Stereotypes as Sources of Conflict in Uganda

Justus NIL, gaju
Editorial Consultant/BMG Wordsmith, Kampala Email: ibmugâ;u ;a yahoo.co.uk

*In order- to govern, colonial authorities had frequently found it expedient to divide in order to rule. An example of such a situation was, for instance, the dividing up of Uganda into a society of contradictory and mutually suspicious interests. They made, for instance, the central area of the country, and to some extent, areas in the east, produce cash crops for export. In so doing they made one part of Uganda produce cash crops and another reservoir of cheap labour and of recruitment into the colonial army. This had the inevitability of producing inequalities, which in turn generated intense and disruptive conflicts between the different ethnic groups involved. The rivalry over access to opportunities gave rise to the formation of attitudes of superiority and inferiority complex*es.

President Yoweri Museveni (MISR, 1987:20)

The history of modern Uganda is a long story of stereotyping. From the beginning of colonial rule to the present, the history of Uganda has been reconstructed in neat-looking but deceptive stereotypes. These stereotypes can be summed up as follows: aliens and natives, centralised/developed/sophisticated states versus primitive stateless societies, the oppressor and the oppressed, the developed north and the backward north, the rulers and subjects, and the monarchists/traditionalists and the republicans. Uganda's history has also been reconstructed in terms of the "modermsers" versus the "Luddites", patriots against quislings, heroes/martyrs and villains, the self-serving elite and the long-suffering oppressed/exploited masses, the "swine" versus the visionary leaders, the spineless politicians and the blue-eyed revolutionaries, etc.

A quick glance at Uganda's history textbooks from primary to university level shows that stereotypes have been central to historical learning and writing (see for example, B. Okello, 2002). Thus, we have the Bantu in the south who constitute more than 50% of the population- this echoes the *Rubanda Nyamwinshi* (natural majority)of Hutu he Hutu regime in Rwanda (1959-1994) - and the Nilotic and Sudanic minority in the north. We have the "lawless" Karimojong warriors and cattle rustlers armed to the teeth, roaming the country and causing havoc to themselves and their neighbours, and the law abiding citizens in the rest of the country who recognise and respect the sanctity of private property. Also, the history of Uganda is nothing more than a sum total of ethnic histories (for example, M. S. Kiwanuka, 1971; S. R. Karugire, 1971; D.W. Cohen, 1973 &1977 and R.R. Atkinson 1999). With a few exceptions (S.R.Karugire, 1980; J. J. Jorgensen 1981 and P. Mutibwa, 1992), no attempt has been made so far to write a historical synthesis of the history of modern Uganda comparable to that of John Iliffe (1979) on Tanganyika.

For social scientists and historians who love and use them, stereotypes have the virtue of simplicity. They put every historical event in black and white. They provide simple, if deceptive, explanations of complex situations and historical realities. Stereotypes have no room uncertainties. They follow the law of absolutes - of good versus evil, of us against them. And yet we know that history is too complex to be reduced to simplicities and certainties. To do so is a travesty of history. As Pieter

Geyl (1965:15-18) reminded us more than fifty years ago, one of the delights of history is that it is an argument without end - there is no finality about the subject, no black and white interpretations of the past, including that of Uganda.

However, not only do stereotypes distort history through oversimplification but they are also extremely dangerous breeding grounds for bigotry, fear, resentment, irrationality, animosity, hatred and ethnic conflict and cleansing. Stereotypes generate self-serving attitudes such as we deserve more because we sacrificed more than others, they are suffering because it is their own fault, it is their problem since they are killing their own people and it is their government and we have nothing to do with it. In extremes cases, stereotypes have culminated in mass violence, the mass displacement of millions of fellow citizens, ethnic cleansing, pogroms and genocide (A.B.K. Kasozi, 1999; G. Prunier, 1995; P. Gourevitch, 1998 and M. Mamdam, 2002).

This paper attempts to do three things. First of all, it highlights the stereotypes that have distorted the history of modern Uganda since the imposition of British colonial rule. It argues that these distortions of the past have generated violence and armed conflict - whose end is no where in sight - that have inflicted immeasurable social, economic and political damage to the country for the past forty years. Secondly, it attempts to demonstrate how historically invalid these stereotypes are and calls for the overhaul of the writing and teaching of the history Uganda from a national perspective free of harmful stereotyping. Thirdly, it suggests how the reconstruction of the history of Uganda can and should go beyond stereotypes to emphasise the shared past of its people despite outward diversity, debunk flattery and self-glorification and pave the way for national reconciliation towards a common future and destiny.

Of superior aliens and inferior natives

One of the stereotypes in the history of Uganda that has persisted to the present has been the division of citizens into superior aliens and inferior natives. Indeed, this stereotype is not unique to Uganda. It is one of the central themes running through the history of the Great Lakes region as whole. In the case of Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, this division of citizens into aliens and natives has inflicted untold suffering and bloodshed to the extent that The Economist once described the region as the "Great Lakes of blood". Historians of Uganda have traced the origins of this stereotype to John Harming Speke. Owing to his Victorian racial prejudices and theories of civilisation, this English explorer could not accept the fact "totally savage Negroes" were capable of originating and developing "sophisticated centralised states" in the heart of Africa (G. Prunier, 1995: 7-10). Speke's historical invention was later taken up, developed and refined by later historians and anthropologists the extent that his farfetched speculation born of prejudice and ignorance was soon transformed into a historical fact. In Uganda, K. Oberg (1940) is good example of Speke's disciples. Even today Speke is alive and well in the commentaries on contemporary Africa (see for example, A. Russell, 2000).

Without belabouring the point - the Hamitic myth is too well to known to warrant repeating in detail in this paper - the essence of alien/native stereotype can be summarised as follows: the Great Lakes centralised kingdoms were established by the Bahima Batutsi who came from outside the region - never mind exactly where they came from or why they came -with their long-horned cattle, conquered and

imposed what was tantamount to alien rule on the native agricultural communities. As a result, of this alien intrusion, the cattle corridor of western Uganda has since then been inhabited by two distinct and separate "ethnic entities" - the subordinate "native" Bairu and the dominant, alien ruling Bahima. This alien/native stereotype is based on the assumption that "the Bairu were the original inhabitants of the country" (M. T. Mushanga, 1970: 29). It is also assumed that centralised states had reached a more advanced stage of social and political development than their "stateless" neighbours had.

But this alien/native stereotype does not stand up to historical scrutiny for several reasons. First, unlike many peoples of Africa (for example, the Luo), in their traditions the Bahima do not claim to have come from outside their present homeland. On the contrary, they assert that they together with their Bairu compatriots were created in situ by God (Ruhanga). According to the Kairu-Kahima-Kakama tradition, the two communities started off as brothers - the sons of God - but later their father decreed their social and economic differentiation. Some historians have dismissed this tradition as a later day invention deliberately constructed to legitimate the social stratification of Bairu/Bahima communities and Hima political hegemony in western Uganda in the centuries following the conquest and subjugation of the native Bairu population. Fair enough. But it is important to note that this invention of tradition is denied or contradicted by the Bairu tradition. In any case why on earth should we believe Speke's speculation more than what the people themselves, say about their history. What happened to the authenticity of oral tradition that is nowadays universally accepted as history? (J, Vansina, 1985).

More importantly, linguistic, archaeological and ethnographic evidence (D. L. Schoenbrun, 1998, chapter 6) suggests that the herders, with their long-horned cattle, have lived long side hunters farmers an: craftsmen: 0- 1110- than. thousand years. This is much longer than the four to five centuries that have been surmised for the arrival of the Hima "invaders" (M. R. Doornbos, 2001:12). Surely, if the Hima arrival in the Great Lakes region was so recent, how could they have lost their original identity so quickly without any trace? At the same time, how can the emergence and evolution of separate and distinct Hima and Tutsi identities, which have more cultural affinities to Bairu and Bahutu respectively than to each other, have taken place so fast if they had common historical roots? Would it not make more sense to attribute the Bairu/Bahima differences to social and economic differentiation over the centuries years rather than the simplistic and speculative exotic racial origins of the Bahima from Abyssinia or wherever. In any case, Oberg (1940: 123) speculates that the Bahima may have been "Hamiticized Negro cattle people" - a concession to the colour of their skins and texture of their hair. If so, which Negro group was Hamiticised? Was it the Bairu Negroes? What did this mean for the Hima historical evolution over the centuries? And if the Bahima invaded the Great Lakes region in waves, as Oberg asserts, at what point did the invasion stop?

But suppose, for the sake of argument, that indeed the Bahima came from outside the Great Lakes region. So what? Does this make them less of citizens than the natives? According to Roland Oliver (1966), the Bantu originated from the Nigeria-Cameroon region and rapidly expanded into their present homelands thanks to the combination of the agricultural and iron revolutions. If this is so, should we call them aliens or natives? It would not make sense to call them aliens just as we should not

apply the same term to the Bahima. For some curious reason, the term alien seems to be reserved for the Bahima. For example, the Luo tradition clearly states that the present Luo speakers originally came from the Sudan and yet they have never been categorised as aliens. If there were any "natives" in the Great Lakes region, they must have been the Stone Age populations who gradually evolved or were assimilated into herding and farming communities as a result of the agricultural and iron revolutions.

Of course, in a racialised colonialalien/native stereotype to their own self-serving purposes. For Hima/tutsi elite being called superior and alien had "a feel good effect". They were proud to be told that they had racial affinities, however distant, with the new colonial masters Overtime they developed a superiority complex, which they used to claim privileges and entitlements, including being appointed colonial chiefs. They then reinvented the pre-colonial past to live the impression that their superiority had existed since time immemorial. Like the new colonial masters, they grounded their rights and privileges on the right of conquering and subjugating the natives some four to five centuries before the advent of European conquest and occupation.

On their part, the natives felt dejected and resentful. They carried the burden of taxation and forced labour. Under colonialism, they served two sets of masters - the white and Hima/Tutsi elite masters. In due course, they sought to turn their supposed native status to their political advantage. In Rwanda and to some extent Ankole, the so-called natives began to make political demands on the ground that they were the natural majority. The extremists even went to the extent of demanding the return of the Tutsi/Hima aliens to their original homelands, where they came from, and wherever that might be (Doornbos, 1978:31).

Although the situation in Ankole did not sink the horrors of Rwanda (1959-94, the undercurrents of animosities, based on the alien/native stereotypes were never far beneath the surface (see for example, M. R. Doornbos, 1978). The tensions of the 1940s and 1950s and the expulsion of the so-called Bayarwanda in the early 1980s were clear manifestations of alien/native stereotyping. Indeed, it is arguable that Ankole has escaped the tragedy of Rwanda and Burundi only because it is part of Uganda.

Ethnic identities made simple

Closely related to alien/native stereotyping has been the oversimplification of the peoples of Uganda into neat-looking, watertight ethnic identities. Social scientists, including historians, have tended to write about these identities as if they were cast in stone from time immemorial. This is misleading party because many of the ethnic identities such as the Karamojong, Acholi, Basoga, Banyankore and Bakiga were colonial constructs. Take the case of the Karimojong. They consisted of the Matheniko, Bokora, Jie, Dodoth and other groups who even today see themselves as separate and distinct identities. Similarly, before the imposition of colonial rule and the construction of ethnic boundaries, the people that we call Bakiga today had clan rather than ethnic identities, for example, Basigi and Bainika, Bamungwe and Bakiyagiro (P. Ngologoza, 1998). Also, the Banyankore as we know them today are an amalgam of Banyankore (the people of Nkore, both Bairu and Bahima), Bahororo, Bayaruguru, Bahweju, Batagwenda, Banyamobo and other groups (Doornbos, 1978 and 2001). However, in recent years there has been a tendency to identify

Banyankore with Bairu and to treat Bahima as if they were a separate and exotic entity, which reinforces the alien/native stereotype.

Students of Uganda history have tended to mix up cultural and ethnic identities. The Baganda, for example, have been described as a homogenous cultural and ethnic identity. And yet Kiganda culture and ethnicity are, in fact, historical syntheses of diverse groups of farmers, herders, fishermen and crafts that came from different directions and were in due course forged into the Buganda nation. When Buganda conquered Bulemezi, Singo, Gomba and Budu during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it incorporated many non-Baganda ethnic identities, including the Bahima herders in the cattle corridor. Richard Reid (2002,chapter 3) has shown that the savannah grasslands of pre-colonial Buganda, where cattle rather than the banana were the principal means of livelihood and the mainstay of the economy, were inhabited by non-Baganda ethnic groups.

The Buganda annexation of "the lost counties" from Bunyoro, and Mawogola, Rwemiyaga and Kabura from Nkore at the end of the nineteenth century, added new ethnic elements to its population. Thus, apart from Baganda, colonial Buganda consisted of diverse ethnic groups such as Bakoki, Bahima, Banyoro (both Bairu and Bahuma), Baruli, Banyara and Bakenyi. In addition, new ethnic arrivals came from Rwanda, Burundi, Japadhola and even Luo Nyanza in Kenya. Thus, both before and during the colonial period Buganda was more of a multiethnic than a homogeneous ethnic identity.

Unfortunately, this rich ethnic diversity has been ignored in writing the history of Buganda (e.g., t. S. Kïwanuka, 1971) and it has been a source of resentment and latent conflict among the ethnic minorities that felt they had a raw deal from being income orated in Buganda. Part of the problem is that ethnic diversity has been seen as weakness rather than a source of strength. Accordingly, we have tended to attach more importance to ethnic purity and to suppress expressions of ethnic pluralism.

Much has been made of the openness of the Baganda to accommodate newcomers regardless of where they come from. In support of the argument that the Baganda have been "ethnic blind" throughout their history, it has been pointed out that, in the recent past, the Baganda are the only people that have elected non- Baganda - for example, in Kassanda County North, Mityana County North, Ntejeru County North, Nakawa Division, Mawogola and Rwemiyaga, to the national parliament. This is fair enough and other areas of Uganda should be encouraged to emulate this commendable example. But it should be noted that the constituencies that have elected non-Baganda also happen to have substantial concentrations of non-Baganda residents.

While it is true that, compared to other peoples of Uganda, have been more open and accommodative, there have always been some caveats along the road to assimilation and integration. All newcomers had to embrace Kiganda culture in total. They could not become the citizens or residents of Buganda and retain their cultural and ethnic identities. That is partly why the diverse historical origins of the Baganda can not be traced with any certainty. Secondly, much of the assimilation and integration of the newcomers into Buganda society was forced. There is evidence that during the colonial period, young men in Bugangaizi and Buyaga had to assume

Kiganda names (e.g., Ssekitoleko and Mukiibi) in order to ensure their own education, social mobility and career development. Such people were quick to reassert their identities once Buyaga and Bugangaizi reverted to Bunyoro. The present ethnic assertiveness in Buruli, with the installation of Isse Abaruli and all that, suggests that the process of assimilation was incomplete.

Some of the newcomers assumed double identities to Cone, with the integration pressures in colonial Buganda, something similar to Fanon's black skins, white masks. In public they professed to be, and behaved like, Baganda, they assumed Kiganda names and clans, and spoke Luganda. In private; in their homesteads, they discretely retained their ethnic identities, including names, language and beliefs. Two examples from personal experience can be cited to illustrate this point.

In the 1990s when I was working in the public service, I met a young man called Bavuma, from Luwero. For all intents and purposes, he was a "true" Muganda. However, he told me that his roots were in Rwanda where his forefathers came from. In his home, they spoke Runyarwanda and used their Kiyarwanda names. He longed to reconnect with his relatives, back in Rwanda. I asked him why he assumed a double; identity. He said it was copying mechanism to survive while retaining at least the residue of his original identity.

In Buwava, Mukono, I had neighbour called Sokawebuze (please note that this is not a typical Kiganda name). He was a devout Muslim. He originally came from Burundi. His Luganda had strong traces of Rurundi accent. His wife was barely fluent in Luganda. This man was a truly first-generation newcomer. Yet all his children already had Kiganda names like Mukasa and, in public at least, they passed for Baganda while in their home they continued to live as Barundi.

The above examples indicate that assuming a new ethnic identity can, in certain circumstances, be a matter of convenience. People who assume double identities for whatever reason can quickly reassert their original identity when it becomes expedient to do so. This reassertion of ethnic identity by newcomers in a host community can generate real or potential conflict. Indeed, the growing concern in Buganda about selling land to "foreigners" can be explained by the fact the newcomers who have settled in Buganda have not bothered or even pretended to assume at least some aspects of Kiganda ethnic identity, including language and cultural practices. This unwillingness to contemplate living within a multiethnic society can become a breeding ground for future conflicts not only in Buganda but also elsewhere in Uganda where there is recent or ongoing in flux of immigrants.

The writing of the history of Uganda has also failed to distinguish ethnicity from language and culture. For example, who are the Lango? Are they an ethnic group? We know that the Lango are Luo speakers but culturally they are closer to the Kumam. Iteso and Karimojong. The Lango of Erute and Otuke have closer ethnic and cultural affinities with the Acholi neighbours to the north, while those around Lake Kyoga show signs of strong cultural inputs from the Baruli, Banyara, Bakenyi and Banyoro neighbours to the south and west. What is true of the Lango is equally true of the Kumam Samia, Basoga and Palwo. What we call ethnic groups in Uganda are historically like Hungarian goulash drawing cultural ingredients from their

neighbourhood to make the equivalent of a rich, delicious and nourishing dish. This means that the peoples of Uganda have a lot more in common than they care to admit, let alone bother to explore and enjoy.

Governance: Form and substance

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, pre-colonial political arrangements in Uganda have been put in an assortment of categories as a matter of course. These include centralised kingdoms (e.g., Buganda, Nkore, Bunyoro and Toro), principalities like those in Mpororo and Busoga, chiefdoms (e.g., Padibe, Patiko and Payiira in Acholi) and a mosaic of "stateless" polities in the rest of the country. While kings, assisted by a hierarchy of chiefs and other bureaucrats, held sway in centralise states, gerontocracy (the rule of elders) was supposedly the order of the day in "stateless" societies. These categories were not neutral or value free. Brought up in strong centralised nation states and empires, nineteenth century Europeans who came to Africa took the enlargement of political scale for granted. Political centralisation and state building were assumed to be automatic measures of progress development and civilisation. The intensity and extent of centralisation reflected the level of development and civilisation. This logic of "centralisation is equal to development and civilisation" was inevitably extended to Africa.
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The pioneer writers on Uganda,from John Hanning Speke onwards, saw the centralised states of Uganda and the Great Lakes region as "sophisticated and civilised", at least by African standards. In contrast, the so-called stateless societies were considered backward and primitive, almost living in the Hobbesian "state of nature", where life was "nasty, short and brutish". It is these societies that the English historian Trevor-Roper had in mind when he described Africa as "a gyration of warring tribes" wandering all over the continent with no history worth studying. This meant that from the outset of colonialism, different standards were applied to different political categories. While the political institutions of centralised states were selectively co-opted by British colonial authorities where it was convenient to do so, for example, under the so-called system of indirect rule, the political practices and institutional arrangements of stateless societies were ignored or discarded.

The supposed sophistication and advanced political development of centralised states in Uganda and the Great Lakes outlived colonialism. Listen to what President Museveni said as recently as 1987. According to him, "Ugandan societies [all of them?] Have been the most sophisticated societies in Africa." He claimed that since, by the time the British came to Uganda, "we had created fairly sophisticated feudal states, the colonial authorities had no choice but to introduce indirect rule and to forego white settlement in Uganda" (MISR, 1987:22). Apart from the fact that not all the peoples of Uganda had created "feudal states", this astonishing claim misreads the pragmatic motives and calculations underlying the policy of indirect rule.

The British introduced indirect rule not because they respected "the feudal states" but because they were thin on the ground and, throughout the colonial period, they did not have sufficient human and financial resources to sustain an army of British bureaucrats in Uganda. Indeed, as Gardner Thompson (2003:22) has correctly pointed out, as recently as 1955, there were only three white officials, including the district commissioner, in the whole of Lango District. Besides, white settlement in

Uganda was in fact attempted in the decades before 1914 and its failure and the triumph of the "peasant economy" had nothing to do with the existence of "sophisticated feudal states" (see M. Mamdani, 1999:1949-61). In any case, elsewhere in Africa, in southern Africa in a I^ particular, white settlement and colonisation were unstoppable despite the existence of strong, centralised and militarised post-mfecane states that were comparable to, or perhaps even more powerful than, the "feudal states in Uganda (D. Denoon, 1972: 15--76 J.D. Omer-Cooper, 1987: 52-99).

The purported superiority of centralised states over stateless polities, which is often asserted without substantiation, raises some interesting questions. Apart from outward appearances and trappings, how intrinsically different were centralised states from stateless polities? By what scientific criteria should the superiority of some forms of government over others be established? Are large, centralised states always better than small, community level polities? Are centralised states always superior or more desirable at all times and in all situations? What are the essential purposes of government - whether traditional or modern - by which we can objectively determine its utility and suitability for particular societies?

The essential purposes of good government can be summarised as follows: the protection of life and property, the enforcement of law and order, the administration and dispensation of justice, the settlement of disputes and the defence of polity territory against external aggression. It is therefore imperative to establish to what extent these minimum basics of government were met by various polities regardless of scale or sophistication in order to decide whether centralised states were more developed, sophisticated and civilised than stateless polities in pre-colonial Uganda. This raises another set of questions worth pondering. Were lives and property better protected in centralised states than in stateless polities? Did centralised states enforce law and order and dispense justice more effectively and efficiently than stateless polities? Did centralised states have better means and ways of performing the minimum functions of government than stateless polities did?

The answers to all the above questions appear to be no. Neither the centralised states nor the stateless polities had the police to protect lives and property and to enforce law and order on a day-to- day basis In each category law enforcement and the protection of lives and properties were primary responsibilities of families and clan councils of elders. Neither the centralised states nor the stateless polities had the means or the will to enforce judicial decisions. Although the centralised states had recognisable centres of power the day-to-day affairs of ordinary people were managed through families and councils of elders just as they were in stateless polities. To claim that centralised states were superior to stateless polities is to confuse form and substance - appearances and historical realities.

Examples from elsewhere in the world indicate that small polities can serve their people as well as, or even better than, larger ones. For example, in terms of good governance and prosperity, the people of Luxembourg have nothing to envy from their bigger German neighbours. Therefore, the notion that centralisation is superior to small, informal and egalitarian forms of governance is nothing more than a stereotype that often oft-ends the sensibilities of those who used to live in the so-called stateless societies. Indeed, it is arguable that the relentless centralisation drive

in colonial and post-colonial Uganda at the expense of traditional, time-tested and people-centred forms of governance is to blame for conflicts that have inflicted so much damage to the country since independence.

The preference and special treatment accorded to the centralised states by colonial authorities were bound to polarise the politics of Uganda, which eventually generated the conflicts of the last fifty years. Since centralised states were supposed to be superior to stateless societies, people in kingdom areas and their traditional rulers began to demand special statuses and privileges. The development of Buganda as a "state within a state", which in the 1950s culminated in the demand for "federo", should be understood in this context. Apart from the creation of what has been described as "complexes of superiority and inferiority", the political divide between the kingdom and non-kingdom areas eventually assumed the ideological dimensions of the 1950s and 1960s. People in kingdom were labelled feudalists, monarchists, neo-traditionalists and reactionaries. In contrast, the people in the non-kingdom areas had the honour of becoming republicans, democrats, socialists and progrevissives.These labels or stereotypes have provided a convenient ideological framework for the conflicts in post-colonial Uganda.

Ironically, as colonial Uganda moved towards independence, the rulers of centralised states, especially Buganda, became opponents of centralisation at the national level. that is why the demanded federalism and their demands were incorporated in the independence constitution of 1962 when Buganda gained full federal status and Ankole, Bunyoro, Busoga and Toro became quasi-federal states. In contrast, the politicians in non-kingdom districts (stateless societies) supported Governor Andrew Cohen's centralising efforts if only to role back the perceived privileges of the kingdom (centralised) areas. As a fall back position, the non-kingdom districts (with the notable exception of Teso) demanded the positions of "constitutional heads" in order to be at par with the kingdoms. The underlying tensions between the advocates of centralisation and those of federalism partly precipitated the 1966 crisis, which culminated in the republican constitution of 1967.

Of oppressors and the oppressed

The division of Ugandans into the oppressors and oppressed without qualification or regard for historical accuracy is one of ubiquitous stereotypes that began at the onset of colonialism and has continued unabated to the present. When the Europeans arrived in Uganda, they attempted to describe the nature of governance, especially in the centralised states. What emerges from these descriptions is a picture of royal despotism, autocracy and tyranny. Under this scenario, the pre-colonial rulers were despotic and omnipotent with unlimited powers of life and death over their subjects. They owned everything from land to cattle. The exercised both temporal and spiritual powers. Their decisions were final. According to Karugire (1980: 23), "the king of Buganda was the source of power and wealth and every functionary of the state held office at the king's pleasure." In short, pre-colonial rulers were laws unto themselves with no checks and balances to restrain their personal whims and unlimited, absolute power (see, e.g., M. Doornbos, 1978 and 2001; K. Oberg, 1940).

But how despotic were the pre-colonial in Uganda? Did they really exercise unlimited power without any checks and balances? Isn't there a difference between the personal display of arbitrary power on an ad hoc basis and institutionalised royal despotism? While in theory the pre-colonial rulers may have looked absolute and

omnipotent, in practice their power was checked not only by their own personalities and capabilities but also by the intervention of other state actors and the prevailing conditions in their states. First, some individuals may have risked being despotic and possibly got way with it, but the wiser rulers often opted for tact, diplomacy, persuasion and consultation before taking important decisions. Secondly, "powers behind the throne" like the queen mother, sister and other senior bureaucrats more often than not intervened to influence or constrain the rulers' actions. Thirdly, the rulers could not ignore the interests of their influential subjects with impunity. There was always the possibility of senior chief or clan leaders rebelling against rulers who attempted to exercise power outside the orbit of tradition and convention (H. E. Hanson, 2003:7-8). Also, in the kingdoms of western Uganda, herders whose wealth was "on the hoof' could vote with their feet, so to speak, and transfer their allegiance from an intolerable ruler to a more amicable one.

However, the royal absolutism stereotype continued to linger in public imagination long after the eclipse of kingdoms in Uganda before re-surfacing as "cultural institutions" in the early 1990s. For example, as recently as 1965 the students of Ntare School History Society, some of whom or their like-minded contemporaries may be influential members of the anti-Obugabe Banyankore Cultural Foundation, described the traditional system of government in Ankole was despotic with the king exercising "unlimited powers" (M. Doornbos, 2001:15). Similarly, the resistance to the restoration of kingship in Ankole is not based on the argument that the institution has become an anachronistic irrelevance in this modern, digital age but on the fear that that its revival would lead to resurgence of royal despotism. Whatever, its pros and cons, the unresolved Ankole kingship controversy remains a source of bitterness and mutual suspicion between the opponents and proponents of restoration (Ibid: 91-127) and could lead, sooner or later, to conflict.

A more insidious and potentially stereotypes that has been perpetuated in the history and politics Uganda is the issue of oppressive rulers versus oppressed subjects. Again Ankole provides a good example of this kind of stereotyping. In brief, the construction of this stereotype goes as follows: the Bahima were the pre-colonial ruling class/caste. The Nkore State belonged to them for it was formed to protect their cattle. They used their power, influence and privileged status/social networks to dominate and exploit their Bairu subjects. The Bairu were not allowed to own "productive" (read cows) cattle. They did not marry Bairu women, etc. On the other hand, the Bairu were peasants, serfs, inferior caste or even slaves, who were at the beckon and call of their Bahima overlords. (For details of this summary see, e.g., Oberg, 940 and E. I. Steinhart, 1999:718)

Now this is strong stuff that calls for discussion. To start with, historically, for the Bahima the term Bairu was not limited to their agricultural neighbours in Ankole but to all people, including Bakiga, Baganda, Basoga, etc., who ordinarily' did not own cattle and who tilled the land, supplemented by hunting, fishing and crafts, for their livelihoods. In Buganda, the equivalent of Bairu is Baddu and no historian has ever suggested that they were inferior to other Baganda. Secondly, Bairu could not have been serfs because there was no serfdom of feudalism in Nkore or anywhere else in western Uganda. Neither Bairu nor Bahima were castes because there were no Indian-like caste; social prohibitions, restrictions and expectations. The Bairu were not slaves because the words for slave in Runyankore were Bahuku (male slaves)

and Bazana (female slaves). Bairu were not even workers for the Bahima because the workers were called Bashumba and these were usually poor Bahima who had mastered the ways of looking after cattle. Therefore, the only appropriate term to describe Bairu is free peasants although even this requires qualification since they were not a uniform undifferentiated mass.

What about the assertions that the Bairu did not own "productive" cattle and the Bahima did not marry women on grounds of social inferiority? These claims are travesties of history. But, unfortunately, in the absence of quantitative and qualitative data, as well as the hazards of oral tradition as history, it is difficult to rebut such travesties (for discussion of the problems of quantification in oral traditions see Justus Mugaju, 1997). Never the less, there is some statistical evidence suggesting that many Bairu owned "productive" cattle long before the advent of British colonialism. Two cattle censuses were carried out in 1935 and 11937 (W. I,. S. Mackintosh, 1938:29) - barely three and a half decades after the imposition of colonial rule - and what they found is quite interesting and revealing.

In 1935 the Bairu in Ankole owned more cattle (107,262 head) than Bahima (72,397 head). Although there was no breakdown between female and male cattle, there is not doubt that most of them were productive cattle. Although by 1937 the Bairu cattle numbers had declined to 88,429 (67,905 female) and the Bahima head of cattle had gone up to 129,590 (116,406 female), Bairu ownership of cattle was still significant. What do these figures mean? They clearly show that the Bairu could not have accumulated so many cattle in less than four decades. In fact, British colonial officials were surprised that the Bairu owned such large numbers of cattle. Thus, the claim that the Bahima did not allow Bairu to own cattle is without historical foundation.

Bahima did not marry Bairu women for obvious, practical reasons. Given the fact that Hima way of life revolved around cattle, Bahima had to marry wives brought up in the kraal culture, knew how to churn milk, process and preserve ghee, clean and smoke the milk containers, cope without solid food and perform their gender roles in a nomadic cattle culture. Similarly, Bairu men married women who knew how to till the soil, grow, weed, harvest and store grains and pulses, as well as prepare meals and brew beer for their families. So the fact that cross marriages between Bairu and Bahima were not common had nothing to with the mindset of superiority and inferiority. In any case, cross marriages occurred under certain circumstances. Rich cattle-owning Bairu married Bahima women and some Bahima married Bairu women or what the European writers chose to call "concubines". The products or "half-castes" of these unions were called *Abambari.*

Did the Bahima constitute a ruling class that oppressed and exploited their Bairu subjects? The answer is no. the ruling class, in Nkore, if there was any, were the Bahinda who "always considered themselves distinct and `above' both Bairu and Bahima. As Archie Mafeje (1998:43) "both Bahima and Bairu subjects suffered extraction of surplus value in form of tribute by the rulers." Besides, the Bairu and Bahima were not homogenous entities. Some of the rich Bairu had more access to power and state resources than poor Bahima neighbours who "preferred to remain with their herds away from both the court and agricultural peasants" (Ibid. :35). The Bairu artisans who produced milk pots, spears, knives and arrows for, and entertained, the rulers had more influence at court that the poor, nomadic herdsmen

who were far removed from the corridors of power. Similarly, the Bairu magicians and spirit mediums were much more influential at court than ordinary Bahima (Archie Mafeje, 1998:42).

Did Nkore other and states in western (Igara Buhweiu, Buzimba, the Mpororo principalities, etc.) belong to the Bahima? To a large extent the Bahima took a keen interest in military service and in the affairs of state because they had every thing to lose from cattle raids. Remember that most of the wars between pre-colonial states in Uganda were more about cattle and women than land. Also, the Bahima had more cattle-related disputes that demanded the intervention of the rulers. In contrast, ordinary Bairu did not have much to gain from the cattle economy-oriented state. Their land, crops and homesteads were relatively immune to war except during short-lived foreign occupation when soldiers lived off the land as well as cattle. Most of their disputes were settled at family and clan levels. Only major Bairu- Bahima disputes called for state intervention and mediation. Accordingly, most Bairu were indifferent to state affairs not because they were excluded by the Bahima ruling class but because they lived autonomous and separate lives outside the remit of the state. As the Nigerians would say, "Of what concern to fish be raincoat?"

Inevitably, the oppressors and oppressed stereotype poisoned Bairu-Bahima relations and was responsible for the animosities and conflicts of the 1940s and 1950s in Ankole. Even today, when the National Resistance Movement is supposed to have smashed `the ugly face of sectarianism, the drama v politics in Ankole continues to be explained in terms of the Bairu-Bahima divide, which remains a potential source of conflict, communal violence and instability. Unfortunately, the notion of the "Bahima State" has been carried over into the politics of post-colonial Uganda. In the 1960s, the equivalent of the Bahima State was the "Badokoli State", which was followed by the Nubian/Kakwa State, the Badokoli State once more in the early 1980s and the Nyarwnda/Nynkore/Hima State since 1986. The conflicts that this stereotyping has led to are still vivid, fresh and unfolding, and it is not necessary to mention them in this paper.

The southern/northern divide

Stereotyping the southern/ northern divide is common and fashionable in writing and commentaries on contemporary Uganda. Briefly, there are two strands of the southem/northern stereotype. The first strand is that the British favoured the northern "martial tribes", especially the Acholi, at the expense of the more educated and economically more developed southerners, who were a potential threat to colonialism in Uganda. For example, according Martin Doornbos (1988:265):

...The Amin and Obote regimes ... basically maintained their sway over the economically more important south on the basis of army support, which had been overwhelmingly recruited from the north. This happened 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 recruitment on Acholi, Lango and West Nile in the north, away from the economic and administrative central region of the country.

Phares Mutibwa and Yoweri Museveni, among others, shared the same stereotyping. According to Mutibwa (1992:6) police and army recruitment "was reserved for northerners and people from the east ... the Baganda became too strong and colonial

rule was endangered." On his part, Yoweri Museveni (MISR, 1987:20-21) asserted that the colonial strategy of divide and rule reserved the north for "recruitment into the politics of colonial army". After independence, "incompetent and parasitic interest groups" used the northern-dominated army to terrorise and oppress the people of Uganda. During the1970s and 1980s this led to‘’conflict between the primitive neo-colonial forces, on the one hand, and the patriotic, nationalistic and modernistic forces, on the other", which needless to say has continued unabated to the present.

The second strand of the southern/northern stereotype is colonial-induced unequal development. Again Yoweri Museveni is one of the leading champions of this line of argument. According to him, the central region of the country and, to some extent, the east produced cash crops - cotton and coffee - at the behest of British colonialism. The northern part of the country became "a reservoir of cheap labour". This colonial-induced uneven development "had the inevitability of inequalities which in turn generated intense and disruptive conflicts between the ethnic groups involved" (MISR 1987:20). In another version of the same stereotype, Museveni (1997:211) wrote:

The colonialists marginalised some parts of the country, including northern Uganda. Instead of introducing commercial agriculture there, as they did in Buganda, they just kept the area as a reservoir of cheap labour for the plantations in the south of the country... The people in the area the north] did not get into the habit of generating wealth through cash-crop production [emphasis mine].

Now did the British colonialists deliberately exclude the Baganda and other southerners from the army as a matter of policy? Is it correct to say that the British did not introduce "commercial agriculture" in northern Uganda? Did northerners fail to "get into the habit of generating wealth through cash-crop production"?

Take the case of the army first. It is true that at independence the northerners were the majority in the army, which at 700 men was small and insignificant. But, according to Garner Thompson (2003:30-33), in 1943 - at the height of the Second World War (193945) - "there were nearly l2, 000 Baganda on military service - three times the number of Acholi". At independence there were 16 Baganda military officers compared with 26 Acholi and 23 Lango. Given their demographic weight, the Baganda were underrepresented in the army not out of intentional exclusion but because the preferred other careers. Even to day when the centrality of the army 1171 politics is so obvious the Baganda do not till their army recruitment quota.

In any case, the small northern-dominated army colonial army was politically harmless. The soldiers were disciplined and confined to the barracks. They did not go round carrying guns and terrorising people as they have done since 1966. They did not man roadblocks and arrest and detain people at will and with impunity. They were not above the law. Therefore, after independence, the army did not gain political prominence because the majority of the soldiers were from the north. It did so because of the political manoeuvres and manipulations in post-colonial Uganda. In an era when military control and coup making became the passports to gaining and retaining power, the Uganda army, like other armies in post-colonial Africa, assumed a dominant role in politics because it was politicised and manipulated by self-serving politicians. Moreover, it is wrong to treat northerners, or southerners for that matter

as a uniform mass. Some northerners, for example in Lango, were not so keen to join the army.

What about the assertion that the northerners did not "get into the habit of generating wealth through cash-crop production"? This assertion is plain wrong. As Gardner Thompson (2003:33-34) has pointed out, as early as 1938 Lango was producing more cotton than Masaka and Acholi was producing more cotton than Mubende. During the colonial period, West Nile became the leading producer of tobacco in Uganda. By 1955 Lango was producing enough cotton to sustain 10 cotton ginneries. During the 1950s, the Uganda National Congress gained popular support in that district because the cotton farmers were concerned about cotton prices and marketing. Indeed, by independence in 1962, the Lango and Acholi were producing more cotton than Buganda. The Lango could not have accumulated "considerable quantities of money" (Ibid: 35) without getting into the habit of generating wealth through cash-crop production". Interestingly enough, the Lango were quick to embrace the plough - there about 4,000 ploughs in the district in the 1940s - when the hand hoe was still universal in southern Uganda.

Beyond stereotypes, towards historical reconciliation

In order to eliminate sources of violent conflict and pave the way for historical reconciliation, it is imperative to expunge stereotypes from the history of Uganda. Emphasis should shift from ethnic origins - from aliens and natives- to citizenship regardless of where people came from or how long they have lived in Uganda. Historians should attach more importance to what people did or do for a living - farming, herding, fishing, hunting, craftsmanship, etc. - rather than over-emphasising ethnic categories, which are in any case misleading, if not meaningless. With regard to governance, the emphasis should be placed on institutional relevance and effectiveness rather than the nature of political organisation. Historians should distinguish form from substance. Finally, it is important to debunk stereotypes like those highlighted in this paper which are not only travesties of the history of Uganda but, most important of all, have tended to inflame passions and ultimately, generate conflict. Those who study the past of Uganda have a responsibility to the present and future and they must not abdicate it through stereotyping.

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