



University of Tennessee, Knoxville
**TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative
Exchange**

Chancellor's Honors Program Projects

Supervised Undergraduate Student Research
and Creative Work

Fall 12-2008

Efforts at Peace: Building a United Uganda

Lauren Leigh Burgess
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

Follow this and additional works at: https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_chanhonoproj

Recommended Citation

Burgess, Lauren Leigh, "Efforts at Peace: Building a United Uganda" (2008). *Chancellor's Honors Program Projects*.

https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_chanhonoproj/1157

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Supervised Undergraduate Student Research and Creative Work at TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Chancellor's Honors Program Projects by an authorized administrator of TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact trace@utk.edu.

Efforts at Peace:
Building a United Uganda

By Lauren Burgess

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction	3
II.	A Series of Coups: The Struggle for Leadership in an Independent Uganda	4
III.	A New Challenge to Peace: The Spiritual Army	8
IV.	Attempts at Peace: The Juba Peace Talks, 2006-2008	11
V.	Conclusion	14
	<i>Bibliography</i>	16

I.

Introduction

Uganda is a relatively small country, with a population of approximately twenty-two million. It has only one major city, the capital Kampala; the rest of the population lives in small villages and rural areas. Despite its small size, however, Uganda is rich in biological and ethnic diversity. Geographically, Uganda is marked by plateaus, rivers (especially the Nile River), lakes (particularly Lake Victoria), forests, semi-arid plains, and mountains.

Uganda is also characterized by conflict. Since its independence as a British protectorate in 1962, Uganda has been plagued by internal conflict. Millions of lives have been lost as Uganda struggles to achieve a sense of unity and stability. Its leadership is characterized by coups, oppression, and violence. The country has been divided along ethnic and regional boundaries, and civilian casualties and child soldiers mark the countryside.

Today, Uganda still struggles against its bloody history. Conflict between the current government and a rebel army prevent peace in the nation. While the rest of the world is still largely ignorant of Uganda's plight, the people of Uganda tend their wounds and wait to see if peace and stability will ever be achieved.

This paper attempts to address the political history of Uganda since its independence from colonial rule. By focusing on the leadership struggles and the current civil war in Uganda, I hope to show that peace is not impossible in Uganda, but there is much to be done in order to achieve that peace.

II.

A Series of Coups: The Struggle for Leadership in an Independent Uganda

Following its independence from the United Kingdom in 1962, Uganda has been plagued by conflict over leadership. Three dominant political parties emerged as Independence approached— the Kabaka Yekka (“The King Only”), the Uganda People’s Congress (UPC), and the Democratic Party (DP). The Kabaka Yekka party was the Buganda king’s party. The Baganda people, the largest ethnic group in Uganda, wanted to retain their autonomy, and the Kabaka Yekka Party represented this ideal. This, however, was not the desire of Ugandans of other ethnic groups, as well as some of the Buganda educated elite. During the colonial era, both the Baganda and the British, who had given the Baganda more autonomy and privileges than the other ethnic groups, treated other ethnic groups as inferiors. They formed the Democratic Party, which stood on a platform of national unity. A third political party, the Uganda People’s Congress, filled the void between these two parties, taking a modernist approach.

When it appeared that the DP would win the elections, the Kabaka Yekka Party and the UPC formed an alliance to thwart it. The Kabaka Yekka was worried that the DP would do away with the traditional monarchy in favor of a more modern look, and in exchange for the security of the monarchy and a role in the new government, they allied with the UPC. The United People’s Congress leader Milton Obote became Uganda’s first Prime Minister.

After just four years in power, PM Obote decided to consolidate his power and attacked the Kabaka’s palace in 1966. Leading this attack was an army officer named Idi Amin. The Kabaka escaped to London, and PM Obote declared himself President of Uganda. Obote became

Obote waged a four-year war against his enemies, leading to massive devastation in the country. This was especially true for rural areas, where Museveni recruited his soldiers. The district of Luwero, north of Kampala, was signaled out for a massive population removal. Approximately 750,000 people were affected by this move. Internment camps were created for the refugees, but they were placed under military control, leading to many human rights abuses. The West Nile District suffered similar casualties. This area was formerly the ethnic base for Idi Amin's support. The UNLA was stocked with former refugees from the Acholi and Lango ethnic groups that Amin had targeted during his reign. These soldiers took their frustrations out on West Nile District, massacring refugees in the area. The death toll from 1981 to 1985 is estimated at around 500,000.

Unrest in the UNLA among the Acholi soldiers began to cause problems for Obote. The Acholi felt like they were being put at the frontlines too often and were not rewarded for their hard work. The death of the successful general of the UNLA, Oyite Ojok, in a helicopter accident brought matters to a head. When Obote appointed a Lango to replace Ojok, the Acholi were outraged. In July 1985, the Acholi marched on Kampala, led by Brigadier Bazilio Olara-Okello. Milton Obote was once again deposed and fled to Zambia.

General Tito Okello became the new ruler of Uganda. His only policy, however, was self-preservation, and he ran a militaristic government. Okello realized that his army was fatigued, and he tried to work out a peace agreement with Museveni and the NRA in what is known as the Nairobi Agreement. Signed in December 1985, this agreement called for a ceasefire and the integration of the NRA into the government and military council. These conditions were never met, however, and the ceasefire was almost immediately broken.

Yoweri Museveni moved on Kampala in January 1986, and formally took up the presidency on the January 29, 1986. Issues of reconstruction and development awaited Museveni's regime, but the Ugandan people welcomed him into the office in hopes for change.

III.

A New Challenge to Peace: The Spiritual Army

In August 1986, a young Acholi woman from the district of Gulu in northern Uganda began building an army. Alice Auma was a spiritual diviner and healer who claimed to channel the Christian spirit of an Italian she called "Lakwena," meaning messenger. According to Alice, the spirit ordered her to lead an army against the evil in Uganda.

At the time of Alice's spiritual possession, northern Uganda was embroiled in conflict. After Museveni came into power, the National Resistance Army occupied the Acholi lands from which former President Okello came. Former members of the UNLA banded together to form the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA) to force the NRA out of the North. The UPDA attacked the NRA, but had little success except in the countryside.

Though there are conflicting reports of how she came to work with the UPDA (her mother claims she was kidnapped; her father says she was recruited because of her spiritual abilities), Alice began her military career among both support and skepticism. Many were doubtful of her military abilities because she was a woman, while others felt her spirituality would help lead them to victory. Nonetheless, Alice was able to recruit troops from the UPDA, and the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) was born.

Alice Lakwena (as Auma came to be known) led her soldiers into battle in unusual ways. She taught them that magic potions would help them fight. For example, she taught them that "Holy Oil" (usually cooking oil) would protect them from bullets, turning them into water. If a soldier died despite this holy armor, it was due to his or her own sins, not the failure of the armor. Lakwena also came up with a list of twenty Holy Spirit Safety Precautions, which

included not killing snakes, not drinking alcohol, and have no more or less than two testicles. These Precautions were intended to create a “new humankind” that would guarantee the followers happy lives if strictly followed.

Despite the peculiarity of Lakwena’s methods, the Holy Spirit Movement Force (HSMF) had two surprising victories against the NRA in November and December of 1986. These victories won the HSMF local support, and an increased number of recruits joined the army. This good fortune did not last long, however. Following a series of military setbacks, people began to believe Alice was a witch who used spirits for destructive purposes. In 1987, the spirit “Lakwena” left Alice, and she was forced to flee to Kenya, where she spent the rest of her life.

A year later, in June 1988, the UPDA signed a peace agreement with the government that called for the end of the conflict and a democratic government. By 1989, the UPDA had disbanded. In the wake of the UPDA and HSM, a young man from northern Uganda by the name of Joseph Kony began an army of his own. Like Lakwena, Kony was a spirit medium. Claiming to be the “spokesperson of God,” Kony recruited a group a hard-core rebels to fight the NRA, including former members of the UPDA and HSMF.

Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) is known for its brutal guerilla warfare, characterized by human rights violations, child abduction, and terrorism. In the early 1990s, the NRA strengthened its attack on the LRA, initiating an offensive called Operation North. Operation North was designed to deny the LRA support in the North, as well as arming civilians to fight the rebel army. Though the Operation reduced Kony’s army, it was a failure and led to further animosity between the government and the North.

In 1993, government minister Betty Bigombe initiated contact with the LRA in an attempt to negotiate peace. The LRA was originally receptive to the initiative. When the

military learned that the LRA was also negotiating with the Sudanese government for support, tensions mounted. The initiative broke down when President Museveni threatened to use force against the LRA if it did not surrender. Other peace initiatives have been made, but none have been effective.

Despite the human rights violations and child abductions he has made, Kony insists that what he is doing is for the good of Uganda and that he is merely following the Ten Commandments in order to liberate Uganda. In a *The Times* article, he is quoted as saying, “Yes, we are fighting for Ten Commandments... Is it bad? It is not against human rights. And that commandment was not given by Joseph. It was not given by LRA. No, that commandment was given by God.”

IV.

Attempts at Peace: The Juba Peace Talks, 2006-2008

The Juba peace talks are the first true steps towards peace between the Lord's Resistance Army and Museveni's government. Held in Juba, the capital of Southern Sudan, they were being mediated by Southern Sudan's Vice President Riek Machar. In response to an ultimatum issued by President Yoweri Museveni in which the president stated that he would assure Kony's safety if peace was agreed to by July 2006, Kony released a video in which he denied committing the atrocities he was accused of and seemed to call for an end to the hostilities.

In June 2006, the Government of Southern Sudan invited the warring parties to meet in Juba to begin work on a peace agreement. The Ugandan government and the LRA sent delegations to Sudan, but Kony was not among them, as he feared being surrendered to the International Criminal Court (ICC). In accordance with Rome Statute, the ICC had issued an indictment of Kony and top LRA leaders for crimes against humanity in 2005. The Ugandan government asked the ICC to rescind the indictment in order to facilitate the peace agreements, but it refused.

The LRA insisted on making it clear that the LRA was not meeting because it could no longer fight, but because it felt the peace talks would be the best way to end the conflict. The government argued that its primary goal was simply a ceasefire. In August 2006, the LRA and Ugandan government signed a truce in which the LRA agreed to leave Uganda and meet in designated areas. The Ugandan government agreed not to attack these areas, and the government of Southern Sudan guaranteed their safety.

A Cessation of Hostilities monitoring team was sent out to investigate if the LRA was holding up its end of the truce in stopping attacks. When it found that an attack had taken place, most likely by the LRA, tensions rose between the LRA and the Ugandan government. Museveni went to Juba for the first time to meet the negotiators face-to-face, as a stalemate had ceased progress on the peace talks. A second truce was signed in November 2006, as the other agreement had technically expired in September.

Peace talks hit a snag, as it became clear that the Southern Sudan government was no longer welcoming to the LRA. After several Sudanese deaths, the Southern Sudanese government no longer wanted to host the LRA, and peace talks went on hold. In April 2007, peace talks resumed and a ceasefire was extended through June. With the coordination of the United Nations (UN), Southern Sudan agreed to again host the talks.

In June 2007, the LRA and Ugandan government met again to decide on justice and reconciliation procedures. They agreed to a dual system of formal justice procedures and traditional ceremony. The government issued an ultimatum that peace talks should be settled by January 2008, or else the government would retake its military initiative against the LRA. The ceasefire, however, was extended through February, as talks began to make progress.

A breakthrough was reached in early February 2008, which decided that war crimes would be settled in a special section of the High Court of Uganda, thereby eliminating the need for a trial via the ICC (under the bylaws of the ICC, a nation has primary jurisdiction regarding war crimes committed within the nation, so long as it addresses those issues). A permanent ceasefire was to come into effect twenty-four hours after the signing of the peace agreement, projected to occur on 23 February 2008.

Another snag occurs on 28 February 2008, over the ICC indictment. The LRA wants the ICC to retract the indictment, while the government wants only to ask the UN to do that once the rebels have demobilized. An accord on Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration is signed the next day, leaving only the signing of the peace treaty itself holding up the two sides.

A signing was scheduled for April 2008, on the Sudan-Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) border, but Kony did not appear. The signing was rescheduled for May, but Kony again refused to appear, claiming that he was misled about the exact terms of the agreement. Reports of child abductions in Sudan, the Central African Republic, and the DRC began occurring in May.

As of December 2008, a final peace agreement has yet to be signed by the LRA and the Ugandan government, though efforts by the two parties continue to resolve the conflict. Joseph Kony claims that he still plans to sign the treaty, though fear of retribution and arrest by the ICC continue to hinder his signing.

V.

Conclusion

Uganda has come a long way since gaining its independence in 1962. Plagued by unstable, often corrupt leadership and civil wars, it has been unable to develop into a truly democratic nation. Torn by ethnic and regional differences, the concept of a strong, united Uganda has yet to be realized. Now, as peace looms closely in the distance, the significance of such a unity is more important than ever.

Western involvement in Uganda has been minimal at best. For decades, the West remained ignorant of the situation in Uganda, and refused to aid it in its struggles. Until the release of the film *Invisible Children*, Americans were oblivious to the human rights violations and conflict in the African nation. Still, most Westerners are ignorant about Uganda and its culture and struggles. It is even claimed that Sarah Palin, the 2008 Republican nominee for vice president, was unaware that Africa was a continent, believing instead that it was simply a country. In 2008, thanks to lobbying pressure, the United States finally got involved in the Ugandan peace talks, taking the role of an observer in Juba. But is it too little too late? And is Western involvement really the answer?

One of the biggest issues to peace in Uganda has been the involvement of the International Criminal Court. Its indictment of Joseph Kony and top LRA officials has been Kony's biggest excuse for not coming forward and signing a final peace agreement. Despite the Ugandan government's request that the indictments be retracted, the ICC stands firm on its decisions and refuses to grant its wish. An organization meant to aid a nation is now hindering its ability to finalize peace.

Another big hindrance to establishing peace in Uganda has been the lack of national unity. One of the greatest factors in the American Revolution was the desire for nationalism and the feeling of being united under a single flag. Uganda has never had that feeling of unity. It is carved into districts, and people feel more loyalty for their districts than their nation. During the era of imperialism, European powers met at the Berlin Conference to carve of the “dark continent,” without regard to African wishes or ethnic divides. Traditionally warring ethnic groups are now grouped under one nation and one government, so that not every group is equally represented. Every conflict that Uganda has faced has been along these ethnic lines, and thus some effort must be made to ensure equal representation for ethnic groups in the government in order to maintain peace.

In the end, if the LRA and the Ugandan government come to an agreement and the treaty is finally signed, will this be the end of conflict in Uganda? Probably not. The issues Uganda faces go much deeper than two warring factions. While the treaty will certainly aid in a continued and prolonged peace in Uganda, the country is far from overcoming its problems. Because the West is to blame for most of the problems that today face Uganda, it must be more actively involved in helping Ugandan stability and development. Rather than take control away from the Ugandans, however, the West must actively include them in the process. Neighboring nations must also be taken into consideration, as the issues faced in this region (the Great Lakes Region) transcend European-imposed national boundaries. Peace in Uganda is possible; it just requires cooperation on several different levels before it can be achieved.

Bibliography

- Behrend, Heike. *Alice Lakwena & the Holy Spirits: War in Northern Uganda, 1985-97*. Oxford, James Curry, 1999.
- Byrnes, Rita M., ed. *Uganda: a country study*. Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1992.
- Farmar, Sam. "I will use the Ten Commandments to liberate Uganda." *The Times*. 28 June 2006. <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article680339.ece>>.
- Kyemba, Henry. *A State of Blood: The Inside Story of IDI AMIN*. New York: Ace Books, 1977.
- Leggett, Ian. *Uganda*. Great Britain: Oxfam, 2001.
- United Nations. International Criminal Court. *Rules of Procedure and Evidence*. September, 2002. 5 December 2008. <http://www.icc-cpi.int/library/about/officialjournal/Rules_of_procedure_and_Evidence_English.pdf>
- United Nations Security Council. *Update Report No. 6: Northern Uganda/LRA*. June, 2008. 5 December 2008. <<http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/site/c.glKWLeMTIsG/b.4201697/>>.