

Ugandans to the Rescue



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The truth ABOUT BINAISA ?

*Godfrey Lukongwa Binaisa, a lawyer, former President and Attorney General in the post independent government, died yesterday in Kampala, **Fred Guweddeko** writes about his life;*

The late Godfrey Lukongwa Binaisa was President of Uganda from July 1979 to May 1980.

He was born on May 30, 1920 in Mityana, where his father was the headmaster of the Church of Uganda Mityana Central School.

His father Canon Anania Jjuuko Binaisa [1892-1999], descended from Ssekabaka Kikulwe, the 23rd King of Buganda. Thus though very unpopular with the culturally monarchical Baganda for his role in destroying Buganda Kingdom in 1966, Binaisa was of the Royal Clan.

Canon Binaisa was born at Kiwumu in the Bukoba District of Tanzania where his parents had fled the 1898-90 religious wars in Buganda. This history led to his son, [President] Binaisa in 1979-80 being labelled a Tanzanian. Canon Binaisa was an Anglican Christian Missionary, working for Gods' Ministry. As Canon Binaisa was a missionary, his wife, Naome Nantume Manyangwa [1897-1985] was the income-

Binaisa and his father

The life of the late Godfrey Binaisa was characterised by rejection, contradiction and conflict with the poverty, ethics, social and political values of his fathers' missionary calling in the Anglican Church.

Because of the poverty in the missionaries' home, the late Binaisa being the first-born helped his mother in commercial cash crop agriculture from the age of eight. By 13 years [1932], Binaisa was already making surplus money for all family school fees and other needs.

Besides organising migrant labour in cotton farming, young Binaisa earned a lot more money from selling cotton and buying products like kerosene from Indian traders.

Natives were short-changed in selling to and buying from Indians but the young Binaisa was so clever that he somehow received more money and bought more goods from the Indians. For a fee, natives would use young Binaisa to sell and buy for them from Indian traders. Canon Binaisa demanded his son be a 'Good Samaritan' and provide these 'commercial' services free. On learning that his son somehow cheated Indian traders, Canon Binaisa was enraged.

As Binaisa grew, the contradictions with his father extended to life-style, religion, economic ethics, etc, and finally to politics. In Junior secondary school the late Binaisa made money by using migrant labourers and natives to find rare live animals, birds, etc, which he sold to Europeans. He bought several 'luxury' shoes, shorts, bicycle, etc, to the annoyance of his father. At Makerere, Binaisa riled his religious father by joining the Radical Scientific Society that sought scientific explanations, challenged religion and advocated secularism.

Because of the association of his son with the 1946-49 Bataka Movement, and his betrayal of the leadership, Canon Binaisa lost family and church property to the arson acts of the nationalists. His son initially plotted with the anti-colonial protest groups but switched to the side of the Colonial Government. In independence politics, Binaisa greatly embarrassed his father, a priest by joining the Uganda National Congress (UNC) that was associated with anti-religion communist tendencies.

When Canon Binaisa retired after 50 years in church service in 1963, he offered to save Buganda from an impending crisis under the Kabaka Yekka Movement by serving as Chaplain of the Mengo government.

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During this same period [1963-66], his son Godfrey Binaisa was the leader of the Baganda on the UPC side that were fighting against Mengo. In the battle between Mengo and the UPC government, father and son fought on opposite sides. When Idi Amin overthrew Milton Obote in 1971, angry Baganda looking for Binaisa severely beat Canon Binaisa and destroyed his property for being a parent.

Under Amin's rule, Canon Binaisa spent a year in hiding fearing for his life after security agents killed the father of Sheik Kamulegeya. Whenever Amin complained about Binaisa, the father who had changed to the name of Jjuko went into hiding. Since Amin had given wealth to Baganda traders under the economic war, none of them even within the CoU wanted to associate with Canon Binaisa and yet the father was never on good terms with his son.

When in 1979, his son became President of Uganda against popular feelings and the midst of violence, Canon Binaisa declined to bless this achievement. Canon Binaisa said his son should not have accepted to be the dumping place for a stolen Presidency. This was not the end, Canon Binaisa who had since 1972 entirely committed his life to establishing the CoU at Kamwokya in Kampala, was shunned by the congregation because he was father to the unpopular President Binaisa. The only request that Canon Binaisa made to President Binaisa was to allocate Dairy Corporation powder milk for CoU purposes.

However, President Binaisa's chit to the Dairy Corporation was ignored. To the embarrassment of Canon Binaisa, the chit from the son to issue milk to the father was exhibited in the NCC [Parliament] as evidence of family corruption in a 'no confidence' motion. Unlike other parents, Canon Binaisa and his son were never harmonised.

The late Godfrey Binaisa attended Non-grade, Elementary at Nateete CoU School and 'Middle' school [1927-1932] in Mackay Memorial, both at Nateete in the present Lubaga Division in Kampala District. During this period, the belief was that it was inhuman to hoard young children in a room for teaching and thus the norm was for Non-grade and Elementary classes to be held under trees.

Education

Binaisa joined Budo Junior [1933-36] [now Kings College] for Intermediate and Junior Secondary education. In his pre-college education, Binaisa holds a fantastic achievement of skipping three years/classes through the 'Express' exams process. This is where for instance a senior three student can sit O-level exams and proceed to A-level upon passing.

Binaisa joined Makerere College in 1937 for Cambridge [1937-38] and Medicine [1939-40] when he was dismissed. At Makerere College, Binaisa shared a room in Sejoongo House with Jaramogi A Oginga-Odinga, from Kenya, with whom they became the 'ideological factories' of Makerere.

Binaisa was for 'Radical Science' and Oginga-Odinga for 'Liberal Arts'. On the intellectual side, Binaisa won the 'Research Cup' in 1938 for advances in science research.

In 1939, Binaisa received the 'Forster Prize' for his scientific findings on swamp worms. In the same year, Binaisa discovered worm specie outside existing entomological taxonomy. The 'Thesis' was submitted to Cambridge University.

The problem for Binaisa was that by 1939, the colonial law did not allow Uganda natives to be awarded university degrees. Binaisa could not be considered for a doctorate.

In student adventure, Binaisa spent the 1937 holiday in Buganda Singo County prison upon conviction under the then Native law preventing boys over 16 years from remaining in school to avoid graduated tax.

This case caused issuing of student 'Identity' cards at Makerere. These identity cards posed a colonial policy problem that recognised natives only under their tribes and not any other identity.

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Binaisa was the richest student at Makerere as he sold rare animal skins to European collectors. Binaiisas' large collection of stuffed animals, skins and skeletons without a licence was seized by the authorities in 1938. They were given to Makerere College and became the foundation for the current Uganda Museum.

When World War II broke out, a war public information office was located at Makerere and the students received one of the first radio sets in Uganda for official British war news.

Students including Binaisa tampered with the radio and secretly monitored German war information news deep in the time. It happened that in 1940, German was winning the war. Binaisa engaged in counteracting official British war news with the truths. He was dismissed at the end of 1940 for, according to him, supporting German in the war.

Dismissal

On top of dismissal from Makerere, Binaisa was rusticated from Buganda region and ordered not to speak about the war to any group or individual person in Uganda.

Binaisa survived full imprisonment due to intervention by the Church and Makerere College. A number of students were dismissed for related reasons. Aged only 20 years, Binaisa went into internal exile in western Uganda.

Although Binaisa was more or less on open arrest in internal deportation as a threat to the war, the same British Colonial administration condemning him could not resist the temptation of his application for a licence to prospect for minerals required by the war industry.

In 1941, the East African High Command in Nairobi issued a War Emergence clearance order to overlook the racial restrictions on native economic activity [then restricted to cash crop growing] and grant Binaisa a 'Special Licence' to prospect for 'War Industry' and 'War Economy' minerals in Western Uganda. After laboratory mineral ore tests confirmed two viable sites, Binaisa won another concession in the racially restrictive colonial banking law and became the first native Ugandan to acquire a commercial loan.

Because Binaisa had manipulated the mineral ore chemical tests to reflect inflated financial potential, the first and third mines failed. Binaisa twice filed for bankruptcy before taking off into wealth with a successful Wolfram mine.

Binaiisas' first expense as a wealthy miner was to acquire a special government licence to stage a fully western wedding. The licence was necessary for the native guests to his wedding to enter the 'Dogs and Africans not Allowed' hotel and for them to be served with whisky, brandy, wine, beer, etc. The British colonial law restricted Africans from European places, lifestyle and conspicuous goods. Binaisa used a lawyer for the concession. He is the first Ugandan, followed by Kabaka Mutesa in 1948, to conduct a 'European' style wedding.

The 1945 wedding of the young 'mitwalo' [millionaire] Binaisa to Ruth Namakula was phenomenal as she was reputed to be the most beautiful girl in Buganda at the time.

Marrying such a girl in Buganda tradition [as in many pre-modern African beliefs] entailed additional expensive rituals purportedly to assuage the gods, deities and spirits associated with for her beauty. It also required a lot of courage either to ignore the stories or to risk confronting the wrath of the spiritual world

actors associated with very beautiful women.

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Binaisa in second exile

From 1947, Binaisa associated with the Bataka Movement protests against colonial economic policy in Uganda oppression. He participated in the February 1949 demonstration at the then 'Baganda Bus Park'. The protests became violent after the April 1949 riots. Binaisa made a turn-around against the protests, betrayed the leaders and colluded in their arrest and prosecution.

The Bataka Movement started assaulting the collaborators. As the Protectorate Government was unable to protect its collaborators from the Bataka Movement violence, it organised for Binaisa to get asylum in Britain.

There the Colonial Office offered Binaisa, then 29 years old, a scholarship for a course of his choice. He opted for 'Geology and Mining' at Glasgow University.

With the savings from his Wolfram mine business, the proceeds from its sale and the generous political scholarship package, Binaisa went on merrymaking spree and forgot studies.

He was discontinued at Glasgow University, the scholarship withdrawn and his personal money exhausted. A destitute Binaisa started sleeping at railway stations. After an arrest for vagabond, Binaisa worked as a railway-station nighttime cleaner and daytime porter at Paddington in 1951.

Binaisa switched to the Post-Office as a postman at night and sorting letters during the day. He became a clerk in the Post-Office Savings Bank but was soon fired. He landed into the Indian High Commissioner in London first as a cleaner, but soon promoted to messenger and to clerk for his intelligence.

Through his fruitful participation in independence politics committees, Binaisa convinced the Indian High Commission to facilitate his registration for a Law Course Evening studies at Kings College, London University.

Binaisa became a radical advocate of the India strategy of decolonisation. This advocated for vertical integration of ex-British colonies with each rather than continuation of the horizontal colonial relationship with Britain under the British Commonwealth. As Binaisa enjoyed India Government funding, Kabaka Mutesa of Buganda was deported to England. Binaisa immediately championed the cause of Mutesa and earned a generous Buganda scholarship.

Binaisa again became a very rich student. He dutifully took time off to advocate for the cause of Mutesa and Buganda, while enjoying late night adventures with the exiled Kabaka.

At the end of Mutesas' exile, Binaisa was part of the escort entourage but he over-celebrated the night before and missed the historical flight. He was called to the Bar in London and returned to Uganda as a qualified British Lawyer in June 1956.