

Whips and Women: Forcing Change in Eastern Uganda during the 1920s¹

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In 1925, the Chief Justice of Uganda, Sir Charles Griffin, realized that women were being whipped in the Native Courts of Eastern Uganda. But "the beating of women is prohibited because they are women and for no other reason", he asserted, arguing that "A civilized Government will not tolerate the beating of women..."² Neither Griffin nor the Colonial Office, which shared his concern, bothered to explain why civilized governments should not whip women, or even why civilization was good. Instead, they asserted a general concept that civilization was the purpose of colonialism, and that its ideals should trump the complexities of local circumstance that led Protectorate administrators, some missionaries, and many African men to insist that the government and missions whip dissident women.

This article examines the textual evidence produced by those who rejected the Colonial Office's assumption and, instead, argued that the government and missions needed to beat women. In these controversies, local administration and mission defenses of the whippings and corporal punishment of women illuminate what government officials and missionary priests saw as progress, and the sorts of coalitions and practices they considered necessary as they pursued the political changes of indirect rule and orderly administration, the economic revolution associated with cotton production, and the social changes brought by Christianity and its novel concepts of family. Despite an unthinking British rhetoric of civilization, local colonial realities in Eastern Uganda were governed by a need for the revenues cotton brought and the political support or acquiescence of local men. In Eastern Uganda until the mid 1920s, officials and missionaries bought men's support by taking on the disciplining of women. They did so openly and defended such practices logically. They abandoned such activities only reluctantly, under pressure, and went on to develop more covert ways to carry on with disciplinary practices they considered essential.

The Chief Justice's enquiry into Native Courts' whipping showed that beatings were routine and increasing in the 1920s as an important tool of Chiefs' administration of order and cotton cultivation. None of this was traditional. The chiefs, their courts, and the regional divisions they administered were all twentieth century innovations, based on Ganda models.³ Conservative estimates by officials in favor of whippings indicated that some of these new courts beat four or five women a day, passing sentences that often reached as high as 20 strokes of the kiboko, a rhinoceros-hide whip. Erratic statistics, covering a variety of time periods, made any analysis of the number of corporal sentences on women problematic, but the Governor indicated that while in Bugwere district 299 women were whipped over a period of about thirteen months, numbers were higher in other intensive cotton growing districts such as Busoga and Teso, with Teso reporting that at least 926 women had been whipped by courts over the previous two years. All of this was illegal as courts lacked statutory authority for corporal sentences on women.⁴

Nevertheless, like missionary-sponsored corporal punishments by priests desperate to enforce Christian marriages on women, Native Courts' use of corporal punishment was a part of an innovative strategic alliance between white authorities and elite local men. These allies worked together to produce--as inexpensively as possible--the economic and social changes they viewed as progress towards prosperity and civilization.

By the 1920s, the violence of conquest, which had included slave raiding and deliberate destruction of property and resources, was giving way even in "backward" Eastern Uganda to a new administrative and economic structure. The Protectorate government appointed a layer of white administrators and displaced rule by Semei Kakungulu, a Ganda warlord who had conquered under both Ganda and British sponsors at the turn of the century. These new white District Officers administered the region through appointed chiefs whose subdivisions had been established in Kakungulu's time (1896-1904), modeled on the divisions of the kingdom of Buganda.⁵ This new bureaucracy was supposed to handle the day to day business of administration in Eastern areas with no pre-conquest history of such central structures. Through these institutions of indirect rule, the Protectorate administration sought an inexpensive peace and a way of sponsoring economic transformation with a minimum of European staff. Economically, cotton cultivation provided new monetary wealth and underwrote both economic and political transformation. New chiefs and other ambitious men increased acreage of the new cash crop, cotton, with labor by their wives and children supplemented by men's labor coerced through taxes.⁶ Missions received land holdings and accepted tax labor to construct buildings, farms and enterprises, and took responsibility for what they saw as the civilizing social change connected to these political and economic developments, such as new forms of family life.⁷ Local British officials and key missionaries, the sponsors of these political, economic and social changes, understood the continued and formal use of violence against women as an essential tool in their efforts to shape the new economy and society.

This complex alliance of British officials, African chiefs, and mission teachers should, according to the local model of colonialism, have allowed development of 'civilized' institutions in an area that African elites and British observers had in pre-colonial times regarded as uncivilized and chaotic. Prior to cotton, Eastern Uganda's principal export crops had been such dangerous and socially dubious commodities as ivory and slaves. Its agriculture had been principally oriented toward subsistence rather than export, with surpluses sold occasionally as part of the provisioning trade for those lucky or unlucky enough to live near a caravan route. The introduction of widespread smallholder cultivation of cotton, therefore, represented something of an agricultural revolution, providing cash and wealth to both those men who could induce their wives to cultivate cotton, and the state that collected taxes and fees from cotton marketing. Reviewing these changes in Teso, one later administrator observed that

... these people were in a state of naked barbarism, existing by a precarious and primitive system of shifting cultivation, ravaged by famine, disease and inter-tribal warfare. [But] Since the beginning of this century, Kakunguru's Sniders have established peace and ordered government; the missionaries have brought the benefits of Christian teaching and education; and the introduction of cotton and the plough and the improvement of farming methods... have raised standards of living and resulted in rapid development of communications and trade, bringing wealth to the district... The Iteso themselves readily and quickly accepted and assimilated these

new ideas and techniques... The resultant wealth has been wisely invested in further improvements by Teso's progressive local government.⁸

Government and missions alike saw cotton, and the access to money, commodities, and new state-based order that it bought, as basic to this process of change.

In the 1920s, however, these early progressive developments were threatened by a new imperial caution about intervention and forced change as British human rights activists and Labour politicians began to pay attention to the methods of colonial governance. Under Colonial Office oversight, Governor Gowers' administration restricted chiefs' use of men's forced labor.⁹ In this labor-hungry economy, where chiefs and big men's economic successes in cotton rested on their political control over agricultural laborers, this threatened administrative power and prestige. Women, always a major source of agricultural labor, thus became even more essential to would-be cash crop farmers as other types of coerced labor became harder to conceal and use. In this context, women's non-compliance, both with state-sponsored cotton-growing initiatives and with missions' efforts to redefine marriage, was a serious problem, threatening the newly powerful chiefs and cotton farmers, Christian communities, and the colonial model of development. This article examines the colonial rhetoric offered by officials and missionaries as they worked to address this crisis. The new progressive, systematic colonialism, administered by white district officials who reviewed chiefs and big men as they peacefully developed a monetized cotton economy and paid taxes to the colonial state, was threatened by those who had been left out of the formal system of control and rewards, but were nevertheless essential to its success: women, especially women as wives and agricultural workers.

To date, little historical research has explored Ugandan women's experiences under colonialism. Elsewhere in British Africa, however, colonial attempts to control women through administrative alliances with senior African men have been well documented, pointing to likely issues in colonial gender politics.¹⁰ Women have been the major agricultural labor force throughout most of Uganda, from the precolonial period to the present, maintaining families' subsistence while men concentrated on politics, warfare, hunting and, in pastoral areas, cattle. Even in Eastern areas which grew annual crops such as millet, rather than the perennial women's crop of plantains and bananas, women have been critically important agricultural workers. Colonial manuals stated this bluntly, with notes such as "Weeding is the task of women.... Harvesting is the duty of women."¹¹ And stable marriages, giving women access to the land men controlled and men access to women's labor, were key to not merely production, but also peaceful reproduction and alliances between men.¹² Cotton added tensions to earlier divisions of labor as it was grown to be sold, rather than stored away in women's granaries under women's authority for family consumption. Men ordered cotton grown, and profited from its sale, but did not provide women with cotton revenue.¹³ Women who neglected cultivation or attempted to claim profits from the cotton they cultivated could thus undermine the region's food security, its sole cash crop, and the source of men's status and tax money. Women who chose their own marriages, or changed their minds, destabilized economic relationships between men who paid and received bridewealth and relied on wives' labor to pay for children's school fees and adults' tax money. Dissident women thus threatened the region's productive and reproductive orders. As women lacked land and money of their own and had little to lose to fines or taxes, however, it

was difficult for men to coerce them except through violence. The fact that men beat women therefore is not particularly surprising.

The governor and administrative officials' intense and sustained defense of Native Courts' power to whip women judicially, as a part of a formal court process, however, is unusual. And it pitted administrative officials against both Protectorate legal authorities and the Colonial Office in Britain. Within Uganda, the Administration rejected Griffin's argument, and that of the Colonial Office, that women should never be beaten. Nor was the administration alone in its acceptance of African chiefs' power to impose corporal punishments which went far beyond the law: Eastern Uganda's missionaries, frustrated by dissident women, also aligned themselves with the police and specific chiefs and imposed public, potentially life-threatening corporal penalties on women who challenged their understandings of propriety.

A close examination of the controversies over Native Court whippings and the Mill Hill Mission's whippings, kidnappings, and forced labor strategies seems to indicate that the forces of change in the region ended up identified not with abstract principles of civilization, but with the local needs of men seeking prosperity and order within the new economy. This was no accident. One official who advocated whippings argued that since neither the women nor the missions protested, illegality was irrelevant and the local ideal of indirect rule should prevail, allowing chiefs to whip as necessary.¹⁴ And a priest appointed to Teso to clean up the mission's practices in the wake of the scandal over its abuses described his new flock as the "rawest and worst" people before descending into Latin to detail their offences, noting "I can quite imagine that Father Kiggen had recourse to the stick occasionally and I have been sorely tempted to do the same..."¹⁵

Ironically, administrative reforms and mission policies, those that encouraged progressive chiefs of disciplined Christian communities and discouraged tribute labor and polygyny, increased the importance of women's cultivation and obedience. Reforms thus made official beatings and corporal punishment of women more essential to the progressive administrations of government and mission even as men's forced labor was replaced by less coercive recruitment.

The new problems: Administrative perspectives on marriage and cotton

Chief Justice Griffin's investigation showed that women were being whipped for "matrimonial offences" and that one of their principal "matrimonial offences" was refusal to cultivate cotton for their husbands. Cotton was a new crop in Uganda, becoming prominent only in the early 20th century. But both European and African men insisted that a wife's duty to cultivate, historically part of a set of marital responsibilities, was not limited to providing her children with food; it included growing the cotton that her husband and the new administration demanded. Women caused problems in a variety of ways as, in a sample of 50 cases, one woman refused to live with her husband, another killed her husband's chicken, and one husband's two wives both left him, together, to "go a-whoring". But in 37 of 50 sample cases, women were whipped for refusing to cultivate or pick cotton, and in 40 of those 50 cases, sentences were 10 or more strokes of the kiboko.¹⁶

Circulars from the Colonial office and governor had explicitly declared that no one was to be forced to grow cotton and that corporal punishment for failure to cultivate cotton was illegal. Not all administrative officers and chiefs took this prohibition seriously, however. An early acting governor had declared that forced cultivation was justifiable because "the Government stands very largely *in loco parentis*, and just as primary education is obligatory in England, so I consider it is also our duty to educate the native in such agricultural pursuits... it is still necessary... for the chiefs to exercise their influence over their people in the way of getting them to cultivate cotton."¹⁷ And Sir Philip Mitchell, one of Uganda's most liberal governors, explained that the circulars which ordered District officers not to use compulsion against Africans but mandated that the Africans "must yield to persuasion" effectively told officers to use whatever means necessary, but not get caught.¹⁸ Furthermore, historians have observed that the administration of the Eastern Province created a substantive pool of laborers through new taxation modeled on both British ideas of poll tax and Ganda labor taxes of *kasanvu* and *luwalo*.¹⁹ The Native Courts, in which chiefs appointed by the Protectorate government drafted and fined individuals into work which could be unpleasant, dangerous or difficult, provided the Governor a degree of deniability when forced to answer questions in parliament about forced labor. But the needs these courts served, whether cotton, railway construction, or portering, were established by the Protectorate government.²⁰

Cotton, and the economic demands and opportunities it brought, was a key backdrop to the controversy, but women's punishments were not just governmental attempts to exact a taxable income. Instead, these court-ordered whippings arose from African men's attempts to expand a wife's duties and accountability in a context where a man's ability to acquire and hold status depended on his success with cotton. As J.M. Gray noted, "a husband who receives an official intimation that greater energy is required from him in the matter of cotton cultivation and who finds his wife insubordinate in this matter, finds that the best means of safeguarding himself is to bring the woman before Lukiko [Native Court] for punishment."²¹ Men's need and desire for money and status propelled them into cotton growing. But women, receiving neither money or status from their increased work load, resisted husbands' demands. The colonial officials and native courts' willingness to enforce women's labor through corporal punishment allowed men, by having their wives whipped, to reinforce their own reputation as progressive cotton farmers. Furthermore, since the court took responsibility for the whippings, husbands did not have to defend their actions to angry fathers- and brothers-in-law whose willingness to defend their daughters and sisters might once have restrained husbands' ability to enforce labor through casual wife-beating.

No one in this controversy argued that court-ordered whippings were traditional. Instead, whippings were part of colonial reforms. During the 1920s and 1930s in Eastern Uganda, cotton was at the center of nearly all government and private initiatives.²² By the 1940s, the politics of cotton was equally closely tied to that of African political and economic activism and early nationalism. Many recent studies of cotton growing in Africa have emphasized its costs in the form of famine, shift to monocrop economies, ecological damage, and social changes which restricted individuals' freedom. Cotton "has long been one of the least rewarding cash crops for the peasant cultivator," Vincent argued in her study of Teso. Other historians, working on Uganda and elsewhere in the continent, have tended to agree.²³

Yet cotton did have its positive side, at least for some. Indeed, the protectorate's remarkable financial health during the late 1920s and throughout the Depression, was principally due to an expansion of cotton growing which allowed individuals to pay their poll tax, pay labourers to take their place at tribute labor, and fund an expanding system of education. By the mid 1930s, the Protectorate's cotton levy, and Ugandans' use of cotton to pay personal taxes, had produced such a large surplus in the Protectorate's reserve fund that the Governor was somewhat embarrassed and in search of ways to usefully spend the money.²⁴ Uganda lent money to the British Government during World War II, and in the aftermath of that war, its accumulated cotton reserve fund paid for a startling degree of social investment and justified a level of development loans that the Colonial Development Board considered unparalleled anywhere else in the empire.²⁵ Cotton also provided both the economic base and the justification for the extension of the railway through the principal cotton-growing regions and the investment in transport, whether by lorry, omnibus, or motor car, which revolutionized not only Ugandans' access to urban and international markets for cotton, but the economic integration of the country as a whole. Many Ugandans, both in the early years of cotton and as its cultivation expanded, complained about the marketing arrangements associated with it, which were dominated by Indian traders and characterized by unjustifiably low producer prices. But even for those who were less than enthusiastic, cotton was the only way for the ambitious to pay for the education critical to their sons' success, and to provide consumer goods essential to prominent families.²⁶

Grown by government appointed chiefs, big men, and peasant farmers, with labor from migrant workers and women, cotton was the crop of development and profits in the new Uganda of the late 1920s through the 1940s.²⁷ Europeans' efforts to establish plantations, sometimes in alliance with elite Africans, failed by the late 1920s as prices fell.²⁸ Peasant production, extending throughout Buganda and the ecologically suitable regions of the Eastern Province, therefore provided the economic backbone of the entire administrative structure of the country, as well as funding individuals' livelihoods and wealth. Family heads minded small plots for tax money. Local chiefs grew cotton with tax labor. Teachers grew and sold cotton from school plots using student and parent labor. The money thus earned bought the necessities of the new, Europeanized way of life for the men with notable positions to maintain within the local community.

The cotton crop behind women's whippings was new, and so were the courts that ordered these punishments. This was not simply a case of irate husbands beating their wives in a context of ongoing domestic abuse. The Native Courts, or lukiko, which ordered the punishments had been established by British officials and their Baganda agents and gradually taken over by a group of appointed chiefs, many trained in mission schools.²⁹ Despite a continuing non-Christian majority in the general population, the elite of Buganda, and the would-be elite of areas such as Eastern Province, were not only heavily Christian, but mostly Protestant. At the very least, a Native Court would have its proceedings recorded by a literate clerk, probably trained in a Protestant mission school. Though Administrative officers might emphasize traditional practice as a guide for Native Courts' judgements, the Native Courts were built on Ganda and British norms, not local ideas of lineage, and were part of a new type of administration.

Courts' intervention in domestic relations was also new. Whatever the reality of women's status in pre-colonial Uganda, British officials were emphatic that in the past, elite women had wielded substantial power throughout Buganda and the areas it influenced. According to them, the need

for women to be whipped in Eastern Province arose in the early 20th century not because of a traditionally low status for women, but because Eastern Province, particularly Teso, women had a dangerously high social status as members of their natal lineages, and could mobilize their own families against the their husbands' lineages in a case of dispute.³⁰ Early anthropological observers were startled by Eastern Ugandan women's willingness to fight back, even physically, against unsatisfactory husbands.³¹ Native Court-sponsored judicial whippings, officials argued, were a new reform measure, ameliorating conditions for women and their families by offering official beatings rather than private violence or inter-lineage warfare. This, they insisted, was a "progressive measure in the best interests of the people concerned".³²

Furthermore, in a context where British and Ganda power had overwhelmed local ways of doing things, the ideology of indirect rule demanded, according to officials, that they allow local authorities to exercise power. Custom could not hold anyone to wifely deference or familial cooperation. Christian women sought votes at mission synod meetings, female teachers pursued equal pay for equal work, and husbands pushed for a pass system for women to keep wives and daughters from leaving home.³³ New institutions were necessary to shape these changes, officials argued, or families would have to resort to a bloody rule by force.³⁴ Explicitly juxtaposing how Britons maintained family power with the changing practices of Uganda, Uganda's Attorney General argued "that in England many cases came before the Police Magistrate where a wife complains of having been beaten by her husband, and whenever the Magistrate is satisfied that the woman had been behaving badly and that the chastisement was not severe, he frequently refuses to entertain the complaint."³⁵ Without such norms, though, the Governor worried that husbands would angrily beat their wives more severely than the court would, and then be unjustly prosecuted for their attempts to do a husband's duty.³⁶

Without whipping or customary sanctions, the Governor insisted to a sceptical Colonial Office, there was simply no way to control Eastern Province women. The Provincial Commissioner, though unable to provide much evidence, complained of "the growing license" which he observed in the women of Bugwere and Budama after the Chief Justice's demand that courts stop whippings. Worse yet, the loss of the power to whip pitted the leading chiefs of each district, who wanted to control women through "a term of imprisonment of two weeks on wives who disobey the reasonable orders of their husbands" against local officials who objected that "this form of punishment would react on the husband, who would be deprived of his wife's services, and her absence would interfere adversely with the home life".³⁷ Unable to control wives, local men tried to salvage their situation in other ways. In Bugisu, as the Governor had predicted, reported beatings by husbands increased. In Lango, conversely, men responded economically, working to reduce bridewealth on the grounds that women who were not reliable in carrying out marital duties of cultivation could no longer be worth as much as they had once been.³⁸ Reduced bridewealth, in turn, further destabilized marriage and undermined the position of the fathers who could have expected to benefit from their daughters' marriages.

Notably, these adaptations to female insubordination threatened men's alliances and made new tensions between Europeans and Africans, high and low level chiefs, and older and younger men. In a context where the success of his administration rested on men's cooperation, the Governor and his officials, sympathised entirely with the men, explaining with amazement that under the new rules a woman took her husband to court for "simple hurt to his wife by beating her with a

stick". Monetary fines, stocks, and ostracism, alternative punishments for women suggested by critics of whippings, did not work, the Governor argued. Fines were paid by husbands eager to get their wives back. Stocks were too brutal. And ostracism "is a dangerous remedy in communities in which women are prone to suicide on slight provocation".³⁹ Faced with the prospect of paying bridewealth, then having a wife who was uncontrollable or prone to suicide, the governor complained that men opted out of marriage and settled for irregular arrangements. Home life, he feared, would be altogether lost.⁴⁰ The governor's fear for home life was not a worry about wives' or even children's quality of life. It was a concern about young men, their fathers, and the masculine connections secured through lineage and marriage contracts that wove society together into an orderly and economically functional unit.

Mission Coercion

When called to account for courts' extralegal whipping of women, officials noted that until the Chief Justice complained, no one else minded the courts' use of corporal punishments to maintain marital power and encourage economic development. Women lacked an audible voice. And the missions, who in another context might have acted as whistleblowers objecting to gross abuses were, instead, part of this corporally coercive system. In some cases they may even have exceeded the administration in their willingness to accept forced labor, administer corporal punishment, and coordinate the enforcement of marital duties--as the mission defined them--on dissident women. Though both Protestants and Catholics seem to have viewed forced labor and corporal punishments as routine and unremarkable, we gain a glimpse of both the rationale behind such practices, and their possible scope, in the scandals that emerged in Teso, Eastern Uganda, as two Catholic Mill Hill priests, Fathers Kiggen and Thyssen, resorted to extreme violence to enforce their vision of church law on people with very complicated lives.

Forced labor was a routine part of missions' economic support. Protestants, who had the allegiance of most of the region's chiefs and elite families, used forced labor to build churches, porter clergy's goods from place to place on itinerations, and cultivate mission and church school gardens. Catholics' access to these forms of support was more limited, being drawn primarily from individuals and families settled on mission land who provided labor as rent, and from work by students and those converts kidnapped and forced to work for the mission as part of a disciplinary punishment.

In Eastern Uganda during the 1920s, the missions were making up their strategies as they went, in an atmosphere of austerity. Unlike Buganda, where they had operated through alliance with leading Ganda state officials, in the Eastern Province they entered a region with a variety of state and non-state systems, which had been initially evangelized (and conquered) by Semei Kakungulu, his military deputies, and Ganda evangelists.⁴¹ Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionaries were a part of this semi-military system as they cooperated with early officials' efforts to occupy land and collect taxes. In Acholi, for example, missionaries temporarily worked directly as tax collectors for the early administration, with one missionary shooting a woman in front of witnesses in 1905.⁴² In Teso, conditions were even more unstable as early Ganda evangelists not only entered regions without local requests, but called in Ganda military support when they felt their work or security was threatened.⁴³ CMS official rules and restraints on violence, erratically enforced even in the capital, were challenged by both African and British

missionaries. These evangelists largely funded themselves through aggressive promotion of cotton, carving out their own territories to the point that Louise Pirouet has argued "cotton and Christianity became inextricably confused".⁴⁴ Despite problems controlling its own employees, the CMS found Eastern Uganda an attractive field for new evangelical growth not just because of the money cotton made available, but also because the lack of a local organized Ganda-style elite would allow the mission itself to define an educational, social, and political agenda, rather than relying on kingdom officials to do so.⁴⁵

The Catholics' position in the region was more tenuous. Three Catholic missions operated in Uganda: the low-budget Verona Fathers in the North (including Acholi), the better-funded White Fathers from Rubaga westward, and the Mill Hill Fathers from Nsambya eastward. The Mill Hill mission, the Colonial Office noted, was the weakest of the major missions in Uganda.⁴⁶ Few Mill Hill fathers had university degrees or even teaching certificates. Recruited from England, Ireland and the Netherlands, they spoke English, but nevertheless found it difficult to socialize effectively with officials, who tended to be Protestants or secular.⁴⁷ In this context, without the wealth and prestige of the Protestants, or the skills and education respected by government officials, some Mill Hill priests resorted to a violent discipline to retain control of their converts even though their Bishop, experienced in evangelism in Uganda, declared that "the Fathers are most kind and charitable in all their dealings with the natives."⁴⁸

The Mill Hill mission's abuses in Eastern Uganda became clear during a bitter feud between the priests and a local administrator, Captain Philips. In July 1926, Philips convicted Father Kiggen for contempt of court. Kiggen had told a chief about to try a case of criminal breach of trust what punishment should be awarded. This intervention in directing judgment, however, had not been Kiggen's first adventure in administration. Previously, he had been summoned by District Officer Philips but had simply ignored the summons. According to his defenders, he could not socialize with Captain Philips, who he saw as a deeply immoral man.⁴⁹

Father Kiggen was upset about this prosecution and passed on his disgust with Captain Philips to others, both within the mission and in the African Christian community. Kiggen ignored the district administration regarding educational and developmental matters, though as the superior of his mission he was in charge of the schools, churches, and institutions of a substantial area. During his prosecution, Kiggen informed his bishop, Campling, of his complaints against Philips. He asserted that, as well as "leading an immoral life with native women", Philips abused witnesses and engaged in professional misconduct. Philips' superior, the Provincial Commissioner for the Eastern Province, was informed of the charges by anonymous letter, questioned Philips, and dismissed the accusations as malicious and groundless after Philips denied them "on his word of honour".⁵⁰

But despite superiors' efforts to paper over the animosity between the two men, the feud escalated. Kiggen, even when pushed by Bishop Campling, refused to apologize to Captain Philips. And Philips launched a police investigation into the mission's practices which exposed serious abuses. Instead of simply providing social services and cooperating with the colonial state, Father Kiggen was administering a mission-sponsored state within a state and cutting off appeals to secular authorities. The investigation "produced statements from some twenty-eight natives to the effect that, for the last three years at least, the European representatives and native

followers of the Mill Hill Mission in Teso district had beaten and imprisoned natives and intimidated them into compliance with canonical directions".⁵¹ Furthermore, even when individuals had sought to appeal beyond the mission to the High Court, the local British police officer, described as a fanatical Roman Catholic, had backed the mission by illegally refusing to forward petitions of appeal.⁵²

Sample complaints against Kiggen show a violent, gendered picture of mission coercion. Of the first nine cases reported, seven involved teachers seizing women, most of whom were beaten and imprisoned. And if the first set of allegations was not sufficient, a second collection of cases was even more graphic, gendered, and clearly illegal. These summaries reported Catholic women who were beaten 24 or 25 strokes and imprisoned with pigs. These beatings and punishments were part of the mission's effort to enforce Christian marriage and block divorce in a population with complex lives.

The police investigation portrayed a society in which women would have done their duty and obeyed non-Catholic husbands, but the mission had intervened to cause hardship for both wives and husbands. A Catholic Teso woman, for example, received 25 strokes for marrying a non-Christian, and was then imprisoned in a pigsty until she escaped. A Ganda woman was given 24 strokes in Kiggen's presence for living with a common law husband outside of Christian marriage. Beaten by teachers even before the punishment Kiggen directed, she lost an eye. And after these beatings, she was confined for two and a half months and forced to carry stones for mission road construction. A Teso woman married by local custom was caught at her husband's house by a teacher who forcibly took her to Toromo, where he kept her for two months until she escaped, running back to her husband. After she had been at home for a month, she was recaptured by the teacher, beaten about the legs which became "very bad" and, despite her pregnancy, put back on the road from Toroma to Ngora, where she escaped, after another beating, and after her clothes had been taken from her. One of the few men reported beaten was a Teso man who received ten strokes in Kiggen's presence for complaining that his "wife, whom he married in accordance with native custom... [was] taken from him and sent into Buganda against her will to learn religion. The complainant asked Father Kiggen for his wife on various occasions but was told she had been sent into Buganda".⁵³

These women's own perspectives are not reported in these summaries and thus it is hard to simply accept the police interpretation of the women's actions and their husbands' or lovers' involvement. Some of these women may have at least initially fled voluntarily to the mission, becoming Catholics to escape husbands or pursue education, following a pattern observed elsewhere in Africa. But this mission was notably unwilling to allow a woman to change her mind later. Instead, it not only defended her against her husband, by sending her elsewhere to school, but against herself and any inclination she might have to abandon the rigorous life of a mission station and return home to the compromises of a non-Christian marriage. And some of the beatings were apparently administered after a husband brought a difficult wife to the teacher and asked that she be whipped.

An unrepentant Father Kiggen, declared persona non grata in the Eastern Province by government officials, was called home after the evidence of mission beatings, judicial interventions, and kidnappings became clear to his superiors. But his recall was not a full

rejection of his methods. His bishop pleaded with the order's Father Superior to remove him because, with the police shadowing his every move, Kiggen would be caught even if he just behaved as usual, and in a future case would be unlikely to be able to escape criminal assault convictions.⁵⁴ His home order, however, kept proposing his return, and the Father General in London visited the Colonial Office directly, complained about the deterioration in relations between officials and the mission, and "endeavoured... to suggest that the flogging incidents must not be taken too seriously having regard to local conditions."⁵⁵ In a similar case in Cameroon in the early 1930s, mission historians chose to emphasize not the violence or illegality of mission punishments, but the charge that Africans behaved in child-like ways and needed direction.⁵⁶

An even more dramatic case led to the expulsion of Kiggen's deputy, Father Thyssen, and the critical investigation and revision of ongoing mission practices. Around 1920, a non-Christian man and woman were married according to local custom. By about 1924, the husband had started to visit a Mill Hill mission administered by a Ganda evangelist, becoming a reader and accepting baptism. Once he was a Christian, he made his wife go to the mission with him, though she later asserted that this was entirely against her will. While attending the mission, she fell ill and, unable to object, was baptised by the teacher. Meanwhile, however, the marriage was troubled. On at least two occasions, the husband accused his wife of adultery and brought her to the teacher to be beaten. This was apparently unremarkable, and created no protest. On the second occasion, Father Thyssen was present. Finally, toward the end of August, 1927, fed up with her husband's cruelty and, she alleged, his adultery, she left him, running home to her mother's compound. After dark on 23 October, 1927, Father Thyssen led a group of ten teachers and readers armed with sticks and carrying torches to seize the wife from her mother's home. They dragged her, resisting, from the house. Her mother, who rushed out to protect her daughter, was apparently punched by Father Thyssen personally, in both the face and gut.⁵⁷

Father Thyssen and his teachers were charged with criminal trespass, voluntarily causing hurt, and riot. Brought before the court, Thyssen paid the teachers' fines and avoided criminal prosecution by paying 25 pounds to the wife's mother, who had been hospitalized by his assault. Neither he nor his teachers were imprisoned or whipped. His superiors simply considered it regrettable that where Kiggen had paid 15 pounds, Thyssen had to pay more. Fortunately, however, from the mission's point of view, Thyssen was able to pay compensation money and thus avoid a criminal conviction.⁵⁸ His superior noted, "It is not, so far as I know, suggested that he was acting otherwise than from a mistaken sense of duty".⁵⁹ Bluntly informed both in London and locally by officials that floggings and mission-sponsored kidnappings must end, the order defended its men. But it also issued a circular to priests stating that priests must follow new rules, or the mission would be unable to defend itself from criminal charges: "the Fathers must see that there must be no more beating of natives either by themselves or by Catechists, or by any others over whom they have any control. The Fathers should communicate this regulation to the Catechists and others from a written document, duly dated, which they will preserve". Further, "they must carefully avoid doing or saying anything which might be interpreted as being interference with court cases" and must not collect evidence, must not talk with outsiders, and should be constantly on their guard with officials.⁶⁰

The new rules, however, were more a response to a threat of prosecution and a difficult legal situation than any rejection of mission violence. The emphasis was on producing a paper trail for mission defense, rather than on compensating the injured, and it provided no apology for past actions, even though in internal documents, the mission worried about Father Thyssen's mental stability.⁶¹ The order's new leader in Uganda, indeed, complained that "the Governor has gone too far and beyond his powers in threatening to deport Fathers Kiggen and Thyssen. His actions seem to me to be very arbitrary and spiteful... His Excellency [the Governor] is not a persona grata with anyone".⁶²

In the cases of both Kiggen and Thyssen, the mission clearly understood and to some degree accepted violence as a progressive force in an unruly region. Kiggen, his superiors noted, never could see himself as having done anything wrong or worthy of punishment. And Thyssen, his superiors argued, had simply acted "to see the [canon] Law obeyed and to carry out what is often extremely distasteful duty".⁶³ Overall, Bishop Campling argued that the Fathers were kind and only trying to ensure faith and progress. While "mistakes had been made in Teso", he implied, they were the product of "great zeal to overcome the vices of the natives", certainly the best of motives.⁶⁴ The order officially abandoned the use of violence only reluctantly and under pressure. Progressive Violence and the New Society

British critics of local practices officially won this particular set of debates over the use of violence in the communities of the Eastern Province. A mild draft letter from the Colonial Office, which rejected any attempt by Griffin to reprimand administrative officers for their disregard for law, nevertheless clearly stated that the native courts should stop beating women.⁶⁵ And the Mill Hill Mission's instructions to priests barred any more violent enforcement of canon law and Christian marriage.⁶⁶

On the ground, however, the result of these controversies was far more ambiguous as both European and African officials rejected the assertions of the Chief Justice and Colonial Office and accepted the pressure of local necessities. Eastern Province administrators received complaints from local African courts unsure what to do with all the difficult women under the new rules. And these administrators rejected the Chief Justice's argument that, in violating the law, they had done something fundamentally wrong. Perryman, an Eastern Province expert promoted to acting governor in the wake of the scandal, defended officials' actions, arguing "a District Officer used to be constantly required to commit illegal acts... and it is difficult for him to distinguish between different illegalities".⁶⁷ Missionaries, too, while restricting their activities out of fear, continued to long for whips as an evangelical tool, even as the Colonial Office officials recoiled in horror at such mechanisms of conversion and church-building.⁶⁸

Over the next few years, officials' and missionaries' grudging acceptance of the law may have prevented a few beatings. But it also led to an administrative push to reform the law, granting greater autonomy to native courts, providing them with more effective ways to hide their actions from judicial overview and appeal. In 1929, the Governor referred to the controversy over Eastern Province floggings when he proposed a new Native Courts bill that removed individuals' right to appeal to the High Court in favor of a system of review of major court decisions by District Officers and Provincial Commissioners.⁶⁹ Still upset about the Governor's defense of officials' disregard of law, the Chief Justice condemned the proposed bill, arguing that courts

should be overseen by those with a loyalty to justice, rather than merely a desire for smooth administration.⁷⁰ The Chief Justice, however, lost. The Colonial Office accepted the governor's argument that Native Courts were intended as an institution which provided political education, and that they should therefore be under the tutelage of an administrative service, rather than held to the strict legal standards of the Chief Justice, and his High Court.⁷¹

The Governor and his officials, after all, were able to argue that they knew the real conditions of the people, not merely the abstractions of the law. And their mission was to create a solid, comprehensible form of administration, which would root the colonial state in the lives of the people and tie the Africans who mattered--the elite, the literate, and those growing cotton--more closely to the institutions of colonial power. Similarly, the mission's nostalgia for violence was not one of the characteristics which nervous superiors regarded as a possible sign of insanity, but, instead, a devout and serious desire to build the church into the lives of the people and make the people live up to the expectations and demands of Church rules. Neither local officials nor missionaries argued that husbands or fathers should have the right to whip their own wives and daughters. Instead, they argued that the state and church should take on that role, simultaneously taking a distasteful necessity out of the hands of men and transforming the beatings from personal matters to public, formal acts which enforced the new order.

Despite Colonial office disapproval, violence remained an important tool of progressive reformers in the Eastern Province and, indeed, in Uganda as a whole. As the Colonial Office tried to block the state from whipping women, the local administration resisted requests for statistics on whippings and fought vigorously to build new institutions, such as the native courts, which would allow it to hide its actions and continue to flog the marginal and disruptive, such as youth and prisoners.⁷² Within the leading schools of Uganda, mission teachers encouraged students to maintain a prefect-based system of discipline which fostered violent hazing in the name of educational advancement and the cultivation of leadership. And within the armed forces, whipping remained a tool of military discipline not just of soldiers, but also of their wives, up to the Second World War.⁷³

Far from receding into history as Uganda's elite turned from slave raiding and elephant hunting to cotton farming and government-appointed chieftainships, violence in the name of wealth, progress and orderly administration remained an important tool of a British and Ugandan elite administrative alliance more concerned with results than with methods.

The struggle over state and mission whippings of women was not the simple matter of civilization versus barbarity that the Chief Justice and his colonial office allies suggested. Instead, it was a moment in which administration, mission, and African leaders made explicit the tensions over governance, economic growth and social change. Violence, and patriarchal leadership, was no longer the private prerogative of the husband and father, but a matter of the courts, mission teacher, and public economy. And despite the Chief Justice and Colonial Office's definition of civilization, public, formal violence in native courts, mission schools and churches became an important resource for the men essential to the colony's orderly, "civilizing" administration.

Summary:

This article uses a variety of archival sources to explore controversies over official beatings and corporal punishments administered to women by Native Courts and the Mill Hill Mission in the Eastern Province of Uganda during the 1920s. It argues that colonial actors, with very few exceptions, rejected the Colonial Office rhetoric of colonialism as a civilizing process. Instead, local colonial officials, missionaries and elite Africans saw violence against women as an essential tool in their efforts to promote a functioning alliance between colonialism and African men. Officials, missions, and elite cotton-growing Africans regarded women as too powerful and independent, threatening their progressive agenda. They therefore saw official violence not as traditional or part of a defense of customary law, but as an innovative and progressive way of dealing with women who were central to the farming economy and far too independent for men's comfort. Through violence, state and missions sought to control women, furthering both official and mission aims, and cementing a relationship with African men by providing a useful service.