

CITIZENSHIP AND TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

UNIT I: CIVIC EDUCATION

Sub-unit : History of Rwanda (Dr. Nkaka Raphael)

Introduction

Hello students, I'm Dr. Nkaka Raphael, Senior Lecturer of History in the Department of History and Heritage studies, in the School of Good Governance, University of Rwanda. Today, I'm going to introduce you to the History of Rwanda. That is a sub -unit of civic education, a unit of the module of "Citizenship and Transformative Education" assigned to the all first year students. I opted to tell you now about the political vision of the kingdom of Rwanda in connection with citizenship, state-building and national identity. There was a vision about territory expansion and a vision about people or social incorporation in power structures. Reading 1 is the missions of kings, Reading 2, a military vision reading 3 a unifying vision and read 4 a conclusion constitute the content of my speech.

Reading I: Missions of kings

Cycles of kings had existed prior to the Mutara Semugeshi reform. For instance, we see the repetition of reign names such as Yuhi, Ndahiro , Nsoro and Ruganzu up to Semugeshi. But it is Semugeshi who decided over names to keep, and kings' mission from his reign onwards. Prior to Semugeshi, Rwanda had had kings who had implemented significant reforms. For example, Kigeri I Mukobanya is said to have initiated the process of centralization of the country. Ruganzu II Ndori had rescued the monarchy of Rwanda. Mutara I Semugeshi came as a monarch who made more reforms in the esoteric code and in the royal ideology. *Abiru* consider him as the genial innovator (Kagame, 1951, p.48).

Semugeshi took a very strong decision of suppressing some of the existing names of reign. He put away the following names: Ndahiro, Ruganzu and Nsoro. The first was said to bear misfortune because Ndahiro Cyamatare lost the dynastic drum *Rwoga*. Ruganzu was also a

name of previous two Kings who were killed by the enemy (Ruganzu I Bwimba and Ruganzu II Ndori). The name Nsoro was put aside because it was used also in a neighbouring monarchy of Bugesera. Then, Semugeshi introduced a new name of Mutara (Kagame, 1972, pp.113-114, Bourgeois, 1954, p.45, p.67). That is why Semugeshi ceased to be called Nsoro II Semugeshi and took the name of Mutara I Semugeshi.

So, four names remained in the cycles of Kings and took the following order: Cyirima, Kigeri, Mibambwe, Yuhi. Mutara was added to that list and became a name of the first place in the cycle like Cyirima. For the first cycle it was Mutara, Kigeri, Mibambwe and Yuhi; for the second it Cyirima, Kigeri, Mibambwe and Yuhi. Thus, Mutara and Cyirima came once for eight reigns, while the others occurred once after four reigns. Since then, the genealogy became as follows:

New cycles of reigns from Mutara I Semugeshi onwards

Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4
1. Mutara I Semugeshi	5. Cyirima II Rujugira	9. Mutara II Rwogera	13. Mutara III Rudahigwa.
2. Kigeri II Nyamuheshera	6. Kigeri III Ndabarasa	10. Kigeri IV Rwabugiri	14. Kigeri V Ndahindurwa
3. Mibambwe II Gisanura	7. Mibambwe III Sentabyo	11. Mibambwe IV Rutarindwa	
4. Yuhi III Mazimpaka	8. Yuhi IV Gahindiro	12. Yuhi V Musinga	

It is very important to note that on the above list there is one king who is omitted, i.e., Karemera Rwaka. Rwaka was officially enthroned in Yuhi Mazimpaka lifetime and succeeded him as an acting king. As such, he is believed to have resigned when Rujugira, the legitimate heir, arrived

from Gisaka to acquire the throne (Kagame,1972,p.129 and 134). Some scholars found this narrative not convincing enough. For example, Vansina (2001,p.132-135) believed that Rwaka was a legitimate king who got deposed by Rujugira.

At the same time, in this reform of Semugeshi, particular commitments were dedicated to the monarchs according to their names of reigns. In this respect, the Kings Mutara and Cyirima would be Kings of cattle (D'Hertefelt, Coupez,1964, p.46, p.98).That is why they would be organizers of *the ritual of watering*. They were obliged to stay either in Nduga or Bwanacyambwe and cross the Nyabarongo river once when they were going to organize the ritual of watering (inziray'ishora). Kigeri and Mibambwe were the Kings of conquest and war (D'Hertefelt, Coupez,1964, p.38). This seems to have been so since Kigeri I and Mibambwe I. They could thus move everywhere, inside and outside the country. On the other hand, the monarchs called Yuhi were Kings of the Fire, which means that their duty was to keep the long life of the royal dynasty symbolized by the permanence of the fire of Gihanga, the supposed founder of the dynasty. They were also Kings of cattle. The esoteric code Ubwiru committed them to live in the Nduga region and never cross the Nyabarongo River (Kagame,1947, pp.385-386;Kagame,1952, p.130; Chrétien, 2000, p.103; Wrigley, 1996, p.200).Consider for instance the following strophe from the ritual of fire (inziray'umuriro):

« Umwami ubyarira umuriro niYuhi

Akima i Nduga

[]

Akeza imana ari I Nduga

Agatsinda ari i Nduga

Akagaba ingabo ari I Nduga

Zigahabwa umugaba

Zikajya kumutsindira. [...]

Ntiyambuka uruzi rwa Mwogo

N'urwa Nyabarongo.” (D'Hertefelt, Coupez,1964, p.54)

But this does not mean that these new commitments just occurred in practice like that. Some kings of cattle were obliged by circumstances to protect the country against invasions and acted militarily in a successful manner.

But these missions got respected most of the time. The conquest mission owed to the fact that Rwanda envisioned to be a very big country in terms of size. The name “Rwanda” itself means “kwanda” i.e. to expand. In order to reach this, military campaigns against neighbouring political entities were necessary. The increase of subjects politically speaking or people socially speaking through conquest was needed. It is people who would later become tax payers, economic producers and ingabo (militarily). The demographic increase was also targeted using cultural sensitization. There was a belief that power comes from belonging to a very big family or owning a very big number of subjects.

Then since Rwanda envisioned to expand, its kings were required to be strong warriors. The ritual of enthronization that informs us how the new king was enthroned, shows us how he was prepared “ritually”, psychologically and socially to be the conqueror *par excellence*. Consider these few passages:

“Barakwimitse ngo utsinde

Uburundi n’Ubunyabungo

N’amahanga yandi yose

Adatura umwami w’i Rwanda.” (D’Hertefelt, Coupez, 1964, p.240)

“Bagashyira ho ihembe ry’inzovu

Umwami akarikandagira hejuru

Ngo umwami ahore ari inzovu

Ahore aheza amahanga hasi.”(D’Hertefelt, Coupez, 1964, p.264)

As a result, the majority (or all) of the Kigeri kings were either great conquerors or great warriors. Crises in military domain were considered not as failures but as misfortunes. See for instance why Ndahiro Cyamatare got one ubwiru ritual, Inzira ya Gicurasi, how Kibilira River is never crossed by Rwandan kings, how names of Ruganzu, Nsoro and Ndahiro get removed from the reigning names. All this is to avoid contradicting the conquering vision.

Reading 2. Military ideology

The practice of kings of creating a military unit at their advent to be added to the existing ones led to the increase of military recruits. This shows some kind of military vision for reaching a bigger size of military recruits in future. But most importantly, the ideological part of military activities reveals to what extent the military vision was elaborated. Through the *ibyivugo* and the *inzira z'ubwiru* we get a grasp of this ideology. The *ibyivugo* trace psychological mobilization at individual and social levels. They also place military exploit at the top of the ideals of ingabo (Kagame, 1969, p.15-88). In dynastic poetry, the King is presented as the most powerful warrior. Sometimes he is compared with the thunder such as the King Mazimpaka. The latter has been considered as the thunder when he defeated the Burundian King Ntare. A poet celebrated the event in his poem in following terms: “The day when the thunder defeated the lion.”(Kagame, 1951, p. 137)

Besides, naming male children followed sometimes military exploits. For example: *Nshozamihigo, Rugamba, Mutiganda, Ntaganda, Rudahunga, Mulindabyuma, Mutabazi, Mukotanyi, Makuza*, etc. This practice may have played both a psychological role (self-fulfilling mission), but also an educative role (socialization).

The Ubwiru rituals also elevate the king at the level of a great conqueror of other kingdoms. The ritual of enthronement, *inziray'ubwimika*, socializes, obliges and instills the new king to be an extraordinary warrior. He is young, so the Abiru, through this ritual, are trying to instill in him all these ideals. Let us consider some excerpts:

Inziray'ubwimika

“Umwene nyabirungu mukuru agasenga

Ngo gahorane imana Kadaho

Tuje kudaha imigisha y'abandi bami

Tuje kudaha ingoma z'abandi bami

Tuje kudaha imvura y'abandi bami

Tuje kudaha inka z'abandi bami

Tuje kudaha imbuto z'abandi bami.”(D’Hertefelt&Coupez, 1964, p.248

“Ngo uwo ni umuribata

Twaribata u Burundi

Twaribata Ubunyabungo

N’andi mahanga yose

Adatura umwami w’u Rwanda. » D’Hertefeltc& Coupez,1964,p.258, p.260)

Reading 3 Unifying vision

Many clans happen to have been incorporated in organs of power and they remained within those positions for centuries. Key to this feature was the adoption and implementation of the principle of hereditary political positions. Some keepers of power were getting dismissed (kunyagwa) but their successors would keep positions. For example, in the Abiru college, we find following clans and lineages: *Abatsobe* (umwiru w’umutsobe), *Abakono/umwiru wa Nyamweru*, *Abatege*, *Abaheka*, *Abakobwa*, *Abatandura*, *Abenemuhinda*, etc.

Another unifying feature is that several clans intervened in the rituals of Ubwiru to make the rituals more ‘national’. Indeed, the reading of *inziray’umuriro*, *inzira y’umuganura*, *inzira y’ishora* and *inzira y’ubwimika* indicates that many geographical places, many people of different clans or lineages appear or play a role in a ritual. Men and women of all ages also are

represented in rituals. In particular, the annual *Umuganura* ritual unified the peasants around the King (Newbury, 1981, p. 89-101).

Moreover, rituals were performed at different times or months of the year. The year had many celebrations or rituals that animated, regulated and kept busy the public life. Throughout the year, these rituals became like national events that gave to Rwandans occasions to meet regularly and share perceptions, beliefs and practices.

Even among the dynastic poets, we see this incorporation of members taken from several clans or lineages: *Abanyiginya*, *Abasinga*, *Ababanda*, *Abene-Nyamurorwa* (or *Abanukamishyo*), and other poets from unknown clans and lineages (Muzungu, 2013).

The fact that these different clans and lineages hold positions of power within the kingdom of Rwanda is not haphazard. Indeed, they had taken part in the expansion of Rwanda, in the building of social and political institutions of Rwanda, and even in the enrichment of cultural aspects of Rwanda (Ogot, 1984, pp. 516-51; Mbonimana, 2011, p. 85-108). Same territory created consciousness about unity among these clans. Moreover, a shared culture among them strengthened a cultural unity.

The Rwandan political ideology was also characterized by power sharing. And power sharing operated in the same line with the unifying vision. To begin with, just as the Rwandan kingdom evolved from a small territory of five political entities (Buganza, Bwanacyambwe, Buriza, Busarasi and Bumbogo) to become the Rwanda of Kigeri IV Rwabugiri, so did the idea of royalty. It is likely that before the king Kigeri I Mukobanya the royal ideology was not yet solid. But since this king, it is mentioned that the process of centralisation of the state led progressively to the advent of the idea of nation, at least for a big part of Rwanda (Lugan, 1997, p. 17).

The monarchy was led by the *Nyiginya* dynasty. It is this dynasty together with other clans that progressively increased the size of the Rwandan territory through conquest and negotiation. But the royalty was embodied in the dynastic drum (*Rwoga* and then *Karinga*). The King was its servant, just as were *Abiru*. In this regard, some authors have argued that it was the royalty that was sacred rather than the King as a person, for he lived amongst members of his court (Mbonimana, 2001, pp. 9-10). In Rwanda, it was the dynastic drum that was sacred (Mbonimana, 2001, pp. 9-10; Gravel, 1968, p. 23). But the King was also the supreme chief of the army and of

the administration (Kagame, 1952,p.116; Vansina,2001, p.55).The royal ideology presents the King as a supernatural creature, linking Rwandans to God; sometimes the King bears (has) the name *Imana* (God).

Although however it was believed that theoretically the power of the King was absolute, above all because the ideology presented him as the ‘representative of God in Rwanda’, it has been made clear that in practice, the monarch did not enjoy absolute power. Indeed, the royal hierarchy superposed to the King a permanent queen mother with whom he shared power. The queen mother was chosen by the ritualists among the clans named *Ibibanda* “matridynastic clans: *Abasinga*, *Abakono*, *Abega*, *Abaha*, *Abazigaba* and *Abagesera* (Bourgeois, 1954, p.52; D’Hertefelt, Coupez, 1964, p.512). Besides, there was the ‘religious’ and political power of *Abiru*. The king’s power was therefore to some extent limited (Kanyamacumbi, 1995, p.238; Gravel, P.B. 1965, p.323; D’Hertefelt, al., 1962, pp.70-71). It was also shared among many other organs that had members coming from different clans and families. Therefore, Vansina is right to say that the Rwandan king was not an autocrat who would rule alone (Vansina, 2001, p.111-117)

The royal ideology contains also the unifying vision in term of peace, prosperity and attitude. The *ishora* ritual expressed that ideology in wishing plant seed, milk, sorghum beer and hydromel, peace, kindness and sharpness to all Rwandans including the king, all men and all women. It wished peace also to all drums and cattle of Rwanda (D’Hertefelt, 1964, p.115, p,116-117). It is important to note that all wishes were addressed not only to men, but also and always to women. That ritual aimed at renewing a dynastic cycle. For that reason we find many wishes for the following cycle. Through the wishes, it is possible to see the vision of the Rwandan court during the next period.

The *Umuganura* ritual aimed, in particular, at increasing the agricultural production of sorghum. This ritual was also very crucial in political vision, given the fact that the ritual revealed the kingdom unity and the solidarity among Rwandan people. In addition, each year, the ritual defined who was belonging or not to the kingdom of Rwanda (Vansina, 2001, p,77).

One can argue that we omit to talk about the so called ethnic cleavage Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. The sources don't allow us to state a precolonial vision aimed at creating cleavage or eradicating the existing cleavages.

We don't have any precolonial source describing Hutu, Tutsi and Twa through physical, moral, sociopolitical and psychological traits. We don't have any source stipulating that Rwanda was first populated by the Twa race, followed by the Hutu race, and, lastly, the « conquerors » of the « Tutsi » race who came from Abyssinia /Ethiopia seeking pastures for their cows.

Such descriptions have been promoted from the colonial period onwards. The Ethiopian origin of Tutsi and Hima in East Africa has been invented by the explorer John Hanning Speke (1863) and adopted without supporting evidences by almost authors after him. Let's consider the following extract: 'My theory is founded on the traditions of several nations, as checked by my own observation of what I saw when passing through them [Hima]. It appears impossible to believe, judging from the physical appearances of the Wahuma [Hima] that they can be any other race than Semi-Shem-Hamitic of Ethiopia (Speke, 1863, p.246). Such statement don't deserve to be considered scientific.'

We are presenting here the mechanism of state and national identity building not a plea for an ancient kingdom totally unified and prosperous. The ancient kingdom of Rwanda was not a place of good governance, of unity without social cleavages. What we present here is the mechanisms used to build the state and to create a citizenship and a national identity. Those mechanisms were dynamic, fluctuating but aimed at building the nation through prosperous periods and political and social crisis. The reading of dynastic poems (ibisigo), the royal rituals (inzira z'ubwiru), ibyivugo, the historical tales (ibitekerezo) and written versions of precolonial Rwandan history allowed us to highlight those mechanisms. Those mechanisms were not defined in theories but we can outline them by checking and analysing the ancient literature.

Conclusion: The mission of Rwandan kings as formulated by Mutara I Semugeshi stresses in clear and open terms the political vision or philosophy of Rwanda viewed in the lenses of its kings. On the other hand, how power was defined, managed, and shared among several clans of Rwanda shows implicitly the implementation of that political philosophy.

The political vision of precolonial Rwanda was shaped around the ideals of having a bigger Rwanda, a more powerful Rwanda militarily, a more populated Rwanda, a more prosperous Rwanda, and a more unified Rwanda. The means used to reach these wide visions include the setting up of administrative and institutional mechanisms and regular reforms of those mechanisms, military affairs but also religious or ritual performances.

How political and military ideals were popularized and socialized through rituals and literary genres (inzira z'ubwiru, ibisigo, imigani, ibyivugo) and public performances or celebrations (ibitaramo), suggests a constant need for precolonial Rwandan leaders to have these visions and philosophies shared among all Rwandans and spread to next generations. This point is also emphasized by Mbonimana: "Rwanda's political system and ideology were built on four pillars, namely a monarchy conceived in terms of a theocracy, a two-headed monarchy (King and Queen Mother), and a policy of territorial aggrandizement, conquest and patriotism, all of which were inculcated constantly to the people, especially through literary institutions." (Byanafashe D. et Rutayisire P., (éd.), 2011 *Histoire* p.109)

Dear students, I'm at the end of my lecture and thank you for your attention. My references and handouts will be available on the UR e-learning platform.

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