

"How to promote a Kingdom – Marketing strategies in Buganda"

In 1993 President Museveni announced the restoration of most of the Ugandan kingdoms which had been officially abolished in 1967. On July 31, 1993, Ronald Muwenda Kiganda Mutebi II was crowned 36th Kabaka of Buganda.¹ Ever since the restoration, various groups have attempted to utilise the Buganda kingdom for their own marketing interests.

This paper will introduce the main actors² and their marketing strategies for the coronation and the royal wedding.

Monarchists

First of all, the kingdom wants to promote itself. But the monarchists themselves do not form a homogeneous group, but are divided into several groups with different motives, aims and strategies. These groups comprise the 'custodians of traditions', as they call themselves, members of the royal parliament who call themselves 'the modern monarchists'³ and Baganda in the diaspora.

The custodians of tradition comprise the leaders of the Bugandan clans and the people in charge of producing and looking after the traditional items of regalia. Many of the custodians of tradition have only very little Western education. They gain status and self-confidence through the secret knowledge connected to their duties. One might call this a "reciprocal construction of value" (Appadurai 1986: 20): the custodian defines the value of the object and the object's value defines the 'value' (i.e. status) of its custodian.

Officially, the Kabaka has only cultural functions, but he appoints his own government. His ministers and the members of his parliament form the 'modern monarchists'. They gain unofficial power by broadcasting their resolutions on

¹ Nomenclature: The region is called Buganda, the people are called Baganda (singular Muganda), the language is Luganda and in English texts the form for adjectives and adverbs is Bugandan, even if this is so grammatically not correct.

² The study for my PhD on the regalia of the Kabaka of Buganda focused mainly on the traditional and modern elite, i.e. those that shape the kingdom and its regalia directly. I have left out other groups who are the main supporters of the kingdoms but satisfy themselves with playing a more or less indirect role in the construction of the kingdom, e.g. the rural population (with the exception of traditional authorities) and Kampala's working class. For studies concerning these groups see Karlström 1999.

³ Reluctantly, I use the terms 'modern' and 'traditional' since this dichotomy was crucial in my informants' discourse.

the royal radio station (CBS) or, during the time of my research (1998-99), by publishing them in the royal newspaper (Njuba Times) – two important instruments for the kingdom to promote itself. For these modern monarchists the kingdom is one way to further their own political careers.

The first wonderful opportunity for the kingdom's self promotion was the coronation ceremony. The public coronation on July 31, 1993 consisted of a so-called traditional and modern part. During the first part the main actors were the traditional monarchists – representatives of different Bugandan clans. In the second part, the stage was left to the representatives of various religions. Religion, more than political opinion or conviction, is thought to be one of the main factors of conflict in Buganda. To prevent this kind of tension, Kabaka Mutebi allowed members of different religions to play an important role in his coronation. "Kabaka is a uniting factor", emphasized one of my informants (G.S.: 1.7.98).⁴

The coronation gave the monarchists the opportunity to present Buganda to the world (through international journalists) as a modern kingdom and the Kabaka as a modernizer uniting different religions. This demonstrated especially to the Central Government and to President Museveni the number of adherents they were able to muster.

In the years following the coronation, the traditional monarchists have lost more and more influence: already during the coronation the modern monarchists were in charge – they decided which traditional leader was to perform a function during the coronation ceremonies. Modern monarchists were also in charge of the overall marketing strategy of the coronation. During the royal wedding six years later, most of the traditional ceremonies were cancelled and the traditional monarchists hardly played a role anymore.

A third important group of monarchists does not live in Uganda itself but is scattered around the world – the Baganda in the diaspora. Many Baganda were forced to leave the country during the times of Milton Obote and Idi Amin – they mainly migrated to Britain, the US and Sweden. Around the year 2000, about 250,000 Baganda were living in the diaspora (Anonymus 1998). They are potent donors and supporters of the Buganda kingdom. Like other communities in the diaspora, they tend to be more conservative, i.e. more conscious of their

⁴ The statements of my informants are anonymous as long as they are not statements of an official representative.

traditions than their fellow countrymen at home. For them the kingdom is a way of self-definition. A Muganda in Britain commented on his situation as follows: “You must have your culture and your nation and then other people will respect you and otherwise you are a third class person” (P.B.: 01.09.98).

Besides organising conferences, the medium of the diaspora is the internet. Via the homepage of the Buganda kingdom they are able to obtain information about the kingdom and to discuss Bugandan matters.

Balokole

In the years following the coronation, special strategies were applied to attract two important groups to the kingdom which at the beginning were not so much involved or were even opposed to the kingdom: one of them was the ‘Born Again Christians’ (Balokole). The Balokole are one of the most influential movements in Uganda (Mugeere 1999). In the beginning, their attitude towards the kingdom was restrained. They regarded it as a traditional institution with unchristian if not satanic implications. Realizing the Balokole’s influential position in Uganda and the fact that they had not been represented at the coronation, Kabaka Mutebi has attempted to assign a higher value to them. In doing so, he is torn between the custodians of traditions and the Balokole who demand an end to all ‘satanic royal rites’. For example, for the fifth coronation anniversary the Kabaka sent only his cultural minister to the traditional ceremony rather than going himself and instead received hundreds of Balokole to the royal parliament for public prayers.

Wannabes

Wannabes (derived from ‘Want-to-be-American’) were also not present at the coronation. They are found mainly among students and graduates of Makerere University. Their lifestyle is markedly Western; they speak with an American accent, wear Calvin Klein trousers and are enthralled by the stars of MTV. They belong to a generation which grew up without a kingdom and do not feel bound to the Kabaka. To them, a kingdom is an old-fashioned institution.⁵ To change their minds, the Kabaka engaged a crew of famous presenters for the royal radio station (CBS) consisting of Mulindwa Muwongwe, Rasta Rob and the Hollywood-trained Peter Ssematimba, which made the kingdom fashionable for the youth by organising boxing matches, car rallies, parties, pop and rap concerts and by inventing special forms of greetings and a youth language. One

⁵ There are also counter discourses, e.g. “Nkoba za Mbogo”, a Buganda monarchist student group.

presenter of the famous 'CBS-crew', Rasta Rob, is not a Muganda. He is a member of the Rastafarian movement in Uganda. The Rastafarians are one of the groups of non-Baganda supporters of the kingdom as they perceive the Buganda kingdom as part of their pan-African roots.

Asian Community

Not only does the kingdom promote itself, other groups also use the kingdom for their own purposes: one of them is the Asian community.⁶ Since colonial times, the Asian community has been an important factor in the Ugandan economy (Mickleburgh 1999). It also forms one of the most significant donor groups among those acting in favour of the Buganda kingdom. A list of donors published after the royal wedding showed that five of the seven biggest individual donors of the wedding were members of the Asian community, each of them donating 10 Mio. UgSh (Anonymus 1999c).⁷ An Asian businessman is one of the main donors of the kingdom. He sponsored Kabaka's costume for the coronation and also six years later for the royal wedding, including the regalia. Asked for his motivation, he stated his close relation to the kingdom: "My financial donation towards the wedding and other development projects is due to the love for Kabakaship and the kingdom at large. The Asian community and I enjoy close cooperation with the people in the kingdom and the country at large" (Ruparelia in Kakande 1999e). The Baganda on the other hand tend to believe that financial gain and not love for the kingdom is the Asian's strongest motive. But there is also an ulterior motive, rarely mentioned by anyone: the fear of the Asian community of being expelled from the country, as in 1972 under the regime of Idi Amin. One informant characterised the Asian sponsor of Kabaka Mutebi's regalia as follows: "This guy is lucky. No one will ever touch him. It was a clever idea [to sponsor the regalia], because anybody who touches him now touches the kingship" (N.R.: 26.11.98). This shows the power of the kingdom within the Ugandan national state: the Baganda are seen as influential enough to expell the Asians and the Kabaka is perceived as powerful enough to protect them in case of danger, whereas officially he does not have any political power.

Central Government

⁶ The term 'Asian Community' comprises mainly Ugandans originating from the Indian subcontinent, not people of Chinese origin. In 1998 the Asian community comprised an estimated 10,000 people (Mickleburgh 1999).

⁷ In 1998/99 1,000 Uganda Shillings correlated with around 1,80 German mark/ 90 Euro Cents.

The central government also uses the kingdom to market itself, but has at the same time an ambiguous position.

In the 1990s, it was the Central Government which set the institutional framework of the current kingdom of Buganda. Upon restoring the Ugandan kingdoms⁸ in 1993, President Yoweri Museveni defined them as purely cultural institutions.⁹ The restoration of the Buganda kingdom was created as a marketing strategy to win the Bugandan lower- and middle-class for the vote of the new Ugandan constitution.

Ever since its restoration, the relations between the Buganda kingdom and the Central Government have become ever tenser, as the monarchists have been demanding more political rights.

The coronation placed President Museveni in a delicate situation, since the restoration of the kingdoms was for many a critique of the nation state, as Kabaka Mutebi himself put it in an interview: "The postcolonial modern European state has failed Africa-wide" (Shoumatoff 1993: 49). During the coronation, Museveni was asked to sit on the same platform as Kabaka Mutebi, but one step lower. He cleverly avoided the humiliation by stating that he was just a normal citizen and preferred to sit on the same level as the other normal citizens attending the coronation as a neutral onlooker.

Some years later when his popularity decreased, he gave up this neutral position and started posing in newspaper articles with royal attributes of power using them to show his own power.

During the royal wedding six years after the coronation, Museveni again changed his position: he humiliated the Baganda by giving a speech which, on the one hand, gave the impression that he did not grant the event any

⁸ The traditional leaders of Buganda, Toro, Bunyoro and Busoga were reinstalled (Kayunga 1995: 244). Museveni did not restore the kingdom in his own region Ankole as this would have meant re-establishing the reign of the Bahima – a minority group – which could have led to unrest in the region (Doornbos und Mwesigye: 1995: 74).

⁹ This limitation re-appeared in the Ugandan constitution of 1995: "Traditional leaders may exist / are to / shall act in accordance with the culture and wishes of the people (concerned). [...] 3 (v) a traditional leader shall not participate in partisan politics (vi) a traditional leader shall not have administrative, legislative or executive powers of central or local government." (q.v. Mukholi 1995: 77-78)

importance. On the other hand, he emphasized the importance of the Central Government in the restoration of the Buganda kingdom and told Kabaka that everyone should stay in his role, “the political leader in his job and the traditional ruler in his role” – using the occasion to a media-effective marketing of the importance and power of the Central government.

Entrepreneurs, national and multinational companies

There are several groups who instrumentalise the kingdom for their own commercial interests.

Whenever there is a royal function, there are lots of vendors in the streets of Kampala selling photos or photo collages as souvenirs of the event – these pictures are cheap and quickly made.

Not only local entrepreneurs but also national and multinational companies see the kingdom as a marketing opportunity. During the coronation the main donor was Coca-Cola. This led to the Kabaka taking his oath under a Coca-Cola umbrella.

During the preparations for the royal wedding, this tendency for multinational companies to be involved even increased: “The wedding was the biggest marketing technique I have ever seen”, as one member of the diaspora stated (M.F.: 30.08.99). National and multinational companies profited from the commercialisation of the royal wedding: airlines competed for the honour to fly the bride and her entourage for free to Uganda. Other members of the diaspora were offered cheap flights to Uganda with the slogan “Royal Wedding Special” (Kibirige 1999).

Upon arriving in Uganda, the royal bride was offered a mobile telephone and a contract from the Ugandan mobile company (Kasolo 1999). The South African competitor sponsored the live broadcast of the wedding on Ugandan television: to market this, a photo collage of the royal couple was created on which the Kabaka and his bride were so close together that their cheeks touched each other – too close for many monarchists and most Christians, as even at the wedding ceremony the Kabaka was not supposed to kiss the bride. Therefore the photo collage was later changed for a 16 x 11 metre congratulation poster hung on one of Kampala’s skyscrapers.

One brewery owned by a member of the Asian community sold “Crown Lager”, the official wedding beer. Around 9 Euro Cents per bottle were given to the

royal wedding fund.¹⁰ Another brewery owned by the Central Government sold “Wedding Bell Lager” showing a picture of the royal couple. The brewery said that they did not sell the beer for commercial reasons but to honour the longstanding relationship between the kingdom and the brewery (Mucunguzi 1999a). The royal wedding committee, which did not receive any profits from the sales of this beer, saw it differently: it prohibited the distribution of the beer, as according to the committee a royal law from the 1960s did not allow any pictures of the Kabaka or the queen in connection with alcohol (Anonymus 1999b, Kaheru 1999).

Whereas during the coronation Coca-Cola held the monopoly on soft drinks, a dispute between Pepsi-Cola and Coca-Cola arose before the wedding. The Pepsi suppliers were physically hindered by Coca-Cola bodyguards from delivering their presents – crates of soda – to the royal parliament (Mucunguzi 1999b). At the wedding celebrations, Pepsi eventually did not cater to the 2,000 invited guests but to the more than 100,000 people who had come from Kampala and the rural areas to the palace. According to Pepsi’s marketing manager, this had a much better marketing effect: 25,000 crates were distributed among the people that day (Mukasa 1999).

Whereas the kingdom received donations of 1 Mio US\$ for the preparation of the royal wedding (Kibirige & Nganda 1999: 1), a discussion of the commercialisation in the media was not desired: the presenter of one of the non-monarchist radio stations had problems after suggesting that the royal wedding robe should be decorated with logos of the companies sponsoring the wedding, comparable to one of Michael Schumacher’s outfits (Katusiime 1999).

Conclusion

This paper has aimed at giving an insight into the different motives and strategies in promoting the Kingdom of Buganda.

The kingdom financed a large part of the coronation but even more of the royal wedding through sponsoring. It marketed itself through promotion in the media as an influential modern kingdom for all Ugandans irrespective of their ethnic or religious backgrounds. For the modern monarchists the kingdom is part of their

¹⁰ The royal prime minister requested the people to drink more “Crown Lager”. One newspaper later on published the story of a man who drunk himself unconscious with “Crown Lager” for the benefit of the Kabaka. (Anonymus 1999a.)

political career, for the traditional monarchists it is a way of confirming their place in society. For the Baganda living abroad the kingdom is a way of defining themselves as Baganda, for the Rastafarians it is part of their pan-African identity.

The members of the Asian community market themselves as friends of Buganda kingdom. They wish to enhance their prestige through donations to the kingdom as a way of protecting themselves against future persecution.

For the Central Government the restoration of the kingdom was a way to attract supporters, but royal occasions were later used to define its own position and power by attracting media attention and to keep the kingdom in its place.

For entrepreneurs, national and multinational companies, the kingdom served their commercial interests. They all recognized the marketing value of the kingdom and stylized the wedding of the Kabaka as a gigantic marketing event.

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