

Chapter Three

Same as it Never Was: Enkejje, *Haplochromis* spp., or Just Trash

Martin J. Hall, Protestant Missionary in 1898: Natives of these islands...will spend hour after hour in their canoes catching with rod and line the fish called nkejje. These they string on grass in rows all fastened together, and dry them in the sun. They like them, and so do the Baganda, but it takes an Englishman some time to learn to eat rotten fish with relish. These square mats of nkejje, as one may almost call them, when all strung are taken in hundreds to Buganda.¹

M.B. Nsimbi, Kiganda Cultural Historian in 1956: Enkejje, a kind of small fish, was the most important fish, not because of its good taste but because it was an essential dish at all tribal feasts. In Buganda anyone who frequents all gatherings of people is likened to the enkejje.²

Bruch Kinloch, Colonial Game Warden in 1972: The Nile perch now comprise more than 56% of the overall catch – a case of turning what the Americans call “trash fish” (the smaller and less palatable fish which form the bulk of the Nile perch’s food) into a ready catchable and marketable product.³

Caroline Kirema-Mukasa and Eric Reynolds, Socio-Economists writing in 1993: *Haplochromis* spp., though formerly abundant in the waters of Lake Victoria, have never constituted a significant fishery and have never been particularly popular. “Nkejje,” as they are commonly called, simply have a basic lack of appeal for most people.⁴

Between 1898 and 1993 the history of *enkejje* was rewritten. These fish went from being a significant source of nourishment, tribute, and trade to having “never constituted a significant fishery.” *Enkejje* were still incredibly abundant in Nyanja when M.S. Nsimbi wrote his 1956 account of *Village Life and Customs in Buganda* quoted above. They would continue to be plentiful there for another thirty years until a large predatory fish – the Nile perch – suddenly

1 Hall, *Through My Spectacles in Uganda: Or the Story of a Fruitful Field*, 67.

2 Michael B. Nsimbi, “Village Life and Customs in Buganda,” *Uganda Journal* 20 (1956): 27–28.

3 Kinloch, *The Shamba Raiders: Memories of a Game Warden*.

4 C. T. Kirema-Mukasa and J. Eric Reynolds, “Marketing and Consumption of Fish in Uganda,” in *Marketing and Consumption of Fish in Eastern and Southern Africa: Selected Country Studies*, ed. J. Eric Reynolds, FAO Fisheries Technical Paper 332 (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1993), 141.

seemed to explode in the fishery.

When Nsimbi's account quoted above was published in 1956, there were likely no Nile perch being caught in southern Uganda at all. And still, in the mid-1950s, decades before significant numbers of Nile perch began appearing in fishermen's nets, Nsimbi was already stressing that "*enkejje*...was the most important fish."⁵ This signals a conceptual shift involving *enkejje*, and indeed Nyanja, that predates the material transformations in fisheries production that followed the proliferation of the Nile perch in Lake Victoria.

This chapter examines multiple versions of these fish from vernacular historical, scientific, and managerial perspectives. Each perspective, however, is forged in relation to specific material and methodological interactions with these fish, and each is motivated by different concerns. That is, *enkejje* and haplochromines are not the same thing, they are ontologically different. Because scientists have published so many studies of Lake Victoria's haplochromines and managers so few, these versions of these fish are discussed here only briefly. Instead, I focus on *enkejje* to demonstrate that while these fish may not have comprised a significant fishery in Lake Victoria, they most certainly did in the pre-Victorian body of water, and to a lesser degree still do in Nyanja. *Enkejje* offers material for elaborating a littoral ontology of this body of water in pre-Victorian times when these fish were still abundant, while at the same time providing background material with which to better tackle the chapters that follow.

This chapter begins by describing these multiple versions of these fish, and why *enkejje* has thus far been excluded from the historiography of the region examined in greater detail for

⁵Nsimbi, "Village Life and Customs in Buganda," 27.

the littoral in Chapters Four. It then elaborates historical littoral experiences with these fish, examining notions of kinship and the production, use and gendering of fishwork and fishing gear addressed with respect to an outbreak of sleeping sickness in Chapter Five. The chapter concludes with description of *enkejje* reproduction as preparatory material for analysis of *okwalula abaana*, “hatching the children,” an event during which women officially granted the status of belonging to children and their mothers analyzed in Chapter Six.

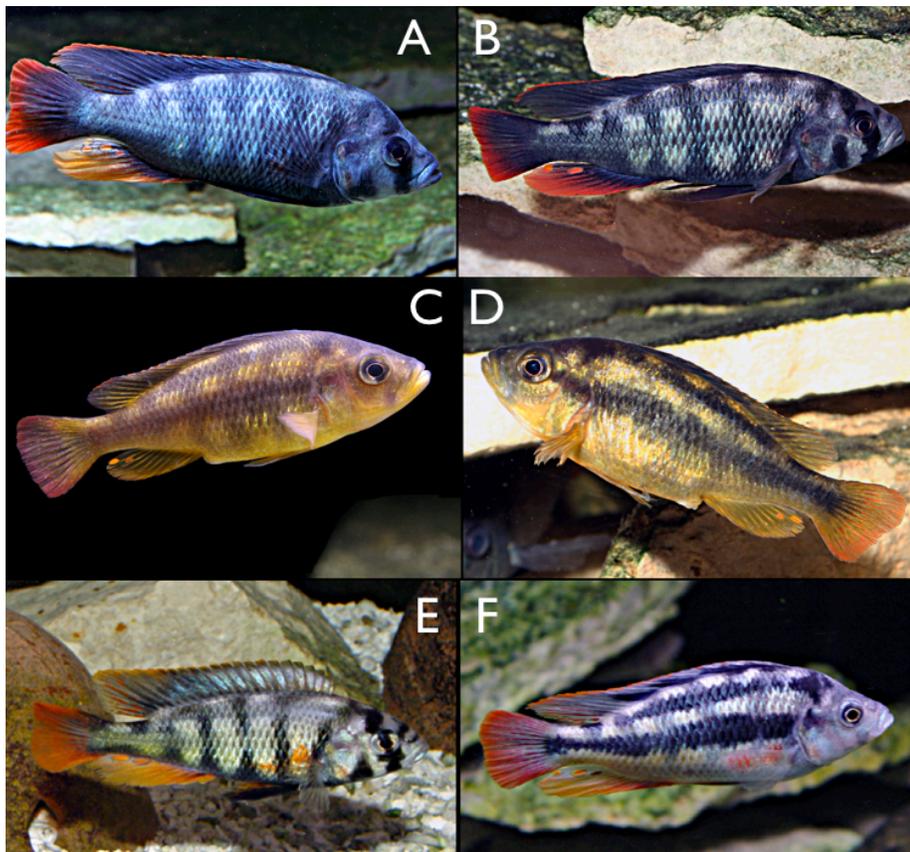


Figure 3-1: *Haplochromis sauvagei* (Uganda) also known as "rock kribensis." All fish pictured here are from the same "species." Images reproduced with permission of the photographer and aquarium enthusiast Kevin Bauman. Photos available from: <http://www.african-cichlid.com/BlueRockKrib.htm>

***Enkejje*: A Fish by Other Names May Not Smell as Sweet**

Enkejje are relatively small and often remarkably brightly and multicolored fish, that is, as long as they are still alive. After these fish are caught, skewered on sticks in rows of ten to sixteen, and dried for consumption or sale, they all take on a uniformly silver-grey hue. This is similarly the case for haplochromines, the scientifically reckoned version of *enkejje*. When harvested, placed in formaldehyde solution and transported to laboratories on the mainland and abroad for study, these too lose much of their visual luster, taking on a uniformly silver-grey appearance. Once these fish are no longer living, it is sometimes difficult, even for trained taxonomists, to distinguish between sub-types, and sometimes even sexes of these fish.⁶

Currently, “*enkejje*” is the commonly used vernacular term from near Bukoba on the Western shores of the lake north and east towards the Nile River, whereas “*enfulu*” is more commonly used from the Nile around to the Kagera River. There are multiple spellings for both terms in the comparative ethnographic literature.⁷ In the not so distant past, both terms were used around the entire lake, perhaps interchangeably, and often referred to fish in general, perhaps because *enkejje* were simply that abundant.⁸ For example, in Rehse's 1910 ethnography of Kiziba at the turn of the twentieth century, he reported that “*nfuru*” referred to fish in

⁶Scientists in particular have had a very difficult time agreeing on acceptable categories and names for these fish.

P.H. Greenwood suggested a reclassification of these species based on functional characteristics: P. H. Greenwood, *The Cichlid Fishes of Lake Victoria, East Africa: The Biology and Evolution of a Species Flock* (London: British Museum (Natural History), 1974). However, this has largely been rejected in subsequent taxonomic work, perhaps because it would reduce the number of overall species, see for example: Frans Witte and M. J. P. Van Oijen, *Taxonomy, Ecology and Fishery of Lake Victoria Haplochromine Trophic Groups* (Nationaal Natuurhistorisch Museum, 1990).

⁷ *Enkejje* is also spelled: *nkejje*, *enkeje*, *nkeje*, *enkaeje*, *nkaeje*, *nkeije*, *nkedye*. *Enfulu* may also be spelled: *fulu*, *nfulu*, *enfuru*, *nfuru*, *furu*.

⁸ Throughout my fieldwork, the general term for fish was simply *ebyenyanja* (things from the lake).

general, whereas “*nkejje*” was listed as a distinct, but undefined fish.⁹ The use of *enkejje* and *enfulu* for fish in general made reporting fish catches quite difficult for colonial administrators.¹⁰ The spatial bifurcation linking *enkejje* to the western and northwestern portion of the lake, and *enfulu* to the northeastern, eastern, and southern portions of the lake is a relatively recent development, likely linked to the formal teaching of vernacular languages in primary schools, instantiations of what Ivan Illich would call, “taught mother tongue.”¹¹

As a source of food, *enkejje* resemble herring, anchovies, sardines, or sprats.¹² The colloquial confusion around what accurately differentiates a herring from an anchovy, or a sardine from a sprat make these categories of fish particularly apt comparisons. Within the admittedly limited recent historical literature referencing these fish or the littoral these fish inspired, they are often referred to as sprats or whitebait.¹³ The use of term “whitebait” is problematic. Whitebait is a marketing term, reflective of the global “whitefish” markets within which Nile perch fillets are now traded. This term often applies to the juvenile fry of a number of small fish species, and not fully-grown fish.¹⁴ Whereas some *enkejje* grew and may still grow

9 Hermann Rehse, *Kiziba, Land Und Leute* (Strecker & Schröder, 1910), 45.

10 H. A. Fosbrooke, “Some Aspects of the Kimwani Fishing Culture, with Comparative Notes on Alien Methods,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 64 (June 1934): 22.

11 Ivan Illich, “Vernacular Values,” *Philosophica* 26 (1980): 47–102.

12 In the earliest English language accounts of these fish, they are described as “sprats.” Roscoe first mentions “enkeje” in 1901 as a clan totem, and then as a ritually important food that Baganda widows ate just prior to the installation of a “new heir and his wife” to manage their deceased husband's affairs. John Roscoe, “Notes on the Manners and Customs of the Baganda,” *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 31 (1901): 118, 128. Sprats make a brief appearance in the Cooks's 1903 account of “missionary life and adventure in Uganda” told “mainly” through the words of Dr. Albert R. Cook, a medical missionary of the Church Missionary Service, and edited by his mother. In a brief section under the heading, “Dick's Virtues” the Cook's note that “little plates of sprats” were “dainties provided for the sick” in the hospital at Mengo. Sprats, readers are told, are also “eagerly eaten by Dick,” his dog Albert R. Cook, *A Doctor and His Dog in Uganda*, ed. Harriet B. Cook (London: Religious Tract Society, 1903), 41.

13 Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 165–167; Stephens, *A History of African Motherhood: The Case of Uganda, 700–1900*, 127:121, n 31, 127.

14 In early nineteenth century England, whitebait composed the foundation of a new summertime dining culture

to be as large as eight or nine inches, whitebait are usually no longer than two. More importantly for our purposes, the “bait” in whitebait foregrounds the role these fish play as source of food for other fish and not for people, especially for the larger and potentially more lucrative fish that fishermen hope to catch for export. *Enkejje* was and still is used for bait, however, these fish also once composed the foundation of an equally, if not more important food fishery.

Enkejje are delicious when roasted, boiled, or fried fresh, but are most commonly consumed in preserved form, either dried, lightly smoked, or in more recent years, ground up into a powder used as a nutritional supplement.¹⁵ It is important to stress that the entire body of an *enkejje* is edible, much like their more commonly known cousins elsewhere. From a nutritional standpoint, the heads, eyes, bones, and skin of *enkejje* provide important, indeed uniquely excellent sources of essential vitamins and minerals that complement a plant-based diet.¹⁶ The seemingly timeless use of *enkejje* soup for treating measles in what is now Uganda attests to the dietary importance of these fish as more than an everyday source of protein, but

for elite and middle-class men who frequented any number of “whitebait taverns” that were then emerging along the banks of rural river towns in the early 1800s. Leaving their wives, and the propriety of London high society behind, “whitebait taverns” offered men an opportunity to feast together on fish and drink alcohol in abundance Victoria Mars, “Little Fish and Large Appetites. Victoria Whitebait Dinners at Blackwall, Gravesend and Greenwich,” in *Fish: Food from the Waters*, ed. Harlan Walker, Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery (Devon: Prospect Books, 1998), 212.

15 Irene Florence Wekiya and H. Appleton, “Nkejje Fish in Lake Victoria.,” *Do It Herself: Women and Technical Innovation.*, 1995, 185–87.

16 Enkejje offer exceptional sources of vitamin A, calcium, iron, and zinc, phosphorous, and magnesium. C. M. Magala-Nyago et al., “Evaluation of Nutritional Value of Malted and Extruded Finger Millet Based Complementary Foods,” in *African Crop Science Conference Proceedings*, vol. 7, 2005, 677–86. Enkejje is combined with omuzigo omuganda (clarified butter or ghee). The combination of enkejje with ghee would likely have increased the bioavailability, adsorption, and metabolism of vitamin A within the human body. In the absence of sufficient fat, protein, zinc, and other nutrients, the nutritional value of vitamin A consumption is relatively low H. V. Kuhnlein et al., *Culture, Environment and Food to Prevent Vitamin A Deficiency* (International Nutrition Foundation for Developing Countries, 1997).

also as a category of fish with the embodied power to heal.¹⁷

For fisheries managers and development experts, these small fish, whether called *enkejje* or Haplochromine cichlids have always been “unpopular for human consumption.” In the first comprehensive lakewide fishing survey conducted in the late 1920s by Michael Graham, he noted that there are fifty-eight species of *Haplochromis*, found in abundance “almost anywhere except in the very deepest parts of the lake...the number of individuals is almost incredible.”¹⁸ Though his report contains some of the most valuable data on fishing practices, and vernacular names for fish composed in the colonial period, he does not locate the value of *enkejje* as a source of food, but rather, as a source of fertilizer for intensive agricultural production on land.¹⁹ “So great are their numbers,” Graham notes, “I have contemplated suggesting trawling for them, in order that they may be used for manure in Kenya Colony. I believe that the stock could withstand an industry consisting of 200 trawlers (that is provided it became economic to use trawlers at all).”²⁰ Fortunately for *enkejje* and *enkejje*’s consumers, because Graham was investigating the causes and potential solutions for the observed declines in what was then the most important commercial fish species, *ngege* (tilapia), he had “not been able to give this

17 All littoral residents that I spoke with about *enkejje* for this study were familiar with the use of this fish for the treatment of measles. There is no specific antiviral treatment for measles, though vaccinations are encouraged, even mandated in some contexts. Current World Health Organization guidelines recommend treatment with adequate nutrition, fluids, electrolytes and Vitamin A supplementation to avoiding the worst effects of a measles infection - blindness and death. See: WHO, “Measles Fact Sheet No. 286,” World Health Organization, February 2014, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs286/en/>. The soup littoral residents have long served children with measles several times a day to improve their condition already contained all of this - butter, salty broth, and fish rich in bioavailable protein and vitamin A. Kabahenda et al., “Protein and Micronutrient Composition of Low-Value Fish Products Commonly Marketed in the Lake Victoria Region.”

18 Michael Graham, *The Victoria Nyanza and Its Fisheries a Report on the Fishing Survey of Lake Victoria, 1927-1928, and Appendices*. (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1929), 22.

19 See for example: Appendix 4 (p 70-83) and Appendix 5 (p 84-110) in Graham, *The Victoria Nyanza and Its Fisheries*.

20 *Ibid.*, 22.

proposition the time it deserves.”²¹

Still, Graham’s experiences with *enkejje*, as an “uneconomic” and “unpalatable” fish fit only for “manure,” continue to influence how these fish are perceived by fisheries managers and development experts up to the present day. Although colonial administrators and missionaries that preceded Graham recognized that these fish were “so prized by the women,”²² for these observers, however, these fish had a “nasty acrid taste” and a “stench” which is “abominable.”²³ *Enkejje* would continue to be the most abundant fish in Lake Victoria and Nyanja until the early 1980s. By the 1990s, however, development experts concluded that *enkejje* “have never constituted a significant fishery” in Lake Victoria.²⁴ These fisheries experts were not necessarily wrong. *Enkejje* were never all that important in Lake Victoria. They were, however, absolutely vital in Ennyanja Nalubaale, and to a lesser degree are still important in contemporary Nyanja.

The historical ethnographic and administrative archival records offer little support for the general conclusion that *enkejje* were never particularly popular. If one looks closely enough, there is abundant evidence to illustrate the historical importance of *enkejje* for littoral residents, as well as for farmers a considerable distance from the lakeshores. *Enkejje* were as both a regularly consumed source of protein and flavor, and as an item of exchange. According to Robert Ashe, an Anglican Missionary to Uganda in the late 1800s:

²¹ Ibid.

²² Michael A. Condon, “Contribution to the Ethnography of the Basoga-Batamba Uganda Protectorate, Br. E. Africa,” *Anthropos* 5, no. 4 (1910): 955.

²³ IBRD, *The Economic Development of Uganda: Report of a Mission Organized by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development at the Request of the Government of Uganda* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press for the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 1962), 453.

²⁴ Kirema-Mukasa and Reynolds, “Marketing and Consumption of Fish in Uganda,” 141.

"Enkeje," a small, strongly-flavored fish something like an anchovy, is largely used as "kyokulira," or what an Irish peasant would call "kitchen," when he has some such luxury as a salt herring to make his potatoes go down. The Swahili people call it "mchuzi" or gravy. A good deal of fish is consumed in Buganda, but is generally smoked and dried, since it is difficult to convey it from the lake in the hot sun without it being spoilt.²⁵

To highlight a few additional examples: Sir Harry Johnston, architect of the 1900 Buganda Agreement and lay ethnographer noted: "fish, of course, enters largely into the diet of the people...A kind of thick soup or curry is made of meat or fish, which is eaten with banana 'stodge' as a relish."²⁶ In 1908, during the earliest efforts of the colonial government to control fisheries production and trade in an effort to thwart the spread of sleeping sickness, *enkejje* were reported to be the only fish from Uganda's southern shores sold in Kampala markets.²⁷ A 1910 study of the Basoga-Batamba, a group of traders straddling the Nile River, noted: "*Nkeje* is the fish generally sought for by the native women, as they say, the peculiar smell and taste of this kind is more palatable."²⁸ Another study published that same year about Kiziba, a formerly powerful littoral polity along the southwestern shores of the lake describes these fish as, "*ein beliebtes Nahrungsmittel*," a popular food.²⁹ And lastly, in Roscoe's classic ethnography of the Baganda, he writes: "one of the commonest dishes used among the poor was the sprat [enkejje], which was dried, and sold on reed-strings, for forty or fifty fishes for a few cowry-shells; it was thus within the reach of nearly everyone."³⁰

Enkejje feature in a number of proverbs collected by Catholic missionary Ferdinand

²⁵Robert Pickering Ashe, *Two Kings of Uganda, or Life by the Shores of Victoria Nyanza* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, Ltd., 1889), 304–305.

²⁶Johnston, *The Uganda Protectorate*, 671.

²⁷UNA, "Sleeping Sickness: Measures to Control Fishing," 1908, Letter to H.M. Deputy Commissioner from Collector, Kampala. February 10, 1908, A 43/93, Uganda National Archives.

²⁸Condon, "Contribution to the Ethnography of the Basoga-Batamba Uganda Protectorate, Br. E. Africa," 955.

²⁹Rehse, *Kiziba, Land Und Leute*, 25.

³⁰Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 439.

Walser, *enkejje* was one of the ‘best liked sauce with porridge,’ and these fish were said to “slip down so easily.” One who visits others frequently may be told they “move about from place to place: like a salted *enkejje* (*otuula bulikafo: ng'enkejje erimu minnyu*).³¹ One who was instructed to leave in a hurry, might be told: “be off: like *enkejje* on *posho*” (*weetwale: enkejje ku butta*). Or, if someone left without saying goodbye, one could say, “he went off (away): like *enkejje* on *posho*.”³² It is possible that these proverbial references to the speed at which *enkejje* were consumed may have meant it was not a food to be savored, still, it was a fish to be eaten, and eaten often.

Haplochromines, the scientifically reckoned version of these fish, were and still are important in different ways for scientists studying Lake Victoria – a lake they once called a “cichlid-lake.”³³ The exceptional abilities of these cichlids to adapt to changing aquatic conditions have elevated these small fish to a level of scientific notoriety virtually unprecedented amongst any other genera of fish. The “explosive speciation,” “remarkable adaptability” and “overwhelming complexity” of haplochromines have captivated scientists and motivated the use of an effusive language that rarely appears in scientific journals. For scientists, answers to important evolutionary questions over which they have “groped in the dark for a hundred years” are “hidden *en masse*” in Lake Victoria’s haplochromines.³⁴ Haplochromines, scientists argue, offer an opportunity to study “evolution in fast forward.” Because these fish ‘all look the same’ and yet all developed very different food provisioning

³¹Ferdinand Walser, *Luganda Proverbs* (Reimer Berlin, 1982), 410.

³²*Ibid.*, 486. Posho is maize flour, given its popular name from its use as a “portion” of rations for African laborers in the colonial period. Posho with beans, because of its low cost, and ease of preparation is the most frequently served meal in prisons, boarding schools, and in canteens where low-paid workers are offered a “free” lunch.

³³M. J. P. Van Oijen, “A Systematic Revision of the Piscivorous Haplochromine Cichlidae (Pisces: Teleostei) of Lake Victoria (East Africa). Part I,” *Zool. Verh. Leiden* 272 (1991): 6.

³⁴Leslie S. Kaufman, Lauren J. Chapman, and Colin A. Chapman, “Evolution in Fast Forward: Haplochromine Fishes of the Lake Victoria Region,” *Endeavour* 21, no. 1 (1997): 23–30.

specializations, scientists say they are “evolution’s smoking gun.”³⁵

In the early 1970s, experimental trawl fisheries for haplochromines were attempted as part of a broader economic industrialization strategy in the region. A portion of the fish catch from these same commercial trawls was allocated towards scientific study, specifically taxonomic studies on the “superflock” of cichlid fish. From a development perspective, the results of these test-marketing efforts for these trawl catches were, however, “discouraging.” For development professionals, the lack of a market for these large quantities of *enkejje* caught all-at-once signaled that these fish “have never been particularly popular” and “have never constituted a significant fishery.”³⁶ Scientists found the results discouraging for a very different reason – it seemed that species of haplochromines were disappearing almost as quickly as they were being identified.

The language of biological kinship helps scientists make sense of the evolutionary processes undergirding the nature of fish that dwell underwater here. Haplochromine cichlids are said to have “founding lineages” that began populating the lake basin around 14,000 years ago. These “native tribes of fish” diverged into multiple “tribes” and “clans,” adapting to the specific aquatic habitats that were available to them. Their language seems to parrot a colonial lexicon of kinship terminology that is no longer considered to necessarily reflect strict notions of biological relatedness, in part because their methods were similar – both early anthropologists and evolutionary biologists studying fish took detailed measurements and observations of heads, noses, eyes, and appendages of as many different individuals as they

³⁵ Ibid., 26.

³⁶ Kirema-Mukasa and Reynolds, “Marketing and Consumption of Fish in Uganda,” 141.

could.³⁷

For taxonomists and scholars of evolutionary process in the long history of these fish, “founding lineages,” “native tribes,” and “clans” are simply one more taxonomical branch emerging from the so-called phylogenetic tree of life, joining present generations of taxa to their founding ancestors. It does not much matter, scientists may argue, what or how these fish are called, just so long as scientific knowledge about them increases. Fish, most sensible people would argue, do not have politics. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, the ways in which fish are experienced, used, contemplated, and valued are intimately implicated in creating ontologically different fish, and by extension, ontologically different bodies of water.

Enkeje were and still are found wherever wetlands and variegated outcroppings of rock compose the shoreline. Indeed, in recent years, *enkeje* are only reliably found at or very near to the littoral itself, where malleable vegetation and solid stone formations offer these small fish food and shelter from the large introduced predatory Nile perch that tend to hungrily patrol open waters.³⁸ All *enkeje* fishing, however, is formally illegal in Lake Victoria because of the small sizes of nets and hooks required to catch these fish. Still, *enkeje* continue to be caught, dried, sold, and eaten in contemporary Nyanja.

³⁷For a brief discussion and extensive accounting of these “Anthropometric Tables” See: Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 493–522.

³⁸For scientific examinations of *Haplochromis* declines, refugia, and resurgence see: Witte et al., “Differential Decline and Recovery of *Haplochromine* Trophic Groups in the Mwanza Gulf of Lake Victoria”; Lauren J. Chapman et al., “Physiological Refugia: Swamps, Hypoxia Tolerance and Maintenance of Fish Diversity in the Lake Victoria Region,” *Comparative Biochemistry and Physiology-Part A: Molecular & Integrative Physiology* 133, no. 3 (2002): 421–37; Andrea J. Reid et al., “Implications of Hypoxia Tolerance for Wetland Refugia Use in Lake Nabugabo, Uganda,” *Ecology of Freshwater Fish* 22, no. 3 (2013): 421–29.

Invisible Fish, Invisible Histories

It is not all that surprising that the little *enkejje* have been estranged from the historiography of Uganda. Indeed, although they comprised vast majority of all fish available there throughout the 1970s, they have not been abundant there since the mid-1980s, around the same time that historians of the Lakes region began researching and writing serious critiques of the nationalist and royalist historical cannon. Some scholars do acknowledge the importance of fish and fishing, and hint at their role in the growth of the Buganda Kingdom itself. However, even when fisheries are treated in some detail, *enkejje*, although the most abundant fish historically, are almost always left out of the conversation.

Without a material, visual referent for these fish in their historic abundance – alive or dead – *enkejje* have thus far been unable to animate the historical imaginations of even the most attentive scholars working to advance understandings of pre-colonial history. Many of the formally educated, landed elite who have long served as key interlocutors for Lakes historians consider *enkejje* to be the food of poor men and old women.³⁹ Why would one spend much time talking about those who ‘suck the marrow of the bones of *enkejje*?⁴⁰ There were perhaps much more illustrious stories to be collected – stories of great wars, king, and chiefs.

Still, *enkejje* were precious for the poor inland as well as for littoral residents. When

³⁹In a recent interview with business tycoon, “doting dad, and fashion freak” Al-Hajji Nasser Ntege Ssebaggala published in the Uganda Observer, when asked about his favorite food he replied: “Njagala nnyo (I really love) matooke and groundnuts. Njagala nnyo enkejje mu binyebwa (I really love groundnut sauce mixed with haplochromis.) I want that aroma.” Diana Nabiruma, “Quick Talk: Seya the Doting Dad and Fashion Freak,” The Observer, 2014, February 11, 2014 edition, http://observer.ug/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=30080%3A-quick-talk-seya-the-doting-dad-and-fashion-freak&Itemid=96.

⁴⁰Walser, *Luganda Proverbs*, 294.

enkejje were few in a family home it was considered best to “leave them for the children to eat.”⁴¹ Even then, parents or an unmarried man ‘dealing out sprats’ may cause dissatisfaction, as everyone is eyeing each other’s fish, and each wants the best share.⁴² A member of the landed poor may consider themselves generous when they “give half an *enkejje*” to someone they consider to be “a poor hungry...beggar,” though this same person “at home eats a whole twigful.”⁴³ After all, the lake is considered the “garden” of those at the lakeshore, and those who tend fish traps, unlike those who only tend the land “do not eat without relish.”⁴⁴

Because *enkejje* now comprise only a small fraction of contemporary fish catches, they no longer feature as obligatory foods served at the kinds of contemporary cultural events that Ugandan scholars and visiting researchers may be invited to — weddings, funerals, and graduations. They are also missing from the “local foods” — such as *matooke* (steamed mashed plantains), sweet potatoes, cassava, greens, chicken, beef, beans, groundnuts, and so on — served daily in homes, market stalls, and small *hoteli*, or restaurants that researchers and residents often frequent in the villages, trading centers, and large cities that fringe the northern lakeshore. Nsimbi’s statement that “in Buganda anyone who frequents all gathering of people is likened to the *enkejje*,” or the proverb, “*kakejje ntabula ku mbaga*,” (the little *enkejje* is always present at a feast) no longer seem to make sense, or perhaps more generously, seem particularly relevant.⁴⁵

Their unique qualities, particularly their small size and the edible nature of their bones

41 Ibid., 181, 229.

42 Ibid., 344.

43 Ibid., 181.

44 Ibid., 413.

45 Nsimbi, “Village Life and Customs in Buganda,” 28. Walser, *Luganda Proverbs*, 190.

– the same qualities that make *enkejje* easy to process and trade, and especially nutritious – made them particularly ephemeral. The material remains of these fish were unable to be located alongside the fragments of pottery, iron products, bones, and clay figurines that mark the region's most provocative archeological finds.⁴⁶ Beds of cichlid fossils, including *enkejje* have been found in eastern Kenya. While these have been carefully studied taxonomically to inform studies of cichlid evolution, these are studies of nature without considerations of culture.⁴⁷

The tools most commonly used to catch these fish, such as baskets (*amagala*), and nets woven from littoral vegetation and fished from shore (*ekiragala*), are still on display at the Uganda Museum, however, these and other important fishing methods, including temporary holes and maze-like traps built into the shoreline with sticks (*ekibigo*) are no longer visible at the littoral. Their material remains and memories seemed to have disappeared, perhaps long since decomposed and transformed into new forms of life at the littoral.

Although much more mundane than the wholesale transformation of the aquatic

⁴⁶ For example, provocative, though seemingly (but probably not) anomalous “Luzira Head” and “Entebbe Figurine” see: Eric J. Wayland, Miles C. Burkitt, and H. J. Brauholtz, “29. Archaeological Discoveries at Luzira,” *Man*, 1933, 25–30; Merrick Posnansky and John H. Chaplin, “Terracotta Figures from Entebbe, Uganda,” *Man*, 1968, 644–50; Andrew Reid and Ceri Z. Ashley, “A Context for the Luzira Head,” *Antiquity* 82, no. 315 (2008). Fishbones have been found in material from the Late Stone Age in trenches dug in the Nyang’oma Rock Shelter near Mwanza, Tanzania. However, as Soper and Golden note, “fish occurs but is rare.” see: R. C. Soper and Bruce Golden, “An Archaeological Survey of Mwanza Region, Tanzania,” *AZANIA: Journal of the British Institute in Eastern Africa* 4, no. 1 (1969): 15–79. A number of fish bones were found in rock shelters excavated in Western Kenya in the mid-1960s, including specimens identified as *Protopterus* (mamba, lungfish), *Tilapia* (ngege, tilapia), and *Clarias* (male, catfish), however, most of the fish bones were of an “indeterminate” variety. See: Creighton Gabel, “Six Rock Shelters on the Northern Kavirondo Shore of Lake Victoria,” *African Historical Studies*, 1969, 205–54. More recently, fishbones and fragments of fishing nets have been found within the “extensive deposits” at Namusenyu, which also contain stone-impressed pottery, and a single piece of obsidian. See: Reid, “Buganda: Unearthing an African Kingdom.” The presence of fishbones in general, or of larger species is not surprising, it is expected. Still, the point is, it is unlikely that bones of *enkejje* will ever be found alongside these remains. That does not mean they were not there.

⁴⁷ See for example: Ethelwynn Trewavas, “XXXVI.—Fossil Cichlid Fishes of Dr. LSB Leakey’s Expedition to Kenya in 1934–5,” *Journal of Natural History* 19, no. 111 (1937): 381–86. For a much more expansive study of these and other cichlid fossil remains see: Judith Anne Harris Van Couvering and Palaeontological Association, *Fossil Cichlid Fish of Africa* (Palaeontological Association London, 1982).

ecology of the lake that accompanied the Nile perch introductions as well as the deaths of the large majority of the bearers of littoral knowledge attributed to sleeping sickness, dictionaries played an important role in shaping how *enkejje* featured (or not) within scholarly, policy-oriented, and popular conversations about the lake and its history. The earliest published Luganda to English grammars and vocabularies were produced by Protestant missionaries in Uganda. These men either had wholly negative experiences at the littoral and on the lake more generally, or limited opportunities to initiate meaningful contact with littoral residents of the islands, based as they were within the confines of the mainland within their earliest years in Buganda, or in the case of missionaries like Martin J. Hall, posted to the Ssesse islands in the late 1890s, did not speak Luganda.⁴⁸

The English to Luganda dictionaries the missionaries compiled did, however, include entries for *enkejje*. Wilson's 1882 grammar simply defines "*nkejje*" as "a kind of fish," making no distinctions between the forms of these fish and others, such as *ngege* (tilapia), which directly precedes the entry for "*nkejje*" and is given the exact same general definition, "a kind of fish."⁴⁹ Pilkington's vocabulary published ten-years later enriched the definition of "*nkejje*" slightly listing it as "a small fish which the natives dry."⁵⁰ This definition was retained in Crabtree's 1902 grammar as "a small fish esp. dried."⁵¹ Snoxall's 1967 dictionary offers perhaps the most

48 George Pilkington reportedly did experience "his own spiritual renewal" on Kome Island in 1893. See for example: Taylor, *The Growth of the Church in Buganda*, 62–63. J.W. Gregory gives a much less charitable account of Pilkington's spiritual revelations: "that visionary pretended to have received the Holy Spirit in the island of Kome, and wished to commentate it to every one, whether they wised it or not." John Walter Gregory, *The Foundation of British East Africa* (London: H. Marshall & son, 1901), 255.

49 C. T. Wilson, *An Outline Grammar of the Luganda Language* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1882), 141.

50 G. L. Pilkington, *Luganda-English and English-Luganda Vocabulary* (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1892), 88.

51 William Arthur Crabtree, *Elements of Luganda Grammar: Together with Exercises and Vocabulary* (London:

descriptive English definition, clearly benefitting from the scientific fisheries research that followed the publication of the earliest dictionaries. “*Enkejje*...small fish, cichlid or mouth-breeding *Haplochromis*, eaten dried and sold on skewers.”⁵²

A 1917 dictionary compiled by the Catholic White Father Le Veux offers a much more detailed description of *nkejje*.⁵³ The White Fathers were more closely allied with littoral residents along the northwestern shores of the lake than were the Protestant missionaries. This was particularly the case with respect to Ssesse Islanders, on whose water-enclosed lands the White Fathers were assigned following the so-called religious war between Christians and the so-called “Mohammedans” in the late 1880s.⁵⁴ English Missionary Robert Ashe noted in 1895 that “a great deal of the influence” of the French missionaries “lay in the fact that the latter never attempted to exert any secular authority over them [their converts],” perhaps encouraging different kinds of conversations about fish, people, and ideas about fish and people in what would become Uganda.⁵⁵

Le Veux first defined *nkejje* as an “*ablette du nyanza, du Choga*” (a bleak of the Nyanza and of Lake Kyoga).⁵⁶ The English translation of *ablette* as bleak is not meant as commentary on the health of *enkejje* populations at the time, rather, the “common bleak” is the English term for an *ablette*. Known to scientists as *Alburnus alburnus*, these are small fish that congregate in large

Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1923), 188.

⁵² R.A. Snoxall, ed., “Luganda-English Dictionary,” *Luganda-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 243.

⁵³ Père Le Veux, *Premier Essai de Vocabulaire Luganda-Français D’après L’ordre Étymologique* (Maison-Carrée, Algeria: Imprimerie des Missionnaires d’Afrique (Pères Blancs), 1917), 340.

⁵⁴ James Ronald Leslie Macdonald, *Soldiering and Surveying in British East Africa, 1891-1894* (Edward Arnold, 1897); Ernest L. Bentley and Baron Frederick John Dealtry Lugard, *British East Africa and Uganda: A Historical Record Compiled from Captain Lugard’s and Other Reports, with Map* (Chapman and Hall, 1892).

⁵⁵ Robert Pickering Ashe, *Chronicles of Uganda* (ADF Randolph & Company, 1895), 302.

⁵⁶ Le Veux, *Premier Essai de Vocabulaire Luganda-Français D’après L’ordre Étymologique*, 340.

schools in the open waters and littoral zone of lakes and medium to large rivers in much of Europe and Asia. Le Veux's likening of *enkejje* to *ablette* is reflective of the similarities he observed between these fish. They both are small, often silver-hued (at least, once caught and dried), and appear in abundance in nearshore areas of lakes and rivers. Though Le Veux and his colleagues may not have been aware of the particular spawning habits of these fish, it is worth noting that *ablette* spawn in schools near the surface of the water, whereas female-sexed *enkejje* spawn individually and demonstrate an exceptional degree of parental care for their eggs and newly hatched young.⁵⁷ *Enkejje* resembled *ablette* in physical appearance and historic abundance, but do not share similar life history traits. Le Veux's definition is already exceptional for mentioning the lakes where *enkejje* were found, as well as for likening *enkejje* to fish that were almost always found in large groups of other similar fish. His valuable description does not end there.

Enkejje, Le Veux continues, is a fish “*les paiens exigent le 'nkejje ensese' pour les rites d'initiation ou leur ceremonial funeraire,*” (the pagans require ‘*enkejje* from Ssesse’ for initiation rites or funeral ceremonies).⁵⁸ Here we see a cultural use for *enkejje* that is completely absent from the English vocabularies. That is, in Buganda, *enkejje* from Ssesse, were used to mark important moments in early life, as well as the very end of life, or at least they were at the time Le Veux was compiling his dictionary. Le Veux ends his entry for *enkejje* by introducing what he calls a “Shocking” expression (here he uses the English word for “shocking,” incredibly rare for this text): “*nkejje nfu, enkejje eddene*” (a dead *enkejje* is a powerful *enkejje*). This phrase is similar to

⁵⁷ For *ablette* see: FishBase, “*Alburnus Alburnus*, Bleak : Fisheries, Aquaculture, Bait,” The SPECIES Table, April 14, 2014, <http://www.fishbase.org/Summary/SpeciesSummary.php?ID=4730&AT=vike>. For *enkejje* see: G Fryer and T. D. Iles, *The Cichlid Species of the Great Lakes of Africa* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1972).

⁵⁸ Le Veux, *Premier Essai de Vocabulaire Luganda-Français D'après L'ordre Étymologique*, 340.

what may still be said of common man or woman who has recently passed on: 'After death, even a small person is remembered as powerful.'

In the absence of detailed histories of fish and fishing in Buganda as elsewhere, the task of generating historical knowledge about *enkejje* has largely been left to fisheries scientists and managers working on Lake Victoria. Their developmentalist orientation has made it difficult for the little *enkejje* to be recognized as a historically important source of food and trade goods, let alone as an essential requirement for 'pagan rituals.' Scientists have focused on the evolution of fish in the absence of humans, and managers focus on the progress of the fishing industry in the absence of history.

Further, these men, and in some cases also women, followed the lead of pioneering missionaries like Alexander MacKay who expressed little tolerance for the kinds of ancestral remembrance and ritual divination towards which *enkejje* was used. Indeed, MacKay had little tolerance for islanders in general.⁵⁹ MacKay became known as the “anti-Mukasa” for his efforts to convince Kings Mutesa and later Mwanga to ignore the prophesies and protestations of the female spirit medium of Mukasa, the most influential “god” of the Ssesse Islands and the Buganda Kingdom more generally.⁶⁰ In her defense, her primary prophesy in that era was that war was imminent “perhaps not now, but in a few years” because the King “had received the white men.”⁶¹ She was absolutely correct. MacKay dismissed the concerns of Mukasa and the

⁵⁹ Alexander M. Mackay, “Boat Voyage along the Western Shores of Victoria Nyanza, from Uganda to Kageye; And Exploration of Jordans Nullah,” in *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*, vol. 6 (JSTOR, 1884), 273–83; Michael G. Kenny, “Mutesa’s Crime: Hubris and the Control of African Kings,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, no. 4 (1988): 595–612.

⁶⁰ Harrison, A.M. Mackay, 144, 168–170.

⁶¹ CMS, “Letter from Mr. C.W. Pearson. January 7, 1880,” *Church Missionary Intelligencer and Record*, 1880, 418.

“older chiefs” who said, in his words, “We were come to take possession of the country, and were trying to alter the national institutions, so as to be conformable with those of our country, as a preliminary step to conquering them altogether!”⁶² However, it would soon become clear that this too was absolutely correct.

Towards a Pre-Victorian Littoral Ontology

Before turning to the multiple meanings and material practices involved in catching *enkejje*, it is first important to consider how lake's historic residents may have reflected on this once famous fish through the clear, freshwaters that still enfold the lake's many islands. Natural environments, as Neil Kodesh notes, "serve as storehouses of historical memory," where scholars and knowledgeable residents can work together to reveal new interpretations of the past.⁶³ Indeed, this examination of fish in relation to the growth of families, communities, and politics would have been impossible without the willingness of my interlocutors along Nyanja's littoral to think with me through the lake and the fisheries that developed there. On several occasions, on several islands, I was told a variation of, 'you can study fish for years and years in school and never know how fish really behave. Here, we watch them and learn. The lake is our classroom.'

The most valuable vernacular written source informing this analysis of the pre-Victorian littoral is a sixty page handwritten account composed in Luganda by Kasirye Zzibukulimbwa.⁶⁴ Zzibukulimbwa was in his late sixties in November of 2011 when he

62 CMS, "Letter from Mr. A.M. Mackay January 7, 1880," 420.

63 Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 13.

64 Zzibukulimbwa, "Ennyanja Nalubaale."

entrusted Bakaaki and me with a copy of an account he had been composing about the lake drawing on his observations of the Ssesse Islands and Entebbe littorals.⁶⁵ Written in a conversational, though clearly informed style, this unpublished account offers, as far as I am aware, the only comprehensive Luganda vernacular natural history of the lake, including types of boats, fishing methods, winds, rivers, and islands found within the lake, as well as fish, birds, trees, insects, and other forms of life. His text is written for a Luganda-speaking (and reading) audience already familiar with the flora and fauna found inland, as well as the larger ecological and social transformations that accompanied the introduction of the Nile perch.

Zzibukulimbwa deliberately sets his account apart from those of “professional researchers.” He begins with a statement that he is “writing down some of the many stories as were told by my grandparents and other culturally interested elders that still and ever will lodge in my mind” as well as those “which I have seen and learned by myself.” Later, in a very brief section on the reproduction of things from the lake (*Okuzaalaa Kw’ebyennyanya*) he states, “We are well aware that we have professional researchers. Even you, you cannot know the whole of you. I am not a part of these professionals, but I speak what I saw with my eyes.” Though it is not clear whether Zzibukulimbwa believes that professional researchers are able to know the “whole of” anything, his account highlights interconnections between *abalunnya* (people on the lake) and *kw’ebyennyanya* (things of the lake), as well as terms that differ between *abalunnya* (literally, people of the lake) and *n’abokulukalu* (people of the mainland).⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Bakaaki and I worked together throughout 2012 to translate this account into English.

⁶⁶ It is possible that *n’abokulukalu* (people of the mainland) may have gained their name long ago from their efforts to forage for *ebikaluu* that comprised the shellfish of the shell middens so important to early foragers at the littoral long ago. See for example: C. Leigh Broadhurst, Stephen C. Cunnane, and Michael A. Crawford, “Rift Valley Lake Fish and Shellfish Provided Brain-Specific Nutrition for Early Homo,” *British Journal of Nutrition*

Much of what Zzibukulimbwa “saw with his eyes” and wrote with his pen still remains obscure to many “professional researchers” still conducting their work within the categorical confines of scholarly disciplines or policy agendas. For example, he describes over forty kinds of winds and their effects on the water and land, and offers the most intelligible and vivid description of the effects of algal blooms and sudden mixing of lake waters that I have ever read.

Zzibukulimbwa's text explicitly addresses changing material conditions and their effects on fishing practices. It does not, however, reference the broader transformations that often shape scholarly accounts of Lake Victoria – kingship, colonialism, independence, political coups, the introduction of species, or the growth of export-oriented fisheries.⁶⁷ Nor does he situate his account, or his perspective, as a particularly Kiganda one. Instead, he focuses on how particular things of the lake – ancestors, winds, shrubs, seasons, and of course fishermen – shape fishing practices. In Zzibukulimbwa's account, the identity and knowledge of littoral residents are discussed in relation to the lake and its inhabitants. Birds, in part because they are readily visible and heard, seem particularly generative of a littoral ontology of individual as well as potential connections between kin, signs of wealth to come, as well as potential competition for the best *enkejje*.

For example, Zzibukulimbwa describes a bird familiar to many English-speakers as kingfishers and to the people of the lake as *oba musajja yevubila*, the man who hunts for himself:

79, no. 01 (1998): 3–21..

⁶⁷ He does, however address how boat builders changed the shape of large vessels to accommodate outboard motors, or how manufactured twines and steel wires replaced grasses in the making of fishing nets and baskets.

This one is small in size like a chick that has just started developing feathers, but it has wings and tail-feathers. It has a long beak and it is very wonderful to watch when hunting. Its favorite fish is the *enkeje* and *mukene*. It floats in the air, and when it spots its catch, it dives down at once into the water...*kecoopola*...you hear when it dives. He resurfaces with its catch in his beak. He only eats what he has fished himself. That is why we call it, *musajja yevubila*, the man who hunts for himself.⁶⁸

Zzibukulimbwa's description of *enkunga*, what others inland call *enkobyokoby*, is particularly illustrative of the kin-based associations fishermen make between the themselves, their loved ones, and fish. He describes this bird as about the size of a pigeon, white in color with a bit of grey on its neck, and with a hooked beak. *Enkunga*, Zzibukulimbwa notes, “does not hunt, it eats rotten things, even if it is a dead human body.” They may be found resting on a dead person, though the body will be perfectly intact, because this bird “just plucks the eyes.” Fishermen “use these birds to detect things that they may be searching for.” According to Zzibukulimbwa, when encountering an *enkunga* while searching for a dead body fishermen might say:

“Muko muko owewa?” In-law, in-law, a thing that floats on the water and moves involuntarily?

If this bird is sitting on something floating, anything, and starts eating it when a wave comes, the wave disturbs what it is sitting on and the bird says:

“Ee, *tondimayo!*” Hey, don't make me drown!

If a fisherman comes across, or comes near this bird sitting on any floating fish, the bird will say:

⁶⁸ There has been some scientific attention to fishing techniques of kingfishers and their changing diets in Lake Victoria. See: R. J. Douthwaite, “Fishing Techniques and Foods of the Pied Kingfisher on Lake Victoria in Uganda,” *Ostrich* 47, no. 4 (1976): 153–60; Jan H. Wanink and Kees PC Goudswaard, “Effects of Nile Perch (*Lates Niloticus*) Introduction into Lake Victoria, East Africa, on the Diet of Pied Kingfishers (*Ceryle Rudis*),” *Hydrobiologia* 279, no. 1 (1994): 367–76.)

“*Muko, muko, omunsoonye!*” In law, in law, you have grabbed it from me!

Here, *enkunga* speaks to the lake – 'Hey, don't make me drown!' and to fishermen – 'in-law, you've grabbed it from me!' The abilities of these fish to seek out the bodily remains of those that have died on the lake and to speak to those who are looking for them place these birds not as objects separate from the lives of fishermen, but rather as part of the relationships that hold people together. In laws whose preferences and abilities make proper burial possible.

A large bird, *engadala*, signals to fishermen that a plentiful catch of fish is on its way:

This one is as big as *embaata kabuzi*, it hunts from deep waters (*buziba oba muddolwe*). Its favorite food is *enkeje enene* (big *enkeje*), the kind of *enkeje* we call *enkeje* called *amadola*. Fishermen like it because it brings good fortunes, when it flies ahead of you. When moving, flying, it splashes the waters with its wings. That why we also call it *okuyababa* (when splashing on the waters). When the coxswain of the boat sees it, he starts cheering it on telling "*yababa-yababa!*"

Fishermen believe that if they see *okuyababa* (the one who splashes), even the fish will spend the night doing the *okuyababa* (splashing into fishermen's nets).

Although Zzibukulimbwa does not mention this next step, Bakaaki and I speculate that if fishermen see *engadala* (the bird who splashes) and fish both doing the *okuyababa* (splashing), that fishermen too may be cheering “*yababa-yababa*” with their women themselves later that night. A good catch brings ample cash. When fishermen have ample funds, they rarely sleep alone.

Several other types of birds are known for snatching *enkeje* from drying racks before they are securely pinned on sticks, or closely watching, waiting for a dying fish to finally float to the surface of the water. Others still are known for eating banana or sweet potato peelings, or moving inland and turning to the flesh of monkeys if they fail to catch fish. The relationships Zzibukulimbwa references throughout his text between people, birds and fish, but also winds,

waves, insects, and trees are ones of mutual interdependence – “a becoming with,” rather than a struggle against.

In his description of multiple types of *enkejje* included below, Zzibukulimbwa notes the uses of these fish and the metaphorical associations between fish and household wellbeing. Perhaps more importantly, he describes named types of *enkejje* in relation to other *enkejje* and the places where they dwell.

We have *enkejje enganda*, these ones are used in *okwalula abaana* [hatching the children] and *okwalula abalongo* [hatching the twins].

We have *amadoola*, these ones are found in deep waters and are relatively big in size, almost the size of *makanasobola* [a fish whose name literally means, “I can manage my home”]. *Amadoola* are commonly found in Lake Wamala, in Mityana District.

We have *endaguzi* – these are very spotted, like they are wearing camouflage.

We have *ebidedeemi* and *empwarwa* – these always move together in very deep waters and are relatively large in size.

We have *enkwekere*, *nkomaga*, *obuwumbi* – these ones also move together and are commonly found in swampy and rocky areas.

Engadya and *enkasa*, these are also used in *okwalula abalongo* (hatching the twins).

The smallest *enkejje* live in really shallow waters in very large numbers. These are called *olukaka*. *Olukaka* always move with *obusiiri*, again in shallow waters.

There are some big *enkejje* used as bait in longlines in deep waters, these are called *mpabuzi*.⁶⁹

When *enkejje* were abundant some thirty years ago, fishworkers had already long been conceptualizing *enkejje* in ways that fisheries scientists and managers elsewhere are now struggling to do, in what they call “species assemblages.” It was the most sensible thing to do.

69 Zzibukulimbwa, “Ennyanja Nalubaale,” 7.

Few fish outside of a tank ever have the opportunity -- if we want to think of individualism as opportunity -- to swim alone. The taxonomic abstractions that emerged alongside the scientific race to identify the multiplicity of Haplochromine types did not rely extensively on in-situ observations. As evolutionary biologist Tjjs Goldschmidt has noted, “only after detailed basic information had been compiled on the structure of the skeleton, the shape of the individual bones, and the muscles and connective tissue” was it possible to compare different types of these fish and “establish, with any certainty, the often subtle differences.”⁷⁰ In most cases it is impossible to classify these fish “without having first examined their heads, both inside and out.”⁷¹ Because these fish are understood through the practices of vivisection and comparison of constitutive parts, it makes it difficult for scientists to envision haplochromines as continuing to swim and dwell with other species. Because fisheries scientists rarely ask for vernacular names of these fish, it is now very difficult to associate vernacular named *enkejje* with scientifically named *Haplochromis* species.⁷²

However, *enkejje* continued to circulate in ways that were not immediately apparent to administrators and development specialists collecting trade and market data, moving in between the lake and household cooking pots as part of everyday food provisioning practices, and used to mark exceptional moments of celebratory abundance and community acceptance.

The historical importance of fishing methods that men and women once used to catch *enkejje/enfulu*, particularly basket fishing, and the use of large nets made from littoral vegetation, had largely been erased from the collective memories of lake’s residents by the

70 Tjjs Goldschmidt, *Darwin’s Dreampond : Drama in Lake Victoria* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 24.

71 *Ibid.*, 25.

72 Andrea Reid, personal communication. Email. April 2, 2014.

confluence of a devastating outbreak of sleeping sickness and the wide-spread forced depopulation of the lakeshore in the first decade of the 20th century, the introduce of “improved” gears such as flax and now thick plastic nets, and the large-scale transformation of species composition in the lake. Before discussing the specific linguistic and material associations with fishing basket and net gear, it is first necessary to situate these fishing practices within recent historical linguistic reconstructions of fishing itself.

Was Fishing in Nalubaale Practiced Along Gendered Lines?

A shared memory of historic taboos related to women and fisheries live on in the memories of those who still work with fish in Buganda. Conventional historical wisdoms state that from ancient times until only about last thirty years, women were not welcome at the littoral. Perhaps they could go to the shores briefly to fetch water, but that was all. They were forbidden from touching fishing boats, touching and especially stepping over fishing nets, and catching fish of any kind. Given that the Baganda people are considered to have always lived within the contemporary geographical boundaries of Buganda, it is assumed that also holds true the three major island archipelagos that fringe the northern shores of the lake — Ssesse, Kome, and Buvuma. The comparative historical ethnographic record does not support this contemporary traditional wisdom.

Rhiannon Stevens has reconstructed two proto-Bantu verbs that North Nyanza speakers once used to describe fishing activities at least from the ninth to twelfth centuries. These are *-vuba, simply “fishing” and *-loba, 'fishing with a line'.⁷³ For Stephens, this

⁷³ Stephens, *A History of African Motherhood: The Case of Uganda, 700-1900*, 127:72.

linguistic distinction suggests two general types of fishing. One dominated by women who fished with basket traps in nearby swamps as part of regular household provisioning activities (for example, “digging,” cooking, trapping small animals, basket making, child care and so on). And a second more "specialized activity" practiced by men who lived in villages along the lakeshore, who once dried and transported their produce “to communities further inland.”⁷⁴

In one 1910 account of a group of specialized *abavubi* and traders living near the shores where the lake meets the Nile River, Father M.A. Condon a missionary and lay ethnographer with the Mill Hill Catholic mission to Uganda suggested that the verb *okuvuba* is used in reference to basket fishing and implies "to catch a number of fish together." Whereas he suggests that *okuloba* references fishing when single hook and line is used, and "probably means 'choose' or 'pick out.'"⁷⁵ It is tempting to conceptualize these categories of *-vuba (basket fishing for many fish) and *-loba (line fishing for individual fish) as corresponding to specific gendered categories of fish, fishing gear, and consumption and trading practice. If one adds *omuvunda*, spearing fish, a form of fishing that men specialized in to the ways we may imagine how fishing practice was historically gendered the potential visual associations are quite striking. However, these are just impulses that may have emerged by what Ivan Illich has termed our "sex crazed eyes," that is our tendency to read biological sex back onto historical forms of vernacular gender.

In communities that specialized in fishwork and trading (often producing and trading pottery, basket work, bark cloth, cord, and other material goods) "the men are not the only

74 Ibid., 127:72–73.

75 Condon, “Contribution to the Ethnography of the Basoga-Batamba Uganda Protectorate, Br. E. Africa,” 954.

fishers, the women also taking an active part in the work."⁷⁶ Even spearfishing in swamps, perhaps the most quintessentially masculine form of fishing, required a canoe where "the woman paddles slowly along, the man stands or sits in the bow, holding a long light spear pointed ready for instant action."⁷⁷

In contemporary usage, *okuvuba* references the process of "getting anything from the lake. Fish, stones, something that fell in the water, or something that is already there naturally."⁷⁸ Men who fish and women who dry fish consider themselves to be *abavubi* (*muvubi* sing.) – people who work with the lake. This term does not distinguish between fishing and fish processing and it does not reference gender.⁷⁹ Because baskets have not been commonly used to fish from the island and mainland littoral for a long time, the term *okuvuba* is no longer associated specifically with basket fishing at all, if it ever was. As we will soon see, even if fishing baskets are associated with fertility, the associations between ideas of the abundance that catching many fish at once implies may have gendered associations, but they do not easily correspond to biological sex.

The term *okuloba* is still in use to refer to a fishing with "a single hook and line," something akin to angling. However, it is a fishing method that is today primarily practiced by young boys, wading out into nearshore rocks, or fishing from piers. While I have yet to see a woman fishing with a hook and line, indeed I have never seen a woman catch a fish at all, there are several references to women in communities of fishing specialists fishing with hook and line

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ C. Macquarie, "Water Gypsies of the Malagarasi," *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 9 (1940): 61–67.

⁷⁸ Zzibukulimbwa, "Ennyanja Nalubaale," 6.

⁷⁹ While outsiders might have derogatory associations with the term *abavubi*, littoral residents specializing in fishing do not share these, "it's what we do, we work with the lake, it's no problem."

in the historical ethnographic record. For example, amongst the Bakene one observer noted that "the women spend much time" in their dugout canoes, "sitting fishing with rod and line; the men confine their efforts to setting fish traps, huge baskets which are anchored to some patch of sudd a little distance beneath the surface."⁸⁰ Those fishing with this "simple hook" were said to be "extremely clever, for a bite means a sure catch."⁸¹ Although men may be strongly associated with "the rod" in more recent years, this was certainly not the case in some specialized fishing communities just over one hundred years ago.

Both men and women were at work, some with the fish traps, others fishing in the deeper waters, whilst some women were up to their waists in the water emptying holes which had been made the previous day and into which small fish had found their way during the night. Numbers of small children were paddling about from tuft to tuft of papyrus in tiny canoes enjoying life even as the happiest of English children. In the distance was a huge crocodile floating lazily away into deep water, and some children in a large canoe watching him as they fished.⁸²

Along the western shores of the lake in Kiziba, Rehse notes that *kujuba* means to fish with nets.⁸³ While net fishing is frequently associated with fishing from boats in the contemporary period, given the importance of the gillnet fishery for Nile perch, there were several methods for net fishing that were once used from the shore itself, indeed, there were nets that required baskets.

Net fishing was strongly gendered male by early autoethnographers like Apolo Kagwa and Paul Mboya, who were themselves male (with perhaps no fishing experience at all).⁸⁴

80 Arthur Leonard Kitching, *On the Backwaters of the Nile: Studies of Some Child Races of Central Africa* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1912), 119.

81 Condon, "Contribution to the Ethnography of the Basoga-Batamba Uganda Protectorate, Br. E. Africa," 954.

82 John Roscoe, "Brief Notes on the Bakene," *Man* 9 (January 1, 1909): 117.

83 Rehse, *Kiziba, Land Und Leute*, 45.

84 Apolo, Sir. Kagwa, *Kitabo Kye Mpisa Za Baganda (The Customs of the Baganda)*, ed. May Mandlebaum Edel, trans. Ernest B. Kalibala (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934); Paul Mboya, *Paul Mboya's Luo Kitgi Gi Timbegi*, trans. Jane Achieng (Nairobi: Atai Joint Ltd., 2001).

Extended periods of ritualized sexual abstinence, avoidance of certain foods, and strict separation of fishermen from their wives was reportedly associated with these forms of fishing, at least when the nets were being made and used for the first few times.⁸⁵ Women, however, were also involved in net fishing. In the words of one observer of commenting on fishing in the eastern part of the lake:

Women pull in the fishing nets made entirely of papyrus stalks, and the men on rafts out on the lake watch to protect them from the hippopotami. The top knots of the papyrus stalks make a compact net, through which fish cannot escape. They eat all and everything they catch. Even if the fish is only half an inch long, they eat it. The women pulling the net are as innocent of clothing as angels in Heaven, and as modest and moral as any of their sisters in the civilized world.⁸⁶

The above practice is also similar to the combined use of baskets and nets described by Johnston:

They bring two very long ropes, one end of each of which is firmly secured to the shore. One rope lies weighted, along the bottom under the water, the other floats on the surface, but from it hangs a fringe of papyrus stalks. The two ropes above and below correspond with its other, and are connected at intervals with strings to ensure their correspondence, while the fringe of papyrus strips make this arrangement into a kind of pliable fence. This, by means of canoes, is brought back to the shore till it describes rather more than a semi-circle. The bringing round of the rope serves to chase all the fish that are between it and the shore towards the mouths of the big wickerwork traps which are placed in a row in the shallow water. The women at the same time, walk up and down dragging traps of smaller mesh, in which they collect numbers of small fish.⁸⁷

Although women were excluded from detailed accounts of fishing practices detailed by Apolo Kagwa, John Roscoe, and Paul Mboya, it appears that women who specialized in fishing

⁸⁵ See for example: Roscoe, "Notes on the Manners and Customs of the Baganda," 392–393; Kagwa, *Kitabo Kye Mpisa Za Baganda*, 149–151.

⁸⁶ Peter MacQueen, In *Wildest Africa: The Record of Hunting and Exploration Trip through Uganda, Victoria Nyanza, the Kilimanjaro Region and British East Africa, with an Account of an Ascent of the Snowfields of Mount Kibo, in East Central Africa, and a Description of the Various Native Tribes* (Boston: LC Page & Company, 1909), 285.

⁸⁷ Johnston, *The Uganda Protectorate*, 787–789.

in nearshore areas and wetlands were not entirely excluded from "the chase." Indeed, women were an integral part of forms of fishing associated with "the chase," including the use of hook and line, spears, and net gear.

Baskets – A Durable Bundle of Traditional Abundance

Even given the materially ephemeral nature of historical fishing gears themselves, the metaphorical and material associations with respect to fishing baskets offers what David Schoenbrun might call a "durable bundle of meaning and practice."⁸⁸ Terms for baskets, *amagala*, and nets fished from shore, *ekiragala* are associated with ancient notions of health and well being, indeed life itself. This association, between flexibility and the strength of authority is reflected in one aspect of the ascension ceremonies when new Kabaka "ate Buganda."

According to Roscoe, a Priest handed the King several pieces of a creeper that was grown for making baskets during these ceremonies, saying "May your life be like a basket which, when it falls down, does not break as an earthen vessel does."⁸⁹ Despite the relative dearth of basket and nets to analyze within archeological finds, within the practice of events marking political authority, baskets were associated with the kinds of durability made possible through the material flexibility of baskets themselves.

⁸⁸ David Lee Schoenbrun, "Conjuring the Modern in Africa: Durability and Rupture in Histories of Public Healing between the Great Lakes of East Africa," *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (2006): 1403.

⁸⁹ Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 196.



Figure 3-2: Fishing Baskets from the Uganda Museum Circa 2009

There are three possible Great Lakes Bantu root stems upon which contemporary uses of *amagala* and *ekiragala* were built. Fortunately, David Schoenbrun's reconstructions of these roots indicate a shared genealogy, that is, the second root is derived from the first, and the third from the second. The “gloss” of these terms are consolidated meanings and “represent the durable intellectual and practical contents of the social worlds inside of which people acted.”⁹⁰ Discussions of these roots alongside the gears themselves helps to reconstruct how fish and fishing likely featured at the littoral prior to sleeping sickness, the introduction of flax and now plastic nets, and species changes in the lake.

The first, *-gàlá indicates, “physical force of life” or simply “life force.” It is the most widely distributed of all three roots here. Schoenbrun suggests this root may be further associated with notions of clarity and abundance, physical health, coolness and wetness, as well

⁹⁰ “Conjuring the Modern in Africa: Durability and Rupture in Histories of Public Healing between the Great Lakes of East Africa,” 1414.

as to 'be useful, make useful, worthy, or valuable.' In KiHaya, a vernacular language in use around the western shores of the lake, this concept is specifically associated with *mugásha*, the “god of the sea” and *muka magáshani*, “maiden; king's woman or wife.” The specific Luganda attestations result in the stem **-gasa*, “be useful, advantageous, profitable; be able,” and also to **-gazi* “spacious, large, distant, wide.”⁹¹ The use of the stem in Rwanda and Burundi draws connections between **-gàlá* and “health, force, life” as well as “genital and human sexuality.” Given the associations between Mukasa (or Mugasha), fish and Mukasa's network of fertility knowledge it is reasonable to assume that fishing baskets are partially what generate this semantic and symbolic connection.

Consideration of the various constructions of fishing baskets, *amagala* themselves makes these associations more clear. Given the early efforts to limit all shore-dwelling and basket fishing as part of sleeping sickness controls in Buganda as well as the similarity of targeted fish around the lakeshore, it is appropriate to consult accounts of baskets and nets fished elsewhere around the Nyanja. Although there are indeed variations in styles of basket- and net-making, as well as the specific techniques of positioning, there is a general similarity of basket types -- baskets for carrying fish, handheld baskets for active fishing, and single or double non-return baskets that are securely set and checked regularly.

According to Zzibukulimbwa, anyone could afford to make an *amagala*, “it was just a matter of weaving your basket and placing it in some water where you suspect fish might pass.”⁹² Women fishing on near the eastern shores of the lake would fish in groups using

91 Schoenbrun, *The Historical Reconstruction of Great Lakes Bantu*, 249, Root 382.(D. L. Schoenbrun 1997, 249, Root 382)

92 Zzibukulimbwa, “Ennyanja Nalubaale,” 18.

baskets close to shore, offering a particularly important and easily obtainable source of food and conviviality for women. One technique involved wading into the lake as a group into water up to about shoulder height and forming a large circle. With ordinary household baskets balanced on their heads and wicker fishing baskets secure in their hands, Nyanja's fishing women, "with great splashing and general jollity," would slowly begin to walk towards the center of their circle, enclosing fish with them along the way.⁹³ Once close together, women would quickly scoop up fish into their conical fishing baskets, lift them out of the water and deposit their catch directly into their household baskets balanced upon their heads. To Graham this form of fishing comprised "a very nice feat of balancing while wading into the mud."⁹⁴ There are many sandy beaches where this kind of fishing would have offered a very refreshing way to provision food.

Of course one first had to make or obtain material for weaving. Strong ropes for basket and net making were often made from a fibrous bark of a shrub known as *ebinsambwe*, one of the formerly more abundant forms of littoral vegetation.⁹⁵ According to Zzibukulimbwa:

These are among trees that don't grow big and tall. We get barks and leaves from these trees. They grow in groups resembling a cultivated cotton plantation. Their trunks are very small with green and reddish colors, and with tiny hairs that do not poke or irritate one's skin like others may. The leaves resemble that of cotton, but are big in size and hairy as just mentioned. The bark is easy to peel, and when peeled, is used to sew together papyrus mats while the bark pieces are not yet fully dry [these pieces of bark, or threads are called *ebinsambwe*].⁹⁶

Although conventional fisheries wisdoms disassociate women from fishing as well as the production of fishing gears, and even fish trading in the past, contemporary elder women who

93 Splashing and noisemaking were not only enjoyable but probably helped scare off deadly crocodiles lurking in inshore waters. Graham, *The Victoria Nyanza and Its Fisheries*, 91.

94 *Ibid.*

95 Also known as *Hibiscus calyphyllus* to botanists, these were identified by Carpenter as forming one of the best habitats for tsetse fly, see: Roscoe, *The Baganda*.

96 Zzibukulimbwa, "Ennyanja Nalubaale," 26.

grew up along the lakeshore still remember that “women used to weave ropes of *ebinsambwe*, and those ropes were used to make fishing nets. Women would make these ropes for their own use, to give to their husbands, brothers, and neighbors, or would make them for sale.”⁹⁷ These ropes were also used to tie or fasten other gears such as the maze-like *akabigo* together.⁹⁸ Roscoe also noted that *ebinsambwe* was used for stitching “the reeds in the roofs of houses.”⁹⁹ “Aloe leaves,” according to Roscoe could also be used to make string for hunting and fishing-nets, but also for decorations in houses, however it is likely he was actually referencing sisal or the raffia palm.¹⁰⁰ Good aloe-string “took time to make, as the leaves had to be beaten, shredded, soaked, and combed; it was, moreover, a tedious task, which made the fingers tender...the aloe fiber was slowly twisted, sometimes by rubbing it with the palm of the hand on the bare upper leg; the worker tied the end of the cord to some tree or stake and twisted the fiber into cord as he moved from the tree to which it was tied.”¹⁰¹

These and other fibers would also be used to make *ekiragala*, what contemporary fishworkers call *kokota*, or a beach seine in English. *Ekiragala* were similarly associated with notions of abundance, health, and continuity. Again, women also used these kinds of nets along the eastern portion of the lake. This is the type of net used by the women in the frontispiece of this dissertation.

97 111013_001 Costa Namukasa, Kigungu

98 Zzibukulimbwa, “Ennyanja Nalubaale,” 18.

99 Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 413.

100 Ibid.

101 Ibid.

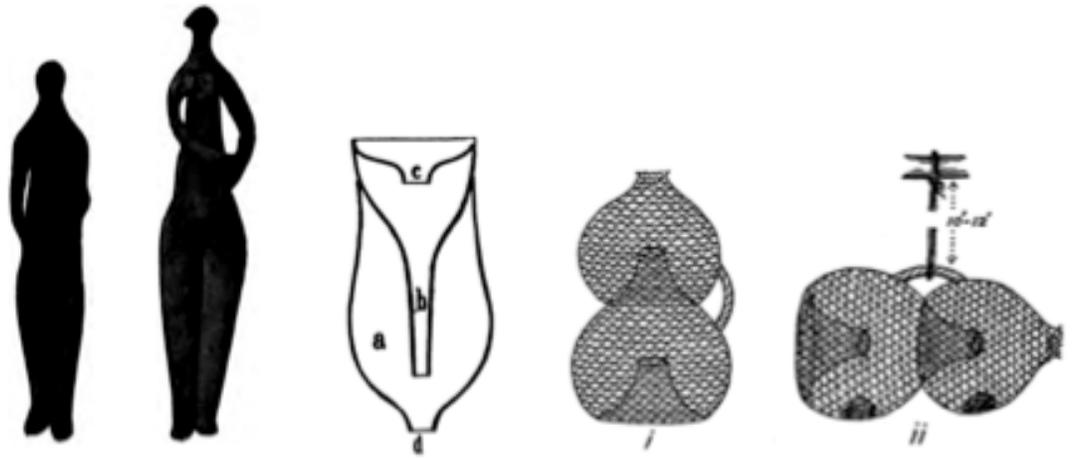


Figure 3-3: The two figures on the left represent male and female clay figurines made near the southern portion of the lake from (Kollman 1899, 169). The center figure is a schematic drawing of a weir basket used in Buganda and Buziba "through passages which get narrower and narrower (b and c), the fish reach a larger space (a), and are taken out at the opening (d), which is ordinarily closed by sticks placed close together." (Kollman 1899, 21–22). The two figures on the right are drawings of double non-return fish traps used in the southwest areas of the lake. The image on the far right demonstrates how these gears would be set, with rocks to anchor them in place (Fosbrooke 1934, 16).

As visible in Figure 3-3, basket gears -- particularly the more elaborate non-return baskets -- visibly resemble the female form. Non-return fishing baskets, most often positioned across a river or stream, or at the shoreline offer fairly suggestive associations between the physical form of women and the form of these types of baskets. Michael Kenny has argued that fishing paddles are obvious (phallic) symbols of Mukasa's masculine gender. The way I see it, the end of a fishing paddle is shaped, however, like the entrance to a fish trap (part c in the center figure above), or the shape of a hoe for digging. There is as much, if not more, reason to believe that the shape of a fishing paddle gestures to the shape of a woman's hips, as it does any part of the male anatomy.

At the contemporary littoral, the shape of women's hips can be seen wherever there are women, and where women's clothes are sold – even in relatively small fishing sites. Women's dresses, skirts, and trousers there are sold on hangers that accentuate, indeed, exaggerate the dimensions of the female form, rather than diminish the width of the garment on display it as is common in Euro-American women's clothing stores. Though, perhaps a paddle is just a paddle.



Figure 3-4: The author holding a fishing paddle.

The second relevant root, *-gála is derived from the first *-gàlá, or life force. The general meaning of this second root *-gála indicates “sons, males on mother's side.” For Schoenbrun, this “metaphor connects wealth in people to wealth in general through that principle...which makes life possible.” In Luganda, Schoenbrun links this stem to the nouns *ekigali*, “small offering made to spirits,” and *ekigali*, “gift offered to a *lubaale*,” or a “basket in which money is placed.” His final suggestion for Luganda references Magala, “the name of a

young boy in well-known story. His father struggled hard to get him a skin garment.”¹⁰² A skin garment here is a euphemism for the kind of social belonging discussed in Chapter Six. Beyond the obvious associations between small baskets for gift giving and fishing baskets, these specific baskets and gifts, *ekigali*, are the very same used into with *enkejje*, banana beer, ghee, and milk are placed during the “testing portion” of *okurwalula abaana*.

The methods used for catching these fish – baskets (*amagala*) and seine nets (*ekiragala*) woven from littoral vegetation – were used by women and men, and connected *enkejje* to historical vernacular conceptions of health, wealth, and the life-giving qualities of the lake.¹⁰³



Figure 3-5: "Fish Traps, Victoria Nyanza" From: Kirkland 1908, 43

102 Schoenbrun, *The Historical Reconstruction of Great Lakes Bantu*, 76–77, Root 104. (D. L. Schoenbrun 1997, 76–77, Root 104)

103) For a discussion of women's work in provisioning wild game and fish for the household in the distant past see Stephens, *A History of African Motherhood: The Case of Uganda, 700-1900*, 127:71–72. For historical reconstruction of the Bantu roots *-gálá (Root 382: physical force of life, life force), *-gala (Root 170: rich person, leader), and *gála (Root 104: sons, males on mother's side) Schoenbrun, *The Historical Reconstruction of Great Lakes Bantu*, 249, 117–118, 76.

A well-made fish trap, or *mugomo*, offers a metaphor for intelligence and aptitude: “*Olinnasajja: ng’omugomo ogutta ensonzi n’obuyamba* (You are a clever fellow: comparable to a *mugomo* (fish trap), whose narrow meshes catch *nsonsi* and even *buyamba* (small catfish and *enkejje*).”¹⁰⁴

Another type of *enkejje* was known by the nets used to catch them, *mpwarwa*. The net has a mesh size of 2 ½ inches, it most commonly catches *enkejje* known also as *mpwarwa*, but it also catches *ebisinja*, small catfish, tilapia, and others. These fish are highly desired, and the fishermen who deploy them are said to *buli lyato ninamu olubanga* (own at least one seat in every boat). The fishermen using these nets were called *abavubi mwem’pwarwa*, and they had a strange effect on women, and indeed, women had a strange effect on these fishermen. According to Zzibukulimbwa, their nets seemed to catch the attention of women interested in partaking in their multispecies delights. In the words of Zzibukulimbwa, “Women were so proud of these fishermen, even if someone was a bartender, she could go on cheering such a fisherman. Even old women could go on showing off to attract his attention. In turn, these fishermen, regardless of their age, could as well go on showing off, trying to attract the attention of either old women, or young girls.”¹⁰⁵

Still not all types of fish and fishing were associated with such “proud” behavior. Others were associated with the sound household management. A bunch of six to ten *enkejje*, of a particularly large type was known as *makangasobola*, meaning literally, “I can manage my family.” The implication here is that each member of the family will receive their own fish, and because each fish is fairly large (about the size of a pen), each family member ought to be

¹⁰⁴ Walser, *Luganda Proverbs*, 354.

¹⁰⁵ Zzibukulimbwa, “Ennyanja Nalubaale,” 22.

pleased. Whomever was able to acquire *makangasobola*, was a demonstrably capable provider.

The third root *-gala, glosses as “rich person, leader.” Which, Schoenbrun notes in both Luganda and KiHaya, derive from the first root examined here. He further suggests a possible underlying verb form indicting “to look after.” Both the practices of setting and later checking a net, as well tending fishing gear for a “rich person” or “leader” including Mukasa (to whom fishermen were either required to give a portion of their catch, or in the case of Mukasa's central home on Bukasa Island, tending traps marked as belonging to Mukasa alone) reflect this sense of looking after that Schoenbrun suggests is embedded within the root *-gala, as well as the meanings intertwined within fishing baskets (*amagala*) and fishing nets (*ekiragala*).

The derivation of the root *-gala used on Ukerewe Island, Schoenbrun notes, is *rugali*, “sort of a local plate made of woven straw.” *Rugali* are similar to the wicker waterproof baskets used to “hatch the children,” a ritual testing event during which grandmothers placed *enkejje*, butter, water, and banana beer into a basket woven from straw to confirm whether young children did (or did not) belong to the families into which they were put forward to be “hatched.”¹⁰⁶

As will be described in Chapter Six, *okurwalula abaana*, or “hatching the children,” was a test of women’s abilities as mothers and members of larger social groups. Mother’s who successfully demonstrated their proficiencies at raising healthy and well-behaved children, as well as being productive and pleasant potential members of families (by for example making salt, weaving baskets, and possibly also sourcing wild bananas and *enkejje*, as well as demonstrating their obedience to elder women and not gossiping), “hatched” socially

106 Schoenbrun, *The Historical Reconstruction of Great Lakes Bantu*, 117–118, Root 170.

recognized children, whether or not the father(s) of their children were biologically related to the families into which their children were ultimately found to belong. The reproductive strategies of *enkejje*, I argue, provided lake's historic residents with visual and material fodder for thinking about how new lives come into being, and indeed come to belong.

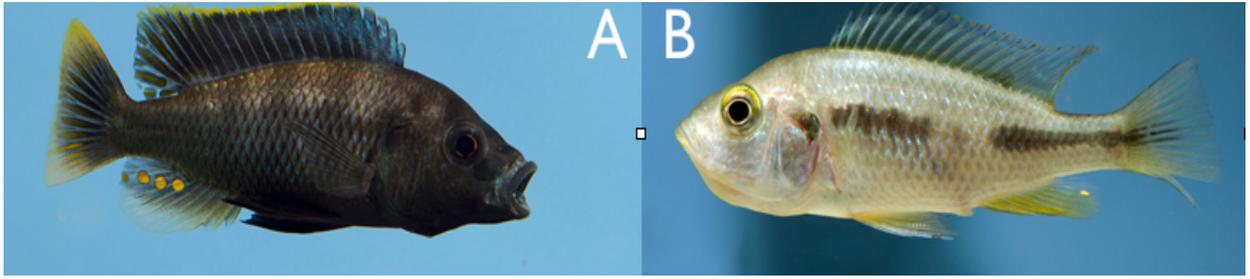


Figure 3-6: *Tssichromis* sp. "blue tipped" A is male, and B is a "holding female." available from:<http://african-cichlid.com/BlueTipped.htm>

Enkejje Reproduction

Although I have argued in this chapter that *enkejje* and haplochromines are conceptually different things, it is possible to read scientific sources to offer a narrative of *enkejje*'s reproductive lives as the littoral's historic human residents may have perceived them so long ago. Because *enkejje* were so abundant, observations of their reproductive habits likely offered ample visual material for historic human residents of the littoral with which to conceptualize their own reproduction. Although Zzibukulimbwa's account is not strictly intended to be a cultural history, his very brief section on reproduction of the inhabitants of the lake points to possible inspiration for *okuwalula abaana*, "the hatching of the children." Hatching the children is an event during which children, and by extension their mothers, are confirmed as to either belonging, or not belonging, to littoral families. Scholars have glossed this event as providing yet another example of patriarchal control over women's reproductive lives and access to

resources. I make a very different argument in Chapter Six. In order to anchor the significance of *enkejje* within *okurwalula abaana*, it is first necessary to consider *enkejje*'s reproductive practices as littoral residents long ago may have observed them. Zzibukulimbwa notes:

All of the inhabitants that I know, who live in the lake, just lay eggs (hippos not included). Lake inhabitants – crocodiles, monitor lizards, fish, and frogs lay eggs. They lay eggs in places called *amabya* (like a nest), and around stones in shallow waters. I will not go deeper into this because I told you, there are some professionals in this.

Despite the incredible physiological variety of this category of fish, one life history trait is universal across all *enkejje* types. All *enkejje* are mouthbrooders, that is the eggs and small young of *enkejje* are raised within their mothers' mouths, rather than on the mud, sand, and rock substrates or in the open water.¹⁰⁷ The presence and importance of this reproductive strategy would have been obvious to the men and women who fished the inshore littoral. When fishing, or simply relaxing by the shoreline, lake's historic residents would have seen mother *enkejje* quickly sucking their young into their mouths when a potential predator appeared, and releasing their young when conditions appeared safe again.

Each and every adult *enkejje* was raised for weeks, sometimes months, inside the mouths of their mothers.¹⁰⁸ When female *enkejje* are ready to become mothers, they find themselves attracted to males that convincingly display a high degree of fitness. The most successful males are often the largest and most brightly colored. Aspiring *enkejje* mothers are also swayed by males with particularly attractive “quivers,” that is, an appealing “high-frequency shaking

107 Greenwood, *The Cichlid Fishes of Lake Victoria, East Africa: The Biology and Evolution of a Species Flock*; Ole Seehausen, *Lake Victoria Rock Cichlids: Taxonomy, Ecology, and Distribution* (Verduyn Cichlids, 1996), 19.

108 This is also true for the tilapia species within the lake. However, for our purposes we focus on *enkejje*. For a discussion of the reproductive strategies of these larger cichlids see: Fryer and Iles, *The Cichlid Species of the Great Lakes of Africa*.

movement of the body.”¹⁰⁹ These physical abilities usually translate into a given male *enkejeje*'s proficiencies in building or locating a safe and sometimes spacious place for the couple to mate – a secure rock shelter or a comfortable sand bower. A female *enkejeje* will only release her eggs for males who have made adequate homes for themselves, even though she will ultimately only spend a short amount of time there. If she is enticed by a male *enkejeje*'s looks and behavior, but his 'home territory' is unimpressive, she is free to simply swim on to evaluate the next attractive male.



Figure 3-7: Male display: Pundamilia nyererei Anchor Island Male
From:<http://www.african-cichlid.com/NyerereiAnchor.htm>

109 Martine E. Maan et al., “Intraspecific Sexual Selection on a Speciation Trait, Male Coloration, in the Lake Victoria Cichlid *Pundamilia Nyererei*,” *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London. Series B: Biological Sciences* 271, no. 1556 (2004): 2447.

After a female *enkejje* decides that a given male is worth her precious eggs, she releases them onto the sand, rock, mud, or vegetal substrate according to her preferences, and immediately scoops them up into her mouth. Males with the most reproductive success have developed particularly attractive “pseudo-egg spots” on or near their anal fins, which encourage fertilization to occur. Aspiring *enkejje* mothers assume that these pseudo-eggs are their own, and try repeatedly to scoop these up too. As this happens, males release their sperm, ideally directly into the mouths of female *enkejje*. An aspiring mother's instincts are strong, and she will try several more times to pick up the male's false eggs. After convinced that she has all her eggs, the aspiring mother *enkejje* simply swims away. Because female *enkejje* are polygamous they may evaluate and visit several other males shortly after this initial mating event. If another male is found to be suitable, females will repeat their attempts to scoop up additional males' pseudo-egg spots, though will rarely release their previous fertilized eggs or release new ones for these subsequent males. This in turn, encourages an additional 'survival of the fittest' situation within her own mouth. Only the strongest semen survives.

Aspiring mother *enkejje* continue to hold their fertilized eggs within their mouth for several weeks, even a month while they transition into small hatchlings. These not yet fully “hatched” fish learn to swim first within the comparatively safe confines of their mothers' mouths.¹¹⁰ During this time she does not eat, she simply cannot risk making room in her mouth when brood is still so young. Soon, her eggs transform into small fry, and the members of her “brood” gain their bearings slowly and safely within the confines of her mouths. When her

¹¹⁰It is entirely possible that a mother *enkejje* will be eaten by a larger fish, or caught in a fish net while she is “holding.” If that does happen, mother *enkejje* will release her eggs abruptly, hopefully into the open water and not the belly of another fish, or the bottom of a boat.

young are large enough to begin swimming for themselves, she releases them into the water for brief periods of time. For another week or two, these new mothers guard their young, teaching them what to eat and how to find sheltered nooks between rocks or amongst roots of floating vegetation where they can safely rest and rejuvenate themselves. During this guarding period mother *enkejje* continue to make space in their mouths for their young, quickly scooping them up whenever a predator is lurking about. Still, not every young *enkejje* survives. Only those young with attentive mothers and those that closely follow their mother's guidance are able to find a space inside her mouth quickly enough will avoid predation. Eventually, a mother *enkejje* will release her young into the water for the last time. This period of care is naturally transformative. Young *enkejje* learn the skills required to survive, as well as receiving subtle guidance as to which mates they ought to be seeking out in the future.

It is this reproductive expertise, scientists argue, that has encouraged *enkejje* to develop the complex and continually dynamic bodily forms, food provisioning strategies, and potential habitats for which they are famous. Mouthbrooding fish in general demonstrate a degree of care for their eggs and small young that is virtually unrivaled in any other type of fish.¹¹¹ In so doing, they focus their energies on raising a small number of young well, rather than releasing as many eggs as possible in hopes that many survive. Female *enkejje* are polygamous, and may successfully mate with several males during the course of one spawning event.¹¹² Because

111 There are at least eight families of mouthbrooding fish out of a over 430 families of fish. Most of these families of mouthbrooding fish are paternal mouthbrooders, that is, it is the male that takes the traditional "mothering" role. Most species of cichlids, and all species identified in Lake Victoria are maternal mouthbrooders. Fabrice Duponchelle et al., "Parallel Life History Evolution in Mouthbrooding Cichlids from the African Great Lakes," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 105, no. 40 (2008): 15475–80.

112 Maan et al., "Intraspecific Sexual Selection on a Speciation Trait, Male Coloration, in the Lake Victoria Cichlid *Pundamilia nyererei*"; Marcel P. Haesler et al., "Female Mouthbrooders in Control of Pre-and Postmating Sexual Selection," *Behavioral Ecology* 22, no. 5 (2011): 1033–41.

females are the only half of a mating pair that invests their energies in raising their young, the genetic paternity of a given female *enkejje* is relatively unimportant in terms of which kind of mate she will seek out in the future to fertilize her own eggs. It is the abilities of a mother *enkejje* to care for her young, as well as her young's abilities to follow her social cues that ultimately matter to the future reproductive choices of her daughters. These behaviors are influenced by biological traits inherited genetically to varying degrees, however, recent studies show that early learning in the "fry" stage of a cichlid's life has a significant effect on the mating preferences of Lake Victoria's female cichlid fish.

Verzijden and Cate, for example, conducted a cross-fostering experiment with two species of Lake Victoria's cichlids. They selected pairs of brooding females that had spawned several days apart, "gently forced" these fish to spit out their eggs, and transferred their eggs into the mouth of the other brooding female. Under these experimental conditions, brooding females fostered the eggs of another female in their mouths into the fry stage for three to four weeks, after which they released their fostered fry to begin foraging for themselves, though continued to guard them for another three weeks. By tracking the mating preferences of female fish raised by these foster mothers, Verzijden and Cate found that fostered females preferred to mate with males that resembled their foster mothers, whether or not their foster mothers were of the same species of fish. Their experiment provides the first strong evidence for cichlids, and for fish more generally, that females prefer to mate with males that resemble the coloration and olfactory cues learned from their mothers.¹¹³

¹¹³ Machteld N. Verzijden and Carel ten Cate, "Early Learning Influences Species Assortative Mating Preferences in Lake Victoria Cichlid Fish," *Biology Letters* 3, no. 2 (2007): 135. It is unclear, however, exactly how this imprinting occurs, though visual and olfactory cues are most certainly at play. *Ibid.*, 136.

Enkejje provided lake's historic human residents with a consistent source of protein, essential vitamins, and fascinating material with which to develop a flexible symbolic repertoire for contemplating the most fundamental aspects of human experience – life and death, and poverty and prosperity. Though *enkejje* can now be substituted with another similar tribe of fish to cure diseases like measles — only *enkejje* are able to be boiled into the “special thick soup” able to prove whether young children rightfully belong to the families into which their mothers and fathers claim they do. Before examining the use of this “special this soup” further in Chapter Six, Chapter Five reexamines the early 1900s sleeping sickness epidemic in Uganda in light of what we have just learned about historical fishwork.

Chapter Four
“Our Lake Victoria was called Nalubaale. The British thought we were dumb and called it after their Queen”¹

The first thing I noticed about Uganda was the comforting texture of the air. It was dark, just before midnight on June 2, 2007 when I stepped out of the stale cabin of the Airbus A330 onto the freshly paved runway of the Entebbe International Airport. I could not see much, though the subtle scents of wood turning to ash and the warm lake breeze felt familiar. They filled me with the tempered excitement that similarly encircled the mid-summer campfires my cousins and I once built with our grandparents on the shores of Lake Erie. Uganda did not feel strange.

Until the next morning, as I moved around downtown Kampala, and saw several groups of people walking together dressed in long white robes. Some were carrying wooden crosses as large as those that Jesus Christ may have carried; others had large red cloth crosses sewn onto the backs of their robes; they were religious pilgrims on their way to honor Uganda’s Christian Martyrs, for Martyrs’ Day.²

Martyrs' Day is held each June 3rd in Namugongo, a town about ten miles northeast of Kampala, in remembrance of the religious persecution and execution of the first Christian converts in what would soon become Uganda. Or so the story goes. Conventional narratives about Martyrs’ Day state that between 1885 and 1887, the then King of Buganda, Kabaka

¹Quotation from: Mandy Bjordal-Louis, *Where Do We Belong?* (Nairobi, Kenya: M. Bjordal-Louis, 2000), 27.

² Martyr’s Day is one of several religious holidays observed with public holidays in Uganda, including Good Friday, Easter Monday, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Christmas.

Mwanga, ordered the execution of at least forty-five young page boys in his court for refusing to return to their traditional religion and renounce their newly adopted Christian faiths. This is not entirely false, but it is not entirely true either.

When these acts of Christian conversion are situated within, at the very least, a previous decade of increasingly intimate contact between groups of inter-continental outsiders and King Mwanga's subjects, advisors, and rivals, particularly those living on and between the many islands that fringe the lake's northern shores – the continued celebration of Uganda's Martyrs becomes more than a symbol of beneficent Christian light continuing to shine down upon a once dark continent. It offers a window for reopening critical questions about the natures of these historical struggles so long ago.

Some accounts of Martyrs' Day stress that "besides...the ever-present anxieties created for any independent African monarch by European imperialist penetration, there was the sexual issue," to use Michael Twaddle's playful turn of phrase.³ That is, it may have been King Mwanga's apparent "addiction to sodomy" that was "the immediate issue" inspiring him to order these executions.⁴ In addition to defying King Mwanga's orders to stop consorting with Catholic and Protestant missionaries who were already destabilizing the moral and material foundations of King Mwanga's authorities and those of his advisors, (which included a number of influential royal women, some of whom, were also called King, and a number of female mediums speaking on behalf of the region's ancestors, one whom was also called King), these now-martyrs had also purportedly refused to succumb to the Mwanga's sexual advances. This

³ Twaddle, "The Emergence of Politico-Religious Groupings," 85.

⁴ John A. Rowe, "The Purge of Christians at Mwanga's Court," *The Journal of African History* 5, no. 01 (1964): 62-63.

sexual preference, or so the story goes, was introduced by Islamic traders who had become regular guests in Mwangi's court. But this too, as we shall see, was only part of the story.

Whether or not Mwangi's sexual preferences offer a challenge to contemporary interpretations of proper sexuality in Uganda (specifically the "foreignness" and "illegality" of homosexuality there), it is clear that Martyrs' Day as currently conceived and celebrated marks coastal Uganda as a space of international and intercultural convergence. What this celebration obscures, however, is centrality of women to social change, specifically the inclusion of outsiders into the cosmopolitan communities that once formed and still form at the littoral.

This chapter reexamines these histories of early colonial contact. By focusing on the consolidation of multiplicity and the submersion of more fluid forms of gendered authority, this chapter demonstrates that narratives about Christian salvation and the practice of early ethnographic scholarship have submerged histories of feminine authority expressed in figures like Kabaka Mukasa, the simultaneously male and female King of the Lake.

Fluid Gender and the Littoral Culture of Belonging

Multiple forms of authority and fluid notions of gender shape the littoral cultural of belonging. As ethnomusicologist Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamusuza has argued for landed-Baganda, "not every female is a woman and not all males are men."⁵ Gender, that is, the socially mediated meanings ascribed to particular biological sexes, is both relational and situational. Nannyonga-Tamusuza describes the ways in which class differences between royalty and

⁵ Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamusuza, "Female-Men, Male-Women, and Others: Constructing and Negotiating Gender among the Baganda of Uganda," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 3, no. 2 (2009): 368.(Nannyonga-Tamusuza 2009, 368)

commoners shaped gendered notions of authority in Buganda. For Nannyonga-Tamusuza, everyone royal was considered male in relation to the peasantry. When peasants and royals were amongst themselves, however, Nannyonga-Tamusuza argues, the patriarchy was upheld.⁶ Although her analysis complicates the simple male/female bifurcation by incorporating analyses of class in relation to gender, by focusing on structure rather than process, Nannyonga-Tamusuza obscures important, perhaps genderless, periods of time in women's lives that characterize their transition from potential mother to potential ancestor. As we will see, there is no vernacular gendered distinction between male and female grandparents. Grandparents are known as *bajjajja* (pl., *jjajja*, sing.), the same term used to describe one's deceased ancestors.

Concerns over the degree of "state control" over women's reproductive lives and assumed polygynous marital relations motivate much of historian Nakanyike Musisi's work on gender in Buganda. Musisi, like many other scholars of pre-colonial Buganda, links the establishment of patriarchal control to the intensification of banana farming and the ensuing "politicization of clans as fraternal interest groups" through which non-kin could be excluded from access to land and livestock.⁷ Although she highlights the comparatively egalitarian nature of relations between men and women that characterized subsistence forms of provisioning, her commitments to "unveil[ing] the origins of the restrictive structures" that

6 Sylvia A. Nannyonga-Tamusuza, *Baakisimba: Gender in the Music and Dance of the Baganda People of Uganda, Current Research in Ethnomusicology* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

7 Nakanyike B. Musisi, "The Environment, Gender, and the Development of Unequal Relations in Buganda: A Historical Perspective," *Canadian Woman Studies* 13, no. 3 (1993): 55. See also: Conrad P. Kottak, "Ecological Variables in the Origin and Evolution of African States: The Buganda Example," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 14, no. 3 (1972): 351–80; Schoenbrun, "A Past Whose Time Has Come"; Hanson, *Landed Obligation*; Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*.

shape contemporary Baganda women's lives at the levels of royalty and clanship preempt conversations about historical and already existing forms of feminine and non-gendered authority and agency that feature within men and women's lives.

As Louis White has shown in her study of prostitution in the growing colonial city of Nairobi in the first half of the 20th Century, the illicit work of women often supported respectable purchases of property, land, and remittances to their families back home.⁸ This, White argues, transformed gender roles, generating pleasures and anxieties for men who were struggling to navigate the changing and increasingly isolating colonial labor economy. As Derek Peterson has demonstrated for eastern Africa more broadly, a crisis of gender relations in the late colonial period motivated the development of patriotic theory there. Men's anxieties over independent women like the urban women White describes, but also farmers, catechists and others, were at the core of eastern Africa's political history. They influenced the circulation of particular historical narratives, the formalization of customary practices into law, and the invention of traditions about the past all "in the name of the fatherland."⁹ Eastern Africa's post independence patriarchy exercised their bureaucratic authorities over the conjugal politics of men and women's domestic lives. In the process, what some feminist scholars have called Uganda's "domestic virtue model," was born.¹⁰ Though now considered a timeless facet of the region's past, this conventional historical wisdom has, in the words of Musisi, "aggressively

8 Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

9 Derek R. Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, C. 1935-1972* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 281.

10 Grace Bantebya Kyomuhendo and Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Women, Work & Domestic Virtue in Uganda, 1900-2003* (James Currey Publishers, 2006).

mobilized” Ugandan women to fight “centuries of discrimination and oppression.”¹¹

This chapter extends these insights into the historical narratives that circulate about littoral women in the contemporary period. These narratives – that women never fished, have always been subservient to men, and have only recently begun fighting for equality – are themselves products of historical managerial anxieties over land, labor, and moral authority in the early colonial period. It first reexamines histories of early contact between littoral residents and English speakers. I then describe the multiplicity of *Kabaka*, a vernacular term, a position of authority, and concept that is glossed in English as a male King. I then examine the early ethnographic and administrative construction of knowledge about the littoral and Buganda more generally and discuss its continued resonance in contemporary scholarship. Historical narratives of women’s oppression gain new traction in the contemporary period, as one justification for the seemingly progressive benefits of political stability and economic liberalization. As we have seen in Chapter Three and will see in Chapter Six and Seven, the discourse of women’s subservience to men obscures histories and contemporary realities of feminine authority and gendered complementarity that has long characterized, and indeed still characterizes fishwork in Uganda.

Early Contact and Littoral Mobility

Early visitors to Uganda were variously enamored and frustrated by the sheer size and complexity of this body of water. They were enamored because the Victoria Nyanza was so beautiful, and frustrated because it continually proved difficult to effectively navigate. Probably

¹¹ Nakanyike B. Musisi, *Transformations of Baganda Women: From the Earliest Times to the Demise of the Kingdom in 1966*, 1994, 1.

all of the earliest visitors to this lake experienced a number of embarrassing, and potentially deadly sequences of maritime mistakes. On the Victoria Nyanza, powerful storms, waterspouts, and dangerous currents seemed to arise without warning, as did flocks of birds, hippopotami, and crocodiles. These visitors often had a difficult time convincing powerful men to mobilize boats and labor to ferry them across the lake. The canoemen they managed to “hire” often failed to respond to their orders, and frequently deserted. With or without hired paddlers, their boats repeatedly crashed into rocks that they were not trained to see, ripping holes in their hulls and having to spend weeks on end repairing their vessels again and again—many of which were carried by African porters piece-by-piece all the way from England or Scotland by way of the Swahili coast.¹²

In 1874, the *New York Herald* and *The Daily Telegraph* sponsored Henry Morton Stanley to “complete Livingstone’s and Speke’s discoveries” of Central Africa. On March 8, 1875 Stanley embarked at Kageyi, near contemporary Mwanza in the *Lady Alice*, a cedar boat forty feet in length that “he had carried with him in sections from England.” It was the first “boat of a white man” ever launched on the body of water Stanley called the Victoria Nyanza. Eventually Stanley circumnavigated the lake in the *Lady Alice* along with a number of local vessels.¹³

Texts such as Headley’s 1886, *Great Explorations in the Wilds of Africa*, circulated widely, and offered compelling narratives of Stanley’s exploratory journeys. Including the following from a “private letter of Stanley’s, written to a friend while at Lake Victoria.” Headley quotes

¹²See for example MacKay’s struggles with “the Daisy” in: Harrison, A.M. Mackay, 37, 45–47, 62, 71, 80–81, 96.

Or, Gordon and Walker’s struggles with the Eleanor in: Tucker, *Eighteen Years in Uganda and East Africa*. New Edition., 15.

¹³ Albert R. Cook, *Uganda Memories, 1897-1940* (Uganda Society, 1945), 4–5.

the letter at length after noting that it “gives a domestic picture that is quite charming.”¹⁴

Come with me to my lodgings, now. I lodge in a hut a little inferior in size to the chief's. In it is stored the luggage of the expedition, which fills one-half. It is about six tons in weight, and consists of cloth, beads, wire, shells, ammunition, powder, barrels, portmanteaus [stiff leather trunks], iron trunks, photographic apparatus, scientific instruments, pontoons, sections of boat, etc., etc. The other half of the hut is my sleeping, dining and hall-room.¹⁵

Just outside of the door of my hut are about two dozen of my men sitting, squatted in a circle and stringing beads. A necklace of beads is each man's daily sum wherewith to buy food. I have now a little over one hundred and sixty men. Imagine one hundred and sixty necklaces given each day for the last three months in the aggregate the sum amounts to fourteen thousand necklaces in a year to fifty-eight thousand four hundred. A necklace of ordinary beads is cheap enough in the States, but the expense of carriage makes a necklace here equal to about twenty-five cents in value. For a necklace I can buy a chicken, or a peck of sweet potatoes, or half a peck of grain.¹⁶

After discussing relative value of cloth to livestock and food, he notes that his expedition was “divided into either squads, of twenty men each” “all armed with Snider’s percussion-lock muckiest.” With “a dozen or so of the most faithful” with “a brace of revolvers in addition to their other arms.” On “being compelled to kill the savages” Headley states that Stanley wrote:

14 Headley, *Great Explorations in the Wilds of Africa: Including Sir Samuel Baker’s Expedition, Lieut. Cameron’s “Across Africa,” and Henry M. Stanley’s “The Congo Free State.,”* 357.

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*, 358.

As God is my judge, I would prefer paying tribute, and making these savages friends rather than enemies. But some of these people are cursed with such delirious ferocity that we are compelled to defend ourselves. They attack in such numbers and so sudden, that our repeating rifles and Sniders have to be handled with such nervous rapidity as will force them back before we are forced to death; for if we allow them to come within forty yards, their spears are as fatal as bullets; their spears make fearful wounds, while their contemptible-looking arrows are as deadly weapons.¹⁷



Figure 4-1: "A Storm on the Victoria Nyanza" From: James Ronald Leslie Macdonald, *Soldiering and Surveying in British East Africa, 1891-1894* (Edward Arnold, 1897), btw 270 and 271.

¹⁷ Ibid., 359.



Figure 4-2: Wreck of the Dhow. From: Thomas O'Neill, *Sketches of African Scenery, from Zanzibar to the Victoria Nyanza: Being a Series of Coloured Lithographic Pictures, from Original Sketches by the Late Mr. Thomas O'Neill, of the Victoria Nyanza Mission of the Church Missionary Society* (Church Missionary House, 1878), between p 14 and 15.

In 1875, Stanley enlisted the services of a young man he called Magassa and sent him to the Ssesse islands to secure canoes for a journey to the eastern shores of the lake. Magassa returned to Stanley with a “graphic account of the dangers” he encountered there. The inhabitants of Ssesse, even with an order from Kabaka Mutesa, the then King of Son of Buganda, refused to donate boats and enroll themselves as paddlers for Stanley and declared that “they would rather be beheaded by the *Kabaka* than risk themselves on an endless voyage on the stormy sea.”¹⁸ The allegiances and obligations of littoral residents rested elsewhere, distributed amongst their families, communities, and larger polities – families, communities, and polities in which women played an active role in creating, guiding, and transforming alongside men. At

¹⁸Henry 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* (Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1880), 138.

the littoral, the pinnacle of authority did not rest with a single King, Chief, or male lineage head. Indeed, there was no single person or position of authority there. Instead knowledge and power were distributed amongst women and men who excelled at controlling the discursive and material conditions of abundance. Still, Stanley made the call to missionaries to come to Uganda. Both French speaking missionaries known as the “White Fathers” and English speaking missionaries with the Protestant Church Missionary Service answered his call.

Although the lake contained formidable dangers hidden just beneath the surface – namely rocks and hippopotami – the most substantial dangers were in plain sight, or at least would be as soon as foreign vessels landed at most potential resting places. Residents of the mainland and island shores of the lake often opposed the passage and landing of the earliest European travelers at the littoral. Smith and Wilson, the first members of the C.M.S. expedition to sail on the lake were in 1877 “assailed by a shower of stones and arrows. Smith was rendered almost blind by injuries from the stones, and Wilson's arm was pierced with an arrow.”¹⁹ The earliest travelers to the region were required to pursue the lake route to Uganda because it was the considered the only way to avoid the residents near the mainland shores, who were at times fiercely opposed to foreign travelers. And for good reason.

Most island and mainland shores were highly valued places to live, offering access to produce and protein from the land and sea, as well as relatively quick transport and trading opportunities. The residents that early European travelers encountered at the littoral were there to encounter in the first place because they had developed ways to successfully secure territorial control, including the forging of strategic alliances with communities on nearby and

¹⁹ Berry, Bishop Hannington and the Story of the Uganda Mission, 37.

distant shores to help maintain that control. Because it is comparatively easy to travel on the water and therefore encounter others traveling on the water, provided a vessel is well equipped with those familiar with the lake, historical littoral communities had developed defensive strategies unique to their particular surroundings.

Indeed, much of the early missionary zeal was inspired by what was perceived as extreme reactions to the violation of these littoral norms of mobility. Though Christianity and civilization offered the moral cover, the first party of missionaries to the lake consisted of "a sailor, clergyman, doctor, two engineers and two artisans."²⁰ In 1878, Lieutenant Shergold Smith and Mr. Thomas O'Neill were murdered on Ukerewe Island, the largest island in the lake.²¹ The littoral justification for their murders had everything to do with the sensible perception that if these particular men were allowed to continue bringing their own vessels to the lake, such as the steam launch Daisy that Shergold Smith brought over with him overland from the coast, or building large vessels from local materials like Smith and O'Neill were attempting to do on Ukerewe Island in the south, that more white men would follow and eventually take control over the land and water.

When Kings were Multiple and Women Were Sometimes Called Sir

In November 1884, Kabaka (King) Mwanga ascended to the throne of Buganda, and Europe's Imperial powers began their yearlong meeting in Berlin to negotiate the geographical particularities of Europe's ongoing "scramble for Africa." According to one travel writer,

²⁰ A. T. Matson, "The Instructions Issued in 1876 and 1878 to the Pioneer C.M.S. Parties to Karagwe and Uganda: Part I," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 12, no. 3 (January 1, 1981): 197.

²¹ CMS, "Reported Death of Lieut. Smith and Mr. O'Neill, April 1878," *The Church Missionary Intelligencer and Record: A Monthly Journal of Missionary Information*, 1878, 251.

“Great Britain...with her usual acumen got the choice morsels in the subdivision of Africa among the European powers.”²² Although Kabaka Mwanga, like his predecessor Kabaka Mutesa, served as the primary political interlocutor in conversations and more or less formal agreements and treaties with “foreign powers,” no single Kabaka ever served on his throne alone prior to the year 1900. As noted in Sarah Stock's *The Story of Uganda and the Victoria Nyanza Mission*:

Strange to stay [sic], it has been the custom for two women to bear the title of *kabaka*, as well as the king. These were the queen-mother (*namasole*), and the queen-sister (*lubuga*). The latter was chosen from among the princesses. The former was the king's own mother, or if she were no longer living, his aunt or some other female relative. The older female relatives of King Mtesa appear to have exercised no little degree of influence over him.²³

Kabaka is a royal title translated in English as “King,” implying a title belonging to a single man. This interpretation, however, is conceptually, indeed factually incorrect.

In 1885, the Mother of the Kabaka, the *Namasole*, was also called Kabaka. The Sister of the Kabaka, the *Lubuga*, was also called Kabaka. Mukasa, the Head God, or more appropriately, Guardian of the Lake, was called Kabaka too. All Kabaka had their own estates and networks of trusted advisors, liaisons, and supplicants, but also potential rivals.²⁴ All had obligations to those who lived with them to do their best to create the conditions for wellbeing, including generating adequate, ideally abundant, sustenance from vegetable and animal food (including fish), physical security, and meting out appropriate forms of justice, including death. In order to

²² Caroline Kirkland, *Some African Highways; a Journey of Two American Women to Uganda and the Transvaal*. (Boston: D. Estes & Company, 1908), 25.

²³ Sarah Geraldina Stock, *The Story of Uganda and the Victoria Nyanza Mission*, 3rd. Ed. (London: Church Missionary Society, 1899), 29.

²⁴ Kagwa, *Kitabo Kye Mpisa Za Baganda*; Baron Frederick John Dealtry Lugard, *The Story of the Uganda Protectorate* (H. Marshall & Son, 1900), 26.

simplify the elaboration of this multiplicity here, I retain the English translation of Kabaka as King, but specify to which King I am referring. That is, I refer to the male Kabaka as the King Son, the *Namasole* as the King Mother, and the *Lubuga* as the King Sister.

The King Mother's authoritative infrastructure was similar to the King Son's and was one "in which women predominate[d]."²⁵ Before the establishment of the so-called Uganda Protectorate Government, according to James Cunningham, administrator and lay ethnographer, the King Mother:

Had a very great influence in the government of the country. The King respected and feared her. He used to say that no one would dare to displease her. She was by right the head of the witches, and rumor had it that she was very clever in preparing poisons.

Her banana plantations were the best kept in all Uganda, and when any of the great ones of the land visited her, she frequently imposed on him the task of planting a banana-tree in her garden, partly to show him how beautifully kept her plantations were, and partly to humble him, as a Muganda chief looks with loathing on all work in the fields.²⁶

The King Mother held the power to force (however delicately and elegantly) the most important men of the so-called Kingdom to labor in her gardens.²⁷ The King Sister was similarly "installed with great ceremony," literally alongside her "brother," the King Son, and "exercise[d] great power in the State, advising with...the three hereditary chiefs in the

²⁵ Lugard, *The Story of the Uganda Protectorate*, 26.

²⁶ James Frederick Cunningham, *Uganda and Its Peoples; Notes on the Protectorate of Uganda, Especially the Anthropology and Ethnology of Its Indigenous Races* (London: Hutchinson & Company, 1905), 184–185.

²⁷ The ability for King Mothers, or Queen Mothers as they are more often called, to mobilize labor in her service is not limited to Buganda. See for example: Susan Cook and Rebecca Hardin, "Performing Royalty in Contemporary Africa," *Cultural Anthropology* 28, no. 2 (2013): 227–51; Beverly J. Stoeltje, "Asante Queen Mothers," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 810, no. 1 (1997): 41–71; Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Rev. pbk. ed. (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1981); Agnes Akosua Aidoo, "Asante Queen Mothers in Government and Politics in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1977, 1–13.

[“King's”] cabinet.”²⁸ Although some scholars have argued that the Royal Sister had “direct political power, including power of life and death, over her subordinates, but she seems to have been otherwise fairly unimportant politically.”²⁹ This all depends on what we consider to be politics. Laurence Schiller rightly points out that the influence of the Royal Sister “probably varied widely with the strength of the occupant.”³⁰ Of course, the same should be said about any of the multiple kings here. The King Sister in office during the wars of administrative conquest in the early 1890s appears to have been particularly “strong.” She seized estates of “petty chiefs” on the ground that the land belonged to her predecessor during the previous King Son’s reign. According to Frederick Lugard, emissary of the British East Africa Company and the Maxim Gun, because the King Sister was closely affiliated with the islands, and because the islands were considered to be closely affiliated with the French Catholic missionaries, this seizure provided “proofs of the intolerance of the Wa-Fransa,” those aligned with the French Catholics and not the British Protestants, rather than proof of the political authority of women as kings.³¹

The position of the King Sister was similarly found in the families of commoners. When any man or woman died, their position and property was inherited by their sons and daughters (who were not always necessarily their biological children). No son could succeed his father or uncle without a Lubuga at his side. When women of high position – those with large productive banana gardens and widespread alliances and obligations – died, she too was

²⁸ Lugard, *The Story of the Uganda Protectorate*, 26.

²⁹ Laurence D Schiller, “The Royal Women of Buganda,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 23, no. 3 (1990): 463.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 464.

³¹ Lugard, *The Story of the Uganda Protectorate*, 143.

succeeded by a daughter (that was not always her biological daughter), and that daughter too had her own Lubuga.

In recognition of the multiplicity of Kabaka, prior to the codification of singularity here, every chief was “obliged after any promotion” to offer their most sincere appreciation in person to the King Mother, King Sister, and King Son and then finally to the guardians of the shrines of the previous King Son.³² The ancestral Guardians of deceased royal authority were represented by multiple generations of women in formal positions of power, as well as by the living King Son and the women who guarded the spirit of deceased Kabaka. These institutions and locations, glossed in English as “Jawbone Shrines,” were particularly anathema to the epistemological and material conditions of governance that the Uganda Protectorate Government worked to establish – indeed, beginning with the death of Kabaka Mwanga, all former Kings would be buried in a single shrine with their jawbones intact, and not their own. Their feminine Guardians would gradually be dispossessed of their rights to land, lineage, and authority that previously accompanied their positions as widows of powerful men.

It might have been impossible for English-speakers to imagine a modern civilization within which women wielded as much, if not more, formal authority as men did. After all, women in England’s United Kingdom were not able to legally own property there until 1870, and could not do so much as vote until 1918.³³ If women held positions of power, these men of the cloth and the gun argued, it was because they were “degraded heathen[s]” to whom these white men, but also women, were obligated to “raise...from a state of ignorance, darkness, and

³² Ashe, *Two Kings of Uganda*, 109.

³³ And even then they had to be over thirty years of age and legally own property, to have close affiliations with a university.

sin to righteousness and to God.”³⁴

The English title King implies singularity. Kabaka, however, are multiple. In addition to the King Mother, King Sister, King Son, and their Guardians, littoral residents recognized a fourth king – Kabaka Mukasa – the most influential figure of the island-based guardians of the lake, or *Nalubaale*. Kabaka Mukasa is a composite figure that presided over a cosmopolitan assemblage of interconnected island and mainland littorals when the first European visitors set foot along the shoreline, and to a lesser degree still does today. According to historian David Schoenbrun, “the relations between fertility (especially that of women), iron, water (rain, rivers, and lakes) and fish as food, expressed in the figure of Mukasa, could well represent some of the fundamental practices of survival and conditions of abundance that characterized those ancestral communities...so long ago.”³⁵

To complicate things even further, Kabaka Mukasa was a position shared by at least two people – a female medium who issued sacred but practical guidance on behalf of the ancestors and a male priest responsible for ensuring that the ancestors could continue to speak through her. Notions of this gendered double were widely recognized all around Mukasa’s watery domain. Mukasa’s estates, much like those of the other three Kabaka were multiple, though Mukasa’s encircled the entire lake, not simply along the northwestern shores where the Buganda “Kingdom” was located. This is to say very little about the Ssekabaka, the deceased Kabaka, who all had at least one estate where women lived, dwelling there to keep the memories of their deceased Kabaka alive.

³⁴ Lloyd, In Dwarf Land and Cannibal Country: A Record of Travel and Discovery in Central Africa, 27.

³⁵ David Lee 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, 1998), 207.

Residents from diverse food provisioning traditions and artisanal specializations converged within Kabaka Mukasa's amphibious estates. Mukasa, if properly placated, was known for offering abundant catches of fish, safe lake transport, rain to quench the thirst of growing agricultural crops, and healthy children in general, and twins in particular.³⁶

According to James Cunningham, a colonial administrator and lay ethnographer:

Mukasa...was the great, great goddess, and there is not the least doubt that her priests exercised extraordinary power. Tradition is voluminous in regard to Mukasa. It is said that she did the impossible – had only one husband – and had miraculous powers. She could bind the raging lake. She could kill or cure kings. She could make rain, or draw a tooth. Nothing was too big or too little for her. Mockers there were, but she taught them at the dearest of all schools – experience.³⁷

Mukasa simultaneously offered protection from and justification for the largely unpredictable harms that were possible at the littoral – including waterspouts, lightning, dangerous childbirth, infertility, and prolonged drought. Through sophisticated techniques of communication, transportation, artisanal production, trade, and food provisioning, Kabaka Mukasa and their subjects worked to create the everyday conditions of wellbeing and eventful moments of abundance that made the shoreline such an attractive place to live.³⁸

According to Cunningham:

³⁶It is an interesting coincidence that in 1903, Sir Harry Johnston, the architect of the 1900 Uganda Agreement which formally dispossessed Mukasa of all land and lake territory, “was rendered anxious and unhappy” when his wife “had an unexpected fall, which brought on the premature delivery of twins, who died soon after their birth.” Harry Hamilton Johnston, *The Story of My Life* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1923), 360.

Whether or not Johnston believed in the powers of Mukasa, especially Mukasa’s associations with the healthy birth of twins, it was clear that the Johnston’s had not won Mukasa’s favor.

³⁷ Cunningham, *Uganda and Its Peoples*, 79.

³⁸As David Schoenbrun suggests, “Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, a Good Place*, 207.

Even the sneering Arab who attempted to cross the lake with a cargo of ivory from Mutesa's court without consulting Mukasa would be soon made to repent his rashness: Mukasa's priests had numerous fanatics in her service, and they would sweep the lake in small rafts and canoes, with lighted brands and hideous howling, and the sailors in the service of the mocker were soon put to flight.³⁹

The co-existence of multiple kings, and especially the existence of *at least two-and-a-half female kings to every male one*, confounded the particularly patriarchal sensibilities of early English-speaking explorers and later colonial administrators. Gender in late 1880s Buganda did not correspond to biological sex, though this did not stop English speakers from applying their notions of biological sex to these ambiguously and flexibly gendered figures. For example, Cunningham noted: "The sex of Mukasa is not very certain; some legends make the god feminine, some masculine."⁴⁰

³⁹ Cunningham, *Uganda and Its Peoples*, 80.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 79 fn1.



Figure 4-3: “The Goddess Mukasa and Her Court” From Cunningham 1905, p 75.

Still, he offered a photograph of “Mukasa and her Court” in his 1905 text, reproduced in Figure 4-3. These local forms of feminine action, thought, and being in the world reflected in these multiple Kabaka were too complex for English-speaking men and women to comprehend. Indeed much of this complexity was intentionally concealed from these white-skinned people who volunteered their military, missionary, and medical expertise towards the purported emancipation of central Africa from slavery. With guns in their hands and the holy book of their ‘Father, Son, and Holy Ghost’ tucked under their arms, Europeans coerced African men

and some women to carry their possessions for hundreds and hundreds of miles, and for months on end – from the Swahili coast to the shores of the lake they called Victoria, and back again – ostensibly to liberate Africans from similarly exploitative forms of labor. Many Europeans did not consider most African men to be men at all: they were simply boys. This made it easier to avoid the potential moral complications of the colonial project itself.

English speakers at the time held no point of reference for an ordering of the world that did not place them at the evolutionary pinnacle of a linear trajectory of progress. Though they perceived themselves at the very height of civilization from which they were able to see and shape the truths supposedly hidden from the rest of the world, they often referenced themselves as carrying the rest of the world on their backs. This, they argued, was “the white man’s burden.”⁴¹

As noted by Mandy Bjordal-Louis, a great-granddaughter of King Mwanga, her “Grandma did not have to kneel before anyone, except the Kabaka, because she was a *Mumbejja*, Princess. Men knelt before her and called her *Ssebo*, Sir.”⁴² While I have not met any official Princesses of the Buganda Kingdom at the contemporary littoral, I have met a number of well respected and sometimes very wealthy women who work with fish who are also called *Ssebo* – Sir, or *Mwami* – a landlord, or chief.

Bjordal-Louis recounts that her grandmother taught her “folks songs of historic importance,” she describes that:

⁴¹ See for example the Preface to a 1899 text written by the President of the Church Missionary Society which notes that the author of the primary text has been “bearing his share of ‘the white man’s burden’ of ruling, civilizing, and Christianising the ‘silent peoples’ of whom John Bull [personification of Great Britain in general] carries no less than 350 millions on his back.” Lloyd, In Dwarf Land and Cannibal Country: A Record of Travel and Discovery in Central Africa, 7.

⁴² Bjordal-Louis, *Where Do We Belong?*, 13.

We had a harp and a bow lyre, *enanga*, before the age of gramophones or radios. One of the songs that we learnt was about the Battle of Ssesse. Grandma told us how, many many years ago, Buganda had several gods. There lived goddesses called Natwoga and Nakimu. The latter was the wife of Mukasa who was a god known as Lubaale. Therefore, our Lake Victoria was called Nalubaale.

Quoting her grandmother directly she notes: “the British thought we were dumb and called it [the Nalubaale] after their Queen,’ complained Grandma”.⁴³ Despite the visibility of Mukasa’s female form throughout the early colonial period, in recent years Mukasa – the giver of children, fish and so much – is conceived of by feminist scholars, particularly those studying fisheries, as “a woman-hating god of the lake.”⁴⁴ This, I argue, is because these scholars are studying Lake Victoria, and not Nyanja.

According to administrators of the colonial government, conflicts such as the 1890 battle of Ssesse, events which royal women once taught their granddaughters songs about, illustrated “how inextricably religion and politics are interwoven in this country. That the missionaries, on both sides [Catholic and Francophone, and Protestant and Anglophone] are their veritable political leaders of their respective factions, there can be no doubt whatever.”⁴⁵ And yet, in the millennium that followed, the political transformations that Uganda's Martyrs initially represented have all but been forgotten. Historical time was reset. New origin stories started to circulate.

⁴³ Ibid., 27.

⁴⁴ Pratt, “Women Who Eat Men’s Money: Ecology, Culture, Gender Relations, and the Fishing Economy on the Western Shore of Lake Victoria,” 235, but also Chapters 4 and 5.

⁴⁵ Gerald Herbert Portal, Further Reports Relating to Uganda No. 1., Africa (London: Her Majesty’s Government, 1893), 13.



Figure 4-4: "The White (?) Man's Burden." Excerpted from the March 16, 1899 cover of *Life Magazine*. Wm. H. Walker, "The White (?) Man's Burden." Illustration, *Life* 33, March 16, 1899.

This pre-Victorian amnesia has seeped its way into contemporary popular opinion. In response to a recent article on Martyrs' Day published in the online version of *The Uganda Observer*, one commenter exclaimed, "I am glad I am Ugandan, I can see now my roots, Halleluiah, Amen and Amen." Another considered the Martyrs to represent "such savage murder by the state of Buganda," and that "up to now such savage murders by the new Ugandan state and by individuals continue to this day. Some of these mass murders are categorized as genocide, massacres, or selective official capital punishment."⁴⁶ The historical narratives of the late 1800s offer sources of comparison, illustrating continuity between the

⁴⁶ What You Did Not Know about Uganda Martyrs," *The Observer*, 2013, June 3, 2013 edition, sec. News, http://www.observer.ug/index.php?option=com_content&id=25649:what-you-did-not-know-about-uganda-martyrs&catid=34:news&Itemid=114.

past and the present. The seemingly backwards brutality of a primitive king, serves a metaphor for the conduct of the contemporary Ugandan government.

The only comment inspiring a direct response was the following: “These so-called martyrs were rebels of Buganda and should be treated as so.” Those who would become martyrs were colluding with outsiders who sought to shift the conceptual foundations of the nature of existence in order to usher in new forms of accumulation and governance – of souls, taxpayers, and students.

In reply to this rebel comment, one reader issued the last word:

Only a pagan or heathen would make such a comment. That the martyrs are remembered for making the ultimate sacrifice shows Baganda have come out of darkness into the truth of the gospel light. The blood of the martyrs is precious to the Lord and His children.

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and loved not their lives unto death. Revelation 12:11,⁴⁷

After this reply, the comment section was closed. The final conclusion seemed to have been reached; “only a pagan or heathen” would see the Martyrs as anything less than heroes, the early Christian founders of modern Uganda.

Residents of Kigungu, the largest fish landing site on the Entebbe Peninsula, still tell their own story of the arrival of the Catholic White Fathers along their shores in 1879. ‘Just before those White Fathers landed, their boat hit a rock that was hidden under the water, there [pointing], not far from shore. Their boat started sinking. So, our jjajja's [ancestors] went into the water to save them.’

⁴⁷ P Baike, “What You Did Not Know about Uganda Martyrs,” The Observer, 2013, June 3, 2013 edition, sec. News, http://www.observer.ug/index.php?option=com_content&id=25649:what-you-did-not-know-about-uganda-martyrs&catid=34:news&Itemid=114.



Figure 4-5: Left: Kigungu Featuring Church and Airplane. Right: Memorial Statue for Fr. Lourdel and Brother Amans of the Catholic White Fathers

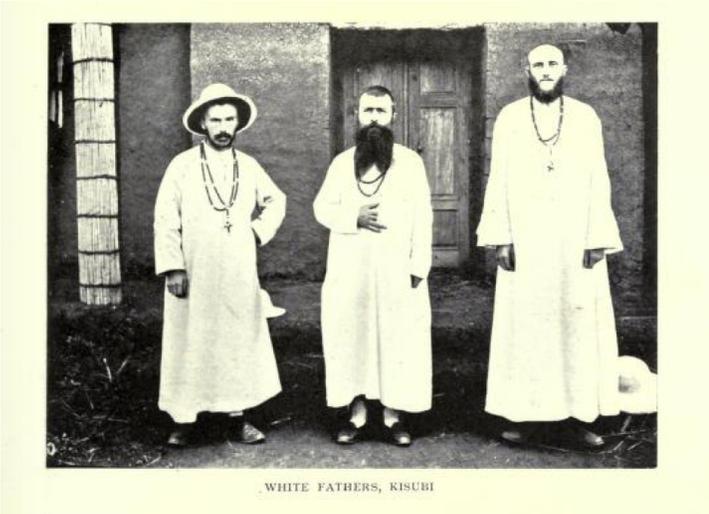


Figure 4-6: A Few White Fathers (Cunningham 1905, 153)

There is still a statue of these two men, Friar Lourdel and Brother Amans, depicting them kneeling with their arms outstretched along Kigungu’s littoral, marking the separation between the inshore water and Kigungu’s large Catholic church. A yearly commemoration of this event is still held each February 17th in Kigungu, though the dominant narrative that

circulated about this historical rescue is reversed.⁴⁸ Those without living memories of Kigungu's past encounters with the White Fathers recount that it was the White Fathers who had saved the residents of Buganda from their formerly heathen ways, rather than residents of Kigungu saving the White Fathers from drowning and even possibly death.

Still, remembrance of this "coming out of darkness into the truth of the gospel light" continues to motivate Christians of multiple genres, nationalities, and situations to make the variously long pilgrimage to Kampala each Martyrs' Day. Even Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, the then head of the worldwide Anglican Communion, have all travelled to Uganda in observance of Uganda's Martyrs' Day.

Most who make the journey to Kampala each June 3rd live much less glamorous lives. Many Martyrs' Day pilgrims are Ugandan farmers taking a break from tending their matooke (large, green bananas that comprise the major traditional staple food there), cassava, sweet potatoes, yams, groundnuts, beans, tomatoes, and onions to reaffirm their commitments to Christ. Despite over one hundred years of promises of material and educational progress that accompanied Christianity's import and uptake in Buganda, most Baganda farmers live quite similarly to those who came before – though they may have iron sheets on their homes instead of a carefully thatched roof, almost all farming is still done by hand, and most of their produce is consumed within their homes. Though many have attended primary school, few have the financial support to access the kinds of educational opportunities that allow one to obtain "formal employment."

Most Ugandans do not specifically celebrate Martyrs' Day. However, because Martyrs'

⁴⁸ I attended this commemoration in 2012.

Day is a public holiday, government, non-profit, and most private offices are closed. Regardless of their religious affiliations, those with formal employment usually have the day off. Most littoral residents spend the day how their ancestors may have so long ago; visiting family and friends, relaxing at home, at a bar, or at the littoral, working with and eating fish. Here multiple Uganda's begin to come into view -- the Uganda that was reshaped by the submersion of littoral histories of knowledge, authority, and morality through the promotion of Christianity and colonial governance. And, the one that refuses to be submerged -- the convivial Uganda, where residents still manage to meet most of their needs and aspirations together, seemingly against all odds.

Anyone fortunate enough to visit one of the many newly developed beaches that skirt Uganda's southern coastline on Martyrs' Day, or any other day, may catch a glimpse of a very different kind of ancient littoral authority that European missionaries and administrator and Kiganda Christian Chiefs worked so hard to dethrone around the turn of the 20th Century -- the assemblage of islands and island authorities formerly widely known as *Nalubaale*, presided over by a composite figure known as Mukasa -- a figure still referred to as a Kabaka or King by some littoral residents.

When visitors to the islands travel in the style of Ugandan elites or elite international tourists, perhaps traveling to Ngamba Island Chimpanzee Sanctuary on a speed boat, or to an exclusive resort on Bulago Island in a small private airplane, they travel over water and island lands that have long composed, and to a lesser degree still do compose, archipelagos of communication, transportation, healing, and trade that connect islands to each other, and the islands to the mainland. Before Ngamba and Bulago were turned into tourist destinations, they

were both productive fishing islands, though in recent years, all fishworkers have been “removed.”

Ethnohistorical Scholarship and the Codification of Political Singularity

Anyone can rule a country who has a sufficient force at his disposal, but he alone who understands the people, their customs, manners, and ambitions, can govern them successfully.⁴⁹

In 1897, Daudi Chwa, a son of Mwanga’s ascended to the throne of Buganda as King, in large part, through to the heavy lifting of the colonial government. He was less than one year old. King Chwa would remain a boy without formal governing rights for another seventeen years. Much of the work of governing Buganda in the early years of colonial rule was conducted by three regents, Stanslas Mugwanya, Zaakaria Kisingiri, and Apollo Kaggwa, who gained their authority through their close associations with the emerging colonial state.

Few Baganda elites would have been more aware of the strategic linkages between ethno-historical scholarship and governance than Apollo Kaggwa, who, as Prime Minister to the child King, exercised considerable authority over the codification of Baganda cultural tradition and indirect colonial rule. Beginning in 1889, Anglican missionary John Roscoe began interviewing landed Baganda chiefs alongside Kaggwa in response to the needs of the newly forming Protectorate Government and their own interests in exploring the ethnographic “Questions” that Sir James Frazer circulated “among missionaries, travelers, and others who have a first-hand knowledge of savage tribes.”⁵⁰ Though Roscoe collected some early notes on

⁴⁹ Cunningham, *Uganda and Its Peoples*, iix.

⁵⁰ James G. Frazer and T. V. Holmes, “Questions on the Manners, Customs, Religion, Superstitions, &c. of Uncivilized or Semi-Civilized Peoples,” *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 18 (1889): 431.

cultural practice prior to the 1900 Agreement, as he noted in his 1900 letter to Frazer, “all of what was so very interesting is being swept away at one stroke by the Government in the name of civilization.” Indeed, these civilizing efforts frustrated Roscoe’s efforts towards scholarly accuracy, as it was difficult for him to receive any assistance from his informants “owing to all the chiefs being busy framing new laws.”⁵¹

The laws Roscoe referenced were in relation to the 1900 Buganda Agreement, which outlined the terms of British-led colonial governance in what would become Uganda. This Agreement simultaneously expanded and solidified the territorial boundaries of the Buganda Kingdom and created the conditions under which the Baganda as ethnographic object emerged. This included the addition of all of the lake's islands into the Buganda Kingdom, whether or not these islanders saw themselves as subjects of Buganda’s King. Indeed, these texts suggested much evidence to the contrary. For example, according to Kaggwa, Chiefs from the Ssesse islands of Bukasa, Bugala, Bwendero, Kome, Buyovu, Bubembe, and Funve did not visit the royal court of the king because “history shows that these chiefs were originally as much rulers as the king himself.”⁵² These alternative royals used to wear “brass rings” (probably copper) on their legs and “several hair crests on their heads” to distinguish themselves from those affiliated with the mainland Baganda King. According to Kaggwa, these “feudal chiefs” suffered violently from the late 17th century onwards, though in the mid-1800s Kabaka Mutesa “abolished this custom” of persecuting these alternative royals and “advised them to visit his court and guaranteed their positions.”

A number of Chiefs, particularly those from Ssesse and those on the mainland closely

⁵¹ Roscoe, “Notes on the Manners and Customs of the Baganda,” 117.

⁵² Kaggwa, *Kitabo Kye Mpisa Za Baganda*, 86–87.

affiliated with Ssesse, “were not satisfied” and “continued wearing the brass rings on their legs...even up to the present time.”⁵³ Although these Chiefs no longer wear brass rings or hair crests up to the present day, some do maintain their claims to royalty, including one lesser known leader of the Kakoboza branch of the Mamba Clan, who still presides over land “for the purposes of culture” at the littoral, just beyond the runway of the Entebbe International Airport. Although this cultural leader has hosted the current King, he does not physically bow before him.

Their foundational texts, *The Baganda: An Account of their Native Customs and Beliefs*⁵⁴ and *Ekitabo kye mpisa za Baganda*,⁵⁵ still anchor much historical and ethnographic scholarship on Baganda culture, though in more recent historical and ethnographic work, these texts are treated more carefully as historical artifacts of intercultural convergence than they are collections of pure ethnographic truth (as if there ever was such a thing).⁵⁶ Indeed, early on in his anthropological endeavors, Roscoe realized that even his most trusted informants would “allow some important thing to pass over and thus give the wrong impressions,” a challenge that remains central to ethnographic fieldwork – data collected is always simultaneously filtered through the eyes, experiences, and aspirations of informants and researchers.⁵⁷

As May Mandelbaum Edel notes in her preface to the most widely circulated English translation of Kaggwa’s seminal text, because Kaggwa was an active protestant on good terms with the Church, it would have been “an extremely jeopardous undertaking” for him to reveal

⁵³ Ibid., 87.

⁵⁴ Roscoe, *The Baganda*.

⁵⁵ Kagwa, *Kitabo Kye Mpisa Za Baganda*.

⁵⁶ See for example: B. C. Ray, *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship in Buganda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁵⁷ Roscoe, “Notes on the Manners and Customs of the Baganda,” 117.

“too thorough an acquaintance — of the sort he undoubtedly possessed — with unorthodox faiths.”⁵⁸ Initially, Roscoe was told that the Baganda “had no such customs” on “the matter of the spirits.” And further, though he noted it strange, Roscoe reported: “women were ignored in all the old customs; they did not take part in any of the ceremonies, and only in the case of an aunt does the spirit seem to be feared.”⁵⁹ Roscoe's later work would do much to disprove these early accounts, particularly the reach of “the matter of the spirits,” these earliest accounts circulated widely amongst the European staff of the newly formed Protectorate government and had already done the conceptual work of severing women from the “field of religion,” just as they had been severed from the field of formal politics.⁶⁰

It was not simply Kaggwa's professed Christian faith that kept him from revealing a rich account of this vernacular “field” to Roscoe and readers of his own accounts.⁶¹ Recognizing the depth and reach of what was glossed as “religion” would have located significant territorial autonomy and moral authority within an assemblage of islands, and island women (both living and once living) that the 1900 Buganda Agreement intended to reign in. Kaggwa had already witnessed the powers of these women to challenge the King's authority by controlling lake travel and trade and mobilizing support for early anti-colonial struggles.

⁵⁸ Kagwa, *Kitabo Kye Mpisa Za Baganda*, 7.

⁵⁹ Roscoe, “Notes on the Manners and Customs of the Baganda,” 117.

⁶⁰ Kagwa, *Kitabo Kye Mpisa Za Baganda*, 7.

⁶¹ For a discussion of the particular problems associated with using the concept of religion to describe Baganda public-healing practices see: Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 17–19.



Figure 4-7: "Sese Canoes: The Little structure on the front of the canoe on the left is meant as a sunshade or screen for a European voyager." Cunningham 1905, p 81

Kaggwa was a young page in Ssekabaka Mutesa's court late 1879 when Mukasa's female medium declared an end to all canoe traffic on the Nyanja. Mukasa "tied" Nyanja to protect her subjects and voice the displeasure of littoral publics who found themselves increasingly subject to depredations of their food and labor to fuel trading, and even missionary expeditions on the lake.⁶²

The European's first mistake, according to Mukasa and their followers was bringing their own vessels overland to the body of water they called Victoria.⁶³ This violated a normative order of aquatic movement that required at least two things. First, vessels travelling

⁶² Kenny, "The Powers of Lake Victoria." Kenny, "Mutesa's Crime: Hubris and the Control of African Kings."

⁶³This egregious error was not limited to Europeans. Indeed, sometime in the early 1800s Kabaka Kamaanya was accused of provoking the "anger of Mukasa by having some canoes dragged over land to the river Nile, thus taking the god of the Lake on to the dry land." (Roscoe 1911, 226)

to Buganda had to travel in a clockwise direction around the lake.⁶⁴ As shown in Figure 4-6, vessels began their journey on the water around contemporary Mwanza, then travelled northwest past Bukoba and the Ssesse islands before landing in Buganda.

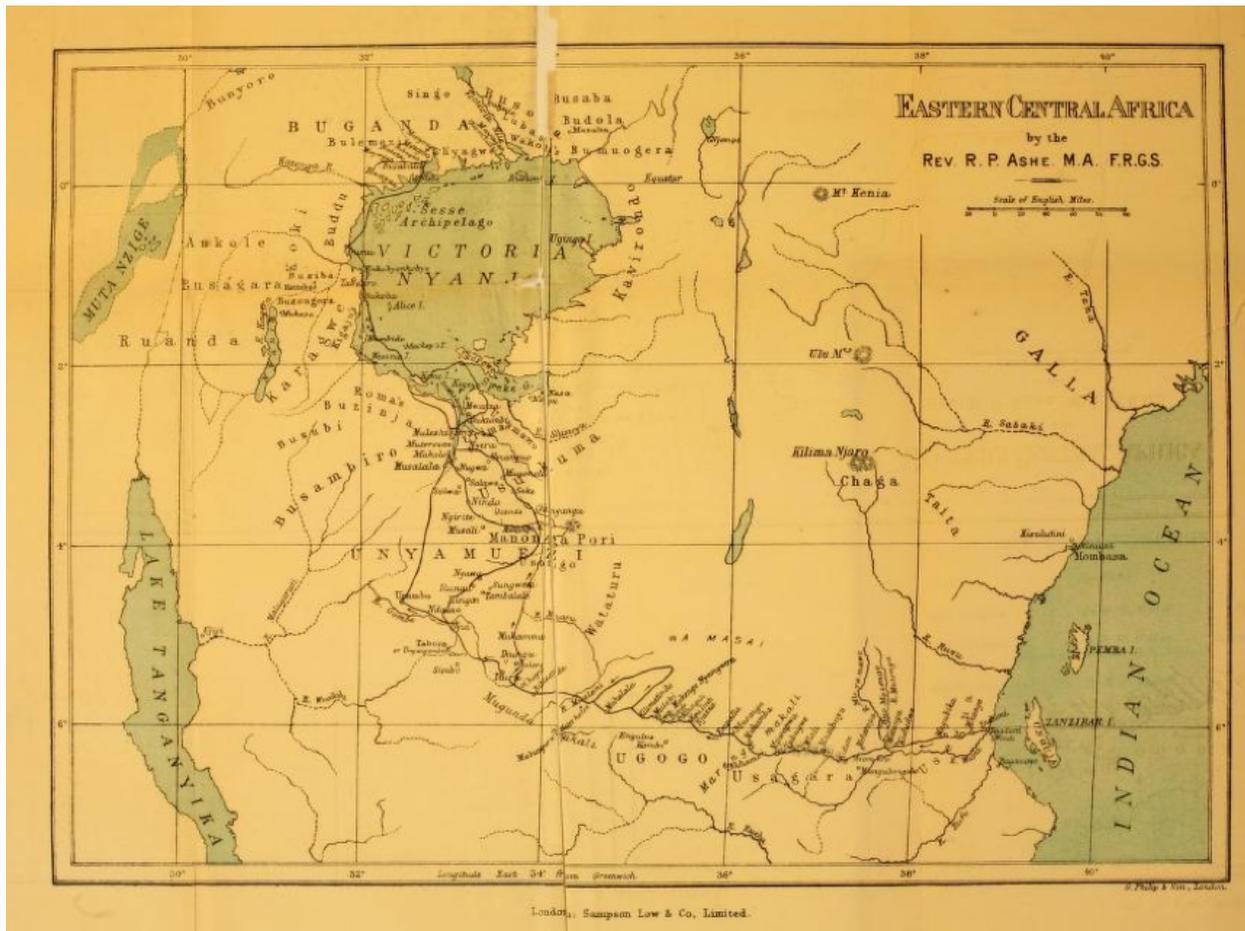


Figure 4-8: "Eastern Central Africa by the Rev. R.P. Ashe M.A. F.R.G.S. 1890" Tracing the Route of the C.M.S. Expedition.

Secondly, vessels moving on the water had to be conveyed by “those who divide the currents” (*bayawela jjengo*), or the “people who walk with their hands” (*abatambuza mikono*), that

⁶⁴ Until the end of the 1900s, “all trade from the coast to Uganda followed the southern route which led through Tanganyika and round the southern tip of Lake Victoria so as to avoid the Masai country.” Gunter Wagner, “The Abaluyia of Kavirondo (Kenya),” in *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples*, ed. Daryll Forde, International African Institute (Oxford University Press, 1960), 35 fn2.

is, men of the shoreline known for their exceptional paddling abilities.⁶⁵ Women also “took their places in a canoe as paddlers, when there was a shortage of men, and they kept pace with the men in paddling,” though women were not “hired out” as men were as paddlers for European expeditions.⁶⁶ This ensured that the Nalubaale sanctioned vessels and the people and goods that they moved within them for the “people of the lake” (*abalunnyanja*), and not in the interests of potentially powerful outsiders.⁶⁷ Indeed, before setting out on for a journey on the lake, the paddlers consulted Mukasa. Mukasa would grant blessings for safe travel, and presumably offer the latest news and advice in terms of the safest routes and to take and how to best conduct themselves on their journeys.⁶⁸

Those who travelled in the name of Mukasa on the water had to prove that they were “obedient and mighty,” to their own authorities, but they rarely subjected themselves to the whims and demands of outsiders. 'Those who part the waters' are skilled in reading the wind, waves, and sky to predict the likelihood of a potentially dangerous storm, and even then, sometimes storms caught paddlers by surprise. Europeans ostensibly leading these canoemen did not know these signs and were often frustrated when their “boys” were not ready to travel at their designated time. Frequently, the European leader of a journey forced boats to take off against the wishes and knowledge of their canoemen, only to have to race ashore again to avoid a rapidly approaching storm.

Powerful littoral authorities did lend their canoes and canoemen to influential outsiders when it suited them, though even then, canoemen did not always follow the orders of those who

⁶⁵ Zzibukulimbwa, “Ennyanja Nalubaale,” 6.

⁶⁶ Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 391.

⁶⁷ Zzibukulimbwa, “Ennyanja Nalubaale,” 6.

⁶⁸ Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 391.

hired them. These canoemen offered running commentary on events as they unfolded within and outside of the boats they paddled from, improvising innovative verses to accompany existing melodic forms sung while paddling and through their conversations with their contemporaries at the littoral. 'Those who divided the currents' viewed the earliest administrators of the Uganda Protectorate Government as "men without helpers, going up and down the lake."⁶⁹ Still, pioneering missionaries and early Christian converts managed to work both with and against littoral authorities to circulate new technologies of morality and governance, including bibles and Christian tracts, but also treaties, gifts, and guns that generated new opportunities for some, and deadly consequences for others.⁷⁰

Establishing administrative control over the littoral, and particularly the islands necessitated considerable armed conflict.⁷¹ Young men looking for assistance securing their futures amongst the transformations that accompanied the formal establishment of the Uganda Protectorate Government and the transformations in land ownership and governance that

69 Johnston, *The Uganda Protectorate*, 699.

70 For missionary accounts see: Mackay, "Boat Voyage along the Western Shores of Victoria Nyanza, from Uganda to Kageye; And Exploration of Jordans Nullah"; Harrison, A.M. Mackay; Hall, *Through My Spectacles in Uganda: Or the Story of a Fruitful Field*; F. E. R. Hall, "In Full and Glad Surrender": *The Story of the Life and Work of Martin J. Hall (C.M.S. Missionary in Uganda)* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1905); C. F. Harford, *Pilkington of Uganda* (Fleming H. Revell Company, 1899); Stock, *The Story of Uganda and the Victoria Nyanza Mission*; J. Cathcart. Wason, *East Africa and Uganda; Or, Our Last Land*. (London: Griffiths, 1905); Berry, *Bishop Hannington and the Story of the Uganda Mission*. For an analysis of the shifting moral terrain see: Nakanyike B. Musisi, "Morality as Identity: The Missionary Moral Agenda in Buganda, 1877–1945," *Journal of Religious History* 23, no. 1 (1999): 51–74. For accounts in an administrative vein see: Bentley and Lugard, *British East Africa and Uganda: A Historical Record Compiled from Captain Lugard's and Other Reports, with Map*; Macdonald, *Soldiering and Surveying in British East Africa, 1891-1894*; Johnston, *The Uganda Protectorate*; Johnston, *The Nile Quest; a Record of the Exploration of the Nile and Its Basin*; Cunningham, *Uganda and Its Peoples*; Great Britain Prepared by the Geographical section of the Naval Intelligence Division, Naval Staff, Admiralty, *A Handbook of the Uganda Protectorate* (London: H. M. Stationery off., 1920).

71 See for example: Bentley and Lugard, *British East Africa and Uganda: A Historical Record Compiled from Captain Lugard's and Other Reports, with Map*; Macdonald, *Soldiering and Surveying in British East Africa, 1891-1894*; Herbert Henry Austin, *With Macdonald in Uganda: A Narrative Account of the Uganda Mutiny and Macdonald Expedition in the Uganda Protectorate and the Territories to the North* (E. Arnold, 1903).

followed were increasingly enrolled in the colonial administrative conquests. While early canoe songs recorded by administrative officials seems to poke fun at these same administrators as “helpless men” and “barren animals,” others mark a transformation in authority and the ways of meeting young men's aspirations for marriage and adulthood.

Harry Johnston seems to take particular pride as being “responsible for adding one word to the Uganda vocabulary: 'mario' or 'mailo' (the English 'mile'),” as noted in the “Marriage Song” sung by canoemen below.⁷²

Weroboli
*Bwotya emundu olizimbarwa wompa malio**
Nkuloza ayisa omwenge ajagana
Abatalina nte mulinywaki
Mulimu atasiba nte
Balinywaki

Choose what you like.
If you are afraid of fighting (guns), where will you build!
If you give me an estate, I will think of you as one who distributes beer and swaggers.
You who have no cows, what will you drink? There are some who have no cows;
What will they drink?

In the canoe song above, canoemen linked their coming of age with obtaining land, livestock and presumably a wife as a result of their bravery fighting with guns for a new kind of authority.⁷³ That is, for with guns to obtain *malio* land – land considered legitimate, legible, and earned according to the terms established by the newly emerging colonial government. The land on which one of the primary family shrines that I visited throughout my extended fieldwork (and in May 2014) was earned this way. The men and women associated with this family land (biological kin, wives, husbands, friends, patients) consider themselves to be “real

⁷² Johnston, *The Uganda Protectorate*, 699.

⁷³ For a detailed study of changing land tenure arrangements in Buganda see: Hanson, *Landed Obligation*.

Baganda,” though they trace their ancestry to Luoland in Western Kenya.

The male ancestor remembered to have first settled there was from Nyang’oma, a village in Siaya District, in Western Kenya, which in recent years has gained notoriety as the ancestral homeland of Barack Obama. Only three or four generations ago, when the founding Jjajja (ancestor) of this family was a young man, he fought for the Buganda King. Because he was a great hunter and fighter, the King gave him land at Buwaya on the mainland (likely following the sleeping sickness outbreak). First, however, they were advised to go to Kome Island and consult the Jjajja’s there about how to best settle on the mainland. Although he was not from Buganda, he and his children intermarried and became members of the Mamba (Lungfish) clan. This is one of the largest clans in the Buganda Kingdom, a clan known for its fishing prowess, historical matrilineal forms of descent, and their littoral roots. The woman who first brought me there noted, ‘I am a sibling of the Mamba, my Ssenga (aunt) is Namubiru, and my younger sister is Nansubuga.’ For her, proof of her Mamba affiliations was established through other women, not her male ancestors. Still, she noted that the people of Kome did not get their land “in a good way.” There were many battles there, though unlike the comparatively better documented accounts for the Ssese and Buvuma Islands, Kome’s history is largely absent from written histories of Buganda. This, I argue, is partially a result of Kome’s submerged history of sleeping sickness that, as we will see in the following chapter, had as much to do with the assumption of new kinds of political control in Buganda and Uganda as it did with the disease known as sleeping sickness. In either case, according to one traveller’s account, Kome once had a “population of ten thousand before the sleeping sickness appeared; by

the time it was evacuated – the inhabitants did not number five hundred.”⁷⁴

Beyond the potential risks of conflict, large parties of visitors under the best of circumstances extracted significant resources from their hosts. The proper practice of hospitality required gifts of substantial quantities of meat, vegetables, chickens, eggs, beer, and so on for the duration of a party's stay, as well as for their journey forward. Hosting a traveling party of men like Henry Morton Stanley, an early explorer, occasional mercenary of Buganda and sensationalist journalist, required provisioning food for over one hundred and fifty people. Hospitality could take its toll on even the most prosperous communities. And that was when all went well.

In 1879, the King's mother and her followers urged the King to travel to the islands to meet with Mukasa to resolve this crisis, though he refused. The urgency of her prophecies required that Mukasa reverse a normative order within which the King humbled himself by visiting her on her island throne. The King Mother made a similar, though much less distant journey to her son's palace. This too was previously unheard of. The situation was serious.

Soon after, Mukasa traveled to the mainland with female mediums of the guardian spirits Nende and Kibuka, and spent considerable time in Entebbe, consulting with her contemporaries there about the changes unfurling around the lake. Later, Mukasa travelled closer to the King's court and stayed with the Gabunga, the admiral of the King's canoe fleet.⁷⁵ There she consulted with the King Mother, King Sister, and multiple Chiefs who were

⁷⁴ Norma Octavia Lorimer, *By the Waters of Africa: British East Africa, Uganda, and the Great Lakes* (Frederick A. Stokes, 1917), 83.

⁷⁵ This term Gabunga formerly referred to any “big man” and probably also “big woman” with a fleet of boats, though the consolidation of these multiple Gabunga into one through the work of “native administration” makes it difficult to know who Mukasa stayed with.

influential members of the King's court. Five months after closing the lake, Mukasa finally arrived before the King with hundreds of women in tow purportedly to divine the cause of an illness that the king was suffering from (missionaries reported that this illness was syphilis, though it is clear from Mukasa's prophesy that followed was about much more than his own physical and mental health).

Her arrival resulted in heated debates between King Mutesa and his Chiefs, and the newly arrived Protestant missionary Alexander MacKay. MacKay arrived in Buganda in late 1877 as a self-proclaimed "missionary of engineering."⁷⁶ He viewed his mission as bringing scientific progress to Buganda through Christianity, though was often frustrated that the King and his Chiefs spent more time asking him to repair their guns than they did asking him for spiritual guidance. Soon after his arrival, MacKay rebranded himself as "the Anti-Mukasa."⁷⁷ He took it upon himself to lecture the King Mutesa repeatedly against "witchcraft in every form, above all as manifested in such a being as Mukasa, the god (lubare) of the Nyanza."⁷⁸ For MacKay it was Mukasa who was causing "rebellion" and destabilizing the country, though Mukasa, perhaps obviously, had the opposite opinion. When King Mutesa confessed to MacKay that it was his mother and her friends who were the main supporters of the figures like Mukasa, MacKay challenged the King's masculinity, telling him that it 'appears there are now two kings in Uganda, and one of them is a woman.'

⁷⁶ Harrison, A.M. Mackay, 20.

⁷⁷ Taylor, *The Growth of the Church in Buganda*, 49. Stock, *The Story of Uganda and the Victoria Nyanza Mission*, 77.

⁷⁸ Harrison, A.M. Mackay, 139.(Harrison 1893, 139)

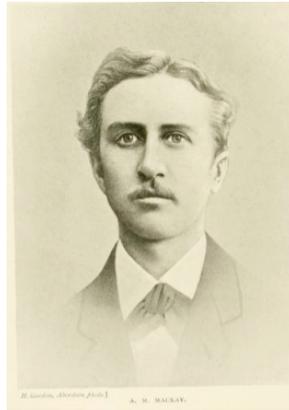


Figure 4-9: “A. M. MacKay” From: Harrison 1911, Frontispiece

It is worth noting that one of the “heathen practices” littoral residents were considered backwards for believing in was that Mukasa could grant them blessings for safe travel on the lake. Missionaries and other travelers wrote letters home requested their readers to pray for their safe passage on the lake. For example, in 1884, the Church Missionary Society published snippets of a letter from Mackay after he had just relaunched the “C.M.S. Eleanor,” a vessel that MacKay had “put together with infinite labor after being terribly damaged *en route*. Mackay wrote: “May we have your prayers that this little vessel may prove of much service in furthering the Gospel of Christ on the shores of the Nyanza! I tell the Natives her name is *Mirembe* (Ruganda for *Peace*). Both names are beautiful.”⁷⁹

After several months of consultations, Mukasa eventually issued her prophesy — in four or five years the white men would try to take over control of the Kingdom and a war would break out if strangers like MacKay were allowed to stay in Buganda.⁸⁰ More specifically, white-skinned strangers with the intention of taking over Buganda would carry a boat overland

⁷⁹ CMS, Church Missionary Intelligencer and Record, vol. IX, 97 (London: Church Missionary House, 1884), 288.
⁸⁰ Harrison, A.M. Mackay, 168.

and enter Buganda through “the back door” (via land through the east, rather than on the water via the Ssesse islands in the West). She was not wrong. In 1885, an Anglican Bishop, James Hannington, accompanied by several other European missionaries and a large convoy of porters attempted to enter Buganda from Busoga (land east of Buganda) – “the back door” to Buganda. In 1885, Bishop Hannington attempted to cross overland from what is now Kenya to Buganda. He too was murdered for this extreme violation of the norms of littoral travel, initiating additional fervor for mission and administrative work there, indeed, he was rumored to have said ‘go tell your king, I have purchased the road to Uganda with my blood.’⁸¹ As the Protestant missionary Martin J. Hall stated, “I know of four men now in the field who are out there as the direct result of one life laid down on the shores of Africa, almost before his work was begun.”⁸²

In the coming years, many regional wars broke out. These conflicts were fought between the “traditionalists” and various configurations of followers of the new religions -- Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. Though officially glossed as civil and religious, these wars of administrative conquest would be fought and won at the expense of Mukasa and her followers.

Though, at least in 1879, Mukasa returned to the Nyanja and islands victorious. Still, the lake remained closed to thru traffic until the King thanked her appropriately for her services, and sent her ninety slaves, ninety women, ninety cows, and ninety goats. These she then redistributed to her followers on the islands. Soon after the king was said to have built a

81 H. B. Thomas, “Captain Eric Smith’s Expedition to Lake Victoria in 1891,” *The Uganda Journal* 23 (1959): 8–9. H. B. Thomas, “The Last Days of Bishop Hannington,” *Uganda Journal*, 1940, 8–9.

82 Hall, “In Full and Glad Surrender”: *The Story of the Life and Work of Martin J. Hall (C.M.S. Missionary in Uganda)*, 366.

temple for Mukasa close to his own home in the capital city, so that Mukasa would be under his control.⁸³ King Mutesa resisted MacKay's call to abandon the traditions of the ancestors maintaining "that there were many old people (women chiefly) in the country, who had power, and these would be sure to kill anyone who despised the gods of the country."⁸⁴

In the two decades that followed, several King Sons would come and go, and King Mwanga would be exiled to Seychelles by the British. A one-year old King would be placed on the throne to succeed him. Several agreements and proclamations were signed and issued on behalf of the then boy King Chwa which eventually gave the British-led "Protectorate Government" legal rights to administer the entire mainland and island shores of the lake as English "Crown Land."

When a new chief was appointed to administer the island on which "the old spirit-house of Mukasa" was located "his first act was to burn Mukasa's house to the ground." Martin Hall, a Protestant missionary who presided over the islands in the early 1900s exclaimed that his "heart was full of thankfulness" when he "saw the house of the Christian teacher, standing almost on the very spot where Mukasa's house had stood in the old days."⁸⁵ For Hall, this represented:

The light of God breaking over these once dark islands, and, as of old, simple fishermen are turning to follow Jesus of Nazareth as their Savior and Friend. *"And darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light."* (Gen. 1, 2, 3.)

Christianity and so-called modern governance seemed to prevail. This was not achieved,

83 Cunningham, Uganda and Its Peoples, 80.

84 CMS, The Church Missionary Intelligencer and Record. VOL. VI. New Series, 1881, 618.

85 Hall, "In Full and Glad Surrender": The Story of the Life and Work of Martin J. Hall (C.M.S. Missionary in Uganda), 271.

however, in the absence of considerable resistance from littoral residents. As Hall noted about Bukasa Island, where Mukasa's largest estate was once located:

This island, too, was the scene of a very bloody battle in one of the civil wars, and the bleached bones and skulls across which one stumbles in the jungle near the Lake side tell a grim story of hard fighting in hard place. But nowadays Bukasa is interesting as our only station for a European missionary amongst the islands, and from here, as a center, he superintends his watery parish, consisting of nearly fifty different congregations, scattered on thirty different islands."⁸⁶

By at least 1906, all women "had to be removed entirely from the palace" of Buganda's colonially reordered kingdom. According to one long-serving English missionary, the "character" of the King mother, in particular, "was of such a nature, and she drank so immoderately, that her influence was too bad for her young son."⁸⁷ His education would instead be "attended to spiritually" by several mission-educated patriarchs of the Buganda Kingdom, through which he would learn "English, reading, writing, and arithmetic."⁸⁸ Only "men and boys," would then be "allowed to service the king."⁸⁹ Though, the rules of temperance did not wholly apply to the administrators of the Protectorate Government. According to one American woman traveler, the white men administering Uganda "universally" drank "whiskey and soda...very little at a time, but constantly," to "counteract the debilitating effect of the country."⁹⁰ White women, "of course, did not share in it." Instead, they drank lime juice and soda, or claret, a dark red wine from the Bordeaux region of France.⁹¹

Whether kings are considered to have been granted their seemingly despotic authority

86 Hall, *Through My Spectacles in Uganda: Or the Story of a Fruitful Field*, 66.

87 Charles W. Hattersley, *Uganda by Pen and Camera* (The Religious Tract Society, 1906), 24.

88 *Ibid.*, 25.

89 *Ibid.*, 24.

90 Kirkland, *Some African Highways; a Journey of Two American Women to Uganda and the Transvaal.*, 155.

91 *Ibid.*

by means of some kind of divine kingship, or through more heterarchic associations of reciprocal obligation between kings and other politically influential authorities, when a Kabaka is glossed in English as a king, the multiplicity of who and what constituted Gugu Kabaka is obscured. This misinterpretation of royal female authority in Buganda's past as comparatively non-existent profoundly shaped the ways in which the lives of non-royal women were and still are understood. Mukasa, as just one example, is now remembered as only ever being a man.

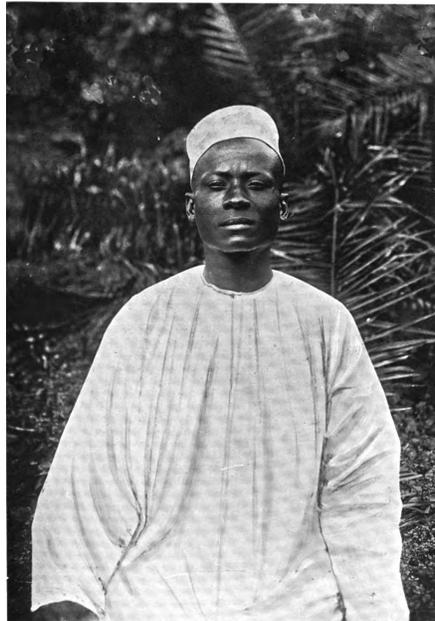


Figure 4-10: "Gugu, of Bubembe Island - This young chief is the son and successor of the late high priest of the goddess Mukasa" From Cunningham 1905 p 83

The Historical Submersion of Fluid Gender

When men like Kaggwa and Roscoe were codifying the cultural history of Buganda, recognition of women's historical work towards the production and trade of commodities was largely obscured. This is particularly the case for their work with fish, but also pottery.

Throughout my fieldwork, I was told that women never used to fish, process, or trade fish. They only began doing so in large numbers around 1986, the year the current president of Uganda came to power. Though women's historical work with fish was taken up in Chapter Three and will be taken up in more detail in Chapter Six, it is worth mentioning that while women located far inland probably did not work with fish, those living at the littoral most certainly did – as illustrated here.

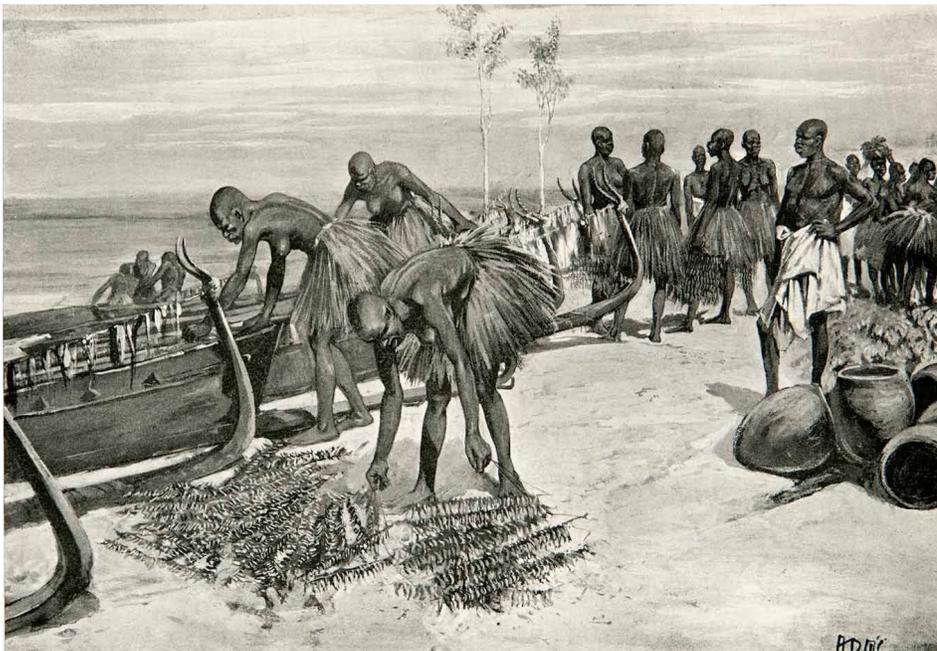


Figure 4-11: "Waganda Marketing:" Women Transporting and Selling Fish and Pottery in the late 19th Century (Grogan and Sharp 1900, Between Page 193 and 195)

Those constructing stories of Buganda's past were doing so from the royal palace of a singular king, a place where women "had to be removed entirely."⁹² Although the names of officially recognized historical Kabaka like Nakibingi and Namugala belie their feminine

⁹² Hattersley, *Uganda by Pen and Camera*, 24.

associations, by at least the early 1980s, it became almost blasphemous in Buganda to suggest that these figures may have once been women. May Edel Mandelbaum's 1934 translation of Apolo Kagwa's *The Customs of the Baganda* includes a lengthy appendix list in vernacular names. She specifically notes names that were "exclusively female," which include Nakibinge and Namugala, two former Kabaka.⁹³ M.S. Nsimbi, in his 1980 study of Luganda clan names took specific issue with those who "hold the notion that all names beginning with Na are female." This, he notes, "is far from the truth."⁹⁴ The proof he offers is an extensive list of names collected from his contemporaries, many of whom, in my reading appear to be men named for well-respected women who came long ago.

Evidence for forms of feminine authority within the pre-Victorian history of the lake and the lands that bordered it are easy enough to miss if one is not listening and reading for them. In one of my interviews with the thirty-second descendant of the Mugula, a littoral figure connecting histories of the Ssesse islands to the mainland, when I asked who Mukasa's mother was, he replied, "I don't know, because in ancient culture women were not so much considered, not until the whites came." Other cultural experts, however, offered multiple names for Mukasa's mother – *Natende, Nambubi, Namukasa, Namatimba*.⁹⁵

Though the authority and agency that Mukasa and her followers exercised would be transformed through Uganda's colonial encounters and later by the developmentalist efforts of the post-colonial Ugandan state – Mukasa is still considered by some contemporary residents

93 Kagwa, *Kitabo Kye Mpisa Za Baganda*, 190–191.

94 Michael B. Nsimbi, "Luganda Names, Clans and Totems," *Munger Africana Library Notes*, California Institute of Technology, no. 52/53 (1980): 9.

95 These names associate Mukasa's mother with aptitude in warefare, pottery, giving, and netting – as in fishing nets and baskets.

to influence the winds, waters, twins, and catches of fish. Except now, when littoral residents talk about Mukasa, they talk about a man.

Littoral residents are not the only ones who have overlooked the historical forms of gender and feminine authority embodied in figures like Mukasa. Although we have already seen many references to Mukasa appearing as an incredibly influential woman in the accounts of missionaries, administrators, and travellers – scholars too have consistently described Mukasa as a man.

In the 1970s and 1980s, anthropologist Michael Kenny published several studies examining Mukasa in relation to the pre-colonial Baganda state and Lake Victoria more broadly. These became the primary source materials for subsequent scholarship addressing pre-colonial littoral culture, as well as the place of the lake in Buganda Kingdom more generally.

In his 1977 work on the “Powers of Lake Victoria,” Kenny notes that the lake *could* be regarded as feminine because “the Luganda word for Lake Victoria is *Nalubaale*, a word indicating a spirit of feminine or motherly qualities.” He concludes, however, that the “most important powers of the lake were male.” Mukasa, Kenny argues, was of male gender and “was viewed as the Lake itself, or at least being in it.”⁹⁶ The feminine attributes of Lake Victoria, Kenny argues, are manifest when the lake serves as a “passive conceptual entity” with a “formless and embracing character.” For Kenny, Mukasa was a male deity expressed through the “power in action.”⁹⁷

Kenny’s conclusions resulted from his misreading of the symbolism embodied within the practices and material emblems he analyzes, as discussed further in Chapters Four and Six, as

⁹⁶ Kenny, “The Powers of Lake Victoria,” 720. Ibid.

⁹⁷ Kenny, “The Powers of Lake Victoria,” 721.

well as the words of the historical texts he quotes.⁹⁸ In his later 1988 study of the “dynamic between the political and divine aspects” of King Mutesa’s reign and of those between “oral history, myth, and mundane political action,” he consistently reads masculine gender onto Mukasa even when the written sources he consulted did not. Much of Kenny’s 1988 study focuses on Mukasa’s consultations with Kabaka Mutesa, addressed later in the chapter. Kenny notes once that Mukasa was represented by a “female oracle” but otherwise refers to Mukasa as a man.⁹⁹ The sources he cites, however, contain vivid descriptions of Mukasa as a woman with considerable “power in action.”

Whether or not Mukasa was a woman, a man, or both, it is clear that Kenny does not understand the most basic aspects of the Luganda language. He notes:

Mu is a singular individual prefix, so the question naturally arises as to the meaning of *kasa*. Spurious etymologies are notoriously easy to construct [!], but where the *kasa* form appears in Luganda it signifies ‘sharpness’ or ‘capacity to draw blood.’ Or ‘bloodiness’: *kasaale* ‘arrow,’ ‘severe pain in chest’; *kassalimbo* ‘precipitately’; *kasaana* ‘thorny shrub of which the bark makes red dye’; *kasandali* ‘self-willed’; *kasasamalo* ‘tumult,’ ‘uprising.’ The name *Mukasa* suggests the spear and other images appropriate to male sexuality, as do the symbols discussed below....¹⁰⁰

In Luganda and other languages of the lake (except Dholuo, which I assume, perhaps spuriously that Kenny was trained in), the meaning of the root stems that follow a prefix, in this case *-kasa, cannot be found by simply looking them up alphabetically in a dictionary. Because Luganda is a tonal language, double vowels (as in *kasaale*, arrow) and consonants (as in *kassalimbo*, precipitously) are meaningful orthographically and indicate different root stems altogether.

98 In several places in his 1988 study, he misquotes the sources, replacing “she” with “he” and “her” with “him.”

99 Kenny, “A Stranger from the Lake: A Theme in the History of the Lake Victoria Shorelands,” 606.

100 Kenny, “The Powers of Lake Victoria,” 724.

The *-kasa root is derived from *-gasa, “be useful, advantageous, profitable; be able,” and also to *-gazi “spacious, large, distant, wide.”¹⁰¹ As we saw in Chapter Three, notions of usefulness and wideness to which Mukasa refer are closely associated with forms of fishing that both men and women practiced. It may seem counter intuitive to English speakers that *-kasa is derived from *-gasa, however, it is perfectly reasonable given the histories of migration and intercultural convergence that occurred along Nyanja’s littoral -- where pastoralists who spoke of Mugasha met farmers and fishworkers who spoke of Mukasa. And more importantly, given the form and content of the languages spoken there, it does not make sense for it to be otherwise.

Similar forms of suppressed feminine (and masculine) authority remain invisible to contemporary English-speaking development experts who have made “women’s empowerment” an integral part of their work. Since at least the 2000s, political and economic institutions in Uganda including those in fisheries have “mainstreamed gender.” In fisheries, a minimum number of women are required to serve on each of several hundred “Beach Management Units” established at fish landing sites around the lake. Giving women a “seat at the table” is a worthy goal. The problem with this, these experts argue, is that women and men who work with fish do not yet know what is best for them. They must first be “sensitized.”

The women and men who informed this study – those who work with fish in southern Uganda – may not be Kabaka, but they certainly are not waiting around to be empowered. They are too busy trying to work with fish.

101 Schoenbrun, *The Historical Reconstruction of Great Lakes Bantu*, 249, Root 382 . Also, Rhiannon Stephens, personal communication on April 16, 2014.