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UYO 010

By Andrew Rice

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KAMPALA, Uganda—One day in December 2000, Duncan Muhumuza Laki walked into the offices of Uganda's central motor-vehicle registry in Kampala. A suited, sober tax attorney, Muhumuza cut purposefully through the registry's front room: past the sweaty men waving papers, past the slackjawed bureaucrats pounding stamps and staplers, past a laser-printed sign reading "No Corruption With Me." A ceiling fan turned lazily overhead. Muhumuza negotiated a narrow warren of wood-paneled cubicles, and descended a staircase into the registry's records room.

To all outward appearances, there was nothing unusual about Muhumuza's visit. He was a regular, an employee of the government's revenue department, which ran the registry, and he was often there for his work, chasing down tax cheats. Nothing in his manner betrayed the fact that this day's business was something more serious, something rather more … personal.

The registry possessed vehicle records dating back to colonial times, but it was hardly a model of organization. Sheaves of documents were piled everywhere: haphazardly on desks, high on file cabinets, in boxes on a metal shelf that leaned precariously to the right.

It would be a miracle, Muhumuza thought, if they had what he was looking for. He found the custodian of the oldest records. He asked, What were the chances that a car registration might still be around after three decades? The custodian said it was possible—he could check.

Muhumuza gave him a license plate number: UYO 010.

The next day Muhumuza returned. Good news: The custodian had found the file. Joy, apprehension, confusion: the emotions flooded through Muhumuza all at once. He fought hard to not betray what he was feeling as the custodian handed him the folder.

Muhumuza carefully opened it. The pages were limp and yellowed with age, tattered around the edges. UYO-010, they revealed, was a "toga white" Volkswagen Beetle, purchased in 1968 by one Eliphaz Laki, for the princely sum of 25,200 shillings, then worth about US$4,000.

Another page. This one bore the date November 29, 1972. The car had a new owner. The man had signed in a shaky, inexperienced hand. His name, the document said, was Mohammed Anyule.

Muhumuza stared at the page in wonderment and disbelief. November 1972. Two months after his father vanished. He wondered: Was this the man who killed him?

* * *

If there were a police report on the disappearance of Eliphaz Laki, it might read something like this:

"Subject was a county chief in Ibanda, a town in western Uganda. Around 11

Eliphaz Laki (far left), the county chief of Ibanda, at a Ugandan Independence Day celebration, October 9, 1971. This is very likely the last photograph taken of him before he disappeared. Duncan Muhumuza Laki idolized his father, and never stopped wondering what happened to him. (Photo courtesy of George Nkoba.)

a.m. on September 22, 1972, three unidentified men came to his office. One of the men told the subject he was a military-intelligence officer. At gunpoint, the men forced the subject to drive away in his car, a 1968 Volkswagen Beetle, license number UYO 010. A friend of the subject reports sighting him sometime later that day, driving his car at high speed down a dirt road approximately 25 miles from his home. The subject waved, the informant said, but looked 'terrified.' Subject has not been seen since."

There was no such police report, because Eliphaz Laki, Duncan Muhumuza Laki's father, was the victim of terror perpetrated by his own government. He was one of the thousands of people—estimates range from 100,000 to 300,000—who vanished from 1971 to 1979, when dictator Idi Amin ruled Uganda. For these "countless … anonymous victims, most of them ordinary citizens who have disappeared without attracting public attention," an international commission investigating the killing wrote in 1975, "there were no investigations, no commissions of inquiry, no reports, and no help [for] their families."

Why did these people die? How did they die? Who killed them? Where are their bodies? Two decades have passed since Idi Amin fled Uganda, ahead of an army of Tanzanian soldiers and Ugandan rebel troops, and yet the years have brought few answers to these questions. In many cases, the families of those who disappeared would rather not ask. The government of President Yoweri Museveni, who took power in 1986, maintains a tacit policy of not digging too deeply, lest the answers revive buried grudges and old tribal hatreds. This is what makes Eliphaz Laki's disappearance—all too common in the grim details of the act itself—a singular case. He was lost, and then he was found.

For that, he owes his son. Duncan Muhumuza looks uncannily like his father: he has the same high, austere forehead, the same mournful eyes. At 40, his hairline has already beaten a hasty retreat across his skull. He walks with a slow, loping gait. He is well mannered, incorrigibly formal, and a born-again Christian. His voice, low and lugubrious, bespeaks deliberation, and he discusses the tragic events surrounding his father's disappearance with a detachment that suggests he is keeping his analytical distance. Perhaps that is how he survived it.

Muhumuza has spent most of the past decade shuttling between his home country and the United States, where his wife, a Uganda-born doctor, works at a hospital in Harrison, New Jersey. They have three children who have grown up watching cartoons and playing video games. A year or so ago, he quit the job at the revenue department, and moved back to America, probably for good. He built a sturdy house in the suburb of Morganville, New Jersey, and is studying for the New York bar examination.

Muhumuza struggles to explain what launched him on his search after so many years. So many times, he says, he considered, came to the edge of action, then shied away. His family, his government, his better judgment—all of them told him there was nothing to be gained from disturbing the past. Yet something drove him forward: A need to recover some remnant of his father, to somehow redeem him. A need to know.

"I was always curious," Muhumuza told me when we met last summer. "Whatever happened? Whatever happened?"

He was ten years old when his father disappeared. Like boys that age everywhere, Duncan idolized his dad. Eliphaz Laki was a poor, fatherless child who, by dint of diligence and study, grew up to be a chief, a civil servant of some importance. A Big Man, as they say in Africa. To his children, he just seemed *big*: tall, stern, imposing.

To Duncan, Laki's Volkswagen Beetle represented his father's place in the world. Cars were rare in the Ugandan countryside in those days; Laki was the first man from his village ever to buy one. When he brought it home for the first time the locals rejoiced with pride. They nicknamed him

"*runanakyenda*," after the local-language pronunciation of his license plate number. In the years before the coup, Laki had traveled the dusty back roads of western Uganda in the Volkswagen, preaching the gospel of Milton Obote, the country's first post-independence leader.

Duncan loved the rides he took in his father's car. Laki could be a distant man, taciturn, but he was often tender, too. He favored little Duncan, whom he called "Shusha." Ibanda was a remote posting, and when Laki was transferred there in 1971 he had taken his son with him, leaving his wife and most of his 13 children at the family farm, hours away. This was why Duncan was there the day his father disappeared.

September 22, 1972 was a Friday, a school day. Duncan woke up early—his father was a stickler about punctuality—put on his school-uniform blazer, khaki shorts and a buttoned-up white shirt, and went to breakfast. As they ate their usual morning meal, a porridge made from milk, tea, bananas and cassava, Duncan could tell something was troubling his father.

Five days before, a puny band of Tanzanian-based guerillas—led by an unknown, 28 year-old Marxist named Yoweri Museveni—had attacked a nearby military barracks. The rebels were routed, and in the days that followed the attack Amin's men embarked on a ferocious mopping-up operation. Soldiers were all over the roads, rounding up anyone suspected of sympathizing with the rebels. In Kampala, the secret police kidnapped the Chief Justice of Uganda's Supreme Court from his chambers, and murdered him. Many of Laki's close friends—fellow supporters of the deposed president Obote, who was suspected of sponsoring the invasion—were likewise disappearing. Laki's uncle: gone. The godfather of his children: gone. His close friend, once the secretary-general of the region, its highest elected official: gone. The secretary-general's three sons, the youngest just 19: dead, shot not far from Ibanda, their bodies left to rot in the African sun.

Duncan knew what was happening. The news of the rebellion was all over the radio. He had seen men stuffed into the trunks of cars. At school, he had heard the gunshots that killed the sons of the secretary-general.

Anyone could see Laki was in pain, even a ten year-old. As word of the killings spread, he had become lethargic, depressed; his lean frame sagged, as if collapsing under the weight of some great sorrow. Duncan wanted to talk to his father, to ask what was wrong. But he didn't know how.

That morning, he tried to get his father's attention. Could he have a shilling to buy ink? Laki fished in his pocket and gave his son the coin. In the years the followed, Muhumuza would often wonder: "Did I touch his hand?"

Duncan left for school. The day was hot, and he tried to stay out of the sun as he walked down the dirt road into town. Ibanda was a frontier outpost, situated amid green groves of bananas in the rolling, rocky foothills of Uganda's western mountains. Downtown consisted of the county headquarters, a humble four-room building across the street from his father's house, a few churches, a school, and a forlorn strip of white-washed shops. Most of them had been abandoned since earlier that year, when Amin kicked Indian merchants out of Uganda. Duncan checked the stores that were open. He couldn't find any ink. So the shilling stayed in his pocket.

Later that morning, something strange happened. Sitting in class, Duncan could see his cousin James rush up to the school. He looked worried. James found the headmaster, a friend of Duncan's father. They talked briefly, in hushed tones.

At midday, Duncan went home for lunch. As he walked up the steep hill towards the chief's official residence, a handsome yellow structure with a peaked red roof, he saw another cousin, Francis, waiting outside.

Francis met him on the driveway, and delivered the news:

"Your father has been taken," he said.

Even at his age, Duncan knew the implications of the word "taken." But somehow, he couldn't believe it had happened. He ran into the house looking for Laki. He retrieved the unspent shilling from his pocket, and left it on his father's bedside table.

Then he ran back outside. Where was the car? Duncan opened to the garage. It was empty.

* * *

That day, Duncan's first instinct had been to run. He had gone first to his headmaster's house. Maybe he could explain. But the headmaster was terrified—he was a friend of Laki's and, like him, a supporter of Milton Obote. Lately, the headmaster had been hiding from the soldiers, sleeping outside in the banana groves. What could he possibly say to his pupil?

Duncan Muhumuza, outside the house in Ibanda, August 22, 2002. The man standing behind him is a distant relative

So Duncan kept running. He found a minister, the pastor of his family's church. But he, too, lacked the words to dispel the boy's confusion, or console his heart.

Despondent, Duncan went home. That afternoon, his mother arrived. She had heard about the killings of other local politicians and had made the long trek from the family farm, hoping to warn her husband. Now she found she was too late. She sat in the living room, stunned. There was nothing she could tell her children, either.

In the years that followed, Duncan's mother would enforce a strict code of silence within the family when it came to their father's disappearance. There was so much fear—anyone could be spying for Amin. It could be the help around the family farm, anyone in the village. "It became a tradition," Muhumuza remembers, "something we grew up with. We never talked about these things."

But one day, shortly after the disappearance, Duncan defied his mother. He confided to his older sister, Joyce: He was going to find out what had happened.

He asked a friend who knew about such shady matters—the friend's brother was an intelligence operative—to track down the Volkswagen. It was likely that the men who took his father had kept the car. Cars were valuable, far more so than human life. Sure enough, Duncan's friend told him a soldier was now driving the Volkswagen around Mbarara, the local provincial capital.

Joyce even saw the car once. She was standing outside of a hotel in Mbarara when it pulled up. Once white, it had been repainted a light shade of blue. But the license number was the same: UYO 010. Joyce watched a man get out of the car, and go inside. She waited for him to come back out, just to see what he looked like. But she never said a word to him. No one could have. It was simply too dangerous.

"Duncan was courageous," she recalled, years later. "But at times we would tell him to hold on."

When Amin was finally overthrown in 1979, Duncan wanted to ask around about his father. The exiles were coming back. Many told stories of amazing escapes. Duncan still half-expected Laki to return. His mother, dying of ovarian cancer, pleaded with him not to inquire about his father, or the car. It could only bring trouble. Leave the past in the past.

* * *

A decade passed; grief faded. In December of 1990, Laki's friends and family gathered at his farm for a solemn ritual. They placed a simple stone in the ground near the house he had built for his family. A plaque affixed to the stone read:

Lord Grant Us Decent Rest
And Disappearance No More

Yoweri Museveni attended the memorial service. 1972's rebel was now Uganda's president. Over the years, Laki's children had come to know the secret their father kept from his family: When Amin took power in 1971, Laki had smuggled Museveni, then a young official in the ousted president's office, to Tanzania in his Volkswagen. He may have saved Museveni's life, and

that had probably gotten him killed. It was widely believed that Laki's local political enemies found out about the trip to Tanzania and betrayed him to Amin's soldiers. Presumably, Laki had been murdered that day in September.

But no one knew anything for certain. Laki's body had never even been found. To his family, this was almost as painful as the disappearance itself. One universal of human culture is the desire to consecrate and send off the dead. In Uganda, a man is supposed to be buried on his own land. Traditional religion, with its foundation in ancestor-worship, teaches that a man who is not so honored becomes a restive spirit, liable to haunt his living descendants.

Laying the stone, President Museveni said at the memorial service, would mend the wrong that was done to Laki. By recognizing how he lived and why he died, he said, the family had redeemed their father. Perhaps his soul had found peace.

But Duncan Muhumuza's mind was not eased. He balked whenever anyone called his father a martyr. It is a Ugandan idiom to refer to a dead man as "the late," but Muhumuza could never bring himself to use those words, or to refer to Laki in anything but the present tense. Deep in the unspoken corners of his heart, he never let go of the hope—at first faint, later, simply irrational—that somehow, somewhere, his father might still be alive. "Maybe he is one of these vagabonds by the roadside," he thought, an amnesiac, or insane.

He kept a spare set of keys to his father's Volkswagen in his dresser drawer at home. Every once and a while, he would take them out, just to look and wonder.

If Laki was irretrievably lost, Muhumuza reasoned, maybe he could still find the car.

* * *

Life intervened. Duncan went to the United States to attend graduate school. The idea of finding the car receded to the back of his mind. Then the promise of a government job brought him back to Uganda. In 1999, he took a job at the Uganda Revenue Authority. Working collections cases, he became familiar with the car registry. Sifting through all those license plate numbers, his mind kept returning to his father's: UYO O10.

It might be worth a try, he thought.

Now the file for UYO 010 lay open in his hands. He stared at the page. Mohammed Anyule. It was a Muslim name. The registration listed an address, a post-office box in a town called Yumbe, far to the north. It made sense. Amin was from the north, and a Muslim. He had staffed the army and secret police with his kinsmen.

After Amin's overthrow, most of his soldiers fled north to exile in the Congo, or Sudan, where they started rebel armies. (Amin himself today lives comfortably in Saudi Arabia.) But in the intervening years, many returned, attracted by the Museveni government's tolerant amnesty policies. Forgiven and forgotten, Amin's men returned to their lives and their farms, shielded from reprisals by protective relatives and tribal bonds.

Joyce Birungi Laki, Duncan Muhumuza's older sister, holding a picture a picture of their father. Their mother prohibited the children from discussing their father's disappearance. Long afterwards, many of Muhumuza's siblings would still oppose his search.

So perhaps Mohammed Anyule might be found. If he had returned. If he lived in Yumbe. If he was still alive.

Muhumuza wondered what to do next. He visited a friend of his father's, a man who had become his guardian when Laki disappeared. Muhumuza gave him a notarized copy of the car registration, and he locked it in his safe.

His guardian told him, if he had found a clue, he had to follow it up. Many of Muhumuza's brothers and sisters were implacably opposed. Their mother was right, they told Muhumuza. Why reopen those old wounds? They knew that truce among the tribes imposed by the Museveni government was only superficial. The north might as well be another country. It could be dangerous to start asking questions around there.

"My brother was struggling," his

sister Joyce later said. "In the family, he was alone."

Except for Joyce. She encouraged her brother. She thought her father would approve. She remembered that once, when one of Laki's uncles drowned, her father had scoured the river for his body, long past the point of hope. If he could just find an arm, a bone, he told his daughter, he could bury it and rest.

Muhumuza agonized for three months. Then, finally, he decided to go ahead.

He still faced a practical problem, however. He couldn't investigate the case himself. He was from a western tribe. Because of traditional enmities, no one in the north would talk to him. Muhumuza had to find someone from the area, someone who spoke the local language, which was as different from his own Bantu tongue as English is from Hungarian. He could forget about the police who were overworked, under-trained, notoriously corrupt.

Through friends, he learned of a private detective from the north, a man named Alfred Orijabo.

Orijabo was a queer duck. He said he was in his late 30s, but he looked much older: his frame was gaunt, his cheeks sunken. (Within two years he would be dead of AIDS.) His voice was high and reedy. He claimed to have once served in a rebel army commanded by one of Amin's generals. He liked to show people a scar, a thin black line along his index finger—"my trigger scar," he called it. He once boasted to an acquaintance: "I am quite accomplished in murder. I have never missed." He placed mystical faith in dreams and omens. He claimed he could tell a guilty man just by looking him in the eye.

Brian Tibo (pictured) and Alfred Orijabo, though from the north, were willing to investigate their own tribesmen.

Whatever his eccentricities, Orijabo said he was willing to investigate someone from his own tribe, which was a surprise. So Muhumuza told him about the clue he had found. The detective agreed to take the case.

The first step was to find out who Mohammed Anyule was, and where he was—presuming he was still alive. Orijabo sent his junior partner, Brian Tibo, up north to investigate. Tibo was from Yumbe, the town Anyule had listed as his address on the registration form. He was young and earnest, mild-mannered where his partner was obstreperous, and had many relatives who had served in Amin's army. Tibo quickly managed to discover that Anyule, a former soldier in his late 60s, had returned from exile and once again lived in Yumbe.

Anyule had been a driver for the intelligence service, Tibo learned, and "fat"—wealthy—in those times when Amin's men had all the enriching levers of government at their disposal. He had a reputation as a womanizer, and had taken many wives. He was a respectable man now, a village elder. They called him Hajji, a prized title given to those who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca. In the recent presidential elections, he had been President Museveni's local campaign agent.

Tibo returned to Kampala and told his boss what he had discovered. On April 15, 2001, the two detectives traveled north to arrest Anyule, accompanied by a police corporal. The policeman wasn't much help. Their route skirted territory controlled by a rebel group, the last remnants of Amin's army, and the police corporal complained incessantly about the risk and hassle. At each step, he demanded "expense" money before he'd proceed.

The three men finally arrived in Yumbe the next day, in the late afternoon, dusty from the long journey. They waited for Anyule near a cluster of ramshackle shops he was known to frequent. At dusk, they spotted him, walking back from evening prayers: a thin man with an angular face and a gray goatee, carrying a walking stick. Employing a subterfuge—they told him they were working for someone who wanted to hire a driver—the detectives talked Anyule into a rented car, in which they took him to the local jail, where he was kept overnight. Anyule grew suspicious, and accused the detectives of being government spies. But they assured him, no, they were taking him for a job interview.

Before dawn, the detectives loaded Anyule into a truck and drove several hours to the nearest airport, where they caught a commuter plane to Kampala. Muhumuza, who had financed the whole trip, was waiting for them when the plane touched down.

Anyule climbed into the back of his car, and they drove to the police station. The mood was oddly cordial.

The suspect and the son made small talk in Swahili. Anyule was not in handcuffs; he wasn't sure what was going on.

Muhumuza sat in on Anyule's interrogation. He watched, hardly able to believe he was so close to discovering the truth. After a while, even Anyule noticed the resemblance between father and son, and told one of the detectives he was surprised by his seeming coolness, his lack of animosity.

Anyule steadfastly denied ever owning a Volkswagen. Finally, Orijabo, the private detective, was allowed to talk to him. He and Anyule spoke the same tribal language, and had developed a rapport. The detective had brought him a change of clothes and underwear, and Anyule believed that as a fellow tribesman, Orijabo would be looking out for his best interests. The detective bought Anyule lunch, and promised him the police would treat him as a cooperating witness.

"I am pleased with the way you have treated me," Anyule told the detective, who tape-recorded the conversation. "You buy me food and clothes and you come to console me."

Anyule confessed to taking part in the seizure of Eliphaz Laki on September 22, 1972. But he was only the driver, he maintained. "I will not tell you a lie, in the name of God," he said. "I always say it is not good to kill a human being."

The killer, the man they were looking for, he said, was named Nasur Gille. Anyule had driven Gille and another man, a local informer who was now dead, on their mission to pick up Laki that day. Gille was a "ruthless person," he said. He could be found in Arua, a town in Uganda's far northwest. "He repairs bicycles under a *minikini* tree," Anyule said. "He has large ears and a curved back."

The Volkswagen, Anyule maintained, had been given to him by the man who ordered the killing, as a reward for a job well done. It had broken down, and he hadn't seen it since he fled into exile, in 1979.

"Who gave the vehicle to you?" the detective asked.

"The Big Man," Anyule replied. "Gowon."

* * *

With the mention of "Gowon," the case suddenly took on political implications. In 1972, Major Yusuf Gowon was the second-in-command at the military barracks closest to Laki's house. In subsequent years, he had been promoted to the rank of Major General, and appointed chief of staff of Amin's army. After Amin's government fell, Gowon had fled to the Congo. But he had returned to Uganda, amid great fanfare, in 1994. The erstwhile general was now a political supporter of Museveni, and had campaigned for his reelection. The government paid the rent on his house in Kampala. He ran a non-governmental organization, with American and Canadian financing, called the Alternatives to Violence Project.

Mohammed Anyule, the driver, outside Uganda's High Court, Kampala, December 2002.

Gowon had returned to Uganda under a grant of amnesty. However, after looking into the matter, the police discovered the immunity did not cover crimes committed before 1986, when Museveni took over the government. So, cautiously, the investigators went forward.

The detectives found Gille exactly where Anyule had told them he'd be: Under a tree, having tea, sitting on his box of bicycle-repair tools. Police surrounded him and walked him back to the police station. Orijabo asked them not to handcuff the subject, and he explained what was happening as they walked. When Orijabo told him he was suspected of killing someone in 1972, the detective later recalled, Gille just laughed: "Which one?"

It didn't take long before Gille's relatives heard he was arrested, and that night, they surrounded the police station, shouting for his release. Many in Arua thought Gille was the victim of unjust persecution. His crime was serving in Amin's army, they felt, and belonging to the wrong tribe. The next morning, to avoid a riot, the police stuffed Gille into the back of a pickup truck, surrounded by armed police officers. They rushed him to the airport, and put him on a plane to Kampala.

Muhumuza picked the suspect up at the airport. When he had met Anyule, he had felt a profound sense of relief: finally, some answers. Gille, by contrast, sent a

chill down his spine. He seemed cavalier, unremorseful.

They drove to the police station, where Orijabo was given the first crack at interrogating the suspect. At first, Gille was uncooperative.

"Who told you these things?" he yelled at the private detective.

Anyule had already confessed to everything, Orijabo told the suspect. Again, he held out the possibility of an immunity deal in return for a confession. Gille told the detective he was feeling ill, and Orijabo offered to buy him some aspirin.

Major General Yusuf Gowon, the commanding officer, November 2002.

Eventually, Gille broke down. He was just following orders, he claimed. "It was Gowon himself who sent us," he said. "He gave us the order for the man we killed."

Later, the detective brought Gille back to the police superintendent's office to repeat his story in Swahili, a language the superintendent spoke. Muhumuza, who was sitting in the office, also spoke some Swahili, and he listened as Gille described the murder in cold, clinical terms.

"I performed the operation," Gille told the police superintendent.

"What do you mean, 'operation?'" the superintendent replied.

"To finish his life," Gille said.

The police superintendent gave the order: Arrest Yusuf Gowon.

* * *

On a sunny afternoon in August 2002, Duncan Muhumuza and I drove to Ibanda, retracing the route his father took on final journey, 30 years before.

I had first met him a few weeks earlier, after learning about his father's murder, and how it was solved, from a small article in the local newspaper. "The former chief of staff of the defunct Uganda Army under Idi Amin, Maj. Gen. Yusuf Gowon," it began, "was yesterday committed to the High Court to answer charges of murdering Eliphazi [sic] Laki." Along with Gowon, the article explained, Mohammed Anyule and Nasur Gille had also been charged with murder. (The promise of immunity had dissipated once their cooperation was no longer deemed necessary.) Gowon had denied any responsibility.

By chance, Muhumuza had happened to be in Uganda for a visit, and he agreed to take me to the spot where Nasur Gille killed his father.

"I always thought maybe one day he'd surface," Muhumuza told me as we drove down the highway, looking out for herds of longhorned cattle that can cross the road without warning. "Call it denial, call it whatever you want. I could not bring myself to the point where I could see him dead."

He spoke about the men who killed his father with remarkably little rancor. When he heard Anyule confess, Muhumuza said, his overriding emotion was not anger, but a sense of relief. He claimed he hardly cared about the trial. "I mean, you convict Anyule," he said, and snorted with laughter. "The poor guy. I mean these were just button pushers. … If Gowon was killed 200 times over, if Gille was convicted and they chopped off one of his fingers every day until he was dead …" He paused. "Nothing."

The road twisted suddenly. "Slow down," Muhumuza said. "Right here." I turned off the paved highway, onto a narrow gravel path, a remnant of the road Laki and his killers had taken that day. Muhumuza directed me to a line of scrubby bushes, where we got out of the car.

Muhumuza and I followed the path his father took, into a meadow. The terrain sloped gently downward. Before us, the ground descended into a valley, from which it rose back upwards to form a line of hills that occupied that middle distance. Off to the north, we could see the rocky peaks of the higher mountains around Ibanda, about 30 miles way. It was the dry season, as it had been the day Laki was killed, and the scene must have been largely unchanged. The hills were brown and deadened, and dotted with scraggly, flat-topped trees. The wind hissed as it passed through the knee-high grass.

"There was this trench here," Muhumuza said, as we hopped over a shallow depression in the ground. He pointed toward an enormous anthill, as tall as a man, covered with purple flowers and brambles.

"He killed him here," Muhumuza said.

After the soldiers picked Laki up from his house, the suspects said in their confessions, they drove in tandem. Laki was behind the wheel of his Volkswagen, with Gille seated beside him. Anyule trailed them in the soldiers' own car. Here, a little past a village called Bwizibwera, Gille told Laki to stop, and ordered him out of the car.

Then, as now, the property was at the edge of a large cattle ranch. It was a secluded place, and there was no one in sight. Gille and Laki walked through the under-

brush, with Anyule trailing behind. Both the soldiers were carrying submachine guns, and 30 rounds of ammunition.

Laki put up no resistance. In front of the anthill, Gille told him to stop.

"Lie down," Gille said to Laki in Swahili. Without a word, Laki lay face-down on the ground.

Gille was a sergeant, Anyule a private. So, pulling rank, he ordered Anyule to shoot the prostrate man. But Anyule's gun jammed. ("God must have made it happen," he later said.) After a moment's frustration, Gille aimed his own gun, and fired one shot into Laki's back.

"He said, 'We abandoned the body here, after we made sure there was no life in him,'" Muhumuza told me, without emotion.

Nasur Gille, the triggerman, leaving the courtroom where he is on trial for murder, in Kampala, November 2002.

After Anyule and Gille were arrested, Muhumuza accompanied them on a series of strange pilgrimages to this spot, where they staged reenactments of the crime. The Volkswagen, it seemed, had disappeared in the turmoil of the 1979 invasion. (It never has been found.) However, now that the men who said they killed his father were cooperating with investigators, Muhumuza found himself presented with an opportunity he had never even dared contemplate: A chance to find his father, and give him a decent burial.

Again, however, the legacy of Amin's terror intervened to obscure the truth. At the foot of the anthill, Muhumuza pointed out to me a deep hole, now covered with weeds. This was where they had first dug. They found nothing.

Gille couldn't understand. He fixed the spot easily, because he remembered some rebels had been massacred near a hill across the way. He recalled even small details with extraordinary clarity. Muhumuza had assumed they were looking for a body with a hole in the back of the skull. No, Gille corrected him, he had shot his father at the place where his neck met his shoulder blades.

This was the spot, Gille insisted. Maybe animals had eaten the body.

Nasur Gille led Duncan Muhumuza to the spot where he shot his father, a large anthill now covered with brambles. (left, foreground). Gille was certain he had the right place, but the body was nowhere to be found.

Then an aged worker from a nearby farm showed up. He had heard about what they were looking for. He told Muhumuza a story: Someone had been killed here in 1972, he said. But after a few days, the rancher who owned the land had discovered the body. He ordered his workers to dig a shallow grave, and bury Laki. Presumably out of fear of bringing himself to authorities' attention, the rancher never told anyone about the body.

Muhumuza went to the rancher's house, and discovered the old man had died the year before. His family was hostile. They said they knew nothing about a body. So Muhumuza returned to the field, again and again, digging holes, prospecting for his father's bones. Nothing panned out. He had felt so close. But now he began to despair.

Finally, someone found one of the

Pallbearers carry Laki's coffin to his grave. (Photograph courtesy of Uganda's Presidential Press Unit.)

workers who had buried the body. The man was recalcitrant—he, too, said he knew nothing. Muhumuza offered him a large reward. The gravedigger still refused to talk. So the local police threw him in jail.

The man's relatives pleaded for him, and he was released, on condition that he lead them to the gravesite within the next few days. Not long afterwards, the man's relatives called. They had found someone, they said, who could guide Muhumuza to his father's remains.

The next day a boy appeared in the meadow. He was wearing a leopard skin, and claimed to have magical powers. The boy whirled and danced, singing an incantation. Laki's family watched incredulously. Then the boy stopped, and pointed to a spot beneath a short *oruyenje* bush.

Muhumuza dug there. A few feet down, the shovel hit something. Carefully, he pushed away the soil. "It wasn't even a body, really," Muhumuza said. The bones were brown and badly decayed: a femur, a rib, a skull. The moment was strangely anticlimactic. An onlooker offered to perform a tradition African ritual, which would involve Muhumuza smearing himself with herbs. He refused. Instead, Muhumuza carefully placed the bones in a cardboard box.

His search was over. He did not cry.

* * *

On August 24, 2002, Eliphaz Laki was finally laid to rest. The funeral took place in Ndeija, the village where he grew up, and the site of the family farm. Laki's farmhouse, a one-story yellow building, is nestled in a valley, between a small river and a steep hill covered with banana trees. More than a thousand people—friends, relatives, dignitaries, people who had read about the case in the newspaper—attended the ceremony. All day, gray rain clouds loomed ominously overhead, but the weather held.

Pallbearers carried Laki's wooden coffin out of the farmhouse, as a red-robed choir, accompanied by an accordion, sang a hymn in the local Bantu tongue. There was a reading from the Book of Genesis, the story of Joseph, who, keeping a promise, carried his father from Egypt for burial in the Promised Land. Then there were hours of testimonials: Gray-haired men in safari suits shared stories of Laki's schoolboy soccer prowess; women in vibrant bandanas told how the chief had brought clean water to their villages. A member of Parliament, a woman from a northern tribe, recounted how Amin had murdered her own brother. "We have all lost members of the family," she said. "We are all one in this sorrow."

Over and over, friends and relatives saluted Muhumuza for his strength and persistence, called him a hero, and said his father would be very proud. Occasionally, Muhumuza daubed his eyes with a handkerchief. But most of the time he bounded about the crowd with uncharacteristic ebullience. It was as if, he said in his eulogy, he had spent his life carrying a millstone on his shoulders, and now, suddenly, it had been removed.

Late in the afternoon, a convoy of four-wheel-drive vehicles roared up in a cloud of dust, and President Yoweri Museveni appeared, wearing a business suit and a wide-brimmed, floppy hat. As a pair of military officers washed his white Mercedes jeep, the president delivered his eulogy. "For a state to exist, people have to die for it," he said. "They must sacrifice their lives so that those who are lucky survive.

"I cannot bring him back," he continued. "I cannot

do anything beyond my means, but I want to show you that the peace you have is the result of the sacrifice of people like this one."

Then the choir struck up another hymn, "O Guide Me O Great Jehovah." The pallbearers picked up the coffin, and began the steep trek through Laki's banana groves. The mourners followed behind in a long, breathless procession, the old men's canes and young women's heels struggling against the loose ground, sending clods of dirt cascading down the hill. Near the summit, the procession stopped next to a small mud hut. This was the house in which Laki grew up. A family of chickens milled about.

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust," the minister read, as the coffin was lowered on ropes into the grave.

Duncan Muhumuza stood with his wife and the president at the foot of the grave. He looked down sadly into the hole, and tossed in a handful of soil. Then he turned and walked back down the hill. The mourners followed, as gravediggers began shoveling dirt onto the coffin.

Today, Eliphaz Laki lies at the top of his hill, beside his boyhood home, underneath a gravestone that reads:

Eliphaz Mbwaijana Laki
1920 – 1972
Disappeared 1972
Remains Recovered 2001
Buried 2002
No Longer "Missing"
Betrayed But Not Forgotten

Eliphaz Laki's grave, January 2003.

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INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS
Fellows and their Activities

Alexander Brenner (June 2002 - 2004) • **EAST ASIA**
A linguist who has worked as an French-language instructor with the Rassias Foundation at Dartmouth College and also has proficient Mandarin and Spanish, upper-intermediate Italian, conversational German and Portuguese, and beginning Cantonese, Alex received a B.A. in History from Yale in 1998 and has just completed a Master's degree in China Studies and International Economics at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He is prepariing for his two-year ICWA fellowship in China with four months of intensive Mandarin-language study in Beijing. His fellowship will focus on the impact of a new government and a new membership in the World Trade Organization on Chinese citizens, institutions and regions both inside and far from the capital.

Martha Farmelo (April 2001- 2003) • **ARGENTINA**
A Georgetown graduate (major: psychology; minor, Spanish) with a Master's in Public Affairs from the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton, Martha is the Institute's Suzanne Ecke McColl Fellow studying gender issues in Argentina. Married to an Argentine economist and mother of a small son, she will be focusing on both genders, which is immensely important in a land of Italo/Latino machismo. Martha has been involved with Latin America all her professional life, having worked with Catholic Relief Services and the Inter-American Development Bank in Costa Rica, with Human Rights Watch in Ecuador and the Inter-American Foundation in El Salvador, Uruguay and at the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Andrew Rice (May 2002 - 2004) • **UGANDA**
A former staff writer for the *New York Observer* and a reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the Washington Bureau of *Newsday*, Andrew will be spending two years in Uganda, watching, waiting and reporting the possibility that the much-anticipated "African Renaissance" might begin with the administration of President Yoweri Museveni. Andrew won a B.A. in Government from Georgetown (minor: Theology) in 1997 after having spent a semester at Charles University in Prague, where he served as an intern for *Velvet* magazine and later traveled, experienced and wrote about the conflict in the Balkans.

Matthew Z. Wheeler (October 2002-2004) • **SOUTHEAST ASIA**
A former research assistant for the Rand Corporation specializing in South and Southeast Asia, Matt will spend two years looking into proposals, plans and realities of regional integration (and disintegration) along the Mekong River, from China to the sea at Vietnam. With a B.A. in liberal arts from Sarah Lawrence and an M.A. from Harvard in East Asian studies (as well as a year-long Blakemore Fellowship in Thai language studies) Matt will have to take long- and short-term conflicts in Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia into account as he lives, writes and learns about the region.

James G. Workman (January 2002 - 2004) • **SOUTHERN AFRICA**
A policy strategist on national restoration initiatives for Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt from 1998 to 2000, Jamie is an ICWA Donors' Fellow looking at southern African nations (South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia and, maybe, Zimbabwe) through their utilization and conservation of fresh-water supplies. A Yale graduate (History; 1990) who spent his junior year at Oxford, Jamie won a journalism fellowship at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies and wrote for the *New Republic* and *Washington Business Journal* before his years with Babbitt. Since then he has served as a Senior Advisor for the World Commission on Dams in Cape Town, South Africa.

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