

The History of Mystique Building and Big Man Syndrome: The Case of Jomo Kenyatta Identity in Kenya

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Abstract: The history of mystique building and bigman syndrome among prominent personalities is not a new phenomenon in the contemporary society. This paper attempts to carry out an investigation into the various claims that attends the identity of Kenya's first president Mzee Jomo Kenyatta whose original name was known as *Johnstone Kamau wa Ngengi*. The paper seeks to find out the claims of various ethnic communities within and without, that *Jomo Kenyatta* is one of their own. Among the claims are:- is Jomo Kenyatta, a Kalenjin, a Mijikenda, a Maasai, or a descendant of Uganda's Bunyoro Kitara kingdom's royal family? The paper also seeks to establish whether these claims have any political motives and reasons for change of name from *Johnstone Kamau wa Ngengi* to Jomo Kenyatta. This paper adopts a qualitative approach by reviewing the available literature on the subject to come up with a logical conclusion. The paper examines literature on the meaning of the name Jomo and Kenyatta in the *Gikuyu* language vis-à-vis the Kalenjin and Maasai claims that the names have a meaning in their languages. The paper also examines literature on the claims that Kenyatta has roots among the Mijikenda and the Bunyoro Kitara's royal family. The paper concludes that apart from the claims made by the Bunyoro Kitara royal family, no confirmation could be made, unless a DNA test is made or the Kenyatta family issue a public statement. As for the Kalenjin claims the same standard of prove is required to clarify the claims. For the Maasai claims, it was established that Kenyatta had an aunt who was married to a Maasai, though the paper was not able to identify the name of the aunt or the name of the husband of the aunt. The paper also established that the reason for name changing could be attributed to identity creation and for political mileage.

Key words: Mystique building, big man syndrome, identity,

I. INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

Change of name and a desire to build a mystique around a personality is not a new invention and many personalities in all spheres of human endeavour have resorted to the same throughout human history. Celebrities, writers, sports personalities, movie stars and politicians have all seen the need to change their names in a bid to build an aura that will enhance their appeal to the public. Several political leaders have changed their names to enhance their appeal and to build a cult of personality and even deity status. Among the leaders to exploit this in the 20th Century was Francois Duvalier, the former despotic president of Haiti. Duvalier preferred to be referred to "affectionately", as Papa Doc (Haggerty, 1991), in

reference to his earlier career as a medical doctor. Besides calling himself Papa Doc, Duvalier went to the extent of seeking divine status as a god (Wright, 2015), (Nicholls, 1996).

Another political leader to change his name and not only to build a mystique about himself but also created a big man syndrome was Joseph-Desiré Mobutu; (born 14 October 1930, died 7 September 1997) who renamed himself Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga (*Columbia University Press, 2012*) shortened to Mobutu Sese Seko, the former military dictator and President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (which he renamed Zaire in 1971) ruled from 1965 to 1997. Mobutu acquired the name which can be given various translations, generally gets understood as meaning:

"the all-powerful warrior who, because of his endurance and inflexible will to win, will go from conquest to conquest leaving fire in his wake," "the earthy, the peppery, all-powerful warrior who, by his endurance and will to win, goes from contest to contest leaving fire in his wake" and "the man who flies from victory to victory and leaves nothing behind him and "the all-powerful warrior who goes from conquest to conquest, leaving fire in his wake" (Wrong, 2009).

Mobutu's change of name in 1972 was part of his authenticity campaign. Embarking on a campaign of pro-Africa cultural awareness, or *authenticité*, Mobutu began renaming the cities of the Congo starting on 1 June 1966; Leopoldville became Kinshasa, Elisabethville became Lubumbashi, and Stanleyville became Kisangani. In October 1971, he renamed the country the Republic of Zaire. He ordered the people to drop their European names for African ones, and priests were warned that they would face five years' imprisonment if they were caught baptizing a Zairean child with a European name. Western attire and ties were banned, and men were forced to wear a Mao-style tunic known as an abacost (shorthand for *à bas le costume*--"down with the suit") (French, 1997). Mobutu also changed his own wardrobe and assumed his classic image—abacost, thick-framed glasses, walking stick and leopard-skin toque.

Jomo Kenyatta who became Kenya's first president and fondly referred to by his admirers as the founding father of the nation was born Kamau wa Ngengi around the last half of the last decade of the 19th Century, to parents Ngengi wa Muigai

and Wambui in the village of Ngenda, Kiambu county in British East Africa. Kenyatta himself was not sure of when he was born, as his parents were illiterate and there were no birth records or hospitals where young Africans could be born at in precolonial Kenya, but it is estimated to have been around 1889 to 1896 (Kenya Factbook, 1997-1998).

II. THE KENYATTA'S IDENTITY AS A KIKUYU

Different communities have come forward to claim that *Jomo Kenyatta* was a member of their family or ethnic group however these claims were never discussed at least in public during his lifetime, rumours from various interested persons circulated even at that time speculating about Kenyatta's origin and parentage.

The first question in this study is to find out whether *Jomo Kenyatta* was a *Kikuyu*. Most literature capturing on *Kenyatta's* early life links him to the Kikuyu community. Kenyatta was brought up in accordance to traditional Kikuyu customs and beliefs of his time. He was taught the skills needed to herd the family flock (Archer, 1969); (Murray-Brown, 1974). As was required of a ten year old, his earlobes were pierced to mark his transition from childhood (Archer 1969). As such, Jomo was not only a Kikuyu, but a Kikuyu nationalist with leadership ambitions. That is why by the time he was in his early thirties, Kenyatta entered politics after taking interest in the political activities of James Beuttah and Joseph Kang'ethe the leaders of the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA). He joined KCA in 1924 and rose up the ranks of the association. Eventually he began to edit the movement's Kikuyu newspaper. By 1928 he had become the KCA's general secretary (Assensoh, 1998).

To further his Kikuyu nationalism, Kenyatta in 1928 launched a monthly Kikuyu-language newspaper called *Mwĩgwithania (Reconciler)* (Archer, 1969); (Murray-Brown, 1974); (Berman & Lonsdale 1998) which aimed to unite all sections of the Kikuyu. The paper, supported by an Asian-owned printing press, had a mild and unassuming tone (Murray-Brown, 1974); (Maloba 2018), and was tolerated by the colonial government though Governor Edward Grigg later wrote to London requesting to close the paper (Murray-Brown, 1974). He also made a presentation on Kikuyu land problems before the Hilton Young Commission in Nairobi in the same year.

By 1929, Kenyatta, had established himself as the undisputed Kikuyu leader. As a result, the Kikuyu Central Association sent him to the United Kingdom, to lobby on its behalf with regards to Kikuyu tribal land affairs. Using the name Johnstone Kenyatta, he published articles and letters to the editor in *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* (Polsgrove, 2009). His Kikuyu nationalism was again evident, when he returned to Kenya on 24 September 1930 and took part, on the side of traditionalists, in the debate on the issue of female genital mutilation of girls. He later worked for Kikuyu Independent Schools in Githunguri (Beck, 1966).

Still unsatisfied that he did a good job on behalf of the Kikuyu Central Association, Kenyatta returned to London in 1931 and enrolled in Woodbrooke Quaker College in Birmingham, to enhance his academic credentials and be able to convince the British government. Discouraged by the lack of official response to the land claims he was putting forward, he began an association with British Communists, who published articles he wrote in their publications. In 1932 to 1933, he briefly studied economics in Moscow at the Comintern School, KUTVU (University of the Toilers of the East) but left after the Soviet Union (worried about Hitler's growing power and seeing Britain and France as potential allies) withdrew its support for the movement against British and French colonial rule in Africa (Polsgrove, 2009).

Apart from the international political environment that made studies in the Soviet Union difficult to proceed with, Kenyatta was unable to convince the Soviets that he had an inclination towards socialism like the other pan-Africanists being trained by the communist government of the Soviet Union, to go and fight for the liberation of their countries from European colonialism.

In 1934, Kenyatta enrolled at University College London and from 1935 studied social anthropology under Bronisław Malinowski at the London School of Economics (LSE). At the completion of his studies, Kenyatta published his own book, *Facing Mount Kenya* (his revised LSE thesis) in 1938 under his new name, Jomo Kenyatta (Polsgrove, 2009), a book that was a kind of treatise on Kikuyu culture.

For a man who started his political career as an activist of the Kikuyu Central Association, a pressure group formed by the ethnic *Kikuyu* of central Kenya to agitate for their land rights, it was no wonder, he presided over a highly Kikuyu centric, ethnicized administration when he got a chance to become the first president of Kenya. At the same time it was intriguing that *Kenyatta*, chose a name that was not a traditional Kikuyu name for himself. Was he reaching out to his alleged *non-Kikuyu* roots? As a result of the above claims, let us interrogate other literatures that have been advanced about Kenyatta's ethnicity and parentage.

III. WAS KENYATTA A MAASAI?

Though it is clear in the public domain that *Kamau wa Muigai-Ngengi* was born of Kikuyu parents – Muigai and Wambui, there have always been speculations that Kenyatta had Maasai roots. While this could be possible, owing to the extensive inter-marriages that have taken place over the years between the Maasai and the Kikuyu, Kenyatta is reported to have taken refuge among Maasai relatives in Narok (Murray-Brown, 1974); (Assensoh, 1998) to escape conscription into the Kings African Rifles to fight on the side of the British during the First World War.

While the popular narrative about Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, has been that Jomo had Maasai relatives and that the name Kenyatta is derived from the beaded Maasai belt which he

liked using (Murray-Brown, 1974), not much literature has been written about Kenyatta's alleged Maasai roots.

While writing to advance the theory that Kenyatta had Kalenjin roots, journalist Weldon Oriop Kirui, weighed in on the issue of Kenyatta – Maasai ties. He claimed that Jomo Kenyatta, visited his Kalenjin “uncle”, Kipchomber Kochichlem Arap Koilegee who was in prison in central Kenya. Arap Koilegee was the brother to Nandi legendary leader Koitaleel Arap Samoei. Arap Koilegee had taken leadership of the Kipsigis in pre-colonial times. He had supported the resistance waged against the British by his brother. He therefore found himself suffering the consequences when together with his brothers, Chebochok Arap Boisio and Kibuigut Arap Tanui were rounded up by colonial authorities and thrown into separate jails located in central Kenya region.

This is the account of Kirui:

“When arap Koilegen was about to die of old age in July 1916, he summoned Kenyatta to his house for briefing. Kenyatta was then a student at Thogoto Mission School. He gave him a beaded belt known in Kalenjin as Kenyattet (correctly Kinyaattet), a container for holding stuff (tobacco), a flywhisk and a monkey skin called Siombuut. He then told Kenyatta that when it is time for the white men go back to Britain he would lead the nation. He instructed him to drop Kikuyu/Christian names, (Johnstone Peter Kamau which he did. After that he instructed him to go to Loita and seek further advice from Maasai Iloibons (Morathi) and in particular Ole Mokompo who died in the early 1970s. After being blessed by the Oloibon, he was told, “Shomo Kenyatta!” in Maa language i.e. go with this belt”.

Could this Ole Mokompo be Kenyatta's Maasai relative? He therefore, claimed that kenyatta or kinyata mean a beaded belt not only among the Maasai, but also among the Kalenjin. Murray Brown, Kenyatta's biographer also wrote that kinyata meant a beaded belt in Gikuyu (Murray-Brown, 1974).

IV. WAS KENYATTA A KALENJIN?

Throughout his fifteen years rule, rumours did the rounds in many a Kalenjin household that Kenyatta was actually a Kalenjin and not a Kikuyu. Many who heard this narrative probably dismissed it a political talk to enhance Kenyatta's appeal among the Kalenjin, since his Vice President, Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi was one of their own.

Apart from the rumours which were whispered from one ear to another, no much attempt has been made by various Kalenjin scholars, writers and commentators to document these allegations and subject the claims to empirical investigation. Whereas not much literature appears in mainstream media and publications about these claims about Kenyatta's alleged Kalenjin roots, much has appeared in the social media in the years that followed the emergence of social media outlets especially on Facebook. One such social

media writer is Weldon Oriop Kirui. Writing on Facebook on 3rd August 2015, which I quote verbatim:

And Now Mzee Nchomo Kinyattet

If Obamas origin is shrouded in mystery that one of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta is even more shrouded but I have gotten the lost key which I have used to unravel the mystery: KINAYAATTET was and is still a beaded belt in Kalenjin.

That Kalenjins have stuck to both the current President-elect Uhuru during his hour of need is something never seen before. In 2002, Kalenjins voted for Uhuru Kenyattet almost to a man a feat they repeated ten years later. Why? Why? Why?

This has forced me to redo my research or refining it which has enabled me to display Jomo Kenyatta's early portrait (his early life), his real father and why he dropped [his] Kikuyu name (Kamau). Mzee Jomo Kenyatta is now confirmed to have been a Kipsigis who grew up among the Kikuyu and later appointed one of their own to continue with leadership. In his Book, Facing Mt Kenya, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta writes that his parents were morathi (diviners or Illobon) from Maasailand east of Legeiyo.

The legend told by old wazees is like this. After the demise of the great Nandi Oloitorian Kipnyolei arap Turugat (Simbolei) his sons went to other parts of the Kalenjin land. One of them, Chebochok arap Boisio was to stay in Londiani in Kericho District. While in Londiani arap Boisio met a young lady later to become the mother of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. It is believed that their friendship and union resulted in the birth of Kenyatta whom we are told was originally called Johnstone Peter Kamau. Kamau's mother Nyokabi Wamboi is reported to have been a widow who used to herd cattle in Londiani. Nyokabi is Kikuyu for Iloikop (Kwavi) Maasai. She later sought employment in European farms in Central Province in the 1900-1920. While in Kikuyu land, Wamboi got married to Muigai who is wrongly believed to have been Kenyatta's father.

After sometimes, Muigai divorced Wamboi “for having a child from Lumbwa (Kipsigis) people. She went back to work in European farms. In 1913, all brothers of Koitaleel arap Samoei were rounded up and banished to Central Province for opposing the evil plans of the white man. They were Kipchomber arap Koilegen (Kochich-lem), arap Boisio and Kibuigut. They were detained in Nyeri and Forth Hall now Maragwa. While in Kikuyuland, Kenyatta's mother was assigned the role of taking care of the three detainees. Why did the white man chose Kenyatta's mother to take care of them?. Is it possible that Nyokabi Wamboi was able to speak Kalenjin, or did the detainees chose her for reason detailed above? It is even claimed that arap Koilegen used to refer to Wamboi as Muthoniwa or (poomuru) - (Kikuyu for sister in law).

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After being blessed by the *Oloibon*, he was told, “*Shomo Kenyatta!*” in *Maa* language i.e. go with this belt. Because of language barriers, *Kenyatta* thought his name was *Jomo Kenyatta* because after sometimes *Mzee* penned his name as *NCHOMO KINYATTA* which he later changed to *Jomo Kenyatta*. *Jomo* is derived from *Maasai* verb *shomo* meaning to go. *Arap Bosio*, *Kenyatta*’s father died in 1929 after being tortured by the white man. When he died, *Kenyatta* was schooling in London. His demise shocked *Kenyatta* so much that for three days, *Kenyatta* was indoors crying and mourning the death of *arap Bosio*. Why did he mourn *arap Bosio*? Perhaps he secretly knew to be his biological dad.

Years later, in 1970s when *Kinyaattet* was resettling *Kikuyus* squatters in *Londiani*, *Kipkelion* district the *Kipsigis* were not amused. Old men of that time could be heard wondering aloud Oh!oh?Kokwam nee *Kipkemoi* oh! (What has gone wrong with *Kipkemoi*?). We can get a clue as to *Kenyatta*’s childhood name. The Old men called him *Kipkemoi* because that was probably his childhood name. The *Talai* clan people are known to call *Mzee Kenyatta* as *arap Tanui*, a name given to *arap Boisio*’s sons who live in *Kericho* district.

Throughout his years on earth, *Mzee Kenyatta* used to refer to all *Kalenjins* as *Kipsigis*. he used to aske....niitie huyo *Murumbwo* (call for me that *Murumbwo*(*Kipsigis*) when he wanted to see former President *Daniel Kapkorios arap Moi*. He may have heard a lot of stories about the *Kipsigis* from his mother.

Back to *Nyeri*, *arap Boisio* again befriended a young *Kikuyu* lady named *Margaret Muthoni Chemarus* who was President *Kibaki*’s aunt. She died in 1987in *Kipkelion*. They married and had children who now live in *Kericho* District. Before *arap Koilgen* died, another old man from *Tugen* named *Chepkeres arap Toroitich* visited him. He later blessed him and told him that one of his grandsons would one day rule Kenya. This later came to be true when *Daniel Toroitich Kapkorios arap Moi* became president.

Now *Kenyans* know the hidden history which have unlocked with a key hitherto unknown. But one thing for sure.....*Mzee Jomo Kenyatta* and *Barrack Obama* were raised by single mothers but rose to rule their countries against all odds.

The facebook post by *Mr. Oriop Kirui* has some inconsistencies that need to be addressed. For instance, when did *Kenyatta*’s mother *Wamboi* die? *Mr. Kirui* has written that

he was selected by the colonial authorities to minister to the detained *Nandi Talai* leaders. However, according to biographies written about *Kenyatta*, state that *Kenyatta* lost his mother when he was seven years as she was giving birth to his brother. This is long before the *Nandi* leaders were detained in *Central Kenya*. This is one area future researchers may concern themselves. *Mr. Oriop Kirui* made startling claims that *Kenyatta* mourned for three days the death of his “father” *Arap Boisio* in *London* in 1929. It is not clear if this account was ever documented anywhere or how these claims could be verified.

Apart from putting into writing those claims about the origin of *Kenya*’s first president, *Mr. Oriop Kirui* has also added hitherto unknown information about *Kikuyu-Kalenjin* genetic ties. Writing on *Facebook* on *April 15, 2011*, *Mr. Oriop Kirui* argued that the *Kikuyu* people when settling in the areas around *Mt. Kenya*, where they now reside, met several *Kalenjin* communities which they assimilated or pushed them out. I again quote in verbatim the facebook post.

V. KALENJIN KIKUYUS ARE BLOOD RELATIVES

April 5, 2011 at 2:51pm

During my research for my book, I have chanced upon amazing facts concerning *Kalenjin-Kikuyu* blood relationship never known before. The *Kikuyu* proper is an amalgamation of many tribes like *Shagishu*, *Ngembe*, *Kalenjin*, *Masai*, *Sonjo*, *Ghumba* and other people of foreign extraction. Writing about the *Kikuyu* in the 1960s, *Prof Godfrey Muriuki* was told that before *Kikuyus* settled in *Central province* there were other people who had settled there before them. These alltochtonous people include *Ghumba*, *Ghumbieng*, *Barabiu*(*Barabaeek*), *Athi*, *Nataeek*, *Sirikweek* (now *Qrigua* of *Western Cape* in *South Africa*) and *Kipchoeek*. Although most of them were driven out of *Central Province* by a combined force of *Kikuyu* and *Masai*, some remained and were absorbed by the *Kikuyu*. Although some scholars had talked about a possible pogrom which may have taken place in the past, these *Kalenjin* speaking groups now live in *Manyara province* of *North eastern Tanzania*. The great rivers of *Kalenjin* blood flowing in *Kikuyu* veins are a result of these groups.

After assimilation, those who remained in *Kikuyuland* took names like *Ngumba* (from the word *Gumba*, *Mwathi* or *Mwathe* among the *Kamba*, *Maina*, *Irungu*, and *Mwangi*. After staying with them for close to 60 years, these groups also introduced to *Kikuyu* the art of circumcision and four *Kalenjin* age sets, *Maina* (*Maina*), *Mwangi* (*Nyongi*), *Chumo* (*Cuma*) and *Korongoro*(*Irungu*). The *Kalenjin* word for initiator, *Motiriot* is *Mutiri* in *Kikuyu* or martyr in *English*. The *Kipchoeek* were a fierce people who used to attack people during the night. They used to live in *Kibichoi* (named after them) area of *Kiambu* district. They were also assimilated by the *Kikuyu* while others were assimilated by the *Samburu*.

The *Kikuyu* name *Waiyaki* (*wa Hinga*) is derived from *Kalenjin* name (*arap Koiyoki*).The story goes this way. About

the year 1800, there used to be a Nandi king called arap Koiyoki of Talai clan. He had a son whom he later sent to rule the Maasai. Once he was in Maasailand, he was renamed Koiyaki Timale Ole Lemotaka. Koiyaki also had a son whom he sent to lead the Kikuyu. He changed his name to Waiyaki wa Hinga. Waiyaki lead the Kikuyu till he was tortured by the white man and buried alive in Kibwezi. There are many Kikuyus by this name now. The word Athi means hunters in Kikuyu and Kamba and this the name given to the Ogiek Kalenjin speaking group by the two communities.

Some of the Kikuyus who have Kalenjin blood have rose to become prominent. These include the late MP Andrew Ngumba, Mwathi who is an MP in Kiambu district, former Defence Minister, Njenga Karume who traces his descent to Ogiek, Dr Munyua Waiyaki, former NACADA boss, Joseph Kaguti and even Mzee Jomo Kenyatta (Kenyatta is Kalenjin word for beaded belt) and many others whom I cannot name because of space limitation. Owing of the Kalenjin blood in Kikuyu veins, the later have now emerged as the second long distance running power after the Kalenjin. If blood were determined a tribe and if Kikuyus divided themselves along the tribes mentioned above, then there would be no one else to be called Kikuyu.

When I saw Kikuyu and Kalenjin butchering each other in 1992, 1997 and 2008, I wondered whether they were not shedding blood of their people who are related. I hope the two communities have learnt that they are related by blood and will never fight again. You could be killing your distant relative (Kirui, 2011).

This post may be dismissed as having been designed with certain political narratives in mind at the time it was written – the need to bolster the then blossoming Kalenjin-Kikuyu alliance that finally culminated in the birth of the Jubilee Alliance. Some of the commentators who reacted to this post said as much. Bill Ruto reacting noted that the mere fact of sharing genetic origin is no guarantee: *‘Bill Ruto commenting on Somali on Somali; Jew [Isaac] on Arab [Ishmael]; Maasai [Uasin Gishu] on Maasai (Laikipiak), etc. It's apparent "blood relations" are irrelevant when it comes to the fundamentals that make fighting an inevitable outcome of disputes!’*

Pouring cold water in the sentiments expressed, Chemaswet Peter argued that true reconciliation could only be possible if truth could be said. *“The Nation will be healed if the truth is done about land issues civil service employment is done on merit but not on tribal basis. Check KRA, Central Bank, Treasury”* (Weldon Oriop Kirui Facebook post, 2011)

Another matter that is raised by the post is whether Kenyatta could be considered a Kipsigis or a Nandi. If his father was Chebochok Arap Boisio who was the son of the Nandi Orgoiyot, Simbolei Kimnyole Arap Turugat, and also a brother of the legendary Nandi resistance leader Koitaleel Arap Samoei, then it is clear that Kenyatta has Nandi heritage and not Kipsigis as stated by the facebook author Mr. Oriop

Kirui. However, before his murder by his own Nandi people in precolonial Nandi, Kimnyole, instructed his sons never to accept leadership positions among the Nandi again and to instead take refuge among the Kipsigis and even take leadership positions there. By the time of the British crackdown against the Nandi during the Nandi resistance (1895 - 1906), Kimnyole's son Kipchomber Kochichlem Arap Koilege had assumed leadership among the Kipsigis (Chomu and Humphry, 2012).

The Nandi resistance did not spare the Kipsigis and the Tugen communities who also fought alongside the Nandi. It was for this reason that the Talai clan to which the Turugat family belonged was targeted by the British. A good number of the Talai fled Nandi to Kipsigisland to escape from the British crackdown. It was for this reason that the British detained Koitaleel's brothers in various parts of Kenya and more specifically Mount Kenya region – Muranga, Nyeri and Meru, as a way of scattering the Talai and forestalling any prospects of the Nandi regrouping and mounting another resistance against the British (The Standard 4, 5, and 6th June 2012).

VI. WAS KENYATTA A MIJIKENDA?

Mzee Jomo Kenyatta during his 15 years presidency had a near sentimental attachment to the Kenyan coast. Kenyatta would spend weeks in the coast on what used to be a busy holiday. It was then claimed that Kenyatta was asthmatic and his doctor had recommended that he spends most of his time in the coast as opposed to the wet and cold highland areas of Nairobi and his Gatundu home. However, there was no confirmation from any credible sources that Jomo Kenyatta was asthmatic. However, Kenyatta had heart problems and suffered mild strokes at various times during his presidency (Cullen 2016). The reason for wearing open shoes was attributed gout and eczema, a rare skin disease he is understood to have picked during incarceration in Lokitaung (Madoka, 2016). Madoka notes that Jomo Kenyatta would prefer walking on the beach to cool his painful feet on the beach mud. Madoka noted that Kenyatta loved his roasted meat and VAT 69 whiskey, which would aggravate his gout and eczema, necessitating a visit to the beach.

Apart from these requirements which were associated with his state of health, it was further rumoured that Kenyatta was actually a member of the Mijikenda Digo community. That it was the reason for Kenyatta never missing to spend plenty of time in Kwale County. No literature in the mainstream media and academic publication stating how Kenyatta is related to a family in Digoland or the Digo community, save for rumours that are probably passed from word of mouth. Writing in the Standard of August 23, 2013, Tobias Chanji quoted a former Member of Parliament Kassim Mwamzandi argues that Kenyatta simply fell in love with the place and became a frequent visitor during his annual holiday visit to the coast. Mwamzandi notes that Kenyatta fell in love with the region because of the people's generosity, rich culture and food but rebuffs sentiments from some quarters that he was a Digo.

“He was not a Digo. It is only that our people were so proud of him. He just liked the place,” says Mwamzandi who adds that before embarking on his annual pilgrimage to Bomani Primary School, Kenyatta would retreat to the Msambweni Development Farm *“to eat well then come here where he could do his harambees (fundraising), then leave,”* he recalls (Tobias Chanji, The Standard, August 23, 2013).

VII. WAS KENYATTA A MEMBER OF UGANDA’S BUNYORO KITARA ROYAL FAMILY?

Among the most intriguing claims is that claiming that Jomo Kenyatta was a descendant of Uganda’s Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom’s royal family. This story of Kenyatta’s Uganda heritage appeared in The Standard of April 12, 2016, written by David Odongo, in which the story heavily relies on a similar story carried in Uganda’s New Vision newspaper. I reproduce the story in verbatim:

Ugandan Newspaper Claims Uhuru Is 'Ugandan'

By David Odongo and New Vision Updated Fri, April 12th. By David Odongo Nairobi; Kenya;

A Ugandan newspaper, The New Vision, has raised sensational claims that Kenya’s fourth president Uhuru Kenyatta could be of Ugandan royal blood. After Uhuru’s swearing in, the Bunyoro monarch, Solomon Gafabusa Iguru sent a congratulatory message to his ‘cousin’ on his election victory.

In a story that tells why success has a thousand fathers...A message from Omukama, or King, cited the old cordial relations between Bunyoro and Kenya and recalled how the late Jomo Kenyatta often visited the Omukama’s father, the late Sir Tito Winyi. The newspaper even published pictures of relatives whose looks are similar to those of Kenyatta’s.

According to the New Vision, the theory that the first president of Kenya was a son of the Omukama Kabalega of Bunyoro-Kitara has for ages been doing rounds in Uganda and with Uhuru being elected as president, the rumors mills are working overtime to justify the claim.

According to historical facts, Kabalega and Mwangi were captured in the plains of Lango in 1899 by a combination of British and Buganda troops, and King Kabalega was shot in the right arm. They were then exiled from Uganda and they spent some time in Kenya before being taken to Kismayu in Somalia and then onto the Seychelles. While in jail, the two kings were under constant guard by the British, and apparently several attempts to rescue the two were made. Their minders kept up a constant update of their progress to the Colonial Administration in the form of dispatches. The dispatches to the foreign office covering the journey from Uganda ones are from Kismayu as the two embark onto the journey to the Seychelles.

Although the dispatches were listed on the catalogue of the Kenya Government Archives, the actual documents were not there when we last checked. This is a verbatim transcript of

what The New Vision reported: Colonial records indicate that the wounded Kabalega was given a ‘Kikuyu nurse’ to take care of him when the two kings stopped at a place named as ‘Kikuyu’. Uncorroborated reports have it that the Kikuyu nurse got pregnant, but the fact was kept secret from the British.

There are different reports of the date of Kenyatta’s birth and time and place of his birth. But historians agree that he was born Kamau Ngengi in a place called Ngenda between 1897 and 1901, about the same time Kabalega is said to have lived in Kenya on a two-year sojourn. It is also agreed by historians that Kenyatta’s father died when he was young and his mother subsequently remarried. But she is said to have gone back to her parent’s home further north, where she died. He was baptized in Johnstone Kamau in August 1914, but later adopted the name Jomo (Kikuyu for burning spear) Kenyatta (from the waist bead belt worn by natives then).

Bunyoro Kingdom sources refused to answer any questions pertaining to Kabalega and Kenyatta, or why the Omukama had congratulated Uhuru Kenyatta. About the Jomo Kenyatta visits to Bunyoro, they said it was ‘normal’. When asked if Uhuru has visited the kingdom, they said ‘not yet’. So, will this mystery ever be solved? A detailed study of the colonial dispatches covering the journey of the two kings from Uganda to Kenya would definitely give an account of what really happened, and there is some indication that Bunyoro Kingdom officials have actually done this, and know the story. The debate going on social media right now is whether the Kenyatta family would consent to a DNA test and what would be the implications if they did? What would the Kenyans do if their President turned out to be actually of Ugandan descent? For more details visit: New Vision. Read <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000081391/ugandan-newspaper-claims-uhuru-is-ugandan/?pageNo=2>

As pointed out by the author of this report the Ugandan connection with the Kenyattas make startling claims. It is not in the public domain as to whether the two families – the Kenyattas and the Kabalegas have done anything to resolve the mystery one way or another.

There could be several reasons why it has not become public knowledge that the Kenyattas have done anything to address these issues about their origin. Why was it that Kenyatta himself never addressed the issue (at least in public) when he was alive. US presidents have always attempted to trace their lineage whenever they get elected. Barak Obama for instance was not apologetic about his Kenyan roots. He came to Kenya to trace his roots, long before he had developed any inclination to politics. Obama even travelled to Ireland to trace the roots of his white parentage. Could it be that Kenyatta was not keen to amplify his non-Kikuyu heritage for fear of losing Kikuyu support? What about the present Kenyatta family members, is there any who would like to

clarify these matters. This paper suggest that further research in this be persued.

Why the change of name

It is not clear when Kenyatta changed his name from Johnstone Kamau wa Ngengi to Johnstone Kenyatta and finally to Jomo Kenyatta. The earliest recorded use of the name Kenyatta can probably be early 1920s (1920-1921), when he named his first business – a shop Kinyata Store, which he operated in Dagoretti. The name of the store is thought to have been named after the beaded Maasai belt which Kenyatta is reported to have been fond of wearing. Could the use of the Kenyatta name be a decision to use a mere nick-name? It could be also attributed to the messianic connotations the Kiswahili transliteration of the Kenyatta name evokes – “Kenya ta” (the lamp or light of Kenya).

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