

Flirting with Power? Nakafwaya, the Greatest Mwadi (Queen) to Re-Invert the Kingdom of Mwata Kazembe

by

Meldad L. Chama¹ and Terry Kanyembo²

¹Kwame Nkrumah University- Zambia

²Muwang'uni Secondary School

Abstract

Lunda history is not short of reference to women. The marriage between a Lunda queen (Ruweji) and a Luba prince (Cibinda Ilunga) revolutionised precolonial central Africa by merging two dominant political and cultural systems in Central Africa. Arguably, this revolution which led to the first de facto Lunda expansion was caused by a woman, Ruweji. The power of women in Lunda historiography is evident in the making, expansion and sometimes undoing of the Eastern Lunda kingdom of Mwata Kazembe. Kafuti or Nakafwaya is the most respected Lunda queen whose reign coincided with the most tumultuous period in the history of Mwata Kazembe. Marrying five brothers (four being successive Mwata Kazembes-Lunda Kings) was not a simple feat. Notorious, beautiful, sexy and flirtatious, and a master political and military strategist, Nakafwaya's role in reinverting the Lunda Kingdom of Mwata Kazembe between 1850 and 1900 needs reassessing. The role of women in power brokering and consolidation, and the woman's 'flirting' with power in traditional Lunda society is the main theme in this paper. The article demonstrates that Nakafwaya's ascension to the Lunda throne gave her real power because the Lunda power structures allowed women to exercise both symbolic and real power. Other positions of power for women in Lunda society will also be discussed. The article reconstructed the status of women in traditional Lunda society by using oral information and the genetic method. That is, by understanding the Mwadiship (Queenship), from its origins to the times of Kafuti, we will illuminate on 'women and power' in pre-colonial eastern Lunda society. Thus, the evolution of the Mwadiship will also be understood by placing it within the times or realities and actions of Nakafwaya.

Key Words: Power brokering; Panegyric; Royal Praises; Polyandry, Mwadi

Introduction

Nine Nakafwaya

Cafwaya balume milongo

This paper is about *Mwadi* (Queen) Kafuti Yamvwa Nakafwaya. Born Kafuti Yamvwa (Yamfwa), she gained her sobriquet 'Nakafwaya' because of her activities in about 32 years of being Lunda Queen. Nakafwaya first appeared in Lunda oral tradition in the mid-1850s when she married Kabwebwe, the younger brother to the reigning Chinyanta Munona Mwata Kazembe VI. It is not known how long her

marriage to Kabwebwe lasted but it is established that Chinyanta Munona became Mwata Kazembe VI in about 1854. Kabwebwe married Kafuti from the Lualaba or Katanga region on his way back from Mwata Yamvo where he had gone to visit. Struck by her beauty, Kabwebwe proposed and married Kafuti and returned with her to the Luapula promising to make her “the chief’s wife.”¹ From this information, we understand that Kabwebwe was a chief under his brother.

After their marriage, Kabwebwe and Kafuti lived at Mukulo, near Kazembe’s capital. However, when Kabwebwe went to give a report of his travel to his brother, Mwata Kazembe VI, Kafuti caught the King’s eye and Chinyanta took her for his wife promising to make her Lunda Queen. At this point the story becomes murky:

When Chinyanta Munona Kazembe VI, who was Kabwebwe’s elder brother, heard of their arrival, he sent for them so that he could meet them at his court and receive a report of Kabwebwe’s visit to Lualaba. It was on this occasion that Chinyanta Munona again met Kafuti Yamvwa whom he had not seen for some time. He asked her why she had not been seen, and explained that she had left Lunda country for Lualaba where she had met and married Kabwebwe. Chinyanta coaxed her and suggested that she leaves Kabwebwe and that Chinyanta would make her the *Mwadi* (Queen) straight away, since he was the ruler. Chinyanta also offered compensation to Kabwebwe in form of a piece of land from Mbereshi river to the Ngoma Stream. Kafuti Yamvwa then became the *Mwadi* there and then.²

Clearly the narrative tries to shield Kazembe VI from any wrong doing by intimating that he knew her even before meeting with Nakafwaya as Kabwebwe’s wife. ‘Coaxing’ her after this meeting shows this was the first time the King was meeting this beautiful woman. Again, the character of Kafuti leaves room for the possibility that she did the ‘coaxing’ herself because marrying the king came with great power and unlimited opportunities. Kafuti came from the Lualaba with a clear vision and mission as can be attested to by her praises – her vision was to rule.

Kabwebwe and Chinyanta were not the last to be hypnotised by Kafuti’s charm and beauty. She even caught David Livingstone’s eye! When Livingstone visited the Lunda Kingdom of Kazembe in 1867, he remarked about Muonga ‘Sunkutu’, Mwata Kazembe VIII’s wife that “She was a fine, tall, good-featured lady” and on another occasion that “she has European features, but light-brown complexion.”³ Yet again on 5th June 1868 Livingstone would spend his precious time and ink in

¹ Jacques Chileya Chiwale, Royal Praises and Praise Names of the Lunda Kazembe of Northern Rhodesia: Their Meaning and Historical Background, *Rhodes-Livingstone Communication* No., 25, (Lusaka: Rhode-Livingstone Institute. 1962), p.55 and Chinyanta, Munona and Chileya J. Chiwale. Mutomboko Ceremony and the Lunda-Kazembe Dynasty. (Lusaka: Kenneth Kaunda Foundation, 1989), p.10

² Chiwale, “Royal Praises,” p. 55 and Chinyanta, Mutomboko Ceremony, p. 10.

³Horace Waller(ed.). *Livingstone’s Last Journals*, vols. 1& 2. (London: John Murray, 1874), p. 201.

describing Kafuti: “she has a pleasant European countenance, clean light-brown skin, and a merry laugh, and would be admired anywhere.”⁴ Kafuti was a dame to kill for because Livingstone chillingly remarked that Sunkutu was strict in punishing infidelity because “He is probably afraid of his own beautiful queen should the law be relaxed.”⁵

Livingstone also provides more information that the marriage between Sunkutu and Kafuti was mired in controversy: assuming Muhamad who had lived at Kazembe’s capital for many years was correct, Sunkutu actually poisoned Chinyanta, probably with the help of Kafuti, and that Sunkutu certainly had to kill Kafuti’s mother “that she might be no obstacle to him in securing her daughter [Kafuti].”⁶ Thus Kafuti was a beautiful and dangerous woman whom the Arabs even feared and evidence shows that the queen Livingstone met was Kafuti because he mentioned her as “the Queen Moäri [Mwadi]or Ngombé or Kifuta [Kafuti].”⁷

After killing or ‘the death of Chinyanta’ it is clear that Kafuti conspired with Muonga Sunkutu to outwit Lukwesa Mpanga, Mwata Kazembe VII in usurping the throne and becoming Sunkutu’s *Mwadi*. It is narrated that Sunkutu usurped the throne when Lukwesa Mpanga was undergoing circumcision for it was customary that any successor to the throne be circumcised. Muonga Sunkutu became Mwata Kazembe VIII and his praise says it all:

Ami ‘Sunkutu’ kabanda.
Kalobwe muntabangula bwanga,
Ye ukubangula mutwe wabukala.⁸
This means

I am the lion that is found in the wild,
someone who is not afraid of being bewitched,
the lion that first eats the head of the penis of its prey.

Muonga, Mwata Kazembe VIII took on the nickname ‘Sunkutu’ or lion and his reference to eating the head of the penis first or foreskin may have been meant to taunt his rival, Lukwesa who was undergoing circumcision and had fled to the bush (Mpanga) once Sunkutu usurped the throne. After spending six years on the run and having mustered an army and Tabwa allies, Lukwesa Mpanga marched against Muonga Sunkutu in 1868 and Sunkutu fled leaving Kafuti. Kafuti again conspired with Kafuti Chinkonkole who became Mwata Kazembe IX. They married at “a place called Futoluko on the Pembe Lagoon where Kafuti Chinkonkole had been hiding.”⁹ Once again, Mwadi

⁴ Waller(ed.). *Livingstone’s Last Journals*, p. 240.

⁵ Waller(ed.). *Livingstone’s Last Journals* p. 239.

⁶ Waller(ed.). *Livingstone’s Last Journals*, p. 220.

⁷ Waller(ed.). *Livingstone’s Last Journals*, p. 236.

⁸ Chinyanta, Mutomboko Ceremony, p. 65.

⁹ Chinyanta, Mutomboko Ceremony, p.10.

Kafuti had become the king maker! It was only after another four years, in 1872 that Lukwesa Mpanga defeated Chinkonkole and successfully reinstated himself as Mwata Kazembe VII. Kafuti, who had grown old finally became Lukwesa's *Mwadi* and her panegyric and appellation sum it all:

(a) *Nine Nakafwaya*

(b) *Cafwaya balume milongo*

Approximate English Version

(a) I am the 'lustful woman'

(b) Who desires to have a chain of husbands to herself.¹⁰

Lunda tradition further records that:

In spite of Nakafwaya's unfaithfulness to her husbands, the Lunda rulers regarded her as the greatest *Mwadi* the Lunda-Kazembe Kingdom has ever had. While she was held responsible at the time for the deaths of her husbands, she played a leading role in the preservation of the Lunda relics during those times of great scramble.

Though she was suspected of being responsible for the deaths of Lunda-Kazembe rulers, the accusation implied that she had a lascivious passion for royal sons, while at the same time expressing self-derision. When she misbehaved while she was still *Mwadi*, she was expelled but with great honour. When she died very soon after, her body was carried in the *Muselo* (hammock) or litter made of zebra-skin and the Lunda royal drums were beaten throughout the night and up to the graveyard. She is the only *Mwadi* who is buried in the graveyard of King's children (*Mumporokoso*). The palace fence was partly broken in accordance with Lunda customs from which the *Muselo*, in which her body was carried, was taken through. Kafuti Yamvwa 'Nakafwaya' is the only Lunda-Kazembe *Mwadi*, Queen, who had been accorded such high respect in Lunda Kazembe history. The following is the text of her *Nkumbu*, the special praise-songs which are beaten on the talking drum *Mondo*, in her honour to this day.

Luba Version:

*Mwishikulu Mumano wateka nongo, Zyeulukenipo mwine
Ntanda wafita, Mwana mukishi ulele mimpane ulu,
Ne kupanga ebenankala.*

¹⁰ Chiwale, "Royal Praises," pp. 55-57 or Chinyanta, Mutomboko Ceremony, pp.11-12.

*Mwana Chinyanta wakesa ku makesa,
Chinyanta wakesa ku Luualaba ngeya.*¹¹

Method: Orality and Lunda ‘Historiology’

In order to reconstruct Nakafwaya’s life history, this paper relied on oral traditions especially panegyric poetry. Jan Vansina defines panegyric poetry, as praises that are created to highlight the “exceptional virtues of the person who inspired the poem and is not composed for the purpose of recording history.”¹² The seemingly non-historical purpose of this type of poetry, however, comes only from the fact that they seem not to record ‘main stream history’ but they are a good source for writing life history because their narrative provides clues to personal feelings and ideas. This type of poetry “expresses better than any other the individual’s attitude towards life.”¹³ Furthermore, these Lunda oral traditions are not just a source but also an interpretation of the past. This fact about oral traditions’ potential to be source and hypotheses that needs testing, is what made Vansina to refer to them as ‘historiology’ or oral historiography.¹⁴ We examine these Lunda traditions for historical information in order to reconstruct Nakafwaya’s life history.

Eastern Lunda historiology or ‘oral’ historiography benefits not just from oral traditions but also from an imprint of the European innovation of writing. Writing about Nakafwaya, therefore, benefits greatly from this dual heritage. Her appellations have been passed down orally from generation to generation until the time when they were written down. Her existence and activities also coincided with European writers that wrote about her times. This is rare when reconstructing a precolonial life history.

By analyzing the *Mwadiship* in the history of the Lunda, we highlight the evolution of the role of the Mwadi in the history of the Lunda of Mwata Kazembe. The ascension of Kafuti to the throne definitely changed the role of the queen in relation to the power of the Mwata (King). Understanding the *Mwadiship*, then, from the origins to the times of Kafuti will give a glimpse in how women exploited power in a world dominated by male oligarchs; a time when men could sell their wives easily into slavery. For example, when David Livingstone visited the Lunda Kingdom during Nakafwaya’s time, an old Pérémbé whom Livingstone thought more than 100 years old sold his young wife but she was redeemed. Another subordinate chief, Kapika, sold his wife into slavery and no redemption was accepted on her behalf such that a frustrated Livingstone could only lament: “The slave-trader is a means of punishing the wives which these old fogies ought never to have had.”¹⁵

¹¹ Chiwale, “Royal Praises,” pp. 55-57 or Chinyanta, Mutomboko Ceremony, pp.11-12.

¹²Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology translated by H. M. Wright* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), p.149.

¹³ Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, p.151.

¹⁴ Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*. (Wisconsin: Wisconsin University Press, 1985), p. 196.

¹⁵ Waller(ed.). *Livingstone’s Last Journals*, p. 239.

Nakafwaya's times were dangerous times to be a woman and when we examine the evolution of the *Mwadiship* in those times, it becomes clear that it evolved within the limits set by Lunda patterns of organisation but also through Kafuti's "conscious and reflective attempt to deal with the problems" she faced.¹⁶ As Elizabeth Tonkin argues, oral tradition can be properly comprehended if "due account is taken of the social organization and language of the people concerned."¹⁷ This approach to Nakafwaya's Life history inverts a "world in which things happen to people to one in which people do things."¹⁸

The Evolution of the *Mwadiship*

The institutionalisation of female grandees at the Lunda court seems to have started after the reign of Ruweji. After the marriage of Chibinda Ilunga to Kamonga Lwaza in order to produce heirs to the throne, the Lunda established two positions for women at their court. The *Swan Murund* or *Swana Mulunda* became the symbolic mother of Lunda society and represented Ruweji while the *Rukonkeshi* or *Lukonkeshya* symbolised the queen mother who bore successors to the throne. According to Lunda tradition, these offices were created by Mwata Luseng, the son to Kamonga.¹⁹

For the Lunda of Mwata Kazembe, the first notable woman in their history was Kasongo. The Lunda kings trace their origins to Ruweji's younger brother Dyulu who had refused to recognise Ilunga's authority. Giacomo Macola disputes this assertion that Chinyanta was a member of Ruund royal family.²⁰ Whether Chinyanta was Luba or Lunda, the (re)incorporation of Chinyanta and his uncle Mwin Tibarak into Lunda society started with the capture of Kasongo by Mwata Yamvo Muteba. Kasongo was the queen or queen mother from whom the strength of Chinyanta's people came. After 'chieftainness' Kasongo was captured, Chinyanta was compelled to surrender to Muteba. Reference is not made to Kasongo as the wife to Mwin Tibarak who was their chief. Thus, referring to her as chief or mother of her people may have been in relation to her position in society.²¹

If Macola's assertion is right, that Chinyanta was Luba and only incorporated into Lunda society thereby delinking Chinyanta from the first Lunda Dispersal that had been caused by Ruweji's marriage to a Luba hunter; then the offices of the two female dignitaries at the Lunda court may have originated from the Luba. This would make Kasongo a *Ndalamba* (Luba queen mother with ritual role) and not a *Swan Murund* (Lunda symbolic mother of society) nor a *Rukonkesh* (Lunda queen

¹⁶ Robert Piercey *The Uses of the Past from Heidegger to Rorty: Doing Philosophy Historically*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.18.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Tonkin "Investigating Oral Tradition," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 27, No. 2(1986), p. 203.

¹⁸ Stefan Tanaka, *History Without Chronology*, (n.t: Lever Press, 2019), p.56.

¹⁹ Chiwale, "Royal Praises", p. 7.

²⁰ Giacomo Macola. *The Kingdom of Kazembe: History And Politics In North-Eastern Zambia And Katanga To 1950*. (London: Transaction Publishers, 2002), p.56

²¹ Chiwale, "Royal Praises", pp. 7-8.

mother).²² Kasongo's ritual, real and symbolic significance to Chinyanta's people, however, does not diminish since her capture turned Chinyanta into Mwata Yamvo's vassal.²³ The offices for women at the eastern Lunda court that evolved after the (re)incorporation were clearly mirroring Lunda structures. The instituting of these perpetual positions of power also meant the continuation of the *Rukonkesh* influence and power. Not only was the *Rukonkesh* a principal wife of the Mwata (Mwadi) at some point but at the death of her husband, she became the mother of the King. In this way, the *Rukonkesh* (former Mwadi) had access to power even after the death of the husband. This adaptation to changes in power must have ensured a less traumatic transition into widowhood and also oriented the new king into his new role easily. At times after the death of a King, the former Mwadi (*Rukonkesh*) even controlled their own fiefdoms and their residence was not limited to the main court. For example, as the Pombeiros moved from Mwata Yamvo to Kazembe, they "came to the farm of Muatahianvo's mother, Luconquessa; found there his Quilolo, named, after the country fashion, Muene Camatanga."²⁴ "Luconquessa" in this case was not at the court but had established herself elsewhere. The *Rukonkesh* was also able to exert direct influence on the reigning Mwata. Her influence was appreciated by the first Portuguese expedition to Mwata Kazembe in 1799 when the *Rukonkesh* stopped Mwata Kazembe Ilunga Lukwesa from exerting his wrath on Lieutenants Antonio Jose da Cruz and Jose Vicente Pereira Salema. It was recorded that the two officers:

went to the Cazembe's house, opened the compound-fence and passed in review the king's wives, saying to each other which was good, which each would choose, and so on. This coming to the Cazembe's ears, he was greatly offended at the insult, and moreover he referred to the Lieutenant having formerly paid court to one of his women when, being in the old palace, he had gone to fly a kite. He would have let the officer know the extent of his wrath, but he was prevented by his mother.²⁵

The influence of the *Rukonkesh* sometimes was destructive even for the Kazembe. They had to balance their love for their songs. The attempt by Kapaka, Mwata Kazembe Keleka's elder brother to usurp power implicated Keleka's mother. According to the Pombeiros, the commotion among Kazembe's people resulted from their fear of the impending coup. They recorded that:

When we reached the war-camp a great disturbance took possession of them (the Cazembe's people) for fear that the eldest brother of the Cazembe, named, after the land-fashion, Capaca, whom the deceased father, Cazembe Hunga,

²² Ndaywel è Nziem, "The political system of the Luba and Lunda: its emergence and expansion" in B.A. Ogot (ed.) *General History of Africa*, Vol. 5 (Paris: UNESCO, 1992), p. 599 and p.602.

²³ Chiwale, "Royal Praises, p.5.

²⁴ R.F.Burton. (ed. and trans.). *The Lands of Cazembe: Lacerda's Journey To Cazembe in 1798*. (London: John Murray, 1873), p.206.

²⁵ Burton, *The Lands of Cazembe*, p. 140.

had banished to the land called Cassange, was coming to take the State from Cazembe. On account of the treason that now prevailed amongst his people, the Cazembe proceeded to examine who was the instigator of the disturbance. Some threw the blame on to his mother, his mother accused some of the Quilolos, and the Cazembe banished to other lands his cousin Quibanba, chief Quilolo, and ordered his hands and ears to be cut. Other Quilolos he fined in goods, and anything else he chose to ask for.²⁶

Although Kapaka's coup attempt is not recorded clearly in Lunda oral traditions, the emphasis in oral tradition that "before his death Kazembe Lukwesa gave strict instructions that his son Keleka or Mayi, was to succeed him"²⁷ intimates that Keleka's ascension to the throne was not smooth because his mother and other officials wanted to go against the wish of Lukwesa. Lukwesa's wish was eventually carried out.

The setup of Kazembe's court when he welcomed visitors is also important to note. A comparison of this setup merits a commentary. The Pombeiros wrote:

The door of the chipango was open, and within the doorway sat the two principal wives of the Muata. On the left was the chief wife, who is styled Muaringombe, [Mwadi Ngombe] seated on an ottoman and wrapped in a large green cloth, having her arms, neck, and head adorned with stones of various colours, and on her head an ornament of scarlet feathers similar to that of the Cazembe, only smaller. The second wife, who bore the title of Intemena, was seated on a lion-skin spread on the ground, being dressed in a plain cloth without any ornaments. Behind these were more than four hundred females of various ages, all standing, and dressed in uhandas [nyandas], or waist-cloths reaching down to the knees. These formed the establishment of the chipango, or the seraglio as it may be called, being divided among the four principal wives, whose servants they were. Seated on a lion-skin laid on the ground to the left of the Cazembe, protected from the sun by two umbrellas, and dressed like the Muaringombe [Mwadi Ngombe], or chief wife, sat a young negress styled Nineamuana[Nyinamwana], mother of the Muane, or Muata, which title devolved on her on the death of the Cazembe's real mother, as being her next of kin. Behind her stood about two hundred negresses dressed in uhandas [nyandas], forming her state establishment.²⁸

²⁶ Burton, *The Lands of Cazembe*, p. 140 and p. 226.

²⁷ Kawambwa District Note Book, vol. 2. National Archives of Zambia.

²⁸ Gamitto, A.C.P. *King Kazembe and the Marave, Chewa, Bisa, Bemba, Lunda and other Peoples*. Vols. 1 & 2 trans. Ian Cunnison. (Lisboa: 1960.), pp. 254-55.

A similar description of the Lunda court was later reported by Monteiro and Gamitto thus:

The gate of the Chipango was open, and seated in it were the two principal wives of Kazembe. The first was seated to the right, sitting on a stool and mantled in a large green cloth; her arms, neck and forehead were ornamented with differently coloured beads, while on her head was an ornament of scarlet feathers like Kazembe's only smaller. The first wife is called Mwadi-Ngombe. The second wife, who was to the left sitting on a lion skin on the ground, was simply dressed in a cloth, without ornament; she was called Ntemena. Behind them stood more than four hundred wives of various ages dressed in Nyandas, all of them being the wives of Chipango, or harem, that being the meaning of the word these women are divided among the four great wives as servants. On Kazembe's left a young Negress sat on the ground protected from the sun by two umbrellas. She was dressed like the Mwadi-Ngombe. She has the title of Nyina-Mwana (mother of Mwane or Mwata) and behind her were standing two hundred Negresses dressed in Nyandas, and forming her retinue. This title became hers, by reason of close kinship, when the real mother of Kazembe died.²⁹

Although the two citations are very similar and Gamitto's record seemed to have been copied from the earlier records; what is significant is that the palace represented different factions jostling for power. Each wife represented different interests and the equating of the Mwadi Ngombe to the Mwata's mother represents the importance of the queen. It also indicates how the Rukonkeshi had evolved into the Mwadi and how the Mwadi was to evolve into the Nyina-Mwana. The position of Ntemena or second wife seemed to have been an added phenomenon with the other two wives having no title except that they were part of the King's harem. It should be noted that only the Mwata proclaimed his Mwadi or queen so the intrigues at the *Chipango* started among the wives. The ultimate success would culminate in having one's child born *paka mengá* (the royal papyrus mat) because only those born in the royal hut could succeed to the throne. Ensuring that her son succeeded to the throne would also guarantee a former Mwadi continued access to the Mwata's power as Nyina-Mwana.

Her Tumultuous Reign

In this section we give an abridged version of Lunda history between 1854 and 1890 from Giacomo Macola's political history of the Kingdom of Mwata Kazembe. We will then infuse this written history with information from written sources and oral traditions of the Lunda. At various times, information was collected from the Current Mwata, Mwata Kazembe XIX; Philip Manungo, headman-

²⁹ Gamitto, *King Kazembe*, p. 20.

Nakabamba village; Ponkeni Chungu-Prince Kazangambayo a Kaluunda; Kalandala Mwanamwilombe, commander of the Lunda armed forces and Mwata's chief adviser; Ruth Chinyanta who is Chieftainess Lukwesa; and Margaret Kanyembo Lukwesa who is Chieftainess Kanyembo. These varying sources helped us to extrapolate historical information from the traditions and thereby accord Mwadi Nakafwaya her right place in Lunda history.

As noted earlier, Mwadi Nakafwaya's historic role started with the reign of Chinyanta Munona, Mwata Kazembe VI. According to Macola, Chinyanta Munona's reign had an inauspicious beginning because of "the first clear instance of succession dispute."³⁰ Contrary to this assertion and as noted above, the Pombeiros noted that there was a succession dispute during Keleka's reign when his elder brother, Kapaka, with the help of his mother tried to usurp the throne. In Keleka's case we note that women could still influence the reins of power and this was expected because of the Kazembe's many wives. In Chinyanta Munona's case, it is worth noting that one of the claimant to the throne was Muonga Sunkutu. When Muonga's claim was dismissed, he returned to his fiefdom among the Chishinga.³¹

Eight years after Sunkutu's botched attempt to usurp power, Chinyanta Munona died and this time Sunkutu successfully usurped the throne with the help of Lunda aristocracy and most conspicuously, Mwadi Nakafwaya! It is recorded that the reason why the Lunda aristocracy responsible for choosing the king appealed to Sunkutu to take up the throne was because Lukwesa Mpanga had "behaved contemptuously in the circumcision lodge and threatened to liquidate most of them."³² The reason for this contemptuous behaviour and threat to kill the *Kilolos* (officials) was most likely because Lukwesa wanted to eliminate those he suspected to have participated in poisoning Chinyanta Munona and Mwadi Nakafwaya was among the conspirators. David Livingstone recorded that "Casembe [Muonga Sunkutu] poisoned his predecessor [Chinyanta Munona]: he certainly killed his wife's mother, a queen, that she might be no obstacle to him in securing her daughter."³³

Lukwesa fled and sought refuge with Nsama IV Chipili Chipiyoka and started creating alliances to strengthen his forces that would be instrumental in recovering his throne. Because of Sunkutu's usurpation of the throne, the Lunda still counted Lukwesa as the seventh Mwata.³⁴ Although some scholars count Lukwesa as the ninth Mwata, that is simply a disregard and oversimplification of Lunda ontology. In fact, Livingstone was right in counting Lukwesa first and noting that he was "still alive, but a fugitive at Nsama's [while] Muonga, the present ruler, drove Lékwisa away."³⁵ Sunkutu's attempt to hunt down Lukwesa was repulsed by the Tabwa even when

³⁰Macola. *The Kingdom of Kazembe*, p. 117.

³¹ Macola. *The Kingdom of Kazembe*, pp. 117-18.

³² Macola. *The Kingdom of Kazembe*, p. 139.

³³ Waller(ed.). *Livingstone's Last Journals*, p. 220.

³⁴ Chiwale, "Royal Praises", p. 123.

³⁵ Waller(ed.). *Livingstone's Last Journals*, p.235.

Sunkutu had solicited the help of Mpamari (Mohamed bin Saleh), the coastal trader. A direct Yeke challenge to Lunda control of its western periphery also started during Sunkutu's reign. Chinyanta had allowed his son in law, Msiri to venture westwards and settle on the peripheries of the kingdom. Msiri had married two of Chinyanta's daughters, Mukunto and Muswa Bantu but started nibbling at the Lunda Kingdom after the death of Chinyanta and Msiri's actions may as well have been inspired by the two daughters of the poisoned Chinyanta.

Sunkutu organised an army led by his nephews Lubabila and Shakadyata but Msiri's Yeke successfully repulsed this attack and killed Lubabila. Suspecting their long-time ally Mpamari of complicity with the Yeke, Mwadi Nakafwaya, and not Sunkutu³⁶, ordered an attack on the Arab traders in the Kingdom. To support this assertion that it was not Sunkutu but Mwadi Nakafwaya who ordered the attack, Livingstone can be cited as precisely recording that:

... they [Arabs] have a bad opinion of the Queen Moäri or Ngombé or Kifuta. The Garaganza people at Katanga killed a near relative of Casembe and herself, and when the event happened, Fungafunga, one of the Garaganza or Banyamwezi being near the spot, fled and came to the Mofwé: he continued his flight as soon as it was dark without saying anything to anyone, until he got north to Kabiuré. The queen and Casembe suspected Mpamari of complicity with the Banyamwezi, and believed that Fungafunga had communicated the news to him before fleeing farther. A tumult was made, Mpamari's eldest son was killed, and he was plundered of all his copper, ivory, and slaves: the queen loudly demanded his execution; but Casembe restrained his people as well as he was able, and it is for this injury that he now professes to be sorry. The queen only acted according to the principles of her people. "Mpamari killed my son, kill his son—himself."³⁷

From the above quotation, it becomes clear that Mwadi Nakafwaya played an important role. The affect aspects of history also become clear because Livingstone provides the emotions involved when Mwadi Nakafwaya decided to take action. The clear connection between political goals and Nakafwaya's feelings in the actions taken broadens our understanding of the conflict between the Lunda and the Arabs. The "subjective emotional stakes" of Mwadi Nakafwaya were high in the events that unfolded in the Kingdom.³⁸ Nakafwaya was distraught by the death of Lubabila and demanded the killing of Mpamari's son. Sunkutu's 'poverty' and wars: first with the Tabwa, then the Yeke, coastal traders and Tabwa again may have stemmed from his lack of legitimacy from the majority of

³⁶ Macola. *The Kingdom of Kazembe*, p.142.

³⁷ Waller(ed.). *Livingstone's Last Journals*, p. 237.

³⁸ Kathryn M. de Luna, "Affect and Society in Precolonial Africa" *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 2013, Vol. 46, No. 1 (2013): 124-25.

people in the kingdom. Sunkutu's brutality attests to his insecurities as Livingstone grimly noted on 27th December 1867 that:

This part was well stocked with people five years ago, but Casembe's severity in cropping ears and other mutilations, selling the children for slight offences, &c., made them all flee to neighbouring tribes; and now, if he sent all over the country, he could not collect a thousand men.³⁹

When foreign alliances proved too strong for Sunkutu, he fled Lunda and was eventually killed by Kumbakumba's (Mohamed ibn Masud el Wardi) Nyamwezi soldiers in Chama's territory. The period that followed proved Mwadi Nakafwaya's shrewdness. As Mwata Sunkutu was in flight, Mwadi Nakafwaya remained and eloped with Kafuti Chinkonkole who declared himself Kazembe IX. Lunda tradition records that "they married at a place called Futoluko on the Pembe Lagoon where Kafuti Chinkonkole had been hiding."⁴⁰ Again, Mwadi Nakafwaya was the King maker and her disapproval of Lukwesa was certain. In about 1872 or 1873 when Lukwesa was finally reinstated as Mwata Kazembe with the help of the Tabwa and coastal traders, Mwadi Nakafwaya became his queen. But Nakafwaya still 'misbehaved' and forced Lukwesa to expel her. The year of her death is not well known but Nakafwaya is said to have been the only Mwadi to have died before his Mwata, that is, Lukwesa but did she? Lukwesa Mpanga is said to have died in about 1886 but in October 1890, "the most prominent escapee among a group of Lunda Prisoners who had fled Bunkeya is said to have been Nakafwaya who had been captured by Yeke and taken as spouse by Msiri".⁴¹ Furthermore, Dugald Campbell also claimed to have seen Nakafwaya noting that the "Last time I saw her she must have been well over a hundred years old."⁴²

On her death, Nakafwaya became the only queen to be accorded the most respect in Lunda history. Chiwale noted that:

When she [Nakafwaya] died very soon after, her body was carried in the *Muselo* (hammock) or litter made of zebra-skin and the Lunda royal drums were beaten throughout the night and up to the graveyard. She is the only *Mwadi* who is buried in the graveyard of King's children (*Mumporokoso*). The palace fence was partly broken in accordance with Lunda customs from which the *Muselo*, in which her body was carried, was taken through.⁴³

³⁹ Waller(ed.). *Livingstone's Last Journals*, p.204.

⁴⁰ Chiwale, "Royal Praises," p.10.

⁴¹ Macola. *The Kingdom of Kazembe*, see footnote on p.155.

⁴² Dugald Campbell. *In The Heart of Bantuland: A Record of Twenty-Nine Years' Pioneering In Central Africa Among The Bantu Peoples, With A Description Of Their Habits, Customs, Secret Societies and Languages*. (London: Seeley, Service & co. Ltd., 1922), p. 166.

⁴³ Chiwale, "Royal Praises", p. 11.

Her influence went beyond the grave because not only did Chishishila, practitioner of Buyembe or Kasanshi which was a secret guild for black magic, believe in the ritual power of Nakafwaya and dug up her grave, stripping her body;⁴⁴ but from her death, the institution of Mwadiship became limited. Never again could the Lunda allow a queen to have so much power over the succession of a new Mwata. The Mwadiship became limited to the life of the Mwata. But the Lunda also created the position of Nakafwaya as an adviser to the Mwata thereby giving women an opportunity to speak into Lunda affairs.

Legacy: Polyandrists Or Suffragettes?

In discussing polyandrous African queens, Campbell wrote:

Among the Wemba and tribes in Northern Rhodesia it is only permitted to the Inamfumu, or “mother of kings,” who can choose any man that takes her fancy; she also chooses her own consort after the consummation of puberty ceremony, leads him to the royal hut, and if no children result, can put him away and choose another, and yet others. ...The third of the trio of polyandrous queens was Ina-Kafwaya of Kazembe’s Lunda people in North-East Rhodesia. She was the leading lady in the Lunda country along the Luapula River, and a photo of her appears in Dr. Livingstone’s Last Journals. Last time I saw her she must have been well over a hundred years old. Nya-Katolo, queen of the Ba-Luena of Portuguese Angola, Mahanga, Msidi’s handsome Zenobia of Katanga, and Ina-Kafwaya, queen of the Eastern Lunda tribe of North-East Rhodesia, were certainly from every point of view three of the most remarkable women I have seen or heard of in Central Africa. Their names are immortalised in scores of songs of love and war, and they are not likely to sink into historic oblivion for another fifty years or more.⁴⁵

Nya-Katolo, Mahanga and Na-Kafwaya were powerful women that can still intrigue historians. Their ability to reassert and redefine what women could do was remarkable for their times. How could a woman flirt with power in a man’s world? The political shrewdness of Nakafwaya can be deduced from her panegyric. When Nakafwaya praised herself or when she is praised on the talking drum, it becomes clear that her actions were intentional and mostly achieved their objective. Nakafwaya utilised her knowledge of the ritual foundation of Kingship among the Lunda and turned herself into a king maker. The mentioning of “*Mwishikulu Mumano wateka nongo*,” refers both to the marriage pot and territorial control. Historians should not dismiss the power of ritual to precolonial peoples understanding of their reality because kings were legitimised and are still legitimised by ritual.

⁴⁴ Campbell. *In The Heart of Bantuland*, pp.108-109.

⁴⁵ Campbell. *In The Heart of Bantuland*, pp. 163-66.

For example, in *Nachituti's Gift*, David Gordon writes about story of a doll involving Nkuba leaving the Bemba and how the doll reappears in the stories dealing with the daughters of Matanda and Kaponto.⁴⁶ To prove that the 'doll' was real, one notes from Lovett Verney Cameron's observation that "Girls without children often make dolls of a calabash ornamented with beads, and lash it to the back in the same manner as infants are usually carried in their country."⁴⁷ Oral narratives can refer to historical actualities or realities. It is not surprising that Nakafwaya understood and manipulated the importance of marriage ritual to retain her hold on successive Lunda Kings. One important element on the Luapula that legitimised a leader after succession (and which Nakafwaya consciously exploited) was the *Nongo*. Ian Cunnison noted that:

In village ritual there are two main elements which are made effective by a third. The first is the *nshipa*, which I do not translate; the second is the *lukunku* or *musashi*, the calabash; and the third is the **nongo**, the marriage pot of the headman's chief wife, which is used for purification after intercourse. When a man succeeds to the head-manship this pot becomes the **nongo yamushi**, the village pot. Together these things are believed to protect the village inhabitants from mystical dangers on the occasion of a death or the birth of a still-born child within the village, or if a member of the village kills or finds dead in the bush a man, lion, leopard, or striped weasel. They are believed to keep wild animals and sorcerers out of the village and to attract and retain inhabitants. **Nongo**, the word for 'village pot', is connected with the idea of chieftainship of any rank. One of the phrases meaning 'to open up a piece of country' is *kuteke nongo mu calo*, literally 'to put the pot on the fire in the country'. This same word *kuteka* means both 'to put a pot on the fire' and 'to rule'. This pot makes the *nshipa* and calabash effective when the headman and his wife wash in it after ritual intercourse, and it is their regular washing in it which maintains these elements in an effective state. [My emphasis in bold]⁴⁸

In this case, *Mwishikulu mumano wateka nongo* refers to how Nakafwaya shrewdly ruled the kingdom of Mwata Kazembe or how Nakafwaya consciously exploited her ritual significance to remain relevant to the kingship. A careful reading of Nakafwaya's praise on the talking drum therefore, demonstrates the historicity of panegyric and shed light on the most tumultuous era of Lunda history. The intrigues at the eastern Lunda court in last half of the 19th century cannot be understood without Nakafwaya. The events involving the Lunda of Mwata Kazembe that had regional

⁴⁶ Gordon, M. David. *Nachituti's Gift: Economy, Society and Environment in Central Africa*. (Wisconsin: Wisconsin University Press, 2006), p. 44.

⁴⁷ Cameron, Verney Lovett. *Across Africa*. (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1877), pp.195-96.

⁴⁸ Ian Cunnison "Headmanship and the Ritual of Luapula Villages." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Jan., 1956), pp. 5-6.

implications during that time were either initiated by Nakafwaya or involved Nakafwaya. The materialistic emphasis on precolonial trade or economy to account for the rise and fall of the Lunda Kingdom of Mwata Kazembe, and even in other precolonial kingdoms, need reorientation to include the emotive aspects of the precolonial past.

From the European travellers who visited the Lunda of Mwata Kazembe, it is clear that ritual pervaded Lunda reality. The foundation of African kingship or the 'kümü' is ritualistic. Nakafwaya's narrative demonstrates the link between ritual knowledge and power and also demonstrates that in different aspects of -kümü, even in Nakafwaya's manipulation of Kingship, there was:

an association between emotively powerful feelings of honor, fame, and respect on the one hand and authority over communities on the other. The meaning of *-kümü surely invites such regional histories of how ritual authority and material wealth came to serve as the instrumental underpinnings of leaders' power in the particular historical experiences of Proto-West Bantu and Proto-East Bantu speakers and the descendants. But it also invites a history of the sentiment of honor, the status of fame, and the feeling of respect within the context of changes in qualities that attracted, inspired, and were made possible by such feeling and status: material generosity (wealth), age/pedigree (status in kin group) or skill/knowledge (ritual or otherwise).⁴⁹

The legacy of Nakafwaya among the Lunda is clear. The perpetual succession to the title of Nakafwaya attests to her legacy. When the Mwata tours his kingdom, he has to rest at a hill between Kabalenge and Ntumbachushi named Nakafwaya. This was a place also where Nakafwaya is believed to have had her cassava field. Her inspiration to other women during her time is difficult to measure but the writings of Campbell cited earlier indicate that women were inspired by 'great' women in their times to stand up to their oppressors. Nakafwaya's exploits outlived her Mwatas.

What can we consider about the precolonial women with power, was it their polyandrous activities or their political activities? Did they represent the role of women in their society like modern suffragettes so we can regard them part of a precolonial women's movement? Crawford remarked about Mushidi's 'exceptional' wife who "dared to preach in a dark, hinting way the far-off dream of women's rights" and when Mushidi got wind of her preaching "With regrettable vulgarity, called the propagandist "a goat" for such silly speech. "Yea, my lord," Mrs. Amazon pouted," even the goats are a model marriage, for the female has as good a pair of horns as the Billy."⁵⁰ The question of equality between men and women even in precolonial society was raised even from the palace courts.

⁴⁹ De Luna, "Affect and Society in Precolonial Africa", p.138.

⁵⁰ Daniel, Crawford. *Thinking Black 22 Years Without A Break In The Long Grass Of Central Africa*, (London: Morgan and Scott Ltd.,1913), pp. 231-36.

The precolonial women were emboldened by the exploits of their queens and by the women organisations they inspired to create. Crawford called Mushidi's wife "A real Suffragette" and noted that she was a "member of a woman's secret society that boasts of big deeds in days gone by."⁵¹ Crawford further noted that Nachituti inspired this secret female "freemasonry" which was called *Budindu*. The exploits of powerful females "stiffened the back of her sex, and really conduced to the amelioration of her lot as the degraded chattel of her black partner... her hint being that what man has done, woman can and will do."⁵²

What is clear about Nakafwaya's life history is that it is etched into Lunda historical memory because her exploits can allow historians to understand Lunda history well. Nakafwaya's life history demonstrates that "Our life history belongs to general history" and "our memory truly rests on lived history."⁵³ Lunda royal praises or panegyrics record a lived past and can be used to shed more light on Lunda history. The history of Lunda of Mwata Kazembe is clearly incomplete without the life histories of powerful women like Nakafwaya.

Conclusion

Flirting with Power? This story of Nakafwaya demonstrates that women used soft power to change the development of their Kingdoms. Although Nakafwaya was not the Mwata, she was able, through attraction and persuasion (not just coercion) to prove a powerful force at the Mwata's court. Most Zambian precolonial narratives recognise women as the founding figures of their ethnic groups yet men have dominated their histories. The role of women in precolonial society "vacillated between an assert and a liability."⁵⁴ Did women lose their power completely or were they powerless in precolonial time? The story of Nakafwaya shows that this was not the case because women could influence the decisions that men in power made. The historians' obsession with war generals like the Mwata relegated women in Zambian history to the background because most likely "non-violence is not history."⁵⁵ Hard power dominates precolonial historiography, which makes it largely androcentric. Therefore, this article demonstrated that the role of Nakafwaya in the history of Mwata Kazembe's Kingdom from the 1850s to the 1900s should be recognised in order to comprehend the dynamics of power in Mwata Kazembe's Kingdom.

⁵¹ Crawford, *Thinking Black*, pp.231-36.

⁵² Crawford, *Thinking Black*, pp.231-36.

⁵³ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, translated by Francis J. Ditter, Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter (London: Harper Colophon Books, n.d.), p.57.

⁵⁴ Foster Sakala, Matildah Mboma and Meldad Chama. *When Destiny Calls: Princess Inonge Mutukwa Wina's Fight for Gender Equality* (Ndola: Mission Press, 2022), p. 1.

⁵⁵ Humphrey J. Fisher, *Slavery in the History of Muslim Black Africa*. (London: Hurst and Co., 2001), p. 4.

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Meldad L. Chama is a lecturer in History at Kwame Nkrumah University, Kabwe, Zambia.

His research interests are in Minority and ethnic studies, pre-colonial historiography, cultural heritage studies, and history and collective memory. His publications include an article in the *Zambia Social Science Journal* titled “A Zambian Requiem: KK’s Collective Memory in History” and a book titled *When Destiny Calls: Princess Inonge Mutukwa Wina’s Fight for Gender Equality*. Chama is presently doing research on precolonial Mweru-Tanganyika and Tanganyika-Malawi corridors.



Terry Kanyembo is Acting Head of Social Science Department at Muwang’uni

Secondary School in Mansa, Zambia. Kanyembo’s research interests include traditional power systems, women in precolonial society, and social and cultural history. His recent Master’s degree research was on the political and socio-economic significance of Mutomboko Ceremony of the Lunda of Mwata Kazembe in Zambia.