DRAFT Epilogue, Regalia Galore Revisited

Epilogue

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The 20th century ended on one unexpected note: in various parts of the world the possible re-entry of traditional rulers, or monarchy as an 'alternative' form of government, had come back on the agenda. How exactly this was to be explained was not entirely clear, and in due course this may well become one of those many topics left for debate among future historians. But if the apparent revival of interest in monarchism rested upon accurate observations, the evident question was why was this the case: was it to be explained as a reaction against 'globalization', or disenchantment with the forms and performance of 'modern', 'secular', 'alienating' government? Was it a reflection of the end of the Cold War, or, generally, the 'post-modern condition'? Or did it constitute a search for and re-assertion of identity, in culturally specific terms, or some sub-conscious popular longing for imaginative roles and relationships, such as that between a prince and his people? Or else, perhaps, was it just plainly a reflection of media interests in having colourful parades and pageants (which are never the same with presidents or central committee chairmen not well groomed for such ceremonial events)?

Whatever the merits and demerits of these currents of thought and sentiment, fact is that in a variety of contexts deposed monarchs or their descendants re-entered the limelight, re-visited 'their' countries (often for the first time, though), and discreetly reminded governments and people alike that they were 'available'. This happened especially on the Balkans, though at one point the idea was floated even in a context as far and unlikely as Brazil. Only in very few cases where heir pretenders thus re-appeared, however, did this lead to actual restoration so far. The Ugandan cases probably constituted the prime example of this happening. Close to the Ankole context, the new Tusi-led regime in Rwanda has also been playing with the option of re-instating the Mwami, the Tusi king. Still, irrespective of whether these trends in the

end would materialize or not, fact is that monarchism once again was capturing imaginations - of all the people, or only of some.

Ankole constituted one of these sites where renewed attention was being given to the institution of kingship. Following the post-1986 sequence of events pertaining to the Ugandan kingships in general, which has been described in Chapter 7 of the present text, the question of the return of Ankole kingship has been on the agenda as of the moment that restoration had constitutionally become an option. The question had first been looked into by the Constitutional Commission, which had been appointed by the National Resistance Movement government that had taken office in 1986. Based on extensive interviews with people from all walks of life, the Commission advised against re-opening the question of restoration of the Ankole monarchy. In taking this position, it appeared as if the Commission was echoing the advice of the representation of Ankole elders, including the ex-Omugabe Gasyonga II, to President Idi Amin in 1971, which had warned that restoration of the kingship could become a seriously divisive issue.

Nonetheless, the matter was tabled again in 1993 following the re-instatement of the Kabaka of neigbouring Buganda, but has remained unresolved since then while continuing to engage proponents and opponents in numerous verbal battles, in the press as well as in the local and national arenas.[1] Evidently, the question has been arousing deeply felt sentiments pro and against in Ankole, and in the process began to recreate rifts and antagonisms that one had previously assumed had been overcome. Kingship, which in essence one would expect to constitute a symbol of integration and unity, in Ankole was turning out to be an instrument of division and conflict.

It is rare to see a dispute of this kind emerge at the present time. Inevitably, it throws up a range of questions all at once: what triggered all this, why did supporters of the

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[1] According to a recent statement from the Nkore Cultural Trust, the organization actively engaged in propagating re-instatement of the Ankole monarchy, they would want to propose shelving the issue till 2003 so as to avoid their campaigning on the issue getting mixed up with that for Presidential and Parliamentary elections (*New Vision,* 15 March, 2000). As the NCT attached several conditions to this proposal, which may prove difficult to fulfill, including the demand that the Uganda government now first recognizes the heir designate to the throne as 'Prince' and should return 'his' property to him, it seems likely that the dispute will continue to rage for some more time to come.

idea of restoration keep pressing their case as they saw it, why did it engender such fierce resistance as it did, and how could this controversy have been avoided, if at all? To many onlookers within Uganda and outside, these appeared some of the initial puzzles and questions provoked by the dispute. Some stocktaking, partly in the light of the earlier analysis in **Regalia Galore**, may therefore be pertinent in the search for answers.

Prima facie the proponents of restoration had quite a plausible case and argument. Ankole kingship had been abrogated in 1967 along with the three other monarchies that had been co-existing until then within independent Uganda, namely Buganda, Toro and Bunyoro. But whereas legitimacy had since been re-accorded, as of 1993, to the other three - which was mainly due to a powerful lobby that had been actively seeking the re-instatement of Buganda's monarchy -, Ankole was still being kept waiting for it.

Restoration proponents submitted that the Ankole monarchy represented a precious historical institution of 600 years old, which therefore is well worth preserving as a crucial part of Ankole's cultural heritage[2]. Also, they saw re-institution of the monarchy as a way of re-creating a sense of corporate identity that might facilitate organization for economic and other development projects of various kinds. Proponents could argue, as indeed they did, that the re-recognition of the legitimacy of Ankole kingship was implied in the very act which had re-established the other kingdoms within the country. Restoration having been accepted in principle by the government and ruling political circles, this would seem to suggest that having kings in these parts of Uganda had once again become the established norm. *Not* having a particular king back thus went against the norm, by that same logic. Looked at from another angle, moreover, re-instituting only three of the four monarchies, but not the fourth, would seem to leave a conspicuous but uncomfortable-looking 'empty place', which would continue to raise questions, from outsiders if not from insiders. Also, the

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[2] Interview with James Kahigiriza, NCT Chairman, *New Vision,* March 15, 2000. It might be noted, though, that even in respect of Nkore there was an inclination among informants interviewed by Roscoe in the early part of the 20th century to provide him each time with more extended genealogies of former Abagabe, presumably out of an interest to emulate Buganda. See John Roscoe, *The Banyankole*, Cambridge, 1923, p. 34.

other (restored) rulers in Uganda might be found wondering why their fellow-monarch from Ankole was not being allowed to join in, and perhaps would feel it tended to qualify the irreversibility of their own restoration.

Yet as will have become apparent from the preceding text, the Ankole case constitutes quite a special and complex one, defying easy categorization and resolution. It derives its complexity less from the kingship question per se but from the historic ethnic division between Bahima and 'Bairu', or Banyankore, within which it had been embedded as well as from the particular ways in which the institution had been reconstructed over time, notably in the colonial period. Unsurprisingly, several of these problematic aspects did get fiercely articulated in the opposition which the prospect of the monarchy's restoration has been engendering.

Thus, opponents to restoration could and did argue that Ankole's kingship largely represented a colonial creation, since more than half of the Ankole District as it had been (re-)constituted at the beginning of colonial rule consisted of (densely populated) areas which had not formed part of *Nkore* kingdom, Ankole's precursor entity. If restoration was at issue, therefore, one prior question that arose was whether this should refer to the *colonial* institution or to the *pre-colonial*, historical, kingdom of Nkore. In the latter case, there would also be several other candidates for restoration, namely some of the smaller kingdoms that had been included into Ankole District at the beginning of colonial rule, like those of Buhweju, Igara and Kajara.

Restoration proponents took it for granted that it would concern the institution as it had been inherited from colonial times. Opponents to restoration argued that that would mean symbolically re-instating the extension of ethnically ascribed kingship, which had been experienced as discriminatory, over regions which historically had not formed part of its domain. They would also argue that it would be difficult to maintain that the institution is 600 years old, as the Nkore Cultural Trust claimed it to be. The colonially restructured institution had lasted only a little longer than 60 years, that is, from the time of the Ankole Agreement (1901) till its abolition in 1967. And, last but not least, they voiced their objection to the equation of Ankole culture with

kingship, pointing to France and other countries whose culture was thriving after the termination of monarchism.

In this connection it is significant to take note of the historical differences between the role of kingship in Ankole society as contrasted to the other Ugandan monarchies, specifically as regards the position the Kabaka held within Buganda society as compared to the Omugabe within Nkore or Ankole. In Buganda, all Baganda in a way could consider the Kabakaship 'theirs', as the Kabaka in principle could marry from all 52 Buganda clans and thus derive a heir from any of these clans. In contrast, Ankole's kings (and historically Nkore's) were recruited exclusively from a single clan, that of the Bahinda. In terms of Ankole's ethno-social structure, the Bahinda as noted formed a minority among a minority, the Bahima, who in a number of ways were quite distinct from the majority of Ankole's population, the Banyankore. In the light of the historic relations of institutionalized superiority and subordination that had existed between Bahima and Banyankore, therefore, opponents argued that re-installing Ankole's kingship in effect would mean re-instating the symbolic pinnacle of Ankole's past ethnic inequality. It is this particular aspect which evidently represents the most profound strand of misgivings among many Banyankore with the idea of reviving the Ankole monarchy.

Against the background of these sensitivities, both the privately arranged coronation of 'Prince' John Barigye as Omugabe of Ankole and its instant annulment by President Museveni in November 1993 produced immediate shock-effects within Ankole society. As to the coronation itself, it seemed telling that for the possible restoration of an institution that supposedly is a symbolic one, hence in principle belonging to the public domain and the public eye, one had sought recourse to a secretive if not clandestine coronation ceremony, away from popular scrutiny. The contradiction which this implied in terms of what role this institution was to play was quite astounding, and in final analysis appears tragically self-defeating.

The President's annulment of the coronation was instigated both by his role as guardian of the constitution and his concern for ethnic animosity emerging in his own home region (which could seriously affect his government's home support). Initially

his intervention appeared to have had the effect of cooling down both the unease as well as expectations that had been aroused by the event. After the initial wave of consternation and relief had subsided, it seemed for a while as if the matter had been laid to rest in the face of the government's reiteration of its (constitutionally derived) position that restoration of the monarchy could be condoned only 'if the people so wish'. This lasted only for about a year, however. Thereafter, pressure and lobbying to try and make the government change its mind was resumed by the Nkore Cultural Trust (NCT), by Barigye himself, and by some high-ranking Uganda army officers from the region, and became ever more intense as time went by.

The pattern of confrontation and debate which subsequently ensued until virtually the present time became strongly polarized, however, with the NCT trying to mobilize public and political opinion in favour of restoration, and the Banyankore Cultural Foundation (BFC) determined to oppose it. The NCT, which at its foundation had given the impression that it intended to work towards a broader cultural agenda, increasingly concentrated its attention and mobilizing efforts on the specific issue of kingship, in effect equating Ankole culture with kingship. As one strong restoration proponent, Maj. Gen. Salim Saleh, put it, there is "dire need for the restoration of Obugabe because the culture of the Banyankore [is] dying fast owing to lack of a cultural leader" (*New Vision*, January 31, 2000). One result of this narrowing of focus to the kingship issue on the part of the NCT was the alienation of some of its original membership, which at the time had joined it in view of its wider platform of interests (*New Vision,* March 13, 2000). Another effect was, predictably, to prompt the rival body devoted to Ankole culture though opposed to restoration, the BCF, likewise into alert and action. Thus, at the threshold of the new millenium, the two groups were identified in the press as the 'pro-Omugabe' and 'anti-Omugabe' camps respectively, and hardly a statement was issued on behalf of the one without an instant counter from the other.

Significantly, though, after a one-time effort in 1998 to reach an agreement in a joint meeting between the two groups had failed, this 'dialogue' never again became a direct one. Rather, it was conducted indirectly, through statements to the press or representations made to the government, which would subsequently be reported in the

press. Any of these would in turn be criticized, denied or debated by spokespeople for the other group. In this connection, no matter how much both organizations ostensibly had 'culture' as their central concern and brief - and presumably even the same culture -, it was difficult not to gain the impression that the dispute had become a highly *political* and *politicized* one. This quality seemed characteristic not just for the way the debate was being conducted, but also for the way the stakes concerned appeared to be perceived. Positions hardened rapidly and seemed to leave little room for compromise or reconciliation. Thus conceived in 'all or nothing' terms, the dispute became one in which both parties felt they had to 'win' at all costs, or else to 'lose'. One question this raises is whether that pattern had strictly been necessary and unavoidable.

But the curious onlooker might well first ask whether it was 'culture' for its own sake, and opposed interpretations of what this might contain, which the two rival associations were so fiercely debating and fighting over with respect to the former Ankole kingdom and the prospects of it getting restored? If that would be the case, it could safely be taken as an indication of a truly exceptional commitment to higher cultural and spiritual values on the part of both groups, rarely to be found in most other parts of Africa or Europe. While theoretically allowing for such exceptional dispositions to occur, it may be useful also to consider alternative explanations. 'Culture', or 'tradition' for that matter, can also be used as an *argument* to advance the claims for particular positions, and privileges, of certain sections within a society over and against those of others. What matters then is what the presentation of the culture in question seems to suggest or imply as to where the dividing lines are to be drawn, and how that particular culture can be put forward as demanding recognition of certain claims or differential allocation of social prestige and power.

In Ankole, it is such competitive claims as to what the specific culture would contain that appear to be centrally at stake. The final outcome of this competition, if it were to be resolved in either one way or the other (rather than 'both'), would in turn add legitimacy to one or another way in which the local political system and process might be given further shape. Specifically, depending on what notion of culture might in the end prevail, this could either come to favour a monarchy-centered patronage

system benefiting particularly the 'traditionalist' Bahima elite (especially those with ties to the former Nkore) and a wider client retinue, or else a more egalitarian and open system in which entrepreneurial Banyankore of different rank and file are likely to play the prominent role. In a still somewhat fluid situation within the Great Lakes Region generally, in which the last word about state formation has not yet been said, it goes without saying that the stakes concerned are potentially very high and far-reaching.

The ostensibly 'political' quality and process characterizing the Obugabe debate also seemed to reflect a rather anomalous situation having arisen with respect to the handling of the issue. At the time of writing, the issue appears to have arrived at a stalemate hardly allowing new departures. Possibly the process could only have been given a different direction by higher political organs in the country, though in a way their hands were tied, too. One question in particular that had remained unclear arose from the fact that the constitution had not specified exactly *how* people's wishes were to be articulated, or to be represented and recorded, nor which body should decide about that. Adding to the complexity around this particular question, the NCT for its part took the position that re-instatement of the monarchy constituted such an intrinsic part of Ankole's culture that this could never be allowed to be put up for a public vote.[3] Among other things, this position seemed a rationalization for the secret coronation which had been staged in 1993. A variant to the proposal for a public vote, namely one in which the matter would be resolved in a collective vote by all LC-III and LC-V councillors and members of Parliament of Ankole, had been proposed by First Deputy Premier Eriya Kategaya (himself from the region).[4] Even this met with strong resistance from the side of NCT, however. According to NCT's vice-chairman George William Katatumba, this would "amount to denying those Banyankore who adhere to a monarchical culture of their constitutional rights" (*The Monitor,* February 16, 2000). Evidently, therefore, this did not leave much space to arrive at an

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[3] Such a position might not have been shared by Queen Elisabeth of England, who had made it known that she would not object to the Australian plebiscite organized in 1999 to decide whether Australia should become a republic or remain under the British monarchy.

[4] Actually, there had already been a meeting of all LC-V councillors from the three Ankole districts at the President's home in 1993, where all but one voted against reinstatement.

agreement even over basic procedures. Significantly, also, the statement appeared to reveal the NCT's position as being that even if only *a section* of the population would favour a return of the monarchy, that by itself would be sufficient for it to take place. That position, however, would seem just as problematic as the (hypothetical) suggestion that 99,99% of the population concerned should have expressed themselves in favour before restoration can be considered.

The Uganda government for its part had all along taken the position that 'cultural' matters such as having traditional leaders were not its business ("as long as the people so wish"). Yet, whether it wanted this or not, by annulling 'Prince' Barigye's coronation immediately after it took place in 1993, it had also placed itself into a position of final arbiter about the matter. Henceforth it was encouraging the two groups to try and sort out the question amongst each other - but which was about the last thing they would be able or prepared to do. Meanwhile, in a situation where many people in regard to all kinds of issues are apt to ask first what are the government's intentions, there continued to be a fair amount of speculation that the government was having its own agenda on the matter. People asked, for example, whether in his public campaigns for restoration, President Museveni's younger brother Celeb Akandwanaho (more commonly known by his army nickname Salim Saleh) was merely exercising his constitutional right to hold a different opinion from that of his elder brother, or whether he was letting up some trial balloons towards a final government position on the matter?

A Way Out from the Stalemate?

In the light of the continuing stalemate about the restoration issue in Ankole, the question arises whether it might not have been possible to conceive of less zero-sum kind of ways of handling a dispute of this kind. It could well be relevant to reflect on this question, if only to better appreciate the complexity of dimensions involved. By the same token, there could be at least a theoretical interest to explore whether at all there might still be any conceivable way out of the stalemate. Towards this end, a useful first step would seem to be to consider the positions each of the key actors have been adopting in the dispute.

Starting with the Nkore Cultural Trust, it is of course perfectly reasonable and legitimate that an organization has been brought to life that has set itself the goal of striving towards restoration of the Ankole kingship. After all, there had been a monarchy before, and if re-instatement depends on "if the people so wish", it makes every sense for an interested 'civil society' organization to take up this challenge and speak out in its favour. That is essentially what the NCT has done, even though it did not quite seem to 'let the people speak', but rather was couching its claims in terms of what Ankole 'culture' would demand. To the extent that the NCT articulates a position favoured by Ankole's former Bahima elite, it should not be surprising that it seems to be taking its cue from history. The historical part of its name, *Nkore*, points in that direction, while the notion of 'trust' evidently carries a conservationist connotation. But in taking up its role, it would also be reasonable to expect of the NCT to appreciate the need to demonstrate that there would be broad public support for its agenda. One cannot just leave it at claiming the Obugabe back as a kind of natural right and expect the government to impose or approve it, while ignoring the (constitutionally based) call for a probing of popular sentiments and preferences. Besides, it would be important for the NCT, as for all other parties for that matter, to take cognizance of other prevailing views on the matter and consider their implications for one's own position.

As for the Banyankore Cultural Foundation, again, in what had essentially been a divided society it was entirely valid for an organization like the BCF to have been founded in order to present an opposite and alternative agenda with regard to the question of Obugabe. As the first part of its name implies, it first of all sees itself as representing *Banyankore*, 'the people of Ankole'. If no other bodies seemed inclined to take account of broadly felt popular opinions about the matter in the first place, it was quite natural that a body like the BCF would seek to give voice to them.

Still, while the points of departure of BCF and NCT are clear, it is perhaps less clear what 'secondary' positions they should be adopting in the process. Notably, if it is unfair to expect a community strongly opposed to the reinstatement of kingship to accept the latter, it is only fair to expect that same community to recognize it as a

major historical concession if the other side were to abstain from further advocacy in recognition of the strong feelings evoked in the process. In this connection, one of the insights which the original study for **Regalia Galore** had yielded was how much the Obugabe had historically been an institution *of* and *for* the Bahima in Nkore, and thus centrally important to them. In due course this background would seem to deserve recognition by all Banyankore alike, irrespective of whether or not in the end the monarchy were restored and in what particular way.

Likewise, the NCT for its part would need to recognize that re-instatement of a *colonially* restructured institution like that of Ankole kingship is by no means as self-evident as it might appear. In a way, one might say it is the tragic fate of the Obugabe to have become so much extended beyond its original domain that it has lost its proper historical foundation. As the earlier parts of this study have revealed, the monarchy's incorporation into the colonial framework caused a once meaningful institution to become largely redundant. The extension of the formal jurisdiction of the Obugabe during colonial times could not but leave many or most Banyankore indifferent to it, and the most vocal parts of society even indignant about the premise of inequality it entailed. Given this background, it would be difficult to expect that the domain of a kingship which could once be extended by way of a colonial administrative measure would now be voluntarily and popularly accepted. The complexity of the case is such, therefore, that any attempt at resolution would require multiple mutual recognition of the concerns on the other side. 'Victory' thinking from either side would seem quite unproductive: rather, any concluding moment to all the deliberations on the issue should ideally come to figure as a high point in social and historical reconciliation (which in the end is worth more than 'winning' any social or ethnic battles).

As for the third 'party' caught up in the complexity of the case, the Uganda government, in taking the formal position that 'kings' are 'cultural leaders' which therefore 'per definition' are not its business, it may actually have abandoned the room it could have used for a more active involvement. The government's position stemmed from its prior concern with the Buganda case, with regard to which its approach had

been meant as a formula to keep the Kabaka out of politics.[5] However, it appears the word 'political' here carries a different connotation, referring to day to day political processes. It surely is a 'political' matter in another sense of the word to be deciding about monarchical restoration, even if it concerns a seemingly 'non-political' office.

With respect to the Ankole puzzle, one wonders whether a more active government intervention might possibly have steered the issue away from deadlock, allowing a search for more creative solutions. In other, perhaps more bureaucratically inclined or endowed contexts, for example, one might have pursued alternative routes in trying to avoid having the issue being decided through competitive campaigning. The latter tends to have the effect of polarizing positions and may produce quite unpredictable outcomes. Instead, one might have opted, for example, for a 'committee scenario': installing a committee of enquiry which is charged by government with the task of looking into all aspects of the matter, or being given a specific brief and questions on the basis of which it is expected to conduct its investigations and make recommendations. Such a committee would take its time, hear all parties concerned, and eventually produce a report with its findings and recommendations. Government in turn would discuss this and could formulate its own position on the matter, possibly in 'white paper' format. Together, these policy papers could form the basis for a more informed debate in parliament or whatever other appropriate context, followed by final decision-making. If this seems a tedious process, which it may well be, it is worth to remember that the whole process of enquiry, reflection and structured discussion about the issues involved is likely to have its own clarifying effects, whatever they may be. One positive aspect of this could be that at least there will be better and fuller information about all the relevant aspects before any final decisions are being reached. A second would be that in this process one would have considered

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[5] That objective was not fully reached: the Buganda Government is now being reconstituted, with Ministers being appointed for various portfolios, all under the guise of the 'cultural leader' principle. The process is reminiscent of the negotiations that took place in preparation of Uganda's independence in 1962, when especially a strong lobby on behalf of Buganda, commonly identified as the Mengo establishment, submitted claims for autonomous structures and offices based on arguments of 'tradition'. Only a few years later, the 'tradition' discourse had made place for one highlighting ethnic confrontation.

and tested all scope for flexibility to bring opposite positions closer together. With some luck, such a process and dialogue would also have its own reconciling and learning effects, which in the context of a society like that of Ankole might well be one of its most important long-term advantages.

Now, clearly, the composition of any such a committee of enquiry would be a matter of utmost importance. In the present, as yet entirely hypothetical case, it would stand to reason that both the NCT and the BCF would need to be adequately represented, and might together constitute the bulk of the committee's membership. Surely, their joint involvement in any such committee could provide for an alternative, possibly more meaningful dialogue about matters of common interest and concern than many of the present indirect exchanges via the press. In addition, some other, third party membership might be invited on the committee for their comparative expertise on particular aspects, or perhaps to facilitate the dialogue, though expressly not to tip the balance of opinion in favour of one position or another.

Guiding questions a committee of such a nature might be invited to concentrate on could run along any of the following, roughly parallel lines: Is there any 'need' to re-introduce kingship in Ankole? What role or purpose would it be expected to serve? Are there any conceivable pre-conditions under which restoration of kingship might become considered as a feasible option in Ankole society? Under what conditions, if any, could re-introduction of the Obugabe come to look acceptable to the vast majority of Ankole society? What kind of restructuring of the institution of kingship would be required to make it acceptable and welcomed by the population as a whole? Or, from an even more positively constructive interest and point of departure: Could the institution of kingship in Ankole be (re-)constituted in any conceivable way such that it might become a socially integrative force, overcoming rather than deepening ethnic divisions and animosities ?

There could be numerous other possible questions, but the important point would be that they should allow and facilitate a joint search for possible pre-conditions. At the present stage and impasse of the debate in Ankole, it might be reasonable to raise questions such as the present ones. They would allow for either affirmative or

negative answers, but in both cases the discussion would be furthered by a fair amount of background thinking and preparation. And in principle, in a society in which some would feel that it needed an instrument like kingship as an *integrative* element, one should in principle expect flexible and serious efforts to come up with appropriate solutions. If finally the issue would nonetheless come to a dead end, which of course remains a real possibility, at least one could say it has not been for lack of careful consideration.

Incidentally, it will be appreciated that these kinds of questions themselves depart from an understanding of institutions of kingship in which their format and constitution are not necessarily 'fixed', but are essentially flexible and adjustable, within limits, to new conditions and demands. There is nothing particularly unusual about this. It is consistent with historical practice and precedent in the case of various European monarchies, which at various times have been subject to major redefinition of their role and prerogatives. In several cases, the public debate and policy dialogue about the position of European royalty continues until today, often including the question of continuation, in adapted form, or termination and replacement by non-monarchical, republican representative institutions. Far-reaching adaptation has also already been the experience of the Ankole monarchy itself. As the earlier parts of the present study have shown, during the 20th century the institution of Ankole kingship has been drastically redefined in a number of respects, so much so that any contemplating of the institution's restructuring at the present time would in no way present a novelty. But if one were to take the position (either in propagating or opposing restoration) that there is no alternative for the institution's format than the one that 'exists', or rather, existed, i.e. the pre-1966 institution, then further exploration of alternatives, if any, will make little sense.

At the present point, it is of course quite uncertain that either the NCT or the BCF or both would be prepared to join in any such dialogue, even if there were prior agreement that the outcome would remain entirely open and contingent upon full consensus. The differences in their respective points of departure might be just too vast. Quite possibly, therefore, this would be 'a bridge too far', though it would nonetheless be interesting, and clarifying in a way, to see how each of the two

organizations might respond to a proposition of this kind. At the same time, the sheer existence of two rival bodies both ostensibly committed to the furtherance of Ankole culture, but presumably having quite contrasted ideas as to what this should entail, appears indicative of serious rifts having re-emerged within the society and especially among its culturally most vocal segments. Hence, if the organizational expression of these rifts in the presence of the NCT and BCF may at first seem anomalous, it will be important to realize that the underlying social divisions which have re-surfaced in connection with the kingship issue in Ankole constitute the really serious matter in need of attention. Put again in briefest possible form, it is not so much kingship as such but the historical legacy and memory (and hence the future) of Bahima-Bairu relations which appear to be at issue in Ankole, at least to this outside observer. Clearly, it would seem in everybody's interest not to allow these to deteriorate, but to try and open a new chapter of cooperation, like what happened in the early days of the National Resistance Army and Movement in Ankole.

It is precisely in this current impasse that seems reflective of this socio-political rift that other initiatives are conceivable which, even though not directly addressed to the question of kingship, might help reconcile rather than divide, and might even be more readily manageable. In the light of the very different understandings and experiences of history and culture in the Ankole region which are likely to be found within the NCT and the BCF, it might be worth envisaging the possibility of a joint history project set up by the two organizations. Such a venture might be extremely helpful in determining the common ground as well as the major differences in their respective readings of history and historical relationships between the various ethnic communities in Ankole. Again, it may well seem far-fetched at this moment to see the two bodies undertake such a joint project, but consider the potential interest and pay-offs: A joint history project could, first of all, be an important *learning exercise* to all parties concerned. If one saw oneself jointly responsible in a venture to produce, say, an authoritative history of Ankole, then by the very nature of it such an exercise would call for profound and extensive dialogue between participants over the key forces that have been shaping Ankole society into its present form. One would not normally or necessarily expect this to 'resolve' various disputes, but at least to clarify them and produce better understandings of what significance others have been

attaching to the same features or experiences manifested in a common context. But there must also be elements in common which it might be worth recognizing as such and making explicit.

Taking this a few steps further, a joint history project for Ankole could extend into various different directions, and actually become quite an exciting project to take part in. For instance, it might look into common elements of clan structure, language, and customs for Bairu and Bahima and see where they differ and vary and where they meet. In the past, many such studies were undertaken separately for Bahima in particular but also for Bairu or Banyankore, underlining exclusiveness. Possibly, any such joint enquiry might be undertaken in the spirit of, or promote, a kind of 'historic compromise'. After all, if there were greater preparedness to consider and acknowledge what one has 'in common', parties might also more readily accept and acknowledge what is 'different': either about the other group's background and involvement or about the latter's perception of history and their role in it. 'Learning from each other's history' could constitute a lead theme in any such exercise.

If any possible joint history project were to unfold, then at some point it might come to surveying the kingship situation prior to colonisation: Mpororo, Buhweju, Buzimba, Igara, Nkore, etc., mapping out the distinctiveness and similarities of each of these entities. The implication could be to show that until the end of the 19th century there had been a range of kingships, all of which could potentially be restored *if* there were an idea to restore *pre*-colonial kingship. Among other things, the project could then verify the possible claims to recognition of the dynasties of the Beenemafundo, the Beenekirenzi, the Benekihondwa, the Beeneruzira and the Beenerukari, among others, several of which are to be found in the present Ntungamo area (Cf. Morris, 1962, p. 20). Besides, a joint history project could possibly provide the proper context for examining the claims that as an institution the *Ankole* kingship would be some 600 years old. As suggested above, if the idea is to restore the colonially restructured kingship, it might need to be recognized that its lifetime has extended just over 60 years. At any rate, the kingship experience in the region, from ancient times until its abrogation, would naturally constitute an extremely important aspect for any joint history enquiry to delve into.

Again, the role of a joint history project would not necessarily be to make recommendations about any future restoration of kingship. But if such a project were to devote attention to the issue, which of course it might well do, it could well come up with a conclusion that several pre-1900 entities would have valid theoretical claims to restoration. This might lead to proposals either to a) recognize them all; b) install a rotational 'chief among chiefs', like at one time in Busoga or in faraway Malaysia; or c) just let the matter rest. If on the other hand one wanted to hold on to the idea to restore the extended *post*-1900 institution of Ankole kingship (on the premise that the presence of kings had once again become established as a *norm* in Uganda after 1993), then one should in principle accept the need for major structural adaptations which would make the institution acceptable to Ankole's population as a whole. A restructured, integrative institution of kingship with which all Banyankore could ideologically identify, for example, not unlike the way Buganda's Kabaka can in principle be seen to relate to all Kiganda clans, would potentially be a great asset to Ankole in overcoming historic ethnic divisions. In particular, this would seem to call for re-consideration of the mode of inheritance and succession, such that in principle one could see Abagabe marry from any of the clans in Ankole, Bahima or Banyankore, and thus produce descendants and heirs that might rightly consider themselves 'all-Ankole'. Again, however, it seems far from certain that those in favour of bringing back kingship to Ankole would be prepared to make that concession.

In this connection, while it is somewhat surprising that this particular aspect has not yet been taken up in the public debate, the fact is that the pre-colonial Nkore kingship was **not** a hereditary institution. To be sure, historically contenders for succession would come from the Bahinda clan as a matter of course in Nkore, but among them there would typically be a struggle for power at the death of an Omugabe.[6] The idea of inheritance was only introduced during colonial times, and began with Gasyonga succeeding Kahaya. But if the pre-1900 institution were taken as the point of departure, an appropriate present-day equivalent for its particular mode of succession could simply be election, though then from a slate of candidates who theoretically might come from any of the clans. At present, such an option may not exist: it remains

to be seen whether those in favour of monarchical restoration would be prepared to engage in as fundamental a rethink of the institution as it might require for it to become of relevance to the society as a whole. At the same time it remains hard to see how minority kingship, supported in practice by a relatively small body of 'adherents of monarchical culture', in the current phrasing in Uganda, could at all be a viable solution. Realistically, the expectation that one must count on a continuing impasse on this score seems at least as likely as achieving any meaningful breakthrough.

Towards an Ankole Museum of History and Culture: A Far-fetched Proposition?

If ever there were anything like a joint history project in which BCF and NCT might participate, with a big leap of imagination one might see this as potentially providing a platform for an even more ambitious undertaking. One truly challenging task that might be taken up within an ongoing history project could be to engage in the building of a museum of Ankole history and culture. Such a museum might serve many purposes, not the least of which would be to provide a concrete object for ongoing dialogue and collaboration between BCF and NCT it would entail. Educationally, too, the creation of an imaginative museum would be of major value to the school system in Ankole and beyond. Above all, there is a rich culture and historical legacy in the Ankole region, which is well worth preserving and displaying for the benefit of Banyankore as well as of visitors to the region. Traditional Bahima livelihood patterns, for example, in more than one way are unique within the wider East African context, subject as they now are to drastic transformation and facing eventual disappearance. It would be extremely important to document all this and preserve it for posterity. Similarly, various aspects of traditional Bairu life and culture would warrant documentation and representation within the context of a museum, and could be engagingly displayed with various advanced techniques now available for such purposes. Again, for many reasons though above all as a focal point for people locally with an interest in the region's historical background, there could be untold benefits from the establishment of an Ankole museum of history and culture. Last but not least, the background and history of Ankole's kingship should naturally be given ample attention and prominence within a museum of this kind. Royalty everywhere

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[6] See page .. above for a discussion with the former Omugabe and senior princes on this question.

brings with it numerous records and attributes that will attract public interest, and which can be complemented by relevant collections of photographs, film and video. The museum might also provide adequate room for accommodating Bagyendanwa, the royal drums, on its premises.

Clearly, therefore, there would in principle be a highly suitable project for joint action by the NCT and BCF, and a successful collaborative portrayal of Ankole culture in its manifold facets would in fact constitute a monument to the role of these organizations themselves. If successful, they might even come to consider a merger. Still, history and culture by their very nature are subject to multiple and malleable interpretation. Clearly, in any joint activity like a shared museum project there would be numerous points on which BCF and NCT would need to compare notes and would want to register their agreement or disagreement with particular historical representations. Again, in as far as they would be able to resolve such issues, the pay-off would be a truly *authoritative* rendering of local history, in turn with substantial positive effects on socio-ethnic relations. But even if <u>no</u> consensus were reached on various key aspects, which given the background history should not be too surprising, a joint museum project might still make sense. It could allow each of the two organizations to concentrate its attention to the aspects and items it considered of primary importance from its own perspective, each working on a different floor, for example. If this involved matters invoking contrasted interpretations, a museum that would thus accommodate different perspectives on vital matters of common interest and history might still be considered a unique venture, or in fact even more so.

Concluding Remarks

In the light of the above, it is not quite accidental that a new edition of a book on the history and background of Ankole kingship should end on a proposal for a museum project on Ankole's history and culture. It seems clear from all accounts that there <u>is</u> an extremely interesting story to be told and re-told in connection with Ankole's kingship and its place in history and culture. A proper museum would seem to be the proper place for this. It could place Ankole's kingship in its historical and cultural context, and it could present that context itself with all the richness and points of

interest for which it has been drawing broad attention. Besides, a museum project, connected to an ongoing forum over the nature and contents of Ankole culture, might possibly help to attenuate the social divisions which indirectly had given rise to it.

When contemplating possible ways of tackling the Ankole kingship issue, a museum project as suggested here might itself be taken as one of the alternative options, possibly constituting the one that might score highest in terms of its potentially beneficial effects on social integration and reconciliation among Ankole's population groups. Other options which have been touched upon in the text above would go in very different directions, and be likely to generate very different effects and political repercussions. The first would be the NCT's line, namely to keep possible restoration focused on the Nkore-originated institution, with a Bahinda-based royal dynasty, as it was terminated in 1967. This would represent the most direct form of restoration of what there was immediately before, but also the one most likely to provoke strong reactions and deepening social conflict. A second option therefore would be to open up the lines of inheritance and expect the Abagabe, not only in theory but also in practice, to marry from any of the other Ankole clans. The third option would be restoration not just of the Nkore monarchy, but also of the kingships of Buhweju and Buzimba (in present-day Ibanda) as well as the break-away kinglets in Igara, Shema, and Ntungamo that had split off from the former Mpororo kingdom. By implication, the territorial domain of each of these would remain limited to that of the respective historical entities, and would not include non-kingdom areas such as Bunyaruguru. This option therefore might represent the most accurate *historical* reconstruction, and to some degree diminish though not eliminate the ethnic issue. A fourth option would be a further variant of this, namely to consider some form of a rotating *primus inter pares* role among these various kings and kinglets, roughly along the lines as once existed in Busoga. A fifth possibility would an elective kingship, theoretically with candidates from any of the clans within the Ankole region. This might appear to constitute the most radical but also the most democratic form of re-structuring. However, historically, it would by no means be without its equivalent and precedent: in pre-colonial Nkore and Mpororo, succession took place not on a hereditary principle but on the basis of competition between different (Bahinda) contenders. Extending this privilege to all the clans would appear only a relatively small step,

constitutionally speaking, and could help overcome the ethnic divide which is re-surfacing. Whether the Bahinda elite and others will be positively disposed towards accepting this in order to allow a more generalized kingship to be considered, remains a big question, however. If they were not but instead might more readily accept a non-royal office holder to be chosen by election, like the Constitutional Heads in various districts shortly after Uganda's independence, that could be considered as an additional, sixth option. The seventh and final option, then, is simply no change from the status quo, implying a continued stalemate about the issue at least for some time to come, but under the circumstances possibly representing the most realistic option.

In recent years, against the backdrop of failed or failing systems of governance in various parts of post-colonial Africa, there has been a wave of propositions calling for attention to a 'betting on tradition' as an alternative in different regions of the continent. The underlying idea of these propositions is that the familiarity and feelings of security which would be associated with traditional institutions like kingship or chiefship might provide a closer fit with prevailing cultural values and allow better chances for culturally specific paths of governance and development. When considering any such culturally 'authentic' alternatives for possible adoption, however, parties concerned will do well to critically examine the powers and interests in support of the tabling of alternative propositions for governance in terms of particular 'tradition' and 'culture' arguments. Also, the particular 'tradition' claimed may itself warrant some probing: not a few supposedly 'traditional' institutions had basically lost their former glory and meaning due to their redefinition and incorporation into colonial structures, as the earlier study for **Regalia Galore** had found to be largely true for Ankole's kingship itself. Instead, new claims may be laid for privileged access to public resources, power and esteem in the name of 'tradition' as a seemingly higher purpose and legitimization, but actually representing the interests of a very specific segment of the community concerned. Chances then are of increased social conflict rather than reconciliation being generated by re-traditionalization. Ankole could become one such case if priority is not given to improving community rapports.