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Document Number Five: Elections and Tutelary Politics in Uganda, 1967–1971[*]

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On 27 July 1970, Jeremiah Opira hosted a meeting in Kitgum, northern Uganda. In attendance was a select audience of local officials from the ruling party, the Uganda People's Congress (UPC), and 'youth leaders' from the area. Opira worked in the capital, Kampala, as deputy head of the government's intelligence organisation. But he himself was from the north and had been at primary school in Kitgum. That had been the beginning of a journey of education and employment—not untypical for a small minority of late colonial subjects—that took him to senior school in neighbouring Kenya, work as a teacher and headteacher, and then to a rapid rise through the ranks of the civil service after Ugandan independence in 1962.[1] Returning to Kitgum, he was very much the local man who had made a successful national career.

According to the report of the Kitgum meeting published in the UPC's party newspaper, Opira used the event to explain a major political innovation. Two weeks earlier, Uganda's President Milton Obote had announced a plan for an entirely new single-party electoral system in a lengthy tract that he had presented as Document Number Five—the last in a series of policy statements that set out a 'Move to the Left' in politics. Opira characterised the central document in that series, the Common Man's Charter, as a material promise 'to provide every citizen with sufficient standard [*sic*] of living particularly clothing, food and shelter'. On the election plan, Opira's speech to his audience emphasised a concern with performance for an international gaze; Obote's plans, he said, 'would demonstrate to the whole world that an African state and government' could 'innovate a system where democracy is practised'. But more than that, the proposed elections—combining single-party politics with an innovative voting system—would change both politicians and voters in Uganda itself, in pursuit of the aims of the Move to the Left. The effect of the earlier elections that preceded independence had been pernicious, Opira said: some MPs had turned their constituencies 'into a kraal from which they get the means of living'. Under the new system, he insisted that 'consciousness would be reciprocally instilled in the electorate and the elected'.

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1. 'Jeremiah Lucas Opira', *Wikipedia* (Wikimedia Foundation Inc., 2001–), at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeremiah_Lucas_Opira (accessed 10 Sept. 2020).

He ended his talk with an appeal: his audience should 'explain to the masses' the importance of the system. As they left, following a performance by a local dance troupe, Opira's wife presented all the attendees with cloths bearing Obote's image.[2]

This little vignette is rich in possible readings, each of which might speak to aspects of governmentality in post-independence Africa. Why did performances by dancers frame the event? How should we understand the gendering of speech- and gift-giving? What does the travel of the word *kraal* (from Portuguese to colonial South Africa to wider imperial usage and then to the post-colony) tell us about languages of government? The newspaper article presented the event as a headmasterly talk by Opira, but studies elsewhere have reminded us of the danger of seeing such events as no more than a lecture to the audience; surely, messages flowed both ways.[3] But the focus of this article is not on the event, but on the newspaper report itself. What kinds of work were people—mostly men—such as Opira seeking to do through the public statements about elections that appeared in the media?

On the same day that Opira spoke with his audience in Kitgum, Felix Onama—who was both secretary-general of the UPC and minister of defence—was in a television studio in Kampala, hailing the election plan as 'revolutionary, original and highly democratic', and saying that it would 'prove to the whole world how well this system was democratic'.[4] Television reached a tiny audience at the time (there were only 9,000 TV sets in the country in 1969), but—like Opira's meeting—Onama's words (or at least a version of them) found their way into the print media.[5] For several months, Uganda's media carried regular commentary and discussion on the election plan. Much of this took the form of praise but there was also detailed discussion, even opposition—sometimes overt, sometimes half-hidden.

To call this media coverage a debate would risk overstating its openness: as will be shown, it was constrained by both self-censorship and intimidation. Nor can we assume that it was a window on political discourse generally: behind the often stilted language of the newspaper article or radio broadcast there was a vast swirl of everyday argument, gossip, rumour and conversation—from the secret backroom conspiracies of political leaders to the political chatter of the bar. Cramped and unrepresentative, the media coverage might also seem ultimately irrelevant. Discussion of possible elections, which had begun in 1967 and peaked in these few months in 1970, finally came to nothing, curtailed by the coup in January 1971 that brought Idi Amin to power.

2. 'Opira Meets UPC Leaders from Labongo', *The People*, 28 July 1970, p. 1.

3. A. Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya* (Cambridge, 1995).

4. 'Election Proposals: Genius', *The People*, 28 July 1970, p. 1.

5. 'Dr Obote Choice in Poll', *Uganda Argus*, 28 Aug. 1970, p. 1; for the number of TV sets, see J. Ocitti, *Press Politics and Public Policy in Uganda: The Role of Journalism in Democratization* (Lewiston, NY, 2005), p. 39.

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Yet the newspaper record—and the imperfect, partial record captured by monitors working for the Summary of World Broadcasts—is revealing. The surviving archival record of debates within Uganda's government is anyway exiguous, but more importantly the media discussion raises a question that can be summarised simply: why did so much energy and time go into public speaking and writing about a complex plan for elections in an authoritarian state? That elections were seen to be important is striking; that there was a degree of public disagreement about how they should be held is even more so. The answer suggested here is that the media coverage of the elections was in itself a kind of political work. When Basil Bataringaya—former opposition politician turned government stalwart—told Uganda's parliament that 'elections serve a useful purpose in nation-building, in the mobilisation of political consciousness and in the control of leaders', both his speech and its subsequent reproduction on radio and in the press made claims about Bataringaya himself and about Uganda's politics that spoke to a specific audience.[6] In Uganda, as elsewhere in Africa, newspapers have been seen as lacking in critical freedom, and vulnerable to government control—whether because of direct ownership by government or ruling party (as in the case of *The People*, one of Uganda's two national English-language newspapers) or because the foreign companies that owned them were reluctant to fall foul of independent African governments (as in the case of the *Uganda Argus*, the other national English-language paper, which from 1967 was part of the Lonrho group).[7] The history of Uganda's media has been cast as a 'struggle for freedom' between a controlling government and a body of journalists dedicated to liberal principles.[8] Yet the boundaries between journalists, politicians, civil servants and party activists were often unclear, and from their beginnings in the early twentieth century Ugandan newspapers had largely been created to pursue particular political agendas rather than any abstract notion of freedom.[9] Vulnerability did not make newspapers irrelevant: constrained in their content and read only by a literate minority, they nonetheless provided a public forum for that minority, who read the press closely as they navigated the perils of a politically tumultuous time.

Radio broadcasts in Amin's Uganda have been characterised as part of a 'politics of exhortation' aimed at the population as a whole.[10]

6. BBC Monitoring Service, *Summary of World Broadcasts*, IV: *Middle East and Africa* (Caversham Park, 1970) [hereafter SWB], ME/3532/B/1, 'Representation of the Bill, 1970', Kampala, English service, 10 Nov. 1970.

7. H. Ng'weno, 'The Nature of the Threat to Press Freedom in East Africa', *Africa Today*, xvi, no. 3 (1969), pp. 1–4; F. Barton, *The Press of Africa: Persecution and Perseverance* (London, 1979), pp. 86, 98.

8. Ocitti, *Press Politics and Public Policy*, pp. 1–2, 4, 137.

9. Ibid., pp. 9–26.

10. D.R. Peterson and E.C. Taylor, 'Rethinking the State in Idi Amin's Uganda: The Politics of Exhortation', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, vii (2013), pp. 58–82.

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Elsewhere in Africa it has been argued that, where the print media is closely constrained by the state, journalists learn to write to 'naturalise the authority of state officials'; Marissa Moorman has noted of Angola that 'state broadcasters have national ambitions'.[11] But it is not clear that the imagined national audience was always listening, or reading. Moorman has also noted that listening communities were actually diverse, and another recent study has suggested that media work can produce multiple distinct 'publics'.[12] The debate over Document Number Five suggests that writing and broadcasting in the English language allowed a relatively discrete group of broadcasters, writers and readers to assert—and argue over—their distinctive place in Ugandan politics. In pretending to speak to the nation, they were talking to, and about, one another. Like Florence Brisset-Foucault's recent study of radio talk shows in twenty-first century Uganda, this is an investigation of what could, and could not be said—and of the role of public statements in claiming political authority.[13] The focus here is therefore on newspapers and radio broadcasts in the English language—not because these were the only forum for political debates among Ugandans (these went on in many ways, in multiple languages) but because they were central to public self-representation by Uganda's elite.

That approach allows us to consider the protagonists, at least in part, as they saw themselves—as intellectuals, whose statements made claims about themselves as 'educators of the masses' (as one of them put it).[14] Those involved included a spy master with aspirations to be a poet, the editor of a critical arts magazine, sundry academics, angry students and a wider cast of politicians and civil servants. This 'small restless group'—as one of their own number later called them—used their talk about elections to assert a profoundly tutelary understanding of politics.[15] This valorised their shared claim to authority—as they talked and wrote, they cast the people of Uganda as holders of sovereign authority, yet also as subjects in need of education. Voters, they argued, did not fully understand the consequences of their choices. Vulnerable to political opportunists, the electorate required instruction.

At the same time, the media reportage revealed both self-fashioning and a project of mutual discipline by that group of literate English-speakers. Uganda had a considerable press in other languages—notably

11. J. Hasty, 'Performing Power, Composing Culture: The State Press in Ghana', *Ethnography*, vii (2006), pp. 69–98; M. Moorman, *Powerful Frequencies: Radio, State Power, and the Cold War in Angola, 1931–2002* (Athens, OH, 2019), p. 1.

12. E. Hunter, '*Komkya* and the Convening of a Chagga Public, 1953–61', in D.R. Peterson, E. Hunter and S. Newell, eds, *African Print Cultures: Newspapers and Their Publics in the Twentieth Century* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2016), pp. 283–305.

13. F. Brisset-Foucault, *Talkative Polity: Radio, Domination and Citizenship in Uganda* (Athens, OH, 2019), pp. 3, 121, 130–32.

14. N. Akena Adoko, 'The Role of the Intellectual in the African Revolution', *East Africa*, vi, no. 3 (1969), pp. 17–23.

15. A.M. Kirunda-Kivejinja, *Uganda: The Crisis of Confidence* (Kampala, 1995), p. 138.

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Luganda, spoken in Uganda's economic and governmental centre, the former southern kingdom of Buganda, where there had been a lively and enthusiastically political press since the early colonial period.[16] By the mid-1960s newspapers and radio were, as one observer noted, 'a necessity for the educated elite and influentials', and English-language media carried a particular weight—despite their modest circulation.[17] The colonial language was in effect the national language and was entangled with 'nation-building': prosperity was the promised reward for overcoming ethnic division, and English was seen as the tool for that overcoming.[18] Luganda, meanwhile, was inevitably associated with the persistent force of Buganda political exceptionalism (on which, more below).[19] Law gave legal force to the linkage of national politics and English: candidates for parliament had to prove their proficiency in English.[20] The colonial language conjured an audience that was international, as well as national: writing in English, Uganda's intellectuals could see themselves as part of debates that were continental and global in scale.

English was a language of estrangement as well as power. Public political events routinely involved performances of a linguistic hierarchy of difference: national politicians addressed local crowds in English, pausing for translators to render their message into vernacular languages. The Ugandan poet Okot p'Bitek (writing in English) described post-independence African politics as 'government by the educated, for the educated. You cannot become a member of their parliament unless you speak English or French'.[21] Vernacular press journalists complained that Uganda's elite were only interested in the English-language media.[22] Those who used the colonial language were constantly aware that their very claims to status might rob them of legitimacy: they feared to be seen as members of a lucky elite who—as another poet, Taban lo Liyong, bitingly put it—had 'fallen into things' and lost touch with the people.[23] Discussing Document Number Five through the English-language media asserted status; but it also became a way to express anxieties about self-seeking elitism, and to imagine an electoral framework that would constrain the elite's own behaviours.

16. J.F. Scotton, 'The First African Press in East Africa: Protest and Nationalism in Uganda in the 1920s', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vi (1973), pp. 211–28.

17. Ocitti, *Press Politics and Public Policy*, p. 38; also A. Oberschall, 'Communications, Information and Aspirations in Rural Uganda', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, iv (1969), pp. 30–50.

18. M. Chibita and P.J. Fourie, 'A Socio-history of the Media and Participation in Uganda', *Communicatio*, xxxiii (2007), pp. 1–25.

19. Ibid., p. 12; Barton, *Press of Africa*, p. 97; E.L. Sommerlad, 'Problems in Developing a Free Enterprise Press in East Africa', *Gazette*, xiv (1968), pp. 74–8.

20. J. Willis, G. Lynch and N. Cheeseman, 'Voting, Nationhood, and Citizenship in Late-Colonial Africa', *Historical Journal*, lxi (2018), pp. 1113–35, at 1128.

21. Okot p'Bitek, 'Indigenous Ills', *Transition*, xxxii (1968), p. 47.

22. Ocitti, *Press Politics and Public Policy*, p. 42.

23. Taban lo Liyong, *The Song of Lawino* (1966; Oxford, 1984), p. 110.

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In approaching the subject as an exercise in intellectual history, this study deviates from the path of previous scholarship on the topic. Generally sceptical of the viability of the plan, a little flurry of scholarly writing around the time of Document Number Five was nonetheless broadly sympathetic, some of it written by individuals who were themselves active in the discussions (which took an ostentatiously academic turn). This literature was informed by the same basic understanding that shaped Document Number Five: that the nation needed building, and that the election plan was—at least on one level—a genuine attempt to overcome ethnic and regional divisions that threatened that task.[24] Subsequent writing has been more cursory, and generally less kind. It has either offered a partisan insistence on the insincerity of Obote (who manipulated elections in 1980 to come back to power for a second term which was generally bloody and disastrous) or—in more general literature—subsumed this story into a wider narrative of Africa's retreat from democracy after independence, in which alternative electoral visions such as Document Number Five are no more than the self-interested scheming of insecure authoritarians.[25]

Those who devised and argued over Document Number Five were indeed insecure and authoritarian and the evidence points to plenty of scheming. The ballot was conceived as a disciplinary and educational project: the plan was for a version of the 'elections without choice' that became common in Africa at this time.[26] Yet it is argued here that the course of events was not inevitable, and those involved saw their behaviour as more than crude self-interest. To speak or write in public was a risk, as well as a way of making a claim, and the actors in these events were trying to shape their future, and that of Uganda, with their public words; their sense of themselves as intellectuals, with a duty to debate and a right to educate, was crucial to their behaviour. In focusing on their published words, this study takes their claims seriously.

I

Document Number Five was rooted in an understanding of Uganda's political situation that was widely shared, certainly among those who

24. T. Aasland, 'Electoral Reforms—National Integration, Mobilization, New Blood—in Document No. 5 on the Move-to-the-Left Strategy in Uganda', *Cooperation and Conflict*, x (1975), pp. 113–42; N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena: Participation and Ethnicity in African Politics, with a Case Study of Uganda* (Berkeley, CA, 1976), pp. 207–8; J. Mittelman, *Ideology and Politics in Uganda: From Obote to Amin* (Ithaca, NY, 1975); N. Provizer, 'The National Electoral Process and State Building: Proposals for New Methods of Election in Uganda', *Comparative Politics*, ix (1977), pp. 305–26; S. Ryan, 'Electoral Engineering in Uganda', *Mawazo*, ii (1969), pp. 3–12.

25. Kirunda-Kivejinja, *Uganda*, pp. 146–52; F. Bwengye, *The Agony of Uganda: From Idi Amin to Obote: Repressive Rule and Bloodshed: Causes, Effects and the Cure* (London, 1985), pp. 28–32; C. Young, 'Africa: An Interim Balance Sheet', *Journal of Democracy*, vii (1996), pp. 53–68.

26. D.G. Lavroff, ed., *Aux urnes l'Afrique! Elections et pouvoirs en Afrique noire* (Paris, 1978); G. Hermet, R. Rose and A. Rouquié, eds, *Elections Without Choice* (London, 1978).

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wrote and commented in English. Writing in an Africa-focused, US-published journal in 1961, shortly before independence, a Ugandan studying for a masters degree in the USA argued that Uganda was an extreme case of a wider condition. Colonial rule had created political units, while at the same time insisting that the populations of these units were so incorrigibly diverse in language and culture that all government structures and practices must be predicated on that disunity. Yet, from the 1940s, imperial powers sought to reinvent colonial rule as an exercise in political as well as social and economic development, and unitary government suddenly became the goal. Subjects who sought to end colonial rule found that, in a world now imagined as one of sovereign nations, unity was the price of freedom from empire. As the author Joseph Mubiru explained, nationalists 'had to fight two enemies, colonialism and tribalism'.[27] Uganda's particularly acute version of this condition arose from the prolonged, on-off British alliance with powerful figures in the kingdom of Buganda, who had amassed wealth and status while ensuring a special position for the kingdom that called Uganda's unity into question.

Mubiru—who had taken his first degree in India in the 1950s—was only one of many who made similar arguments, and the artificiality of Uganda as a colonial creation became something of an intellectual commonplace among Ugandans—the routine introduction to any political history.[28] So too did the notion that Buganda's distinctive politics made Uganda an especially challenging terrain for nationalism, because the few who had been 'enlightened' by education—who should have been nationalist leaders—were inclined to see their interests in ethnic terms, not national ones.[29] It was widely accepted—among intellectuals, at least—that ethnic difference (which was compounded rather than ameliorated by a cross-cutting sectarian divide between Catholic and Protestant) threatened the future Ugandan nation. By the time Mubiru was writing his article, two parties, each avowedly nationalist, were competing for dominance—the UPC and the Democratic Party, or DP. Bitterly rivalrous though they were, politicians from both parties shared the same tutelary idea of politics as nation-building: the people required 'enlightenment'.[30] In preparing English-language statements to be published in the press, both UPC and DP election candidates presented their role as the 'dissemination of knowledge', a 'fight against ignorance': 'We must educate our people so that they can begin to

27. J. Mubiru, 'Uganda: Nationalism Unresolved', *Africa Today*, viii, no. 7 (1961), pp. 8–13.

28. G. Ibingira, *The Forging of an African Nation: The Political and Constitutional Evolution of Uganda from Colonial Rule to Independence, 1894–1962* (New York, 1973), p. 4; S.R. Karugire, *Roots of Instability in Uganda* (1988; Kampala, 2003), p. 7; D.W. Nabudere, *Imperialism and Revolution in Uganda* (London, 1980), pp. 9–11.

29. Ibingira, *Forging of an African Nation*, pp. 66, 68, 75.

30. 'Kakonge Ends His Tour of Karamoja', *Uganda Argus*, 11 Jan. 1961, p. 5.

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see further than the frontiers of their own districts'.[31] Many Ugandan politicians apparently shared the reported concern of Grace Ibingira, another UPC leader, that the 'common man' only understood the language of 'tribe or religion'.[32]

That vision of nationalist politics as tutelary was heavily inflected by the abrupt late colonial lurch towards teaching citizenship, and was by no means unique to Uganda. The 'mass education' imagined by late imperial policy was a political as well as an economic project: people must be taught to be governed.[33] Before the independence of what became Tanzania, Julius Nyerere declared that people 'must learn to think as a nation'; the Zambian nationalist leader Kenneth Kaunda wrote of the urgent need for a 'high level of national intelligence and education'.[34] In the 1960s, academic analysis echoed the anxieties of departing colonial officials and nationalist politicians: 'political socialisation' became the vogue term for the urgently felt need to teach people how to be citizens.[35] But Uganda was seen as particularly threatened by division, and its people especially in need of tutelary politics, partly because of the messy and inconsistent British policy around independence. As the imagined slow timetable for self-government turned swiftly to plans for a rapid withdrawal at the end of the 1950s, the British had feared that the intransigence of Buganda's ruler, the *kabaka*, would tear Uganda apart even before they could leave. They sought simultaneously to placate Bugandan particularism and to grant swift independence to Uganda as a nation. Obote had become the leader of the nationalist UPC party when it was created in 1960 as a determined advocate of national unity. But in 1962, as independence negotiations stalled, he seized the moment to offer an electoral pact to the *kabaka* and his supporters, offering Buganda special status after independence.

For some this seemed an unprincipled compromise with tribalism, but Obote, writing in the press for an English-speaking audience, defended his deal as a necessary expedient: 'unity and understanding' were the goals of the party, but the problem was that people had 'loyalty' to their traditions and there was a need to overcome their 'fear' of central government—the task of his party was to 'effect unity on [*sic*] the country and amongst the people of Uganda'.[36] The deal carried the UPC to victory in the 1962 elections—making Obote prime minister

31. 'Electoral Candidates State Their Polices', *Uganda Argus*, 27 Feb. and 3 Mar. 1961: statements by E.N. Bisamunyu and A.M. Kera.

32. Kasfir, *Shrinking Political Arena*, p. 206.

33. Colonial Office, *Mass Education in African Society* (London, 1944).

34. C.C. Harris and J.K. Nyerere, 'Tanganyika Today', *International Affairs*, xxxvi (1960), pp. 35–47; K. Kaunda, 'The Future of Democracy in Africa', *Transition*, xv (1964), pp. 37–9.

35. J. Coleman, *Education and Political Development* (Princeton, NJ, 1965); D. Koff and G. Von der Muhll, 'Political Socialisation in Kenya and Tanzania: A Comparative Analysis', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, v (1967), pp. 13–51; K. Prewitt, *Education and Political Values: An East African Case Study* (Nairobi, 1971).

36. 'UPC Policy Statement', *Uganda Argus*, 6 Apr. 1962, p. 2.

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at independence in that year, and allowing the *kabaka* to become titular president of Uganda shortly afterwards. Speaking to the party conference shortly afterwards (in a speech which was published in *Transition*, a new English-language journal for culture and politics, published in Uganda), Obote insisted that, whatever the deal with Buganda, Uganda was 'one country with one National Parliament and Government'.[37]

The thoroughly predictable unravelling of Obote's deal with the *kabaka* in the aftermath of independence has been well described elsewhere.[38] The climax came in 1966, when in the space of a few weeks Obote first arrested a group within the UPC (including Ibingira) who were challenging his leadership and then sent soldiers to seize the royal palace in Buganda. In 1967, Buganda and other, smaller kingdoms were abolished and Obote was declared president under a new constitution, approved by the parliament that had been elected in 1962 (many opposition members having crossed the floor to join the UPC, avowedly as a display of their commitment to unity). Obote hailed these events as a 'revolution', and in an article for a regional intellectual and political journal published in Nairobi argued that 'feudalism' had been overthrown.[39]

An article in *Transition* defended the new constitution in a way that justified it in tutelary terms.

> With the achievement of independence on the 9th day of October, 1962, we nominally achieved a degree of unity. Many persons still thought in terms of locality and tribalism … Time and certain measures were necessary to help develop national feelings.[40]

The author of that article was Akena Adoko—Opira's boss at the head of the intelligence service. Adoko had studied in Sudan, India and the USA, and saw himself as something of a polymath. The head of Uganda's Law Society, he was also a regular pseudonymous journalist and public speaker, and chose to publish his analysis of the events of 1966 in the form of an epic poem—in English.[41] He argued that popular parochialism could only be overcome by strong central authority. Garnishing his arguments with references to Locke and Paine, Adoko insisted that the right to govern was derived from education:

> Now, in Uganda, our electors who consist of people of no formal education and no training in the art of modern government have resigned themselves

37. M.A. Obote, 'A Plan for Nationhood', *Transition*, Oct. 1962, pp. 15–18. For *Transition*, see B. Tabaire, 'The Press and Political Repression in Uganda: Back to the Future?', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, i (2007), pp. 193–211.

38. P. Mutibwa, *Uganda Since Independence: A Story of Unfulfilled Hopes* (London, 1992), pp. 22–50.

39. M.A. Obote, 'The Footsteps of Revolution', *East Africa Journal*, x (1968), pp. 7–14.

40. A. Adoko, 'The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda', *Transition*, xxxiii (1967), pp. 10–12.

41. A. Adoko, *Uganda Crisis* (Kampala, 1967).

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> to the necessity of selecting as their representatives, persons with more knowledge on such things and persons who speak a foreign language which is not known to them but which is legally the national language … They appreciate that knowledge must, in the light of a given premise, lead, in all good faith, to a different conclusion from that of ignorance, and the conclusion derivable from knowledge has greater chances of being right than that derivable from ignorance.

Adoko's article was a response to Obote's expressed wish that the introduction of the constitution should exemplify 'government by discussion'—a notion of consensual rather than oppositional democracy that had been articulated (in the pages of *Transition*) by Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's leader, as a distinctively African political form.[42] As Picho Ali, head of the president's newly established 'Research Section' (also known as the 'Research Office')—which was closely associated with the intelligence service—explained, discussion was a tool for popular instruction, and '[o]ne of the most vital processes of democracy is to educate the masses'.[43]

After minor amendments and some brave critical speeches in parliament from the surviving rump of the opposition and a handful of UPC members, the constitution was passed. It seems unlikely that this discussion had much influence on 'the masses', confined as it largely was to the pages of *Transition*—though the editor of the UPC party paper hailed it as evidence that the media could be 'nationalist' and educational', even as he lamented the wider failings of an 'elitist press'.[44] It did, however, provide opportunity to rehearse for English-speaking readers and listeners the argument that popular 'ignorance'—as Adoko had put it—must be overcome. As Obote reportedly told parliament (in a comment printed in *Transition*), full parliamentary democracy was not yet possible because 'there were certain matters that came with it that were lacking in Uganda'. The persistent corollary to the theme of popular ignorance was concern about abuse of power by the educated: Obote was also quoted in *Transition* as saying that 'those who saw the inside of universities' had 'brought shame on Africa'.[45] A few months later, Adoko echoed the point in a television discussion, reprinted as an article: 'the masses' were ignorant and vulnerable to 'mental acrobats' who abused their education to mislead the people. Genuine—that is,

42. J.K. Nyerere, 'One Party Government', *Transition*, ii (1961), pp. 9–11; D. Nelson, 'Newspapers in Uganda', *Transition*, xxxv (1968), pp. 29–33.

43. P. Ali, Letter, *Transition*, xxxiv (1967), pp. 11–13. On the Research Office and the intelligence service, see A. Browne, 'Joseph Robert "Sepp Meier" Bikobbo Mugayo (*c*.1942–76)', *Another World? East Africa and the Global 1960s* (University of Edinburgh, 2019–), at https://globaleastafrica.org/global-lives/joseph-robert-'sepp-meier'-bikobbo-mugayo-c1942-76 (accessed 23 Feb. 2023).

44. Nelson, 'Newspapers in Uganda'.

45. N. Kasfir, 'The 1967 Uganda Constituent Assembly Debate', *Transition*, xxiii (1967), pp. 52–6.

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nationalist—intellectuals had a duty to guide the people to save them from these 'so-called intellectuals'.[46]

As well as abolishing the kingdoms, and making Obote president, the new constitution allowed the postponement of elections by resetting the parliamentary clock. Through 1967 and 1968, press coverage relayed the message from Obote and others in the UPC that premature elections would compromise Uganda's stability: the people were still too vulnerable to manipulation and so were not yet ready for the ballot.[47] But from 1969, public discussion began to take a new direction, as it became possible for the media to publish divergent opinions on the question of elections. That change was preceded, ironically, by the effective suppression of *Transition* in 1968. That has been widely understood as an act of censorship by an increasingly authoritarian regime. It clearly was this—but it can also be understood as the muddled consequence of a spat among Uganda's 'restless few'.[48]

II

There had already been warning noises from Onama and Obote about *Transition*'s propagation of 'foreign ideas'.[49] The revelation that *Transition* had been unknowingly receiving financial support from a CIA front organisation had not helped. But the trigger for crisis came in the wake of an article by Picho Ali—in *Transition* itself—demanding that court judgments should be guided by the 'aims and objectives' of the state.[50] *Transition* printed multiple critical responses. Some came from young radicals—one a student in Dar es Salaam, the second yet another UK-trained lawyer—who mocked Ali's claim that there had been a 'revolution', and stressed the need for those who worked in government to 'decolonise the mind—mental emancipation—through education'.[51] More stinging commentary came from Abu Mayanja, a veteran politician and a barrister, whose political trajectory had carried him from ardent nationalism to a period of study in Cambridge, then to support for the *kabaka*, then into the ranks of the UPC. Mayanja shared the vision of tutelary government—in 1960, he had reportedly remarked that democracy was 'a "habit of mind" which it will take his

46. Adoko, 'Role of the Intellectual'.

47. 'The Remarkable Results of Hard Work—Don't Jeopardise it All with Elections', *The* People, 18 Mar. 1967, pp. 4–5; see press clipping from *Uganda Argus*, Apr. 1967, n.d., in Washington, DC, National Archives and Record Administration [hereafter NARA], 2557 POL 15-1, Stebbins, US Embassy Kampala, to State Department, 11 Apr. 1967.

48. P. Benson, *Black Orpheus, Transition, and Modern Cultural Awakening in Africa* (Berkeley, CA, 1986), pp. 185–204.

49. 'A Matter of Transition', *Transition*, xxxviii (1971), pp. 43–9.

50. P. Ali, 'Ideological Commitment and the Judiciary', *Transition*, xxxvi (1968), pp. 47–9.

51. Letters, *Transition*, xxxvii (1968), pp. 10–11, 11–12.

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poorly educated country many years to attain'.[52] But he denounced Ali's argument as an attack on the judiciary—and took the opportunity both to twit the author for the poor quality of his Soviet legal training and to imply that ethnic politics had delayed the appointment of new judges.[53]

Mayanja was arrested; so too was Rajat Neogy, the editor and publisher of *Transition* (though the police first arrested the editor of the party newspaper by mistake). The offending edition of the magazine was allowed to circulate, and Obote made a public show of insisting that *Transition* was not banned and, indeed, that everyone should read it. Mayanja and Neogy were charged with sedition but acquitted, the judge mordantly observing that *Transition* 'had a limited appeal, and would be read by few people'. Released from detention, Neogy—and the magazine—moved to Ghana in 1969 (a particularly galling choice for Obote, for reasons explained below).[54]

Obote was evidently hurt by the international criticism that attended these events. When *The Observer* newspaper in the UK carried a story lamenting the arrests, Obote wrote a long letter to the editor, insisting that his government was not authoritarian and was beset by conspirators.[55] Addressing a seminar for journalists in late 1968, Adoko exhorted them to ensure their 'intellectual independence', but insisted that the threat to this came from the 'financiers' of the press, not the government.[56] In September 1969—as *Transition* was publishing its first issue in Ghana—a special supplement appeared in *The Times* of London, casting Obote in a sympathetic light as a leader struggling to achieve unity, and presenting him as a patron of academic seminars on policy issues and Akena Adoko as the intellectual host of television discussion programmes. That supplement was partly written by Ali Mazrui, professor in political science at Makerere University, who had been instrumental in mobilising a carefully phrased but effective campaign of support for Neogy and Mayanja. Mazrui, who had been publicly vilified by Obote, was then privately reassured of the president's fondness for *Transition*.[57]

This messy act of suppression set the uncertain context for the media discussion of elections in 1969 and 1970. That discussion was partly driven by events elsewhere, for the postponement of elections was beginning to make Uganda seem out of line. Tanzania had held post-independence elections in 1965, and was preparing for a second round of

52. H. Kitchen, 'Profile: Abu Mayanja: Militant Voice of Ugandan Nationalism', *Africa Report*, v (1960), pp. 7, 14–15.

53. Letters, *Transition*, xxxvii (1968), pp. 13–15.

54. 'Acquittal in Uganda', *The Times*, 3 Feb. 1969; 'A Matter of Transition'; for a more detailed discussion, see Benson, *Black Orpheus*, pp. 185–204.

55. Later published as the 'Letter to a London Friend': see below.

56. Ocitti, *Press Politics and Public Policy*, pp. 40–41.

57. Benson, *Black Orpheus*, p. 191.

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such elections in 1970. In Zambia—whose president, Kenneth Kaunda, was, with Obote and Nyerere, a member of the informal 'Mulungushi club' of self-styled radical national leaders—the ruling party had won elections overwhelmingly in 1968.[58] Kenya held national elections in December 1969. The spectacular politics of stateness in the region meant that, at summits and at annual commemorations of independence, Obote was increasingly on show alongside presidents whose legitimacy was newly burnished by electoral success. On the other side of the continent—but looming large for Uganda's intellectuals—Ghana held elections in 1969, after a prolonged transition following the overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah in 1966. Nkrumah, arguably Africa's most prominent politician of the independence era, had treated Obote and the UPC rather as protégés.[59] The coup that toppled him was denounced (not without cause) as the result of neo-colonialist conspiracy; when the coup leader passed through Uganda's airport *en route* to a meeting in Ethiopia, Obote seized the opportunity to confront him publicly.[60] But an alternative narrative presented Nkrumah's fall as the result of having lost touch with the people—most starkly evidenced in Ghana's 'elections' of 1965, in which no ballots were cast and every ruling party candidate (including Nkrumah) was returned unopposed. Mazrui had used a book review in *Transition* to state that argument publicly.[61] Angry readers denounced Mazrui, but the argument struck home: the British High Commissioner reported privately that Obote had concluded that Nkrumah had failed to 'keep in touch with reality'.[62]

Circumstances within Uganda also encouraged discussion of elections and raised the possibility that, rather than being a threat, the ballot might itself be the means to educate the public. Despite Obote's boast that the 'revolution' had vanquished feudalism, he and others were acutely aware of the persistent support for the monarchy in Buganda after 1966. Leaflets written in the name of a 'Secret Council' circulated widely, threatening violence against the state, and there were sporadic actual attacks, including one on Obote's motorcade in 1968.[63] The government's response was partly blunt repression—the arrest and detention without trial of a significant number of real or imagined opponents, including the main leaders of the DP. The characterisation of this period as a

58. Kew, The National Archives [hereafter TNA], FCO 31/711, Printed Diplomatic Report No 9/70, 'Uganda: Annual Review for 1969', Scott, British High Commissioner, Kampala, to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (SoS), 12 Jan. 1970.

59. O. Agyeman, 'Kwame Nkrumah's Presence in A.M. Obote's Uganda: A Study in the Convergence of International and Comparative Politics', *Transition*, xlviii (1975), pp. 13–24.

60. NARA, RG 59 CFP, 1964–66, Box 2322 POL 7, Stebbins, US Embassy Kampala, to State Department, 15 Nov. 1966.

61. A. Mazrui, 'Nkrumah: The Leninist Czar', *Transition*, xxvi (1966), pp. 9–17.

62. For an example of the denunciations, see E.R. Ibira and K.Y. Waibika, Letter, *Transition*, xxxi (1967), pp. 6–7; TNA, FCO 31/713, Valedictory, D.A. Scott to Secretary of State, 26 Jan. 1970.

63. O. Otunnu, *Crisis of Legitimacy and Political Violence in Uganda, 1890–1979* (Cham, 2016), pp. 194–5.

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'consolidation of dictatorship' in which space for debate was closed down is partly accurate.[64] But Obote and his allies also saw the challenge as an educational one, and imagined the ballot as a solution to this—and as a way to turn the ruling party into a more effective tool of control.

III

The UPC had always been a problem for Obote. In his rhetoric, the party was a vanguard of transformation. In practice, it was a consortium of locally influential 'big men'. After independence the party had been riven by a struggle between a minority of young radicals and this established hierarchy. In that struggle Obote had leaned first towards the big men and then—once the radicals were excluded from key offices—increasingly against them. Among academics, the weakness of the UPC, and its dominance by regional big men, was accepted fact.[65] Whether or not Obote read their articles, his occasional presence at campus drinking-holes—in a university environment shaped by the radicalism of the later 1960s—would have ensured that he was well aware of this intellectual critique.[66] In 1968, he had begun talking of the need to revive the party. Lamenting that 'the outside world has represented the people of Uganda as people who are only concerned about the maintenance of feudalism, and as inward-looking people who care more about their tribes than about their political belief', he called for a fusion of party and state as the basis of 'revolutionary action'.[67] A sense of gathering urgency was manifest early in 1969 in Obote's speech to parliament—widely reported on radio and in the newspapers—warning that 'evolution' towards national unity was not possible: 'nation-building' demanded 'conscious effort and planning'.[68] The election of new party officials in mid-1969 was intended to face this challenge, but became instead a subject of scandal: rumours that the elections had been manipulated by corrupt individuals began to circulate, reaching the ears of diplomats; these were soon followed by media reports that Obote himself was pointing to malpractice within the party.[69] In September 1969, Obote issued a 'message to the

64. Chibita and Fourie, 'A Socio-history', p. 15.

65. C. Gertzel, 'Report from Kampala', *Africa Report*, ix, no. 9 (1964), pp. 3–7; C. Leys, *Politicians and Policies: An Essay on Politics in Acholi, Uganda, 1962–65* (Nairobi, 1967).

66. P. Anyang' Nyong'o, *A Leap into the Future: A Vision for Kenya's Socio-Political and Economic Transformation* (Nairobi, 2007), pp. 231–2.

67. NARA, 2558 POL 12 1/1/67, US Embassy, Kampala to State Department, 15 June 1968: 'Extract of the Speech by President of Uganda People's Congress', 6 June 1968, in *Constitution of the Uganda People's Congress* (Kampala, 1968).

68. SWB, ME 2999/B/1, 'President Obote's Address to Parliament' [excerpt], Kampala, English service, 11 Feb. 1969.

69. TNA, FCO 31/468, 'Brief for ODM Produced by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office', 4 July 1969; SWB, ME/3193/B/4, 'Obote's Address to UPC Central Executive Committee' [précis], Kampala, English service, 1 Oct. 1969.

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nation'—which was printed, and reported at length on the radio and in the press—in which he warned that 'we should all, and particularly the leaders, listen attentively to the voice of the people'.[70]

This concern drove what Obote and others increasingly called the 'Move to the Left'. This began to take published form in October 1969, with the Common Man's Charter—or 'Document Number Two of the Move to the Left'. Though it was presented as a radical new statement, the Charter's core analysis of Uganda's political dilemma was an elaboration of a familiar tutelary theme: 'the people of Uganda must move away from the ways and mental attitudes of the colonial past, move away from the hold of tribal and other forms of factionalism'. The 'well-to-do, the educated and the feudal elements' were likely to lead people astray, and so mass education was needed:

> there may be many people in this country who are either uninformed or misguided, who have not yet come to appreciate the importance of nation-building. We therefore consider it our responsibility to inform the uninformed, and to guide the misguided.[71]

Media reports emphasised Obote's view that 'the charter and its principles should be widely spread by the mass media. It will also be discussed by study groups and individuals in the country … The charter lays emphasis on giving people massive [*sic*] education'; and that 'the most important thing in the charter is the necessity and desirability to give the masses some basic education on how their country is governed and the economy run'.[72]

But would the party itself be a reliable tool of such education? Rumours of discontent among senior UPC figures reached the ears of diplomats in Kampala, centring on Felix Onama.[73] At the UPC party conference in December 1969, Ugandan radio reported a speech to the conference by Nyerere that called for a 'decolonisation of the mind' and for 'changing people's way of thinking'.[74] This was followed by a closing speech from Obote which seemed to imply that politicians within the UPC itself were a problem and promised to prevent 'dangerous rich people' from standing in the coming elections.[75]

70. TNA, FCO 31/468, 'Message to the Nation from His Excellency the President of the Republic of Uganda, Dr A Milton Obote, on the Second Anniversary of Republic Day, 8th September 1969' [copy].

71. The Common Man's Charter, paras 8, 15 and 13. There is a copy of the Charter available via the *Internet Archive Wayback Machine* at https://web.archive.org/web/20110727195757/http://www.radiorhino.org/htm_material/archiv/text/press/monitor/THE%20COMMON%20MAN%20CHARTER%20By%20DrAMO.htm (accessed 24 Feb. 2023).

72. SWB, ME/3200/B/1, 'Obote's Statements on the Common Man's Charter' [excerpts], Kampala, English service, 8 and 9 Oct. 1969.

73. TNA, FCO 31/468, Wenban-Smith, British High Commission, Kampala, to Purcell, Foreign and Commonwealth Office [FCO], 18 and 21 Nov. 1969.

74. SWB, ME/3260/B/1, 'The UPC Annual Delegates Conference' [excerpts], Kampala, English service, 17 Dec. 1969.

75. 'President's Closing Speech to the UPC', *Uganda Argus*, 22 Dec. 1969, pp. 1–2.

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As the conference ended, Obote was wounded by a would-be assassin—a reminder that his constant fear of conspiracy was grounded in reality, and the cue for a further wave of arrests and detentions. When he re-emerged after a period of recuperation, the rhetorical construction of the Move to the Left resumed: a statement proposing the dispossession of businesspeople of South Asian origin who did not have Ugandan citizenship was followed by the announcement of a programme of nationalisation. But elections became the central tool of the Move, which became synonymous with the call for a 'New Political Culture'. Obote set the tone with a remark—private, but evidently widely known—that elections could be good for 'education, entertainment and the increase of people's feeling of participation'.[76] Seminars were organised by the Milton Obote Foundation, an educational charity created by the president, to stress the importance of elections, and the media began to report the discussion over possible electoral systems that had been a subject of private speculation for months.[77] In July 1970, Document Number Five was released.

Document Number Five began from the premise that adult suffrage was the basis of sovereign government. But a local politics of clientelism meant that parliament risked becoming 'an assembly of peace conference delegates'. Instead '[t]he masses must learn to accept that a member of Parliament representing a Constituency also represents the total interest and welfare of all the people of Uganda'. The Document denounced the 'old guards' of the party, and 'tribal masters', declaring that the leaders of the party 'must be subjected to a rigorous scheme of educating themselves and the masses'.[78] Buganda was not mentioned, but the implication was obvious: overcoming feudalism was inextricably linked to reforming the party.

The education needed to do this would be electoral: each parliamentary constituency would be partnered with three other constituencies from other regions of Uganda—so that any Buganda constituency, for example, would be linked to three that were not in Buganda. To win the 'basic' seat, a candidate would also have to secure support in the other constituencies: this was the '3 + 1' system, and would prevent politicians from playing to a single ethnic or regional constituency.[79] For both politicians and public the election would become 'Operation "Know Uganda"'.[80] As a further safeguard against unsuitable candidates, however, there would also be close controls on who could stand: only party

76. Aasland, 'Electoral Reforms', p. 115.

77. 'One-Party System the Ideal', *Uganda Argus*, 29 June 1970, p. 1; for rumours and speculation, see NARA, Box 2557 POL 12, US Embassy Kampala to State Department, 28 Oct. 1969.

78. A.M. Obote, *Document Number 5 on the Move to the Left: Proposals for New Methods of Election of Representatives of the People to Parliament* (3rd edn, Kampala, 1970), pp. 23, 26, 27, 32.

79. SWB, ME/3434/B/1, 'Obote's Proposals for Electoral Change' [excerpt], Kampala, English service, 17 July 1970.

80. 'Operation "Know Uganda"', *Uganda Argus*, 30 July 1970, p. 1.

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members were eligible, of course, but more than that, a new 'party organ'—free from the influence of sitting MPs—would have final say over the nominations.[81]

Discussion of the proposals was itself to be part of the tutelary project: part of a campaign to 'educate the masses to know and understand the system'.[82] *The People*, which had now become a daily rather than a weekly newspaper, was imagined as a forum for that discussion. Opira's mission to Kitgum was only one of a number undertaken to explain Document Number Five, and the document was printed (in English) and made available for sale.[83] An opinion piece in *The People* under the by-line Peter Kawesa (widely assumed to be the pen-name of Akena Adoko) judged that '[t]he new proposals therefore provide the basis for the transformation of our amalgam of tribes into a Nation'.[84] 'Seminars' to explain the document to UPC members were organised around the country by the Adult Education Centre, a body established by the Milton Obote Foundation—though as one observer noted, these seminars were largely held in English and attended by the educated.[85] Radio broadcasts were made in both English and vernacular languages—though the same observer pointed out that weaknesses in translation and style made the vernacular versions very hard to understand.[86] Academics at Makerere were encouraged to produce written commentaries to be published in *The People*.[87] Both that newspaper and the *Uganda Argus* carried editorials and opinion pieces praising the proposals and identifying them as the focus for:

> political education at grassroots not only to enable the electorate to understand the machinery for the new proposals but, even more so, to understand the fundamental principles in the proposals including the philosophy of the Common Man's Charter.[88]

This rush of material coincided with the arrival of a new editor at the *Argus*—Ateker Ejalu, another UK-trained lawyer. A friend of Obote and previously editor of *The People*, Ejalu made his commitment to the 'New Political Culture' very evident.[89]

Ejalu's paper carried a piece by a 'Special Correspondent' calling for 'many more elections than we have had in the past' to 'educate

81. Obote, *Document Number 5*, pp. 40–41.

82. Ibid., p. 22; 'John Odero on the Proposed New Electoral System', *The People*, 21 July 1970, p. 3.

83. See the advertisement in *The People*, 28 July 1970, p. 1.

84. P. Kawesa, *The People*, 18 July 1970, p. 5.

85. 'New Election Proposals: The Best to Fight Against Tribalism', *The People*, 5 Aug. 1970, p. 8; 'Dr Obote Recommended "Presidential Candidate"', *The People*, 12 Aug. 1970, p. 1; T. Aasland, *On the Move to the Left in Uganda* (Uppsala, 1974), pp. 24–5.

86. Ibid., p. 22.

87. *The People*, Special Supplement, 12 Aug. 1970.

88. 'Viewpoint', *Uganda Argus*, 18 July 1970, p. 2; also 14 Aug. 1970, p. 2.

89. 'New Political Way: Role of the Press', *Uganda Argus*, 3 July 1970, p. 7; for Ejalu, see Barton, *Press of Africa*, p. 99.

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the people at grassroot level'.[90] Coverage was not wholly uncritical. Expatriate academics at Makerere mixed polite enthusiasm for the goals of the proposals with scholarly caution over their practicability—would it be possible to manage these multiple simultaneous polls across constituencies?[91] Ugandan academic comment was less cautious. Akiiki Mujaju, a young researcher finalising what would be a doctoral thesis on the UPC at Columbia, agreed with the premise of the proposals—that elections had been turned into clientelist contests and that the party was no more than a coalition of local patrons. But he doubted whether one election would be enough to entirely change the behaviour of voters and politicians: what was needed was 'the re-education of the educated'.[92] Okello Oculi—a graduate teaching fellow in political science, lately returned from masters study at Essex University (and, incidentally, the author of a popular novel that had denounced elite abuse of power), evidently shared this scepticism over the ability of elections to re-educate the UPC's old guard: he co-authored a piece asking if the proposals gave enough power to the president.[93]

Discussion came to be focused on Document Number Five's proposals for presidential election. Obote had suggested a direct election for the president. His plan had left little to chance over the outcome of the poll—the party's candidate would be unchallenged in a yes/no vote—but saw the ballot as the most basic demonstration of popular legitimacy. But did that imply that the party was not supreme? In August 1970, the UPC National Executive voted to accept the parliamentary election proposals, but rejected those for the president: Uganda's president, they argued, must be chosen by the party.[94] In an unattributed editorial, *Uganda Argus* supported the decision:

> the Revolution must be kept on until such time it has been felt by, and has taken root in, the country. Elections can have adverse effects on the continuity of the Revolution, especially if such elections are to apply to the architect and leader of the Revolution.[95]

At a UPC delegates' conference called two weeks later to discuss the election proposals, Obote presented a hastily revised suggestion to postpone the direct presidential election, but opposition to the whole idea persisted.[96] The press reported a speech to the conference from

90. 'The Presidential Commission—Elections and Talents', *Uganda Argus*, 21 Aug. 1970, p. 2.

91. D.L. Cohen, 'The Role of the Party in a One-Party Democracy'; I.S. Ryan, 'Most Exciting Pieces of Electoral Engineering', in *The People*, Special Supplement, 12 Aug. 1970. See also A. Nekyon, 'Reservations on "Grand Aims"', *Uganda Argus*, 1 Aug. 1970, p. 2.

92. A. Mujaju, 'A Prescriptive Government and Document No 5', in *The People*, Special Supplement, 12 Aug. 1970; see also *Uganda Argus*, 12 Aug. 1970, p. 1.

93. H. Patel and O. Oculi, 'Some Observations on Document No 5', in *The People*, Special Supplement, 12 Aug. 1970.

94. 'Election of the President: Council Says it Cannot Tamper with the Decision of the Supreme Organ of the Party', *The People*, 13 Aug. 1970, p. 1.

95. 'Viewpoint', *Uganda Argus*, 24 Aug. 1970, p. 2.

96. 'Democracy Appeal by Dr Obote', *Uganda Argus*, 22 Aug. 1970.

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Ali Kirunda-Kivejinja, usually seen as one of UPC's radicals, who had taken his first degree in India in the 1950s: he opposed direct election, saying that it 'was the party members who understood and believed in the ideology and who must therefore choose the best among themselves to implement that ideology'; 'revolutionary decisions' could not be subject to a 'plebiscite'.[97] But there were also articles supporting Obote: Otim Oryem, a UPC party official with his own reputation for radicalism, published a piece in the *Uganda Argus* that cited regional examples by listing the ruling parties of Tanzania, Kenya and Zambia and insisted on the importance of popular choice:

> We can only compare notes with TANU, KANU and UNIP, but in any revolution the people are important. So for the revolution to succeed, the people of Uganda as a whole must be involved, and with the way we have decided to carry out our revolution, they must have a say in the election of their leaders.[98]

The same newspaper—having opposed Obote's plan in a leader four days earlier—now editorialised that '[w]e want a President who will speak with the entire weight of the citizens of Uganda behind him', and headlined its report of Obote's speech 'People must control leaders of Uganda'.[99] Okello Oculi—who was working with a US researcher on 'political socialisation'—accused members of the National Executive of conspiring to isolate Obote from the people by refusing elections, and explicitly mentioned Nkrumah's fate:

> Nkrumah was called many sweet names. The sweetness of the names and the noise with which they were called rose side by side with plans to betray him and to isolate him from the people.[100]

The president's proposals were rejected overwhelmingly, and Onama—who rumour positioned as the archetype of the local party boss—was identified in the press as a key opponent of the proposal.[101] For the next few days media coverage was strikingly divided. On 28 August *The People* offered a lengthy front-page editorial supporting the decision, offering the Soviet Union as an exemplar for a distinct version of the tutelary argument:

> there is a grave danger in exposing the leader of a Revolution to an election before the Revolution itself is wholly understood by the masses. In his endeavour to get himself understood and possibly popular with the voters he might be compelled to start speaking in the language that is understood by

97. 'New Method of Election Cements the Party', *Uganda Argus*, 26 Aug. 1970, p. 1.

98. O. Oryem, 'Uganda's Part in the African Revolution', *Uganda Argus,* 27 Aug. 1970, p. 1.

99. 'Viewpoint', *Uganda Argus*, 28 Aug. 1970, p. 2; see also 29 Aug. 1970, p. 1.

100. O. Oculi, 'Fire or Rain at Mbale?', *The People*, 27 Aug. 1970, p. 3. For his academic work, see K. Prewitt and O. Oculi, 'Political Socialization and Political Education in the New Nations', in K. Prewitt, ed., *Education and Political Values* (Nairobi, 1971), pp. 1–22.

101. 'Onama Rejects …', *The People*, 27 Aug. 1970, p. 1.

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> the masses and popular with the masses which might not be the language of the Revolution.[102]

But the same page quoted a letter from Makerere Students' Guild to the newspaper, declaring that direct presidential elections were crucial as an educational tool: otherwise 'mass participation without prior mass mobilisation and political education could endanger the revolution'; and the paper also printed extracts of a letter from the Guild to Obote which declared that 'The very act of handling a ballot paper and voting [for] a candidate is a very important act in the life of a Common Man'.[103]

The same edition published a letter accusing Kirunda-Kivejinja of seeking to 'minimise the supremacy of the people'.[104] The next day the paper covered Obote's final speech to the conference, reproducing—without comment—direct quotations that made clear his determination to overturn the decision: 'Dr Obote warned that if the leadership goes too fast and leaves the masses behind, the Revolution would fail' … "the masses must be involved in the Revolution—and one of the mechanics of getting them involved is to have some sort of direct link with the leader of the party" … "And I am sure that I will be back here"'.[105] On the same day, the newspaper printed the text of Obote's letter to the editor of *The Observer*.[106]

Obote immediately threw his energies into a new round of UPC elections, heavily reliant on student volunteer organisers, the explicit basis for which was that the elections of 1969 had been open to 'favoritism'.[107] At the same time, he prepared a new memorandum, which was printed in a new edition of Document Number Five and combined—somewhat tortuously—the principle of supremacy of the party with a directly elected president.

The public record of the next few months saw politicians, civil servants and journalists picking their way cautiously, unwilling to denounce the decision of the party conference, but also unwilling to disagree with Obote's apparent preference. More seminars to explain Document Number Five were held: Wilson Okwenje, a Makerere graduate and former diplomat to the USA, who had replaced Ali as head of the 'Research Section', reportedly told one seminar that the election proposals were 'the most exciting and sophisticated innovation' and were surely being discussed at the non-aligned summit conference being held in Lusaka.[108] There was even a seminar for expatriate

102. 'Voice of the People: Revolution First, Campaign Second', *The People*, 28 Aug. 1970, p. 1.

103. 'Makerere Students Guild Supports NUSU', *The People*, 28 Aug. 1970, p. 1; for the text of the letter to Obote, see p. 3.

104. Rugwizangoga, Kampala, Letter, *The People*, 28 Aug. 1970, p. 3.

105. 'Document No 5 Adopted', *The People*, 29 Aug. 1970, p. 1.

106. 'Myths and Realities', supplement, *The People*, 29 Aug. 1970.

107. 'Peter Kawesa on the Elections', *The People*, 15 Oct. 1970, p. 3.

108. 'We Must Be Proud of These Proposals', *The People*, 18 Sept. 1970, p. 4.

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Ugandans working in Kenya; Akena Adoko was scheduled to address this, but handed over at the last moment to Okwenje.[109] There was more insistence on the educational merits of the 1 + 3 system: Bataringaya told parliament that this would 'broaden the knowledge of the electorate and of the aspiring or prospective leaders about Uganda and her people', and reportedly told a seminar of civil servants that elections would be a '"giant step towards liberating the minds of the people of Uganda from tribal considerations and influence in Parliament"'.[110] Yet there was an undercurrent of uncertainty, or even dissent. Wanume Kibedi—lawyer, and an aspiring UPC politician—reportedly told one seminar that the conference decision should be respected, but also that 'it was important to keep the leader of the Revolution in direct contact with the masses', as party delegates might be bought off with 'foreign money' but 'the masses' could not be bought.[111] In an issue of *The People* that editorialised on the virtues of the 1 + 3 system, Okello Oculi published a piece in which he questioned the very idea of elections by universal suffrage:

> Cannot each village, each county, each district sit down and agree on who should lead? Did not traditional Africa have mechanisms for selecting the best of each generation to be leaders of clans?'[112]

His argument rehearsed the concern over popular ignorance, but drew a conclusion that looked to other international exemplars as well as the idea of a distinctive African political culture:

> Voters in Pakwach, in Omoro, in Busia, in Kisoro will not know which candidates has [*sic*] betrayed the country's interests in dealing with which foreign company … The voters are kept ignorant. They vote the man in. Where is the hygiene in our politics? …
>
> We may be accused of showing no respect for the good judgment of the people, the common man. Our answer is that it is worse to play games and tricks with the common man. The Cubans do not have elections, but they are building one of the healthiest societies in the world today. The Chinese do not have elections and yet they are without the poverty, the rate of crime, the rate of mental illnesses and the rate of racial hatred and conflict in America today.

At another seminar, Dent Ocaya-Lakidi—another political scientist recently returned from masters study, in his case in Toronto—reportedly cast further doubt on the value of elections: saying that 'irrational forces were likely to turn things back to where they were unless a deliberate

109. '"Move to the Left" Seminar in Nairobi', *The People*, 12 Nov. 1970, p. 8.

110. 'UPC Seminar Continues', *The People*, 16 Sept. 1970, p. 1; 'Single Party System Forsters [*sic*] Greater Unity', *The People*, 19 Sept. 1970, p. 1; 'Constitution to Be Amended: Vote for the 18s?', *The People*, 10 Nov. 1970, p. 1; 'Students for Parliament?', *The People*, 19 Nov. 1970, p. 1.

111. 'New Methods of Election a Big Step Forward', *The People*, 26 Sept. 1970, p. 5.

112. 'Voice of the People: New Democracy Is Discovered', and O. Oculi, 'The Death of Elections', *The People*, 16 Sept. 1970, pp. 1, 3.

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attempt was made to control them'. If elections were necessary to guide the people away from tribalism, they should be held only once, after which those elected should serve as a perpetually self-refreshing electoral college.[113]

This chorus of doubt was abruptly quelled in early October 1970. It was replaced by a discussion of the party elections that reaffirmed the idea that the ballot could teach both people and politicians how to pursue a genuinely national politics. As an editorial in the *Uganda Argus* put it:

> IN CONSOLIDATING UGANDA'S REVOLUTION, THERE MUST BE A SUCCESSFUL MOBILISATION AND EDUCATION OF THE MASSES AT THE GRASSROOTS. THE SUCCESS OF THE REVOLUTION WILL NOW DEPEND ON THE SUCCESS IN PARTY ORGANISATION.[114]

This coverage emphasised Obote's micro-management of the party elections, which took over two months to complete. Reports picked up and repeated Obote's assertion that this was a 'national occasion', and the work of the supervisors a 'national duty'.[115] 'Peter Kawesa' declared that through party elections the 'common man' could 'select as his representative the person in whom he has confidence'.[116] Some press reports began to describe the party votes as though these were themselves the national elections, others referred to them as 'primaries', voicing the widespread assumption that those who won the position of constituency chairman would go on to be parliamentary candidates. Okello Oculi hailed the process, and Document Number Five, as an exemplary success for Africa.[117] Others took up the notion that Uganda was engaged in a collective electoral demonstration for a sceptical international audience: as another UK-trained lawyer-turned-Makerere academic put it, '[t]he enthusiasm, the eagerness, readiness and the promptitude that animated the electorate and the elected must have staggered the British press'.[118]

Meanwhile, the idea of the common man was being elaborated by others working in the 'Research Section', which had briefly become a sort of intellectual hub for young radicals.[119] To be a Common Man

113. A. Apecu, '"Let Us Have the Next Election, But Make it the Last"', *The People*, 18 Sept. 1970, p. 1.

114. 'Viewpoint', *Uganda Argus*, 1 Oct. 1970, p. 2.

115. 'Viewpoint', *Uganda Argus*, 16 Oct. 1970, p. 2; 'Party Chief Explains Election Procedure', *The People*, 15 Oct. 1970, p. 1; 'The UPC Elections', *The People*, 24 Oct. 1970, p. 3; 'Party Branch Elections in Kampala Today', *The People*, 13 Nov. 1970, p. 1.

116. 'Peter Kawesa on the Elections', *The People*, 15 Oct. 1970, p. 3.

117. O. Oculi, 'Africanising Document No. 5', *The People*, 23 Oct. 1970, p. 4.

118. E.A.S. Ochienghs-Wellborne, 'Some Reflections after Primary Elections', *The People*, 9 Nov. 1970, p. 6; 'Voice of the People—Those Party Elections', *The People*, 16 Nov. 1970, p. 3; 'Voice of the People—A Unique Piece of Democracy', *The People*, 19 Nov. 1970, p. 3.

119. Kirunda-Kivejinja, *Uganda*, pp. 138, 141–2.

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was not just a default condition, but a set of attitudes that must be learned: as a speaker from the Research Section reportedly told school pupils, the 'Common Man was any law-abiding citizen who believed in the territorial sovereignty political and eventually economic independence of Uganda and contributed to the development of his country as an indivisible unit'.[120] Obote's close ally, Sam Odaka, called for 'mass education irrespective of age', noting the importance to the Common Man's Charter of a 'willingness to learn'.[121]

In the wake of those party elections, Obote called for consideration of his revised presidential election proposals in a rapid series of meetings in December 1970: the party executive, followed by the National Council, then an emergency delegates' conference. Obote's careful explanation that these revisions did not conflict with the August decision, but simply provided a way to make party supremacy compatible with the sovereignty of the people, was read out in full on the radio, and published in *The People*.[122] The proposals made presidential nomination reliant on the support of multiple constituency party branches, so that the chances of an effective challenge to Obote were vanishingly small—in effect they doubled down on the premise that voting was a useful way to teach people citizenship and ensure presidential legitimacy, but only if voters were protected from unsuitable candidates. Direct press coverage of the question resumed: the president of the Makerere Students' Guild, Tumusiime Mutebile, was given space in the *Uganda Argus* to write an article declaring that the rejection of Obote's proposals 'amounted to defranchising [*sic*] the citizens of Uganda'; another academic was reported in *The People* denouncing his local party branch for issuing a statement that opposed direct elections.[123] In advance of the meetings both *The People* and the *Uganda Argus* repeatedly carried editorials that endorsed the new proposals.[124] *The People* reminded its readers of the gaze of an international audience suspicious of one-party rule:

> We say we are going to be a one-party state. It is on this note that we want to prove to the entire world that democracy does not only exist where a government of a country is based on a mass of parties [*sic*] but that democracy, and for that matter undiluted, can very well exist in a one-party state.[125]

120. 'Uganda Revolution Is Socialist', *The People*, 16 Nov. 1970, p. 3.

121. 'Old System of Owning People as Property by Kings No Longer Exist [*sic*]', *The People*, 15 Dec. 1970, p. 8.

122. 'Before His Report Was Adopted …', *The People*, 17 Dec. 1970, p. 3; SWB, ME 3562/B/1, 'Consideration by Party of Constitutional Amendment', Kampala, English service, 15 Dec. 1970.

123. 'UPC Delegates Conference Should Accept Dr Obote's Challenge', *The People*, 18 Dec. 1970, p. 5.

124. 'Dr Obote Proposes: The President Be Elected by the People', *The People*, 15 Dec. 1970, p. 1; 'Voice of the People: Mbale Conference, Adopt the Report', *The People*, 17 Dec. 1970, p. 1.

125. 'Voice of the People: We Again Ask You to Adopt Dr Obote's Report', *The People*, 18 Dec. 1970, p. 3.

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Okello Oculi, meanwhile, returned to the tutelary theme. The 'educated urban elite' might seek to mislead and divide people, but elections would provide the opportunity for a 'National Educational Programme'.[126]

The conference voted unanimously in favour of the proposals. The press celebrated the decision: *The People* hailed it as evidence that '[o]ur Government formed by the UPC has proved that Africans are also capable of institutional engineering and innovation' and carried an article by Okwenje celebrating the conference.[127] Uganda was, it seemed, on the way to the tutelary elections imagined by the radical intellectuals. But little more than a month later, Obote's government was overthrown by a figure who had remained entirely uninvolved in these discussions, and who was remote from the self-conscious intellectualism of the English-language press: Idi Amin.

IV

While the discussions around Document Number Five were in full swing, two articles appeared in international journals offering radically different views of Obote's Uganda. Neogy, writing from his exile in Ghana, wrote of his bitter disappointment at the collapse into 'one-man rule', and derided Uganda's politicians collectively for their failure as intellectuals—they were, he said, no more than 'adolescents'.[128] Mazrui, meanwhile, gave a lecture in Nairobi, published in a Canadian journal, which hailed Obote as a 'reconciliation leader', willing to listen to opponents.[129] Each was pursuing a strategy that tells us much about these politics. Neogy sought to wound Obote by challenging his intellectuality; Mazrui to discipline his behaviour by evoking an international gaze. Both wrote in English for an imagined audience of intellectuals.

The people who produced and consumed Uganda's English-language media in these years were almost all men. They were divided by many things. Their divergent regional and sectarian affiliations were a constant topic of explicit concern. But they were split also by level of education; by age; and by where they had studied. Those with higher degrees or study experience in the UK or USA found ways to express their sense of higher status; just as others found ways to question 'foreign' ideas. There were also institutional lines of difference, though these were more readily crossed: between party worker, elected politician and

126. O. Oculi, 'Mbale and "the People of Uganda as a Whole"', *The People*, 18 Dec. 1970, p. 5.

127. 'Voice of the People: We Reject the Westminster Model', *The People,* 22 Dec. 1970, p. 3; W. Okwenje, 'The Subtleties of the Second Mbale Conference', *The People*, 23 Dec. 1970, p. 5.

128. R. Neogy, 'On Being an African Intellectual' (1970), *Transition*, cxxiii (2017), pp. 44–61.

129. A. Mazrui, 'Leadership in Africa: Obote of Uganda', *International Journal*, xxv (1970), pp. 538–64.

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civil servant; between those who worked in the Research Section and the intelligence service and others. Yet, divided as they were by experience and rivalry, this group shared a profound self-regard as educated men and an equally profound mutual suspicion. They were also united by their anxious awareness of the scrutiny of a wider world. For all of them, to write or speak for the media was to lay claim to the role of intellectual.

That claim involved a risk. Their awareness of the fragility of state authority and their mutual suspicion gave members of this elite an authoritarian reflex, based on the belief that where the masses were ignorant, the educated were dangerous. To write or speak was to risk arrest. Yet no one quite knew the rules, or the limits of discussion. British diplomats, struggling to follow events in 1970, decided that in some way Obote was somehow orchestrating the whole process, but the evidence (and more expert analysis) suggested otherwise.[130] As one of those involved at the time later reflected, this was a time when no one knew 'what was right to do, and what was wrong'.[131] There was no single censor, and decisions could be erratic: this was a state that arrested the editor of the wrong newspaper and allowed the distribution of a publication that was allegedly seditious, and where journalists and editors faced tricky decisions on how to report the president's public rebuff by his own party.

In writing and speaking about Document Number Five, these intellectuals pursued projects of personal and factional advancement that ran along and across their multiple divisions—making judgements about what could be said, and how; but also seeking to change the possibilities of speech. They were self-consciously global, assertive and innovative, rather than imitative. African authenticity; revolutionary rigour; liberal political philosophy—all could be evoked. Even as they spoke and wrote, their silences ruled out other possibilities. That Uganda should be the 'nation' could not be questioned, nor could the assumption that the people required education to overcome ethnic and sectarian sentiment. Rivalrous as they were, Uganda's intellectuals were engaged in a collective affirmation of a shared understanding of national politics: that the public lacked knowledge and were therefore vulnerable to manipulation; that the educated possessed knowledge but were prone to corrupt self-interest. Both visionary and stilted, their public statements cast Uganda as a nation of the future, achievable only by the triumph of education over ignorance, but in danger from the perfidy of the very elite who imagined that future.

Brief and constrained as it was, this discussion left a legacy. Its presumptions shaped a reactive resentment that lent initial popularity

130. TNA, FCO 31/710, Redshaw, British High Commission, Kampala, to Purcell, FCO, 18 Aug. 1970 and 7 Sept. 1970; P. Willetts, 'The Politics of Uganda as a One-Party State 1969–1970', *African Affairs*, lxxiv (1975), pp. 278–99.

131. Kirunda-Kivejinja, *Uganda*, p. 142.

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to Amin: the coup might be seen as the come-uppance for those who had so easily fallen into things. Yet the intellectuals' sense of self was enduring. A few of those who had made themselves prominent did not survive Amin's rule—Picho Ali and Otim Oryem both vanished, presumably murdered; others went into semi-permanent exile. But many of the intellectuals who were part of this debate were to be central to Uganda's later public life. Obote himself returned after Amin's fall, notoriously; but so did others. One of the student leaders who voiced support for Obote became Uganda's prime minister; another became governor of the Bank of Uganda. The radical young student who mocked Picho Ali in a letter to *Transition* went on to be first deputy prime minister; Adoko's deputy returned to government in 1980, as did Okwenje.

But the most significant legacy is an idea. The belief that the task of governing Uganda is fundamentally a tutelary one—that a people lacking knowledge must be taught their citizenship, that the educated can be dangerous, that the true intellectual must use their learning for nation-building—has endured.[132] It has lain at the heart of the political programme of Yoweri Museveni, who has been president of Uganda since 1986: and who, as a young man, spent a few crucial months after leaving university working in the Research Section, reading the international press and pursuing student politics.[133]

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132. R. Kassimir, 'Reading Museveni: Structure, Agency and Pedagogy in Ugandan Politics', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, xxxiii (1999), pp. 649–73.

133. Y. Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed: The Struggle for Freedom and Democracy in Uganda* (1997; Nairobi, 2007), pp. 53–6.

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