

DISCUSSION PAPER 17

Juma Okuku

Ethnicity, State Power and
the Democratisation Process
in Uganda

Indexing terms

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*The opinions expressed in this volume are those of the author
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Contents

Introduction	7
Ethnicity and Democratisation: A Theoretical Overview	8
Explaining ethnicity	8
Democratisation	9
Ethnicity Construction in Uganda: Historical Perspectives	10
Colonial intervention and the making of ethnicity	11
Post-colonial practices and the reproduction of ethnicity	15
The assumptions of the nation-state project and ethnicity	15
The suppression of political opposition and civil society	16
Ethnicity, militarism and the rise of an ethnically organised state	18
Bureaucratic reforms and enhancement of ethnicity	18
Militarism and enhancement of ethnicity in the 1960s	19
The period of military dictatorship, 1971–79	20
1980 elections, ethnicity militarism and civil war, 1981–85	22
The NRM, ‘no party’ democracy and the question of power	23
The broad-base, legitimacy and power	25
NRM politics, constitutionalism and the consolidation of power	27
Constituency Assembly (CA) elections, debates and suppression of the opposition	28
“No-party” democracy, ethnicity and regionalism	31
Civil war, militarism and enhancement of ethnicity	33
The International Community and the Democratisation Process in Uganda	37
Conclusion	39

Glossary

CA	Constituency Assembly
CAA	Civil Aviation Authority
CADS	Constituency Assembly delegates
CP	Conservative Party
DP	Democratic Party
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
GSU	General Service Unit
Kabaka	King of Buganda kingdom
KY	<i>Kabaka Yekka</i> (King Only/Alone)
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MCs	Movement Councils
NRA	National Resistance Army
NRC	National Resistance Council (NRM's Interim Parliament)
NRM	National Resistance Movement
PPU	Presidential Protection Unit
PSC	Public Service Commission
PU	Privatisation Unit
RCs	Resistance Councils
SPLA	Sudanese People's Liberation Army
Ssabataka	Chief of Buganda Clan Heads
UA	Uganda Army
UFA	Uganda Freedom Army
UFM	Uganda Freedom Movement
UIA	Uganda Investment Authority
UNC	Uganda National Congress
UNLA	Uganda National Liberation Army
UNLF	Uganda National Liberation Front
UPC	Uganda Peoples' Congress
UPC/KY	Uganda Peoples' Congress/ <i>Kabaka Yekka</i> (King Only) Alliance
UPDA	Uganda Peoples' Democratic Army
UPDF	Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces
UPDM	Uganda Peoples' Democratic Movement
UPM	Uganda Patriotic Movement
UPU	Uganda Peoples' Union
URA	Uganda Revenue Authority

Museveni's claim that the opposition in Africa tends to be ethnic, and therefore by implication illegitimate, explains little, for where the opposition is ethnic it is more likely that the government is no less ethnic. It also ignores the fact that a legal ban on organising an opposition does not remove it, it simply tends to drive the opposition underground.
(Mamdani, 1998:31)

Museveni held talks with the clergy before the March 12 Presidential elections and agreed to be succeeded by a Muganda Catholic.
(*The Monitor*, 20 June 2001)

INTRODUCTION

One of the post-independence political concerns in Uganda today is that ethnicity has been detrimental to national unity, democracy and development. There is no doubt that the conflicts in Uganda from 1964 to 1966 when the Prime Minister, Milton Obote, overthrew the President, Edward Mutesa, have taken on an ethnic expression. The 1971 coup by Idi Amin, the civil war of 1981–86 and the insurgency in the North since 1987 have all had ethnicity as one of the driving factors. The central problem was and has been the politicisation of ethnicity, that is, its use for purposes of group mobilisation in social conflict that also involves the state. However, ethnicity cannot be taken as a given. The problem was (is) not of ethnicity in itself. Ethnicity was (is) more intimately linked to political and economic conditions, that is, the unequal distribution of and competition for power and wealth.

The nature and role of the state, regime survival and political leadership account for the impact of ethnic consciousness on democratisation or authoritarianism. The issue is to explore the origins of ethnic consciousness, explain its causes and the mechanisms through which it can be managed. We contend that uncontrolled ethnic consciousness is not inevitable and the answer to the problems of democracy and ethnicity is not to redraw the map of Uganda or delay the democratisation process by instituting so-called no-party democracy. Ethnicity in Uganda, as elsewhere on the African continent, has been historically constructed and subsequently reproduced. While democratisation may be problematic in the face of ethnic consciousness, the paradox is that the best way to reduce ethnic consciousness is more and not less democratisation.

This paper critically reviews the impact of ethnicity on the democratisation process in Uganda from colonialism to the present. The paper is divided into four parts. Part one is a theoretical overview of the issues of ethnicity and democratisation. Part two examines the nature of ethnicity construction and expression in the colonial period. Part three looks at the post-colonial political practices and their enhancement of ethnicity in Uganda. Part four discusses the possibility of deconstruction of ethnicity through democratisation and the 'no-party'-'movement' system. In conclusion, the contention is that there is a need to understand the substantive underlying political, economic and social configurations that enhance ethnicity rather than denouncing them.

ETHNICITY AND DEMOCRATISATION: A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

The relationship between ethnicity and democratisation remains contentious in democratic theory. This theoretical overview is intended to provide a framework from which to explore and explain the paradox of ethnicity and democratisation in Ugandan politics. Ethnicity has exercised profound influence on Uganda's politics from colonialism to the present. However, there has been little theorisation of its bases and how it can be transcended. What exactly then is ethnicity?

Explaining Ethnicity

Ethnicity has been variously conceptualised as a sense of ethnic identity consisting of the subjective, symbolic or emblematic use by a group of people of any aspect of culture in order to create internal cohesion and differentiate themselves from other groups (Brink, 1991:8). In the contemporary debate on ethnicity, consensus has emerged on two of its key features. One concerns the *formation* of ethnic identities and the other the *function* ethnicity performs in the contemporary setting. It has been argued that ethnic identities are social constructs defined by the historical conditions in which they emerge. The first feature, *formation*, postulates that ethnic identity is based on ethnic groups which can be referred to as a historically formed aggregate of people having a real or imaginary association, a specified territory, shared cluster of beliefs and values connoting its distinctiveness in relation to similar groups and recognised as such by others (Markakis, 1996:4).

The primordial conception of ethnic identity formation is the essentialist view of ethnicity in which ethnic groups are taken as givens. Ethnicity is viewed as an archaic reality underlying modernity. This static perspective has been predominant in social science as in the concept of plural society. It is the basis of a fundamentally pessimistic view of multi-ethnic societies. It ignores how 'tribes' themselves have usually been modern constructions through the intervention of colonialism, which froze the play of identities (Nederveen, 1996:2). There is also the notion of the constructed or the 'invented' nature of ethnicity or ethnicity as an 'imagined' community, as politics

(Ranger, 1983; Anderson, 1991). The question that arises then, is what is the logic governing the process of construction or invention and what are the political consequences of this view? While this view takes distance from the essentialising claims of identity politics, its limitation is that it underrates or ignores the role of cultural meanings and symbolic resources, as if these could be flattened to straightforward economic or political choices. As Nederveen contends, ethnicity is an inherently unstable category. As a constructed or imagined community, like the nation, its logic is that of imagination and imagination is a social practice. It is a plural and contested category, shifting in between the narrow comforts of *enclosure* ethnicity and the contradictory pressures of *competition* ethnicity. The objective traits of a group that can form the basis of ethnic identification range widely and vary according to circumstances. Why and how ethnicity is instrumentalised politically is conditioned by prevailing historical circumstances.

The second key feature of ethnicity is its *function* in contemporary settings. The objective of ethnicity is in most cases to obtain and use state power, in order to gain access to resources commanded by the state or defend ethnic identities from state intrusions. Because the pattern of resource distribution in both colonial and the post-colonial state is iniquitous, ethnicity has proved to be an effective means of political mobilisation for those who seek access to state power in order to change the pattern of resource distribution. Ethnicity, therefore, is a continuation of the dialectics of domination and emancipation. Ethnic mobilisation can be limited through the just exercise of state power by those in power. Ethnicity as such is not a permanent phenomenon. Since ethnicity is a construction, it is amenable to deconstruction. As Smith (1992) observes, if ethnicity is constructed and reconstructed by articulatory practices growing out of contemporary conditions and power relations among social groups and the interpretative meaning given to them rather than out of some timeless or primordial dimension of human existence, then the creative leadership by political and cultural elites and public intellectuals, as well as everyday interventions of ordinary people into the flow of racial and ethnic discourse do matter in the elimination of a feeling of exclusion. Democratisation—ensuring the expansion of social and political space, the building of democratic institutions for peaceful transition and the tolerance of alternative political views—is fundamental in this process.

Democratisation

Democratisation can be defined as the change of a non-democratic state into a democratic one. Mehra (1993) contends that a non-democratic society is not likely to have a democratic government. In the context of society, democratisation refers to the transformation in its political culture, from passive, non-participative citizens becoming active and not only insisting that the state be alive to their aspirations, but also keeping a check on state power and providing constructive direction to its policies through regular and active participation in the political and developmental process. The democratisation process involves the introduction of universal suffrage

and genuine political competition with free and fair elections to decide who will take power constitutionally (Robinson and Healy, 1992). But democratisation and good governance involves more than these. It is much more than simply the pluralisation of politics and acceptance of political competition that constitutes democratisation. The core aspects are legitimacy in the exercise of power, construction of solidarity reciprocities, development of trust in state-society relations and institutionalisation of accountability (Young and Kante, 1992:58–58).

Democracy is said to be problematic in ethnically plural societies. While this may be true under certain circumstances, the solution to the problem of ethnicity is not to suppress ethnic identities and consciousness. Ethnic configurations, the generation of ethnic consciousness and the impetus of ethnic protest, must all be understood in the context of the changing relationships between the state and civil society—that domain between the state and society—from which they derive significance and orientation (Doornbos, 1998:21). While the democratisation process is bound to be problematic in the face of ethnic tension, the paradox is that the best way to manage ethnicity is more and not less democratisation as a tool of its deconstruction. Ethnic identities become amenable to political manipulation either when suppressed groups feel marginalised from the political and economic processes or when privileged groups feel their interests threatened. The solution to this is the expansion of social and political space, not its constriction, and the recognition of the civil and political rights of every member of society. More broadly, as Magubane (1969:541) observes, ethnic consciousness and expression in terms of conflict or cleavages must be derived from social structure and not relegated to psychological variables (tribalism) or to innate hatreds between ethnic and racial groups. Ethnicity has a social history. It is made through historical, political, economic and social processes. It is therefore through these very processes that ethnicity may be deconstructed. Democratisation, broadly conceived, appears to be an indispensable element in this transaction.

ETHNICITY CONSTRUCTION IN UGANDA: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

The genesis of the ethnic crisis in Uganda, as in most parts of Africa, is mainly linked to the colonial intervention process and the particular organisation of power in society. The post-colonial practices simply enhanced it. Therefore, the formation of ethnic identities is a social construction defined by the historical conditions in which they emerge. Ethnicity is not a constant. Over Uganda's history, ethnicity has been continually redefined as the context has changed. The objective of this part of the paper is to present a historical examination of the colonial and post-colonial practices which created and sustain the ethnic phenomenon in Uganda's socio-political set up. Mamdani (1996:185) contends that to understand the phenomenon of what is referred to as 'tribalism', it is necessary to look at it within a social context. This is why, rather than conceiving of an ethnic identity as simply 'invented' by statecraft,

as in Ranger (1983) or as 'imagined' by intellectuals, as in Anderson (1991), it would make sense to speak of the making of an ethnicity. Ethnicity is made through political, economic and social processes. It is these processes that we examine here.

Colonial Intervention and the Making of Ethnicity

The problem of ethnicity and political power in Uganda has been superficially explained in a one-sided manner as mainly an outcome of the first 25 years of independence and the pre-industrial nature of Ugandan society (Museveni, 1997:187). Mazrui (1975) advances another view, which attributes ethnic mobilisation to tribalism in Uganda. Perhaps a more negative trend is one that attributes continued ethnicity in the country to the personalities of those who governed after independence (Karugire, 1988:4). It is historically partial, both theoretically and empirically narrow, to conceptualise the problem of ethnicity and political power in Uganda in this manner. It is important to trace the social history of ethnicity and power, particularly from the colonial practices, in order to interpret the current situation intelligently.

The historical conditions under which ethnicity was constructed in Uganda were buttressed by the establishment of British colonial administration towards the end of the 19th century. In the 68 years of colonial rule, Britain systematically cultivated and firmly established an intricate system of domination in all spheres of Ugandan society. Politically, the origins of ethnicity and the obstacles it poses to the democratisation process can be located in colonial politics. At the same time, ethnicity was a form of anti-colonialism. The cultivation of ethnic intricacies by colonialism can be analysed at several levels: the drawing of colonial boundaries, the organisation of power within the colony, the political and economic dominance of Buganda, the underdevelopment of civil society and finally, ethnicity and the anti-colonial movement.

First, the single most important element that entrenched ethnicity in the body politic of Uganda was the arbitrary colonial act of boundaries. Driven by an overwhelming economic logic, British colonialism brought within the fold of one country peoples at different levels of social development and split nationalities into or among several countries (Mukherjee, 1985). One important colonial legacy is that Uganda is made up of societies that in the past were either antagonistic to each other or were not necessarily themselves part and parcel of a similar culture or society. The pre-colonial antagonism exploited by the forces of British colonialism to ease their military-political conquest fed into the pattern of 'collaboration' and 'resistance' to colonialism that kept ethnic consciousness alive. The north-south divide in Uganda today is one of the most enduring legacies of this colonial act. It must be noted, however, that the incorporation of different ethnic groups under the same rule does not in itself lead to antagonism based on ethnicity. It was the way power was organised in the colony that further enhanced it.

Second, the form through which power was organised in the colony underpinned the process of construction of ethnicity (Mamdani, 1999b:192). With the objective of divide and rule, colonial political structures encouraged polarisation of ethnic

identities rather than trans-ethnic alignments and crosscutting cleavages. Instead, colonial power within the territory had ethnicity as the fulcrum as the British sought to use it as an instrument of divide and rule. This generated the basis of long-term ethnic consciousness. As Mamdani (1983:10) observes:

Every institution touched by the hand of the colonial state was given a pronounced regional or nationality character. It became a truism that a soldier must be a northerner, a civil servant a southerner and a merchant an Asian.

The implication of this institutional 'division of labour', and the organisation of power, could only be realised during the post-colonial period with attempts to reform the state. The assignment of the north, for instance, as a source of soldiers and policemen had negative implications for stability as the ruling elite during the immediate post-colonial period, who were from the north, used this military predominance to acquire and retain power undemocratically. The differentiation amongst the colonised subjects inevitably led to the crystallisation of ethnic, religious and racial consciousness. This is because the emergence of ethnic consciousness is a matter of demonstrating how people come to identify themselves as different from others and how a community of identity and interest emerges, manifesting itself in the interaction with other groups (Hansen, 1974:29).

The religious dimension led to the creation of another cleavage. The Catholic Church lost the battle for political power to the Anglican Church in the 1890s. In terms of political power, therefore, the Anglican Church came to identify itself as the church of the establishment. The centrality of the Catholic Church in the formation of the opposition Democratic Party, DP, in the mid-1950s only exacerbated the polarisation as religion became a factor in the formation of subsequent political parties.

Third, no colonial act was more catalytic in the whole process of ethnic consciousness than the special treatment of Buganda in the whole scheme of things, politically, economically and socially. At the time of colonial conquest, Baganda officers were used to colonise the Bunyoro Kingdom, the north and the eastern parts of the country. In these areas they were appointed as chiefs. This colonial policy created a political complication that still haunts Uganda today. To the other colonised ethnic groups Baganda chiefs and not the British colonialists, were seen as the enemy. While the political system in Uganda was a pyramid of power that was effectively based on race, Buganda came to occupy a special status amongst the colonised. As a result, Buganda came to conceive itself differently as it was treated differently. This ethnic superiority complex came to the fore in the move towards independence. This special treatment became an obstacle in the 1940s and 1950s with increasing demand for democratisation (Oloka-Onyango, 1997:174-75). To protect the interests of the chiefly elements, the Buganda kingdom adopted a variety of tactics, from opposing direct elections to the national assembly in Buganda, to the eventual establishment of a political party, *Kabaka Yekka*, (King Only), directed solely at the preservation of the *Kabaka* (king).

In economic terms, Uganda was turned into a reservoir of raw materials (cotton, coffee and tea) for British industry. Building upon pre-colonial differences, Britain turned the southern part (Buganda, Busoga and Ankole) into cash crop growing areas. But cash crop production was discouraged in northern areas. Their production was based on both peasant and migrant labour mainly drawn from the North, West Nile, Kigezi and Rwanda. In the North, principally Acholi and Lango, the colonialists recruited soldiers, policemen as well as labourers for factories and plantations in the South (Mamdani, 1983:10). The result of this 'division of labour' was the building of ethnic cleavages that would entrench ethnic consciousness in the long run. Therefore, through divide and rule tactics, one region was pitted against another and one nationality (tribe) against another.

Socially, most of the social infrastructure such as schools and hospitals was concentrated in Buganda. The distribution of schools in Uganda was unfair. For instance, in the 1920s there were 368 schools in Buganda, 44 in Western Province and 42 in Eastern Province and none at all in northern Uganda (Kabwegyere, 1974:179). This was a conscious colonial government policy of making northern areas reserves of cheap unskilled labour for the plantations, the army, police and prisons. Such a social policy could only but deepen ethnic and regional cleavages.

Fourth, colonialism by definition is anti-democratic. The political and economic exclusion of the colonised simply enhanced regional, religious and ethnic consciousness. For the subjects, there were no rights of association, freedom of speech, press or assembly as the natives were excluded economically from trade and manufacturing for most of the colonial period. The late 1940s and 1950s saw a number of political and economic reforms as a result of the anti-colonial movement. Reforms allowed for enhanced rights of association, permitted the formation of co-operatives and trade unions and witnessed the removal of some racial restrictions on trade and employment. It was also the eve of the establishment of political parties (Oloka-Onyango, 1997:174). The problem with the reforms and the political organisations that emerged was that they did not transcend the intricacies of the colonial political economy, particularly ethnicity and regionalism.

The first political party, Uganda National Congress, UNC, was predominantly Protestant and Buganda based. Throughout the period of its existence, UNC remained a party of local grievances and never formulated a national manifesto beyond the slogan of 'Self Government Now'. Formed in 1956 to advance the interests of Catholics in the administration of Buganda Kingdom, the Democratic Party, DP, was overwhelmingly Catholic in membership and leadership. Uganda Peoples' Union, UPU, founded in 1958, and was the forerunner of Uganda Peoples' Congress UPC, founded in 1960. This was an anti-Buganda party since it was formed primarily to oppose the concessions that Buganda was demanding from the colonial government (Karugire, 1988:37-42). The co-operative and trade union organisations, which transcend ethnicity and regionalism, were highly circumscribed by colonial legislation. While permitting the formation of trade unions, the colonial state did not favour the growth of a strong trade union movement. The Trade Union Ordinance of 1952

... made it illegal for anyone to organise general unions and required unions be set up for each industry. (It must be noted that while general unions enhance the solidarity of the working class and express its general interests against the class of employers, separate unions divide workers into separate organisations, making it possible for the employers to confront each union separately.) Furthermore, the colonial state also, by the same law empowered itself to police union funds, which were not to be used for political purpose. (Mamdani, 1983:17–18)

By the end of colonialism, civil society—that domain mediating between the state and society and one of the building blocks of a democratic society—was basically underdeveloped. Colonial state practices had obstructed the emergence of autonomous organisations and leadership determined to put, and capable of putting, the national interest above their individual and geo-ethnic group. It was only on this basis that the democratisation process could be advanced meaningfully. The combination of the above colonial practices led to the institutionalisation of ethnicity in the anti-colonial national movement. Due to the institutionalisation of ethnicity the initial, even the later, resistance to colonialism was fragmented along ethnic lines. The organisations that emerged were ethnically oriented as well. Even their demands were not for democratisation. They were limited to education and employment. As Mamdani observes:

Everywhere, the local apparatus of the colonial state was organised either ethnically or on a religious basis. This is why one finds it difficult to recall a single major peasant uprising over the colonial period that has not been either ethnic or religious in inspiration. This is so for a simple but basic reason: the anti-colonial struggle was first and foremost a struggle against the hierarchy of the local state, ethnically organised Native Authority that claimed an ethnic legitimacy. Indirect rule at once reinforced ethnically bound institutions of control and exploded them from within. (Mamdani 1999a:9)

What the colonial construction of power had done, in Shakespearean terms,¹ was not to instil civilisation amongst the natives but to concoct a toxic ethnic ‘witches brew’. While the nationalist movement externally espoused unity, internally it was fractured along ethnic and religious lines. The centrality of ethnicity in the political calculations of the nationalist movement precluded the restructuring of the colonial institutions that enhanced it. Instead, the colonial power structures and institutions were built on and became the basis of ethnic and anti-democratic practices in the post-colonial period.

The contribution of colonial practices in the construction of ethnicity should not be underestimated, as these colonial practices became a major obstacle to the realisation of the nation-state project. In general terms, however, although the very process of colonial state creation accounted, in part, for the rise of regionalism and ethnic consciousness, it also gave rise to a shared nationalist, multi-ethnic aspiration for self-determination and self-rule. Ethnicity is a continuation of the dialectics of domination and emancipation. This contradictory tendency of ethnicity led to the rise of the nation-state project by the time of independence.

¹ This is an allusion to the Shakespearean Three Witches in *Macbeth*, who were believed to possess magical powers. Here the reference is to the ethnically intricate system that the colonial state had constructed.

Post-Colonial Practices and the Reproduction of Ethnicity

The post-colonial practices of the mainstream nationalists, who inherited the national state, saw the reproduction rather than the deconstruction of ethnicity in Uganda's body-politic. To achieve a meaningful level of democratisation, colonial practices had to be transcended through a process of deconstruction of its bases. The major objective of any serious nation-state project should have been to dismantle and concurrently to rebuild institutions for deconstruction of ethnicity and regionalism in the country's development process. The reforms by the political leadership that inherited the central state apparatus were limited as far as the deconstruction of the political bases of ethnic consciousness, restructuring the economy to defuse the ethnic and regional material expression and the liberation of civil society, are concerned (Mamdani, 1996:288–291).

The basic argument of this part of the paper is that the post-colonial practices enhanced rather than deconstructed ethnic consciousness. The tackling of the national question was not organically tied to the question of democratisation. This is discussed at a number of levels: the assumptions of the nation-state project, militarism, the stifling of civil society and the resulting rise of an ethnically organised post-colonial state. These are themes that run through all the post-colonial regimes in Uganda.

The Assumptions of the Nation-State Project and Ethnicity

Uganda gained political independence in 1962 under a quasi-federal constitution, inheriting all the cleavages discussed above. The first government was a coalition between Milton Obote's Uganda Peoples Congress, UPC, and *Kabaka Yekka*, KY, (King Only), of *Kabaka Mutesa*. The post-independence government led by Milton Obote, 1962–71, had a number of assumptions. First, the task of nation-building called for uniting all the forces in society. To him, the diversity of ethnic identities was inherently negative and obstructive to successful nation-building and development. As Obote stated in 1963:

The tribe has served our people as a basic political unit very well in the past. But now the problem of people putting the tribe above national consciousness is a problem that we must face, and an issue we must destroy. (Hansen, 1974:63)

This set the stage for the clash between the UPC, a republican party and KY, an ethnic chauvinist and monarchist party devoted to the preservation of the special status of Buganda Kingdom in the post-colonial set up.

One explosive political problem the government handled constitutionally was the long-standing dispute between the Buganda and Bunyoro Kingdoms over the so-called 'lost counties'. These were counties that belonged to the Bunyoro Kingdom before the onset of colonialism but were given to the Buganda Kingdom as appreciation for its assistance in the conquest of the Bunyoro Kingdom by the British. The colonial government left it to the government of the newly independent state to settle this issue through a referendum. The referendum was held in 1964 as was required by the independence constitution. The population in the two counties voted

overwhelmingly for their return to the Bunyoro Kingdom. This democratic solution to the problem of ethnic conflict provoked instead ethnic antagonism between Buganda and Bunyoro on the one hand, and the central government and the Buganda Kingdom, on the other. The Buganda Kingdom was not content with the way the dispute was handled by the government of Milton Obote. This resulted in a strain between the Buganda Kingdom and the central government culminating in the break-up of the UPC/KY alliance formed at independence (Karugire, 1988:184). The ethnic conflict, militarism and authoritarianism that followed between 1964 and 1971 during the Obote I regime had this tension as one of its sources. The leadership on both spectrums of the 1964 wrangle was rather antagonistic and confrontational, a recipe that democratic practice is not made of.

The 1966 crisis, which resulted in the violent overthrow of the independence constitution, was a culmination of *three* political developments. First, the break up of the UPC/KY alliance, second, the leadership wrangle in UPC, using the Congo gold scandal² as an excuse to overthrow Obote. This resulted in Obote's detention of his own cabinet ministers for the plot and third, the unilateral suspension of the Independence Constitution in 1966. Using authoritarian methods in what was essentially a civil conflict that could have been handled politically compounded the problem. The long-term effect of this was to exacerbate ethnic mobilisation and destroy any chance of democratic solutions to such cleavages. Because the opposition to Obote came from mainly Bantu politicians, the crisis came to take on a North-South dimension.

While it is true that Obote was trying to break up the heaviest concentration of power in the land in order to safeguard his position and perhaps concentrate on the nation-building objective, instead of using democratic means, he did so through the use of ethnicity. The treatment of Buganda between 1966 and 71 lent little credibility to his declared intentions of reducing the significance of the ethnic factor in Uganda's politics. The Baganda were still regarded as so hostile and unreliable that the region was kept in a state of emergency throughout this period (Hansen, 1974:66–71). Suppressing the Kingdom of Buganda and the imprisonment of Southern politicians without trial simply politicised ethnicity in the country's body politic. Obote's partisan authoritarianism played a key part in keeping ethnic consciousness alive in the country waiting for an opportunity to re-assert itself.

The Suppression of Political Opposition and Civil Society

The second central assumption of the nation-state project was that only a one party state could carry out the tasks of nation building in a unitary set up. A major reason given by incumbent African leaders for the abandonment of political pluralism was the urgent necessity to rid Africa of cultural divisiveness, which western style multi-

² The Congo gold scandal refers to allegations by an opposition parliamentarian in 1965, that the Prime Minister, Milton Obote, his defence minister, Felix Onama and army commander, Idi Amin were involved in smuggling gold and ivory from eastern Congo. The Uganda army had been sent to aid the Lumumbist rebellion led by Mulele in eastern Congo in its military operations.

party politics seemed to be keeping alive and which appeared to sap political and developmental energies in a multi-ethnic environment. This was complemented by the imposition of the almost worshipful notions of the national father figure (Olukoshi and Laakso, 1996:14–15). Accordingly, the suppression of opposition parties, internal opposition within the ruling parties, the subordination of civil society organisations such as trade unions and co-operatives was part of this authoritarian enterprise. Such authoritarianism could not lead to nation-state building.

Uganda's post-independence experience has not been different from this general rule. The period 1964–66 saw the suppression of internal opposition within Milton Obote's own party, the UPC. After 1967, with the new constitution, Obote turned on all and sundry, culminating in 1969 with the banning of all opposition parties as 'dangerous societies' that would adversely affect 'peace and order in Uganda' (Oloka-Onyango, 1997:175). In the 1960s, as in the early 1980s, the UPC governments interfered greatly in the internal affairs of the trade unions and co-operative societies. The party manipulated elections so that the leadership that was not sympathetic to it was thrown out and a pro-UPC one brought in. This was achieved through intimidation and politically inhibiting elections (Barya, 1990; 1991 and Nyangabyaki, 1999).

These authoritarian practices could not resolve the intricate ethnic configurations in the country. The suppression of civil society organisations, which may have mediated the various pluralist interests in society, and worked as bases for political/democratic resolution of differences and ensuring some meaningful level of accountability on the part of the state, precluded peaceful transition. The assumption that it was the one party state that could accomplish the nation-state project was essentially wrong. In practice, the one party state in Uganda as was the case in Africa in general, suppressed alternative political organisations, relied on a 'father-of-the-nation', fused party institutions to those of the state and was generally undemocratic. Thus the one party state that resulted did not resolve the issue of ethnicity and democracy. It instead came to represent a thinly disguised monopoly of power by an elite drawn from a combination of ethnic and religious groups with the exclusion of others. Jibrin and Pereira (1993:13) make a general observation that: 'one party rule in general, is a major impetus for the promotion of ethnicity as it is a means of protection from the threat posed or perceived as posed to the given ethnic group by the party in power which is usually exclusive'. Far from getting rid of ethnicity, the one party state keeps it as one of its social bases to ensure dominance and monopoly of political power under the 'father figure', both within the party and the nation.

The centralisation of power which is characteristic of a one party state, with little respect for alternative political organisations and ethnic identities, is one of the factors in explaining the incidence of political conflicts and violence of the kind that has characterised political life in post-colonial Uganda. It could be argued that the persistence of the ethnic problem in Uganda is linked to the failure of democratic practice, not vice versa. Barongo (1989) and Mudoola (1993) attribute ethnicity to excessive centralisation of power and little respect for institutions in a multi-ethnic

political context. The exclusion of some sections of society from political participation and the struggle of elite members of ethnic groups to control the centre, heighten and intensify political conflicts. According to Kasfir (1976:22), de-participation is the most striking feature of African political change since independence.

The persistence of the ethnic problem in Uganda is linked to the failure of democracy. In a democratic regime, stability could be maintained by means of democratic practice and broad participation. In general terms, the struggle for access to power and economic resources by different ethnic groups and lack of full participation in the political, civil and economic lives of their countries, in most of Sub-Saharan Africa, result in ethnicity, that is the political mobilisation of ethnic identity in order to change the pattern of resource distribution. Perhaps, most far reaching was the introduction of the military in Uganda's politics and the restructuring of the bureaucracy along ethnic lines.

Ethnicity, Militarism and the Rise of an Ethnically Organised State

From colonialism through the post-colonial period in Uganda, one finds not a meritocratic state run along Weberian lines but an ethnically organised state. In spite of the various regimes' apparent aversion to ethnicity in Uganda, they have rested on distinctly ethnic political foundations and reproduced themselves on the basis of definable, and in most cases, narrow ethnic alliances. The ultimate result of authoritarianism, militarism and the stifling of civil society organisations was that it did not get rid of ethnicity and regionalism and construct a nation-state. Here, I discuss the re-organisation of two elements of the state: the bureaucracy and the military.

Bureaucratic Reforms and Enhancement of Ethnicity

The reforms by the political leadership who inherited the central state were limited as far as the deconstruction of political bases of ethnic consciousness is concerned. Important for any reform project should have been the restructuring of the bureaucracy on the basis of merit and technocracy. Instead, the inherited colonial bureaucracy was ethnicised. A politician and not a technocrat was appointed to head the newly established Public Service Commission, PSC, in 1963. A UPC politician from Obote's home district, Abdala-Anyuru, was appointed to be Chairman of the Commission (Karugire, 1988:59–61). This dealt a death-blow to meritocracy and insulation of the bureaucracy from political interference, a basic requirement for an autonomous and efficient bureaucracy. As Karugire notes:

... Soon, abuses piled up, unsuccessful UPC politicians were made district commissioners, relatives of ministers embezzled public funds with impunity, appointment and promotion on merit were ignored and 'undesirable' civil servants were subject to prompt and frequent transfers, often by telephone to hardship stations. (Karugire, 1988:60)

The local government 'reform' followed a similar trend. With the so-called native authorities, indirect rule came to be the principle form of colonial rule in most of

Uganda. Indirect rule was grounded less in racial than in ethnic structure. What was needed was to transform these structures which enhanced ethnic consciousness. As Mamdani observes:

After independence, however, there was a dramatic shift in the political focus of the nationalist leaderships, from local to the central state apparatus, from democratising local state apparatuses to a dual occupation: de-racialising civil society in the towns and restructuring unequal international relations. (Mamdani, 1999b:192)

The centre's increased power can be located at the level of the powers given to the minister of local government by the 1967 Local Administration Act. The 1987 Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Local Government System, observed that the act:

Gave the Minister extensive powers over local authorities. For instance... he has control inter alia over the number of members of council, election of senior officials of council, election of council members themselves and the bye-laws they may pass. The Act also empowers the minister to take over a Local Administration. (Uganda Government, 1987:9)

The local administrations instead of being agents of democratisation and destruction of ethnic basis in the bureaucracy, remained centres of authoritarianism where a dictatorial centre rode roughshod over compliant local authorities. All regimes in Uganda have used local administration to advance their political interests, with Museveni's regime, since 1986, showing a slight difference due to its decentralisation policy. Even then, the decentralised local government structures have been merged with National Resistance Movement, NRM, structures. They have become symbols of decentralised corruption as well as instruments of patronage for political loyalists of the NRM regime.

Militarism and Enhancement of Ethnicity in the 1960s

The other part of the state where the political leadership failed to transform its ethnic basis was the military. The introduction of militarism and the mobilisation of ethnicity in the military, impacted negatively on political development in Uganda. During both Milton Obote's regimes in the 1960s and the early 1980s, Idi Amin's regime in the 1970s, and including Yoweri Museveni's since 1986, militarism was and has been employed as a means of capturing and maintaining power. As a result, the resolution of the problem of ethnicity through democratic means in the foreseeable future has been postponed.

The scourge of military power that looms throughout Uganda's post-independence period was introduced in Uganda's politics between 1964 and 66. Between 1964 and 66, democratic solutions were abandoned and Obote resorted to militarisation of the country's politics as a strategy for crisis management (Okoth, 1995:123). The loss of the 1964-65 power struggle between the Prime Minister, Obote and the President, *Kabaka* Mutesa, within the UPC/KY ruling coalition, resulted in the retreat of Mutesa into enclave, chauvinistic Ganda ethnicity and aggressive, militarist

ethnicity on the part of Obote, with a reliance on the army which was dominated by the northerners. By 1967, the army had been dragged into Uganda's politics, thereby eroding the relative degree of democracy and pluralism that had prevailed in the country between 1962 and 1966.

Militarisation only exacerbated the ethnic question. This is because the army had been used in a showdown with an ethnic group in the 1966 invasion of Kabaka's Lubiri, (King's Palace). The army could no longer be regarded as an organ that was neutral in an ethnic sense (Hansen, 1974:66). The deliberate recruitment of the Specialised Paramilitary Corps into the Obote regime along ethnic lines lent little credence to his fight against ethnicity. Obote initiated a massive expansion of a Special Paramilitary Corps, Special Force, and created a lavishly equipped intelligence service, the General Service Unit, GSU, under the command of Akena Adoko, his cousin, and recruited almost solely from his own ethnic group, the Langi (Hansen, 1974:88). The result was the rise of an ethnically organised state. Obote failed to resolve the contradictions inherited from the colonial political economy. Every regime in Uganda since then, Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement, (NRM) included, has used ethnicity in the military and other state organs to retain power.

The attempts to transcend the reliance on the military and ethnic alliances through ideological manoeuvres came to nought. The launching of the '*Move to the Left*'³ was intended to broaden Obote's social base and lessen reliance on the military. The rivalry in the army and Obote's increasingly radical stance in foreign relations with regard to the liberation of the then settler Rhodesia and apartheid South Africa resulted in the 1971 coup by Idi Amin relying mainly on ethnic groups from his West Nile region. Amin was assisted by the British and Israeli military operatives in the country who were training the Uganda army and air force (Omara-Otunno, 1987:86-87)

The ultimate result of authoritarianism, militarism and the suppression of civil society organisations, was that it did not lead to the deconstruction of ethnicity and regionalism in the service of constructing a nation-state. Instead it meant that there would be no peaceful transfer of power in the country, hence the military coup of 1971.

The Period of Military Dictatorship, 1971-79

The 1971 coup was a result of ethnic and power rivalry between the President Milton Obote and his Army Commander, Idi Amin. One of the primary reasons given by Amin for the 1971 coup was that Obote had suppressed multi-partyism and imposed a one-party dictatorship. Therefore, on the face of it, the Amin military junta was committed to the restoration of multi-party democracy (Mugaju, 2000:21). In the aftermath of the coup, the Amin regime conducted vicious violence against

³ *The Common Man's Charter* was a political document issued in 1969 to place Uganda on a socialist path alongst Julius Nyerere's 1967 Arusha Declaration, in neighbouring Tanzania.

the Langi and Acholi officers and men in the Uganda Army and Special Force, the principal power base of the Obote regime. Amin soon ordered the army's Acholi and Langi elements that he considered rivals for power, to return to barracks and had thousands of them killed (Human Rights Watch, 1999:21). Despite their knowledge of this, many Ugandans, especially those living in Buganda and dissatisfied with Obote's increasingly oppressive government, initially welcomed the coup. The release of detainees and Amin's allowing the return of *Kakaka* Mutesa II's body were popular measures. He also allowed the installation of Ronald Mutebi (the late *Kabaka's* heir) as *Ssabataka* (Chief of Buganda clan heads) but not as *Kabaka* (king) (Oloka-Onyango, 1997:176). One could have had the impression that Idi Amin was trying to resolve the 'Buganda question', which had haunted the country for the past 20 years. The initial euphoria, however, soon gave way to despair. The ethnic targeting of the Acholi and Langi soon spread to all ethnic groups, including those from Amin's West Nile home region, whom he suspected of any form of opposition to his regime. The targeting of particular ethnic groups and the spread of a reign of terror and murder, could not solve the question of ethnicity in Uganda's politics.

Soon, Amin created several new, ethnically and religiously based security organisations, which reported directly to him and which ruthlessly killed thousands of Ugandans. According to a report by the New York City Bar Association's Committee on International Human Rights, the estimated number of victims of Amin's reign of terror was between 100,000 and 500,000. According to the report:

Within three months after he took power... Amin suspended all democratic rights, gave the army dictatorial powers of arrest and punishment and set up a military tribunal to try political offenders. A period of terror administered by the army (now dominated by Sudanese mercenaries, the Anyanya, Kakwa and Nubian ethnic groups from Amin's West Nile region) and security forces followed. (Human Rights Watch, 1999:32)

Ethnicity and religion once again had been used to reconfigure the state structures as a basis of power. The regional and ethnic cleavages had acquired a new lease of life. The promise of democratic elections at the time of the coup was shattered as Idi Amin declared himself life President and all talk of multi-party politics was quickly forgotten. As soon as he consolidated power, he declared all political parties illegal. In his view, and using the current President Museveni's arguments against the restoration of multiparty politics, political parties were not only the breeding grounds of tribalism, religious sectarianism, subversion and disunity, but they were also potential agents of imperialism and Zionism. During the eight years of Amin's regime, multi-partyism was outlawed (Mugaju, 2000:22).

The overthrow of the Amin regime by a combined force of the Tanzanian Army, Tanzania Peoples' Defence Forces, TPDF, and Ugandan guerrilla armies under the Uganda National Liberation Front/Army, UNLF/A, heralded the hope of a return to normalcy. However, this hope was soon shattered as the Ugandan political elite jostled for dominance in the new system. The old cleavages of ethnicity and militarism soon broke down this transitional arrangement. The short-lived Uganda National Liberation Front, UNLF, experiment in 'umbrella politics' did not support the revival of formal multi-partyism either. This meant that change could only come through

undemocratic means. Change did come and violently too, when former President Obote loyalists in the Military Commission of UNLF, led by Paulo Muwanga, carried out a coup in May 1980 against the Lukwonga Binasisa government which had succeeded Prof. Yusufu Lule who ruled for 68 days after Idi Amin. Once again the questions of the military and retention of power were central in the coup.

1980 Elections, Ethnicity, Militarism and Civil War, 1981–85

The period 1980–85 is characterised by an aberration of democracy, intensification of militarism, ethnic mobilisation and violence. There was a multi-party election on 10 December, 1980 organised by a partisan Military Commission. Four political parties participated: Uganda Peoples Congress, UPC, led by A.M. Obote, Democratic Party, DP, led by P. K. Ssemwogerere, Uganda Patriotic Movement, UPM, led by Yoweri Museveni, and the Conservative Party, CP, led by Joshua Mayanja Nkanji. The election results were disputed. The Chairman of the Military Commission, (the ruling military junta), Paulo Muwanga is believed to have rigged the election for his party, UPC. The return of UPC and Obote to power raised mixed feelings amongst a cross-section of Uganda's population. Once again the hope of a democratic transition to power had been shattered.

Ethnicity came to play a major part in the elections. For instance, most of the elected opposition members of parliament came from the southern part of the country. Nearly all MPs in Buganda were elected on a DP ticket, the party they had rejected in the 1962 general elections. In West Nile where there may have been opposition MPs, being a region identified with the Amin regime which had been overthrown a year before, there was no election at all. The MPs from the area were declared unopposed and they were all members of Obote's UPC! As Mugaju observes,

The disputed elections of 1980 broke all the principles and practices of multi-partyism. The nomination of party candidates was a farce. During the elections there was more talk about which party had which military commanders and 'meeting violence with violence, intimidation with intimidation' than which party programmes were likely to pull Uganda out of the post-Amin quagmire. (Mugaju, 2000:22)

What resulted was a declaration of war against the government by Yoweri Museveni, the leader of UPM on the basis that the elections had been rigged, although he lost to Sam Kutesa, a member of the DP. Ethnic mobilisation and militarism reached its zenith. Museveni took advantage of the intense dislike of Obote in Buganda and launched his guerrilla war by the National Resistance Army, NRA in Buganda. Another guerrilla movement, the Uganda Freedom Movement, UFM, and its military wing, Uganda Freedom Army, UFA, led by Andrew Kayiira was also launched in Buganda as well. UFM was a Ganda chauvinist organisation, which did not have much appeal beyond Buganda. The major failing of UFM was the failure to mobilise on the basis of national issues. Second, their methods of struggle were mainly adventurist and terrorist as they planted bombs aimlessly—sometimes injuring civilians. NRA on the other hand had mobilised the grassroots in the contested territory through the creation of Resistance Councils, RCs, in which the people

elected their leaders and at the same time passed information to NRA on the movement of government troops, UNLA. However, one shortcoming of Museveni and his NRA is that he intensified regionalism in military politics, particularly after the Okello coup in 1985, as he preached 'Bantu commonality' in a country where there are different ethnic groups that do not necessarily belong to the 'Bantu commonality'. He ranted against the 'Anyanyas', 'animals', 'savages' and 'criminals' from the north that dominated the army, UNLA, he was confronting. This served as a basis for the hard line that Museveni has been taking on the war in the north for the last 15 years.

Despite the repressive measures by UNLA, NRA continued to make significant progress against the Obote government. The strong ethnic, anti-Obote sentiments in Buganda, where bad memories of Obote's first government remained entrenched ensured NRA support in the region. In 1985, Obote's army commander, General Okello Lutwa together with the commander of the northern brigade, Brigadier Bazillio Okello, ousted him. The overthrow of Obote itself was a by-product of narrowly ethnic intra-army hostility between Acholi and Langi, exacerbated by manoeuvres in favour of Langi, Obote's ethnic group.

The Okello government seized power on a platform of national reconciliation, urging all political groups and insurgent groups to join the new government. Although many insurgent groups joined the Okellos, NRM/A refused to join the military junta because of the number of seats given to them on the ruling Military Council. There followed peace talks in Nairobi, derogatively referred to then as peace jokes in Kampala, from August to December 1985 between NRM/A and the Military Council government. These months saw extensive mobilisation, recruitment and extension of territory by the NRA as the peace talks took place in Nairobi. This was in preparation for taking power militarily. When the NRA felt militarily strong enough, Museveni scuppered the Nairobi Peace Agreement. On 26 January 1986, Museveni's NRM/A defeated the Okello government and captured Kampala.

THE NRM, 'NO PARTY' DEMOCRACY AND THE QUESTION OF POWER

The NRM/A inherited all the cleavages and intricacies that had bedevilled Uganda's post-colonial history: ethnicity, north-south divide and militarism. A sense of political and economic sanity, mainly in the southern parts of the country was restored by NRM administration. However, force, intolerance, manipulation of constitutional provisions, suppression of alternative political views, the reconfiguration of power on distinctly ethnic/religious and political foundations, and the reproduction of state power on the basis of definable narrow ethnic alliances became the hallmark of NRM/A. The result has been the further entrenchment of a militarist, ethnically organised state, totally opposed to genuine competition for power.

The NRM has used the notion of 'no-party' democracy to extend its grip on power. President Museveni loathes the idea of handing over power to his opponents

in the case of defeat in an open contestation for power. As he puts it in the statement below:

I'm not ready to hand over power to people or groups of people who have no ability to manage a nation... Why should I sentence Ugandans to suicide by handing over power to people we fought and defeated? It's dangerous despite the fact that the constitution allows them to run against me . At times the constitution may not be the best tool to direct us politically for it allows wrong and doubtful people to contest for power. (President Yoweri Museveni, addressing a rally in Western Uganda, quoted in *The East African*, February 12, 2001)

Important proclamations were made during the armed struggle on the restoration of democracy, hence the rejection of militarism in Uganda's politics and the deconstruction of ethnicity and regionalism from the country. 'Without democracy', the NRM proclaimed, 'there can be no peace and no stability (NRM, no year, p. 4)

Some foreign academics sympathetic to the regime have claimed that there have been:

Removal of the army as a threat to life and property, and as a direct player in setting the political agenda, the elimination of the ethnic factor from recruitment and the end of the threat posed by civil war. (Brett, 1995:144)

A critical observer of Uganda's politics in the last fifteen years cannot fail to construe this as a half-truth. As Kasfir notes:

The twists and turns in Museveni's 'movement', 'no-party' democratic doctrine and its application since 1986 more closely reflect the political realities of legitimising and maintaining state power than they do the emergence of a novel form of democracy. (Kasfir, 2000:61)

The NRM has not transcended the distinctly regional, ethnic and religious political foundations inherited from the post-colonial dispensation, in that it has reproduced itself on the basis of these alliances. The loser in this enterprise has been democracy. Through militarism, constitutional manipulation, ethnicity, regionalism and the sheer arrogance of power, President Museveni has managed to impose a one party state on Uganda. As Human Rights Watch (1999:143) contend: 'Despite claims to the contrary, the ideology of the 'movement' appears to be leading to a reinstatement of one-party rule.'

How has the NRM tackled the contradictions it inherited in Uganda's political economy, which have been obstacles to the democratisation process? When the NRM came to power, its first act was to ban all political activities in the country (NRM, 1986). Past political conflicts in Uganda were attributed to ethnically and religiously based political parties. The solution to this was sought in political conformity as expressed in 'no-party' rule. The major proponent of this view has been President Museveni and his inner circle of 'Movement' adherents. The solution to ethnicity, therefore, is the suppression of the likely 'sectarianism' through a 'no-party', 'all-inclusive' system of governance until there occurs, a 'crystallisation of socio-economic groups upon which we can then base healthy political parties' (Museveni, 1997:195). This, for a number of reasons, cannot be a sustainable solution. The 'crystallisation

of classes' in Uganda is likely to take more than 50 years. In any case, ethnicity is not inevitably the practice of democracy. As Horowitz argues in general terms:

Uncontrollable conflict is not inevitable, and the answer to the problems of democracy and ethnic conflict is not to redraw the map of the world. Rather, it lies in the political structures that discourage polarisation of ethnic conflict and encourage trans-ethnic alignments and crosscutting cleavages. (Horowitz, 1985:682)

The political structures, which are indispensable in the transaction, are organised political social movements that cut across narrow ethnic or regional lines. As Doornobos (1998:27) argues, 'ethnic pluralism and co-existence require' a give and take attitude. In its absence, the insistence on conformity is likely to engender increasingly embittered articulations of ethnic consciousness'. The NRM sought to deal with this through coalition politics referred to as a 'broad-based' arrangement. The motives for coalition politics were only partially aimed at resolving the inherited ethnic and regional cleavages. The major objective was the expansion of the NRM social base and extension of its grip on power.

The Broad-Base, Legitimacy and Power

At the time of capturing power in 1986, NRM had a very narrow social base in the country. Its leadership was narrowly ethnic and regional. As Kasfir observes:

No previous Ugandan political organisation was less well-known, and only the Okellos, and perhaps Amin, had been socially less representative than the NRM was at the moment it took power. (Kasfir, 2000:63)

The answer to this dilemma of lack of legitimacy and the need to retain and expand the power base was the 'broad-based' 'Movement' type of government. Individual members of the opposition Democratic Party, DP and Uganda Peoples' Congress, UPC and Uganda Freedom Movement, UFM were handpicked and co-opted into government as cabinet ministers. Their participation in government was basically on NRM terms, as individuals and not as representatives of their political organisations.

Notwithstanding the underlying motives, the 'broad-based' arrangement signalled a move away from single party monopoly to power sharing. With hindsight, however, the real function of the 'broad-base' was to legitimise NRM, an organisation with a narrow social base as it extended its grip on power in the country. As Kasfir asserts:

The NRM appropriated ... a time-honoured Ugandan technique of governance, the use of patronage to fill the important political positions, to expand the NRM's claim to social inclusion. To make this technique serve a legitimising purpose, the leaders of the NRM incorporated their 'anti-sectarian' rationale and called it 'broad-based' government. (Kasfir, 2000:65)

Gradually, the 'broad-base' increasingly became narrower. By about 1992, NRM had become exclusive. Democracy once again had been derailed. In 1986, the NRM self-mandated a four-year transitional period during which the economy would be reconstructed and 'free' and 'fair' elections conducted to return Uganda to a

democratic form of government. Only a year later, Museveni reneged on his pledge. Then followed the comprehensive ban on political activities other than those sanctioned by the regime. This indicated that NRM was not a transitional government. The suppression of the unarmed opposition activity was a blow to the democratisation process in Uganda. In fact, the NRM 'transition' period has been amended from four to twenty years, and is intended to end in 2006!

The second element in the NRM consolidation of power was the introduction of Resistance Councils, RCs, into every village, parish, sub-county and district. This was a tremendous innovation in popular participation and mobilisation in Uganda's political history. However, as Oloka-Onyango notes:

When NRM was still a guerrilla (anti-state) movement struggling its way through the bush, RCs could certainly be said to have given expression to grassroots and popular aspirations. (Oloka-Onyango, 2000:41)

Once in power, the RCs became instruments of control rather than popular participation. At present, RCs, (now renamed Local Councils, LCs, have increasingly become allied to the ruling party, NRM, as they have been integrated with the Movement Councils, MCs, which are organs of the ruling party as well as the Local Government structures. Perhaps a more ill-conceived understanding of RC structures in Uganda is that which equates them to a form of 'civil society' organisation (Karlström, 1999:104–123). During the various elections that have been conducted in Uganda since 1989, the RCs were critical in ensuring that 'Movement' candidates retained their hold on power, negating any claim to neutrality and non-partisanship.

The third point was that, by 1989, the National Resistance Council, NRC, had been elected to act as a national parliament. The election of the NRC was not conducted through universal suffrage, but by members of the RCs. Each sub-county had nine representatives who were to vote on behalf of the rest of the citizens. Moreover, it was based on the queuing system instead of the secret ballot box. There was as well no formal involvement of opposition political parties in this arrangement, although several members of the opposition were elected to it despite the obstacles placed in their way by the NRM. This made the election inherently undemocratic. With the election of the 'parliament', the NRM had created a framework for its national legitimation and extension of its grip on power.

The period between 1986–89 can be characterised as that of NRM's power consolidation. Several government ministers from the opposition, who had been co-opted into the NRM government, were arrested and charged with treason. Andrew Kayiira, minister of energy was marked out as posing a serious threat to the leadership of NRM, particularly in Buganda. He and several other cabinet ministers were arrested and charged with treason, but were later acquitted due to lack of evidence. Shortly after his acquittal, Kayiira was assassinated under suspicious circumstances (Omara-Otunnu, 1992:449).

The most important event internally, in terms of democratisation, during this period was the setting up of the Constitutional Commission, to collect views from citizens for drawing up a new constitution. Given the background to violent non-

constitutionalism of the post-independence period, this was a step in the right direction. Externally, the most important move in the regime's consolidation of power, was the total embrace by the NRM government of International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank's structural adjustment programmes. It would seem the endorsement of Western economic growth strategies went some way to compensate for the lack of 'conventional' democracy in Uganda (Haynes, 2001:201). From the early 1990s onwards, the 'international community' would tolerate the restriction on political rights and abuse of human rights in Uganda as long as the NRM regime pursued and encouraged private enterprise. This has been a minus on the democratisation process of the country. This is elaborated below.

Thus, the notion of 'broad-based' government was not a charitable act on the part of the NRM. Their objective was the expansion of the NRM narrow social base, legitimisation of its rule and consolidation of its power. It had little to do with resolving the ethnic, religious and regional cleavages it had inherited from the previous regimes. Neither did it make sustainable achievements in terms of the emergence of novel forms of democracy such as observing the principle of genuine competition for power. This contention can be confirmed in the NRM's practices and manoeuvres during the constitution-making process.

NRM Politics, Constitutionalism and the Consolidation of Power

Towards the end of 1988, a 21 member Constitutional Commission was appointed. Given the violent non-constitutionalism of the past, this was promising for democratic development. The Commission was to seek the views of the ordinary citizen through the holding of public meetings, debates, seminars and workshops throughout the country (Uganda Constitutional Commission Act, 1988:4). The limitation of the Commission's role in the constitution-making process, however, was that it was merely advisory. The Commission had to submit a report, including a draft Constitution, to the Minister of Constitutional Affairs for his consideration! (Furley and Katalikawe, 1997:247).

The political framework within which the constitution-making process operated and by implication the underlying motives, have been critiqued by leading Ugandan scholars and some foreign observers (Mamdani, 1991; Barya, 1993 and 1998; Furley and Katalikawe, 1997; Oloka-Onyango, 1998 and 2000; and Benjamin, 1993). Oloka-Onyango (2000:45) makes two pertinent observations on the composition and operation of the Commission. First, almost to a person, the Commission comprised strong adherents of the 'movement' system, incorporating both the political commissar of the NRM as well as his counter-part in the NRA. Second, the Commission was extremely circumspect about the mode of political organisation and system of governance in its mandate that it was 'educating' the public based on particular 'guidelines'. While this was supposed to be a 'people's' constitution, there are a number of issues that remained shrouded in an almost mystical type of secrecy.

The question remains, why were other political organisations and social movements not formally accepted in this important exercise of making a national constitution?

Furley and Katalikawe (1997:251–52) wonder why, in view of the government's declared intention to involve the people in the making of their constitution, the NRM found it necessary to have the people's views vetted by the NRM cadres. They contend that the idea that the 1995 Constitution was a 'people's' constitution was a noble lie. Far from being based on people's views, the 'people's' constitution is a product of the country's elite: it was designed, written and promulgated by them. The NRM was determined to keep the contending political forces in the country out of the constitution-making process. Some critics are of the view that the process was to ensure NRM's imposition of its own constitution upon the people of Uganda. The minister of constitutional affairs during the constitution-making process, Sam Njuba, accused the Commission of 'doctoring' the draft constitution. He claimed that there were 'eight wise men' who smuggled into the process draft proposals that were not contained in the people's memoranda and left out others (*The Monitor*, 15 July 1994). He was subsequently dismissed.

In terms of the democratisation process, the pertinent shortcoming was the formal exclusion of contending political forces in the entire constitution-making exercise. The guarantor of democracy cannot be constitutional safeguards engineered by consultants, (in Uganda's case, hand-picked political loyalists and NRM cadres armed with 'guidelines'). It must rather be the organised presence of social and political movements which need democratic freedoms for their very existence and which will therefore struggle to defend them (Mamdani, 1995:56). The major objective of the exercise would appear to have been the legitimisation of NRM and its monopolisation of state power by enacting laws that would disadvantage alternative political organisations in their legal contestation for state power. This objective can be observed in the Constituency Assembly (CA) debate on the draft Constitution, which is considered next.

Constituency Assembly (CA) Elections, Debates and Suppression of the Opposition

The election of Constituency Assembly Delegates, CADs took place in March 1994 and debates continued into 1995. Once again, the contending organised social and political movements in Uganda were denied formal participation. The Constituency Election Act of 1993 provided an opportunity for the NRM regime to translate its administrative ban on political activity into a legal ban. The election rules provided that candidates would 'stand and be voted for... upon 'personal merit' and any candidate who used or attempted to use any political party, tribal or religious affiliations or other 'sectarian' grounds for purposes of the election would be disqualified.⁴ This did not apply to NRM and its candidates.

⁴ Constituency Assembly Elections Rules, Rule 11, quoted in, Human Rights Watch, 1999:39.

In the heat of the preparation for CA elections, there were growing 'voices and sentiments to boycott the exercise rather than to participate in it',⁵ particularly in the multi-party camp and Buganda. Before the elections, NRM used an ethnic calculation and restored the Buganda monarchy with pomp and ceremony. However, this would appear to have been a calculated move to gain support in Buganda rather than resolving the long-standing 'Buganda question', the question of the special status of Buganda vis-à-vis the rest of Uganda, one of the cleavages that has haunted post-independent Uganda. It aimed, first, at achieving ethnic unity of the Baganda for CA election purposes and subsequent elections. Second, was to shut out political parties as a factor in the electoral contest. Buganda, the stronghold of the Democratic Party, DP, with a substantial percentage of the country's voters, was thus targeted. As Oloka-Onyango (1997:180) observes: 'The single factor that could secure the alliance of the Baganda across virtually all religious, sectoral, class and ideological lines was the issue of the monarchy'. The monarchy was, therefore, hastily restored with a spotlight on the impending CA elections and Ronald Mutebi, became *Kabaka* (king) of Buganda but with apparently only cultural powers. This was a hollow divide between culture and politics as Oloka-Onyango (1997:182) observes:

...the full hollowness of the 'cultural' proscription of the restoration of Buganda kingdom was revealed only days after the coronation when President Museveni attended the opening of the restored *Lukiiko* and did not even bat an eyelid on being introduced to the ministers and other officials of the Buganda government. Amongst the ministers were those in charge of 'constitutionalism', 'political affairs', 'human rights' and 'local government'. This in an institution that had been restored as purely cultural!

There is no doubt that the restoration of Buganda Kingdom was popular in Buganda. But it would seem it was an essentially political institution intended to serve particular NRM interests. As a result most of the Baganda turned away from the idea of a boycott. The alliance between the NRM and the Buganda monarchy was crucial in NRM's efforts to lock out political parties in Buganda. Here, the NRM was taking an ethnic and 'sectarian' position, which according to Museveni, is common with political parties in Uganda and indeed Africa, to advance its political interests of consolidating power, contrary to its public professions.

When CA elections took place, the majority of the delegates, CADs, were NRM adherents in alliance with the Buganda contingent, struggling for its narrow monarchical interests, summed up as *Federo*, (federalism for Buganda vis a vis the rest of Uganda). Of course, there were secular Baganda CADs, but these were a minority. It is therefore not surprising that after the result of the elections for the CADs were compiled, President Museveni proclaimed victory, and declared 'we have won' and surrounded them 'Zulu style'.⁶

⁵ *Buganda's Position on the Draft Constitution: Views of the Buganda Lukiiko*, n.d. p. 4, quoted in Furley and Katalikawe, 1997:248.

⁶ Museveni was referring to Shaka Zulu's horn formation warfare that was supposedly used in his military conquests in Southern Africa. One question remains though, since all Ugandans belong to the 'Movement' whom had they defeated and whom had they surrounded in Zulu style?

A number of issues stand out in the CA debates as far as the democratisation process in Uganda is concerned: the election of both presidential and parliamentary candidates on the same day; the political 'systems' and the use of a referendum to change the political 'system'. One of the issues that appeared simple and straightforward was the election of the presidential and parliamentary candidates on the same day. The draft provision read as follows: 'The Electoral Commission shall ensure that elections are held at times fixed and notified in advance to the public'. Dick Nyai, a CAD member from Ayivu, in West Nile and a member of opposition the UPC, sought to add the following proviso: 'Provided that subject to the provisions of this constitution, presidential and parliamentary elections shall be held on the same day' (Oloka-Onyango, 2000:49). The suggestion met the most hostile reaction from the majority of NRM CADs, who had by now formed a parliamentary caucus, as had the pluralists. The major reason was that the majority of NRM CADs staked their successful future campaign to become members of parliament, MPs, on President Museveni's name. The voting for both presidential and parliamentary candidates on the same day was unpredictable, though good for democracy. On the one hand, it would not allow parliamentary candidates to use President Museveni's name to be elected. To President Museveni, even if he won the presidential elections, the composition of the parliament that would have been voted in on the same day was unpredictable. It was likely that it would not be a rubber stamp parliament, which would grant him all his policy wishes. Therefore, the rejection of presidential and parliamentary elections on the same day was mutually advantageous to both parliamentary candidates hopefuls and to President Museveni. An important element in democratic elections was defeated.

The other issue, was the debate on political 'systems'. The draft constitution provided for political systems: 'movement', multi-party, federal and any other form of democratic political system. It is with this provision that the NRM sought to achieve a number of objectives: to elevate the 'movement', which, in essence is a political party, to a 'system', to suppress multi-partyism, since only one 'system' is allowed to operate at a time and finally, to legally conscript, all Ugandans into the 'movement' even those who were opposed to it.

By elevating the 'movement' to a political 'system', the NRM was to acquire and retain power above what it really is, a state-based organisation (Barya, 2000:35), than was constitutionally provided for. This was given legal expression in the Movement Act of 1997, which legally bound all Ugandans in the 'movement' by fusing its structures with those of the Ugandan state, and creating a pyramid of 'movement' structures from village to the national level. The Movement Act simply reinforces the monopoly of political space that the NRM has been intent on acquiring since capturing power in 1986.

The suppression and legal expression of conformity can be found in some provisions of the 1995 Uganda Constitution (Article, 269), which prohibits organised political dissent to the 'Movement', since only one system can operate at a time. This goes against the notion of good governance and democracy. Yet as, Oloka

Onyango (1998:46) argues, '... a key element in any system of democratic governance is the right to organise in expression of disagreement with the existing status quo'.

The final issue during the CA debate and the resulting constitution, was the use of a referendum to change the political 'system' in operation. For the previous fifteen years, political organisations were constitutionally prohibited from opening and operating branch offices, holding delegates' conferences and holding political rallies. According to the new constitution, there would be a Political Organisations Act, which would enable different political organisations to canvass for their views during the referendum campaigns. The Political Organisations Bill was presented to parliament in 1998 and was withdrawn a few months later. The referendum took place on 2 July 2000 where the 'movement' ran against itself but was largely boycotted by the pro-democracy activists. The 'movement' won 'overwhelmingly'. Essentially this was the last step in the legal entrenchment of a one-party state in Uganda, which the NRM is all but in name.

As Human Rights Watch notes:

On February 2, 2001 parliament passed the Political Organisations Law with the view of relaxing some of the restrictions placed on political parties and their activities, but the president has yet to sign it into law. ...the law would fail to grant real freedom to political parties. ...under the law, political parties would still be unable to organise at grassroots level, allegedly 'for fear of confusing the people. (Human Rights Watch, 2001:5)

This law does not affect the 'movement' since it is not a party but a 'system'! The movement would operate, recruit, hold delegates' conferences and continue using its party symbol, which in this case, is a bus.

The stipulation in the constitution that the question of return to multi-partyism shall be subject to a referendum is a travesty of democracy. As Mamdani (1998:31) notes:

The consequence of a movement election (as prescribed in the constitution) ... is to make organised opposition illegal. That this can be decided by majority vote in a referendum makes a travesty of the right to organised opposition, crucial to any democracy, since everyone knows that an opposition is just that, precisely because it is in a minority. The legal ban simply drives the opposition underground.

Such warnings on the consequence of a 'movement' elections bearing on the long-term democratisation and the stability of the country are just ignored. What this makes clear is that NRM has very little respect for open democratic practices, which would pit it against other contending political forces in the country.

'No-Party' Democracy, Ethnicity and Regionalism

One of the major arguments for the constriction of political and social space in Uganda is that 'no-party'-'movement' democracy would reduce the negative impact of ethnicity, religion and regionalism in the country's politics. Three questions arise: how long will 'no-party'-'movement' democracy last?, to what extent has 'no-party'-'movement' democracy reduced ethnicity, religion and regionalism in Uganda's

politics? And will the end of 'no-party'-'movement' democracy herald the arrival of pluralism?

First, the NRM has not indicated how long the transition to a society where there is 'the crystallisation of socio-economic groups on which we can base healthy political parties' (Museveni, 1997:195) shall take. Uganda is nowhere near to creating substantial working and middle classes on which to base political pluralism. This reasoning is used to rationalise NRM's hegemony and, particularly, for President Museveni to monopolise power both in his party, the NRM and as a 'father figure' of the nation.

Second, the 'no-party'-'movement' democracy is claimed to reduce ethnic and regional divisions. It is unclear whether the 'no-party' system in Uganda has had the effect of lowering the regional and ethnic divisions in the country (Human Rights Watch, 1999:49). According to Nelson Kasfir (1995:149) regional tensions have increased since 1986: 'Regional splits have deepened since the NRM came to power. Most of the top leadership of the NRM comes from the west, particularly from the former political unity of Ankole'. More recently Mamdani (1998:31) has reinforced this view by contending that

Museveni's claim that the opposition in Africa tends to be ethnic, and therefore by implication illegitimate, explains little, for where the opposition is ethnic it is more likely that the government is no less ethnic.

Oloka-Onyango (1998:47) observes that, 'The fact is that under the movement, the problems of ethnicity, religion and sectarian organising have not disappeared'. Instead, other fissures such as commercialisation of politics or who is 'movement' *enkomba* (concentrated) and who is 'movement' *omufunguro* (dilute),⁷ as if people can be reduced to chemical formulas, have been introduced into 'movement' politics.

When it suits him, president Museveni has not hesitated to deploy 'sectarianism' in ethnicity or religion, to retain power. He has used these 'sectarian' mechanisms as long as they fit into his strategy for the retaining of power at all costs. The restoration of the Buganda monarchy prior to CA elections and the promise to mainly Buganda Catholic clergy, shortly before the 12 March 2001 presidential elections, that a Muganda Catholic would succeed him is revealing. The celebratory account of how 'sectarianism' (ethnicity) has been neutralised in Uganda by Muhereza and Otim (1998:190–203) does not seem to correspond with the reality in Uganda today where there are underlying ethnic tensions and contradictory interpretations of some public policies. Such an account is based on shaky evidence and it is a form of mindless empiricism that must be rejected.

Finally, will the end of 'no-party'-'movement' democracy herald the arrival of pluralism? From what we have observed most of, if not all, the cleavages inherited by the NRM have only been simply driven underground. The bitterness that is expressed in the north-south divide has deepened as President Museveni and the NRM have chosen a confrontational, militarist approach for ending the war in the

⁷ These terms are used to delineate the level of loyalty of individuals to the 'movement' type of governance.

north. There has also been increasingly unequal access to the resources of Uganda's economic 'success' story trumpeted by the World Bank and IMF. These, together with the failure to build democratic institutions and civil control of security forces, are unlikely to herald the arrival of pluralism and peaceful transfer of power in the country. It would seem that Uganda today is like a house of cards: it will collapse once the 'father figure' is removed, most likely violently.

The contradictory and self-serving changes in Museveni's rationale for 'movement' democracy during the first decade in power suggest that he regarded it as an instrument of maintaining power rather than as a means to build democratic institutions. President Museveni and the NRM have often used 'movement' democracy to entrench their own power rather than risk losing it in an open democratic process, conveniently citing ethnicity and pluralism as excuses (Kasfir, 2000:62). The obsession with power and fear of being seen as 'weak' if he accepts peaceful resolution of conflicts, are evident from Museveni's conduct of wars in the north and west of the country.

Civil War, Militarism and Enhancement of Ethnicity

NRMs claim to have demystified the gun as an instrument of power and settling of political disputes does not lend itself to much credence, if one looks at the attitude and the conduct of the war in the northern and western parts of the country. The effusion by Olara Otunnu⁸ summarises NRM's policy towards the conflict in the north. Far from Brett's (1995:144) claim that the NRM has put to an 'end threats caused by civil war', for 15 years civil war has raged on endlessly in the north. There are three major ingredients of this conflict: first, militarism by the NRM and the belief that the conflict can only be ended militarily, second, an ethnic mind-set of the NRM regime towards the people of the north which borders on a vendetta and racism. Third, the uncompromising stand taken by the Lord's Resistance Army, LRA, a brutal, ruthless rebel army led by Joseph Kony. In its occasional incursions into Uganda from its bases in the Sudan, it usually leaves behind death and destruction. It is responsible for murders, rapes and abductions of children for its campaign against the NRM government. Citing Kasfir again: 'devastating civil wars have been fought in parts of the east and the north. The perception of the NRM as a 'southern' government, and the wars it has fought against remnants of armies of its former enemies, has reinforced regional cleavages' (Kasfir, 1994:149). The NRM government has not hidden its contempt for a peaceful resolution of the northern insurgency. A number of instances supporting this contention can be pointed out.

First, the revenge attacks on the former UNLA, by the 35th battalion of NRA in Kitgum District in 1986-87 (Brett, 1995:145), led to the rise of the Uganda Peoples' Democratic Movement/Army, UPDM/A, to resist this humiliation. Between 1986

⁸ Joseph Olara Otunnu, (2001), 'What shall I tell the Children?' A Speech to the 57th United Commission on Human Rights at Geneva, April 10, 2001. Olara-Otunnu, is the Uganda-born United Nations Under Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict.

and 1992, the people of Teso and the Acholi were subject to military brutality which drove them into the bush to wage war against the Museveni government. It is a bit insensitive to the plight of the people of Teso and Acholi to claim that:

Although NRA soldiers continued to commit atrocities, including the murder of civilians, the brutal treatment of large numbers of people moved from their homes into camps, (the so-called protected camps in Acholi today) and illegal detentions, *these were never comparable with atrocities committed in Luwero*. (Brett, 1995:148. Emphasis added.)

The fact that atrocities in Luwero by both the UNLA and NRA took five years, and those in the north have taken fifteen years, does indeed, make them incomparable! The issue here is not the number of years that sections of Ugandan society have suffered as a result of political differences, but to avoid these atrocities by using peaceful conflict resolution. Targeting a particular section of society by a government, which claims to be the most enlightened in post-independent Uganda, for a period of fifteen years for reasons based mainly on personal ego and ethnic vendetta, is basically criminal. Olara Otunnu contends that the war has become a cynical pretext for the systematic destruction of a people, indeed of an entire society:

Over the last fifteen years, the children of northern Uganda have endured and witnessed things beyond belief. Fifteen years of massacres, atrocities, and dying made all too banal. Fifteen years of systematic dehumanisation, discrimination and humiliations employed as deliberate instruments of policy. Fifteen years of a people trapped between the atrocious crimes and impunity of those supposed to protect them and the brutality of LRA coming in from the bush. Fifteen years of a land reduced to desolation, of a people reduced to an existential shadow of a once vibrant society.⁹

The notion that the NRM government is committed to the peaceful resolution of the conflict in the North needs qualification in the light of its practice in the last fifteen years. We examine some cases below of peace negotiations between the rebels and the government as well as aspects of government policy, which were apparently aimed at the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

In March 1988 a Peace Agreement¹⁰ brought the UPDM/A out of the bush. Charles Alai, one of the political leaders of the group became a Deputy Minister in the NRM government. This soon turned out to be part of the process of military resolution of the conflict. Betty Bigombe was appointed as a Minister of State for Pacification of the north. The idea of pacification lacks any pretence of peaceful resolution of the conflict. This compares well with the colonial notion of pacification of primitive tribes of Lower Niger, which Chinua Achebe alludes to in his novel, *Things Fall Apart*.¹¹ Less than two years after the Peace Agreement, the military officers of the former rebel UPDA, who had been integrated into the NRA were arrested in January 1990 and charged with treason. Several of the officers, among them, Lt. Colonel Ocheru-Nangai and Major Mark Lapyem died in detention in

⁹ See note 8 on p. 33.

¹⁰ The Peace Agreement Between the Uganda Government and the Uganda Peoples Democratic Movement', 3 June 1988, quoted in Brett, 1995.

¹¹ Chinua Achebe, (1958), *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann.

unexplained circumstances while Major Mike Kilama was shot by NRA while reportedly trying to escape to Kenya. Lt. Colonel Walter Odoch escaped from the country and now lives in the United Kingdom. Captain Okumu Cana escaped from Mbuya Military Hospital after years in detention but died in Sweden in 1996.¹² Charles Alai was later dismissed from the Cabinet. Was this, indeed, a fair and peaceful resolution of the northern conflict?

Far from the claim that 'by 1994 the civil war was virtually over, leaving behind little more than criminal gangs (Brett, 1995:149) the situation in the north continued to deteriorate. To the contrary, the civil war had intensified with the further loss of trust in the government by the people of Acholi as UPDA officers who had been integrated into NRA, now renamed Uganda Peoples Defence Forces, UPDF, disappeared without trace. The LRA was making inroads in its war of attrition in the region as they received military support from the Sudanese government, which was reacting to continued support by the Museveni regime of Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army, SPLA, led by Colonel John Garang. This is why once again, the government found it necessary to engage in peace talks with the LRA.

Betty Bigombe, Minister of State for Pacification of the north, headed the government negotiating team with Joseph Kony, leader of LRA rebels, in the 1993–94 peace talks. After long negotiation, a peace agreement was reached in 1994. However, LRA demanded six months to re-organise themselves in returning from their bases in the Sudan. This unreasonable demand on the part of LRA played into the hands of President Museveni who was at pains to accept the peaceful resolution of the conflict instead of his preferred military conquest of the North. Rather than set a reasonable time period, say one month, for the LRA to return from their Sudan bases, in March 1994 President Museveni issued an ultimatum to LRA to surrender within a week or else they would be 'crushed'. Ironically, this was on the day the government and LRA were supposed to sign the agreement. Once again, a peaceful resolution of the conflict had been shattered. The one-week ultimatum has turned into years and the war still continues to rage.

It would seem that the other two attempts at peaceful resolution of the conflict in the north were public relations exercises. First, there was the Defence and International Affairs Committee of the Uganda Parliament. It was mandated to discuss and explore ways in which the conflict in the north could be brought to an end. Not surprisingly, the Committee, which was dominated by NRM adherents from southern Uganda, recommended a military solution. A minority report by two northern MPs, Nobert Mao and Omara Atubo, urging peaceful talks with rebels, was brushed aside by Parliament. Second, was the enactment of an Amnesty Act 2000. This was promulgated at the prodding of the donor community, which wishes to see the image of a warrior President cleaned up. However, war drums from the government to 'crush' the rebels continued. More than 400,000 people in the north now live in 'protected villages', which are no less than detention camps.

¹² I owe this information to Paul Omach, Lecturer in the Department of Political Science, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.

Therefore, due to the intransigence of LRA and NRM's preferred military solution to the conflict, the North remains under siege by these uncompromising parties. The result has been a blatant abuse of human rights, murder and abduction on the part of LRA and systematic dehumanisation, discrimination and humiliation used as deliberate instruments of policy by the NRM government.¹³

Olara Otunnu said:

What shall I tell the children of northern Uganda, when they write and ask: 'How come that the champions of human rights gathered in Geneva are also the ardent champions of those responsible for such dark deeds in our land? Does anybody out there really care about our fate, about what is happening to our parents and us? We hear your deep silence. How shall I explain to the perplexed children that those on whom they had counted to defend their human rights have instead become cheerleaders and chief providers of succour and support for a structure which practises and celebrates systematic repression, ethnic discrimination and hatred, impunity, corruption and anti-democracy, a structure which routinely and chillingly gloats about destroying 'those people' — 'those people' and their children?'¹⁴

As a result, the majority of the northerners have been alienated by this deliberate, punitive government policy. This explains why the North has consistently voted against NRM in general, and Museveni in particular, in the last 12 years of electoral games in Uganda.

Despite the claim by Brett (1995:144) that there has been an elimination of the ethnic factor in recruitment and promotion, NRM has essentially relied on ethnic identity for promoting officers in the army. This moves the NRM progressively closer to an ethnic, military dictatorship. For instance during army promotions in 1996, the promotions reflected the essentially NRM's south-western ethnic dominance:

Of the 35 army officers promoted and published in the press, 23 are Westerners. All of them speak Runyoro-Rutoro-Runyankole-Rukiga, which was recently named Runyakitara, and live in one area, the West and south-western parts of the country. Of the 23 western officers promoted, 18 are Banyankole. 16 of the Banyankole are Bahima, (Museveni's sub-ethnic group amongst the Banyankole), who form only 20 per cent of all the Banyankole. (*The Monitor*, 16–19 August 1996)

More dramatic was the recent revelation by the army Chief of Staff, Brigadier James Kazini, that Nyabushoshi, President Museveni's *county*, not district, of origin has 'contributed' 6,000 officers and men to UPDF. This is almost as many officers and men as in the entire Uganda Army (UA) of 6,700 at the time of Obote's overthrow in 1971, and 10 per cent of the current UPDF, all from one county (Hansen, 1974:75). The military still plays a direct role in setting the political agenda in Uganda. In fact, the politics of Uganda has been re-militarised and ethnicised.

This can be evidenced by the 12 March presidential elections. Despite President Museveni relying on a biased legal framework, he used the state machinery as well

¹³ I have deliberately left out the rebel activities in western Uganda due to space. However, as in the north, the government's preferred solution is a military one.

¹⁴ See note 8 on p. 33.

to obstruct a transparent and fair electoral process. In addition to Museveni's financial and structural advantages, arbitrary arrests, attacks and intimidation were directed against the opposition, its supporters and agents. As Human Rights Watch put it then:

Since the start of the electoral campaign on January 11, reported cases of violence and arbitrary arrests implicate army soldiers, military intelligence officers, the police and Presidential Protection Unit, (PPU), (*under the command of President Museveni's son, Lt. Muhozi Keinerugaba*), as well as local defense units that are trained and armed by the government. (Human Rights Watch, 2001:2. Emphasis added.)

As the going got tough, and there was a real possibility of Museveni's failure to get the 50 per cent of the vote to be declared winner on the first ballot, Museveni 'threw all caution to the wind and *called out the army to supervise elections*', (*emphasis added*), (*The Guardian*, 9 March, 2001). This was tantamount to putting the country under martial rule. Museveni also employed the 'sectarian' religious card, which according to him is common with political parties. A few days before Election Day on 12 March, 2001, he invited the Catholic clergy, mainly from Buganda, to State House. These were most likely to campaign for the opposition since most of them are likely members of DP. He made a strong case for their votes and promised them that a Muganda Catholic would succeed him. (*The Monitor*, 20 June, 2001.)

President Museveni took the challenge from Rtd. Colonel Dr. Kizza Besigye, his 'bush doctor' and political ideologue in the first five years of his rule as ethnic betrayal. The violence meted out to Colonel Kizza Besigye's supporters, particularly in western Uganda, was unprecedented since it was the home region of both contenders. To Museveni, Besigye was a spoiler in this game of regional hegemony. Similar violence was repeated in the June 2001 parliamentary elections.

The militarism and ethnic mind-set used both in the civil war in the North and in electoral processes has left the country under the grip of ethnicity, militarism and authoritarianism. Democratic practice, which could have gone a long way to resolving these long-standing intricacies in Ugandan politics, has been thrown to the wind. The rejection of peaceful resolution of conflicts around the country has long-term consequences for Uganda's national unity and development. Finally, one has to stress the conspiracy of silence in the 'international community' in the restriction of political rights, abuse of human rights and in the consolidation of an ethnically organised one-party state in Uganda.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND THE DEMOCRATISATION PROCESS IN UGANDA

Since the early 1990s, many western donors have premised their aid on progress in the democratisation process. Unlike other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, for example Kenya and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, (DRC), which have been demonised by IMF and the World Bank and which have aid cut off, Uganda's progressive entrenchment of a one-party state seems to be compatible with donor

interests. Uganda has never been threatened with harsh donor conditionality like other African countries. Instead, the western donors have opted for 'dialogue' based on flawed engagement and conspicuous silence on issues of political rights and human rights abuses in the country. As the Human Rights Watch (1999:145) observes:

The international community seems to accept the serious human rights abuses in Uganda as a minor issue, and has not engaged in much critical discussion with the Museveni government about these abuses.

It would appear that the most important element in this flawed engagement is the symbiotic benefits to both the NRM government and western donors in general, and the World Bank in particular. Uganda is one of the few African countries which has been willing to embrace the stringent and unbridled structural adjustment programmes, (SAPs) which the World Bank considers essential to restoring fiscal discipline and monetary stability. Uganda has also served as an important advocate for the World Bank's programmes in Africa. At the same time, the World Bank has invested very heavily in making Uganda an 'economic success' story. As a result, the World Bank is loath to see Museveni criticised (Human Rights Watch, 1999:151–52).

Two of the key measures pursued by the NRM government and the donors, which must be appreciated, have been civil reform and demobilisation of the armed forces without any civil disturbance, primarily aimed at saving salary costs. As Haynes (2001:197) notes, 'The size of the civil service was reduced from over 300,000 staff members to a third of that number in the 1990s. Similarly, the armed forces were substantially demobilised. However, these apparent achievements have been eroded by government and donor policies. Concurrent with the civil service reform, the government and donors embarked on the creation of new specialised agencies to implement aspects of civil structural adjustment. These included Uganda Revenue Authority, URA, Uganda Investment Authority, UIA, Civil Aviation Authority, CAA, and Privatisation Unit, among others. The negative side to the creation of these organisations was that the NRM saw it as an opportunity to reward its political and ethnic clients from the south-western part of the country with jobs. This ethnically based recruitment raised concern. When the press raised the issue, President Museveni simply retorted, 'after all westerners, (his place of origin) are more educated'. This can only but enhance ethnicity in the country.

The demobilisation of the armed forces was also wiped out with the NRM's militarist stance in the region. With the invasion of the DRC in 1998, the demobilised soldiers were integrated in the army to aid in war efforts. Therefore, both the civil service reforms and armed forces demobilisation have not been as successful as the donors and the government would want us to believe.

Uganda's relations with western donors in the 1990s have obstructed the democratisation process and peaceful conflict resolution in the country. The resort to 'dialogue' rather than coercive methods may be attributed to a number of factors. As Hauser (1999:621), summarises, donors were concerned by:

...the destruction from which Uganda was recovering, the need to present Uganda as a success for economic liberalisation, and donors' need to maintain good relations with Uganda in order to pursue their foreign policy goals. The resulting donor-recipient relationship has however created dangers for the maintenance of long-term sustainable democracy in Uganda, by condoning divisive policies, and neglecting the need for coalition-building and conflict resolution.

The recovery from decades of destruction in Uganda through donor and the NRM government policies in the past 10 years must be appreciated. However, the practice by Western countries of focusing on individuals or personalities as the solution to national dilemmas, in this case President Museveni, rather than alternative political organisations, needs re-thinking. There seems to be a view that Ugandans, and Africans in general, do not deserve the same rights as peoples elsewhere, and that strong men are what is needed to keep the volatile African countries at peace. It would seem the argument by Haynes (2001) 'that Western demands for democracy in Africa in the 1990s were sometimes not much more than rhetoric: what Western governments wanted primarily was political and economic stability, not necessarily democracy' is largely accurate.

Finally, the implication of treating Uganda as a special case, where political and human rights abuses are condoned as a result of narrow foreign policy goals, is that it undermines the moral authority of the western donors' position on human rights and democracy elsewhere on the continent. The long-running conflicts between the NRM and rebels and regional monopoly of power in the country by the NRM itself imply a lopsided economic 'miracle'. This is because where there is conflict and regional and ethnically defined access to power and hence, economic resources, there remains iniquitous resource distribution in the country, a source of future conflict.

Sections of the Ugandan society have become increasingly pessimistic about the 'international community's' support for the Ugandan democratisation process. As the space for democratic organisation and association remains constricted with the tacit support of the donor community, Ugandans have to rely on internal resources to push forward the democratisation process. Given the determination by NRM to monopolise power indefinitely, the situation opens the door for methods that lack any democratic pretension. The tragedy of Uganda is that there has emerged a militarist, autocratic, ethnically organised state, which relies on ethnic chauvinism and resists the democratisation of state power since the regime's survival hinges on ethnic hegemony over state resources.

CONCLUSION

It is the argument of this paper that much of the explanation of the causes of ethnicity, ethnic conflict, militarism and the possible solutions to them in the Ugandan context, obstructs an understanding of the substantive underlying political, economic and social configurations that enhance ethnicity. The intricate ethnic configuration and militarism in Uganda's politics lie in their historical construction and continued

reproduction since independence in 1962. Ethnicity is neither primordial (archaic) nor static. All societies are plural because human organisation is based on cognition of different levels of identity—family, clan, village, tribe, religion, language region or nationality. Pluralism in itself is not problematic except when certain groups perceive that they are being excluded from what they consider to be their rights, whether political, religious, administrative, economic or linguistic. The central problem posed by exclusion is domination. Since ethnicity is made or constructed it can be deconstructed. The answers to the dilemma posed by ethnicity and forces of its deconstruction must lie in structural changes which address political, social and economic inequity and imbalances in power in a given society. The answer, in other words, points to good governance and democratisation. Rather than resist or negate the process of group definition, it is more useful to evolve less antagonistic ways of promoting co-existence between groups. Democratisation of state power is fundamental in this process.

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