

Part I: Why Envy Buganda's Prominence?

By Fr. Lawrence Kanyike

The early British explorers and very well-traveled men, Speke and Stanley, found Buganda with a peaceful, well-ordered society, dominated by a clan system united under their Kabaka, something similar to their home country, England. In comparison to the surrounding people, they described Buganda as an Island of civilization surrounded by hostile tribes. It is this uniqueness that made it difficult for the British to convince Buganda that it should be part of the new country now called Uganda.

The Baganda, despite being the most accommodating culture in Uganda, never desired to federate with any state. They are not against unity but that this should not be done at the expense of sacrificing their culture. For them unity should not destroy their uniqueness and prominence. They rather subscribe to the belief that Buganda must be in Uganda than that Uganda be in Buganda and so their agitation for “federo”.

No wonder Buganda declared its own independence from Britain on October 8th, different from the common one of October 9th. Up to now, a Muganda does not feel patriotic enough if after the singing of the National anthem, the Buganda anthem, the Kitiibwa Kya Buganda is not sung. There is a feeling that Buganda must stand out and its greatness, its kitiibwa, its civility, must be preserved. Their civility and their love for their homeland has made many non-Baganda elites to purchase land in Buganda. There is no tribe in Uganda that loves its homeland more than the Baganda.

Unfortunately, Buganda's civility, historical prominence and love for its homeland has been interpreted as arrogance and has made them a subject of envy by other surrounding tribes, accusing Britain of favoring it over other areas by starting all developmental programmes in Buganda. Of course for any historian who is not incapacitated by envy would know that this is not true. It is Buganda's civility that solely attracted the explorers to open up

educational and social institutions in Buganda and from Buganda to spread to other areas. After all, it is the king of Buganda who invited missionaries to come and educate his people.

The Baganda are so patriotic for their homeland that they have always been suspicious of any foreigner occupying their land lest that person ruins its civility. The root cause of the 1966 crisis is not what lawyers and politicians have all along called a constitutional crisis. The Constitution could be committed to the flames for all the Baganda care. The real crisis was, if in the Baganda culture there is no occupant of a chair higher than the Kabaka, then where is the Prime Minister or for that matter the president's chair? This, in my view, is still the problem with the present administration. The President does not know what to do with the Kabaka's prominence in Buganda.

As long as the central government situates its administration in Buganda, the kingdom of Buganda will always remain a problem for the government. There was even a suggestion that Obote removes his government from the Buganda soil or move his capital to Mbale. If Obote was not blinded by his hatred for the Baganda, probably the 1966 crisis would have taken a different route. So, it was more than simply a constitutional crisis. The Baganda's love for their Kabaka and their land is in their blood stream and in my view, there is no law that can change this. Creating laws that suppress Buganda's natural prominence can only aggravate the problem.

Envy for Buganda's prominence by the surrounding tribes is, in my view, the root cause of all the problems we have in this country and unless we learn to accept each other's cultures, tribalism and hatred will continue to thrive. It all started with Obote who, after becoming prime minister, was bothered by Buganda's prominence in the Uganda he was going to lead and instead of learning from what made Buganda prominent he enviously tried to destroy it by destroying its center, the Kabaka.

Indeed his violent attack on the Baganda ushered in a culture of violence, the militarism which is still with us today and civility which was the characteristic of Buganda ceased to

exist. Ironically, all the leaders who have militarily captured power are non-Baganda and they all have tried to suppress Buganda's prominence by creating laws that weaken it.

Unless the leadership of this country stops being envious of Buganda's prominence and allows its rightful position in Uganda, Buganda will continue to believe that there is a deliberate intention to grab its land and render Baganda vagrants in their own homeland.

Several years ago, a prominent leader in the present system of government was heard to have made an unfortunate statement that "Nammwe Abaganda mujja kusaka nga ffe bwetwakolonga." Otherwise would the Banyankore or any other tribe be satisfied to have their land be administered by foreign tribes?

My heart bleeds to see that the supposedly intelligent Baganda have turned a deaf ear to the plight of their own people, sacrificed the dictates of their consciences and intellectual honesty and for selfish motives, have jumped into the bandwagon of the system that oppresses their own people. This indeed is a tragedy! In a land that was described as an island of civilization and therefore inevitably made the center of civilization where all educational and social institutions continue to thrive, why has it become the battle ground for political power?

Why all the corruption, the atrocious acts like human sacrifice; why all the sorry situation our hospitals and roads are in and all other social institutions established for us by the colonialists, why in short, has Buganda lost her glory? Where has all her civility disappeared to?

Should we conclude with the ominous statement of William Shakespeare that the Tragedy of Administration is to put a small man in a large office because he soon reduces it to his own size? God forbid!

Part II: Why Buganda opposes the Land Bill

For centuries, landlords in Buganda have lived peacefully with tenants. The hospitality of Baganda stretches to incorporating non-Baganda tenants into the clans of their landlords.

They all became basajja ba kabaka, the Ssabataka (chief landowner), the centre around which the Baganda as a people rotate.

Under the Ssabataka, there was a system of the bataka, who together with the Ssabataka, kept the people of Buganda together. All disputes including land could trace their origin, a place where their ancestors are buried (obutaka). This was the civility that prevailed in Buganda before the early explorers Speke and Grant arrived in Buganda.

Any historian who is not incapacitated by envy and greed for money, will know that Buganda is the origin of the existence of Uganda as a country. There are no other reasons than the civility of Baganda that made the early explorers and missionaries to centre all their developmental programmes in Buganda.

But what has happened to the island of civilisation? Why all these land evictions and who is behind the chaos that creating instability in Buganda? Is the controversial Land Bill necessary? Does it not disturb the peace which Buganda is trying to restore?

In my view, the answer is amazingly simple! The post- independence power-hungry politicians, envious of Buganda's prominence aimed at destroying everything that makes Buganda prominent - the climax of which was the removal of the Kabaka.

A united Buganda has always been a threat to these politicians. The destruction of that which unites the Baganda - the Kabakaship, would put an end to their prominence.

Obote believed that a good Muganda is a dead one. He thought that by removing the Kabaka, he would destroy the prominence of the Baganda. Well, he was wrong. Despite the absence of their Kabaka for more than two decades, the Baganda did not lose their historical roots. The clan heads, the bataka (dwellers on land), kept Baganda culture alive.

The definition of a real Muganda is one who has the ability to trace their ancestral genealogy up to where their primal ancestor are buried.

Therefore, land is part of what defines the Baganda, and tampering with their land means attacking the core of their very existence. Land is a human right given by God. It's not negotiable and any amendment or law that doesn't respect that right can't be considered as good.

Tenants not a priority

The government insists that the amendment to the Land Act is meant to protect tenants from evictions by landlords. But peasants have never been NRM government's priority. First of all, there is widespread poverty in the rural areas today than it has been since independence.

Peasants have been used by NRM politicians to promote their political greed for power. In real terms, the poor peasants in Uganda would be happier if their health was taken care of, for instance, by stocking drugs in hospitals, constructing lasting roads and building good schools.

It would make more sense if Uganda's leadership concentrated more on providing essential necessities of life to peasants than going into problematic areas like land that has the potential of creating instability.

It seems NRM government leaders enjoy creating chaos in order to remain in power. Otherwise, Uganda needs peasants who are living and not those who the NRM leadership claim to protect but who are constantly in danger of death because of lack of medical care.

**Buganda leaders*

**In my view, the Land Amendment Bill has nothing to do with protecting tenants. In this vein, it is also disappointing to see that some Buganda leaders in the NRM have decided to fight their own people.*

Like their NRM bosses, some of the leaders in Buganda want to pass a bad law that will incite people and create instability in Buganda. This land issue is not a matter of legal theorising but an issue that requires practical decision.

I appeal to the NRM leadership to examine their consciences and realise that God created this country with a multiplicity of tribes who occupy their land according to the rules that govern their culture.

I also urge all politicians to stop using peasants to promote their political greed. In normal democracies, Parliament is supposed to speak for the people but Uganda's Parliament speaks for the NRM leadership.

The NRM has the majority and they are only waiting for the President to command, 'Jump' And what they are expected to ask is: How high?

Finally, I submit that this land amendment bill has nothing to do with protecting peasants.