

Long before the arrival of colonial powers in Central and East Africa, a kingdom was established in what is now southern Uganda, eastern Congo and Rwanda. At various times, it expanded and contracted, but its internal organisation remained relatively stable over time and consisted of a complex system of government, in which the king, his mother (and her uncles) and specialised advisors, not all of whom were appointed by the king (some could not be dismissed by him), shared power and formed a kind of constitution based on oral tradition. Based on oral accounts (which were written down by missionaries, historians and ethnographers), unpublished oral history research from the 1980s and small oral history projects currently underway, this project analyses how contemporary people, from the 19th century to the present day, have represented, interpreted and constructed the Abanyiginya system of government in accordance with their social and political agenda. It also examines counter-narratives that emerged in the 19th century that challenged the system of power and grassroots, cross-border and trans-ethnic resistance movements against this system of government. Contemporary conflicts in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo have their roots in the above-mentioned events. Therefore, the project also contributes to a better understanding of what is happening there today.