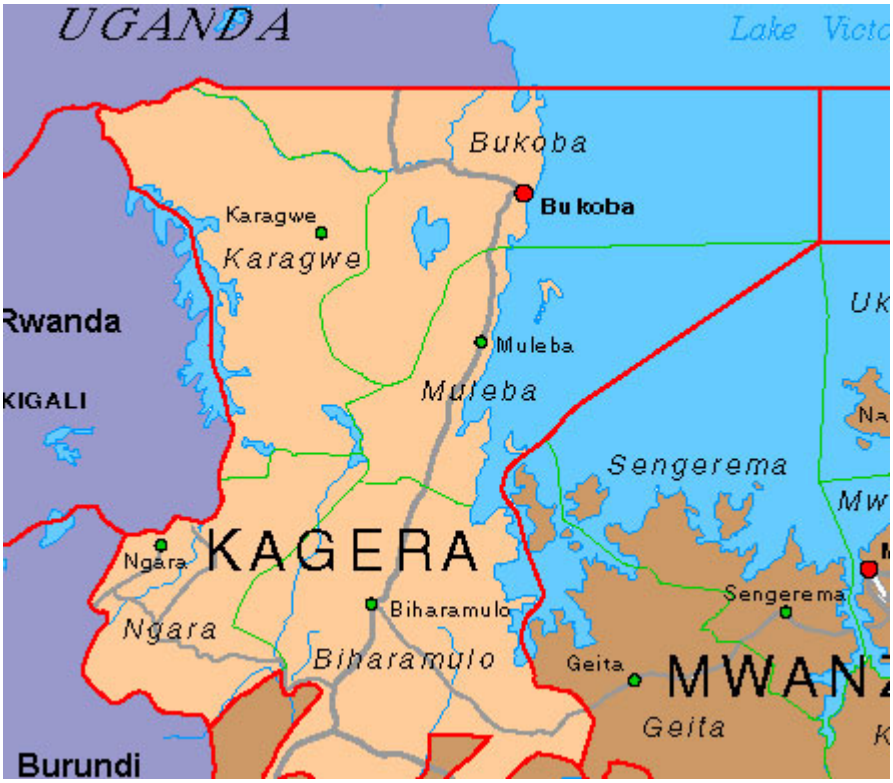
Self- Praise Verses in Haya Ethnic Groups.



Kagera regional map

Kagera's famous agricultural product from the farm to the market

Kagera Region is located in the northwestern corner of Tanzania. Bukoba, Kagera Region's capital, is a fast growing town with an attractive waterside setting. Situated on the shore of Lake Victoria, Bukoba lies only 1 degree south of the Equator and is Tanzania's second largest port on the lake. Kagera comprises six administrative districts: Bukoba, Misenyi, Muleba, Karagwe, Ngara and Biharamulo. According to the 2003 National Census, the population is at 2,003,888 with an annual growth rate of 3.1%. The region borders Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi and lies just across the lake from Kenya. This location makes Kagera an ideal place for business and a perfect stop for tourists traveling between any of these nations and Tanzania. You may arrive in Kagera by air or ferry from Mwanza, or by road from Rwanda or Uganda. The main industrial activity in Kagera is agriculture with coffee being the main commercial product. The main food crops and dietary staples are maize, beans and “matoke” that is, large green bananas (plantains) that are roasted or steamed.

For a period of about five centuries Kagera Region had nine different Kingdoms and a highly hierarchical society. It was during this time that coffee was introduced as a cash crop and bananas were introduced as a staple food. Women of the time were thought to be inferior to men and were treated as virtual slaves. Kings lived in elaborate palaces and were respected as their kingdom’s direct link to god of. The demise of these kingdoms (Kihanja, Karagwe, Kiziba, Misenye, Bugabo, Kyamtwara, Ihangiro, Bukara and Biharamulo) came after Tanzania gained its independence and President Nyerere saw them as detrimental to National unity. The writer of this article is from Kyamtwara.

The regimes of these kingdoms were blended by the Germans who colonized Tanganyika in 1890, and who are reported to have liked the Haya, the ethnic group of Bukoba, Misenyi and Muleba districts. Later, the British took over from the Germans. Kagera region is considered to be the first area where Lutheran missionaries settled. Presently, the Roman Catholic Church and other religions also enjoy a large following in the region. This is evidenced by the physical presence of the impressive cathedrals, mosques, jamats and churches found everywhere in the region.

Kiswahili is Tanzania’s national language and is spoken throughout the country, however most people speak their own tribal language as well. In Kagera, Kihaya is the main tribal language though languages of other minority tribes are also spoken. The ability to grasp a few words in the local dialect when visiting Kagera is much appreciated by the community. English is taught as a subject in primary school, but is the medium of instruction from Secondary education onwards.

In African generally, personal praise verses carry stories of who you are, where you're coming from, and what you've been through, so that you and others can "know" you well. If you were born an African child, you might be taught to recite a special chant of self-naming that identifies your family, community, and regional affiliations; proclaims your clan and revered ancestors; announces your place in society, as well as other special circumstances and characteristics. In a lifetime, an African person may acquire many "praise names" - or epithets (=

descriptive substitutes for a person's name) - which embody not only the virtues but also the vices of the person and/or the person's ancestors. So important is such African naming that sophisticated oral art forms called "praise poetry" have developed in almost every African traditional society.

Personal praise verses (majigambo, in Swahili) or (Ebyebugo, in Haya) is an art in Haya ethnic groups. The Haya live in Bukoba Misenyi, and Muleba districts, Kagera region in Tanzania. Among other ancient cultural survivals, majigambo remain one of the most important Haya cultural heritages. This art is practiced on special occasions like marriage ceremonies, at the nomination of a Haya chief, on a Haya day, at the cerebrations of the national torch and sometimes at school graduation. These praises are in the form of poetry but they are not sung, instead they are recited and the person who recites them can do it in the form of declaring.

When hunters succeed in killing a dangerous animal or any big animal, they have to praise themselves when they return home. They do this to show how strong they are particularly when they kill a dangerous or a trouble-making animal. The praises are mostly recited by men. Because these praises are inherited from one generation to the other, all levels of men (that is, children, young men and adults) engage in reciting these praises. Children who live with their grandparents are better instructed in the art, and are in a good position to recite these praises and preserve them in their memories for future use, than those living with their parents.

One of the Haya traditional houses (mushonge)

According to Kabuta (1997), the peculiarity of majigambo is that, its content is much more tied to the owner (the reciter), for they only use the first person singular and the content is tied to bravery or heroism, and the repetitions contain many poetic names.

Kabuta defined the verb “kujigamba” (of which its plural noun is “majigambo”) as the act of boasting or praising oneself, to feel like you know everything in this world, to feel you are better of than others, to stoop, to honor yourself, to feel that

you are having things that other people do not have, to distinguish yourself from others, to preen, show off, et cetera.

To some other people who are not used to such culture of kujigamba, they feel like boasting or self-praise is a bad behavior which is blameworthy; but majigambo are different from boasting. It is an art that helps an individual or a group of people to comfort themselves and to give them hope and strength.

To Kabuta, this art in Africa goes back as far as 3100 BCE about the same time as the invention of writing in Egypt. The narrator of these majigambo is not a normal person, who thinks he knows much; instead he is an artist that knows well the subject matter he is narrating about as well as the appropriate poetic formula. Majigambo, as stated above, are composed and recited by the same person. Employing poetic techniques like metaphor, imagery, repetition, and sometimes-even rhymes, the narrators of these verses, base them on a particular event. Some majigambo can be recited during initiation ceremonies, at weddings, when people return home from war, when one passes an examination, wins a puzzle, a game, or a case, etc.

Though some majigambo are long, most others are short. The target audience easily understands them because they mostly deal with things that are happening or have happened in their society. For those who are not from the community, however, it is difficult to understand what is being said especially if they do not know the narrator's history.

Among other things, majigambo should have part or the whole of the following;

- A real or an artistic name of the narrator
- His masculine genealogy
- His feminine genealogy
- Explanation of sacred deeds he has done
- Promises to do more than his king or predecessors
- Conclusion

Mulokozi (1989:10-11) states that in reality, majigambo are not written but rather are abruptly composed and recited at the moment of composition. However, in order to preserve majigambo for future generations, these praise verses are now being written down. Indeed, nowadays, some people read instead of recite them.

The following majigambo were composed by the author, Merchades M. Rutechura, who (in part I) praises his strength and courage and (in part II) his male and female line of descent.

Ninye Mutakyamirwa eya Rutechura	I am Mutakyamirwa son of Rutechura;
Rutechura eya Rugeiyamu,	Rutechura son of Rugeiyamu;
Rugeiyamu eya Tegeleza,	Rugeiyamu son of Tegeleza;
Tegeleza eya Byanjweli	Tegeleza son of Byanjweli;
Byanjweli eya Kabisha; ntabuka Kimizi	Byanjweli son of Kabisha; I am from Kimizi;
Kimizi ey'ekyalo kya Buhembe	Kimizi in Buhembe village.
Ndi muigi, mara muigiwaila.	I am a hunter; a hunter who endures.
Ndi manzikandindi, manzi ya Rufu	I am courageous; I don't fear death
Nkaiga omwirungu, eirungu rya Kyazi,	I used to hunt in the veldt, the veldt of Kyazi.
Najumbula entare, nairuka nasiga embwa zona.	I saw a lion, and ran after it faster than my dogs.
Yuruuuuuuuuuuuu!	Yeaaaaaaaaaaaah!
Kuleba omumaisho entare engarukira	After some time, the lion turned towards me.
Ndeba enyuma mbona embwa tizilio.	I looked back and saw no dogs behind.
Nkwata eichumulya orubango ruendeka.	I raised my spear, but the haft broke.
Nyemelela, nkwata entare ngienda ebikya.	I stood erect; wrestled with the lion, and broke its neck
Yuruuuuuuuuuuuu	Yeaaaaaaaaaaaah!
Mara kandi oruganda ndi Munkango	I am of the Munkango tribe.
Owaigara lyakabura, owa myongo etaranda	Of the invisible house, among of unspread pumpkin plants.
Ninsheka ngaramire, ninyang'orwango rwa rutashesheka.	I laugh while looking up, because I don't want my meanness to fall.
Ninyanika oburo omurufunjo, ninyanga enkoko itaburyaa	I dry my millet under the bed so that the chickens won't eat it.

In this majigambo note in particular the following usage of poetic language and figures of speech:

1) **Anadiplosis** in the first six lines where each new line begins with the last word of the preceding line.
2) **Alliteration** and **syntactic parallelism** in line seven and eight, where 'm' occurs at the beginning of five words and where each sentence begins with a copular expression (I am), followed by an

expression amplifying the sense of the copular expression. The next line too also imperfectly exhibits the same structure.

3) **Hyperbole** - where the speaker is said to outrun his dogs.
4) **Syntactic parallelism** in the last two sentences where an introductory phrase in the first part of the sentence is followed by a reason for the action in the second part of the sentence.

2

Waitu nimbasiima muno	I thank you all
Orwo mwampa omwanya ogu kwebuga,	For offering me this opportunity to praise myself
Eibala lyange ndinkuba,	My name is thunderstorm
Mala ndi mulilo.	And I'm fire
Nkaluga eigulu nagwa aharwazi nalwatayata	I came from above, rested at the rock and broke him in pieces
Chonka nanye tindalugileo kusha,	But, I didn't defeat him,
Rwazi akampenda omugongo	He broke my backbone too
Nikyo namueleile eibala rwazi	That's why I called him rock.
Kyenshonga muno kwebuga	It is necessary to praise myself
Oruganda lwange ,	and my clan,
Enshonga oruganda rwange lwezile	because my clan is pure
Tikyokimoi n'enjoka anga ekikele	It's not the same as that of snakes or frogs.
Inye omuruganda ndi Munkango	My clan is Munkango
Ndi owankango	I'm from Nkango
Mara Nkango	And Nkango
Akanyirukya kunyiya Buzinja	chased me from Bujinza
Okuba bakenda kunyita	because they wanted to kill me
Olwenshonga nkabashagya obwege	Because I was more intelligent than them.
Kayaizile yansheleka Kabale	Nkango hid me in Kabale
Kabale aka Ngahiza	Kabale part of Ngahiza
Tata ni Rutechura	My father is Rutechura
Tatenkuru ni Rugeiyamu	My grandfather is Rugeiyamu
Tatenkuruza ni Tegeleza	My great-grandfather is Tegeleza
Nimbebugila munoi	I also praise them
Olwokuba nibo bantaile omurugand'olu.	Because, they brought me into this clan.
Nakwebuga n'olubaju olwa mawe	I can praise even the side of my mother

Enshonga tiyashweilwe mwa tata	because she wasn't married to my father;
Aina nsinjo anga oruhoile	With any mark of pregnancy.
Mawe ni Ma Theopista.	My mother is Theopista.
Mawe nto ni Kokushubila.	My older aunt is Kokushubila.
Mawe ntokazi ni Kaijuko	My young aunt is Kaijuko.
Aba nibo banyonkize,	Those are the ones who breast fed me
Ekyo mbendela	I love them
Orwongoba tibaiyula bibisi	Because, when I visit them, they don't prepare badly cooked-food.
Bakanzala ndi kakaka,	I was very thin when I was born.
Mbwenu nabaile kikaka	And now I'm a giant
Ninshaba ekyebugo eki mukitole Mara mukirongole.	I pray that this praise be accepted and be rewarded.
Mbakasinge ndi	Thank you, I'm ...
Kandi mba kasili akalimwamu buli kamoi	And I'm the farm that grows everything
Mba kataka akalabisa buli kamoi akabyalwamu	And I'm the soil that grows everything that is planted on it
Ndi kyakagolo chonka tindya bogolo	I'm tobacco, but I don't use tobacco
Nakugambila bingi chonka ndekelele aho	I'd have said a lot, but let me stop here.
Engamba bingi kumalayo esimwa bake	Too much is harmful.
N'engamba bingi temenya mbali ejumila nyinazala	And he who says a lot doesn't know when he scolds his mother in law..

Among the many figure of speech in this part of the praise verves note particularly:

1) Metaphors "My name is thunderstorm and I am fire" in lines three and four.
2) Hyperbole equating an opponent with a rock in lines five through eight.
3) Chiming (rhyming) of the last two words in line eleven and twelve (rwange lwezile, anga ekikele).
4) Epistrophe in lines thirteen through fifteen where each lines ends with the syllable "nkango".
5) Parallelism in line seventeen eighteen where two different words with the same meaning are used to begin each line.
6) **Anadiplosis** in lines nineteen and twenty with the repetition of "Kabale" at the end of one line and at the beginning of the next line.

7) **Syntactic parallelism** and **alliteration** in lines 21, 22 and 23 (tatenkulu ni; tatenkuluza ni..) and also in lines 29-31, the three line s beginning with “mawe”.
8) **Metaphor** the three striking metaphors in lines 40, 41 and 42 where the narrator equates himself with the farm and the soil that grows everything as well as with tobacco, a product of high value.
9) And last but not least the **Kihaya proverb** cautioning a narrator to stop his narration before he inadvertently insults someone in line 44.

Conclusion

In this paper I have presented a literary genre known as majigambo in order to demonstrate the poetic genius of my ancestors. It is hoped that future generations will recognize its worth and continue to preserve a truly worthy aspect of our traditional culture. Like Xhosa “Isibongo” and Yoruba “Ijala”, there is much beauty and wisdom in its verses. Those interested in preserving this tradition are encouraged to submit to me other examples for inclusion in a book I plan to write in not too distant future. I can be reached by email at rutechura@wisc.edu or by phone at 608 262 8462.

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