Abstract: The late colonial era in Uganda was not an easy time to keep families intact. Colonial officials, missionaries, and concerned East Africans offered their diagnoses of the problems and prescriptions for responding to the dilemma. In this context, Balokole Anglican revivalists articulated new patterns and ideals of family life. These new patterns of family life were not uniform across Uganda or East Africa, but they did share common characteristics that were derived from the spiritual disciplines and religious beliefs of the Balokole revival. As such, this essay argues that the revival movement was not simply a new message of eternal salvation or primarily a form of dissent, but rather a means through which a group of African Christians sought to address quotidian domestic problems and concerns of late-colonial East Africa.

Keywords: Uganda, East African Revival, family, conversion, colonialism, Ankole

Introduction

Mary’s home was located to the north of Mbale, a modest town in eastern Uganda that is nestled on the western slopes of Mount Elgon. Even at 92 Mary had a liveliness in her voice, and she warmly invited me into her house – a tidy, homey, four-room concrete
structure with a yellow exterior. It was not an extravagant house, but it was clean and orderly; things were in their place. Jerrycans arranged according to size and color stood along one of the walls of the dining room, which we could see from her living room where we sat. I asked her about how she kept her home. She responded:

When you accept [salvation], God gives you knowledge even if you are not educated. For me, I’m not educated. I can do things better than those who are educated with degrees because God is the one who gives me all this knowledge. If God says, ‘Do this’, you can do it. And the reason people are like that, they want to be an example to other people so that others can know that the saved people are like that – are clean. Because as old as I am, I tell the children do this and that, and they do. You can see even with the jerrycans there, they are ordered because all that knowledge comes from me. … And all the time I pray to God, ‘God, give me more knowledge. Even in these years I need your knowledge’.

For Mary, who had converted to Balokole Christianity in 1945, being a mulokole (saved one; Balokole: saved ones) meant that she had to organize her life and her home around new values, values that came from God-given knowledge. She was saved, but her salvation did not seem to be concerned simply – or maybe even primarily—with eternal life. Rather, her salvation was inextricably bound up with quotidian decisions: How should I dress? What should I eat? In what order should I arrange my jerrycans? The answers Mary and other Balokole revivalists gave to questions like these mattered deeply since revivalists hoped to communicate their testimony—a personal account of how the Christian God had moved in their lives—by demonstrating the superiority of their new home life. For her and other Balokole, transformations in domestic patterns, in the ways she cleaned and related to her family, were an inherent part of the Balokole life of salvation. She said gently but with certainty: ‘The testimony must begin in the home’. ¹

The East African Revival required converts to give testimony of their spiritual transformation from their dark pasts to the light of salvation in which they now lived. The revival was thus about movement, and Balokole were set into motion by a new message
of salvation that emanated from a network of evangelical Anglican mission stations in southern Uganda and northern Rwanda in the early-mid 1930s. *Balokole* articulated this movement with a ‘discourse of discontinuity’, which Matthew Engelke (2004) likewise found among the *weChishanu* apostolics of Zimbabwe. *Balokole* believed that the mission churches (in Uganda revivalists were of the Anglican Church of Uganda) had become plagued by hidden sinfulness that needed to be put into the light of public knowledge. *Balokole* believed that everyone, baptized African Christians and Western missionaries included, needed to confess their sins publicly and, in confessing, make fundamental breaks with their past ways of life. While some of the changes that *Balokole* advocated were in continuity with Western missionaries’ teachings, African revivalists believed that missionary Christianity permitted a colluded spirituality that tolerated hidden sins like adultery, alcohol drinking, and smoking. The revival sought to enact clearer, cleaner breaks with these and other behaviors. Their message was simple: all were living in sin, all needed to confess their sins publicly to step into the light of salvation, and living this life of salvation meant joining with other revivalists in intimate fellowship meetings, which were held in addition to Sunday mission church services. As a result of these teachings, *Balokole* Christians sought to rid their lives of ‘sin’. Going beyond missionaries’ definitions of sinfulness, they changed their hairstyles, clothing styles, what they ate, how they organized their families, and, in some cases, what kind of houses they built (Peterson 2012; Ward and Wild-Wood 2012; Stanley 1978; Noll 2009; Church 1981). In short, the revival profoundly remade many East African domestic spaces as revivalists sought to orient their families toward the light of salvation.
Homes, however, were politically contested spaces in late colonial Uganda. As Derek Peterson has convincingly argued, concerns over morality, particularly women’s morality, drove political debate, organization, and dissension in late colonial East Africa (Peterson 2012). Late colonial politics was therefore intimate, often resulting from debates about sex, marriage, and gender roles. As Peterson observes: ‘It was on the field of etiquette, manners, and comportment that ethnic patriots sought to regiment their constituents and produce a respectable people’ (2012, 13). In Peterson’s argument, reform movements, patriotic associations, and various nationalists imagined a patria ordered according to ‘tradition’. Balokole, by contrast, were perceived to be obnoxious and unruly by those outside of the revival movement. In Ankole, for example, they were known as ‘those who do not cooperate’ (abatarukukawanisa) among their non-Balokole neighbors. In seeking a radical discontinuity with their pasts, Balokole sought to be rid of anything pertaining to those pasts. The true revival convert thus had to be perspicacious in order to search out those decisions, objects, and habits that might separate him or her from the light of salvation. It is this fundamental tension between cosmopolitan, dissenting revivalists and ethnic patriots who sought to reify ethnic particularity that Derek Peterson traces in Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival.

Compared to Peterson’s analysis of the revival and late colonial politics, however, this essay is less centered on the revival as an articulation of dissent. While many studies of the revival have focused on the movement’s spirituality, what has been less acknowledged are the many ways that the revival prompted converts to envision and enact new modes of life – particularly domestic life—which were sustained by the spirituality of the revival movement (Peterson 2004). This essay describes how Balokole
Christians in late colonial Uganda developed new habits, ideals, and practices pertaining to domestic spaces and family life as a result of their desire to avoid anything deemed sinful. It argues that the East African (or Balokole) Revival in part constituted a creative response by African Christians to address an interrelated set of contemporary challenges posed to East African families from the 1930s to the 1950s. These challenges, which included drunkenness, promiscuity, divorce, and domestic instability, were related to larger processes of labor migration, urbanization, and the expansion of the cash economy. The article concludes with a short case study of a group of Hima Balokole in Ankole in the mid-late 1950s, focusing on the changes they made to their families, daily routines, and kraals that took place in the midst of the socioeconomic context described in the first two sections of the essay. This essay thus places the development of Balokole homes within both the socioeconomic context of late-colonial East Africa and the spirituality of the revival movement. In doing so, it seeks to demonstrate that Balokole revivalists developed not simply a new way to get to heaven, but also new ways of being in the world – of organizing their homes, families, and daily routines. The ideals of a new home life were meant to communicate to their neighbors that the Balokole life of salvation brought stability, peace, and happiness to families who lived by its new standards. Such ideals demonstrated that homes could be maintained in an era in which many feared they were disintegrating. In short, this essay aims to show why many Balokole, like Mary from Mbale, believed that the testimony must begin in the home.
Migration, Urbanization, and Marriage in Late Colonial Uganda

The history of families in late colonial East Africa is inseparable from the histories of colonization, Christianization, migration, and urbanization. The early history of the East African Revival is particularly inextricable from the context of regional migration in the 1930s and 1940s within and among Uganda, Ruanda-Burundi, and Tanganyika (Ward 2012). In these decades hundreds of thousands of East Africans migrated through the region, hoping to flee famine, find work as migrant labor, or attend school. When revivalists walked, bicycled, and rode motorcycles as the peripatetic proselytizers that they were, they traveled down colonial roads that were already well trodden by other migrants. The revival emerged and expanded during a period of unprecedented movement, transition, and dislocation in East African history, and if the revival were to succeed its message, values, and lifestyle would necessarily have to be portable (Wild-Wood 2008). In order for Balokole to develop new models for quotidian family life in the late colonial era they needed to address these interrelated factors of social change. The East African Revival emerged in this context as a creative response to the spiritual and moral challenges of migration and urbanization, which were often perceived to have a deleterious effect on East African families (Peterson 2004). The East African Revival and the family models it developed are thus part of this history of migration and urbanization (Gordon 2012, ch. 3).

The social, legal, and economic factors that helped drive urbanization in East Africa did not affect all areas of the region equally. As such, the patterns of migration and the reasons that people migrated varied, as did the perceived impacts of migration and urbanization on village life and economies. As the early missionary historians of the
revival often pointed out, the revival itself emerged in the wake of a severe famine in Ruanda-Burundi in the late 1920s that left thousands dead and moved tens of thousands from Ruanda into neighboring Uganda and Tanganyika (Church 1981; Stanley Smith 1946). While there were periodic waves of migration into south-central Uganda in response to severe famines in the colonial era, the much more regular movement of people could be said to be the result of an expanding cash economy, which created new social, economic, and moral dynamics. Between 1938 and 1951, for example, approximately 1.2 million immigrants crossed the border from Ruanda into southwestern Uganda, many of whom became temporary wage laborers at tea or cotton estates in Toro and Buganda (Powesland 1957, 81). This high rate of migration created employment conditions in Uganda favorable to employers. In turn, migrants’ low wages meant that they frequently encountered terrible conditions, with many subsisting on one meal a day, contributing to a very high turnover rate and, by extension, the rate of temporary migrations. Due to its associations with malnutrition migration became a public health concern in Uganda, since a number of migrants simply starved to death on their way to Kampala from Ruanda, even when famine conditions did not exist. However, the need for cash to pay taxes, school fees, and bridewealth was sufficient to make the risk worthwhile for many workers in interlacustrine East Africa.

These dynamics not only increased the numbers of regional migrant laborers in Uganda, they also specifically swelled the population of Kampala. In 1912, for example, Kampala had a very modest population of 2,850, most of whom were Europeans or Asians. It blossomed to 24,100 by 1948 and then nearly doubled again by 1959, with the population of the greater Kampala area possibly as high as 100,000 by the end of the
1950s (Omolo-Okalebo et al. 2010). However, men and women did not migrate equally. Though the tendency by the time of independence was toward a more equitable balance of the sexes in Uganda’s towns, in the late colonial period men outnumbered women in parts of Kampala by a ratio of 3 to 1 (Southall and Gutkind 1957). This imbalance, it seems, contributed to a context in which conjugal relationships in towns became more dynamic, competitive, and diverse than would likely have been found in many village communities.

Melvin Perlman, a British anthropologist who worked in Uganda in the mid-twentieth century, argues that by the 1940s young men and women from Toro, western Uganda, regarded migration to Kampala as a means of escaping from the constraints of traditional mores, particularly regarding sexuality. This migratory and moral trend led many elders to worry about the moral laxity occasioned by the availability of sex in the city. By the end of the 1950s Perlman estimates as many as 80 percent of unions contracted in Kampala were ‘concubinages’, being neither church nor civil marriages nor conforming to ‘native custom’. But the term ‘concubinage’ hides an array of relational patterns that developed in late colonial Kampala and other Ugandan towns. The following excerpt from a study of Kampala in the 1950s that describes the neighborhood of Kisenyi allows a glimpse into the relational dynamism and dilemmas produced in this urban crucible:

A Teso launderer came to Kampala in 1948, and brought his Teso wife with him. Since 1949 he had also had a Ganda concubine, but she lived in another room in Kisenyi, in a house owned by her mother, so that neither she nor her husband had to pay rent for it. Another Teso washerman had several Ganda wives, all living in different houses in Kisenyi and also selling beer. A Haya man, one of the local leaders of this tribal group, had lived in Kisenyi for four years, having as his concubine the daughter of the Ganda landowner on whose land he was renting a room (Southall and Gutkind 1957, 78).
One Toro girl explicitly acknowledged the disparity between urban and village values and lifestyles: ‘I will love him [her Kiga husband] while he is here, but I will not go back with him to his house’ (Southall and Gutkind 1957, 78). On this point, the authors of the report observed: ‘Marriage in Kisenyi subsists in a sphere in which neither Protectorate nor Native Law has anything effective to say. This would not matter very much if marriages were contracted according to some well defined customary system. But this is now hardly the case’ (Southall and Gutkind 1957, 69). As a result of migration and urbanization, Ugandans were developing a variety of relational patterns that existed, at times, within as well as beyond the legal and moral structures of traditional customs, Christian churches, and Protectorate law.

Issues pertaining to the legal status of Ugandan marriages, however, were as old as the Protectorate itself. In 1893 the Buganda Lukiko (Parliament) passed a law stating that women in polygynous households could leave those households if they wished to live ‘in a Christian manner’. In 1902 the Protectorate government passed the Marriage Ordinance that made marriage a civil matter, which was amended in 1903 with the Native Marriage Ordinance. This ordinance provided for legal recognition of ‘religious marriages’. In 1914 an amendment was added to the Marriage Ordinance that offered a path to legal recognition for monogamous customary marriages (Mecklenberg 1998). The legal multiplicity here is confusing, and served to legally marginalize polygynous households in Uganda, but Ugandan Christians or those who wished to become Christian had additional considerations to weigh, such as the role that bridewealth or beer drinking might play in marriage negotiations, or the status of wives who were dismissed or wished to leave their marriage upon conversion.
Though the legal status of ‘tribal’, civil, and religious marriages had been debated since the 1890s, increased migration and urbanization accelerated the legal and moral complexities surrounding East African marriages. In 1944 the British Protectorate Government in Uganda conducted ‘An Enquiry into African Marriage Customs as affected by contact with European Civilization’. Unsurprisingly, it described how Ugandan families were frequently a casualty of the destructive confluence of a cash economy, colonial legislation, and Christian church ordinances. Not insignificantly, the report cited that African Christians ‘suffer exceptional difficulty owing to the fact that the law regulating the status of persons contracting marriages under Christian rites pays insufficient regard to the conditions of African social life’. Whereas colonial officials had worried about ‘civilizing’ the tribal peoples at the beginning of the twentieth century, by the early 1940s in Uganda they had become concerned about the effects of ‘detribalisation’ on Ugandans. Colonial officials, along with African chiefs and elders, worried about the consequences of a generation of youth disconnected from the moral guidance and supervision of family and elders (Summers 2005). Increased migration—and new forms and motivations for migrating—resulted in alienation from village communities, a perception of a breakdown in traditional family relationships, and a general sense of spreading moral laxity (Peterson 2012).

Uganda’s emerging towns and urban centers emerged as new fields of agency in which men and women negotiated new challenges and forged identities, created means of surviving, and developed relationships that often had a remarkably lower influence of village life, from which many specifically sought to distance themselves. While towns seemed to be particularly attractive to those who had some exposure to European
education, religion, and/or culture, their effects proved to be perennially worrisome to missionaries, colonial officials, and Ugandan chiefs and parents. The relational multiplicity of late colonial Kampala made even the task of defining terms such as ‘prostitute’, ‘husband’, ‘wife’, ‘marriage’, and ‘lover’ fraught with legal complications and contextual moral ambiguities (Doyle 2012; Peterson 2004; Southall and Gutkind 1957). While the dynamics of urban migration in particular could be said to give young men and women greater agency over their choice of partner and sexuality, it is clear that such social dynamics strained family structures, village life, and the means through which moral conduct was instilled.

In his study of migration among a small community in Ankole, western Uganda, which was commissioned by the Protectorate Government, British anthropologist Derek Stenning observes that by the 1950s migration had become a means for Bairu agriculturalist young men from Muko to mature into socially recognized adults by acquiring cash to pay taxes, secure bridewealth, or improve their lot. While some young Bairu men welcomed the opportunities offered through migrant labor, it is equally clear that many men resented its necessity: ‘[Our] home life is spoilt. [Our] wives do not bear [children]’, one man lamented. But for men in Ankole and elsewhere in East Africa, migration became increasingly necessary to have a wife at all. By the 1930s bride-prices in Ruanda-Burundi, Tanganyika, and many parts of Uganda had skyrocketed, forcing men to migrate to work and save the cash required to be married properly. Stenning observes a trend in the payment of bridewealth in Ankole whereby cash was increasingly demanded by families, particularly Christian families, and livestock not only became less available but their cash value in the course of the early twentieth century rose rapidly. For
example, a heifer in 1920 was valued at 40/-, but by 1958 was worth 1200/-, while seven goats went for approximately 350/-. Since the amount usually asked for in the mid-1950s was one or two heifers along with seven goats and a typical wage laborer earned 60-70/- for two to three months of agricultural work in Buganda, one can easily see how a customary marriage in which bridewealth exchange was essential was well beyond the reach of many young men in Ankole.¹³

The need for cash not only made getting married more difficult, it also strained marriages themselves since some wives were sent back to their families so that the husband could reclaim the original cash bride-price he had paid. This left many women and families broke and desperate, giving them few options but to pursue the new opportunities found in East African cities. As one woman in Mulago, Kampala, who was regarded as a prostitute said: ‘I don’t mind that men treat me like this. I know that they will always look after us when we come to their houses. I have been here for a long time and I have always had lovers. If I get old I will have to go back to my village, but I shall take a lot of money with me’ (Southall and Gutkind 1957, 165). This ‘prostitute’ seemed to represent the dynamics that the missionary scholar Bengt Sundkler described with respect to the Haya in Tanganyika: ‘The lake steamer brought [women] in their hundreds to Nairobi and Kampala, and returning home later with bicycle and syphilis and umbrella she had social success, she saved the family with money’.¹⁴ The economic independence that women could gain through occupations like prostitution or beer selling in East African towns, combined with the fact that typically far fewer women than men lived in these towns, meant that many women found that they could develop a variety of income sources and relationships with men who would support them with beer, food, cash, and
other goods (White 1990). One Ganda woman in Kisenyi, Kampala, stated in the 1950s that ‘I am not a prostitute, but people think that every woman who rents a room here is one’ (Southall and Gutkind 1957, 87). Some women were reluctant to take wage jobs at all because any wage earning was associated with prostitution (Southall and Gutkind 1957).

The emerging cash economy brought with it new moral crises and the desire for cash created new marital expectations, which likewise put demands on husbands (Fallers 1957). In southwestern Uganda, for example, a wife took her husband to court for ‘neglecting me by not buying me dresses’; the district court ordered the husband to buy her dresses and pay a fine.15 Men—as husbands, fathers, and chiefs—often experienced these new socioeconomic contexts as crises of their authority, while younger men were often placed in a position of needing to migrate, though not all saw labor migration as burdensome. As Southall and Gutkind observed, somewhat patronizingly: ‘Men regret their failure to control their daughters and their loss of authority over their wives and concubines, but they constantly undermine as lovers what as parents and husbands they would like to maintain’ (1957, 89). Townsmen who were married or formed conjugal relationships, however, often found themselves needing to adopt new ideals and gender roles in town than they would have had in their villages.

With many men and women leaving villages for work on plantations, or to attend school, try their luck in towns, or start working in a colonial profession, family life began to disintegrate throughout eastern Africa. When Yeremiah Rwakatagoro, a mulokole from Kigezi who converted in the 1940s, recalled the context of his conversion, he stated, ‘I was a miserable man. I was failing to keep the home’.16 It seems that many East Africans
in the late colonial period could identify with him, and it is not difficult to understand why—the late colonial period was not an easy period to keep East African families intact. However, against the jeremiad discourse of family disintegration that dominated the public discourse around issues of migration and family life in the late colonial period the basic reality that much migration was undertaken for the sake of sustaining or eventually enabling family life needs to be held. Even among men and women in Kampala who had entered into a number of conjugal relationships, it seems that a customary marriage remained an ideal and a desire. For many it was the very motivation for their migration to town in the first place.

When in the 1930s Balokole revivalists emerged to diagnose the ills that surrounded them, they tended to believe not that the detribalisation that colonial officials lamented had gone too far, but rather that it had not gone far enough. They saw mission churches devoid of spiritual vitality because ‘nominal Christians’ had become mired in irregular conjugal relationships, turned to ‘traditional’ rituals and objects to secure success in the face of uncertainty, or taken illicit advantage of their proximity to new forms of wealth. In order to endure these new challenges, Balokole believed that families and homes needed a more radical break with the past. For Balokole, the era of increased mobility and migration in the late colonial era moved them to imagine a new kind of family.

**Reviving Homes**

The East African Revival was a conversionary movement. Revivalists preached that in order to be saved one had to make a radical, fundamental break with one’s past. Through
their testimonies, they had to parse their thoughts, lives, and experiences in terms of light and darkness. So common was this language among revivalists that they were sometimes called *abamusana* – ‘people of the light’. The Johannine imagery of light and darkness meant that revival converts sharply juxtaposed their life before converting with their life after, and this juxtaposition often centered on the home. For example, when recounting her testimony in the early 1970s, Faith Bugaare, who lived in southwestern Uganda, recalled that she first encountered revival preaching ‘[when] I was in that miserable home’. Descriptions like hers were common among *Balokole*.

Some *Balokole* said that their homes had ‘sadness’ (*enaku*) or ‘witchcraft’ (*emandwa*). Others talked about how their parents did not approve of mission churches or schools. Still others lamented the dirtiness of their natal homes, the posture in which their mothers gave birth, the style of clothing they had worn, or the manner in which they had styled their hair. These practices were usually understood under the larger category of ‘sin’, which had to be confessed and gotten rid of. Clearly, from the beginning of the movement, what revivalists defined as ‘sinful’ affected how they related to their bodies, families, and domestic spaces. If the basic task of the revival was to repent of sins by confessing them so that the blood of Jesus could wash them away, then revivalists were also tasked with developing new patterns of domestic life that would allow them to distance themselves from such ‘sins’. To put it in the language of the revival, having left the deeds of darkness, *Balokole* had to learn to live in the light of salvation as families.

If the East African Revival were to remake families in the 1930s and ’40s, it had to remake families in a world on the move. From the beginning, the revival movement was multilingual and interethnic, and articulated new sins for an era of migration (Osborn
In an era in which ‘traditional’ moral standards were perceived by missionaries and East Africans as being in serious fluctuation, as described above, the revival offered a moral imagination that was suited to the incorporation of multiple ethnicities (Bruner 2012). Many, though by no means all, of the sins revivalists confessed to were sins of cosmopolitanism: they stole things from mission stations or schools, they had been in illicit sexual relationships while working in towns, they were dishonest with cash. Some even thought that merely walking in front of a bar in town could be considered sinful (Karamura 1996). Additionally, Balokole tended to define as sinful those things that distinguished one ethnicity from another. Upon converting, Balokole women might shave distinctive markings from their hair. Others changed bathing habits and most preferred European or Ganda-style clothes. Female converts often publicly broke food taboos, hoping to demonstrate their inefficacy to baffled and offended onlookers. For this reason, Balokole were mockingly called ‘the chicken eaters’ (abaenkoko) in Kigezi, southwestern Uganda, and in Mbale, southeastern Uganda. However, the above statements need to be qualified with the fact that the sins confessed across the region varied. Derek Stenning finds that many of the sins confessed by Hima Balokole had to do with tribal offences or sins that pertained to the unique context of the pastoral life of the Hima. Such offenses could include quarreling with neighbors at a water hole, chewing tobacco, or having disagreements over the terms of cattle transfers.

Of the sins mentioned above, none occupied as prominent a place in the Balokole imagination and economy of salvation as sexual sins. Those who migrated or lived in towns often engaged in conjugal relationships that Balokole regarded as sinful. As a result, revivalists’ confessions across East Africa were often salacious and lewd. In the
words of one missionary: in revival fellowships ‘there was a lot of talk about sex’. In part, the revival sought to reform the perceived lax sexual morality of urbanized and migrant East Africans. At an Anglican missionary-run girls school in Rwanda, for example, revivalist preaching led to an all-night session of public confession among the female students, with many of them confessing to sexual sins. The next day, to manifest their repentance, the girls brought the blankets their partners had given them as favors for sex and burned them in a large fire (Osborn 1991). Similarly disruptive manifestations appeared in the wake of revivalist preaching at boarding schools throughout the region, with students sometimes becoming unruly as they repented. This led the Protectorate government to conclude in 1943: ‘The effects of [revivalist] influence on education are likely to be the most far-reaching and injurious of all’. However, this means of expansion also ensured that many prominent revival leaders were drawn from the ranks of African students, teachers, clerks, and nurses – people and professions who were exposed to migration and town life, and the moral and practical challenges that arose from it. As the revival made its way into cities, it impacted men like Isaiah, who was from a rural area in Toro, western Uganda, and worked as a clerk for a British employer in Kampala in the 1940s while he lived with two women, though married to neither. According to his testimony, the Holy Spirit convicted him when he was drunk in a bar, which made him confess his sins to fellow patrons before returning to his apartment where he slept on the floor until the two women left the next week. The revival’s message of salvation as a radical discontinuity with the past, a complete severance from the ways of ‘pagan’ tradition, was evidently deeply appealing to East Africans who were negotiating the interrelated challenges of displacement stemming from migration and
urbanization, with many of these challenges involving family, sex, and marriage. In a period in which marriage itself was undergoing profound shifts, revivalists developed their own strategies for addressing the rise in irregular unions that had often been formed as a direct or indirect result of migration.

The revival sought to transform marriages, and Balokole diagnosed these threats to East African families with the language of salvation, sin, and confession. They considered education, catechesis, and even baptism as adiaphora, which could not be relied on to guarantee one’s salvation. What mattered for salvation was whether one had confessed one’s sins publicly and then joined a revival fellowship group. On this basis, Balokole worked to create a new way of family life for the late colonial era. Even though the revival was a conversionary movement and, in that sense, sought the transformation of individuals, it was never an individualistic movement. Balokole were expected to meet regularly in fellowship groups, which were supplemental to regular Sunday church services. These fellowship groups were often the vital center of Balokole spirituality in which revivalists met to pray, read, and discuss the Bible, confess their sins, sing hymns, and ‘walk in the light’ with one another. ‘Walking in the light’ was a capacious phrase used by revivalists to refer to plainspoken talk about their spiritual and practical lives (Wild 1999). It was a time to be completely open and honest, and a time in which even personal decisions – like whether someone should switch jobs – were aired and debated.

Since it pertained to beginning their family life, unmarried Balokole would use these fellowship groups to find marriage partners. Potential spouses were discussed by ‘walking in the light’. Marriage itself was not regarded solely as an individual’s choice, but rather was taken on as a matter for collective discernment among a revival fellowship
group. and fellow revivalists would oversee the courting process (Smoker 1971). Individual preference was not completely overridden in this process; there is evidence from Ankole that Balokole could use their group networks to resist unfavorable spouses that were suggested by their natal families. Of concern was not a potential spouse’s lineage, clan, or ethnicity, but rather the state of his or her soul (Kibira 1974). In an age in which bridewealth payments were skyrocketing, Balokole therefore rejected the practice as part of their sinful pasts, but they also pooled their resources to help pay for weddings and celebrations. At weddings, which were held in churches, fellow revivalists, even if they were not biologically related, might stand in for parents of the wedding couple, whose families frequently refused to attend such services. But even these church weddings could differ from non-Balokole church weddings. For example, Balokole among the Hima of Ankole would not practice the seclusion of the bride before her wedding, which was still practiced by non-Balokole Hima Anglicans. Instead, a mulokole noted, ‘We like to have our women show themselves in public and with their heads uncovered to show that we are saved’. Such differences between Balokole and non-Balokole Christian practices in Ankole and elsewhere signaled larger conflicts. In the opinion of Anglicans in Ankole who were not part of the revival, such patterns of behavior by Balokole Hima fundamentally undermined the already-fragile state of families in the district because Balokole subverted traditional customs. The new domestic patterns and ideals that were fostered by the revival could divide Balokole from other Christians as sharply as it divided them from non-Christian Africans.

Balokole patterns of finding spouses balanced individualistic patterns of marriage and communal customs. For those revivalists who, through work, school, or ostracism,
had been separated from their families, revival fellowship networks supplied the needed expertise, supervision, and support for a marriage. It was the extended revival fellowship rather than the extended biological families or bridewealth payments that secured revivalists’ marriages. Thus interethnic marriage became somewhat commonplace among revivalists. Interethnic *Balokole* marriages therefore exemplified a favored phrase of the revival: ‘All one in Christ Jesus’.

From the beginning, the revival’s quintessential practice of public confession was frequently a domestic event, and spouses were often the first to hear revivalists’ confessions of sin. As Erenesti Nyabagabo recalled his first encounter with revival preaching: ‘I [then] went to my wife and told her – I knelt on my bed and confessed to her my sins one by one until I came to the end’. 31 Many of the sins that were confessed were sins that directly affected converts’ families. Andrew Rugasira’s rather typical testimony went as follows:

> It was on [the] 28th [of] February 1935 that I was relieved of my sinful load that had been on my back. I committed so many sins. I was a drunkard, an adulterer, as well as a perfect bully—I used to beat my wife and so many other shameful things. But now I praise and thank God for having remitted me of these sins, as well as giving me peace. He made me love my wife, who I had hated strongly and who I used to beat harshly.

Andrew added: ‘My wife and I have peace in our house’. 32 It was this transformation from sadness, hatred, violence, and secrecy to peace, openness, and happiness that revivalists sought. The former was a home in darkness, the latter a home in the light of salvation.

Beyond these initial confessions, husbands and wives were exhorted to ‘walk in the light’ together on a regular basis, meaning they should pray together, confess their sins to one another, and share decision-making responsibility within the family.
Revivalist women often preached and shared their testimonies alongside male revivalists (Larsson 2012). Many Balokole wives became integral partners in evangelistic campaigns with their husbands. Revivalist children remember their parents getting up early and staying up late in order to pray and make family decisions collaboratively; the relatively democratic ethos of the Balokole fellowship group could thus be transferred into the Balokole home. Eventually some revivalist couples even opened joint banking accounts, giving both spouses control over the family’s finances. These shifts in the gender balance in Balokole homes were likewise reflected in their language: Balokole spouses called one another omugyenyi or ‘friend’.

This democratic, open spirit extended to the treatment of their children, as one senior revivalist recalled:

[Someone may ask.] ‘How can I repent of a certain sin to my daughter? To my son?’ And yet you can beat up your son with that anger? Then later on you realize, ‘No, I think I did wrong. That was heavy punishment. Maybe I [should not] have done it. And you are supposed to call him, your son or daughter, and tell him that ‘I’m sorry I beat you; I was harsh, but [I am] very sorry. Please, forgive me’. … We are saying for us [revival] elders, that’s what should be done.

Revivalists were people who, in some respects, could discipline their children more lightly than their neighbors did, though revivalists recall that their parents demanded their children’s strict adherence to revival disciplines like praying and attending church. However, their child rearing, expectations, and family habits grew out of the spiritual practices and ideals fostered by the revival movement. There is some evidence that because of these habits and changes, the marriages of revivalists in certain regions of East Africa seem to have been more stable in a period in which marital stability was believed to be in decline.
The task of living salvation as a Balokole family, or the task of building a Balokole home, meant that not just one’s relationships, conjugal and/or familial, had to be changed, but that daily habits and even architectural designs had to be altered by converts so that sin might be avoided. Mary’s jerrycans, with which this essay began, are just one small example of the quotidian changes the revival instantiated. Even in household chores and daily routines, Balokole sought to convey to their unsaved neighbors and relatives the superiority of their new saved lifestyle for maintaining a good home life in the late colonial era.

Case Study: Balokole in Ankole, Uganda

The majority of the material in this section is taken from the archival collection of Derek Stenning, a British anthropologist who conducted research in southern Uganda in the mid-late 1950s, some of which was done at the behest of the Protectorate Government of Uganda. Because his research tended to focus on issues of labor migration, cattle distribution, and government resettlement plans, his encounters with Balokole were occasional and incidental. However, his field notes are a valuable and insightful resource that has largely, though not entirely, gone unused by scholars of the East African Revival. Nevertheless, they illustrate how some Balokole in southwestern Uganda created new, unique domestic habits that flowed from the larger spiritual ideals articulated by the revival movement more broadly.

Ankole is located in southwestern Uganda and was bordered to the north by the kingdom of Buganda, to the west by the kingdom of Toro and the district of Kigezi, to the south by Rwanda and Tanganyika, and to the east by Lake Victoria. The East African
Revival was introduced to Ankole in Mbarara, the kingdom’s largest town, in 1935. Preaching teams comprised of Ugandans and Rwandans conducted a short preaching campaign that focused on Mbarara High School, an Anglican mission school. As the school became a hub for Balokole Christianity, students would organize themselves into preaching bands, often going on preaching tours around Ankole on weekends and school holidays. In Ankole as elsewhere in Uganda, Balokole Christianity was never the numerically predominant form of Christianity; it existed as a minority expression of Christianity (perhaps around 10 percent of all Christians), with Roman Catholicism and non-Balokole Anglicanism having substantially more adherents. Those who converted in Ankole were usually Anglicans from the Hima, as opposed to the Iru, people.

When the Hima, who tended to be seminomadic pastoralists, converted they confessed their sins. These sins included many issues found elsewhere among Balokole: they were adulterers and thieves, they were drunkards. Many confessions, like those from other regions of East Africa, pertained to their experiences in town or migrant laborers. However, many Hima Balokole confessed to the sin of ‘greediness’, particularly as it related to their treatment of their cattle. For example, Balokole believed that it was greedy to wander in search of grazing pasture for their cattle. One Hima mulokole observed, ‘Bahima commit the sin of greediness in moving about in search of pasture, deluding themselves that the place ahead is better than the place where they are’. 39 Hima Balokole likewise believed that it was greedy to milk their cows more than once per day – even that it was greedy to milk the cows before their calves had a chance to suckle. 40 In making these changes, Hima Balokole altered the quotidian rhythms of the Hima kraal in which cows were usually milked twice a day.
For the Hima becoming a *mulokole*, even when they had already been Anglican, often entailed a range of alterations to their daily routines and domestic architecture so that they might avoid sin. The young *Balokole* who preached that pastoral migration was a sin urged Hima converts to settle down, and these new converts then constructed new, permanent homes with walled rooms.\(^{41}\) For *Balokole*, this new architecture indicated that they would not offer their wives in hospitality to visiting male relatives, as was sometimes practiced (Kasenene 1971). The home was constructed around the avoidance of adultery, mirroring a common dedication among *Balokole* to sexual continence and monogamy. While the introduction of permanent walled, Western-style houses was often associated with Christian missionisation both in East Africa and elsewhere, it should also be noted that the *Balokole* who enacted these changes had often already identified as Anglican (Mutongi 2007). The revival propelled them to make changes that their baptism or catechesis in mission churches did not; instead, these changes were enacted by Hima revival converts upon hearing of *Balokole* salvation from other East African (often Hima) *Balokole*, not European missionaries. It would seem, then, that *Balokole* spirituality was a significant factor in driving the Hima to enact changes in their homes and daily routines, a spirituality that met with some degree of responsiveness in late-1930s and 1940s Ankole.

Like elsewhere, *Balokole* in Ankole rejected the payment of bridewealth upon marriage. One stated tersely: ‘To sell a person is a bad thing’.\(^ {42}\) As was discussed above, the rates of bridewealth payments in Ankole had increased rapidly from the early to mid-twentieth century, with non-*Balokole* Christians often wanting payment in cash and non-Christians preferring payment in livestock, especially cattle. This was a very common
reason for the Hima and others from Ankole to migrate into other parts of the Uganda Protectorate for wage employment. While Stenning did not record specific rates of migration among Hima and Iru men in Ankole, his research clearly presents a picture of very high rates of temporary labor migration for both ethnicities, which he believes increased from the 1930s. The purpose for this temporary migration from Ankole, as in many other interlacustrine areas, tended to be to get cash for poll taxes or to secure cash for bridewealth. Thus for young Balokole, rejecting bridewealth meant that it became possible to be married without having to wait for a father’s inheritance or serving as a migrant laborer in order to save sufficient cash for the bridewealth.44 Because the Balokole population in Ankole could be sparse, those seeking marriage necessarily had to depend quite heavily on extended revival fellowship networks to locate a suitable spouse. As one divorced Mulokole confidently stated, ‘God will find me a husband, since through God I gave up the husband that I had’.45

From his survey of a set of Hima kraals in northern Ankole in the late 1950s, Derek Stenning notes a number of changes that a Balokole-dominated kraal had made, compared to nearby kraals of Hima who were not revival converts. For example, whereas the cattle dung heap occupied a prominent, central location within the typical Hima kraal, the Balokole kraal had removed the cattle dung heap to outside the kraal fence, in keeping with their new ideals of cleanliness. Balokole not only milked their cattle once per day (as compared to twice per day for non-Balokole Hima), they also were among the first to begin pasteurizing the milk. The Balokole kraal likewise held an afternoon tea, though before the tea was served they took time to fumigate each house within the kraal with a chemical pesticide.46
These changes were part of Balokole’s larger dedication to personal and domestic cleanliness. To live in the light of salvation meant living a morally and physically clean life. Becoming more attuned to new standards of cleanliness was, in some cases, part of the revival’s interethnic ideals. In this sense, maintaining high standards of bodily and domestic cleanliness was designed to help eliminate potential offenses to visiting Balokole of other ethnicities from other parts of East Africa. More immediately, however, the Hima who were the subject of Stenning’s investigation had just been resettled due to an outbreak of tsetse flies. In this case it seems that Balokole may have incorporated the practice of spraying pesticides before their afternoon tea in order to demonstrate to their neighbors that their kraal was better protected from diseases plaguing livestock and human populations than their non-Balokole neighbors.

Even at a funeral held by Balokole in Ankole, the revivalists pointed to their newfound domestic harmony and stability as evidence of the superiority of their new way of life. The family of the deceased man testified that the man’s sons were not bickering over how to distribute the cattle. They shed no tears at the funeral; instead, they were rejoicing that the father was now in heaven. Significantly, the bodies of deceased Balokole were buried with their head facing north and their hands by their sides, usually near or just outside of the kraal fence, which contrasts to the customary Hima burial especially for senior men, who would usually be interred underneath the large cattle dung heap in the center of the kraal. Nor was the deceased man’s son planning on sending away his wife, as he could have done according to some Hima customs. After pointing out these differences to those present at the service, the son of the deceased man
highlighted the juxtaposition, exclaiming, ‘But look at us, we are joining hands and praising God’ (Prince 2007).

Like others in East Africa, Balokole Hima in Ankole were looking for ways to secure domestic and marital harmony in an era of flux, uncertainty, and disruption. For the Hima, these patterns made it difficult in some instances for them to rely on cattle alone to sustain themselves, pressuring some to begin raising other livestock and cultivating crops. Some of the changes that Hima Balokole adopted – like limiting milking and preferring permanent homes – necessarily meant that they also developed a more diversified domestic economy. They regulated this new economy and lifestyle through revivalist spirituality and language – sin and salvation, light and darkness. Hima Balokole often spoke in terms of avoiding the sin of ‘greediness’, which referred to a range of behaviors that they associated with their past ways that had been lived in spiritual darkness. This made them more suited to the adoption of forms of nascent East African cosmopolitanism while also regulating and proscribing it. Balokole cosmopolitanism was not that of Kampala or other towns; rather, it was a selective and discerning cosmopolitanism. Like Mary in Mbale, the new habits, organization, and patterns of life developed in the Hima Balokole homes and kraals was itself the testimony that they hoped to give to their neighbors. In this sense their new domestic life was their testimony. It demonstrated that the forces that seemed to be disruptive could, if properly regulated, also produce a harmonious and happy household if only those within it would live according to the light of salvation.
Conclusion

The changes that Balokole demanded of converts corresponded with challenges posed to conjugal and familial structures in the late colonial era, often as a direct result of processes of migration, urbanization, and Christianization. These changes to the home and family of Balokole Christians demonstrate that revivalists, through the revival’s spirituality and terminology, diagnosed ills plaguing East African families and sought to construct a new model of family life in the late colonial era. In adopting similar styles of dress and bathing habits, in trying new foods and incorporating them into their diets, in removing necklaces and amulets and distinctive hairstyles, Balokole were removing ethnic particularity from their bodies and domestic spaces. In a sense, they were creating a new home built on the new cosmopolitan principles of Balokole salvation.

The Balokole family was therefore a product of revivalist spirituality. Balokole families sought to rid their homes of sin – often capably defined – and they incorporated the revival’s disciplines of prayer, confession, and open decision making into their daily lives and child rearing. Through interethnic marriages, the revival sought to show that all could be one in Christ Jesus, and a peaceful, harmonious, orderly, and happy household was essential evidence in revivalists’ testimonies of the power of God to rid them of the dark ways of their sinful pasts and usher them into the life of the light of salvation. However, the revival itself was indelibly part of the socioeconomic context of the late colonial era. East African families were struggling to cope with the shifting legal and moral standards and definitions created by British colonial officials and missionaries. Migration became essential for many, especially men, who worked on colonial roads or plantations, on mission stations and in schools, further challenging...
traditions that sustained families. Urbanization brought novel challenges as young men and women could mix and mingle as never before. While some nationalists sought to reify ethnic distinctiveness in the midst of this mingling, *Balokole* sought to break down the ‘sinful’ particularities of their natal homes and replace them with the cosmopolitan life of salvation of the revival fellowship. *Balokole* revivalists wanted to give order to the confusion of the late colonial home by setting new standards, expectations, and behavioral codes for husbands and wives, sons and daughters. Even lining up jerrycans according to color and size could signal this new order to others, who could see a home structured according to God-given knowledge. The *Balokole* family was modern but not simply Western; it was cosmopolitan but not simply a bricolage. For *Balokole* families, their home grew out of the life of salvation; it was where the story of that salvation often started.

**References**


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**Notes**

1 ‘Mary’ interview with author, Mbale, Uganda, 22 February 2012. This paper utilizes a variety of sources. I conducted all interviews dated 2012 as part of a research project that was approved by the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology, and I would like to thank Dr. Alex Kagume of Uganda Christian University for his assistance in affiliating with UCU for this research. A number of archival collections were consulted for this project, and these are abbreviated throughout. UCU refers to the Bishop Tucker Archives at Uganda Christian University. SOAS refers to the archival collection at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. ABU UCU refers to the Archives of the Bishop of Uganda at Uganda Christian University. CO refers to the Colonial Office records held at The National Archives (UK) at Kew Gardens. CUL, DMUA refers to the Cambridge University Library, Department of Manuscripts and University Archives. IMC/CBMS is the International Missionary
Council/Council of British Missionary Society archives, which I accessed on microfiche. JEC are the Joe E. Church papers, kept at the Cambridge Centre for the Study of Christianity World-Wide. Some of the content contained in this paper was first presented as “The testimony must begin in the home”: Re-making Families in the East African Revival’ at the Yale-Edinburgh Group annual meeting, 26-28 June 2014, and ‘Migration, Integration, and the Fellowship Networks of the East African Revival’ at the American Society of Church History/Ecclesiastical Historical Society, 3-5 April 2014. I would like to thank those present at these sessions for their thoughtful questions and helpful critiques.


8 ‘An Enquiry into Africa Marriage Customs as affected by contact with European Civilization’, n.d. (ca. 1944), ABU, UCU, box 179/f. 1011.


11 Anonymous informant, quoted in Derek Stenning, CUL, DMUA, Derek Stenning: Anthropological Collections on Uganda, MS Add. 7916, box 2/f. D 12/Doc. H.


15 ‘Chahi Gombolola Court, Bufumbira, Kigezi’, SOAS MS 38, box 3, f. 8, p. 50.
16 Yeremiah Rwakatagoro interview, East African Revival Interviews, UCU, folder 3.


22 ‘Mary’ interview with author, 22 February 2012; Rwamfiizi interview, 29 September 1971, East African Revival Interviews, UCU, folder 2, p. 4.


24 Joe Church to Lawrence Barham, 11 December 1939, JEC box 3/f. 4/n. 25.


26 ‘Isaiah’ interview with author, 6 March 2012, Ntinda, Uganda.

27 Derek Stenning, ‘Personal Histories (from questionnaires)’, Respondent 49, CUL, DMUA, Derek Stenning: Anthropological Collections on Uganda, MS Add. 7916, Box 2, file D 10.


‘The findings of the Warden and Chaplain of Mukono who examined the charges brought by Omw FB Luboyera against Omw Nyonyintono and other members of the group of the Abalokole, in the parish of Natete in January 1951’, Archives of the Bishop of Uganda, Record Group No. 1, Uganda Christian University Library Archives Section, box 32, file 210.

Erinesti Nyabagabo, East African Revival Interviews, folder 3, 2.

Quoted in Shem Ndimbirwe interview, East African Revival Interviews, UCU, folder 3.

William Nagenda to Joe Church, 15 June 1942, JEC 5/1/2.

‘Elijah’ interview with author, 20 January 2012, Mbarara, Uganda.


‘Elijah’ interview with author, 20 January 2012, Mbarara, Uganda.

Bill Butler interview part 2, East African Revival Interviews, UCU, folder 1, 16. ‘Constance’ interview with author, 6 February 2012, Kampala, Uganda.

Bengt Sundkler, ‘Marriage Problems in the Church in Tanganyika’, July 1944, ACU, UCU, box 117/f. 5. This observation, however, needs to be conditioned with the
reality that marital disharmony was often an initial result of one spouse converting to
revivalist Christianity, in some cases resulting in divorce.


41 ‘Paul’ interview with author, 21 January 2012, Mbarara, Uganda.


43 Derek Stenning, ‘Introductory’ file, ‘Coral Tree Hill’, CUL, DMUA, Derek Stenning: Anthropological Collections on Uganda, MS Add. 7916, box 2, file D 1, Doc. D.

44 Derek Stenning, ‘Introductory’ file, ‘Coral Tree Hill’, CUL, DMUA, Derek Stenning: Anthropological Collections on Uganda, MS Add. 7916, box 2, file D 1, Doc. D.


47 Derek Stenning, ‘Correspondence and proposals regarding pastoral land use survey, 1957, in Mutuba II (Kinoni), Nyabushozi County’, CUL, DMUA, Derek Stenning: Anthropological Collections on Uganda, MS Add. 7916, box 2, file C 1, Doc. A.
