

# Democratization and Conflict Resolution in Uganda

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## Introduction

Since the 1990s, the promotion of democracy and good governance have been championed as vital for the resolution of conflicts, consolidating peace and promoting development in societies emerging from conflict. Multilateral and bilateral development agencies added democratization to their programmes, and transition to democracy became a major aim of foreign policy and development assistance of many western donor states.<sup>1</sup> This partly reflected the triumph of liberal internationalism in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War; and the optimism that intra-state conflicts could be peacefully resolved through multilateral initiatives, and commitment to rebuilding failed states.<sup>2</sup> The reciprocal link between democracy, peace

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<sup>1</sup> David Williams and Tom Young, 'Governance, the World Bank and Liberal Theory', *Political Studies*, 42(1994): 84-100; Michael W. Doyle, 'Liberalism and World Politics', *American Political Science Review*, 80, 4 (December 1986): 1151-69; Larry Diamond, 'Promoting Democracy', *Foreign Policy*, 87 (Summer 1992).

<sup>2</sup> See, Boutros-Boutros, Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace*, (New York: United Nations, 1992); Gerald, B. Helman and Steven R. Ratner, 'Saving Failed States', *Foreign Policy*, 89 (1992-93): 3-20.

and development is rooted in liberal internationalist paradigm. The liberal approach emphasizes political reconstruction and transition from authoritarian rule to institutionalized democratic governance; socio-economic reconstruction and transition from state controlled to market economies; and a security transition involving demobilization and reintegration of former combatants into civilian life, formation of new national army and security sector reform.<sup>3</sup>

Influenced by the assumptions of liberal internationalism, western donor states and organizations have tried to resolve conflicts in countries such as El Salvador, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Namibia, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) among others; and to consolidate peace in countries such as Ethiopia and Uganda that were emerging from conflicts.<sup>4</sup> Although western donor states and multilateral agencies have at times hastily made pronouncements about 'successful transitions from war to peace', the degree of success of these interventions has varied.<sup>5</sup> In Mozambique, there has been remarkable peace and development, while in Angola democratization was a disastrous failure. The DRC is still embroiled in conflicts, and Uganda which has been hailed by western donors as the model of

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<sup>3</sup> Shepard Forman and Stewart Patrick, 'Introduction', in Shepard Forman and Stewart Patrick (eds.), *Good Intentions: Pledges of Aid for Postconflict Reconstruction*, (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 5; Khrisna Kumar, 'The Nature and Focus of International Assistance for Rebuilding War-Torn Societies', in Khrisna Kumar (ed.), *Rebuilding Societies after Civil War: Critical Roles for International Assistance*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1997), 1-39; World Bank, *Postconflict Reconstruction; the Role of the World Bank*, (Washington DC.: World Bank, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> See, Nat J. Colletta, Markus Kostner and Ingo Wiederhofer (with assistance of Emilio Mondo, Taimi Sitari, and Tadesse A. woldu), *Case Studies in War-to-Peace Transition: the Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in Ethiopia, Namibia and Uganda*, (Washington DC.: World Bank) Discussion Paper, 331.

<sup>5</sup> Marina Ottaway, 'Promoting Democracy after Conflict: The Difficult Choices', *International Studies Perspectives*, 4 (2003): 314-322.

successful postconflict recovery in Africa<sup>6</sup>, is still riddled with violent internal conflicts.

This paper reflects on the link between democratization and peacebuilding in Uganda. It seeks to answer the question why democratization in Uganda has not led to the resolution of conflicts. The central argument of the paper is that democratization process in Uganda has focused on building and reforming institutions as opposed to consensus building and conflict resolution. The NRA/M used democratic reforms to reconfigure the Ugandan state and politics to consolidate itself in power and to hoodwink western donors and ensure continued international support. Accordingly, the NRM government has carried out a sham democratization process that has not contributed to resolution of conflicts. It rejected the idea of building national consensus in favour of the strategy of exclusion and inclusion. It 'criminalized' opponents and adopted a mixture of militarist approaches, political cooptation and patronage in response to conflicts. The NRA/M government was able to do this because western donors were happy with the record of Uganda's economic reforms, the perception of Uganda as an island of stability', and of the Ugandan leader Yoweri Museveni as a reliable partner of the West. Uganda is thus, a thinly disguised authoritarian state with endemic conflicts.

### **The Dynamics of Conflicts in Uganda**

Uganda is mired, not in one, but many conflicts. The conflicts are at various levels and are composed of interlocking struggles. These conflicts are linked to the challenges of state and nation-building; accumulating, centralizing, and concentrating the power resources

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Collier and Ritva Reinikka, 'Reconstruction and Liberalization: An Overview', in Ritva Reinikka and Paul Collier (eds.), *Uganda's Recovery: The Role of Farms, Firms and Government*, (Washington DC. and Kampala: The World Bank and Fountain Publishers, 2001): 15.

necessary for effective territorial domination'.<sup>7</sup> The Ugandan state was an 'artificial creation'<sup>8</sup> of British colonialism. It is defined by complex and crosscutting regional divide between the Nilotic north and the Bantu south; ethnic, linguistic and religious cleavages. Integrating these diverse groups into a coherent national entity has presented daunting challenge since the colonial era. Since pre-independence politics, conflict over an appropriate 'form of government' for Uganda, as well as the role of the different actors or groups in national politics has been endemic.<sup>9</sup> There has been conflict between proponents of unitary and federal systems; republicanism and monarchism; single and competitive party systems; sub-national and national loyalty, among others.

The 1962 constitution reflected attempts to manage the various conflicting interests. This compromise document provided for a federal status for Buganda and semi-federal status for the other four Kingdoms, and unitary relations between the districts and the central government. However, the constitutional arrangement did not satisfy all groups. In 1962, the 'Rwenzururu' rebellion broke when the Bakonzo and Bamba took up arms against domination by Toro Kingdom and fought for 'recognition of the rights of minority ethnic groups in independent Uganda'.<sup>10</sup> It did not therefore take long before the spirit of compromise and institutional restraints on the use of power, which had reluctantly been adhered to, dissipated. In 1966, Prime Minister Milton Obote ordered a military invasion of the Kabaka's palace. The Kabaka fled to exile where he died a few years later. The following year, a new constitution declared Uganda a

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<sup>7</sup> Youssef Cohen, Brian R. Brown and A.F.K Organski, 'The Paradoxical Nature of State Making: The Violent Creation of Order', *The American Political Science Review*, 75, 4 (1981): 901-2.

<sup>8</sup> D.A. Low, 'The Dislocated Polity', in H.B. Hansen and M.Twaddle (eds.), *Uganda Now: Between Decay and Development* (London: James Currey, 1988): 39.

<sup>9</sup> See David Apter, *The Political Kingdom in Uganda: A Study of Bureaucratic Nationalism* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961): 264-68.

<sup>10</sup> Syahuka-Muhindo, 'The Origin and Development of the Rwenzururu Movement: 1900-1962', *Mavazo*, 5, 2 (December 1983): 60-75; Tom Stacey *Tribe: The Hidden History of the Mountain of the Moon*, (London: Binder and Stacey International, 2003).

republic and centralized power in an executive president. This resulted in a crisis of legitimacy and heightened conflict in the ethnically fragile state. In 1971, the army overthrew the civilian government of Milton Obote. This was the beginning of eight years of brutal and autocratic rule under military dictator Idi Amin. Amin's rule was characterized by violence and it poisoned ethnic relations as the regime alienated one ethnic group after the other.<sup>11</sup> It resulted in social dislocation and institutional decay. Hence, when he was overthrown in 1979 by a combined force of the Tanzanian Peoples Defence Force and Ugandan guerrillas, violence and disorder continued, and the successive regimes were confronted with the problems of re-establishing societal and political order.<sup>12</sup> The major political actors of the time, most of whom were political returnees whose claim to a role in national politics rested on their 'roles' in the overthrow of Idi Amin were deeply divided along political, ethnic, religious, military and ideological lines.<sup>13</sup> Intrigues and manoeuvres were ripe, as different groups positioned themselves for political control. The euphoria and hopes of progress and national reconciliation that followed the end of Idi Amin's brutal rule had dissipated.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the December 1980 elections were held under a tense atmosphere of considerable controversy, mistrust, political violence and threats of civil war. The UPC government which came to power after the elections was therefore faced with a crisis of legitimacy. In February 1981, Yoweri Museveni who had threatened to 'go to the bush' and wage war if the elections were rigged, launched a guerrilla war against the UPC government.

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<sup>11</sup> Colin Legum (ed.), *African Contemporary Record*, 5 (1972-73); H.B Hansen, *Ethnicity and the Military in Uganda* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1977).

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Decalo, *Coup and Army Rule in Africa: Motivation and Constraints* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990): 133-98.

<sup>13</sup> Cherry Gertzel, 'Uganda after Amin: the Continuing Search for Leadership and Control', *African Affairs*, 79, 317 (October 1980): 461-89.

<sup>14</sup> *Africa Research Bulletin*, 22, 7 (15 August 1985): 7722.

By the time the NRA/M came to power in January 1986, Uganda was in a shambles. There was rampant violence and insecurity. The government had lost control and the army had disintegrated into armed gangs that were engaged in looting and harassment of civilians. The conflict had also polarized Uganda along the regional north-south divide and along ethnic lines. The NRA/M guerrilla war had pitted a predominantly southern guerrilla army against a northern dominated government army, the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA). There were also many rival armed groups such as Uganda Freedom Movement (UFM), Federal Democratic Army (Fedemo), Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF) and Former Uganda National Army (FUNA), among others, vying for political control. The situation in Karamoja sub-region in north eastern Uganda was also volatile. Underdevelopment, years of neglect and proliferation small arms and light weapons had transformed and led to the escalation of cattle rustling.<sup>15</sup> From the onset therefore, the newly established NRA/M government was faced with the twin tasks of consolidating its hold on power and resolving issues related to the struggle for political control and the roles of various actors in national political life.

It was against this background that the capture of power by NRA/M in January 1986 was greeted with optimism about the restoration of peace, political stability and democracy. The NRM had come to power on the platform of establishing democracy, restoring security and consolidating national unity.<sup>16</sup> Within a few months, it had succeeded in extending its control over the entire country and establishing a measure of stability. In May 1987, the NRM government signed agreement with the IMF and World Bank and began to implement Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPS). This endeared the NRM government to Western donors and resulted in the flow of aid and improvement in Uganda's economic performance during the

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Walker, *Anti-pastoralism and the growth of poverty and Insecurity in Karamoja: Disarmament and Development Dilemmas*, A Report for DFID East Africa (Uganda), March 2002.

<sup>16</sup> *Ten-Point Programme of the NRM* (Kampala: NRM Publications, 1986).

1990s. The western world began to view Uganda as an island of stability in a troubled region; a country that enjoys political stability and sustained economic growth.

However, the optimism was premature. The peace that existed at the time was a victor's peace, which depended on the ability of the NRA/M to impose and maintain its control, and quiescence of defeated groups. Issues related to political control and the roles of the various actors in national politics remained unresolved. Thus, within a few months, there was resurgence of violent conflict in northern Uganda between the NRA and former soldiers of the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA), which the NRA had defeated. The conflict broke out after NRA soldiers began to roundup and take to 'politicization camps', (a euphemism for concentration or detention camps), all former UNLA soldiers who had defied an order to report to army authorities within ten days, which was made over Radio Uganda in mid-April 1986. Tension escalated into full-scale war when former soldiers of the UNLA who had re-organized under the banner of the Uganda Peoples Democratic Army (UPDA) attacked NRA positions in Gulu and Kitgum districts in August 1986. The attack opened a Pandora's Box. Within a few months, the conflict spread like bush fire to the entire north and eastern Uganda. A number of armed groups, with diverse political and military importance emerged to challenge the NRA/M regime.<sup>17</sup> These included the UPDA, UPA/F, Ninth October Movement (NOM), Force Obote Back Again (FOBA), and NALU, which was active in western Uganda around the foothills of the Ruwenzori Mountains, and others of limited significance. Most of these groups were either defeated, and some of the members co-opted by the NRA/M government, resumed civilian life or remained in exile. The most resilient group has been the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which has tormented northern Uganda since 1987.

The NALU rebellion was led by Amon Bazira, a former minister in the deposed UPC government. Through the rebellion, local political

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<sup>17</sup> Colin Legum (ed.), *Africa Contemporary Record*, Vol. 19, (1986-87): B459.

rivalry and vendetta among Bakonzo politicians were entangled conflicts at the national level over struggles for political control. The rebellion also 'reignited' the 'Rwenzururu' rebellion which had been ended in 1982 through negotiations with the government.<sup>18</sup> The agreement which ended the conflict collapsed after Bakonzo politicians who were members of the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) like Amon Bazira were either detained or forced to flee to exile in 1986. The government also stopped funding the Rwenzururu leader ('King'), Charles Mumbere who was studying in the United States because he was considered a protégé of the UPC.

The outbreak of armed conflicts in northern and south-western Uganda presented the NRA/M with a dilemma of whether to adopt a military or democratic approach to resolution of the conflict. The NRA/M criminalized its opponents to prevent them from gaining domestic and international support. It used military repression co-optation and patronage to respond to conflicts. When the conflict in northern Uganda had just started, President Yoweri Museveni described it as a result of 'rear-guard actions of the defeated, moribund, sectarian and neo-colonial elements', and labelled his opponents as "*the elements that have caused untold suffering to the people of Uganda, violated human rights, murdered people, destroyed the economy and violated the sovereignty of the people of Uganda.*"<sup>19</sup> He declared that: "*Fighting and annihilating these types of elements is a justified cause.*"<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The nucleus of NALU was remnants of the Rwenzururu militants. To mobilise support, NALU invoked the name of exiled King Charles Mumbere. After the assassination of Amon Bazira in 1993, Charles Mumbere became the titular leader of NALU.

<sup>19</sup> Yoweri K. Museveni, 'Speech on the Opening of the National Resistance Council Session at the National Assembly', Kampala, 7 April 1987

<sup>20</sup> Yoweri K. Museveni, 'Address to the Nation on the Anniversary of Uganda's Independence' 9 October 1987.

## **The National Resistance Movement (NRM) and Democratic Reforms in Uganda**

The NRM carried out reforms in two phases, which overlapped. It concentrated on establishing new political institutions and consolidating its hold on power. During the first phase, the ideological orientations of the NRM, the 'self-conceived superiority of thoughts'<sup>21</sup> and the conviction that the organization had the 'correct political line', and the imperatives of regime consolidation influenced the process of reforms. The NRM emphasized central control and command; and adopted a top-down approach.

To legitimise its authority and consolidate its hold on power, the NRA/M established new political institutions and governance structures, at the local and national level, albeit in an extra-legal manner.<sup>22</sup> Through Legal Notice no. 1 of 1986<sup>23</sup>, an 'interim' government was established. The National Resistance Council (NRC), the ruling organ of the NRA/M was made the government of Uganda. Both executive and legislative powers were fused in the NRC, whose membership was expanded to include newly appointed ministers and deputy ministers. The new government also appointed an ombudsman, the Inspector General of Government (IGG) and established the Uganda Human Rights Commission to investigate human rights violations. The National Resistance Movement (NRM) secretariat headed by the National Political Commissar was established and Special District Administrators (SDAs) were introduced to replace District Commissioners. These were charged with the supervision of

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<sup>21</sup> John Ssenkumba, 'The Dilemmas of Directed Democracy: Neutralising Ugandan Opposition Politics under the NRM', in Adebayo Olukoshi (ed.), *The Politics of Opposition in Contemporary Africa*, (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1998): 179.

<sup>22</sup> Republic of Uganda, *Report of the Uganda Constitution Commission: Analysis and Recommendations*, (Entebbe: UPPC): 54; Anthony J. Regan, 'Constitutional Reform and the Politics of the Constitution in Uganda: A New Path to Constitutionalism?' in Peter Langseth, J. Katorobo, E. Brett and J. Munene (eds.), *Uganda: Landmarks in Rebuilding a Nation*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1995): 162-64.

<sup>23</sup> Legal Notice No. 1/1986; *Africa Research Bulletin*, 13, 2 (15 March 1986): 7969-70.

Resistance Councils and Committees (RCs), a five-tier system of local government structure. The RCs were promoted as structures for popular participation. In reality, RCs were used to consolidate NRA/M rule and they served as grass root structures of support for the NRA/M. The National School of Political education was also set up to train political cadres who were then deployed in the districts to carry out mobilization duties.<sup>24</sup> The course syllabus was designed by the NRA/M and it was based on its ideological beliefs. The political education programmes became very divisive as it was used to spread NRA/M propaganda.

In a measure, ostensibly to create national unity, the NRM pledged to establish a 'broad-based' government. However, within the NRA/M decision making powers remained with an 'identifiable "core"' committed to the organisation's basic ideology. The NRA/M government also determined those to include and exclude, as well as the parameters of participation. Such an approach is not conducive for building national consensus and resolution of conflicts. On the 27 January 1986, one day after the NRA/M captured Kampala, Yoweri Museveni told journalists, diplomats and representatives of international organisations that the NRA/M would talk to virtually all political and military factions. He however made it clear that 'criminal elements' would not be accommodated.<sup>25</sup> Those the NRM considered opponents were labelled 'criminals' and were intimidated, coerced or co-opted.

However, the scope of participation in politics was also constrained. Participation in politics was limited by the principle of 'individual merit'. People were expected to participate in politics in their individual capacities, but not as members of political organizations. In line with its views that political parties were 'sectarian' and 'divisive', on 11 March 1986, three months after it came

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<sup>24</sup> Ondoga, Ori Amaza, *Museveni's Long March: From Guerrilla to Statesman*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1998): 154-55.

<sup>25</sup> *Africa Research Bulletin*, 23, 1 (15 February 1986): 7948-51.

to power, the NRA/M regime directed political parties to suspend activities; holding meetings and rallies. Only activities 'intended to enhance national unity along the lines set by Government' were allowed.<sup>26</sup> The NRA/M also expanded its political education programme in which political parties were portrayed as divisive and sectarian, and blamed for past political evils.

Faced with severe economic crisis and the desire to secure badly needed external aid, in 1987 the NRA/M government signed an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank and adopted a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). Since then, especially from the 1990s, the liberal paradigm, which entails transition to a liberal democratic polity and market-oriented economy, has influenced and moderated the process of reforms in Uganda. In 1988, the NRM government appointed a constitutional commission and mandated it 'to consult the people and make proposals for a popular and lasting constitution based on national consensus.'<sup>27</sup> International donors supported the constitution making process under the framework of support for democratization.

However, despite the stated noble intentions, and the importance of constitution making for conflict resolution, Uganda squandered an important opportunity.<sup>28</sup> The desire for regime consolidation and the consolidation of personal power by the incumbent resulted deprived the country of the opportunity to build national consensus and establish a framework to accommodate divergent groups and interests. The president appointed the Chairman and members of the Commission, without any democratic consultation, and the Commission operated in a manner that gave the impression of a controlled process aimed at restricting unpalatable outcomes. The Commission held 33 district seminars, which identified 29 major issues,

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<sup>26</sup> Colin Legum (ed.), *Africa Contemporary Record*, 18 (1985-86): B476.

<sup>27</sup> Uganda Constitutional Commission Statute (Statute 5 of 1988).

<sup>28</sup> Ellen Hauser, 'Uganda's Relations with Western Donors in the 1990s: What Impact on Democratization?', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 37, 4 (1999): 621-41.

which became the central agenda for the commission's work. Seminar participants comprised members of parliament from the district, officials from the District Administrator's office, RCs, chiefs, representatives of religious organizations, educational institutions, women and youth groups. The Commission provided guidelines for the seminar. District constitutional committees educated people at the sub-county level on the constitutional issues before calling upon them to submit memorandum. The police disallowed attempts to organize debates outside the sanctioned framework.<sup>29</sup> This created the perception in some quarters that 'the whole exercise was a gimmick', as the government 'had already made a Constitution and was only seeking legitimacy for it.' The draft constitution the Commission submitted to the government confirmed the above view. The Commission recommended the suspension of political party activities for a five-year period, by entrenching the 'Movement' or no party system of governance in the constitution. To its credit, the Commission recommended that a democratically elected Constituent Assembly (CA) should debate the constitution.

However, the NRM preempted discussion on the role of traditional rulers when it introduced constitutional amendments and restored traditional rulers and institutions.<sup>30</sup> This deprived the country of the opportunity to openly debate, negotiate and come to an agreed position on traditional and cultural institutions. In restoring traditional institutions, the government acted opportunistically to win political support among the Baganda, after failing to intimidate Baganda monarchies and activists from dropping their demands for a federal system of government. It subordinated traditional rulers to NRA/M rule by not spelling out powers of traditional institutions. Although traditional rulers are supposed to play cultural roles only and should

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<sup>29</sup> The Republic of Uganda, *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, National Assembly, Official Report, November 1988; Sam Obbo, 'City Square Calm', *New Vision* (Kampala), 10 May 1991: 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> See J. Oloka-Onyango, 'Constitutional Transitions in Museveni's Uganda: New Horizons or Another False Start?' *Journal of African Law*, 39, 2 (1995): 158.

not participate in politics, determining what is political depends on the president's interpretation. It is also the president who has the powers to sanction the creation or recognition of a cultural institution. The president by his own admission is the king of kings of *Ssabagabbe*. The President he has supported the creation of new kingdoms and chiefdoms where non-existed. Such was the case of Buruuli 'kingdom' whose creation was sanctioned, if not instigated by the government, to the chagrin of Buganda Kingdom. The government has also withheld recognition for the restoration of Ankole Kingdom, and the establishment of others like the Rwenzururu kingdom. After the 1993 constitutional amendments, Charles Mumbere declared a restoration of the Rwenzururu Kingdom<sup>31</sup> and sought President Museveni's support and recognition of the Kingdom. But there has not been any equivocal support from the president who uses the grant of recognition for patronage. This has contributed to lack of support for the NRM and also increased animosity between NRM politicians and their political opponents. It has also made the area a fertile ground for regional rebellions such as those of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebels who invaded in 1996. At one time, the government accused the Bakonzo, including 'King' Charles Mumbere who was in exile, of supporting the ADF. However, Mumbere denied any link with the rebel group. Nonetheless, many Bakonzo were reportedly arrested, detained and tortured. Critics have accused the NRM government of exploiting the conflict to suppress its opponents by deliberately linking them with the ADF.

The CA had its shortcomings. The CA statute and rules of procedure were designed in such a way as to benefit the NRM.<sup>32</sup> Besides, the NRM government manipulated CA deliberations through

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<sup>31</sup> Tom Stacey, *Tribe: The Hidden History of the Mountain of the Moon*, (London: Binder and Stacey International, 2003): 377.

<sup>32</sup> Constituent assembly Statute (Statute No. 6 of 1993).

patronage and intimidation.<sup>33</sup> It carried out a cabinet reshuffle and appointed a number of CA delegates to cabinet position, and some directors in boards of state-run parastatals, and reportedly moderate voices in government and CA.<sup>34</sup> The conduct of the CA regarding contentious issues did not also encourage consensus building, and led to criticisms that outcomes were fixed in advance.<sup>35</sup> For instance, the question of whether Uganda should become a federal state was rejected firmly without a vote. And on the nature of political systems, the CA which was dominated by members of the NRM voted to retain the 'Movement' or no party system for five years, and made provision for a national referendum to determine whether to revert to multiparty political system after five years. This denied the country the opportunity to resolve one of the major sources of conflicts in Uganda. Entrenchment of the 'Movement' system of governance in the constitution led to increased and continued suppression of the activities of political parties on the ground that the constitution prohibited their activities.<sup>36</sup> This has generated intense conflict over the political space.

Since the promulgation of a new constitution in 1995, presidential and parliamentary elections were held under the 'no party' movement system of governance in 1996 and 2001. Intimidation, harassment and violence against opposition multi-party coalition political groups marred the 1996 elections. During the campaigns, NRM supporters branded supporters of the leader of the Democratic Party (DP) and candidate of the opposition coalition, Paul Ssemogerere traitors; and

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<sup>33</sup> Omara Atubo, 'New Constitution: NRM Intimidated, Bribed to Win....', *Monitor* (Kampala), 4 September 1995; John Kakande, 'NRM is Influencing CA, says Mulenga', *New Vision* (Kampala), 29 July 1995.

<sup>34</sup> Kiiza Besigye, 'The Evolution and Character of the National Resistance Movement (NRM), and the Movement Political System in Uganda', [www.besigye.com/besigye\\_statement.htm](http://www.besigye.com/besigye_statement.htm), 11 November 2001.

<sup>35</sup> Dani Wadada Nabudere, *Uganda Referendum 2000: Winners and Losers*, (Kampala: Monitor Publications, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> Joe Oloka-Onyango, "'New Breed" Leadership, Conflict, and Reconstruction in the Great Lakes Region of Africa: A Socio-Political Biography of Uganda's Yoweri Kaguta Museveni', *Africa Today*, 50, 3 (Spring 2004).

subjected them to systematic harassment and intimidation. This was particularly the case in southwestern Uganda where NRM supporters considered it a crime for anybody to oppose Yoweri Museveni or advocate for return to multi-party political system.<sup>37</sup>

The NRA/M used scaremonger tactics to sow seeds of discord and undermine support for Paul Ssemogerere in the southern part of Uganda. Paul Ssemogerere's alliance with the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) and his statement that he would not oppose return to Uganda of former President Milton Obote, were used by the NRM to scare people from voting for him. Thus instead of using democratic elections to resolve conflicts, the NRM leadership used the elections to entrench the north-south divide and to maintain the southern consensus on which it relies to remain in power. The results of the presidential elections reflected the regional north-south divide. Thus, although Yoweri Museveni won the presidential elections with about 75 per cent, he lost by a wide margin in war ravaged northern Uganda. The same voting pattern was repeated during the 2001 and 2006 elections, which indicated a deepening of the north-south rift.<sup>38</sup>

Intimidation, harassment and violence intensified during and after the 2001 elections. A parliamentary committee report on election violence attributed this among others, to activities of the army, intelligence organizations and militias.<sup>39</sup> After the elections, Yoweri Museveni's main opponent and former bush war associate, Kizza Besigye, fled to exile after losing an appeal to the Supreme Court, which ruled by a margin of 3-2 vote that there were widespread irregularities during the elections. A number of Besigye's political

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<sup>37</sup> Geoffrey B. Tukahebwa, "Block Voting" in South Western Uganda: the Case of 1996 Elections in Rukungiri District', in Sabiti Makara et.al. (eds), *Voting for Democracy in Uganda: Issues in Recent Elections*, (Kampala: LDC Publishers, 2003): 203.

<sup>38</sup> Sabiti Makara, 'Uganda's 2006 Elections: Consolidating Democracy and Building Peace? *East African Journal of Peace and Human Rights*, 13, 1 (2007): 60-65.

<sup>39</sup> Republic of Uganda, *Report of the Select Committee on Election Violence*, September 2002.

associates also fled the country, while others were arrested and charged with treason. The government alleged that Besigye had formed an armed group, and was preparing to attack Uganda from the Democratic Republic of Congo. It was also reported that Besigye's former campaign agent, James Opoka had linked-up with the LRA, but was later killed by LRA leader Joseph Kony. Besigye denied any involvement in insurgency, although he did not rule out resorting to armed struggle to bring political change to Uganda.

As I have already argued, by attempting to link its political opponents with armed rebel groups, the NRA/M government has found it convenient to use conflicts to suppress political opposition and to militarize society. It has therefore not been keen to link democratization with conflict resolution. Since the 2001 presidential elections the NRM leadership has also become more intolerant and repressive. In 2001 a military general was appointed to head the Uganda Police Force. Since then, political cadres and military men have been recruited into the police force, allegedly to 'improve it'.

In March 2003 the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) decided to amend the 1995 constitution and allow a return to multi-party political system and removal of the 'two term limit'. Critics argued that the decision to allow multi-party system was not based on the desire to promote democracy but on expediency. The NRM used it to get rid of internal opposition and for perpetuating Yoweri Museveni's personal rule.<sup>40</sup> Besides, patronage, bribery and manipulation riddled the process of amending the constitution. Furthermore, despite adopting multiparty politics the NRA/M continues to operate like it did under the no party 'Movement' political system. Opposition political parties are not allowed to operate freely. Harassments and intimidation of opposition politicians by security agents has continued. Multi-party politics has been controlled and distorted.

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<sup>40</sup> Sabiti Makara, 'Uganda's 2006 Elections: Consolidating Democracy and Building Peace?' *East African Journal of Peace and Human Rights*, 13, 1 (2007):65-80.

The above shortcomings notwithstanding, a new constitution was promulgated in 1995 amidst optimism. There have also been some remarkable developments since the promulgation of a new constitution in 1996. The parliament has also ventured in areas like conflict resolution. In 1996, with the euphoria of the 'transition' to democracy after the promulgation of a new constitution and elections, the 6<sup>th</sup> Parliament extracted concession from the government of Uganda to look into the conflict in northern Uganda. However, the inclination towards military solution to internal conflicts was too strong. Besides, like all parliaments in authoritarian states, the Ugandan parliament was (and is still) weak. The presidency controls it, and it suffers from the perils of parliaments in personal states. Thus, the Parliamentary Sessional Committee on Defence and Internal Affairs, which investigated the conflicts in northern Uganda ruled out peace talks with rebels, and instead recommended a military solution. This decision undermined the role of democratization in the resolution of conflicts. Nonetheless, a minority report by two members recommended peace talks.<sup>41</sup> The minority reported argued that parliament should be the last institution to shut the doors to peaceful resolution of conflicts.

From then on, civil society groups sustained the search for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The government of Uganda, which prefers military solution, gave half-hearted approval to civil society initiatives. Thus, although President Yoweri Museveni endorsed the peace efforts by Acholi Religious Leaders and 'Rwodi' (chiefs), cooperation by military and intelligence agencies could not be taken for granted, as representatives of Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) who were attacked by the army during one peace mission painfully learnt.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Republic of Uganda, *Towards a Peaceful Resolution of the Armed Conflict in Northern Uganda: A Minority Report from the Committee on Defence and Internal Affairs on the War in Northern Uganda*, (January 1997): 1–4.

<sup>42</sup> See, 'The Arrest ('Capture') of Fathers Tarcisio, Julius and Carlos Rodriguez, *Justice and Peace News*, (Gulu), Vol. 2, No. 5, (August 2002).

Insistence by the government of Uganda on military response to conflict and its efforts at subverting democratic reforms has raised serious concern about the behaviour of western donors have continued to provide aid to Uganda. The government of Uganda has been able to refuse to pursue its militant approach because of the support of major western donor states such as the United States. As Ellen Hauser has argued, western donor states, especially the United States, has used President Yoweri Museveni as an 'interlocutor' in the region.<sup>43</sup> The United States for instance, has been more preoccupied with promoting its national interest. It has used the conflict in northern Uganda as a proxy in its conflict with Sudan, first in the struggle against the spread of Islamic fundamentalism and later the 'war on terror'. The government of Uganda has been shrewd enough to align its policies closely with those of the United States to preempt pressures to resolve conflicts through democratic means. When in December 2001, the United States added the LRA and ADF on its 'Terrorist Exclusion List' under the newly enacted US Patriot Act, designed to protect the US and its citizens after September 11,<sup>44</sup> Uganda followed suit. In March of 2002, Uganda followed suit and passed the Anti-Terrorism Act, thereby criminalizing the LRA and other insurgent groups and excluding peaceful negotiations with them.

After years of mounting pressure, in June 1996 the Ugandan government, dropped its insistence on military solution to the conflict in northern Uganda and accepted to take part in peace talks with the LRA under the mediation of the Government of Southern Sudan.<sup>45</sup> The talks got off to a difficult start with both parties taking hard-line stances. From the onset, the Government of Uganda viewed the purpose of the talks as that for negotiating the terms of surrender for

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<sup>43</sup> Ellen Hauser, 'Uganda's Relations with Western Donors in the 1990s: What Impact on Democratization?', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 37, 4 (1999): 621-24.

<sup>44</sup> Integrated regional Information Networks (IRIN), Uganda: IRIN Focus on Humanitarian Issue in 2001', <http://www.irinnews.org>.

<sup>45</sup> Yoweri Museveni, 'State of the Nation Address, 6 June 2007, reprinted in the *Daily Monitor (Kampala)*, 8 June 2006; and *New Vision (Kampala)*, 10 June 2006.

the LRA. It rejected LRA calls for cessation of hostilities. The LRA adopted the tactic of walking out and causing stalemate.<sup>46</sup> By accepting to negotiate, the president was playing the card of ‘expediency’. In his unguarded moments, the President betrays himself. He uses words like ‘soft landing’ to refer to the Juba Peace talks. He has also been reported to have said: “*I am always branded a warmonger. So I had to be here and show that I am a very peaceful person.*”<sup>47</sup> Despite initial challenges, the LRA and Government of Uganda signed a landmark Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in August 2006,<sup>48</sup> and subsequently signed four other agreements. The talks raised hopes for restoration of peace in northern Uganda. There was remarkable improvement in security in northern Uganda. However, the failure of LRA leader Joseph Kony to show up in Rikwangba for the signing of the final agreement and Uganda government’s resumption of military attacks against the LRA rebels in December 2008 have thrown the prospects for peaceful resolution of the conflict in balance.

## Conclusion

After more than two decades in power during which the NRM government has carried out a number of democratic reforms, Uganda is still afflicted by a number of conflicts. The NRM has not linked democratic reforms with conflict resolution. Democratization in Uganda has focussed on the building of institutions as opposed to consensus building and accommodation. The process has been controlled and has reflected the aspirations and interests of the NRM leadership. The NRM carried out democratic reforms to consolidate its hold on power and broaden its support base. It initiated reforms to get

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<sup>46</sup> Michael Wakabi, ‘Kony, Kampala set for Ceasefire as Talks Open in Juba’, *East African* (Nairobi), 10-16 July 2006: 8; Frank Nyakairu, ‘Government Gives Terms for Peace’, *Daily Monitor* (Kampala), 17 July 2006: 1-2.

<sup>47</sup> Kony Not Serious, says Museveni’, *New Vision* (Kampala), 15 April 2008: 1.

<sup>48</sup> Henry Mukasa, ‘Government, LRA Sign Peace Deal’, *Sunday Vision* (Kampala), 27 August 2006: 1-2.

foreign aid from western donors. Massive inflow of aid from the west has enabled the NRM to distribute resources to clients and maintain a coalition that has given the impression that a national consensus exists in Uganda. There are also indications that the NRM has had every intention to continue monopolising power and subverting the processes of democratization. It has sought to maintain itself in power through force.

The consequence is that, Uganda is possibly more divided today than it was in 1986 when the NRM came to power. Regionalism and ethnicity have become important consideration in the allocation of scarce resources. The conflict in northern Uganda has resulted in widespread economic and institutional collapse. Poverty, malnutrition and mortality rate are well above emergency thresholds. This has widened the regional north-south. The development of two countries and two economies, a prosperous south and an impoverished north has been entrenched. Local level conflicts have also intensified. In addition there is increasing lack of tolerance and growing dissent in the country, as numerous political groups are alienated.