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"Uganda Unhinged": Re-evaluating the Ugandan Asian Expulsion

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This paper seeks to re-evaluate the Ugandan Asian expulsion of 1972 in terms of both chronology and culpability. Existing literature generally implicates Gen. Idi Amin as the primary, if not sole instigator of the expulsion crisis. Using Ugandan and Kenyan newspaper coverage from the pre-expulsion era, in addition to an analysis of Dr. Milton Obote’s economic policy, I argue that Uganda had already traversed far down the path to expulsion by the time Amin seized power. Dr. Obote initiated an economic campaign that targeted Asian merchants, in addition to issuing threats of expulsion as a negotiation tactic with world leaders. Newspapers, meanwhile, scapegoated the Asian community, producing the necessary public sentiment to justify expulsion. These findings indicate that expulsion became a reality earlier than previously accepted and suggest Obote and East African newspapers bore a great responsibility in producing the crisis.

Introduction

On August 4th, 1972, General Idi Amin issued an ultimatum ordering Ugandans of Asian descent to exit the country within 90 days with no right of return. Over fifty thousand Asian Ugandans fled during the following weeks, the majority of whom resettled in the United Kingdom, though non-passport holders were left stateless. Over five decades have passed since Amin initially ordered the expulsion, and no true settlement has been reached, nor have Ugandan racial tensions quieted. Despite a 1983 law providing for the repatriation and compensation of those expelled, the process is ongoing; dozens of lawsuits are still being filed over land claims, and as many as 4000 land parcels have yet to be reclaimed.[1] In the landscape of such negotiation processes, the question of blame becomes more potent than ever, as does the task of reconstructing a timeline.

At the time, the media constructed expulsion as the spontaneous and arbitrary actions of an unhinged dictator, and later literature adopted a similar stance. Such an analysis not only contributed to a growing canon of deranged African leaders but was influential in determining international policy. According to the initial BBC reports on the expulsion, Amin, while addressing Ugandan troops, recounted a dream in which Allah commanded him to expel Asians.[2] Since there is no recording of Amin's speech, it is unclear to what extent the BBC shifted the public gaze towards the dream versus to what extent Amin himself claimed oneiric influence. The dream may have also been a rhetorical strategy, creating a divine ethos, rather than a true factor in Amin's decision . What is clear, however, is that the BBC broadcast was influential in defining international views of the expulsion. Diplomat Ninranjan Desai, of the Ministry of External Affairs of India, was dispatched to Uganda in August 1972 to assess the situation. He recalls in an oral interview that the MEA first learned of the expulsion via the BBC broadcast, but discounted

[1] Liam Taylor, "Expelled Ugandan Asians Fight for Seized Properties 50 Years on," *Reuters*, December 2, 2022.
[2] Ninranjan Desai, "Revisiting the 1972 Expulsion of Asians from Uganda," *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* 7, no. 4 (2002): 448.

Amin's actions as his standard eccentricity due to the spontaneity suggested by the broadcaster.[3] In fact, the atmosphere in the MEA remained unserious for several days, and assessors were only dispatched over a week later. Even then, a culture of neglect appears to have dominated the response. Desai recalls, "Our mission there did not have proper statistics of the number of Indian citizens there – leave alone those of Indian origin with British/other passports."[4] As thousands of Asians fled Uganda, journalists continued parroting the same theory. The *New York Times*, for instance, referenced the dream theory in November 1972, and explained Amin's actions as follows: "the decisions appear to form in his own mind as he speaks."[5]

While Amin-era academic works veered away from the dream theory that dominated journalism, they adopted much the same regard towards Amin as an agent of expulsion. Hassu H. Patel, for instance, traces the origins of expulsion to December 1971, but nonetheless argues that an escalation towards expulsion occurred under Amin's thumb.[6] A similar logic appears in historian Anirudha Gupta's analysis of Uganda-Britain-India relations. He argues that a culture of silence dominated the discourse on Ugandan Indians, and "[Uganda, Britain, and India] attempted to keep a balance between action and inaction, until Amin decided wholly and irretrievably to upset it."[7]

More recent literature has done little to amend earlier precedent. Former Foreign Secretary of India Jagat S. Mehta, who helped negotiate compensation for the expulsion, writes in description of the crisis, "To begin with, in 1971, Amin had also looked upon the Asians with favour, hoping

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[3] Desai, "Revisiting 1972 Expulsion," 448.
[4] Desai, "Revisiting 1972 Expulsion," 448.
[5] Christopher Munnion, "The African Who Kicked Out the Asians, Who Said Hitler Was Right, Who Has Made His Country a State Sinister," *The New York Times*, November 12, 1972. Munnion posits three alternative explanations to Amin's decision, all of which relate to Amin's whims and/or personal life.
[6] Hasu H. Patel, "General Amin and the Indian Exodus from Uganda," *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 2, no. 4 (1972): 19.
[7] Anirudha Gupta, "Ugandan Asians, Britain, India, and the Commonwealth," *African Affairs* 73, no. 292 (1974): 313.

thus to get their economic amelioration and so stabilising his position."[8] Mehta attributes Amin's shifting policy towards Asian Ugandans to declining economic conditions and the collapse of law and order. Amin sought a scapegoat and settled upon the Asian community. Mehta describes this decision as a "gimmick,"[9] suggesting a lack of predictability or rationality. Returning to Ninranjan Desai's oral interview, the questions themselves are suggestive. The interviewer preludes the first question with a declaration that, "In 1972, the Ugandan Dictator, Idi Amin, based on his whims expelled all 'Asians.'"[10]

We thus see a canonized narrative that originated in initial reports that continues through contemporary academia. Expulsion was a spontaneous action undertaken in 1972. Naturally, if one dates the expulsion to 1972, the blame naturally falls on Idi Amin's shoulders. The spontaneity of his actions also exculpates India and Britain for a policy of neglect and a lack of preparedness during the crisis. In contrast to this narrative, expulsion entered the realm of probability earlier than previously accepted. Certainly, by the time Amin seized power, Uganda was already well along the path towards expulsion. Early reports are marked by selective amnesia, whether intentional or not, of preceding events that contributed to expulsion. Later academic work built upon the foundations of contemporaneous literature, reinforcing this erasure. One of the few academics to dispute this story is Garth Glentworth, who critiques the tendency to consider Amin an irregularity: "A short step from this conclusion is the idea that Amin and his regime are bizarre if dangerous aberrations in Uganda's political development."[11] Whether because of the prominence of the spontaneity theory in the press or the chaos created by mass expulsion, there seems to be a selective amnesia of pre-expulsion events, expulsion included. Amin is framed as an "aberration"

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[8] Jagat S Mehta, "Negotiating Compensations for Indians with Idi Amin's Government," *India International Center Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (2001): 27.
[9] Mehta, "Negotiating Compensations," 28.
[10] Desai, "Revisiting 1972 Expulsion," 446.
[11] Garth Glentworth, "Obote and Amin: Change and Continuity in Modern Uganda Politics," *African Affairs* 72, no. 288 (1973): 237.

despite the clear commonalities in his policy compared to those of his predecessors and contemporaries. Operating on Glentworth's framework, which places Amin in historical context, this paper situates the Asian expulsion in context of journalism and policy during the late 60s and early 70s. Returning to pre-expulsion media, there was a clear pattern of anti-Asian legislation and rhetoric dating as far back as independence. This is not to say that expulsion was an inevitable consequence of colonial rule. Rather, media campaigns, targeted policy, and precedent set by Kenya and Zambia transformed expulsion from a contingency to reality. When Amin launched his coup d'etat in early 1971, Ugandans viewed expulsion as, if not a necessity, then a viable path of decolonization.

Asians in East Africa

Asian Ugandans trace their origin to the merchants and laborers of colonial Uganda. Britain promoted Asian migration to Uganda starting in the late 19th century, in tandem with the Uganda Railway project, which was completed in 1902.[12] While many were originally laborers who aided in construction, others were artisans or merchants brought to support the project on a border level. As railway construction progressed, the Asian population continued to grow and became firmly associated with commerce, with the rupee becoming the dominant currency of East Africa.[13] Poor white settlers bemoaned the competition posed by Asians and lobbied for stricter immigration control. Britain, which had initially encouraged Indian migration for settlement and labor, acquiesced and imposed new regulations.[14]

[12] Vali Jamal, "Asians in Uganda, 1880-1972: Exclusion and Expulsion," *The Economic History Review* 29, no. 4 (1976): 603.
[13] Mukesh Kamar, "Indian Immigration in Uganda: Trends and Pattern," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 67 (2006): 938.
[14] Kamar, "Indian Immigration," 939.

However, the Asian population of East Africa was sufficiently large that Britain could not ignore their presence. Instead, Asians were integrated into the colonial hierarchy, a buffer between whites and Africans. Asians were granted privileged status over Indigenous Africans on the economic, bureaucratic, and quotidian aspects. Britain hired Asians as colonial administrators while barring Africans from the same positions. Asians were also granted privileged status in the education system and soon accounted for the majority of engineers, doctors, and lawyers in Uganda and its neighbors.[15] Across the border, Kenya implemented the Kipande system, which required Kenyans to carry an identity card indicating their racial and employment status at all times, to be produced as demanded by the police. Asians held different Kipande than those of their African counterparts. These privileges continued until independence, leading to stark racial inequalities and increasing resentment. Seeking to redress disparities, Uganda implemented affirmative action post-independence, though to little effect. In fact, Asians benefited from affirmative action more than any other demographic, widening the economic gap and reinforcing labor segregation.[16] As a result, Asians accounted for approximately 90% of commercial activity and business ownership by the late 1960s.[17]

Despite Asian economic domination, however, claims that Asians were colonial collaborators or posed a threat to the decolonization process lack verity. On the contrary, Asian-Africans took an active role in independence calls as early as 1920 and continued their support, even as deportations began. The East African Indian National Congress endorsed Kenyan independence calls and assisted Harry Thuku and Jomo Kenyatta in their early publications.[18]

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[15] Jean-Marie Henckaerts, *Mass Expulsion in Modern International Law and Practice* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1995), 23.
[16] Mahmood Mamdani, "The Uganda Asian Expulsion: Twenty Years After," *Economic and Political Weekly* 28, no. 3/4 (1993): 94.
[17] Farhana Dawood, "Ugandan Asians Dominate Economy After Exile," *BBC*, May 15, 2016.
[18] R.V. Ramdas, "The Role of Asians in the Freedom Struggle of East Africa," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 23, no. 2 (1970): 283.

During the Mau Mau uprising, Asians constituted a majority of the lawyers defending freedom fighters.[19] This latter may partially be a result of lawyer demographics, though the colonial government expressed criticism for Asian participation, suggesting lawyers were at least somewhat aware of their role as resistors. Indian decolonization efforts are further evidenced in the proceedings of the 1971 Singapore Conference and the British-South Africa Arms Deal debacle. When Britain entered talks with South Africa on a deal to sell weapons to the latter, several African states rallied to oppose the deal. East African Asians joined forces to express their opposition, calling on Indira Gandhi to attend the conference and make a stand against Britain.[20] Combatting colonial influence, therefore, did not necessarily entail expulsion or anti-Asian discrimination. Rather, expulsion was the result of policy and public sentiment. Journalists and politicians capitalized on colonial-era inequality and resentment to construct a common enemy.

Colonial policy laid the framework for long-standing anti-Asian tensions in East Africa, but the most significant period of change in Uganda occurred in the second half of Obote's rule. After Kenya gained independence, President Kenyatta spearheaded an anti-Asian movement, which culminated in the 1968 Immigration Act. The Ugandan press and politicians escalated racist rhetoric, perhaps as a result of increased awareness of neighboring Kenya's policies. The real transition occurred in 1969, with the implementation of Obote's Move to the Left campaign. In 1971, the Singapore Conference and the South African arms crisis added another layer of anti-colonial resentment that perpetuated the ongoing crusade. It was during this Conference that Amin seized power, his rule born in an era of intense international and domestic tension.

[19] Ramdas, "Role of Asians," 284.
[20] "Asians Call on Indira Gandhi," *Uganda Argus* (Kampala), January 12, 1971.

The Media and Expulsion

While the dominant narrative pinpoints 1972 as the crucial year in expulsion, the media had already laid the foundations in the late 60s and early 70s. A fundamental shift had already occurred by Amin's coup that portended the events to come. Deportation rose to the forefront of decolonization discourse in East Africa, with newspapers calling for the expulsion of settlers and Asians in the name of *uhuru*.

Uganda was no exception, and Asians were subject to intense media and political scrutiny that reinforced stereotypes of exploitation and colonial collaboration. One of the largest newspapers of the era, the *Uganda Argus,* ran a series of articles addressing the "Asian Question" through both explicit and implicit references. Note that the *Uganda Argus* defined an African as a Black man.[21] Thus Africanization could be used both for anti-colonial policy and anti-Asian policy. In fact, the boundaries between settlers and Asians entered a state of flux. The *Uganda Argus,* published a piece entitled, "Cooperate Asians Told,"[22] a title that evokes the law's true intentions and reinforces stereotypes of Asians as uncooperative. The content goes further, alleging that Asians came to Uganda with little means of survival. Thus, the author continues, they must have exploited Africans in order to obtain their current economic status.[23] Clearly drawing upon a narrative of exploitation, this article is symbolic of larger portrayals of the Asian community – colonial imports, exploiters, hawkers, and obstacles to progress. Of course, Asians had been granted moderate privilege over Indigenous Africans during the colonial era, giving such rhetoric a layer of truth, and making it that much more dangerous. Capitalizing on elements of truth, the press covered authentic stories of fraud and exploitation associated with Asians, thereby fostering resentment. One such example is an article entitled "Merchants Deny Fraud Charges"[24] – the first

[21] Chris Serunjoga, "'Improve the Native Medicine,'" *Uganda Argus* (Kampala), January 8, 1971.
[22] "Co-operate, Asians Told," *Uganda Argus* (Kampala), September 16, 1970.
[23] "Co-operate, Asians Told."
[24] Fred Baingana, "Merchants Deny Fraud Charges," *Uganda Argus* (Kampala), January 11, 1971.

sentence indicates the racial background and non-citizen status of the alleged perpetrators despite having virtually no bearing on the crime.

The media crusade continued through the late stages of the Obote regime. In early 1971, the *Argus* ran an article in which businessman Mr. W. W. Kalema stressed "the importance of Africans participating in trade."[25] On the surface level, the article appears merely to be a propaganda piece for the Move to the Left Campaign. Taking into account that Asians made up 90% of commercial activities, and the concurrent legal crackdown on Asian commercial activity, the advice takes a more sinister tone. Did being "bold" in business, as Mr. Kalema suggested, entail reporting one's non-citizen neighbors to the authorities in order to buy their businesses at a reduced price? Whether or not Black Ugandans took the piece as a call to action, the racial implications of advising Africanization remain. The *Argus* also published a manifesto from the Ugandan Student Union (NUSU) expressing their desire to ban "certain people" from voting.[26] Their enemies of choice – businessmen and capitalists, a dogwhistle for Asians. In light of its anti-Asian sentiment, the NUSU's calls for economic and social independence take a new aspect. If Asians are neither Africans nor citizens, and should be banned from political participation, the NUSU's calls for revamped independence efforts entail, if not expulsion, then a complete economic takeover.

Expulsion discourse also contained more broad calls for purging colonial remnants. After Zambian President Kaunda boldly declared to "'Chuck Britain out'" of the Commonwealth, the *Argus* picked up the phrase.[27] In tandem with narratives of Asians as colonial propagators, Ugandans may have interpreted such calls as encompassing the "alien" population.

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[25] "Don't Let Problems Deter You, Be Bold in Business," *Uganda Argus* (Kampala), January 4, 1971.
[26] "Ban Them from the Polls Say Students," *Uganda Argus* (Kampala), January 13, 1971.
[27] "If Commonwealth Doesn't Like Her Policies, 'Chuck Britain Out,'" *Uganda Argus* (Kampala), October 16, 1970.

By the early 70s, the situation had escalated such that adjacent countries were actively deporting both Asians and Britons. Britain, meanwhile, was deporting Asian migrants back. Ugandans would likely have been aware of such action through both international and domestic papers. The *East Africa Standard* covered a series of Asians expelled from Kenya, or who voluntarily left, many of whom Britain promptly deported back. Mr. Natwarlal Patel entered the U.K without a voucher (whether of his own accord is unclear) and was promptly deported back to Kenya. Nor were passport holders safe. Mr. and Mrs. Hirji Shah (to whom the *Standard* refers as "migranauts") were deported from Kenya three times and back from the U.K four times during a 14-day period, despite holding British passports.[28] The latter incident occurred after Amin had seized power, though still in the early days of his regime, long before the traditional dating of expulsion. Ironically, "pinballing" likely reinforced the notion that Asians were colonial sympathizers, or at the very escalated Kenyan-British tensions – Britain clearly wanted them to remain in East Africa. In fact, newspapers actively pushed the narrative that Britain was trying to keep Asians in Africa. Both the *Argus* and the *Standard* reported that the British government issued a document to Commonwealth Prime Ministers prior to the 1971 Singapore Conference outlining an extension of immigration laws.[29] While it is unclear why Britain chose to expand restrictions, both papers argued increased restrictions were a reactionary measure to increased waves of Asian African migrants. This narrative of Britain as an enemy seeking to keep Asians in Uganda reinforces the "us versus them" attitude present elsewhere.

[28] "Migranaut Asians Tell of 14-Day Ordeal," *East Africa Standard*, February 26, 1971.
[29] "Kenya Asians May Discuss Problems at All-Africa Rally," *East Africa Standard* (Nairobi), January 1, 1971.

The Political Face of Expulsion

The media crusade coincided with legislation of similar function. Uganda enacted its own legislation and copied Kenya's tactics of expulsion. These policies indicate that expulsion was cemented as a possibility by early 1971 and that Britain was aware of the escalating crisis.

Uganda's Move to the Left Campaign was an attempt to forcibly Africanize the economy by removing Asians from trade, and if possible, from the country. Dr. Obote initiated the Move to the Left Campaign in 1969 with the issuing of the Common Man's Charter. Ostensibly, the Campaign sought to integrate Uganda under a socialist government, but the rhetorical basis of the movement was teeming with expulsion-oriented language. Just after Idi Amin's coup, Irving Gershenberg wrote that "The government of Milton Obote moved to have non-Ugandan Africans leave Uganda as well as to control the movement of monies out of Uganda."[30] The Charter itself is quite explicit, stating that, "[The common people of Uganda] reject, both in theory and in practice, that Uganda as a whole or any part of it should be the domain of any... foreign influence or of foreigners."[31] Similar to the press, the Charter constructs Asians as foreign elements, providing a framework for expulsion as liberation. However, neither Gershenberg's findings nor the Charter itself appear to have significantly influenced post-expulsion literature. Scholars routinely oppose Amin's economic restructuring to Obote's Move to the Left, despite commonalities. Actually, "Africanization" appears to have superseded the respective socialist and capitalist ideologies of the two plans.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Kenyan president Jomo Kenyatta vehemently persecuted the Kenyan Asian population. Not only did Uganda directly copy these policies, but Kenya helped produce an atmosphere that favored expulsion. The 1969 Kenyan Trade Licensing Act entailed the

[30] Irving Gershenberg, "Slouching Towards Socialism: Obote's Uganda," *African Studies Review* 15, no. 1 (1972): 79.
[31] The Common Man's Charter of 1969.

imprisonment of all non-citizen traders without work permits and required them to sell their businesses.[32] Exceptions were made, though over the following two years, the Ministry of Commerce issued "hundreds" of quit notices to alien traders and ceased granting extensions. In 1971, Kenya summarily ordered the remaining traders to "pack up." According to the *East Africa Standard* via a Ministry representative, "They will, under measures which are to be introduced by the ministry, be compelled to sell their businesses."[33] Those traders applying for renewed work permits were ignored, suggesting Kenya had expanded the scope of expulsion. Uganda would later copy both the trade licensing act and threaten to annul work permits, clearly taking influence from Kenyan anti-Asian policy. Unlike Uganda, academics trace Kenyan Asian expulsion to the late 60s. The fact that Uganda copied Kenyan legislation calls into question the possibility that expulsion only became a possibility in Uganda in 1972.

In 1969, Uganda enacted the Trade Licensing Act, which like its Kenyan counterpart, compelled all non-citizen traders to sell their businesses. The law ostensibly supported African shopkeepers, though was in practice highly discriminatory. Execution functioned via an enforcement officer, who conducted searches and ordered shopkeepers to provide documentation of citizenship. Those found non-compliant were legally branded as "hawkers" and forced to sell their businesses to Africans.[34] Considering over 90% of merchants at the time were Asian, and the majority were non-citizens, it is apparent that such legislation was an assault on Asian Ugandans' livelihood and economic means. Media accounts provide further evidence that the law was used to discriminate against Asians. Editors at the *Uganda Argus* evidently believed that the law was targeted, entitling an article "Cooperate, Asians Told."[35] Uganda's trade development officer, Haji Wasiki, interviewed for the article, explaining his role in enforcement. Surprisingly, considering

[32] Trade Licensing Act of 1969 (Kenya).
[33] "Pack Up Order Likely for Alien Traders," *East Africa Standard*, January 7, 1971.
[34] Trade Licensing Act of 1969 (Uganda).
[35] "Co-operate, Asians Told."

his high rank, he operated on-the-ground, suggesting that the government considered the 1969 Act a priority. Furthermore, the presence of a high-level official indicates that racialized enforcement was not a localized incident, but a top-down strategy. While Uganda may not have actively participated in deportation 1972, the Trade Act was a form of implicit expulsion. By removing their primary source of income, the law pushed Asians to leave the country to seek their livelihoods elsewhere.

Targeted economic policy continued through the end of Obote's regime and manifested at the regional level as well as the national. The East African Community (EAC) imposed a new policy in January 1971, restricting pensions for those not of East African descent.[36] Interestingly, the policy made an exception for pensioners who left East Africa permanently. This policy suggests that incentivizing non-Africans to emigrate was of equal or higher priority than sheer finances. Uganda was willing to pay Asians, so long as they had exited the country. Unlike the Trade Act of 1969, which provided economic benefits to Indigenous Africans, the Pensioner Act was an unnecessary economic burden on the Ugandan and other East African governments. If promoting African interests were the true priority, the EAC would have cut pensions for all non-citizens residing outside of East Africa, including those who left permanently. African newspapers asserted that Asians were exploitative and an unnecessary economic burden. However, East African countries were willing to effectively pay Asians to exit the country, controverting the notion that expulsion was solely based on economic interests.

Concurrently with the Pension Act, London sent a delegation to Uganda to enter talks with Obote on the matter. Had it not been clear to Britain that expulsion was a possibility, the conference should have clarified the situation. Obote requested that Britain permit entry to the 12,000 Asian Ugandans currently awaiting entry vouchers for the U.K and promise admission to 25,000 more

[36] "Clamp on Non-East African Pensioners," *Uganda Argus* (Kampala), January 12, 1972.

Asians residing in Uganda "should their work or trade permits be withdrawn."[37] The fact Uganda was already in the process of excluding non-citizens from the commercial scene, in addition to the possibility that work permits would be annulled, leaves little room for doubt that Ugandan was actively seeking to remove Asians from the country. In fact, the real issue at play appears not to have been Asians themselves, but with whom responsibility ultimately rested. Mr. Ntende, a member of the Ugandan delegation, issued a public letter arguing that "by conferring upon them the full status of British subject… Britain assumed certain irrevocable obligations towards such persons."[38] Britain, in part, pointed to the fact that many Asians had applied for Ugandan citizenship at the time of independence. Although these applications were almost universally rejected, Asians lost their claim to British status merely by applying for citizenship elsewhere.[39] On the other hand, the *Argus* claims Prime Minister Heath acquiesced and promised admittance of the Asians. If true, the debacle caused in Britain by the arrival of thousands of Asian Ugandan refugees in 1972 had already been determined 18 months prior.

Asian-Africans were evidently aware of the growing rhetorical and legal discrimination. In January of 1971, both the *East Africa Standard* and the *Uganda Argus* reported on plans for an pan-African-Asian conference to be held that summer. According to the *East Africa Standard,* "The conference would discuss the religious, cultural, and social problems faced by Indians who had made their home in Kenya."[40] The conference in question never appears to have taken place in light of rapid political transformations in East Africa. Asians also began leaving Uganda voluntarily, though Asian migration was a site of international tension. Britain had, of course, already enacted the 1968 Immigration Act, making resettlement difficult even for passport holders.

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[37] Arnold Raphael, "London Sends Mission on Asians," *Uganda Argus* (Kampala), January 11, 1971.
[38] "Talks on Plight of British Nationals: 'Britain's Baby,' Letter on New Law Proposal," *Uganda Argus* (Kampala), January 12, 1971.
[39] Raphael, "London Sends Mission."
[40] "Kenya Asians May Discuss Problems at All-Africa Rally," *East Africa Standard* (Nairobi), January 1, 1971.

Thus the gates opened to the whole of Europe, to the dismay of European states. Denmark refused to comply after the Danish Church requested work permits for 100 Ugandan Asians seeking to leave the continent.[41] Whether the Ugandans had chosen to leave or been forced cannot be ascertained, though is hardly relevant. Even if technically voluntary, the fact that 100 Asians simultaneously requested work permits indicates Uganda's Move to the Left plan and other discrimination tactics were effective at driving Asians out of the country.

Conclusion

While the primary expulsion occurred in 1972, the necessary causes had already come to fruition. When Amin seized power in January 1972, expulsion was well under way in neighboring Kenya. Meanwhile, Obote was pursuing an economic strategy in Uganda that forced Asians to leave the country – he may even have considered annulling work permits for those who remained. The "Asian Question" dominated the media, with both explicit and implicit calls for a complete economic takeover and anti-Asian discrimination. With these events in mind, it is evident that expulsion was a contingency, if not a reality, before 1972.

Re-evaluating the chronology of expulsion has significant implications on both the questions of causality and culpability of the crisis. As previously established, a common analysis of expulsion is that of spontaneous expulsion. Academics and journalists routinely suggest that Amin ordered Asians to exit the country "on a whim," in response to a dream, or because he arbitrarily chose Asians as the scapegoat of his economic purification program. On the contrary, expulsion was an organized affair predating Amin's regime by several years. Amin's choice of Asians as the scapegoat of his purification was hardly arbitrary considering Obote had used precisely the same strategy during his Move to the Left campaign. While Obote justified his policy

[41] "Danish No to Asians," *Uganda Argus* (Kampala), January 6, 1971.

via socialism, and Amin pushed for a capitalist society, the two were united by Africanization, which manifested in the form of anti-Asian action. Amin may also have taken inspiration from Jomo Kenyatta, who had already drawn international scrutiny for deporting hundreds of Asians.

In contrast to Anirudha Gupta's description of a "culture of silence," discourse on Asians was strikingly vocal in the pre-expulsion period. This calls into question British and Indian responses to the expulsion of 1972. Both nations were aware of the escalating tensions and chose policies of strategic neglect. India's failure to maintain statistics on Indians in Uganda, including Indian citizens, is striking considering Kenya had already deported Asians to India, and that East-African Asians planned at least one international conference prior to expulsion that included Indian representatives. Britain's choice to ignore entry requests from Ugandan Asians, despite their status as British citizens, only further exacerbated tensions and worsened the crisis, when it arrived, in terms of quantities of refugees.

Idi Amin ravaged the Ugandan economy and caused serious harm to thousands of civilians. We should not absolve him of his choice to expel tens of thousands of residents with little forenotice. On the other hand, his choices were far from "unhinged," "spontaneous," or "on a whim." Rather, the press, Dr. Milton Obote, and neighboring African leaders set the stage for a crusade to cleanse Uganda on economic and racial terms. Britain and India implemented a policy of salutary neglect, aggravating the impending crisis. In this context, Amin took the reins from his predecessors and implemented a "final solution." One is left to wonder if the "Asian question" was a contributor to Amin's coup, rather than the other way around. In either case, Amin should not be construed as a madman. His actions were, if cruel in nature and intent, neither spontaneous nor unique in nature.

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