

"Rethinking Uganda in the 1940s with New Evidence"<sup>1</sup>

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In this talk I evaluate how newly available evidence in the National Archives of England changes our perception of Uganda in the 1940s. This material, which was gathered up and hidden in a warehouse in southern England as part of "Operation Legacy" to protect the reputation of the Empire as it set, reveals a much more vibrant proto-nationalism than historians of Uganda are in the habit of seeing. Ugandans of all ethnicities participated in the 1945 strike and 1949 insurrection, and they evinced a remarkable discipline and a sophisticated awareness of political strategy. Wealth, not ethnicity or race, was the most significant social cleavage of Uganda in the 1940s. The "migrated archives" allow us to hear the voices and see the actions of labourers, police inspectors, the unemployed and other people who were not elite leaders of the Protectorate, the Buganda kingdom, or the small group of British-educated critics of those regimes. With a broader range of voices, things look different. The dichotomies of traditional versus modern, *bataka* vs. chiefs, and Baganda vs. everyone else dissolve, and what we see instead is a diverse group of patriots struggling to realize their vision of a just and fair society, in which everyone had a voice and an obligation to contribute to the well-being of the whole.

First of all, I want to thank Mr. Ndebesa for his comments to come, Dr. Mafumbo for her kind work in organizing, and also Dr. Asimwe, Dr. Rutabajuuka, and Professor (Dean) State for your support of this talk in particular, and in the very many ways you have developed my understanding of Ugandan history over many years.

I want to argue this afternoon that what happened in the 1940s looks like the protonationalisms that occurred in other parts of Africa at the same time. The breezes of freedom blowing from India, the ideas and also the stresses of the Second World War (Byfield et al Africa and WW2 p. 39 and Birmingham WW 2 books) had the same kind of influence in Uganda that they had in places where they clearly led to nationalist movements. I think that happened in Uganda, and it is important to see that it happened, and that it was brutally repressed. I think Uganda's 1940's early nationalism had really interesting characteristics: It was multi-ethnic, it was disciplined, it had multiple centers of power, and a very clear ethic of good governance that was a creative new thing, that incorporated new ideas into indigenous patterns of accountability. When it was crushed this movement was in the process of learning, but had not yet learned, how to deal with the extreme inequalities of wealth that had been created in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>1</sup>I hope readers will forgive me for the draft quality of this talk. I have left the references in parentheses rather than putting them into footnotes because this work will be Chapter 4 "The Modernity that Might Have Been" of my forthcoming book tentatively titled "Kampala: The City and Social Distance"; and I am also submitting another version "The Moral Economy of the Ugandan Crowd in 1945" to the American Historical Review., so I wanted to keep the notes where I can see them and change them.

What I want to present to you is different from the commonly accepted perceptions of Uganda's past, and from the work of scholars. I don't think the dichotomies hold. I don't think there were old people holding to tradition and young people longing for modernity: if we look carefully at the 1945 strike and the 1949 insurrection, what we see is people of all ages innovating with indigenous practices of how to get political accountability. I don't think there was a *bataka* party which operated using a clan logic in opposition to a *bakungu* group which accepted a royal logic; I think that is an oversimplification and distortion adopted by Protectorate authorities to cover their own mistakes. Unfortunately, that erroneous formulation made its way into scholarship and popular understanding, obscuring our ability to see the complexity and sophistication of the conception of politics which gave rise to the so-called "disturbances" of the 1940s. The thousands of people who participated in the events of 1945 and 1949 had a plan for good government they were trying to put into action: they did not think that their only role as citizens was to be obedient to the king. And the participants in those events were not just Baganda. Based on the evidence of the 1940s, Uganda did not have an entrenched tribalism created by the British which would prove to be insurmountable, rather, all kinds of people acted together, and one can see, in their words as well as their actions, a recognition of the need for an expression of nationalism.

In this talk I want to stress the evidence that has just been released in the last five years, as a result of the case brought against the foreign office by Mau Mau victims, which proved that sensitive documents from the colonial period had not been lost, or destroyed, but were hidden in a warehouse near Heathrow. All these files, called the "migrated archives" are now in the British National Archives at Kew. However, my interpretation of them rests in part on some of my earlier work, in particular my argument in "Landed Obligation" that British rule fundamentally changed the nature of chiefship not only by giving chiefs salaries but also by eliminating thousands of chiefships – so the only thing *miruka*, *gombolola* and *ssaza* chiefs of the colonial era had in common with their predecessors was their names. Another concept informing my interpretation of the 1940s is the argument I made in "Mapping Conflict: Heterarchy and Accountability in the Ancient Capital of Buganda" that although the kingdom had a very clear center, power and agency were actually quite diffuse.

What I am really excited to share with you today is what I have been reading in Kew. As I brought the documents to my table, and opened them, I often thought "I can't believe this!!!" and I really wanted to share it with my colleagues here. The talk proceeds in three parts. I am going to talk about 1945, then I am going to talk about 1949, and then I am going to draw conclusions. For the 1945 strike, and then for the 1949 event, which was a deputation from "all of Buganda" to the king that turned violent, I'm going to talk about the discipline and organization, the political vision, the evidence for the participation of people of many ethnicities, and the challenge posed by extreme economic inequality. So, for those of you who want to make outlines, there will be 1945 with 4 sections, 1949 with 4 sections, and then conclusions.

## The 1945 Strike

First, the 1945 general strike – and I am causing it a strike, not a plot to overthrow the Ganda kingdom prime minister, which is how the Official report represented it, because it was a

general strike. World War 2 inflation had seriously undermined the value of wages. When an anticipated announcement of a war bonus, which had been decided by a government committee, was not announced on the expected day and with some organization by the motor drivers union and the farmers union, thousands of workers stopped working in all four provinces of the protectorate, transportation, factory production, government work all stopped. Near the end of the strike came three meetings in the courtyard of the palace of the king, and the result of these was that Kulubya, the Prime Minister, resigned. That evening, Governor Hall made a broadcast by loudspeakers in Kampala claiming that the “misguided” “wicked” strikes and disorders had been carefully planned to achieve a purpose that “was primarily political and not economic.” The leaders, who stayed in the background, had “incited Government labourers to strike” with a “hidden motive” “to bring forcible pressure on the young ruler of Buganda to compel him to carry out certain changes in his Government.” (Uganda Herald January 31<sup>st</sup> 1945 “End of the Labour Troubles” page 1, 8) The Whitley commission could find no actual evidence of a plot, however, as contemporary observers – both European and African, noted at the time.

The migrated archives contain evidence that the reason for these meetings that I had never seen before. Eight strikers were killed by police, and when those deaths happened, people tried to get the Kabaka and the leading chiefs to respond to the injustice of the deaths, and their failure to do so led to the 3 meetings in the courtyard of the king.

#### 1945 strike: discipline and organization

The official report presents a movement, led from the top, but a small group who wanted to create pandemonium in order to overthrow the Buganda Government. Every police officer, from the Commissioner to the African and Asian Sub-Inspectors, had to write an individual account of their actions during the strike, and those narratives, in the migrated archive, tell a very different story. They show diffuse power, with very large numbers of people consulting together and making decisions. And they show a tremendous amount of discipline and order.

Long, intentional conversations among people who worked together or in the same industry led to the decision to strike. That workers met with fellow workers in the same industry and deliberated about whether and when to strike reveals a level of social organization that Protectorate officials – and later observers - generally failed to appreciate. Whitley, in fact, surmised that the strike started on different days in different locations because the leaders realized they could not supervise them all on the same day (Whitley, 14), The secret police memorandum prepared for the Commission of Inquiry describes the intense conversations workers held together. In order to decide whether to strike, on 14 January a “crowd of at least 200 houseboys from the European Quarters” assembled at the “Big Tree in Nanji Kalidas Gardens” ( now the Sheraton Garden). Several people addressed the group, each one greeted by applause. They decided to write to Masindi, Jinja, and Entebbe, to find out what houseboys there intended to do, and collected money for postage for letters to those groups. (This is W. Scott, chief inspector of police, probably 69) M. K. Akker, Inspector of police, Kampala, 91) Drivers in Masaka, Government clerks in Maska, tailors in Kawolo/Lugazi and Kampala all indicated that they were communicating with others who did the same kind of work and making decisions. 137-138. vol 2 police memo . (15 September 1945 UAMDATU to Rita Hinden, Rhodes house, Fabian Colonial Bureau 127/1)

People assembled every morning on the top of what was then called “Museum Hill” for listening to and giving speeches. The museum location (now occupied by the Uganda National (Gaddafi) Mosque) has a commanding view of the town, was close to where Africans lived, and in January 1945 it had ladders placed against the building for repainting which allowed speakers to be seen by the crowds. Reaching a stage of negotiation with the Government was a focus of the meetings. After the morning meeting, strikers spread through the city to convince others to not work, and stopped their activity every evening at sunset. Police reporters expressed surprise that the action ended so abruptly every evening, but to city dwellers it made sense: when a drum was beaten at the palace at 6:00pm, people went home. In addition to the large meeting that began each day, groups of strikers seem to have made collective decisions in the moment. For example, R. A Hook, an Assistant Inspector of Police in Kampala, noted that after he and a group of ten constables carrying batons had prevented a group of 100 from entering the East African Tobacco and Company factory, and then prevented the same group from entering the slaughterhouse “A large group then gathered on the green near there, held a meeting, and then moved away together. p. 89 police memo vol 2. In Masaka, on January 19, the Pokino defused a tense situation by convincing a large crowd to move to the football ground in order to discuss their issues. p. 27. VOL 1 The most perceptive of the police who filed reports described a great deal of conversation – of people making arguments and responding. C.V. Curtis, the commandant of the Police Training School, described being approached near the Bus Company garage, where a large crowd had gathered:

“One, Salim, who said he was a Muganda, living at Mengo and a Mohamedan (wore a fez) came to me and commenced talking to me about the fact that the people wanted more pay and better conditions and that they did not want people to work until their conditions had been improved. A considerable portion of the crowd stood around listening to our conversation. I told him that if people returned to their work and represented any problems they may have in the proper manner that proper steps would be taken to consider their cases, but that if the people attempted to use force they would not improve their case at all and they would be stopped by force. The crowd listened with great attention. Salim appeared to be quite a reasonable type of man. p. 112,

Groups of workers stayed together with their fellows, but they also combined: on the 18<sup>th</sup>, police found Railway workers and E.A. Power and Lighting workers trying to convince Soya Bean Factory workers to strike. police memo, vol 3, p157-158

Because the strike required people who did not know each other to work together, people used easily recognizable symbols to identify leaders, and employed dance to consolidate a collective identity. In Jinja on the 17<sup>th</sup>, striking workers coordinated so they met in the bazaar having marched together from their work places. The B.A. Tobacco workers marched, the Township Authority employees danced and sang, waving pangas and grasscutting slashers, and the Public Works Labour carried sticks. When they met together they cheered, split up into groups of 20 to 30, and moved through the bazaar and residential areas, looking for people who were working. 144, appendix 6, by Driscoll, superintendent of police, jinja. An Entebbe Police Inspector described strikers dressed in banana leaves and carrying sticks, travelling in groups of about 50. F.T. Reader, Inspector of Pollice, Entebbe, p. 67, Elsewhere, leaders were marked out

by decorations on their clothing. At Namirembe Hospital on the 17<sup>th</sup>, the crowd of 3 or 4 hundred was being led by three men, two of whom “had put on skirts made of leaves and headdresses.” R.A. Hook, p. 90 New symbols as well as old ones identified leaders: one of the most sympathetic police reporters, described a roadblock on Bomba road before Kawempe, where a crowd of 500 was led by a man in a military uniform and someone described as “a ‘shenzi’ type of African.” 72, vol 2, Scott There were definitely leaders - not everyone was climbing the ladder at the museum in order to speak to the crowd – but there was also a tremendous amount of agency, of people taking initiative, of recognizing decisions had to be made and making them.

Police on the ground, whose descriptions of events are found in the migrated archive, describe cheerful, disciplined action where the official report describes mob rule and insurrection. I think the three successive meetings the strikers held at Mengo, in the courtyard and inside the Buganda Parliament demonstrate people’s expectation that they could demand accountability of their leaders. It is important to notice that people were not showing submission to the king, they broke the rules of ordinary behavior, and in their words and actions explained that the immoral behavior of rulers required a different display of loyalty. Invoking the indigenous language of withholding labor and support as a mechanism of political accountability, people gathered in the courtyard of the palace – where the Lukiko building was located in the 1940s, returned the next day, and a few days later sat quietly outside the palace until they won their objective. At the first meeting, on January 19<sup>th</sup> the ministers of the Lukiko sent the Saza chief of Kyadondo outside to ask for two delegates to speak to the ministers, but the crowd en masse entered the Lukiko hall, saying that if they sent only two, those two might be arrested. Their three chosen delegates spoke about wages (Kayongo), War Bonuses (Gomeri Lwera, Secretary of the Drivers Association), and politics (Musazi). When Serwano Kulubya, the deeply-distrusted Chief Finance Minister tried to respond, the crowd shouted him down until he was silenced. Kiwanuka, the Chief justice and acting prime minister, told them to return the next day to hear the response of the Kabaka, who was away hunting. (54 life of kivu ) Later that day, as the Kabaka returned from his hunting trip, the crowd holding the blockade across the road he was travelling “stopped him and told him that they were angry with him for seeking his own pleasure when his people were suffering.” According to Kivu, that crowd held up the Kabaka for half an hour (Life of Kivu.54) Later Kivu saw the Kabaka returning from visiting the Resident – he was having to drive his own car, which indicates that labor – at least the labor of his drivers – was being withheld from the king. 54, life of kivu.

The crowd and their spokesmen defied Ganda practices of submission politely and with discipline. On the 20<sup>th</sup>, the representatives gave the same speeches as the day before, but this time with the Kabaka present, but only some Saza chiefs and few Lukiko members. Kayongo, discussing the question of wages, asked the Kabaka to remove Kulubya, who was considered to be cold, and ungenerous, and entirely European in his outlook. He pointedly “warned the Kabaka that there would be repercussions which would inevitably affect his own position.” 56, life of Kivu. The strikers were again told to wait: the Kabaka would discuss the issue with his advisors. People left without trouble. On January 23<sup>rd</sup>, a crowd of thousands, who were noticeably of all tribes, attended the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting at the Buganda Lukiko on the palace grounds. The crowd was not satisfied with the Kabaka’s statement that a special committee, headed by Kulubya, would discuss Buganda Government salaries. Recognizing that they had been entirely ignored, the crowd outside the Parliament stayed in place, and grew. Musazi gave a speech about

the French Revolution and the 1926 General Strike in England. Scott, p. 73 POLICE memo vol 2 The Resident arrived and asked them to disperse, then the Kabaka sent a messenger saying that inside wages were being discussed and they should disperse. The crowd stayed, but the atmosphere was not hostile.

Let's look at the contrast between two different views of this moment, and think about what they say. AT 1:15 pm, the Kabaka's Private Secretary telephoned the Kampala Police to say that it was "most expedient that something should be done at once, as the crowd are in the Lukiko. They have caught the Omulamuzi and are beating him with sticks." At 1:35, The Resident in Buganda telephoned to say that the crowd had seized the acting katikiro, and to ask if the Governor had ordered the K.A.R. to proceed to the scene. A phone call to the Private Secretary then revealed that he had heard one explosion outside the palace but there was no noise now, and ten minutes later he phoned to say the crowd was outside the outer fence, still moving about furious and still had the Omulamuzi but "they are not beating anyone at the moment." He explained, "The trouble is wages, they are interested in some parts of the Native Government. They wish some changes to take place. The crowd are not all Baganda – mixed." (p. 153, appendix 5 "Extracts from Kampala Diary of Events".)

The British members of the Protectorate police force, who wrote comprehensive narratives of their individual actions and impressions for the commission of Inquiry, unanimously described the crowd at the palace as orderly. In the early afternoon, after the crowd had demanded Kulubya's resignation, E.J.G. Browne, returned to the palace and learned that the Omulamuzi had not actually been hurt seriously. He observed that the crowd was "in good humour and not at all antagonistic." 131, E.J.G. Brown, According to Kivu, what had happened was that "When the Chief Justice, who was also the acting Prime Minister, tried to drive into the palace in his car, the crowd surrounded him, and when he explained that he was coming from the Resident's office. "One man said that he had gone to ask the Protectorate Government to send the King's African Rifles to come and kill us. Then part of the mob began to assault him but others came to his aid, and he was rescued, and ran to hide.<sup>57</sup>" This roused the crowd to look for Kulubya, and people blocked the gates to make sure that Kulubya could not get out. According to Kivu, a palace worker who sympathized with the crowd found Kulubya in the palace, and got him to resign by telling him (falsely) that the mob had set the Palace on fire in order to get him to resign. Kulubya wrote a note of resignation, one of the princes took it to the Kabaka, and the Kabaka refused to accept it. When the crowd heard this, they began to shout to the Kabaka. One person got up on the speaker's platform and suggested that if the Kabaka "did not accept and announce Kulubya's resignation within 30 minutes, we would depose him." The crowd shouted its approval, the blockade on the palace was strengthened, cars patrolled the palace grounds, and people waited. life of Kivu, 57 At 3:45 the Resident conveyed to Police Headquarters the information that the crowd at the Lubiri "was perfectly quiet and sitting down" and less than an hour later their patience and polite behavior was rewarded when it was announced to the crowd that Kulubya had resigned. 153.

To summarize regarding discipline and organization– the strike had leaders, but not just a few big ones at the top: at every level people took initiative, they used dance and other symbols to convey their connections and their intentions, and although in the meetings at the palace their goal was to force the king to pay attention to their concerns, the participants behaved with

discipline, they explained what they wanted and then waiting, cheerfully and quietly, for it to happen.

#### 1945 Strike: a political vision of reciprocity

The actions that I have just described – that people gathered in the thousands, made their demands, and then sat down and waited until what they had asked for had happened, shows that part of their political vision is that their vision of reality matters, and that their leaders will respond to their perception of good governance. And they were right – they did get the response they sought.

I think the same expectation of reciprocity is evident in the way strikers explained their demands. Prices had gone up dramatically, and it seemed logical to people that the well-publicized Colonial Development Fund would be used to increase pay. King George, it was said, had written a letter to the Kabaka telling him to raise everybody's wages. (page 135 POLICE MEMO) P.L. Musoke, writing to the Commission of Inquiry in response to an advertisement in Matalisi in February 1945, explained that "all employees of British and Native Governments, and of Missions and trader, had tried to explain that their pay did not enable them to maintain their lives and their dependents in their homes." The Government "had appointed Price Controllers but neglected to appoint Pay Controllers" and people faced difficulties and were not being heard. (P.L. Musoke to Commissioner of Inquiries, High Court, Kampala 12 February 1945 It was particularly troubling that some people had received higher wages because of wartime conditions, but others had not. "One citizen gentleman," who wrote an anonymous critique of the Whitley Report to the Fabian Colonial Bureau, noted that non-native Government artisans and then Government artisans had received higher wages because of wartime conditions, which led other workers to expect the same thing. In the absence of machinery for negotiating wages and labor conditions, he wrote, workers had to fall back on "the unadvised method of making alarms;" the authorities should have been alert to the rising frustration of the workers and responded in a timely way, "There was total bad delatoriness in making decisions and this delatoriness is inexcusable."

The people who stopped working stated clearly that their goal was higher wages – and also, that they expected employers to recognize and respond to their needs In Kampala at the Public Works Department where workers downed tools on January 13, Sub-Inspector P. Kasirye of Kampala translated for the night soil men who told him "“unless our pay has been increased to Shs. 45/- we will not work until the order has been issued out on Monday.” p. 84, vol 2 police memo The Superintendent of Police overheard the remark in Kampala "We are paupers." " p 212, vol 3, Appendix 16. and the Chief Inspector of Police reported that on January 15, "The great shout of the strikers is "we want more pay, you can't feed your wife and family of [sic] twelve shillings." Ugandan participants and some observers spoke and acted as though inordinately low pay for some was everyone's problem. Paulo Kiyingi, a Lukiko member and employee of the Protectorate, told Mulyanti that they themselves, the chiefs, were responsible for the strike, because "we should have advised the Kabaka to give the porters 40 shillings." BNA FCO141/18157 Nsibirwa Assassination affidavits, Mulyanti, Prince Suna wrote to Kivu, telling him that the cause was just, but food should be brought into the city and sold in Katwe, where Europeans would not go, because people were suffering. That these statements

were offered as evidence for deporting Kiyingi and Prince Suna demonstrates the ideological stakes in the strike. Workers who returned to work having been offered small raises might have been naïve, as the Protectorate Agent in Mubende implied, or they might have been acting on the principal that showing gratitude would obligate the employer to continue to be generous. H. Davidson, police memo, 144-147.

There are aspects of the strike that look like a deliberately orchestrated clash of classes with conflicting social interests, as a strike would have been understood in Europe. James Kivu along with 50 others picketed the Labor Office in Entebbe, and in their negotiations, the labor unions showed a very thorough knowledge of British and Protectorate labor law. However, if we look at the words of strikers, and also at their actions, there is a very clear understanding of reciprocity – of leaders and followers, and employers and workers, as part of a social whole, where expectations of reciprocity will be fulfilled.

#### 1945 Strike: Articulation of a National Patriotism

A key element of the ‘1945 disturbance’ which does not figure in either scholarship or most contemporary accounts was the burials of its fallen heroes. Africans participating and observing the strike were shocked by the shooting of eight strikers, and those deaths played a larger role in the mobilization than has previously been recognized. Eight strikers were killed, 3 by policemen, two by special constables, and four by the K.A.R. outside the polish detainee camp. They were four Batoro, one Munyarwanda, one Congolese, one Lugwara, and one Muziba. Burying the eight dead strikers, none of whom were Ganda, required finding spaces and authority figures willing to articulate new kinds of allegiances in the act of burial: evidence from the secret depositions supporting the deportation of key chiefs after a political assassination in August 1945 suggests that the burials of strikers became gatherings that asserted the moral value of sacrificing life for a Uganda led by Ugandans. Conducting the funerals of 1945 strikers was used as evidence of sedition after the assassination of Nsibirwa later in the year.

Ugandans felt horror that people had been killed, and then deep distress at the Protectorate and Buganda Kingdom officials’ callous response. The deaths created a challenge of meaning-making which people resolved through burials that became large rites of nascent patriotism. People who had the means reached out to Protectorate authorities and asked them to make the shooting stop. On January 19<sup>th</sup>, when 6 people had been killed, Daudi Musoke, leader of the Baganda Cooperative Society and author of Buganda Nyaffe, Yaki Kiasi, a trader, and two Protestant clerks, Luben Lutwamu and Blasio Kahungu approached C.W. Curtiss in the Wandegeya market below Makerere College in Kampala, where he was making a broadcasts from his car telling people to go back to work or stay out of town. They were “very agitated” about the use of firearms, and with Curtiss’s assistance went to make a statement to the Resident, but in that meeting, and a longer conversation with Curtiss, they were told that lethal fire was legal, and they should “that they should quietly start to work among their immediate friends and relations and in this way they could do a lot of good for themselves, their own people and the country.” 113-114, police memorandum vol 2 The leaders of the UAMDA held a meeting with the same goal with the Resident on the 19<sup>th</sup>, after 7 had been killed. By that time, all employees had left the Resident’s office, and the Buganda Kingdom Prime Minister had to interpret. According to K. B. Maindi, they “begged that the use of firearms should be stopped forthwith



against unarmed Africans, since the Protectorate Government came here merely to protect us” but “the Resident’s only reply was that they should advise people to return to work. MSS Brit. Emp. s. 365/125/1a from K.B. Maindi acting president to C.W.W. Greenidge, secretary Anti Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society and Dr. Rita Hinden, Fabian Colonial Bureau, 15 March 1945. The Resident threatened that the Fabian Colonial Bureau might cancel the Union’s affiliation for not calling off the strike: Kivu responded that he would himself write to the Fabian society and explain “how the Government had killed harmless strikers who had never done any violence or used intimidation.” “ Life of Kivu 52 Writing to Rita Hinden four months later, P.L. Musoke described the great shock people had felt to see people shot, and asked whether there would be compensation to the families, or punishment to the shooters. P.L. Musoke to Dr. Rita Hinden 12 Feb 1945 MSS Brit. Emp. s. 365/125/1a Four days into the general strike, when six people had already been killed, Governor Hall announced that firearms would be used and that the police and military would “direct their fire against ringleaders” but it just did not make sense to Ugandans that protestors could be killed.

According to “one citizen gentleman” the strike turned to politics because of the failure of chiefs, “who are fathers of the people of the state “ to rally to help seek redress from the Government regarding the loss of life. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ugandans shocked that workers had been beaten by their foreign employers, took the men “whose marks were visible” to be seen by the members of the Lukiko; the same expectation of leaders’ responsibility to observe and respond to inappropriate violence seems to have been operating with the strike shooting deaths.

“The mass of people watched this situation but the failure of the chiefs only continued on. Some days later the strikers went themselves to the Lukiko Parliament in search of help but nothing was done materially in their trust and efforts. Failure went on till the situation generally reminded every man in the street of the old popular complaints against the composition of the ministries of state and the working of the Lukiko Parliament.”

“One citizen gentleman” divides the strike into two parts, “from 11<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> January 1945 on a pure wages question only “ and “from 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> January 1945 on mixed questions of wages and shooting persons in order to stop them from claiming increased wages and administration by will of the people through the parliament.” A COMMENTARY ON THE REPORT OF COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO THE DISTURBANCES WHICH OCCURRED IN UGANDA PROTECTORATE DURING JANUARY 1945 DATED 14<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 1945 by “one citizen gentleman” to Dr. Rita Hinden MSS Brit. Emp. s. 365/125/

The negotiations that allowed the people mobilized for the strike to bury the members of that group who had been killed took place out of the sight of Protectorate observers, but in retrospect it is clear they were fundamental to the movement. For all East African societies, burials affirmed the relationship of the living and the dead, and of the living to each other: they were acts that defined communities. Solving the problem of how to bury men who had no clans or family in Kampala yet whose lives mattered involved the creation of a new kind of community. Strikers tried to take corpses to be seen by the Kabaka but that effort failed: the Kabaka was away hunting until the 20<sup>th</sup> and the anonymous commentator quoted above implies they were rebuffed by the Kingdom’s senior ministers. The strikers then apparently sought the

assistance of important men who would be willing to conduct burials. I. K. Musazi's father buried the Rwandan striker on his land at XXX near Kampala; Kivu wrote that the large gathering for the burial "gave the strikers moral strength." "Life of Kivu 50 Stanley Kitka Kisingiri, one of the largest landowners in Buganda, conducted the burial for a Munyoro striker. He explained that he bought the coffin, provided the burial land and performed the ceremony because "we should honour the deceased who had died for his country." BNA FCO141/18157 Nsibirwa Assassination affidavits, Mulyanti, 2b. According to another chief, when asked why he had conducted the burial of a striker, Kisingiri said "If we do not do things like this our Country will never be free from the reign of the British." BNA FCO141/18157 Nsibirwa Assassination affidavits, Mpagi, 1, In the cultures of those who participated in the general strike, powerful people continue to influence the living from their graves. The small amount of evidence we have regarding the burials does not tell us whether people anticipated that the graves of the martyred strikers would be remembered. We do know that the people who conducted the ceremonies, and the crowds who attended, defined those who had died as contributors to the creation of a Uganda without colonial rule.

So, to conclude on the point of articulating a nascent national patriotism, people from all over the region participated in the strike, and the crowd of thousands who gathered at the Kabaka's palace asking for better governance was also not all Baganda. Eight people died during the strike, none of them were Baganda. The burials of at least two of them become moments when people expressed a sense of national patriotism.

#### 1945 Strike: the challenge of economic inequality

The great, almost unmanageable gap between wealthy and poor Ugandans and the failure of comprehension by the highest Protectorate authorities contributed to the strike becoming more violent as it continued. Crowds of strikers moving through the towns first had a celebratory quality, but an element of violence entered as some people, notably youths and unemployed city-dwellers, began to beat up Africans who continued to work. Strikers with sticks confronted police with batons and guns: each time a policeman or European-sworn-in-as-special-Constable shot a striker dead, the anger and violence increased. Police and other observers remarked on the progression from cheerfully striking workers to violent clashes. According to G.W. Peskett, the Superintendent of Police, Buganda, described the crowd as "friendly, quite orderly, and cheerful" on the first days, and then turned "angry and truculent." 75 vol 2 police memo A police inspector in Kampala described the large crowd of several thousand milling about the area of the Bus Park and Allidina Visram street as "good tempered and obviously enjoying themselves" and "intent only on stopping every person working." in the morning, but after a leader was shot on Williams street as the crowd tried to prevent him from being arrested, they began to attack cars and lorries. M.K. Akker, 92 The crowd of several hundred began to throw stones at the police "shouting that we Europeans had murdered their brother." W. Scott [vol 2, about p. 70], At Namirembe Cathedral, workers met in an orderly group with Canon Williams to ask for more pay on Monday, on Tuesday bands armed with sticks, but not aggressive, visited the Cathedral to ensure that people were not working, and on Wednesday, after the first shooting death, Williams had to ask for police protection. Letter to Rev. H..D. Hooper Rev. H.D. Hooper, 20.1.45 Mss Brit. Emp s. 365/Box 125, Empire-wide riot strategy, which instructed police to fire at the

leaders of a crowd that was out of control, exacerbated the situation, because groups responded to the attacks on their leaders. Ungless 108-9

Urged to convince working people to join the strike, unemployed young men beat up their peers who were working. The anonymous European businessman “Sundowner” who wrote a column in the Uganda Herald, reported that the porters and P.W.D. workers “downed tools and sought satisfaction in an orderly manner with no indication of ill-feeling” but then other people – whom he called “Kampala’s unemployables” and “shabby totoes, loud mouthed and fleet of foot” who did not follow the lead of their elders took over.. (Uganda Herald 1/24/1945, p.3) He thought that the strike had been “utterly ruined” by the outside sympathisers who were not workers themselves. As the Uganda Herald explained in its 1 page, 4 paragraph edition on January 17<sup>th</sup> (which was all that could be produced because all the staff was striking) “organized hooliganism” had “aggravated considerably” the strikes which had spread to other occupations from the lower paid Government employees. Peskett, the Superintendent of Police, Buganda, noted that “many reports received from Indians found to be much exaggerated on investigation,” but there was also quite a lot of beating. police memo 75 The strike leaders tried to stop the violence, but could not. Some crowds were beyond the control of chiefs. The Pokino talked down an angry crowd in Masaka, but Joswa Zake, accused Matiya Wamala of deliberate inaction “when the mob was at Wobulenzi”, “he did not go there nor did he support or help me when I went there. He did not call out his people and he did not beat the alarm drum and indeed he took no steps proper to his position, and the circumstances of rioting which existed.” BNA FCO141/18157 Nsibirwa Assasination affidavits Zake 1 (numberal 8 on the page) Kivu asked the Buganda Resident for permission to urge people not to be violent over the wireless, but by the end of the week there were large crowds – one observer estimated about a thousand, who “shouted out “we are beating everybody found working, we do not like anyone to be on duty until the pay will be increased.” p. 85 police memo.

The perception that the turn towards violence came from people who were not workers but the most disaffected urban dwellers is corroborated by the commentary on the official report of “one citizen gentleman.” He said that because strikers carried sticks because they had “arranged on the Old Kampala Hill to perform alarm-dance demonstrations in order to keep their strikes alive.” He said this was “usual all over the world of savages and primitives” and “no violence was expected at all.” According to him, the violence of authorities provoked violence and a “money warfare state was generally felt and appreciated by the peasantry throughtout the Protectorate. “ He calls it unfortunate, and urges,” Think of their mentality. And think of the gaps and gulfs of misunderstandings and the despal obtaining between the non-native employers and native labourers.” “A COMMENTARY ON THE REPORT OF COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO THE DISTURBANCES WHICH OCCURRED IN UGANDA PROTECTORATE DURING JANUARY 1945 DATED 14<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 1945 by “one citizen gentleman” to Dr. Rita Hinden MSS Brit. Emp. s. 365/125/1a) In 1945, angry unemployed young men beating houseboys, clerks, and hospital orderlies revealed the deep fissure in Ugandan society was not race, or ethnicity, but wealth.

Before I move to 1949, let me summarize what I see looking at 1949. Just as there were strikes in 1945 in Ghana, Nigeria, and elsewhere that galvanized nascent nationalist movements, in Uganda in 1945 highly motivated, organized at many ranks, and well-disciplined people

demanded fairness and responsiveness from their employers and the leaders of the Buganda kingdom. The people engaged in this were of very many different ethnicities, and the burials of martyred strikers, on land in Uganda, evoked statements about the worthiness of dieing for a Uganda led by Ugandans. Although the intentions of the leaders were non-violent, the poorest and least advantaged members of society seem to have taken advantage of the break in normality to demonstrate anger at their African superiors. Also, the death of strikers brought out more violence.

1949: A gathering to seek democracy that became an insurrection

It is really difficult to find a way to describe what happened in 1949, because I think it started as one thing and became something else. The Kingdon report called it a “disturbance”, ABK Kasozi called it a riot in which the Kabaka’s palace was almost burned down, and Carol Summers and others have called it an ‘insurrection’, but I think the migrated archive shows that the intention was a peaceful attempt to influence the king using the indigenous political vocabulary of pleading in his courtyard, which only became a general insurrection when the Protectorate police forced people out of the political space that it was their right to occupy. I do not think the intention of the participants, from the outset, was the burning of chiefs’ compounds that actually occurred, I think the intention was to get the king to align more fully with his people, through the action of gathering “all of Buganda” in the mbuga, the courtyard of the palace, and staying there until he learned to listen to his people. It was an attempt to win the king’s allegiance away from the ruling chiefs. The violence against chiefs was, I think, a spontaneous response, directed from the top. I think the violence against other people with Protectorate connections shows again the almost insurmountable social strains caused by extreme inequality.

1949: the organization and discipline

The gathering that began on April 25, 1949 at the palace of the Kabaka had been well-planned. Throughout the period from 1945 to 1949 all kinds of meetings are taking place, in many locations, of many different combinations of people, with different names, pursuing a variety of strategies to get Government to be more accountable. On April 15 about 300 people assembled at the Kabaka’s lake to discuss a plan to bring people to participate in a procession to the Lubiri on 25 April. People were to bring food and firewood, so that they could stay until the king agreed to their demands. A typed pamphlet gave these instructions: it began with a prayer and ended with long live Kabaka. It was posted on trees and circulated, so that it was general knowledge. The Resident put pressure on the Kabaka to write a letter saying he would only see delegates, and only 500 people could assemble, and the Protectorate police made plans to prevent a larger gathering. Knowing this, crowds of thousands gathered at the palace at 5:30 am on the 25<sup>th</sup>. It is clear that they intended to stay a long time, because they had trucked in mountains of food, and large amounts of cooking utensils and firewood that were later confiscated by the police from the compounds near the palace.

Everything about their conduct as this failed effort at accountability began shows an intention that the people of the kingdom have to be seen by the king, they have to communicate clearly, and the king has to listen, The record of their representatives meeting with the Kabaka

on April 25, which differs in important ways from the record reproduced in the Kingdon report, makes this clear. In response to their five demands (discussed below) the king says he explained these things to the Lukiko, and the Lukiko representatives should have told them. They respond. “The representatives did not convey those words to us, otherwise the whole of Buganda should not have come to this Courtyard,” which the official version translates as “ “The unofficial representatives did not convey these statements to us. The people would not have come here today had they conveyed the statements to us.” In response to the King’s scolding, that they should have taken their issues to representatives instead of to him, they explain, in the secret version, that because the chiefs say that their representatives “are voicing their own opinions and not that of the people” “that is why we have deemed it necessary to bring all these people so that it may be clearly understood that we are not voicing our own opinions.”

To show that they represented “all of Buganda” the people gathered at the courtyard of the king chose both men and women as their delegates to the king. They had two banners. one had a picture of a man wearing a bark cloth with a rope around his neck, that said “Buganda asks for independence (liberty)/freedom. The other had two women, and between them the message, “Kabaka give us liberty, our cotton may be ginned.” Each flag was carried by a man and a woman.

In the meeting of the delegates with the Kabaka, they made the five points of their written petition, each point delivered by one speaker. The written petition states, WE YOUR PEOPLE, PEOPLE OF BUGANDA, HAVE COME BEFORE YOU WITH FIVE IMPORTANT MATTERS IN WHICH WE ASK FOR THAT MOST IMPORTANT THING, FREEDOM. THE MATTERS HAVE BEEN BROUGHT BY OUR DELEGATES.

THE FOLLOWING ARE THE MATTERS:-

- I. YOUR HIGNESS SHOULD OPEN THE RULE OF DEMOCRACY TO START GIVING PEOPLE POWER TO CHOOSE THEIR OWN CHIEFS.
- II. WE WANT THE NUMBER OF 60 UNOFFICAL RPERESNTATIVES TO BE COMPLETD.
- III. WE DEMAND THE ABOLITION OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT
- IV. WE WANT TO GIN OUR COTTON
- V. WE WANT TO SELL OUR PRODUCE IN OUTSIDE COUNTRIES, THAT IS, FREE TRADE.

(This is FCO 141/18131)

On April 25, the crowd expressed frustration at Police attempts to limit their numbers and to prevent speakers from speaking. When the Police backed down, the crowd was eager to hear from its delegates, whose speeches lasted for two hours. They were unwilling to listen to the Katikiro, and drowned him out (even though he was using a van with sound projection, so that he gave up, and gave the Kabaka’s typed remarks to one of the delegates to read. The crowd refused to leave the Lubiri at the end of the speeches, although the speakers stated that the Kabaka had requested that they leave. So on the 25<sup>th</sup>, the crowd were not violent, but they were not willing to be silenced or pushed out of the king’s courtyard, and they would not listen to the Katikiro. The people who spent the night in the space were orderly, and in the morning, police reported they were singing hymns. Before the police baton charge on April 26, the second day of the gathering,

police reported that the crowd was orderly. (FCO 141/18133, p. 6 of the diary of the commissioner of police the second half of the memo)

So, to summarize regarding organization and discipline in 1945: in response to a typed summons posted on trees and widely circulated, thousands of people brought truckloads of food and firewood to the Lubiri, their carefully composed delegation met with the king, and explained that they had come in large numbers because chiefs misrepresented them, and they wanted the king to see them and hear them. They were not willing to leave and there were not willing to be silenced, but police reported the crowd outside was well-behaved.

#### 1949: the political vision

The people assembled assumed that people had an obligation to express their concerns to the king, and the king had an obligation to listen. Semakula Mulumba explained this in paragraph 37 of a letter to Governor Hall,

“If all the people of Buganda desire to see their Kabaka in connection with a general issue, they assemble on the “Mbuga”, and ask the “Katikiro”, the Prime Minister to inform the “Kabaka” that all his people assembled on the “Mbuga” desire to see him. Without delay, the Kabaka goes to the “Wankaki” to meet the people face to face near the fire-place, “Buganda.” Mulumba explained that it was such a solemn gathering that no one sat down, even the king who, if he was tired, would lean on the Wankaki. He wrote, “The people who assembled came from different parts of the country, and they were really representative of the masses of the people. They were led by their Members of Parliament. They wanted to meet their Kabaka face to face at the “Wankaki” in accordance with the traditions and customs of the country. They desired to submit their demands to the kabaka who, in turn, and on their behalf, would demand justice from higher authorities, if need be.” FCO141/18185 black 1940s photocopy of a letter from Mulumba)

The political vision of the 1949 participants included the concept that good government a mutual respect and responsiveness between rulers and the ruled. In the meeting of the delegation with the Kabaka on April 25, the delegates argued with the Kabaka about what it means to have representative government, and how representatives and people must behave towards each other. This is the thrust of the first three points they make – they want a different kind of government, because the chiefs and others in the Lukiko are not representing them. They say they are outnumbered in the Lukiko and their voices cannot be heard, the king tells them they do not give the chiefs strength and respect. The Kabaka attacks them on procedure, not that they should not have come to him, but that they should have gone through their representatives first. He uses the Buganda Agreement of 1900 to silence the request for democracy and better representation – if people agree with the 1900 Agreement, then they have to let him deal with politics. The Kingdon report version of the meeting obscures the political analysis of the delegation, and makes them sound deliberately rebellious. For example, when the delegates explain that they have brought all the people because chiefs claim the representatives are not really speaking for the people, in the Kingdon version the Kabaka responds, “You want to cause an uprising? You seem to want to tie my hands.” The migrated files version has “Do you want to disturb people by the way you have come? It looks to me as if you want to tie my hands.” In both of these

versions of the meeting, the Kabaka tells the delegation to tell their people to go home, and walks out. In these two Protectorate perceptions of the meeting, people have asked for more democracy and representation, and their king has denied that request.

People gathered at the courtyard of the palace also expected the king to develop, to learn how to be a good king. There is some direct evidence of this, for example, in the police reports of rumours and spies at political meetings who say that people say the Kabaka is young and he can learn to be a better king. A translation of the Uganda Star version of the meeting in the migrated archives provides indirect evidence of people's aspiration of the king learning to be responsive, as it reports a meeting with quite different dynamics. When the delegates ask for 60 unofficials, the Kabaka responds "I will see to that immediately, in accordance with the Agreement; but, there are still certain arrangements to be made concerning some small counties." When Mr. Musoke asks that the current government resign because the people are disgusted with the present chiefs who do not serve the people, the Kabaka asks "Is this the time for the resignation of these chiefs?" Mukasa responds "Yes, your Highness... You should help your people very much if you brought that about" and the Kabaka responds "I will do this, too, in accordance with the Agreement." Regarding the ginning of cotton the Kabaka says "I will handle this matter very soon", and regarding free trade he says "I shall handle that matter too." In the Uganda Star version, the Kabaka does rebuke the delegates for sending Semakula Mulumba to England without going to him first, and he questions whether they actually represent all the clans. The conclusion of the meeting, according to the Uganda Star, was that the Kabaka told the delegates "All the demands you have submitted on behalf of my people will be considered, and I shall do something about them. But, it is important that you let the people know that I must act in accordance with the constitution laid down in the Uganda Agreement of 1900, which I must maintain." The Kabaka's proclamation a few days later, in which he called the people who had burned chiefs houses "pests" and ordered that "He who hesitates to use his every endeavor towards bringing these people to justice is being unfaithful to me; he who fails loyally to defend his Chief is likewise failing in loyalty to me" suggests that the king's actual words were probably autocratic and not conciliatory. The Uganda Star's version of a responsive, caring kabaka held up the qualities people hoped the Kabaka would learn, through the polite insistence of "all of Buganda" gathered outside his palace. The delegates hoped to meet with him again on April 26<sup>th</sup>.

Being present in the mbuga was a dimension of the unwritten constitution – people felt they had a right to be there, and the police baton charge clearing the area at about 9:00 am on April 26<sup>th</sup> was a profound violation of the unwritten constitution of the kingdom. At 6:00 am there was a crowd of 500 quietly sitting, with some singing hymns. At 8:22 am, Curtis, the chief of police, announced that the numbers were too many and they had to disperse. Soon after two police ex-askaris present a typed document that request all Police Officers to sign their names and state by whose orders people were being prevented from seeing their Kabaka. The announcement that the crowd was too large and would have to disperse was "greeted by shouts and jeers from the crowd. There was now a good deal of shouting; various members of crowd were walking up and down shouting – apparently insults." The crowd was about 1000 in front, 2-3,000 in the back, and more in the banana groves. They were aggressive, and being encouraged by some leaders to remain. They were told that if they did not leave, arrests would be made. People did not leave and at 8:45 Curtis reported "general riot" and asked for the K.A.R. to move

forward.” People were climbing up to the rostrum to speak, and the crowd was “nasty”. At 9:55 the police made a baton charge, people responded with the sound of alarm, and there was a general battle of people with stones versus police with batons, eventually the police drove people out of the courtyard, they retreated to the lake, where roaring and cheering could be heard about noon, labour immediately stopped working, and after that, the burning of chief’s compounds began, and lasted for two days. FCO 141/18133,

To summarize, regarding political vision. It was people’s responsibility to see the requirements of good government, speak about them to the king, and the king’s responsibility to listen and to learn. The courtyard of the king was the place for this fundamental element of rule, and to not allow people to be in that space was a most egregious violation.

1949: Articulating a nationalist vision.

The direct evidence is that the crowd at the palace was not just Baganda. Other people who lived in Kampala saw the pamphlet, felt compelled by the message, and showed up. We do not know what they said, how others saw them, we just know they were there.

We also know that Joyce Mukalasi, the leader of the women’s section of the Musazi’s organization the Federation of African farmers, had composed “stirring songs dealing with national struggle and farmers movement”, and that people sang these songs “full of hope and yearning” all the time, and ” “You could tell by the way they sang their songs that this was not just an organization; it was a movement of men and women filled with a vision of a new future.” (George Shepherd, "They Wait in Darkness", 1955, 33, 55.” Police thought people were singing hymns at the gathering at the palace – but were they actually singing songs that evoked a national struggle? I would like to suggest that the music of the farmers and trade union movement of Uganda would be a great topic for a Makerere history or ethnomusicology student to research.

There is also scattered evidence in the collected police reports for this period of people in the Ganda diaspora around Uganda arguing that other people have to have the opportunity to advance, or an independent nation will be possible.

1949: Economic Inequality

As was the case in 1945, the leaders who sent people out to disturb the existing order could not control the people they sent off. In 1945, the instructions were to prevent people from working, and some people (those without jobs?) took the opportunity to beat Africans who had jobs. In 1949, the angry and frustrated leaders of the effort gave instructions to steal vehicles, and petrol, and burn the houses of chiefs. The groups that set out, in stolen lorries, to undertake the burning of ssaza chiefs’ houses sought other targets when they were successfully turned away from the ssaza chiefs’ compounds. Their targets were people who had some kind of association with the Protectorate. I think the two days of violence in May and then the months of retribution, can only be seen as class warfare. First, it was the poor burning the houses of chiefs and the extremely rich, and then, in the period of retribution, it was the most powerful chiefs attacking the financial autonomous emerging middle class. But class warfare only started, I



think, because the Protectorate authorities egregiously violated the unwritten constitution of Buganda.

## Conclusions

First, the complex, ambitious political engagements of Uganda in the 1940s (successful in 1945 and not successful in 1949) allow us to glimpse at a kind of African independence that never happened. Unlike the form of parliamentary democracy that emerged from the Lancaster House negotiations, the 1940s efforts were built on an indigenous political logic. British parliamentary democracy is built on an assumption that competition among parties in conflict yields accountability. Ugandans in the 1940s argued that rulers and ruled were part of a social whole: they had mutual obligations that could and would be met. Some of their political ideas and strategies, such as the responsibility and right of people of all ranks to take action and lead, seem really attractive and perhaps superior (in my mind) to the mostly passive political role I have as a member of the American electorate (and conflict-driven party politics is not looking that useful to me right now, either). There are other aspects of their strategy, such as the use of rumour for character assassination, which were real liabilities and made things worse (I haven't had time to talk about this, but I could in questions. The political innovation and the powerful aspirations for democracy of the 1940s mean that the Ganda conservatism of the 1950s was not inevitable, it has to be explained.

Second, I think it is important to recognize that people were in a process of learning that was interrupted. They were learning how to see themselves as part of a unit that was Uganda. This was just beginning, but it was happening. They were learning how to put together their inherited understanding of mutual responsibility in governance with new tools, such as voting. They were trying to articulate, and trying to figure out what to do about the profound divide between rich and poor which the 20<sup>th</sup> century had created. They did not have answers, but it was a topic of conversation. If people start to learn something, and then the instigators of those conversations are deported, and the locations of those conversations are forbidden, it makes sense that the learning stops. But it is important, for our understanding of what came later, to see that it was happening.

Finally, the excessive, paranoid response by Governor Hall to the efforts towards accountable governance in 1945 and 1949 substantially hindered Uganda's path towards independence. Uganda lost the insight, vision, and commitment to good government of true patriots Hall deported, including the important Buganda Royal Prince Suna and the long-serving Saza (provincial) Chief S. Wamala, both of whom died in detention. While in other colonies labor activism helped build national coalitions that contributed to vital independence movements, in Uganda the 1945 strike and the 1949 bid for more accountable governance in Buganda taught harsh lessons in keeping quiet and avoiding the public sphere. (Byfield et al Africa and WW2 p39.) If colonial authorities had been able to see twenty years into the future, they might have valued the openings for nation-building that the strike and the effort at accountably created, in their employment of a highly diffuse, multi-centered practice of power, and in their expectation of people's capacity to claim political accountability from their rulers, and in their attempt to assert the mutual responsibility of the people of the polity.