Ebika by’Abaganda
(The Baganda Clan System)
A PRIMER

By Charles Mukasa, Ph.D.
Who are the Baganda?

1. The **Baganda** (single: **Muganda**) are the natives of the kingdom of Buganda
2. There is an estimated 7 million Baganda; over 50% are aged 16 years or below
3. An estimated 150,000 to 200,000 (less than 3%) live in Diaspora (outside the kingdom)
4. The Buganda nation was formed by many groups (chiefdoms, sub-kingdoms, etc.) that adopted common cultural practices (*obuwangwa n’obulombolombo*), including:
   - Loyalty to the **Kabaka** (king), the throne (**Nnamulondo**) and clans (**ebika**)
   - The Luganda language
   - National taboos (**emizizo gya Baganda**)
   - Baganda clan identity and mandatory cross-clan inter-marriages
   - Burial and funeral rites (e.g., **okutambuza olumbe**, **okwaabya olumbe**) and succession (**okusika**) practices
   - Marriage practices (e.g., **kwogereza**, **kwanjula**, **kukyaalira nsiko**, **embaga**, etc.)
   - Spiritual and religious practices (**Katonda** – one God, **balubaale** – angels, **okusamira** - worship, **emizimu** - spirits, etc.)
   - Theatre and entertainment (e.g., **Amazina Amaganda**, **Engero za Baganda**, **Ebitontome**, **Ebikoco**, **Enyimba enganda**, **Ekigwo Gombya**, etc.)
5. The Buganda nation grew through birth and assimilation of others who are willing to adopt Baganda cultural practices
   - Millions of Baganda have given their lives fighting to preserve their culture
6. Baganda are exceptionally friendly to outsiders who respect their Kabaka and culture; however, Baganda can be persistent, brave and even violent in defense of their kingdom
   - Baganda fought for centuries to create the biggest and most resilient kingdom nation in Africa today
   - Baganda formed the core of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) guerrilla force that created the current (2011) Uganda regime, on agreement that Buganda self-determination (Federo) would be restored
   - In 2009 Baganda youths gallantly demonstrated Buganda’s anger when the NRM government barred the Kabaka from touring his Bugerere county – over 50 were murdered or maimed by Uganda police and army
Who is a Muganda?

- Normally, one becomes a Muganda by birth to a father who is a Muganda.
- In the past people became Baganda through naturalization (e.g., when a new clan or community joined the Buganda kingdom).
- A Muganda must belong to a Baganda clan (ekika).
- A Muganda must not belong to the same clan as his or her mother.
- A Muganda has a national responsibility to be loyal to Namulondo and all fellow Baganda (obwa Sseruganda).
- A Muganda has responsibility to their own clan and their mother’s clan (Ebukojja)
  - Support and honor your clan members (Taata - father, Muganda wange – same sex members, Mwanyinaze – opposite sex members, Ssenga – paternal aunt, Taata omuto – paternal uncle).
  - Respect and love your mother’s clan members (Maama – female members, Kojja – male members).
- A child of a Muganda woman and non-Muganda father is called Omujjwa (plural: Bajjwa), not a Muganda.
  - Although the practice is not official, some Bajjwa fully adopt Baganda cultural practices and get lovingly absorbed in one of the Baganda clans, most commonly the mother’s clan.
Who is a Muganda, again?
What is Buganda?

The Kingdom of Buganda is the largest and economically strongest kingdom on the African continent. At over 1,000 years, it is also one of the oldest. Buganda is divided into 18 counties called massaza (singular: ssaza). However, since May 1966, Buganda is ruled under Ugandan occupation constitutions that the people of Buganda rejected and publically protested.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>LAND AREA (MILES²)</th>
<th>POPULATION (2010)¹</th>
<th>Annual GDP (2010)¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buganda</td>
<td>19,600²</td>
<td>7.0M</td>
<td>$10B³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Uganda $17B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>8,370</td>
<td>7.8M</td>
<td>$213B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>4,400</td>
<td>2.7M</td>
<td>14B</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>4,100</td>
<td>4.2M</td>
<td>$39B</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>10,170</td>
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<td>$6B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>240⁴</td>
<td>5.0M</td>
<td>$223B</td>
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<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>16,100</td>
<td>7.9M</td>
<td>$523B</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>14,400</td>
<td>23.1M</td>
<td>$431B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹SOURCE: Wikipedia. ²In 1966 Uganda government stole 10,000 miles² of Buganda native lands and forests. ³Estimated 60% of Uganda’s $17B GDP. ⁴Kabaka institution owns 350 miles⁴ but Uganda selective laws limit its use and enable illegal occupation of 10,000 miles² of Baganda native lands.
What is a clan?

www.Wikipedia.com:

“A clan is a group of people united by actual or perceived kinship and descent. Even if lineage details are unknown, clan members may be organized around a founding member or apical ancestor.”
What are Baganda clans?

1. Baganda clans (*ebika*; singular: *ekika*) organize their members around their founders and founders’ hereditary descendants.
2. Baganda are a patrilineal society and all children, except certain members of the royal family, belong to the clan of the father.
3. Each clan has a totem (*omuziro*) and a minor totem (*akabbiro*). Most totems are animals or plants but there are few exceptions.
5. Between 1200 and 1400 AD, Kabaka Kintu, the first in the reigning Abalasangeye dynasty, added 13 new clans to Buganda and solidified the foundation for the Baganda’s current clan based cultural practices (*Obuwangwa n’obulombolombo*).
7. Since Kabaka Kimera 25 new clans have been added through naturalization and splits in existing clans. The reigning Kabaka authorizes new clans.
How do Baganda clans and Kabaka relate?

- Clan leaders and elders are collectively called *Abataka* (singular: *omutaka*).
- The Kabaka is the head of all clan elders (*Ssabataka*).
- Descendants of princes belong to the *Balangira* clan; the Kabaka appoints the leader of the *Balangira* clan (*Ssabalangira*).
- Certain designated clan leaders, led by *Mugema* of the *Nkima* clan, finally determine who the next Kabaka will be.
- Clan leaders advise the Kabaka on matters relating to customs and cultural norms.
- The Kabaka is the final arbiter in internal clan disputes – clan cases are formally argued in a special cultural court called *Embuga ya Kisekwa*.
- The Kabaka does not belong to a clan, the same way other Baganda do:
  - He inherits the office of Kabaka from his predecessor but not a clan lineage.
  - He is limited by the taboos (*okuzira*) of his mother’s clan (e.g., cannot marry from his mother’s clan – which is a guarantee that all clans have a chance to produce a Kabaka).
  - He relates to his mother’s clan members as maternal parents (*Bukojja*).
- From time to time clan members visit and have direct discussions with the Kabaka during the ceremony of *okulanya e mbuga*. 
How do clans connect Baganda to Kabaka?

- Ssabasajja Kabaka
  - Kika or Kasolya (Clan)
    - Ssiga
      - Mutuba
        - Lunyiriri (Blood line)
          - Lugya (Compound)
            - Nju or Maka (House)
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54 clans

Range from 3 to 50 in a clan

Can exceed 100 in one Ssiga

Can exceed 100 in one Mutuba

Can exceed 100 in one Lunyiriri

Can exceed 100 in one Lugya

7 million Muganda
How important are clans to Baganda?

• Every Muganda is defined by his or her clan – without clans Baganda lose identity
• Clans are the glue that protect Buganda from disintegration during major national crises. Examples of such crises include:
  – Religious wars that were promoted by colonialists in the late 1880’s
  – When Milton Obote and Idi Amin forced the Kabaka into exile on May 24, 1966
  – Throughout the Uganda military occupation and persecution of Baganda since 1966
  – When there were attempts to stop the coronation of Muwenda Mutebi as Kabaka of Buganda
  – Current efforts to weaken the Buganda nation from within and endanger Namulondo
• Nearly all Baganda customs and cultural practices are based on the clans – Examples:
  – Baganda names are based on clans (e.g., Mubiru is Mamba clan and Nassali is Nkima clan)
  – Designated clan leaders (e.g., Mugema of Nkima clan) decide who becomes the new Kabaka
  – Intermarriage within a clan is incest and taboo
• Clans stabilize and secure the Kabaka institution – Examples:
  – The Kabaka does not belong to one clan
  – The Kabaka associates with the clan of his mother and, since he cannot marry from it, each clan has a chance to have a Kabaka as their Mujjwa, one of many reasons he is so loved.
  – Mandatory intermarriage across clans guarantees each clan a chance to bear the next Kabaka
• Clans are credited with the legendary Baganda ingenuity and friendliness
  – Mandatory clan intermarriages enlarge gene pool and minimize genetic defects and diseases
• Buganda customs and cultural practices might not have survived colonialism and the numerous political crises since 1966 without clans and the Abataka
Challenges to Baganda Clans

1. Hostile political and economic environments in Buganda
   - Baganda institutions, including clans are under attack by the occupation since 1966
   - Baganda are much poorer and easier to corrupt in 2011 than in 1966
   - Some of the Bataka are facing outright poverty

2. A well funded campaign to Ugandanize, distort and dilute Buganda culture and institutions

3. How to respond to the social-economic changes since 1966
   - How to better recognize women educational and business advancement within the clan structures
   - 51% Baganda are women and have changing expectations for “equality”
   - Over 50% of Buganda land is controlled by foreigners
   - 50 – 60% of Baganda have no traditional farming and craftsman skills (they are children below 18 years)
   - Over 20% of Baganda under 18 years are orphans

4. Large numbers of Bajjwa have no other cultural identity except as Baganda

5. Many Baganda can’t prove their identity due to wars, poverty, AIDS deaths, etc.

6. How to align with universal human rights on identity for some Bajjwa, orphans, etc., who could be in permanent identity limbo today

7. How to revive and modernize the practice of registering Baganda across all clans (started around 1920 and mostly abandoned since 1970; the Magunda ssiga in the Ffumbe clan is an exception - they have a computerized register)
To learn more...

- [www.buganda.com](http://www.buganda.com)
- [www.buganda.or.ug](http://www.buganda.or.ug)
- [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)
- [www.ggwanga.co.ug](http://www.ggwanga.co.ug)
- [www.kasubitombs.org](http://www.kasubitombs.org)
- [www.luganda.com](http://www.luganda.com)
- [www.ubos.org](http://www.ubos.org)
- Contact “Ofiisi y’Abakulu be Bika bya Baganda” at Bulange, Mmengo, Buganda (Uganda)