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POLITICS, ETHNICITY AND CONFLICT IN POST INDEPENDENT ACHOLILAND, UGANDA 1962-2006

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DEDICATION

For my Mother Eseza Tanga, my father Y. Tanga, wife Brenda, children: Jenkins
Obbo-Tanga, Collins Tanga, Nyaburu Irene and Uncle Bill Owollo.

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Table of contents

Abstract..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY. Error! Bookmark not defined.

 Background to the study..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

 Aim **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

 Rationale..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

 Acholiland’s historical experience **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

 Purpose of the study **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

 Significance..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

LITERATURE REVIEW Error! Bookmark not defined.

 Historical Overview..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

 (a) The Legacy of British Colonialism: Ethnic Compartmentalization,
 Uneven Development and Post-colonial Conflicts in Uganda **Error!
 Bookmark not defined.**

 (b) Post-colonial Political Experiments in state building, the
 politicization of the military and conflicts in Uganda **Error! Bookmark
 not defined.**

 (c) Conflict as a result of the complex Religious practices, traditions
 and culture of the Acholi **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

 Prevailing schools of thought and their approaches **Error! Bookmark not
 defined.**

 Conflict and ethnicity **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

 Statement of the problem **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

 Research objectives **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

 Methodology..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

 Chapter Outline **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

CHAPTER TWO: ACHOLILAND PRIOR TO BRITISH COLONISATIONError!
 Bookmark not defined.

 Acholiland and its boundaries **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

 The Migration..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

 The Acholi in scholarly classification **Error! Bookmark not defined.**



The clan as the basis of socio-political organizations**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Acholi Collective Ethnic Identity **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Acholi relations with neighbours **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Acholi Experience with Aliens **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

CHAPTER THREE: BRITISH IMPERIALISM IN ACHOLILAND 1890-1962

..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Introduction **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

The Period 1890-1910 **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Moving Frontier of British Imperialism in Acholiland**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Map showing Districts **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

British Colonialism and Transformations in Acholiland: 1911-1962.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Other agents of change in Acholiland **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Pre-independence politics in acholiland (1950-1962)**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

CHAPTER FOUR: POST INDEPENDENCE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND

CONFLICT IN UGANDA, 1962-2006 **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Introduction **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Conceptual Framework **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Leadership **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Post-independence political leadership and conflict**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Obote Apollo Milton & Edward Mutesa II's period (1962-1971)**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Idi Amin's period (1971-1979) **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Weak leadership and political chaos in Uganda, 1979-1985**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

68 days of the Lule Leadership **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

The Binasisa Regime (June 22, 1979-May 1980).....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

The second Obote regime (1980-1985) **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Tito Okello's leadership and continued conflict in Uganda..... **Error!**

Bookmark not defined.

Museveni's Leadership..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

CHAPTER FIVE: POLITICS, ETHNICITY AND CONFLICT IN UGANDA,

ACHOLILAND IN PERSPECTIVE 1962-1986 . Error! Bookmark not defined.

Introduction **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Ethnicity and Politics: A theoretical overview . **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Colonialism and the construction of ethnicity **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Regional disparities and conflict in Uganda ... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Political parties and ethnicity in Uganda..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Ethnicity and Politics in the Post-colonial period**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Ethnic manipulation under Obote I government.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

The Idi Amin regime 1971-1979 **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Second Obote government (The Luwero civil war of 1981-1986) and the manipulation of Ethnicity **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

The rise of the National Resistance Movement and Conflict in Acholiland, 1986-2006 **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

CHAPTER SIX: CAUSES AND THE DYNAMICS OF CONFLICT IN

ACHOLILAND, 1986-2006 Error! Bookmark not defined.

Introduction **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

The rebellion in Acholiland **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

The causes and dynamics of the conflict in Acholiland..**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

The NRM under Y. Museveni and Conflict in Acholiland 1986-2006**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Alice Auma Lakwena and Holy Spirit Movement Forces (HSMF)**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

The LRA and continued conflict in Acholiland**Error! Bookmark not defined.**



CHAPTER SEVEN: CONSEQUENCES OF CONFLICT IN POST-

INDEPENDENT ACHOLILAND; (1986- 2006) .. Error! Bookmark not defined.

Introduction **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

The Genesis of Conflict in Acholiland: A Recap **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Conclusion **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

General conclusion **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

References355



ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

ADF	-	Allied Democratic Army
ARLPI	-	Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiatives
DP	-	Democratic Party
FEDEMU	-	Uganda Democratic Freedom Movement
FOBA	-	Force Obote Back Again
FRONASA	-	Front for National Salvation
FUNA	-	Former Uganda National Army
GSA	-	General Security Agency
HSM II	-	Holy Spirit Movement II
HSMF	-	Holy Spirit Movement Forces
KAR	-	Kings African Rifles
KY	-	Kabaka Yekka(-Kabaka Alone) Party
LRA	-	Lords Resistance Army
MPs	-	Members of Parliament
NALU	-	National Army for the Liberation of Uganda
NASA	-	National Security Agency
NCC	-	National Consultative Council
NOM	-	Ninth October Movement
NRA	-	National Resistance Army
NRM	-	National Resistance Movement
OAU	-	Organisation of African Unity

PRA	-	Peoples Redemption Army
SRB	-	State Research Bureau
SPLM	-	Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement
U.Shs	-	Uganda Shillings
UDCM/A	-	United Democratic Christian Movement/Army
UFA	-	Uganda Freedom Army
UFM	-	Uganda Freedom Movement
UNLA	-	Uganda National Liberation Army
UNLF	-	Uganda National Liberation Front
UNRF II	-	Uganda National Rescue Front Part II
UNRF	-	Uganda National Rescue Front
UPA	-	Uganda Peoples Army
UPC	-	Uganda Peoples Congress
UPDA	-	Uganda Peoples Democratic Army
UPDF	-	Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (New name for National Resistance Army)
UPDM	-	Uganda Peoples Democratic Movement
UPM	-	Uganda Patriotic Movement
USA	-	Uganda Salvation Army
WHO	-	World Health Organisation
WNBF	-	West Nile Bank Front



Glossary

- Acholi - People who inhabit Acholiland
- Acholiland - Current districts of Pader, Gulu and Kitgum that is
Home to the Acholi
- Gang - Village in Acholi or home
- Baganda - The people of Buganda
- Kabaka - King of Buganda

Abstract

This dissertation examines the extent to which conflict in post-colonial Acholiland is largely a product of the political dynamics of successive post-colonial regimes, including the extensive manipulation of politicized ethnicity and ethnic stereotyping rather than the age-old ethnic differences emanating from the region's history. Acholiland lies in the Northern part of Uganda.

Unlike the other East African states of Kenya and Tanzania that have enjoyed relative peace since their independence in the 1960s, Uganda has had a long conflictual history since 1962. The citizens of Uganda only enjoyed few years of relative peace and stability between 1962 and 1966. Between 1966 and 2006, one part or another of Uganda has experienced years of conflict accompanied by instability and political turmoil resulting from the failure to resolve political differences using political-civil means. The Ugandan political leadership after independence has failed to work out a basic political consensus on the basis of which political institutions can be built to resolve political conflicts, short of physical force. The net effect of all this was to bring the Uganda army on the stage of Uganda politics. Since 1962 the army has been used as an instrument of policy to resolve what basically was/is a domestic struggle for power. In this entire process, various ethnic groups have been victims of the cycle of violence. Since 1986 until 2006, war has ravaged Acholiland in northern Uganda to a greater extent than any other part of Uganda. The Uganda army (The National Resistance Army) (NRM), later renamed the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF), has since engaged one insurgent group after another in Acholiland. The debilitating consequences of the 20 year old conflict in Acholiland and the

search for peace are subjects of growing scholarship. This work on conflict in post-independent Acholiland (1962-2006) seeks to contribute to this scholarship.

While it has been postulated that conflict in Acholiland is largely because the Acholi are warlike people and are therefore more prone to war than other ethnic groups in Uganda, it is argued here that conflict in this area is largely a product of the political dynamics of successive post-colonial regimes, including the extensive manipulation of politicized ethnicity and ethnic stereotyping.

As the study shows, ethnicity by itself is not a problem and ethnicity can be harnessed for the stability and development of any country. However, once politicized and militarily instrumentalized, as has been the case in post-independent Uganda, ethnicity then becomes a vehicle for violent conflict. This then makes ethnically informed practices the main means through which war and its effects are interpreted and acted upon. The study also traces the history of Acholiland in the colonial period to identify the major trends that shaped its development and contributed to the region's turbulent post-colonial experience.

INTRODUCTION

Uganda has now been independent for forty-seven years (1962-2009). In these years as an independent country, various parts of the country have been in a state of political crisis and conflict. Unlike most African states where the political environments settled down to a greater or lesser degree after independence, Uganda has experienced extended periods of violent internal strife, similar to that found in Chad, Sudan and Somalia. While there is some relative political quiet in countries like Sudan at the cost of personalized dictatorial rule, the northern part of Uganda remained in a state of political-military strife and turmoil between 1986 and 2006, as one insurgent group or another rose to challenge the ruling National Resistance Movement government in Kampala. All such insurgent groups have been militarily organized and equipped in their challenge to the central government.

Indeed, as E.A Brett has rightly summed up the post independent Uganda political situation, “Bullets rather than ballots have dominated politics in Uganda, where two governments have been removed by coups (i.e. Obote I-1971 and Obote II – 1985), one by foreign invasion (i.e. the 1979 Tanzania-Uganda National Liberation Front invasion] and another by armed rebellion (i.e. the NRA and Museveni rebellion of 1981-85 that culminated in the overthrow of Tito Okello).¹ Consequently, Uganda has had eight governments since independence in which only the first government (1962-1971) was formed by peaceful constitutional means.

¹E.A. Brett, “Neutralising the Use of Force in Uganda: The Role of the Military in Politic, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 33, 1 (1995), 129-152.

Overall, the citizens of Uganda enjoyed only four years of relative peace and stability between 1962 and 1966. In the years after 1966, Ugandans were exposed to a level of violence that far exceeds that of any other people in eastern Africa.² Well over one million Ugandans were killed between 1966 and 1985 through violence that was invoked for political purposes.³ Different explanations have been advanced for this unfortunate history with regard to Uganda, ranging from failure of the post-independent political leaders to integrate the country into one unit,⁴ from religious loyalties and ideologies,⁵ to regional and superpower influences,⁶ to ethnic antipathies and chauvinism.⁷ This work respects these different views and academic positions but will emphasize the importance of post-colonial politics, the role of ethnicity and especially how politicized ethnicity and ethnic stereotyping have been fundamental in post-independent conflicts in Uganda and particularly in the north of the country.

When S. P. Huntington worked out a model to account for political instability in developing areas, he particularly attributed this phenomenon to the absence of viable political institutions which can domesticate power.⁸ By his criteria, a political system may be modernized, in terms of material and social

² The political-military situation in Uganda remained volatile, to the extent that almost every region has since 1966 been exposed to violent rebel activity or internal disagreement leading to chaos. For instance the 1966 crisis in Buganda, the Amin coup and massacre of civilians in Acholi and Lango (1971-1979), insurgent rebel activities in Teso 1986-1987, rebel activities in West Nile 1981-1982, 1987-1990, and rebel activities in Acholiland 1986-2006.

³ A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-1985*, (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1994), 3.

⁴ A. Omara-Otunnu, "The Dynamics of Conflict in Uganda", in Oliver Furley (Ed.), *Conflict in Africa*, (London: I.B Taurus Publishers, 1995), 223-236.

⁵ A. B. Mujaju, "The Political Crisis of Church Institutions in Uganda", *African Affairs*, 73, 299, (January 1976), 11-18.

⁶ P. Woodward, *Rivalry and Conflict in Northern East Africa*, (London: The Centre for Security and Conflict Studies, 1987)

⁷ A. Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda: The Making of a Military Ethnocracy*, (London: Sage Publications 1975)

⁸ S.P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, (United Kingdom: Yale University Press, 1969), Chap. 1

development, without being developed short of physical use of force if there are no generally acceptable political formulae for resolving conflicts. Uganda's post-independent politics exhibits the above, namely, being modernized but with no generally acceptable political formulae for resolving conflicts- or transforming from one government to another- short of use of physical force.

Since independence, as D. Mudoola rightly notes, "the Ugandan political leadership have failed to work out a basic political consensus on the basis of which political institutions can be built to resolve political differences short of use physical force".⁹ Unfortunately, force is not a state monopoly in Uganda but a means by which political groups seek to establish their hegemony over other competing political groups. The end result of this is conflict, as one group tries to impose its policies over others, while other political groups fight back to access state authority and resources. Conflict in Acholiland should be seen in this context.

In addition, there is the fragility of Uganda political institutions, which can be attributed to a highly fragmented political elite operating in socio-political situations that are highly polarized. Ugandan political elite have consequently worked out political formulae, not as a means through which conflicts can be resolved for the ultimate good of the political system as such, but as tactical weapons for taking care of interests articulated by the political elite's interests peculiar to themselves, or the social forces they purport to represent.

⁹ D. Mudoola, "Post Colonial Politics in Uganda: An Interpretation", *MAWAZO*, 6, 2 (Dec. 1985), 19-29.

In Uganda since 1962, the constitutional formula has been periodically used to advance selfish interests. When the constitution was not thus manipulated, then ethnicity was exploited for the same ends, hence its politicization. Wherever there has been a change of government in Uganda, the army has been used by those who have control over it to espouse selfish-personal interests and the interests of a particular social group. While one may argue that this was a direct outcome of the divide and rule policy that the colonial state in Uganda adopted in managing local challenges to power, post-independent political elites should have known that the end result of such a ploy would always be conflict. The British, who saw northern Uganda as a problem area, described it initially as a “disturbed hostile territory” and treated it as an occupied territory until 1921. In some parts like Karamoja, the Karamoja Act of 1964 even criminalized any forms of gathering.¹⁰ Yet, the southern part of Uganda, by contrast, was favoured and protected from other regions.

While we contend here that ethnic identity and politics in Uganda are directly and indirectly linked to the colonial processes be as the colonial state, not only utilized ethnic politics, but also left in place an institutional apparatus that promoted ethnic identity- the political elite that took over the reigns of state power after 1962 simply exacerbated ethnic polarization leading to a series of conflicts, including that in the current state of conflict in northern Uganda, with its epicenter in Acholiland.

¹⁰ J. Barber, “The Moving Frontier of British Imperialism in Northern Uganda, 1898-1919”, *Uganda Journal*, 29 (1965), 27-43.

In the few years after independence when Ugandans enjoyed relative peace, such as between 1962 and 1966, it was not necessarily because the leaders were committed to what Ali Mazrui calls the “politics of reconciliation”,¹¹ but simply because none of the leaders and the forces they represented then felt strong enough to challenge the independence constitutional arrangements or because they did not have enough control of the military to effect change unconstitutionally. Once the equation of power tilted in their favour, Ugandan rulers consistently resorted to unconstitutional means to access and exert political power. For instance, after introducing the 1967 Constitution and abolishing Kingdoms recognised in the original independence constitution, the Buganda kingdom that had frustrated most of Obote’s designs was no longer a threat. As D. Mudoola put it, “with the introduction of the 1967 Republican Constitution and ‘Move to the Left’, the rules of the game helped not only to regularise and legitimize Obote’s seizure of power, but to bring the Uganda army on the stage of Uganda politics since the army was then used as an instrument of policy to resolve what basically was a domestic struggle for power”.¹²

The net effect of this on Uganda’s politics was that Parliament, political parties and other civilian institutions, as arenas for resolving political conflicts, were relegated to the background and were later used for legitimizing political courses of action already decided on by the political elite (in this case Obote) and his cronies. Later leaders after Obote did not deviate much from such unconstitutional means to cling on to power.

¹¹A. Mazrui, “Violent Constitutionalism in Uganda”, in *Government and Opposition*, 11, 4 (1967).

¹²D. Mudoola, “Post Colonial Politics in Uganda, 20.

Yoweri Museveni's government (1986-2009) has made several constitutional amendments to help retain political power indefinitely. For instance in 2005, Parliament ultimately amended the 1995 Constitution to remove "five year term limits",¹³ to allow President Museveni to contest for presidency in 2010. Museveni categorically stated that the lifting of term limits was not necessarily in his favour but would be of benefit to any contender for the presidency. At the same time, Museveni portrayed himself as the only man with a "vision" for a prosperous Uganda.¹⁴ Besides, he has also increased the number of districts in Uganda from 45 when he came to power in 1986 to 83 in 2006, as a way to promote his nominees as district administrators and supporters as Members of Parliament, while arguing that that the new districts are meant to bring services closer to the people. However, as current Minister of Lands – Hon Omara-Atubo rightly put it,

Ethnic manipulation has been done through the creation of districts whose purposes is not bringing services nearer to the people but to contain tribal sentiments by dividing up a group of people.¹⁵

Indeed, as opposition politician Betty Among also emphasized, "districts play a role in retention of political power. District creation is not always a demand by the people concerned but a political move geared at appeasing a group of politicians".¹⁶

¹³ The 1995 Uganda Constitution had term limits as one of the many ways of protecting Ugandans from over-zealous rulers who do not relinquish power. After winning elections in 2001, Museveni would have served the mandatory two terms by 2010 and would not stand for re-election. The government bribed members of Parliament with 5 million Uganda shs (approximately 3000 dollars in 2006) to amend the constitution by removing term limits. He therefore qualifies to run for the presidency indefinitely.

¹⁴ S. Makara, "Uganda's 2006 Multiparty Elections: Consolidating Democracy and Building Peace?" *East African Journal of Peace & Human Rights*, 13, 1 (2007), 54-80.

¹⁵ *Parliamentary Hansard*, Kampala, (July 20th 2005).

¹⁶ *Parliamentary Hansard*, Kampala, (July 20th 2005).

The political history of Uganda is rife with several examples where political leaders in control of state organs devise ways of eliminating others (especially opposition) from access to both political power and economic resources. Once one group takes control of the state, the highly fragmented political elites work out a formula for balancing the political forces and adhere to a formula that benefits them. The other competing factions are then left with no other option but to organize militarily to gain access to political power and economic resources. The end result of all this is conflict like that in northern Uganda, especially Acholiland, between 1986 and 2006.

The Acholi homeland in northern Uganda has been the arena of conflict since 1986. The Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF), commanded until 2006 by General Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, who is also the president of Uganda, has fought different insurgent groups, such as the Uganda Peoples Democratic Army (UPDA) under Odong Latek, the Holy Spirit Movement Forces (HSMF) under Alice Auma Lakwena, the Holy Spirit Movement II of Severino Lukoya, and the Lord's Resistance Army/Movement (LRA/M) of Joseph Kony. Until 2006, the LRA/M of Joseph Kony remained the most resistant to defeat despite government's highly praised military operations, such as "Operation Lightning Thunder" in December 2003.

As shall be delineated in this study, the causes and consequences of armed conflict in northern Uganda, particularly in Acholiland, the reasons for it and the "facts" about it all differ, depending on who is telling the story or writing about it. The dominant explanation given at the official level for the persistent

conflict in the Acholi area is that the political upheavals, including civil wars, rebellion and associated massive displacement of people and dispossession which have bedeviled Uganda (Acholiland included) can, to a large extent, be attributed to ethnicity, ethnic diversity, ethnic rivalries and the effect of British colonialism. At an unofficial level, conflict in this area is perceived as the outcome of the cultural and militant background of the Acholi people.

This study considers such explanations to be partial simplistic, and unable to provide a comprehensive appreciation of the causes of political conflicts in Uganda mainly because they are not grounded in a thorough understanding of historical reality that shaped the history of Uganda in general and Acholiland in particular. The conflict in Acholiland should be seen as part of Uganda's history of conflict since independence in 1962. This study shall, therefore, provide the necessary historical context that should assist in a clear understanding of Acholiland's post-colonial experience. The study is organized in seven (7) chapters.