

Kufuluhela—Return the Land of Plenty to Barotseland

by Sibimbi Maibiba



As Malozi we have much to be thankful for. Most people around the world have lost touch with nature and their place in it but we have maintained that sacred balance of coordinating our daily lives with the natural order of things in the heavens up to this moment. What bring us most in balance with the order of the universe are our ceremonies Kuomboka and Kufuluhela, not just two but six times each year. They have all been described as

many things but I like to call them mass migration spectacles—a floating symphonic exodus—performances of spiritual renewal of faith in the role of the Litungaship both male and females, in the entire Barotseland Kingdom north and south, east and west, and centre of the flood plain. Bringing a balance to our lives at home and abroad regardless of our other faiths and beliefs, these ceremonies are what make us Malozi. However, today our most sacred rites of passage are threatened to never belong to us again, if we do not stand up and claim them as the rightful owners.

These ceremonies are all born out of ecological necessity and over time have become grand texts, myths and unifying performance practices for us, the MaLozi of southern Africa. Kuomboka and Kufuluhela as cultural practices explored by Mutumba Mainga in *A History of Lozi Religion* (1972) and Likando Kalaluka in *Kuomboka: A Living Traditional Culture among the Malozi people of Zambia* (1979). These works covered the cosmology, cultural history and ecology as well as explored the political and economic basis of Kuomboka and Kufuluhela.

There are three different Kuomboka and Kufuluhela ceremonies in separate locations, each with their own royal barges, xylophone orchestras and separate pageantry at Lealui, Nalolo and Libonda. These six grand migrations and many other ceremonies in Barotseland give us an enormous repository of cultural memory and places our belief system at the forefront at all times as the central unifying grand narrative for our people.

Kuomboka and all of its cultural properties—music, dance, masquerade and much more—has ancient Nilotic roots and we hear them spoken of in the oral epics of the praise singers to the Litunga, Litunga-la Mboela and Mboanjikana. They tell us how over time they have become ceremonies of cultural unity and opportunities for collective consciousness where we "wade in the water" with our King, Queen and Princess Regents as they lead us to higher ground physically and spiritually and then bring us back—down to the land of plenty.

Kuomboka and Kufuluhela are our symbolic systems of democratic governance where every individual paddler represents a section of the people in the Nalikwanda and together, they represent the whole nation of Barotseland. We are the nation in this symbolic system. The Litunga is the custodian of the nation and the current one, Edwin Lubosi Imwiko, has violated many of the sacred oaths protecting the nation and calls for his removal must continue to ring loud and clear for without this symbolic system in action, we cease to exist. Therefore, it is with great dismay to hear that our most recent Nalikwanda and

perhaps this Kifuluhela today is paddled by outsiders. Our sacred secret from most ancient times revealed and corrupted by those who only wish to destroy us. If there is one thing that will go down in history as the most heinous of all crimes against the Barotse nation, this may be the one. Your Majesty, return us to the land of Plenty because it does not belong to any one person but the people of Barotseland.