

Chapter Five

“One Dark Trouble in this Era of Progress:” Sleeping Sickness and The Roots of Lake Victoria’s Fisheries Regulations

Its effects have been particularly felt in the islands, such as Ssesse and Buvuma, which are rapidly becoming depopulated. So far, no remedy has been discovered, and all who are taken with the fell disease are doomed to die.¹

In later times many of the dwellers on the islands of Lake Victoria have attributed sleeping sickness to the introduction of European methods into the country, and especially to Christianity. Because the gods have been neglected and are angry, they send sickness and death: so the old priests tell the people. To reason out clearly cause and effect in cases of disaster may be too difficult for the native, still he has reason for associating sleeping sickness with the European.²

In January 1908, George Wilson, the then Deputy Commissioner of the Uganda Protectorate Government wrote a “Notice” officially declaring all “fishing upon the Lake Shores to be illegal,” and that “any subject of His Highness found so fishing” would be “liable to punishment.”³ This was the first government-led attempt to regulate fishing practice. It was not intended to protect fish stocks or develop fisheries. Instead, it was designed to control the movements of littoral residents in and around the Victoria Nyanza in an attempt to stop the spread of a mysterious disease known as sleeping sickness.

Sleeping sickness (human trypanosomiasis) was first identified in Uganda in 1901, though it was likely present long before, but not in epidemic proportions. It is a disease

1 J. Hayes-Sadler, General Report on the Uganda Protectorate for the Year Ending March 31, 1903. Presented to Both Houses of Parliament by Command of His Majesty. December 1903, Africa, Africa (London: His Majesty’s Government, 1903), 9.

2 John Roscoe, *Twenty-Five Years in East Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 266.

3The Regents acted on behalf of the Kabaka because he was a boy of only eleven or twelve when fishing was rendered illegal, and therefore was not able to legally exercise his sovereignty as King until he turned eighteen as per the Uganda Agreement of 1900. For the quote see: (UNA 1908a, Notice from George Wilson, Deputy Commissioner, January 31, 1908)

transmitted to humans through the bite of blood-sucking tsetse flies carrying trypanosomes. Though, this is what medical science now knows to be true. The initial outbreak of the disease confounded scientists, military doctors, colonial administrators, and littoral residents for some time.

Between 1900 and 1910, the deaths of an estimated 200,000-300,000 individuals, an estimated two-thirds of all littoral residents within the newly formed Uganda Protectorate Government were attributed to the disease.⁴ According to Wilson, colonial “medical experts” had determined that “much of the work for the suppression and prevention of Sleeping Sickness was made futile by the frequenting of the Lake Shores by fishermen and canoes in general.”⁵

Historical studies of sleeping sickness in Uganda have focused on administrative and scientific efforts to eradicate the disease following its discovery in the earliest years of the 20th Century.⁶ Early studies lauded researchers and the colonial state for their combined efforts to understand and prevent the spread of the disease. The seeming urgency of sleeping sickness control efforts legitimized mass population removals from the island and mainland shores and the clearing of certain forms of littoral vegetation, often before these efforts were made official policy through approval from the Colonial Office and formal legislation. In the absence of their bold efforts to pursue “bush clearance and population removal” prior to “official approval,”

⁴ Kirk Hoppe, “Lords of the Fly: Colonial Visions and Revision of African Sleeping-Sickness Environments on Ugandan Lake Victoria, 1906-61,” *Africa* 67, no. 1 (1997): 87.

⁵Capitalization in original. See: (UNA 1908a, Notice from George Wilson, Deputy Commissioner, January 31, 1908)

⁶ See for example: Harvey G. Soff, “Sleeping Sickness in the Lake Victoria Region of British East Africa, 1900-1915,” *African Historical Studies* 2, no. 2 (1969): 255-68; Hoppe, “Lords of the Fly”; Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870-1950* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), Especially Chapter Four.

Harvey Soff argued, “it is conceivable that the entire population would have died.”⁷ As we will see here, if stopping the spread and virulence of sleeping sickness was their goal, this was exactly the opposite strategy to pursue.

Later studies focused on competition and cooperation between Ugandans and the scientific and administrative agents of the colonial state. Focusing on forced depopulations, strategic clearance of littoral vegetation, and planned resettlements, as well as Ugandans’ response and resistance to these efforts, Kirk Hoppe examined the production of new ideological and spatial arrangements for Ugandans and British administrators alike. As Hoppe has argued, sleeping sickness worked to generate binary oppositions between order and disorder, and health and sickness that were central to colonial visions of Uganda’s littoral and African environments. These efforts initiated “a cycle of long-term land alienation from 1906 to 1962,” which emerged from the confluence of scientific research, environmental intervention, and colonization.⁸

It is significant that Uganda’s early sleeping sickness control efforts were enacted at a time when most colonial administrators were still referring to this body of water as the “Victoria Nyanza.” The Nyanza had already been named in honor of Queen Victoria when it was “discovered” by Speke in 1858. Prior to the sleeping sickness epidemic in the early 1900s, the Victoria Nyanza still retained its uncontainable qualities. It had not yet been transformed, indeed tamed, into a lake. As we will see, sleeping sickness was crucial in the ontological transformation from the Victoria Nyanza to Lake Victoria. More specifically, efforts to manage

⁷ Soff, “Sleeping Sickness in the Lake Victoria Region of British East Africa, 1900-1915,” 268.

⁸ Hoppe, “Lords of the Fly,” 103.

sleeping sickness led to the development of Lake Victoria's fishing industry.

This chapter is inspired in part by James Giblin's work on the politics of environmental control in Tanzania. Giblin has demonstrated the ways in which complex networks of patrons, clients, and cattle allowed for the flourishing of residents of North Western Tanzania throughout the 19th Century despite the existence of animal sleeping sickness there. Movements and exchanges of cattle, as Giblin argues, worked to remove forms of vegetation that would otherwise offer excellent habitat for tsetse flies.⁹ Building on the work of Ford, who argued against conventional wisdoms that sleeping sickness was introduced through east and southern Africa's colonial encounters, Giblin traces the emergence of animal sleeping sickness to the growth of the slave trade in the mid-1800s. By the mid-1800s, over 100,000 people were moving along roadways towards the coast as part of eastern Africa's slave trade. This significantly eroded existing social and political institutions that facilitated movements of cattle that worked to contain the spatial extent and virulence of animal sleeping sickness there. Although these changes predated the establishment of colonialism there, they created the scene on which colonialism unfolded. Partly because Uganda's sleeping sickness epidemic affected humans, and not livestock, Ford and Giblin's insights have yet to be incorporated into better understandings of the epidemic there.

Attempts to evacuate residents from the island and mainland littorals began as early as 1904 as part of the emerging colonial government's sleeping sickness control efforts.¹⁰

⁹ Giblin, *The Politics of Environmental Control in Northeastern Tanzania, 1840-1940*.

¹⁰ For political histories of sleeping sickness in Uganda see: Soff, "Sleeping Sickness in the Lake Victoria Region of British East Africa, 1900-1915"; Hoppe, "Lords of the Fly." For recent debates in the nature of sleeping sickness from a public health perspective see: Susan C. Welburn et al., "Sleeping Sickness: A Tale of Two Diseases," *Trends in Parasitology* 17, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 19-24; Eric M. Fèvre et al., "Reanalyzing the

However, it was not considered “practicable” to pursue “such measures as segregation and attempting to confine the population of the affected and non-affected districts within their areas” until several years later.¹¹

By 1908, with the backing of the advice of medical officers, the Protectorate Government decided to completely evacuate all residents within “an arbitrary distance of two miles inland from the waters' edge,” areas where the tsetse flies were thought to be most common. The protectorate government attempted to remove all residents from the Ssesse, Buvuma, and Kome groups, as well as “the whole of the two-mile deep strip of the 1,900 miles of the northern shore of Lake Victoria.”¹²

The previous chapter described encounters between early English-speaking visitors (to the body of water they called the Victoria Nyanza) and littoral residents (living around the body of water they called Nyanja Nalubaale). These encounters – between natures and cultures – I argued, worked to establish the conceptual and material foundations of a managerial ontology that would later work to bring Lake Victoria into being. The growing insecurity experienced by littoral residents in this period led to the decline in fisheries-related practices that were crucial for keeping sleeping sickness at bay along Nyanja’s shores – dense settlements, abundant livestock, and the constant manipulation of shoreline vegetation were crucial for maintaining conditions of wellbeing at Nyanja’s littoral. This chapter demonstrates

1900-1920 Sleeping Sickness Epidemic in Uganda,” *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 10, no. 4 (2004). For the broader regions see: Kjekshus, *Ecology Control and Economic Development in East African History: The Case of Tanganyika 1850-1950*; Giblin, *The Politics of Environmental Control in Northeastern Tanzania, 1840-1940*.
11 J. Hayes Sadler, *Uganda Annual Report for 1904-1905, Colonial Reports - Annual* (London: His Majesty’s Government, 1905), 23.
12 H.R., Colonel Bateman, “Research and Reminiscences: Uganda 1908-1910,” *Uganda Journal* 15, no. 1 (1951): 26.

that Lake Victoria's managerial ontology and fishing industry more generally emerged from efforts to control a disease that the Victoria Nyanza itself had caused.

Not all Sleepers had Sleeping Sickness

In 1905, scientists with the “Royal Sleeping Sickness Commission” identified two phases of sleeping sickness – a latent phase characterized only by swollen lymph nodes and an “invariably fatal” phase, during which “signs and symptoms due to changes in the nervous system” were added to presentations of swollen lymph glands.¹³ The swollen lymph stage was described scientifically as “polyadenitis,” a symptom exclusively associated with the plague less than a decade earlier.¹⁴ As noted by two early researchers with the Royal Society's Sleeping Sickness Commission, “glandular enlargements [are] common amongst all natives” and they may be “prominent” in cases of sleeping sickness, however, “in some cases this may be very slight.”¹⁵ In part, because administrators believed that you could identify an individual in this stage simply by looking, by 1905, an estimated 50 to 75% of all littoral residents were already considered to be in the first phase of this disease. Because the disease was said to cause somnolence, all individuals considered infected were called “sleepers.”

During this first phase those assumed to be infected were otherwise asymptomatic and experienced no problems “carrying on their ordinary work.”¹⁶ Still, for military scientists,

13 E.D.W., Captain Greig and A. C. H., Lieutenant Gray, Continuation Report on Sleeping Sickness in Uganda, Sleeping Sickness Commission (London: Royal Society (Great Britain), 1905), 5.

14 Andrew Macphail, “Pathology,” *The Canada Medical Record* 25 (1897): 310.

15 George Low and Aldo Castellani, “Report on Sleeping Sickness from Its Clinical Aspects,” in *Reports of the Sleeping Sickness Commission*, vol. II (London: Harrison and Sons, 1903), 19.

16 Greig and Gray, Continuation Report on Sleeping Sickness in Uganda, 6.

“inhabitants” of infected areas were likened to “wild animals in the case of Nagana” (cattle sleeping sickness).¹⁷ Those in the swollen lymph phase were described “as reservoirs of the parasite” and were liable to “infect 'clean' fly belts,” that is, areas potentially suitable for the tsetse fly, but where they were not yet found.

According to Dr. Albert Cook with the C.M.S. Hospital in Mengo, sleeping sickness patients did not always die of sleeping sickness; many appeared to succumb instead to pneumonia – a condition which was increasingly diagnosed in his hospital.¹⁸ However, this did not stop him from declaring the disease, “invariably fatal.” Given the initially crowded and always food-scarce conditions of most sleeping sickness segregation camps and medical treatment wings, it is not difficult to imagine why many otherwise healthy individuals succumbed to a different infectious disease altogether.

The second phase of the disease was identified only after extensive samples of blood and spinal fluid were collected from individuals considered already infected. The “tell tale signs” of a “trembling tongue” and a “difficult time responding” may have characterized any patient in any clinic at the time, especially when one could see other patients having their bodily fluids painfully removed, or tethered to ropes in the “madhouse” section of the sleeping sickness camps.¹⁹

The transition from swollen lymph to certain death was said to occur when trypanosomes travelled from the blood into the painful to extract lumbar fluid encased within one’s spine. Medical experts were confused that sleeping sickness patients did not exhibit the

17 FINISHLocate Cite

18 Greig and Gray, Continuation Report on Sleeping Sickness in Uganda, 6.

19 MacQueen, In Wildest Africa, 371.

symptoms of the disease. As Hayes-Sadler noted:

When the symptoms become apparent they are characterized by a lethargic condition, with muscular tumors and gradual increasing weakness. At the later stages the patient becomes emaciated and bed-ridden, and though retaining consciousness, refuses food, and ultimately dies of inanition. This sleepiness, from which the disease is named, though very marked in some cases, is absent from others, and is not so constant a symptom as the name would lead one to suppose.²⁰



Figure 5-1: Left: “Taking Blood from the Neck of a Suspected Man” Right: “Dr. Marshall Injecting Atoxyl” (MacQueen 1909, 372)

In Dr. Christy's 1903 report, he noted that the majority of cases in Busoga and Uganda were “not typical cases, somnolence being frequently almost absent until the late stages developed.” Not every sleeping sickness patient, it turned out, had sleeping sickness.

Concentration Camps and Medical Cures

In 1906, Robert Koch, a German doctor known for his discovery of tuberculosis bacillus, was granted a medical concession on Bumangi Island in the Ssesse Archipelago to investigate the causes of sleeping sickness. On the island, he stayed for several months with a Catholic

²⁰ Hayes-Sadler, General Report 1903, 9.

White Father Friar Bec who presided over a concentration camp of an unknown number of littoral residents. Dr. Koch's proposed cure for the disease was the continued administration of Atoxyl, a combination of arsenic, aniline, and carbonic acid. Because it appeared that consistent doses of Atoxyl limited the abilities of trypanosomes to enter into patient's spinal fluid, therefore advancing from stage one to stage two of the disease, Koch recommended the administration of Atoxyl to all suspected "patients" identified as being in stage one – that is, essentially all littoral residents.

When "treatment" with Atoxyl stopped, the trypanosomes reappeared in blood and spinal fluid samples. So, Atoxyl had to be continuously administered to "treat" the disease. Both Dr. Koch, and Dr. Hedges with the Royal Sleeping Sickness Commission worked to identify appropriate treatment regimens. Naturally, given the toxicity of the "cure," it took some time for these medical experts to find a dosage of Atoxyl that would not kill or blind their "patients."²¹

Before leaving the Ssesse Islands in late 1906, Dr. Koch wrote:

Having finished my research on sleeping sickness I now return home. My stay at Bumangi has been, I believe, not only for the advantage of science but also for the happiness of many patients. To allow Fr[iar] Bec to carry on his devoted services to the patients for a while I shall leave a sufficient supply of Atoxyl and other medicine.²²

Peter MacQueen, an explorer and hunter visited a sleeping sickness camp outside Kampala. He observed that camp residents "do not seem to believe that they are going to die, yet the doctor says to me, 'not one of these people will ever leave this place alive. All are

²¹ Albert R. Cook, "On Sleeping Sickness as Met with in Uganda, Especially with Regard to Its Treatment," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 1 (1908): 25-42.

²² Quoted in: Yves Tourigny, *So Abundant a Harvest: The Catholic Church in Uganda, 1879-1979* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1979), 75.

condemned to death absolutely within two years.”²³

He noted that the patients were divided into four classes in accordance with the extent of the ravages of the disease.” It is worth quoting him at length here, because so little has been written about conditions in these sleeping sickness camps.

Class A are patients who do not know that anything is the matter with them, but have enlarged glands on the neck...

Class B [have] typical gland enlargement of the neck and the man is not so strong as he used to be. He has body itch and general debility. Cannot walk as far as formerly. If you look at his tongue it is tremulous...

Class C, the glands are large, the patient has a body itch all over, cannot walk at all, tongue tremulous and the man sleeps a great deal.

Class D is a case where a man has all the foregoing symptoms emphasized and in addition has meningitis. It is from the latter affectation that sleeping comes, and this case is always hopeless.

Many cases have no sleeping symptoms apparent. At this stage some of them go mad.²⁴

MacQueen ended his account by noting that:

It seemed to me the jolliest deathhouse that I had ever seen. The boys were playing a kind of football; the women were sitting in the court, chatting and gossiping, as if disease and death were the farthest from their minds... The country was as sweet as Main or Massachusetts in the springtime, yet here were all the terrors of wasting madness and annihilating death.²⁵

²³ MacQueen, In Wildest Africa, 370–371.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 372.

Engines of Progress

An extraordinary fascination surrounds the history of the Victoria Nyanza. It is remarkable that a lake with a shoreline of 3,200 miles and an area of 25,000 square miles lying in the midst of a thickly populated region of East Africa should have remained undiscovered to the modern civilized world until Speke discovered it in 1858. Now the lake is daily traversed by steamers with regular ports of call, engaged in conveying passengers, tourists, and cargo as safely as on Lake Michigan.²⁶

The lack of reliable, “seaworthy” transportation was a significant hindrance to the type of commerce, control, and spiritual salvation that early European visitors sought to establish in and around the Victoria Nyanza. The kinds of vessels considered by English-speakers to be truly seaworthy, however, began reaching Nyanja after the Uganda Railway was completed. These literal engines of progress worked to shift the view from within required in the time of the Victoria Nyanza to the view from above that characterizes Lake Victoria.

As early as 1891 Captain A.F. Eric Smith led an expedition for British East Africa Company to identify the most practicable route from the east African coast to Lake Victoria by railway. According to Captain Smith, “no satisfactory investigation of the shores of the lake can be carried out by means of the available native canoes, which are quite unseaworthy, whose hire is a matter of great trouble, and the rate of whose progress is entirely in the hands of owners and crews.”²⁷ Replacing paddled canoes with steel boats, and later boats equipped with steam engines considerably shortened the journey to Buganda. What was once a lengthy journey around the southern end of the lake, carefully skirting the shores between islands and the mainland clockwise around the lake would soon be avoided by traveling from Sio Bay in the

²⁶John Bland-Sutton, *Man and Beast in Eastern Ethiopia: From Observations Made in British East Africa, Uganda, and the Sudan* (Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1911), 27.

²⁷Thomas, “Captain Eric Smith’s Expedition to Lake Victoria in 1891,” 131.

eastern portion of the lake to Entebbe - a journey that reportedly only took three days in the C.M.S. steel sailboat.²⁸

In 1901, the Uganda Railway had reached Nyanza's eastern shore at Kisumu, linking the Victoria Nyanza to emerging colonial settler city of Nairobi, and on to Mombasa on Africa's eastern coast. Steamships like the Winifred at "175 feet long, of 250 tons register, and 500 horse-power" docked at "Port Florence" in Kisumu alongside a large jetty built "so that the trains can run out right alongside the railway steamer."²⁹ Not only did visitors to the Victoria Nyanza no longer have to navigate the complexities of hiring and managing porters for months at a time on the overland journey from the coast to the lake, they never had to set foot outside of the tightly controlled spaces of colonial travel, at least until they reached their final destination. The transformation from canoe to steel boat and from small steel boat to steamship shifted the visual and material encounters that first constructed the Victoria Nyanza, and later worked to bring Lake Victoria into being. That same year, sleeping sickness was discovered.

²⁸ W. J. Ansorge, *Under the African Sun; a Description of the Native Races in Uganda, Sporting Adventures and Other Experiences* (London: William Heinemann, 1899), 33.

²⁹ Hattersley, *Uganda by Pen and Camera*, 132.



Figure 5-2: “The Residence of the Commissioner at Entebbe.” Where Uganda’s National Archives and the National Agricultural Research Organization now reside. From: (Kirkland 1908, 213)

Fourteen months before declaring all fishing to be illegal, Wilson gave a lengthy report on “The Progress of Uganda” during a monthly meeting of the African Society held in London. He noted that “in comparing the horrors of the past with the peace and prosperity of the present” we may “be satisfied with a consciousness that great and undoubted good is being done.”³⁰ His report lauded the completion of the Uganda Railway extending from the Indian ocean at Mombasa to the eastern shores of Lake Victoria at Kisumu, and the plying of steamships all around the lake. Through these new technologies of transportation, the time and complications for would-be travelers and goods moving to and from Uganda were significantly reduced. Instead of a complicated and taxing journey on foot or by hammock with porters carrying goods by the head load “along a route so [formerly] full of difficulties,” by 1906, the

³⁰ Wilson, “The Progress of Uganda,” 131.

journey had become “a simple matter of 585 miles rail to the Lake, and 175 miles across the Lake to Entebbe, by well appointed 600-ton steamers.”³¹ Instead of three months, it took only four days. The so-called progress of the Uganda Protectorate was marked in transportation infrastructure, and the export of cash crops – coffee, cotton, and even fish.

Perhaps in preparation for George Wilson's departure for London, in 1906, the Acting Sub-Commissioner submitted what he called a true copy of a table of “death returns from sleeping sickness” for the years 1900, 1901, and 1902 composed by Apolo Kagawa.³² Although the first cases of sleeping sickness were not “discovered” until July 1901, eight-thousand four-hundred and thirty (8,430) residents of all the islands and the mainland shores from the Nile to Entebbe were reported to have succumbed to the disease in 1900.³³ In 1901, another ten thousand three hundred and four residents (10,384) were reported dead. Almost twice that number were “returned” from Buvuma Island alone in 1902, for a total of twenty-four thousand and thirty-five (24,035) “death returns from sleeping sickness” that year. To put this death tally in perspective, the total number of deceased littoral residents from 1900-1902 was just slightly higher than the total number of all students enrolled full time at the University of Michigan's Ann Arbor campus in the fall of 2013.³⁴ Still, as far as the leadership of the Protectorate government was concerned, though sleeping sickness generally compromised the viability of the emerging colonial state, the lives of littoral residents were “inconsequential.”

It is not surprising that the Buvuma Islands were initially the hardest hit by the

³¹ Ibid., 117, 130.

³² UNA, “Sleeping Sickness in Uganda: Return of Deaths During Years 1900, 1901, 1902.,” 1906, A 42/155.

³³ Cook, *Uganda Memories, 1897-1940*.

³⁴ Office of Budget and Planning, *All Campuses Enrollment Headcount, Total/Ann Arbor/Dearborn/Flint* (Updated 3/21/14) (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, 2014), http://obp.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/pubdata/factsfigures/enrollment_umaa_fall13.pdf.

sleeping sickness epidemic. The Bavuma, as those who lived (and still live) on Buvuma Island are called, consistently and successfully resisted attempts by the Baganda and the colonial state to incorporate the islands into their administrative domains. Indeed, the Bavuma had to be “pacified” before steamships could safely travel between the port at Kisumu and those at Jinja, Kampala, and Entebbe.

Even archival documents, the truth-makers of conventional historical research contain curious elisions that make it difficult to locate verifiable truths. For example, in 1900, the Uganda Protectorate Government extended its administrative jurisdiction of Buvuma Islands. Though the Bavuma Islanders continued to resist attempts to be governed by the Baganda Chiefs who worked as agents of the form of “indirect rule” that the colonial government was in the process of establishing. On 13th of October 1900, “Her Majesty's Special Commissioner” Mr. Johnston wrote to Mr. Grant who was soon to “assume control over Buvuma:”

I have detached the Island of Buvuma from any connection with Busoga for reasons which it is not necessary now to discuss and I have made that Island one of the Sadzas of the Kingdom of Uganda. You are aware of the past history of Buvuma and how constantly it has fought with Uganda in the past....

When first proceeding to Buvuma you need take only a few men with you. If the people are recalcitrant and do not accept your settlement, then it will be a case of proceeding there with a force sufficient to overawe any attempt on their part at resistance. They will of course have to pay the Hut and Gun Tax levied elsewhere in Uganda....

The Bavuma may possibly state that they object to having a Muganda placed over them. I cannot take such an objection into consideration now. It is the fault of the Bavuma themselves that I have had recourse to naming a Muganda Administrative Chief of the island and not choosing one of themselves.³⁵

Five days later Mr. Johnson wrote Mr. Grant again: “I should like to see you as soon as

³⁵ UNA, “Busoga Correspondence Outward Vol. I 1900-1901,” 1900, Letter to Mr. Grant from H.M. Special Commissioner, October 13, 1900, A 11/1, UNA.

possible on a matter of some importance which I think can be best discussed in conversation. It refers to a plan I have in view which I think you would be able to carry out with ability and discretion.”³⁶ Although there is intentionally no written record of this meeting, or the “plan in view,” by April 1901, there is evidence to suggest that a Muganda Chief named Nova Jumba preemptively (that is, without explicit administrative approval), went to the islands and seized livestock, land, and burned homes of islanders. Though his efforts were supposedly unsanctioned by the colonial government, in September 1900, Johnston noted that:

The general impression is that the Bavuma is a disorderly lot and that the Chiefs have little authority over their people. If they wish to dispel this idea they will at once return the women and children to you [who presumably the Bavuma had seized from the mainland]. If not, at the very first sign of insubordination, I will send a horde of Baganda who are thirsting to overrun the Bavuma Islands.³⁷

It is impossible to know for certain whether the “horde of Baganda” was a part of Johnston's “plan in view.” In any case, soon after a “mysteriously fatal” illness began sweeping the shores of Buvuma Islands, spreading north to the mainland shores around the Nile and West to the Ssesse Islands. Although the disease was not “discovered” until mid-1901, in 1900 5,127 people were said to have died of it on Buvuma. In 1901, another 6,874 and in 1902, an additional 19,049 Buvuma Islanders were reported to have died from Sleeping Sickness. Amid sustained efforts to bring the Buvuma Islands “under control” of the Protectorate Government, over 31,000 people died on Buvuma from 1900-1902 alone.³⁸

To be clear, I do not doubt that sleeping sickness was real. However, it is more than possible that the tens of thousands of deaths that accompanied the administrative conquest of

36 Ibid., Letter to Mr. Grant from H.M. Special Commissioner, October 18, 1900.

37 Ibid., Letter to the Acting Collector from H.M. Acting Deputy Commissioner, September 13, 1900.

38 UNA, “Sleeping Sickness in Uganda: Return of Deaths During Years 1900, 1901, 1902.”

Buvuma were conveniently attributed to this mysterious illness. At the same time, these deaths generated the conditions under which sleeping sickness was able to flourish at the littoral.

Seizures of livestock, for example, encouraged the growth of bushes and small trees that the tsetse fly, the small, biting carrier of the disease, preferred to lay their eggs near. The reduction in island residents who would have otherwise regularly harvested littoral vegetation for making fishing gears, boats, homes, clothing, and fuel wood for making pottery, smithing iron, and cooking food was probably even more favorable to the tsetse fly than the reduction in livestock.

By the time Wilson's speech on the "Progress of Uganda" was published in 1908, colonial administrators still reported "almost constant lake-wide traffic" around the Ssesse, Kome, and Buvuma Groups of islands.³⁹ Many of these vessels were transporting food and fish from the islands to the mainland, continuing a long-standing trade in life's most vital substances there – bananas and fish.

Upon returning to Entebbe, in a note to the "Collector" in Entebbe, just after returning to Uganda George Wilson wrote; "it would be well if we could stop all food going to Entebbe by canoe. Let it all go by road or steamer. It's a difficult matter to arrange, but something must be done."⁴⁰ Maybe, "once the 'Mackinnon' [a steamship] starts running, if I reduce the fares for natives they might be induced to travel by her instead of going in canoes."

Still, the reports from administrators of "almost constant" traffic on the lake were

³⁹ UNA, "Sleeping Sickness: Measures to Control Fishing"; Chadwick Walter, "Letter to the Governor of Uganda January 13. 1908. In *Sleeping Sickness: Tsetse Fly in the Islands: Revd Chadwick's Report On.*," 1908, A 44/17, UNA.

⁴⁰ UNA, "Sleeping Sickness: Measures to Control Fishing," Minute 5 (February 18. 1908) and Minute 10 (March 24, 1908) from George Wilson.

probably overstated. During the “pacification” of the Ssesse Islands in 1890 and of the Buvuma Islands in 1900, the fleet of resident boats – indeed the number of total littoral residents – was drastically reduced.

By 1907, long after the worst of the outbreak was over, the Protectorate Government began their efforts to forcibly evacuate island residents in earnest. Their goals were to put a complete end to all canoe traffic between the islands and the mainland, purportedly to stop the spread of tsetse fly. Understandably, officials like Bell and Wilson projected a fairly peaceful picture of the success of their clearance efforts. They reported that the mainland shores were cleared voluntarily with the assistance of chiefly influence. Clearance of the islands was much more difficult. One travel writer reported hearing that the many residents who resisted these efforts were: “So distressed at having to leave their homes that many of them tried to escape. They ran away, and the only manner in which they could be captured was by driving them into the lake. They can’t understand why they should not be allowed to live there and die of sleeping sickness if they wish to do so....It is very pathetic.”⁴¹

Flies and Fishwork

The reduction of littoral populations following the so-called “pacification” of the islands, both reduced the abilities of littoral residents to work with shoreline vegetation, making the shoreline itself a more dangerous place. This had devastating implications for the spread of sleeping sickness and the survival of littoral communities in the earliest years of the twentieth century. First there were the actual deaths caused by these conflicts. These effects

⁴¹ Lorimer, *By the Waters of Africa: British East Africa, Uganda, and the Great Lakes*, 83. (Lorimer 1917, 83)

were exacerbated by attempts to sever “any connection with Busoga.”⁴² This limited trade in food as well as trade in pottery from Buvuma to Busoga.

Fishwork was crucial to maintaining healthy conditions at the littoral. Prior to the introduction of flax gillnets in the early 1900s all fishing gears (*emitego*) were made from littoral vegetation.⁴³ Baskets, nets, and traps of various kinds detailed in Chapter Three were woven from fibrous trees, bushes, vines, grasses, and creepers. Even spears and hook-and-line gears required extensive collection of wetland trees, bushes, and grasses to fuel the furnaces of iron smelters and the forges of smiths.⁴⁴ These same fibers were used to sew together planked canoes, the roofs of homes, and baskets for serving, storing, and transporting water and food. Although well-made gears, homes, and baskets were durable, they certainly did not last forever. Fishing and living at the littoral required almost constant manipulation of shoreline vegetation, manipulation that we saw in Chapter Four helped to generate conditions of abundance, while simultaneously minimizing habitat suitable for tsetse fly reproduction – that is to say, historical fishing practices worked to keep sleeping sickness at bay.

G.D.H. Carpenter, one of the chief investigators of the “bionomics” or ecology of the tsetse fly noted extensive regrowth of littoral vegetation following the clearance of human residents from the littoral and identified two main conditions that shaped the abundance of tsetse fly on any given island — the availability of shade and the moisture level of the land underneath. The best breeding grounds, according to Carpenter were those where “banks of

42 UNA, “Busoga Correspondence Outward Vol. I 1900-1901,” Letter to Mr. Grant from H.M. Special Commissioner, October 13, 1900.

43 Zzibukulimbwa, “Ennyanja Nalubaale.”

44 Peter Schmidt, *Iron Technology in East Africa: Symbolism, Science, and Archaeology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

sand or gravel which formed the beaches of earlier days when the lake was at a higher level, and now usually covered with bushes providing excellent shade, and by reason of their structure well drained; although near to the water not at the actual water's edge."⁴⁵ At the water's edge, however, Carpenter found that the pupae of tsetse flies are "killed by the diminution of the density of shade."⁴⁶ "Shade produced by a fresh green growth, as of a certain aromatic herb, is at once made use of by the fly for larviposition."⁴⁷ Fortunately, while Carpenter was a keen observer, he was not a botanist. The names he collected for forms of littoral vegetation that he identified as creating ideal conditions for the fly were first collected in the littoral vernacular, then scientific names were given. He noted that *ebinsambwe* and *luzibaziba* as provide "the most favorable shade" for the tsetse fly.⁴⁸

As we saw in Chapter Four, *ebinsambwe* was widely used in the making of fishing nets, homes, and sewing canoes together – basically any activity that required a strong rope. *Luzibaziba* (*Alchornea cordifolia*) is another form of littoral vegetation (note the –ziba in the vernacular term). It was used to treat diseases known to scientists as pre-hepatic jaundice, but also fever, pregnancy related illness, skin rashes, and measles.⁴⁹ In the Bushi areas of South Kivu, the leaves are also crushed, soaked in water and used as a gargle to soothe a toothache.⁵⁰

As the littoral became an increasingly unsafe place to live around the turn of the 20th Century, *kinsambwe* and *luzibaziba*, two forms of vegetation that tsetse flies preferred to lay

45 G.D. Hale Carpenter, "Third, Fourth and Fifth Reports on the Bionomics of *Glossina Palpalis* on Lake Victoria," in Reports of the Sleeping Sickness Commission (London: Harrison and Sons, 1919), 42.

46 Ibid., 3.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., 41.

49 Paul Ssegawa and John Massan Kasenene, "Medicinal Plant Diversity and Uses in the Sango Bay Area, Southern Uganda," *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 113, no. 3 (2007): 526.

50 Kusamba Chifundera, "Contribution to the Inventory of Medicinal Plants from the Bushi Area, South Kivu Province, Democratic Republic of Congo," *Fitoterapia* 72, no. 4 (May 2001): 354.

their larvae near, less and less residents were able to work with these fibers. As these forms of vegetation were allowed to grow, so did the spatial extent of the tsetse fly. Efforts to evacuate the littoral completely only made the situation worse.

The First Fisheries Regulations and the Making of an Industry

During the past few years the best canoes have had to be destroyed, and the people on the islands of the lake have been removed to places inland...it was found necessary to destroy the canoes in order to prevent the people from returning to their old homes on the islands where it was found that the greatest number of deaths from the scourge was taking place....By the expulsion of the natives from the lake districts, industries such as fishing, canoe building, and navigating the waters of the lake have ceased, while the fisherfolk live the life of exiles on the mainland and long for permission to return to their old haunts and birthplaces, even though they would thereby run the risk of contracting the disease and of dying. To many of these fisherfolk the inland life is more like banishment and imprisonment than anything else, and they frequently beg to be allowed to return to die in their own land.⁵¹

Although efforts to limit fishing and canoe traffic were ongoing since at least 1904, the extensive legal regulatory infrastructure for these efforts was not provided until 1908 when the Sleeping Sickness Ordinance was published in the *Official Gazette of the East Africa and Uganda Protectorates*. In the ordinance, H. Hesketh Bell, the then Governor of the Uganda Protectorate Government declared “the whole of the mainland of the Uganda Protectorate within a distance of two miles of the Victoria Nyanza” and “all the islands in the Victoria Nyanza” as “infected places.”⁵² This spatial representation of the shoreline as “infected” extended to all fishworkers and littoral residents more generally, and subjected them to the rules outlined in the Ordinance.

⁵¹ Roscoe, *Twenty-Five Years in East Africa*, 73.

⁵² Hesketh Bell, “Sleeping Sickness Ordinance, 1908,” in *The Official Gazette of the East Africa and Uganda Protectorates*, Vol. X No. 202 (Nairobi: Governors of East Africa and Uganda, 1908), 199.

Under these rules, fishing was prohibited “within a distance of two miles of the mainland,” and any person found fishing within two miles of the mainland littoral “may be arrested by a Government officer without a warrant.”⁵³ It is unclear whether and how littoral residents were notified of these legal changes, it is likely that public claims to cooperation were overstated and that many residents remained unaware of these requirements until representatives of the “Native Government” began “going round burning all the huts within the two mile area and removing all those people who have not already moved.”⁵⁴

There were, however, a number of “cleared landing places” authorized for use. These specific landing places were those that had been denuded of vegetation thought to create ideal habitat for the tsetse fly, and were subsequently more tightly controlled than other areas of the shoreline. Not coincidentally these were often ports of call for the large steamships that were beginning to travel from Kisumu in what is now Kenya up and around the northern coast of Lake Victoria, including “the Mackinnon Pier, the Railway Pier and the old steam launch Pier,” but also other sites in Jinja, Luzira, Munyono, Munyago, and Entebbe.⁵⁵ Although these were landing sites designed to colonial visions of order and health at the time, they could be declared open or closed by high-ranking colonial administrators at any time without prior notice.

The Sleeping Sickness Ordinance legislated significant changes in canoe-based

⁵³ Ibid., 198.

⁵⁴ UNA, “Sleeping Sickness Area Evacuation of Lakeshore,” 1907, Letter from Sub-Commissioner Busoga, December 3, 1907, Z. 958, UNA.

⁵⁵ The “cleared sites” noted in the 1908 Sleeping Sickness Ordinance included; Bukaleba, Kitotes, Kakunguru's Hill, Jinja, Bugungu, Kasirye, Senyi, Kibanga, Luzira, Munyonyo, Kisubi, Maniago [Munyago], The Mackinnon Pier, the Railway Pier and the old steam launch Pier and the land lying between them at Entebbe, Banga, near the Gaol [Prison], Entebbe, Nakiwogo, Bawaya [Buwaya], Bukakata, Dumo, Lulamba [Jana Island], Bugala [Island], and Bumangi (on Bugala). The proceeding landing sites are spelled as given in the Ordinance, I have added some contemporary spellings or names in brackets for clarity. Bell, “Sleeping Sickness Ordinance, 1908,” 199.

transport of people and goods. Each canoe “belonging to the mainland” was required to register annually with the Collectors at Entebbe or Jinja, or with other Officers appointed by the Governor. Those authorized to register these vessels could “refuse to register any canoe” at anytime, seemingly for any reason. Prior to making specific journeys on the water, a “permit to ply” had first to be obtained stating the specific duration, purpose, and route of a given canoe trip.⁵⁶

Specific regulations were put in place for canoe traffic around the Ssesse Islands. These rendered it illegal for any canoe from the mainland to travel to the Ssesse Islands without a special permit from the Collector of Entebbe that had to be countersigned by the Deputy Commissioner. No canoes whatsoever were permitted to travel between the Ssesse Islands and any other island, whether registered or not. And, Ssesse canoes registered and authorized were only permitted to travel to two landing sites on the Ssesse Islands (on Bugala and Jana islands) and only at one site on the mainland at Entebbe, thereby consolidating the circulation of legal people and goods.⁵⁷

These regulations could and did change at the behest of the Governor and relevant implementing authorities like the “Collectors” at Entebbe and Jinja. Landing sites once authorized as open could suddenly be closed. Licensed vessels could be confiscated and destroyed for lacking a proper “permit to ply,” or in response to reports that these vessels otherwise violated the Sleeping Sickness Ordinance as interpreted on the ground and on the water.

⁵⁶ UNA, “Sleeping Sickness Area Evacuation of Lakeshore,” Letter from Sub-Commissioner Busoga, December 3, 1907.

⁵⁷ Bell, “Sleeping Sickness Ordinance, 1908,” 197.

These Collectors were given their titles in reference to their duties in collecting taxes in their territories called “Collectorates.” They were so influential that one elder “in charge of culture,” remembers the Mr. Cooper as the Governor of Uganda during the sleeping sickness era, even though his title was simply that of a Collector.⁵⁸ That is, lower-level officials were remembered as the most powerful figures of colonial governance in littoral residents lives, powers they exercised through their abilities to extract labor and later money towards the payment of taxes.

These licensing and “permit to ply” requirements made it more difficult for canoes which were previously said to move constantly between islands and between islands and the mainland to continue their vigorous trade in fish and agricultural crops, but also iron, pottery, salt, and other goods. Trade between islands and between the islands and mainland had long been crucial for the food supply of both the islands and the mainland. According to Apolo Kagwa, the Prime Minister, or Katikiro of the Buganda Kingdom in the early colonial period, many islands were “rich and fertile,” and residents there raised “good bananas, sweet potatoes, yams and coffee.” Kagwa he noted, and just “sixteen islands fed all of Buganda during the hard times during the war of 1890.”⁵⁹ These attempts to reign the movements of littoral residents into the regimes of order and health that justified the existence of the colonial state in Uganda were anathema to the practices of food provisioning and trade that had sustained the development of the Buganda Kingdom for so long. As just one example, in 1908, a boat and several men sent by the Muggula Milyango to Ssesse for food was found “wrecked midway

⁵⁸ Interview with 32nd Mugula of Buyira Entebbe, December 9, 2012, 121211_002.

⁵⁹ Kagwa, *Kitabo Kye Mpisa Za Baganda*, 157.

between Entebbe and Ssesse,” by a regular tour of the islands of the S.S. Mackinnon. This frustrated colonial officials given that “the orders of many months standing against mainland canoes” was “persistently ignored within sight of the Collectorate.”⁶⁰

With respect to fish consumption, it became illegal for any person to “buy or otherwise receive fresh fish which comes from that part of Victoria Nyanza within which fishing is prohibited.”⁶¹ Presumably, dried fish was permitted in similar circumstances, although it is not specifically mentioned in the Sleeping Sickness Ordinance of 1908. Though this Ordinance certainly did not stop littoral residents and colonial administrators alike from obtaining fresh fish, under the Ordinance, “any person found in possession of fresh fish shall be deemed to have committed an offense unless he had reasonable grounds for believing that the said fish did not come from that part of Victoria Nyanza within which fishing is prohibited.”⁶² Although there was likely considerable ambiguity and room for negotiating what constituted “reasonable grounds” in each case that individuals were found “in possession of fresh fish,” this Ordinance officially inaugurated the Protectorate Government with the legal authorities to confiscate and destroy fish and fishing vessels that failed to comply with their specific visions of and provisions for a healthy lakeshore.

Even before this declaration was made, efforts to limit fishing and the movements of canoes had made fish so scarce on the Entebbe Peninsula that “certain natives living some distance from Entebbe on the Kampala side had been offering to bring fish free to people.”⁶³

Rather than signal the importance of fish as food and fishing as a long-standing source of

60 UNA, “Sleeping Sickness: Measures to Control Fishing,” Memorandum to Collector Entebbe, January 31, 1908.

61 Bell, “Sleeping Sickness Ordinance, 1908,” 198.

62 Ibid.

63 UNA, “Sleeping Sickness: Measures to Control Fishing,” Note from Cooper, January 8, 1908.

opportunity for littoral residents, however, this compelled P.W. Cooper, the “Collectorate of Entebbe,” to conclude that illicit fishing must certainly be ongoing outside of Entebbe, where fishing was already banned or confined to only two landing sites. Although concerned about the “food situation,” Cooper's proposed solution was to render all fishing illegal, a position legally enacted by the Deputy Commissioner and presumably the Regents of the Buganda Kingdom shortly thereafter as detailed above.

This blanket prohibition on fishing near the majority of island and mainland littorals, including productive wetland fisheries, rendered fishing techniques, including basket traps, weirs, and nets fished from shore illegal simply because of the locations in which they must be used. Traps and nets made from littoral vegetation were used in deeper waters which required canoes to be used, however, most fish consumed on a regular bases was probably caught within wading distance from shore. This prohibition on accessing the littoral was particularly detrimental for women and those who depended on littoral women who fished with baskets for small fish to meet their daily household needs. Although these methods were later found to “in no way endanger the stock of the ngege,” the fish stocks that colonial managers would later be most concerned with developing and managing.⁶⁴ They were thought to place fishworkers in contact with the tsetse fly, and therefore at risk of contracting and spreading sleeping sickness. The range of potential fish consumers extended from the littoral far inland. Reductions in the availability of this highly nutritious source of protein were significant. And, reductions in the production of these gears, canoe-based trade, and littoral populations more generally, unfortunately contributed to the geographic extent and virulence of the disease, rather than

⁶⁴ Graham, *The Victoria Nyanza and Its Fisheries*.

reducing its intensity and spread.

According to Charles Pitman, who served as the Game Warden of Uganda from 1925-1951, Uganda's fishing industry commenced with the introduction of “European fishing methods” in 1910.⁶⁵ Unlike in Kenya, where the introduction of flax gillnets preceded the spread of sleeping sickness onto the eastern shores, gillnets were not introduced in Uganda until after widespread attempts to “clear” the littoral. By this time, the vast majority of residents of the island and mainland littoral had already died, or been evacuated inland – often forcibly – as part of sleeping sickness control efforts. Although all fishing was initially rendered illegal as noted above, “owing to the obvious difficulties” associated with “feeding satisfactorily a large number of displaced persons” fishing was permitted from certain cleared landing sites.⁶⁶

The first nets were brought to Uganda in 1910 by “a Swede named Martin,” and soon after a “Goan named Souza” began importing nets and operating his own fishing operation.⁶⁷ Sleeping sickness controls limited the spatial extent of legal fishing efforts while gillnets increased the intensity of these same efforts. Soon after gillnets were introduced, “one fishing village in Entebbe in 1910 had about 300 natives employed in fishing,” and “two Europeans and seven Goans” were also fishing in Entebbe at the time. The Mill Hill Roman Catholic Mission at Kisubi began importing gillnets from France in 1911 in an attempt to meet the needs for fish within one of the earliest sleeping sickness “segregation camps” where littoral residents were

65 C. R. S. Pitman, “Typescript: Fishing and Angling,” 1952 1947, 3–4, Z. MSS PIT/C93, British Natural History Museum.

66 *Ibid.*, 4.

67 Graham, *The Victoria Nyanza and Its Fisheries*, Letters from C.W. Chorley, Sleeping Inspector at Mengo p. 49.

relocated, though they ended their fishing efforts there in 1918 when no new “patients” were coming to their camp and all “patients” had already died.

By 1914, steamships had been travelling on the Victoria Nyanza for over a decade and the vast majority of littoral residents had died from “sleeping sickness” or otherwise been subdued. The conceptual victories these material transformations afforded men like Captain E.M. Jack, who represented the British in the 1910 Anglo-Congolese Boundary Commission, the opportunity to note with conviction that:

In speaking of the lakes I have purposely avoided using the word Nyanza. Nyanza means an unfordable sheet of water, and is used by the natives for either a lake or a big river. There does not seem to be any special reason for the continuance of this word in connection with lakes any more than there is for the use of native words for other geographical features. To speak of 'Lake Victoria Nyanza,' as is frequently done, is equivalent to saying, 'Lake Victoria Lake.'⁶⁸

Lake Victoria was born.

Lake Victoria Is Dying (Again)

In 2014, around one million fishermen are still catching nearly a million tons of fish from the lake known as Victoria each year. About ten million more women and men work in and around the lake with fish or in fishing-related occupations, including boat-building, net-making, and boat and net repair – all activities I term “fishwork.” Many more provide essential and luxury goods and services to fishworkers, including the provision and preparation of food, accommodation, fuel, clothing, beauty treatments, intoxicating beverages, and pool and video halls.

Despite the continued abundance of a variety of fish, scientists, development experts,

68 Evan Maclean Jack, *On the Congo Frontier: Exploration and Sport* (T. F. Unwin, 1914), 6.

policy professionals, journalists, and some fishworkers now believe that Lake Victoria is dying, or already dead. The only way to save this “sick giant” from certain death, these concerned stakeholders agree, is through “an accelerated push” towards better management of the lake, and most especially, better management of its most lucrative export fishery.⁶⁹ That is, the only way to save Lake Victoria, many say, is to save Lake Victoria's Nile perch.

Almost one hundred years ago, fisheries experts working for Uganda’s colonial Protectorate Government made the same predictions while envisioning very similar solutions, specifically that the fishing industry will most certainly collapse in the near future if its most lucrative commercial fishery, then considered to be for native species of tilapia, is not closely managed. The warnings and testimony of C.M. Chorley Esquire, a Sleeping Sickness Inspector with jurisdiction over the land and lake known as Mengo, then the political center of the Buganda Kingdom and the “Native Government,” illustrate this perfectly. In 1927, Chorley wrote a letter to Michael Graham, an ecologist conducting the first lake-wide fisheries survey, declaring that that “the fishing industry in Lake Victoria is on the downgrade.” The number of fishermen and quantity of fish catches had dwindled markedly from their peak a decade earlier, he evidenced, while prices paid for fish sold in large markets had skyrocketed. This, according to Chorley, threatened Lake Victoria “with final destruction unless an effort is made to avert such a calamity.”⁷⁰

Chorley's 1927 prediction of the final destruction of Lake Victoria's fishing industry may appear overly alarmist, his counterparts in Kenya and Tanzania, however, offered similar

69 Nancy Chege, *Lake Victoria: A Sick Giant*, Technical Report (World Watch Institute, 2004).

70 Graham, *The Victoria Nyanza and Its Fisheries*, 49.

accounts. As a Sleeping Sickness Officer, Chorley was given the impossible task of excluding fishermen and others from accessing the lake and lakeshore, and supervising their activities when access was officially permitted. Though sleeping sickness will be taken up much more closely in Chapter Five, it is worth noting here that by 1910 it was illegal for anyone, African or otherwise, to access Lake Victoria without the express permission of designated colonial administrators in an effort to prevent the spread of this disease.

Between 1900 and 1910, an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 deaths of residents of the mainland and island shores were attributed to the sleeping sickness. As we have seen, many of these were likely due to other causes – wars of administrative conquest, and the realization of previous colonial aspirations and efforts towards controlling all lakewide canoe traffic. In those same years, most residents of the lakeshore were evacuated to sleeping sickness concentration camps, many of which were run by Catholic and Protestant missionaries.⁷¹ There, the blood and spinal fluids of the so-called “sleepers” were regularly drawn, and they were “treated” with Atoxyl, a combination of arsenic, aniline, and carbonic acid. No one was really cured. If the littoral residents in these camps did not die of sleeping sickness, they died from arsenic poisoning. The disruption of food production that accompanied the administrative wars of conquest in the late 1800s and early 1900s was also accompanied by several years of drought. Most camp “patients,” one observer argued, died of starvation.⁷²

Those considered healthy were upon evacuation relocated elsewhere inland. Some were able to return to their island lands several decades later. It may come as no surprise that

⁷¹ In early accounts, the terms “concentration” and “segregation” camps were used interchangeably. UNA, “Sleeping Sickness/Segregation Camp for Buddu,” 1907, A 43/92, UNA. After World War II, the term concentration camp fell out of fashion for obvious reasons.

⁷² Kitching, *On the Backwaters of the Nile*, 56–58.

residents of the lakeshore continued to fish, hunt, collect water, and grow food near the shores whether it was formally illegal or not.⁷³ While some certainly contracted sleeping sickness, others did not.

In his capacity as a Sleeping Sickness Inspector Enforcement Officer, Chorley witnessed the growth and decline of Lake Victoria's fishing industry. As just one example, though he cited several, the Waiya Bay separating the Entebbe peninsula from the mainland was closed as a Sleeping Sickness Infected Area from about 1904 until 1918.⁷⁴ In just five months after the area was officially opened for fishing for the first time in over a decade, 300,000 fish were “taken out” of this bay at a rate of 300-500 fish daily for every one hundred yards of imported nets set in these waters. By 1927, catches were reportedly down from nearly five hundred fish to at most fourteen fish for the same quantity of nets.⁷⁵ Chorley documented a phenomenon that fisheries scientists and environmental geographers alike would describe many decades later. It usually takes less than twenty years for a “fishing industry” to severely compromise the ecological integrity and economic viability of otherwise productive fisheries.⁷⁶ In 2008, as in 1928, a multinational cadre of fisheries scientists and managers maintain that the reduction of Lake Victoria's fish exports to European consumers – Lake Victoria’s contemporary fishing industry -- is a crisis that must be averted. Following Garret Hardin’s tragedy of the commons thesis, contemporary fisheries managers often read the cause of this crisis as a classic case of

⁷³See for example: Hoppe, “Lords of the Fly.”

⁷⁴ Graham, *The Victoria Nyanza and Its Fisheries*, 49.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶For an analysis of the ecological impacts of industrial fish production see: Daniel Pauly et al., “Fishing Down Marine Food Webs,” *Science* 279, no. 5352 (1998): 860–63. For a detailed critique of the managerial regime that presided over Newfoundland's cod fishery collapse see: Bavington, *Managed Annihilation: An Unnatural History of the Newfoundland Cod Collapse* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010). For a global analysis of the political economy of fisheries industrialization, decline, and geographical spread see: F. Berkes et al., “Globalization, Roving Bandits, and Marine Resources,” *Science* 311, no. 5767 (March 17, 2006): 1557–58.

“too many fishermen chasing too few fish.”⁷⁷ In the concluding section of this chapter, we return to Nyanja’s contemporary littoral, where stone trenches, *enkejje*, spirits, and ideas about fish and people continue to bring different bodies of water into being.

Kome, Enkejje, and a Growing Commercially Extinct Fishery

My first trip to Kome Island came through the one of the kind of coincidences that make fieldwork feel good. In late March 2012, Bakaaki told me he was soon attending a workshop on fisheries governance, so I invited myself along to a three-day meeting of the “Governance Working Group” of the Partnership for African Fisheries. The Group was composed of fisheries experts from across the Continent — Egypt, Gabon, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and of course Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, and led by an independent research and consultancy organization based in the United Kingdom and France. The meeting was held in Entebbe where I was based, so there was no need to consider staying in the luxury Imperial Resort

⁷⁷Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” *Science*, New Series, 162, no. 3859 (December 13, 1968): 1243–48. As David Gordon has demonstrated for the fisheries of Lake Mweru and the Luapula River situated between Zambia and the DRC, the “open access” conditions that Hardin’s compelling thesis elaborated were created through colonial-led attempts commercialize fisheries production. By at least the late 18th Century, access to Mweru-Luapula’s most productive fishing areas was mediated through reciprocal relations between two different kinds of littoral authorities –autochthonous “owners of the land” and conquering “rulers of the people.” Within this arrangement, the environmental conditions of land and lagoons served as material for evaluating whether these rulers were appropriately serving “the people.” Owners of the land voiced the concerns of living through the medium of communication with their ancestors. If the situation became sufficiently unbearable, rulers of the land could and would be overthrown.

This way of organizing ownership and access to resources was not intelligible to European colonial administrators who overlaid notions of individual and communal land tenure over more flexible and complicated systems of access. Administrators granted formal property rights to the “rulers of the people” rather than the “owners of the land,” shifting the moral obligations and accountability of rulers to resource users, resources, and the knowledge and practices inherited from the ancestors.

Still, littoral residents of Mweru-Luapula did not instantly become individual, self-maximizing economic subjects. Rather, they continued to make what Gordon terms “rational and respectable” investments in strengthening and expanding social networks.⁷⁷ Periods of increased economic productivity and growth experienced over the past forty years in Mweru-Luapula’s fisheries, as Gordon demonstrates, emerged through the work of rural women and migrant processors and traders, rather than large-scale and capitally intensive investments in infrastructure.⁷⁷

Beach Hotel, where meetings with such illustrious guests are so often held. It was an ideal opportunity to reconnect with old fisheries friends, and to make new ones.

Our conversations for those three days centered on the need to shift the ways fisheries experts talked about fisheries with politicians. There were presentations on successful efforts to capture foreign vessels flag-shifting and fishing in African waters without permission, developments in industrial fish processing on the Swahili coast, and fish-farming in Egypt amongst others. Much of the buzz was around the concept of wealth-based fisheries, ways to reframe how fisheries are interpreted and talked about by managers in order to raise attention to the forms of wealth that fisheries generate.

During our afternoon tea break of fish fingers and biscuits, I stepped outside to phone Akello to confirm the time we would be heading to a beach not far from where I was standing to buy “illegal” fish that night. Just as I turned to enter the glass revolving doors spinning into the air-conditioned atrium of the hotel, I heard a familiar voice: “Fishmonger! How are you my daughter?” I turned and saw the sparkling eyes of my old friend Odoi.

Moments later he invited me to join him on a trip to Kome Island that weekend. Of course I agreed.

Kome is one of the larger islands on the lake, though it is almost never labeled on any map that accompanies scholarly texts about Buganda or the broader region.⁷⁸ That is, if the island appears on the map. This is strange, given the Kome is the closest large island to Kampala and Entebbe, where so much work of the Buganda Kingdom, Colonial State and now

⁷⁸Indeed, when Kome Island does appear in historical texts and more recent ethnohistorical scholarship, it is most often in reference to the Kome Island in the southern portion of the lake.

Ugandan Government takes place. Although the island is often conceptually lumped with the Ssesse islands in the west, they are administratively connected to Mukono District to the east of the island, connected through the fish trade to Kampala and Kasenyi on the southern shores, and socially connected to the hills of Buwaya where some survivors of sleeping sickness in the early years of the 20th century were given land.

It takes anywhere from forty-five minutes to ten hours to make the twenty some-mile journey from the mainland to the south of Kome, depending on the “horsepower” of the engine used and type and weight of the vessel. Much depends on conditions of the lake, the kind of boat you move with, the “horsepower” of the engine, and the boat owner’s take on whether time is money, or money spent on fuel is actually the kind of accounting that matters.

Transformations in transportation were crucial to shifting perspectives of places like Kome, and making a manageable shoreline, indeed a manageable colony.

That next day, I saw my first and maybe only living *enkejje*. We arrived on the island just an hour after we left. Odoi’s speedboat is much faster than the local boats I was used to. In subsequent trips, it would take six to ten hours to reach Kome.

I climbed (or rather, tried not to slip) down a steep hill from a promontory peninsula called Bega Point. At Bega, strong rocks face the open sea and stalwartly break the force of the roughest waters. Behind Bega rests a well-protected island bay just a short distance from the worst of the waves. Directly adjacent to the bay are gardens that would make the most polycultured organic farmer tingle — sweet potatoes, beans, cassava, maize, sugar cane, spinach, hot peppers, onions and savory and sweet bananas, all interspersed with mango, citrus, avocado, and *mutungulu*, a small deliciously acidic fruit tree found only in wetlands.

Bega was formerly a sacred and strategically important space, Odoi assured me, “don’t worry, I already told you I did all those silly things the jjajja’s wanted me to do.” A short walk through light forest cover from Bega towards the center of the island are remnants of two old trenches, dug into the earth and fortified with stones. I’m told the King ordered the people of Kome to dig these trenches to protect themselves from the Bazungu (Europeans) back in the 1880s. Bega faces the “backside” of the island, “It’s always important to protect your behind from intruders,” I’m told.

The sheltered bays near Bega still offer incredibly fertile, indeed tranquil land for farming. There women who want to dig can request a plot from a man that the owner of the land has authorized to grant access to land for gardening, as the man who holds the legal title to available farmland there lives in another fishing site near Kampala. Women only have to pay for a plot if they intend to sell their crops, if they are just growing for their own consumption, they can keep digging and keep harvesting as long as they would like. Even women planning to grow for selling pay the equivalent of twenty U.S. Dollars for a plot to farm until they decide to quit, or shift to a new plot. Most middle-aged women who have lived on Kome for a few years have their own plots, younger women who may not plan to stay long, or who do not otherwise consider obtaining their own plot, may help a friend in her garden, rely on her friends or lovers for food, or if she has money, purchase her own.

Behind the wall of stone at Bega rest clusters of large, flat rocks that combine to form small but deep, incredibly clear pools of water. I sat for a while on the warm stone. My eyes relaxed over the open liquid horizon — it was rare to look out into the lake and not see another island. My mind wandered briefly back to the waters of that North American Great Lake of my

youth, Lake Erie, where there too the waves brought a sense of nostalgia for what had yet to come, always coming and going, dampening the sand then pulling the moisture back out into the lake.

Soon I noticed that one of the long-legged white birds I scared off during my less than graceful descent had returned. I watched it watching one of these pools, stepping slowly towards and finally into in the pool furthest from me, waiting a moment, then quickly plunging its head into the water. Fish, there must be fish in there. Only then did I think to direct my gaze towards the pool of water at my feet.

Inches away from my toes, cold, freshwater from the deepest parts of the lake constantly flowed in and out through small channels in the rock that buffered the potential impact of the waves. I soon saw group of about a dozen small sparkling silver-hued fish. They looked like *mukene* (“silverfish”) though I had never seen *mukene* still swimming either. I looked closer and saw one larger fish about twice the size of the others. Strange, I thought. Is that *enkejje*? I think so.

The *enkejje* seemed to be stewarding the others, maybe they too were *enkejje*? When the current rushed into the pool, the large fish appeared to lead the others in nibbling on the fine layer of algae accumulated from the steady inflow of invisible nutrients collected from the continuous movement of the lake’s clear water. When the force of the sea reversed its flow, fish disappeared out of sight into the nooks between rocks, perhaps seeking temporary cover so as to not be swept out to sea.

I initially thought the name “Bega Point” was derived from the English term “beggar,” and since Odoi had told me that people used to congregate there to practice “cultural things,” I

figured that ‘Bega’ referred to those that came to visit Bega point, to beg. Despite asking many current residents what the name meant, I was left with this assumption for almost a year.

It was not until my fifth visit to Kome that I was able to spend a few hours with Nzera Nabbosa. Jjajja Nabbosa was born on Kome and has lived in one of the small inland villages on Kome for most of her life. She knew about Bega, indeed, as a healer and medium, she knew him well. Jjajja Nabossa told me:

Bega is one of twelve *misambwa* that come over me, he usually comes with Serwambe and Lunfuwa - Lunfuwa is their leader. Now listen, Lunfuwa is that small rocky island just off the shore near Bega, no people are allowed to land there, it’s a home for birds and fish and otters and things. These *misambwa* come and tell me what medicine to use cure the different ailments that people come to me with. They tell me what they are suffering from. A woman came here recently who was about to deliver a child but was having trouble. The *misambwa* came over me and told me what medicine to get her, and when she took it she delivered well.

As a *musambwa*, Bega is a simultaneously a place, a one fully living person, and a mobile spirit with the powers to heal. When I asked Jjajja what happened to her grandparent’s *misambwa* when they were relocated to the mainland as part of sleeping sickness controls, she said, “They took them with them and brought them back when they came.”

Bega was given its name long ago from the verb *okubega*, to cut and serve food, “he is the one that served the visitors when they came,” Nabossa told me.⁷⁹ People used to come here from all over this and neighboring islands to seek guidance from the elders and ancestors, and to feast. Bega referred to the one giving food in littoral vernacular, not those asking for it, as I had assumed.

Before building his home on the island, he first had to bring “an important priestess”

⁷⁹ Thank you to Eve Irene Kirabo for suggesting this connection.

living on an island beyond Buvuma (which is very, very far) to appease the ancestors. This was an unusual circumstance. My host and his wife were making significant material investments in the land at Bega, transforming this still powerful promontory into a luxury holiday eco-resort. They were unwilling to allow the kinds of “sacred activities” that Bega was known for to continue, or rather, they wanted to have some “culture” here to attract guests, but culture that they controlled. When Odoi first arrived on the island, he told me there were still several small shrines active, people would come and go staying for as long as they felt appropriate. The priestess instructed my host to bring a sheep, goat, cock, hen, and nine pigeons. He did, and “jumped over” each animal. The priestess wanted to pour the fresh blood of each animal on him, but he refused. Instead, he was told to close his eyes and the blood was released in a circle around him. The ancestors said they were happy, but ordered him to leave immediately, lest the ancestors become upset again. He left, but returned several days later, and burned their shines down to the ground.

Conditions at Bega are transitioning from a site of healing and remembrance for littoral residents to a place of respite for wealthy elites. The rules of the ancestors are still remembered at this Point, even if the specific history of Bega is now mostly forgotten— no women were allowed to spend the night, no iron, cement, or permanent structures were allowed period, and no one was to bathe in the lake after having sex — if they did, Jjajja Mukasa would most certainly do something terrible, like whisk the offenders away to die a watery death in the rough waters just off the shore. The shoreline is incredibly tricky here. It is not difficult to imagine begin swept away.

Just a short canoe ride away from Bega point is a fishing camp where Akello and I

would stay during our many subsequent trips to Kome Island. From March-June as many as three-hundred men, women, and children make tens of millions of Ugandan shillings working with a type of fish known to managers as *Synodontis*, one of several categories of fish they consider to be commercially extinct. Many who live there during the season are from all over Uganda, and as far as Congo and Kenya, and Tanzania, but they all call this fish *nkolongo*. During *nkolongo* season, fishworkers live for a time in rented rooms constructed with repurposed timber sourced from old fishing boats. Most come to fish, smoke, or buy *nkolongo* for sale on the mainland, though others come to sell clothes or domestic goods, or work in newly opened restaurants and bars. Permanent and seasonal residents alike appreciate the activity of the *nkolongo* season, not least because they may earn as much, if not more cash during the peak *nkolongo* season than they probably will throughout the rest of the year, whether they spend their time farming or working with fish.



Figure 5-3: A Fishing Camp (Nkampi) on Kome Island

Women residents also pride themselves at working so hard during the season that they have no time for backbiting or rumor-mongering. Women told me they were simply too busy (making their own money) to worry about whether their husbands were spending time with women who come to the fishing camp when catches are good to entertain men, and earn some money.

Nkolongo is an ancient species of fish that probably predates the existence of this particular Nyanja itself.⁸⁰ Its three serrated boney appendages that stick out from its scale-less body just behind the top of its head and on both sides of its body behind its gills are capable of easily piercing through the flesh of careless humans and fish alike, and signal the evolutionary

⁸⁰ Stephan Koblmüller et al., "Mitochondrial Phylogeny and Phylogeography of East African Squeaker Catfishes (Siluriformes: Synodontis)," *BMC Evolutionary Biology* 6, no. 1 (2006): 49.

advantage of this fish's ancient body armor. *Nkolongo* are abundant in the deep waters off of the southern shores of Kome Island from mid-March to mid-July, roughly corresponding to the long rainy seasons (from mid-January to mid-June), but are also common in many central and southern African rivers and lakes.⁸¹ They are also one of the most delicious smoked fish I have ever tasted.⁸²

Some scientists believe that *Synodontis* spend most of their lives in open water, traveling only to rivers to spawn.⁸³ Most fishermen believe the opposite is true, that *nkolongo* usually live in rivers like the Kagera in the west and only come into the open waters between February and March, where they spawn and then hang around waiting for their young to become big enough to safely make the journey back to the rivers where they live. Most female *nkolongo* are gravid, that is ripe with eggs, in January before the season begins, and by June and July, the last months of the season, many more small *nkolongo* (about the size of one's hand) are caught.

Whatever their seasonal origins, *nkolongo* is one of the only fisheries in the Nyanja actually increasing in size. Its significance, however, is systematically – though likely unintentionally – obscured by methods used to assess fish abundance in the lake and the economic value of fish once they are captured. Both lake-wide net and market-based surveys have thus far been unable to capture basic information required for scientists and managers to estimate the ecological and economic value, or even extent of this niche fishery. Neither research methods are designed around the seasonal abundance or dearth of this species in mind,

81 J. J. Day, R. Bills, and J. P. Friel, "Lacustrine Radiations in African *Synodontis* Catfish," *Journal of Evolutionary Biology* 22, no. 4 (2009): 805–17.

82 Frans Witte and Kees (PC) Goudswaard, "The Catfish Fauna of Lake Victoria after the Nile Perch Upsurge," *Environmental Biology of Fishes* 49, no. 1 (1997): 21–43.

83 J. S. Balirwa and F. W. B. Bugenyi, "Notes on the Fisheries of the River Nzoia, Kenya," *Biological Conservation* 18, no. 1 (1980): 53–58.

and only very few studies have been designed for Lake Victoria with this species of fish in mind at all.⁸⁴

The bulk of *nkolongo* are caught in areas between submerged rock outcroppings, these are difficult for large research vessels and their large nets to pass. Some Ugandan fisheries scientists and managers who have participated in managerially-oriented research surveys have told me that the European's directing these efforts simply told them to throw these fish back into the water uncounted and unaccounted for. Because *nkolongo* are very difficult to remove from fishing nets, when they have been caught in research nets, the nets too may be disguard, even thrown into the body of water scientists know as Lake Victoria.⁸⁵ At least half of all *nkolongo* processed from fishing camps like those on Kome Island are transported directly from landing sites to traders taking fish for export to distant markets in Northern Uganda and eastern Congo, thereby, bypassing most of the formal markets where statistics are collected.

The *nkolongo* fishery is the only one where I have seen women removing fish from nets. Even when women own the boats and nets that bring in Nile perch, tilapia, and mukene (the three most common commercial species of fish presently caught in the lake), they leave it to fishermen to remove fish from nets. This is largely due to the nature of fishing for *nkolongo* and

84 Koblmuller et al., "Mitochondrial Phylogeny and Phylogeography of East African Squeaker Catfishes (Siluriformes: Synodontis)"; Day, Bills, and Friel, "Lacustrine Radiations in African Synodontis Catfish."

85 Interlocutors have suggested this for contemporary Lake Victoria. This tendency for *nkolongo*, known to scientists as *Synodontis* to disturb researchers was noted as early as 1961 by E. L. Hamblyn, a scientist then briefly affiliated with the East African Freshwater Fishery Research Organization. As it noted for "It will be noticed that the gill net was not fished after the large haul of *Synodontis* caught in Fishing 2 [the second experimental treatment identified in his report]. These *Machochid* fish are dangerously armed with serrated pectoral spines which may be locked at right angles' to the body. This behaviour, coupled with the strong dorsal spine, causes them to become almost inextricably entangled in a gill net which is ruined by a heavy catch." E. L. Hamblyn, "Appendix H: A Note on Lake Rudolf," in Annual Report 1961, East African Freshwater Fisheries Research Organization, East African Common Services Organization (Nairobi, Kenya, 1961), 47.

the materiality of the *nkolongo* itself. *Nkolongo* fishing begins around ten or eleven at night, when fishermen leave the shore, traveling slowly to conserve fuel. Once in the productive fishing grounds of the lake's open waters, fishermen set their nets, wait several hours, then begin hauling them onboard and traveling again slowly back to shore. Because the best chances for catching *nkolongo* are on rainy and windy nights, when the *nkolongo* is forced up towards to surface of the lake from the deep waters where it prefers to dwell, fishermen are careful to wait until the lake has calmed down before they pull their nets and begin traveling back to shore. Boats usually do not return until between mid-day and mid-afternoon. Because of the high oil content of the *nkolongo's* flesh, and its three serrated boney appendages that make it very difficult to remove these fish from nets, once boats land, it's 'all hands on deck' to remove them for smoking before they are spoiled by the afternoon sun.

Because Bega and this fishing camp face the open water, the early morning storms here can be fierce. Around three a.m. the wind suddenly seems to come to life, entering your ears somewhere between a sweet song and a scream. Trees that were perfectly straight in the light of day have their branches blown back, prostrating towards the land. Waves crash into rocks, spouting water up meters into the air, reaching all the way to Bega in their midst. Flashes of fuchsia, yellow, white, and brown light up the liquid horizon. Piercing, blending together into spectrum of shades it is difficult to find anywhere else. Mesmerizing, until a sudden crack of thunder vibrates through everything, and hearts forget to beat.

Even during daylight hours, the Nyanja here can be so rough that even Odoi's powerful speedboats may be docked on the island for days, unable to ford the lake. I wonder where the *enkejje* hide out during the storm.

Chapter Six Hatching the Children of Ennyanja Nalubaale

In the language of *Ennyanja Nalubaale's* littoral, the vernacular word for island is *(eki)zinga*. Although *zinga* is a noun, it references an object (*eki*) that comes into being through the action of rolling, coiling, twisting, and folding (*zinga*).¹ Associations between islands, fishwork, and the littoral politics of belonging emerged from material practices and intellectual traditions that rendered the littoral livable through the physical and conceptual work of rolling, coiling, twisting, and folding.

As we have seen in Chapter Four, fishing gears used to catch *enkejje*, such as baskets (*amagala*) and nets (*ekiragala*), were associated with littoral concepts of abundance, authority, and wellbeing around this body of water in pre-Victorian times. Chapter Five demonstrated that the manipulation of littoral vegetation, such as *ebinsambwe* for making fishing gears and *luzibaziba* for making medicines, worked to reduce available habitat for tsetse flies that may or may not have carried sleeping sickness. This chapter focuses on an event known as *okwwalula abaana*, the hatching of the children. Through the hatching of the children, material and metaphoric associations between water and land, domestic and wild food, and children, adults, and ancestors come to life around Nyanja's pre-Victorian littoral.

It is impossible to know exactly when littoral residents started practicing *okwwalula abaana*. It likely coincided with a “difficult but territorially expansive” period during which

¹ The verb form referenced here is *okuzinga*.

concerns over fertility and belonging were paramount. By 800 AD the northwestern shores of this lake had become a very attractive place to live.² The well-watered hilltops were ideal for banana farming and forests and wetlands offered abundant sources of wild meat, fish, and fiber. Navigable waters and wetlands afforded an ease of movement and trade that by 1000 AD had connected the lake's littoral to trading networks that extended from the Indian Ocean in the east into the iron, copper, and salt producing communities in the center of the continent.³

Archeologists, social historians, and historical linguists rightfully assume that fishing was an important subsistence, even a somewhat commercial activity, throughout the regions long history. Little to no attempt, however, has been made towards considering how techniques for catching and consuming particular kinds of fish coexisted with other food provisioning practices that led to the development of the complex political institutions that have fascinated historians of the region for so long.⁴

As we have seen, it is clear that fish, and *enkejje* in particular, were part of the “eclectic food system” that developed at least on the northern shores of the Nyanja by the first millennium AD.⁵ Though this study is primarily concerned with describing this body of water as multiple in and around the northwestern island and mainland shores of what is now contemporary Buganda, fish, fishing, and life at the littoral more broadly, were similarly generative elsewhere. As Michael Kenny has argued, “logic, history, and economic interest

² Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, a Good Place*, Chapters Four and Five.

³ Reid, “Buganda: Unearthing an African Kingdom,” 41; Kenny, “Pre-Colonial Trade in Eastern Lake Victoria.”

⁴ Mary E. Prendergast, “Kansyore Fisher-Foragers and Transitions to Food Production in East Africa: The View from Wadh Lang’o, Nyanza Province, Western Kenya,” *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa* 45, no. 1 (April 1, 2010): 83–111.

⁵ David Lee Schoenbrun, “We Are What We Eat: Ancient Agriculture Between the Great Lakes,” *The Journal of African History* 34, no. 01 (1993): 22.

meet in the significance which Lake Victoria [sic] attained in the ritual life of the peoples around it.”⁶ Together they offered a shared, but shifting sets of material possibilities and constraints that shaped how littoral residents interpreted, and in turn shaped the island and mainland shores they inhabited, as well as the communities they developed there.

This chapter begins with a discussion of *Ennyanja Nalubaale* in relation to the *Lubaale*. I then examine how fishing structured gendered associations between land and water in ways they did not inland, specifically, that women lived on in the land and men lived on in the lake. I then discuss the implications of this for lineality and land in the region through a detailed discussion of *okuzwalula abaana*. This chapter concludes by returning to Mukasa to revisit the misinterpretations of littoral patriarchy that have submerged the gendered complementarity of this figure for far too long.

Nyanja Nalubaale: Water, Stone, and Remembering Not to Forget

The vernacular term for this ancient body of water, *Nyanja Nalubaale*, rarely appears in non-vernacular language accounts.⁷ When it does, *Ennyanja Nalubaale* is frequently translated as “the lake of the gods” though occasionally also the “mother of the gods,” with the root stem **-lubaale* interpreted as one of many gods, or spirit guardians of the Buganda Kingdom and Baganda people. The *Balubaale* (non-gendered plural of the singular *Lubaale*) are occasionally likened to the saints of Catholic Christian traditions as a point of Western reference. After this

⁶ Kenny, “The Powers of Lake Victoria,” 721.

⁷Christopher Wrigley, for example, uses both terms interchangeably, and describes “(ba)-lubaale “ as they feature in Ganda tradition as “deities...not the ancestors of the kings...the stories about them were only feeble anecdotes purporting to explain their names or characters.” Wrigley, *Kingship and State: The Buganda Dynasty*, 41.

brief mention in English accounts, however, this body of water is generally referred to as Lake Victoria.

It is inappropriate, however, to understand the *Lubaale* as purely a religious or spiritual entity, because this is not how they were and still are experienced. Mukasa is made real through winds, waves, and rain, catches of fish, and the birthing of twins. The *Lubaale* *Kiwanuka* becomes real through lightning, and *Nandaula* through eruptions of boils on the skin. When *Nalubaale* are discussed as gods, they are conceptually severed from the material basis of experience – visible, felt, and embodied – over which they held, and to a lesser degree still hold considerable influence.

David Schoenbrun's careful reconstruction of the term suggests that **-lubaale* represent a semantic link between “stones” and not forgetting ancestral spirits, or “the challenge posted to the living of achieving in such a way so as to not be forgotten after they depart for the land of the dead.”⁸ Presumably for Schoenbrun and for historical residents of the littoral, islands were stable material formations within an otherwise fluid body of water. They offered material inspiration for conceptual connections between the living and the dead, and between the islands and the land inland.

The material basis for *Nalubaale* is further evidenced by how the *Balubaale* speak, that is, make themselves known. *Lubaale* speak through participants in public healing events and in private consultations between “patients” and *bakabona* the guardians of the *Lubaale*. In public events, *Lubaale* make themselves known through the actions of those that the *Lubaale* will speak through. In private consultations, some *lubaale* speak through the falsetto or grunting

⁸ Schoenbrun, *The Historical Reconstruction of Great Lakes Bantu*, 213, Root 327.

voice of a healer, other *lubaale* and other healers may not. Before Mukasa speaks, those who Mukasa has visited will be able to “eat fire,” touching their tongues to the glowing embers of a burning piece of wood. When Kiwanuka is present, those he speaks through are able to step and dance on fire. When Kinene, the *Lubaale* of death and life visits, the visited suddenly lays on the ground, completely immobilized, resembling one who is dead. Their body will be covered by other participants in bark cloth, just as is done in a funeral. The body of the visited remains immobile for hours, overnight, or sometimes days. It may start to smell and attract flies before the *Lubaale* may eventually have made its point and moved on. After which the person afflicted simply comes back to life as if nothing had ever happened.

Speaking, however, is not necessarily associated with verbal acts of speech, but rather a more general notion making their presence known. This, however, is again done through very specific material practices. *Lubaale* may speak by throwing or beating grass from the floor of the shrine (*kiba kizibu muddiuro ly'mperwo okukuba obusubi*), indicating the strong physical movements of those through which *lubaale* speak. If, however, the *lubaale* refused to speak, certain trees may be burnt on the fire to encourage *lubaale* to come and throw grass. For example, *akakubanjazi* is a tree, which grows in groups on isolated patches of soil on rocks, or in places where boats that have fallen into disuse have begun to decompose and recombine into new forms of life. These grow tall, but not wide, and have leaves that taste sweet when chewed.

The “Na-” prefix in *Nalubaale* indicates the feminine gender of the *Lubaale*, however, there is no clear correspondence between the gender of a given *Lubaale* and their abilities to communicate with and through living individuals of a given biological sex or practiced gender. There are male *Lubaale* that “catch the heads” of women, and female *Lubaale* that “catch the

heads” of men. As just one example, when a feminine *Lubaale* comes over a man when groups have gathered to summon the Balubaale, he must serve food to everyone at the feast that follows to “get clean and back to normal.”⁹ Indeed, *Lubaale* are commonly referred to as “Jjajja” a generally honorific term that refers to living grandparents of any biological sex and deceased ancestors alike. Still, it is significant that when *lubaale* are referenced as a group at the littoral, it is through their feminine associations.

According to Holly Hanson, the *Nalubaale* gained prominence as national *Lubaale* within the Buganda Kingdom sometime around the 17th Century.¹⁰ Schoenbrun suggests that this occurred when a set of territorial nature spirits, or *misambwa*, became portable. That is, rather than remaining rooted in a particular place, *misambwa* began traveling with and through individuals and communities who innovated ways to carry on their legacies. For vernacular littoral historian Zzibukulimbwa, *misambwa* are the really living spirits of the mighty dead people who once lived during a time when the waters of *Nyanja* literally rose to prominence, physically separating the islands of the lake from the mainland. This was the time, Zzibukulimbwa states, that the Ssesse islands received their general name, from the verb *okussesetuka*, the islands have moved.

Published contemporary and historical ethnographic evidence for how *misambwa* feature within the everyday lives of those who bring them into being is sparse. Perhaps this is because *misambwa* appear so strangely complicated, and yet, they have very practical influences. At the littoral and in the consultation rooms and larger shrines of healers, however, *misambwa* make

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10 Hanson, Landed Obligation.

themselves known. Their purposes there are clearly “to judge.”

Focusing on the interconnections and innovations in practices of public healing and clanship, Neil Kodesh has examined the ways in which the processes of state building in Buganda – including violence – both fortified and transformed already existing community building practices. For Kodesh, “the clan concept served as powerful tool for organizing societies, creating alliances, and promoting collective health.”¹¹ The expansion and reconfiguration of existing clan networks and the development of new clans from the mid-seventeenth century onward, Kodesh argues, drew upon core concepts and practices of public healing, including “the significance of territorial spirits [*misambwa*], the authority associated with firstcomer status, and the capacity of mediums to steer the content of a community’s moral economy.”¹²

Although he briefly notes the work of women as spirit mediums, spirit wives, and princesses, his otherwise elegant analysis of public healing and pre-colonial state building has little room for women as agents of the sophisticated and shifting regimes of healing and community building he describes.¹³ Kodesh's work marks a significant contribution towards the study of “historical visions that lie outside official, courtly histories,” and does the difficult work of reanalyzing clanship beyond notions of kinship and descent. However, because the clan histories he so carefully analyzes were collected primarily from the patriarchs of these clans themselves, rather than, say, their wives, sisters, daughters, or perhaps more importantly, their

¹¹ Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 173.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ drawing on the work of Nyakanyike Musisi's on the gendering of royal women as male (and commoners as female), Iris Berger's work on the authorities and agency of female kubandwa healers in the Great Lakes region, and Rene Tantalala's work on cwezi spirits and mediumship in Western Uganda, FINISH

grandmothers, Kodesh misses important opportunities to challenge classic assumptions of hierarchical notions of power and the primacy of biological descent even further. Situating these developments within the materiality of the littoral and the metaphorical assumptions that emerged brings us closer to a more sensible explanation.

Spirits of Fishermen Live on in the Water, Spirits of Women Live on in the Land

An abundance of shared place names suggest long histories of cultural commerce at and between littoral places.¹⁴ For example, there are two islands named Kome – one along the north-central shores of contemporary Uganda and another along the southern shores of contemporary Tanzania. At the extreme end of the Entebbe Peninsula to the immediate southwest of the Entebbe International airport in Uganda is one of three settlements associated with an ancient cultural complex linking the Ssesse Islands to mainland Buganda at Entebbe known as Misoli. Several hundred kilometers southeast of Entebbe's Misoli, is a trading center known as Misori located near the entrance of what is now Homa Bay in eastern Kenya, a littoral locale offering comparatively easy access to the open waters of the lake, and the large neighboring islands of Rusinga and Mfangano.¹⁵ The ancient burial grounds of lake's leaders are still remembered as Busiro along the northern mainland in and around Entebbe. Busira Island near Bukoba in contemporary Tanzania was known similarly as the “island of the dead.” Indeed, in the littoral communities along the western shores of the Nyanja, “chiefs and men of

¹⁴Cory and Masulu note that “in the absence of confirmation, it is by no means safe to assume that the same place-name has the same etymology and meaning in different places.” Hans Cory and M. M. Masulu, “Place Names in the Lake Province,” *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 30 (1951): 53.

¹⁵ “l’s” and “r’s” are often used interchangeably in vernacular languages spoken around the lake.

rank are interred in caves,” while women are buried near their home, and fishermen are buried at sea.¹⁶ These shared place names reflect histories of intercultural commerce productive of shared spatial imaginaries that once linked fishing and life along the shoreline towards the lake,

Similar compositions of the littoral vegetation also provides common material for spatially distant littoral residents to think and work with. Wetlands predominate the mainland and island shores of the lake from just below the Kagera River in the west, up and around to the so-called Winam Gulf in western Kenya, and again from just east of Mwanza across to the western shores of the lake. The papyrus “swamps” that fringe the lake are known as *ebitogo* in Luganda, *togo* in Dholuo.

It is significant that all around the lake, the deepest, most distant waters from the shore are known *Lolwe* and *Dolwe* – in both Bantu- and Dholuo-based languages. Fishermen who fish these particularly treacherous waters are considered *Balolwe*, whether or not they fish from waters classified as belonging to contemporary Tanzania, Kenya, or Uganda. In Western Kenya, *Nyalolwe* was a term used for sleeping sickness¹⁷

Midway between the inshore littoral, and the deepest waters of *Dolwe*, lies an area of the lake known as Buziba. As early as 1897, Colonial administrators identified Buziba as a specific mainland territory along the western shores of the lake north of Bukoba and south of the Kagera River.¹⁸ This caused confusion for early administrators because this geographical territory seemed to be inhabited by people who called themselves “Waheia” and “Batundu,” and

16 (Werner 1910, 60) Alice Werner, “The Native Races of German East Africa,” *Journal of the Royal African Society* 10, no. 37 (1910): 60.

17 See for example: *Some Fathers of St. Joseph’s Society, A Handbook of the Kavirondo Language* (Nairobi: Caxton Printing & Publishing Works, 1921), 11.

18 Rehse, *Kiziba, Land Und Leute*.(Rehse 1910)

only very rarely did they call themselves “Waziba” or “Baziba,” as these investigators expected.

¹⁹ There were and still are at least several other Ziba's around the lake, including Godziba, an island in *Lolwe*, situated in the deep waters far from the south-central shores of the lake; Ziba, a small village just north of the bay behind the Entebbe Peninsula along the northern mainland fringe of the lake; and also Buziba the liquid center of Lake Nabugabo, a small inland lake connected to the northwestern shores of Nyanja through a thickly vegetated papyrus wetland, the kind littoral residents still call (*ebi*)*togo*, whether speaking Kihaya, Luganda, or Dholuo.²⁰

The Kimwani, were a group of fishing specialists along the southwestern shores of Nyanja, and studied by H.A. Fosbrooke in the 1930s. In Fosbrooke's study of their fishing methods and culture, he reported the Kimwani believe that the spirits of departed fishermen go to live with Mukasa in the lake.²¹ The spirits of deceased littoral women, “spirits of fishers' wives,” in Fosbrooke's parlance, “however, live near the house.”²² Perhaps this emerged from the very practical fact that the lake is dangerous, it is normal for the lake to bring death to men who fish in distant waters. Women were likely buried inside their homes. Based on practices described for how men made claims to land and their descendants maintained them, women's homes were likely not inhabited by anyone else after their deaths, but rather, if relations between the deceased woman and those still living where she last lived were favorable, her home would remain and be regularly maintained by her living ancestors. While most fishermen

¹⁹ Werner, “The Native Races of German East Africa,” 59.

²⁰ More recently in contemporary Tanzania, the mainland area once known as Buziba is known for its commercial gold prospects, and not its impressive lacustrine history. For a rich discussion of gold mining, economic transformation, healing, and struggles for environmental justice east of Buziba in Mwanza, Tanzania see: Menan Hungwe Jangu, *Healing Environmental Harms: Social Change and Sukuma Traditional Medicine on Tanzania's Extractive Frontier*, Dissertation. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2012), especially Chapters Four and Five.

²¹ In the southern and southwestern portion of the lake the term Mugasha is commonly used to refer to Mukasa.

²² Fosbrooke, “Some Aspects of the Kimwani Fishing Culture,” 4.

were either buried at the water's edge (if the shoreline is sandy), or if the shoreline was rocky and a shoreline burial impossible, stones were fastened to the fisherman's neck and feet, and he was "buried at sea."²³ Exceptional Kimwani men could be buried inland, if his relatives chose to sacrifice a goat to Mukasa. In that case, Fosbrooke reported that the clan would assemble on the shore where the goat is then cooked and consumed. After eating the goat, its bones are thrown into the lake to appease Mukasa.

This is still the case for some families who continue to maintain close connections and beneficial relations with their ancestors. For example, I was told during one visit to a family shrine where I frequently travelled that the grandparents who were given this land told their grandchildren that they were to be buried in their homes, and that their homes should be kept in a respectable condition. The quality and periodic maintenance of the thatched roof of the home is particularly important here. If rain touches the ground inside the house, and therefore seeps into the graves themselves, anyone and everyone in their family is likely to fall sick, with a cold, flu, malaria, and so on. I was told that this had unfortunately happened in the past, but that this family worked to make their ancestors happy again.

Whether buried at sea, or buried at home, after the burial, according to Fosbrooke, "in all cases it is necessary for the clan to go to the lake and drink water." This is to show Mugasha that relations of the deceased do not blame Mukasa for killing one of their members. If they neglected to drink from the Nyanja, Mukasa would be angry and claim many more victims. Anyone who refused to drink the Nyanja at that point could not drink it again in the

²³ Ibid.

future, should they do so they “would die.”²⁴ Indeed until only recently along Uganda’s littoral, newcomers to the Nyanja were encouraged to drink water directly from the lake before setting out on their first canoe journey so that Mukasa would know that the newcomer is both obedient and mighty.

Although women are now remembered to have never been welcome in fishing boats in Lake Victoria, this historical ethnographic record does not support this claim for Nyanja. According to Mors’ 1953 account of fishing in Buhaya, a region bordering the Buganda territory of Buddu, “the Bahaya like to have a woman in the canoe when they are fishing as it is believed that thus they will catch many fish.”²⁵

Amongst the Kimwani, women and men launched new fishing boats together. According to Fosbrooke, the owner (always assumed to be the husband, but this is not likely the case) and his wife gather food of every kind they can (except fish, because the canoe has yet to be used for fishing). Then they enter the boat on land, and sit next to each other. Those that have helped build the boat begin to push it into the water while saying “your name is so-and-so,” that is, giving the boat the name decided by its owner - often named for “fishers of repute.”²⁶ The husband and wife then paddle out into the Nyanja together. After this, they eat the food that they brought with them and then returned to the site from where their boat first departed. The couple then sponsors a feast to all who participated in the construction of the boat. Here the productivity and conviviality of the male-female pair is generative on the water, as well as on land.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Many boats are named for women. For the quoted text above see: P. O. Mors, “Notes on Hunting and Fishing in Buhaya,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (1953): 92.

²⁶ Fosbrooke, “Some Aspects of the Kimwani Fishing Culture,” 4.

Named Enkejje and Littoral Interconnection

As noted in Zzibukulimbwa's account, there were many specific vernacular names for different types of *enkejje*:

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*.²⁷

Though he references the yellow color of *amadoola*, and the possibility of finding fish wearing camouflage, the majority of his descriptions focused on the sizes of each type, where they are found, and what other kinds of fish move with them. These relationships between *places in the lake* (deep, deep waters, shallow waters, and swampy and rocky areas), and *between other fish* (big fish moving together, certain big fish and small fish always moving together) are

²⁷ Zzibukulimbwa, "Ennyanja Nalubaale," 7.

central to littoral interpretations and experiences of this body of water. They of course require other people to make them possible. As Zzibukulimbwa notes, only “baitfish” seems to swim alone.

There are at least four named types of *enkejje* that were once used in *okwalulá abaana* in Buganda: *enkejje enganda* (of Buganda), *enkejje engadya* (of Nagadya at Nkumba), *enkejje enkasa* (of Bukasa Island), and *enkejje ensese* (of Ssesse Islands).²⁸ Because many types of *enkejje* are no longer with us, we do not know whether these were blue or yellow, spotted or striped, or big or small, whether they ate snails, scales, or other fish. That is, we do not know whether any physical characteristics of specific *enkejje* types made them well suited for use in *okwalulá abaana*. It is possible that the actual physical characteristics of types did not matter all that much.

What is important, however, is that these were *enkejje* associated with specific places and that these places were associated with the “networks of knowledge” that Kodesh demonstrates were assembled around littoral centers of “public healing.” More than simply kinds of fish or kinds of physical nourishment, named *enkejje* link the test of belonging that *okurwalula abaana* represents with the Ssesse Islands (*enkejje ensese*), Nkumba Point where Nagadya, a feminine Lubaale of fertility once presided (Nkumba University now stands where her shrine once was), Bukasa Island, or of Mukasa more broadly (*enkejje enkasa*), and of Buganda more generally (*enkejje enganda*).

These naming practices were similar to those for winds; it really all depends where you are positioned relative to the lake. If you are standing on the mainland at Entebbe facing the

²⁸ The first four varieties were mentioned in: Zzibukulimbwa, “Ennyanja Nalubaale.” For *enkejje ensese* see: Le Veux, Premier Essai de Vocabulaire Luganda-Français D’après L’ordre Étymologique, 340.

lake and the wind is blowing your hair back, you would call those winds *Buziba* (from the lake). If you journeyed a short distance across lake southeast from Entebbe towards the island of Nsazi, and the wind was at your back, you would say the winds were *omu nnantebe* (from Entebbe). And yet, if the same winds were blowing, but you were standing on one of the many Ssesse Islands to the west, you may simply say that the wind is blowing Mugungu — that is from the former Buganda counties of Kyaddondo, Busiro, and Mawokota. At the littoral, what is, is always relational.

It is possible that residents living in mainland Buganda hatched their children with their own *enkejje* (*enkejje enganda*) and that residents of the Ssesse Islands did the same, using *enkejje ensese*. Maybe it was the other way around, residents of Buganda hatched their children with *enkejje* from Ssesse and residents of Ssesse hatched their children with *enkejje* from Buganda. Either way, types of *enkejje*, distinguished based on where they were fished, are crucial for constituting communities there.

Fish, Children, and Littoral Lineality

Okwalula abaana, literally, the “hatching of the children,” was an event during which children – and by extension their mothers – were once and for all decided to either belong to a family, or not. For John Roscoe, the missionary turned ethnographer, the “marriage of the parents was unimportant compared with this ordeal.”²⁹ Importantly, *okwalula abaana* combines produce from multiple provisioning traditions — agricultural (boiled bananas and banana beer),

²⁹ Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 61–64.

pastoral (milk and ghee), fishing and foraging (*enkejje* and mushrooms) and two elements that sustain them all – water (Nyanja), and salt made from vegetal ash.

Communities of farmers, fishermen, hunters, potters, and iron-smelters and smiths have long been concerned with securing their continued access to productive farmland, forests, and fisheries. David Schoenbrun's careful examination of the shifting terrain of food production and social life in this period suggests that between 900 -1100 AD that collections of family units or homesteads (*ndá*; *lulá* plural) became the focus of social relations and clanship.³⁰ The semantic domain of *lulá*, Schoenbrun notes, “is 'inside' the body, quite often the womb itself.”³¹ The stem is also used in reference to a particular kind of vegetal creeper known as *kyewelula*, which was commonly used to bind sticks together during the construction of houses. This creeper can stretch up to three miles in forests, and when planning to build a number of houses, builders would spend days in forest collecting these creepers and rolling them together into large bundles.³²

I reference the physical spread of *kyewelula* here because it reminds us that families ought not to be considered in the “nuclear” sense – as a bounded unit of mother, father and children, or even in the “extended” sense – as including grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins. But rather, “families” at the littoral society were compositions of many different people that formed the basic units of successful communities, rather than accumulations of biological relatives. Families were assembled like bundles of *kyewelula*, tied to each other through the tasks they “carried out: fishing, hunting, farming, and herding, the bearing and raising of

30 Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, a Good Place*, 172–175.

31 *Ibid.*, 174.

32 Zzibukulimbwa, “Ennyanja Nalubaale,” 31.

children, and the practical tasks of craft production, house building, and caring for the sick and departed.”³³ The size of these groups, Schoenbrun reminds us “likely ranged from ten people to hundreds.”³⁴

Although Schoenbrun and Kodesh do not discuss *okwalulá abaana* explicitly, the practices of “hatching the children” offers an opportunity for examining the kinds of gendered negotiations over lineality and land that took place, and to a lesser degree still take place, at the littoral. Given the increased focus on the continuity and expansion of family groups (*lulá*) around 1000 AD, it is reasonable to assume that *okwalulá abaana* was the primary means through which “others” were “brought *inside* as wives or husbands and their children given legal status as insiders, as ‘us’ not ‘them.’”³⁵

These concerns were partially motivated by contests between littoral communities, but also by periodic influxes of pastoral groups seeking to extend their territorial control beyond the grasslands north, west, and south of the lake. Some of these would-be usurpers practiced a “famous fish avoidance,” that is, they defined themselves by their distaste for fish.

Scholars that do reference the hatching of the children, either stress, in the case of Musisi, or note, in the case of Stephens, that hatching the children marked the acceptance of new children into paternal clans.³⁶ This close examination of *okwalulá abaana*, however, reveals that grandmothers, not men, were responsible for testing children (and by extension their mothers). It was women who carried on the genealogical memories and imaginaries of littoral

33 Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, a Good Place*, 98–99.

34 *Ibid.*, 99.

35 *Ibid.*, 174.

36 Nakanyike B. Musisi, “Women, ‘Elite Polygyny,’ and Buganda State Formation,” *Signs*, 1991, 766; Stephens, *A History of African Motherhood: The Case of Uganda, 700–1900*, 127:121.

ancestors through the practices of naming children. Grandmothers guided and judged the behaviors and abilities of mothers, ensuring that only the good eggs eventually “hatched.” Given the littoral associations between women and land, and men and water after one’s biological death, it makes sense that elder women were responsible for deciding who belonged, that is, who was able to make claims to the resources that families were able to marshal.

Though Schoenbrun focuses on the concurrent development of patrilineal forms of descent in this same period that *okwaululá abaana* was likely innovated, he does note that “fishing groups drew the line differently.”³⁷ Schoenbrun offers the example of fishing and pottery specialists in and around the Malagarasi swamplands, located in what is now southeastern Burundi and northwest Tanzania. Known as the *Wakiko* to others, and to themselves as *Wanahonza*, these “men and women are trained to handle canoes almost from infancy, and of course, become expert.”³⁸ According to one observer writing the late 1930s, “they fish over a wide area each year...fishing is their principle industry, but the women are famous potters and turn out large numbers of pots, water jars and many other articles.”³⁹ In marked contrast to what we assume about lineality in eastern Africa, these fishing specialists understood that “children are the property of the mother.”⁴⁰

Given the spatial extent of wetlands and riverine and lacustrine littoral, it is important to consider these alternative reckonings of descent as more than an anomaly, but rather as constitutive of the political and economic transformations that began taking place around 1000 AD at the littoral. Andrew Reid has argued that this same period is one during which “fishing

37 Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, a Good Place*, 209 n 19.

38 Macquarie, “Water Gipsies of the Malagarasi,” 64.

39 *Ibid.*, 65.

40 *Ibid.*

(as a source of protein) and other activities on the lake became intertwined with inland agricultural (carbohydrate-rich) production in a successful combination that was one of the key features of the resultant kingdom of Buganda."⁴¹

For Schoenbrun, food and metalwork:

bound the region together in trading relations that could easily have stimulated or resulted from deeper social ties such as marriage or alliance. These trade links swung in two main fulcra: between fish (mostly dried) and farm produce around lakes and rivers and between pastoral and farm produce around pastureland. A third, rather amorphous connection undoubtedly grew up between hunters who worked the savannas and forests and their herding or farming customers."⁴²

Building on Steven Feierman's suggestions that public healing ceremonies served as rituals designed to ensure both personal reproduction and group survival, Kodesh links the development of clanship to achieving the social purposes of natality in Buganda. *Okwalula abaana*, I argue was how this was materially and metaphorically achieved. The multiple shrine centers dedicate to the *lubaale* around the Nyanja Nalubaale may have been exactly where this was achieved.

Littoral residents negotiated repeated moments of intercultural convergence by innovating ways to prove who rightfully belonged to littoral families and who did not. These "tests" were not necessarily exclusionary, indeed, most families (*lulá*) would have wanted to "pass" as many potential members as possible, thereby expanding their potential territorial authority both in space (across land and lake) and in time (from one generation to another). The practice of *okwalulá abaana* was likely crucial, yet thus far overlooked, as a means of public healing following particularly difficult periods of violence or changing weather patterns that

41 Reid, "Buganda: Unearthing an African Kingdom," 41.

42 Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, a Good Place*, 27.

compromised the production of food. For Kodesh, the increased violence and an influx of captives from wars experienced in the region in eighteenth-century Buganda provided a “willing constituency of people seeking to reduce their vulnerability through participating in the public activities at shrines.⁴³ *Okwalulá abaana* offered a way for littoral women to consolidate group identity and maintain access to land while also offering guidance on behavior and provisioning for newcomers. It also would have been important during more prosperous periods not as an extreme event, but as part of the regular life cycles of families.

The “results” of these tests were not arbitrary. As we will soon see, the grandmothers who guided the practice of *okwalulá abaana*, required that new mothers were proficient in a number of important productive domestic tasks, including basket and salt making. Importantly for our purposes, those who innovated the practice of *okwalulá abaana* placed fish eating at the center of what it meant to belong along the verdant northwestern island and mainland shores of the lake. Newcomers did not necessarily have to be from fish-eating families, but they had to be willing to eat fish.⁴⁴

How the Children Are Hatched

At least two children, one of either sex, must be eligible for this ceremony before preparations will begin. According to Roscoe, “however numerous they were [children of one sex] they could not go through the ceremonies without awaiting at least one child of the other

43 (Kodesh 2010)FINISH

44 N. Mpesha and M. Mwangi, *Mugasha: Epic of the Bahaya* (East African Educational Publishers, 2000).

sex.”⁴⁵The children to be tested need not be born of the same mother or father, though because both biological sexes were required, the children may be anywhere from a few months to many years old.

Before the ceremonies took place, the mothers of the children went to the shores of the lake to cut reeds (*eggugu*), which they then burned into ashes and combined with water to make salt. The mothers brought this salt with them to the home of the elder family member who hosted the ceremony. Perhaps not coincidentally, the male priest of Mukasa’s main shrine was named Ggugu.

Before the legitimacy test began, all guests in attendance, except for the mothers, would share a meal of matooke steamed in their peels and soup made from *enkejje* fish cooked in the salt the mothers had made. The elders I interviewed were very clear on this point, the fish used in this ceremony “was nkejje and nothing else.” *Enkejje*, when boiled in a sauce makes a special kind of soup — it is thick, but not too thick. According to Roscoe, the fish was given to mothers as a “charm to effect rapid child-bearing, just as the fish swarm by thousands in the shallow waters of the lake.”⁴⁶ More than just a charm, *enkejje* are one of the few fish in Nyanja that can safely be consumed without removing its bones — they are excellent sources of protein, fat, and vitamins and minerals. Following the meal, the legitimacy test would begin.

The mothers would sit on a new bark cloth given to them by the host of this occasion with their children on their laps. Their mothers-in-law, the potential grandmothers of the children, sat across from the mothers and a large woven waterproof basket was placed between

⁴⁵ Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 62.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

them. The grandmothers poured banana beer, milk, and water into the basket. The mothers then handed the umbilical cord of her child, which she had been preserving for some time, to the grandmothers. The grandmothers would then smear the cord with a bit of ghee and then drop the cord into the basket. As the cord entered the water the grandmother said 'this is the child of so and so' mentioning some of the ancestors of the family. If the cord floated, the children were considered legitimate members of the family. If the cord sank, the child was considered to be "wild," that is, not born of the family. Though, it was well known that grandmothers were able to influence the results of these tests, as Lusembo noted, "apparently the umbilical cord was manipulated according to the knowledge about the child."⁴⁷ Presumably, the more ghee and salt the grandmothers used, the greater the chances the cord would float.

Children who passed the test were washed in *olweza* and *ebbombo*, two herbs that brought blessings to children, and most especially blessings to twins. More than simply luck, these herbs were and still are used to treat a variety of other illnesses. *Olweza* (*Aerva lanata*) can be infused within bathing or drinking water as a "good luck charm."⁴⁸ The herb may also be smoked on a broken pot to assist with the adjudication of disputes, specifically "criminal case[s]."⁴⁹ There is some disagreement over the scientific names of particular species, possibly also because there is not complete consensus on their vernacular names either. *Olurweza* is also listed as *Helichrysum odoratissimum* in some studies, which has been found to have "activity

47 Mathias Lusembo, "The Transformation of the Status and Role of the Ganda Married Woman since 1877," Rome: Doctoral Dissertation, 1990, 123.

48 Ssegawa and Kasenene, "Medicinal Plant Diversity and Uses in the Sango Bay Area, Southern Uganda," 523.

49 J. R. S. Tabuti, K. A. Lye, and S. S. Dhillion, "Traditional Herbal Drugs of Bulamogi, Uganda: Plants, Use and Administration," *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 88, no. 1 (2003): 22.

against *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* and other species of *Mycobacterium*.⁵⁰ The second herb used in the "hatching" ceremonies as well as with young children in general is *akabombo* (*Cyphostemma adenocaula*). Similar to *olueza*, *akabombo* also has an impressive array of uses, including treatment for yellow fever, boils, tapeworm, and septic wounds.⁵¹ The leaves can be infused in liquid or chewed to induce labor and treat measles.⁵² The whole plant can also be used to make a salve to treat genital warts.⁵³ When added to water used for bathing, it treats amoebiasis and "spirits."⁵⁴ This is all to say, regular use of *olueza* is perfectly sensible.

Then, their grandmothers would take the basket containing the umbilical cord, milk, water, and beer to a banana garden on their family's land, and insert the cord into the top of the stem of a banana plant. If the confirmed child was a girl, the cord was placed in a banana plant grown for food (*nakitembe*), if it was a boy; it was placed in the stem of a variety used to make beer (*embidde*). After this, the mothers were required to fetch firewood or water for the host of the ceremony and were then allowed to have their share of the *matooke* and *enkejje* sauce. After the meal was over, the mothers went inside the home of the elder hosting the ceremony and he (or she) "jumped over" each mother, while the mother told the child that the elder was its father.

The following day, each mother again sat on her barkcloth outside, and her mother-in-

50 John RS Tabuti, Collins B. Kukunda, and Paul J. Waako, "Medicinal Plants Used by Traditional Medicine Practitioners in the Treatment of Tuberculosis and Related Ailments in Uganda," *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 127, no. 1 (2010): 135.

51 F.A. Hamill et al., "Traditional Herbal Drugs of Southern Uganda: Part I," *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 70, no. 3 (July 15, 2000): 291.

52 Maud Kamatenesi-Mugisha and Hannington Oryem-Origa, "Medicinal Plants Used to Induce Labour during Childbirth in Western Uganda," *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 109, no. 1 (January 3, 2007): 7.

53 Ssegawa and Kasenene, "Medicinal Plant Diversity and Uses in the Sango Bay Area, Southern Uganda," 533.

54 Tabuti, Lye, and Dhillon, "Traditional Herbal Drugs of Bulamogi, Uganda: Plants, Use and Administration," 40.

law (the child's grandmother) sat on the opposite side. Holding a piece of cooked *enkejje* in her right hand and a piece of cooked matooke in the other, the mother-in-law placed her hands on the knees of her daughter-in-law and began listing the names of her child's ancestors. As she moved through the list, she moved her arms slowly up to her daughter-in-law's mouth, into which she placed the matooke and then the nkejje fish. After this, the grandmother went to her grandchild and began again to slowly list the names of the child's ancestors. And, when the child laughed after hearing one of the names, the grandmother named that ancestor as the child's guardian.

The council of elders of Uganda's Native Anglican Church prohibited the practice of *okwalula abaana* in 1913, and circulated the following statement amongst church leaders: "that the ceremony of giving a Tribal name be accompanied by heathen rites be forbidden, but that the Tribal name be given in baptism as a second Christian name and thus prevent the invocation of an ancestor to name the child in a heathen ceremony."⁵⁵ As early as the 1930s, the demands of the colonial labor economy reduced the amount of time available for families to meet. Children were increasingly hatched at funerals, instead of at a separate family event. Though littoral residents continue to practice *okurwalula abaana*, they now do in secret. No longer is a male and female pair of children required before the test can begin, a single child will do. Now, *okurwalula abaana* is understood as a vernacular paternity test.

⁵⁵ Taylor, *The Growth of the Church in Buganda*, 144.

Enkejje and Matters of Life and Death

As we learned in Chapter Three, *enkejje* were valuable sources of nourishment, flavor, and opportunity for littoral residents.⁵⁶ *Enkejje* were associated with ideas of abundance and life itself. These were generated through women and men's work observing fish, and making and fishing with baskets. Although all this in itself is remarkable – *Enkejje's* practice of mouthbrooding, described at the end of Chapter Three, offered material with which historical littoral residents developed of a flexible symbolic repertoire for thinking about and shaping some of the most fundamental and interconnected aspects of human experience – being born, accepted, and remembered.⁵⁷

Okwahu *abaana* focuses on family in a broad sense. Though, this does not mean that *enkejje* did not feature within larger institutions of clan and state building in Buganda. As just one interconnected example, the Mpindi (Small Bean) and Enkejje clans were together responsible for guarding the throne of the Buganda Kingdom after the death of the King Son and before the installation of a new one. They also both had special uses for *enkejje*, which marked the successful birth of a child or to comfort the spirits of the deceased and the not yet fully born.

The days following childbirth are potentially precarious for both mother and child. At

⁵⁶ Studies on “maternal fish intake” and early child development in Denmark and the U.S. have shown that higher maternal fish intake is associated with higher child developmental scores at 18 months and 6 months, and three years of age. See: Julie L. Daniels et al., “Fish Intake During Pregnancy and Early Cognitive Development of Offspring,” *Epidemiology* 15, no. 4 (2004); Emily Oken et al., “Associations of Maternal Fish Intake during Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Duration with Attainment of Developmental Milestones in Early Childhood: A Study from the Danish National Birth Cohort,” *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 88, no. 3 (2008): 789–96; Rejane C. Marques et al., “Maternal Fish Consumption in the Nutrition Transition of the Amazon Basin: Growth of Exclusively Breastfed Infants during the First 5 Years,” *Annals of Human Biology* 35, no. 4 (2008): 363–77.

⁵⁷ (Oken et al. 2008; Marques et al. 2008; Daniels et al. 2004)

least three days of seclusion and rest was required.⁵⁸ Having help with food provisioning and preparation was particularly important during this period, as is, at the littoral at least, a willingness to eat fish.

Women of the Mpindi (Bean) Clan once marked the successful birth of a child into their family only after the child's mother consumed an *enkejje* tail first with its “fins and the ridge of spikes along its back left on.”⁵⁹ If she struggled to eat the fish, it was apparent that her child did not rightfully belong. At the same time, this made it relatively easy to prove that women and children did belong to the families into which they bore their children – all they needed to do was practice eating *enkejje*.

One motto, or drumbeat slogan, of the Nkejje Clan, states: “pluck one nkejje, and throw it into the fire so that the grandchildren may be filled with its aroma. [the eye of] the goat, during slaughter, takes its [eye] off the 'killer' and onto the knife.”⁶⁰ It seems that many mothers did just that. Women who buried their children after an untimely death would throw a few *enkejje* onto the fire the day after they buried their children. The aroma of the *enkejje* was said to soothe the spirit of their departed loved ones.⁶¹

At its most basic formulation, whole *enkejje* made whole bodies, families, and polities at

⁵⁸ There is consensus within the published literature that either three or four days will be spent in seclusion following the birth of a child. There is no agreement, however, whether which number of days corresponds to the sex of the child just born. Some accounts say that three days are required if a girl is born because boys are weaker than girls. Others say that four days are spent in seclusion when a girl is born because she is weaker than a boy. Others state that four days are spent in seclusion because boys were preferred.

⁵⁹ Mpindi clan women I have spoken with at the contemporary littoral do not remember this practice. However, see: Roscoe, “Notes on the Manners and Customs of the Baganda,” 56.

⁶⁰ In Luganda, Nkejje tungulako emu osuule mukyooto abazzukulu bawunyirwe evvumbe. Kiiso kiiso kya Mbuzi (Kirekerera omussi nekitunuulira omubaazi). From: Eve Irene Kirabo, trans., “Buganda Clans and Their Totems - Enkejje,” The Official Buganda Kingdom Website, accessed April 28, 2014, <http://www.buganda.or.ug/index.php/buganda-clans-and-their-totems-v15-523/enkejje>.

⁶¹ Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 126.

the lakeshore possible. Central to this littoral interpretation of *okurwalula abaana*, are close associations between fertility, access to land, and a continued abundance of small fish for women, men and children to catch, distribute, and eat. Like wetlands that buffer potential flows and depositions of nutrients and contaminants between the dry world of humans and the wet world of fish, *enkejje* once mediated between the competing authorities of littoral ancestors, and the needs and desires of the living and the not yet fully born.

Though Schoenbrun notes the importance of food collection and fishing as important for shaping Lakes Bantu (agriculturalists) communities' relation to their physical world, and for partly shaping their “views of themselves as say, eaters of fish, in contrast with Tale Southern Cushitic groups [pastoralists] who may well have practiced their famous fish avoidance,” little attention has been paid to how lacustrine groups such as the Baganda, but also Luo, Sukuma, and Haya came to practice both farming, fishing, and the raising of livestock.⁶² The seemingly strict avoidance of particular kinds of food, for example fish, is one strategy that cultural groups have long used to differentiate themselves from others.⁶³ Indeed, food provisioning and consumption techniques contribute to the development and definition of individual selves, as well as social units, from family groups to larger communities.⁶⁴ Along the littoral of northern islands, several clans closely connected to the Nyanja – the *Enkejje, Mamba, and Nsuma* Clans,

62 Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, a Good Place*, 67.

63 Frederick J. Simoons, *Eat Not This Flesh: Food Avoidances from Prehistory to the Present* (Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

64 FINISH Claude Fischler, “Food, Self and Identity,” *Social Science Information* 27, no. 2 (1988): 275–92; Sidney W. Mintz and Christine M. Du Bois, “The Anthropology of Food and Eating,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 2002, 99–119; Schoenbrun, “We Are What We Eat: Ancient Agriculture Between the Great Lakes”; Ceri Z. Ashley, “Towards a Socialised Archaeology of Ceramics in Great Lakes Africa,” *African Archaeological Review* 27, no. 2 (2010): 135–63; Mary E. Prendergast, “Diversity in East African Foraging and Food Producing Communities,” *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa* 45, no. 1 (April 1, 2010): 1–5. FINISH (Fischler 1988; Mintz and Du Bois 2002; D. L. Schoenbrun 1993b; Ashley 2010; Prendergast 2010a)

all have fish that were historically important to the founding ancestors of these groups as their primary totems.⁶⁵ The Mamba clan in particular is associated with what some scholars have called “ancient matrilinealism.” According to Michael Graham in his 1929 fisheries survey of the lake, “the four string-like paired fins of Protopterus [lungfish] are sometimes broken off and remain as stumps, when the natives may call them “massiwa.”” Graham notes that Massiwa is “Kiswahili for breasts; (which is absurd).”⁶⁶

Recent archeological investigations into the changing forms and uses of ceramics in Kenya and Uganda from the first and early to mid-second millennia AD suggest the importance of fishing as a complementary specialization and “supplement to the nutritionally restricted banana.”⁶⁷ Types of ancient ceramic remains known as Urewe, Transitional Urewe, and Entebbe have been identified as concentrated around the mainland and island littoral, but have rarely been found more than a few kilometers inland. The different forms and uses of these types of ceramics hinge on their size, and level of decoration. Urewe ceramics are small in size, though intricately decorated in a way that suggests their importance in domestic spheres of preparing, consuming, and storing food. Transitional Urewe reflects less investment in decoration, but retains the generally small size of Urewe ware suggesting the continued focus on domestic food production, preparation, and storage. Entebbe ceramics, however, are comprised of large vessels that may have held up to forty-eight liters of liquid or food. For archeologist Ceri Ashley, this relatively rapid increase in the size of ceramic produced in this

65 Cunningham mentions that amongst the “expert fishermen” in Buvuma “fish is eaten both by men and women, except a small sect who will not eat the fish known as “nkedye.” (1905, 132)

66 Graham, *The Victoria Nyanza and Its Fisheries*, 77.

67 Ceri Z. Ashley, “Towards a Socialised Archaeology of Ceramics in Great Lakes Africa,” *African Archaeological Review* 27, no. 2 (2010): 158.

period represents a “jump towards a new scale of social intercourse.”⁶⁸

This jump would have coincided with a relatively rapid increase in the size of ceremonial gatherings where biologically and socially-related groups met, ate, and together developed new social institutions, including regimes of public healing and clanship described by Kodesh. For Ashley, these large vessels suggest a shift in social authority away from the family home and close kin-group towards the wider community. Exactly the kinds of constituencies that shrine sites like Mukasa’s served, and served with fish.

Rethinking Blood and Bodies of Water

As discussed throughout this dissertation, the most in-depth studies of Lake Victoria, and by extension the islands and water in relation to the mainland, are premised on a number of fundamental misinterpretations about how gender structures access to fish, land, and agencies of various kinds. Mukasa as both material and metaphor for thinking and acting at the littoral illustrates both the extent of these misunderstandings and the possibilities for more promising reinterpretations. As we have seen in Chapter One, Mukasa was not a singular entity in the pre-Victorian body of water, but rather Mukasa manifested in a male-female pair that was then replicated throughout the littoral, but also wind, waves, fish, the birth of children, and especially the birth of twins. In Chapter Three, we saw that while scholars have understood Mukasa’s material symbols of office – specifically canoe paddles – as phallic, they may just as easily represent a woman’s hips and the womb there contained. In Chapter Four, we saw that

⁶⁸ Reid and Ashley, “A Context for the Luzira Head,” 158.

while Mukasa may have conceptually represented a male spirit, Mukasa appeared to early English speakers *in the flesh* through the form, voice, and commands of a post-menopausal woman. In the late 1800s, whether or not Mukasa was gendered male, female, or something else, it was a biological female who resisted the efforts of English speakers to bring the Victoria Nyanza and hence colonial rule in Uganda into being.

In Chapter Seven, we will see how women continue to work with Mukasa's bounty seemingly against all odds. These associations between notions of abundance, the work of coiling, twisting, rolling, and folding fishing gear, and eating fish created conditions of abundance and well being that characterized *Nyanja Nalubaale* so long ago. And, as we have just learned in this chapter, it is grandmothers, not male chiefs, clan leaders, or spirit priests had the final say in just who belonged to littoral families. Thinking with Mukasa, however, reminds us that grandmothers were not gendered female. Yes, they were once women, but the processes of aging bring grandmothers and grandfathers together as *bajjajja* – the same term used to describe the agencies of ancestors already long gone.

One final examination of scholarly misinterpretations of Mukasa helps bring this all together. Michael Kenny, in his study of the "Powers of Lake Victoria" implies that Mukasa's maleness and the maleness of the lake itself are manifest in Mukasa's lust for blood.⁶⁹ Quoting Roscoe he summarized the sacrifice of animals that accompanied the building of a new temple for Mukasa on Bubembe Island:

69 Kenny, "The Powers of Lake Victoria," 720.

As soon as the animals had been examined, a gutter was laid to carry the blood into the lake...[a priest caught] a little of the blood from each, and poured it into a large wicker water-proof receptacle which stood near, while the rest of the blood flowed down the channel into the lake. Watchers at the lake announced in a loud voice when the blood first reached the water; they called: 'he has drunk it....'⁷⁰

Citing Kaggwa, Kenny notes, "everyone, even the priests, was on that day prohibited from going on or even near the lake, on pain of death."⁷¹

There is another possible reading of Mukasa's bloodthirst when we consider this event in relation to the objects and obligations associated with Mukasa and the desires of littoral residents for socially accepted children. All of these indicate Mukasa's role in regulating periods of work and rest in relation to the monthly cycles of women's bodies and the monthly cycles of the moon.

Gifts to Mukasa were given in the "sacred number nine," referencing the nine months of pregnancy.⁷² Each year, the King gave Mukasa gifts to Mukasa's temple on Bubembe Island in either nine or ninety. On Bubembe, Mukasa was said to have a "meteoric stone which was turned first to the east, and then to the west according to the phase of the moon."⁷³

For Baganda, the waning moon "was said to bring on menstruation."⁷⁴ Each month, Mukasa's drums sounded to mark the pending appearance of the new moon, which "warned the people of the monthly cessation from work."⁷⁵ Women and presumably men, were instructed

70 Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 293–294.

71 Kaggwa, *Kitabo Kye Mpisa Za Baganda*, 115.

72 Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 293. Roscoe notes that upon the ascension of a new King to the throne of Buganda he would give gifts to Mukasa in a "peculiar form" in either groups of nine or ninety. *Ibid.*, 196.

73 Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 290.

74 *Ibid.*, 25.

75 *Ibid.*, 297.

not to work during this period of rest, and this time was known as “peace.”⁷⁶ Because a woman was not allowed to work, “touch anything and...go where she liked” during this period of “peace,” Mukasa’s regulation of women’s bodies has been glossed as offering additional support for patriarchal control.⁷⁷ However, the many women attendants at Mukasa’s shrine on Bubembe Island labored “under the principle wife of the chief priest” and not under the male priest himself.⁷⁸ It is unreasonable to assume that this mandatory rest was some kind of punishment. Even Mukasa’s priests enjoined all to practice a “period of abstinence...for a period of four days” in honor of Mukasa.⁷⁹

For Baganda, conception begins at menstruation, not at a woman’s first missed menstrual period. Towards the end of my fifth interview with Musoke Richard, a healer living on the mainland, but from Bukasa Island, we began talking about women’s fertility, a subject that we had not previously discussed despite our many hours of intense conversation. He mentioned a number of ways that healers work with women to bring (or not bring) children. He used me as an example: If you want to become pregnant, we have medicine that will ‘make your eggs become near,’ if you take the medicine, within a few hours you will get your period.⁸⁰ Menstruation, he noted, was when a pregnancy begins.

Pottery, a practical art once practiced by women on the islands, but remembered as exclusively a masculine domain within the ‘customs of the Baganda,’ (probably because women

76 Kagwa, *Kitabo Kye Mpisa Za Baganda*, 101.

77 *Ibid.*

78 Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 293.

79 Kagwa, *Kitabo Kye Mpisa Za Baganda*, 114.

80 He continued: “If you do not want to become pregnant, I can give you a bundle of medicine tied very, very tightly. With this medicine, you cannot become pregnant until you bring the bundle back to me, and I untie it for you. If you are having only girls, and you want a boy, you can take the medicine and have a boy. If you only have boys and you want a girl, you can take and you will have a girl.”

were removed from the King Son's palace around 1905) also illuminates gendered associations of power regarding fertility, and the cycles of the moon and women's bodies within the traditional art itself. According to Roscoe, potters would not begin their work until four days after the new moon and would continue until the moon was full. After the full moon, work ceases, lest their pots crack. Presumably, many pots would be exchanged during the full moon, when large groups of people gathered to eat, drink, dance, sing, and think together about the problems they faced and the future they desired. Coincidentally, this was also the time when women would be ovulating.

These potters, Roscoe claimed, were always men.⁸¹ According to Taylor, "there are several potters; those who are Baganda are men, but the Bavuma potters are, traditionally, always women."⁸² Cunningham noted: "the Bavuma are famous for their pottery, and carry as many as three hundred pieces in one canoe along the Uganda and Busoga coasts, bartering them with the natives for hoes, tobacco, and food."⁸³ On the western shores, and for the southern island of Ukerewe, Gerald Hartwig noted that "the women of each clan formerly produced their own pots and woven fiber containers. The two major kinds of pots included large ones for carrying water and smaller ones for cooking."⁸⁴

In contemporary Buganda, menstruating women are prohibited from entering shrines and other sacred sites. If an important ceremony is held during the new moon and women attending are menstruating, they can still participate at a distance. Post-menopausal women,

81 Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 402.

82 Taylor, *The Growth of the Church in Buganda*, 117.

83 Cunningham, *Uganda and Its Peoples*, 140. See also Macdonald, *Soldiering and Surveying in British East Africa, 1891-1894*, 147.

84 Gerald W. Hartwig, "Oral Traditions Concerning the Early Iron Age in Northwestern Tanzania," *African Historical Studies* 4, no. 1 (January 1, 1971): 102.

however, were allowed to participate as closely as they pleased, indeed, large ceremonies I attended at family shrines in 2011 and 2012 did not begin until the eldest grandmother of a given family was in attendance.

As the “chief of all the gods,” represented in both male and female forms, Mukasa shaped the rhythms of work and rest along the pre-Victorian island and mainland littoral.⁸⁵ Gifts of nine, “peace” at the new moon, and Mukasa’s role in bringing blessings of fish, safety, and children speak to the vital importance of littoral ontologies of fluid gender in making life with an uncontainable body of water actually work. At the littoral, blood brings life, not simply death. Connections between islands and the mainland, between generations, and between long-term residents and newcomers were crucial to successfully “hatching the children,” a ritual practice within which women as grandmothers superintended.

⁸⁵ Kagwa, *Kitabo Kye Mpisa Za Baganda*, 114.

Chapter Seven

Working with Fish in the Shadows of Lake Victoria

Almost all fishworkers in Uganda are criminals under the law. Most do not carry guns, manufacture explosive devices or plot to overthrow the government, though they may be considered “economic saboteurs,” an offense on par with treason.¹ Still, in these heavily regulated but selectively enforced fisheries, formally illegal fish are regularly caught, processed, consumed, and traded along one of the most tightly controlled coastlines in the region. Despite sustained efforts to limit Lake Victoria's illegal fish trade, Ugandan fish of sub-legal sizes are consumed from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Denmark, from Kampala to Tampa, Florida. This chapter develops the concept of vernacular fisheries practices in relation to fishing, and fish processing, trade, and consumption. It describes a body of water, Nyanja as ontologically different from Lake Victoria based on these flexible forms of vernacular fishwork. It argues that visions of a sustainable Lake Victoria cast shadows over vernacular fishwork in Uganda. These shadows conceal the contributions Uganda's fishworkers make towards economic growth, food security and sovereignty, and the burgeoning leisure culture along the southern shores of Uganda. However, they also make subsistence possible.

The designation of certain forms of fishing practices and certain forms of fish as illegal is premised on global fisheries management norms that claim to represent universally best

¹ Catherine Bekunda and Henry Sekanjako, “NRM MPs Want Economic Saboteurs Killed,” *The New Vision*, January 17, 2012, <http://www.newvision.co.ug/news/628420-NRM-MPs-want-economic-saboteurs-killed.html>.

management practice. For Lake Victoria, these are translated as the formal prohibition on catching, trading, and consuming “immature,” “undersized,” or “juvenile” fish. The law, however, is intentionally vague on exactly what constitutes an illegal fish.²

Management of Lake Victoria's fishing industry has focused on species and forms of fish preferred by non-African consumers: first tilapia in the colonial period, and now the Nile perch and the export market for Nile perch fillets. This constitutes what John Balirwa, Director of the Ugandan Fisheries Resources Research Institute as of 2014, has called “special interest management.”³ There are many more kinds of fish that ought to be better studied here. The funds for managerially-oriented research, however, are closely tied to the most financially lucrative fisheries. Recently, as prices for Nile perch exports have decreased relative to other globally-traded “whitefish,” so have donor funds for fisheries research and management.

To increase stocks of Nile perch in the early 2000s, managers began enforcing prohibitions on forms of fishing (specifically the use of all beach seine nets and gill nets with less than 5-inch mesh) and forms of processing, trade, and consumption (specifically tilapia under 11 inches and Nile perch under 20 inches). According to a fisheries officer at a major fish market in Kampala, Uganda, “What fish remains for internal consumption, the size anyway, is small. And for us they are very important.” Commenting on the impact of population growth

² The definition given in the The Fish Act of 1951 states that fish are: “‘immature,’ in relation to a species of fish, mean[ing] that it is of a length less than such as may from time to time be notified by the chief fisheries officer by statutory instrument, either generally or in respect of any specific area. See: Government of Uganda, “The Fish Act Ch. 197” (Government of Uganda, 1951). Although the Fish Act was revised in 2010, the definition of immature fish has been retained from the 1951 legislation, giving the Chief Fisheries Officer the legal authority to declare exactly what constitutes an immature, and hence, illegal fish. In practice this means that “the maturity of fish is based on the total length of that species at first maturity,” which is generally considered to be twenty inches for Nile perch. Joyce Nyeko, Senior Fisheries Officer at the Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industry and Fisheries. Personal Communication, July 13, 2014.

³ Balirwa, “Ecological, Environmental and Socioeconomic Aspects of the Lake Victoria’s Introduced Nile Perch Fishery in Relation to the Native Fisheries and the Species Culture Potential: Lessons to Learn.”

and rising fish prices, he stated:

When you go in some ports you find a lot of immature fish being sold. Because that's what they [local consumers] can afford to buy. The mature fish is now going to the rich and they are going outside. So that's the problem we are facing. Internally there is a growing market also. The population is growing and there's a need for fish. Some people have become financially better off when we began to ship some of these fish outside of the country in bigger quantities. That's why you find that there's now a market, an internal market. Formerly, before we exported much fish to you [Europeans and Americans], we used to sell the kilos of Nile perch for around seven hundred shillings, but now it's 5,000 internal! A Kilo!

Rising fish prices have had a deleterious impact on fish consumption at, but particularly beyond the littoral, with fish consumers reporting a reduction in their own fish consumption. The development of the Nile perch export market, alongside increased local demand for fish, has sparked the emergence of new and increasingly dangerous networks of exchange. Violence among fisheries officers trying to stop illegal fishing, processing, and trade is but one example.

Nile perch fishery enforcement efforts have focused on the seizure of fish less than twenty inches in total length, as well as particular kinds of fishing gear. Fishing nets made of durable plastic materials, known as monofilament nets and beach seines of all kinds are prohibited in Lake Victoria. Gillnets made of flax or other materials are permitted provided their mesh sizes are five inches or greater, the assumption being that this will ensure that harvested fish are at least of a reproductive age, but this is not always the case. The technically legal size of gillnets is actually seven inches. However, because enforcement officials generally target nets less than five inches, in practice, nets of five inches or greater usually pass as legal.⁴ Fishworkers may also intentionally or inadvertently violate the law, for example, by not

⁴ The Uganda Government, "The Fish (Fishing) Rules, 2010. Statutory Instruments 2010 No. 35." (The Uganda Government, September 3, 2010).

obtaining a valid license, fishing or purchasing fish from a non-gazetted site, or landing or purchasing fish anywhere between sunset and sunrise. Still, the size of fish and the type and size of fishing gear are what enforcement efforts focus on, and are in turn the criteria used here to define “illegal” fish and fishing.

While familiar with these formal fisheries regulations, many fishworkers do not describe their own use of prohibited fishing gear or their participation in the “undersized” Nile perch trade as a violation of proper fishing practice. It is common, for example, for legal-sized gillnets to catch Nile perch of less than twenty inches, even though fishermen using these nets may be targeting larger fish. It would be improper, fishworkers say, not to sell, process, or eat these fish once they are already landed on shore.

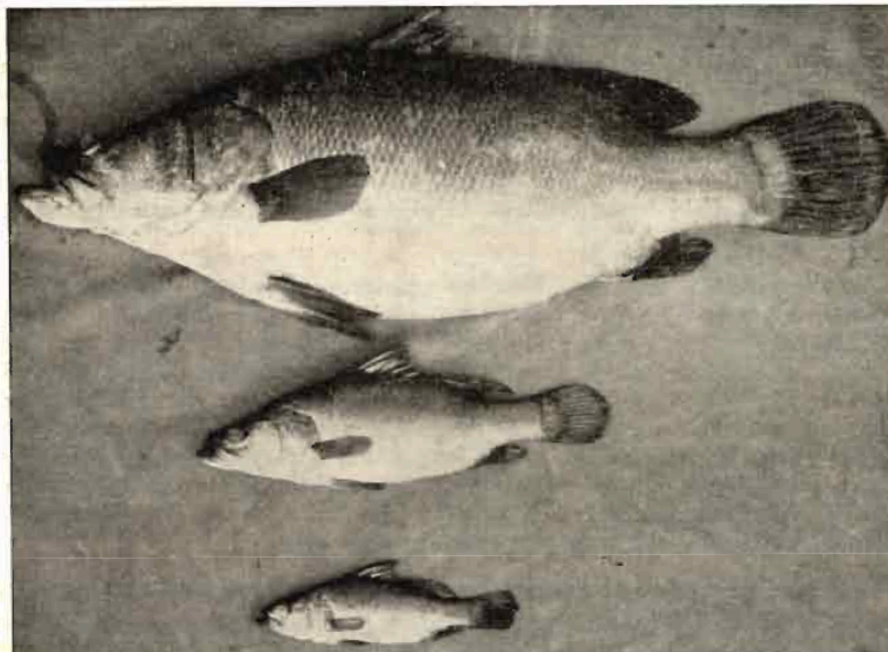


Figure 7-1: "Nile Perch taken in the Jinja area of Lake Victoria during 1964. The largest measured 71 cm. [28 in.] in total length, the middle specimen 34cm. [13 in] and the smallest about 20 cm. [7 in.]" Photo by J.M. Gee, in EAFFRO Annual Report 1964

Although all Nile perch less than twenty inches may all be considered immature by

enforcement officials, fishworkers further subdivide these into two broad categories – *fingiri* and *miraza*. *Fingiri* are fish the size of one's fingers or hand, and *miraza* are fish that fishworkers consider to be of “reasonable size,” about the length of one's forearm.⁵ These roughly correspond to the bottom two fish pictured in Figure 7-1, the smallest fish is *fingiri*, and the middle fish – *miraza*, or, reasonable. At only 28 inches, the top fish too could be considered *miraza*. Often, even reasonably sized fish are so large that they are already too expensive for most Ugandan consumers to purchase. Still, when fishworkers open up some large, but legally immature, fish to remove their various organs before sale, some females are found with mature egg sacs and some males with obvious milt.⁶ While most fishworkers agree that harvesting and trading *fingiri* results in short-term profits at the expense of the long-term health of the fishery, *miraza*, or reasonably sized fish are considered to be fairly large.

This is all to say that what constitutes an immature fish or an illegal fisheries activity is neither metaphorically nor materially fixed. Enforcement is often context-dependent. This has made it difficult for some fishworkers, particularly women who smoke and sell fish, to know exactly what fish they ought to be working with. Women who have had their fresh fish seized on the way to their homes for processing or their smoked fish seized on the way to market are often told to “stop working with these small fish.” At times, even these larger fish are seized, discouraging women from trying to purchase larger fish in the future. Differential interpretations of size and maturity absolutely matter here.

As important work on other freshwater fisheries has shown, littoral people have

⁵ We recognize that this varies from person to person. This is not intended to be a precise measurement.

⁶ Milt is the fish equivalent of semen.

simultaneously cooperated and resisted colonial and independent state fisheries' interventions to meet their needs first, even amid the introduction of exotic species and new networks of political and economic patronage.⁷ This highlights the unlikelihood of a simple correspondence between global discourses of sustainability and development and the ways in which they are adopted and adapted in littoral places.⁸ We consider sustainability to be both a compelling concept and an empirical reality enacted through the work of a shifting assemblage of littoral actors that include transnational and multidisciplinary managerial professionals, investors, clients, concerned consumers of Lake Victoria's Nile perch, and Nyanja's elite littoral residents who are increasingly involving themselves in the project of co-management.

In an attempt to avoid the dangers inherent in elaborating the illegal practices of many so-called criminals, this chapter instead focuses on vernacular forms of fishwork. Vernacular fishwork generates relationships between fish and people that may be at odds with conventional managerial reckonings of fishery sustainability. However, fishworkers still manage to sustain ways of living, growing, and indeed thriving that already offer alternatives to the production and consumption of things and ways of thinking driven by managerial science, capital and the fantasy of a world without limits. While some of the practices we describe below may be considered subsistence-oriented within popular accounts of fishing in Lake Victoria, Ugandan

7 For southern African fisheries see: David Gordon, *Nachituti's Gift: Economy, Society and Environment in Central Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); van Sittert, "The Tyranny of the Past: Why Local Histories Matter in the South African Fisheries." For south American freshwater fisheries see: Orlove, *Lines in the Water*; Leviell and Orlove, "Local Control of Aquatic Resources: Community and Ecology in Lake Titicaca, Peru."

8 For a careful elaboration of this concept see: Tsing, *Friction*. For ethnographies of integrated conservation and development projects in fisheries see: Walley, *Rough Waters: Nature and Development in an East African Marine Park*; Celia Lowe, *Wild Profusion: Biodiversity Conservation in an Indonesian Archipelago* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

fishworkers, subsistence evokes a hand-to-mouth, bare-life scenario that fails to reflect the contemporary realities of how fishworkers live, and how they wish to live in the future. Further, subsistence as a category reinforces the image of unchanging, rural, and usually 'backwards' existence that does not correspond to the ongoing adaptations and innovations Ugandan fishworkers make along their cosmopolitan shores to make it possible for others to eat fish. The continued flexibility of fishworkers ensures that fish are available for local, regional and intercontinental consumption, despite unprecedented efforts to limit the availability of fish that Ugandans prefer to subsist on.

Both the Ugandan government and most Ugandans themselves view transforming food production from a subsistence activity into a small-scale commercial enterprise as a key component for economic and social development. This desire for and outcomes of this transition are most clear in fish processing itself, where the Ugandan government with support from donors (the European Union, USAID, World Bank, etc.) has focused its efforts on adding economic value to fish through industrial processing for intercontinental export. Most fish consumed in Uganda is still produced artisanally, that is, by hand. These artisanal processors have focused on establishing and building their own processing capacity and networks of buyers for domestic and regional markets on their own, without guidance from international agencies or the government.

This chapter begins by differentiating Lake Victoria from *Ennyanja Nalubaale* and *Nyanja* by distinguishing Lake Victoria's Nile perch from Nyanja's *emputa*. These distinctions are then used to sketch a brief history of contemporary fisheries' commerce and control along Uganda's cosmopolitan south-central shores to better describe how and why most vernacular

fishwork has been criminalized. We then elaborate selected vernacular fisheries practices, focusing on how fish are caught and distributed, locations and techniques of fish processing, and the role of the senses in buying and eating fish to articulate how attempts to enforce a singular managerial conception of sustainability both limits and enables different kinds of fishwork and fish consumption.

Lake Victoria's Nile Perch and Nyanja's Emputa

There is a scientific and popular consensus that Lake Victoria's Nile perch fishery is overfished.⁹ Indeed, management experts are wondering whether to label the Nile perch fishery as “complete disaster.” Still, exports of Nile perch fillets remain one of Uganda's more lucrative sources of foreign exchange. While Lake Victoria as a lake defined by its Nile perch may indeed be on its way out, the body of water, or *Nyanja* as it is referred to by most residents of its northern shores, still lives on.¹⁰ Indeed, residents of the northwestern shores were intimately familiar with *Nyanja* as *Nyanja Nalubaale* long before anything called Lake Victoria ever existed.

This large body of water (*ennyanja*) was given its name in honor of the ‘really living spirits of the mighty dead people’ (singular, *Lubaale* and plural *Nalubaale* when referring to the

9 M. Njiru et al., “Are Fisheries Management, Measures in Lake Victoria Successful? The Case of Nile Perch and Nile Tilapia Fishery,” *African Journal of Ecology* 45, no. 3 (2007): 315–23; Njiru et al., “An Overview of the Current Status of Lake Victoria Fishery: Opportunities, Challenges and Management Strategies”; “Curb Overfishing on Lake Victoria,” *New Vision*, September 25, 2007, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/>; “Uganda: East African States Censure Overfishing in Lake Victoria,” *The New Vision*, October 24, 2008, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/>.

10 *Nyanja* implies a large and largely uncontainable body of water, be it a flowing river or an expansive inland sea.

feminine spirits of the lake, but *Balubaale* when referring to more than one *Lubaale* more generally). The various abilities and activities of these feminine *Lubaale* helped to form, and still influence, life within and around this lake. Still, there is as much new and global about this lake as there is indigenous and local. Most residents of *Nyanja Nalubaale* have taken up Christianity or Islam as their formal religion, though many still practice vernacular spiritual traditions, for example paying tribute to important familial and occupational shrines in hopes of receiving blessings for their health and for their businesses, including those that involve fishwork.

However, many contemporary residents who live and work around this lake were born elsewhere within and outside of Uganda and may not believe in, nor partake in, practices that pay homage to this lake's various *Nalubaale*. These residents will most often refer to the body of water as *ennyanja*, a large, uncontainable body of water, but will specify which *ennyanja* they are referring to if they suspect there is any confusion, though this is often unnecessary. While I do not wish to denigrate the diverse and prestigious lineages of *Nyanja Nalubaale*, as they are still important to some fishworkers, I choose to refer to this body of water throughout as simply *Nyanja*, retaining vernacular sensibilities about the uncontainable nature of this body of water that residents who live and work along *Nyanja's* north-central shores have developed to make sense of, and to live well it. When using the name Lake Victoria, I refer to classic global understandings of this lake as 'discovered' by an Englishman, named for an English Queen, and managed in accordance with global fisheries norms.

Nyanja supports a multiethnic and multispecies fishery – it is normal for at least five vernacular languages to be in use at a single fishing site, and many more species could be harvested there. Fishwork in *Nyanja*, especially on the islands has encouraged different kinds of

ideas about culture to emerge there than those generally conceived of inland. Whereas popular ideas about ethnicity in eastern Africa reinforce social difference, in the words of one fisherman from Buvuma Island:

Most people here are not Baganda, they just come. They are Acholi, Busoga, Mteso, all people. If they come here and spend five or ten years, then they will be called a Muvuma [one from Buvuma]. We become one family. When you stay in a place for more than five years, you become a citizen of that place.

This is a theme often recounted at the littoral. We are all one blood. We have many tribes here. We all struggle. All that matters is one's behavior.

Despite a barrage of accounts reinforcing an image of a Lake Victoria ravaged by too much fishing, uncontrolled pollution, and the uneven geographies of global capitalism including global climate change, more Ugandans may be eating more fish from *Nyanja* than they have in recent years, though most of these fish are formally illegal.¹¹ Still, the range of consumers of *Nyanja's* fish extends into Rwanda and Burundi, and beyond the watershed to include eastern Congo. Would-be consumers extend beyond the Continent to include every other continent active in the now global fish trade.

Vernacular fishwork broadly refers to fisheries-related activities conducted in relation to *Nyanja's* complex, dynamic and historically inflected shoreline, rather than in accordance with relatively static economic, managerial and academic understandings and categories of what Lake Victoria's fishery is and how it must be sustained. In order to begin describing vernacular fishwork in more detail, one additional conceptual and material distinction between the fish used to frame this analysis, that is, between Lake Victoria's Nile perch and *Nyanja's Emputa* is

¹¹ This is particularly the case for contemporary littoral residents whose parents and grandparents may have avoided eating fish for cultural reasons.

required. Both are considered to be the same species of fish, but they take very different forms depending on whether this body of water is understood as Lake Victoria or as *Nyanja*. The majority of Nile perch caught in Lake Victoria is uniformly processed into chilled or frozen 250-gram fillets in fish factories. Most of these fillets are then exported outside of the continent and sold as one of many “whitefish” available on global seafood commodity markets.¹² *Emputa* caught from *Nyanja* are usually processed whole by frying or smoking at a processor’s home, and traded and consumed locally. However, some smoked *emputa* are also traded far inland and regionally to neighboring countries, and some are also sold fresh or fried in local markets as whole fish or in bone-in pieces. Regardless of where the final consumers of *emputa* reside, those that eat *emputa* are usually eating technically “undersized and illegal” fish.



Figure 7-2: Left: Lake Victoria's Nile Perch. Right: Nyanja's Emputa.

While elders around the lake still reminisce about kinds of fish that the Nile perch consumed out of existence, they, like their children and many newcomers to the lakeshore,

¹²There is a growing local and regional trade in frozen fish fillets and processed “fish fingers.” These are sold in the aisles of the region’s most expensive supermarkets at twice the price of fresh fish in open air markets.

enjoy eating forms of *emputa* that resemble these extinct species. Specifically, Ugandans prefer whole *emputa* that range in size from a hand's length to the distance between one's elbow and the tips of one's fingers, those we consider to be of reasonable sizes. Featured generally in local markets, these forms of fish are easier than larger ones to catch, process and transport, are sold at prices within reach of most Ugandans, and retain the rich flavor and nutrition found in the head and skin. They also require the use of one's bodily senses when making decisions about how, where, and when to buy which fish. And, because of the widespread lack of home-based refrigeration in Uganda, fresh fish are purchased in proportion to one's needs and preferences for fish on a given day, and smoked fish which may stay safe to eat for several weeks are very popular. However, as we will see, Nyanja's *emputa* is at odds with the high modernist ideology of science-driven sustainable development that the Ugandan state and a multinational cadre of experts and consumers of fish fillets have cultivated for Lake Victoria's Nile perch industry. As an industry that literally produces disembodied fish products, its value is judged by standardized numerical measurements of quantity and quality, rather than the embodied senses and knowledge of those who work with and eat whole *emputa*.¹³

The development of new species and forms of fish production and consumption in Lake Victoria and Nyanja has made establishing mutually agreeable criteria for environmental subject formation in Nyanja difficult, as the politically charged categories of indigenous and local are circulated globally about this fishery, but have much less purchase here.¹⁴ The question is not simply whether to protect or degrade native or commercially important fish, but

13 Mitchell, Rule of Experts; Scott, Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed.

14 Agrawal, Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects; Agrawal and Gibson, "Enchantment and Disenchantment: The Role of Community in Natural Resource Conservation."

rather why, how, and when to harvest particular species and forms of fish that circulate differently in different places – debates that are also about scientific discovery, becoming and belonging, migration, militarization, disease, and desirable trajectories of economic growth.¹⁵

This analysis is inspired by Ivan Illich's description of the vernacular domain as "homebred, homespun, homegrown, homemade...absorbed by roots that grow from each individual into the environment in which he or she has an 'abode.'"¹⁶ Vernacular fishwork occurs when and where fish are caught, traded, processed, and purchased closest to home, though this does not exclude the vernacular work required to supply and source fish for intercontinental markets. Vernacular practice around *Nyanja's* fisheries is rooted in particular places, but these practices are difficult, if not impossible to calculate, control or predict, because like the lake itself, they are always on the move. Like Illich, I recognize vernacular work as "unpaid activities which provide and improve livelihood, but which are totally refractory to any analysis utilizing concepts developed in formal economics."¹⁷ However, I do not exclude all fishwork that involves cash exchange from this analysis of the vernacular domain. If I did, there would be very little to describe here, as cash is exchanged almost every time fish change hands around *Nyanja*, even between neighbors, friends or lovers. Rather, I locate the most vernacular forms of fishwork where those doing actual work with fish have the greatest say in negotiations over prices at which fish, or one's work with fish are exchanged. Vernacular work

15 Mack et al., "Biotic Invasions: Causes, Epidemiology, Global Consequences, and Control"; Warren, "Perspectives on the 'alien' versus 'native' Species Debate: A Critique of Concepts, Language and Practice"; Comaroff and Comaroff, "Naturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse and the Postcolonial State"; Head and Muir, Pat, "Nativeness, Invasiveness, and Nation in Australian"; Goldschmidt, Darwin's Dreampond: Drama in Lake Victoria.

16 Ivan Illich, "The Waning of the Vernacular," Second Thoughts Vol. 1 No. 1, May 1978, http://johnohligier.org/artman/publish/article_60.shtml.

17 Illich, "Vernacular Values," 61.

is unpaid in the sense of wage-based or salaried employment, but in Nyanja, vernacular fishwork most certainly pays.

Lastly, it is crucial that the understandings and work of *Nyanja's* residents are not relegated to the categories of homogenous and genderless “fishers,” and “fisherfolk.” Vernacular fishwork is gendered. Few of *Nyanja's* women that inform this study want to fish from boats on the open water, as many fishermen do, but some women own, or would like to own fishing boats and fishing nets. Few men care to prepare fish for domestic consumption, except perhaps as prestigious chefs employed in the region's most expensive hotels. However, this does not mean that gender comprises a static set of identities and practices, but simply that gender influences who may do what with fish, and where, when and how they may do what they choose.

At the same time, local and regional demand for fish increased alongside the establishment of the Nile perch export industry. New and long-time residents of Uganda's southern coast increased and began eating more fish, and many fish for the first time. *Nyanja* now hosts a growing middle-class comprised of individuals who enjoy eating fish, even if their parents or grandparents maintained strict taboos against fish consumption. Littoral residents and leisure visitors from the capital city are just as likely to have learned how to enjoy “the engine” of a fish (its head) from their parents, as they are able to confidently state, “in my culture we don't eat fish,” while politely cleaning an expensive meal of fried tilapia and chips from their teeth. These cultural transformations, coupled with the rise of domestic fish prices that followed intercontinental refashioned fish. Within a generation, fish were transformed from a widely available food that some people did not eat into a luxury food item. However,

domestic preferences for small, affordable and easy-to-transport whole fish directly compete with the export industry's requirements for comparatively large, filletable Nile perch, as well as the Ugandan state's perceived need for foreign exchange from exports. The Nile perch industry has also been heavily influenced by notions of sustainable development propagated by international donors and enforced by the Ugandan government. By the mid-2000s, 'poor management' and reductions in stocks of fillet-able Nile perch led several processing factories to close, and fish exports to fall. Lake Victoria's sustainable development crisis was born.

Which Fish for Whose Future?

By late 2008, a crisis consensus was reached by the Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization and presumably the 300 stakeholders present at the "Fish for the Future is Everyone's Responsibility Conference" held in Kampala, Uganda late October of that same year. The conference, primarily funded by the European Union, the largest importer of Nile perch fillets, purportedly brought "all relevant stakeholders" together to discuss the latest in fisheries science and policy. Fishermen and women who dry, smoke and fry fish for a living, however, were noticeably absent.

I presented a paper at this conference, and attended every official public conference event, but had no idea it would culminate in the release of a 'Conference Communiqué' on behalf of "We, the Participants of the LVFO Regional Stakeholders Conference held at Imperial Royale Hotel, Kampala, Uganda from 27th- 29th October, 2008." This Communiqué declared that all participants agreed "stocks of Nile Perch is [sic] in danger of collapse if urgent regional action is not taken." Although the Communiqué acknowledged that "fishing

communities and households in the region are more vulnerable than others in the event of collapsed fishery,” it did not address the economic and nutritional importance of local and regional fisheries trades in a variety of species. Instead, the Communiqué “launch[ed] an appeal and call to action by all and particularly the governments to take concerted actions to sustain the [Nile perch] fisheries” by reducing pollution, eliminating illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing, increasing monitoring, surveillance and control of fisheries, and developing “mechanisms to...limit access and the use of user rights.”¹⁸ The majority of Conference participants and presenters, myself included, were not asked to review a draft of the Communiqué or offer their approval of the final Communiqué in any discernible way. Indeed, it appeared finalized long before the Conference ever began. In early April 2009, the three basin nations of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda were awarded a loan from the World Bank for ‘fisheries development’ totaling 90 million USD, in large part to implement the agenda advanced in the 2008 Conference Communiqué.¹⁹

Nile perch exports are seen as a “quick” source of “dollars” for Uganda, while the local and regional trades in *emputa* are described as costing the country tens of millions of dollars in lost revenues each year. As stated by His Excellency Honorable Yoweri K. Museveni in a 2011 Presidential address on the economy:

18 See: LVFO, The Joint Communiqué of the Council of Ministers of the Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization Issued in Kampala, Uganda on October 29, 2008. (Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization, October 29, 2008).

19 Gerald Tenywa, “Sh180b for L. Victoria Development,” *New Vision*, April 14, 2009.

Quick dollars can come from fish exporters. In 1986, [the year Museveni became President of Uganda] there was not a single fish factory in Uganda. There are now 21 fish factories in Uganda, but only 17 are operational. They are, however, operating at 25% capacity because there is not enough fish. This is caused by over fishing – eating the mpuuta [emputa] before it is three months old – before it has started laying eggs. Fish is now bringing in \$80m per year. This can, within one year, go back to \$150m or more. The factories and external markets are there.²⁰

It is worth noting that President Museveni is not one of Nyanja's newest residents who have begun eating fish, even if their parents have not. Even though he can see Nyanja from almost every corner of his spacious Statehouse gardens in Entebbe, President Museveni views eating fish 'as a punishment.'

This emphasis on the potential profits to be gained from the export of Nile perch has predictably led to a crackdown on *emputa* fishing and the processing and sale of *emputa*. Despite these efforts, culminating in the late 2011 announcement that a new division of the Marine Unit of the Ugandan People's Defense Force - Ugandan's military – will be formed to enforce fisheries regulations, formally illegal fishing, processing, and consumption of *emputa* continues.²¹ Despite these formal laws on the books, on the shores and on the water they are viewed by most fishworkers as 'recommendations' rather than legally binding codes of conduct. While fisheries experts maintain that fishworkers must still be 'sensitized' to know what is best for them, *emputa* consumers, fishworkers included, cannot ignore their senses that tell them that a good fish is one that is whole, affordable, and freshly caught. It is towards these bodily senses and the physical and social work involved in catching, distributing, processing and purchasing fish that we now turn.

²⁰ Extracted from: Yoweri K. Museveni, "His Excellency on the Economy," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Republic of Uganda, July 6, 2011, <http://www.mofa.go.ug/index.php/presidents-message>.

²¹ Prossy Nandudu, "Uganda: UPDF to Patrol Fish-Producing Water Bodies," *The New Vision*, November 23, 2011, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201111240117.html>.

Locating Vernacular Fishwork

Catching and Distributing Fish

Industrially processed frozen and chilled fish fillets comprise Uganda's second highest foreign exchange earner, though it is difficult, if not impossible, to find industrial fishing in Uganda's waters. Vernacular practice guides the work of fishing and fish distribution in *Nyanja* for all species caught, always directing a portion for home consumption and to local processors, though fishing practice and the distribution of catches are also influenced by international market prices and fisheries regulations designed to produce exportable Nile perch fillets from Lake Victoria. Most notably, there is little to no bargaining possible over the prices paid for exportable Nile perch. They are set by factories and the middlemen who transport fish to the factories, though prices are more flexible for other forms of Nile perch available for local markets and depend on the size of fish, how and when the fish was caught, and the social connections buyers and sellers may have already established.²²

The actual work of fishing is done almost exclusively by men who construct nets and boats, cast and pull nets, and manage boats and the distribution of fish. Most fishing is done at night, by two men working from a wooden boat filled with gillnets and propelled by an outboard motor, or though beach seining, an illegal, but important shore-based method is still used. Women may pull nets from shore, and own and manage boats, though it is rare, if not impossible to find a woman fishing from a boat. Fish for domestic consumption are

²²A factory buyer will offer a slightly higher price per kilogram if fish are purchased on credit, rather than with a direct cash payment.

predominately purchased, cleaned, and smoked, fried, or stewed by women working with whole fish. Men, however, may do some of this work, but are more often seen selling whole fresh fish in large markets, and preparing bone-in portions of fresh Nile perch in these same markets for domestic consumption.

Fishworkers, however, are not limited to those who fish, own boats, and process and trade fish. A retinue of colleagues, friends and family are required to make fishwork possible. Fishermen usually head out into the lake around 5 PM, with a bag of food, some water, and often locally-brewed alcohol to keep them warm and calm, though their exact time of departure depends on the movements of fish. The further fish are from shore, the earlier fishermen will depart from shore to catch them. Around 6 PM fishermen will begin setting their nets, then, after taking a brief rest on the water, begin the several hours' work of pulling nets, and hopefully fish, into their boats around 1:00 AM, though this depends on the weather. If there are heavy storms, fishermen will try to stay safe and dry under heavy plastic tarps, only beginning the work of pulling nets once the sea calms down. Boats will start reaching the shore from the previous night's journey around 7-9AM, though when there is a strong land or sea breeze, or a heavy storm, boats may reach the shore much later in the morning, sometimes after 11 AM.

Another group of men are paid to lift nets out of boats and pile them on shore. This can happen either before boats are pulled out of the water to reduce the damage these heavy nets may cause to the bottom of boats when they are pulled to shore, or after.²³ If there is a strong

²³Removing nets before landing is most important in the dry season when lake levels are lower and the ground where boats are landed more firm.

sea breeze boats are pulled in with their nets though if there is a strong land breeze, nets will be removed as quickly as possible. When catches are good, these men are paid daily for their work. When catches are less than favorable these men will still work but not demand their usual cash payment, leaving the boat manager to decide how much to pay them. Either before or after removing nets, around 9-14 individuals (usually men) and almost always the boat owner or manager, gather around each boat and begin pulling it to shore. Time is of the essence here, as boats may break from strong winds and waves. Sometimes women will join men in pulling boats, depending on the cultural beliefs of the boat owner, though if a woman owns or manages a boat, she will almost always be there to help pull.²⁴

Once this group is assembled, any one person there to pull the boat will begin a call-and-response chant, or *harambe*, to begin the process of pulling a boat to shore. He or she will usually start with “*oooouuh yah*” and the others will reply “*yah.*” Then again “*oooouuh yah,*” with all replying “*yah!*” Then the leader will say, “*kale, kale,*”²⁵ (ok, ok) and all will reply, “*kale,*” (yes), then again “*kale, kale,*” with all replying “*kale,*” then the leader will say, “*Kuula eiyato tugende!*” (Pull the boat and we go!), and all start to pull. In about 5-10 seconds, it is necessary to rest a moment and begin again. Again, the leader begins with “*kale, kale,*” and the chant and this pattern of pulling are repeated until a boat is brought safely to shore. Most, if not all of

²⁴Some boat owners and fishermen maintain ‘traditional’ beliefs that it is bad luck for women to touch fishing nets and fishing boats. This is not a practice limited to Uganda’s fishermen, but is common in North American and Scottish fisheries, amongst others. See: Carrie L. Yodanis, “Constructing Gender and Occupational Segregation: A Study of Women and Work in Fishing Communities,” *Qualitative Sociology* 23, no. 3 (2000): 267–90; Nadel-Klein, “Granny Baited the Lines: Perpetual Crisis and the Changing Role of Women in Scottish Fishing Communities.”

²⁵ In Luganda, a vernacular language spoken by many in south-central Uganda, the word *kale*, means yes, ok, or you are welcome, depending on the context. *Kale*, is pronounced ‘kaa-lay,’ and not like the darkly-hued leafy green kale.

those who pull boats work with fish to some degree, but are almost never paid for their work.²⁶



Figure 7-3: Fishermen sorting their catch

Then, the boat manager or owner, almost always a man, carefully sorts the catches by size and quality. Only the freshest looking Nile perch of over 20 inches in length are placed in a large thickly woven plastic bag (*kaveera*) for weighing and sale to factory agents or suppliers. *Emputa* of 14–19 inches in length are placed in another *kaveera* for sale first to a regular buyer of sub-legal fish. Individual fish that show signs of dying as they were caught in a net (with grey gills, cloudy eyes, and softer flesh), rather than when the nets were pulled out of the water, will be set aside either to be sold with sub-legal fish of 14–20 inches, or given to fishermen as part of their side payment for their work. Fishermen are usually given two *emputa* of reasonable size immediately after fish are sorted, one for ‘breakfast expenses’ and one for home consumption, irrespective of the number and size of fish caught that day. He may choose to sell or give one

²⁶ In 2008, Jennifer briefly visited a fishing island with a District Fisheries Manager who described fishing on that island to her as ‘the best organized’ in Uganda. There, men wore different colored shirts representing their specific task in fishwork, and were said to be paid a daily wage in accordance with the tasks they performed. This included those who pulled boats to shore, but she did not ask any of these men whether this was actually the case. We have not seen this way of arranging work at fishing sites anywhere else around the lake.

or both of these fish to one of several women who meet the boats at shore, depending on his preferences and obligations. Given the heightened awareness and enforcement of size-based regulations for Nile perch, those sorting the catch will often intentionally ignore any *emputa* of less than 14 inches that are landed. Fishermen themselves will usually tie fish of these sizes into bundles, conceal them during sorting, and choose to sell these fish if and when suitable buyers are present.

The boat owner or manager is tasked with weighing and selling legal-sized and fresh fish to industrial fish factories by the kilogram at a price set by factory buyers. These fish are weighed together on a scale hanging from one of many fishing boats at a landing site. Middlemen buying fish at landing sites make their money by paying fishermen 90 percent of the total payment they expect to receive from buyers at the factories, and keeping the remaining 10 percent for themselves.



Figure 7-4: Middlemen Collecting Nile Perch, Headed for a Factory

Though if asked, middlemen will tell boat managers that the scales at the factory reported approximately 10 percent less weight than what was reported at the shore. So, to avoid potential conflict and disappointment, boat managers have developed the vernacular practice of deducting one kilogram from every ten that they weigh when they report available catches for sale to these same middlemen. Boat managers and middlemen are aware that the other party is not entirely straightforward about the monetary value or quantity of fish traded on a given day. Though, it takes a great deal more than these everyday vernacular market manipulations to dissolve amicable relationships between them.

Another man, known to and trusted by the boat manager, usually weighs and purchases all reasonably sized, sub-legal *emputa* from a given boat or set of boats. He then sells them at the beach by the kilogram at a price he sets, or at price negotiated with buyers, usually women, for an individual fish, or group of fish, depending on the weight and sizes of fish caught, and the buyers present. The boat manager then collects the proceeds from Nile perch destined for factories, and *emputa* destined for local and regional markets for each boat. He then calculates the sum total of revenues per boat, and deducts the costs of fuel for each boat's next trip depending on the number of liters of fuel remaining from the most recent trip, the current price of a liter of fuel, and how far the fishermen will travel on their next trip. The amount of fuel allocated for each boat is always decided through a daily negotiation between the boat manager and both fishermen, though the manager has the final say. However, because a single manager may be responsible for running several boats and is well aware that individual boats may operate at a loss for several days before making a good catch, he may front his own capital for fuel in order to distribute fuel supplies more evenly between his boats.

After deducting the costs of fuel for a given boat's next fishing trip, a boat manager will then calculate 30 percent of the total revenues from each boat as payment for both fishermen. That is, each fisherman receives 15% of total revenues after fuel costs, two reasonably sized fish and the proceeds, if any, from selling *emputa* less than 14 inches in length. Before being paid, each fisherman must also work with one hired worker to reorganize nets for the next fishing trip. Together they straighten nets while simultaneously placing them back inside each boat. These hired workers may organize nets for one or more boats, but each works with a fisherman from that boat to ensure that the nets are properly prepared. This takes time, and takes more time when rougher waters cause nets to become entangled. After this is completed, one fisherman from that boat will request payment from the boat owner. The boat owner then hands over the amount he has calculated for their pay to one fisherman, plus 5,000 to 6,000 Ugandan shillings to be divided into two and given to each man who helped reorganize the boat's fishing nets. That fisherman will then give the other fisherman half of all the money received from the boat manager, and each will pay their support staff for helping to arrange their nets. Fishermen may also skim a small portion of the payment allocated to his support staff, arguing that the nets were not in such a bad condition after all, and did not justify the whole 3,000-shilling payment. While all of the above is ongoing, another man is usually seen preparing floats for nets, carrying fish to middlemen and buyers from factories, and other odd jobs that must be done that day, again for one or more boats. Wages for these positions are also paid daily, and are negotiated based on the amount of work completed and the total quantity and quality of fish caught in a given day.

Women, and some men, also provide accommodation, sustenance, and entertainment

for those who fish – just as fisheries experts are often treated to lodging, food, and social mixers at meetings and conferences. Sometimes these are provided in private homes, but they are also available in rented rooms, local restaurants, video halls, and bars. While this vernacular work is rarely, if ever, included in managerial descriptions of Lake Victoria’s fisheries actors, it nonetheless influences the composition of fish catches and their distribution, processing and consumption. For example, if a fisherman or the buyer of reasonably-sized fish is married to a woman who runs a local restaurant serving breakfast and lunch, or who re-sells fresh fish, or smokes or fries fish, he will usually give one or more of his *emputa* to her, or sell them at a discounted price. Other friends, neighbors, and potential buyers may also request sub-legal fish of various sizes, though often fish of less than 14 inches are preferred, because they are more affordable, easier to process, and suitable for consuming in a single meal. This encourages the continued catching and distribution of sub-legal fish, which compete with factories for exportable Nile perch, but nevertheless, ensures that *emputa* are available on local and regional markets.

Fish Processing

The distinctions between vernacular and industrial fisheries practices are clear at the processing level. Vernacular, artisanal processing is most often done at one’s home in concert with a variety of other household responsibilities. Industrial fish processing, however, is only conducted within factories, where working hours, social conduct and the number and kinds of fish products produced are strictly controlled. While both artisanal and industrial processors work with the same species of fish and work six days a week if able, the similarities seem to end there. Key differences between the two hinge on processing methods and the forms of fish

processed, control over how, when and where to work, and the potential financial and nutritional gains from each form of processing.

Perhaps most importantly, artisanal processors work with much fewer fish and set the price for the fish they sell, whereas the industrial supply chain is driven by orders and prices based on international market conditions.²⁷ Artisanal fish production is often described as having negligible impact on Uganda's national economy, because most of this vernacular work takes places within the shadows of an economic calculus that views formal wage work and the accumulation of foreign currency as ideal and integral to economic development. In an average day women may fry or smoke 20 or more whole fish; in processing plants, however, it is not uncommon for employees to produce 20 tons of uniformly processed 250 gram fillets, though sometimes they may produce more than 50 tons. Despite the much lower volume of fish products processed in any given day, women who smoke and fry fish often make three times what most permanent employees of fish processing plants are paid in a single day, depending on how much fish they purchased for processing. With an investment of around 8.50 USD in buying fish, they will make around 7.70 USD in profit in a single day.

Women who work with fish at home complete a variety of tasks in order to produce their fish for sale. Most fish processors I have worked with are women who smoke and/or fry *emputa*, so it is on these methods and these women that I focus. Women source and purchase fish, and transport them from the beach to their homes. Usually at home, but sometimes at the beach, they de-scale, de-gut and clean the insides and outsides of their fish and find a safe place

²⁷ Andy Thorpe and Elizabeth Bennett, "Market-Driven International Fish Supply Chains: The Case of Nile Perch from Africa's Lake Victoria," *The International Food and Agribusiness Management Review* 7, no. 4 (2004): 40.

to discard fish scales and innards. They also dry, store, and sell the expensive swim bladders found inside their *emputa* separately to buyers supplying Asian markets, who are mostly Korean. Building and repairing smoking kilns and stoves for frying is also part of the fishwork women must do, though sometimes they have help from their husbands, neighbors, or colleagues. They also purchase fuel wood (though if smoking fish near a forest, women may gather their own wood), cooking oil and salt.

Before fish are smoked or fried, many women will rub the inside of their fish with salt and other spices. Then there's the actual work of frying and smoking fish, which can take several hours and requires a constant fire that is hot, but not too hot. While heating their fish, many women will calculate the cost of each fish in relation to the desired revenues from their fish. Their fish will then be sold from home, on the way to and at local markets, and to wholesale markets in large cities. Selling from home and to local markets gives women the most freedom in setting prices for their fish, and is most lucrative. However, some women prefer selling at large wholesale markets, even though their buyers almost always set the price for their fish, because they prefer to receive one lump payment for their fish, rather than selling each fish individually or in small groups. Recent efforts to patrol larger markets for illegal fish have encouraged more women to sell their fish closer to home. However, in May of 2014, women in a major fish market in Kampala told Jennifer that they no longer have problems with "Fisheries" coming to their market—as soon as "Fisheries" would come, women gathered together and started beating them with newspapers. Eventually, these enforcers stopped coming.

Women fish processors rarely work alone; indeed it is often dangerous to do so. Most

fish processed with vernacular methods used to be purchased in the early morning light between 6 and 9 AM. However, recent efforts to ‘sustainably manage fishing in Lake Victoria,’ have reduced the quantity of fish available to processors in *Nyanja* during these times, as legal- and even many reasonably-sized fish are too expensive for women to purchase, or too expensive for their customers to buy, and because efforts to enforce minimum size regulations for Nile perch have actually increased. So, fishing for and purchasing fish preferred by local processors and most local consumers occurs between 8 PM and 6 AM when most enforcement officials are not working.²⁸ Once it is dark, women who process fish in the same neighborhood meet and travel together to beaches where they buy fish. Where they go to buy fish depends on the size and species of fish they want to buy, and whether or not they know fishing is occurring at a given site, though these decisions are also influenced by the social connections women forge with fishermen and other women at fishing sites who may keep each other informed of predicted enforcement operations, or particularly abundant catches.

There are certain dangers associated with walking to and from fishing sites at night. Women try to avoid these by traveling with others. Buying fish in darkness increases the risk that women will encounter thieves trying to steal their cash, fish, or mobile phones as they travel to and from fishing sites. It is worth noting that as formal enforcement efforts have increased, so to have the number of self-styled ‘Fisheries Officers’ who try to confiscate fresh and processed fish, whether or not they are legally authorized to do so. The risk of encountering thieves and/or enforcement agents is greatly reduced when women travel in

²⁸ Nyanja is located on and near the equator, so there is very little seasonal variation in when the sun rises and sets. It is usually completely dark by 7:30 PM and completely light by 7:30 AM.

pairs, and almost eliminated when women travel in groups of four or more. In so doing, they come to view each other as workmates, rather than competitors, even though they may be selling fish quite close to one another. They discuss and provide advice on processing techniques, and where to purchase quality, but cost effective fuel wood and oil to fry their fish. They may even provide each other with loans when one is in need of additional operating capital.²⁹ Selling fish from home allows women to avoid having their fish confiscated on the way to and at markets, which are increasingly patrolled by enforcement officials.

Most artisanal processors have children to care for, and many are single mothers responsible for paying school fees, and making sure their kids are well behaved, healthy and clothed. Many who do not live directly adjacent to fishing sites prefer to buy fish at night because it fits better with their responsibilities to their families. When women purchase fish at night, they may clean them as soon as they reach home, or before their children wake up in the morning. Women with older children and helpful neighbors may have help in cleaning their fish, while others do this task alone. While their fish are drying a bit in the early morning sun, a necessary step when processing the oily flesh of *emputa*, they prepare and serve breakfast for their children, and – if their children are of school-age and their school fees are paid – prepare and send them off to school. Then, around 8 or 9 AM women begin to fry or smoke their fish. Both methods take about two hours, either to smoke a single batch of fish, or to fry several fish at a time in several batches. After processing, women will begin, and in some cases continue, to sell their fish.³⁰ Women who fry fish usually sell their fish from home, whereas women who

²⁹ Capital is the actual word most women use to describe the cash required to operate their fisheries activities, whether or not they are comfortable speaking English.

³⁰ It is not uncommon for women to sell a few of their fish fresh before processing to their neighbours, though

smoke fish often sell them on neighborhood streets and at local markets. Both have an easier time managing their multiple responsibilities, as most of their fish will be sold within a few hours of processing due to high local demand for fish. This gives women time to clean up, relax a bit and prepare lunch or an evening meal for their children. Later, after ensuring that their children's homework and evening baths are completed, and that they are safely off to sleep, they will again meet their colleagues and begin another journey to the lake.

In my conversations with women who process and sell fish, they often stress the emancipatory possibilities their work affords them, though they are often depicted as victims in what academic and policy literatures call "sex for fish," transactions.³¹ When asked, most state that they would rather continue their work with fish because of the high daily pay and flexible schedule, even if they were able to obtain a 9-to-5 job in an office with an equivalent salary. Many say that their work with fish has afforded them the financial freedom to 'chase away' abusive husbands, or otherwise not tolerate lovers who do not treat them the way they want to be treated. Yes, some women who process fish do have romantic relationships with fishermen. As one elder processor told us "we're all human, it can't be avoided"; others tell us "it's natural." It is true that forging intimate relationships with fishermen usually allows women to be first in line to receive fish when nets are pulled ashore, and some women do complain that this is unfair. Women also recount that whenever there is a particularly forward fisherman who they

they much prefer to sell them after processing because they will receive more money for their smoked or fried fish.

³¹ For a rich ethnographic study of market women and their interpretations of the freedom that selling food affords them see: Garcia Clark, *Onions Are My Husband: Survival and Accumulation by West Africa Market Women*. (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994). For an overview of the "sex-for-fish" phenomena from a policy perspective see: Bene and Merten, "Women and Fish-for-Sex: Transactional Sex, HIV/AIDS and Gender in African Fisheries"; Kwena et al., "Prevalence and Risk Factors for Sexually Transmitted Infections in a High-Risk Occupational Group: The Case of Fishermen along Lake Victoria in Kisumu, Kenya."

have no interest in being intimate with, they simply go to purchase fish from a different net, boat, or landing site. Again, artisanal fish processors may feel like they must work each day because the money is so good, but they do so with a high degree of autonomy.

The average workday and working conditions in industrial plants that process Nile perch fillets for export are very different from those processing *emputa* from home. The approximately thirty employees at a given fish-processing factory only do one specific task. Both men and women work in fish factories, though men usually do the work of managing factories, sourcing fish from the shore, the initial cleaning and filleting of fish, and the handling of fish by-products. Women in processing factories are most often found trimming fillets of their excess skin and fat, making sure that each order is accurately filled, or preparing meals in factory cafeterias. Their attention to detail is perceived as better suited to producing more appealing fillets, and more accurate shipments of fish for export.

Employees must report for work at a specific time, usually 8 AM, though when there are large orders there may also be a second shift. They must dress in white lab-like coats and gumboots, and wear gloves and hairnets. Wages are paid to plant workers based on a nine-hour workday, but overtime is paid at the same hourly rate for additional hours worked beyond nine hours. Most days factory workers are able to take an hour lunch break to eat a free meal of *posho* (stiff maize-flour porridge) and beans in the factory cafeteria, and leave work at 5 PM. When there are particularly large orders, however, employees are required to stay until all fish is processed, frozen and packed for export, sometimes as late as 10 PM. Permanent employees are paid every week, or every two weeks, while “casual workers” (those hired each day to clean factories and do odd jobs) are paid daily. Usually employees are paid on time, but occasionally

payment will be delayed up to several weeks, and they are paid from around 1 USD a day to 3 USD a day depending on the nature of their work.

These factories are very clean, indeed kept as sterile as possible, so as to not accidentally contaminate fish destined for export. This carries over to the rules guiding bodily and social conduct while employees are at work. On the walls of one of Uganda's largest and most well respected processing plants, a large notice painted in black, bold capital letters states,

“NOTICE: DO NOT - SPIT IN THE FACTORY, POKE YOUR NOSE/EAR, PICK YOUR TEETH, SNEEZE/COUGH OPENLY, SCRATCH YOUR BODY, CHEW/EAT ON THE LINE, SMOKE IN THE FACTORY, TOUCH ON WALLS/DOORS, HORSE PLAY, TALK UNNECESSARILY.”



Figure 7-5: Rules for Bodily Conduct in a Fish Factory

In stark contrast to the multiple and everyday sounds overheard around the homes of women who smoke and fry fish; the loud din of refrigerators, ice-machines, and scraping knives is usually all that can be heard at these industrial factories. There is no convivial conversation outside of the lunchroom. If there is, employees will be warned, or made to leave early without a full day's pay. Employees may of course gather together after work for a meal or a drink.

Factory employees may also leave work early, but receive full pay if they are injured on the job. About once a week in any given factory, someone who works with a sharp knife will probably be accidentally cut or cut themselves, and sometimes very deeply. When this happens, factories will pay for medical treatment and wages for all missed days. Employees may also fall sick from malaria, a respiratory infection, or other common illnesses. When this happens, employees have the option of either receiving their regular pay for sick days taken, or having the factory pay for required medical treatment. Sometimes there is not enough fish, or orders, to justify running the entire factory for the day. On these days all employees must report to work if they wish to be paid, but can go home after signing in, and will be given a half-day's pay. The comparatively higher paid technicians, engineers or plant managers, however, still work full day, but use this time to fine-tune and repair factory equipment.³²

Employees of factories that I have interviewed noted the steady wages factories provided, but most would rather be paid slightly less to have more freedom during their workday. While I do not want to dwell on the racial aspects of factory work in Uganda, most plants are managed by expatriate Indians who are usually not Ugandan citizens and have a

³² It is important to note that this information detailing employee compensation and medical care came from a former employee of a fish processing plant, and not from a plant manager, so we expect it to be quite accurate.

reputation for not being “easy” to work for. Despite the health benefits, steady wages, and permanent work that factories provide, it is common for factory workers to refer to their current or former bosses as “slave drivers,” or, “people I just cannot work for.” Artisanal fish processors face daily risks of having their fish confiscated by fisheries authorities and a few say they would prefer a different form of work. But they can and often do make much more money, have much more autonomy, and derive a great deal more enjoyment from their work than those who process Nile perch for export.

Purchasing Fish for Food

Domestic and intercontinental consumers of Nile perch purchase fish in relation to its preparation, quality, quantity, and price. Both want to purchase fish best suited to how and to whom fish will be served, and to know that their purchase is safe and nourishing. Both want to eat affordable fish, though they are also concerned about the nutritional content of the fish they buy. Intercontinental consumers are attracted to Nile perch fillets for their firm flesh and mild flavor, and because they are wild, caught in clean waters and possess a uniquely high omega-3 content. Domestic consumers also select *emputa* for these same reasons, but they also reference buying fish of various species for their food value, a value which includes obtaining the flavor, protein, fats and micronutrients found in whole fish including fish flesh, skin, heads, and sometimes bones, depending on the species. These disparate subsistence preferences for whole fish on domestic markets, and filleted fish on intercontinental markets, strongly influences the degree to which purchasers and consumers are able to use their bodily senses when making decisions about whether, where and when to buy and eat fish.

As detailed in the previous section, most Ugandan fish exported to Europe, the U.S.

and beyond takes the form of 250-gram fillets. Some fish are sold in larger pieces with their skins still on to niche markets, but the large majority of fish are sold without bones, skins, heads, guts, or anything else except uniformly processed, flash-frozen flesh. Most consumers in Europe and North America find negotiating bones in one's meal to be awkward, unappetizing, and potentially dangerous, though for those used to eating whole fish, bones are not a problem. Fish in Uganda is said to enter one's mouth from one side, and their bones effortlessly leave by the other. For fish consumers used to eating fillets, this vernacular way of eating takes a bit of practice, but can be very satisfying. One must eat slowly, examining each bite before actually biting down. One comes to know where and what kinds of bones are in a given portion of fish. One knows which bones may be easily pulled out with two fingers before a piece enters one's mouth, and which bones are better suited to separating from the flesh by gently sucking on the piece once it enters one's mouth.

A large portion of the export market is still based on frozen fillets, though processing plants prefer to export 'fresh' or 'chilled' fillets as these fetch a comparatively higher price. While 'fresh' fillets are most often consumed shortly after they are purchased, intercontinental consumers also purchase frozen fillets for the convenience of consuming fish at their leisure without worrying about the fish 'going off.' Payments for exported fish are usually received by processing plants much faster for 'fresh' fillets, as they are transported via airplane, and payments for frozen fillets much slower, because they are first transported by truck and/or train to the coastal port city of Mombasa, Kenya, then transported via large ocean-going cargo ships.



Figure 7-6: A Delicious Meal of Emputa (Head and Middle Section) with Lumonde (Sweet Potato) and Matooke (plantains)

Fish sold domestically in Uganda may be fresh, fried, dried, salted or smoked. Fresh and fried fish are usually purchased for eating that same day, as many Ugandans do not have refrigerators, and most that do have them know they may be rendered useless by frequent power outages that occur at any time. Smoked, dried and salted fish may also be purchased for consumption that day, but they can also be stored for use in the future. Most domestic fish consumed are purchased whole, with eyes, skin, and bones intact, as these are important indicators of fish quality.³³ Large hotels may also purchase fillets cut at landing sites, and not in

³³ When buying fresh fish at local markets there is always the option to have one's fish cleaned. Some purchasers prefer to clean their fish themselves at home to save a bit of money, and to have the highly nutritious organs of the fish on hand to feed domestic cats and dogs, while others are able and happy to pay someone else to clean their fish for them.

factories. Large fish may be sold in pieces either fresh or fried, but they too are sold with their skin and bones intact.

Most Ugandans purchasing fish for themselves, or to share with one to two other people usually prefer medium-sized, or what fishworkers call reasonably-sized fish, those about the length of one's forearm, or, from one's elbow to the tips of one's fingers. Those with larger families prefer to purchase smaller fish, those about the size of one's hand. This way, when fish are served at mealtimes, each member of the family may have their own fish, instead of pieces from a single larger fish. This eliminates possibilities for potential disagreement over who may get which part of a fish, as each individual tends to have their own favorite part. Some prefer the head, for its tender meat, nutritious eyes, and rich tasting gills, while others prefer the middle sides, belly or tail, for their firm flesh, crispy fins, and comparatively less work involved in actually eating them. Most fish consumers in the long-industrialized world also prefer eating their fish in pieces, but they prefer pieces that have been stripped of their actual fishiness.

When reading articles in Ugandan news dailies about the local and regional fish trade, one is left with the understanding that most fish sold on these markets are processed and sold in "unhygienic conditions," though Ugandans almost never get sick from eating their fish.³⁴ Maintaining internationally standardized hygiene requirements is key in industrial plants to maintain a steady supply of orders from international fish importers.³⁵ After industrial processing, Nile perch fillets do not smell, taste, or look like fish to fish consumers who prefer whole fish. Most Ugandans do not care to eat a supermarket-bought fish fillet, not least

³⁴ Joel Ogwang, "Uganda: New Tough Fisheries Law Starts Biting," *The New Vision*, December 26, 2010, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201012270028.html>.

³⁵ Stefano Ponte, "Bans, Tests, and Alchemy: Food Safety Regulation and the Uganda Fish Export Industry," *Agriculture and Human Values* 24, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 179–93.

because they are priced well outside of their ability to purchase these forms of fish, but because they know that they are no longer fresh, and to them, no longer fish.

Domestic purchasers of fish have an expansive repertoire of vernacular techniques based on their bodily senses, particularly sight, smell and touch to determine the quality of the fish they buy, whereas intercontinental consumers must rely on industrial and impersonal signifiers of freshness and quality based on expert-based statistical quality control systems. When purchasing any domestically available fish, consumers can immediately smell and see the environment where fish is sold to ascertain general quality. Fish on domestic markets should smell like fish, but they should not smell too much. The environment where fish is sold should show signs that basins, market stalls, and outside home counters from which fish are sold are cleaned regularly, though they need not be as sterile and impersonal as a supermarket freezer aisle, or a stainless steel fish counter.

When buying fresh whole fish, domestic purchasers can and do touch the fish skin and flesh to make sure it is firm, while simultaneously visually inspecting a fish's eyes to make sure they are clear, and at times pulling back a fish's gills to make sure they are still pink and not grey in color. If upon touching a fish, the marks of one's fingers remain, or do not immediately disappear, it is clear that that particular fish is not as fresh as it could be. Less than perfectly fresh fish may still be purchased, and are almost always still safe to eat, but purchasers will bargain over the price.³⁶ Smoked and fried fish are similarly examined to ensure that these fish are not over-, or undercooked. According to women who smoke and fry fish, fish that is too

³⁶ Most fish is first offered at a set price either for a single fish or several similarly sized fish. While these are usually the prices at which fish are sold, there is some flexibility over the price, particularly if the purchaser can make a compelling case as to why the asking price is not appropriate. There is always a "final price" set by the seller below which the fish will not be sold.

dark or too light in color, or with flesh that is too hard or too soft, is understood by their buyers to not be as delicious or nutritious as another fish that is dark or golden brown, with firm, but somewhat flexible flesh. A buyer of smoked fish may take hold of a fish, place the fish's mouth up to her nose and inhale deeply to smell whether a given fish or batch of fish was well processed. If the fish smells 'dark,' it is usually rejected, if it smells 'sweet' it is usually purchased. If there is some ambiguity, domestic buyers have the ability to speak directly with the individual who initially purchased and/or processed the fish, or at the very least, speak with a buyer of fish who usually knows who processed the fish (though this knowledge usually decreases in relation to the number of buyers and resellers who have played some role in bringing fish to a particular market).³⁷ Domestic buyers who will either consume, or resell, fish may ask whether fish was purchased and processed that day, or the night before, and whether the fish may have died in the net in which it was caught, rather than upon being hauled into a boat or onto shore. Only when a buyer is satisfied with the quality of fish, ascertained by the use of multiple bodily senses, and a satisfactory price is agreed upon, will a Ugandan purchase a fish.

Domestic buyers purchasing fish from the most vernacular of locations – directly outside the homes of processors and where fish are also smoked or fried - may purchase fish every few days, or even every single day from the same seller. They will already know when and where a particular processor goes to purchase fish, and when they are usually processed.

³⁷ For example, women who purchase fish wholesale from central markets, and sell them at local, but retail markets, may have a good idea who processed or initially purchased their fish, but they may not be able to pinpoint the exact processor. We say 'usually decreases' because some of the supply chains for emputa sold in distant markets are tightly controlled with only a few individuals responsible for sourcing and selling large quantities of these fish.

Because these buyers are almost always neighbors of the processor, they will often smell the appealing aromas of fish being smoked or fried almost immediately if they are home when processing is occurring. Buyers often are happy to buy fish that was processed the previous day, or several days before purchasing if the fish is smoked, because they are still perfectly safe and enjoyable to eat. However, domestic buyers used to eating the freshest fish are averse to eating fresh fish that has been preserved on ice, as this is said to significantly alter the flavor, making it “less sweet.” As mentioned in the previous section, a processor’s reputation for preparing delicious and nutritious fish, or not, is very important for building and maintaining their customer base. There is direct accountability for the quality of a given fish sold, purchased and consumed.

The bodily senses of potential consumers of industrially processed Nile perch fillets are considerably disabled. This is particularly the case for frozen fish fillets, which are almost always purchased in a thick plastic bag holding several uniform 250-gram fillets individually packed in similarly thick plastic. Consumers of fish fillets do examine the general conditions of where the fish is sold, but they have no way of truly knowing where, when and how fish were caught and processed. This is why labeling is needed for fillet consumers, but not for Ugandan eaters of fish. As is shown by a recent spate of lawsuits brought against fish importers who intentionally mislabeled the species of fish for sale to suit local preferences – for example, selling Ugandan Nile perch as Gulf of Mexico Grouper in Tampa, Florida – it is difficult, if not impossible to know whether the fish fillets one purchases is even cut from the species of fish

they are purported to be.³⁸

Consumers of so-called fresh fillets do use some of their senses to determine whether or not to buy a given fillet. They can smell fish at fish counters at the time of purchasing, though they cannot tell which of the many fish on offer may be producing a given smell. These same consumers may be able to ascertain elements of quality based on whether the fish is white or pink in color and not grey, but they have no way of knowing whether fillets have been chemically treated to maintain a given color, which they sometimes are. And, they may be able to have a conversation with the person working behind the fish counter about the supposed origins of a given fillet. However, like buyers of frozen fillets, they cannot speak with anyone who has ever touched the fish in its whole form, or someone who can say with any certainty which industrial plant processed a particular fillet, or even which country the fish was from – Nile perch fillets are from Lake Victoria, not from particular Ugandan, Kenyan, or Tanzanian places.

The senses of potential consumers of frozen fillets are much more disabled. They may hold a package of fish to feel whether it is completely frozen, but they have no way of knowing whether the fish inside was ever accidentally thawed and refrozen, or frozen quickly enough in the first place to prevent it from spoiling. Perhaps most importantly, they cannot know whether a fish is truly safe to eat until their bodies begin the process of digestion.³⁹

38 Jennifer L. Jacquet and Daniel Pauly, "Trade Secrets: Renaming and Mislabeled of Seafood," *Marine Policy* 32, no. 3 (2008): 309–18; Dana D. Miller and Stefano Mariani, "Smoke, Mirrors, and Mislabeled Cod: Poor Transparency in the European Seafood Industry," *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 8, no. 10 (2010): 517–21.

39 Consumers of Nile perch fillets are not ill on a regular basis, though there have been a number of quality concerns. See: Ponte, "Bans, Tests, and Alchemy: Food Safety Regulation and the Uganda Fish Export Industry."



Figure 7-7: Nile Perch Ready for Shipping (left) and Rebranded in the Netherlands as Victoriabaarsfilet (right)

How then do consumers of frozen Nile perch fish fillets know that they are purchasing forms of fish that are delicious, nutritious and safe if, after all, one cannot literally look a fish fillet in the eye to see whether it is clear or cloudy? First, because an appetizing Nile perch fillet consumed outside of eastern African is one that has very little flavor of its own, the actual taste of the fillet depends on what other foods, herbs, and spices it is cooked with. To determine whether fillets are nutritious and safe, consumers first must trust the supermarket chains and fish counters where fillets are sold. If they are well lit, clean, cold, and do not smell like fish, there is usually no doubt that what they sell is fine to eat. Consumers may examine nutritional information on the back of a package of frozen fish, though it is possible that because of

chemical treatment and long-freezing times, that the generic nutritional information printed on the outside of a package may overestimate the nutritional value of the fish inside. Potential buyers of frozen fillets may scan expiration dates imprinted on each package, though it is known that these dates should not, but occasionally are, changed to avoid discarding large quantities of fish that are over two years old. Whitefish commodities are often priced based on the number of times they have been frozen, thawed and refrozen, which may be as many as three to four times. These same buyers also look to the package itself, scanning corporate logos, seals of compliance with intergovernmental fish safety requirements, expiration dates, and increasingly, markers that the fish contained therein went through some kind of sustainability certification. Would-be consumers of industrially processed fish may trust the image of quality constructed for them by corporations and regulatory bodies, though they are unable to trust their own senses when purchasing industrially processed fillets.

Making a Living in the Shadows

Fishworkers are almost always depicted as subsistence producers, the poorest of the poor in Uganda, but this is simply not true. In early 2012 fishermen, whether working with gillnets from a boat, or with beach seines from the shore made around 13 USD each working day, plus they took home at least two reasonably-sized fish for sale or their own subsistence. Women who fry fish from home often earn a profit of about 8 USD in a day from purchasing just over 4 USD of fish the night before, though depending on how much money they have on hand to buy fish, they may make much more, or much less. In both cases, fishworkers make the same, if not more, than many salaried government workers, including administrative staff, technocrats, and fisheries enforcement officials, police officers and soldiers. While required to

have a university degree, many government employees bring home just over 6 USD each working day, while those that work the same hours cleaning their offices make just under 2 USD per working day. When we consider that fishworkers usually work 6 to 7 days a week, we see that they may make twice what a highly educated, government worker with job security may make. And, if they are women who process fish, still have the time to greet their children with a hot meal when they return from school, and manage to buy their homes and purchase livestock as an investment in their eventual retirement. Although most government employees may only make enough to subsist each month, and many try to start small businesses to make ends meet, salaried work is never described as subsistence production for the Ugandan state.

While *Nyanja's* fish have long been produced for cash-based exchange, the reality remains that fish and cash are incommensurable. For 2,000 Ugandan shillings you can buy three freshly fried hand-sized *emputa*, but you cannot actually eat a 2,000-shilling banknote for lunch (the going rate paid to fishermen for catching a kilogram of exportable fish), but you may be able to use one to purchase a prepared lunch of rice and beans. Nor can you purchase a kilogram of similarly high quality animal protein in a market with the same banknote, as fresh legal-sized Nile perch cost about 30% more than beef. However, to live well in the cities and towns of Uganda's southern coast, including fishing sites, one needs a steady flow of cash. When we ask women who work with fish to compare the quality of life in their home villages up-country, where soap and paraffin may be the only commodities that one must purchase, they often lament the fact that 'you must buy everything you need to live' around *Nyanja*. There is little available land for farming, planting fruit trees, or gathering fuel wood, though some residents do creatively find ways to do so. *Nyanja's* fishworkers, and the many consumers of

emputa, need *emputa* for subsistence, but they also want *emputa* to send their children to good schools, provide a safe and secure home for their families, and to invest in their retirement.

Nyanja's fishworkers and fish-eaters are increasingly becoming fluent in economic and scientific logics and languages that guide fisheries management in Lake Victoria, but this informs their vernacular practices of working with and eating fish, rather than supplanting them altogether. This focus on *Nyanja* and vernacular practices around *emputa* are not intended, nor are they able, to refute the importance of Lake Victoria and Nile perch to the future of Ugandans and eastern Africans more broadly. However, I have situated vernacular fishwork, including vernacular fish eating, as ontologically different from the production and consumption of industrially processed fish fillets and fisheries managed by techno-science. It is my hope that shedding selective light on vernacular fishwork has revealed ways of knowing, working and living well with a body of water known as *Nyanja*, with fish named *emputa*, and with each other, that may be influenced, but not driven by assumptions of scarcity, economic efficiency, and the existence of a singular sustainability.

Epilogue: Now We're Wondering What to Do with all the Factories

On a clear May morning in 2014, a select group of stakeholders met in Jinja, Uganda to discuss the fate of Lake Victoria's Nile perch fishery. Moments away from the source of the Nile, participants were asked to “Re-Plan the Strategy and Action Plan for the Recovery of Nile Perch.” The Executive Secretary of the Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization (LVFO) opened the meeting with a particularly apt historical reflection: “In 1981 we were trying to figure out what to do with all the Nile perch. Thirty-three years later – in 2014 – we are trying to figure out what to do with all the factories.”

Thanks to a fortunate coincidence, I happened to be in Uganda that May. I invited myself to this meeting: 'Of course you can come Jennifer, you are most welcome.' Phew. I joined this dedicated group of fisheries scientists, managers, representatives of national co-management institutions, industry, and development partners with the European Union-funded “SmartFish” Program in the two days of conversation that followed.



Figure 8-1: Logo of the East African Community. The slogan translates as "one people, one destiny." Note the large body of water in the center.

The Nile perch boom of the late 1990s and early 2000s loomed large in participant's minds. Revenues from Nile perch exports had plummeted in recent years, and yet there was also a sense that the existing and potential economic value of the export fishery was not adequately captured in existing statistics. Factories were buying raw fish at twice the price they had paid in recent years, but the prices they were paid for their exported fillets had stagnated. Some were only operating two or three days per week. Factories that had not closed entirely were only processing one to twelve tons of fish per day, a small fraction of the forty tons most factories were processing each day in 2005. Despite a generation of efforts to develop and later sustainably manage Lake Victoria's Nile perch fishery, efforts made possible in part through disbursements of more than 500 million USD in development loans and grants, the future of Lake Victoria's Nile perch fishery looked bleak. Participants started asking themselves and each other:

We have excellent management plans. Why do we still have management problems?

Should we close the lake? Close the factories?

Recruit more military and police for law enforcement?

Increase biodiversity by introducing *more* species into the lake?

Should we just issue a statement declaring this whole thing a disaster?

Although I had invited myself to this meeting, I was asked to offer my interpretation of the Nile perch situation after invited guests had given their formal presentations. This offered a opportunity to “speak for” those with whom I primarily work with in Uganda – women, but also men, who supply fish for local and regional markets – something I finally felt qualified to

do. These are not opportunities I take lightly.¹ The men, but mostly women, I work with take on big risks when they purchase, process, and sell their fish. Because they usually work with sizes of Nile perch that are technically illegal, that is, less than twenty-inches, their fish could be confiscated by law enforcement agents at any time (but usually is not). Navigating the need to demonstrate the specificity of “the situation,” while not giving away so many details that anyone I know, or any places that I care about would be unduly affected by my attempts to “give voice” to their concerns is difficult, but vital.

Even though those supplying local and regional markets with fresh, fried, and dried fish comprise the large majority of those employed in Uganda's fisheries, informally or otherwise, they are almost never asked to “speak for” themselves. Because their activities are generally illegal within Lake Victoria's regulatory framework, they are seen as having no moral ground to stand on. One scientist at the meeting stressed: “This local and regional trade in undersized fish, you can even call it a disease,”

Fishworkers are seen as being “addicted” to the substances (“undersized fish”) that have resulted in this disastrous disease. Their contributions to food security are overlooked because fisheries laws designed to sustain the Nile perch industry cast their work as criminal and the consumer of their fish products as members of the ignorant poor, or worse, “people who will eat anything.” Within the context of Lake Victoria's managerial politics, only industrial fish processing plants count as “industry.” As we have seen, the development of this industry has its origins in the dispossession of littoral residents from their Nyanja in failed attempts to stop the

¹ See for example: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” 1988; Linda Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” *Cultural Critique*, 1991, 5–32.

spread of a very different disease.

I agreed with these experts that the fishing industry may well be a disaster. Fish factories processing fish for export are “Lake Victoria’s fishing industry.” They are owned by only a handful of individuals, most of whom are not eastern Africans. They offer formal employment for a few, at the expense of informal employment for many. For me and for many of the fishworkers I work with, the fishing industry may be a disaster, but this is not *their* problem.

Participants at this meeting to “Re-Plan the Strategy and Action Plan for the Recovery of Nile Perch” stressed the need to give fishing communities a “sense of ownership over the resource.” I argued that the reason why managers feel like they need more military and police support is because fishworkers *already have a strong sense of ownership*. They are increasingly fighting for what they know is theirs – *emputa, ngege, enkejje, mukene, nkolongo, semutundu, male, mmamba, nsuma...*

Participants continued to discuss the need to “sensitize” fishing communities to know how to better manage their resources. I argued that fishworkers are already well aware of their senses that tell them they want, indeed, need to eat and continue working with *emputa*. Sensitizing fishworkers to conserve large populations of large Nile perch would be *senseless*.

Finally, I drew attention to the continued use of the term “integrity.” Participants argued: Managers need more integrity. Enforcement officers need more integrity. And most of all: fishing communities need more integrity.

This perceived lack of integrity, I concluded, had nothing to do with the moral character of managers, enforcers, or fishworkers as individuals. Rather, it has everything to do

with multiplicity of a body of water that has for too long been considered the same thing.

As a postlude, I include here a song sung by Andrea Kakoza. Jjajja Kakoza was 91 years old when she shared the lyrics below with Robert Pringle during his fieldwork on the social history of the Nile perch introductions in 2003.² She noted this was a song traditionally sung on Buvuma Island about the many kinds of food available there. At first, Jjajja noted, people did not sing about *emputa*. But, after *emputa* came, people began singing its praises.

Enva tulina yingi eza bulingeri, tulina soya beani, tulina karwo, tulina enyama.

Tulina enkejje eyo nayo ewoma

Kyoka mubenyanja, tulina emputa.

Tetunalaba kiwoma kisinga emputa.

We have many types of sauce: we have soybeans; we have cowpeas; we have meat.

We have [e]nkejje, which are also sweet.

Surprisingly, we have [e]mputa.

We have never seen anything as sweet as [e]mputa

² Pringle, "The Nile Perch in Lake Victoria: Local Responses and Adaptations," 517.

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