

Religious, Cultural and Moral Changes in the Chibwelamushi Harvest Ceremony of the Lala-Swaka people of Serenje and Mkushi districts

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Abstract

The study sought to determine the changes that have taken place regarding the religious, cultural and moral aspects in Chibwelamushi Harvest Ceremony (CHC) of the Lala and Swaka people of Serenje and Mkushi districts. The study employed qualitative approaches in which it evoked ethnographic interview design in order to effectively address the issues raised by the research question. The method of data collection included, observation, interviews and document analysis using the semi structured interview guides activity, observation checklist and document analysis checklist. The target population included all Lala and Swaka People. The sample of 14 interviewees included one national chairperson and secretary of CHC, 2 representatives from insaka yelala, 2 initiators of initiates, 2 Traditional Affairs Officers, 4 ordinary members from two tribes and one senior chief from each district. The study revealed how the coming of Christianity, colonialism, modernity and capitalism have impacted on CHC. Based on the findings, the article recommends among others that the Lala and Swaka people take it upon themselves to teach the young ones the significance of CHC as well as inculturate some positive aspects of Christianity, colonialism, modernism and capitalism with key aspects of CHC in order to safeguard these aspects against erosion and extinction so that this ceremony can be appreciated and preserved to the next generation.

Key Words: Religious; Cultural; Moral; Chibwelamushi; Lala-Swaka

1.0 Background and Context

The *Chibwelamushi* Harvest Ceremony (CHC) is celebrated in Zambia as one of the traditional ceremonies. A number of writers have attempted to write about traditional ceremonies in Zambia but they have concentrated on the ‘big five’; *Kuomboka*, *Umutomboko*, *N’cwala*, *Likumbi Lyamize* and *Kusefya pa ng’wena* ceremonies leaving out CHC other smaller cultural traditional ceremonies. The article closely reviews the changes that have taken place regarding the religious, cultural and moral aspects in CHC of the Lala and Swaka people. Mizinga (1995) cited by Kanene (2011: 2) urges that research needs to be undertaken on the proliferation of Zambian traditional ceremonies and the significance of the ceremonies. Additionally, during the CHC, the First Lady by then, Christine Kaseba Sata was quoted in the *Times Newspaper* of 8 September 2013 saying that, documentation of such ceremonies was important for any country because that would be the only way people could be able to learn about the different rich cultural backgrounds or better still their roots. Kanene (2011: 2) contends that, during the 2009, *Lwiindi Gonde* Ceremony, the provincial minister of Southern province was quoted in *The Post Newspaper* of 12 July 2009 saying that, the government was concerned with the erosion of cultural values and that any attempt to restore the cultural heritage of the country was going to be supported.

However, despite all the above mentioned calls and reminders, it appeared that people mandated to preserve and uphold Zambian cultures, have no clear documented practices and research done on CHC. Clearly there is limited to almost non-existence of theoretical and empirical studies which have been done to unveil what constitute different dynamics of the CHC. This article

therefore, attempts to fill the gap by examining the changes that have taken place regarding the religious, cultural and moral aspects in CHC which are crucial for preservation. This might also be a gigantic step towards sustainability measure in value addition of traditional ceremonies. The purpose and major task of the article was to examine the changes that have taken place regarding religious, cultural and moral aspects in CHC.

2.0 Major Research question

The article was guided by one major question: What are the major changes that have taken place over the years regarding religious, cultural and moral aspects in CHC?

3.0 Literature Review

The study done by Guhr (2010) established that traditional ceremonies are a time-honored form of communication and provide a vibrant record of our common heritage which includes the dances, songs, crafts and artifacts that have been passed down through the generations. This shows that from time immemorial traditional ceremonies have been respected as a form of communication among people. Kapwepwe (2007) cited by Kanene (2011: 1) indicated that culture is celebrated by different tribes in different styles at different times and for various reasons. Tembo (2003) and Guhr (2010) revealed that the Lala and Swaka people celebrated ceremonies and observed various customs and rituals in order to live in harmony with their ancestral spirits. These studies though lack clarity on the details of how these customs were observed and how rituals were and are now done.

Guhr (2010) contends that the Lala and Swaka people practiced a *Citemene* agricultural system. He argues that it is from this system that the CHC emanates. The CHC is 25

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done to thank the ancestral spirits for the previous good harvest and health and to appease the spirits so as to have more blessings in the coming year (Guhr and Kapwepwe, 2010). The Lala term '*Icibwela mushi*' means coming home. People celebrate this event as a thanks giving ceremony for the safe return from their temporary homes in the fields where peasant farmers stay during planting season (Tembo, 2003) that the theoretical studies have revealed that the ceremony originates from an agricultural system called *Citemene*. However, what is not clear is the explanation of the changes that have taken place regarding religious, cultural and moral aspects in CHC.

Contrary to the above assertion, Kaira (2005) argues that the *Watch Tower Movement* between 1925 and 1935 had very adverse effect on productivity of the Lala and Swaka people by brain washing and indoctrinating the Lala-Swaka people with unproductive ideas. However, it has not explained the area of productivity the Lala and Swaka people were brain washed and indoctrinated in. Therefore, it was interesting in this study to find out the areas of productivity Lala and Swaka people were brain washed and indoctrinated with unproductive ideas and how this affected their cultural identity. It is important therefore, that articles such as this one is framed for people to have necessary information about ceremonies such as CHC. This might help elders of tribes and chiefs to make certain modification to enhance the learning and practicing of CHC in order to safe guard aspects such as religious, cultural and moral parts against erosion. Kaira (2005) further argues that in 1935, Chief Kabamba of Serenje appealed for an end in the destructive activities among the Swaka and Lala as it had brought a lot of destabilisation in the villages. This was worse in Chief Kanonesha's village where people begun disobeying the 26

chief's orders to work in their gardens. This implied that Lala and Swaka people looked down on their way of life and this was detrimental to CHC. Consequently, this implies the ceremony risks dying a natural death together with its religious, cultural and moral aspects. Hence, the need to have well researched documents on these aspects so that people could learn about them and help in the preservation of this cultural heritage is more inevitable than ever.

Chukwudum (2009) contends that on becoming a Christian, the African easily sees Christ, the only mediator between God and man, as a 'proto-ancestor'. Chukwudum (2009) further indicates that the African Christian now no longer believes in many gods of his traditional religion, but in one God, as his ultimate Lord and Master. These studies have revealed that the African replaced their ancestors by Christ and no longer believed in many gods of his traditional religion but in one God. However, these studies have not indicated the kind of changes that happened in the celebration of CHC and how these changes affected the way of life of the Lala and Swaka people.

Consenting to the above assertion, Orowolo (2010) argues that the traditional African cultural practices became fully 'westernised'. Western culture was regarded frontline civilisation. The African ways of doing things became primitive, archaic and regrettably unacceptable in public domain. It would be interesting to find out how Lala and Swaka cultural practices became fully 'westernised'. Kasongo (2010) has further revealed that Christianity challenged traditional belief systems and promoted the diffusion of new ideas and modes of life. This could mean that Africans could no longer believe totally in African belief system and the celebration of CHC is no exception.²⁷

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Additionally, Kasongo (2010) has explained that Africa now suffers from level of mental enslavement; cultural imperialism; the need for decolonisation of the mind. In agreement to the above arguments, Orowolo (2010) has pointed out that one of the most profound consequences of colonisation has been how the political and economic rape of the colonies has also led to what sometimes seen to be an unbridgeable cultural gap between the nations that were the beneficiaries of colonisation and those that were the victims of the colonial assault. This could mean the Lala and Swaka people looked down on their culture and risks to dying a natural death, hence, the need to have well researched documents on CHC so that people could read about its importance and help in the preservation and transmission of this culture to the next generation.

In support of this, Mizinga (1995: 3), indicated that most of the local people in the post-colonial era did not take traditional ceremonies as serious as the people of the pre-colonial Zambia. This could mean that most of the Lala and Swaka people are not as passionate supporters and followers of Lala and Swaka heritage as they were before. Agreeing to the above assertion, Orowolo (2010) has indicated that years of colonialism were destructive in terms of cultural heritage and values. There is need, therefore, for the flogging of the negative impact of western civilisation and culture on Africa in all fora; so that policy makers can begin to see the need to reappraise their policies that contribute to the cultural dearth of Africa. Relating to this study, this could mean that the Lala and Swaka people's attention shifted from relying on their ancestors for their survival. It was important therefore, to learn where the Lala and Swaka people's attention shifted to for their survival.²⁸

Mizinga (1995) further reveals that capitalism as a social system accompanied by some imperialist oriented forces impinged on social institutions leading to almost their demise. With regard to this study, this could mean that shrines and other traditional huts such as *insaka* where education for boys took place could not be rebuilt in different places where Lala and Swaka people went to work because they joined the western way of life and worship.

The ceremony is a tool by which the Lala-Swaka people preserved and transmit their customs from generation to generation. Holding the ceremony annually helps in sustaining the Lala and Swaka culture. CHC is celebrated in Mkushi district and is hosted by Senior Chief Shaibila of Swaka people of Mkushi and attended by Senior Chief Muchinda (*Kankomba Welala*) of Serenje and all the chiefs of Serenje and Mkushi districts and people of all walks of life (Guhr 2010). The ceremony plays the role of bringing the past to the present and reinforcing the future (Kanene, 2011). Through its elements, CHC has religious, cultural and moral aspects which authors and researchers have not paid much attention. They have not unveiled the changes that have taken place regarding these aspects from the onset of the ceremony. Therefore, it was important from this background to undertake write the study that informed this article because it revealed the changes that had taken place regarding the religious, cultural and moral aspects in CHC. The article also suggests other possible intervention measures regarding the upholding of some key aspects of CHC for the next generation 29

4.0 Methodology

The article highlights on the qualitative approaches employed under social constructivism paradigm in which it evoked realist ethnography research design in order to effectively determine the changes took place over the years regarding the religious, cultural and moral changes in the CHC. This method of data collection included observations, interviews and document analysis using the semi-structured interview guide activity and observation checklist. The population in the study involved entirely people who belonged to the Lala and Swaka tribes in Zambia. The targeted fourteen participants which including one national chairperson and secretary of CHC, two representatives from *insaka yelala*, two initiators of initiates, two Traditional Affairs Officers, four ordinary members from two tribes and one senior chief from each district purposively selected. The selected were considered to be knowledgeable about CHC since they were key custodians of traditional heritage.

The researchers also observed the whole procession of CHC. Data was analysed according to emerging themes which generally were answering the research concerns indicated earlier. The study made use of the combination of methods to establish the accuracy of responses. The data from interviews were compared with data from relevant documentation studied from the traditional affairs officer and the researcher's observations. Then, a summary was drawn. The study also used various sources of data as multiple methods of data collection and sources of data validate research. This is so because methods complement each other with no overlapping weaknesses (Brewer and Patton, 2002). A combination of methods ensures that inconsistencies are removed and thus valid and reliable data emerges (Patton, 2002 and Yin, 2003). 30

In order to validate the findings, during field work, the researchers listened to the recordings at the end of each day so as to check for unclear material and then cross check with the respondents (Patton, 2002). While cross checking, the researchers also made use of the respondents for the verification of the findings. The researchers also ensured voluntary participation of respondents; no harm to participants either emotional or physical was inflicted on them. The integrity and privacy of participants including surety of anonymity and confidentiality of some information they gave was granted.

5.0 Findings and Discussion

The findings and discussion are anchored on the changes that have taken place over years regarding religious, cultural and moral aspects in CHC. It was established that the practice of CHC has been affected negatively by the advent of colonialism, Christianity, capitalism and modernity. There was a general consensus that the Lala and Swaka people were mainly subsistence agriculturalists engaged in crop production referred to as *chitemene* agriculture system. This was supported by about seven out of the eight participants. They reported that they traditionally grew finger millet in the fields that were located away from their villages. This kind of food production was condemned by the Colonialists; thus the local people were introduced to new farming systems. Since then, people use largely contemporary methods for their food production. The interviewees revealed that capitalism as a social system accompanied by some imperialist oriented forces impinged on CHC leading it to near demise. The findings further showed that with the coming of Christianity, people's beliefs in the powers of the gods of their ancestors were affected negatively.³¹

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Most of the Lala and Swaka people do not depend entirely on ancestral spirits and gods. This led CHC to lose its significance to a good number of people especially the young and those that spent most their lives in towns or other parts of the country other than the Lala and Swaka land. Documents revealed that the *Watch Tower* movement between 1925 and 1935 had a very adverse effect on productivity of the Lala and Swaka people by brainwashing and indoctrinating the people with unproductive ideas of abandoning tradition and begin to embrace modern religion anchored on Jehovah God (Kaira, 2011). Therefore, people looked and still look down up on their traditional ways of worship. The interviewees argued that the traditional ways of worship were referred to as evil, barbaric and demonic. In making a critical point clear, one of the custodians of the traditional heritage explained that:

A special hut which Chiefs in the olden days used to have behind their houses called *impata* in the local language where chiefs prayed to the ancestral spirits, evoked spirits and the gods, performed certain rituals and most of the village shrines became and are unfunctional even today (interview with custodian of traditional heritage, September 2014)

The interviewees (6 out of the 10) further revealed that, the coming of capitalist and social formation affected CHC intensely as Lala-Swaka people who acquired Western education loaded with Western values, abandoned the Lala and Swaka ideologies such as ancestral worship. The Lala-Swaka people who began to work in different parts of the country because of the advent of the capitalist system which brought a new form of economic and education system could not rebuild shrines in different places where 32

they went to work from but instae joined the western ways of worship. The interviewees further revealed that they could not build a hut for boys' education called *insaka* where boys could be taught their cultural heritage including special craft skills such as making baskets, reed mats, traditional roofs, hoes and spears among others. This shows that this part of a culture (religious, cultural and moral aspects) died naturally among those who went away from Lala and Swaka land.

The researchers observed that few of the cultural aspects that were taught to boys during *insaka* are still taught during CHC since *Insaka* is no longer there nowadays. This entails that the time for learning is not adequate because this is done only during the ceremony and only carters for those that attend the ceremony. Though most of interviewees mentioned the changes that had taken place over years, some respondents could not pinpoint any. In making a clarification on their lack of clarity, one of them opined that:

We don't know those things, us we just come to watch dances and also to sell our merchandise since during the ceremony; there is a bigger population so we make good business (Interview with general participant, September, 2014).

This shows that most of the CHC attendants found the celebration of CHC as an opportunity for other social activities. It is important therefore that people are sensitised about the importance of traditional ceremonies such as CHC to safeguard them against erosion and extinction.

Colonialism, Christianity, capitalism and modernity have greatly impacted on religious, cultural and moral aspects of CHC. This article established that the practice of CHC was negatively affected by the advent of 33

colonialism, Christianity, capitalism and modernity. The interviewees argued that a good harvest was vital to the Lala and Swaka people's existence.

This article revealed that the Lala and Swaka people were mainly agriculturalists who were engaged in crop production for their subsistence referred to as *chitemene* agriculture system. This kind of food production was condemned by the colonialists, thus the Lala and Swaka people were introduced to new farming systems. The study further revealed that the Lala and Swaka people managed to produce enough food for their families through the offerings and sacrifices they made to their ancestral spirits. The chief or high priest played a very active role because he or she was the earthly link between the living and the long line of spiritual ancestors in the other world. This article argues that with the coming of Christianity, people's beliefs in the powers of the ancestral spirits and gods negatively affected.

This article observes that a special hut in which Chiefs in the olden days used to have behind their houses called *impata* in the local language where chiefs or 'priests' prayed to the ancestral spirits and evoked spirits and the gods, and most of the village shrines became and are unfunctional up to date. This contradicts Chukwudum (2009) who indicated that one must also consider 'ancestor worship' as an important related value in African culture. Consenting to this, Kasongo (2010) showed that Africa now suffered from a level of mental enslavement; cultural imperialism; the need for decolonisation of the mind. In agreement to the above arguments, Orowolo (2010) has pointed out that one of the most profound consequences of colonisation has been how the political and economic rape of the colonies has also led to what sometime's seen to be an unbridgeable cultural gap between the nations

that were the beneficiaries of colonisation and those that were the victims of the colonial assault. This could mean the CHC is no longer given and celebrated with the dignity that it deserves. There is need therefore, for stakeholders to provide other ways of information dissemination about CHC so that a good number of Lala and Swaka people could have a chance of learning about this ceremony as one way of decolonising their minds and once again be serious with CHC after knowing its significance.

What is clear from the evidence provided is that Christianity challenged the Lala and Swaka traditional beliefs. In line with this, Kasongo (2010) has revealed that Christianity challenged traditional belief systems and promoted the diffusion of new ideas and modes of life. This entails that the religious, cultural and moral aspects of CHC were diluted and risked extinction. It appears that the coming of capitalist and social formation with its accompanying influences affected religious, cultural and moral aspects of CHC intensely as Lala and Swaka people who acquired Western education loaded with Western values, abandoned the Lala and Swaka ideologies inclination such as ancestral worship. These findings are similar to Chukwudum (2009), which argued that on becoming a Christian, the African easily saw Christ, the only mediator between God and man, as a 'proto-ancestor'. Chukwudum (2009) further indicated that the African Christian now no longer believed in many gods of his or her traditional religion, but in one God, as his or her ultimate Lord and Master. This could mean the Lala and Swaka people abandoned their way of life (the religious, cultural and moral aspects) where great value was attached to ancestral worship as their mediator between the living and God.³⁵

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The article further argues that modernity challenged the Lala and Swaka traditional beliefs. Modern medicine largely took precedence over traditional methods in matters of health. In addition, colonialism was destructive in terms of cultural heritage and values. There is need, therefore, for the flogging of the negative impact of western civilisation and culture on Africa in all fora; so that policy makers can begin to see the need to reappraise their policies that contribute to the cultural dearth of Africa. This could mean that the Lala and Swaka people's attention shifted from relying on their ancestors for their survival. Thus, rendering the religious, cultural and moral aspects of CHC irrelevant to the people. Therefore, there is need for stakeholders to support the principles of cultural revival. In support of this, Mizinga (1995), indicated that most of the local people in the post-colonial era did not take traditional ceremonies as serious as the people of the pre-colonial Zambia. This could mean that most of the Lala and Swaka people are not as passionate supporters and followers of Lala and Swaka heritage as they were before. This could suggest that there is need to sustain a traditional ceremony such as CHC and sensitise the public about its significance through writing well researched documents as a way of adding value to its existence and reduce the decay of Lala and Swaka culture and citizens.

The article finally contends that the Lala and Swaka people are now working in different parts of the country because of the advent of capitalist system which brought a new form of economic and education system. Thus, abandoned their cultural heritage, and some of them were even ashamed to speak Lala and Swaka in public in different parts of the country where they went to work as they thought they would appear not to be educated. The Lala and Swaka people looked down on their culture in 36

the name of education and modernity. In line with that Mizinga (1995) has revealed that capitalism as a social system accompanied by some imperialist oriented forces impinged on social institutions leading to almost their demise. This entails that shrines and other traditional huts such as *insaka* where education for boys took place could not be rebuilt in different places where Lala and Swaka people went to work because they joined the western way of life and worship. This entails that CHC has undergone a lot of changes and therefore, there is need for stake holders to make certain modification to enhance the learning and practicing of CHC.

6.0 Conclusion

Though CHC is celebrated by the Lala-Swaka people for many years, the article has established that the practice of CHC has been affected negatively by the advent of colonialism, Christianity and capitalism and modernity. The article has indicated that with the coming of Christianity, people's belief in the powers of the ancestral spirits and gods is affected negatively. The findings in the study revealed that the village shrines have diminished in villages and could not be rebuilt wherever educated Lala-Swaka people went and have gone for the modern employment. The article further argues that the Lala-Swaka people who acquired Western education abandoned the Lala-Swaka ideologies of inclination to ancestral worship as a protective way of life. The article has also established that the education hut for boys *insaka* where boys were taught cultural matters could not be built in towns and other areas where Lala-Swaka people have gone for employment.³⁷

7.0 Recommendations

The article recommends that as a way of protecting religious, cultural and moral aspects from colonialism, Christianity, capitalism and modernity, enculturation should be promoted because society is never static. Therefore, elders of the Lala and Swaka people should embrace all positive elements that have arisen from all these clashes. There is need also for an increase in education concerning CHC through related research and publications especially by Ministry of Traditional Affairs and scholars for people to read and learn more about this ceremony in order to uphold it and transmit to the coming generations.

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