

CHAPTER TWO

Western Bantu (Abaluyia, Abagusii, Abakuria, Luo-Abasuba)

Abaluyia

The Luluyia-speaking people occupy the Western Kenya Province, Samia in Uganda, Bukedi and Bagisu districts plus a small extension of territory into Busoga district also in Uganda. There is little difference between the Babukusu of Kenya and Bagisu of Uganda, and there is none at all between the Samia of Kenya and the Samia of Uganda. The Banyuli of Uganda are of the same stock as the Banyole of Kenya. The Lake Bantu of Tanzania parted from some of the Abaluyia of Kenya somewhere in Uganda long time ago. The Bahaya are particularly akin to the Abaluyia and their language is not far removed from Luluyia spoken in Kenya. The Bukoba of Tanzania are of the same clan as the Bukoba of Samia in Kenya. There are pockets of Nilotic-speakers in Luluyia-speakers' areas in both Kenya and Uganda. In Uganda they are Iteso and Badama (Jopadhola) respectively. The Iteso of Kenya are an off-shoot of the Iteso who live in the Teso district of Uganda.

Maragoli tradition has it that they came from Misiri [Egypt?] and are believed to have descended from a group known as Soba during their stay in the northern part of present-day Sudan and a portion of present-day Egypt. John Osogo on this has written:

On the map, the suggested area of origin of the Baluyia has been marked astride the Nile comprising a section of the northern part of present-day Sudan and a small portion of present-day Egypt. This whole area lies over what was once known as the land of Kush (Kash). Note that Serra and Kurru were important places at that time. Note also Soba; what connection could this have with the Maragoli, who say they came from Egypt, and are believed to have descended from a group known as Soba? These are all fairly wild guesses, but they are worth thinking about.⁵

The Abaluyias' Adam and Eve counterparts of the Jews appear to have been Akuru (or Kuru) and his wife Muka who are also known as Mwambu and Seera. According to A.J. Akell in his book *A History of the Sudan from the earliest times to 1921*, places known as Seera, Dongola, Merowe, Kuru and Soba existed before the Birth of Christ. these places are in the areas which the Abaluyia relate to their origin or migration route from Misiri. it would appear reasonable, therefore, to accept the Misiri legend of origin as being grounded in authentic historical experience. Furthermore the Abaluyia traditions of migration from the north, from Misiri or Abyssinia (Ethiopia) is corroborated by other Bantu traditional histories.

Paul Aseka Abuso, writing about the origin of the Abakuria, has stated:

Mt. Elgon district is also important in the tradition of various Abakuria clan's claim that at that time their ancestors who had earlier come from 'Misiri' were living on the northern side of Lake Victoria.

Migration into Kenya

Some of the Abaluyia people travelled from the Congo area through Uganda into Kenya. Others travelled first to the northern parts of the present Sudan before turning southwards and into Kenya.

The earliest Abaluyia immigrants arrived in the territory that is today western Kenya before 1000 A.D. and the latest waves of immigrants arrived in about 1700. The very earliest clans to arrive have now disappeared or have been absorbed by clans which arrived much later and only their names are still remembered. It would appear that the first arrivals passed through Buganda on their way from Bunyoro or the Congo. Some groups went through Busoga to Ibanda and the others moved over generations to the mainland between the mouths of the river Sio and the river Yala and settled on the Islands of Sigulu, Jagusi, Siro, Lolue and Mageta. They also moved to Samia (Kenya) between Bunyala and Yimbo, particularly the Igoye area and the area around Kadimo Bay. The groups which went through Busoga settled in Ibanda and some reached river Malaba and later on reached Sang'alo in Kenya and Bunyole in Uganda. A northern route brought the Mount Elgon sub-groups to their present settlement.

The Name Abaluyia

The Abaluyia community is made up of eighteen sub-groups. The sub-groups which constitute the community have a common background, common customs and speak closely related dialects of the same language. Each sub-group is divided into many clans and in the olden days, the sub-group formed the basic political unit. The smallest unit within the sub-group was the Olukongo, which literally means 'a ridge'. But although the Abaluyia had a common language and a common culture, they did not have a name embracing the whole community, that is, all the sub-groups.

In the 1920s these Bantu communities of western Kenya, realising that they had a common background and a unifying language, began to explore possibilities of the formation of a community association to cater for their common interests. Several associations were formed including the Bantu Kavirondo Tax-payers Association. In 1940 the Abaluyia Welfare Association was formed. The name Abaluyia quickly gained popularity particularly after the Luyia language committee was established and formulated an orthography for Luyia language. Within ten years, the name Kavirondo was discarded and the name Abaluyia stuck. According to Abaluyia tradition, communities used to hold criminal tribunals at the junctions of foot paths. The area at the junction of foot paths was known as Uluyia or a meeting point and it is claimed that the name Abaluyia was derived from this. There is another version. In a polygamous home the courtyard outside the main father's house is called Luyia. All the children are referred as children of one Luyia and hence the name Abaluyia.

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Abaluyia sub-groups are as follows:

1. Ababukusu
2. Abamarama
3. Abalogoli (Maragoli)
4. Abanyala ba Maelo
5. Abetiriki (Terik) (Kakamega)
6. Abitakho (Kakumega)
7. Abanyala baongo (Busia)
8. Abesukha (Kakumega)
9. Abakabalasi
10. Abawanga
11. Abasamia
12. Abatsotso
13. Abakhekhe
14. Abashisa
15. Abamarachi (Ambamataki)
16. Abanyole
17. Abakhayo
18. Abatura
19. Abatachoni

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The Wanga Empire

During its last two centuries, the empire was the best organised in Buluyia. The Nabongo ruled the whole sub-group effectively and also extended his authority over a number of neighbouring sub-groups. Both Netia and Osundwa retained services of Maasai (Abasebe) mercenaries to fight and raid for cattle for them from other people and sub-groups. Wamukoya Netia had inherited some of the Maasai mercenaries from his father Musindalo but increased their number on his accession to the Nabongoship. They were paid with cattle in addition to their share of the booty brought from their devastating raids.

The Nabongo was assisted in governing his territories by various chief clan elders appointed by the Nabongo himself. Thereafter, the office became hereditary in the families or lineages of the elders so appointed but the Nabongo also had special elders who assisted him in hearing and settling cases. The tribunal elders were appointed by the Nabongo who remained the court of final appeal in cases referred to him by the chief clan elders. Before that cases or appeals were first presented to the Weyanga (president of the court) who then presided over the hearing. The Weyanga was usually a member of the Abanashieni clan. The Abakaribo clan provided the Nabongo's messengers and police.

How the Empire Split

Nabongo Osundwa who was the father of Kweyu and Wamukoya was the cause of the quarrel between the two brothers as he was misled by the royal servants to believe that his eldest son Kweyu was not concerned about his deteriorating health. As he lay in his deathbed, he sent for Kweyu many times, but apparently since the servants did not want the arrogant Kweyu to inherit the throne as they preferred Wamukoya, his messages never reached Kweyu. Any time Kweyu asked the servants what his father's state of health was, they replied that "he was just as you left him" giving the impression that Nabongo was not dangerously ill. Osundwa gave up waiting for "unconcerned" Kweyu, as the servants had hoped, and bequeathed the throne to Wamukoya. By the time Kweyu at last came calling, his father had already died and Wamukoya had already performed the ceremony of spearing the bull in the traditional manner, and people had shown allegiance to him. In anger, Kweyu declared that Osundwa's body would not be taken to Matungu for royal burial as had been done to the previous Nabongos. He insisted that the Late Nabongo should be buried at Eshimuli near his home, but Wamukoya remained the confirmed Nabongo. Kweyu declared himself the supreme chief of Wanga Mukulu and though he was never recognised as Nabongo, he ruled Wanga Mukulu independently of Wamukoya till he died. He was succeeded by his son Sakwa, whom the German explorer Carl Peters found on the throne of Wanga Mukulu in 1890.

Sultan Sakwa

Apparently the Wanga Mukulu chieftanship or sultanate was well-run and impressed Carl Peters who signed a treaty with Sakwa. Carl Peters wrote the following:

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Kwa-Sakwa rose before us, not like a village but like a town. A dense crowd came streaming out of the gate towards us . .

This is the way he described Sakwa's form and attire:

A great bronze chain hung around his neck, and his arms were profusely ornamented with artistic copper rings. He carried a lance in his right hand, and a shirt [kanzu] of cotton fabric covered his body.

In his effort to impress and to have the Europeans on his side against Nabongo Mumia, he signed a formal treaty with Carl Peters which reads as follows:

Sultan Sakwa of Kavirondo, begs Dr. Carl Peters for his flag. He acknowledges Dr. Peters unreservedly as his Lord. Dr. Carl Peters promises to protect Sultan Sakwa according to his power, and to help him in the conquest of the whole of Kavirondo, so far as is consonant with Dr. Peters' other plans. Sultan Sakwa solemnly hoists the German flag today in his capital. Both parties complete this treaty by the signatures of witnesses.

Sakwa's treaty with Dr. Carl Peters did not produce results as the Berlin Agreement transferred those parts of East Africa to Britain.

Nabongo Mumia

Nabongo Mumia succeeded his father Shiundu, who died in about 1881, when he was aged between twenty seven and thirty years. As a young and friendly king he received Joseph Thomson into his kingdom in 1883. It is the same Mumia who in 1885 advised Bishop Hannington at his capital of Kwa-Sundu (now Mumias) not to approach Buganda from the east, but who, when the missionary insisted on going, gave him a number of Bawanga guides and porters for the fateful safari to Busoga. Only one man Otsuolo son of Ingutia returned to Kwa-Sundu alive carrying the sad news of the murder of the Bishop and the remains of the Bishop who had been killed along with all his caravan on the orders of Kabaka Mwanga.

Mumia acceded to the Nabongoship of Wanga at a very critical time of attacks against the kingdom by the Ugenya Luo, the Ababukusu and the Abanyala (Navakholo). It was also a prolonged period of drought followed by a severe famine. Wanga was also afflicted with a cattle-plague which killed many cattle.

Nabongo Mumia was a very generous and kind ruler and a good warrior. He was extremely pleasant and cheerful, but maybe he did not have enough wisdom or determination as a leader. Joseph Thomson, the first European to be received by Mumia said of him:

The present chief is a mild and pleasant young man, and we were soon on the best of terms with each other. Though of a sluggish temperament . . . He enjoyed enormously examining my photographs. He became so enthusiastic about the charms of one young lady, who was represented as posing aesthetically over a flower, that he gave me a large order for a bevy after that pattern at two tusks of ivory a head. I said I would see what I could do for him.²²

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Thomson also wrote:

I arrived at the town of Sundu [Kwa Sundu]. This place under the father of the present chief was one of great importance and size; but since his death has gradually dwindled away, till the wall encloses more Matamma field and grass patches than huts. The inhabitants, under an effeminate prince, have no special advantages, and consequently prefer to live in smaller villages to be nearer their fields.

Nabongo Mumia helped the British to establish colonial government in Nyanza Province. Most of the Abaluyia sub-groups like the Ababukusu and Kakalewa, for example, were brought under control by Wang'a chiefs under Mumia's orders. It is possible that if Mumia had not foolishly listened to advice from some Swahili Moslem friends at Mombasa to refuse to go to England for the coronation of King Edward VIII in 1902, he would have acquired the same status as that of the Kabaka of Buganda whose regent Apolo Kagwa went. On reaching the coast on his way to board a ship for England, the Swahilis, who had influenced him at Mumias with Islamic religious ideas, approached him and told him that he was being fooled and that if he went, he would be killed. As it was, Mumia gave up the voyage. In 1909 he was made Paramount Chief, which in effect was only a nominal title, from which he retired in 1926. Mumia died on 24 April 1949 with what had remained of his kingdom.

ABAGUSII

The Abagusii are a Bantu ethnic group which occupy the most southerly portion of the cool fertile western section of the Kenya highlands. Their language places them within the family of the Bantu-speaking majority of sub-equatorial Africa. The present Gusii homeland consists of an elevated plateau which rises to the south and east to altitudes of over 2000 metres above sea level and is cut into wide flat-bottomed valleys by the Kuja river and its tributaries. The plateau extends over 200 square kilometres with a mean altitude of 2250 metres above sea level. Between the Abagusii and Lake Victoria are the Nilotic Luo. To the east and south-east they are bordered by the Kipsigis and the Maasai respectively. To the south, though separated by a corridor of Luo, are the closely related Abakuria.

Abagusii in their traditions acknowledge their close relationship with the following peoples: the Abakuria, the Abalogoli, the Ababukusu, the Abasuba, the Ag]k[y[, the Am]]r[, the Aembu, the Ambeere and the Akamba. Their tradition also has it that on their way from the country which they call 'Misiri', they were also accompanied by the Baganda and the Basoga besides the above mentioned peoples. The Baganda and the Basoga are said to have branched off from the rest of the immigrants around Mount Elgon, taking a south-westerly direction. The Ag]k[y[, Am]]r[, Aembu, Ambeere and Akamba are said to have travelled eastwards towards the central highlands of Kenya, while the Ababukusu appear to have remained around Mount Elgon. The remaining clusters — the Abagusii and the Abalogoli migrated southwards following the River Nzoia valley and arrived near Lake Victoria between 1490 and 1520. Following an easterly course along the lakeshore, they settled at the head of Goye Bay in Yimbo location of Nyanza with their homeland spreading across present day Ulowa, Sare and Unyejra at the foot of Ramogi hill. Luo migrants found them settled in this general area.

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The migration and settlement history of the Abagusii people right from the cradle-land of the Congo-Niger complex is inter-twined with the rest of the East African Bantu migrations and settlements. Many of the East African Bantu peoples' traditions acknowledge a sojourn in Misiri and evidence for this exists. Professor W.R. Ochieng in his contribution in the book Kenya before 1900 has written thus:

The Gusii themselves speak of Mogusii as the founder of their society and the person after whom their tribe was named. They also say that Mogusii's father was called Osogo, son of Moluguhia, son of Kigoma, son of Ribiaka, who was son of Kintu (variously called Mundu, or Wantu, or Muntu, apparently according to personal preference). It was Kintu, the Gusii says, who led the migration from "Misiri" to Mount Elgon, and there they appear to have stayed until they were forced to disperse because of droughts and pestilences. Gusii traditions also indicate that Moluguhia, the grandfather of Mogusii, had a number of sons who founded some of the Baluyia sub-tribes or clans, and that among his remembered sons were Osogo and Mogikoyo [M[g]k[y][]. Osogo's descendants are said to have founded the Gusii, Kuria, Logoli and several suba tribes, while the descendants of Mogikoyo became the G[k]y[, the Meru and the Embu tribes and – according to a few elders – the Kamba tribe as well. It is worth pointing out at this stage that these Gusii claims are not to be taken for granted. Linguists like Whitely and Greenberg, who have studied the Gusii and other Bantu languages, are agreed that the Gusii, Logoli, Kuria, Gikuyu, Embu, Kamba and Meru languages are very closely related.¹

Mogikoyo is a common name among the Abagusii while the Maragoli also name their sons M[g]k[y]. This is a tangible proof of the existence of the ancient clan or ethnic blood relations as asserted by the Abagusii, Maragoli and Abakuria among others to the Ag[k]y[and their other related communities.

Goye Bay

Abagusii traditions indicate that they lived at Goye Bay for two generations only and it is probable that both Mugusii and Mulogoli were born there. The arrival of the Luo section of Joka-Jok in the area created a big security risk for the small population of Abagusii and Abalogoli. The area is at the head of Goye Bay up to the mouth of the River Yala.

Bunyala was becoming overcrowded by various Bantu peoples such as Mwasi, Boko, Munje, Ini, Lungo and Nzamba who were being pushed from the area to the north east of Lake Victoria by the Luo invasion. The Abagusii and Abalogoli were also living side by side with other Bantu peoples such as Khaala, Lwani, Tsipi, Kaweri, Kholo and Benga.

The Luo invasion and settlements in the areas earlier occupied by the Abagusii and Abalogoli gradually became a major problem to them and the threat to their security increased with more regular and daring cattle raids by the Luo taking place. The Abagusii and Abalogoli were forced to flee from these areas. Professor W.R. Ochieng on this has written:

From the available evidence it would appear that the Luo did not attack the Gusii and Logoli immediately they came into contact with each other. Rather, the Luo appear to have welcomed the prospect of an illicit addition to their cattle wealth and, loath to frighten their quarry, resorted to a policy of pinpricks, contenting themselves with small-scale raids, at reasonable intervals. When the Luo later intensified their raids on the neighbouring Bantu clans, however, groups

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began to leave, one after the other, to safety, away from the clubs and spears of the raiders. Most of the above mentioned Bantu clans fled into Samia and Bunyala and are still to be found there. It would appear, however, that a number of Bantu clans migrated southwards into Sakwa, Asembo and Seme before retiring to the higher and colder areas of present-day Buluyia.

Kisumu Settlement

To reduce pressure on land and for security reasons, the Abagusii and Abalogoli left Goye Bay to settle first by Lake Gangu in Alego and then at Kisumu [Kisumu] led by Mogusii. Between 1580 and 1620 the settlement at Kisumu was forced to break up by severe drought. This caused the Abagusii to migrate to the Kano plains led by a number of warriors whose names are remembered as Mombasi, Kimanyi, Oibabe, Omugsero and Mochorwa. Mogusii was either too old or dead to lead the migration. However, Abagusii traditions are clear that Mogusii's mother Nyakomogendi died at their Kisumu settlement at a very old age. Abalogoli under the leadership of Mulogoli or Omoragoli — the Logoli name for a seer or soothsayer remained at Kisumu but after some years, they also moved first to Seme and later to the land they inhabit today.

Occupation of Gusii Highlands

About AD 1755 the Abagusii moved out of Kano plains divided into four distinct groups. Wanjare group was led by Oisukia, Basi by Ogichocho, Sweta by Manyanta and the Girango group by Tabichi. They first stopped at Gososia in the present day Mugirango where they settled for a short period. The majority of the group, under the famous Sweta leader Manyanta, migrated to an area further to the south of Gososia which Abagusii scouts had recommended. A smaller group made up of Sweta, Sigisia and Osiango clansmen travelled to the thickly wooded highlands to the west of Gososia and it appears they first erected their settlement in the area of present day Nyamira. Sigisia and Osiango were largely pastoralists who also cultivated wimbi and root tubers. The wet and cold conditions of the highlands killed many of their people and forced the two groups to move to the area of south Mugirango where the climate was warmer. Unfortunately, the Maasai forced them back to the highlands where they settled at Kiegora in Nyaribari. From there, they moved to south Kitutu and spread to north Mugirango.

Social and Political Organisation

The environment under which the Abagusii migrated can be said to have had an effect on the nature of their settlement as well as their social and political organisation. The Abagusii society did not constitute one political unit. It was a collection of social and political units based on exogamous patrilineal clans. Each social and political unit consisted of one large clan and a number of affiliated smaller clans or sub-clans or families who ordinarily settled in a distinct territory over a ridge or adjacent ridges. Gusii political organisation was based on the clan in which elders ruled under a traditional chief. The clan warriors maintained law and order including providing defence. The Kitutu Abagusii were different as they had a chief under whom a number of clan chiefs served. The Abagusii people spoke a common language as they do today, shared a common and continuous territory, common customs, traditions and acknowledged descent from Mogusii.

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The period between about AD 1870 and 1900 had many problems for the Abagusii. This was a time when sections of the Abagusii were rushing to occupy the land they live on today. The scramble for land brought about very bitter conflicts among the groups sometimes leading to fighting. Due to these conflicts, disunity, famines and pestilence, the neighbouring tribes, particularly the Maasai and the Kipsigis, took advantage to constantly raid Gusii groups for animals and also to expand their territories into Gusii territory. Due to the Maasai and Kipsigis menace, by 1880 no Abagusii families lived to the south of Kuja river. And during this time, Muksero and Wanjare people were undergoing acculturation due to their close interaction with the Luo. Efforts by prophet Sakawa to unite the Abagusii against their common enemies failed and raiding and snatching of territory continued until it was stopped by the colonial administration.

Colonial Occupation

The British declared Uganda a protectorate of which Gusii county was part in 1894. But the Abagusii remained unaware that they were a subject people until late in 1904 when the British colonial government started to intervene in their domestic affairs. The Kitutu section of the Abagusii had just taken punitive measures against Abagusero Abagusii for alleged offences against Kitutu women and children who had gone to trade in Luo land. On learning of the civil strife in Gusiiland, the Kisumu Provincial Commissioner, S.S. Bagge, sent one hundred soldiers and fifty policemen to restore peace, law and order among the Abagusii and also to make them realise that they were now under British rule. The Abagusii demanded to know what the white men were looking for in their country. When the colonial administrators realised that the Abagusii would not yield their independence, they attacked with guns. Professor J.M. Nyasani on this has written:

On 12th September 1905, a punitive expedition consisting of members of V company of the 3rd K.A.R. stationed at Kericho under the command of Captain E.Y. Jenkins was dispatched to Kisii. Also accompanying the expedition were L. Gower the camp officer, the commander of the civil police, a certain Milton, a medical officer Rodriguo and G.A.S. Northcote as political officer. The patrol consisted of one hundred men of V Company of the 3rd K.A.R., fifty police from Kisumu, eighty native levies mostly of Sudanese origin and one hundred and twenty five porters. The expedition had twelve maxim guns among other war equipment.⁶

The ill-armed and unprepared villagers put up stiff but hopeless resistance against the maxim guns and about 100 Abagusii warriors were killed and 3000 heads of cattle were confiscated. The British colonial forces plundered and burnt Abagusii homesteads.

ABAKURIA

The people now known as Abakuria are of diverse origins and clans. Before the twentieth century they did not know themselves as the Abakuria but by either their various clans or by "provinces" from which they came. The name Kuria seems to have been applied to the whole group by the early colonial Chiefs mainly to distinguish them from the other Luoised groups along the southern shores of Lake Victoria who were known as Abasuba — a name which at times also included the Abakuria proper.

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The Abakuria live in both Kenyan and Tanzanian territories. In Kenya they live in Kuria district and in Tanzania they live in both north Mara and Musoma districts.

The homeland of the Abakuria is between River Migori to the east and the estuary of River Mara to the west. On the eastern side the area stretches from Migori district in south Nyanza to Musoma district of Tanzania on the western side. To the south the land borders the Transmara district on the Kenyan side and the Nguruimi area in Tanzania. To the north is Lake Victoria with a small corridor occupied by the Luo and some other Bantu peoples. The immediate neighbours of the Abakuria are the Abagusii, Maasai, Nguruimi, Zanaki, Ikoma, Luo and Suba of south Nyanza (Suba district).

The Abagusii state that their ancestors originally came from "Misiri" and that they migrated with the ancestors of the Abakuria, Abalogoli, Ababukusu, Abasuba, Ag]k[y[, Am]]r[, Aembu/Ambeere and Akamba and that they lost contact with these people in the Mount Elgon area. The Abagusii and Abalogoli followed river Nzoia Valley which eventually took them to the northern shores of Lake Victoria probably between AD 1500 and 1560. At this early stage there doesn't seem to have been significant differences between the Abagusii, Abakuria, Abalogoli and Abasuba among others. Their distinctive names and identities appear to have developed much later when they had separated into their present homelands.

The origin of the name Kuria is a thorny point in Abakuria history. The major Abakuria sub-tribes such as Abanyabasi, Abatimbaru, Abanyamongo, Abakira, Abairegi and Abagumbe have traditions to the effect that their ancestor was Mokuria (or Mukuria) who lived in

"Misiri". His descendants migrated from "Misiri" and after many years of wandering on the other side of Lake Victoria, they eventually reached and settled in the present Bukuria.

According to this tradition, the Abakuria have been divided from time immemorial into two families: the Abasai of the elder wife of Mokuria and the Abachuma of the younger wife. But this tradition does not explain how the Abakuria people got their generation sets, such as Maina, Nyambiriti, Gamnyeri on the Abasai side, and Mairabe (Norongoro), Gini, Nyangi on the Abachuma side. These generation set names are also found among other people such as the Ababukusu, Kalenjin, Ag]k[y[, Aembu/Ambeere and Am]]r[. It is therefore most probable that the early Abakuria people who brought the generation set system into Abakuria society were a splinter group from a much larger community living in the area of Mount Elgon from which the Kalenjin people, a section of the Ababukusu and the Ag]k[y[clusters emerged. Paul Aseka Abuso in his book A Traditional History of the Abakuria has written thus:

Abakuria section of the Abagumbe, Abapemba, Abaasi and Abasonga also state in their tradition that they travelled together with the ancestors of the Kikuyu among other people from Misiri to Lake Baringo in the Kenya Rift Valley where they finally separated. Although Kikuyu history does not corroborate this point it looks as if at one time the ancestors of these people originally lived together in some area north of Mount Elgon. Perhaps the people known as Sirikwa we have talked of above were part of that larger ancestral community — or possibly their descendants. This is not yet clear.

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The other view of the origin of the name Kuria is as follows. Between about 1774 and 1858, some of the Abakuria people were living in Musoma district in the present Tanzania and were settled in a hilly area north of the River Mara then known as Korea hill. The inhabitants of that area in time became known as Korea people after the name of the hill, which eventually changed to Kuria hill whereby the people became known as the Abakuria. The divergent views on the origin of the name would explain why the name had not gained wide acceptance among the Abakuria even at the beginning of the last century, as people still largely identified themselves by the sub-group names. During the colonial period, it was the name Abatende (after the Abatende clan in Bugumbe area) rather than Abakuria, which was in common use among the Kenya Abakuria. Those living in Tanzania continued to be known by their totems. It is only in about the 1950s that the name Abakuria gained wide usage. In a similar manner the Mijikenda, Abaluyia and Kalenjin became generally accepted as collective ethnic names in the 1940s and 1950s, at a time when in Kenya they were seeking political recognition by the colonial authorities.

The Abakuria are divided into several clans which include the following; the Abagumbe, Abairegi, Abanyabasi, Abaasi, Abapemba, Ababurati, Abakira, Abamera, Simbete, Watobori, Abakunta, Wiga, Kaboye, Abakenye; Wasweta and Abagirango.

Social and Political Organisations

The Abakuria people appear to have sprung from too many directions to have a common historical origin, although a number of clans claim to have come from Misiri. The culture of the present Abakuria therefore is an amalgam of many different cultures which may originally have been opposed to each other in content and practice. Among the Abakuria today are found people who were originally from the Kalenjin, Maasai, Bantu and Luo speaking communities.

Between A.D 1400 and 1800 when migrations into Bukuria took place, the foundation was laid for the future Abakuria cultural and political developments. Early inhabitants of Bukuria came from both Bantu and Nilotic speakers who brought into Bukuria their peculiar cultures. Predominantly agricultural Bantu came into close contact with predominantly Nilotic pastoralists. Thus a blend of cultures took place among the early inhabitants of Bukuria from the start by combining agricultural practice with pastoral pursuit as well as tendencies towards nomadic life. Today elements of Abakuria agriculture is much like that of the Abagusii and the Luo while in cattle keeping they have borrowed the practices of the Maasai, Zanaki and Nguruimi.

Before the population had increased very much, it appears that a number of the Abakuria communities developed independently without many interactions with the others. Many of those who lived at the foothills of such places as Gutura, Maheta and Gwasi tended to carry on with their mode of life as if there were no other people around them. During the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, more and more immigrants settled into the region and whether they liked it or not, the earlier communities were forced to interact with the new arrivals or at any rate to confront them. Some of the newcomers were aggressive and would not let their neighbours live in peace as they engaged in raiding for cattle and at times fought for dominance in the region. This meant that the small family clusters that had hitherto lived peacefully in the region shifted location and internal migration and resettlements were a continuous and repetitive process within and around Bukuria. In this way new social groups were formed. Many of these new societies were often swelled by splinter groups running away from other broken-up communities

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as a result of disruptions of war and raids. The Abamerani, for example, are said to have swallowed up many other clans.

LUO-ABASUBA

The Luo-Abasuba who today occupy the lake region of south Nyanza and the two islands of Rusinga and Mfangano were not originally Luo. They were composed of Bantu speaking peoples who came from all over East Africa, with a large number having come from Buganda after the killing of Kabaka Junju around 1760. From the islands of Lake Victoria, some extended their fishing into Tanzania and then proceeded on to south Nyanza in Kenya.

Geographically, the Luo-Abasuba territory stretches along the gulf of Nyanza from Ruri bay to the southern end of Matara Bay including the islands of Mfangano and Rusinga. Mfangano island is much more rugged and has a smaller population than Rusinga though it is larger in size. Gembe on the mainland of the south Nyanza lake region is much more open whereas Kaksingri and Gwasi are rather similar in topography, the difference being that Gwasi is almost surrounded by hills.

Flight of Abakunta from Uganda

Professor Henry Okello Ayot in the book A History of the Luo-Abasuba of Western Kenya from A.D. 1760 - 1940 has stated as follows:

The history of the Luo-Abasuba, which is the topic of this book does not start until 11 generations ago using 23 years as the mean length of a generation . . . towards the end of the reign of Kabaka Junju. According to the revised genealogy of Apolo Kaggwa, Kabaka Junju began to reign in 1764. However, Kaggwa combined the periods covered by both Kabaka Junju and Semakookiro so that it is difficult to know when Kabaka Semakookiro began his reign. Gorju, who wrote in 1920, gave the date of the flight of the Abakunta from Buganda as around 1760.¹

According to elders interviewed during genealogical investigations made by Professor Ayot for his work, Abakunta arrived in Mfangano island about between 1740 and 1763. Historian Kaggwa has given a full account of the circumstances which led to the Abakunta's flight from Uganda.

Settlement of the Abakunta — Mfangano Island

Kiboye reached Mfangano island as a bachelor. He sailed to the mainland of south Nyanza and built for himself a hut at a place which is today called Kisegi and trapped animals and fished there. One day Kiboye's fire went out and since there were few inhabitants, he decided to go to the top of the hill and try to spot any home nearby. He saw smoke rising somewhere and went there to ask for some fire. At that home he found the owner smoking an opium pipe which he shared with Kiboye who found out that the old man's wife had died and left him with one daughter. The old man's name was Wiga. The girl was old enough to be married and during their conversation, Kiboye expressed the wish to marry her. The father agreed provided Kiboye had cattle to pay for the bride price. Later on he left for Mfangano island. On reaching home, Kiboye told his brother, Witewe, that he had something he wanted to discuss with him. After eating, Kiboye told Witewe, his wife and their younger son, Muse, that he had found a girl and needed cattle for the bride price which they did not have as they had only recently arrived from Buganda

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and their daughters who in turn could have earned him cattle as bride price had not yet been married.

Witewe then offered to give Kiboye one of his daughters whom he could exchange with Wiga, the old man, for Wiga's daughter. One of Witewe's daughter was called in and the situation explained to her. She agreed to marry the old man Wiga upon Kiboye's promise that he would live with them. Before she could change her mind, Kiboye and his niece left for Gwasi the following day. When they reached Kiboye's hut, he left her there and went to see the old man. He told Wiga that as he had no cattle he had brought a girl whom Wiga could take as a wife and Wiga agreed to give his daughter to Kiboye in exchange. Both men lived happily with their wives thereafter.

Rusinga Island

The second group of the eastern Abakunta immigrants who had preceded Mwembe were led by Kenge and Mukonya who sailed from one island to another until they reached Rusinga Island following the route taken by the first Abakunta group, as the story is told by the descendants of Kenge and Mukonya. Professor Ayot has written:

The group led by Kenge and Mukonya can still give the route which they followed from Uganda with very little variation from the one followed by the first Abakunta group led by Witewe and Kiboye. The following islands in Lake Victoria seem to have been calling points on their way to Rusinga Island: Nyagombe, Kome, Lolwe, Sigulu and Mageta. These are the main Islands between Rusinga Island and Uganda; therefore, it is quite possible that they were used as resting places for a few days en route. Kenge and Mukonya also called at Imbo Kadimo, where they were told that the first Abakunta group had passed on to Mfangano Island. They then sailed to Rusinga Island and went to live on the hill, which is today referred to as Kia Kenge simply meaning Kenge Hill.

Assimilation of the Abasuba – 1780 - 1940

The Luo influence on the customs and practices of the Abasuba took effect over a long time of intermixing and assimilation between the two communities involved – the Bantu and the Nilotic. As has already been seen, the Luo arrived in Yimbo at about 1490 which they found occupied by Abagusii and other Bantu clans who had been living in the area – some of them for several hundred years. The Bantu warriors launched an attack on the Luo, but lost.

After defeating the Bantu, the Luo established their homes around Ramogi Hill and began to raid Bantu homesteads for cattle. For many years, Abagusii organised Bantu forces to repel the constant Luo attacks on their homesteads, but more and more Luo were arriving and the Abagusii, Abalogoli, Abamuli (or Wamuri) and other Bantu clans found it very difficult to defend their homesteads and animals and decided to move away. Eventually, a line of Luo rouths (chiefs) was imposed upon the Bantu clans to make sure that all the original Bantu clans were very closely watched. Governing councils consisting of Luo and only a few representatives of the defeated Bantu clans were established. Some of the Bantu representatives on the governing councils came from the Goma, Walowa and Wayipi clans. Giving an example of the Kadimo routh's operations, Prof. Ochieng has written:

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Each of the Kadimo ruoths controlled the chiefdom through a territorial council called Buch Piny. This council consisted of the leading elders from the major Yimbo clans — both Luo and Bantu. These elders were called Jodong dho udi. The war leader of the ruothdom, or Osumba Murwayi, was also a member of the council. The council dealt with major political, judicial, and economic matters affecting Piny, or the ruothdom, like murders, cattle thefts, trade and interclan disputes, famines, pestilences, invasions, defence, trade and inter-clan conflicts.

There was also an inner cabinet of the buch piny which was composed primarily of elders from the ruoth's clan, as well as a few leading experts like jobilo (diviners), jotheth (blacksmiths) and jojimbo koth (rainmakers). This inner council was called buch dound ruoth or buch oganda ruoth. It advised on major and sensitive policy issues of state — like who should be the army leader, when should war be declared, who should be allies or which clan elders, or magicians were a threat to the security of the ruothdom.