

## THE POLITICS OF MASS DEATHS: HUMAN BODY PARTS, HUMAN REMAINS AND WAR PROPAGANDA IN MUSEVENI'S UGANDA

### Introduction

The policy of public display of human body parts and human remains has a long history in warfare. Whether for cultural reasons of heroism and gallantry, sadistic and psychopathological reasons or a measure of attrition rate of the enemy, this grotesque but ingenious display of human body parts and human remains has powerful propaganda value. The propaganda values include, but are not limited to, justifying militarism and aggressive genocidal wars, demonizing imagined enemies, mobilizing donor community support, generating and sustaining regime relevance and legitimization of violence. Since the NRM/A regime came to power in 1986, the public display of human remains has been central to its demonization project, legitimizing the regime, and garnering western support. Whenever General Yoweri Museveni's legitimacy is threatened, a guided tour of Luweero is organized to display human remains and body parts. Museveni conducted many of these tours with the diplomatic corps in 1996. In the subsequent years and most recently in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006, he took western ambassadors to Luweero (*The New Vision*, May 19, 2006). Among the African presidents he recently took to Luweero, was the President of Tanzania, Jakaya Kikwete (*Monitor Online*, 2006). Again, about the middle of this year, May 2006, he summoned and took members of western diplomatic corps to Luweero where he claimed publicly that a former United Nations Under-Secretary for Children in Armed Conflict, Olara Otunnu, was responsible for the atrocities represented by the display. In spite of the numerous accusations and public showings of human remains and body parts, there has never been any prosecution of perpetrators. Why is it that we hear the loudest and persistent accusations for Luweero deaths by General Museveni, but no prosecution of the alleged perpetrators of the crime? What purposes are Luweero atrocities serving the NRM/A regime of General Museveni? What impact has the consistent allegation, without court conviction, on the struggle to control the public history and public memory of Luweero deaths?

This analysis examines the struggle to accurately present public history and historical memory in view of Museveni's transformation of Luweero deaths into a practical political tool of ethno-xenophobia, demonization of imagined political opponents, concealment of genocide and harnessing ethnic and western donor legitimacy to govern. Emphasis on Luweero deaths and the many sites of massacres must be seen as exposure and disclosure that not only challenge the self-celebratory NRM/A narratives, but tell the truth to restrain manipulators of such tragedies who seek political relevance and personal aggrandizement. Luweero atrocities and those in other parts of the country are Ugandan deaths. These deaths are Uganda's tragic history of the folly of NRM/A militarism and megalomania to extra-constitutionally gain political power. General Museveni, a presidential candidate for the Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM), was defeated by Sam Kuteesa, a Democratic Party (DP) contender and brother-in-law of Museveni in the 1981 general election (*The Monitor*, October 9, 2006, "Museveni Challenges Kuteesa's win"). Kuteesa is now serving as a foreign minister in the NRM/A regime. Instead of Museveni following the recommendation of the Commonwealth

Election Observer team to abide by the verdict of the court; he resorted to war, a crime of breach of peace, leading to the mass deaths around the country.

Researchers may encounter a public often unwilling to read critical analyses that challenge political myths and call into question comfortable and self-righteous assumptions that have sustained the NRM/A regime and its beneficiaries. The truth, however, must be spoken clearly and selflessly. In the absence of a balanced account in which the voices of all the actors in Luweero and other infamous sites of massacres can be heard, the marginalized will often devise counter narratives to explain the disjunction between their demonization and the NRM/A celebratory official account. Fashioned by deep, well-founded suspicions and political logic to counter deception, propaganda and demonization, these counter narratives can be as difficult to dislodge as the official NRM/A self-celebratory version they seek to undermine.

We must adopt a more critical and interpretive sense of the past beyond complacency and political comfort levels. Failing to do that, we will be paralyzed by the fanatical propaganda and deception of the NRM/A regime and its political and military elites which revise history, remake and exploit the memory of the Luweero and other sites of massacres for political gains. We must also direct the consciousness of Ugandans to hardcore historical facts rather than to NRM/A deliberately manufactured political and social myths to legitimize ethno-nationalism and governance. Those found guilty, through trial in a competent court of law, of commission of atrocities in Luweero, Teso, Lango, Acholi, West Nile and western Uganda, and profiting from peddling the tragedy must be punished for the war crimes.

## **1. THE NRM/A AND ATROCITIES: HUMAN REMAINS AND BODY PARTS**

Contemporary debates on Luweero deaths must be solidly grounded in the knowledge of history, but not in political mythmaking, which is often characterized by exploitation of deaths and tragedy for personal interests. This debate must take place in a public arena because Luweero deaths have a greater presence in the national psyche than any events in Uganda's history since the NRM/A came to power in 1986.

To understand the politics of death, it is imperative to revisit Museveni's undergraduate thesis, *Fanon's theory of violence: Its verification in liberated Mozambique* (1971), at the University of Dar-es-salaam, Tanzania. In glorifying violence and death, Yoweri Museveni writes, "violence alone, violence committed by the people, violence organized by its leaders, makes it possible for the masses to understand social truths and give the key to them." Museveni continued to show the potency of organizing violence and displaying human remains and body parts as tools of war. He writes,

In Mozambique, it has been found necessary to show peasants fragments of a Portuguese soldier blown up by a mine or, better still, his head. Once the peasants sees guerillas holding the head of the former master, the white man's head cold in death, the white skin, flowing hair, pointed nose and blue eyes notwithstanding, he will know, or at least begin to suspect, that the picture traditionally presented to him of the white man's invincibility is nothing but a scarecrow. However, once the peasants' passions are aroused, they usually swing to the other extreme; that all white men are devils... This position is not entirely wrong...

The despicable act of displaying severed heads of dead human victims for propaganda purposes must be seen within that context. General Museveni and associates regarded the slaughtered white men with amused contempt. We must take seriously that this act was not a simple matter of youthful student bravado. The mutilations, public display of severed heads and body parts were raised to a level of military and political policy in the NRM/A conduct of warfare in Uganda from 1981 to the present.

Luweero would offer the first war theater for such despicable utility and public display of human heads and body parts during Museveni's military campaign from 1981-1986. Subsequent Uganda war theaters from 1986 to the present time would experience their share. In attempting to understand atrocities and war in a political debate on April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, involving NRM Members of Parliaments from northern and eastern Uganda, Andrew Mwenda, a Kampala radio anchor for KFM 93.3, quoted the late Apolo Milton Obote. He said,

Museveni has for the last twenty three years fought different enemies in different regions of Uganda: Uganda National Liberation Armies (UNLA) in Luweero, Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA) in the north, West Nile Bank Front, Uganda People's Army of Peter Otai in Teso, Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in western Uganda, and the Lords Resistance Army (LRA). In all these wars, the adversaries are different, the theaters of war different, the periods different. There are only two elements that are constant: Museveni on the one hand and massive atrocities against civilians on the other.

Mwenda asked,

What does this tell us? How can it be that all Museveni's adversaries in the different regions of Uganda, under different political organizations, and at different historical times fight the same way? Is it not logical that since Museveni and atrocities is the only constant, that it is Museveni who employs atrocities to win wars?

Certainly, the cynical manipulation of atrocities as political and military policy of warfare in Uganda implicate Museveni in atrocities, mass murders, war crimes and crimes against humanity beginning from wars in Luweero and spreading to the rest of Uganda. It is important to cite a few:

- "Terror and Massacres of Muslims in Ankole in June 1979" (*Uganda Government. Report of the Human Rights Commission of Inquiry into Violations of Human Rights*, 1981,p.31)
- "Abduction and Assassinations of Civilians" (*Amnesty International, Uganda, August, 1981,p.1*)
- "Attacks on Civilian Vehicles" (*Africa Research Bulletin*, December 1-31, 1981: 6289BC)
- The late Dr. Andrew Lutakome Kayira, eyewitness report after meeting Museveni at the NRA command post in Luweero said,

There were no less than 50 heads at a quick count. We found Museveni and the NRA soldiers inside the ring of human heads. Museveni told us while pointing at the heads. You see those heads? That is how I deal with those who do not agree with me. (Cited in Muwanga and Gombya, *The Pearl of Africa is Bleeding*)

- “Massacres of Civilians in Luweero while disguised as UNLA Soldiers” (Lance-Sera Mwangi, *Violence in Uganda: What is inside Museveni’s Uganda*; Mwangi and Gombya, *The Pearl of Africa is Bleeding*; A.J. McIlroy, in Luweero, *The Daily Telegraph*, London, on 16<sup>th</sup> August, 1984.
- Cooking 28 massacred civilians in pots in Gang pa Aculu in Omot, Pader, northern Uganda, on October 28, 2002 (See, Dr. James Rwanyarare, *New Vision*, October 28, 2002; *The Monitor*, November 14, 2002).

The use of atrocities would become bolder as the insurgencies drew longer, changed phases and emphases; and senior NRM/A members refashioned new political parties. The blame for the atrocities would metamorphose into a bold political strategy to demonize, blackmail, malign and obstruct justice for the purpose of NRM/A legitimization and governance. The ferocity of the exploitation of Luweero deaths to silence and malign any political opposition that drew attention to the genocide in northern Uganda would increase exponentially.

## **2. THE POLITICAL UTILITY OF LUWERO DEATHS TO THE NRM/A REGIME**

### **[a] Muffling western donor criticisms and generating ethno-xenophobic hate and anger of victims towards the alleged perpetrators.**

The exploitation of the Luweero human remains and body parts, as a weapon to generate hate and anger in victims, is here exemplified as the most lethal weapon of war beyond dispute in the conflicts in Uganda. This act by the NRM/A regime stoked ethno-xenophobic hate and anger of victims against alleged perpetrators. The exposure of human remains became the official NRM/A trump card and policy for dealing with political opponents of the regime, and predominantly those living in northern and eastern parts of Uganda.

Whenever General Museveni NRM/A regime comes under attack for human rights violations, he would personally take ambassadors accredited to Uganda to Luweero mass graves, where he would officially vilify “killers” and make more accusations to justify his human rights records. On May 18, 2006, Henry Mukasa, a *New Vision* journalist, quotes Museveni:

The purpose of your coming here with me is because some of your countries have interest in the human rights situation in Uganda especially European countries. As human beings, it’s okay but you should do so with knowledge.

Museveni continued,

Because you don’t know, instead of being part of the solution, you can be part of the problem. To cure this, I am going to partner with you to enable you to know Uganda so that when you talk, you don’t talk from ignorance.

A selected group of NRM youths were assembled to heckle the diplomats at Nakaseke: The NRM/A youth hecklers jeered,

They tell lies, false propaganda, trying to turn black into white about human rights in Uganda and these (ambassadors) become the loudspeakers.

The convergence of NRM youth hecklers and official propaganda of Luweero deaths as a political tool of blackmailing western diplomats worked, to some extent. In western capitals and official relations, Museveni's human rights abuses are being carefully sanitized and the narratives are scripted to exclusively implicate NRM/A's political opponents, in spite of glaring facts to the contrary. Any attempts to raise the violations of the NRM/A regime by critics are usually ignored and deemed unnecessary and malicious.

At the domestic level, its application has stoked ethno-xenophobic hate and call for vicious revenge against the "killers." On November 18, 2002, Joshua Kato, a *New Vision* journalist reports the effectiveness of the policy of NRM/A official functionaries inculcating hatred in the example of 74 pupils between the ages of 12 to 13 years. These children were displaced by war in northern Uganda and brought to take their national examination from Luweero. Fred Sserukenya, a teacher said, "We decided to bring them to Kampala so that they sit for their exams in more comfortable environment." This was not to be: Edward Kawooya, the Local Council 1 (LC1), accused the pupils of posing "a serious security risk" and directed that the pupils be evicted in 48 hours. A pupil cried, "Have mercy on me," and another, "I don't want to miss my exams," tears welling in his young eyes. They continuously pleaded, "We want to sit our exams. Whatever happens, let us be allowed to sit our exams even if it is on the streets of Kampala." The blaming of Luweero deaths upon the northerners was responsible for such official policy. Where is the sense of nationhood and nationalism if official policy blames innocent young citizens who were born many years after the Luweero insurgency was over and have nothing to do with past records of alleged atrocities? Such actions are best understood as arising from a regime whose power base is ethno-nationalists and its lifeblood is stoking ethno-xenophobic hate and anger.

**[b] Blackmailing political opponents and critics of the NRM/A regime**

[i] In *Notes on the concealment of Genocide*, the late Apollo Milton Obote accuses Museveni for committing atrocities against Ugandans in Luweero, while masquerading as the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA). General Museveni fired back that Obote must answer for the atrocities of the UNLA, in Luweero. Obote's accusation of Museveni's NRM/A gained support from the Luweero report of A.J. McIlroy of the *The Daily Telegraph*, London, on 16<sup>th</sup> August, 1984.

And Mr. Nusur Jogojogo, the area chief, later told me [McIlroy]:

Three months ago, seven villagers were killed; three men and four children were shot or hacked to death by men with pangas and guns. They were bandits; there is no doubt about that. Some of them were from our village. They were dressed half way, I mean they were in Army and civilian clothes, all mixed up.

By the time the soldiers arrived, the people had fled into the bush. Whatever possessions they left behind, were looted by the soldiers.

McIlroy's report is corroborated by a serving UPDF officer (former NRA), Col. Kutesa. He writes in his book entitled, *Uganda's Revolution: How I Saw It*, (2006): "they (NRA)

dressed in UNLA uniform and green coats, they [his NRA colleagues] mingled with the government soldiers and infiltrated...”

Col. Kutesa had made such a claim before he published his book. During an interview with William Pike on Capital Radio in Kampala in 1995, in a program called Desert Island Disc, he told Pike that he was “a Lieutenant in the UNLA but as an NRA infiltrator whose mission was to undermine the credibility of the army from within.” Similarly, the *Monitor Newspaper* of April 15, 2005, carried a report that as officer in-charge of the road block at Konge, Kutesa would harass civilians, rob them of their money and kill some.

It went on to say that Generals Kahinda Otafire and Elly Tumwine boasted at the funeral of the late Adonia Tiberondwa of similar kind of machinations and deception to delegitimize the regime of Obote and win local support. Certainly, atrocities committed against civilians with the purpose of achieving a political and military victory worked, especially when the adversary took the blame for it. As an effective weapon, the use of atrocities for political gain would become clearer during the last political competition between incumbent President Museveni and Besigye, a former physician to Museveni during the NRM/A guerilla was in Luweero. Besigye and other former members of the NRM/A high command who fought alongside Museveni against the UNLA were blamed for the Luweero atrocities. Yet these military commanders were firsthand witnesses to the deaths and destruction of the war Museveni launched after losing the election to a DP candidate. The former colleagues grew furious and warned Museveni to stop blackmailing them for cheap political ends.

### **[ii] Blackmailing former NRM/A guerrilla colleagues, turned political critics.**

In the electoral challenge of 23 February, 2006, Museveni blamed the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) leaders: Col. (Rtd) Kizza Besigye, Major General Mugisha Muntu, Major Rubaramira Ruranga and John Kazoora, for the atrocities in Luweero. Put simply, shifting the blame for Luweero deaths upon his former guerilla colleagues served as a strategy to shift internal alliance and deny them legitimacy in the southern part of the country; and Museveni, unblemished, remained the defender of the southern ethnic political power elite.

The retired FDC military officers who served loyally under Museveni’s NRM/A and witnessed the ferocity of the war responded in anger. Major Ruranga, of the UPDF (former NRA), who fought alongside General Museveni during the Luweero war from 1981-1986, when the atrocities were committed, writes in the *New Vision*, July 12, 2005:

...the killings in Luweero during the civil strife must be blamed on the National Resistance Army (NRA) that started the war.

Major Ruranga continued,

I hear many people claiming that Obote killed people in Luweero. Obote could have done something wrong but Museveni did many bad things. I was in NRM with Museveni and people in Luweero were used as shields by us. I saw many people die, not only from bullet but also from hunger.

So for someone to say NRA did not kill people and that former regimes were more bloody than this one is not true because there is no war where two sides are shooting in a cross fire and only one side gets casualties.

Another demonized retired UPDF (former NRA) military officer, Kazoora, Kashari Member of Parliament, who fought alongside Museveni spoke of his personal dossier on the 1981-86 Luweero war on November 8, 2005, while responding to Museveni's accusation of Luweero deaths. He writes,

Some of us have deliberately kept quiet about Luweero war ...it would be wrong for one side to accuse the other of committing crimes in Luweero

I thought that we were fighting for democracy. Little did I know that we were fighting to make one man, Museveni a life President.

Col. Besigye (Rtd), presidential torchbearer for FDC, and former personal physician to General Museveni, who fought alongside Museveni during the Luweero war, supports and emphasizes Kazoora and Ruranga's statements. In an interview with Andrew Mwenda, on KFM's Tonight on October 27, a day after he returned from exile, Col. Besigye acknowledged that the NRM/A, which he was part of, could share the blame in the Luweero killings.

Col. (rtd) Besigye said,

In a war, all parties are there to kill either in defense or aggression. We need to investigate who killed who, for the purposes of resolving future conflicts. It's not good for one party to lay charges on others. People (forces) of all parties could be culpable.

The FDC former NRM/A military officers-turned-regime political critics, unleashed the wrath of President Museveni's press office. Responding with more accusations and blame for atrocities, Ofwono Opondo, published an opinion piece in the *New Vision*, on August 26, 2005, in which he shifts the blame for atrocities onto General Muntu, the longest serving Army commander of the NRA/M, who is currently in-charge of FDC mobilization, and Besigye, as FDC presidential candidate.

Opondo writes,

If Muntu was seeking comprehensive justice for all, how come he is not talking for the 39 who died (read roasted alive) in Mukura wagon (Teso), Bur Cor (Acholi, where scores of people were buried alive), when he was Army commander?

He continues,

Indeed, the politicians from northern Uganda, including ministers like Omara Atubo and Zackary Olum, whose sober accounts of torture while being arrested and in detention between 1990 and 1993, should not seek redress lest they (meaning Muntu and Besigye) are called to judgment.

And further, FDC leaders falsely believe that 1986-98 when they were the bosses is now so far away, and it would be better to forget.

Opondo wanted to blackmail Gen. Muntu into silence when he referred to atrocities committed against civilians in eastern and northern Uganda by NRA, for which Muntu bore command responsibility. He was silent on the fact that as president and commander-in-chief of the NRA, Gen. Museveni bore the final command responsibility. In his address to the Langi and Acholi Resistance Councils (RCs) and elders, Museveni had once admitted to atrocities under Gen. Muntu. He said,

Sometimes, our own indisciplined soldiers took advantage of the breakdown of law and order caused by the rebellion and committed atrocities against the civilian population. (*New Vision*, March 28, 1994)

The admission followed similarly, “mass rapes and other atrocities by the NRA,” (*New Vision*, January 1, 1988; *New Vision*, February 22, 1988, etc), for which Muntu and other retired officers were in active service and gained rapid promotions.

The open acknowledgment by President Museveni, Gen. Muntu (rtd), Col. Besigye (rtd) and the other retired UPDF officers have not been followed with criminal convictions and a truth and reconciliation commission. We must be clear that the blackmailing of Gen. Muntu, Col. Besigye and others was because they would deny Museveni the free utility of atrocities for political legitimacy, to consolidate an ethno-xenophobic and militarist regime and to conceal the current genocide in northern Uganda.

### **[c] Consolidating an ethno-xenophobic and militarist state, a genocidal and divisive administration**

By consistently inciting maniacal feelings of revenge and contempt, which functions to support the northern genocide, the NRM/A has successfully divided the country along ethnic lines. Andrew M. Mwenda writes in *The Monitor* newspaper, April 26, 2004,

It does not pay for other MPs to follow colleagues from Acholi, Lango and Teso in walking out of parliament because that does not advance their electoral fortunes. The war in northern Uganda has therefore been contained in the prism of an ethnic conflict affecting only the Acholi, or Langi, and the Iteso, rather than a national problem.

Mwenda continues his observation in *The Monitor*, May 6-12, 2006:

The war in the north has always been used to rally people in the south around the NRM and Mzee (Museveni) during election times by spreading imaginary fears that “northerners want to come back to power to kill us.” This cynical and highly ethicized politics was effectively employed during the 1996 presidential election campaigns. Some FM radio stations ran adverts of soldiers with a northern accent torturing and killing people at roadblocks. Newspapers also carried adverts of skulls... But to keep the ethicized campaigns against the north, it is politically necessary to brand them (political

competitors) agents of “those northerners” by linking them either to Obote or Kony. It is this process of demonizing people from the north...that is the basis of Mzee’s regime.

The consolidation of ethno-xenophobic policy thrives on the devious NRM/A regime’s self-celebratory memory. This is often invoked in the name of nation, ethnicity and perpetuates the need for revenge. The lifeblood of the ethno-xenophobia is deliberately manufactured myths to conceal complicity in genocide against the northerners. Its practical policy is militarism and militarist ethno-xenophobic and chauvinistic governance.

The 41-page report entitled, *Northern Uganda: Understanding and Solving the Conflict*, by the Brussels-based International Crisis Group (ICG) released on April 15, 2004 agrees,

The war helps him justify and maintain the status quo in Uganda politics, denying his opposition a power base and offering numerous opportunities for curtailing freedom of expression and association in the name of “the war against terrorism”.

The State House acting presidential press secretary rubbished the report describing it as “ridiculous and the work of research tourists.” To be clear, the ICG is chaired by former Finnish President, Martti Ahtisaari, and run by former Australian Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans. Both have clear credentials in democratic governance.

Similarly, a political science professor, Joel D. Barkan, of the University of Iowa, writes in *The Weekly Observer* newspaper on 4 August 2005,

The war has served Museveni’s political purpose in two fundamental ways. First, it has helped him consolidate popular support across southern Uganda, and particularly among the Baganda.... Second, the war has shored up Museveni’s political base within the UPDF; the UPDF has always been a pillar of the regime.

President Museveni supports Professor Barkan when he added that the high ranking military officers needed the war to amass wealth, hence consolidating his political base (*New Vision*, November 29, 1996). Museveni said,

It is true that in the past army officers were doing business out of the suffering of Acholi and they did not want it [the war] to end.

The tragedy of Acholi people has become a necessary Trojan horse to accumulate wealth among the high ranking military officers. A government’s own investigation into the Ghost Soldier reports by Mbabazi/Generals Tinyefuza and Saleh, showed that about 50 percent of the UPDF payroll was inflated with “ghost soldiers”. Unfortunately, no prosecution has even been undertaken; and, most of the implicated officers have gained rapid promotions.

#### **[d] The NRM/A and genocide against the Acholi population**

The genocide imposed on the Acholi people is fabricated as being the result of the mass deaths committed in Luweero; instead of the Acholi people remaining as a formidable political opponent of the NRM/A regime. It follows that numerous

accusations have been concocted to implicate the Acholi people and to justify their decimation by the NRM/A regime. John Muto-Ono P'Lajur, a journalist for *The Monitor* newspaper, reports on April 5, 2004, of a Luweero meeting from March 4-7, to which Acholi elders and religious leaders were invited to apologize to the Baganda victims. The Acholi leaders rejected the invitation saying that they never fought the Baganda, even in ancient history. Many Acholi councilors described the meeting as "unfair and meant to justify the ongoing war" [genocide] against them.

Gulu Local Council-V Chairperson (LC-V), Lt.Col. Walter Ochora, an Acholi and former commander in Luweero with the defunct UNLA, turned a staunch supporter of the NRM/A in Gulu, said, "Neither the Acholi nor the Obote army would take responsibility for the killings." As a former soldier with the UNLA, he was the enemy of the NRA rebels and fought long and hard battles to kill the NRM/A rebels of Gen. Museveni.

His observations are supported by that of Col. Kutesa, a former officer of the NRM/A. Kutesa writes that he fought the bloody battle of Kampomera against Lt.Col. Ochora; both former outfits were arrayed against the other. Kutesa calls Ochora a personal friend with whom he often shares memories of their concerted attempts to kill each other. He also speaks of fighting against Colonel Ogole of the UNLA at Kamboga, where many combatants perished.

Col. Kutesa writes vividly of death and destruction in the Luweero war. However, Museveni would rather not call these fighters to account for Luweero deaths; neither does he investigate or punish these officers for Luweero deaths. In the context of political demonization to retain power at all costs, the genocide against the Acholi people, politically opposed to the NRM/A regime, would continue under the propaganda machinery that extols Museveni as ushering in the era of "peace and tranquility," "economic growth," and the "golden boy of the west" and "the savior of Uganda from ruin."

However, one thing remains clear to critical observers. Kevin Ogen Aliro, a journalist with *The Monitor* newspaper reports why some people are reluctant to see the genocide in Acholi (*The Monitor*, May 18, 1999):

I particularly understand the dilemma of some ordinary Ugandans, who after many years of torture and oppression, don't want to believe that the UPDF (former NRM/A) ...could even dream of such atrocities against any Ugandan... Ugandans are victims of self-denial and its associated symptoms. In their subconscious...they know that UPDF, like previous armies, are capable of all and worse.

Aliro gives a personal reminiscence:

I was like such Ugandans. There were times when I would never believe the UPDF would hurt a fly. I dismissed the Bur Coro incident (in which innocent human beings were buried and smoked in a pit) as an isolated case of indiscipline.

In his conclusion about the silence surrounding the genocide in Acholi, he said,

Deep inside, we (journalists) were also afraid. Afraid of the known consequences of publishing anything that may be deemed by the powers that be as "damaging to the image of Museveni's sacred cow, the NRA (now the UPDF)." Hundreds of other incidents came and went, most unreported.

The decimation of the Acholi population is the result of lethal cocktail of deceit, demonization and ethno-xenophobic hate, in which western governments and the United Nations became complicit. Genocide is unfolding under our watch as we save Darfur, a less severe and shorter in intensity tragedy, than that in northern Uganda. There is ongoing genocide against the Acholi people, political opponents of the NRM/A regime, in northern Uganda.

**[e] Luweero deaths as a necessary political tool for regime survival and governance.**

The Luweero atrocities and mass deaths is being used to build a vanguard of people often unwilling to hear the narratives that challenge NRM/A political myths and call into question comfortable and self-righteous assumptions of the NRM/A regime's non-complicity.

Badru Wegulo, Chairman of the UPC Constitutional Steering Committee, challenged Museveni to investigate the Luweero deaths. He observes that whenever election time nears, Luweero deaths are raised to prominence by Museveni. Skulls and other human bones are dug up; the staccato of machine gun fire and eerie torture cries play on the national radio to instigate ethno-xenophobic hatred and win votes for Museveni. Wegulo said (*The Monitor*, June 22, 2005),

If the government is concerned about Ugandans, we demand that an international commission be set up to investigate who is responsible for the killings in Luweero.

The NRM spokesman, Ofwono Opondo, answered,

There is no need for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and we shall not have one anyway.

Concerned and irked by the continuing exploitation of Luweero deaths for political blackmail by the NRM/A, a Member of Parliament for Samia Bugwe North, insisted:

We are tired of Luweero and the demonization...They have stretched us far enough..."

Ofwono Opondo, once again, dismissed the call for international investigation. He said,

We do not need the international community to come and tell us who killed people in Luweero either. The survivors are there and they can tell us who destroyed their homes.

Early this year, 2006, before ambassadors and high commissioners accredited to Uganda, a suggestion to have the alleged perpetrators tried for Luweero deaths and punished was dismissed by Museveni:

[We] did not follow up culprits who fled to European capitals from where they are issuing invectives on [my] government to paint it black. [It] was deliberate not to ask for extradition of presidents Idi Amin and Milton Obote to allow wounds to heal. The devils we chased away here ran to Europe from where they became angels. (*New Vision*, May 18, 2006).

If Museveni wanted to allow the Luweero wounds to heal, why is it that when the legitimacy of his regime to govern is slipping, then Luweero atrocities are remembered and the “wounds” opened? Certainly, the concealment of truth and perpetration of atrocities through [i] shifting the blame and [ii] using truth telling merely as tactical but not principled communication, yield handsome dividends to legitimize President Museveni’s governance.

### **3. THE CONCEALMENT OF TRUTH UNDER NRM/A REGIME OF GEN. YOWERI MUSEVENI:**

#### **[a] Shifting the blame**

Joseph Paul Goebbels, Propaganda Minister of the Nazi regime under Adolph Hitler.

If you will tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.

It follows that the longer the genocide perpetrated by Museveni and associates in northern Uganda continues, the longer and larger are the lies told. Shifting the blame of Luweero mass death conceals the truth.

Recently, President Museveni alleged that Olara Otunnu, a former Uganda diplomat at the UN, a former Under-Secretary for Children in Armed Conflict at the UN, is responsible for the Luweero atrocities. Olara Otunnu, the author of various articles: “What Shall I tell the children of Northern Uganda” (2001); “The Secret Genocide” (2006); “Nation in Crisis” (2006); and “Genocide in Northern Uganda” (2006), sought in his writings to expose Museveni’s demonic agenda for the ongoing genocide in northern and eastern Uganda. How farcical is it to attempt to pin the Luweero deaths on Olara-Otunnu, who never set foot in Luweero? Needless to say, the exploitation of Luweero deaths is a powerful political weapon for Museveni’s regime survival and governance. For this weapon to be disarmed an international investigation must be launched and Museveni and associates benefiting from parleying deception must be brought before the International Criminal Court (ICC) for genocide and war crimes in Luweero, eastern and northern parts of Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

#### **[b] Concealing the truth: Why is President Museveni hiding the Justice Odeh Commission report on Luweero deaths?**

On coming to power, the NRM/A regime commissioned an investigation into human rights abuses from 1962 to 1986. The commission recommended that several commanders of the former NRM/A, now UPDF, and the defunct UNLA be punished for war crimes in Luweero. However, the lists of the military commanders to be punished were never released; and Museveni refused to grant public access to the commission’s report. We must ask:

- Where is the Justice Odeh Commission report that investigated, reported and recommended that some former UNLA and some current UPDF

officers be punished for crimes committed in Luweero? Why is Museveni hiding the Justice Oder Commission report?

Museveni followed the refusal to release the Justice Oder commission report with an injunction against those NRM/A high command officers for writing about their Luweero guerilla experience, while under his [Museveni] command. What is that injunction supposed to hide?

Certainly, the truth about the many massacres that underpin governance, diplomatic support and legitimacy for Museveni will be exposed. The exposure will undermine the use of human remains and body parts as tools of governance, legitimacy and demonization of regime critics and political opponents. It will expose the propaganda machine of the Museveni regime.

#### **4. NRM/A DECEIT AND MANIPULATION: TRUTH TELLING AS TACTICS, NEVER AS PRINCIPLE!**

Truth telling has been reduced to tactics of regime survival and harnessing ethnic legitimacy, which is masked as nationalism. Here are some test cases of political and military elite duplicity, which must be understood solely as animated by the desire to cling to power at all cost. Power for power's sake is the maxim and it must be held by lies, deception and duplicity.

##### **[a] Nairobi Peace Talks in 1985.**

Museveni said,

We tried peacefully to push the case that the Amin elements, who had killed people in broad daylight, must be excluded.

**The present truth is:** Former notorious Amin's ministers, Moses Ali, became a Minister under Museveni, and Amin's Vice-President, Mustafa Adrasi, notorious for mass deaths, (and was jailed for mass murders), is now one of the over 100 advisors to President Yoweri Museveni.

##### **[b] Soldiers on the street of Kampala**

Museveni swore never to call soldiers to the streets (*The Weekly Observer*, 2005)

On his 6<sup>th</sup> day in Office in 1986, President Museveni swore:

I will never deploy soldiers on streets like my predecessors had done.

**The present truth is:** On December 22, 2005, John Vivian Sserwanio, a journalist, revisits the promise and reports in *The Weekly Observer*, 2005. He writes,

Soldiers are now a regular feature on Kampala Street.

##### **[c] Constitutional Term Limit**

Peter Mwesigye of *The Crusader* asked Museveni about the constitutional term limit.

Museveni said, in *The Crusader*, Sunday 12 May, 1996:

I said that I would serve only one term, this term. My inclination is that I should retire after this. Of course the constitution says I can serve two terms as president, and it would not be unconstitutional if I did it; but my inclination is that I should serve this one term, then retire.

President Museveni followed the statement by writing in the *New Vision*, on Oct 29-Nov 5, 2003, saying that,

I will not cling to power.

**The present truth is:** Museveni changed the Constitution to govern as a life president, in the Kisanja-project (no-term limit) (See, *The Monitor*, March 16, 2005, “Museveni Explains Reluctance to Retire”; *New Vision*, March 17, 2005, “I want to remain an Actor – Museveni”).

Museveni said,

Bidandi Ssali has been asking me to retire and remain an advisor. But if I advise you when I am Commander-in-Chief and President and you refused to take heed, how sure are you that you will take my advice when I am just an advising elder.

Emphasizing his desire to never relinquish power through electoral process, Museveni, in the *New Vision* newspaper, August 13, 2004, said,

Why should I sentence Ugandans to suicide by handing over power to people we fought and defeated?

#### **[d] Electricity Power Crisis**

Museveni said, on Independence Day celebration at Kololo on October 9, 2004,

Interference from development partners has made it impossible to hold anybody accountable for the power crisis, as the country had become “everybody’s business.

In an opinion piece to the *New Vision*, on February 15, 2006, President Museveni shifted the blame to FDC political opponents:

The opponents of this dam were PAFO members who, at that time, were masquerading as Movementists but have since then joined FDC. These were people like Kazoora, Muntu, Salaamu Musumba, etc.

**The truth is:** Jaberu Bidandi Ssali, former Minister of Energy and Local Government in the NRM/A, and Museveni’s confidant, said,

As far back as 1989, a proposal to build new hydro electric power sources to stabilize the country’s power supply for the next 15 years (1990-2005) was tabled but President

Museveni rejected the idea. He [Museveni] said no, no, no, ... clearly irritated” (*The Observer*, 2006)

Bidandi continued,

Museveni’s rejection partly stems from his nature of “thinking he has the solution to every problem, only for him to turn around later and blame other people whenever things go wrong.

Shifting the blame for electricity power shortage to FDC opposition party, Museveni writes (*New Vision*, February 15, 2006),

We must ask you to reject them in the coming elections. Many of them no longer belong to the Movement. They are in FDC. These are: Kazoora, Musumba, Muntu, Lukyamuzi etc” responsible for electricity shortage and paralyzing the Government in respect to electricity.

**[e] On the Genocide in Northern Uganda**

Museveni blamed donors for the failure to defeat the Lord’s Resistance Army in the wake of Barlonyo massacres.

**The truth is:** Ambassador Sigurd Illing, Head of European Union Delegation, disagrees. Ambassador Illing, said,” (*The Monitor*, February 28, 2004, “Don’t Blame us for Kony’s war – Donors.”)

Donors agreed to exceptional increases in defense spending last year that were related to combating the LRA.

Ambassador Illing added,

It is the obligation of government, as Parliament repeated this week, to protect the lives and property of its people.

**[f] On Multiparty and Democratic Pluralism in Uganda**

Edmund Kizito of Reuters asked President Museveni,

We expect you campaigning against multiparty democracy?

Museveni answered:

Yes, Yes. I will campaign against multipartyism. I do not believe in multipartyism for Africa now or Uganda. For the next ten or fifteen years, I do not believe in it. So I will campaign against multipartyism in Uganda in four years time. And I am sure we shall defeat it. We shall not have multipartyism here (*The Monitor Online*, 2005; *The East African*, Nairobi, August 2, 2005).

**The truth is:** In 2005, Museveni campaigned for multipartyism after changing the constitution so that he becomes a life president (*The Monitor*, March 24, 2005, “Opposition Call for Anti-Kisanja Demo”).

### **[g] The ICC and Human Rights Violations in Northern and Eastern Uganda**

Apolo Kakaire writes on July 6, 2006 under the title, “Amnesty Offer Blow for Rebel Chief Arrest Plans” (*News: Institute for War and Peace Reporting, London, UK; The Monitor*, May 17, 2007, “Museveni Offers Kony New Deal”) Museveni said,

If Kony reaches a deal with me, Uganda would guarantee him safety from prosecution, by the ICC (International Criminal Court).

Museveni himself blamed his offer on the United Nations. He said,

The United Nation, by implication the ICC, has no moral authority to demand that Kony be brought to trial, since they had failed to arrest him...

**The truth is:** Museveni now insists that Kony be arrested by the ICC. Museveni said,

The ICC is actually very good for us (Uganda) because it makes the terrorists (rebels) come up to seek peace and end impunity. The ICC was created to fight impunity.

In dealing with Museveni, we must be clear that deceptions and propaganda, however openly contradicting, which will consolidate the NRM/A regime in power and shield him from prosecution for war crimes and genocide, are usually presented as truth. He preempts democratic political threats to his hold onto power by vicious blackmail, violence, deception and atrocities for which opponents must take the blame.

### **CONCLUSION**

The manipulation of Luweero deaths has become a powerful political and military weapon in the hands of NRM/A political and military elite to mobilize ethno-xenophobic hate and chauvinistic nationalism against political opponents. Particularly against the Acholi population, it has been used to justify the ongoing genocide, and, among other political critics, it is useful to demonize to consolidate a militarist and ethno-xenophobic power base. Luweero deaths are useful for the preservation of NRM rule, as the NRM regime struggles to legitimize its governance and entrench itself in power. The use of Luweero deaths as weapons of malice, to malign opponents and retain power has replaced the search for justice. At the hand of Gen. Museveni, it has become an actual commodity, a promissory note and a currency to buy political support. The success of manipulating the Luweero deaths is reflected in incessant instability and denying access to the Justice Oder commission report that investigated human rights abuses from 1962 to 1985; denying a truth and reconciliation commission investigation; refusing an independent international inquiry into Luweero deaths and prohibiting retired NRM/A military officers from freely writing about their experiences in the Luweero war.

Ugandans must understand that Museveni used atrocities to get to power; uses atrocities to impede democratization that threatens his hold on power, by shifting the blame on his political opponents like the UPC and FDC. Museveni was successful in using atrocities against Obote in Luweero; against Besigye in the last two general elections; in the war against rebels in eastern and northern Uganda since 1986, and in the

Democratic Republic of the Congo. He is also successful in maliciously shifting the blame for the war in northern Uganda upon western donor nations who contribute 52 percent of Uganda's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but who also allied with Museveni for strategic control of Africa.

Finally, the history of NRM/A regime is a narrative of victimization, violence, massacres, genocide and exploitation of death to give political life to the NRM/A regime. Mass deaths, deception and genocide disguised as concern for the sanctity and protection of life, are necessary for NRM/A legitimacy to govern. Sadly to say that the NRM/A regime was never about the promotion of democracy and human rights, but rather domination resting on coercion, massacres, beatings, mutilations, humiliations, rape and genocide. While this analysis does not offer insight into NRM/A psychopathological deception, lies and obsession with death and massacres, one point must remain clear: whatever direction our current debate takes us, it must go down the path of broader public education and learning the truth about Museveni's complicity in the Luweero deaths and the horrendous destruction of lives in its wake. It must also emphasize the shameless duplicity with which Museveni has harnessed Luweero deaths for political dividends. What we understand today as Luweero deaths is a legacy of the NRM/A engineered war on February 6, 1981, against the defunct UNLA of the late Apolo Milton Obote, nearly 25 years ago. It is apt, to quote Joseph Paul Goebells honest boast, "We have made the Reich by propaganda" and I must paraphrase it to say that in Uganda, the NRM/A has made itself by propaganda.

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