## **PREFACE**

Getting people out of politics must strike most rulers as an attractive idea at some point in their careers. Getting them out of ethnic politics will seem even more attractive because it offers rulers the chance to become statesmen. Whether personal advantage or public policy acts as catalyst, leaders sometimes try to reduce the volume of national and local participation.

Their prospects seem but wishful thinking because any attempt to contract participation in politics, and especially in ethnic politics, offends two notions proclaimed by common sense and sanctified by social science. The first notion is that once people begin to participate in politics, they cannot be dislodged. The second is that ethnicity everywhere is such an intractable social force that it cannot be removed from politics until people forget their ancestry. Furthermore, few social scientists and virtually no politicians would publicly discuss the behavioral implications of policies intended to reverse the growth of participation because these policies are regarded as inherently undesirable.

Victories in the worldwide spread of the right to engage in political activity are usually considered signposts on the path of world history. Those who pass through national struggles are not expected to relinquish newly acquired opportunities lightly. Once it has been won, who would give up the right to decide his own fate?

Ethnicity is thought to be equally unyielding to political direction. Not so many years ago both politicians and academics rested comfortably in the belief that ethnic loyalties and regional nationalisms had occurred in a stage long since transcended in the industrialized states. But today, with ethnicity resurgent everywhere, and not just in the Third World, coping with ethnic political participation has become a universal task.

xii PREFACE

If the political demands growing out of nationalism or ethnicity or "tribalism" are as inexorable as the resilience of the cultures they are taken to symbolize would suggest, the statesman must either compromise or crush. State authority must be surrendered or nationalism defeated; to many politicians and academics there seems no other possibility. And if this is true in America and Europe, how much more must it be the case in Africa? For there observers think they see primordial cultures deeply rooted in the participants' identities, and thus conclude that the path toward unity under any sort of effective central coordination will be exceptionally difficult.

Armed only with this framework of conventional wisdom, any observer would find postindependence politics in Uganda exceptionally puzzling. For in the latter half of the 1960s, there was not only a growing transformation of the regime that steadily reduced the volume of participation but also a sustained attempt by Ugandan leaders to take ethnicity out of politics. These two courses of action overlapped, though the latter was not simply a special case of the former.

Transforming the Ugandan regime meant that a variety of government structures identified with independence were dismantled. Most of these had provided opportunities for people to enter politics and, to varying degrees, to influence policy. The government seemed to succeed in getting them out of politics. In this respect Uganda followed a pattern that appeared to be endemic throughout subsaharan Africa. But how could governments poor in both resources and skilled manpower implement such an unlikely policy throughout their countries? Was it possible that people who had acquired some degree of political consciousness in the agitation and elections that led to independence would acquiesce in these changes?

Although Ugandan officials would have denied that they were placing obstacles in the path of participation in general—at least until the military took power—they were forthright about the purposes of the measures they introduced to dampen ethnic expression from the crises of 1966 until the coup of 1971. Whatever its importance in the precolonial period (a matter of some debate), ethnic political participation had become central to Ugandan politics during colonial rule and the first years of independence. But later, public assertion of ethnic

PREFACE XIII

demands seemed to fall off sharply. Was it possible that for a while Ugandans found bases for political activity other than their ethnic identity?

To resolve these seeming contradictions between Ugandan facts and social science wisdom, we must rework our notions of participation and ethnicity. Participation turns out to be a complex concept that can be broken down into several components on which governments can sometimes have significant impact, either stimulating or reversing the growth of political involvement. It is possible to get people out of politics, though it is another issue entirely to determine whether and when it would be desirable to do so.

Ethnicity is also more complicated than is generally assumed. It leads an intermittent though often intense existence, dominant in certain situations and absent in others. A variety of conditions will determine whether people living in Moscow, New York, Calcutta, or Lagos will seek political reward on the basis of ethnic identity. Governments, either intentionally or unintentionally, influence many of these conditions — sometimes dissuading, sometimes persuading people of the relevance of their ethnic orgins. This book, then, concerns the political consequences of the conceptions that people accept as social reality and the possibilities of changing these conceptions through political engineering.

Everyone who writes about Africa, and particularly about ethnicity, has to decide whether to follow popular usage or anthropological convention in referring to ethnic units. People speaking African languages, particularly in Bantu linguistic areas, use different prefixes to refer to a single person, to more than one person, to the place in which they live, and to descriptive adjectives. Anthropologists do away with these

<sup>1.</sup> In Bantu languages generally Mu- is the prefix added to refer to an individual, Ba- or Mi- to denote the plural, Bu- to identify a territory, and Ki- to indicate that the word is used as a descriptive adjective – thus, Muganda, Baganda, Buganda, and Kiganda. To simplify usage somewhat, I have dropped the Ki- prefix and used the collective word for the people as the form for adjectives (for example, Baganda customs rather than Kiganda customs). I have not substituted an r for l, as is sometimes done in western Ugandan Bantu languages (for example, Runyankore instead of Lunyankole) with the exception of references to languages used on Radio Uganda, where the change seems to have been officially adopted.

xiv PREFACE

prefixes and use the core of the name of the ethnic unit (a nonword) in each of these cases.

I have decided to follow popular usage current in East Africa rather than anthropological practice. Dropping prefixes can lead to confusion of people with place names. Perhaps a more important reason is that in a book which articulates a notion of ethnicity depending in part on the identities that people perceive for themselves and others, it would be a mockery to use a term that carries no meaning to any of them.

Reference to the *Bakonzo* instead of the *Bakonjo* (except as a government—designated census category) is an extension of this point, since the people in question regard themselves as Bakonzo. The *Bakonjo* spelling — now accepted by the government and most other Ugandans — derives from the language of the people whom the Bakonzo often identify as their oppressors.<sup>2</sup> My usage is not entirely consistent, and I refer, for example, to the Chagga and the Luo without a prefix. However, anthropologists are not always consistent either and often use a prefix when referring to the territory regarded as the "home" of members of an ethnic unit.

I have received generous assistance from many quarters and particularly from Ugandans — government officials, scholars, Makerere students, and farmers in many parts of the country — who have taken time from their own pursuits to fully answer questions and gently correct mistaken impressions. Today it would be imprudent to acknowledge by name any of those now in Uganda — a small indication of the personal dangers created by the present regime.

A number of colleagues took the trouble to review carefully earlier versions of several of the chapters presented here. I am especially grateful for the close scrutiny and important criticisms offered by Michael Davies, Richard Hook, Samuel Huntington, and particularly Crawford Young. I have also been guided by the helpful suggestions of David Baldwin, Dennis

<sup>2.</sup> The distinction provides an example of the researcher's problem of deciding whether the identity of an ethnic unit depends upon the perceptions of those who are members or those who are outsiders. The problem is taken up in chapter two.

PREFACE xv

Cohen, Henry Ehrmann, James Fernandez, Garth Glentworth, Frank Holmquist, Sidney Kasfir, Martin Kilson, Gene Lyons, Roger Masters, William Mayer, W. H. Morris—Jones, Christian Potholm, Paul Puritt, Ken Sharpe, Frank Smallwood, Denis Sullivan, Yash Tandon, Michael Twaddle, Neil Warren, and Joshua Zake.

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xvi PREFACE

In lieu of the conventional final acknowledgment, I wish to solemnly record here that I have promised not to thank my wife for carrying out her usual duties in return for an agreement that she will not thank me for being a husband when she writes a book of her own. With so much assistance from so many different sources I can take little credit beyond the responsibility for errors in what follows.

N. K.

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