far away. The disposal may take place either at public grave, clan or family burial graves, depending on the decision made by the family elders. It is the custom for the Lambya's to bury some belongings of the dead together with the body of the dead, such items include; traditional small mats (*akalutefu*), ornaments (*uwambo*) and some tools that the dead person used to like them. Some of these items might be placed on the grave afterwards. Formerly, the senior chiefs in Ulambya region were buried by their servants, of which these days the practices does not continue. The Lambya belief behind this was that the departed needs weapons to defend him along the way to the next world or food to eat in the journey. However to the other side the belief is there to show that the departed is wished all well, peacefully to serve the links with those left behind and ensure that life goes on.

When a Lambya senior chief has died it goes a formal ritual of burial. Usually they are buried in the late evening and only men attend to the grave. No women are allowed to attend apart from caring for the kitchen. The reason why women don't attend the burial ceremony of the traditional authority is because in Lambya they are regarded as strangers in the village. This stranger comes in because of marriage system of patrilineal; they leave their respective villages and follow their husbands to stay together in the husband's village. This is done to escort the chief peacefully and observe *mwiho*. There is usually a special dance that is performed known as *sendemule*. This tradition dance is only performed when a senior chief (*umwene*) has died. It is only performed by women. It has its sacred drums and its special rhythm. Previously the senior chiefs were buried while seating similar to the burial of the Ngoni. The *sendemule* dance is only staged with consent from the chief and

that the dancers perform in a circle to the rhythm of three drums and a whistle. There is no hand clapping and that sometimes dancers carry leaves as they move in a circle.

During the burial, the immediate family of the dead person is expected to stay together on one side of the grave at a designated place. Sometimes the dead person's personal properties are buried in the grave. After the burial, the people are invited to the dead person for refreshment. Many people cleanse themselves at the entrance of the house, where everyone must wash off the dust of the graveyard before entering the house; others do it after the burial straight away from the graveyard site.

Traditionally the period of strict mourning usually continues a week or some may even extend to a year, depending on who has died. During this period, the bereaved stay at home and do not socialize or have sexual contact. Some wear black clothes or black cloths fastened to their clothes, and shave their hair from the day after the burial. They believe that life is concentrated in the hair. Therefore shaving the hair symbolizes death, and its growing again indicates strengthening of life and starting a new life.

### **Feasting and food during funeral**

Feasting follows the funeral rites to comfort the bereaved. The food that is used ranges from dry maize, beans, beef and other livestock. Livestock's are slaughtered when a rich fellow has died while dry maize (*inkhanje*) and beans (*amalima*) are gathered whenever in the village there is a funeral or when people are going to attend a funeral in the village. These are gathered by females, who usually have a duty of cooking food at any funeral that occurs in the village.

### **Weeping ceremony (*Chiliro*)**

*Chiliro* is another mourning time to symbolize the transfer of the dead person spirit to his/her village spirits. Basically what happens is that when someone has died in another country or district and has been buried there. The relatives related by blood (*awaluko*) are asked to transfer the dead person spirit buried in the foreign land to be taken to where their family spirits belongs. The symbolic meaning behind this belief is that they try to avoid violence spirits and they believe that the spirit of the dead person should be received in the ancestor's spirits. The Lambya and other ethnics groups in Chitipa they believe in this

tradition because it helps them put their relatives together in one accord, not only that but also to bring their ancestors close to the village so that they can easily be remembered. There are some few protocols that someone has to adhere. The important one is culture. What do we mean when we say culture? If the custom of paying lobola was not followed it becomes difficult to observe *chiliro* believes. This is very critical to many Lambya people. If she is a woman who was married but no lobola was paid, it means when she dies in any geographical location no *chiliro* is to be observed by the side of the husband who married her, thus if she belongs to the Lambya ethnic group. This simply means that she will be buried at her place of origin where her ancestors lied. If the lobola protocol was adhered to then *chiliro* definitely takes place. If it is a man belonging to the Lambya ethnic then *chiliro* is observed if he dies in a foreign land, here foreign land could mean outside his origin village, district and nation.

### **How they do it**

After the actual burial of the beloved one the same day or after some few days then the relatives of the deceased person gather together and predict who is going to carry the *chiliro* stick. When they agree they all together go to the grave of the deceased person and the one chosen carries the stick that is *chiliro*. Often times the person who carries the stick of *Chiliro* is a very close person to the deceased (*umufwile*). The stick is used to hit the grave to take or transfer the dead person spirit to the required place of burial. The required places in this case are the family graves where his or her relatives are buried.

The chosen person together with some village elders goes to the graves of their deceased whom they want to carry *chiliro* back home and he/she picks the stick and hit horizontally at the grave of their relatives awhile saying words. The words that are said are names of the person buried and the place where they will be reburied. For instance if the person who died was Davie and the origin place to be buried is Chinunkha, then the carrier will say “*Davie twende uye uwone kukaya ku Chinunkha ko kuli abakamu*” (Dave lets go and lie back home in Chinunkha where there are relatives). The moment these words are said the person carrying *chiliro* never looks back; if they look back it’s it is believed that they are leaving the spirit of their departed relative in a foreign land. They usually lap the sticks in a cloth and are treated as if it is real funeral.

When they reach the origin place of the person they announce in the village through the chief about the *chiliro* they have brought in the village. Then the chief spread the message and calls people to attend to. In some cases people cry and shed tears for the *chiliro* while in some parts they don't. If the person who died had some relatives living very far way they wait for them before them burry the *chiliro* stick. On the grave they dig a small whole where they lay the stick and make the tomb to symbolize that their relatives spirits is home.

### **The Lambya spirit world**

The question of spirits is a particular theological language, with its own logic. It is dangerous to draw line before one can translate into the judging language like science. Theologically, the spirits are a way of expressing Gods supremacy and transcendence, but also his imminence through mediator ship. It serves useful purposes like making the supernatural real and concrete in daily life. But it can also bring degradation of religion like avoidance of true divine transcendence by bringing the supernatural to man size and reach. However my concern in this book is to focus on what the Lambya ethnic group does with their spiritual world. As we consider and value the belief of their spirits. I want to take the belief of the Lambya spiritual world from the roots of the Lambya early history so that there should be a good understanding why some customs are happening and others not in present Ulambya region. Therefore, I will excavate deeply into the early history of the Mwabulambya and the Sikwese's.

The Lambya believes in number of spirits, these are categorized into different nature depending on their nature. For instance they believe that some objects are spirits such objects include: storms, fire and other natural forces or objects. They also believe in the spirits of the dead human beings like chiefs (*awamwene*) and other leaders who died long time ago. These are people who were leaders of their clan or some influential leaders who did something great in their clan. For the Lambya they believe that the spirits of the first chief Mwabulambya has got some influence among the clan and the spirits of the counselor Sikwese. The Sikwese's to show respect to their ancestral spirit, as the first counselors of chief Mwabulambya they have made a private shrine where they continue to bury their members of the clan. They have made a shrine at Itongo in Chinunkha Village, close to the graves of their first leaders of the clan. They usually visit the place for invocations, petitions, prayer for forgiveness, consultations and thanksgiving which are accompanied by offerings, gift in form of food, or other objects left for the spirits. This is

not happening often because of some politics that are going on amongst the Sikwese's themselves and the Lambya's as an ethnic group. However, this could be a result of leadership amongst the clan.

Each clan amongst the Lambya's has got its grave or a shrine where they go and offer petitions or ask for forgiveness by offering different kinds of gifts. In these clan graves it's where they continue to bury their members of clan today however there are common graves for everyone, in these graves everyone can be buried. Anthropologically the Lambya's believes that clan spirits have to be respected to avoid being attacked by strange spirits that is why it's their tradition that each clan should have its own land for burying the dead. Some of the notable shrine where the Lambya ethnic group uses as shrine today is in Chinunkha trading centre at *kunsaka*. The site is located close to a hill called *Nakagamba* and in Kafola hill just on top of the hill itself. These are places where chiefs and some influential villagers are buried. Today when you visit these sites it's like there is nothing taking place at these sites. This could be an influence of modernization, modern Christianity or culture being dynamic. The possession of clan graves shows that each clan amongst the Lambya's has got responsible of taking care of their clan spirit.

### **Sacrifice and offerings (*Ukusumbila*)**

The practice of making sacrifices and offerings is found all over the Lambya community. By this material or physical things are given to God and other spiritual beings. The distinction between sacrifices and offerings is this; sacrifices involve the shedding of the blood of human beings, animals or birds; offerings do not involve blood but concern the giving of all other things such as food stuffs, water, milk, beer honey or money ( Mbiti 1991: 63). In Bulambya region the kind of situation that calls for a sacrifice may include drought (*inzala*), war (*inkhondo*), insects, pests, and destructive floods. Since these affect the community it is the community which then sacrifices an animal. In past years a human being was also being sacrificed by being buried alive together with the departed chiefs. This customs is no longer being practiced today among the Lambya's.

For the Lambya's offerings which like sacrifices are given for both communal and personal or family needs, includes whatever people wish and are able to give. They can be both expensive and cheap. Communal sacrifices and offerings are normally made at

shrines, or in sacred groves like Kusaka (Chinunkha), Kafola Hill (Kafola), Mwenebanda (Ibanda) and Mbula Hill (Ifumbo). Or other holy places such as small hills, rivers (Mwachiula, Mwambukiro, Mwenebanda), waterfalls, and so on. Personal sacrifices and offerings are normally made in or near the home, and in some areas people have shrines in their homes for this purpose. These are commonly found in clans graves. They may also be made in public places of sacrifice or as the ritual elder or diviner may direct.

### **Spirits (*Imizimu, vizyuka*)**

Spirit of those who died a long time ago (*imizimu ya basekulu, sekulu*); there are countless number of these. Most of them are no longer remembered in their human form by anybody. People still believe that such spirits must exist in the invisible world. Some of them may be recollected through clan founders, myth, or reciting ones genealogies. For instance amongst the Lambya some remember the spirit of Nyondo (who was once a chief sometimes back) most of such spirits of are no longer within the personal memory of the living. People do not have clear ideas about these spirits of human beings who died in distant past. The spirits of people who were once leaders, heroes, warriors, clan founders and other outstanding men and women sometimes continue to be respected. For instance the clan of the Sikwese's remembers one of the Sikwese's who was a great adviser to the chief Mwabulambya was. The Sikwese's regard him as their can hero, same to Mweniishalikira (the Mtambo's), Mkombanyama, Simphokolwes (the Mambwes).

### **Fire customs in Ulambya region**

As the oral traditions says the tradition contest of fire-making between the Sikwese and the Mwabulambya would appear to refer to the symbolic transfer of power from the former to the latter. Therefore fire symbolically means translation of power amongst the Lambya speaking group. Hence the Mwabulambya's are seen as the inventors of fire and the strong men who defeated the original owners of the land, who in this case are the Sikwese's. The Mwabulambya's, however, could not have established themselves in the new area without the support of their rivals, who were also the main link with the spirits of the earth. The tradition also serves a function in present Lambya social and political life. It explains and justifies the respective roles of the Sikwese's and Mwabulambya's.

The story of the creation of fire is significant in another sense. Fire ceremonies featured prominently in certain rituals of the Lambya royal family. In the past whenever chief Mwabulambya died, all fires in the land were quenched and new ones were lit only after another person had ascended the throne. The new fires were lit from the central fireplace at the court of the Mwabulambya. The tradition that mentions the invention of fire and the fire-making competition probably refers to the introduction of this new royal ceremony into Ulambya.

During this time no one in the land was required to start their own fire without someone getting it direct from the chief's court. If you were found starting your own fire you were either taken to the elders or some misfortunes were supposed to happen in your life. Therefore people in the land were abided in these do and don'ts. At this time people were advised not to eat pumpkin leaves (*chiyungwa*). If someone is disobey this there were taken to the elders for counseling or they were faced with some misfortune like being killed by lightning. Due to dynamic of culture these things are no longer happening in the land as many Chiefs and clans heads are influenced by modern Christianity. The practicing of denying the communities not to take pumpkin leaves is known as *ukusumbira*. This is the time whereby the elders in the village come together and organize an offering to their departed ancestral spirits. When the elders have returned from shrine, then the chiefs and his subordinates makes declaration for people to start eating the leaves. Currently the main common shrines connected with the Lambya's are two: at Kafola hill and in Chinunkha at *kusaka*.

# Chapter 5

## Ethnography of the Lambya foods

### Introduction

The Lambya dwells in large well developed settlements around areas with rich soil for agriculture. Food is one of the most common exchange goods in everyday life and as ritual occasions. Marriage arrangements often involve many stages of food gifts and counter gifts exchanged between the groom's family and bride's family. For the Lambya they eat a variety of food below are some of the traditional foods commonly found in Ulambya region

1. Beans (*a-malima*); these are locally grown in many places in Ulambya region. They are commonly eaten as relish and breakfast when mixed with maize crops (*filombe*), the mixture of cooked beans and maize is referred to as *nthyela*. These are commonly eaten during rainy season if preserved well could be eaten in dry season as breakfast, lunch or supper. Most of times the Lambya foods are usually mixture of foods. It is uncommon to find them eating a single food as their dish.
2. Cassava (*a- mayawo*); the cassava is also grown in the plain. This is usually cooked for breakfast and others makes flour from it known as *kondowole*, commonly done by the Tonga and Nkhonde of Nkhatabay and Karonga district.
3. Millet (*a-malezi*); millets are also grown in Chitipa plain. These are commonly used for brewing sweet beer (*u-bala*).
4. Beans leave (*chinkhubili*); these are usually mixed up with grinded nuts or else mixed up with cooked beans.
5. Pumpkins leave (*chiyungwa*); these are common in rainy season, they are usually mixed up with grinded nuts to make relish or mixed together with beans.
6. Traditional Okra (*i-zumba*, commonly known as *pupwe* usually grown on anthills, the Lambya's mixes this okra with cooked beans).
7. Fine grinded nuts (*chinthiwisya*); this one can be eaten as relish
8. Thick porridge (*ugali, ughali*): Nsima
9. Fresh cooked maize and beans (*i-nthyela*) could be eaten as breakfast or supper
10. Cooked dry maize (*inkhanje*) food eaten at the funeral

## Ethnography of the Lambya material culture

1. Wincwing basket (*uluselo*); commonly used for wincwing maize, beans and many other cereals crops. In a genuine Lambya house where there is a woman this has to be present.
2. Gourd (*a kapale*); used for making sour milk (*chambiko*) and keeping milked milk (*ulukama*). Often used for drinking local brews (*chipumu*) (Fig: 2)



Figure 6: Some sample of gourd found in amongst the Lambyas in Chitipa district

3. Cooking stick (*umutinkho*) used for cooking thick porridge and other brews.
4. Beads/ornaments (*uwambo*) used to give to the bride and are used for beatification among the Lambya women.
5. Insolo (*Bawo/Mancala*) part of the Lambya game, to pass time. Commonly played by men
6. Mat (*akatefu*); these are used for sleeping; they are given as part of condolence to a woman who has been faced who has lost a family member due to death. Commonly made by Lambya women.
7. Cloth (*umwenda*); given as part of the condolence to a woman who has lost a family member due to death.
8. Head gear (*ichitambala*); what women use to cover their heads, especially hair
9. *Akaya*; is an ascertainable locality in which one or more groups of persons reside in separate house, subject to the authority of a village headman (*mwnekaya*)
10. *Abakaya*; strangers who occupy land in the village with the consent of the village headman and live as co- villages.
11. *Abajeni*; a non animilated strangers who do not occupy land in the village

12. Stirring stick (*umutinkho*):stick used for cooking porridge, thick porridge, sweet beer, beer and relish

### **Procedure of making sour Lambya milk (traditional Chambiko**

One of the elements that constitute the Lambya traditional culture is the making of soured milk (*ulukama, ulutoni*). To dwell among the Lambya one has to enjoy drinking soured milk together with cooked sweet potatoes or with thick porridge (*ubughali*). Below is the procedure followed when making the Lambya sour milk? This procedure applies to many ethnic across Chitipa district; the procedure was observed in a number of Lambya villages and some data was gathered on internet/ face book under friends of Chitipa (F.o.C 2012).

### **Preliminary procedure**

1. Normally one has to have cows which produce milk. These have to be milked twice in a day, thus morning and late afternoon. Before starting milking the milking utensils have to be washed and clean. The milked cattle is usually tied its hind legs. The milking utensils consist of the gourd, banana leaves, and possibly a dish. The banana leaves are withered first on fire before they are turned to be used.
2. After milking a litre, it is first poured in the gourd and is kept in a cool place, while the mouth of the gourd is covered with withered leaves of the bananas, these leaves will help to speed up the solidification of the milk. The milk takes a week or so, but it needs regular checking to see how the bacteria are working on the milk.
3. After doing this then you can start topping up while the process is taking place. This may depend on whether or temperature. If the area is very cold then it is left for at least some days roughly to two weeks and when temperature is high perhaps roughly a week. This is done to let the milk get into solid form. The moment it get solid then some water usually floats on top of the gourd this needs to be taken out, the process of doing this is called *kusuya amasulu*.. This is instantly removal of water that settles down and then top up with fresh milk again repeating the first procedure. After topping up then it is left for two to three days before it is ready for drinking. In some areas amasulu are drunk in some areas they consider them as waste.

### **Procedure of making a Lambya traditional sweet beer (*Ubala*)**

Sweet beer is prepared differently depending on a particular ethnic group. Each ethnic group has got its own recipe and procedures on how they prepare their sweet beer. The Lambya has perhaps could be one of the ethnic group that has got a different recipe different from many other ethnic in Malawi. To make a traditional sweet beer a Lambya woman has to have the following: a big pot, sliced sweet potatoes, grinded millet, water, flour (*umugaiwa*), stirring stick and fire.

1. First water is boiled for some 5-10 minutes in a big pot depending on the people who would be drinking the sweet beer.
2. Then millet flour is added little by little until it is a little bit thick while stirring
3. Later sweet potato flour is also added little by little to give some sweetness
4. After adding these then fire is reduced so that the porridge boils in a gentle way to allow the flour to mix better. This is done for some 3-5 minutes.
5. When this is done definitely then the pot is taken out from the fire to cool
6. When it is cool then sweet beer is done for drinking

### **Traditional Lambya houses**

Archaeological studies done in Karonga district shows the earliest evidence of human occupation in Malawi by revealing various occupation sites one of the earliest site being the Mwanganda elephant butchery site, which was first excavated by J.D. Clark on the plain in 70's ( Clark and Haynes 1970). Here stone tools like Choppers, scrapers and flakes were found lying beside the fossiled remains of an elephant which possibly dates back to the later Pleistocene. The sites is currently being studied by the American archaeologist Dr. Jessica Thompson in collaboration with Malawian archaeologists. In Karonga plain there is a wide distribution of artefacts belonging to Middle Stone age (MSA) period. Recent studies shows that these people were hunter gatherers who utilised quartzites raw material in making their tools (Simengwa 2011). These people seemed to have been succeeded by the Later stone age culture. The evidence of this comes from sites like Mwambulambo village far north of Karonga district (Robinson 1982). Artefacts discovered from this early iron working community is characterised by thin fabric, smooth finish globular bodies and channeled curvilinear motifs. Pottery with similar features has been also found in southern Malawi at Nkope (Cole-Kings 1973).

The archaeological evidence from different sites in northern Malawi suggests that by the beginning of second millennium A.D. a new wave of migrants had entered the area (Robinson 1982). The material culture of these newcomers was more advanced than that of the early iron working communities. This could not be different to those who occupied the northern Malawi today. Some of the culture include houses made of wood, daga and grass. The method of building like this is still known to the Ngonde, Lambya, Phoka and to the Nyiha of southern Tanzania.

There seems to be a correlation between these archaeological findings and oral traditions of some descendants of the earliest inhabitants of the Lambya and Ngonde in the region. The Lambya usually build their houses without bricks commonly known as *dindila* or *sindila*, sometimes they build their houses with daga, wood and grass. This traces them back to their ancestors, whose remains were found in Karonga. Therefore the housing style that are common in Chitipa and Karonga are of the same style. No wonder this is what their ancestors left for us.

### **Settings**

The Lambya house setting is common with many northern district ethnics. Usually the father and mother sleep in the same house together with little children. The adults boys and girls after attaining 18 years they are usually advised to build their own small houses within their parents compound. These small houses are known as *i-mphanga*. When building their house they make sure that they have left some space where they can build a kraal (*i-chiwaya*). Usually a kraal is made in front of their houses where it can be visible from predators. Almost each and every Lambya house has to a raised structure usually on a courtyard or veranda where food or utensils are put to dry; these are known as *akatalati* (see Fig 6). The other structures that easily identify the Lambya housing settings are the pigeon pen and maize shells (*inthamba*).

There are ways how traditional houses are constructed in Lambya villages. Some of them are **conical huts**. The earliest form of the traditional huts that could be related to the Lambya could be that which was archaeologically found by Robinson (1982) in Karonga district. The traditional house that was discovered was made of daga (mixture of cow dung and clay

soil) and with perhaps a conical grass huts with an apex. The main construction material is reed or small branches of trees. The technique involves using a rope and poles to draw a circle on the ground then digging holes along the created circle. Reed grass is then planted and bound together using rope and saplings which are placed horizontally. The ropes are made from Miombo trees.



Figure 7: A maize shell and a pigeon pen



Figure 8: some recent traditional houses found in villages amongst the Lambya's

# *Chapter 6*

## **An interim report of archeological and anthropological research of, February –March 2011; Phalombe & Mulanje district**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is a summary of some of the major academic research in anthropology and archaeology. The author was involved in designing and implementing the survey up to data collection and analysis written in this chapter.

### **Background**

The personnel of the department of anthropology, Catholic University of Malawi through the director of African Heritage Research and Consultancy requested on the summary of the research that was done in Phalombe district on various aspects of cultural heritage found in the district in particular Michesi Mountain and mount Mulanje, and the areas surrounding these landscapes. In general terms the research covered a wide range of anthropological and archaeological finding. Some of the possible main objectives of the research study were; to locate all possible heritage found in Phalombe district, to identify the archeological remains found in Michesi Hill, to locate caves in Michesi Hill, to find the etymologies of various words connected to the heritage of Phalombe.

### **Research design and methodologies**

The work at these places and sites consisted of an initial survey by the author, which in some cases where possible surface collection of material culture were taken for further verification with experts. Such collection was done especially when the sites appear more promising.

#### *Data collection methods*

Several methods were applied but in this survey the most commonly methods that were in use were the open ended questionnaires and interviews. These were done to different individuals in each village respectively. However in some cases the focus group discussion

was also used. The use of previous document written about a particular heritage was also part of the game.

### *Interviews*

This was done to several individuals one by one in some cases as a group in various villages, pertaining to what they know about a particular heritage or oral traditional. This involved in targeting the chiefs where ever possible, though lots of these chiefs are not Llomwes so in some cases it made the research a bit tough because the information was meant to be looked after a long search and walk to those who were the Lomwe.

### *Focus group discussion*

This was much used in cases where the oral traditional or when gathering information about etymologies of words in Lomwe. This was much effective in the village where it was very difficult to gather information due to long distances and due to scarce of people who knows better about the ancient things in the village. More anthropological data and oral traditional were accessed through this method especially villages surrounding the Boma and those at Likulezi. The main reason why this method was used was to target the elderly men and women who apparently are the custodians of our culture.

### *Snowball sampling*

Snowball sampling method was used throughout the research. This method of a sampling was chosen with the aim of finding the hidden elderly men and women who had information that was required in the project. This process was done through the identification of the Group Village Headmen, who at the end were being left out with the task to call and identify those who should be on the focus group discussions of which at the end of the project lots of important questions were answered.

### *Judgmental Sampling*

This methods was used to find the general information about the heritage that people surrounding Phalombe know about it, in this case people who to be interviewed were just chosen on randomly basis in any village surrounding the trading centre of Phalombe, the chosen were picked up because of the interest they showed on the things that the project

was looking for and those who had at least some little information on the heritage and history of the district and the colonial era information.

### **Findings**

The archeological sites recorded in this report have been described according to what people within the village say about them. This is so because the research combines the archaeological and anthropological findings which commonly require the use of ethnographic studies wherever possible. Ethnographic in general terms could be defined as, “the writing of the present people.” Hence “*anthropology is interested in what people say to be true*”. Therefore the report considers the views of what the villagers uttered during the ethnographic studies and the interviews. This will possibly help to eliminate some of the bias on what the outsiders may think over the views of the local villagers.

### **Michesi Hill (Phalombe district, P.E)**

#### *Mwala wa padwale* (a flat rock)

It is a site situated on the west side of the rock known as “*Mwala wa padwale*” just on the left hand side of the path going to the rock. Suggest a major Iron working community ritualistic site, the site almost covers an area of approximately 0.02 square meters, the site has got a cluster of big and smaller boulders, and some with simple overhang over them, below these boulders and overhang possibly are channeled Maudzu sherds. In some cases on the site there are full pots of the same type inverted just between the rocks themselves. Suggest these pots are *in situ*. However, the site needs to be surveyed or visited during the dry season when the Mountain is burnt for further documentation of what is on the site, the site looks more promising in terms of pottery.

#### *Naporo River J*

On the West bank of the River formed by Naporo as you go on top of it, consist of a big rock shelter of approximately 15 meters long and possibly 1-2 meters high to the roof. On this one a few pieces of sherds could possibly belong to Maudzu ware as they were identified, on this shelter no full pots were discovered so far. Apparently the site seems to inhabit wild game in the Mountain.

Just some few meters from the Naporo I shelter there is a big boulder with an overhang below which is sherds on the surface and some broken pots. The way they appear suggest a sacrificial site, because the pots have got some white matters which could possibly be the dried flour which is commonly known in many societies that was used to be offered to the spirit when misfortunes happens.

#### *Naporo River II*

This is a big boulder situated along the Naporo River, the site provide face to face with Naporo I cave. No potsherds or lithic were discovered associating with the cave itself.

#### *Namajani River*

On the left side of the woodlot of blue gums planted close to the river of Namajani in the Michesi Mountain there is almost a 10 meters long overhang and it approximately 2-3 meters high to the roof. Some few potsherds were identified with some decorations similar to Maudzu ware. Apparently not assigned to any known ancient ware in the country, suggest needs more time to study the site when the areas get burnt.

#### *Michesi path*

Just after the last houses found on the main path leading to Michesi Mountain, along the path there are some scattered potsherds of Maudzu ware, the distance of scattering of these sherds could possibly be 100 meters. In other way after every 100 meters upon finding the sherds you are at least assured of finding another few sherds, this is from all angles of orientation ( East, North, South, West) suggest a village around this place however, needs to be visited again in dry season when the area is burnt.

#### *Eastern side (the admarc side path to Michesi)*

The site is situated on the top of rocks but close to a River ( guide forgotten the name) the site has some full pots with some red burnish, the research on this site was disturbed by an angry snake, but needs some more time to visit the site looks promising.

### *Ruins of villages destroyed by Naporo*

Situated in the village of Ngandanga close to the agriculture houses, there are ruins of houses destroyed by Naporo. As you walk over the area there are presence of mounds of destroyed houses and some pottery and the bricks. In some cases there are only planted trees left, as Naporo doesn't uproot the artificial trees. In one village just at the end of the path from Phalombe Boma Catholic Church there is one thick Mango tree of which Oral traditional says that there is one Python which always move around the place, without harming people. It occasionally appears to the people. Some groups have related this snake to Naporo.

Most of the caves that have been located and visited so far are just showing the presence of pottery on the surface and some intact in the rocks. Amongst all the Caves no lithic artifacts have been discovered so far. However, as you go on top of the mountain it seems promising, because there is some presence of milky quartz raw material and the vein quartz of which if the survey extend to focus on the top most area the landscape looks more promising that could reveal the Later Stone Age (LSA) site but this needs to be done in dry season when the bushes are burnt. This is so because path leading to some of these Caves are just slippery and the bushes makes it difficult to walk especially when going top of the Mountains. Due to these the survey was a bit difficult. Apart from these some areas were not visited in the Mountain because of the strong Oral traditions of spirits as the researchers in Anthropology this has to be respected, because the belief are just significant to the of Phalombe society. This Oral traditional also goes together with the stories of existence of big snakes in the Mountain of which big snake in the Mountain are connected to the spirits as it is in one narrative below.

### **Miscellaneous archeological and anthropological discovery; Phalombe, Michesi Mountain, Likulezi Area**

As one of the major objective of the study for the project, etymologies of various words , names found in the Phalombe district were meant to be investigated, below are some of the interpretation and oral meaning of what they ( villagers) think could be the history of the words. Some have been explained while others still need further investigation if funds are available.

### *Phalombe*

This is the name of the district itself. However, the project wanted to find out the meaning of the word itself and the interpretation of the word this has been partially achieved but still needs to be investigated. After a long investigation in various villages, and amongst the elderly people, the most common narrative that was being revealed was that the name Phalombe meant a River (Msinje). This was not satisfactory to the project; therefore, the research went further looking for the origin and the interpretation of the word Phalombe. From this further research revealed a different narratives, that was not common to many but at least three elderly men and a woman had a common narrative of the name itself, of which they may be aged 70 years above because when asked their ages they all said they can remember but they were born in the time of first chiefs of Nazombe and Nkumba, so their narrative could be at least trusted. Phalombe was a meeting place of most Lomwe who came from Mozambique to Malawi.

What they said was the name Phalombe originates from the time when the Lomwe were coming from Mozambique due to war they had a place where they all were meeting there to rest and share food they had carried from Mozambique the place was close to the river that had its source from Michesi Mountain. Since they were running from war they were afraid with any group they could meet on the way. Now when they arrived on this place they found the colonial white men. Then they gathered into groups to try to defend themselves to the white men if the white men wanted to attack them. Into those groups they were shouting loud in Lomwe these words, “*umuphale umphe*” meaning catch and kill him. They were shouting these words to scare the white men then the white men started making fun of them by repeating the phrase in Lomwe and they failed to do that as a result they shortened it to “*Palombe*” which later has changed to Phalombe, then the River was named after this scenario happened. This could possibly make some sense in the origin of the word itself. Despite that it has changed to Phalombe these days.

### *Mulanje*

Just after explaining this they went further explaining about the origin of the word Mulanje. What they said on this one was that when the Lomwe were travelling from Mozambique to present Mulanje, they had also a place somewhere there around Mulanje where they were also meeting to rest and share food, they used to call the place in Lomwe

as “*mulaniche*” which means to spit out what is in your mouth, at this place there also had to meet with the white men who interacted with them into peaceful manner, as they were saying *Mulaniche* then one of the white men leader wanted to learn the language and he failed to pronounce the word *mulaniche* in Lomwe as a result he just shortened it to Mlanje, of which at present is Mulanje. This is how they explained the meaning of these words, however there is still some more information that needs to be gathered about these words to confirm the truthiness.

#### *Namajani River and its origins*

This is the River just within the Phalombe Boma but it has its sources in Michesi Mountain. The name Namajani was given to the River long time ago because of the following scenario, a certain group of Yao from Mozambique who came through the gap, loved so much meeting at this River and sharing their stories there. Now when these were meeting at this place they loved calling the place as Majani which means Monkeys in Yao language. The place was also loved by the Monkeys who liked drinking water there now these Yao were also looking for job at A Lister and when going there they were just agreeing to meet at Majani and the Lomwe who followed the Yao called the River as Namajani, this is how the River got its name.

#### *Michesi mountain peak*

There are some stories that just behind the peak there is rock on top with a figure like seven (7). This research project did not extend to that far end, but needs to look on that side next time when funds are available.

#### *Milanje vs. Mulanje*

To some these words look the same but they are different places. The survey has revealed that Milanje is a certain place in Mozambique others says it is a Hill just close to Malawi. People from this place speak deep Lomwe language different from any Lomwe found in Malawi. Simple Lomwe is called “*emuhasani*.”

#### *Phalombe Boma to Mulanje*

Phalombe sub-boma was established by Kamuzu Banda (first president of Malawi). However the separation of Phalombe sub-district and Mulanje was done by Muluzi (former

president of Malawi) in between 1996 to 2004. The reasons why they separated these two was based on political and other reasons of which the political needs to be checked to the Phalombe district commissioner (D.C.) while these other reason include the issues of land disputes between the chiefs who were based on Mulanje and part of Phalombe.

However, others say that the separation of Phalombe and Mulanje started in the time of ALister who was based at the fort. Some people were saying that the moved the Boma because lots of ALister friends were based in Mulanje where they were growing lots of tea there, the version has been repeated by at least four people. Others were saying that it's because ALister followed the cold weather of Mulanje and wanted to have a tea estate. While others were saying that there was lack of strong educated men in Phalombe who could have rejected the movement. However there is more to expect on the transfer of this Boma of which suggest going back to the district commissioner of Phalombe to see if at all some of these documents are still there.

#### *Snakes in Michesi*

With strong oral traditional about the spirits in mount Michesi as researchers in anthropology there is at least some beliefs on observation, one day the team of survey met with the big snake which the local call it M'bobo ( black mamber ) it's a big snake bigger than a tyre of motorcycle bike. The snake likes biting people on top of their heads. On its face it looks as the cock head. The stories about this snake were spoken before getting into the Mountain. When investigated about this snake they said it's connected to spirits not Naporo. It once appear when you saw it mean when you go down you will hear that a particular individual has died, so it acts as messenger, more like the way people in different society view an Owl. When it lands on your house it means that one of your relatives has died or he/she will be sick terribly. Therefore in some Lomwe society of Phalombe the snake also acts as messenger of information. This prevented the survey not to reach into other areas.

#### *Bananas in Michesi*

With strong Oral traditional about the finding of ripe Bananas in the Mountain has been proven true through this research though the Bananas were not found ripe, but the Bananas were found in the course of the research. There is still strong belief that they are provided

by the spirits in the Mountain. When asked about the spirits most of the villagers were saying that the spirits that are found in the Mountain belong to the Llomwes ancestral. However, some have reported that the Batwa's have ever lived in Michesi Mountain. These Batwa's were known as people without tribe or ethnic group. In Lomwe these were known as "anamasepwani"

#### *Oral speaking of existence of the following just around Phalombe*

A rock with foot imprint around Likulezi, Grave in the Mountain of Chief Mpoto (Juma), Michesi Mountain (the footprint) at Fort-lister gap, A rock with a carving of a boy, kneeling, while receiving a Banana at Chiringa, Kumachemba full pots, Behind Mulli brothers lodge along the Likuhubula River presence of footprints, In Mulanje Mountain close to Phalombe boarder there is presence of a rock designed in a form of table commonly known as Mwala wa tebulo which is located together with Mwala wa Mpanda which is designed as a wall.

These are some of the oral stories that were heard in the course of doing the research, some of these places have been proven guilty by being discovered while others needs some more travelling to find them, as a result this research did not bother to locate them due to time, hope most of them does exist. Suggest to be discovered so that people can appreciate their heritage and nature in their area.

#### **Monuments in Phalombe**

##### *Native Tobacco Board (NTB, Present ADMARC)*

This is the building that today is housing the present admarc of Phalombe district. This building is part of the oldest building in Phalombe district. It is situated along the M1 from Phalombe to Migowi, Chiringa. This building its where the colonial masters were distributing maize to the needy by the time when Malawi experienced a terrible hunger and this was a place where tobacco was sold by the farmers , approximately this was around 1920s according to Anafi Majamanda who once received maize at the place in those days, age around 70+. The building was now turned to admarc during the era of Kamuzu Banda. Just the opposite of it when you cross the road there was a big farm of colonial master by the name of Mc-non who was growing a lot of tobacco, which was being sold at NTB.

### *Mthandizi ruins*

Just after some 50 to 100 meters walk, to the left side there is ruins of old Mthandizi buildings, which were destroyed by the earth removals by the Mota Engel Company when constructing the road to Migowi. But the walls of it can be seen and the bricks.

What was happening at this place was that it was acting as a meeting place of various people from across the district of Mulanje by then, who were looking for job in mining companies in Zimbabwe, Zambia and South Africa. They were coming at this place to register their names and wait to be transported to the working areas where they have registered their names. When they are picked up they were transported to Blantyre Mthandizi at Bangwe branch in Blantyre. These buildings of Mthandizi were building by Alfred who was working at the fort by then. Possibly this was around 1920 to 1930s. Today some of this place is a maize field while the other areas have been turned to maize mill.

### *Fort Lister gap*

Built in 1893 on what was then an important root of slave traders through the pass between the Mulanje and Michesi. It was abandoned in 1906 and the ruins now are protected monument. The remains of villages can be seen all round but these were contemporary with the fort judging by the pottery found on the surface. At the place there was a small prison, hospital, post office and the military offices. All these facilities were transferred to Mulanje by A Lister, of which the fort was named after him. Just close to the place there are tombs of him, his cooks and the grave of his dog. (Commonly known as *Manda azungu*) this place is funded by the British (Queen) to maintain the place of their relatives. The gap was the centre of the district Mulanje by then. By then there was the following famous colonial masters who were living there; Frank, Whitney, Kendrick, Benzyl, Mafia, Harry.

### *Old Catholic preparatory seminary at Likulezi (now known as C.C.T.C)*

This is Catholic site, which is now used as a school for training the catechist for the church. However, it is composed of a number of old buildings prior to 1960s. In those days it was called a minor seminary where seminarians were prepared to join the priesthood. Some of the buildings at this place are in good condition while others are destroyed due to

improper care. The seminary is located just behind the Chikomwe Hill known as Likulezi Hill. To get there you need to reach first at Likulezi trading centre that is when you are coming through Phalombe road, then you can take the first turn from trading centre this can be found to the left side. Suggest further research on its establishment at Likulezi.

#### *Mullis brother farm*

This is one of the big farms in Phalombe district of which at present it is owned by Mullis brothers. In old days this farm was owned by one of the missionaries of the Catholic Church who were living at Likulezi old seminary. The farm by then was owned by David B. Ritchie who died on 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1921, his tomb is at Likulezi Catechist centre known as C.C.T.C. up to now it is not well known if this man was a priest or a brother at this Roman Catholic institution. There is a need for more investigation about him.

#### **A rock with imprint at Likulezi (in Phumduma village)**

This is one of the famous rocks when one gets into Likulezi looking for old things. The rock is situated just close to Chazinga Full Primary School, which is a 2 kilometers walking journey from Likulezi trading centre and a 30 minutes journey on bicycle. To get there you take the road to Chazinga F.P. School. The site is located in dambo valley of Chomba. The transport from Phalombe boma to the site is only K 200, but one can board a bicycle to get at the site that is at Likulezi trading centre. This can take you to Chazinga School where one can ask about the place. The rock is famously known as pa Mwala wa padwale, then the villagers can locate the place.

The rock is well known to have the imprints of various animals, like Hyenas, Cheetahs, Birds, Lions, Leopard and the footprints of a human being of which they assign them to Jesus Christ. However, the villagers and oral traditional that is common is that the animals were there before the rock got dry when God was creating the world. Besides these imprints just on the middle of the rock there are six holes dug in a similar manner like those holes of the present *Bawo* game (Mancala). The holes are almost 3mm deep and 4cm wide. People have been saying that these holes are bawo game.

Just behind this rock there is strong oral traditional that concerns the rock. One of the famous narratives is of the Python snake and other unidentified snakes that usually come at

the wells that are located at the site to drink water, but never bite people, the snakes are just too big enough.

When investigated about the reasons why the snake comes in at the site the following narratives came out, which were observed by one of the informants who was giving this account. There is a python and other unidentified snakes that occasionally come in at the site to drink water. The python usually come during the dry season or when it is close to enter into rainy season. Before rain comes in the village the snake appears first then within some few days then rain falls. When the snake has moved during rainy season the expectation of the river or well is that it always floods, when the snake has moved first water floods as if Naporo has passed, therefore this snakes is known as Naporo which is an animal in oral traditional researched so far, now the people in the village when they see the floods they say “*kanyama kayenda*” which means an animal has passed /moved. They relate this snake to be of their ancestral spirits. Sometimes when this snake has appeared in the village it means someone has died or he/she is in terrible situation, but most of the time when it appears in abnormal time not in dry season it means that someone has died in the village. These snakes do no bite people they just run away when they have met with people, in this case the villagers has noted that when the snake appears it carries the message of death (*chidziwitso cha maliro*).

Sometimes the unidentified snakes could also be found just close to the place where people are living. However, they don't mean they want to bite but they carry messages. These snakes are not chased as other snakes, but people interact with them by talking to them while directing them with flour so that they can move far away in respectable manner. To do this they say these words, “*inu chokanipo apa pakhomo muzizimusa ana akakuonani tiyeni mukakhale apo*”. (You move out at this place you will scare little ones when they see you here, let's go and stay there) they say these words while directing it with flour and the snake obeys without causing any harm. When people were asked about the place where their ancestral were offering sacrifice some mentioned the place while others were pointing at Nalijeni Hill just to the south of Likulezi, again in this Hill there is a strong Oral traditional that there is a big snake that occasionally appears in the village to give message but it never bite people, when you attempt to chase it just get missing without knowing exactly where it has gone.

### **Differences in Lomwe languages**

In the course of trying to find the etymologies of words in Lomwe language the project noticed one thing that is the Lomwe language differs from one location to the other. This is so because it has been mixed up with the Mang'anja language which is Chewa. Apparently there are seven (7) groups of Lomwe each group came with its own leader from Mozambique and they settled into different areas in Malawi, especially in southern region of Malawi. As of now we have the following groups;

- ~ Amuhavani, settled in Phalombe district
- ~ Ameto settled in Thyolo
- ~ Amunyamwelo settled at Nyezerera area
- ~ Atakwani } settled in Mulanje
- ~ Amaleche }
- ~ Akokhola, these settled at Mulomba
- ~ Apotola settled in Thyolo

All these when they were coming from Mozambique they were settling first at palombe, where there is current Boma. They were being stopped there for medical checkup at a dispensary, where they were being given some medicine before they proceeded into the country. They were not sleeping in the houses. Most of these Llomwes proceeded to Kumbandanga (present Thyolo district) they migrated into different times; it was not one migration of people.

### **Chiefs in Phalombe district**

Phalombe district has got two big chiefs that were the first to arrive with the Lomwe group from Mozambique and settle in Phalombe by then these are;

- ~ Paramount Nkumba
- ~ Senior Traditional authority Nazombe

Under these are small chiefs who came after the Lomwe group and these are not all Lomwe some of these small chiefs are Mang'anja, these small Chiefs include the following;

- ~ Traditional authority Kaduya

~ Traditional authority Chiwalo

Under these then there are Group Village Headmen like;

- ~ Nyezerera
- ~ Nkhulambe
- ~ Nambazo
- ~ Sakhome
- ~ Bokosi
- ~ Sakhome
- ~ Chingwalu
- ~ Ngandanga
- ~ Tawanga
- ~ Chibwana
- ~ Phunduma
- ~ Tetheleya

### **Nkumba chieftaincy**

The Chieftaincy of paramount chief Nkumba started in the Mozambique. He came up to Malawi in approximately around 1700. He first settled with the group of the Lomwe in Phalombe district at Likulezi. This migration was followed by the Chief Nazombe who is another big Chief in Phalombe.

### **Lesson learn from the field**

#### *Ethnocentric in Phalombe: from Lambya culture to Lomwe culture adoption*

This is one of my lessons that I have learn so far, considering other culture on neutral basis. When I was working amongst the Llomwes of Phalombe I considered myself, so ignorant about their culture as if I don't know anything concerning their culture and beliefs. This enabled me to learn a lot of things in Lomwe culture and beliefs. I never judged whatever they were telling me not to do and what I have to do. This was much significant for me to continue with my field work. At the end of the field work in almost every village I made friendship with the local people, young, aged, kids and people in various professions at Phalombe. Being ethnocentric has helped me to be humble and appreciate the culture of people I worked with.

### *Interviews*

This field work has helped me to improve my skills on how to ask questions on interviews that will produce answers to the things that I am required to achieve in the project involved. In this field I did not have the questionnaires as it was required but I organized myself in the manner to achieve the objective of the project without using the questionnaires, this has been done throughout the fieldwork. In this area I challenge that my skill has improved tremendously. Despite that sometimes in the field I could meet with the difficult people whose their responses were abit difficult to understand ,either it's because of me asking wrong questions I don't know or them not understanding what I meant in particular question.

### *Proud with my career as an anthropologist & archaeologist*

One thing that I also enjoyed and like in this field work was the questions that I was being asked by different villagers when doing the job or when meets in the street. Many people have asked me what I was looking for, after they recognized that was doing research in Michesi Mountain of which many fear stories of spirits. This kind of questions was asked when was climbing down the mount Michesi, most of the people were wondering why I was searching for the caves and things of the past. One of the people asks me “*what are you going to do with the caves or the things of the past*”. This made me proudly; explain to her about my field of archaeology and anthropology, after explaining she wondered that their Mountain contains some archaeology. Through such examination I was helped by such people to identify other old site found in Phalombe and in the Mountain. Hence when they found something that I was looking for in the mountain there were coming to my place and told me that they have found something that I was looking so I could go with them to see what they were saying. If chances were found I could also explain to them what was looking for in terms of material culture. Through this I have explained to them about my career. This made me proud because I was valued as somebody who is an expert and a researcher and whom the villagers respected. I liked this so much.

## **Limitation in the field work**

I can describe what I have learn so far in the field but still limitation cannot be avoided anyway

### *Weakness*

- ~ *Distance*; most of the time in this field work I was walking long distances about 2-3 kilometers to get the required information, which sometimes could rob the interest of the researchers who doesn't like walking.
- ~ *Appointments*; sometimes after walking a long distance to get to the place of required information to book appointment with the source of information. After you agreed to meet at a particular time you find that she/ he have not shown up. After along distance of walking sometimes it was easy to give up visiting the person once again, which sometimes could contribute to the loss of information required.
- ~ *Economy/finances*; this was at least a problem. This is so because I was supposed to pay for my room in the rest house at K 500 on the same money that I was receiving I was also to pay the guiders, the informants and the travelling transport as well as my food. The money that I was receiving was not just enough to carter for the services. This made me to eat little food while working so hard food like chips, barbecue and cold drinks cannot be used for supper and lunch for somebody climbing the Mountain and who walks for long distances.
- ~ *Accommodation*; Phalombe has got only two places of accommodation. The one that was putting in was abit cheaper than the other. To the cheaper one some facilities are not just good enough but the rooms are quite ok. However the rooms do not have the sockets for the use of electrical appliances as a result you cannot charge the phone in the room or use the computer. But promised to be improved by the owners of the rest house.
- ~ *Thieves*; one day after I knocked off from the field I washed my clothes and hanged them on the lines, and when was coming from taking my supper I found that all my clothes were stolen. I was left with only the cloth that I was wearing on that particular day. It was bad for me.
- ~ *Informants/villagers*; they usually look for money when they have been asked to respond to the questions in the project. They have been misguided by other researchers who visits some of the villages whereby they give them money so

they expect any researcher to give them money or something else despite that they give unsatisfactory information. This was a bit of a problem in some villages where I visited but I dealt with such problem.

### *Strength*

- ~ This research has improved my skills of conducting the interviews
- ~ I have learnt how to be economic with the finances when you are in the field
- ~ I loved walking and hiking despite that distances were just long enough
- ~ I have learnt how to explain to people about archaeology on the local people so that they can understand what we mean by studying the past
- ~ This fieldwork has improved my experience on how to conduct archaeological research and link the material culture to the Oral traditions
- ~ I enjoyed knowing new places in Phalombe and the culture and beliefs of the Lomwe
- ~ I have also experience on how to talk to Chiefs, and the elderly people in the village so that they can give required information
- ~ Learnt how to interact with people

### *Group of informants involved in giving information above*

1. Group Village Headman Asakhomwe
2. Mr. Mandawala, Likulezi
3. Mr. Martias John, Bokosi Village
4. Mr. Chiwale, Chibwana, Village ( a farmer)
5. Mr. Amos Jim, Phunduma Village ( a farmer and businessman)
6. Chipirilo Sayidi, Bokosi Village ( farmer)
7. Group Village Headman Tetheleya
8. Fr. Charles Likulezi C.C.T.C ( Roman Catholic priest)
9. Group Village Headman Nkhulambe
10. Group Village Headman Ngandanga
11. Group Village Headman Tawanga
12. Group Village Headman Bokosi
13. Mr. Anafi Majamanda, Bokosi Village ( former guard of Fortlister gap and a local businessman)

14. Mr. Lemani, Tawanga Village ( a farmer and assistance chief of group village headman Tawanga)
15. Group Village Headman Chibwana
16. Gogo Anna Doka, Phunduma Village (farmer at Likulezi)
17. Gogo Mary Juma, Phunduma Village (farmer at Likulezi)
18. Mr. Gogo Mwanafi Wambe, Phunduma Village ( farmer at Likulezi)
19. Mr. Daston Mishoni, Chibwana Village ( farmer)
20. Fr. Gervasio Namba ( parish priest at Likulezi )
21. Paramount chief Nkumba
22. Mr. Manenera Namangale, Nkhulambe Village ( farmer)
23. Mr. Emmanuel John, Ngandanga Village ( farmer)

### *Acknowledgement*

I view research in anthropology or archaeology as a dynamic process that seeks the support and participation of many individuals in sequence of integrations at every level. Such support and participation take many forms, including intellectual, finance, material and moral support. I am indebted to many people and it is difficult to mention all their names. However, I assume those whose names I fail to mention that their contributions in whatever form are highly appreciated.

In this regard, there are specific people to whom I wish to convey my heartfelt gratitude. First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the commitment of Mr. Menno Welling for the outstanding and exemplary intellectual and finance guidance and supervision of this research in Phalombe. The research gained substantially from the experiences of Mr. Welling. The work of him in different areas in Malawi and Europe and well versed knowledge in heritage management, anthropological and archaeological research was of great importance. The works of many other villagers were also of great value. I am nonetheless immensely indebted to my entire guide in the field like Mr. Martias John, Mr. Mandawala at Likulezi, Fr. Gervasio Namba at Phalombe parish, group village headman Chibwana, Mr. Majamanda, and all whom I fail to mention your names your assistance will greatly be appreciated.

# *Chapter 7*

## **Discussion on importance of traditions in a society**

### **Introduction**

Traditions in a society are important for many reasons. They remind us of where we came from. They also give us a sense of belonging. They are part of history and they need to be handed. This chapter discusses the important of preserving the society traditions.

### **Importance of traditions**

Tradition is existing body of knowledge. A tradition is a group of related ideas that have lasted for a long time. In some cases in Malawian society due to democracy and human rights people have spent their time trying to improve the ideas. In some cases they have been trying keeping the tradition exactly the same over time.

Just because society traditions contains knowledge valuable doesn't mean they are always right. Sometimes they are not. That is why human rights bodies try to change some traditions. All the knowledge in traditions can be intimidating. And no one has time to carefully and critically go through all the details of all the traditional knowledge they follow. That's fine. But one should bear in mind two things; first if something goes wrong, if there seems to a problem- then relying on society tradition is not good enough. Second a thoughtful person should critically evaluate some traditions. It's your choice which, but everyone ought to be good at something and have the experience of trying to improve some knowledge.

When we find something wrong with a tradition, if at all possible we should improve the tradition, not abandon it. We should seek away to modify the tradition but also retain existing knowledge, our change should be as small as possible to solve the problem. If we were to start from a scratch, we may avoid the flow we found, but we are not perfect and our new ideas will contain other flow- we should consequently be respectful of traditions even as we find errors in it, and try to improve it with new ideas of our own.

Tradition was made because people are generally not very smart. They cannot be trusted to make the correct decision, so tradition were created by people who were created by people who were wiser than them in the hopes that it would help prevent them from making bad decisions.

I have a question to readers of this book; do you ever listen to advice from your parents? I, personally do, because it makes perfect logical sense to listen to the advice from someone who is older and has had more experience than you retort, yes there could be some advice that is bad or incorrect, but you do have to make a basic choice to either accept it or reject it based on whether or not it makes sense to you. Additionally looking at my previous experience, I can say that in general parents give very good advice, also you have to look at it from their position, are they wanting to deliberately give me bad advice. As their role as parents they are only wanting the best for me, and so I know that they try to only give advice that is good and beneficial to me. Don't you think that listening to someone who has 30 years more experience on this earth than you and truly only wanting to give you good advice, is a wise thing to do, even if it seems illogical to your inexperienced immature mind at that time. Usually the reasoning behind it becomes clear later on.

For example, it is tradition for you to look both ways before you cross the street. Your parents told you to look both ways and you do. At the time they told you that, it is unlikely, at that age you understood the fundamental reason for why you did it, but now, after much more experience and getting a lot order, you, understand that looking both ways does make sense because those being polluting hunks of metal can turn you into a read smear mark down the middle of the road if you step out and get in their way.

### **Sustaining traditions in the society**

With the world of human rights and democratic societies the issue of sustaining traditions is a controversial. People tend to keep old customs alive for numerous reasons. From my own point of view, I absolutely agree with this tendency.

First of all, identity should be a priority. The characteristics of a place can be revealed greatly through its traditions. Customs have been built for centuries mostly based on the locations geography features; the element that determines the main employment as well as

the typical working technique. Therefore, by maintain traditions, a society can demonstrate the most significant information of their living spot. More interestingly, the continuation of customs enables people to practice the traditional acts as a part of their lives. As a result, one can bring the tradition of his or her hometown to anywhere they set feet on. Traditional maintenance is a critical to the identity definition as well as its fame.

Secondly, mental life is of no less importance. Social activities are indispensable in the traditions of a group of people. Through the participation in such social activities, one has the chance of getting to know the people living in the same community. As a result, one can both enjoy a close relationship with other people and help create a warm, safe environment in the society. Furthermore, due to the practice of performing old traditions, a person can simply develop a connection with his or her ancestor, who did the same things centuries ago. Through a great feeling of being close to the ancestor, one can build up a very natural and deep love for family. This allows people to keep good contact with family members and siblings.

Finally, the consideration of financial benefit draws much attention on the issue of traditions. The prosperity of tourism in the country and region depends greatly on the traditions displayed in that area. When going on a trip, tourists expect to see, experience new customs and escape the routine of modern life for knowledge acquirement and relaxation. For that reason, travelers are bound to be extremely attracted by places where they can observe aged rituals and ways of living. The people residing in such places can take advantages from the financial interests coming from tourism. More notably, maintain traditions also means continuing customary employments, many of which are of great financial interest now, such as handmade pottery. People can make money from the same work passed from generation to generation instead of abandoning it and find a new one in this modern society nowadays.

## **CONCLUSION**

Tradition is an important part of society, and without it, there would be many more people who would become contenders because they insisted on ignoring traditions and decided to earn things out the hard way. Advice like tradition can be thought of the same way, you

either accept it, ignore it, or you find out on your own whether it is valid to or applicable. In the end, usually trusting the source of the advice or tradition should be enough for you to have faith that they know what they are talking about and that their advice should be heeded.

Traditions are important because they contain ethnic best knowledge collected over the years and passed from generations. But they can also be dangerous. They can induce blind spots in people and be bad for everything except getting themselves thoughtful to children. It is up to us to consider which traditions are which.

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## **Historical Text**

These consist of the formal and informal interviews carried out during the period of the research. These form parts of main source of information for this book, the text are being kept at Lanujos Social Research & Consultancy Services, under the department of research and publication in Blantyre. We believe that much of this information is kept at Chancellor College, constituent of University of Malawi, where the first scholar Professor Owen Kalinga deposited similar text. We did not have any access to those texts, but we believe they are related. They include the following;

The Lambya Historical Text (LHT)

The Ngonde Historical Text (NHT)