

This chapter gives a concise statement on the scope of the thesis and the central arguments to be pursued. It specifies the problem to be investigated, the purpose of the study and the research methodology.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The political history of Independent Africa is replete with many accounts of political conflicts which have attended the course of the continent's political life. Notable among these political conflicts are the Biafran civil war in Nigeria of 1967-1970, which pitted the Ibo people of south-eastern Nigeria against the Federal Government; the civil war in Angola that saw Jonas Savimbi's guerilla group, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), fighting the ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA); and the conflicts in Burundi and Rwanda in which the protagonists have been the Hutu and Tutsi; the only two ethnic groups, or perhaps more accurately, occupational groups constituting the population of each of the two countries.

There was also the civil war in Sudan fought between the mainly Moslem (Arabic-speaking) North and the Christian (African) South which sought autonomy and independence under the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM); the Somali crisis where conflict is predominantly at the level of clans; the recurring crises in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the two decade-long conflict in northern Uganda with its epicentre in Acholiland. Some African

leaders have described the continent of Africa as synonymous with difficulties. In a speech to business forum in Johannesburg, former president of Zambia Kenneth Kaunda described Africa as “a continent at cross-roads because of its failed economic policies and conflicts arising out of bad leadership”,¹⁷ while Museveni of Uganda expressed pity that Africa lags far behind South America and Europe. Conflicts that have bedeviled the continent for years need a lasting remedy.

A number of Scholars who have focused on this phenomenon of political conflicts have argued that their cause is the very fact of the existence of various communities in the same nation-state and the hatred emanating from that situation.¹⁸ David Weeks, for example, contends that conflict is an inevitable outcome of diversity.¹⁹ This study will argue to the contrary.

In Uganda, the population has been exposed to a level of violence that far exceeds that of any other people in Eastern Africa.²⁰ Since Uganda obtained independence from Britain in 1962, the people of Acholi have had a varied political experience. In the Obote regimes (1962-1971) and (1980-1985), the Acholi dominated the rank and file in the army and also occupied a number of high-ranking military and political offices. This changed in 1986 with the rise to power of the National Resistance Army/Movement led by current President

¹⁷*The Daily Monitor*, 5 January 2006, 3.

¹⁸ Beyene, “Decentralization as a Strategy for Resolving the National Problem: The Ethiopian Experience” in the 18th AAPAM Conference on “Decentralisation as a Principle of Democratic Governance in Africa; Issues and Options”, Nairobi, Kenya 17–21 March, 1977, 4.

¹⁹ T.A. Imblogibe, “Conflict in Africa: Roles of OAU Sub-regional Organisations”, Lectures at the National War College, Abuja, 17 February, 1998, 1.

²⁰ A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-1985*, 3.

Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. Since 1986, the Acholi homeland in northern Uganda has been the stage of armed conflict although a fragile peace has obtained since 2006, when peace talks moderated by the Government of South Sudan began. The debilitating consequences of this twenty year conflict and the search for peace are subjects of growing scholarship. This work on conflict in post-colonial Acholiland (1962-2006) seeks to contribute to this scholarship.

AIM

After a background chapter on the pre-colonial history of Acholi, the thesis will trace the colonial history of Acholiland to identify the major trends that shaped its development during the colonial period and contributed to the region's turbulent post-colonial experience. The study argues that conflict in post-colonial Acholiland is a product of the political dynamics of successive post-colonial regimes, including the extensive manipulation of politicized ethnicity and ethnic stereotyping, rather than the result of age-old ethnic differences emanating from the region's history.

RATIONALE

Using conflict in Acholiland as a micro-study, we hope to show to what extent the colonial period and the effects of British "divide and rule" policy contributed to post-colonial conflict in Africa and how far such conflicts are, in the end, conflicts over political power or access to economic resources. We contend that, while no doubt a contributing factor, ethnic difference is not in itself a

cause of armed conflict but is rather an instrument of mobilization for political leaders. Equally, the role of religion in conflict, as with the Lord's Resistance Army/Movement (LRA/M) of Joseph Kony or Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Mobile Forces (HSMF)²¹ is basically more a mobilization strategy than a cause, as some of the works reviewed tend to indicate.

This study investigates how the use of the state as an instrument of material acquisition has meant that those who have benefited over the years from the structure of access have used every trick available, including mobilizing ethnic support, to sustain themselves in power. Likewise, those who want to access political power have resorted to the same means, leading to conflict.

In Africa, as Chabal and Daloz have noted, there is no well-defined separation between the political realm, on the one hand, and the more economic, social, religious and cultural areas, on the other. It is difficult to know what is or is not political, partly because the vision of politics is both inclusive and more extensive than in the West.²² The pervasive role that the state plays in the economic and distribution processes attracts competition and later conflicts. It has become a rule in Africa that to develop or benefit from the state, one must be closely related to or otherwise associated with, those in power. The competition to acquire power is often militarized, hence conflicts. In Africa generally, it is expected that politics will lead to personal enrichment for the

²¹ The Holy Spirit Movement was a rebel group led by Alice Auma Lakwena from Gulu opposed to the NRA/NRM of Museveni. After its defeat in 1987 at Jinja, Joseph Kony began a new movement he called the Lords Resistance Army.

²² P. Chabal & J. Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*, (Oxford and Bloomington: The International African Institute/James Currey/Indiana University Press, 1999), 52.

political leader and members of his ethnic group. Consequently, as each leader of Uganda came into power, as Okalany notes, the members of that particular ethnic group would rejoice saying “it is our turn to eat,” or “we have fallen into things”. Indeed, the key positions in government and other departments are dished out first to “tribesmen” before the other ethnic groups are remembered.²³ Thus, writing on ethnicity and political conflicts in Nigeria, Cletus Chukwa contends that “political conflicts and other socio-economic setbacks stem from ethnic differences.”²⁴

In his study on “the Rwandese political tragedy”, Wanjala Nasongo criticizes D. Kamukama’s position on the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda for emphasising the role of ethnicity. Wanjala believes that the tragedy was the result of a combination of factors.²⁵ Similarly, Gasarase also believes that “the Hutu-Tutsi hatred “explanation is too facile” and that “some knowledgeable individuals who keep harping on it do so for a variety of reasons”. He argues that the tragedy in Rwanda needs to be understood in terms of deeper historical reasons and the failure by Rwanda’s post-colonial leadership to unite the masses rather than simply that the Hutu hated the Tutsi.²⁶ The present study argues that ethnicity is neither inherently conflictual nor necessarily deleterious even in a heterogeneous state like Uganda.

²³ D. H. Okalany, “Ethnicity and the Culture of Eating in Uganda, 1962-1986”, in B.A. Ogot (Ed.), *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Democracy in Africa*, (Maseno: Desktop Pub. Unit, 1996), 188.

²⁴ C. Chukwa, “Ethnicity and Political Conflicts in Nigeria”, in B. A. Ogot and P. G. Okoth (Eds.), *Conflict in Contemporary African*, (Nairobi: Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, 2000), 143.

²⁵ S. W. Nasongo, “Resource Allocation And The Crisis of Political Conflict on Africa: Beyond The Inter-ethnic Hatred Thesis”, in P. G. Okoth and B.A. Ogot (Eds.), *Conflict in Contemporary Africa*, 48.

²⁶ C. Gasarase, “The Rwandan Conflict: Sources, Evaluation and Implications for Refugee Reparation and National Reconciliation and Reconstruction”, in CODESRIA Conference on Academic Freedom, Social Research and Conflict Resolution in the Countries of the Great Lakes”, (Arusha, Tanzania 4th –7th Sept. 1995), 1.

ACHOLILAND'S HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE

In the mid-to-late 17th century, Acholiland was essentially a frontier region where central Sudanic and Eastern Nilotic worlds met. As Atkinson notes, the first was a series of Eastern Nilotic encroachments from about 1000 to 1600 into Central Sudanic-dominated areas north of Acholi. Second, during the same period numerous groups of the Teso-Karimojong (or Ateker) branch of Eastern Nilotic speakers came into Acholi from the East. Most settled in eastern Acholi, but some made their way as far as the Kilak-Lamola region in the extreme west. Third, Western Nilotic Luo speakers made their first appearance in Acholi, probably during the early to mid-fifteenth century.²⁷ Eastern Nilotic Ateker were numerous and settled throughout Acholiland. Today, Acholiland is inhabited, not only by people claiming Acholi origin, but also by some Madi and Labwor whose ethnic composition is quite different from the Acholi.²⁸ This illustrates that Acholi as conceived today is home to different ethnic groups as result of migrations.

The argument we advance here is that ethnicity can be harnessed to enhance productive goals and objectives if properly guided. It is the politicization of ethnicity that is dangerous. Politicization of ethnicity often takes place in a situation characterized by inequitable structures of access. Such structures give rise to the emergence of an “in-group” and “out-groups,” with the latter trying to break down the structures of inequality and the former responding by building barriers to access that ensure the continuation of its privileged

²⁷ R. R Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity* 63. See also R.R. Atkinson, “A History of the Western Acholi of Uganda c. 1675-1900: A Study in the Utilization of Oral Data”, (PhD Diss. Northwestern University, 1978), 123.

²⁸ J.B. Webster, “State Formation and Fragmentation in Agago”, in J.M Onyango-Ku-Odongo & J.B. Webster (Eds.), *The Central Lwo during the Aconya*, (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1976), 222.

position.²⁹ The common result is armed conflict for power. Conflict that has bedeviled post-colonial Acholiland since independence has features of all these anomalies.

This study will be guided by the following critical questions: What are the historical forces that shaped ethnic identity in Uganda in general and Acholiland in particular? To what extent have the Acholi as a distinct and collective ethnic identity been a factor in Uganda's national politics since 1962? How has ethnicity been politicized and stereotyped in Uganda? Why has Acholiland been the centre of continuous conflict since 1986? To what extent can conflicts in post-colonial Acholiland be connected to its particular colonial history and experience in post-colonial transformation? How have ethnic mistrust and complex traditional religious practices of the Acholi exacerbated conflict? How can ethnic rivalries and conflicts in Uganda and Africa generally be contained or neutralized? What role have external forces played in conflict in Acholi? And to what extent can the conflict be attributed to failures of post colonial politics and leadership as opposed to the impact of the colonial heritage?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Conflict in post-colonial Acholiland is an interesting case in its own right, if only because of its very destructive nature. Different accounts have been given as to its origins and why it has persisted. Uganda's president, Yoweri Museveni, has

²⁹ W. O. Oyugi, "Politicised Ethnicity and Conflict in Kenya: A Periodic Phenomenon", in *Proceedings of the Conference on African Conflicts: Their Management, Resolution and Post-Conflict Resolution*, (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2000), 34.

argued that ethnicity as a social identity has been at the centre of the conflict.³⁰

This study is intended to investigate this claim by tracing the pre-colonial and colonial history of Acholiland and its interaction with the rest of Uganda in the colonial and post-colonial periods. The study will help contextualize the “ethnicity problem” and determine its impact on post-colonial society and politics in Uganda. Thus, the study hopes to contribute to current theoretical debates on post-colonial conflicts through a historical analysis of the local experience of Acholiland.

SIGNIFICANCE

The study of conflict in post-colonial Acholiland will contribute to a greater understanding of its root causes. It will interrogate standard explanations that emphasize the “North-South divide,” the Acholi as a “martial tribe,” the “war-like nature of the Acholi,” or the claim that post-colonial conflict in Acholiland arose because “the northerners, in general, and, the Acholi in particular, have dominated the political space in Uganda for a long time”.³¹

Uganda has experienced more than twenty insurgencies against the current government. Rebellion in West Nile, under the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF) and Uganda Rescue Front (URF), has long ended. In the Western region, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and the National Liberation of Uganda (NALU) have also been defeated. The Peoples Redemption Army, claimed by Government to be fronted by opposition leader, Dr. Kiiza Besigye, has never fired a single-shot and is, therefore- if it even exists at all- not a threat to peace

³⁰ Y.K. Museveni, with E. Kanyogonya & K. Shillington, *Sowing The Mustard Seed: The Struggle For Freedom and Democracy in Uganda*, (London: Macmillan, 1997).

³¹ *Drum East Magazine*, October 1985.

and security. In the Teso and Lango regions, the Uganda Peoples Army (UPA), under Peter Otai, and the Force Obote Back Again (FOBA), respectively, have long been crushed. Armed rebellion has, however, persisted in Acholiland since 1986, under different groups. Currently, the Uganda government has failed to wipe out the Lord's Resistance Army rebels under Joseph Kony. The persistence of rebellion in this area and its humanitarian consequences make it an important subject worth studying.

Lastly, but most importantly, this study will contribute to the scholarship on conflicts in Africa by, highlighting the role played by British colonial policy in Uganda, especially the effects of its division of labour, its declaration of Teso, West Nile and Acholiland as recruitment area for the army and police, and its economic and social marginalization of these areas, as well as how post-colonial leaders exploited this situation for their own selfish ends, leading to conflict. In addition, it will show the historical role that elders played in this society to sustain or re-establish peace, and how the current situation can be helped through the efforts of government and local traditional leaders. Hopefully, this study will stimulate further research that incorporates in serious historical perspective on the dynamics of conflict as well as a critical assessment of the role that ethnicity plays in such conflicts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Overview

The modern state of Uganda assumed its present geopolitical identity between 1890 and 1926 as a product of European (British) colonialism. On the eve of its independence from the British in 1962, colonial Uganda was in many ways well-equipped to embark on successful independent statehood.³² A resource-rich country, colonial Uganda had long been paying the costs of its administration and, as early as 1916, was no longer a burden to the British tax payer. Between 1945 and 1960, Ugandan peasants paid over £118 million to the administration and development of their country. After independence, unlike Kenya, Uganda attracted no substantial foreign investment or aid but, unlike many other dependent ex-colonies, Uganda's subsistence sector was not only self-supporting but very strong, with seventy five percent of cultivated land devoted to this end.

Instead, after 1964, Ugandans have been exposed to levels of violence and internal conflicts that far exceed that of any other country in East Africa. Conflict continued up to 2006 in northern Uganda, especially in Acholi, and although a fragile peace has come to this area since, the effects of two decades of war make sustainable peace both difficult and uncertain. Internal conflicts in Uganda have thus marked the country since its very inception as a post-colonial state.

³²A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964 –1985*, 3. See also H. Kyemba, *A State of Blood: The inside Story of Idi Amin*, (Kampala: Fountain publishers, 1977), 69.

The high incidence of socio-political conflicts in Uganda has generated considerable scholarly literature.

(a) The Legacy of British Colonialism: Ethnic Compartmentalization, Uneven Development and Post-colonial Conflicts in Uganda

Some scholars have attributed post-colonial instability and conflicts in Uganda to the legacy of British colonialism in Uganda, especially the effects of the British colonial policy of “divide and rule”. Tarsis Kabwegyere gives a concise introduction to the “divide and rule” theme and how it laid the foundation for post-colonial conflicts. As he writes:

The differences among (Africans) were aggravated by the colonial practice of ‘divide and rule’, a practice that was designed to reduce social interaction and the emergence of a collective consciousness among the oppressed. At policy level, it promoted disunity, ethnicity and parochialism which sowed the seeds of conflicts in the post-colonial period.³³

Similarly, Bruce Berman has argued that “the colonial state’s strategy of fragmentation and isolation of distinct tribal units promoted ethnic competition and conflict.”³⁴ On his part, Mugaju states:

During the colonial period, the problems of ethnicity were compounded by economic distortions. British colonialism created regional imbalances and ethnic specialization. Southern, and to some extent, eastern Uganda became regions of peasant production of cotton and coffee. ...others such as, Acholi, Teso and to some extent West Nile became catchment areas for the armed forces.³⁵

³³ T. B. Kabwegyere, *The Politics of State Formation: The Nature and Effects of Colonialism in Uganda*, (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1977), 44.

³⁴ B. Berman, “Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism”, *Africa Affairs*, 97 (1998), 328.

³⁵ J. Mugaju, *Uganda’s Age of Reform: A Critical Overview*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1999), 14-15. See also M. Doornbos, “The Uganda Crisis and the National Question”, in H. Holdger and M. Twaddle, (Eds.), *Uganda Now*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1988).

This kind of representation has become a common place depiction of British colonialism, with Bruce Berman, Lwanga-Lunyiigo, Phares Mutibwa, Mahmood Mamdani, Ginyera Pincywa, Museveni, Martin Doornbos, and Onadipe and Lord, Mugaju echoing it.³⁶

While it seems indisputable that ethnic incompatibility and polarization are basically a product of British colonialism and enabled the British to dominate and economically exploit the colonial state of Uganda, the inheritors of the colonial state and the politics pursued thereafter made the bad situation worse. As we shall argue, the first generation of post-colonial rulers was more interested in power than justice and democracy. The way they manipulated the ethnic compartments that the British created largely accounts for Uganda's recurring post-colonial conflicts, a feature that both Kabwegyere and Berman seem to neglect in their works.³⁷ It therefore appears reasonable to argue that if Britain could govern Uganda in comparative peace for nearly seventy years, subsequent indigenous rulers, knowing local problems more intimately than the British, could, at the very least, equal that record. Since they abjectly and

³⁶These scholars contend that conflict in post-independence Uganda is a legacy of British Colonialism and especially British policy of divide and rule. See B. Berman, "Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State"; P. Mutibwa, *Uganda since Independence: A Story of Unfulfilled Hope*, (London: Hurst & Co., 1992); M. Mamdani, *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda*, (London: Heinemann, 1976); Ginyera-Pincywa, "Is there a Northern Question?" in Kumar Rupesinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, (London: James Currey, 1989); Lwanga-Lunyiigo, "The Colonial Roots of Internal Conflict", in Kumar Rupesinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, (London: James Currey, 1989); Onadipe A. and Lord D., "Conciliation resources: African Media and conflict", New York: Conciliation resources (Online). Available from <http://www.c-rorg/occ.papers/af-media>; Y. K. Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed: The Struggle For Freedom and Democracy in Uganda*, (London: Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1997); M. Doornbos, "The Uganda Crisis and National Question", in H. Hansen & M. Twaddle (Eds.), *Uganda Now*, (London, James Currey, 1988).

³⁷ T.B. Kabwegyere, *The Politics of State Formation*, 44. See also B. Berman, "Ethnicity Patronage and the African State", 144-160.

tragically failed to do so, an explanation must then be sought in their motives and performance.

Samwiri Lwanga-Lunyiigo traces the historical roots and the structural causes of the reproduction of violence in Uganda and argues strongly that the administrative boundaries enacted by the British were to reproduce ethnicity where policies provided for the institutionalization of parochial tribally-oriented local government. He then contends that “this constitutional division made the unity of Uganda extremely difficult to achieve, and was to be a potential cause of conflict in the post-independence decade”.³⁸

Whereas it is true that British colonial policies had both favoured and aided the continuation of tribal loyalties while blocking the development of supra-tribal links, attributing the current conflicts to this aspect alone needs new examination and modification. Lwanga Lunyiingo treats the colonial period as a monolithic whole and makes no allowance for any other explanation or even the changes Uganda’s post-colonial leaders would have initiated to alleviate the situation of conflicts. Lunyiigo, like Kabwegyere, neglects the important part that weak post-colonial leaders have since played by manipulating the colonial divisions to their favour. He does not find anything wrong with the way post-colonial politics was handled to result in the current conflicts. Our study will try to go beyond the part played by colonialism even when we respect its contribution to the current crisis as well.

³⁸ S. Lwanga-Lunyiigo, “The Colonial Roots of Internal Conflicts” in K. Rupensinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, 24-41.

Martin Doornbos extends the argument further by emphasizing how the uneven development engineered by the British made the northern region in general, Acholiland in particular, a source of colonial labour; thereby creating the current regional economic disparity which is a source of grievance and conflict. In the course of blaming British rule for the excesses of Uganda's presidents Idi Amin (1971-1979) and Milton Obote (1980-1985), he identifies "a legacy of the colonial regime that had sought to create a power balance, divide and rule model through concentrating military and police recruitment on Acholi, Lango and West Nile in the North, away from the economic, educational and administrative central region of the country".³⁹

Similarly, Phares Mutibwa believes that "army and police recruitment was reserved for northerners and people for the East lest Baganda became too strong and colonial rule was endangered".⁴⁰ Mutibwa also highlights the negative legacy of British colonialism in relation to the arbitrariness of Uganda's boundaries; that is boundaries that ensured that each tribe was an independent administrative unit. He accuses British colonialists of introducing new class formations unknown in Uganda before. Although he does not define these classes, it is possible that they embrace what Twaddle refers to as civil servants, cash crop farmers and traders.⁴¹ Whereas it is historically true that social change accompanies economic change and that these particular classes can be said to represent beneficiaries as much as victims- albeit frustrated

³⁹ M. Doornbos, "The Uganda Crisis and the National Question", 265.

⁴⁰ P. Mutibwa, *Uganda Since Independence*, 6.

⁴¹ M. Twaddle, & H. Hansen, "The Changing State of Uganda", in M. Twaddle & H. Hansen (Eds.), *Developing Uganda*, (Oxford: James Currey, 1998), 229.

beneficiaries- of economic change, colonial conflicts in Uganda cannot be explained by relying only on the role played by British colonialism because it narrows the scope.

In explaining why the National Resistance Movement under Yoweri Museveni resorted to guerrilla warfare in the 1980s against the government of Milton Obote, Mutibwa suggests that they had to fight “the system” which had been created by the colonial power and then inherited at independence, perfected by Obote and matured under Amin’s dictatorship. In this study, the impact of colonial rule is one important dimension which will be investigated. However, it is insufficient in itself to explain contemporary conflicts. Both colonial realities, and especially post-colonial political transformations, have to be analysed. The ethnification of the army, for instance, is what made it an instrument of coercion and a centre of ethnic politics in the post-colonial period.

Samwiri Rubaraza Karugire,⁴² and Kasozi,⁴³ in their respective works, have described at some length how ethnic, religious and social inequality has led to conflicts in post-colonial Uganda. Karugire, in particular, traces the chequered political history of Uganda from the attainment of independence in 1962 to the military coup by Tito Okello that overthrew Obote for the second time in 1985. Tito Okello had, until 1985, been commander of the Uganda National Liberation Army and a close confidant of Milton Obote. He argues that disunity on ethnic and religious grounds and the administrative isolation of Uganda’s component

⁴² S. R. Karugire, *The Roots of Instability in Uganda*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1996), 4.

⁴³ A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-1985*, 19.

parts during the colonial period were the basic foundations upon which political instability was built. He then concludes that this situation was exacerbated by an ethnically unbalanced army which was largely illiterate. Although he gives a very illuminating account of Uganda's history, his book stops in 1985, thereby leaving out a whole 20 years of conflict in Acholiland. Karugire does not critique in depth the nature of post-colonial politics and especially how the ethnic compartments left behind by the British have since been manipulated to result in the current conflict.

For his part, Kasozi attributes the major causes of conflicts in Uganda to social inequality, the failure to develop legitimate conflict resolution mechanisms, and factors such as lack of a common language, religious sectarianism and gender inequality. Both works, brilliant as far as they go, still fall short of our basic objective to examine the northern Uganda conflict as a product of the political dynamics of post-colonial regimes, and especially the extensive manipulation of politicized ethnicity and ethnic stereotyping.

Firimoon Banugire, in his essay entitled "Uneven and Unbalanced Development: Development Strategies and Conflict", raises questions concerning the relationship between uneven regional development, unbalanced development strategies and social conflicts in Uganda. He contends that, whereas the development potential of Uganda and its natural resource base are fairly unevenly distributed, regional differences in the level of development are largely because of development strategies pursued during the colonial period and reproduced after independence. Even when the northern region produced two

leaders in the persons of Obote (1962-1971, 1980-1985) and Idi Amin (1971-1979), the area still lagged behind economically. The essay clarifies how the economic marginalisation of northern Uganda, including Acholiland, makes it a center of economic grievances leading to conflicts.

Banugire then calls for fundamental political reforms, without which a progressive economy cannot be realized. He argues that a precondition to restore the economy is to build popular participation.⁴⁴ His emphasis on the economic development strategies adopted by post-colonial governments and their neglect of the North generally is essential to this study. The same economic explanation or dimension is also advanced at a more general level by Ritva Reinikk and Paul Collier.⁴⁵ Economic policies pursued in post-colonial Uganda are part of the nature of politics that our study will critique. This study analyses the economic marginalization of Acholiland both in the colonial and post-colonial period as a contributing factor to the current conflicts.

Y. Barongo examines the problem of ethnic pluralism versus political centralization in Uganda.⁴⁶ He argues that the phenomenon of excessive centralization of power in a multi-ethnic Uganda has been the source of conflict and instability since independence. This is because the base for political activity and decision making is narrowed down to a unifocal area which allows the participation of a small section of political elites. Secondly, since there is an

⁴⁴ F. Banugire, "Uneven and Un-balanced Development: Development Strategies and Conflict", in K. Rupensinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, (Oslo and London: James Currey, 1989), 18.

⁴⁵ R. Ritva and P. Collier, (Eds.), *Uganda's Recovery: The Role of Farms, Firms and Government*, (Washington D.C. and Kampala: The World Bank and Fountain Publishers, 2001), 16.

⁴⁶ Y. Barongo, "Ethnic pluralism and Political Centralization: The Basis of Political Conflict in Uganda", in K. Rupensinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, (Oslo and London: James Currey, 1989), 29.

absence of effective lower levels of participation, the struggle to gain access to political power at the centre becomes intense, leading to conflict. He then recommends political decentralization in order to absorb ethnic conflict. This contention that the violent conflicts bedeviling Uganda since 1966 are basically political in origin is in line with our study.

However, the fact that Uganda is a multi-ethnic society should not automatically mean that it is a state ripe for conflict. The point that should be given more thought is the way post-colonial leaders in Uganda have failed to harness the multi-ethnic state to progress and have, instead, pitted one group at a time against another in a manner that leads to a state of suspicion and animosity among the different ethnic groups. It is this manipulation and ethnic stereotyping that is our focus in this study and which is central to post-independence conflict not only in Acholiland, but Uganda more generally.

Kabumba Ijuka discusses ethnic conflicts within the Public Service, looking at how conflicts are pronounced at the top of the administrative hierarchy and how such conflicts are often related to political alignments. It maintains that politics and administration are very much inter-linked. Ijuka also shows how there is an overt policy in Uganda's politics of excluding some groups from decision-making processes and the negative stereotyping of other groups within the system. As he notes, "the present system and politics in Uganda tend to emphasize differences rather than similarities".⁴⁷ From Kabumba's exposition, we still find

⁴⁷ I. Kabumba, "Ethnic Conflict within the Public Service", in K Rupensinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, (Oslo, London: James Currey, 1989), 16.

manipulation, ethnic stereotyping and how leaders in positions of authority use their powers to segregate the public service on the basis of ethnicity. In the long run, the conflict for political power is backed by members of ethnic groups so as to access economic resources. Although Kabumba's work is on the Public Service in Uganda, it will help inform our study on the political dynamics of Uganda more generally.

Okalany, on his part, argues strongly that ethnicity has played an important role in the political upheavals in Uganda during the post-independence era up to 1986. He points out that post-colonial Uganda inherited divergent ethnic groups whose pre-colonial setting was undermined by British colonialism which created "favoured" societies against the others. The British system of indirect rule, he asserts, "widened the gap in development so much so that at the attainment of independence, each ethnic group wanted to entrench itself in power in order to 'eat'. The leaders who came to power tended to promote and focus much attention on members of their ethnic background first before others were thought of later".⁴⁸ He then concludes that it was this sense of ethnic insiders and outsiders, more than any other factor, that brought about conflicts and, hence, the fall of those respective leaders from power. Whereas Okalany's contention that post-colonial leaders inherited divergent ethnic groups is convincing, he fails to examine why other African countries such as Kenya and Tanzania also inherited similar colonial systems, but have been marked by much less conflict than Uganda.

⁴⁸ D.H. Okalany, "Ethnicity and the Culture of Eating in Uganda, 1962-1986", 183.

What has become a recognizable feature in post-colonial politics in Uganda is the manipulation of ethnicity by the elite to satisfy selfish goals. Uganda's political elite simply manipulate formal political formulae and their socio-political bases to the extent that their particularistic interests are served. Consequently, this thesis argues that Uganda's instability is a function of a negative polarized imbalance of socio-political forces in which groups dictate political terms only acceptable to themselves. This state of political affairs, in turn, generates reaction from temporarily marginalized ethnic groups who seek, using political resources available to them, to overthrow the established political order. This then leads to frequent conflicts.

Nelson Kasfir and Ali Mazrui also explain Uganda's upheavals since independence by reference to ethnic tensions. Kasfir's work documents how ethnicity was embedded in Uganda's body politic.⁴⁹ He traces this development very well from the time of independence in 1962 but gives little room to the colonial period and how this early period laid grounds for later historical developments in Uganda. While one may argue that his concern was largely politics because of his academic orientation, a historical context is indispensable for understanding Uganda's political issues. Ali Mazrui⁵⁰ deals extensively with the involvement of the military in Uganda's politics. His work illustrates how this process started and developed in the post-colonial period. Whereas Mazrui singles out the military as the most destructive institution that Uganda has had since 1962, it is the ethnicisation of politics (and the military)

⁴⁹ N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena: Participation and Ethnicity in African Politics; With a Case Study of Uganda*, (Berkeley: University of California Press 1976).

⁵⁰ A. Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda: The Making of a Military Ethnocracy in Uganda*, 6.

by political leaders to promote their ethnic interests that has been the problem and not the military as an institution.

Other works on ethnic politics, such as those by Kenneth Ingham, Anthony Low, Ingham Kenneth, David Apter, Samwiri Karugire and Jorgensen,⁵¹ have mainly been concerned with Buganda, seeking to define its political status in colonial and post-colonial Uganda.

(b) Post-colonial Political Experiments in state building, the politicization of the military and conflicts in Uganda

Other useful works on conflicts in Uganda are those by Dan Mudoola. In his chapter on “Communal conflict in the military and its political consequences”, Mudoola argues that in various social formations, it is common that in the search for hegemony over fragile state institutions, leaders will resort to military means in trying to resolve what are, typically, political problems”.⁵² He singles out the nature of post-colonial politics and especially the excessive use of the army in trying to solve political issues as the central factor leading to conflicts in Uganda. “Frequently”, he writes, “in terms of political mobilization, recruitment of the army is based on ethnic criteria”.⁵³ Mudoola’s major argument is that the interventionist role of the army in Uganda has been the result of the failure of successive post-colonial leaders and politics in general to work out widely accepted institutionalized peaceful means of resolving

⁵¹ D. Apter, *The Political Kingdom in Uganda*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961). I. Kenneth, *The Making of Modern Uganda*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958) S. R. Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, J.J. Jorgensen, *Uganda: A Modern History*, (London: Croom Helm, 1981) and D.A Low, *Buganda in Modern History*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971).

⁵² D. Mudoola, “Communal Conflict in the Military and its Political Consequences” (1989), 13.

⁵³ D. Mudoola, “Communal Conflicts in the Military and its Political Consequences”, 13

differences. He traces the evolution of the military into politics since independence to when the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) government undermined the Constitution and brought the military into politics, thus weakening all other contending sources of power. This work informs our debate on the role of politics in national peace and security.

This study will illustrate how armies created along ethnic lines were used to support individual leaders in their pursuit of political goals, leading to gross violation of human rights and escalation of conflicts. In this way ethnicity was both politicized and militarized. The behaviour of such armies was eventually used to stereotype the entire society or ethnic group of the majority members constituting it. We also argue that in the political arena, this over-reliance on the army also encouraged a preference for military solutions even for political problems. We intend to show that these features are predominant in post-colonial politics and conflicts in Uganda and Acholiland in particular.

In his other work entitled *Religion, Ethnicity and Politics in Uganda*, Dan Mudoola accounts for political and institutional instability in post-colonial Uganda by focusing on the dynamic relationship between specific interest groups: the religious-cultural, trade union, students/youth and ethnic groups.⁵⁴ He illustrates how post-independence Uganda has been virtually an institutionless arena in which highly polarized interest groups have sought to capture power on their own terms, causing counter-reactions and conflicts which have compounded the process of institution-building. Although the

⁵⁴ D. Mudoola, *Religion, Ethnicity and Politics in Uganda*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1993), 2-3.

specific interest groups he focuses on, except ethnic groups, are not of direct relevance to our study, his analysis of Uganda's post-colonial institutionless politics and analytical appraisal of and comparison with Tanzania's relative stability because of reliance on political institutions is vital to this study. By showing how various groups were in mutual competition, preventing the growth of any cohesive unifying national aspiration, Mudoola contributes to an understanding of colonial and post-colonial Uganda politics significantly.

Another stimulating work is by Amii Omara-Otunnu. Employing a historical analysis, Omara-Otunnu attributes the high incidence of socio-political conflicts in Uganda to the lack of structural integration of the different parts of the country into one state, and the consequent perception of divergent interests by the various constituent parts. He then correctly contends that "the occurrence of conflict in Uganda has borne a direct relationship to the existence or absence of a variable national ideology or ethos and the degree of internal legitimacy of the authorities".⁵⁵

His analysis of the political situation in post-colonial Uganda will enrich this study in different ways. In Ugandan politics, as this study will show, conflicts have been a consequence of disturbances of socio-political equilibrium and shifts in the locus of power, together with concomitant economic benefits. Ethnic considerations then come in because every incoming ruling group will attempt to restructure power relations differently from that which had hitherto

⁵⁵ A. Omara-Otunnu, "The Dynamics of Conflict in Uganda", in Oliver Furley (Ed.), *Conflict in Africa*, (London: I. B Touris Publishers 1993), 225.

obtained. The end result is the division into the “haves and have nots”, thus, creating a volatile state for conflicts.

Edward Khiddu-Makubuya and Abraham Kiapi address the role of “Paramilitarism” and “the Constitution”, respectively, as the main factors leading to conflicts in Uganda. Khiddu-Makubuya argues that Uganda’s paramilitary agencies such as the National Security Agency (NASA), General Security Agency (GSA), and State Research Bureau (SRB) have not only been principal instrumentalities of the violation of human rights in Uganda but have also served to entrench ethnic politics and regimes in power. They have thus “undermined the development of national democratic institutions and the emergency of fair play in Ugandan public life, opening way for armed conflict as a means of political ends”.⁵⁶

Although Khiddu-Makubuya’s study takes on an issue rarely discussed and theorized in the literature of internal conflicts, it adds knowledge on the central aspect, namely, politics and conflicts in Uganda, which is the basic subject of this study. The ethnic factor that he identifies as the yardstick for recruitment to such organizations helps to illustrate how politicized ethnicity in Uganda is a crucial factor in the day-to-day political dispensation in the country.

Abraham Kiapi, on his part, discusses the various approaches to conflict resolution in multi-ethnic societies, particularly the critical role the constitution

⁵⁶ E. Khiddu-Makubuya, “Paramilitarism and Human rights”, in K Rupensinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, 15.

plays in mediation between claims made upon the state.⁵⁷ Although most of his efforts are on the mediation process and legalities of the constitution, he acknowledges an essential fact that political manipulation of constitutions in Uganda to favour one ethnic group or leader at the expense of the others and the trend towards one party rule eliminates other players and results in conflict. For our study, his work will assist in some areas of post-colonial politics and its management or mismanagement that that result in conflicts.

Akiiki Bomera Mujaju adds new dimensions on the conflicts in Uganda.⁵⁸ He argues that internal conflicts are a product of the country's own history and, in most African countries, the result of the colonial heritage. Mujaju also discusses the international and regional context which fuels and helps to escalate internal conflicts. These external factors then exploit the internal fragility of the political system characteristics of Uganda. His work will help our study on the role of politics and external assistance in the escalation of conflict in Acholiland. As he states, "because our political systems are initially incoherent and because aspects of their internal form are projections of the external environment, they are easily manipulated from outside".⁵⁹ Like earlier scholars, Mujaju also contends that political power in Uganda is strongly concentrated at the centre, with no strong structures mediating between the centre and the periphery, leading to possibilities of conflict. He also points to the acquisition of lethal

⁵⁷ A. Kiapi, "The Constitution as a Mediator in Internal Conflict", in K. Rupensinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, 33-44.

⁵⁸ A.B Mujaju, "Internal Conflict and its International Context", in K. Rupensinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, (Oslo, London: James Currey, 1989). See also R. Mukama, "The Linguistic Dimension of Ethnic Conflict", in K. Rupensinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, (Oslo, London: James Currey, 1989) and A. Nsibambi, "The Land Question and Conflict", in K. Rupensinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, (Oslo, London: James Currey, 1989).

⁵⁹ A. Mujaju, "Internal Conflicts and its International Context", 19.

arms by conflicting groups and how this escalates conflicts. Whereas he has varied examples from contemporary Mozambique, Nigeria, Ethiopia, the Sudan, Angola and Zaire to illustrate his point, our study shall especially focus on the role of Sudan and the Karamoja-Kenya corridor of cattle rustlers as relevant examples.

Behrend Heike⁶⁰ and Frank Van Acker⁶¹ provide a military explanation of the conflicts in Uganda. Behrend's summary of the post-colonial condition of violence and counter-violence that characterized Uganda also supports the above view. In her words,

With the militarization of politics that had already begun under Obote in the 1960s, the state has increasingly itself become an instrument of violent retaliation. Whoever took over state power was not only able to gain wealth, but also to revenge against members of other ethnic groups or religions as in times before the existence of the state.⁶²

This indictment applied to all the regimes since Uganda's political independence, including the current National Resistance Movement government.

Frank Van Acker, in his chapter on "Uganda and the Lords Resistance Army: The New Order No One Ordered", deals specifically with the post-1986 conflicts in Acholiland by focusing on the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) of Joseph Kony. The basic argument that he advances is that conflicts in Uganda are because

⁶⁰ H. Behrend, "Is Alice Lakwena a Witch? The Holy Spirit Movement and its Fight against Evil in the North of Uganda", in H. Hansen & M. Twaddle (Eds.), *Changing Uganda: The Dilemma of Structural Adjustment*, (London: James Currey, 1999).

⁶¹ F. Van Acker, "Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army: The New Order no One Ordered", in *African Affairs*, 103 (2004), 335-349.

⁶² H Behrend, "Is Alice Lakwena a Witch?" 23.

Uganda's post-colonial experiments in state-building were largely based on the army as an instrument of domestic politics. Domestic politics itself then increasingly became a function of ethnic retaliation which, in-turn, not only hardened ethnic boundaries but created a sizeable and almost unemployable "lumpen militariat" class which solidified violence as a means of interaction in society.⁶³

Although both Behrend Heike and Van Acker do not describe the entire history of the Acholi conflict in detail, they still bring out the salient realities of Ugandan politics where violence has become a solution of first rather than last resort and in which every war can be justified since it is always embedded in the history of the country. Even when they only focus on the Holy Spirit Movement of Alice Lakwena and the Lord's Resistance Army or respectively, their work will be very useful to our study partly because they ably illustrate the kind of politics in post-colonial Uganda where the state became the instrument of violent retaliation in the arena of domestic politics and show how this has made the military either a public good or a public bane.

(c) Conflict as a result of the complex Religious practices, traditions and culture of the Acholi

Some scholars, such as Mujaju, attribute the persistent post-colonial instability and conflicts in Uganda in general to religious differences germinated during the colonial period.⁶⁴ They contend that "Religious groups and their activities have

⁶³ F. Van Acker, "Uganda and the Lords Resistance Army", 338-339.

⁶⁴ A.B. Mujaju, "The Political Crisis of Church Institutions in Uganda", in *African Affairs*, 75, 298 (Jan. 1975). See also F. Welbourn, *Religion and Politics in Uganda*, (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1965), 37-38 and D.A Low, *Religion and Society in Buganda; 1875-1900*, (Kampala: East African Institute of Social Research, 1962).

proved durable and divisive in Uganda since the introduction of Protestantism, Catholicism and Islam before and during the colonial period”. Mujaju takes it further by illustrating how African political parties in Uganda in the decade before independence took on something of a religious character in terms of their constituencies and this remained the case afterwards. He believes that differences between or among these religious groups laid foundation for later conflicts in Uganda. This expose falls out of the present study’s basic objective though the literature they detail remains historically correct.

In the same vein, D. Nkurunziza ⁶⁵ and Thomas Ofcansky ⁶⁶ emphasize that the origin of the on-going conflict in Acholiland in northern Uganda can, to a certain extent, be traced to the complex religious traditions of the Acholi tribe and is deeply rooted in ethnic mistrust between the Acholi people and the ethnic groups of central and southern Uganda.

Okumu ⁶⁷ argues further that besides religion, the primary cause of the current stage of the conflict (1986-2006) is the mistrust, especially of Museveni, when he first failed to keep the terms of the Nairobi Peace Agreement of 1985 between his National Resistance guerilla Army and the Uganda government then under the leadership of Tito-Okello Lutwa (an Acholi), the mistreatment of former Acholi soldiers and other grievances among certain groups of Acholi, which,

⁶⁵ D. Nkurunziza & L. Mugumya (Eds.), *Towards a Culture of Peace and Non-violent Action in Uganda*, (Kampala: Makerere University kampala,2000),2

⁶⁶ T. P. Ofcansky, “Warfare and Instability along the Sudan-Uganda Border: A look at the 20th Century”, in J. Spaulding and Stephanie Beswick (Eds.), *White Nile, Black blood: War, Leadership and Ethnicity from Khartoum to Kampala*, (Asmara: The Red Sea Press, Inc 2000), 197-208.

⁶⁷ R.R. Okumu, “The Effects of War on Government Policies in Northern Uganda from 1986”, (Gulu, UNDP Unpublished).

however, he does not name. The Nairobi peace agreement was an attempt by President Moi to mediate between Yoweri Museveni and Tito Okello who had overthrown Obote in 1985. This attempt failed after the NRA accused Tito Okello of violating the terms that had been agreed on. According to Okumu, this explains the twenty year old conflict. While the efforts by these scholars are commendable, their explanations neglect historical factors. As will be highlighted in the present study, the aspects these scholars emphasize play a role in the conflict but are not necessarily its roots or even central cause. These scholars' rather reductionist image of the war and its causes, still common in the understanding of conflicts in Africa, must be taken with care.

In other instances, explanations which border on ethnic stereotyping have been advanced with regard to war in Acholiland. According to President Museveni, who among other things is the Chief spokesman for the National Resistance Movement (NRM), the initial reason for the conflict in Northern Uganda was that the Acholi and Langi communities were deprived of their ability to get rich through looting from other Ugandans. Museveni further states that "it was tribal opportunism that brought such numbers (50,000) of people to their side. In other words, the reasons why the rebels in the north, organized on a tribal basis, were fighting to control the national government was because the NRM stopped them from looting."⁶⁸ This kind of explanation lends credence to this study's main argument that conflict in Acholiland is partly a result of bad politics, and ethnic stereotyping. Such a statement from the President and Commander-in-Chief of Uganda's armed forces exposes the extent to which the

⁶⁸ Y. K. Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed: The Struggle for Freedom and Democracy in Uganda*, 59.

Acholi, in general, have been seen in the image of the few Acholi soldiers in the Uganda army. This ethnic stereotype of the Acholi has contributed greatly to the rise of rebel movements in the area.

In addition, it has also been argued that the war in northern Uganda in general and Acholiland in particular is criminal, not political and that the insurgents are bandits and not rebels. Major General James Kazini, a non-Acholi and member of Uganda's Army High Command, and Army General between 1998 and 2004, blames all violence upon the Acholi, saying: "If anything, it is local Acholi soldiers causing these problems. It is the cultural background of the people here. They are naturally violent. It is genetic".⁶⁹ This view from a senior military officer executing the war demonstrates the stereotypes and propaganda that have intensified as the conflict persists. This explanation also fails if rated against tested social-cultural anthropological studies. Most studies in this area argue that violence, war and conflicts are socially and politically patterned rather than that they are the mere expressions of something biologically innate.⁷⁰ This study maintains that the conflict in Acholiland must be understood in the context of national Ugandan politics.

PREVAILING SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT AND THEIR APPROACHES

The decision to take up arms is a complex process involving many actors in a wide range of conditions and circumstances. Thus, it is almost impossible to reduce conflict to a single cause or source, whether local, national, regional or

⁶⁹ *Human Rights Watch*, (New York: Lius Institute, 1997), 59.

⁷⁰ T. Allen, (Ed.), *Divided Europeans: Understanding Ethnicities in Conflict*, (Hagire Boston: Klunwer Law International 1999). See also T. Allen and J. Seaton (Eds.), *The Media Conflicts: War Reporting and Representation of Ethnic Violence*, (London: Zed Books, 1999)

international. The history of a war's outbreak is usually complex and multifaceted and the historian must take carefully nuanced choices as to which factors to stress or what evidence to trust. The task is complicated because as Welch⁷¹ points out, there are very few necessary conditions for war and very many sufficient conditions of which only a few of these may apply in any single conflict.

Since 1945, civil or internal conflicts have been more common in Africa than international or inter-state conflicts.⁷² Different schools have advanced different theories in explanation of conflicts in different parts of the world. Six general explanations are often advanced to account for the rise of an armed opposition. These explanations include; the Relative deprivation theory, Group Entitlement theory, State Responses and Capabilities theory or theory of diffusion, the Economic Development theory and Theory of Protracted Social Conflict (PSC).

The Relative Deprivation Theory⁷³ offers an explanation that is based on the contrast between the Group's expected and actual access to prosperity and power. This theory places great emphasis on what the rebel groups expect and actual access to prosperity and power. It also emphasises the role of what the rebel groups expect a state to give them and its capability. It, thus, places too much emphasis on psychological factors and on perceptions at the expense of the concrete social, economic and political realities that lead to armed conflicts. According to this theory, armed opposition in Uganda and Acholiland in

⁷¹ D. Welch, *Justice and the Genesis of War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 8.

⁷² D. Singer, "Armed Conflict in the Former Colonial Regions; From Classification to Explanation", in V.D. Goo and K. Rupensinghe (Eds.), *Between Development and Destruction: An Enquiry into the causes of Conflict in Post-Colonial States*, (The Hague: Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

⁷³ T. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 447-8.

particular has been presented as an outcome of the neglect of the region by the National Resistance Government.⁷⁴

The above approach is closely related to Group Entitlement theory,⁷⁵ which places more explicit emphasis on ethnic factors which accompany the economic and political issues.⁷⁶ This theory projects that the more diverse a country is ethnically, the more the expectation of the different ethnic groups, and the more, the possibility of conflicts if such expectations are not fulfilled. This theory would suggest that because of the ethnic diversity of Uganda, conflicts that have bedeviled it since independence are because of failed expectations and would narrow the causes of conflict in Acholiland to a single factor. It places emphasis on ethnic diversity as a source of conflict.

It is also important to emphasize that ethnic diversity does not in itself seem to be a cause of war, for if it were, the most war-prone states would be the most ethnically diverse, which is not the case. Indeed, it may well be that ethnic and religious factionalization even reduces the risk of violent conflict,⁷⁷ perhaps because it encourages divergent groups to learn the skills of living together, despite diversity. It is only when this learning process fails that ethnic diversity may turn out to exacerbate conflict precisely because it offers fertile material for political mobilisation. Here then ethnicity will have been politicized. The case of the disintegration of Yugoslavia during the 1990s is a good example.

⁷⁴ A. G. G. Ginyera Pinywa *Northern Uganda in National Politics*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1992), 16.

⁷⁵ D. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985)

⁷⁶ T. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, 236.

⁷⁷ P. Collier, "Doing Well Out of War". Paper presented in Conference on Economic Agendas in Civil War London, April 26-27, 1999. 6-12.

According to the State Responses and Capabilities theory, there is a U-shaped relationship between repression by the state and the upsurge of armed opposition or any other form of domestic violence.⁷⁸ When repression is high; signifying some form of state strength and the absence of a collapsed state, the costs of rebelling are high. This demotivates the would-be rebels. On the other hand, low levels of oppression signify the presence of alternative institutions through which disadvantaged groups can express their views. This makes violent expression of political and other social interests unnecessary.⁷⁹

The problem with this theory is that it places a great deal of emphasis on the nature of the state and much less on the nature of armed opposition itself. Worse still, the assumption that situations of high repression increase the cost of rebellion ignores the role of external factors. In the case of Uganda, the more the Government increased military expenditure and use of force through the famous “iron fist” policy, the more the rebellion intensified and even spread to the neighbouring districts of Teso and Lango in the 1990s. The armed groups also reduced the cost of armed rebellion by operating from neighbouring Southern Sudan. The Acholi as a people occupy a wide stretch of land across the border and into Southern Sudan. The rebels therefore found friendly sanctuary in Southern Sudan from where they increased their recruitment and attacks into Uganda.

⁷⁸ T. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, 237.

⁷⁹ Boswell and Dixon, “Dependency and Rebellion: A Cross National Analysis”, *American Sociological Review*, (1990), 55. See also E. Muller and E. Weede, “Cross-National Variation in Political Violence: A Rational Action Approach”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 34 (1990), 40-78.

The Galton problem or Theory of Diffusion is based on the assumption that armed conflict/opposition in one particular context has a lot to do with the existence of other rebellions across space.⁸⁰ Armed opposition is assumed to emerge in areas with recent histories of domestic strife. In such a context, armed opposition emerges because; first it is institutionalized as a mechanism for changing power or support for the rebellion of a kindred group⁸¹ or because rebellion in one area constitutes an opportunity for rebellion elsewhere since the state is considered weak and spread to contain politically inspired violence. In other cases, armed rebellion by one group may serve as an example to other groups to emerge. In Uganda, it can be argued that the National Resistance Army victory in 1986 was an example for several other groups within Uganda and across its borders to emulate. However, conflict in Acholiland goes beyond 1986 making it impossible to base all emphasis on the above explanation. Acholiland has experienced years of conflict both in the colonial and post-colonial periods before the rise to power of Museveni.

Economic conditions emerge as the most important explanatory factors. The key issue in this explanation is a low level of economic development in Acholiland and Uganda in general.⁸² This may be indicated by the low average Gross National Product per capita, by a disproportionately large agricultural sector, or by a country's economic vulnerability to shifts in world markets in commodities and capital. Hauge and Ellingson identify lack of democratic openings as an important secondary factor in addition to poor economic

⁸⁰ M. Ross and Homer, "The Galton Problem in Cross-National Research", *World Politics* (1976), 29.

⁸¹ T. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, 381.

⁸² W. Hauge and T. Ellingson, "Beyond Environmental Scarcity: Casual Pathways to Conflict", *Journal of Peace Research*, 35, 3 (1998), 299-317.

conditions. These findings are qualified by arguments and evidence put forward by Collier⁸³ that, even in poor societies, leaders are usually competing with one another for control of the available economic surplus, small as it may be. When the surplus is small, as in poor societies, competition for it may be particularly intense and a violent confrontation will very likely result. Whereas this may explain the terrible violence in Liberia (1989-1997), the war in Sierra Leone since 1991, decades of warfare in Angola, and the cycles of massacre and brutality in Burundi and Rwanda, it can be argued that no single theory can adequately explain the phenomenon of armed opposition the world over. Each armed rebellion occurs in a specific historical context. Each armed group, therefore, needs to be understood contextually and historically.

In the case of Uganda, we shall focus our attention on a conflict analysis referred to as the Protracted Social Conflict Theory [PSC]. This approach will enable us understand the contemporary conflict in Uganda and Africa from a broader perspective, thus jettisoning the common trend of defining Africa's conflicts as exclusively ethnic or exclusively external.⁸⁴ PSC refers to the "prolonged and often violent struggle by communal groups for such basic needs as security, recognition and acceptance, fair access to political institutions and economic participation".⁸⁵ It is through the PSC that we can understand that

⁸³P. Collier, "Doing Well Out of War, 6–12" See also Collier P. & A. Hoeffler. *Justice Seeking and Loot Seeking in Civil War*, (Washington D.C: The World Bank/CSAE, 1999), 5.

⁸⁴ H. Solomon and de Coning "Enhancing the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution", in *Poletaria*, 19 (1999), 34-35.

⁸⁵ H. Miall, et al., *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts*, (London: Polity Press 2000), 71.

complex processes rather than a singular factor often lead to conflicts in Africa.⁸⁶

CONFLICT AND ETHNICITY

In the contemporary debate on ethnicity and its place in politics, consensus has emerged on two key features. One concerns the formation of ethnic identities like the Acholi, as a social construct defined by historical conditions in which they emerge.⁸⁷ The other concern, which impacts on this study, is the function ethnicity performs in contemporary society. J. Hutchinson and A. Smith, in *Ethnicity*⁸⁸ present the theory of instrumentalism of ethnicity which will guide our study of conflicts in post-colonial Acholiland. According to them, ethnicity is mainly a political weapon which people find convenient to mobilize for selfish goals. There is evidence in Africa to suggest that where ethnicity has been central in conflicts, there have always been political machinations behind it.

In post-colonial Uganda, political manipulation based on ethnic differences has become the main means used by the political elite to legitimate themselves in power, with particular ethnic groups considered important in the wielding of political and military power. This fits the instrumentalism theory of ethnicity advanced by J. Hutchinson and Smith. The Acholi, have paid the price of this manipulation in colonial and post-colonial Uganda through conflicts that have bedeviled the area.

⁸⁶ H. Solomon and de Coning, "Enhancing the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution", 35.

⁸⁷ J. Markakis, "Nationalism and Ethnicity: A Theoretical Perspective". A Paper Presented at a Workshop on Ethnicity and the State in East Africa, Ossrea: Addis Ababa, June 1996, 3-5.

⁸⁸ J. Hutchinson and A. Smith, *Ethnicity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 125.

In the colonial period, the British manipulated the Acholi as labourers for plantations in the South and later as soldiers in the army. The British preferred the Acholi to man the army based on the myth they created of the Acholi people as being a 'martial tribe'. Whereas we do appreciate the contribution of the colonial period and especially the effects of British policy of divide and rule, it is still prudent to question the role of post-colonial leadership and how they handled this legacy of British colonial rule in Uganda, especially on the Acholi. This myth was extended into the post-independence period of Obote (1962-1971) and (1980-1985). Whereas this myth was without any scientific basis, it has contributed to the conflict Acholiland has experienced since 1962. During Obote's first regime (1962-1971), the Acholi were dominant in the army as well as in political offices. After the destruction of the Buganda kingdom (1966), new threats emerged and Obote heavily relied on the Acholi and Langi for support in the army to stay in power. Even then, however, the Acholi largely remained dominant in lower ranks, unlike the Langi who formed the officer corps of Obote's army.⁸⁹ In 1971, this dominance was interrupted by Amin after overthrowing Obote.

Immediately after Idi Amin's coup in 1971, as Hansen writes, "Obote the individual became identified with the whole of Lango group and his regime, with the Acholi as well".⁹⁰ The Acholi's special access to the military and politics turned into a deadly liability. During the early years of his violent rule, Idi Amin

⁸⁹ A. G. G. Ginyera-Pincywa, *Northern Uganda in National Politics*, 16.

⁹⁰ H. Hansen, "Ethnicity and Military Rule in Uganda", *Research Report 43* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute, 1977).

extended conflict into Acholiland by ordering mass killings of Acholi army personnel, civilians, as well as politicians and Acholi intellectuals, including Anglican Archbishop Janani Luwum. It is widely acknowledged that thousands of Acholi individuals died and that many more fled the country.⁹¹

In this way, ethnic manipulation of the Acholi by Obote is what Idi Amin (1971-1979) used to justify his brutal policy and extension of conflict into Acholiland. Amin and his associates also targeted Lango individuals, yet, as Mazrui, correctly notes, “had the vengeance of the coup been directed at the government of Obote as a whole, it would have had to be directed at people from almost every corner of Uganda.⁹² The ministers were drawn from West Nile, Lango, Acholi, Kigezi, Ankole, Buganda, Bunyoro, Teso and elsewhere. During Obote’s second term in power (1980-1985), soldiers in the new army (Uganda National Liberation Army), including Acholi individuals, took revenge on people living in the West Nile region where Amin came from.⁹³ Besides, Obote also manipulated the Acholi in fighting Museveni’s guerillas in Luwero, during his second term. The result of this manipulation was double fold. First, the Acholi became the most hated “tribe” in Uganda, especially in the south, where the elite claimed that the Acholi dominated in the political arena and in the army.

⁹¹ A. G. G. Ginyera-Pincywa, *Northern Uganda in National Politics*, 16. See also H. Hansen, *Ethnicity and Military Rule in Uganda: A Study of Ethnicity as a Political Factor Based on a Discussion of Political Anthropology and the Application of its Result*, Research Report, No 43 (Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies 1977).

⁹² A. Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda*, 117.

⁹³ J. Crisp, “Ugandan Refugees in Sudan and Zaire: The Problem of Repatriation”, *African Affairs*, 85 (1986), 339 and P. G. Okoth, “Uganda-Sudan Relations: The Fallacy of Inter-state Conflict Management via Bilateral Diplomacy, 1955-1995”, in P. G. Okoth and B. A. Ogot, (Eds.), *Conflicts in Contemporary Africa*, (Nairobi: Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, 2000), 94 -116.

The NRM leadership under Museveni also fell prey to this myth in whipping up support during its struggle against Obote and even after taking over power in 1986. In an interview with the *Drum Magazine*, in Nairobi, in 1985, Museveni categorically stated:

the problem in Uganda is that the leadership has mainly been from the north. The Acholi are everywhere: in the army, big offices, etc. The southerners, who are mainly Bantu, have played a peripheral role all these years since independence in 1962.⁹⁴

The second effect of Obote's manipulation of the Acholi, was the extension of conflict into Acholiland after the fall of Tito Okello, (an Acholi), who had overthrown Obote in 1985. Since 1986, Acholiland has remained a battlefield between different rebel groups and the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces of Yoweri Museveni's government.

When Museveni captured the capital city Kampala in 1986, soldiers from the previous governments left Kampala and fled northwards. From their bases in Southern Sudan, some of them regrouped and launched the Uganda People's Democratic Movement/Army (UPDM/A).⁹⁵ Museveni's troops which followed the fleeing Obote and Okello soldiers allegedly killed, raped and used other forms of physical abuse aimed at non-combatants as well when they reached Acholiland, which was foreign territory to them.⁹⁶ People in the war-torn Acholiland also saw the army's looting of their cattle as a deliberate strategy to destroy them.

⁹⁴ *Drum (East) Magazine*, (October 1985), 9.

⁹⁵ C. Lamwaka, "Civil War and the Peace Process in Uganda, 1986-1997" in *East African Journal of Peace and Human Rights*, 4(2) (1998), 139-169. See also B. Nyeko and L Okello, "Profiles of the Parties in the Conflict", in Okello Lucima (Ed.), *Protracted Conflict, Elusive Peace: Initiatives to End the Violence in Northern Uganda* (London: Conciliation Resources and Kacoke Madit, 2002), 1-6.

⁹⁶ R. Doom and K. Vlassenroot, "Kony's Message: A New Koine? The Lords Resistance Army in Northern Uganda", *African Affairs*, 98 (390) (1999), 5-36.

Moreover, the war was also a kind of ethnic cleansing on the Acholi for their “political domination” of politics in Uganda and revenge for the Luwero massacre which was still blamed on them. As one time Prime Minister Kintu-Musoke once put it, “the Acholi have to pay for what they did in Luwero”.⁹⁷ This justifies J. Hutchinson and A. Smith’s position that ethnicity is a political weapon which people find convenient to mobilize.⁹⁸

The destruction that followed Museveni’s takeover in 1986 has affected all sectors of Acholi society to a degree never experienced before,⁹⁹ and, eventually, even elders and other influential members of Acholi society were to be instrumental in the increased recruitment of young people to rebel ranks. One can argue that the Acholi did this, partly, for self defence.

The dynamics of conflicts in Acholiland since 1986 have been characterized by different rebel groups. First, was the Uganda People’s Democratic Movement, initiated by sympathizers of the former President, Tito Okello. Then came the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) of Alice Lakwena. After the defeat of Lakwena, her father, Severino Lukoya, continued with the resistance for a few months until 1987 when he was captured. The stage was then set for the rise and continued resistance of Joseph Kony and his, so-called, the Lords Resistance Army. It is this movement that the NRM government is still battling with to-date.

⁹⁷ *The Monitor*, 129 (1996).

⁹⁸ Amnesty International *Uganda: The Failure to Safeguard Human Rights*, (London: Amnesty International, 1992).

⁹⁹ Amnesty International *Uganda: The Failure to Safeguard Human Rights*.

In this historical study of conflict in post-colonial Acholiland, we contend that politicization of ethnicity is orchestrated for the purpose of obtaining access to state power in order to gain access to resources commanded by the state. Because the pattern of resource distribution in both the colonial and post-colonial state is inequitable, ethnicity has proved to be the most effective weapon to use. This fits well in the theory of Instrumentalism of W. Weber, J. Eller, R. Coghlan, W. Conner, A. Cohen and F. Barth, put together in *Ethnicity* by J. Hutchinson and A. Smith.¹⁰⁰

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem which, among others, seems pervasive on the global scene today and is undermining social stability seems to be both intra-state and inter-state conflict. Post-colonial Uganda is no exception, as it has become a veritable theatre of intra-state conflicts. Conflicts in Uganda have increased in the recent past, each aiming at different results. Acholiland in northern Uganda remains the theatre of such prolonged conflict since independence in 1962.

In the last 20 years alone (1986-2006), different rebel groups have sprung up in armed opposition to the National Resistance Movement government under Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. Since 1986, anti-government armed groups include the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA), the Uganda Peoples Army (UPA) in Teso region, Force Obote Back Again (FOBA), Ninth October Movement (NOM) in Lango, National Liberation of Uganda (NALU), Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in Kasese-Western Uganda, West Nile Bank Front (WNBF) and Uganda Rescue

¹⁰⁰ J. Hutchinson & A. Smith, *Ethnicity*, 30.

Front in West Nile region of Northern Uganda. To-date, all these areas have been pacified, with the exception of Acholiland. Despite the blustering rhetoric of the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF), Uganda's National Army and "Operation Iron Fist" which they launched in the 1990s, the army has still failed to damage the rebels in Acholiland significantly. Instead, this operation brought the rebels from their camps in Southern Sudan to permanent residence on the doorsteps of the Acholi people and the neighbouring areas.

The dominant explanation that has been given at the official level for the persistent conflict in this area is that such conflicts are a colonial legacy and that ethnicity is deeply entrenched in them. At the unofficial level, conflict in this area is perceived as the outcome of the cultural and militant background of the Acholi people, their assumed violent nature genetically, and their complex traditions and religions. There is need to critically analyse the official as well as the unofficial perspectives to explain the on-going conflict in the area better. The nature of post-colonial politics and especially how political leaders or the elite have handled the ethnic question and resource allocation need to be equally examined. The attempt by the state to resolve the conflict using a military approach has been a dismal failure partly because the root causes of the conflict and the interests of the parties in it have not been properly analysed as an initial framework for the peace process.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this study is to reconstruct the historicity of the conflict in post-colonial Acholiland with a view to establishing its main cause and how the conflict could be mitigated. More specifically, this study will seek to:

- Analyse and document the historical development of conflict in Acholiland,
- Locate the possible local and International factors that have exacerbated it, and
- Propose ways of resolving or minimizing the extent of the conflict.

METHODOLOGY

This study relied heavily on secondary sources, newspapers, interviews, participant observation and group discussion, as well as various government documents, such as parliamentary debates, reports from parliamentary committees on Defence and war in Northern Uganda and in Western Uganda and West Nile, reports from peace meetings, briefs with the rebel leaders and by Sudanese delegations to Uganda. Also useful were minutes of the Kacoke Madit (Grand Acholi meetings held in London and Botswana), reports from committees on resettlement of Internally Displaced People and Disaster Preparedness reports as well as reports from Northern Uganda Social Fund Project. Other sources of information were Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations working in Acholiland or dealing with conflict and peace related activities and International Organisations like World Vision, Accord Uganda, International Alert, Amnesty International, and *Medicines Sans Frontiers*.

Chapter Outline

The Study is organised as follows:

Chapter 1 lays down the key arguments informing the study, while Chapter 2 focuses on Acholiland prior to British colonialism. Chapter 3 examines how British colonialism was established in Acholiland and its impact on the socio-economic and political life of the people and institutions there. Chapters 4 and 5 analyse post-independence political leadership and conflict in Uganda between 1962 and 2006 and the politics, ethnicity and conflict in Acholiland, respectively. Chapter 6 focuses on the causes and dynamics of conflict in Acholiland from 1986 to 2006 and the final chapter, explores the consequences of conflict in Acholiland as well as providing the Conclusion to the study.

ACHOLILAND PRIOR TO BRITISH COLONISATION

This chapter examines aspects of the initial stages of the imperial condition and its impact in Acholiland, focusing on the encounter between the Acholi people and early imperial intruders into the region; like the Arabs, Nubians, Turko-Egyptians and later the British.

The Acholi people have been classified by anthropologists as “Nilotes”. This term was originally used indiscriminately by European explorers, traders, government officials and travellers to refer to all peoples of the Upper Nile Valley. Subsequently, only certain of those people with closely related physical, linguistic and other cultural characteristics were designated as Nilotes.¹⁰¹ These groups generally have traditions and myths which suggest a common origin. Other groups living in the Upper reaches of the Nile (variously called Bantu, Nilo-Hamitic, Sudanic tribes) have been greatly affected by the Nilotes through migration, warfare, assimilation and intermarriage. In turn, the Nilotes have also been influenced physically, linguistically and culturally by their neighbours.

The name (Acholi) by which the people are known today came into use only during the colonial period and its derivation is uncertain and contested. Earlier travelogues of Emin Pash and Samuel Baker incorrectly categorized them as

¹⁰¹ B. Audrey, *The Nilotes of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and Uganda*, (London: International African Institute, 1952). See also J.P. Crazzolaro, “The Lwoo People”, *Uganda Journal*, V, 1 (1938) and B. A. Ogot, *History of Southern Luo*, I, *Migration and Settlement, 1500-1900* (Nairobi: East Africa Publishing House, 1967).

Shilluk and called them Shuli. The variants Shuuli and Shooli became broadly used at the time when Arab traders in slaves and ivory moved into the region in the 1850s.¹⁰² Parallel to this outside label, the Acholi were sometimes called “Gang” or “Gangi”, meaning home or village; a name given to the Acholi by their southern neighbours.¹⁰³ Acholi neighbours, the Lango and the Banyoro, initially called them “Gang” or “gangi”.¹⁰⁴ The denomination Acholi was of recent origin, although a people with a common culture and socio-political life was already in place when the Arab traders and European explorers arrived in the region. The Alur neighbours of the Acholi in the West of River Nile called them “Lango” but this, apparently, is a general word meaning ‘stranger’, which happens to have been adopted by the people known as the Lango to the South-East of the Acholi.

According to Girling, some of the Acholi speak of themselves as “Lwo”, but this name refers specifically to the supposed descendants of certain migratory groups. He then hazards a guess that it seems possible that the name “Acholi”, like the names of very many other people, is derived from the local word “an-loco-li, meaning “I am a man”. This name may have come, according to him, into use only recently (about 30 years ago), as the internal cohesion of the people increased and the need for a new word became felt.¹⁰⁵ This suggests that the development of this name was gradual as Acholi ethnic identity came into reality over time.

¹⁰² F. Sverker, 2003, *Living With Bad Surroundings: War and Existential Uncertainty in Acholiland, Northern Uganda*, (Sweden: Uppsala Studies in Cultural Anthropology, 2003), 54.

¹⁰³ Okot P’ Bitek, “The Concept of Jok among the Acholi” in *Uganda Journal* xxvii, (1963), 15-29.

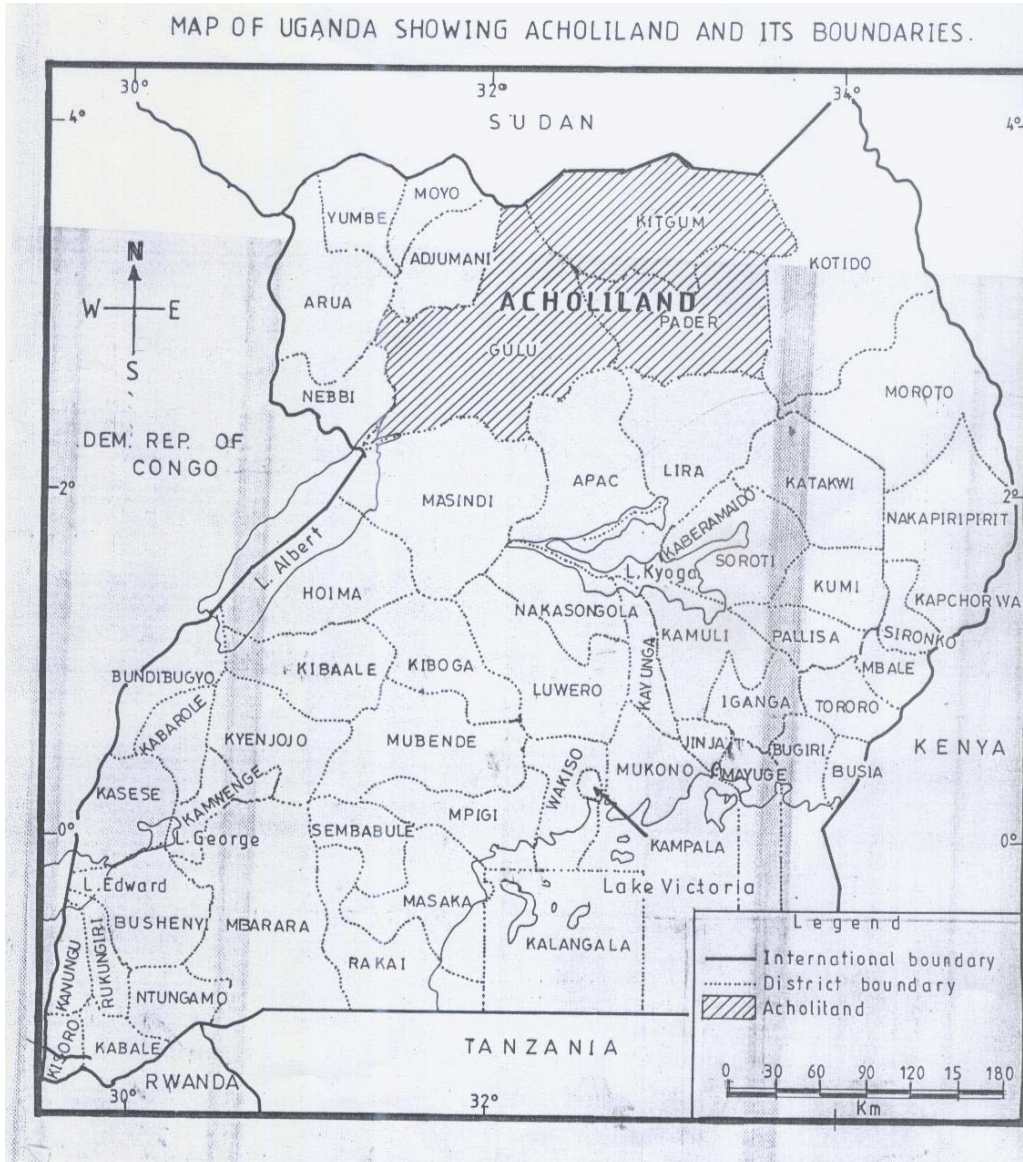
¹⁰⁴ ‘Gang’, as used by Lango & Banyoro, meant village. “Gang” was also used by the first European travellers who approached the area from the South and it appeared in the first grammar of the language in 1907. It was used to differentiate those Acholi who were settled agriculturists in villages and those wandering hunters (or the Kidi).

¹⁰⁵ F. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 1-2.

Today the Acholi people generally consider themselves a distinct ethnic group and call their language Acholi or, sometimes, Luo. They live mainly in Pader, Kitgum, and Gulu district; four of the northern districts in Uganda, of which two, Gulu and Kitgum, border Sudan. According to the 2002 national census, the population of the three districts numbered 1,083,973. This makes up some four to five percent of Uganda's total population of more than twenty million.¹⁰⁶ The districts of Pader and Kitgum correspond roughly to Acholi Mamalo or the Upper Acholi, or, literally, those who descended from the hill. Gulu district corresponds to Acholi Mapiny or, according to the Acholi, the lower Acholi.

¹⁰⁶ Uganda Government, *Uganda Population and Housing Census*, (Kampala: Government of Uganda, 2002), 37.

Acholiland and its boundaries



Source: Macmillan Wall Map of Uganda: Districts by 2006.

Acholiland stretches along much of the northern border of Uganda. It is the largest district in northern Uganda and is sub-divided into the three sub-

districts of Gulu, Pader and Kitgum. These districts constitute some twelve percent of the country's total area or 27,872 square kilometres.¹⁰⁷ Situated on a plateau 3,000 to 4000 feet (1,025-1,350 meters) above sea level, the district consists of nearly 11,000 square miles (28,400 square kilometres) of rolling savannah.¹⁰⁸ Acholiland enjoys substantially natural borders. It lies to the northeast of Lake Albert, the most northerly of the well-defined basins of the Western Rift Valley. The Nile flows into and immediately out of the north end of the lake. It provides Acholiland with its Southern and Western borders.

The greater part of Acholiland -some eleven thousand square miles - lies within Uganda. The remainder lies over the border in the Sudan. The Acholi people also extend well into the Sudan but a range of mountains near the international boundary separates the Uganda Acholi from their kinsmen to the north. During the last fifty or so years, Acholi living in Uganda have tended to develop separately from those in the Sudan.¹⁰⁹ However, they are still one people and any change in the present situation might lead to a demand for them to be united under one political authority.

To the East, the semi-desert and the Labwor and Orum mountains lie between the Acholi and the neighbouring Karamojong. It is only in the southeast that Acholiland's boundary is not marked by a specific geographical feature. Acholiland also consists of a series of huge "terraces" rising gradually from west

¹⁰⁷ M. O. Rwabwoogo, *Uganda Districts Information Handbook*, (5th edition) (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2002), 7.

¹⁰⁸ R. R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity: The Origins of the Acholi of Uganda*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1994), 46.

¹⁰⁹ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 1.

to east. The Albert Nile, at about 2000 feet above sea-level, flows through the lowest and hottest land in Uganda where it forms the western boundary of Acholiland.¹¹⁰

The river Achwa or Aswa, as written in most English maps today, running from the south east towards the northwest, has naturalized the administrative border between the east and west.¹¹¹ In the colonial period, British colonial authorities categorised the lower Acholi as the western Acholi, with headquarters in Gulu town, while they labelled the Upper Acholi, the eastern Acholi, with the colonial administration based in Kitgum town. At that time, the districts were called Gulu and Chua. In 1937, the colonial administration merged the two to form a single Acholi District. Different regimes in Uganda have since divided or subdivided the large Acholi region. On 20th March 1971, General Idi Amin reversed the 1937 arrangement by separating the two once again.¹¹² Today, it is subdivided into Gulu, Amuru, Pader and Kitgum.

Acholiland is divided almost in half by the watershed of its two main river systems. The dividing line runs from the Lango District in the southeast to the Madi-Adjumani district in the northwest. Topography favours the land west of the watershed where rivers are perennial and the soil is relatively rich. Villages

¹¹⁰ J. Baker, "Baker and Ruyonga" in *Uganda Journal*, xxv, 2 (1961), 13-15.

¹¹¹ C. Leys, *Politicians and Policies: An essay on Politics in Acholiland, Uganda*, (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967), 18. See also J. Webster, "The Peopling of Agago" in Onyango-Ku-Odongo and J. Webster (Eds.), *The Central Lwo during the Aconya* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1976), 219-220.

¹¹² H.B. Thomas, and Scott, *Uganda*, (London, and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), 113.

tend to be larger than those to the east where the smaller streams fill their rocky beds only during the rainy season.¹¹³

Rainfall in Acholiland is seasonally well-distributed, coming in two seasons, namely, in March to May and October to December. The rainfall is heaviest at the time of the vernal and autumnal equinoxes. Unfortunately, rainfall is not always reliable in Acholiland.

The distribution of annual rainfall between different areas of Acholiland also determines the rhythm of everyday life. Girling writes that:

During the rainy season, there is little intercommunication between the different areas of Acholiland. The people are...fully occupied with agricultural work, but the long grass and the swollen swamps and streams also make travelling difficult. This periodic isolation and the ties of cooperation in work which are established between members of the same local communities seemed to have increased the internal cohesion of the village and the domain or chiefdom.¹¹⁴

Although, over time, post-colonial regimes have tried to improve the communication infrastructure in this region, what Girling notes above still exists as one of the major problems. Before war arrived and intensified in Northern Uganda, especially after 1986, many Acholi families kept cattle. During the course of the war, however, most cattle have been looted or killed by the fighting forces. Only two percent (of approximately 250,000 heads) or some few thousand head of the cattle remain.¹¹⁵ While cattle have never been the

¹¹³ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 14-15.

¹¹⁴ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 14-15.

¹¹⁵ W. Weeks, "Pushing the Envelope: Moving beyond Protected Villages in Northern Uganda", (New York- Report submitted to the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian affairs), 2002, 35.

main source of income or subsistence for the great majority of Acholi,¹¹⁶ the symbolic significance of this cultural loss should not be underestimated. Many Acholi, especially older people, regard cattle as the most prestigious form of wealth.¹¹⁷ The Acholi also keep goats, sheep and pigs, which, for many, have become the major domestic animals since the outbreak of the war and the social unrest that accompanied it.

Agriculture remains the primary subsistence activity for most Acholi, with Millet and Sorghum being the staple crops. The Acholi also grow maize, sweet potatoes, cassava, peas, beans, groundnuts, simsim and various vegetables as well as other savannah crops. Tobacco, sugarcane, cotton, sunflower and rice are grown both for trade and consumption, but these activities too have been heavily affected by the war.

The Migration

Like their neighbours the Lango,¹¹⁸ the Acholi owe the emergence of their ethnic identity not to any kind of inner consistency, but to concrete historical experience, especially the experience of migration, which became the determining trait of their ethnic identity today.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Okot. P'Bitek, "The Concept of Jok Among the Acholi People", *Uganda Journal*, 27, 1 (1963), 15-29. Other related views in R. R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity: The Acholi of Uganda*, 56.

¹¹⁷ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 61.

¹¹⁸ The Lango or Langi are neighbours of the Acholi and speak a Lwo language.

¹¹⁹ J. Tosh, *Clan Leaders and Colonial Chiefs in Lango*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

Starting around 1600, the people who would later be called the Acholi came with other Lwo in several waves of migration from the southern Sudan to their present territory and to Bunyoro.¹²⁰

The Acholi consider themselves a distinct tribal group from the other Lwo-speakers in northern Uganda. They came from the north as the Lwo, and after following a semi-circular route in the south of present-day Sudan, they crossed to the eastern bank of the Nile, somewhere in the region south of Nimule.¹²¹ They then followed the river upstream towards Lake Albert until they reached a place which they called Pubungu (modern Pakwach). At this place, some disagreement occurred among the migrating Lwo and they broke up. The break up of the migrating Lwo is of importance for the subsequent history of northern Uganda. The group that moved across the Nile at Chope into Bunyoro became the founders of the present Acholi group. Later in the eighteenth century, a number of Lwo migrated from Bunyoro back to Acholi and into what is now Kenya.¹²² According to Atkinson and others, it is this group that encountered and intermingled with the Madi; a Sudanic speaking group in the western part of the area. Once they settled, the Luo language superseded that of the Madi and the two groups joined together as the Acholi tribe.¹²³

Some Acholi clans claim to be descended from a common ancestor named Lwo, and designate themselves accordingly as Lwo¹²⁴. A number of these clans

¹²⁰ J. P. Crazzolaro, *The Lwo People*, 1-2.

¹²¹ J. P. Crazzolaro, *The Lwo People*, (Verona, Editrice Nigrizia 1950), 554.

¹²² R. M. Bere, "An outline of Acholi History", *Uganda Journal*, 11, 1 (1947), 1-8.

¹²³ F.K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 6.

¹²⁴ R. M. Bere, "An Outline of Acholi History", 1-8.

constituted about thirty chiefdoms in today's Acholi region, but these chiefdoms were extremely changeable, with constant splintering; a process perhaps corresponding to the internal African frontier model developed by Igor Kopytoff.¹²⁵

The Acholi in scholarly classification

In historical and ethnographic literature, the Acholi are commonly grouped together with the Chope, the Paluo and the Alur as the Central Lwo because of linguistic affinity and assumed common historical origin.¹²⁶ Most Acholi have no problem communicating linguistically with the Alur people who live west of the Acholi or the Lango (Langi) neighbours to the South. Roughly speaking, Acholiland and Langoland, the later consisting of Apac, Lira and Dokolo districts, correspond to the region often called northern Uganda.

Older ethnographic sources assign the Central Lwo to the broader category of the Nilotes.¹²⁷ The Nilotic denomination describes the various social groupings of the geographical region of the Upper Nile Basin; suggesting that there are cultural traits shared by these various peoples. In Evans Pritchard's terms, the Nilotic peoples constitute a "common ethnic stock" or "an ethno-regional cluster" of peoples.¹²⁸ The Upper Nile Basin is assumed to be the cradle-land of Nilotic peoples, from which migrations of the proto-Nilotes are said to have

¹²⁵ I. Kopytoff, *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 3.

¹²⁶ F. Sverker, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, 59. See also J.O. Dwyer, "The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialisms", (PhD Dissertation, University of Colombia, 1972), 3.

¹²⁷ C. Selgiman and B.Z. Seligman, *Pegan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*, (London: Routledge and Sons Ltd, 1932), and B. Audrey, *The Nilotes of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and Uganda*, (London: International African Institute, 1952)

¹²⁸ E. Pritchard, "Nilotic Studies" in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 80, 1-2 (1950), 1-6.

originated. The term Nilotic is also known as a denomination of a language family in the study of African languages.¹²⁹

When discussing the Acholi, the Catholic Missionary Crazzolaro¹³⁰ and the political scientists Dwyer,¹³¹ argue that the Lwo (Luo, Lwoo) categorization is the only accurate one to use. Today, most Acholi people strongly identify themselves as Lwo and their native tongue as Luo. They use the Lwo denomination in the context of the wider history of migration in the region.¹³²

Some historians question the Lwo origin of the Acholi population and the historical accuracy of including the Acholi as a sub-group of Lwo.¹³³ More importantly, in everyday life, while these people may portray themselves as Acholi or even Lwo, they see themselves, first and foremost, as Ugandans. For these reasons and despite the objections of Atkinson, the Crazzolaro classifications of the Lwo will be used in this work. The Acholi are indeed Nilotes and are part of the migrants from the Bahr-el-Ghazel region of modern southern Sudan

The clan as the basis of socio-political organizations

The Acholi ideology of social organization is oriented to patrilineal descent with decentralized and exogamous lineages called Kaka. According to Allen,¹³⁴ these

¹²⁹ J. H. Greenberg, *Studies in African Linguistic Classification*, (New Haven: Compass, 1955), 26.

¹³⁰ J. P. Crazzolaro, *The Lwoo Part I: Lwoo Migrations*, 1-6.

¹³¹ J.O Dwyer, "The Acholi of Uganda", 20.

¹³² Okot P'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1971), 1-3.

¹³³ R. R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 75-80.

¹³⁴ T. Allen, Review of Ronald Atkinson's *The Roots of Ethnicity. The Origins of the Acholi of Uganda before 1800*, in *Africa*, 66 (3), (1996), 472-475.

groupings may be portrayed as “close relatives”, as they also refer to women who have been married into the group.

Girling’s study of the Acholi indicates that the household was the largest unit that could maintain a separate economic existence with a division of labour based on sex. A collection of households whose heads were linked by agnatic kinship ties varied in size from place to place depending on the skeleton of the kinship network. Next in size was the village which often had an identity because of having a common ancestor. As Girling writes of the Acholi in the 1950s, “the village is a living reality, it is the social group into which they are born and spend the greater part of their lives (and) it plays a part in regulating their relations with other Acholi.¹³⁵ This was the basis in the development of clans”.

According to Bere, “the history of the Acholi is the story of the clans and, if this history is to be understood, it is necessary to consider the nature of these clans”.¹³⁶ Crazzolara has identified the groups (clans) which moved east of Pubungu as the Patiko, the Alero, and the Payera,¹³⁷ and argued that these groups are the raw material of Acholi history.

In this work, a clan will be used as a collective term for all those persons who believe themselves to be descended through the male line from the same ancestor. The common ancestor is so remote that no clan member can show

¹³⁵ F.K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 82.

¹³⁶ R. M. Bere, “An Outline of Acholi History”, 6.

¹³⁷ J.P. Crazzolara, *The Lwoo Part I: Lwoo Migration*, (Verona: Museum Combonianum, 1950), 1-10.

with confidence an unbroken line connecting him with the founder, but this does not hinder his descendants from considering themselves “brothers”. Even larger clans, which are widely dispersed, have members who know each other as “brothers”.¹³⁸

Secondly, since clans are hardly found alone, their associations with each other are also to be called clans. This is a simple recognition of the fact that a large and powerful clan is usually swelled by small ones to whom it offers protection. The leader of the historically most important clan is usually the leader of such an “associated” clan group, although each clan would continue to recognize its own traditional leaders.

In the 19th century, there were probably several hundred groups which would qualify under the above definition of clan. According to Dwyer, the number of these clans constituted about thirty chiefdoms in today’s Acholi region.¹³⁹ The Payera were probably the largest and strongest partly because they occupied the central region of Acholiland. These clans were grouped together under independent rwodi (plural of rwot). The rwot was “owner” of the land and was descended from an aristocratic lineage (Kal), which formed the core, surrounded by various other common lineages (Labong).

¹³⁸ R. M. Bere, “An Outline of Acholi History”, 6.

¹³⁹ Different sources give different numbers with regard to chiefdoms in Acholi then. For instance J.O. Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda”, 32; R.R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 77; while F. Uma, “Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relations”, 1, puts it at 60. What this shows, irrespective of this difference, is that the history of Acholiland then was more of clans and chiefdoms than a single ethnic entity.

The nineteenth century produced several contradictory reports on the position and power of the rwodi (plural of rwot). In some, the office of the rwodi is depicted as a central authority, and the man himself as possessing political powers. In others, he is portrayed as a person with no real political power of enforcement, but dependent on consensus with his “subjects” who could drive him out or abandon him and seek a new rwot.¹⁴⁰ This last point seems to have more credibility partly because the rwodi had no powers over the various clans in his chieftom or kingdom and certain clan heads even led their people away for one reason or another. For instance, certain clans of Payera left Paira East and settled in what is now known as Anaka because of the maladministration of the Nubians. When the Nubians left and rwot Awich ordered the clans-Padyek, Oria, Paduny, Pawatomeru, Patira and Alokulum to rejoin their brothers in Paira East, the leaders of these clans openly refused.¹⁴¹ In fact, both descriptions can be considered as justified. These two possibilities bear witness to the dynamic social world in which the Acholi later congealed into an ethnic group. Such were the basic features that came to characterize Acholi society from the late seventeenth to through the nineteenth century.

Acholi Collective Ethnic Identity

There is controversy over when different African societies (Acholi included) congealed as collective ethnic identities. Anthropologists most often conclude that ethnic identity is a construction and is, sometimes, even instrumentally constructed. In other words, ethnic identity is formed, constructed, invented,

¹⁴⁰ H. Behrend, *Alice Lakwena, and the Holy Spirits*, 15.

¹⁴¹ K. F. Uma, “Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relations in the Nineteenth Century”, 11-12.

even imagined and politically manipulated.¹⁴² It is the outcome of “social relations wrought in historical particularities.¹⁴³ The opposite approach discusses ethnic identity as natural, static and immutable, like race, a primordial essence that is passed on from generation to generation and cultures as fixed texts.¹⁴⁴

According to Behrend, the Acholi as a collective ethnic identity did not exist in pre-colonial times. The ethnonym came into usage during the colonial period. At that time, “there was no real Acholi ethnic identity but only localized clan identities”. When the colonialists created the Acholi district, they were “thus creating an ethnic group that had not existed before”.¹⁴⁵ Her main contention is that colonial rule was instrumental in the formation of an over-all ethnic belonging among the many Acholi clans.

This kind of representation that strongly relates ethnic identity to the colonial era and manipulation has been advanced elsewhere by Okuku, Allen and others.¹⁴⁶ Nelson Kasfir contends that “in Anglophone Africa, what happened was that the colonial regimes, administratively created ethnic units (tribes) as we think of today”.¹⁴⁷ This position is reinforced by Donald Gelfand and Russell when they contend that “Ethnic development occurs when hitherto, different

¹⁴² T. Shibutani & K. Kwan, *Ethnic Stratification: A Comparative Approach*, (New York: MacMillan, 1969), 263. See also L. Robertson, “The Constructed Nature of Ethnopolitics”, *International Politics*, 34 (1997), 267.

¹⁴³ B. Lindgren, “The Politics of Ndebele Ethnicity: Origins, Nationality and Gender in Southern Zimbabwe”, Uppsala: Uppsala University, PhD Thesis in Cultural Anthropology, 2002, 50.

¹⁴⁴ Here, ethnic identities are regarded as biological. One is born in an ethnic group and dies in it. The contention here is culture is a fundamental mandate in ethnicity. It has come to be known as primordialism.

¹⁴⁵ H. Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits*, 18.

¹⁴⁶ J. Okuku, “Ethnicity, State Power and the Democratisation Process in Uganda”, 6. See also T. Allen, “Ethnicity and Tribalism on the Sudan-Uganda border,” 40.

¹⁴⁷ N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena: Participation and Ethnicity in African Politics, with a Case Study of Uganda*, 82.

and independent communities are brought together under a single administrative umbrella”.¹⁴⁸ There is also the Terence Rangerian view of the invention of ethnicity. This is the notion of the constructed or “invented” nature of ethnicity or ethnicity as an “imagined” community, as politics. Terence Ranger argues that ethnic identities like that of the Acholi were invented by colonialism. He contends that in Africa, as in India, British colonialists invented ethnic groups so that they would easily exert authority over a large population by asserting authority over the indigenous ruling classes.¹⁴⁹ As a result of this process and to fit in the British policy of divide and rule, ethnic identities like Acholi were created and have since remained a feature in Ugandan politics.

Sverker Finnström¹⁵⁰ has not only disagreed with the central idea propagated by supporters of the theory of constructionism of ethnicity but also with the contention that Acholi ethnic identity was a colonial creation. According to Sverker Finnström, the idea that Acholi is a colonial creation is questionable on the ground that the historical forebears of the Acholi also lived and socialised with each other before Europeans discovered their land and put a name to it in writing, or put borders on the map. He therefore hesitates to conclude that Acholi ethnic identity was a colonial invention simply because it was labelled tribal or because colonial agents were the first to write down the denomination “Acholi”.¹⁵¹ Dwyer goes further to suggest that the idea of a common Acholi

¹⁴⁸ D. E. Gelfand and D. Russell *Ethnic Conflicts and Power: A Cross-National Perspective*, (New York: John Wiley and Son Inc., 1973) expounded the idea that ethnic identities were bound together to make what became colonial territories without due consideration to their differences and particularistic interests.

¹⁴⁹ T. Ranger, and Hobsbawn (Eds.), 1983, *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 221.

¹⁵⁰ F. Sverker, *Living with Bad Surrounding*, 63.

¹⁵¹ F. Sverker, *Living with Bad Surrounding*, 63.

identity ought to be traced to pre-colonial times, although the individual Acholi's first awareness was of his (or her) clan. He points out that the Acholi first called themselves by referring to the clans they belonged to than by the collective name-Acholi.¹⁵² This argument is more elaborated and refined by Atkinson.¹⁵³

Whereas our main objective is not to trace the origin of Acholi collective belonging as was the case with Dwyer and Atkinson, it will still serve our purpose when we investigate ethnicity and conflict later in this work. This study's position is that ethnicity is a social construct and that ethnic identities are a colonial invention in a dynamic process.

Crazzolaro believes that each Acholi ruler was completely independent both of other Acholi and also of foreign control. The Acholi tribe, he writes, "consisted and to some extent still consists of small kingdoms or chiefdoms (i.e. groups ruled by a rwot or king) and depended on nobody else". This absolute independence from each other and from outside influence (e.g. Bunyoro), he asserts "must be stressed in the face of some sporadic assertions from interested parties who wish to glorify themselves at the expense of the Acholi".¹⁵⁴

He makes the same point elsewhere again, that "all of the twenty to thirty remaining independent chiefdoms were of about the same size; none of them

¹⁵² J.O. Dwyer, *The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism*, 12.

¹⁵³ R. R. Atkinson. *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 11-12.

¹⁵⁴ J.P. Crazzolaro, *A Study of the Acoli Language, Grammar & Vocabulary*, (London: Oxford University Press), viii.

had sovereign rights of any kind over the others, in spite of some assertions as of Bunyoro and Payira to the contrary”.¹⁵⁵

The above position is further reinforced by R. M. Bere when he states that,

the history of the Acholi is the story of the clans and if that history is to be understood it is necessary to consider briefly the nature of these clans. Each was, and to some extent still is, a separate political entity with its own history and occasionally customs.¹⁵⁶

In so far as government was concerned “they recognize no hereditary chiefs and bow their knees to no overlords, but they pay deep respect to clan heads and rain makers”.¹⁵⁷

Each of the clan domains, for instance, had its own Jok (Spirit) on which it depended for success in agriculture, hunting and war.¹⁵⁸ The authority of the Jok did not extend beyond the clans’ domains. Thus, any power which one clan did have over another had no ritual or religious sanction. Such power was invariably temporary because the control was never completely secure and never received organizational recognition in the political structure of the society. As Girling notes, it could be because traditional links between the clans were horizontal, not vertical.¹⁵⁹

The bond between or among clans was strengthened through intermarriage, then encouraged in Acholi among members of the royal families, as well as the

¹⁵⁵ J.P. Crazzolaro, *The Lwoo People*, 18.

¹⁵⁶ R. M. Bere, “An Outline of Acholi History”, 1.

¹⁵⁷ R. M. Bere, “An Outline of Acholi History”, 1.

¹⁵⁸ J. O. Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism”, 52.

¹⁵⁹ F.K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 156.

commoners of the chiefdoms. Thus, a man from Padibe could get a wife from Kochi and a girl from Atyak was free to pick a husband from any part of Acholi, provided that the bridegroom and bride were upright persons and were not suspected of being wizards.¹⁶⁰ Such intermarriages were important for the preservation of peace and friendship in that the Acholi hesitated to take up arms against their neighbours who were relatives by marriage.

Administratively, the colonial government was very much responsible for the creation of the districts of Gulu (1910) and Chua (1914). Later in 1937, these two districts were amalgamated to create one Acholi District. Bere, an agent of the colonial Administration, wrote in 1947:

The urgent trend of modern administration has been to bring the clans together and to make the Acholi conscious of their unit as a single people, without destroying their individual background. To this end, the districts of Gulu and Chua (today's Kitgum and Pader) were amalgamated in 1937, when a unified Acholi District was formed with its headquarters at Gulu. At the same time, the Acholi Council, with seats, not only for chiefs but for representation of the people from all parts of the country, was brought into being.¹⁶¹

It is reasonable to argue that these clans were formed for reasons of common interest such as defence or to deal with a disaster and could break apart with ease as well on the occasion of the slightest disagreement. By the end of the 18th century, as Atkinson notes, the broad unity that characterized Acholiland by the mid 19th century had not taken on concrete, practical forms of expression. Neither the area nor the people who inhabited it were yet perceived as a unit either by the people themselves or by neighbouring groups. One

¹⁶⁰ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 2.

¹⁶¹ R. M. Bere, "An Outline of Acholi History", 8.

indication of this is that neither area nor people were identified by a name that was both inclusive of the whole and exclusive of others.¹⁶² It is not in doubt that colonial practices were powerful instruments in the making of more rigid ethnic boundaries and divide in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa.¹⁶³

In addition, the market economy of the colonialists was to restrict people's movements over ethnic borders. In pre-colonial times, salt extracted on the shores of Lake Albert found its way to other places and so did iron hoes and spearheads produced in Bunyoro, while bark cloth made in Buganda found its way to Alur chiefs in the West Nile region. Acholi chiefs (rwots) were sometimes dressed in bark-cloth made in Bunyoro. The Lango exchanged cattle for iron tools manufactured by the Acholi.¹⁶⁴ Many of these products, exchanged in trade networks that crisis-crossed the region, could not compete with the cheap goods mass-produced in British factories, which were made available in stores all over the Ugandan protectorate.¹⁶⁵ In this way, the colonialists seized the control over the market and they narrowed the room for action that Africans had previously had in these matters. An important feature of non-colonial interregional alliance making and networking weakened, as a result.¹⁶⁶

Colonial rule and its mechanisms ensured that a people congealed in a district or ethnic group could not voluntarily and easily break apart otherwise colonial

¹⁶² R.R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 262.

¹⁶³ J. Lonsdale, "Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribalism", in Kaarsholm and J. Hultin (Eds.), *Invention and Boundaries: Historical and Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism*, (Roskilde, University: International Development Studies, Occasional paper, 11 (1994), 134.

¹⁶⁴ J. Lonsdale, "Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribalism", 134.

¹⁶⁵ S. R. Karugire, *The Roots of Political Instability in Uganda*, 24.

¹⁶⁶ S. R. Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, 128.

policies and administration in general would collapse. Once several clans were brought together and restricted under appointed leaders and systems, their consciousness as one people beyond clans developed especially against a common enemy- the British.

The above discussion reveals the nature of the debate on the history of the Acholi people. The primary aim of the discussion is not to establish the origin of the Acholi but to emphasize that the sense of collective belonging in Acholiland started with colonialism. For these reasons and despite the objections of Ronald Atkinson, Dwyer and Sverker Finnstrom, the Behrend version on Acholi ethnic identity, which maintains that there was no real Acholi ethnic identity but only localised clan identities, will be used in this work.

Acholi relations with neighbours

There is considerable disagreement regarding the relationship among the different Acholi leaders (rwodi) and between the people of Acholiland and their neighbours in the days before European rule. Crazzolaro has insisted that each Acholi rwot was independent both of other Acholi authorities and of foreign control (for example Bunyoro).¹⁶⁷ Bere is not quite emphatic and simply states that each Acholi clan was a “separate political entity”¹⁶⁸. Girling feels that although each Acholi (rwot) had a degree of relative independence and there was never any formal political control exercised by the Banyoro over the Acholi, they still recognized the Bakama of Bunyoro as their suzerains.¹⁶⁹ This seems true

¹⁶⁷ J. P. Crazzolaro, *The Lwoo People*, 18.

¹⁶⁸ R. M. Bere, “An Outline of Acholi History”, 8.

¹⁶⁹ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 120.

because in the mid nineteenth century the large Payera clan that had close ties with Bunyoro seemed to enjoy the respect of most other Acholi clans. Samuel Baker considered Rwot Chamo of Payera to be the paramount chief of the Acholi. Yet, says Girling, this was “allegiance owed by the weaker to the stronger, and based on esteem rather than conquest”.¹⁷⁰

In spite of these confusions, Rwot Chamo and his son Awich were able to maintain their traditional ties with Bunyoro; duly paying respect on ceremonial occasions to the common ancestors they shared: Labongo. Gifts and ambassadors were regularly exchanged. Acholi and Bunyoro were also to have a short-lived alliance against the invading Europeans.¹⁷¹

Relations between the Acholi and their neighbours, the Langi, were invariably strained at different times. The Langi appeared to have had more cattle than the Acholi and the temptation to raid for them was very great. Chiefdoms like Puranga and Lira-Palwo did raid the Lango area. The hostility between Puranga, Lira-Palwo and the Langi went back to the years before 1800. The Acholi also fought the Madi on several occasions. War was usually declared by either the Acholi or the Madi as a result of feuds occurring during hunting campaigns, in which the Acholi and Madi lost some of their men.¹⁷²

On the eastern frontier generally, the Acholi and the Ateker people lived in unity and peacefully until relations were poisoned by the Nubians who organized

¹⁷⁰ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 120.

¹⁷¹ J.M. Gray, “Rwot Ochama of Payera” in *Uganda Journal*, 12 (2) (1948), 121-128.

¹⁷² F. K. Uma, “Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relations in the Nineteenth Century”, 10.

raids into the Dodoth County with the support of the Acholi. After the Nubians left, the Acholi organized their first full-scale war against the Jie.¹⁷³ The Acholi were disastrously defeated and a formal peace was concluded. In accounting for this defeat, most informants today list among the causes the fact that the Acholi were in the wrong in carrying war into Jie County and thus the gods favoured the Jie.¹⁷⁴

It must, however, be emphasized that these wars were less serious than those fought with and outside Acholi when the Arabs and Nubians introduced firearms. By leading combined forces of the Acholi chiefdoms against the Madi, Lango-Omiro and the Lango-Dyang for cattle and slaves, the Nubians created bitter feelings between the Acholi and neighbouring societies with which they used to be on good terms. Within Acholi itself, the Nubians created enmity among several Acholi chiefdoms like Payera and Padibe which had been friendly chiefdoms previously.¹⁷⁵ Even before British colonial rule was imposed in Acholiland, therefore, situations of lawlessness and conflict already existed, but at very low levels.

Acholi Experience with Aliens

The first known contact between the Acholi and peoples beyond Equatoria (present-day Southern Sudan and Northern Uganda) was with Arabs and the Egyptians in the mid-nineteenth century. The origins of this alien thrust into Equatoria lay in the invasions of the Khedive Muhammed Ali in the 1820s.

¹⁷³ J. B. Webster, "The Peopling of Agago", 7.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with A. Okello, 15 March, 2007.

¹⁷⁵ F. K. Uma, "Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relations in the Nineteenth Century", 11.

Aggressive traders followed this invasion to the town of Khartoum and these “Khartoumers” began to establish trading empires in the Equatorial region of the Nile.¹⁷⁶ The main products extracted were ivory and slaves. Their notable trading stations were located at Pabo, Ajulu, Pajule, Padibe, Jebel Labu (Kalongo). The most important centres of these, however, were Patiko in the Central Zone and Pabo and Padibe in the western Zone.¹⁷⁷

According to Uma, there was relative peace and stability within Acholi society before the advent of Arabs and Nubians in the mid-nineteenth century largely because the Acholi regarded themselves as brothers in a large sense.¹⁷⁸ The Acholi based their argument on the fact that all the people who came into Acholi were originally from the Sudan and were led by Lwo. Importantly, also the Arabs who came into Acholiland were merely commercialists or commercial adventurers who did not, initially, interfere with or try to control the political system of Acholi society. As Girling notes, “the Arabs were then content to maintain purely commercial relations”.¹⁷⁹ Even when early Arab traders conducted raids, most of such raids were directed against the Acholi’s neighbours often with the assistance of the Acholi as allies. The main purpose of these raids was to acquire cattle, captives and Ivory.¹⁸⁰

In the early stages, Arab traders brought into Acholi many new items like copper bracelets, beads, saucepans, wooden boxes, clothes and firearms. They

¹⁷⁶ J. O. Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism”, 36.

¹⁷⁷ R. R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity: The Origins of the Acholi of Uganda*, 267.

¹⁷⁸ F. K. Uma, “Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relations in the Nineteenth Century”, 11.

¹⁷⁹ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 121.

¹⁸⁰ R. R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 269.

also brought into Acholi slaves and cattle captured in Madi and Bari in Southern Sudan, which they exchanged for Ivory with the Acholi. The Acholi acquired wives from such slaves and it was partly through this system that many people of foreign origin, like the Bari, Madi and Lango-Omiro were absorbed into Acholi society.¹⁸¹

Arab-Acholi relations were not always cordial. In the 1860s, and largely through Acholi-Arab interaction, the Acholi rwodi acquired firearms in different quantities. The arrival of these ivory and slave traders, and the importation of rifles from the north fundamentally changed the status of the rwodi. Some of them even managed to build up private retinues of armed followers.¹⁸² Whereas such rwodi employed their small armies equipped with rifles to attack neighbouring chiefdoms and other ethnic groups, such as the Madi or Langi,¹⁸³ robbing cattle and enslaving women and children, some like Rwoth Chamo of Payera and the rwoth of Patiko later used such armies to expel Arabs out of their areas.¹⁸⁴

The exchange of rifles for ivory and slaves had catastrophic results in Acholi as in other parts of Africa. The reports on the “pacification” of Acholi at the beginning of the colonial period permit a rough estimate of the degree to which rifles had spread.¹⁸⁵ When the colonial administration began registering guns and disarming the Acholi, the chiefs of Gondokoro and Gulu alone possessed

¹⁸¹ R. R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 269.

¹⁸² H. Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits*, 80.

¹⁸³ Langi are the people of Lango- neighbouring Luo cousins to the Acholi. Lango refers to the homeland of the Langi people.

¹⁸⁴ F. K. Uma, “Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relations in the Nineteenth Century”, 11.

¹⁸⁵ J. R. Postlethwaite, *I Look Back*, (London: T.S V, Boardman, 1947), 51.

almost 1500 rifles.¹⁸⁶ This also illustrates how the spread of firearms as a prelude to armed conflicts in the area predates the colonial period.

The first European in Acholiland was a Maltese trader named Amabile, who established a trading post near Palero in 1861. Another European, Miami, followed shortly.¹⁸⁷ There is no evidence that any of these men engaged in slave trading and their activities remained almost inconsequential.

The period of Khedive Ismael Pasha (1869-1879) marked a new phase of alien intrusion into Acholiland. Under the influence of both the ideas and finances of Europe, Khedive Ismael initiated a policy of eradicating the trade in slaves. For this purpose, Europeans were employed and the process of evicting the “merchant-rulers” was begun under Samuel Baker and Charles Gordon. The famous meeting of Speke and Baker at Gondokoro in February, 1863, can be said to mark the beginning of British interest in the area. Baker is still fondly remembered in Acholiland, over a century after his first visit. The Acholi respected his person partly because he had driven out the hated Arab traders and slavers. According to Dwyer, his success might have been due to the fact that he established good relations with Rwot Chamo of Payera clan, who he considered the leader of all Acholi.¹⁸⁸ This may have been true de-facto in the 1870s, but it was certainly not true de jure: Baker’s diplomatic efforts would have been considerably more difficult had he been forced to deal with several Acholi rwoodi.

¹⁸⁶ See Native Reports, 1910 (Entebbe: Entebbe Archives, 1910), 6.

¹⁸⁷ J. H. Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, (London: J.M. Dent and Company, 1863), 111.

¹⁸⁸ J. O. Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism”, 37.

Gordon and his successor as Governor of Equatoria, Emin Pasha, did not often visit Acholiland in person and their administrations are remembered by the Acholi primarily because of their notorious Nubian troops. The demand made on the Acholi by these troops was for food but the only thing that the Acholi people received in return for this form of taxation was protection from a no longer menacing enemy.¹⁸⁹

Pressure from external powers was renewed but in a new guise. The 1880s saw a number of attempts by followers of the Mahdi to push into the Egyptian province of Equatoria. They had little success there except in isolating Emin Pasha and his garrison. The province was “relieved” by Stanley’s famous expedition in 1889. Emin Pasha was convinced to go to the coast and those of his soldiers who did not accompany him disbanded to the west of the Nile.¹⁹⁰

Acholiland was free from alien domination, violence and intimidation which were endemic to the exploration mission. As Fabian notes in his study of nineteenth century Central Africa travelogues, “No sharp line separated exploration from military action”.¹⁹¹ Acholiland was free from alien domination only temporarily because more serious pressure came from a new alien threat—the British colonialists.

¹⁸⁹ J. O. Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism”, 37.

¹⁹⁰ D. A. Low, *Buganda in Modern History*, 106.

¹⁹¹ J. Fabian, *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 146.

In conclusion, the history of Acholi during the initial stages of the imperial condition was not entirely peaceful. Arabs and Nubians promoted internal division in a community that had not yet congealed as a political unit or force enough to withstand such division and manipulation. Consequently, as Webster and Onyango-Ku-Odongo have noted, “by 1872 Arab traders had already created very unstable conditions in Acholiland”. Generally, “life in Acholiland then was that of a war of each against all”.¹⁹² Torn apart by feuds and internal strife and greed and encouraged by Nubians in the absence of a strong centralised system like Buganda’s, the Acholi people could not stand together and face their common enemy. The traders could easily raid their homes at will, at any time and take food as well as other valuables.¹⁹³ The arrival of the British colonialists found the Acholi in such a state and partly explains why they fell easy prey to the British and their divide and rule policy. Arabs and Nubians initiated the breakdown of the Acholi social fabric; the British intensified the process and Uganda’s post-colonial leaders simply exacerbated it to even higher levels. This fits well with Atkinson’s observations that,

Uganda’s recent and distant past do relate, in fairly direct, if perverse, ways. Many of the events and relationships characteristic of Uganda’s recent history, including political violence, have ultimately been bound up with Uganda’s perception of their social and ethnic identity.¹⁹⁴

Therefore, it is wrong to blame the current conflicts in Acholiland entirely on the Acholi or on the myth of Acholi being warlike. It is necessary to consider the conflicts as a result of Uganda’s chequered pre-colonial, colonial and post-

¹⁹² J. B. Webster & Onyango-Ku- Odongo, “The Peopling of Agago”, 212.

¹⁹³ J.B. Webster & Onyango-Ku- Odongo, “The Peopling of Agago”, 212.

¹⁹⁴ R. R Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 1.



colonial History. Imperial conditions during the period of British control simply intensified the already difficult situation.