

The Work of Time in Western Uganda

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Abstract

This paper is about the unsettling prospect of the millennium. In post-colonial Africa and in other locales, nationalists sought to organize culture as heritage, a set of behaviors and projects inherited, in a lineal fashion, from ancient forefathers. By codifying and consolidating religion, and by reforming citizens' conduct, nationalists created a sovereign culture that could serve as a foundation for an independent state. But there were other, more imminent frames in which citizens could act. The essay focuses on the Rwenzururu Kingdom in western Uganda, where in 1970 a prophet named Timosewo Bawalana announced that the Christian eschaton had at last arrived. Rwenzururu's founders were historians: they recognized the organizing power of linear time. With evidence of their distinct language and culture at hand, Rwenzururu's architects used the techniques of modern governance—census, map, bureaucracy—to make their independent polity visible, credible, and worthy of support. Where Rwenzururu separatists organized time as a forward march, Timosewo Bawalana was following a difference cadence. By breaking with the past, Bawalana interrupted the heritage lessons that Rwenzururu's founders conducted, opening up an experimental form of community. His radical politics lets us see that the definition of citizenship involved an argument over the passage of time.

Introduction

Founded in 1962 by leaders of the Konzo ethnic minority, western Uganda's Rwenzururu kingdom was a production of history. The kingdom's architects were homespun historians who, in the 1950s, had conducted research showing that Konzo people were autochthons, unjustly colonized by Uganda's government. “We ask for the re-establishment of our power in Rwenzururu, we the natural owners of our land”, they wrote in their declaration of independence.¹ With the evidence of history in hand, Rwenzururu's founders could argue that they were restoring an old order of cultural and political sovereignty. But in October 1970, after eight years of low-level guerilla warfare, Rwenzururu's time ran out. The charismatic prophet Timosewo Bawalana announced that Rwenzururu stood on the edge of a new epoch. The kingdom of God had come to earth, and old antagonisms had come to an end. “The war is over for the [Konzo] revolutionary movement against our enemy”, he wrote in a circular letter. “Atrocities like killing and burning of houses and envy are now over”.² He instructed his supporters to “repent and make an apology” to their former antagonists, citing *Ecclesiastes* 3:11-12, which read “He hath made every thing beautiful in his time”. Hundreds of soldiers were convinced that they were indeed living in God's time, and they buried their spears in pits that Bawalana had prepared for them. But within a year, Rwenzururu's partisans had driven Bawalana from the kingdom, and by 1972, Rwenzururu's leaders had recovered their historical

vocation. “Since 1830 our great grandfathers had never ceased to fight for our power”, wrote the new Prime Minister. “We are also fighting for the same cause”.³

East Africa’s nation-builders—men like the founders of Rwenzururu—claimed to be heirs to ancient cultures. They composed inspirational history books that documented their forefathers’ traditions and highlighted the lessons they had to teach to their descendants. By positioning citizens as legatees of their ancestors, nation-builders created a *patria* to instruct, defend, and speak for. Time-breakers like Timosewo Bawalana, by contrast, were living in the precipice of a new millennium, awaiting Christ’s imminent return. By reframing chronology, Bawalana was also creating new politics. Radicals like Bawalana would not agree to live as patriotic citizens of their native homelands. In their visionary work they challenged the political and discursive order that defined twentieth century eastern Africa.

The history of African religion has been conceived as the study of continuity. In the 1960s and 70s, a generation of theologians cast “African Traditional Religion” as a system of belief, with doctrines and rituals that paralleled Christianity and other world religions (Mbiti 1969, Mbiti 1975, Idowu 1962, Idowu 1973). The theologians’ thesis was that Africans already knew the sacred, and already recognized God, prior to Christian missionaries’ arrival. Their foreknowledge made it easy for Africans to fold their traditional ideas about divinity into missionaries’ monotheism, argued the theologians, making African Christianity a continuation of the old religion. Africans, argued the Kenyan theologian J.N.K. Mugambi, “do not have to choose between being Christian and being African. They can be both Christian and African at the same time” (1989, p. 22). In recent times historians have subjected the notion of African Traditional Religion to a much-needed critique (Shaw 1990, Landau 1999, Peterson and Walhof 2002, Gifford 2009). But the emphasis on continuity continues to guide anthropologists’ and theologians’ writing on African religions. The project is always to show how contemporary African Christianity grows out of older religious forms, how Africans have “domesticated” missionaries’ religion. In Ogbu Kalu’s textbook on African Christianity there are five entries in the index under “African worldview” and 25 under “African theology” (Kalu 2005). Even radical revivalist movements, Kalu argues, betray “a certain sense of continuity with the traditional past, embedding African Christianity into the deep structure of all African traditional religions in spite of varieties of names and symbols” (p. 306).

Theologians’ effort to unearth the continuities that guide African religious life takes place on a broader field of cultural production. Since the 1950s and 1960s, African polity-builders have sought to link the project of self-government with the project of cultural self-realization. Nationalists sought to build a national heritage, to organize languages, law, music, and dress, to conform etiquette, attire, and religion to the template of tradition. In his inaugural address as president of independent Tanzania, Julius Nyerere announced the formation of a Ministry for National Culture and Youth by proclaiming “I have set up this new Ministry to help us regain our pride in our own culture. I want it to seek out the best of the traditions and customs of all the tribes and make them part of our national culture” (Nyerere 1967, p. 186). In the legal arena, Tanzania’s rulers sought to standardize local customs, creating a unitary form. The goal, in the words of a government councilor, was to “write the laws which arise from the customs and practices of the tribes of the people of [Tanzania]”, so that in future times they “will be obeyed by all [Tanzanians] like the law of the English”.⁴ In Tanzania as elsewhere in eastern Africa, nation-building involved the creation of a sovereign, uniform culture. The leaders of independent African states sought to establish African-run churches, free from the control of European bishops and missionaries. In a 1961 speech delivered before an assembly of Protestant

churchmen, Oginga Odinga—soon to be Kenya’s Vice President—argued that that “The Christian Church in Kenya, and for that matter in Africa, should be truly our own. I regard the achievement of this as perhaps the greatest service the pastor can do for the African politician” (Welbourn and Ogot 1966, 68). For African polity-builders, an independent church was a critical component of national sovereignty. Like Julius Nyerere, like the founders of Rwenzururu, Odinga sought to ground political institutions in the *longue durée* of African history, to claim for contemporary hierarchies the legitimacy that history could impart.

But even as theologians document the ties that bind African Christians securely to their forefathers’ religion, even as nation-builders identify citizens with a national heritage, Africans themselves seem evermore open to new things. Christians comprise 57 percent of the total population of sub-Saharan Africa. According to a recent survey, roughly half of them believe that Jesus will return in their lifetime. The numbers are higher in eastern Africa: at least 60 percent of Christians in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda look forward to Christ’s imminent return (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2010, 13). Scholars and politicians are avidly establishing intellectual and religious structures that link Africans to their past, but many Africans look forward to a moment when time will suddenly shatter, when former things will pass away, when a new epoch will begin.

This essay is about the politically destabilizing promise of the millennium. Heritage is, after all, an inheritance, a set of behaviors and symbols passed, in a lineal fashion, from past to present. The architects of Rwenzururu recognized the organizing power of linear history. In the 1950s, dozens of Konzo people conducted field research on the political history of the Rwenzori Mountains, and in their research they found evidence of their distinctive language and history. By organizing culture as a heritage, Rwenzururu’s organizers were positioning themselves within linear time, as the latter-day heirs of their forefathers. As legatees of a people who had once been sovereign, they set out to build a state, using the techniques of modern governance—census, map, bureaucracy—to make their independent polity visible, credible, and worthy of support. Where would-be states like Rwenzururu sought to organize time as a forward march, radical visionaries like Timosewo Bawalana were following a difference cadence. Bawalana and his followers would not agree to pursue their forefathers’ antagonisms, or live as natives of their forefathers’ culture. By breaking with the past, Bawalana interrupted the heritage lessons that Rwenzururu’s founders were conducting. His millennialism lets us see that the definition of citizenship involved an argument over the passage of time.

Partisan History

In Uganda as in other parts of colonial Africa, British officials ruled African subjects indirectly, using African chiefs, kings and sultans as lower-level functionaries in governmental work (Mamdani 1996). The Toro kingdom was one of several neo-traditional polities that the British rulers of Uganda upheld (Steinhart 1977, Ingham 1975). The kingdom’s political elite were Toro pastoralists, whose cattle were pastured on the plains in the eastern part of the kingdom. But the kingdom’s population also included a large minority of Konzo peasants, who lived in the Rwenzori Mountains, on Uganda’s western border with the Congo. A 1961 census counted 183,000 Toro living in the kingdom. There were 103,000 Konzo, most on the slopes of the Rwenzori Mountains.⁵ The west was Toro’s economic heartland, rich with coffee. In the late 1950s 54 percent of the tax revenue collected by the Toro government came from Konzo farmers (Syahuka-Muhindo, 1991, p. 39). But government resources were distributed in favor of the Toro lowlanders. Most of the kingdom’s schools were built on the plains, where the classrooms were

full of Toro children. Mountaineers, by contrast, had little opportunity to educate their children: in 1940 there were only two schools in the mountainous homeland of the Konzo people.⁶ In politics, too, minorities were disadvantaged: all the kingdom's county chiefs were Toro (Government of Uganda 1962).

In culture as in education, politics and economics, Toro elites lorded it over the kingdom's minorities. Like any colonial power, Toro elites sought to contrast their cultural attainments with their subjects' barbarity. The Toro chief in Bwamba county gave his subordinate chiefs their marching orders in an essay on the "Qualities of leadership". "Have confidence in yourself; be brave; be prudent", he wrote. "In body and in action meet any peril without retraction... Work very much but speak little".⁷ Toro's elites practiced the habits of command. They scorned their subjects for their backwardness. In 1955, a group of Konzo petitioners complained that their Toro parish chief often called them "idiots", saying that "dogs are better than we".⁸ At a marketplace in the northern part of the mountains, people who wished to purchase goods from a leading Toro shopkeeper were made to kneel and plead for his attention.⁹ A Toro chief nearly caused a riot when, in 1962, he likened Konzo children to the "small rats" that were often used to feed kittens. In the same way, the chief said, Konzo babies would be used to nourish Toro children.¹⁰ Toro's cultural imperialism was brutally hierarchical. Uncultured minorities had to be made subject to Toro's guiding hand.

The insults they endured were not in themselves enough to mobilize Konzo people against Toro overlordship. It took intellectual and political work to create a radical state of mind among Toro's minorities. The "Bakonzo Life History Research Society" was founded in the early 1950s. The Society's moving spirit was Isaya Mukirane, a Konzo schoolteacher who lived in the Rwenzori's northern foothills. Their aim, said the Society's constitution, was to "instill patriotism among the Konzo people and have them unite together".¹¹ Swalehe Musenene asked the central research questions in an open letter to the Society's chairman.¹² He began by asking about Konzo language. "Why is it whenever you find a Konzo person he is always speaking a diluted Konzo language?", Musenene asked. "How should we rejuvenate the purity of this language?" With this question in view, Musenene set out a research programme for the Society to pursue.

How should we know the real names of the Konzo children from the 1st to the 12th born?
 What are the equivalent Konzo names for West, North or South?
 What is the Konzo name for Rwenzori Mountains?
 What is the Konzo name for River Semliki?

There was more than academic interest behind these rigorous questions. For Musenene, research into language led directly to research on demography. "Why is it that we are not aware of the total population of the Konzo people in Toro, Congo, the rest of Uganda, and the diaspora?", Musenene asked. He was inviting Society researchers to cast a wide net, to identify themselves with the Konzo-speaking people who lived in the Congo, across the international border. For Musenene as for Society researchers more generally, research into Konzo history and language was politically creative: it made them a recognizable people.

With questions like Musenene's in view, members of the Bakonzo Life History Research Society set out to do fieldwork. Researchers were given a cyclostyled form on which a series of ethnographic, linguistic and historical questions was printed. Each question had a space below it, where researchers wrote in the answers that interviewees provided. The questions were didactic

and instructional. Konzo patriots had little time for objectivity. The first question was “What was the origin of the Konzo people?”. “Who was the main chief of the Konzo people in ancient times?”, went another question.¹³ Researchers were identifying the Konzo as indigenes, possessing a social structure of their own. But the Society’s researchers did not stop there. They focused on the history of Toro government over the mountains, asking “How did the chiefs of the Toro come to dominate the subjects among the Konzo? Did the chiefs beat them up?”¹⁴ Other questions asked about the ownership of the mountain’s natural resources. “Who found the Kilembe mine, and who was the owner of it?”, one question went.¹⁵ Questioners were carefully building up a body of evidence that could prove their ownership of the mountain’s resources. Their research led to an inescapable conclusion. “Now that the Toro have suppressed the Konzo”, went the questionnaire’s final declaration, “they should go”.¹⁶

For the society’s researchers as for Konzo people more generally, historical research was thrillingly consequential. Their field research gave Konzo historians the moral authority to speak as representatives of an oppressed Konzo collectivity. Isaya Mukirane was elected president of the Bakonzo Life History Research Society, and soon thereafter he began to describe himself as president of the Konzo people.¹⁷ One of my interviewees objected to this conceit: “I told him that if you are going to be president of the Konzo people, it is they who will elect you”, he said. But Mukirane did not need an election to make himself a spokesman for the Konzo people. His authority was derived from the body of research material he was collecting. When in 1958 the anthropologist Axel Sommerfelt began to conduct research on Konzo ethnography, Mukirane wrote an angry letter telling him that “the Bakonzo Life History members are not accepting you to write our history as they have already begun writing it by themselves”.¹⁸ Mukirane was exerting authority over the Konzo past even as he claimed a political position in the contemporary world.

By 1960 the Society had collected enough material to publish a pamphlet.¹⁹ Sadly, the research findings were never written up. Mukirane is said to have taken the reports, the cyclostyled forms and other research materials into the mountains in 1962, where they were destroyed during the long guerilla war. Published or not, the Society’s research work vitally shaped Konzo people’s sense of their historical destiny. In February 1962 several members of the Society met with Uganda’s Minister of Local Government.²⁰ They used the occasion to present their research findings. The Toro king had secretly made a deal with British government, they complained, so that the whole of the Rwenzori mountains was annexed to the Toro kingdom without reference to the Konzo, “the real inhabitants of the country”. The historian Isaya Mukirane thought it to be an open-and-shut case. In 1962 he told a commission of inquiry that “I think any lowest judge in the world can see it clearly how unfairly it was—[Toro] who came from Bunyoro, grazing their cattle and made themselves over rulers in the country which was not theirs!”²¹

This was inspirational history, for in their research Konzo activists made a struggle for independence seem morally necessary. In the last months of 1961, Special Branch reported on a “subversive organization” that was working to free Bwamba county from the Toro kingdom’s government.²² The police thought it to be an “unsophisticated movement without a name”, though they did take note of its members’ favorite hymn, which went “When the time comes, we shall send off the Batoro”.²³ By 1962, the separatists had found themselves a name and a political community to fight for: Rwenzururu. The name first appears as the return address on a letter sent by Isaya Mukirane to the government committee that was reviewing the Toro kingdom’s constitution.²⁴ Mukirane argued that minority groups in Toro should enjoy equal rights, and that

Konzo people should, in principle, be allowed to stand for election as Prime Minister of the Toro kingdom. When Toro's leaders refused to accept this arrangement, Mukirane and eighteen other elected members of the Toro parliament marched out of the parliament building in protest. In August 1962 there were scattered attacks on Toro government chiefs. This violence was not random. Rwenzururu activists used violence to carve out a geographic and political space in which a distinct polity could be seen. In September 1962 two buildings containing the tombs of Toro's kings were burnt.²⁵ In November a party of men shouting "Rwenzururu" chased off builders constructing a bridge. The road was meant to link the highlands to the Toro kingdom's capital in Fort Portal.²⁶ By December 1962, Toro's government in the mountains had effectively collapsed, as chiefs sought refuge in the lowlands. Most of the schools in the highlands had likewise been closed, as Toro teachers had fled to safety.²⁷ In a circular, Rwenzururu's organizers proclaimed that "we must show the central government that the Toro government has failed to administer the country".²⁸ Government buildings vacated by Toro chiefs were occupied by Rwenzururu chiefs, and in every sub-county and parish committees were set up to hear litigation.

The architects of Rwenzururu were setting their people apart from Toro. On 15 August 1962, Isaya Mukirane and a group of colleagues wrote to Ugandan Prime Minister Milton Obote to announce their independence from the Toro kingdom.²⁹ They began by summarizing the findings that the Bakonzo Life History Research Society had generated. "From time immemorial", they wrote, "[Konzo people] were the true natives of what is now called Toro". With their research findings in front of them, Mukirane and his colleagues could prove that "we...are created different from [Toro people] in our build, appearance, traditions, languages, customs, marriage, native dances, circumcision, and mourning for our deceased relatives". Their culture and biological make-up made their political independence seem necessary. Mukirane and his colleagues described how, on 30 June 1962, Rwenzururu's founding fathers had celebrated their national independence: on a hilltop in the northern Rwenzori Mountains they had lit a bonfire, hoisted a flag, and sung an anthem. It is not clear that these ceremonies actually took place. But on paper, at least, Rwenzururu's founders were claiming an inspirational political history. The Belgian Congo had become the independent Republic of the Congo on 30 June 1960; and on 1 July 1962 the Belgian territories of Rwanda and Burundi had achieved their independence. Their independence day positioned Rwenzururu as one of a consecutive series of polities claiming independence from central Africa's colonial rulers. It also gave Rwenzururu's founders precedence over Uganda's leaders, since the British protectorate of Uganda was not to get its political independence until 9 October. Rwenzururu's independence day, wrote Isaya Mukirane, "had already been prepared for them by God and the authorities to be on 30th June 1962, before Uganda's independence".³⁰

Rwenzururu's leaders were claiming an important place in political history, but independence ceremonies would not make Rwenzururu independent from Uganda. Rwenzururu's founders had to do work to make their polity distinct, visible, and worthy therefore of attention. They had, that is, to manage their people's culture. Language was one arena in which Rwenzururu's founders sought to set themselves apart from their Toro overlords. They would not agree to speak the Toro *lingua franca*. In 1962 members of the Bakonzo Life History Society wrote to the Colonial Secretary, complaining that the Toro language was "different from [the Konzo language]...and we are forced to use it".³¹ In fact the Konzo language shared a great deal with the Toro language: an early traveler thought that two thirds of Konzo words were identical with the Toro language (Pasha 1898, pp. 221-222). But Konzo patriots had to be essentialists about their language. By August 1962, Konzo-speaking crowds were shouting

down speakers who addressed them in the Toro language.³² In 1963, a petitioner wrote to the chair of the Uganda Language Board asking for recognition of the “Lubwisi” language.³³ He had done extensive research, he wrote, and found “strange syllables which do not exist in the [Toro] orthography”. He asked for the Board’s help in the financing of Lubwisi language publications.³⁴ Rwenzururu partisans had as their national anthem a song that went “Our language! Our olden language, where has it gone now? It has turned into [Toro]” (Stacey 1965, p. 101). Rwenzururu’s partisans were identifying a national language, free from the corruptions of Toro.

In ecclesiastical life, too, Rwenzururu’s creators worked to create a distinct, recognizable polity. In April 1963, as Rwenzururu’s architects organized their government, the World Council of Churches convened the “All-Africa Church Conference” in Kampala, Uganda’s capital. Some 420 church leaders attended, among them the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, who assured the congregation that “we are exceedingly glad of the renewal of the existence of African nations, [and] of the development of their national independence and state sovereignty”.³⁵ The conference showed that an independent state, possessing an independent church, could earn recognition from international power-brokers. By early 1964 the ‘Rwenzururu Kingdom Church Ministry’ was ordering Anglican clergymen to pay over Easter collections to Rwenzururu coffers. In a Konzo-language letter, the Anglican bishop of the Toro kingdom was “stopped and warned from visiting and moving around churches in the Rwenzururu kingdom”.³⁶ Clergymen working in Rwenzururu were put under house arrest in their parishes, and ordered to absent themselves from the synodical meetings held in Toro’s capital. Rwenzururu’s leaders were actively organizing a national church, creating Konzo-speaking parishes worked by a native clergy. One editorialist compared Rwenzururu’s church builders to Martin Luther (Basingura, 1962). Rwenzururu’s long-serving Minister of Churches told me how he used to preach that “the church should not remain in Toro, it should go to Mount Rwenzururu, like the ark of the Bible”.³⁷ Just as the Israelites had once traveled with the ark in their midst, so too, he said, did Rwenzururu partisans bring the church with them as they left Toro. In this independent church there could be no divided loyalties. A 1965 circular letter proclaimed that “in Rwenzururu Kingdom there is no special place belonging to Protestants or Muslims or Catholics”.³⁸ Troublesome religious leaders were instructed to “go and fight in your mother countries: Germany, Mecca and Rome”. In its ecclesiastical life as in its politics, Rwenzururu was to be sovereign, free of outsiders’ control.

Rwenzururu’s separatist project was expressed spatially in the management of territory. The ethnographic and historical work that the Bakonzo Life History Research Society had conducted in the 1950s showed Konzo and Amba people to be autochthons, natives who had since distant times inhabited the Rwenzori Mountains. Rwenzururu’s architects sought to exercise sovereignty over the terrain they identified as a fatherland. From the earliest years of their war Rwenzururu’s founders told their supporters to leave their homes on the plains and to move uphill, into the Rwenzori Mountains.³⁹ Political sovereignty was organized topographically: in 1967 observers reported that the Toro kingdom controlled the lowlands, while Rwenzururu governed the mountains.⁴⁰ Many people found it hard to live on ethnically divided terrain. Government officials reported that in 1964 5,000 refugees were living in camps in the lowlands, having fled from their homes in the mountains.⁴¹ Rwenzururu’s founders could not afford to worry over this humanitarian problem. They needed to sort out a constituency and establish their claim to a territory. When in 1969 Uganda’s government planned to take a census, Rwenzururu’s Prime Minister wrote to the census organizers warning that “some of the Rwenzururu citizens are hidden in Uganda” and asking Uganda’s government to “chase all of

them back to their country”.⁴² As they worked to consolidate their citizenry, Rwenzururu’s architects also sought to limit their movements. In 1968 Rwenzururu’s Minister of Security instructed supporters to destroy buses and other motor vehicles owned by Toro people.⁴³ Rwenzururu partisans sought to orient their constituents’ loyalties by tying them securely to a particular, bounded homeland, and by limiting their ability to travel.

The organizational work of self-identification gave Rwenzururu’s organizers the grounds on which to appeal to the international community for attention and support. In November 1963 Isaya Mukirane sent a telegram to U Thant and the United Nations, asking for international protection against the “Batoro officials, rifles, Companies and Foreign Visitors who are disturbing the Kingdom of Rwenzururu”.⁴⁴ When the journalist Tom Stacey sought to deliver a letter from Milton Obote to Mukirane, Mukirane refused to accept it. Obote, he said, “has no right to discuss with me privately. The matter is put into the hands of the U.N. Organization” (Stacey 1965, p. 178). Stacey thought Mukirane was delusional. But a clear political strategy drove Mukirane’s internationalism. In February 1965, Mukirane’s supporters gathered on a mountaintop to organize Rwenzururu’s bureaucracy. The meeting appointed Ministers of Finance and Education, Immigration, Internal Affairs, and Health, and named permanent secretaries for each new ministry (Stacey 2003, pp. 297-98).⁴⁵ It also appointed chiefs for each of the counties that Rwenzururu claimed. This bureaucratic structure provincialized the Ugandan state. In 1967, the Rwenzururu Permanent Secretary for Natural Resources could write to the manager of Kilembe Mines, ordering him to stop “spoiling and digging our copper from the Rwenzururu Kingdom soil”.⁴⁶ In 1973, Rwenzururu’s leaders could write to Ugandan president Idi Amin, warning him that “you are restricted and strongly proscribed...from taking intervention into Rwenzururu kingdom government affairs”.⁴⁷ By transforming a portion of Uganda into a distinct, sovereign polity, Rwenzururu’s independent government put the agents of Milton Obote and Idi Amin at the margins.

Isaya Mukirane received no reply to the letters he addressed to the authorities in Kampala, New York and Addis Ababa. But that was not his purpose. There was a local audience for the letters he composed. Rwenzururu typists had supplies of carbon paper close at hand, and the letters that they addressed to the United Nations, Milton Obote and other power brokers were distributed in marketplaces throughout the Rwenzoris or read aloud in public assemblies. Their widely-circulated correspondence with the international community helped Rwenzururu’s diplomats make their low-level guerilla war look like a war of independence. For Rwenzururu separatists, the archive itself—the body of correspondence they posted to international power brokers—was evidence that established their polity’s sovereignty. When Rwenzururu’s Prime Minister wrote to the Secretaries General of the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations in 1967, he opened up the archive catalogue for their inspection.

Referring to the letters dated 18 February 1962, which was written to the Governor of Uganda, and the telegram no. 6, and that of 21st May 1962, which was addressed to the Prime Minister of Uganda government indicating that Rwenzururuians were going to hoist the Rwenzururu National Flag on the 30th June 1962: after hoisting the Rwenzururu Kingdom National Flag, the Rwenzururuians began to collect and pay poll tax to a Government and [to] develop the Government.⁴⁸

A skein of letters and telegrams—carefully indexed and enumerated by date—was proof of Rwenzururu’s independence. Rwenzururu’s organizers used their archive to shape their

constituents' loyalties. In 1969 the Uganda government appointed chiefs over the uphill parts of Bwamba county. The people refused to recognize them, arguing that "they have already an independent nation of their own in Africa without being included in the Uganda Republic". In every village Rwenzururu had appointed county chiefs, parish chiefs, policemen, and army officers.⁴⁹ Rwenzururu's organizers used the bureaucracy they created to make their state look as though it was already sovereign. By this sleight of hand they sought to transform their ragtag followers into principled patriots, fighting a war of national independence.

Rwenzururu activists aimed to make the mountains' cosmopolitan inhabitants into sons and daughters of the soil. In their historical research they identified the cultural and political characteristics that set their people apart from their Toro overlords; and in their archived correspondence they made themselves spokesmen for an oppressed people. As the legatees of an ancient, sovereign people, partisans could identify the injustices that the kings of Toro had done to them. And as legatees of their ancestors, Rwenzururu's architects could make their partisan guerilla conflict look like a just war, fought to right the wrongs of the past. The Rwenzururu movement was not actually a product of history. But its architects needed to organize history in a linear fashion in order to lay out a programme of action and to orient their constituents' loyalties. The past was the forum wherein Rwenzururu's partisans conjured up a constituency, established a political persona, and identified a project to pursue (Peterson and Macola 2009).

Bringing in a New Era?

But not everyone saw themselves as their forefathers' heirs. Even as Rwenzururu's organizers lined up the evidence, even as they organized their constituents, other activists were organizing time differently. In 1970 and 1971 the charismatic prophet Timosewo Bawalana came, for a brief time, to exercise power over the Rwenzururu kingdom. He argued that a new era of peace and comity was at hand, that the epoch prophesied in the Biblical book *Revelation* was, in fact, at the door. With a new millennium at hand Bawalana urged Rwenzururu's partisans to forget the wrongs of the past, to lay down their weapons, and to forge a common purpose with Toro people. His new epoch disrupted the linear history that Rwenzururu's organizers had so carefully crafted.

Timosewo Bawalana was the son of a founding member of the Bakonzo Life History Research Society, but his authority did not derive from his command over the past. His eye was fixed on the new era that he saw on the horizon. Bawalana enlisted in Rwenzururu in 1968, working as a clerk for the chief in Kisinga. He was horrified at the violence he witnessed. One man was speared in the back while fleeing from Rwenzururu tax collectors, and as he died, he lamented "I am dying for nothing". Bawalana told me that this and other violent episodes convinced him that he should "fight for peace, trying to spare lives".⁵⁰ By 1970 Bawalana had earned a reputation as a prophet who could foretell the future. He sent letters to Rwenzururu's leaders, warning them that "God is tired of the smell of blood on his handiwork", and on 3 October 1970 he was invited to preach at Rwenzururu's capital, in a remote part of the mountains called Buhikira. Isaya Mukirane had died in 1966, and his son and successor, Charles Wesley Kisembo, was a boy only 14 years old. Wearing white robes, Bawalana addressed Rwenzururu's assembled leadership, telling them to "spear me, and forget spearing the people. I have come here to sacrifice myself". He spent several hours praying for peace. It was a convincing sermon. Rwenzururu's leaders appointed a four-person commission of inquiry to investigate Bawalana's credentials, and after deliberating for only one day, the commission found that Bawalana's prophetic powers had been born out by the evidence.⁵¹

Over the course of the following days Bawalana established a hold over Rwenzururu's government. "He would look for some verses in the Bible", remembered one of his critics, and "he would inform people at the headquarters that he had been directed by God that he should tell them those verses".⁵² In a handwritten letter condemning his political opponents, for example, Bawalana began by quoting *Isaiah* Chapter 1 verse 10: "Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah!"⁵³ Bawalana was ventriloquizing God's voice, speaking to a people who—like the corrupted citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah—had incurred the righteous anger of God. His exegetical practice gave Bawalana's words an overpowering force. His contemporaries remember how, with Bible in hand, he would read out a passage and command that "Minister so-and-so should be transferred, and so-and-so should be promoted".⁵⁴ The Secretary of State, the army commander, and other high officials were summarily dismissed, and the Prime Minister was compulsorily retired. Bawalana took his place, forming a close alliance with the widow of Isaya Mukirane and building a house within the precincts of the palace.

On 15 October 1970, less than two weeks after his arrival at Rwenzururu's capital, Bawalana announced that Rwenzururu's soldiers had unilaterally laid down their weapons.⁵⁵ They were inspired by *Revelation* Chapter 19, verses 11 to 16. The passage describes a white-clad king, his eyes aflame, with the words "King of Kings, and Lord of Lords" written on his thigh. Arrayed behind him was a heavenly army, clothed in white linen. The vision taught Bawalana and his followers that 'we should tell our people to stop enmity and bloodshed which had been practiced for a long time'. But that was not the only lesson that Bawalana drew from *Revelation* Ch. 19. The Biblical text placed a king at the center of a peaceable army. And so, later in October 1970, Bawalana crowned Charles Mumbere, Isaya Mukirane's teenaged son, as Rwenzururu's king, prophesying that the "kingdom of Rwenzururu was going to last a long time".⁵⁶ He argued that the coronation marked a new era in Rwenzururu's history. "The war is over for the Bakonzo Baamba revolutionary movement against our enemy", Bawalana wrote in a cyclostyled letter.⁵⁷ "Look, Mumbere Charles Wesley has been crowned as your king. Atrocities like killing and burning of houses and envy are now over". He cited *Isaiah* Chapter 2, verses 4 to 6 as guidance: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more". Bawalana buried a great number of spears late in 1970 and early in 1971. He remembered that Rwenzururu soldiers delivered hundreds of them into his hands.⁵⁸ The king-maker Bawalana was aligning Charles Kisembo's reign with Biblical prophecies about the coming millennium. The era that the Old Testament prophets had once dreamt of, Bawalana argued, had at last arrived.

Rwenzururu's architects had composed history so as to make their partisan war appear to be a morally necessary struggle for freedom. Bawalana, by contrast, sought to make a clean break with the past. He created a new army regiment, clad in red caps, which he called *Mwiherere*. The scarlet headgear, he told me, was meant to remind soldiers that "the blood is on your heads. Do not shed more". The regiment's name made the point boldly. *Mwiherere*, Bawalana told me, referred to the Biblical book *Joel*, which is a contemplation on the changeable character of God's favor. "Let the weak say, I am strong", commands Joel the prophet (*Joel* Ch. 3:10). One of my informants offered a further definition, calling *mwiherere* "something that can happen instantly", as when a goat dies without a cause, or a child perishes without falling sick.⁵⁹ By their name Bawalana's soldiers were reminded about contingency, about the precariousness of human purposes. Rwenzururu partisans derived righteous energy from their study of the past,

and fought to right the wrongs that had been done to their fathers. Bawalana's soldiers, by contrast, were led to question their vocation.

Bawalana's correspondence made the same point. From 1962 onward Isaya Mukirane and his colleagues had fought on behalf of "Rwenzururu", a polity that was shaped by culture, language and history. Their correspondence, composed in the vernacular and carbon copied to partisans all over the mountains, helped constitute Rwenzururu as a political community. Bawalana's correspondence, by contrast, was meant to raise questions. In 1970 and 1971 Bawalana listed the "African Corner of Why?" as his return address, or sometimes *Coin de Quoi*, the "Corner of What". Bawalana told me that he hoped his readers would ask "Where are we, and what am I doing, and what should I do next?"⁶⁰ Bawalana wrote as a *provocateur*, inviting his readers to ask questions about their direction. His circular of 14 October 1970, for example, began with an invocation:

Swala Alahu—Lahuma inis Alfagira Omega ina Omnibus de l'Obusingha Rwenzururiene en Afrique.⁶¹

The sentence was a concoction of holy words. "Swala Alahu" gestures toward the Arabic-language invocation that opened Islamic prayer services; while "Alfagira" is perhaps "Alfajiri", the prayer with which Muslims open the day. From "Alfajiri" Bawalana skips to "Omega", and so calls to mind the Biblical book *Revelation*, where God, seated on his throne, calls himself "Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End". Then comes a Latin word, "Omnibus", recognizable from the Catholic mass. The invocation ends with "l'Obusingha Rwenzururiene en Afrique", a French translation of the phrase "The Kingdom of Rwenzururu in Africa". The phrase was a fission of holy words. It invited readers to skip between different sacred settings, different languages, and different holy books. Rwenzururu's patriots self-consciously wrote in the vernacular, addressing people that had inherited a language, and a project, from their forebears. Bawalana's readers, by contrast, were led to place themselves in a variety of settings, to read in a variety of languages. His multi-lingual concoctions took his constituents outside their vernacular homeland and into a cosmopolitan arena.

Bawalana was decoupling Rwenzururu from the engine of historical narrative. After a break in time, neither history nor culture could determine human action. In this new epoch physical aggression was revalued, transformed from a patriotic act to an offense against God and king. "It is good for anyone who committed a lot of atrocities during the war to make his confession", Bawalana told Rwenzururu's fighters in a circular letter. "It is good for such people to repent and make apology".⁶² On 30 October 1970 Bawalana convened a service of repentance at Bazira, just uphill from the Anglican church at Nsenyi. Letters of invitation were distributed widely, especially among Toro lowlanders, promising that Rwenzururu had "left a system of killing anyone". Some 5,000 people attended the service. The speakers affirmed that the Rwenzururu government had been "granted power over all the mount as well as the lowlands". But, in keeping with the vision from *Revelation*, they also stressed that killing people, burning houses, and theft had all been abolished.⁶³ Rwenzururu soldiers were ordered to stop using violence when collecting taxes, and prisoners slated for execution were pardoned and released from detention. Speakers exhorted their listeners to "cooperate with non-Rwenzururu on the land as they were brothers".⁶⁴ Bawalana drove the point home through his cyclostyled correspondence. "You should always be respecting God who delivered you to his life of truth and also saved us from the spears and pangas of our foes", he wrote in November. "It is declared

by God that whomever committed sin against his people should immediately repent in order to save his soul”.⁶⁵ In their confessions of wrongdoing, Bawalana’s constituents were recategorizing their former deeds, treating what were once patriotic deeds as sin. Their testimonial practice pushed Rwenzururu into a new era in history.

Timosewo Bawalana was not a starry-eyed idealist. He needed hard evidence to show that a new order was, indeed, at hand. He therefore corresponded with officials of Uganda’s government, encouraging them to follow the path of peace. In October 1970 Bawalana wrote to “Uganda Agents and Chiefs” to offer guidance about good government. “Did courageous leaders like Alexander the Great and Charles Magne succeed because of stealing goats and chickens?”, he wrote. “Of what use can one benefit from claiming to be a tyrant and yet he has no dignity among the people?”⁶⁶ He urged Uganda’s officials to desist from drunkenness, and to make a proper assessment of taxpayers’ possessions before collecting taxes. Even as Bawalana sought to reform the machinery of local government, he also conducted clandestine negotiations with the District Commissioner, insisting that the Uganda government’s soldiers and police should match Rwenzururu’s self-sacrificing commitment to peace. Uganda officials responded to his overtures: the District Commissioner ordered that “this period of non-violence” should be used to open a dialogue with Rwenzururu’s leaders.⁶⁷ When in January 1971 Toro’s chiefs arrested a few Rwenzururu partisans, Bawalana sent off a stern letter—written in English—to the Uganda government. “Since I started preaching, no human blood has ever been shed”, he noted.⁶⁸ In his diplomatic negotiations Bawalana was working to keep violence at bay, and creating a body of evidence to show that a new epoch had arrived.

Not everyone welcomed the new era that Timosewo Bawalana was bringing in. Many partisans complained about his arbitrary dictates, about his self-promoting assumption of political power. Others suspected him of colluding with Uganda’s government. In September 1971 Paulo Rwibende, Rwenzururu’s “Operations Commander”, mustered a force of 75 soldiers, secured the armory, and attacked the house in which Bawalana was living.⁶⁹ Bawalana’s supporters, armed only with spears, were unable to defend him, and Bawalana ran away in fear. His critics gleefully remember how he “was chased away even without clothes”.⁷⁰ By February 1972 Bawalana was in the custody of the Uganda police.⁷¹ Within a few months, Rwenzururu’s partisans were busily re-building their archive and recapturing their historically determined sense of direction. In June 1972 Prime Minister Yolamu Mulima, installed after Bawalana’s ouster, reminded Rwenzururu partisans that “foreign intruders, namely the [Toro], the British, and the Congo Republic, even though they seized power of our land, they met strong resistance from our great grandfathers”. Their forefathers’ sacrifices set out an agenda for Rwenzururu partisans to pursue. “We have not been fighting for small parts or counties”, Mulima wrote, but “to return the full powers of our Kingdom to ourselves”.⁷²

Men like Paulo Rwibende and Yolamu Mulima could not afford to acknowledge Timosewo Bawalana’s radically new epoch. Their political project was grounded in linear history, not in eschatology. In their historical research, members of the Bakonzo Life History Research Society had identified their people as indigenes, and illuminated the crimes that Toro interlopers had committed in their grandfathers’ time. Rwenzururu’s partisans fought to right the wrongs of the past. Their linear view of time made partisans see themselves as co-sharers of a distinct culture, inherited from their distant ancestors. And at the same time, their linear view of history gave partisans a common purpose, as latter-day legatees of a people against whom injustices had once been done. It was history that conjured up Rwenzururu’s constituency, and gave it a shared purpose. Their nativism set Rwenzururu’s patriots against Timosewo Bawalana,

whose epoch-making prophesy sapped Rwenzururu of its purpose and direction. Where Rwenzururu's partisans knew themselves to be the product of history, Bawalana was making a break with the past. It was as patriots that Paulo Rwibende and others took up their weapons and drove Bawalana from their kingdom. They had no time for a new epoch.

Conclusion

Western Uganda is an apposite location from which to rework our understandings of citizenship, for the dynamics that this paper describes shaped the post-colonial world more generally. European states exported caricatures of their culture to their African and Asian colonies. Thinking themselves a superior race, white settlers and officials scrubbed out evidence of delinquency and presented a good face to the colonized majority. "Poor whites" were the enemy within, to be rehabilitated by the Salvation Army or repatriated as Distressed British Subjects (Lonsdale 2010). The most incorrigible for them were confined to insane asylums (Jackson 2010). In Rhodesia, Kenya, and Java government policed sexual behavior, ensuring that cross-racial liaisons became neither public nor permanent (Stoler 2002, McCulloch 2000, Anderson 2010). This carefully-contrived image of integrity was projected backward in time through the history lessons that Africans and other colonial subjects learned. The colonial library was full of inspirational biographies. At the Presbyterian mission in central Kenya, for example, African students could read, in English, about James Hannington and Mary Slessor; in Swahili they could read about David Livingstone, Richard Burton and Booker T. Washington.⁷³ By this curriculum European rulers sought to impress their African and Asian subjects with their fitness to rule. Their morality and social discipline was the first qualification for colonial government.

Nationalists sought to surpass their rulers, to project an image of integrity that exceeded theirs. Rwenzururu's efforts to clarify Konzo people's heritage was part of a larger pattern of cultural editing, a work of reform through which nationalists sought to create a credible foundation for self-government. One of this work of cultural reform religion very often became heritage, the footing for moral order. In colonial India, one of the earliest appearances of the word "Hinduism" in the English language came in 1817, when the Bengali intellectual and sometime Bible translator Rammohan Roy published a tract arguing that the Upanisads manifested a pure monotheism. The "doctrines of the unity of God are real Hinduism", he wrote (quoted in Lorenzen 1999, pp. 631-32). Roy was drawing Indians together not as practitioners of idiosyncratic rituals, nor still as cloistered Brahmins, but as one people under God (van der Veer 1999, Bayly 2007). One reformer, writing in Lucknow in 1905, condemned Hindus who worshipped at the tombs of Muslim saints and mocked women who believed in soothsayers (Joshi 2001). In the same breath, he instructed wives to "be of service to her husband with her body, soul and choice" (pp. 63-64). Another reformer condemned wandering *sadhuis*, miracle-working mystics, as "suckers and parasites on the tree of nationality" (115). By editing out heterodoxy and by upholding husbands' authority over their wives, reformers were constituting a uniform culture, an immanent frame in which Indians could together live (Chatterjee 1993).

But there were other frames in which colonized people could position themselves. The 1956 conversion of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, author of India's constitution and leader of India's *dalits*, is perhaps history's most consequential act of time-breaking. For Ambedkar, the religious order that Hindu nationalists valorized was a "chamber of horrors". "The iron law of caste", he wrote in a 1945 indictment, "the heartless law of Karma and the senseless law of status by birth are to untouchables veritable instruments of torture which Hindum has forged" (Narain 1994, p.

85). He famously told leaders of India's depressed classes to consider their religious identity as a matter of choice, not a fact of destiny.

If you want to gain self-respect, change your religion. If you want to create a cooperating society, change your religion. If you want power, change your religion. If you want equality, change your religion. If you want independence, change your religion (Keer 1971, p. 255).

On 14 October 1956, Ambedkar—joined by 380,000 of his followers—publicly converted to Buddhism (Queen 1994). Indian nation-builders from Rammohan Roy to Mahatma Gandhi codified Hindu rituals and beliefs, sorted orthodoxy from deviance, and marshaled up an Indian community defined by its obedience to a unitary God. Gandhi scorned the convert Ambedkar. “Religion is not like a house or a cloak, which can be changed at will”, he wrote. “It is a more integral part of one's self than one's own body” (Viswanathan 1998, p. 231). But Ambedkar and other converts would not be subjected to Gandhi's culture-building project. He and his followers were experimenting with novel religious postures. Their conversion undermined the cultural work in which Hindu nation-builders were engaged.

Timosewo Bawalana knew nothing of Bhimrao Ambedkar. But like him, Bawalana regarded the past as a source of degradation, not a foundation for morality. Like Ambedkar, Bawalana unsettled heritage by making a break with the past. Patriots in Rwenzururu and India thought themselves to be the lineal heirs to ancient cultures, and invited citizens to comport themselves in accordance with their fathers' will. Time-breakers like Bawalana and Ambedkar would not take on their fathers' projects. They invited people to act according to a new logic, to behave as radicals, not as patriots. Their activism helps us glimpse a time when the immanent frame breaks apart, when the curriculum of heritage is torn asunder and new forms of agency become possible.

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- ⁵¹Interview: Yoweri Nziabake, Kasese town, 17 June 2010.
- ⁵²Interview: Paulo Rweibende, Hima, Kasese, 11 September 2007.
- ⁵³KDA Box 21, “Bakonjo/Baamba Secession Movement” file: Bawalana to “comrade”, Katwe church, 18 November 1970.
- ⁵⁴Interview: Yereimiya Byasalya, Katatinda, Kyabarungira, Busongora, 7 September 2007.
- ⁵⁵KDA Box 20, “Bakonjo/Baamba Secession Movement: Rwenzururu” file: Bawalana to D.C. Fort Portal, 15 October 1970.
- ⁵⁶Interview: Christine Mukirane, Kasese town, 12 September 2007.
- ⁵⁷KDA Box 21, “Bakonzo/Baamba Secession Movement” file: T. Bawalana, cyclostyled memorandum addressed to Katwe church, 14 October 1970.
- ⁵⁸Interview: Timosewo Bawalana, Fort Portal, 28 May 2010.
- ⁵⁹Interview: Yoweri Nziabake, Kasese town, 17 June 2010.
- ⁶⁰Interview: Timosewo Bawalana, Fort Portal, 28 May 2010.
- ⁶¹KDA Box 21, “Bakonzo/Baamba Secession Movement” file: T. Bawalana, cyclostyled memorandum addressed to Katwe church, 14 October 1970.
- ⁶²KDA Box 21, “Bakonzo/Baamba Secession Movement” file: T. Bawalana, cyclostyled memorandum to Katwe church, 14 October 1970.
- ⁶³KDA Box 21, “Bakonzo/Baamba Secession Movement” file: Yustasi Mukirane to Secretary General, 6 November 1970.
- ⁶⁴KDA box 102, “Toro Intelligence Reports” file: Toro Intelligence and Security meeting, 11 November 1970.
- ⁶⁵KDA Box 21, “Bakonzo/Baamba Secession Movement” file: Bawalana to “comrade”, Katwe church, 18 November 1970.
- ⁶⁶KDA Box 21, “Bakonzo/Baamba Secession Movement” file: Bawalana, cyclostyled letter, 14 October 1970.
- ⁶⁷KDA Box 263, “Touring reports, Bukonjo” file: Touring Report, Bukonjo, 25 January 1971.
- ⁶⁸KDA Box 23, “Bakonzo/Baamba Secession Movement: Rwenzururu” file: Timosewo Bawalana to D.C. Fort Portal, 12 January 1971.
- ⁶⁹Interview: Paulo Rwibende, Hima, Kasese, 11 September 2007; KDA Box 102, “Toro intelligence reports” file: Toro District Intelligence Committee minutes, 9 November 1971.
- ⁷⁰Interview: Josephat Kule, Bwera town, 13 September 2007.
- ⁷¹KDA Box 20, “Bakonzo/Baamba Secession Movement” file: Regional Police Headquarters, minutes, 8 February 1972.
- ⁷²KDA Box 20, “Bakonzo/Baamba Secession Movement” file: Yolamu Mulima to “All Rwenzururuans”, 9 June 1972.
- ⁷³Tumutumu Church Archives, Karatina, Nyeri, Kenya, “Presbytery ya Tumutumu: Maciira maria mangi” file: “Mbuku maria e library ya kanitha Tumutumu”, November 1941.