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EDITORIAL NOTE

Since its appearance in 1995 Jadavpur Journal of International Relations (JJIR) has been a salient feature of our department's academic programmes and activities. Truly reflective of the wide scope of International Relations, the present volume like the previous ones covers a wide range of issues. Right from the start our collective endeavour with research contributions both from within the department and from outside has been geared towards realising the goal of academic excellence. We have hoped all along that JJIR would find its niche beside the other reputed journals on the subject in India and abroad. This time through *Manuscript India* we expect to be able to reach a much larger number of readers, and we leave to them the task of judging whether we have already attained our objective or are yet to do so.

From Twariire¹ to Tweriire² Politics: Commoditising Democracy to Resolve Agrarian Crisis in the Great Lakes Region

MURINDWA-RUTANGA

This article focuses on the nature of politics arising out of the raging agrarian crisis in Kigezi, situated in South-western Uganda, in the Great Lakes Region, bordering Rwanda in the south and the Democratic Republic of Congo in the west. It is predominantly an agrarian economy, with few emerging trading centres, towns and one municipality. Kigezi lacks any form of industrialisation, lacks rural electrification. Kigezi, like Bihar, in India has nothing positive to remember about the British colonialists other than being transformed into a labour reservoir – a status that has prevailed hitherto. 1996 was a year of presidential and parliamentary elections in Uganda. The presidential elections took place in March 1996. They were then followed by the Local Council (LC) elections in the districts. Local Councils are people's councils. They are like the Panchayats in India. In Kigezi, these elections did not follow a consistent pattern. We shall examine these elections and their impact on the peasant politics and on the agrarian crisis in Kigezi.

There were three candidates in the presidential race, the incumbent President Museveni of the National Resistance Movement (NRM), the president of the Democratic Party [DP], Kawanga Ssemogerere and K. Mayanja, whose JEEMA party was anchored in Islam. In these presidential elections, the DP leadership had formed an alliance with the leadership of the Uganda People's Congress [UPC] to try and remove the NRM from power. These three candidates could prima facie be said to be representing the three main religions in Uganda - Protestantism, Roman Catholicism and Islam respectively. But the alliance between the DP leadership and the UPC leadership implied an alliance between the Protestants and Catholics against the NRM. What, however came out of these presidential elections was that the majority of the population were not swayed by these configurations drawn by the party leadership. Other than the northern parts of Uganda,

where the Lakwena Holy Spirit Movement had been raging since 1987, most of the electorate in the rest of the country evaluated the three presidential candidates on their individual merits and potentials as presidents. What seemed to be the main guiding factors included issues of security. There were fears of Obote's possible return to power³. Other factors included stability, development, charisma, articulateness, firmness and decisiveness in action, and performance. Even before the elections took place, most of the electorate had resolved not to change the top leadership. Museveni emerged victorious with the highest votes in the March 1996 presidential elections. He won with the overall of 75 percent of all the votes cast. What came out from these elections was that the different constituencies were competing with enthusiasm to have the highest votes cast for Museveni as president. This happened even in the home constituencies of the other two presidential candidates.

The parliamentary elections brought out the materialist and religious linkages between the agrarian crisis and democracy. These elections brought new shifts in political configurations, campaigns and alliances. One of the main developments was that politics shifted from the NRM's political and legal confines to new platforms. While the sitting Members of Parliament [MPs] advocated for no change of the status quo ante, those who aspired to replace them searched for and/or created other political platforms on which they could stand firmly and countervail the NRM candidates.

This had a precedent in the concluded presidential elections. This had emerged through a political alliance between the DP leadership and the UPC leadership. This was the first DP-UPC alliance in Uganda's political history. The alliance had been occasioned by the NRM's monopoly of the politics at the top. While the NRM had initiated a democratic process at the lower levels in form of LCs, it maintained a tight hold on politics and power at the apex. It was able to achieve this by outlawing the political parties' activities. Political frustrations and the realisation that no single party could defeat the NRM single-handedly forced the UPC leadership to offer full support to the DP presidential candidate. This was an alliance of the oldest political rivals since their formation. These two parties constituted the main internal political forces that were opposed to the NRM and its dominance of Uganda's politics. Three things need to be noted here.

First, the leaderships of all the parties and movements in Uganda lack contact, consultations with the membership. They lack any control over the membership. They operate as separate entities. It is this that partly explains why the decampaigning and bitter attacks by the DP and UPC leadership on Museveni and the NRM failed to have much influence on the electorate. This excluded the northern part of Uganda where the anti-NRM guerrilla war was raging. What needs to be pointed out here though in passing is that this is the home of two deposed Uganda's presidents: Obote and General Tito Okello Lutwa. What is of interest to note is that the latter headed the second military coup against Obote's government in 1985. This geo-political domain is the main base of UPC. This largely explains why the most vigilant members within the leadership who have been daring the NRM hail from the same region.

Second, the internal party crisis has bedevilled these two old political parties. There is a general tendency in Ugandan politics to equate the leadership with the party. Whatever any person in the leadership says is assumed to be the decision of the party. Another strange thing is the persistency of confusing the ruling party or movement with the government and the state. Their continuous failure to distinguish conceptually, practically and theoretically the differences between the party – both the membership and leadership – from the government and the difference between the government and the state has continued to solidify the confusion amongst the general population that the ruling party/movement is at the same time the government and the state. Riding on this conceptual and theoretical confusion and errors, the ruling parties/movements go ahead to claim to be the conscience of the nation-state. In so doing, they are able to make claims that they represent the interests of all the population. The main problem stems from the total absence of political work among the electorate. There is total lack of democracy within these parties and movements. There is absence of party work, no ideological work, no mass meetings and mobilisation programmes. The parties lack cadreship and programmes. They lack organisational structures in the countryside and among the working population. Kigezi gives a good example.

The parties in Kigezi do not have offices, staff and party cadres in a region composed of over one million people. There is total absence

of ideological clarity and commitment to the party. This applies to all these parties and movements. This has been a common feature of these parties since their formation. It is this that explains the disappearance of the party as soon as the government is overthrown through a military coup d'état. It should also be noted that there has not been any government in Uganda that has handed over power to another government through peaceful succession. The leadership normally clings to power until when its government is overthrown militarily.

Third, these parties and movements lack democracy internally. There is lack of change of leadership and the leadership runs the party in a despotic and authoritarian manner, in contravention of the party's constitution and claims. These parties and movements are ruled as personal estates. The leaderships utilise the parties' resources as they wish. The leaderships become surrogates for the parties. There is no body or organ to hold them accountable. The membership is not consulted on anything. It remains outside politics until election time or when the party leadership is embroiled with internal power struggles or when it is struggling with the leadership of another party. It is in such circumstances that the leadership returns to the people to solicit their support.

All this is well demonstrated by the UPC. This party was formed in 1956 and Obote was elected as its first party president. Uganda got independence on October 9, 1962 with Obote as the Prime Minister. The Obote faction within the UPC used the army in 1966 to smash the Buganda kingdom, forcing the Kabaka [King] of Buganda to flee into exile in Britain. Obote then abolished the 1962 Lancaster Constitution and introduced a different one in 1967. Among other things, he abolished the monarchical institutions and usurped the presidential powers, which had been vested in the Kabaka of Buganda. Obote's government was overthrown on January 25, 1971 by the military under Idi Amin, with the central organization and command of the British and Israelite officers. Obote went into exile in Tanzania till 1980. Obote then came to power again in 1980 [known as Obote II] and he ruled up to 1985 when his government was overthrown through a military coup. He this time fled past Tanzania to Zambia, where he is still living in exile. What should be noted is that he is still the party president. At no point in time did he ever contemplate to relinquish the party presidency. There have not been any serious party elections for

the party leadership since when he became the party president forty-six years ago. He has led the party and conducted the party business from exile for a total of twenty-seven years. It is not surprising that this party split a few years ago and has the potential for more splits.

Another strange thing is the aggrandizing of power by the top leaders. It is highly questionable whether it is possible for a person with different state duties as president can have sufficient time to lead his/her party and build it into a strong one. It also poses a question on the efficiency of such a party, and how critical it can be for internal criticisms on the functioning of the leadership and how to replace certain non-functioning party members, which at times may include the party president himself/herself. Another important question is on whether the president of the party wants a strong party that will undercut his political power or even remove him from office. All these reflect some of the root causes of Uganda's political crisis. The trend of politics in Uganda is for the leadership to usurp the powers and functions of their political parties and become the surrogates of the parties. This is evident in all the history of all the parties and movements in Uganda.

While ruling the party from exile, those manning the party at the UPC headquarters have been in Kampala, dominated by those members from Obote's region. This has tended towards regionalising UPC. This has had an unintended consequence of alienating the membership not hailing from the north. They are those who have been shifting loyalty to the other parties. Another factor that has been working negatively against the UPC party has been the atrocities committed by the post-colonial army. The use of the army in repressive actions from 1966 have continuously undermined the party and isolated it from the masses. This needs explanation. The army in Uganda was dominated by soldiers recruited mainly from the northern Uganda right from colonialism up to 1986. Obote hailed from the same region. Once in power, he accentuated this regional dominance in the security and intelligence organs and in politics. This continued during the Amin's dictatorship, Obote II and Tito Okello's military Junta in 1985. The defeat of this Military Junta on January 26, 1986 by the National Resistance Army (NRA) marked a major shift of the military and political power from the north to the south. The NRA was a guerrilla

army, which was predominantly constituted by the combatants recruited from the southern and western Uganda.

While the DP leadership tried to exploit the religious factor during the 1996 presidential elections and maintained appeals for those sentiments, the UPC leadership failed to examine the consequences of those appeals on the electorate. It disregarded them and tended to underestimate the political judgment and capabilities of the electorate. What came out from the election results was that the electorate had defied the party leadership's directives and elected Museveni. This reflected how the leadership was not in control of the membership. Even then, it must have been clear to these parties that the elections were not in their favour.

The parliamentary elections that followed these presidential elections did not display the popular enthusiasm that characterized the latter. They did not conform to the earlier pattern exhibited during the presidential elections. Many people did not care as to who actually went to parliament. Thus, while the presidential elections had exhibited a nationalist character, the parliamentary elections demonstrated new traits of lack of interest in politics, a return to religio-conflictual politics and commercialisation of votes.

In the parliamentary elections, the sitting MPs and other NRM candidates were favoured as the whole election process was carried out in the movement form of politics. Every intending candidate had to stand on his/her individual merit. Though the political parties were not legally banned, their activities remained outlawed. The NRM had frozen these parties into a disadvantaged locus where they could not operate freely and openly. The leadership of these parties broke these political and legal barriers and used every available space to issue statements supposedly to their membership. This was also done on different occasions such as burials, weddings and in the political rallies. The fact is that these party declarations were directed to the outside world to make claims of the mass opposition to the NRM. They were also making accusations to the NRM of depriving them of their right to political organisation and participation. They hoped that the international community would come in with punitive measures against the NRM. Internally, they were reminding the NRM of their existence as a political force.

The sitting candidates found it beneficial to exploit the popularity of Museveni. They adopted the presidential campaign slogan of: "No Change! No Change! Why Change?" The opposition candidates had to try hard and neutralise this by coining slogans like: "No Chance! No Chance! Why Chance?" Thus emerged the "No Change! - No Chance!" politics in Uganda. By end of this electoral process, most of the "No Change!" politicians had been returned to parliament. It is this background which sheds light on the politics of Kigezi since 1996.

Reconstruction of Conflictual Politics in Kabale Municipality

Whereas the population in Kigezi was unanimously united on the candidature of Museveni for presidency, religio-conflictual politics came to the centrestage in the subsequent parliamentary elections. These election campaigns became characterised by religio-conflictual politics. The contending candidates were Dr. Ruhakana-Rugunda and Sarapio Rukundo. Ruhakana-Rugunda, locally known as Ndugu [brother] was the sitting MP for Kabale Municipality. He was a founder member of the NRM and one of its pillars. He was also a strong NRM cadre and a Minister. On the other hand, Sarapio Rukundo was emerging from the Public Service and he had not yet established himself in politics. He was an accountant in the National Housing and a businessman. He joined politics when Bob Kitariko vacated the political race. He had suffered humiliating defeats in elections against Ruhakana Rugunda. Kitariko was Secretary General of the DP in Uganda. Kitariko's political crisis seems to have stemmed from his secret trip to Kigali in November 1993 during the Rwanda war. The press reported that Kitariko and Habyarimana had discussed the NRM government's support for the RPF, and the Rwandans' registration to vote for the NRM in the ongoing constitution election exercise. The press went on to disclose that Kitariko therefore asked for Rwanda's support so that they defeat the NRM in the CA elections. The revelations by the press of his secret meetings with Habyarimana seem to have undermined Kitariko's credibility and they contributed to his humiliating defeat. The NRM then seized this opportunity to offer him a job in the Election Commission. These developments forced him to vacate the political race for Kabale Municipality constituency. It was this empty political space that Rukundo came to occupy. It did not have

a reliable political base that Kitariko had created and which Rukundo was coming to inherit and expand.

It is important to note that the politics in Kabale Municipality led to a resurrection of religio-conflictual politics. Such recourse was inevitable for any new entrant in the political arena that was controlled by a strong NRM candidate. To encroach on such political space and draw away part of the electorate or even get one's candidature to be accepted by the electorate required any new entrant to anchor himself or herself in one of the already constructed platforms. Another option would be to espouse a radical form of politics. The possible political models in the agrarian Kigezi included religion, communalism and revolutionary politics. There were no workers' organisations or producers' co-operatives since there were no serious economic activities and industries in the area. Religion became the readily available option in this case. It was this religion that helped the incoming candidate to edge in and start opposition politics, and try to erode the political base of the NRM.

The sitting MPs had a broad political base. This included the NRM supporters and sympathisers, the youth, women, relatives, those who were inspired by the candidate's personality, education and articulateness and those who did not want a return to conflictual religious politics of the 1950s and the early 1960s⁴. There were also others who saw the NRM candidate in terms of ministerial material for Kigezi. This was mainly based on education and long-established association with Museveni. That section of the electorate hoped that this would help them to get their share of the national resources from the NRM government. This view tended to cover the majority of the electorate in Kigezi and many parts of Uganda⁵. Then, there was a section of the electorate who had elected Museveni and felt that they had to give him a strong team of "his people" to work with for *entunguka* [development]. After all, Museveni had made pledges to the electorate and the people knew that these pledges could be fulfilled if Museveni had his group of people. Then, there were socially vulnerable groups like the sex workers and the riffraff who wanted to elect a person who could guarantee their security in the Municipality. The import of the success of the RPF in the Rwanda war was not lost on the people of Kigezi.

Despite the bitter consequences of that war, it had raised the peasants' rating of the NRM government. It was this whole political domain that the new entrant had to penetrate and contest for power. The question is how far the religious factor could erode such a constituency and defeat the NRM candidate within such a short period of time that was given for political work before elections. Another important problem was that the incoming candidate did not present an alternative political program to the NRM politics. It is this background which largely explains why these elections took religious overtones and transformed it into the most highly contested constituency in the country.

The ensuing election campaigns became highly charged. While the supporters of Dr. Ruhakana-Rugunda declared "Rugunda, No Change! Ndugu⁶, No Change!" the opposition coined a different slogan: "*Rugunda Kyuka, Rukundo Ayenke!*" [Rugunda be weaned so that Rukundo starts suckling.] These campaigns ended and the election results were the first to be announced in the country, with Rugunda having won them. Rukundo refused to accept these results and he petitioned the High Court, challenging the election results. The appeal was finally thrown out.

The politics of petitions against election results needs to be understood. Whereas some petitions may be expressing actual grievances against certain malpractice, many politicians contest the election results for political reasons. It becomes a way of informing the electorate that they are still around, interested in the next elections. As the petitions go on for years, the electorate is constantly reminded of his/her intentions.

The opposition and the press failed to realise that the NRM's multi-religious form of politics had diluted the religious factor in Kigezi. Having vocal supporters behind a candidate cannot reflect the whole truth. Facts show that many of those who attended rallies were not necessarily supporters but *abashungi* [the mockers]. Many people attended the rallies but they were not registered voters or they had registered in their home areas. These included many of the *boda boda* (bicycle) operators in Kabale Municipality. It needs to be noted that being an agrarian economy, most people travel to the urban areas in the morning and return to their homes in the evening. Such people swell

the rally attendants but they vote from their areas. Some people would come to partake of whatever the candidate would distribute to the supporters. The agrarian crisis, poverty, neo-colonial politics and commodity production have eroded the direct truth of the people of Kigezi. The people from Kigezi were known for speaking direct truth locally known as *kugambiraho*. The opposition and the press ignored this and maintained a persistent error of counting the number of people in a religion and those who promised to vote for the candidate. This had come out clearly earlier in the presidential elections where in some instances even the candidate's polling representatives refused to vote for them and the candidate came out with zero votes. In the case of Kabale Municipality elections, they failed to contrast these with the voters who actually cast the vote for the candidate. In fact, most of the electorate cannot reveal the candidate whom they voted for even after the elections. The mockers [abashungi] and the double-dealers or eaters [abari] also give misleading information about their voting. That is why journalists do not attempt exit polls. It would be a futile exercise.

Secondly, there was an important political equation of fielding candidates in these constituencies among the NRM candidates. In this political alignment, the main NRM candidates for the Kabale Women Representative and the one for Rubanda East were Catholics⁷. These had a strong support in Kabale Municipality. These two joined forces with Ruhakana-Rugunda and they carried out their political work as a team and won the elections. All these militated against the dominance of the religious factor. Another important factor worth noting relates to the academic qualifications of the individual candidates. Kigezi people value education, despite its being cheapened by the Amin regime. The candidates of the NRM had sound academic qualifications⁸. This factor also contributed in the decisive choice of the candidate. What the results came to reveal was that both the opposition and the press in Uganda exaggerated the religious factor in Kabale politics. After the opposition had constructed it, the press picked it and overplayed it. The press took advantage of its privileged position to blow up the religious factor. Part of the press was doing it to hit back at the NRM and settle old scores while another section was promoting its political party interests. It should be noted that the press and the opposition were very successful in bringing back religion at the centre-stage of Kigezi politics. This however did not recede but it became a crucial factor in the subsequent LC elections, and the LC V functioning.

The Rise of Tweriire⁹ Politics from Twariire¹⁰ Politics

What came out from the March 1996 presidential elections and the subsequent elections to parliament and LCs was that the electorate in Uganda valued only the presidential elections. As soon as the presidential elections ended, the electorate in Uganda lost interest in the subsequent elections. The only differences were the elections in the Kabale Municipality. This reflected how people value the presidency. Faced with this disinterest, it became the duty of the candidates to motivate the electorate to go and vote for them.

The electorate becomes pleased when there are many candidates competing in their constituencies in the movement type of politics. The broadening of the candidates is a result of the NRM's no-party movement politics. Its purported object was to eliminate factional and divisive party politics that had characterised Uganda's politics since the 1950s. What was hidden from the public was the fact that the NRM candidates did not have any platform where they would ably compete if the NRM allowed open multiparty politics. The end result would have been that the NRM candidates might be defeated in any election in which parties were allowed to put up candidates. This was part of the process through which the NRM was routinising itself as a party. It was no longer a subject of struggle but was in power. It had become the object of new movements. The incontestable fact however is that opening up the country to elections under political parties at that historical moment would have thrown the country into chaos. The political parties in Uganda were still ruled by the discredited, old leadership. This is well demonstrated by the fact that UPC is still under the firm hand of its first party president. He has been its party president, forty-seven years since he became its president. He is currently running the party affairs from exile, in Zambia. In this movement form of politics, any number of candidates can stand and people are supposed to elect them on the basis of individual merit of the candidates. Though it sounds good, promising to eliminate conflictual politics based on the old political parties, religions, ethnicity and regionalism and ensure political sanity, the practice has proved to be the reverse. This form of politics has turned elections into the market season, with voters selling their votes to the candidates for essential goods and liquor. It is important to trace the history of this process and the forces that continue to fuel it.

Campaigns for any form of political elections have been transformed into occasions for the electorate to receive material inducements from the standing candidates. This is a continuation of the UPC politics of *Twariire* which literary means "we have eaten" or "we are already eating." Every word came to mean literally what it said. This had been introduced in the second UPC rule of 1980-1985. This was the period after the fall of the Amin regime. The UPC politicians took advantage of the serious shortage of commodities to introduce the politics of essential commodities. In this form of politics, only those who pledged loyalty to the UPC could receive the essential commodities and water. These commodities were not free but were being sold. Despite this, those not belonging to the UPC were denied these commodities. This was well articulated in the UPC party song *Nyamurunga*¹¹.

Waaba nooyenda akonyo!
 Nyamurunga!
 Nookaashanga omu Congress,

 Nyamurunga!
 Orikwenda Akonyo k'okunyunya!

 Nyamurunga!
 Naakaashanga omu Congress!
 Nyamurunga!

If you want salt,
 Nyamurunga!
 You will get it from
 Congress,
 Nyamurunga!
 Whoever wants salt to
 chew,
 Nyamurunga!
 Will find it in Congress,
 Nyamurunga!

The message was clear that anyone who did not join the UPC would not get the essential goods. Gradually, this politics took root in the country and it came to be adopted. These commodities were the cheapest items. Yet, they are effective in depriving the electorate of their voting power. Another explanation is that the peasants know that the politicians are using them to climb up to power to eat [*kurya*]. As such, they try to wrest whatever they can from the candidates before the elections take place. This has changed the politics from *twariire* to *tweriire* [we had better also eat]. In other words, whereas the politicians are already eating, the electorate also would like to eat – *tweriire*. Thus, election time becomes a time of great activity, great expectation and relief to the majority of the poor peasants. They are sure that commodities and alcohol will trickle in and the electorate will catch them [*kukwata*]. This has led many people to play the politics of

uplicity and manoeuvrability. They collect these goods from the different candidates without any intentions of voting for any.

The Tweriire Politics of "No Salt! No Soap! No Booze! No Vote! Why Vote?"

To understand this politics of essential commodities one needs to examine the agrarian politics at two levels: the elections for the district and the parliamentary elections. First, the Legislative Council [LegCo] elections in 1957 and the subsequent parliamentary form of democracy did not deliver tangible things to the peasants as promised. The candidates had made wonderful promises to save the masses from ignorance, poverty and disease. The people elected them on these promises but nothing came. They came with more empty promises at the end of their tenure in parliament. The masses came to define politics as a game of lies, which they termed *pokopoko* or *poropaganda* [lies or deceits]. These empty promises combined with other factors to disinterest the peasants from active politics. The other factors included the continuous conflictual politics anchored in religion, ethnicity, intra-party struggles and authoritarianism. This soon changed to fear during the military dictatorship under Idi Amin. By the time this military regime fell, a new situation had been created where the people were disgusted with politics. They had finally internalised Obote's warning to the opposition that politics was a dirty game. They had lost interest in the whole exercise and did not care about who came to power. Amin's brutal killings and detentions without trial had taught them how people died for the mistakes made by politicians, who would be living comfortably in exile. Certain economic factors also contributed to this. Amin's dictatorship, economic policies and state terror had combined to destroy the economy to the extent that there was shortage of everything including salt, soap, paraffin and hoes. These were the most crucial items that the peasants required. All these factors worked in favour of the politicians. They had only to exploit these conditions to get the peasants' votes cheaply. The politicians began to identify the things that the electorate required most. In their search, they zeroed on the basic necessities for households for women and alcohol.

These peasants had been under dictatorial exploitative forces since the colonial invasion, mainly under the direct fused, despotic power of the chiefs. They had been subjected to bribery, exploitation

and fines at various levels and times. The different governments have been curtailing their freedom of speech and capacity to question their malpractices. The people in many cases were electing the rich people to the LCs. There is no accountability to the electorate. These instead expand the scope of corruption, bribery, embezzlement, extortion and requisition of public property.

How do the candidates motivate the electorate to vote? The consequences of the agrarian crisis, massive unemployment, destitution, lack of means of livelihood and money for alcohol consumption have increasingly debased and self-devalued the peasants' morality and self respect. This is demonstrated by how the politicians have transformed them into sellers of votes for a kilo of salt and a tablet of soap. Thus, election time becomes the time for *okukwata omwonyo n'esabundi* [catching salt and soap]. This gives a picture as if these are free things falling and have to be caught urgently. The illegality and immorality of this transaction is demonstrated by its clandestine nature. The local agents of these candidates handle the distribution of these goods late in the evenings to those who pledge to vote for the supplier. These two items are aimed at the votes of women. Even the politicians plan strategies of when and how to supply them. Thus, the politicians are able to quantify the electorate's votes in terms of essential commodities. The agents are also given sufficient money to ensure that those who drink alcohol and others are catered for. Election time becomes a time of activity for *twerire* and *tenywere*. [We had better eat and drink or we too should eat and drink]. The peasants have no time to listen to *pokopoko* and *poropaganda*. This demonstrates the extent to which the population has lost faith and interest in post-colonial politics. All these demonstrate how the elections have been reduced to the material necessities of the peasants of "No Salt! No Soap! No Booze! No Vote!" This reflects the level to which elections have become a game of cheap selling of votes. This is a market relationship where the democratic rights of the electorate are transformed into material things. This has a lot of negative implications.

First, the contesting candidates do not have any concern for the agrarian population and the problems confronting them. It is this that explains why candidates emerge from the city during election time and promise to represent the people while they have no slight idea of what

problems are confronting these people and how they propose to resolve them. The question is how they can represent people whose problems they do not know? The candidates do not prepare programs based on the agrarian crisis in Kigezi. They do not have any suggestions of how they propose to address them, how they propose to raise resources to implement these solutions. They do not have proposals on the role of the population in implementing these programmes and of how to tackle the rampant social problems in society. On their part, the electorate has lost confidence in the politicians and they have no interest in what they say. It is this that largely explains why they do not demand any programs from all the candidates for scrutiny to reject or readjust them. Such a position would be advanced agrarian politics where people would not be divided on the individualised needs but they would be more united in selecting the candidate with better solutions to the agrarian crisis. To what extent can people continue to vote for politicians who do not present to them what they propose to represent them with? Without knowing all that, the politicians will continue to go to represent themselves. This trend needs to be reversed so that elections cease being occasions for the politicians to empower themselves by disempowering the electorate by buying their votes, using other constructs like religion, lineage, regionalism or gender. One of the solutions is for the agrarian population to be taught how to begin valuing their voting power. There is need for various groups and organisations to begin educating them on the power of the vote and the implications of selling their mandate for salt, soap and/or alcohol.

This form of elections, maintaining the sitting MPs in the house or replacing them with the new ones, would not produce any tangible solutions to the agrarian crisis. Both the sides of "No Change!" and the other one of "No Chance!" were saying the truth. The irony was that there could not be any change in their system and problems without radical changes in the political system. To achieve this required radical pro-people political programs and manifesto, which would be widely discussed by all the agrarian population and the candidates so that the electorate would choose the right candidates on the basis of presented programs. These would be the programs on which the electorate would vote and on which they would hold their elected representatives accountable. Thus, the peasants do not have any basis to hold the politicians accountable or even blame them. They do not have any moral ground to demand programmes since the politicians did not get

the votes freely but bought them. This was being echoed by the opposition's slogan of no chance. The electorate did not have any chance. They were the losers. The slogans in these elections were very demonstrative of the peasants' new notions of politics. There was total absence of demands for issues like political progress, agrarian reforms, land reforms, social services, industrialization and employment opportunities for agricultural inputs, subsidies, credit facilities, rural electrification and other crucial factors for the survival, well-being and development of the agrarian population. Instead, they carried their candidates' banners with slogans, morale boosting and mobilising political songs that were coined in religious songs and phrases. This is well demonstrated by the slogan of the opposition in Kabale Municipality, which was calling that *Rugunda Kyuka, Rukundo Ayonke!* [Rugunda to be weaned in order to give chance to Rukundo to begin breast-feeding].

It is all this that explains why no politicians in Kigezi have taken the agrarian crisis in Kigezi seriously and delved into ways of resolving it. There is no politician or candidate who has ever presented any serious political agenda to the people on which the people would elect him/her and hold him/her accountable. This is demonstrated by the LC elections in the post decentralisation era. People were elected to leadership in the district without any programmes that they intended to implement and resolve the agrarian crisis. While they may be interested in taking over power, they may not be knowing the problems that they are meant to address and their alternative solutions. Thus, they take over from where their predecessors stopped and the agrarian crisis continues to worsen.

This explains why the politicians are at a loss when the agrarian crisis worsens. Faced with the worsening agrarian crisis, the politicians have no solutions in place but to report to parliament, appeal to the government and to the charity organisations and foreign bodies for assistance for the suffering masses. This is well demonstrated by the famine of September 1997 in the districts of Kabale and Kisoro. Notwithstanding its long-term socio-economic and political causes, its immediate causes included prolonged droughts, which were followed by hailstorms and floods. The MPs from these areas and the LC V Council did not study these disasters and their likely consequences on the agrarian economy. Had they done so, they would have come up

with solutions in time. Instead, they became jittery about the problem when people were already starving. They had no solution in place other than going to make it known to parliament and to the public through press¹². This also raises the question of disaster preparedness for Kigezi and for the whole country. There are no measures and resources in place for any such eventualities. As a result, both the victims and the leaders are at a loss when such disasters continue to occur.

Looking at the trend of the politics in Kigezi of salt, soap, booze and religion, there appears to be little chance for the politicians to turn their focus on the issues that are confronting the peasants, principal among which is the raging agrarian crisis. The return of this area to sharp religio-conflictual politics complicates any such possibilities even more. The LC elections that followed the parliamentary elections and the subsequent LC politics demonstrate this very clearly. This is currently undermining the functioning of the Kabale District Council. What needs to be noted however is that the cause of the current conflict in the Council is over resources. Religion came in as a factor when one section of the council stopped the other section from encroachment of public resources. Thus, the issue is larger than religion per se. Yet, it has taken a religious expression and it becomes very hard to separate the two. Any social or political conflict that takes on a religious flavour tends to involve more people from the society involved and even beyond. All these issues affect the politics at the local level and the national level.

Conclusion

Poverty, the consequence and one of the main indicators of the agrarian crisis, has forced the peasants to conditions of exchanging their democratic and political rights for a tablet of soap, a kilogram of salt or a few bottles of local brew - normally *omuramba*¹³, *tonjo*¹⁴ or the potent *crude waragi*¹⁵. This ridicules and cheapens the elections because it becomes an occasion for commoditisation of votes to the competing candidates in the constituency. This transaction also ridicules those people who surrender their voting power to the politicians. The problem has become so complex that even those politicians who at one time were educating the electorate to receive those goods but vote for "the right candidates" had to succumb and join the vote-buying racket. This commoditisation of votes takes place

before the voting day and away from the polling station. The consequence of this commercialisation of votes results in polling stations being filled up with disinterested debtors paying political debts. That explains why they lack interest in the election results. This marks the defeat of democracy in the agrarian setting. The question is how this problem can be addressed.

There is need to identify the basic needs of the agrarian population and find ways of availing them cheaply and locally. Soap, salt and paraffin are commodities within reach of any state. What is lacking is the political will. The state has to solve this issue. At the same time, the Uganda population has to be taught about their voting powers, obligations and responsibilities. There has to emerge a new political culture which demands performance and accountability based on pro-people programmes. The people have to keep track of the politicians' performance in their different places, and assess their conduct in public business. It is through this that the population will be freed from the grip of preying politicians. This is a task for different parties including committed politicians, organic intellectuals, civic leaders, religious leaders, agrarian cadres and the population as a whole. Others include the print media producing materials in simple local languages, the electronic media, especially the radio. They have a big role to play in trying to combat this problem by decrying it while educating the people of these issues, their political rights and what should be done. Other fora include debates in the agrarian setting, discussions, drama and films in the local languages, and integrating it in the academic programmes at all levels of education in the country.

It is through a variety of such methods that the democratic rights of the peasants and their respect for democracy can be re-established. This is likely to have a positive impact on the electorate and change their attitude towards politics. Such corrective measures would make them shift to new politics of electing those with pro-peasant programmes, those who have knowledge of the peasants' problems and who have formulated concrete proposals of how they intend to resolve them. They would enable the peasants to examine these proposals in detail and choose the most suitable ones for resolving their agrarian crisis. This would in the process enable them to reflect on their class interests while choosing their representatives to the different fora, right from presidency, parliament to LCs.

Notes and References

1. *Twariire* literary means "we have already eaten" or "we are eating".
2. *Tweriire* literary means "we better eat" or "we had better eat". Both these concepts gained currency in Uganda's politics from the 1980s to refer to politics of eating or politics of the stomach.
3. On their part, some UPC die-hards were comparing Obote's second coming of 1981-85 with Jesus' second coming. Some have been talking of Obote III, implying his third coming.
4. *The Monitor*, 30 November 1993.
5. This was not a misplaced hope. In the current NRM government, Kigezi has six ministers. The seventh was censured by Parliament last year, 1998. Three of these are from Kabale District, two are from Rukungiri District and one is from Kisoro District. Even if the Ministers fail to bring developmental projects to their areas, still, the peasants become somehow contented that they too have produced a minister for the country. It is this, which partly explains why the peasants tend to despise those who come accusing the politicians of being corrupt.
6. Ndugu is Dr. Ruhakana-Rugunda's favourite political nickname. It is a Swahili word for "brother." He addresses every male as Ndugu and this term fits well in the local language – Rukiga or Runyakitara.
7. The three candidates were doctors. They all won the elections and two of them were immediately appointed ministers to key ministries. Dr. Ruhakana-Rugunda became Minister in charge of Presidential Affairs while Dr. Abel Rwendeire became Minister of State for Higher Education in Uganda.
8. Four of the six ministers from Kigezi were formerly lecturing at Makerere University, one of whom, is a professor in Veterinary Medicine. The fifth minister is a specialist doctor in Paediatrics.
9. *Tweriire* means "We better eat" or "we had better eat." It is used here to refer to the response of the population to the politics of eating. This reflects the acceptance of the politics of eating by the population.
10. *Twariire* means that "we have already eaten" or "we are eating." This was coined by the UPC to declare that they were winning elections. Gradually, the usage changed when they began to loot the public resources. It came to mean that the politicians were eating public resources.
11. *Nyamurunga* was a song extracted from a Rukiga folk story, in which the most beautiful girl, *Nyamurunga*, was lured into marriage by a man who had transformed himself into the most colourful, beautiful bird. The song initially composed by a Kabale UPC choir soon became the UPC song in the country. Obote soon became known as *Nyamurunga*. This UPC party song clearly said that whoever wanted salt for chewing had to join the UPC. Salt is the cheapest item, though very essential for life.
12. The MP of Bufumbira and the Kabale Women Representative raised the matter to the parliamentary Committee and the press. The LC V Chairman also raised the same problems to the press. *The New Vision*, June 6, 1997.
13. *Omuramba* is local brew from sorghum.

14. *tonto* is alcohol brewed from bananas.
15. *Waragi* is a potent liquor distilled from *tonto* or *omuramba*.