Introduction to Ugandan Culture
What is culture?

- Culture is not the same as nature
  - Eating
  - Drinking
  - Sleeping
  - Elimination

- Culture is based on symbols
- Culture is learned
- Cultures are integrated
- Cultures interact and change
Elements of Culture

- Symbols
- Language
- Values
- Norms
- Physical environments
Symbols

- Anything that carries a particular meaning recognized by people who share a culture.
- Societies create new symbols all the time.
- Reality for humans is found in the meaning things carry with them.
  - The basis of culture; makes social life possible.
Some Key Terms:

- **Culture shock**
  - Disorientation due to the inability to make sense out of one’s surroundings
    - Domestic and foreign travel

- **Nonmaterial culture**
  - The intangible world of ideas created by members of a society

- **Material culture**
  - Tangible things created by members of society
Terms:

- Ethnocentrism
  - The practice of judging another culture by the standards of one’s own culture

- Cultural relativism
  - The practice of judging a culture by its own standards
Uganda: Basics

- Colonized by the British
- Independence 1962
- President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni
- Kampala Capital City
Idi Amin

- Ugandan President 1971–1979
  - Amin's rule was characterized by human rights violations, political repression, ethnic persecution, and gross economic mismanagement.
  - The number of people killed as a result of his regime is estimated by international observers and human rights groups to range from 100,000 to 500,000.
Geography

- Uganda is landlocked
- Bordered by Kenya, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, and Rwanda
- Mostly plateau with rim mountains
Geography

- Inactive and active volcanoes
- Water sources
  - Lake Victoria
  - Lake George
  - Nile River
Climate

- **Dry Season**
  - *June to August and December to February*
  - July Average temperatures hover around 27°C/81°F in the afternoon and 16°C/61°F in the morning.

- **Wet Season**
  - *March to May and September to November*
Tribes and Languages

- National Languages
  - English
  - Swahili

- Tribal Languages
  - Include languages from the Bantu, Nilotic, and Central Sudanic language groups.

- Buganda largest tribe (16%)
- Basoga (5%)
Major Agricultural Industries

- Coffee
- Cotton
- Tea
- Sugar
Ugandan Food and Culture

- Cooking is usually done over an open fire.
- Men and boys over 12 usually stay out of the kitchen.
- Kitchen is often times separate from the main house.
- Main meals – lunch and super
- Breakfast – consists of tea and porridge
Traditional Food:

- Matoke – Staple dish made with bananas.
- Posho (polenta)
- Beans
- Goat meat
- Rice
- Sorghum
- Millet
- Tomatoes
- Mangos
Traditional Dress

- Fabrics are made with silk and cotton.
- Very bright beautiful colors and patterns.
The Gomesi

- Is a floor-length, brightly colored cloth dress with a square neckline and short, puffed sleeves.
- The dress is tied with a sash placed below the waist over the hips.
- The Gomesi has two buttons on the left side of the neckline.
The Kanzu

- Is adapted from the typical Arabian dress “thobe”.
- The traditional kanzu has maroon embroidery around the collar, abdomen, and sleeves.
Family and Kinship

- All cultures have family.
- The function and structure of families are various and diverse in each culture.
Family and Kinship

- In the USA, we tend to think of immediate family members rather than extended family members.
- In the USA, we need clear blood or legal relations to consider someone a family member.
- In many African cultures, people do not need direct blood lines or legal relations to consider someone a family member.
- Kinship is through not only laws and marriage but through ancestry.
Traditional Family Culture

- Line of descent is followed through the male line.
- Line of descent is important because it determines inheritance and identity.
- Oldest born son also head of household.
- Last born son stays with parents.
Traditional Family Culture

- After marriage, women usually move to the husband’s family home.
- Bride price/Dowry – payment made by the groom or groom’s kin to the bride’s kin.
- On average Uganda women have 5 children.
Marriage Patterns

- Polygamy—Marriage that unites a person with two or more spouses
  - Polygyny—Marriage that unites one man and two or more women
  - Polyandry—Marriage that unites one woman and two or more men
Sol Marston, who is 55 and lives in Eugene, Oregon, has been married three times and divorced twice.

Ndumbe Monkua lives in Yaoundé, Cameroon, with his four wives and their fifteen children.

Dimitriy and Irina Marchenko in Moscow will celebrate their fortieth wedding anniversary this year.
Why Polygamy?

- Economics
- Insurance policy
- Identity and name
- Social Prestige
- Care of family
Traditionally, women's roles are subordinate to those of men despite the substantial economic and social responsibilities of women in traditional Ugandan societies.

Until recently (90’s), it was custom in some regions to kneel when speaking to men in public.
Women’s Roles:

- Care takers
- Farmers (70% to 80% agricultural production)
- Cooks (90% of food processing)
- Water carriers
Women’s Rights

- Women make up 52% labor force.
  - Much of this labor is unpaid.
- Women are underrepresented in leadership roles in government and business.
  - 35% of parliament
  - Source World Bank
- Women own roughly less than 20% of land.
Estimates project around 70% of the country is literate.

But there are gaps...

- Rural – Urban
- Women – Men
Women and Violence

- 48% of women experience physical violence from their partners.
  - (Source: Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2011).

- 36% of women experience sexual violence from their partners.
  - (Source: UN Women 2011–2012)
Culture: Access to Education and Human Rights

- There is a direct link between poverty, violence, and lack of education.