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War and Corruption:  
A Political History of Uganda

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Honors 498, 499  
Dr. Dean Curry  
May 7, 2007
Uganda is a land of vast natural beauty. It has gorgeous mountain ranges, lush forests, stunning plains, and the source of the great Nile River. The land is so fertile that legends say that if a traveler ends the day by propping his walking stick in the soil, he will wake up to find that it has sprouted leaves. Uganda was once considered to be the Pearl of Africa. However, it is now better known for something as great in magnitude as its natural beauty: the destruction of the country by its own political leaders.

In 1962 Ugandans received their freedom from colonial rule. What should have been the beginning of a bright future was the first step down a path of devastation. Sir Edward Mutesa became the first and only legitimately elected president, but was forced to flee at gunpoint four years later. Through political finagling and military might, Milton Obote was able to obtain what essentially amounted to dictatorship of the country. He began a trend of increasingly horrific regimes to overthrow a terrible ruler just to make things worse. Not only was the economy continually wreaked by each consecutive leader, but each leader committed ethnically-aimed atrocities that put a socially unified Uganda seemingly out of grasp. An example of the devastation is found in the capital city of Kampala where there are a large number of giant carnivorous storks, whose population numbers are said to have soared during Idi Amin’s rule because the birds were able to feast on the corpses of the political opponents he had killed. In addition, “Children became used to seeing corpses lying around, so much so that it became common simply to jump over them if one came across them in one’s path without bothering to cover them up or report the matter to the police” (Mutibwa 122). The devastating effects of these self-seeking regimes on the people of Uganda have been severe and demoralizing. It has only been since 1986, under the Presidency of Yoweri Museveni, that things began to improve. Much of the country has seen vast improvements and the formation of a stable and successful
society. Yet, there are still many residual problems, including rampant corruption and a twenty
year war in the north.

It is a troubling question as to how a country with so much potential could suffer the
devastation that Uganda did. One scholar notes with a great deal of truth, “There seem[s] to be
just \textit{too many} causes of the countries troubles” (Hansen 1). There are many people, groups, and
factors that each played a role in the destruction of a beautiful country; too many to fully
describe the situation in one paper. However, Uganda’s inability to develop a sense of national
unity has continually plagued the country and played a prominent role in most of the troubles.
At independence, the country was a conglomeration of diverse peoples and no leader has been
able to meld the people into a unified or even semi-unified whole. Instead, political leaders used
ethnicity as a tool to gain and maintain support. Through this practice divisions were turned into
chasms. Adding to the problem, the coming of the British and contact with the Western world
drastically changed the original societal structures. The British reorganized the lifestyles of the
people in order to make it possible to extract taxes, demand manual labor, and enforce policies.

Uganda began as an arbitrary colonial construct. European powers drew up the
boundaries for their new protectorate with little thought for the people they enclosed inside.
Trapped within these artificial, but official walls, were twenty eight distinct ethnic groups; all
different down to their core values and beliefs (Gukina 14). As the British forcefully melded
these people groups together, everything changed. Their way of life was taken from them and
they were left struggling to discover how to live in a world that was transitioning far faster than it
ever had before. What resulted was hopelessness for most, and a spirit of unrestrained and
unrealistic opportunism for a privileged few. Rapidly shifting wealth led to a culture of grabbing
whatever one could, as long as it lasted—for one’s self and one’s tribe.
Uganda has been, and still is, deeply plagued by a lack of national unity with fractions inherently built into the social and political system. The British created an unstable entity, and then with little preparation in 1962, left the people of Uganda with the necessity of running an independent country. Ugandan politicians gladly took the reigns and did their worst. “Colonial policies . . . sowed the seeds of the weeds that now overrun Uganda. However, Ugandans must take blame for nurturing rather than uprooting and destroying the weeds” (Obbo 205).

Ugandans deserved independence and they deserved it quickly, but in 1962 they were not ready. Politicians took an unstable country and collapsed it. While there are many positive aspects of Uganda’s history, this paper will focus on understanding the negative ones by examining the ways in which ethnic and cultural factors played into the politics of Uganda to create the wars and corruption that have plagued the country for as long as it has existed. While the first twenty-five years of independence brought constantly increased suffering for the people of Uganda, the last twenty have brought some relief. Museveni has turned the country around, but only time will tell how long the scars from the country’s past will remain.

**Pre-colonial Situation:**

A common Western misperception is that all Africans are the same. A stereotypical picture of an African family is one living in a tiny circular mud hut spending their time sustenance farming and caring for a small herd of long-horned cows. It is assumed that in the late 1800’s they would have been too primitive to differ in political ideology, core values, or beliefs. However, this could not be more untrue. The traditional political structures in East Africa were numerous and diverse in nature and each ethnic group had its own rich and drastically different culture (Gukina13).
Although complex, traditional African political structures can be broken down into several distinct categories based on centralization of power. The simplest political structure is the band. This type of structure consists of a handful of related individuals working together in a hunting and gathering society. Choice in leadership is based on ability to ensure survival. The best natural leader is put in charge because the people do not have the stored resources needed to make mistakes and live. It is rare, but can be seen in the Jie ethnic group (Potholm 13).

The next step up in complexity is the segmented society, which takes several forms. A classical segmented system is one in which an ethnic group is broken down into smaller groups, called clans with closer kinship ties. There is a leader for each clan, but not the population as a whole (Potholm 14-15). Another type of segmented society is the universalistic segmented system. It is similar to the classical segmented system, except it has a built in mechanism for separation into age groups during times of need. For example, during a war the people would separate into groups such as elders, warriors, and children, each with their own function. This type of society has leaders who take control of the whole group in such times as war as well as leaders for each clan (Potholm 15-17). The ritually stratified segmented system has a central power that is set up for religious purposes only. Political power remains in the hands of the individual clans. An example of this structure is the Ankole people (Potholm 17).

Some societies set up as autonomous village systems similar to city states in Italy or Greece led by either an individual or council (Potholm 18). This structure was based on the, implicit philosophical assumption that the government that governs least governs best, and that local autonomy was a political goal worth pursuing@ (Potholm 19).

The political systems with the most centralized power are the pyramidal, associational, and centralized monarchies. The pyramidal monarchy is made up of several clans and each has
its own individual leader. The leader of each clan makes up a council, which is headed up by the leader of the most powerful clan. The Lange ethnic group formed this type of structure (Potholm 19-20). The associational monarchy is similar, but the clans are more closely tied together (Potholm 21-22). In a centralized monarchy there is a “strong centralized administration, a firm territorial base, and heterogeneous membership” (Potholm 22). The leader is able to tax and force subjects into a workforce or army. This type of structure is represented in the Buganda kingdom (Potholm 22).

Three ethnic groups, the Chiga, Karamojong, and Buganda, amply illustrate the vast differences among the people of Uganda. The Chiga are located in the mountains of southeastern Uganda. They are a Bantu speaking people group with a classic segmented society. Their lives are based around cultivating the mountain slopes. The only political structure with any authority is the family and all decisions are made by mutual agreement. For example, if a crime is committed, the close relations of the offender and victim would gather to determine and pronounce a sentence. The society is held together by strong relational ties rather than any political force (Gukina 24-27).

The Karamojong are located in northeastern Uganda and linguistically are considered Hamites. Instead of farming, their society is based entirely on herding. The size of one’s cattle herd determines one’s wealth and social standing. Their political structure is close to a universalistic segmented system. They are segmented by age groups and the male elders maintain the political power and special ability to communicate with their god. As a group they have strict rules that require lending assistance to anyone in their ethnic group that needs help. However, a distinct separation in their eyes exists between those who are Karamojong and those
who are not. Warriors were allowed to raid anyone who was not Karamojong without any motivation beyond desiring their cattle (Gukina 31).

The central one fourth of the country was dominated by the Buganda Kingdom. This kingdom was a strong centralized monarchy. Full power rested in the hands of the Kabaka. "The Kabaka was the fountain of authority and justice and his authority was real and felt in every household" (Gukina 35). Beneath the Kabaka was a hierarchical structure with four layers of chiefs. These chiefs were directly appointed by the Kabaka and he could promote or demote them at will. The various chiefs had power to make decisions, but they spoke in the name of the Kabaka. Citizens on the lowest level were supposed to have direct allegiance to the Kabaka rather than be attached through their chief. To support this direct rule, the Kabaka continually moved his residence around the kingdom, so that he could spend time in the location of each clan. They also had a court system where the original decision was made by the lowest level of chief, but if needed could be appealed all the way up to the Kabaka. Challenging the Kabaka’s decision resulted in execution (Gukina 32-36).

Development of a Protectorate

It was with the Buganda tribe that the British first made contact in the region that would later become Uganda (Mutibwa 1). European explorers looking for the source of the Nile in 1862 were amazed to stumble upon a people group with such a developed political system. John Speke, who was the first European to travel through Buganda wrote, “I cut a poor figure in the comparison with the display of the dressy Waganda. They wore neat bark cloth cloaks resembling the best yellow corduroy cloth . . .” (Gukina 45). Journalist, Henry Stanley showed up soon after and convinced the Kabaka to send a letter through London’s Daily Telegraph to the Queen asking for missionaries and western technology (Mutibwa 1).
Before the arrival of westerners, there was an impending war between the Buganda Kingdom and the Bunyoro Kingdom because the Kabaka of Buganda desired more territory. Ethnic groups in the north, especially the Karamojong, conducted frequent raids of their neighbors. In addition, Muslim traders were contending for control of the region. However, as a whole the area was relatively peaceful with little interaction between ethnic groups (Gukina 14-15).

British missionaries began to arrive at the court of the Kabaka in 1877 to win Buganda for Protestantism. This was the beginning of much trouble for Uganda. In 1879 French Catholics joined the struggle (Mutibwa 1-2). In 1884 with the death of Kabaka Mutesa I, the king of Buganda, the religious conflicts turned into a full scale military war (Gukina 48). At first the Christians allied to rid Buganda of the strong Arab influence, but soon were fighting each other as well (Gukina 49). Most of the Bugandan citizens converted to one of the foreign religions, with Catholics making up the majority, followed by Protestants, and lastly Muslims. However, the Protestant force was able to defeat the Catholics in the key battle of Mengo in 1892, leading to a political dominance by a minority (Mutibwa 2). The successor of Mutesa I, Mwanga, was against all three religious groups, but in order to reestablish order was forced to ally with the British (Gukina 49). The British established a protectorate in 1894 and the struggle for religious dominance was over for the next sixty eight years of British rule. Yet, it would resurface again to help prevent unity after Uganda was given its independence in 1962.

While religious conflict was repressed by the British, the source of an even greater division was created. The British were unwilling to put their own financial resources into the governing of Uganda, but also unwilling to lose their control of the area because the Germans wanted it to connect colonies they already had on Africa’s west and east coasts (Gukina 50).
Therefore, the British set up a classic example of indirect colonial rule through the Buganda. This agreement pleased Bugandans because it put them in charge of the protectorate and empowered them to expand, but it also created a monumental barrier to national unity.

Buganda began to take Uganda for the British by conquering one of their rival kingdoms, Bunyoro. Not only did the Buganda take away the political autonomy of the Bunyoro, the British also gave them rights to some of the Bunyoro territory. This annexing of Bunyoro land, termed the Lost Counties by Buganda, caused great conflict between the two kingdoms because it was where past Bunyoro kings were buried (Mutibwa 3). Buganda was able to conquer all of what is now Uganda, some peacefully and some militarily. After an area was under British control, a Buganda chief was placed in charge. They typically ignored the traditional politics of the area and ruled in the style of Buganda, with all Buganda leadership (Gukina 57).

The power that was given to the Buganda within the British protectorate created great hostility toward the Buganda by the rest of Uganda. In other African countries with direct colonization anti-European sentiments were created by the colonizers, which could be used as a unifying factor at independence. In Uganda, the Buganda were the ones directly colonizing the rest of the people, so there was even greater anger at the Buganda than the British (Gukina 57).

Since the British did not fund the colonial government or the Buganda leadership, there was a need to tax the peasants. However, many Ugandan societies were not monetarily based. Taxes had to be taken in what the people produced, or the people had to work for the British to earn cash. The need for tax money guided chiefs to force the people to grow cotton and other cash crops (Gukina 58). Those who could not earn enough through cash crops had no choice but to subject themselves to manual labor for the British.
These changes tore at the heart of societies’ cultures and values, destroying everything they had considered normal for centuries. For example, for the Karamojong the only way to be successful was to have a large herd of cattle and to steal cattle from other groups. To them manual labor for the British was a disgrace (Gukina 65). In addition, the Karamojong were not used to being forced by any type of army or police force; when the elders made a decision the youth followed it out of respect (Gukina 31). With the onset of colonial rule, power was taken from the elders and forced upon the community with guns. Many had to sell their cattle to pay taxes and the rest had to work for the British. These changes were not easily accepted. In 1923 the British appointed chief was too successful at controlling the population, so the elders met and decided that the chief should be killed. They sent the young warriors to execute him, which the respectful youth willingly did (Gukina 69).

The transition of the Chiga was equally as hard. The Chiga would have had no concept of centralized authority. Buganda’s political structure could not have been more different to their relational approach. Yet, they were forced by the British and the Bugandans to rapidly make the change and obey a centralized government bent on exploiting them.

Colonial rule turned differences into divisions that would later help cause every disaster that the country faced. Many conflicts were based on two specific factors: a north/south divide and a division between three language classes. Although, the Bugandans initially were responsible for militarily expanding the British protectorate, they were disarmed in 1905. A new army was created that was dominated by people from the north and east (Mutibwa 6). At the same time, most of the economic, educational, and agricultural development efforts were focused on Buganda and central Uganda, while the edges of Uganda remained underdeveloped (Gukina 64). A clear-cut division was created between the thriving centralized Buganda Kingdom and
the undeveloped marginal areas. What resulted was a split between the economic power in the south and the military power in north and east. The current president, Yoweri Museveni, claims that the divide, which still remains politically important, was intentional. The northern section of the country was purposefully ignored in order to make it easy to recruit from for manual labor and the army (Gardener 318). Another explanation is that the separation was caused by a “divide and conquer” plan by the British to keep the Buganda from becoming overly powerful (Mutibwa 6). Thompson Gardner, however, claims that “. . .the colonial state was severely limited in what it could impose against the will of the territory’s inhabitants. . .” (5). He argues that the people of Uganda were so different that the British had no hope of creating national unity and, therefore, can not be blamed for the disunity. Many of the ethnic groups in the central and southern regions already had strong centralized governments and were easier to work into the model of indirect rule. The ethnic groups in the north tended to have a more decentralized power structure. It is possible that they were simply left out because they were difficult to control.

The second great division was between three traditional language systems within East Africa. Linguists have divided the languages spoken in Uganda into three separate families. The ethnic groups in the central region, including the Buganda Kingdom, speak what are considered to be Bantu languages. The Langi and Acholi of northern Uganda are Nilotic, and the West Nile consists of languages within the Sudanic family (Uganda Now 5). After independence politicians used the language classes as social ties with which to broker for power.

**Transition to Independence**

In the mid-twentieth century the British realized that they would eventually have to give up control of Uganda and in 1953 took a poorly received step towards preparing for Uganda’s independence (Wrigley 30). The British government communicated that Uganda, Kenya, and
Tanzania might receive their independence together with the formation of an East African Federation. The Kabaka, who did not like the idea that Buganda’s privilege status might be lost in a large federation, demanded the individual independence of Buganda and plans for when that independence would come (Mutibwa 14). Taking drastic action, the British deported the Kabaka. The intentions of the British were to reduce the power of Buganda in hopes of providing Uganda with a greater chance of unity after independence. However, not only did the people of Buganda become angry, but all of Uganda was upset by this move. They felt it was an attempt to suppress Ugandan political power (Wrigley 30). The Kabaka was eventually returned and in 1955 a political agreement was reached that formed a Ugandan run Legislative Council (Wrigley 31). This move began the too rapid development of Uganda into an unprepared independent nation. There was not enough time to properly prepare the country for autonomous rule since transitional plans had begun so late:

Another decade at least of colonial rule, devoted to the serious planning of workable political structures, would have given the launch a better chance of success. But the British—not those on the spot but their masters in London—were anxious to be gone, and so they simply took the existing administrative units and turned them into states, handing the African people a governmental framework and telling them to build themselves a nation around it. The chances that this could be done without blood and tears were slender everywhere, but nowhere more slender than in Uganda, where the basic structural defect, the size and solidity of Buganda, had been plastered but not properly repaired. (Wrigley 33).

The Ugandan army offers a clear example of how the British rushed Uganda towards independence. Idi Amin, who joined the King’s African Rifles in 1946, only received a few years of elementary education (Mutibwa 79). At first he climbed up the ranks because of his physical size (Mutibwa 80). Amin was a large and athletic man, strong enough to become Uganda’s heavy weight boxing champion in his youth (“2003: ‘War criminal’ Idi Amin dies”). His lack of education should have kept him in the low ranks, but he quickly increased because
the British needed Ugandan officers to take over the army when they relinquished control. He was one of the first two Ugandan commissioned officers and, based on this alone, was indispensable. He was even kept in the army after committing war crimes in Kenya because they had no one to replace him (Mutibwa 80). He was also sent to training courses in both England and Israel, but did not complete them. Shortly after independence he was made Deputy Commander of the Army. The other officer commissioned at the time was made Commander of the Army, which shows how little choice the British gave themselves (Mutibwa 80).

**Disunity at Independence**

At the turn of the 20th century the British had taken a geographic area with a wide variety of people groups and constructed a protectorate for purposes that only made sense to the West. After just under seventy years, potentially a single lifetime, of policies that weakened unity rather than creating it, they turned the protectorate into a country. As independence neared there was great anticipation, but it is no wonder that Ugandan’s view of what independence should look like differed dramatically across the country. Some saw a benefit in keeping a united Uganda and had developed a sense of a relationship with the rest of the protectorate. To many others, a true freedom would allow them to return to the independence of the individual political structures that their parents or grandparents had lived under.

During colonial rule there was little reason for the different ethnic and political groups to interact. The British had strict regulations which prevented trade or any market economy to develop between geographical areas. All business was done directly with the British (Gukina 80). The only political interaction between ethnic groups was when the British used one group to dominate another, which clearly did not create positive relations. Therefore, there were only a few opportunities for the different ethnicities to interact. These included the Uganda Bar
Society, labor unions, Uganda Teachers Association, and religious organizations (Gukina 78). Religion played a major role in Ugandan politics, but unfortunately it created another reason for division, rather than national unity. The other mixed ethnic organizations were beneficial in reducing ethnic barriers, but contained such a small percentage of the population that their effects were minimal. Buganda’s leadership so strongly desired to be autonomous and not lose the political power they had gained under colonialism that they declared Buganda’s independence in 1960, however this failed to actually take effect (Mutibwa 16).

**Beginning of Politics**

The first political party in Uganda appeared in 1952. It termed itself the Uganda National Congress (UNC) (Mutibwa 13). A short ten years from independence, the formation of a political party was an important step towards self governance. However, the party was also a sad sign of what Ugandan politics would look like. The party was nearly uniformly Bugandan Protestants (Mutibwa 13). Over the next decade several more political parties developed, but all were divided along religious and cultural lines. The Democratic Party (DP) was made up of Bugandan Catholics; the Progressive Party (PP) was compiled of Bugandan Protestants; the Uganda Peoples Union (UPU) consisted of non-Bugandan Protestants; and Kabaka Yekka (KY) was focused on restoring power to the Kabaka of Buganda (Mutibwa 13-18).

Three parties remained and were the major players in the transition to independence. An anti-Buganda section of the UNC split to join with the UPU and formed the Uganda People’s Congress (UPC) (Mutibwa 16). The KY held the support of most of Buganda and the DP benefited from the country’s Catholic majority. Animosity developed between the KY, who wanted nothing besides what benefited Buganda, and the DP. An election was held for parliament where each district voted for a representative from their region. The leader of the
party that won the most seats would become president and could build the government. The DP had the largest support base and should have controlled the country at independence. Milton Obote, leader of the UPC, prevented his defeat by making an alliance with the KY (Mutibwa 19). The UPC and the KY had no political similarities and allied not out of recognition of commonalities, but purely because it made them stronger than the DP. Due to this alliance Milton Obote became Prime Minister and the Kabaka, Sir Edward Mutesa, became President. Obote cunningly fought his way into the unenviable position of leading a country that had little desire to be a single political entity and was now governed by two opposing but somehow allied parties. There was nothing but a common experience of British occupation to unite Uganda, and even that was tainted by the Bugandan’s role in colonization. There was no common language, no common culture, no common political history, no relationships between groups, and the marginalized sections of Uganda were much less developed than the central region. In addition to this, no Ugandan had any experience governing a country. All political offices open to Ugandans before independence could do nothing more than challenge rules made by the British.

Consequently, when Obote and his ministers assumed powers of government, they had, among their ranks, several eminent men who had considerable experience in berating the Protectorate administration in the Legislative Council but not of exercising actual powers of government or superintending over an orderly administration (Karugire 189).

Obote’s rule:

For the first few years in power Obote was careful. He had many rivals, so he spent time slowly grabbing power from whomever he could (Mutibwa 31). Obote’s government began by reducing the authority of the local government offices by centralizing the functions they were originally responsible for. He then went after civil organizations. The leaders of trade unions tended to be Kenyan immigrants because they had past experience in Kenya’s more developed unions. Obote decapitated the power of trade unions by making it illegal for non-Ugandans to be
officials. (Mutibwa 32). The next target was the two religious groups that did not support the 
UPC: Catholics and Muslims. The government took over Catholic schools and formed the 
National Association for the Advancement of the Muslims (NAAM). The NAAM might sound 
pro-muslim, and actually was, but it was created to rival the Ugandan Muslim Community 
(UMC) which was run by an Uncle of the Kabaka. Obote’s cousin led the NAAM and it was a 
way of removing power from the KY and controlling Muslims (Mutibwa 31).

The differences in political goals between Obote’s government and the KY eventually 
stressed relations to the point where both groups turned to the military in order to retain power. 
The KY looked to Shaban Opolot, the Army Commander, because his daughter had married a 
Bugandan politician. Obote looked to Idi Amin, the Deputy Commander, because they were 
both from northern Uganda (Mutibwa 36). To stay on top, Obote demoted Opolot and made Idi 
Amin the Army Commander. He also had five ministers who opposed him arrested (Mutibwa 
37-38). When the Kabaka continued to struggle for power, Obote took the final step towards 
dictatorship. In 1966 he claimed full and unchallengeable control of the country and even 
discarded the constitution. Buganda reacted by trying again to secede, which resulted in the 
battle of Mengo (Mutibwa 39). Idi Amin led the Ugandan army to capture the Kabaka’s palace 
forcing the Kabaka to flee to London (Mutibwa 39). Bugandans strongly supported their Kabaka 
and many civilians joined the fight. “Scores of these civilians were loaded on to army trucks and 
disposed of, many of them while still alive, either by being thrown into Murchison Falls or by 
being buried alive in common graves” (Mutibwa 39). The following year Obote completely 
removed Buganda as a political entity by getting rid of the kingdoms and restructuring the 
government into new districts without even using the term Buganda (Mutibwa 60).
Along with enemies caused by political and cultural reasons, Obote developed many enemies for economic reasons. Obote kept pushing the government in a socialist direction with the desire for the government to take ownership of most of the means of production. Many feared what this would look like, especially with corruption being a major factor in Obote’s regime. The government was used as an income source for Obote’s supporters. If the country shifted in a socialist direction, it could be assumed that the government would continue to be dishonestly used to increase the wealth of government employees, leaving the poor even poorer. This fear helped set the stage for Idi Amin’s coup in 1971 (Mutibwa 69).

Unrestrained Power and Cultural Reasons for Corruption

In pre-colonial times the individual political groups within Uganda were able to control their regions in a way that best benefited their communities. As with any society, there were problems, but it was functional. Traditional customs and rules had evolved in such a way that kept people accountable to do what was most beneficial to society as a whole. Leaders might have been powerful, but even the Kabaka was not completely resistant to others influence. In each society in Uganda, there were strict cultural guidelines that restricted the rulers with built-in checks and balances. For example, the mother of the Kabaka had a duty to scold him for his mistakes (Potholm 27). The rulers were also held accountable by the cultural understanding that a ruler was supposed to serve the people rather than exploit them (Potholm 26). “The ruler or rulers, whether king, chief, or group of elders, were regarded as serving the society; they were there to punish law breakers, arbitrate disputes, and insure domestic tranquility” (Potholm 25).

In many Ugandan societies much of the political authority rested in the hands of the elders. Although age does not guarantee good leadership abilities, it does often correlate with wisdom and a thorough understanding of life. Therefore, decisions were usually made with
knowledge of the issues involved and generally with some relationship to those who the
individual decisions would affect. Especially, since groups decisions in Africa are typically
based on a common agreement of everyone involved rather than majority vote. Coupled with the
difficult to break cultural mandate to respect one’s elders, this political model led to community
minded decisions that would, for the most part, be followed.

In addition, to the basic premises of what is important in African society differ from that
of Western cultures. In Africa, relationships maintain the highest importance. “Being the richest
man does not necessarily give status. Status is gained by willingness to share the riches with
other people. Consequently, it is not possible to accumulate wealth and still be an accepted part
of society” (Maranz 60). If someone saves money instead of giving it to a relative in need, then
he or she is strongly looked down upon (Maranz 37). Since Ugandan pre-colonial political
structures were generally developed around family and ethnic lines, most people within a group
were connected by relational ties so there was no way for one individual to get ahead without the
rest of the group. Therefore, although leaders generally had a degree of wealth above the rest of
societies, they did not horde huge amounts of wealth. The Kabaka of Buganda probably
amassed the most wealth due to the size and stature of the kingdom. Yet, he was still expected to
look after his kingdom’s best interest.

Since culture did not allow one to maintain savings, when hard times came along people
had no way to deal with financial difficulties by themselves. Instead, they relied on their
network of friends and relatives to provide for their need. Mutual reliance became a method of
survival (Maranz 65). In this way, strong ethnic and group solidarity developed. However, the
same was not true of outside groups and those who were not friends or relatives. Scarce
resources kept competition between ethnic groups strong. An example is the Karamojong who
were required by unwritten rules to give aid to any Karamojong who needed help, but were
esteemed for successful cattle raids of outsider’s herds (Gukina 31).

The transition from pre-colonial times to independence was swift. Colonial rule changed
society quicker than culture could adapt. The mores that once helped keep everything on track
were no longer beneficial. To make things even murkier, a new culture from the West had been
forced on people that had little use for it. As with any mixing of different ideas, there was
potential for good results. Western culture could have brought just as many good ideas and ways
of thinking as it had the potential to pick up from African culture. However, Ugandan societies
did not have the time or liberty to sort through what the best of both cultures would look like.
Kwame Nkrumah, who organized Ghana’s independence and was a strong African nationalist,
pushed the idea that colonialism brought with it a cultural battle (Potholm 44). When the British
conquered Uganda, they came with the idea that they were the superior race; that their forced
control of Uganda was justifiable because there was much they could teach the poor uncivilized
natives. This superiority is displayed in the first stanza of Rudyard Kipling’s poem “The White
Man’s Burden.”

Take up the White Man's burden--
Send forth the best ye breed--
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild--
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.

Nkrumah believed this thought of inferiority was so ingrained in Africans under colonialism that
it still lurks in their minds even after independence (Potholm 43). Even today, “To be civilized
means to be white- that is to act and think according to the maxims of white culture” (Potholm
44). The problem with this, in addition to the fact that it is false, is that most Ugandans do not
think in white terms. It is dangerous to think a country can be ruled with “white philosophy” when the people still operate by “African philosophy”.

The rapid switch from traditional political structures to a society trying to mirror itself after the Western world, created the perfect breeding ground for corruption, as well as adding fuel to the fire of ethnic prejudice. With the onset of colonial rule and taxation there came a need to make money, yet there was little opportunity to do so. Besides degrading manual labor for others, government jobs became the prominent place people looked for income earning jobs, but even with these the pay was unacceptably low. Because of this, government workers turned to abusing power for personal gain. Yet, the reasons for corruption are more complex than simple greed. A study on corruption in Uganda done in the late 1990s showed four major categories of corruption: procurement, privatization, vote buying, and judicial (Ruzindana). Corruption has been reduced since the time of Obote and Amin, but Uganda was still found to be only less corrupt than 35 out of 160 of the world’s countries in 2005 (Poroznuk 16-17). Within procurement, kickbacks are a common and expected practice both in government and private business. Problems within the category of privatization are that government officials often use government money, including foreign aid, for personal expenses. The regimes of Obote and Amin wreaked the judicial system and it still often runs on bribes and political influence. The study cited several reasons for corruption including low pay, deals made to get into political office that had to be repaid, poor monitoring, and poor enforcement of anti-corruption policies (Ruzindana).

Along with those reasons there are several cultural and societal explanations for rampant corruption in Uganda. David Maranz ascribes part of the problem to the use of a one pocket system when a two pocket system should be used (41-42). In Western cultures, government and
businesses operate based on what Maranz refers to as a two pocket system. In this model, government money is kept strictly separate from personal finances. In Uganda it is more acceptable to operate like a single proprietor business functions in the US; that is, as if all the money could be used for whatever needs arise, personal or governmental. This way of thinking leads to great abuse of government finances.

In Africa friendships are more important than material goods because it is an expected part of friendship to take care of each other financially. Friendships are often built upon what they can do for each other, and social networks are considered an important part of survival. “It is only natural to expect material benefits from friendships” (Maranz 65). When this practice is carried into government positions, it becomes a great challenge to national unity because the social expectation to help others is only applicable within one’s group of friends and relatives. One is not required to help outsiders. Government power is continually used to benefit friends and relatives at the cost of everyone else. A school teacher described how this discrimination happened even at schools with regard to scholarships that were offered:

In all my classes the non-Buganda children were hardworking and often achieved top grades even in Luganda classes! Every time I recommended any of these children whom the fellowships were meant to reward, none of them ever received any. The headmaster always managed to reward the academically poor pupils just because they happened to be his children or those of his friends and relatives (Obbo 206).

The damaging combination of colonial practice and African culture helped create a strong division between the north and south. The south received no positive British influence along with subjection to their rule and remained more traditionally based, while the north was the center of British development. There is a common belief this division between the north and south sections of Uganda was specifically created to make it easy to recruit northerners for the army and manual labor and to keep Bugandans out of the military in order to spread the power.
However, Thompson Gardner argues that colonial rule was too weak to have consciously created the division. He believes it was an unfortunate consequence of the north being too far away from the center of the country and made up of groups who did not have easy to manage centralized monarchies (318). Whatever the case, the division was created during British rule and strengthened through post-independence politics. It became that the “South was the ‘productive’ region and the north was the region that supplied labor” (Obbo 207). Part of the problem was that when education was scarce, those who received it were easily able to get high level jobs for the British. It became an expectation that even a minimal education qualified one for a job as at least a clerk. “Once a boy has passed through the primary school he considers that he has automatically joined the ranks of those who order others to work, and that physical labor by himself was derogatory” (qtd. in Obbo 207). However, as the education program expanded, there were no longer jobs available for all who desired them. Due to British developmental efforts in Buganda, most of the educated came from this region. They developed a sense of superiority, which was encouraged by British views of the northern groups, and led to the desire for “a foreigner to be poor and work for them” (Obbo 212).

**Idi Amin**

In January of 1971 Obote left the country for official business and Idi Amin staged successful coup. Just two years before one of Obote’s officials had bragged at an international conference that Uganda was not at risk of a military takeover like other African countries had befallen because Obote had taken measures to avoid it, “one of them being the appointment as military commander in Uganda of a complete non-entity, namely Amin” (Hansen 2). However, Idi Amin proved to be much more of a factor than anyone expected and tragically left his mark firmly cut into the soul of Uganda.
At first there was great rejoicing at the chance of a new political era. Amin was praised for saving the country from Obote (Mutibwa 83). He began his rule with an admirable gesture of respect and unity by bringing the body of Edward Mutesa, the first president of Uganda, back to Uganda for an official burial. Since he had been the Kabaka, this was of vast importance to Bugandans and even the rest of the country appreciated it (Mutibwa 86). Yet, even as Amin was being acclaimed as a hero, he was beginning a racial cleansing of the army. Obote, who was Langi, had looked to the two northern ethnic groups, the Acholi and Langi, for support. Idi Amin was from the West Nile, which consists of several ethnic groups with close ancestral ties to the people of southern Sudan. Idi Amin feared he did not have a strong enough hold on the military because a significant portion of the army consisted of Acholi and Langi, which he wrongly assumed supported Obote (Mutibwa 88). Amin relied heavily on his own people from the west. He even recruited 500 southern Sudanese into the army before attempting the coup (Woodward 233). In addition to this increase in the number of West Nilers, the first twenty months of Amin’s rule saw the massacre of many of the Acholi and Langi soldiers, but these massacres were well hidden. News only escaped in the form of heavily disputed rumors (Mutibwa 88). These killings catapulted ethnic relations to a whole new level of desperation. Throughout his years as a dictator he replaced all important government employees with West Nilers and “by about 1975 he had transformed the army, which had been predominantly Lou-speaking (dominated by the Acholi and Langi) up till the 1971 coup, to a predominantly Sudanic-speaking body of West Nilers from his own region” (Mutibwa 107-108). Idi Amin, a Muslim, also pushed to spread his religion. Islam was never made the official religion, but it was made an unofficial requirement for success. Many people converted to Islam in order to make it where they wanted in society and the government (Obbo 218).
In addition to the horrific killing of his opponents and the unthinkable brutality with which Amin ran the country, his impact on Uganda was focused on several key decisions, two of which were the expulsion of foreigners and the development of ties with Arab nations. When Israel and England refused to give him the military equipment he desired, he began to communicate with Libya. Shortly after, he began spreading rumors that the Israelis were trying to destroy the country and finally ordered them out of the country on April 1, 1972 (Mutibwa 91). Israel had guided Amin’s overthrow of Obote, so throwing them out of the country was a bold move, partially provoked by Israel trying to exert too strong of influence over him (Mutibwa 89-90). Cutting ties with Israel brought a close relationship with the Arab world and a great deal of aid (Mutibwa 91). In 1976 Amin showed the strength of his support of the Arabs when he sided with terrorists who captured a plane filled with more than 100 Israeli civilians. The plane landed in Uganda’s international airport at Entebbe and Amin detained both the passengers and the plane. However, Israeli Special Forces struck quickly and managed to free all of the hostages.

Several months after breaking ties with Israel, Amin expelled all Asians. This measure was even more significant than his earlier removal of Israelis, because most of the 50,000 Asians considered Uganda to be their home (Mutibwa 93). Although the British were furious, black Ugandans for the most part supported this move. There were two reasons that Asians in Uganda were disliked. One was that they controlled much of the country’s wealth. Idi Amin had promised to save the country from its dire economic situation, but was capable of doing little about it. So, he attempted to please the people by removing the Asians’ wealth and spreading it out. Their properties were redistributed on a mostly arbitrary basis. Whoever had reason and influence enough took control of whatever they could. The other reason that disappearance of
the Asians was approved of was their tendency to live in isolated communities, which left black Ugandans with a sense of inferiority (Mutibwa 92-93).

**Corruption during the time of Amin**

Before Idi Amin Uganda had its fair share of problems, but the legacy Amin left was one of total destruction. Scars from the deep wounds ripped into society by his regime may never go away. Amin killed anyone who opposed him, or he thought might oppose him in the future. “In Uganda this orgy of barbarism resulted in the loss of thousands of lives, destruction of property and demoralization” (Kareihamba 70). Amin created such a level of instability that a culture of hopelessness ensued. There was little possibility of economic survival through morally justifiable means, so many turned to corruption. Government power became entirely about what wealth one could horde.

When Amin kicked out the Asian population, their wealth had to be given to others. In many cases businesses were passed out to people who had little knowledge of how to run them. “The beneficiaries were the holders of power; Amin’s ministers, army personnel, Nubians and Muslim communities and their supporters and potential allies” (Mutibwa 116). People receiving shops or factories without significant previous managerial experience led to poorly handled businesses that were more of a status symbol that a real income source. A social class developed that was referred to as Wabenzi. To be a Wabenzi was to own a Mercedes Benz. It became expected that anyone with any political power would use their clout to obtain a Mercedes.

What was worse was that the wealth often did not stay in the hands of the first receiver. Instead, redistribution of the stolen Asian properties was a continuous process with frequent shifts whenever power changed hands. “Given a background of considerable poverty and the element of uncertainty of ownership, instant wealth at the cost of no more effort than that
involved in gambling . . . diverted many away from honest hard work to concentrate on the
search for titles to new assets that could be appropriated” (Mutibwa 117).

When the president’s regime massacres without restraint and success becomes based on
colorations rather than qualifications, morality within all levels of the government degrades.
The justice system was useless and law enforcement was in the hands of a murderous regime.
To this day it is common to expect to have to pay a bribe to get a bandage change at the
government run hospitals and a little money given to a police officer can easily prevent a
speeding ticket. With corruption clearly festering in the societal organization meant to keep
order and justice, it did not take long to spread into all aspects of community. What had once
been a culture based on trust and friendships became shadowed with fear and hate, especially
between ethnic groups. Illustrating this, in 1979 a Munyankole taxi driver was burnt alive by a
large group of Buganda villagers who suspected him of being a thief. A Buganda was later
discovered to be the real thief and his whole immediate family was shot (Obbo 211). “It was a
return to what Thomas Hobbes would have called ‘man in a state of nature’ where life was
solitary, brutish and short” (Mutibwa 122).

Fall of Amin

Amin quickly made enemies and after several years of rule most of the country wanted
him overthrown. However, it is difficult to contest a man with no morals because he will destroy
everything that those who oppose him care about. Because of fear that Amin would kill their
relatives, even those fortunate enough to escape to another country were able to do little to fight
him. In 1977 the Archbishop of Uganda was killed and Ugandan exiles in Britain decided they
must stand up against Amin. They formed the Uganda Group for Human Rights, which sparked
the formation of similar groups across the world (Kanyeihamba 70). Eventually this social
pressure led to a conference in Moshi, Tanzania. Through the conference, the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) was formed, a united coalition of several groups that opposed Amin. They also had the strong support of the Tanzanian government (Mudoola 280).

Amin was finally brought down because he angered Tanzania. In 1978 he sent soldiers into the corner of Tanzania to attack Ugandan guerrilla forces and created havoc in the area. Tanzania was not willing to stand for this and provided troops to aid a UNLF takeover of Uganda. When invading soldiers reached Buganda they were well received and Amin and those loyal to him fled the country (Mutibwa 114). Amin evacuated first to Libya, then Iraq, but ended up living comfortably in Saudi Arabia until his death in 2003 (“2003: ‘War criminal’ Idi Amin dies”).

The UNLF had lofty ideals and hope was as high as it had been when Amin began his presidency. One official has written, “Those of us who participated in the UNLF government made a solemn promise to the effect that never again would our country pass through terrible years of persecution and instability. We were to nurture an administration under a climate designed to enhance freedom over the seeds of democracy” (Kanyeihamba 71).

As soon as Amin was removed the UNLF, began to have problems. The new president, Yusufu Lule, did not have previous experience in politics and was chosen because he was respected worldwide and, in part, because he was Bugandan. Also, the UNLF was a diverse group that was only held together by a hatred for Amin (Mudoola 282). Two months later, Lule was replaced by Godfrey Binaisa. The switch proved to be a mistake. Binaisa focused his efforts on acquiring wealth for himself instead of rebuilding the country (Mutibwa 133). His biggest mistake, though, was not taking the proper measures to block the return of Obote. Binaisa removed Museveni from his position as Minister of Defense, which effectively destroyed
an important faction that openly opposed Obote. He then released Oyite-Ojoke from his position as Chief of Staff. Oyite-Ojoke was one of Obote’s top supporters, so his dismissal sparked an unstoppable response. The Military Commission, which was under the leadership of Obote supporters, took control of the government and set up an election in which Obote was allowed to run (Mudoola 283).

The removal of Binaisa by the Military Commission placed the Acholi and Langi portion of the military in charge. They took this chance to seek revenge on the West Nilers for their role in Idi Amin’s rule. Militias were recruited in Acholi and Lango and directed to destroy the West Nile region. The only building left in the region’s main city was a Catholic Church. Everything else was destroyed. Loss of life in the region was high, including some prominent civil servants, and all material wealth was carried away by the soldiers (Mutibwa 137-138).

It was on this note of divisive corruption that the first election since independence took place. The three main political parties vying for votes were the old parties, the UPC and the DP, as well as a new party, the Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM). The UPC was lead by Obote and had the backing of Tanzania. The UPM was started by Yoweri Museveni and ran with little expectations to win because it was created shortly before the elections. It was created essentially to oppose Obote and offer hope of a government based on principles (Mutibwa 138-139). The DP had many of its original members, but gained many more from those who had learned to fear and despise Obote during his first presidency (Mudoola 289).

The UPC had control of the government as the election was approaching and took many illegal precautions in order to assure their success including, destroying the West Nile region, which was the DP’s base of support, and banning opponents from running in the election for trivial and false reasons (Mutibwa 141). In the end, however, the DP was able to pull in the most
votes. It was clear as initial voting counts began to come in that the DP would win. Unwilling to
accept defeat, the UPC declared through the Military Council, who organized the elections, that
announcing the results was illegal until they had been processed by the head of the Military
Council. When votes had been recounted by the Military Council, the UPC won seventy-four
seats, the DP won fifty-one, and the UPM only managed to obtain only one (Mutibwa 143).

The single positive aspect of this election was that the DP managed to get the most
votes. Even though the election was stolen from them, their success shows that for the first time
in Uganda’s history, a political party had managed to become “truly national and cut across
regional, religious, ethnic and other boundaries. The DP, as one of its strongest supporters
admitted, was no longer a party of Catholics” (Mutibwa 144). Uganda’s greatest struggle has
been that its politicians and people of power have been unwilling or unable to look beyond their
individual groups interests and push for a united Uganda. “Uganda elites have worked out
political formulas not as means through which conflicts can be resolved for the ultimate good of
the political system as a whole, but as tactical weapons for taking care of interests peculiar to
themselves or the social forces they purport to represent” (Mudooa 295). Every leader feared
they would be dethroned and used the equivalent of a divide and conquer policy by placing
members of groups loyal to them in positions of power. When making appointments loyalty was
seen as much more important than ability.

Obote’s Second Rule

The faked success of the UPC in the election meant that Obote once again held control of
the country, except this time he came with a vengeance. Obote was distrusted or disliked by
most of the country, but he found his strength in the predominately Acholi and Langi army
(Mutibwa 150). Again he filled the government and business positions with people from the
north. They quickly grabbed up everything left by the supporters of Amin. The only area where non-northerners had a stronghold was in the banking system, because the expertise of several Bugandan and Banyankole bank managers was indispensable (Mutibwa 153).

There should have been no where to go but up after the Amin era, but Obote proved to be capable of much worse. “Amin may have used spectacular methods to kill his prominent opponents, but the peasants and the non-political members of the elite were by and large left alone” (Kanyeihamba 73). With Obote no one was safe. He used the army to subdue any portion of the country who did not support him. When ethnic Rwandese in southern Uganda were realized to be opposed to Obote, soldiers were sent to pillage and burn the area. Thousands were chased into Rwanda and unable to return because their documentation proving Ugandan citizenship was taken. The same occurred in the West Nile region and excessive violence was used to subdue the volatile Karamojong (Nabudere 305). The army became a force of mass terror that consumed anything in its path. There is some debate as to whether Obote had control of the army or if the atrocities were a result of mindless mob violence, but there is evidence that most attacks were orchestrated by his regime (Kanyeihamba 74).

The DP chose to fight Obote through the fifty-one seats that they had won in parliament, but this was not enough for Yoweri Museveni. He formed the National Resistance Movement (NRM) and with many of the UPM supporters started a guerilla attack on the Obote government in the form of the National Resistance Army (NRA) (Mutibwa 154).

There had always been animosity between Obote and Bugandans, and Museveni wisely based his guerilla movement out of their territory in a region called the Luwero Triangle (Mutibwa 158). The Luwero triangle is a large area, more circular than triangular, situated directly in the center of the country, just north of Kampala. Obote responded to the fighting in
force. In a speech on the radio, Obote made it clear that if the fighting did not stop, he and the Acholi-Langi army would destroy the area like they had destroyed the West Nile region. And they did just that. Low estimates are that 300,000 Bugandans were slaughtered and 500,000 displaced. Soldiers were so desensitized by their endless killings that one Acholi soldier scribbled these words on the wall of a house after chopping the inhabitants to death, “Killing a Muganda or a Munyankole is as easy as riding a bicycle” (Mutibwa 159). Obote and his commanders did not take any chances. They detained and killed anyone considered to be a threat, generally based on nothing more than ethnicity. One man described how he was detained in a building with 180 people that was so small that he could not lie down or even stand up straight. Before suffering under this treatment he had not opposed Obote, but afterwards he joined the NRA with many others similarly angered by Obote’s tactics (Twaddle 313-314).

The NRA started small, with twenty seven guns as Museveni is proud to admit, but quickly grew as disdain for Obote rose exponentially (Museveni 9). Dissension rose even within Obote’s own military because of high casualties in the fighting with the NRA. The Acholi officers became especially angered when they realized that Obote was favoring the Langi over the Acholi. He kept ordering the Acholi sections of the army into the dangerous areas of the country while the Langi soldiers were stationed in the safer regions (Mutibwa 161).

Acholi rule

The end of Obote’s rule came when the NRA shot down a helicopter and killed the Army Chief of Staff. All the officers fit to replace him were Acholi, but after leaving the position open for six months, Obote finally chose a Langi officer to become the new Army Chief of Staff (Mutibwa 162-163). The Acholi officers, specifically the Army Commander Tito Okello and Commander of the Northern Regiment Bazilio Okello, as well as Vice-President Paulo
Muwanga, brokered a coup and removed Obote from power (Nabudere 306). Obote fled to Zambia and stayed there until he died in 2005 (“Ugandans mourn at Obote’s funeral”).

With the firm resistance of guerilla forces, the new leaders knew they did not have enough strength to maintain power alone (Nabudere 306). They began to consolidate power by making ties with each of Uganda’s militant factions, beginning with the NRA. At first Museveni responded positively. He was happy that Obote had been forced to flee and he was willing to negotiate with the Acholi officers (Nabudere 306). However, he soon realized that things would not improve under the Okellos because they were not willing to give up their power to a civilian government. The army would continue to plague the country (Mutibwa 169). In fact the “liberators” spent their first few days in control of the capital looting it (Mutibwa 167).

So instead, the Acholi officers turned to soldiers they had kicked out six years ago. Several officers in Amin’s army were given high ranking positions in the UNLA and all soldiers were welcomed back. The NRA spoke out against the return of the murderous ex-Idi Amin soldiers (Nabudere 307). Although, the NRA had at one point allied with the Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF), which was one of several forces fighting against Obote that had been made up of ex-Amin soldiers (Twaddle 316).

Many soldiers and politicians that had adamantly opposed Obote quickly joined the government formed by his leading henchmen, even though human rights violations were just as common (Mutibwa 171). The NRA vowed to only join if they received half of the political power and a voice in each of the government appointments (Nabudere 308). The agreement was clearly not possible and the NRA stayed in the bush to fight.

By this point in the NRA’s struggle for power, they had gathered enough support to go beyond guerilla warfare to more conventional fighting. They had control of the western section
of the country and set up a formal government there (Mutibwa 172). In December of 1985 futile peace talks between the two sides were conducted and an agreement was signed. However, the fighting continued and in January of 1986 the NRA formally captured Kampala (Nabudere 311).

Hope?

When one Ugandan heard that Obote had fled with the amount of money it takes to run the country for three years he or she made this comment:

What is new? Lule and Binaisa cleared the treasury during their short rules. Binaisa offered no excuse. Obote is making up for the last time he was kicked out penniless. Everyone is out to make something. My boss buys expensive rather than cheap stationery because he gets good kickback percentages (Obbo 219).

This statement tells of the general outlook in Uganda after years of corrupt rulers and continual instability. There was a clear sense that there was no justice in Uganda. If one wanted to survive one had to take whatever they could whenever they could get it. If you did not someone else would. The volatility also caused an attitude of hopelessness where it did not make sense to plan for the future. Things never got better, only worse. In 1971 when Amin took over, sugar cost .65 Uganda shillings per kg, based on a market in Bunyole, Uganda. In 1987 a kilo of sugar cost 10,000 shillings. The staple food, matooke, or cooking bananas, increased from 5 shillings for a bunch to 6,000 shillings during the same time period. While the cost of sugar increased by 1,538,500% and the cost of bananas increased by 120,000%, a primary teacher’s salary, which was not high to begin with, only increased by 32,00% (Whyte132). Even for those whose group was in power at the time, it was almost foolish to attempt to attempt to build lasting equity because when the next group took over they could only keep what they could move out of the country. Therefore, there was little emphasis on developing the country. Looking for hope outside of the country was also unreasonable. Foreign powers, whether they intended to help Uganda or exploit the country, only managed to add to their troubles. Britain started Uganda on its
tumultuous journey. Israel helped put Idi Amin in power. Tanzania gave Obote’s supporters the strength they needed to put Obote back in power and Britain aided Obote almost to the end of his second rule. The U.S., as well as several European powers, provided arms to the Okellos with which to fight Museveni even though the country was in tatters under their rule (Mutibwa 174).

**Musevni and the NRM**

When Yoweri Musevni and the NRM defeated a corrupt regime and forced their way into the government only the Acholi were sad to see their rulers leave. However, Uganda had been through this too many times before. A new leader would save the country only to carry out the same destructive practices. Would Museveni be any different?

Museveni brought into power a Ten-Point Programme that he had spent his time in the bush developing (Mutibwa 179). He began his swearing-in address by stating that he was different. The NMR was going to bring a “fundamental change” (Museveni 3). In the speech he outlined the 10 points, the first of which was restoration of democracy. “It is not a favor from any government: it is the right of the people of Africa to have a democratic government . . . The government should not be the master, but the servant of the people” (Museveni 3). The second point addressed security and the third unity. Museveni wisely pointed out that “Politics is about the provision of roads, water, drugs in hospitals, and schools for children” (Museveni 6). He stressed that it was the political leaders vying for power that caused Uganda’s disunity. “They are simply opportunists who have no program and all they do is work on cheap platforms of division because they have nothing constructive to offer the people” (Museveni 7). In the same speech he compares being a politician to being a doctor with the point that both must diagnose the problems correctly or they are failures (Museveni 8). Museveni seems to correctly diagnose the ills of his country, but has had mixed results concerning the treatment.
In the 1990s Museveni received much acclaim both from Africa and the West. In 1997 the New York Times published an article that stated, “It is little wonder. To hear some diplomats and African experts tell it, President Yoweri K. Museveni has started an ideological movement that is reshaping much of Africa, spelling the end of the corrupt, strong-man governments that characterized the Cold-War era” (McKinley Jr.). He was hailed as bringing peace to Uganda, saving the countries economy, and became a case study for successful reduction of AIDS. He was going to make Uganda the envy of Africa. Finally a leader of Uganda was making the country better instead of worse. For the most part he did; however, by 2006 many Ugandans, as well as the international community, began to worry when he changed the constitution to allow him to run for president again and began talking about becoming leader of an East African federation ("Who's for president?"). He ended up winning the election in part through illegal means by suppressing his opponents as well as the press ("America's friend.").

In Museveni’s swearing-in address he criticized Idi Amin with the statement, “We want our people to be able to afford shoes. The honorable excellency who is going to the United Nations in executive jets, but has a population at home of 90 percent walking barefoot, is nothing but a pathetic spectacle” (Museveni 8). Yet, in 2000 Museveni made plans to buy a $33 million dollar presidential jet (Opolot). Museveni’s relatives also have gained great wealth through corruption and their connection to the government. Museveni’s brother, Salim Saleh, is a large business owner and, according to a UN report, was charge with playing a major role in the military looting mineral resources from the DR Congo ("War economy" 2). The International Court of Justice ordered Uganda to pay the DR Congo $10 billion dollars for this incident.

The countries greatest problem, though, has been the continued north/south divide. The southern and central region of the country has thrived while a twenty year war was taking place
in the north. Shortly after Museveni came to power in 1986 an Acholi woman named Alice Lakwena, claiming to be a prophet, started a religious based military movement with the goal of destroying the new government. Lakwena felt ordered by the spirit of an Italian army officer that possessed her to start the Holy Spirit Movement and fight Museveni. Her movement was very successful for the first year, but was eventually defeated by government forces. Lakwena fled to Kenya, but many of the fighters switched to an offshoot guerilla group called the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) ("Alice Lakwena"). The LRA is led by Joseph Kony who also claims to be governed by a spirit that inhabits him. At first, the LRA fought to depose Museveni with the desire to rule the country by the Ten Commandments, but quickly degenerated into terrorizing their own ethnic group, the Acholi. Support for the group dwindled and Kony turned to capturing children to increase the groups ranks. At night his forces would sneak into a village to steal children and kill the rest of the family. The girls became wives for him and his officers, while the boys became soldiers. The LRA taught their captives unquenchable fear as well as desensitizing them by forcing them to watch the slaughter of any child who cried or tried to flee. Soon the boys were made to kill another child and eventually became fully active soldiers. In addition to the use of child soldiers, the LRA committed countless human rights violations. One man who lived in the area told of how the LRA had attacked a village and hacked all the inhabitants to death with machetes. The next day when relatives came to mourn the deaths, the LRA came back. The LRA forced the relatives to cook and eat the dead. Then they slaughtered everyone.

Museveni has been criticized as doing little to stop the war. There are many reasons why stopping the war would be difficult. Northern Uganda is a vast sparsely populated area and the mountains of southern Sudan have also offered safe refuge for the LRA fighters. The LRA is
also made up of the same ethnic group as the area they inhabit, so they are able to easily integrate into society and hide from government forces. Yet, it seems more than mere coincidence that the ethnic group which Museveni saw commit endless atrocities against his own people as he fought them to gain power, is the one that he has allowed to suffer for twenty years. Whatever the case, Museveni was able to stop the fighting in 2006 and peace talks are in progress.

The question that needs to be answered before judging Museveni is whether better is good enough. When Ugandan politicians first gained control of their country from the British they received a land of disunity. The British forced many diverse and unwilling people groups into one country and charged ill-equipped Ugandan leaders with the job of creating some sort of cohesiveness. The political culture that resulted from British influence on Ugandan traditional values was not one that benefited Uganda. Instead, each ruler abused the country for his own interests and those with ties to him. The country slid deep into a pit of despair with almost every area of the country suffering genocide under one of the leaders. Museveni has given Uganda hope. His flaws are transparent, but he has done miracles considering what he had to work with as he has given the people of Uganda the chance of success that they deserve. He has brought Uganda to a peak, but the question now is with his corruption and hunger for power can he keep Uganda moving forward toward a more just and democratic future?
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