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ETHNIC PLURALISM AND POLITICAL CENTRALISATION: THE BASIS OF POLITICAL CONFLICT IN UGANDA

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and the struggle of the elite members of ethnic groups to control the centre, hightens and intensifies political conflict. To many observers of the Ugandan political scene, particularly those of foreign (western) origins, the struggle for political power at the centre among political elites from different ethnic backgrounds which in recent years has assumed violent dimensions, is an expression of ethnic or 'tribal' conflict and hostility. Contrary to such views, this paper attempts to show that the violent conflicts that have bedevilled the Ugandan nation since the 1966 crisis, are purely political conflicts in origin, cause and effect. The paper contends that the struggle for participation and control of political power at the centre, is one of the major causes of political conflict in this country.

In the end, the paper advocates for the decentralization of power and the creation of a strong system of local government as means of minimizing political conflict in Uganda. Decentralization has the effect of diversifying the centres of power and widening areas of political participation. This, in effect, leads to the diffusion of conflict among the various centres of power and, therefore, to the attenuation of the impact and effect of conflict on the political process and the political system. Above all, decentralization encourages local autonomy. It provides opportunities to the broad section of the national population to control local decisions that affect their daily lives and their immediate environment. Such popular and widespread participation of the nationals in political life, contributes to the stabilization of the political process

at the local and national levels. Examples are cited from elsewhere to demonstrate how the principle of decentralization of power has tended to mitigate conflict and to ensure political stability and socio-economic progress. But first, let us examine the theoretical question pertaining to the relation between pluralism and political conflict.

PLURALISM AND CONFLICT

Basically, the concept of pluralism refers to a situation in which there exists in society many groups of various sizes which may have different values, interests, ideas and aspirations.[1] When applied to social and political organization, pluralism denotes two tendencies in group relations. On the one hand, given the characteristics of the groups involved, a situation of pluralism may result in consensus, harmony and understanding among the various groups. On the other, the dynamics of pluralistic life may produce situations of conflict leading to incompatibilities in social and political relationships among groups. Social scientists have identified three models of pluralism which account for these two tendencies in group relations, namely, social pluralism, cultural pluralism and ethnic pluralism. A brief review of each of those models is necessary in order to clarify the theoratical thrust of the main themes of the paper.

Social pluralism is essentially a model that explains the persistance of democratic stability in a plural society.[2] The pluralist model of democracy sees society as mode up of several social groups of various sizes and interests.

These groups are independent of each other and the government, and provide a basis for the dispersal of power in society. Groups intervene between the individual and the government; they check each others power and that of the government thereby discouraging the monopoly of power by anyone group or by the government.

The various groups that exist in society are organized around common interests and needs of their members. Membership is voluntary and group solidarity rests on civic ties among its members and not on primordial or sacred particularism. Individuals join groups in order to advance their interests and provide for their needs in a collective manner. An individual may belong to more than one group thus creating a network of interlocking relationships among the various groups. Common among the groups in a plural society are the many groups that are organized to cater for the social, economic, professional and civic interests of their members such as trade unions, chambers of commerce, Medical and Bar associations Women and Youth organizations etc. Such groups provide platforms for the expression of numerous demands and create centres for political participation at group level.

Since the various groups have different interests, needs and demands, the interaction among themselves and the government inevitably creates situations of conflict. However, the intensity of violent tendencies of group conflict are mitigated by the existance of underlying value consensus among group leaders and members. Through the process of negotiation and compromise, individuals and groups

are able to arrive at a mutual adjustment and accommodation of the various competing claims. This mechanism enables society to maintain its equilibrium and consensus in the context of continuing conflict. In addition, the overlapping membership of individuals in various groups creates cross-cutting loyalties thereby providing channels for integrative communication among different groups. On the whole, the theory of social pluralism believes in the importance of social groups as the basis of democratic stability and integration of society.

It should be noted here however, that contrary to what is believed to be the case, pluralist democracy does not promote or guarantee the dispersal and balancing of political power in society. On the contrary, social pluralism actually encourages the acquisition and monopoly of power by a few individuals and groups and provides grounds whereby the interests of the stronger group of individuals pre-empt and dominate public policy. Pluralist democracy places a high premium on the freedom of interest group activity and on the principle that public policy should result from the free interplay of the various competing interests. But attempts at balancing the various group interests becomes problematic in practice because what turns out as the common or public interest represents no more than the interests of the stronger and better organized groups.

While it allows competition, therefore, pluralist democracy promotes in reality the interests of organized vested interests and strong pressure groups which disproportionately represent the interests of wealth and those

of a minority section of society that controls and dominates the means of production. Pluralist politics does not safeguard the interests of the weaker groups, which in terms of numbers, may represent the interests of the majority.[3]

There is no doubt that Uganda has a pluralist social structure. But this structure is dominated by a few, well-organized and urban-centred elite and business interests. The power and influence of these groups stand in stark contrast to the powerlessness of the ill-organized groups of the masses of the workers and peasants. Thus, whereas social pluralism is a reality of Uganda's social and political scene, it does not function effectively to provide centres for the popular participation of a wide section of the national population. In terms of the needs for mass participation, social pluralism provides no viable alternative to the requirements of diverse centres of power at the various levels of decision-making which a decentralized political structure provides. Hence, conflicts arising out of the struggle for political participation and power continues to persist in the context of social pluralism.

In recent years social scientists have developed another model of pluralism - that of cultural pluralism.[4] Unlike the social pluralism model which finds in the diversity of groups a mechanism for conflict, consensus and stability, the cultural pluralism framework portrays the relation among groups as one of irreconcilable conflict that often leads to political violence and the malintegration of society. In a culturally compartmentalized society,

people are divided not so much over concrete social, political or economic interests but over deep-seated cleavages arising out of primordial or sacred ties. Cultural groups exists naturally; they are not volutary because membership is reserved for people who are born into them. Examples of such groups include ethnic, racial, caste and religious groups. And because membership is exclusive, individuals become highly identified with and attached to the groups in which they are members. Thus one finds that a powerful consensus on values exists within a group but not between groups. This makes it difficult for the various groups to cooperate and integrate together. Normally, one group monopolizes political power and uses its control of the institutions of government to dominate others. Accordingly, political order, stability and social conformity are maintained by coercion and not by any consensus on values.

The analytical rigour of the cultural pluralist model rests on its assumption that the various groups that constitute society exist as separate communities each with its own distinct cultural values, institutional patterns and political orientations. As was the case when it was first formulated and applied,[5] the model does reflect the realities of a colonial society in which factors of race and culture made it difficult for the various cultural groups to interact and co-operate and in which wealth, power and prestige were distributed a long racial lines. In contemporary Africa, the model has practical utility in analysing and understanding the problems of conflict

and political violence existing in the racially and culturally hetorogeneous white dominate societies in southern Africa. But in Uganda and the rest Africa, the cultural pluralism model does not seem to be of value in offering a viable framework for understanding situations of conflict and group violence.

Attempts to account for the endemic conflicts that sometimes manifest themselves in traumatic violence in the racially homogeneous but ethnically plural societies of Africa, led to the development of the ethnic pluralism model by Leo Kuper and M.G. Smith.[6] This model sees African societies as made up of many ethnic groups of various sizes and influence. These groups are distrinct from each other on the basis of language, social organization and other cultural characteristics. Each ethnic unit forms a political entity that may constitute a centre of political power and claim the identity and loyalty of its members. But unlike the cultural groups which live side by side but separately, ethnic groups share a certain amount values which derive from a basically common culture and race as well as common historical and contemporary experiences. This enables people to interact and live together. However, because of the differences in interests and the desire to maximize influence in a competitive situation, groups tend to use the resources available to them to assert themselves in relation to other groups. Using ethnic identity and solidaristic ties as weapons of political bargaining, the elite cadre of the various groups engage in constant struggles for the control of state power.

And when they gain this control, they use political power to suppress the interests of other groups and to ensure the dominance of members of their own ethnic groups in all sectors of employment and social and political life. Such a state of affairs creates tensions among the in and the out groups and leads naturally to political conflict and violence.

There are two basic characteristics of the pluralist models discussed above that should be noted. First, all the three types of pluralism imply the existance of multiple and diverse centres of power and political activity. The recognition of this reality is important in any political arrangement aimed at maintaining a stable political process. In a pluralist democracy these centres are recognized as independent centres of power, influence and political action. The activities of the various groups are utilized to mitigate conflict and to integrate society together. On the other hand, political centralization tends to suppress the activities of independent groups and to destroy these groups as centres of mass political participation.

The second charactiristic to note is that conflict is the basic feature that underlies the process of group relations and interaction. With respect to social pluralism, conflict is mitigated by the underlying consensus on values. In the case of cultural pluralism, conflict is contained through coercion and the political domination which one cultural group maintains over others. With regard to ethnic pluralism, the relation between groups is

characterized by competition and rivalry and not hostility and suspecion as is the case in respect of the relations among cultural groups. So, the less frequent ethnic groups are made to compete among themselves for power or resources the less situations are created for conflicts to develop among them. Ethnic conflicts, particularly those of a violent kind, can therefore be avoided through a political arrangement that allows little competition and rivalry among the groups. And this is an arrangement that gives relative autonomy to ethnic groups to make decisions that affect the control and utilization of local resources. It is to this political device of managing conflicts among ethnic groups in Uganda since the colonial times that this analysis now turns.

POLITICAL ACCOMMODATION OF ETHNIC PLURALISM.

Characteristically, colonial administration in Uganda was based on a system that recognized the multi-ethnic nature of society. Following the 1900 Agreement, the British proceeded to establish a system of administration in which territories or districts that were demarcated on ethnic lines became the basic political and administrative units.[7] These units, particularly the Kingdom areas and more especially Buganda, were given considerable autonomy by the well known British colonial system of indirect rule. Whereas the British controlled the central government and administration, the power for the management of local affairs was retained and exercised by the local political and administrative elites within the overall colonial policy

and under the supervision of the colonial government agents. Thus the kingdom and district political and administrative units provided traditional elites and, later, an increasing number of educated Africans, a wide range of opportunities for political participation and decision-making.

The Local Government System.

The 1949 Local Government Ordinance strengthened further the system of local government. Kingdoms and districts became the basic structures through which the country was administered. Increasingly, it became a deliberate policy of the colonial government to encourage educated Africans to work in their respective local government administrations and to leave the central government to the British officers.[8] Consequently, local governments became the foci of identity and loyalty for African elites and centres of political participation.

The colonial system of local government, as established in Uganda, had inherent mechanisms of preventing the development of conflicts among ethnic groups. In the first place, the system made sure that there were no major areas of competition and struggle over which ethnic groups could come into contact and conflict. By and large ethnic groups were politically kept apart from each other. There was no struggle to control the centre and the resources involved because these were under the exclusive control of the central colonial government. Since substantial amount of power to make local decisions was decentralized and diffused among local government units,

and since these units controlled critical resources such as employment and provided also opportunities for participation to many traditional and educated elites, ethnic groups had limited areas of contact upon which conflicts could develop among them. It is this device of dispersing power among local political units which ensured that the centre was kept under relatively less pressure of political activity. For the ethnic groups, the centre was not an object for competition and struggle among them. And it is precisely this device that enabled the colonial government to maintain political stability and social harmony in potential situations of explosive ethnic conflict.

The 1962 Independence Constitution.

The need to control and accommodate conflict arising out of ethnic pluralism was one of the important factors that determined the structure and provisions of the 1962 constitution which the British left behind on the country's attainment of independence.[9] The Independence constitution was indeed an ingeneous act of social engineering that reflected an understanding of the complexity of Uganda's social and political forces on the part of the departing British. It sought to continue and strengthen the experiment that had began early in the colonial times of dispersing power among the various ethnic units and broadening areas of mass political participation. The main features of the constitution that were specifically aimed at avoiding the possibilities of ethnic tensions and conflicts included the granting of greater degrees of autonomy to kingdom and, to

a lesser degree, district administrations; the establishment of a strong system of local government and the expansion of areas of local political participation and representation in the form of elected councils for each district. Let us look at this important feature of the constitution a little further.

Uganda's Independence constitution was a unique document that contained both elements of unitarism and federalism. This in itself was a reflection of the country's peculiar social and political structure that needed an intricate arrangement that was capable of holding the multi-ethnic nation together in relative peace and stability. What was required for the purposes of avoiding the problem of ethnic conflict, was a political device which the British had tried before with remarkable success. This was a device, which has already been mentioned, that provided ethnic groups with sufficient powers to conduct their own affairs and which, therefore, left the centre relatively free from ethnic-based political activity. As long as ethnic groups enjoyed such powers, they regarded the centre to be of less importance as an object of struggle for control. Increasingly, a wider section of traditional and modern elites were inclined to seek political participation in local units rather than the centre. And this device had the effect of maintaining political stability by decongesting the centre of the heat of political struggle and conflict.

In full recognition of this need, therefore, the 1962 constitution decentralized political power and dispersed it among the various local units with varying degrees of

autonomy. Buganda, the largest and most prestigious kingdom in the country, was granted full federal status in relation with the centre while the smaller kingdoms of Bunyoro, Toro, Ankole and the territory of Busoga were each granted a federal status of a lesser degree. The rest of the ethnic groups that were organized in district political units and which historically did not have hereditary traditional rulers, maintained unitary relationships with the central government.

In terms of power, the kingdom of Buganda with its own government and system of administration, enjoyed considerable autonomy and controlled a wide range of resources.[10] At the centre of political activity was the institution of the Kabaka (the King) and the Great Lukiiko - the Assembly - which was constituted by a large size of elected representatives. The system of administration was organized in ministries each of which was headed by a political Minister. As a political unit that was built around the Baganda ethnic group, the Buganda kingdom government provided a wide range of avenues for high skilled employment in its system of administration. It also provided broad areas of political participation to a wide section of both traditional and educated Baganda elites. Indeed, there were many Baganda political elites who had built viable political careers in the Buganda political system and who were forced to turn to national politics only after the destruction of the kingdom in 1966.[11] But while the kingdom government existed as a local political unit, it served to absorb thousands of political and administrative elites and to prevent thereby, the building-up of

The powers which Buganda enjoyed under the 1962 constitution as well as the basic political and administrative institutions which existed in the kingdom, were to be found also in other kingdoms, although these were relatively of lesser degree of importance and significance. Thus, each kingdom government had an elected assembly as the centre of political activity and decision-making. It had also comparatively smaller compliment of ministerial departments around which the administrative system of the kingdom government was organized. Like the Buganda Government, the other kingdom governments too provided opportunities for employment and political participation to large sections of traditional and educated elites and relieved pressure that would otherwise have been exerted on the central government by people pursuing these values and goals.

With respect to the non kingdom unitary districts, the constitution provided for the devolution of power by the central government to an elected council in each district. Essentially, the districts were directly governed by the centre. But the councils exercised powers and performed functions that were conferred upon them by law. At independence, district councils derived their power from, and their functions were defined by, the Local Administration Ordinance of 1962. And the functions of these councils were of such magnitude and importance as to necessitate the establishment and maintainance of a system of local administration that employed thousands of local traditional and modern elites. As local political and administrative units, therefore, district administrations catered for the needs for employment and political participation and kept away

from the centre a large section of politically active elites.

Thus we find that the 1962 constitution embodied important features of political pluralism. The constitution recognized the political life of ethnic groups by providing for the decentralization and dispersal of power among the political units of the various groups. It is this principle of constitutional pluralism that regulated and controlled ethnic conflicts and stabilized the political process at the national level. As we shall proceed to show presently, it was the abolition of this constitutional provision and safeguard that signalled the entry in national politics of bitter and, on the most part, violent ethnic conflicts and struggle.

A further legal provision that strengthened the foundations of the politics of political pluralism in Uganda, was the Constitutional Heads (Elections) Act No.66 of 1963.[12] Enacted by the National Assembly hardly a year after independence, the Act showed the magnitude of the pressure of non kingdom ethnic groups for more power, recognition and status. The Act provided for the election by District Councils of Constitutional Heads in districts who were to occupy the status and perform the functions that were more or less similar to those of the hereditary rulers in the kingdom areas. This Act expanded further the areas of political participation at the local level. Some notable national political elites relinguished their positions at the centre to become Constitutional Heads of their districts.[13]

The foregoing analysis has focused on the discussion of the political and institutional arrangements for the control of political conflict and inter-ethnic political violence. As already indicated, these arrangements were to be found in two areas of colonial initiative. The first was the system of local government that was organized around ethnic groups as political and administrative units. These units were given wide-ranging powers to deal with matters and problems of local concern. The second arrangement was enshrined in the Independence Constitution which decentralized and liberalized the political structure and gave definite constitutional powers to local political units both federal and unitary. As long as these arrangements remained in force, the country enjoyed periods of relative stability, peace and socio-economic development. But this was not to last long as the proceeding disoussion attempts to show.

TRENDS TOWARDS POLITICAL CENTRALIZATION: THE CONTEXT OF POLITICAL CONFLICT IN UGANDA.

For a period of approximately four years of independence, the central government led by Prime Minister Apolo Milton Obote remained relatively stable, strong and free from traumatic conflicts. Its main political challenges and pre-occupations of the time were confined largely to the role of refereeing over conflicts and disputes among local political units, mainly Buganda and Bunyoro.[14] But by and large, the kingdom and district administrations remained inward looking and apparently contented with the powers and

functions conferred upon them by the constitution and other laws under it. As long as the central government refrained from tampering with these powers and functions and was seen to be fair in dealing with matters of concern to ethnic groups, local political units remained largely disinterested in the politics at the centre. But the moment the central government started encroaching on the powers of the federated states, particularly those of Buganda, and was perceived to be using its powers unfairly to surpress the interests and aspirations of local political entities, the relationship between the central government and Local administrations became increasingly strained.[15] Gradually, the strained relationships between the centre and the local political units, particularly Buganda, forced the local units to enter the central political arena to assert themselves.[16] In the face of the challenges emanating from other centres of power, the central government reacted by attempting to reassert its supremacy over local political units. The increasingly developing conflicts between Buganda and the central government provided opportunity for the central government to accumulate more power by undermining the powers of the local political units. In other words, as time went on the central governent embarked on a consciously calculated process of political centralization which drew more and more local political entities and their most active political elites into the imbroglio of political competition and struggle at the centre.

The process of political centralization passed through three phases that represented a period of fundamental

politioal changes in the country's post-independence history namely, the Buganda crisis of 1966 that resulted in the demise of the foundations of political pluralism in Uganda - the 1962 constitution, the advent of the 1967 constitution that abolished kingdoms and, finally, the imposition of the one-party state in 1969 which signalled the end of the politics of institutional and legal opposition and conferred anthoritarian outlook on the central government.

Coming from Lango district, a nonkingdom area, and guided by the 'revolutionary-centralizing' philosophy,[17] Milton Obote was culturally and politically inclined to prefer a unitary form of government for the whole country. During the Constitutional Conference in London in September 1961. Obote came out strongly in favour of supreme powers for the central government. But the pressures from the kingdoms, particularly Buganda, led to the spliting of state powers between the centre and the federal states. It is this constitutional encumberance and the tendencies of Buganda to guard its federal status jealously against the encroachment of the central government that prevented Prime Minister Obote from pursuing his preferred vision of political centralization as early as he would have wished. The opportunity for fulfilling this vision was presented by the events that led to the 1966 crisis which Obote handled to his advantage with political skills that earned him admiration even among his political opponents.

The 1966 Crisis

The 1966 crisis was a culmination of two main political developments. The first of these was the break-up in 1964 of

the ruling alliance between Obote's Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) and Buganda's Kabaka Yekka (KY).[18] This led to the political relations between Obote's Central government and the Kabaka's Buganda government based at Mengo becoming strained. The second was the internal factional conflicts within the UPC which resulted into the arrest and detention of some of Obote's Ministers, the suspension of the 1962 Constitution and further deterioration of the relations between Buganda and the central government. As these developments are fully documented elsewhere,[19] only a short outline will be given here.

In what was seen to be an 'Unholy Marriage', the UPC led by Milton Obote entered into an alliance with the KY in 1961. This alliance was clearly aimed at ousting the Democratic Party (DP) led by Ben Kiwanuka from power[20] at the pre-independence general elections that were later scheduled to take place in April 1962. The alliance was seen as unholy because of the evidently divergent socio-political outlooks of the two parties. The KY was basically a traditionalist party whose main pre-occupation was the glorification and preservation of the institution of the Kabakaship and the protection of Buganda interests. The UPC on the other hand was led by men with a modern vision of the state - men who exhibited nationalist outlooks and tendencies in favour of a unitarist government. By and large, the UPC - KY fraternity was seen as an alliance of convenience whose inherent contradictions were sooner or later to cause problems for the alliance itself.

The alliance consisted of a series of mutual understanding between the UPC and KY. One of these was that KY would have the exclusive right to field all candidates in Buganda in competition with the DP in the event of a direct election to the National Assembly and the UPC would field candidates only in the rest of Uganda. The two parties would then join forces at the national level in Parliament. Details were worked out as to how the two parties were to share power if the alliance won the elections.

The 1962 constitution provided for direct elections to the Buganda Lukiiko and gave powers to the Lukiiko to decide whether Buganda's twenty-two representatives to the National Assembly were to be directly elected by the people, as was to be the case in the rest of the country, or nominated by the Lukiiko. Early in 1962, elections to the Lukiiko were held and turned out to be a contest between KY and DP which the KY won overwhelmingly. Then during the national elections in April of that year, the Lukiiko decided that Buganda's representives to Parliament were to be nominated by the Lukiiko. This left the DP in the cold without any representives from Buganda because those who were nominated by the Lukiiko to represent Buganda in Parliament were all KY men. With UPC winning the majority of seats in the rest of the country,[24] the combined strength of the Lukiiko nominees and the UPC's elected representatives placed the UPC-KY alliance into power.

Uganda, therefore, entered the period of independence with the UPC-KY delicate political outfit in power. But this outfit was not destined to last long. The incompatibilities between the two parties did not permit them to work

harmoniously together and soon the basic divisions and conflicts between them came into full view. At first Obote had to tolerate many of the problems that were caused for him by KY being in government. But when the UPC became increasingly strong and dominant as a result of the cross-overs in Parliament by mainly DP members of Parliament, Obote summarily terminated the alliance in August, 1964 and removed KY ministers from office. This saw the end to the working reletionship between Buganda and the central government and plotted the path of political confrontation between the two. It was this tendency towards the gradual monopolization of power by one group- the UPC - that ushered in the beginning of a period of political conflict at the centre.

Yet it was the contradictions within the UPC itself, rather than the break-up of the party's alliance with KY, that triggered off the 1966 crisis. Right from its formation in 1960, the UPC could be said to consist of two factional tendencies: one progressive and socialist- inclined and the other conservative and pro-capitalism. The factions based on these two tendencies came into open conflict and struggle for the control of the party during the 1964 Annual Delegates Conference of the UPC that was held in Gulu Town. In the election to the key position of Secretary-General of the party, the radical socialist-inclined incumbent, John Kakonge, lost to the challenge of Grace Ibingira representing the conservative capitalist wing of the party. The accedency of the ambitious Ibingira to the powerful party post of Secretary-General placed him in a position in which he began to aspire to the leadership of the party itself and

ultimately of the government, both of which positions were held by Obote at the time. Through scheming, manipulations and forming of strategic alliances, Ibingira and his supporters in the party and government sought to undermine the power and position of the prime minister with the sole aim of throwing Obote out of power. In one politically significant incident in February 1966, Ibingira and his group collaborated with the DP and KY members of parliament to support a motion tabled by a leading KY member, Daudi Ocheng, accusing Prime Minister Obote, three of his close ministers and army chief of staff Col.Idi Amin of impropriety in receiving large sums of money, being proceeds from the sale of gold and ivory that were allegedly derived from the involvement of the Uganda army in the 1964-65 Congolese rebellion. In particular, the motion called for the immediate suspension of Col.Amin who, apparently referred to in the motion as the leading army officer, was charged together with some members of the government of planning to overthrow the constitution. The interesting side of the matter was that before proceeding to undertake an upcountry tour, Obote had summoned the UPC parliamentary group which formed the majority in parliament and decided collectively that Ocheng's motion would not be allowed to be tabled for discussion. But as soon as Obote left Kampala, the motion was not only tabled and discussed but was also adopted by the seating UPC MPs in conjunction with the DP and KY MPs. The lonely dissenting vote was only registered by John Kakonge.

The political implications of this motion were enormous. A top military officer was to be suspended,

a dicision that was certainly destined to cause uneasiness in the leadership and ranks of the army. As was common elsewhere in Africa that year, such action would probably have led to a military intervention and the overthrow of Obote. But most significantly, Obote and his close ministers were to be investigated for gross misdemeanour in receiving and putting to private use unauthorized funds. Such action was calculated to undermine Obote's power and source of legitimacy as the leader of government.

But Obote took this challenge with characteristic calm. He completed his tour as scheduled and upon his return to the capital proceeded to move very fast to deal a decisive blow on those colleagues in government that were plotting against him. On 22nd February, 1966 and contrary to the provisions of the constitution, Obote assumed full powers of government and ordered the arrest and detention of five ministers of his government, including Grace Ibingira. It is worth noting for the sake of our interest in inter-ethnic relations and sources of conflict, that all those arrested and detained were southern Bantu politicians. This was followed on 24th February by the suspension of the constitution itself which effectively removed the Kabaka of Buganda, Sir Edward Muresa, from the office of President and Head of State which he had occupied since 1963 under the terms of the UPC-KY alliance. Then in April 1966 Obote removed all doubts as to the direction to which he was heading by introducing to the National Assembly and having that body adopt immediately without debate the 1966 interim republican constitution which made him President and Head of State

The most important political outcome of the 1966 crisis, for our purpose, was the abrogation of the Independence Constitution which had been the symbol of political pluralism in the country and the increasing accummulation of power by the central government. For sure, the tampering with the constitution, which had been the chief source of the power of the Buganda Kingdom under the Kabaka, and the assumption of extra - constitutional powers by the central government under Obote, could not go unchallenged.

In numerous resolutions which culminated in the last one in May 1966 that called upon the central government to remove its seat of government from Buganda soil, the Buganda Lukiiko engaged in a bitter political struggle for the survival of the institution of Kabakaship and the Buganda State. In a sharp reaction, the central government interpreted this resolution as an act of rebellion by Buganda and provided Obote with the opportunity to lauch an armed attack on the Kabaka's palace under the pretext of looking for arms that were planned for use in the rebellion. After a spirited battle, the Kabaka's forces at the palace capitulated and Sir Edward Mutesa fled into exile, leaving behind the ruins of a kingdom that had played a central role in the historical development of Uganda.[22]

The defeat and dismemberment of the Kingdom of Buganda marked the end of subnational centres of power that were organized around ethnic groups and ushered in an era of a highly centralized Ugandan state. Henceforth, there was to be one major centre of power - the central government - to which all Ugandan elites were to look for political

participation and employment. It was from this time that the importance of controlling power at the centre dawned on many political elites who had hitherto contented themselves with participation in Buganda politics and elsewhere in district political units. The narrowing of areas of participation and political power at one centre resulted in intense political struggle among political elites for the control of the central government. And since the 1966 crisis had dramatized those events as the struggle for power between the southern Bantu and the northern Nilotics, the struggle for participation and power in Uganda came to be seen and interpreted largely in ethnic terms.

The Republican Constitution and One-Party State.

After his triumph in 1966, 'Obote proceeded to make preparations for the complete elimination of all centres and symbols of rival power. This was achieved following the adoption of the 1967 republican constitution which is currently in force. A leading provision of that constitution declared that "The Institution of king or Ruler of a kingdom or Constitutional Head of a District, by whatever name called, existing before the commencement of this constitution under the law then in force, is hereby abolished".[23] This provision did not only abolish the kingdoms which had been Obote's main source of political challenge before the events of 1966, but it also effectively abolished the system of local government as had been established elsewhere in the nonkingdom areas. A large section of elites could no longer look to District Councils for political participation or to

the public services of district administrations for employment. Instead, they all looked to the centre in search of these values. This resulted in the increase of political conflict and tension among the competing members of ethnic groups.

With the republican constitution firmly in place and with the reins of power firmly in his hands, Obote then felt sufficiently strong and politically safe to embark on a socialist adventure. For long, he had apparently kept his socialist tendencies under the carpet because he had lacked sufficient power to reveal them, given the power equations within which he had to operate. But now this power he had and therefore, throughout 1968 and 1969, Obote made speeches and released a series of literature[24] spelling out his government's intentions to follow a socialist path of development. His socialist package for Uganda was adopted in December 1969 in Lugogo Indoor Studium in Kampala by the delegates conference of the ruling party. And then, as Obote was leaving the conference hall late in the evening at the height of his political triumph, he was shot at and injured in the mouth by an intending assassin. The attempted assassination was obviously blamed on the enemies of the impending socialist revolution in Uganda, which included both internal and external forces. Obote took advantage of this event to strengthen his power and that of his government further by clamping down on opposition parties and declaring a one-party state in Uganda.

The declaration of the ruling UPC as the only legal political party removed completely the remaining elements of

political pluralism in the country. Henceforth, political competition was confined only within the ruling party. Consequently, the state became highly centralized and authoritarian. Political competition and the struggle for power at the centre became very acute. In order to retain power in the face of serious challenges from other quarters, both real and imaginary, Obote was increasingly forced to place his most trusted men in the key branches of the state apparatus. As it turned out these men happened to be members of his own ethnic group, the Langi, or those from the ethnic group closely allied culturally to Obote's, the Acholis.[25] Such a preponderance of people from a few ethnic groups in the key centres of power gave the other ethnic groups, which happened to represent the majority, a feeling of being politically dominated. This gave further impetus to other groups to struggle to control political power at the centre.

The magnitude of group struggle for power was dramatized violently by the 1971 military coup led by Idi Amin. Among the accusations levelled at Obote by the coup leaders was his favouritism for the Langi and Acholi, particularly in the army and intelligence services. Following the initial success of the coup, Amin and his ethnically determined supporters proceeded to eliminate the Langi and Acholi from the army and to do precisely what they had accused Obote of doing. He established a hegemony that controlled political and military power for eight years which was based on a coalition of ethnic groups from the West Nile district and southern Sudan to which Amin belonged or had close affinity.

After the fall of Idi Amin in 1979 and the two-year interim period of the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) administrations, Milton Obote and his UPC party came into power for the second time round following the disputed 1980 general elections. Once again, he established a government that was propped up by the dominance of the Langi and Acholi in the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA).[26] In response to this development, and particularly to the widespread belief that the 1980 elections had been rigged in favour of the UPC,[27] Yoweri Museveni organized a resistance movement and a guerilla army, both of which came to be dominated by the southern Bantu, most notably the Banyankole and the Baganda. Then in a crude twist of history, trouble developed within the Acholi-Langi alliance in the UNLA when Obote was accused in early 1985 of his old problem of ethnic favouratism. The Acholi officers accused him of favouring the Langi over the Acholi in appointments to top military positions.[28] In July of that year, the Acholi officers under the leadership of General Tito Okello, the UNLA Commander, and the northern Brigade Commander, Bazilio Okello, broke ranks with their traditional Langi allies and overthrew Obote's government in a military coup. The new Head of State, General Tito Okello, proceeded to establish a coalition government in which the Acholis were evidently in dominant positions both in government and the army.[29] But Okello's government was to be shortlived because six months later in January 1986, it was removed from power by the force of arms of the NRA. Following the collapse of Okello's government and the disintegration of the UNLA, Yoweri Museveni

established a government, currently in power, which is dominated by the southern Bantu.[30]

Thus, political conflicts and violence in Uganda have tended to aoquire ethnic dimensions in recent years because of the excessive centralization of power which has led the struggle to control the centre to be very intense indeed among the elite members of ethnic groups. In this struggle, political and military elites have tended to mobilize and use their ethnic bases and resources, such as military manpower, in order to struggle effectively to control political power at the centre. Hence, the seemingly ethnic conflicts and hostility in Uganda are basically political conflicts originating from the struggle for popular democracy and political participation. As long as the active political elites are by the existing political structure required to participate only in one centre of power at the national level, the struggle for power will continue to reflect itself in seemingly inter-ethnic conflict and violence. And as long as the old mutual suspecion continues to exist among ethnic groups along the southern-northern divide, the more difficult it will be to achieve a national consensus which is so vital for political stability.

POLITICAL DECENTRALIZATION AND POLITICAL STABILITY

I have persistently argued in this essay that political centralization intensifies conflicts among (ethnic) groups while decentralization of power tends to diffuse such conflicts. Basing analysis on the colonial system of local government and the provisions of political pluralism in the Independence Constitution, I have shown how the dispersal of

power and responsibility among many local political units in Uganda tended to work in favour of political stability by keeping political conflicts among ethnic groups at the lowest Ivel. We have demonstrated further how the abolition of political decentralization in 1966 and the subsequent concentration of power at the centre, increased the tempo of political conflict that led to the development of a culture of violence and endemic political instability. With reference to the Nigerian post-independence experience we propose in this last section of the paper to take a further, if brief, look at how political decentralization may provide a viable framework for political stability by decongesting the centre of excessive political conflict and undercutting the potentialities of ethnic atagonism.

THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

Nigeria emerged into independence in 1960 with a three-region federal structure.[31] Each region, namely, the Northern, Western and Eastern regions, was organized around a dominant ethnic group: the Hausa/Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the West and the Igbo in the East. The federal arrangement provided each constituent unit with a regional government, headed by a Premier, and with a Regional Assembly constituted by elected representatives as the centre of political activity. This arrangement encouraged the development and functioning of regionally-based political parties. Indeed, such parties existed and controlled the governments in their own regions. Thus the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) led by Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto controlled the Northern Regional government, Chief Obafemi Awolowo's Action Group (AG) was dominant in he Western region,

while Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe led the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), a party that was in government in the Eastern region. By and large, the federal government remained a weak outfit that was run by a weak coalition of the regionally-based political parties, the control of which was an unattractive proposition for many leading politicians.[32] The preoccupation of the political parties then was to be supreme in their own regions. The regions, therefore, rather than the federal centre became areas of intense political participation and activity.

The three-region federal structure, however, tended to mask greatly the multi-ethnic nature of the Nigerian society. The fact was that the three main ethnic groups around which the federal structure was organized, dominated other important, and in many cases very large, groups within the regions. For example, the Hausa/Fulani in the north were seen to dominate other politically important groups such as the Tiv and the Idoma. Similarly, in the West, the majority Yoruba dominated many mid-west ethnic groups while in the East the Igbos dominated the equally socially advanced Efiks and Ibibios. Such an arrangement, therefore, became a source of constant friction and tension between ethnic groups within the regions and became a basis for the articulation of demands for further expansion of autonomous centres of power to meet the political aspirations of other important ethnic groups.

It was precisely in response to such demands and pressures that the Mid-West region centred around the Benin ethnic groups, was carved out of the Western region in 1963

to become the fourth region of the Nigerian federation. While this action gave political solace to mid-western ethnic groups, it certainly acted to fuel the demands of other 'minority' groups elsewhere for 'local self-determination.' Such demands became so widespread and reached such high degrees of intensity that they were seen by many observers as constituting the greatest threat to the survival of the Nigerian nation as a single political entity. This was the state of affairs when the first military takeover of the federal government occured in January 1966 under the leadership of an Igbo commander, General Ironsi.

Like many other alarmed Nigerian leaders at the time, General Ironsi mistook the demands for further expansion of centres of power and democratization of the political structure for signs of political disintegration of the Nigerian state. In an attempt to quell what he saw as the forces of disintegration, he proceeded to promulgate a decree that abolished federalism and imposed a unitary form of government in its place throughout the country. This action created more problems than it solved; in fact, it made matters worse. The demands for the restoration of federalism in its expanded form, as earlier demanded, became intensified. Political calculation would have required General Ironsi to back down. But his insistance on the centralization of power under one unitary government led to the tragic end of his regime and his life in a counter-coup of July 1966.

On assumption of power, the new military leaders under the leadership of Lt.Col. Yakubu Gowon immediately recognized the reality. And the reality was that the best way to diffuse political tension and ethnic conflicts was not to

narrow areas of participation through the process of political centralization but rather to expand them further through decentralization and creation of greater numbers of autonomous centres of power. In one of his first few decisions in office, therefore, Gowon announced the creation of the twelve-state federal structure that gave considerable concessions to the demands of many ethnic groups for greater political decentralization. The civil war that erupted between the former Eastern region which styled itself as Biafra and the federal forces prevented the immedicate implementation of the new federal system. But when the war ended in 1970, Nigerian federalism began to thrive again on the new twelve-state structure.

Although the division of the country into twelve states was certainly an improvement on the former four-region structure, the exercise was not based on careful study and thought. On the contrary, it was a haphazard decision that was taken to diffuse a serious political situation at the time. Accordingly, in demarcating state boundaries, no serious consideration was undertaken in grouping ethnic units together on the basis of affinities or compatibilities. The twelve-state structure was basically a replication of the old colonial provincial structure. Therefore, many ethnic groups found themselves either divided across state boundaries or seriously dominated by others. Accordingly, the demands for more states continued to be championed by many ethnic groups throughout the country.

Following the coup of July 1975 that toppled the Gowon regime, a high powered Commission on the Creation of New States was set up to study the problem carefully and

recommend on how the problem was to be solved on a more or less permanent basis. Basing on the recommendations of commission, the present nineteen- state federal structure was established. Later on in 1976, Nigerian federalism was strengthened and perfected by the establishment of an elaborate system of Local Government which provided even greater opportunity for political participation and decision-making at the very local level.

In marked contrast with many other African countries, therefore, the political trends in Nigeria since independence have been in the direction of greater expansion of political pluralism through increased decentralization of power and diversification of centres of political participation. The Nigerian federalism is constituted by three tiers of government. At the lowest level, there are the more numerous political and administrative units in the form of Local Governments. These serve the needs of the local elites and smaller ethnic groups for participation and political decision-making. At a higher level, there are the larger centres of power in the form of states with all compliments of the institutions and resources of government. It is at the state level that a greater number of Nigerian political and administrative elites aspire to participate. Then, there is the federal centre whose political and administrative elites constitute a weak coalition of political forces and ethnic groups in the federation. Although the federal centre controls enormous national resources and commands supreme power in the land, it is not the major target of political activity. In so far as the states control

local resources and provide services that are nearer to the people, it is the states that constitute the main centres for meeting the political and economic aspirations of the majority of the Nigerian people. Indeed, Nigerians within Nigeria are identified or identify themselves on the basis of the state of their origin . It is the state identity that determines what benefits one can get in terms of such things as employment, scholarship or even a school adminission for ones child. The state, therefore, is a political unit around which peoples hopes, aspirations, sentiments and loyalties are attached.

In the final analysis, the Nigerian experiment at the atomization of power has, since the Civil War, gone along way in providing a framework for political harmony and stability in the context of ethnic diversity. What pertains in Nigeria now is not a situation of conflict and hostility among ethnic groups, as was predominantly the case during the era of the three-region power structure when the base of participation was still narrow for many elites, but a situation of competition and rivalry among them. Ethnic groups organized in states compete with each other for the allocation of federal resources; they compete among themselves for the achievement of further rates of development in terms of good roads, number of schools, hospitals, number of doctors and other highly qualified personnel. In this sense, political decentralization in Nigeria has not only provided a basis for the control of inter-ethnic conflicts but has also given impetus to a dynamic process of social and economic progress in the country.

CONCLUSION

In citing the Nigerian example here, the idea is certainly not to advocate for that country's style of governmental organization as a political device for controlling political violence and inter-ethnic conflicts in Uganda. Rather, the purpose has been to demonstrate, borrowing from that example, the importance of the principle of political decentralization in the control of group conflict, particularly of ethnic kind. As has been indicated, this principle was first tried in Uganda by the colonial government in the 1950s with remarkable success. And before its dissolution in 1962, the same government embodied the same principle in the Independence Constitution. For the first three or four years, the principle of the existance of diverse centres of power was tolerated. This ensured political stability for the country during the period. Not until 1966 when this principle was grossly violated and then Obote embarked relentlessly on the process of political centralization, that the period of acute conflict and violence which has since characterized Uganda's political life actually set in.

It should be pointed out that decentralization of power and unitarism as a system of government are not mutually exclusive. It is perfectly possible to have a strong central government existing side by side and in harmony with a strong system of local government. What is necessary is to broaden areas of political participation and decision-making by creating local political units that individually or collectively cannot successfully challenge

and cripple the centre. Such amount of power and responsibility are then surrendered to them to perform functions and provide services to the local people that are basically complementary to those of the centre. It is a strong system of local government that can provide the much desired opportunities for ethnic groups to manage affairs that are of vital interest to them. It is the same system that can satisfy the needs of the masses of people for popular democracy. And it is the satisfaction of these basic political needs that can minimize the incidence of political conflict and violence in Uganda and ensure the political stability and socio-economic progress of the country.

FOOTNOTES

. For a definition and discussion of the concept of pluralism see, among others, David B. Truman, The Governmental Process, (New York: Knopf, 1960); Harry Eckstein, Division and Cohesion in Democracy, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966); Leo Kuper and M.G. Smith (eds), Pluralism in Africa, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969).

2. The link between plitical democracy and social pluralism is contained in the writings of many theorist of liberal demoncracy. See, for instance, William Kornhauser, The Politics of Mass Society, (New York: The Free Press, 1959); Seymour Lipset, Political Man, (New York: Doubleday, 1960); Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963) and Robert Dahl, (ed.), Political Opposition in Western Democracy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

3. For another critique of the social pluralist interpretation of democracy see, Peter Bachrach, The Theory of Democratic Elitism (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967).

4. The cultural pluralism model owes its inspiration to J.S. Furnival's study of the relations between the cultural and racial groups in colonial India and Burma. See his Colonial Policy and Practice (London: Cambridge University Press, 1948). Those who have applied this model to the study of contemporary societies include, M.G. Smith, The Plural Society in the British West Indies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965) and Leo Despress, Cultural Pluralsim and Nationalist Politics in British Guiana (Chicago: Ranal Mcnald, 1967).

5. By J.S. Furnival, ibid.

6. Leo Kuper and M.G. Smith, Pluralism in Africa, op.cit. especially the Introductory Chapter.

7. For an outline of the history and political developments of colonial Uganda see, K. Ingham, The Making of Modern Uganda (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1958) and David Apter, The Political Kingdom in Uganda (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

8. See Apter, ibid.

9. See, Uganda Government, Uganda Constitutional Instruments (The Constitution of Uganda in Force) (Government Printer: Entebbe, 1963).

10. See Article 74(1) and (2) and Schedule 7 of the 1962 Constitution of Uganda.

11. Prominent among contemporaries who held leading political positions in the Kabaka's Government are the present Education Minister in the NRM/NRA government, J.S. Mayanja-Nkangi, who held the position of Katikkiro (Prime Minister) in the early 1960s and Abubakar Mayanja, presently the Minister of Information, who at one time served as Minister of Education in the Buganda Government.

12. See the Constitutional Heads (Elections) Act, No.66 of 1963 (Entebbe: Government Printer, 1963)

13. For example Chemonges relinquished his seat in Parliament to become the Constitutional Head of Sebei district with the title of "Kingoo of Sebei".

14. The most politically significant conflict or dispute of the time was the long outstanding dispute that existed between Bunyoro and Buganda over the 'lost counties'. The "lost counties" were tracts of land that belonged to the Kingdom of Bunyoro before Britain imposed colonialism over Uganda but which were given to Buganda, first as a punishment to Bunyoro for resisting

the colonial invading armies and secondly, as a present to Buganda for assisting the British to defeat the Bunyoro resistance. After successfully dodging its responsibility for settling the problem it had created, the departing British left it to the government of independent Uganda to settle by holding a referendum in the disputed counties after two years of independence. This the central government under Prime-Minister Apolo Milton Obote did and two of the counties under dispute were returned to Bunyoro and the dispute was finally solved.

15. The Kabaka's Government resorted to court litigation each time it thought that the central government was acting contrary to the provisions of and powers conferred on it by the constitution. For a discussion of this see, Ali.A. Mazrui, "Violent Constitutionalism in Uganda", Government and Opposition, Vol. 11 No.4 (July - October 1967).

16. It was from the strained relationships between the governments of Buganda and Uganda that the Kabaka and the Buganda Lukiiko became mobilized to play increasingly activist roles in the affairs of the central government. Otherwise, both the Kabaka and the Lukiiko had been interested primarily in the Buganda affairs.

17. See, A.G.G. Gingyera-Pinycwa, Apolo Milton Obote and His Times (New York, London, Lagos: Nok Publishers, 1978), Introduction.

18. The Kabaka Yekka (KY) was more of a political movement than a political party. It emerged suddenly in early 1961 and spread rapidly throughout Buganda. As its name suggests, (Kabaka Yekka - Kabaka Only or King Only) it was mainly interested in matters related to Buganda, more particularly in the preservation of the institution of the Kabakaship.

19. see, for instance, A.M. Obote, "The Footsteps of Uganda's Revolution", East African Journal, Vol.V. No.10, Octoben 1968 and A.G.G. Gingyera-Pinycwa, op.cit.

20. The Democratic Party led by Benedicto Kiwanuka won the 1961 general elections to the Legislative Council which took Uganda into a period of internal self-government with Kiwanuka as the first Prime Minister.

21. Outside Buganda, the UPC won 38 seats against 24 seats for the DP.

22. For a full chromicle of the 1966 crisis by an insider and leading participant see, Sir Edward Mutesa, The Desecration of My Kingdom (London: Constable, 1967).

23. See, Uganda Government, The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (Entebbe: Government Printer, 1967), Article 118 (1).

24. The main socialist document authored by Obote was The Common Man's Charter, (Kampala: Consolidated Printers, 1969).

25. For instance, Obote's cousin, Akena Adoko, was the head of the powerful and much feared intelligence agency, the General Service Unit and it was generally known that Obote was grooming Lt.Cols Oyite-Ojok and M. Arach, both of them from Obote's ethnic group, for top leadership positions in the Uganda Army. See, A.G.G. Gingyera-Pinycwa, op.cit. p.246.

26. Both the Army Commander, Gen. Tito Okello, and the Army Chief of Staff, Maj. Gen. Oyite-Ojok were Acholi and Langi respectively.

27. The claims that the 1980 general elections in Uganda were rigged in favour of the UPC were advanced by the opposition politicians and the Democratic Party. See, for instance, "The rigged 1980 Uganda General Election", A document supplied by the DP Secretariat, Kampala and A.W.F. Bwengye, The Agony of Uganda: From Idi Amin to Obote (London: Regency Press, 1985).

28. This was one major reason given for the July 1985 coup against Obote's government. cf. General Toto Okello's maiden address to the Nation carried by Radio Uganda July 29, 1985.

29. The Military strongman, Bazilio Okello, a close ally of General Tito Okello, was made the Commander of Defence Forces'. The Cabinet and appointments to top positions in parastatals reflected clearly the dominance of the Acholis.

30. Again one needs to look at the ethnic composition of the Cabinet and top Commonders of the NRA to see the preponderance of people from the southern Bantu.

31. The discussion of the Nigerian federalism and its problems that follows is based largely on Professor E.O. Awa's two books: Federal Government in Nigeria (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964) and Issues in Federalism Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1976).

32. At independence and after the general elections of 1965, the Coalition federal government was made up by two regionally-based political parties, namely, the NPC and the NCNC. The regions were so powerful and the control of their governments more attractive than the control of federal government that the most powerful politician of the time, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello decided at independence to remain as the Premier of the Northern Region and to send his protege, Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, to head the Federal Government as Prime Minister on behalf of the majority NPC party of which Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello himself was the leader.