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Challenging Colonialism through Religion: Connections Between Colonialism, Power, and Religion in Colonial Uganda

By Ruth Aardsma Benton

Abstract: In the late nineteenth century, Christian beliefs and European ideas spread among the people of present-day Uganda through increasing British involvement in this region and the work of Christian missionaries. However, some Ugandan people also used these ideas to challenge and critique European society and the colonial system itself. This paper explores two ways that this happened. In the case of the Malakites and Bayudaya, a stricter interpretation of the Bible and Christian beliefs led them to see European Christians as hypocritical and to question parts of the colonial system such as European medical care. As demonstrated by Ignatius K. Musazi and Reverend Reuben Spartas Mukasa, both of whom had connections to the group Abazzukulu ba Kinta, or the Descendants of Kintu, another way blended elements of Christianity with other ideas and worked within the existing systems to challenge colonialism. Both approached used Christian concepts to question British colonialism.

British involvement in the area now known as Uganda began in the second half of the 19th century. Although there were economic reasons for British involvement in the region, the British claimed that their involvement in East Africa was for humanitarian purposes, including ending the slave trade in that region.¹ Christian missionaries from different denominations began their work in Uganda starting in the late 1870s, and their missionary compounds became centers for social resources such as medical care and education.² As Christian beliefs and knowledge of the Bible, as well as other European ideas, began to permeate Ugandan society, these beliefs were used by some Ugandans to critique European society and the existing political systems. As Jason Bruner put it, “throughout the colonial era, African Christians and non-Christians alike negotiated and debated Western notions of progress while they selectively adopted and adapted modern European technologies, practices, and modes of healing in their pursuit of health and well-being.”³ From the literature consulted for this essay, two approaches to the use of Christian religious beliefs to challenge the colonial system can be observed. Some groups, such as the Malakites and Bayudaya, adopted a stricter interpretation of scripture which led these groups to reject aspects of European culture. In the case of the Malakites, there was even a sense of superiority to European Christians who were seen as not following the faith that they were teaching in Uganda. In essence, the closer adherence to certain elements of the Christian message brought by missionaries was also a rejection of parts of the colonial system and its established religion. A second approach that was used originated from a blending of global history and influences with biblical exegesis. Two examples of this approach can be seen by examining the philosophies of Ignatius K. Musazi and Reverend Reuben Spartas Mukasa and the groups associated with them. Compared to the Malakites and Bayudaya, this approach took elements of Christianity and blended it with other ideas to challenge the existing system from within.⁴ After briefly outlining colonial and missionary history in modern-day Uganda, both of these approaches to Christian missionary work and colonialism will be analyzed.

When Richard Burton and John Hanning Speke were exploring the region now known as Tanzania, they learned about kingdoms that were to the north of Lake Victoria, including the kingdom of Buganda.⁵ The explorers learned about

¹ Jonas Fossli Gjersø, 833. Gjersø, Jonas Fossli. “The Scramble for East Africa: British Motives Reconsidered, 1884-95,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 43, no. 5 (2015): 833.

² Richard J. Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 21-25, 244-248.

³ Jason Bruner, “‘What is a European hospital but a pagan shrine?’ Missionaries, Progress, and the Problem of Materiality in Colonial Uganda. *Material Religion* 14, vol. 3 (2018): 317.

⁴ To put this another way, Musazi and Spartas take more of a “Christianity and” approach compared to the rejection of elements that led to the creation of the Malakite sect and the founding of the Bayudaya community.

⁵ In the Bantu language, prefixes are used to indicate if the root word is singular personal, plural personal, or a neuter adjective. Words that begin with “Mu-” indicate the term is singular plural, “Ba-” or “A-” indicate the term is plural personal, and a neuter adjective begins with the “Ki-” prefix. This is important to keep in mind while reading scholarship on this region as this convention is followed by some scholars. See Frederick Burkewood Welbourn, *East African Rebels: A Study of Some Independent Churches* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1961), x.

the history and people in the southern part of Uganda and brought these stories back to Britain, but they did not explore the region.⁶ It was not explored until Speke returned in 1862 on a trip that proved that Lake Victoria was the source of the Nile.⁷ Speke was the first European to spend time among the Buganda people and one of their neighbors, the Bunyoro, and his accounts from his expedition laid the foundation of European understanding of this region.⁸ During the 1880s, British involvement in East Africa increased because they saw this region as being more relevant to their foreign policy than West Africa.⁹ In addition to its strategic location for protecting British interests in the Indian subcontinent, it was believed that there were extensive economic opportunities in Uganda once they ended the region's slave trade.¹⁰ Germany also had interests in East Africa, and in 1886, the Anglo-German Boundary solidified national spheres of influence.¹¹ Modern-day Uganda became a protectorate of the British empire in August of 1894.¹²

British involvement in the protectorate was uneven and tended to favor the kingdom of Buganda. When Speke reported about the kingdom of Buganda, he claimed it was more advanced than others in the area, which he attributed to “the arrival from the north of lighter-skinned, and therefore more intelligent and culturally advanced, invaders in the distant past.”¹³ Historian Richard J. Reid argues that the European's continued belief that Buganda was a “comparatively advanced civilised state, *vis-à-vis* the surrounding states and societies” explains why the kingdom of Buganda was the focus of European interest “at the expense of others in the area.”¹⁴ Although racist beliefs shaped how the British saw all Africans in the region, they believed Buganda was somewhat unique in that it was more receptive and willing to develop than the surrounding people.¹⁵ Changing geopolitics among the kingdoms of Buganda and the neighboring kingdom of Bunyoro also played a role in shaping British involvement in the region.¹⁶

⁶ Reid, 18-19.

⁷ Reid, 19.

⁸ Reid, 19.

⁹ Gjersø, 834.

¹⁰ Gjersø, 834-835.

¹¹ Gjersø, 837.

¹² Gjersø, 850.

¹³ Reid, 19.

¹⁴ Reid, 19.

¹⁵ Reid, 21.

¹⁶ In his discussion of Uganda's precolonial and early colonial history, Reid examines the intertwined history of Buganda and other groups in the area, in particular the Bunyoro. While it is not the focus of this essay, some familiarity with the history of this region helps to shed light onto British colonial efforts in Uganda and illustrates that the fact that the colonial system was not built on a blank slate. In 1869, the ruler of Bunyoro died, and young son, Kabalega, fought to inherit the throne. During this struggle, which helped to craft Kabalega's image among the British as a skilled warrior, Kabalega sought assistance from the Buganda king to defeat his competitors. Reid, 141. After Kabalega secured the throne, Bunyoro entered a more prosperous period. Building off of the military policies of his father, Kabalega was able to expand Bunyoro territory and “take full advantage of the rapidly expanding commerce in slaves and ivory which was driving the region's economic transformation.” Reid, 142-143; quote from 143. Although Bunyoro benefitted from these economic ties to the north, it also placed them into conflict with other groups, including some with ties to the Sudanese. Through a series of events that included a rejection of the offer to become an Egyptian protectorate, Bunyoro emerged as a military power in the region. This also

According to Reid, the “new class of younger chiefs [in Buganda that] was emerging by the 1880s” continued to be “politically ambitious but less interested” achieving in these goals through “military prowess.”¹⁷ Instead, they used “the opportunities offered by new religions, clothing and...guns.”¹⁸ During this period, while Buganda faced some internal turmoil, the kingdom of Bunyoro grew in military strength which led the British to see them as “savage obstacles to progress” compared “to the semi-enlightened and cooperative” people of Buganda.¹⁹ The increased military presence of Bunyoro also meant that the less favorable northern route to this region was not accessible to Europeans, which meant reliance on the southern route which was dominated by Buganda.²⁰ Thus, Buganda functioned as a sort of “gatekeeper” to the region.²¹ Thus, the British were more closely aligned with the Buganda than with other kingdoms or groups in the region that later formed the protectorate.²² Bruner also identifies the willingness of different groups to accept Christianity, along with other missionary practices, as another way that the British imposed a “racialized hierarchy” on the people of Uganda.²³ All of this forms the backdrop for understanding missionary work in Uganda.

Christian missionary work in modern-day Uganda began in the late 1870s, prior to the establishment of the region as a British protectorate. When Henry Morton Stanley visited Buganda, he claimed he was able to convert the king of Buganda to Christianity in 1875.²⁴ According to Stanley, the king appealed to Europeans to come teach the people of Buganda.²⁵ British Anglicans, who were connected to the Christian Missionary Society (CMS), were the first group of

meant that the northern route, albeit the less favorable option, into the region was blocked off to Europeans. Reid, 143-145. In contrast, Buganda had entered a period of decline after it helped to secure the throne for Kabalega. Although Buganda had also been implementing military reforms, the benefits were not very apparent until the 1890s. Thus, while Bunyoro grew in military might, Buganda’s was declining. Reid, 145. During this time, some of the other regional states were able to preserve some autonomy during this time. Reid, 149. Additionally, Buganda was facing internal political struggles and social changes, including the emergence of elite women in politics and changing attitudes among the younger tribal chiefs. Reid, 147-149. As Reid notes, there is an element in irony that after helping Kabalega gain control of Bunyoro, the fortunes of Buganda declined. Reid, 141. Yet, it is this same change in power dynamics that led to Buganda’s dominance during the colonial period. Reid, 141-150.

¹⁷ Reid, 148.

¹⁸ Reid, 148.

¹⁹ Reid, 143.

²⁰ Reid, 144-145.

²¹ Reid, 23.

²² The favoritism that can be seen throughout the colonial period is an important factor in the legacy of violence and unrest in this region. This issue was raised repeatedly in the scholarship read for this essay.

²³ Bruner, 324.

²⁴ Prior to the introduction of Christianity to the region, there had been a Muslim presence. According to Reid, after Stanley’s visit, the king “experimented” with Christianity, which ultimately upset the more devout Muslims in his kingdom. After some protests by Muslims that challenged the king’s authority, the king “was furious, and he rounded up some seventy Muslim converts and had them burnt to death at Namugongo.” Reid, 175. Reid goes on to note that this massacre has been “overshadowed by the story of the Christian martyrs a decade later.” Reid, 175.

²⁵ Reid, 21-22.

missionaries to this region.²⁶ Approximately two years later, in 1879, a group of French Catholic missionaries, who had been based in Algiers, also began ministry in this region.²⁷ According to Reid, “the souls that each would win in the decade that followed were, in political terms, critical to the balance of colonial interests and the very nature of the territory itself.”²⁸ During this period, both Christian groups grew quickly.²⁹ However, the French Catholics, who were also known as the White Fathers, became more powerful in the region, in spite of their fewer numbers, due to the White Fathers’ ability to attract the chief’s children to their missionary compounds.³⁰ The Anglican missionaries were able to exert more influence when the White Fathers left Buganda for three years, beginning in 1882, due to tensions in the region.³¹ The fact that the CMS missionaries remained in Uganda was viewed as showing greater dedication to the people, and the missionaries also attracted converts through their reading and carpentry programs.³² The king of Buganda felt threatened by the missionaries, their work, and the Christian converts, and “in 1866 he had several dozen burnt to death...at Namugongo.”³³ Because of the internal unrest that had been developing, as well as the divisions caused by the introduction of outside religions, there was a period of war in the early 1890s in which religion played a role.³⁴ Additionally, the Imperial British East African Company, which was unprofitable at this time, discussed pulling out of Uganda. The idea of the company leaving Uganda concerned CMS, as it feared this would result in another massacre of Christian converts. Thus, CMS appealed to its donors to help raise the necessary funds to keep the company in Uganda.³⁵ Jonas Gjersø, in his article, “The Scramble for East Africa: British Motives Reconsidered, 1884-95,” discusses the role CMS played in helping to keep the British presence in Uganda, which ultimately led to the establishment of the British protectorate.³⁶ Although Gjersø does not address any motive that CMS may have had beyond concern for mission work and efforts to end slavery in East Africa, the role that CMS played does illustrate the complex connections between mission work and British colonization in Uganda. Not only was there a link between colonialism and religion from the British perspective, but some Ugandans used the theology and religious works brought to the region by missionaries to critique the colonial social and political order.

²⁶ Reid, 22, 175.

²⁷ Reid, 22.

²⁸ Reid, 22.

²⁹ Reid, 175.

³⁰ Reid, 175-176.

³¹ Reid, 176.

³² Reid, 176.

³³ Reid, 176. According to Reid, there may have been another component to this massacre. It seems that some of it may have come from some of these converts resisting the king’s sexual advances. Reid, 155 and 176. Gjersø refers to a massacre at Khartoum that took place in 1885, and this incident made CMS missionaries and their converts concerned about the possibility of the Imperial British East African Company pulling out of Uganda in the early 1890s. Gjersø, 843.

³⁴ Reid, 157-158. In some literature, it appears that this is also referred to as a period of religious wars. See Arye Oded, “The Bayudaya of Uganda,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 6, no. 3 (1974): 170.

³⁵ Gjersø, 843-845. As Gjersø notes, the company threatened to leave only six months after CMS had helped to fund its work in Uganda.

³⁶ Gjersø, 843-845.

One way that the Christian influence and scripture that the missionaries brought to Uganda could be used to challenge the colonial system can be seen by examining the groups known as the Malakites and the Bayudaya.³⁷ Both movements can be connected to Joswa Kate Mugema, who began to study with missionaries around 1878. Mugema, a friend of the king of Buganda, became an Anglican chief and was dedicated to his religious studies and desired to help spread the Gospel.³⁸ According to Welbourn, Mugema became quite fascinated with the story of God saving Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from death in the fiery furnace after they refused to worship an golden idol erected by Nebuchadnezzar.³⁹ From this story, and from other biblical passages, Mugema came to believe that one needed to trust God alone for healing.⁴⁰ An early example of this belief can be seen from an encounter Mugema had with CMS missionaries when they visited him in 1891. In spite of being known as a powerful chief who owned a lot of property, one of the missionaries who wrote about this visit describes Mugema as an “old man quite crippled” with an “ulcer very foul being just covered with a piece of banana leaf.”⁴¹ The missionaries reported that Mugema refused their offer to treat his leg, and there is not any evidence that Mugema received medical care from this date until his death in 1942.⁴² This rejection of European medicine is one of the defining characteristics of the Malakites, but it seems that the sect itself may not have been formed until later. Both Welbourn and Bruner date the origins of the Malakites to the 1910s. Citing letters written in both 1912 and 1914, Welbourn argues that the sect emerged at some point between these two letters.⁴³ Bruner states that the sect’s denouncement of medicine began in the early 1910s, that membership hit a peak of approximately 90,000 baptized members during the 1920s, and that by the 1970s, the sect was spoken of as if it had disappeared.⁴⁴

The Malakites can be viewed as being anticolonial through their interpretation of the Bible, their rejection of European medical care, and their

³⁷ There are a few different names, and translations of these names, that I have come across in my research. Welbourn refers to their name as *Ekibina kya Katonda Omu Ayinza Byona*, abbreviated as KOAB, and he translates this to mean “Society of the One Almighty God.” In Oded’s article, the group’s name is shorted to just *Katonda Omu Ayinza Byona*, which is translated as “God is Omnipotent.” A later scholar, Bruner, refers to them as *Aba Katonda Omuinza Webintu Byona* which he translates as “those of the God who can do all things.” It is generally clear from the literature that they are referring to the same group as the authors tend to also use the name “Malakites.” (They were called Malakites after an influential leader, Malaki Musajjakawa. The one exception to the term “Malakite” that I encountered was the term “Bamalaki,” which in light of Welbourn’s note about Bantu word construction and the description provided, is likely the same group. Because the most often term appears to be “Malakites,” I have elected to use this term.

³⁸ Welbourn, 32.

³⁹ See Daniel 3. On page 31, Welbourn states that Mugema was “close friends with one of the martyrs.” It may be that his interest in a story of God preserving men who were sentenced to burn to death for their faith may have resonated with him because of his own connections to martyrs. Welbourn, 31.

⁴⁰ Welbourn, 31-32.

⁴¹ Welbourn, 31. The quote here is a passage that Welbourn quotes from Baskerville’s *History*.

⁴² Welbourn, 31.

⁴³ Welbourn, 33-34.

⁴⁴ Bruner, 318 and 321.

contention that European Christianity had not advanced as far as they had.⁴⁵ In general, it seems that the Malakites took a more literal or strict interpretation of some Biblical passages to defend their stance on both baptism and medicine.⁴⁶ In the case of baptism, they argued that it was not necessary to go through the long process that Anglicans and Catholics required before being baptized. Malakites contended that only “a simple profession of faith” was needed prior to baptism.⁴⁷ From passages such as Mark 16:16 and Matthew 28:19, Malakites claimed that the Bible did not require a lengthy educational process. As Bruner notes, not only did this claim about baptism make sense to “literate adherents who formed the earliest converts,” but it may have “appealed to those who had been left out of European missionaries’ educational structures.”⁴⁸ Medical treatment was another area of contention between the Malakites and Europeans. From the perspective of the Malakites, the Bible banned all forms of medical treatment, regardless if they were of European or African in origin.⁴⁹ For them, “the matter was simple: missionaries flouted the clear commandments of the God they preached” because they “condemned African methods of healing while they themselves practiced witchcraft and distributed ‘amulets’ (nsiriba) and ‘fetishes’ (or jjembe, which worked kulogo, which missionaries translated as ‘magic’) in the form of Western biomedicines, implying that God was not, in fact, almighty to heal as he chose.”⁵⁰ In essence, the use of medicine by missionaries was seen as being just as pagan as African healing practices. According to historian Michael Twaddle, it should be recognized that the Malakites were not merely being resistant to European thought. Rather, he notes that the movement included educated Ugandans, some of whom worked for the protectorate, and who based their argument on their interpretation of the Bible.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Bruner, 335. However, this idea can be seen throughout the article by Bruner.

⁴⁶ Scholarship indicates that the Malakites also insisted on observing the Sabbath rather than Sunday, which was problematic for British authorities. For an example, see Oded, 173.

⁴⁷ Bruner, 318. Welbourn also discusses the simple requirements that were necessary before baptism. On page 37-38, Welbourn indicates that the stance on baptism may have been adopted by Malaki and his followers but was not originally part of Mugema’s beliefs. Welbourn’s discussion of the Malakites seems a bit contradictory at times. For example, on page 38, while discussing the issue of baptism, Welbourn moves on to a discussion of other differences between Malaki and Mugema, particularly over medical treatment, that were reported by some officials. Welbourn appears to take the stance that any theological differences that may have existed in the beginning were later smoothed over and that these may have been rumors spread to try to split the group apart. Yet, towards the end of his chapter on the Malakites, on page 50, he writes:

It must be recognized that, for the great majority of [Buganda]—as perhaps of the ‘Christian’ nations of Europe—to be a Christian was much less a matter of conviction than of social propriety. ... The readiness with which baptism was obtainable, also, provided all the usual advantages with no period of preparation and with a welcome tolerance of polygamy, alcohol, and perhaps witchcraft; and there is sufficient evidence that many who were thus baptized made no further pretense of refraining from medicine. But some did.

When he makes this last claim, however, he does not site any sources or figures. See Welbourn, 37-38, 50.

⁴⁸ Bruner, 320.

⁴⁹ Bruner, 319.

⁵⁰ Bruner, 319.

⁵¹ Bruner 319. In this passage, Bruner is stating Twaddle’s claims but not quoting them. On page 318, Bruner claims that the Malakites also “opposed the way that land had been distributed in the

The rejection of European medicine may not seem like a policy that challenges the colonial system at first. Yet, when one looks at some of the implications of this stance, it becomes more obvious that even the rejection of medicine can be seen as anti-colonial. By refusing European medical treatment for themselves and veterinary care for their livestock, the Malakites could be seen a threat to social order. For example, during an outbreak of smallpox in 1915, their refusal to be vaccinated caused problems for the British. There was concern that by refusing the vaccine, public health, not to mention the health of British troops, was endangered.⁵² At the time, the Principle Medical Officer recommended that the government consider instituting martial law. Similarly, the governor, while acknowledging that people should be allowed to hold their own religious beliefs, argued that, in this case, acting on this belief was breaking a law that was designed for the public good and that those who resisted should be punished accordingly.⁵³ Although “the Government as a whole persisted in regarding the movement as harmless,” both Welbourn and Bruner mention other times that Malakites refused to cooperate with health policies. There was resistance to the treatment for syphilis, in part because the medicine was referred to as “606,” which was too close “666,” the sign of the beast in Revelation.⁵⁴ Bruner states that this refusal of treatment was “appalling” to missionaries and officials because they mistakenly believed that there was “a 50% or greater incidence rate of venereal syphilis.”⁵⁵ Sleeping sickness was also a concern in the region, and there was resistance to quarantine measures the British attempted to implement.⁵⁶ With respect to veterinary medicine, Welbourn describes a series of outbreaks of rinderpest among cattle owned by members of the sect between 1918 through 1923, and Malakites opposed various anti-plague measures instituted by the British.⁵⁷ Violence also broke out in 1929 when a group of 20 to 30 Malakites were asked to follow some anti-plague measures. According to Welbourn, “the crowd became hostile and, on the unexpected arrival of a European Sanitary Inspector, a riot occurred in which the latter lost his left hand, five [Malakites] were killed and the villagers [who supported the chief that initially confronted the Malakites] burnt down the [Malakite] church.”⁵⁸ Although the Malakites were not the only group that objected to European medical treatment, they have been described as the “most vociferous and obnoxious in their refusal to partake in any medicine” and their actions challenged colonial policies and raised concerns about public health.⁵⁹

Through their challenge of the colonial system by rejecting European medical care, the Malakites seem to have posed an ideological challenge to the

early Uganda protectorate.” However, beyond noting that Semei Kaakungulu, “one notable early convert,” was “embroiled in land disputes with the protectorate government for much of the 1910s and 1920s, Bruner does not seem to elaborate on this point.

⁵² Welbourn, 42.

⁵³ Welbourn, 42.

⁵⁴ Bruner, 320. Welbourn also discusses this on page 34.

⁵⁵ Bruner, 327.

⁵⁶ Bruner, 327-328.

⁵⁷ Welbourn, 43-46.

⁵⁸ Welbourn, 43.

⁵⁹ Bruner, 318.

colonial system itself. As stated before, the fact that Europeans, including missionaries, relied on medicine rather than on God for healing, was seen as a hypocritical use of other types of pagan healing practices.⁶⁰ This idea of hypocrisy was compounded by European efforts to preserve aspects of traditional Ugandan culture.⁶¹ From the perspective of Europeans involved, museums and exhibitions were meant to demonstrate the progress of the Ugandan people towards modernity. Europeans saw the “[removal of] objects from their original contexts and networks” as showing the “impotence of the items, as they then stood as mere signifiers of spiritual, cultural, and political progress.”⁶² However, Ugandan converts “wondered what missionaries were up to when they preserved the very objects they had exhorted Africans to abandon and destroy, even outlawing certain practices associated with them.”⁶³ Although the Malakites agreed with missionaries that some objects and rituals were pagan, the fact that the missionaries still preserved some of these objects seemed a bit too much like paganism itself.⁶⁴ It was seen as “contradictory and dangerous.”⁶⁵ Because of their stance on preserving pagan objects and their reliance on God alone for healing, the Malakites saw themselves as moving beyond the Europeans and as obeying the Bible more devoutly.⁶⁶ Bruner, in fact, contends that the Malakites were attempting to critique the European concept of modernity itself and argues that they believed that they had “progressed into a truer, purer modernity” than the missionaries around them.⁶⁷ In this sense, the Malakites were also challenging the very idea of which society was truly civilized.

Another religious group that believed missionaries were not living in accordance to the doctrine they brought to Uganda is the Bayudaya community. Their founder, Semei Lwakilenzi Kakungulu, originally split from the church due to “a personal quarrel with the British,” but over time, his interpretation of the Old Testament led him and his followers to convert to Judaism.⁶⁸ Before founding the Bayudaya, Kakungulu was a prominent political and military official in Buganda who served first the Buganda King and later worked with British officials. Kakungulu, who became a protestant in the 1880s, fought against Muslims and played a significant role in “routing the Muslims” from Buganda in 1891. He then served in the religious wars between protestants and Catholics that began soon thereafter and ended in January 1892.⁶⁹ Through marriage, Kakungulu was also closely connected to the royal family. According to Arye Oded, the British came to value Kakugulu’s military ability. After the British protectorate was formed in 1894, the British “gave him a free hand in his battles against the tribes,” and he “led the spearhead of the army which, at the end of the nineteenth century, paved

⁶⁰ Bruner, 319.

⁶¹ In his discussion of this, Bruner focuses primarily on the Uganda Museum as well as its 1908 Exhibition. Bruner, 321-327.

⁶² Bruner, 334.

⁶³ Bruner, 324.

⁶⁴ Bruner, 326.

⁶⁵ Bruner, 334.

⁶⁶ Bruner, 325-326 and 334-335.

⁶⁷ Bruner, 318.

⁶⁸ Oded, 170.

⁶⁹ Oded, 170.

the way for the British rule over wide areas of Uganda.”⁷⁰ He was later appointed as the military governor of an eastern province of Uganda.⁷¹ Kakungulu, however, hoped to be appointed as a king, and at one point, he erroneously believed that the British would do this.⁷² According to Kakungulu, in 1901, he had been promised by Sir Harry Johnston, the British Special Commissioner to Uganda, that he would be appointed as a king in exchange for service in the Lango region and for helping to fight Sudanese soldiers who had rebelled against their British officers.⁷³ Over the course of the next decade, Kakungulu “realized that in spite of all his efforts he would not achieve recognition as ruler of his own kingdom and that in fact he had merely been used as a tool to facilitate the establishment of British rule in Uganda.”⁷⁴ After leaving his military post, Kakungulu joined the Malakites and helped to spread their beliefs.⁷⁵

After becoming a member of the Malakites, Kakungulu studied the Old Testament extensively and advocated for closer adherence to Mosaic law.⁷⁶ In 1919, when Kakungulu insisted on following the practice of circumcision, he was told that this was a Jewish practice rather than a Christian one, and Kakungulu declared that he would now be a Jew.⁷⁷ According to a relative, Kakungulu began to go through the Bible and selected passages that he thought were important. This became the foundation for a 1922 book of prayers and rules that his followers were supposed to adhere to.⁷⁸ Although Kakungulu claimed that he was Jewish, he continued to accept the New Testament as scripture and believed in Jesus.⁷⁹ After meeting and befriending a Jewish trader, Kakungulu asked to be instructed in Judaism, in part to clear up his misconceptions about Judaism.⁸⁰ From this Jewish trader, Kakungulu and those who followed him learned about Jewish customs and beliefs, including observing the Sabbath, wearing head coverings, and following rules about how to prepare meat.⁸¹ According to Oded, Kakungulu did not force his family, servants, or those who lived in his lands to convert. However, he did grant some benefits for those who were part of the Bayudaya community.⁸² Upon Kakungulu’s death in 1928, Bayudaya membership declined, but they have since received support from other Jewish communities in

⁷⁰ Oded, 170.

⁷¹ Oded, 171.

⁷² Oded, 171-172.

⁷³ Oded, 171.

⁷⁴ Oded, 172.

⁷⁵ Oded, 173.

⁷⁶ Oded 172-173. Oded claims that while Mugema opposed idol worship and forbade his adherents to eat pork, Mugema was not opposed to polygamy and did not follow the practice of circumcision.

⁷⁷ Oded, 174. Oded provides some insight into why this was such a divisive issue. On page 174, Oded points out that “normally Ganda abhorred and forbade any mutilation of the body, and regarded circumcision as a violation of their traditional law.” In fact, this was a bit of a sticking point between a Ganda king who had converted to Islam but refused to practice circumcision and other Muslims.

⁷⁸ Oded, 174-175.

⁷⁹ Oded, 176.

⁸⁰ Oded, 176.

⁸¹ Oded, 177.

⁸² Oded, 177-178.

the United States and Israel.⁸³

Although the emergence of the Bayudaya community may not seem very anti-colonial in comparison to the Malakites, the Bayudaya demonstrate the idea of rejecting components of Christian faith brought to Uganda by missionaries. Like the Malakites, their religious differences emerged through a closer reading and interpretation of scripture. In the case of Kakungulu and the Bayudaya, Kakungulu's careful study of the Old Testament and his insistence on obeying all of Mosaic law led him to breaking away from the Malakites, who had themselves broken from European Christianity.⁸⁴ In both cases, there is, at its core, a critique of European influence through the way these groups interpreted scripture and broke away from the message of European missionaries.

In contrast to the Malakites and Bayudaya, another way that Ugandans could challenge the colonial system is by working through the church itself. This is illustrated by the work of two men associated with *Abazzukulu ba Kinta*, Ignatius K. Musazi and Reverend Reuben Spartas Mukasa. *Abazzukulu ba Kintu*, or the Descendants of Kintu, emerged during a time of political activism from the 1920s through the 1940s. Some Ganda political activists were concerned with how land was being distributed and privatized and were involved in events that became known as the Bataka controversies during the 1920s.⁸⁵ There was also unrest among rural farmers whose "growing economic grievances" were "exacerbated by colonial cotton regulations" as Uganda became a major producer of cotton for the British empire.⁸⁶ According to Jonathon L. Earle, the colonial officials themselves were concerned over how the Buganda cotton inspectors treated the rural farmers.⁸⁷ Tensions were also growing due to other controversies within Uganda, including the *Namasole* affair, the expulsion of students from Bishop Tucker Memorial College in Mukono, and the assassination of Prime Minister Martin Luther Nsibirwa.⁸⁸ Unlike Bataka activists who thought that more

⁸³ Oded, 185-186.

⁸⁴ Reid raises another point about the relationship between Kakungulu and the colonial system. On page 163, he argues that although "Kakungulu's story is fascinating in itself, but it is also illustrative of the making of local administration, not least in the context of the somewhat rough-and-ready, frontier nature of the early Ugandan administrative and political arrangements of power – certainly beyond the metropolitan hub of central Buganda." Although it does not connect to religion, it does show some of the complexities within the colonial system. Reid, 163.

⁸⁵ Jonathan L. Earle, "Reading Revolution in Late Colonial Buganda," *Journal of East African Studies* 6, no.3 (2012): 507, doi: <https://dpo.org/10.1080/17531055.2012.696902>. On page 508, Earle translates the term "Bataka" as hereditary clan heads. Reid provides a similar translation on page 119.

⁸⁶ Earle, 508.

⁸⁷ Earle, 508.

⁸⁸ The *Namasole*, also spelled as *Namasole*, affair centered around a controversy regarding the widow of King Daudi Cwa. According to tradition, the widow of a king, or a *Namasole*, was not supposed to remarry. However, after the king's death in 1939, his widow wanted to remarry after becoming pregnant. Although the Bishop of the Church of Uganda performed the marriage, this breach of tradition upset conservatives in Buganda. See Kevin Ward, "'Obedient Rebels': The Relationship Between the Early 'Balokole' and the church of Uganda: The Mukono Crisis of 1941," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 19, no. 3 (Oct. 1989): 210. The controversy surrounding the expulsion of theology students from the college in Mukono is related to a divisive revival movement that began in the 1920s with connections to the Ruanda Mission of CMS. This is the focus of Ward's article.

political power should be given to the clan heads rather than concentrated in the monarchy, the *Abazzukulu ba Kintu* wanted to power to be held by a just and moral monarch. They considered themselves the “political heirs of Buganda’s proto-mythical” king, whom they pointed to as an example of such a king.⁸⁹ In their argument, they used a combination of “global history and biblical exegesis to rethink [the region’s] royalist past” and the political critique raised by Bataka activists.⁹⁰

Musazi was an important figure in the history of Uganda due to his involvement with *Abazzukulu ba Kintu*, the Uganda African Farmers’ Union, and later the Uganda National Congress.⁹¹ As the son of a chief in the region of Buganda known as Bulemeezi, Musazi grew up in an area that had a strong military culture, supported the monarchy, and was heavily protestant.⁹² Musazi felt a call to missionary service as a child, and he later studied for ministry in the Anglican church.⁹³ This included spending some years attending school in Great Britain. His training as an ordinand required knowledge of ancient languages, including Greek and Hebrew, and assignments that required careful and extensive study of biblical passages.⁹⁴ According to Earle, Musazi’s studies led him to think about the connections between religious faith and politics, and he looked to the early Christian church as a model of this.⁹⁵ From his studies on the book of Acts, he saw the early church as being “a subversive political community that used conversion to undermine empire and entrenched religious elites, a moral language that he could easily translate to conceptualise Protestant dissent in Bulemeezi.”⁹⁶ There were also secular influences that shaped Musazi’s beliefs, including the 1926 United Kingdom General Strike, his study of 19th century history of French peasants and the 17th century English Civil War, and the writings of individuals such as Émile Zola. From these, Musazi developed his ideas about political activism and the importance of unions.⁹⁷ Upon his completion of ordinand requirements, Musazi was informed that he would not receive an appointment to a church in the UK and was told to return to Uganda to serve in local parish ministry for six months. Earle quotes an American economist, George Shepherd, as saying that Musazi stated “that ‘he could not accept ordination because of the discrimination against Africans by the Church of England’”.⁹⁸ His reaction may have been “further exacerbated by the circumstances surrounding an engagement he had with an English woman.”⁹⁹ A few years after his return to Uganda, Musazi ended his efforts to work in ministry upon learning that one of his homilies had not been well-received by the Bishop of Uganda.¹⁰⁰ At this point, Musazi turned

⁸⁹ Earle, 509.

⁹⁰ Earle, 509.

⁹¹ Reid, 312.

⁹² Earle, 510.

⁹³ Earle, 511-512.

⁹⁴ Earle, 512.

⁹⁵ Earle, 512.

⁹⁶ Earle, 512.

⁹⁷ Earle, 512.

⁹⁸ Earle, 513.

⁹⁹ Earle, 513.

¹⁰⁰ Earle, 513.

his attention towards politics.¹⁰¹

Although Musazi was influenced by intellectuals and events outside of his religious training, he drew on his training in the Anglican church and arguments based on biblical passages to make his argument.¹⁰² In Earle's study of a significant portion of Musazi's remaining library, he notes that Musazi's most annotated books were "an English Authorized Bible" and a copy of the English Book of Common Prayer.¹⁰³ Earle juxtaposes Musazi's use of these books with annotations and underlined passages from Harold Laski's *Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*, which reflects a Marxist influence.¹⁰⁴ Although Musazi was influenced by Laski's writing and saw similarities to the situation in Uganda, Musazi turned to the Bible in order to formulate his critique of the colonial government and the desire of chiefs to gain more power.¹⁰⁵ He used Biblical passages to show "the interdependence of political justice and the necessity of morally robust monarchies" and to "imagine Buganda as a place where just kings held corrupt" individuals and practices "accountable."¹⁰⁶ His annotations indicate that he made connections between passages such as Isaiah 58:6-7, which focuses on aspects of social justice, and the book of Amos, in which the elite among the Israelites are condemned for living well at the expense of those in need.¹⁰⁷ Musazi also notes passages where it is indicated that God removed or punished monarchs who did not live up to their responsibilities to maintain a just and moral kingdom.¹⁰⁸ Using passages that condemned corrupt and inequitable kingdoms, he argued for the establishment of a Buganda kingdom based on Biblical principles of social justice. From the New Testament, Musazi used interactions between John the Baptist and King Herod, passages about Jesus' confrontation with Judas, and the narrative of Jesus' trial before Pilate to demonstrate need to call out corruption and, once again, articulate the role political leaders should play in carrying out justice.¹⁰⁹ For Musazi, "theology shaped the political and the political informed the theological- neither was epiphenomenal."¹¹⁰ This appears to reflect the critique raised by *Abazzukulu ba Kintu*.

Another person associated with *Abazzukulu ba Kintu* was Reverend Reuben Spartas Mukasa, who was also involved with the formation of the African Greek Orthodox Church in Uganda.¹¹¹ Spartas, as he is often referred to, had also trained to serve in the Anglican church before his religious journey led him away from the Anglican church and towards the Orthodox church.¹¹² Spartas's explanation for this conversion was his realization that the Anglican church was

¹⁰¹ Earle, 513.

¹⁰² Earle, 510 and 516-519.

¹⁰³ Earle, 516.

¹⁰⁴ Earle, 516-518.

¹⁰⁵ Earle, 519.

¹⁰⁶ Earle, 518-519.

¹⁰⁷ Earle, 518.

¹⁰⁸ Specifically, Earle notes the use of passages from Daniel, II Chronicles, and Isaiah. Earle, 519.

¹⁰⁹ Earle, 519. For example, in a note written by the account of John the Baptists' beheading in the book of Mark, Musazi notes similarities between this situation and the current one in Buganda.

¹¹⁰ Earle, 520.

¹¹¹ Earle, 514 and Welbourn, 77.

¹¹² Welbourn, 77-102 and Earle, 515.

another branch of Christianity compared to the Orthodox church, which he saw as being closer to the “true Church,” as Spartas phrased it.¹¹³ Born in the late 1800s, Spartas served in the African Native Medical Corps during World War I and later in the King’s African Rifles (KAR). During his time in the KAR, Spartas was introduced to Marcus Garvey and the African Orthodox Church in America.¹¹⁴

An important feature of this religious movement, as noted by Frederick Burkewood Welbourn, is the fact that people of African heritage were allowed to serve in religious offices that the Protestant Episcopal Church of America banned them from.¹¹⁵ Welbourn also quotes a passage of *Nationalism in Colonial Africa*, written by T.L. Hodgkin, which states that “Garvey...was successful in spreading the idea of independent African churches as an instrument of African liberation.”¹¹⁶ In 1929, “Spartas publicly announced that he had broken with the Anglican Church and formed a new church called ‘the African Orthodox Church [AOC]—a church established for all right-thinking Africans, men who wish to be free in their own house, not always being thought of as boys.’”¹¹⁷ In a letter Spartas wrote in 1933 to a former mentor, Spartas appears to connect his religious conversion with this idea of being treated like a man rather than a boy: “inside Anglicanism I was speaking with the voice of an insolent child who presumes to teach his grandmother to suck eggs.”¹¹⁸ Spartas also “used the history of Orthodoxy – a more ancient faith – to critique the colonial state and Anglican paternalism.”¹¹⁹ Because of the importance for Orthodox churches to be seen as both valid and legitimate, AOC was later accepted as part of the Greek Orthodox Church.¹²⁰

Like Musazi, Spartas seems to have become more political over time. According to Turner, Spartas was involved in riots in Uganda in 1949, and Welbourn states that Spartas was imprisoned from 1949-1957.¹²¹ In fact, in his chapter on Spartas, Welbourn contends that after Spartas’ ordination in 1932, the “story” shifts more towards the church.¹²² Regardless, Welbourn insists that Spartas was instrumental to its founding of the AOC and that Spartas was clear about “the explicit nationalism, if not pan-Africanism” in his efforts to establish this church.¹²³ In “The Place of Independent Religious Movements in the Modernization of Africa,” Turner, a contemporary of these men, makes an important observation about the connections between religion and politics for leaders such as Spartas. He observes that it is logical that there is a marriage of politics and religion in these movements because many “leaders of anti-colonial political movements had so often received their educational equipment and even

¹¹³ Earle, 515 and Welbourn, 77.

¹¹⁴ Welbourn, 78-79.

¹¹⁵ Welbourn, 79.

¹¹⁶ Welbourn, 79.

¹¹⁷ Welbourn, 81.

¹¹⁸ Welbourn, 84.

¹¹⁹ Earle, 515.

¹²⁰ Welbourn, 80-81.

¹²¹ H. W. Turner, “The Place of Independent Religious Movements in the Modernization of Africa,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 11, no. 1 (1980): 44 and Welbourn, 82.

¹²² Welbourn, 81.

¹²³ Welbourn, 81-82 and 84.

their radical ideas from Christian schools.”¹²⁴ Although the focus of this critique of the colonialism from within Christian beliefs has focused on Musazi and Spartas, they appear to represent the groups that were associated with them.

In 1962, Uganda became an independent nation.¹²⁵ Over the course of nearly a century, Uganda was exposed to European culture, first through missionaries and explorers and then as a British protectorate. Yet, the beliefs Christian missionaries brought with them also contained elements that were later used to challenge the British colonial system. As demonstrated by the Bayudaya and Malakites, some groups questioned what missionaries had taught them and challenged the political and social structure through rejecting elements of these imported religions. There were also challenges from within through the formation of groups like the AOC that wed global history and secular thought with Biblical concepts. The development of these critiques emerged in situations where racism is apparent, and the leaders of these movements generally had some sort of personal frustration or harm caused by the colonial system. While highlighting some specific movements, a full discussion of other groups, sects, and cults that used Christianity in some form to protest colonialism is beyond the scope of this essay. Looking at the ways the groups and individuals discussed in the essay resisted existing social and political structures, however, provides some insight into ways that the people of Uganda fought against colonialism.

¹²⁴ Turner, 49.

¹²⁵ Reid, xxii.

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