

**GENDER AND DEATH: CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ATTITUDES INFLUENCING
BURYING OF STILL-BORN BABIES AMONG THE KAONDE OF ZAMBIA**

by

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**A Dissertation Submitted to the University of Zambia in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement of the Degree of Master of Arts in Gender Studies**

**The University of Zambia
(2010)**

DECLARATION

I, Willie Ngambela, declare that this dissertation:

- (a) Represents my own work:
- (b) Has not previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other University; and
- (c) Does not incorporate any published work or material from another dissertation.



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Signed.....
W Ng

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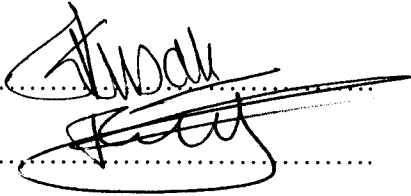
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APPROVAL

This dissertation of Willie Ngambela is approved as fulfilling the partial requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Gender Studies by the University of Zambia.

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ABSTRACT

This study on Gender and Death: Cultural and Social attitudes influencing burying of still-born babies among the Kaonde of Zambia, aims to explain why there is gender division in the burying of still-born babies among the Kaonde, and how this gender division is expressed. It also aims to assess the perception of what the Kaonde believe is the cause of still-birth. Further, it seeks to analyse the traditional rituals, beliefs and symbols surrounding the burying of still-born babies among the Kaonde.

The study used mainly qualitative and a bit of quantitative methods to collect data by using interviews. The data was analysed manually.

The study revealed that among the Kaonde, there is a gender division when burying still-born babies. Only elderly women known as *ba biimbela* bury still-born babies. Other findings also revealed that parents of still-born babies are not allowed to mourn. The study has also revealed that there are contradictory beliefs about the cause of still-birth. The majority of the respondents believe that still-birth is caused by witchcraft and adultery. On the contrary others believe that witchcraft has nothing to do with still-birth and attribute still-birth to physical work, overweight, stress and diseases as well as ignorance and early pregnancies among young girls.

The study also revealed that *kafunga* is a special rite of passage performed by the Kaonde when burying still-born babies. In the *kafunga* rite, traditional rituals relating to fertility, sexuality and death are performed. Once these rituals are performed, the mother of the still-born baby is re-integrated into society. The study has also revealed that the way the Kaonde bury still-born babies is not unique, it is also similarly practiced among other ethnic groups. The researcher of this study recommends that a similar research be carried out by a female researcher so that other detailed information that was not availed to him because he is male could possibly be availed to the female researcher. This information is likely to contribute more knowledge to gender studies.

DEDICATION

My research is dedicated to all my relatives both dead and alive.

The dead are:

My late mother Netty Grace Pupe Ngambela

My late father Mr William Ngambela

My late daughter Kusanta Ngambela

My late brothers and sisters: Washingtone Ngalande, Clifford Ngalande, Enock Ngambela,

Maria Ngambela and Georgina Ngambela

My first cousins: Fred 'Mwisho' Ngambela, Dr.Christopher Kasonso, Davison Pupe, Judy Pupe,

Rabecca Shikishi, Nora Mwelwa Shikishi, Gloria Mulenga and Beatrice Kajoba Kilengwe

My mother-in-law Mrs Esther Kabwami Bulaya

My aunties Ms Dazzy Pupe and Mrs Nesa Pupe Mobela

Those alive are:

My wife Lucy Mwanaute Ngambela and my daughter Mapesho Ngambela,

My brother John Ngambela

My sister Martha Kitengwe Ngambela

All my nephews and nieces

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I thank my 'brother' Dominic Kangongo for encouraging me to take up this Masters Degree Programme, even when financial resources seemed not to be forthcoming to me. His moral support really inspired me to face my challenges.

I also thank all organizations that helped me with the materials I have used to write this research. Some organizations allowed me to use their facilities even when such facilities were strictly for their own members.

And to my family, especially my wife for being so understanding when it came to spending part of the financial resources to pay towards my tuition fees. My family suffered in one way or another. To my family, I say they should continue with the same spirit as I may continue with other studies and more of their resources will be used. This is a challenge that they need not to refuse.

My special acknowledgement also goes to all the participants in this study who willingly shared their experience. Without them I would not have written this thesis. To you all I say thank you very much for sparing me your precious time to enable me interview you.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background

In many communities, people are confronted with death. The loss of a beloved one is followed by mourning and grieving. Most of the ethnic¹ groups in Zambia have similar ways of mourning and grieving. They follow what their ancestors had prescribed to them (This is more evidenced in villages than in urban areas). This ancestral prescription is what leads to issues of death being treated differently. For example, mourning periods in Zambia differ according to the age of the deceased. The mourning period would be longer if an elderly person has passed away than when a child has died.

During the period of mourning an elderly person, members of the community gather at the funeral house and mourn with the bereaved family. This is because members of the community regard every funeral as 'theirs'. This means that death should be regarded as affecting everyone in that community². Therefore, each member in the community is obliged to mourn with the bereaved family. At the funeral house, men and women engage in traditionally prescribed gender roles when working and mourning. That is, women fetch water and prepare food for the mourners while men take up the responsibility of ensuring that the deceased is put to rest. Women cry aloud but men only sob. Men organise themselves and assign among themselves, who is to make announcements and who will make a coffin. This is more pronounced in villages. In urban areas, the fore-

¹ Zambia is composed of seventy-two ethnic groups.

² See Skjonsberg (1989) who wrote about the Chewa of Eastern province of Zambia. She said, 'When death arrives in a village, every village resident is called upon to contribute to the funeral in one way or another and all ordinary work is laid aside. Those who do not join the preparations may be summoned before the headman.'p.175.

mentioned gender roles may be interchangeable. Women may get involved in arranging coffins at funeral parlors and pay for services of preparing a grave site at local councils.

However, the above description of organising a funeral is applicable to people who are born and die later and is different from the way still-born babies are buried. Many ethnic groups do not consider still-born babies as real human beings. Among these ethnic groups are the Kaonde from North-Western province. The Kaonde believe that still-born babies should neither be mourned nor buried in a similar manner as those who die after birth, (Ngambela³ 2006: 82-83).

This study examines how cultural and social attitudes influence the Kaonde when they bury still-born babies. The group of people this study refers to, the Kaonde, came to Zambia in the 16th century from what is today known as the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Kaonde left Congo because of land and leadership wrangles. When they reached Zambia, they again split into various groups. Some headed and settled in the North-Western province of Zambia while others settled in the Central province. The Kaonde belong to one of the Bantu matrilineal groups. At present they are among the major ethnic groups living in Zambia.

In the Kaonde social structure, the husband is the head of the household and makes almost all decisions in the home. The man controls property and wealth in marriage while

³ I wrote an article that is similar to this study. However, most of the topics (that are similar to this study) in my article are not as detailed as those found in this study. In addition, some of the topics covered by this study are not found in my article (see also chapter four, for the difference between my article and this study).

the woman is expected to bear many children. In addition, a woman is expected to take care of the children because men are not considered as fathers; their children are not theirs, but belong to the mother.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Among the Kaonde, men are neither allowed to bury still-born babies nor to attend the burial of still-born babies. Only elderly women are allowed to attend the burial and also to bury still-born babies. The reason for allowing only elderly women to bury still-born babies among the Kaonde is unclear to most of the people. In order to offer a clear explanation to this problem, an investigation has to be done. The investigation will help to reveal how cultural and social attitudes influence the Kaonde when assigning gender biased roles in matters to do with burying still-born babies.

1.3 Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of this study is to explain the cultural and social attitudes influencing the burying of still-born babies among the Kaonde.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- (i) To assess the perceived causes of still-birth among the Kaonde.
- (ii) To explain why there is a gender division in the burying of still-born babies among the Kaonde, and how this gender division is expressed.

- (iii) To analyse the traditional rituals, beliefs and symbols surrounding the burying of still-born babies.

1.4 Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- i. What are the cultural and social attitudes influencing the burying of still-born babies among the Kaonde?
- ii. What are the perceived causes of still-birth among the Kaonde?
- iii. Why is there a gender division in the burying of still-born babies among the Kaonde, and how is this gender division expressed?
- iv. What rituals, beliefs and symbols are used among the Kaonde when burying still-born babies? And what are the meanings of these rituals and symbols?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Few studies have been conducted on gender and death, especially on the gender division and gender relations that exist during the process of burying still-born babies. Fletcher (2002) has argued that the case of still-birth is an unexplored arena in social sciences and yet the experience by women is intense and profound. The findings of the study will add more knowledge to social sciences, particularly gender studies.

1.6 Operational Definitions

Culture is the whole set of things, ideas and beliefs that are passed on from generation to generation and is changed over time.

Elderly/older women refer to women who have reached a menopause stage and have experience in performing rituals and rites of passage.

Still-born baby is any child who dies before the age of two years and whose parents did not perform a ‘taking in’ ritual.

Taking in⁴ is a ritual sexual act performed by the mother and father of the child so that the child will be accepted as a human being in the community.

Tradition is a ceremony, custom or an activity that is handed down from generation to generation by demonstration or word of mouth ([www.english-encarta](http://www.english-encarta.com)).

1.7 Limitation of the Study

This study only interviewed thirty-five people. This is a small sample to generalise from.

1.8 Structure of the Study

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one gives the background to the problem of the research. Chapter two discusses the literature on burying still-born babies. Chapter three covers the methodology used in the study while Chapter four deals with research findings. Chapter five is the conclusion.

⁴ Rasing (2007: 4) claims that among the Bemba the taking-in ritual is performed while the baby lying in between its parents, who have sexual intercourse, after which the child is rubbed with its father’s sperm. Although Rasing has written about the Bemba situation, the taking-in ritual is one custom that is wide-spread among different ethnic groups, including the Kaonde.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter examines what various scholars have written about the subject of gender and death. The focus is on studies done on still-born babies.

It is important to note that issues of gender and death, especially on still-births have not been well explored. For example, in Zambia, research on still-births appears to be scanty (c.f. Rasing, 2007). A few studies that have been done by anthropologists and other scholars include death rituals, mourning rituals, symbols used in mourning ceremonies and their explanations (c.f. Turner, 1967 and 1969). Other studies that have been documented are those related to emotions and their psychological effects on the bereaved ones.

A study on death was conducted by Cacciatore in 2005 in the United States of America. She conducted a qualitative research whose main focus was on the emotional, spiritual and psychological experiences of mothers who give birth to still-born babies. Her study analyses the negative effects that these mothers go through after giving birth to still-born babies, especially if no psychological intervention strategies are put in place during the period they lose their babies. Her study recommended that these women need psychological support from the community at the time when they lose their babies. Cacciatore suggests that women should not be isolated from their close relatives or counsellors. Close relatives and friends should be encouraged to give the women support.

Another study related to still-born babies was done in 2007 by Rasing. In her study entitled 'Mourning in silence: gender aspects of mourning in Zambia', Rasing focuses on women who have lost their husbands and women and men who have lost a child, including still-born babies. Rasing explained generally on how still-born babies are buried and how rituals are performed during the burial ceremony. Rasing also revealed that women are not allowed to mourn still-born babies. However, Rasing claims that nowadays, customs around still-birth have changed. She claims that males and females attend burials for still-born babies in urban areas.

Forni (2007) also conducted a study in 2000 on funerary rituals and burials in Babessi village in Northwest Cameroon. Among Forni's research findings was that women in Babessi charge their clients fees when they perform rituals for them.

2.1 Gender Issues

Sex, Gender and Gender roles

There is a distinction between sex and gender. According to Oakley (1972), sex is a biological categorisation between men and women. Sex is said to be 'permanent'⁵ in any culture. However, sex is different from gender. Erikson (1980), defines gender⁶ as a social construct of what it means to be a man or woman. Erikson claims that gender involves learning a set of differentiated behaviours considered by society to be

⁵ Although most literature support that, it is important also to note that currently the issue of one's sex being permanent is debatable. This is because of the latest happenings in science. There is transgender, where one is able to change his or her own sex from being a man to a woman or vice versa.

⁶ The concept of gender is debatable and quite complex because of the many theories about it. For more details about the theories and concepts about gender see Oakley 1972, Chodorow, N (1989), Buss (1995), Anselmi and Law (1998), Walzer (2001), Rasing (2001 and 2007) and Alsop et al (2002).

appropriate for a man or woman. There are different roles that men and women are expected to perform in their communities. Erickson refers to them as gender roles. Gender roles refer to the set of attitudes and behaviours socially accepted by members of a particular culture to be appropriate for males and females, (Rosenblatt *et. al.*, 1976). Therefore, from the expected behaviours, a man's behaviour needs to be masculine while for a woman feminine.

Alsop *et. al.*, (2002), also claim that theories about gender indicate ideas about femininity and masculinity. Alsop *et. al.*, explain that gender focuses on the expected social roles and responsibilities that women need to play in relation to those of men. These expected social roles shape the daily lives of men and women in their families and in the wider communities they live. This point is evident in the gender differences in matters associated with mourning rituals. Rasing (2007), claims that there is a division of male and female space at funerals. Rasing says:

‘Women sit inside the house, on the floor, indicating their place inside or related to the house and associated with the soil, while men sit outside on chairs, indicating their place outside the house and associated with the sky.’ (p.5.)

Most communities believe that gender roles are important if social order has to be maintained. They believe that when there is a clear pattern of ‘women’s work’ and ‘men’s work’, both in the household and in the wider community, then each person will behave accordingly. Each one will know what his or her role is. There would be social order in communities if each person knows and acts according to his or her role.

2.2 Gender Issues in Death

Gender differences surrounding death can be seen in certain ethnic groups in Zambia (Rasing, 2007). In certain ethnic groups, a woman is not supposed to attend the burial of her deceased husband. Ngambela (2006), also includes the mother to a still-born baby among those who are forbidden to attend the burial of her 'child'. This is because she is associated with death. Any person perceived to be linked to death is said to be polluted with death spirits. If such a person is not cleansed from death spirits, he or she may also pollute the community. Rituals need to be performed to cleanse such a one from death spirits so as to prevent him or her from polluting the community.

Douglas (1966) offers an explanation for beliefs related to ritual pollution. Douglas (1966) claims that pollution is related to disorder. Death is an example of one factor that is related to community disorderliness. To re-establish order, rituals have to be performed. In the case of death, people that are believed to be exposed to death are isolated from the community. They are put in seclusion so that rituals are performed. Rituals are performed in order to remove the death spirits. Douglas (1966) reveals that when people are exposed to pollution, they are prohibited from performing certain functions in life. The prohibitions include touching fire, using or even seeing certain objects, eating certain food or performing sex with a menstruating woman. It is believed that failure to observe the prohibitions would expose the individual involved or the whole community to danger.

2.3 Gender Identity

According to Erikson (1980), gender identity comes about when one sex exclusively performs an activity without the involvement of another sex. For example, women alone will perform an activity, such as a rite, without the involvement of men. Women alone will perform different roles including the masculine roles that are perceived to be for men in most communities. For example, women may take up the role of a leader when conducting a rite. Erikson (1980), also states that when women construct their identity, they do not follow the patriarchal⁷ prescribed structures that forbid women from taking up male roles. Women follow their own informal structures that are considered to be private. Barriteau (www.uwipress.com), reveals that in private or informal structures such as female rites, most men tend to leave⁸ the decision-making to their women. Alsop *et al.*, (2002), claim that construction of the public sphere for men and private sphere for women by most communities is for the purpose of maintaining ‘nature order’⁹.

Women, too, use the informal structures as platforms to ‘carve’ their fellow woman to become a ‘real woman’. For example, in the case of a female initiation rite, an uninitiated person is not considered to be a woman despite her chronological age. The explanation behind this is that an uninitiated woman has not been taught about the expected norms of how to become a woman in society. One has to be taught about these lessons in order to

⁷ Erikson refers to the patriarchal structures as formal structures and the non patriarchal structures as informal.

⁸ Nevertheless, this is contrary to what Mahdi et al (1987) have revealed. Mahdi et al reveal that male authority is not completely surrendered. For example, the roles of males as household heads are still recognised even in the private spheres according to Mahdi et al (1987).

⁹ According to the natural order theory, women and men should take up different positions within society in order for the two groups to remain in harmony. Men need to take masculinity like positions and women feminine positions. For details about theories of natural order (See Greenstein (1993),

be accepted in society. These lessons include issues of fertility, sexuality, performance of rituals and their secrets, marriage and personal hygiene, (Erikson, 1980).

During initiations, women do not allow a man to attend the initiation rites. The lessons conducted in the rites are exclusively for women. This too, applies to most male rites.

Women are not allowed to attend. The lessons in the female rites are taught only by women who have experience in the traditions of that particular group, (Mbiti, 1975; Rasing, 2001). These women have also passed through the rites themselves and have the support of most of the members living in their communities as being good teachers of initiation rites.

Although women construct their identity as a single group called 'women', Alsop *et. al.*, (2002), have observed differences within the 'women' group. There are differences in terms of hierarchies within the women groups. For example, in the case of initiation rites, women who perform rituals have more power and authority than other women in the same group. The ritual performers are also considered to be more superior than the initiate. This is because ritual performers have the power to make the initiate a 'woman'. That is the why the initiate is made to look inferior by the ritual performers when rituals are being performed. This is because the initiate is said to be ignorant about rituals. The ritual performers also attain a higher status in communities than non-ritual performers. This is because in certain cases, the ritual performers are paid when they perform rituals in a rite, (c.f. Forni, 2007). In cases where clients are charged by ritual performers, the economic status of ritual performers is likely to be higher than that of other women who

do not perform rituals. In addition, ritual performers are also considered to have a higher rank than other women. This order is based on the fact that they have more knowledge and experience as compared to the other women, especially the initiates.

Women also respect the hierarchy created within themselves as a group when performing the rituals. In the case of burying still-born babies, only elderly women are allowed to bury and perform rituals. Rasing (2007), reveals that only women of post-child bearing age can bury still-born babies. According to Rasing (2007), these women neither risk the danger of giving birth to still-born babies nor are they exposed to the danger of infertility. These women have passed through this stage already. Mbiti (1975: 158) also claims that at village or family level, not everyone is responsible for performing rituals. Only ritual leaders perform rituals. In the case of female rites, only elderly women perform ritual (Mbiti 1975). The ritual leaders acquire their position by virtue of their age and experience. In a family, the oldest member could perform ritual functions. The ritual leaders are believed to be a link between the ancestors and the people in the community (Mbiti, 1975). Therefore, they have a special responsibility of keeping the traditions by performing rituals according to traditional expectations. Performing rituals accordingly, helps in keeping the traditions so that there is no conflict between the living and the ancestors, especially around the community where the ritual leaders live, (Mbiti, 1975: 158). Through sanctions and prohibitions, the ritual leaders maintain harmony between the communities and the spiritual world (Mbiti 1975).

2.4 Gender Relations

The gender relations between men and women are normally based on power relations. There is a difference in terms of power balancing concerning the roles that males and females play. In many societies, roles played by males are perceived to be of a higher value than those played by women, especially in cultures where patriarchy is accepted as the only proper family structure, (www.unfpa.org). Power aspects are considered to be of male privileges, (Eagly and Woods, 1999). Men are expected to hold superior positions than women. Men should always lead while women should be in subordinate positions. Men who lack power may compensate by exerting power through violence towards women, (Eagly and Woods, 1999). Eagly and Woods (1999), reveals that the men's violent behaviour towards women who are perceived to have more power than the men is based on 'gender envy'. Gender envy comes up when men identify an arrangement where women take up roles that are believed to be for men. Men usually resent such arrangements because they think they defy traditional gender order. Men usually protest and give negative views to express their dissatisfaction about such arrangements. Ngambela (2006), claims that among the Kaonde, men protest that women should not be involved in burying still-born babies because they are witches. Among the Kaonde, men are not allowed to take up any role when burying still-born babies. Women take up the role of leadership and conduct burial without the help of the men. This arrangement is considered to be wrong because leadership is perceived to be a preserve for men. Therefore, men accuse women of stealing body parts of still-born babies to make charms. In the case of kitchen parties where men do not have a role to play, there is also tension between men and women, (See: Rasing, 2001: 237).

Although power is considered to be a preserve of the men, especially in the public domain, women too have gained access to power through other alternative institutional structures. In institutions such as female rites, women have been able to articulate their interests, concerns and have placed women's issues on the main agenda, (Mackinnon, www.heinonline.org, Walker 1988). Women have successfully demonstrated considerable leadership to their fellow women when performing these rites. The rites have been successfully performed without the assistance of the other sex.

2.5 Cultural Influence on Burying Still-born Babies

In many African societies, people define, observe or value still-born babies in a similar way. For example, Lovell (1983: 30), claims that losing a baby through miscarriage or still-birth is often not viewed as 'proper' bereavement in most societies. This is because people in these societies claim that in a still-birth, there is no person to mourn for. Rasing (2001), reveals that among the Bemba, children who have not been 'taken in' by their parents are not regarded as 'real' humans. When such a child dies, no form of mourning is allowed. It is only after the parents have performed a ritual, *ukukusho umwana* (to make the child strong) or *ukuteko mwana* (taken in) that such a child will be regarded as real. Rasing (2007), says:

'Mourning a still-born baby is considered inappropriate and is not allowed, not even by the parents. Mourning a still-born baby would be a bad omen, which may result in the birth of more still-born babies or infertility of the mother. The still-born baby is not considered a child or human being, if the ritual of *ukuteko mwana* had not yet been performed.'(p.4)

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background

In many communities, people are confronted with death. The loss of a beloved one is followed by mourning and grieving. Most of the ethnic¹ groups in Zambia have similar ways of mourning and grieving. They follow what their ancestors had prescribed to them (This is more evidenced in villages than in urban areas). This ancestral prescription is what leads to issues of death being treated differently. For example, mourning periods in Zambia differ according to the age of the deceased. The mourning period would be longer if an elderly person has passed away than when a child has died.

During the period of mourning an elderly person, members of the community gather at the funeral house and mourn with the bereaved family. This is because members of the community regard every funeral as 'theirs'. This means that death should be regarded as affecting everyone in that community². Therefore, each member in the community is obliged to mourn with the bereaved family. At the funeral house, men and women engage in traditionally prescribed gender roles when working and mourning. That is, women fetch water and prepare food for the mourners while men take up the responsibility of ensuring that the deceased is put to rest. Women cry aloud but men only sob. Men organise themselves and assign among themselves, who is to make announcements and who will make a coffin. This is more pronounced in villages. In urban areas, the fore-

¹ Zambia is composed of seventy-two ethnic groups.

² See Skjonsberg (1989) who wrote about the Chewa of Eastern province of Zambia. She said, 'When death arrives in a village, every village resident is called upon to contribute to the funeral in one way or another and all ordinary work is laid aside. Those who do not join the preparations may be summoned before the headman.'p.175.

mentioned gender roles may be interchangeable. Women may get involved in arranging coffins at funeral parlors and pay for services of preparing a grave site at local councils.

However, the above description of organising a funeral is applicable to people who are born and die later and is different from the way still-born babies are buried. Many ethnic groups do not consider still-born babies as real human beings. Among these ethnic groups are the Kaonde from North-Western province. The Kaonde believe that still-born babies should neither be mourned nor buried in a similar manner as those who die after birth, (Ngambela³ 2006: 82-83).

This study examines how cultural and social attitudes influence the Kaonde when they bury still-born babies. The group of people this study refers to, the Kaonde, came to Zambia in the 16th century from what is today known as the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Kaonde left Congo because of land and leadership wrangles. When they reached Zambia, they again split into various groups. Some headed and settled in the North-Western province of Zambia while others settled in the Central province. The Kaonde belong to one of the Bantu matrilineal groups. At present they are among the major ethnic groups living in Zambia.

In the Kaonde social structure, the husband is the head of the household and makes almost all decisions in the home. The man controls property and wealth in marriage while

³ I wrote an article that is similar to this study. However, most of the topics (that are similar to this study) in my article are not as detailed as those found in this study. In addition, some of the topics covered by this study are not found in my article (see also chapter four, for the difference between my article and this study).

the woman is expected to bear many children. In addition, a woman is expected to take care of the children because men are not considered as fathers; their children are not theirs, but belong to the mother.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Among the Kaonde, men are neither allowed to bury still-born babies nor to attend the burial of still-born babies. Only elderly women are allowed to attend the burial and also to bury still-born babies. The reason for allowing only elderly women to bury still-born babies among the Kaonde is unclear to most of the people. In order to offer a clear explanation to this problem, an investigation has to be done. The investigation will help to reveal how cultural and social attitudes influence the Kaonde when assigning gender biased roles in matters to do with burying still-born babies.

1.3 Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of this study is to explain the cultural and social attitudes influencing the burying of still-born babies among the Kaonde.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- (i) To assess the perceived causes of still-birth among the Kaonde.
- (ii) To explain why there is a gender division in the burying of still-born babies among the Kaonde, and how this gender division is expressed.

- (iii) To analyse the traditional rituals, beliefs and symbols surrounding the burying of still-born babies.

1.4 Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- i. What are the cultural and social attitudes influencing the burying of still-born babies among the Kaonde?
- ii. What are the perceived causes of still-birth among the Kaonde?
- iii. Why is there a gender division in the burying of still-born babies among the Kaonde, and how is this gender division expressed?
- iv. What rituals, beliefs and symbols are used among the Kaonde when burying still-born babies? And what are the meanings of these rituals and symbols?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Few studies have been conducted on gender and death, especially on the gender division and gender relations that exist during the process of burying still-born babies. Fletcher (2002) has argued that the case of still-birth is an unexplored arena in social sciences and yet the experience by women is intense and profound. The findings of the study will add more knowledge to social sciences, particularly gender studies.

1.6 Operational Definitions

Culture is the whole set of things, ideas and beliefs that are passed on from generation to generation and is changed over time.

Elderly/older women refer to women who have reached a menopause stage and have experience in performing rituals and rites of passage.

Still-born baby is any child who dies before the age of two years and whose parents did not perform a ‘taking in’ ritual.

Taking in⁴ is a ritual sexual act performed by the mother and father of the child so that the child will be accepted as a human being in the community.

Tradition is a ceremony, custom or an activity that is handed down from generation to generation by demonstration or word of mouth (www.english-encarta.com).

1.7 Limitation of the Study

This study only interviewed thirty-five people. This is a small sample to generalise from.

1.8 Structure of the Study

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one gives the background to the problem of the research. Chapter two discusses the literature on burying still-born babies. Chapter three covers the methodology used in the study while Chapter four deals with research findings. Chapter five is the conclusion.

⁴ Rasing (2007: 4) claims that among the Bemba the taking-in ritual is performed while the baby lying in between its parents, who have sexual intercourse, after which the child is rubbed with its father’s sperm. Although Rasing has written about the Bemba situation, the taking-in ritual is one custom that is wide-spread among different ethnic groups, including the Kaonde.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter examines what various scholars have written about the subject of gender and death. The focus is on studies done on still-born babies.

It is important to note that issues of gender and death, especially on still-births have not been well explored. For example, in Zambia, research on still-births appears to be scanty (c.f. Rasing, 2007). A few studies that have been done by anthropologists and other scholars include death rituals, mourning rituals, symbols used in mourning ceremonies and their explanations (c.f. Turner, 1967 and 1969). Other studies that have been documented are those related to emotions and their psychological effects on the bereaved ones.

A study on death was conducted by Cacciatore in 2005 in the United States of America. She conducted a qualitative research whose main focus was on the emotional, spiritual and psychological experiences of mothers who give birth to still-born babies. Her study analyses the negative effects that these mothers go through after giving birth to still-born babies, especially if no psychological intervention strategies are put in place during the period they lose their babies. Her study recommended that these women need psychological support from the community at the time when they lose their babies. Cacciatore suggests that women should not be isolated from their close relatives or counsellors. Close relatives and friends should be encouraged to give the women support.

Another study related to still-born babies was done in 2007 by Rasing. In her study entitled 'Mourning in silence: gender aspects of mourning in Zambia', Rasing focuses on women who have lost their husbands and women and men who have lost a child, including still-born babies. Rasing explained generally on how still-born babies are buried and how rituals are performed during the burial ceremony. Rasing also revealed that women are not allowed to mourn still-born babies. However, Rasing claims that nowadays, customs around still-birth have changed. She claims that males and females attend burials for still-born babies in urban areas.

Forni (2007) also conducted a study in 2000 on funerary rituals and burials in Babessi village in Northwest Cameroon. Among Forni's research findings was that women in Babessi charge their clients fees when they perform rituals for them.

2.1 Gender Issues

Sex, Gender and Gender roles

There is a distinction between sex and gender. According to Oakley (1972), sex is a biological categorisation between men and women. Sex is said to be 'permanent'⁵ in any culture. However, sex is different from gender. Erikson (1980), defines gender⁶ as a social construct of what it means to be a man or woman. Erikson claims that gender involves learning a set of differentiated behaviours considered by society to be

⁵ Although most literature support that, it is important also to note that currently the issue of one's sex being permanent is debatable. This is because of the latest happenings in science. There is transgender, where one is able to change his or her own sex from being a man to a woman or vice versa.

⁶ The concept of gender is debatable and quite complex because of the many theories about it. For more details about the theories and concepts about gender see Oakley 1972, Chodorow, N (1989), Buss (1995), Anselmi and Law (1998), Walzer (2001), Rasing (2001 and 2007) and Alsop et al (2002).

appropriate for a man or woman. There are different roles that men and women are expected to perform in their communities. Erickson refers to them as gender roles. Gender roles refer to the set of attitudes and behaviours socially accepted by members of a particular culture to be appropriate for males and females, (Rosenblatt *et. al.*, 1976). Therefore, from the expected behaviours, a man's behaviour needs to be masculine while for a woman feminine.

Alsop *et. al.*, (2002), also claim that theories about gender indicate ideas about femininity and masculinity. Alsop *et. al.*, explain that gender focuses on the expected social roles and responsibilities that women need to play in relation to those of men. These expected social roles shape the daily lives of men and women in their families and in the wider communities they live. This point is evident in the gender differences in matters associated with mourning rituals. Rasing (2007), claims that there is a division of male and female space at funerals. Rasing says:

‘Women sit inside the house, on the floor, indicating their place inside or related to the house and associated with the soil, while men sit outside on chairs, indicating their place outside the house and associated with the sky.’ (p.5.)

Most communities believe that gender roles are important if social order has to be maintained. They believe that when there is a clear pattern of ‘women’s work’ and ‘men’s work’, both in the household and in the wider community, then each person will behave accordingly. Each one will know what his or her role is. There would be social order in communities if each person knows and acts according to his or her role.

2.2 Gender Issues in Death

Gender differences surrounding death can be seen in certain ethnic groups in Zambia (Rasing, 2007). In certain ethnic groups, a woman is not supposed to attend the burial of her deceased husband. Ngambela (2006), also includes the mother to a still-born baby among those who are forbidden to attend the burial of her 'child'. This is because she is associated with death. Any person perceived to be linked to death is said to be polluted with death spirits. If such a person is not cleansed from death spirits, he or she may also pollute the community. Rituals need to be performed to cleanse such a one from death spirits so as to prevent him or her from polluting the community.

Douglas (1966) offers an explanation for beliefs related to ritual pollution. Douglas (1966) claims that pollution is related to disorder. Death is an example of one factor that is related to community disorderliness. To re-establish order, rituals have to be performed. In the case of death, people that are believed to be exposed to death are isolated from the community. They are put in seclusion so that rituals are performed. Rituals are performed in order to remove the death spirits. Douglas (1966) reveals that when people are exposed to pollution, they are prohibited from performing certain functions in life. The prohibitions include touching fire, using or even seeing certain objects, eating certain food or performing sex with a menstruating woman. It is believed that failure to observe the prohibitions would expose the individual involved or the whole community to danger.

2.3 Gender Identity

According to Erikson (1980), gender identity comes about when one sex exclusively performs an activity without the involvement of another sex. For example, women alone will perform an activity, such as a rite, without the involvement of men. Women alone will perform different roles including the masculine roles that are perceived to be for men in most communities. For example, women may take up the role of a leader when conducting a rite. Erikson (1980), also states that when women construct their identity, they do not follow the patriarchal⁷ prescribed structures that forbid women from taking up male roles. Women follow their own informal structures that are considered to be private. Barriteau (www.uwipress.com), reveals that in private or informal structures such as female rites, most men tend to leave⁸ the decision-making to their women. Alsop *et al.*, (2002), claim that construction of the public sphere for men and private sphere for women by most communities is for the purpose of maintaining ‘nature order’⁹.

Women, too, use the informal structures as platforms to ‘carve’ their fellow woman to become a ‘real woman’. For example, in the case of a female initiation rite, an uninitiated person is not considered to be a woman despite her chronological age. The explanation behind this is that an uninitiated woman has not been taught about the expected norms of how to become a woman in society. One has to be taught about these lessons in order to

⁷ Erikson refers to the patriarchal structures as formal structures and the non patriarchal structures as informal.

⁸ Nevertheless, this is contrary to what Mahdi et al (1987) have revealed. Mahdi et al reveal that male authority is not completely surrendered. For example, the roles of males as household heads are still recognised even in the private spheres according to Mahdi et al (1987).

⁹ According to the natural order theory, women and men should take up different positions within society in order for the two groups to remain in harmony. Men need to take masculinity like positions and women feminine positions. For details about theories of natural order (See Greenstein (1993),

be accepted in society. These lessons include issues of fertility, sexuality, performance of rituals and their secrets, marriage and personal hygiene, (Erikson, 1980).

During initiations, women do not allow a man to attend the initiation rites. The lessons conducted in the rites are exclusively for women. This too, applies to most male rites. Women are not allowed to attend. The lessons in the female rites are taught only by women who have experience in the traditions of that particular group, (Mbiti, 1975; Rasing, 2001). These women have also passed through the rites themselves and have the support of most of the members living in their communities as being good teachers of initiation rites.

Although women construct their identity as a single group called 'women', Alsop *et. al.*, (2002), have observed differences within the 'women' group. There are differences in terms of hierarchies within the women groups. For example, in the case of initiation rites, women who perform rituals have more power and authority than other women in the same group. The ritual performers are also considered to be more superior than the initiate. This is because ritual performers have the power to make the initiate a 'woman'. That is the why the initiate is made to look inferior by the ritual performers when rituals are being performed. This is because the initiate is said to be ignorant about rituals. The ritual performers also attain a higher status in communities than non-ritual performers. This is because in certain cases, the ritual performers are paid when they perform rituals in a rite, (c.f. Forni, 2007). In cases where clients are charged by ritual performers, the economic status of ritual performers is likely to be higher than that of other women who

do not perform rituals. In addition, ritual performers are also considered to have a higher rank than other women. This order is based on the fact that they have more knowledge and experience as compared to the other women, especially the initiates.

Women also respect the hierarchy created within themselves as a group when performing the rituals. In the case of burying still-born babies, only elderly women are allowed to bury and perform rituals. Rasing (2007), reveals that only women of post-child bearing age can bury still-born babies. According to Rasing (2007), these women neither risk the danger of giving birth to still-born babies nor are they exposed to the danger of infertility. These women have passed through this stage already. Mbiti (1975: 158) also claims that at village or family level, not everyone is responsible for performing rituals. Only ritual leaders perform rituals. In the case of female rites, only elderly women perform ritual (Mbiti 1975). The ritual leaders acquire their position by virtue of their age and experience. In a family, the oldest member could perform ritual functions. The ritual leaders are believed to be a link between the ancestors and the people in the community (Mbiti, 1975). Therefore, they have a special responsibility of keeping the traditions by performing rituals according to traditional expectations. Performing rituals accordingly, helps in keeping the traditions so that there is no conflict between the living and the ancestors, especially around the community where the ritual leaders live, (Mbiti, 1975: 158). Through sanctions and prohibitions, the ritual leaders maintain harmony between the communities and the spiritual world (Mbiti 1975).

2.4 Gender Relations

The gender relations between men and women are normally based on power relations. There is a difference in terms of power balancing concerning the roles that males and females play. In many societies, roles played by males are perceived to be of a higher value than those played by women, especially in cultures where patriarchy is accepted as the only proper family structure, (www.unfpa.org). Power aspects are considered to be of male privileges, (Eagly and Woods, 1999). Men are expected to hold superior positions than women. Men should always lead while women should be in subordinate positions. Men who lack power may compensate by exerting power through violence towards women, (Eagly and Woods, 1999). Eagly and Woods (1999), reveals that the men's violent behaviour towards women who are perceived to have more power than the men is based on 'gender envy'. Gender envy comes up when men identify an arrangement where women take up roles that are believed to be for men. Men usually resent such arrangements because they think they defy traditional gender order. Men usually protest and give negative views to express their dissatisfaction about such arrangements. Ngambela (2006), claims that among the Kaonde, men protest that women should not be involved in burying still-born babies because they are witches. Among the Kaonde, men are not allowed to take up any role when burying still-born babies. Women take up the role of leadership and conduct burial without the help of the men. This arrangement is considered to be wrong because leadership is perceived to be a preserve for men. Therefore, men accuse women of stealing body parts of still-born babies to make charms. In the case of kitchen parties where men do not have a role to play, there is also tension between men and women, (See: Rasing, 2001: 237).

Although power is considered to be a preserve of the men, especially in the public domain, women too have gained access to power through other alternative institutional structures. In institutions such as female rites, women have been able to articulate their interests, concerns and have placed women's issues on the main agenda, (Mackinnon, www.heinonline.org, Walker 1988). Women have successfully demonstrated considerable leadership to their fellow women when performing these rites. The rites have been successfully performed without the assistance of the other sex.

2.5 Cultural Influence on Burying Still-born Babies

In many African societies, people define, observe or value still-born babies in a similar way. For example, Lovell (1983: 30), claims that losing a baby through miscarriage or still-birth is often not viewed as 'proper' bereavement in most societies. This is because people in these societies claim that in a still-birth, there is no person to mourn for. Rasing (2001), reveals that among the Bemba, children who have not been 'taken in' by their parents are not regarded as 'real' humans. When such a child dies, no form of mourning is allowed. It is only after the parents have performed a ritual, *ukukusho umwana* (to make the child strong) or *ukuteko mwana* (taken in) that such a child will be regarded as real. Rasing (2007), says:

'Mourning a still-born baby is considered inappropriate and is not allowed, not even by the parents. Mourning a still-born baby would be a bad omen, which may result in the birth of more still-born babies or infertility of the mother. The still-born baby is not considered a child or human being, if the ritual of *ukuteko mwana* had not yet been performed.'(p.4)

Also Breugel (2001), claims that among the Chewa, small children who die before their parents have performed a special ritual called *kutenga mwana* (to take the child), are not considered to be real human beings. Breugel (2001), says:

‘The spirit of a child who has not been “taken” has to await re-birth in another child who its own mother or her close relative conceives. In the mean time, it is considered a *chiwanda* (a ghost). On the contrary a child who is “taken” will be received into the spirit world, however, young it is.’(p.83.)

2.6 Beliefs and Taboos about Still-born Babies

Handling and burying still-born babies is surrounded by beliefs and taboos. People who are involved in handling and burying still-born babies have to follow those beliefs and taboos.

In traditional African way of life, it was considered normal to adhere to beliefs and taboos that prescribed the conduct of behaviour by the people in many aspects of life. People observed the traditionally prescribed beliefs and taboos during burying of still-born babies. For example, among the Kaonde, women are not supposed to mourn a still-born baby, (Ngambela, 2006). This is because a still-born baby is not considered as a ‘normal’ human being. It is believed that only ‘normal’ humans are to be mourned. This belief is also found in several Zambian cultures as seen from the literature.

In other ethnic groups, including the Kaonde, rituals were performed in accordance with the prescribed rules and beliefs. It was believed that ignoring or performing rituals wrongly had a negative consequence to both the perpetrator and the perpetrator’s community, (Colson, 2006; Turner, 1967; Mbiti, 1969; Douglas, 1970; Magesa, 1997;

Rasing, 2007). For example, the perpetrator will have some severe illness while the perpetrator's community may experience infertility or the children may get ill.

Beliefs and taboos are observed by the living in order to live in harmony with their ancestral spirits. Mbiti (1969), has explained that ancestral spirits need to be pleased at all times, if people have to live in harmony. Mugambi (2002), says:

'According to traditional African religious beliefs, the world was inhabited by spiritual beings with whom peaceful and harmonious relationships must be maintained at all times. These beings were believed to affect the daily life of the community positively or negatively, depending on whether or not the members of the community had managed to observe that obligation.'(p.64.)

It is believed that when the living fail to observe traditional taboos, it then becomes the duty of the ancestral spirits to correct that error. When the ancestral spirits take up the duty of correcting the error, they make their displeasure known to the living through revelations such as infertility, deaths and illnesses. According to Mugambi (2002), ancestral spirits were harmful to the life of the community members unless the members kept them happy and at peace. Neglect could spell disaster for individual human beings or the whole community.

The reality and presence of ancestral spirits is equally acknowledged through several taboos found in many African communities. For example, women within the child-bearing age are bound to observe several prohibitions. It is believed that such women run a serious danger of becoming childless if they flouted such taboos, since it results in scaring away souls of unborn babies that are believed to hover around homesteads and families. These souls want to enter the wombs of potential mothers. Other taboos do

prohibit adultery. Ignoring the taboos also result in misfortunes¹⁰ such as persistent illness, prolonged labour or still-births. Remedies to these misfortunes include performing prescribed rituals, communicating with ancestors and confession of one's mistake as in the case of prolonged labour where a pregnant woman is required to mention the partner she had committed adultery with.

However, despite the influence of modernisation, several beliefs and taboos are still prevalent in certain communities, especially in villages.

2.7 Why Women Should Bury Still-born Babies

According to Skjonsberg (1989), in African tradition, there are roles that are regarded as women's and those that are for men. Traditionally, women's roles include the reproductive aspect, (Oakley, 1976). Women, and not men, are expected to take care of 'their children' from the time the women are pregnant to the time when the child is born, including burying of a still-born child. In matrilineal societies, it is believed that children belong to women, (Rasing, 2001; Richards, 1940).

When a baby is still-born, women alone are the conductors of the burial ceremony (Skjonsberg, 1989: 174). The whole process of burying still-born babies should be performed by elderly women. Women should perform rituals without the involvement of men. Both men and women are not allowed to mourn the still-born baby (Skjonsberg,

¹⁰ Ancestors are thought to mete severe punishments on people who disregard the hallowed traditions of the community, or infringe taboos and norms of acceptable behaviour in society. People living in communities, especially in villages try to strictly observe such taboos and norms, thereby ensuring peace and harmony in their relationship with one another, with ancestors and other supernatural beings.

1989). Women also believe that the task of burying still-born babies is related to fertility. Most ethnic groups consider fertility to be more related to women affairs than to men.

2.8 Rituals and Rites of Passage

Sociologists and anthropologists have been dealing with the question of what rituals are for a long period of time. One of the many scholars concerned with rituals is Emile Durkheim (2001). Durkheim (2001), has tried to set parameters on modern discussion on social cohesion. Durkheim's assertion is that social cohesion is an unavoidable requirement for any society to survive. Society would need symbolic practices like rituals to integrate different groups of people to live in harmony. Durkheim's discussion on rituals is rather complex.

Casquete (2002), defines rituals as forms of communication through action. She says that there are various types of rituals. She mentions them as death rituals, mourning rituals and birth rituals. According to her, these rituals have different functions in society. For example, the main functions of mourning rituals are to confirm and reinforce that death is real. A ritual has to be performed that would show a separation of the living from the dead. Mugambi (2002), says:

'Rituals are dramatic and symbolic expressions of a community's compressive self-understanding. There are two significant features in rituals-dramatic activity and the use of symbols. With regard to the first feature, a stranger observing a community in the process of a ritual would find the activity a rather curious spectacle. The stranger might accurately describe what he/she observed but might not interpret his/her observations correctly. The second feature of rituals is the use of symbols. Symbols convey general and comprehensive messages to those with whom they are familiar. For example, someone who is initiated would be socially treated as an adult irrespective of whether or not he/she had attained physiological maturity. A person who has undergone initiation would be called a *man* or a *woman*, while those

who are not initiated are called *boys* and *girls*, irrespective of their chronological age.’(p.204)

Concerning rites of passage, Van Gennep, (www.deathreference.com), noted that virtually all human societies use special ceremonial rites to mark significant transitions in the social status of individuals. He called these special ceremonial rites as ‘rites of passage’. In the *rites de passage*¹¹, individuals are symbolically killed, reborn, and nurtured as they take on new social status and then reborn into society as new and different persons. According to Van Gennep, there are three phases which an individual has to undergo in the rites of passage for the reasons he states below. Van Gennep says:

‘In the first phase, candidates for the rite have to be separated from the status to be left behind. Secondly they enter a “between” period devoid of distinguishing marks of status and expression of their old identity, such as names or clothing. In the case of adulthood, adolescents may undergo a degree of discipline and share a mutual sense of hardship, bonding them together. Their curtailed freedom begins a re-orientation toward their future status and life obligations. This may involve learning the traditions of their society or the skills of some particular trade. Only after this period of learning and endurance is complete do they undergo the third phase of re-incorporation into society. They do so with their new status and identity, new patterns of behaviour with appropriate duties and responsibilities.’

Van Gennep (1909: 106), claims that all stages in the rite of passage have their own rituals and symbols. Turner (1969), also added some insights to Van Gennep’s theory of rites of passage by coining the three stages in the rites of passage as preliminal, liminal and postliminal. Turner (1969), elaborates that the preliminal stage is the first phase and is regarded as the separation phase in the rites of passage. In the preliminal phase, an initiate is separated from the main community. This phase comprises the symbolic

¹¹ The *rites of de passage* do not only conform to culturally defined life-crises, but may accompany any change from one state to another. *Rites de passage* are also not restricted sociologically to movements between ascribed statuses (Mahdi et al 1987). They also concern entry into a new achieved status, such as joining a new profession, being admitted as a new member of a secrete society or becoming a mother.

behaviour signifying the detachment of an individual from an earlier phase in the community. In the case of an initiation rite, a girl may be taken by elderly women from her home to the bush when she experiences her first menses.

Turner (1969), links the liminal phase to death, invisibility, darkness or to being in the womb. In the case of an initiation rite, an initiate is considered to be a *Tabula Rasa*. This means that the initiate is considered to possess nothing to demonstrate or that she has no status. During this phase, the person/initiate must be teased or ill-treated in order to make her/him strong. This is meant to make the initiate learn to bear the disappointments and pains that she/he would experience in life. Also in this phase, the behaviour of the initiate is said to be passive and humble. The initiate is supposed to obey the instructions from the ritual leader without complaints. The ritual leader represents the whole community. Therefore, the initiate has to submit to an authority that represents the whole community. The liminal phase is also a test which the initiate has to undergo in order to become a full member of the society. The initiate is asked to do things that she/he will never do again in her/his life.

The liminal phase is also considered to be a dangerous and polluting phase. This is because in this phase people are not classified¹². Douglas (1966: 96), claims that anything that cannot be classified is regarded as polluting and dangerous. This is the reason why an initiate in this case is secluded to avoid polluting the community.

¹² Communities often consider initiates exceptionally vulnerable and dangerous at this time because they have become socially ambiguous.

In the postliminal phase, an initiate has to be incorporated back into the society after passing through the first and second stage. The initiate re-emerges often through formal ritual procedures. But this time, she/he has gained a new status that has been acquired during the transition period.

Casquete (2002), claims that in many societies a woman who has lost a child is secluded from the main society for some time until a ritual is performed to cleanse her. A woman who has lost a child is believed to be surrounded by death. Death is considered to be a disorder in society. Anything that is considered a disorder in society is related to pollution, (Douglas, 1966). The woman who has lost a child is believed to have the power to pollute the community in which she lives. She is can pollute the community if she prepares food for them. People who eat this food may become ill. A fire can also be polluted through contact with such a woman. Thus, a cleansing ritual has to be performed to prevent a woman who has lost a child from polluting the community in which she lives. The penalties for those who come in contact with polluted fire take the form of illness, mainly of the chest, (Richards, 1959: 34).

Concerning mourning, Turner (1969), reveals that some ethnic groups do not mourn still-born babies because certain groups of spirits do not like to hear people talking loudly or crying loudly. It is from this assumption that some people associate the spirit of still-born babies to those spirits that appreciate to be mourned in silence.

2.9 Ethnic Identity

The issue of ethnic identity has become one of the major debates in the anthropological studies, especially when coming up with a definition of what an 'ethnic identity' is (c.f. Ott, 1989; Appadurai, 1996; [www. defineethnic group-google search.htm](http://www.defineethnicgroup-google.com)). There are a number of theories concerning the definitions of what an 'ethnic identity' is, therefore, making it difficult to understand them. It is, therefore, not the intention of this research to go into details and exhaust what each scholar has written about the definition of ethnic identity. According to Eriksen, (2001), an ethnic group is a group of humans whose members identify with each other, through a common heritage. Eriksen claims that members of an ethnic group are able to share a common cultural practice, speak the same language and have the same culture that is in contrast to other groups. This definition however, is in contrast to how Appadurai, (1996) views an ethnic group.

Appadurai (1996), does not support the idea that ethnic identity should be based on characteristics such as members of the group belonging to the same religion, speaking the same language or belonging to the same kinship. Appadurai's view is that the fore stated characteristics are not permanent and, therefore, cannot be used as markers of identity. Appadurai, (1996) believes that what constitutes an ethnic identity is naturalisation. Naturalisation, according to Appadurai (1996), is an idea where people believe that they belong to the same group by consciousness. Appadurai (1996), refers to it as ethnic consciousness. In this group, members have different opinions about an issue. For example, they may speak about an issue like death differently, taking into consideration that they come from different backgrounds. Appadurai, (1996) believes that there should

be different views by members within the group referring to itself as one. Waters (1990), further claims that ethnic identity is a social construct. He views ethnic identity as a perceived frame in which individuals identify themselves consciously or unconsciously with those with whom they feel a common bond. The group feels their common bond is based on the fact that their members have similar traditions, values and beliefs.

2.10 Meaning of Symbols used in the Burial Ceremonies of a Still-born Baby

In this section symbols are explained in the light of their traditional significance and meaning in the context of death.

Studies by Turner (1969), Rasing (2001) and Mugambi (2002) reveal that in burial ceremonies, a number of symbols are used. These studies claim that one object may have different meanings. Mugambi (2002), has explained that the cross has different meanings in the Christian religion. One visible sign about the cross is to remind the Christians and other people of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the salvation of humanity. On the other hand, the cross is a mark of identity for Christian churches all over the world. Colour symbolism is also ambiguous as it depends upon the context in which it is being used (Colson, 2006). Colson (2006), observes that among the Tonga of Gwembe, red symbolises danger and at the same time it symbolises life.

There are different symbols used during burials of still-born babies. For example, still-born babies are buried under different types of trees. Turner (1967), mentions one tree that excretes a thick white fluid. This symbolises breast milk from a mother. Turner gives

a detailed explanation about this symbol. He states that by burying a still-born baby under this tree, it is believed that the baby would rest in peace because the baby will rest and sleep once it has symbolically taken food, 'milk' (the white fluid) from this tree.

In another study, Nangendo (1964), explains the belief associated with the idea that a still-born baby's head has to face the eastern direction in the grave. Nangendo's observations are based on a study of the belief system of the Bukusu of Nigeria. She says the Bukusu believe that re-birth and fertility come from the east. This is based on the fact that the sun rises from the east, which is regarded as the symbol of life by most ethnic groups. Therefore, the still-born baby's head should face the eastern direction if spiritual re-birth has to occur. The head is preferred because in a normal delivery during labour, the head is the part of the body that comes out first from the mother's womb. According to www.intuitivetimes.ca/articles:

'Graves where still-born babies lie should be dug running east to west so that the head will be the first to rise when the call comes from the east on the day of Judgment'.

Abasi (1995), elaborates the symbolical meaning of the woman who performs the burial of a still-born baby. According to her, the elderly woman who receives the body of a still-born baby to lay it down into the grave performs the functions that are similar to those done by midwives¹³ in hospitals. The elderly woman ensures that the still-born baby is laid into the grave and later covered with soil.

¹³ Among the Bemba a woman with such similar skills is referred as *nachimbusa*. The position of *nachimbusa* demands skills in midwifery and traditional medicine. (See Richards 1940).

2.11 Causes of Still-birth

There are generally two contradictory views about the cause(s) of still-birth. These two views are the traditional and the medical view.

According to the traditional view, it is believed that still-births are caused by witchcraft. Witchcraft explains why people fall ill and die (Mbiti, 1965: 165). The common causes of witchcraft are domestic tensions and jealous. Families that are believed to be staying well are targets of witchcraft, especially by members of their kin. Males and females are involved in practicing witchcraft. Field (1960), claims that witches are able to steal fertile wombs of women. The purpose for stealing the womb is simply to punish the women, and for no reason. Debrunner (1961), says,

‘Witches are known for their abilities to make women barren and men sterile. In the women’s cases, their wombs are turned upside down by witches. She is thereby incapacitated from any natural flow of childbirth. This disruption results in still-birth’(p43.)

Richards (1940), also cites a case in one of the villages in Kasama where a woman was divorced because her children died. The divorced woman was believed to have been bewitched. This made it impossible for her to have living children. Richards also claims that the desire for children is very strong in the rural districts, especially among the Bemba. Richards reveals that among the Bemba, only after having had some children, a man can be appointed as village headman, and obtain the status of a man of substance. The Bemba men, therefore, pray for parenthood as it is one of the bases of social status. Although Richard’s research findings on the Bemba were done some seventy years ago, his findings still show a lot of similarities with other ethnic groups, including the Kaonde.

Mbiti (1965), outlines three methods used by witches to practice witchcraft on their victims. The witches use familiars, projection and direct attack methods when attacking their clients. Melland (1923), defines familiars as agents that are used by witches to execute the witches' intentions on the victim. Familiars can take either human or non-human form. The human familiars are acquired by killing and raising the victim. Non-human familiars are made from shells of creatures such as snails, crabs or tortoise. The shells are filled with 'medicine' for the purpose of carrying out assignments. The familiars have the ability to seek out the victim and execute the instructions assigned by the master. Melland claims that among the Kaonde, a familiar called *tuyewera*¹⁴ (sic) is employed by witches to kill babies.

The second type of witchcraft method involves the projectile method. The witches use projections of an invisible missile made from charms, especially human bodies, to harm their victims. This form of witchcraft is believed to occur more frequently than familiars. The projectile method causes sharp pains in the chest of the victim. This method is also known to terminate pregnancies of women victims.

The third method, the direct attack requires a mysterious contact with the victim. Mbiti (1975), claims that witches possess powers that are able to manipulate a victim for the purpose of causing harm. The witch may introduce substances into the victim's body without the victim noticing it. All the three methods outlined above are believed to cause still-births in women.

¹⁴ The correct name is *tuyebela*. Apart from the *tuyebela*, Melland also mentions of the *sung'unyi* that the Kaonde use as a witchcraft familiar. Melland says a *sung'unyi* is a human-headed, snake-like familiar. It is used by the Kaonde witches to consume the victim's shadows.

However, the issue of witchcraft has been received with mixed feelings among several scholars. For the sake of this thesis, the scholars have been categorised into two groups. One group doubts the existence of witchcraft (c.f. Schomoll, 1993). These scholars claim that beliefs in witchcraft have no room in this modern world. They claim that most beliefs in witchcraft are not based on rationality but on myths. They too claim that it is difficult to believe in witchcraft as it can not be proved scientifically. According to Colson (2006), belief in witchcraft only provides justifications of individuals' personal failure. For example, those who fail to have children may attribute their failure to witchcraft. Evans-Pritchard (1937), also claims that among the Azande of Sudan, failure to explain some events that happened within their communities was attributed to witchcraft as the cause for such events. Most of the Christian missionaries who came to Africa discouraged their members to neither associate with people that believed in witchcraft nor belief in it (c.f. Timberondwa, 1978). Some missionaries even doubted if witchcraft did exist in communities.

However, despite these mixed feelings about witchcraft, other scholars¹⁵ (c.f. Melland, 1923; Field, 1960; Debrunner, 1961; Mbiti, 1975; Adjido, 1997; Geschiere, 1997) who have carried out research in witchcraft among some African communities do support the idea that witchcraft does exist and is practiced by the people they have studied.

Geschiere (1997), uses the examples of Benin and Cameroon to illustrate that witchcraft has not disappeared under the disguise of modernity. Witchcraft is still prevalent in

¹⁵ These scholars do not believe in witchcraft but only support the idea that witchcraft is believed in and practiced.

public life. In Geschiere's views, the in roads of modernity and post modernity in Africa have not rendered witchcraft absolute. Geschiere claims that there are many sources that provide evidence that witchcraft is real. For example, based on his study in Cameroon, Geschiere (1997), said that one of the informants narrated how his wife was bewitched by an uncle. The uncle wanted his nephew's wife not to bear children. The uncle testified this when he reconciled later in life with his nephew. After the reconciliation, the nephew's wife started bearing children. At the time of the interview, the nephew said he had three children. Geschiere (1997), observes that although witchcraft is perceived to be in conflict with rationality that does not imply that there is no witchcraft. Adjido (1997), says:

'The mechanics of witchcraft may not always be known, but witchcraft is all too real and concrete, not mysterious.' (p.266)

In African tradition, still-births are also believed to be caused by adultery, especially by an adulterous man. If a man committed adultery while his wife was pregnant, it was believed that the baby would be still-born or would die soon after birth, (Richards, 1940 and Rasing, 2001). Colson (2006: 156), claims that among the Tonga, it was believed that a woman, who had sexual intercourse with men other than the father to the child, was likely to 'injure' the child. This resulted into the child's death in the womb or immediately it was delivered. Probably this had to do with mixing of two types of blood, that of the father and that of the other man. Mixing of different blood was considered a taboo and usually resulted in polluting a child to death.

Medical studies have also offered different reasons for causes of still-birth. For example, the findings by Kristensen *et. al.*, (2005), revealed that pregnant women with over weight

as compared to pregnant women with normal weight had still-births. Other results by the same study revealed that young mothers, especially those below the normal child bearing age who become pregnant ended up having still-born babies. This is because of their physical immaturity to start bearing children. Other factors that may result in new born deaths include anaemia and obstructed labour.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter is composed of methods that were applied in carrying out this research. They are presented in the following order; study design, sample selection, data collection and data presentation and analysis.

3.1 Study Design

This research used mainly a qualitative study design even though the quantitative method was also used to collect empirical data. Data was collected through in-depth interviews. Different interview guides were employed when interviewing each group of the following respondents: women who bury still-born babies and perform rituals, health workers and fathers and mothers who have had a still-born baby. In-depth interviews were applied in order to get information based on people's experience that could not have been obtained otherwise. In-depth interviews were suitable for this study because of the sensitivity of the topic. People need to get used and trust a person before they reveal information. Moreover, in-depth interviews enable the researcher to clarify unclear questions to the respondents and also to probe the interviewee for more information.

3.2 Sample Selection

A purposive method was used to choose the subjects. Thirty-five subjects were chosen, based on their knowledge and expertise. The majority of female participants had more than five years of personal experience in dealing with issues of burying still-born babies.

Women and men who had still-born babies had more than three¹⁶ times experienced the loss of a baby through still-birth. This experience made all the subjects reliable for the study.

Snowball sampling was applied to select women and men who had still-born babies and also the elderly women. The snowball method was important because there was no documented record in Kasempa district of people who bury still-born babies and perform rituals. (An enquiry was made at the district council and it was confirmed that there was no such a record). The researcher had to rely on other people to introduce to him or recommend to him the respondents who had the knowledge and experience about burying still-born babies and performing rituals. The snowball sampling method enabled the researcher to get a sample of thirty-three. For the two health workers, purposive sampling was applied. Therefore, in this research, the following people were interviewed: two health workers, three elderly men whose wives had given birth to still-born babies, five mothers who have had still-births and twenty-five women who are involved in burying still-born babies and perform rituals during and after the burial ceremony.

3.3 The Sample

Two health workers were selected from Mukinge hospital. Two women who had given still-birth were found with the help of medical personnel while the other three women were found with the help of wives to the village headmen. For the other twenty five women who participated in the research, four villages were visited where the researcher

¹⁶ I decided to go for those that had three or years of experience because most of them were above thirty-five years and those are the respondents I was interested in. I was informed that these were capable of giving me well elaborated responses unlike the young men and women who were below thirty five years.

was introduced to the headmen's wives. The researcher explained the purpose of the visit. In all the villages, it was not easy to interview the women on first appointment. They made appointments for later dates, because they wanted to consult others. On the dates set, at every village, there were men who talked more than women. The men wanted to know if there was any money involved to pay the respondents. When they realised that there was no money involved, some of them left. The researcher explained again to the few women and men, the purpose of the research. They agreed to participate in the research. A few weeks later, these women and men introduced other people who were equally skilled and had knowledge about the topic. This introduction of new subjects continued until the sample was thirty-five.

All the men and women in the sample were above thirty-five years of age. They were all Kaonde who have lived in Kivuku or Mukinge most of their lives. However, their education background was not the same. Five of them had grade twelve certificates, ten had failed at grade nine level and twenty had not gone beyond grade five level.

3.4 Setting

This study was conducted in Kasempa district of the North-western province of Zambia. The areas where the study was conducted were Kivuku and Mukinge in Kasempa district. Mukinge is 5 km away from the town centre and Kivuku is about 1 km from Mukinge. Kivuku is divided into small sections or villages that are closely located to each other. Mukinge is a mission station of the Evangelical Church in Zambia. There is a hospital at Mukinge and three schools that are run by the Evangelical Church. Mukinge and Kivuku

have a population of about 4 000 people altogether, (according to the headmen.) The majority of them are women and children. The main economic activity of the people in Kivuku and Mukinge is small scale farming. They grow crops such as maize, sorghum or millet. A few of them have formal employment, and work as teachers or nurses. A small number of the population work as labourers at Mukinge hospital or at schools in the surrounding areas. This means that the socio-economic status of the majority of the people is below average. They are economically poor.

Kivuku and Mukinge were chosen because in these areas, people do not shift to their fields. The fields are close to their villages. This was convenient because fieldwork was conducted from January to February, the time when people were busy with farming.

The villages in Kivuku are close to each other. This closeness of villages made it easy to walk from one area to another to interview the respondents. The researcher 'camped' near the settlements of the respondents.

3.5 Data Collection

Data was collected through formal interviews. Before the interviews, pre-visits were made to establish a rapport with the participants. Since the topic of research was sensitive, people would not be willing to give information to a stranger. Some villages in Kivuku were visited. During these visits, one of the informants introduced the researcher to the local people as 'our child from town'¹⁷.

¹⁷ I am a Kaonde but currently not living in the village.

In-depth interviews were conducted in Kiikaonde with women who have experienced still-births, women who bury still-born babies and perform rituals, and elderly men whose wives have had still-birth. Interviews with the two health workers were conducted in English and partly in Kiikaonde. The health workers were able to understand some English. Short notes were taken during the interviews. Immediately after each interview, the whole interview was written in detail. This approach was useful and reliable because I was able to remember easily the details of interviews I had just had.

The questions for each interview group were all open-ended questions. Each group was asked its own set of questions that were different from the questions given to the other group.

3.6 Instrumentation

Semi-structured interview guides were used for each group of respondents. The interview guides were composed of open-ended questions. The aim of using open-ended questions was to minimise bias and to provide the respondents with a degree of autonomy, so that they could provide a lot of information on their experiences and explain symbols and meanings of the burying rituals.

3.7 Data Presentation and Analysis

The researcher used both statistical and descriptive methods to analyse data. For easy interpretation, statistical data was presented using frequency distribution tables and

percentages. The data collected through interviews was analysed manually and presented in narrative form.

3.8 Statement of Ethics

The participants were assured confidentiality and anonymity of all the information they provided.

3.9 Informed Consent

All the participants were briefed about the research so as to obtain their consent to participate. The participants willingly agreed to participate in this study and openly talked about their experiences.

Having described the methodology that was employed in this study, the next chapter will present and analyse the findings of this study.

Chapter Four

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the findings of the study and how data was analysed are presented. The results of the study are presented in two sections. Section A presents information on the participant's biographical data while section B presents the results of the interview guide which sought information from the participants.

4.1 Section A: Participants' Biographical Data

Table 4: Distribution of Participants According to Gender

Gender of participants	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Females	32	91.4%
Males	3	8.6%
Total	35	100%

Table 4 shows the distribution of participants according to gender. The findings reveal that 91.4% of the participants were female while 8.6% were males. The overall result is that there are more female participants than males in this study.

Table 5: Distribution of Participants According to their Academic Qualifications

Academic qualifications	Frequency	Percentage
Grade 12 and above	5	14.3%
Grade 9	10	28.6%
Grade 5 and below	20	57.1%
Total	35	100%

Table 5 shows the distribution of participants according to their academic qualifications¹⁸. The findings reveal that 14.3% had Grade 12 and above qualifications, 28.6% had Grade 9 qualifications while 57.1% had Grade 5 or below¹⁹ qualifications. The overall results are that the education background of the participants is not the same. There are disparities. Only a few attained higher (Grade 12) academic qualifications while the majority were among the least educated.

Section B

This section describes how the burial ceremony of a still-born baby is conducted by the Kaonde.

4.2 Burial Ceremony of a Still-born Baby (*kutaya kafunga*)

Among the Kaonde, the burial ceremony of a still-born baby is referred to as *kutaya kafunga*.

'*Kutaya kafunga*' is a ritual attended by *biimbela* (older women) to bury a still-born baby. The process of disposing off a still-born baby begins with the grandmother of the *kafunga* gathering other *biimbela* to help her with the ritual. The *biimbela* are invited by word of mouth but in secrecy. No other woman is supposed to know about this burial ritual. The grandmother and the other *biimbela* avoid spreading this information because it is believed that, when announced and the mother of a still-born baby fails to conceive, then members of the community would accuse the grandmother and all the *biimbela* who had

¹⁸ For the sake of this study only, all the participants with academic results below grade 12 are considered to be among the least educated in the sample.

¹⁹ This group included all the elderly women who conducted the burial for still-born babies.

participated in the burial as the cause of the mother's failure to conceive. Other reasons were to prevent witches knowing beforehand the burial place, (The explanation for avoiding witches to know is given later). The other reason was to avoid people who have not reached the age of a *kiimbela* to know. This knowledge is only for the *biimbela*. The *biimbela* may lose the status of seniority in the community once the burial information leaks, because it is assumed that senior women are supposed to adhere to traditional norms.

The *biimbela* who are invited are not supposed to turn down the invitation. In case they do, they bring ill-feelings to other members of the community, especially to those who had invited them. This is because members of the community are supposed to work together in sadness and in happiness.

Although the invitation to dispose off a still-born baby is open to the *biimbela*, the number of those invited does not exceed ten. It is assumed that if many *biimbela* are involved, some may not keep the secret, especially those who are not closely related to the *kafunga's* mother.

The burial ceremony begins in the early hours of the morning when all the invited *biimbela* are gathered and *tupamba* (small hoes) are organised. The *biimbela* use *tupampa* to dig the grave for a *kafunga*. *Tupamba* are easy to carry and not easily noticeable. The *biimbela* are not supposed to show the tools they are going to use for

digging, for fear of being noticed by the people. For this reason, the *biimbela* do not carry *makasu* (hoes) but carry *tupamba*.

The mother of a *kafunga* does not accompany the women to the burial site. She remains at home with a *kiimbela* who monitors her so that she conforms to the traditional beliefs and taboos regarding the burial of a *kafunga*. Equally, no man is allowed to attend the burial.

When they start off for burial, one of the *biimbela* wraps the *kafunga* in a *kiitenge* or a piece of white cloth that the grandmother has been wearing. A *kafunga* is not laid in a coffin. After wrapping a *kafunga*, one *kiimbela* carries it. The other *biimbela* accompany her to the burial site. Because burial is done in privacy, none of the members in the group have pre-information as to where the burial site would be. The burial site is decided by the whole group on the day of the burial. However, the grandmother has the final authority whether to accept the site or not. The site for burial is under a *mufungo*, *mubanga* or *mweenge* tree.

When the *biimbela* reach the burial site, the *kafunga* is laid down. One *kiimbela* is asked by the grandmother to dig the grave with a *kapamba* where the *kafunga* is to be buried. The grave is not deep and its size is the same as the body of the *kafunga*. Before laying the *kafunga* in the grave, a *kiimbela* cuts a small piece of root from the *mweenge* tree and puts it on the back of another *kiimbela*. Once the *mweenge* root is placed on the back, a *kiimbela* lifts the *kafunga* and passes it on to the other *kiimbela* who dug the grave. The

kiimbela then lays the *kafunga* skillfully in the grave by ensuring that its whole body is inside the grave and its head is facing the eastern direction. When this is done, one or two *biimbela* cover the grave with their palms and ensuring that the covered grave is not identified as such. The grandmother inspects the covered grave carefully, and if satisfied with the work done, she requests the *kiimbela* carrying a *mweenge* root to start off back home first while other *biimbela* follow her at a short distance. This is to ensure that other *biimbela* keep an eye on her so that she does not look back in the direction where the *kafunga* has been buried. There is a belief that if she looked back, the fertility of the *kafunga*'s mother will 'go back' into the *kafunga*'s grave, and the *kafunga*'s mother will remain barren for ever.

When the *biimbela* are about to enter the house, the grandmother calls for the *kafunga*'s mother and a *kiimbela* with a *kipyango* (small broom) to come out of the house and join her. When the two join, the grandmother asks the *kiimbela* carrying a *mweenge* root to transfer it to the mother of the *kafunga*'s back. The mother is then taken a few metres from the house and asked to bend without looking in the direction of where her *kafunga* was buried. The grandmother says the following words:

'Napopwela muufumepo panyuma ya mwanami.' (I beg that you leave my child's back.)²⁰

Upon completing her sayings, the grandmother asks a *kiimbela* holding a *kipyango* to sweep away the *mweenge* root from the *kafunga*'s mother. This removal of the root is referred to as *kwikalotolapo*. When the *kwikalotolapo* has been done, the mother is taken

²⁰ Adamo (2004) says "In many African societies there is a belief that elders have omens in their words. When elders speak performative words correctly in the right place and at the right time, the requested action will be granted by the ancestors," (p.27.)

by one *kiimbela* to a house specially²¹ reserved for seclusion while the other *biimbela* leave. They gather again at the home of the *kafunga*'s mother.

At the home of the *kafunga*'s mother, the grandmother collects some water with some *musamba baafu* roots soaked in it. She pours it in a dish and asks all the *biimbela* who had accompanied her to the grave to wash their hands in the herbal water. Other close relatives (but not the husband) and children who stay within the village are equally asked to wash in the water mixed with *musamba baafu* herbs. The older relatives are told the reason why their hands were being washed in herbal water.

During seclusion, the mother is given further instructions by a *kiimbela* assigned to look after her. This seclusion period lasts more than a month but does not exceed three months. The mother is instructed not to prepare her own food or her family's, because she is considered unclean. The mother is also asked to cover her hair with a piece of cloth, especially if the hair is stylishly plaited. Anything that is considered to be fancy on the mother's body is not allowed during seclusion. The mother is under the control of the *biimbela*. The *biimbela* have to approve of anything that the mother has to do when she is in seclusion.

Before going to bed, the mother is allowed to bath in water mixed with herbs. Mothers who have a first experience of still-birth are helped to bath by the *kiimbela*. The *kiimbela* massages the mother with the warm herbal water. The main objective of massaging the

²¹ This is a temporal shelter specifically constructed to be used during the period of seclusion.

mother is *kubwezha mubiji*, 'repairing' and preparing the body for the next pregnancy. This is done once per day, (during the whole seclusion period).

When the mother is about to come out of seclusion, the *kiimbela* informs the grandmother. The grandmother arranges with the *kiimbela* the date when to perform the last ritual. As soon as the date is set, a ritual is organised for the mother and father of the *kafunga*. The grandmother also witnesses the ritual.

The ritual is performed by allowing the mother and the father of the *kafunga* to bath together in water with some *kilambwe* roots soaked in it. Sometimes, other herbs such as *musamba baafu* can be used. The father washes himself first in full view of his wife. The wife does the same while the husband is watching her. The idea is that the couple bare witness to each other that each of them had bathed in the herbal water so as to avoid the couple accusing one another in case of problems in future. This ensures that neither spouse accuses the other of not having followed the instructions of cleansing. Bathing by the couple is done in silence and no soap is used. When the couple has finished bathing, the husband comes out of the bathing shelter first. This is to signify to the grandmother and the *kiimbela* that his wife has finished bathing too. The husband goes into a special shelter that is reserved for him. There, he waits for his wife who joins him later. As soon as the husband leaves the bathing shelter, the *kiimbela* and the grandmother take some 'new clothes'²² to the mother in the bath shelter. They watch her put on the 'new clothes'. The old clothes that the mother had been wearing whilst in seclusion are surrendered to the grandmother. The grandmother at a later stage gives them to the *kiimbela* who had

²² The clothes could either be those bought from the shops or second hand clothes.

been teaching the mother about how to perform rituals of the *kafunga* rite and the taboos and beliefs that surround the *kafunga* ceremony. Giving out clothes is one way of appreciating the *kiimbela*'s work²³. Later, the grandmother takes away the plates and cups that the *kiimbela* and mother had been using when the mother was in seclusion. The grandmother keeps them at her home to ensure that they are never²⁴ used again in a *kafunga* ceremony.

When the mother has put on the 'new clothes', she is taken out of the bathing shelter by the *kiimbela* and led to a shelter where the husband is seated. When she reaches the shelter, the *kiimbela* hands her over to the husband. The grandmother smears some white mealie meal on the mother's head, whilst ululating. After the mother has been smeared with mealie meal, she is declared 'free' to the husband by the *kiimbela*. To be 'free' means that she could start using fire to prepare meals for her husband and other members of the community without making them fall ill. She is also allowed to have sex with her husband again. The white mealie meal smeared on the face of the mother symbolises that the mother has been purified and the husband is free to take her.

4.3 Interpretation of Symbols used in the Process of Burying a Still-born Baby

In this section the symbols are explained by using the information that was given by respondents and related literature.

²³ This is not always the case. Sometimes the clothes may be taken by the grandmother and the *kiimbela* is simply appreciated by the word of mouth.

²⁴ Some informants told me that the grandmother may use the cups her self, and but not in any ritual performance.

One way to classify symbols used in the *kafunga* ceremony would be to categorise them into symbolic objects and symbolic actions. The former would include *kiilambwe* or *musamba baafu* medicine, white cloth, *mweenge* tree, a hoe and *mweenge* root. The latter would include a shallow grave, *biimbela* and still-born baby's head facing the east during burial. All symbols used in the *kafunga* ceremony are related to fertility, sexuality and death.

4.3.1 *A Shallow Grave*

'*Kafunga kafwainwa kwikazhika mukilende kyabula kuzhika. Akye kilumbulula kubwezha lusemi bukiji,*' (Laying the still-born baby to rest in a shallow grave is believed to allow a woman to conceive in a short period of time) said one old woman. To bury a still-born baby in a deep grave would be like 'burying the womb'²⁵ of its mother, hence, the child's mother would be sterile forever.

One woman illustrated that the grave was like a hole where seeds are sown. She claimed that if the hole is too deep, a plant may not shoot, but will die. Similarly, a still-born baby has to be symbolically sown in the grave, like a 'seed'. The buried still-born baby will be reborn early in spiritual life depending on the way it is buried. 'If wrongly sown then it will not shoot out,' said the woman.

²⁵ Writing about still-born babies among the Chewa of Zambia, Breugel (2001) gives a similar reason why still-born babies are buried in shallow graves.

4.3.2 *A White Cloth*

Most participants stated that a white cloth is preferred to any other cloth because it symbolises purity and fertility. When a baby is born, it is covered in a clean cloth (preferably a white²⁶ napkin if it is born in a hospital).

Most participants explained that physical death was not the end of still-born babies' lives. Still-born babies have to be born in the spiritual world. It is believed that still-born babies need to enter the spiritual world in a pure form. Therefore, still-born babies need to be wrapped in a white cloth if they are to remain in a 'pure form' and enter the spiritual world for their rebirth.

4.3.3 *Mweenge Tree*

A *mweenge* tree produces a white fluid. 'The white fluid symbolises male sperms and breast milk from the mother', said a *kiimbela*. Male sperms are important for fertility while milk is the baby's food. Therefore, the still-born baby symbolically 'drinks milk' from the *mweenge* tree and rests²⁷ under it. One *Kiimbela* said:

Kichi kya mweenge kiji namabula avula biingi, akyo kilumbula amba ina kafunga ukasema baana bakwabo bavula. Nekikwabo, mambo a kyekichi kyakosa kabiji kekechi kyuma ne, nelusemo lwa wamukazhi momoka molulondela. (The *mweenge* tree has a lot of leaves, which symbolises the many children the mother would continue to bear. Hence burying under the *mweenge* tree is believed to assure the mother of continuous fertility. Because the *mweenge* tree does not dry, a dry spell of fertility of the mother is unlikely to occur. The *mweenge* tree also symbolises the ethnic group. It is assumed that just as the tree is firmly anchored in the ground, the ethnic group will also stand. This is to imply that the spirit of the departed will not disturb the ethnic group as it is also part of the ethnic group).

²⁶ Writing about symbols among the Ndembu, Turner (1967) claims that among the Ndembu a white colour is associated with the spiritual world and absence of death.

²⁷ Turner (1967) says that among the Ndembu a still-born baby is likened to a 'real baby'. His explanation is that a real baby would only rest and sleep when it has taken a lot of food.

4.3.4 *Biimbela*

The Kaonde are a matrilineal²⁸ group who consider a child as belonging to the mother and not the father. Therefore, among the Kaonde, fertility is a woman's issue. The *biimbela* being women, have to perform the task of burying babies. Though the *biimbela* are no longer fertile, they still represent sexuality and fertility. The *biimbela* are close to the spirits and act as intermediary to the spiritual²⁹ world where the *kafunga* comes from and goes to.

4.3.5 *A Hoe*

Throughout their lives, women use a hoe in the fields for agricultural production. A hoe is produced by men and used by women. The hoe symbolises a penis or sperms that are produced by men. Sperms are 'given' to women during sexual intercourse so that reproduction could occur. There is a belief that women need to use a hoe during burial of a still-born baby for re-birth of another child to occur in the mother's womb.

4.3.6 *Musamba Baafu*³⁰ *Water*

Among the Kaonde, it is believed that any person who touches a corpse has to be ritually cleansed before she or he could rejoin normal life in the community. She or he has to bath herself or himself in water that is mixed with herbs that help to prevent death spirits from haunting her or him. Having bathed in herbal water, a person is considered to have re-joined life.

²⁸ See for example Richard (1940), Rasing (2001), and Colson (2006) who have explained in detail about the issue of motherhood in matrilineal societies in Zambia.

²⁹ La Fontaine (1986: 104) explains that the actors that perform rituals are close to the spiritual world.

³⁰ Literally translated, *musamba baafu* is life giving water.

'Bantu bonse bafuma nakuzhika kapopo bafwainwa kowa mu muchi, nabiji musamba baafu. Akye kilumbulu amba mipashi ya kapopo kechi yakosha kwibalondela ne' (Bathing with *musamba baafu* symbolises cleansing oneself from still-born babies' death spirits), said a *kiimbela*.

4.3.7 *Mweenge Root*

It is believed that a spiritual link exists between the mother and the still-born baby. The Kaonde believe that the spiritual link is with the mother's womb. The *mweenge* root represents this relationship. There is a belief among the Kaonde that the *kafunga* still claims the mother's womb. Therefore, the *mweenge* root is put on the mother's back (which symbolises the womb) and swept off. The sweeping off of the *mweenge* root symbolises that there is no linkage any more between the death spirit of the still-born baby and the mother's womb. This implies that the *kafunga* spirit can no longer harm the next baby that the mother would bear and carry on her back.

'Muzhazhi bamubweshwa kwiinaji pakuba amba lusemo lubwela' (The root is also taken to the mother in order to 'return' the fertility to her), said a *kiimbela*. Hence, the root symbolises fertility that has returned to the mother. If the root was not returned, the mother would remain barren.

4.3.8 *The Still-born Baby's Head Facing the East*

Most Africans believe that life is cyclic, (Mbiti, 1969; Hinfelaar, 1989; Rasing, 2001; Ngambela, 2006). This means that one is born, lives, dies and then is re-born. This cycle is related to the cosmologic life ideas and the natural world where the sun rises from the east and sets in the west. Like other Africans, the Kaonde consider the east to symbolise re-birth. *'Kafunga kosentu kafwainwa kutazha mutwe ku musela mu kilende, mambo*

kokufuma bumi bwalusakuko (Every still-born baby is buried with the head facing the east, so that it can be re-born in the spiritual world), said a *kiimbela*.

4.4 Discussions on Information given by Participants during Interviews

Below is a summary of discussions and information given by participants during the interviews.

4.4.1 Causes of Still-birth

There are different and contradictory views about the cause of still-birth. The majority of the participants, especially those with least education, claimed witchcraft and adultery were the causes of still-birth. Men accused women of practicing witchcraft on their fellow women. Women too, accused men of 'stealing children' from the women. The majority of male participants revealed that relatives of the *kafunga's* mother, especially the female inflict witchcraft on the mother. According to one informant, witches can either terminate a child or 'steal' it. She claimed that male witches cause the death of a 'baby' within the mother's womb. 'A woman can have a protruding tummy (pregnancy) and yet witches have "stolen" some body parts from the baby to make charms. A woman does not know that what she is carrying is an "empty bag". No child with flesh will come out at delivery. What comes out is blood only,' she said.

Another informant claimed that a mother who is perceived to be living happily with her husband is a target of witchcraft. Witches aim at terminating her pregnancies so that the

mother can be referred to as *inamufu* (mother of deaths). Husbands would divorce such a woman because she would not give them children³¹.

One woman said:

‘My husband divorced me after discovering that we had no living child for more than six years. This is because all my pregnancies ended in miscarriages and people referred to me as *inamufu*.’

Another man said:

‘*Mukazhami namukaine mambo a kufwisha baana javula. Onse mavumo apitailanga tu. Mukazhami wajinga inamufu.*’ (I divorced my wife because all her pregnancies ended up in miscarriage. My wife was a ‘mother of deaths’)

A small number of female respondents said that women were to blame for their still-born babies. They attributed still-birth to pregnant women’s lack of seriousness in following orders given to them by elderly women. Pregnant women are given traditional medicine by elder women. The medicine ‘protects’ the woman’s pregnancy from being terminated by witches and to help the woman deliver her baby without labour complications. Labour complications result into still-birth. The medicine is taken with instructions; taking the medicine early in the morning before the sun rises, using a certain colour of a cup or avoiding eating certain types of food, like eggs. Women who fail to follow these instructions are likely to risk the experience of still-births.

Other respondents with least education, especially elderly women and men in their early fifties believed that adultery also caused still-birth. They claimed adultery committed by

³¹ In most marriages children play a vital role in the stability of marriages. If there is no child, the affection between the husband and wife will slowly come down.

either the father or the mother of the child can cause death of a 'child' in the womb. One elderly woman confessed and said:

'Mwaana wami wafwile bukapopo mambo na ubile bukende . Mwana yese uji munda wafwainwa kutaika enge shaji na ngwa inaji enge wauba kende.' (I had a still-birth because I committed adultery when I was pregnant. Still-birth is caused by adultery committed by either of the two parents).

However, interviews with some medical personnel revealed different views about the causes of still-births. One Kaonde nurse revealed that carrying too much weight while pregnant increases the risk of complications for a mother and might lead to death of the foetus in the mother's womb. She did not agree that still-births are caused by either witchcraft or adultery. The nurse also said young girls who become pregnant end up with still-births because their bodies are not ready for reproduction.

4.4.2 Beliefs and Rituals about a Still-born Baby

Many respondents with the least education and in their late forties claimed that a child that has not been 'taken in' by the parents cannot be mourned because there is no 'child' to mourn for. One woman said:

'Mwaana keyewa yeba nsunsa kwi ba nsemi. Nge keba mu nsunsa ine, awa mwaana ke kapopo' (A child cannot be considered a human being unless it has been 'taken in' by the parents, if not that child should be regarded as a still-born child.)

In addition, most respondents in age group of fifty years claimed that it was a custom according to the Kaonde tradition not to mourn a still-born baby. It is believed that if either of the parents mourns, the couple would never have a child. Men and women are afraid not to have a child in life. In the case of men, one's manhood is often measured by the number of living children one has. A man without children cannot become a

headman. In the case of a woman, she would not become a *kiimbela* in her old age. She would, therefore, not gain respect in society because she would be considered not to be a real woman.

On the contrary, a Kaonde nurse defined³² a still-born child as any child born dead. She said any living child can not be considered to be still-born because that is not medically true. Another Kaonde nurse did not support the idea of stopping parents from mourning their still-born babies. She revealed that in hospitals, a mother or father of a still-born baby is allowed to mourn. She claimed mourning reduces the psychological and emotional tensions that affect the parents during the grief. This Kaonde nurse did not support the idea that a parent who mourns a still-born child would never conceive another child again. The nurse claimed that was not medically proved.

The Kaonde nurse also revealed that at hospitals, still-born babies are disposed of in the incinerators by either male or female nurses. There are no traditional rituals performed when disposing off the still-born babies in the incinerators. The Kaonde nurse did not agree that failure to perform the traditional burial ritual when disposing of a still-born baby would cause any illness to somebody. The Kaonde nurse did not also believe that a mother whose still-born child is buried without performing traditional rituals would not bear another child. She said she had never come across such type of literature in medical studies.

³² Other nurses also defined a still-born child similarly.

The findings revealed some contradictions about the cause of still-birth. Those with Grade 12 qualifications and above contradicted some Kaonde traditional beliefs about the cause of still-birth. Hence, they had different views from those that were given by the majority of the respondents with least education and those in the group of fifty years.

4.4.3 *Seclusion of Mothers who gave Still-birth*

Giving birth³³ is considered a rite of passage for all mothers and they have to undergo seclusion as part of a ritual to attain adulthood (see the detailed explanations about rites of passage by Richards, 1940; Turner, 1967; Rasing, 2001 and 2003; and Van Gennep, www.tracegenetics.com). In the case of still-birth, a mother has to undergo seclusion because of the death involved. Therefore, rites connected with death are intended to perform some rituals that will cleanse the mothers from death spirits. The mothers of still-born babies are believed to be surrounded by the spirit of death that may pollute members of the community. If the mother is not cleaned, members of the community may experience some illnesses. It is also believed that if rituals are not performed, the mother will continue to give birth to still-born babies. This is because the spirit of death will continue to haunt her womb.

The respondents also stated that during the mother's seclusion, the *biimbela* transfer³⁴ their traditional knowledge to the mothers. This knowledge is only availed to mothers

³³ By giving birth the mother attains the status of adulthood because only adults give birth. Therefore this is a rite of passage for the mother as she has to pass through the transition from 'childhood to adulthood'.

³⁴ Although this knowledge is strictly availed to women who have reached a menopause, young mothers that have lost a child are also given this knowledge during seclusion. The young mothers are considered to be 'elderly' because they have experienced still-birth. However, they are only allowed to perform the rituals in a *kafunga* rite when they reach their menopause.

who have experienced losing a child. One woman who has had a still-born child stated that during seclusion, the *biimbela* gave her some secret lessons concerning burying of still-born babies. The *biimbela* instructed her not to reveal the secrets to women who had not experienced still-birth. Another informant revealed that lessons taught to mothers in seclusion vary. Some lessons teach about the types of food that have to be avoided when a mother is pregnant, such as *mbovo ya musombo* fish. Other lessons are to do with the types of herbs that mothers have to take when they are pregnant. Mothers are also taught in detail how to perform different types of rituals, such as death and fertility rituals. The mothers will use the knowledge when they become *biimbela*. Most of the women who had passed through the *kafunga* rite claimed that they had more knowledge of the *kafunga* rite now than before. The women claimed that they were capable of performing a *kafunga* rite successfully if given chance.

4.4.4 Cultural Influences on Burying Still-born Babies

The findings indicated that most respondents with least education agreed that the Kaonde should continue to bury their still-born babies in a traditional way. Most of the respondents were Christians who belonged to the Evangelical Church in Zambia. Even though they were Christians,³⁵ they did not want to abandon their Kaonde traditional culture. They believed doing away with the traditional way of burying still-born babies, would be like adopting a non Kaonde culture. They believed that the Kaonde needed to keep their identity because they did not want to lose it as an ethnic group. Burying still-born babies in a traditional way was believed to be one way of keeping the Kaonde identity that was related to the ancestral spirits. Many respondents stated that they did not

³⁵This did not include the respondents from Mukinge.

want to follow the Christian teachings because they forbid performing of traditional rituals. They stated that they wanted to continue performing death rituals just as their ancestors used to perform when they experienced still-birth. One of my informants said:

‘I belong to the Pentecostal church. I perform rituals when burying still-born babies despite my pastor being against church members performing traditional rituals. The pastor considers members of his church as children of God who should not involve themselves in ungodly acts.’

A Catholic woman affirmed that many of her fellow women are Christians but perform rituals with her when burying still-born babies. She claimed her fellow women said that Christian teachings, especially that of the evangelicals, came from an alien culture that the Kaonde should not follow. The Kaonde must follow what was ‘left’ by their ancestors.

During one of my personal conversations with Rasing (15/05/2009), she said:

‘Many rites of passage are for women. For example, initiation rites, giving birth to a live or still child. All these rites concern fertility. There are no or very few such rites for men since for them fertility is not an issue, especially in matrilineal societies.’

Several respondents also revealed it is an ancestral prohibition to allow men to bury still-born babies. The task of burying still-born babies was given to women by their ancestors. One woman claimed that ‘Men are dangerous’.³⁶ Men are thought to be witches that steal body parts from the women. The respondents claimed that men remove body parts from

³⁶ This is similar to what Rasing (15/05/09) told me during my personal conversation with her. She said, “Men are perceived to be dangerous because they are involved in hunting, so symbolically they kill. Therefore, men are considered to be life takers unlike women who are life givers.”

still-born babies to make charms or to sell them to fellow witches. One man described how male witches use³⁷ body parts that they get from still-born babies.

The prohibition of men from burying still-born babies is also attributed to gender roles and construction of gender identity among the women. All societies, including the matrilineal type have a structure in which gender roles are separated but complementary. Men and women are seen as distinctive categories. In a matrilineal society, such as that of the Kaonde, children belong to a woman because caring for children is considered to be a reproductive role. Many societies including the Kaonde consider reproductive roles to be feminine.

The findings also indicated that the majority who did not believe in Christian teaching, especially those with least education and were in their early fifties were against the idea of allowing mothers to mourn their still-born babies. The respondents revealed that before a child can be considered a human being, its parents must perform a ritual called *kusunsa mwana* or 'taking-in the child'. Still-born babies are not considered as human beings because their parents did not perform this ritual. It is therefore, considered a taboo to mourn such a child because it is not a human being.

³⁷This man was a confessed former witch. He said eyes are used to make charms that operate like telescopes. This charm enables a hunter to see wild animals from afar clearly. In the same way, still-born baby's ears are used as boosters to a normal ear to listen to sounds from afar as audibly as if they are at close range. Another charm that was revealed was that which operates like a submarine. This charm enables the witches to submerge themselves under water for some time without suffocating. It was believed that the charm operates just like the way a baby remains in the mother's womb without breathing on its own. Witches apply this principle to hide themselves when they commit a crime so that they are not easily found. The witches also hide innocent people under water for a long period of time.

However, respondents from the Mukinge sample did not accept the idea that children who have passed the age of two years and have not been 'taken-in' by their parents should still be regarded as still-born children. The respondents thought this was not reasonable, especially to the single mothers whose husbands died before they gave birth. If their children died, then that is not the fault of a woman.

On the other hand, a few Christian respondents from Mukinge, especially those that had a Grade 12 certificate and were in their late thirties did not support the idea of mothers being stopped from mourning their babies. They claimed that mothers needed to mourn their babies in order for them to 'release' their pain of loss.

A thirty-six years old pastor's wife of Mukinge said:

'When I lost my two weeks old child, my husband was away. I mourned my child and I did not allow my elder sisters to perform the *kafunga* ritual during the burial of my son. My child was buried within a local cemetery. Both men and women from my church attended this burial. Up to date, nothing bad has happened to me despite that no 'taking-in ritual' was performed for my child when she was alive. I have now got three children who are school going.'

Other members from the Mukinge sample did not accept the idea that children who have passed the age of two³⁸ years and have not been taken-in by their parents should be regarded as still-born children. The respondents thought this was not reasonable, especially to the single mothers whose husbands died³⁹ before they gave birth. If their children died, then that is not the fault of a woman.

³⁸ In cases where a man denied being the one responsible for the pregnancy, it is not easy to 'take-in' such a child. Such a child may live more than two years without being 'taken-in'.

³⁹ Ideally when a husband dies, his relatives are supposed to take up the role of the father and husband. The children are considered as dependants from the father's relatives. Hence the brother of the deceased can

The differences in opinion reveal that not all Kaonde have the same opinions. There is differentiation in this ethnic group.

4.4.5 *Kapopo* Illness

Another reason for discouraging mothers to mourn their still-born babies had to do with a punishment that is supposed to be inflicted on those people who mourn still-born babies. An illness known as *kapopo* is believed to affect the perpetrator for breaking the taboo, while in certain cases other members of the community are affected too. The symptoms of *kapopo* are sores on the face. Some elderly women claimed that these sores are different from the 'normal sores', because Western medicine cannot cure them. They said that such sores are only cured by applying traditional medicine such as *musamba baafu* on the victim's sores. It was also revealed that some of the victims of *kapopo* do not survive. The *kapopo* illness is considered to be severe in children because this type of illness, like most illnesses usually affect innocent people. 'Therefore, to avoid these calamities, the Kaonde uphold principles concerning beliefs on still-born babies,' said one *kiimbela*.

However, the nurses claimed that from their observations and medical assessment, the sores that many patients referred to as *kapopo* are caused by some micro-organisms, such as bacteria or fungi. These sores are in the family of ulcers and are curable. By taking modern medicine such as, anti-biotic capsules, these ulcers are cured.

perform the 'taken-in' ritual with the widow of his late brother. However, in cases where a brother was suspected to have died of witchcraft- (because he married a beautiful wife) or where relatives just want to punish the widow, such roles of a father or husband may not be taken up easily. Hence the children may not be taken-in and can stay more than two years without being 'taken-in'.

4.4.6 Analysis of the Whole Kafunga Ceremony

The whole *kafunga* ceremony can be considered as a rite of passage. This ceremony reveals that the mother of a *kafunga* undergoes three phases⁴⁰ when the *kafunga* ritual is performed. These phases are the separation, seclusion and re-integration. A ritual leader called a *kiimbela* performs the ritual.

In the first phase of the *kafunga* ritual, the mother is taken a few metres away⁴¹ from her home by the *biimbela* to where a ritual of *kwikalotolapo* is performed. In the second phase, the seclusion phase, the mother is isolated from her home and the main community and taken away from the main community to a small hut where she stays with a *kiimbela*. The mother is believed to be a danger to the members of the community. She has to be secluded to protect the community from being polluted, as she is believed to be surrounded by death spirits. The mother is also given some traditional lessons during the seclusion period. This is because the mother is considered to be a *tabula rasa* who does not know anything about the *kafunga* ritual. She has to be taught by the *kiimbela* who has knowledge and experience in performing rituals. In the *kafunga* rite, like other rites such as initiation, the ritual leaders pass on knowledge to the initiates. The mother also undergoes some hardships and humiliations. For example, during seclusion, the mother is not allowed to mourn her child, to choose what to eat, to bath, where to sit, when to talk or choose where to sleep. The mother has to be given instructions by the *kiimbela* whenever she wants to do anything. This is meant to test her emotional strength. The

⁴⁰ As Van Gennep has observed that often rites of passage share similar features, including a period of segregation from everyday life, a semi-seclusion state of transition from one status to the next, and a process of reintroduction to the community but with a new status given to the initiate.

⁴¹ A bush is preferred so that people not invited to the *kafunga* rite will not have easy access to witness it when it is being performed.

mother is also humiliated by allowing her to sit in silence in a small room alone. She sits in the same position and is not supposed to complain about this treatment. The mother has to undergo rituals and ordeals designed to re-define her social standing. This is because she was stripped of her identity and, therefore, she needs to re-acquire it. She can only acquire this status when rituals have been performed.

In the *kafunga* ceremony, rituals are also performed for the mother in order to chase away the spirit of the still-born child, so that it will not bother the mother any more nor will it come back again to harm the children that the mother will be carrying on her back. The anthropological explanation however, is that the mother is associated with death and subsequently, with pollution.

In the last phase, the mother is re-integrated into the community again. The mother is asked to bath first. After bathing she is given 'new clothes' which is a symbol of attaining a new status, that of a mother, although she has lost her child. The mother is also smeared with mealie-meal to symbolise that she has been purified and she is no longer a danger to the community. She is free again to perform all the activities that were forbidden while in seclusion. There is also ululation by the *kiimbela* when the mother is handed over to the husband. This public hand over also symbolises that the mother is handed over to the husband where she has to be under him again. In the public domain, it is believed that women are supposed to be under the care of their husbands. The *kiimbela* simply adheres to the cultural expectations by handing the woman back to her husband. The cultural expectations are that the women's roles are in the private domain. This is where the

kiimbela has been with the mother. The ululation is also meant to symbolise that the mother has passed the transition test and has to go home so that she could 're start' her life as a mother again⁴².

Comparisons Between the Literature Review and the Research Findings

The Study by Rasing (2007), differs from this research because in her findings, she claims that nowadays, males attend burials for still-born babies. The findings of this research show that this is not happening among the Kaonde, especially those living in rural areas. In the case where men attended a burial for a still-born baby, such would not be considered as a 'true *kafunga*' rite but something alien to the Kaonde tradition.

A similar study that was conducted by Forni (2007), on funeral rituals and burials differs from this study because her findings revealed that women in Babesi village charge their clients, fees when they perform rituals for them. Among the Kaonde, the *biimbela* do not charge the women in the villages. The *biimbela* perform the rituals voluntarily, and it is up to the grandmother of a *kafunga* to pay them or simply thank them by word of mouth.

This research also differs from the Christian teaching that discourages performing of rituals, (see. Colson, 2006; Igreja, 2003; Mugambi, 2002; Magesa, 1997; and Timberondwa, 1978). Some Christian religious leaders discouraged their members from performing rituals because they were ungodly. However, the findings in this study reveal some similarities to Richards findings among the Bemba in 1956. Richards claimed that

⁴² This description is based on several accounts that were given by older women. The narratives are compiled into one because of their similarities. In addition it also uses part of the written work I had used in my previous article.

missionaries failed to convince the women that they should withdraw from what the missionaries perceived to be ‘pagan’ practices such as performing of rituals in the female rites. The Bemba women continued to perform the rites. This study too reveals that the practice of performing rituals is still going on. Among the Kaonde women, especially those with least education and living in rural areas are still performing rituals despite that they practice Christianity. This also reveals that the religious leaders have failed to convince the women to stop performing rituals.

In addition, this research differs from the reasons advanced by medical researchers with regards to the causes of still-birth. This research reveals that the majority⁴³ of the respondents believed that still-birth was caused by witchcraft. The findings by Geschiere in 1997, that some ethnic groups in Cameroon believed in witchcraft and practiced it is similar to the present situation among the Kaonde. The Kaonde still believe in witchcraft and practice it.

The findings of this research also differ from what Ziwa (2004), wrote about beliefs concerning still-born babies. Ziwa says:

‘The belief that the dead can come back to influence the living does not include a foetus/child. Whether the foetus is aborted or not, it can cause no harm to society’ (p.166).

However, this study reveals that among the Kaonde, there is a belief that the death spirit of a *kafunga* exists and is able to harm members of the community if they break the taboos about burying a still-born baby. For this reason, rituals are performed for the

⁴³ These were villagers who had not attained grade 12 level of education.

mother to a *kafunga* in order to chase away the spirit of the still-born baby so that it will not bother the mother any more nor will it come back again to harm the children that the mother will be carrying on her back.

This study also reveals a contrast to a study by Colson (2006) among the Tonga of Gwembe. Colson (2006), reveals that among the Tonga of Gwembe, a mother who has lost a child through still-birth is brought to the foot of the grave of her child where she is instructed to sit with legs stretched out on either side of a tiny trench. This is to symbolise a child's birth. The explanation is that, as the child once departed from her body, it now departs from her care. However, this study reveals that among the Kaonde the mother of a still-born baby does not attend the burial of her child.

The research findings do not show much difference from other ethnic groups in the way the Kaonde bury their still-born babies. Similarities have been noted in the way the Kaonde use symbols and interpret them just like other ethnic groups do. Studies carried out by Turner (1959), among the Ndembu show such similarities. For example, among the Ndembu, a still-born baby is buried under a *mweenge* tree just like the Kaonde. The reasons the Ndembu give for burying a still-born baby under a *mweenge* tree are the same as this study has given. Studies by Breugel (2001), among the Chewa also reveal that the symbols used in burying a still-born baby are similar to the Kaonde, and even the meanings of the symbols are similar to the explanations given in this research. For example, among the Chewa, a still-born baby is not buried in a deep grave because it is believed that the mother would take longer to conceive if the still-born baby was buried

in deep grave. A similar reason is given by the Kaonde for not burying a still-born baby in a deep grave. Because of the similarities in the way still-born babies are buried in many ethnic groups, it not easy to support the claim among the Kaonde that they bury still-born babies in a 'Kaonde traditional' way.

This study has also revealed that not all the Kaonde have similar views about burying a *kafunga*. In this study there are different opinions expressed by members of the Kaonde about burying a *kafunga*. This is despite the fact that the Kaonde belong to one ethnic group. The expectations were that since all the Kaonde belong to one ethnic group, they could have one opinion about burying a *kafunga*. However, studies by Appadurai (1996), have revealed that ethnic identity cannot be based on characteristics such as members of the same group speaking the same language or belonging to the same kinship. Appadurai (1996), claims such characteristics are not permanent. In an ethnic group, members have different opinions about an issue.

In addition, this research is similar to Igreja's (2003) findings among the people of Mozambique and Colson's (2006) findings among the Tonga people. For example, Igreja (2003), cites some religious leaders (especially those educated at Catholic and Protestant schools) in a Mozambique death situation who considered it wrong for Christians⁴⁴ to perform traditional rituals. The religious leaders considered performing of traditional rituals as evil and Christians needed not to indulge in such an activity. Similarly, among the educated and Christian Kaonde, performance of traditional rituals is not supported.

⁴⁴ According to Malungo (2001), Christians avoid performing traditional rituals in times of death because they believe that misfortunes are brought about by the devil. Therefore, Christians only have to pray to chase away the devil instead of performing rituals.

They also give similar reasons as those revealed by Colson (2006), and Igreja (2003). For example, reasons given by Christians for discouraging performing traditional rituals are that:

‘Because the funeral ritual is phrased to emphasise the continuity of spirit and its acquisition of a new identity in the form of the *mizimo*, much of the funeral ritual is banned by Christian churches. I have seen young men, after helping to dig a grave and handle a corpse, refuse to participate in the ritual of washing at the grave when the burial was completed. Instead, they stood at the foot of the grave to recite a prayer learned at church. They refuse to participate in what they describe as “heathen practices”’, (Colson 2006 198-199).

This study has also revealed that while it may be true that traditional religion still has considerable influence in the life and culture of the people, it is also true to say that it no longer enjoys exclusive dominance and control over the life of the vast majority of the people. This includes those belonging to the same ethnic group such as the Kaonde. Mbiti (1975), and Ejizu (1986), have attributed this recent change to the advent of external forces, such as colonialism, Christian missionary campaigns and modernisation that have swept through most African countries. Mbiti (1975), claims that prior to the spread of colonialism and Christian missionary campaigns, most groups in Africa lived in homogenous communities where traditional religion was regarded as the sole religion for everyone who lived in that community. It was the sole world-view with which people explained, predicted and controlled every facet of life. However, the situation has changed. Colonialism, Christian missionary campaigns and modernisation have created a new social order. Ejizu (1986), claims that this current situation has brought about the following implications: Traditional religion which was viewed as a sole religion is no longer dominant in many people’s lives. Certain beliefs, customs and practices that were associated with the idea of promotion of community living among many ethnic groups

have been done away with. For example, the traditional belief in ancestors and other spiritual beings, as well as the vital role they were believed to play in fostering community-living, have been on the decline, especially to those who have been exposed to Western education. Another factor contributing to this decline includes Christian missionaries preaching against it.

The findings have revealed that in the *kafunga* rite, women construct a gender identity. Women have created a female space within a male (patriarchy) space domain. The women themselves under the leadership of a *kiimbela* conduct and perform the *kafunga* rite. The *biimbela* use the rite to teach other women about issues that concern women. For example, death rituals and symbols of fertility are performed and taught to women. These are domestic roles that are considered to be important for a woman if she has to become a *kiimbela*. In addition, symbols of womanhood, secrets of the *kafunga* rite (which are not supposed to be known by men) and their value are also made clear to the women. By sharing knowledge and secrets, that exclude men, women's unity is constructed. In the rite, there is stress that men are outsiders, especially in matrilineal societies. Men are kept outside the rite because they are not supposed to know what happens in the rite. Men are kept ignorant about the secrets of the rite. In this way, women gain more knowledge on issues of fertility than men. The knowledge of fertility also shows the power imbalances between men and women that the women are to gain by using their private domains.

The *Kafunga* rite also contains ideas of hierarchical order. The *biimbela* who perform rituals are considered to be more superior to those being initiated in the rite, including the other women present when rituals are being performed. The *biimbela's* superiority is based on their greater ritual knowledge and the experience they have acquired in performing rituals.

The findings by Eagly and Wood (1999), that the differences in male and female roles can affect the life of men and women, is also evident in the *kafunga* rite. The findings of this study reveal that in the *kafunga* rite, the gender relations between men and women are not harmonious. Men⁴⁵ accuse the women of being witches. The men claim that these women should not even be given the task of burying still-born babies because they remove body parts from a *kafunga* and use them for witchcraft. This accusation can be considered to be 'gender envy' by the men and is culminating from imbalances in power relations between the two sexes. In the patriarchy system, where the Kaonde belong, men and not women are supposed to be leaders in society. Men are supposed to make decisions on most of the issues in societies because they are considered to have more power than the women. However, in the case of the *kafunga* rite, men have no power⁴⁶. Most of the men therefore, talk ill of women who perform the *kafunga* rite because it excludes them. Some men accuse women who perform rituals in the *kafunga* rite of being witches.

⁴⁵ This hostility does not go for all men. For example the father to the still-born baby and male relatives of either the father or the mother.

⁴⁶ Men are considered to be outsiders in issues of female rites. This exclusion of men from women female rites enables women to have more knowledge about female rites than men. The possession of more knowledge in the female domain gives the women more power over the men in issues to do with female rites.

This study also differs from the researcher's previous work (2006). There the researcher only wrote about the gender aspect of burying still-born babies. This study concentrates on issues of cultural influence on burying still-born babies. In addition, my previous article was not as detailed as this study.

Chapter Five

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Conclusion

In this chapter, conclusions will be drawn. They will focus on answering the research questions. The chapter will also give recommendations for further studies.

The first question is, why is there a gender division in burying still-born babies among the Kaonde, and how is this gender division expressed?

The findings reveal that among the Kaonde, still-born babies are mainly buried by elderly women only. This is because the Kaonde believe that the task of handling and burying of still-born babies was given to the women by their ancestors. The elderly women are believed to possess traditional knowledge and experience to perform rituals. Moreover, these elderly women have passed the child-bearing age and are, therefore, not afraid of losing a child, in case the *kafunga* spirits haunt them. It is also believed that the elderly women are related to the ancestral spirits where even still-born babies belong. Therefore, the elderly women are able to relate with the spiritual world easily when sending the spirit of the *kafunga* to its resting place.

Men are not involved in burying still-born babies because in matrilineal societies such as the Kaonde, issues of procreation and fertility are women's issues. This is despite the fact that men too are involved in procreation. In matrilineal societies, (see Richards, 1954; Rasing, 2001), children belong to women. The task of burying still-born babies is considered to be for women. During the burial of still-born babies, there is a hierarchical

order that is followed among the women. Only elderly women are involved in the burying. The mother of a *kafunga* learns the rituals from the experienced *biimbela* during her seclusion. The *kafunga's* mother will use this knowledge gained in future to perform rituals when she becomes a *kiimbela*.

The second question is, what do the Kaonde perceive as the causes of still-births?

The findings reveal that among the Kaonde, there are variations concerning the cause of still-birth. Most women and men in their early fifties and whose educational background is low, believe that witchcraft is the cause of still-birth. Most men accuse women of being witches and practicing witchcraft on their fellow women. Men claim that women are jealous of their fellow women, especially those who are perceived to be living well with their husbands. Jealousy women are accused of terminating pregnancies of their fellow women. It is thought that these jealousy women find delight in seeing their fellow women being divorced by their husbands. Most men have a scapegoat of divorcing their wives after discovering that their wives are incapable of bearing children. The Kaonde men perceive that having children is an important requirement for attaining respect in the Kaonde society. However, this respect cannot be attained if the man's wife is *inamufu*⁴⁷. Men do not want to live with wives who would not bear them children. Most traditional communities relate manhood to the number of children a man has. Men with many children⁴⁸ are perceived to be 'real men'. The 'real man' status is what every man would want to attain in life. Hence a man would divorce a *inamufu* for failing to give him children who are living.

⁴⁷ See the glossary for an explanation of *inamufu*.

⁴⁸ This is despite that children do not belong to men in matrilineal societies.

The informants, whose education background was above grade twelve, did not support the idea that witchcraft was the cause of still-birth. This group of informants also included the nurses. They mentioned medical conditions among the causes of still-birth in pregnant women. The nurses did not support the idea that women with still-birth should be stopped from mourning because if they were stopped from mourning their babies, they would be psychologically affected in their lives. This group of informants did not also agree that women who did not perform rituals would be punished by the ancestors and become barren. The informants claimed this was a myth because it was not medically proved. In addition, my personal conversation with Rasing (2009), also revealed that women mourn their babies in silence. Rasing (2009), also claimed that nowadays men attend⁴⁹ burial ceremonies for a *kafunga*, especially in towns.

The research has also revealed that among the Kaonde, a woman who fails to bear her husband children is divorced and she is never even considered as a mother⁵⁰. This also includes the man whose wife fails to give him children; he is not considered as a father and may not attain the status of a headman. The Kaonde believe that for a woman, motherhood is based on having conceived before and having children who are alive while for a man fatherhood is based on having impregnated a woman and has children who are living.

⁴⁹ A study by Rasing in 2007 also revealed that nowadays males and females attend burials for still-born babies in urban areas. However, this was not the case in the past, only females used to attend. This too was not only among the Kaonde, but even other ethnic groups

⁵⁰ This motherhood is different from what the *kafunga's* mother re-attains in the rite of passage. In the rite of passage, the *kafunga's* mother attains the status of a mother after she has passed through the transition test.

The third question is, what rituals, beliefs and symbols are used among the Kaonde when burying still-born babies? And what are the meanings of these rituals and symbols?

The research has revealed that the Kaonde perform a special rite called *kutaya kafunga* when burying a still-born baby. In this rite, a number of rituals are performed. The rituals include fertility, sexuality and death rituals. These rituals are performed by a *kiimbela* for a mother of a *kafunga* and the father (though for him it is only once when the mother is about to come out of the rite). The rituals are performed in order to appease the ancestral spirits. It is believed that failure to appease the ancestral spirits would result in the mother failing to conceive another child. As the mother of *kafunga* experienced death, rituals are performed in order for her to pass through the transition phase⁵¹. In the first phase, rituals have to be performed in order to separate the mother from her previous status. In the first phase, the ritual of *kwikalotolapo* is performed. In the second phase, the mother is considered to be vulnerable to danger and also dangerous to the community. Therefore, a number of rituals have to be performed for the mother to come out of this dangerous situation. In the last phase, the mother has to be integrated back into the community, however, with a newly defined status. The mother attains this status through ritual procedures. She can only be re-integrated after rituals to cleanse her have been performed. The *kafunga* rite is also surrounded by traditional beliefs. There is a fear that if people living in the community do not adhere to the beliefs, a calamity would befall the entire community, especially the children. Therefore, there is strict adherence to observing beliefs and taboos for the sake of staying in harmony with the ancestral spirits.

⁵¹ Mugambi (2002: 202) says, "Death symbolises the transition from the physical mode to the spiritual mode of existence. At the same time, it symbolised the transition of the parents from one stage of elderhood to the next."

In addition, symbols that relate to fertility of the mother and father of the still-born baby are used in the *kafunga* rite. The *kiimbela* also performs symbolic actions related to fertility. The meaning of the symbols used and the symbolic actions performed are explained to the mother and father by a *kiimbela*.

Generally, the findings have revealed that despite the fact that the *kafunga* rite is still being practiced by the Kaonde, other external factors such as Christian teachings have invaded the rite. The Christian teachings are trying to challenge the old conceptions about the *kafunga* rite. These teachings have under played the importance of the rite, and to some extent discouraged the Kaonde not to participate in it. There is also a difference of opinion among the Kaonde. This is despite the fact that the Kaonde belong to one ethnic group where every member is expected to have the same views about the *kafunga* rite. The Kaonde who strongly believe in Christian faith have deconstructed beliefs related to the *kafunga* rite including the idea of stopping parents of still-babies not to mourn their babies. However, this is contrary to what the majority of participants, including parents of still-born babies, revealed. They do not support the idea of mourning their still-born babies. The parents are aware of the perceived consequences of mourning their babies. It is believed that if parents mourned their babies, they would never have babies in life. This was what most parents did not want to experience.

However, the perception not to allow parents to mourn was not supported by health personnel and those participants that had attained grade 12. The health personnel and the grade 12 participants believed that mourning reduced one's emotions. Suppressing

emotions was said to be a health risk to the parents. Despite the health risks involved in not mourning a still-born baby, many parents who experience still-birth opt to take emotional and psychological risks in preference to having children because of the traditional belief that children are important in life for a married couple.

The difference in opinion within an ethnic group can be explained by referring to the study carried by Appadurai (1996), concerning ethnic groups. Appadurai (1996), observed that the markers used for identity in ethnic groups are not permanent but flux. People can belong to the same ethnic group but each member can have a different opinion over certain issues that concern the ethnic group to which they belong, therefore, not all members of one ethnic group should have the same belief about their culture. Appadurai (1996), also claims that it is a fallacy to believe that all the members found in an ethnic group should have one view about their culture. He states that ethnic groups are heterogeneous, although they may look as if they are homogeneous. Just as the members of the same ethnic group could belong to different religious faith or different political parties, the same may apply to them having divergent views about their culture.

Although the study observed that there has been some external influence in the *kafunga* rite, especially by the Christian faith, this influence has not succeeded in prohibiting the Kaonde from performing traditional rituals during the *kafunga* rite. The Kaonde believe that stopping to perform rituals would mean following a culture that is alien. Among the Kaonde, especially those with the least education, it is believed that maintaining the

cultural norms, such as burying still-born babies in a 'traditional way'⁵² helps them to preserve their culture.

5.1 Recommendations

It would be interesting if a female researcher would carry out a similar study among the Kaonde so that more information could be gathered on the topic. Other detailed information that was not availed to the researcher because he is male could probably be availed to a female researcher. It would also be interesting if a similar research could be carried out among other ethnic groups in Zambia by way of comparison. Such a study could also be important to the contribution of knowledge in gender studies.

⁵²However, this is a perception because what is considered to be 'a Kaonde traditional way' of burying still-born babies is not unique. Other ethnic groups also bury still-born babies in a similar way like the Kaonde.

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APPENDIX I

Section A: Personal Information

1. Sex:

2 Age.....

3. Academic qualification: (a).....

(b).....

(c).....

5. Years of experience in performing rituals of still-born babies.....

APPENDIX II

Section B: Interview guides

Interview Guide for Women who Bury Still-born Babies and Perform Rituals

1. What is a still-born baby?

.....

2. Why do you think elderly women alone are allowed to bury still-born babies among the Kaonde?

.....

3. Explain why mourning still-born babies are is not allowed among the Kaonde.

.....

4. Describe the rituals that are performed when burying a still-born baby.

.....

5. Describe some specific rituals that are performed at each stage of burial when burying a still-born baby among the Kaonde.

.....

6. Describe the symbols related to burying of still-born babies among the Kaonde.

.....

7. Explain the meanings of the symbols of described in question 5.

.....

8. How many women do you invite for burial of a still-born baby?

.....

9. Why do you invite such a number of women?

.....

10. What is the cause of still-birth?

.....

APPENDIX III

Interview Guide for the Health Workers

1. What is a still-born baby?

.....

2. What causes still-birth?

.....

3. Describe how a still-born baby is disposed off in hospitals?

.....

4. What happens if it is not buried in a proper way?

.....

5. What is your view on a taboo not to allow parents to mourn at all their still-born babies?

.....

6. Does your health institution support mourning of still-born babies?

.....

APPENDIX IV

Interview Guide for Men

1. What is a still-born baby?

.....

2. Can a mother/father who loses a first child through stillbirth be regarded as a mother/father? Explain.

.....

3. What do you think about the view that 'women alone should continue to perform the task of burying still-born babies'?

.....

4. What is your view about not allowing parents to mourn their still-born babies?

.....

5. What do you think is the cause of stillbirth?

.....

APPENDIX V

Interview Guide for the mother who has ever had a Still-born Baby

1. From your own experience, narrate to me how the elderly women treated you when you had a still-born baby.

.....

2. What information were you given to reduce your emotions?

.....

3. What is your view on a taboo on mourning still-born babies?

.....

4. Describe your experience in seclusion during the time you had a still-born baby?

.....

5. How are people with still-born babies perceived in your own area?

.....

6. Do you see yourself differently now than before you had a still-born baby?

Give details for your answer.

.....

7. From your own experience how are people with still-born babies perceived in your area?

.....

8. What is the cause of still-birth?

.....

GLOSSARY

<i>biimbela</i>	plural for women who perform a burial ceremony for still-born babies
<i>inamufu</i>	a woman who loses her children frequently through death
<i>kapopo</i>	a still-born baby or an illness believed to be caused by a still-born baby
<i>kikondo</i>	a coffin
<i>kiilende</i>	grave
<i>kiimbela</i>	singular for a woman who performs a burial ceremony for still-born babies
<i>kiimpembwe</i>	a special house that is reserve for mourning
<i>kilambwe</i>	a medicinal plant
<i>kipyango</i>	a broom made of wild bush shrubs
<i>kisapi</i>	a cloth
<i>kiitenge</i>	a piece of cloth worn by women like a skirt
<i>kizhila kine</i>	forbidden or taboo
<i>kulunga mukele</i>	to add salt
<i>kunsusa mwana</i>	ritual performed by parents for a child to be accepted as 'human'

<i>kutaya kafunga</i>	burying a still-born baby
<i>lusemo</i>	to reproduce
<i>mufungo</i>	a special tree where a still-born babies are buried.
<i>mweenge</i>	a tree where a still-born baby is buried. It excretes a whitish fluid that symbolises milk
<i>mboyo ya musombo</i>	type of fish that looks like a tiger fish
<i>nsemi</i>	a parent
<i>tupamba</i>	small hoes
<i>wai</i>	an initiate
<i>wamukazhi</i>	female