

The Roots of the Democratic Party

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President Museveni has often characterised the Democratic Party as a confessional party; however, DP is a political party which was established to articulate the interests of Catholics as a dominated identity in Buganda. ■

To understand how Catholics became a dominated identity in Buganda we need to go to the late 19 century when the two major religions, Catholics and Protestants, arrived in the Kingdom of Buganda. The Church Missionary Society whom we now call the Protestants arrived in 1877 and the Society de Notre-Dame d'Afrique the so called White Fathers whom we call Catholics in 1879.

Far ahead of the Christians were the Muslims: the first Arab to set foot in Buganda did so in 1844 and by the time of the arrival of Christians, the Arabs, and therefore Islam had made substantial inroads into Buganda society. The court of their master, the Sultan of Zanzibar had become the model of that of Kabaka Mutesa.

When the explorer Stanley arrived at Mutesa's court in 1875 he found that the assembled Baganda chiefs, with their fezes, robes and scimitars were almost a replica of Zanzibar and Oman. Kabaka Mutesa had also established what they called the kibulisi of Busiro. These were bodyguards so-named after the Sultan's bodyguards. They were required to wear beards just like the bodyguards of the Sultan.

A number of Arabs had established homesteads in the countryside, were marrying local women and like Africans from other tribes had become integrated into Kiganda society. The advice of the Arabs was heeded at court and the Kabaka greatly appreciated and used their charms and medicines.

Some Arabs like Idi had become Mutesa's scribe (the Arab script was already in use at court by the time of the Stanley visit) got appointed to chieftainship. By the end of Mutesa's reign, the Baganda Muslims led by Muguluma had been appointed to high offices.

On several occasions Mutesa had ordered all his subjects to adopt Islam. In 1867 he observed the fast of the month of Ramadhan and twice in 1875 and 1881 proclaimed Buganda to be a Muslim state. The Arab influence eventually became so pervading that even those who held aloof such as Katikiro Mukasa adopted Islamic style and manners,

Such was the disadvantageous situation in which Christians found themselves on arrival in Buganda; further, things were not made better when they had to submit to surveillance by Mutesa by living in and around his court.

The stringent demands of Christianity, such as dissociation from polygamy upon converts also did restrict conversion. Thus by the end of Mutesa's reign, Christians could not boast of chiefs of influence like Muguluma who was the Kalabala or deputy chief of Buddu.

A Christian who attained some measure of eminence was Yozefu Nsigirisa who was Mutesa's Mutanda of Bulemezi; but even his modest eminence profited the Christians very little as in the crisis of Mwangwa's reign he spent the two years before the 1888 revolution in the stocks.

However, among the royal pages, chiefs servants and minor officials at the capital Christians made a tremendous headway, to the point of Christian pages outnumbering Muslim ones.

And this fact was to be of great value in the long run especially as pages were youths usually presented to court by clan heads and from their ranks were to be chosen future leaders.

The competition between the two faiths apart, the historical context was of immense uncertainty and Buganda was ripe for major social changes.

Clans as a form of social organisation and structure out of which the Kiganda monarchy arose, was on the decline and giving way to nationality and territorial forms of organisation. This was giving rise to intense struggles between the Kabaka and his appointed chiefs, the Bakungu, on the one side, and, the hereditary clan heads, the Bataka, once peers of the Kabaka on the other.

What appeared to be the assertion of authority by the Kabaka over the hereditary clan heads was actually the ascendancy of a larger social entity, the Ganda nationality over clans. The period under review, 1877-1914, was the one during which the Kabaka finally asserted his authority, and the Bakungu chiefs eclipsed the Bataka.

It was in these circumstances that Mwanga ascended the throne in October 1884. The times were extremely difficult and confusing, with far too many forces operating. This required great insight, statesmanship, strong character and firm will. Mwanga was seriously deficient in these qualities.

Worse still Mwanga never carried himself as a Kabaka. The Kabaka was expected to rule firmly and to administer justice correctly, showing respect to his Chiefs, the clan heads and the tradition of Buganda.

In one incident, early in his reign, when a medium of the god Namalere came to the palace to lay a complaint and was rather noisy and violent, Mwanga ordered the pages to beat him up and drive him out. In traditional Ganda society this was sacrilege.

On another occasion Kabaka Mwanga sought to wreck vengeance on his maternal uncle, for having upbraided him when a prince, by getting him executed. The uncle got properly consigned to the executioners and was only saved by the Katikiro.

Kabaka Mwanga also had the practice of heaping favours on his childhood friends, without regard for ability or seniority.

For some strange reasons Mwanga had a pathological hatred of the old chiefs who had served his father and always sought either to dispossess them or generally embarrass them. These people still wielded immense social power and mishandling them only served to isolate Mwanga.

Quite often he took measures to replace these chiefs with younger elements, who were still of doubtful stature. People like Apollo Kagwa who as late as 1886 was still a junior official in the Stores Divisions was in 1887 thereabout promoted to replace Kalungi, Mutesa's chief Storekeeper. Another young man, Henry Nyonyintono was also appointed to the high post of Muyinda.

Such moves which eventually culminated in Mwanga entrusting political power and destiny of the kingdom in the hands of these youths quite puzzled many. The only plausible explanation for them is left us by Kirevu, a contemporary observer who explained that Mwanga, having executed the Christians, felt isolated and since he could not fraternize with the old chiefs any longer, had to take steps to win the young.

He fully implemented this strategy in 1887 when he created four chieftainships and

appointed the youths to head them. Consisting of reckless bands of young men, these organs became the centres of power in the kingdom. One of these organs, the Ekijasi (the army) was 100,000 men strong.

Almost as though to deliberately precipitate a dangerous situation, these young men went around terrorizing the countryside. During royal tours, intended for the king to endear himself to his subjects, pillaging and every kind of brigandage became the order of the day. Initially the plunder was directed against the old chiefs whom Mwangwa disliked but soon it could strike anybody.

Perhaps the worst case was the raid on the estates of Mwangwa's grandparents at Gayaza. It was indeed an abomination for a king to raid his grandparents. Yet the most bizarre and the last straw to break the camel's back was yet to come.

In September 1888, Mwangwa attempted to rid himself of his standing army. The new men at the helm, Christians and Muslims, were no longer the sheep for slaughter of the years of persecution. Having tasted power and knowing how to use it, they had become the arbiters of Buganda's destiny.

Mwangwa deposed

On the night of September 9, 1888, Christian and Muslim leaders met at Nyonyintono's headquarters (14) and resolved to depose Mwangwa. He was deposed the following day and his brother Kiwewa installed Kabaka.

The process of composing new administration was not easy: there were wrangles on the apportioning of offices according to religion, giving rise to considerable friction. The two main parties in the revolt, the Muslims and Christians, eventually arrived at a tenuous agreement in which the best jobs, the Kabakaship and the accompanying palace offices went to the Muslims.

Muslims were also appointed to the post of Kimbugwe (the second minister) and held not only two of the four largest in chieftainship but also two of the largest Batongole positions. For the Christians, as the equivalent of the Kabakaship and Kimbugweship they acquired the Katikiro (first minister). The Christians also received the other two important Bakungu offices and the two other major Batongole chieftainship.

Considering the relative military strength of the two forces in September, where the Muslims had an edge over the Christians, the settlement was satisfactory to both forces.

It was not long, however, before the events of September 1888 became "less significant in witnessing the replacement of one Ganda king by another than in creating circumstances favourable to more radical subsequent change".

Problems arose when the religious freedom the reign of Kiwewa brought enabled all worshipers, Muslim and Christians, to proclaim their faith openly. Though Muslim converts did the same, the Muslim leaders were shaken by the much larger number of Christians who now came to the open to proclaim their faith and increased the clientele of Christian chiefs to the extent that they overshadowed their previously more powerful Muslim colleagues.

It was apparent that increasingly the centre of political power was shifting towards the Christian party and this naturally became an issue of concern to the Muslims. Matters were made worse by Mutesa's Katikiro, Mukasa, who though then deposed, still wielded immense influence. He kept "taunting the Muslim leader Muguluma, the Kimbugwe who had been a powerful chief even under Mutesa, with the acquisition of the post of Katikiro by Nyonyintono, a Christian, an upstart and a eunuch to boot.!"

Evidently the situation was ripe for a showdown between the two parties.

The occasion for the confrontation was provided by one of the Christian leaders, Antoni Ddungu who was the Protestant Katikiro of Kisalosalu. When Mwanga was being deposed, Ddungu was away levying tribute in the Bukoba chiefdoms. On his return he found that Kanta, the chiefdom which he coveted had been allocated to the Muslims. He was so disappointed that he is reported to have said that if Kiwewa continued to favour Muslims that much, then he would be replaced by a princess.

This was an extremely reckless statement to make, especially as fears already existed that Christians wanted to crown a princess and one of the princesses, Nasiwa was mistress to one of the Christians. The Muslims used this incident to convince Kiwewa that the Christians were not loyal, deserve elimination and a plan was hatched to kill Christians when they next came to court.

The outcome of this was another war. This time the war was between the Muslims and Christians. The Christians were defeated and were, swearing to come back and capture the capital, driven west to Nkore (the neighbouring kingdom).

Immediately, there followed another struggle with the pagans, the result of which was the replacement of Kiwewa by Kalema and the rise of Muguluma not only to the political leadership of the Muslims but also becoming Katikiro.

This elimination of the Christians was an act of purification from then on the social force in power was exclusively Muslim. Refining the tendency which had begun when Mwanga was deposed, that is the social force or political grouping which wins forms an administration made up of men from its fighting ranks, the Muslims formed an administration exclusively of themselves.

In power, like political parties which seek to shape the country according to their ideology, the Muslims proceeded to turn Buganda into an Islamic state modeled on what they imagined to be the Sultanate of Zanzibar.

The circumcision of all Buganda was decreed and at this point a large number of people of chiefly rank who had stayed rather than go into exile in Ankole were confronted by the gruesome choice of conversion, flight or death. The peasants in the villages also had it very rough; the Muslims ravaged the countryside, especially Singo which could not recover its previous prosperity for a long time.

Meanwhile in Ankole the Christians who were welcome, as a mark of gratitude, pledged that Ntare, King of Ankole must never be exposed to attack from the Muslim armies in Buganda. To allow for that possibility was to repay him evil for good and would also be the surest way to turn him against them. The surest way to prevent all this was to march into Buganda and demolish the Muslims when the time was ripe.

Christian military strength also increased as other Christian compatriots, fleeing the persecution in Buganda joined the others in Ankole. Eventually, the more adventurous Christian leaders could not be restrained any longer and the Christian army left for Buganda.

In Buganda, because the Muslims were extremely isolated, the Christian army was exceedingly welcome and largely because of this support, easily defeated the Muslims in October 1889.

The Christians returned Mwanga as Kabaka and, as what was originally a tendency had now

become a tradition, proceeded to form a predominantly Christian administration. A refinement to this tradition was added: apart from the major officials being Christian, care was taken to see that the degree of service to the cause was rewarded. Thus "the original Christian leadership received the provincial and great chiefdoms, and the new men who had recently come to the fore took posts of lesser rank.."

This Christian edifice or party which had just scored victory over the Muslims, like every phenomenon, had its intrinsic internal opposites and contradictions. Some aspects of this dates back to the time of the Reformation, when the Anglican Church broke away from the Roman Catholic Church and other aspects were a legacy of the seventeenth century war of religion, which by the nineteenth century had assumed the form of competition for converts in the non European new world.

By 1890 a pattern of hostility had been so entrenched that when new missionaries arrived or new Baganda converts got won over, they automatically became partisans in the contest between the two parties. In Buganda the origins of the hostility can be traced in the early 1880's, to the rivalry for converts between the Catholics and Protestants.

In due course, influenced by palace intrigue, the pages of Kabaka Mwanga's audience chamber were predominantly Catholic, while those of the store house largely Protestant. This tendency of religio-political division extended to the standing armies which Mwanga had created and which were led by his ex-pages.

In exile in Ankole, the Catholics and Protestants settled in separate locations, thus continuing to reinforce the two camps.

There was perpetual animosity as Nikodemu Sebwato, one of the Protestant leaders who later became Sekibobo (County chief of Kyagwe) was to write to Alexander Mackay: "..... when we left Buganda we came in two crowds. we and our brothers who are followers of the pope. But we do not pull well together. They want always to fight with us "

The animosity was so strong that one time, in the early days of exile in Ankole, when a rumour spread that Mwanga was with Mackay turning into a Protestant there was intense fury in the Catholic ranks and some even said it would be better to fight than be ruled later by Protestants.

Paradoxically even the protracted campaign to depose the Muslims, a situation which should have served to unify them into a single monolithic Christian party, instead contributed a great deal to reinforce their differences.

"Each faction was sustained in the struggle by a vision of the particular kind of future Buganda they wished to establish; the longer the struggle and the more sacrifice it demanded, the less likely it was that either party would give up any of its eventual gains.

It was therefore, no surprise that the allocation of offices after the victory over the Muslim party, became virtually intractable. On the intervention of the respective missionaries who had by then become the real leaders of the religio-political parties, a treaty stipulating equal sharing of offices was drawn.

"Alternate ranks in one vertical hierarchy" the treaty stipulated, "should be held by members of opposite parties. .. (27) Further, to maintain the balance which was the principal objective of the agreement, every chief who changed his religion had to forfeit his political office."

"Thus the treaty became an expression of a marked politicization of religion in Buganda and

an indication of the fact that religious divisions had by now become the main stratifying principle in society. ..In other words two rival social forces, though taking a religious coloration,had been set off.

It was in the throes of the mounting intense rivalry between these two nascent social forces that envoys from various imperial countries entered Buganda with the purpose of making treaties of colonization.

The situation was extremely vulnerable for foreign contention: both religio-political parties jointly and separately were on the look out "for outside support that would guarantee them the military means necessary to keep the Muslims in check, while advancing or at least not retarding their own internal competitive position.

The need for external assistance on the part of the Protestants grew acute as the balance of power increasingly shifted away from them. The main force which influenced this shift was the institution of the Kabaka.

As the Kabaka had become a Catholic, the vast majority of Baganda peasants followed his lead and became Catholic. As this flow into Catholicism continued, the Protestants in due course saw their salvation in the Imperial British East African Company (IBEAC) which had arrived in the area. IBEAC being a British company, the Protestants who were the supporters of the English mission,the CMS, logically expected it to lend them support.

The Catholics on the other hand clearly identified British political power with the Protestant religion and they feared that once the British assumed control, the Catholics would in consequence be removed from position of influence. They therefore preferred that the Germans rather than the British take control; and for that matter even signed a treaty with a German envoy, Carl Peters, in February 1890.

This diplomatic contest between the Germans and the British was amicably brought to an end when the two powers in July 1890 signed a treaty which placed Buganda under British sovereignty.

The internal conflict between the Catholics and Protestants was resolved in a war which broke out on 24th January 1892. In this brief war, Captain Lugard, the leader of the Imperial British East African Company (IBEAC) who had been instructed to "consolidate the Protestant party" lent support to the Protestants who were under the leadership of Apollo Kagwa.

The out come of the war was a decisive defeat of the Catholics led by Kabaka Mwanga and Stanislaus Mugwanya. The defeat of the Catholic party broke the backbone of any resistance to British supremacy and brought to dominance the Protestant party,a social force which was wholly dependent on the British.

However, Lugard was under no illusions: he still expected hostility from the Catholic party and therefore saw his principal task as creating an equilibrium which simultaneously would emasculate and involve the Catholics in the political and social affairs of Buganda; in any case his instruction was to "attempt by all means in your power to conciliate the Roman Catholics..."

Realizing that with the Baganda for any arrangement to have legitimacy the Kabaka must be involved, Lugard set about to fill the Kabakaship. Two months of hard bargaining with the Catholics enabled Mwanga to return to his throne and a treaty was concluded between the Kabaka and IBEAC, fully recognizing British protection and supremacy of the company.

Shortly after returning and largely as a result of differences which had arisen between

Mwanga and the Catholic leaders, Mwanga changed his religion and became Protestant. This had two major consequences. First, it enabled the strongest and most loyal force to the IBEAC to merge with the centre of legitimacy in Buganda.

And this led to the next consequence: while the Protestants could now take advantage of a Protestant orientated Kabaka, the others had to look to another centre of power, the IBEAC for the protection and guarantee of their rights. Through this, Lugard acquired a political base which was later recognized in the revision of the treaty whereby the British representative got formal access to and influence on the real centre of power in Buganda.

Armed with this newly acquired initiative and recognizing the three politico-religious parties as the real effective political structure, Lugard proceeded to reorganize Buganda in such a manner that the social and political structure reflected the respective standing of these three forces.

To placate the Catholics, the county of Buddu was to be exclusively for Catholics and people of other religions had to move to other areas. The Muslims were allocated three small counties which were deliberately situated as buffer between the Catholics and Protestants.

The result of the land apportionment was to secure for the Protestants 60/70 percent of Buganda.

With regard to chieftainship, the Protestant Katikiro continued in office and so did the Catholic Kimbugwe as the next highest ranking official; the Protestants secured six county chieftainships, the Muslims three and Catholics one, namely Buddu. The lower ranking chiefs were, it was stipulated, to be of the same religion as their respective county chiefs.

This arrangement was obviously not viewed with satisfaction by the Catholics. There still remained some aspects of the arrangement likely to give rise to tension. The potential for tension was removed when Portal returned to Uganda and consolidated the religious equilibrium by reducing and even eliminating possible sources of dissatisfaction.

This was achieved to a considerable degree by elevating the status of Catholics who up to then were being treated as the vanquished. Not only were the Catholics accorded fairer and more responsible position in Buganda, they were also granted more territory. In concrete terms the important chieftainships such as Katikiro had to be held by two people concurrently, one Catholic and the other Protestant.

To placate the Protestant party who were expectantly unhappy with this sharing arrangement, there was a provision to the effect that the Protestant chiefs would take precedence over Catholic ones holding similar offices. With regards to territory, the Catholics acquired one more county, Kaima, one sub-county and the Ssesse Islands which were constituted into a county.

This new arrangement, to a large measure, was acceptable to both parties and both Bishop Hirth, on behalf of the Catholics, and Bishop Tucker for the Protestants pledged to bring pressure to bear on their respective followers to accept the arrangement. At this point, it was clear an equilibrium had been attained and ground cleared for a new social and political order.

This was the order which obtained throughout the colonial period. Much as the Catholics were treated as second class subjects of the Kabaka and were uneasy about it, there was not much they could do.

A Catholic could not be Katikiro. The highest post in the kingdom that a Catholic could aspire

to was the Omuwanika. There had always been ten Protestant county chiefs, compared with eight Catholics; and in the Kabaka's Government which was formed in 1955 four of the Ministers were Protestants, one a Mohammedan, and only one a Catholic.

To make matters worse, in 1955 Matayo Mugwanya, a Catholic and the grandson of Stanslaus Mugwanya, the leader of the Catholic forces during the 1892 war contested for the post of Katikiro of Buganda. He came within three votes of being elected Katikiro of Buganda. Actually had the Kabaka not replaced several members of his representatives in the Lukiiko in the last minutes he would have won.

With the political awakening on the eve of colonialism, the Catholics organised themselves in political party called the Democratic Party to redress themselves of their minority status. Ironically the first President of the party was Matayo Mugwanya, the son of Stanslaus Mugwanya.

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