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Ugandan Politics and World War II (1939–1949)

Carol Summers

World War II shaped Uganda's postwar politics through local understandings of a global war.¹ Individually and collectively Ugandans saw the war as an opportunity rather than simply a crisis. During the war, they acquired wealth and demonstrated loyalty to a stressed British empire, inverting paternalistic imperial relations and investing loyalty and money in ways they expected would be reciprocated with political and economic rewards. For the 77,000 Ugandan enlisted soldiers and for the civilians who grew coffee and cotton, contributed money and organizational skills, and followed the war news, the war was not a desperate struggle for survival. Ideological aspects of the war, such as Fascism and Nazism, did not produce any widespread revulsion: Even at the height of the war, boys at the country's top school blithely organized a Nazi club.² Instead, soldiers, fundraisers, and cotton growers sought *personal* opportunities as they demonstrated their loyalty and competence.

World War II, though, also taught the modern power of *collective* action and the potential exactions and interventions of an ambitious modern state, whether imperial or explicitly Fascist. Impoverished and indebted by the war, Britain was slow to accept Ugandan assessments of themselves as British allies, rather than subordinate clients. As the war ended, therefore, frustrated

¹ This paper rests primarily on research about Buganda, the central kingdom of the British protectorate of Uganda. Prior to the 1950s, Baganda regularly conflated Buganda and Uganda. I acknowledge a larger Uganda when referring to Uganda and Ugandans when describing events, ideas, and initiatives extending beyond the kingdom of Buganda. Baganda were prominent in these, but not in exclusive control. I have reserved the labels "Buganda" (the kingdom), "Baganda" (the people), and "Ganda" (the adjective) for things that were connected more specifically to the kingdom.

² The drinking and boxing club had officers called "Hitler," "Himmler," and "Goering," CO 536/210/5, 25–26, the National Archives (hereafter TNA), Kew. For discussion, see Carol Summers, "'Subterranean evil' and 'tumultuous riot' in Buganda: Authority and alienation at King's College, Budo, 1942," *Journal of African History*, 47 (2006), 93–113.

Ugandans, individually and collectively, broke with the low-key politics of petition that had characterized earlier years and moved toward a modern mass politics rooted in Ganda culture. This new politics defended Ganda initiative against British planning and demanded generational turnover and structural change from both older Ganda institutions and Uganda's colonial administration.

Background

When World War II broke out in 1939, Uganda was already approaching the end of a colonial era structured around the Uganda Agreement of 1900. The agreement's alliance between a Ganda oligarchy and British official and missionary leaders was losing its ability to define events in the central kingdom of Buganda, much less the protectorate as a whole. World War II and its aftermath – not as a collection of battles, but as a social, economic, and political challenge – brought new actors and aims into the country's politics, and opened political processes while impairing British administrative efforts to adapt.

Ugandans contributed to the imperial war effort by volunteering (or being volunteered by local authorities) for the military, expanding production of cotton and coffee, accepting high taxes and confiscatory pricing controls on cotton and coffee, and raising and “donating” money both as individuals and as groups to help Britain. Ugandans overtly performed wealth, generosity, and loyalty, literally becoming creditors to the British exchequer. In doing so, they upended British ideas of imperial superiority and patronage, creating an imbalance that implicitly called on Britain to reciprocate with its own gifts, loyalty, and opportunities in the war's aftermath.

Unlike Britons, who saw World War II as a desperate struggle for survival against truly dangerous foes, Ugandans drew on older local understandings of war as proving new leaders, pulling new resources into the country, and exposing youth to new ideas and connections capable of remaking politics. Beyond direct military recruitment and propaganda, the fundraising meetings, vernacular newspapers, and popular entertainments that characterized the war years fostered the growth of a modern public sphere. In newspapers, meetings, shops, and buses, Ugandans discussed the war, connected with a broader world, and passed rumors of local scandals and dramas. In this new public sphere, norms, whether of proper colonial civilization and order or of indigenous cultural hierarchy and deference, were threatened from all sides. The war years from 1939 to the end of 1944 brought the final collapse of older elite politics into scandal and ineffectuality as popular activists used the scandal surrounding the pregnancy and marriage of Buganda's moral guardian – the Nnamasole (queen mother) – to discredit older Christian leaders, bringing down a prime minister and affirming the value and power of popular opinion. Thinned and stretched by war, British

officials and missionaries increasingly lost control over institutions key to older systems of colonialism, including schools and churches, even as Ugandans demonstrated organizational and leadership skill, political will, and economic resources.

As the war ended, Uganda's 77,000 newly cosmopolitan soldiers began to return home, and a war-impoverished Britain considered how to repay debts to Uganda that included more than a million pounds sterling in direct lending and three million from the Cotton and Coffee Fund, as well as soldiers' wages and more abstract indebtedness. Ugandans joined in an overt, public mass politics that demanded what they believed they were owed. In January 1945, a well-organized general strike forced payment of war bonuses and increased salaries for a range of workers, as well as toppling unpopular local government ministers and chiefs and unsettling imperial complacency. In September 1945, the prime minister of Buganda, Martin Luther Nsibirwa, was assassinated on the steps of Namirembe Cathedral the morning after he had – in opposition to local opinion – forced legislation through Buganda's parliament that provided for government seizure of private land for public purposes, such as the expansion of Makerere University College and the imperial experimental cotton facility. Between 1945 and 1949, cotton growers, motor drivers, and activists of the explicitly political Bataka Union funded and mobilized a pushy and demanding international lobbying effort, mass public meetings in Uganda, and a covert network that embarrassed British officials and culminated in the cotton holdups and mass uprisings of March 1949. Banned, these organizations went underground, but the civil society that fostered them and the mobilizing skills they demonstrated remained in use by activists well into the 1950s as they reshaped Buganda and Uganda in relation to Britain and the world.

War and Opportunity: Ugandan Perspectives

To understand why Ugandans saw the war as an opportunity rather than a danger, it helps to look at how they wrote about it. Robert Kakembo, an elite educated Ugandan veteran from the protectorate's central kingdom of Buganda, produced an English language pamphlet circulated in Uganda to provide officials with some sense of Africans' goals. The pamphlet, "An African Soldier Speaks," described World War II as a time of dramatic opportunity in Uganda. Kakembo described soldiers – often from remote regions – who came into the army ignorant. In his description, though, each returned home as an individual "smartly dressed in His Majesty's uniform and with plenty of money . . . he is 100 per cent changed. He is fat and strong, clean and clever, with plenty to talk about and lots of money to spend" Such men, he wrote "proved to Europeans that he [the African soldier] is not inferior." And beyond proving himself to Europeans, a man who "learnt to read and write . . . used to reading newspapers, to listening to wireless

broadcasts . . . will never submit to the neglect that the uneducated masses, back home in the villages, undergo." Even civilians, Kakembo argues, had been changed as "the war has brought about a great industrial revolution and agricultural improvement. The favourable prices, the assured market . . . all these have brought about a great revolution in the ordinary life of the African, and he is not going back to where he started in 1939."³

From this description of war transforming individual African men and European perceptions of their abilities, Kakembo argued for a harnessing of skill, hope, and discontent to produce development and progress. Instead of an administration that muddled by, coordinated by increasingly elderly and out-of-date chiefs, he bluntly asserted that "They must give room to the young generation." Kakembo's politics were not those of simple Africanization, socialism, or modern nationalism as he, like some other returning soldiers, lobbied British patrons to recognize war service as a qualification for chiefships and offices in the protectorate's Native governments. Instead, his vision was one of hard-earned material consumption, and he viewed postwar Ugandans as increasingly educated, sophisticated about consumer goods and commodities markets, thoughtful about the country's future, and aware of gaps in knowledge, but eager and able to learn. "He does not want to accept things blindly, he wants to know why . . . and he wants to give his views. . . . We . . . are very impatient, because we want to grow overnight."⁴

World War II changed Uganda not through violence or collective experiences, in Kakembo's analysis, but by remaking individuals and their possibilities within a complex local history. Newly tested individuals – whether ex-soldiers or successful cotton farmers – became important as leaders for a new path, but they did so from a thicket of cultural ideals and institutions, most notably those of the kingdom of Buganda. British discussions of "demobilization" and hope for a calm return of at least 80 percent of soldiers to rural farms⁵ did not describe what Kakembo and others sought as the war ended. Instead, asserting that "The African needs firmness and leadership," Kakembo called for *mobilization* with compulsory education and work that would provide a basis for a new economic, social, and political order. The ideas of directed development, enforced communal cohesion,

³ Robert Kakembo, *An African Soldier Speaks* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1946), 9–10, 22, 24. Soldiers eagerly used Army information rooms, learned to read and write, kept in contact with home, and voiced opinions on local political conflicts, according to Army censors in "What the askari thinks," *Fortnightly Review*, copy in CO 536/215/12. CO, TNA, Kew.

⁴ Kakembo, *An African Soldier Speaks*, 44.

⁵ Officials estimated that only 20% of returning soldiers would find paid employment. "80% will have to return and remain on the land." P. L. O'Brien, "Report on the political situation in Uganda and the events leading up to the Buganda disturbances of January 1945 by G2(I) Northern Area, 13 May 1945," WO 276/504, TNA, Kew.

and the rise of the youth featured in Kalembo's vision of leadership; his program evoked, in some measure, early ideas of Fascist development, rather than the rural romanticism or laissez-faire progressivism of the war's victors. Perhaps alive to such implications, he quoted Winston Churchill's wartime declaration, "Give us the tools and we will finish the job."⁶ Development and membership in the new wider world was the job. World War II and Ugandans' experiences as participants in it, he asserted, offered the some of the necessary tools.

Kakembo was far from alone in his sense of himself and other returning soldiers as potential leaders of a new Uganda.⁷ In Uganda during the war years not just African activists, but even British officials, most notably two wartime governors, Sir Philip Euen Mitchell and Sir Charles Cecil Farquharson Dundas, were impatient with older doctrines of high colonialism such as indirect rule, and eager to promote the politics of the new educated classes. Mitchell's sponsorship of Makerere College and rejection of any adapted form of education in favor of the broader education of a new African elite was part of his vision that the new Africa required new leadership.⁸ His successor, Dundas, had gained prominence in earlier years for fostering of Africanized coffee cooperatives in Tanganyika. In wartime Uganda he struggled energetically for local government reforms that would offer younger, educated activists a public voice at the expense of older kingdom-based institutions.⁹ His final gesture before he was replaced by the more conservative Sir John Hathorn Hall was to call for an ambitious program of investment in social welfare and economic development. Dundas dismissed incipient panic over the economic, social, and political effects of returning soldiers on Uganda's stability by asserting the best preparation for demobilization would be to

improve . . . conditions of all sorts in the ex-soldiers' [homeland and to] make a land fit for heroes to live in. It will not surprise me if these returning soldiers give some trouble to their own authorities, especially to such as are incompetent and venal. They have lived under the superb leadership of British officers

⁶ Kakembo, *An African Soldier Speaks*, 46, 47.

⁷ Timothy Parsons describes how the Colonial Office originally welcomed Kakembo's pamphlet, but then viewed its political agenda as provocative and banned it. Nevertheless, the East African Command printed and circulated 400 copies as guides to district officers on what to expect from veterans. Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999), 249.

⁸ Sir Phillip Mitchell's speech is in the *Proceedings of the Inter-territorial Conference held at Makerere, Uganda, 21-24 May, 1938 on the Establishment of a Higher College* (Entebbe: Government Printer, June 1938).

⁹ See Sally Falk Moore, "Encounter and suspicion in Tanzania," in J. Borneman and A. Hamoudi (eds.), *Being There* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 162; and on Uganda, Sir Norman Whitley, *Report on the Commission of Inquiry into the Disturbances which Occurred in Uganda during 1945* (Entebbe: Government Printer, 1945).

... and have seen inefficiency ruthlessly liquidated. They may not gladly tolerate a regime of muddle... nor defer to incompetent superiors and they may demand to have a voice in the management of affairs. Personally I would consider that a healthy tendency... The influence of thousands of men coming among the people with new ideas and experiences may bring a much needed rousing spirit into native life and body politic.¹⁰

These critics believed that Uganda, and perhaps especially the protectorate's central kingdom of Buganda, had become stagnant. The late 1940s brought a possibility of dynamic change. Dundas, Kakembo, and others portrayed soldiers and wartime entrepreneurs as energetic potential leaders who could pull Uganda from its backwardness and exhausted crisis to build something new. The generation that had negotiated the Uganda Agreement of 1900 and administered the country under vague British oversight had lost credibility as local observers denounced what they saw as the degeneration of the kingdom.¹¹ Protectorate and missionary institutions and initiatives, such as those of the kingdom of Buganda, came under increasing overt criticism by activists as both lacked resources and often relied on key personnel who had been young at the beginning of the century when the protectorate was founded and grown old working in Uganda.¹² Britain, stressed by the war, was barely able to staff and administer scant protectorate offices, let alone direct development.¹³ The general strike in January 1945, and the assassination of the prime minister later that year, further confirmed observers' sense of the weakness and inadequacy of the older men and longstanding arrangements that had guided Buganda through the early years of colonialism.

In viewing service in a victorious military campaign as a qualification for leadership, Kakembo pointed to soldiers' initiation into the mysteries of new consumer goods, information networks, and technical knowledge. His assertion of victorious warfare as a qualification was not simple militarism. It fit well with older Ugandan ideas of warfare as a profitable activity and way of demonstrating competence and loyalty to the king and those who controlled the kingdom's high offices. Summarizing generations of statecraft within Buganda, a retired official noted that war could be called for when the country was poor and needed more cattle, if an official needed to get rid of a rival or (solving two problems at once) if "the country had lots of young men who might cause trouble, the way to get rid of them was to declare

¹⁰ Sir Charles Dundas to Sir A. Dawe, September 7, 1943, CO 536/209/2, TNA, Kew.

¹¹ See Carol Summers, "Youth, elders, and metaphors of political change in late colonial Buganda," in A. Burton and H. Charton-Bigot (eds.), *Generations Past: Youth in East African History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 175-95.

¹² C. E. Stuart, "28 years of happiness in Africa," 5, unpublished memoir, MS 3983, Archives at Lambeth Palace Library, London.

¹³ Gardner Thompson argues that during World War II, Britain "all but lost control of" Buganda. See Thompson, *Governing Uganda: British Colonial Rule and its Legacy* (Kampala: Fountain Press, 2003), 222-44.

war; some would be killed and others would return rich in cattle and women which they have plundered from other tribes.”¹⁴ In this analysis, war produced prosperity that allowed competent and tested new leaders to emerge, focusing their rapaciousness outside the kingdom, rather than in faction fights within it. War created leaders not directly through some militaristic or heroic model, but practically, as a means of accumulating the resources necessary for prosperous patronage and killing the unqualified. War, progress, and opportunities were closely related concepts for Ugandans.¹⁵

In 1945, soldiers discussed the appointment of one of their comrades, Mikaeri Kawalya Kaggwa, as Buganda’s finance minister and, after Nsibirwa’s assassination, prime minister. Kawalya Kaggwa was a returned soldier appointed to restore order to the administration of a kingdom in crisis. Ambitious for their own futures, serving soldiers asserted, “Now the kabaka [king] is fed up with his chiefs and is waiting for the askaris [soldiers] whom he wants to appoint.” These soldiers spoke dismissively of aging leaders and arrangements, and saw themselves as solutions to the country’s problem: men proven by war, ready to take offices and lead in Buganda’s meritocratic system of chiefship or to found building societies, cooperatives, and enterprises to compete with Indian cotton marketing and omnibuses and produce both personal and communal wealth.¹⁶

This sense of World War II as an opportunity rather than something to fear extended beyond Uganda’s soldiers. Far from the war’s major combat, Uganda experienced only limited military casualties in its armed forces, felt only minor shortages, and, despite increased taxes and price controls,¹⁷ was prosperous – indeed wealthy – as Britain was bombed, drafted, and rationed. Notable Baganda, including some veterans of World War I, such as Prince Suna, participated in military recruitment drives. Educated, politically connected elites, such as Stanley Kisingiri, coordinated a series of films, concerts, and events designed to simultaneously propagandize

¹⁴ Anonymous author, “Leadership study,” typescript (1954), Sir Keith Hancock Papers, 29/1/6/4, Institute for Commonwealth Studies, University of London.

¹⁵ Recent histories of precolonial Buganda differ over local meanings regarding the term “war.” Richard Reid described precolonial warfare as “fundamental to the process of state-building, to the material basis of state power and to internal cohesion.” While acknowledging its inherent violence and disruption, he described war as having “enormous significance as an agency of change and national self-expression”; see *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002) 178–79. Holly Hanson’s interpretation is darker, emphasizing war’s elevation of successful looters and how they alter the balance of power; see *Landed Obligation: The Practice of Power in Buganda* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003), 59–87, 107–112.

¹⁶ “What the askari thinks,” copy in CO 536/215/12. CO, TNA, Kew.

¹⁷ Governor Dundas criticized wartime taxes, citing estimates that “out of an average earning of Shs.110/ derived by a Muganda peasant from his economic cultivation he nets no more than Shs. 27/” after direct and indirect taxation. Sir Charles Dundas, “Memorandum on native taxation,” March 19, 1942, CO 536/209/10, TNA, Kew.

Ugandans and elicit voluntary donations. Ugandans from the elite to the ordinary bought tickets and donated money to attend performances that ranged from a display of bicycling tricks to football matches, skits, dance, and singing.¹⁸ With their careful recording and publicizing of organizers and donors, these events allowed Ugandans to display their strength, loyalty, and concern for Uganda's future and their ability to address causes ranging from specific military equipment to impoverished British old people and European refugees. Ugandans expected these displays to lead to postwar acknowledgement and rewards from both local and British elites.

Such displays were not limited to ambitious individuals willing to organize, sing, or donate money. Ugandans mobilized collective organizations for explicit demonstrations of wartime loyalty that reversed paternalistic imperial expectations and called for reciprocity. The Colonial Office was disconcerted, for example, by the decision of Native Government officials in the Eastern province to give Britain thousands of pounds in interest-free loans from their surplus balances, welcoming both the money and the spirit, but nervous about the implications of such a dramatic diversion of local tax money from local concerns to the imperial exchequer.¹⁹ The country's top school, Makerere, established a cadet corps in 1940 that drilled, learned to shoot, and presented itself for inspection by military officials.²⁰ And the Catholic church, despite or because of the monitoring and intermittent detentions that its Italian clergy were subject to, encouraged its schoolboys to enlist and actively cooperate with propaganda efforts.²¹

Britain lacked the administrative capacity to force Uganda to mobilize for total war.²² Nonetheless, the country mobilized in its own way, as men "volunteered" for respectable military service while disdaining work in the labor brigades, expanded production of cotton while making concerns about exploitation and Indian control of ginneries clear, and handed over financial surpluses in ways that made indigenous wealth (as opposed to British need) prominent.²³ Despite complaints by some British observers that Ugandans failed to understand the war as desperately serious, anecdotes of their participation in war-related activities show Ugandans connected in personal ways

¹⁸ These events were widely covered in the *Uganda Herald*. Beyond fundraisers for general war-fighting, specific events such as a boxing tournament aided thousands of Polish refugees in Uganda.

¹⁹ Sums involved ranged from £15,000 from Teso and £1,250 from Busoga in cotton-growing regions to £1,500 from the marginal Karamojong. Governor of Uganda to colonial secretary, July 20, 1942, CO 536/209/1, TNA, Kew.

²⁰ File 1, Box 517, MSS. Perham (Papers of Dame Margery Freda Perham), Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House (hereafter BLCAS-RH), Oxford.

²¹ [Unsigned copy], "Mobile propaganda safari in Uganda," (1943), file 1, Box 530, MSS. Perham, BLCAS-RH, Oxford.

²² See discussion in Thompson, *Governing Uganda*, 77-79.

²³ *Ibid.*, 96-165.

with what the war meant. Individuals made ostentatiously large donations, such as the £1,200 Christmas donation by the Kabaka in 1942.²⁴ They also raised money through events. Football matches, boxing tournaments, and bicycle displays allowed both performers and spectators to connect to specific war funds, supporting Greek and Polish refugees in Uganda and a home for the elderly in Bristol, as well as chairs for antiaircraft batteries in Coventry and ultimately specific military supplies, including airplanes and a ship.²⁵ Along the way, these “loyal” Ugandans emphasized that they were part of a new political class that expected opportunities. Writing from the emerging hub of radical Ugandan politics, Kampala’s Katwe neighborhood, A. B. Mukwaya argued:

A new social class is being born before our very eyes . . . taking form and shape at a speed that is to some people terrifying. Certainly the war has helped to speed up this growth. This class becomes increasingly self-conscious and excessively vocal every day; and all this to . . . acquire . . . a position . . . in the social and political life of the country.²⁶

The exhaustion of the old and the challenges of war offered Ugandans, whether in Buganda or beyond, an opportunity for legitimate authority as individuals and parts of a new Uganda. This authority was accessible in the military, but also beyond it in civic and local government organizations that proclaimed loyalty and abilities, calling, in the historical context of Buganda, for recognition and reciprocity on the part of the British institutions and individuals that received this help. Within Uganda, recruitment campaigns coordinated by Ugandans pulled an estimated 10 percent of men of military age into the armed forces during the war.²⁷ Ugandans accepted new taxes and unfavorable price regulations, and they donated money for the war effort. Offices, tax abatements, higher cotton and coffee prices for growers, new access to civil service jobs and government preferments dominated by Indians, and higher wages for all – these could provide opportunities for many in the postwar context, and seemed like the least people could expect in return for their generosity and sacrifices.²⁸

War as Danger: British Perspectives

During the war, British officials fostered such local understandings of World War II as an opportune moment rather than a crisis or danger. When, in 1940, the war came to East Africa, the governor’s press release was curiously blasé, telling Ugandans: do not be afraid. There are Italian forces in Abyssinia but

²⁴ *Uganda Herald*, October 14, 1942.

²⁵ Private donations and fundraisers were reported in the *Uganda Herald*.

²⁶ A. B. Mukwaya to editor, *Uganda Herald*, December 28, 1944.

²⁷ Thompson, *Governing Uganda*, 96.

²⁸ The concept of reciprocal obligation is a key idea threaded throughout Hanson’s *Landed Obligation*.

it is a very long way from you people of Uganda, and there are large armies to prevent them from coming here. It is possible but not likely that you may see an Italian aeroplane or two over some part of Uganda; if you do, do not be frightened. Sit quietly in your banana groves or under any trees until it has gone away. It will do you no harm.²⁹

Even as the governor reassured Uganda's people, an imperiled Britain moved away from benign language about imperial partnerships and development for mutual benefit in the context of the war effort, and rather desperately sought to extract as much money and support as possible from Uganda and other parts of the empire not already lost to the Japanese. In the summer of 1940, and even more aggressively in the summer of 1941 and after, Britain demanded money from Uganda, calling for higher taxes and the transfer of revenues to the British exchequer. "Everybody is overtaxed," commented a Colonial Office analyst, "but if the UK taxpayer is to go on accepting heavy sacrifices . . . it would be only reasonable that the African should accept taxation."³⁰

Simultaneously in Uganda, British officials complained that Ugandans were making no real sacrifices for the war and expressed nervousness about the implications of Ugandan war contributions for the country's future politics.³¹ Overstretched by the transfer of 20 percent of European administrative personnel to the military, the cancellation of leaves, the addition of new war-related responsibilities such as conscription, disbursement of family allowances and the arrest of deserters, ongoing demands for donations to the war effort, and ordinary wartime shortages of bicycle parts and consumer goods, stressed European officials reacted nervously to African sacrifices, demonstrations of loyalty, or expectations for reciprocity. They held tight to routines and joked with dread about what would happen when "the undisciplined African [came] home from the wars" and made political demands. An observant propaganda officer considered it "unpleasantly sinister" how worried officers "frankly urge us to fire our weapons [in a military exhibition] so that Africans might appreciate the futility of arguing with Bren guns."³²

As the war began, Uganda's governor dreaded the political and social implications of the country's involvement enough that he had argued for negotiations with Italy to make Africa a demilitarized zone.³³ His successor

²⁹ The message ended "Have no fear, we shall prevail." Governor Philip Mitchell, "Message to the people of Uganda," June 11, 1940, file 2, Box 530, MSS. Perham, BLCAS-RH, Oxford.

³⁰ Illegible signature, note, October 4, 1943, CO 536/209/15, TNA, Kew.

³¹ For example, L. Lawson to Mr. and Mrs. Lawson (Dublin), August 14, 1942, CO 536/209/6; details for the governor's correspondence on contributions can be found in CO 536/209/1, TNA, Kew.

³² See "Mobile propaganda safari in Uganda," file 1, Box 530, MSS. Perham, BLCAS-RH.

³³ Sir Philip Mitchell to Margery Perham, December 24, 1939, File 3, Box 514, MSS Perham, BLCAS-RH, Oxford.

was more willing to push Uganda for the resources that an embattled empire needed, but remained concerned about putting the empire into Uganda's debt, noting in 1943 that by the end of the war, the empire was likely to owe the protectorate more than a million pounds, not including the full pockets of demobilized soldiers and the unspent savings of Ugandans who had been unable to buy bicycles and other scarce goods during the war owing to restrictions on imports. People, he argued, would be well-off enough to demand more in every area from consumer goods to education, health care, roads, agricultural extension services, and good government.³⁴

Far from understanding the war as offering benign opportunities for furthering Britain's partnership with its proven Ugandan allies, wartime British officers grew anxious and suspicious of Ugandan initiative and leadership. Governor Dundas, for example, relied on local elites for both their ability to secure civic peace and their skill in procuring wartime resources, but he neither liked nor respected them. He argued that those in charge of native treasuries had collected taxes, but failed to spend more than half of what they collected, being particularly slow about delivering education and other services. While that meant they had funds to donate to the imperial government, it boded ill for their effectiveness. Local authorities, he asserted, were likely to experience trouble from returning soldiers because many were "incompetent and venal." It would take British authorities, he argued, rather than new powers for African institutions, to serve the masses as opposed to an elite class of chiefs and landowners.

Wartime tensions were particularly acute in the kingdom of Buganda. British leaders might occasionally joke about the war's usefulness in allowing them to banish imperial troublemakers, but the reality was anxiety for the white community as Italians and Germans (including those of Jewish background) were detained, Polish and Greek refugees arrived along with prisoners of war, and a civil labor board drafted local white wives into secretarial and support positions.³⁵

The most dramatic breakdown of any hope that service in World War II would lead directly to imperial patronage, though, came in the aftermath of 1945's dramatic events – the January general strike and the September assassination of Buganda's prime minister. Prince Suna, a World War I veteran who had been a prominent military recruiter, died in detention,

³⁴ Governor Dundas's analysis was as provocative as Kakembo's. See Sir Charles Dundas to Sir A. Dawe, September 7, 1943, CO 536/209/2, TNA, Kew.

³⁵ See Bishop of Uganda to Max Warren, copy enclosed in Max Warren to Archbishop of Canterbury, January 1, 1954, 150: 80-1, Archives at Lambeth Palace Library, London. Dr. Wachsman, a German Jew employed as a school coordinator, was detained as an enemy alien, as were Italian fathers and sisters working in northern Uganda. Polish and Greek refugees were discussed in the *Uganda Herald*. Prisoners of war were deployed within Uganda at tasks that included clearing swampland near Jinja. On white women's war work, see minutes, Civil Defense Board, Mss Afr. S 523, BLCAS-RH, Oxford.

accused of complicity. Stanley Kisingiri, who had led efforts to collect Ugandan donations for the war effort, was deported to the Seychelles. Further, in an articulate collection of petitions, other leading Baganda protested from their detention site at Kitgum that Britain had betrayed them. As a petition from the wives of detainees asserted, "each one of [the detainees] has . . . put in a period of valuable service in the country[;] each one of them set himself out to do his utmost towards the successful prosecution of the war. Each gave freely according to his means."³⁶ Yet, such prominent and loyal men had been detained without charges or due process. "We should be reluctant to believe that the Uganda Attorney General is naturally a sadist who rejoices in the suffering of people without cause, but it is very curious." The detainees complained that instead of acknowledging loyalty and following "civilized" rules, British officials chose to act like the "Gestapo."³⁷ As Mrs. Kamulegeya noted, even Axis leaders like Himmler and Goering got trials: her husband, and the other detainees who had helped build British Uganda, did not.³⁸

War as Disappointment

As the war ended, individual Africans expected opportunities and rewards for their proven loyalty, while at the same time Britons expressed nervousness about the empire's proven need for Ugandans as allies, not simply subjects. This tension shaped a complicated, experimental popular politics in postwar Uganda, especially Buganda. Britain's wartime allies were not noticeably radical advocates of social change or nationalism. In advocating strong governance and British guidance, they included some of the country's conservatives. The retired Lieutenant Mikaeri Kawalya Kaggwa, who became prime minister, was especially quick to dismiss any popular or youthful pressure for democracy or change, asserting "What Buganda needs is hard work and discipline so that [the people] may be happy with the little things they have." He went on to condemn advocates of rapid change, asking "What have they done . . . Have they improved their country in any way? Have they cultivated and kept good farms? No!!"³⁹ Even Kakembo's call for "a flying age" was coupled with a call for British guidance, rather than any abrupt autarky. Kakembo and Kawalya Kaggwa,

³⁶ E. Kamulegeya, A. Wamala, E. Kiingi, and K. Kanyike to A. Creech Jones, July 30, 1946, CO536/211, TNA, Kew.

³⁷ Detainees at Kitgum prison camp to A. Creech Jones, July 23, 1946, CO 536/211, TNA, Kew.

³⁸ Kamulegeya, Wamala, Kiingi, and Kanyike to Creech Jones, July 30, 1946, CO536/211, TNA, Kew.

³⁹ M. E. Kawalya Kagwa to Rev. Canon H. M. Grace, December 5, 1945, Box 281, CBMS A/T. 3/2, Archives and Special Collections, School of Oriental and African Studies Library, University of London, London. Kagwa's title was essentially an honorary rank for Africans in East African military units did not receive commissions.

one hopeful for what he called “the age of speed” and the other rooted in farming, were only two of many intensely political Baganda and Ugandans who sought their own visions of how the country should develop after the war.

In 1945, the *Uganda Herald* held an essay contest on “The Ideal African Chief for 1945.” The top prize went to Seperiya Kisauzi Masembe’s carefully balanced essay, which emphasized the ideal chief as an ethical and rational bureaucratic administrator, providing social services and good government, before ending with a brief hint of something more political in vague suggestions that the ideal chief: knows . . . that he is his people’s representative, their mouthpiece. Encourages Societies where his people discuss their affairs and put them before him. . . . He gives them free speech but he is firm. . . . He reads books and newspapers, not only of his own country, but of others too. . . . He willingly changes his opinion if proved to be wrong. . . . In his private life political controversies have no room.⁴⁰

The reality of a newly complex politics, though, could be seen in the British judge’s decision to award prizes as well to at least fourteen other entrants, who ranged from Catholic teaching brothers to detained political activists, at least some of whom rejected the idea that chiefs should work well with British officials or stand as neutral civil servants, instead emphasizing the need for democratically elected chiefs who would educate but also involve people in their country’s politics and decisions.⁴¹

Britain, rationing bread at home and offering development aid slowly and unimpressively, seemed to offer Ugandans little and threatened Ugandan autonomy. The Ugandan “Civil Reabsorption Office” failed to support returning soldiers in their ambitions to form cooperatives and businesses, instead simply reserving entry level positions in the protectorate’s police forces, prison service, and post office for “the better type” of returning soldiers and proffering limited technical training that prepared less than 10 percent of returnees in crafts ranging from building to shoemaking.⁴² Overall, veterans were so unimpressed by the demobilization process that district archives are full of individual petitions for compassionate leave and early discharge, and district offices found themselves left with last pay packets that

⁴⁰ “The ideal African chief for 1945,” *Uganda Herald*, November 7, 1945.

⁴¹ See coverage in *Uganda Herald*, 1945. Essays were in English, restricting possible submissions. See also petitions from Fenekansi Musoke, Y. S. Bamutta and I. K. Musazi, 1945, CO 536/211. Without accountability, Musazi noted, “The people pay . . . leaders, and . . . get shocking bad value for their money.”

⁴² Many reserved positions went unfilled – in 1946, the police department reported four applicants for eighty reserved vacancies; for example, see civil reabsorption officer to all district commissioners, September 9, 1945, Box 280; civil reabsorption officer to district commissioners, May 17, 1946, and civil reabsorption officer to district commissioners, May 15, 1947, Box 282, both in Toro District Archive, Mountains of the Moon University, Fort Portal, Uganda.

impatient veterans failed to claim.⁴³ An embittered detainee, Y. S. Bamutta, delineated a program of economic initiatives that would reward Uganda for its wartime efforts and allow it to develop, but noted that his ideas were blocked:

Both the Protectorate Government and vested interests have deliberately pursued a policy of criminal negligence in regard to the problem of returning money to the developing economic scheme of the country. . . . [This is because] the Baganda if developed economically would interfere with the monopolies of cotton, coffee etc from which the Protectorate Government is drawing a huge yearly income.⁴⁴

Thus, the postwar politics of Uganda, most notable in the central kingdom of Buganda, centered on efforts by popular Ganda activists to mobilize for popular control of a changing economic and political world. Instead of loot and offices for returning soldiers and young men, there were new economic initiatives – such as cotton ginneries and bus routes – that Ganda entrepreneurs wanted to seize.⁴⁵ Activists organized in the 1940s at least partly simply to demonstrate their administrative capacity and influence.

Cotton growers, whose sterling surpluses and acceptance of submarket prices had contributed to Britain's economic survival during the war, organized during the late 1940s in the African Farmers' Cooperative to advocate "free trade" and market opportunities. They sought to organize their own cooperatives, gin their own cotton, and acquire a greater share of profits from high world prices. Growers were meticulous in their attention to status. They were intensely entrepreneurial and capitalist. But they hosted British socialist politician Fenner Brockway and emphasized in the splendor and organization of their welcome to Brockway that they had the ability and right to administer the country's economy. Overawed by his reception, he wrote that not only had he initially been welcomed by more than 3,000 people who lined his way from the airport, but throughout his visit:

I have never experienced anything like the succession of meetings to which I was taken. . . . The arrangements for my tour were perfect. . . . this outlawed Farmers' Union had constructed meeting-places for the occasion in twenty

⁴³ Compassionate leave was requested on the grounds of houses burning, family members' insanity, unpaid debts, second wives needed, sick parents, etc. Investigation of district officials produced mixed results. Some men whose last pay and gratuities went unclaimed were owed more than 100 shillings. District commissioner Fort Portal to accountant general, May 17, 1947, box 282, Toro District Archive, Mountains of the Moon University, Fort Portal, Uganda.

⁴⁴ Y. S. Bamutta to Creech Jones, July 24, 1946, CO 536/211, TNA, Kew. New histories emphasize the austerity that characterized postwar Britain. For example, see David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain: 1945-1951* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008).

⁴⁵ See Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*. For Kenya, see Hal Brand, "Wartime recruiting practices, martial identity and post World War II demobilization in colonial Kenya," *Journal of African History*, 46 (2005) 103-25. Ugandan patterns were similar.

centres far distant in the country. In two places, where there was no available accommodation, they had actually erected bamboo bungalows, duly fitted with European-style lavatories, for my one-night's stay!

Growers made clear to Brockway that they were men of substance who expected to make their own decisions and earn their own profits, rejecting both the monopoly power of Indian cotton ginners and the administrative fiat of Uganda's administrators. Brockway reported being questioned closely:

Did governments in England tell farmers what they must grow and how they must grow it? Did the Government fix prices, pool the crops, sell in the world market and keep the profits? My replies shook them. Not all that, I would say, but a good deal of it. They would look at me with astonishment. Why did we put up with it?

Far from petitioning Britain, whether for development assistance, marketing help, or charity, these growers saw themselves as able, organized, and aware, with no need to put up with British interventions. Reading newspapers, holding meetings, and organizing in cooperatives, these growers knew how the protectorate government had accumulated a cotton fund of more than three million pounds. Many mobilized not just economically, but with the political Bataka Union, which asserted that before and during the war, growers had trusted the administration to deal honestly but after the war "they had completely emerged from the 'dark canyon' of ignorance. . . . This cotton and coffee money was the property of the growers." Frustrated activists complained, however, that "the parties who received money from the cotton and coffee crops" were the protectorate government, the native government, the Europeans, and the growers.⁴⁶

This juxtaposition of entrepreneurialism, organization, and radical rejection of British colonial interventions was not unique to the cotton growers' association. As the war ended in the 1940s, people in Uganda were increasingly political as they read or listened to a variety of local vernacular newspapers and gossip networks, participated in modern organizations ranging from church groups and cooperatives to unions and political associations, and worked to shape both the upcoming generation of Ganda leaders and the future of Uganda's development. Their networks were modern and cosmopolitan in their engagement with a larger world, but very Ganda-centric in their analysis and aims. This local vision of the world rested on several basic understandings. First was the assertion that Buganda was not a British colony, but an ally, tied to Britain for mutual benefit but not subject to Britain or owned as a territory. Second, leading Baganda saw their connections with Britain as significantly helpful to the empire, and expected their

⁴⁶ Translation of letter from Bataka Union to governor of Uganda, printed in *Gambuze* and reproduced in *Fortnightly Review*, September 9, 1948, CO 537/3601, TNA, Kew.

help in time of Britain's crisis to be reciprocated and indeed pay dividends when the Axis powers had been defeated. Finally, activists, frustrated by Britain's failure to acknowledge and pay its debts and eager to seize new postwar opportunities, regularly compared British recalcitrance to the misgovernance attributed to Nazi Germany. Seperiya Kadumukasa Kaggwa – a former chief, active cotton businessman, and relatively conservative political figure – nevertheless critiqued Britain's response to the 1945 general strike as a move toward a "REIGN OF TERROR as it was in Germany during HITLER'S REGIME."⁴⁷ Kadumukasa Kaggwa's activism, like that of many cotton growers and other activists, was almost libertarian in its confident assertion of Ugandans' ability and eagerness to take care of themselves, and rejection of developmentalist or paternalist planning and interventions by British administrators.

Radical Mobilization

The radical politics of the late 1940s in Uganda was an awkward fit with international class-based politics or modernist ideas of state-sponsored development planning. Instead, the 1945 general strike, the cotton activism of the late 1940s, and the Bataka movement leading up to the 1949 insurrection were all movements that crossed classes, from elites to day laborers, and Banyarwanda immigrants. The political language they spoke emphasized betrayed loyalties, poor patronage, and abuses that undermined Ganda ideas of ethical power and governance rooted in reciprocity between generous patrons and hardworking heirs.

Given the meaninglessness of class-based politics among ambitious men seeking social mobility and the alienness of European categories of Fascism and liberal democracy, Ganda political activists worked to develop a Ganda form of political action. One of their most creative initiatives in the late 1940s was the Bataka Union. In the publicity photo in Figure 25.1, it is possible to see a mass meeting that gathered together working men with bicycles to listen and donate funds. Bataka Union meetings could, according to British intelligence estimates, attract thousands of participants who contributed directly by putting money in the baskets circulated in meetings and indirectly by buying the pictures, pamphlets, and badges the movement produced.⁴⁸ Its leaders offered Britain advice and called for a postwar future of indigenous modernity. Unlike meetings organized by missionaries, officials, or experts, the agenda was controlled by local activists, not international guides. Platform speakers emphasized Buganda's clans that guarded

⁴⁷ Emphasis in original, Seperiya R, Kadumukasa Kaggwa to secretary of state for the colonies, October 2, 1945, CO 536/215.9, TNA, Kew.

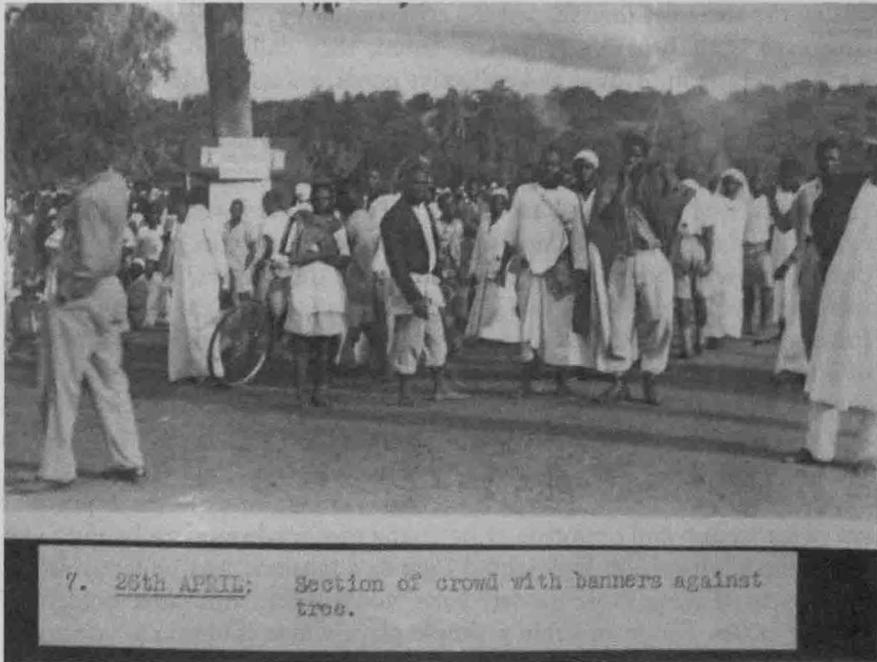
⁴⁸ See reports on these meetings in the fortnightly intelligence reports of 1948 and 1949, CO537/3600, TNA, Kew.



FIGURE 25.1. Publicity photo of Bataka Union mass meeting, enclosed with petitions from the Bataka, [1948], CO 537/3593, TNA, Kew.

the inheritance and security of all Baganda, developing a rhetoric of citizenship not on the basis of individuality, but for people tied together with responsibilities and rights. This rhetoric emphasized the country's senior men as grandfathers who held the past in trust for the grandsons who had a right to their inheritance. Neither Marxist nor nationalist, Bataka activists offered harsh critiques of senior men and of Buganda's Kabaka (king) for collaborating with Britain and eating and enjoying Buganda's resources, rather than acting ethically, guarding the land and preparing the children for the future. Most important, they called for the people to elect their own representatives and officials.

Despite the traditional view of warfare as *resolving* the disorderliness of young men by ensuring that they got either death or opportunities, and the marked willingness of activists to cooperate across expected ideological divides, Uganda's political turmoil increased in the late 1940s. Men who sought offices, unionized for improved conditions and pay, founded cooperatives to market goods or buy and sell cotton, mobilized to challenge inadequacies of mission churches and schools, or even just read and discussed a range of controversial vernacular newspapers, became part of a political scene full of demands and action. Some activists worked with British officials or mission institutions; however, for others, it proved easy to slip



7. 26th APRIL: Section of crowd with banners against tree.

FIGURE 25.2. Police photograph of scene showing part of a massing of thousands of protesters stormed by a police baton charge that left the symbols of social mobility – protesters' bicycles – behind, to be collected by barefoot police in imperial uniforms, dated April 26, 1949, in "Strikes and disturbances in Kampala during April 1949: photographs taken during 1949 riots," CO 537/5864, TNA, Kew.

from petitions to an active citizenship that included lobbying to insurrection. Detained after the 1945 general strike, activists such as Ignatius Musazi, Fenekasi Musoke, Henry Kanyike, Yusuf Bamutta, and others denied any wrongdoing, but many reemerged within the energetic politics of the 1949 uprising, a carefully timed and organized violent conflict that ended with military intervention, thousands of arrests and collective fines for the people of Buganda.

Conclusions

World War II's legacy in Buganda was not simply integration into a broader world and a new worldly class of returned soldiers, but an increasingly widespread – and critical – reevaluation of Buganda's alliance with Britain. While some elites continued to find British allies helpful and productive, more and more Baganda found Britain inadequate. Baganda expressed impatience with Britain as their ally in Uganda's 1945 general strike, in more dramatic mobilizations in an insurrection in 1949, and more loudly

during the struggles that shaped the crisis of the 1950s. When they became frustrated with Britain's refusal to listen, they called for acknowledgement of Ganda individual and collective needs, wants, rights, and interests. Buganda's young king, deft in British culture and proud of his honorary commission in Britain's army, complained that Great Britain never told any territory that it was prepared for self-government.⁴⁹

Uganda was not central to World War II. It was well away from all fighting, and avoided mass conscription, but Uganda and its people did more during the war than simply grow cotton for the empire. Ganda officials recruited "volunteer" soldiers. Uganda's donations bought the British air force planes and the navy a ship. Cotton growers loaned Britain millions of pounds from their cotton fund and native government chiefs offered the surplus balances of their treasuries. Everyone suffered a lack of bicycle tires and consumer goods. All this was uncontroversial as what a loyal people did when the king asked and an ally was in danger.

After the war, things changed. In 1946, Kakembo expected a postwar era of leadership and opportunity by young men made modern by their war experiences. His vision highlighted Uganda's tensions, but underestimated the variety of ways those modern men would work with older holders of Ganda values. Far from being a simple place where tradition gave way to modernity through the sponsorship of Britain and its veterans, Uganda, and particularly Buganda, proved spectacularly messy. Traditional values of belonging to land and kin connected with democratic ideals; radical activists learned techniques from Fabian lobbyists, Catholic Action, and the King's African Rifles; and the country's experiment with democratic ideals and rhetoric tumbled into frustration and disarray after an unsuccessful insurrection in 1949.

The legacy of the 1940s proved to be mobilization and mass politics – Kakembo's "impatient" time rather than Kawalya Kaggwa's patronizing call for "hard work" and "little things." The association between returned soldiers and modern nationalism was not simple. But in its challenges and transformation of imperial power and capacity, the spread of new information and worldly ideas, and restructuring of economic relations, production, and commerce, the war remade Ugandans' political worlds. Ugandans found Britain unable or unwilling to reciprocate their loyalty. The new public sphere superseded older relations of loyalty and patronage, leaving contentious Ugandans to fight in new ways, pursuing a sometimes contradictory array of changes.

⁴⁹ Notes on meeting held November 3, 1953, with the Kabaka, the Omulamuzi, and the governor of Uganda, etc., CO 822/567, TNA, Kew.