

## Working Paper No. 2

### **Rethinking the Public and Private a Time of Transition: Conflict in Jinja District as a Microcosm of Change in Uganda**

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# **Rethinking the Public and Private a Time of Transition: Conflict in Jinja District as a Microcosm of Change in Uganda**

Aili Mari Tripp

## **Introduction**

It has become increasingly important in examining local politics in Africa and elsewhere to be able to explain the role of indigenous leaders, clan politics, women's groups and other non-formal and local actors and institutions that influence governance often in unanticipated ways. The local political terrain, but also national politics, is influenced by many forces that are not accounted for in formal political structures. Yet scholars are often ill equipped to incorporate these actors into their analyses to show their connections to formal political processes and institutions. Political scientists, for example, seem to focus on formal governance structures. When informal institutions are deemed to matter, they are treated as though they are distinct and separate from formal institutions. In scholarship on Africa, for example, one finds them isolated in studies of "traditional authorities." For the most part they are considered the domain of anthropologists rather than of political scientists, relics of the past that are about to be swept away by the tides of modernization and globalization.

Policy makers, foreign donors, and multilateral organizations likewise do not sufficiently account for these non-formal actors in their interventions for reasons similar to those of scholars. However, by ignoring or underestimating their influence and by isolating these forces from actors with whom they are more familiar, policymakers oversimplify the terrain of collective action, missing important opportunities and engaging societal actors selectively, in ways that may lead to serious omissions and unanticipated obstacles.

This paper attempts to map a variety of publics that influence local development by looking at the main conflicts and types of conflicts arising in Jinja District (Busoga) between 1990 and 2005. Although the examples draw from this

one part of Uganda and many of the references in the paper are to African politics, the implications of this study reach well beyond the continent.

Some of the conflicts discussed in the paper are local but reflect national trends and changes. Others are the result of changes at the national level. They involve a wide variety of actors, which in some contexts would be considered "private" and in other contexts "public." The chapter looks at a wide variety of conflicts over the building of a dam, the use of a forest, the creation of a regional tier of combined districts, the future of the Busoga kingdom, whether political organizations or parties can freely meet, who should disburse tenders, the fate of cooperatives, the abolition of Parent Teacher Associations, corruption and the church, and finally, women's right to create health clinics in the face of village council opposition. The range of individuals involved range from spirit mediums, to chiefs, sugar-cane outgrowers, informal women's drama groups, Local Government councilors, bishops, parliamentarians, presidents, foreign donors, and many other publics, which operate simultaneously in private spheres. The paper shows why the public and the private are active in all these examples by mapping out where the actors and institutions are situated in relation to one another.

Many studies of local level politics are limited because they examine only a small fraction of political life. This paper is an attempt to develop a framework with which to analyze a multiplicity of public arenas by looking at the way in which public and private spheres are nested in one another and influence one another. It is premised on the idea that the boundaries between the public and the private overlap and are blurred.

For scholars of African politics and comparative politics more generally, it has become especially important to understand the relationship between the various public and private spheres because so often the formal political arenas receive more attention than the informal political arenas, be they monarchies, chieftancies, clans or informal associations. Yet the "private" publics are every

bit as important, but much less visible and harder to study. Even with democratization and political liberalization, clan-based or “traditional” authorities and institutions have continued to play an important role and in some cases they have become even more of a presence.<sup>1</sup>

In the context of the Nigerian Igbo dual sex governance system, Nkiru Nzegwu challenges the limitations of international and domestic development agencies that simply can not fit many indigenous institutions into their conceptual framework. It seems that part of the difficulty is the way in which these institutions defy “Western” or liberal understandings of the public-private split.

For example, Nzegwu explains that there has been a revival of the dual sex governance structures in Igbo as well as other West African societies. A dual sex political system is one in which representatives of each gender governs their own members through a Council. In much of former Eastern Nigeria most communities have a broad-based Women's Governing Council that has sole jurisdiction over wide ranging political, economic, and cultural affairs of women, from market issues, to relations with men, and to morality. The public and private spheres are thoroughly blended. These organizations, according to Nzegwu, are autonomous of the state. Their decisions are binding regardless of social status, education, or income level. Moreover, the councils represent women living as far as Lagos, Kano, or New York. Their leaders service a wide

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<sup>1</sup> Engelbert, Pierre. “Back to the Future? Resurgent Indigenous Structures and the Reconfiguration of Power in Africa,” In Olufemi Vaughan (ed). *Indigenous Structures and Governance in Africa*. 2003; J. Williams, Michael “Leading from behind: democratic consolidation and the chieftaincy in South Africa,” *J. of Modern African Studies*, 42, 1 (2004), pp. 113–136; Oomen, Barbara 2000. *Tradition on the move: Chiefs, democracy, and change in rural South Africa*. Leiden: Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa; Bank, Leslie and Roger Southall 1996. ‘Traditional Leaders in South Africa's New Democracy’, *Journal of Legal Pluralism* 37-38: 407-31. Karlstrom, Mikael 1996. ‘Imagining Democracy: Political Culture and Democratization in Buganda’, *Africa* 60: 485-505; Indiana Press University; Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal, E. Adriaan B 1996. ‘States and Chiefs: Are Chiefs Mere Puppets?’ *Journal of Legal Pluralism* 37-38: 39-78; Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal, E. Adriaan B. and R. van Dijk, eds. 1999. *African Chieftaincy in a New Socio-Political Landscape*. Leiden, The Netherlands: African Studies Centre.

range of associations and therefore were multifaceted in their approach, since they were concerned with social, cultural, religious, economic and political issues simultaneously (Nzegwu 1995).

The Igbo Women's Councils, for example, intervene in matters that concern the market, ensure moral behavior, sanction men who violate women's rights in the community, govern multiple smaller organizations, and lobby for women's interests at the national level. Nevertheless, according to Nkiru Nzegwu, organizations like these have been consistently overlooked and dismissed by development agencies because of preconceived notions of women's roles, a bias in favor of elevating literate people in leadership roles, and the misguided notion that men are the only experts when it comes to water supply systems, food production, mechanized farming, and business investment.

There is also an important gender dimension to the public-private debates. If one only narrowly looks at formal governance institutions one fails to appreciate the ways in which half the population, women, engage various publics and the various public spaces in which women are key actors. Local women's organizations, for example, may be important forces to contend with at the local level but may fall off the radar when it comes to formal engagement of the political process due to historical marginalization of women from this arena. Diamond and Harstock (1981, 720) have argued that taking women's lives seriously would have major consequences for our understanding of what is political and the relationship between public and private would be seen as much more interconnected. As Kathleen Jones (1985, 25) puts it:

Women's access to formal political power is often circumscribed both institutionally and culturally, pushing them to the margins of formal politics. Yet the way that politics is studied often ignores the ways in which women influence, challenge and engage politics because the focus is only on a small number of political institutions.

Women, like many other political actors, are made invisible by the scholarly lens.

Re-defining our concepts of politics, agency, and community necessarily challenges the assumed bifurcation of the public and the private into two radically isolated realms.

Michael Schatzberg asks "Where does state end and civil society begin?" (Schatzberg 1988, 4) in arguing that the boundaries are blurred. The model developed in this paper allows us to see *how* the two spheres are connected and related, without destroying the analytical power that comes from talking about the two spheres. It assumes that there are many publics and public spaces as well as many private spaces. This paper shows how private spheres are embedded within public spheres and vice versa. It also illustrates why they can not be separated from one another in any polity, regardless of whether they are democratic or authoritarian, and regardless of where authority lies.

Older institutions like the chieftancy in South Africa, clan formations, the Botswanan community council *kgotla*, the parliaments (*lukiko*) of the four kingdoms in Uganda, or the aforementioned women's councils in eastern Nigeria, exist side by side and interact with modern parliaments, local governments, and presidencies. They influence formal authority within the state but are shaped and transformed by it as well. The actors in most of these informal institutions are active within formal institutions either in their individual capacity or through an institutionalized arrangement. They may even gain crucial advantage or exert undue influence as a result of their involvement in an informal institution. Nevertheless many of these informal institutions are situated within the "private" political arena of the clan or within extended *family* politics (See chart). How does one understand these private arenas as public arenas and public arenas as private ones?

The study of social movements and contentious politics examines non-institutionalized forms of mobilization, which may be evident in some of these

publics, but many informal publics are, in fact, very institutionalized, thus the notion of social movement vs. institutionalized politics, although a useful descriptor of many contexts, does not adequately capture the phenomenon of private arenas serving as public arenas and vice versa.

Much of the discipline of political science focuses only on formal political institutions like elections, parties, parliaments, the executive, the judiciary and local government. It is, however, important to account for a full range of political arenas in order to bring into full view a more complete set of political actors and interests. By continuing to ignore the informal institutions, we reify a sharply bifurcated world in which only the formal part of the bifurcation is important. To account for these various political arenas it is necessary to find a way to map the political terrain in a way that allows a broader range of political activities to be incorporated. This has especially important implications for policy makers and development practitioners in seeking to implement policies with broad impacts. Policies that do not account for the totality of actors and interests have the potential to be seriously derailed and misguided.

### **Mapping the Public and Private through Fractals**

To allow for a more complex and nuanced perspective of the political terrain it is useful to draw on the mathematical concept of fractals as a tool with which to understand the political nature of these activities. Susan Gal and Gail Kligman introduced the use of fractals to study the public-private divide in an excellent book, *The Politics of Gender After Socialism* (2000, 41). With fractals, which mixes natural art with geometry, a shape can be repeatedly subdivided into parts, each of which is a smaller copy of the whole nested within a larger shape. Fractals are used in computer modeling of natural structures that do not have simple geometric shapes, like clouds, mountainous landscapes, and coastlines. In observing a coastline from above and from afar one might see it simply as a straight line. But as one draws closer to the coastline one begins to see more of

the contours. With each closer observation the view becomes more detailed. It is still the same coastline, but as one focuses in on a particular section of the coastline it looks different and with each advancing frame, the coastline becomes fractured into smaller and smaller indentations and protrusions.

Fractal distinctions of the public and private split can also be examined close up with continuous and recursive divisions which can be divided repeatedly into the same public private distinction, each nested within the other (see Chart). This allows us to map public activities that are extremely important to people themselves. A whole variety of spheres of public activity become visible rather than treated as an afterthought. The model is useful as a corrective because it forces one to acknowledge the public nature and consequences of private spheres of influence as well as the implications of public agency on the private spheres. This schema allows us to account for and include a wider range of public spaces into discussions of citizenship and politics.

The model shows the multiplicity of public-private relationships and spheres. It also shows why it is impossible to draw hard and fast demarcations between the two spheres because embedded within every public and every private sphere are other publics and private spheres. Such a model helps us think about the relationships between these various public and private spheres and how each constructs the other. It is not just the state that constructs society as is often claimed, it is also society that constructs the state. The family constructs the social sphere and vice versa. Some of these dynamics may be stronger in one direction rather than the other, but this model allows for the dynamics to work in a multidirectional fashion.

The model may also help us understand why at a particular point in history one sphere has greater legitimacy than another: why under former totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe and Soviet Union the family was seen as a refuge from the state; why the clan today is more important than the state in Somalia; or why the Nordic countries are more likely to think of societal

responsibility in terms of state responsibility more so than people in other parts of the world.

Peter Ekeh (1975) argues, for example, that there are two public realms. The "primordial public realm," made up of kinship groups, is considered moral and legitimate. The state constitutes the second "civil public realm," which lacks legitimacy and is characterized by corruption. Goran Hyden echoes this in arguing that the state is corroded by a society that values family and other "primordial" ties over civic obligations. The familial "economy of affection" drains the state of resources through communal ties and leads to corruption, nepotism, tribalism and the primacy of narrow parochial interests (1983, 17).

Legitimacy afforded a particular institution may also vary within a society. In some societies older authorities like chiefs in South Africa are gaining prominence within communities, yet women's activists seeking a rights based solutions to land, inheritance and other such property-related concerns find their reassertion into contemporary politics a retrograde development.

In periods of rapid political change, the borders between the public and private spheres often become contested and fractals help us examine those boundaries and how they are shifting. The boundaries between these relationships are fluid and in constant flux as they seek to shape each other. To be able to push the boundary one way or the other in an institution or in public debate is a sign of enhanced power.

The concept of the public and the private itself remains an abstraction. The public and private are not places, spheres of activity or types of interaction, institutions or practices. As Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (2000, 41) have put it: "Public and private are best understood as a distinction that can be used to characterize, categorize, organize and contrast spaces, institutions, groups, identities, discourses, activities, interactions, relations. Where one draws the line between public and private is generally a political contest."

This paper seeks to map and organize some of the ways in which the distinction manifests itself in the institutional landscape of Jinja district in Uganda within the context of a series of local conflicts some taking place. By looking at conflicts, one can better identify the contested nature of the boundaries between the public and the private. Conflicts also allow one to better identify a wide variety publics to show how they have changed over time or are in the process of being changed. By mapping these various publics the paper shows how the public and private are integrally connected and inseparable because of the ways they are embedded in one another.

### **Jinja: Background**

Jinja district is located in the western part of Busoga, where the majority population (65 percent) is known as Basoga who speak Lusoga. Other ethnic groups in the district include the Baganda (8 percent), Iteso (5 percent), Banyole (4 percent) and Bagisu (3 percent). The Basoga are the third largest ethnic group in Uganda, making up 8.7% of the total population. Jinja district, with a population of 413,937 (2002 census), has the highest population density in Uganda outside of Kampala. It has the fourth largest town in Uganda, Jinja, with a population of 71,213.

Jinja town is also the former industrial capital of Uganda. Although industrial production has virtually collapsed, Jinja still has Owen Falls dam, a brewery, a textile factory, a grain mill, a steel mill, leather and tanning factory, a sawmill and a fisheries industry (Dauda 2004).

The majority of the population are involved in farming, while others engage in trading, and a portion are self-employed or employed. The main cash crops grown are coffee, sugarcane and maize. However, most farmers are engaged in smallholder subsistence farming and animal husbandry, growing staples like cassava, beans, and maize, in addition to fruit and vegetables.

Jinja is governed, as other districts in Uganda, by a hierarchical system of elected local councils that are vehicles for direct grassroots political participation. Up until 2005 when a regional tier was added, local government in Uganda was based on the district as the unit providing leadership to lower local councils (sub-county) and administrative unit councils at the county, parish and village levels. The local councils are corporate bodies having both legislative and executive powers. Administrative unit councils serve as political bodies that advise on planning and implementation of services. They assist in the resolution of disputes, monitor the delivery of services and assist in the maintenance of law, order and security. Local Governments make local policy and regulate the delivery of services. They formulate development plans; receive, raise, and manage and allocate revenue.<sup>2</sup> Central government is responsible for national affairs, service provisioning and policies.

This next section details the main conflicts in Jinja District between 1990 and 2005 that have an impact on the way the public and private spheres are delineated, contested, and changed within the context of broader changes in Uganda.

### **Market Reform**

Uganda has undergone a policy of privatization, economic reform, promotion of private investment and attempts to improve the business environment since the late 1980s. It has sought to remove constraints on investment through commercial law and financial sector reforms and by improving the infrastructure.<sup>3</sup> The effort to improve infrastructure and to encourage greater private sector investment has created new sets of challenges involving competing interests and alternative publics. Two cases are explored

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.molg.go.ug/local\\_govts/local\\_gov\\_system.htm](http://www.molg.go.ug/local_govts/local_gov_system.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development, 30 July 2005, <http://www.finance.go.ug/peap.html>

below: one which mobilized the guardians of Busoga's spirits and another involving local sugar cane growers, which take on public roles in these conflicts. These actors competed against private sector interests, which themselves become a public when confronting the spirit medium in the first case and the household economy in the second.

#### *A New Public: The Guardians of the Bujagali Spirits*

Actors normally associated with a private sphere may become politicized and may take on more public roles under certain circumstances as was the case in the dispute over the building of a dam at Bujagali falls in Jinja. For years the Ministry of Energy had planned to build a 250 mega-watt power plant at Bujagali. It would have destroyed five sets of rapids along a four-mile stretch located six miles from the source of the Nile. The proposed dam immediately drew opposition from Bujagali healers (Abaswezi) and guardians of spirit shrines based at Bujagali falls and of 75 spirits of Busoga. One oracle, Budhagali Nabamba, claims to be the 39<sup>th</sup> official spirit medium of the falls, and has been particularly active in resisting the creation of a dam.

Rafting companies also claim the falls are the best stretch of rafting water in the world. Environmental groups led by the National Association of Professional Environmentalists went on a tour of Europe and the US to lobby against the project together with the Deputy Prime Minister of the Busoga Kingdom. Thus private sector interests and NGOs took on public roles as did the spirit mediums.

As a result of pressure from the healers, environmentalists and from the tourist industry, the parliament rejected the proposed project to be built by Advanced Energy Systems, the world's largest independent energy producer. The American-owned company had won the \$530 million contract in 1994. Parliament rejected the project because they believed the bidding process had not been competitive and the details of the Power Purchase Agreement were

never made public. Moreover, the World Bank suspended funding in 2002 while Uganda's Inspectorate of Government investigated allegations of corruption and bribery. Because of these irregularities, parliament supported an alternate Norwegian Norpak proposal to construct a cheaper, more environmentally-friendly power generating facility at the Karuma Falls. In spite of parliamentary opposition to the dam, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and Minister of Energy and Mineral Development, Ms Syda Bbumba, are going ahead with the project.<sup>4</sup>

The spirit guardians and leaders of the Busoga kingdom became important influences in the fate of the dam together with environmentalists, tourist industry advocates, and parliamentarians. This illustrates how religious and cultural forces that might be considered "private," can in some circumstances act as a public in spite of their private roles in other capacities.

#### *Sugar or Livelihood in Butamira Forest?*

The tension between the interests of market economy and subsistence economy or household economy were evident in a conflict over the cutting down of a forest for commercial purposes in Jinja. As in the previous example, the private sector interests are a public in contrast with the household economy, yet the assertion of household economic interests in this conflict placed them a public role.

Residents of Butamira came into conflict with the Madhvani Group's Kakira Sugar Works over its attempt to take over Butamira Forest, which people rely on for firewood, food, medicine, water and their general livelihood. The residents were supported by environmentalist groups, including Uganda Wildlife Society, Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment and Butamira Forest Association, as well as Makerere University Busoga students' community

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<sup>4</sup> "Bujagali Dam Gets Financiers," *New Vision*, 3 August 2005 Wednesday.

(Abasoga Nseete). The forest reserve is located in Buyengo sub county, Kagoma County in Jinja district.

The conflict had its roots in the 1949 lease of Butamira forest reserve, which the Busoga local government granted Muljibhai Madhvani & Co. Ltd. for 49 years. Madhvani's Kakira Sugar Works used the forest as a source of firewood. When local government was abolished in 1966, the forest became part of the central government forest estate. In 1972 Idi Amin expelled the Asians from Uganda and the Custodian Board took over management of the Asian-run company and inherited the lease. In 1985 the Madhvani family returned to Uganda and repossessed Kakira, continuing to use the forest under the terms of the original lease. Kakira no longer needed the forest for firewood after 1995, when it switched to bagasse (residue of sugar cane crushing) for fuel.

The Madhvani Group had its 49-year lease renewed in 1998 under what parliamentarians considered questionable circumstances. A parliamentary select committee demanded a probe of the lease to Madhvani group, resulting in the firing of the assistant commissioner for forestry and the revocation of the lease.

Meanwhile, Kakira Sugar Works cut down 1,347 hectares of trees in Butamira forest reserve and planted sugar cane. Residents found their livelihoods threatened as the bushbuck and other animals they used to hunt disappeared with the forest. The few remaining animals were on the run, eating people's banana and maize crops. The forest also allowed for the creation of protected wells. Residents feared that the continued felling of trees threatened to dry up the natural springs and water sources.<sup>5</sup> In 2000, the commissioner for forestry allocated to 148 groups and 30 individuals based in Butamira permits to plant trees and crops as a way to restore 700 hectares of trees Kakira had cut for fuel.

Then in November 2001, the Government with the backing of the president and prime minister sought to lease the forest to Kakira Sugar Works to

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<sup>5</sup> "Museveni Trying to Give Butamira to Madhvani," *The Monitor*, 27 November 2001.

expand sugar production and help cut back on Uganda's sugar deficit. The Madhvani group argued that Uganda annually produces 140,000 metric tons of sugar (Kakira produces almost half this amount), while it consumes 200,000 metric tons. This means the country has to import about 60,000 metric tons. The European Union gave Uganda a sugar quota but because it could not meet this quota, Mauritius is now exporting Uganda's quota in addition to its own. Kakira executives felt that the expansion of its production as a result of claiming the forest would result in a \$24 million expansion of production of sugar, the creation of more jobs, increase taxes paid to the government and a reduction in foreign exchange expenditure. Kakira's estate is over 8,700 hectares and is supplemented by cane from over 3,600 out-grower farmers working on 10,000 hectares. It is the largest sugar producer in Uganda. Employing over 10,000 people, the Madhvani Group is one of the largest diversified private-sector groups in East Africa.

Local residents were not persuaded by the arguments regarding the need to increase sugar production in Uganda. They would not accept offers of compensation or of locating alternative forest reserves. Peter Mwandha Ntudu, LC5 councilor for Buyengo Sub County, felt there was little benefit to residents because they were paid so little for working as out-grower farmers. Tempers flared as a 62-year old resident of Butamira said: "I'm not ready for any compensation or alternative forest reserve; I'm ready for a battle. Let the Kakira Sugar Works officials bring lorries to put in our dead bodies." Another local youth commented: "My family and I will carry mattresses and sleep in the forest."<sup>6</sup>

In 2001, the parliamentary committee on Natural Resources also battled government over the forest, with the government accusing the members of

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<sup>6</sup> "Sugar Cane Will Never Grow in Butamira, Vow Residents," *The Monitor*, 5 December 2001.

parliament of trying to subvert the course of justice and usurp powers.<sup>7</sup>

Residents filed two cases in the High Court won a court injunction over the renewing of the lease in 2001. Uganda Wildlife Society together with Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment and Butamira Forest Association filed a civil suit.

Residents pursuing their economic livelihood from the forest clashed with the one of the largest corporate interests in Uganda. In so doing, the residents, many of whom themselves were sugar cane out-growers and farmers who relied on the forest for supplementary resources, became a public in this context of engaging parliamentarians, ministers, NGOs, the courts, and local government officials in their pursuit of their interests. Similarly, the sugar company represented a private sector interest yet in contrast to the household and subsistence economies this corporate body served as a public.

### **Kingdoms in a Republic?**

Some changes in formal public structures are, in reality, attempts to accommodate informal institutions and give them more of a public role. Every post-independence leader in Uganda has had to come to terms with monarchism in Uganda, especially the powerful Buganda kingdom. None have to date done so successfully. President Museveni has sought to appease the Baganda monarchists and has pinned its hopes on an arrangement that is intended to meet most of their objectives while not according the Baganda special status. The intent is to strike a balance between acknowledging Buganda's prominence, while at the same time not offending other kingdoms, chiefdoms or other regions of Uganda. Thus a regional tier system was approved by parliament in 2005 to coalesce the country's 78 districts.

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<sup>7</sup> "Rugunda Explains Government Position On Butamira Forest," *The Monitor*, 29 November 2001.

Earlier efforts to give a role to hereditary leaders were initiated by first opening the door to the reestablishment of kingdoms in 1993 as cultural institutions. President Milton Obote had abolished the three kingdoms of Buganda, Ankole and Bunyoro as well as the Busoga Chieftancy on September 17, 1967. Under Museveni's new arrangement, the king (*Isebantu Kyabazinga*) of Busoga, Henry Wako Muloki, was reinstated in 25 October 2002, together with a prime minister (*katukiro*), the Chief's Royal Council of 11 (five princes and heads of five royal families and six ssaza chiefs), and 42 members of the parliament (*lukiiko*).

Continuing pressure for a federal system from Buganda resulted in a government proposal for regional parliaments in a federal system for Buganda, Busoga, Toro and Bunyoro. With waning political backing nationwide, Museveni was eager to shore up his support among the kingdoms, especially Buganda. Having been granted symbolic cultural recognition as guaranteed in the 1995 Constitution, the kingdoms continued to press for greater political power and a more public role. Museveni sought to make some accommodations, while at the same time controlling the outcome.

Busoga implemented a Cooperation Charter ahead of the other kingdoms. The Busoga People's Forum and the Busoga Parliamentary Group lobbied for federal status to bring together the districts of Jinja, Kamuli, Iganga, Mayuge, Bugiri and Jinja Municipality to "co-operate in areas of infrastructure, energy and water development, promotion of health, education, tourism, trade, communication, physical planning development, planning employment, mobilisation and cultural development." The Deputy speaker of the House, Rebecca Kadaga, and Vice President Speciosa Kazibwe spearheaded this initiative. The entity was approved by parliament and by the relevant district councils. Thus in 2004 Busoga with 2,586,000 people became the only recognized geographical administrative unit larger than a district in Uganda. It would not collect taxes and was to serve as a non-political 'cultural' leadership of the kingdom (*Obwa*

*Kyabazinga*). The move was not universally supported as Samia peasants from Bugiri and other non-Basoga ethnic groups objected to the entity and petitioned the parliament to stop its implementation.

No sooner had the regional body been established than parliament passed a plan to create regional tiers throughout the country in 2005 as a layer of administration above the existing district system. In part, this was motivated by the aforementioned need to curry favor with Buganda electorate and federalists prior to the 2006 presidential elections, but also as an overture to other parts of the country that were interested in an expanded role for "traditional leaders." For the government, the regional bodies would also have the added bonus of making the executive more powerful, especially the presidency. Regional leaders will be unable to tax the population, yet they will be accountable to them without the means to respond freely to their demands. They will be funded by central government, forcing them to be beholden to the executive, while at the same time creating the basis for possible conflict with the center. The regional bodies will be in charge of secondary education, referral hospitals, cultural matters, inter-district roads, water and sanitation, and monitoring agriculture. The administration will be composed of a regional assembly of directly elected leaders. Where there are hereditary leaders, an elected prime minister or representative will create a short-list of names from which the king or "traditional leader" can select individuals to participate in the assembly. The government will provide for the hereditary leaders. These leaders will be in charge of selection of clan leadership, clan, "traditional" and customary matters; matters relating to cultural funeral rites, cultural succession and customary heirs; "traditional" lands, sites, shrines and installations; and "traditional," customary and cultural practices.

On the one hand, the arrangement is an effort to appeal to ethnic institutions by acknowledging entities like Buganda and Busoga through an administrative arrangement. However, it is unlikely to be a tenable arrangement. Central government barely has the resources to pay for the local council system

and has created 20 new districts in 2005. The regional assemblies represent an additional layer of administration aimed to extend the power of central government. Because of this, not all hereditary leaders are pleased with the arrangement, including Basoga leaders.

The Busoga Lower Local Governments Association, a body that brings together LC3 chairpersons from Busoga, have registered their opposition to the federal plan with the Kyabazinga, arguing that they were in favor of decentralisation and the earlier arrangement under which the districts of Busoga cooperate under the Busoga Charter.

The Kingdom itself refused to endorse a single council that would combine political and cultural functions. They argue that this would kill the earlier Busoga People's Charter. Many monarchists feel the cultural and political roles need to be separated in this context as they are wary of finding themselves trapped in an arrangement in which they were dependent on central government. It was an arrangement they felt would create expectations resulting in people making demands on the regional assembly/kingdom that they would be unable to meet because of the way in which central government had constructed the resource base.<sup>8</sup>

In this process of forging a federal system, the public and private roles of the *Obwa Kyabazinga* were actively debated and reconstructed, demonstrating on the one hand the role of the state in constructing kingdoms, chieftancies and clans. But it also illustrates the malleability, flexibility and adaptability of the kingdom as an institution. It has carved out a role for itself within the confines of state parameters as is evident in the context of numerous conflicts described in this paper. The process of redefining the *Obwa Kyabazinga* has been one of giving the kingdom a greater public presence, but not on its own terms.

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<sup>8</sup> "Busoga Rejects Mengo Federo Deal," *The Monitor*, 23 March 2005.

## **Eating on the Job**

Another way that publics are linked to private spheres is through corrupt patronage or “eating” as it is popularly known in Uganda and other parts of Africa. In 2005 the Cabinet approved an amendment to the Local Government Act that would replace tender boards with Local Government Contract Committees appointed by the chief administrative officers rather than the Local Government Councils. The aim was to enhance transparency and accountability in service procurement in local governments.<sup>9</sup>

The use of tenders for private political patronage had become one reason people seek public office. Several construction companies were blacklisted in 2005 after having won millions in shillings of tenders from the Jinja Municipal Council to supply substandard quality poles and for doing shoddy work on schools in town. In previous years, pharmaceutical companies, other construction companies and taxi park managers were implicated in similar forms of corruption along with their local council patrons. District councilors would grab contracts or give them to their associates to build schools, roads, and bridges with the consequence that the work is not done or is done shoddily. They collaborated with other councilors and Treasury officials to get paid. This explains in part why district elections are so bitter and why district governments have been considered among the most corrupt institutions in Uganda.<sup>10</sup>

Popular views of corruption confirm these claims. 79 percent of the population surveyed in a 2003 National Integrity Survey commissioned by the Inspector General of Uganda<sup>11</sup> believed that tender boards were the most corrupt. Only traffic police were found to be more corrupt with 83 percent of those surveyed finding them to be the least honest. By comparison 78 percent found the electoral commission to be most corrupt, 67 percent the regular police (excluding traffic police), 54 percent the courts, 47 percent the District Council,

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<sup>9</sup> “Contract Committees to Replace Tender Board,” *The Monitor*, 25 April 2005.

<sup>10</sup> April 26, 2002 Friday Councillors Shouldn't Eat Where They Worketh, *The Monitor*)

<sup>11</sup> The survey was carried out by K2-Consult Uganda Limited.

34 percent local administration, 34 percent the LC3, and 27 percent the LC1. The percentage of people in Jinja district who think corruption in the district is extensive stands at 79 percent. Bribery rates, however, were down considerably in most areas compared with a 1998 version of the survey. Many of the continuing problems are related to the low wages people obtain, but also to the lack of oversight and systems of accountability to ensure impartial granting of tenders and decisions on contracts. These are all indications of ways in which the non-state influences creep into and affect the performance of official public offices.

While some of the checks can come from within the administration, and now from political parties as the country opens up to multipartyism, other checks come from watchdog NGOs. The need for independent oversight is evident from a case involving Jinja Municipal Council (JMC). In the late 1980s and early 1990s patronage ties between the highest LC levels and the Jinja Municipal Council (JMC) resulted in the resignation of the Walukuba East Parish LC2 council. They were protesting the collusion of LC3 and LC5 with the JMC to prevent residents from obtaining water for several years in spite of having paid their water bills to the JMC. Unable to work through the LC system, the LC2 leaders were forced to organize outside of the system and form a Walukuba Tenants Welfare Association. This organization was promptly banned by the Jinja District Administration but later was permitted to apply for registration as an NGO. It succeeded in getting the water turned on but was unable to recover all the money that had been "eaten" (Ugandan euphemism for corruption) along the way (Dicklich 1994). The LC2 council in this case was unable to meet its objectives in this public capacity and thus formed as an alternative public in the "private" capacity of an NGO.

### **Keeping New Publics from Emerging in a Multiparty Era**

The opening of the country to multipartyism in 2005 has resulted in mobilization among new publics: multipartyists. The nature of this so-called

democratization process is evident from the way the opposition is being harassed and intimidated. The ruling proto-party, the National Resistance Movement Organisation, is bent on staying in power and has used both legal and extra-legal means to maintain its dominance. Its tightening grip on politics in Uganda has resulted in splits within its Movement. For example, the Parliamentary Advocacy Forum (PAFO) was formed in 2002 and is made up of disaffected Movement parliamentarians, moving into the private sphere of associational life and belonging to the public of political society (see Chart). It has had several of its events broken up by thugs hired by the NRMO. One of these incidents took place in Jinja in March 2004.

PAFO joined the Reform Agenda to form Forum for Democratic Change in 2004. The hoodlums, who referred to themselves as "Movement Youths," beat up a number of PAFO members, including numerous parliamentarians from Busoga. During an investigation, the thugs identified Iganga district LC5 chairman Asuman Kyafu and Mafubira sub-county LC3, Gulume Balyaino as the ring leaders.<sup>12</sup> When new spaces open, existing publics can either accommodate or suppress emerging publics. The harassment of PAFO in Jinja is part of an effort to suppress new publics that accompany the shift to multipartyism.

### **Contesting the Boundaries between the Public and Private**

The Museveni regime introduced greater freedom of association, and the number of new nongovernmental organizations has mushroomed since 1986. Some interest groups have organized vigorously and have on occasion been able to influence policy. But other nongovernmental organizations have faced restrictions. Some have had their workshops closed down; others have experienced difficulties registering, or have been threatened with closure. The government fears advocacy organizations that are deemed to "political," while encouraging organizations that are more development.

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<sup>12</sup> "Discipline Instigators of Jinja Pafo Fracas," *New Vision*, 29 December 2004.

The government has therefore attempted to create numerous state-sponsored or state-controlled organizations, including Women's Councils, Youth Councils, and the Uganda National Students Association, in lieu of independent ones, and has heavily influenced others, like the Uganda Public Employees Union, Uganda Medical Workers Union, and Uganda Civil Servants Union (Mujaju 1997, 49). The government has systematically undermined the strength of the cooperatives and trade unions. In 1986, 80 percent of the labor force was unionized; today, only 20 percent remain unionized. Similarly, cooperative societies, which had about 500,000 members at their peak, have virtually disappeared (Sebunya 2003).

Propositions have been made to amend the 1989 NGO Registration Statute in a way that will further curtail the latitude of NGOs, especially organizations engaged in advocacy. As a result of pressure from NGOs, the bill has been shelved for the time being. The pressures on NGOs to remain apolitical and developmental while avoiding advocacy suggest an ongoing contestation over not only the boundaries between the public and the private but also over the meaning of the public and the political.

### *Coopted Cooperatives?*

In Jinja the boundaries between the public and the private have been contested and have shifted in a number of arenas. One of the most important boundaries in Jinja has been that between the state and cooperatives. Cooperatives started in Uganda in 1913 with the formation in Kiboga of the Kanakulya Growers Cooperative Society. The movement grew during the 1950s and 1960s so that by 1990, there were 5,300 cooperative groups (Sebunya 2003). Busoga once had a thriving cooperative movement. The Busoga Growers Cooperative bought and marketed cotton, maize, coffee and beans of peasants. It provided credit and inputs to peasants, and paid pre-determined prices to the farmers, which was intended to eliminate unscrupulous middlemen.

With the institutional decay under Amin coupled with policies of Obote and Museveni, the cooperative movement fell into disarray. Under Obote excessive government interference made them practically into a parastatal with almost no separation between the state and cooperatives. Liberalization and privatization under Museveni was intended to improve quality, prices and markets. Instead it opened up the numbers of people involved in marketing agricultural products, drove down the quality of produce, and made the cooperatives uncompetitive, pushing them out of business. For example, private dealers like Kyagalanyi, IBESO and HK Nsamba have taken away close to 60 percent of the business from the cooperative unions that at one time enjoyed a monopoly in marketing major crops.<sup>13</sup>

At their peak in the 1980s, coffee cooperative unions controlled over half of the country's entire coffee trade. By the late 1990s, the 6,000 societies and 700 credit and savings societies were financially crippled. In 2002, the government did an about face and are now welcoming cooperatives. The Ministry of Tourism, Trade and Industries has developed a policy on cooperatives and are in the process of reintegrating district commercial officers into the functioning of cooperatives. It remains to be seen whether the Ugandan government will give the cooperatives the autonomy they need to function effectively. Their autonomy is critical to their capacity to thrive. Many are suspicious of government motives given the track record of past administrations. They fear that the boundaries will be drawn in such a way as to coopt the cooperatives.

### ***Parent Teacher Associations***

Even autonomous community organizations have seemingly posed threats to the state. In Uganda, for example, Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs)

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<sup>13</sup> Wamanga, Lawrence, "Uganda's Eastern Coops In New Alliance," *New Vision*, 19 January 1998.

represented one of the largest areas of independent community mobilization. They were not formed into a national or even regional or district wide network, but rather, each PTA operated independently in its own respective school. Formed after independence, they became especially important under Idi Amin's rule as the country fell into disarray in the 1970s and government sponsorship of the educational system unraveled. Resources dwindled in Jinja schools, especially in the municipality, after 1972 with the expulsion of the Asian population by Idi Amin. The Asian community had put considerable resources into the Jinja Municipal schools and Asian teachers were numerous. Their exodus had a particularly serious impact on Jinja schools, especially since the JMC was unable to respond to the collapse of the system yet it became an obstacle to parents' efforts to save the schools by collecting fees from parents. Jinja parents responded (as did parents nationwide) to the collapse of the school system in 1980 by creating PTAs and funding the schools themselves. Enormous pressures on poorly compensated teachers and head teachers working under difficult conditions resulted in bribing and suspicions of illegal conduct on the part of head teachers and PTAs. Inequalities arose between schools that had better PTA funding and those without adequate parental support. Nevertheless most PTAs kept the schools open and running (Dauda 2004).

After the NRM took over in 1986, the JMC began to cooperate with the PTAs and encouraged the formation of new ones. Management committees were set up in schools involving the councilors, school heads and parents. PTA funds, which were independent of other funds and controlled by the PTAs, were used to supplement teacher salaries and help construct new school buildings. They made up the bulk of funds but were controlled by the PTAs, not by the management committees. By 1995 the schools were making a comeback. However the government portion reaching the schools in Jinja district was negligible. In 1994-95 for example Jinja District was to have received 41.5 million shillings for primary education in Jinja Municipality, however, only a few million shillings ever

made it to the town. Instead the government contribution dwindled from 21.7 million shillings in 1991 to one million shillings in 1994. Four million shillings were generated by a local small education tax and the remainder and bulk of expenses came from the PTAs (Dauda 2004).

Nationwide, from the 1980s up until 1996, 90 percent of the funding for the schools came from PTAs, which paid for school maintenance, salaries, educational materials, and furniture. Parents not only raised tuition fees, but they also provided school transport, midday meals, school supplies, textbooks, buildings, dormitories, teachers' houses, equipment, animals and school farms that supplemented the teachers' salaries (Senteza-Kajubi 1991, 324). In the process, imbalances arose because poorer parents could not afford the fees and provide lunches, hence were unable to school their children.

In a bid to gain votes in the 1996 presidential elections, Museveni announced the abolition of the PTAs and introduced Universal Primary Education (UPE). The numbers of students enrolled shot up overnight from 2.6 million to 5.3 million in 1997 and up to 7.6 million by 2005. Before UPE, only 60 percent of the school-going age (six-12 year-olds) were in school compared with 90 percent in 2005. UPE was modified to allow four children in each family to attend school.

UPE was popular when it was initially announced because it promised to allow poorer households to send their children to school. However, the government did not have the resources to deliver quality education to the majority of school children overnight, nor had the educational system prepared for the immediate and massive influx of students. Teachers were not paid for months at a stretch, and large numbers of schools did not have adequate numbers of teachers or school supplies. Classrooms increased in size from 40 students to 110 on the average. Over 75 percent of students in Jinja district do not have lunch, which affects their performance.

Museveni was banking on massive donor assistance to implement UPE while eliminating one of the major ways in which citizens of Uganda had been

contributing to their own welfare through civil society organizations. Eager to see a major emphasis in education provisioning, none of the major donors funding the UPE, including the World Bank and USAID, seemed to find the dissolution of PTAs in the rural areas problematic nor did they put pressure to slow down the introduction of UPE to allow for more planning. The PTAs were eventually allowed to return in the more politically volatile urban areas, although with their powers considerably diminished. Their rural counterparts remained banned.

The results of banning the PTAs in rural areas have been disastrous even though parents have continued to be asked for donations. Inequality in education has widened as middle class parents took their children out of public schools and put them into better-equipped private schools. Meanwhile, nationwide only 22 percent of the children who were in schools when UPE was introduced reached standard seven. In Jinja, of the 87,000 children enrolled in the district's 82 primary schools since the introduction of UPE in 1997, 26,000 or 30 percent were no longer attending school four years later.<sup>14</sup> Nationwide, only 19 percent or 460,000 of the students who enrolled in 1997 sat for Primary Leaving Examinations in 2003.<sup>15</sup>

The abolition of PTAs as a nationwide institution and introduction of UPE was a political ploy to gain votes. The boundary of public provisioning of education that had during Amin's time shifted entirely to society in the form of the PTAs was now being shouldered by donors and government with a diminished role for the PTAs that existed primarily in urban centers. Thus the agency was shifted from a societal public to state public underwritten by foreign donors representing an external public.

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<sup>14</sup> "20,000 [sic 26,000] Primary Education Children Drop Out," *New Vision*, 7 July 2001.

<sup>15</sup> "MPs Question UPE Statistics," *The Monitor*, July 29, 2003.

### **Other Publics: Eating in the Bishop's House**

The state is not the only public where struggles over resources are fought. Even religious institutions can find themselves mired in worldly battles, as was the case in a heated and sometimes physical conflict that took place in Busoga Diocese of the Church of Uganda in the 1990s. In Busoga, roughly half the population belong to the Church of Uganda. For example, in Jinja, 48 percent are Protestants, 28 percent are Catholic and 22 percent Muslim.

Between 1993 and 1998 two factions in Busoga diocese waged battle over Bishop Cyprian Bamwoze's right to remain bishop of the Busoga Diocese. His opponents threatened to secede from the church if he did not step down. Canon John Nabeta and later by Canon Samuel Lubogo led the church "rebels." Lubogo at one point installed himself in Bishop House at Bugembe Cathedral and demanded that he be consecrated bishop. The conflict at times involved physical fist-fights between supporters and detractors of Bamwoze even during services. In January 1997 when Bamwoze faced pressure to resign by his superiors in the COU, Busoga Diocese split off from the Church of Uganda. Similar conflicts had resulted in breakaway diocese in other parts of Uganda (e.g., South Rwenzori broke from Rwenzori Diocese in 1984 in response to pressures from the Bakonzo of Kasese).

Bamwoze became bishop in 1972. Since he took over the diocese, it had grown from 26 to 220 parishes in the mid 1990s. The Bishop was accused by his opponents of misusing church funds, of womanizing, and of immorality. He was rumored to have been closely involved with the UPC in the 1960s and was implicated in some of the atrocities they had committed, including arranging for his wife's murder (Liebowitz 2001).

As one member of the diocese explained to Jeremy Liebowitz (2001): "Bamwoze being in the chair, he had a lot of resources at his disposal [that] he was able to dish out to his people. And people who were in the opposition were saying, if we unseat this man, we shall also have the resources, to share out."

The House of Bishops had twice sent Bamwoze on forced leave in vain. The Archbishop Livingstone Nkoyooyo had stated at a public event in reference to Bamwoze that "The office of a bishop is not an eating house for him alone but for all Christians he is leading." He decried "widespread corruption in the Church of Uganda," saying that such practices had led to the exodus of members from the church to join other Anglican sects.<sup>16</sup> It was not until 1998 that the conflict was resolved and Bamwoze retired as bishop, having reconciled with his opponents. The Kyabazinga of Busoga is said to have played a role in resolving the differences. After retiring, Bamwoze became the chief campaign manager for UPC MP Aggrey Awori's bid for the presidency in the 2001 elections.

The alleged corruption within the church suggests that private interests do not only find their way into state institutions but can be manifested in other publics. The conflicts over access to resources within religious institutions are every bit as political as such struggles in parliament or in ministries and they can be just as nasty.

### **Women's Mobilization**

Since 1986, women have dramatically increased their political participation in Uganda's formal political institutions both at the national and local levels. In a relatively short period, the women's movement and women's organizations became one of the major societal forces in Uganda and have played a significant role in trying to improve the status of women. They have also addressed more general social justice issues and worked to advance the interests and rights of the poor, the disabled, children, and other more vulnerable groups. New nonpartisan women's organizations formed to improve leadership skills, lobby for women's political leadership, conduct civic education, and press for legislative changes, although success in the latter has been limited. Groups mobilized around issues like land, domestic violence, rape, reproductive rights, female genital cutting,

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<sup>16</sup> "Uganda Reshuffle Upsets Anglican Church," *All Africa Press Service*, 5 February 1996.

media representation of women and other such concerns that had rarely been addressed by the women's movements in the past and often were considered taboo by the government and even the society.

This extraordinary growth in women's influence had in part to do with the Museveni regime's efforts to increase female representation. Uganda had a woman vice president from 1993 to 2003; women were appointed to key cabinet posts; they held one quarter of the seats in parliament and one third of seats in local government; women headed key commissions and agencies; held one third of all court appointments at all levels except the Supreme Court, where 14 percent of all judges were women. Although a focus of the women's movement has been on increasing women's representation in political leadership, women have also successfully pushed for greater acceptance of female leadership and participation in many other arenas that were traditionally not open to women in business, in religious institutions, and in the leadership of NGOs.

Women in Uganda as elsewhere in Africa have not only made the personal political, but they have also sought political power and influence in order to make the political personal so they could democratize the home, to gain greater leverage within the household (Geiger 1998).

At the local level there is a growing realization that national policies are supportive of women but have a long way to go before they take root at the local level. As one village woman in Jinja explained to me: "We as women, we have been oppressed . . . and men still want to oppress us further in this government of enlightenment." Women have seized on the perception that this government allowed women greater political space and encouragements and sought to advance themselves at the local level, perhaps even in ways that the Ugandan government did not expect as the following case study suggests.

While at the national level numerous professional, advocacy, and NGO organizations were created by women, at the grassroots women formed multipurpose clubs that engaged in savings, farming, income-generating projects,

handicrafts, sports, cultural events and other functions, depending on the needs and priorities of members. Much of their activism has occurred within local women's organizations, through which they have sought access to power and resources. Women have had to fight for the right to a presence in public spaces, even their own grassroots organizations, which their husbands will sometimes forbid them from participating, suggesting a link between struggles within the household and the kinds of public roles women play.

*"Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder"*

Over 30 Women in Wakitaka had formed a group called Ekikwenza Omubi Women's Project that was led by a woman by the name of Gertrude Mbago (Tripp 2000). The name of the association comes from the Lusoga proverb *"Ekikwenza omubi — omulungi takimanyha,"* which roughly translated means, "when someone falls in love with an ugly one, the beautiful one keeps wondering why" or "beauty is in the eye of the beholder."

Like other women in the village, the women in the group were involved in small holder subsistence farming and animal husbandry, growing staples like cassava, beans, and maize, in addition to fruit and vegetables. They also included women involved in handicraft production, in trading fruits and vegetables, and in other forms of self-employment.

When Ekikwenza Omubi carried out a three-month baseline survey and discovered that the main needs in their community were health needs, they set out to establish a health clinic. With the help of a local school teacher, they enumerated the numbers of people, the ages of the residents, the common illnesses and the general health care problems in Wakitaka parish. To determine existing sanitation standards they asked residents about the protection of local water sources and how they prepared their food. They intended the survey to help them make a case for establishing a health center in the area.

The new spaces for initiatives to address health needs like the one in Wakitaka emerged partly as a result of changes in government policy, but partly because the government did not have the capacity and resources to fulfill many of the social service functions it once did. For example, in the area of health services, in the 1960s Uganda had one of the best medical delivery systems in Africa. Government health facilities were well stocked with medication that was provided free of charge to users. With the disruptions of the Amin regime in the 1970s, government health services deteriorated rapidly, medical professionals diminished in number and medicines became scarce. Voluntary, private and local healers became key sources of health care in the country as a consequence of the decline in government facilities (Brett 1991, 297-309; Whyte, S. 1991, 130-148).

Much like its introduction of UPE prior to the 1996 elections, the government announced that it was dropping user fees in the health sector prior to the presidential elections in 2001. This resulted in a 50-100 percent increase in demand of health services, which forced the government to eventually increase its health expenditures.

At the same time, the government has continued to rely on private providers of health care. Protestant, Catholic and Muslim institutions run 78% of the 490 private health units, with the remainder being run by humanitarian organizations and community-based organisations. Private health care providers run 42% of the country's 99 hospitals, and 28% of the 1,617 lower level units in Uganda. Non-facility providers make up the larger portion of the private medical practice in Uganda. They include the Uganda Red Cross and African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF), Medici con l'Africa, OXFAM, Save the Children<sup>17</sup>

The government has also made modest sums of money available to the subcounty administration to assist in the establishment of such units. The Wakitaka women who tried to start a clinic immediately confronted resistance from the village Local Council, which sought first to prevent them from opening

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<sup>17</sup> [http://www.health.go.ug/part\\_health.htm](http://www.health.go.ug/part_health.htm)

the clinic and later once they had it going, tried to take it over and ultimately got the clinic closed. As the headmaster of St. Peter's Secondary School in Wakitaka explained: "Women wanted to manage [the clinic] with men at the back. Men wanted control with women at the back." Others suggested that the LC councilors may have imagined there was money in the project that could be "eaten" if they got their hands on the clinic.

The women felt the main reason for all the hostility toward their project was the perception of the men that women could not lead such an initiative. The women felt they should be in control of the project. Women historically had been the main ones who had involved themselves and succeeded in community efforts. Their interest in these collective efforts came directly out of their roles as household providers and caregivers. As Mbago put it: "As far as the men of Wakitaka are concerned, they are not used to community work. So no man will be willing to start such a group. In my life there has been only one man from a neighboring village who had started such a group, but he never even managed to get support." The main constraint on women getting involved in such community efforts, she felt, was that "they are socially oppressed by men and they are not allowed to move out on any venture."<sup>18</sup>

The gombolola chief concurred. He had never seen women so engaged in community activities in the past. He noted how women in Mutai had established the health clinic, in Namule they were planting trees, in Buwenda there was a ceramic women's project, in Bugembe farming vegetables. A heifer project had been initiated. "It is with this regime that women have space to participate in projects. Previously they were in clubs and drama groups. But the NRM regime has provided for women to come into community projects. Women are doing very well, but not the men, who just play cards (karate) and bao and drink waraji." He noted the impact this had had on gender relations within the household: "Women were now saying to men 'Now in our house we should be partners.'" He

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with author, Gertrude Mbago, Wakitaka, 7 July 1995.

described Mbago as exceptional and said that he had never seen a woman leader with such intelligence and strength in his subcounty.<sup>19</sup> The deputy district medical officer also pointed out: “Women believe they have acquired something as women . . . Women view this as a collective achievement.”

One finds at the local level that women and women’s groups create real public goods and resources, not by simply lobbying for them or by getting elected, but by pulling up their sleeves and doing something about concrete problems directly (funding schools, establishing health clinics, dealing with local calamities, supporting orphaned children, offering training and educational classes to more disadvantaged women, etc.). Mobilizing women and engaging in concrete development activities might be considered the private “housework” of formal politics. It is the necessary but unrecognized and undervalued work that undergirds formal politics and development (Ferree 2003, personal communication). But it is at the same time a public activity in its own right at the same time. It engages the public, benefits the public and involves a collectivity with a purpose, not just isolated individual women.

### *Challenging the Boundaries of the Public and Private*

The struggle over the health clinics in Wakitaka is a microcosm of how national policies plays out at the local level and of how the boundaries of the public and private are being contested. These myriads of local struggles matter as as those at the national level because they represent the actual transformations in gender relations in the daily lives of people.

The fractal model helps delink the public-private divide from its gendered moorings by showing how men and women can be found in both public and private spheres although not always to the same extent or in the same way. If private spheres are embedded in publics and vice versa, one can see how women

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with author, 2.1, Mafubira, 19 April 1993.

who may be more involved in what are commonly thought of as private spheres of community work are not locked into that framework. Women may still be found in informal institutions while being underrepresented in formal governance structures. But the model shows how seemingly informal/private institutions that women are active in play a public role given an expanded understanding of multiple publics.

Through their grassroots organizations women are not just challenging the boundaries of the public and private, they are bringing the private into the public. It is from the kinds of organizations described above that women are earning leadership and organizational skills which they draw on in building national organizations. Thus women draw on their domestic experiences and experiences in local organizations to influence various publics.

## **Conclusions**

If we take an expanded view of what is political and what constitutes the public sphere, we come to see how profoundly political these local level conflicts are and how they have implications for changing practices in Uganda.

This paper has outlined a series of mechanisms through which public and private spheres are connected in the case of Jinja District. Private spheres in one context are public spheres in another. Spirit mediums associated with the private sphere of healing may find themselves challenged and forced to act in a public sphere, representing the collective interests of the ancestors and communities in Jinja. Public and private elements within the economy may find themselves in conflicts over resources, as did the sugar agrobusiness company, and the residents living near the Butamira forest who had used the forest for subsistence purposes. Thus the private corporate interests represented a public in relation to the forest dwellers, who were operating within the dictates of the household economy. Yet the private residents near Butamira forest also played a public role in this context.

Formal public structures may be modified to accommodate informal private institutions like kingdoms, chieftancies and clans to give them a greater role, but they can also diminish the older governance institutions as has happened historically in Uganda. These hereditary institutions themselves play a role in determining formal parliamentary or local government election outcomes. Their flexibility and adaptability accounts for their resilience and capacity to transform themselves as circumstances require. Some conflicts in Jinja were over where to draw the line in recreating a new public role for the Busoga kingdom, especially in a region that has a multiplicity of ethnic groups. The newly introduced regional assemblies will place new expectations on the kingdom, which now is more dependent on central government but also has insufficient resources with which to accommodate popular demands.

Some publics like the NRM-O attempt to suppress the emergence of new political organizations that have emerged in the context of multipartyism using informal means, i.e., thugs. Political society is part of the private sphere but at the same time it is a public sphere in relation to civil society. The state's fear of advocacy organizations and alternate sources of societal power influence has in the past resulted in attempts to suppress various organizations, eliminate them in the case of Parent Teacher Associations or coopt them as in the case of cooperatives. Those organizations that are developmental are encouraged but warned against becoming too political. The state is in this context attempting to limit the public influence of societal actors by drawing a sharp line between state and society. Another way that publics are linked to private spheres is through corrupt practices and patronage networks.

In rural parts of Uganda, women responded to the government's active encouragement after Yoweri Museveni came to power in 1986 to mobilize themselves into a multiplicity of organizations. The story of the efforts of a women's group to start a health clinic in Wakitaka illustrates the changing boundaries between the various public and private arenas. It also shows how

women's drew on their domestic roles and household related obligations to play a public role in transforming the community by building a health clinic. It was because of this private role that they also were stigmatized as a group by opponents of the clinic. Thus, women's attempt to play a more public role was limited on the pretext that women's proper domain was within the household. In this way interpersonal relations and prescribed roles also can affect the divisions between the public and private.

All these vignettes illustrate how nested the different layers of public and private relations are within one another and how the private arenas affect the public ones and vice versa. It shows how studies of public and political institutions cannot automatically dispense with seemingly private actors because they influence, shape and can themselves serve as a public in another context or when viewed through another lens.

### **Implications for the Development Community**

These vignettes also have profound implications for the development community. Had the donors, for example, fully understood the historic role of PTAs in Uganda, it is unlikely they would have agreed to underwrite the implementation of Universal Primary Education in a way that eliminated this important aspect of parental participation. Their support of decentralization and federalism, would have necessitated more attentiveness to the historic role of kingdoms and the political implications of their revival. Greater assets would be provided to support women's activities if there were a keener understanding of the potential and limitations of local women's associations. They would be supported in better ways were there a better understanding of the role of women's groups in creating social and public resources and the obstacles they face in having to challenge existing gender relations in order to play that public role. In adopting policies to support the private sector, there needs to be greater appreciation of the way it is connected to and conflicts with informal and

subsistence economies. Support for private sector endeavors may need to account for the powerful influence of spirit mediums in public arenas as we have seen in the battle over Bujagali dam.

Only by expanding our understanding of the political will be able to understand the multiple arenas in which resources, power and influence are struggled over, negotiated and accommodated. This brief survey of a wide variety of conflicts in Jinja shows how we need to explore more deeply a variety of publics to gain a more complete picture of the ways in which people interact politically.

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<b>Public</b> State		<b>Private</b> Society										
<b>Public</b> Formal Politics	<b>Private</b> Informal Politics		<b>Private</b> Associational Life					<b>Private</b> Market				
<b>Public</b> Legislature Executive Judiciary Local gov't	<b>Private</b> Patronage network		<b>Public</b> Social			<b>Private</b> Family		<b>Public</b> Formal economy		<b>Private</b> Informal economy		
	<b>Public</b> State- based net- work	<b>Private</b> Non- state based network	<b>Public</b> Political society		<b>Private</b> Civil Society Cross-cutting organizations		<b>Public</b> Clans Kingdoms Elders councils	<b>Private</b> Kin- based groups	<b>Public</b> Market based	<b>Private</b> Subsistence economy	<b>Public</b> Market based	<b>Private</b> Household
			<b>Public</b> Parties	<b>Private</b> Advocacy and lobby groups	<b>Public</b> NGOs	<b>Private</b> Local orgs						