

Ethnic Conflict in Uganda

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The Republic of Uganda, a small sub-Saharan African country, has seen a history of extreme violence and ethnic conflict. Such clashes have been going on since the pre-colonial era (1860-1894). This conflict intensified in the post-colonial period (1962-1986), however, during which time nearly 1 million Ugandans were killed.

A number of initiatives and programmes have been launched in the years since the NRM under President Yoweri Museveni acceded to power, to address these ethnic issues. This paper explores five of these initiatives, below.

One further note deserves mention here. Much of the data included in this paper is drawn from my doctoral dissertation, "The Politics of Acknowledgement: Truth Commissions in Uganda and Haiti."² Some of it was collected in Uganda in the summer of 2001 from interviewees who wished to remain anonymous. As a result, in some places, quotes are attributed simply to unidentified government agents. In all cases, the

¹ Joanna R. Quinn is Assistant Professor of Political Science at The University of Western Ontario.

² Joanna R. Quinn, "The Politics of Acknowledgement: Truth Commissions in Uganda and Haiti," Ph.D. diss., McMaster University, 2003).

information is current at the time of writing. But, as with most highly charged situations, the state of affairs in Uganda remains fluid.

Social and Political History of Ethnic Breakdown in the Colonial Period

Until the late nineteenth century, there were few Europeans in the Great Lakes region of Africa. When Europeans began to arrive, it was in waves: first came occasional visits by travelers in the 1860s and early 1870s; next came missionaries in the late 1870s; and, finally, the Imperial British East Africa Company in 1890. Britain was involved in the region as early as 1960,³ and formally declared a protectorate over the area which now comprises Uganda in 1894.⁴

At that time, the country was divided into a series of indigenous kingdoms and chieftaincies, each of which had its own ruler and leadership system.⁵ Although the kingdoms of Bunyoro-Kitara, Toro, Bugosa and Ankole had enjoyed high levels of allegiance and power in the pre-colonial period, by the 1890s, the Kingdom of Buganda had become Uganda's principal Kingdom. As a result, the British counted the Baganda⁶ as their main strategic allies. After Britain colonized the Kingdoms of Bunyoro, Toro, Ankole and Bugosa in 1896, the Baganda promptly became the highly-favoured agents of the British Crown, acting as tax collectors and labour recruiters, and forcing the Buganda

³ "Districts in Uganda," *Government of The Republic of Uganda*; [article on-line]; <http://www.government.go.ug/districts/>; internet; accessed 30 May 2004.

⁴ M. Louise Pirouet, "Uganda: History to 1971," *Encyclopedia of Africa South of the Sahara*, ed. John Middleton (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1996) 303-306.

⁵ Dirk Berg-Schlosser and Rainer Sieglar, *Political Stability and Development: A Comparative Analysis of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990) 97.

⁶ "The people of Buganda are referred to as *Baganda* (the singular form is *Muganda*), their language is referred to as *Luganda*, and they refer to their customs as *Kiganda* customs." From "Introduction," *The Buganda Home Page*; [article on-line]; <http://www.buganda.com/bugintro.htm>; internet; accessed 24 May 2003.

culture on those from other parts of the new Protectorate of Uganda. As a result of this colonial policy, the other kingdoms deeply resented the Baganda.

The Kingdom of Buganda, particularly, attempted several times to conquer the other kingdoms.⁷ From 1894, when the British claimed Uganda as a protectorate, the colonial powers began to re-define the social structure of the country. The British favoured certain groups over others. An official in a quasi-governmental organization explained the history of the police in Uganda to me in this way:

The entire history of the police, just imagine, they are really not police, they are made up of a police recruiting army from 1906. The British decided they needed an army, so in 1901 they decided to pick some big strong people from the north to fight – what we call Nubian – they come from the mountains in Sudan. Those were originally the people who were chosen to be the police. English foreigners, when they came here, identified certain tribal groups, like the people here in the central Uganda area, who questioned the colonials why they wanted them to do so and so. So they went to the north and relocated the whole bunch of them down here to keep the law. The police are people who you ran away from. They are foreigners. They are strangers. They beat up people, and sometimes they kill them.

Into this already tense atmosphere was woven a tense relationship between Muslim traders from the coast of east Africa, and Christians. Serious conflict between the two groups ensued in the form of war between 1888 and 1889, and also between Christian factions in 1892, from which the Protestants emerged victorious.⁸ In 1900, the Uganda Agreement,⁹ a treaty between the British protectorate and the kingdom of Buganda, was signed, an attempt to establish indirect British rule in the protectorate. The Uganda Agreement divided Buganda along religious lines, and Ganda chiefs were given pockets of land measured in square miles (called *mailo* lands) as their private property,

⁷ Ofcansky, *Uganda: Tarnished Pearl of Africa*, 14-16.

⁸ Pirouet 304.

⁹ The Uganda Agreement of 1900 is also referred to in the literature as the Buganda Agreement, as it significantly changed Bugandan society. See Berg-Schlosser and Siegler 97-99.

their rule restricted to a central royal council. During this period, Uganda was held up by Britain as a model of indirect rule.¹⁰

Social and Political History of Ethnic Breakdown in the Post-Colonial Period

The original structure of Uganda's post-independence government had been established in the form of Legislative and Executive Councils in 1920. Ugandans were not granted access to either of these bodies until 1944 and the early 1950s, respectively.¹¹ Those politicians who entered the fray in 1962, then, were novices in the use of Britain's exported Westminster parliamentary system, itself an ancient and well-established institution. Even the new prime minister, Milton Obote, a Langi tribesman who held office from 1962 to 1971, was relatively inexperienced in the ways of parliamentary democracy.

Uganda's political structure continued in much the same configuration, even through especially violent strikes in Buganda during 1945 and 1949, until 1962. The Baganda were rioting against unfair government policies regarding cotton sales, and for the right to local representation. In March of that year, internal autonomy was granted to Uganda, followed by complete sovereignty on 9 October, 1962. A National Assembly was elected, and a semi-federal constitution drafted; for the first time since colonialism and contact with the British, Ugandans once again enjoyed independence.

After Uganda declared independence in 1962, the Ugandan leaders themselves continued to pursue policies that further divided the population. In 1967, the traditional

¹⁰ Pirouet 304.

¹¹ Samwiri Lwanga-Lunyiigo, "The Colonial Roots of Conflict," in *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, ed. Kumar Rupesinghe (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1989) 37.

Kingdoms were abolished.¹² “Obote was creating artificial divisions among the people... He thus actually served imperialism by emphasising internal differences.”¹³ One government staffer reflected on the changes in post-independence Uganda: “You know, the colonialists really changed people’s cultures. But unfortunately the Ugandan leaders who took over after Independence hoped they would form a Ugandan mono-culture and that people would forget their own cultures. Which is very difficult. And the way it was done was by using the police to do it. And the people suffered... Unfortunately the government destroyed those cultures.”

Life under Obote and his successors turned out to be very different than it had been under the British. From 1962 until 1986, Uganda experienced a series of coups, culminating in a great concentration of power in the hands of the head of state. Obote’s first term in power was characterized by significant numbers of riots and armed attacks.¹⁴ Many of the violent protests were carried out by the Baganda in protest against Obote’s consolidation of power. Other uprisings came from the Ugandan military.

General Idi Amin Dada, an illiterate career soldier of “limited intelligence”¹⁵ from the minority Kakwa tribe in the northwest of the country, served as Obote’s army commander. In 1971, Amin overthrew Obote, suspended the constitution and ruled under a provisional government structure until 1979. To sustain his authority, Amin, who came to be known as “the butcher,” carried out a reign of terror, systematically murdering and torturing those he considered to stand in his way.¹⁶ He targeted those who were seen

¹² The Republic of Uganda, *The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Violations of Human Rights* (Kampala: UPPC, 1994) 23.

¹³ Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed* (London: MacMillan, 1997) 44.

¹⁴ Berg-Schlosser and Siegler 196.

¹⁵ Thomas P. Ofcansky, *Uganda: Tarnished Pearl of Africa* (Boulder: Westview, 1996) 42.

¹⁶ Nancy G. Wright, “Uganda: History From 1971,” *Encyclopedia of Africa South of the Sahara*, ed. John Middleton (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1996) 306.

to have supported Obote, especially people of Acholi and Langi descent, many of whom tended to dominate the military. The more than 70,000 ethnic Asians living in Uganda were brutally expelled by Amin in 1972 and their property confiscated, compensation for which had yet to be determined at the time of writing.¹⁷ During this period, violence was rampant, and the military and paramilitary mechanisms of the state conducted brutal campaigns of torture.¹⁸ No exact figures of the number of people who were killed under Amin exist. The Commission's Report refers only to the "hundreds of thousands" who died.¹⁹ Conservative estimates place the figure at between 300,000²⁰ and 500,000.²¹

In 1978, Amin's Ugandan forces attacked Tanzania and annexed 1,800-square kilometres of Tanzania. Amin reportedly believed that he was "teaching President Nyerere [of Tanzania] a lesson"²² for Tanzania's September 1972 invasion of Uganda, which had been organized by Obote and supported by the Tanzanian government. In November 1978, in support of Amin's opponents (including forces led by past president Obote and future president Museveni), Tanzania invaded Uganda. By April 1979, Amin's forces were defeated. Amin himself fled to exile in Libya.²³ Interim governments were appointed in 1979 and 1980.

As the result of rigged elections in 1980, Obote returned to power. He remained until July 1985 when he was overthrown, again by a faction of the Ugandan military. The

¹⁷ Pirouet 305.

¹⁸ Berg-Schlosser and Siegler 199; Edward Khiddu-Makubuya, "Paramilitarism and Human Rights," in *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, ed. Kumar Rupesinghe (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1989) 141-157.

¹⁹ The Republic of Uganda, *The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Violations of Human Rights* (Kampala: UPPC, 1994) 628.

²⁰ Philip Briggs, *Uganda* (Old Saybrook, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 1998) 23.

²¹ Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed*, 41.

²² *Ibid.*, 92.

²³ Ofcansky, *Uganda: Tarnished Pearl of Africa*, 47.

country was once again assailed by “rampant human rights abuses,”²⁴ under Obote’s “Operation Bonanza,”²⁵ this time far worse than anything experienced during Obote’s first term in office. The paramilitary apparatus of the state again began its practice of routinely violating human rights, by means of rape, torture, looting and destruction of property.²⁶ The scale of repression and abuse was roughly the same as it had been under Amin. The only difference for many Ugandans was that their former leader (Amin) had been substituted for another (Obote) with a heightened and reinvigorated fury. Conservative estimates again place the number of those killed during this period at approximately 300,000²⁷ to 320,000.²⁸ From July 1985, a military council governed for six months, until it, too, was overthrown.

Yoweri Museveni seized power in January, 1986, abolishing all political parties except the National Resistance Movement (NRM) that had made his victory possible.²⁹ Museveni and the NRM (formerly the National Resistance Army – NRA) had been fighting against the regimes of Amin and Obote, as well as the transitional regimes, in Uganda since 1971.³⁰ Conditions began to improve in Uganda after Museveni took power. Buganda and some of the other Ugandan monarchies were restored, but to considerably less status than they once held.³¹ The human rights abuses abated.

²⁴ “Uganda,” *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 1999*, ed. Robert Famighetti (Mahwah, NJ: Primedia Reference, 1998) 852.

²⁵ Ofcansky, *Uganda: Tarnished Pearl of Africa*, 54-55.

²⁶ Berg-Schlosser and Siegler 199, Khiddu-Makubuya, “Paramilitarism” 153.

²⁷ *Uganda* (Brooklyn: Interlink Books, 1998) 53; Ofcansky, *Uganda: Tarnished Pearl of Africa*, 55.

²⁸ Ofcansky, *Uganda: Tarnished Pearl of Africa*, 55.

²⁹ For a much more complete account of Uganda’s history from 1971, see Berg-Schlosser and Siegler 97-132.

³⁰ Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed*, 33, 46-173.

³¹ “Uganda,” *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2000*, ed. Robert Famighetti (Mahwah, NJ: Primedia Reference, 1999) 868.

Current Conditions

In 2004, the structure of Uganda's government remained much the same as it was when Museveni came to power in 1986. The Republic of Uganda was governed by President Yoweri Museveni and Prime Minister Apollo Nsubambi.³² Yet Uganda was left devastated by more than two decades of intense struggle and brutality. It is one of the states in the world most badly affected by HIV and AIDS.³³ Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been forced to assume much of the encumbrance of the provision and contribution of financial support³⁴ as the state itself has been financially unable to offer assistance in all areas.³⁵

Acholi, in northern Uganda, remained at the mercy of both rebel armies and Ugandan forces. "The conflict in Acholiland began soon after Uganda's last regime change in January 1986. It was triggered by the NRM's methods for consolidating control over the northern parts of the country."³⁶ Joseph Kony, leader of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), seized Ugandan boys to act as soldiers, and kidnapped girls to be used by him and his fellow rebels as their wives. "The LRA rebels say they are fighting for the establishment of a government based on the biblical Ten Commandments,"³⁷ and worked toward the overthrow of Museveni's government. (Kony's forces took over from a group called the Holy Spirit Movement, which was led

³² "Uganda" (1999), 852.

³³ "Mariandina AIDS Research Foundation," *National Information Centre*, 11 Sep. 1999; [article on-line]; available from <http://www.mariandina.or.ug>; internet.

³⁴ Hölger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle, "Introduction," in *Changing Uganda: The Dilemmas of Structural Adjustment and Revolutionary Change*, eds. Hölger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle (London: James Currey, 1991) 15.

³⁵ Susan Dicklich, "Indigenous NGOs and political participation," in *Developing Uganda*, eds. Hölger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle (Oxford: James Currey, 1998) 145.

³⁶ Catherine Barnes and Okello Lucima, "Introduction," *Accord* (2002) 11: 1.

³⁷ "Lord's Resistance Army," [article on-line]; available from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/lra.htm>; internet; accessed 29 June 2003.

by a woman called Alice Lakwena, who claimed to receive visions from God that told her to carry out vicious attacks. Lakwena and Kony were cousins.) Until 2002, the Government of Sudan backed the LRA in retaliation for Uganda's official backing of the southern Sudan Peoples Liberation group.³⁸ Vicious fighting continued into 2004.

Citizens sometimes still associate "government" with violence and corruption.³⁹ In an effort to reverse this image, the government annually granted amnesty and pardon to prisoners.⁴⁰ This was specified in Museveni's "Prerogative of Mercy," which allowed the President to pardon any criminals responsible for crimes committed before the 1995 Constitution came into force.⁴¹ The Government has attempted to create a new image, through agencies such as the official government daily newspaper, *The New Vision*,⁴² Radio Uganda,⁴³ and the National Museum, National Cultural Centre and Nommo Gallery. All are evidence of what the government boasts of as a "forged union of many peoples... [who] live and work together as one people, all proud to be Ugandans, while each cherishes their history and traditions."⁴⁴

At present, the people of Uganda remain poor. Continued military involvement in other countries in the Great Lakes Region (including Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan), as well as against rebel activity in the north of the country has exacted a high cost

³⁸ Ibid., 2. For an excellent summary of events, see Michael Twaddle and Hölger Bernt Hansen, "The changing state of Uganda," in *Developing Uganda*, 5-6.

³⁹ James Tumusiime and Sylvester Onyang, "UPDF amasses in Karamoja," *The Monitor*, 11 Sep. 1999; [article on-line]; available from http://www.africanews.org/east/uganda/stories/19990911_feat4.html; internet.

⁴⁰ "Professor Rugumayo Tours Luzira Prisons Complex," *New Vision*, 11 Sep. 1999; [article on-line]; available from http://www.africanews.org/east/uganda/stories/19990911_feat4.html; internet.

⁴¹ *Uganda Constitution (1995)*, article 281.

⁴² "News in Uganda," *National Information Centre*, 11 Sep. 1999; [article on-line]; available from <http://www.nic.ug/News>; internet.

⁴³ U.S. Department of State, "Uganda Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998," 26 Feb. 1999; [report on-line]; available from http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1998_hrp_report/uganda.html, 25 July 1999; internet.

⁴⁴ "Uganda Arts and Culture," *National Information Centre*, 11 Sep. 1999; [article on-line]; available from <http://www.nic.ug/Arts>; internet.

both militarily and economically. And, although the government implemented changes intended to stabilize the country, more than 35% of the population lives in abject poverty.⁴⁵ The Government continues to perpetrate human rights abuses, and “there continue to be numerous, serious problems.”⁴⁶

Remedies

Over the years, then, the country has been divided along several lines.⁴⁷ The first of these is the north-south divide. In part, this arises because the colonial powers had chosen to favour certain groups over others, as described in the recruiting of the police force, above. The second divide is symbolized by religious cleavages. These divisions run mainly between Protestant, Catholic and Muslim segments of the population, as evidenced in the three major political parties that came to exist after independence: the Catholic Democratic Party, the nominally Protestant Uganda People’s Congress, and the Kabaka Yekka, an Anglican Bugandan party.⁴⁸ In fact, both Obote and Museveni attempted to “demonstrate denominational impartiality.”⁴⁹ Obote, a Protestant, visited the Vatican to try to allay inter-denominational fears.

These party divisions also reflect the third clash: ethnicity. President Museveni described these how these cleavages play out in national politics:

⁴⁵ “Uganda,” CIA: *The World Factbook* 19 March 2002; [report on-line]; available from <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/ug.html>; internet; accessed 23 May 2003.

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of State, “Uganda Report on Human Rights Practices for 2002,” 31 Mar. 2003; [report on-line]; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18232.htm>; internet; accessed 24 May 2003.

⁴⁷ Susan Dicklitch, “Uganda: A microcosm for crisis and hope in sub-Saharan Africa,” *International Journal* 51.1 (Winter 1995-1996) 105-108.

⁴⁸ Dirk Berg-Schlosser and Rainer Siegler, *Political Stability and Development: A Comparative Analysis of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990) 99-100.

⁴⁹ Ofcansky, *Uganda: Tarnished Pearl of Africa*, 74-75.

The question of policies never comes into discussions of party politics. The argument is simply: 'You are black, therefore you are in this party; you are white, therefore you are in the other party; you are a Protestant or Catholic, therefore you two cannot belong together in the same party.' If someone takes a position on an issue, it is after he or she has already been press-ganged into an identity group. The person then argues this position from the point of view of identity, and not from the merits of the issue at hand."⁵⁰

Since coming to power in 1986, the present government, under President Yoweri Museveni and the National Resistance Movement, has implemented a number of political programs and institutions aimed at "fixing" the ethnic tensions that exist within the country. Their success or failure, and it must be admitted that these remedies have largely failed, has depended on a variety of factors. Several of these remedies are explored below.

Ten-Point Programme

One of President Museveni's first acts upon seizing power in 1986 was to outline a ten-point programme in which he emphasized democracy, security, national unity, independence, restoring and rehabilitating social services, ending corruption and misuse of power, dealing with the plight of displaced people, pan-African cooperation and pursuing a mixed economy as the basic tenets of his philosophy. These were intended to provide "the basis for a nationwide coalition of political and social forces which could usher in a better future for the long-suffering people of Uganda."⁵¹ Specifically, he pledged the "consolidation of national unity and the elimination of all forms of sectarianism."⁵²

⁵⁰ Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed*, 16.

⁵¹ Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed*, 217.

⁵² *Ibid.*

Museveni himself attributed the cause of such strong differences between ethnic groups (i.e. language, religion and custom) and the resultant violence in a Marxist-style explanation:

Sectarianism is a consequence of an incomplete social metamorphosis. In other countries, society has been changing continually... In its metamorphosis society in Europe has gone through several stages in order to reach its present state, just as a butterfly or a cockroach does. The insect's first form of life is an egg, which develops into a larva, then a pupa, after which it matures into a fully-fledged butterfly or cockroach. The problem with Africa is that not only has its society not metamorphosed, it has actually regressed. When the British explorer seeking the source of the Nile, John Hannington Speke, came to Uganda in 1862, many of the societies here had three classes – a feudal class, an artisan class and a peasant class. Both the feudal and artisan classes were wiped out and Uganda effectively regressed into becoming an almost exclusively peasant society. The situation now is that 92 per cent of the population are peasants... Eventually, the society will be transformed and modernised [*sic*]. The moment that process takes place, one's tribe or religion cease to be of much consequence.⁵³

Resistance Councils

One of the responses of Museveni and the NRM to ethnic difference and “sectarianism” was the formation of local Resistance Councils (RCs), which were named after the Resistance Movement that Museveni himself championed. These RCs grew out of the efforts of the NRM (then the National Resistance Army, or NRA) from their underground bush war beginnings in 1981. At that time, the RCs were informal networks of volunteers who assisted the NRA in their campaign, providing “food, recruits and intelligence information” for the guerrilla soldiers.⁵⁴ The NRM claims to have held elections for positions within the local RCs. Within a few years, the RCs came to act as *de facto* local governments, organizing and providing services including policing and administration.

⁵³ Ibid., 187-188.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 189.

When Museveni came to power in 1986, the RC structures were formalized all over the country. The RCs were structured hierarchically, beginning with an elected committee at the village level, which was known as RC1. “Above the RC1 came the Parish Resistance Council... The system was replicated through the sub-county, RC3, level, to the county, RC4, and on to the district, RC5, level.”⁵⁵ Theoretically, and to some extent also in practice, “the RC system has allowed thousands of Ugandans to participate in the governing process.”⁵⁶ Yet the RCs wield an enormous amount of power. RCs “vet recruits into the army and police, they have judicial powers to decide on some civil cases, and they have been made responsible for a broad range of development in their areas, such as building clinics, dispensaries and schools.”⁵⁷

Reviews of the RC system, therefore, are mixed. Dicklitch saw the RC system as “important in bringing together people of different ethnicities and religions to work for mutual benefit.”⁵⁸ Yet she warned that the RCs also acted as a tool of the NRM to harmonize political opinions, and that dissent was not tolerated. As a result, “the NRM’s claim to populism [was] slowly eroding.”⁵⁹ Others, including Ofcansky, saw the RC system as detrimental to the creation and maintenance of “nationwide popular, efficient local-level government. Anti-Museveni insurgents often killed RC members to discredit and weaken his regime. Corruption and incompetence plagued many village RCs.”⁶⁰

By 2004, a parallel system of agencies ready to take on many of the responsibilities abdicated by the state was in place. These took the form of civil society

⁵⁵ Ibid., 190.

⁵⁶ Ofcansky, *Uganda: Tarnished Pearl of Africa*, 157.

⁵⁷ Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed*, 190.

⁵⁸ Susan Dicklitch, “Uganda: A microcosm for crisis and hope in sub-Saharan Africa,” *International Journal* 51.1 (Winter 1995-1996) 112.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 113-114.

⁶⁰ Ofcansky, *Uganda: Tarnished Pearl of Africa*, 61.

organizations, a great number of which came into being when Museveni came to power in 1986. Prior to that time, most social organizations were self-help organizations operating at the local level. “Most Ugandans were too terrorized by the state for the duration of the 1970s and 1980s to engage in any [real] activity.”⁶¹

Banning of Political Parties

In tandem with his building of RCs at various levels, Museveni banned all political parties, which are so closely tied to ethnic and religious groups.⁶² Political parties were banned under the 1986 Political Parties and Organizations Act.⁶³ He claimed that the elimination of political parties would harmonize Ugandan society. “Many people do not understand our aversion to political parties, but it is because of the history of sectarianism which these parties fostered in our society, mainly on the basis of religion.”⁶⁴ Museveni has continued to contend that a “multiparty political system [is] not necessary to ensure democracy in Uganda.”⁶⁵ In 1993, Museveni made it clear that he wanted the no-party system to continue for at least fifteen years.⁶⁶ And he continued to pursue what he claimed was a “democratic government that relies on consensus rather than force... [yet he had] postponed elections... and banned political parties.”⁶⁷

But by 2004, Museveni had not re-introduced the element of opposition to the Ugandan political landscape. The no-party Movement system was ostensibly confirmed by

⁶¹ Susan Dicklitch, *The Elusive Promise of NGOs in Africa: Lessons from Uganda* (New York: MacMillan and St. Martin's Press, 1998) 54.

⁶² Dicklitch, “Uganda: A microcosm of crisis and hope,” 108.

⁶³ Will Ross, “Uganda restrictions under fire,” *BBC News*, 3 July 2002.

⁶⁴ Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed*, 190.

⁶⁵ Ofcansky, *Uganda: Tarnished Pearl of Africa*, 61.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁶⁷ Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed*, 60.

Ugandans in a Referendum held in 2000.⁶⁸ Opposition members and their leaders were often harassed and arrested in advance of planned political rallies.⁶⁹ Neither had any real civic education been carried out.

A member of the unofficial opposition had this to say in 2001: “The political situation definitely has not improved. The institutions of democracy and civil society which can play its role: the government wants to have control of them. Democratic institutions like political parties of course are all abolished. And what other institution can develop a concept that would promote democracy? We have nothing else.” One wonders how it should be surprising that civil society was unable to “grow and strengthen... given the fact that society was almost uniformly repressed by those in power during the majority of the independence years.”⁷⁰ In the end, members of Uganda’s political and intellectual elite were not at all positive about the developments in civil society that had begun to appear. “Scratch the surface,” said one, “and I think you’ll find very serious problems.”

Reinstatement of Kingdoms

The tribal kingdoms of the country were abolished in 1967, under Obote.⁷¹ An earlier Constitution, promulgated in 1962, had given the Kingdom of Buganda considerable powers, and named the King of Buganda, traditionally called the *Kabaka*, as President. The 1962 Constitution “[entrenched] Buganda and its *kabaka* in the affairs of Uganda. In short, Buganda was given a privileged position, making it appear to be a state

⁶⁸ “USAID/Uganda,” [report on-line]; (Washington: USAID, 2002); available from <http://www.usaid.org/about-usaid-uganda.htm>; internet; accessed 5 November 2002.

⁶⁹ Paul Busharizi, “One Killed in Uganda Ahead of Banned Rally,” *Reuters.com*; [article on-line]; available from http://www.reuters.com/news_article.jhtml?type=worldnews&StoryID=510967; Internet; accessed 12 January 2002.

⁷⁰ Dicklitch, “Uganda: A microcosm of crisis and hope,” 47.

⁷¹ The Republic of Uganda, *The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Violations of Human Rights*, 23.

within a state.”⁷² In 1966, the National Assembly substantially limited the power of Uganda’s traditional leaders and Obote forced the King of Buganda into exile. By 1967, “he introduced a new constitution, which abolished Uganda’s four kingdoms (Buganda, Bunyoro, Ankole, and Toro) and gave the president considerable powers.”⁷³

Many of the kingdoms had fought on the side of Museveni during the bush war, when Museveni “marshaled all aggrieved parties” to fight against Obote.⁷⁴ The kingdoms were eventually reinstated under in 1993, but without any political powers.⁷⁵ The existence of the kingdoms is now protected under the 1995 Constitution.⁷⁶ “The entire issue of the powers – and the financial upkeep – of the kingdoms (particularly the Buganda kingdom) is a political hotbed. To what extent they will maintain their independence from the central government remains to be seen, but it is certain that the kingdoms of Uganda – an integral part of the country’s cultural roots – will remain entities to be reckoned with for some time to come.”⁷⁷

To be sure, the kingdoms and their respective dignitaries enjoy an elevated status within the country. Princess Elizabeth Bagaya of Toro, for example, has been an outspoken international activist for Uganda. And in July 2001, Museveni hosted Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi in a state visit during which Gaddafi attended the coronation anniversary celebrations of King Oyo of Toro, a kingdom in the west of Uganda.⁷⁸

⁷² “Post-independence,” *Spectrum Guide to Uganda* (New York: Interlink Books, 1998) 48.

⁷³ Ofcansky, *Uganda: Tarnished Pearl of Africa*, 61.

⁷⁴ “The Kingdoms of Uganda,” *Spectrum Guide to Uganda*, 298.

⁷⁵ *Uganda* (Brooklyn: Interlink Books, 1998) 298-299.

⁷⁶ *Uganda Constitution (1995)*, article 246.

⁷⁷ “The Kingdoms of Uganda,” *Spectrum Guide to Uganda*, 299.

⁷⁸ Gawaye Tegulle, “Why is Gaddafi in love with Uganda?” *New Vision* (Kampala), 18 July 2001.

Special Regional Ministries of State

Another initiative implemented by Museveni is the establishment of at least three Ministries of State to deal with issues that are relevant to particular regions. (There are 28 Ministries of State in total in Uganda.) These special regional Ministries of State date to the early 1990s. And all operate under the general umbrella of the Office of the Prime Minister.

In fact, their geneses are similar; all of the special regional Ministries of State have been established in areas of intense fighting and/or resistance to the Museveni government. They have been created in Luwero Triangle, Karamoja, and in several regions in the north of the country. These three areas represent areas of concern, and in both Karamoja and the north of the country, particularly around the region of Gulu, serious fighting and other difficulties continue.

The first was established in 1991 to deal with the District of Luwero, which is located virtually in the centre of the country of Uganda. The Luwero Triangle, as it is often called, was the scene of some of the worst fighting, from 1980-1986, in the history of Uganda. Thousands of people were killed during battles between the forces of Obote and Museveni. "The mission of the Department of Luwero Triangle is to administer the task of planning, coordinating and organizing the social, economic and political rehabilitation and development in the war affected areas in the face of the after mirth of the liberation war of 1981-1986."⁷⁹

In the District of Luwero, quite unlike the other regions of the country, there appears to be grass-roots impetus to remember what happened. And the citizens there, in

⁷⁹ Government of Uganda, "Presidential and Foreign Affairs Committee Report on the Ministerial Policy Statement and Budget Estimates for the Financial Year 2003/04," [report on-line]; available from http://www.parliament.go.ug/presidential%20rpt7_session3.htm; internet; accessed 01 June 2004.

cooperation with the Ministry of State in charge of the Luwero Triangle, are attempting to memorialize those who died. Along the side of the highway that runs throughout the length of the district sit two abandoned tanks. The citizens of Luwero District have asked specifically that they be left as a reminder of the fighting. In that area, there was also a mass burial of thousands of skulls left from the fighting. One government official explained:

At the end of the war there were lots of skulls, scattered all over Uganda. So this government made an effort to collect those skulls and skeletons. They had sites where they kept them for some time; people went to see the skulls. Initially they were really just collected in the open, and people could see there was a skull over here, a skull over there. Then they collected all of these because they could not tell who the skulls were. Eventually the government went and collected them and made mass burials of those skulls at the various sites in the country. So those places are there.”

Another of the Ministries of State has been established in Karamoja, a region located in the far northeastern part of Uganda, sharing a border with Sudan and in very close proximity to Kenya. The people of Karamoja (colloquially called Karamojong) are described as “Uganda’s most singular ethnic group... nomadic pastoralists whose love of cattle has an obsessive quality rivaling that of the Maasai of Tanzania and Kenya.”⁸⁰ The Karamojong had allied themselves with Obote in 1978-1979, and had been provided with a substantial number of guns to fight Amin. They continued to use these weapons afterward, mainly for cattle-raiding. As Museveni expressed, by the time the NRM came to power, “much of the damage had been done. In little more than six months, virtually all of the cattle in Teso, Acholi and Lango had been stolen.”⁸¹ The cattle raiding continues today, and the area is known for “spasmodic outbursts of armed fighting...

⁸⁰ Briggs, *Uganda*, 280.

⁸¹ Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed*, 179.

most of [which] is ethnic rather than directly political in nature... Human fatalities are commonplace.”⁸²

The Department for Karamoja Affairs, then, “was set up to address the special social, economic and security needs of the area and its neighbourhood.”⁸³ It is intended to organize funding for the region, and to manage development programmes in the region. It is also meant to deal with the proliferation of small arms in the area, as the concentration of such weapons in the region “provides a breeding ground for terrorism.”⁸⁴

The third special regional Ministry of State relates to 18 districts in the north of Uganda, including Adjumani, Apac, Arua, Gulu, Katakwi, Kapchorwa, Kitgum, Kotido, Kumi, Lira, Moroto, Moyo, Nakapiripirit, Nebbi, Pader, Paliser, Sironko, Soroti and Yumbe. As with Karamoja, the northern region has faced substantial violence in the past decades. The rebellion of the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) which grew out of the HSM in the north, as discussed above, posed a significant danger.⁸⁵ Especially in the early years of the NRM’s term in office, areas in northern Uganda were under attack by both rebel armies and Ugandan forces. The LRA kidnapped children to act as both soldiers and wives for soldiers from areas northern regions. At the same time, the LRA was doing battle with the Karamojong cattle thieves from eastern Uganda.⁸⁶ Much the same as the bush warfare carried out by Museveni in attempting to oust Obote II, Museveni was determined that the rebel armies should be

⁸² Briggs, *Uganda*, 281.

⁸³ Government of Uganda, “Presidential and Foreign Affairs Committee Report.”

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ The Republic of Uganda, *The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Violations of Human Rights*, 17, Sec 2.9 (IV).

⁸⁶ For an excellent summary of events, see Michael Twaddle and Hölger Bernt Hansen, “The changing state of Uganda,” *Developing Uganda*, 5-6.

disarmed and disabled. Some of this fighting continued in 2003, and those children who were kidnapped had only just begun to return to their families.

The mandate of the Ministry of State for Northern Uganda Rehabilitation, therefore, is designed to address a number of issues:

- To coordinate the various efforts of government and other stakeholders towards the rehabilitation of northern and northeastern Uganda.
- To oversee the restocking project in the north.
- To supervise the implementation of the Northern Uganda Action Fund (NUSAF) project.
- To promote various peace initiatives and conflict resolutions.
- To coordinate the design for additional initiatives, interventions and projects to address the problems of the people in northern Uganda; and
- To participate in liaison with other ministries/agencies in the implementation of the Amnesty Act in the region.⁸⁷

Commission of Inquiry into Violations of Human Rights –Uganda’s truth commission

Another of the initiatives sponsored by Museveni was the truth commission. The Commission of Inquiry into Violations of Human Rights (CIVHR) was appointed on 16 May 1986, three months after Museveni took office. The Commission was inaugurated one month later, on 13 June 1986.⁸⁸ Until the tabling of the Report on 10 October 1994, the Commission worked to gather evidence and testimony relating to the events of 1962 to 1986. Thousands of people completed questionnaires with regard to their recollection of particular events, many of which were then investigated in the field with the thought that they could be recommended for prosecution. From these, particularly strong and

⁸⁷ Government of Uganda, “Presidential and Foreign Affairs Committee Report.”

⁸⁸ Although the CIVHR was named and appointed in May, it was not until June that its work officially began. This is common for truth commissions, who must first design a mandate for themselves, find office space and furniture, and hire staff. For a more in-depth discussion, see Joanna Quinn and Mark Freeman, “Lessons Learned: Practical Lessons Gleaned from Inside the Truth Commissions of Guatemala and South Africa,” accepted for publication in *Human Rights Quarterly*, (Nov. 2003).

representative cases were chosen to appear before the Commission. In all, 608 witnesses appeared before the CIVHR, from 11 December 1986 to 7 April 1993.⁸⁹ The Commission travelled to many regions of the country, holding hearings and collecting testimony in seventeen districts.⁹⁰ This testimony was gathered and bound into eighteen volumes. Today, one set of these volumes is housed at the Uganda Human Rights Commission. Each of the commissioners displays his or her set proudly in their homes and offices. Two complete sets reside in that same locked closet wherein so much material surrounding the Commission was found. The final report is more than 720 pages long, and contains testimony, analysis, and recommendations, along with lists of names of those who were subjected to torture and abuse.

In the end, however, the Commission was relatively unsuccessful. It was beset by a number of problems. These included a significant number of institutional failures, among them a severe shortage of funding and resources, a lack of capacity to accomplish such a task, and the enormity of time required to complete the mandate. As well, political will to carry out such work within the country was extremely low. Although the Commission eventually finished its work, its impact has been disappointing.

Conclusions

The divisions within the country of Uganda are enormous. But the greatest of these appears to be related to differences in ethnicity. It is on this basis that the extreme violence that has been carried out since pre-colonial times has been perpetrated. Indeed, the situation in 2004, while less severe, certainly echoes the violence of the past.

⁸⁹ The Republic of Uganda, *The Report of the CIVHR*, Appendix 10: xxx.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Table Three: V-VI.

The NRM government, under Museveni, has established a number of initiatives and programs to address these ethnic issues. Yet, of the five discussed in broad terms above, not all of these has been particularly effective. Certainly, the implementation of the truth commission and the complex system of Resistance Councils has been disappointing. And Museveni's continued ban on political parties defies international human rights norms, as laid out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Uganda is a signatory. The reinstatement of the kingdoms of Uganda and the convocation of the three special regional Ministries of State have been only moderately successful.

And ethnic conflict in Uganda continues. Museveni and the NRM must be encouraged to develop more effective programmes.