WIDER Working Paper 2022/167

The making (and unmaking) of Uganda's ethnic-based decentralization programme

Adventino Banjwa*

December 2022

Abstract: Uganda's post-colony continues to be haunted by the colonial logic of ethnicity. This logic has mapped the country's post-colonial political landscape as a terrain on which spirals of ethnic-based conflicts and violence are the norm. Because colonial ethnic spatial demarcations were also unequally governed, the question of ethnic inequality was necessarily implanted into the post-colonial political landscape. Many came to define Uganda's post-colonial politics as one of 'ethnic balancing'. Various programmes have sought to address the ethnic-based inequalities inherited from colonial political modernity. The contemporary ethnic-based decentralization is one such policy. This study seeks to contextualize this policy as presently pursued in Uganda. making three core arguments. First, common to colonial and post-colonial decentralization arrangements is the predominance of ethnicity as a structuring logic, as post-colonial political modernity recycled the political technologies of colonial political modernity. Second, and relatedly, while official discourse in Uganda has foregrounded geographical factors, territorial size, and ethnic-based marginalization as core principles guiding decentralization, the latter has proven to overshadow the rest in motivating new district demarcations across the country. Finally, contrary to commonplace assumptions, there is no continuity between the 'decentralization' experiment of the National Resistance Army/Movement rebel group in the early 1980s and the decentralization policy the regime championed while in power. The latter radically reproduced the colonial logic of ethnicity, whereas the former attempted to subvert it.

* Makerere Institute of Social Research, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda; adventino88@gmail.com

1   Introduction

On 12 July 1993, Dr Specioza Naigaga Wandira Kazibwe, later to be Uganda's first female vice-president, and at the time the Minister for Women in Development, Culture and Youth, suggested, while moving the National Women's Council Bill, 1992, that this bill was 'in line with *the spirit of decentralization*'.[1] She never claimed to be inventing the term. Neither did she purport to be making a theoretical statement. Hers was an affirmation of a reality which many in government, and some in academia, continued to affirm, but one that remained vaguely understood.

Yet Specioza Kazibwe's later engagement on Uganda's decentralization programme suggests that at least she knew the contours of what she called the *spirit of decentralization* in Uganda's politics of the 1990s. Thus, eight years later, now vice-president, she argued that the decentralization policy, in its version of district multiplication, was very effective in terms of helping 'the many ethnic groupings which have also been undermined for lack of representation at the political level [in the districts]'. 'When people have their [ethnic] self-determination through districts', she noted, 'you see them really rejuvenated because they know they have their destiny in their own hands'. Vowing to speak frankly and openly, she went on to give examples of new districts that were supposedly doing well because their residents were rescued from political and economic marginalization by ethnic majorities in their former districts.[2] Yet this uncritical exaltation of new ethnic districts was not a result of decentralization magically leading to the emergence of mono-ethnic districts. On the contrary, the new districts simply reconfigured the equation of ethnic majorities and minorities—the former minorities now became majorities, alongside a string of new minorities.

In this context, this paper is an attempt to think through this spirit of decentralization in Uganda—the logic that has driven Uganda's decentralization programme historically, as well as its contemporary trends and contestation. Drawing on a body of existing literature, I shall call Dr Kazibwe's spirit of decentralization *the logic of ethnicity*.

The logic of ethnicity is here understood in its historico-political context. To critically engage it in the context of Uganda's decentralization programme, this paper draws on critical post-colonial political theory developed by Mahmood Mamdani (2017 [1996], 2020), and engaged with in various case studies on Uganda (see especially Ngabirano 2021; Sseremba 2020, 2021). Mamdani's earlier work advanced the theory of *decentralized despotism*, in which he argued that colonial power ruled Africa through political technologies that politicized cultural difference, based mainly on what colonialism defined as 'tribes' but in other cases also on religion (Mamdani 2017 [1996]: xxff., 109ff.). He sums up the underlying intent in this colonial mode of governance as *define and rule* (Mamdani 2013 [2012]).

If colonial *decentralized despotism*, with its politicization of cultural difference, was a mode of rule—one that aided colonial state formation—Uganda's post-colonial decentralization largely took for granted its colonial antecedent, deploying it in a fire-fighting style against colonially engineered

---

[1] Specioza Wandira Naigaga Kazibwe, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 12 July 1993; emphasis added.

[2] The now vice president and member of parliament for Kigulu County in Eastern Uganda Dr Specioza Wandira Kazibwe gave these views in the parliamentary sitting of 12 July 2001. She praised examples of ethnically demarcated districts as success stories of the decentralisation programme, such as Nakasongola, carved off Luweero district. The latter is majority Baganda, and Nakasongola was carved off for the minority Baluuli, who formed an ethnic majority in the new district. Another example she gave was Bugiri district (for 'half Batenga and half Samia'). See Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 12 July 2001.

ethnic-based political and economic forms of marginality. Two post-colonial operations are observable as intending to counter ethnic-based marginality in Uganda: *ethnic balancing* at the centre (ethnically balancing the awarding of public sector jobs, ministerial positions, etc.; see earlier conceptualization by Mudoola 1996); and *ethnic autonomy* in the local decentralized unit (the district). Evidently, both take for granted the colonial logic of ethnicity. Much as the focus of this study is on the latter, it is important to bear in mind the distinction.

This paper asks three interrelated questions. (1) Why did Uganda adopt the particular version of decentralization it implemented in the late 1990s, and were there alternatives to such an arrangement? (2) What kind of debate existed at that time (especially during the 1990s)? (3) What forces—institutions, individuals, etc.—were behind the pursuit of the decentralization programme in Uganda from the 1990s onwards? The study is based predominantly on archival sources and interviews. Other relevant primary and secondary sources, such as newspaper archival material, have also been widely consulted.

The paper presents three core arguments. First, I argue that common to both colonial and post-colonial decentralization arrangements is the predominance of ethnicity as a structuring logic. On this basis, post-colonial political modernity recycled the political technologies of colonial political modernity. Second, and relatedly, I argue that while official discourse in Uganda has foregrounded geographical factors, territorial size, and ethnic-based marginalization as core principles guiding decentralization,[3] Uganda's experience has proven that the latter has overshadowed the rest in motivating new district demarcations across the country. Finally, I argue that contrary to commonplace assumptions, there is no continuity between the 'decentralization' experiment of the National Resistance Army/Movement (NRA/M) rebel group in the early 1980s and the decentralization policy the regime championed while in power. The latter radically reproduced the colonial logic of ethnicity, whereas the former attempted to subvert it. Because Uganda's post-1990s decentralization programme became one of awarding new districts to ethnic communities that were demanding them, the programme's success came to be measured in terms of the number of new ethnic districts awarded.[4] This is how we have moved from around 33 districts in the early 1980s to 146 today[5]—and no one can tell with certainty how many there will be next week, next

---

[3] This was later revealed by Museveni, while addressing the Commonwealth Local Government Forum held in Kampala in May 2013; see Vision Reporter, 'Decentralization Best Policy: Museveni', *The New Vision*, 15 May 2013. This was not clear in the early days of the decentralization programme. Thus, when one member of parliament asked about the criteria used to demarcate new districts, the minister concerned cited a constitutional provision which suggested that only parliament could approve new districts—to the total dissatisfaction of the asker; see Parliamentary Hansard, 14 November 2000.

[4] During a Commonwealth event in Kampala in 2006, President Museveni urged Commonwealth member states to 'embrace decentralization' in light of its success in Uganda, seen in the fact that everyone wanted district status; see P. Nyanzi, 'Embrace Decentralisation, Says Museveni', *The Monitor*, 2 May 2006. What the president did not tell the delegates is that demands for district status were not the result of any success whatsoever in Uganda. His own Commission of Inquiry into Local Government decried the fact that wherever it went, people demanded district status. This was in 1987, before his government implemented anything tangible, policy-wise. On this, see especially Green (2008: 4).

[5] This figure is provided by Uganda's Electoral Commission; see Electoral Commission (2020), 'Electoral Commission Statistics', September, available at: www.ec.or.ug/electoral-commission-statistics (accessed 13 July 2021). As I try to elaborate throughout the paper, this expansion is not so much about the size of the decentralising unit per se, as some have claimed (see J. Buwembo, 'We Have Come Full-Circle, We Call a County a District', *The Daily Monitor*, 18 September 2011; J. Buwembo, 'In Uganda, Districts Will Soon Be Smaller Than the Original Counties', *The East African*, 10 September 2011, available at: www.theeastafrican.co.ke/OpEd/comment/In+Uganda++districts+will+soon+be+smaller+than+original+counti

month, or next year! This absolute uncertainty was already visible in the early years of the policy. Thus, in 2001, when the Parliamentary Appointments Committee needed to change its rules regarding district representation due to the creation of new districts, a controversy emerged on how to word the amendment. Before 2001, it stated that there had to be representation from all 39 districts. But by 2001 these were now 54, and two more were in the pipeline. Parliament could not fix the number due to this radical uncertainty and hence left it open and vague.[6]

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. From this general introduction and outline of the argument, I critically explore the making of Uganda's ethnic-based decentralization programme and the political debate that animated it. I explore the literature on Uganda's decentralization to speak to its core contributions as well as gaps concerning the programme's historical dynamics and contemporary trends. In concluding remarks, I underscore the fact that the core challenge faced in attempts to unmake Uganda's contemporary ethnic-based decentralization, and the crisis it has generated, is exactly how to address colonially engineered ethnic-based political and economic inequalities without normalizing the colonial politicization of cultural differences. I present this as a post-colonial decolonial task—one that calls for challenging the colonial political legacy, not freezing cultural differences.

2 The making of Uganda's post-1986 ethnic-based decentralization policy reform programme

2.1 The Bush War reforms

In the early 1990s, the top leadership of the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) was keen to argue that its 1990s decentralization policy was an organic programme conceived during the course of the five-year Bush War (1980–86) that brought it into power. Thus, during his 1993 ministerial statement to the then National Resistance Council (NRC)[7], the then Minister of Local Government, Jabeli Bidandi Ssali, gave what he considered 'a historical perspective' to the decentralization programme that was being implemented. In his historicization, Bidandi argued that 'the decentralisation policy was first conceived by the [NRA/M] during the people's protracted war'. According to the minister, the programme's 'practical implementation' came in 1986, 'when the Government introduced the Resistance Councils and Committees that were granted wide-ranging powers'.[8]

Evidently, Bidandi Ssali's 'historical perspective' was limited to the history of the NRM. He outlined the original objectives of the programme as 'improving local democracy, accountability, efficiency, equity, effectiveness, and sustainability in the provision of social services countrywide', while making it clear that their initial focus was 'on the district' as the decentralizing unit.[9] It was in line with this understanding that when he fell out with Museveni years later, one of his concerns

es/-/434750/1234114/-/5q1dhx/-/index.html (accessed 13 July 2021); K. Ssemwogerere, 'We Are Close to County Districts', *The Daily Monitor*, 9 May 2010) but more on the ethnic composition of the decentralized units.

[6] Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 9 July 2001.

[7] Functioning as the country's legislative body.

[8] Minister of Local Government Jabeli Bidandi Ssali, Ministerial Statement to the NRC, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 30 March 1993.

[9] Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 30 March 1993.

was with local government and decentralization. 'Mr. President', Bidandi wrote to Museveni in 2007, 'posterity will condemn you for infanticide with regard to Local Governments', adding, 'you have strangled decentralisation, your own baby'.[10] The idea that decentralization began with the current regime, and that there is continuity between its 'decentralization' experiment in the Bush War period and the decentralization policy it embarked on while in power, constituted the official historical account of Uganda's contemporary decentralization programme.

This official account notwithstanding, decentralization as a state policy in Uganda is not the 'baby' of the current ruling government. Its history dates back to the colonial era. Today, this view has been accepted in some circles within the ruling government, but rather puzzlingly in an uncritical fashion. In 2013, for example, the president was quoted admitting that regarding the decentralization policy, 'the NRM did not change the colonial government structures but rather added the elected leaders to the existing civil servants to safeguard the interests of the electorate and mitigate the possible abuse of office by the civil servants'.[11] The contours of such a colonial structure undisturbed by his government were already visible in the political map of Uganda at independence in 1962. It was based on 18 districts, demarcated along ethnic (or 'tribal' in the colonial lexicon) lines. This structure was the foundation upon which all post-colonial governments, including the current one, were built (see Table 1).

Table 1: Colonial ethnically demarcated districts by 1962

Colonial districts at independence, 1962		
Region	Districts for ethnic majorities	Undefinable majority
Northern Uganda	Acholi Lango Karamoja Madi	West Nile district (for the Alur, Janam, Lugbara, Kakwa, and others)
Eastern Uganda	Teso Bugisu Sebei Busoga	Bukedi district (for Bugwere, Samia, Bagwe, Banyole, Japadhola, and others)
Western Uganda	Ankole Bunyoro Toro	Kigezi district (for the Bakiga, Bafumbira, Bahororo, Banyarwanda, and others)
Central Uganda	East Mengo West Mengo Masaka Mubende	

Source: authors' construction based on DENIVA (2011:3); Tidemand (1994:iii).

Yet while colonialism demarcated districts along ethnic lines, there was a slight difference. The first concerns the historically multi-ethnic Buganda region, where the four districts at independence were demarcated according to a simple geographical logic (East Mengo, West Mengo, Masaka, and Mubende). Secondly, in each of the other three regions where districts were granted to ethnic majorities, the colonial rulers were confronted with one region where it was not

---

[10] This letter, written on 29 January 2007, was reproduced by *The Observer* in 2016; see J.S. Bidandi, 'Your Impunity Is Amazing', *The Observer*, 22 April 2016.

[11] Vision Reporter, 'Decentralisation Best Policy'.

possible to grant a comparatively viable district to one ethnic majority. The colonial solution was to follow the geographical logic without dismantling the ethnic basis within each district.[12] Thus, in the Northern region, West Nile district was created for the Alur, Janam, Lugbara, Kakwa, and others. In the Eastern region, Bukedi district was created for the Bagwere, Samia, Bagwe, Banyole, Japadhola, and others. And finally, in the Western region, Kigezi district was created for the Bakiga, Bafumbira, Bahororo, Banyarwanda, and others (DENIVA 2011; Tidemand 1994; see also Schelnberger 2008). Yet immediately after independence, a process began whereby in all areas where districts were colonially demarcated according to a simple geographical logic (in Buganda, West Nile, Bukedi, and Kigezi), new tiny ones emerged out of each, clearly reinforcing the ethnic logic, while in the rest of the regions, the spiral continued along the same historical colonial path of ethnicity (see Tidemand 1994: iv and following). Between 2002 and 2019, for example, official statistics indicate a more-than-doubling of districts in each of the four regions (see Table 2).

Table 2: Number of administrative units per region, 2002–19

Region	Level	2002	2014	2016	2017	2018	2019
Central	District						
		13	24	24	25	26	26
Eastern							
		15	32	32	34	36	37
Northern							
		13	30	31	32	34	37
Western							
		15	26	29	31	32	35
National							
	National cumulative	56	112	116	122	128	135

Source: author's construction based on Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2019).

Whereas these statistics in part speak to the untenability of the idea that decentralization as a state policy began in 1986, as Bidandi Ssali claimed, there is one sense in which one can definitely agree with the minister that the current government 'strangled' a particular 'baby' of its own on the question of decentralization. This requires us to draw a distinction between, on the one hand, the post-1986 decentralization trend (the unending demarcation of ethnic districts), and on the other hand, the theoretical formulation and experimentation with 'decentralization' carried out between 1980 and 1986 by the then rebel group now in power, the NRA/M.

The predominant tendency in the political debates of the early 1990s was quite uncritical of the new regime. However, there were voices within the Constituency Assembly (tasked with debating the new constitution) that took note of the difference between the NRA/M's 'decentralization' experiment between 1980 and 1986, and the decentralization programme it embarked on while in power. For instance, Professor George Kanyeihamba (a former judge and member of the Constituency Assembly) has written that during the Constituency Assembly, the Committee on Local Government advised the delegates to be cautious with the decentralization trend taking

---

[12] In Eastern Uganda, Pamela Khanakwa (2012), for instance, has demonstrated how inter-district ethnicity-based conflicts haunted the colonial regime in this part of Uganda.

shape at that time. But because most members of the Assembly 'were determined to create tribal and sectarian fiefs' for themselves and their communities, the Committee's advice was thrown out. The Constituency Assembly 'rushed where Angels fear to tread', he recalls, 'and converted Uganda into … tribal enclaves'.[13]

A number of studies on the NRA/M's 1980–86 'decentralization' experiment (through the institution of the Resistance Council, or RC) signal an attempt to address ethnic-based political and economic inequalities in its 'liberated areas' of the multi-ethnic Luweero Triangle not by re-enforcing ethnicity as the basis but by negating it, with the emphasis on residence. This dynamic has been recorded by two prominent members of the 1987 Local Government Commission, Apolo Nsibambi and Mahmood Mamdani (see Mamdani 2017 [1996]: 208; Nsibambi 1991: 279; see also Tidemand 1994).

The five-year records of the *Uganda Resistance News*, the 'official newsletter of the National Resistance Movement (NRM)'[14] during their 1980–86 rebel activity,[15] are quite telling on the question of RCs and Committees. In the ninth issue of the first volume (which came out in February 1983), the rebels set out to describe 'how those who liberated themselves went about setting up their own government and brought their lives back to normal'.[16] The governance mechanism rebels inspired in their controlled areas was the institution of the RC, through which residents from each of the rebel-controlled areas were asked 'to elect their own committees'.[17]

These councils and committees were constituted in four core tiers: the village (RC1), the parish (RC2), the sub-county (RC3), and the district (RC5). The starting point was the village. All adult residents of the village constituted the Village Council through which '*all residents* … elected an Executive Committee composed of the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, a Secretary and other Secretaries for Security, Mobilization, Youth, Women, Propaganda and Information'.[18] Writing on the question of decentralization during the NRA Bush War, the 1993 Uganda Constitutional Commission emphasizes that '[t]he foundation of the RC system is the village council which consists of *all adults residing in the village*' (see Odoki 1993: 486; emphasis added). The village Executive Committees within the parish (Muluka) constituted the Parish Council, which elected the Parish Executive Committee. In turn, Parish Executive Committees within the sub-county (Gombolola) constituted the Gombolola Council, whose members 'often met and elected their Gombolola Executive Committee'.[19] In this political design, from RC3 (the sub-county), 'the next step was the district [RC5], thus by-passing the *saza* (county) level'[20]—certainly because the counties were the primary units from which representatives to the national legislative body were to be drawn.

---

[13] G. Kanyeihamba, 'Blessings and Curses of Multiplication of Districts', *The Daily Monitor*, 17 July 2011.

[14] 'Theoretical Justification of NRM Struggle', *Uganda Resistance News*, 1(1), August 1981; Wamala et al. 2014: 1.

[15] In 1990, the entire archive of the newsletter (1981–85) was published by the party secretariate as a book, which was republished by Foundation Publishers in 2014; Wamala et al. (2014).

[16] 'The Secret behind NRA Success', *Uganda Resistance News*, 1(9), February 1983; Wamala et al. (2014: 173).

[17] 'The Secret behind NRA Success'.

[18] 'The Secret behind NRA Success'; emphasis added.

[19] 'The Secret behind NRA Success'.

[20] 'The Secret behind NRA Success'.

What is novel about this NRM/A 'decentralization' experiment is that rather than reproduce the ethnic basis for organizing the political unit—the RC—the rebels' emphasis was on residence. To be included in the political body of the village, the parish, the sub-county, all the way to the district, all that mattered was that one had to be an adult resident of that village, parish, sub-county, and finally the district. The same would theoretically apply to representatives of counties in what the rebels conceived as the NRC (the legislative body): one only needed to be an adult resident of that county.[21] This set-up was abandoned in the 1990s with the rebels now fully in power. Below, I critically explore the debates and trends of the 1990s and after—a period when many of the policies of the rebels in power, including decentralization, were debated and enacted.

2.2   Post-1990s: debates and trends

At the current pace of developments, with 146 districts and still counting, Uganda's ethnic-based decentralization programme has reached an impasse. All scholarly commentary today points to some kind of crisis. Donors who once hailed the programme and funded it unreservedly continue to protest against its unpredictable expansion through district multiplication.[22] Donors played a critical role in the implementation of the programme. Right from its inception, donors to Uganda's decentralization programme organized around their umbrella entity, the 'Decentralisation, Development Partner Group in Uganda'. The World Bank, Denmark, EU, The Netherlands, Ireland, Belgium, Australia, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) were the group's members.[23] In the early days of the programme, for example, Denmark (through Danida, the Danish International Development Agency) provided the initial US$430,000 that kickstarted the Decentralisation Secretariat in the early 1990s.[24] Denmark continued to fund the Secretariat almost singlehandedly until 2002, when it stopped paying the salaries of the Secretariat's staff.[25]

Besides the disappointment of the programme's donors, researchers who have surveyed one district after another looking for services that the programme set out to take nearer to the people report with bitterness that there are no such services on the ground. Ethnic-based inequalities in districts have not been resolved by creating new districts for politically and economically marginalized ethnic groups. Rather, these inequalities have been teleported to new districts. And this is the case for one primary reason: the multi-ethnic character remains a defining feature in new districts. What changes in new districts is the equation of who constitutes the ethnic majority, and thus who gets the keys to politically and economically marginalizing the 'others', the new ethnic minorities. It is worth noting that in each of these new districts, the ethnic majority reigns not only politically but also in terms of controlling access to other socioeconomic resources and opportunities that political power brings with it. An anonymous writer in the early 2000s pointed to the District Service Commissions in the freshly minted ethnic districts, which the writer accused of turning the awarding of jobs in these districts into an exclusive distributive mechanism among those who constituted each new district's ethnic majority. The writer saw this as constituting an

---

[21] 'Resistance Councils', *Uganda Resistance News*, 3(1), January/February 1985; Wamala et al. (2014: 313).

[22] J. Namutebi. 'Donors Warn on Creation of Districts', *The New Vision*, 6 December 2007; J. Maseruka, 'Donors Oppose New Districts', *The New Vision,* 31 December 2008.

[23] For the list, see Namutebi, 'Donors Warn on Creation of Districts'.

[24] Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 30 March 1993.

[25] See I. Musoke, 'Danida Stops Paying Local Government Staff Salaries', *The Monitor*, 15 July 2002.

act whose unavoidable outcome would be 'the emergence of tribal empires in the districts'.[26] A similar trend has been observed even in lower subdivisions of the district (especially sub-counties and parishes). Perhaps nowhere in recent times has the latter point been so poignantly displayed as in the government's new economic development programme, termed the Parish Development Model (PDM), which seeks to immortalize the existing district units by making district subdivisions (parishes) the basis for access to economic empowerment through government PDM funds.[27]

With this prevailing crisis, therefore, it is particularly critical to revisit the post-1990s political debate on the subject in order not only to understand the making of the current crisis but, even more importantly, to ascertain whether there were progressive voices and alternatives at that time on which to build any attempts to transcend the contemporary impasse—to unmake the current crisis.

Proponents and opponents

The pages of Uganda's Parliamentary Hansard and the archives of leading newspapers in the course of the 1990s and 2000s suggest that proponents of the current decentralization policy based their views on a number of positions. All enthusiasts of the programme talked about it in reference to the districts and their subdivisions, and this would be a constant point of reference for proponents and critics alike.

The idea that the new districts would bring services nearer to the people, especially through an expected expansion of government cash transfers, was predominant at a time when the programme was still a promise. This, as we shall see shortly, changed later on to lamentations on the absence of said services amid risible local revenue sources. Before his falling out with the president, Bidandi Ssali had in 1999 called decentralization 'baby' of the ruling group, one that was set to take services nearer to the people.[28] Many others argued along similar lines.[29] For those who professed to speak frankly and openly, as did Dr Specioza Wandira Kazibwe, decentralization would once and for all put to an end the fact that 'many ethnic groupings [had been] undermined for lack of representation at the political level [in the districts]'.[30] Decentralization was seen as 'the right path to addressing [regional/ethnic] imbalances', and the least historically oriented among them thought that what had all along hindered economic growth and development in Uganda since independence was the absence of 'decentralization'.[31]

---

[26] Anonymous, 'Decentralisation a Threat to Unity', *The Daily Monitor,* 20 June 2002. For an earlier similar concern, see J. Bintu, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 28 July 1994.

[27] M. Guloba, 'Uganda's New "Parish" Model Tries Development from the Grassroots', The Conversation, 8 March 2022, available at: https://theconversation.com/ugandas-new-parish-model-tries-development-from-the-grassroots-177752 (accessed 5 April 2022).

[28] Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 13 July 1999.

[29] A. Nsibambi, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 22 July 999; R. Deo, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 2 May 1999, 6 February 2001. See also F. Mugabi, 'Minister Hails Decentralization', *The Monitor*, 12 April 2002; Nyanzi, 'Embrace Decentralization'; Vision Reporter, 'Decentralization Improves Government Transfers to Districts', *The New Vision,* 8 August 2002; A. Mubiru, 'Kadaga Praises Decentralisation', *The New Vision,* 15 May 2004.

[30] Specioza Wandira Kazibwe, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 12 July 2001.

[31] Kiyonga suggested, 'suppose when we took power from the colonialists in 1962, this kind of initiative had been implemented, our country would have made very, very massive development and growth'; Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 4 July 1995.

Within the parliamentary group, organized around the NRC in the 1990s, critical reflection on the programme came in three forms. In the first category, the decentralization policy was enthusiastically supported but with numerous reservations. In the second, radical critiques were advanced but without necessarily offering alternatives. In the third, critique was advanced while at the same time some kind of alternatives to the policy itself were offered. Because Uganda was a *de facto* one-party state between 1986 and 2005, where elections were said to be based on individual merit in an all-embracing 'Movement System' of governance (on this, see e.g. Kasfir 1998), it is not possible to attribute these arguments and positions to 'political parties'—ethnic or otherwise (cf. Chandra 2004). Below, I consider the arguments in each category in their own right.

For the first category, the understanding was that if their reservations were worked upon, the policy would go on to achieve its stated results. The core issues raised by this group included limited funding and capacity in the districts,[32] and the charge of 'decentralization of corruption'. 'The experience currently with decentralisation', argued one member of parliament, 'is that we have actually decentralized corruption from the centre to the districts.[33] Others argued that the programme embodied a disguised attempt at recentralization and patronage by those in central government.[34] In the early 1990s, one member of the NRC insisted, echoing Réne Dumont's classic (1966) book, that 'a number of decentralized districts have had a *false start*' (emphasis added), with low institutional capacity and limited funding for their operations.[35] These and related concerns were foregrounded, right from the early days of the policy, as the bottlenecks to an otherwise good policy.

For the second category, the different problematics of the policy as they saw it were put forward, with the view that this policy needed to be dropped altogether. Some pointed to the potential of the programme to make Uganda completely ungovernable by subdividing the country into a string of minute ethnic administrative units and thus pushing the cost of public administration through the roof.[36] Others saw the decentralization programme and its unending district multiplication as a clear testimony to the worrisome fragility of the political structures built by the new regime in

---

[32] E.g., K. Wadri, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 1 August 2001; N. Ocula, Parliamentary Hansard, 16 August 2001; C. Kiyonga, Parliamentary Hansard, 28 July 1994; Mr Sibo, Parliamentary Hansard, 16 August 1995; Mr Olum, Parliamentary Hansard, 24 August 1995; Mr Ntabgoba, Parliamentary Hansard, 3 April 1996; A. Kanyike, Parliamentary Hansard, 16 March 1999; Mr Baku, Parliamentary Hansard, 27 July 2000; K. Matsiko, Parliamentary Hansard, 2 October 2000; Mr Kawanga, Parliamentary Hansard, 2 October 2002; G. Watenga, Parliamentary Hansard, 16 November 2016. See also P. Onyango, 'How Decentralisation Took Corruption to Districts', *The Daily Monitor*, 31 January 2004; M.A. Habati (2012), 'The Lies, Truth, of Creating New Districts', *The Independent Uganda*, 14 July 2012; J. Kato, 'Can the Country Afford 200 Districts?' *The New Vision*, 23 October 2009; M. Odongo and P. Oyee, 'Government Rapped over Decentralisation'. *The New Vision*, 7 December 2001; P.O. W'Oceng and R.G. Gamwera, 'Uganda Local Government Association: Statement on the Creation of 25 New Districts', *The New Vision I*, 24 August 2012.

[33] Mr Pinto, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 5 April 2001. For other examples, see e.g. D. Dradriga, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 14 April 1994; B. Amongi, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 7 August 2001; Z. Bakoko Bakoru, Parliamentary Hansard, 27 July 2000; S. Madada, Parliamentary Hansard, 10 July 2002. See also D. Mafabi, 'Corruption Stinks at Districts', *The Daily Monitor*, 7 December 2009; B. Oketch, 'Poor Administration, Nepotism, Robbing Kole Service Delivery', *The Daily Monitor*, 31 January 2018; H. Matsiko, 'Corruption Growing in Local Governments', *The Independent*, 20 February 2017; R. Kayizzi, 'Decentralisation Promotes Corruption', *The New Vision*, 21 November 2003; Vision Reporter, 'Implement Decentralisation Resolutions', *The New Vision*, 3 December 2008.

[34] E.M. Lukuku-Moi, 'DP Promises to Take Services Closer to People', *The Daily Monitor*, 24 January 2011

[35] Mr Rwakakooko, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 22 August 1995.

[36] Dr Nkuuwe, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 6 February 2001.

power.[37] Questions of patronage,[38] corruption, recentralization,[39] and deeper impoverishment[40] continued to surface throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

A relentless line of critique at this time targeted ethnicity as a core element in the new decentralization policy. While in the first category above ethnicity was proudly mentioned as the basis of the post-1990s decentralization policy, here ethnicity was paraded as a problem, commonly critiqued as *tribalism*.[41] District Service Commissions were identified as sites of tribal activity, because they ensured that people from the majority ethnic group of the district, 'their people', dominate district jobs and other opportunities.[42] Many were puzzled to realize not only that new districts were devoid of any meaningful services, but that ethnic-based political and economic marginalization, and with it ethnic-based conflicts, continued to pervade them—when they had been created to remedy such marginality and conflicts in the old districts.[43]

The third category not only problematized the policy as they saw it: they also pointed towards some kind of alternatives. The most relentless proposition was the federal option.[44] The agitation for federalism, especially coming from the Kingdom of Buganda, is a long-standing proposition for how post-colonial Uganda ought to be governed. It has been suggested in some scholarly circles that contemporary demands for federalism are a direct consequence of the failure of the decentralization policy (Green 2008: 504, 2013: 4). How could this be the case, given that the regime that took power in 1986 was immediately confronted with demands for federalism? (See Odoki 1993). The political debates of the 1990s reveal how even when the government decided to start implementing the decentralization programme in an *ad hoc* fashion, reminders were relentless that it was not the only available proposition on how to address group claims and varying views on how to govern the country. For instance, in the early 1990s, when the then local government minister Jabeli Bidandi Ssali gave a statement in the NRC which presupposed a national consensus on decentralization, he was immediately reminded that such was not the case, that 'there is a body

[37] E.g., J.K. Lukyamuzi, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 21 August 2001; interview with J.K. Lukyamuzi, president general of the Conservative Party, Kampala, 4 October 2021.

[38] W. Oguttu and O. Opondo, 'What Are the Implications of Creating More Districts?' *The New Vision*, 11 August 2007; E. Kakonge, 'Why NRM Decentralization Doesn't Serve Citizens', *The Daily Monitor*, 24 January 2011.

[39] E. Ssekabira, 'Decentralisation or Recentralization'? *The New Vision*, 22 January 2004. See also J. Namutebi, 'Politicians Attack Government over Decentralization', *The New Vision*, 29 August 2007.

[40] Mr Oluba, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 28 April 1994; O. Dick, 'Decentralisation Brings Poverty Closer, Here's Why', *The Daily Monitor*, 24 January 2011.

[41] Odongo and Oyee, 'Government Rapped over Decentralization'; Vision Reporter, 'The New Districts Are Huge White Elephants', *The New Vision*, 26 July 2005.

[42] J. Bintu, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 28 July 1994. See also Anonymous, 'Decentralisation A Threat to Unity'.

[43] See Prof. Mwaka, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 20 July 1999; S. Madada, Parliamentary Hansard, 10 July 2002; C. Musoke, 'Address Diversity to Prevent Ethnicity: APRM Report', *The New Vision*, 1 October 2009; M. Nsamba, 'We Need Criteria for Creating New Districts', *The New Vision*, 11 May 2009; Kanyeihamba, 'Blessings and Curses'; C. Onyango-Obbo, 'Why Region Needs 500 New Districts, and King Museveni', *The Daily Monitor*, 27 July 2010; S, Ssentongo, 'District Splitting May Breed More Tribal Conflict Than It Solves', *The Observer*, 19 October 2016; M. Taylor, 'Bit by Bit, Uganda Is Laying the Groundwork for Future Unrest', *Africa Arguments*, 13 December 2017, available at: https://africanarguments.org/2017/12/bit-by-bit-uganda-is-laying-the-groundwork-for-future-unrest (accessed 13 July 2021); J. Buwembo, 'Beti's Talking Federo, It's Raising Districts, My Head Is Spinning', *The East African*, 27 December 2010.

[44] This point was further elaborated to me by an active member of parliament in the early 2000s and self-professed 'federalist' John Ken Lukyamuzi, in an interview I conducted with him in Kampala, 4 October 2021.

of opinion in the country that favours a federal system of Government'.[45] Federalism as an alternative continued to be advocated for throughout the 1990s and 2000s.[46] No doubt these demands continue to the present day.[47] For those to whom it constitutes a better alternative, federalism has been presented as the lasting solution to ethnic-based inequalities and the colonially engineered imbalances in economic development across the country.[48]

At the turn of this century, many within Uganda's political circles came to realize that the only reason the current government had hurriedly embarked on ethnic-based decentralization was to curtail pre-existing demands for federalism. Members of the then NRC questioned the rush to implement the programme. '[We] have not passed a law on decentralisation and yet it is being implemented',[49] one member lamented. 'I do not know whether the [local government] minister is not trying to smuggle in a policy that should be approved by this House', another complained.[50] When a member decried the danger in side-lining members of parliament 'about such a vital policy programme', the then chairperson of the NRC, President Museveni, angrily interrupted him.[51]

In his State of the Nation Address of 2000, President Museveni insisted that decentralization was now 'a point of social and political reference', and that '[no]body should take this away from the Movement'.[52] A question remained: 'Why is it that ten years after the implementation of the decentralisation programme, we are here crying foul that there is zero capacity in districts to handle anything?', asked one member. 'The explanation one can guess', he insisted, 'is that in 1993 … there was a serious debate between federalism and other forms of government. So, [decentralization] was conceived to stifle the idea of federalism'.[53] The qualitative difference between decentralization and federalism has been an important part of this debate. As a prominent member of the government of the Kingdom of Buganda revealed to me, one has to draw a distinction between federalism/'power sharing' (in Luganda, *okugabana obuyinza*) and decentralization/'sharing power' (*Okugaba ku buyinza*). Whereas the initiative in the former is dominated by the federating units, the latter is a predominantly top-down initiative.[54] Yet a core question federalists must face is exactly how to address legitimate claims of ethnic-based marginality in a manner that would avoid the crisis decentralization is facing today.

---

[45] Mr Ongom, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 30 March 1993.

[46] See Mr Ssekindi, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 26 June 1994; Mr Marwas, Parliamentary Hansard, 7 June 1994.

[47] The leading institutional advocates at this time—though by no means the only ones—were the Buganda Kingdom and the two opposition political parties, the Uganda Federal Alliance and the Conservative Party.

[48] J.K. Lukyamuzi, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 16 August 2001; interview with J.B. Mugasira, general secretary, Uganda Federal Alliance, Kampala, 26 September 2021; interview with J.K. Lukyamuzi, 4 October 2021.

[49] Dr Tiberondwa, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 11 March 1993.

[50] W. Nkalubo, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 7 July 1993. This was after the minister of local government: Jabeli Bidandi Ssali, Ministerial Statement to the National Resistance Council, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 30 March 1993.

[51] Dr Magezi, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 16 February 1993.

[52] Y.K. Museveni, State of the Nation Address 2000, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 6 June 2000.

[53] J. Baptist Kawanga, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 13 August 2002. See also The Monitor Editorial, 'The Rot in Districts Will Only Get Worse', *The Monitor*, 23 May 2002.

[54] Interview with Oweekitiibwa David F.K. Mpanga, Kampala, 19 October 2021.

The official response to persistent demands for federalism was what came to be called the Regional Tier system. This came with a Constitutional Amendment in 2005, specifically Article 178 of the Constitution—'Co-operation Among Districts'.[55] However, like decentralization, this also envisioned 'co-operation' among districts in ethnic terms.[56] In Buganda, for example, even before the kingdom's leadership rejected the constitutional amendment, district-owning small ethnic groups within the kingdom had rejected it for attempting to force them back into the Buganda Kingdom's political control.[57] In Western Uganda, Kasese district, the home of the brand-new Rwenzururu Kingdom (curved out of Toro Kingdom), refused to join in any 'co-operation' with nearby districts dominated by Batoro.[58] Instead, it was proposed that Kasese itself be split to create two other districts (Bwira and Rwenzori) and then a 'co-operation' be formed with those[59]—a co-operation with its imagined ethnic self! Another interesting aspect about the Regional Tier is that despite being ratified by many districts across the country,[60] and being scheduled to enter into force in 2006, with its rejection by the Buganda Kingdom, it has never been implemented.[61]

Finally, there have also been demands for what we may here call *dedistrictization*—'a halt to creating new districts … inasmuch as "districtisation" does not appear to have had any significant impact on development outcomes', as Elliott Green has cogently put it (see Green 2015: 15). It seems to me that dedistrictization was also the central recommendation of Uganda's 1993 decentralization study delegation to Denmark, whose report indicated that Denmark's lessons for the world on decentralization derive from the country's reforms of the 1970s. The emphasis of these reforms was on the spatial and financial viability of any decentralizing unit.[62] It was thus not by accident that throughout the late 1990s and 2000s, leading newspapers carried editorial opinions that insisted on the need to freeze the creation of new districts.[63] However, the idea that Uganda's wave

---

[55] See 'Regional Tier at a Glance', *The Observer*, 4 October 2009, available at: https://observer.ug/component/content/article?id=5386:regional-tier-at-a-glance (accessed 13 July 2021).

[56] Thus, Regional Tier could not be expected to curb the growth of new districts as some argued it would (see e.g. I.O. Amiza, 'Only Regional Governments Will Save Us from Political Districts', *The New Vision*, 2 December 2009). This is because in both, the logic of ethnicity was taken for granted. Regional Tier does not put an end to the creation of new districts, nor does it compel districts to 'co-operate'.

[57] See J. Maseruka, 'Nakasongola Boss Opposed to Federo [Regional Tier]', *The New Vision*, 26 February 2003; R. Mutumba, 'Nakasongola Wants to Keep Out of Buganda', *The Monitor*, 3 March 2005; N. Kajoba, 'Kayunga Backs 3rd Terms', *The New Vision*, 27 August 2004; S. Madada (from Kayunga), Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 3 February 2005.

[58] The name for the people of the Toro Kingdom.

[59] J. Thawite, 'Kasese Rejects Regional Tier', *The New Vision*, 28 June 2005; H. Ssekanjako and M. Walubiri, 'Parliament to Consider to Split Kasese', *The New Vision,* 27 June 2012.

[60] In 2005, 57 of the then 69 districts had ratified the Regional Tier Bill. See C. Musoke, '57 Districts Ratify Regional Tier Bill', *The New Vision*, 10 December 2005.

[61] S.I. Mugabi, 'Kadaga Tasks Government on Implementation of the Regional Tier', *The Nile Post,* 22 February 2020, available at: https://nilepost.co.ug/2020/02/22/kadaga-tasks-government-on-implementation-of-regional-ti er (accessed 5 April 2022).

[62] Wokuri M., 2008. 'What Went Wrong with Decentralisation?' *The Daily Monitor*, 31 August 2008. See also, Vision Reporter, 'New Districts Are Huge White Elephants'.

[63] See The New Vision Editorial, 'More Districts Won't Do', *The New Vision*, 17 September 1999; The Monitor Editorial, 'The Rot in Districts Will Only Get Worse'; The Monitor Editorial, 'Government Should Save the Decentralization Programme', *The Monitor*, 16 June 2005; The New Vision Editorial, 'Creation of New Districts Should Be Frozen', *The New Vision*, 9 December 2007; The Monitor Editorial, 'Review Creation of New Districts', *The Monitor*, 20 May 2008; The New Vision Editorial, 'Leave Out Tribalism in the Creation of Districts', *The New Vision*, 24 June

of district multiplication can simply be brought to a halt is based on a limited understanding of the logic that emboldens people to risk it all in pursuit of separate districts. It does not explain why the hitherto larger colonial units (18 in early 1960s) have rapidly disintegrated into the current 146 districts, with persistent demands for further subdivision.

I have so far explored the making of Uganda's decentralization programme, and the debate that animated it. While the case of Uganda's decentralization programme is one of the most studied cases of decentralization in Africa given the programme's initial overwhelming celebration and financial support from the international donor community as I earlier indicated, there has barely been an interest in the making of this programme (its historical and contemporary trends, the debate that animated it in the early days, the historical alternatives to the version of decentralization in place since the early 1990s). In the following section, I aim to briefly highlight the core contributions of existing key studies on Uganda's decentralization programme, while shedding light on the existing gaps in light of the account laid down above.

3   Literature on Uganda's decentralization programme

Generally speaking, early studies on decentralization took an evaluative dimension, even if critically so in a good number of cases (see e.g. Bossert and Beauvais 2002; Crawford and Hartmann 2008; Dick et al. 2016; Fjeldstad and Semboja 2000; Garcia and Rajkumar 2008; Hope 2000; Ranis and Stewart 1994; Raghunandan 2012; Tordoff 1994; World Bank 2004). From the 1990s[64] in Uganda, different studies set out to evaluate the progress of the country's highly praised decentralization programme.[65] The primary concern was to measure the impact of the programme on clearly demarcated variables, such as 'service delivery', the kind of services taken to the people, the challenges/problems and failures of the programme, and the potential and other benefits derived from its implementation (see e.g. Ayeko-Kümmeth 2014; Azfar et al. 2006; Bashaasha et al. 2011; Bazaara 2003; DENIVA 2011, 2012; Golola 2001; Green 2008, 2010, 2013, 2015; Manyak and Katono 2010; Mbabazi 2019; Muhumuza 2008; Okidi and Guloba 2006; Saito 2000, 2003, 2012; Steiner 2006).

This body of literature has contributed to much of what we know today about Uganda's decentralization programme. Yet it leaves a lot to be desired. The most outstanding limitation in these studies is the fact that most of them simply rehearse the official mantra of decentralization taking services nearer to the people. Confronted with this official mantra, evaluative literature takes

---

2009; The New Vision Editorial, 'There Is No Need for More Districts', *The New Vision*, 29 April 2009. See also Onyango-Obbo, 'Why Region Needs 500 New Districts'.

[64] The financial experimentation on the programme was introduced in July 1993, beginning with 13 districts during that financial year. See Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 7 July 1993; L. Neruba, 'Decentralization', *The Daily Monitor*, 16 June 2008; Wokuri, 'What Went Wrong with Decentralisation?' This was later extended to the rest of the districts in 1998, after the 1997 Local Government Act; see S. Kitatta, 'How Decentralisation Was Killed in 10 Years', *The Daily Monitor*, 29 June 2016. It was believed that the decentralisation of the budget would also be done gradually, starting with a few districts (Mukono, Kabale, Jinja, Arua, and Kotido) and later expanded to other districts. See Vision Reporter, 'Moves Underway to Decentralise Budget', *The New Vision*, 13 February 1998.

[65] As earlier noted, Uganda's decentralization policy was heavily donor-funded in its early years, and it received continental and global acclaim. A number of countries in the Commonwealth network came to Uganda at the beginning of this century to learn from Uganda's widely praised success with decentralization. See M. Olupot, 'UNDP Praises Decentralization', *The New Vision*, 13 March 2000; G. Matsiko, 'Rwanda Team Here for Study', *The New Vision*, 18 February 2003; J. Odomel, 'Delegates to Study Decentralisation', *The New Vision*, 5 December 2003; Nyanzi, 'Embrace Decentralisation'; A. Mubiru, 'Kagame Jets in for Local Government Meet', *The New Vision*, 16 May 2013.

its critical scholarly task as one of a fact-finding mission. Its core question is: are said services[66] being taken closer to the people or not? In one study after another, the conclusion is unequivocal: Uganda's decentralization programme has not resulted in the extension of services closer to the people as promised. After this observed reality follows a series of conveniently ignored recommendations on what the government in power should do to in order to actualize the potential of the decentralization programme. If the core strength of this literature is that it has patiently and painfully audited the promises and outcomes of the programme, its downside is that we do not get a sense from it of the nature of the decentralization programme that Uganda implemented in the 1990s, the organizing principle or logic behind it, the forces behind it, and its historical alternatives. Because this literature builds on an analytical move that essentially accepts the official rhetoric on decentralization as 'extending services nearer to the people', it cannot ask questions such as what constitutes 'the people' in official drives 'to take services nearer to the people'.

The second important aspect in the existing literature on Uganda's decentralization relates to theory. As in the mainstream political and historical study of Africa, the predominant theoretical position in the literature on Uganda's decentralization programme is what has been critiqued as 'neopatrimonialism' (see Mkandawire 2015; Wai 2012). Neopatrimonialism as theory suggests that crises that have engulfed post-colonial Africa, in their political and economic forms, can be better understood by focusing on the *agency* of the political elites in these countries, who are obsessed with what one of the theory's advocates in the study of Uganda has called 'neopatrimonial legitimacy' (see Rubongoya 2007). Post-colonial agency is here presented almost as absolute, which, within some circles of decentralization scholarship, has led to conclusions that decentralization is an electoral strategy, a calculation by members of the party in power to maximize their chances of holding onto power—whether at the centre or at subnational levels (see especially O'Neill 2005).

For many studies on Uganda's decentralization programme, the theory of neopatrimonialism provides the core lens through which the programme is critiqued (see e.g. Bazaara 2003; DENIVA 2011, 2012; Golooba-Mutebi 2004, 2008; Green 2008, 2010, 2013, 2015; Lewis 2014; Oyuku-Ocen 2014; Rugambwa et al. 2012; Steiner 2006; cf. Grossman and Lewis 2014). For instance, on the phenomenon of Uganda's globally unmatched pace of district multiplication, Elliott Green writes that during the regime of Idi Amin Dada in the 1970s, the number of districts was 'almost doubled … from 19 to 37 in a clear example of the prebendalistic practices common to Africa at the time' (Green 2013: 13). He adds that contemporary 'district creation has created patronage opportunities for Museveni which has paid off in numerous recent elections' (Green 2013: 13; see also Green 2008: 3, 2010, 2015: 502).

In a 2007 interview that Elliott Green conducted with Mr Vincent Ssekkono, the then Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Local Government (responsible for decentralization), Ssekkono revealed to his interviewer that 'the creation of new districts *has enabled ethnic minorities who were formerly marginalised to obtain their own district*' (see Green 2008: 6; emphasis added). Ssekkono randomly provided for his interviewer a couple of examples to prove his point, pointing out that those that do not fit this logic were the exceptions to the rule. While rejecting this position, Green (2008) insisted that this could not be the case, for in all cases where a (politically, economically) marginalized ethnic group was granted a separate district, fresh violence, contestations, and demands for further subdivision ensued (Green 2008: 7ff.). Green's latter observation is an

---

[66] Such as digging boreholes, upgrading rural roads, and building primary schools and rural healthcare facilities and equipping them, to mention a few.

extremely important one, but for a different reason. It raises a question that Green (2008) and many similar studies do not ask: why is it that in case after case, the creation of ethnic districts has either sparked off new demands for further subdivisions, or paved the way for intra-district ethnic-based violence?

Perhaps the most puzzling reality about decentralization in Uganda is that many existing studies continue to marginalize ethnicity as an explanatory logic at a time when the programme's political engineers openly accept it. As early as 2000, Museveni argued that the creation of Kaberamaido district would end the political and economic marginalization of the Kumam ethnic group in Soroti district.[67] Four years later, he insisted that the split of Arua district to create Koboko district was necessary 'due to the dialectical disparity between the natives [in Koboko] who speak Kakwa and the majority of Arua indigenous settlers whose language is lugbara'.[68] Ahead of another highly contested presidential election in 2011, Museveni opined that a core consideration in the creation of these districts was 'cultural identity'. He gave an example of the ethnically marginalized Bafumbira people in Western Uganda, who were then dominated and marginalized by the Bakiga, both in Kabale district. When the Bafumbira complained and demanded a separate district, the president concurred and directed that Kisoro district be curved out of Kabale for the Bafumbira. The president felt compelled to state the obvious, that the same ethnic 'principle' guided the demarcation of Kaberamaido (for the Kuman ethnic group) out of Soroti, and 'the creation of Busia ([for the] Samia), Butaleja ([for the] Banyole), Budaka ([for the] Bagweri [sic]), and Pallisa ([for the Itesots]) and others … [out] of the old Tororo District'.[69] These instances of political pride in demarcating ethnic districts to address claims of ethnic-based political and economic marginalization have been numerous especially since the turn of this century.[70]

Another key dimension is the bottom-up nature of these demands, which again is downplayed in many existing studies on Uganda's decentralization. Since the 1990s, one can cite numerous instances where the political elite express frustrations with the relentlessness with which communities demand ethnic districts. Statements like 'people are on our necks',[71] or that the situation is at a 'panga level' because 'people want to cut each other up'[72] due to the delay in declaring them a district, are easy to come by in the records of the 1990s. One member of parliament suggested that there be a Parliamentary Committee on Assurances (now actually in place) through which to hold government accountable on new district promises.[73] On numerous occasions, President Museveni decried the relentlessness with which communities pushed for 'too

---

[67] See E. Mulondo, 'Kaberamaido to Become a District', *The New Vision*, 5 June 2000.

[68] See T. Butagira, 'A Proposed District That Caused Rivalry and Tension', *The Daily Monitor*, 14 October 2005.

[69] See Y.K. Museveni, 'New Districts Good for Cultural Identity, Service Delivery', *The Daily Monitor*, 31 January 2011. This article was ghost-written for Museveni by his then personal assistant, Moses Byaruhanga, probably in response to an earlier critique by Prof. Edward Kakonge in the same paper, where Uganda's decentralization programme was critiqued for failing to bring the aforementioned services nearer to the people, and for the fact that district creation was politically motivated, as a way to acquire more seats in the country's legislative body and also to politically award loyal ruling-party cadres. See Kakonge, 'Why NRM Decentralisation Doesn't Serve Citizens'.

[70] An interesting example at the turn of this century was narrated by renowned journalist Onyango-Obbo. See C. Onyango-Obbo, 'Kibaale's Hated Bakiga Are Like Mugabe's White Farmers', *The Daily Monitor*, 20 February 2002.

[71] See Hon. Wasswa, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 28 July 1994.

[72] See G. Wambuzi, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 17 December 2002.

[73] G. Wambuzi, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 17 December 2002.

small districts'. Yet he appears helpless in face of such demands because in the end he has consistently granted them.[74]

When applied to Uganda's decentralization programme, the theory of neopatrimonialism reformulates the discourse on *invention*, advanced since the early 1980s as a structural critique of colonial political modernity (see e.g. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Mudimbe 1988), to now propose it as a critique of post-colonial political agency. In this reformulation, the idea is that new districts are essentially a top-down *invention* by the president, meant to reward his cronies with all that comes with the new district (district political and other positions, constituencies for new members of parliament, government financial grants, etc.), who in turn pay back by mobilizing for and supporting the president in national elections and on other national issues.

No doubt, what is involved in the creation of new districts in Uganda may seem to suggest the predominance of patrimonialist tendencies. The most apparent of these indicators are the timings of announcing new districts, always during presidential election campaigns[75] (22 announced ahead of the 2006 presidential elections; 11 approved ahead of the 2011 presidential elections;[76] 25 announced ahead of the 2016 presidential elections[77]). While not all new districts are created in predominantly ruling-party/Museveni strongholds, granting or promising district status to a community agitating for it at such a critical electoral time constitutes a strong point on which a case for re-election can be made—and with it, more promises to the new district if members of that community vote for the incumbent president. The strategy seems to work. Since the 1990s, newspaper archives have been awash with examples where newly created districts sided with positions of Museveni's government on contentious political and economic issues—such as singing the advantages of decentralization in face of other groups' demands (particularly those of the Buganda Kingdom) for federalism, and backing the highly contested third term for President Museveni in 2006.[78]

Such pointers to neopatrimonial operations aside, what remains unexplained relates to the bottom-up nature of these demands, the fact that throughout the post-colonial period, whether during the regime of Idi Amin or today, people are risking it all to get new districts for themselves.[79] A recent

---

[74] See Vision Reporter, 'Decentralisation Best Policy'. In other cases, the then local government minister Tarsis Kabwegyere decried the pressure that was being put on his ministry to grant districts (Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 17 March 2005). Another local government minister, Kahinda Otafiire, also helplessly decried the same intense pressure from communities and politicians to create these districts, saying that the trend 'has gone too far!' (see R. Baguma and J. Ogwang, 'Otafiire Worried over Districts Numbers', *The New Vision*, 21 September 2008.

[75] As early as 2000, one member of parliament, Omondi Okot, told his colleagues: 'The perception people have about some of these districts that are emerging now, appears to be political. And this is true, because their pronouncements, in some cases, are made at rallies. What else do you need to hear about that!' (Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 14 November 2000).

[76] I. Imaka, M. Nalugo, and I. Ladu, 'Parliament Approves Ten New Districts', *The Daily Monitor*, 25 December 2011.

[77] S. Mutabazi, 'Uganda Getting It Wrong on Creation of New Districts', *The Daily Monitor*, 11 September 2015.

[78] See A. Tumusiime and F. Kayizzi, 'Hoima Leaders Dismiss Federo', *The New Vision*, 28 July 2004; N. Kajoba, 'Kayunga Backs 3rd Terms'; C. Bagonza, 'Nakasongola Backs 3rd Term', *The New Vision*, 20 October 2003; Maseruka, 'Nakasongola Boss Opposed to Federo'.

[79] In the case of Kaberamaido, for example, despite it having been announced at a rally, it was pointed out in 2000 that ordinary people had demanded that district for the past 22 years. See Omondi Okot's submissions, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 14 November 2000. Across Tororo there were fears of an impending 'plague', and a person was feared dead after a number of people, as a sign of protest against the government's reluctance to award them a

study by Sseremba (2021) on the Rwenzori region, *inter alia*, navigates the process which the people of Kasese and Bundibugyo went through since colonial rule to be granted these two separate districts by the Amin regime in 1974 (cf. Banjwa 2021). In many other instances, ordinary citizens strategically wait for the president on the campaign trail to 'arm-twist' him into granting them district status, by conditioning any electoral support on his doing so.[80] In quite a dramatic turn in citizens' dogged pursuit of ethnic districts, the people of Nakaseke in Central Uganda confronted Museveni with a threat to exhume the skulls of victims of the 1980–86 war that brought Museveni's regime into power if he did not grant new district status to this pastoralist-dominated part of Luweero district.[81] In Eastern Uganda, residents in Tororo ate uncooked rats in public view to protest the government's delay in granting them separate districts.[82] The theory of neopatrimonialism can convincingly tell us about how Museveni delivered these districts in a manner that rejuvenated his waning power and popularity. But it cannot explain the bottom-up nature of demands for new districts.

Another key feature in the debate on Uganda's decentralization programme relates to the question of history. While the core focus of this paper is on the post-1980s period, and more so on developments after 1990, it is worth noting that the contemporary decentralization programme is rooted in earlier historical processes—processes that must be grasped if we are to clearly understand its dynamics and the contestation it has generated today. These are issues in which the historically oriented scholarship on Uganda's decentralization has taken keen interest.

Two tendencies can be identified in these studies. In the first, two core periods are designated. The first involves the whole period from 1900 to 1986. It is suggested that this is a period when decentralization lacked the element of local autonomy. According to this tale of events, it was the advent of the current regime in 1986 that shifted emphasis in the political praxis of decentralization, from central control to local autonomy—even if the extent of this autonomy is still a matter of political contestation (see e.g. Tordoff 1994; cf. Green 2013).

In the second tendency, the lumping together of colonial and a big chunk of post-colonial history in the first tendency is challenged. In its place, four periods are designated: 1900–62, in which the centre is said to have been weak while local governments were quite strong; 1962–86, when weak local governments are said to have existed alongside powerful central governments; 1986–2006, which is said to have marked the real 'decentralization phase'; and finally, the post-2006 period, suggested as representing the betrayal of the decentralization policy (of 1986–2006) by the unruly creation of new districts (see especially DENIVA 2011).

Evidently, both tendencies portray 1986 as the beginning of what they consider a true decentralization policy in Uganda. Even when the second tendency critiques the first for the undifferentiated portrayal of the 1900–86 period, both agree that 1986 ushered in something new—in this case regarding local autonomy. This kind of historical rendering permits one important question: is there a common thread running through the colonial and post-colonial periods regarding decentralization in Uganda? Much as many of these studies agree on the existence of continuities between colonial and post-colonial decentralization regimes, their primary

---

district, killed and ate uncooked rats in public view. See Mr Egola's comment, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 17 March 2005.

[80] Hon Wambuzi, Uganda Parliamentary Hansard, 17 December 2002

[81] See H. Mukasa and F. Osike, 'President Approves Nakaseke District', *The New Vision*, 20 June 2005. See also Kato, 'Can the Country Afford 200 Districts?'

[82] See Parliamentary Hansard, 17 March 2005; Kato, 'Can the Country Afford 200 Districts?'

emphasis is on discontinuity—either between 1986 and the earlier period, as in the first tendency, or between distinct periods/phases since the dawn of colonial political modernity in Uganda, as in the second tendency.

I have indicated in the first section of this paper that despite the shift from colonial to post-colonial regimes, a constant dynamic, whose relation to the different phases of decentralization in Uganda must be clearly understood and problematized, is the question of ethnicity. Such a dynamic, despite being downplayed or presented ahistorically, is scattered in the findings of numerous writings on Uganda's decentralization programme. Ayeko-Kümmeth, for example, decries the contemporary 'soilisation of politics', where each brand-new district becomes an exclusive political and economic domain for 'sons and daughters of the soil' (2014: 182). This 'soilisation', however, is thought of as a recent phenomenon (cf. Ssentongo 2016). When Habati (2012) talks of the need to emphasize economic development as a panacea for the escalating tribal districts, he does not ask why *economic injustice*, and not just *political marginality*, form the basis for those who demand ethnic-based districts. Such a question requires taking issue with the very basis on which Uganda's political society is organized, and why people think that equity, security, and prosperity can be obtained only through one's ethnic compatriots (see also Green 2008; Kasfir 1979; Mudoola 1996; Oyuku-Ocen 2008; Rugambwa et al. 2012; Saito 2012; Simson 2019; Singiza and De Visser 2011).

4   Conclusion

The following argument unfolds from the above discussion. First, I have argued that the logic of ethnicity, despite being decentred in many existing studies, continues to structure Uganda's unending district multiplication. My engagement with the 1990s political debate on the programme has revealed how a number of proponents of ethnic-based districts hoped that ethnic-based political and economic forms of marginality in districts would be put to an end through the granting of new districts to disgruntled ethnic groups. Second, I have argued that this is a futile endeavour, because it is based on highly questionable assumptions. Because it fails to seriously consider the irreducible multi-ethnic nature of our societies, and hence the impossibility of mono-ethnic districts, the programme simply paves the way for infinite claims of ethnic-based marginality, and, with them, infinite demands for new districts. One commentator has argued that at this pace of development, the number of districts in Uganda will reach 200.[83] Another predicts 500![84] Even this is a futile exercise, because as long as new districts are still created on the basis of ethnicity, no one can foretell with certainty the number of districts Uganda should be prepared to embrace in the near future.

The above underscores a particular rendering of the crisis faced by Uganda's ethnic-based decentralization (though it is certainly not the only one). As I have indicated in the above engagement with the literature, one of the most engaged perspectives frames the crisis in terms of patronage politics. Here, ethnicity as a guiding element in Uganda's decentralization is accepted and decentred at the same time. At the centre of it all is placed a neopatrimonial ruler, who uses district creation as a strategy to entrench himself in power. How this works, it is suggested, is that new districts are generally awarded to the ruler's cronies in exchange for continued support and political mobilization in national elections (see especially Green 2008, 2010, 2013, 2015). To use a concept developed in a not-so-different context, the perspective views decentralization 'as an

---

[83] Kato, 'Can the Country Afford 200 Districts?'

[84] Onyango-Obbo, 'Why Region Needs 500 New Districts'.

electoral strategy' not to empower a political party in power *per se*, as O'Neill (2005) referred to, but to empower President Museveni in national elections.

While this perspective no doubt explains important aspects of Uganda's contemporary decentralization policy, the emerging concerns are two-fold. First, it fails to consider, much less explain, the bottom-up dimension to district multiplication—why ordinary people go as far as to eat uncooked rats or exhume the dead to demonstrate their anger over delays in awarding their ethnic community a distinct district. Moreover, as Gisselquist (2014: 20) has observed, in instances where such ethnicization of politics is also linked to patronage politics, the causality between patronage and ethnic politics remains a mystery (see also Gisselquist et al. 2016). Second, its predominant consideration of contemporary manifestations, important as this is, does not permit a historically informed query on the circumstances under which ethnicity becomes a core structuring logic of the political and access to resources in it. While it is true that people look to the state for numerous resources (Posner 2005), it is not inevitable that they must invoke their ethnic identities in that endeavour.

Are there alternatives to this programme? The engagement with the 1990s political debate on Uganda's decentralization programme presented earlier revealed four core alternatives that existed. The *first* was inspired by the political experimentation with 'decentralization' by the NRA/M rebels in their 'liberated areas' during the 1980–86 war that brought them to power. A core element in this experimentation is that it dismantled the idea that participation in politics and access to socioeconomic resources from the local political unit, the village, all the way to the parish, sub-parish, and the district, should be based on one's ethnic identity. In the place of *ethnicity*, the rebels' emphasis, as I elaborated in the first section of this paper, was on *residence*. The *second* and persistent alternative has been the federal option. The current government dashed demands for federalism, even with evidence of its popularity reported by government commissions (see especially Ssempebwa 2003; see also Odoki 1993). As a response to demands for federalism, in 2005 the government came up with the Regional Tier alternative, which sought to organize the country into distinct blocks of districts in different regions that supposedly agreed to 'co-operate'. This official alternative did not challenge the logic that organizes existing districts, nor did it end the creation of new ones. Advocates of a federal option, among them the Kingdom of Buganda, rejected the official alternative, which remains shelved to date despite having resulted from a constitutional amendment. Finally, there have been calls for *dedistrictization* (freezing the creation of new districts and merging unviable ones).

I have noted that all of these alternatives have to face one important challenge: how to address legitimate claims of ethnic-based political and economic forms of marginalization without recycling the colonial politicization of cultural differences. This would mean dismantling the colonial idea of ethnic (or 'tribal') inevitability in the structuring of the political (in this case the local decentralizing unit, the district) and access to socioeconomic opportunities within it. This does not mean freezing cultural differences. It means ending their reckless politicization. In this decolonial endeavour, I have suggested that the 'decentralization' experiment of the NRA/M rebels in their 'liberated areas', through the institution of the RCs, offers a more emancipatory starting point.

References

Ayeko-Kümmeth, J. (2014). 'District Creation and its Impact on Local Government in Uganda'. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 8(3): 81–91. https://doi.org/10.5897/AJPSIR2013.0639

Azfar, O., J. Livingston, and P. Meagher (2006). 'Decentralization in Uganda'. In P. Bardhan and D. Mookherjee (eds), *Decentralization and Local Governance in Developing Countries: A Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Banjwa, A. (2021). 'Book Review: Violence in the Rwenzori Region and the Puzzle of Ethnicity'. NilePost, 30 August. Available at: https://nilepost.co.ug/2021/08/30/book-review-violence-in-the-rwenzori-region-and-the-puzzle-of-ethnicity (accessed 2 September 2021).

Bashaasha, B., M.N. Mangheni, and E. Nkonya (2011). *Decentralization and Rural Service Delivery in Uganda*. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute.

Bazaara, N. (2003). 'Decentralization, Politics, and Environment in Uganda'. CBR Working Paper 80. Washington, DC: Centre for Basic Research (CBR).

Bossert, T.J., and J.C. Beauvais (2002). 'Decentralization of Health Systems in Ghana, Zambia, Uganda and the Philippines: A Comparative Analysis of Decision Space'. *Health Policy and Planning*, 17(1): 14–31. https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/17.1.14

Chandra, K., (2004). *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Headcounts in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108573481

Crawford, G., and C. Hartmann (2008). *Decentralisation in Africa: A Pathway out of Poverty and Conflict?* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. https://doi.org/10.5117/9789053569344

DENIVA (Development Network of the Indigenous Voluntary Associations of Uganda) (2011). 'The Dynamics of District Creation in Uganda'. Policy Briefing Paper. Kampala: DENIVA.

DENIVA (2012). 'Re-thinking District Multiplication in Uganda'. Policy Briefing Paper. Kampala: DENIVA.

Dick, E., K. Gaesing, D. Inkoom, and T. Kausel (eds)(2016). *Decentralisation and Regional Development: Experiences and Lessons from Four Continents over Three Decades*. Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-29367-7

Dumont, R. (1966). *False Start in Africa*. London: Andre Deutsch.

Fjeldstad, O.H., and J. Semboja (2000). 'Dilemmas of Fiscal Decentralisation: A Study of Local Government Taxation in Tanzania'. In *Forum for Development Studies*, 27(1): 7–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/08039410.2000.9666122

Garcia, M., and A.S. Rajkumar (2008). 'Achieving Better Service Delivery through Decentralization in Ethiopia'. Working Paper 131. Washington, DC: World Bank. https://doi.org/10.1596/978-0-8213-7382-8

Gisselquist, R.M. (2014). 'Ethnic Divisions and Public Goods Provision, Revisited'. *Ethnic and Racial studies*, 37(9): 1605–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2012.762106

Gisselquist, R.M., S. Leiderer, and M. Nino-Zarazua (2016). 'Ethnic Heterogeneity and Public Goods Provision in Zambia: Evidence of a Subnational "Diversity Dividend"'. *World Development*, 78: 308–23. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2015.10.018

Golola, M.L. (2001). 'Decentralization, Local Bureaucracies and Service Delivery in Uganda'. WIDER Discussion Paper 2001/115. Helsinki: UNU-WIDER .

Golooba-Mutebi, F. (2004). 'Reassessing Popular Participation in Uganda'. *Public Administration and Development: The International Journal of Management Research and Practice*, 24(4): 289–304. https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.309

Golooba-Mutebi, F. (2008). 'Politics and Local Government in Uganda'. In F. Saito (ed.), *Foundations for Local Governance: Decentralization in Comparative Perspective*. Heidelberg: Springer Science & Business Media.

Green, E. (2008). *District Creation and Decentralisation in Uganda*. London: Crisis States Research Centre.

Green, E. (2010). 'Patronage, District Creation, and Reform in Uganda'. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 45(1): 83–103. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-009-9058-8

Green, E. (2013). *The Rise and Fall of Decentralization in Contemporary Uganda*. WIDER Working Paper 2013/073. Helsinki: UNU-WIDER.

Green, E. (2015). 'Decentralization and Development in Contemporary Uganda'. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 25(5): 491–508. https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2015.1114925

Grossman, G., and J.L. Lewis (2014). 'Administrative Unit Proliferation'. *American Political Science Review*, 108(1): 196–217. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055413000567

Habati, M.A. (2012). 'Uganda's Tribal Districts are a Ticking Time Bomb'. OpenDemocracy, 20 July. Available at: www.opendemocracy.net/en/opensecurity/ugandas-tribal-districts-are-ticking-time-bomb (accessed 13 July 2021).

Hobsbawm, E., and T. Ranger (eds) (2012 [1983]). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107295636

Hope, K.R. (2000). 'Decentralisation and Local Governance Theory and the Practice in Botswana'. *Development Southern Africa*, 17(4): 519–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/03768350050173912

Kasfir, N. (1979). 'Explaining Ethnic Political Participation'. *World Politics*, 31(3): 365–88. https://doi.org/10.2307/2009994

Kasfir, N. (1998). 'African Ambiguities: "No-Party Democracy" in Uganda'. *Journal of Democracy*, 9(2): 49–61. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1998.0029

Khanakwa, P. (2012). 'Inter-Communal Violence and Land Rights: Bugisu–Bugwere Territorial Boundary Conflict'. MISR Working Paper 6/2012. Kampala: Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR), Makerere University.

Lewis, J.I. (2014). 'When Decentralization Leads to Recentralization: Subnational State Transformation in Uganda'. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 24(5): 571–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2014.971771

Mamdani, M. (2013 [2012]). *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity*. Kampala: MISR, Makerere University. https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674067356

Mamdani, M. (2017 [1996]). *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Johannesburg and Kampala: Wits University Press and MISR Press. https://doi.org/10.23943/9781400889716

Mamdani, M. (2020). *Neither Settler Nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674249998

Manyak, T.G., and I.W. Katono (2010). 'Decentralization and Conflict in Uganda: Governance Adrift'. *African Studies Quarterly*, 11(4): 1–24. https://doi.org/10.2979/africonfpeacrevi.1.1.8

Mbabazi J. (2019). 'Decentralisation: Uganda's Success Story'. EABW News, 11 December. Available at: www.busiweek.com/decentralisation-ugandas-success-story (accessed 13 July 2021).

Mkandawire, T. (2015). 'Neopatrimonialism and the Political Economy of Economic Performance in Africa: Critical Reflections'. *World Politics*, 67(3): 563–612. https://doi.org/10.1017/S004388711500009X

Mudimbe, V.Y. (1988). *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. Morrisville, NC: Lulu Press.

Mudoola, D.M. (1996). *Religion, Ethnicity, and Politics in Uganda*. Kampala: Fountain.

Muhumuza, W. (2008). 'Pitfalls of Decentralization Reforms in Transitional Societies: The Case of Uganda'. *Africa Development* 33(4): 59–81. https://doi.org/10.4314/ad.v33i4.57343

Ngabirano, E. (2021). 'Beyond Local Government Reforms: A Case Study of Toro and Kigezi Districts in the Politics of Postcolonial Uganda'. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 28(2): 165–85.

Nsibambi, A.R. (1991). 'Resistance Councils and Committees: A Case Study from Makerere'. In H.B. Hansen and M. Twaddle (eds), *Changing Uganda: The Dilemmas of Structural Adjustment and Revolutionary Change*. Oxford: James Currey.

Odoki, B. (1993). *The Report of the Uganda Constitutional Commission: Analysis and Recommendations.* Entebbe: Uganda Printing and Publishing Corporation (UPPC).

O'Neill, K. (2005). *Decentralising the State: Elections, Parties, and Local Power in the Andes.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511610417

Okidi, J.A., and M. Guloba (2006). *Decentralization and Development: Emerging Issues From Uganda's Experience.* Occasional Paper 31. Kampala: Economic Policy Research Centre.

Oyuku-Ocen, E. (2008). 'Decentralisation in Uganda and the Dance of Creating Districts: Theory and Practice in Uganda'. Master's Thesis. Rotterdam: Graduate School of Development Studies, International Institute of Social Studies (ISS).

Posner, D.N. (2005). *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511808661

Raghunandan, T.R. (ed.) (2012). *Decentralisation and Local Governments: The Indian Experience.* New Delhi: Orient Blackswan.

Ranis, G., and F. Stewart (1994). 'Decentralisation in Indonesia'. *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies*, 30(3): 41–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/00074919412331336677

Rubongoya, J. (2007). *Regime Hegemony in Museveni's Uganda: Pax Musevenica.* New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230603363

Rugambwa, J., A. Larok, and R. Ssewakiryanga. (2012). 'Do We As a Country Need New Districts? An Open Letter to Parliament'. Available at: www.deniva.or.ug/docs/Reports/2012/2012DoWeNeedNewDistricts.pdf (accessed 13 July 2021).

Saito, F. (2000). 'Decentralisation in Uganda: Challenges for the 21st Century'. Paper presented in the Centre for Basic Research Seminar Series, Kampala, 7 April 2000, and at a workshop on Uganda, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London, 17 April 2000.

Saito, F. (2001). 'Decentralization Theories Revisited: Lessons from Uganda'. *Ryukoku RISS Bulletin*, 31(3): 1–17.

Saito, F. (2012). *Decentralization and Development Partnership: Lessons from Uganda.* Heidelberg: Springer Science & Business Media.

Schelnberger, A.K. (2008). 'Decentralisation and Conflict in Kibaale, Uganda'. In G. Crawford and C. Hartmann (eds), *Decentralisation in Africa: A Pathway out of Poverty and Conflict?* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Simson, R. (2019). 'Ethnic (In)Equality in the Public Services of Kenya and Uganda'. *African Affairs*, 118(470): 75–100. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/ady034

Singiza, D.K., and J. De Visser (2011). 'Chewing More Than One Can Swallow: The Creation of New Districts in Uganda'. *Law, Democracy & Development*, 15(1): 1–20. https://doi.org/10.4314/ldd.v15i1.4

Ssempebwa, F. (2003). *Report of the Constitutional Review Commission.* Kampala: Constitutional Review Commission.

Ssentongo, J.S. (2016). 'Royal Massacre and King's Detention Point to What Uganda Is Becoming'. The Conversation, 14 December. Available at: https://theconversation.com/royal-massacre-and-kings-detention-point-to-what-uganda-is-becoming-70348 (accessed 13 July 2021).

Sseremba, Y. (2020). 'Ethnic Emancipation and Conflict Escalation in Uganda'. *Third World Quarterly*, 41(12): 2030–47. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2020.1803059

Sseremba, Y. (2021). *The State and the Puzzle of Ethnicity: Rethinking Mass Violence in Uganda's Rwenzori Region.* Kampala: MISR, Makerere University.

Steiner, S. (2006). 'Decentralisation in Uganda: Exploring the Constraints For Poverty Reduction'. GIGA Working Paper 31/2006. Hamburg: German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA). https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.977969

Tidemand, P. (1994). 'The Resistance Councils in Uganda: A Study of Rural Politics and Popular Democracy in Africa'. PhD dissertation. Roskilde: International Development Studies, Roskilde University.

Tordoff, W. (1994). 'Decentralisation: Comparative Experience in Commonwealth Africa'. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 32(4): 555–80. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X00015858

Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2019). *2019 Statistical Abstract*. Kampala: Uganda Bureau of Statistics.

Wai, Z. (2012). 'Neo-Patrimonialism and the Discourse of State Failure in Africa'. *Review of African Political Economy*, 39(131): 27–43. https://doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2012.658719

Wamala, B., A. Mbabazi, K. Kivejinja, Z. Kaheru, J. Sabiti, and J. Tumusiime (2014). *Mission to Freedom: Uganda Resistance News, 1981–1985*. Kampala: Fountain.

World Bank (2004). *Decentralisation in Madagascar: A World Bank Study*. Washington, DC: World Bank. https://doi.org/10.1596/0-8213-5841-3