

## **“The Chimpanzee Who Swallowed a French Man”**

In the early 1900, colonials and Christianity came in Rwanda. After experiencing resistance from the local population on multiple occasions, colonials adopted a system of governing through local kingdom structures already in place. Thus, colonials were actively educating the class of elite youth close to the kingdom to maintain and strengthen that style of governing. My grandfather, Naigiziki was one of the few elites who had the opportunity of getting a high school education at that time where he attended a boarding high school owned by Catholic priests “Peres Blancs” [ White priests] .

### Becoming the Chimp

One time, my grandfather Naigiziki, then a young man, was called to the Principal’s office. The “ Peres Blancs” priests were not happy. My grandfather Naigiziki had torn out his French dictionary and only few pages were remaining. They asked Naigiziki to explain why he ripped the pages out of his dictionary. He explained: “the dictionary was heavy and I rip out each page I memorize to avoid always having to carry that heavy book.” The Priests were upset and they wanted to know where he put the missing pages. Maybe they could glue them back together. Naigiziki, hoping that telling the truth would alleviate the problem, replied : ” I have been using each page I memorized as toilet paper.” This made the priests angrier and disappointed. They gave him tests to check if he had memorized the French dictionary and he passed. After that incident, Naigiziki started writing theatre plays on the French Revolution where he himself played King Louis the XIV. Naigiziki had a perfect French accent, and Naigiziki’s accent could pass to play King Louis the XIV. The priests felt that a young black man had invaded their language and culture.

They couldn't believe the young man they were seeing was the same speaking with a perfect French accent. They joked that it couldn't be Naigiziki; a black man who they thought was inferior to them and looked like a chimpanzee. They couldn't believe it was Naigiziki speaking French perfectly as French do, unless he had swallowed a French man. So, they nicknamed Naigiziki, "The Chimpanzee who Swallowed a French Man". Naigiziki, now dubbed, "The Chimpanzee who Swallowed a French Man", kept his degrading nickname throughout his entire career and he continued to be outstanding.

Naigiziki defies limiting beliefs

Naigiziki attracted the attention of the King of Rwanda, King Rudahigwa, who needed a translator to communicate with the Colonials. This is how Naigiziki entered politics, became the Secretary of King Rudahigwa, who later appointed him as Governor of Mayaga, a region in the South Province of Rwanda. Though he was involved in politics, Naigiziki continued his passion for teaching and writing. In 1943, he received the UNESCO award for his novel "Escapade" [Escape] and the following year he published his most popular novel "Mes Transes a Trente Ans". [My Stresses at Thirty Years Old).

### **The Visit of King Baudoin of Belgium, in Rwanda.**

In the Spring of 1956, King Baudoin of Belgium paid a visit to his colony, then called the "Congo Belge Colonie" (the Congo Belgian Colony). So, King Baudoin stopped by and visited Rwanda. At that time, Rwanda was part of the Congo Belge Colony. It was a huge event which took a lot of preparation. King Baudoin's pictures along with the Belgium flags were displayed on posters all over the country. The local population rehearsed their dances, songs and poems.

They cleaned the roads and planted flowers along the main roads. Each and every person dressed up for the big day in preparation of King Baudoin of Belgium. At that time Naigiziki was the Secretary of King Mutara Rudahigwa of Rwanda. King Rudahigwa assigned Naigiziki to prepare a welcome speech in French praising the cooperation between the Kingdom of Belgium and the Kingdom of Rwanda. The event time was 9 a.m. and the venue was Huye Stadium. The big day arrived. Naigiziki was ready to deliver his speech by 9 a.m. at the stadium. Back then the stadium was an open space where cows would graze. Naigiziki prepared the speech and showed up at 9 a.m. sharp and no one was yet there. At that time, Naigiziki was also writing his book: "L'INKOTSA L'Oiseau de Mauvaise Augure" (BAT the Evil Bird). As part of writing his book, Naigiziki used to go to his retreat house in Bugesera in far East of Rwanda. Before King Baudoin of Belgium visit in Rwanda, Naigiziki had already planned ahead of time to go to his retreat to listen to the birds for the work on his book. So, Naigiziki planned to deliver the historic speech, and afterwards, he would head to his retreat. He waited for the Kings and all their guests to come, but they had not come on time. Rwandan protocol took the Belgium delegation to different attractive locations within Rwanda.

The King of Rwanda expected that Naigiziki would understand. Naigiziki gave it a try. He waited for one hour and at 10:30 a.m., he resolved to deliver his speech to an empty stadium. His audience was made up of a few cows that were grazing guarded by a few cow boys. When Naigiziki was done delivering the historic speech to cows and cow boys who were at the stadium on time he left. In fact, Naigiziki was mocking the colonials who claimed that the local people were not civilized enough to understand the value of time and be punctual. In his own words: "I can't disappoint birds they value my time."

Of course, this was considered crazy. People would give everything they have just to be invited to meet King Baudoin of Belgium. But in the case of Naigiziki, he was declining the opportunity of being the point of attention; the speaker, the moderator, the translator, etc.

King Rudahigwa and his guests showed up around 12:30 p.m. They expected Naigiziki to deliver the historical speech yet he couldn't be found. They all exclaimed : " The chimp has left!"

They scrambled to find someone else to give a quick speech and save the day but King Rudahigwa was disappointed.

Later, King Rudahigwa requested that his staff search the entire country for the chimp . They found him in a forest near his retreat house in Bugesera where he was quietly listening to the birds.