

Perpetuating Lineage

Nancy K. Nteere¹

¹ Galebitra Kenya, Nairobi, Kenya

The two huts emerge from the horizon. The bigger hut, thatched with thick dry grass and embalmed with cow dung mixed with mud belongs to the husband and the smaller one thatched with a thin layer of grass and embalmed with red clay to her iweto, I conclude. She speaks in Swahili, “nyinyi ndiyo wageni” (Are you the visitors), we affirm and after brief introductions she directs us to the bigger hut, her husband's hut. Kavisu, an elderly woman in her mid 50's with a fading beauty and a sizeable figure, is lazing about in the hut waiting for her wife to warm her water ready for her day's bath. Kavisu is a woman-husband. Kavisu's choice of taking up an iweto (taking on a younger woman to bear children) was out of obligation and the need for continuity of the family's name. This tradition has been in existence since the 1920's. Kavisu's husband, Dedan Mutisya died before they could get children together, Dedan's family had a lot of wealth and they did not want to see the wealth go to waste, they suggested Kavisu takes up an iweto, who would give her a son to inherit Dedan's and Kavisu's wealth. As is the culture, Kavisu proposed to Mwikali, she agreed, Kavisu paid her bride price which consisted of three goats, a cow and a hive full of bees. Kavisu had to construct a hut for Mwikali as culture does not allow them to stay in one hut. In this research I unearthed a culture which is slowly left forgotten but still exists among the Kamba tribe of Kenya, who know what it stands for.