Introduction: Power and History Writing in Colonial Buganda

[Men and women] make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please in circumstances they choose for themselves; rather they make it in present circumstances, given and inherited. Tradition from all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they appear to be revolutionising themselves and their circumstances, in creating something unprecedented, in just such epochs of revolutionary crisis, that is when they nervously summon up the spirits of the past, borrowing from them their names, marching orders, uniforms, in order to enact new scenes in world history, but in this time-honoured guise and with this borrowed language.

Karl Marx[1]

This book is an intellectual history of the eastern African kingdom of Buganda. It uses material drawn from approximately one hundred semi-structured interviews and thirty-three private and institutional archives to explore the genealogies of political thought in late colonial Uganda. In doing so, it proposes three contributions to the historiography of eastern Africa. First, it shows the degree to which competing activists interwove literacy with precolonial regional histories to imagine dissenting visions of society and kingship in postwar Buganda. Whereas previous studies of colonial literacy in Africa have tended to focus on either 'sacred' or 'secular' literary practices, this volume argues that Ganda activists reworked their texts in ways that significantly blurred European religious and political epistemologies. Second, this book investigates how Buganda's colonial intellectuals used their texts and pasts differently to imagine alternative political futures during the concluding years of formal empire. In ways that have been glossed over in Buganda's nationalist historiography

[1] Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', in *Marx: Later Political Writings*, ed. by Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 31–127 (p. 32).

and much of Uganda's postcolonial commentary, I argue that multiple political and historical narratives circulated throughout colonial Buganda. There did not exist one particular way of conceptualising or talking about power or social belonging in mid-twentieth-century southern Uganda. As opposed to explaining the end of empire in terms of centralised resistance following the First and Second World Wars, which has preoccupied previous studies, this work suggests that the end of empire was precipitated by political outcomes shaped by historiographical and ideational pluralism. In colonial Buganda, there did not exist a single historical vision around which the state's colonial order could be sustained over time. Finally, as opposed to seeing Buganda's colonial intellectuals as belonging strictly to a class of missionary-educated elites, as previous works on African intellectuals have suggested, this book argues that activists throughout the late colonial period laboured extensively to present themselves as able mediators of distant political pasts. Buganda's colonial intellectuals were fundamentally political historians, innovators who spliced regional historiographies with new types of source material to recast older ways of thinking about mobility, solidarity and power.

As previously unexplored private archives were unearthed during the course of my research, they began to highlight the prominence of political pluralism in colonial Buganda and the extent to which the classifications used in previous studies on colonial literacy needed to be reworked. After living in eastern Africa for two years, I began my doctoral research in Uganda in 2009. Building upon archival work that had been conducted in the United Kingdom during the previous year, I now returned with a list of approximately one hundred activists who had significantly shaped the processes of decolonisation in Buganda. The list included women and men, nationalists and patriots, and politicians committed to different religious traditions: spirit priests, Muslims, Protestants, Catholics and revivalists. In addition to cultivating meaningful relationships with these former activists and their surviving families, it was my hope to identify private collections that could offer intimate insight into Buganda's shifting intellectual landscapes throughout the postwar period.

One of the key activists whom I was interested to learn more about was the Catholic intellectual Benedicto Kiwanuka, Uganda's first elected prime minister. Like many other politicians during the period, Kiwanuka struggled to successfully navigate Uganda's tumultuous

postcolonial politics. In the late 1950s he was one of the few Ganda intellectuals who openly argued that Buganda should be fully incorporated into a centrally governed state, whereas many Baganda advocated for Buganda's special status or the kingdom's secession from Uganda. As Uganda's chief justice in the early 1970s, he publicly challenged Idi Amin's government. In retaliation, military operatives assassinated him in late 1972. But in Uganda's Protestant historiography, which has informed much of the existing academic literature on colonial Buganda, very little had been written about Kiwanuka's political and historical imagination. From what vernacular historiographies did Kiwanuka draw to articulate his liberal vision? As a barrister who had studied law in London, to what extent did he adapt European legal theory to contest Buganda's monarchy? As a devout Catholic, how did he rework the Bible and Church traditions to complicate claims that were being circulated by Protestant and Muslim intellectuals? To address these types of questions it was necessary to identify sources that were not readily available in institutional archives.

From interviews that I conducted in Uganda with elderly members of Kiwanuka's political party, the Democratic Party, it appeared that Kiwanuka's private papers had been destroyed after his assassination. After all, many of Uganda's high-profile activists burned or submerged their records during the 1970s and 1980s to protect themselves and their families.[2] In time, though, I eventually got in touch with Prime Minister Kiwanuka's son, Ambassador Maurice Kiwanuka, to ascertain if in fact the papers actually existed. Following extensive conversations, I learned that after Kiwanuka was murdered most of his private records, including volumes from his personal library, were hidden and placed under lock and key. After a series of discussions, I was directed to a medical dispensary in the outskirts of Kampala where the collection was stored. As I soon discovered, Kiwanuka's tin-trunk archive included approximately 4,905 pages of material that was organised into eighty-three folders. It also contained over 900 pages of loose manuscripts, including course notebooks from Kiwanuka's studies in London in the early 1950s.

[2] One anonymous interlocutor whom I interviewed, who had been a prominent member of Buganda's parliament in the 1960s, recalled burning hundreds of files just outside of his home to protect himself and his family during the Luwero conflict.

The collection provides extensive insight into Kiwanuka's political thought. Through letters, diary entries, government correspondence, party reports and annotated newspapers and books, I was able to begin to understand the inner workings of Kiwanuka's public activism and historical vision. What I was particularly interested to find was the extent to which Kiwanuka wove Europe's classical liberal histories with Catholic theology to recast Buganda's vernacular historiographies. Kiwanuka's papers and annotated library show that he moved comfortably between historical sources that have often been compartmentalised in European intellectual history and much of the writing on colonial literacy in Africa, a point to which I will return below. By way of introduction, though, I wish first to present two case studies that illustrate Kiwanuka's coterminous use of European political history and Catholic writings.

The king of Buganda was exiled for two years in London in the mid-1950s, which I explore more fully in Chapter 3. The exile of *Kabaka* Muteesa II was Uganda's anti-colonial crisis. It precipitated the formation of numerous political parties and defined the constitutional terms under which Uganda secured her independence in the early 1960s. During this momentous occasion, Kiwanuka was critically studying constitutional history as a law student in London. His remaining study notebooks from 1952 to 1953 illuminate the content from which he drew to reflect on Buganda's uncertain monarchy.

Kiwanuka studied contractual, Roman and constitutional law during his course work.[3] Notes from his course on constitutional law show that Kiwanuka was actively thinking in the mid-1950s about 'the nature of federalism',[4] 'supremacy of the Constitution',[5] 'right of personal freedom'[6] and the 'Relation Between Parliamentary Sovereignty and the Rule of Law'.[7] Kiwanuka's textbook annotations focused particularly on the history of the constitutionalisation of European monarchies and the creation of nation-states in the late 1700s. Kiwanuka's underlined sections show that he studied the historian Frederic Swann's

[3] BKMKP [Course Notes]: 'Law of Contract', 9 October 1952–12 May 1953; 'Roman Law', 27 February 1953–c. 3 May 1953; 'Constitutional Law', 14 October 1952–12 May 1953.
[4] BKMKP [Course Notes] 'Constitutional Law', np.
[5] Ibid., np.
[6] Ibid., np.
[7] Ibid., np.

1923 discussion on 'Limited Monarchy'.[8] The underlined sections are Kiwanuka's:

> The King knows no party. The King is nowadays raised quite above party strife. He is neither Whig nor Tory, Liberal nor Conservative. It was not always thus. But during and since Queen Victoria's long reign, our Sovereigns have, with great wisdom, shown no bias to the one side or the other in politics, and it is now an accepted rule that the Crown must not be drawn into the arena of political warfare. This impartial attitude of the Ruling Monarch enables all of us, whatever our particular shade of political opinion, to bury our differences, and unite in loyal adherence to the Throne.[9]

For reasons that are more fully explored below and throughout this book, the authority of Buganda's colonial monarchy was tied to Protestant control of the state. And Swann's summary presented Kiwanuka with political alternatives, the possibility of recreating a kingdom, previously divided along denominational fault lines, 'above party strife'.

The timbre of Kiwanuka's annotations translated easily into public discourse. His papers show that in May 1953 he addressed an audience of Baganda in London. The speech was delivered at a party to celebrate the graduation of the Protestant Joseph Luyambazi-Zake, who was graduating from law school. Luyambazi-Zake was a member of a prominent Protestant family and in the mid-1950s he served as a representative on the Namirembe Conference, which was tasked with redrafting Buganda's constitution (Chapter 3). During the speech, Kiwanuka argued that it had been problematic to develop political communities in Buganda according to religious devotion and bias, especially for non-Protestants: '[In the past] it has been the custom of us Baganda to see that we dissociate [. . .] from those other people who do not belong to our religion. [. . .]'[10] Kiwanuka proceeded to analyse the religious history of Buganda. Christian missionaries taught Baganda, he argued, to create political authority according to religious traditions. In the colonial state, religious devotion problematically predetermined political mobility and social interaction. Kiwanuka

[8] BKMKP Library Frederic Swann, *English Citizenship* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1923).
[9] Ibid., p. 3.
[10] BKMKP [Course Notes] 'Roman Law', np, [c. May 1953]. Kiwanuka's speech was drafted between two lectures delivered in May in his course notebook.

referenced an allegedly idyllic time before Christianity and Islam dominated kingdom politics: 'It is high time that we who are called grandsons of that mythical man known as Kintu [the first king of Buganda] joined our ranks and worked together as real brothers.'

By conjuring Kintu, Kiwanuka was in fact adapting his coursework in classical liberalism. In the eighteenth century, European intellectuals worked to reconstitute divine rights and monarchical authority; universal rights and republican conceptions of democracy were common alternatives. For Kiwanuka, political authority in Buganda needed to be divorced from the Church of Uganda, in ways that he noted from Swann and others. And now, to an audience comprised of children whose fathers and grandfathers had created the Protestant state that he was now assessing, citing Kintu was the most straightforward way to begin to pull away the layers of Buganda's partisan colonial history and to reimagine political solidarities. 'If we work apart we shall be doomed to failure as a nation,' Kiwanuka concluded, 'but together we shall surmount all obstacles.' Swann's political history and the story of Kintu were used to remember a time when authority in the state was not tied to Protestant confession.

Two months after addressing Luyambazi-Zake's guests, Kiwanuka began to read what would become one of the most annotated books from his studies in London: Richard Crossman's *Government and the Governed: A History of Political Ideas and Political Practice*. Kiwanuka's annotations show that he had become familiar with European political thought prior to returning to Uganda in the mid-1950s. He was especially interested in the writings of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Kiwanuka reflected on Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, in which Locke argued that 'rulers should be sometimes liable to be opposed when they grow exorbitant in the use of their power, and employ it for the destruction, and not the preservation, of the properties of their people.'[11] Drawing from Crossman, Kiwanuka noted that 'Locke abolishes sovereignty and replaces it with a division of powers between the legislature and the executive (i.e., the new constitutional monarch)'.[12]

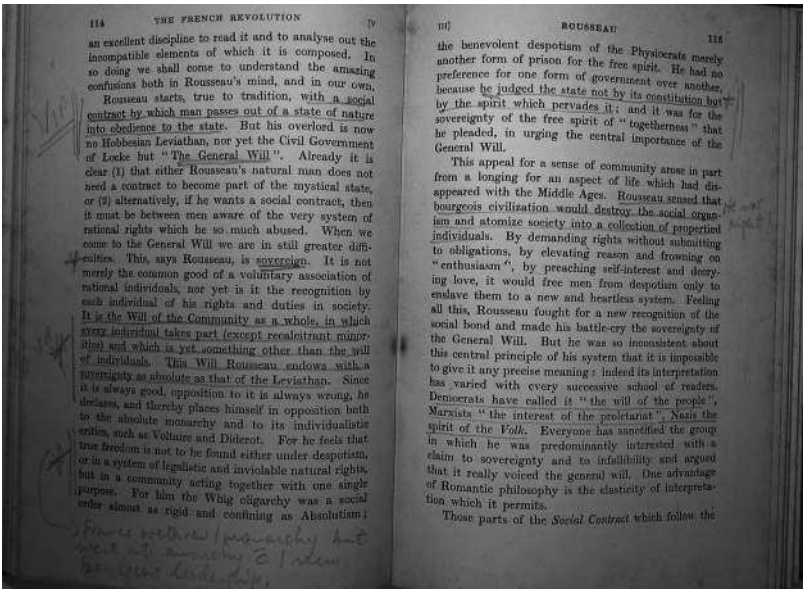
Whereas with Locke Kiwanuka observed the language of the division of monarchical and state power and the protection of rights and

[11] Ibid., p. 71, underscore.
[12] Ibid., p. 74, underscore.

liberty, 'a safeguard for rational man against the wilfulness of princes',[13] with Rousseau he scrutinised the themes of social equality and contractual power: General Will and Social Contract. That Rousseau 'reacted [. . .] violently as he did to the tyranny of absolute monarchy' was 'VIP' for Kiwanuka.[14] He underscored Rousseau's argument 'that bourgeois civilization would destroy the social organism and atomize society into a collection of propertied individuals',[15] much as it had in Buganda after the invention of private land (*mailo*) in 1900. With Uganda in mind, Kiwanuka annotated: '[Rousseau] was right!'[16] Crossman suggested that Rousseau imagined 'the restoration of a primitive natural community which is bound together by its moral sentiments, and whose law is the expression of those moral sentiments and of a new common will', which Kiwanuka noted was also 'VIP'.[17] A preferable society, 'the Will of the Community as a whole', highlighted Kiwanuka, is one 'in which every individual takes part [. . .]'.[18] For Rousseau and Kiwanuka the creation of equitable societies required the recovery of pristine pasts, periods that exhibited 'beautiful primitive qualities' before becoming 'contorted and defiled by the imposition of civilization'.[19] Kiwanuka drew from Rousseau to conceptualise a liberal kingdom, a state within which communities were not unsettled by religious – namely, Protestant – politics (Figure I.1).

Kiwanuka, though, did not only adapt Europe's constitutional canon to rethink Buganda's Protestant hierarchy. Following his return to Uganda, he became the president of the Democratic Party (DP), Uganda's foremost Catholic movement. In late 1959, Kiwanuka turned to Catholic tradition to develop the material culture of the party. In July, Kiwanuka began conceptualising the logo of the DP in conversation with the Verona missionary Father Tarcisio Agostoni, whose mission was based in Gulu. The two wished to develop a symbol based upon the cruciform monstrance (Figure I.2), an image located in

[13] Ibid., p. 71, underscore.
[14] Ibid., p. 111, annotation. The full range of Kiwanuka's marginalia indicates that he used the abbreviation VIP to signify a Very Important Point, and not only a Very Important Person.
[15] Ibid., p. 115, underscore.
[16] Ibid., p. 115, annotation.
[17] Ibid., p. 113, annotation.
[18] Ibid., p. 114, underscore.
[19] Ibid., p. 112, underscore.



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an excellent discipline to read it and to analyse out the incompatible elements of which it is composed. In so doing we shall come to understand the amazing confusions both in Rousseau's mind, and in our own.

Rousseau starts, true to tradition, with a social contract by which man passes out of a state of nature into obedience to the state. But his overlord is now no Hobbesian Leviathan, nor yet the Civil Government of Locke but "The General Will". Already it is clear (1) that either Rousseau's natural man does not need a contract to become part of the mystical state, or (2) alternatively, if he wants a social contract, then it must be between men aware of the very system of rational rights which he so much abused. When we come to the General Will we are in still greater difficulties. This, says Rousseau, is sovereign. It is not merely the common good of a voluntary association of rational individuals, nor yet is it the recognition by each individual of his rights and duties in society. It is the Will of the Community as a whole, in which every individual takes part (except recalcitrant minorities) and which is yet something other than the will of individuals. This Will Rousseau endows with a sovereignty as absolute as that of the Leviathan. Since it is always good, opposition to it is always wrong, he declares, and thereby places himself in opposition both to the absolute monarchy and to its individualistic critics, such as Voltaire and Diderot. For he feels that true freedom is not to be found either under despotism, or in a system of legalistic and inviolable natural rights, but in a community acting together with one single purpose. For him the Whig oligarchy was a social order almost as rigid and confining as Absolutism;

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the benevolent despotism of the Physiocrats merely another form of prison for the free spirit. He had no preference for one form of government over another, because he judged the state not by its constitution but by the spirit which pervades it; and it was for the sovereignty of the free spirit of "togetherness" that he pleaded, in urging the central importance of the General Will.

This appeal for a sense of community arose in part from a longing for an aspect of life which had disappeared with the Middle Ages. Rousseau sensed that bourgeois civilization would destroy the social organism and atomize society into a collection of propertied individuals. By demanding rights without submitting to obligations, by elevating reason and frowning on "enthusiasm", by preaching self-interest and decrying love, it would free men from despotism only to enslave them to a new and heartless system. Feeling all this, Rousseau fought for a new recognition of the social bond and made his battle-cry the sovereignty of the General Will. But he was so inconsistent about this central principle of his system that it is impossible to give it any precise meaning: indeed its interpretation has varied with every successive school of readers. Democrats have called it "the will of the people", Marxists "the interest of the proletariat", Nazis the spirit of the *Volk*. Everyone has sanctified the group in which he was predominantly interested with a claim to sovereignty and to infallibility and argued that it really voiced the general will. One advantage of Romantic philosophy is the elasticity of interpretation which it permits.

Those parts of the *Social Contract* which follow the

Figure I.1 H.S. Crossman, *Government and the Governed: A History of Political Ideas and Political Practice* (London: Christophers, 1952), annotated 2 July 1953, pp. 114–15

Annotations 1–2: 'VIP'

Annotation 3: 'France overthrew monarchy but went into anarchy because new bourgeois leadership.'

Annotation 4: 'He was right!'
Source: BKMKP Library

the Catholic missal. The artistic representation structured time and the natural world around Jesus Christ, 'the Sun of Justice'. The 'Sun of Justice' conveyed a particular order: the Gregorian and Catholic calendars, days, hemispheres, equinoxes and solstices. On 8 July 1959, Kiwanuka received a letter from Father Agostoni, who reflected on the Party's emblem. The Verona missionary hoped to recreate 'the Sun with the rays all over Uganda with the initial of Truth & Justice [. . .]',[20] which he suggested represented *amazima n'obwenkanya* (truth and justice). Truth, it was noted, 'is the light of the intellect to

[20] BKMKP CM/32 Tarcisio Agostoni to Benedicto Kiwanuka, 8 July 1959.

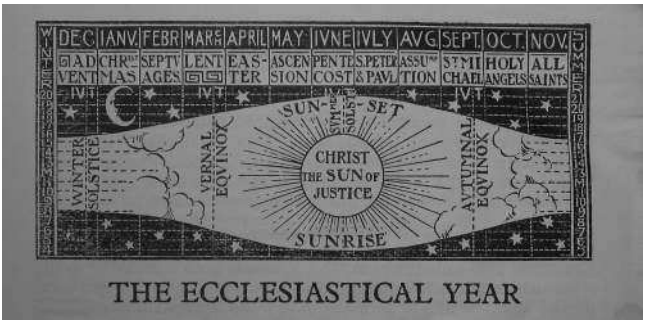

Figure I.2 *Saint Andrew Daily Missal* (Bruges: Liturgical Apostolate Abbey of St-André, 1957), p. x
Source: BKMKP Library

give one truth, [. . .] to enlighten one's mind'. Kiwanuka had disclosed to Agostoni earlier that he had hoped to market DP as 'light' and to portray opposing political parties 'as darkness'. 'What is best', replied Agostoni, 'than the sun's symbol'. The Sun signified political justice and implied that 'the sun is equal for all: it rises for all and sets down for all'. It reminded Ugandans that 'the Father in heaven loves all men indistinctly', that 'God let the sun to rise over the good and over the sinner in the same time without distinction [. . .]'. Without the Sun, 'there is no life, not heat, no crops, no rain no light on earth [. . .]'. In turn, 'the D.P. will be the life for the country, the heat (the love); will provide for economics and for industry; is the one to awaken people from the sleep and to open their eyes as the sun in the morning [*sic*]'.

The letter reminded Kiwanuka of the Party's divine mandate and its relationship to natural and moral genesis: Sun, light, redemption and development. Just as God demonstrated his love and purposes through the created world and the Church, it was asserted, Kiwanuka would administer political order in Uganda through the Democratic Party. The parallels were powerful, and during the following month, at the Party's Annual General Meeting, Kiwanuka translated the content of his and Agostoni's correspondence onto the front page of the conference programme. Kiwanuka noted that the 'Democratic Party is for Justice and Truth for the African People. D.P. is the Sun of the Country. D.P. is the Light of Uganda. D.P. is the Mother of Civilization. D.P. is the Backbone of Government of the Future of Uganda'. And

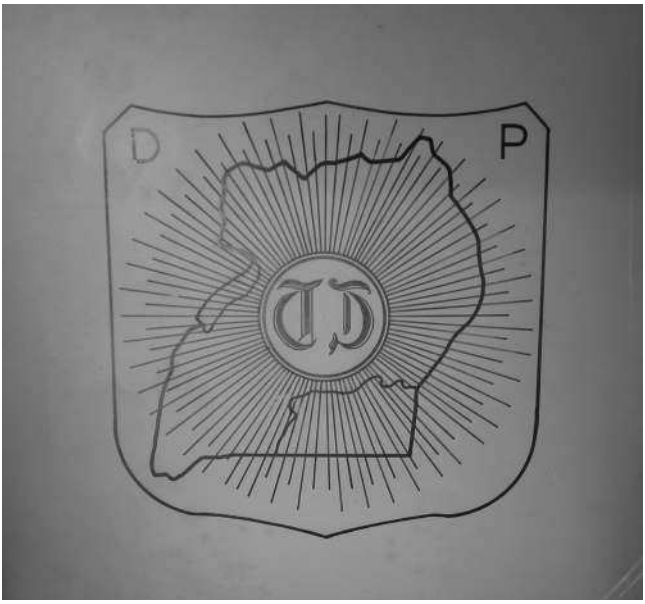

Figure I.3 DP Emblem, 1959
Source: BKMKP Sundry Corresp. + Lukiiko Matters

just as Christ's monstrance (presence) and the Sun's light provided life indiscriminately, 'D.P. is Just for All; D.P. is Good for All; D.P. is Fair to All'.[21] The Party's official emblem incorporated the missal's monstrance (star cluster) (Figure I.3). Two large letters replaced 'Christ the Sun of Justice', 'TJ', the abbreviation for truth and justice, which generously blanketed Uganda. In the opposing corners, the letters 'D' and 'P' were positioned.

Kiwanuka's movement between classical liberalism and Catholic theology problematises much of the existing literature on colonial literacy in Africa, which has largely followed the modernist distinction between 'sacred' and 'secular' classifications of knowledge production. Whereas academic approaches have tended to place 'religious' and 'political' texts and ideologies into separate spheres, Uganda's late

[21] BKMKP Sundry Corresp. + Lukiiko Matters 'Democratic Party Annual General Meeting: Programme', 7–9 August 1959.