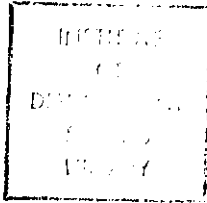


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IS THERE A NORTHERN QUESTION?



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INTERNAL CONFLICT IN UGANDA:
IS THERE A "NORTHERN QUESTION"?

By

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The prevalence of internal conflicts within human societies has for a long time been recognised by social theorists as an inevitable consequence of the co-existence of large numbers of human beings in a situation that is not only spatially limited in the geographical sense, but also in terms of the resources men require for their sustenance and survival.¹ These two limitations, together with the human and social diversity that are to be found normally in a society, create a naturally fertile ground for internal conflicts. This being the case, it is obvious that a paper like this one can hardly do justice to the plethora of internal conflicts that may exist in any given society, most of which will, in any case, tend to lend themselves to being handled through peaceful, constitutional, or other less sensational methods of settlement, leaving normally only a few to be tackled through the use of such force and violence as have "helped" Uganda to "win" for herself her wellknown notoriety as a country beriddled with problems of internal conflicts. It is, ^{only the} thus, _/ the latter type which will draw most of our attention in this paper.

Conflicts of this kind assume in young or newly independent countries, like those of Africa, a degree of significance rarely possible in the older states of the world. For, as Clifford Geertz has argued,² in states of this kind politics tends to be characterised by intensive and furious inter-group rivalries, assuming sometimes even an "Either Life or Death" intensity, as groups based on party affiliations or such other foundations as tribe, nationality, ethnicity, region, religion etc. struggle to fend for their

particular interests in the new political situation created by independence and by the departure of the colonial rulers who used to serve as umpires while their regime lasted to keep the peace among such groups as they had brought together into a single colony. In the process, rules of the political game, as prescribed, for example, in the independence constitutions - rules which spell out, among others, how and when to replace people in power or to extend their tenure or to dish out the meagre resources available to the various groups are prone to be violated, with force or violent conflict remaining as the only means available to remedy group grievances.³

In the case of Africa, one does not need to look far and wide to identify states whose recent political histories do conform to this very classic statement on internal conflict - Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Sudan, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Chad - you name it: all are going through the experience Geertz had prophesied in 1963 when he wrote his article

II

A Brief Survey of Uganda's Violent Internal Conflicts:

Be that as it may, it seems to be an incontrovertible fact that Ugandans, compared with fellow Africans in many other states on the continent, have had more than their due share of the affliction of violent internal conflicts. Indeed, as we meet at this seminar to discuss the problem of internal conflict in Uganda, a real and bloody war is raging on in the North and North-East of the country between soldiers of the National Resistance Army and the so-called "Rebels", a collective term for several groups of armed combatants each with its own acronym - UPDM/A, FOBA, UPA, etc.

Whatever the war may be all about, and despite all the secrecy that tends to surround internal conflicts of this kind, some highly disturbing consequences of the fighting have been filtering through to the rest of Uganda as well as to the rest of the world. Take,

for example, the staggering "Kill Counts" as they come through our news media. The essence of war as some sage has said may, indeed, be violence. But when the violence is against one's own people one cannot help being shaken up by the staggering "Kill-Counts" that have been reaching our ears. But even these are only a partial picture of what may be happening to human life in that apparently far away corner of Uganda. They do not, for example, include civilian non-combatants like and their property, who in a situation like this are the grass on which two elephants are fighting. With the human beings and their personal property, a number of social and economic institutions and other infrastructures that cater for the general public also tend to go - things like schools, hospitals, ginneries etc., are either closed or destroyed outright in the course of the fighting.⁴

This particular case of internal conflict has been presented first in this brief survey of violent internal conflicts in Uganda only because of its current topicality. Otherwise, it should have given pride of place to the older and better known tragedy of the "Luwero Triangle" which, until January of 1986, and for five full years, darkened the political horizon of this country. Like the above war, and, indeed like all "Guerilla vs Government" conflicts the world over, it was shrouded in secrecy, with neither the guerillas nor the Government being sufficiently generous with public information about their encounters or progress.⁵ Fortunately, with the coming into power of the National Resistance Movement/Army, that veil of secrecy has now been relatively rolled back, and there is plenty that many of us did not know, but now know, about that tragedy.

I have, nevertheless, hoped to get myself even better informed about it by studying closely a report put together by a team of Makerere Social Scientists which toured and studied the Luwero Triangle immediately after the fall of the Lutwa junta in January 1986 before writing this paper. But by the time

of writing this, I had not yet managed to secure that vitally important document from the colleague who was supposed to make it available. It would have, been for me, the nearest thing to first-hand information on the havoc and tribulations that befell this other corner of Uganda. Fortunately, my quest for further information on the war was destined not to be completely frustrated. For, in June of last year, as a member of a Commission of Inquiry into the Local Government System appointed by the Hon. Minister of Local Government, I had the wonderful opportunity of touring virtually the whole of Uganda with the exception of Acholi and Lango where the war with the Rebels was already moving to higher and higher pitches of violence.

Thanks to that opportunity, I traversed almost the whole of the "Triangle" moving from Kampala through Luwero Town to Nakasekke Town; from Kampala through Mpigi, Mityana, to Mubende; and, from its western side, from Hoima through Kagadi to Mubende once more. While the human skulls heaped along some roads within the Triangle told their ghastly story, the either blown-down or roofless structures one saw along roads once booming with prosperity like, for example, the section from Busunju to Kiboga, told in their own way the story of the sorry toll that the war in the Triangle took of the inhabitants and their property. The deeply gullied roads and the unduely overgrown wild grass and bushes along them also did in their own way tell the story of what the war in the Luwero Triangle must have meant.⁶

Both the war in the "Luwero Triangle" and the war in the North and North-East of Uganda have been singled out here only because they are the most recent. Otherwise, they are only two stories in a long-drawn-out saga of tragic violent and destructive internal conflicts that have bedevilled the political history of this country since the attainment of political independence a quarter of a century ago.

Thus, besides them, numerous other examples are available for mention. These would include: The Rwenzururu Movement (1961+); the seemingly eternal conflicts in and revolving around Karamoja; the whole question known in our recent history as the "Buganda Question" with the many facets it has presented for internal conflict, particularly between 1961 and 1966. Among these examples we must also include what some analysts have come to refer to generally as "institutionalised state violence" something that has impressed itself most firmly on our minds since the Amin years. In all of these instances and in several others that we may have overlooked, as well as in the two to which we have referred in greater detail above, various groups answering to such diverse membership criteria as tribe, nationality, region, religion, ideology, "defenders of national integrity" etc. have had to come out to use violence and force in the pursuit of their claims; causing a lot of killings and other painful damages.

Quite obviously, the people of Uganda still have a lot to tell to each other as to why this country has had to go through so many violent internal conflicts. Many have the answers, but harbour them within their breasts. Yet they must now speak so that they may understand their predicament and be better able to overcome or to circumvent them. This is why this seminar on internal conflict is welcome development on the behalf of a people, like ours, who are either too shy, or too arrogant, to talk to each other about their problems even when there is so much suffering and so much gnashing of teeth in anger about this suffering.

Now, it might be asked, if all the people of Uganda still have a lot of exchange of ideas to do in order to understand their predicament with regard to the problem of violent internal conflict, why pick on the "North" in particular? Is this not to re-affirm the opinion, held in some quarters in this country, namely, that

North rners have been responsible for the lack of progress, as well as, for the damages and suffering that this country has had to go through?⁷

For those who are bothered by these questions, let me offer the following assurances before we go any farther. First, it must be realised that it always takes at least two individuals or groups to have a conflict. Thus, any attitude on the part of any group in this country bordering on the notion "I am holier than you" would clearly not be a useful attitude in the understanding of our internal conflicts. Secondly, and still by way of a re-assurance to those who might be bothered by the above questions, here is my preliminary answer that I intend to elaborate upon in the rest of this paper: the issue as to whether or not there is a "Northern Question" is a matter that is both complex and delicate, necessitating, in the former respect, very careful diagnosis of the problem and identification of remedies, and, in the latter case, considerable tact and level-headedness in judgement. On this note, let us now proceed to examine the issue as closely as we can.

III

The "North" Before Independence

What do we exactly mean by the term "North" in the context of Uganda. This is an apt question to get us started on our search for an answer or answers to the main question before us.

Before independence, the term "North" carried a distinctly political meaning, referring specifically to the Northern Province, one of the four large units above the district level, into which the British organised the country they created at the turn of the century and named Uganda. As such it referred collectively to the districts of Karamoja, Lango, Acholi, West Nile and its sub-district of Madi.

Prior to this British organisation of the area as a political unit the peoples of the area had lived in different tribes or segments of tribes of various cultures and political set-ups. Culturally and economically all had their own forms of activities that sustained them. In fact in their own way and like other people on the globe these tribes had their own cultural pride, too.⁸ Trade, diplomatic relations and warfare among them did take place particularly between the neighbouring Lango and Acholi; the Acholi and Alur; the Acholi and Madi; and The Lugbara, Kibu, Lendu on the one hand, and the Alur on the other.

It is significant here to mention in relation to this period prior to the advent of British rule to the region, that these exchanges and communication between these peoples extended well into the South to cover a large portion of what is today referred to as Southern Uganda in contradistinction to Northern Uganda. Mention must, in particular, be made of the political relationship that existed across the Nile between the Kingdom of Bunyoro-Mitara and other "kingly" houses in Northern Uganda.⁹ Nor must we forget the political asylum and ready hospitality that the two major Southern Kings, namely Mwanga of Buganda, and Kabalega of Bunyoro received in the North when they fled from their pursuers the British who were bent on dispoiling their kingdoms in order to create their own political regime.¹⁰ It is, thus difficult to avoid the conclusion that there was a time, not in the far distant past, when the peoples of the North and those of the South could look at each other as individuals or groups to be accepted or rejected on the strength of their own humanity or friendship without such eye blinkers as later prejudices were to introduce during the years of British rule. At that point in time people must have hardly thought of the "North" or "Northerners" as constituting any particular question in inter-group relationships within a large portion of what is now called Uganda in which contacts were possible.

But this generally happy state of affairs underwent considerable changes in the course of British rule. This author does not believe too much in assigning all African blames to the imperialists. Nevertheless the hard facts of history sometimes make this unavoidable and the best that can be done under the circumstance is to promise even-handedness in meting out blame in our treatment as to the causes that underlie the so-called "Northern Question". Further, another paper on the colonial roots of internal conflict scheduled to be read in the course of this seminar will presumably go into much greater detail than is possible here.¹¹ It should therefore suffice for us here to say that the British made at least three contributions toward the creation of a "Northern Question". First, through the system of indirect rule which they administered in discriminatory or different "dozes" to different parts of the country, some parts of the country came to acquire more privilege than others. Under it the North had quite easily the least privileged position. Secondly, through their development and labour policies, the North became not only an under-exploited region, but a mere reservoir of cheap and generally undesirable labour to the South.¹² In some cases, like that of Karamoja in particular, and of West Nile, and Kadi, there was even what one could describe as outright under-government,¹³ the inability of a government to fulfil roles expected of it and to respond effectively to the demands imposed upon it by its environment and people. In short, in all these ways, British colonial policy, whether deliberately or not, was busy, in the course of the sixty years or so that it lasted, in differentiating the North from the rest of the country.

Another contribution toward differentiation between the North and the South will have greater relevance in a subsequent sub-section. But we might as well make mention of it here while we are on the theme of differentiation. This came through the spate of scholarship in the field of Social Anthropology that swept through the country,

particularly after World War II. This development did, among other things, categorise the peoples of the country into various ethnic/racial/linguistic groups. Terms like the Bantu, the Nilotics, the Nilo-Hamites, the Sudanics, and all that, began to crop up in school classrooms, so that a child who was a "Nilotic" was now made to learn in his Primary 3 or 4 that he was; while another one in a similar class who had not known that apart from being a "Muntu" or "dano" its equivalent in the Nilotic Lwoo language was similarly now made to know that he was from the "Bantu" group. All this was, of course, not bad education. For, as some people have said, the best study of man is man himself; hence the desirability of making an education to help man to know the various forms and positions he occupies in the cosmos.

But one negative effect did emerge out of all this kind of educational awakening in regard to the ethnic/linguistic/racial categories to which Ugandans belonged. Some people simply took it too seriously. These categories eventually came to assume too much significance, especially among the educated classes who are, for better or for worse, the main "Vector factors" for the dissemination of divisionism or sectarianism as it is commonly known in this country today. However, more of that later on. For the time being we need to stress that another important line of division between the North and the South had been drawn through the use of these categories, with the South being generally taken to be predominantly "Bantu" and the North being equally generally, taken to be predominantly "Nilotic".

But the matter was not allowed to end there. On the basis of political organisation, the social anthropologists had pumped into these categories notions of cultural superiority and inferiority. Those with large state organisations were culturally superior and those without them were culturally inferior. Here again the Bantu and the Nilotics fell apart from each other, as the Bantu were said

to have large state organisations while the Nilotics and others were found wanting in this respect. Thus here was yet another important line of differentiation between the North and the South.

Although these lines of differentiation all put the North in a clear disadvantage as an underprivileged back-yard of Uganda inhabited by people whose cultures, at least politically, were generally presented by the social anthropologists as being inferior, these disadvantaged peoples did not articulate their deprivation and neglect in the form of a "Northern Question" as might easily have been the case for a people so grotesquely neglected and undergoverned as they were.

For this at least two developments may be said to have been accountable. To be sure, at the beginning of the modern nationalist phase in Uganda i.e. in the early 1950's, Northerners felt quite uncertain and suspicious about the prospect of an independent Uganda which some of them assumed for granted would be dominated by the Baganda. But then the two developments we are referring to intervened; and the manner they were handled disarmed many Northerners of any fears that they may have had about their position in an independent Uganda.

The first was the new and stridently combative form that the Buganda Question assumed on the eve of independence with the founding of the Kabaka Yekka (the King Only) or KY Party in 1961, and its strong determination to maintain the "political status quo" in relation to the position of the Kingdom of Buganda in an independent Uganda. The second one was the determination of two nationalist leaders determined to uphold the "national" integrity of Uganda, namely, the late Benedicto Kiwanuka and Milton Obote, with their respective parties the Democratic Party (DP) and the Uganda Peoples' Congress (UPC) firmly behind them.

The first of these developments completely over-shadowed such lukewarm restlessness on the part of the Northerners as could have become hot enough to constitute a "Northern Question". Secondly, whatever the resultant of the triangular battle for national power that now gripped the KY, DP and UPC, as long as it did not consist of a complete or single-handed ascendancy of the KY, could not have exacerbated Northern fears about Buganda domination in the nation, thanks to the fact that both Kiwanuka and Obote were regarded in the North as genuine nationalists who could not be expected to disregard the interests of the North.

In the event, Obote and his UPC won the courtship of the KY and hence of official Buganda. The country thus proceeded to independence without much ado from the North about its position in an independent Uganda. In terms of the basic question before us, we may, thus, submit that even at this crucial stage there was still no significant "Northern Question" to worry about.

IV

Independence and Political Dominance of the North:

Not only did Obote and his UPC/KY come to power at the Centre. He held on to it for eight solid years without any break-in between the years for popular elections. Then another Northern man, Idi Amin, overthrew him; and, again held on to ^{power} for another eight solid years without any break-in between the years for popular elections. When Amin finally had to make his exit from the centre three Baganda leaders - Yusufu Lule, Godfrey Binaisa, and Paulo Muwanga had short spells of power at the centre, only to give way again to Obote whose second regime was again not really too short as it covered a reasonably long period of nearly five years from December 1980 to July 1985. Thus, between them, these two Northern leaders ruled Uganda for more

than 20 out of the 25 years during which Uganda has been independent. And yet it must be remembered that Tito Okello and Bazilio Okello, two other Northerners, also came in after having expelled Obote from power in July 1985 to round off this story of almost uninterrupted Northern rule. Thus, without any doubt, the first quarter century of independence has been the quarter century of Northern political dominance. But dominance brings along with it some unique problems of social/political relations among groups about which we should be clear if we are to appreciate the place of the North in internal conflicts in Uganda at this particular juncture.

Generally, in Africa as we know it today, to have a president from a given sector of a country always results in other people taking it for granted that that particular sector is as a whole dominant in the political system, this even if the President makes an effort to spread out his appointments to higher offices of state as well as development projects throughout the country. Nor is it taken into account that the vast masses of the people from the area from which such a president comes will generally neither come near him nor acquire, during his tenure of office, anything extra to improve their hard lot in life which is quite often below the poverty line. Should large numbers of the security forces also happen to hail from the president's particular sector of the country, then the verdict as to the dominance of that sector is deemed to be verified beyond any reasonable doubt. Again, the lot of the ordinary masses from the sector where such a president and his fellow tribesmen in the armed forces come from is not considered to be important: the particular sector of the country as a whole is deemed to be in political ascendancy in the country. Neither Obote, Amin, or any Northern leader coming after them nor the Northerners, as a whole could escape from this crude judgement.¹⁴

Now, political dominance, as thus conceived, has consequences that are relevant to our analysis here both for the so-called dominant group as well as for those other sectors of society who consider them to be dominant. Here, let us avail ourselves of the opportunity of a comparative perspective afforded by lessons we have learned from the ^{better} known "Buganda Question" which we referred to briefly sometime earlier on in this paper. In a large measure, that question had to do with the politically dominant position of Buganda and how to secure it in the new independent Uganda that was about to come into being. In this particular case, two important consequences emerged. The first was the feeling of "specialness" or "apartness" that tended to be felt in and about Buganda. The Relationships Commission of 1961, for example, saw this quite clearly and articulated it correctly when it said that:

"The problem of Buganda overshadows all other problems in Uganda."15

Thus, first

And foremost, How was Buganda to relate to the rest of independent Uganda? But, there was, as we have said another or second consequences, too. For, while Buganda felt this way, the reaction from outside about its political dominance was one of suspicion, fear, and even hatred in some quarters, resulting in the ganging up by some other parts of the country to form a political party to face up to the challenge or "Question of Buganda".

And yet Buganda's so-called political dominance was a carefully circumscribed and restricted dominance that held sway only over Buganda and over affairs touching closely on Buganda. It was never as extensive in area and scope as the political dominance that Obote and Amin with their security forces appeared to enjoy throughout the country after independence. If the much more limited political dominance Buganda enjoyed, could have the two serious consequences observed above, what guarantees were there that these consequences would not manifest themselves in the relatively long period of Northern dominanc

The answer is, there were no guarantees. In fact the North came to be singled out as a special region enjoying an undue share of the national cake particularly as represented by the numbers of men and officers in the security forces. Even in the civil service and the parastatal bodies, notwithstanding Obote's general disposition to spread out his appointments across the nation, murmurs could be heard, especially during his Regime II. As for Amin, although he set off initially with a broad-based cabinet of highly educated men, he did not take long to disband and to replace them mainly by Nubians/Muslims and other people - his main criteria of selection being that the candidate be either a Nubian/Muslim or a West Niler. This, too, people noted and murmured about; and although his arena for recruitment of fellow Nubians or Muslims extended over the whole country, and even beyond sometimes, it went down in some people's minds as over-patronization of the North.

As we have noted in the case of Buganda the second consequence of "regional specialness" is the kind of resentment which takes the form of an urge to unity on the part of those who feel excluded. The North did not escape becoming the object of this kind of resentment. While this resentment started off unobtrusively around 1964 among Parliamentarians and within the UPC, it gathered considerable momentum, thanks to the unwitting contributions of both the Obote and Amin Government in keeping it alive. People in power - suffer from a peculiar disadvantage in the context of internal conflict: through the multifarious executive decisions they must make, they run much more easily than people out of power the risk of alienating a lot of people.

This is the risk that both Obote and Amin fell into during their long tenure of power. To confine ourselves to the theme of internal conflict, a number of their decisions impinged upon Buganda and the Baganda, or had to be executed within the soils of Buganda.

In this way Luganda's resentment became the pivot around which the move for some kind of unity against the North came to revolve.

It was in this kind of context that the "North", the region from which these leaders and the soldiers who had sustained them in power came to loom out large especially in the minds of some young intellectuals from the South as a distinct problem or "Question" to be reckoned with head-on. I can best elaborate this point by taking the reader now to the period after the exit of Idi Amin from power. As will be recalled, the fall of Idi Amin was followed by a spell of freedom of the press and expression that eventually even culminated in the general elections to Parliament of 1980.

While those elections have since been shrouded in controversy, the campaign for them was conducted most vigorously and frankly on the campus of Makerere University. The leaders of all the four contending political parties - The UPC, the DP, the UPM, and the CP - were welcomed and given a forum to address the University Community, always with the University authorities, as a matter of courtesy and decorum, playing the host to them. Apart from such highly formal occasions members of the University community belonging to the various parties took up the cudgels on the behalf of their respective parties in such various informal forums as the Senior Staff Club, the Senior Staff Common Room etc. to argue and further the causes of their parties in the campaign. It was on occasions like these that one frequently heard a blunt and frank assertion which went more or less like this:

"We are tired of Northerners - they have had enough of a chance to prove themselves, but have failed."

But even before the campaign for these elections this opinion had sufficiently congealed itself into an important body of opinion in the minds of many Ugandans, particularly those then in exile who thought about the future of their country.

The North and its place in the country - or more precisely, in the leadership of the country, it would appear from this, had become a major question to be resolved, a resolution to which neither the general elections, free and fair, or rigged, or the displacement of Obote by the two Okello's - Tito and Bazilio, respectively, held the clue. Over the years since independence, the North had become a problem; and the only way out was to crack that problem, in order to find a suitable place ^{for others} in the national political scheme of things. If this interpretation is correct, as I contend it is, going to the bush was inevitable. Its consequence we now know, of course. However, in case one requires specificity, we may say that, thanks to that war, what had increasingly become a "Northern Question" during the 20 or so years of independence, namely, continued Northern political dominance was arrested, giving rise to a new political situation. How the North is fitting itself into this new situation, is our next step.

V

Recent Changes in the Political Character of the North:

We have already seen how the North was organised by the British into a single political unit. In appreciating the continued potential of the North as a source of problems to the rest of Uganda as well as for devising suitable policies towards the North, there is the need to understand the nature of the transformation that the traditional North has undergone as a political entity.

First, it is to be noted in this regard that the large unit that the British set up as the Northern Province was very badly rattled and shaken up by the abolition of the structure that held it together politically, namely, the post of the Provincial Commissioner which was effected for all the three provinces, outside Buganda, which carried these posts. While it is true that other provincial officers as bore the responsibility for professional and technical duties in

the province were left in place, these could not bring the kind of political coordination that the existence, status, and prestige of the Provincial Commissioner had made possible.¹⁶

Accordingly, while as we have shown earlier above both Obote and Amin were able to cash politically on the support of Northern soldiers, centrifugal forces were also at work among these very same soldiers - centrifugal forces that were eventually to propel them to wreak as much havoc on their own peoples of the North as they did elsewhere. This is the pattern within which the military coup d'etat of Idi Amin in 1971 and the consequent wanton massacres of Acholi and Langi soldiers must be understood. In this regard, it has not been sufficiently appreciated that even before extending his murderous wrath all over the rest of the country, Amin had seen to it that even his own fellow West Nilers like Col. V. Ocima, the former member of Parliament, Mr. Martin Okello, the former Secretary for Defence, Mr. Martin Rubanga, all of whom belonged to the Alur tribe were massacred.

Eventually Amin's own time to go came in 1979; and with that what the historians describe as a "Re-action" against his home and his people in West Nile was launched by the Acholi and Langi, his fellow Northerners whom he had so ruthlessly molested, but who now had the better part of him. The Tanzanian soldiers who overran his home town and area of Arua did almost everything humanely possible to preserve the area, perhaps for fear of being described by the outside world as ruthless revanchists. But the Acholi and Langi fellow Northerners had no qualms on that score. Very extensive destruction of life and property was therefore carried out, leaving much of Arua the eye-sore it is today in terms of destroyed structures and many which may remain incomplete for many years to come, because their owners were killed in this ruthless exercise of revenge.

Finally, as is well known, these two brotherly tribes themselves fell apart in 1985, with their quarrel culminating in the overthrow of the Obote II regime in 1985. The havoc and damage wreaked by Acholi soldiers upon Lira and the surrounding areas belonging to their erstwhile ally the Langi, again defy description and will remain for long a matter of great shame.

All in all, then, that is the new political picture of the North that emerges. With all the above background of violent internal conflicts within even the North itself it is difficult to put forward the North as a single political entity that, as of now at least, is in a position to present any serious "Question" to the rest of Uganda. In fact, just like the Italy which Prince Clemens von Metternich the arrogant Austrian Foreign Minister (1773-1859) described in the 19th Century before its unification/ described as a mere "geographical expression", the North as a political entity could today also be described with correctness and without any contempt as a mere "geographical expression", lacking any internal political cohesion.

Be that as it may, we still must reckon with one point on this sub-theme before leaving it altogether. This is the point that old beliefs or myths do die hard, and have a tendency to hang around to help some people to sustain their collective morale or interests. It was, in fact, in this context that my late teacher, Professor Hans J. Morgenthau made the following brilliant observation which I find apt to quote at some length here to sustain the important conclusion we have reached in this particular section of the paper:

"All nations live by myths. That is, they paint a picture of the past that satisfy their needs but does violence to the historic record. Some myths are beneficial. They are those that strengthen a nation's confidence in having been, and being able to do what the tasks of the moment demand of it...."

"Other myths are pernicious. They draw from a distorted reality lessons for the understanding of the past and the charting of future action which please collective emotions, but lead judgement and action astray. They are a special curse which the past casts upon the future, a curse with which the dead threaten the living."17

The idea of the "North" of Uganda as a single monolithic political entity posing a question at the moment to the rest of Uganda would, in my view, be one such myth. But, to go along with Morgenthau, it would also be a dangerous myth as far as the national integrity of this country is concerned, suitable as it may be for serving the sectarian interests of some people in this country.

Not only is the North a mere geographical expression as we write. It is in terms of its boundaries a unit that is very permeable politically! That being the case, people who mean well whether they be from the East, Buganda or West, can penetrate it easily and do there such good national work as sowing the seeds of political unity and harmony, promoting, thereby, a speedy assimilation of the North in the rest of Uganda. The understanding between the NRM/NRA under Museveni and the UNRF under Moses Ali provides an example of this desirable penetration of the North. Similarly, whether one likes it or not, the extension of the recruitment ground of the NRA into Nebbi and Arua districts provides yet another example of the kind of "bona - fide" penetration we are talking about. So are the efforts to spread the NRM ideology as embodied in The Ten Point Programme and the innovation the Government intends to introduce in the area of local government. Apart from the current war in the North and North-east these "bona - fide" penetration now being attempted mainly in The West Nile would be possible in the rest of the North, too, hence the need and urgency of ending that war.

But just as "bona - fide" people are free to penetrate the North so are those who are not politically well-meaning. These, too, can penetrate the boundaries of the North to do such evil things as sowin

the seeds of disunity and discord, promoting in the process, the alienation of the North from the rest of Uganda. This group is so important in the context of this seminar, it deserves a word or two more to itself.

Any successful revolutionary change tends to bring to the fore in position of leadership ideological zealots, not only fanatically committed to the ideology of the movement that brought about the change, but also to its discipline and code of behaviour. On its part, the National Resistance Movement now in power had a good supply of ^{such} people, particularly in the forefront of its leadership - the commanders and cadres, as they have been called. Indeed, a great part of their success in the "Luwero Triangle" and elsewhere was the fruit of the contribution of men and women of this type. But it would be remiss on our part if we did not here draw attention to some of the lapses from the original code of commitment and behaviour that are now beginning to be noticed by the masses, particularly the masses in the North in the ranks of these people who were one time so careful about their behaviour in the face of the public.

in this regard,
It is opportune on my part that I write this precisely on the day when the President himself has been reported to express concern about the behaviour of soldiers along these lines when he recently addressed a meeting of The Defence Council.¹⁸ On my part, the behaviours of soldiers, and other people from outside the North, without good political will that could sow the seeds of disunity and discord, and, hence, promote the alienation of the North from the rest of the country about which I feel our national leadership and all well-meaning citizens should be apprised include, to cite but a few examples, the following mannerisms and traits: the wanton and careless application of insulting stereotypes that keep drumming into the ears of Northerners the highly questionable presumption that they are "primitive and backward" and that they are "idiots" or "Banyanya" etc. NRM/NRA personnel who have got addicted to

these facile phraseologies are definitely not suitable apostles of conciliation and friendship to the North. Fortunately, the NRM/NRA has a large team to choose from; it should, therefore, not be a problem to replace these missionaries of alienation with others who can serve as missionaries of national conciliation and assimilation. Traditional cultures in Uganda are diverse and in some instances very complex and highly sophisticated in their own unique ways; and, cultures, being such sensitive, aspects of group life, can any country really afford to have them tinkered with lightly by any Tom, Dick, and Harry?¹⁹

Apart from this concern about the assault on the cultures of the people of the North, the other important matter of concern that could give rise to alienation on the part of a region which, as we have already said time and time again is politically very receptive to positive and constructive influence from the rest of Uganda would be the behaviour and discipline of Government soldiers as they move among civilians dwelling in largely rural communities, who by the very nature of the community within which they live can be victimised, violated, or deprived of their possessions with almost complete immunity since the agencies of the state which should act as "countervailing" forces are either not available or too far away in the rural setting. But following on what the issue of the New Vision to which we have just made reference above has reported about the President's concern on indiscipline among soldiers, this particular issue seems to be in good and proper hands. It is not necessary therefore for us to dwell on it at length for now.

So much, then, for the ease and, in the overall, encouraging prospects with which the one-time political solid North, which for more than twenty years had threatened to monopolise state power, and, hence, to present to the rest of the nation a "Northern Question" of unending political dominance may now be politically penetrated. Bu

if we leave the story we have been struggling with in this sub-section at this point, it would fail to convey the fullness of the point we wish to convey in this section. We must, therefore, proceed now to fill in that missing portion.

We have said that considered from the political perspective, the North is now not a political monolith, if it ever was; and is therefore now easily available for penetration by political forces and influences from the rest of Uganda. However, and this is the missing link we now wish to put in place, the penetration of peoples, whether in the narrower sense of political penetration, or in the much wider sense of cultural penetration, is never sound if it is only a one-way affair. If it is only a one-way affair, it can give rise to unnecessary and serious complications in inter-group relations. These are, for example some complications about which, in the global context, the African states and the rest of the Third World nations are now complaining, namely, the problem of dependency in its multiple forms - political, cultural, economic etc. Penetration must, therefore, always be a two-way affair, such that the other group from "outside" can come in; while the group "inside" can also have ease of access into the "outside" group.

Concretely, what we mean here is that the peoples of the North must also have free and unquestionable penetration into the rest of the country. For then this is a more crucial point, because the South, particularly the Kampala-Jinja area is a metropolitan area, enjoying such facilities, amenities, and opportunities as have tended to draw up-country people, the world over, to such metropolitan complexes. The educational, social, and health institutions of this area, the employment opportunities, and so on, available here must be available not only to the people of the North but to all other Ugandans outside this area on the basis of equal opportunities and terms. One might perhaps

wish to bother to chip in the argument that, after all, we all laboured and sweated to create the facilities and opportunities for prosperity now available there. But that is not really the salient point. The real salient point is that metropolitan areas are metropolitan areas, and that unless we want to go the way of Apartheid South Africa, they must be managed on the basis of a kind of open door policy—certainly and without doubt, at least, for all citizens of the countries in which they are situated.

In the course of preparing this paper, I had the opportunity of discussing the topic with a number of Northern friends living in Kampala. The point we have just been discussing was one of the greatest concern to them. Many feared that there was a deliberate plot to dislodge Northerners from positions they held in Government and parastatal bodies, merely because they were from the North, so that they could be replaced by Southerners.²⁰ Others reported that some irresponsible people from the South had begun to urge them to go back and develop their places in the North instead of wasting time in the South which is already developed. Still others reported having heard rumours of such bizarre plans as to "localise" all education below the tertiary level, such that instead of coming to such prestigious and well established schools as Budo, Kisubi, Namagunga or Gayaza, your child irrespective of his or her merit, would have to attend the so-called "Third World" school²¹ near your village in Pakwach in Nebbi District or in Nabilatuk in Moroto District!

Disintegrative approaches of this kind quite obviously have little to do with the modern times in which we are not only now living, but into which we would like to advance more vigorously and more deeply. In terms of the North with which we are concerned, if policies of this type by some real bad chance come to prevail those who really desire to see one integrated Uganda will have missed what I must now call a heaven-sent

opportunity for the North to be fully assimilated into the rest of Uganda. Is it necessary to add to this what should be obvious, namely that the adoption of policies of this kind would push us inexorably to what I presume no one wishes us to have, namely, a serious "Northern Question"?

We must, however, end this sub-section on a much happier note than the above. Towards that end, we submit that with the new development in the political position of the North and with some measure of good political will, the North, in the political sense, is ripe for assimilation, rather than alienation from this nation. It is, in fact significant in this regard, that even the rebels fighting in the North, if the report of Tiberio Atwoma Okeny's Goodwill Mission is a fair summary of their position, would seem to be seeking for exactly this in as far the relation of the North to the rest of the country is concerned as may be seen from the following extract from the Report of the Mission:

"The leaders of UPDM/A informed our mission that they are fighting for their survival and preservation of fundamental human rights in Uganda, for the integrity and independence of Uganda, for democracy, freedom and the establishment of an independent national army, for the introduction of a populist (sic.) Constitution and for peace and prosperity for all the people of Uganda."²²

Conclusion: Is There a Northern Question?:

The time has now come to furnish an overall answer to question before us, and that is what we know want to attempt.

As we said above, the answer is complex. Thus, we see in the, first place and in the light of our survey that although the North could have assumed a posture in the politics of the country that might have made its place in Ugandan politics highly problematical, it did not assume such a posture. We are referring here to the period on the eve of independence, when, with its many disadvantages - political, economical and educational - it might have dragged its foot in the march towards independence or asked for special treatment to enable her to catch up with the others, or to have imbalances corrected, as Southern Sudanese having been clamouring for since the independence of the Sudan in 1955.

But it was a Northerner who took up the chief executive position in the country and with the assistance of largely Northern security personnel stayed long in power, being followed subsequently by another Northerner, who again with the assistance of largely Northern/Nubian personnel also stayed long in power. Further when the latter eventually did fall from power, the very same first Northerner who had taken power on the inception of independence returned to power, remaining at it for some five years, again with the support of largely Northern security personnel. The long period of over twenty years covered by these two Northerners was, unfortunately, the period in which internal conflicts became in the manner Clifford Geertz had postulated for the new states of Africa and Asia endemic in the country. Further, it was also the period in which the phenomenon we have referred to as "institutionalised state violence" made its ugly appearance among Ugandans. These two Northerners and Northern security were, thus, deeply involved in executive decision-making relating to the many internal conflicts of their times and in their application and enforcement.

We postulated that, generally speaking, in African politics, characterised as it is, with primordial sectarianism people tend to think that when a leader comes from one section, then that leader and all the people from his section are benefiting. In the same way, we now need to add in this conclusion, their misdeeds tend to be also attributed to all the people from the section from which the leader comes. We submitted that both Obote and Amin and their people of the North must have come to be viewed in this way by people in the rest of the country - how else could one explain such sentiments as we said were commonly articulated during the electoral campaign of 1980 as: "We are tired of Northerners"?

That being the case, we may now submit as our second point in our conclusion, that it could be only by this kind of reasoning, namely, the kind of reasoning that tends to associate people from the sector from which a leader comes with the advantages and the misdeeds of the leader that it might perhaps be said, in the context of the internal conflicts that were endemic in the years of Northern dominance, that there has been a "Northern Question," with the North and Northerners as the ^{source of problems.} the/

It is at this point that we must sternly appraise the validity of this popular habit in African politics of associating the ordinary masses with such advantages as their "sons" who are privileged to attain state power enjoy, as well as with their misdeeds. In a very substantial sense this "rule-of-thumb" association of the ordinary masses with leaders who come from their areas is unfortunate and grossly unfair to the masses. We know only, too, well that the masses from such tribes/nationalities or regions from which leaders originate continue, generally, in a world of their own, wallowing in their poverty as they have done for ages without end without being rescued from such poverty by their "lucky" sons who by some stroke of ^{luck} reach the pinnacle of power in the state. That being the case the ordinary masses of the North must not be implicated in the bickerings, quarrels, killings, and extensive destruction that have tragically accompanied and continue to be so characteristic of our internal conflicts.

The Northern masses have continued to till their land, to tend their animals, and generally to attend to such of their chores as are required to eke out an unenviable existence in a context of unbearable poverty - all that without taking even an axe or panga to harm any non-Northerner. What is even more, such of these ordinary Northerners as did come to the South lived among Southern fellow countrymen so amicably that such of them as were in the rural areas of the South, particularly in Buganda, absorbed the cultures of the South absolutely with some of

them not only speaking Luganda fluently and without any strange accent, but also giving such typically Kiganda names as "Musisi", "Musoke", "Mukasa" etc to their children.

It has been important to make this distinction between the leaders and the masses, because as we pointed out at the end of Section II, the question we are dealing with is also a delicate question. In the course of these conflicts many Ugandans, not just in one area but in various other places as our main treatment above may have shown, lost their dear ones and possessions. It is, thus, not fair to associate the innocent masses with the sufferings that the various conflicts have wreaked upon Ugandans.²³

All that had to do with the Obote-Amin years in Ugandan politics. Let us now take our last step and advance into the present, the time we are now passing through. Is there a "Northern Question" threatening us in this period? Our treatment has been very emphatic about this. With the North now so badly disintegrated politically we can say that there is no peculiarly Northern Question of a political kind, which is what this analysis has been restricted to. That is why we maintain that with tact and political goodwill on the part of all, particularly that of our leadership, the North of today is ripe for assimilation rather than alienation.

Finally, let me now point out the obvious, namely that our analysis here has been done mainly through the political periscope. Should we have employed another, and equally relevant periscope, namely the socio-economic one, our answer would have been far less re-assuring than it is now. For, when one looks at the North through the latter periscope, its character as a problem area in the socio-economic transformation of Uganda becomes very very apparent. That, however, is an exercise for another occasion. We, thus, re-iterate for this particular occasion that, from the political perspective, the North today does not constitute any insurmountable challenge or "Question" for Uganda.

FOOTNOTES

1. The phenomenon of internal conflict caught the attention of the great Greek philosopher, Aristotle, who discussed it in his Politics as far back as the 4th century B.C., while in our modern times Sociologists, Economists, Political Scientists, etc. - all have made substantial contribution to our understanding of the importance of the phenomenon within social groups. David L. Sills, (ed.), The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers Vol.3, 1972) contains a good synopsis of their respective contribution.
2. Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States" in Clifford Geertz (ed.) Old Societies and New Societies: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa, (London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963).
3. I have personally found Geertz' argument so compelling, I have had to refer to it again and again, although in different contexts, as for example, in my article "Soldiers and Society in Uganda: Some lessons from the Past" which should be coming out in the Mawazo issue scheduled to appear before October this year.
4. Apart from what the newspapers and Radio Uganda have been releasing on this war, I had the opportunity to glean through some of the papers prepared by Mr. Tiberio Atwoma Okeny and his "Goodwill Mission" to the Rebels in the "war zone" in Northern Uganda - Dec. 1986-April 1987. I was given to understand that these papers are open documents, hence my taking the liberty to read them, too, and to quote from them.
5. Who Actually, Luganda-speakers in and around Kampala must have been relatively much better informed than the rest of us/did not speak Luganda and who, therefore, had to depend on the morsels of news the then English Weekly DP Newspaper Munnansi kindly chose to let us have. The paper, incidentally, folded it up its business as soon as the Obote regime was overthrown, something which many Ugandans regret and do not understand.
6. These trips were made between July and December 1986. The vigorous programme of rehabilitating the area that the Government launched had not yet begun to make much of a difference.
7. See Section 4 p.17 where the slogan "We are tired of Northerners" that is discussed there appears to imply this opinion.
8. The theme of cultural pride will be picked up again for treatment in a subsequent section of this paper.
9. According to Aidan Southall, for example, a number of Alur Chiefs either claim their descent from the kings/Bunyoro or had to of come for confirmation of their title after accession to chiefship - Aidan, Southall Alur Society: A Study in Processes and Types of Domination. Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd., 1953, pp.218-219.
10. Kenneth Ingham, The Making of Modern Uganda, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1958.
11. My colleague Sam Lwanga-Lunyiigo will be treating for us the topic "The Colonial Roots of Internal Conflict in Uganda".

12. There is perhaps no better way to impress upon readers the importance of this labour "reservoir" by explaining to readers /than that in the case of West Nile the whole of that complex that now comprises the military barracks at Pakwach was fully occupied twice a week by indentured workers from upper West Nile who then took the "SS Robert Coryndon" to come down to Jinja subsequently by train to work on the Kakira and Lugazi Sugar Estates. But many other Northerners from West Nile itself, Acholi and Lango found their own other way to cheap labour in the South. The category of "undesirable labour" must include for this period both the Police and the King's African Rifles (K.A.R.) about which Southerners, particularly Baganda were none too keen at this stage, even if one takes into account that official Government policy started off initially by not encouraging them as Ian Grahamme correctly confirms in his book, Amin and Uganda, London: Granada, 1980, P.27.
13. The Theme of "undergovernment" as opposed to misgovernment or even dictatorship about which we speak so often has been fascinating me recently; and I do hope that my continued reflections over it will one day yield at least one paper in which I relate it to some of the political ills in Uganda.
14. The only hope, if hope there is, is that as the years go by and the dust or emotions of the politically over-heated present times settle down, historians will settle down to sift the relevant data and perhaps come up with conclusions that will convince people about the true realities of African politics.
15. Uganda Protectorate, Report of the Uganda Relationships Commission 1961, Entebbe: Government Printer 1961, p.28.
16. Uganda Protectorate, Report of the Uganda Relationships Commission, 1961, Chapter 19 Para. 448.
17. Hans. J. Morgenthau, in his "Foreword" to Tang Tsou's monumental study of the political pathology behind what the latter aptly titled America's Failure in China, 1941-50, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963, p.VII. Morgenthau's own examples of pernicious myths were the idea that Algeria was an integral part of France and the idea that "America lost China" in 1949 when Mao-Tse-Tung and his communists swept into power, although China never "belonged" to America.
18. The New Vision, Sept. 16, 1987, p.1.
19. Incidentally this is one of the developments about which most Northerners I have talked to about the question before us have expressed grave concern and anger. Thus, the sooner action is taken to advise NRM/NRA personnel about the harm to North-South relationship this careless verbal assault on the cultural status of the peoples of the North is doing the better for the nation.

20. In the report that Mr. Tiberio Atwoma Okeny's Goodwill Mission to the Rebels submitted to the Government on its return that we mentioned earlier in the paper, "The discriminatory dismissal of serving men and officer in the Uganda Police and Prison forces and other officials from public institutions" is presented as one of the "Immediate causes" for the UPDM/A involvement in the war in The North.
21. This is how some people in and around Kampala contemptuously refer to the many secondary schools that mushroomed in the Obote II regime in almost every parliamentary constituency in the country.
22. From the report of the Goodwill Mission.
23. I have dealt with the role of Northern soldiers with whose misdeeds the ordinary masses of the North should, again, not be associated, in another paper "Soldiers and Society in Uganda: Some Lessons from the Past" which is scheduled to come out in the next issue of MAWAZO.

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