

Linda Cimardi

**PERFORMING
ARTS AND
GENDER IN
POSTCOLONIAL
WESTERN UGANDA**

Performing Arts and Gender in
Postcolonial Western Uganda

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Performing Arts and Gender in Postcolonial Western Uganda

Linda Cimardi



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Cover image: Bunyoro Kingdom Culture Development Troupe performing at the
2010 Mpango in Hoima, Bunyoro. Photo by Linda Cimardi.

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Foreword

As an ethnomusicologist and native of western Uganda, it is a great pleasure for me to present this work. *Performing Arts and Gender in Postcolonial Western Uganda* is one of the few books available to readers about the music and dance of this region. Drawing on years of extensive fieldwork and on the knowledge of the Runyoro-Rutooro language, the author explores and analyzes local repertoires and in particular *runyege*, the traditional performing art of the Banyoro and Batooro people of western Uganda. With both historical and ethnographic depth, she considers the multiple theories about its origins and the different views about the past and current role of its components: singing, instrument playing, dancing, and acting. The author focuses on gender as a fundamental element forging not only *runyege*'s normative structures and durable meanings, but also its coexisting inner flexibility and liveliness. Following the analysis of gender in *runyege* together with both the examination of broader gender notions in Bunyoro and Tooro through time and the impact of precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial cultural institutions, the reader is offered a view on the continuous redefinitions, simultaneous understandings, ongoing negotiations, and various embodiments playing out in this genre.

Performing Arts and Gender in Postcolonial Western Uganda shows the complexity and relevance of traditional African art forms not only as local heritage, but also as a potent means for expressing contemporary identities and articulating gender. This volume represents a precious contribution to both academic scholarship on East Africa and to the conservation of and reflection on cultural heritage of our local communities.

Samuel Kahunde, PhD

Acknowledgments

This book is the result of several years of research and sharing of ideas, insights, and perspectives with numerous people whom I had the good fortune to meet and who have generously contributed to this work in valuable ways.

My deepest and sincerest gratitude goes to the many people in Uganda who have participated in this research. This book would not be possible without their willingness to share their cultural heritage; their availability to play, sing, dance, and narrate; and their helpfulness in discussing their memories, perspectives, and understandings on gender and performing arts in Bunyoro and Tooro. They are too numerous to be mentioned here, but I hope that the presentation of their experiences and perspectives in the following pages will provide the reader with at least an impression of the importance of their collaboration and assistance with this research. With some participants, whom I remember with gratitude and admiration, I built a relationship of profound exchange and dialogue on both practical and theoretical aspects of my research. Isabarongo Issa Sunday and Isabarongo Stephen Mugabo, my research assistants and friends, have been fundamental in translating and mediating my encounters with Nyoro and Tooro culture and performing arts. They have been indispensable and valuable partners in carrying out fieldwork, and I owe them immense gratitude on both the human and scientific level.

I first began studying Nyoro and later Tooro musical cultures when based at the University of Bologna and I benefited from the supervision and advice of Donatella Restani, Nico Staiti, and Serena Facci. Serena has continued following the development of my work in the succeeding years, including reading the early drafts of this work—I am immensely grateful to her for her guidance, advice, and constant support. She was also instrumental in introducing me to the Italian Mission in Equatorial Africa, then directed by Cecilia Pennacini. I am thankful to the mission, which supported my research for many years and through which I first met dear colleagues and friends. In particular, Anna Baral has been a close friend and an invaluable reader and commentator on my work. Since my Bologna years, my former colleague Paolo Valenti has become a trusted friend.

The archival research that I conducted at Makerere University, at the MAKWAA (Makerere University Klaus Wachsmann Audiovisual Archive),

and at the university's Main Library in Kampala has been fundamental to the advancement of this work. Especially during this time, I benefited from the valuable advice of Sylvia Nanyonga-Tamusuza and other colleagues based in Makerere University, in particular Dominique Makwa. I am also grateful to the late Peter Cooke, who counseled me, shared his research and documentation, and finally read and commented on my earlier papers connected to this research.

After finishing my doctorate and focusing for some years on Eastern European music and dance, I came back to the topic of this book thanks to Gerd Grupe, who encouraged me to translate the material and publish it in English during my time at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Graz in 2017–18. Since then, my Graz colleagues Kendra Stepputat and Sarah Weiss have provided me with helpful advice and inspired my work in academia. Damascus Kafumbe deserves my deep appreciation for his wise suggestions and sincere friendship.

I thank the Marian-Steegmann Foundation, which generously supported part of the publication costs of this book. My appreciation goes also to the University of Rochester Press and in particular to Ellen Koskoff and Julia Cook, who have followed the development of this book from its first proposal up to the final version. Finally, I want to express my sincere thanks to the two anonymous peer reviewers who contributed significantly to improvements in this book with their comments and guidance.

I have grown as a person, a woman, and a scholar in the course of researching and writing this book over the past fourteen years. I finished writing the first draft and later revised this book during the first and third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, and during this time I enjoyed the solid and loving support of my husband Michael and now the pure joy brought by my baby daughter Nora, to whom I dedicate this book.

Berlin, December 2022

Note on Language

Runyoro-Rutooro¹ is the language of the Banyoro and Batooro people of western Uganda.

In this idiom, words have prefixes that specify the meaning of the stem. Thus, *ru-* usually identifies a language (like Runyoro-Rutooro); *mu-* and *ba-* (like Munyoro-Banyoro, Mutooro-Batooro) the singular and plural for persons; and *bu-* the place or region (like Bunyoro, while Tooro does not have a prefix). Prefixes are also used for adjectives (like *kinyoro* or *kitooro*), but here I will use only the stem with an uppercase initial letter for adjectives (like *Nyoro*) to simplify the reading. I use these typologies of terms, together with proper names, in roman type while other words and expressions in Runyoro-Rutooro appear in italics.

In most Nyoro and Tooro words, prefixes are preceded by a vowel (for instance *Omunyoro*, *Abanyoro*), which can be considered to function as an article. I retain this initial vowel only when I present song lyrics or quote sayings and proverbs; in all other cases I omit it.

In the transcription of Runyoro-Rutooro, I followed the orthographic norms described by Henry F. Miiirima (2002). In particular, long vowels are written as double vowels or as diphthongs and triphthongs with the semi-vocalic letters *w* and *y*, while short vowels are written with a single letter. Differently from several other Bantu languages, modern Runyoro-Rutooro is no longer a tonal language (Kaji 2009; Rubongoya 1999); in only a few cases two different tones are used to differentiate the meaning of a word that would be written in the same way (Kaji 2018).

I specify here the pronunciation of some letters, as described by L. T. Rubongoya (1999), using the phonetic notation of the International Phonetic Alphabet:

A → /a/

E → /e/ or /ɛ/

I → /i/

O → /o/ or /ɔ/

U → /u/

1 In 1952, Runyoro-Rutooro was defined as one language (spoken by two ethnicities), part of the greater Runyakitara language family spoken in western Uganda (Miiirima 2002; Rubongoya 1999).

W (always as semivowel) → /u/

Y (always as semivowel) → /i/

C → /tʃ/

K → /k/

J → /dʒ/

G → /g/

H → /h/

S → /s/

Z → /z/

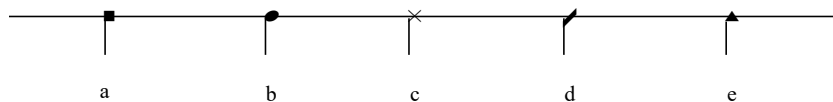
NY (+ vowel or + semivowel and vowel) → /ɲ/

R and L (allophones) → /r/ and /l/

Note on the Musical Examples

For the musical transcriptions in this book I use Western staff notation; however, I had to approximate the value of sounds in terms of both pitch and duration of the notes, since this kind of notation cannot illustrate Nyoro and Tooro music in detail.

In the percussion transcriptions, I have adopted the symbols employed by Sylvia Nanyonga-Tamusuza (2005) to indicate the different types of hand gestures or strokes on the drum's skin (a, b, c, d).



The notes with a square head (a) indicate a muted sound, obtained by pressing the palm in the center of the drum; this type of stroke is used mainly by the *ngoma* A to produce the low-pitched fundamental beat, which supplies the metrical reference for the other drums and for the dancers in *run-yege*. The notes with a round head (b) indicate a banged sound, produced by beating the middle part of the drum skin with the palm but not the fingers and letting it resonate. The notes with a crosshead (c) indicate a stroke made with closed fingers in the middle area of the drum skin. These latter two kinds of strokes are mainly used by the *ngoma* B to perform the basic rhythmic pattern and its variations. The notes with a slashed head (d) indicate a slapped sound, corresponding to striking the drum with open fingers near the rim; this kind of stroke is characteristically used on the *ngaabi*, although it can also be employed by the *ngoma* B. Besides these symbols, black triangle noteheads (e) indicate the sound of the *binyege* leg rattles.

Note on Online Audio and Video Material

The audio (A) and video (V) recordings presented in the text can be found online at <http://hdl.handle.net/1802/37373>.

- A1 *Kaisiki ija ontongole* performed by Gerrison Kinyoro (solo) and Stephen Mugabo (chorus). Kiguma (Tooro), May 11, 2011.
- A2 *Kyera maino* performed by Korotirida Matama (solo) with Aberi Bitamazire and Godfrey Kwesiga (chorus). Muuro (Bunyoro), June 28, 2010.
- A3 *Kamutwaire* performed by Korotirida Matama (solo) with Aberi Bitamazire and Godfrey Kwesiga (chorus). Muuro (Bunyoro), June 28, 2010.
- A4 *Ke ke kamengo* performed by Dorothy Kahwa (solo). Muuro (Bunyoro), August 12, 2009.
- A5 *Bituli bambi* performed by Gerrison Kinyoro (solo) with two other men (chorus). Kiguma (Tooro), September 9, 2010.
- V1 *Runyege*, performance by Tooro Kingdom Cultural Troupe. Fort Portal (Tooro), 2012.

Prelude

Encountering Local Culture in Western Uganda

In the early morning of June 11, 2011, in the royal enclosure in Hoima, western Uganda, everything was ready to celebrate the *Mpango*, the anniversary of the enthronement of the Nyoro king, Solomon Gafabusa Iguru I. In the Kingdom of Bunyoro, a Ugandan traditional institution nowadays endowed with merely cultural power, this annual event is considered essential for representing and celebrating Nyoro identity, which is rooted in the local monarchy and cultural heritage and mainly expressed through royal rituals and traditional performing arts. The royal enclosure—an area including the royal palace, smaller buildings, and grazing fields for the royal herd—had been set up in the previous weeks to host the event. The space in front of the royal palace, a two-story white building constructed in the 1960s, was cleared and several gazebos were arranged to host special guests, dignitaries, and important religious, cultural, political, and business personalities from both the kingdom and the whole country. While this open space was public (though mostly reserved for dignitaries and invited guests), in more peripheral areas of the enclosure some special huts had been constructed according to traditional techniques. These huts were used for private royal ceremonies that took place during the preceding day and night. On the morning of the *Mpango* I was at the royal enclosure, ready to attend the hours-long celebration. This consisted of a varied program: the speech of the king, followed by speeches given by political and religious local authorities; the kingdom's anthem performed by the local brass band; the excited crowd greeting the arrival of the president of the Republic of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, followed by his brief speech and the collective singing of the national anthem; the ritual procession of the main royal drum and other regalia from the nearby house of their custodian to the royal mound and then inside the palace; and the *Mpango* music played by the royal drums and side-blown trumpets (*makondeere*). The presence of the president, who attended the central part of the ceremony, and the playing and dancing of the *Mpango* music were the highlights of the event, which had attracted a few thousand people, especially from the surrounding villages and other towns of the kingdom

but also from other parts of Uganda and neighboring countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania.

In this official celebratory frame, the traditional dance performances of the semiprofessional ensembles from the region as well as from other parts of the country offered interludes of entertainment between the more exclusive entries in the program. However, one performance among others seemed to attract the most attention from the audience, with reactions ranging from candid astonishment to amused embarrassment to annoyed disapproval. It was the *runyege* dance performed by a local cultural group, the Bunyoro Kingdom Culture Development Troupe, led by one of my main research participants, Christopher Magezi.

During my previous visits to Uganda, I had been told multiple times that *runyege* is the dance of the Banyoro—the genre with which the Nyoro people identify—although a very similar dance is performed in the neighboring kingdom of Tooro. *Runyege* is normally accompanied by drumming, singing, and clapping; dancing is organized in two distinct parts for men and women who, in the course of the dance, alternate group formations, solos, and interactions which resolve in the formation of couples, each composed of a man and a woman. *Runyege* is taught in local schools and forms a regular part of the repertoire of the semiprofessional ensembles in the region, like the group that performed that day in the royal enclosure.

On the one hand, local audiences often enjoy *runyege* performances in different venues, ranging from school festivals to wedding parties to shows in hotels to cultural celebrations. On the other hand, the royal music played by the *makondeere* that day was more rarely heard or danced to, since it was performed almost exclusively for the annual Mpango event. So, why were the Mpango attendees so intrigued by that *runyege* performance that they watched and commented on so eagerly? In my eyes, the performance was similar to others I had seen in other contexts, with comparable instrumental accompaniment, singing, dance style, and formations alternating on the dancing space. I could catch only a few words among the comments of the audience members seated near me, which focused on a woman or a man dancing. My research assistant Issa soon explained to me that one of the *runyege* dancers performing the women's part was a man, and this was why people were puzzled and made comments. Some among the attendees were surprised and wondered aloud if the dancer was a man or a woman based on his appearance and dance skills; others recognized the performer as a man and appreciated his dance abilities, commenting with a mixture of amazement and amusement that "he really dances as a woman"; others considered it inappropriate for a man to dance the women's part, especially in front of the king, at a time when the ensemble was supposed to display traditional Nyoro culture. As I started to understand on that occasion, it was very

uncommon for a man, dressed in female attire disguising his male appearance, to dance the women's part in *runyege*. This performance was possible and accepted within the current stage conventions of *runyege*, but, at the same time, it somehow destabilized a number of assumptions about the local tradition, gendered body, dance structure, and performance dynamics.

This opening scene illustrates the topic of this book: how gender and local culture are bound to, articulated in, and negotiated through the traditional repertoires of music, dance, and theatre in western Uganda. Gender—inscribed and represented in *runyege*, the main genre I will discuss in this book—is one of the primary ways in which Nyoro (and Tooro) culture is preserved, handed down, and displayed. Although I focus on the areas of Bunyoro and Tooro, the observations I make are relevant beyond Eastern Africa in various other postcolonial contexts. Throughout my discussion, I demonstrate from different angles how the triad of gender, local culture, and performing arts interlock between past and present, in dialogue with as well as in opposition to issues characterizing the postcolonial period, touching on themes of tradition, ethnicity, biology, religion, morality, and sexuality. Different performing arts such as singing, instrument playing, dancing, and acting are among the topics discussed in this book as I analyze how they were transformed over time and are today recodified and staged in different contexts and in ways that use the heritage of the past to shape the present. Although these dynamics can be found in various global contexts, what is perhaps unique to Uganda is the extent to which the theatrical strategies and conventions—introduced through the festivalization and semiprofessionalization of traditional genres—codify and repeat conservative gender models while at the same time remaining intrinsically ambiguous in allowing the expression of alternative femininities and masculinities. While this contribution can be of significance for ethnomusicologists and anthropologists with an interest in the Global South, I consider my work relevant also for nonspecialists interested in the Ugandan context, since the dynamics I describe, with a close look at Bunyoro and Tooro, are part and parcel of national trends and debates on gender, identity, and ethnicity representation in a multicultural context, as well as on preservation and modernity of cultural heritage.

In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, a number of topical and political matters touching on issues of gender and sexuality, culture, and morality provoked fierce debate in Uganda. One, which also gained concerned attention internationally, was the Anti-Homosexuality Bill (also known as the “anti-gay” bill), which was approved in the Parliament after long discussions and soon after ruled invalid by the Constitutional Court in the 2010s. The bill seemed to be the result of a recent trend of conservative morality encroaching on society and politics. As argued by Alessandro

Gusman and Lia Viola (2014), to regain consensus Ugandan politicians have built on the “moral panic” created by the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the last decades and have legislated to regulate sexuality—not only through the Anti-Homosexuality Act but also with the Anti-Pornography Act. This is another law promulgated by the Ugandan Parliament and better known as the “miniskirt bill” since, in its first formulation, it banned the wearing of skirts that did not cover the knees. Supporting these laws was seen as giving emphasis to African and local traditions, on the one hand, and to morality inferred from religious prescriptions (both Christian, especially evangelical and pentecostal denominations, and Muslim) and colonial heritage, on the other hand. These elements articulate a discourse of self-legitimacy and opposition to neocolonialism—understood as foreign interests and influences on Uganda’s internal politics and laws—shared, to varying degrees, by both the government and most of the population (Nyanzi 2013b and 2014; Sadgrove et al. 2012; Ssebagala 2011; Vorhölter 2012; Ward 2015).

Tradition and culture are at the center of the debates around what is appropriate and what should be prohibited and condemned in gender and sexuality issues. As I was able to experience during my time in Uganda, these debates permeate the whole society, from the metropolis of Kampala to remote villages where the impact of national policies can be experienced. Through a politicized nostalgia of the good old times, local culture is mobilized in the discourses of power centers and among common people as the model of reference, as the mold of indigeneity opposed to exogenous “values” perceived as imposed, and as the source of inspiration to reconceive a viable future beyond the instability of present times. Usually through the constructed notion of “African identity,” local tradition and culture serve as a powerful argument to invoke “good” models from the past and release the influential African moral positivity against what is perceived as foreign influences, but also to construct the destabilizing as alien (Nyanzi 2013b; Vorhölter 2012). The notion that a “good” and positive conception of gender is embedded in local culture marks the arguments of contemporary moralizing trends in Uganda and is blatantly evident in the debates around women’s behaviors and nonheteronormative identities.

However, in multicultural Uganda, what tradition and culture are being referred to? Where are they located? Who—the government, local institutions, citizens, traditional performers—owns and/or represents them? How are the discourses surrounding these topics grounded in local cultures and which are the fulcras articulating these discourses?

Since the mid-1990s, Ugandan cultural institutions like precolonial monarchies have become more and more important loci of the experienced, as well as the imagined, tradition that incorporates cultural heritage and customs in the Ugandan political claustrophobia (Reid 2017). At the same

time, traditional performing arts are also fundamental repositories of indigeneity and customs, a spring from which to draw examples as well as a tool to represent tradition and thus to negotiate and reshape its image. In several world cultures, the local village as opposed to the city is understood as the place where tradition resides, also in the form of traditional performing arts; in Uganda, tradition is perceived to be located in the plurality of peripheral cultural institutions like the kingdoms and villages that, together with their music and dance heritage, represent the various ethnicities of this multicultural nation. One such peripheral area is western Uganda, the regions known as Bunyoro and Tooro, where the broad phenomena that exist at the national level can be retraced in their local understanding and articulations. The way performing arts in these regions participate in these discourses and shape the node of tradition and gender is at the core of this book.

Introduction

Approaching Gender and Performing Arts in Bunyoro and Tooro

In 1993, when Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Movement (NRM) government restored the precolonial monarchies that had been abolished in 1967, most of the populations living south of Lake Kyoga rejoiced (Reid 2017). Since Independence, the central power had been in the hands of the dictatorial presidents Milton Obote and later Idi Amin, both from the northern part of the country, where institutions like kingdoms did not exist. As a Southerner and the leader of the guerrilla army that chased out the previous dictator thanks to the support of Southerners, Museveni understood the political and cultural importance of restoring the traditional kingdoms. To many people in Buganda, Bunyoro, Tooro, and Nkore, the abolition of the kingdoms had meant an abuse of power by the central government and the removal of institutions that were carriers of a long history and heritage (Karlström 1999; Kiguli 2001).¹

While the Buganda Kingdom was so highly valued by British colonial administrators that its name was given to the entire Protectorate (Uganda being the Swahili version of Buganda), the most ancient kingdom of the African Great Lakes region had probably flourished in present western Uganda, in Bunyoro. According to some historians (Chrétien 1985 and 2000; Dunbar 1965; Majefe 1991), the Empire of Kitara originated in

1 The Nkore kingdom, located in Museveni's natal region, is the only one that has not been restored. The populations that did not recognize themselves in the ethnicities identified by the kingships had different attitudes towards precolonial monarchies, like the Bakonzo and Baamba populations, whose territories in the Rwenzori mountains had been included in the British-supported Tooro kingdom since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Tooro administration, marked by discrimination against Bakonzo and Baamba peoples, finished with the abolition of traditional kingdoms in 1967 and "was a cause of considerable rejoicing throughout the Rwenzori" (Doornbos 1970: 1129), although it did not signify the end of the Konzo and Amba calls for independence.

that area and later expanded to include most of southern Uganda, eastern Congo, northern Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi, between 1300 and 1650. Over the centuries, independent kingdoms emerged from the empire and different languages developed, but the various monarchies retained common features and rituals defining royalty, as well as the traditional religious complex (*kubandwa*) marked by spirit mediumship (Pennacini 1998).

These traits also marked the putative successor of the Kitara Empire, the Bunyoro Kingdom, and the newest realm that emerged from it around 1830, Tooro (Fig. I.1). The people living in these two kingdoms, the Banyoro and Batooro, speak the same idiom of the Bantu interlacustrine linguistic group, the Runyoro-Rutooro, although minor pronunciation and lexical variants connote the two areas. Furthermore, because of their common past, Bunyoro and Tooro have a similar social structure, involving an extended royal family, a sort of aristocracy composed of the chiefs' families, and commoners, traditionally connoted as pastoralists (*bahuma*) or agriculturalists (*bairu*). As in other societies of the Great Lakes area, pastoralism was connected to the prestige and wealth derived from owning cows, while agriculturalists had a lower status in society (Doornbos 1970; Roscoe 1923; Taylor 1998). In precolonial times, a mixed system of agriculture and pastoralism, typical of the so-called Kitara Complex (Buchanan 1973), characterized the economy of both areas. During the second half of the nineteenth century, cattle decreased dramatically in Bunyoro because of raids, diseases, and the spread of ecological decay caused by continuous internal conflicts and wars against the British (Doyle 2006). As a consequence, agriculture became the main activity in Bunyoro with just a small proportion of the population dedicated to pastoralism (Beattie 1960: 1–2; Doyle 2006: 11–41; Torelli 1973). In Tooro the consequences of British colonization were not so dramatic, and rearing of livestock remained rather widespread (Ingham 1975; Taylor 1998). Today, agriculture is the main activity in both Bunyoro and Tooro, and cattle rearing is much less widespread, though still conveying high social status.

Nowadays, despite their numerous shared cultural and social traits, the Banyoro and Batooro consider themselves as separate peoples. The central claim in support of this is the existence of two distinct kingdoms, which are held to represent the identity of two different peoples. Since their restoration in 1994 as institutions with exclusively cultural prerogatives in the frame of the republican State, traditional monarchies have assumed the role of preservers and promoters of local culture. They are thus perceived as the source of original identity for the populations that identify in these institutions and their leaders, as well as the manifestation of a territorial delimitation and localized power in the multicultural national context.

The status of the Tooro and Nyoro kingships as separate entities consolidated during colonial times (ca. 1900–1962). Because of Bunyoro's fierce

contributed to the identification and construction of different ethnicities by tracing administrative borders, organizing surveys, and carrying out ethnographic work. The independent Ugandan state took up this colonial heritage of ethnicity identification and, also during the time of the abolition of the precolonial kingdoms, the different cultures of the country continued shaping their ethnic affiliation in relation to their neighbors, based on language, customs, and performing arts.

When the 1995 Ugandan Constitution ratified the restoration of the precolonial kingdoms as cultural institutions, it also opened the way to the recognition of other cultural entities that were acknowledged by local communities as being of cultural and social importance. Already during the colonial period, Ganda preeminence and privilege within the Protectorate had stimulated other populations, especially in the north of the country, to establish similar institutions in which they could identify and be represented in the multicultural context (Fallers 1961; Johannessen 2006; Mazrui 1970). The 1995 reform fostered a general run for the recovery of forgotten chieftainships and the creation of new similar institutions (Gardoncini 2010; Pennacini and Wittenberg 2008; Stacey 2008). Therefore, beginning in the mid-1990s, cultural institutions such as monarchies became crucial in the identification of peoples, territories, and local cultures. American historian Derek P. Peterson (2016) argued that monarchies also work as undemocratic constituencies and corporations. On the one hand, these institutions identify only with the main ethnicity in their territory, which under the leading party's (NRM) policies are administratively reconfigured as constituencies, and undermine minorities by denying them both cultural and political representation. On the other hand, while triggering a process of cultural revival that involves several aspects of social life including performing arts (Cimardi 2015 and 2017b; Pennacini 2011), monarchies have become like corporations that promote local heritage as branded product for tourism.

In connection with the cultural revival brought about by the restoration of traditional kingships, in recent years a renewed consideration for autochthony, indigenous traditions, and customs in contrast to foreign practices has emerged and grown ever stronger. The traditionalist attitude articulated following the ethnicities constructed during colonialism has given way to a new diffidence toward practices of the Global North that is at the same time a postcolonial critique of that heritage. This current of thought is of course not unique in Ugandan society and confronts the similarly widespread positive idea of "Western" customs as bringing modernity and well-being. While I do not wish to undermine this latter view or oversimplify the complexity of the various positionalities in Ugandan society, in this book I focus on the localist vision that is entrenched in cultural institutions, expressed and represented in traditional music and dance, and codified in the ethnic classification of

the repertoires in the school festival system. Bunyoro and Tooro—through their monarchies, cultural heritage, and societies at large—are also involved in a local-global process of self-definition and confrontation. Although these two regions are today quite peripheral parts of the country in relation to central and southwestern Uganda (Buganda and Nkore), where most of the political, administrative, and economic activities are managed, they are more prosperous and nationally relevant than the northern regions, which are still suffering from prolonged insecurity and instability. In this sense, Bunyoro and Tooro are areas where national as well as local cultural phenomena find a dimension that can probably be representative of the whole country.

Gender in the Field

My interest in music from Uganda started in late 2007 with the research on Nyoro royal music that I undertook for my M.A. thesis (Cimardi 2008). Reading the literature on the region, I realized that, although western Uganda was considered the cradle of traditional monarchies through the Kitara Empire and Bunyoro as its contemporary heir (Chrétien 1985 and 2000; Mair 1977), no recent research on music had been carried on there. Studying royal music in Bunyoro was not only needed to cover a scholarship gap but also interesting in exploring how historical events such as the abolition and later restoration of the monarchy impacted on court music as well as how these processes affected other Ugandan regions.

Thanks to my supervisor, Serena Facci, I got in touch with the Ugandan ethnomusicologist Sylvia Nanyonga-Tamusuza, who welcomed me in Uganda, hosted me at her house during my first and last weeks in the country, and introduced me to Makerere University, the institution where she works in the capital city Kampala. Through her, I met Harriet Kasangaki, a Nyoro teacher who was by then also a music student at Makerere and could accompany me to Bunyoro.

In a busy and overcrowded taxi, Harriet and I traveled together northwest from Kampala. In Hoima, the main town in Bunyoro and seat of the Nyoro kingship, I settled into a small, tidy hotel in the town center where most of the customers were locals. Harriet suggested that one of the volunteers of the local branch of the Ugandan Red Cross Society, Issa Sunday, could help out during my stay because he had been part of a semiprofessional ensemble in the past as well as experienced in international cooperation through the Red Cross. Issa, who is a couple of years older than me, was at the time in his late twenties and lived in a village close to Hoima town. With great enthusiasm and energy, he started cooperating with me during my fieldwork on Nyoro royal music. At the same time, I became involved in the activities

of the Ugandan Red Cross in western Uganda as a volunteer in their health campaigns in rural areas, advising on new activities and helping with fundraising in my home country of Italy.

Investigating Nyoro royal music during the two months I spent in Uganda in 2008 made me aware of the limitations set on me because of my gender. Royal music is essentially performed by men, and parts of the ceremonies in which it is played are reserved for royal family members and selected men. Although as a foreigner I was perceived as a guest and thus respected and welcomed, some areas of royal music activities and practices remained inaccessible to me (as to any other female who is not part of the royal family), such as parts of the royal rituals or playing (or trying to play) some musical instruments (see chapter 3). Thanks to conversations with both male and female Ugandan friends and acquaintances, I also began to reflect on how gender was influential both in the local cultural heritage and in national policies as well as to question how my own gender could be perceived by my participants and condition my research.

The following year, I spent some more time in Bunyoro and started focusing on the traditional repertoires outside the royal context that are not marked by interdictions on women, but nonetheless strongly connoted by gender. Indeed, apart from some shared songs related to dancing and storytelling, traditionally there was a clear differentiation of songs for women and men, and even today the same division marks dances like *runyege*. While my initial interest was in women's performing expressions and practices in an effort to balance my previous work on royal music performed exclusively by men, my research later expanded to embrace various gendered performance practices, including those connoted as "for men" as well as those that are today less connoted by the performer's gender.

In 2010, besides visiting research participants and volunteering in Bunyoro, I traveled to the southern neighboring kingdom, Tooro, to research similarities and differences in the local repertoires of these culturally close regions. Together with Issa I traveled to Fort Portal, the main urban center in Tooro and headquarters of the royal palace, located on the highest of the numerous hills on which the town develops. Much richer in luxuriant vegetation than drier Hoima and more lively along its up-and-down roads, Fort Portal is the town where I spent the following weeks. There, I hoped to find a woman as a research assistant because I thought that this could facilitate new insights on gender.

Unfortunately, my attempts at establishing a relationship with a female assistant were not successful. Young women had difficulties in dealing with elders because their gender and age traditionally dictated that they were not in a position to lead a conversation, especially with male research participants. A recurrent perception I found among both women and men in