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THE UGANDA CRISIS AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION

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## The Ugandan Crisis and the National Question

Is Uganda about to see a return of peace and social rehabilitation instead of new cycles of political confrontation and violence? Will the country be able to restore its national unity and integrity or would it yet face the prospect of fragmentation? Does the NRA take-over in early 1986 signify a historical and strategic turning point in these regards or could it be only a passing phase?

Against the background of years of disruption and trauma these questions are now (March 1986) raised with renewed urgency and anticipation. Yet to many onlookers of Ugandan politics a way out of the stalemate had for long seemed remote indeed. In recent years Uganda's politics had come to be marked by diminishing expectations. As new rounds of confrontations shaping the country's future had followed each other both at conference tables and in the field, each time their outcome appeared anticipated in many quarters with lessened confidence and increased scepticism. Could it still make a difference? Commonplace attitude had come to view the course of Ugandan politics as engaged in a downward spiral: retrogressing from one missed opportunity to another, it seemingly succeeded in reaching new depths of hostility, destruction and self-destruction at each interval. Increasingly, the question had become whether any conceivable settlement could redirect this commonplace perspective.

Thus for years Uganda's paradox appeared only too familiar: in few situations would there have been more widely shared affirmation of the urgency to recreate political stability and social justice, yet few instances would have manifested sharper divergences and conflicts as to what and whose priorities ought to be followed towards achieving this. Thus, a spectre of unfulfilled expectations surrounded to the stalemate between contending parties, fluctuating as they tended to be, and increasingly played its autonomous part.

In recent years several moments had at first seemed to offer a promise of change and rehabilitation. First, of course, there had been the ousting of

Idi Amin in 1979, desired by many factions and parties but seriously delayed as a result of mutual conflicts and suspicion. The moment of relief and expectation at Amin's overthrow was shortlived, though, and soon became dampened by renewed rivalries and political dispute. As factional struggles along familiar lines of petty politics appeared to resume their course, the installation and demise of the Lule and Binaisa governments were marked by heightening fatigue and increased pessimism. Obote's subsequent return to power, anticipated with mixed feelings as it was, nonetheless gave rise to some renewed expectation, among at least some quarters, that perhaps it might re-establish a power basis from which political stability might be extended. "If only order could be restored, then..." was more or less how the argument ran. Economically, things did not turn out too badly (Kasfir, 1985), but in political terms the failure proved more dismal than even the most gloomy forecast could have anticipated. Obote, who had been a master in playing out ethnic and other factions against each other, now found that his skills in this respect acted as a boomerang. In a context marked by aggravated distrust, internal strife along ethno-religious, party and intra-military lines escalated to virtually unprecedented heights. There was widespread conviction that the elections held in 1981 to regularize the political basis of government had been rigged by Obote's UPC to ensure their recapture of power. All too strongly, it seems, had Obote come to believe that as he had been illegally removed by Amin, he was personally entitled to a restoration of his position at the collapse of the Amin regime engineered by Tanzania's intervention. And as a matter of fact, the Tanzanians did put their cards on him.

With reference to Obote's second regime, the International Commission of Jurists came to quote a figure of 300,000 as victims of oppression, army and police brutality, and ethno-political conflict, identical indeed to the number of casualties attributed earlier to Amin by Amnesty International. Increasingly, controlled and uncontrolled terror had become a dominant feature of political life. Once more, therefore, there was a sense of relief when Obote was ousted in 1985, though this was at once overshadowed by profound uncertainties and fears about the immediate future. The overthrow

itself had come as a by-product of narrowly ethnic intra-army hostility between Acholi and Langi military, exacerbated by Obote's manoeuvres in favour of the Langi. The Acholi-led Okello coup was staged as a pre-emptive measure in this connection, just as years earlier (1971) Amin's coup had sought to pre-empt Obote's plans to reduce his position of power within the army.

During 1985 symptoms of political desintegration multiplied rapidly. A wide assortment of political groups and coalitions each had their different 'project'. Militarily, the scene had become fragmented into an array of alternative armed power bases, the most important of which were the increasingly Acholi-dominated 'official' Uganda Army, the ex-Amin forces, and Museveni's National Resistance Army. Underscoring how much the pursuit of power had become an end in itself, the 'official' Army of Basilio Okello did not shy away from entering into an unholy alliance with the ex-Amin troops they had earlier been persecuting when it was evident that the NRA had become a serious challenge to their power. Only the NRA seemed fairly clear as to what should be its next steps. Inevitably, in many quarters questions as to what should happen next were shifting into what might happen. More generally, hopes for improved prospects tended to mix with anticipations of worse to come. "If only..." became a matter of wishful thinking as much as of political argument.

### Dominant Themes

It is illustrative to look back at the trajectory of Ugandan politics since independence, which might well be viewed in terms of a succession of "if only" arguments, each based on a particular and dominant interpretation of what appeared to be the key axis of political cleavage and conflict at the time and of what seemed to be required to overcome it. Basically, one could distinguish some four or five more or less distinct waves of interpretation (Doornbos, 1978). Essentially, each of these themes raised the national question from a different perspective, or rather, put forward

different national questions and answers. First, no matter how remote from realities it may now appear in retrospect, a good deal of thought around the time of independence was based on the premise that "if only" 'traditional-modern' dichotomies and cleavages could be reconciled, then things would augur well for Uganda's political destiny. The main issue, as perceived by observers as well as participants at the time, was how to make viable provisions for the incorporation of traditional institutions, especially the kingship of Buganda and the smaller kingdoms, within the structures of a modern nation-state. However, as the sources and nature of conflict soon seemed to be shifting, during the next several years "if only" arguments likewise acquired a new contents: by the mid-sixties, ethnically-based dispute - ranging from micro intra-district to macro Bantu-Nilotic levels - seemed to have become highly pervasive in the Ugandan political arena. Thus interpretations converged next on the conclusion that "if only" ethnic conflict could be overcome, then Uganda would be in better position to achieve its national integration. Only few observers paused to ask whether it was ethnicity per se or other forces that triggered off the observed conflicts. Again, however, towards the end of the sixties a new premise suggested itself: "if only" the class basis of politics could be resolved, then there would be better prospects for genuine national development. The Common Man's Charter, at the political level, and neo-Marxist approaches at the conceptual level, posed the centrality of class and class conflict where previous themes had been silent about this.

Amin's armed intervention in 1971 put an abrupt end to all these lines of thought, while at the same time beginning to generate a new kind of hypothesis: "if only" the military could be ousted and civilian rule restored, then the country at last would find its true basis for national reconciliation, etc. The record of what evolved since, however, is fresh enough. Basically, from 1971 till the present internal strife in many respects has been particularly severe in Uganda, causing the national question to be articulated and echoed in a whole range of dimensions. In the end, with diminishing expectations, "if only" arguments came to include, or even to concentrate on, calls for at least a 'clean' military, which in

turn, it was hoped, would help recreate basic 'order'. As it happened, with the NRA slowly extending its control over Southern Uganda, confirmation was increasingly received that it did in fact live up to its reputation of constituting a reasonably disciplined, non-looting, non-harassing people's army. In Southwest Uganda, it was reported to be popularly experienced as a liberation force, or indeed as a kind of blessing in disguise.

"If only" assumptions in politics have a peculiar quality. They can imply a mobilizing element, conducive at least in the short run to orientate thinking towards alternative national strategies. But in the Ugandan case many or most of the conceivable "if only's" were somehow advanced and exploited within a relatively short span of years. In the process the stock of such arguments soon got exhausted: as basic political trust and relationships were progressively being eroded, each next cycle could only succeed in arousing diminishing credibility. Successive traumatic experiences especially with the politics of the gun accumulated into such depths of political cynicism that virtually any group or project could expect to be met with a priori disbelief - and with the chance of new waves of political confrontation. The question then becomes which national project can still be worth that. If Uganda in 1986 will be able to break out of this circle and stalemate, it will be no minor achievement.

#### Starting from Scratch?

Uganda's current condition may be likened to a 'starting from scratch' predicament, applicable here to a whole nation. It is not exactly the first time that the country finds itself in this condition. At the end of the Amin regime much the same kind of situation had presented itself. It could well be argued, in fact, that Uganda's predicament has since only been perpetuated and aggravated, producing a sort of continuing zero-sum situation.

Generally speaking, it is in relatively rare instances only that one may encounter situations of similarly gross political havoc in the wake of some

major confrontation or calamity and the traumatic experience that goes with it. It is different from liberation, coups, elections per se. Its physical illustration might be one of uncounted casualties and pervasive debris, and in fact, one of the first things it may require is clearing the minimum necessary to enable the most immediate, pressing needs to be attended to. That, necessarily, is conveyed in any notion of 'starting from scratch'. Beyond the actual physical disaster one would find actual evidence of the following: a) a significant diminution in resources and resource capacity; b) a significant change, diminution and 'disrupting' in public decision-making capacity, and c) a destruction of pre-existing social ties, a breakdown in value systems and difficulties in the viability of non-local exchange systems (Schaffer, n.d.).

First things first. But what things are first things? Dazzled still from the final explosions of disaster, people may be trying to reorientate themselves in what suddenly appears a strange silence or interlude, trying to formulate answers to questions as simple as "what now?". What questions indeed should be asked first? There might be "how to" questions, presuming basic goals are clear enough and given, though even these would probably involve an exercise of greater magnitude than the usual in sizing up and implementing what will be required by way of reconstruction, restoration, returning to 'normal'. But the "what next" may well demand more qualitative re-appraisals, concerning the kind of start, and the kind of direction, that should be chosen. 'From scratch', after all, suggests that once the immediate debris has been removed, there will be a clean slate to start from. This would not restrict one to the extrapolation of pre-existing designs or structures, but may present one with a rare chance to strike out in novel directions, even the kind-of-direction-one-had-always-wanted-to-go had it not been for the accumulated past acting as 'constraint'.

Notwithstanding the misery that may have given rise to them, there has often been something euphoric about the notion of fresh starts; such moments tend to raise expectations of enlarged scope and promise. Whether this applies to Uganda now is a moot question. But it should be plain that often there has been not so much a fresh start as at best a fresh slate, and that

the fresh slates that perhaps appeared to offer new room for manoeuvre or for choice among alternative courses, have been extremely rare historically. When, then, can fresh slates be expected to serve as liberating charters, releasing rather than restraining energies towards reconstruction?

The basic question in regard to the notion of 'starting from scratch' is, of course, is it conceivable and possible to strike out in ways that are not in some sense derived from the past? No matter how disorienting the present may be, and thus to appear suggestive of a 'new' situation of sorts, what real chances are there of a move away from historically given divisions or strategies?

Experience so far is not too promising. Uganda, together with Kampuchea, Nicaragua immediately after Somoza, and famine-stricken Ethiopia, has come to be regarded among some of the most extreme 'scratch' cases imaginable. After years of unprecedented obliteration of the very fabric of society even basic relief stagnated at times due to bitter persistence of political enmities. Again, notwithstanding the sigh of relief which the country enjoyed at the ousting of Idi Amin, pre-existing divisions had resumed their course as if these horrendous years had been merely an interruption, or as if no lesson was learnt. To the contrary, it appeared as if the Amin years had been a learning period. Revenge took a heavy toll and mutual distrust perpetuated the stalemate. In turn, fear for revenge at least in the North had recently led to preparations for an expected final reckoning.

What must be recognized, though, is that where the social, economic and political scene is largely in havoc, few survivors will be ready to start from blank slates. To anticipate differently may be to expect the heroic or the impossible. The bitterness of trauma tends to enhance, rather than to diminish, determinations to fulfill sworn pledges, frustrated goals or simply to hold on to positions of power. Prolongation and intensification of previous hostility, exacerbating a kind of involution of political options, may thus be as probable an outcome as their sublimation or reconciliation - as again the Ugandan case has illustrated over the past several years.



It is useful, therefore, to consider such 'starting from scratch' moments more closely and see what they imply. Do they allow fresh starts, at all? What is the room for manoeuvre? What are the options, what the chances of a process of perpetuated stagnation? If the government apparatus itself is in disarray and as yet unable to confront key issues, are there not, rather, chances of political fragmentation or even of a gradual dismantling of the state? In that event, what new socio-economic patterns might be emerging, and what power configurations would be likely to shape up? Alternatively, with a basic shift in the power balance, what new chances are there for national reconstruction, or for at least new answers to the national question? And at what price?

#### The National Question

Along with Ethiopia, Sudan, and Chad, Uganda is one of the countries of Africa with regard to which the 'national question' has come to be posed in its most basic form, that is, referring increasingly to the viability of Uganda as a 'national' political entity. The redefinition of the 'national question' which this has implied in the case of Uganda is no less than dramatic and may well constitute the most significant and enduring change resulting from the rifts that arose and deepened during the Amin and Obote episodes. Basically, during the 1960's and even well into the 1970's, national integration perspectives (irrespective of whether they were based on modernization notions, or emphasized the bridging of either ethnic or class gaps) had generally been anticipating the progressive incorporation of various social categories and ethno-political sub-units within the context of the post-colonial Ugandan state. The premise of national integration as an empirical process as well as a constant point of reference had in fact been underlying each of the "if only" themes which were successively articulated in Uganda. In the 1980's, however, the 'national question' has been acquiring a different and more complex contents, concerned less with the how of national integration, but with what basis there is for it. How realistic

will it be to continue to conceive of Uganda as a viable national unit? What conditions are required for its fulfillment? What are the limitations? What the alternatives?

Posing these questions is in no way to deny the urgency of calls for reason today to all conflicting parties to bury their differences (and preferable their arms) and to be prepared to jointly make a fresh start. Earlier, the initiative for the Moshi meeting at the termination of Amin's regime, where all the various groups opposed to his dictatorship came together to formulate a joint plan of action under the umbrella of the Uganda National Liberation Front, was an excellent precursor in this regard. At the same time, it should be realized that such calls have their limitations and to some extent are likely to remain illusory. The scope for fresh starts, as noted, is extremely thin generally and quite problematic still in the concrete case of Uganda today.

But it is equally important to confront these questions from a longer-term perspective, no matter which policy conclusions might finally be drawn from such an exercise. National boundaries are widely viewed as sacrosanct - which is an important principle indeed in the face of possible external designs and interventions. Yet as not a few examples in European and world history illustrate, boundaries are apt to be transformed over time with changing circumstances. Denmark and Norway, just as Holland and Belgium, are only two out of a number of cases that once formed a single state. As growing internal contradictions and mutual incompatibilities led to aggravating irritation and tension, in these two cases the partners reconciled themselves to a divorce which, as it happened, in the end probably allowed them a coexistence on friendlier terms than their earlier unison had seemed to make possible. Today, Belgium itself is slowly but steadily breaking up into two parts, a Flemish and a Walloon nation. The process is a complex one, manifesting itself over several decades, and is generated by a combination of factors: differential economic transformation, socio-political emancipation, and cultural revival. Disappointing as it may at first appear step by step to see two partners wind up their relationship, they deserve credit if

they have the courage to face the potential prospect of deepening divergences and separation and accordingly manage to take rational measures towards reconstructing their contractual bonds on a new basis.

Thus also in the Ugandan case, as the possibilities of fragmentation have been getting closer, it will be important to treat this not as a taboo topic but in any event to consider its potential implications more closely. In fact, the relative (political) cost of 'desintegration' - to the center as well as to the regions concerned - might be assessed and contrasted to the cost of maintaining national 'integration', that is, of continued efforts to maintain the post-colonial framework as a basis for development.

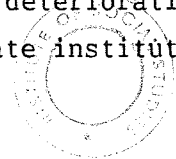
Concretely, what ties the various regions of Uganda - East, West, North, South - together is principally a common center (though not centrally located), and a common political-administrative framework. In turn, there is the common but competitive interest in capturing a share of the resources which the center controls. Economically, there are very few integrative complementarities between the regions, particularly North-South, unless one would consider as such a certain risk spreading through reliance on more than one dominant cash-crop: cotton in the North, coffee in the South. On the other hand, precisely one dimension of inter-regional competition is focussed on the differential way in which the center determines how it will draw revenue from these two main export crops. The annual fixing of producer prices for coffee and cotton thus has always been keenly anticipated by peasants in the North and South, and by necessity constitutes one of the key policy choices of the Ugandan state: is the state going to extract relatively more heavily from the North or from the South to acquire the resources it requires for its own upkeep? What difference will a Southern or Northern dominated government make in this respect?

No matter in what direction the balance might go, however, from the side of the center or the state system as such the matter may be posed rather differently. The center clearly will have a stronger interest in having access to two or more resource poles it can exploit, no matter in how biased a way this may be, than it appears to be of interest to each of the producing regions to be tied to the others within a common framework. Again, at

present there are few complementarities that would provide a different basis. One implication of this though is that questions about the preservation (or dissolution for that matter) of national unity and the corresponding state frameworks generally will be of more immediate concern to those social strata who are more directly associated with the state system - e.g. through employment, contractual relations or patronage - than they are for the majority of peasants in any of the regions. In that sense there is clearly a differential class interest in the concern with national unity.

By implication, however, the crisis of the Ugandan state will also have hit harder at some of the people who economically were fully dependent on it than at sections of the peasantry who still had access to land for foodcrops. Subsistence in various parts of the country was acquiring a fresh meaning, and to some extent indeed provided a protective shield to many peasants vis-a-vis the demanding and increasingly capricious state - precisely as they succeeded in remaining 'uncaptured' (Hyden, 1980, 1986). By implication, to many of them the state increasingly became of limited relevance only. Still, relative food security hardly extended to physical security. Many peasants were not spared the cruelty and harassments of marauding soldiers, who could confiscate their supplies or make it impossible to work on their land.

In the process, the state itself was becoming increasingly 'militarized', that is, in a political context marked by vagaries about the immediate future, control and 'occupation' of the central state institutions was sought not so much out of a determination to initiate any alternative national policies, but because they constituted a highly strategic bullwark in the continuing power game with opponent groups. As noted above, both Amin's and Okello's seizures of power had had such pre-emptive strategic functions. By implication, though, the effectiveness of central institutions for policy purposes could only get further impaired and reduced, and without intervention this process of deterioration might conceivably have advanced to a point where central state institutions would have become fairly irrelevant



from a point of view of public policy. Theoretically, at least, the dwindling state might then more easily have been dispersed with.

More immediately, it would have accelerated a certain contraction of spheres of political action, leaving increased room to local and regional centers of power. Already, the experience with roadblocks marking distinct areas of control tended to accentuate such tendencies towards contraction. In due course, they might have come to constitute the protective barriers behind which, perhaps, a novel kind of mini-states or polities might have been emerging. There has been the Rwenzururu case as one possible forerunner, for example, experimenting a grass-roots administrative technology for no less than 20 years (Doornbos, 1970). Irrespective of its long-run likelihood or possible merits otherwise, one thing to note within this speculative scenario is that at least it would have begun to relate government and politics closer to rural people generally. As it happens, failure to achieve this has widely been cited as one of the root problems of the crisis of the African post-colonial state.

#### The North-South Relationship

It hardly needs further emphasizing in the present context that in social, cultural and linguistic terms the differences and contrasts between the various Ugandan regions, but again especially between North and South, are vast indeed. Though many African countries incorporate significant cultural and ethnic diversity, in the Ugandan case this is particularly pronounced. Less clear than it is sometimes assumed, however, are the political implications of such diversity. Ethnic or cultural differences per se do not necessarily lead to social or political confrontation. Whether conflict will get infused with a dimension of ethnic hostility, will basically depend on the way and extent to which ethnicity is being or has become manipulated for political or economic ends. Once politicized, however, the ethnic dimension may come to represent quite a forceful element precisely because of the collective emotive processes that are thus being generated.

In Uganda the ethnic factor clearly has been aroused to an extremely critical level for over two decades now, so much so that it can hardly be expected to readily let itself be obliterated - even if, as presently appears to be the case, a deliberate effort is made by the new regime not to play the game of ethnic politics. At this juncture, therefore, pleas for national reconciliations alone can still hardly avoid being read as expressions of wishful thinking: "if only, etc...". If left to itself, the ethnic factor thus must certainly be expected to articulate itself in novel forms of expressions. In fact, if it were not for the bitter animosity that culminated between Acholi and Langi within the Ugandan army between 1981 and 1985, one might hypothesize that in the years ahead one could witness more explicit revivals of the dream of a Luo nation as a defensive reaction, just as at earlier points Buganda had reasserted itself as a candidate for separation when it feared imminent domination from the North. As the point of gravity has now shifted to the South a revival of the latter claim is less likely, but the recent years of internal warfare have undoubtedly also raised Kiganda, Bantu and Southern ethnic political consciousness.

One of the most delicate tasks of the new regime will be how to handle this new consciousness and the regained political confidence which forms part of it. Consciousness of nationalism and regionalism can work out as either a relatively positive and constructive force or as progressively a narrowing and destructive one, depending essentially on the stimuli it receives. It is precisely at junctures such as the present one in Uganda that one may be witnessing the process of choice of direction of such collective moods. The best that could happen would be the emergence of a 'clean slate' kind of Ugandan identity, the worst would be the fostering of superiority and revenge feelings in the South vis-a-vis the North.

In the short run the chances of Uganda actually breaking up into several rival armed camps, potentially evolving into two or more de facto mini-states, has certainly diminished with the collapse of the Okello - led Acholi resistance and the NRA extending its presence into the North. Nonetheless, the country has been very close to a spiral of fragmentation, which with a different handling of the immediate confrontations might well

have accelerated on its course. Needless to say that much of the explosive material piled up especially under the North-South relationship, though provisionally defused, is very much present still and will take a long time of very careful handling to prevent it from being mobilized once again.

Besides, the Ugandan case is not an isolated example. Within the African inter-state system one case of potential fragmentation is fairly readily contained. The role of the O.A.U. and the significance of its Charter are well known in this regard. However, problems not unlike those of Uganda have been manifest also in neighbouring Sudan, Ethiopia, Chad and to some extent in Somalia. In some instances, the question may well be posed whether one can still speak of a state in a Weberian sense, as opposed to the O.A.U. definition (Buijtenhuijs, 1984). As it happens, the countries concerned form a more or less continuous region, which in time to come might possibly allow for novel alliances of political movements across the official interstate boundaries (Cf. Woodward, 1986). Conceivably, some of the latter in the decades to come might be receding to more formal lines of demarcation, while new de facto boundaries could become more prominent. Evans-Pritchard's distinction between 'states' and 'stateless societies', both endowed with governmental functions but differently, might then re-assert itself with a fresh meaning. What, in that case, would the African map be looking like in, say, 50 years from now?

At least as important in a longer term perspective, however, the formation in Uganda of a NRA-led government during the first months of 1986, and the steady expansion of NRA-control throughout the country may be considered to signify a historic transition in two major respects: One, for the first time in post-colonial Africa a popularly-based guerrilla movement has demonstrated the practical possibility of overthrowing one of the notorious and illegitimate military regimes that had become so characteristics for the continent. Second, for the first time in post-colonial Uganda did the power balance shift in favour of the South, that is, a mainly Southern-recruited armed force came to provide the basis for government power and has thus ended the feeling of people in Buganda and elsewhere in the South of being

subjected to an occupation force from the North. Together these two transitions are likely to have a major impact on the future trajectory of the Ugandan state and politics, potentially giving it a significantly different direction as well as greater stability.

As is well known the Amin and Obote regimes had basically maintained their sway over the economically more important South on the basis of army support which per definition had been overwhelmingly recruited from the North. Per definition, as it concerned, not without irony, a legacy of the colonial regime that had sought to create a power balance, divide and rule model, through concentrating military and police recruitment on Acholi, Lango and West-Nile in the North, away from the economic, educational and administrative central region of the country.

Now that this key political resource has been taken away from the North, further developments on this front will be of crucial importance. In the longer run, one question is what will be the reaction of the North - or rather, of different groups from Acholi, Lango and West-Nile, who in recent years have become profoundly divided amongst each other. In fact their divisions and mutual hostilities within and outside the Ugandan army no doubt constituted one major underlying factor facilitating the NRA victory. Now that the latter has become a fact, what long-term chances will there be of their eventual reconciliation and the redefinition of a 'common Northern interest'? Are there likely to be efforts to recapture part of the lost resource base, e.g. by renewed pressures for special recruitment into the armed forces? Are there chances of an underground option, or alternatively of armed operations from bases in Southern Sudan or Zaire? At least as important, however, is what will be the South's and especially the new center's position - concretized partly in new recruitment policies for the armed forces, partly in other policy measures which the new internal balance of power enables it to initiate. What, in short, will the South do with the combination of military, political and economic power that it now has gained, for the first time since independence?

Though not without hazards, one might speculate that if the post-Amin and post-Obote process of political desintegration had come to its ultimate





conclusion, namely, a falling apart into several regional monopolies of power and political control, in the long run this might possibly have provided an alternative suitable point of departure for reconciliation and negotiated reunification. Thus, paradoxically, due to its demonstrated power advantage the NRA government now faces the more difficult task of having to lay down and impose a framework which otherwise might possibly have come about on a basis of voluntary association. Though such a process would by no means have been easy and its outcome far from certain, the longer-term mortgage of a Southern-imposed settlement should not be underestimated.

The role and position of Buganda, as defined by its elite strata, as always presents special implications. Earlier, its very centrality had been militating against its ambitions for a separatist option. At that time, if it had instead constituted a distinct region away from the political center, it might have represented a ready-made candidate for separate statehood. Today, one must basically assume decreased interest in any separate status for Buganda, as influential political and economic strata are likely to perceive the advantages of a renewed primacy of Buganda, and the South generally, as a region dominant within Uganda. This will probably be true whether or not a restoration of kingship in Buganda were (once again) to be considered. A central location will be advantageous from any such hegemonic perspective whereas it would rather pose problems to any alternative scenario which would include the option of a division.

One final irony in this connection is that in the relative stability of the early sixties one had seen the formal tabling of motions for Buganda's independence plus indeed the actual secession of Rwenzururu, whereas in contrast, while the collapse of the Ugandan state had never seemed so imminent as it became in 1985, no voices favouring an exit option for one or another region have been heard.

#### Key Questions

As for the future, again, much will depend on the way in which some of the underlying conflicts and grievances are handled: Will NRA forces succeed in maintaining lasting control throughout the North and inspire a renewed sense of trust and rehabilitation in West-Nile, Acholi, Lango? Will the Museveni government manage to infuse its policies with a reasonable dosis of equity - regionally, sector-wise, and in terms of urban-rural equations - while nonetheless avoiding a resumption of the politics of petty trade-offs which had so often been advanced as a substitute? Will one achieve a way of unloading the center and granting a fair amount of autonomy to regions and districts while retaining a flexible form of coordination? What new conception, and content, of the role and position of the state will be evolving under NRA aegis? And lastly, in what direction will the NRA, mindful no doubt of Kalecki's admonitions addressed to 'intermediate regimes' (Kalecki, 1972), be specifying its political program and ideology beyond the all embracing populist ticket with which it made its political entry?

However heavy the legacies of the past, it is in several of these respects that the first steps taken, 'from scratch' so to speak, will prove to be of decisive importance in the search for new political openings, or indeed for new answers to the national question.

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