

Towards Multispecies History

Ethnic Formation with Other-Than-Human Beings: Island Shrine Practice in Uganda's Long Eighteenth Century

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Abstract: Many studies of ethnic formation find metaphors of descent at the core of largely masculinist discourse about belonging and difference. This study integrates the meaning, affect, and information-sharing prompted with the other-than-human beings – in particular, trees – enlisted during rhythmic assembly at an Island shrine in east Africa's Inland Sea (Lake Victoria), in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Fostering ethnic identification there drew on lateral connections that crossed language, region, and standing without creating boundaries. A gendered discourse exceeding the masculine was likely indispensable to this sort of belonging. The beginning of a long period of bellicose state expansionism and the deep history of public healing in the region framed these developments.

Résumé: De nombreuses études sur la formation ethnique trouvent des métaphores de la lignée au cœur d'un discours masculin sur l'appartenance et la différence. Cette étude intègre le sens, l'affect et le partage d'informations suscités par les êtres autres qu'humains – en particulier, les arbres – incorporés lors d'un rassemblement rythmique dans un sanctuaire de l'île dans la mer intérieure de l'Afrique de l'Est (lac Victoria), au XVIII^e siècle. La promotion de l'identification ethnique s'est faite à partir de connexions latérales qui dépassent le cadre de la

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langue, de la région, et du statut sans créer de frontières. Un discours sexué dépassant le masculin était indispensable à ce genre d'appartenance. Le début d'une longue période d'expansionnisme belliqueux d'État et la longue histoire de guérison publique dans la région ont fourni un cadre à ces développements.

“*Balubaale b'e Ssesse tebalina emiziro.*”¹

“The *lubaale's* people from Ssesse do not have avoidances.”
[Public healing groups from Ssesse are open to anyone.]

Introduction²

This essay treats ethnicity as a mode of intellectual activity and as a domain of social experience. Attentive to context and cognition (see Introduction), John Lonsdale's distinctions between moral and political ethnicity inflect the essay.³ Struggle between rich and poor over the terms and conditions of their mutual obligations characterizes both kinds of ethnicity. But moral ethnicity looks inward at its tensions, socializing inequality while questioning one-sided reciprocities. Political ethnicity looks outward, fretting over boundaries of various sorts.⁴ Most scholars use both forms in writing about ethnicity. But, they recognize with Brubaker that the cognitive character of ethnic attachments warns against assuming such attachments become concrete. Exploring that outcome is a task for historians. If ethnicity is a way of seeing, a metaphor for belonging, rather than a thing seen, then it is ethnic entrepreneurs who seek to flip that cognitive quality by converting subjective senses of belonging into concrete forms of action. Yet, they may do this in making and reconstituting concrete groups without fretting about exclusion and boundaries. They may make groups without ethnicity.⁵ Destabilizing the category of ethnicity in this way means we cannot treat ethnicity like an organ in the body that just does its work whether we feel

¹ Michael B. Nsimbi, *Amannya Amaganda n'Ennono Zaago* [Ganda Names and Their Meaning] (Kampala: Longmans, 1980 [1956]), 152. And, he adds, “*era n'Ekika ky'Ejyoma y'e Buganda tekirina muziro* [“the Drum Clan of Buganda had no avoidance”].

² This essay has benefited from cautions and suggestions from Peter Hoelsing and Parker Shipton. I am particularly grateful to Jonathon Earle and Jennifer Johnson for their ideas. Mr. Christopher Muhoozi, Makerere University and Northwestern University, and Fr. Dominique Arnaud, White Fathers' Archivist, helped with vernacular sources.

³ Fredrik Barth, “Introduction,” in: Fredrik Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 9–38, 19–21, 29–30, 37–38; Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); John Lonsdale, “Moral & Political Argument in Kenya,” in: Bruce Berman, Dickson Eyoh and Will Kymlicka (eds.), *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2004), 73–95.

⁴ Lonsdale, “Moral & Political Argument,” 77.

⁵ Thanks to Jonathon Glassman for this turn of Brubaker's phrase.

communities were sources of material wealth – food, including fish – and of intellectual property – canoe-building, information collected through canoe travel, fishing skill, and public healing networks.

Public healing-information networks included one focused on Mukasa. The figure of Mukasa is much older in the islands and on the mainland than a long eighteenth century. Yet, it was during that period, as people at Mukasa's shrine – supervisors and supplicants, alike – managed the needs of the Ganda state, that they broadened the varieties and timing of assembly and supplication. The broadening built on earlier practices, to be sure, but involved a set of other-than-human beings – domestic animals, trees, and lively fluids – whose presence could prompt visceral reflection among supplicants. That emotion was a key component in a comforting, primordialist argument about sources of authoritative knowledge and moral behavior.

Shrine managers made this argument part of their efforts to expand the number of people invested in the shrine during the increasingly uncertain generations of a long eighteenth century. They argued that the figure of Mukasa, and the rhythmic practices of assembly and supplication, were excellent sources of information, creativity, and fertility, that ordinary people could use to realize aspirations for respectable adult belonging. Mukasa and the Ssesse islands were good places for this because they provided resources people needed in order to be self-sufficient and, thus, to be able to support “industrious kin and clients.”⁶

This durable group was not oriented toward tending boundaries until late in the nineteenth century. Nor was it restricted to single places or regions or sorted solely through the descent metaphor. Shrine practices at Ssesse fostered a form of identification with lateral connections that crossed language, region, and standing, and invoked a gendered discourse exceeding the masculine. Mukasa's shrine practices turned, in part, on the provision of sanctuary and purpose to vulnerable people, perhaps especially young women. When material want and ideologies of political belonging shifted, as they did with the emergence of a bellicose mainland statecraft, the vulnerability of such young women to those interests might increase. Yet, need and want were not the only forces breathing life into the shrine. Leaders of other groups – clans, royals, and specialists like fishers – also invested in Mukasa's shrine. They traveled there by sewn canoe from distant corners of the Inland Sea.

Mukasa's ethnic formation was an actually constituted collectivity – not only a way of ordering the world – with a variety of rhythms and diversity of assembly that arguably had considerable temporal depth. The other-than-human beings enlisted there help scholars think about the ways in which

⁶ John Lonsdale, “Unhelpful Pasts and a Provisional Present,” in: Emma Hunter (ed.), *Citizenship, Belonging, and Political Community in Africa: Dialogues between Past and Present* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2016), 17–40, 24.

assembly intersected with the visceral dimensions of meaning-making. The essay thus explores these key threads historians must track in their accounts of ethnic formation (see Introduction).⁷ In particular, the essay applies historical imagination to bring to life the ways in which shrine personnel and visitors might have thought of or seen other than-human-beings as mirrors and metaphors, prompting these different elements of ethnic formation.

Individuals, gendered groups, representatives of clanship, and royalty obviously gathered at Mukasa's shrine for different reasons. They knew Mukasa as the water of the Inland Sea, out of which the Islands rose, as the meteor-hammer housed in one of the large buildings at the site, that was used to mark time by being turned to point east or west each two weeks of a lunar cycle. They knew Mukasa brought fish into nets and baskets, ensured safety in canoe travel, brought rain in the right amounts and times, and brought children, especially twins. That knowledge meant that repeated assembly oriented to Mukasa had moral and political weights, the concreteness of which relied in part on other-than-human beings. This essay explores the affective weights of the past, the variety of metaphorical elaborations on moral and political aspects of belonging, and the shifting material contexts of belonging. All of those elements were generated in the interplay of people, animals, plants, and fluids that formed littoral ethnicity.

By exploring assembly with other-than-human beings as a kind of ethnic formation at the shrine, ethnicity unfolds before it is a political effect of the violence of statecraft or commodification, or of imperial conquest, or as a central pillar of colonial rule, post-colonial ambition, and the like (see Introduction). To be sure, such forces affected this particular shrine to Mukasa. It was abandoned or destroyed late in the nineteenth century, caught up in the frictions of imperial conquest.⁸ But, Mukasa's ethnic identification not only predated the others just listed, without leading necessarily to them. It also formed around different ideas and metaphors of belonging than those binding people to a single territory or sorting them through metaphors of descent. Mukasa's people were linked laterally through a central place, held ambivalent attitudes toward statecraft, and ennobled a multi-gendered composition of their community. Like each of the several clans which played key roles in the shrine's life, Mukasa's people constituted a reservoir of knowledge and ambitious creativity. Their ethnicity was like a macro-clan, like a state, but not quite.

⁷ Jonathon Glassman, "Race and Ethnicity in African Thought," in: William Worger, Charles C. Ambler and Nwando Achebe (eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Modern African History* (Hoboken NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2018).

⁸ James F. Cunningham, *Uganda and Its Peoples: Notes on the Protectorate of Uganda* (London: Hutchinson, 1905), 84, photograph of the tree next to Mukasa's shrine.

It was something else: a moral community not defined by difference yet one that could be mobilized along those lines.

Other-than-Human Beings and Ethnic Formation

Ethnic formation with other-than-human beings crosses African history's major periods and regions. Steven Feierman adapted Fredrik Barth's well-known ecological argument regarding the situational core of ethnic identification, by showing the ways in which plant and animal life constituted the "ecological zones" informing different ethnic identifications in Northeastern Tanzania. Shambaai, the home of the Shambaa people, is a place that formed them, with which they identify, often through accumulated knowledge of plant, animal, insect, and natural phenomena unique to that highland zone.⁹ Different life forms belonging to that zone are indispensable to nutritional, social, and moral living in Shambaai.

Writing histories of ethnic formation with such scope reveals the mirrors and metaphors of groupwork which people made with other-than-human beings. As Mary Douglas argued sixty years ago, the widespread and ancient fiction that people live apart from the rest of life should not be taken for granted, especially, perhaps, by historians of ethnic formation.¹⁰ Creatures whose looks and behavior cross categories remind people that the lines they draw between themselves and other life forms are provisional and arbitrary.¹¹ Clearly, if people enlist a very wide variety of other-than-human beings in the fraught work of making groups, their choices are worthy of reflection. The ways in which people made particular beings indispensable to belonging will reveal why they selected those beings. It might also reveal some of their motives in constituting a particular "autonomously self-maintaining" group.¹² All of that specificity will, in turn, reveal the diversity of durable groups Africans made in the past hiding behind English words like "clan" or "shrine."

Ugandans constructed and altered categories of being, and the shapes of moral arguments the categories reveal, in ways too diverse to consider here.

⁹ Steven Feierman, *The Shambaa Kingdom* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), 17–22; Barth, "Introduction," 19–20.

¹⁰ Mary Douglas, "Animals in Lele Religious Symbolism," *Africa* 27–1 (1957), 46–58; Brent Berlin, *Ethnobiological Classification: Principles of Categorization of Plants and Animals in Traditional Societies* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014 [1992]); but see Sarah Cutfield, "A Linguistic Analysis of Dalabon Ethnobiology," *3rd International Conference on Language Documentation and Conservation* (2013), <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/26062>.

¹¹ Neil Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze: Clanship and Public Healing in Buganda* (Charlottesville VA: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 49.

¹² Anna L. Tsing, "Unruly Edges," *Environmental Humanities* 1–1 (2012), 141–154, 144.

But, the anatomy of semantic fields expressed through Bantu language noun class systems is revealing. It provides a quick and dirty guide to the boundaries between forms of life understood by speakers of Bantu languages in the Northern Inland Sea region. Plants and some animals, rivers, and hills, can be referred to using nouns with the same class prefix and concords. Many but not all insects and fish are referred to using nouns in a different class. Mushrooms go in yet another class. At some point in the distant past of using Bantu languages people understood plants, some animals, rivers, and hills to share some quality which none shared with insects or mushrooms. Yet, semantic links across and within these classes of nouns suggest hegemonic theories of relations among forms of vitality and embodied life.¹³

In Luganda, for example, mushroom names often reduplicate termite names. Particular mushroom species thrive around the hills of particular species of termites.¹⁴ Luganda speakers (and many others), recognized the coevolution of mushrooms and termites, despite their using different class prefixes and concords to refer to each kind of life. Speakers of other African languages note that fish and termites are prolific reproducers, using that abundance to explore the association of fish and termites with twins and fertility.¹⁵ To perform the rites of twins is sometimes called *kùmenyà òlùkànda*, in Luganda. The phrase refers to counting out and disassembling the *òlùkànda*, “a load of up to about 30 skewers woven together of *ènkèjje* small fish.”¹⁶ As Jennifer Johnson explores in her essay (below), these “spratfish” help explain twinship and orient people toward its particular challenges and opportunities, including the salience of both patricentric and matricentric affiliation.¹⁷ Metaphors juxtaposing a Queen termite’s

¹³ Frances Katamba, “Nominal Derivation in Bantu,” in: Derek Nurse and Gérard Philippson (eds.), *The Bantu Languages* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 103–120, here 114–119.

¹⁴ Henry A. Osmaston, “The Termite and its Uses for Food,” *Uganda Journal* 15–1 (1951), 80–83; Alan Hamilton, with Naomi Hamilton, Phoebe Mukasa, David Ssewanyana, Cephas Ssentooogo and Christine Kabuye, *Luganda Dictionary and Grammar* (Godalming: Alan Hamilton Publishing, 2016), 283, 342; John Roscoe, *The Baganda: An Account of Their Native Customs and Beliefs* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1911), 197–219, 440. Fossil records of termites are between 144 and 165 million years old and Africa has the “richest termite fauna in the world.” East Africa has 177 of the continent’s 644 species; cf. Hans G. Schabel, *Forest Entomology in East Africa: Forest Insects of Tanzania* (New York: Springer Publishers, 2006), 192–193.

¹⁵ James Fairhead and Melissa Leach, “Termites, Society, and Ecology: Perspectives from West Africa,” in: Élisabeth Motte-Florac and Jacqueline M.C. Thomas (eds.), *Les Insectes dans la Tradition Orale* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 197–219, 209–210.

¹⁶ Ronald A. Snoxall, *Luganda-English Dictionary* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967), 204, 183–184.

¹⁷ Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 65–71.

“control” over a mound to the control sovereigns exercised over a polity – such as the realm of Buganda – draw on this link. “*Omuteregga afuga Buganda nga Namunswa bw’afuga ekiswa*” or “The effective speaker (an honorific for a sovereign) rules Buganda like the Queen-termite rules the termite mound.”¹⁸ The abundant fertility termite mounds provide manifests as mushroom growth. The proverb promises that the value of the domination of rule lies in access to the means to secure such abundance.

People in the region engaged mushrooms, termites, and spratfish to think about belonging, abundance, mobility, descent, and responsibility. In the settings explored here, people drew on the pragmatic facts of these other-than-human lives to craft propositions binding the prolific fertility of – and threats to – each form of life with its location at the border between above and below the ground. The border in question marks a point of contact between the land of the living and ghostland, below.¹⁹ The living tree branches used by Mukasa’s shrine managers during assembly, one focus of this essay, share with termites and mushrooms the ability to cross that border.

People also used the growth patterns of gourd vines as a means to classify and categorize.²⁰ The separate chambers each gourd comprises are connected by vines growing from a single root. If groups of people are gourds linked by vines, to a single root, they are connected lineally, but not reductively. Like the termite-polity juxtaposition, this one points to other elaborations. People saw the gourd-vines in their kitchen gardens grow in this manner. Yet, they knew that in order to get a useful gourd they had to shape it as it grew. “*Ekisuwula entabi: kye kikuwa entindira*” or “The gourd vine branching gives the trellis.”²¹ People’s desires shaped the groups connected by the lineal vine, just as the creative, political work of public healers fostered connections between past, present, and future generations.

Histories of ethnic formation written with other-than-human beings sharpen key elements in the best work on this topic. They reveal the material and metaphorical resources ethnic entrepreneurs drew on.

¹⁸ Nsimbi, *Amannya*, 33.

¹⁹ Renée Tantal, “The Early History of Kitara in Western Uganda: Process Models of Religious and Political Change,” PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin (Madison WI, 1989), 363ff; David Schoenbrun, “A Mask of Calm: Emotion and Founding the Kingdom of Bunyoro in the Sixteenth Century,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55–3 (2013), 634–664, 659–660; Anonymous, “Eswa Embala,” *Munno* 6–27 (1937), 140. Carl-Axel Silow, *Notes on Ngangela and Nkoya Ethnozoology: Ants and Termites [Etnologiska Studier 36]* (Göteborg: Göteborgs Etnografiska Museum, 1983), 77, 110–111, 163–170, contains extensive evidence of using the behavior of different species of termite (ant and bee) to classify human sociality.

²⁰ Silow, *Ants and Termites*, 163–164.

²¹ Ferdinand Walser, *Luganda Proverbs* (London: Mill Hill Missionaries, 1982), 125–126.

Archly instrumentalist political leaders might think with termites in seeking to channel the energies and orient the aspirations of large groups of followers. Senior women choreograph with spratfish the fraught questions of admitting children into clans. Such histories will resuscitate scholarly attention to the affective primordialism in ethnic formation. Scholars must think historically about the other-than-human beings that ethnic entrepreneurs used in order to provoke feelings of belonging. That is the way to refuse the central claim of primordialism to lie beyond history and to reveal the ways in which ethnic entrepreneurs made such feeling appear history-less by drenching it in antiquity. Like their ethnic entrepreneurial subjects, scholars must blend the banal aspects of people's experiences with and knowledge of other-than-human beings with the marked dramas in which people used those forms of life to compose and revise groups of people. The shifting availability of other-than-human beings in this work restrains assumptions of stability in the intellectual ground of that work. Changes in availability placed a premium on creative, entrepreneurial reflection and engagement with new sources of imagining and constituting groups. That is one reason new metaphors of belonging, or variations on older ones, emerged and faded over time. The complexities of intellectual work, material circumstance, and historical antecedent that a scholar must address in order to get at these dimensions of ethnic formation invite her to focus on a tight regional setting.

Sources

Oral traditions about clans, about the rulers of Buganda, and about figures like Mukasa form the core of evidence grounding the essay. It is a well-known body of source material that has long mixed oral and written versions. In the 1860s, John Hanning Speke published abridged accounts of discussions with Karagwe and Ganda (and other) royals about their dynastic history. In the 1870s and 1890s, Henry Morton Stanley reported even richer accounts of regional political histories.²² Late in nineteenth century, research teams of African *literati* picked up these threads and such mixing continues, today.²³ Ethnographic and autoethnographic descriptions of this shrine and of others like it add additional detail, sometimes confirming sometimes departing from the “oral” traditions.

²² John Hanning Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1863), 246–260; Henry Morton Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent or The Sources of the Nile Around the Great Lakes of Equatorial Africa and Down the Livingstone River to the Atlantic Ocean*, volume 1 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969 [1878]), 344–380; Henry Morton Stanley, *My Dark Companions and The Strange Stories They Tell* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), *passim*.

²³ Nick Twinamatsiko, *The Cwezi Code* (Kampala: Pilgrims Publications, 2010); Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi, *Kintu* (Nairobi: Kwani Trust, 2014).

The collaboration between Sir Apolo Kagwa [Kaggwa], prime minister of Buganda from 1889 to 1926, and Canon John Roscoe, a member of the Church Missionary Society fluent in Luganda, is perhaps the most famous. Each of them wrote and published over several decades.²⁴ They wrote for different, shifting audiences, but shared a rich engagement with Christian thought and a commitment to an early kind of ethnographic practice. Kagwa's Luganda-language writings were framed by the colonial politics of his Ganda state's relations with an emergent colonial state. The Buganda Agreement of 1900 crystallized many of these issues. That legal arrangement began a new chapter in the messy process of sorting land tenure relations that had been upended by several generations of mobility and dislocation earlier in the nineteenth century. Among other things, the Agreement pushed aside clan estate holders and wrestled with the religious sectarianism of the immediately preceding generation.²⁵ Many other disruptive forces swirled around in the aftermaths of imperial conquest. One of the most important in shaping the sources on which this essay rests was the fact that chiefly representatives of the Ganda state were installed on the Ssesse and Buvuma archipelagos at this time. Before then, these island groups enjoyed a high degree of independence from mainland political power; Buvuma even more than Ssesse.²⁶

Roscoe did more than mission work. He inserted into James Frazer's studies of divine kingship what he was learning with Kagwa from the elder men and women the Prime Minister called to his residence for interviews about the history and culture of greater Buganda. The details of this relationship have been explored elsewhere.²⁷ His monograph, *The Baganda*, was the result. In keeping with other missionary-ethnographers obsessed with finding precursors or echoes of Christian history in African religious

²⁴ John Rowe, "Myth, Memoir, and Moral Admonition: Luganda Historical Writing, 1893–1960," *Uganda Journal* 33 (1979), 17–40, 217–219; Jonathon L. Earle, *Colonial Buganda and the End of Empire: Political Thought and Historical Imagination in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) substantially widens the market place of ideas during this period and after.

²⁵ For a sense of this complex "moment" in the region's history, see: M.S.M. Semakula Kiwanuka, *A History of Buganda: From the Foundation of the Kingdom to 1900* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1972), 220–270, 288–301; Holly E. Hanson, *Landed Obligation: The Practice of Power in Buganda* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann Publishers, 2003), 127–163.

²⁶ Apolo Kagwa, *Ekitabo kye Mpisa za Baganda* (Kampala: Uganda Printing and Publishing Company, 1918), 151; J.T. Yowana Kikulwe Gomotoka (translator David Kiyaga-Mulindwa) "History of Buvuma" (Kampala: unpublished manuscript, n.d. [1930s]), *passim*; David W. Cohen, *The Historical Tradition of Busoga: Mukama and Kintu* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972), 70ff, 97; Henri Médard, *Le Royaume du Buganda au XIX^e Siècle* (Paris: Karthala, 2007), 59.

²⁷ Benjamin Ray, *Myth, Ritual and Kingship in Buganda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 22–53; Médard, *Le Royaume*, 345–349.

practice in order to locate the latter firmly prior to the former, Roscoe's pages often dwell at length on such practices.²⁸

These different obsessions explain the added detail in Roscoe's history of Mukasa's relationship with his older "relatives" in the Ssesse group.²⁹ He reports that Mukasa was born on Bukasa Island but moved to Bubembe island, a short canoe-paddle to the southwest (Map 1). Kagwa's account of the same topic, perhaps less concerned with presenting the richest possible picture of religious practices in place before Islam or Christianity reached the region, does not mention this detail. In the relevant section of his magisterial autoethnography of Ganda cultural history, *Ekitabo kye Mpisa za Baganda*, Kagwa reports that Mukasa was from Bubembe island, with no mention of the shift in location. In another section, however, where Kagwa tells us which holders of clan-estates could not behold Ganda sovereigns, he mentions the figure of Ggugu. Kagwa placed this senior manager at Mukasa's Ssesse shrine in the Wild Date Palm Juice clan and located his estate on Bubembe island.³⁰

In yet another twist, the version of this text most often consulted by scholars is a partial translation into English by Ernest Kalibala, who would earn a doctorate in 1946 from Harvard University and was a fellow member of Kagwa's Grasshopper clan. It was published in 1934, at the behest of Franz Boas. But, the volume took shape under the editorial auspices of May Mandelbaum (Edel), an ethnographer of southwestern Uganda in her own right.³¹ It is virtually certain that editor Mandelbaum (Edel) added to Kagwa's text new categorical distinctions of religious figures and practices, integrating them into Kalibala's translation.³² One finds in this version material on Mukasa placed under separate subheadings – one called "Serwanga Mukasa" and the other called "Mukasa." While, in his Luganda original, Kagwa placed that material under a single heading: "Lubale Serwanga Mukasa." Mandelbaum (Edel) also worked into Kalibala's partial translation page numbers from Roscoe's *The Baganda* in order to indicate where Kagwa's account added detail to Roscoe's. The two new subheadings repeat the essence of the "journey" from Bukasa to Bubembe: the transformation of Mukasa from a figure ensconced in a particular location

²⁸ On this larger, and vexed question, see: Paul Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann Publishers, 1995); William Worger, "Parsing God: Conversations about the Meaning of Words and Metaphors in Nineteenth-Century Southern Africa," *Journal of African History* 42–3 (2001), 417–447.

²⁹ Roscoe, *Baganda*, 290ss.

³⁰ Kagwa, *Mpisa*, 212 (Serwanga Mukasa and Bubembe), 151 (Gugu and Bubembe).

³¹ Apolo Kagwa, *The Customs of the Baganda* (translated by Ernest B. Kalibala, edited by May Mandelbaum [Edel]) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934).

³² Kagwa, *Customs*, 7–8.

into one that traveled. But, either as a result of Mandelbaum's editorial hand or an oversight in Kalibala's translation, the English text claims only Bukasa as Mukasa's home. Kagwa's Luganda original claims that Mukasa was from Bubembe island.³³ The salient point of this source-criticism is to show the rich detail in the material to hand and the politics of knowledge shaping it. Roscoe wanted, among other things, to place Buganda in a wider world history. Kagwa wanted the same, to be sure, but had to contend with as fractious – but just as learned – an audience as those who listened to Frazer's lectures at Cambridge or read *The Golden Bough*.

Kagwa and Roscoe were not the only team writing the region's history. Other African politicians and *literati* conducted field research. A fine example is the sprawling work of J.T. Yowana Kikulwe Gomotoka, the "Head of the Princes" of the Ganda state. While Kalibala was translating Kagwa, Gomotoka was interviewing elder men and women from each of the islands in the Buvuma group (Map 1), as well as others in Western Kenya, and along the Kyaggwe littoral.³⁴ Strenuous debate on the history of clanships, nobility, particular ancient knots of sovereignty, and myriad other topics appeared in print in the vernacular newspapers published by Catholics and Protestants, after the turn of the twentieth century.³⁵

These rich, earlier bodies of historical work are obviously secondary sources in themselves. Their authors were much engaged in contemporary political struggles over the past and the future. Yet, they form much of the ground beneath the guild scholarship on the region's history.³⁶ They are all the work of men, although senior women and categories of women sometimes figure prominently in their accounts.

Still, descriptions of Mukasa's island shrine are scarce perhaps because the shrine was destroyed or abandoned sometime late in the nineteenth century.³⁷ The combined forces of Ganda and British statecrafts, and their supporters, struggled with the island groups like Ssesse and Buvuma, in the 1870s and 1890s and depopulated them and the Ugandan littoral in the

³³ Since this essay is not concerned with the "transformation" of Mukasa into a portable figure of authority, I will refer to the shrine's location as being on Bubembe island.

³⁴ Kiwanuka, *History of Buganda*, 17–22; Gomotoka, "History of Buvuma," *passim*.

³⁵ Earle, *Colonial Buganda*, 231–232.

³⁶ Earle, *Colonial Buganda*, 1–38.

³⁷ Cunningham, *Uganda and Its Peoples*, 84, has two photographs of Bubembe, likely taken between 1902 and 1905, when the book appeared in print. One caption states: "The Valley of Blood: The blood of animals slaughtered for sacrifice to Mukasa flowed down this valley to the lake from the temple." The other caption reads: "Forest scene, Bubembe island: Mukasa's temple *was* (emphasis added) near the tree on the right." No buildings are visible in either image.

1900s, as a sleeping sickness epidemic spread in the region.³⁸ Before those cataclysms the Bubembe shrine attracted multiple clan representatives and people from different parts of a vast region, mentioned by Kagwa and Roscoe and others writing in vernacular publications, who felt a connection to Mukasa's home and used it to think about wealth, harm, and health.³⁹ People of the littoral who work with Mukasa today have no memory of the Bubembe shrine. They recall, as Kalibala apparently did, that Mukasa's principal shrine was on Bukasa Island, just north of Bubembe.⁴⁰

Buganda's expansion, which began in the seventeenth century looms over the sources. The violent frictions that expansion caused with neighboring regions, and the diverse networks it fostered, also shaped the material. From the eighteenth century, those networks linked the region more directly to distant zones of an emerging imperial world – the Indian Ocean region, the middle Nile Basin, and the Inner Congo Basin. Scaling up challenged Buganda's cadre of leaders – senior women and men throughout the domain – to keep political and economic power oriented toward a center that they controlled. From the royal capital to the ordinary household, the opportunities to engage directly with other regions fostered alternative centers of power.⁴¹ Some specialized in violence, others in agriculture, artisanal work of various kinds, and still others focused on services, like maintaining fleets of sewn-canoes for use in war or transportation. Regional antecedents to these forces must be considered when analyzing and interpreting the oral and written material collected in their midst or immediate aftermath.

Antecedents: Mukasa's Island Shrine, the Inland Sea, and the Buganda State

The figure of Mukasa belongs to a period in the region's history that opened around a thousand years ago.⁴² Before that time, littoral and

³⁸ Kirk Hoppe, *Lords of the Fly: Sleeping Sickness Control in British East Africa, 1900–1960* (Westport CT: Praeger, 2003).

³⁹ Kagwa, *Mpisa*, 212–218; Roscoe, *Buganda*, 290–301; Nsimbi, *Amannya*, 127–128.

⁴⁰ Jennifer Johnson (personal communication, 8 April 2018).

⁴¹ David W. Cohen, *Womunafu's Bunafu: A Study of Authority in a Nineteenth-Century African Community* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 123–145; Hanson, *Landed Obligation*, 61–87.

⁴² Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 27–66; David Schoenbrun, "Pythons Worked: Constellating Communities of Practice with Conceptual Metaphor in Northern Lake Victoria, ca. A.D. 800 to 1200," in: Andrew P. Roddick and Ann B. Stahl (eds.), *Knowledge in Motion: Constellations of Learning Across Time and Place* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016), 216–246; Rhiannon Stephens, *A History of African Motherhood: The Case of Uganda, 700–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 38–73.

mainland communities invested the descent-inflected notion of being first in a territory with great responsibility and opportunity. Firstcomers, they argued, had special knowledge of the workings of a territory – its ecological dynamics and potential for wealth and health.⁴³ The abundance of people, or rain and the absence of conflict or drought enjoyed by a present group of heirs to past firstcomers demonstrated to others that that argument was correct.

The very success of that political arrangement faced climatic and, likely, demographic shifts, around the turn of the first millennium CE. These shifts raised questions for people about the efficacy of the previous arrangements. In response, people developed new, scaled-up forms of social composition built on the old ideas of firstness but with an efficacy no longer restricted to particular territories. The result was a new form of social composition – a new sort of clanship and of public healing practice – aimed at populating it with diverse sets of skilled members.⁴⁴ Access to the spiritual authority of older first comers still mattered, but, increasingly, their knowledge and authority was oriented to entire genres of experience and need, rather than to particular territories. Mukasa was one such figure, whose remit included fertility and all matters relating to life and livelihood on the Inland Sea. People brought many other figures into existence with similarly broad range.⁴⁵ These named, portable figures allowed public healing and clanship to constitute expansive political communities.

A few centuries later, particularly effective mobile public healers, figures like Kimera or Ndahura, came into prominence.⁴⁶ Their names refer to a generic success in politics and to the individual knots of skilled leaders who managed the networks. These named figures were categories of leadership capable of composing expansive groups linked together at established central places where representatives of different clanships met and conducted the business and politics of public healing. Such central places included Kisengwe, Mubende, Magonga, Mangira, Busagazi, and

⁴³ David Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place: Agrarian Change, Gender, and Social Identity in the Great Lakes Region to the 15th Century* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann Publishers, 1998), 112, 195–206. See also: Igor Kopytoff, “Introduction,” in: Igor Kopytoff (ed.), *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 3–84; Jan Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 47–49; Kairn A. Klieman, “*The Pygmies Were Our Compass: Bantu and Batwa in the History of West Central Africa, Early Times to c. 1900 C.E.*” (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann Publishers, 2003).

⁴⁴ Neil Kodesh, “Networks of Knowledge: Clanship and Collective Wellbeing,” *Journal of African History* 49–2 (2008), 197–216; Schoenbrun, “Pythons Worked,” 226ss., pushes Kodesh’s chronology several centuries earlier.

⁴⁵ Tantalala, “Early History,” 358ss.; Yolamu Ndoleriire Nsamba, *Mystique in Sovereigns’ Headgear: A Historical Journey via Bunyoro, Uganda* (Wandsbeck: Reach Publishers, 2016)

⁴⁶ Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 98–130.

Bukesa, to name a few (Map 1). Each of these places worked on a calendar about which little is known, but that likely attended to lunar cycles. These long-term processes of transformation and continuity in the scales of political life turned on assembling the best mix of skill and knowledge to serve the needs of potential followers. Many of the clan histories implicated in this essay, open by tracing the itineraries followed by the first two or three generations of founder-figures. The places those figures visited – and the names of the founder-figures themselves – all point to particular mixes of skill and knowledge. Some mention iron-working, healing, bark-cloth production, salt-trading, canoe-building, and so forth.

The “monarchies” for which the region is well-known emerged from but did not erase this new nexus of scale and corporation.⁴⁷ The scare quotes point up the fact that these monarchies, including Buganda, were run by knots of sovereignty. A Queen-mother, her son, the king, and his queen sister – not an individual – constituted the sum total of a given sovereignty.⁴⁸ Individually and together, they extracted from public healing and expansive clanship the ideological resource of reciprocal obligation, establishing royal capitals through which material and affective dimensions of patronage and clientship flowed. The networks centered on royal capitals were conduits, like the older one founded at Magonga, by the Kintu figure. They concentrated flows of wealth and followers, providing the material assets people needed in order to initiate their own patron-client relations with others in their local community and, so, behave like respectable adult men and women. As a result, royal capitals tended to be mobile.⁴⁹ That way, particular knots of sovereignty could respond more nimbly to opportunities and need for wealth and health.

Those developments began during a period of reduced rainfall in a long sixteenth century.⁵⁰ But specific regional differences in food system (cattle, grains, or bananas) and access to raw materials like iron ore or salt, undergirded the creation of different political cultures among these new kinds of sovereignties. Out of this brew of ambition, competition, and wealth in knowledge familiar forms of political and bellicose expansions emerged. The process likely began in Bunyoro, spreading by the necessity of imitation, to territories like the ones that would become Buganda.⁵¹ By the second half

⁴⁷ Hanson, *Landed Obligation*, 59–91; Médard, *Le Royaume du Buganda*, 318–331; Nsamba, *Mystique*, 92–173.

⁴⁸ Nakanyike B. Musisi, “Women, ‘Elite Polygyny,’ and Buganda State Formation,” *Signs* 16–4 (1991), 757–786; Stephens, *African Motherhood*, 112–144.

⁴⁹ Apolo Kagwa, *The Kings of Buganda* (translated and edited by M. Semakula Kiwanuka) (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1971), 222–224.

⁵⁰ Schoenbrun, “Mask of Calm,” 635.

⁵¹ And beyond, cf. Jan Vansina, *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda: The Nyiginya Kingdom* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 38–66.

of Buganda's eighteenth century, military expansion had produced large numbers of female captives. Though concentrated in the capital, this aspect of statecraft rippled far and wide.⁵²

Tensions between a broad range of figures (called *lùbaalè*), like Mukasa, and a sitting king erupted during this period, just after the turn of the seventeenth century. Kagwa tells us that the conflict turned on Tebandeke, the sovereign, having been embarrassed by public requests from the shrine managers and mediums (called *bàlùbaalè*) for payment for their services.⁵³ The *bàlùbaalè* had grown nervous that Tebandeke's many children had reduced his need for their services. However, after he destroyed their shrines, Tebandeke fell ill. He found health by becoming a medium of Mukasa. At the turn of the seventeenth century, it seems, threats to collective well-being posed by climatic shifts were still best managed through *lùbaalè* practice, run by *bàlùbaalè*. That is one message in this account of what might be called sovereign overreach. But, the conflict foreshadowed later ones.⁵⁴

In the eighteenth century, militarism had grown into a decisive feature of regional political economy.⁵⁵ At the same time, the region began to be connected much more directly to trading emporia at the Indian Ocean coast and in the lower Nile Basin. Those links made it harder for royal centers to retain control over flows of wealth and knowledge, as opportunities for establishing successful new centers grew apace (with access to new markets).⁵⁶ Developed with ancient principles of social composition, new centers destabilized the older ones, calling forth yet another period of political innovation in which public healing figured prominently. At times integral, at times oppositional, sovereign knots of rule enlisted the support of public healing centers, like Bubembe.

One famous example of Ssesse's – but not Mukasa's – entanglement with Ganda state militarism exists. It involved the knot of sovereignty surrounding Nnakibinge (king) and Nannono (a wife, of the Leopard clan), in the middle decades of the eighteenth century.⁵⁷ Desperate for some

⁵² Musisi, "Elite Polygyny," 757–786; Stephens, *African Motherhood*, 133–135.

⁵³ Kagwa, *Bakabaka Bebuganda*, 48–50.

⁵⁴ Kiwanuka, *History of Buganda*, 109; Christopher Wrigley, *Kingship and State: The Buganda Dynasty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 182–229, especially, 182–184; Richard Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda* (Oxford: James Currey Publishers, 2002), 177–205, 227–248, especially, 185–190; Hanson, *Landed Obligation*, 74.

⁵⁵ Reid, *Political Power* 177ss.

⁵⁶ Kiwanuka, *History of Buganda*, 148–152; Wrigley, *Kingship and State*, 230ss.; Hanson, *Landed Obligation*, 75–91.

⁵⁷ Among many others, see: Wrigley, *Kingship and State*, 182–214; Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 143–154.

advantage over Bunyoro's effective military, Nnakibinge sought the advice of mediums from Magonga, one of the ancient centers founded by the Kintu figure. He was told to visit Mukasa's father, Wannèma, who resided on Bukasa Island, in the the Ssesse group. Wannèma's son, Kibuuka, was experienced with conflict and could help defeat Bunyoro. In Kagwa's version of this story, Wannèma suggests Mukasa instead of Kibuuka. Nnakibinge persisted, Wannèma relented, and Kibuuka provided the mainland polity with the edge it needed to turn the tide against Bunyoro.⁵⁸ Kibuuka's military skill was not sufficient to turn the struggle in Buganda's favor. The queen-mother of Buganda, Nannono, finished the task, in part by supporting the establishment by leaders of the Sheep clan of a new shrine center at Mbaale, a place both near the littoral and near the inland boundary with Bunyoro.⁵⁹

Of the many conclusions one can draw from this episode, it is clear that Nnakibinge and Nannono met the challenge of Buganda's military weakness. Alliance with a principal island *libaalè* shrine was instrumental in their eventual success along those lines. Kibuuka, as son of Ssesse, embodied the necessary creativity and courage. Moreover, founder-figures of the Sheep clan turned that initial alliance into a long-term solution, by establishing a shrine of their own to which many young men and women from different clans were attracted to the possibilities of gain offered by involvement in the complexities of an economy increasingly oriented to organized violence.⁶⁰ Presumably Mukasa's network would have brought naval power to bear on the struggle with Bunyoro. Perhaps that is why Wannèma first suggested Mukasa to the desperate Nnakibinge. But Nnakibinge and Nannono – and the networks that grew up around Mbaale's shrine to Kibuuka, after his death – were focused on a ground war. They were not yet prepared to invest in naval power. Mukasa's shrine and its complex following remained largely independent of Buganda's eighteenth-century struggles with Bunyoro.

The story depicts a weak Ganda statecraft on the Inland Sea during this period. That suggests that Ganda royals' political adventures and jockeying for position did not generate sufficient friction for Mukasa's Bubembe culture of assembly to cultivate a political ethnicity invested in discourses and practices of difference and competition. Investment in naval power began in the eighteenth century, when Ganda sovereigns like Mawanda, turned state military attentions eastward, toward Busoga and Buvuma.⁶¹ Ganda naval power peaked in the late nineteenth century, but canoe fleets from Ssesse and Kyaggwe (Map 1) were part of these developments from

⁵⁸ Kagwa, *Kings*, 27.

⁵⁹ Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 143ss., 225 fn28.

⁶⁰ Wrigley, *Kingship and State*, 210–215; Reid, *Political Power*, 181–185.

⁶¹ Kiwanuka, *History of Buganda*, 71–78.

the beginning. That nineteenth century naval skill and knowledge was embodied in part in founding a new shrine oriented to one of Mukasa's "children" a figure called Nnende. Nnende's shrine was located in Kyaggwe, on the approach to Busoga and Buvuma. But Buganda never colonized either of those places, despite a long nineteenth century of trying.⁶²

The histories of Kibuuka and Nnende suggest that attractions between some wealthy littoral communities and the newly bellicose Ganda state may have been mutual. The former stood to gain access to mainland markets. The latter stood to gain access to Inland Sea-borne transport, for use in war and potential comparative advantage in trade, increasingly important over a long nineteenth century. Control of movement on the water was particularly important to the fortunes of political centralization in littoral zones.⁶³ Early in that century, as widespread drought settled in, king Ssemakookiro had invited Mukasa's *bàlùbaalê* to cure a bout of indigestion. They traveled from Ssesse and told him publicly that he should cure himself. Confused by this advice, Ssemakookiro "sent everyone away that he might have a private session with the god."⁶⁴ They told the king that the solution to his indigestion lay in imprisoning his over-ambitious sons. Those offspring were taking advantage of the new opportunities for wealth and standing by engaging on their own initiative with the caravan trade. Ssemakookiro's request for help from Mukasa's *bàlùbaalê* seems partly informed by his need for access to the Inland Sea, in order to keep the wealth that moved across it aimed at his royal center and not those of his sons.

Relations between the royal center of Buganda and island centers in Ssesse and Buvuma grew still more contentious as the nineteenth century unfolded. Sometime in the 1870s, when he still held the title "Mukaabya" the sitting king of Buganda invited the *bàlùbaalê* of four different figures from the islands, led by Mukasa, to visit the royal capital.⁶⁵ They arrived at a place called Mutundwe Hill to find houses ready for them, "built by the servants known as Ekikasa." Mukasa's people insisted on meeting with the king, "the three other gods, some very important chiefs, and the three priests of Mukasa." Mukasa's shrine managers "demanded ninety women, ninety slaves, ninety cows and nine hundred cowry shells" from the Ganda sovereign. Mukaabya's refusal severed ties with Ssesse's shrines, clear evidence of the frictions over access to the riches of the Inland Sea.

Shortly after this rupture between mainland and littoral, frictions erupted into outright violence. In 1875, the navy and infantry on Buvuma

⁶² Richard Reid, "The Ganda on Lake Victoria: A Nineteenth-Century East African Imperialism," *Journal of African History* 39–3 (1998), 349–363; William Fitzsimons, "Warfare, Competition, and the Durability of 'Political Smallness' in Nineteenth-Century Busoga," *Journal of African History* 59–1 (2018), 45–67.

⁶³ Reid, *Political Power*, 135–205.

⁶⁴ Kagwa, *Mpisa*, 217; Kagwa, *Customs*, 116.

⁶⁵ Earle, *Colonial Buganda*, 151–157; Kagwa, *Mpisa*, 217.

Map 2. Shrine Sites of the Northern Littoral and Environs, ca. 1890. After Médard, *Le Roayume*, 330.



Island defeated a Ganda navy, with Stanley watching and advising.⁶⁶ A few years later, in 1879, un-chastened by his experience with Buvuma, the Ganda king, Mukaabya, sought to transport loads of ivory by dhow, across the Inland Sea, and to ports at the Indian Ocean. Mukaabya did not secure Mukasa's permission, excluding Mukasa's followers from the opportunities for gain in the conduct of such trade. Mukasa's people were sufficiently well organized to respond to the slight by stopping for three months all canoe and dhow-borne trade along the northern littoral of the Inland Sea.⁶⁷ These examples reveal that island and littoral remained powerful zones of wealth and political strength. Struggles for control over them induced Mukasa's people to tend a political boundary with the Ganda state.

Such violent struggle over access to the Inland Sea soon loosened people's control over their ecology. That loss opened the door to disease, such as sleeping sickness. These were the contexts in which newly victorious imperial forces drove off littoral and island communities, including those at Bubembe, to mainland settlements at least two kilometers from

⁶⁶ Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent*, volume 1, 326–343.

⁶⁷ Cunningham, *Uganda and its Peoples*, 80.

the Inland Sea. This was likely also the time when people abandoned the Bubembe shrine. But, Mukasa survived (Johnson, this volume).

With this long history in the background, this essay explores Mukasa's practice in the two centuries in which the Buganda polity began to expand through violence and bureaucracy. That focus underscores shifting fields of struggle over securing a material basis for achieving the civic virtues of self-sufficiency – including raising children – and proper, controlled clientships with Buganda. Despite the tantalizing hints on the matter, just described, it is difficult to determine if the gradual interest taken by Ganda statecraft in the affairs of Bubembe had begun late in the seventeenth century to transform the moral ethnicity at the core of their work into a project of making political difference. After all, as we just saw, the diversity of people invested in Bubembe exceeded the capacities of a Ganda state to contain, until the very end of the nineteenth century.

The shifting fields framing Mukasa's shrine in this period focused on gendered concerns with fertility, on seasonality, and on mainland sovereignties increasingly engaged in wars that produced enslaved women. Shrine managers activated conceptual worlds through the accessible, visceral joys of shared work and rest, of eating particular kinds of things, and through proximity to specific kinds of beings, that marked key moments in the festive work of the place. Work and eating in these ways could prompt reflection on the state of the conditions undergirding fertility, such as shifts in seasonality. Other-than-human beings were central to those prompts. Collectivities assembled rhythmically and randomly, over time, lending durability to this affective and practical belonging. Constituencies were bound by both lateral and vertical forms of belonging. Laterality had been magnified centuries earlier through the collapse of distance afforded by inventing sewn-canoe travel.⁶⁸ Verticality was enacted through the return of the spirits of departed men and women, blended into the figure of Mukasa and their mediumistic work of persons possessed in a given present by those departed persons. In the language of descent, these were bi-lateral collectivities, thinking and acting – collecting information, for both ordinary people and increasingly interested mainland statecrafts – with both male and female predecessors to address the implications of patterned uncertainties in seasonality for fertility quests.

Rhythm and Range in Mukasa's Island Public Healing

There were many shrines to Mukasa (Map 2), as the foregoing history suggests. They render Mukasa as an idea-practice of labor, sacrifice, assembly, and return-giving for fishers, canoe workers, men and women in gendered fertility quests, pursuit of natality and virility. Mukasa's lateral reach is

⁶⁸ Schoenbrun, "Pythons Worked," 224–225.

reflected in the presence of the name in different languages of the region. In Luganda, people classify the kinds of practices with a family resemblance to those that occurred at the Bubembe shrine, calling Mukasa a *lùbaalè*. In Ruhaya, Runyankore, Rutooro, or Runyoro, Mugasha or Mugasa the same classification places this figure in a category called *cwezi*.⁶⁹ *Lùbaalè* and their people were flung far and wide. They were, after all, examples of the portable spiritual authority and expansive clanship engineered around more than a thousand years ago in this region, discussed above. Most of them called Ssesse home.

Chronological details about the growth of Mukasa's Bubembe shrine are elusive in the available sources. The seventeenth-century "opening date" for the setting of the analysis, below, is arbitrary. It marks a period of climatic stress, discussed below, during which the shrine may have been affected by mainland political expansions that accompanied the environmental change. That date also marks the period when Tebandeke became a medium of Mukasa. The period closes at the turn of the nineteenth century, as Ssemakookiro struggled to keep wealth and loyalty flowing through his royal center.⁷⁰ The clan to which the principal shrine managers belonged, mentioned by Kagwa, enjoyed prominence throughout this period. The sources mention figures and audiences that had accumulated gradually, from long before sitting royals of an expansionist Buganda state began inviting Mukasa's island *bàlùbaalè* to visit the mainland.

Kateregga (king) and Nabuso (queen-mother) initiated that expansionism, late in the seventeenth century. Over the course of the eighteenth century, as expansionism settled in to sustained conflict with neighboring polities, especially Bunyoro, the violence and dispossession it entailed created opportunities and needs for new collectivities, or clanships. The Wild Date Palm Juice clanship was one example. This clanship had taken sufficient shape and weight to figure in accounts of the reign of Mulondo (king) and Nnamulondo (queen-mother), early in the eighteenth century.⁷¹ In accounts of the shrine drawn upon for this essay, each of the shrine's three leading priests belonged to this clan. Moreover, involving royal messengers in refurbishment reflects a practice of political engagement

⁶⁹ Speke, *Journal*, 3; John Nyakatura, *Abakama ba Kitara: Abatembuzi, Abacwezi, Ababito* (St. Justin, Quebec: W.-H. Gagne & Sons, 1947), 45; Henry Muzale, *Ruhaya-English-Kiswahili Dictionary* (Dar es Salaam: University of Dar es Salaam Press, 2006), 159, which gives for Mugasa the "name of a god or deity of oceans, seas, lakes and water in general."

⁷⁰ Kagwa, *Kings*, 56–57, 96–102.

⁷¹ David Schoenbrun, "The Names of the Python: Toward a History of Ethnic Formation in East Africa Before 1900," unpublished manuscript, Northwestern University (Evanston IL, 2017), chapter 2; Nnakibinge and Mulondo's "reigns" as eighteenth century phases, rather than periods of rule by individual persons, is argued in Wrigley, *Kingship and State*, 169, 203–206, 210–215.

with the shrine, enclosed by the long century of catastrophic drought preceding the onset of Ganda military expansion.⁷²

The figures directing action at Bubembe fit into the category of public healers. They clearly served collective interests, from positions as guides in forming the ideas and feelings – grids of critique, action, planning – constituting the moral ethnicity of Mukasa's following.⁷³ They did so with the stabilities of assembly afforded by the existence of the shrine. Theirs was not a particularly evanescent public healing. As Feierman emphasized when he first formulated the phrase, public healers formed momentary assemblies to address problems of fertility, prosperity, the responsibilities of rule and following, and so forth.⁷⁴ His examples unfolded in times and places with rapacious statecrafts. Their violence crossed lines of dignity and propriety in the service of polities propped up by genealogies that connected state leaders to antique and august figures of great time-depth in a region.

Mukasa's shrine at Bubembe does and does not fit these descriptions. It was a stable place, at least until its abandonment around the turn of the twentieth century. Genealogies place Mukasa inside a logic of seniority, two generations removed from the oldest *lùbaalè*, whose shrines were also in the Ssesse Islands. The cast of figures, the peasant intellectuals running events at the shrine, were reproduced through institutions of selection and education which lie beyond the scope of this essay. As we have seen, it stood apart from the principal powerful states of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Bunyoro, Buganda, Kooki, Nkore, and the Haya polities, in a broad arc to the west – sometimes enlisted Mukasa in their struggles with one another or in their gambits for extending the reach of authority to direct flows of wealth and persons to their roving capital “centers.”⁷⁵ This poor fit warns that Mukasa's ethnic formation with its great geographical reach and rhythms of assembly, was shaped – but not determined – by mainland interests.

⁷² Schoenbrun, “A Mask of Calm,” 635; Wrigley, *Kingship and State*, 178, 214; Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 158–163.

⁷³ See also: Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 39–50; and others discussed in the Introduction.

⁷⁴ Steven Feierman, “Healing as Social Criticism in the Time of Colonial Conquest,” *African Studies* 54–1 (1995), 73–88, 80; Steven Feierman, “Colonizers, Scholars, and the Creation of Invisible Histories,” in: Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (eds.), *Beyond the Linguistic Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 182–216, 189–192, 196–203, 206–209.

⁷⁵ Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 143–154; Peter R. Schmidt, *Historical Archaeology: A Structural Approach in an African Society* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 80, 81, 116, 302, 305; Nsamba, *Mystique*; Samwiri Rubaraza Karugire, *A History of the Kingdom of Nkore in Western Uganda to 1896* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971), 84, 121.

Indeed, in the Inland Sea's greater northwestern ecumene the name "Mugasa" sounds Haya, while "Mugasha" sounds Rutaran (even, with the further affrication of /s/ to /sh/, Hima or Huma), and "Mukasa" sounds Ganda. Others conceptualized the powers of the Inland Sea in similar fashion. They used pythons, sewn canoes, prominent islands, and so forth. But they summed up the concept with different names. Meru was Mukasa's name in Busoga and in Buvuma.⁷⁶ Atego was Mukasa's name in the eastern zones of the northern littoral.⁷⁷ Similarities in the sources of these conceptualizations point to a single zone of groupwork set on the littoral and in the islands. The different names suggest the promotion of awareness of difference among and between the groups. Such difference-making was not clearly oriented toward any particular state. Yet, as we have seen, anecdotes tell of engagement with Sese in general and with Mukasa's people in particular by the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century rulers from Kyamtwa (Map 1) and Buganda. They clearly reflect a new level of interest in the islands and the political economies of the Inland Sea which Mukasa's people looked after. Care must be taken not to impart to the different names and practices oriented to such a figure the whiff of political tribalism. Further research may well reveal the differences in the names to reflect slightly different moral ethnicities under construction.

Assembly, Affect, and Durable Moral Community

In the simplest terms, Mukasa's Bubembe shrine constituted collectivities whose make-up crossed lines of gender, age, and status and lines of regional, linguistic, and species affinity. They assembled at the shrine to secure the means of social reproduction, the "assets that offered them self-mastery within their community of belonging."⁷⁸ Published accounts of the shrine describe an elite place visited by representatives of Ganda or Haya kings and by chiefs from nearby islands.⁷⁹ Ordinary islanders, and many others given to the shrine as slaves or as gifts of thanks for Mukasa's beneficence, were also intimately involved in its workings. Many buildings, numerous residents, many visitors, roads leading to ports, and unusual objects not reported from other shrines oriented to *libaalè* figures were found at Bubembe.

Bubembe's ceremonial festivals were similar to those at other shrines. The retinue of young women just mentioned, given by elites as servants or

⁷⁶ David W. Cohen, "The Cwezi Cult," *Journal of African History* 9–4 (1968), 651–657, 655.

⁷⁷ Michael Kenny, "Powers of Lake Victoria," *Anthropos* 72–5/6 (1977), 713–733, 722.

⁷⁸ Lonsdale, "Unhelpful Pasts and a Provisional Present," 24.

⁷⁹ Speke, *Journal*, 395–396, during a visit in April 1862 a New Moon was sighted; Kagwa, *Mpisa*, 212–218; Roscoe, *Baganda*, 284, 290–291; Mzee Augustine Kaindo, "Origins of Rugomora Mahe," in: Schmidt, *Historical Archaeology*, 298–312, 302–305.

slaves, or by thankful parents who had enjoyed a spirit's efficacy, lived at any shrine of consequence.⁸⁰ Named drums, with particular beats played by titled officials, figured prominently. Tobacco, smoked in ceramic pipes over a special fire, instigated the medium's possession experience. The wand a medium used emphasized the words she spoke while possessed. The waterproof, woven-wicker basket (*èkiserò*, sing.), which Ssemagumba used to catch sacrificed cattle blood to give to Mukasa. Large stones, some specific plants, and the general dress of the priests and medium, all would be familiar to visitors at other shrines. The male-only eating of sacrificed animals, that too was familiar. But when it came to building, labor, swallowing, the choreography of sacrifice, seasonality, and the importance of lunar synody – the phases of the moon's visibility – and fertility, there were contrasts.

Bubembe was the only place where the blood of sacrificed cattle (or goats) was conducted into the Inland Sea along an aqueduct made from the stems of mature fronds of a banana tree.⁸¹ When refurbishing the shrine's buildings, Ggugu cut the necks of the eighteen head of cattle sent from Buganda's mainland royal capital. Ssemagumba caught a little of the blood from each animal directing it into the aqueduct, which other managers had laid in a course linking the shrine to the harbor. When the spate of blood reached the Inland Sea, those at the landing place chorused: "He has drunk it."⁸² Cattle blood literally linked Mukasa's shrine on the land to Mukasa's abode as the waters of the Inland Sea.⁸³ During rebuilding, all

⁸⁰ Kagwa, *Mpisa*, 209–237; Roscoe, *Baganda*, 274–275. These archly royalist sources emphasize the "giving" of female youths; it is likely that many joined such shrines of their own accord in the seventeenth century, to escape unfavorable circumstances of marriage in their home regions created by the initial bellicose expansions of a young Ganda state; for coeval West African parallels, see: Sandra Greene, "Family Concerns: Gender and Ethnicity in Pre-Colonial West Africa," *International Review of Social History* 44–S7 (1999), 15–31, 19ss.

⁸¹ Elsewhere, sacrificial blood was conducted "by the door of the shrine, and beer was poured out there," suggesting that on-lookers at Bubembe could have understood the boundary between land and water, crossed by the ox's blood, as analogous to a shrine's door. Roscoe, *Baganda*, 288.

⁸² Cunningham, *Uganda*, 82, "a great howl went up;" Roscoe, *Baganda*, 294, gives "He has drunk it." But the Luganda phrase in Kagwa, *Mpisa*, 214, reads: "*Anaitayo Mukasa anamu'ta*" or "It is passing into her/him/it Mukasa is killing her/him/it." Roscoe translated the idea that the blood passed into the Lake freely as a kind of drinking but left aside – as did Kalibala, in his translation of *Mpisa* – the last verbal phrase that referred to killing cattle. Roscoe also reports that the gutter was made to follow the path Mukasa had taken after landing on Bubembe. Kagwa regularly points out in *Mpisa* when his findings differ from Roscoe's, but he neither repeats nor disputes this claim there.

⁸³ Roscoe, *Baganda*, 293–294; Kagwa, *Mpisa*, 213.

of the sacrificed cattle but one was “divided among the lower order of priests and workmen, but no woman was allowed to eat any of it.”⁸⁴ The single animal – perhaps the one selected by Ssemagumba and tied to Mukasa’s temporary residence – “was the property of the priests, and might be shared only by members of their families and clans.”⁸⁵ Bubembe was the only place where women cleared each of the roads running to seven different harbors, their labor reviving a gendered map of Mukasa’s lateral range.

The performative eating in Bubembe’s festivals also contrasted with a python’s eating at other shrines and with claims of what Nambubi, Mukasa’s mother, ate. Nambubi was said to eat only raw plantain, but Mukasa ate only “the heart and liver of animals and drank their blood.”⁸⁶ At Bulonge, in Buddu (Map 1), resident pythons swallowed meals of entire animals, and sipped milk mixed with kaolin. At Bubembe, Mukasa “ate” blood and organ meat, while everyone else ate butchered meat, properly cooked. The entire animals that pythons swallowed but that no person ever ingested in that condition were replaced at Bubembe with flesh, organs, and blood, materials everyone ingested from time to time, in ordinary eating.

The liver and heart of animals are nutritious and tasty. They also have linguistic associations with the palette of affect that can communicate human intention. In the later nineteenth century, ethnographer-lexicographers were told that hearts housed courage as well as malice. Livers contained corrosive feelings of spite that drove a desire for revenge.⁸⁷ Trapping affect inside the body or in organs is a common metaphor juxtaposing the body as a container to abstract qualities of emotion.⁸⁸ But, the details of the mapping differed over time and place.⁸⁹ In Luganda, the

⁸⁴ Roscoe, *Baganda*, 294.

⁸⁵ Kagwa, *Customs*, 115; Roscoe, *Baganda*, 293–294.

⁸⁶ Roscoe, *Baganda*, 291.

⁸⁷ Charles T. Wilson, *An Outline Grammar of the Luganda Language* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1882), 70, gave “Liver, *kivumbu*.” Albert R. Cook, *A Medical Vocabulary and Phrase Book in Luganda* (Kampala: Uganda Bookshop, 1903), 19, gave “*Kibumba*, liver;” Charles W. Hattersley and Henry Wright Duta, *Luganda Phrases and Idioms* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1904), 85, *kibumba* “liver;” Snoxall, *Luganda-English Dictionary*, 130, “*èkibúmba* n. liver.”

⁸⁸ Zoltan Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁸⁹ John R. Taylor and Thandi Mbense, “Red Dogs and Rotten Mealies: How Zulus Talk about Anger,” in: Angeliki Athanasiadou and Elzbieta Tabakowska (eds.), *Speaking of Emotions: Conceptualisation and Expression* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998), 191–226, 194ss.

zone of the body linked to desire is not restricted to the anatomical organ inside the chest. *Èmmemê* refers to the area around the sternum, extending to the heart as a proxy for “inside.” It is often a metonym for strong emotion, distinguished in the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, from spiritual feeling.⁹⁰ The derivation of *kibumba*, the Ganda term for liver points to just such a detail, taking us to a verb, *kùbumba*, “to mold (out of clay).” Kibumba is an innovation – Ganda speakers not only ceased using other, more widespread terms for liver, they are the only ones in the entire Great Lakes region to use this word in talking about the liver. A common metaphor in Luganda, for the human gestational process, draws on work with clay and making medicine.⁹¹ So, Mukasa’s liver-meal also evoked the on-going labors of virility and natality required to grow the child in a well-contained space. In this case, the antiquity of the more general linking of organ and affect took on the additional *gravitas* of pointing to the risks to healthy children of envy, hidden in the livers of other people.

The shrine came to life to different rhythms, as well as at the occasional prompting by the needs of a knot of Ganda state sovereignty. At the sighting of a new moon, work on the island slowed markedly, as it did widely across the region, for varying lengths of time, from four to ten days. People did not even collect firewood and many accounts say people suspended sexual activity as well. At three-month intervals, “crowds of people gathered together” for twenty days while Mukasa appeared and possessed the female medium Nakangu.⁹² During these gatherings, supplicants and gawkers shared the shrine with its managers, royal representatives, and estate-holding clan figures from other Islands. Other gatherings were less rhythmic, prompted by a royal consultation or rebuilding the

⁹⁰ George L. Pilkington, *Luganda-English and English-Luganda Vocabulary* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1899), 68; Henri Le Veux, *Premier Essai de Vocabulaire Luganda-Français d’après l’Ordre Étymologique* (Maison-Carrée: Imprimerie des Missionnaires d’Afrique [Pères Blancs], 1917), 624; Eridadi M.K. Mulira and E.G.M. Ndawula, *A Luganda-English and English-Luganda Dictionary* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1952), 67; Snoxall, *Luganda-English Dictionary*, 206; Hamilton *et al.*, *Luganda Dictionary*, 257. For usage, see: Viktor Katula, “Abadzukulu ba Sekabaka Kagulu: Ekiyigganyizo eky’okubiri,” *Munno* 14–9 (1924), 136–137, 137; Viktor Katula, “Abadzukulu ba Sekabaka Kagulu,” *Munno* 14–11 (1924), 155–156, 155.

⁹¹ Margaret Trowell, “Some Royal Craftsmen of Buganda,” *Uganda Journal* 8–2 (1941), 47–64, 58; John Giblin and Kigongo Remigius, “The Social and Symbolic Context of the Royal Potters of Buganda,” *Azania* 47–1 (2012), 46–80, 67–68; *èmmùmbwa* “home-made remedy made of herbs mixed with clay, usually sausage-shaped,” Snoxall, *Luganda-English Dictionary*, 206.

⁹² Roscoe, *Baganda*, 299; Cunningham, *Uganda*, 88.

entire temple complex.⁹³ Calamities such as food shortages or disease epidemics could prompt assemblies as well.⁹⁴ Assemblies sprawled; no single person or group ever saw all the events.

The rhythmic forms of assembly provide the best insights into the moral ethnicity people created there. The lunar synody prompting activity pointed to the importance of fertility in the workings of the shrine. Fertility was a key “asset” in adult quests for self-mastery and the moral community to which that mastery gave life. At Bubembe, lunar synody – the phases of the moon’s visibility – timed large gatherings of women and men. This reflected a theory of fertility not only aimed at regulating menstruation to increase the chances of pregnancy, but also aimed at increasing access to the other resources needed to secure virility and natality. “Natality” and “virility” are ideas meant to capture the gendered differences between what men and women had to do in order to generate children. From conventional gendering of behavior to composing bundles of wealth and social relationships, making children involved men and women in well-timed sex, bodily preparation and adornment, ritual practices (cf. Hoelsing’s essay and Johnson’s essay in this volume), and properly assembled cross-generational and trans-local social networks.⁹⁵

Given their moral and intellectual inclinations, it is unsurprising that authors like Kagwa and Roscoe wrote about sexual activity at such gatherings in coded language. Roscoe mentions that after the close of refurbishment, senior priests and as well as “all the people who had taken part in the work” could “go to their homes.”⁹⁶ The phrasing points to the resumption of sexual activity, after the appearance of the new moon, in the week following the end of the twenty-day period of gathering and labor. Roscoe also mentions that Nakangu, Mukasa’s female medium, “might have as many slave-girls as she wished from those attached to the temple.”⁹⁷ These snippets clearly suggest that shrine managers were

⁹³ Kagwa, *Mpisa*, 215; Roscoe, *Baganda*, 292; Elisa Jjumba, “Book of the Ssiga of Jumba,” Africana Section, Makerere University Library (Kampala, 1964) 5, 11; copy in possession of Neil Kodesh.

⁹⁴ A. Mukanga, “The Traditional Belief in Balubaale,” *Occasional Research Papers in African Religions and Philosophies* 17–167 (1974), 5. Mukanga’s sources included Kikaziki, an 80-year old, non-Christian, from Lusango, Buddu, a practicing female medium of Wannèma.

⁹⁵ Suzette Heald, “The Power of Sex: Some Reflections on the Caldwells’ ‘African Sexuality’ Thesis,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 65–4 (1995), 489–505; Stella Nyanzi, Justine Nassimbwa, Vincent Kayizzi and Strivan Kabanda, “‘African Sex is Dangerous!’ Renegotiating ‘Ritual Sex’ in Contemporary Masaka District,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 78–4 (2008), 518–539.

⁹⁶ Roscoe, *Baganda*, 295.

⁹⁷ Roscoe, *Baganda*, 298.

susceptible to pressures on their responsibilities to shelter the Nanziri, in keeping with the argument that they represented gifts of thanks to Mukasa from grateful (and wealthy) supplicants.⁹⁸ But it also hints directly at the matter of fertility of greatest moment to ordinary supporters of Mukasa. Sexual symbolism and activity is a common feature of songs sung during initiation into public healing groups oriented to spirit possession and mediumship elsewhere in the region.⁹⁹ Even if it is dangerous under these limitations of information to say more on this topic, it is difficult to imagine Mukasa's shrine, a place engaged in possession and mediumship and their reproduction, bereft of such activity or spoken allusion to it.

It is better, perhaps, to dwell a little longer on the notion of menstrual synchrony, hinted at in the practice of releasing everyone involved in refurbishment to "go home" sometime in the fourth week of their assembly. This directs attention to the link between fertility quests and shrine activity at Bubembe. The science of menstrual synchrony is equivocal; some find the evidence for it compelling, while others dispute it.¹⁰⁰ Be that as it may, the fact that menstrual cycles and lunar cycles are both about 29.5 days long has prompted people the world over to think about menstrual timing with lunar synody. That fit makes imposing circumstances of assembly an irresistible way to take advantage of causality. By keeping the temporal doubling in step, with rest and good food, the differences between individual menstrual patterns might be reduced.¹⁰¹ People understood that menstruation was a precondition for biological reproduction, so the longer of the rhythmic assemblies just described might have had this practical dimension oriented toward fertility, even though pregnancies were not guaranteed. Monthly menstruation may

⁹⁸ Kagwa distinguishes "slaves" from "women" in the make-up of such "gifts" in the nineteenth century; Kagwa, *Mpisa*, 217–218.

⁹⁹ Tantala, "Early History," 181; A.B.T. Byaruhanga-Akiiki, *Religion in Bunyoro* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1982), 54–55; John Nyakatura (translated by Zeibya Kwamya), *Aspects of Bunyoro Customs and Traditions* (Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1970), 71.

¹⁰⁰ Zhengwei Yang and Jeffrey C. Schank, "Women do not Synchronize their Menstrual Cycles," *Human Nature* (2006), 433–447; H. Clyde Wilson, "A Critical Review of Menstrual Synchrony Research," *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 17 (1992), 565–591.

¹⁰¹ Martha K. McClintock, "Menstrual Synchrony and Suppression," *Nature* 229 (1971), 244–245; Martha K. McClintock, "Social Control of the Ovarian Cycle and the Function of Oestrus Synchrony," *American Zoologist* 21 (1981), 243–256; Winnifred B. Cutler, "Lunar and Menstrual Phase Locking," *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* 13 (1980), 834–839; Sung Ping Law, "The Regulation of Menstrual Cycle and Its Relationship to the Moon," *Acta Obstetrica Gynecologica Scandinavica* 65 (1986), 45–48.

not have been the norm for lactating mothers and women on low fat diets whose daily labor consumed many calories; it may have been so for younger women, not yet biological mothers, who rested and ate higher fat foods, perhaps at celebratory assemblies like those at Bubembe.¹⁰² Fertility quests clearly attracted supplicants of all statures to refurbishing events at Mukasa's shrine.

Thus, men and women from all stations of life, across a long eighteenth century assembled repeatedly at Mukasa's shrine. Some came in search of fertility or information. Others came in service of a newly expansionist Ganda state, also interested in fertility and information. In each case, the scope of assembly exceeded the experience of any single individual. It blended emotion and networking, again and again. By thinking more deeply about one of the other-than-human beings – the trees shrine managers enlisted in convening these refurbishing assemblies – a clearer picture emerges concerning the specific contexts shaping the motives and aspirations driving ordinary people, as well as royal representatives, to assemble at Bubembe.

Trees: Seasonality and Laterality

The other-than-human beings recruited into refurbishing – and the titled figures who engaged them – add depth and range to the moral community composed over and over again at Mukasa's shrine. Trees figured prominently. Each of the shrine's three managers cut a branch from a different tree, which they used as poles to build Mukasa's new house.¹⁰³ The senior manager among them was called Ssemagumba. His title was derived from an intransitive verb, *kugúmba*, (Luganda) meaning “to gather into a group; muster” or “hurry, hasten.” The verb underlies the noun for the bones of a skeleton; *ëggumbà*; *àmàgumbà*.¹⁰⁴ The intransitivity of the verb implies that the impetus for gathering lay as much with the gatherers as it did with Ssemagumba. In other words, the intransitive verb prevents us from imagining Ssemagumba as the lone initiator of such gatherings. People understood or were invited to understand the gatherings over which Ssemagumba presided as collectively caused. Yet, as an adjective, the same stem, *-gumba*, may be translated as “barren,” and

¹⁰² Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb, “A Critical Appraisal of Theories of Menstrual Symbolism,” in: Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb (eds.), *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 3–50, 45–47; Etienne van de Walle and Elisha Renne (eds.), *Regulating Menstruation: Beliefs, Practices, Interpretations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

¹⁰³ Kagwa, *Mpisa*, 214.

¹⁰⁴ Snoxall, *Luganda-English Dictionary*, 98, 91.

gives a noun, *omugúmba*, “woman who cannot give birth.”¹⁰⁵ Care must be taken not to naturalize a condition such as barrenness which people understood as processual and conducive to intervention. Slight departures from regular tonal patterns, between the terms, raise doubts about their cognation. But the homophony surely fostered rhetorical play and association, inviting people to link ideas of orderly assembly with solutions to a gendered experience of barrenness. One could translate the title into English as “father/leader of assemblies” or “father/leader of barren women” or “father/leader of the bones.”

Ssemagumba cut a branch from a living *òlùsambyâ* tree. *Òlùsambyâ* is the Ganda name for a tree called *Markhamia platycalyx* in the Linnaean system. Cognates occur in neighboring languages from both the closely related and neighboring Rutara and North Nyanza groups of Great Lakes Bantu languages (see below).¹⁰⁶ In Buhaya, on the western Tanzanian littoral (Map 1) the *mshambya* tree is a source of medicine public healers used “to dry up the water” into which heroic figures had thrown themselves.¹⁰⁷ This same tree was on display in the Ganda royal capital. It provided the wood for the scepter handed by the head of the Blue Monkey clan to a new *kabaka* (or king) of Buganda. The generic term for scepter, *ddamula*, is derived from the verb *kùlamula* “to judge, arbitrate.” And, *bagambira*, the name of this particular scepter, gives a literal translation of “they who tell for or testify.” Both terms define the worked, wooden object – not a branch from a living *òlùsambyâ* tree – as central to legal process, a quintessential domain of royal authority. The scepter was passed to the new monarch following the gift of a medium-wife, the “daughter” of the clan head, who cooked for the new king.¹⁰⁸

The second most senior figure, with the title Ggugu, carried a branch from a tree called *kawoomerezi*.¹⁰⁹ I have been unable to find a translational equivalent for this tree in the Linnaean system; a literal translation

¹⁰⁵ Kibuuka Balubuliza Kiingi, *Enkuluze y’Oluganda ey’e Makerere* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2007), 777. The noun, *omugúmba*, or “barren woman,” belonged to the lexicon of Proto Bantu; cf. Stephens, *African Motherhood*, 186.

¹⁰⁶ William J. Eggeling and Ivan R. Dale, *The Indigenous Trees of the Uganda Protectorate* (Entebbe: Government Printer, 1952); Alan Hamilton, *A Field Guide to Uganda Forest Trees* (Makerere: Makerere University Printer, 1981), 202–203; Hamilton, *Luganda Dictionary and Grammar*, 88.

¹⁰⁷ Spirian Lwosa, 15 May 1969, Kigarama, Kiziba, in: Schmidt, *Historical Archaeology*, 62. See also: Bernhard Strück, “African Ideas on the Subject of Earthquakes,” *Journal of the Royal African Society* 8–32 (1909), 398–411, 401–402.

¹⁰⁸ Kagwa, *Mpisa*, 19.

¹⁰⁹ The title (“Ggugu”) was derived from *eggugu* “type of sedge (found in swamps; used for making mats and extracting salt) *Pycreus nitidus*,” *eggugu*; *amagugu* “large load/bundle.” Cf. Hamilton, *Luganda Dictionary and Grammar*, 38. The name can link salt, mats, and trade.

gives: “little tasty, charming thing.” The name perhaps signals that this tree bears beautiful blossoms or fruit pleasing to eat. Ssebadide, or “Father of those who ate,” the third most senior manager, carried a branch from the *òmùsaali* tree (*Mimosa ugandensis* or *Garcinia buchananii*), which bears a yellowish edible fruit with medicinal properties.¹¹⁰ Each new king of Buganda has a unique royal medicine made from this wood.¹¹¹ *Òmùsaali* wood was used also for making the prows of the famous sewn canoes from Sseese.¹¹² When a royal court was involved in refurbishing Mukasa’s shrine at Bubembe, the royals sent their emissaries with “reeds” with intact root balls.¹¹³ At the shrine, the roots were severed and used to fix the structure holding the meteor-hammer and before which Ssemagumba set the *ekisero* of blood. The reed stems were woven into the thatch and walls of Mukasa’s new house, tied to the poles provided by the shrine managers with hide thongs from the slaughtered cattle.¹¹⁴ These plants constituted a *materia medica*, a set of materials for building homes and sewn canoes, a group of ecological zones and processes, eating, the arcana of royal ideology, and presumably other fields of meaning and use that eluded our sources.

A focus on the *òlùsambyâ*, reveals intellectual and practical knowledge of great moment for supplicants and managers. Information on the uses and ecology of the *òlùsambyâ* tree is more abundant than for the other trees used by Mukasa’s two other shrine managers. The range of meanings and ideas that the tree could invoke shifted with specific contexts. So, thinking about this tree as a mirror or metaphor for elements of moral ethnicity does not go far enough. The trees have their own history, a history

¹¹⁰ Geoffrey D.H. Carpenter, *A Naturalist on Lake Victoria: With an Account of Sleeping Sickness and the Tse-Tse Fly* (London: Dutton, 1920), 95. On Bulago island: Arthur Leonard Kitching and George Robert Blackledge, *A Luganda-English and English-Luganda Dictionary* (Kampala: Uganda Bookshop, 1925), 71; Timo D. Stark, Mathias Salger, Oliver Frank, Onesmo B. Balemba, Junichiro Wakamatsu and Thomas Hofmann, “Antioxidative Compounds from *Garcinia buchananii* Stem Bark,” *Journal of Natural Products* 78–2 (2015), 234–240. doi: 10.1021/np5007873. See also: Otto Stapf *et al.*, “Plantae Novae Daweanae in Uganda Lectae,” *Journal of the Linnean Society (Botany)* 37 (1906), 495–544, 523–525; M.T. Dawe, *Report on a Botanical Mission through the Forest Districts of Buddu and the Western and Nile Provinces of the Uganda Protectorate* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1906). The visit to Buddu coincided with the height of forced removals during the sleeping sickness epidemic.

¹¹¹ Eggeling and Dale, *Indigenous Trees of the Uganda Protectorate*, 41, 197; called “Nantaba,” Roscoe, *Baganda*, 325.

¹¹² Kagwa, *Mpisa*, 289.

¹¹³ Kagwa, *Mpisa*, 212, uses “*emuli*,” the plural of *òlùmuli* “stem of Elephant grass, cane, reed;” cf. Hamilton, *Luganda Dictionary*, 87. Ubiquitous on the mainland, Elephant grass (*Pennisetum purpureum*) is rare on smaller islands, according to Carpenter, *Naturalist*, 105.

¹¹⁴ Roscoe, *Baganda*, 292; Kagwa, *Mpisa*, 212; Kagwa, *Customs*, 114.

which evidently spoke to people through what the “behavior” of particular trees indexed.

The *òlùsambyâ* branch Ssemagumba cut and wielded during refurbishing Mukasa’s shrine, signaled a mix of ideas about seasonality and health. The noun is derived from the verb stem *-samba* “kick; stamp, tread” by inflecting it with a causative suffix, giving *-sambya* or *-sambisa*.¹¹⁵ Other nouns, made from the same stem, referred to both the “lesser rains” and “small dry season,” a thousand years ago, when people spoke North Nyanza and Rutara languages from which, respectively, today’s Luganda and Runyoro have descended.¹¹⁶ The lesser rains might come between May and September or October. Their moisture originated in the Atlantic Ocean.¹¹⁷ As deverbatives from the causative form, *kùsambya*, “to cause to kick, to kick with” or “to hurry, hasten” the nouns *àmàsambya* or *àkàsambya* signified the short rains, in Proto-South Kyoga. These rains could ease farming work and improve yields. As deverbatives of the transitive conversive form, *kùsambula*, “to root up (the stubble from the previous crop); make fallow,” the noun *àkàsambula* signified the close of the long dry season, the season during which people began to turn over the earth to fallow their fields. Variations in these semantic values reflect the fact that, although the timing of short rains and a short dry season was unpredictable, farmers nonetheless associated this time of the year with preparing fallow ground for planting.

Markhamia trees are found widely in Uganda and elsewhere in the Bantu-speaking zone of Africa, clearly suggesting people have a long acquaintance with them. Yet, people have named this tree with different words, suggesting just as clearly that their relationships with the trees have

¹¹⁵ Le Veux, *Premier Essai*, 829 and 830, where the two forms appear as equivalents.

¹¹⁶ On “Rutara” as an earlier, historical speech community, see: Schoenbrun, *A Green Place*, 167. On “North Nyanza” as an earlier, historical speech community, see: Stephens, *African Motherhood*, 23–26. On particular glosses, see: C. Hermann, “Lusiba, die Sprache der Länder Kisiba, Bugabu, Kjamtwara, Kjanga und Ihangiro,” *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen* 7 (1904), 150–200, 159; Muzale, *Ruhaya-English-Kiswahili*, 230; Businge Makolome Robert and Martin Diprose, *Ntongoli gya Lugungu; Lugungu Dictionary* (Hoima: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 2012), 211; Richard Kayaga Gonza, *Lusoga-English, English-Lusoga Dictionary* (Kampala: MK Publishers, 2007); Richard Nzogi and Martin Diprose, *Ekideero ky’oLugwere; Lugwere Dictionary* (Budaka: SIL Press, 2012), 185; Le Veux, *Premier Essai*, 830. See: Francis Rodegem, *Dictionnaire Rundi-Français* (Tervuren: Musée Royal de l’Afrique Centrale, 1970), 401, for a different name, *umusavé*.

¹¹⁷ Vanessa Gelorini and Dirk Verschuren, “Historical Climate-Human-Ecosystem Interaction in East Africa: A Review,” *African Journal of Ecology* 51–3 (2013), 409–421, 410.

shifted over time. People use its leaves and the bark of its roots to treat diseases of the throat and eye.¹¹⁸ It is often planted near homes as a ready supply of poles for building. At the forest-fringe it can be a tall, deciduous tree, with a slender bole, and bright, trumpet-like yellow flowers. Termites don't like to eat its timber. It is a dominant member in semi-deciduous forests and thickets in the region surrounding Ssesse.¹¹⁹ Beyond the homestead, it prefers the forest's fringe, where it will have less competition for soil-moisture and sunlight. Its leaves re-appear after the long rains raise moisture levels in the soil. A leafed-out tree meant softer earth, not only rain, suggesting it was time to begin the hard labor of opening a fallow field to cultivation.

Yet, in the 1940s, the tree was not mentioned in a detailed account of the vegetation of Ssesse.¹²⁰ A.S. Thomas, the knowledgeable colonial forestry official who authored the paper, conducted his study of forest, grassland, farm, and termite mound vegetation communities in the comparatively early days of resettlement in Ssesse, following the forced removals of the sleeping sickness years. Even under these favorable conditions for forest recovery, *M. platycalyx* did not catch Thomas's roving eye. None of the several lists of species of tree, shrub, grassland, and crop in his essay includes this genus and species. It would seem at least possible that its use by Ssemagumba made sense primarily to supplicants who had come to Ssesse from the rim of the Inland Sea littoral, where the tree was common. The tree's gestures toward seasonality assumed a wide audience. But, the timeliness of what its leafing-out implied had a new salience at the opening of the seventeenth century.

The ecologist J. Curt Stager and his colleagues argued some time ago that patterns in the diatom assemblages living in the Inland Sea shifted in

¹¹⁸ Mutiat Bolanle Ibrahim, Nutan Kaushik, Abimbola Adepeju Sowemimo and Olukemi A. Odukoya, "Review of the Phytochemical and Pharmacological Studies of the Genus *Markhamia*," *Pharmacognosy Review* 10 (2016), 50–59. Red Colobus monkeys prefer the tree's flowers and fruit, perhaps to self-medicate, when ill, see Eggeling and Dale, *Indigenous Trees*, 42; Colin A. Chapman, Tyler R. Bonnell, Raja Sengupta, Tony L. Goldberg and Jessica M. Rothman, "Is *Markhamia lutea*'s Abundance Determined by Animal Foraging?," *Forest Ecology and Management* 308 (2013), 62–66.

¹¹⁹ Moses Isabirye, Bruno Verbist, M.K. Magunda, J. Poesen and J. Deckers, "Tree Density and Biomass Assessment in Agricultural Systems Around Lake Victoria, Uganda," *African Journal of Ecology* 46 (supplement 1) (2008), 59–65, 60; I. Langdale-Brown, Henry A. Osmaston and J.G. Wilson, *The Vegetation of Uganda and its Bearing on Land Use* (Entebbe: Ministry of Agriculture, Government of Uganda, 1964).

¹²⁰ A.S. Thomas, "The Vegetation of Sese Islands, Uganda: An Illustration of Edaphic Factors in Tropical Ecology," *Journal of Ecology* 29–2 (1941), 330–353.

the eleventh and twelfth centuries.¹²¹ They explained that shift as a consequence of the onset of a pronounced seasonality and a heightened intensity to the period of long rains. People in the region noticed. They invented a new word – *itoigo* – to name the new kind of long rainy season.¹²² The new word and the new seasonality emerged together with the new kind of mediumistic practice, discussed above, made portable by blending the figure of the medium with the disembodied power that possessed her.¹²³ The linguistic evidence for this transformation has been set out elsewhere, and has been confirmed and expanded on by close comparative study of clan and dynastic traditions from the region.¹²⁴ The salient point here lies in recognizing the historical depth of engagement with intimate dimensions of environmental change in and near the Inland Sea.

By the eighteenth century, Mukasa's people had long taken those patterns for granted. But, between 1630 and 1670, just ahead of the onset of Buganda's territorial expansion and before Tebandeke's initiation as a medium of Mukasa, they faced a forty-year period of low waterlines for the Inland Sea. During this period, people lived with the reality that long rains might not be so long and that the dry season might be both drier and longer. Those realities, in turn, shifted the distribution and relative productivity of food systems featuring cereals, tree-crops, cattle pastoralism, fishwork, and hunting. Each of those orientations was discontinuously distributed in a complex patchwork, with fishwork and hunting providing the connective tissue.¹²⁵

Obviously, as any of the shifts between patterns unfolded, access to and sharing information on the successes and failures of regional food systems represented important economic opportunities.¹²⁶ Mukasa's shrine's assembly drew people from the far reaches of the northern rim

¹²¹ J. Curt Stager, Brian Cumming and L. David Meeker, "A 10,000-year High-resolution Diatom Record from Pilkington Bay, Lake Victoria, East Africa," *Quaternary Research* 59 (2003), 171–182, 179–180; James M. Russell, Dirk Verschuren and Hilde Eggermont, "Spatial Complexity of 'Little Ice Age' Climate in East Africa: Sedimentary Records from Two Crater Lake Basins in Western Uganda," *The Holocene* 17–2 (2007), 183–193, 191–192.

¹²² Hermann, "Lusiba," 157, *Tóigo* "rainy season"; Le Veux, *Premier Essai*, 1023*, *toggo* "rainy season of March to June."

¹²³ Schoenbrun, "Pythons Worked," 238–239.

¹²⁴ Schoenbrun, *A Green Place*, 197–206; Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 39–50.

¹²⁵ Andrew Reid and Ceri Z. Ashley, "Islands of Agriculture on Victoria Nyanza," in: Chris J. Stevens, Sam Nixon, Mary Anne Murray and Dorian Q. Fuller (eds.), *Archaeology of African Plant Use* (Walnut Creek CA: Left Coast Press, 2014), 179–188.

¹²⁶ David W. Cohen, "Food Production and Food Exchange in the Precolonial Lakes Plateau Region," in: Robert I. Rotberg (ed.), *Imperialism, Colonialism, and Hunger: East and Central Africa* (Lexington MA: Lexington Books, 1983), 1–18.

of the Inland Sea, promising participants a comparative advantage in realizing those opportunities. The *òlùsambyâ* branch Ssemagumba displayed was familiar to most, if not everyone, who saw it. Its presence put into a single frame this rich mix of historical contexts with a core orientation to the Inland Sea. After all, fish protein could ameliorate food shortages. The *òlùkandâ* mat of dried *ènkejjes* spratfish, used in the twin rites (Johnson, this volume), was the favored unit for such exchange. It came from the Inland Sea and could be swiftly delivered to locations of greatest demand by the sewn-canoe.

Through observation people learned that the life cycles of the plants in their daily surround measured the progress and the quality of seasonality.¹²⁷ Other examples of what might be called climatic index plants could be given. The point is that people had ways of anticipating shifts in the weather from season to season. Those shifts were of enormous consequence for fishwork, canoe-transport, banana and grain agricultures. Ssemagumba's *òlùsambyâ* branch, carried during Mukasa's shrine refurbishments, pointed simultaneously at the concerns of ordinary farmers, fishers, and traders as well as at the concerns of a centralized statecraft with the industry and loyalties of the former. The *olusambyâ* tree was a powerful boundary object – an object that managed relations between different zones of knowledge and interest, not an object used to separate such zones.¹²⁸ It constellated those concerns and interests in part by channeling them through the shrine, making it a political center.

Roscoe described the felling of an *òlùsambyâ* tree in the creation of the Nantaba charm, something occasioned by the installation of a new king and carried out by his father's mother's relatives.¹²⁹ Nantaba was a gourd stitched into a goatskin that was decorated by sewing cowrie shells and beads onto its surface. Inside that gourd was the wind that a woman had captured by placing the gourd on the stump of the *òlùsambyâ* tree, immediately after it was felled, "with its mouth towards the quarter from which the wind came, so that it blew into it, making a mournful sound." This practice assumes a prevailing wind, something central to regional rainfall regimes.

¹²⁷ Carla Roncoli, Keith Ingram and Paul Kirshen, "Reading the Rains: Local Knowledge and Rainfall Forecasting Among Farmers of Burkina Faso," *Society for Natural Resources* 15 (2002), 411–430. See also: Fred G. Musoke, "The Importance of the Banana Plant to the Buganda Culture," BA Thesis, Makerere University (Kampala, 1975), 14.

¹²⁸ Andrew P. Roddick and Ann B. Stahl, "Introduction: Knowledge in Motion," in: Andrew P. Roddick and Ann B. Stahl (eds.), *Knowledge in Motion: Constellations of Learning Across Time and Place* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016), 3–35, 9–10.

¹²⁹ Roscoe, *Baganda*, 325–326.

However, the availability of the tree shifted over time with the ebbs and flows of seasonality. Thomas's report might be only a recent example. This raises questions about the apparent stability of using *òlùsambyá* in public performance at the shrine and what that use indexed for an audience. The waterline of the Inland Sea stood at high levels between 1400 and 1600 CE and between 1700 and 1750 CE. In between, the waterline stood at much lower levels for two periods of time. The first period, mentioned above, lasted from 1630 to 1670, a long human generation. The second period lasted from 1780 to the middle of the nineteenth century, with the first twenty years of the nineteenth century representing "the driest period of the millennium."¹³⁰

Until that second period, the shifts in lake level correlated with sun-spot minima, or reductions in the amount of the sun's irradiance. More solar radiation produces equatorial droughts by intensifying low pressure at Africa's northern and southern extremities. Increased solar radiation pushes the Intertropical Convergence Zone further north and south, and keeps it parked at one or the other extreme for longer periods of time. Reduced solar radiation, on the other hand, actually increases cloud formation and alters the tracks storms take once they've formed.¹³¹ So, when the Inland Sea's waterline rose, between 1400 and 1600, it was likely accompanied by increased cloudiness and variable storm tracks. Both were conditions sewn-canoe fleets would have had to take into account when planning and executing voyages.

That bundling of effects changed, however, as the second low-stand set in, after 1780. It was still cloudier than usual and storm tracks were variable, but the overall amount of moisture in the equatorial climate shrank. That reduction produced the infamous droughts of the two decades that opened the nineteenth century, recalled in oral traditions all across East Africa.¹³² After the 1820s, then, the indexical bonds linking *òlùsambyá*'s flowering and leafing with cloudiness, and rainfall broke apart.

This chronology of wet and dry water budgets reflects the Inland Sea's restless shape. When available moisture shrank, it pulled the waterline

¹³⁰ J. Curt Stager *et al.*, "Solar Variability and the Levels of Lake Victoria, East Africa, During the Last Millennium," *Journal of Paleolimnology* 33 (2005), 243–251, 247.

¹³¹ Douglas V. Hoyt and Kenneth H. Schatten, *The Role of the Sun in Climate Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹³² Stager *et al.*, "Solar Variability," 249; Immaculate Ssemmanda *et al.*, "Vegetation History in Western Uganda during the Last 1200 Years: A Sediment-based Reconstruction from Two Crater Lakes," *The Holocene* 15–1 (2005), 119–132, 129; David Anderson, "The Beginning of Time? Evidence for Catastrophic Drought in Baringo in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10–1 (2016), 45–66, 45–52, 57–59.

away from existing settlements and ports at a pace people noticed.¹³³ A receding waterline meant not only less rainfall overall, but also a shift in the character of rainfall and in its seasonality. Enlisting a branch from *M. platycalyx* when refurbishing Mukasa's house, therefore bundled a host of environmental processes that everyone experienced. If such trees were ubiquitous at the homesteads in settlements around the northwestern rim of the Inland Sea and across these periods, as they are today, their bud-break and flowering times shifted "later," in a drier regime, and "earlier," in a wetter regime.

The *òlùsambyâ* branch publicly connected Ssemagumba to Mukasa's new building, the same building that housed the meteor-hammer bound up with marking the progress of lunar synody. The patterned uncertainty of the Inland Sea's shape-shifts was one background against which Mukasa's shrine aligned lunar synody with fertility cycles, seeking to take advantage of possible causality. The uncertainties of life's interspecific cycling – when would children come, rain fall, and new leaves open and flowers set? – was given a pattern in assembly at the shrine. But, the *òlùsambyâ*'s sensitivity to the presence of moisture in the soil meant that exceptionally dry periods could make it much harder to keep the tree around the homestead. In these ways the tree's being mirrored the opening and expanding of periods of abundant and well-timed rainfall; while at the same time being vulnerable to periods of shrinking rainfall or dramatic oscillations in its timing and volume.

Conclusions

At Mukasa's shrine, people deployed other-than-human beings from different categories of existence – water plant, tree, domestic tree, and animals – at key moments in the work and relaxation of assembly. They gestured with them to practical aims – the polysemous meanings of eating, the promise of fertility represented by assembling with lunar synody, and the patterned uncertainties of seasonality. But they also gestured with them to the necessity of managing individual affective economies, and metaphysical dimensions of moral life. Rhythmic assembly drew participants from great distances repeatedly, over long spans of time. The result bound people and other-than-human being into a broad, complex argument about the primordial, instrumental, and cognitive terms and conditions of a littoral ethnic formation.

¹³³ Perhaps echoed in the unattributed story that "the earth rests on a great rock in Lake Victoria, in which a son of the lake-god Mukasa resides," from Franz Stuhlmann, *Mit Emin Pascha ins Herz von Afrika* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Press, 1894), 189, where Stuhlmann credits "Waganda" as his source; cited in Strück, "Earthquakes," 401–402. See also: Schmidt, *Historical Archaeology*, 70–72.

Assembly made the shrine a hub of access to information and skill that flowed around the littoral and ran inland along the clan networks to which participants belonged. Hints of the desired content may be gleaned from glossing the forms or wealth and knowledge associated with particular clan formations, after the fashion invented by Neil Kodesh. Participants in this kind of ethnic formation included specialized canoe-builders and different kinds of fishwork, others who brewed, made medicines, hunted, black-smithed, cut, pounded, and dyed bark cloth, and potted. All belonged to other claims-making groups and, with the possible exception of shrine managers and others given to the shrine, they attended other *libaalè* centers. The longevity of social investment in Mukasa's Bubembe shrine – claimed in its long genealogy – reflects the success of Mukasa's efficacy in the formation over generations of Mukasa's people repeatedly bringing the place to life.

Mukasa's double gender reflects a shifting, composite nature for this figure. Mukasa's meanings and relations to people, in the domain of gender, were multiple and contingent upon need and setting. Before Mukasa's medium was female a man played the part.¹³⁴ But, as a meteor-hammer, Mukasa emitted a masculine aura of metallurgical labor. Mukasa could receive the visceral and intellectual projections of people at different stages of gendered life, making Mukasa relevant to individual and collectively gendered aspiration.

The visceral in this emerges in a disjunctive choreography of varieties of labor, sacrificing, and eating. Manager-entrepreneurs sent out to audiences and actors in these choreographies metaphors and metonyms meant to instigate particular kinds of reflection and debate. They could promote moods and themes for thinking about the work they enclosed. Different participants experienced different parts of the event, so, modalities of reflection informing future action differed. The implication is that these all produced talk, if not outright debate, which must have had internal, dyadic, and collective story lines. Many bunched by clan membership to share in the meat of the sacrificed cows. Others, like each of the groups of women clearing each of the seven roads leading from the shrine to seven harbors, were composed by unknown logics of mixing, perhaps aligned with travel, trade routes, and their own gendered mobility. Yet "all" are said to gather at the shrine to witness and work on new buildings. So, the three-monthly assemblies reflect a socially composed knowledge blending eating, virility, and natality.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Ssemagumba, who became the senior shrine manager when the woman Nakangu arrived; Roscoe, *Baganda*, 297.

¹³⁵ Steven Feierman, "On Socially Composed Knowledge: Reconstructing a Shambaa Royal Ritual," in: Gregory Maddox and James Giblin (eds.), *In Search of a Nation: Histories of Authority and Dissidence in Tanzania* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2005), 14–32.

The blood had associations with descent and lineage for everyone involved. Men alone manipulated this blood and patrilineality was widespread in the region by the eighteenth century, and cattle were common components of the complex bundles of wealth transferred between lineages in the course of making marriages and establishing rights and responsibilities over children.¹³⁶ These patricentric concerns coexisted at Bubembe with matricentric ones enacted in clearing roads. The kinesthetics of male interactions with blood emphasized flow and capture as source domains mapping abstract qualities of descent that sacrifice enacted. Catching liquid in a vessel or in cupped hands is described in Luganda as *kulembeka*. In its prepositional inflection, the verb *kulembekera* describes the generic action of making an offering to a *lùbaalè*. The use of blood in sacrificial offerings is widespread, of course. The blood Mukasa consumed – as the Lake, as the resident in a temple with an *èkìsero* basket full of blood – was the blood that crossed the boundary between the living and the dead. The roads that women cleared to link the shrine to the island's many ports, also invoked connection and an explicitly lateral connection at that. Women made roads and Nakangu apportioned some of the shrine's retinue of women to estate holders and priests from other Islands, performing a littoral laterality of networking and creating the affinal bonds at the core of socially viable reproduction.¹³⁷ At Bubembe, descent and alliance were invoked in matricentric and patricentric registers, suggesting strongly that a larger commitment to bilateral practices of belonging animated the civic virtues in play with Mukasa (see Johnson, Earle, and Hoelsing, this volume).¹³⁸

Addressing uncertainties of belonging happened under the gaze of the Bubembe shrine's managers. They never ate with a member of their clan, but men of the same clan ate the beef Ssemagumba and colleagues distributed during refurbishment, the animals whose blood Mukasa-the-Waters had drunk.¹³⁹ Sharing the flesh of sacrificed animals as separate groups of different clanmates expressed their strategic solidarity as cells. But doing so at the shrine played to a single audience watching everything – unlike the separateness of the road-clearers – enacting their collaboration in the sustenance and promotion of Mukasa's efficacies. The gifts of food left in Mukasa's house, near the meteor-hammer, were ordinary things.

¹³⁶ Stephens, *African Motherhood*, 84–99.

¹³⁷ Stephens, *African Motherhood*, *passim*.

¹³⁸ Jennifer L. Johnson, "Fishwork in Uganda: A Multispecies Ethnohistory about Fish, People, and Ideas about Fish and People," PhD dissertation, University of Michigan (Ann Arbor MI, 2014), 6, 7, "Namayanja" a name for the Lake in a canoe-song that capitalizes the "Lake" as "Mother of the bodies of water," an unending pool of amniotic fluid.

¹³⁹ Kagwa, *Mpisa*, 214: "*bakabona teyalibwangako muntu mulala atali wakika kyabwe.*"

Mukasa or Mukasa's priests ate ordinary things – a joint of beef, a rich liver, salty blood – but they did so in a setting that exposed them, on behalf of others assembled, to the ambivalent power of the past, present when the blood flowed into the lake, and to a mix of anticipation and worry about the future. The visceral and the reflective could blend in Mukasa's ethnic formation.

This unfolded in a time of expansionist, destabilizing statecraft on the mainland. By the 1820s, at the conclusion of a profound drought that had blanketed the larger region and with trade arteries to the Indian Ocean coast enjoying a newfound regularity, the military struggles had reached a *dénouement* of sorts. The Ganda state bordering the Inland Sea had largely turned Bunyoro toward centers further inland that looked north. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Ganda statecraft consolidated its naval power. That naval power increasingly threatened the independence of island centers in Ssesse or Buvuma. Political life clearly included defending a watery boundary between the islands and Buganda.

By the 1870s, island independence from mainland machinations surely depended in part on the work of assembly at places like Bubembe. Entrepreneurs paired the power of affective attachment with opportunities for networking in evanescent and rhythmic moments of assembly, in Bubembe's ritual life. They crafted a groupness with clanships that was bigger than them. This labor of belonging at Bubembe was part of the rhythmic life of the site. Shrine managers there evoked ideas of and feelings for Mukasa – across a wide spatial reach – spinning them like iron flakes to point to Bubembe by the magnet of a New Moon, a toggle of the agricultural calendar, a gift from a mainland royal, or a visit by another islander. What people forged there was moral and political because intellectually visceral.

Primordialist arguments for belonging enlisted several other-than-human life forms. Their varied referents were not necessarily available to all in Bubembe's audience, placing a premium for entrepreneurs on using particularly polysemic creatures and plants. Perhaps even more important, the elements of collective wellbeing indexed by the trees whose cut branches shrine managers wielded during assembly, shifted over time, perhaps in concert with shifts in the availability and health of the trees themselves. The fertility, networked information, and mobility to which supplicants hoped to gain access through such assembly were bound up with other-than-human beings not just reflected in them or elaborated through the metaphorical extensions the details of a tree's life offered for framing a moral community's most urgent priorities.

Current ideas and experience of ethnic formation emphasizing difference, masculinity, and descent metaphor must be expanded to include those that emphasize struggles over the moral community, other-than-masculine, and lateral or affinal metaphors. Such studies will include other-than-human being as mirrors of mixing difference and belonging

in evaluating civic virtue and vice. But, they will also find in other-than-human being metaphors that ethnic entrepreneurs used to frame and channel debates over the material circumstances fostering or preventing virtues of health and wealth and their proper distributions or vices of illness and poverty. The interspecific worlds through which the figure of the human can be rejigged were not stable. They were subject to changes in climatic and ecological process. Some processes were large-scale – like the ebb and flow of sunspot minima. Others were smaller scale – like the wandering waterline of the Inland Sea or the clearance of forests in making charcoal for metallurgy or other uses.

Creative public healers, like Mukasa's shrine managers, generated ideas about moral ethnicity – and invested them with a whiff of primordialism. This draws the historian's attention to affective elements of the gendered politics and inequalities of wealth and health at the core of the process. Other-than-human beings work there because, at some point in the past, aspects of their living, beyond being mirrors and windows for people to make meaning, drew public healers' attention to that potential. This suggests that, despite the epistemological challenges of interspecific communication (see Introduction), we ignore studying the figure of the human as an interspecific one at our peril. Those relations are sure paths to deeper and broader theories of belonging, including ethnicity. The capacity for ethnicity to flicker between protean and durable are challenging enough to track and understand. Recognizing roles – and the disjunctive interests – in these processes for other-than-human beings makes the challenge even broader. Taking it on will decenter a stable notion of the person – and of the ethnic – from the work of social life, with concomitantly vast implications for plumbing the depths of the moral and the ethical in that work.

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