



Oath that turns boys into beasts

By Wanjala Wafula

The setting for this piece is in Namaloko (witch's river) that follows into the mystifying Kumulinda dam in Bungoma County in western Kenya. The ceremony is to prepare all boys of ages ten to thirteen for the coveted annual circumcision ceremony in August. The organizers are community elders and a legion of traditional circumcisers. The crowd is about two hundred persons and the ambiance is that of uncertainty. The time for the event is 5am. We are not allowed to attend the festival and therefore set our equipment to record and listen in. Sadly for the elders, they don't seem to remember that I went through the same initiation and at the same venue many years ago.



We pose for a photo with the elders soon after the initiation ceremony

It is elder Nayele Mrumba, the 97 year old traditional healer and a record holding polygamist who breaks the long silence. He invites the initiates to the venue and sets the agenda for the day. He hands over the proceedings to Sitati Lukulu, the leader of all circumcisers in the region. He goes through a short trance and begins to thunder out what he calls the rules of manhood. He declares that the initiates will soon be men and that men are always right and they are masters of their families even if they do not contribute anything to the sustenance of the family. "You will buy them with the wealth of our land and they must toil the land and feed the children that you sire", he insists. "Women are like your cows, you can get as many as you wish and you must force them to obey your orders all the time. We are men because we are strong and we must make our wives and children feel our presence all the time".



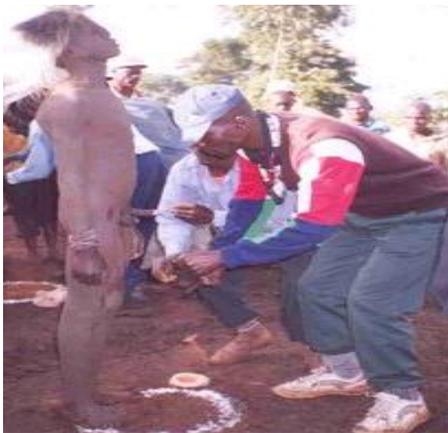
Elder Sitati Lukuku (forgive pic quality)

The assertive elder then goes ahead to insist that "Your wives will have to seek your permission before going in bed as well as before turning their back on you in the bed. "Have them as you wish because they were created for our use and bought by our wealth. Make them pregnant as many times as possible and always have more than one because a man with one wife is like one with a single eye. Set them against one another but love the one who takes care of your stomach"

Sitati asserts that “If you beat your wife and then comes a visitor, the wife should smile as if nothing happened because your goats don’t shout when strangers are around. If she embarrasses you then have the habit of punishing her in public. Follow her to the market, river and the farmland and punish her there. Why should a man be guilty of disciplining his own property? Again, you are the master even in bed. You decide when to have sex, how to have it and how many times to have it. Good wives are those that spare energy for there husbands each night. There are a few intelligent ones who are right sometimes but you must make them know that it’s you who is always right all the time”

“Never allow your wives to have power over you in anyway. Train your wives to know that before going to bed the wife must be plain naked with no panty or bra, to allow the husband to enter at any time he feels like. Never negotiate for sex because that is the only power that women can have over you. If she refuses to let you have sex then hit her hard. Never interfere if a man beats his wife at night because we will blame you for her arrogance. But, don’t beat to kill because we shall fine you twenty heads of cattle for her head”.

Sitati’s face lightens up and with a smile he boastfully claims that “The husband never lies, but he enlightens. You see these women are very keen sometimes and they may detect a lie in what you tell them. Train them from the beginning that what you say to them is the truth



verifiable by our ancestors who only to men anyway. Have you seen any women on whose prayers the ancestors bring rain? Have you seen or heard of any woman who has fought successful battles for our land? Speak out or go back to your mothers until you are ready to be men” Sitati thunders as the initiates answer in the affirmative. When are annoyed and shouting in the house your wife must kneel down and remain silent until you are done. Never allow your wives and their children to engage you in any conversation less you want to be the wife of the house”, he orders as shakes one of the initiates that he had spotted dozing off.

Boy undergoing traditional circumcision in Western province of Kenya

“Your wives should wait for you before making any decisions. They were never given any brains to make their own decisions. Let their decisions be limited to small things. Don’t let them own any property because allowing a woman to own property is making her other lovers rich. A woman is like a river from which any thirsty man can drink and there are some of us who drink a lot you know! Women adore those who drink a lot and you will be forgotten” he boasts as breaks into a traditional song hailing the virility of real men. “Never allow your wives to know where you are all the time. Never allow them to comment about what time you get home. Make them mind their own business and celebrate that you are home at whatever time you get there”.

“Never allow your wives to visit you in the fields unless there is something urgent or some is about to die. Some of these wives we marry are a bad omen and an abomination. Some of them come to the fields in the pretext of meeting their lovers in the bush. Even if your wife tilts

your land and raises some money, she is not allowed to do any kind of expenses without consulting the husband even if it's her own money. If she is badly offended, all the misunderstandings have to be solved by only the two of you in the bedroom without witnesses and this should be to the man's advantage. Don't allow your wives to decline eating even if they is upset because that is when you will be poisoned and killed. Women who openly show her jealous must be sent away. Women were created to receive orders and not to give them".

In a nutshell, the traditional male circumcision rituals are a very significant rite of passage for the young teenage initiates as it effectively signifies the transition from childhood to the league of adulthood. On the contrary, the rituals also act as a medium through which the initiates are exposed to messages that are highly sexualized and gender-stereotyped. Boys are informed that "open doors" (vaginas of unmarried women) are always theirs for the taking and that they should shun household chores. They are encouraged to demonstrate sexual prowess and



"hunt" together, using monetary gifts received to procure sex. They are taught how to be "tough" with women (wife battering) and how to make women work hard for them.

Women taking an oath in Kaya Kinondo on the Kenya coastline, they swear never to raise a finger against a man

Thousands will go through the ritual this year resulting in thousands of sexual and gender based violence in the near future. We are launching the **Komesha (stop) campaign** to focus on this cluster and your support is highly appreciated.

The writer is a Programs Director of The Coexist Initiative, a not for profit synergy of men and boys community-based organizations committed to eliminating all forms of Gender based violence, foster HIV prevention and champion the rights of minority groups in Kenya. Visit www.coexistkenya.com or email Wafula@coexistkenya.com- facebook-wanjala Wafula- skype:coexist.initiative. Tel: +254712653322