SOME IMPLICATIONS OF LITERACY IN UGANDA

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I

During the last fifty years, several debates have waxed and waned regarding the implications of literacy for African history. Among social scientists in general and social anthropologists in particular, Jack Goody and Ian Watt's survey of "The Consequences of Literacy" (1963)[1] for hitherto preliterate or partially literate and now modernizing societies, drew attention to one suggested transformation: "The importance of writing lies in its creating a new medium of communication. (...) Its essential service is to objectify speech, to provide language with a material correlative, a set of visible signs. In this material form speech can be transmitted over space and preserved over time; what people say and think can be rescued from the transitoriness of oral communication."[2] The consequences, in Goody and Watt's view, were immensely important: "In oral societies the cultural tradition is transmitted almost entirely by face-to-face communication; and changes in its content are accompanied by the homeostatic process of forgetting or transforming those parts of the tradition that cease to be either necessary or relevant. Literate societies, on the other hand, cannot discard, absorb or transmute the past in the same way. Instead, their members are faced with permanently recorded versions of the past and its beliefs; and because the past is thus set apart from the present, historical enquiry becomes possible. This in turn encourages scepticism; and scepticism, not only about the legendary past, but about received ideas about the universe as a whole."[3]

[1]Jack Goody, and Ian Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5 (1963), 304-45.
[2]Jack Goody (ed.), *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1968), 1.
[3]Goody, and Watt, "The Consequences," 324.

History in Africa 38 (2011), 227–255

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Goody and Watt's study did not receive universal approval from other social scientists from the beginning. Kathleen Gough argued to start with, on the basis of Chinese and Indian evidence, that: "Difficulties arise because it is hard to disentangle the implications of literacy from those of other techniques (for example, plough agriculture, rapid transport or power industries), or of other institutions (for example, specialized priesthoods or powerful governments) commonly found in advanced societies."[4] Literacy was therefore an enabling factor, rather than a causal one. Furthermore, as another scholar pointed out: "The suggestion is no longer that a culture has acquired such technological skills as literacy because it is intellectually superior, as earlier racist theories had argued. Rather, it is (...) that a culture is intellectually superior because it has acquired that capacity," through the technology of literacy. However, all forms of literacy are "ideologically charged," and "any version of literacy practice [will have] been constructed out of specific social conditions and in relation to specific political and economic structures."[5] These are all important points and they will be stressed throughout this paper.

Among historians of Africa, one major debate about the significance of literacy has concerned the place of oral traditions and testimonies in researching and writing about the aspirations and experiences of Africans and African societies in time-perspective; and the extent to which oral sources can be treated as historical documents and analysed as much as possible like written sources of evidence. In this debate David Henige has played a leading role, backing up and extending Jan Vansina's earlier advice to African historians that whatever oral sources we manage to track down should be recorded carefully, annotated scrupulously, and treated as much as possible in the ways that documents from the past have been studied and understood by historians at least since the late nineteenth century.[6] David Henige's writings have aroused a number of reactions from other students of African history, hostile as well as friendly, and later in this paper I shall be alluding to two of these critics as regards historical writing on Uganda. I shall also be drawing attention to one of the more surprising ways (to me, at least) in which David Henige's advice to any interviewer of elder-

[4]Kathleen Gough, "Implications of Literacy in Traditional China and India," in: Jack Goody (ed.), *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1968), 84.
[5]Brian V. Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge, 1984), 29.
[6]Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition* (London, 1965); David Henige, *Oral Historiography* (London, 1982); David Henige, "Oral Tradition as a Means of Reconstructing the Past," in: John E. Philips (ed.), *Writing African History* (Rochester NY, 2005), 169-90.

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ly informants on historical subjects to record of the details of their replies, circumstances and other persons present as fully as possible, influenced my own researches into Ugandan nineteenth-century history as regards slavery. But, first, albeit briefly, some of the ways in which literacy practice in Uganda has been "constructed out of specific social conditions" and "in relation to specific political and economic structures" more broadly in the country, must be outlined.

II

Uganda, as the spelling indicates, was the Swahili name for the kingdom known locally as Buganda. As such, it came to be used by British colonial officials as their name for the wider Uganda Protectorate of which Buganda formed the most central section by the close of the nineteenth century. Earlier, the Swahili language had been spread throughout the East African interior largely by coastal traders. Essentially, they appear to have been seeking new supplies of ivory and slaves. As a Bantu language in basic structure, Swahili proved comparatively easy to acquire for speakers of other Bantu languages in the interior such as Luganda – or Lunyoro, the language of Buganda's most powerful northern neighbouring kingdom before the advent of British colonial rule.

Arabic had been, and continues to be, a different matter. It was brought to Buganda in the nineteenth century not only by coastal traders from the east but by travellers from the Turko-Egyptian empire to the north. It soon served as both the sacred language of the Quran and as a medium for interstate diplomacy and trade. By the 1870s "Swahili and sometimes Arabic" are known to have been employed by prominent individuals at the royal capital of Buganda in official letters and "as messengers and emissaries of the kabaka [or king]."[7] Arabs also assisted Mutesa I on occasion by supplying firearms and other items with which to wage war more successfully against neighbouring kingdoms as well as politically decentralized societies. This process continued in the first years of Mutesa's successor as Ganda king, Mwanga II (1884-1888), but it was brought to an end by the victory of the Protestant faction led by Apolo Kagwa fighting in the subsequent suc-

[7]Abdu Kasozi, *The Spread of Islam in Uganda* (Nairobi, 1985), 22. Other major sources here continue to be John A. Rowe, "Revolution in Buganda 1856-1884," PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin (1967), chapter 2; Arye Oded, *Islam in Uganda* (New York, 1974), 37-119.

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

cession war (1888-1893), supported by the Roman Catholic contingent of which Stanislaus Mugwanya would later emerge as leader, and assisted by incoming British chartered company and colonial officials. Later still, English, French – and even Latin, for seminarians – would become further important foreign languages needing to be learned by Christian converts among the Baganda and neighbouring societies, while the Luganda language itself would enter a momentous fifty years of transformation from being a predominantly oral tongue into becoming a literate language for Buganda's elite as well as the continuing oral medium for the kingdom's majority population. Additionally, Luganda would become the language of administration in many politically decentralized parts of the Uganda Protectorate in which British officials would be assisted by Baganda agents.

Literacy had been one of the leading attractions to Ganda converts in the nineteenth century of both Islam and the kinds of Christianity introduced into Buganda by the Church Missionary Society and the White Fathers, along with new types of clothing, soap, and firearms weaponry. Both Muslim and Christian converts were known initially in the old kingdom as "readers" (*basomi*). "Reading" was particularly important to the Protestant pastors and preachers of the CMS and they pushed it ahead as quickly as possible with the assistance of a Ganda team of helpers already fluent in Swahili and sometimes also conversant with Arabic, by translating the Bible into Luganda – initially issuing it in instalments, then publishing it in what became known as "the biscuit-tin Bible" (because of the Huntley & Palmers' metallic containers in which many of the first printings were kept in part at least in order to save them from ants). Roman Catholics struggled to keep up with Protestants in translating and printing work in the Luganda language, but by the start of the twentieth century they had equalled them in the number of religious publications issued to their adherents in the vernacular, not to mention the many brief biographies of Christian martyrs slaughtered on Mwanga II's orders in the mid-1880s, researched and written up in eager (and accurate) anticipation of their eventual canonization by the Roman Catholic church.[8]

[8]Among many studies, see John V. Taylor, *The Growth of the Church in Buganda* (London, 1958); J.F. Faupel, *African Holocaust* (London, 1962); Holger Bernt Hansen, *Mission, Church and State in a Colonial Setting: Uganda 1890-1925* (London, 1984); John M. Waliggo, "Bible and Catechism in Uganda," in: Hannah W. Kinoti, and John M. Waliggo (eds.), *The Bible in African Christianity* (Nairobi, 1997), 178-95; Michael Twaddle, "The Bible, the Quran and Political Competition in Uganda," in: Niels Kastfelt (ed.), *Scriptural Politics: the Bible and the Koran as Political Models in the Middle East and Africa* (London, 2003), 139-54.

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Now began an orthographical war in Buganda in the early British colonial period. On one side were Ganda Protestants, on the other Ganda Roman Catholics, both battling over how their native language should be spelt and printed in prayer books and in vernacular newspapers and textbooks. This literary battle was only ended when a later generation of indigenous intellectuals made it their business, as members of the Luganda Language Society, to agree upon a new common orthography which survives with minor emendations to the present day in both religious and secular publications. Furthermore, as Catholic and Protestant missionaries moved into other areas of the Uganda Protectorate, literacy in other Ugandan vernacular languages also increased as a result of their and their converts' competition with each other for additional followers and influence.[9]

One vehicle for increasing elite literacy outside Buganda at this time, was the establishment of high schools for the sons of chiefs and others. These schools were encouraged by British colonial officials keen to strengthen their hold upon the new protectorate by recruiting African clerks conversant with English as well as fluent in local vernacular languages. Such schoolboys were considered likely to be as effective as the Baganda agents and the South Asian clerks (and soldiers) already recruited from Britain's Indian empire to assist in running the new colonial territory. They were also expected to be cheaper to employ. There only appeared to be one potential problem with this plan. There needed to be enough graduates from the new high schools able to read and write English, but not too many of them. As Tom Watson and Oliver Furley subsequently summarized the thinking of British colonial officials:

> If there were too many of them, it would clearly make them misfits in society, and perhaps politically dangerous. The Committee appointed by the Governor to report on a Native Civil Service in 1919 was typical in saying: "We are opposed to any extensive literary education for the general native population, and we consider it should not proceed beyond a standard which will enable a native to learn a trade by which he can earn a living. Unless literary education is complete, or is accompanied by technical training, the native is apt to regard himself as a superior being for whom the ordinary duties and responsibilities of life have no significance."[10]

[9]Louise Pirouet, *Black Evangelists: The Spread of Christianity in Uganda 1891-1914* (London, 1978).

[10]Oliver Furley, and Tom Watson, *A History of Education in East Africa* (New York, 1978), 187.

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Demands by the new generation of high school educated Ugandans and others for greater teaching of English throughout the Uganda Protectorate, continued to grow year by year between the First World War and the Second. British officials attempted to counter these demands by encouraging the teaching of the Swahili language instead. Broadly, it was a sensible policy to encourage greater communicative unity among the wider population as well as in the new elites of Uganda through the medium of a newly standardized Swahili circulated in Roman rather than Arabic script. Unfortunately, the policy was only implemented patchily. This was because of opposition to it from within Buganda by its king, Daudi Chwa, together with local intellectuals and by their European missionary friends and advisers: they were all concerned about the dangers inherent in any of the British colonial plans for "Closer Union" in East Africa, of unduly increasing the power of white settlers outside as well as inside Kenya, and of putting into reverse the transformation of Luganda into a major literary force within both Buganda and the wider Uganda Protectorate by so positively favouring the teaching of Swahili. However, it hardly helped the long-term fortunes of the Swahili language in higher British colonial policy-making that its principal supporter within Uganda was the governor, Sir William Gowers. He was an able administrator but privately his behaviour was controversial; "Wicked Willie" even made his wife a prohibited immigrant in Uganda during his tenure of office as a consequence of one of his amatory adventures (if one oral testimony to the present writer by a former colonial administrator is to be believed). Gowers's advocacy of Swahili was however implemented to a degree in politically decentralized areas outside Buganda, making it compulsory in primary schools as well as in the King's African Rifles and the police. But, over the longer term, its prospects were also harmed by continuing opposition from within Buganda, where most British government offices within the protectorate had their headquarters, difficulties associated with deprivations caused by the Second World War, and the impossibility of implementing effectively any major new language policy without considerable additional financial support. In 1944 Swahili suffered a major additional blow. This was as a result of an important conference at Makerere which reviewed the whole linguistic situation again and recommended that "English alone deserves recognition as the inevitable lingua franca of the future." Mother tongue teaching also needed to be supported throughout the Uganda Protectorate for the very earliest years of formal education: "The chosen languages (...) were to be Luganda, Runyoro-Lutoro, Acholi

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(Northern Luo), Ateso and Lugbara." Swahili was nowhere emphasized in this plan.[11]

After the independence of Uganda from Britain in 1962, Professor Ali Mazrui was a leading member of staff at Makerere University. He relates how:

> President Milton Obote and his Minister of Information assured me in private that Swahili would be introduced on Radio Uganda before long. At that time Radio Uganda already broadcast in 14 languages on its 2 channels but not Swahili in spite of the fact that Swahili was more understood in Uganda than the majority of those languages. (...) Obote was a genuine believer in the value of Swahili. (...) [He] announced at Makerere University in October 1970 his intention to promote its teaching in the schools in Uganda.[12]

A few months later, Obote was overthrown by Idi Amin and his supporters in the Ugandan army. President Amin, as he now became, declared Swahili to be the national language of Uganda. However, Amin did very little to facilitate its teaching in Ugandan schools. Moreover, as another authority reports: "The harassment of Ugandans who did not speak Swahili by Obote's and Amin's soldiers had a negative effect of causing people to hate the language."[13] The basic statistics had been assembled by Peter Ladefoged and his associates between 1968 and 1970: "39 per cent of Ugandans could hold a conversation in Luganda. Of these, 16 per cent are native speakers, and 23 per cent speak Luganda as a second language. Compared with English, which is spoken by 21 per cent and Swahili, spoken by 35 per cent, Luganda is certainly understood by more people."[14] In a more recent survey, the current prime minister of Uganda (Professor Apolo Nsibambi) points out that when the country's present constitution was being debated by its constituent assembly in the 1990s: "The consensus was that English should be the official language of Uganda. However, Article 6 (2) of our new constitution allows any other language to be used as a medium of

[11]Bernt Hansen, *Mission*, 383-95; Ireeri Mbaabu, *Language Policy in East Africa* (Nairobi, 1996), 101-3.
[12]Quoted in Mbaabu, *Language Policy*, 106.
[13]Mbaabu, *Language Policy*, 106.
[14]Ruth Mukama, "Recent Developments in the Language Situation and Plans for the Future," in: Holger Bernt Hansen, and Michael Twaddle (eds.), *Changing Uganda* (Kampala/London, 1991), 337.

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

instruction in schools or other educational institutions or for legislative, administrative or judicial purposes."[15]

However, this was a permissive, not a mandatory, provision. Without mandatory provision and sufficient material and human resources devoted to its popularization, no single East African language is likely to become Uganda's national language in the near future because the division between Bantu, Sudanic and Paranilotic languages in the country is of a similar order to the division in Europe between Slavic and non-Slavic languages. As another leading historian of Uganda remarks: "Although the promotion of a national language requires enormous resources, policy makers have never allocated sufficient funds for its teaching and popularization."[16] During the last two hundred years, newly introduced literate languages have complicated rather than resolved problems of wider integration among peoples living in the territory known nowadays to the outside world as Uganda. Today most linguists agree that Swahili in its standardized form probably still has the greatest potential for enabling the greatest number of the country's small farmers as well as most members of its educated elite to communicate with one another effectively both orally and on paper. Reading and writing apart, the development of new technologies of communication through commercial radio and mobile phones has increased still further the ease with which central government can get into touch with its citizens, and vice versa, while policies of universal primary education (UPE) introduced by the governments of President Yoweri Museveni underline their continuing commitment to universalizing reading and writing skills throughout Uganda as finances allow.

III

Nonetheless, enhancing literacy skills forms only part of any national educational plan, and national education plans only partly dictate – and are in turn dictated by – national language plans. It is therefore time to say some-

[15]Apolo Nsibambi,"Language and Literacy in Uganda: a View from the Ministry of Education and Sports," in: Kate Perry (ed.), *Language and Literacy in Uganda* (Kampala, 2000), 2-5. By the time his article was published, Nsibambi had become prime minister of Uganda.

[16]Abdu Kasozi, "Policy Statements and the Failure to Develop a National Language in Uganda: A Historical Survey," in: Kate Perry (ed.), *Language and Literacy* (Kampala, 2000), 23.

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

thing more generally in this paper about the role of literacy in independent Uganda's overall development since independence from Britain, and about the role of literacy in particular in the historical study of Uganda's past.

The first thing to say about the role of literacy in national development is that it is no longer considered to be quite the independently important developmental marker that it once was. In 1962, when the present writer arrived in Uganda as a teacher recruited direct from Cambridge University to become a member of the Anglo-American "Teachers for East Africa" programme, education as a whole, and literacy in English in particular, was considered to be of vital importance for the country's future. Dr. Zake, the then Minister of Education, was concerned to recruit as many volunteer teachers as the US and British (and indeed any other) governments and foundations would supply and support. In retrospect, it was perhaps an overly optimistic time. As Bethwell Ogot, then a lecturer in history at Makerere, later commented:

> Economic well-being and "take-off" seemed to be promised and guaranteed to every African state, provided it followed the route indicated by the Western democracies and expounded in detail by the then economic chief priest of the West, W.W. Rostow, in a work that was considered as the "bible of development," *The Stages of Economic Growth* (1960). This "modernization theory" had as its counterpart in a liberal historiography which interpreted the whole of African history in a developmental perspective.[17]

Since then, the economic well-being of Uganda has come to be seen as a more difficult journey, preceded by a much more bumpy political roller-coaster ride, not helped by excessively optimistic foreign scholarly advice, and with many more ups and downs in outcomes than earlier thought likely. Whether, and how, literacy in any language may assist overall economic performance in the country nowadays seems a more problematic matter. Earlier developmental literature has continued to stress its basic importance. To quote one authority:

> Education and Literacy... Education contributes to living standards through the provision of direct consumer satisfaction and by providing a means for self-improvement and enhanced earning power. From the viewpoint of soci-

[17]Bethwell A. Ogot, "Africa: the Agenda of Historical Research and Writing," in: Bethwell A. Ogot (ed.), *Building on the Indigenous: Selected Essays 1981-1998* (Kisumu, 1999), 207-8.

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> ety the latter aspect is important in adding to the stock of human capital. An educated or trained workforce is much more productive than an unskilled one. Most recent research on economic growth has stressed the importance of investment in education as a major determinant of growth.[18]

However, other studies suggest otherwise. Some surveys even suggest that literacy may precede major economic take-off by several centuries, as in Sweden.[19] In other places, a wider prevalence of literate skills in society may largely follow it, if national wealth increases suddenly and massively as a result, say, of the discovery and exploitation of some valuable mineral deposits.

Uganda's first major engagement with the global marketplace occurred immediately before, during and after the First World War, as the first students were starting their studies at the new Christian missionary high schools and seminaries, and when cash crops in cotton and coffee grown principally by a generation of largely still preliterate small farmers first reached railhead en route for Mombasa, Britain, India, Japan and the United States of America.[20] Whether the discovery, refining and exportation of oil from Uganda in the near future will be followed by a much greater increase in national literacy rates, or whether any resultant riches may be diverted to other even more pressing objectives, remains to be seen.

IV

The role of literacy in the study of Uganda's past was a central concern of the first set of professional historians to teach at Makerere College (as Makerere University was then known) immediately after the Second World War. Indeed, given the paucity of oral information available regarding the territory's pre-British history, the situation could hardly have been otherwise. Not until Bethwell Ogot commenced his researches into the origins and settlement of the Southern Luo peoples, in what is nowadays southeastern Uganda and western Kenya, did this situation start to change substantially. Where

[18]Alasdair I. MacBean, and Vudayagiri N. Balasubramanyam, *Meeting the Third World Challenge* (London, 1978), 42.

[19]Harvey J. Graff, "The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Society and Culture," in: Suzanne de Castell, Allan Luke, and Kieran Egan (eds.), *Literacy, Society and Schooling* (Cambridge, 1986), 61-86.

[20]Cyril Ehrlich, "The Uganda Economy 1903-1945," in: Vincent Harlow, E.M. Chilver, and Alison Smith (eds.), *History of East Africa Volume Two* (Oxford, 1965), 395-475.

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Ogot pioneered, other teachers and students at Makerere followed. Like Ogot, Sam Karugire and Semakula Kiwanuka later studied for doctoral theses dealing with the oral and written histories of their respective homelands in Uganda under the tutelage of Roland Oliver at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies. A number of British and US citizens also joined Oliver's African history seminar in London around the same time and these also undertook research into Ugandan history; David Cohen, John Lamphear, John Tosh, and the present writer among them. We were all greatly stimulated, not only by Roland Oliver and his SOAS colleagues' fascination with African pre-colonial history, but also by the persuasiveness of Jan Vansina's advice on oral fieldwork and recording methodology.[21] We were also greatly impressed by a fellow PhD candidate visiting SOAS from the University of Wisconsin who was amassing a mountain of information on the methodology of oral tradition. He was introduced by one of Oliver's colleagues, Douglas Jones, a West African specialist. His name was David Henige.

David Henige was kind enough to include my paper "On Ganda Historiography" in the first issue of *History in Africa* (1974). In it, I attempted to outline some of the ways in which vernacular historical writing in Buganda departed from the trajectory outlined for ancient Greece by Jack Goody and Ian Watt in their landmark article on "The Consequences of Literacy" noted at the start of this essay. But perhaps I did not highlight sufficiently strongly there the "specific social conditions" and "specific political and economic structures" in which Ganda literacy emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This is because a subsequent contributor to this journal suggested that:

> (...) the example of the Lovedale Press [in Southern Africa] should be an object lesson to historians who have proffered subjective explanations for the shortcomings of vernacular histories. Certainly, it would be wrong to ascribe the bland nature of so many vernacular histories entirely to the restraints and attitudes of the vernacular historians themselves. (...) I do not altogether credit

[21]Jan Vansina, "Recording the Oral History of the Bakuba," *Journal of African History* (1960), 43-53, and 257-270; Bethwell A. Ogot, *History of the Southern Luo: Migration and Settlement 1500-1900* (Nairobi, 1967); Samwiri Karugire, *A History of the Kingdom of Nkore in Western Uganda to 1896* (Oxford, 1971); M. Semakula M. Kiwanuka, *The Kings of Buganda* (Nairobi, 1971); David W. Cohen, *The Historical Tradition of Busoga* (Oxford, 1972); John Lamphear, *The Traditional History of the Jie of Uganda* (Oxford, 1976); John Tosh, *Clan Leaders and Colonial Chiefs in Lango* (Oxford, 1978).

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> M. Twaddle when he explained the fact that so many Ganda wrote but did not publish their autobiographies by referring to "a high evaluation of privacy and individualism." One can imagine reasons of a more concrete nature.[22]

Subsequently, in reviewing a particular series of Ganda vernacular biographies in more detail, I responded to Jeff Peires's criticism of my earlier study's supposed lack of attention to the constraints within which Ganda vernacular historians had worked by comparison with Southern Africa, by saying:

> Of course, more generally, the "concrete" constraints on vernacular publications in a society of cash-cropping, lineage-based small farmers enjoying limited rights in freehold land and still living close to continuing oral tradition and only recently Christianized just before the advent of British protectorate rule, were clearly of a very different order from those operating in a situation of much greater European demographic penetration and industrialization as in Southern Africa. (...) The distinction between "concrete" and "subjective" factors here is not an easy one to make. Nor, indeed, is it a very helpful distinction to make in a society of small farmers only recently affected by literacy and monotheistic religion and just starting to be gripped by the possessive individualism that accompanied the penetration of mercantile capitalism into the East African interior during the twentieth century. As I hope that my notes on the nine principal lives of Semei Kakungulu have shown, the fact that most of them remained unpublished did not necessarily inhibit their very "concrete" usefulness regarding land and clanship claims (indeed, in certain crucial respects, the fact that they remained unpublished enabled them to be updated in a manner not unreminiscent of oral tradition itself).[23]

However, in both earlier articles on Ganda vernacular historiography, I omitted to consider in any substance one further very important "concrete" constraint upon many aspects of economic, political, social, and cultural life in the kingdom of Buganda: slavery. But, before saying more about this important matter, perhaps we should pause for a moment in order to distinguish between the at least three generations of Ugandan authors writing vernacular histories to have emerged immediately before and during the period of British protectorate rule.

[22]Jeffrey Peires, "The Lovedale Press: Literature for the Bantu Revisited," *History in Africa* 6 (1979), 170-71.
[23]Michael Twaddle, "The Nine Lives of Semei Kakungulu," *History in Africa* 12 (1985), 332.

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

V

The first generation of these historians was taught to read and write Luganda in the Roman as opposed to the Arabic script by the first Christian missionaries to visit Buganda during the 1870s and 1880s. Of this generation, Apolo Kagwa was by far the most prolific author, followed by the nine chroniclers of the career of Kagwa's great rival for power, Semei Kakungulu. John Rowe has produced what is still by far the fullest annotated list of these writings as part of a longer bibliography of Ganda historical publications.[24] Rowe and I have also translated a number of shorter Muslim chronicles dealing with the later nineteenth century still to be published. Other important chroniclers of this period are Batalomayo Zimbe and Ham Mukasa, both of them Protestants. I also suggest that Simioni Kalikuzinga should be included here. He was "a major functionary in Daudi Chwa's palaces who, among other things, was a noted court historian," commented Lwanga Lunyiigo, a history lecturer at Makerere University, in a Kampala newspaper.[25] Though not exactly the most productive of vernacular historians as regards publications appearing under his own name, indeed personally I know of nothing surviving in print formally attributed to him, informally he is known to have contributed to a number of Daudi Chwa's publications; and he was consulted by a wide circle of social anthropologists and professional historians working at Makerere after the Second World War. Louise Pirouet was one of these and she paid tribute to him as an informant with "a phenomenal memory, and in other conversations which can be checked on [he] has shown an amazing degree of accuracy. Cf. Wright, Buganda in the Heroic Age."[26] Michael Wright himself relates how "the major breakthrough" leading to his own book came when he was taken by a Ganda friend to:

> Bulange, one of the villages of the capital, and [another informant] led me to a dilapidated house with a tiled roof, the home of the bed-ridden Simioni Kalikuzinga. I soon saw that this fine old man was in a different class to that of my other informants. Not only had he a higher intelligence and sharper memory, but, above all, he embodied as no one else I had met the central tra-

[24]John A. Rowe, "Myth, Memoir and Moral Admonition: Luganda Historical Writing 1893-1969," *Uganda Journal* 31 (1969), 17-40, 217-19.
[25]Lwanga Lunyiigo, *Weekly Topic* (13 April 1990), 7.
[26]Pirouet, *Black Evangelists*, 204.

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> ditions of Buganda (...) I questioned Kalikuzinga on every important issue I could think of, considered his answers and questioned him again. Time and again I confirmed from other sources the accuracy of his knowledge. We had eighty-seven interviews in all. (...) We last met on the morning of my final departure from Uganda in March 1963 on my resignation from the Overseas Service. With his help I had completed, in a way that far exceeded my expectations, the task that I had embarked upon four years before of collecting oral evidence on the period.[27]

Two years later, Michael Wright heard that a research student at SOAS called Michael Twaddle was about to go to Uganda to interview a number of elderly Ugandans who remembered the first years of the British protectorate administration there, possibly from one of the surviving British officials whom I had already interviewed in Britain. Anyway, Wright got in touch and asked me to visit Kalikuzinga on his behalf and ask some further questions. This I did towards the close of a period of my own interviewing of a number of Semei Kakungulu's surviving followers mostly living in other parts of Uganda. Subsequently, I kept a typed carbon copy of my questions and Kalikuzinga's answers for my own use as well as posting off the top copy to Wright.

My own questions were mostly about possible reasons for young Baganda joining Kakungulu at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, immediately before his conquest of many areas of central and eastern Uganda for the new British protectorate government. On this subject, I did not find Kalikuzinga's answers especially enlightening. Young men joined Kakungulu's following north and east of the River Nile, he suggested, because Kakungulu could give them *ebyalo* or "villages" to administer there: "Men who had *ebyalo* in Buganda [already] did not, on the whole, go to Bukedi with Kakungulu;" and Kalikuzinga gave me the name of only one exception to this rule – "a very brave man" (*omuzira nnyo*) with several villages already at Kawanda in Buganda, with whom Kalikuzinga had fought against some Sudanese rebels shortly beforehand.[28] When eventually publishing his book in 1971 Wright claimed to have had "eighty-three interviews with him between May 1962 and March 1963 (...) and [I] have since put a considerable number of questions to him through friends."[29] When

[27]Michael Wright, *Buganda in the Heroic Age* (Nairobi, 1971), x-xi.
[28]Interview with Simioni Kalikuzinga at Bulange village, Kampala, 10 December 1965.
[29]Wright, *Heroic Age*, 217.

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presenting my own PhD dissertation for examination in 1967, immediately before moving to Makerere to take up employment there as a history lecturer, I included this note in my list of sources:

> 32. SIMIONI KALIKUZINGA. Knowledgeable Muganda and most experienced in answering questions about Buganda raised by scholars working at Makerere College and the East African Institute of Social Research, Kampala; previously questioned by many such scholars: informative about some aspects of Kakungulu's career in Buganda, but a difficult source to evaluate.[30]

I stand by this judgement. Although in my PhD thesis of 1967 I listed Semioni Kalikuzinga among my primary oral informants, in retrospect it seems clear to me that he should have been included among my category of secondary oral informants – along with George Wamimbi – because Kalikuzinga had clearly internalized a considerable amount of information acquired from written sources before being interviewed by a succession of researchers from Makerere and elsewhere. David Henige's work provides repeated cautionary reminders here of what oral testimonies are: eyewitness evidence, rather than merely oral channels of communication of the sort resorted to by Michael Wright in collecting material for *Buganda in the Heroic Age*.[31] More about George Wamimbi later.

VI

A second generation of high school educated intellectuals and seminarians constitute another category of vernacular historians in Buganda. Highly rep-

[30]Michael Twaddle, "Politics in Bukedi, 1900-1939," PhD thesis, SOAS, London University (1967), 289.

[31]Wright even downgrades chronicles of Ganda history as evidence, as opposed to the oral information he obtained from Kalikuzinga – "chronicles which leave open the whole field of motive and the quality of action," presumably because they lacked "the warmth of human utterance" as their authors were dead when Wright conducted his enquiries. These words appear at page 203-4 of Wright's study, where it is claimed that "the words of Baganda who were alive at the time must surely weigh heavily in the balance [against archival and chronicles surviving from the period] (...) What is crucial is the warmth of human utterance. It is, I believe, at that level, or at none at all, that the historian will finally come to understand the African past." I have argued against this view both in the *Bulletin of SOAS* 37 (1974), 519-20, and in "The Emergence of Politico-Religious Groupings in Late Nineteenth-Century Buganda," *Journal of African History* 29 (1988), 81-92.

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

resentative of this category is Sabalangira Gomotoka, the Catholic head of the princes' clan who contributed regularly to both Christian missionary periodicals and secular newspapers between the First World War and the Second. He figured prominently in the earlier study "On Ganda Historiography" as a controversialist against both the Protestant biases of Apolo Kagwa's earlier vernacular accounts of conflicts in the later nineteenth century and in support of Buganda against the dangers of encroachment by white settlers propped up further in power by British colonial plans for "Closer Union" throughout British East Africa after the First World War. Gomotoka was also the author of the still unpublished (to my knowledge) multi-volume history of the Princes' Clan, *Makula* ("Treasure"), together with a much shorter unpublished history of the Sese Islands, retained by Makerere University Library.[32] Also important here are Míti and Rock's unpublished "History of Buganda," copies of which are deposited at SOAS and in Makerere University Library (where the Luganda original is kept along with an English translation), together with Father Joseph Ddiba's three-volume account of the coming of Christianity to the country, *Eddiini mu Uganda* ("Religion in Uganda"), published in Masaka in the 1950s and 1960s.

VII

A third generation of vernacular historians benefitted from the development of higher education at Makerere College during the inter-war period. Outstanding representatives of this generation were Eridadi Mulira and Michael Nsimbi. E.M.K. Mulira was educated at Budo school and Makerere College in the late 1920s and early 1930s. He was a schoolmaster at Budo and at Achimota in West Africa (1935-1938), before becoming a teacher at Budo again in 1941, Mukono in 1943, and editor of *Ebifa mu Buganda* ("Buganda News") in 1946-1947. He was at SOAS from 1947 to 1949, co-authoring *A Luganda Grammar* with E.G.M. Ndawula, E.O. Ashton and A.N. Tucker (London 1954). From 1950 to 1953 he was a researcher with the Institute of Social Research at Makerere, before becoming editor of another vernacular newspaper and starting his political career in earnest. I did not meet him

[32]Information about *Makula* comes from John Rowe and Arye Oded; I myself deposited Gomotoka's manuscript history of the Sese islands in Makerere University Library on the instruction of my Luganda teacher at SOAS, Ronald Snoxall, to whom Gomotoka had given it earlier.

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

personally for research purposes until the 1980s when he lived in Kampala just below Namirembe Cathedral in an area already known locally as *ekyalo Mulira* ("Mulira village").

Michael Nsimbi also spent the years 1930 to 1932 at Makerere, before becoming a teacher at Rubaga (1933-1934) and at Tabora government school in Tanganyika (1935-1937). In the *Makerere College Register* published in the mid-1950s, from which his as well as Mulira's movements are taken, his address is given as the Provincial Education Office, Kampala. I met Michael Nsimbi first in December 1962 when, as a TEA teacher, I attended a vacation course on archaeology and early history organized by the archaeologists Merrick Posnansky and John Sutton – and subsequently published by Posnansky as editor under the title *Prelude to East African History* (London/Ibadan/Nairobi, 1966). I had several conversations with Nsimbi during the workshop's safaris to archaeological sites in western Uganda. From these talks it became clear that he had written not only the principal guide to Ganda place-names and surnames, *Amanya Amaganda n'Ennono Zaago* (Kampala, 1956) but, like Eridadi Mulira, he had also published books for schoolchildren of a very different character, in which mythical stories about earlier history were adapted and summarized very dramatically for their benefit, presumably in response to the renewed stress upon mother tongue education throughout Uganda from 1944 onwards. Like Mulira, Nsimbi had also been very active in the Luganda Language Society after the Second World War. But he did not speak to me at all about the racism he had encountered earlier in his professional career, to which Lwanga Lunyiigo draws attention in his fine tribute to Michael Nsimbi upon the award of an honorary doctorate to him by Makerere University in 1990.[33]

It is important to take all these details of their authors' careers into account when attempting to use any of their publications as evidence for actual earlier events in Ugandan history.

VIII

After serving for two years as a sixth-form teacher on the TEA programme, I enrolled as a PhD candidate at SOAS where, as already related, I researched, wrote up and presented for examination a doctoral dissertation

[33]Lwanga Lunyiigo, "(Dr.) Michael Bazzebulala Nsimbi," *Weekly Topic* (30 March 1990), 7, 13, (April 1990), 5, 7.

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

on "Politics in Bukedi 1900-1939" at London University in 1967. This dealt with an area of eastern Uganda where British colonial officials had established an administration upon the foundation of Semei Kakungulu's failed attempt to create yet another kingdom in the Great lakes region of East Africa at the same time as conquering it in the British imperial interest. Immediately afterwards, I returned to Uganda to become a teacher at Makerere University where I was able to continue my researches into Kakungulu's career in Buganda as well as in the then Bukedi, Teso, Lango, Bugisu and Sebei districts. I was fortunate in having Semakula Kiwanuka and Bertin Webster as my successive superiors in the history department at Makerere, because both of them encouraged my researches enthusiastically albeit rather differently. If Bertin had reservations about my work, it was not so much about my efforts in collecting oral testimonies and traditions about earlier Ugandan history as about my conclusions. As will be well known to David Henige, Bertin Webster was impatient with any criticisms of oral tradition and testimonies being unduly contaminated by "feedback" from written sources. I was far too much of a "pollutionist" in his view, in worrying excessively, as he saw it, about the dangers of distortions caused by documentary evidence influencing oral accounts of earlier history.[34] However, I hope that what I have now to say about my researches into slavery in pre-colonial Uganda may reassure him about both the seriousness and the positiveness of my concerns in this area of study – not only in seeking the most reliable forms of evidence, of both an oral and a written character, but also in upholding the importance of African agency here as elsewhere in African history.

Slavery was not a major matter in Uganda for historians and social anthropologists to worry about when working at Makerere immediately after the Second World War. Slavery had been an important social institution at the East African coast, and for Swahili-speaking traders during the nineteenth century seeking captives as well as other commodities in the East African interior for use at their inland settlements or for export abroad. Within Uganda itself, domestic slavery was generally considered by the generality of scholars to have been a comparatively mild affair because most slaves had been women. It was only when invited to contribute a chapter on the Great Lakes region of East Africa to a collection of studies on

[34]J. Bertin Webster, "The High Priest of Scepticism Lost in a Footnoted Fairyland: a Reply to David Henige," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 15 (1982), 476-83.

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

women and slavery in Africa more generally, that I really began to look at the subject more seriously. This was in the later 1970s, and by then I had returned to London University and been appointed to a joint post in African history and politics at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies. First, I checked my interview transcripts from Uganda. Fortunately, these were fairly full, verbatim records of interviews undertaken for my PhD dissertation on "Politics in Bukedi 1900-1939" and on Kakungulu's career in Buganda between 1967 and 1970 – I had followed Vansina and Henige's advice here almost to the letter! Unfortunately, there were very few clear references in my transcripts to the subject of slavery but there were quite a number of unclear ones. Then I looked at as many vernacular histories of Buganda as I was able to find, again with inconclusive results, particularly in writings by the first and second generations of Ganda vernacular historians. Only when I checked my notes on E.M.K. Mulira did I get an important lead – in several pages of information in Audrey Richards's study of migrant labour in Uganda, evidently written when Mulira had been a researcher at the Institute of Social Research at Makerere. Richards had not made much of them in her study, but she was a good enough scholar herself to include them.[35] These pages took slavery in Buganda seriously, and quoted particular Luganda words for different sorts of slaves in the old kingdom. I made a note to visit Eridadi Mulira when I next travelled to Uganda. This was in 1981. After interviewing Mulira at his home at this time, I also revisited a number of my earlier informants still living in the country, consulted a number of other authorities, undertook additional searches with slavery as well as Semei Kakungulu in mind in the Entebbe Secretariat Archives, and then returned to UK to re-examine my earlier transcripts of oral evidence again alongside my new information. Fortunately I had full transcripts of earlier interviews; if I had followed, say, Michael Wright's mode of research, insofar as I was able to deduce what it was from his list of questions for Simioni Kalikuzinga, I might not have retained full transcripts of my earlier questions posed as well as the substance of the answers received during interviews.

The result was a chapter on slavery in Buganda in a collection of studies of the end of slavery in Africa edited by Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts.[36] Additionally, I published another study in the proceedings of a

[35]Audrey I. Richards (ed.), *Economic Development and Tribal Change* (Cambridge, 1954), 170-72.

[36]Michael Twaddle, "The Ending of Slavery in Buganda," in: Suzanne Miers, and Richard Roberts (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison, 1988), 119-49.

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

History Workshop conference.[37] It is important to note that I was only able to complete these studies after asking a further set of questions about slavery which I had omitted to ask informants about during my earlier periods of fieldwork in Uganda. Moreover, I was also only able to complete the work after a much more thorough search through the relevant archives and a much closer analysis of the language of vernacular chroniclers, as slavery now appears to me to have been a non-subject as far as both the first and second generations of vernacular historians in the country were concerned. That indeed was the principal "concrete" significance of it in nineteenth century Ugandan history.

Slavery was a critically important part of the social structure of the old kingdom, but hardly anybody wrote about it then or talked about it later unless asked specifically about it by an interviewer. It was an area of silence. This was especially the case in the first generation of chronicles produced by the first converts to Christianity in Buganda. Quite why, I am not entirely sure. The Christian Bible, of which several of the chroniclers themselves had become devoted and diligent readers and translators by the 1890s, of course had many references to slavery in its Old Testament sections. Perhaps it was partly a consequence of shame, slave status implying non-person status in the old kingdom, a slave literally being a chattel. Perhaps it was partly also a result of the particular ethos of honour dominant in Buganda during the last years of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century.[38]

A second conclusion: oral interviewing is only as productive and useful as the interviewer allows. It is a mistake to assume that oral traditions and testimonies constitute a reservoir of historical information which researchers, particularly foreigners like me, can easily tap into.

A third, more comparative point. When presenting an earlier draft of my conclusions on "Slaves and Peasants in Buganda" to the London African History Seminar, the SOAS historian Richard Gray commented that at least one aspect of my account should be of positive interest to historians of West and Central Africa studying earlier centuries: Kabaka Mutesa I's objection to excessive numbers of slaves being taken out of Buganda by traders from the East African coast during the nineteenth century, mirrored in Gray's

[37]Michael Twaddle, "Slaves and Peasants in Buganda," in: Léonie Archer (ed.), *Slavery and Other Forms of Unfree Labour* (London, 1988), 118-29.
[38]John Iliffe, *Honour in African History* (Cambridge, 2005) has an especially interesting chapter on the Ganda Christian martyrs of Kabaka Mwanga's reign.

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

view objections by the rulers of Kongo and Benin to comparable initial outflows from their kingdoms in the early phases of Portuguese trading along the Central and West African coasts.[39]

IX

A notable feature of third-generation vernacular historians in Buganda, such as Eridadi Mulira and Michael Nsimbi, and indeed of outstanding individuals with expert knowledge surviving from an earlier generation like Simioni Kalikuzinga, has been their willingness to engage with visiting as well as local researchers in history in a frank and open manner. This, insofar as one can tell, was usually the case on both sides; mutual respect and trust prevailed. Outside Buganda, other Ugandan informants and intellectuals have also provided invaluable assistance to foreign as well as local researchers over the years. As regards my own researches in eastern Uganda, George Wamimbi proved an invaluable helper to me over forty years ago.

This was when I was collecting oral information for my doctoral thesis on the history of local politics in eastern Uganda. Wamimbi helped me enormously in Bugisu. He answered my questions about oral traditions of origin, about circumcision age-sets and about clanship and more recent events among the peoples living on the westerly and southern slopes of the gigantic upturned saucer of Mount Elgon through which the modern boundary between eastern Uganda and western Kenya progresses, without reserve. He also helped me by first identifying and then sometimes also accompanying me when visiting more elderly Bagisu whom he suggested I might find helpful as primary sources of information. Again, I kept verbatim transcripts of each of these interviews as well of those of my longer conversations with George Wamimbi himself. When my doctoral thesis was submitted for examination two years later, I included a note in my section on "secondary oral informants":

> 2. GEORGE WAMIMBI. President of the Masaba Historical Research Society, and at present headmaster of Bugitimwa Junior Secondary School, Bugisu: has collected Bagisu traditions of origin for several years with the aid

[39]A situation also noted by Joseph C. Miller, *Ways of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade 1730-1830* (Madison, 1988), 106. For more recent researches on the East African interior, see Henri Medard, and Shane Doyle (eds.), *Slavery in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa* (Oxford/Kampala/Nairobi/Athens OH, 2007).

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> of a tape-recorder, and hopes to write them up soon for the East Africa Literature Bureau; proved an invaluable secondary source on Bugisu history. Interview[ed] at his Bugitimwa home on 18 August 1965 and 1 December 1965 and several informal meetings. Previously interviewed by Jean La Fontaine and Rachel Sweeting.[40]

Later I included a few sentences about George Wamimbi in a paper on "'Tribalism' in Eastern Uganda" for a seminar at SOAS, the substance of which the anthropologist Philip Gulliver included in a symposium he edited and published in 1969:[41]

> The Mbale dispute has affected political activity among the Gisu and Gwere peoples at several levels. Among many students and teachers it has taken a largely literary form. During the 1950s a number of young Gisu came together to form the Masaba Research Society [*sic*] in order to collect and collate local traditions of origin relating to Mbale and its ethnic environs. But increasingly this society has become a collection of straightforward antiquaries as its political intentions have been frustrated by official delays. Today its members are attempting to standardize the Lumasaba language, record old circumcision songs, and collect materials for an ambitious *History of Bugisu* to be edited by the Society's President, George Wamimbi. The Mbale dispute has also affected literary production at Makerere University College, where Gisu students publish *Mulembe*, a magazine which has urged the social improvement of Bugisu as well as propagating the Gisu view on Mbale during its first years of publication.[42]

Shortly before Gulliver's volume appeared in print, I submitted a mimeographed version of my contribution to it to a conference at Makerere, and I benefitted from a number of criticisms of the paper by several Gisu undergraduates whom I by then had the privilege of teaching in the history

[40]Michael Twaddle, "Politics," 313. La Fontaine was a social anthropologist associated with the Institute of Social Research at Makerere during Audrey Richards's time as director and she wrote several important studies of the Gisu people. She was an excellent researcher, as far as the Gisu I spoke to, and I obtained at least one other Mugisu informant's name from her PhD thesis which I consulted before undertaking my own interviews in Uganda. Rachel Sweeting had spoken with Wamimbi before completing her MA thesis for SOAS on church growth in Bugisu a year or so before me.

[41]Michael Twaddle, "'Tribalism' in Eastern Uganda," in: Philip H. Gulliver (ed.), *Tradition and Transition in East Africa: Studies of the Tribal Element in the Modern Era* (London, 1969), 193-208.

[42]Twaddle, "'Tribalism'," 202.

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department there. Shortly afterwards, together with Donald Denoon and Sam Karugire, I organized a workshop at Makerere for Ugandan local historians, to which both Andereya Mayegu and George Wamimbi were invited. Mayegu was a sub-county chief from South Bugisu who had compiled extensive lists of circumcision age-set names and songs.

Twenty-five years later, several of my sentences about Wamimbi and his researches in Gulliver's edited volume were reprinted in a footnote to a chapter on "The Constitution of Expertise" contributed by David Cohen to a book entitled *The Combing of History*.[43] Among other things, this was an attack upon David Henige's approach to recording and interpreting oral traditions and testimonies for the purposes of modern historical study from a very different perspective from Bertin Webster's and indeed David Cohen's own earlier publications. The setting for the attack was a seminar at Johns Hopkins University attended by scholars aware to a greater or lesser extent of Wamimbi's work, stopping off in Baltimore while en route to or from a number of unspecified conferences in the Americas: Jean La Fontaine, Stephen Bunker (a newly appointed professor of social anthropology at Johns Hopkins who had earlier undertaken research into coffee marketing in Bugisu and interviewed George Wamimbi several years after I did), Suzette Heald, another social anthropologist with direct knowledge of Bugisu, Aidan Southall, an expert on the Alur people of northwestern Uganda, Elisha S. Atieno Odhiambo from Nairobi [and Cohen's colleague in composing several books on Kenya], Frank Rottland of the University of Bayreuth, and David Cohen himself. Rottland's importance was that he "had in 1970 been part of a Makerere university faculty team which had traveled to eastern Uganda to document – from the perspectives and through the practices of different disciplines – a Gisu circumcision campaign" and that "he had maintained a set of some fifteen papers produced by the team, along with copies of typescripts on Imbalu [Gisu circumcision rites] produced by eastern Ugandan writers, including Wamimbi." David Cohen "had witnessed the Gisu circumcision campaigns in their extensions into Busoga to the west and had examined the Makerere papers during a research visit to the University of Cologne in 1983."[44]

George Wamimbi himself was not present at the seminar. It is unclear from Cohen's comments whether he had been invited to the meeting at Johns Hopkins University about his work or even whether he was still alive.

[43]David W. Cohen, *The Combing of History* (Chicago, 1994), 218, note 5.
[44]Cohen, *The Combing*, 220-21.

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Certainly, if he was still alive, Wamimbi does not appear to have been shown Cohen's extended comments, comparing his contribution to his evidently still unpublished manuscript on the "Modern Mood in Masaba" with some earlier publications by Jean La Fontaine on Gisu anthropology. What is also odd is that, towards the end of his extended comparison of Wamimbi's work with La Fontaine's, Cohen selected another target for criticism: David Henige and "the vulnerability of what he has taken to be pristine oral tradition to the printed word" in *The Chronology of Oral Tradition*.[45] Cohen admits that "the connection between Wamimbi's production of a text on Imbalu and Henige's admonitions concerning the influence of a written text upon an oral one is of course imperfect. Wamimbi's text is itself a written one." However, this did not stop Cohen from going on to suggest that:

> Historians and others interested in contact between literary and non-literary traditions can hardly live with the simplifications and reifications involved in the simplistic dichotomy of written and oral. Wamimbi's rewriting of La Fontaine alerts one to the complexity of discourses which develop in innumerable settings between source and source.[46]

In another footnote, David Cohen reported that:

> Where we concluded that Wamimbi's text on Imbalu is written out of La Fontaine's Gisu, there was of course no way to assure ourselves that earlier texts unknown to us may have influenced either or both authors to some extent. Neither author cites any earlier author who might have influenced their texts, though, as noted below, La Fontaine does refer to John Roscoe's writings in her exposition.[47]

In fact, if Cohen or one of his research associates had visited Bugisu to interview Wamimbi in person (if he had been still alive) or one or other of his fellow members of the Masaba Historical Research Association (if he was not), Cohen would have discovered, as I myself had done twenty-five years before, that George Wamimbi had himself undertaken a number of enquiries into the history of male circumcision ceremonies and age sets in Bugisu and this association had been one of a number to emerge in eastern

[45]Cohen, *The Combing*, 230-31.
[46]Cohen, *The Combing*, 231.
[47]Cohen, *The Combing*, 224, note 12.

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Uganda in the twentieth century committed by their Ugandan intellectual founders to "improving" and raising the cultural morale and consciousness of their respective communities, much as Eridadi Mulira, Michael Nsimbi, and their companions and predecessors had attempted to do within the Buganda region of Uganda. If Cohen had also consulted the Makerere magazine mentioned in my contribution to Philip Gulliver's symposium, Cohen would also have come across an article in it by George Wamimbi, in which he paid warm tribute to a visiting linguist studying Gisu language issues in a very respectful manner. He would also have read Wamimbi's stress yet again upon the need for all Bagisu or Bamasaba peoples to unite and cherish their cultural distinctiveness in their particular part of a by now rapidly changing Uganda, by agreeing among other things on a common orthography for the Lugisu or Lumasaba language as well as a common appreciation of Gisu circumcision ceremonies.

These matters aside, David Cohen commits a category error in considering George Wamimbi to have been a primary source of oral historical information. Like Simioni Kalikuzinga, Wamimbi was a secondary source of both oral and written information about the past in his particular area of Uganda; and David Cohen is wrong to claim to have had privileged access through one of his manuscripts to a unique source of historical information. Just as Simioni Kalikuzinga had been interviewed by other researchers before Michael Wright, so too had George Wamimbi been consulted by a number of researchers before David Cohen made him his focus of criticism from afar. At least one of these researchers had been Jean La Fontaine herself, as the note in my doctoral thesis of 1967 already quoted indicates. The implication by Cohen that Wamimbi was using La Fontaine as a unique source for his own writing is therefore to say the least somewhat misleading. David Cohen is also wrong to rubbish David Henige's supposedly oversimplistic "dichotomy of written and oral" and, by implication, his further advice on the need for greater rigour in recording oral information. Fortunately, I recorded my own earlier interviews with George Wamimbi verbatim, and this enables me to see more clearly today the unacceptable representation of Wamimbi's own researches and writings as a whole by David Cohen in *The Combing of History*.

X

It is time to move on. Of the several debates about the relations between literacy, history and development noted at the outset of this paper, least of all

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has been said about the longer term relevance of Goody and Watt's suggestion about one of the principal products of "The Consequences of Literacy" being the growth of a more critical and sceptical attitude towards the past than possible in a wholly oral environment. Essentially, I have continued to support the view expressed in my own earlier work that, while this is probably largely true in the longer term, in the shorter term we need to identify more precisely the concrete circumstances in which it develops. I have also suggested that in the Ugandan case it may be helpful to identify at least three generations of vernacular historians since the 1890s. Most attention has been paid in this paper to Buganda, but I have also said something about one representative of the third generation of Ugandan local historians whom I first encountered more than forty years ago in the very different sociological setting of Bugisu close to the Kenya-Uganda border.

As the Canadian scholar Charles Taylor suggests more broadly regarding more advanced capitalist societies:

> It seems an undeniable feature of modern-market, growth-oriented, industrial economies, embedded as they are in bureaucratic polities, that they force a kind of homogeneity of language and culture, both designedly, as through the education system, and by the very way they operate, as through their media. (...) Earlier "network" identities, linked to family, clan, locality, and provenance, tend to decline, and new "categorical" identities, which link us to a multitude of others nationally or even globally – on the basis of confession, profession, citizenship – take on more and more importance.[48]

In this paper I have outlined how certain Ugandan vernacular historians themselves helped to contribute to these processes in the less advanced capitalist circumstances of both the British protectorate period and the first years of independence in Uganda, by encouraging more effective defences of their respective languages against encroachment by rival tongues, and through more effective stress upon cultural commonalities – clan and kingship in the Ganda case, circumcision in the Gisu situation – as against more damaging internal splits along politico-religious or factional lines. Admittedly, much more needs to be said about these matters than is possible within the limitations of a journal article. I have not covered the whole of Uganda, only particular parts in which I have been privileged to undertake historical research and interviewing over the years.

[48]Charles Taylor, "Nationality and Modernity," in: Charles Taylor (ed.), *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays* (Cambridge MA, 2011), 83.

https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

However, as should by now be clear, the present writer is grateful for David Henige's advice and warnings to oral interviewers and researchers over the same period. I have only one real qualification to make regarding David Henige's advice in his many publications. Because of the discretionary trust and respect implicit in all decent interviewing and analysis of individual human beings' personal testimonies, it is not desirable to make all interview transcripts and personal details open to direct inspection by other researchers until after a decent interval of time has elapsed. John Tosh first pointed this out to me when publishing a revised version of his PhD thesis on the colonial history of part of northern Uganda as *Clan Leaders and Colonial Chiefs in Lango* (Oxford, 1978) without full details about his oral informants in his list of sources. This was because he feared for their lives should this information have become public knowledge in Uganda during the presidency of Idi Amin. It was a reasonable fear and a just response at the time, and in the meantime the information in question could be seen by authorized readers of his original doctoral dissertation in London University Library. I think his advice has universal application.

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