

THE
PLATEAU TONGA
OF NORTHERN RHODESIA

Social and Religious Studies

by
ELIZABETH COLSON

*Professor of Social Anthropology
Brandeis University
Sometime Director of the
Rhodes-Livingstone Institute*



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extent that clan exogamy is rigidly maintained. I have recorded only three instances of marriage within the clan where there was no question of slave descent to complicate the issue. For a slave or a person of slave-descent is a quasi-member of the clan with whom marriage is permitted. The Tonga stress clan exogamy as the most important aspect of the institution. Almost fifty years ago, when missionaries first went among them and queried them about the nature of the clan, the Tonga said that the clan was an institution given to them by God so that people might marry properly.¹ And so they still view the matter. The clan system also provides a mechanism for finding acceptable substitutes for certain rites in which matrilineal kinsmen should participate if no one of the proper category is available. Finally, the clan system forms the basis for a system of joking-relationship and reciprocal services.

Before describing this, however, it is necessary to discuss clan names, and their association with certain animals. Twelve clans are found very widely throughout Tonga country, from the Zambezi River to the western borders. Two more seem to be found only in the western areas. In the north-west, the system of names seems to be rather different, and probably it is affected by the system of the neighbouring Ilia. [The system also varies in the southern portion of the Gwembe Valley.]

Most of the clan names cannot be translated today, though they are assumed to refer to animals. Many of the clans have a number of names, any one of which may be used. Informants do not know why these multiple names exist, and they certainly do not seem to designate divisions within a clan, or local groupings. The same person may sometimes say, for instance, that he is a Mukuli, again that he is a Mutenda, and again that he is Muunga. When queried, he will comment: 'It is the same clan. It just has different names.'² Each clan is associated with a number of animals or natural phenomena. These are not totemic associations, since no one avoids or honours his clan animals in any way. The association between a particular animal and a particular clan is not invariable

1. No
totems
= clan
names

¹ Personal communication from Father Moreau, S.J., who helped to found Chikuni Mission in 1905.

² [These are three different clans in the southern Gwembe.]

throughout Tonga country. In some areas, one clan will be associated with an animal which is attributed to quite a different clan in some other area. Occasionally even within a single area there is some disagreement between people as to the proper clan association for different animals. But in the main this difference of opinion seems to apply chiefly to what one might call secondary associates. Each clan is usually referred to as having one particular associate, and then informants remember to add that it also has others. These secondary associations are remembered chiefly in the praise names and slogans belonging to the clan and in clan-joking situations. Why the Tonga should have such a varied array of animal and other associates for their clans, I do not know. Possibly it results from the amalgamation of the various foreigners into the common clan system. Whatever the cause, the associations persist and appear in the joking situations.

The clans and their most common associates are given in Table III. Where an animal has been attributed by different informants to different clans, I have shown this by placing it within brackets.

TABLE III
Clans and their Associates

Clan	Associates
1. Bahyamba	hyena, rhinoceros, pig, ant, fish
2. Batenda	elephant, sheep, lechwe, (hippopotamus)
3. Baleyia	goat, tortoise, black vulture
4. Bansaka	leopard, bee
5. Bakonka	(eland), jackal, rain, zebra
6. Bafumu	pigeon, frog, (hippopotamus), cattle
7. Bansanje	hare, honey guide
8. Bayuni	bird
9. Bacindu	lion, grain
10. Beetwa	crocodile, monitor lizard
11. Bantanga	white vulture
12. Balongo	baboon, (buffalo), scavenger bird
13. Bancanga	bush-baby
14. Bankombwe	(buffalo), (eland)

Clan names are used constantly in daily life. People are commonly addressed by their clan names, or they may be honoured by being addressed by the clan names of their fathers. Everyone, including young children, knows his clan affiliation.

Hyena, and said it was impossible for him to come now as he was ill. Hyena insisted. Hare finally agreed, and said he would come if Hyena would carry him on his back. Hyena set off with Hare on his back. Hare suggested that Hyena should run so that they might get there faster. Thus Hare galloped up to the gathering, mounted on Hyena to whom he applied a switch from time to time. As they arrived, he shouted: "Well, see! Do I ride him?" And he jumped off. Since then Hyena (Bahyamba) and Hare (Bansanje) have had *bujwanyina*, and that is what they joke about.'

A similar tale relates the origin of the *bujwanyina* relationship between the Bahyamba, the Bafumu, and the Bansanje. 'One day there was Rhinoceros (Bahyamba), Hippopotamus (Bafumu), and Hare (Bansanje). Hippopotamus always stayed in the water and never came out in the daytime. Rhinoceros never went in the water. Hare went to Rhinoceros and said, "Why don't you go into the water and bathe? You would feel fine. I'll tell you what I'll do. Tomorrow morning I will bring a rope, and you will take one end and I will take the other. I will get in the water and we will both pull. If I pull you into the water that will mean that you will come into the water all the time." Rhinoceros agreed. Then Hare went to Hippopotamus and told him that he ought to come out of the water in the daytime, and that next morning he, Hare, would bring a rope and see if he could pull him out. So the pulling contest was arranged. Hare, out of sight of the contestants, so arranged the rope that Hippopotamus and Rhinoceros were pulling against each other. Then he ran away. Hippopotamus and Rhinoceros pulled most of the day. Then each began to wonder what could be wrong and if Hare could really pull this hard. They went to investigate and found each other. They said: "Ah, Hare has tricked us!" Since that day, these three clans—Bahyamba, Bafumu, and Bansanje—have had the joking-relationship.'

Another describes the origin of the joking-relationship between Bakonka, Bansanje, and Bacindu. 'One day Lion (Bacindu) fell into a pit trap. Jackal (Bakonka) came along and agreed to push a stick into the trap so that Lion could climb out. Lion was very hungry after his imprisonment. He announced that he was going

to eat Jackal, who protested that this was no just repayment for his assistance. Lion refused to listen. Before he could eat Jackal, Hare (Bansanje) came along and asked what was happening. When he had heard the story, he asked Lion to show him just what had happened. Lion jumped into the pit. Hare grabbed out the stick and told Jackal not to help Lion out of the trap again. So they went off leaving Lion in the trap. Since then Jackal (Bakonka), Hare (Bansanje), and Lion (Bacindu) have had *bujwanyina*.

It would be pointless to give any more of these tales, which are all of the same type. They are said to explain the origin of the joking-relationship, but they are certainly not essential to it. Many people deny any knowledge of the tales and say that they carry on the relationship with their paired clans because this is a matter of tradition: 'Perhaps the old people knew how it started. We just know that it is the custom which they left for us to follow. So we follow it.' Even the very old may not remember the tales attached to their own particular joking-relationships. One old man of about eighty told me that he as a Muhyamba has a joking-relationship with the Bansanje. When I asked him why, he cheerfully replied. 'You must ask the old people. They never told me and I don't know.'

Certainly the tales give no clue to the importance that the pairing of clans has in Tonga life, for it enters into many situations, besides that of the formal exchange of insults and jests. Paired clans have reciprocal duties which they perform for each other. Whenever a man or woman has so misbehaved that he has brought upon himself the general condemnation of his community, it is through the clan-joking partners that his shame is brought home to him. This cannot be done through his own kinsmen—through the people of his own matrilineal group and the people of his father's matrilineal group—upon whom he relies for support and assistance. Nor may it be done through his affinal relatives. For them to shame him would injure their permanent relationship which is built upon mutual respect and support. Perhaps their exclusion is also based upon the assumption that if the offender were amenable to the advice of his kinsmen, he would have so