THE ROLE OF THE ACADEMY IN POLITICS AND ECONOMIC REVIVAL: UGANDA IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

by

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Academics and intellectuals are major agents of political change, but relatively minor agents of economic change in post-colonial Africa.

Phase I: the Phase of Decolonization

The golden age of African nationalism of the post-colonial variety was from the 1930s to the 1970s. African academics with a wider pool of African intellectuals helped to mobilize the masses against the colonial order.

African liberation was much faster than most people expected.

Kenya became a British colony after Jomo Kenyatta was born. The colonial era was so brief that Kenyatta lived right through it and came to rule Kenya himself for 15 years after the British had left.

Uganda's earliest manifestations of anti-colonial nationalism took the form of defending Uganda from white settler-dominated Kenya. Many Ugandans recoiled from Britain's desire to unite Kenya, Tanganyika and Uganda into a greater union (a kind of pre-independence East African Federation). When Kabaka Mutesa II articulated fierce opposition to East African union, he was, in part, resisting the encroachment of white settler power from Kenya into Uganda. The Kabaka was sent into exile in Britain by the Governor of Uganda. Many of Kabaka's male subjects vowed not to shave their beards until the British returned their king. When Kabaka returned to Uganda later in the 1950s, many of his subjects shaved their beards at Entebbe Airport in celebration. Some of those beards were stuffed into pillows as souvenirs.

The momentum of Buganda's defiance extended to other parts of Uganda. Within a few years Uganda became independent in 1962.

Makerere's contribution to the anti-colonial struggle included the early graduates who sometimes defied the British for ethno-cultural reasons and sometimes for genuine Pan-Uganda patriotic reasons.

Among the Pan-Ugandan nationalists was Apollo Obote, who adopted the additional name of "Milton" out of admiration for John Milton, the author of Paradise Lost. Obote was inspired by Satan's immortal line in Milton's poem: "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven."

Another immortal East African product of Makerere was Julius K. Nyerere who, in the struggle against colonialism, created the Tanganyika African National Union on saba-saba – the seventh day of the seventh month in the 1950s.

Although Tanganyika was the least developed of the three British East African colonies, Tanganyika was the first to win independence in 1961.

Although Kenya was the most infrastructurally developed of the three colonies, it was the last to win independence in December 1963.

Uganda was caught in between, winning its independence in 1962.

But the differences in scheduling were minor. The real achievement in all the three East African countries was the spectacular speed of political decolonization.

Phase II: The Phase of Nation-Building

While Phase I of East Africa's basic decolonization was impressively triumphant, the second phase of nation-building was truly in fits and starts.

Because African intellectuals and academics could not come to grips with viable strategies of economic development, nation-building was extremely difficult to sustain in the post-colonial era.

Intellectuals and academics thought they could be effective agents of economic change by the ideology they adopted. In the 1960s and 1970s socialism, and even Marxism were popular on many campuses in Africa.

Marxism had three roles – as ideology of development, as an ethic of distribution and as a methodology of analysis.

Marxism became the opium of the post-colonial intelligentsia. Addiction to Marxism and socialism was at its height on the campuses of the University of Dar es Salaam and Haile Selassie I University in Addis Ababa.

The University of Nairobi was next in leftist orientation – with prominent figures like Ngugi wa Thiong'o as the vanguard.

The Makerere campus was the least intoxicated by socialism and Marxism – resisting the opium of the rest of the African intelligentsia.

In Kenya, the political intellectuals, like Tom Mboya and Mwai Kibaki, were at variance with the academic intellectuals, like Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Michere Mugo. The campus intellectuals were to the left of the political intelligentsia.

Uganda under Obote I also witnessed an ideological divergence between the political intellectuals who were pushing for Obote's Move to the Left and the campus intellectuals who were skeptical of leftist rhetoric, such as Mat Kiwanuka in the History Department, Apolo Nsibambi in political science and George Kanyeihamba in law.

Apart from a minority of political scientists on campus, like Yash Tandon, Ahmed Mohiddin and the young Okello Oculi, academic intellectuals in Uganda were to the right of the political intellectuals under Obote I – while in Kenya, campus intellectuals were to the left of political intellectuals under Kenyatta and early Moi.

At the University of Dar es Salaam radical leftist academics were disproportionately non-Tanzanians – such as Walter Rodney of Guyana, Mahmood Mamdani of Uganda, John Saul of Canada and Lionel Cliffe of the United Kingdom. Issa Shivji was the only prominent Tanzanian who was also truly leftist – the author of The Silent Class Struggle in Tanzania.

In Nyerere's Tanzania, both the campus intellectuals and the political intellectuals were leftist, but the academicians were more leftist than Julius K. Nyerere.

Marxism as a methodology of analysis dominated the legacy of Dar es Salaam, but Marxism as an ideology of development failed to deliver worldwide.

As for Marxism as an ethic of distribution, it has continued to be attractive to all those who are appalled by the injustices of economic inequality and the gross inequities between the Haves and Have-nots in post-colonial Africa.

As for African elites who chose to pursue the capitalist path of development, many of their economic strategies were similarly out of focus in their capitalism. Their strategies stimulated urbanization without industrialization; they aroused capitalist greed without capitalist discipline; they activated Western consumption patterns without Western production techniques; they whetted Western tastes without cultivating Western skills.

Idi Amin's expulsion of Uganda Asians was a particularly bizarre route towards Africanized capitalism. Idi Amin sought to replace Asian dukawallas with African duka-warriors. Once again, the result was capitalist greed without capitalist discipline; Western-style consumption patterns without Western-style production techniques.

Of the major East African leaders, Yoweri Museveni is the only one who has traversed the whole ideological spectrum from a profound distrust of capitalism to a restored faith in market forces.

I still remember a dinner exchange I had with him at the Entebbe State House:

Museveni: *"So Professor, I hear rumors that you have moved to the left in recent years."*

Mazrui: *"Mr. President, I also hear rumors. I have heard that you have moved to the right."*

Museveni insisted that his new faith in market forces was not a quest for profit, but a quest for technology and development.

Museveni and Nkrumah had something in common. Nkrumah out of office was way to the left of Nkrumah in office. Similarly, Museveni, prior to supreme office, was way to the left of Museveni in office.

Nkrumah was neo-Marxist, both before he became Head of Government (and Head of State), and after he lost power. Nkrumah returned to his leftist roots in his post-presidential years.

In the case of Museveni, we know he was leftist before he had supreme power, and we know he became more pragmatic as Head of State. We do not know yet if Museveni would return to his leftist roots when he becomes an ordinary citizen again.

Museveni's pragmatism in power has paid off in the capital city of Kampala. Kampala was decaying and full of hazards when Museveni came to power in 1986. Today, Kampala has the look of a dynamic metropolis – building higher and higher, as well as wider and wider.

Far less successful is the fate of Jinja, which was once the country's industrial capital. If I was advising President Museveni on urban policy, I would urge a strategy of two cities, a kind of tale of two cities – like Sidney and Melbourne in Australia.

If Kampala is Uganda's Sydney in terms of development, let Jinja grow into Uganda's Melbourne.

In Australia, the capital is the small city of Canberra. So Kampala is a combination of Sydney and Canberra. But Uganda's urban policy should still be based on a strategy of two cities – one of which should be astride the source of the Nile.

Of course, present moves towards peace in Northern Uganda are a more urgent priority. Although the war of the Lord's Resistance Army is not the longest war in post-colonial Eastern Africa, the Ugandan war with the Lord's Resistance Army may be the most brutal.

The separatist war of Eritrea against imperial and revolutionary Ethiopia was a 30 year war (1962-1992), but it was not as savage as the 20 year war in Northern Uganda.

The second civil war in Southern Sudan was more than 40 years long – from 1963 to 2004. But it was not a war which chopped off limbs and lips or brutally violate women and children as the war in Northern Uganda has done for a couple of decades.

At long last, Ugandans are to be congratulated if they are now taking the Northern war truly seriously and both sides are at last eager to end it.

If there are intellectuals on both the government side and in the Lord's Resistance Army, here is another opportunity to demonstrate that such intellectuals can indeed be major agents of political change, even if they remain minor agents in economic change.

If the first phase of East Africa's modern history was decolonization and the second phase was the challenge of nation-building, this third phase is the phase of globalization.

I will address globalization more frontally in my presentation for the Uganda Bank on Thursday. Today let me place Makerere within the origins of globalization in Eastern Africa.

What role has Makerere played in the process of the villagization of the world? Let us take this special look which combines the global with the local – the glocalization of Uganda and East Africa.

Makerere in the History of Globalization

Globalization is a new word but it represents a long-drawn out historical process. Globalization consists of the forces which are pushing the world towards becoming a global village.

Most recently those forces have been at their most dramatic in the Information Superhighway (Internet and the death of distance) and in the spectacular interdependence of the world economy. When Southeast Asian economies take a downturn, Boeing (the U.S. plane manufacturer) feels the pain. Sales of planes are dramatically down. When peace returns to the Middle East, oil prices tumble down.

But what paved the way for the Information Superhighway and the computer revolution in the world economy? Higher education and the escalating sophistication of research are part of the story. Higher education has been a major force in the villagization of the globe – turning the world into a global village. Where does Makerere fit in this equation?

At the global level Makerere's role has to be examined in symbolic terms. As the oldest university college in the region, Makerere was the vanguard of globalization in East Africa's experience. If higher education has been central to the momentous process of turning the world into an independent global village, Makerere has been more than part and parcel of that process. In Eastern Africa it has been a historic vanguard.

Let us note a few brief factors in the flow of history:

I. Makerere was part of a British global university – like Legon in Ghana, Mona in Jamaica, Ibadan in Nigeria. They were all parts of the University of London.

II. Makerere evolved from Euro-African university college (linked to London) to Pan-East African University college (linked to the University of East Africa). I still remember when the Department of Political Science at Makerere struggled with the University of London over whether to include Karl Marx in a course on political philosophy.

III. Makerere experienced globalization in reverse. There was a time when it was too global and not African enough. Makerere was:

(A) teaching French

(B) teaching German

(C) teaching Russian before teaching African languages for a degree

In retrospect the Makerere experience posed the question: How much globalization is Westernization? Western education produced young Obote who changed his name from Apollo Obote to Milton Obote out of admiration for the author of Paradise Lost. Was that globalization or Westernization? Makerere and Western education

produced Julius K. Nyerere who translated two of Shakespeare's plays into Kiswahili. Was that globalization or Westernization?

Makerere had unofficial links with Transition magazine, which was founded by the late Rajat Neogy who was not himself at Makerere. Transition magazine became the most scintillating and intellectually effervescent magazine in Anglophone Africa in the 1960s. Future Novel laureates wrote for it- like Wole Soyinka (who later edited it) and Nadine Gordimer. Future world-class novelists wrote for it like Paul Thoroux, Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong's. Kwame Nkrumah and Tom Mboya responded to articles in Transition.

The Uganda phase of Transition ended after Obotoe's government (first administration) imprisoned editor Rajat Neogy. When Neogy was released he re-started Transition in Ghana, and subsequently handed it over to Wole Soyinka. The Ghana phase of Transition ended when Soyinka tried to change the magazine's name to Cindaba.

Now there is a United States' phase of the same magazine, with Soyinka as Chair of the Editorial Board, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah as editors. Now the magazine is based at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Linkages across time from Makerere to Harvard!

Makerere also witnessed an astonishing array of visitors from all walks of life and most parts of the world. I remember my personally inviting the distinguished Irishman, Connor Cruise O'Brien who had served with the United Nations in Katanga, the Congo. In his speech at Makerere he described Moise Tshombe, the secessionist leader of Katanga, as "the best politician that money can buy." The phrase hit world headlines.

Since then we have known many other African politicians who have also been up for sale!

I remember the Hollywood film star, Sidney Poitier, expressing surprise that there were so many male homosexuals in Uganda. When I asked him what had given him that idea, he referred to so many men in the streets holding hands. I laughed. I told him "In this culture holding hands is a sign of friendliness and good will. It is not a sign of sex. This is a culture of the touch of friendship rather than foreplay!"

I remember listening to a sermon in the Main Hall by Father Trevor Huddleston. It was one of the most moving sermons in any religion that I have ever heard. There was a simple refrain to which Father Huddleston kept on returning: "Near the hill where he was crucified there was a garden!" It was a simple refrain, but the juxtaposition of the horror of the crucifixion and the beauty of the garden was so deeply moving.

I remember welcoming Thurgood Marshall. By his role in the U.S. Supreme Court case of Brown versus the Board of Education in 1954, this man had had a bigger impact on 20th century American history than most Presidents manage to have. He was a great luminary even among the star-studded visitors to Makerere.

I first met Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia at Makerere in the 1960s. He was in the company of Kabaka Mutesa II of Buganda. These were two kings whose sudden deaths later in history were to be steeped in mystery.

In my sitting room in Binghamton is a photograph of the African continent taken from outer space. It was presented to me by an American astronaut whose visit to Makerere to talk about outer space was initiated by me through negotiations with the U.S. Embassy in Kampala.

The Archbishop of Canterbury also visited us, and addressed an audience in the Main Hall. Students wanted to know how he and Queen Elizabeth II could both be "the Head of the Church of England". The Archbishop eventually adroitly sidestepped the debate by reaffirming that the Head of the Church was God!

Scientists and medical experts from other parts of the world also visited Makerere. The Medical School at Makerere had made such important advances in research in tropical diseases that it was on the verge of being nominated for the Nobel Prize in Medicine. Had Idi Amin's coup been delayed by another three years, our medical school might have made it.

Distinguished alumni of Makerere have become presidents of their countries.

- Julius K. Nyerere to Tanzania
- Apollo Milton Obote of Uganda
- Yusuf Lule of Uganda
- Benjamin Mkapa of Tanzania
- Mwai Kibaki of Kenya

Many have become distinguished Vice-Presidents, Prime Ministers, ministers, scholars, scientists, diplomats, parliamentarians, administrators, entrepreneurs, Central Bank governors, politicians and statesmen and stateswomen.

But perhaps among those who have symbolized globalization the most is a Ugandan whose relationship with Makerere became an interrupted symphony. That Ugandan nearly became the Secretary-General of the UN instead of Bourtros-Boutros Ghali. He subsequently became a distinguished President of the International Peace

Academy, and was later working for the UN to help protect children from the ravages of war. The Ugandan is Olara Otunnu.

Salim Ahmed Salim – later Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity – was also considered for Secretary-General of the UN. Salim was vetoed by the USA while Otunnu was probably vetoed by the Ugandan government.

A Tanzanian alumnus of Makerere who even more symbolized aspects of globalization was Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere himself – who became a major figure not just in Pan-African politics but also in the global arena of North-South relations. He often did bestride that narrow world like a Colossus – and also qualified as a Shakespearean scholar in a certain sense.

Finally, a word about a mysterious Kenyan who was honored by Makerere with the fastest professorial promotion of Makerere's history (from lecturer to full professor in less than two years). In the 1980s the Kenyan went global with a television series, which has been shown in dozens of countries and translated, into several languages. In the 1990s the Kenyan held five professorships on three different continents – none of the professorships in Kenya. In 2003 he was at last honored by his own President in Kenya. Is the Kenyan waiting for the birth of an East African Federation before he returns home full-time? The Kenyan shall remain nameless!

Like most other East African academics, the Kenyan tried to be a major contributor to political change in the region. But again, like most East African intellectuals, he was at best only a minor footnote to economic change.

The struggle continues.

Conclusion

Academics are sometimes offered roles in government or in statecraft that pose moral dilemmas. Again, permit me to draw from my own personal experience.

The highest political role which was offered to me in Uganda was under Idi Amin's regime. One evening my old friend, Abu Mayanja, came to my home at Makerere to discuss a proposition. Abu was at the time serving as a Minister in Idi Amin's government. He came to my house to ask me if I would consider serving as a special advisor to the President. Abu asked: "Are you willing to be the equivalent of Henry Kissinger to Idi Amin's Richard Nixon?"

In retrospect, I am not sure if I was more intrigued by the substance of the proposition or by the analogy! But I needed time to think about the matter. The challenge was awesome. But did I really want to be a part of any unelected government, let alone a military one?

Fortunately, I had lecturing engagements in England in the following two weeks. Abu Mayanja and I agreed that I could give my answer upon my return from Britain.

Two weeks was a long time in Idi Amin's calendar. I was hoping that upon my return Idi Amin would have gone on to other matters. I kept quiet when I got back to Kampala. When Abu Mayanja next came to my house, he commented on my "eloquent silence" regarding the proposition to play Henry Kissinger to Idi Amin's Richard Nixon! I apologized that I was unable to accept the offer.

Since then, I have often wondered whether I made the right decision. Was there a life I could have saved if I genuinely had Amin's ear as his advisor? Could I have saved

the life of Chief Justice Benedicto Kiwanuka or the life of Makerere's Vice-Chancellor Frank Kalimuzo? Or is all this mere wishful thinking?

On a subsequent occasion, Idi Amin wanted to send me to South Africa as part of the dialogue he had initiated with the apartheid regime. More than thirty years before Foreign Policy journal in Washington, D.C. nominated me in 2005 among the one hundred top public intellectuals in the world, Idi Amin wanted to send me to South Africa to convince white racists that the Black race could produce high-powered intellectuals (or what Idi Amin called "big minds").

Here was a challenge in statecraft. But, needless to say, I was most reluctant to be sent to Pretoria as "Exhibit A of a Thinking Black Man". That would have been to play the racist game rather than to fight it. Indeed, I was reluctant to participate in any manner in breaking the international sanctions against the apartheid regime. But how was I to say "No" to Idi Amin a second time?

Fortunately, the South African Head of State came to my rescue. He replied that Idi Amin's proposal of "academic dialogue" was "premature". I thanked the Lord!

When offered to play big roles in government, academics will continue to face ethical dilemmas from time to time. President Yoweri Museveni's present Cabinet has several professors, including the Prime Minister. Outsiders will not know what precise roles they play in government behind the scenes. The academics in government are often more sensitive to the public good than most outsiders give them credit for.

I missed my chance to serve Uganda in Idi Amin's government. Would I have been a positive influence or a frustrated intellectual? Indeed, would I have survived to tell the tale?

Who can know for certain from today's vantage point? Our history is replete with great "might have beens"!