

Hi Martina,

I think this picture communicates a message which needs explanation. This gentleman is called Kabindi. He is a member of the Balongo Cultural Group from Bukholi, Bugiri district in Eastern Uganda.

Kabindi means a small pipe, which I guess is a name he got because he smokes the pipe and most of the time one finds this gentleman smoking a pipe. There is a traditional practice which made him to smoke the pipe. He is a believer in Ugandan spirit manifestation as a way of healing etc. People who practice this often smoke the pipe to show their role in this institution.

Even when you invite them to come and invoke the spirits of your family, they bring some herbs and smoke around to make the process less tiresome, as the spirits will manifest quickly.

It takes a number of days(five - eight or more) to go through the process of cleansing a family from curses and other afflictions metted on the family by their "Emizimu" or "Emisambwa" - spirits if they are disgrantled. The "Baswezi" - priests of the traditionalists believe that at times there is a hidden curse which haunts a family due to bad behaviour of a member of the family. For example if one of the ancestors of a family killed an innocent person, the spirit of that person can haunt all generations that follow until the day when the spirits are invoked to come so that they can appease them. The spirits can show their anger by making members of the family to be lame, blind, deaf and all other sorts of infirmities. Members of the family can stay barren, fail to marry, be importent and other such problems. When these happen repeatedly in the family, then members of the family meet and prepare to invite these " Basamize" - priests.

When the "Basamize" - priests like Kabindi are invited, they bring drums and play "Enswenzi" music and dance as they invoke the spirits to come and talk to the members of the family. One or more members of the family get possessed and in this state, they tell the members of the family what the spirits demand from the family.

Often, the spirits demand chicken, goats, sheep, cows, clothes and other items plus construction of shrines somewhere as the spirits decide.

The entire ceremony can last five to eight days as noted earlier but until one member from the family gets possessed, the whole things is counted imcomplete. If no member of the family gets possessed at all, then the whole ceremony has failed. the family can invite another team of priests.

On Kabindi's head, there is a headgear, made from barkcloth and cowrie shells. This is a show of high rank in the priesthood and this position goes with certain roles in the entire institution.

As you can see, Kabindi has a white shirt, a necktie and coat on. His message is that he has ebraced the foriegn civilization as expressed in the necktie and coat - that is, to be smart. On the

other hand, he has a barkcloth gown which is the wear associated to his priesthood rank. The gown has cowrie shells on it, to make it special enough for the special significance in society.

One time I wrote about the wedding we witnessed in Gulu, where traditional rituals were performed right inside the catholic church, with women sprinkling libations on the bride as they entered the church. This is another instance when two civilizations manifest in the heart of an African. Here, Kabindi had led the Balongo (Twins) cultural group to participate in the Senator cultural Festival and he thought the only way to show that he was deeply rooted in the Ugandan culture was through dressing. Many people looked him and regarded him to be funny.

In Uganda, there is a section of people who believe in spirit mediums but have been affected by bad practices of some people who engage in human sacrifice. The churches and mosques are the places where Ugandans belief system has been gradually changed but despite this some still look back and end up believing in the Church or Mosque gods as well as the spirits. Which way Kabindi? Why? We can add on.

Best,

James

