Introduction

Captivity and Freedom in Postcolonial Uganda

ON THE evening of October 8, 1962, thousands of people lined the streets of Kampala, eagerly awaiting the declaration of Uganda's independence. When midnight arrived, crowds watched intently as the Union Jack was taken down and Uganda's flag, with its red, yellow, and black stripes, was raised against a backdrop of fireworks. One foreign correspondent described the "unprecedented scenes of rejoicing" in the new capital city, as dancing, singing, and cheering crowds filled the streets throughout the night.[1] In the lead-up to these celebrations, the government announced that between 2,500 and 3,500 prisoners would be released, and also indicated that many more would be granted remission.[2] Along with female prisoners serving short sentences, Uganda's new leaders prioritized those who had been incarcerated for "offences arising from political affairs," thus including individuals imprisoned for anticolonial struggles.[3] Their freedom was highly symbolic, meant to represent both a rupture from colonial rule and a new future for the Ugandan nation.

To mark the occasion, Milton Obote—Uganda's new prime minister—delivered a speech. Calling the release an "act of grace," he urged the ex-prisoners to be good citizens. "I very much hope that this generosity on the part of the new Government will encourage prisoners when released to be of good behaviour," he exclaimed, "and to help the Government and the people of the new Uganda. When prisoners are released they should work hard

to assist in the maintenance of law and order, without which our country will not go forward."[4] Obote thus not only celebrated the prisoners' release but also reminded them—and the nation—of the limits of this freedom.

Such limits were immediately experienced by the prisoners excluded from the Independence Day amnesty and remission. Uganda's prison population had climbed steadily throughout the post–World War II years, and by 1960 it had reached its peak, with over nineteen thousand held in the Uganda Prisons Service (UPS).[5] Many more were confined in Uganda's two other prison systems: while UPS was run by the central government, there were also prisons run by Buganda Kingdom—the most powerful polity prior to colonization—and by various local government authorities. The release of several thousand prisoners at independence thus only affected a small percentage of Uganda's incarcerated population. Among those excluded from the Independence Day clemency measures were prisoners labeled as "habitual criminals" and those arrested in connection with the Rwenzururu secessionist movement in western Uganda.[6] In the state's view, the latter were too political, as the movement threatened Uganda's newfound national identity, while the former were not political enough, as those classified as "criminals" were not seen as valuable and productive members of the new nation.

Many Ugandans, however, challenged these lines of exclusion. Some people in prison wrote letters, drawing on a tactic long used as a form of protest by those behind bars. One such letter came from Mukama, a convicted prisoner held at Bufulubi local government prison who had been originally charged with stealing a bicycle.[7] "Since we now have one Government in Uganda," he wrote to senior local government officials, "and we got independence so as to chase foreigners, why should there be [a] difference yet there is one Government? And why were our friends, who were imprisoned by the Uganda Government prisons, granted remission yet we were not?"[8] Mukama therefore challenged what he saw as the remnants of the colonial indirect rule structure in Uganda's penal system, using the language of unity that government officials themselves celebrated at this time. Officials dismissed his complaint, indicating that he was a "habitual criminal" and a "troublemaker," especially as he had repeatedly deployed another key tool of prisoners' resistance: escape.[9] Mukama had broken out of prison four times, directly challenging the state's carceral capacity by taking freedom into his own hands.

Prisons also became sites of dissent in more public ways. In November 1962, just a month after independence, approximately one thousand members of the Rwenzururu secessionist movement attacked a local government prison in Toro. As they overtook the prison, they freed forty individuals and

"badly damaged" the building in the process.[10] Members of the movement thus drew on a tactic that has been widely used in struggles against state repression, from the storming of the Bastille in revolutionary France to the attacks on prisons in colonial India during the uprising of 1857–58.[11] As historian Dan Berger writes, prisons have long been targeted in anti-oppressive struggles, as they "stand in for bigger structures of violence," while those in prison become a "symbol whose freedom marks a step toward larger, collective liberation."[12] By releasing their incarcerated comrades, the Rwenzururu secessionists sent a powerful message to the government, demonstrating that they too would exercise agency over their freedom.

The Independence Day clemency measures and Ugandans' response to them reveal a great deal about the connection between freedom and captivity in postcolonial Uganda. Through enacting the release and remission, the state sought to publicly align itself with freedom, the watchword and goal of anticolonial movements across the Global South in this period. The release of political prisoners was especially poignant, as many of Africa's new generation of leaders had been held in colonial carceral sites, from Kwame Nkrumah—who, following his release from James Fort Prison, went on to become the president of Ghana—to Jomo Kenyatta, who was held in the brutal detention camp system set up as part of British counterinsurgency efforts against the Kenya Land and Freedom Army.[13] Yet, while the Independence Day measures represented a public performance of freedom, the contours and meanings of this freedom were a site of contestation between the Ugandan state and its citizens. Carceral spaces were key arenas in which this struggle unfolded, one in which freedom was denied, debated, and demanded.

This book is about incarceration in postcolonial Uganda and the spaces, ideas, politics, and experiences associated with punitive confinement. It examines the two and a half decades following independence, covering the period between 1962 and the inauguration of Uganda's current president, Yoweri Museveni, in 1986. In this twenty-four-year period, Ugandans experienced seven governments—most of which were overthrown by force—as well as the mass expulsion of Uganda's South Asian population, a war with Tanzania, and a civil war. Each government—particularly the Obote I (1966–71), Amin (1971–79), and Obote II (1980–85) regimes—relied heavily on incarceration to maintain its power, with devastating consequences for Ugandans. As a work of both social and political history, this book also examines how carceral systems were imagined and experienced by those held within, working for, or impacted by them. It traces the lives and stories of people held within penal spaces, both those categorized as "political" and

“criminal” prisoners; prison staff; other security agents; government officials; family members of those affected by incarceration; and the Ugandan public. As Ann Laura Stoler argues, scholars should not simply examine “what is ‘left’” following colonialism but also “what people are ‘left *with*’” and how they deal with the “durability of what is not easily disposable or set aside.”[14]

Carceral Afterlives argues that confinement—both as a punishment in and of itself and as a vehicle for other modes of punishment—was central to state power and critiques of the state in postcolonial Uganda. This was the case across all the regimes in this period, from those considered to be civilian governments to Idi Amin’s military dictatorship. Confinement occurred in a range of spaces, such as government-run prisons inherited from colonial rule and informal detention sites in which the state tortured and killed perceived enemies. Throughout these decades, Ugandans contested the government’s use of incarceration and, in the process, made powerful critiques about the limits of freedom in the postcolonial state.

This argument has four wider implications for the study of Uganda’s history, the postcolonial state, and global histories of prisons and confinement. First, it challenges the idea that Amin’s military dictatorship was uniquely brutal. Called “Hitler in Africa” and “The Butcher of Africa,” Amin has long been viewed as the African continent’s ultimate example of a violent dictator. Spaces of confinement have played a key role in cementing his reputation, with headlines such as “Amin ‘Joined In’ Prison Killings” and “I Was in Idi Amin’s Death Camp” relaying tales of his regime’s brutality around the world. The Amin years were, without question, a time of horrific violence, torture, and state-sponsored killings, but the regime’s punitive practices borrowed heavily from Obote, who in turn adapted many colonial policies. By adopting a more holistic approach to the study of postcolonial confinement, this book demonstrates the recursive nature of incarceration and punishment in Uganda’s history, thereby situating the Amin regime’s repression within a longer history of state violence that is tied to British colonial rule.

Second, *Carceral Afterlives* emphasizes the coloniality of Uganda’s system of confinement.[15] As was the case across much of the African continent, confinement as a form of punishment was a largely alien concept in the territory now known as Uganda prior to British rule. Prisons were imposed very early on in the colonial period. While justified as part of the “civilizing mission,” they played a key part in the violent imposition and maintenance of colonial control. Despite their status as a hated symbol of colonial repression, prisons persisted after independence—a phenomenon that can be found across most former colonial states yet has largely been taken for granted in existing scholarship. This book instead unpacks the prison’s

postcolonial endurance, examining how government officials sought to harness the symbolic, material, and coercive power of prisons to serve a range of political agendas. In doing so, it also engages in wider debates about the influence of colonial legacies in independent Africa, long a preoccupation of postcolonial scholarship. The prison's continued existence across former colonial states is one of the key examples of how colonial structures and ideologies are not "bounded by the formal legalities of imperial sovereignty over persons, places and things."[16] Uganda's leaders strategically drew upon multiple aspects of colonial punishment to boost their power, while also borrowing methods from their predecessors, other postcolonial counterparts elsewhere on the continent, and wider global penal trends. In examining these, this book moves away from sweeping and static accounts of colonial legacies, instead arguing for empirically rooted studies that work across multiple scales of analysis.[17]

Third, this book argues that scholars must pay closer attention to the connections between carceral systems in the Global South and Global North. While penal institutions in Africa have, both historically and presently, been used to reinforce racist ideas about the "barbarism" and "backwardness" of the continent, *Carceral Afterlives* shows how prisons and other sites of punitive confinement are products of "modern" power. This is not the so-called progressive and imagined "modernity" used by colonial officials to justify their presence in Africa and elsewhere, but rather the modern power created through systems of colonialism, capitalism, captivity, and white supremacy. While the history of punishment has unfolded differently across geographical spaces, the wider context of carceral systems' colonial origins and entanglement in other systems of oppression must be kept in view. With this approach, one can begin to see the similarities across penal systems in the Global North and the Global South, including their role in economic exploitation, the intransigent commitment to reforms despite widespread evidence that prisons do not create safer societies, and the ongoing centrality of violence to penal practices. This book thus challenges the teleological narratives that have been so entrenched in studies of punishment and used to created hierarchies of "civilization," instead foregrounding the shared features of penal systems across the globe.

Finally, *Carceral Afterlives* shows how prisons and other sites of punitive confinement have been important arenas of resistance and critique in postcolonial Uganda. Incarcerated people and those in solidarity with them on the outside have long used the prison and other spaces of captivity as symbols of unfreedom and sites of struggle. This has been closely studied in the context of other liberation struggles on the African continent, from

the resistance of detainees in Kenya during the 1950s to Nelson Mandela's "long walk to freedom" in apartheid South Africa.[18] There has also been much written about the prison and anticolonial resistance in other parts of the Global South, such as the "gaol-going" strategies used by the Indian National Congress and communist visions forged in the prisons of colonial Vietnam.[19] Finally, struggles for freedom have been closely examined in the United States, from the contributions of Black prison activists to wider civil rights and Black Power movements in the post–World War II period to the ongoing movements for prison abolition led by Black scholar-activists such as Angela Davis and Ruth Wilson Gilmore.[20] What has received much less attention, however, is how such struggles have played out in the postcolonial African context. In Uganda, the state's use of incarceration and detention without trial was constantly contested by Ugandans inside and outside of penal spaces. Politicians, lawyers, those behind bars, and members of the public used critiques of confinement to express disillusionment with the limits of decolonization and hold the state accountable. This book thus traces the significant contributions that Ugandans have made to the interconnected struggles against captivity, colonialism, and neocolonialism.

GLOBAL HISTORIES OF THE PRISON

As a technology of empire, the prison spread throughout the globe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, becoming a nearly universal institution. Its history, therefore, cannot only be told within national or regional frames of reference. While *Carceral Afterlives* focuses on prisons and other spaces of punitive confinement in Uganda, it does so in a way that attends to the wider global transfers of ideas, institutions, and people across the colonial and postcolonial periods. Prisons were first established in Uganda in the 1890s, approximately a century after what historians have called the "birth" of the prison in western Europe and the United States.[21] By then, incarceration was the central mechanism of punishment across of the world, with prisons and penitentiaries—including Pentonville in England, Auburn in the United States, and the Casa de Correção in Brazil—becoming a symbol of the "modern" state and its desire to create "docile and useful" citizens.[22]

While Uganda's prison system has not been closely studied, there has been a great deal written about the history of prisons across Africa and the Global South.[23] Scholars have examined the parameters of colonial penal institutions in multiple regions, demonstrating how they were rooted in racism, violence, and forced labor. One of the main questions within this field is the extent to which colonial prisons and their successors reflected European models. In response, historians have drawn heavily upon Michel

Foucault's seminal work *Discipline and Punish,* whether to argue for the absence of a "carceral archipelago" in the colonial context or to challenge his dichotomy of premodern and modern power.[24] While Foucault's work brings into focus the expansive nature of carcerality, it should not be used as a rigid template for assessing prison systems in the colonial or postcolonial context, particularly as he does not take race into account.[25] Shifting away from state discourse and grand theories, some of the most generative work on African prisons has focused on the lived experiences of confinement, highlighting the communities forged while behind bars in sites such as Robben Island and detention camps in Kenya.[26] Prisoners' writing, especially through memoirs, has further illuminated such stories and social worlds, playing a key role in shaping public understandings of both colonial and postcolonial confinement.[27] Finally, scholars have looked at the recent application of human rights policies and reforms in prisons, as well as ethnographic accounts of everyday prison life.[28]

What has been largely absent, therefore, are inquiries into the decades following independence, the time in which prisons transitioned from colonial to national institutions. This continuity is not only overlooked in the African context but also more globally. Whereas scholars have closely studied the prison's "birth" in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, its imperial expansion, and its explosion in the United States beginning in the 1970s, the prison's entrenchment after colonialism has not been closely analyzed. Understanding why and how this occurred is crucial to making sense of where we are today, as more people—upwards of eleven million in 2020—are incarcerated than at any time in human history.[29]

Until recently, scholarly analysis of postcolonial penal systems on the African continent either appeared as an addendum to histories of colonial punishment or to emphasize the violence of postcolonial states. Achille Mbembe, for example, characterizes the goals of colonial punishment as "disciplining bodies with the aim of making better use of them, docility and productivity going hand in hand," while arguing that punishment in the postcolonial setting was marked by "raw violence" and a "loss of limits or sense of proportion."[30] Although Florence Bernault provides more depth, tracing some of the specific legacies of colonial penal systems, she adopts a similar tone, arguing that "post-colonial dictators have built sites of detention and torture that speak to no other logic than that of megalomaniacal and murderous power."[31] While reflective of certain aspects of postcolonial punishment, such representations remain affixed to the wider tropes used to frame African states in negative terms rather than drawing upon empirical evidence. This approach runs the risk of furthering the idea that

postcolonial governance can be summarized in "single stories" and stereotypes.[32] In contrast, this book argues that carceral systems in postcolonial Africa need to be analyzed with the same level of nuance and specificity that has been applied to studies of these same systems in the colonial period and in the Global North.

The best scholarship on postcolonial prisons has done exactly this. At the core of these inquiries has been the question of how to approach the nature of the colonial legacy. There is, unsurprisingly, widespread agreement that the prison's persistence is a key indicator of the impact of colonialism on penal systems after independence. As Mairi MacDonald writes, the "idea that social transgression could and should be punished by incarceration" was a product of colonialism, as prisons were largely alien across the continent prior to European rule.[33] She is cautious, however, about ascribing all aspects of postcolonial punishment to European influence, instead arguing that scholars should consider what African leaders "needed" of the colonial legacy to "legitimize" their states and power, particularly in the context of a changing global political landscape that included the Cold War.[34] Others have adopted a similar approach. Christine Deslaurier, for example, argues that although the prison's colonial origins in Burundi have "left tangible traces on its current architecture, norms, and organization," the postcolonial state "has also adjusted the prison over time to its own social and political designs."[35] Benedicto Machava's work demonstrates how Mozambique's carceral system was shaped by colonial precedents such as the use of flogging, imprisonment, and punishment through labor but was also impacted by state-socialist policies, influences from other countries in the Global South such as China, and the realities of austerity.[36] These and other case studies point to both the centrality of colonialism and the influence of other national and global dynamics in shaping penal systems after independence.

This book argues that the prison is a central part of colonialism's afterlife in Uganda.[37] Chapter 1 outlines the features of colonial punishment, providing a foundation for subsequent analysis of Uganda's postcolonial carceral system. Along with the striking continuities within the Uganda Prisons Service—in which buildings, uniforms, and policies remained largely unchanged in the postcolonial period—there were many other aspects of punishment that were shaped by colonial approaches. These include the use of detention without trial, deployment of the military against civilians, repeated and prolonged enactments of states of emergency, and the use of camps for punishment and surveillance in the context of wartime. Furthermore, the colonial-era criminalization of "vagrancy," "idleness," sex work,

and the LGBTQ2S+ community has led to many Ugandans being put behind bars, convicted of offenses created to serve colonial power structures.

Such continuities, while impacted by colonialism, also reflect broader realities of penal systems worldwide. The study of the prison's postcolonial endurance is animated by a bigger question that runs throughout the history of this institution: Why do governments continue to use prisons, despite significant evidence that they are violent and racist spaces that do not make societies safer? As Frank Dikötter argues, it is "precisely the singular resilience of this contested institution that makes a history of the prison so urgent."[38] In Uganda, while the very existence of the prison was attributable to colonialism, it endured for many of the same reasons it continued to exist elsewhere in the world: it allowed governments to enhance their control through confining those deemed "dissident" and "deviant." As the British did during the colonial period—and many states around the world do today—the postcolonial Ugandan state used the prison to enforce hierarchies that served its interests, imprisoning those whose politics, ethnicity, race, religion, sexuality, economic activities, and even choice of clothing were deemed subversive. The definitions of deviancy shifted across regimes, but the centrality of confinement as a tool of state violence and power did not.

This coercive function, however, does not fully explain the prison's persistence. Practically, prisons endured for some of the same reasons that many other colonial-era systems did. Postcolonial governments recognized that the institutional infrastructure of colonialism could be useful in managing and controlling newly created national communities, many of which were grappling with divisions created or exacerbated during colonial rule. Prisons were also symbolically powerful. Uganda's leaders sought to harness the prison's imaginative capital, carefully cultivating its image as a "monument to modernity" that could enhance their reputation globally.[39] This phenomenon can be seen across time and space in the Global South: from nineteenth-century South American nations to twentieth-century African ones, postcolonial governments strategically used the prison to buttress their claims to "modern" statehood in pursuit of national and global legitimacy.[40] Finally, prisons provided the state with a source of free labor. In Uganda and elsewhere on the continent, prisoners were forced to work on farms and in factories. Uganda's leaders extolled the prisoners' ability to produce for the nation, with this messaging becoming an important part of their economic development strategies following centuries of European exploitation. Although many other African nations had similar goals and facilities, this entanglement of carcerality and capitalism has not been as closely studied in the African context as it has in the Global North. This

economic aspect—as well as the prison's symbolic dimensions—is analyzed in chapter 2. Together, the chapters in this book show how the prison's endurance in Uganda must be read in the context of national, regional, and global political dynamics; Uganda's colonial history; and the wider history of this institution's centrality to the power of the "modern" state.

BEYOND THE PRISON: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PUNISHMENT

In the 1960s and 1970s, as the entrenchment of prisons became a reality in many newly independent states on the African continent, another chapter in global history of punishment was beginning: the unprecedented expansion of carceral power in the United States. As historian Heather Thompson has shown, while the number of people incarcerated in both federal and state prisons increased by 52,249 between 1935 and 1970, it grew by a staggering 1.2 million between 1970 and 2005.[41] Today, the United States has over 20 percent of the world's prisoners—a disproportionate number of whom are Black, Brown, and Indigenous—yet approximately 5 percent of the world's population.[42] Mass incarceration has impacted every facet of American life, from the workings of democracy to the revitalization of rural communities reeling from the economic fallouts of neoliberalism.[43] Beyond the prison, immigration detention, parole, policing, and other forms of confinement and surveillance have also expanded their scope and power, turning the USA into what scholars have called a "carceral state."[44]

The United States is, in many ways, an exceptional case when it comes to histories of captivity, and it has been largely treated as such by both its own historians and those studying penal systems elsewhere. There is much to be gained, however, by adopting a more comparative approach and considering the connections across the United States, other settler colonial states such as Canada, and former colonial states in the Global South.[45] This comparative approach reveals some differences, but also many overwhelming similarities. Such connections should not come as a surprise, as the prison and the wider penal systems that they function within were exports of empire, shaped by the same set of ideas about punishment and "civilization" from the late eighteenth century onwards.

One of the main features of the "carceral state" scholarship has been its "institutionally capacious" approach to punishment, which analyzes the "full range of policies and agencies that employ penal power" rather than just focusing on prisons or other easily recognizable penal institutions.[46] This is very useful in the Ugandan context, as informal detention sites—which are discussed in chapters 5 and 6—were a fundamental part of the state's carceral infrastructure, particularly during the Amin and Obote II regimes. Captivity at

the hands of the state extended far beyond the prison: one could be confined in the trunk of a car, the basement of a building, a police cell, within military barracks, or in a hotel room or private residence. Bringing these spaces into view not only reveals the complexity and capacity of Uganda's carceral system but also allows for further insights into how different sites of confinement related to each other in ways that reinforced the state's power.

This is especially clear when we consider the dynamic between prisons and detention sites. Prisons, on the one hand, were spaces of expectation. This had deep roots: the colonial state deliberately framed UPS as a rule-bound institution where proportionality and professionalism supposedly prevailed, a framing that emerged in the context of the discourse of "civilization" used to justify the imposition of prisons. Similar expectations continued after independence, becoming linked to visions of national unity, productivity, and "modernity." The prison system—whether in the colonial or postcolonial context—never lived up to this set of expectations, but its existence had important effects. Firstly, it had a significant impact on the institutional culture of UPS and the professional identities of prison staff, which are explored in chapter 2 and chapter 3. Secondly, it created a framework for accountability. When such expectations were violated, Ugandans critiqued and challenged the state's uses of incarceration, including through the courts, engagement with local government officials, the media, and through political organizing. The state rarely held up its end of the bargain, but, as is examined in the final three chapters of this book, Ugandans pushed them to do otherwise.

Detention sites, in contrast, were spaces of "exception."[47] They were untethered from the legal system and run by paramilitary groups that were independent of the police and prison services. Detention took place in longstanding sites of coercion, such as police stations and military barracks, as well as less obvious spaces, such as private buildings and hotel rooms. Many, such as Nakasero State Research Centre and Makindye Military Prison, were known to the public but were also spaces of secrecy and silences. Most people held in these sites did not make it out alive, and those who did carried the trauma of torture and bearing witness to extreme violence. Accounts of these detention sites have dominated portrayals of postcolonial confinement in Uganda, especially during Amin's military rule. In an article in the *Washington Post* published shortly after Amin's overthrow, journalists Martha Honey and Tony Avirgan offered a lurid—but not untypical—description of Nakasero: "As we entered the dungeons today, we saw scenes of incredible horror—bodies in varying states of decay and mutilation, almost all showing signs of torture. There were pools of blood on the steps, and blood was

smeared on the walls." Some of the detainees, they claimed, had "survived by eating human flesh."[48] For some readers of this *Washington Post* article, Honey and Avirgan's account no doubt confirmed long-standing racist notions of "darkest" Africa, whose spaces of confinement were often viewed as similar to medieval "dungeons."[49]

These detention sites, which were incredibly violent, should not be read as markers of postcolonial dysfunction nor reversion to an "archaic" penal past but rather as fundamental components of "modern" punishment.[50] Scholars such as Giorgio Agamben have argued that such "spaces of exception," from Nazi concentration camps to Guantánamo Bay in Cuba, are a fundamental part of state power in both the Global North and Global South.[51] This insight connects to a critique long made by scholars studying colonial punishment, who challenge Foucault's argument that the "birth" of the prison marked a rupture from public and physically violent forms of punishment to custodial, disciplinary forms that acted on the "soul." As historian Diana Paton writes in her work on Jamaica, "The idea that modern forms of power are abstracted from—indeed, counterposed to—pain and violence is false and is itself a product of the Enlightenment narrative. . . . Violence and pain are fully part of modern power."[52]

With this recognition, a new analytic space opens for examining Uganda's carceral system. While seemingly on different ends of a carceral continuum, prisons and detention sites were closely connected. Practically, they overlapped in terms of prisoners and personnel, as people frequently circulated between these spaces. At a deeper level, their simultaneous existence speaks to the multiple ways in which the state sought to perform and reproduce its power, from the disciplinary discourses, industrial and agricultural projects, and nation-building agendas associated with the prison to the use of detention sites, disappearance, and extrajudicial killings to remove those deemed a threat to the body politic. These different modes of carceral power should not be read through the binary lens of "modern" / "premodern" but rather in relation to widespread trends in penal practice and state power across time and space.

DISSENT, DECOLONIZATION, AND ABOLITION ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT

On the night of December 30, 1977, Kenyan writer and scholar Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o was arrested by members of the Special Branch at his home in Nairobi. He spent nearly a year in Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, the same site that had, only two decades before, held many women imprisoned by the British as part of their counterinsurgency against the Kenya Land and Freedom Army.[53] This connection to the colonial past weighed heavily

on Ngũgĩ, as reflected in an argument he had with a guard about whether his imprisonment was like that of Jomo Kenyatta. "His case was different," the guard insisted. "His was a colonial affair. . . . Now we are independent." Ngũgĩ responded, "A colonial affair in an independent country, eh? The British jailed an innocent Kenyatta. Thus Kenyatta learned to jail innocent Kenyans."[54] Ngũgĩ recounted this argument in his memoir *Wrestling with the Devil,* which he dedicated to "all writers in prison" and to "a world without prisons and detention camps." His work speaks to the long-standing connections between struggles for decolonization, liberation, and abolition on the African continent.

The same year that Ngũgĩ was released from prison, a group of African government officials, academics, and prison administrators met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to prepare for the upcoming United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders, which had first been held in 1955. At this meeting, African delegates were meant to think through what a "regionally-specific" approach to punishment might look like. The "de-institutionalization of corrections" was one of the key agenda items, and it provided the delegates with a space to discuss the past and future of prisons and other penal institutions on the continent. In the meeting report, the delegates insisted that this issue had to be considered in the "context of African history." "Prisons," the report read,

> had been alien to the cultural tradition of most African nations and had been introduced by colonial Powers. Prisons were repressive institutions. However, in many parts of Africa they came to be seen as unavoidable evils, a view which persisted today in various quarters, even though the former colonial powers were now embarked upon a vigorous programme of de-institutionalizing the penal system. The traditional African method of responding to wrong-doing had included community control and social reintegration, coupled with restitution, concepts which were now being accepted by modern correctional theory and practice. Because of the repressive nature of prisons, a number of African countries, upon achieving independence, decided to abolish this form of punishment. Yet no nation had wholly succeeded in doing so. . . . Inhumane prisons were, perhaps, the last vestige of suppression imported by colonial Powers, and Africa has to free itself from this vestige and find its own answers to its problems.[55]

Closing this section of the report a few pages later, the delegates concluded, "The entire range of human imagination had to be mustered in the search

for alternatives to imprisonment, although, to be realistic, the ultimate disappearance of prisons was not in sight."[56]

The Addis Ababa meeting speaks to the presence, possibilities, and challenges of prison abolition on the African continent. African contributions to these struggles have recently become visible on a global stage through the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria, which, although focused on the elimination of the notorious Special Anti-Robbery Squad, has been linked to calls for prison abolition.[57] With a few exceptions, however, such as Viviane Saleh-Hanna's work on Nigeria or Sohela Surajpal's dissertation, this topic has not been closely studied.[58] As Julia Chinyere Oparah argues, many scholars in the Global North—especially in the North American context—have "defined the concerns, priorities, and goals of prison studies and anti-prison activism with no regard for the experiences of scholars and activists in the Global South."[59] As contemporary calls for abolition grow across the globe, solidarity across continents will be of vital importance.

There is much to be learned by foregrounding how Africans have connected critiques of the prison with struggles for decolonization and liberation. Along with structural and ideological continuities mentioned earlier, colonialism also permeated postcolonial punishment as a critical framing device, with Africans using comparisons to colonial rule to condemn state violence and neocolonialism. The repression of FRELIMO's government in socialist Mozambique, for example, was seen by many as a "return to the 'old regime'" of colonial rule, while political prisoners in Zimbabwe emphasized the "moral blameworthiness" of the independent state.[60] As Zimbabwean political prisoner Paul Themba Nyathi asked, "How can people who set up elaborate structures to free people from the humiliation, the racism of minority rule subject their people to such cruelty?"[61] For many Africans, therefore, recourse or resemblance to colonial punitive tactics was seen as the ultimate betrayal of the goals of liberation struggles.

Similar critiques arose from Ugandans. This book argues that incarceration was not only indispensable to the Ugandan state's management of dissent but also a focal point *of* dissent. Ugandans continuously contested the state's use of punitive confinement, making broader arguments about the limits of freedom and decolonization in the process. This includes Abu Mayanja, a lawyer and minister who regularly challenged the Obote government's use of detention without trial in the late 1960s. "Far from wanting to change the outmoded Colonial laws," he wrote in an article that would lead to his own detention, "the Government of Uganda seems to be quite happy in retaining them and utilising them, especially those laws designed by the Colonial regime to suppress freedom of association and expression."[62]

For Mayanja and many other Ugandans, incarceration became a key arena for critiquing and challenging the coloniality of the Ugandan state. The majority of Ugandans discussed in this book were not calling for the prison's abolition, and, in some cases, their critiques actually reinforced the liberal legal order in which prisons have been able to thrive. This, however, does not undermine the fact that those inside and outside prisons raised important questions about the coloniality of confinement, its use in ongoing state violence, and the limits it placed on freedom. As societies around the world today grapple more than ever with questions about the prison's future—and very existence—such histories offer inspiration and instruction for contemporary struggles for change.

HISTORICIZING THE POSTCOLONIAL STATE IN UGANDA

Along with drawing upon critical histories of carceral systems from around the globe, this book is also in conversation with scholarship on Uganda's postcolonial history. For many years, there was very little academic inquiry into or public reckoning with the period between independence and the beginning of Museveni's presidency. Museveni actively promoted this erasure: when discussing his predecessors during his inaugural address in 1986, he urged Ugandans to "sweep that garbage where it belongs, onto the dung heap of history."[63] Increasingly, many Ugandans are doing the opposite, especially as they reckon with the entrenchment of Museveni's power and many of his repressive policies, which are now being read in relation to previous postcolonial governments. Much of this recent engagement has been focused on Idi Amin's military dictatorship.[64] Interest in Amin, however, is by no means new, both within Uganda and more globally. During his dictatorship and in its initial aftermath, much was written about Amin, mostly by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), journalists, and Ugandans in exile.[65] While this material offers some useful empirical evidence, it is notable for its sensationalism rather than substance, filled with graphic descriptions of torture and other forms of violence, as well as rumors about Amin's alleged cannibalistic practices. These accounts also focus overwhelmingly on Amin's personality. As Richard Reid argues, in much of the early writing on the 1970s, "Uganda was Amin, Amin was Uganda, and he dominated observers' line of vision absolutely."[66] In contrast, more recent reckonings with the 1970s have shifted the focus to the Amin state and how it was experienced.[67] This has occurred through scholarly inquiries; through sites of public memory such as the "The Unseen Archive of Amin," which first opened in 2019 at the Uganda Museum before touring across the country; and through recollections shared by Ugandans in the media, in memoirs, and in other spaces.

While this intensified interest in the Amin years is welcome, it has not been replicated in the study of Obote's time in office, which normally serves as a backdrop to the 1970s. Obote served as Uganda's second prime minster and, in 1966, seized executive power through suspending the constitution, arresting political opponents, and organizing a violent attack led by Idi Amin on Mengo Palace, which was the site of government for Kabaka Edward Mutesa, the ruler of Buganda and Uganda's first president. Following Amin's overthrow in April of 1979 through a war with Tanzania, after which there were a few short-lived regimes, Obote returned to power in a disputed election in December of 1980. His second presidency, known as the "Obote II" period, lasted until 1985, when he was overthrown yet again through a military coup, this time led by Tito Okello Lutwa, who was then quickly replaced by Museveni in 1986.

Rather than focusing on a particular postcolonial government, this book looks at multiple regimes in relation to each other.[68] This decenters the historiography from its Amin-centered bias, while also foregrounding longer-term processes that shaped the postcolonial state, thus making visible both the continuities across regimes and unique contextual political dynamics. By putting the colonial period in conversation with the 1960s–80s, this book demonstrates the recursive nature of state punishment. Each successive government mobilized the past in a paradoxical manner, borrowing directly from the repertoires of their predecessors, while also symbolically seeking to demonstrate their distance from past punitive practices. As has so often been the case throughout history, therefore, punishment was mobilized in a linear manner, used to mark progress and map distance between one regime to the next. Yet, despite performing this politics of rupture, Uganda's leaders also drew directly from tactics of their predecessors, incorporating and adapting previous laws, organizational structures, and spaces of confinement for their own purposes. For example, while Obote primarily held detainees in government prison sites during his first presidency, he began using "safe houses" more systematically in the 1980s, following the precedent set by Amin. Throughout the period under study, Uganda's postcolonial regimes used incarceration to enforce a mode of politics in which debate, dissent, and mass mobilization were brutally punished and paths to power were exclusive and violent.

There were also, however, specific events, agendas, and wider global dynamics that shaped each regime's approach to punishment. The Obote I years, which are explored in depth in chapter 4, were impacted by the factions within his own party (the Uganda People's Congress) and tensions with Buganda Kingdom and the Democratic Party, as well as his statist economic policy. Many of his penal policies fit in with those adopted by others

in Africa's first generation of postcolonial leaders, particularly the legislation surrounding detention without trial. Punishment during the Amin regime, which is analyzed in chapter 5, was shaped by his military background, expulsion of the South Asian population, the regime's "economic war," and the Uganda-Tanzania War, while the civil war of the early 1980s profoundly influenced policies during the Obote II years, which is assessed in chapter 6. These are just some of the many internal and external dynamics that had an impact on postcolonial Uganda's carceral system.

STUDYING THE POSTCOLONIAL STATE: METHODS AND SOURCES

Prisons are spaces of secrets and silences, operating "outside of public view."[69] This is even more true for other spaces of confinement, such as detention sites. Research on institutions of confinement, both past and present, is shaped by this reality. Despite UPS's "open door" policy—which was initiated in 2006 following a period of human rights reform—much of the history of confinement in Uganda remains unknown.[70] Existing accounts have either focused on the detention of the Amin years or more recent efforts at reform during Museveni's presidency.[71] Such inquiries have often reinforced the dominant image of the prison in Africa: a space of violence in desperate need of reform. This book adopts a different approach, moving away from reformist prescriptions or sensationalized stories of brutality to instead focus on how incarceration was conceptualized, enacted, experienced, and contested in postcolonial Uganda.

Carceral Afterlives engages with a range of sources, including official archives, oral histories, personal collections, media sources, gray literature, memoirs, and visual sources. These were found through research in Uganda, the United Kingdom, and South Africa, as well as multiple digital collections. Like any historical work, this book grapples with the power structures that shape which narratives are made accessible about the past and which are silenced. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues, there are multiple ways in which silences are (re)produced: the making of sources, the creation of archives, the moment of fact retrieval, and the assembling of histories.[72] All of these are present in history-making processes in and about Uganda. This is glaringly obvious in relation to "Operation Legacy," the British imperial effort to remove any sensitive material from their colonies prior to independence.[73] This process began in Uganda in 1961 before spreading across the empire.[74] In the aftermath of colonialism, silences took hold in the archives in both violent and mundane ways, such as the burning of the *lukiiko* archives by Obote's government in the 1960s or impacts of austerity on archival spaces, which has led to decay through insects, mold, flooding, and other natural

causes.[75] Such silences also extend beyond archives. Many Ugandans who experienced the 1960s–80s are no longer alive to tell their stories on account of the war and state repression of these decades and the consequences of the structural violence that have led to a relatively low life expectancy in Uganda. Consequently, many of the sources that are the most accessible and the best preserved are generated by institutions and individuals in the Global North, reflecting asymmetries of knowledge production that are themselves tied to colonialism.

Archival sources provide the foundation for this book, reflecting the prison's entanglement in the bureaucratic apparatus of the state. These two colonial-era institutions are profoundly intertwined beyond their shared purpose of surveillance. Prison archives serve both a bureaucratic and performative purpose, creating a traceable identity that can be transmitted across time and space. The annual reports, personnel files, photographs, rule books, and other archival remnants are meant to signal the professionalism of the institution to both an internal and external audience, playing a crucial role in certifying its legitimacy. Such representations were reinforced by the official media of this period, which provided the government with an important arena in which to spread messages about the prison's role in nation building and social order. In contrast, there is almost no archival trace of other spaces of punitive confinement.

Archival sources, themselves the product of colonial bureaucracies and epistemologies, pose many challenges. In *Snakepit,* a novel about Amin's military rule, Moses Isegawa evokes the erasures and haunting that permeate archives, as well as the ways they produce banality. "It was the Western way: tragedy erased and carted away into library files where it lost bite," he writes, "later coming off the page like a shadow, bland in its weightlessness, almost a figment of the chronicler's imagination."[76] As Isegawa powerfully argues, archives are official renderings of complex experiences, cataloging violence and its effects in ways that are legible to the state. Furthermore, much of the official material is exaggerated and performative. As Peterson and Taylor write, the archives of the Amin regime were filled with "exhortatory propaganda, inflated statistics, self-regarding reportage and other fictions."[77] Read critically, such material can open a window into a regime's efforts to craft a specific image. It is also important, however, not to bypass the more mundane material that offers insight into the quotidian dimensions of government bureaucracy. By reading these documents along the archival grain as well as against it, we can peer at the pathways of power and the bureaucratic logic of the postcolonial state, teasing out both the exhortations and everyday rhythms.[78]

This book is also shaped by the fact that certain groups of people who were incarcerated are more visible in the archive than others. *Carceral Afterlives* looks at two legal categories of people who were held in sites of punitive confinement: detainees, or those who were detained without trial in government prisons, "safe houses," or camps; and prisoners, or those who were sentenced through a trial process and held in government prisons. Within the historical records, more information is available about the individual experiences of detainees, especially high-profile people who were labeled as "political prisoners," such as government ministers and opposition politicians. Memoirs are particularly important in this regard, as they provide insight into the "socialities and intimacies forged within worlds of capture," as well as pushing back against the state's goal of the disappearance and erasure of those held in carceral sites.[79] Not all detainees' experiences are well known, however, as only those with a certain level of political, economic, or social power received media coverage or benefited from wider advocacy efforts. Those categorized as convicted or "criminal" prisoners—who are often the most stigmatized group of incarcerated people—are much less visible in the source materials, with statistics standing in for individual stories.[80] This book seeks to push back against these erasures in the archive by drawing on accounts of protests within prisons, complaints written by those inside, insights provided by detainees who shared spaces with convicted prisoners, as well as reading against the grain of official materials. It is important to remember, however, the limits of these sources. As Kirsten Weld argues, "One must not confuse the rich life of a person with its thin archival record—its paper cadaver."[81] This is especially important when studying the lives of incarcerated individuals, whom the state sought to narrowly define as "criminal" and "deviant."

Additionally, there is the challenge of providing social history insights while also protecting individual privacy. This is particularly relevant for the personnel files within UPS, which provide intimate insights into the lives of prison staff and, occasionally, those they guarded. The information within them has been included in a way that focuses on wider experiences rather than telling the stories of individuals who may not want difficult details of their lives shared.[82] This approach recognizes that archives are repositories of human experiences that should be treated with a similar ethic of care and consideration as oral histories.[83]

Within this book, oral histories—like archives—are treated as a form of active engagement with the past rather than a neutral recounting of experiences. As Katie Kilroy-Marc argues, "remembrance marks the transience and dynamism of the performative act of remembering, stressing how the

conscious and active invocation of the past happens *in* and *through* the present."[84] Interviews conducted in this book were not seen as ways to fill archival gaps but instead to show how individual Ugandans—including people who were imprisoned or detained, current and former prison officers, military personnel, police officers, government officials, and the families of these individuals—chose to represent their past.[85] The interviews were deliberately conducted with the relational aspect of remembering in mind, often carried out in family homes, in tandem with loved ones, and, when possible, over a series of meetings. The stories generously shared in these interviews provide a valuable window into Ugandans' experiences with and perceptions of the prison and other sites of confinement in the postcolonial period. Due to the sensitivity of this material, pseudonyms have been used for interviewees, except for a few individuals who have written or spoken publicly about their experiences.

Finally, the archival and oral materials were analyzed in relation to a range of media sources, memoirs, and gray literature. The stories in the *Uganda Argus,* the *Voice of Uganda,* and the *Uganda Times*—the official newspapers in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s respectively—provide a record of the government's self-representation to a national audience. More critical media sources, such as *Munnansi* and *Drum* magazine, offered counternarratives as well as accounts of state-sponsored violence. Gray literature plays a similar role, with the testimonies of the Commission of Inquiry into Violations of Human Rights and the reports of NGOs such as Amnesty International providing details on government abuses. While these help us to track the nature and scale of violence during these periods, they also support the "'damage-centered' research" trend that has been so pervasive when writing about colonialism and its effects, and thus they need to be used alongside other accounts.[86] Narratives of state violence were also found in memoirs of former detainees, which have proliferated in recent years. Together, these sources provide insight into how Uganda's carceral system endured and was contested after independence.