

## Renovating History in Idi Amin's Uganda

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In Idi Amin's Uganda history was constantly being made anew. The great questions of the day imposed themselves on the very fabric of local government work. In every obscure corner of public life there were battles to fight and win. There was a 'Double Production Campaign' to increase the yield of cotton farms; a 'Keep Uganda Clean' campaign to clean up urban space; an 'Economic War' to encourage African-run business. Areas of administrative work that had, in colonial times, been apparently technical in nature were, in the 1970s, made urgently political. Local government authorities found themselves on the front lines of global affairs.

In the domain of cultural administration there were particularly urgent matters to attend to. There was a vast expansion in the field of collecting and conservation, as heretofore forgettable places and objects were redefined, almost overnight, as things of political importance. 'Seldom has such a small group of people been given a broader mandate or a more exciting or challenging responsibility', wrote the director of the Department of Antiquities in a 1975 report.<sup>1</sup> New staff were hired to discover, curate, and maintain sites of heritage: the Department of Antiquities employed 16 people at the Kasubi Tombs, 19 people at the tombs of king Kabalega, and 6 people at the remote fort at Patiko, over 70 people in all. They catered to a significant contingent of travellers, both domestic and international, who were interested in what we now call 'cultural tourism'. In 1975 9,681 people visited the Kasubi Tombs, where the kings of Buganda lay.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter I focus on an obscure, unremarkable bureaucrat, a man named John Tumusiime, who from 1972 to 1976 was the 'Culture Officer' of Kigezi, Uganda's southernmost district. Over the course of years Tumusiime conceived, financed, organized, and built several institutions—a museum, a monument—that preserved local history. He worked with fragile and transient things. Valorous deeds, heroic actions, and meaningful events do not ordinarily create their own mark. For any curator, erosion—of memory, of culture, of landscape and soil—is a constant challenge. The building of memorials in Uganda—as everywhere else—has always been a struggle to cheat time of its spoils. It requires impervious materials—concrete, wire fences, brass plaques, glass display cases—to transform the great events of the age into turning points on the historical record. And it takes maintenance and repair to ensure that the objects of heritage—once defined—do not decay. Heritage work entails reclamation, the freezing of time, the mythologization of characters, the separation of hitherto unremarkable space and things and their investiture as inviolate. All of that is hard work. Repairs are always needed. And—

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<sup>1</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 23, 'Monuments' file: Department of Antiquities Monthly Report, January 1975.

<sup>2</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 23, 'Monuments' file: Department of Antiquities Annual Report for 1975.

especially in places where things like concrete and wire is in short supply—it needs human ingenuity, self-sacrifice, and dedication to achieve the ‘museum effect’.<sup>3</sup>

Where did John Tumusiime—and other of Uganda’s culture officers—find their vocation from? Why, at a time when government and economy were so dysfunctional, at a time when tens of thousands of people were killed by the malevolent agents of state security, did earnest and high-minded men and women invest themselves in the work of cultural recovery?

### **Monuments to Colonialism**

The British officials who governed colonial Uganda were confident that their history—their deeds, their heroes—deserved to be remembered. In March 1935 the chief secretary of Uganda’s government sent round a circular to local government authorities. The circular directed officials to ‘mark the more important historical sites in this protectorate before the passage of time has made them unidentifiable’. Stones or cairns, labeled with memorial tablets, were to be erected at particularly important sites.<sup>4</sup> It was the first official attempt to create a memorial infrastructure for Uganda. Everything was geared around the remembrance of colonial conquistadores. The district commissioner in Fort Portal, in western Uganda, thought the only sites worth marking were the places where Frederick Lugard’s forts had once stood. In a former time they had protected the Toro Kingdom against the military might of Kabalega, the king of Bunyoro. Only a few of the forts had ever seen military action. But the district commissioner thought it would be ‘interesting, and comparatively inexpensive, if some small memorial were erected to mark their position and significance’.<sup>5</sup> Memorials were duly constructed at several of the forts.

In the years following World War Two there was a rapid expansion in Uganda’s memorial architecture as colonial officials sought to capitalize on the growing global market in tourism. The East Africa Tourist Travel Association was formed in 1947 by the governments of Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika.<sup>6</sup> Experts estimated that each overseas tourist brought £120 into the local economy, making tourism a potentially important source of profit. Kenya disproportionately benefitted from the tourist trade: in 1955 35,000 overseas tourists visited Kenya, bringing as much as £4,200,000 into the local economy. Uganda received only 7,500 visitors that year.<sup>7</sup> Officials lamented the poor state of the tourist infrastructure. There were fewer than 500 hotel beds in the whole of Uganda, and most of the colony’s hotels were well below standard. ‘With a few exceptions sanitation is deplorable’, wrote the Director of Information, and the ‘service [is] slow and unwilling’. In many hotels there was no supply of hot water; one of Kampala’s leading hotels did not even supply coat hangers to its guests. The official argued that radical improvements were needed: he suggested that hotel owners should be

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<sup>3</sup> See Derek R. Peterson, Kodzo Gavua, and Ciraj Rassool, eds., *The Politics of Heritage in Africa: Economies, Histories, and Infrastructures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Kabarole District Archives box 507, file 1: Chief Secretary, Entebbe, circular to Provincial Commissioners, 23 March 1935.

<sup>5</sup> Kabarole District Archives box 507, file 1: D.C. Toro to P.C. Western, 29 April 1935.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Ouma, *Evolution of Tourism in East Africa (1900-2000)* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1970), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Uganda National Archives CSO 100/17701: Development Council, ‘Tourism’, n.d. (but 1955).

given low-interest loans, and that imports of bedding and crockery for use in tourist hotels should be free of duty.<sup>8</sup> In 1956 the Uganda government created a Hotels and Tourism Board to oversee the development of the tourist infrastructure, and allocated £250,000 to help develop the hotel service.<sup>9</sup> The Apollo Hotel—with 600 beds—was built with government funding in the center of Kampala. It was opened in 1963.

There was a rush to renovate, rebuild and extend monuments to an earlier age of colonial heroism. The history of European exploration was a selling point for tourism. The International Congress of African Touring, held in October 1949, encouraged African colonial governments to ‘recognize the importance of preserving objects of scientific, aesthetic, geological or other scientific interest, in order to complete the variety of attractions available to the touring public’.<sup>10</sup> And so a promotional pamphlet published in March 1950 invited tourists to ‘follow in the steps of the great explorers’. ‘This is the land of Livingstone’s explorations,’ the pamphlet announced, ‘the scene—in those not-so-long-ago days—of Stanley’s Travels in Darkest Africa’.<sup>11</sup> A memorial slab to Frederick Lugard was installed in Namirembe Cathedral in 1950. The inscription lauded Lugard for his ‘untiring efforts, high ideals, and devotion to duty’ which had ‘introduced into Uganda British standards of administration and justice’.<sup>12</sup> In 1953 the signs that had marked the place where major roads crossed the equator were renovated. The old sign—constructed of boards—was replaced with a concrete ring, mounted on a plinth, through which the equator passed. Above the ring was the word ‘Uganda’ in concrete letters. Newspaper editorialists lamented the passing of the old era. ‘There was a friendly “Dr. Livingstone I presume” look about them that made one feel a bit of an explorer’, wrote one commentator.<sup>13</sup> Notwithstanding the nostalgia, older monuments were everywhere reconstructed in concrete and stone. In 1957 Uganda’s Director of Public Works erected a concrete obelisk, a platform, and a shelter on the west bank of the Nile to mark the site of Speke’s discovery of the river’s headwaters.<sup>14</sup> The place had formerly been marked with an iron peg.

These and other monuments were tourist attractions. They were meant to build the romance and heroism of the British civilizing mission into Uganda’s landscape. About this British administrators were firm. When in 1958 there was a proposal to allow African-run local councils to identify sites of historical importance, British officials objected strenuously. One official argued that

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<sup>8</sup> Uganda National Archives CSO 64/11861/I: Horace White to Chief Secretary, 27 October 1952.

<sup>9</sup> Uganda National Archives CSO 100/17701: Development Council memorandum, ‘Tourism’, n.d. (but 1955).

<sup>10</sup> Uganda National Archives Secretariat Topical Collection, box 7, file K.37/20/2/8: Maj. Gen. J. Ballantine to Chief Secretary, Uganda, 21 October 1949.

<sup>11</sup> Uganda National Archives CSO 64/11861/I: Undated flier (but 1950).

<sup>12</sup> Uganda National Archives Secretariat (new series) 1109: Secretary Uganda Society to Chief Secretary, 11 October 1950.

<sup>13</sup> Uganda National Archives CSO 64/11861/II: Editorial, *Uganda Herald*, 19 May 1953.

<sup>14</sup> Uganda National Archives Office of the President, Confidential files, box 85, file C.43/107/01: Director of Public Works, ‘Speke Memorial’, 17 Jan. 1957.

This might very well open the door to extremist politicians agitating for the abolition of sites connected with British historical significance. Conversely nationalistic trends being what they are, it might lead to invidious arguments concerning sites of local or pretended historical importance, e.g. the birthplace of some temporarily popular local personality.<sup>15</sup>

Even as government councils were increasingly populated with energetic, opinionated, capable African leaders, British officials insisted that they alone possessed the proper perspective to measure greatness in history.

The concrete legacy of colonialism was a monumental architecture that testified to the heroism and self-sacrifice of Uganda's British rulers. There was little concrete trace of African political initiative.

### **Silencing History**

Milton Obote's government—which assumed power after independence in 1962—had little material to work with in constructing a national personality for Uganda. The colonial history so carefully built up by British officials could not be the foundation for an independent African nationalism. Neither could Uganda's antique kingdoms furnish the basis for solidarity. In 1966 Obote—who was concentrating power in his own hands—had sent in the army to destroy the palace of the king of Buganda. Thereafter he declared Uganda to be a unitary state. Some people saw it as a lost opportunity. 'Your administration has turned our country into a place of tears, a place of fears, a place of barbarism, agony and death', wrote a student named Kiggundu. The destruction of the king's palace was a particular cause for lamentation.

By ordering those attacks, your Government has displayed a complete lack of foresightedness [and a] lack of appreciation of your country's culture, tradition and history. In almost every civilized country, which was formerly ruled by Kings who were later deposed by popular uprisings, royal palaces and all that goes with them were preserved even to now. They are important historical monuments, relics of the past, attracting thousands of tourists every year. They are sources of revenue and a lesson to the generations of the future.<sup>16</sup>

If Buganda could not be a kingdom, young Kiggundu was saying, it should at least be a museum.

President Obote had no time for kings or for the antique heritage of royalty. Kingdoms—whether as political entities or as museum projects—could not furnish the building blocks for a Ugandan cultural identity. About this there could be no dispute. Obote headquartered a regiment of the Uganda Army at the palace of the king of Buganda. When a British diplomat visited the grounds in 1969 he found the palace sitting derelict and forlorn, pockmarked with bullets. A paratroopers' school had been established behind the decaying bandstand.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 27, 'Monuments' file: P.C. Western Province to P.S., Ministry of Local Government, 28 August 1958.

<sup>16</sup> British National Archives DO 213/237: J. Kiggundu to Obote, 17 July 1966.

<sup>17</sup> British National Archives FCO 31/489: Defence Advisor to Minister of Defence, 17 June 1969.

The other kingdoms of Uganda were likewise deprived of their monumental architecture and of the orientation that ritual could provide. The ruler of the kingdom of Toro—the long-lived Edward Rukidi—died in December 1965, just as the Obote government was moving to centralize power in Kampala. According to ancient custom, the ceremony to ‘close’ Rukidi’s tomb was scheduled to take place in September 1966, ten months after his death. The closing of the king’s tomb was traditionally a grandiose occasion, when the heir and incoming king finally established his government over the kingdom. But September 1966 was not a time for the grand celebrations of royalty. Only four months before the new king of Toro was to take his place President Obote’s army had crushed the kingdom of Buganda. In the last months of 1966 there was little appetite for royalist ceremony. No-one remembered the protocol for the closing of the tomb, and on the day of the ceremony the kingdom’s Prime Minister was obliged to hurriedly dash off a note—in handwriting—telling local officials where and when to appear.<sup>18</sup> No one was sure about how to proceed.

A few people made efforts to find a new footing on which the honor and commemorate Uganda’s ancestral kingdoms. One of Toro’s prominent men wrote asking for permission to erect a statue of the deceased king. He was careful to put a liberal gloss on Toro’s royalism: King Rukidi had been ‘the only King who used to welcome every Ugandan and never discriminated [against] anyone here in Uganda as well as outside Uganda’, he wrote.<sup>19</sup> The statue was never built. There was not much left with which to remember the kings of old. In the last months of 1967 the palaces of Toro and other kingdoms were seized by government, and the kingdoms were constitutionally abolished. The young king of Toro, newly installed after his father’s death, was given a scant ten days to vacate his home.<sup>20</sup> The palace was transformed into an assembly hall and dormitory for a nursing school, while the outbuildings were occupied by administrators. Within a year the grounds were occupied by squatters, who filled the premises with bananas and other crops.<sup>21</sup>

In this way the heritage of royalty was placed out of bounds. In the wake of President Obote’s thoroughgoing suppression of Uganda’s kingdoms the narrative field was cleared of orientation, and it was not clear where, if anywhere, history was leading. In the year following the abolition of the kingdoms Uganda’s government organized a competition for school-based musical groups. The organizers were careful to say that ‘the songs we are interested in are National Songs and not Traditional Songs’. Winning songs were to concern the ‘achievements of our Nation and ... participation of our National organization and their leaders’.<sup>22</sup> For many people it was not clear

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<sup>18</sup> Kabarole District Archives box 1230, file 4: Omuhikirwa’s office to all Heads of Department, n.d.

<sup>19</sup> Kabarole District Archives box 1230, file 4: Augustino Kalimirire to Administrator, Fort Portal, 23 December 1966.

<sup>20</sup> Kabarole District Archives box 739, ‘Uganda Constitution’ file: J. Inyoin to Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Local Government, 18 Sept. 1967.

<sup>21</sup> Kabarole District Archives box 739, ‘Uganda Constitution’ file: Rwambarare to Administrative Secretary, Toro, 12 Sept. 1968.

<sup>22</sup> Kabarole District Archives box 77, ‘Sports, General, 1961-71’ file: Chairman, National Trading Corporation, to all Education Officers, 5 Sept. 1969.

how the Ugandan nation ought to be celebrated. Whose accomplishments were to be hymned? Whose history remembered? When government established a new ‘Inspectorate for Monuments and Attractive Sites’, its mandate was the ‘preservation of all the existing attractive monuments and other interesting historical pieces’.<sup>23</sup> The minister responsible asked local government officials to document previously unrecognized sites which ‘are known only to the local people’. Away in the east officials were mystified about the criteria. It was not clear, wrote the district commissioner, whether ‘places of local interest would actually qualify as being of national interest in Uganda at large’.<sup>24</sup> The list of sites that he submitted was anodyne, full of uncontroversial things: a cave where hyenas used to live; a rock where one of the region’s mythical ancestors was said to have buried his wife and son.

There was no narrative on which to hang a national story. No one knew where the ancestors to the nation of Uganda might lie. In the absence of national martyrs, and in the absence of a deep historical past, Uganda’s cultural economy was depoliticized. The focus was on foreign visitors. In 1963 the Obote government sent out a delegation to gin up global interest in tourism in Uganda. The delegation was led by a foreigner, E.H. Wilson, whose credentials were his avid sportsmanship and his leadership of the Uganda Cricket Association.<sup>25</sup> It was important that the tourist industry would create the right impression. A government minister called for the prohibition on the ‘taking of photographs calculated to degrade the country’.<sup>26</sup> Tourists were in the habit of photographing ‘naked or half naked people, shabby huts and shanty villages and like scenes calculated to show how primitive the people and country are’. The minister wanted to prohibit photographs of naked people, of people carrying spears or implements of war, of ‘primitive housing, food, drinking, dress or even markets’, or of ‘primitive methods of bringing up children’. The punishment for an offense was to be six months in prison.

The ban was never put in place. Instead, the Obote government worked to put beautiful and uncontroversial images into circulation. In 1968 the Ministry of Tourism produced a series of Christmas cards and posters that advertised Uganda to tourists and visitors. The posters featured scenes of cultural significance—photos of dancing festivals, for instance, or of circumcision ceremonies.<sup>27</sup> When asked by the Ministry of Tourism to name historically important sites in Kigezi district, the local government officer replied with a list of scenic places: the Birunga Mountains as viewed from the Kanaba Gap; the hot springs of Karungu.<sup>28</sup> There was nothing about conflict, war, or politics. Officials of the Obote government expected that the tourist

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<sup>23</sup> Kabarole District Archives box 1230, file 4: P.S., Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and Tourism, 12 May 1965.

<sup>24</sup> Jinja District Archives Comm. Development 8/8: D.C. Busoga to P.S., Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and Tourism, 18 Sept. 1965.

<sup>25</sup> Library and Archives of Canada RG 25 5238 7116-DT-40: Wilson to Hake, 31 Jan. 1963.

<sup>26</sup> Uganda District Archives OP Confidential Collection, box 45, file PM: 1963: Minister of Information, Broadcasting and Tourism, ‘Measures to Prohibit the Taking of Photographs Calculated to Degrade the Country’, 9 May 1963.

<sup>27</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 26, ‘Historical Monuments’ file: P.S. for Tourism to all District Commissioners and culture officers, 7 August 1968.

<sup>28</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 26, ‘Historical Monuments’ file: Administrative Secretary, Kigezi to D.C. Kigezi, 21 October 1968.

business would ‘reflect mostly the African culture and personality’, and encouraged hotel owners to ‘concentrate on the African way of life’.<sup>29</sup>

That is how, in Obote’s Uganda as in other places, the tourist industry helped to make culture safely apolitical. Even as the Obote government was working—militarily and politically—to deprive Uganda’s ancient kingdoms of their organizational power, culture itself was made into a selling point. Tourism entailed the celebration of beautiful things and safely domesticated rituals. It made culture itself into an attraction. What was needed was the right management. When in 1969 Uganda celebrated the International Year of African Tourism officials organized an essay contest to mark the occasion. Students were invited to compose an essay of 1,000 words on a range of managerial subjects: from ‘What can be done to combat poaching in my district?’ to ‘Law and order in Karamoja as a prelude to developing the district as a tourist attraction’.<sup>30</sup> No-one was asked to write about political history. For Obote’s officials, tourism was a ‘great promoter of international understanding, hence, a peacemaker’, as one of them wrote in 1969. The catastrophe of the Tower of Babel had resulted in ‘disaster and eternal separation’, he wrote; but through tourism the divisions of Biblical times could be healed.<sup>31</sup>

To be clear: Uganda’s nascent tourist industry was never free of controversy. From the start the tourist business aroused tensions over cultural property, over the rights that local people might exercise, and over the profits to be gained. Many people objected at being made into the quaint and uncomplicated subjects of touristic photography. In 1956 an editorialist complained that Karamojong people, in the remote north of Uganda, were deliberately being cut off from the rest of the country.<sup>32</sup> By keeping the Karamojong primitive, the editorialist argued, government was affording tourists ‘an opportunity to take photographs which they can sell on post cards’. Ugandans were well aware of the stakes entailed in romanticized portraits of African primitivity. In 1961 two European tourists stopped along the road leading from Fort Portal to Bundibugyo to photograph a group of cattle herders. As they composed the photograph a man rode up in a bicycle and demanded that the tourists should pay thirty shillings for the photo they had taken. The tourists refused, and drove away in their vehicle. Two miles down the road the tourists stopped again, this time to photograph a group of Batwa pygmies. The man on the bicycle again appeared, demanding that they pay each of the 24 pygmies present thirty shillings each. When the tourists refused, the pygmies placed rocks in front of their car and stood in front of it. The tourists, alarmed, sounded the horn, scattered the crowd and drove away.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 26, ‘Historical Monuments’ file: Principal, Institute of Public Administration to D.C. Kigezi, 19 October 1970.

<sup>30</sup> Moroto District Archives box 8, C/MIS 7: P.S., Ministry of Information, Broadcasting, and Tourism, to all District Commissioners, 16 August 1969.

<sup>31</sup> Hoima District Archives Info 1110, file 5: Daniel Baguma, ‘Tourism is Twice Blessed’, 2 Sept. 1969.

<sup>32</sup> *Uganda Eyogera*, 13 March 1956. In Jinja District Archives box 117, file INF 2/2: Summaries of the Local Press, 1189.

<sup>33</sup> Kabarole District Archives box 116, ‘Petitions and Complaints, Bwamba County’ file: Officer Commanding Police to subcounty chief Bubukwanga, 18 Jan. 1961.

The police who investigated the incident did not know who the interfering man on the bicycle was. Neither do I. Nevertheless, it is clear that the tourist industry—formally disengaged as it was from Uganda’s political history—was bound up in a field of contention over profits and representation. The tourists’ photographs, like the Christmas cards that Milton Obote’s Ministry of Tourism created, pictured idyllic natural scenes and happy people. They made Ugandans appear innocent. But all was not as it seemed. Behind the scenes appearances were being managed, as people struggled to define and control the politics of history. The Obote government, keenly interested in suppressing the power of Uganda’s ancient monarchies, closed down monuments to royalty and evacuated the field of culture. This was a machinery for the suppression of political argument. It made Uganda’s culture appear integrated, free of division, happily apolitical, and simple.

As a way of capturing tourists’ interest it seems to have been an effective strategy. The number of tourists visiting Uganda rose steadily in the late 1960s, from 53,000 in 1968 to 74,000 in 1969.<sup>34</sup> In that year tourism was the third largest sector in Uganda’s foreign exchange economy. In 1970, on the eve of the coup that brought Idi Amin to power, the number of tourists visiting Uganda rose to 78,000, the largest number in the country’s history.<sup>35</sup>

### **History and Politics**

In September 1971—eight months after he came to power—President Amin loaded the British High Commissioner in his personal helicopter and flew with him to Kangai, in the northern part of the country, to lay the foundation stones for two monuments. They marked the places where, in 1899, the anti-colonial leaders Kabalega and Mwangi had been captured—after a long war—by British forces. The sites were decidedly inconspicuous: they lay on either side of a minor road, in a remote part of Uganda, at a place that had never before been marked. Amin was convinced that there were lessons to be learnt on those humble grounds. ‘Contrary to what one might suppose after reading foreign historians, Africans did play an active part in their own history’, he said. If Uganda’s people ‘had joined forces then, why could they not work together now?’<sup>36</sup> The plaque that was erected at the site drove the point home: it read ‘After a long struggle against foreign domination, Omukama [King] Kabalega was captured here by British troops on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1899’.<sup>37</sup>

Under Idi Amin’s presidency a host of hitherto unremarkable places and objects were made into evidence of Ugandans’ long struggle against British oppression. There was a proliferation of sites of memory. The Department of Antiquities made an appeal for members of the public to ‘bring to our attention monuments of historical significance, rock paintings or any peculiar stone

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<sup>34</sup> Lira District Archives box 517, file with no cover: Hon. A. Ojera, Minister of Information, Broadcasting and Tourism, 8 August 1970.

<sup>35</sup> British National Archives FCO 31/1049: Minister of Finance, Budget Speech, 17 June 1971.

<sup>36</sup> British National Archives FCO 31/1018: Slater, British High Commission, to East African Department, 5 October 1971.

<sup>37</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 23, ‘Monuments’ file: Department of Antiquities Monthly Report, July 1974.

that can be found in your areas'.<sup>38</sup> In Mparo, near Hoima, local people pointed out a 'medium sized shrub with proliferating branches and diminutive leaves' that was supposed to have been planted by King Kabalega. It was said that he had sacrificed nine men, nine cows, nine goats and nine chickens on the occasion when the tree was planted.<sup>39</sup> At the Uganda Museum in Kampala the curator acquired a spear measuring 55 centimeters in the blade. It was said to have belonged to king Kabalega himself.<sup>40</sup> In 1972 the Amin government lodged a request with the British Museum for the return of the Luzira Head, the most famous archaeological object discovered in eastern Africa, which had been taken from Uganda by a British geologist in 1929.<sup>41</sup>

What explains this sudden surge of interest in history and archaeology? To an extent that exceeded other African states Amin's government positioned itself on the front lines of an ongoing war against the neo-colonial control of European power. In historical remembrance as in other domains there were battles to fight and win. One of the monuments that President Amin inaugurated during his September 1971 tour of northern Uganda marked the place where king Kabalega—in the company of the outcast king of Buganda, Mwanga—had met with Chief Daudi Odora of Lango. Amin argued that the monument had uncovered a hitherto suppressed past. Historians from foreign countries, he told the audience, had played down the 'activities and achievements of the local rulers and their people'. He called on 'competent scholars, both foreign and indigenous', to 'carry out research at the various ancient, historical and traditionally important sites'. It was his government's policy, he said, to 'start a thorough search and study of all meaningful sites in the hope that this will lead to a better understanding of the earlier people of Uganda'. The tombs of the ancient kings were to be rebuilt in concrete; and museums would be created at each place.<sup>42</sup>

All of this was propaganda. But it chimed with wider currents in Uganda's political and cultural thought. The call for cultural recovery was widely articulated across the African continent in the 1970s. It was the decade of Black Consciousness, a South African ideology that—in one scholar's insightful assessment—sought to 'preach and instill dignity and confidence worthy of the image of God' in black people.<sup>43</sup> It was the decade of *authenticité*, the ideology of cultural self-assertion propounded by the dictator of Zaire, Mobutu Sese Seko. Zairians adopted new African names to replace Western names; and western attire was discouraged in favor of authentically African styles.<sup>44</sup> Mobutu's cultural program attracted interest and support in

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<sup>38</sup>Kabale District Archives Public Works 23, 'Monuments' file: Department of Antiquities Monthly Report, January 1975.

<sup>39</sup>Kabale District Archives Public Works 23, 'Monuments' file: Department of Antiquities Monthly Report, September 1974.

<sup>40</sup>Uganda Museum, acquisitions catalogue, item E.71/61/1-2.

<sup>41</sup>British National Archives FCO 31/1359: Uganda Ministry of Foreign Affairs to British High Commission, 22 March 1972.

<sup>42</sup>'New Move to Retain History', *Uganda Argus* 5211 (1 Oct. 1971).

<sup>43</sup>Daniel Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968-1977* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), 13.

<sup>44</sup>See among other works Bob White, *Rumba Rules: The Politics of Dance Music in Mobutu's Zaire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Kenneth Adelman, 'The Recourse to Authenticity and Negritude in Zaire', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 13 (1) (1975), 134-39;

Uganda. There were calls in the Ugandan press for the revival of African names. ‘The Europeans came with their intention to confuse the masses they were leading. They wanted to feel great and superior by getting Africans to accept their names’, wrote an editorialist in the *Voice of Uganda*. ‘What is wrong with calling yourself Rubanga, Twenomujuni, Mirembe etc.?’<sup>45</sup> Other editorialists called upon the young to clothe themselves in accordance with tradition. ‘Aping is not creativity’, wrote Omar Nasser, the *Voice of Uganda*’s most emphatic journalist. ‘There is of course nothing wrong with keeping with the times as far as fashion goes. But ... fashion has to be respectful and dignified. Decency is a great attribute in any youth group’.<sup>46</sup>

In 1972 the Amin government summarily banned the wearing of miniskirts. The matter had been discussed at the highest levels. At an early meeting of Amin’s cabinet the Minister of Culture and Community Development warned that miniskirts had

spread throughout the country very fast to the extent of threatening or even signaling the extinction of our National dresses. These dresses are a source of scandal, they encourage crime and they are not in the interest of our culture.<sup>47</sup>

A year later the Amin government banned the growing of bushy beards and the wearing of long hair by men. Government blamed ‘foreign hippies’ for all manner of criminal behavior, including printing counterfeit money, kidnapping and assassination.<sup>48</sup> One morning in early July 1973 a group of three Indian men arrived in the Entebbe airport on a flight from London, attired smartly in suits, collars and ties but wearing hair over their ears. The agent at the immigration desk initially refused them entry, then produced a pair of scissors with which he personally cut the visitors’ hair.<sup>49</sup> In 1974 the president banned the wearing of wigs. The wigs that Ugandan women craved, said President Amin, were ‘made by the callous imperialists from human hair mainly collected from the unfortunate victims of the miserable Vietnam war’. In any case they were rarely cleaned, harboring ‘articles injurious to life from lice to lizards’. And they made ‘our women look unAfrican and artificial’.<sup>50</sup>

Here—in women’s attire and hairstyle, in the beards that men wore—was a further front in Uganda’s long war against imperialism. Many people rushed to join the fray. Yekosofati Engur,

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and Sarah Van Beurden’s excellent *Authentically African: Arts and the Transnational Politics of Congolese Culture* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, XXX).

<sup>45</sup> Editorial letter, *Voice of Uganda* 1 (3) (5 December 1972).

<sup>46</sup> Omar Nasser, ‘African Youth had Better Stay Clear of Streaking Cult’, *Voice of Uganda* (6 April 1974).

<sup>47</sup> Uganda District Archives OP Confidential Collection 31/06: Cabinet memorandum 119, ‘Mini Dresses’, 1 June 1971.

<sup>48</sup> British National Archives FCO 31/1234: Hyde, High Commission, to East Africa Department, 7 July 1972.

<sup>49</sup> British National Archives FCO 31/1234: High Commission to Consular Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 7 July 1972.

<sup>50</sup> ‘Decree Bans Women’s Wigs and Trousers’, *Voice of Uganda* 1 (365) (5 Feb. 1974). For an accounting of the politics of attire in Amin’s Uganda we await Doreen Kembabazi’s forthcoming University of Michigan dissertation.

the Minister of Culture and Community Development, barnstormed through Uganda, making speeches about the need for cultural recovery. Engur had a long and distinguished political career. He had been imprisoned by the British in 1958 as one of the leaders of the Uganda National Congress, an early nationalist party. In 1960 he was elected *Won Nyaci*, the traditional leader of northern Uganda's Langi-speaking community.<sup>51</sup> He saw himself as a public servant. At one locality during his 1972 tour Engur told an audience that 'African culture was suppressed by colonialists who called it Satan and yet our culture was given to us Africans by the same God who gave them theirs'. Africans were more moral than whites, he argued, comparing the lewd dances of Europe with the staid and decorous conventions of African dance. He hailed the ban on miniskirts as a reinforcement of traditional morality, for women's fashionable attire had played a key role in 'spoiling our culture'.<sup>52</sup> It was culture that 'distinguishes us as a people of a grown up country', he argued. 'We cannot be independent until we have done away with colonial politics and culture'.<sup>53</sup>

It was the role of government to ensure that the struggle against colonial culture was fought and won. Whole arenas of life that had hitherto existed outside oversight were vacuumed into the apparatus of the state. A wave of new departments, new ministries, and new bureaucracies came, quite suddenly, into being. New regulations were invented, too. Religion was one area that needed regulation. Early in February 1971, only two weeks after coming to power, President Amin announced—in a speech broadcast over Radio Uganda—the establishment of a new Ministry of Religious Affairs. 'Government believes that religion must be a source of togetherness', Amin told a group of clergymen. 'Government does not believe that religions or religious organizations should tolerate any tendencies that bring about ... disunity among people who profess the same religion'.<sup>54</sup> In 1975 and again in 1977 the Amin government banned dozens of religious organizations which it thought to be 'dangerous to peace and order'. Among them were the Seventh Day Adventist church, the Bahais, and the Quakers.<sup>55</sup> The buildings owned by these organizations were seized by government.

In this as in other fields the Amin state claimed for itself the superintendence of arenas of life that had formerly been private concerns. Managers were particularly needed to superintend the work of cultural preservation. The Department of Antiquities was established in 1973. The first conservator, a man named Paul Wamala, thought his new institution's task was clear: it was 'engaged in rediscovering our cultural heritage'. In colonial times anything of historical or archaeological interest was taken off to the British Museum.<sup>56</sup> His department's task was to challenge 'the false ideas of cultural superiority' which Europeans had cultivated through their

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<sup>51</sup> Lira District Archives box 517, file with no cover: Lango District Council meeting, 28 June 1960.

<sup>52</sup> Lira District Archives box 609, 'Speeches, Policy Statements' file: Speeches made by the Minister during a Tour of Teso, 13 to 15 September 1972.

<sup>53</sup> 'Our Identity Depends on Culture', *Uganda Argus* 5267 (2 December 1971).

<sup>54</sup> ISA MFA-Political-0002lqo: Conference of Religious Leaders, Kabale, 19 May 1971.

<sup>55</sup> Kabarole District Archives box 382 file 3: District Commissioner, Toro, to all county chiefs, 18 October 1977.

<sup>56</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works box 26, 'Historical Monuments' file: P. Wamala, 'Operation of the Department of Antiquities', n.d. (but 1973).

well-stocked museums. The Department of Antiquities sought to protect and develop sites that testified to Africans' historical attainments. The unremarkable shrub in Mparo—ostensibly planted by king Kabalega—became a site of pilgrimage for government officials and visitors wishing to dramatize their anti-colonial commitments. In August 1973 President Amin visited the tree at Mparo in the company of Somalia's vice-president and Tanzania's foreign minister. Newspapers reported that the guests were shown the spears, shields, and drums that Kabalega had once used, and were conducted to a 'growing tree which was planted in nine human corpses, nine sheep, and nine goats'.<sup>57</sup> There were plans to erect a large sign post at the place, with a notice in four languages—English, French, Arabic and Swahili.<sup>58</sup> The district's culture officer duly arranged to have a 'good and proper reed fence' erected around the tree, since the existing fence looked shabby.<sup>59</sup>

Across Uganda there was a rapid repurposing of geography. Human and natural infrastructure was relabeled. Everywhere there were reminders of an epochal struggle. On 21 April 1971—three months after Amin came to power—workers arrived at the entrance gate of Uganda's parliament buildings and removed a giant medallion, bearing Milton Obote's bust, which hung from the arch. That same week the large letters spelling the word 'Apollo' on the side of the Apollo Hotel were removed, and the hotel was renamed the Kampala International Hotel.<sup>60</sup> In January 1973 workers took down the statue of King George VI, which sat in front of the High Court.<sup>61</sup> The artist and editorialist Eli Kyeyune called it 'a turning point, whereby colonial symbols have inevitably to give way to indigenous African symbols'. It was time for new statues, for 'there are ancient heroes, including the great African martyrdom heroes, that represent the dilemmas of modern Africa'.<sup>62</sup> In July 1973, Idi Amin and Zairian president Mobutu Sese Seko visited Arua, in north-western Uganda, where they renamed what had formerly been Lake Albert with the name 'Lake Mobutu Sese Seko'. A few days later they likewise renamed Lake Edward, christening it Lake Idi Amin Dada in what the newspapers called a 'colorful ceremony' at a lakeside fishing village. Mobutu told the assembled crowd that the renaming of the lakes was 'another step in the decolonization of the minds of the people'.<sup>63</sup> Throughout Uganda local government officials were obliged to rename streets and public buildings that had hitherto borne British names. It had to be done on very short notice: the Ministry of Public Service gave town clerks two weeks to find names that would 'fit with this country's economic, social and political aspirations'.<sup>64</sup> So it was that, in Kabale town, Archer

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<sup>57</sup> 'Bunyoro People Urged to Toil', *Voice of Uganda* (24 August 1973).

<sup>58</sup> Hoima District Archives PUW box 1026, file 3: Personal Private Secretary to Minister, Culture and Community Development, 4 October 1973.

<sup>59</sup> Hoima District Archives PUW box 1026, file 3: Culture Officer, Bunyoro, to gombolola chief Buhanika, 4 Feb. 1974.

<sup>60</sup> United States National Archives RG 59 SNF 1970-73, box 2644, file POL 14 1/1/70: Kampala to State Department, 23 April 1971.

<sup>61</sup> 'At Last It's Pulled Down', *Voice of Uganda* 1 (40) (19 Jan. 1973).

<sup>62</sup> Eli Kyeyune, 'Symbols of Cultural Revolution', *Voice of Uganda* 1 (49) (2 Feb. 1973).

<sup>63</sup> 'Authenticity Triumphs over Colonialism', *Voice of Uganda* 1 (193) (17 July 1973).

<sup>64</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 26, 'Historical Monuments' file: P.S. Ministry of Public Service to all town clerks, 19 December 1972.

Road became Makobore Road; Cohen Road became Kangwagye Road; and Sharp Dormitory in Kigezi College became Lumumba Dormitory.<sup>65</sup>

History had never before been so urgent. There was a pressing need for an inspirational past, for people, styles, sites and objects that could furnish Ugandans with a distinctive historical repertoire to name and celebrate. In 1975 the Department of Antiquities brought out a book titled *Kabalega and the History of Uganda* on its newly-established 'Uganda's Famous Men' series. The book portrayed Kabalega as he 'fell victim to forces of colonialism and imperialism and not as a rebellious and barbaric King as he had been labeled by the British colonialists'.<sup>66</sup> The book also stressed Kabalega's 'reforms in the Military, politics and economics' which had 'caused him to establish a unified and formidable Kingdom'. Another book published that same year was entitled *Mubende Hill: Its History and Ritual Importance*. It highlighted the long history of the 'Bacwezi Empire', which had its headquarters in Mubende. Neither of these books was based on primary historical research. There was no time for that. The authors drew material from already-published texts and rushed them into print. That was what was needed: short, inspirational texts that could furnish the framework for a new narrative about Uganda's precolonial and colonial history.

All of this cultural work was an act of invention. It involved the clarification of hitherto changeable styles and songs, the expropriation of bits of land from ordinary use and its redefinition as sacred ground, the elevation of formerly disputable figures and their remaking as heroes. Conservation entailed reification, separation, the freezing of time and the suppression of change. That is how conservators worked. They turned living things into museum pieces.

The effort to conserve and institutionalize cultural heritage always stood in tension with the human propensity to forget, to remake, to reuse, to reframe. The things that preservationists sought to conserve—historical landmarks, regalia, customs, culture—had once lived other lives. Other people were invested in them. It was by no means easy for preservationists to wrest the substantial things of heritage away from those who had other purposes to pursue. Katasiha fort is one of several earthworks constructed in the 1890s, during the British conquest of the kingdom of Bunyoro. When in 1965 an official from Kampala visited the site, he found that a farmer named Kyomya was cultivating the fort's central square.<sup>67</sup> The deep ditches outside were overgrown with thick bush. There was as yet no legislation in place to establish the fort, or any other site, as a national monument; and so the Kampala official was obliged to 'hope that the claimant, Kyomya, can be persuaded to allow the clearance of the ditches to take place'. A bargain was duly struck: Kyomya was allowed to cultivate the land in the area, while the 'historical area', including the ditches, was to be kept free of cultivation. There the matter rested until 1974, when the district's culture officer wrote to Mr. Kyomya warning him not to cultivate

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<sup>65</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 26, 'Historical Monuments' file: 13 February 1973.

<sup>66</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 23, 'Monuments' file: Department of Antiquities, annual report for 1975.

<sup>67</sup> Hoima District Archives PUW box 273, file 1: P.S. Ministry of Culture and Community Development to D.C. Bunyoro, 3 February 1967.

the land at Katasiha.<sup>68</sup> Kyomya replied that very day with a tart and pointed letter. ‘The land I am cultivating has been legally possessed, cultivated and recultivated by my grandfather, father and myself since 1927’, he wrote.<sup>69</sup> ‘As a progressive cultivator I am worthy to have it. And I am intending to expand my farming as I have already started based on the appeal of our government for DOUBLE PRODUCTION’. The following week the subcounty chief visited the site, spent several hours in Kyomya’s company, and found that he in fact possessed a certificate of occupancy for the land on which the fort was located.<sup>70</sup>

In Katasiha as in other memorial sites around Uganda there were different and contending interests at play. The preservationist impulse—to set aside, to separate, to conserve—always stood in tension with the interests of other users. Preservationists regarded these other forms of use as a kind of unfaithfulness to the past, a corruption of the original purpose. In fact every place had hybrid origins and multiple uses. Almost every heritage project was hard-fought. In October 1974, the Conservator of Antiquities angrily noted that the burial mound of Suna II—one of Buganda’s kings—had recently become the site of a building project, as a householder had begun to erect a house on the premises. That same month the Conservator noted that the memorials at Bukaleba and Fort Thurston—sites of the famous Uganda mutiny of 1897—had been demolished. Three memorial plaques had been wrenched off.<sup>71</sup> In 1975 the Conservator reported that a wire fence had recently been erected around the Muganzirwazza earthwork, which had been erected by prisoners of Buganda’s king in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Here was a kind of ‘fortress conservation’, in which wire fences served to demarcate and define the properties of national history. But the fence had been compromised by playful children, who made a game of swinging on the wires, causing them to bend and break. The Conservator reported that the ‘kids have been warned off and their parents informed about their behavior’.<sup>72</sup>

That is how conservation worked. Monuments are never in a solid state. Even the most solid and impressive monument needs attention. Natural forces—the growing of trees, the erosion of soil, the drying of mortar—always impinge upon the monument, making it crack, list, and eventually disappear. Maintenance is therefore a vital requirement for any monumental architecture. And in Idi Amin’s Uganda the tools and equipment needed for maintenance were always in short supply. The work of cultural preservation—like other aspects of public life—had to operate under austere conditions.

In the absence of the necessary equipment human labor and ingenuity were needed to maintain complicated and politically sensitive sites of culture. In western Uganda, for instance, there were

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<sup>68</sup> Hoima District Archives PUW box 1026, file 3: Culture Officer Bunyoro to Augustine Kyomya, 12 July 1974.

<sup>69</sup> Hoima District Archives PUW box 1026, file 3: A. Kyomya to Culture Officer, Bunyoro, 12 July 1974.

<sup>70</sup> Hoima District Archives PUW box 1026, file 3: Gombolola chief Busisi to saza chief Bughaya, 23 July 1974.

<sup>71</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 23, ‘Monuments’ file: Antiquities monthly report, October 1974.

<sup>72</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 23, ‘Monuments’ file: Conservator of Antiquities, monthly report for April 1975.

dozens of tombs wherein the rulers of the ancient kingdom of Bunyoro were buried. All of them have survived as monumental sites due to the constant labor and attention of commoners. The impressive tomb of king Duhaga was reported in January 1972 to be overgrown with weeds and bush. It was an embarrassment. The headmaster of the local school had to marshal his students and spend a week clearing the site.<sup>73</sup> The government's culture officer in Bunyoro was overwhelmed by the maintenance work that was needed on the region's many tombs and historical sites. One site—a cave with seven compartments—was overgrown with bushes, and inside it there were said to be snakes and other dangerous creatures. The official wanted the fire brigade to take a hand in clearing and maintaining the site.<sup>74</sup> Some officials suggested that government should organize and fund concrete monuments for each of the region's tombs. The monuments were to be cone-shaped, eight feet wide and eight feet high, marked with a plaque.<sup>75</sup> It was a noble suggestion, but concrete was in short supply. When Tito Winyi—the king of the defunct kingdom—died in 1972, the burial committee hoped to put up a permanent structure, in rock and concrete, to mark the site of his tomb. But money was short; and by the end of 1972 Winyi's clansmen had lowered their ambitions and were raising funds to erect a tomb made of 'local building materials', far cheaper than concrete.<sup>76</sup> The structure they put up was a 'traditional hut' made of thatch and poles. By 1982 it had collapsed in a heavy rainfall.<sup>77</sup>

Even the site at Mparo—where the famous tree planted by king Kabalega was located—had to operate under austere conditions. The tomb of Kabalega's female relatives was in a state of dereliction by 1975, and the regalia kept on the site was being eaten by termites. The Conservator of Antiquities had the regalia removed from the tomb and stored in an office.<sup>78</sup> There had been plans in place to build the tomb of the king in concrete, at a cost of Shgs. 60,000. In the end government allocated a bare Shgs. 1,000 to the project.<sup>79</sup> It fell to local people to undertake the necessary work of keeping the site open. When the reed fence around the site collapsed in heavy winds, an official from Kampala ordered the sub county chief to marshal a working squad within two days to clear the site and to smooth the road leading to the tomb.<sup>80</sup> Parish chiefs were given a week to collect the necessary building materials: each parish was to produce 300 bundles of reeds, 100 poles and 100 bundles of thatch, all to be delivered to the sub

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<sup>73</sup> Hoima District Archives PUW box 273, file 1: Alexandra Nomukyeya to Administrative Secretary, Bunyoro, 21 July 1972.

<sup>74</sup> Hoima District Archives PUW box 273, file 1: Michael Kaheru, Culture Officer, to Administrative Secretary, Bunyoro, 8 Sept. 1972.

<sup>75</sup> Hoima District Archives PUW box 273, file 1: Administrative Secretary Bunyoro to P.S., Local Administration Division, 16 March 1971.

<sup>76</sup> Hoima District Archives PUW box 273, file 1: Culture Officer Bunyoro to D.C. Bunyoro, 28 November 1972.

<sup>77</sup> Hoima District Archives PUW box 1025, file 1: District C.D. Officer to P.S., Ministry of Culture and Community Development, 9 November 1982.

<sup>78</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works box 23, 'Monuments' file: Conservator of Antiquities, monthly report, April 1975.

<sup>79</sup> Hoima District Archives PUW box 1026, file 3: Conservator of Antiquities to Minister of Culture and Community Development, 8 August 1974.

<sup>80</sup> Hoima District Archives PUW box 1026, file 3: Sam Byagira to muluka chief Butima, 24 April 1975.

county headquarters. Neither the materials nor the labor were to be compensated. ‘This is a voluntary but national activity’, noted the official.

It was by no means the only time that local people were called upon to contribute their labor and their resources to the creation and maintenance of a national myth. Almost all of Uganda’s monuments were maintained by commoners. In 1975 the culture officer planned to erect a shelter at the fort at Katasiha, where tourists could sign a visitors’ book and have a picnic while visiting the site. There were no funds to pay for the installation of the shelter. It had to be constructed on a ‘self-help basis’, through the unacknowledged labor and sacrifice of people living in the vicinity of the fort.<sup>81</sup> In September 1976 the thatched roof of Kabalega’s tomb—installed by ‘self-help’ labor only one year before—had to be replaced, and local people were again called upon to cut reeds, carry them to the tomb site, and help in the work of installing the new roof.<sup>82</sup>

That is how heroes were made in Idi Amin’s Uganda: through routine acts of repair and maintenance. That is also how cultures were preserved. Ordinary people—their labor, their time, their treasure—were called upon to maintain national myths. Some people acted out of a sincere sense of devotion, out of imaginations that were fired by the requirements of the time. Other people were compelled to take part. Whether out of a sense of patriotic enthusiasm or out of an intimidated resignation it was commoners who were called upon to fabricate the things with which the Amin government could pursue its war against cultural imperialism.

### **Monumental Work in the Provinces**

Like other government officers in Idi Amin’s Uganda, John Tumusiime was on the front line of a life-and-death struggle over cultural imperialism. He felt himself an authority over a great many things. Empowered by the Amin government to preserve cultural traditions and manage performances, he worked hard to ensure that the fragile stuff of history would not be lost, that the conventions of the traditional arts would be safeguarded. Out of his own initiative he created new institutions that could act as repositories of memory and culture.

From where did John Tumusiime get his sense of purpose?

To an extent that was greater than at any other time in Ugandan history, international affairs intruded itself upon the mundane machinery of local government. The great events of the age were never far away. John Tumusiime’s files—now held in the recently-renovated archives of the Kabale district government—bulge with paperwork about faraway things. He kept a great amount of material. There is a copy of the ‘Soviet Women’s Quiz’, sent direct from Russia via the Uganda Women’s Secretariat.<sup>83</sup> There are reports and recommendations from UNESCO, cyclostyled in Kampala and distributed to culture officers. The largest amount of extraneous material in John Tumusiime’s files came from the organizers of FESTAC II, the ‘Black and

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<sup>81</sup> Hoima District Archives PUW box 1026, file 3: Culture Officer, North and South Bunyoro, to county chief Bughaya, 24 June 1975.

<sup>82</sup> Hoima District Archives PUW box 1026, file 3: Culture Officer, North and South Bunyoro, to county chief Buhaguzi, 19 August 1976.

<sup>83</sup> Kabale District Archives uncatalogued ‘Miscellaneous’ file: Secretary General, Uganda Women’s Secretariat, to all Community Development Officers, 26 May 1977.

African Festival of Arts and Culture’, originally planned to be held in Lagos in January 1975 and latterly postponed to 1977. The reports, minutes, and planning documents generated by the festival’s organizers were duplicated in Kampala by the Ministry of Culture and distributed in the post to Uganda’s far-flung district culture officers. They are interleaved throughout John Tumusiime’s files. The file titled ‘Festivals and Competitions’, for instance, contains the earliest planning documents from the FESTAC planning committee in Lagos, inserted back-to-back with paperwork and correspondence concerning the ‘Kigezi Cultural Festival’ that Tumusiime organized in Kabale town in 1973.

An extraordinary amount of work was involved in preparing Uganda’s contribution to FESTAC. The Nigerian government promised to fund 500 artists and performers from eastern Africa, and each participating country established a working committee to identify individuals and objects that were to be sent to Lagos. In Uganda there were subcommittees responsible for organizing exhibitions on tattoos, cosmetics, leatherwork, woodworking, and art. There was a committee to identify dances to be performed in Lagos; and another to select dramatic works that could be performed. Uganda did not take part in the exhibition concerning ‘modern dressing’, since miniskirts and wigs had been banned by presidential decree. There was, however, an embroidery subcommittee in Uganda, which sent out calls over Radio Uganda encouraging ‘gifted women in embroidery’ to donate their work for display at the festival.<sup>84</sup> The music subcommittee had extensive discussions over whether to send ‘entirely and only traditional music’ to Lagos, or whether to include music with Western elements. ‘What is the real difference between traditional music and Western music?’, committee members asked. The minutes unsurprisingly report that ‘no final and satisfying conclusion was reached’ to that debate.<sup>85</sup>

All of this organizational work made stern demands on the festival’s organizers. The visual arts subcommittee had counted on a budget of Ush. 400,000, with which it planned to purchase Uganda’s ‘best and most outstanding artistic treasures’ from museums in Britain and Europe. At the last minute the budget was reduced to Ush. 10,000. The committee was obliged to dramatically scale down its plans. The art show planned for Lugogo Stadium had to be hastily overhauled. The committee had planned to erect partitions on the football pitch where the art could be hung for display. In the end the art had to be placed on tables for viewing. The chair of the committee—the artist Eli Kyeyune—commandeered a vehicle and drove from one end of Uganda to the other, collecting some 200 objects for display. For two weeks he spent his nights in the stadium, laying out the exhibition.<sup>86</sup> Kyeyune was not alone in his desperate efforts to conjure up material. The committee responsible for organizing Uganda’s contribution to ‘Celebrity Day’ at the Lagos festival was likewise obliged to scramble to assemble things that could be put on display. The committee wrote to district cultural officers in 1973, asking them to

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<sup>84</sup> Kabale District Archives Community Development 21, ‘Cultural Activities’ file: Mrs. Dungu to all Community Development Assistants, 2 April 1974.

<sup>85</sup> Kabale District Archives Community Development 17, ‘Festivals and Competition’ file: Uganda National Steering Committee meeting, 6 December 1974.

<sup>86</sup> Kabale District Archives Community Development 17, ‘Festivals and Competition’ file: Eli Kyeyune, report of the Visual Arts Committee, February 1975.

send in the names of people who had advanced ‘African Art and Culture’.<sup>87</sup> By December 1974, having received only a few nominations, the committee was sending out radio announcements asking the public to send in names of eminent and historically significant people.<sup>88</sup> In the end, the members of the National Steering Committee themselves drafted a list of celebrities for transmission to the Lagos festival.

In faraway Kigezi John Tumusiime saw himself as an active participant in all of this activity. The chair of Uganda’s pottery committee visited Kigezi in 1974, collecting two pots for display in Lagos. The following year Tumusiime sent four additional pots to Kampala for inclusion in FESTAC. There was a small one, traditionally used for washing; a large one used to for storing butter; and a curved one used for feminine hygiene. He was careful to note the vernacular names for each of the pots.<sup>89</sup> He was likewise helpful to the anxious committee preparing the list of Ugandan celebrities. In January 1974 he prepared biographies of four eminent men of Kigezi and sent it to Uganda’s Principal Culture Officer. First on his list was Makobore, ruler of the ancient kingdom of Rujumbura. Tumusiime took care to dwell on the size of his person—he was six feet tall, and ‘possessed the gigantic size that rendered him immobile’. Even so, wrote Tumusiime, he was ‘kind, liberal and just. He helped all in need and punished wrongdoers ... He was gifted and knew how to rule’.<sup>90</sup> There was no evidence offered to support these characterizations, no footnotes to published literature, no interview material. Tumusiime’s characterization of the magnanimous Makobore was a work of imagination. They were written to conform to the expectations of audiences in Kampala and Lagos.

In his excellent book on FESTAC, the anthropologist Andrew Apter has argued that the festival offered Nigeria’s government a vehicle by which to constitute a transnational black culture and produce a ‘Nigerian vision of the black and African world’.<sup>91</sup> John Tumusiime’s files demonstrate that FESTAC had a wider influence than that. In a remote corner of southern Uganda, Mr. Tumusiime found in the FESTAC conference a means of organizing and authenticating a local project of cultural recovery. Here was a funding stream by which to buttress and extend projects that were already underway. Here, too, was a source of inspiration, the impetus for a vocation.

Tumusiime did his work on behalf of FESTAC alongside the wider field of activity in which he was engaged as Kigezi’s District Culture Officer. He took up his post on 15 June 1972. The first report he filed had on its cover a hand-drawn picture of a drum, with three people crowding

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<sup>87</sup> Kabale District Archives Community Development 17, ‘Festivals and Competition’ file: P.S., Ministry of Culture and Community Development, to all Culture Officers, 22 October 1973

<sup>88</sup> Kabale District Archives Community Development 17, ‘Festivals and Competition’ file: National Steering Committee meeting, 19 December 1974.

<sup>89</sup> Kabale District Archives Community Development 17, ‘Festivals and Competition’ file: Tumusiime to Chair, Pottery Subcommittee, 17 November 1975.

<sup>90</sup> Kabale District Archives Community Development 17, ‘Festivals and Competition’ file: Tumusiime to Principal Culture Officer, 26 January 1974.

<sup>91</sup> Andrew Apter, *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 3.

round to play it.<sup>92</sup> The report vibrated with ideas and energy. Within the space of a few weeks he had organized committees in each of the district's subcounties, through which elders and citizens could 'assist and advise ... on how best [to] preserve, promote, and develop the Culture of the people in this District'. There was a new society of blacksmiths, dedicated to making traditional knives and spears. There was a committee working on local history and folklore. There were 26 dance troupes in the district. Tumusiime welcomed the Amin government's decision to ban miniskirts for Ugandan women, claiming that

short dresses were a contradiction of people's culture ... because traditionally a woman had to dress completely and even her ankles were not to be seen. So this good move restored the moral and culture of the people.

Tumusiime's assessment of Kiga women's traditional attire was historically inaccurate, inattentive to the changing styles in which the region's women attired themselves. Accuracy was not his concern. Tumusiime felt himself empowered—by virtue of his position—to speak as an authority on Kiga affairs, to distinguish traditions from innovations. He lamented the unpopularity of Kiga traditional food, for the 'educated class tend to be interested in foreign dishes like Italian soup, HOT DOG etc. and they neglect and despise our traditional dishes like Oburo, Amasaza etc.' By early July, only three weeks after his arrival in the district, Tumusiime was busily organizing a district festival to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Ugandan independence. He planned to feature a fashion show, with 'traditional dressing of all four ethnic groups in Kigezi'. Here there would be no Italian soup or hot dogs. Neither would there be miniskirts. The central part of the show was to feature a 'traditional homestead', to be built of reeds, poles, grass and traditional furniture.<sup>93</sup>

The work that Mr. Tumusiime did to define and orient traditional culture was conducted in conditions of austerity. There were constant and inbuilt shortfalls of funding, infrastructure, and material. Tumusiime's office lacked furniture. There was no stationery, and even the paper on which his reports were printed had been borrowed from other offices.<sup>94</sup> The district culture festival in 1976—which Tumusiime organized—was nearly scuppered due to lack of transport. Two days before the festival was to begin, Tumusiime was writing to Kigezi's District Commissioner asking for the use of a lorry that could carry 'people, handicrafts, traditional dishes and brews from the subcounties' to the site of the festival.<sup>95</sup> Other culture officers in Amin's Uganda likewise found it hard to carry out their work. It was hard to find the resources—petroleum, suitable vehicles, accommodation—needed to convene the festivals where traditional culture could be performed. The 1977 culture festival in Busoga, in eastern Uganda, was 'nearly overtaken by a tidal wave of anti-feelings', according to the culture officer.

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<sup>92</sup> Kabale District Archives ADM 7 'Annual Reports' file: Department of Culture annual report, 1972.

<sup>93</sup> Kabale District Archives Community Development 17, 'Museums' file: Tumusiime to D.C. Kigezi, 7 July 1972.

<sup>94</sup> Kabale District Archives ADM 5 'Kigezi District Annual Reports' file: J. Tumusiime, Department of Culture, North and South Kigezi, Annual Report for 1974.

<sup>95</sup> Kabale District Archives Community Development 17, 'Festivals and Competition' file: Tumusiime to D.C. South Kigezi, 29 June 1976.

The dance teams and the theatrical troupes that had planned to participate could not travel due to lack of motor transport, and by 11 am on the day of the festival only two dance teams had arrived on the show grounds. In desperation the culture officer was obliged to requisition a tipper, a school bus, and a lorry to drive round his district, collecting dancers and actors for the show.<sup>96</sup>

### **Heritage Work in Unlikely Times**

There was an acute tension between the idealism of culture workers like John Tumusiime and the constraints of a collapsing infrastructure. This tension can be seen in two initiatives that Tumusiime launched. In the first instance, Tumusiime managed to build a memorial to the end of World War One in an unlikely and inappropriate place; in the second, he founded a museum to local culture in what had formerly been a Hindu temple. Both of these unlikely projects were grounded in fictitious or inflated accounts of history. Both projects were driven by the political and cultural momentum of the time. And both projects placed Tumusiime himself—his energy, his entrepreneurship, his time—at the center of the making of history.

In November 1972 President Amin celebrated Remembrance Day—a British holiday commemorating the end of the first World War—in southern Uganda. Twelve cabinet ministers and most of the diplomatic heads of mission were in attendance. It was a riotous occasion: Amin appeared at the hotel in Kabale town at 11:30 p.m. the night before the ceremony, and he, his ministers and a few diplomats danced to the music of an army band until 3:30 a.m. The next morning they made the trip to Kisoro, some miles outside Kabale town. At 11 a.m. they sang ‘Oh God, Our Help in Ages Past’ as a flag was lowered and wreathes were laid.<sup>97</sup> During his speech at this august occasion Amin told the assembled diplomatic corps that the last battle of World War One had been fought at the place. There was a derelict stone monument on the site; Amin claimed that it marked the place where the last shots of the war had been fired. In fact the derelict monument commemorated an altogether different event: it marked the place where, in 1909, a company of Sikh soldiers commanded by a British major had repulsed a group of German troops marching north from Rwanda.<sup>98</sup> But by 1972 the plaque had fallen off the stone. It was there, a *lieu de mémoire* waiting for an assignment.

For John Tumusiime—who was present at the occasion—President Amin’s offhand comment was the starting place for a new project of historical commemoration. A few days after the Remembrance Day ceremonies he wrote to the Conservator of Antiquities to elaborate on Amin’s story. He claimed that

After World War I had ended, and even trities [sic.] to end the war signed, the British Legion and the German Battalion continued fighting on this place. So the last blood to be shed in this war and the last shot to be fired was done on this place two years after the end of the war had ended. This was due to the lack of Communication for the Forces here

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<sup>96</sup> Kabale District Archives Community Development 21, ‘Festivals’ file: P. Byakagaba, ‘Report on the first North Busoga District Cultural Festival and Handicraft Show’, 14 October 1977.

<sup>97</sup> District Archives FCO 31/1234: Harry Brind to East Africa Department, 13 November 1972.

<sup>98</sup> District Archives FCO 31/1363: Defence Advisor to Ministry of Defence, 4 December 1972.

never knew that the war had ended. Even today one can see big pits where Soldiers used to take cover during the fighting.<sup>99</sup>

Tumusiime was right about the offset timing of the war's end. The German army in east Africa had, in fact, continued to fight some weeks after the signing of the armistice that had ended World War One. But that army was in South Rhodesia, not Uganda, when the war ended. The last shots of the war had been fired several thousand miles to the south of the monument in Kisoro. John Tumusiime's reconstruction of events was inaccurate, but it was good marketing. Tumusiime asked the Conservator of Antiquities for funding to erect a 'traditional house' on the site, 'so that the place is given its full splendour'. He asked also for funds to recruit a porter to care for the site.

There followed a long and difficult negotiation over the logistics by which a traditional house was to be erected. As it turned out, traditional building routines were expensive and difficult to organize. The Conservator authorized the allocation of funding within a few weeks of receiving Tumusiime's letter. By April 1973 a porter had been hired, the site had been demarcated, and the memorial had been gazetted in Ugandan law. But the bamboo poles needed to erect a house that looked traditional were hard to find: the nearest bamboo forest was five miles away, and they needed a lorry to get them moved to Kisoro.<sup>100</sup> By April 1974 the four workers who had been employed to build the traditional house were on strike, demanding payment of Ush. 1,200 before they would commence work. They asked again for the use of a vehicle to transport the bamboo poles to the site.<sup>101</sup> By October that year the house had finally been erected, and Tumusiime reported that it was 'beautiful'. It was unroofed, for the thatching grass needed to cover the building was located five miles away.<sup>102</sup> In May 1975 Tumusiime reported that thatching grass had been cut on four separate occasions, but it had never been moved to the Kisoro memorial because there was no transportation for it. In consequence the grass had rotted.<sup>103</sup> In December 1975 Tumusiime asked local government officials to impose forced labor on the residents of the place, for the bamboo frame was decaying due to its exposure to the rain. By April 1976 the thatching was, finally, under way. The work was done by the residents of Nyakabande during the once-per-week communal labor in which they were forced to engage. It took three months to finish the job.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 23, 'Monuments' file: J. Tumusiime to Conservator of Antiquities, 16 November 1972.

<sup>100</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 23, 'Monuments' file: J. Tumusiime to Conservator of Antiquities, 9 April 1973.

<sup>101</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 23, 'Monuments' file: Subcounty chief Nyakabande to District Culture Officer, 4 April 1974.

<sup>102</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 23, 'Monuments' file: Tumusiime to Conservator of Antiquities, 29 October 1974.

<sup>103</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 23, 'Monuments' file: Tumusiime to Conservator of Antiquities, 6 May 1975.

<sup>104</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 23, 'Monuments' file: Community Development Assistant to Culture Officer, 14 April 1976.

Very few people ever saw the memorial that John Tumusiime built. In 1974 there were 60 visitors; in 1975 there were 6; and in 1978 there were 21.<sup>105</sup> In 1979, during the Tanzanian invasion that toppled Idi Amin, the monument was damaged by gunfire. The bamboo house was demolished; and the caretaker of the site brought the metal plaque to the subcounty chief's headquarters for safekeeping.<sup>106</sup> By 1980, the year following Amin's overthrow, farmers were cultivating the plot on which the monument sat without regard to the boundaries that John Tumusiime had erected. In 1986, when the National Resistance Movement came to power, it fell to a new culture officer—a man named Baryayebwa—to write to government authorities to ask for funding to rebuild the monument. 'After the first World War the British and the German battalion continued fighting at this place, so that the last shot to be fired took place two years after the war had ended', he wrote. He was cribbing from the petition that his predecessor, John Tumusiime, had composed some 15 years before.<sup>107</sup> It had been filed in the district's archives.

The history of the Kigezi monument is instructive in a number of ways. It tells us that *lieu de mémoire* are actively made, not simply preserved or handed down from the past. It tells us that the narratives that make sites of memory meaningful can be borrowed, plagiarized, and pinned onto sites that actually have nothing to do with their purported meaning. What I want to stress here, though, about John Tumusiime's vexed efforts to erect a monument to the end of World War I in southern Uganda is this: conservation is hard work. There is labor involved in the making of myths. It needs concrete, wire, bamboo, thatch, and human sweat.

All of it takes maintenance. That brings me to a second project that John Tumusiime pursued over the course of his career as Kigezi's culture officer: the building of the Kigezi District Museum. Kigezi's 'Culture Committee' had passed a resolution calling for the building of a museum in 1973. The aim, wrote Tumusiime, was to 'collect our traditional ornaments, the early black smithing, some sculptures and other ancient and traditional skills'.<sup>108</sup> The Kabale town council agreed to allocate a building on 14/15 Ruchiro Road to house the new museum. The building had formerly been Kabale's Hindu temple, seized by the 'Departed Asians Property Committee' after the expulsion of Uganda's Indian community in 1972. Within a few months of the Indians' departure the building had fallen into dereliction: the doors, the locks, and the electricity meters had been stolen, and many of the windowpanes had disappeared.<sup>109</sup> In 1976, when John Tumusiime developed a plan for the rehabilitation of 14/15 Ruchiro Road, he estimated that it would take 60 tons of cement to rebuild the structure's floor.<sup>110</sup> He hoped to put

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<sup>105</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 23, 'Monuments' file: Sinumvaybo John to Culture Officer, 24 Jan. 1985.

<sup>106</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 23, 'Monuments' file: Subcounty chief Nyakabande to Culture Officer, Kabale, 3 October 1980.

<sup>107</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 23, 'Monuments' file: E. Baryayebwa, Culture Officer, Kabale to Magistrate, Kisoro, 31 July 1986.

<sup>108</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 24, 'Kigezi District Museum' file: Tumusiime to Curator, Uganda Museum, 20 April 1973.

<sup>109</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 24, 'Kigezi District Museum' file: Tumusiime to Curator, Uganda Museum, 19 April 1973.

<sup>110</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 24, 'Kigezi District Museum' file: Tumusiime to Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Culture and Community Development, 18 Feb. 1976.

a craft shop on the right side of the museum, a lecture hall near the front, and a showcase at the center in which a diorama was to be positioned. And he asked also for money to employ a watchman to guard the premises. But by 1977, when a new culture officer took over Kigezi District, the museum was again in disarray: it had been looted twice in the previous year. Thieves had taken away 36 window panes, two padlocks, one office desk, and all of the boards that had lined the showcases.<sup>111</sup> The watchman, who was supposed to protect the property, had absconded from duty, as he had not been paid for eight months.

The museum was finally opened to the public in July 1978. There were two dance troupes in attendance, and the culture officer was keen to ensure that they made a good impression. ‘They should look very smart and should not come smelling like alcohol’, he told their local chief.<sup>112</sup> But by 1980—after the fall of the Amin government—the museum had again fallen into disrepair. The new culture officer reported that the lock for the main door was out of order, the photographs displayed in the museum’s halls had faded with time, and the paint needed renewing.<sup>113</sup> He had to use his own money to repair the lock. There were 6,614 visitors in the first half of 1982. The culture officer pointed up the urgent need for a latrine to accommodate the many people visiting the place.<sup>114</sup> By 1990, the museum had again become derelict. The absence of toilets meant that the place ‘smells of urine and feces is found outside the building’, wrote the caretaker. Thirty window panes were missing. Ants had invaded the displays, consuming several of the exhibits. The roof leaked and needed repair. The signpost had fallen down. And children made a habit of playing on the grounds, while nearby householders grazed their cattle on the premises.<sup>115</sup> In 2007 the museum was permanently closed, as Indians returning to Uganda had repossessed the building and refounded their temple.

## Conclusion

I met John Tumusiime’s daughter on a Sunday morning in August 2017. A mutual friend introduced us following an early-morning service at the Anglican cathedral in Kabale. She was the last of Tumusiime’s several children, born in the late 1980s, only a few years before he died. She had grown up knowing very little about her father. There were tears in her eyes as I told her about the monument that Tumusiime built, about the museum that he founded, about his work with dancers, musicians and blacksmiths. Later I sent her copies of many of the documents on which this chapter is based, along with an early draft of the chapter itself. On that Sunday morning I did not know what to offer by way of an assessment, for John Tumusiime was in many ways a failure. Seen in a certain light, his self-sacrificing work on behalf of a murderous dictator could be seen to be malign.

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<sup>111</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 24, ‘Kigezi District Museum’ file: James Ssebaduka to Acting Chief Conservator, Antiquities, 17 August 1977.

<sup>112</sup> Kabale District Archives Community Development 17, ‘Museums’ file: John Tiina-Kagun District Archives to county chief, Ndoorwa, 3 July 1978.

<sup>113</sup> Kabale District Archives Community Development 17, ‘Museums’ file: H. Baryayebwa to Curator, Uganda Museum, 6 November 1980.

<sup>114</sup> Kabale District Archives Community Development 17, ‘Museums’ file: Baryayebwa to Curator, Uganda Museum, 22 Feb. 1982.

<sup>115</sup> Kabale District Archives Community Development 17, ‘Museums’ file: Caretaker, Kabale Museum, to Culture Officer, Kabale, 18 June 1990.

FESTAC II took place over the space of 29 days in January and February 1977. More than 17,000 artists, dancers and intellectuals participated. The Ugandan delegation was, by most accounts, a great success. The dress rehearsal was conducted over two weeks at the National Theatre in Kampala. The audience included President Amin, his wife Sarah, and their children.<sup>116</sup> The Ugandan stall at Tafawa Balewa Square in Lagos was said by journalists to be ‘a wonder’. It included an impressive collection of wooden carvings and an array of articles woven from bamboo. The journalists were most impressed with the embroidery, created by Ugandan women on novel and exciting patterns. They thought it was ‘likely to stun visitors’.<sup>117</sup> When the Ugandan delegation returned from Lagos early in February 1977 President Amin organized a state luncheon for them. The jamboree in Lagos, he said, had ‘set in motion a new wave of cultural awareness throughout the continent’. It was for every African to ‘try and have a greater cultural consciousness in his everyday life’.<sup>118</sup>

The great Nigerian intellectual Wole Soyinka thought the whole thing was a farce. ‘Our people were offered a narrowed-down, reductionist aspect of culture in a gargantuan orgy of ill-organized spectacles’, he wrote. Soyinka decried what he called ‘Culture with a capital C’, which was ‘pronounced into being by a Ministry of Culture’. The FESTAC II convocation had taken rich and complicated artistic traditions and relegated them to ‘token, or symbolic, expositions, starved of funds and given scant coverage even in the media’.<sup>119</sup>

What did John Tumusiime make of all of this? In April 1976 he was transferred to another district.<sup>120</sup> He left many projects unfinished. I do not know whether any of the articles that he sent to Kampala were actually placed on display in the impressive stall in Lagos. His organizational and curatorial work was never publically acknowledged. That is how curatorship works: it renders itself invisible, making the art and the performance appear, whole, before an audience.

John Tumusiime invested himself in two heritage institutions—a monument and a museum—that were lost to posterity. Seen from the vantage point of preservationists, the story of the Kabale Museum and the story of the monument of Kisoro are about loss, failure, and forgotten history. But the interesting questions here are to do with impermanence itself, with the transitory nature of memorial sites, and with the speeding pace of decrepitude during the 1970s. The infrastructure of heritage conservation in Idi Amin’s Uganda was constrained by shortage and lack: by the absence of petrol to fuel vehicles, by the absence of paper, by shortages of glass and concrete, by deficits in government payroll. All of these shortfalls made the work of repair and maintenance more difficult and vexing, more demanding of time, human ingenuity and commitment. That is why John Tumusiime’s career as Kigezi’s culture officer is worth studying. He was not

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<sup>116</sup> ‘Artists Perform Before Marshall’, *Voice of Uganda* 2 (4) (5 Jan. 1977).

<sup>117</sup> ‘Stall in Lagos is a Wonder’, *Voice of Uganda* 2 (23) (27 Jan. 1977).

<sup>118</sup> ‘Well Done, Cultural Envoys’, *Voice of Uganda* 2 (35) (8 Feb. 1977).

<sup>119</sup> Wole Soyinka, ‘Twice Bitten: The Fate of Africa’s Culture Producers’, *PMLA* 105 (1) (Jan. 1990), 110-120. Quote on p. 110.

<sup>120</sup> Kabale District Archives Public Works 24, ‘Kigezi District Museum’ file: Tumusiime to Curator, Kabale Museum, n.d. (but April 1976).

particularly successful in his work, and neither did the institutions he built outlast his tenure in office. Nonetheless, his commitment helps us understand that, for some men of the front line, Idi Amin's war of cultural and political liberation was worth fighting.