

# Exclusion, Identity and Armed Conflict: A Historical Survey of the Politics of Confrontation in Uganda with Specific Reference to the Independence Era

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## **ABSTRACT**

*At one level of analysis, Uganda's quest to find an acceptable political and constitutional formula with which to address three decades of political mismanagement continues to be characterised by armed conflict.*

*At another level, the tendencies, which underlie the major armed groups in the country, touch on largely unresolved dichotomies, which have been used as powerful mobilising tools at different stages of the country's historical development.*

*At a third level of analysis, Uganda's experimentation with different modes of political organisation does not appear to have found a satisfactory solution to the outbreak of armed rebellions in the country both at the level of theory and also in practice.*

*This paper discusses the politics of exclusion and identity within the overall context of armed conflicts in northern and southern Uganda. It isolates the northern-based Lords Resistance Army (LRA), and its southern counterpart, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), and attempts to examine the identities around which both groups continue to mobilise on the one hand, and the perceived identities around which their rebellions seem to be challenging on the other. It also identifies the patterns of exclusion and factionalism that have influenced the rise of these groups and tries to find some answers as to why the dichotomies and identities around which they mobilise are so enduring.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Most specialists on Ugandan politics argue that in 1962, the year in which the country gained its political independence from Britain, the prospects of economic success and constitutional democracy looked quite positive.<sup>1</sup>

Mention is made of the fact that the country adopted a Westminster system of government, complete with an official opposition party, a fairly disciplined and impartial civil service and an independent judiciary.<sup>2</sup>

Kabaka Fredrick Muteesa II, King of Buganda, was elected by Parliament as non-executive Chief of State while Dr Apollo Milton Obote served as Prime Minister and Head of Government Business. The Independence Constitution provided for fundamental rights and freedoms, guaranteed separation of powers and made innovative provisions for the functioning of federal-type relationships between the central government and the well established kingdoms of Ankole, Buganda, Bunyoro and Tooro. A correct balance appears to have been realised.

Then known as the pearl of Africa, Uganda, at least on the surface, seemed to have all the ingredients that would enable her to play a successful post-independence role not only on the continent, but also in the then East African community.

Beneath the surface, however, the seeds of conflict and war were being sown. When one examines the nature of political scheming and

manoeuvring which characterised the political climate at this formative stage, it becomes clear that the country was heading for civil war. We argue here that independence politics in Uganda has shaped many, but not all, of the schisms which continue to afflict Uganda today. To qualify this argument, a short analysis of the competing tendencies and motivations of the dominant political forces at this particular phase becomes necessary.

### **I. SOWING THE SEEDS OF CONFLICT AND DIVISION: INDEPENDENCE POLITICS AT A GLANCE**

By the late 1960s, when all pretences to multi-party democracy had been eventually discarded, the politics of exclusion had come to characterise Ugandan society. Firstly, the military became the primary guarantor of state power, and a tool through which opponents were either intimidated from participating in government, or summarily executed. Second, the practice of splitting the support of opposing parties in order to consolidate power and exclude them from processes of governance became a normal course of politics. Third, each party advanced a particular set of identities (religious, regional and ethnic), around which it mobilised support from sections of the population. The regional schisms promoted by the factional politics of this period eventually played themselves out in the military, to such an extent that from 1966 to 1986, the military was seen as a symbol of regional (read ethnic) interests. When one group occupied the state, it used the military to displace the others, and vice versa. This cycle repeated itself no less than six times between 1966 and 1986. The independence period in Ugandan politics is therefore critical in explaining why the country has failed to develop a genuine democratic culture and why the politics of confrontation, rebellion and unprincipled scheming is so ingrained in the body politic.

The dominant parties at independence were the Uganda National Congress (UNC), the Democratic Party (DP), the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) and the Kabaka Yekka (Kings Only) Party. The themes and identities around which these parties mobilised in fact militated against rather than facilitated accommodative politics. The UNC was more concerned with winning immediate independence, with or without multipartyism. The UPC resulted from a

merger between the UNC and Obote's faction of the Uganda People's Union (UPU). It started out on an anti-Buganda platform, but also attempted to mould itself as a socialist-oriented party. It was anti-traditionalist and sought to check the influence of the Buganda royalists. In so doing, it carved for itself an ethnic identity, as did all the other parties.<sup>3</sup>

The UPC leadership was sub-divided into four competing tendencies. Milton Obote's power base lay in Langi (Northern region), while George Magezi fronted for the local interests of the Banyoro (South West region). Grace Ibingira, another prominent UPC politician drew his strength from Ankole (Western region) while Felix Onama, who later served as Minister of Defence, based his constituency in the West Nile district (also in Northern Uganda). UPC was not bound by a uniting ideology. Its contending viewpoints were based on the idiosyncrasies of the leaders who composed it.

Its tactic of mobilising support by appealing to regional sentiment was to play an important role in fuelling the conflicts in Northern Uganda, a region which has remained troubled due to factors that will be examined in the following sections.

The Kings Only Party (KY), on the other hand, remained opposed to any political challenge mounted against it. It sought to maintain the dominance of the Buganda Kingdom in the country's politics and to safeguard the Protestant faith. At some point, it actively campaigned for self rule, in the context of a homeland for the King's subjects. It was on the basis of this stance that KY opposed the idea of establishing an East African Federation in the late 1960s. Its political outlook revolved around federalism, and quasi self-determination.<sup>4</sup>

The DP coalesced around a Roman Catholic identity. Its chief aim was to contain what it perceived to be Protestant hegemony in the country's politics and economy. The Protestant (Church of England) hegemony was in their view symbolised by the KY, and by extension the Buganda monarchy.

Each party sought to exclude the other from influencing the country's politics, and this meant that every political party which has either occupied or influenced the government between 1962 and 1986 has done so with the aim of marginalising not only its political oppo-

nents but also the regional constituencies which they represented. Thus the Kabaka Yekka establishment throughout the 1950s and early 1960s marginalised and in several cases criminalised the non-Uganda constituency. The UPC government on the other hand, marginalised and criminalised the non-Buganda constituency, along with the West Nile (particularly the Lugbara and Kakwa) region. The Lugbara and Kakwa were identified with Amin, who overthrew Obote in 1971.

Idi Amin's military government in turn marginalised and criminalised the Acholi and Langi communities and even initiated mass executions and migrations of Acholi and Langi soldiers and civilians. The Langi and Acholi were identified with Obote. The return of Obote as Head of State following a series of unprincipled schemes and manoeuvres (including a sham election in 1980) reversed the trend and the Kakwa and Lugbara communities once more found themselves on the receiving end.<sup>5</sup>

Factional and exclusionary politics found expression not only at the level of government and the military, but also at the level of official opposition strategy. Opposition formations also perceived their struggles in the context of advancing the interests of the regional communities and constituencies from which they commanded support. By 1966, therefore, each party was clearly identified with a particular regional community. The KY and DP were predominantly Buganda (identified with the Southern constituency), while the UPC was predominantly Langi and Acholi (identified with the Northern constituency). Within the north there existed two sub-constituencies, namely the Acholi-Langi as identified with Obote and the Lugbara-Kakwa-Anyanya as identified with Idi Amin. When the military increased its prominence in the country's politics, the regional composition of its rank and file was determined by who was in power. Thus between 1966 and 1986, the army was dominated by ethnic groups from the north. This balance of power was overthrown when the NRA, a southern-based armed movement, came to power. By this time, a cycle of armed rebellion had been developed, meaning that as soon as the NRA came to power, the displaced Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA), retreated to its Northern Uganda stronghold and began preparing to wage war against the NRA. The cycle

shows that the military in Uganda had by this time been used as a tool to foster exclusion as a means to protect incumbent governments.

This divisive mode of politics also influenced the outlooks of the numerous armed rebellions which have emerged at different points in the country's history. The Force Obote Back Army (FOBA) was therefore a Langi/Acholi outfit. The West Nile Bank Front (WNBF) was a Lugbara/Kakwa outfit. The Uganda People's Army (UPA) was a Teso outfit and so on. It was only the National Resistance Movement and Army (NRM/NRA) which made a conscious effort to rise above sectarian politics and usher in a qualitatively fresh political start for the country, but it too was not immune from the divisive politics at the time, since its composition was drawn from the very same society which it sought to change.<sup>6</sup>

All elections held during this phase – 1961 to 1962 – and the Parliamentary by-elections between 1962 and 1964, were driven by exclusionary practices, and were manifestly undemocratic. The dominant political parties, with the exception of the DP, have all manipulated elections at different points in time. Thus in the 1962 elections, KY applied the tactics of intimidation, vote rigging, and cheating to ensure that the DP did not form the incoming independence government. KY and the UPC had by this time formed a very unusual alliance. For its part, the UPC applied the very same tactics in all by-elections between 1962 and 1964 to stifle the DP.<sup>7</sup> It suspended the Independence Constitution in 1966, and passed the famous "pigeon hole" Constitution in 1967. Record has it that Obote forced this document through by simply informing Parliamentarians to collect the new Constitution from their pigeon holes. He manipulated and won the sham elections of 1980, which eventually prompted the launch of a liberation war by the National Resistance Army (NRA). These elections are widely perceived to have been won by the DP. The party, however, took up its position as the official opposition but by 1983, there was no longer any meaningful parliamentary discourse to talk about. The electoral and political process was all about exclusion rather than accommodation.

## 2. THE BUGANDA FACTOR IN UGANDAN POLITICS

No examination of the roots of instability in

Uganda would be complete without an overview of the Buganda factor in the country's politics.

Buganda was the most sophisticated and economically powerful kingdom in Uganda. It had well established traditions, a history of conquest, diplomacy and trade, and an impressive array of public institutions, including a defence force, parliament, palaces, anthem, symbols and a coat of arms. It also had extremely close connections with the British monarchy, whose interests it protected, and through which many Buganda nobles received instruction and education. It was through the Buganda Kingdom's machinery that the colonialists established their system of indirect rule in Uganda.

The DP remained opposed to the Buganda (Mengo) establishment and mounted a sustained challenge against it during the independence phase. It saw it as part of its mission to challenge the Kingdom and by extension, the Church of England. The DP was composed of a section of Buganda Roman Catholic elite who felt ostracised by the Protestant-dominated Buganda Kingdom establishment. This schism has its roots in a tradition established in 1892, which had it that the King of Buganda had to be Protestant. He was investitured in a coronation ceremony modelled along the lines of the British monarchy which took place at the main Protestant church. Insofar as the Buganda Kingdom establishment was concerned (as were other kingdoms in Uganda), there was a fine line between religion and politics.

The DP-KY split can further be explained by the nature of power politics in Buganda during the advent of independence. The conservative elements within the monarchy were concerned about the prospect of being displaced from the political scene by the other dominant political parties. The monarchs of other kingdoms in the country also shared this fear.

The Governor of the then protectorate, Andrew Cohen, started working towards the possibility of federating the three East African territories (Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika, now Tanzania), along the lines of the then Central African Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (now Zimbabwe and Zambia respectively). This federation, which was dominated by white settler interests, sparked a fear within conservative Buganda that a similar federation in East Africa would be dominated by the white

settler community in Kenya. Besides this, they feared that their significance in Ugandan politics would fade.

Matters were made worse when Cohen urged the Buganda Kingdom to recognise that its long held special status would have to be subordinated in the interests of a unitary nation-state. The King of Buganda publicly opposed Cohen's scheme and demanded that Buganda be separated from the rest of the then protectorate and transferred to the jurisdiction of the British Foreign Office. The King was exiled to London by the protectorate, but this shored up anti-colonial sentiment and strengthened the separatist campaign launched by his close associates.

With time, Cohen relented under mounting pressure and returned the King to the country. After securing an agreement that the King would not obstruct the process of integrating Buganda into the rest of the country at independence, the protectorate gave the King powers to appoint and dismiss chiefs (who not only served his administration, but also that of the protectorate). The King's new powers were explained as being consistent with residual powers of a constitutional monarch, but in reality, he played a key role in shaping the politics of the country.

A new group, fiercely loyal to the King, campaigned to have the King's powers broadened even further. They were now willing to participate and integrate into an independent Uganda, but on the condition that the King headed the new state. By this time, however, there existed a polarisation between those who supported and those who opposed Buganda dominance. In 1959, Buganda's population was two million, out of Uganda's total of six million.<sup>8</sup> Of these, at least one million people owed allegiance to the King. This number was too large to ignore, but at the same time too small to dominate the entire county. Seeing no compromise in sight, the British, during the 1960 London Conference, called for elections in March 1961. The purpose of this election was to prepare the winners for independence.

The King's associates, calling themselves "Friends of the Kabaka", organised a boycott of the entire election. They also intimidated Buganda sections of the population who attempted to vote. Consequently, in the Buganda region, only the Roman Catholic supporters of the DP

withstood immense pressure and went ahead to vote. They won 20 out of the 21 seats allotted to the Buganda region. The DP therefore won the majority of seats despite the fact that they had a minority of 416 000 votes versus 495 000 for the UPC. It was against this background that Benedicto Kiwanuka became Uganda's new Chief Minister.

The results shocked the Buganda separatists, who consequently formed the Kings Only Party (KY). They welcomed the recommendations of a British proposal for a future federal form of government wherein the Kingdom would enjoy a degree of internal autonomy, provided it agreed to participate fully in government.

Against this backdrop, the UPC – which was seeking a role for itself in a future independence government – struck an “alliance” with KY. The aim of this unprincipled scheme was to dislodge the DP from government. We describe this scheme as unprincipled because as we have mentioned elsewhere, UPC was formed as a coalition of Roman Catholics outside the DP who stood opposed to the King's hegemonic role. But this very stance against Buganda was not based on a political programme, or a set of political principles. It was based on power. As for the KY, its alliance with UPC was astonishing, given that it had long viewed the UPC as posing more of a threat to it than the DP, which after all, in their view, was comprised of disloyal Buganda subjects who had rebelled against the nobility and the Church of England. Such was the manipulative politics of the day.

Obote therefore reached an understanding with the King of Buganda, in which he accepted Buganda's special autonomy and a provision that the King could appoint his representatives to the National Assembly. In return, Obote secured an alliance to defeat the DP. The arrangement also provided for the King to become the Head of State, which was of immense symbolic importance to the Buganda subjects and supporters of the Buganda Kingdom. The DP was inevitably defeated. Uganda's Parliament after the 1962 election therefore consisted of 43 UPC delegates, 24 from KY and 24 from the DP.<sup>9</sup> The UPC-KY “coalition” therefore formed a new government with Obote as Prime Minister and the King of Buganda as non-executive Head of State.

The year 1964 marked the entry of the army

into politics. Elements of the army mutinied on the grounds of meagre pay and Obote called in British troops to restore order. As it turned out, Obote acceded to most of the demands made by the mutineers. In order to maintain control and avert a similar incident, he identified and selected Idi Amin, then a junior officer, and rapidly promoted him as a personal aide. He was later to lead an attack on the King's Palace, something which marked the end of the UPC-KY alliance.

The collapse of the alliance began with the question of the so-called “lost counties”. These counties straddled the Kingdoms of Buganda and Bunyoro, which have a long history of antagonism and war. They originally belonged to Bunyoro but were annexed to Buganda in 1900. Obote used this highly emotive issue to secure support for his UPC, and free himself from his unprincipled alliance with KY. Knowing how sensitive the matter was to the Buganda Kingdom, Obote used a combination of patronage and promises of future rewards to lure opposition members of Parliament (MPs) to cross the floor to join government benches in Parliament. For a change, even the DP chose to participate in this undemocratic scheme. Several of its parliamentarians from the Bunyoro region agreed to join the UPC, if Obote would undertake a referendum and restore the lost counties to Bunyoro. The King of Buganda opposed this scheme and dispatched 300 armed veterans to intimidate Banyoro residents from voting. In response, 2000 Banyoro veterans lined the frontier as a show of force. The referendum was held and the counties returned to Bunyoro.

This weakened the KY, whose staunch supporters began to cross the floor *en masse* to join the UPC. By 1966, the Parliament comprised 74 UPC, nine DP and eight KY members. As Buganda weakened further, factionalism within the UPC crept in. In 1965, a faction of UPC supporters, with backing from politicians hostile to Obote, attempted to pass a vote of no confidence in his leadership. Rather than resign, Obote turned to Idi Amin and the army for support. He interestingly conducted a coup against his own government, suspended the Constitution, arrested the rebel UPC MPs and assumed total control of the state. It was then that he forced through his pigeon hole constitution, which abolished the federal powers of the

Buganda Kingdom and concentrated power in the Prime Minister's office. As the Kingdom prepared to mount a legal challenge, Obote sent the army to attack the palace. The King was effectively ejected from Ugandan politics, and ended up an exile in Britain where he later died.

The UPC-KY antagonism had far-reaching consequences for the country. Among the Baganda community, it created a deep sense of resentment and suspicion towards not just the UPC, but the constituency which it was identified, namely the Acholi and Langi. The North–South schism, one of the most enduring legacies of Uganda's political history was thus widened. It is to the root of this schism that we now turn.

### **3. ARMED REBELLION: A CASE STUDY OF THE LRA AND ADF**

Any discussion on armed conflicts in Uganda must begin with an overview of the North–South dichotomy in the country's politics. At independence, the political, educational and economic elite were concentrated in the south of the country, while the military was drawn from the north. This resulted from a colonial policy which treated the south as a special territory, and used the machinery of the Buganda Kingdom to enforce the colonial political economy. On the military side, the pre-World War units of the then Kings African Rifles (KAR), were drawn mainly from the south. As was the case elsewhere in Africa, ex-African servicemen who fought alongside their colonial masters during the world wars became the chief proponents of the anti-colonial struggles.

The colonial administration feared that at this point, any military concentration in the south of the country would threaten its own interests. It was for this reason that in 1945, after the Second World War, recruitment policy was changed to concentrate the military in the north. This meant that the Acholi and West Nile communities dominated the military structures. The independence politicians used this cleavage to achieve their own political ends. The North–South dichotomy is also shaped by a number of additional factors.

The first is a linguistic divide between the Nilotic-speaking people of the north and the Bantu-speaking peoples of the south. There is very little commonality between these languages. The northern languages are in fact clos-

er to those spoken in southern Sudan, than those in southern Uganda. The same applies to their cultural mores.

Second, there was, and still is, an economic divide between the pastoralists, who occupied the drier rangelands of the west and north, and the agriculturists, who cultivated the better-watered highland or lakeside regions. Given this physical characteristic, coupled with the fact that Uganda's economy is based on agriculture, the south finds itself in a more advantageous economic position.

Another divisive factor was the uneven development in the colonial period, whereby the south secured railroad transport, cash crops, mission education, and the seat of government, seemingly at the expense of other regions which were still trying to “catch up” after independence.<sup>10</sup>

The question of servitude also added to the dichotomy. Nubians had been brought in from Sudan to serve as a colonial coercive force to suppress local tax revolts. This community shared little sense of identification with Uganda. The presence of an alien militia sowed the seeds of future conflict. In fact the Nubians, commonly referred to as Anyanya, were later to play an increasingly significant role not only in the military, but also in influencing armed conflicts in the country. The Anyanya factor is also important in understanding the dynamics of the Uganda–Sudan conflict.

Therefore, the North and South continue to remain psychologically apart. This factor, among others, lends the armed groups an extremely powerful mobilising tool which they have used to their advantage. It has also served the current government well, in the sense that the southern population remains far removed and largely disinterested in the conflict in Northern Uganda.

In Parliament, it is the Northern Parliamentary caucus which continues to force the Northern question into the collective memory of the National Assembly. For ordinary Ugandans, especially those from the south, the Northern dynamic does not resonate. The region is commonly referred to as a war zone and statements to the effect that the people from the North are backward and only interested in fighting are commonplace.<sup>11</sup> This does not auger well for reconciliation and accommodative politics.

Another dangerous dynamic is the perception among the Northerners that the Uganda Peoples Defence Force (UPDF) (renamed from the NRA) is a Southern-based army of occupation, which is decimating the children of the North to avenge the atrocities committed by the Northern dominated armies which held sway from 1962 to 1986.

#### 4. A VICIOUS CIRCLE OF REBELLION

When the National Resistance Movement and Army (NRM/A) captured state power in 1986, a fundamental feature of Ugandan politics, namely the domination of the military by Northerners, was overthrown. The Southern-dominated liberation movement became the new national army. Almost immediately, the defeated forces of the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) fled into northern Uganda and entered southern Sudan, where they regrouped and formed the Uganda Peoples Democratic Army (UPDA). This action was motivated by fear of reprisals, and the need to recapture state power.

Accordingly, the North–South schism, which we witnessed during the independence era, came to the fore. The escaping Northern generals could not envision an army dominated by the South. Given that it had now become common practice to use the army to settle political differences, they could not imagine how the NRA would spare their lives if it caught them. On their escape route to Sudan, they took advantage of the distrust towards the NRA in the region and told the population about the horrors which the NRA would visit upon them in revenge for the murders which the Northerners committed during the previous regime. The government’s perceived failure to bring a decisive halt to the conflict initially contributed to some extent to popular support for the insurgency in the North and their acceptance of UPDA propaganda.

Popular support for the insurgency was also linked to a series of failures by the NRA to protect the local communities in Acholi, Lango, Teso, Pallisa, Mbale and Sebei from Karimojong cattle raiders. For its part, the UPC quickly exploited the weaknesses of the NRA and used these to mobilise ethnic sentiment in the North and turn the population against the NRA. This partly explains the reason why there was, and still is, a perception in the North that the gov-

ernment simply does not care about the welfare of this region, and that through its military campaign, it is exacting a genocide on the Northern population.

For its part, the NRA/M found itself in a vulnerable situation. On the one hand, it had the responsibility to win the population on its side, and, on the other, it had to return fire if attacked. This created a dilemma, particularly when the forceful recruitment of grossly under-age children into the rebel ranks to fight against the NRA became commonplace. The children became military targets against their own will, further complicating the situation.

During the period that the UPDA sustained its operations in the North, it drew its support from Gulu and Kitgum. Because Acholi officers loyal to Tito Okello removed Obote in an internal coup in 1985, the UPDA could not extend its operations into Lango (Obote’s area). Coupled with the fact that it also committed countless atrocities against the West Nile population (Idi Amin’s community) it could also not extend into the West Nile area. Again, the independence schisms (Acholi–Langi versus Lugbara–Kakwa) can be seen.

Disillusioned by its failure to recapture power quickly, the UPDA entered into a peace treaty with the NRM government. Analysts have correctly pointed out that like its mother organisations before it, the UPDA did not base its opposition around a set of political programmes and principles. It did not perceive its insurgency beyond purely military means. Guided by an identity which was moulded during the repressive years of Obote’s rule, the UPDA saw itself fighting against a Southern-dominated army, and ultimately displacing it from the state. For the UPDA, the NRA represented a Southern identity which needed to be resisted. When time for negotiations with the NRM therefore came, the settlement reached was not based on political issues, but rather on issuance of jobs to some UPDA leaders, and the integration of the rest into the NRA. The structural, historical, psychological and economic factors which have given character to the North–South schism were not satisfactorily addressed.

With the exit of the UPDA came the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) of Alice Lakwena, a spiritist cum military commander who believed that she possessed the spirit of an Italian doctor

who lived in the area in the 1900s. The HSM, unlike UPDA, managed to attract support outside of Acholiland. It used a combination of myth, superstition and voodoo to enchant the population to rally to its cause. It told its fighters that the stones they threw at the NRA would turn into grenades and that if they smeared shear (simsim) oil on their bodies before going into combat, they would deflect or melt NRA bullets. Lakwena told her followers that the reason why the Acholi were suffering was because they had to pay the price for the many sins they had committed in the past. The only way they could absolve themselves was to collectively fight together, under divine guidance, to defeat the Southerners in Kampala. The HSM proved to be difficult and highly unpredictable.

Using a combination of unscientific methods of waging war and seemingly disjointed tactics, wholly unfamiliar to a disciplined and well-trained force, the HSM at some point reached within 100 km of Kampala. Its fighters would typically attack in droves, while chanting hymns and invoking spiritual powers. As an advancing line fell, following a hail of gunfire, another would surge forward replacing it. This cycle was repeated several times, in order to confuse the NRA units.

Despite the fact that the HSM base expanded beyond Acholiland, it was confined to the northern region. Lakwena found it easier to operate in areas occupied by Nilotic communities (Acholi, Langi and Teso). When she tried to spread into Bantu-speaking areas, the Movement quickly collapsed. Yet again, the North–South dichotomy is apparent.

With the exit of the HSM, we were introduced to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

The LRA is in many respects an offshoot of the HSM. Following the defeat of Alice Lakwena, Joseph Kony, also a spiritist, began to recruit former UPDA elements and HSM fighters who had remained in the north while Lakwena was advancing southwards towards Kampala. His group was originally known as Holy Spirit II.

The LRA, like the HSM before it, mixed religion with myth, superstition and magic. It also coalesced around an anti-Southerner identity. Like Lakwena, Kony believed that he was a spirit medium who received instructions from spirits and in turn communicated these to a council of scribes, who recorded them. It is said

that Kony has a choir of girls who dress as nuns and chant praises to him. Before battle, he performs certain rituals which include praying at an altar, and asking the girls to remove their blouses at a painted circle divided into 30 sections. Testimonies made by some of the few children who have been rescued from Kony show that the children are forced to participate in mass killings, usually under gun point. They are used as porters, workers and sex slaves, and also participate in combat. Taking cover during battle is considered cowardly and is punishable by death.

The LRA envisions ruling Uganda according to the Ten Commandments. It views the current government as being dominated by foreigners and hopes to replace it with a purified Acholi organisation. One interesting characteristic about the LRA is its endless attacks on the population within which it lives. Any Acholi who did not support it was considered a legitimate military target.

Coupled with its strategy of abducting underage children and forcing them into its ranks, the LRA has not endeared itself to the population. But this has not automatically translated into support for the NRA. This is a clear indication that the North–South schism is much more profound than it usually appears.

The mass abduction of children began in early 1995. In 1996, presidential elections were held in Uganda for the first time since the NRM came to power. Before the elections, the LRA said they would lay down their weapons and quit the rebellion if Paul Semogerere were to win. They announced a cease-fire to allow elections to go forward. Though Museveni won these elections with a 75% overall majority vote in the country, in Acholi he received less than 20% of the vote. A similar voting pattern is reflected in the recent referendum as well as Presidential elections.<sup>12</sup>

## **5. THE ALLIED DEMOCRATIC FORCES (ADF)**

Based in the Ruwenzori mountains of western Uganda, the ADF is a combination of fundamentalist Tabliq Muslim rebels and remnants of the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU). It has claimed responsibility for a string of bomb blasts that have rocked the country, particularly Kampala, in recent times. It also frequently links up with the ex-Rwandan armed forces and Interahamwe militias operat-



ing in the region. The Interahamwe are responsible for the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

Like the LRA, the ADF rebels, based in the Rwenzori Mountains, reportedly committed atrocities against the local civilian population, driving them from their homes and farms in the mountains into lowland towns.

In the west and south-west, the ADF significantly heightened their activities in 1998, which included repeated attacks on civilian targets, trading centres, and private homes. The ADF continued to plant land mines extensively and increased its attacks on both rural and urban civilian targets.

The ADF's deadliest attack to date occurred on 8 June 1998, when rebels killed 80 students of the Kichwamba Technical College in Kabarole district by setting locked dormitories on fire. An additional 80 students were abducted in the raid.

## **6. WHAT WERE THE MOTIVATING FACTORS BEHIND THE FORMATION OF THIS MOVEMENT?**

The series of manoeuvrings at independence overshadowed Muslim concerns about having been marginalised by the colonial and post-colonial establishments. Idi Amin's coming to power was seen as a first step to seeking redress for these perceived imbalances. Amin's later overthrow, however, stalled these nascent hopes.

Fuelled by the gradual rise of militant Islam in other parts of the world, the Tabliq Youth Movement was formed in Uganda in the early 1980s. Initially, it was interested in welfare and reform issues, but when the Supreme Court ruled in favour of one of the rival Islamic factions in Uganda, the Tabliqs blamed this on what they perceived to be government interference in Islam. Given the radical nature of the Tabliqs, the movement henceforth became political and professed their aim of constituting an Islamic state in Uganda.

In 1989, The Tabliq Movement attempted to block the government-backed Uganda Muslim Supreme Council (UMSC) leader from occupying his office. A violent confrontation between them and the police ensued, leading to the arrest and imprisonment of several youth leaders. The Movement split into a radical faction headed by Jamil Mukulu and a moderate one headed by Sulaiman Kaketo. After their release from prison, Mukulu's group went into hiding

and was next seen at Busekura in Bunyoro, in 1995.

Following their defeat at Busekura, the group went underground once again, and this time reappeared as the Allied Democratic Force (ADF). With alleged support from the late President of the former Zaire, Mobutu Sese Seko, the ADF in 1996 attacked and occupied Mpondwe border post (Uganda–Zaire) for a number of hours. As is the case with the LRA, the ADF has proved difficult to defeat.

The emergence of the ADF in many ways brings with it a new dimension to the pattern of armed rebellions in the country. First, is that it is the only southern-based armed group challenging the NRM government.

Second, it coalesces around a Christian–Muslim schism, as opposed to a North–South one. Third, it does not have a clearly identifiable leadership as compared to the other groups in the North. Fourth, it operates out of areas in which the NRM has traditionally enjoyed popularity. The ADF has also added a new phenomenon to armed conflict, namely urban terrorism.

Another important characteristic is that the ADF, unlike its Northern counterparts, is a conglomeration of various armed elements, and does not have a unifying ideology. It is networked with the Interahamwe, ex-Zairean Forces and ex-Rwandan armed forces. Its links with these groups appear to have temporarily neutralised its Islamic identity.

## **7. LOOKING AT THE DICHOTOMIES IN CONTEXT: WHY ARE THEY SO ENDURING?**

What is clear from the overview presented here is that in both regions (North and South), armed movements have emerged under conditions of relative deprivation, and have mobilised for support along ethnic and religious identities.

While the ADF emerged from conditions of perceived Muslim marginalisation and exclusion, the UPDA, LRA, WBNF, FOBA and HSM emerged from conditions of perceived fear of reprisals, uncertainty concerning the displacement of Northerners from the army after a 30-year hegemony and feelings of exclusion from the emerging movement politics.

It also becomes clear that both sets of rebellions fit into two enduring dichotomies in Ugandan politics, namely the Muslim–Christian dichotomy and the North–South dichotomy.

The Muslim–Christian dichotomy is rooted

in the perceived marginalisation of Muslims under the colonial period, and also under succeeding governments, with the exception of the Amin period. Against the rising tide of militant Islam, Uganda's opposition to Islamic fundamentalism in Sudan and perceived closeness to United States foreign policy, the radical Islamic tendency in Uganda has been on the increase.

After a brief lull in late 1989 the ADF emerged as an armed force in 1996. It remains the only armed element today which has attempted to take the war to the heart of the South. It has tried to achieve this through urban terror, but beyond this, it concentrates on hitting at soft targets, much like its counterparts in the North. Its alliance with other groupings from very disparate backgrounds might dilute its Islamic leanings.

The Roman Catholic-Protestant dichotomy on the other hand continues to exist, but it has not yet expressed itself into armed conflict and is not likely to do so. This may partly be explained by the fact that the proponents of this schism are to be found in the economically powerful and relatively well to do class. It should be remembered that the DP and KY traditionally drew their rank and file from the educated and economically powerful elite. They clearly have a stake in the country's stability.

The North-South dichotomy, however, presents a particular problem. Whereas the armed groups in the North claim to have found an armed solution against Southern political and economic dominance, their victims remain concentrated in the North, rather than the South. Militarily the UPDF is perceived to be an army protecting Southern interests but even then, in recent years the focus of the armed groups has been soft civilian targets rather than the military itself.

Within the meaning of the North-South dichotomy genuine differences exist, the leading one being that there appears to be a psychological gap between the North and South. Southern interaction with the North tends to be confined to the military, or in the media. The Northern collective experience does not seem to elicit a strong resonance with Southerners. They appear detached from it. This may partly be explained by the fact that the worst human rights abuses in Uganda were committed during the years when the control of the military and government was in the hands of the

Northerners. Most civilian deaths occurred in the south and Southerners constituted the highest number of exiles.<sup>13</sup>

There also exists a level of hostility against the Anyanya phenomenon. The Anyanya were the first Southern Sudanese separatist elements who attempted to secede from the rest of Sudan. They are closely related to the Kakwa of Uganda, who are found in the West Nile (where Amin comes from).

Idi Amin recruited several Anyanya elements into his own army. These foreign elements were later to play an extremely prominent role in the purges of the Amin era. Given the fact that the colonialists also recruited the Anyanya to assist them in suppressing tax revolts in Uganda, the local population, particularly the Southerners, developed a deep resentment towards them. This phenomenon remains intact within the collective memory of the Southerners (intellectuals and peasants alike). The problem here is that Southerners do not seem to be making a distinction between the Northerners and the Anyanya. The preferred tendency is to stock them into one group, in much the same way as the different groups in the North refer to the "Southerners" as one bloc.

Finally, the armed groups in the North are not democratic, and do not have the will or experience to present a qualitative alternative to the Movement. None of them is fighting for the restoration of multiparty democracy and their acts against civilians are scarcely representative of any form of democracy, but underlying the tension, is an unresolved Northern-Southern question which must be addressed if this conflict is to be resolved.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the brief historical survey presented here, it is clear that like other countries on the continent of Africa, Uganda's quest to create institutions, processes and competencies to build a culture of tolerance and accommodation remains elusive. The country's 30-year history of political mismanagement has put in place a cycle of confrontational politics, which has in turn prepared the ground for the outbreak, as well as the recurrence, of armed conflict. Politics is traditionally viewed as a contest for state power, and in the pursuit of power in Uganda, politicians have not hesitated to break the rules of democracy to suit their own inter-

ests. Such is the collective experience that the Ugandan electorate has had to contend with.

The various armed conflicts facing the country are a manifestation of unresolved regional and religious cleavages, which have been used as mobilising tools by politicians at different phases in the country's political development. On the surface, these cleavages at times play themselves out as simply "ethnic conflicts" but in reality, they are fuelled by social and economic tensions, resource inequalities, etc.

Central to these cleavages, is the North–South question. The paper has shown that this dichotomy remains one of the most enduring legacies of Uganda's recent history. While it may be true that a number of historical factors have shaped it, a comprehensive and holistic approach towards addressing the North–South question may lead us to a resolution of the conflicts in Northern Uganda.

It is clear that none of the armed groups has articulated a coherent political programme around which to base their opposition, but the

strategy of seeking to settle their claims by offering material rewards does not auger well for the long-term resolution of the conflict. A series of innovative interventions may point us in the right direction. There are psychological, cultural, spiritual, economic and political questions that underlie these cleavages, and this paper suggests the application of a combination of strategies to address the issues as holistically as possible.

The struggle to find more accommodative models continues. Civil society and government in Uganda must strive to build institutional capacity to deliver strategic interventions to address the catalysts of armed conflict, and must in the same vein develop complementary partnerships to build a viable democracy based on conflict resolution, tolerance and accommodative, as opposed to exclusionary, politics.

Only when the spectre of armed conflict is addressed, can Uganda hope to realise its goals of socio-economic development, industrialisation and poverty eradication.

**ENDNOTES**

- 1) For a discussion on pre-independence politics in Uganda, consult Bade, A, 1996, *Benedicto Kiwanuka: The man and his politics*, Kampala, Fountain Publishers.
- 2) See for instance, Avirgan, T and Honey M, 1982, *War in Uganda : The Legacy of Idi Amin*, London: Zed Press.
- 3) Bwen gye, A.W.F, 1985, *The Agony of Uganda: From Idi Amin to Obote*, London: Regency Press p 25.
- 4) Ibid.
- 5) See for instance, Kyemba, H 1997, *A State of Blood: The inside story of Idi Amin*, Kampala: Fountain Publishers.
- 6) Mutibwa P 1992, *Uganda Since Independence: A Study of Unfulfilled Hopes*, Kampala: Fountain Publishers.
- 7) Consult Okoth P.G. et al (eds), 1995, *Uganda: A Century of Existence*, Kampala: Fountain Publishers.
- 8) Dinwiddy, H, 1981, The Search for Unity in Uganda: Early Days to 1966, *African Affairs*, vol. 80, No. 321.
- 9) See for instance, Ondoga ori Amaza, 1998, *Museveni's Long March: From Guerrilla to Statesman*, Kampala: Fountain Publishers.
- 10) Langseth, P. et al (eds), 1995, *Uganda: Landmarks in Rebuilding a Nation*, Kampala: Fountain Publishers.
- 11) See for instance Kasozi, A.B.K, 1999, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda 1964-1985*, Kampala: Fountain Publishers.
- 12) Karugire, SR, 1980, *A Political History of Uganda*, London and Nairobi: Heinemann.
- 13) Mayombo, N 1997, *Constitution-Making and the Struggle for Democracy in Uganda 1988-1995*, LLM Dissertation, Makerere University.