

The bitter bread of exile – A candid appraisal of Buganda's position

By Stephen Ssenkaaba

I relished the opportunity to read "The Bitter Bread of Exile- The financial problems of Sir Edward Mutesa II during his final exile, 1966-1969" – one of the most recently published works on Sir Edward Mutesa- Uganda's first president and deceased King of Buganda. It is a detailed account into an intricate story that has been the subject of much speculation, loose talk and falsehoods. Professor ABK Kasozi, the author, also uses Mutesa's tribulations in exile to analyse the position of Buganda within the larger geopolitical entity that is Uganda.

The 341 page book gets off to a historical start, explaining the origin of the Baganda, their essence and their place in the larger Uganda. The author further explores the struggle to control this region in the difficult post-colonial days and the subsequent emergence of the powerful Mengo establishment. The story delves into the difficult relationship between Mengo and the newly born Ugandan state and how the ensuing bad blood eventually led to a three year bitter exile and death of Mutesa.

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Kasozi shows how the British colonialists set the stage for political turbulence in Uganda, tactfully alienating its people while seeking to dominate them. As a people that lived in an organized society with clear administrative structures and whose territory was of key strategic importance to colonialists, Buganda initially found favour with the colonial masters and became beneficiaries of the white man's selfish benevolence in exchange for collaboration in their expansionist policies. It was an uneven arrangement that gave the Baganda a false sense of entitlement to the resources and benefits of a new nation, raising suspicion and envy among other ethnic groups that saw themselves as sidelined. This set the stage for political wrangles, betrayals and infightings and much hatred for Buganda and ensuing 1966 crisis.

As the Kabaka of Buganda, Mutesa was the sacrificial lamb for the transgressions of a crumbling nation fueled by the selfish imperialist actions of Britain. His exile in Britain haunted and presented a huge moral dilemma to the British government who, unwilling to spoil diplomatic relations with President Obote's government, desisted from offering any financial support to the man whose current predicament many knew their country was responsible for creating. Obote's government took advantage of this tension to embarrass and frustrate Mutesa until his miserable death in London in November 1969.

Kasozi's book puts the Buganda – Uganda question into historical and perhaps cultural perspective. It also calls for serious soul-searching on the part of Buganda which for many years has been consumed by its need for special recognition within the larger country. Coming at

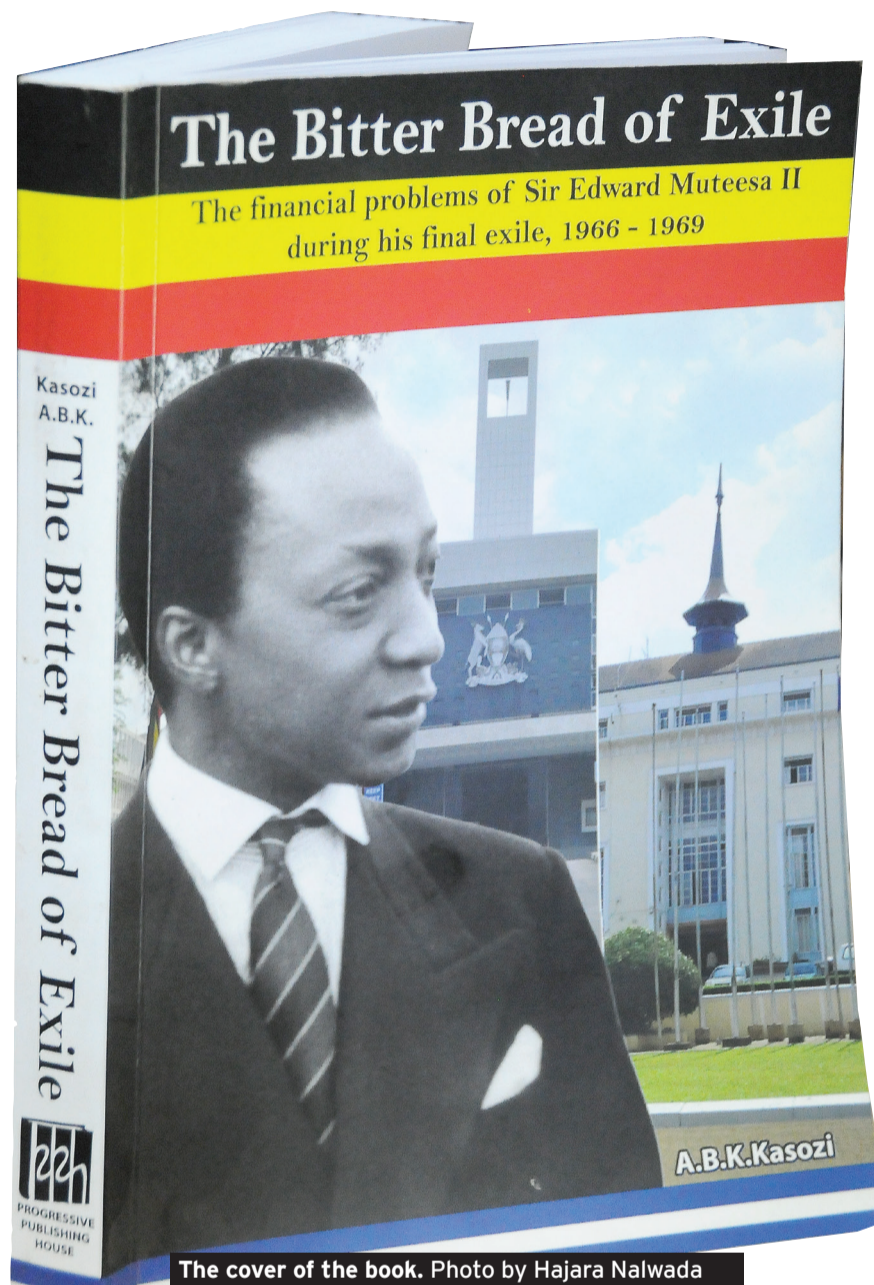
a time when the central Government is cozing up to Mengo, this work compels us to think about the depth of the looming overtures between central government and Mengo. It is not a political commentary, No. It is more of a nuanced pointer to the bigger issues that lie beneath the love hate relationship between the nation and this powerful and influential region.

This is a book you will love more for its substance than its style. Its detailed historical accounts, the wide ranging research and extensive sourcing bring out new interesting information otherwise not known by many people. It is a good insight into the political machinations that characterised Uganda's road to independence and its aftermath. It is all well tied in with the plight of Mutesa which ends into his exile and death.

For all its detail and anecdotal evidence, the continued reproduction of correspondences between the Uganda Government and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (CFO) over the plight of Mutesa kind of dull this otherwise interesting story. The italicised verbatim letters go on and on crowding the story and often becoming the main pointers to key issues in this book. While those correspondences provide useful background and evidence, perhaps they should have been presented in a less prosaic style?

That notwithstanding, Kasozi's work remains a rich informative account of an important chapter in Uganda's history. And a reference point for so many unverified facts about the circumstances that surrounded the death of this great man. Kasozi desists from judgmental, opinionated writing that many academicians like him tend to employ. Instead, he provides the information and lets the reader draw his own conclusions from the facts that he presents.

It is a sober read that many people who have not bothered to trace one of the most critical moments of Uganda's political history will find useful. This is one of many books authored by professor Kasozi. His academic grounding and keen interest in history enable him to execute a well-balanced piece of work that combines serious scholarly rigour and readable simplicity. Find the book in Kampala's different bookstores. It is worth a read.



The cover of the book. Photo by Hajara Nalwada



Mutesa meeting Indian leaders in Uganda in 1963



Kabaka Edward Mutesa II's last tour of Buddu Kooki and Mawogola 'ssazas' in the 1960s