Towards Multispecies History

Fish, Family, and the Gendered Politics of Descent Along Uganda’s Southern Littorals

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Abstract: This article examines historic gendered negotiations over identity, descent, and access to land along Uganda’s southern littorals by thinking about belonging with an exceptionally diverse assemblage of small fish. Based on accounts from contemporary littoral residents, the comparative historic ethnographic record, and fisheries scientists, the article describes the reproductive practices of *enkejje* as they may have been visible from Uganda’s southern littorals and situates the practices of raising socially recognized children within broader historical developments of clanship and public healing. Attending to these small fish in moments and in places where groups are under construction reorients analyses of descent politics beyond an often implicit focus on male interests towards the work of grandmothers, aunts, and mothers in debating the qualities of the most foundational units of the body politic – male and female children constituted relationally as persons through their status as legitimate family members.

Résumé: Cet article examine les négociations historiques genrées sur l’identité, la lignée et l’accès à la terre le long des littoraux sud de l’Ouganda en pensant au phénomène d’appartenance avec l’aide d’un assemblage exceptionnellement diversifié de petits poissons. Basé sur des témoignages de résidents littoraux contemporains, de l’histoire ethnographique comparée et des études scientifiques halieutiques, cet article décrit les pratiques reproductrices d’*enkejje* telles qu’elles peuvent être visibles depuis les côtes sud ougandaises et situe les pratiques d’éducation des enfants socialement reconnus dans des développements historiques plus larges des clans et de guérison publique. Étudier ces petits poissons dans les moments et dans les endroits où les groupes sont en construction réoriente les analyses de la politique de descendance au-delà d’un intérêt masculin souvent implicite envers le travail des grand-mères, tantes et meres en discutant les qualités des unités les plus fondamentales du corps. Ainsi les enfants de sexe masculin et féminin sont constitués en tant que personnes par le biais de leur statut de membres légitimes de la famille.
History in Africa

Introduction

Prior to the 1980s, the majority of fish swimming in the waters that fringe Uganda’s highly crenelated southern shores were small, diverse, and often brightly colored. Residents of these littorals still call these fish *enkejje*, and continue to recognize these fish for their unique reproductive habits. Whereas many other types of fish release their eggs into the open water after spawning or tend to them within the confines of their nests, *enkejje* mothers raise their fertilized eggs almost entirely within their mouths. After their eggs transition into small fry, mother *enkejje* periodically release their young into the water and continue for at least several weeks to take them into their mouths when predators appear, and release them again when danger has cleared. Once these small fry have learned sufficient skills and grown large enough to survive on

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5 *Enkejje* are not the only mouthbrooding fish in this region. The fish known as *engege* to residents of Uganda’s southern shores, to scientists as *Oreochromis*, and to English speakers as tilapia also practice mouthbrooding. Peter H. Greenwood, *The Cichlid Fishes of Lake Victoria, East Africa: The Biology and Evolution of a Species Flock* (London: British Museum [Natural History], 1974).
their own, their mothers release them into the water to become their own free-swimming fish. This reproductive strategy, known to English speakers as maternal mouthbrooding, was and still is readily apparent to fishworkers and littoral residents who have the time and interest to find a quiet place on the shore with a clear view into the water below.

*Enkejje* were and to a lesser degree still are required accompaniments to curative and commemorative practices along the northern shores of Africa’s largest body of freshwater. This body of water is known to English speakers as Lake Victoria, to residents of Uganda’s contemporary southern littorals as a sea called *Nyanja*, and by historic residents of Buganda as *Ennyanja Nalubaale*, a sea formed in relation to powerful feminine ancestors. In addition to *enkejje*’s abilities to treat the symptoms of measles when consumed boiled into a thick soup, these fish were used to neutralize taboos associated with childbirth and to mark the death of family members at funerals. More importantly for the argument offered here, *enkejje* once featured – and indeed still do

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6 According to Michael B. Nsimbi, “*enkejje* was the most important fish (...) because it was an essential dish at all tribal feasts.” Indeed, because of the historic ubiquity of *enkejje* at events where groups were in formation, “in Buganda anyone who frequents all gatherings of people is likened to the *enkejje*.” Michael B. Nsimbi, “Village Life and Customs in Buganda,” *Uganda Journal* 20 (1956), 27–36, 28. For distinctions between Lake Victoria and *Nyanja*, see: Jennifer L. Johnson, “Eating and Existence on an Island in Southern Uganda,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37–1 (2017), 2–23, 5–9.

7 All littoral residents that I spoke with about *enkejje* for this study were familiar with the use of this fish for the treatment of measles. There is no specific antiviral treatment for measles, though vaccinations are encouraged and even mandated in some contexts. Current World Health Organization guidelines recommend treatment with adequate nutrition, fluids, electrolytes, and Vitamin A supplementation to avoiding the worst effects of a measles infection: blindness and death. See: World Health Organization, “Measles Fact Sheet No. 286,” February 2014, http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs286/en/. The soup littoral residents have long served children with measles several times a day to improve their condition already contained all of this: butter, salty broth, and fish rich in bioavailable protein and vitamin A. Margaret K. Kabahenda *et al.*, “Protein and Micronutrient Composition of Low-Value Fish Products Commonly Marketed in the Lake Victoria Region,” *World Journal of Agricultural Sciences* 7–5 (2011), 521–526. As for taboos, according to Mathias Lusembo, if a woman was assisted in childbirth by her own mother, rather than her mother-in-law, “she had to get fish called *nkejje* to neutralize the in-law taboo for her married daughter had squatted before her.” Mathias Lusembo, “The Transformation of the Status and Role of the Ganda Married Woman since 1877,” PhD dissertation, Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, (Rome, 1990), 54. According to the White Father Le Veux in his 1917 Luganda-French dictionary, *enkejje* is a fish which “les païens exigent le ‘nkejje ensese’ pour leurs rites d’initiation ou leur cérémonial funéraire,” (the pagans require ‘enkejje from Ssesse’ for initiation rites or funeral ceremonies). Père Le Veux, *Premier Essai de Vocabulaire Luganda-Français d’après l’Ordre Étymologique* (Maison-Carrée: Imprimerie des Missionnaires d’Afrique [Pères Blancs], 1917), 340.
feature – within an underexamined suite of ritual practices known to Luganda speakers as okwalulá abaana and reasonably glossed in English as “hatching the children.” During okwalulá abaana, grandmothers and aunts symbolically test the legitimacy of their children based on prior evaluations of the behaviors of their mothers. Healthy children whose mothers demonstrate appropriate decorum and aptitude in a number of practical tasks are granted the status of legitimate family members and are given family names by maternal elders superintending the testing ceremony. By passing okwalulá abaana, children become people, and their mothers become official members of the families into which their children are hatched.

Multispecies ethnography encourages scholars to examine humans as emergent through relations with other agentive beings. More than simply new topics of inquiry and sources of methodological innovation, the study of relations between people, animals, plants, and other beings offers opportunities for theorizing what it means to be human beyond conceptualizing difference as variations on the “standardized human (a species, generally Euro-male).” Examining social phenomena as emergent through asymmetrical and sometimes mutually dependent relations between humans and our “significant others,” those other-than-human beings with which some people insist on coming into being, refocuses analytic attention away from the always-already existence of people and the groups we form towards their continued emergence.

Historians may hesitate to embrace the somewhat speculative nature of multispecies ethnography as a mode of inquiry. After all, it is difficult, maybe impossible, to truly understand what other-than-human beings may think about humans (and this only becomes a concern if we entertain the possibility that humans are not the only beings capable of thinking).


9 Ogden et al., “Animals, Plants, People, and Things,” 6–7. The species concept itself is contested within this field, leading some ethnographers to prefer the term “multibeing ethnography.”

10 For Anna Tsing, if we accept that the social is made through “entangling relations with ‘significant others,’” then “clearly living beings other-than-human are fully social – with or without humans.” Anna L. Tsing, “More Than Human Sociality,” Anthropology and Nature (London: Routledge, 2013), 27–42, 27. See also: Donna Haraway, When Species Meet (Minneapolis MA: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Eduardo Kohn, How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology beyond the Human (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

11 This does not stop some ecologists and anthropologists from trying. Jonathan Balcombe, What a Fish Knows: The Inner Lives of Our Underwater Cousins (New York: Scientific American/Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2016);
However, if, as John Lonsdale has argued, ethnicity is formed through internal debate over what constitutes socially responsible behavior within groups themselves, we may also examine ethnicity as emergent through encounters with other-than-human beings that people intentionally engage within ritualized practices of “ourselves-ing.” Indeed, relations between people and other-than-human beings reveal fresh opportunities for analyzing the creation of persons and the relationship between persons and things that Jane Guyer argues should undergird any model of wealth-in-people.

Attending to the specificies of *enkejje* and how they feature within events where groups are formed reorients analyses of descent politics beyond an often implicit focus on male interests towards the work of grandmothers, aunts, and mothers. Through the practices of hatching the children with *enkejje*, senior women debated and evaluated the desired qualities and quantities of the most foundational units of the body politic – male and female children constituted relationally as persons through their status as legitimate family members. With an abundance of wealth in *enkejje*, and inspired by *enkejje*'s unique reproductive proclivities, senior littoral women composed expansive families and constellated cosmopolitan communities along the southern shores of what would become Uganda.

**Invisible Fish/Invisible Histories**

*Okwalulá abaana* has received limited attention from scholars concerned with the political and social history of Buganda. The few scholars who have considered the hatching of the children gloss this event as providing yet another example of patrilineality, patrilocality, and overall patriarchal control over women’s reproductive and social lives. This interpretation, I suggest, is largely due to the fact that the conditions under which the sources used to analyze this historic event were written over one hundred years ago, as well as the influence these sources had on the codification of cultural histories passed down to scholars by other means.


At a fundamental level, English-language accounts of African vernacular concepts suffer from a translation problem. In Luganda, the most widely spoken language along Uganda’s southern littorals, titles denoting political authority such as kabaka (for heads of state) and omutaka (for heads of clans or major clan subdivisions), professional affiliations such as muvubi (fishworker) and musawo (doctor), and titles reserved for those with exceptional spiritual authority such as kabona (ritual expert), lubaale (guardians), Mukasa (the head lubaale), or jjajja (grandparent or ancestor) do not mark their holders as either male or female. The most common English translations of these titles, however – more and less implicitly – do. When kabaka is translated as king, omutaka as chief, muvubi as fisherman, musawo as medicine man, kabona as priest, lubaale as god, Mukasa as chief of the gods, and jjajja as grandfather, English speakers tend to envision these positions and the individuals they reference as male, whether or not they actually were. These titles may well have marked the individuals that held them as masculine, but as Sylvia Nnanyonga-Tamusuza has argued, this did not necessarily mean they were held by biological males.

The most widely consulted historic ethnographic sources for the hatching of the children, as well as precolonial cultural history in this region more generally, are John Roscoe’s 1911 and Apolo Kagwa’s 1918 ethnographies of the Baganda people and the Buganda territory more broadly. Both texts were written following tumultuous transformations in the lives of littoral residents that profoundly shaped the contours of how historic forms of ethnicity were documented and later remembered through these texts, namely: 1) after all of the several hundred islands skirting Uganda’s southern shores were formally incorporated into Buganda’s administrative domain in 1900 (whether or not residents of these islands considered themselves Baganda, and many did not); 2) after all women were “removed entirely from the palace” of Buganda’s colonially reordered kingdom around 1906 and by extension the formal domain of high politics.

Although not explicitly engaging concerns related to biological sex or gender, Neil Kodesh eloquently addresses the conceptual inadequacies associated with translating lubaale as god and the importance for his interlocutors of using the vernacular term in Beyond the Royal Gaze: Clanship and Public Healing in Buganda (Charlottesville VA: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 177–178.


and 3) after Uganda’s colonial government ordered the depopulation of all mainland and island littorals in 1907 and declared all fishing not explicitly supervised by Europeans illegal in 1908, ostensibly to protect residents against an emerging outbreak of sleeping sickness.20

Roscoe and Kagwa’s accounts situated fishwork within masculine domains of activity. There is, however, ample evidence for historic forms of water transportation and fishing in the region in which both men and women participated. Even Roscoe noted: “Women sometimes took their places in a canoe as paddlers, when there was a shortage of men,” and that these women “kept pace with the men in paddling.”21 Colonial administrators, travelers, and ethnographers noted that women fished alongside men with traps, nets, and hook-and-line gear. In littoral communities that specialized in producing and trading fish, “the men are not the only fishers, the women also [take] an active part in the work.”22 For example, one observer noted that “the women spend much time” in their dugout canoes, “sitting fishing with rod and line; the men confine their efforts to setting fish traps, huge baskets which are anchored to some patch of sudd a little distance beneath the surface.”23 Those fishing with this “simple hook” were said to be “extremely clever, for a bite means a sure catch.”24 Although men may be strongly associated with “the rod” in more recent years, this was certainly not the case in some specialized fishing communities just over one hundred years ago. Even spear-fishing in swamps, perhaps the most quintessentially masculine form of fishing, required a canoe where “the woman paddles slowly along, the man stands or sits in the bow, holding a long light spear pointed ready for instant action.”25

Perhaps the most refreshing, productive, and visually striking form of fishing that took place was the combined use of baskets and nets described by Johnston below, a form of fishing that put fishworkers in intimate contact with *enkejje*:

> They bring two very long ropes, one end of each of which is firmly secured to the shore. One rope lies weighted, along the bottom under the water, the other floats on the surface, but from it hangs a fringe of papyrus stalks.

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21 Roscoe also noted that only men were “hired out” as paddlers for European expeditions. John Roscoe, *The Baganda; an Account of Their Native Customs and Beliefs* (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1911), 391.


The two ropes above and below correspond with its other, and are connected at intervals with strings to ensure their correspondence, while the fringe of papyrus strips make this arrangement into a kind of pliable fence. This, by means of canoes, is brought back to the shore till it describes rather more than a semi-circle. The bringing round of the rope serves to chase all the fish that are between it and the shore towards the mouths of the big wickerwork traps which are placed in a row in the shallow water. The women at the same time, walk up and down dragging traps of smaller mesh, in which they collect numbers of small fish.26

Enkejje mothers brooding their fish in their mouths would have found this practice disruptive to the care of their young. Those trapped within the confines of nets and baskets may have involuntarily released their young into the water and tried to scoop them up again. Many young enkejje, too young to survive on their own, would have been lost. This struggle would have been immediately apparent to women wading and dragging traps, nets, and baskets in the clear, sandy-bottomed waters where the type of fishing Johnston described took place.

Imagining okwalulá abaana along Uganda’s southern island and mainland littorals within a more historically nuanced social context – one within which littoral localities, especially islands, were interconnected, but relatively autonomous from the mainland Buganda State; where king mothers, king sisters, and female lubaale mediums and priests had their own followers, lands, and powers over life and death; and where women actively fished, processed, and traded fish alongside men – requires new methodological tools for examining how children – and by extension their parents – came to belong in the cosmopolitan communities that have long populated Uganda’s southern littorals.

A more accurate ecological context is required too. When Roscoe and Kagwa were writing their accounts, enkejje were by far the most abundant type of fish available along Uganda’s southern shores. In the decades that followed the introduction of the Nile perch into Lake Victoria, most enkejje were consumed out of existence – not by people, but by growing populations of Nile perch.27 And yet, contemporary accounts of Lake Victoria’s fisheries tend to begin as if Nile perch have always existed there. One otherwise careful political historian of pre-colonial Buganda recently noted, “widely eaten fish included lungfish, barbels, catfish and the type known to Europeans as Nile

perch. “28 In the 1980s alone, an estimated 65 percent, or approximately two hundred species, of these fish were “eradicated” by the Nile perch and concomitant transformations in the aquatic ecology of this body of water. Indeed, for fisheries ecologists, this “may well represent the largest extinction event among vertebrates” experienced throughout the entire twentieth century.29 What does this mass extinction event mean for the historiography of this region?

By the time historians of the Great Lakes region began researching and writing serious critiques of the nationalist and royalist historical canons in the mid-1980s, enkejje had almost completely disappeared from Ugandan, Kenyan, and Tanzanian waters. Without a material, visual referent for these fish in their historic abundance, enkejje have thus far been unable to animate the historical imaginations of even the most attentive scholars working to advance methodological approaches for analyzing social histories of recent and much more distant pasts. Indeed, similar to the historical and anthropological study of the Nuer, where, according to John Burton, “the piscatorial theme has been all but obfuscated by the anthropological romance with pastoralism,” banana cultivation has been overemphasized in studies of pre-colonial political histories of Buganda.30 Although enkejje have become much more rare in recent decades than they were at the turn of the twentieth century, it is still possible to see them tending their young through the clear waters that encircle the many islands skirting Uganda’s southern shores, places where residents do not eat their food (emere) without sauce (enva) made from fish.31

31 For a discussion of distinctions between food (emere) and sauce (enva) and the contemporary and historic political significance of recognizing this distinction, see: Johnson, “Eating and Existence,” 10–12.
How Enkejje Hatch Their Young

All enkejje are maternal mouthbrooders; that is their eggs and small young are raised for weeks and sometimes months within their mothers’ mouths. The presence and importance of this reproductive strategy would have been obvious to the men and women who fished the inshore littoral. Mouthbrooding fish demonstrate a degree of care for their eggs and small young that is virtually unrivaled in any other type of fish.\(^{32}\) It is this reproductive practice, evolutionary ecologists argue, that has encouraged enkejje to develop the complex and continually dynamic bodily forms, food-provisioning strategies, and ability to inhabit diverse ecological niches for which they are famous.\(^{33}\) In so doing, they focus their energies on raising a small number of young well, rather than releasing as many eggs as possible in hopes that many survive. It is the ability of mother enkejje to care for their young, as well as the ability of their young to follow their mothers’ social cues, that ultimately matter to the survival of enkejje fry and their eventual hatching as free-swimming juvenile fish. Although I do not want to equivocate people with fish, and do not claim to know how gender is constituted among enkejje, for legibility when describing the reproductive practices of enkejje below, I use the gendered pronouns her/she to refer to female enkejje and him/his to refer to male enkejje.

The most successful males are often the largest and most brightly colored, and display particularly attractive “quivers,” that is, an appealing “high-frequency shaking movement of the body.”\(^{34}\) These physical abilities usually translate into a given male enkejje’s proficiencies in building or locating a safe place for the couple to mate – a secure rock shelter or a comfortable sand bower. A female enkejje will generally only release her eggs for males who have made adequate homes for themselves, even though she will ultimately only spend a short amount of time there. If she is enticed by a male enkejje’s looks and behavior, but his “home territory” is unimpressive, she may simply swim on to evaluate the next attractive potential mate.

After a female enkejje decides that a given male might be worth her precious eggs, she swims within his nest long enough for a male enkejje to begin gently nudging her abdomen with his snout. This encourages female

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\(^{32}\) Only eight families within the over 430 families of fish identified by scientists practice mouthbrooding. Most of these families of mouthbrooding fish are maternal mouthbrooders; that is, it is the male that takes the traditional “mothering” role. Most species of cichlids, including all species identified in Lake Victoria, are maternal mouthbrooders.


enkejje to release “one or a few eggs” onto his nest and immediately scoop them up into her mouth. Males with the most reproductive success have developed particularly attractive “pseudo-egg spots” on or near their anal fins, which encourage fertilization to occur. Aspiring enkejje mothers assume that these pseudo-eggs are their own and try repeatedly to scoop these up too. As this happens, males release their sperm, ideally directly into the mouths of female enkejje. An aspiring mother’s desires to protect visible eggs are strong, and she will try several more times to pick up the male’s false eggs, before repeating this processes with the same male, or trying again with another male altogether. After she is convinced that all of her eggs are safely within her mouth, the aspiring mother enkejje simply swims away and the male enkejje plays no further role in tending their young.

Successful mothers scoop their eggs into their mouths quickly. There are good reasons for this. Other fish, including some male enkejje, specialize in eating the eggs of enkejje, so eggs left too long may be food for other fish. More interestingly for our purposes, in the process of quickly picking up eggs, mother enkejje sometimes scoop up eggs belonging to other enkejje or other “tribes” of fish altogether. Although it is difficult to know whether this would have been a practice that historical littoral residents observed, female enkejje have been observed in experimental settings “stealing” eggs from other enkejje mothers and tending to them instead of or alongside their own. Enkejje have also been observed scooping up the eggs of other “tribes” of fish and raising them as their own, even though these other fish may end up eating all of their host’s own enkejje eggs before they have had a chance to reach the fry stage. Given the possibility that mother enkejje

36 Goldschmidt, “Egg Mimics.”
38 They do this by mimicking the coloration of females and following the swimming patterns of the male enkejje ready to spawn. Wolfgang Mrowka, “Egg Stealing in a Mouthbrooding Cichlid Fish,” Animal Behaviour 35–3 (1987), 923–925, 924.
39 They do this by mimicking male sexual advances and “gently butting with their snouts the abdominal region of the female who was ready to spawn.” Mrowka, “Egg Stealing,” 924.
40 For example, Haplochromines in Lake Tanganyika are known to mouthbrood Synodontis. This behavior has not been observed in Lake Victoria, but given the presence of Synodontis alongside enkejje there, it is likely that enkejje also sometimes mouthbrood Synodontis in Lake Victoria. For a fascinating and short video of this, see: “Killer Cuckoo Catfish/National Geographic,” posted by National Geographic, Youtube video, 2:50, 9 January 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tnvbV1cZZHc.
may intentionally or accidentally foster mouthbrood eggs from other fish, when I refer below to the eggs and young that a mother enkejje raises as “hers,” I am referring to all eggs and fry that she tends in her mouth, whether or not they are actually her own biologically related young.

An aspiring mother enkejje continues to hold her fertilized eggs within her mouth while they transition into small fry. These not yet fully “hatched” fish learn to swim first within the comparatively safe confines of their mothers’ mouths. During this time, she does not eat, as all her attention and all the space in her mouth must be dedicated to her young brood.41 Soon, her eggs transform into small fry, and the members of her brood gain their bearings slowly and safely within the confines of her mouth. When her young are large enough to try swimming for themselves, she releases them into the water for brief periods of time. These new mothers carefully guard their young, teaching them what to eat and how to find sheltered nooks between rocks or amongst roots of floating vegetation where they can safely rest and rejuvenate themselves. Throughout this guarding period, mother enkejje continue to scoop up their young into their mouths whenever they sense danger is near. Eventually, mother enkejje release their young into the water for the last time. This period of care is naturally transformative. Young enkejje learn the skills required to survive and receive subtle guidance on which mates they ought to seek out for their own reproduction in the future.42

41 Although I want to avoid equivocating people and fish, it is worth noting that immediately following birth, mothers of human children also avoided eating with outsiders and exposing their children to outsiders in general. Julien Gorju, Entre Le Victoria, l’Albert et l’Edouard: Ethnographie de La Partie Anglaise Du Vicariat de l’Uganda, Origines, Histoire, Religion, Coutumes (Rennes: Imprimeries Oberthûr, 1920), 333.

42 Machteld Verzijden and Carel ten Cate, for example, conducted a cross-fostering experiment with two species of Lake Victoria’s cichlids. They selected pairs of brooding females that had spawned several days apart, “gently forced” these fish to spit out their eggs, and transferred their eggs into the mouth of the other brooding female. Under these experimental conditions, brooding females fostered the eggs of another female in their mouths into the fry stage for three to four weeks, after which they released their fostered fry to begin foraging for themselves, though the mothers continued to guard their fry for another three weeks. By tracking the mating preferences of female fish raised by these foster mothers, Verzijden and Ten Cate found that fostered females preferred to mate with males that resembled their foster mothers, whether or not their foster mothers were of the same species of fish. Their experiment provides the first strong evidence in cichlids, and for fish more generally, that females prefer to mate with males that resemble their mothers. It is unclear exactly how this imprinting occurs; however, visual and olfactory cues are most certainly at play. See: Machteld N. Verzijden and Carel ten Cate, “Early Learning Influences Species Assortative Mating Preferences in Lake Victoria Cichlid Fish,” Biology Letters 3–2 (2007), 134–136, 135–136.
Still, not every young *enkejje* fully hatches into a free-swimming adult. It is entirely possible that a mother *enkejje* will be eaten by a larger fish, or caught in a fishing net while she is “holding.” If that does happen, littoral residents report that mother *enkejje* will release her eggs abruptly, “vomiting” them out, hopefully into the open water and not the belly of another fish, the bottom of a boat, or into a tightly woven fishing basket.

### When and Why Did Children Begin to Hatch?

It is unclear exactly when families living along Uganda’s southern littorals began practicing *okwalulá abaana*. According to Rhiannon Stephens, ceremonies testing the legitimacy of children (*okufulumya omwana*) and naming children after ancestors (*okugulika omwana* or *okwalula omwana*) were ongoing in Busoga at least as early as the sixteenth century. It is possible they began much earlier. David Schoenbrun’s examination of the shifting terrain of food production and social life in this region suggests that between 900–1100 CE collections of family units or homesteads (*ndá; lulá* plural) became the focus of social relations and clanship. Indeed, the semantic domain of *lulá*, Schoenbrun notes, “is ‘inside’ the body, quite often the womb itself.”

The families (*ndá; lulá* plural) into which children were hatched through *okwalulá abaana* ought not to be conceived of in the “nuclear” sense – as bounded units of mother, father, and child, or even in the “extended” sense – as including grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins. Families along these historic littorals were (and in many ways still are) compositions of many different people that together formed the basic units of successful communities, rather than accumulations of biological relatives. Historic residents of these littorals formed families tied to each other through the tasks they “carried out: fishing, hunting, farming, and herding, the bearing and raising of children, and the practical tasks of craft production, house building, and caring for the sick and departed.” According to Lucy Mair’s ethnographic work in the early twentieth century, “these are the people who would attend funeral ceremonies, turn up to support a relative in a court case, join in attack or defense in a blood-feud, and possibly combine to pay a fine.” The size of these groups, Schoenbrun reminds us, “likely ranged from ten people to hundreds,” and they may well have been strongly matrifocal.

44 Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place*, 172–175.
More recently, Schoenbrun has focused on shifting material and metaphoric relations between people and pythons to reveal new forms of clanship emerging in response to conflict along these littorals beginning around 800 CE.\textsuperscript{48} As Andrew Reid reminds us, this same period is one during which “fishing (as a source of protein) and other activities on the lake[sic] became intertwined with inland agricultural (carbohydrate-rich) production in a successful combination that was one of the key features of the resultant kingdom of Buganda.”\textsuperscript{49} As previous connections between spiritual authority and territorial specificity were increasingly “dislodged, coopted, or suppressed” through the conceptual and practical work of spirit mediums and their interpreters, littoral residents innovated a new polysemous term for clanship, \textit{ekika}, to encompass “big homestead; clan, family.”\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Ekika} reflected more expansive notions of belonging that mediums constellated across dispersed communities into what Neil Kodesh calls “networks of knowledge” directed towards healing in and around \textit{lubaale} shrines.\textsuperscript{51} These are the very same figures and shrines for which the pre-Lake Victorian body of water, \textit{Ennjanja Nalubaale}, was named.

\textit{Lubaale} are difficult beings and concepts to translate into English. Early Luganda-English dictionaries described \textit{lubaale} as “a spirit, a demon; a false god; an idol.”\textsuperscript{52} Much more recently, Kodesh has described them as “national spirits,” titles of “distinction reserved for those spiritual entities whose efficacy reaches beyond a particular territory or clan network and ensures the well-being of the entire kingdom” – status that \textit{lubaale} gained, according to Holly Hanson, sometime around the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Lubaale} are not, however, properly purely religious or spiritual entities. They are beings made real through material and affective encounters with and conversations about the objects and phenomena with which particular \textit{lubaale} are associated – for example, Kiwanuka is known through lightning, Ndaula through eruptions of boils on the skin, Musoke though waterspouts on the Nyanja, and Namusoke through rainbows.


\textsuperscript{49} Andrew Reid, “Buganda: Unearthing an African Kingdom,” \textit{Archaeology International} 7 (2003), 40–43, 41.

\textsuperscript{50} North Nyanza innovated \textit{ebika} (pl.) for “big homestead; clan; family.” Schoenbrun, “Pythons Worked,” 221–227.

\textsuperscript{51} Schoenbrun, “Pythons Worked,” 222.

\textsuperscript{52} G.L. Pilkington, \textit{Luganda-English and English-Luganda Vocabulary} (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1892), 58.

\textsuperscript{53} Kodesh, \textit{Beyond the Royal Gaze}, 123, 143; Hanson, \textit{Landed Obligation}, 72–75.
Fish, rain, winds, waves, children, and especially twin children composed the *lubaale* Mukasa’s domain. As a figure translated in early English-Luganda dictionaries as the “queen of the gods,” contemporary littoral residents and historians alike tended to reference Mukasa in English with masculine pronouns. According to Kagwa, Mukasa “was supposed to be very good and kind, and considered everybody his [sic] child, never killing anyone.” When Mukasa came to visit estates within this *lubaale’s* dominion, “all the prisoners” were purportedly “set free.” Mukasa’s efficacy was once ensured through the affectively charged work of assembling, assisting, feasting, and healing at Mukasa’s shrines. For the first English missionaries in Uganda, Mukasa’s expansive progeny and radical peacefulness rendered Mukasa “the greatest liar, and the greatest rebel of all.”

Scholarly attention to Mukasa tends to focus on this *lubaale* as a single figure represented by a medium and priest, connected to the Buganda Kingdom through exchanges between Kings and Mukasa’s main shrine on Bubembe island. Prior to at least the early 1900s, however, there were once “many temples to Mukasa” and many more mediums and priests who worked in service of Mukasa in those shrines. Similar to the reported singularity of Mukasa, Mukasa’s ties through marriage and descent to feminine figures like Nalwanga, whose shrine was immediately adjacent to Mukasa’s on Bubembe, and whose primary task, according to Roscoe, was “assisting childless women to become mothers,” are also absent from the historiography of Buganda. Neither is attention given to Nalwoga, still remembered for doing the same work on Nsazi by residents of that island, or to Nagadya, a fertility figure who once presided over a shrine called Bulam, or “life,” near Entebbe where Nkumba University now stands. Nagadya’s

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54 Lucy Mair described Mukasa as a “deity who formerly presided over the supply of children.” Mair, *An African People*, 37. See also: Peter Hoesing (this issue) for a discussion of twin songs.


57 Kagwa, *The Customs of the Baganda*, 55.

58 Schoenbrun, this issue.


60 This is largely because this is how Mukasa was described in the most commonly consulted historical ethnographic sources.


62 Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 301. Accounts examined for this study do not agree as to whether these feminine *lubaale* are wives, sisters, mothers, or children of Mukasa. It’s my sense that the existence of a relationship between Mukasa and these figures is more important than the specific nature of these relationships.
priest, perhaps not coincidentally, was called Furu, another name for *enkejje*.\(^{63}\) Mukasa’s kin were situated in places where *enkejje* were historically abundant and available for both men and women to catch. More than simply offering advice on becoming pregnant, perhaps these littoral figures offered guidance on and possibilities for hatching socially recognized children.

Building on Steven Feierman’s suggestions that public healing events were designed to ensure both personal reproduction and group survival, Kodesh has linked the development of clanship to achieving the social purposes of natality in Buganda’s *lubaale* shrines. For Kodesh, the increased violence and an influx of captives from wars experienced in the region in the eighteenth century provided a “willing constituency of people seeking to reduce their vulnerability through participating in the public activities at shrines.”\(^{64}\) This was particularly the case for *lubaale* shrines located on islands, where, according to Gomotoka, writing in the 1930s, people “found freedom” in places where “it was possible to gain riches through fishing.”\(^{65}\) The continued disruptions to the peaceful conduct of social life throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, particularly along mainland and island littorals over which multiple authorities violently competed, would have made this all the more necessary.\(^{66}\)

The practice of *okwalulá abaana* may well have been one way that littoral residents negotiated repeated moments of intercultural convergence and emerging crisis by innovating ways to bring outsiders within littoral families “as wives or husbands” and grant their children “legal status as insiders, as ‘us’ not ‘them.’”\(^{67}\) *Enkejje*, with their visually striking reproductive practices, uniquely nutritious flesh, and sheer abundance, were crucial to that process.

**How Some Children Were Hatched**

For John Roscoe the “marriage of the parents was unimportant” compared with the initiation rites of *okwalulá abaana* that featured *enkejje*.\(^{68}\) Indeed, as Rhiannon Stephens has recently demonstrated, raising socially recognized children was more important for women than marriage with respect to their “identity, social status, and political and religious authority.”\(^{69}\) Children who were officially determined to belong to a particular family held rights to inherit land and property belonging to their families, whether

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\(^{63}\) Kagwa, *The Customs of the Baganda*, 122.

\(^{64}\) Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 154.

\(^{65}\) J.T. Yowana Kikulwe Gomotoka (translator David Kiyaga-Mulindwa) “Kome” (Kampala: unpublished manuscript, n.d. [1930s]), 3. For this manuscript, see: Schoenbrun, this issue.

\(^{66}\) Reid, *Political Power*, Hanson, *Landed Obligation*.

\(^{67}\) Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place*, 174.

\(^{68}\) Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 61.

or not their parents were officially wed. Mothers who successfully demonstrated their ability to raise healthy and well-behaved children, while also being productive and pleasant potential members of families, I suggest, “hatched” socially recognized children, whether or not the father(s) of their children were biologically related to the families into which their children were ultimately found to belong.

There are two practical conditions that must be met before okwalulá abaana may begin. First, the children must be able to sit on their own. This was first affirmed at a ceremony culminating in okukuza omwana, or the strengthening of the child. When an infant was approximately three months old, the father’s mother came to the mother’s home early in the morning. Grandmothers then sat the child on a mat with the “soles of their feet placed together to balance them, and barkcloths tucked round them for support.” According to Mair, grandmothers then gave infants able to sit up in this way their “personal name.” This name “was the name of an ancestor, and was selected by a sister of the father, or sengawe, ” and the duty of the aunt in this event was to “select a name which was ‘likely to be lost.’” After the child had successfully sat on its own supported by barkcloth, those in attendance ate a celebratory meal which the child’s mother had prepared. Following this event, the child was seated in a similar manner every day and “receives vocal and affective approval from his mother or others until he [sic] is able to maintain a sitting posture by himself [sic] with no support.”

70 “If a woman had intercourse with any man, and became a mother by him, the child, if once it was accepted by the man’s clan as his child, took its place among his children, with all the rights of a son whose mother had gone through the marriage ceremony.” Roscoe, The Baganda, 61.

71 By, for example, provisioning materials required for okwalulá abaana: salt, baskets, mushrooms, and possibly also sourcing wild bananas and enkejje, as well as demonstrating their obedience to elder women.

72 Although the accounts examined here focus on the Baganda, Bagisu children were also only named after the child “is old enough and strong enough to sit alone unsupported.” Roscoe, The Northern Bantu, 175.


74 Mair, An African People, 54. Roscoe reported that grandmothers did so after “scooping a shallow hole in the floor.” Roscoe, The Baganda, 58.

75 Mair, An African People, 54.

76 Roscoe, The Baganda, 58.

Although I have been unable to find accounts of children unable to pass *okukuza omwana*, it is likely that this occasion offered an opportunity for maternal elders to offer recriminations, as well as guidance and support, for mothers and fathers whose children were not adequately progressing. Indeed, if infants became sick prior to the time when they were to be officially hatched, sexual impropriety by the mother, and especially the father, was to blame.78 According to Kagwa, the child would die “if a mother or a father wronged another person during the time between the birth of their child and its naming.”79 If a child showed signs of “nausea and general debility” attributed to their parent’s improper behavior, the “spouses accused each other of misconduct,” and an *okukansira* ceremony would be performed.80

During *okukansira*, if the father was thought to be the guilty party, the child would be given medicine to induce vomiting. If the mother was considered at fault, the child would already be frequently vomiting and an antiemetic was instead administered. If the child was unable to vomit and failed to improve, for Kagwa, this “showed that the sickness was due to some other cause and the parents were innocent.” More than simply a possible medical treatment to induce or stop vomiting, *okukansira* may have been especially important for parents of children who fell sick and died. Parents of children who died before they were officially hatched were exonerated from any suspected wrongdoing, easing their guilt about the loss of their child. Still, because of the possibility that their actions may harm their children, parents were very “careful to have no intercourse with anyone else until after the naming ceremony.”81

Secondly, many children could be tested in the same ceremony, but at least two children, one of either sex, first had to be eligible before preparations would begin.82 Children to be tested did not have to be born of the

78 Mair says the effects of a father’s adultery were instantaneous and known to be fatal. Mair, *An African People*, 55.
80 Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 102. Roscoe states that this was a cleansing ceremony, also conducted for those who partook in the “good deal of promiscuous intercourse” that went on during twin ceremonies. For Roscoe, during *okukansira*, the “medicine-man came, and was given some of the woman’s urine, which he mixed with other medicines, and then rubbed on her chest and on the chests of her children; this was supposed to neutralise any evil that had attached itself to her or to them.” Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 72. Gorju states that the leaves of *mwetango* or *keyeyo* or the feathers of a river bird known as *nfulubiru* were instead used. Gorju, *Entre le Victoria*, 334.
82 According to Roscoe, “however numerous they were [children of one sex] they could not go through the ceremonies without awaiting at least one child of the other sex.” Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 62.
same mother or father; however, because both biological sexes were required, children to be tested could be anywhere from a few months to many years old, depending on the family into which children were being hatched. The centrality of the male/female pair across families of several mothers and fathers within okwalulá abaana references and reinforces the importance of Mukasa’s dual-gendered nature, as well as more expansive notions of parentage and family in use at the littoral.

Before the ceremonies took place, the mothers of the children went to the shores of Ennyanja Nalubaale to cut reeds (eggugu), which they then burned into ashes and combined with water to make salt. Mothers brought this salt with them to the home of an elder family member who hosted the ceremony. It is worth noting that the second most senior priest of Mukasa’s main shrine was also named Ggugu, a figure whose name is semantically linked to salt, trade, and mats for sitting. Once assembled, all guests in attendance, except for the mothers, share a meal of matooke steamed in their peels and soup made from enkejje and mushrooms cooked in the salt the mothers had made.

Mothers expecting their children to hatch would sit on a new bark-cloth given to them by the host of this occasion with their children on their laps (some accounts also say sitting beside them). Their mothers-in-law, the potential grandmothers of the children, sat across from the mothers and a large woven waterproof basket was placed between them. The grandmothers poured banana beer, milk, salt, and water into the basket. Mothers then handed the umbilical cord of her child, which they had been preserving for some time, to the grandmothers. The grandmothers would then smear the cord with ghee and then drop the cord into the basket. As the cord entered the water the grandmothers would, “This is the child of so-and-so,” mentioning some of the ancestors of the family. If the cord floated, the children were considered legitimate members of the family. If the cord sank, the child was considered to be “wild,” that is, not of the family that had assembled.

The stakes of failing to hatch could be quite high. According to contemporary elder women, children who failed the test quickly became sick and died. Mothers whose children failed the test could be harshly
admonished by members of the families into which their children were determined not to belong. They could be accused of adultery, beaten, and/or banished entirely from family estates, and left to try and hatch their children into a different family altogether. Still, there is evidence to suggest that the results of these tests were not always treated as conclusive.88

Children who passed the test were washed in *olweza* and *ebombo*, two herbs associated with Mukasa and bringing blessings to children, and most especially blessings to twins. More than simply luck, these herbs were and still are used to treat a variety of other illnesses.89 Then, senior women would take the basket containing the umbilical cord, milk, water, and beer to a banana garden on their family’s land, and insert the cord into the top of the stem of a banana plant. If the confirmed child was a girl, the cord was placed in a banana plant grown for food (*nakitembe*); if it was a boy, it was placed in the stem of a variety used to make beer (*embidde*), materially

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88 According to Kagwa “a chief (…) would wait for the result of the test to be confirmed by the sickness and death of the illegitimate child.” Ostensibly, if the child did not become sick or die, this may prove that the results of test were incorrect. Kagwa, *The Customs of the Baganda*, 103.

89 *Olueza* (*Aerva lanata*) can be infused within bathing or drinking water as a “good luck charm.” See: Paul Ssegawa and John Massan Kasenene, “Medicinal Plant Diversity and Uses in the Sango Bay Area, Southern Uganda,” *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 113–3 (2007), 521–540, 523. The herb may also be smoked on a broken pot to assist with the adjudication of disputes, specifically “criminal case[s].” John R.S. Tabuti, Kare Arnstein Lye and S.S. Dhillion, “Traditional Herbal Drugs of Bulamogi, Uganda: Plants, Use and Administration,” *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 88–1 (2003), 19–44, 22. There is some disagreement over the scientific names of particular species, possibly also because there is not complete consensus on their vernacular names either. *Olueza* is also listed as *Helichrysum odoratissimum* in some studies, which has been found to have “activity against *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* and other species of *Mycobacterium*.” John R.S. Tabuti, Collins B. Kukunda and Paul J. Waako, “Medicinal Plants Used by Traditional Medicine Practitioners in the Treatment of Tuberculosis and Related Ailments in Uganda,” *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 127–1 (2010), 130–136, 135. The second herb used in the “hatching” ceremonies as well as with young children in general is *akabombo* (*Cyphostemma adenocaula*). Similar to *olueza*, *akabombo* also has an impressive array of uses, including treatment for yellow fever, boils, tapeworm, and septic wounds. See: F.A. Hamill *et al.*, “Traditional Herbal Drugs of Southern Uganda: Part I,” *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 70–3 (2000), 281–300, 291. The leaves can be infused in liquid or chewed to induce labor and treat meases. See: Maud Kamatenesi-Mugisha and Hannington Oryem-Origa, “Medicinal Plants Used to Induce Labour during Childbirth in Western Uganda,” *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 109–1 (2007), 1–9, 7. The whole plant can also be used to make a salve to treat genital warts. See: Ssegawa and Kasenene, “Medicinal Plant Diversity,” 533. When added to water used for bathing, it treats amoebiasis and “spirits.” Tabuti *et al.*, “Traditional Herbal Drugs,” 40. This is all to say, regular use of *olueza* is perfectly sensible.
joining the body of the hatched child to particular places and the consumptive well-being of littoral families. After this, the mothers were required to fetch firewood or water for the host of the ceremony to show their continued obedience to family elders. Only then were mothers permitted to have their share of the *matooke* and *enkejje* sauce that symbolized the unity of the family. After the meal was over, the mothers went inside the home of the elder hosting the ceremony and he (or she) “jumped over” each mother, while the mother told the child that the elder was its father. Given that Mukasa’s medium was a “private person, of chief’s rank” for most of the year and that islands were sometimes ruled by the wives of mainland Kabaka, the Kabaka’s mother, princesses, and the Kabaka’s sister, it is entirely possible that through *okwalulá abaana*, women also became fathers.  

The following day, each mother again sat on her barkcloth outside, and the senior woman who conducted the legitimacy test sat on the opposite side. Holding a piece of cooked *enkejje* in her right hand and a piece of cooked *matooke* in the other, the mother-in-law placed her hands on the knees of her daughter-in-law and began slowly reciting the names of her child’s ancestors. As she moved backwards from the recently deceased towards ancestors deceased long ago, she moved her arms slowly up to her daughter-in-law’s mouth, into which she placed the *matooke* and then the *enkejje* fish. After this, the grandmother went to her grandchild and began again to slowly list the names of the child’s ancestors. When the child giggled after hearing one of the names, the grandmother named that ancestor as the child’s guardian. In Luganda, this process of naming a child after another person is known as *bbula*, a transitive verb also meaning to “bring up (from water); restore to a former state; rescue; salvage; revive.” A child’s laughter demonstrated that the ancestor being revived was pleased to take on his or her duty as guardian.  

*Okwalulá abaana* offered a way for elder littoral women to consolidate group identity and maintain access to land while also offering guidance on proper behavior and provisioning practices for newcomers. Senior women, not men, were responsible for testing children (and by extension their mothers). The results of these tests were not arbitrary. Grandmothers and aunts who guided the practice of *okwalulá abaana*, required that new mothers were proficient in a number of important productive domestic tasks, including basket and salt making, and raising healthy, well-fed babies. Indeed, it was known that senior women would influence the results of

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92 If children fell sick after their naming ceremony, they may be given new names.
these tests; as Lusembo noted, “Apparently the umbilical cord was manip­ulated according to the knowledge about the child.”93 According to Mair’s observations around 1930, “at the ceremony which I saw, so much butter was used that only a miracle could have prevented them floating.”94 This is also reflected in several proverbs reflecting on the qualities of mothers and their children by likening children to umbilical cords and mothers to materials used to wrap umbilical cords for storage and display. For example, ayagala omulongo: Ayagala n’olukoba, “one who loves the child: also loves its mother (the strap in which the cord is wrapped up).”95 And tokyawa mulongo: ng’oyagala olukoba, “don’t despise the umbilical cord, if you like its wrapping.”96

Although this essay focuses on a fairly elaborate version of okwalulá abaana, legitimacy of would-be children of particular families were at times tested much more easily. Women of the Mpindi (“small bean”) Clan, for example, once marked the successful birth of a child into their families only after the child’s mother consumed a roasted enkejje sprinkled with banana flour. These enkejje had to be eaten by mothers in the opposite way that one might eat a pickled herring. Rather than holding the tail and letting the small fish slip down one’s throat, inMpindi legitimation ceremonies, enkejje were consumed tail first with its “fins and the ridge of spikes along its back left on.”97 Children of mothers who ate these fish easily were known to belong. According to Roscoe, “if the fish stuck in her throat” the mother was accused of adultery, and “the child was disowned.”98 These penalties may seem harsh, but these “tests” were not necessarily exclusionary. After all, it was relatively easy to prove that children belonged to Mpindi clan families – all a mother needed to do was practice eating roasted enkejje tail first. Most families would have wanted to “pass” as many potential members as possible, thereby expanding their potential territorial authority both in space (across land and sea) and in time (from one generation to another).

Concluding Thoughts on Fish, Children, and Littoral Lineality

Accounts of okwalulá abaana differ on the order of activities and their complexity; however, elders I interviewed were very clear on one point: the fish used in this ceremony “were enkejje and nothing else.” Enkejje, when boiled in a sauce, makes a special kind of soup, they say — it is

94 Mair, An African People, 57.
95 The umbilical cord and the cord within which it is wrapped are inseparable, “like mother and child,” according to Ferdinand Walser, Luganda Proverbs (Berlin: Reimer, 1982), 66.
96 Walser, Luganda Proverbs, 454.
97 Mpindi clan women I have spoken with at the contemporary littoral do not remember this practice. However, see: Roscoe, The Baganda, 56.
98 Roscoe, The Baganda, 56.
thick, but not too thick. According to contemporary littoral residents, the act of eating enkejje soup demonstrates that all in attendance have come together as one family.

For Roscoe, enkejje were given to mothers as a “charm to effect rapid child-bearing, just as the fish swarm by thousands in the shallow waters of the lake [sic].”99 Mair contests Roscoe’s interpretation “that the sprats were a fertility-symbol” by referencing “the explicit native statement that they are used because they come from Sesse, the island in the Lake [sic] which is the home of Mukasa.”100 I posit that both were correct. The sheer historic abundance of enkejje were nutritionally and symbolically important for conceiving and hatching socially recognized children. Particular types of enkejje were used to hatch children because they were associated with lubaale shrines known for their abilities to enhance the fertility of women and hatch socially recognized children.

There are at least four named types of enkejje that were once used in okwalulá abaana in Buganda: enkejje enganda (of Buganda), enkejje engadya (of Nagadya), enkejje enkasa (of Mukasa), and enkejje ensese (of Ssese).101 Because many types of enkejje are no longer with us, we do not know whether these were blue or yellow, spotted or striped, or big or small, or whether they ate snails, scales, or other fish. That is, we do not know whether any physical characteristics or dietary preferences of specific enkejje types made them well suited for use in okwalulá abaana. It is possible that the actual physical characteristics of specific types did not matter much at all. What is important, however, is that these were enkejje associated with littoral locales and that these places were associated with the “networks of knowledge” that Neil Kodesh demonstrates were assembled around lubaale shrines so crucial to the kinds of families that constellated forms of clanship and kingship that developed in Buganda.

Enkejje provided historic littoral residents with a consistent source of bodily nourishment and fascinating material with which to develop a flexible symbolic repertoire for contemplating the most foundational constituents of the body politic – persons constituted through their acceptance in an expansive family unit. At its most basic formulation, whole enkejje made whole bodies, families, and polities at the littoral possible. Central to this interpretation of okwalulá abaana are close associations between raising socially recognized children and a continued abundance of small fish for women, men, and children to catch, distribute, cook, eat, and become persons and families with. Like wetlands that buffer potential flows and depositions of nutrients and contaminants between the dry world

99 Roscoe, The Baganda, 64.
100 Mair, An African People, 51 n1.
101 The first four varieties were mentioned in: Kasirye Zzibukulimbwa (translated by Robert Bakaaki and Jennifer L. Johnson) “The Beginning of Ennyanja Nalubaaale and the Inhabitants of the Lake,” (Kampala, unpublished manuscript, n.d. [1980s]), copy in possession of the author. For enkejje ensese see: Le Veux, Premier Éssai, 340.
of humans and the wet world of fish, enkejje once mediated between the competing authorities of littoral ancestors, and the needs and desires of the living and the not yet fully born.

When women, men, children, and the families they form are analyzed as historically constellated through their relations with each other and with fish, conventional wisdoms about patriarchy and patrilineality are called into question. Attention to enkejje and okwalulá abaana reorients analyses of the politics of descent away from the often unmarked male domains of tribes, kingdoms, and even clans towards the work of grandmothers, aunts, and mothers in family estates and lubaale shrines. Grandmothers and aunts, not grandfathers and brothers, were responsible for hatching children. Through okwalulá abaana, senior littoral women consolidated group identity by super-intending, debating, and passing judgement on the health of children, the desired qualities of their mothers, and ultimately the conduct of proper behavior in the cosmopolitan families and communities they formed.

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