

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Myths, Dreams and the Business of Spiritual Heritage in Uganda

Pauline Harding¹

¹Institute of Archaeology, University College London, UK / Uganda Museum, Kampala, Uganda
p.harding@ucl.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

Aspects of Uganda's cultural heritage damaged by 20th-century religious and political conflicts have enjoyed a resurgence over recent decades. This paper explores how the 'authorised' heritage values previously outlined by Laurajane Smith (2006) here fall behind popular material heritage narratives centred on myths, spirits and dreams. The research draws on ethnographic data from heritage sites in southern Uganda, to suggest that the past is being continually reshaped in response to the socio-political, ideological and economic struggles and ambitions of the Ugandan people. This living, developing heritage is facilitated by a central government preoccupied by agendas of development and national unity that is keen to forget the country's ethnically divided past. The paper contributes to an underdeveloped heritage literature about spiritual understandings of materiality in non-Western settings, challenging the Western secular-rationalism that persistently dominates international heritage discourse.

KEYWORDS: Uganda, heritage, spirits, landscape, myth

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Harding, Pauline. 2023. Myths, Dreams and the Business of Spiritual Heritage in Uganda *Journal of African Cultural Heritage Studies*, 3 (1), pp.151-168. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22599/jachs.127>

Introduction

Colonial and Christian dismissal of African culture as demonic and ‘backwards’ has resulted in enormous damage to many of Africa’s cultural heritages over the past century (Abungu 2012: 58; Tankink 2007: 225). In this paper I examine how recent cultural heritage revivals and reinventions in Uganda have been causing the nation’s past to redevelop, with ‘old’ heritage values – what Laurajane Smith has called Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) – falling in parallel with alternative understandings of heritage by a range of ‘non-expert users’ (Smith 2006: 34–35). These alternative understandings, far from being ‘subaltern’ or ‘dissenting’ (ibid.), appear to flourish even at the expense of their academic counterparts, in a country where ‘academic pasts can be argued to have no more veracity or value, than those generated by other knowledge sources, particularly those that may be termed local or indigenous’ (A. Reid 2016: 197). Academically, cultural heritage tends to be valued in terms of static, preserved materials and practices, but authors including Ngoro (2005: 15, 36, 48), Abungu (2012), Meier (2016) and Sinamai (2022) have challenged the relevance of this approach in sub-Saharan Africa, where they see heritage to be timeless, spiritual, developing and alive. By considering the nature of cultural heritage in contemporary Uganda, this paper offers a further challenge to the universal applicability of the Western secular rationalism that prevails in heritage academia.

This research draws on ethnographic interview and observational data obtained in 2018 (approved by ethics committees at UCL 2017-18:043 and Makerere University MAKSS REC 09.18.213) from heritage sites in Kampala, Mityana and Mukono, southern Uganda (figure 1), where academic and state-sanctioned narratives of the past often fall behind sub-national alternatives rooted in myths, spirits and dreams. At Ttanda Archaeological Archives, Mityana, archaeologists consider a series of deep shafts to have been dug precolonially to mine kaolin, but many Ugandans believe them to have been created by a god. On Dindo Hill, Mukono, communities explain archaeology and landscape through myth and attribute pareidolic meaning to unusual rocks. Both sites are peppered with shrines and inhabited by spirit mediums who draw on the power of the past to counsel their visitors. In Kampala, meanwhile, a medium consults a spirit to advise the restoration team of the country’s only UNESCO cultural World Heritage Site, the Kasubi Tombs, and spiritual associations shape perceptions of displays at the Uganda Museum. Local curation of material and myth in these contexts offers a fascinating window into the meaning of heritage in Uganda.

Within this discussion I refer to ‘top down’ actions of official heritage curators, including cultural and governmental bodies guided by AHD. These contrast with local heritage behaviours of individuals and communities. Of course, the division is blurred: while any official heritage body has its own social norms that are ‘every bit as local in their social situatedness as any other’ (Ferguson 2006: 99), individuals acting within an official capacity may have a different approach to heritage in secondary contexts. Many Africans, for example, adhere to ‘accepted’ Western practices and religions such as Christianity openly by day, and more controversial local customs and religions only in secret by night (Abungu 2012, 57; Fihlani 2017; Udelhoven 2017). That, suggests Uganda’s Commissioner of Museums and Monuments (CMM), is ‘because the modern religions are more accepted among the civilised

community. So if you entirely go to believe in the spirit medium, then you are backward.’ This is common within colonially styled Christianised nations where cultural behaviours have been demonised as ‘primitive’, ungodly threats to prosperity, nationalism and modernisation, but where strong allegiances to local culture anyway remain. Approaches to heritage in Uganda are shaped by these conflicting religious, cultural and political ideologies, some open and others hidden, that penetrate all levels of society (Meyer 2001: 106, 111; Udelhoven 2017).

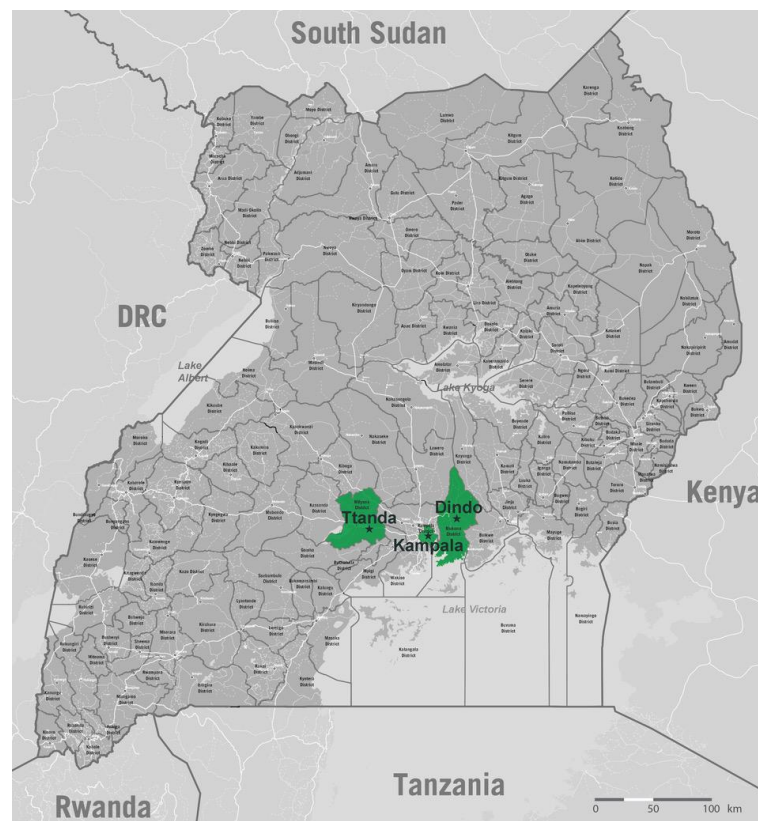


Figure 1: Map of Uganda with districts here (after Relief Web 2020)

Spirits in Ugandan history

To understand the nature of cultural heritage in Uganda, it is useful to begin by recognising the integral role played by spirits in the region’s history up until the present day. Before Uganda’s borders were drawn, this area on the north to north-western shores of Lake Victoria had from as early as the beginning of the second millennium CE comprised multiple violently competing kingdoms and chiefdoms (A. Reid 2013; R. Reid 2017: 100–184). In the most powerful of these kingdoms, Buganda, spirit mediums, priests and traditional healers remained politically influential into the 18th century, with shrines to *lubaale* (local gods) strategically placed to guard against outside threats (Roscoe 1911: 273–274, 277–278; Ray 1977: 366–367; Kodesh 2010: 184–186; Behrend 2011: 153). The Ganda (people of Buganda) would visit the shrines of *lubaale* to pray for health, wealth and success, and to receive advice and medicines from their mediums. When a *kabaka* (king) of Buganda died, he became a *ssekabaka* and shrines were built in his honour, at his burial place and in his successor’s palace

enclosure. Here the *ssekabaka* would advise the new *kabaka* in matters of state via a medium said to have been chosen by his spirit (Roscoe 1911: 112, 283; Ray 1977: 370). The shrines of Buganda's 35 *ssekabaka* are maintained by their wives' and sisters' descendants still today. Many of these shrines were built in Busiro, although Mutesa I (r.1856–1884), Mwanga II (r.1884–1897), Chwa II (r.1897–1939) and Mutesa II (r.1939–1967) share Kampala's Kasubi Tombs, owing to changes in burial custom that came with the growing influence of Christianity and Islam (Roscoe 1911: 105, 283; Kigongo and A. Reid 2007: 379)

Indeed, the role of spirits in Buganda transformed with the introduction of Islam by Swahili traders in the 1840s, and of Christianity by European explorers and missionaries in the 1860s–70s, at a time when the significance of local spirit mediums had already begun to pale beside the growing central authority of the *kabaka* (Insoll 1997: 181; Kodesh 2010: 187; R. Reid 2017: 22). To reinforce his political influence and weaken that of the mediums, Mutesa I embraced Islam and forced his subjects to do the same (Kasozi 1981: 128–132). Ideological factionalism caused civil war and political revolution with the arrival of the Christians. Order was only restored when the Ganda, in collaboration with the British Christians, drew up the 1900 Buganda Agreement. This resulted in the British Protectorate, defining Uganda's borders, redistributing lands among Ganda elites, and marking the beginning of an era of co-rule (Twaddle 1972: 54).

In the decades that followed, the missionaries caused many Africans to reject their own cultural heritages for being 'primitive', and to convert to Christianity for its association with wealth and progress. Local cultural and religious practice was increasingly rejected or hidden (Hattersley 1908: 224–225; Green 1995: 25–28; Meyer 2001: 106–107; Ndoro 2005: 10; Behrend 2011: 148–149; Abungu 2012: 58; Udelhoven 2017: 86–89). In Uganda, British Protectorate officials confiscated artefacts that they associated with 'witchcraft' and used them as evidence in criminal prosecutions. Many of these items were then displayed in the Uganda Museum, alongside bloodied murder weapons and other ethnographic curiosities, creating a link between heritage, 'witchcraft' and criminality (Park et al 2021: 524; Peterson 2021: 11–12). This association was reinforced by the similarity of the English word 'museum' with the Luganda word *emuzimu* (spirits of the dead), and the Museum quickly became known to the Ganda as *enyumba ya mayembe* (house of fetishes). Its curator, meanwhile, became the *omukulu wa mayembe* (keeper of the fetishes). Ugandan communities throughout the 20th century feared its spirits and believed that the government used them to gain strength (Hattersley 1908: 225; Plumb 2002: 72–73; R. Reid 2017: xxii). As a consequence, the Christian church denigrated and discredited the sacredness of heritage sites, objects and practices all across sub-Saharan Africa, particularly where they were associated with ritual and death. This included pipes, pots, and barkcloth (see Roscoe 1911: 105), all of which became associated with the devil (Ndoro 2005: 13; Tankink 2007: 225).

From Uganda's independence in 1962, violence tore apart the nation during a succession of coups and political massacres, most notably during the rules of Milton Obote (1966–1971; 1980–1985) and Idi Amin (1971–1979). In 1967 Uganda's cultural heritage was attacked further, when Obote abolished its historical kingdoms and chiefdoms. Since Yoweri Museveni (1986–) became president and relative

peace returned the country, and since he restored Uganda's kingdoms as cultural institutions in 1993, Uganda's cultural heritage has emerged increasingly from its hiding places. Reception of historical objects, practices and places has in some Christian circles, however, remained aggressively negative. Myriad cultural artefacts, sometimes of great antiquity, have consequently been confiscated and burned, for example during witch hunts by the Uganda Martyrs Guild in the 1990s (Behrend 2011: 105). Spiritual associations with the past remain divisive today. One Ugandan archaeologist in 2018 described how his colleagues had been afraid to assist him in archaeological surveying work at a site in neighbouring Kenya the previous year, because they associated its pottery with 'witchdoctors'. The CMM, meanwhile, recalled how some Ugandan Christians still fear certain cultural artefacts so much that they 'take them to the church and they burn them', just as Pentecostal preachers in present-day Nigeria 'set fire to statues and other ancient artefacts that they regard as symbols of idolatry' (Nwonwu & Igonikon 2021). The Uganda Museum has also suffered from its association with spirits:

Not very many Ugandans used to come to the Museum, simply because they had this perception that the Museum is a spiritual place. ... People who looked at traditional religion as satanic did not want to associate themselves with the Museum. Because you could come to the Museum and all of a sudden, if you had a relationship or lineage to one of the spirits, they would attack you while you were here. Of course, it used to happen. People who come here ... some of them get possessed and have attacks (interview with the CMM, 2018).

During the CMM's time working at the Museum, historical artefacts have been abandoned there by owners afraid of their spiritual powers. Worshippers have also left offerings outside display cases devoted to the *lubaale* Nakaima and Kibuka (interview with the CMM; Plumb 2002: 120). Spirituality and ritual, therefore, are a divisive but integral part of Uganda's cultural heritages, and the two cannot be severed without doing enormous damage to local customs and interactions with cultural objects and space (Ngoro 2005: 68–69).

Spirits, myths, and the landscape

Having outlined how Uganda's history and culture are inextricably connected with spirits and rituals, I will now explore another important characteristic of Uganda's cultural heritages. That is the relationship between spiritual heritage, myths, and the landscape. In Uganda, just as in other nations across sub-Saharan Africa, spirit shrines can most often be found by trees, rocks and water bodies, in caves and on hills (Meier 2016: 153–154; Gavua 2015: 141; Varissou 2018: 124). In some cases archaeology, built and inhabited long ago by ancestors whose spirits are thought to remain in situ, combines with landscape to give a place spiritual power. Uganda's 15th-century Bigo bya Mugenyi earthworks, for instance, have long been attributed to heroes of the semi-mythological Chwezi Empire said once to have ruled the region. At least since the 1990s pilgrims have left offerings to these ancestors-turned-*lubaale* at a shrine beneath its mound-top *euphorbia candelabra* tree (Wayland 1934: 22–24, 31; Shinnie 1960: 16, 27; Robertshaw and Kamuhangire 1996: 741–742). On Dindo Hill, meanwhile, a footprint-like shape in the rock is presented as that of Kintu, who as Buganda's alleged first man and king is central to local identity and a protagonist in Ganda histories and myths (Roscoe

1911: 136–137; Southwold 1968: 143; R. Reid 2017: 107–112). Dindo Hill has also been deemed sacred on account of its unusual rock formations and a nearby water source, and it hosts several *lubaale* shrines. Trees and archaeological features form a spiritual and mythological focus across the Ttanda landscape, too, and have again been linked to myths of Kintu. In these settings nature and culture combine, as communities associate landscape features with mythological and spiritual narratives, and shape each location accordingly. These narratives of landscape reveal community values that are also sculpted by the environment, sensual experience and physical space (Walker 1997: 95; Ndoro 2005: 53, 68; Sinamai 2022: 61–64). This symbiotic, continual development can be seen as integral to the nature of some cultural heritage in Uganda, as a closer examination of the Ttanda landscape will show.

In the 1920s, colonial geologists identified 176 holes arranged in lines over a space of around 40 acres in Ttanda. Each of these pits measures around three feet wide and between four and 34 feet deep. Many appear to be connected by tunnels at the base and have steps cut into their sides. Archaeologists have interpreted them to be mineshafts dug to extract kaolin, to make paint used in rituals and to craft tuyeres for iron furnaces (Lanning 1954: 188–189; A. Reid 2016: 200). Kaolin leaves no datable by-product and so it is difficult to know the shafts' provenance, although they are certainly precolonial (Badenoch 2004: 18, 37; Humphris & Iles 2013: 61; A. Reid 2013: 895). According to the earliest known writing about Ttanda's pits, local communities had 'no knowledge of their origin and describe them as the work of God, which points to the fact that they were sunk prior to the advent of the Buganda' (A S Taylor, in Wayland 1921: 7). Around five acres of the landscape are today owned by a private landlord who has signposted them as Ttanda Archaeological Archives, although they are popularly known as the Walumbe Pits.

Walumbe is the Ganda *lubaale* of sickness and death. His story is intertwined with that of Kintu and can be summarised as follows. On arrival to the land that was to become Buganda, Kintu met a woman called Nambi, from Heaven, and the couple fell in love. To win her hand in marriage, Kintu had to pass a series of tests set by her father, Gulu, but once he had done so and the pair returned to Earth, Nambi realised that she had forgotten to bring millet to feed her chickens. She returned to Heaven to collect it, but on her second descent was followed by her brother Walumbe. After some time Walumbe requested one of Kintu and Nambi's offspring as a servant, but the couple refused. When Walumbe began to kill their children in protest, Gulu sent Nambi's other brother Kayikuzi to chase him away, but the murderous *lubaale* escaped by digging a series of tunnels and pits deep into the ground at Ttanda, where he is said to remain to this day (Roscoe 1911: 460–464; Musinguzi 2021). This association between Walumbe, the Ganda *lubaale* of sickness and death, and Ttanda's pits had already existed for several generations by the beginning of the 20th century (Kagwa 1934: 112–113). Academic understandings of Ttanda's shafts remain little known, and even a temporary exhibition held by the Uganda Museum at the 25th jubilee of Kabaka Muwenda Mutebi II in July 2018 related that it was not humans but Walumbe that had dug them.

Nowadays Ttanda Archaeological Archives, together with three nearby spin-off sites without shafts, attract tens of mediums and worshippers daily. Roscoe (1911: 18) observed that the Ganda saw dreams as a 'means of communication between the living and the dead' and never 'let a dream pass

unnoticed, without drawing from it the lesson it was intended to convey'. Still in 2018, Ttanda's pilgrims explained that spirits had visited them in dreams and instructed them to erect *lubaale* shrines, place offerings and make animal sacrifices there. Dindo Hill, while less busy than Ttanda, has followed a similar trajectory. Residents of the rock site expressed that they had moved into this 'palace' in the 1990s, after being instructed to do so by spirits in a dream. They found pareidolic meaning in the site's natural features: one they called Kintu's cow, another his throne, and so on (figure 2). The significance of dream means that its visitors continually reshape understandings of history according to what they believe the spirits tell them. Academic conclusions about the sites have failed to gain credence with the public at large, and local communities continue to value them for their spirituality rather than their secular archaeology.

State facilitation of dream-based heritage development

It can be argued that the Ugandan state has enabled communities to continually reinvent the nation's past without state interference or the application of AHD. While Uganda's government might be expected to oversee formalised, top-down heritage management in the country, instead it rarely engages with matters of the past at all. President Museveni has on occasion compared present-day Uganda to the Chwezi Empire, 'which 800 years ago split up into different regions and kingdoms in the present-day Uganda', to ask Ugandans to 'trace our roots and discover that we are the same people' (from a 1994 speech by Museveni, quoted in Robertshaw and Kamuhangire 1996: 740). Overall, however, since Uganda's independence in 1962 its successive governments have persistently disengaged with aspects of the past that they have considered anti-nationalistic, backward looking or to offer dangerous reminders of previous popular eras of power. This gives the impression that there is little 'authorised sense of what heritage is about' (Smith 2006: 58) in the country at all, leaving everyday Ugandans the freedom to take heritage curation into their own hands. Developments effectively place state authorities in the dissenting role, as they – the usual enforcers of AHD – pursue unrelated agendas of their own.

At times, the government's distaste for Uganda's politically charged cultural heritages has been blatant, for example when Obote in 1967 abolished the newly independent nation's historical and once politically autonomous chiefdoms and kingdoms. This happened during a period of national violence that caused many customs to be lost or forgotten (Carmody and Taylor 2016: 115; Nsibambi 2019: 28; R. Reid 2017: 39). According to the Buganda State Minister for Tourism:

With the abolition of the kingdoms in 1962 [*sic*], we lost ... not only physical property for the kingdom but we lost a lot of our culture. ... So that generation of young people that grew up during that time, without a king on his throne, did not know much about Buganda, unless you learnt it from your own family.

Cultural narratives and practices were subsequently recast. Since the *muzibu azaala mpanga* (main tomb building) of the Kasubi Tombs burnt down in 2010, for example, reconstruction work has had to rely not on memory but on colonial-era descriptions of forgotten local historical building processes and

rituals (R. Reid 2017: 39). Interviews with the site's restoration team revealed that further lost information is being filled in by a site manager taking advice from a young spirit medium who claims to receive restoration instructions, through dreams and visions, from Ssekabaka Kintu. Given that Kintu far predates the kings, cultural norms and beliefs that influenced the Kasubi Tombs' original building plans, this association seems to have been established principally to heighten the perceived authority of those claiming to be in Kintu's counsel. Consequent disputes have caused severe delays in the site's reconstruction, as dreamt-up cultural practices – including a rejected proposal to tile over the thatched roof – risk eclipsing more historically consistent alternatives.

A population boom from 6.8m to 44.3m people in Uganda between 1960 and 2019 has caused further confusion, because so many more Ugandans have been forced to relocate from their cultural homes into urban centres to find work. By 2025 the UN expects over 50% of Africa's populations to have moved into cities, up from 14.5% in 1950 (Awumbila 2017: 145; UN-Habitat 2010). What is more, 68% of these Ugandans are now aged 24 or under (World Bank 2019b; UNPD 2017: 21) and have grown up believing that 'new' heritages are longstanding, because that is all they have experienced in their lifetimes and government-set school curricula do nothing to tell them otherwise. These new heritages include material developments such as those at the Kasubi Tombs and Ttanda sites, but also the heritages of entirely new kingdoms that have sprung up since Museveni restored Uganda's original kingdoms in 1993. These 'cultural institutions' have been multiplying rapidly, encouraged by state offerings of stipends and other benefits to new kings. As they break away from the larger kingdoms, claiming their own longevity, territory and identity, they weaken the political and cultural potency of their predecessors and cause popular understandings of the past to be continually rewritten (Peterson 2016: 790; Peterson et al 2021: 15).

The Ugandan state has not only caused heritage narratives to be confused or forgotten. It has also, owing to an understandable focus on economic and infrastructural development, allowed Uganda's heritages to go underfunded or be completely destroyed. In 2014 the 'state protected' archaeological site of Bweyore, Nkore – the best-preserved precolonial capital in the Great Lakes region – was annihilated during road construction work (A. Reid 2016: 199). In 2007 engineers 'relocated' a Busoga Kingdom spiritual heritage site to make way for a hydroelectric power station in Bujagali, Jinja, and state ambitions to provide 100% of the population with access to electricity by 2030, up from 22% in 2017, cause a further threat (Okoth 2017; UEGCL 2019). While oil exploitation in western Uganda has the potential to contribute billions of dollars to the economy, it is gradually destroying the rich, little-explored archaeologies of the Rift Valley, and as land is consumed by expanding cities and developing agriculture, grasses required for traditional Ugandan thatch are becoming harder to obtain. The government has also overlooked or encouraged the gradual destruction and repurposing of Uganda's colonial architecture (interview, CCFU 2018; Peterson et al 2021: 6). This includes the Uganda Museum, which in 2011 would have been demolished and replaced with a multi-story trade centre, with its displays crammed onto one floor, had it not been for legal intervention from several local civil society organisations (R. Reid 2017: xxiii; Peterson 2021: 16). Of course, a museum in a glass, floodlit skyscraper, which at 222m high was set to be the tallest in Africa, might have attracted new audiences.

The change would also, however, have compromised the exhibition space, restricted its development, destroyed the historical building and grounds, and threatened the survival of some of the Museum's artefacts.

All this is unlikely to be for purely fiscal reasons: as Museveni's popularity wanes, elite Ganda rally for renewed political autonomy and the government avoids drawing attention to past, popular eras of political power. Rather than capitalise on heritage to contribute to the national economy, therefore, Uganda's tourism initiatives instead focus on lucrative treks to see its mountains gorillas (c.f. Giblin et al. 2011: 176). Even in the 1990s, a writing competition hosted by Uganda's Directorate of Cultural Affairs banned discussion of ancestral tradition, instead requesting only 'forward looking' topics, to 'have Uganda's history-in-the-making on permanent record for tomorrow's generations' (competition rubric, cited in Peterson 2016: 793). In 1999, meanwhile, the government prohibited the Uganda Museum from engaging schools in outreach work, for fear that it would create tribal bias harmful to Uganda's national identity (Plumb 2002: 222). The Museum's displays have also historically been restricted: in 1971 Amin's government oversaw the curation of nationalist exhibitions (Plumb 2002: 94) that have still today been little updated. They comprise vaguely labelled, ethnically non-divisive items alongside dry presentations of secular archaeological material, with important artefacts that remind of past kingdom power hidden away in the Museum stores. According to the CMM:

We have the first gown of Kabaka Mutesa. There are many sensitive things. They're antagonistic. The way we got them. ... There is this inward fight: this is Ugandan, this is Baganda, this is Ugandan, this is Baganda. But Buganda is part of Uganda, so they should support us to be national! Keep the things here!

A temporary exhibition of recently discovered photographs from Amin's Uganda in 2019 marked significant progress as concerns pre-Museveni political representation at the Museum. Even then, however, images were carefully displayed alongside reminders of the more murderous aspects of Amin's rule. This and concluding photographs of a smiling Museveni served 'to protect the Museum from the imputation of political disloyalty' (Peterson et al 2021: 31). As for the Museum's permanent displays, they have barely changed since the 1960s, owing to inadequate budgets, equipment, infrastructure and staff, in a building that has long been plagued by leaks, insect infestations, light exposure and fungus. The entire annual budget, which is currently around US\$80,000 and controlled by the Ministry of Tourism rather than the Museum's curators, is needed to keep the displays and building in serviceable condition, and so little is left over for development (Trone 1981: 1, 14–18, 23; Plumb 2002: 97, 201; Park et al 2021: 524; Peterson et al 2021: 6).

As such, the Museum fails to provide visitors with adequate information about Uganda's rich heritages. In line with a national development plan focused on oil and gas, tourism, agriculture, infrastructure and human capital (ibid.: xxv), however, on my 2018 visit I did find one notable new update: lacklustre fossils and aged information plaques now fell in the shadow of a flashy oil and gas 'heritage' display (figure 3). This exhibition, just as Uganda's government-set educational curricula centred on science, technology and engineering (NDPII 2015: 197), is clearly designed to woo visiting school children into

futures as oil and gas engineers rather than to inspire passion for the past. Here the government sends a strong message to its people: the past is anti-developmental and non-lucrative. According to a history lecturer at Makerere University:

Politically there is a lot of portraying history as a very useless discipline, wasting people's time. I have met students who seem very angry that they have been admitted to university to come and just study history and something else, in that it is not going to help them to get jobs.

As a consequence, says the lecturer, students who study history at university tend to be those who were not accepted onto other courses, are unenthusiastic and show little flair for the subtleties of historical discourse. The state's anti-historical agenda, in the eyes of the Kampala university lecturers and tour guides to whom I spoke, also represents a fear that historical knowledge will inspire challenges to its authority. As one Ugandan teenager wrote in a school poetry compendium:

We are not taught to be free-thinkers
We are taught to be stream-lined in thinking;
This system teaches us to hate past leaders
It teaches us to be subordinates, not to rise above,
It encourages us to stay down, not to bother,
Because its creators do not believe that we will ever be better!
Welcome to a country without any history (Wacha 2018: 71)

The state's uneasy relationship with Uganda's ethnically divided heritages can be said to have pushed its focus instead towards building a nationalistic future centred on development. Proponents of the past are therefore in short supply, engagement with AHD at a state level is near non-existent, and matters of cultural heritage are left in the hands of the kingdoms and populace.

The Ugandan people's heritage

Within AHD, Smith (2006: 56) observes a 'tension between the idea of "heritage" and the idea of current and mutable cultural practices', where heritage legislation such as the 2001 UNESCO Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity risks 'fossilising' cultural practices, rendering them 'frozen in time and thus meaningless' (ibid.: 55). Within Uganda, however, such tension could be argued to be negligible, because AHD has little real significance to the Ugandan people. Instead Uganda's communities keep their heritage developing, giving an important insight into the political, social and economic concerns of the population.

There are, of course, exceptions. At the Uganda Museum in 2018 a curator expressed frustration that the dated objects in the displays were kept inanimate in cases: 'They should bring these things back to give to the people [who] are doing their rituals,' he suggested. 'Putting them in a glass to me is a jail chamber. It doesn't speak to the life of meaning. ... I think that does not make us a representation of our heritage.' For years the Museum's staff have discussed creating a 'living museum' of performances, festivals, outreach programmes and cultural villages to bring the past alive all over the country (Plumb 2002: 246), but thanks to shortages of funding and trained personnel, little progress has been made.

Long gone are the days when musicians animated the Museum's musical displays and snakes slithered in its cases. Even its newer cultural village was closed on my visit in 2018, with several of its huts sadly rotting or burned.

Nevertheless, elsewhere public celebrations of living, developing heritage appear to eclipse representations of heritage that has been 'frozen in time'. Pockets of Uganda's heritage have thrived as 20th-century prohibitions against local religion and culture have faded away. In Kampala, at the Kabaka's 2018 jubilee, Buganda's clans proudly celebrated their cultural identity with vibrant performances and exhibitions. At Kyambogo University, students compete in a friendly annual inter-clan competition, and performing arts groups including the popular Ndere Troupe stage several weekly displays of regional music and dance. Since at least 2009, informal community museums nationwide have taught new generations of Ugandans about cultural norms, to keep them connected to the past as the population modernises and diversifies (CCFU 2012; Nsibambi 2019). At the Kasubi Tombs and other *kabaka* burial sites, royal descendants perform frequent rituals, and communities visit uncurated archaeological sites including Bigo bya Mugenyi, Ttanda Archaeological Archives, Katereke Prison Ditch, Mubende Hill and Dindo Hill not to learn about history, but to connect with their *lubaale*.

Cultural heritage, of course, is inextricably tied to identity, and there are landscapes all over sub-Saharan Africa that are not simply 'places': they are deeply connected to local communities via the human experiences, memories and ancestors that have lived within them (Sinamai 2022: 55–58). In Buganda, ancestry can be equated with legitimacy, creating land ownership ties that can be difficult for the government to bypass still today (Kodesh 2010: 184–186; 189–191; A. Reid 2016). It is inevitable, therefore, that celebrations of kingdom heritage and developing *lubaale* shrine sites within regions that once constituted a politically independent Buganda have been interpreted as territorial Ganda behaviour in what were once kingdom-ruled lands (see Kigongo and A. Reid 2007; A. Reid 2016). This is certainly the case at the Kasubi Tombs, which is a hub of Ganda spirituality and ritual, and which is widely accepted to symbolise Buganda's past political power. At heritage sites in Ttanda and Dindo, however, mediums, guides and visitors told a different story. Here they insisted that the sites simply provided support for Ugandans in need, whatever their ethnicity. Those in need are increasingly many: in 2017 Uganda's population growth rate was 3.2%, the fifth highest in the world (CIA 2017), and its infrastructure remains crippled by the insecurity and state disfunction that characterised the late 1960s to the mid-1980s. In 2016 the average annual GDP per capita was just \$606 (£460) (World Bank 2019a), with 21.4% of the population living beneath the international poverty line, on a daily income of under \$1.90 (£1.45) (World Bank 2018). Hundreds of thousands of Ugandans die every year from curable illnesses such as malaria, with many unable to reach medical facilities (Pham and Vinck 2010: 26; Bwambale 2017). In the opinion of the director of Kampala's Ndere Cultural Foundation:

Uganda is now faced with a lot of poverty and hopelessness that people are seeking for divine intervention from all sorts of venues. ... So people are going to church, people are going to mosques, people are going to shrines, not because they are making a statement about identity but because they are hoping that they are going to come back with a magic bullet that will kill all poverty, all disease and all hopelessness.

There is nothing new in populations turning to religion in times of need, of course (e.g. see Tankink 2007 on the importance of Born-Again Christianity among war-ravaged communities in southwest Uganda). More significant from the perspective of this research is how socio-political strife appears to have encouraged Uganda's communities to develop their cultural heritage sites. At Ttanda Archaeological Archives, in 2001 Andrew Reid photographed one votive spear and a few cowrie shells beside a single mineshaft dedicated to Walumbe. In 2009, I found spears of different shapes, clay pots and barkcloth devoted to multiple *lubaale* at various shafts. By 2018, minibus loads of visitors were leaving these offerings plus gourds, alcohol, milk, pipes, foodstuffs, hats, handbags, flags, wires, engine parts, wooden crosses, a satellite dish and light switches, all with their own spiritual significance (figure 4). The *lubaale* now represented included Kintu, Nambi and Walumbe, but also Kiwanuka, god of storms; Ddungu, of hunting; Kaumpuli, of the plague; Mukasa, of water; Musoke, of rainbows; Ndwula, of smallpox; Wanima, of lameness, and others. Newer sites surrounding Ttanda Archaeological Archives, including the Palace of Bulamu and Kinene, and the 'burial place' of Nambi and Kintu, were also busy and developing, brimming with shrines and offerings. At the Nambi–Kintu site, devotees knelt before Nambi and Kintu's 'bodies' (two rocks piled high with bark cloth – figure 5), and worshippers prayed for their children at a *lubaale* shrine filled with Christian bibles, picture books, toy snakes and white Western dolls, beneath posters of praying nuns (figure 6). At all these sites I was told that rapid material heritage developments had been instigated by spirits that instructed the living via dreams. During one consultation at the 'Walumbe Pits', I heard a medium ask his patient to bring offerings including barkcloth and flax on her next visit, then instruct her to sleep on the floor that night and text him about her dreams when she awoke, so that he could offer further advice. She and other visitors left offerings in return for counselling, herbal medicines and ritual instructions to help them with matters of health, business, harvest, fertility, security and wealth, or to thank the *lubaale* when their wishes had been granted. The diversity of these shrines can be said to grow in accordance with visions and dreams inspired by pilgrims' needs, which themselves reflect current challenges faced by Uganda's population.

Uganda's heritage spaces, just as others identified by Ndoro in Zimbabwe, can therefore be said to be 'dynamic cultural landscapes', used by local communities for 'economic survival and spiritual strength' (Ndoro 2005: 54). Here Uganda's heritages appear to reshape without 'expert' interference, not in response to the political ambitions of kingdom elites, but in accordance with the needs of everyday Ugandans who have to find their own ways to cope with national shortfalls in everything from healthcare, security, education and sanitation to general infrastructure (Peterson 2016: 792; Park et al 2021: 518; Peterson 2021: 626, 633–636). The nature of Uganda's cultural heritage and its development, therefore, might be seen as representative of Ugandans' present political, social and economic concerns.

Cultural entrepreneurialism

Heritage in Uganda, as anywhere, also provides opportunities for cultural entrepreneurs. Not everyone who frequents Uganda's heritage sites prays for wealth: some instead create work for themselves, by adapting site narratives to make money from pilgrims and tourists. Here community heritage development again eclipses AHD, although it takes a form little different from the top-down management described by Smith (2006: 79), where, 'meanings and memories become scripted or regulated by the way a place or landscape has itself been defined, mapped and thus managed – in effect heritage experiences/performances become regulated by the management process itself'. Rather than being exclusively managed and shaped for tourists by heritage professionals, however, local entrepreneurs mould Uganda's cultural heritages for a spiritual audience, in response to their needs, ambitions and dreams.

While genuine community beliefs concerning spiritual instruction should be respected, information gleaned from dreams can be difficult to dispute and is particularly contentious when it supports financial agendas. The current landowner of Ttanda Archaeological Archives, for example, explained that his father named the site in the 1970s, to attract researchers and tourists. Most visitors, however, were interested in making offerings to Walumbe, so around 2000 he cleared away foliage and hired a spirit medium to oversee what is now a thriving spiritual business. Visitors must pay a small entrance fee, another fee to be shown around the site, and another fee to each spirit medium that they ask for advice. They are offered an oral-only site narrative centred on myths, spirits and dreams, without any mention of archaeology. At least two people are said to have died by falling on spears or into the exposed shafts, reinforcing rumours about Walumbe's power. Guides promised me that even the site's dogs were possessed, and stories of miracle cures given by the mediums had attracted pilgrims from far and wide. According to the landowner, 'for those guys that make money in there, any kind of mystery that gets associated to the place increases their chances of earning from people. ... They can actually give you all sorts of falsehoods.' He also suspects that some of his groundsmen pretend to be spirit mediums, having 'realised there is a quick buck to be made'.

This money-making extends beyond the boundaries of the site, as visitors purchase offerings to give to its diversifying *lubaale*. Ritual activities at Ttanda Archaeological Archives, Dindo Hill and other shrine sites across the country have created a micro-economy, with whole sections of Owino Market, Kampala, devoted to the sale of ritual items. These items are offered in the Ttanda landscape in such great numbers that they frequently have to be cleared away again, presumably to be resold. At the Kasubi Tombs, meanwhile, the restoration project manager has struggled to 'stop ... people making money from rituals that don't exist' during the reconstruction process, because:

Somebody would come and say, for instance, about the [*muzibu azaala mpanga's*] central pole, 'We need \$30,000 to go to Kyagwe, cut this tree down and bring it.' ... And then you begin to find out that people are inventing culture to make money. ... It happens, they know it's fake, he gets the money ... he probably spends \$2,000 on the tree and then buys a car.

As such, AHD again falls in the shadow of local heritage developments that place more value on community heritage behaviours than on academic expertise.

Conclusion

King (2019: 388) notes that heritage practitioners in Africa tend to see heritage management as a top-down affair, governed by a heritage elite that is 'further buttressed by international heritage conservation conventions and frameworks'. In this paper, however, I have suggested that international heritage practice, as characterised by Smith's (2006) AHD, pales in significance to community approaches to a living, developing heritage inspired by spirits, myths and dreams, shaped by religious belief, cultural entrepreneurialism and community need. Uganda's government, rather than enforcing a secular AHD, seems to distance itself from representations of a spiritual and ethnically divided past that sits at odds with its nationalist, developmental agenda. At the same time, it tacitly encourages Uganda's cultural institutions to multiply, fracture and weaken, allowing heritage narratives and spaces to develop without restriction. As a result, Uganda's heritage belongs to its communities, and it is not static, but vibrant, spiritual and alive. Without interference from the central government, international heritage legislation or Smith's (2006) AHD, it flourishes and develops continually.

Acknowledgements

This research has been funded by the London Arts and Humanities Partnership and conducted in association with the Uganda Museum. Thanks go to Remigius Kigongo, Catherine Ajiambo and Zaina Nabirye for their assistance with Luganda interviews and their support during my time in Uganda.

References

Abungu, G 2012 Africa's Rich Intangible Cultural Heritage. In: Stefano, M S et al *Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Suffolk: Boydell Press. 57–70.

Awumbila, M 2017 Trends in Urbanization and Migration in Africa. In: Aall, P and Crocker, C A *The Fabric of Peace in Africa*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, CIGI Press. 145–162.

Behrend, H 2011. *Resurrecting Cannibals: The Catholic Church, Witch-Hunts and the Production of Pagans in Western Uganda*. James Currey.

Bwambale, T 2017 Uganda's elderly population to double to 2.5 million by 2040. *New Vision*, 28 September [online access at <https://www.newvision.co.ug/newvision/news/1462612/uganda-elderly-population-double-million-2040> last accessed 23 February 2018].

Carmody, P and Taylor, D 2016 Globalization, Land Grabbing, and the Present-Day Colonial State in Uganda. *The Journal of Environment & Development*, 25(1): 100–126. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1070496515622017>

CCFU 2012 *Community Museums in Uganda*. Kampala: Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda.

-
- CIA** 2017 Country Comparison [online access at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2002rank.html> last accessed 7 September 2018].
- Ferguson, J** 2006 *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Fihlani, P** 2017 Has voodoo been misjudged? *BBC News*, 1 September [online access at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-41048840> last accessed 01 September 2017].
- Giblin, J D et al** 2011 Challenges for Pre-Colonial Archaeological Site Management in Rwanda. *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites*, 13(2–3): 174–88. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1179/175355211X13179154166079>.
- Green, M** 1995 Why Christianity is the ‘Religion of Business’: Perceptions of the Church Among Pogoro Catholics in Southern Tanzania. *Journal of Religion in Africa* 25: 25–47.
- Insoll, T** 1997 Mosque Architecture in Buganda, Uganda. *Muqarnas*, 14: 179–188. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1523244>.
- Kagwa, A** 1934. *The Customs of the Baganda*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kasozi, A B K** 1981. The Impact of Islam on Ganda Culture, 1844–1894. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 12: 127–35.
- Kigongo, R and Reid A** 2007 Local Communities, Politics and the Management of the Kasubi Tombs, Uganda. *World Archaeology* 39: 371–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00438240701563094>
- King, R** 2019 How do African states think about cultural property? *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 26: 387–411. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0940739119000328>.
- Kodesh, N** 2010 *Beyond the Royal Gaze: Clanship and Public Healing in Buganda*. Virginia: University of Virginia Press.
- Lanning, E C** 1954 Notes on Certain Shafts in Buganda and Toro. *Uganda Journal*, 18(2): 187–190. The Uganda Society. Available at <https://dl.wdl.org/13816/service/13816.pdf> [last accessed 19 June 2020].
- Meier, S P** 2016 Stories of Stone: The Transformation and Reinvention of Swahili Coast Pillar Tombs. In: Beardsley, J *Cultural Landscape Heritage in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington D C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection. 139–160.
- Meyer, B** 2001 ‘You Devil, go away from me!’ Pentecostalist African Christianity and the Powers of Good and Evil. In: Clough, P and Mitchell, J P, *Powers of Good and Evil: Social Transformation and Popular Belief*. Berghahn Books. 104–134.
- Musinguzi, B** 2021 Tanda Pits: The Legend of Walumbe. *Monitor*, 21 February 2021 [online access at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/tanda-pits-the-legend-of-walumbe-3299274> last accessed 31 August 2022].

-
- Ndoro, W** 2005. *The Preservation of Great Zimbabwe: Your Monument, Our Shrine*. Rome: ICCROM.
- NDPII** 2015 Second National Development Plan 2015/16–2019/20. Available at <http://npa.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/NDPII-Final.pdf> [last accessed 19 June 2020].
- Nsibambi, F** 2019. Documenting and Presenting Contentious Narratives and Objects—Experiences from Museums in Uganda. *Heritage 2*: 27–33.
- Nwonwu, C and Igonikon, K** 2021. The Nigerian priest saving Igbo deities from the bonfires. *BBC Igbo*, June 23. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-57316651?fbclid=IwAR0wH9NGvnsaSbW30c79RXymUMN9VIyYZ2gu1YOT0cksNg-faQwIVLxp-Wc> [last accessed 3 August 2022].
- Okoth, C** 2017 Uganda to Double Electricity Capacity by 2019. *New Vision*, 13 September. <https://www.newvision.co.ug/newvision/news/1461557/uganda-double-electricity-capacity-2019> [last accessed 23 February 2018].
- Peterson, D** 2021 Government Work in Idi Amin’s Uganda. *Africa*, 91(4). 620–640.
- Peterson, D et al** 2021 The Unseen Archive of Idi Amin: Making History in a Tight Corner. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 63(1): 5–40.
- Pham, P & Vinck, P** 2010 *Transitioning to Peace: A Population-Based Survey on Attitudes About Social Reconstruction and Justice in Northern Uganda*. Berkeley: Human Rights Center, University of California.
- Plumb, S** 2002 The Challenges of Social, Political, and Economic Change: Multiple Portraits of the Uganda Museum. Unpublished thesis (PhD), The Pennsylvania State University.
- Ray, B C** 1977. Sacred Space and Royal Shrines in Buganda. *History of Religions* 16: 363–73.
- Relief Web** 2020 Map of Uganda. Available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/REACH_UGA_Map_CountryReference_21JAN2020_A3.pdf [last accessed 21 April 2020].
- Reid, A** 2013 The emergence of states in the Great Lakes region. In: Mitchell, P R and Lane, P J *Handbook of African Archaeology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 883–895.
- Reid, A** 2016 Constructing History in Uganda. In: *Journal of African History* 57(2): 195–207. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853716000268>.
- Reid, R** 2017 *A History of Modern Uganda*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Robertshaw, P and Kamuhangire, E** 1996. The present in the past: archaeological sites, oral traditions, shrines and politics in Uganda. In: G Pwiti and R Soper, *Aspects of African Archaeology*. 739–44. Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications.
- Roscoe, J** 1911 *The Baganda: An Account of their Native Customs and Beliefs*. London: Macmillan.

-
- Shinnie, P L** 1960. Excavations at Bigo, 1957. *Uganda Journal*, 24: 16–28.
- Sinamai, A** 2022. Ivhu Rinotsamwa: Landscape Memory and Cultural Landscapes in Zimbabwe and Tropical Africa. *ETropic* 21(1): 51–69. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25120/etropic.21.1.2022.3836>.
- Smith, L** 2006 *Uses of Heritage*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Tankink, M** 2007 ‘The Moment I Became Born-again the Pain Disappeared’: The Healing of Devastating War Memories in Born-again Churches in Mbarara District, Southwest Uganda. In: *Transcultural Psychiatry* 44 (203): 203-231. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1363461507077723>.
- Trone, A** 1981 *The Uganda Museum: Priorities for Conservation*. London: UNESCO
- Twaddle, M** 1972 The Muslim Revolution in Buganda. *African Affairs*, 71: 54–72.
- Udelhoven, B** 2017 The Devil of the Missionary Church: The White Fathers and Catholic Evangelization in Zambia. *Journal of Global Catholicism* 2: 70–109. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32436/2475-6423.1022>.
- UEGCL** 2019 Business Operations. Available at <https://www.uegcl.com/business-operations/projects/karuma-hydro-power-project.html> [last accessed 19 June 2020].
- UN-Habitat** 2010 The State of African Cities: Governance, Inequality and Urban Land Markets. Available at <https://unhabitat.org/state-of-african-cities-2010-governance-inequalities-and-urban-land-markets-2> [last accessed 31 October 2022]
- UNPD** 2017 World Population Prospects: Key findings & advance tables – 2017 Revision. Available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/world-population-prospects-the-2017-revision.html> [last accessed 19 June 2020].
- Varissou, S** 2018. The Sacred Groves in the Bight of Benin. In: W Ndoro, S Chirikure & J Deacon *Managing Heritage in Africa: Who Cares?* Oxford: Routledge. 122–38. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315472973>.
- Wacha, A** 2018 Welcome to Uganda. In: Nabisunsa Girls School *With Pens That Shout and Mouths That Shut*. Kampala: Bonacraft Studios Limited. 70–72.
- Walker, N** 1997 In the Footsteps of the Ancestors: The Matsieng Creation Site in Botswana. *The South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 52: 95–104. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3889074>.
- Wayland, E J** 1921. Covering note by EJW. Local Correspondents. Papers. Wiley Digital Archives: The Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland.
- Wayland, E J** 1934 Some Notes on the Biggo Bya Bagenyi. *Uganda Journal*, 2: 21–32.
- World Bank** 2018 Poverty & Equity Brief, Sub-Saharan Africa: Uganda, October 2018. Available at https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/33EF03BB-9722-4AE2-ABC7-AA2972D68AFE/Global_POVEQ_UGA.pdf [last accessed 29 January 2019].

World Bank 2019a GDP per capita. Available from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=UG> [last accessed 29 January 2019].

World Bank 2019b Uganda. Available from <https://data.worldbank.org/country/uganda?view=chart> [last accessed 31 December 2019].