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## Sub-Saharan Africa

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# The Great Rift

By Andrew Rice

*"It was as if I had been betrayed, but one is not betrayed by an enemy."*

—Graham Greene, *The Quiet American*.

APRIL 1, 2003

Francis Kwerebera was cutting weeds by the roadside when he first saw them coming. It was a sunny late-morning. Kwerebera, then 24, was bent over, working with a scythe, barefoot, wearing just a t-shirt and shorts. It was hot, as it always is at the end of the dry season, when the round-topped hills of western Uganda turn from shades of green to hues of sand and ash. Kwerebera heard the dull rumble of an automobile engine—in 1972, still an exotic noise in the Ugandan countryside—and looked up.

A small car, a Morris Minor, was moving fast down the dirt road, kicking up a fine fog of orange dust in its wake. Abruptly, the car skidded to a halt, right in front of the spot where Kwerebera was cutting weeds. He could see three men sitting inside.

The driver threw the car into reverse, backed up, and stopped in front of a low, red-roofed building—the office of the local county chief, Eliphaz Laki. The driver got out of the car and walked inside.

Kwerebera was a relative of the chief's, and had been living with him in Ibanda, the small town where he was stationed, for about a year, doing odd jobs around the house and farm work in the nearby banana groves. Laki was an educated man, a successful politician, a chief—the most successful person their village had ever produced.

Yet Kwerebera knew that lately, his uncle had been troubled. Five days before, guerrillas had attacked a nearby army barracks, in a disorganized attempt to overthrow the military government of President Idi Amin. The army had easily repulsed the rebels, and since then, soldiers had picked up many of Laki's friends—almost the entire political leadership of the area—on suspicion of collaborating with the attack. Only a few days before, Laki had told to Kwerebera, "I don't know what this world is coming to."

That morning, September 22, Laki had been late to work, which was unusual. He had a reputation for punctilious adherence to routine: At his desk by 7:30, home for lunch at noon, back to work at two, home again at five. But on this morning he had tarried over his breakfast, seeing his ten year-old son Duncan off to school, giving him a shilling to buy ink. Then, at around 9 a.m., he had walked



*Eliphaz Laki in the 1960s.*

*This is the second in an occasional series of articles about the disappearance of Eliphaz Laki, the men accused of killing him, and the murder's reverberations through Uganda's history and present-day politics.*

across the street from the chief's official residence to the four-room county headquarters.

Laki had shut himself in his office, a small room with a view of the rambling, craggy mountains beyond the town. The county cashier sat across from him, doing the books. Laki had told the cashier he expected Amin's men to come for him soon. Now he sat at his desk, awaiting the inevitable.

The stranger entered the headquarters' dim, concrete-floored outer room, adjacent, via a closed door, to Laki's office. He was a tall wisp of a man with bloodshot eyes, dressed nondescriptly in a white shirt and black trousers. Several men were lingering in the outer room, chatting and passing the time. They noticed the stranger's skin was charcoal-dark, and guessed he was from Uganda's north, Amin's home area.

The stranger walked up to one of the lingering men, a policeman, and flashed a card identifying himself as a military intelligence officer. The policeman's neck snapped back, and he looked away. Back in those days, he would later say, seeing a soldier, and especially an intelligence officer, was "like seeing a snake." The stranger asked to see the chief. The policeman gestured at the closed door.

The cashier heard a knock. "Come in," Laki said. The



*"The driver got out of the car, and walked around the side of the low, red-roofed building..."*

stranger entered. He and Laki talked for a moment in Swahili, a language the cashier did not understand. Then Laki stood up from his desk.

"Let's go," he said.

Laki and the stranger walked briskly out of the county headquarters, passing the police officer and his friends without saying a word. He looked petrified. The police officer, wondering what was going on, turned to look out the window. Another man stood just outside, wearing plain clothes and carrying a submachine gun.

Laki and the stranger crossed the street and climbed the steep driveway leading to Laki's house, the county chief's official residence. The other two men trailed them in the Morris Minor. The policeman tried to follow, too, just to see what was going on.

Near the bottom of the driveway, a gruff, bearish man stopped him. The policeman recognized the gruff man—he had come with the soldiers, but he was not a soldier himself. His name was Salim Sebi. Before the coup, he had been a bus driver, a political dabbler well known to the prominent men who were now disappearing.

The policeman made up a story—he said the chief had forgotten his keys, and he needed to give them to him. Sebi shooed him away, laughing in a way that made it clear that where the chief was going, he wouldn't need keys.

More than 30 years later, the policeman, now wrinkled and jowly, would recall for me the events of that day in his small home shaded by banana trees. "Sebi was my friend," he said. The old man reflected for a



moment on the most perplexing question of all: Why was Eliphaz Laki murdered?

"Me, personally, I do not blame the army very much," he finally concluded. "We killed ourselves."

\* \* \*

"*Betrayed But Not Forgotten.*" Eliphaz Laki's epitaph ran through my head for a long time after his funeral. One night, at the end of a long conversation, I asked Laki's son, Duncan Muhumuza, what the epitaph meant to him. "I think he was betrayed by our system," he replied. But this explanation seemed incomplete. I asked the same question of Yona Kanyomozi, a wily old politician whom Laki raised as a foster son. He smiled thinly, and was quiet for a moment. "It was just a bad regime," Kanyomozi said, in a way that made it clear he could say a great deal more, but thought he shouldn't.

Eliphaz Laki's murder was an atrocity, to be sure. But a betrayal? He never knew the soldiers who killed him—and familiarity is a necessary ingredient to betrayal. We are betrayed by those we know the best: the ones we love, the ones we trust. Our neighbors. Our friends.

In Laki's case, the events that led to his death followed seamlessly from the work of his life: politics. Religious rivalry, tribal grievances, personal grudges, greed for the spoils of government—all of these factors, the great plagues of African politics, combined to create a situation in which men who knew each other well, who had been schooled together, worked together, eaten together and gone to church together, turned against one another, and used the willing executioners of Idi Amin's army as their weapons.

In this sense, Duncan was right: His father *was* betrayed by the democratic system he tried to build in Uganda. Laki died for the same reasons the country he loved in those heady days of independence descended into the madness of dictatorship—a dictatorship led by Idi Amin, but cheered and aided by countless other of his countrymen. Laki's story—how he lived, and why he died—is Uganda's too.

\* \* \*

Eliphaz Laki was born in 1920, in a thatched hut in the Ugandan district of Rwampara, not far from the edge of the western branch of the Great Rift Valley, a 6,000-mile cleavage in the earth's crust that runs from the Red Sea to Mozambique. Rwampara is a place of undulating hills, ripples of the primordial tectonic heaving that created the Great Rift. In Laki's youth, the valleys were covered with papyrus-choked swamps, and people mostly lived on the slopes, growing bananas and other subsistence crops, or grazing cattle precariously against the grade.

Laki never knew his father, a small farmer who died within a few years of the birth of his only son. His mother was left to fend for her family alone, and she did the best

she could, selling fruit and vegetables around their village. But to other villagers she was an unattached woman, an object of scorn. They ridiculed her, called her "widow"—a slur that combined overtones of both "useless" and "witch." Laki, they called an orphan.

But Laki was bright—everyone could see that—and Africans, then as now, have their own kind of social-welfare system. One day, the local county chief happened to pass through the village in his big red Studebaker. Someone pointed out Laki to the chief's driver. Just like that, the driver said Laki could come and live with him at the chief's residence and begin primary school. He was 14 years old.

To Laki, the chief must have seemed wealthy beyond imagination. He owned the Studebaker, for one thing—the only car for miles around. He had a vast herd of cows, the local measure of income and status, perhaps as many as 300, remembered Manasseh Katsigazi, another poor child whom the chief brought into his home. Katsigazi, who became Laki's lifelong friend, said that the chief treated them "like his own children."



*Manasseh Katsigazi grew up in the chief's house with Laki, and became his lifelong friend.*

Or almost. Laki lived in the servants' quarters, away from the chief's own children. And the chief was an aloof man; he behaved oddly toward some of the children. He would greet some of them—the poor ones, the farmers' kids—with a tap of his walking stick, and would avoid touching them with his hands.

Truth was, as Laki would have learned soon after arriving in the chief's home, however benevolent his benefactor might be, there was, and would always be, a divide separating him and Laki, another kind of great rift. It was not one of tribe—they were both Banyankole—but rather of caste. The chief was from the ruling class, the Bahima. Laki was one of the great mass of peasants, the Bairu.

The Bahima and the Bairu spoke the same language and coexisted, for the most part peacefully, in the same areas. Yet they were divided by custom and suspicion. The Bahima were cattle keepers, reverent towards their cows, traditionally nomadic, subsisting mostly on milk. The Bairu, like Laki's family, were farmers, typically unable to afford many cows, if any. The Bahima viewed cultivating the land as dirty work, and the Bairu as an inferior race. (In this regard, the relationship was similar, if not identical, to that between the Tutsis and the Hutus in nearby Rwanda.) The Bahima had an aristocratic class





*A statue of a cow stands at the entrance of the town of Mbarara. Cattle are treated reverentially in western Uganda, particularly by the cattle-keeping Bahima.*

and a king, the *omugabe*. Their Bairu servants were forced into humiliating servitude, forced to “carry off their lord’s urine,” writes Martin Doornbos, the preeminent historian of western Uganda, and forbidden to “touch Bahima milkpots, lest these turn ‘unclean.’”

Once, the divide had been tolerable. Bairu who didn’t like the way things operated had a simple recourse: move out of the kingdom. But then, near the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British arrived. Coming from their own class-based society, infused with notions of Social Darwinism and crackpot anthropology, the first generation of colonizers saw the Bahima as natural allies. They decided that the Bahima, who typically have sharper features and lighter skin than the Bairu, had originated from Ethiopia, and thus were members of a superior “Hamitic” race. The British carved out a large piece of western Uganda, named it the Kingdom of Ankole, and put the Bahima king in control to rule on their behalf.

By the time Laki was old enough to go to high school, however, things were changing in Ankole. The colonial government had introduced cash crops like coffee, and some Bairu farmers had become quite rich. The children of these farmers were getting educations. Many of the Bahima, meanwhile, actively resisted sending their children to school, since it took them away from watching the family cows.

At Mbarara High School, the missionary school that

served as the training ground for the kingdom’s elite, which Laki attended on a scholarship, he met a group of young Bairu who were eager to challenge the Bahima students’ social supremacy. They started a club, naming it after a local proverb that goes: “The daughter will grow up to be as big as her mother.”

After high school, Laki took a job as a roving health inspector for the colonial government. He married and started a family. He became a familiar figure on the dirt roads of Ankole, which he traversed on his bicycle, always wearing a smart gray suit, a white shirt and a tie. A fastidious man, he taught the villagers the importance of hygiene, told them to build pit latrines and to dig wells instead of simply drawing water from muddy natural springs. Sometimes Laki traveled from town to town with an acting troupe, dramatizing the importance of cleanliness through little plays.

Meanwhile, at night, Laki was stealing away from his house to attend secret meetings, led by a schoolteacher in a tweed jacket, who, in clipped sentences, preached a message of equality and usurpation. The teacher, who had been one of Laki’s instructors at Mbarara High School, was named Kesi Nganwa. Furtively, Nganwa was building a following among the new, educated Bairu elite: teachers, ministers, civil servants. They would come to call their leader *Ruterengwa*, a title that means, “nothing compares to him in stature.”

It was simply a matter of numbers, Nganwa told his acolytes; with democracy, the Bairu would take over Ankole. He had traveled to England, where he had heard the anti-colonial ideas then bubbling up from places like India and Ghana. The very word, *independence*, had a contagious effect, which was spreading even to Uganda. Parties were forming, platforms were being drafted, new leaders were emerging.

Nganwa saw change coming, and his mission was to organize the Bairu to take advantage of it. His job, as a schools supervisor for the Native Anglican Church, gave him cover to travel the district on his bicycle, recruiting.

“He could look at you and see your talents,” said Yoasi Makaanu, 72, who was then a young teacher and is now a retired politician. (A picture of Nganwa still hangs on a wall of his farmhouse.) Because the Bahima still ran Ankole, the existence of the society was a tightly-kept secret. News from Nganwa was



*Eliphaz Laki and his wife, Jane, on their wedding day in 1949. (Photo courtesy of Joyce Birungi Laki.)*

whispered from person to person, at funerals or wedding receptions or in meetings after church.

The meetings themselves would typically take place at the home of a sympathizer. The men would pray, then eat a dinner of *matooke* (steamed plantains) and millet. After the meal the men would drink tea and talk. (Many of the men were born-again Christians, so there was no alcohol.) They would discuss the future, and brainstorm ways to overthrow the Bahima.

Laki cut a striking figure at these meetings. Tall, thin and balding, he was a slow speaker, not hotheaded like some of the men. The others were impressed with his intelligence and political savvy. Laki, in turn, found a group of men who shared his education and his politics. Over time, his secret bond with them as a member of Ngranwa's society deepened into friendship. The men spent holidays at each other's houses; their wives became friends and their children played together. One of them became the godfather of some of Laki's children.

Laki was particularly close to two of the men. James Kahigiriza was a well-to-do, affable land surveyor. "We were almost like brothers," Kahigiriza told me when we met in November 2002. When a new job required Laki to move to Mbarara, the local capital, he lived at Kahigiriza's house for a while. In the early 1960s, they traveled to the United States together to study American ranching techniques. At one point, they even opened a joint bank account.

Nekemia Bananuka, too, became a lifelong friend, so close to Laki that his son, Duncan, still refers to Bananuka as his uncle. Bananuka was a vegetable salesman, and he had prospered selling exotic items like cabbage and cauliflower to white people. Brash, ambitious and impatient, Bananuka openly boasted that he would lead Ankole one day. He alienated some of the men—"a radical," they called him, with disdain—but Laki sympathized, and became a loyal follower.

In 1955, the secret society achieved the previously unthinkable: through intrigue and superior organization, they managed to get their leader, Kesi Ngranwa, elected prime minister of Ankole by the local parliament. The Bahima chieftains were deeply shocked. After the decisive vote, one of them walked home dejectedly, forgetting he had driven his car to the meeting.

There were rumors that Ngranwa would be assassinated before he could take office. Ngranwa's followers met secretly to make "preparations" in case of such a killing, drawing up lists of prominent Bahima to be murdered in reprisal.

Mercifully, there were no killings, but the political infighting did not end with Ngranwa's election. Over the next few years, power swung back and forth, until, in

1960, the prime minister was finally ousted.

Not long after his defeat, Ngranwa quietly checked himself into a hospital in Kampala. No one even knew he was sick. But after an operation, he died. The doctors said it was leukemia. In African politics, however, no death can be ascribed to something so random and mysteriously as cancer, so for years the rumor persisted that



*Yoasi Makaanu, one of the men Kesi Ngranwa recruited into his secret society. The men became close friends, "like brothers," Joyce Laki said.*

Ngranwa was poisoned. (Martin Doornbos, the political scientist, told me that he once tracked down Ngranwa's death certificate, and found there was nothing to the stories.)

Ngranwa's funeral, held at St. James Cathedral in Mbarara, had the air of a state occasion. Children were given the day off of school. Laki and all the rest of the men were there. Nekemia Bananuka drove the coffin to the gravesite. James Kahigiriza, one person who attended the funeral told me, wept openly.

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On October 9, 1962, the Duke of Kent presided over a ceremony in Kampala, formally ending Britain's 70 years of colonial rule in Uganda. There to accept power on behalf of Uganda's citizens was a young, bow-tied politician from the north of the country, Apollo Milton Obote. Obote had just been named prime minister, in an election heavily influenced by the departing British. They believed he was the right man for the job. His party's slogan—"Unity, Justice, Independence"—embodied the nationalistic idealism of those days of African promise.

Present too that day was a barrel-chested young military officer, marching as a member of a ceremonial honor guard. His name was Idi Amin.

With independence secured, politics in Ankole—and in Uganda as a whole—began to change. The informal groups that had gathered in darkness (and there were secret societies among the Bahima, too) were now meet-

ing in the open, under the aegis of new political parties.

Laki's group naturally gravitated to Obote's party, the Uganda People's Congress (UPC). This was partly for sectarian reasons. In the immediate post-independence era, parties tended to coalesce around existing religious divisions, as opposed to social classes or ideological affinities. The UPC was the Protestant party, and Laki and his friends were devout Anglicans. However, there were real political calculations involved, too: The UPC was nominally left wing, and the Bairu still thought of themselves as Ankole's underclass. Nekemia Bananuka, who assumed the leadership of the local UPC organization, saw in the party a vehicle to loosen the Bahima elite's grip once and for all—and to overthrow the king, who had retained his throne even after the British exit.

The Bahima were determined to keep the king in power. To continue their fight against the Bairu, they joined the UPC's strongest rival, the more conservative Democratic Party (DP). In some ways, it was a strange choice: The DP was a Catholic party, and the Bahima were predominantly Protestants. But the many Catholic Bairu felt no sympathy for Laki and his friends. They felt they had been largely excluded from Nganwa's movement. When it had come time to divide the patronage spoils of Nganwa's victory—chieftaincies, high school scholarships—Catholics had received an uneven share. They were more than happy to join an alliance of convenience with the Bahima.

The showdown came in 1963, the year after independence. Once liberated from his meddling British overseers, Obote had quickly shown he was far from a democrat. On the national level, the new prime minister offered lucrative ministerial jobs to defectors from other parties, and opposition parliamentarians nearly trampled each other crossing the aisle. In Ankole, he swiftly set about crushing the DP, aided by his loyal lieutenant, Nekemia Bananuka.

The central government called elections to choose a new local parliament. It was a nasty campaign. Old electoral districts were gerrymandered in the UPC's favor. The DP spread the rumor that if the UPC socialists took over, they would likely confiscate people's private property and extra wives. A small Muslim minority was up for grabs, and the UPC tried to woo it by claiming that Catholics really loved pork.

On Election Day, a top DP politician, Boniface Byanyima, was working as a monitor, visiting polling stations. The way the balloting system worked, each voter was supposed to step behind a curtain and drop a slip of paper into one of two boxes, one for the UPC, one for the DP. When he came to Laki's home village, Byanyima told me, "The box was completely empty. I did not find a [campaign] agent there. He had been chased away." (Elders in Laki's village told me they recalled no such shenanigans.)

Though outnumbered by the Catholic-Bahima alli-

ance, the Protestants of the UPC won the election handily. The old order had been fully usurped; for the first time, the Bairu were indisputably on top. Young Bairu were given jobs and scholarships. The new government built hospitals and schools. (Laki had one constructed near his home village.) It started cooperative ranches, which allowed many Bairu to own cattle for the first time.

Shortly after the election, Laki was appointed a county chief, and posted to the small town where he had grown up as a ward of the Bahima chief. The old chief had built the official residence on his own land, as if he intended the job to remain in his family forever, like an English barony. Now Laki, his former servant, was master of the house. The old chief retreated to a farm behind the county headquarters, where he lived out his days in the company of his beloved cows.

As is the custom in Africa, the new leaders quickly grew wealthy, at least by local standards. Kahigiriza commandeered prison laborers to build his house and tend his garden. Laki used money he obtained via a special government loan program for public officials to dispense with his bicycle and buy a car, a Volkswagen Beetle. Nekemia Bananuka bought his own automobile, a powder-blue Ford Fairlane with a white top. It was a splendid machine, and Bananuka nicknamed it *omugabe nankizaki*, which, roughly translated, means: "Does the king have wheels like these?" (The *omugabe* drove a Ford Zephyr.)

The heady days were not to last long, however. Bananuka had always prophesied that he would lead Ankole one day. Now, having masterminded the UPC's election victory, he assumed he would be the new prime minister. Many of Bananuka's old friends harbored secret doubts, however. Bananuka said he wanted to abolish the office of king and turn Ankole into a republic. Only the central government had the power to do that, however, and Bananuka's tough talk was certain to antagonize the *omugabe*, with whom the new leaders needed a good working relationship. For now, he was still the king.

"We feared this man, although he was leading us," said Yoasi Makaaru, who was a member of the parliament at the time. "He had that kind of radicalism."

After much intrigue and infighting, the parliament finally settled on a compromise candidate: James Kahigiriza, Laki's friend, the surveyor. Temperamentally, Kahigiriza was Bananuka's polar opposite: gregarious, eager to please, uneager to rock the boat. He was considered a moderate, someone who would be collegial with the king. Most of all, Kahigiriza had no enemies.

But his appointment made an enemy of Bananuka. Bananuka was too powerful to keep out of the government entirely, so Kahigiriza appointed him to head the ministry overseeing public works. Bananuka used this





*Laki (left) with James Kahigiriza, then the prime minister of Ankole, on the occasion of his swearing-in as county chief, in 1963. (Photo courtesy of Joyce Birungi Laki.)*

position to stay in the public eye, while plotting his former friend's overthrow. The rest of the men who had grown close over tea with Nganwa were forced to choose sides, and once again a rift opened up in Ankole. Bananuka's faction was called *Enkomba*, "the concentrate." Kahigiriza's was called *Omufunguro*, "the dilute."

It was like a divorce, Laki's daughter Joyce said: "You decide to go with your mother, or you decide to go with your father." At first, Laki tried to stay out of the fight. It was Kahigiriza, when he became prime minister, who appointed Laki a county chief. But before long though, Kahigiriza claims, Laki was taking part in secret nighttime meetings, conniving with Bananuka.

Political exigencies made it necessary for Kahigiriza to strike a deal with Bahima and Catholic politicians to create a broad-based ruling coalition. Bananuka accused the new prime minister of selling out. Kahigiriza, in turn, accused Bananuka of "intrigue and rumor mongering."

Over the next few years, the two factions would continue to engage in bitter, and increasingly sophomoric, political warfare. Bananuka and the district's public-relations officer, a close relative, conspired to burnish his reputation at Kahigiriza's expense. When Kahigiriza, who was known to like his whisky, presided over the opening

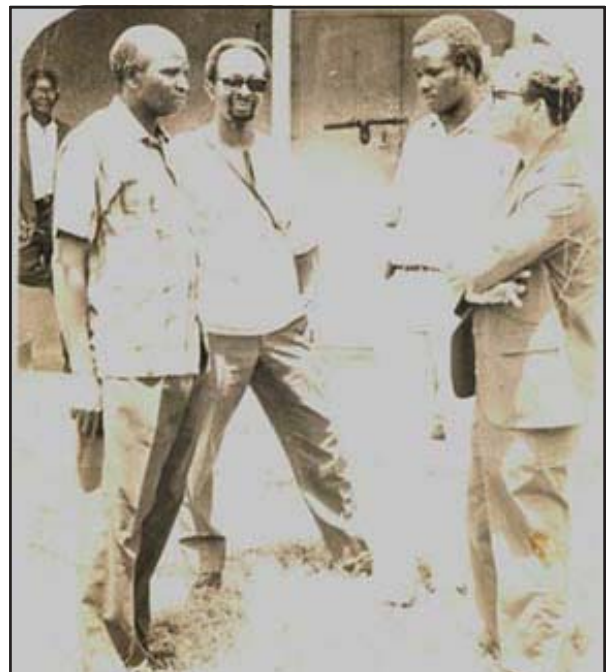
of a local bar, the district issued a press release entitled: "Mission Accomplished." Kahigiriza accused Bananuka of financial misdeeds. When he finally fired his rebellious minister in 1966, Kahigiriza ordered the police to tow away Bananuka's beloved car.

All through this period, sessions of parliament would often dissolve into chaos. Afterward, delegations from both sides would jump in their cars and speed to Kampala, like feuding children rushing to their father, each trying to be the first to tell Obote about the other's outrageous behavior.

Eventually, Obote chose to side with Bananuka. The kingdom was abolished, the king forcibly retired, and Kahigiriza was ousted from the prime minister's job. Bananuka had won.

After that, reprisals. When Bananuka took charge, many of the old chiefs were fired. The chief jailer of the local prison, a member of the Bahima group, was demoted and transferred to a remote area—a move that would take on great significance in years to come. Schoolteachers who were suspected of opposition sympathies faced similar punishment. "In politics, they behaved liked thugs," opposition leader Boniface Byanyima said.

Naturally, Kahigiriza was bitter. In 1970, he attempted a comeback, mounting a campaign against Bananuka for the office of Ankole UPC chairman. The vote was held in public, at the Mbarara soccer stadium. The two men were sent to opposite sides of the field. Delegates were told to line up behind their choice. According to Kahigiriza's autobiography, "to the surprise of all those present, a column of soldiers suddenly appeared in the stadium, and



*Laki, the chief, on a visit to a local cooperative farm. (Photo courtesy of Joyce Birungi Laki.)*

ordered all the delegates to line up behind Bananuka.”

This incident was a manifestation of a larger and more troubling trend. Nationally, Obote’s heavy-handed tactics were wearing thin with the public, and he was increasingly relying on the army to stay in power. In the capital of Kampala, to Ankole’s east, the Baganda, Uganda’s largest tribe, were furious. Obote had ousted their king, *Kabaka* Edward “Freddy” Mutesa (who was also the country’s figurehead president), sending the army to attack his palace. Naming himself the new president, Obote had suspended the constitution and arrested several ministers whom he believed to be threats.

Obote had once declared he was the only leader in Africa who did not fear a military coup. But now, desperately trying to assure the army’s loyalty, he filled its officer corps with members of his own northern tribe. This brought him into conflict with his army chief, General Idi Amin, who, though also from the north, was from a different tribe.

The tension between the two men was an open secret. The only question was which one would strike first. Obote tried to. In January 1971, before leaving for a conference of British Commonwealth leaders in Singapore, he left instructions that Amin was to be arrested before he returned.

Amin was faster on the draw. Early on the morning of January 25, 1971, tanks rumbled down the road past Laki’s house toward Uganda’s western border. Laki, like everyone else, turned on the radio. The BBC said there had been a coup. Radio Uganda played nothing but martial music. Around 3 p.m. came an announcement: The government had been overthrown, and General Amin was in charge. A soldier read out a list of 18 justifications for the coup, listing, among other things, Obote’s failure to hold elections and his abridgement of speech freedoms.

Later that evening, Amin himself went on the air. “I am not a politician, but a professional soldier,” he began, humbly. But “matters now prevailing in Uganda” had forced him to take over. “Free and fair elections will soon be held in the country, given a stable security situation,” he vowed. He invited all political exiles to return.

All over Mbarara, people poured into the streets, joyous at Obote’s overthrow. They waved tree branches, a traditional show of jubilation. James Kahigiriza was one of the most ebullient. “I saw him with my own naked eyes,” Yoasi Makaanu said. “He was carrying a flag around town ... praising Amin, praising the army, praising the overthrow.”

That night, Laki went to Bananuka’s farmhouse outside Mbarara, where all the top UPC leaders were gathering to discuss what would happen next. They were confused, unsure of what to do. “When you lose a government, it’s like losing a parent,” said Edward

Rurangaranga, a politician who was among the men who attended the meeting.

Someone raised the example of Nigeria, where the military had overthrown the government in 1966. The coup had been bloody. “West African countries were having coups, and we were hearing bad, bad things,” Rurangaranga said.

They had no idea how bad it could get.

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Six days later, Yoasi Makaanu was hanging around Nekemia Bananuka’s house in Mbarara, listening to his portable radio, trying to get news of the coup, when a wiry, 27-year-old with a thin moustache walked up to the front door. The young man’s name was Yoweri Museveni. All of Bananuka’s men knew Museveni—he was one of the Bahima, but he was all right. He had a bright future, they thought.

Museveni agreed. A year out of Dar es Salaam University, he was already telling friends that he was born to rule Uganda. He idolized Che Guevara, had learned to shoot a rifle in North Korea, and had trained in rebel camps in Mozambique. At the moment, he was working for Obote’s secret police (a fact confirmed by numerous contemporaries, though Museveni now maintains he was merely a Foreign-Service underling). He was contemplating a run for parliament. Simultaneously, he was trekking down to the shantytowns to preach Marxism to dissatisfied young men there. He was teaching them to shoot and telling them to prepare for Communist revolution.

“You see,” said Zubari Bakari, one of Museveni’s early recruits and now a government official, “he was already plotting to overthrow Obote.”

But Idi Amin had overthrown Obote first, and Museveni was scared. He went inside the house and told Bananuka that he had to get to Tanzania, where he would be safe from Amin’s thugs. Bananuka liked Museveni, who was friends with his son. He agreed to help.

Bananuka went out. After about half an hour, he returned with two men, Laki and another UPC activist. Bananuka had encountered Laki in town, where he had gone to buy milk and butter for the family. Now, after some hurried preparations, and without a word to his wife or any other family member, Laki got into his Volkswagen Beetle and drove to Tanzania.

The road they took ran through a little border town called Kikagati. It was near dusk when they left, and the drive was hard, down a bumpy, dusty road. The little Beetle was crammed: Laki was driving, Museveni sat in the passenger seat. Three other men, including Museveni’s compatriot Zubari Bakari, sat in back.

The road wound through eucalyptus groves and





*The road to Kikagati.*

marshes, past scrubby flatlands where leopards and lions hid in the tall grass by the roadside. Finally, they reached the wide Kagera River, the border between Uganda and Tanzania, and crossed.

From there, they made their way to Dar es Salaam, where Milton Obote had gone after the coup. Tanzania's president, Julius Nyerere, had received Obote like a wronged hero, sending a Rolls Royce to the airport to pick him up, and housing him in his own State House, over which he allowed Obote fly the Ugandan presidential standard.

Laki's little delegation went into the elegant presidential residence, to the upstairs sitting room where Obote was receiving visitors. After a while, Nyerere showed up, too. Obote was stunned. He pressed the men for details about the situation within the country. He had trouble believing the reports of widespread celebrations at his ouster.

[In an e-mail correspondence with me from his current exile in Zambia, Obote denied this encounter ever occurred, claiming he did not even meet Museveni until a year later. This denial conflicts with Museveni's autobiography, with an account given to me by Bakari, who attended the meeting, and with what Laki told confidantes on his return.]

Obote pressed Nyerere to prepare an immediate invasion to oust Amin and reinstall him as president. But Museveni argued for patience, saying that he could prepare a rebellion from within.

The talks went on for a week or so, and ended with an understanding that Nyerere would finance a rebellion, if Obote and Museveni could organize it. Laki, Museveni and the other three men traveled back to the border, where they split up. Before they parted, Museveni told his travel companions: "I will contact you."

Laki returned home. He had been gone two weeks,

and had worn the same clothes the whole time. He had grown a beard. The butter he went to town to buy still sat on the back seat of his car, melted. He never told his wife where he had gone.

Things had changed in the short time Laki was gone. The military was in charge, and many of his politician friends were out of jobs. Bananuka was starting a bus company. Makaaru would end up driving a taxicab. Laki himself was a civil servant, and couldn't be fired easily, but he was transferred from the comfortable surroundings of the town he grew up in to a far more remote post, Ibanda.

Meanwhile, the Bahima and Kahigiriza's group, who had welcomed the overthrow, were ascendant again. They pledged their fealty to the new regime and gave Amin a gift of several hundred cows. In one often-recounted story, when Amin came to visit Mbarara for a large rally shortly after the coup, the former chief jailer, who had been fired by Bananuka, dropped down on his knees to greet the general. For their loyalty, Amin's local supporters were rewarded with jobs and power.

Despite the evident danger, Laki continued to help Museveni prepare his rebellion. At the time, the young revolutionary was smuggling arms into western Uganda and spirited young men into Tanzania for military training. "Our idea was that they should get us people to go for training," said Eriya Kategaya, then one of Museveni's chief contacts within Uganda and now the country's minister of internal affairs.

How many rebels Laki recruited, and what other assistance he might have offered Museveni, remains something of a mystery. Few Ugandans are willing to openly discuss what Laki and others might have done to assist Museveni, in part because they are reluctant to speak about any portion of the president's personal history that might depart from the authorized narrative contained in his autobiography. "These matters involving the president are ..." Yona Kanyomozi said, pausing for a long



*Yona Kanyomozi was a destitute child, so poor that he didn't even own a shirt to wear to school when Laki met him. Laki took the boy into his home and saw that he got an education. Kanyomozi is now a member of the regional East African Legislative Assembly.*

time to consider his words. "Very ... sensitive." However, several people told me that Laki and Museveni met frequently between the time of the coup and the rebel attack on Mbarara, 20 months later.

"These fellows knew how to work underground," Kanyomozi said.

\* \* \*

One day in the spring of 1972, the Rev. George Nkoba, a friend of Laki's and the headmaster of the primary school in Ibanda, was sitting in his farmhouse, having his usual after-work cup of tea.

"I saw a Land Rover coming," Nkoba, now 71, recalled. The car pulled up to his house and three armed soldiers got out. "Before I could even say hello, I was thrown in back of the Land Rover." Nkoba landed on top of someone else, but could not see who it was. Then he heard Laki's voice.

"Have you also been arrested?"

The soldiers took the men to the barracks in Mbarara. Two days later, Laki was taken to Kampala, where he was imprisoned at the Makindye military barracks. Makindye had already earned a notorious reputation—it was the home of the cell called "Singapore," so nicknamed because, like Obote, prisoners who went there never came back. When Laki arrived, he found many of his friends, including Nekemia Bananuka, had already been there for several days.

The cell they shared was cramped, dark and fetid. It had no toilet. "Brains of people were all over the wall, blood was all over the floor," said Yoasi Makaaru, who was also among the prisoners.

Laki was brutally beaten, so badly that his daughter could scarcely recognize his swollen face when she came to visit. The soldiers liked to flog the prisoners with canes covered with rough hippo skin, and made them hop around the grounds crouched on their haunches, like frogs. One night, the men's captors prepared a dinner for them: huge helpings of meat, more than any person could possibly eat. The soldiers kicked the men in their backs, and told them to finish the meal. "This is the last supper you will have on this earth," they declared.

The men weren't killed, however. They were just forced to watch everyone around them die, which in many ways was worse. "Each of us, in his own way, prayed to God to take his breath away so this torture would end," said Edward Rurangaranga, another of the prisoners.

Each night around midnight, soldiers would come to the door of the cell and read out a few names. In the morning, Laki and the others would be called to load their former cellmates' bodies onto trucks. Many of the dead men's faces were bludgeoned beyond recognition.



*After being released from Makindye, Laki and some of his fellow prisoners went to a photo studio on Kampala Road to have a group photograph taken with their wives and friends. Back row (l-r): Yuda Katundu, a UPC activist who had accompanied Laki on the trip to Tanzania; Blasio Ntundubeire, another county chief; Laki; Yona Kanyomozi, Laki's foster son. Front row (l-r): Alice Katundu, Yuda's wife; Kenneth Kereere, Laki's nephew; Jane Laki, his wife. (Photo courtesy of Kenneth Kereere.)*

To save bullets, the soldiers would force a few of the prisoners to beat the others to death with hammers and pickaxes. When the prisoners with hammers had finished the job, they were bayoneted or shot.

All the men were convinced they would die. But then the beatings stopped. Amin decreed that they had been forgiven. Over the course of the summer, the men were gradually released. On the day Laki was freed, he and some of his friends who had also been released, along with their families, went to a photo studio on Kampala Road. They had not bathed, shaved or changed their clothes, but they posed for a group photograph.

"It was a landmark in their lives," said Kenneth Kereere, a nephew of Laki's who was there that day, and who still owns a framed copy of the photograph. "I think they wanted to take note of the change in the country. ... Many other Ugandans were imprisoned at the time. Very few got out."

That night, Laki and his wife stayed at Kereere's apartment in Kampala. Laki showered, then they ate dinner. "We just sat in the living room, talking all night," Kereere said. Kereere drank beer. Laki, a teetotaler, had

tea. For the first and only time, he told someone else what he seen in "Singapore."

"It had nearly driven him mad," Kereere said. Jane didn't say much. She stared at her husband. He was emaciated, and he wore a scraggly beard.

Kereere didn't believe Amin was done with Laki. He urged his uncle to think about fleeing the country, going into exile. "He refused point-blank," Kereere said. Laki said he didn't want to leave his 13 children, that he had faith that God had a plan for him. "He said, 'Let them kill me,'" his nephew recalled. "They will also die, just like me."

Laki's nephew was right—Amin wasn't finished with Laki and his friends. Shortly after their release, some of the men started vanishing, this time for good. The first to go was Yuda Katundu, a UPC activist who accompanied Laki and Museveni on their trip to Tanzania. He was kidnapped from outside a hospital, where he was waiting to give a friend a ride home. Other disappearances followed.

Laki was deeply shaken. He had never been one to talk about his feelings. Ever since he had been released from prison, he had been more reticent than usual, as if he was remembering things he didn't want to tell anyone. For long spells, he would just sit, silently, his head down, his arms crossed, and his feet stuck out, crossed at the ankles.

George Kahonda, another civil servant and UPC supporter, remembers walking home from church with Laki one Sunday, a short time before he was killed. They took a dirt path—since his arrest, Laki had been avoiding the main road, where he might run into soldiers. "He told to me one thing I will never forget," Kahonda, now 71, said recently. "He said, 'My dear friend, I fear my heart is too heavy to be contained in my chest.'

"Probably," Kahonda said, "it was his subconscious, telling him he was about to be arrested."

\* \* \*

One day in the summer of 1972, Yoasi Makaanu, forcibly retired from politics, was driving his taxicab, when Nekemia Bananuka flagged him down. Bananuka got in the back of the car and told him to drive to a small house he owned in Mbarara. There, Makaanu saw a familiar figure waiting for them: Yoweri Museveni.

Museveni had come with a friend, another young rebel. They went inside and talked. "They told us that Amin had a plan to finish us all," Makaanu said. "They said that unless we arranged for him to be toppled, he would not leave any stone unturned."

At this point, Makaanu became noticeably nervous. He had already been to prison once, and he knew what

would happen if anyone found out he had met with Museveni.

Museveni, sensing his uneasiness, pulled out a pistol. "He said, 'You people are so timid for nothing. You see this pistol? I got this from the barracks.'" He told Makaanu he had friends in the army. When he was finished taunting him, Makaanu said, Museveni dismissed him curtly: "You are going to be finished. You go back now."

Makaanu left. Bananuka stayed behind.

Not long afterwards, on a Sunday morning, residents of Mbarara awoke to gunfire. Museveni had been as good as his word. An attack had begun.

It was a disaster from the start. ("One of those rare events in military history," concluded Ugandan historian Samwiri Karugire. "A perfect failure.") The rebels numbered just 1,400, and they were badly armed and poorly trained. A plane full of guerrillas who were to land at Entebbe Airport, seize it, and march on Kampala, never made it to its destination because its pilot did not know how to retract the landing gear. A phalanx of soldiers who were supposed to march on the town of Masaka ran out of ammunition halfway there.

Museveni's group, which was attacking Mbarara, numbered just 350 men. An expected popular uprising failed to materialize, and the rebellion was crushed in a few hours. Museveni beat a hasty retreat back to Tanzania with just 46 of his men. In the days that followed, the official newspaper would publish photographs of dead rebels piled high outside the Mbarara barracks.

In Ibanda, news of the invasion came over the radio. Laki, who had no idea an invasion was coming—a messenger who was supposed to carry advance word of the attack had failed to get across the border—was furious with Museveni. "This man is going to get us killed!" he yelled to his friend, the police officer.

He was right. Over the next few weeks, soldiers rounded up Bananuka and nearly all of his political allies. A few tried to escape punishment—one chief even made a hasty conversion to Islam, Amin's religion, thinking it might save him. Soldiers took him from a hospital bed, where he was recovering from a circumcision, and he was never seen again.

At the time of the rebel attack, Nekemia Bananuka was at his farmhouse, not far from the barracks. When the rebels scattered, a few wounded stragglers came to him to seek shelter. Bananuka gave them food and water, and told them to hide in some woods on his property. Soldiers came, killed the rebels, and shot up his house. (Its walls are still pockmarked with bullet holes.)

Bananuka fled to his sister's home. The soldiers fi-





*Nekemia Bananuka and his family, circa 1966. Front Row (l-r): Sarah, Nekemia, Robina. Standing: George, Herbert, Fred, David, Edward. Three of Bananuka's five sons—Herbert, David and Edward—were killed after the invasion. (Photo courtesy of Fred Bananuka.)*

nally came for him in his own bus, the one he had started operating when he lost his political job. His bus driver, a Muslim, was behind the wheel. It is said that the soldiers dismembered and killed Bananuka, but no one knows for certain. His body, like the almost all the others', has never been recovered.

Three of Bananuka's sons, aged 19 to 26, tried to make a run for it. They made it to Ibanda, where Laki was living, and hid with some relatives. Soon the soldiers came—again led by a local man. They took the boys to a spot outside of town, near a well. The two oldest embraced, and were shot. The youngest was cut down as he tried to run away. When the soldiers left, they instructed the local people not to bury the bodies. They were left to rot.

Laki was fatalistic when he heard Bananuka had been killed. "It seems we are all going to die," he told a friend. Numerous people came to visit him in his last days, and all of them suggested he try to get out, flee the country. Instead, Laki wrote his will.

"He had given up," said Laki's daughter Joyce. "Because he saw all his friends had been killed."

Joyce rushed to Ibanda when she heard of Bananuka's

death. Laki told her the same thing he had said to the others: He wouldn't run, because he wanted to die in Ankole. That evening, Laki said he wasn't hungry. He just wanted to get into bed.

"We prayed together," Joyce said. "I took some water for him to bathe, but he said [no]. And daddy was a person who never, ever slept without bathing. But that night, he said, 'Let me sleep. Let us pray and then I sleep.'"

The next morning, Joyce caught a bus back home. A few days later, she happened to see a soldier she knew on the street. The soldier looked at her sympathetically. "I'm sorry you daddy died," he told her.

It was the first she'd heard.

\* \* \*

Why was Eliphaz Laki killed? On one level, the question is easily answered: He clearly *was* aiding Museveni's rebellion, at least in some small way. But how was this discovered? And why was it discovered?

In Ankole, it is nearly universally held that the blood-letting of the 1970s sprang from the same wellsprings as the political rifts of the 1960s: greed, religion, ethnic rivalry, and above all, politics. To many, the circumstantial case alone—nearly the entire former leadership of the district was wiped out—suggests a wider political vendetta. Laki aside, most of the men who disappeared were guilty of nothing more than belonging to Bananuka's faction of the UPC.

"Clearly, the Bananuka group was targeted," said Ndebesa Mwambutsya, a history professor at Makerere University in Kampala. "A soldier from West Nile [Amin's native area]—how would he know them?"

Undoubtedly, someone local was helping Amin's men prepare a list of enemies, which told them whom to arrest after the coup—and then, after the invasion, whom to kill. When a former military intelligence officer was finally arrested for Laki's murder, in 2001, he told interrogators there was indeed a "long list" which Amin's men were working from—men he himself had never heard of, but who the army had been told were sympathetic to the rebels.

"I don't think Amin on his own would have known [about] them, without the assistance of the local people," said Eriya Kategaya, Museveni's internal affairs minister.

So, people whispered names to Amin's men. But who were they?

Salim Sebi, for one. He was with the men who came to pick up Laki on September 22, 1972. And his story is illustrative of the way tribe, religion and greed turned normal men into killers during Amin's era.

A bus driver and hanger-on in local politics, Sebi be-

longed to the same tribe as Amin—though he had lived in Mbarara as long as anyone could remember. He was a Muslim, too. After the coup, Sebi loudly declared that he was a cousin of the president. This made him a powerful and dangerous man. He began appropriating property and terrorizing former friends whom he considered less than loyal to the regime—as well as anyone else who got in his way. When I visited Laki’s home village in January, the caretaker of the family farm showed me a small scar above the inside of his wrist, which said came from being lashed with barbed wire. “This was Sebi,” he said. Apparently, he had once parked his car somewhere Sebi didn’t like.

When the killings started in 1972, Sebi guided Amin’s intelligence officers around Ankole, since he knew where everyone lived. According to one subsequent government inquiry, he used his power to settle petty scores—one man disappeared, the report alleges, simply because Sebi’s father-in-law owed him money. For his assistance, Sebi, like others, was allowed to take cars and other property of the dead men as booty.

Boniface Byanyima, a prominent DP politician and thus no friend of Laki’s, told me that one night after the invasion, Sebi came to visit him. They shared two beers, and Sebi recounted his involvement in the killings. “He told me his job was to hunt the bad people and kill them, and clean the country,” Byanyima said. “He said they had cleaned many people,” including Laki.



*Boniface Byanyima. Salim Sebi came to see him one night, and boasted of how he had “cleaned” Ankole.*

After Amin’s overthrow, Sebi fled the country, and apparently died in exile. But other alleged collaborators still live in Ankole. Everyone knows who they are—their names are whispered like deadly secrets—but the accusations are seldom aired in the open.

A rare break in this informally enforced silence occurred last year, when, at a public meeting of a local council, Sarah Bananuka, Nekemia’s daughter, who is now a government official, accused one councilor of being complicit in her father’s death, and advised him to “get saved.”

The man’s name was Ephraim Rwakanengyere. During the 1960s, Rwakanengyere was the chief warden of the local jail in Ankole. He served the government, as Laki did, and was generally considered a likeable character, though somewhat sycophantic. (Nekemia Bananuka’s son Fred told me a story of witnessing the jailer once hurtling into his father’s path to shield him

from a stiff breeze.) But somewhere along the line, perhaps because he had been appointed by Kahigiriza, perhaps because he was a member of the Bahima group, Bananuka soured on Rwakanengyere, and he lost his job.

In March, I went to visit Rwakanengyere on his cattle ranch deep in rural Ankole. A strikingly tall, garrulous man, he told me he was overjoyed when Amin took power. (He was the one who, the story goes, prostrated himself before Amin at a rally in Mbarara.) Amin’s government appointed Rwakanengyere police chief, and according to numerous people, he assisted Amin’s men in their roundups. A former police officer told me of attending a meeting where his boss boasted: “We’re killing guerrillas.”

Rwakanengyere and I drank tea with milk from his own cows, and I asked him about Sarah Bananuka’s accusation. “That was rubbish,” he said.

He claimed to have no idea why Laki and the others were killed. “Laki was a very good man,” he said. “I don’t know what happened there.” Though he was head of the police, he hadn’t tried to find out, he said—“because we were scared.”

After Amin’s overthrow, Rwakanengyere spent time in prison for crimes he allegedly committed under Amin. But when Museveni took power, in 1986, he was mysteriously released. Many Bairu suspect the reason for the release was that he and Museveni belong to the same tribal clan. But the former police chief said his imprisonment was simply a case of nasty politics.

“That’s why I was very happy” when Museveni took over, he said. “Without the butt of the gun, [the previous regime] would never have released me.”

Many in Ankole regard the former police chief’s protestations of innocence skeptically. “All of these arrests after the coup—he is the one responsible for them,” Sarah Bananuka told me when I met her in November. Bananuka’s public accusation of Rwakanengyere caused a stir in Ankole; even many of her sympathizers believe that delving too deeply into that past could just revive old divisions, and might even be dangerous. But Bananuka is unapologetic. “For a long, long time,” she told me, “there was and there is still jealousy and intrigue and people taking advantage of any bad situation.” Those people should be named, she said.

In our conversation, Bananuka told me she believes the targeting of Laki and others was not a case of mere senseless repression, but rather an outgrowth of the political feuds of the 1960s. And the man who was ultimately responsible for it all, she said, was none other than her father’s archenemy, James Kahigiriza.

This suspicion is frequently voiced among the survivors of the purge, and the descendants of the men who





*Sarah Bananuka, in front of the family home outside Mbarara, November 2002. The house's living room is still pocked with bullet holes left by Amin's soldiers when they came looking for her father.*

died. "Kahigiriza was the architect of the whole thing," said Edward Rurangaranga, one of Laki's political allies, who was shot and left for dead during the 1972 purge, but survived and escaped into exile. Rurangaranga has an axe to grind, but even those who had no political sympathy for the men who died tend to agree. "The Kahigiriza people were the ones killing, to eliminate [their enemies]," said Francis Bantariza, a former member of parliament, and a member of the Bahima ethnic group.

Sarah Bananuka told me that after her father was released from imprisonment in Makindye, he told her he had learned their arrests were the result of a letter that Kahigiriza himself had allegedly written to Amin.

When I met James Kahigiriza for the first time, on a rainy day in November, I asked him if he had ever written such a letter. "Me? Not at all," he replied.

Kahigiriza, who began his career in politics alongside Laki as a proponent of Bairu equality, has since become one of the staunchest defenders of the extinguished order. Today, he heads an organization that lobbies the government to restore the *omugabe*, the Bahima king, to his throne as a ceremonial ruler. Now in his eighties, Kahigiriza walks haltingly with a cane, and no longer hears so well. His mind is still sharp, however, and he nimbly deflected any questions that touched on the question of who betrayed Eliphaz Laki and his friends.

"I would frankly say that I was one of the group who was happy when Obote was overthrown," Kahigiriza admitted. But he said he had had nothing to do with the

subsequent persecution of his political enemies. "I did not know of these gentlemen's arrests," he said. By which, he subsequently explained, he meant he did not know who had reported them to the army back in 1971.

"I knew they went to Makindye," he said. "When they came back, I thought they were very lucky to have returned."

What about his old ally, the police chief, Rwakanengyere? Kahigiriza again professed ignorance. "I do not know anything he was doing," he said.

When the invasion came in 1972, Kahigiriza said, his family fled their farm, but he himself stayed to protect some animals. "I couldn't dare act, go out," he said. He was a "coward," he said—he certainly wouldn't have been out aiding the army.

Kahigiriza must have been doing something to please Amin, however. Shortly after crushing the rebellion, the president summoned him to Kampala for an audience. "The first thing he told me," Kahigiriza said, "was that he had been told that Ankole was now calm and free." In return for his loyal service, he said, Amin offered him the chairmanship of the Uganda Land Commission, a powerful (and lucrative) government post. (Kahigiriza himself would eventually run afoul of the regime, and be tortured in the basement of the Bureau of State Research, a story recounted in AR-6.)

Kahigiriza had been a close friend of Laki once; he told me they had been like brothers. So I asked the ques-



*James Kahigiriza in November 2002.*



tion I had asked so many others: Why was Laki killed?

“I knew Laki as an innocent fellow,” he replied. “You know, it could be his friends, some of the people he was arrested with, [were rebels]. So many other people were killed in this way, through false allegations.”

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On September 22, 1972, Eliphaz Laki asked the tall stranger where he was being taken. To the barracks, Amin’s man replied. There was an officer there who wanted to see him. Just to talk.

The two men walked around to the back of the house. Laki asked to go inside, to change his clothes. Whatever was going to happen, he wanted to be dressed for the occasion. The stranger allowed him to enter the house, and waited by the door. Laki went into his bedroom, grabbed his best coat, and put it on over his white shirt and tie. He picked up his car keys.

When Laki emerged from the room, his maid asked him what was going on. He just said he had to leave. Laki called to his nephew, James, who also lived in the house. He instructed James to go to the family farm and tell his wife that soldiers had taken him. He dug in his pocket for some money for the bus fare, and gave it to his nephew.

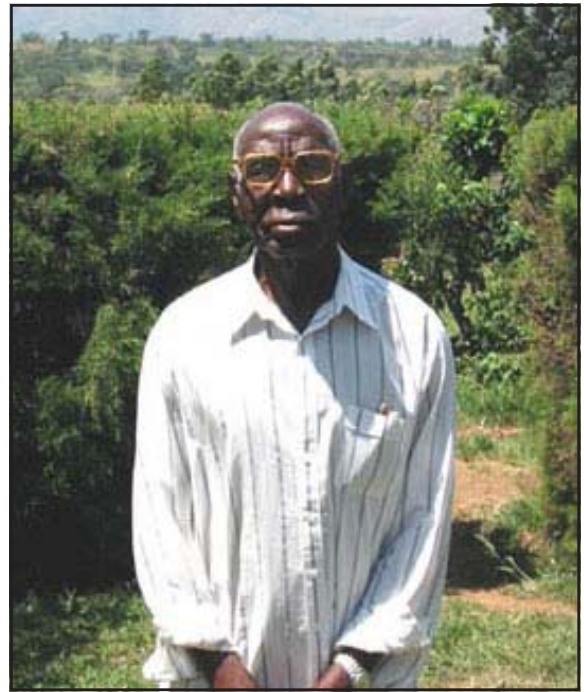
Outside, Salim Sebi had opened up the wooden door to Laki’s garage, and was pushing his Volkswagen Beetle out into the backyard. Laki came outside, got into the car and turned the ignition. The car wouldn’t start. It was out of gas. No problem—the soldiers had brought a full gas can, just in case. They poured the fuel in, and Laki turned the ignition. Again, the Beetle wouldn’t start.

One of the men clapped, loudly. Francis Kwerebera, who was still cutting weeds down by the road, knew that was a signal to him. He and a few other men working nearby walked up the hill. Laki asked them to push-start the car. This time, it roared to life.

The soldiers’ car, the little Morris Minor, peeled off ahead, impatiently. One of the soldiers got into the Beetle next to Laki and told him to follow. As the Beetle passed the bamboo groves at the bottom of the driveway, Laki turned back and waved to his son, Peter, who was kicking a soccer ball around the yard.

A few miles down the road, Laki pulled over in front of the local subcounty chief’s office. He sent someone inside to fetch the chief. When he came outside, Laki, without a word, handed him the keys to the county headquarters and sped off.

About 25 miles farther down the road, a friend of Laki’s, another subcounty chief named James Ganafa, was standing outside his office along the main road from Ibanda to Mbarara, when he saw Laki pass. He had known Laki for a long time, and even in the brief glimpse



*James Ganafa, a friend of Laki’s and a subcounty chief, was the last man to see Laki alive, other than his killers.*

he caught of his face, he could see something was wrong. He looked grim, terrified. Laki waved to his friend. Then, in an instant, he was gone, disappeared down the road.

The soldiers killed Laki a few miles away, at the edge of a large cattle ranch, a spot they had apparently chosen at random. His body lay there, untouched, for several days. Eventually, the corpse became bloated and foul-smelling, and the man who owned the ranch discovered it.

The rancher must have recognized the body. He was active in politics, and knew Laki well. But the rancher was from the other side of Ankole’s great rift. He was one of the Bahima, and he had been chief himself, until Laki and his Bairu friends took over and he had lost his job.

The rancher wanted the body moved, because it lay near a trench, which drained into a small pond where his cows went to drink. So he ordered it buried in a shallow grave and instructed everyone to keep quiet—finding a body could be a dangerous business in Amin’s time.

The rancher lived until 2000, two decades after Amin’s overthrow. But even after Amin was gone, he never told Laki’s family what had become of their father. They were left to wonder.

For nearly 30 years, Laki would remain buried beneath a few feet of soil, undiscovered. Waiting. □

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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 preparing 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 freshwater 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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Institute Fellows are chosen on the basis of character, previous experience and promise. They are young professionals funded to spend a minimum of two years carrying out self-designed programs of study and writing outside the United States. The Fellows are required to report their findings and experiences from the field once a month. They can write on any subject, as formally or informally as they wish. The result is a unique form of reporting, analysis and periodic assessment of international events and issues.