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# Beyond Idi Amin: Causes and Drivers of Political Violence in Uganda, 1971-1979

Thomas James Lowman

## **Abstract**

This thesis is a study of the causes and drivers of political violence during Idi Amin's eight years as President of Uganda between 1971 and 1979. It is concerned with the relationship between political violence and order, the causes and function of political violence in post-colonial Africa, and the production and patterns of political violence, with a specific focus on the role of localised agency and coercive institutions in this production. It also seeks to contribute to a new wave of literature on the state and political life in Uganda under Amin. During Amin's rule political violence became widespread, and hundreds of thousands of Ugandans are estimated to have been killed. The following chapters draw on a range of primary materials including Ugandan government records, oral interviews, and the testimonies given to two investigations into human rights abuses in 1974 and 1986 that have made a reappraisal of the period possible.

This thesis argues that the power and reach of the Ugandan state under Amin has often been overestimated. Political violence in this period was the product of a weak state, struggling to successfully reproduce what Mitchell terms the 'state effect', in which the state comes to be regarded as separate to society, with a monopoly on deadly force. Uganda's new rulers inherited the same constraints as their predecessors, and their approach to governance further undermined the functional capacity of the state apparatus. The spread of political violence that followed was driven by the vulnerability and insecurity of the new ruling clique, but it was also shaped by the localised agency and input of a wide range of state and non-state actors. Deteriorating and poorly controlled institutions, opportunistic crime and malicious denunciations, and the persistent failure of the new regime to impose and maintain consistent and disciplined practices within the repressive institutions through which they ruled all contributed to the apparently arbitrary and 'chaotic' pattern of violence for which the Amin era is typically remembered.

# Beyond Idi Amin: Causes and Drivers of Political Violence in Uganda, 1971-1979

Thomas James Lowman

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Department of History, Durham University

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## List of Abbreviations

APC	Armoured Personnel Carrier
ASU	Anti-Smuggling Unit
CIDPU	Commission of Inquiry into the Disappearances of People in Uganda
CIVHR	Commission of Inquiry into Violations of Human Rights in Uganda
DC	District Commissioner
DP	Democratic Party
ECT	Economic Crimes Tribunal
FRONASA	Front for National Salvation
GDA	Gulu District Archive
GSU	General Service Unit
KY	Kabaka Yekka
LoC	Library of Congress
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
NRA	National Resistance Army
NRM	National Resistance Movement
OAU	Organisation for African Unity
PSU	Public Safety Unit
SRC	State Research Centre
UGNA	Uganda National Archive
UNLA	Uganda National Liberation Army
UPC	Uganda People's Congress

## Statement of Copyright

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## i. Introduction

The following thesis is a study of the causes and drivers of political violence during Idi Amin's eight years as President of Uganda between 1971 and 1979. It is concerned with the relationship between political violence and order, the causes and function of political violence in post-colonial Africa, and the production and patterns of political violence, with a specific focus on the role of localised agency and coercive institutions in this production. It also seeks to contribute to a new wave of literature on the state and political life in Uganda under Amin. During Amin's rule political violence became widespread, and hundreds of thousands of Ugandans are estimated to have been killed. New security units were created and quickly gained a lasting reputation for torture and murder. The extreme insecurity generated by this violence made detailed analysis of the Amin regime at the time difficult, but recent writing has employed a range of valuable primary materials to gain further insight into the period. Drawing on these materials, this thesis re-examines political violence in Uganda under Amin's rule. The key themes of the thesis, and their analytical significance are outlined below, followed by an outline of my research methodology, and the thesis structure.

### Violence and the State in Amin's Uganda

The past decade has seen increasing academic attention being given to Amin's eight year-reign in Uganda, and to political and social life under his military government. Oversimplified visions of Amin as a psychotic dictator, and the country as an extension of his maverick persona have been

abandoned in favour of detailed historical work utilising an array of useful historical sources that have since become available. These include rehabilitated district archive files from across Uganda, oral interviews, and the testimonies recorded in two significant investigations into violence in Uganda, one undertaken under Amin himself in 1974, and the other organised by Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) in 1986. These materials have made possible the analysis of many different aspects of life in the country at this time from many different perspectives.

This thesis takes inspiration from a 2013 special collection in the *Journal of Eastern African Studies* entitled 'Rethinking Amin's Uganda'. The articles in this collection employ a range of now accessible information to critically revisit the Amin era. The picture that results is a muddier, more complex one than conventional accounts of the period offered. The limits of Amin's power are demonstrated in Asiimwe's study of his regime's failure to contain a blossoming illegal coffee trade.<sup>1</sup> Decker's exploration of the brave testimonies of women called forward as witnesses to regime-led investigations into the 'disappearances' of thousands of Ugandans that took place in 1974 counters the traditional tale of a single 'great man' inflicting misery on a passive nation.<sup>2</sup> Hundle's article on those 'exceptions' in the Ugandan Asian community, who stayed behind despite Amin's expulsion of almost the entire population in 1972, highlights the contradictions and inconsistencies that were inherent in so many of his policies, and the crucial difference that connections to those in power could make.<sup>3</sup> This thesis draws on ideas from across this collection throughout, but two are particularly influential. These are Peterson and Taylor's assertions that Uganda under Amin should be studied not as the playground of a single personality, but as a 'forum of agency', in which myriad actors played an important part, and that

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<sup>1</sup> Godfrey B. Asiimwe 'From monopoly marketing to coffee magendo: Responses to policy recklessness and extraction in Uganda, 1971–79', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 7:1 (2013), pp.104-124.

<sup>2</sup> Alicia C. Decker, 'Sometime you may leave your husband in Karuma Falls or in the forest there': A gendered history of disappearance in Idi Amin's Uganda, 1971–79', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 7:1 (2013), pp.125-142

<sup>3</sup> Anneeth Kaur Hundle, 'Exceptions to the expulsion: Violence, security and community among Ugandan Asians, 1972–79', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 7:1 (2013), pp.164-182.

the Amin regime employed a distinct style of rule with an emphasis on verbal address and commands transmitted through the news media, a phenomenon they refer to as the 'Politics of Exhortation'.<sup>4</sup>

It is the contention of this thesis that this recent work on Amin's Uganda has largely avoided a detailed re-examination of the political violence that was such an important part of his regime. There has been an admirable focus on the quotidian, and life beyond the reaches of the Amin state, but a reluctance to confront the most extreme excesses of the period with the same analytical clarity and bolstered primary record now being employed elsewhere. The following chapters seek to redress this gap, whilst also showing that some of the theoretical concepts from this recent literature can be particularly useful when analysing violence in Amin's Uganda. Recognition that Uganda in this period was a forum of agency is crucial, as a range of actors competed for position, and employed violence towards diverse and often contradictory ends. This emphasis on agency synthesises neatly with Kalyvas's theory of violence as a joint production, in which the input of a multiplicity of actors, including civilians and non-state actors, is crucial.<sup>5</sup> The idea of Amin's regime as a 'command economy', issuing orders in person and through radio and the press but regularly eschewing or bypassing the existing literate bureaucracy is also pivotal. It helps us to see that much of the violence of the period was organised and enacted outside of the formal state structure, or in tandem with it, rather than from within it. The formal bureaucracy continued to operate, but in volatile conditions and under extreme pressure, and its staff were often the targets of such violence themselves. Ultimately the hybrid and improvised nature of this style of rule enabled much of the bureaucracy to outlive Amin's regime, as the rapid (albeit fragile) reassembly of the formal Ugandan state after the chaos of his fall demonstrates.

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<sup>4</sup> Derek R. Peterson and Edgar C. Taylor, 'Rethinking the state in Idi Amin's Uganda: The politics of exhortation', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 7:1 (2013), pp. 58-82.

<sup>5</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, (Cambridge, 2006), p. 12.

The dependence of Uganda's new leaders on verbal commands created enormous space for the wilful reinterpretation, cooption, or dismissal of orders, contributing further to the apparently chaotic and arbitrary pattern of political action, of which deadly violence represented only the most extreme form. This pattern became more pronounced over time, as early efforts to collaborate with the civilian elite gave way to their complete subordination to Amin's inner circle of formerly low-ranking soldiers. The result were myriad forms of responsive and echoic agency, employed by soldiers, security agents, and civilians at the local level, that adapted and responded to the ever-changing commands and exhortations issuing from the political centre. Such action sustained the regime in power, but also greatly undermined its functional capacity, and often drew it into conflicts with Ugandan society, as the actions of individual soldiers prompted conflict that the regime responded to with further force.

#### The Causes, Uses, and Production of Political Violence in Africa

This thesis employs multiple theoretical tools from the wider literature on political violence, much of which has a specific focus on Africa. It employs these in order to better analyse the causes, uses, and logic of political violence in Amin's Uganda. Like many other historical cases of extreme political conflict, violence under Amin was originally explained away by a combination of what Huggins refers to as 'bad apple' theory (in which heads of state like Amin and their key followers are presented as uniquely deviant, and violence under their rule can be adequately explained by this alone), and essentialist explanations that centred on the supposed inherent sadism of his supporters, as Northerners, Muslims, and West Nilers.<sup>6</sup> David Anderson has debunked similar 'individual-dispositional' explanations of violent action in his study of

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<sup>6</sup> Martha K. Huggins, 'State torture: Interviewing perpetrators, discovering facilitators, theorising cross-nationally- proposing torture 101', *State Crime Journal*, (2012), p. 45.

systematic violence in Kenya.<sup>7</sup> This thesis draws upon this literature in order to critique similar outdated explanations for Amin-era violence in chapter one.<sup>8</sup> To better understand the role played by deadly force in the African setting one must first consider the relationship between political violence and societal order.

Rather than an inherently deviant or aberrant force, violence has been a recurrent political resource, and often has important social meaning. Reid has stressed the centrality of political violence as a creative and developmental tool for aspirant leaders and state makers in Africa, before, during, and after the colonial era.<sup>9</sup> Violence was employed to centralise power, to control trade routes, and to underpin new forms of political authority. African militaries in both their pre-colonial and colonial forms were often collective bodies of ‘armed entrepreneurs’, employing deadly force for their own gain as well as contributing to the political projects of Africans and Europeans alike.<sup>10</sup> The legacies of this relationship between violence and development have had pronounced political consequences for the continent, creating and sustaining fault lines and frontier cultures that have continued to shape subsequent armed conflicts.<sup>11</sup> The importance of such historical ‘legacies’ of violence in the East Africa is echoed by Anderson and Rolandsen, who stress the importance of considering such factors alongside the contemporary constraints on political action in East Africa, and the role of agency.<sup>12</sup> For Leopold, historical trajectories of violence can replicate themselves continuously within particular societies, as they are repeatedly

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<sup>7</sup> David M. Anderson, ‘British abuse and torture in Kenya’s counter-insurgency, 1952-1960’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 23:4 (2012), pp. 700-719.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Leopold, ‘Sex, violence and history in the lives of Idi Amin: Postcolonial masculinity as masquerade’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 45:3 (2009), pp. 321-330.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Reid, ‘The fragile revolution: Rethinking war and development in Africa’s violent nineteenth century’, *Africa’s Development in Historical Perspective*, (2014), pp. 393-423.

<sup>10</sup> Richard J. Reid, *Warfare in African history*. (Cambridge, 2012)

<sup>11</sup> Reid, ‘The fragile revolution’.

<sup>12</sup> David M. Anderson and Øystein H. Rolandsen. ‘Violence as politics in Eastern Africa, 1940–1990: Legacy, agency, contingency’, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 8:4 (2014), pp. 539-557.

shaped by association with past violence. This is of particular relevance to communities and ethnic groups in Africa that were identified in the colonial era as ‘martial peoples’, as these perceptions led to disproportionate recruitment of men from such groups into colonial armies, further perpetuating their relationship with violence.<sup>13</sup> As well as being a functional act, violence can have performative dimensions, conveying culturally coded messages.<sup>14</sup> For Mbembe the performance of violence can serve as the ultimate expression of political sovereignty, the power to determine who lives and who dies.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout history violence has been used to disrupt and challenge existing social and political orders, or to defend and underpin them. Bourdieu has argued that societies and states employ many forms of symbolic or structural ‘violence’ to enforce existing hierarchies and norms peacefully (the most advanced of these being the disciplinary institutions and practices of the modern nation state), but when these fail physical violence has been used both to attack and to uphold societal order.<sup>16</sup> Maintenance of such order is often an ‘aspiration’ of governments rather than a consistent reality in the countries that they govern.<sup>17</sup> In the face of existing social and political domination or exploitation, violence that challenges established elites or states from ‘below’ or from within can be subversive and/or emancipatory in character.<sup>18</sup> It may offer catharsis to those without the means or platform to articulate their grievances through other means, in

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Leopold. ‘Review: Violence in Contemporary Africa Reassessed’, *African Affairs*, 104:4 (2005), pp. 685-695.

<sup>14</sup> Neil L. Whitehead, ‘On the poetics of violence’, *Violence*, (2004), pp. 55-77. See also Stephen Ellis ‘Violence and history: A response to Thandika Mkandawire’, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 41:3 (2003), pp. 457-475.

<sup>15</sup> Achille Mbembe, ‘Necropolitics’, *Public Culture*, 15:1 (2003), pp. 11-40.

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, (California, 1998), p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> David Branch and Nicholas Cheeseman, ‘The politics of control in Kenya: Understanding the bureaucratic-executive state, 1952-1978’, *Review of African Political Economy*, 33:107 (2006), p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Concerning Violence*, (London, 2008).

particular social and political subalterns.<sup>19</sup> It may allow for the capture and reallocation of institutions and resources, or the removal of abusive rulers. It may also assert alternative sources of authority and order that a centralising power has sought to repress. It is not always revolutionary in character, as violence 'from below' can tacitly reaffirm or shore up ideas about the existing social and political order, as it does when it comes in tandem with demands for (or promises of) better practice or service from the state and those that run it, rather than cries for their removal. In such a context what is being demanded is improvement or renewal rather than destruction.<sup>20</sup>

Inversely, violence offers ruling elites the means to impose and sustain order from 'above'. Violence can be a performance of symbolic authority, a demonstration of the power of the state (and those that occupy it) to cause physical harm in their defence and/or in defence of those that they govern. When wielded to inspire compliance and to deter certain kinds of negative action (including other forms of localised violence) it can quell instability or insecurity and generate the conditions for peace, itself a form of accepted 'symbolic violence'.<sup>21</sup> It is precisely this monopoly on force that underpins the stability of many modern nation states. Certain kinds of performative state-led violence can also be used to outline the 'legitimate' contours of violence within a given polity, and, by extension, to define and ostracise alternative 'illegitimate' forms. In the absence of such top-down forms of coercion other kinds of localised violence may proliferate, challenging or undermining the established order.

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<sup>19</sup> Karl van Holdt, 'The violence of order, orders of violence: Between Fanon and Bourdieu', *Current Sociology*, 61:2 (2013), p. 127.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

However, van Holdt warns that political violence can be ‘profoundly corrosive’.<sup>22</sup> It is difficult to control, and can undermine institutions, produce a climate of fear and withdrawal, and sharpen divisions. Violence repeatedly generates the conditions for its own recurrence. It can replicate itself in organisations and cultures, and can have a long afterlife. Whilst it may be a tool for ordinary people to use against established order, it is often ordinary people who suffer the most, and would-be liberators can quickly become oppressors themselves. Recourse to violence can generate further cycles and spirals of violence that can reach far beyond its original aims, as revenge attacks, opportunistic violence, and panic contribute to a widening circle of escalating conflict. As a political and social resource it is ‘ambiguous, mutable and doubled edged,’ and exactly how violence will be interpreted, and the outcomes it will generate is extremely variable.<sup>23</sup> Reliance on violence may also undermine alternative strategies by which social and political order might be challenged and maintained without loss of life. Those who seize or maintain power through naked force often find themselves struggling to legitimise themselves peacefully.

Kalyvas’s study of civil wars provides useful theoretical tools for understanding the forms of violence that emerged in Amin’s Uganda.<sup>24</sup> Political violence can inspire compliance in target populations, and convey deterrent messages to discourage insurgency and resistance.<sup>25</sup> It can also establish control in a given territory from which greater collaboration with a civilian population can develop.<sup>26</sup> Generally speaking, such violence is more effective when it is selective, that is, when there are clear links between those punished and the activities they are punished for, and those obeying the rules of the governing faction are spared or rewarded. Producing selective violence effectively requires considerable resources and information. Processing denunciations

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>24</sup> Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.



and monitoring potential opposition requires complex and disciplined institutions. In the absence of such resources and information the wrong civilians may be targeted, soldiers may abuse their positions, and the deterrent and communicative effect of violence may be greatly reduced. This will all serve to make meaningful collaboration from civilians less likely.<sup>27</sup> Violent actors operating in conditions of scarce resources and information may instead opt to employ indiscriminate violence, targeting entire groups rather than individuals, but over time armed factions are likely to attempt to practice violence more selectively.<sup>28</sup> Local populations are more likely to collaborate with violent groups when the area in which they live falls firmly under the control of a particular faction, and is not contested. This contributes to a recurring feature of violence during civil conflicts, in which major 'spikes' of violence occur not at the moment of greatest contestation, but at times (and in areas) of relative hegemony and control.<sup>29</sup> Russell has demonstrated this pattern at work in his study of rebel and regime violence in Burundi in 1972, as a short and unsuccessful rebel attack was defeated before the Burundian army launched a huge wave of retaliatory violence, much of it far away from the rebel activity.<sup>30</sup> A similar dual sequencing of moves towards more selective violence and widespread retaliatory 'spikes' of violence can be observed in Amin's Uganda.

Post-colonial African rulers have regularly turned to institutions in a bid to produce political violence (and maintain order) more effectively. Institutions can have powerful structural and situational effects, enabling and legitimating certain kinds of violent action. Harnessed effectively, such institutions can help to organise and control violence in order to employ it more selectively, and to prevent abuses that might provoke unrest and disrupt societal order. However,

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147-151.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>30</sup> Aidan Russell, 'Rebel and rule in Burundi, 1972', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 48:1 (2015), pp. 73-97

they can also become sites of extreme violence, enabling and driving violence in unexpected ways. Institutions designed to wield deadly force in defence of the state have often become sites of routine torture and murder in colonial and post-colonial Africa. The wider literature on violent actors and spaces can provide useful vocabulary for analysing why and how this happens. Since Browning's influential study on the perpetration of war crimes by Germany's 'ordinary men' in the Second World War there has been an increased focus on the importance of situational and psychological factors in producing violent action and actors.<sup>31</sup> Huggins et al explored this in depth in a post-colonial setting in their study of Brazilian death squads, showing that the production of violence by agents of state institutions was a learned and taught process, in which violence workers were 'made' by the demands of their work in a time of heightened political conflict, and by the secrecy, legitimisation, and insularity afforded them by their position within the state.<sup>32</sup> Anderson has applied this methodology in his study of British detention camps in Kenya during the Mau-Mau insurgency, outlining the ways in which torture in these camps became structural, enabled by an 'implicit structure of state acceptance', as well as the role that organisational fragmentation and secrecy played in creating space for the pervasive perpetration of atrocities to develop.<sup>33</sup> In such environments governing elites can play a key facilitating role, by assembling and funding the institutions that enact violence, by providing justificatory language for said violence, or by instituting ineffective or performative 'enquiries' into it.<sup>34</sup>

These conceptual tools are of use in the study of Amin's Uganda, where the army, Military Police, and two new security units, the State Research Centre (SRC) and Public Safety Unit (PSU), all became sites and drivers of regular, deadly violence. The institutional design of these units

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<sup>31</sup> Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men*, (New York, 1992), p. 62.

<sup>32</sup> Martha K. Huggins, Mika Haritos-Fatouros, and Philip G. Zimbardo, *Violence Workers: Police Torturers and Murderers Reconstruct Brazilian Atrocities*, (California, 2002).

<sup>33</sup> David M. Anderson, 'British abuse and torture in Kenya's counter-insurgency, 1952-1960.', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 23:4 (2012). pp. 700-719.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 713.

legitimated certain kinds of violent action, and they were offered a veneer of secrecy and impunity by ad hoc legislation and the subordination of other organs of government to the military. Violence workers were 'made' on the job in prisons at Makindye, Naguru, and Nakasero, and evidence of new and particular patterns of routinised violence, unique to these institutions and their functions, show through in the primary record. Early episodes of sporadic and improvised violence gave way to more systematic and predictable forms. Amin and his senior officers employed legitimising language to gloss over such violence throughout his rule, and investigations into abuses often had the shallow character of 'morality plays' rather than serving as a platform for the meaningful de-escalation of violence.

However, this thesis will argue that such institutional and situational factors can only tell part of the story in a post-colonial African setting. For reasons owing mainly to historical legacies explored in more detail below, state institutions in the African context have often been poorly resourced, and have struggled to separate themselves from the societies in which they operate.<sup>35</sup> The juridical reach of such institutions in theory is often far greater than their empirical and functional footprint.<sup>36</sup> The same was true of the Uganda Army, Military Police, SRC and PSU under Amin. The forms of violent behaviour that emerged within these institutions was often a product of their limitations rather than their design. Huge numbers of recruits were brought in in a very short space of time, and existing staff were replaced or removed overnight. Efforts to train new staff were often ineffective or short-lived, and discipline and order within these institutions was negligible as a result. The need to use positions in such units as sources of patronage meant that they were disproportionately staffed with men from poor and marginal communities, reflecting Amin's own support base, and this compounded the already considerable challenges to their

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<sup>35</sup> Frederick Cooper, 'Conflict and connection: Rethinking colonial African history', *The American historical Review*, 99:5 (1994), pp. 1516-1545.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Jackson and Carl Rosberg, 'Why Africa's weak states persist: The empirical and the juridical in statehood', *World Politics*, 35:1 (1982), pp. 2-4.

functional capacity. As a result, some of the soldiers and security agents repeatedly employed informal and personalised agency in their work, including in their perpetration of violence. This contributed further to the corrosive pattern of entrepreneurial violence, opportunistic vendettas, and petty feuding. Such violence was a regular source of unrest within Amin's regime, but efforts to retrain the security forces and stamp out such behaviour repeatedly failed. Violence workers in such a setting were often extremely vulnerable to violence themselves, prisoners of an unpredictable environment that their own violent action or the actions of others helped to sustain.

### Violence and the Post-Colonial State

The volatile relationship between violence and order is of enduring relevance to the study of post-colonial African states, some of which have experienced persistent political violence and disorder since their independence. 'The State' is both an idea and a functional entity comprised of a range of overlapping structures and practices. The former is an inheritance of European political theory, and ideas about what the state could and should be and do have been a central preoccupation of modern political action. The abstract ideal of the state and its purpose can hide the ulterior networks that dominate and rule it.<sup>37</sup> In function, states are bundles of institutions and practices that project and utilise political power, the nature, capabilities, and popular legitimacy of which varies greatly in specific contexts. The relationship of the modern state to political violence has been a subject of much debate. Academics have often focused on the 'modern and state-derived' character of mass violence, and studies of extreme cases of violence like the Holocaust that were enabled and driven by the bureaucratic and panoptic qualities of the modern European nation-

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<sup>37</sup> Philip Abrams, 'Notes on the difficulty of studying the state', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1:1, (1988), pp. 58-89.

state have cast long shadows over subsequent analyses of political violence enacted elsewhere in the world.<sup>38</sup>

The idea of the state as an 'intrusive alien authority' has been employed by historians like Young in Africa, for whom the colonial state was *bula matari* (The crusher of rocks), violently imposing itself on African populations with ease.<sup>39</sup> For Abbink the African state 'hovers above' society.<sup>40</sup> From such a line of reasoning it might follow that the violence of the colonial and post-colonial state reflects this alien state's predations on the populations that it dwells above. Some argue colonial violence could be divided neatly into a binary of coloniser and colonised, and was the essential, even sole means by which colonial society was maintained.<sup>41</sup> This thesis rejects the idea of a state separate from the societies over which it purports to rule.<sup>42</sup> It does, however, hold that the struggle to project *the idea* of the state as an entity above society, and the much more pragmatic and collaborative reality of colonial and post-colonial state politics in Africa, are important factors in understanding the persistence of certain forms of political violence in many African states.

In practice the exact limits of 'the state' are difficult to define, as is any clear distinction between it and the society in which it sits.<sup>43</sup> However, the perception of the state and its norms as

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<sup>38</sup> Mark Mazower, 'Violence and the state in the Twentieth Century', *The American Historical Review*, 107:4 (2002), pp. 1158-1178.

<sup>39</sup> Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*, (London, 1994), p.1.

<sup>40</sup> Jon Abbink, 'Violence and state (re)formation in the African context: Global and local aspects of crisis and change', in Frank Columbus (ed.), *Politics and Economics of Africa, Volume 3*, (New York, 2004) p. 142.

<sup>41</sup> Tsenay Serequeberhan, 'Colonialism and colonised: Violence and counter-violence', in Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (ed.), *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, (Oxford, 1988). p. 241.

<sup>42</sup> Joel S. Migdal, *State in Society: Studying how States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another*, (Cambridge, 2001), p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> Timothy Mitchell, 'The limits of the state: Beyond statist approaches and their critics', *American Political Science Review*, 85:1 (1991), p. 78.

distinct from society has been a crucial factor in its successful function and acceptance by governed populations.<sup>44</sup> Violence may serve to impose or defend the power of a given state, but it cannot project the idea of an all-powerful state separate from society all on its own. Mitchell argues that in order to construct and maintain this distinction the state is:

...represented and reproduced in visible, everyday forms, such as the language of legal practice, the architecture of public buildings, the wearing of military uniforms, or the marking out and policing of frontiers.<sup>45</sup>

Such forms of day-to-day construction and enactment produce the state as a 'structural effect'.<sup>46</sup> Practices like the maintenance of border controls, detailed documentation of citizens, and the implementation and policing of laws all serve to replicate such an effect, and many of these practices are very recent developments in world history. Foucault referred to such disciplinary and normalising strategies as the 'capillary' power from which consistent state authority and legitimacy arises, and they are mutually constituted processes involving the reciprocal input and action of a governed population, which comes to 'embody' mechanisms of power in its actions.<sup>47</sup> Through such processes the idea of the state, its rules, and its authority are maintained and reinforced within and through its subject peoples.<sup>48</sup> Power and order is thus maintained by this 'state effect', as well as by whatever less subtle coercive tools are available to the state in question as a last resort.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>47</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, (New York, 1980). p. 96.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>49</sup> Mitchell, 'The Limits of the State', p. 94.

Most African states are a comparatively recent phenomena, imposed by force in the era of colonial conquest and grafted on to diverse societies that already had their own alternative forms of social and political authority and organisation, many of which resembled 'stateness' themselves. As a result, colonial states suffered from a chronic lack of legitimacy or authority, and, with limited material resources with which to buttress these, they compensated for this by regular recourse to lethal violence, as well as by establishing fragile new underpinnings of alternative 'symbolic violence' and 'stateness' in the form of nascent armies, legal systems, and police and prison systems.<sup>50</sup> Without the resources and manpower to project power in consistent and routine ways, the colonial 'state effect' was produced inconsistently and lopsidedly. Cooper revises Foucault's notion of capillary state power by positing that in Africa colonial state power 'was more arterial than capillary- concentrated spatially and socially, not very nourishing beyond such domains, and in need of a pump to push it from moment to moment and place to place.'<sup>51</sup> This compromised the creation and sustenance of a routinised recognition of the state as separate to society in the colonial African setting, and post-colonial states in Africa have faced similar struggles to regularly produce such an effect.

Recourse to political violence in Amin's Uganda can in part be understood as a duality resulting from this inconsistent generation of state normalisation, both in the violent challenges issued from within and outside state structures by groups that neglected to buy into the idea of the state as above and unanswerable to them, and in the violence employed by a vulnerable regime seeking alternative strategies with which to project its authority when the idea of the state proved insufficient. That Amin and his supporters understood the importance of reproducing their

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<sup>50</sup> Catherine Boone, 'States and ruling classes in sub-Saharan Africa: the enduring contradictions of power', in Joel Migdal, Atul Kohl and Vivienne Shue (eds.) *State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World*, (Cambridge, 1994). p. 111.

<sup>51</sup> Cooper, 'Conflict and connection', p. 1533.

own brand of 'stateness' whilst in power is demonstrated by their consistent efforts to project the idea of the Ugandan state (and their starring roles in it) through the news media, and their more intermittent use of military tribunals, official inquiries, and performative punishments. These efforts were often undermined by the pressing need of the new regime to rely heavily on a small group of soldiers who were so obviously rooted in one small corner of Ugandan society, and whose merits as state officials were easily called into question by the populace. Like their colonial and post-colonial predecessors, Uganda's military rulers employed such efforts in an experimental, inconsistent, and thoroughly 'arterial' fashion.

Colonial administrations were concerned, first and foremost, with imposing and maintaining the power of the colonial state over indigenous African peoples, but they also depended heavily on the participation of indigenous Africans within their structures. The extreme violence of conquest and subordination generally gave way to attempts at more routine forms of domination, and colonial administrators were often compelled to draw 'eclectically' on collaborative relationships with existing African authority figures in order to project European power in as cost efficient a manner as possible.<sup>52</sup> This style of rule greatly empowered the local chief or headman, who was 'invented' or reimagined where he could not be found, and invested with the power of the colonial state.<sup>53</sup> This combination of sporadic violence (much of it overtly performative), varying patterns of local collaboration, and 'decentralised despotism' transmitted through command underpinned colonial rule, and it is worth noting the broad similarities to the strategies of rule that emerge under Amin in Uganda. There is far greater continuity here than is often recognised, and political violence often reflected the diffuse and collaborative nature of these ruling strategies, influenced and shaped as it was by local 'gatekeepers' and informants. The

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<sup>52</sup> Justin Willis, 'Violence, authority and the state in the Nuba Mountains of condominium Sudan', *The Historical Journal*, 46:1 (2003), p. 93.

<sup>53</sup> Frederick Cooper, 'Possibility and constraint: African independence in historical perspective', *The Journal of African History*, 49:2 (2008), p. 172.



distinct insecurity of Amin's ruling circle of soldiers, and their inability or unwillingness to draw consistently on other more subtle forms of domination like the literate bureaucracy, the courts, or the police pushed them towards intermittent violence instead. Such strategies only served to further enmesh the organs of the state in the societies on which they relied, hampering their efforts at producing a consistent idea of themselves as above society.

Colonialism had been a project of economic exploitation, and the socioeconomic changes that resource extraction generated proved a further source of tension, which colonial states struggled to manage. Executions, 'pacification' campaigns, and the regular performance of symbolic state power were all employed to quell unrest stemming from such changes, as well as ongoing resistance from competing sources of authority and legitimacy. Such economic change was only ever partially implemented in most parts of Africa, such was the anxiety of colonial administrators about a potential loss of control. As a result the resource base that colonial states could draw on remained small, and they were extremely reliant on the external guarantees and support of the European metropole. At the same time such change as was effected brought fresh challenges such as newly urbanising and 'rootless' working communities, rapidly accumulating and ambitious African beneficiaries, and competition for paid positions in an expanding and top-heavy governing administration.

Having inherited these fragile structures and the contradictory demands of sustaining order and maximising economic exploitation at independence, many African states did not enjoy a monopoly over symbolic or physical violence.<sup>54</sup> They could not rely on longstanding and consistent patterns of routinised 'stateness,' with their attendant patterns of normalised compliance. Many competing forms of authority and legitimacy endured outside and within formal state structures, in diverse societies and polities that were only recently amalgamated into

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<sup>54</sup> Boone, 'States and Ruling Classes', p. 126.

the colonial state system. In Uganda the struggles of the national government to impose itself in the face of separatist nationalists from Buganda, a large regional kingdom that the colonial era had only partially incorporated into the protectorate, were indicative of struggles that were taking place across independent Africa.<sup>55</sup> Other forms of ‘symbolic violence’ that might have sustained societal order without recourse to violence were thinly rooted and poorly resourced, having been dominated by Europeans and inconsistently implemented during the colonial era.

These conditions, combined with the new expectations and opportunities presented by independence, made the risk of violent challenge to the post-colonial order in new African states extremely high.<sup>56</sup> Vulnerable states had lost any ‘higher power’ to appeal to for help, and were vulnerable to capture by ambitious specialists in violence, or secession attempts by cohesive regional bodies.<sup>57</sup> The wave of coups, uprisings and civil conflicts that followed attests to this. In the face of these challenges African regimes sought to centralise power and militarise their states, bolstering their institutions of coercion (and, often, undermining alternative potential sources of power and legitimacy). In the face of these threats state directed violence was employed to impose order and to sustain new elites in power. In many ways these strategies mirrored the earlier efforts of colonial regimes to impose themselves through force, as mass detentions, executions, and campaigns of violence reappeared in some parts of the continent. In such conditions existing ties of language, family and reciprocity became ever more important, prompting ‘the continuing and even increasing salience of communal solidarities.’<sup>58</sup> Violence could take on an increasingly ethnic or regional character as competing groups utilised the politics of difference in order to gain an

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<sup>55</sup> David Apter, *The Political Kingdom in Uganda*, (London, 1998).

<sup>56</sup> Abbink, ‘Violence and State (Re)formation’, p. 142.

<sup>57</sup> Phillip Roessler, *Ethnic Politics and State Power in Africa: the Logic of the Coup-Civil War Trap*, (Cambridge, 2016).

<sup>58</sup> Bruce Berman, ‘Ethnicity, patronage and the African state: The politics of uncivil nationalism’, *African Affairs*, 97:388 (1998), p. 306.

advantage or to protect themselves.<sup>59</sup> Amin's government, in which power was steadily concentrated around a core of soldiers from West Nile and the Nubian community, and which found itself in conflict with men of the Acholi and Langi ethnic groups for control of the army, attests to this same process of increasingly fraught and ethnicised politics.

Whilst intended to promote order, resorting to violence often proved corrosive. It generated the conditions for persistent disorder, by altering the nature and practice of already weak institutions, triggering cycles of revenge and fear, and sharpening divisions between regional, ethnic, and religious communities. Such strategies enabled some African governments to prolong themselves in the short term, but they often prompted further unrest and challenge, especially at the peripheries of new nations where resistance could be organised beyond the reach of the formal state. The lack of empirical sovereignty over peripheral areas and borders was a repeated source of existential anxiety for African regimes. In the Amin era this took the form of alarm over the persistent flight of political opponents over the borders with Sudan, Kenya, and Tanzania, as well as invasion across the latter border. This was a recurrent factor driving episodic regime violence, as Amin and his supporters sought to stem the flow of political opponents and shore up their borders.

In Amin's Uganda, the post-colonial state was the target of political struggle, and the violence and strategies employed in these same struggles altered the nature and capacity of the structures and practices of the state. Amin's seizure of power was made possible by the preponderance of the state's coercive apparatus, its embeddedness in Ugandan society, and the corresponding vulnerability of its ruling elite, a triple inheritance from the colonial era that subsequent political choices by Uganda's independent leaders had entrenched rather than countered. Once in power, Amin laid claim to the authority and legitimacy of the state (such as

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

that was), and much of the violence he and his supporters employed was framed in terms of the defence of the 'nation' and its people. This masked what was in actuality a hostile takeover by a tiny circle of soldiers, who set out to exploit the state for themselves, and to secure themselves in power.

In practice, however, Amin's style of rule and that of his followers sat in an uneasy relationship with the formal state bureaucracy. The hybridity of their 'command economy' as highlighted on page 3 demonstrates the ways in which they often preferred to operate outside of, or in tandem to, the existing state system. Though the 'plateau of soldiers that came to rule the country quickly took up many of the preoccupations of their civilian and colonial predecessors, they did so by repeated tours of the country, and by issuing of verbal instructions in person and through the news media. Whilst they recognised the potential uses of legal and bureaucratic governance, they also repeatedly compromised and bypassed it, diminishing its effectiveness. Early attempts at collaborative rule in cooperation with educated civilian bureaucrats gave way to the personalised politics of exhortation. Political violence was often organised in much the same way, which can partly account for the patterns of violence that accompanied Amin's rule.

During the takeover and the years that followed small groups of soldiers produced violence without the sanction and direction of the formal state apparatus, taking their orders from individuals close to Amin and, at times, from rival or independent actors within the fractious network of soldiers that encompassed the core of his regime. This made it difficult to trace responsibility for the use of violence, and to distinguish when action was being ordered directly by Amin or his leading supporters, and when it was being undertaken for localised and ulterior purposes. Amin himself seems to have struggled to keep track of where violence was being employed and why, and condemnation of 'rogue elements' and ill-disciplined soldiers were a routine feature of his speeches. Investigations into such abuses in 1974 and again in 1977 further

demonstrated these concerns. This may partly have been a strategy of deflection, but it also arose from the fragmented nature of political organisation during this period.

Despite its limitations, the Ugandan state proved persistent in the face of this deterioration. The idea of the state as a potential source of order and security continued to appeal, both to those seeking to use it to bolster their authority and to those hoping for it to offer them protection. Existing state structures and practices were heavily altered and compromised, but not destroyed. The idea of Amin's government as an entirely unaccountable 'state of blood' is challenged by the repeated efforts of his regime to be seen to perform order and justice through enquiries and tribunals. He and his supporters never demonstrated serious appetite for a complete reordering of the state, preferring instead to implement ad hoc changes, leaving much intact (the notable exception being the drastic economic overhaul prompted by the expulsion of the Ugandan Asians). Alterations like the abolition of Special Branch, and the introduction of new regional provinces were often either uncompleted or grafted onto the existing state system. The police, prisons and courts were demoralised, but all continued to function to some degree.<sup>60</sup> There were marked contrasts between newly established organs of Amin's security apparatus and those which had preceded his seizure of power, as evidenced by the comparative safety of prisoners in the existing prisons network as compared to the far more systemic violence being meted out at Nakasero and Naguru under the SRC and PSU. Examination of district archive files reveals that violence was often being recorded and reported, and civilian administrators tried to restrain rogue actors in the military and security forces. Day-to-day efforts to produce the 'state effect' survived, and the hybridity of political power under Amin, with so much action organised outside of the formal state infrastructure, ultimately enabled said infrastructure to outlast military rule.

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<sup>60</sup> Kate Bruce-Lockhart, 'The archival afterlives of prison officers in Idi Amin's Uganda: Writing social histories of the postcolonial state', *History in Africa*, 45 (2018), pp. 245-274.

## Methodology and Source Materials

This following chapters combine a reexamination of the existing secondary literature of the Amin years with primary research and fieldwork conducted in Uganda, Britain and the United States in 2016-18. In Britain I utilised archival materials from the British Library and the National Archives. These encompassed a range of newspaper sources from Uganda and elsewhere, foreign office reports, and memoirs. I also utilised transcribed radio materials from the Summary of World News Broadcasts (SWNB), and the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS). In the United States I employed materials from the Library of Congress and the National Archives and Administration Office (NARA). The overwhelming bulk of the primary material was gathered during fieldwork in Uganda between October 2016 and March 2017. During my fieldwork I gathered materials from the new national archive in Wandegaya, Kampala, and from the District Archive in Gulu. I studied the collections at Makerere University, and collected testimonies from the Human Rights Commission, Kampala. In addition I conducted 76 oral interviews in Kampala, Arua, Koboko, and Gulu. Triangulation across these different bodies of material has been employed to corroborate information. In analysing the primary record my research was guided by several core questions:

- 1) How far was violence in this period an historical aberration, and how far did it reflect deeper patterns? What were its immediate and long-term causes and drivers?
- 2) When and where was violence most widespread, and why? What consistent patterns and logics of violence can be deduced?

3) To what extent was violence shaped and driven by the state? How was it contested, coopted, and resisted?

Oral interviews are a valuable historical source, conveying individual memories and lived experiences of historical moments, as well as demonstrating the ways in which popular historical memories have become streamlined and reworked over time. One must be alive to the risks posed by 'feedback' of the present into the past, and be careful to cross reference information gathered by interview with other kinds of archival material.<sup>61</sup> Robben has demonstrated in his reflections on interview work during his study of Argentina's insurgency between 1976-83 that awareness of the subjectivity and positionality of those remembering and recounting political violence is extremely important. Accounts of violence may themselves involve subtle attempts at what Robben terms 'ethnographic seduction', as informants are often aware of or perceptive to the biases of those interviewing them and may choose to present their accounts in line with these. One must remain wary of the acceptance of streamlined or singular narratives, especially when studying bilateral conflicts in which labels like 'victim' and 'perpetrator' may not do justice to the actors involved.<sup>62</sup> This is of particular relevance in Uganda, a country where 30 sustained years of NRM rule has given rise to increasing frustration with the existing regime and its president. In such a context, a degree of comparison of Museveni to past presidents like Amin and Obote, and the reappraisal of their records through rose-tinted eyes is inevitable and must be allowed for and countered with rigorous triangulation of sources.

However, these concerns are far outweighed by the potential utility of such sources.

Conducting interviews in Uganda gave me the opportunity to speak with dozens of former soldiers

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<sup>61</sup> Justin Willis, 'Feedback as a 'problem' in oral history: An example from Bonde', *History in Africa*, 20 (1993), pp. 353-360

<sup>62</sup> Antonius C. G. M. Robben, 'Seduction and persuasion: The politics of truth and emotion among victims and perpetrators violence', in Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius Robben (eds.) *Fieldwork Under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Culture*, (California, 1995), pp. 83-96.

and security agents of the Amin regime, men who often left little to no written footprint in the archive, but whose memories and experiences are nonetheless crucial to understanding the outbreak and persistence of political violence under Amin. Similarly, interview work in Acholiland enabled me to gather localised experiences of Acholi civilians that went largely undocumented during Amin's rule, owing to the region's peripheral location and the insecurity of the time. In a period of considerable inconsistency and instability, in which localised agency was often crucial, such accounts can convey the immense diversity of lived experience that life under an unpredictable and violent regime entailed. In the archival materials from Uganda, the UK, and the US, I found a rich body of sources with which to reconstruct and understand the day to day workings of political life in Amin's Uganda. Ugandan archival files demonstrate the persistence of the civilian bureaucracy, which continued to document and to report up until the very last days of Amin's regime. Political violence appears on the margins of such sources, in the lists of missing or replaced staff, in letters of complaint about the abuses of local soldiers, and in the threatening instructions of regime figures issued at meetings and via security briefings. Here again a wide range of voices and experiences spring into view, as my exploration of local administrators and their struggles in Gulu District in chapter five will demonstrate. British and American government files capture the reactive steps of external governments to the course of events in Uganda, and persistent concerns about the fragile nature of Amin's hold on power and, subsequently, his abuse of it. Detailed dossiers on the existing Ugandan political elite give way to more speculative reports on the small circle of soldiers that came to rule, demonstrating the near lack of information on Amin's regime that even erstwhile allies could rely on.

In the press pages of the Uganda Argus and its regime-dominated successor the Voice of Uganda one gains insight into the daily political projections of Amin's government, of the ceaseless tours conducted, commands issued, and achievements hailed. The rise and fall of particular soldiers and governors is documented here, as are the regime's hostile reactions to political opposition and its efforts to present itself as an arbiter. Ugandan radio transcripts help to



provide a firm chronology to particular sequences of violent and political struggle, providing a timeline with which to cross reference other source materials. Whilst undeniably partisan, even in these state-controlled sources there is contestation, resistance, and co-option, as a range of actors sought to employ the news media for their own purposes, and the changing and competing political ambitions of key regime figures play themselves out on the front pages. There are interesting and telling inconsistencies- why are certain kinds of violence presented as front-page news, and widely reported, whilst others are covered up or denied? If Amin and his supporters were so entirely autocratic, why did they insist on extensive and elaborate investigations into 'disappearances', and the dismissal and trial of rogue soldiers? What can this tell us about the different types of violence being produced in Uganda during Amin's rule? This is perhaps one of the most clear indications of the gap between the kinds of violence the regime hoped to employ, and that which had to a considerable extent escaped its control.

Finally, this thesis makes extensive use of the testimonies given to two domestic investigations into violence in Uganda in 1974 and 1986. The first was a commission of enquiry into 'disappearances in Uganda', ordered by Amin himself in the aftermath of a serious attempt on his life. Whilst the report was ultimately shelved, with very few changes implemented, hundreds of Ugandans had stepped forward to give testimonies to the commission. In these accounts, many of them given by the widows and families of deceased soldiers and civilians, we gain insight into the many different ways in which violence played out in the early years of Amin's regime, from the coordinated massacres of soldiers in barracks in mid-1971 to the sporadic localised abuses of soldiers and security agents in Kampala. A whole host of motivations and actors spring into view, a clear indicator of Peterson's 'forum of agency' in action. The 1986 inquiry was far more extensive, conducted by Museveni's NRM after its successful seizure of power. Contained in 14,000 pages of verbatim transcripts at the human rights commission in Kampala, there are hundreds of witness testimonies that further encapsulate the complex web of violent action that developed and entrenched itself under Amin. Such accounts offer a view from 'ground level' that conventional

sources on the period can rarely offer. In addition to the accounts offered by victims of violence, the testimonies given by former security agents like Francis Itabuka of the SRC and Kassim Obura of the PSU help to sketch out the design and function of Amin's security apparatus, and interviews with low-level staff from these units provide invaluable insight into the perspective of Amin's own 'violence workers.' Their testimonies can speak to the ways in which institutions can legitimate and conceal violent action, but they also highlight the fragility of institutional function in the Ugandan context. Human rights testimonies pose particular challenges as historical sources. They are vulnerable to the domineering attempts at narrativization and memorialisation of the past by powerful contemporary interests.<sup>63</sup> In Uganda this is demonstrated both by the efforts of Amin and his supporters to control and suppress the findings of the 1974 report, but also by the comparative absence of the violence of the NRA and their supporters from the accounts given to the investigations under Museveni's rule in the 1990s. Fear of recriminations or punishment by those conducting the investigations, or incentives such as financial compensation or revenge may motivate those offering testimony to distort or fabricate information. Nonetheless, with astute triangulation against other sources, and an awareness of the potential agendas and interests of those seeking and offering testimony, such materials can provide crucial historical detail that may otherwise be lost.

### Thesis Structure

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<sup>63</sup> Gary Baines, 'The master narrative of South Africa's liberation struggle: remembering and forgetting June 16, 1976', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 40:2, (2007), pp. 283-302.

My findings are presented in five chapters. The first three are chronological, and national in scope. Each is intended to cover a distinct phase in the evolution of political violence during Amin's regime. The fourth and fifth chapters are micro-studies, engaging in detail with the creation and function of Amin's security units, the Military Police, PSU, and SRC, and with violence in Acholiland between 1971 and 1979 respectively. These studies are intended to allow for further exploration of the key questions of the thesis laid out in chapters one to three using as of yet unexplored primary materials.

Chapter one analyses the violence that accompanied Amin's seizure of power, and the consolidation of his regime between January 1971 and January 1972. It will argue that centrally-directed violence in these months had a distinct and subversive character- that of state capture and regime consolidation, and of a challenge to the established sociopolitical order. Violence was less diffuse than it would later become under Amin's rule, organised and produced primarily by a small group of low-ranking officers within the Ugandan army and the Military Police. It was this clique, led by Major Hussein Marella, who were at the forefront of the direction and production of violence in this period. Rather than the realisation of a blueprint for terror, over the first few months of Amin's government political violence escalated well beyond the expectations of any of the primary political actors. This was a corrosive and multilateral process, as mutual fears and misapprehension prompted an escalation of violence by Amin's supporters against Acholi and Langi soldiers in the army.

Chapter two tracks the emergence of violent governance under Amin, between January 1972 and January 1975. The intra-military violence that accompanied the first twelve months of the Amin regime had consolidated his hold on power, and established a fragile near monopoly on force. From 1972 onwards the ways in which violence was produced, and the functions it served

evolved noticeably. Civilians now became targets for the security forces. Violence was often used in response to external or internal 'shocks' to the regime's stability. It was employed as an instrument of rule, to assert authority and sovereignty, as a deterrent to certain forms of political action, and to impose order. Much like the earlier spread of intra-military violence, this was a reactive and bilateral process. The forms of violence most typically associated with Amin began to emerge, as the selective abduction and assassination of individuals became common. There was a disproportionate focus on Uganda's educated elite, but the production of violence was also increasingly decentralised, involving the input of greater numbers of soldiers as well as civilian informants. This lent increasing importance to localised agency. The regime also experimented with certain forms of publicly transmitted violence, in the form of televised executions.

Chapter three explores the nature of violence in the final years of Amin's regime. There was considerable continuity in these years, with intermittent recourse to violence by the regime as a means of repressing alternative sources of authority and legitimacy, of controlling and regulating public life, and of responding to perceived 'shocks' to its security. This was only ever partially under control, as the actions of state agents and civilians at the local level saw continual cooption and escalation of violence. There were further experiments in publicly performed violence, as the regime pursued an 'economic war' against certain forms of perceived economic malpractice, utilising tribunals and executions as well as creating new anti smuggling units to combat a booming illegal coffee trade with deadly force. A fresh campaign of violence against Acholi and Langi men in the army and bureaucracy was launched in 1977, and it was this, combined with the ongoing insecurity and feuding at the heart of the regime, that caused a further unravelling of military discipline culminating in a border war with Tanzania in 1978. The war triggered the collapse of the regime, and a drastic escalation of localised violence as the societal order broke down, prompting revenge attacks, looting, and the proliferation of weapons, and generating further instability.

Chapter four examines the creation and function of three of Amin's security units, the SRC, PSU and Military Police. Their offices at Nakasero, Naguru and Makindye respectively became sites of considerable violence under Amin's regime, and security agents from these units were at the forefront of the production of political violence on behalf of the government. Institutional and situational factors are important in understanding the entrenchment of violent practices within these units. Secrecy, impunity, and legitimacy provided by their ostensible function as national institutions, as well as the ad hoc legalisation that established and protected them, were all important in protecting and enabling their violent action. However, this chapter argues for the importance of the post-colonial setting both in limiting the functional capacity of Amin's security apparatus, and in enabling other ulterior forms of violence. These units were poorly resourced, poorly trained, and were an important patronage resource for Amin's regime, disproportionately staffed with men from marginal networks that were more favourable to him. Opportunistic violent entrepreneurialism and feuding was rife within the institutions, whose outward exterior masked a fractured and confused chain of command within them, as officers closer to Amin's inner circle clashed with their alleged superiors. They were sites of chronic insecurity and instability, in which the 'violence workers' of Amin's government were themselves vulnerable to elimination or dismissal. These limitations contributed to the further spread and persistence of localised violence.

Chapter five explores the relationship between violence and governance in Acholiland from 1971 to 1979. Using files from the Gulu District Archive (GDA) it argues that the experience of the Acholi in the Gulu area under Amin was broadly similar to that of Ugandans elsewhere in the country, with the notable exceptions of targeted purges of Acholi men in the armed forces in 1971 and 1977. 'Spikes' of regime directed violence took place here as elsewhere, as did the gradual escalation of predatory and entrepreneurial violence by soldiers and security agents. The archival

files show that this process was documented, and, at times, contested by civilian administrators, who strove to report and flag up abuses by the military. The archive is also a site of denunciation and misinformation, as civilians wrote in to report on each other, and to deny accusations levelled against them by others. It demonstrates further the importance of localised agency in shaping the pattern of political violence in this era. The archive also highlights the hybridity of political life under Amin, as agents of Special Branch continued to operate despite the unit supposedly being abolished, and the creation of a provincial governor post constituted a graft onto the existing structure of local government. Ultimately much of this civilian infrastructure survived the violence of the Amin era, and this has important implications for more recent academic debate on the experience of the Acholi under Amin and its role in the emergence of subsequent armed rebel movements in the region. Whilst the violence of the period damaged the connections between local society and the state, a relationship that had always been uneasy at the best of times, it did not completely destroy it.

## 1. The Circle Widens: Violence and State Capture in Uganda, 1971 - 1972:

This chapter analyses the political violence that accompanied Amin's seizure of power, and the consolidation of his regime during the first twelve months of his rule. Violence in this period was defined by a drawn out and reactive process of state capture and consolidation, as Amin and his supporters used political violence to subvert the sociopolitical order, and, subsequently, to impose a new one that placed themselves in control of the army and state institutions. Having subverted the idea of a Ugandan state separate to society and with a monopoly on violence with their takeover, they immediately sought to re-establish such a monopoly for their emerging regime. The degrading effects of the political violence of the takeover on the Ugandan military and the other organs of the state proved damaging to their efforts to establish control without further violence, leading to a second bilateral escalation of hostilities within the Ugandan military in the months that followed the coup, and culminating in indiscriminate massacres of Acholi and Langi soldiers in July and December 1971.

The coup was a hostile takeover of the military from within by a small circle of low-ranking soldiers whose positions were threatened by Amin's impending arrest, and who refused to accept the idea of a military hierarchy and government above and unaccountable to themselves. Several of the socioeconomically marginal sub-national communities from which the members of this network was drawn had deep historical roots to legacies of organised political violence in the region that dated back to the onset of colonial rule. The army had been a site of declining discipline and increased unrest for some time, and the policy choices of the first Obote regime had failed to resolve these tensions. The decision to arrest and sideline Amin prompted soldiers loyal to him to implement a coup. The coercive institutions through which Uganda's first civilian government sought to impose itself were rooted in Ugandan society and had proved difficult to

control, and this was a challenge that Amin himself would now struggle with as ruler of the country. The production of violence in these early stages of Amin's rule was the work of a small collection of officers within the army and Military Police, led by Brigadier Hussein Marella. At times this group seems to have acted independently of Amin. There is evidence of a significant degree of localised agency and variation in the production of violence by the soldiery, who were only ever partially under central control or direction. Amin's power depended on this small group of officers, and as such their violent action went unpunished. Instead, a wave of promotions saw greater power vested in the small 'plateau' of junior officers who had placed him in power.

Amin's control of the country was very tenuous after the coup, which had created considerable disorder and produced a climate of mutual fear and hostility within the army. Over the next twelve months attempts to use selective political violence to reimpose order and eliminate dissenting elements in the army proved corrosive, prompting a further escalation of intra-military violence. This was not inevitable, and should be regarded as a bilateral (albeit lopsided) process, caused in part by the hostile behaviour of elements of Amin's support base, and ominous signs of an emerging violent dictatorship, but also by the desertion of hundreds of Ugandan soldiers out of the country to link up with Milton Obote in exile. The new regime quickly discovered that it lacked the resources and knowledge to prevent this from happening. It resorted to improvised massacres, and finally to coordinated large-scale massacres of Acholi and Langi soldiers in barracks across the country in July 1971. This eliminatory logic culminated in December 1971, when hundreds of imprisoned soldiers and security agents were removed from Luzira prison and taken to Mutukula, where they were systematically massacred. The extent and nature of intra-army violence in this period was deliberately covered up, and, thanks in no small part to hasty international recognition of the regime, Amin and his supporters were able to consolidate themselves in power.



### Violence in Amin's First Year: A Brief Chronology:

This chapter addresses the escalation of indiscriminate violence that accompanied Amin's first twelve months in power. It argues that this escalation is best understood as a reactive and negotiated process, set in motion by the coup and the corrosive effects of Amin's violent seizure of power in January 1971, which culminated in a systematic massacre of some 600 men a year later at Mutukula Prison in 1972.

The violence that accompanied the coup had generated considerable tension and anxiety within the Ugandan military, as a small group of low-ranking officers who predominantly hailed from the marginal West Niler and Nubian communities (with which Amin himself identified), eliminated the existing officer hierarchy and installed Amin as Head of State. There was accompanying hostility towards the Luo-speaking ethnic groups of the Acholi and Langi, who had come to be regarded as the 'favoured' groups of the previous Obote government that Amin's supporters had overthrown, and which was now reorganising outside of Uganda in a bid to restore itself to power. These intra-military tensions had deep historical roots. The Ugandan military had been disproportionately staffed with West Nilers, Nubians, and Acholi and Langi soldiers since the colonial era.<sup>64</sup>

In February 1971, selective arrests and murders of soldiers by agents of Amin's new regime during 'mopping up' operations prompted hundreds of mainly Acholi and Langi soldiers to flee the country, fearing persecution. In April 1971 this large-scale flight of personnel was revealed when several hundred deserters were captured on the Sudanese border and returned to Uganda, where

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<sup>64</sup> Dennis R. Pain, *Acholi and Nubians: Economic Forces and Military Employment*, (Kampala, 1987). p. 41.

they were massacred en masse by the army at Ogwec Corner. The new regime had discovered its lack of capacity to prevent soldiers deserting, and, fearing further Acholi and Langi soldiers joining with Obote, it responded with indiscriminate violence. Two months later the first of several large-scale intra-barracks massacres took place at Simba Battalion in Mbarara, in which hundreds of Acholi and Langi soldiers were systematically murdered. This was followed by other massacres at Moroto, Jinja, Magamaga, and at several smaller border posts. The final massacre at Mutukula in January 1972 represented the end of the new regime's consolidation of power, as it resolved the question of what to do with the hundreds of soldiers and security agents detained in Luzira and Murchison Bay prisons since the coup. Rather than risk their release, it opted to eliminate them too.

In contrast to the later years of Amin's regime, most of violence in these first months does not resemble the 'typical' selective violence against civilians for which he has come to be remembered. Violence was primarily inflicted on soldiers and security agents. Unlike later violence, much of this took the form of indiscriminate massacres of large numbers of people at once. There was no deliberate public dimension to violence produced at this stage. Violence was not being used to send messages to the wider population, and the new regime endeavoured to hide it from the public eye.

How best to approach explanation of the dramatic escalation of violence over Amin's first twelve months? Whilst the coup itself attracted considerable academic attention in the 1970s, conditions on the ground were not at all conducive to detailed analysis of what followed. Using new primary source materials from the 1974 and 1986 investigations, in which hundreds of testimonies on violence in Uganda were offered by a wide range of participants, this chapter will analyse the evolution of violence. It will seek first to assess what limited evidence there is as to who the key actors at the centre of the new regime were in this period, and the implications of this

new and fragile nexus of power for what followed, before analysing the process by which the post-coup situation deteriorated into a series of indiscriminate massacres.

### Uganda's New Rulers: State Capture from Within

There was (and still is) only limited information available about the soldiers and civilians that the Amin coup ultimately thrust into Uganda's political limelight. It would be an understatement to say that their rise to prominence in the country was unexpected, and after the takeover foreign observers scrambled to identify and make sense of men of whom they had known little or nothing before Amin himself burst onto the international stage. This thesis argues that Amin's takeover constituted the capture and subordination of the key organs that comprised the Ugandan state from within, beginning with the army, by a fragile and opportunistic coalition of officers who refused to buy into the idea of the state as above and unaccountable to themselves when doing so meant overlooking a serious threat to their own interests in the form of Amin's impending arrest.

The disproportionate recruitment of particular social groups into the Ugandan military since the colonial era had made it vulnerable to the coalescence of dissenting and conflicting elements within its structures, and warning signs to this effect had been observable for years before this small group of officers seized control of the army for themselves, and placed Amin in power.

Many early explanations for the coup have tended to compensate for a lack of information with a narrow focus on Amin and Obote in particular, casting events in terms of a supposedly longstanding and insatiable thirst for power on the part of the former, and the perceived political

shortcomings and failures of the latter. For David Martin, the coup was the culmination of a 'rise' to power that had been in the making for years prior. The political feuding in the military that preceded it, the attempt on Obote's life in 1969, and the promotions that Amin handed out to key men after the coup are all marshalled as evidence of a long term plan to seize control of the country.<sup>65</sup> Mutibwa later asserted that by 1970 divisions between the camps were 'clear to all', and that a 'drift' towards the coup was inevitable.<sup>66</sup> For Mazrui, the two men had been playing a 'game of sheer survival'.<sup>67</sup> Other accounts have focused on structural dimensions. Lofchie spoke of the Ugandan military as a 'social class', that had intervened in politics to protect its interests.<sup>68</sup>

Other work moved away from analysis of the coup in terms of 'inevitable' clashes between individuals or classes. Michael Twaddle's article on the coup did important work, stressing scepticism about any long-term plan to take power, and recasting the crisis as 'a matter of days rather than years'. He demonstrated two important factors. Firstly, political life under Obote was actually steadily improving at the time of the coup, with elections planned and a gradual reintegration of certain political detainees. Rather than a deteriorating political situation, Amin's own short-term preservation (he had already been demoted, and was due to be arrested) was the key proximate factor. Secondly, the Ugandan Military at this time was a deeply fragmented institution, with limited functional capacity. It had not so much acted as been a *site* of action during the coup.<sup>69</sup> Twaddle's interpretation of a short-term, reactive coup involving mutual

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<sup>65</sup> David Martin, *General Amin* (London, 1974), pp. 1-10.

<sup>66</sup> Phares Mutibwa, *Uganda since independence: a story of unfulfilled hopes*, (Trenton, 1992) p.72.

<sup>67</sup> Ali Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda: the Making of a Military Ethnocracy*, (Cambridge, 1975) p.111.

<sup>68</sup> Michael Lofchie, 'The Uganda coup: class action by the military', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 10:1, (1972). pp. 19-35.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Twaddle, 'The Amin Coup', *The Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 10:2 (1972), pp. 104-106.

misapprehension, and involving only a small fraction of the army, has stood as a generally accepted orthodoxy ever since.<sup>70</sup>

Analysis of primary materials serves to bear out this interpretation. Indeed, the more one reads and hears of the month or so that followed Obote's overthrow, the more the question changes from 'why did Amin overthrow Obote' to 'how proactive a participant was Amin in any of the key events of the coup?' Former soldiers have stressed that the coup was initially a mutiny, instigated in response to rumours of Amin's impending arrest, and driven unilaterally by a small group of low-ranking soldiers who feared what would happen to them if Amin was removed.<sup>71</sup> The whistle had been blown on Amin's arrest by a Sergeant Major, Musa, who rallied a small number of officers to his defence at the crucial Malire Mechanised Regiment. These soldiers broke into the armoury, armed themselves, secured several armoured personnel carriers (APCs), and used these to overpower and disarm their senior officers. The Malire Regiment, now under control of pro-Amin forces, then captured the key institutions of government overnight in Kampala and Entebbe.<sup>72</sup> Brigadier Charles Arube oversaw an accompanying pro-Amin takeover at Jinja barracks in the East. The Military Police barracks at Makindye was also seized and the unit placed under control of Brigadier Hussein Marella, who set about arresting and detaining any resisting soldiery.<sup>73</sup> With this done, Amin and other senior officers were contacted, presented with a fait accompli, and brought in to help develop a plan of further action.

In some accounts, it was not even certain that Amin would be appointed as figurehead of the coup at all. There was at least some discussion of appointing Felix Onama, the acting Minister

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<sup>70</sup> For a recent reassertion see Richard J. Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, (Cambridge, 2017), p. 59.

<sup>71</sup> Major General Francis Nyangweso, 1986 CIVHR, pp. 8880-8882. UHRC.

<sup>72</sup> Felix Onama, 1986 CIVHR, p. 12798. UHRC.

<sup>73</sup> Major General Francis Nyangweso, p. 8881.

of Defence, as a civilian face for the new regime.<sup>74</sup> Some respondents claim that Charles Arube was considered as a possible candidate (though this version seems to be concentrated among his admirers).<sup>75</sup> Amin's hand is also believed to have been largely absent from the document that announced his arrival to the nation. The famous 'eighteen points', listing reasons for the military takeover and condemning various unpopular practices of the Obote regime, are widely believed to have been drafted by Valentine Ocima, a well-educated coup supporting officer from West Nile, and Wanume Kibedi, Amin's cousin and a member of Obote's Uganda People's Congress (UPC), who would be put in place as his Foreign Minister.<sup>76</sup> Amin was invited by the soldiers to take up a temporary role as Head of State, a position he would later mythologise as having been forced upon him (as greatness so often is in the lives of larger-than-life military men), despite initial reluctance.<sup>77</sup> There may have been some truth in this, but any doubt seems to have dissipated by morning the following day when his new caretaker government was announced.

Who, then, were 'Amin's men', the shadowy junior officers who had caused such a dramatic political crisis? There is still remarkably little known about them, though speculation and myth continues to abound. Numerous identity templates are applied to Amin's core supporters which are best addressed now. Each offers some analytical use, but none of them adequately capture the diffuse little network of soldiers that were, unbeknownst to them, now only a few steps away from ruling over entire portions of the country in the years that followed. Crucially, such lenses are of only minimal explanatory value in understanding why violence in the months that followed

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<sup>74</sup> Abele Muhamed Ali, interviewed in Arua District, January 27 2017.

<sup>75</sup> Sam Odama, interviewed in Arua District, December 09 2016.

<sup>76</sup> James Kiryankusa Namakajo, 1986 CIVHR, p. 3839. UHRC. Namakajo worked in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in the early months of the new regime, and was keen to stress the influence that both Kibedi and Ocima had with Amin at this stage.

<sup>77</sup> There are many references to this narrative in Amin's public declarations. For an example see 'The speech of his excellency the President General Idi Amin Dada to the officers and men of Public Safety Unit and Military Police at Makindye on 21st July, 1972' in *Speeches by His Excellency the President General Idi Amin Dada*, (Entebbe, 1972).

escalated to such drastic levels. Earlier accounts of the Amin years positing what Anderson has termed and critiqued as ‘individual-dispositional’ explanations have often sought to present the backgrounds of Amin’s key supporters as sufficient explanation for their use of violence in and of itself, a position that this thesis rejects.<sup>78</sup>

The men of the coup certainly were low-ranking officers. They were not, however, quite as thuggish and illiterate as some of the more sensationalist accounts make out. Consider the example of one of Amin’s more infamous supporters, Isaac Maliyamungu. Generally believed to be a distant relative of Amin, Maliyamungu had emerged into the political scene when he captured Entebbe airport with an APC during the coup, shooting it up in a somewhat performative fashion for good measure.<sup>79</sup> He certainly had a knack for violent spectacle, and would go on to become a near permanent fixture at Amin’s side. His reputation for ruthless violence has endured in Uganda to this day exactly as, one imagines, he had hoped.

Maliyamungu is often offered as an example of the deviant and mercenary ‘foreign’ elements among Amin’s key supporters. Aspersions as to his ‘Congolese’ identity, and suggestions of his being ‘psychotic’ continue to surface, both in oral interviews and more serious academic works, as implicit explanations for his violent behaviour.<sup>80</sup> Such analysis rather mirrors early historical treatment of Amin himself. This picture is incomplete. Maliyamungu first appears in Uganda’s historical record not as a Congolese mercenary, but as a casual labourer turned gatekeeper at Nyanza Textiles in Eastern Uganda.<sup>81</sup> There is nothing to suggest a history of extreme violence before the extraordinary events of the coup, though there is a wealth of evidence to demonstrate that, once conditions proved conducive to violent action, Maliyamungu took to it

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<sup>78</sup> Anderson, ‘British abuse and torture’.

<sup>79</sup> Major General Francis Nyangweso, p. 8885.

<sup>80</sup> Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p. 63.

<sup>81</sup> Apollo Lawoko, *The Dungeons of Nakasero*, (Stockholm, 2005), p. 71.

more enthusiastically than most. Indeed, his very advancement and influence within Amin's regime seems to have hinged upon it.

In these early stages Amin still enjoyed the support of several relatively qualified senior officers, including the aforementioned Valentine Ocima, Charles Arube, and Jackson Avudria. There were also plenty of officers in the existing army hierarchy who were quite content to let Amin have a crack at running the country from the fringes, without pitching in to join the opposition, including Brigadier Bernard Rwehururu, Wilson Toko, and Zed Marururu. This would quickly prove to be a recurring fault line within Amin's ruling coalition, as a combination of insecurity and contempt led to conflicts between those more privileged and educated officers regarded as 'suited' to rule and the largely unqualified officers who had taken power.

Hansen and Southall have sought to demonstrate the ways in which ethnicity and language were central factors in determining Amin's support base in the army.<sup>82</sup> These factors were undoubtedly sharpened by the violence of the coup, and they only became more important in Amin's regime as time went on. But at this stage there were many exceptions. Many of the key coup actors hailed from West Nile, generally (though not unanimously) agreed to be Amin's home district. They included soldiers from the Kakwa, Lugbara, Alur, and Madi ethnic groups that inhabited the district, and included future senior figures such as Moses Ali, Mustafa Adrisi, Lieutenant Colonel Toloko, and Isaac Lumago. These may well have constituted a majority amongst the soldiers that had acted on January 25th 1971. It would be a mistake, however, to characterise the coup as a 'West Niler' coup. It had been implemented from within the Malire Mechanised Regiment and Military Police. It had involved numerous key officers from other parts of the country, including Kassim Obura, Francis Nyangweso, Smuts Guweddeko, and Ali Waris

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<sup>82</sup> See Holger Hansen, *Ethnicity and Military Rule in Uganda*, (Uppsala, 1977), and Aidan Southall, 'General Amin and the coup: great man or historical inevitability?' *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 13:1, (1975), pp. 85-105.



Fadhul. The latter is regularly referred to as a 'Sudanese' but was in fact a Nubian-speaker and polyglot from the Basoga ethnic group in Eastern Uganda. There were numerous Basoga in the army, and in Amin's first government.

One must also address both the 'Nubian' and 'Sudanese' factors at this stage. After the coup Amin drew increasingly on support from marginal communities with which he was most personally familiar- as well as the West Nile ethnic groups these included men from Sudan, Congo and Kenya, as well as from the Ugandan Nubian community at Bombo (another contender for Amin's birthplace, and a town in which he spent most of his youth), and Uganda's other urban centres. Some later analyses focused on the fact that the majority of these men were Muslim, though there were at least some Christians in Amin's inner circle throughout his regime, not least Maliyamungu.<sup>83</sup> Nubian-speakers were, undeniably, a crucial part of Amin's support, and it is not inconceivable to think of Ki'Nubi as having come to serve as something of a lingua franca (alongside Swahili) in his inner circle in the latter years of the regime.<sup>84</sup> However, at times analysis of the role Nubian-speakers played in the regime has risked slipping towards resembling a grandiose ethnic conspiracy theory. This is most clearly demonstrated in Southall's important article on the coup, in which the historical prevalence of Nubians in the army is recognised, but in which the author falls into a teleological 'inevitability' trap of his own.<sup>85</sup>

The same caution is merited when discussing the influence of 'the Sudanese'. In the aftermath of the coup Obote supporters, searching for excuses, argued that the day had been won by 'Anyanya' mercenaries.<sup>86</sup> This line was picked up in subsequent analyses and the centrality of

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<sup>83</sup> For a particularly crude version of this 'Islamist' interpretation, see Louise Pirouet, 'Religion in Uganda under Amin.' *Journal of Religion in Africa*, (1980) pp. 13-29.

<sup>84</sup> For a detailed history of the 'origins' of Uganda's Nubians, see Leopold, 'Legacies of Slavery in north-west Uganda: the story of the 'one-elevens', *Africa*, 76:2 (2006), pp. 180-199.

<sup>85</sup> Southall, 'General Amin and the Coup'.

<sup>86</sup> Martin, *General Amin*, p. 45.

'foreigners' to Amin's regime remains an enduring trope in popular narratives within Uganda today. Two things bear mentioning. The first is that 'Sudanese' and 'Anyanya' are often invoked as derogatory terms for Ugandan Nubians, and men from West Nile. In his testimony to the 1986 Commission Moses Ali noted that in Uganda 'a black person is Anyanya and from the north is Anyanya'.<sup>87</sup> In the country today the 'Sudanese and Congolese' are often left holding the blame in absentia for the more unsavoury events of the Amin years. The second is that Amin certainly did rely on a significant degree of support from men from outside the Ugandan national template. He had attracted ire for his illicit support of the Anyanya during Obote's regime, and, as will be explored in Chapter Two, changes in geopolitical circumstances in Sudan later had a knock-on effect on his regime. There was also a crucial degree of mobility and fluidity between the Nubian-speaking communities in Juba, Khartoum, and Nairobi, and those in Uganda. Suffice to say that the ascension of a Nubian-speaker to the position of head of state drew in more than a few ambitious hopefuls from outside the country.

For the purposes of this chapter by far the most important 'Sudanese' figure in the story of escalating violence under the new regime is that of Major Hussein Marella. As will be examined below, Marella played a pivotal role as the newly installed head of Uganda's Military Police. Like Maliyamungu, he is an enduring figure of infamy. The small Military Police prison at Makindye had quickly become the site of some extreme atrocities, explored in depth in Chapter Four. Marella later became extremely unpopular with key sections of the Ugandan army, who seized on his Sudanese origins in their criticism of him. The impression endures that he was a 'foreigner, leading Amin astray'.<sup>88</sup> The image of the 'Sudanese mercenary' with 'no loyalty' to Uganda was picked up on and distributed by critiques of the regime, including Human Rights Groups (many of

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<sup>87</sup> Moses Ali, 1986 CIVHR, p. 13502. UHRC.

<sup>88</sup> Henry Kyemba 1986 CIVHR, p. 1740. UHRC. Kyemba puts much stock in Marella's nationality as an explanatory factor for the violence of the Military Police.

which listed numerous misplaced Ugandans in their reels of allegedly ‘foreign’ influences at the core of the regime).<sup>89</sup>

How representative, or indeed fair, is this vision of Marella? Under his leadership the Military Police certainly did not shy away from employing deadly violence, but his Sudanese identity offers little meaningful explanation for this, and the notion that he was a newly arrived ‘mercenary’ also merits scrutiny. When Marella was later exiled from Uganda in the wake of the 1974 mutiny Amin praised him for ‘21 years’ of Military Service in the country. He is regularly said to have been an Anyanya fighter at some point, but there is no hard evidence to support this, or suggest when it might have been. Felix Onama’s testimony to the 86 Commission sheds crucial light on Marella’s origins in the country:

Now I must clear the point here because Marella was in the army, but he was in the Kings African Rifles, he was recruited in 1954 in Hoima, because his relatives came working in the cotton ginnery in Hoima, from Sudan. And so some were working in saw mills and so on. So in 1954 this man was recruited in the army and he went and went and then he remained, and he was picked a particular assignment in Bamanunika to train the General Service, they were trained from there and then they were sent to Jinja.<sup>90</sup>

Like others in Amin’s inner circle, Marella is better understood, not as a mercenary ‘foreigner’, but as a working migrant, having grown up on the margins of the Ugandan economy before seizing an opportunity to join the colonial military. His later role as a recruitment and training officer near Bombo under Obote may have been particularly crucial to the success of the coup. Amin had attracted criticism before the takeover for alleged illegal recruitment of men at

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<sup>89</sup> *Uganda & Human Rights. Reports to the UN Commission on Human Rights.* By the International Commission of Jurists. (Geneva, 1977)

<sup>90</sup> Felix Onama, p. 12781.

Bamanunika, and Felix Onama estimated that several hundred unauthorised personnel had been discovered in various military units before Obote's fall.<sup>91</sup> The Military Police, established in 1967 in an attempt to improve army discipline, had been heavily staffed by West Nilers and Nubian speakers, which partly helps to explain the central role that it played in Amin's takeover and consolidation.

With these lenses of identity given their due consideration, what then in the character of this small clique of soldiers might be instructive in understanding the spread of violence that followed? First and foremost was their almost total lack of high-level command experience, and the complete breakdown of the existing hierarchy that their takeover had generated. These were men learning their positions on the job, in conditions of exceptional upheaval and pressure. They had compromised the military hierarchy and the idea of an all-powerful state separate from society in taking power, and in doing so had represented only a tiny minority within the larger body of the Ugandan army. They had no guarantee that the loyalties of the thousands of soldiers that had played no part in the coup could be counted on to respect their seizure of power. This made for an extremely tense, uncertain post-coup situation.

Much ink has been spilt highlighting just how unqualified a leader Amin was, but his supporters were *his* juniors, many of them far less familiar with command and with the workings of government. Like many northerners they often preferred to converse amongst themselves in Swahili or Ki'Nubi, and they often lacked Amin's own useful grasp of a wider range of Uganda's many languages, a stumbling block to nuanced engagement with many of its peoples and with their new civilian counterparts, who were overwhelmingly educated men from the south of the country. They were also relatively few in number. The coup had hinged on the capture of two army barracks and the Military Police barracks, and active participants are only likely to have numbered

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

a few hundred at most, in an army of several thousand. This too created a considerable degree of insecurity within the new clique.

The soldiers were drawn from social groups that had, until that point, enjoyed only a marginal, and often impoverished position in colonial and postcolonial Uganda. This is a factor to which Mazrui assigned increasing importance in subsequent analyses of the regime, referring to the intersection of class dimensions, and the rise of a 'lumpen militariat'.<sup>92</sup> Most had not enjoyed the benefits of even basic education. Mustafa Adrisi, Amin's future Vice-President, remains an oft-lampooned target for anecdotes asserting this point. He was mocked during his 1986 Commission testimony because he was not fully literate and, unsurprisingly, had therefore not read the Ugandan constitution.<sup>93</sup> An inability to pay school fees remains one of the more common reasons given by former soldiers as to why they joined the army in the first place.<sup>94</sup> Before the extraordinary opportunity presented by the coup, it is not unreasonable to suggest that many of the soldiers that would soon become provincial governors had already reached a career ceiling in the military's lower rungs. In the weeks that followed the coup a sudden demotion back to anonymity in the barracks, or worse, arrests and detentions under a new government in retribution for the mutiny and violence of the coup, were still very real and undesirable possibilities for Amin's new men.

However, the evidence also suggests that that in the immediate wake of the takeover most of the coup actors were, in the main, content to be rewarded for their service with promotions, before returning to the barracks, and the background.<sup>95</sup> Seeking a veneer of formal legitimacy for

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<sup>92</sup> Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda: the Making of a Military Ethnocracy*, (London, 1975), p. 129.

<sup>93</sup> Mustafa Adrisi, 1986 CIVHR. UHRC.

Major Yusuf Gowon, interviewed in Arua District, January 27 2017.. For Gowon, life in the army commonly started when one was 'defeated by the fees'.

<sup>95</sup> Semakula Kiwanuka, *Amin and the Tragedy of Uganda*, (Cambridge, 1979), p. 49.

the takeover, Amin had established a Defence Council in one of his first decrees to advise him in his governance of the country.<sup>96</sup> Membership was never formalised, and it seems likely that 'Defence Council' meetings, regularly invoked by Amin to stamp authority on announcements and decisions, could cover a wide spectrum of gatherings, from one to one conversations to meetings involving dozens of men. As will be demonstrated, dialogue between Amin and the men that put and sustained him in power was an ongoing and evolving process throughout his regime.

There was also a long list of promotions. Rather than re-establishing an obvious chain of command to replace that which had been destroyed, Amin promoted a 'plateau' of lieutenant colonels from amongst the primary actors in the coup and its aftermath. He also implemented a regular rotation of the position of Army Chief of Staff.<sup>97</sup> There were consensus-seeking undertones in these moves, but they are unlikely to have helped to clear up the institutional chaos in the army that had followed the takeover. It provoked considerable unrest amongst the existing senior personnel. As will be demonstrated below, Amin's early months were characterised by a preoccupation with securing adequate resources to appease and train this new 'plateau', and equip them with the skills to restore a measure of order and discipline in the army. Unfortunately these efforts failed to take root before a further escalation of intra-military violence.

#### Civilian Collaboration and Political Opposition: A Post-Obote Order?

The degree of civilian collaboration in Amin's first few years in power is still well remembered in Uganda. His first cabinet is occasionally and wistfully recalled as having been 'the best we ever

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<sup>96</sup> 'The Armed Forces Decree, 2 February 1971', in *1971 Decrees* (Entebbe, 1971), LoC.

<sup>97</sup> 'Leading personalities in Uganda 1971', FCO 31/1026, UKNA.

had', on paper if not in practice.<sup>98</sup> When Amin announced his first civilian cabinet in February 1971, it encompassed a range of known political figures, including several from the fringes of Obote's own UPC party. The army clique had been none the wiser as to who to choose, and it seems likely that Wanume Kibedi had played a significant part in the selection process. As a result, many of the new cabinet were actually longstanding political insiders.

Most of the early political plays by this new government were not atypical of other caretaker governments elsewhere in Africa in this period. Political prisoners were released, and new commissions of inquiry were instigated. Amin demonstrated a knack for reconciliatory gestures when he restored the body of Kabaka Mutesa II for burial in Uganda, which carried immense symbolic significance in the south of the country. He waded into the ongoing secessionist struggles of the Bakonjo and Bwamba in Uganda's Western Region, and sought to mediate on impasses in the Muslim community and Anglican church. Amin and his ministers toured ceaselessly in these early months, assessing the mood and needs of the various regions of the country.<sup>99</sup> It is significant that the military decision makers of his inner circle were still largely in the background in this first year- the new regime was still trying both to present itself, and to function, as a collaborative enterprise.

These early moves bought Amin a degree of domestic goodwill and legitimacy. Saul has referred to the constellation of interests that now aligned themselves with the new regime in the short term as a 'negative coalition', an idea that has some value.<sup>100</sup> Enthusiasm at this stage was probably as much about the fact that Obote had been removed as it was about the possibilities

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<sup>98</sup> William Sebuguzi, interviewed in Kampala, 2 November 2016. Prince Nixon Ndawula, interviewed in Kampala, 28 October 2016.. Jowett Aritua, interviewed in Arua District, 9 December 2016.

<sup>99</sup> Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, p. 59.

<sup>100</sup> JS Saul, 'The unsteady state: Uganda, Obote and General Amin', *Review of African Political Economy*, 3:5 (1976), pp. 12-38.

offered by Amin as head of state. In a pattern that should be familiar to historians of armed interventions by the army into politics, military rule was presented as a 'state of exception', an interim process by which order and effective civilian rule could ultimately be re-established. Mbembe has argued that such states of exception can provide justification for governments to employ exceptional measures, including authoritarian and violent ones.<sup>101</sup> Amin's domestic legitimacy hinged on the promise of restoring stability, and the popular belief that he would reverse the more unpopular decisions taken by Obote, the most obvious of these being the abolition of the kingdoms.

With the benefit of hindsight perhaps the most fateful decision taken by the new governing coalition was that of delaying elections for a further five years, as was announced on 20 February 1971. Kiwanuka has argued that, contrary to popular belief, this was not simply Amin trying to get his foot in the door. Rather, he had envisaged himself as 'future protector and defender of a civilian government which did not interfere with his position'.<sup>102</sup> The reasons for a continued suspension of civilian government, besides the obvious instability that had followed the coup, were the fears of some members of the UPC and Kabaka Yekka parties (KY) that, tarnished by Obote's regime and fall, they would lose ground to Benedicto Kiwanuka's Democratic Party (DP) if an election came soon. The DP itself was still somewhat out of sorts after mistreatment and detention of many key figures under Obote, and unable to press its case in the context of a temporary suspension of political activity. Ultimately there was sufficient mutual uncertainty and suspicion as to what an election might mean for coveted insider and outsider status as to push those around Amin to council him to delay. It was the subsequent escalation of violence that soon made any voluntary abandonment of power by Amin and his supporters highly unlikely.

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<sup>101</sup> Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', pp. 11-40.

<sup>102</sup> Kiwanuka, *Amin and the Tragedy of Uganda*, p. 49.



These early moves were not taking place in a vacuum, free of contestation. Obote himself had not been captured in the coup as he was in Singapore at the time, and this made him a rallying point for ongoing opposition to the new regime. As we will see below, Obote's continued political threat, with small groups of his supporters quickly setting up operations in Sudan and Tanzania, had a severe destabilising impact on Amin's first months in power. He presented a credible external threat that was both a genuine cause for fear and concern amongst Amin's supporters, and an opportunity for them to justify and distract from more extreme political action at home.

The importance of a broader international context that had already been highly conducive to military takeovers in Africa in this period should also be recognised. A military coup in an independent African state was already a relatively familiar phenomenon by 1971. Far larger African countries than Uganda had experienced army takeovers. Nkrumah had been removed in Ghana in 1966, the same year that civilian rule had also been overturned in Nigeria. Mobutu had been in power for years in Congo, likewise Bokassa in the Central African Republic. Such takeovers had often been insulated from outside reversal by the emerging superpower realpolitik of the Cold War and Arab-Israeli conflict, and by the willingness of the newly independent African states to follow a policy of 'non-interference' in each others' affairs. Former colonial powers like Britain and France were also largely unwilling to conduct large-scale interventions in their former territories.

In the Ugandan case this had numerous key implications. A military takeover in itself was not regarded as particularly unusual, and many international observers still tended to believe, in these early stages at least, that military rule could present an opportunity and an alternative to inept or corrupt civilian regimes. In Britain woefully misplaced short-term interest calculation dictated that Obote had been more of a threat to British businesses and regional interests than Amin was likely to be. Amin's familiarity with Britain from his time in the King's African Rifles (KAR), and his apparently humble demeanour led some commentators to hope, like his domestic

civilian collaborators, that he might prove to be quite politically malleable. Accordingly, Britain recognised the new Ugandan regime remarkably quickly, on 6 February 1971. This opened the door to recognition of Amin's regime by a wider range of states, and badly damaged the chances of Obote's re-establishing himself in power. It is perhaps telling that violence in the country actually escalated again after this international recognition had been offered. Amin also enjoyed a degree of logistical support from the Israelis, who had a strong presence in Uganda at the time. Talk of either Britain or Israel having acted directly to place Amin in power was common at the time, but this does not seem to have been the case. Their near immediate support for him in these early months, however, was undeniably crucial in shoring up his tenuous hold on power.

The international climate of non-interference could create headaches for new leaders as well as opportunities. Obote was outside the country, and thus beyond Amin's reach. Julius Nyerere of Tanzania was hostile to the takeover, and soon offered Obote a degree of refuge and support, and in the short-term Obote also had access to the southern Sudan. This stopped short of direct 'interference' with the new Ugandan regime, but certainly served to greatly undermine Amin's relatively fragile legitimacy at home. It also created a political situation where any potential opposition to Amin could feasibly gather in strength outside Uganda on several different sides. Anxiety about this potential vulnerability, and frustration about a lack of capacity to do anything about it, would both prove key factors in the behaviour of the new regime over the coming months.

## February - July 1971: Multilateral Escalation of Intra-Military Violence

It was in these disruptive post-coup circumstances that violence continued to escalate within the army. It is the contention of this chapter that this was not inevitable, though it was, perhaps, highly likely. There were several key precipitant factors: the extraordinary disruption and damage caused to the state security apparatus by the coup, the style of rule that was now being adopted by the new regime, and the limitations of Ugandan state power. These factors combined to set in motion a multilateral escalation of hostilities within the Ugandan Army that prompted Amin's supporters to resort to indiscriminate massacres.

Violence in Amin's first year was primarily directed within the Ugandan army, as well as against members of Obote's former intelligence unit, the General Service Unit (GSU). In the early weeks it was essentially a continuation of the coup, which, as previously discussed, had only really represented a partial takeover of the military by a small group of men. These same men now sought to consolidate their position and impose order. In the weeks following Amin's announcement as head of state he and his supporters remained entirely uncertain as to whether the new regime had been accepted and recognised by soldiers in the outlying barracks that had not witnessed any violence on 25 January 1971. There were also large numbers of deserters to be accounted for, as some soldiers had gone into hiding during the fighting and a large proportion of these had not returned, fearing reprisals. Having employed violence to disrupt the existing political order, Amin and his supporters now turned again to violence in a bid to impose a new one. Violence was now targeted at combatting and eliminating any ongoing active opposition to the takeover, and achieving compliance within the Ugandan military.

Kalyvas asserts that employing selective violence effectively requires certain favourable conditions. These include organised, well-resourced institutions capable of following instructions correctly, and personalised information with which to identify the appropriate targets.<sup>103</sup> Without these conditions political actors increase the likelihood of their being regarded as using violence indiscriminately, which can often have a very detrimental effect. This certainly seems to apply to the consolidation of the Amin regime. Ultimately the first months of Amin's government were defined by a failure of selectivity, which prompted a shift from selective to indiscriminate violence. This was partially a product of unfavourable conditions, but also of heavy-handed strategy.

In the post-coup situation Amin's supporters were operating in distinctly unfavourable conditions. The Ugandan army was neither well organised, nor well-resourced. The existing chain of command had been smashed in the coup. As Felix Onama's 1986 testimony verifies, this was an army into which hundreds of recruits had been introduced illegally in the years preceding the takeover, and out of which huge sums of currency had been channelled into illicit cross-border operations. Record keeping was patchy, and the army clique that was now seeking to impose itself had almost no experience or patience with bureaucracy. Huge numbers of firearms were missing. In March 1971 Obitre-Gama, the new Minister of Internal Affairs, reported that despite orders for arms in private hands to be returned to the armouries only 25% of them had been accounted for.<sup>104</sup>

Keeping track of soldiers that had been killed, had fled, or were still in their posts would have been an extremely challenging task in these early months. The GSU had been immediately abolished in the wake of the takeover, a popular move politically, but one that deprived the new regime of any functioning domestic intelligence unit. Some GSU staff were now on the run, adding

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<sup>103</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, 'The paradox of terrorism in civil war', *The Journal of Ethics*, 8:1 (2004), pp. 97-138.

<sup>104</sup> Kiwanuka, *Amin and the Tragedy of Uganda*, p. 74.

to the confusion. The Military Police, tasked with identifying and detaining such deserters and dissidents at Makindye Prison, had only existed for four years before the coup, had itself undergone at least some degree of violent takeover, and was missing personnel. It too was now in the hands of relatively inexperienced leaders.

Crucially, there was also a dangerous ethnic dimension unleashed by the violence of the coup which, without very careful management, presented something of an intra-military time-bomb. Namely, efforts to selectively target opponents in the Ugandan setting could very easily be interpreted or presented as a campaign of indiscriminate violence against particular ethnic groups. This had already undermined other regime changes in newly independent African states- The Ironsi coup in Nigeria had famously been overturned by Northern Soldiers led by Murtala Muhammed who came to regard it as an 'Igbo takeover', for example.<sup>105</sup> Kasfir stresses a model of ethnic participation that recognises it as fluid and intermittent. Rather than a predetermined, guaranteed factor, ethnic dimensions exist as a potentiality, that actions and events may serve to diffuse or escalate.<sup>106</sup> Events inside the Ugandan army on 25 January 1971 had served to sharpen such a potentiality, which now required immediate attention.

In their efforts to mobilise their fellow soldiers on the night of the coup, some of Amin's supporters had insisted that, rather than simply protecting Amin and their positions, they were foiling an ethnic plot, led by the Acholi and Langi soldiery, to take full control of the army for themselves and eliminate all other ethnic groups.<sup>107</sup> This seems to have had no basis in reality: it was either a fabrication intended to bolster support for the coup, or a moment of worst-case panic. There is nothing in Obote's previous record in government to suggest that a turn to such ruthless

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<sup>105</sup> Toyin Falola and Matthew Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, (Cambridge, 2008).

<sup>106</sup> Nelson Kasfir, 'Explaining ethnic political participation', *World Politics*, 31:3 (1979), pp. 365-388.

<sup>107</sup> Captain Ali Musa Ombiga, interviewed in Arua District, 21 January 2017.

violence was likely. The most obvious evidence to the contrary is the fact that Brigadier Suleiman Hussein, a soldier from West Nile and the man who had replaced Amin as army commander, was heading up the group of officers tasked with arresting him. Hussein's West Nile ethnicity proved of little protection, and he was killed by Amin's supporters during the takeover.<sup>108</sup>

Rumours of ethnic conflict, however, outlived the initial violence of the coup. Acholi and Langi officers had formed the bulk of the casualties during the takeover, and this didn't go unnoticed by their surviving colleagues.<sup>109</sup> A large number of the deserters were also from these Luo-speaking ethnic groups. They still represented by far the largest group of men in the army itself, greatly outnumbering the West Nile and Nubian soldiery.<sup>110</sup> Having just taken over the country with only a few hundred men, the new pro-Amin clique would have been all too aware of the potential threat this large body of soldiers might present if even a portion of it was mobilised along ethnic lines. The preponderance of Acholi and Langi soldiers was also a huge stumbling block to employing selective violence against the former regime effectively. Any arrests or violence carried the risk of triggering mass flight or resistance to the new regime if they were perceived to be a campaign of ethnic persecution.

It bears repeating that the binary logic of 'pro-Amin West Nilers and Nubians versus pro-Obote Acholi and Langi' that has come to be a standard feature of the 'Amin story' had only partial basis in military life before the coup itself. These groups did form the largest populations in the army, but it was a more diverse environment than some accounts tend to make out. Acholi and Langi soldiers were not 'pro-Obote' by default (Obote's subsequent removal in the 1980s by the Okello siblings bears witness to that). On the night of the coup the rumours of ethnic factionalism,

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<sup>108</sup> Kenneth Ingham, *Obote: a Political Biography*, (London, 2013), p. 134.

<sup>109</sup> Christopher Obogo Okello, interviewed in Gulu District, 26 March 2017.

<sup>110</sup> For statistics on the ethnic composition of the Ugandan army pre-Amin, see Amii Omara-Otunnu, *Politics and the Military in Uganda, 1890-1985*, (New York, 1987).

and the corresponding violence, were as much the product of the panic and desperation of the event itself as of any predetermined 'hatreds' or political allegiances.

A key example of this is the experience of the Teso soldiery. During the coup itself the low-ranking pro-Amin soldiers implementing the violence rounded up and killed a large number of Teso soldiers. This seems to have been an act of panic- there was nothing to suggest any collective participation of Teso soldiers in the fighting, indeed there is very little to suggest that the Amin regime ever came to regard itself as at odds with the Teso again in future. Several respondents in West Nile and Acholiland remembered the massacre of Teso soldiers, and all of them attributed it to confusion rather than strategy.<sup>111</sup> In the fraught circumstances of the takeover, indiscriminate violence was briefly and erroneously targeted at Teso soldiers, as well as the Acholi and Langi.

Diffusing the tensions that the violence of the coup had generated without further conflict would have required very careful handling, an enormous challenge for any new regime. As discussed above, the task of managing it had now fallen to inexperienced, scared soldiers, who had inherited ineffective, compromised institutions, and whose primary concern was now securing their own positions and safety. Colonel Nanyumba, a bystander in the coup, succinctly assessed the escalatory dynamics of violence at this stage in his own testimony to the 1986 Commission:

'You see, when you kill one man you make a hundred enemies: because you touch my father, you touch my mother, you touch my sister, you touch my children is it not? Now it haunts you in your mind that I think so and so is looking for my life because I killed his father. So, you go a little further and kill a little more and the circle widens.'<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Bishop Ona, interviewed in Arua District, 26 January 2017.

<sup>112</sup> Colonel S.J. Nanyumba, 1986 CIVHR, p. 3830. UHRC.

From February 1971 onwards, the circle certainly widened. At the Malire regiment, women whose husbands had been killed were given bus passes to return to their home districts. (at this stage this also included the widows of deceased West Niler and Nubian combatants).<sup>113</sup> News of what had happened slowly spread across the country, aided by witnesses like the aforementioned widows. Private Kosmatino Ojok's father realised something had happened to him when he stopped returning his letters. Their family investigated, and one of Ojok's sisters discovered that he had been arrested at Mbuya barracks and detained in Luzira. Held with him was Lt. Liya Otim, whose wife Juliet visited him several times in this period to secure crucial financial support for their family.<sup>114</sup>

The detainees at Luzira were accessible to their families and were being looked after well, held within the established prison system. There was nothing in the pronouncements of the new regime in the weeks immediately following the coup to suggest that their lives were in danger. Former GSU staff actually continued to gather in Kampala for weeks, seeking payments owed for their previous services under Obote.<sup>115</sup> The major exception was the Military Police prison in Makindye, where violence against detainees was being swiftly institutionalised under Marella's leadership. However, fears among Acholi and Langi men in the army escalated sharply in February when further arrests of senior officers began. These followed on from international recognition of Amin's regime, and seem to have been 'mopping up' operations, aimed at identifying and detaining 'Obote supporters'.

Testimonies given to the 1974 Commission shed light on the post-coup 'mopping up' operations. Captain Federick Ogwal had been on a safari in Arua District at the time of the coup.

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<sup>113</sup> 1974 CIDPU, p. 602.

<sup>114</sup> 1974 CIDPU, p. 566-569.

<sup>115</sup> James Namajako, p. 3874.



Rather than returning to the Malire Barracks where he was stationed, and within which the bulk of the initial violence had centred, he opted to stay in hiding and wait for news. In February soldiers came to his family home near Lira where his wife Helen Ajwang was staying. Led by Isaac Lumago, the soldiers intimidated Helen and demanded to know where her husband was, suspicious that he had not contacted his regiment since the coup.<sup>116</sup> A former customs officer who was recruited into the army in 1963 by British officers (despite their initial doubts over his diminutive stature), Lumago was a captain at the time of the coup and would continue to rise to prominence under Amin, serving as Minister for Industry and Power as well as a brief stint as army Chief of Staff in the later years of the regime.<sup>117</sup>

Soldiers were hunting for absentees in Gulu District as well. Eliazara Otuchi and Julius Otuchi, also of the Malire regiment, had fled north on the night of the coup and were hiding near Gulu when soldiers came to bring them back south on the 30th January. Their wives witnessed their capture:

One of them called him by his rank, that 'RSM we are busy working in Kampala yet you are enjoying at home with your wife.' He told him to come out and my husband came out. He ordered him to kneel down and he did so; this man commented that 'you used to give us hard work today you will see'. He hit him on the head with the gun.<sup>118</sup>

Despite being identified by witnesses to the 1974 commission, corporals Abujo and Alinga denied having taken part in these operations. However, Alai Mukili, another soldier identified by the civilian witnesses, gave his own testimony to the commission confirming his role in a team of

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<sup>116</sup> 1974 CIDPU, p. 606.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> 1974 CIDPU, p. 608.

soldiers in Gulu area arresting deserters in this period- though he insisted they had only actually caught one man.<sup>119</sup>

In addition to the search for missing or deserting soldiers, there were further arrests of officers at barracks that had not been the focal point of the coup itself. Leon Otim was among a small group of soldiers who were arrested in February 1971 at Moroto barracks, when soldiers led by Moses Ali came from Kampala to secure it. Records show that Otim and his colleagues were held at the quarter guard before being transferred to Luzira.<sup>120</sup> Whether the takeover of Moroto barracks was entirely peaceful is still disputed. Ali, Amin's future Finance Minister and an enduring figure of influence in West Nile to this day, confirmed in his testimony to the 1986 commission that he had overseen the capture of Moroto barracks in February 1971, but denied any involvement in the arrest or murder of Acholi and Langi soldiers, insisting they had already fled, and that he had found 'no resistance at all'.<sup>121</sup> Mohammed Ali, a Somali witness to the same commission whose father was killed by soldiers near the barracks in July, was adamant that he saw the bodies of murdered soldiers in February, but there was some confusion in his account between the large-scale July massacres at Moroto barracks and these earlier arrests.

The post-coup arrests were not an indiscriminate attempt to detain or kill all Acholi and Langi soldiers. They were selective, and aimed at arresting conspicuously absent soldiers and a few senior men in barracks that had not yet been secured. Detainees were mostly taken to Luzira, where they remained largely unharmed. However, the fact remained that the vast majority of the officers detained in February were Acholi and Langi officers. This seemed to confirm to large numbers of lower-ranking soldiers from those ethnic groups that were still in the army that Amin

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, p. 665.

<sup>121</sup> Moses Ali, p. 13472.

intended to persecute and arrest them all. With the benefit of hindsight, one can reasonably question whether selective arrests were ever going to be easy to conduct without inflaming further mutual suspicion in the wake of the violence of the coup. Concerns were further amplified by the violent conduct of many of the soldiers tasked with mopping up operations.

The new regime attempted to diffuse the situation through pronouncements in the news media. As will be explored below, this was rapidly established as the primary mode of communication between the military and the populace. Major Peter Oboma, an Acholi officer who was still serving in Amin's new regime, instructed any soldiers still in hiding to 'surrender themselves' to avoid any further 'suffering of the innocent'.<sup>122</sup> In February 1971, Amin warned of ongoing operations against soldiers in Akokoro County (Obote's home area), but distinguished between the regime's targets and 'innocent civilians'.<sup>123</sup> Erinayo Wilson Oryema, an Acholi and Amin's new Minister for Mineral and Water Resources, announced that 'we may be Acholi but we are also Ugandans. The new Government will protect you if you will protect yourselves'.<sup>124</sup>

Such commands may have provided some reassurance, but not enough to prevent further escalation. Hundreds of Acholi and Langi soldiers responded to the emerging conditions by deserting and fleeing the country altogether. With Obote and some other senior officers still residing outside Uganda as a rallying point, bases were established in Tanzania and Sudan from which a possible counter-strike against the new regime might be launched. Men like corporal Kosea Otto fled their posts and went into hiding in their home districts.<sup>125</sup> Christopher Okello recalled the impact that the ongoing arrests had on the local populace:

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<sup>122</sup> *Uganda Argus*, 'Message to the Acholi Soldiers', February 1 1971.

<sup>123</sup> *Uganda Argus*, 'Do not interfere', February 1 1971.

<sup>124</sup> *Uganda Argus*, 'Ministers Tour Districts' February 15 1971.

<sup>125</sup> 1974 CIDPU, p. 573.

People in the air force were relaxed. West Acholi people were relaxed. People were going on with their normal business. But as the months passed people started feeling the effect. Arrests were being made in Kampala of prominent people, businessmen, soldiers. The first arrests in Gulu were mainly of Acholi pilots. Nyeko (a family friend who was a pilot at Gulu airbase) was told he should escape but he insisted things would be ok. He was arrested and disappeared. We began to get the sense that it was mainly Acholi people being arrested.<sup>126</sup>

A small number of Obote loyalists capitalised on these doubts and set about recruiting men for the long struggle to return their ousted leader to power. Commandeering a handful of lorries and cars, they used the opening months of 1971 to shuttle a few hundred young men out of the area.<sup>127</sup> One incident in April saw staff from the tse-tse fly control unit near Gulu disappear overnight.<sup>128</sup> Workers in the unit had access to a small number of antique firearms, and these guns vanished too.<sup>129</sup> There was also movement of soldiers across Uganda's eastern border. The fear generated by the earlier killings was key in driving this flight of soldiers out of the country- far from being indicative of enduring popular support for Obote, it was a 'conscription of circumstance'.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Christopher Obogo Okello, interviewed in Gulu District, 26 March 2017.

<sup>127</sup> 1974 CIDPU, p. 253.

<sup>128</sup> 'Nominal List of Tse Tse Fly Control Employees Missing During April 1971', Box 541, GDA.

<sup>129</sup> Saidi Maata, interviewed in Gulu District, 28 January 2017.

<sup>130</sup> Samuel Oduny, interviewed in Gulu District, 23 March 2017.

### 17 April 1971: Massacre at Ogwec

The belated discovery of this large-scale movement of soldiers and refugees prompted a hurried, violent response from Amin's forces in the army. The most substantial evidence for this concerns a large-scale massacre which took place at Ogwec Corner on 17 April 1971. Evidence given to the 1986 commission of inquiry into human rights violations has helped to shed light on a massacre that took place at this site in Lamwo District, on the northern border with Sudan. On that day several lorries arrived from the direction of the Sudanese border and stopped at Lokung. Hundreds of Luo-speaking captives were unloaded from the lorries by soldiers, who beat them and held them overnight at a local school. A teacher there, Erukana Nono, assisted and guided the soldiers into the building. Local people were understandably surprised and came to investigate. Kezironi Pacoto, working as a port at a nearby police post at the time, investigated with the Deputy Police Commissioner, Mr Okudu. Both men were instructed to return to their homes by the soldiers. Locals were informed that the captives had been going to join Obote, and were under arrest for that reason.<sup>131</sup>

The following day multiple APCs arrived with more soldiers from the south. Mr Machimino Ochen also witnessed a helicopter landing by the school, bringing 'three Africans and one white man.' The soldiers gathered hoes from the trading centre, and in the afternoon the captive men were loaded back onto the lorries and driven to Ogwec corner, where they were shot en masse.<sup>132</sup> The soldiers then departed towards Palabek, where they are reported to have harassed and killed

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<sup>131</sup> Several respondents to the 1986 CIVHR gave evidence about the massacre at Ogwec. They included Mr Kezironi Pacoto, p. 10262, Mr Macimino Ochen p. 10244, and Mr Abel Okumu, p. 10217. UHRC.

<sup>132</sup> Macimino Ochen, 1986 CIVHR, p. 10247. UHRC.

other civilians before heading south.<sup>133</sup> The local civilians built up courage to investigate, and after a few days men went to Ogwec Corner and discovered hundreds of unarmed, stripped bodies, partially buried.<sup>134</sup> The victims were not local to the area- Mr Abel Okumu remembered that he and his peers identified some of them as having come from West Acholi and Gulu area, and others were known to have come from West Kitgum.<sup>135</sup> A handful of men had survived their wounds, and one local man, Mr Emmanuel Omoya, rescued and tended to a survivor, taking him on his bike in search of medical treatment. The locals reported that government officials came to see the site shortly after the killings, led by Charles Oboth-Ofumbi- evidence that some civilian members of Amin's cabinet were aware that violence was ongoing during the early months of his rule. They also stressed that one of the captives had been a very young boy, and that he had been spared and taken away by the soldiers.<sup>136</sup>

There are no exact statistics to confirm the number of men killed at Ogwec corner- witness estimates varied from between 150 and upwards of 400. Witness reports to the 86 commission seem to confirm it as the incident in which Anyanya soldiers handed over fleeing Acholi and Langi men to Amin's forces that was often referred to with scepticism in some of the earliest writing on Amin's regime.<sup>137</sup> The witness testimonies also reveal that these captives were indiscriminately massacred. There is every reason to believe that the Ogwec massacre was, at that point, the largest isolated killing of unarmed men in the early months of Amin's regime. The presence of men in APCs and an apparent handover from Sudanese Anyanya fighters suggests that this was carried out by the same forces that were responsible for the violence of regime consolidation across the country.

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, p. 10251.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, p. 10252.

<sup>135</sup> Abel Okumu, 1986 CIVHR, p. 10228. UHRC.

<sup>136</sup> Abel Okumu, p. 10231.

<sup>137</sup> Martin, *General Amin*, p. 138.

Details of the Ogwec massacre were concealed from the wider public, though Amin did refer a few days later (in a speech condemning chiefs in West Acholi for their failure to detect subversive activities) to '470 supporters of Obote' who had been caught trying to cross into Sudan. Four days after this, and ten days after the killings at Ogwec, a story was published in the Uganda Argus which claimed that 600 Ugandan soldiers had been killed at the Sudan border fighting against 'pro-Obote guerillas'. Given a lack of any evidence to suggest there had been serious fighting between the army and the soldiers that they captured, this seems likely to have been an attempt to offer a falsified explanation for the large numbers of missing men. The marginality of the district in which the massacre occurred, and the fear it inspired in the local populace ensured that the full details of it were not leaked for years.

The 1974 and 1986 commissions also provide evidence to suggest that, in the aftermath of the Ogwec massacre, Amin supporters started to conduct other, more selective arrests and eliminations of deserting soldiers and their collaborators in the north. On the 20th April 1971, Levi Jackson Omara Ebek was seized from his shop by soldiers in a Peugeot car. His lorry had been sighted as it was used to move men out of his home area of Oyam county.<sup>138</sup> Four days later a Mr Okuja, another lorry owner, was picked up for the same reasons. Dozens were rounded up by soldiers in Gulu and Lira in a similar fashion.<sup>139</sup> Testifying to the 1974 Commission of Inquiry a local Superintendent, Mr Odyek, stated that the efforts of the local police force to take these men into their own custody had been brushed off by the soldiers.<sup>140</sup> Soldiers who had remained at their posts at the tse-tse fly border unit were rounded up and shot.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> 1974 CIDPU, p. 252-3.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Saidi Maata, 28 January 2017.

The case of Lawrence Odokonyero, narrated to the commission by his brother Nekaleo Oringa, is particularly instructive. Lawrence had been on leave for five or six months and was due to return in May 1971. Before he could do so, a group of Kakwa-speaking soldiers arrived at his home and told him that they had been sent by the president to bring him back to Mbuya barracks. His brother was suspicious, so he followed the men in his own vehicle. After travelling for some distance it became clear that the men were not driving to Kampala as they had suggested. Oringa drove to Gulu and reported the incident to the police, before fetching his brother, a former policeman, and going in pursuit of the soldiers. They found Odokonyero's body at an improvised forest dumping site, with the bodies of twelve other murdered soldiers.<sup>142</sup>

In these months Amin and his supporters had learned very quickly that releasing political prisoners was easy, but keeping tabs on potential dissenters was not. As far as he and his supporters were concerned the Ugandan bureaucracy had either failed to detect or willingly overlooked the large-scale movement of soldiers and refugees out of the country. When the scale of the desertions became apparent, Amin was furious, and no doubt threatened by the course of events. The response to this heightening of stakes was a turn to indiscriminate and eliminatory violence against deserting and suspected soldiers, the assumption being that any and all deserters were Obote loyalists, and that each man that made it outside the country was a potential soldier in the former president's emerging, albeit small army. These early developments also sowed the first seeds of mutual distrust between the new regime and the existing civilian bureaucracy that would become increasingly salient in the years to come.

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<sup>142</sup> 1974 CIDPU, p. 10269-10270.



## July 1971- January 1972: Indiscriminate Intra-Army Massacres

The ongoing ramping up of intra-army fear and hostility prompted a shift in strategy. This culminated in multiple incidents of mass violence inside barracks around the country in July 1971. The initial spark for this violence seems to have been an outbreak of retaliatory killings at Mbarara Barracks in late June. At the time the regime did its best to keep what had happened quiet, but the murders of two white foreigners by men of the Simba Battalion as they were investigating what had happened a few days later had drawn international attention to the south-west. Violence then broke out in numerous other barracks in mid-July, in the midst of Amin's impromptu state visit to Britain.

At the time of the July violence numerous regime figures, including Amin himself, Charles Arube, and Ernest Obitre-Gama, issued contradictory statements denying that anything had happened, or blaming reports of shooting on a fabricated attack by 'Tanzanian Guerillas' at Moroto and Jinja.<sup>143</sup> But the international press had generally concluded that the Ugandan government was concealing 'inter-tribal feuding' of some kind. This line stuck- two years later Drum magazine was still describing the violence as 'tribal clashes', caused by 'antagonism' between groups that Amin's coup had only 'briefly resolved'.<sup>144</sup> In an internal communique to the foreign office, Booth had speculated that a 'further round of conflict between the Acholi and Langi and the other northern tribes' might be underway.<sup>145</sup> Given that news of the violence coincided with Amin's visit, and attendant discussions of military and logistical assistance, the news seems to have been ignored in the short term.

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<sup>143</sup> *Uganda Argus*, 'Heroes Killed', July 14 1971.

<sup>144</sup> Adam Seftel (ed.), *Uganda: the Bloodstained Pearl of Africa and its Struggle for Peace: From the pages of Drum*, (Kampala ,1994) p. 125.

<sup>145</sup> 'Confidential Priority FCO TELNO 715 of 14 July', FCO 31/1027, UKNA.

Examination of the testimonies given by survivors of the July violence to the 1974 commission belies any notion of an intra-army conflict. This was not spontaneous, bilateral conflict between two armed camps. Rather, the July violence seems to have been an attempt to coordinate a systematic and indiscriminate massacre of predominantly Acholi and Langi men, carried out across multiple barracks simultaneously. It was coordinated and conducted by low-ranking soldiers, with the direction or tacit assent of at least some of their new superiors. What is far less clear is whether the decision to implement the massacres had rested with Amin, or with those of his supporters like Marella and Maliyamungu who had been more intimately involved with the violence of the takeover.

Explanation of the July killings should be grounded in the course of events that had immediately preceded them. They were the culmination of the fearful, eliminatory logic that had been escalating in stops and starts since the coup, and demonstrated on numerous occasions since at Makindye Barracks, Ogwec Corner, and in isolated murders of small numbers of Acholi and Langi soldiers. The months before had demonstrated that Amin's control over the army was tenuous at best, that violence against real and imagined opponents was ongoing, and that as a result Acholi and Langi soldiers were now fleeing in large numbers to join Obote, a process that the regime had barely detected at first, much less been able to prevent. At this stage pro-Obote forces had a growing presence in both Sudan and Tanzania, and were consciously reaching out to the Acholi and Langi communities over the Sudanese border in particular. This will all have served to lend credence to the idea that, unless eliminated, the large numbers of Luo-speaking soldiers that remained in Uganda represented a potential threat, be that as deserters, informants, or counter-coup plotters. It is often suggested that foreign advisers to Amin in this period cautioned him of exactly this. The corrosive effects of earlier political violence had generated fertile conditions for its recurrence.

At barracks level it is also instructive to consider who would have stood to benefit from the removal of hundreds of Acholi and Langi men from the army. Mobilisation along ethnic lines can certainly be reflective of fears and anxieties within institutions and communities, but it can also be an expedient tool. Men of the West Niler and Nubian communities that were now enjoying prominence through their association with Amin's new government had been competing directly with Luo-speaking men for jobs and promotions in the security arm of the Ugandan state for decades. Under Obote the idea had entrenched itself, however fair or representative it may actually have been, that Langi men in particular had benefitted under his government at the expense of other groups. This had been amplified by the events of the coup. The post-coup fear that all Acholi and Langi soldiers constituted an emergent fifth column would have appealed to those nursing resentments about their own ability to advance through the ranks, and their removal also stood to open up a large number of paid positions in the army. Samuel Walaka, a former West Niler soldier, remains adamant that some men wanted to seize this opportunity to 'remove the stars' from the higher ranks.<sup>146</sup> By the end of May 1971 the capture of hundreds of deserters, and the discovery of recruitment campaigns in the north had all provided the ammunition to support this stance. Amin, alive to the unrest, had promised a reorganisation in June, reassuring the troops that 'everyone would be given an opportunity to get promotion'.<sup>147</sup> It is this in particular that lends credence to the idea that it was some of the more junior West Niler and Nubian officers, rather than Amin himself, who launched the July violence.

The roll-out of violence began at Mbarara Barracks in late June 1971. According to Brigadier Bernard Rwehururu, efforts to train the newly assembled officers at the barracks had been disrupted when two officers, Lt. Obwoya and a John Okello, were caught trying to flee that

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<sup>146</sup> Samuel Walaka, interviewed in Arua District, 26 January 2017.

<sup>147</sup> *Uganda Argus*, 'Uganda Army to be reorganised', June 16 1971.

barracks with rifles that they claimed were for a hunting trip in the south-west. He alleges that it was this incident that sparked a mass killing, which was led by junior officers rather than the commanders.<sup>148</sup> Accounts of the massacre given to the 1974 commission were overwhelmingly brought forwards by the widowed survivors of men that had died there. They demonstrate clearly that a planned, indiscriminate massacre took place. The exact start date is disputed, but it is generally agreed to have been around the 19th, 20th, or 21st June. At 9 am on one of these days, soldiers arrived at Simba battalion from elsewhere, and ordered the men to gather unarmed at the parade ground so they could be addressed.<sup>149</sup>

Once assembled, the Acholi and Langi soldiers were separated from the rest, and set upon with bayonets, pangas and clubs at close quarters. Exactly how they were separated differs across different accounts. Florence Apio suggested to the commission that soldiers had come previously to compile a list of Acholi and Langi men, but other accounts suggest that they were asked to step forward before the killing started, and that soldiers were exhorted to identify Acholi and Langi men to the killers as they went to work.<sup>150</sup>

Frances Oroma lost her husband, Corporal Zakayo Oceru, in the ensuing violence. She described it as a 'day of chaos'- killing continued for upwards of three hours, with soldiers chasing their fleeing victims into the surrounding area.<sup>151</sup> A similar, smaller round-up happened the following day, aimed at flushing out any soldiers who had been overlooked. It is estimated that several hundred men had been killed. A few days later, in a pattern reminiscent of earlier intra-army violence, the wives and families of the deceased were issued with bus passes to return to their home districts.

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<sup>148</sup> Rwehururu, *Cross to the Gun*, p. 32.

<sup>149</sup> 1974 CIDPU, p. 632.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, p. 622.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, p. 632.

These testimonies reveal several crucial details about the nature of the violence: that it was an indiscriminate attack on unarmed Luo-speaking soldiers, and that it was initiated by men who had come from outside the barracks specifically to implement it. Although apparently triggered by the perceived desertion of more Luo-speaking men from the barracks, it was *not* a spontaneous outbreak of 'tribal' violence within Simba battalion, though it seems that men of the battalion were drawn into the production of violence once it had begun. The list of casualties offered in the 1974 commission speaks for itself, consisting solely of Acholi and Langi victims: Samuel Odidi, Manasi Otim, Raymond Ogwal, Gabriel Odida, Yuventino Okulo, to name just five. One witness recalled being taunted by soldiers, who said that 'they used to tell us that you Langi you said you were strong and you were boasting with your husbands'.<sup>152</sup>

Unlike the earlier violence of the coup, there is no evidence to suggest that any West Nilers or Nubians were killed at Mbarara. If the goal of the assailants was to eliminate all Acholi and Langi soldiers then they did not succeed, and this is demonstrated both by the second day of killing that followed (many soldiers would surely have taken the opportunity to escape before then), and by the fact that further killing took place at Mbarara barracks in mid-July, when the campaign of violence was rolled out across several other key barracks. It may be that the massacre was intended as an extreme deterrent, to substantially reduce Acholi and Langi numbers, and to inspire compliance in the survivors.

The violence at Mbarara seems to have prompted subsequent violent action amongst the soldiery. Three weeks later on the 11th July, as Amin visited Britain, violence broke out again. This time it took place in several locations simultaneously, at the two largest army bases in the country at Jinja and Moroto, and the ammunitions depot at Magamaga. There were subsequent smaller

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, p. 620.

massacres in the days that followed, at Mbarara barracks again on the 15th, at the border guard unit at Oraba in the north on the 18th, and at Moyo barracks on the 19th.<sup>153</sup>

At Jinja barracks, killing started at night. Soldiers were woken in their bunks and told to go on duty, where they were attacked by men from outside the barracks, once again armed with knives and pangas. Those that refused to leave their rooms were subsequently taken by force. Fighting at Jinja continued for several days, and at one stage the quarter-guard building was destroyed with grenades, with detained Acholi and Langi soldiers inside. Once again it was a case of armed men killing unarmed men.<sup>154</sup> As in Mbarara, many were able to escape the initial killings, and fled into the surrounding area. Charles Ilama, who was living with his father in Lugazi some fifty miles away at that time, remembers injured men appearing in the surrounding villages seeking refuge, as soldiers continued to hunt for them.<sup>155</sup>

Some accounts of the violence at Moroto barracks, where Lieutenant Colonel Mondo was in charge, suggest that it started when a Corporal Ogaba opened fire on fourteen new recruits and their three instructors, suspecting that they had come to kill the Acholi and Langi men at the barracks. Whatever the truth of this (and given that the story was offered by senior West Nile officers it certainly merits scrutiny), the end result was the same, with a sustained hunt for Acholi and Langi soldiers, and the issuance of bus warrants to the bereaved families of the victims.<sup>156</sup> At Moyo and Oraba new soldiers are reported to have arrived several days before killing started. These were coordinated, indiscriminate massacres. Valentino Ocen was only 12 when he witnessed the violence at Moyo barracks. He saw bodies being loaded in trucks to be taken away and disposed of before he himself was loaded onto a bus bound for Gulu. On the way home the bus was stopped

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid, pp. 560-700.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, pp. 581-583.

<sup>155</sup> Charles Ilama, Interviewed in Gulu District, 25 March 2017.

<sup>156</sup> 1974 CIDPU, pp. 665-671.

at a road block, and several women were mocked and whipped by the West Nile soldiers on duty.<sup>157</sup>

Evidence suggests that control over the soldiers implementing the July violence was very limited. This is best demonstrated by the murders of Nicholas Stroh and Robert Siedle at Simba Battalion in Mbarara on the 9th July. Thanks in no small part to their identities as white Americans, a thorough investigation into their disappearance was launched, ostensibly with the support of the new regime. Judge Jeffrey Jones led the investigation, and discovered evidence to the effect that when the two men came to Mbarara to investigate rumours of a mass killing for themselves, they angered soldiers at Simba Battalion with their line of questioning, and were murdered at the barracks, most likely by a soldier called Juma Ali (who would later come to be known infamously as 'Butabika', after Kampala's largest psychiatric hospital). Ali was reportedly seen driving their car around the barracks having commandeered it for himself. The Commanding Officer at Simba was Ali Waris Fadhul, one of the original coup actors, and he refused to cooperate with Jones's investigation. He and other soldiers from Simba gave contradictory statements in their attempts to cover-up the murders. Jones was eventually forced to flee the country.<sup>158</sup>

The July violence consolidated the emerging pro-Amin faction's control over the army and pre-empted any potential threat from the Luo-speaking soldiery. All subsequent conflict within the army took the form of challenges to the regime from within its 'own' narrower ethnic support base. Identifying Amin's role in the violence is difficult. He was overseas when the bulk of the killing took place, and it is hard to imagine him coordinating a massacre over the phone in the UK whilst also trying to demonstrate that he could be trusted with further military supplies. As has already been explored, he had gathered the officers to Mbarara for external training in May. Here

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, p. 672.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, p. 657.

again, it seems highly unlikely he would have drawn British attention to a barracks that was about to bear witness to a mass murder, given his desire at this time for their continued goodwill and support. It seems most likely the decision to instigate purges in the barracks was arrived at after this in June, with Amin either forced into an acquiescent role, or presented with a *fait accompli* upon his return home from Britain by his supporters. This demonstrates a key tension in studying political action during Amin's rule, namely the challenge of identifying the less visible actors within his regime who were often responsible for directing episodes of political violence.

Brigadier Charles Arube was the acting army commander at the time of the massacres, but he was apparently reprimanded for not having prevented them, and moved into a lesser role when Amin returned. It seems highly likely that the same small group of mainly West Nile and Nubian-speaking soldiers from Malire regiment, and men of the Military Police led by Hussein Marella who had overseen so much of the violence in the wake of the coup, were at the centre of the organisation and production of the July violence. That external soldiers came to oversee the massacres suggests that support for (and advance knowledge of) the killings was not at all widespread within the army. That Amin was either content to go along with what happened, or impotent to retaliate against those involved is demonstrated by the continued advancement of men directly implicated in the July violence- Ali Fadhul became a Lieutenant Colonel and one of the most prominent figures in the regime as Governor of Northern Province. Juma Ali was sent abroad for a short spell but later became head of the Economic Crimes Tribunal (ECT). Lieutenant Colonel Mondo continued to occupy senior positions in the army hierarchy.

Perhaps tellingly, the only immediate political casualty of the July killings was Lieutenant Colonel Valentine Ocima.<sup>159</sup> Ocima is known to have been relatively moderate, one of the contributors to the original eighteen point declaration, and an advocate in his (admittedly brief) time at the

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<sup>159</sup> *Uganda Argus*, 'Lt. Col. Ocima stripped of office', July 20 1971.



centre of Amin's regime for greater transparency and accountability in the new regime. In the aftermath of the coup he and Amin had worked together closely for weeks. Government records show that he issued arrest warrants on Amin's behalf.<sup>160</sup> He had envisioned a return to civilian rule overseen by a codified Defence Council, along the lines of Ghana's National Liberation Council. On the 20th July he was stripped of his position and sidelined, accused of plotting civilian murders in West Nile and issuing 'wrong arrest orders'.<sup>161</sup> It is highly likely that these charges were fabricated, and Ocima was killed shortly afterwards. This, combined with Arube's fall from Amin's graces, represented a triumph for the pro-violence, low-ranking soldiery at the expense of more moderate officers. The July violence had served to strengthen their influence over Amin.

The final, largest massacre took place at Mutukula on the Tanzanian border in January 1972. Many accounts of Amin's regime have taken note of this mass killing, and its horrific nature has been revealed by the testimonies of several survivors. But the massacre at Mutukula has not yet been connected to the wider escalation of violence and desertion in the first year of the regime. This thesis argues that Mutukula must be understood not as a horrific, one-off event, but as the culmination of the violence of the previous months. Specifically, it represented a heavy-handed solution to the regime's inability to control or identify dissident elements in the army, driving elements within Amin's support base to resort instead to indiscriminate massacres.

Why did the Mutukula massacre happen when it did, several months after the intra-army violence in July had effectively secured the new regime's position? The answer lies in the early decrees Amin had issued in relation to detention of political suspects. The six hundred soldiers and GSU men that had been imprisoned during the coup and its aftermath had been detained extrajudicially and without trial. Initially this had been circumnavigated by the 'Detention

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<sup>160</sup> UGNA.

<sup>161</sup> *Uganda Argus*, 'Lt. Col. Ocima stripped of office', July 20 1971.

(Prescription of Time Limit) Decree' of the 13th March 1971, which provided for six months imprisonment of those:

'in detention as a result of military operations consequent upon or incidental to the take-over of the powers of the Government on the 25th day of January, 1971, or for having been associated in any manner with the General Service Department.'<sup>162</sup>

On the 11th September 1971, two days before this original decree was due to expire, Amin passed a new 'Decree to Amend the Detention (Prescription of Time Limit) Decree: 11th September 1971'.<sup>163</sup> This provided for a further three months of detention without trial for the political prisoners of the coup- whose ranks had now been bolstered by further arrests during the July violence. This is crucial in numerous ways. By now violence had escalated well beyond the original conflict of the coup itself. Hundreds of soldiers had fled the country, and others had been massacred at Ogwec and in multiple barracks. Some survivors of the earlier violence had been detained in Luzira, where they would doubtless have informed the other detainees of what had been happening. Evidence given to the 1974 commission demonstrates that the Inmates at Luzira and Murchison Bay had been accessible to their families, who are also highly likely to have kept them aware of ongoing developments. These detainees were almost certainly alive to the threat that the new regime posed to them, and domestic pressure was now mounting for their release. Had this ever taken place, there is every likelihood large numbers of them would have fled, as their colleagues had already done, and joined up (for want of other options) with the opposition forces in Tanzania and Sudan. It is entirely reasonable to stipulate that at this moment in time the detainees at Luzira may still have outnumbered those soldiers who had actually acted in support

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<sup>162</sup> 'Detention (Prescription of Time Limit) Decree', in *1971 Decrees* (Uganda Government Printer), LoC.

<sup>163</sup> 'Decree to Amend the Detention (Prescription of Time Limit) Decree: 11th September 1971', in *1971 Decrees*, (Uganda Government Printer), LoC.

of Amin and the takeover in his first year in power. Those voices who had pushed for a policy of intra-army massacres in July would certainly have wanted this potential threat eliminated.

The second extension of imprisonment for the detained soldiers ostensibly ran out on the 11th December 1971. The deadline passed without incident, but two weeks later it was announced the prisoners were being transferred to the tiny army prison farm at Mutukula, for 'court-martial'. Just as the July violence had witnessed an evolution in the degree of coordination involved in violent action, here too there was evidence of a desire for a greater a level of secrecy. Mutukula was far from the public eye. The prisoners were moved at night, held for a few hours on lorries at Makindye Prison (further evidence of the central role of the Military Police faction and Brigadier Marella), before being moved in the early hours of the morning down to the border.

During their 1974 investigations, the Commission of Inquiry into Disappearances in Uganda found that the Luzira prison records offered a complete list of the men that were moved out to Mutukula. The records show that many of them had been arrested in the 'mopping up' operations after the coup, and in February. They included Leon Otim, arrested at Moroto Barracks in February, and and Corporal Rufus Ogwong, captured at Gulu Airbase after the takeover. The captives were merged with a smaller group of some 96 former GSU officers that had been brought from Murchison Bay prison, as well as small groups of recent detainees from other barracks. What happened to them at Mutukula has been revealed thanks to the testimonies of a small handful of men that were able to escape, fleeing over the border into Tanzania, where they were subsequently interviewed by journalist David Martin. A former GSU staffer, James Namakajo, also gave an invaluable testimony to the 86 Commission.<sup>164</sup> His detailed account offers insight into the process by which the Mutukula detainees were steadily killed, a small number each day, over a period of weeks. The detainees were told by Major Marella that they were going to be screened, to

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<sup>164</sup> James Namakajo, 1986 CIVHR, pp. 3835- 3910.

sort those responsible for 'crimes' from those who were 'innocent'. They were initially interviewed by some military intelligence officers and men from Special Branch including one, a Mr Wanyama, that Namakajo was familiar with:

A few days after this exercise, or I should actually say that during that exercise, they started taking small groups of people, I am talking about 15, 20, 10, to what they described as a Military Tribunal which was supposed to be taking place in Masaka and this procedure was proceeding according to rank, they took the most Senior Officers, right from Major...<sup>165</sup>

The prisoners were made to dig 'trenches' in the surrounding fields each day, and it seems that these were used to bury the victims in small numbers as they were killed. Like Makindye, conditions at Mutukula were grossly inadequate for the large numbers of men being detained, and existence in the cells became a case of 'survival of the fittest'. The staggered, deceptive fashion in which killing was carried out at Mutukula suggests that, like the earlier violence of the coup and its aftermath, it was probably implemented by a relatively small number of soldiers. After some time the soldiers on duty became less meticulous in covering up what was happening, the detainees became fearful and suspicious, and a break-out attempt followed. Many prisoners were killed but 23 escaped to safety in Tanzania. In the wake of the break-out, killing was accelerated. One of the four detention buildings was blown up with prisoners inside, in a similar style to Lubiri Barracks and the Quarter Guard at Jinja. Then Amin announced ahead of a visit to West Germany that there had been a mass escape of prisoners and that the remaining detainees were to be released. These numbered some 64 men, and Namakajo was adamant that Acholi and Langi men had been deliberately screened:

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid, p. 3848.

'12+24+14+14. Buganda 22, Eastern Region 24, Northern Region 14, Western Region 14.

Northern Region here describes West Nile, strictly West Nile and I have a list of those who were released. I wish I can turn over to the Commissioner.'<sup>166</sup>

On the 5th February 1971 the survivors were driven back to Kampala, where Charles Oboth-Ofumbi and Charles Arube addressed them and told them to 'stop any activities, be obedient citizens, and return to work'.

Namakajo's testimony offers numerous crucial pieces of information. It demonstrates the centrality of Marella's Military Police team at Makindye in the removal of the Luzira prisoners and their subsequent murders at Mutukula. Senior officers were killed first, and, whilst many of these were Acholi and Langi, there were men of other ethnic backgrounds amongst the victims as well. Hassan, the Ugandan Asian CID once tasked with investigating the Okoya murder, was among those who died. Equally important are the identities of the men tasked with the killing itself:

'I do believe that Idi Amin used them [the executioners from Mutukula] again and again in the massacres. I have seen the photographs of the public executions and I do recognise the same faces that were at Mutukula, in Mbale executions, the clock tower executions, I still see the same faces!.... I think there was a special squad- I did not know the names of these people; there was one Muganda boy that I knew among them, was also called Nsubuga and he told me his home was behind Naguru, I have tried to track him since without any success. I must also say before this Commission that there is fallacy that the Nubians were the only ones who carried out these atrocities; I must say that the group of people that

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid, p. 3852.

were at Mutukula was very representative apart from Acholi and Langi- the Basoga were there; the Baganda were there and a lot of West Nilers.’<sup>167</sup>

His testimony also raises further questions- was the screening by intelligence officers and Special Branch a mere facade? Or were some prisoners released or condemned according to these interviews? Were the conclusions of the investigating officers simply ignored by the guards in favour of a more permanent solution? Did Amin’s announcement that the prisoners were to be released constitute an intervention by him on their behalf? Had the ‘investigations’ really been concluded, or was the increasing risk of international attention being drawn to Mutukula sufficient that the operation was brought to a premature end? These are not questions that can be satisfactorily answered with the reference to the existing primary material. What is certainly true is that the Mutukula killings constituted the last major incident of indiscriminate mass violence against soldiers and former GSU men in the consolidation of Amin’s regime. In conjunction with the July violence, it left the army firmly under the control of the small clique of lower-ranking officers (now heavily represented in the Defence Council, and the ‘plateau’ of lieutenant colonels) who had first seized command in January the following year.

#### Vendettas, Opportunists, Intercessions: The Politics of Exhortation and Local Agency

It is a central contention of this thesis that an analysis of violence during Amin’s regime must reconsider the forms that violent action took at the local level. Namely, events and decisions at the political centre are extremely important, but do not in themselves fully explain the pattern and logic of violence that emerges during this period. Violent processes invariably escalate and

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid, p. 3853.

spread beyond the original goals and intentions of the primary political actors. State agents may pursue goals that are entirely tangential, even antithetical, to those of the state's supposed rulers. Conversely, actors at the local level can prove highly receptive to events and ideas at the political centre, adopting and co-opting them for their own reasons.

Some previous attempts have been made to categorise this relationship in the Ugandan case. Kasozi argued for a tripartite definition of violence, in which three broad strands of political, deviant, and vigilante violence can be identified.<sup>168</sup> Mazrui came to differentiate between 'tyranny and anarchy', noting that many analyses of the Amin era overemphasised the former with a focus on centralised, regime-led violence, whilst ignoring the escalation of other, decentralised forms in this period.<sup>169</sup> Mamdani asserts that violence was employed either to oppress or to resist oppression, but adds further qualifications by noting that 'fascist terror' in Amin's Uganda had both an 'institutional and individual aspect'- another attempt to grapple with the immense diversity of action taken at the local level.<sup>170</sup>

All of these lenses have some useful applications. Violence in Amin's Uganda certainly spread well beyond the political clashes at the centre of the state, and was employed towards criminal and personal ends as well as political ones. It often had a destabilizing, corrosive effect, despite the fixation with order and centralising agenda of the new military regime. Crucially, as Mamdani recognises, this did not map conveniently to a binary of 'state' and 'local' actors- rather soldiers could act in their own interests as well as carrying out orders, and civilians might just as easily aid or co-opt the new regime in pursuit of their interests as resist it. In a post-colonial state

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<sup>168</sup> Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, p. 114.

<sup>169</sup> Ali Mazrui, A, 'Between development and decay: Anarchy, tyranny and progress under Idi Amin', *Third World Quarterly*, 2:1 (1980), pp. 44-58.

<sup>170</sup> Mamdani, *Imperialism and Fascism in Uganda*, (Africa World Press), p. 44.

that had consistently struggled to reproduce a consistent 'effect' of itself as above society, the agents of the state regularly fell short of its idealised expectations for action.

This thesis asserts that the production of violence became steadily more decentralised over Amin's eight years in power, and involved a widening array of actors and networks as time went on. But it also seeks to argue that the forms violence took must be grounded historically, both in the resources and style of government as it was implemented during the Amin era, and in relation to the events and ideas emanating from the political centre at each given 'stage' of rule.

Peterson and Taylor have categorised the Amin regime as ruling through a 'politics of exhortation'. Government was propagated through radio and newspapers, through speeches and directives. It was a style of rule tailored to suit a new elite that was both inexperienced in, and hostile to, bureaucratic government. Barracks rule was employed on a national scale. Commands were issued at the centre through the news media, and the expectation was that they would be immediately obeyed (and correctly interpreted) by the groups that such commands addressed.<sup>171</sup>

Peterson correctly notes that these groups were often vague social categories, like 'chiefs', 'the youth', or 'Asians', with limited homogenous basis in reality, and that the expectations of the regime for the success of this approach to governance were unrealistically high.<sup>172</sup> Over time this created a significant disconnect between the political rhetoric of the centre, and events on the ground. The escalation of violence between February and July 1971 is a case in point- despite repeated exhortations by the new government to the contrary, soldiers continued to hide and desert.

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<sup>171</sup> Peterson, Derek R., and Edgar C. Taylor. "Rethinking the state in Idi Amin's Uganda: the politics of exhortation." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7.1 (2013): 58-82.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, p. 60.



This thesis will argue that the politics of exhortation had a crucial effect on the spread of violence in this period. Far from generating a political realm that was moulded to Amin's own personality, the oscillating and contradictory command economy that the new regime generated produced a 'field of action', with space (and indeed necessity) for regular reinterpretation and guesswork of instructions at the local level.<sup>173</sup> Specifically, it will argue the 'powerful mouthpiece' through which Amin and his supporters issued their decrees, and sent out new ideas and orders with the expectation they be acted upon, gave rise to a steady increase in distinct forms of echoic agency.

Soldiers, administrators, and civilians alike initially scrambled to correctly interpret and act upon the commands emanating from the centre. They often did so in conditions of considerable fear and uncertainty, with limited experience, and scarce resources. As time went on, actors at the local level began increasingly to realise that the emerging style of government also offered considerable space for wilful contestation, reinterpretation, or co-option of the new regime, and they adopted and manipulated its rhetoric in order to do so.

The attention span of Uganda's new rulers was limited by a reliance on commands and exhortations at the expense of written bureaucracy. There was also a very real willingness to overlook, ignore, or deny unfavourable information. By exploiting this leeway, and echoing the ideas of the centre and applying them in myriad ways, local actors pursued a wide range of goals and agendas, creating the confusing picture which has proved such an analytical challenge to those seeking to categorise what was happening. This was not simply anarchy. Rather it was the product of a wide range of competing, often overlapping logics, much of it taking place outside the 'official' rhetoric and actions of the Ugandan state. Violence at the local level thus appears as one extreme form of agency in the wider 'forum of agency' that the politics of the Amin state created.

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid, p. 60.

In Amin's first year the production of violence was still relatively contained, and it largely took place within the army and the Military Police. Other new state agencies tasked with security operations had yet to be fully established and sent into action. Collaboration with and reliance on civilians was minimal compared to later on. Nonetheless even at this early stage there is ample evidence in the primary record of multiple forms of echoic agency in action, and the wide range of uses to which the political situation generated by events at the centre was exploited at the local level. A range of actors pursued personal vendettas, seized opportunities to enrich themselves, and made attacks on the existing social order.

One key example of echoic agency in action is the violence against key UPC supporters that took place in the south immediately after Amin's takeover. Respondents confirm that much of this short-lived outbreak of violence was not directed by the army (contrary to some interpretations Amin himself was not particularly anti-UPC, and multiple UPC members ended up in his first cabinet). Rather, locally organised DP and KY supporters took advantage of the situation to settle scores.<sup>174</sup> There were also strikes in Kampala, as workers seized on the regime change to push for improvements in their conditions. In his appeals for calm, Ernest Obitra-Gama warned that personal vendettas were being settled 'under the cloak' of the political transition.<sup>175</sup> Some of these were continuations of disputes that predated the coup. At the Apollo Hotel, disputes over treatment of staff took on a political dimension when disgruntled workers tried to take down the 'Apollo' sign in the aftermath of the takeover.<sup>176</sup> Multiple hotel staff were reported to the new regime as being undercover GSU agents.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Robert Astles, *Forty Tribes*, p. 157.

<sup>175</sup> *Uganda Argus*, 'Minister Warns', February 27 1971.

<sup>176</sup> *Uganda Argus*, 'Such a stir over a name', February 12 1971.

<sup>177</sup> *Uganda Argus*, 'Apollo Strikes Continue', February 23 1971.

Accounts of the ‘mopping up’ operations of February 1971, as given to the 1974 commission, demonstrate that there was considerable variety and inconsistency in the treatment meted out against Acholi and Langi soldiers by arresting officers on the ground. At times this had an opportunistic or entrepreneurial character. Detained soldiers found their property damaged or stolen and risked being victims of excessive, even deadly force. Lt. Celestine Amone was arrested at Mubende barracks in mid February 1971 and taken away. His wife testified that the lieutenant who had overseen his arrest returned shortly afterwards with a lorry to take away Amone’s BMW.<sup>178</sup> In other instances flexibility or lenience was unexpectedly applied. Lt. Wilson Ogwal was also assigned to Mubende barracks and worked with the Uganda Cranes football team in Kampala. In February he was arrested and beaten by men who accused him of being a ‘favourite’ of Obote because he was a Lango, but he was released almost immediately after being detained. Ogwal was later killed in the July violence.<sup>179</sup>

A particularly violent incident took place at Masindi barracks, where the arresting soldiers opted to severely beat multiple captive men, to such an extent that several were hospitalised. Among them was Nikanoli Opio, a corporal at the barracks. Opio was recovering in hospital shortly afterwards when his wife witnessed the same soldiers who had first beaten him arrive at the hospital, beat him again, and take him away. There is no evidence to suggest that Opio was ever handed back into official custody.<sup>180</sup> Documentation of these early arrests was better than later in the regime, but some individuals still seem to have fallen through gaps in the record. when Corporal George Ogwal was led away by an army driver on the 5th March 1971 he was told that ‘the big man wants you for duty’. A week later his wife was told to leave the barracks but was also

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<sup>178</sup> 74 Comm, p. 679.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, p. 567.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, p. 615.

informed that the army did not know where her husband was and that men were still searching for him.<sup>181</sup>

Some of these cases show early signs of the pattern of violence that would later become typical of the Amin regime: abductions of individuals, facilitated by vehicles and legitimated with appeals to the authority of the president and state. There is little evidence to suggest this was in accordance with a consistent strategy at senior level, though the release of some detained soldiers demonstrates that there was some kind vetting or assessment of detainees going on, and that some senior figures in the new regime had the power to intervene and protect detained suspects. Kiwanuka names Wanume Kibedi and Charles Oboth-Ofumbi as regime figures who could 'secure a victim from the lion's den', and it is likely that they weren't the only ones.<sup>182</sup> The evidence also demonstrates that in the aftermath of the coup control over soldiers at the local level was fragile, with some exploiting the conditions to undertake looting and excessive violence. Much of this localised agency was echoic to the pronouncements of the new regime, responsive to the emerging idea that Acholi and Langi soldiers posed a potential threat as internal enemies.

#### Conclusion:

The violence of 1971 left the small group of soldiers who had coalesced around Amin in control of the Ugandan Army, and, by extension, the country. After an initial coup of only limited casualties thousands had now died, and there was no question of handing back power to an alternative government that would surely prosecute, even execute them for what had happened. This was not the preplanned manifestation of a sinister political will, though a new and violent political order was now in the making. Rather than an indication of some inherent sadism on the part of

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid, p. 571.

<sup>182</sup> Kiwanuka, *Amin and the Tragedy of Uganda*, p. 81.

Uganda's new ruler, the drastic escalation of intra-military violence was the product of inexperienced and fearful actors, the corrosive effects of earlier violence, and limited resources and information. Thrust into power by low-ranking soldiers, Amin's own role in driving violence had been subsidiary and reactive, but under his leadership other violent actors were being richly rewarded. There had been an important degree of civilian collaboration and international support in these early stages that is often forgotten. These had provided a crucial layer of domestic and external legitimacy for the new regime even as it failed to control the spread of political violence.

A partial, hurried takeover had produced a tense political situation, with an emergent ethnic fault-line within the Ugandan Army, and an external rallying point for political opposition in the form of Obote and his supporters in Tanzania and Sudan. Having employed violence to subvert the established order, Amin and his supporters now turned to violence in order to impose it. Early attempts to manage the crisis through selective arrests, violence, and reconciliatory rhetoric had not diffused the situation. Mutual fear and misapprehension, and the flight of hundreds of soldiers prompted a shift from selective to indiscriminate violence- at first this was highly improvisatory, as witnessed at the massacre at Ogwec Corner. Subsequently this strategy was rolled out across all the major barracks in Uganda, and indiscriminate massacres were used to pacify the soldiery and achieve compliance to the new regime. The final and largest of these massacres, at Mutukula, resolved the question of what to do with the hundreds of political prisoners taken during the earlier months. Opposing voices within the ruling clique lost out and were sidelined.

The production of violence in this first year was mostly the work of small teams of soldiers within the army and the Military Police at Makindye led by Brigadier Marella. There was already evidence of considerable variation, and the application of agency at the local level. The style of rule now adopted by Amin and his supporters- Peterson's 'Politics of exhortation'- created space for

political actors to exploit the political situation for their own ends. This led to a rise in the use of violence for personal and entrepreneurial ends, but also saw releases, intercessions and moderation in some circumstances too. Civilians were not yet regular targets for violent action by state agents, but this was soon to change.

## 2. A Lion Rampant? Violence and Governance in Amin's Uganda, 1972-1975

This chapter addresses the emergence of violent governance under the Amin regime that took place in the period between January 1972 and January 1975. In these three years there were numerous key changes at the political centre. The coalition of military and civilian interests that had been presented to the country when Amin took power began to collapse, to be replaced by a more openly autocratic and militarised style of rule. Power was further centralised, and concentrated around Amin and his supporters in the army. There were numerous quite radical shifts in government policy, including a diplomatic volte face at the international level, and the declaration of a domestic 'Economic War', launched with the expulsion of Uganda's Asians in 1972. The regime also faced a series of internal and external 'shocks' to its authority and sovereignty: an invasion over the Tanzanian border by pro-Obote forces in September 1972, the emergence of a nascent insurgency led by Yoweri Museveni in 1973, and an attempted coup in 1974.

The intra-military violence that accompanied the first twelve months of the Amin regime had consolidated his hold on power, and established a relative monopoly on force. From 1972 onwards the ways in which violence was employed evolved noticeably. Civilians now became targets for the security forces. The regime lacked domestic legitimacy, and responded to 'shocks' to its power with the use of violence to protect and reinforce its position. Violence was used as a political tool, to assert authority and sovereignty, as a deterrent to certain forms of political action, and to generate compliance. Much like the earlier spread of intra-military violence, this was not the realisation of a preconceived blueprint for terror, but a reactive and multilateral process.

The forms that violence took evolved as well. State violence started to assume the 'typical' form with which Amin is generally associated; the selective abduction and assassination of individuals by soldiers and security agents using vehicles and small arms. Members of the educated Ugandan elite were disproportionately targeted. The production of violence was increasingly decentralised; new security units were created, and began to work alongside the army and Military Police. At the local level, violence was increasingly a joint production, as local collaborators and informants provided information and denounced their neighbours to the security forces. There was also an experimental public dimension to some of the state's use of violence. Where previous killings had been covered up, the regime now employed the news media to transmit certain forms of violence nationally, including the first public executions in Uganda's independent history.

Some have regarded this period as Amin's heyday, the era of a 'lion rampant', imposing his will without mercy on a cowed population.<sup>183</sup> This chapter will counter this view. Far from being dominant, the Amin regime in these years was insecure and reactive, compensating for its vulnerability with force, which in turn undermined its credibility. For all the ambition of Uganda's new rulers, there were stark limitations to their power and reach. The regime depended heavily on civilian informants, which gave rise to the increasing salience of localised 'gatekeepers'. It was also naive and inexperienced, and heavily reliant on the news media. This created considerable space for malicious denunciations, and the co-option of the security forces by civilians for their own purposes. Amin's control over the security apparatus remained tenuous, and an ongoing breakdown of discipline saw attendant increases in violent entrepreneurialism, feuding, and intra-institutional conflict. This prompted unrest, and an attempted coup in 1974, which actually pushed the regime into making numerous small concessions and changes. An investigation into the 'disappearances' of civilians was launched in 1974, and offered a rare opportunity for the

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<sup>183</sup> Mutibwa, *Uganda Since Independence*, p. 104.



population to engage the regime in dialogue about its use of violence. Ultimately this potential pathway towards greater accountability was passed up, as Amin opted instead to place his loyalty and trust in his existing support base.

### 1972-1975: Contractions, Realignments, and Shocks

If the political manoeuvres and attendant intra-military violence of 1971 had enabled Amin and his supporters to 'get a foot in the door', then from 1972 onwards they started to push others out into the cold, and entrench their own hold on power. This process was defined by a whirlwind of major changes on both the domestic and international stage between late 1972 and late 1973. After this time government in Amin's Uganda looked much more like it is generally remembered; power entrenched in the person of Amin himself, with a supporting cast of mostly military men serving in ad hoc ministerial and governor's roles, the declaration of an 'Economic War', and the expulsion of the Ugandan Asians, and an abrupt turn towards new geopolitical allies and backers at the expense of old ones. Each of these shifts has been routinely explained in terms of Amin's apparent eccentricity and arbitrariness. However, abrupt and abrasive as Amin often was, it is more instructive to recognise all three of his 'changes of course' as examples of political strategies that have been common in postcolonial Africa, grounded in longstanding tensions in postcolonial African states and societies. Such challenges, and the responses they have so often prompted, are far more systemic than the personality of one African leader.

Between 1972 and 1973, political power was centralised yet further, as Amin and his supporters in the army emerged in sole control of the country. Many members of Amin's civilian cabinet fled or were dismissed, to be replaced by soldiers from his support base. The regime

experimented with new forms of political organisation, introducing provinces (and provincial governors, the majority of them soldiers) in 1973, and replacing the existing network of chiefs with newly selected ones in the same year (also mainly soldiers). This has been described as militarisation of the state, and to an extent it was, though many other arms of government were left more or less intact.<sup>184</sup> Amin ruled by decree, and became steadily less dependent on civilian and military advisors.

The most consistent reason offered for Amin's increasing political isolation centres on his personality; paranoid and incompetent, so the reasoning goes, he feared to have any other senior figures too close to him, lest they supplant him. This has previously been referred to as the 'familiarity syndrome'.<sup>185</sup> Amin's own limitations and fears were certainly important, but they were not unique to him. The crisis of legitimacy created by his takeover was systemic in the military as well as the country. Newly promoted officers, rankers mere months before, struggled to impose themselves on their equally qualified subordinates, who in turn sensed opportunities for promotion, and intrigued accordingly. Like any government in practice, the disparate selection of soldiers and civilians thrown together in 1971 found increasing points of disagreement and contention, and were drawn into competition for the spoils and patronage opportunities that their positions afforded them. These were only amplified by the enormous cultural differences between the civilian cabinet, largely drawn from wealthier, educated circles in the south, and Amin's military backers, who were overwhelmingly poor, northern, and Muslim. In this climate of gridlock and mutual suspicion, Amin ruled in increasingly autocratic fashion, personalising and centralising power to compensate for the lack of agreement and cohesion. His approach may have been particularly arbitrary and unpredictable, but a shift away from experiments with pluralistic and consensus-driven politics towards a bureaucratic authoritarianism that often partly resembled

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<sup>184</sup> Alicia Decker, *In Idi Amin's Shadow: Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda*, (Ohio: University Press, 2014) p. 57.

<sup>185</sup> Omara-Otunnu, *Politics and the Military in Uganda*, p. 129.

the colonial governments that African elites had replaced was a recurring feature of African politics in these years.<sup>186</sup> Such a shift had played itself out to a greater or lesser extent in a wide range of otherwise markedly different postcolonial regimes, from Nkrumah's Ghana to Banda's Malawi.

Perhaps the best remembered, and most mythologised aspect of Amin's reign besides the political violence that was unleashed is his declaration of an 'Economic War', which began in August 1972. Amin achieved international notoriety when he announced that, following an approach by God in a dream the previous night, he would be expelling Uganda's Asian population. What started with the targeted removal only of non-Ugandan citizens (Asian communities' refusal to take up Ugandan citizenship had been a bone of contention under Obote) escalated in the following weeks to include almost the entire Ugandan Asian community. Thousands of Asian businesses and properties were seized and redistributed on an ad hoc basis. Many but by no means all of these went to members of the armed forces; in Buganda in particular many civilians succeeded in securing property, with the churches gaining huge tracts of land.

The Economic War is generally blamed in tandem with the incompetence of Amin's rule for Uganda's drastic economic decline in this period. This is a fair assessment, though it should be tempered with the observation that, much like the resurgence of personalised rule, economic collapse was far from unique to Uganda over these years. Uganda remained very much at the mercy of a world economy in which it occupied a vulnerable position as a landlocked, cash-crop exporting nation. The departure of the Asians created an enormous vacuum and soon generated considerable shortages of a wide range of goods and skilled manpower, but it also thrust more Ugandans into business than ever before. As a populist move the Economic War was immensely effective in the short-term, bolstering Amin's support through the opportunities for patronage

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<sup>186</sup> Bruce J. Berman, 'Ethnicity, patronage and the African state: the politics of uncivil nationalism', *African Affairs*, 97 (1998), pp. 305-341.

that expulsion had generated, confirming him in the eyes of many people as a ruler with the interests of ordinary Ugandans at heart, and providing a distraction from other, more unsavoury elements of his rule. Over time the regime's efforts to define what 'Economic War' should look like in practice, and to regulate Uganda's new 'black businessmen' would draw it into violent conflict with the civilian population, a process that is explored in chapter three.

On the international stage, Amin started to define and orient himself as a particularly belligerent African nationalist, condemning imperialism, distancing himself from Uganda's 'traditional' British backers, breaking with Israel, and falling into line with the geopolitical stances against Apartheid and Israel that were commonly held by the leaders of many African states at this time. It was exactly the kind of positioning that had made Obote unpopular with the British before his own removal, but, by pivoting towards Libya, Russia and the Arab states, Amin was able to make up for any resulting dip in financial and military support. A break in the long-running civil conflict in Sudan in March 1972 had made a severance of ties with Israel more straightforward, as their support to the Anyanya (with whom Amin had been sympathetic) was no longer required. Amin's break with Britain was even more straightforward. He was disappointed by their apparent refusal to back him unreservedly, a feeling that was only intensified by his longstanding affection and nostalgia for the country, and his time in the KAR. The British government's escalating wariness at what he regarded as a time of existential peril for his regime caused him understandable anger. Freer now than he had been to point out and respond to the inequalities and injustices of the world order, and Uganda's own imperial past, Amin began to regard Britain through a contemptuous, anti-colonial lens.

Bayart and Ellis have stressed the importance of 'extraversion' to African rulers, who employ a range of strategies to maximise gains from their links to the comparatively vast

resources of a range of external powers.<sup>187</sup> Amin's realignment of Uganda's international backers constituted an 'extraverted' strategy of his own, prompted by the unwillingness of Israel and Britain to provide him with the military hardware that he believed he needed. Amin moved instead to develop ties with Gaddafi's Libya, with Russia, and with the oil-rich Arab states. He began to develop an unpredictable and 'shocking' oratory in some of his engagements with the western world in particular, through which he distanced himself from his erstwhile allies and demonstrated his new allegiances. Many of the outlandish statements that resulted from this change of course have been pointed to as evidence of Amin's supposed insanity. However, they fitted into Amin's broader 'extraverted' strategy of realignment, through which he temporarily resolved the issue of military supplies. In the polarised international climate of the Cold War, Amin was far from the only African leader employing such strategies.

In a great many ways then, the political changes wrought by Amin in his first real years in full control of the country were answers to a familiar set of questions posed to many sub-Saharan African rulers at this time. This same heavy handed approach to challenges at the political centre by Amin and his key supporters also contributed to a further escalation of political violence in Uganda. Prompted by a series of 'shocks' to their authority and security, the army responded with deadly force. The first such shock was in September 1972, when the army repelled an invasion of the country by exiles loyal to Obote, with the collusion of Nyerere's Tanzania. In the months immediately following this invasion, the security forces unearthed a small insurgency movement called the Front for National Salvation (FRONASA), led by Uganda's future President, Yoweri Museveni. Amin and his supporters escalated their use of violence in response to these challenges.

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<sup>187</sup> Jean-Francois Bayart & Stephen Ellis, 'Africa in the world: a history of extraversion' *African Affairs*, 99:395 (2000), pp. 217-267.

## September 1972: The Emergence of Violent Rule

His killing was not indiscriminate. He would pick up his victims. They would disappear but he wouldn't go killing family. I never experienced wives or children being killed during Amin's time, except in the North, I think, the Acholi and the Langi had it rough at that time... Those who were being killed were usually the top ones - top men, the most educated people, doctors, lawyers were killed, accountants; whereas in Obote's time, it was anybody who happened to belong to an area which he didn't want. It was actually a massacre.<sup>188</sup>

It is over these years that the forms of violence that Ugandans continue to associate with Amin today emerged. Abductions and murders of civilians became common, with violence targeted at the Ugandan elite. There were experimentations with public executions and the presentation of violence through the news media. Just as the earlier escalation of intra-military violence was a bilateral process, so too was the regime's steady adoption of violence as an instrument of rule in its pursuit of domestic order and control. Amin created the Public Safety Unit (PSU) and State Research Centre (SRC), two new security units that joined with the army and Military Police in wielding deadly force against opponents of the regime. These new security units are explored in depth in chapter four.

The two major changes in violent practice in this period each followed a 'shock' to the new regime's security and power. There had been a small number of civilian disappearances prior to the failed September 1972 invasion, but analysis of the primary material suggests that it was in the immediate aftermath of this that widespread arrests and assassinations of civilians first took place

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<sup>188</sup> Emmanuel Kirenga, 1986 CIVHR, p. 3944. UHRC.

across the country. In much the same way the discovery of FRONASA in 1973 led the regime to experiment with public executions, in a bid to deter any further anti-government insurgency.

The failed invasion of the south-west in September 1972 by forces loyal to Obote and its aftermath is generally regarded within Uganda to have marked a key turning point in the Amin regime. Violence that had largely been confined to barracks and a small number of selective killings in the north was now visibly extended into the civilian population, targeted primarily at former and present civilian administrators and politicians. Consider the following from Festo Kivengere, the former Bishop of Kigezi:

We sensed that, from the time of this invasion, the president's whole attitude changed. As his sense of insecurity grew, the method of widespread murder also increased. Many Christians were attacked because they happened to have been involved in the former government- especially those who had been in high positions. Many lost their lives, and others escaped out of the country.<sup>189</sup>

The attack had been executed disastrously. The small invading force was a loose coalition comprised of the pro-Obote 'Kikosi Maalum' ('Special Force' in Kiswahili), led by Colonel Tito Okello, and men from Yoweri Museveni's Front for National Salvation (FRONASA).<sup>190</sup> Plans for a secondary team to land by air at Entebbe were brought to an abrupt end when the plane they had acquired for the operation crash-landed in Kenya. The convoys intended to carry soldiers north to make twin attacks at Mbarara and Masaka arrived without fuel, necessitating pit stops en route.<sup>191</sup> Attacks that were supposed to begin at the same time before sunrise ended up taking place in

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<sup>189</sup> Festo Kivengere, *I Love Idi Amin: The Story of Triumph Under Fire in the Midst of Suffering and Persecution in Uganda*. (Michigan, 1977), p. 23.

<sup>190</sup> The Refugee Law Project, *Compendium of Conflicts in Uganda*, (Uganda: 2014). p.82. UHRC.

<sup>191</sup> Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence*, p. 123.

daylight and out of sync.<sup>192</sup> The majority of the soldiers that made up Obote's 'People's Army' hailed from the north of the country, and were less familiar with the terrain of the south-west. An uprising of the local civilians and defections of soldiers had been regarded as integral to the success of the operation, and neither occurred.

For Amin and his supporters, this was a moment of crisis and panic. In the event the oft-anticipated invasion was easily beaten, but it prompted a hurried and heavy-handed response. Testimonies to the 1974 and 1986 investigations demonstrate that two concentric waves of arrests, executions, and detentions were unleashed by the army and Amin's new security units. In the south-west, reprisal killings against guerillas and their collaborators were launched by the army, led by Ali Fadhul, Yusuf Gowon, and Isaac Maliyamungu. Launched by the battalions at Masaka and Mbarara, it seems unlikely that Amin himself had any input in directing these retaliatory killings. But there were also hundreds of arrests and killings of prominent civilians in other districts across the country. These arrests were led by men of the Military Police, SRC, and PSU, headed up by Brigadier Marella and Ali Towilli. The targets and victims of these purges were overwhelmingly members of the Ugandan civilian elite. The direct involvement of Amin's new security units, and the national scale on which they went into action, both point to at least a degree of central coordination and planning in this attendant wave of arrests and killings.

Why did the army turn against the Ugandan elite at this moment? The events of Amin's first months in power had already seen what trust existed between his supporters and the civilian bureaucracy damaged by the large-scale desertions of Acholi and Langi soldiers in 1971. At the time, Amin and his followers had regarded the failure of the state bureaucracy to detect or prevent this as evidence that members of the former administration could not be trusted. The 1972 invasion seemed to confirm these fears, which were compounded when a few former UPC

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<sup>192</sup> Captain Ali Musa Ombiga, interviewed in Arua District, 27 January 2017.



supporters in the south-west were seen cheering on the invading forces. Oversights which in all probability stemmed more from the functional limitations of the Ugandan state than from subversive political allegiances amongst its staff were interpreted as proof of the latter. In the panic that followed the invasion Amin's men took no further chances on the loyalty of their civilian counterparts. This underpinned a further escalation of violence, to include civilians as well as actual combatants.

It would be remiss to discount a degree of political opportunism. It seems quite likely that, by this point, Amin and his men had decided to stay in power indefinitely. As was explored in chapter one, this will have partly been a logical outcome of the escalation of violence that had previously occurred. Men like Juma Ali, Isaac Maliyamungu, and Brigadier Marella were already heavily implicated in the violence of the coup. To handover to an alternative government was to risk punishment. But this winner-takes-all approach is a recurring feature of life at the political centre of many African states to this day. In countries of scarcity with weak central states, so many of the opportunities for enrichment and advancement hinge on control of the 'gate' between the wider world and the nation as a whole.<sup>193</sup> African leaders and regimes have repeatedly responded to this concentration by seeking to entrench themselves in power, whatever the cost. Some did so because they believed the political and economic projects they were seeking to implement required time, and the states they presided over were vulnerable without the appropriate guidance. Others did so because the wealth and status that came with power was too great to relinquish. Most did so for a little of both. At the beginning of 1973 articles began to appear in the government-controlled *Voice of Uganda*, calling for Amin to be made 'president for life'.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Cooper, *Africa Since 1940*, pp.156-159.

<sup>194</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'Make him life president', January 31 1973.

As we have demonstrated above, Amin and his supporters were not without political vision, albeit one that was often reactive, arbitrary, and short-termist. But there was a far more obvious set of candidates for government of the country in the former members of the UPC, DP and KY, and among Uganda's educated elite. By the standards and hierarchies of the colonial and postcolonial order, it was men like this who had been equipped for government, not soldiers with only basic education. Many members of this same group still regarded the Amin regime as a short-lived and transitional one. Benedicto Kiwanuka of the DP was known to regularly joke about exactly this, publicly referencing Amin's future 'retirement'.<sup>195</sup> The ban on political activity had pushed political organisation underground, but it had by no means stopped it from happening. In the wake of the failed invasion the regime panicked, turning on the educated elite and wiping out a substantial number of civilian political heavyweights.

In the south-west, teams of soldiers hunted for anybody believed to have assisted or harboured the invading forces. Violence was aimed at eliminating potential threats, but also at reasserting the authority of Amin's government and deterring subsequent political action. Lt. Col. Ali Fadhul and Major Yusuf Gowon directed operations around Mbarara, and Isaac Maliyamungu led the arrests and killings in Masaka. Lower-ranking soldiers like Sergeant Nasur Gille and Private Mohammed Anyule operated in kill-teams in the south-west countryside, travelling with the help of local informants. The case of Elpihaz Laki, murdered by these soldiers of Simba Battalion on the 22nd September 1972, is particularly instructive thanks to the wealth of evidence that came to light when his son Duncan took Gowon, Gille, and Anyule to trial for his father's murder in 2002. Thanks to Duncan's own courage the dynamics of the operations in 1972 were thrown briefly into light.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Manzoor Moghal, *Idi Amin: Lion of Africa*, (Milton Keynes, 2010), pp. 52-53.

<sup>196</sup> Andrew Rice, *The Teeth May Smile But The Heart Does Not Forget*, (New York, 2009).

Like many of the victims of the 1972 violence, Laki had risen to prominence with the UPC, appointed as a county chief by James Kahigiriza in 1963. The two men had fallen out in the mid-1960s, and Laki continued in the administration after Kahigiriza himself was removed. Laki had also associated with Yoweri Museveni, providing him with accommodation and help even after the latter had gone into exile and resistance against Amin.<sup>197</sup> He had already been briefly detained in Makindye barracks in the wake of Amin's takeover, before being released to return to his work. There were certainly grounds for somebody hunting for political dissidents to suspect him.

In the immediate aftermath of the September attack, Laki's close friend Nekemia Bananuka was murdered at his farm near Mbarara by soldiers as they hunted for the fleeing guerillas. Bananuka's three sons were also killed.<sup>198</sup> Five days later, the aforementioned team of soldiers arrived at Laki's place of work. He was escorted home, where he was forced to hand over the keys to his car. Nasur Gille was the assigned 'triggerman', and he is alleged to have murdered a number of civilians during these operations. The two men had relied on Salim Sebi, a local Nubian who worked in Mbarara as a bus driver and knew the roads well, to help them find their targets. They drove to a secluded forest, where Laki was executed. His body would not be found until Duncan's own investigations in the early 2000s.

The retaliatory violence was intended to be selective. This is best demonstrated in Yusuf Gowon's command of the Simba Battalion at Mbarara.<sup>199</sup> Ali Fadhul was in the field in pursuit of the rebels, leaving him in charge. Gowon's approach was to try to filter detainees as they were brought in. He would later insist that 'my war ended at the barracks.'<sup>200</sup> Bodies piled up in the yard,

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<sup>197</sup> Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed*, (London, 1997), p.48.

<sup>198</sup> International Commission of Jurists, *Violations of Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Uganda*, (Geneva, 1974), p.47.

<sup>199</sup> Andrew Rice, *The Teeth May Smile*, p . 182.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, p.183.

photos of which were later distributed in a Uganda Argus article covering the invasion.<sup>201</sup> Several survivors later attested to Gowon's attempts to identify and release civilians that he knew or believed to be innocent, but this was no simple task for a Lugbara major operating in the unfamiliar territory of Ankole. His work was made harder by panic, ill-disciplined soldiers, and misleading local informants.<sup>202</sup> Gowon later insisted that 'those were the people who were just feeding us false allegations.. the Ankole people knew themselves, who was who'.<sup>203</sup>

Some of the violence carried out in the south-west had an overtly performative and symbolic dimension, intended to demonstrate the power and threat posed by the security forces. Amongst certain soldiers there was also evidence of subaltern resentment for their victims, and of old scores being settled. Basil Bataringaya, Obote's former minister of internal affairs, was picked up from his home in Kantojo, some distance from where the fighting had taken place. Famous for being one of the first Ugandan politicians to 'cross over' from the DP to join the UPC in 1964, Bataringaya too had retired from public life when Amin briefly detained him after seizing power.<sup>204</sup> He was dismembered, and his remains displayed just outside of Mbarara. In one particularly shocking incident in Masaka, Isaac Maliyamungu seemingly took great pleasure in inflicting a brutal death on the mayor, Francis Walugembe. Maliyamungu had been operating in the area since the coup, and had previously come to blows with Walugembe as he sought to run Masaka as 'his own private kingdom'.<sup>205</sup> Manzoor Moghal, an administrator in the Masaka Municipal Council, bore witness to the violence:

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<sup>201</sup> *Uganda Argus*, 'The Mbarara Invasion That Failed', 21 September 1972.

<sup>202</sup> Major Yusuf Gowon, interviewed in Arua District, 27 January 2017.

<sup>203</sup> Rice, *The Teeth May Smile*, p.183.

<sup>204</sup> *Uganda Argus*, 'We are ready: President Amin', 27 March 1971.

<sup>205</sup> Patrick Ruhinda, interviewed in Kampala, 5 November 2016.

Maliyamungu, based at the Masaka Army Barracks, had a great inward contempt for the suave, smartly dressed, handsome and articulate Walugembe and received the instructions to kill him with sheer delight. He proceeded to carry out his orders in such a ritual fashion that even Amin must have been shocked by the sheer barbarity which Maliyamungu and his men used in finishing off Walugembe...

...After a long and public chase through the streets of Masaka, Francis was cornered by Maliyamungu and his soldiers. Even then he pleaded with his captors to contact Amin, whom he assured them repeatedly would tell them to spare his life. But his desperate pleas fell on deaf ears, and his captors proceeded to extract the last breaths of his life in a barbarous and heinous fashion. His was a death of a thousand cuts. Taking pleasure in their work his killers cut his body repeatedly; sparing him no indignity they cut away the whole pieces of his hands, limbs and body gradually. He was tortured to a slow and excruciating death.<sup>206</sup>

Across the country, a concomitant purge of members of the civilian elite was soon underway. Testimonies given to the 1974 and 1986 investigations have confirmed what outside observers suspected at the time; that the violence that followed the September 1972 invasion spread much further than the south-west, where fighting had actually taken place. In Kampala, Gulu, Fort Portal, and Jinja, small teams of soldiers and plain clothes security agents arrested an array of civilian administrators and former politicians from their homes and workplaces, whisking them away in vehicles. This wave of arrests went on for weeks, and it was the first time in which the selective targeting of civilians by the Amin regime which Ugandans remember today as 'picking' was employed.

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<sup>206</sup> Moghal, *Idi Amin: Lion of Africa*, p. 57-8.

Matayo Kandole and Gregory Kateera both worked at the Toro District Administration in Fort Portal. They had previously been investigated on allegations of having written letters to Obote in Dar Es Salaam, most likely malicious rumours. On the 18th September 1972, the day after the invasion, soldiers led by Jackson Smart came to Fort Portal and arrested both men. They were taken to their houses, which were ransacked, before being driven away from the area. Neither man was seen again. There were similar arrests in Gulu, where the DC Julius Abe was able to flee over the border in Sudan thanks to an advance tip off.<sup>207</sup> Many other administrators were not so lucky. The Administrative Secretary, Simayo Oryem, was picked up and taken by a group of soldiers.<sup>208</sup> In Kampala, Benedicto Kiwanuka, the former DP leader acting Chief Justice, was seized from his chambers and dragged away to Makindye prison, where he too was murdered.<sup>209</sup>

The September 1972 violence signalled the end of the short-lived collaboration between the army and Amin's civilian cabinet. This is best demonstrated by the resignation and flight of Edward Rugumayo and Wanume Kibedi in 1973.<sup>210</sup> Each man took refuge in Nairobi before announcing their intentions, Kibedi on grounds of 'illness'.<sup>211</sup> Members of Kibedi's extended family had been murdered in Jinja by the army after the invasion. Rugumayo had met with Museveni prior to the September invasion and probably feared the consequences of this coming to light.<sup>212</sup> By all accounts, Amin was surprised by the departures of both men. He responded by sending his remaining cabinet ministers on leave.<sup>213</sup> Kibedi and Rugumayo became strident critics of the government from abroad, establishing a pattern of flight and condemnation that would be

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<sup>207</sup> 'A report of the situation in West Acholi from 25th September 1972', 11 October 1972. GDA.

<sup>208</sup> 'The mysterious disappearance of AC Administrative Secretary Mr S. P. Oryem', 22 September 1972. GDA.

<sup>209</sup> William Guterridge, *Military Regimes in Africa*, (New York, 1975), p. 157.

<sup>210</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'Edward Rugumayo resigns as minister', 22 February 1973.

<sup>211</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'Kibedi absent, sick', 27 February 1973.

<sup>212</sup> Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed*, p. 61.

<sup>213</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'All ministers given 30 days leave', 28 February 1973.

followed by other senior politicians over the coming years. Their desire to draw international attention to the deaths of their countrymen, and to distance themselves from the violence of the regime, would both play a central part in the dissemination of horrific stories of violence to a western audience. This contributed to the streamlining of a narrative that presented Amin as all-powerful and all-responsible. From then on Amin would appoint civilian ministers only on an ad hoc basis.

As the facade of collaborative government collapsed, Amin leaned ever more heavily on the military for support. But here too dissenting voices were beginning to spread. Uneasy at Amin's changes of course and apparent lack of control over the army and security forces, several of his Defence Council met with him in mid-1973 and urged him to consider standing down. Amin responded by stripping several men of their operational command, and sending others abroad on training. Among those retired was Lieutenant Colonel Musa, who had risen rapidly to prominence after the coup, and now found himself sidelined.<sup>214</sup> One of the other intervening officers, Brigadier Charles Arube, found himself placed on a six-month course in Russia. Intelligence reports suggested that Amin had become increasingly wary of his influence and ambitions.<sup>215</sup> Arube's return to Uganda in 1974 would later trigger a severe intra-military clash. Of the original 'big three' alluded to in post-coup intelligence reports, only Isaac Maliyamungu remained in Amin's confidence. He was rotated from his command in Masaka and placed in charge of the main ordinance depot at Magamaga, further evidence both of the trust the president continued to place in him, and of Amin's increasing fear of the army.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Jan Jergen Joergensen, *Uganda: A Modern History*, (London, 1981) p. 277.

<sup>215</sup> CIA Report on Arube

<sup>216</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, 'Briefs', 1000 GMT, 27 January 1974. Radio.

## February 1973: Insurgents & Public Executions

The regime had first experimented with public displays of force in September 1972, when photos of the casualties and captives of the failed invasion were published in the *Voice of Uganda* newspaper and distributed across the country. Early in 1973, a further shock to Amin's authority and security prompted him to once again use the news media to transmit an even more extensive display of deadly force. Mbembe's theory of necropolitics posits that exercising the power to kill (or to allow to live) can constitute an 'ultimate expression of sovereignty', one that state rulers employ to demonstrate their power, and to establish hierarchies; conditions and out-groups in or against which violence is to be regarded as legitimate.<sup>217</sup> This can include a public, performative dimension, intended to draw the wider population into the process, and convey deterrent messages. A willingness to wield such violence had been one of the political features of the colonial state, and it has since been picked up and employed by some postcolonial elites as well. Amin now sought to use television and radio to amplify the deterrent effects of public violence.

On 23rd January the *Voice of Uganda* announced that a 'sordid' guerrilla plot had been revealed.<sup>218</sup> Numerous fighters were arrested at small camps in south Busoga and Ankole region. Among those arrested were Tom Masaba, a former army captain, and Bitwari Joseph, the former District Commissioner of Bugisu. The ongoing hunt for other guerrillas dominated the front pages of the state-owned newspaper throughout January and February.<sup>219</sup> The identity of the rebel organisation, Yoweri Museveni's 'Front for National Salvation' or FRONASA, was announced on

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<sup>217</sup> Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', pp.11-16.

<sup>218</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'Sordid guerilla plan revealed', 23 January 1973.

<sup>219</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'Guerillas to be executed', 24 January 1973. *Voice of Uganda*, 'Guerillas arrested', 1 February 1973.



February 5th.<sup>220</sup> A Radio Uganda spokesperson laid out the punishment for rebellion in no uncertain terms:

Villages in whose district guerrillas are found will be burned down. Taxi drivers who give guerrillas lifts will be blown up in their cars and house owners hiding them will be blown up in their homes. People hiding guerrillas will lose children and never see them again. Any person whose son is convicted of hiding or feeding guerrillas will not see that son anymore because that son will be dead.<sup>221</sup>

For all the clamour, the resources FRONASA could call upon in 1973 were minimal. Formed in Dar es Salaam in early 1971, the group had co-mingled with the pro-Obote camp in exile. From May 1972 a (very) small number of recruits and weapon caches had been established in camps at Kabale, Atiak, Kampala, and close to several other regional centres. Museveni had visited them on multiple occasions, often disguising himself as a Muslim Ph.D. student. In his biography Museveni claims that FRONASA also had allies in Makerere University, and the Kyambogo Teacher Training college. This fragile network was still in its infancy when it was discovered, numbering well under a hundred fighters in total. Some sources at the time were of the belief that the 'guerrillas' were not combatants at all, but civilians arrested on trumped up charges. This is belied by Museveni's own account of 1973 in his autobiography, in which he confirmed that the men captured in these months were indeed with FRONASA.<sup>222</sup>

FRONASA fighters had fought and died during the failed invasion in September 1972, and with the discovery and destruction of the few cells within Uganda itself, the capacity of the group

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<sup>220</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'London paper reveals more on guerillas', 5 February 1973.

<sup>221</sup> Kasozi, *Social Origins of Violence*, p. 123.

<sup>222</sup> Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed*, p. 72.

to threaten the regime became almost non-existent. Uganda and Tanzania had signed the Mogadishu agreement in October 1972, committing the latter (in theory) to cutting off support for armed exiled groups.<sup>223</sup> Museveni and his remaining colleagues found themselves jailed and harassed by Tanzanian security forces on a regular basis.<sup>224</sup> Deserters from the FRONASA camp in Bunya forest either informed on the operation, or were arrested and interrogated. The outcome was the same; an army crackdown on most of the FRONASA camps, aided by a combination of the ongoing captures of fighters and further betrayal of the organisation by its allies.<sup>225</sup> Ongoing training of a handful of new FRONASA fighters was done far away, in conjunction with FRELIMO in Nachingwea.<sup>226</sup> Many of those involved turned to other forms of employment as they struggled to maintain their families away from home.

The limited scale of insurgent operations in Uganda was not known to Amin and his supporters. In a rushed bid to bring a halt to rebel activity, the Defence Council set about trying those that the army had captured through a military tribunal overseen by one of its members, Lieutenant Colonel Ozo (the Commander at Moroto barracks who was subsequently promoted to the post of Provincial Governor of Mbale). The stumbling block presented by the lack of formal authority for such a tribunal to preside over civilian cases was removed in January 1973 when a decree was passed extending its powers to any civilian deemed to have committed a capital offence.<sup>227</sup> In two sittings, the first on January 23rd and the next on February 4th, a total of 12 men were found guilty of rebel activities:

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Madanjeet Singh, *Culture of the Sepulchre: Idi Amin's Monster Regime*, (New Delhi, 2012), p. 182.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., p.85.

<sup>227</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'Amendment to the Armed Forces Act', 25 January 1973.

At its first sitting on January 23 (1973) the Tribunal sentenced five men to be executed by a firing squad. Four of them, including a former army captain and a former district commissioner, had been captured on the previous day during the storming by troops of a guerrilla training camp in the Busoga district of south-east Uganda, while the fifth, a former policeman, had been arrested for illegally possessing firearms, According to the official account of the trial, one of the accused was said to have made 'curious entries' in his diary, which he could not explain, and another was alleged to have hidden several shotguns and a pistol in his girlfriend's house.<sup>228</sup>

The Defence Council announced the decision to execute those convicted in their home districts 'so that everyone, including his parents, can see'.<sup>229</sup> To further amplify their reach, the executions were also broadcast on Ugandan radio and television. On the 10th February 1973, the 12 men were killed by firing squad in seven different towns. The radio and local soldiers had ordered local civilians to attend, and the state television and press sought to present these crowds as evidence of regime support. Some historians have bought into this narrative: Mutibwa noted that 'It is sad to record that thousands of people voluntarily travelled to these places to witness the executions.'<sup>230</sup> Others have stressed the opposite. Nyeko argued that 'by carrying out these executions in nearly *all* of the country's regions Amin had, by default, merely confirmed the increasingly 'national' character of covert opposition to his government.'<sup>231</sup>

This idea of overwhelming popular support for the executions, or indeed of popular resistance, is undermined by witness accounts like those of Christopher Okello and Frank Masiko,

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<sup>228</sup> 'Violations of Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Uganda', *The International Commission of Jurists*, May 1 1974, p.23.

<sup>229</sup> *DRUM*, April 1973

<sup>230</sup> Mutibwa, *Uganda Since Independence*, p.105.

<sup>231</sup> Balam Nyeko, 'Exile Politics and Resistance to Dictatorship: The Ugandan Anti-Amin Organisations in Zambia, 1972–79'. *African Affairs*, 96:382, (1997), p.105.

both teenagers when they attended executions in Gulu and Kabale respectively. Their recollections capture the surprise and confusion of local populations:

Amin arrested people across Uganda and organised a 'firing squad'. These were across the regions. Two people were shot here in Gulu, Labeja and Oneka. They were just teachers from the villages. They killed them near Taks Centre. I saw it with my own eyes. They put black hoods on them, stood them against the hill and just shot them... the radio had told us to go and watch. A big crowd turned out, we were surprised, people did not really know what a firing squad was. Afterwards it became a no-go area, but we threw leaves there to indicate 'we have buried you.' So people did that. Forensic work now would find the bullets I'm sure.<sup>232</sup>

The army, they shook us. Schools were closed, people were treated badly- they called us collaborators. Bananuka was killed. Executions of men were carried out in public afterwards. The problems were in Mbarara... Kabale was far away, we had no problems. We didn't understand why they were murdering people in our stadium.<sup>233</sup>

The vast majority of violence in the Amin era was not produced for a wider audience. The power to arrest, to 'disappear' civilians, was certainly employed by agents of the regime, but only rarely was this openly alluded to by Amin and his leading supporters. Rather, both arrests and murders of civilians were routinely denied. The distribution of images in September 1972, and the public executions of 1973 constitute an exception to the rule, rather than the norm. They were both born of moments of panic and desperation, and employed in an experimental fashion by the regime in the hope that they might produce greater compliance in the wider population, and deter

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<sup>232</sup> Christopher Oyogo Okello, interviewed in Gulu District, 20 March 2017.

<sup>233</sup> Frank Masiko, interviewed in Kampala, 10 November 2016.

further armed resistance. Indeed, the uncertainty of the regime as to how the executions would be received was evident in Kampala, where the decision was taken at the last minute to execute Badru Semakula on grounds of kondoism, not guerrilla activity.<sup>234</sup> The first public executions to take place in the country's independent history, the regime did not experiment with such tactics again until March 1977.

### Civilian Gatekeepers & Malicious Denunciations

During Amin's first year, violence had largely taken place within the barracks, instigated by soldiers who were at least partially familiar with each other and with their surroundings. From 1972 onwards these same men were seeking to govern on a national scale. This often meant soldiers and security agents were trying to work in environments with which they were entirely unfamiliar. As a result political violence increasingly became a joint production, in which local informants and collaborators were extremely important. Arrests generally took place in and around urban centres, or on main roads, where vehicles could arrive (and escape) at haste. The testimonies of many civilian witnesses to state violence include references to local 'gatekeeper' figures, responsible for informing on their neighbours, and helping to lead the security forces to them.

Much of the time, these informants were themselves drawn from the same previously marginalised networks and communities that Amin was now building his support base from. The formation of such patrimonial linkages is a recurring feature of many postcolonial African regimes. Most urban centres in Uganda at this time had a small Nubian population or enclave of

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<sup>234</sup> A Special Correspondent, 'Uganda under military rule', *Africa Today*, 20:2 (1973), p.17.

some kind, where the descendants of the former slave soldiers were largely occupied in petty trade and low-wage labour. Some men from these communities now seized an opportunity to become useful to the new government (or exploit it for their own ends). The experience of the aforementioned Salim Sebi, the local Nubian from Mbarara who helped lead the soldiers of Simba battalion as they hunted for guerrillas and collaborators in late 1972, demonstrates the importance of these local gatekeepers:

A Muslim and a Nubian, Sebi had lived in Mbarara for as long as anyone could remember, and he was married to a local woman. He was a towering, muscular man; people said he looked very much like Amin... after Amin came to power, Sebi loudly declared that he was a “brother” of the general, in the tribal, not familial, sense. He began working as an informer for the army intelligence service, which suddenly gave him mighty influence.<sup>235</sup>

In turn, local men with links to Sebi exploited his links to the army. Witnesses to the CIDPU in 1974 described how Juveniah Bitareho, a local cattle trader, was owed significant sums of money by a man called Alfred Rutega. Rutega was Sebi’s father-in-law, and on 27 September 1972 he came to Bitareho’s house with two soldiers and took him away.<sup>236</sup>

Sebi is not an exceptional case. In Gulu, a group of men from the Nubian enclave there led by Musa Faraji and Okullu Salim directed the soldiery in their roundups of civilian administrators including Simayo Oryem in September 1972. Oryem’s wife Lucy testified that this was partly an act of revenge against beneficiaries of the previous regime and wider social order, motivated by envy and resentment. She remembers Faraji telling her that “you Acholi you are very proud... but now there is no connection between us and you”. Faraji repossessed her husband’s car, and kept it for

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<sup>235</sup> Rich, *The Teeth May Smile*, p. 171.

<sup>236</sup> 1974 CIDPU, p. 75-77.

several months. As the local men led soldiers through the street they called for 'all those who had been in Gulu High School' to be arrested.<sup>237</sup>

Not all such 'gatekeepers' hailed from the ethnic groups or communities typically associated with Amin. In Aboke, near Apac in northern Uganda, a dispute over a land lease turned violent towards the end of 1972. A local teacher called John Edward Ejura had been seeking to build a new school in the area for sometime, but had always been refused permission by the local community. Ejura had contacts in the Army, and the Military Police garrison at Lira, and in December 1972 he exploited these to his advantage. Soldiers and military policemen came to the nearby village and burned several houses, issuing beatings and arresting several people. Ejura had reportedly told them the locals were 'practicing witchcraft on their children'. Once the area had been cleared he secured a loan with which to build his new school on their land. Ejura's school was still standing years later when the NRM investigation into human rights abuses began; Erifazi Ogwang, himself evicted from the area in the 1970s, gave his testimony in the hope that the local inhabitants might be allowed to use some of the school's land for cultivation, and see it returned to them.<sup>238</sup>

In an environment of such fear and hostility, malicious denunciations became common. Many of those arrested by the army were denounced by people they knew, with ulterior motives for having them removed. Simayo Oryem is believed to have been informed on to the security forces by his assistant, a man called Ramathan who had been his school-mate. Ramathan had become an Assistant Administrative Secretary in the administration immediately after the coup thanks to his links to the regime. He now replaced Oryem as Administrative Secretary.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Lucy Oryem, 1986 CIVHR, pp. 10315-10325. UHRC.

<sup>238</sup> Erigazi Ogwang, 1986 CIVHR, pp 8965-8983. UHRC.

<sup>239</sup> James Nyeko, 1986 CIVHR, pp. 19326-10343. UHRC.

This same pattern replicated itself across the country. Frank Kalimuzo, the Vice-Chancellor of Makerere University, also disappeared in the aftermath of the September invasion. He and Amin had previously enjoyed an entirely amicable relationship, but he had made enemies in the University hierarchy (itself a hot-bed of feuding), and was known to have fallen out with Charles Oboth-Ofumbi, who was now in an influential position as Defence Minister. Andrew Adimola, a former member of the Amin government, believes it was these rivals who informed on Kalimuzo, exploiting a recent trip he had made outside the country to Mombasa to suggest he was collaborating with the external opposition. He recalled meeting with Oboth-Ofumbi in a bar sometime after as he boasted “these people who have been playing with us, where are they now?”<sup>240</sup>

Workplace rivalries could now take on a deadly dimension. On the 18th October 1972 James Bwogi was seized from outside his children’s school, and taken away in a car by four men in military uniform. Bwogi had been employed by Radio Uganda as Producer of Programmes, and travelled extensively overseas. In May 1972 he had become Director of Uganda Television and Radio. His wife Mary searched for him with the help of her children, who had noted down the car licence plate. In her testimony to the 1986 commission, Mary explained that her husband’s promotion had angered several of his colleagues, who had coveted the same position. One man in particular, a Mr Bisase, had written at least one letter to Amin’s Permanent Secretary reporting her husband for poor conduct, and making changes without consulting the rest of the staff.

Some time later rumours had circulated that Bwogi was trying to steal government secrets for Obote, and to ‘confuse the Baganda’. Bwogi’s role in the coverage of the Kabaka’s burial ceremony, during which a young Ronald Mutebi had been taken around his studio, was being

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<sup>240</sup> Andrew Adimola, 1986 CIVHR, p. 10387-10388. UHRC.



touted as evidence of his support for the restoration of the kingdoms. Bwogi had been warned of these rumours and was trying to fix an appointment with Amin in the days before his arrest.

William Naburi, a cabinet member with ties to the Bwogi family, met with Amin on Mary's behalf in a bid to trace and rescue James, but Amin is alleged to have told him that numerous letters had been sent to the security forces incriminating him, and that there was nothing he could do. James Bwogi died in custody.<sup>241</sup>

The regime's dependence on local informants and vulnerability to malicious denunciations can both be understood as consequences of its narrow support base, political inexperience, and lack of localised knowledge. This exacerbated the longer-running historical limitations on Ugandan state power and reach. Fearful and unprepared soldiers and security agents with a licence to employ deadly force were now being drawn into localised disputes across the country, creating (at surface level) an apparently random and arbitrary pattern of violence. The extension of violence against the civilian elite, so many of them in key posts within the national bureaucracy, generated further disconnection between the regime and events on the ground. In practice this served to greatly entrench these same limitations, and create even more space for manipulative and exploitative agency at the local level.

### Unravelling Institutions

The collapse in military discipline set in motion even before the coup continued almost unabated over this period. Some soldiers were emboldened to exploit their newfound dominance, employing violence for their own ends. There were further isolated incidents of violence against soldiers and

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<sup>241</sup> Mary Bwogi, 1986 CIVHR, pp. 10553- 10568. UHRC.

civilians in and around army barracks, and the police came under increasing attack from the army. In a letter to the OAU, Obote claimed that that this violence was being directed by Amin himself, 'periodic massacres', inflicted by squads acting 'precisely according to Amin's directives'.<sup>242</sup> This somewhat oversimplifies the picture. Amin certainly did little to help the situation with his style of rule. He encouraged soldiers and security agents to use their initiative (and force) in detecting and arresting 'trouble makers', and his regular claims to be the target of a range of external plots can only have contributed to a climate of fear and hostility.<sup>243</sup> But much of what was happening was the result of the earlier destruction of the existing army command, and the relative freedom of action for the (pro-Amin) soldiery that this had generated. It was the result of a *lack* of central control.

Direct targeting of civilians by the regime seems to have died down after the initial wave of violence that followed the September invasion, but individual 'disappearances' and murders continued. Much like the earlier intra-military violence, the regime's earlier willingness to sanction deadly force now emboldened further violent action by opportunistic individuals in the security forces. These echoic killings copied the style and rhetoric of previous arrests, as individuals were abducted in vehicles from their homes, places of work, or in transit. There was a disproportionate targeting of wealthy individuals. Stephen Lubega, the manager of Nile Hotel in Kampala, disappeared after dropping his fiancé to college on the 28th November 1973.<sup>244</sup> Samuel Kasada, a civil engineer, was assaulted at his house by soldiers who claimed to be searching for guns, but instead stole his car. Kasada was escorted away and 'vanished'.<sup>245</sup> The seizure of cars, and use of violence against civilians driving them, became especially common and merits

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<sup>242</sup> Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Africa*, p. 302-303.

<sup>243</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'Arrest trouble makers', January 26 1973. *Voice of Uganda*, 'An imperialist assassination plot disclosed', January 12 1973.

<sup>244</sup> 1974 CIDPU, pp. 46-47.

<sup>245</sup> 1974 CIDPU, pp. 73-74.

consideration. This was partly about economic gain, but it was also a recurring attempt by soldiers to seize for themselves an especially potent symbol of postcolonial prosperity and status.

At Tororo, the army unit that had been placed under the control of Lieutenant Colonel Toloko after the coup was proving particularly unruly. In January 1972 Charles Mwaka, a soldier at the barracks, disappeared. It seems likely he was killed in the barracks, but when his family investigated both Toloko and Major Doka, another newly appointed senior officer, denied all knowledge of Mwaka's whereabouts.<sup>246</sup> Weeks later there was a dispute at the nearby Rock Hotel.<sup>247</sup> Toloko and several soldiers were drinking when they got into an argument with the hotel manager about their bill. The District Commissioner of Bukedi, Everest Mulekezi, was also in the hotel and he attempted to intervene. Toloko flew into a rage and had both men arrested by his soldiers. Their bodies were later found in the Malaba river.<sup>248</sup> There was trouble in Soroti at around the same time. Soldiers and agents of the recently formed PSU raided the town and killed multiple civilians in February 1972, in an 'anti-kondo' operation. This seems to have been triggered locally, led and carried out by two captains, Ousi and Byakwada.<sup>249</sup>

The regime took some steps to try and restore discipline, but it did so in typically arbitrary and inconsistent fashion. Lt. Col. Toloko was recalled from his post in Tororo and placed under observation in Kampala.<sup>250</sup> Some respondents in West Nile believe this was because of his Christian faith, and it has also been suggested his dismissal constituted an attack on 'the Madi' in

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<sup>246</sup> 1974 CIDPU, p. 43.

<sup>247</sup> 'Recent incidents in Uganda: the implications. secret report by S Y Dawbarn of the EAD. 20/03/1972. FCO 31/1327 UKNA.

<sup>248</sup> 1974 CIDPU, pp. 54-57.

<sup>249</sup> 'Trouble at Soroti' British High Commission to EAD, 7 March 1972, FCO 89/7 UKNA.

<sup>250</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'Officer dismissed for bad behaviour', January 3 1973.

the army.<sup>251</sup> It seems much more likely to have been the result of his inept command and murder of civilians at Tororo. Subsequently, Toloko was arrested by Brigadier Marella's Military Police, and killed in Makindye.<sup>252</sup> A Lieutenant Atanansio was dismissed in the same period for beating a prison officer. Amin had sent Ernest Oryema to investigate the Soroti incident. When investigations were concluded, Amin suspended Lt. Col. William Ndahendikire, the CO of the 1st Infantry Brigade at Mbale, the DC of Teso and the acting OC of the Police. None of these men seem to have been directly involved in what had happened, and Ndahendikire's removal seems to have been more about seizing an opportunity to remove one of the remaining senior officers from before the coup.

Omara-Otunnu has argued that Amin's lax control of the army was popular with the soldiery, and maintained him in power. This may have been true for some soldiers, but there were others who were deeply distressed by the deteriorating situation.<sup>253</sup> Acholi and Langi senior officers may have been removed, but there were now increasing tensions between the 'old guard' of the Ugandan Army and the newly promoted 'plateau' of Amin supporters. Concerns over the large numbers of new and inexperienced army recruits, the ongoing spread of violence, the new and unaccountable security units, and the collapse in professional standards within the military were all sore points. One complainant was Captain Jackson Avudria, a Lugbara who had initially supported the coup, but had rapidly become disillusioned with the course of events since. When a large number of new soldiers were passed out without any training he is said to have stormed out

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<sup>251</sup> Alfred Enguo Eguma, interviewed in Arua, 11 December 2016. Amin certainly did question the discipline of Madi soldiers (blaming their conduct on 'excessive drinking') when he announced the dismissal of Lt. Atanansio and Lt. Col. Toloko, but there is nothing to suggest a widespread 'purge' took place.

<sup>252</sup> Masimo Olukwa Kenyi, 1986 CIVHR, p. 5772. UHRC.

<sup>253</sup> Omara-Otunnu, *Politics and the Military in Uganda*, p. 129.

of a group photo in disgust. On the 9 June 1972 he was ambushed on his way home from the Nile Hotel in Jinja by soldiers, and disappeared.<sup>254</sup>

The only formalised proceedings took place when a staff sergeant in the air and sea battalion at Tororo, Arkanjero Baru, was put on trial for the murders of two lieutenants, one of which was a Kenyan pilot. This was prosecuted under the terms of the Armed Forces Act, and was effectively a court martial. Baru defended himself on the grounds that there had been considerable fear and paranoia about guerrilla activities in Tororo at the time, which had led to him panicking and shooting a man who was acting suspiciously in a bar.<sup>255</sup> Baru was convicted and executed, and Amin introduced an amendment to the Armed Forces Act the following day that would allow him to establish military tribunal by decree in future.<sup>256</sup>

These intra-military tensions came to a head in March 1974, when an abortive coup attempt was launched by Brigadier Charles Arube and Lt. Col. Elly Aseni. The two Kakwa officers tried to rally support for an attack on the 'foreign elements' guiding Amin amongst soldiers at the Malire Mechanised regiment, and attacked the Military Police base at Makindye Prison and the PSU headquarters at Naguru, hunting for Hussein Marella and Ali Towilli.<sup>257</sup> Arube may well have had a vested interest in the uprising; his influence with Amin had been in steady decline since July 1971, and Marella had supplanted him as Chief of Staff whilst he was on a training placement in Russia. He had been harbouring political ambitions of his own for some time.<sup>258</sup> Regardless, the

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<sup>254</sup> 1974 CIDPU, pp. 195-200.

<sup>255</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'Aim was not to shoot anybody', 18 January 1973.

<sup>256</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'Plea for mercy as soldier is convicted', 24 January 1973. *Voice of Uganda*, 'Amendment to the Armed Forces Act', 25 January 1973. Ravenhill, 'Military rule in Uganda', p. 243.

<sup>257</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, 'Army officer commits suicide', 1700 GMT 24 March 1974. Radio.

<sup>258</sup> Sam Odama, interviewed in Arua District, 9 December 2016.

mutiny acted as a focal point for wider anxieties in the military about the break-down of discipline, and the influence of Nubians and low-ranking men of foreign origin like Marella, Towilli, and Maliyamungu. The recent murder of Michael Ondoga, a Lugbara who had been Amin's Foreign Minister, had angered a number of the Lugbara soldiery who now joined in the coup.

The uprising was a military failure, as the soldiers failed to capture their intended targets, or to mobilise adequate support. Arube himself was shot during the fighting, and died from his injuries. Amin rather dramatically interceded when he confronted men of the Malire regiment at the Command Post (in some versions he was still in his pyjamas), promising concessions and promotions. This seems to have helped to defuse the situation. The aftermath is noteworthy for the entirely reconciliatory and concessionary manner in which it was handled. Attempts by Amin to prosecute Elly Aseni, the surviving coup-organiser, failed when soldiers demanded his release, and reiterated their desire for Brigadier Marella's dismissal.<sup>259</sup> Despite his own reluctance, Amin acquiesced to these demands. Marella returned to Sudan, taking a convoy of spoils with him. New personnel were appointed at Makindye, and some efforts were made to curtail the violence being implemented by staff their against their detainees.<sup>260</sup> In a further conciliatory move, Amin appointed Mustapha Adrisi as his new Chief of Staff. Adrisi was a former KAR soldier like Amin himself, and particularly popular with the Lugbara soldiery.<sup>261</sup> In the short-term, the Arube uprising had pushed Amin into some small concessions. But it also demonstrates how fragmented the Ugandan Army was at this stage, and how tenuous Amin's own control over it continued to be.

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<sup>259</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, 'Military tribunal on March mutiny begins'. 1700 GMT 4 June 1974. Radio.

<sup>260</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, 'Amin address defence council, to visit mideast', 1700 GMT, May 1974. Radio.

<sup>261</sup> Mustapha Adrisi, 1986 CIVHR, p.44. UHRC.

### Domestic Backlash & the 1974 Inquiry: An Alternative Pathway?

There has been a tendency to regard these 'middle years' of the regime after early popularity and collaborative government had broken down, but before the more obvious and well-documented signs of internal conflict and collapse appeared in the later 1970s, as a period of relative state hegemony. This narrative was shaped heavily by the over-optimistic proclamations of Amin himself, but also by external observers and Ugandan refugees and dissidents from outside the country that cast the regime as 'totalitarian', all-seeing and all-knowing, riding rough-shod over a civilian population that did not dare to speak out against what was going on.

It is certainly true that *armed* resistance to the military lacked any real focal point or organisation after the failed 1972 invasion and the destruction of FRONASA. But a re-examination of the historical record demonstrates that Amin was already in a far more vulnerable position internally than is often realised. There was at least a degree of open civilian discontent and criticism of the military. Much of this criticism centred on challenging the regime to uphold its own earlier promises of order and an end to abuses against civilians. Perhaps even more striking were the hoops that the military jumped through in these years in a bid to present itself as responsive to these civilian concerns, and to try to distance itself from ongoing violence. However questionable their intentions, the popular engagement of civilians with the process ensured that this was not mere theatre. Neither was it purely an attempt to appease international observers.

There were warnings from the Ugandan churches. Bishops from the north led by Janani Luwum had written to Amin in the wake of the coup, expressing their concerns about the deaths and disappearances of Acholi and Langi soldiers. The expulsion of the Ugandan Asians had also

met with criticism- Emmanuel Nsubuga publicly distancing himself from false claims in the *Uganda Argus* that he had endorsed the decision. By 1973 influential bishops were meeting regularly with Amin and counselling him to establish greater control over the army and take action against civilian disappearances.<sup>262</sup> Amin's decision to send the army back to barracks in 1973 was well received. Critical articles in the *Voice of Uganda* reprimanded the churches in response.<sup>263</sup> In 1975, a series of memoranda spearheaded by Nsubuga and Luwum criticised the government for its expulsion of Catholic priests and expressed concerns about ongoing human rights abuses.<sup>264</sup> The much-storied clash between Amin and Luwum in 1977 should be seen in light of these longer-running tensions between church and state.

The government had also come under fire from the press. The most striking condemnation of state violence had appeared in the pages of *Munno*, a popular Catholic newspaper edited by Father Clement Kiggundu. Kiggundu had collaborated with the widows of murdered soldiers and civilians to try to publicise what was happening. His murder in January 1973 was regarded as further confirmation that the regime was actively targeting civilian political opponents. Amin's Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Major Juma Oris, railed routinely against the 'distorting' stories published in *Munno* and *Taifa Empya*, another Luganda newspaper.<sup>265</sup> It has often been suggested that state pressure on the media made the regime impervious to criticism, but even the *Voice of Uganda* carried a range of stories throughout this period that quite clearly demonstrated the ongoing problems Amin and the military were facing. Whether through tales of confusion at road-blocks, terrified businessmen in Kampala, or the ongoing warnings about 'confusing agents' and 'false officers', the supposedly pro-Amin paper did little to convey a sense

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<sup>262</sup> J.J. Carney, 'The politics of ecumenism in Uganda, 1962-1986.', *Church History*, 86:3 (2017), p. 784.

<sup>263</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'Catholic Church Leaders are Cautioned.', 3 February 1973.

<sup>264</sup> Carney, 'The Politics of Ecumenism', p. 784.

<sup>265</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, 'Minister gives 'last warning' to independent newspapers', 1000 GMT 1 July 1974. Radio.



of order and progress. One story from February 1973 condemned the military for interference in legal cases:

The meeting was informed of widespread interference with the course of justice by the members of the Security Force, District Commissioners and Chiefs. During the discussions, cases were cited where members of the Security Forces turn up in court and demand that someone be released, or that someone be sent to jail or that someone be prosecuted.<sup>266</sup>

Protest at the deteriorating situation began to express itself in a variety of ways around the country. At a national women's summit in Kampala in November 1972, Theresa Mulindwa interrupted the scheduled talk to state that women were 'tired of being widows without graves.'<sup>267</sup> In Acholiland, scarred by the violence inflicted on the local population after the coup and the September invasion, civilians began to disengage from urban centres. Margaret Lamony remembers her family spending ever-increasing amounts of time in the bush, avoiding the towns where 'you felt they could reach you at any time'. They started to visit Gulu only sparingly, to get essential supplies.<sup>268</sup> Cotton production in the region nosedived, as civilians disengaged from doing business with the state.<sup>269</sup>

On 4 June 1974, Amin announced a commission of inquiry to investigate the 'disappearances'. This was the second time such an undertaking had been promised in just over a year- a smaller investigation had hurriedly blamed the disappearances of 85 prominent citizens on Obote in January 1973. The 1974 commission is generally regarded as a farce. Quinn asserts that it

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<sup>266</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'Law men's memorandum to the President.', 20 February 1973.

<sup>267</sup> Decker, *In Idi Amin's Shadow*, p. 117.

<sup>268</sup> Margaret Lamony, interviewed in Gulu District, 27 March 2017.

<sup>269</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'Drop in yield of cotton dismays.', 6 March 1976. *Voice of Uganda*, 'Walusansa warns chiefs on cotton.', 6 March 1976.

‘failed to meet its mandate or uncover any truth’.<sup>270</sup> Decker has noted that the decision came on the same day as a damning report about rights abuses in the country from the International Commission of Jurists, and suggests we should regard it as ‘a fine performance of political theatre.’<sup>271</sup> International pressure was doubtless important, and this may indeed have constituted another ploy in the regime’s strategies of extraversion.

However, the decision to establish a commission should also be seen in the light of the domestic discontent and failed mutiny that had immediately preceded it. Amin had promised another investigation as early as the 26th April 1974, after receiving a delegation of senior police officers who had voiced their concerns to him.<sup>272</sup> He was praised by Archbishop Sabiiti for responding to their wishes when the two men met days later.<sup>273</sup> Similarly the idea that Amin saw the commission as nothing more than a distraction also merits scrutiny. The regime did genuinely distinguish between casualties it regarded as necessary and acceptable (mostly prompted by the takeover, and the failed September invasion), and those illegitimate killings that took place without state sanction. Quite how the commission was to draw neat lines between such cases is unclear, but that is not to say that it was not hoped that it might. Amin appointed the British-born Justice Mohamed Saied as chair, supported by Stephen Kefulumya and A. Esau of the police, and Captain Haruna Salim of the SRC.<sup>274</sup> They eventually delivered their 800-page report on 13 June 1975.

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<sup>270</sup> Joanna Quinn, *The Politics of Acknowledgement: Truth Commissions in Uganda and Haiti*, (Vancouver, 2010), p. 49.

<sup>271</sup> Decker, *In Idi Amin’s Shadow*, p. 118.

<sup>272</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, ‘Amin orders inquiry into peoples’ disappearances’, 1700 GMT. 26 April 1974. Radio.

<sup>273</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, ‘Amin receives, talks with Archbishop Sabiiti’, 1900 GMT. 29 April 1974. Radio.

<sup>274</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, ‘Decree establishing inquiry commission’, 1000 GMT 30 July 1974. Radio.

Whatever the regime's intentions for the commission, there was a degree of genuine popular engagement with it from the moment investigations began.<sup>275</sup> In addition to the initial hearings in Kampala, dozens of civilians on the periphery of the country in Kitgum, Lira, Gulu, Mbarara, and Fort Portal came forwards to report the disappearances of friends and family. 545 witnesses gave testimony, a significant proportion of them women.<sup>276</sup> This was the moment in which the bereaved wives of Acholi and Langi soldiers murdered at barracks, and the families of civilians dragged from their homes or places of work by unknown uniformed assailants could speak the truth, in the hope that the state might respond. As she testified on the disappearance of her husband, Juliet Aroma told the commission that 'I have waited for the case for a long time. That is why I came.'<sup>277</sup>

The investigations constituted one of the first forums in which civilians were able to directly confront members of the armed forces and security units about their behaviour. Many of the soldiers named by civilian witnesses were forced into hastily improvised alibis and denials. A soldier from Simba battalion insisted that witness testimonies of the massacres at Mbarara in June and July 1971 constituted 'a pack of lies'.<sup>278</sup> Other soldiers from Simba battalion, including Lt. Col. Ali Fadhul, gave such conflicting testimonies that Justice Saied concluded that it 'makes it extremely hard, if not impossible, to believe their denials... One would be struck by the incredible dissimilarity of the two versions'.<sup>279</sup> Lucy Oryem appeared before the commission in Kampala to report Simayo Oryem's 'disappearance' in Gulu, and Justice Saied had Musa Faraji brought south

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<sup>275</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, 'Commission of inquiry begins work', 1000 GMT. 1 July 1974. Radio.

<sup>276</sup> Decker, 'A gendered history of disappearance'.

<sup>277</sup> 1974 CIDPU, p. 570.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 621.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 655.

to testify about his alleged role in leading the soldiers to him. Faraji denied everything, and pretended to feel dizzy in order to avoid having to testify further.<sup>280</sup>

The limitations of data collected under the watchful eyes of soldiers and security agents that represented a regime that was known to be killing civilians are self-evident. However, in a period defined by a scarcity of reliable information and statistics it seems remiss not to at least comment on the data that the 1974 investigations collated. Whilst only ever representing a modest sample of the population and covering a small percentage of the total fatalities, the data nonetheless corroborates certain trends reported elsewhere in the primary record:

Month	1971	1972	1973	1974	Total
January	22	7	10	3	42
February	8	2	8	2	20
March	13	0	1	1	15
April	12	0	1	1	14
May	1	1	0	2	4
June	11	6	3	1	21
July	35	5	0		40
August	2	5	14		21
September	1	67	4		72
October	1	33	10		44
November	1	4	3		8
December	2	4	1		7
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>308</b>

**Figure 1:** the 308 ‘disappearances’ as reported to the 1974 investigations, and the months in which they ‘went missing’. Note the ‘spikes’ immediately after the coup, during the July violence of

<sup>280</sup> Lucy Oryem, 1986 CIVHR, pp. 10322-10324. UHRC.

1971, and in the aftermath of the failed September 1972 invasion. The data adds further support against the idea that the pattern of violence in Amin's first years in power was undifferentiated and linear.<sup>281</sup>

Breakdown of Cases by Profession	
Soldiers	93
Policemen	49
Prison Staff	13
Others	153
<b>Total</b>	<b>308</b>

**Figure 2:** 'missing persons', as reported to the 1974 investigations, by profession.<sup>282</sup> This serves to confirm both the significant numbers of soldiers killed during the consolidation of the regime, and the attendant violence of the army against the police force.

Traced To:	Civilians	Police Staff	Prison Staff	Soldiers	Total
Army	54	12	1	3	70
Military Police	16	14	9	0	39
PSU	4	11	0	0	15
Army Personnel	0	0	0	87	87
Fled Country	2	0	2	0	4
Guerillas	14	0	0	0	14
Unknown	61	12	1	3	77
GSU	2	0	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>308</b>

<sup>281</sup> CIDPU.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

**Figure 3:** organisations identified by witnesses to the 1974 investigations as being in some way responsible for each of the 308 ‘disappearances’. The Ugandan Army, PSU and Military police are heavily implicated in many cases. The SRC is a notable absence from the data- possibly due to pressure on the commissioners and the presence of SRC Captain Haruna Salim during the investigations.<sup>283</sup>

The data gathered by the investigators completely undermined the excuses offered by Amin since his seizure of power. Of the 308 ‘disappeared’ that the commissioners heard testimonies about, only a minuscule number had been found to have fled the country, or been linked to the activities of the GSU or otherwise unknown ‘guerillas’. By contrast, the forces of the regime were named in a large number of cases. This is all the more remarkable when one considers the environment of fear and uncertainty in which civilians were giving testimony, and the immense personal risks they shouldered in speaking up. Justice Saied was entirely convinced as to the integrity of these civilian testimonies:

We believe the evidence given by the simple, straight forward and unsophisticated civilian witnesses, women and young men, whose husbands and fathers disappeared, some in front of their eyes and they could do nothing to keep them back. We are of the opinion that such witnesses, knowing that their kith and kin were snatched from them for ever and are not going to come back, no matter what they no say or do, will speak the truth and only the truth.<sup>284</sup>

The commissioners had struggled to produce their report in the face of scarce resources and obstructive soldiers. They understood their role as a preliminary investigation, and included a

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., p. 657.

long list of cases to follow up with a mind to holding future trials. In their concluding remarks they noted:

We lament the general paucity of evidence in the majority of cases which made our task much more difficult. In other cases, where the clues led to any particular government institution in whose custody the subject was last seen or heard of, the difficulty quite obviously was about the identity of the person who might have been responsible for either ordering the unlawful disposal or the identity of the actual person who carried out such illegal orders for such disposal of the subject.<sup>285</sup>

Nonetheless, the finished report also offered a series of recommendations for improving the situation in the country, and preventing further disappearances. These included suggestions for restoring the effectiveness of the police:

Everything possible must be done to re-organize the Police Force with special emphasis upon restoring morale and confidence within the Force and removing any impression of a 'Big Brother' watching it all the time, to enable it to execute its statutory functions and duties efficiently without fear or favour from any quarter.<sup>286</sup>

no office, no matter what his rank or standing in the Police Force, should arrest anybody else within the Force on unfounded allegations or rumour-mongering.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., p.782.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., p.799.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., p.800.

The work of the CID, which is of vital importance in investigating cases, collecting evidence and bringing offenders to justice, should not be interfered or tampered with by any officer who is not concerned with the CID. We have in mind particularly the activities of the PSU which calls for files, releases exhibits and deals with suspects in contravention of the law.<sup>288</sup>

There was criticism of the PSU, for routinely failing to record details of its operations, for interfering with the work of the police, and for regularly transferring and arresting subjects without notice or warning. The commissioners suggested that it 'should be restricted in its activities solely to combating kondoism and no more', and advised its subordination to the rest of the Police Force.<sup>289</sup> There was similar criticism of the Military Police for regularly overstepping its boundaries and assigned functions. Crash programmes in legal training across the army, police, and other state units were recommended. The commission also noted that

'High ranking Military Officers are also bound by the law and they too should strictly comply with all these provisions when arresting or ordering the arrest of anyone.'<sup>290</sup>

The 1974 investigation merits recognition as more than a piece of 'political theatre'. It was a 'what might have been' moment in the history of the Amin regime, an alternative pathway that ultimately went unexplored. This was a window, however slim, for the president and those around him to engage in meaningful dialogue with the civilian population, and to make extensive changes. The popular response to the commission had been significant, and there was sufficient evidence in the testimonies that Justice Saied and his assistants had collected to dismiss and

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., p.801.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid. p.805.



investigate several of the leading perpetrators of violence in Uganda, and to overhaul the staff of the domestic security units. The suggestions for clarification of those same security units' duties and the bolstering of the police were practical and would have been easy enough to implement. Acting in a meaningful fashion on the findings of the report may have bolstered Amin's domestic legitimacy.

Justice Saied met with Amin, Charles Oboth-Ofumbi, and the chief justice, Mr Justice Wambuzi at the old command post in June 1975 to hand over the finished report.<sup>291</sup> He denounced Ali Towilli, Kassim Obura, Juma Ali, and multiple other army officers, but stated that 'there is not even the remotest suggestion that President Amin directed the disappearance of any person or the annihilation of an ethnic group of persons'.<sup>292</sup> In turn, Amin promised Saied that all of those alleged to be involved in the disappearances were to face a court of law.

Ultimately the proposals were largely ignored. Amin concluded that the report demonstrated once and for all that 'Uganda observed the rule of law, respected human dignity and tried in all ways to protect the lives of the people'.<sup>293</sup> The report itself was never published. Whether Amin read it, or had it read, seems debatable. Some of the claims he continued to make even as he was presented with the evidence that had been collected ran directly counter to Saied's findings.<sup>294</sup> The president seems to have preferred his own interpretation of events to that offered by the commission. There were some attempts at reform and legal training within state

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<sup>291</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, 'Commission of inquiry returns report on disappearances', 1700 GMT, 25 June 1975. Radio.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>293</sup> Decker, *In Idi Amin's Shadow*, p.119.

<sup>294</sup> 'Commission of inquiry returns report on disappearances', Radio. Amin claimed that most of the killings happened in 1971, and blamed this on the chaos of the takeover. The data compiled by Saied points to a greater number of disappearances in 1972, after Amin was already consolidated in power.

institutions in the years that followed, but the police force was not strengthened, and only two of the recommended follow-up investigations were conducted.

Most telling of all was Amin's treatment of Major Juma Ali, named in the investigations and again by Justice Saied himself during his handover of the report. Ali had largely been out of the public eye since he was named as the man responsible for the deaths of Stroh and Siedle in June 1971. In the face of still more allegations against him, Amin now opted to promote him into the plateau of lieutenant colonels, and placed him *in charge* of a military tribunal that he tasked with trying Ali Towilli and Kassim Obura. Of the other junior soldiers implicated in the investigations, Amin said 'their cases will be dealt with later'.<sup>295</sup> The trial was to take place the following morning in Bombo, at the Malire regiment. If ever there was a moment that showed where Amin's priorities lay, and the stock he put in formal process, it was this. The tribunal sat, Obura walked entirely free, and Towilli was sidelined from his role for about 10 months before being reinstated as a senior assistant police commissioner in July 1976.<sup>296</sup> Amin had opted to protect his inner circle at the expense of the investigations. Cases like that of Lucy Oryem and Musa Faraji were dropped by the police, who feared to get too close to anything that seemed to lead back to the regime.<sup>297</sup>

Understanding why Amin took this course of action requires consideration of several factors, that amounted to a lack of political will to engage with the findings in a meaningful way. Quinn asserts in her own analysis of the CIVHR that 'truth commissions do not work in a

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<sup>295</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, 'Amin prepares for trial of senior security officers', 1400 GMT 27 June 1975. Radio.

<sup>296</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, 'Former assistant police commissioner reinstated', 1700 GMT 12 July 1976. Radio. Amin references Towilli's role as a go-between for the police in the Defence Council, which rather confirms his influence within the inner circle of the regime.

<sup>297</sup> Lucy Oryem, 1986 CIVHR, p. 10323. UHRC.

vacuum'.<sup>298</sup> They are subject to prevailing political conditions, constraints, and the perceived interests of a range of political actors. The commissioners of the CIVHR later learned this for themselves during their eight years of investigations into Uganda's former governments. Even though the vast majority of the actors being investigated were not associated with the core strength of the ruling NRM, Museveni's ongoing attempts to build a broader support base in the country necessitated the negotiation of compromises and amnesties with former combatants and soldiers, including men who had occupied senior positions throughout the Amin regime. In many cases this meant that whatever 'truths' the CIVHR had discovered had to be shelved in favour of the short-term demands of peace and stability, as Duncan Laki found out when he took Major Yusuf Gowon to court for his fathers' death, only for Museveni to intervene directly to bring the proceedings to an end and have Gowon freed. Achieving a balance between the competing demands of peace and justice with comparatively scant resources to call upon has been a recurring struggle for truth commissions in African settings.<sup>299</sup>

Though it was established in a far more ad hoc manner, and with significantly less regime interest or support, in many ways the CIDPU was no different. Amin was still loyal to, and heavily dependent on, the soldiers who had placed him in power, many of whom were named in the investigations. It had taken an armed uprising to push him into exiling Brigadier Marella, and even then he had almost refused. He had lost the veneer of legitimacy that civilian heavyweights like Wanume Kibedi had offered him, and he had already dispensed with some key military allies in Ocima, Musa and Arube. Prosecuting more of his key supporters carried with it the very real risk of prompting another armed attempt to remove him. His cautious handling of the Arube mutineers stands as further evidence of his fear to move against his soldiery. Trying Towilli and Obura carried less political risk; both PSU men were policemen. This partly explains why they were

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<sup>298</sup> Quinn, *The Politics of Acknowledgement*, p. 49-51.

<sup>299</sup> Tim Murithi (ed.), *The Politics of Transitional Justice in the Great Lakes Region of Africa*, (Auckland Park, 2016.)

briefly investigated, the 'fall guys' for the regime, though they too were ultimately protected by their links to the President. The Nubian/West Nile core of the army was the real source of Amin's power and authority, and there were no obvious alternatives, especially since the purges of civilians in 1972. Prosecuting even a few of his supporters in detail might have meant their naming him in a court of law as being responsible for their actions, or those of their units. In the end, the commission was indeed treated as little more than a morality play, intended to demonstrate responsiveness to the outside world, and to temporarily quell domestic concerns. With such a fragile and volatile support base, acting on the information it unearthed in any concerted way proved too much of a political risk for Amin to take. Retributive justice was not served, though a degree of peace was, for the time being, maintained.

### Conclusion

By 1975 Amin's promises to prevent further insecurity had long since rung hollow. The political vulnerability of the regime had driven it into unleashing unprecedented violence against Ugandan civilians, prompted by the external shocks to its power levelled against it by the invasion of Kikosi Maalum and the discovery of FRONASA. Like the earlier spread of intra-military violence, this was a reactive and bilateral process, rather than a preconceived plan. In the south-west, army reprisals were conducted without obvious central direction, and a diverse range of strategies were employed by actors at the local level. The selective targeting of a range of civilian administrators across the country by the security forces that took place in tandem was more coordinated, and may have been an opportunistic strike against those who might conceivably have supplanted Amin and his core supporters in government. It signalled the end to any notion of the army voluntarily relinquishing power.

Two characteristics of violent practice under the Amin regime emerged in these years; the selective 'picking' of individual civilians by soldiers or security agents in vehicles, and the implementation of military tribunals with the power to sanction executions. The first soon became common practice in the country, while the latter was used only sparingly, in an effort to deter further guerrilla activity after the discovery of FRONASA. Although the most dramatic 'spike' of violence took place in the immediate aftermath of the September 1972 invasion, there was a continued escalation of violence at the local level. This use of force had the effect of temporarily securing Amin's power, and that of the military, as members of the postcolonial civilian elite fled the country or withdrew from political life. In the long run it damaged his credibility and his government's capacity to function.

There were still considerable limitations to the knowledge on which Uganda's new rulers could draw in identifying and eliminating political opponents. As a result, violence became a joint production at the local level, in which local 'gatekeepers' and informants were crucial. This gave rise to new power dynamics, and a rise of malicious denunciations, as local actors sought to exploit the regime's weaknesses for their own purposes. In much the same way the extension of violence had emboldened the army and security forces, who acted with increasing impunity, contributing to a further deterioration in discipline.

Contrary to many accounts of the period, violence did not go entirely uncontested. Amin was not a 'lion rampant', able to act with complete impunity. Indeed, the very use of such secretive 'disappearance' tactics points to the weakness and vulnerability of the regime, rather than its strength. The ongoing spread of violence caused serious discontent amongst some of Amin's key military supporters, culminating in the Arube uprising in March 1974. Amin's delicate handling of the mutineers demonstrates both his willingness to engage in dialogue with his soldiery, and his

fear to punish those on whom his power rested. Civilian unrest prompted Amin to announce the 1974 CIDPU, which offered an opportunity for the regime to make itself more accountable, and to take steps against declining institutional standards. Ultimately it opted instead to protect its key supporters in denial of the evidence collected against them. Key concerns went unaddressed, and continued to create serious systemic problems in the final years of Amin's rule.

### 3. Order of a Kind: Violence and Governance in Uganda, 1975-1979

This chapter explores the evolution of state violence in the final years of Amin's regime. In many ways this period saw the continuation and/or reappearance of earlier trends. Despite signs the domestic political situation was generally improving in 1975, Amin's fixation with establishing a particular vision of domestic order, and the army's hostility towards perceived threats to itself saw the government drawn into a series of new localised conflicts with the civilian population.

Ongoing efforts to manage the consequences of the 'Economic War' led to the increasing use of state-sanctioned violence against a range of freshly defined 'economic criminals', including an extremely ineffective war on the illegal coffee-smuggling trade known as *magendo*. This prompted the creation of the Economic Crimes Tribunal (ECT), an experiment in court justice as administered by the military itself. In Kampala, agents of the regime clashed intermittently with various elements of Ugandan civil society, sending soldiers onto the campus at Makerere University in 1976, banning Uganda's largest football club in 1977, and launching violence against playwrights and bishops. This was the work of an anxious and reactive government, preoccupied with managing and regulating public life, and relying heavily on force to respond to the many threats it perceived to itself and to societal order.

At the political centre, the same tensions inherent in the Amin regime since its inception continued to produce intermittent conflict. It was Amin's efforts to manage these divisions that inadvertently prompted a border war with Nyerere's Tanzania in 1978. The war with Tanzania revealed the Ugandan army for what it had become, a loosely organised coalition of armed entrepreneurs with very little cohesion. Amin was defeated and ousted faster than anybody had believed to be possible. The political ramifications of the invasion for Uganda were far-reaching. The complete collapse of the army, and the spread of weapons into the civilian population created

a sudden and violent collapse of order and security in the country. There was now widespread looting, and large-scale retaliatory violence by local populations against their ousted rulers. This was the inheritance of Uganda's civilian elite as it sought to re-establish itself in government in the wake of Amin's fall.

Examining the deleterious short-term impact of the Tanzanian war and Amin's fall on Uganda necessitates consideration of two uncomfortable truths. First, for all its excesses and abuses, Amin's regime had nonetheless maintained a degree of social and political order in the country that soon proved elusive for his successors. Second, it was an unexpected military conflict with another state that had ultimately ousted him; not a popular domestic uprising, nor the systemic failings of his government, nor the internal political violence that had preceded the war with Tanzania. Were it not for the chain of events that sparked the border war with Nyerere, it is plausible that Amin could have ruled for years to come.

#### 1975-1979: From the OAU to Exile

The 'Amin story' is often treated as an undifferentiated linear descent into anarchy. Such a narrative casts Amin's abuses and flaws, especially his recourse to violence, as his inevitable undoing. Examination of Amin's final years forces us to reappraise this view. Despite the violent political turmoil that had characterised Amin's first few years in power, by 1975 the situation had to some extent settled down. Life at the political centre continued to be unpredictable, but there were no serious armed threats to the security of the regime, and the worst 'spikes' of political violence in 1971 and 1972/3 had both given way to a general peace, albeit one that was still



interspersed with the isolated 'disappearances' of individuals, and the abuses of the security forces. The regime retained a relative monopoly on force, albeit through a fragmented and ill-disciplined military, and the centralisation of power by Amin and his army backers had left them in effective control of the government, and Uganda as a whole. The regime's finances were bolstered by a boom in global coffee prices, which helped to compensate for the shortages generated by the Economic War.

Some international observers were starting to buy into a narrative of relative progress. In private discussions about whether the US should consider reopening its embassy, Ambassador Marshall argued that:

Amin appears, according to diplomatic observers in Kampala as well as senior Kenya government officials, to be learning arts of statecraft rather more rapidly and effectively than one might have expected on basis of his earlier behaviour... informed observers appear convinced that he can and does learn from experience and that his understanding of foreign affairs has definitely improved and will continue to improve.<sup>300</sup>

In July 1975, Amin was appointed chairman of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), following in the footsteps of several other military rulers including Nigeria's Yakubu Gowon and Somalia's Siad Barre. This has previously been offered as a reason for the relative calm that followed: Amin was simply too busy with other duties to cause chaos at home.<sup>301</sup> It seems more likely the reverse was true, with a period of comparative stability and peace allowing him to focus his attention on regional matters. In his acceptance speech Amin promised not to 'embarrass' the

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<sup>300</sup>'Telegram 499 From the Embassy in Kenya to the Department of State, January 17, 1976, 0815Z.'

<sup>301</sup> Omara-Otunnu, *Politics and the Military in Uganda*, p. 132.

OAU. A notable absentee from the annual meeting was Julius Nyerere, Amin's longstanding regional enemy, who boycotted the event in opposition.<sup>302</sup>

Within four years of Amin's OAU appointment, Nyerere's Tanzanian forces had swept his regime from Uganda to usher in a new chapter in the country's political history.<sup>303</sup> This time it was Amin's turn to play the absentee; he fled into exile, never to return to the country of his birth. A president who had sworn to rule until his death, and the repressive apparatus that had sustained him in power, were both pushed out in a matter of months in one of post-colonial Africa's few 'conventional' interstate conflicts. In the years following his stewardship of the OAU Amin had presided over further domestic unrest, and a renewed campaign of eliminatory violence against civilians. The nascent rapprochement between Uganda and the international community had been abandoned in favour of economic sanctions.

Understanding how the fleeting indications of progress detected by onlookers in 1975 were ultimately lost in the years that followed requires examination of the re-emergence of state directed violence that took place over this period. This took several different forms. The regime continued to employ deterrent force in pursuit of various domestic goals at home. This included a campaign against 'economic criminals', a war on illegal smuggling, and clashes with disparate elements of Ugandan civil society, including the students of Makerere University and domestic football fans. This was the violence of rule; reactive, public, and, for the most part, non-lethal. It demonstrated both the compulsive desire of Amin and his supporting network to regulate and order public life, and the limitations on their power to do so.

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<sup>302</sup> *New York Times*, 'Amin new head of African organisation', July 29 1975.

<sup>303</sup> George Roberts, 'The Uganda–Tanzania war, the fall of Idi Amin, and the failure of African diplomacy, 1978–1979.' *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 8:4 (2014), pp. 692-709

But there was also the resurgence of the more secretive strategies of rule previously employed by Amin and other members of the regime to maintain their grip on power. A re-escalation of eliminatory violence against civilians took place in 1977, prompted by further 'shocks' to the security of the regime. Overseen by the SRC under the leadership of Farouk Minawa, the 1977 purges saw 'disappearances' become common once again, and claimed many high-profile victims. It was this deadly violence which most severely undermined Amin's standing with his neighbours and with international observers.

### Traders be Warned: Violence and the 'Economic War'

The later years of the Amin regime were defined by ever increasing efforts by the army to regulate and police public life singlehandedly. They pursued a vision of societal order in which the instruction and direction of senior soldiers was paramount, and orders were issued regarding all manner of day to day issues. Without recourse to the courts or police (both of which were still largely intact, albeit greatly demoralised), Amin and his supporters dominated a 'command economy', in which their soldiers were expected to enforce regulations on the ground. Soldiers were placed in high positions in all manner of state-owned corporations. The regime remained as suspicious of bureaucratic process as ever, and verbal instructions and the threat and application of force were central features of this style of rule. Violence was utilised as a tool in efforts to establish order. Beatings and other forms of corporal punishment were employed to generate compliance and deter the population from an ever-lengthening list of public 'crimes'. Unlike the more extreme 'spikes' of political violence in Amin's Uganda the violence of day to day rule was not usually deadly in nature, though the regime did retain the right to execution as exercised through the military tribunal.

There were many different focal points for the regime's desire to order and control in these years. Many of them stemmed from anxieties around the management of modernity, itself an inheritance of the colonial state. Decker has explored the 'keep Kampala clean' campaign, and the relevance of dirt as a metaphor for the wider existential anxieties of the Amin regime.<sup>304</sup> This externalised anxiety found no shortage of outlets. There were decrees banning and policing certain forms of women's dress, with condemnation of wigs and mini-skirts. The distilling of enguli, a potent bootlegged spirit, was condemned and policed.<sup>305</sup> In Karamoja in the North-East, Amin's contempt for the 'backwards' pastoralists of the region and their ways of life had led him to demand the Karamojong communities dress themselves differently, and there were harsh punishments for men and women caught wearing traditional dress. Fear of foreign influences led Amin to ban the sale of newspapers from outside the country.<sup>306</sup> Amin's key supporters would go to extraordinary lengths in their efforts to wage the myriad domestic 'wars' that the regime found for itself. At times it was as if they hoped new practices might be ordered into existence overnight. In one exemplary case, Colonel Sulemani, newly appointed as managing director of the Uganda Transport Corporation, assembled dozens of bus drivers at the park in Kampala to personally demonstrate 'an alternative boarding system', and to extol the importance of pre-collecting fares.<sup>307</sup>

By far the most extensive 'battleground' in the army's war for societal order was the ongoing struggle to define and 'win' the Economic War. Amin and his supporters had hoped that expelling the Ugandan Asians in 1972 would usher in a period of economic prosperity, as newly

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<sup>304</sup> Alicia Decker, 'Idi Amin's dirty war: subversion, sabotage, and the battle to keep Uganda clean, 1971-1979', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 43:3 (2010), pp. 489-513.

<sup>305</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'Brewing illegal enguli', 1 January 1975.

<sup>306</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'Beware the gaol', 1 January 1975.

<sup>307</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'Col Sulemani shows the way', 9 January 1975.

Africanised businesses kept wealth in the country that they believed the Asian population had previously been sending overseas instead. In practice this belief had proved to be misplaced. Rather, a new set of challenges had emerged. Besides the shortages of goods that soon resulted from the mismanagement of businesses by inexperienced Ugandans, there were attendant rises in the over-charging and hoarding of goods.<sup>308</sup> This short-termism was partly a response to the unease and scarcity that Amin's rule was creating, but it also a product of the dynamism and competition unleashed by such a large-scale redistribution of goods and businesses into African hands. Appalled at what they saw as their 'war' going off the rails, Amin and his supporters took the battle to the entrepreneurs they now condemned as Uganda's 'black Asians'. There were already laws dating from before Amin's own reign against a range of economic crimes, but the army was now placed on the frontline of their enforcement.<sup>309</sup>

In Kampala, Amin's appointment of Captain Abdullah Nasur to the position of Governor of Southern Province in January 1975 signalled the beginning of an extensive regime crackdown on economic malpractice in the country.<sup>310</sup> A large and intimidating presence, Nasur hailed from the Nubian community at Bombo, and had made a reputation for himself coaching the army's football team. He quickly became infamous for his stern policing of the capital; rumours that he would force captives to eat their own sandals abound in Kampala to this day.<sup>311</sup> Accusations of 'economic sabotage' could now have very deadly consequences. In 1977 William Sebuguzi was arrested at the CMB, where he was alleged to have damaged some office equipment. He escaped when other staff members intervened on his behalf.<sup>312</sup> Frank Kisitu was only a teenager when he was picked up by

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<sup>308</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'Kityo fumes at push-price meat seller', 1 January 1975.

<sup>309</sup> Amnesty International, *Human Rights in Uganda 1978*, p. 5.

<sup>310</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'Traders get last warning', 9 January 1975.

<sup>311</sup> John Kirya, interviewed in Kampala, 25 November 2016. Nasur still resides in Bombo today, and vigorously denies these allegations.

<sup>312</sup> William Sebuguzi, interviewed in Kampala, 2 November 2016.

PSU men near Jinja and charged with smuggling. His father was a soldier at Jinja barracks and was able to arrange his release from Makindye. For roving state agents searching for opportunities to extort civilians, 'economic sabotage' became the latest charge. In the markets of Nakasero, John Kirya and his fellow traders were forced into a regular game of cat and mouse with the soldiers to whom they sold their goods. Bartering and haggling could easily erupt into accusations of hoarding and 'milking the country.'<sup>313</sup>

The regime came into direct conflict with Ugandan coffee smugglers, a struggle which soon demonstrated the impotence of the army in regulating economic activity. Poor terms of trade offered by Amin's government, the instability it had brought, and a huge boom in coffee prices in 1976 had brought with it an attendant rise in cross-border smuggling, a phenomenon popularly known in Uganda as *magendo*. This mainly took place at the south-western and eastern borders of the country, where coffee was carried over into Rwanda and Kenya. The scale of operations varied massively, from entire truckloads with armed escorts to groups of local children braving the border with sacks. Frank Masiko remembered the bafflement of his peers in Kigezi when he decided to go to Kampala to study in 1975:

We would run it over the border at night, and sleep through school in the daytime. When I left for Makerere they couldn't understand it! "Why do you go to university? The money is here!"<sup>314</sup>

In time smugglers were sufficiently emboldened as to run coffee in motorboats over Lake Victoria. As *magendo* reached astronomical levels, the state suffered a drop in export revenues.

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<sup>313</sup> John Kirya, interviewed in Kampala, 25 November 2016.

<sup>314</sup> Frank Masiko, interviewed in Kampala, 10 November 2016.

Rugarama Coffee Factory in Kabale is said to have operated the entirety of 1976 without actually handing in any coffee to the CMB.<sup>315</sup>

Panicking at the sudden decline in revenue, the regime endorsed the use of deadly violence against smugglers. The Economic Crimes Tribunal Decree of 1975 was amended to allow for ‘any person who diverts certain commodities to unscheduled destinations, even within Uganda’ to be put to death.<sup>316</sup> Sudden, arbitrary, and violent justice could be meted out by soldiers upon any civilian accused or suspected of economic malpractice. As with so much of the violence of this period, there was very little attempt to centrally direct or control how this worked in practice. In Kabale in 1977, John Nshenyenyeka was seized from his home by soldiers and beaten to death. He sold second-hand clothes that he stored in a small building which he shared with several others, but he was also known to be involved in the *magendo* trade, using the storage space as a front. One day clothes were stolen from the building, and, using this as their pretext, soldiers accused, arrested, and killed him without any further process.<sup>317</sup> His brother Simon went to the barracks in an attempt to rescue him, but was driven away. Sometime later the clothes were found, in the possession of somebody else.<sup>318</sup> Margeret Rwabishari, one of the other traders, was also detained, but her husband managed to bribe the soldiers to let her go.<sup>319</sup>

In an effort to bring an end to *magendo*, soldiers were stationed on the borders, and were assigned to patrol the lake. This proved highly ineffective. Initially permitted to bring back seized coffee to sell to the CMB, soldiers quickly realised that it was more profitable to simply insert

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<sup>315</sup> Godfrey Assiimwe, ‘Inside the coffee smuggling arena: The Amin regime versus “others” in Uganda, 1973-79’, *The Journal of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences Makerere University*, 10, p. 169.

<sup>316</sup> Amnesty International, *Human Rights in Uganda 1978*, p. 5.

<sup>317</sup> Cecilia Mukankyawaya, 1986 CIVHR, pp. 9754-9770. UHRC.

<sup>318</sup> Simon Rugundana, 1986 CIVHR, pp. 9773-9787. UHRC.

<sup>319</sup> Margeret Rwabishari, 1986 CIVHR, pp. 9732-9745. UHRC.

themselves into the illegal trade, extorting or protecting the smugglers. Gradually the extent of military involvement in *magendo* escalated.<sup>320</sup> Links to the military became essential for the larger smuggling operations.

A new Anti-Smuggling Unit (ASU) of police was created on Lake Victoria equipped with motorboats and helicopters in an effort to prevent the flight of coffee to Kenya. Robert Astles, a British expatriate who had served in the Ugandan government since the 1960s, is often cited as having been in charge of the ASU, but in his private papers Astles denied any involvement with this unit, claiming a case of mistaken identity and confusion with a later investigation into corruption in the ASU which he was involved with.<sup>321</sup> Legend in Buganda tells of Astles' helicopter literally landing on smuggling craft, sinking them instantly.<sup>322</sup> The ASU numbered only a handful of men, and lacked the resources to make a meaningful dent in *magendo*. In the eyes of Charles Tindyebwa, a former ASU member, in prosecuting smugglers the Amin state was fighting a war with itself:

When I talk of a smuggler in Uganda, the man who is not armed, he cannot do the smuggling. A man who was not armed by that time would not do the smuggling... these were either smugglers being escorted by soldiers or soldiers themselves doing the smuggling.<sup>323</sup>

The policemen of the ASU found themselves at loggerheads with several high-ranking officers, including Brigadier Taban and Isaac Maliyamungu, both of whom ran shipments on the

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<sup>320</sup> Robert Astles, private papers.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> This was mentioned in multiple interviews, including with William Sebuguzi, Frank Masiko, Jack Calnan, Nixon Ndawula, and Elizabeth Livingstone.

<sup>323</sup> Charles Tindyebwa, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2934. UHRC.



lake. ASU agents were followed and threatened by army officers. On occasion this could spiral into serious confrontation. In one such incident Mr Yowana, a tracker based at a lakeside hotel uncovered a smuggling ring and was strangled to death. A follow up investigation resulted in several policemen being tortured by soldiers.<sup>324</sup>

Local smugglers were adamant that high-level government figures such as Ali Fadhul, Isaac Maliyamungu and Mustapha Adrisi profited massively from smuggling operations during this period.<sup>325</sup> This was despite Fadhul's own condemnation of the damaging impact of *magendo* on state efforts to develop the country, and ongoing war against 'economic criminals'. Whatever the truth of the rumours regarding these high-profile names, the illegal economy certainly was a site of considerable collaboration and exchange between Amin's army and local populations over which they ruled. It gives lie to the popular stereotype of Amin's incompetent lackeys, incapable of running businesses. Rather, much of their energy and innovation was being channeled into high-stakes, high-reward ventures at the expense of central government and long-term development.

There were further attempts to lay claim to a veneer of authoritative legal process. In a bid to give further legitimacy to the struggle against economic malpractice Amin introduced the Economic Crimes Tribunal (ECT). Like previous regime efforts to formalise its actions, the ECT was a hybrid construct. Ostensibly a new independent court, in practice it was staffed by an array of soldiers handpicked by Amin from among his own support base. Overseen by Abdullah Nasur of Central Province, the ECT sat across the country, though it almost immediately ceased operations in Karamoja. In theory the ECT judges had the powers of court judges, as conferred on them by

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<sup>324</sup> Robert Astles, private papers.

<sup>325</sup> Robert Astles, private papers. Astles was insistent that Maliyamungu's wife, based in Kenya, was collaborating with him in running coffee across the lake. This should probably be seen through the lens of the feud between the two men.

Amin. The court was given powers to issue punishments (up to and including the death penalty) for a range of 'economic crimes' including over-charging, hoarding, smuggling, and embezzlement. Here again the regime found itself caught between the contradictory impulses of adopting forms of authority that might resonate more broadly, and the desire to ensure full control over such a process.

The ECT tribunals were a fascinating, short-lived experiment in court justice as administered by the military itself. New independent courts were established, overseen by soldiers- with occasional consultation of legal advice from elsewhere. Many of them were chaired by Juma 'Butabika' Ali. Ali would later serve on the tribunal that ordered the clock-tower executions of September 1977. With a well established reputation for abusing civilians and escaping disciplinary action by this time, he was appointed for his connections to Amin's inner circle.<sup>326</sup>

The accused were expected to conduct their own legal defence. Butabika was prone to improvising the sentences issued: in one case he ordered a convicted smuggler to undertake forced work in Karamoja.<sup>327</sup> The justice distributed was as informal and improvised as the economic activity it sought to control. Lashes were issued, retirement benefits taken away.<sup>328</sup> Punishment took on a heavily personalised appearance.

The broad terms of the Economic Crimes Act could be widely interpreted, and this left a huge amount to the initiative of individual actors, as well as the staff of the tribunal itself. Many of the cases that it oversaw had occurred before the tribunal existed. One example of this was the

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<sup>326</sup> Mustafa Adrisi, 1986 CIVHR, pp. 6055-6259. UHRC.

<sup>327</sup> 1986 CIVHR, p. 230. UHRC.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

case of prison warden Yusuf Kawea and Police Constable Tindimukira, both sentenced to death by the tribunal. They had accused a Wilson Mvule, a shop owner, of over-charging, and detained him at the CPS in Kampala in 1974. After taking a bribe, the men had released Mvule. When the ECT began hearing cases Mvule seized his opportunity, and had his former assailants arrested and brought before it on grounds of corruption. As with the 'economic war' more broadly, the ECT brought opportunity as well as danger, and was readily engaged with by Ugandan civilians.<sup>329</sup> It became another site of ongoing contestation and negotiation.

This truly was a time of 'the thief chasing his own shadow.'<sup>330</sup> On the borders and in the streets violence was employed against 'economic criminals', some (but far from all) of it under the pseudo-legal auspices of the ECT, in a bid to impose order on a rapidly informalising economic sphere in which many of the security forces were themselves enmeshed. When military policeman Ronald Magembe appeared before the court accused of stealing ammunition from Makindye, he explained that he was selling the bullets on to officers in the SRC who were struggling to get around the stricter gun and ammunition controls at Nakasero. Butabika was entirely unimpressed by Magembe's revelation, and sentenced him to ten years in prison.<sup>331</sup>

Taking place in tandem with the punishments and death sentences levied by the ECT were intermittent and unpredictable interventions by Amin himself. On 12 March 1976, Amin ordered that seven prisoners who had been sentenced to death for 'various economic crimes' were to be pardoned and released. The men hailed from a range of ethnic groups, and were released on Amin's instruction following a visit he had made to Luzira prison. The president made several such interventions, that seem to have been an effort to apply a 'carrot' to go with the 'stick' of

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>330</sup> Mamdani, *Imperialism and Fascism in Uganda*, p. 52.

<sup>331</sup> 1986 CIVHR, p. 234. UHRC.

deadly force, and to demonstrate his capacity for leniency as well as his power to determine the fates of Ugandan citizens.<sup>332</sup> He almost certainly had one eye on the international community too, as comments he made upon their release about the appreciation of ‘many countries’ for his actions seem to demonstrate.<sup>333</sup> They served to amplify the inconsistent and patchy nature of the regime’s prosecution of ‘economic criminals’.

The Economic War highlighted the contradictions and limitations of Amin’s brand of military rule. Efforts to insert the will of Amin and his supporters into all aspects of daily life proved extremely difficult. When their usual cocktail of decrees, verbal commands and force failed, Amin’s men sought legitimacy for their punishment of civilians in the pseudo-legal ECT. Amin’s unwillingness or inability to discipline and control the soldiers that he tasked with law enforcement ensured that the war on smuggling was effectively hamstrung by the systemic complicity of the army. This same hands-off management of the soldiery ensured that alternative bodies like the newly established ASU and police that might otherwise have helped to police the Economic War more effectively remained demoralised and impotent. Paradoxically, in the short-term the rise of *magendo* also prompted greater exchange and collaboration between soldiers and civilians than ever before, as dynamic illicit networks engaged in high-risk smuggling flourished at the expense of the central government. It was not so much a struggle between the army and society as between overlapping and competing networks that straddled both. In much the same way, the efforts of the ECT to provide a veneer of legitimacy were undermined by its being so obviously interwoven with Amin’s own support network, and it found itself a site of localised conflicts as civilians sought to exploit it for their own ends.

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<sup>332</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, ‘Marshal frees 27 prisoners’, 26 March 1976.

<sup>333</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, ‘President pardons seven men’, 12 March 1976.

## Guns on Campus: Violence & The Ugandan Public

Violence had declined for a time after the spike of 1972/3. This was the result of the regime's relative monopoly on force, and the fear and compliance generated by the earlier 'disappearances', rather than any kind of working concordat between the army and the other segments of civil society. Just as earlier violence had generated a degree of criticism and pushback from among the civilian population, in the final years of Amin's rule further tensions between the military and various segments of Ugandan civil society generated further clashes, producing spirals of condemnation on the part of the latter, and further recourse to force on that of the former. The corrosive and escalatory effects of violence were evident, as sporadic outbreaks of protest and reactive regime directed violence took place at Makerere University, among the Ugandan churches, and within Kampala's most popular football club. Contrary to some earlier accounts, these clashes were rarely driven by Amin's own paranoia or grievances, or even those of his immediate supporters. Rather, a series of localised conflicts escalated and drew in the repressive apparatus of the regime.

One of the most storied incidents was a running clash between soldiers and students on the campus of Makerere University over several months in 1976. In many ways this conflict reflected the enduring tensions between Amin's soldiery and the educated elite in Uganda. It began when Paul Serwanga, a law student, was murdered near the campus on 5 March 1976 by a PSU patrol. At the time explanations as to why this happened had immediately formed along factional lines. The regime blamed the incident on Serwanga, alleging that he had been caught

breaking into a property.<sup>334</sup> By contrast, rumours circulating in Kampala suggested that soldiers had been harassing Serwanga's girlfriend before turning on him.<sup>335</sup>

Serwanga's death set in motion a cycle of protest and backlash. Angry at the murder, thousands of students took to the streets in protest.<sup>336</sup> In the clumsy attempts by PSU agents to cover up what had happened more civilians were killed. Esther Chesire, a Kenyan student and the rumoured girlfriend of Serwanga was prevented from boarding a flight by soldiers, and disappeared. The resulting diplomatic incident prompted an investigation at the university, and the further disappearance and death of Theresa Nanziri Bukenya. Warden at the university hall in which Esther Chesire had been resident, Bukenya had been placed under pressure to testify against her character by state agents, and her courageous refusal to do so cost her dearly.<sup>337</sup> Professor Bryan Langlands, originally tasked with chairing the inquiry, was expelled from Uganda on 26 July 1976. The refusal of the army to directly confront a single incident of gross military misconduct led to further deaths, and further denials. It is still unclear whether senior soldiers had ordered the subsequent disappearances, or whether these murders were the work of low-ranking officers hoping to cover up their own misdeeds, but the regime closed ranks in defence of those who had perpetrated the violence.

Unrest at Makerere remained high, with anger at the ongoing disappearances fueling regular strikes and demonstrations. Letters of protest, some allegedly drafted by rebels from outside the country, were pinned up in the student halls.<sup>338</sup> This culminated in the infamous 'Makerere incident' of August 1976. Soldiers were sent onto campus and broke up demonstrations

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<sup>334</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'Police shoot law student in chase', 8 March 1976.

<sup>335</sup> 'Opposition to President Idi Amin of Uganda 1976', FCO31/2043. UKNA.

<sup>336</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, 'President orders inquiry into student's death', 9 March 1976.

<sup>337</sup> Amnesty International, *Human rights violations in Uganda*, 1977.

<sup>338</sup> Frank Masiko, interviewed in Kampala, 10 November 2016.

with force, beating and injuring dozens of students. Contrary to early reports from the campus it seems that there were no fatalities during the raid, but students were nonetheless subjected to significant violence, and some female students suffered sexual abuse. Frank Masiko, a student on campus at the time, was confronted in the midst of the raid by a soldier from his home district:

When the soldiers came they forced us to march, on our knees, for quite some time. They beat us badly, the commanding officer read us a letter from 'the rebels' that had been put on the wall. They took some students to Makindye and later released them. Nobody died but some were hurt badly. One of these State Research guys was from Kigezi. He knew me. I ran at him for help but he beat me with a stick, he broke my clavicle! He shouted 'I am going to punish you for joining those who want to hurt our government.'<sup>339</sup>

In many ways the escalating nature of violence at Makerere was all too familiar. The actions of state agents at the local level drew the regime into a series of attempts to stamp out and deny what was happening, at the cost of further lives. It mirrored the spirals of murders and denials in the wake of the coup, and the steps taken in 1974 to investigate 'disappearances'. What was new was the mobilisation of a large number of the student body against the regime, and the willingness of the regime to respond in turn with unprecedented levels of force against students.

Makerere was not the only site of increasing discord between the regime and civil society. In 1977 the tensions between the churches and the state escalated into a feud between Amin and the Anglican bishops, that culminated in one of the most high-profile deaths of the entire period: that of Archbishop of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Zaire, Janani Luwum. Appointed Bishop of Northern Uganda in 1969, he was elected Archbishop in May 1974.<sup>340</sup> Raised in Gulu himself,

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Mutibwa, *A History of Uganda Since Independence*, p. 301.

Luwum had been regularly consulted by Acholi civilians about the disappearances in the district, and had written to Amin on the need to restore discipline in the army on many occasions.<sup>341</sup>

Highly respected and regularly consulted with by all manner of senior Acholi and Langi, it seems that the regime began to suspect him of involvement in the anti-government plots with which it was so preoccupied by 1977. A fresh wave of violence against civilians was unleashed in response, which are explored below. The church came under increasing scrutiny. Soldiers claiming to be looking for weapons raided Luwum's house, and that of Bishop Yona Okoth on 5 February 1977. They did not find any. The Anglican leaders responded with a joint statement condemning the action:

'What happened to the Archbishop in his house on the night we have referred to is a direct contradiction to what you yourself, Your Excellency, have said in public and to the established structures and procedures in dealing with security matters. That is why we are very disturbed, and with us the whole of the Church of Uganda.'<sup>342</sup>

Amin met with Luwum on 14<sup>th</sup> February, in a tense meeting. Things escalated a day later, when Amin convened a meeting of the bishops at the International Conference Centre. In conjunction with Adrisi and Maliyamungu, prisoners were brought forward to read statements linking Luwum to a recently foiled plot against the government. A cache of weapons was presented, alleged to have been found at the Archbishop's house. Luwum was arrested alongside two of Amin's longest serving ministers, Charles Oboth Ofumbi and Erinayo Wilson Oryema. Many former soldiers in West Nile remain adamant that Luwum was in some way connected to the

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<sup>341</sup> Margaret Ford, *Janani: Making of a Martyr* (London, 1978), p. 57.

<sup>342</sup> Lawoko, *Dungeons of Nakasero*, 317.



plot.<sup>343</sup> In arresting Ofumbi and Oryema the regime had turned on some of the last civilian figures to have been associated with it ever since its inception in 1971.

Exactly what happened to them is now steeped in myth. What is certain is that all three men were killed, and subsequently buried, with large numbers of soldiers in attendance. The regime blamed a freak car accident, alleged to have happened right next to Nakasero. Other witnesses from Nakasero claim that the three men were brought in and killed there on 16 February. They were announced dead on the radio on 17 February.<sup>344</sup> Subsequent investigations by the 1986 commission found that all three men had died from gunshot wounds. It seems most likely to have been a remarkably brazen, crudely managed triple murder, followed by the latest in a long line of cover up attempts. That their deaths were planned before the meeting seems unlikely; it would be a nonsensical political ploy to arrange such a public arrest of such well-known figures, and to then attempt to stage and deny the subsequent murder of the three detainees within days. There was no precedent for such public involvement of Amin in the detention and deaths of political opponents over the course of his government. It is likely that the interrogation of the men had got out of hand, resulting in their deaths, and prompting the subsequent cover-up. Once again a lack of control over the military created had contributed to further problems for Amin and his supporters.

Luwum became an instant martyr in the eyes of Uganda's Anglican population. His death reverberated abroad, where pressure increased in foreign governments to condemn and sanction the regime. His replacement, Archbishop Silvanous Wani, was a former KAR chaplain and hailed from Amin's own home town of Koboko. At the time this prompted many to believe that Wani was

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<sup>343</sup> In my interviews with Ceasar Wani, Alumu Arikui, and Brahan Malengo this view was aired, to cite only three.

<sup>344</sup> Olara-Otunnu, *Luwum*, p. 55.

'Amin's man'.<sup>345</sup> But Wani was actually the bishops' choice- they hoped that an Archbishop from West Nile might be able to better influence the government. He had previously warned Amin about extra judicial killings, including after the death of Michael Ondoga in 1974. He had himself been robbed at gunpoint twice under the Amin government. Wani followed in Luwum's footsteps, offering consultation and condemnation behind the scenes, much to the chagrin of the president.<sup>346</sup> Relations between Christians in the country and the regime remained tense. SRC agents regularly monitored services at Rubaga and Namirembe cathedrals. In Masaka in 1978 localised violence broke out when Shaban Kaloddo, a prominent Muslim businessman, was murdered by a competitor. Multiple Christians were murdered in retaliation by security forces who were led by local men.<sup>347</sup> Luwum's death prompted the flight into exile of several of the Anglican bishops.<sup>348</sup> The last surviving member of Amin's 'golden cabinet' of 1971, Henry Kyemba, also fled into exile, where he would publish the polemical *A State of Blood*. With its focus on Amin himself, and its tales of cannibalism and sexual excess, it remains one of the most widely circulated accounts of the Amin government. Public opinion of Amin overseas continued to sour, helped along by new accounts of the regime that achieved wider distribution.<sup>349</sup>

The events at Makerere and Luwum's death are the best remembered examples of public clashes between the regime and civil society in these final years, but another case serves to demonstrate the way in which the increasing insecurity of Amin and his followers drove them to employ increased violence against groups they had previously had no quarrel with. In February 1977, following several weeks of warnings, Abdullah Nasur, the Governor of Central Province, issued a ban against Express Football Club. The oldest of Uganda's football teams, its support base

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<sup>345</sup> Archbishop Silvanous Wani, 1986 CIVHR, p. 3446. UHRC.

<sup>346</sup> Bishop Misaeri Kawuma, 1986 CIVHR, p. 1961. UHRC.

<sup>347</sup> Kasozi, *Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, p. 253.

<sup>348</sup> Bishop Misaeri Kawuma, 1986 CIVHR, p. 1960. UHRC.

<sup>349</sup> Melady, *Idi Amin: Hitler in Africa*.

was the largest in Kampala in the 1970s. Several players and fans were arrested by the armed forces and held at Makindye.

Understanding why Nasur suddenly decided to crack down on Express requires consideration of several factors. The army had actually been extremely supportive of domestic sport ever since seizing power. But in their increasing efforts to police and maintain a strict vision of societal order in the late 1970s, the sporting realm came in for sustained criticism. Charges of ‘hooliganism’, frequent disruption of matches by violent groups of fans, and questions over the misuse of state funds by sporting officials all began to plague the reputation of domestic football in particular.<sup>350</sup> As governor of Kampala Nasur in particular was on the frontline of this struggle, which was intensified by changes at Express FC that seemed to have a more overtly political dimension.

Express games attracted large crowds, and money was often gathered at the end of matches to reward well-performing players. ‘Jolly’ Joe Kiwanuka, killed in 1973, was one of the club’s founders. In the latter years of the regime the largely Baganda support base took to calling Express ‘The Club of the Dead’, in honour of the numerous patrons and fans killed by the government.<sup>351</sup> Fearful that these collections might be being used to fund guerillas, Nasur had the club dissolved and banned from competition. Nasur and Amin had both been enormously supportive of Ugandan football in the early years of the regime, including helping to fund the Uganda National team in its first appearance at the Africa Cup of Nations in 1976. That they now turned on domestic football was indicative of their escalating fear of any organized activity. Far from deterred, the Express FC fan base simply founded a new club, SC Villa, and started attending their games instead.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> *Voice of Uganda*, ‘Police-Coffee league match abandoned’, 12 March 1976. *Voice of Uganda*, ‘Capt Gogo threatens to pull Forces clubs from the league’, 13 March 1976.

<sup>351</sup> Frank Masiko, interviewed in Kampala, 10 November 2016.

<sup>352</sup> Aloysius Kiwanuka, interviewed in Bombo, 16 March 2017.

The many clashes between the regime and the public in these final years share several key features. They were overwhelmingly the product of regime anxieties about public order, and the political loyalties of civilians. They also resulted from the corrosive and escalatory effects of violence as an instrument of rule, as the abuses of state agents at the local level repeatedly 'drew in' Amin and his other leading supporters, who were rarely the precipitant factor in state crackdowns, but usually had the last word. Whether in the abuses of soldiers at Makerere, the suspicion and raids of intelligence men at Luwum's place of residence, or the evolving fissures between soldiers and civilians in Ugandas footballing community, local disputes were amplified and complicated by the heavy-handed response of the army. That the regime repeatedly sought to cover-up the abuses and mistakes of its soldiery served to generate further hostility between itself and the populace.

### The 1977 Purges & Executions

These people came during the day. They arrived at Kabale at night and proceeded to Ndorwa the following day. When they arrived at Ndorwa we were not working. Around day break they started arresting some of us. We were later told what was happening. One of my colleagues, a Mukiga was escorting prisoners to work. His name is Katongole. He told me, 'Mwaka you are still here, do you know what is happening? Amin's soldiers have come here and are arresting your tribesmen. In fact some of you have already been arrested.'<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Julius Peter Mwaka, 1986 CIVHR, p. 10204. UHRC.

Whilst the 'Economic War', and clashes between the army and the Ugandan public constituted the visible face of force in the final years of the Amin regime, 1977 also saw a return to the secretive eliminatory violence that had been most extensively conducted in 1971 and 1972, but had since de-escalated. Selective arrests and 'disappearances' of civilians once again became rife, as the regime, and in particular Amin's intelligence unit, the State Research Centre, responded to a new set of 'shocks' to regime security and authority by unleashing a fresh campaign of violence. The 1977 purges are particularly significant because there was a resurgence in the deliberate targeting of Acholi and Langi men in the army and civil service, in a manner that had not been seen since the year following Amin's takeover. It prompted further resistance and contestation, both domestically and overseas. The SRC was under the control of the same smaller core of Nubian soldiers who had placed Amin in power, and upon whom he had increasingly relied, and these soldiers now took the leading role in the production of violence against their perceived enemies.

Understanding why there was such a drastic re-escalation of violence in 1977 requires examination of several factors. 1976 had seen multiple 'shocks' to the regime's authority and to Amin's personal safety. The best documented of these was the Entebbe Raid, an international crisis triggered when Amin offered refuge to a group of Palestinian hijackers who had taken control of an Air France plane with over 200 passengers, of which the Israeli civilians were separated and held. Another incident that is regularly pointed to as evidence of Amin's instability, it should be placed in the context of wider diplomatic hostility towards Israel that had come to constitute a norm for most African leaders since the early 1970s. Africa's 'diplomatic break' with Israel has been identified by Legum as one of the central strands of 'African Foreign Policy' in this period.<sup>354</sup> As he had so many times before, Amin approached an issue confronting many of his peers in heavy-handed and sensational fashion. The result was national humiliation, as hostages held at Entebbe Airport were rescued in a lightning strike by Israeli special forces, who killed

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<sup>354</sup> Colin Legum, 'The Organisation of African Unity- success or failure?' *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, 51:2, (1975), pp. 208-219.

numerous Ugandan soldiers in the process.<sup>355</sup> Ugandan soldiers subsequently ‘retook’ the airport from their own forces, the initial assumption being that the fighting was a mutiny or coup attempt.<sup>356</sup>

The SRC reacted in knee-jerk fashion, implementing punitive roundups and executions of the air traffic controllers that had been on duty, targeting violence against Kenyans in Uganda (the raid had been staged from there), and murdering the elderly Dora Bloch (the sole remaining hostage who had been undergoing medical treatment elsewhere).<sup>357</sup> The real enemy was long gone, and this only underlined government frustration and impotence in the face of the incident. Students making trouble for soldiers near Makerere began to taunt their pursuers with cries of ‘shouldn’t you be catching the Israelis?’<sup>358</sup>

Whilst Entebbe constituted the most eye-catching of the blows to Amin’s position in 1976, it was far from being the most serious. In addition to the aforementioned clashes between the army and civil society, Amin narrowly escaped death at a police passing out parade at Nsambya on 10 June 1976, when a grenade was thrown into his car, killing his driver.<sup>359</sup> Several civilians were killed by the panicking presidential escort.<sup>360</sup> It was in the immediate aftermath of this event that Amin finally confirmed himself as ‘president for life’, seemingly doubling down on the consolidation of power in order to better protect himself.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

<sup>356</sup> Saul David, *Operation Thunderbolt* (New York, 2015), p. 320.

<sup>357</sup> Kyemba, *A State of Blood*, p. 166.

<sup>358</sup> Frank Masiko, 10 November 2016.

<sup>359</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, ‘Amin unscathed after assassination attempt’, 1700 GMT 12 June 1976. Radio.

<sup>360</sup> Rwehururu, *Cross to the Gun*, p. 79.

<sup>361</sup> Mutibwa, *A History of Uganda*, p. 279.

In the north, a small localised insurgency was beginning to take root. Former soldiers under the Obote regime would cross from Sudan to recruit and train small groups of fighters in and around Gulu. Robert Obunyo was one such fighter. His father had died in the killings of Acholi officers that followed Amin's takeover. In 1976 he was recruited at market by Brigadier Banyya (who would later fight in Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army), and trained intermittently in the bush. At this point there were only very small numbers of fighters, and even fewer weapons with which to arm them. Local government was gripped by panic about the dangers of failing to crack down on political mobilisation in the area.<sup>362</sup> At Atiak Police Post, the numbers of arrests of suspected guerrillas had got so high by late 1976 that staff wrote to the district commissioner requesting an extension of the prison cells.<sup>363</sup>

In a pattern that had by this point become familiar, Amin's security apparatus responded to these 'shocks' to its authority with fresh violence. However, where earlier campaigns had been led by a range of armed groups from the army, Military Police, and PSU, it was the State Research Centre under Farouk Minawa that now led the way in directing reprisals against civilians. There were several reasons for the regime's increasing dependence on the SRC to enact political violence. Amin's seizure of power, and the invasion of September 1972 had both directly engaged the Ugandan Army, which had found itself first the site of violence, and then the reactive party in an armed struggle. This was not the case in 1977, where there was no credible external threat to the army. The Military Police and PSU, units that had both played a significant role in enacting violence against civilians during the previous 'spikes' of violence, had since come under heavy scrutiny after the 1974 CIDPU. Personnel changes and increased oversight meant that both were now less inclined and less able to freely pursue violence against Amin's political opponents. By contrast, the SRC under Minawa's leadership was still under the control of members of the pro-

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<sup>362</sup> Robert Obunyo, interviewed in Gulu District, 29 March 2017.

<sup>363</sup> 'Need for extension of remand cell at Atak Police post' 26 October 1976', Box 541. GDA.

Amin clique. As Amin's support base continued to contract the SRC persevered in directing violence against enemies of the regime on his behalf.

It is generally agreed that a conscious decision was taken early in 1977 to implement purges of Acholi and Langi men from the armed forces and civil service. What is much less clear is where this initiative originated. In his testimony to the 1986 Human Rights Commission, former Vice-President Mustapha Adrisi asserted that it was a 'President's directive, carried out in all units.'<sup>364</sup> Other explanations have suggested that Amin, Adrisi and Maliyamungu, as the most powerful members of the Defence Council, were behind the decision.<sup>365</sup> The heavy involvement of SRC agents in the arrests, the detainment and deaths of large numbers of civilians in Nakasero, and the significant increase in the flow of Acholi and Langi refugees in 1977 all point to the killings being on a considerably greater scale than they had been for several years.<sup>366</sup> Like earlier violence, however, these killings were probably the work of an ulterior pro-Amin network within the SRC rather than the unit as a whole.

The disproportionate focus on Acholi and Langi men seems to have once again originated in the belief that these ethnic groups were supportive of Obote and the Ugandan exiles. To vindicate this fear, a political pamphlet of dubious origin, 'Obote's war call to Langis and Acholis against other Ugandans', was distributed by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in 1977.<sup>367</sup> As explored above, there certainly was some small-scale organization against the regime by these communities in 1976 (and indeed throughout the 8 years of Amin's rule). This slow-burning resistance certainly did not extend to the entire Acholi and Langi communities, but it

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<sup>364</sup> Mustapha Adrisi, 1986 CIVHR, p. 6253. UHRC.

<sup>365</sup> George Ivan Smith, *Ghosts of Kampala*, (London, 1980), p. 186.

<sup>366</sup> See Lawoko, *Dungeons of Nakasero*, and Kato, *Escape from Idi Amin's Slaughterhouse*.

<sup>367</sup> Uganda Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *Obote's War Call to Langis and Acholis Against Other Ugandans*, (Uganda: 1977). LoC.



served as evidence to Amin's intelligence unit of an ongoing Luo-speaking conspiracy. An inability to control the borders, and the failure of security services to prevent and uncover previous plots both contributed to the heavy-handed response.

Accounts of survivors and escapees of the 1977 purges indicate clearly that large numbers of Acholi and Langi men were being targeted by state agents. As before, the regime targeted the most visible (and reachable), arresting soldiers and civilians in barracks or within the civil administration. Contrary to many popular narratives, this seems to have begun before the infamous murder of Archbishop Janani Luwum, and continued to escalate afterwards. Major Donald Odur fled his job in the military records office in Republic House early in 1977 because operations to round up Acholi and Langi had begun.<sup>368</sup> As the description of the roundup in Kabale that Julius Mwaka escaped at the beginning of this section demonstrates, these purges were not limited to Gulu and Kitgum.

Whilst there are no reliable statistics for the casualties involved, there is every reason to believe that the numbers of arrests and killings in the 1977 purges were equal to or greater than the previous 'spikes' of 1971 and 1972. The 1977 violence involved sustained operations by the SRC in a way that the previous 'spikes' had not. Large numbers of prisoners were being detained, tortured and killed in the SRC cells at Nakasero in 1977 and there is little evidence to suggest that this had been the case in the years before.<sup>369</sup> It produced the largest wave of refugees in the Amin era, and attracted the greatest domestic criticism.<sup>370</sup> There were killings in Murchison Bay prison, and massacres of soldiers and policemen are reported to have taken place on Paradise Island (near

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<sup>368</sup> Major Donald Odur, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2145. UHRC.

<sup>369</sup> Data on detention of civilians at Nakasero is extremely scarce, but it doesn't receive mention in the existing source materials as a regular holding site before the late 1970s.

<sup>370</sup> Jorgesen, *Uganda: a Modern history*, p. 314.

to Luzira Prison) in Lake Victoria- possibly in a bid to avoid news of them getting out.<sup>371</sup> In Lira the district commissioner gave a speech in March 1977 urging the local population not to run away whenever vehicles approached, insisting the situation in the country was safe and exhorting people to remain in the area rather than fleeing into Sudan- indirect evidence of the extent of local fear in this period.<sup>372</sup>

Rumours that the SRC was working through a single list of all Acholi and Langi men were rife in this period. There is certainly evidence that small, localised lists of staff were used by SRC agents during their roundups in different areas.<sup>373</sup> There is no conclusive proof of a 'master list'. Nor is there sufficient evidence that violence was only being employed against the Acholi and Langi. Luo-speaking men were definitely targeted disproportionately, but the SRC also arrested members of a wide range of other ethnic groups. Neither were the purges systematic: not all Acholi and Langi men were targeted, and many managed to escape or negotiate their way out of capture.

Survival could hinge on connections, courage, and caution. Charles Olet described how he was able to continue working in the Ministry of Health throughout this period by living an extremely restricted life, sticking primarily to his home and place of work, avoiding public spaces and bars, and getting home before dark.<sup>374</sup> He was able to negotiate on behalf of several junior staff, on one occasion preventing Juma 'Butabika' from seizing a colleague by threatening to phone Amin then and there.<sup>375</sup> Kitara McMot was adamant that he regularly escaped scrutiny

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<sup>371</sup> Kasozi, *Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, p. 253.

<sup>372</sup> 'DC address to the people in Apac town on the 28<sup>th</sup> march, 1977' B10R7. UGNA.

<sup>373</sup> Julius Peter Mwaka, 1986 CIVHR, p. 10209. UHRC.

<sup>374</sup> Charles Olet, 1986 CIVHR, p. 3992. UHRC.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3982.

because of his non-Acholi surname.<sup>376</sup> As in the case of Julius Mwaka, the intervention of friends and colleagues could also give people time to escape.

As before, such instructions as had been issued were routinely reinterpreted and contested by individual officers at the local level. At Bondo barracks, Lieutenant Colonel Mukiri is alleged to have directly overseen the murders of several Acholi officers. By contrast, Lieutenant Colonel Lambert of the 2<sup>nd</sup> regiment opted instead to send his Acholi and Langi subordinates on leave so that they could escape. In some areas this resistance to the campaign of violence amounted to full-scale armed insubordination. The Chui battalion in Gulu, staffed with many Acholi and Langi soldiers, began to deny SRC convoys access to the barracks and surrounding areas. Soldiers from the battalion engaged in armed skirmishes with SRC men on Gulu road in 1978.<sup>377</sup> At Mubende, a mutiny by the Tiger Battalion had to be suppressed, and at Iganga prison in Busoga several hundred prisoners were freed by soldiers who had been hired by a local businessman to rescue his brother.<sup>378</sup>

The killings prompted a further chicken-and-egg cycle of flight into exile by Acholi and Langi soldiers and civilians, many of whom felt left with no choice but to join with Obote's forces in exile. Julius Mwaka from his government posting in Kabale into Rwanda across the south-western border with several hundred others, before joining the larger refugee camps in Tanzania. He remembers being treated with hostility by the longstanding exiles, who were suspicious that he might be a government spy.<sup>379</sup> Donald Odur linked up with the nascent Save Uganda Movement (SUM), one of several smaller rebel groups that were boosted in this period. Like so many Acholi

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<sup>376</sup> Kitara McMott, interviewed in Gulu District, 25 March 2017.

<sup>377</sup> Tumusiime and Bichachi, *Uganda's Presidents*, p. 191.

<sup>378</sup> Aidan Southall, 'Social disorganization in Uganda: Before, during and after Amin', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 18:4 (1980), p. 634.

<sup>379</sup> Julius Mwaka, 1986 testimony, p. 10204.

and Langi survivors of the purges, both men later joined and served in the UNLA.<sup>380</sup> Smith Opon-Acak, who had served in the Malire Mechanised throughout the regime, now deserted and linked up with Kikosi Maalum. Opon-Acak would later rise to prominence as Chief-of-Staff under Obote's second administration in the 1980s. His role as a soldier in the Amin- era military actually served to greatly undermine his standing with Acholi soldiers in the UNLA.<sup>381</sup>

There was also fresh experimentation with public execution. On 9<sup>th</sup> September 1977, twelve Ugandan prisoners were murdered by firing squad at Kampala's Clock Tower, the site of the earlier 1973 execution of Badru Semakula.<sup>382</sup> These were the alleged plotters to whom Janani Luwum had been tenuously linked. William Sebuguzi stood in the crowd as his older brother, Daniel Nsereko, was shot. Nsereko had worked in the police force at Crested Towers, and refused to go into hiding despite warnings of his impending arrest.<sup>383</sup> Arrested in February 1977, He was held in Luzira for six months, then presented with his colleagues to a kangaroo court overseen by Juma 'Butabika'.<sup>384</sup> Of the 16 men that were originally arrested only three were released.

In his own account of the plot and his time as one of the prisoners in Nakasero, Apollo Lawoko stated that there had indeed been some formative discussions and meetings between the accused men and various Ugandan exiles, led by Abudalla Anyuru, the former chairman of the Uganda Public Service Commission. Lawoko denies any involvement by Luwum and Oboth-Ofumbi, insisting he and his colleagues were tortured in Nakasero and forced to alter their trial statements to implicate the two men and make the plot seem further reaching than it had ever

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<sup>380</sup> Major Donald Odur, 1986 testimony, p. 2154.

<sup>381</sup> Tumusiime and Bichachi, *Uganda's Presidents*, p.123.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>383</sup> William Sebuguzi, interviewed in Kampala, 2 November 2016.

<sup>384</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, 'Coup plot trial continues in Kampala', 29 August 1977. Radio.

actually been, and exonerate the regime. The plot was discovered after Anyuru took the extremely risky step of trying to involve Kassim Obura of the PSU, his fellow Langi and acquaintance. Obura had the plotters arrested.<sup>385</sup>

The parallels between the clock-tower killings and the executions of March 1973 are striking. Both followed the discovery of small rebel networks, and occurred at a time of significant regime insecurity. Both came after an unofficial campaign of state violence, and both seem to have been an attempt to draw a temporal line under the insurgency in question, and the state's reaction to it. And in both cases, perhaps crucially, the regime was confident that it had captured legitimate insurgents, and was justified in responding with deadly force. This may explain why it was happy to hold public executions in both cases. As in 1973, the executions prompted a mixed response. The executions took place during Ramadhan, greatly upsetting Uganda's Muslim community.<sup>386</sup> Numerous appeals for clemency by other African leaders had been ignored.

The 1977 purges and the Clock-tower killings should both be understood as the latest in a series of 'spikes' of political violence implemented by the Amin regime, in response to its perceived vulnerability in the wake of a series of fresh challenges to its authority in 1976 and 1977. Many of the dynamics were reminiscent of earlier violence, such as the deliberate targeting of Acholi and Langi men prompted by fears about their political allegiances, the selective 'picking' of men from their workplaces, and the attempt to quell would-be rebels with the use of a public performance of violence. Crucially, however, elements within the Ugandan Army were becoming increasingly resistant to outside interference by Amin's security agents in the SRC, as evidenced by the spread of barracks mutinies that accompanied the purges. Amin's increasing loss of control over the army would soon fatally undermine his regime.

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<sup>385</sup> Lawoko, *Dungeonss of Nakasero*, p. 119.

<sup>386</sup> Peter Nayenga, 'Myths and Realities of Idi Amin Dada's Uganda', *African Studies Review*, 22:2 (1979), p. 136.

## 1978: A Year of Peace?

‘If I had known the current Chairman of this Commission before, I would have made sure that he was appointed a minister so that *he* could have argued with the President’ –

Mustapha Adrisi.<sup>387</sup>

Rowing back on the campaign of political violence that had defined 1977, Amin declared in his new year’s address that 1978 was going to be ‘a year of peace.’<sup>388</sup> But far from achieving any steps towards stability, 1978 saw further factional infighting between Amin’s ‘plateau’ of senior officers, and the continuing breakdown of the Uganda Army into competing components. Whilst Amin had succeeded in navigating previous episodes of unrest within the military, this latest round of factional struggle was the proximate cause of a crucial turning point in Uganda’s history: an interstate conflict with Nyerere’s Tanzania.

Amin’s downfall hinged on his lax control of the soldiers and regional governors on whom his power rested. Political feuding within Amin’s inner circle, forever bubbling below the surface of public life, boiled over again in 1978. Officers are once again alleged to have confronted Amin with the request that he relinquish the presidency.<sup>389</sup> Nurnberger has argued that crucial changes in the international climate had sharpened the divisions within the Ugandan military, as US

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<sup>387</sup> Mustafa Adrisi, 1986 CIVHR, p. 6220. UHRC. Emphasis added.

<sup>388</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, ‘Amin reports progress, policy in new year’s message’, 1700 GMT, 1 January 78. Radio.

<sup>389</sup> Mutibwa, *Uganda Since Independence*, p.113.

sanctions imposed from 1978 led to the drying up of foreign reserves that Amin had previously employed to buy the acquiescence of his soldiery.<sup>390</sup>

Whilst far from the only conflict that erupted in this period, the most significant development appears to have been the increasing influence of Mustafa Adrisi and Moses Ali, and tensions generated by a combination of resource scarcities and a series of investigations into regime corruption. Adrisi, who had risen to prominence when he replaced Brigadier Marella as Chief of Staff at the behest of the 1974 mutineers, had been announced as vice-president in 1977.<sup>391</sup> His career greatly mirrored Amin's own- he had also joined the army in the KAR days, and fought against the Mau-Mau. The post of vice-president had been vacant for the first six years of Amin's rule, and the significance of the sudden decision to fill it has often been ignored. The rationale for the appointment seems likely to have been appeasement of the same soldiers (many of them Lugbara like Adrisi himself) that had sought Marella's removal. Adrisi enjoyed a degree of popularity within the army, but it made for an increasingly uneasy relationship with Amin:

'Amin's intelligence kept on informing him that all the people liked Mustapha. I was called to Nile Mansions four times; he asked me why I wanted to overthrow him. I told him, if you think I want to overthrow your government you retire me, I will go back home. I do not want people to kill themselves in Uganda. Then Garandhi told the President that if he removes me, the government will be overthrown. Amin left me.'<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> Ralph Nurnberger, 'the United States and Idi Amin: Congress to the Rescue' *African Studies Review*, 25:1, (1982). pp. 49-65.

<sup>391</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, 'Amin appoints Mustafa Adrisi Vice-President', 1900 GMT 25 January 1977. Radio.

<sup>392</sup> Mustafa Adrisi, 1986 CIVHR, p. 6067. UHRC.

Adrisi was increasingly regarded (somewhat over-optimistically) as an advocate for the restoration of order and discipline by soldiers and civilians alike. He was known to have interceded to free civilians from Makindye, and had spoken out against extra-judicial killings (though it should perhaps be noted that Amin himself had also released prisoners and condemned violence, and Adrisi had also publicly threatened civilians in the fraught aftermath of the attempt on Amin's life in 1976.) By his own admission to the 1986 commission, Adrisi had become increasingly jaded with Amin's leadership, and was considering taking action against him when he had a serious motor accident during a tour of West Nile on April 19th 1978.<sup>393</sup> Unsurprisingly given the controversy surrounding Luwum's own such 'accident' in 1977, Adrisi's entourage assumed that they were under attack and opened fire on crowding civilians. Several army units mutinied.

In this same period relations between Amin and Moses Ali, another prominent West Niler, were also souring. Ali had served as Finance Minister since 1977, presenting an 'Action Programme' for economic recovery that was promising in tone, if not in implementation.<sup>394</sup> He had played a subsidiary but nonetheless significant role in the aftermath of the coup, visiting numerous barracks to confirm their loyalty to the new regime.<sup>395</sup> In 1978 he was heavily involved in fundraising for a new headquarters for the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, and he had personally organized a large number of *Mauledis*, a move that was always likely to arouse concern in a period defined by extreme hostility and suspicion towards any kind of large-scale activity that might have political implications.<sup>396</sup> The enormous mosque that would eventually be constructed in Kampala is still attributed to Amin today, but he had initially been reluctant to endorse the project. Amin had become cool towards the UMSC despite his role in its establishment, dismissing

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<sup>393</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, 'Vice President Mustafa Adrisi Injured in Road Accident', 1700 GMT 19 April 1978. Radio.

<sup>394</sup> Mutibwa, *A History of Uganda*, p. 266.

<sup>395</sup> Moses Ali, 1986 CIVHR, p. 13742. UHRC.

<sup>396</sup> A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Life of Prince Badru Kakungulu Wasajwa: and the Development of a Forward Looking Muslim Community in Uganda 1907-1991*, (Kampala, 1996), p. 208.



several of its appointed leaders in 1975 and preferring for the most part to ignore it.<sup>397</sup> In 1978 it emerged that large amounts of the money raised during the *Mauledis* had disappeared, prompting an investigation. This led to a series of arguments between Amin and Ali, including heated confrontations during Defence Council meetings.<sup>398</sup> Amin publicly condemned his Finance Minister for 'misallocation' of vehicles.<sup>399</sup> SRC agents searched Ali's house in Moyo.<sup>400</sup> Several of his associates were detained in Makindye.<sup>401</sup>

How much significance should be assigned to these clashes, the latest in a long line of disputes and minor shifts in power amongst the small circle of men closest to the President? Avudria, Ochima, Toloko, Musa, Arube, Aseni, Marella: many prominent soldiers and erstwhile allies had already been and gone. The crucial difference in the case of Amin's falling out with Adrisi and Ali is that neither feud had fully resolved itself by the time of the regime's fall. This was in no small part due to the much more seismic political impact of Uganda's conflict with Tanzania, which was triggered by the ongoing fallout from the 1977 purges, and Adrisi's accident.

The months between the vice-president's car-crash and the outbreak of war (May-October 1978) were characterised by frantic rotation, dismissals, and belligerent statements against neighbouring Tanzania by the President, primarily in an effort to shore up his support and appease mutinous elements in the Uganda Army.<sup>402</sup> Finding himself at odds with former stalwarts such as Isaac Lumago and Abdullah Nasur, Amin took over several ministerial portfolios for

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<sup>397</sup> Ibid, p. 196.

<sup>398</sup> Rice, *The teeth May Smile*, p. 198. In some accounts of this confrontation the two men drew guns in a cabinet meeting. In others Ali is struck by an ashtray.

<sup>399</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, 'Idi Amin dismisses Finance Minister', 1000 GMT, 26 July 1978. Radio.

<sup>400</sup> Francis Itabuka, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2070. UHRC.

<sup>401</sup> Kasozi, *The Life of Prince Badru Kakungulu*, p. 208.

<sup>402</sup> Omara-Otunnu, *Politics and the Military in Uganda*, 140.

himself, and appointed Yusuf Gowon as Chief of Staff.<sup>403</sup> Gowon is alleged to have been very skilled in the kinds of political intrigue necessary to thrive in the Amin state (known as a ‘snake’, to his rivals), and had been rising steadily through the ranks since his command at Mbarara during the 1972 invasion.<sup>404</sup> He and Moses Ali were longtime rivals. Ali was dismissed from his post as Minister of Finance and from the army as well, ‘due to the outcry of the masses’, and for the misallocation of the funds for the UMSC headquarters.<sup>405</sup> He was later attacked at his home in West Nile by armed gunmen, but escaped.<sup>406</sup>

In a return to tactics previously employed in 1972 and 1974, a new human rights committee was announced in September, ‘charged with the duty of explaining Uganda’s position abroad’.<sup>407</sup> Mohamed Said was to reprise his role as the head of a commission into abuses in the country. In similar fashion to the 1974 commission, several army figures were also named as participants, including Kassim Obura, head of the PSU, and Major Gowon. The committee was in part a reaction to escalating international sanctions and condemnation, and partly an attempt to reassert control over the security apparatus. Presumably another report would have been produced had the regime survived long enough for the committee to get to work. But events at the Tanzanian border soon relegated it to insignificance.

The initial ‘spark’ at the Mutukula crossing that prompted Uganda’s occupation of the Kagera salient is still much disputed. The conventional narrative holds that, desperate to distract

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<sup>403</sup> Major Yusuf Gowon, interviewed in Arua District, 27 January 2017.

<sup>404</sup> Rice, *The Teeth May Smile*, pp. 197-8.

<sup>405</sup> ‘Idi Amin dismisses Finance Minister’. Radio.

<sup>406</sup> Rice, *The Teeth May Smile*, p.198.

<sup>407</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, ‘Amin announces setting up of human rights committee’, 1400 GMT, 3 April 1978. Radio.

his mutinous soldiers from events at home, Amin deliberately sparked a war with Tanzania.<sup>408</sup>

Other interpretations are somewhat less clear-cut, suggesting that Amin had rotated some rebellious units to the South-West to keep them out of the way, but that the first Ugandan soldiers to cross into Tanzania were actually mutineers from Mbarara barracks, who clashed with pro-Amin forces before fleeing over the border with their former colleagues in pursuit.<sup>409</sup> Whatever the exact cause of the incursion the end result was the same, with Ugandan troops occupying part of north-western Tanzania.

### The Uganda-Tanzania Conflict, 1978-79

Representing as it does something of an anomaly in post-independence African warfare, The interstate war between Amin's Uganda and Nyerere's Tanzania has begun to attract some scholarly attention in its own right. It is not the purpose of this thesis to explore the strategic dimensions of this conflict. Nonetheless the sudden, unexpected, and unqualified success that Tanzania enjoyed in the war can tell us something about the state of Uganda, and of Amin's support base in 1978-9. Comparisons of violence brought about by the conflict with that which had come before are often central to individual narratives of the Amin years and their aftermath. This too can help to construct a better understanding of the nature of political violence before and after Amin's fall.

The Ugandan Army proved extremely ineffective in comparison to its Tanzanian counterpart. As explored earlier, it was by this time comprised of many mutually antagonistic and

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<sup>408</sup> Decker, *In Idi Amin's Shadow*, p. 150.

<sup>409</sup> Roberts, 'The Uganda-Tanzania War', p. 695.

fragmented battalions, weakened by repeated purges, and led by officers that were deeply suspicious of each other. Soldiering in the Amin years had often come to mean smuggling, extortion and business operation rather than training and manoeuvres. Accounts of the conflict by participants, such as that by Bernard Rwehururu, are rife with tales of incompetence and failure: in one episode he alleges that officers sent to Libya to purchase bombs had left their fuse mechanisms in Benghazi.<sup>410</sup> As they met with military setbacks, the battalions began to fight amongst themselves over who had started the conflict in the first place. Desertions were common and whole formations, including the rebellious Chui battalion, withdrew against the wishes of central command. Some former Ugandan soldiers believe that the Tanzanians were bribing key officers in order to convince them to retreat.<sup>411</sup> Rwehururu's account suggests that yet another coup attempt was being formulated amongst senior officers on the frontline.

In a somewhat ironic twist, it is commonly rumoured that large reserves of weaponry and ammunition stockpiled in Tanzania for the liberation struggle against apartheid-era South Africa, a strategy supplied and pushed for by Amin himself, played a significant role in giving the Tanzanian forces a military edge.<sup>412</sup> Use of the BM Katyusha multiple rocket launcher, popularly remembered in Uganda as *Saba Saba*, gave the Tanzanian forces superior range and access to a weapon that, with its distinct and booming sound, was extremely damaging to the morale of Amin's forces.<sup>413</sup> The *Saba Saba* has continued to resonate in Ugandan historical memory as a moment that conflict 'came home', permeating the domestic sphere in ways that political violence had not commonly done before.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Rwehururu, *Cross to the Gun*, p. 110.

<sup>411</sup> Captain Ibrahim Juma, interviewed in Arua District, 28 January 2017.

<sup>412</sup> Tumusiime and Bichachi, *Uganda's Presidents*, p.157.

<sup>413</sup> Rwehururu, *Cross to the Gun*, 108.

<sup>414</sup> Elizabeth Livingstone, interviewed in Kampala, 7 November 2016.

The result was that the Tanzanian's retaliatory push into Uganda was more successful than anybody had dreamed. Masaka and Mbarara were both taken swiftly, and a counter-offensive led by Lieutenant Colonel Godwin Sule ended when he was killed at the frontline.<sup>415</sup> Some reports suggest that the Sudanese-Nubian general was deliberately run over by a tank driven by his own rebellious soldiers.<sup>416</sup> A plan that had begun with capturing and installing a temporary government in Mbarara and Masaka now expanded to encompass the entirety of the country.<sup>417</sup> Limited running battles on the road to Kampala proved unable to stop the Tanzanian advance, and hundreds of Ugandan soldiers began to desert.<sup>418</sup>

#### After Amin: Reprisals, Returnees, Refugees

It is common to view Amin's fall in 1979 as inevitable. Uncomfortable though it might be to admit, this is a view that is often informed by implicit values rather than by the empirical circumstances of his regime's collapse. A dictatorship underpinned by violence, cronyism, and economic strife is an unpalatable thought to most political commentators. That such a regime might actually have survived for many more years to come poses awkward questions with bleak answers. Given that Amin's 'inevitable' fall has come to constitute a crucial part of the general narrativization and streamlining of the period, it merits scrutiny.

Without the exceptional political circumstances of the Uganda-Tanzanian war the political picture that remains is not an unstoppable slide into political collapse, but a slow, steady deterioration of political, social and economic life, punctuated by oscillating patterns of escalating and de-escalating insecurity and violence. Much of this deterioration and instability stemmed

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<sup>415</sup> Rwehururu, *Cross to the Gun*, 146.

<sup>416</sup> Yakani Manassi, interviewed in Koboko District, 30 January 2017.

<sup>417</sup> Jorgensen, *Uganda: a Modern History*, p. 331.

<sup>418</sup> Bishop Ona, interviewed in Arua District, 26 January 2017.

from the excesses and struggles of Amin and his supporters at the political centre, but it was also driven by actors at all levels of the country, as illegal economic activity, localised feuding, and misinformation spread and entrenched themselves to further exacerbate a climate of uncertainty. The key institutions of the Ugandan State had been in similar decline, through a combination of opportunistic indiscipline and fearful paralysis, but they had also proved persistent. Much of the worst political violence had been conducted outside the formal apparatus of the state, most of which was still intact, albeit in a demoralised and damaged condition.

It is possible to imagine this declining but functional political order limping on for years, as many other such regimes did elsewhere on the continent. The international 'watershed' moment of the end of the Cold War, with its knock-on effects of weakening dictatorial regimes in Africa and contributing to the emergence of greater conditionality in donor relations with African states, was still a decade away. Other military dictatorships, like that of Mobutu's Zaire, endured until after this moment having overseen similar periods of decline. Bokassa's Central African Empire fell months after Amin, but only with direct French intervention, something that no outside power was likely to attempt in Uganda. It is conceivable that a subsequent factional struggle within the army of the kind that Amin had repeatedly survived and navigated over his eight years in power might later have removed him, but neither is it certain. External and insurgent armed opposition to Amin had certainly enjoyed a resurgence in the later years of his government, but it had remained limited, both in manpower and resources. That Ugandan actors played so small a part in the Tanzanian side of the war serves to demonstrate this.

Once the crucial (and, in continental terms, unusual) political impact of the Tanzanian defeat of Amin's forces on Ugandan politics is recognised, one must turn to the political and social ramifications of the subsequent Tanzanian occupation, and the complete collapse of Amin's regime on domestic life in the country. The experience of Uganda in the Tanzanian occupation and

its aftermath demonstrates several key factors. First and foremost is that as ineffective and predatory as Amin's government had been, it was nothing compared to the brief period of relative anarchy that was unleashed by its sudden and total destruction, and the attendant power vacuum Uganda experienced. It had certainly wielded violence, but it had also maintained a degree of order. This was now shattered by a dangerous combination of reprisals against the regime, localised struggles to establish power, and opportunistic crime, all exacerbated by a sudden flood of weaponry into the country. It presented the politicians that now sought to move Uganda forwards with a series of huge challenges, many of which owed as much to the short-term dynamics of the Tanzanian occupation as the impact of the Amin regime itself.

The flight of Amin's army and the capture of Uganda by the Tanzanian forces were accompanied by the most systematic looting and destruction of property in Uganda's post-independence history.<sup>419</sup> Kampala witnessed significant upheaval, as civilians and soldiers alike broke into abandoned businesses and houses. Simon Mpanga was only a teenager when the regime fell, but he remembers travelling in from the neighbouring countryside with his brothers to loot and carry back valuable goods from the capital.<sup>420</sup> The offices of the SRC and PSU were themselves heavily looted, destroying much of the evidence of their operation. This was the Kampala that foreign correspondents arrived in to begin an autopsy of the Amin regime.<sup>421</sup> Armed entrepreneurialism, far from dying down, enjoyed a whole new lease of life.

Respondents remember the Tanzanian army as having conducted itself with discipline: rather, it was the fleeing Ugandan soldiery, and the civilian population, that was responsible for most of the serious damage in the months leading up to and following Amin's fall.<sup>422</sup> Streams of

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<sup>419</sup> Mirica Kisitu, interviewed in Kampala, 15 November 2016.

<sup>420</sup> Simon Mpanga, interviewed in Kampala, 19 November 2016.

<sup>421</sup> Richard Possnet, 'Uganda after Amin', *The World Today*, 36:4, (1980), p. 148.

<sup>422</sup> Mirica Kisitu, 15 November 2016.

retreating soldiers took advantage of their weapons to loot and pillage most of the major towns on their journey North, before fleeing to West Nile and across the borders, mostly into Sudan and Congo. Homes were far more likely to be broken into during these months, and women remember being far more afraid about the risk of sexual violence.<sup>423</sup> Colonel Nelson Obiale remembered the widespread looting:

We came back through Masindi and everything was already destroyed. Who fought in Masindi? We went to Pakwach, everything was destroyed. Who fought in Pakwach? Who fought in Nebbi? Who fought in Arua? It certainly wasn't Nyerere!<sup>424</sup>

Huge quantities of guns and ammunition found their way into civilian hands in this period. Some of these were abandoned by Amin's army, as in the case of the army barracks in Moroto, which was systematically looted by local Karamojong herdsman. This, coupled with the years of abuse the Karamojong had suffered at the hands of the military, would have severe implications for patterns of cattle raiding in the region: having been stifled for some years by the armed forces, this now intensified and took on more dangerous forms than ever before.<sup>425</sup> Elsewhere the Tanzanian army and Ugandan exiles also distributed weapons, often without hesitation or consideration for what impact this might have. Julius Mwaka remembered the mass conscription in Kitgum area, which saw large numbers of young men, most with only minimal training, given weapons. Some of these subsequently failed to report for duty, taking their weapons with them. Others formed informal militia and launched revenge raids into West Nile.<sup>426</sup> The struggle to control the use of weapons in Uganda predated Amin, and had worsened under his rule. In the wake of his fall this spread of firearms accelerated drastically.

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> Colonel Nelson Obiale, interviewed in Arua District, 24 December 2017.

<sup>425</sup> Benjamin Knighton, *The Vitality of the Karamojong Region*, (London, 2017), p. 26.

<sup>426</sup> Julius Mwaka, 1986 CIVHR, p. 10215. UHRC.



An eruption of retaliatory violence was launched against ‘Amin’s men’ in years following the regime that often mapped to the areas that had suffered the worst under his rule. In the South-West, attacks on local Muslims and Nubians took place in 1979 and 1980.<sup>427</sup> The most infamous, a massacre at Rwizi River, followed a series of provocative speeches by Edward Ruugaranga, a prominent politician who had himself been severely injured during the 1972 killings in that same area.<sup>428</sup> There had been clashes along religious lines in the south-west as recently as 1978, and some of the violence may have been a continuation of this. An early investigation into the violence by the new government was met not just with Muslim witnesses, but several of the alleged perpetrators, unapologetically listing the abuses they themselves had suffered in the Amin era.<sup>429</sup> After several months of intermittent violence the situation cooled, thanks in no small part to reconciliatory efforts on both sides.<sup>430</sup>

Agents of the regime now had to navigate the hostile domestic environment. John Male, a Nubian-speaker from Bombo who had worked for the security services, remembers stopping any use of the language for months, and staying close to his house. Jowett Aritua, a former civil servant who had worked as an interpreter for Mustapha Adrisi, was shot and injured on his porch in Arua by UNLA soldiers who had been led to him as one of ‘Amin’s men’.<sup>431</sup> Frank Masiko was drinking in a Kampala bar with friends from Kigezi who had fought in the liberation army when he spotted the same SRC agent that had broken his clavicle during the Makerere violence:

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<sup>427</sup> Kasozi, *The Life of Prince Badru Kakungulu*, p. 213.

<sup>428</sup> Rice, *The Teeth May Smile*, p. 213.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>430</sup> Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, p. 213-4.

<sup>431</sup> Jowett Aritua, 9 December 2016.

I went to him and I said “you know who I am, and I know who you are. My friends here would very much like to meet somebody like you, but if you leave now I will not tell them.” And he went to the bathroom and he must have gone through the back window because I did not see that man again for years!<sup>432</sup>

This period saw cross-border movement on a far greater scale than the Amin years. For the large numbers of men from West Nile that had made up the army, the return home was relatively brief. The pursuing Tanzanian and UNLA forces chased most of the Uganda Army over the border. West Nilers were certain the UNLA would come to avenge violence against the Acholi and Langi, and killings and looting soon bore them out. Over the next two years it has been estimated that 80% of the population of West Nile District fled into Sudan and Congo, thousands of them ending up in refugee camps. Many of the houses built by soldiers of the regime were deliberately targeted and destroyed.

Former soldiers formed a series of small splinter groups, to protect themselves from the reprisals. Most of these groups lived off the land at the expense of the local population. Some of them were loosely formed around the idea of restoring Amin to power. Others simply weren't ready to give up life by the gun and return to other means of subsistence.<sup>433</sup> These included but were not limited to the Oyoro Boys, who looted Arua area during 1979 and engaged in brief skirmishes with the UNLA, the Yerego insurgency in Maracha district in 1980, and the Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF).<sup>434</sup> Led by Moses Ali and Mustapha Adrisi, the UNRF incorporated numerous former Amin era officers and had support in Koboko and Yumbe area. They launched raids from across the border in Sudan, and contributed alongside the UNLA's reprisals to

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<sup>432</sup> Frank Masiko, 10 November 2016.

<sup>433</sup> Samuel Walaka, interviewed in Arua District, 26 January 2017.

<sup>434</sup> Former SRC agent, interviewed in Arua District, 9 December 2016.

instability in the region for several years. Caught between the warring groups, the local population suffered massively.<sup>435</sup> At Ombaci near Arua in 1982, fighting between UNRF forces and the UNLA escalated into a massacre of thousands of local people who had been sheltering in the Catholic mission.<sup>436</sup>

Many of the leading figures of the regime fled to West Nile or into Sudan and Congo, but some remained. Often these were men who had homes outside of West Nile, and were not caught up in the mass exodus. Kassim Obura, former head of the PSU, had returned to his family home in Lira. On May 7<sup>th</sup> 1979 soldiers arrived at his house, tied him up, and destroyed his compound. He was taken to Makindye, now under the control of the UNLA, where he was tortured, losing the use of one eye. Obura was then detained in Luzira prison. He would later be one of the few high profile members of the Amin regime to be executed for crimes committed during this period.<sup>437</sup> Other former soldiers, including Ali Fadhul and Abdullah Nasur, were arrested in Bombo and detained.<sup>438</sup> For many of 'Amin's men' this is where the historical trail, extremely limited to begin with, ends. Isaac Maliyamungu fled into Congo in 1979, where he was allegedly murdered. Farouk Minawa of the SRC started over as a businessman in Tripoli, and Juma 'Butabika' Ali of the ECT went to Khartoum. In many cases it seems likely that the same supranational Nubian-speaking communities from which many of Amin's circle had been drawn now provided some degree of cover for them in exile. Amin himself never returned to Uganda, despite his promises to the contrary. Despite the requests of multiple rebel groups he refused to join with his former soldiers in their tougher new circumstances, retreating instead into luxurious decline with his family, a fact that is often commented on by his former supporters:

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<sup>435</sup> Leopold, *Inside West Nile*, pp. 44-5.

<sup>436</sup> Brahan Malengo, interviewed in Arua District, 9 December 2016.

<sup>437</sup> Kassim Obura, 1986 CIVHR, p. 1495. UHRC.

<sup>438</sup> Francis Itabuka, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2038. UHRC.

I am called Amin's man but I did not join in Amin's time. We are called Amin's men but we did not join to help Amin. Now we are in peace, the poorest of soldiers. And where is Amin?<sup>439</sup>

The political inheritance of the returning exiles was a country rife with rumour, and communal grievances. The informal economy was booming, at the expense of a withered and floundering central administration, bereft of funds and of educated and capable staff. The police were entirely demoralised, and rates of local crime and homicide had been rising ever since the fall of the regime, especially around the capital. Many of Amin's former soldiers continued to move with their weapons at the fringes of the country. In the south-west, the north, and the north-east, the communities which had been most badly treated under the Amin government were warier than ever of rule from Kampala. Many of them now had access to arms and ammunition that they had not before. These multiple challenges would continue to undermine and compromise subsequent efforts to run the country.

### Conclusion

The final years of the Amin regime witnessed the re-emergence of similar violent processes to those which had followed his takeover, and the subsequent threats posed to his regime in late 1972. Following new 'shocks' to the regime's authority and security in 1976, regime-led violence against civilians which had been de-escalating since 1974 rose once again. The purges of 1977 differed from earlier violence in that direct military involvement was reduced. Rather the violence was carried out by SRC agents led by Farouk Minawa, who was tied closely to Amin's inner circle. There was a re-emergence of ethnicised violence, with Acholi and Langi men once again finding themselves disproportionately targeted. Just like in 1971 this was partly a response to a nascent

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<sup>439</sup> Major Yusuf Gowon, interviewed in Arua District, 27 January 2017.

insurgency from amongst these populations. Like earlier 'spikes' of violence, the 1977 purges were very unpopular, and prompted a rowing back from the regime in 1978, when Amin declared 'a year of peace'.

In addition to these more familiar patterns was the emergence of new battlegrounds between state and society over questions of public order. This took the form of new conflicts between the regime and disparate elements of urban society, as demonstrated by recurrent and short-lived clashes with students at Makerere, with the Ugandan churches, and with domestic football crowds in Kampala. Like earlier violence these clashes are often best understood as being the product of localised conflicts that escalated to draw in the repressive apparatus of the regime. They were often driven by the ongoing predatory behaviours of the Ugandan security forces, coupled with the desire of the regime to impose order and insulate itself from scrutiny. These clashes were disproportionately influential in shaping western coverage of Amin's Uganda, which incorporated these incidents into an increasingly streamlined narrative of a declining and repressive dictatorship.

Increasing conflict over the economy, prompted by predatory state practices and the spread of illegal smuggling and hoarding of goods, created a new frontline in the Amin state's 'Economic War'. In the war against *magendo* new forms of economic crimes were punished with violence, and the regime fought to establish control over economic life with a combination of localised violence and pseudo-legal punishments issued by the ECT. Like the regime's occasional use of public execution, the ECT and the anti-smuggling security units were short-lived and experimental, their quasi-formal nature contradicted by the heavy involvement of Amin's inner circle and defined by arbitrary and personalised punishments. The 'Economic War' was one in which the Amin state fought its own shadow and lost, outmanoeuvred by limited resources,

widespread collusion in smuggling by the security forces, and the repeated manipulation and co-option of state forces by local actors. It was a losing battle that Amin's successors inherited.

The aforementioned struggles are generally positioned within a wider narrative of Amin's inevitable rise, resort to violence, and sudden fall. In the traditional narrative each of these stages is inevitable. However, despite the undeniable vulnerability and volatility of the Amin regime, there is little to suggest the domestic challenges facing it in 1978 were any more dangerous than similar threats that Amin had already navigated. As this thesis has sought to demonstrate, such 'spikes' of violence had appeared and then disappeared several times already. It was the remarkable circumstances of the Ugandan occupation of the Kagera salient, and Amin's war with Nyerere's Tanzania that ultimately proved to be the regime's undoing. The sudden destruction of Amin's government by outside forces led to a temporary unravelling of the social and political order which, whilst damaged by Amin's rule, had also been maintained to a considerable degree. For many Ugandans this was the era in which violence truly 'came home', not the violence of Amin's own time in government. The resulting anarchy, the spread of armaments into the country, and the continuing spread of localised violence presented Uganda's new would-be rulers with an extreme set of political challenges.

#### 4. 'I Was Not Followed': Uganda's Violence Workers, 1971-1979:

It is your acts that will follow you. I was not followed. I didn't want somebody's property; I didn't want somebody's wife. I was a servant.<sup>440</sup>

This chapter attempts to better understand the Amin regime's 'violence workers.' Specifically, it examines in detail three infamous state units that were heavily implicated in the perpetration of violence during this period. The Military Police (MP) at Makindye, the State Research Centre (SRC) at Nakasero, and the Public Safety Unit (PSU) at Naguru all achieved infamy under Amin for employing violence against civilians. Despite near unanimity in existing accounts as to the central role of these units in shaping violence in the Amin years they have received little to no meaningful scholarly attention. Crucially, no existing historical account of violence work in this period has employed the testimonies of perpetrators as well as those of victims.

Drawing on fieldwork interviews as well as testimonies with witnesses and former staff given to two key investigations into violence in Uganda, this chapter will explore how and why the units were originally established, their intended functions, and their operation in practice. It seeks to demonstrate how specific patterns of violence against civilians became routinised in these state units, and the ways in which staff understood and justified their actions. Numerous structural and situational factors were pivotal in creating and sustaining new forms of violent behaviour. Secrecy, organisational fragmentation, and the legitimacy and impunity offered by the resources and language of the state all served to facilitate the development of institutionalised patterns of violence.

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<sup>440</sup> Former SRC agent, interviewed in Arua District, 9 December 2016.

However, such structural explanations can only paint part of the picture. The many forms of violence produced by the security forces in this period cannot be explained satisfactorily by their institutional design alone. Amin's security units suffered from the same limiting factors as the Ugandan state more broadly in this period. Far from being cohesive and omnipotent, the security units of the state were inexperienced, poorly equipped, badly informed, and riven with internal factionalism. The bureaucratic surface of the organisations often masked an ambiguous and fractured chain of command, the overlapping ambitions and agency of individuals, and the importance of alternative social networks that permeated the security apparatus in shaping the course of events inside and outside of their offices. Prisoners in these spaces often found ways of navigating, contesting, and even escaping them. They were sites of some extreme violence, but they also witnessed unlikely episodes of heroism and camaraderie. In many ways they serve as a microcosm of the Amin regime itself.

#### Introduction:

One morning in early October 1972, Solomon Watmon was sat in his compound in East Acholi District when a green Peugeot 504 pulled in. Solomon worked at the District Administration, and he had been informed the day before by his friend Okidi Polomoy that intelligence officers from Anaka were looking for him. Polomoy had left the previous night, to escape over the border into Sudan, but Solomon had decided to stay.

Several intelligence officers in plain clothes got out of the car and approached him, led by Paul Mugoya, the local District Commissioner. Mugoya identified him, and the men stopped speaking amongst themselves in Ki'Nubi, and asked him his name in Langi. When he confirmed



his identity, they asked for the keys to his car, and informed him that he was under arrest.

Solomon accompanied them without any resistance.

Solomon was taken to Lira police barracks, where he was detained in a cell. He was never asked to make a statement, and nobody made any written record of his arrival or detention. After two weeks he was put into a Land-rover with four other Langi men, and driven towards Kampala. Upon arrival in the capital, the Land-rover stopped first at the PSU offices in Naguru, where the other four prisoners were dropped off. It then continued on to Makindye barracks, where Solomon himself was handed over to the Military Police.

Solomon was detained in Makindye for three weeks. Upon arrival, he was tortured for a short period of time, forced to lie in a puddle of muddy water for thirty minutes and beaten by several military policemen. After the first day, he was only beaten occasionally, fed largely with porridge, and confined to a cell. He recalled being ordered to drink his own urine on one occasion. In early November a lieutenant came and called out his name, and informed him that “the same people who brought you here are there, they want you.”

Solomon was freed from the cell and plied with cigarettes and sodas. He was informed that the president had asked the intelligence officers to find him and take him back to Kitgum. He was driven home and restored to his office at the district administration. He was never told why he had been reported to the intelligence officers, and he never asked. His car remained in the possession of the Military Police. When he enquired some months later at the president’s office about it, he was informed that the government would search for it, or pay for a new one. He never received a replacement.

Solomon’s testimony to the 1986 Commission is typical of many such stories of civilians who suffered at the hands of the security forces during Amin’s regime. A lack of explanation for one’s arrest, an absence of any documentation during the detainment process, routine torture, the theft of property, and a sudden, unexplained release were common experiences for victims of

Uganda's Military Police, Public Safety Unit, and State Research Centre during this period. That Solomon seems to have been informed on and handed over by colleagues in the district administration, and subsequently found to have been entirely innocent, is also instructive, both of the fear these organisations inspired in the civilian population, and of their utter dependence on local informants in their operations.<sup>441</sup>

The perpetrators in Solomon's account remained nameless, even faceless. They were plain clothes officers with apparent state sanction; he remained uncertain exactly which unit it was that had arrested him in the first place. This chapter begins the process of rendering Amin's violence workers more visible.

#### Explaining Amin's Violence Workers: A Historical Challenge:

Existing accounts of the Amin years are unanimous in their assessment that the Military Police, PSU, and SRC were at the heart of the regime's use of violence. Despite this, there has been very little effort made to understand and distinguish between these units. Indeed, the explanations offered for their use of violence have often been generalised and lazy. There is a tendency to treat state violence in the period as entirely criminal and random. Henry Kyemba's famous account spoke of 'a state of blood and random slaughter'.<sup>442</sup> Ofcansky argued that 'the violent tactics employed by the Amin regime often had no purpose other than to terrorize the Ugandan

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<sup>441</sup> Solomon Amone Watmon, 1986 CIVHR, pp. 10191-10200. UHRC.

<sup>442</sup> Kyemba, *A State of Blood*, p. 12.

population'.<sup>443</sup> Numerous accounts have pointed to the grim irony of a unit established to instil 'Public Safety' instead employing violence against civilians, and have generally regarded the PSU as just another means of keeping Amin in power.<sup>444</sup> Overwhelmingly, accounts have argued that there was no real difference between the security units; all were essentially criminal, and extensions of Amin's own violent personality. In much the same way, respondents often generalised about the fate that befell victims of the security forces; the common adage that 'nobody lived to tell the tale' regularly appears in popular narratives.

Some accounts have focused on ethnicity as explanation in and of itself. The security forces were 'savages from the Muslim Kakwa... it [violence] was for them like television for children'.<sup>445</sup> David Martin pointed to the fact that many of the regime's soldiers were Nubians, 'renowned for their sadistic brutality, lack of formal education, for poisoning enemies and for their refusal to integrate, even in the urban centres'.<sup>446</sup> This theme of Nubians as sadistic and amoral is picked up in other accounts too. The regime's men were 'mindless savages', defined by their lack of education and 'casual brutality'.<sup>447</sup> The usual motifs of West Nile cannibalism often appear. In one instance a reported method of murder at Makindye prison involving prisoners being made to kill each other in turn with hammers was explained away as 'tribal custom'.<sup>448</sup> This method, referred to as 'Nyondo', was picked up and reported widely by human rights organisations, but no credible evidence for it exists in the historical record.<sup>449</sup> Besides the obvious lunacy of guards arming their own prisoners with hammers in a confined space, it seems more likely that the 'Nyondo' method

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<sup>443</sup> Thomas Ofcansky, *Uganda: tarnished pearl of Africa*, (London, 2018) p. 43.

<sup>444</sup> Mutibwa, *A History of Uganda*, p. 276.

<sup>445</sup> David Gwyn, *Idi Amin*, p. 11.

<sup>446</sup> Martin, *General Amin*, p. 14.

<sup>447</sup> Grahame, *Amin & Uganda*, p. 99.

<sup>448</sup> Loyal Gould & James Garrett, 'Joint Editorial: Amin's Uganda: troubled land of religious persecution', *Journal of Church and State*, 19:3, (1977), p. 433.

<sup>449</sup> The International Commission of Jurists, *Violations of Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Uganda*, (Geneva, 1976).

was one of many exoticised stories of brutality that were designed to shock, and to mobilise opposition to the Amin regime at home and overseas.

Fictional portrayals of the period have done little for this exoticization of violent action during the Amin years. 'The Last King of Scotland' features two horrific scenes of spectacular torture by unknown security agents identified only by their reflective sunglasses and flowery shirts. Neither of these scenes have a genuine basis in the historical record.<sup>450</sup> Moses Issegawa's *Snakepit*, for all its insight into the dynamics of power during this period, also relishes in embroiling pseudo-historical characters in long, fabricated torture sequences.<sup>451</sup> Under the legitimising guise of 'historical fiction', stereotypes about 'ethnic' violence in Uganda have been embellished and reified.

Previous historical analyses of the regime have attempted to better categorise the nature of violence under Amin. Mamdani asserted that 'violence is never aimless', and pointed to the significance of 'both an institutional and individual aspect' to the violence in this period. He was struck by the significance of the 'recruitment of urban riffraff' into the army and security units.<sup>452</sup> This same duality of violent practice is a recurring theme of the Amin years. Short noted the existence of 'an official and an unofficial terror'.<sup>453</sup> Mazrui pointed to 'tyranny' and 'anarchy' as different drivers of violence.<sup>454</sup> For Kannyo, this same duality is best understood as the 'open' and 'masked' face of state terrorism. He labels the SRC, PSU and MP as 'death squads', established to impose terror and eliminate opposition.<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> Kevin Macdonald et al, *The last king of Scotland*. Twentieth Century Fox, 2007. Film.

<sup>451</sup> Moses Issegawa, *Snakepit*, (New York, 2005).

<sup>452</sup> Mamdani, *Imperialism and Fascism in Uganda*, p. 44-45.

<sup>453</sup> Philip Short, 'Amin's Uganda', *Transition*, 40 (1971), pp. 48-55.

<sup>454</sup> Mazrui, *The Making of a Military Ethnocracy*, p.

<sup>455</sup> Edward Kannyo, 'State terrorism and death squads in Uganda, 1971-1979', in Bruce Campbell and Arthur Brenner (eds.), *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability*, (New York, 2000), p. 154.

There exists now a far better array of historical materials with which to attempt an analysis of the Amin regime's violence workers. The investigations of 1974 and 1986 provide testimonies from dozens of witnesses to the activities of state units and agents in this period. Crucially the 1986 testimonies also include statements from a number of high-ranking staff within the units themselves, as well as lower-ranking officers. This enables us to reconstruct accounts of their operation from both sides. Interviews with former staff of the MP, PSU and SRC can also offer insights that have previously gone assumed without consultation, or ignored.

There has also been steady progress in recent decades within the theoretical literature on violent organisations, atrocity environments, and 'violence workers' in a range of historical contexts. The Zimbardo prison experiment infamously established the significance of spatial and psychological dimensions in the development of abusive environments.<sup>456</sup> Following on from Browning's seminal work *Ordinary Men*, there has been increased recognition that perpetrators of violence, far from being drawn from inherently violent groups, are often 'made' by the institutions and contexts in which they serve.<sup>457</sup> Hatzfeld has examined this in an African context in her study of genocidaires in Rwanda in 1994, highlighting the ways in which previously non-violent actors learned to kill gradually in groups over the course of the genocide.<sup>458</sup> Huggins has explored this in the context of the Brazilian military dictatorship, exploring the ways in which torture and murder became legitimised and routinised by military policemen.<sup>459</sup> Anderson has employed similar tools in his work on British torture in Kenya during the Mau-Mau insurgency, further highlighting the role of the state in organising and facilitating the emergence of structural patterns of violence.<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> Curtis Banks and Philip Zimbardo, 'A study of prisoners and guards in a simulated prison', *Naval Research Reviews*, 9, (1973), pp. 1-17.

<sup>457</sup> Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. (New York, 1992).

<sup>458</sup> Jean Hatzfeld, *A Time for Machetes: the Killers in Rwanda Speak*. (London, 2005).

<sup>459</sup> Huggins et al, *Violence workers: Police torturers and Murderers Reconstruct Brazilian Atrocities*. (California, 2002).

<sup>460</sup> Anderson, 'British abuse and torture in Kenya's Counter-Insurgency, 1952-1960'.

Robben has pursued a similar line of inquiry in the study of the Argentinian Junta, and the importance of understanding the ways in which perpetrators of violence rationalise and justify their actions.<sup>461</sup> The importance of secrecy, of compartmentalisation and competition within and between a range of units, and of global and local discourses that serve to facilitate and rationalise violence are recurring themes in these works.

This chapter will argue that these attempts to identify key dynamics in the entrenchment of violent behaviour by state agents do shed some light in regard to Amin's security apparatus. Legitimising discourses, secrecy, organisational fragmentation, routinisation, and facilitation all played a part in producing and sustaining 'violence workers', and violent work, during this period. There was an undeniable spatial dimension at play in the production of violence: the cells at Makindye, Naguru and Nakasero all became violent spaces over the eight years of Amin's rule in a way that other sites did not, and particular patterns of routinised violence emerged.

However, one must also recognise the importance of the specific historical context, and of the choices of the political actors involved, both in establishing, maintaining, and disrupting violent spaces and patterns of behaviour. The agency of individuals mattered, and the escalating and de-escalating 'spikes' of violence identified in chapters one to three can also be observed within the state's security apparatus. None of these units or sites was an undifferentiated instrument of unlimited violence throughout the period in question. Indeed, all three witnessed periods of intensified and reduced violence against civilians during the course of the regime. They also served different functions, had access to different resources, and impacted upon different sections of the population.

As has been explored in the three chronological chapters of this thesis, the idea of 'the state' can also mask alternative registers and networks through and for which people understood and took action. The institutions of the state were embedded in Ugandan society, with important

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<sup>461</sup> Antonius Robben, *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina*. (Pennsylvania, 2005).

implications for their function and capacity. The MP, SRC, and PSU were all heavily drawn from multiple key sub-national communities, the same communities that formed the crux of Amin's political support. Training resources were very limited and the large, hastily assembled staff of these units often acted beyond and outside their established remit. There was considerable violent entrepreneurialism and localised feuding, much as there was in the Ugandan Army throughout the Amin years. As a result practices within the state's coercive apparatus were heavily inconsistent and informalised. This same informalisation could, at times, prove the salvation of victims and detainees of the security forces. The right connection in the right place could see one released or treated leniently. Ultimately these units and their offices were forums of agency, and contested moral spaces. Their operation was as much a product of the Ugandan state's weaknesses and limitations as of any conscious political design, and the result was an inconsistent and unpredictable environment in which violence workers were often victims of insecurity and deadly force themselves.

#### A Brief History of Amin's Security Units:

The Military Police was the only security unit besides the Army itself to predate the Amin regime. It was established under Obote in 1967 to improve discipline in the Ugandan Army. Military policemen were crucial in helping Amin establish his regime. Led by Brigadier Hussein Marella, the Military Police had a large number of Nubian and West Niler staff to which more were added in the wake of the coup. Under Marella the barracks at Makindye was turned into a prison, and during the expansion of violence against Acholi and Langi soldiers that followed the coup many of them

were detained there. Makindye became a site of routine torture and killing of some soldiers, as well as sending detained soldiers on to Luzira prison. Military policemen led by Marella oversaw waves of arrests of Acholi and Langi soldiers in 1971, and were also instrumental in the massacre of soldiers and former GSU staff at Mutukula in December 1971. The exact numbers of staff serving in the Military Police during this period have not been documented.<sup>462</sup>

Victims of the Military Police were overwhelmingly soldiers, but military policemen also committed abuses against civilians. After the failed 1972 September invasion military policemen participated in the rolling out of violence against civilians, and oversaw a fresh wave of arrests at Makindye. This, as well as ongoing incidents of localised violence against soldiers, prompted the attack on Makindye by soldiers loyal to Brigadier Charles Arube in March 1974, discussed in chapter two. After this, Brigadier Marella was dismissed from his post, and Lieutenant Colonel Albert Drajua replaced him as the new commander.<sup>463</sup> The 1974 inquiry exposed multiple incidents of misconduct by the Military Police. Sustained efforts to train and discipline military policemen were made, and for a time Makindye ceased to be the focal point for the regime's violence that it had previously been. In the final years of the regime torture of civilians once again began to take place in Makindye prison, and was one of the sources of conflict between Amin and Mustafa Adrisi that prompted their falling out in 1978.<sup>464</sup> None of the leading staff at Makindye remained in Uganda after the fall of Amin. As a result this chapter draws on victim testimonies, and interviews with three former Military Police staff.

The Public Safety Unit was an armed police unit, created in November 1971 to replace the Special Force, and combat the rise in armed crime in and around Kampala (popularly known at the time as 'kondoism'). It was headed up by Ali Towilli, a Nubian policeman, and Kassim Obura, himself a former Special Force officer. PSU recruits were trained as policemen, and wore uniforms.

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<sup>462</sup> Nelson Obiale, interviewed in Arua District, 24 December 2016.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

<sup>464</sup> Mustapha Adrisi, 1986 CIVHR, p. 6067. UHRC.



The unit operated out of the police training base at Naguru. Special Force was abolished in the same period and many of its staff had been killed or fled; Amin and his supporters did not trust the unit, which had been staffed with many Acholi and Langi police officers. The PSU was roughly 1,000 men strong.<sup>465</sup> It represented one of the early attempts by Amin's regime to establish order through the use of coercive institutions.

'Kondoism' has often been treated as nothing more than an excuse or falsification of the regime for establishing the PSU, but armed crime was (and remains) a very real problem in Kampala. The months before Amin's takeover had seen the national press dominated by stories of violent armed robbery, and requests for an armed police unit with enhanced powers to combat the problem predated Amin's own government. Some of this violence can be accounted for by the gradual breakdown of discipline in the Ugandan Army, but not all. Emmanuel Kirenga remembered armed gangs of up to 30 men terrorising local villages in the late 1960s.<sup>466</sup> PSU patrols did help combat armed crime- people were still reporting armed robberies to the PSU as late as 1978.<sup>467</sup> The PSU also helped to contain and break up strikes. In the final years of the Amin regime PSU agents were also regular enforcers of the new 'economic crimes' act. It was more intimately concerned with day to day policing concerns than either the Military Police or the SRC.

The PSU HQ at Naguru quickly developed a reputation as a site in which torture and murder of detainees was taking place. In the aftermath of the September invasion in 1972 it too hosted political prisoners of the regime, and PSU agents were active in the hunt for political opponents and guerillas. Like the Military Police, the PSU became the focal point of unrest within the Ugandan military during the Arube mutiny, and soldiers stormed Naguru hunting for Ali Towilli. In the resulting investigations and the 1974 Inquiry Towilli was implicated in kidnapping and dismissed from his post, but Amin had him restored a few months later. Towards the end of

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<sup>465</sup> Kannyo, 'State terrorism and death squads in Uganda' p. 168-169.

<sup>466</sup> Emmanuel Kirenga, 1986 CIVHR, p. 3959. UHRC.

<sup>467</sup> John Nkera, 1986 CIVHR, p. 4009. UHRC.

the regime a CID unit was attached to the PSU which helped to reduce incidents of violence against civilians. There was also increasing tension at the leadership level between Ali Towilli and Kassim Obura, culminating in their dismissal by Amin in 1978. After the regime fell in 1979, Ali Towilli fled abroad, but Kassim Obura was arrested and detained in Luzira prison. He gave his own testimony of events in the PSU during the 1986 commission of inquiry into human rights abuses, and was executed by Museveni's NRM along with two other former security agents in 1989.

The State Research Centre was first established in September 1971. To begin with it was unnamed and referred to as a 'Security Organisation', and funds for it were earmarked from the former GSU budget. Amin instructed Major Leone Ozi to recruit and train staff for the unit. In collaboration with training officers from Israel, America and Britain, Ozi initially recruited roughly 90 educated officers from the army into the new unit, where they undertook training in intelligence gathering, counter-intelligence, and interrogation from the foreign advisers. The unit was officially named the State Research Centre in March 1972.<sup>468</sup> The SRC was established to combat internal threats to the country and regime, and to conduct intelligence gathering. SRC agents operated nationally, but there were no regional offices besides the Headquarters in Nakasero, which was the site of the original GSU offices. Over the course of the regime the SRC expanded to include up to 2,000 staff.

The SRC was the best funded and equipped of all of the security units established during the Amin years. They earned salaries up to six times that of regular soldiers. Crucially, funds from the SRC were also supplied to Amin's 'Presidential Escort Unit'- this was the informal group of low-ranking, predominantly Nubian-speaking soldiers that had accompanied him before, during, and after the coup. Many of them had enjoyed rapid promotions in exchange for their service. Over time the distinction between the two units became increasingly blurry: Amin insisted on ever-greater numbers of Nubian soldiers being employed in the SRC as they already were in the

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<sup>468</sup> Major Leone Ozi, 1986 CIVHR, p. 9336. UHRC.

Military Police and PSU. Farouk Minawa was established as deputy in the unit, and quickly became the primary link to Amin, and the most influential figure inside the SRC. Ozi's attempts to train and discipline the new recruits resulted in acrimony and his dismissal and flight to Sudan in 1973, whereupon he was replaced as Director by Francis Itabuka, one of Ozi's original SRC recruits.<sup>469</sup> Itabuka faced the same problems as Ozi had before him, and routinely sought transfer before himself being retired in 1977. At this stage Farouk Minawa assumed full control of the SRC, and also combined the post with the position of Minister of Internal Affairs from 1978 onwards. The SRC itself played no role in the violence of Amin's takeover and consolidation, but was active in arresting and eliminating political opponents from early 1972 onwards. It was the primary unit engaged in the purges of Acholi and Langi men from the army and civil service in 1977 and 1978. At this stage Nakasero was used as a detention centre on a greater scale than in the earlier years.<sup>470</sup>

Multiple former agents of the regime's security apparatus were detained in the years that followed Amin's fall. These included Kassim Obura of the PSU, Francis Itabuka of the SRC, and several former staff of all three units. During the 1986 Commission of Inquiry into Human Rights Abuses many of these detained men gave evidence against the regime. These testimonies, combined with those of former victims of the security forces and other written accounts, provide invaluable insight into the ways that actors within the regime understood their role and actions. The remainder of the chapter will use these materials to analyse and explain how violence became routinized within the SRC, PSU, and Military Police.

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<sup>469</sup> Major Leone Ozi, 1986 CIVHR, p. 9311. UHRC.

<sup>470</sup> Francis Itabuka, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2125. UHRC.

## Fertile Conditions: Ad Hoc Legalisation, Impunity and Insularity

From the moment Amin seized power he used decrees to retroactively protect his supporters from accountability. These were originally drafted with the assistance of Wanume Kibedi and Valentine Ochima, both of whom subsequently fell out of favour. The first was ‘The Detention (Prescription of Time Limit) Decree, passed on 13 March 1971.’<sup>471</sup> This allowed for detention without trial for up to six months, and allowed for similar detention of former GSU personnel. This was followed by decrees which greatly extended the powers of arrest of soldiers and policemen, including giving them the power to arrest subjects pre-emptively, and to search properties and vehicles without a warrant.<sup>472</sup> The Armed Forces (Amendment) Decree of April 1972 placed responsibility for the punishment of soldiers in the hands of a court martial to ‘consist of the President and not less than five officers, four of whom shall be of a rank of not lower than captain.’ Responsibility was taken out of the hands of civilians and vested in the regime itself.

The impact of these changes on the conduct of the security forces was immediate. A climate of near-impunity and entitlement for soldiers and security agents was established and maintained. Under the vague terms of new powers of arrest acts the PSU ‘enlarged’ its duties to include all kinds of minor offences in Kampala. Soldiers and policemen now had the power to arrest anybody without supporting evidence, and this fed into escalating abuses of their powers. The case of Yozefu Magembe as it was reported to the 1974 Commission is instructive. Magembe had resigned from his position as a muluka (parish) chief in 1972, and spent some time away. He

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<sup>471</sup> Decker, *In Idi Amin’s Shadow*, p. 43.

<sup>472</sup> ‘The Armed Forces (Amendment) Decree, 4th April 1972’, in *1971 Presidential Decrees*, (Uganda Government Printer), LoC.

was arrested on suspicion of being a guerrilla, and dropped off at the Sanje army camp, where he disappeared.<sup>473</sup>

The police, gutted by the violence against Acholi and Langi officers in 1971 and 1972, were increasingly afraid to challenge the actions of soldiers and state agents. The lack of clarity of function and purpose of the regular police force created by the new units and the decrees that protected them drove many policemen to fearful inaction.<sup>474</sup> Makindye, Naguru, and Nakasero became defined by their insularity to existing forms of civilian law and order. When Mr Ntambi was arrested and tortured by the PSU in 1975, he was warned after his release not to pursue a complaint lest it 'cost him his life'.<sup>475</sup> Foreign Ministry staff had gone to Naguru in the same period to try and rescue a colleague, Francis Ssemongwe, but were driven away by Kassim Obura. State agents began to interfere with court proceedings. In addition to the well-documented death of Benedicto Kiwanuka, Mr Ayigihugu, a lawyer in Kampala, was detained and beaten in Naguru in the middle of a case.<sup>476</sup> Samson Ddungu, the businessman for whose murder Kassim Obura was eventually tried and executed, had just won a court case when he was arrested by PSU agents who were unhappy at the outcome.

The 'trial' of Kassim Obura and Ali Towili in 1974 highlighted the impunity that Amin and his inner circle afforded the security forces. Despite the wealth of evidence against the two men, and the dozens of testimonies linking the PSU and Military Police to abuses against civilians, a Military Tribunal presided over by Amin himself found both men innocent of any charges.<sup>477</sup> Captain James Bogere, at this time an adjutant in the Military Police, claimed that the unit's documentation had been destroyed by a damaged water tank in March 1974, a claim that was not

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<sup>473</sup> 1974 CIDPU, p. 10.

<sup>474</sup> Mr Ebaju, 1986 CIVHR, p. 12066. UHRC.

<sup>475</sup> Mathias Ntambi, 1986 CIVHR, p. 3517. UHRC.

<sup>476</sup> Charles Tindyebwa, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2959. UHRC.

<sup>477</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service*, 'Amin prepares for trial of senior security officers', 1400 GMT 27 June 1975.

scrutinised and which served to conceal the abuses of the previous years.<sup>478</sup> Brigadier Hussein Marella was the only high-profile casualty of the fallout of the 1974 inquiry and the armed uprising that had prompted it. New training measures at Makindye, and the reintroduction of an accompanying CID unit at Naguru, both served to temporarily improve conduct in their respective offices, but only to a limited extent. The failure of these investigations to force substantial change is indicative of a recurring tension at the core of Amin's style of government, namely the incompatibility of his sporadic attempts to adopt the legitimacy of formal state practice with his dependence on a small and unaccountable core of soldiers that he couldn't afford to have prosecuted or sidelined. Similar contradictions later undermined the Economic Crimes Tribunal, and they were a constant limiting factor in the efforts of his regime to maintain order.

#### Naguru, Makindye, and Nakasero: Sites of Routinised Violence

In this climate of relative impunity and facilitation, all three of Amin's security units witnessed the development and entrenchment of routinised violence within their respective bases. In the case of Makindye this happened from the moment Amin seized power, as Acholi and Langi soldiers were held and tortured at the barracks. Subsequently similar treatment was inflicted upon civilians. The PSU HQ at Naguru started receiving detainees from November 1971, and, as the 'war on kondoism' progressed (and the PSU took up an ever wider range of other enforcement duties) abuses against civilians began to take place there too.<sup>479</sup> The historical record suggests that

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<sup>478</sup> 1974 CIDPU, p. 70.

<sup>479</sup> Charles Tindyebwa, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2939. UHRC.

regular detainment and torture of soldiers and civilians did not take place at the SRC offices in Nakasero on a large scale until the final years of the regime (though many assassinations of political opponents were carried out by SRC agents in the early years).

At all three sites, a degree of violence against detainees became institutionalised, practiced on a routine basis by staff within the units in question. The testimonies of former staff offer several key insights into how violence workers performed and understood their operations. Many of these dynamics are typical of similar cases elsewhere in the world. Hierarchy and compartmentalisation allowed staff to displace responsibility for their actions onto their superiors, colleagues, and the 'chain of command', or to directly facilitate violence without themselves committing atrocities. Legitimising discourses served to glorify state work and dehumanise detainees. The routinisation of certain forms of torture and killing helped to normalise violence practices within these institutional spaces.

Institutional hierarchies played an important part in legitimising violent practices. Ali Hassan Ajak, a former SRC agent, was tasked with internal security. He guarded the perimeter fence at Nakasero during the daytime, and slept at his home in Bombo at night. In his testimony to the 86 Commission Ajak insisted that, although he could hear cries from inside the Nakasero offices, and cars came in regularly with detainees, he was powerless either to investigate or to inspect vehicles because of the 'chain of administration.' He admitted feeling 'miserable' about his work, but insisted he could 'do nothing, as per my duties'<sup>480</sup>:

How could I report? These noises were in the offices, the Captains were in the offices the Lieutenants were in the offices, everybody in the offices were hearing, then to whom had I to go and report?<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>480</sup> Ali Hassan Ajak, 1986 CIVHR, p. 13704. UHRC.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid., p. 13705.

Charles Tindyebwa, a former PSU patrol driver, defended his actions on the grounds that he had been 'specifically trained for that purpose'. He understood his role as a subordinate one:

This was a group work. You would just go in a vehicle four, five people. Then the commander of the vehicle takes a decision or receives messages on the radio call that go in such and such a place. So the driver drives, you arrest somebody in a group, take him as instructions given... ..nobody is taking a decision, whoever is commanding them is the final man.<sup>482</sup>

For Tindyebwa, senior officers like Ali Towilli and Kassim Obura were responsible for what was happening in the PSU. He reasoned that if they had really wanted violence in the unit to end, they could have ordered for it to do so. Brahan Malengo, a former Military Policeman at Makindye, insisted that he was only of 'low rank', and as a result he 'mostly avoided' involvement in any of the more violent work of the Military police.<sup>483</sup>

Institutional compartmentalisation also helped to facilitate violent action. As Tindyebwa's testimony above suggests, many staff in Amin's security forces saw themselves as playing a subsidiary role. He was never on 'yard duty', so he did not regard himself as responsible for the violence taking place inside Naguru itself. However, such component roles serve to facilitate the operation of units in which considerable violence was being undertaken. One respondent who had served as an SRC agent explained to me how a large chunk of the unit's manpower was employed in fairly routine inspection work:

I was tasked with supervising Government owned enterprises. After the Asians were expelled a great many of these were government run- Elon Textiles, Tea Production, that

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<sup>482</sup> Charles Tindyebwa, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2951. UHRC.

<sup>483</sup> Brahan Malengo, interviewed in Arua District, 9 December 2016.



sort of thing. I checked on how they were run, on expenditure and production, it was actually very simple work.<sup>484</sup>

Compartmentalisation ensured that there were specific teams tasked with torturing or killing detainees. Tindyebwa referred to the 'bad ones' in the PSU, naming a corporal Oola, and a Mr Olowo. He initially insisted he never saw violence in the yard firsthand; he only ever heard 'stories'. This imagined distance between his own actions and those implementing violence was compromised by the subsequent, detailed evidence that he gave to the 1986 Commission.<sup>485</sup>

Brahan Malengo referred to 'special people' who were tasked with guarding prisoners at Makindye. When asked if these same people oversaw violence against detainees, he said yes.<sup>486</sup> The SRC had units tasked with intelligence gathering, patrols, and presidential escort, but it also contained a team to run the cells at Nakasero. It was men of this team that meted out violence against detainees. This displacement of responsibility also helped Ali Ajak to square his own role at the SRC, on the grounds that violence would happen anyway, and that he had a large family to feed.<sup>487</sup>

It is telling that in their personal testimonies to the 1986 Commission as former senior personnel, Francis Itabuka and Kassim Obura both invoked an inverse conception of hierarchical responsibility and compartmentalisation. Such an interpretation downplayed their own role in the functioning of their institutions. Obura insisted that the PSU was compartmentalised to such an extent that it ran itself regardless of his own input; he suggested he was doing more good 'to work there and sacrifice and remain'.<sup>488</sup> Itabuka insisted that he never left the SRC front desk, and as such could deny any knowledge of what happened to detainees in the cells. He gave the example

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<sup>484</sup> Former SRC agent, interviewed in Arua District, 9 December 2016.

<sup>485</sup> Charles Tindyebwa, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2941-2947. UHRC.

<sup>486</sup> Brahan Malengo, 9 December 2016.

<sup>487</sup> Ali Ajak, 1986 CIVHR p. 13707. UHRC.

<sup>488</sup> Kassim Obura, 1986 CIVHR, p. 1473.

of a Major Mutono whom he saw being brought in, but didn't see again.<sup>489</sup> Kassim Obura claimed that he himself was never present at the 'yard' in Naguru where violence against detainees was taking place.<sup>490</sup> Just as those at the bottom of the organisation could displace responsibility, so too could those at the top.

Both men were placed at the heart of operations in the testimonies of other perpetrators and victims. Their denials demonstrate the ways in which institutions as imaginaries can enable individual actors to rationalise and justify their facilitatory roles in a violent environment. Such justifications were not unique to staff at the very top. Appointed as an adjutant at Makindye in 1974, Colonel Nelson Obiale viewed his role as a restorative one, helping to undo the indiscipline and chaos of the Military Police in the early years of Amin's rule. Under his instruction, so he claimed, 'the cells became classrooms'.<sup>491</sup> This may have been true, and there certainly were changes at Makindye in the wake of Brigadier Marella's removal as head of the unit. However, the statistical evidence is not available to demonstrate whether such initiatives succeeded in preventing further abuses by Military Policemen. Obiale's account is indicative of an enduring mentality within so many organisations, that of the individual who believes he is changing a bad situation from the inside.

Torture and the killing of civilians became routinised in the offices of all three of Amin's security units. At the PSU, torture of detainees took place in 'the yard', and was primarily geared at subduing and tiring the prisoners, and forcing confessions from them. Charles Tindyebwa admitted without hesitation to the 1986 Commission that detainees 'would be tortured according to their crimes alleged and this specifically had a squad which was dealing with these suspects'.<sup>492</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> Itabuka, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2061. . . Alternative accounts have placed Itabuka in the cells at Nakasero, contradicting his own testimony. In his account of the PSU Kassim Obura also attempted to deny being present at the cells before admitting he was often there.

<sup>490</sup> Kassim Obura, 1986 CIVHR, p. 1468.

<sup>491</sup> Nelson Obiale, interviewed in Arua District, 24 December 2016.

<sup>492</sup> Charles Tindyebwa, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2939. UHRC.

Several other accounts confirm the existence of a specific team of men that was primarily responsible for torture at the PSU. Several of these violence workers are named across multiple accounts, including Corporal Oola and Superintendent Otto.<sup>493</sup> In his own testimony to the 1986 Commission Kassim Obura denied personal involvement in torture at Naguru, but admitted that it had 'always been there'.<sup>494</sup> Other testimonies from victims of the PSU placed Obura and Ali Towilli at the scene of torture on several occasions, including directly instructing and overseeing the torture of detainees.<sup>495</sup>

Routinised torture in the PSU took multiple forms. Francis Ssemombwe, arrested over a missing file in 1975, noted that there were certain forms of 'normal torture to which every prisoner was subjected'.<sup>496</sup> Detainees were usually beaten upon arrival at the yard. Beating was mainly with canes and kiboko (hippopotamus hide) whips. Euphemistic language regarding this introductory beating was common. Mr Ntambi, another victim of the PSU in 1975, remembered it being referred to as his 'warm up' when he was handed over at Naguru, and Charles Tindyebwa referred to introductory beating as 'breakfast'. There were also daily exercises for the prisoners in the morning, which were combined with some forms of whipping and humiliation by the guards.<sup>497</sup> Such language and routinisation served to normalise violent practice.

The most striking and feared form of torture within the PSU yard seems to have originated there, and involved detainees being whipped and interrogated whilst their heads were jammed into the wheel rim of a motor vehicle. Ntambi, Ssemombwe, and Mr Ernest Lule all referred separately in their witness testimonies to this form of torture being inflicted on them during

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<sup>493</sup> Ibid, p. 2947. Ntambi and Ssemombwe both recalled these same men in their testimonies.

<sup>494</sup> Kassim Obura, 1986 CIVHR, p. 1468. UHRC.

<sup>495</sup> Francis Ssemombwe, 1986 CIVHR, p. 3522. UHRC.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid., p. 3545.

<sup>497</sup> Mathias Ntambi, 1986 CIVHR, p. 3506. UHRC.

interrogations at the PSU.<sup>498</sup> Charles Tindyebwa confirmed the use of a wheel rim to torture detainees in his own testimony, but justified it on the grounds that it was reserved for ‘robbers who would be caught red-handed’.<sup>499</sup>

Given the lack of substantial evidence against any of the aforementioned victims of the unit, and their subsequent release, this notion of the wheel-rim torture being saved for special cases is unconvincing. It demonstrates the license given to violence workers at the PSU to generate and replicate innovative forms of torture against civilians. Contrary to Kassim Obura’s own testimony, Mr Ntambi told the 1986 Commission that Obura was present as he was tortured using a wheel rim. Francis Ssemongwe remembered Obura specifically instructing Corporal Oola to focus his attentions on him during his detainment, highlighting the facilitating role played by the organisation hierarchy.<sup>500</sup>

However, there is also some evidence to suggest that torture at Naguru had escaped from the control of the senior staff. Tindyebwa remembered that Obura used to demand that PSU staff only cane suspects when specifically instructed to do so. He was of the mind that the team tasked with torture in the yard had become difficult to manage:

I think as a human being that this group which was in the yard, was a bit inhuman and it was so powerful that even the head of CID Mr Rukyamare would give an order that nobody should be tortured, the following day, you would find that things had been done the other way around.<sup>501</sup>

Murder of detainees at the PSU seems to have become similarly routinised. Killing took place at night, and vehicles would usually arrive to carry victims away before the morning. Killing

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<sup>498</sup> Ibid, p. 3507. Ssemombwe, p. 3525.

<sup>499</sup> Tindyebwa, 1986 CIVHR p. 2939. UHRC.

<sup>500</sup> Francis Ssemombwe, 1986 CIVHR p. 3527. UHRC.

<sup>501</sup> Charles Tindyebwa, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2946. UHRC.

was primarily done with knives, but there were occasional shootings. Detainees were taken from the yard cells and killed in the immediate vicinity. This didn't happen every night, but it did happen regularly. Francis Ssemongwe estimated that during his six-month imprisonment in Naguru some 60 prisoners were killed.<sup>502</sup> He and Mathias Ntambi both witnessed Corporal Oola taking prisoners from their cell before interrogating and then disposing of them. Many of these victims were directly linked to the PSU's primary function- the 'war on kondoism'. One such victim was a Mr Masaba, who was accused of snatching a gun from a PSU vehicle. Another was a man accused of being the leader of an armed gang in Mukono District. In both cases the men were killed by Corporal Oola at close quarters rather than with a gun. In the case of Mr Masaba, Kassim Obura oversaw the interrogation himself, before instructing Oola to kill him after failing to secure a confession. Other prisoners were often made to help load bodies onto vehicles in the yard, so that PSU men could dispose of them.<sup>503</sup>

There is also some evidence of the routinisation of violence at the SRC headquarters in Nakasero in the final years of the regime. Detainees in this period were mainly soldiers and civilians suspected of plotting against the regime. In his testimony to the 1986 Commission Major Leone Ozi was adamant that, in the first few years, violence against prisoners within the centre itself was not common; rather, it took place outside. Francis Itabuka admitted that under his own leadership, beatings at Nakasero became regular, including a 'breakfast of canes' similar to that in Naguru, but insisted the worst violence took place at night time, when he was not present.<sup>504</sup> Ali Ajak remembered hearing the cries of detainees from outside when he was on guard duty.<sup>505</sup>

Witness accounts from victims of the SRC are far more limited than for the PSU; Nakasero had multiple underground holding cells, so violence in the office was considerably less public than

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<sup>502</sup> Francis Ssemombwe, 1986 CIVHR, p. 3530. UHRC.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid.

<sup>504</sup> Francis Itabuka, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2104. UHRC.

<sup>505</sup> Ali Ajak, 1986 CIVHR, p. 13706. UHRC.

the open yard at Naguru. John Sekabira, held in Nakasero in 1976, remembered being burned with lit cigarettes and beaten and interrogated upon arrival at the SRC.<sup>506</sup> Wycliffe Cato could hear beating of detainees at night-time from his cell, and was himself tortured. Much like in Naguru, canes and kiboko whips were the most common implement used in torture, the goal of which was to secure confessions from detainees. According to Cato, beating and interrogations were often overseen by Farouk Minawa himself, and Nubian staff, most of whom were Kakwa or Lugbara speakers. In his account he offers the example of a 'Captain Simba', himself a 'Nubianized' man from Buganda who was especially involved in torture and murder of detainees.<sup>507</sup>

Apollo Lawoko and James Kahigiriza both give accounts of the killing of numerous men during the 1977 purges against Acholi and Langi soldiers and civilians. Both men were held in Nakasero during this period, which was probably the single most violent in the history of the SRC. There was a distinction between 'C1' and 'C2' cells: civilians being held in the latter, and soldiers in the former. At night, killing would take place in C1 cell, mainly with hammers but occasionally with guns. One particular torturer referred to himself as 'Nyangawu'- 'Hyena' in Swahili. In the heightened violence of 1977 larger numbers of men were moved through Nakasero, and many of them were killed.<sup>508</sup>

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<sup>506</sup> Wycliffe Kato, *Escape from Idi Amin's Slaughterhouse*, (London, 1989), p. 52.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid.

<sup>508</sup> James Kahigiriza, 1986 CIVHR, p. 1506-9. UHRC. Apollo Lawoko, *The Dungeons of Naksero*.

### Institutional Limitations, Ulterior Networks, and Agency:

The aforementioned structural factors go some way to explaining how violent practices became entrenched with the Military Police, PSU, and SRC. However, they do not offer a complete picture. Amin's security units were far from being coherent, functional institutions. There was an immense variety of experience amongst detainees, and a wealth of examples as to the diverse behaviour of different state agents. How can we explain this? Individual choice and agency is an important factor, and will be explored below. However, the historical specificities of the Amin state also bear consideration. Specifically, the security forces suffered from many of the same tensions this thesis regards as crucial to understanding political and social life under Amin. They had been established in extreme political circumstances, and were expected to work with extremely limited resources. They were also sites of mutual contestation between the sub-national social networks in which they were embedded. There is evidence of a considerable degree of opportunistic and entrepreneurial behaviour on the part of state agents, which structural factors failed to control or prevent. At times the extent to which the violence produced by Amin's security forces was designed or controlled from the top down appears to have often been negligible, if at all.

Two of the three security units did not exist until the very end of Amin's first year in power. The SRC and PSU were both hurriedly established to fill a vacuum created by the disbandment and sidelining of the General Service Unit and the Special Force respectively. The Military Police had undergone large-scale personnel changes when it was taken over in the coup. These were not, then, established institutions into which violent practices became ingrained, but new and improvised ones, created in the extreme circumstances of the coup and its aftermath. The lack of faith in the existing security forces (and the need to install loyal supporters in place) meant that, much like the army, huge numbers of existing personnel had been removed and recruitment was effectively starting from scratch.

Each unit was tasked with fighting a different internal 'war' for a heavily militarised, and insecure regime. The Military Police had, from the moment of the coup, been tasked with hunting down and detaining deserting and dissident soldiers, initially the single greatest threat to Amin's new government. The PSU was Amin's answer to the problem of 'kondoism', rising armed crime in Kampala. It effectively replaced the standard police force in many of their duties. The SRC fought small anti-insurgency campaigns against FRONASA, and pro-Obote forces, and was tasked with national surveillance and presidential security. As will be explored below, these roles often overlapped in practice. The oscillating and arbitrary style of governance employed at the political centre also meant that staff in the units were regularly exhorted and called upon to undertake other kinds of violent work, the biggest example being their de facto service on the frontline of Amin's 'Economic War'.

Much like other staff in the Ugandan state apparatus during this period, Uganda's security forces were subject to what Peterson has identified as the 'command economy': Amin's style of rule. This has been characterised as a reliance on verbal communiques, transmitted through the news media and in person, and a relative lack of interest in more conventional government bureaucracy. This 'politics of exhortation' has been shown in other writing on the Amin state to have generated a range of confused and contradictory responses from government staff, who attempted to meet a range of unrealistic and sometimes contradictory objectives with very limited resources.<sup>509</sup> Why, then, should we regard the security forces as being in anyway immune to these very same dynamics?

The historical record shows that, like their civilian counterparts, the soldiers and police of the Military Police, PSU, and SRC were subject to an endless series of oscillating and vague demands from the political centre. Amin regularly promised the public that captured kondos

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<sup>509</sup> Peterson & Taylor, 'Rethinking Amin's Uganda', p. 59.



would be treated 'severely'.<sup>510</sup> At a speech to passing out PSU men in Naguru in 1972 he assured them that they 'You have the right to arrest anybody, no matter what rank he has'.<sup>511</sup> In later speeches and announcements Amin backtracked, insisting that the security forces should 'respect their leaders' and avoid excessive force. The new units were expected to keep up with the changing demands of the regime, and produce instant results. The social categories they were tasked with policing, including 'kondos', 'guerillas', 'saboteurs', were often vague, and hard to identify from amongst the civilian population. The impact of these discourses was to create an environment of confusion, but also to open up space for malicious reinterpretation of the regime's demands. Over time state agents increasingly exploited this for a range of purposes.

The early operation of the PSU was defined by a complete lack of resources or manpower on which to rely. Amin's distrust of the Special Force was such that Kassim Obura claimed that only four of the original staff were ever brought over. Much like the army, the PSU was immediately treated as a patronage opportunity by the new regime, and large numbers of West Nilers and Nubians were recruited into it. Like Amin's own inner circle in the army, such men often lacked literacy and educational qualifications. Kassim Obura insisted that other policemen did not want to be transferred into the new unit, and that he was only sent poor quality men. He initially requested that the CID be reinstated to help oversee and train the PSU. Mr Ebaju, a former policemen who worked at the adjacent training school in Naguru, testified to the 1986 Commission that training in this period was essentially a farce. They were expected to rapidly process hundreds of new recruits in the tiny space they had available, and new recruits were sat en masse outside under the mango trees as there was not room for them all in the classroom. The PSU effectively started operations without any adequate preparation, sending poorly educated, untrained staff to combat armed criminals.<sup>512</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> *President's Speeches, 1971*, (Uganda Government Printer), p. 86. LoC.

<sup>511</sup> *President's Speeches, 1972*, (Uganda Government Printer), p. 80. LoC.

<sup>512</sup> Mr Ebaju, 1986 CIVHR, p. 12083. UHRC.

PSU agents and military policemen were all on low-grade salaries. Many recruits had moved to Kampala from elsewhere for work, and had families to support. Most were very young. Brahan Malengo was only 19 when he started patrolling with the Military Police.<sup>513</sup> As the regime went on and the economic situation in Uganda declined, these salaries increasingly failed to provide for even basic necessities. Just as it did in the army, the declining economic situation prompted ever more imaginative informal and extracurricular activity on the part of security agents.

Training and funding at the SRC was different. The unit was far better resourced, given its perceived importance to the survival of the new regime. Major Ozi had been given permission to recruit highly educated army officers to serve in it. But here too a dearth of educated or experienced manpower quickly undermined the ability of the unit to function as an institution. This was partly due to the patronage factor. The huge salaries of the SRC were an enormous financial opportunity for men from the patronage networks of the new regime. Unlike the PSU, a role in the SRC was regarded as being of particularly high status.<sup>514</sup> Major Ozi struggled when the 'Presidential Escort' (Amin's original cohort of bodyguards, who are likely to have conducted much of the intra-military violence during the consolidation of his regime) was effectively merged into the SRC, along with huge numbers of new recruits, many of which came from West Nile and the Nubian community. Ali Ajak confirmed that during his time at the SRC the use of written records was partial at best. Francis Itabuka echoed this, stating that he had introduced an occurrence book during his time in charge of the unit, but that it 'did not work very well'. He estimated that only 10% of SRC arrests were logged.<sup>515</sup> It is possible to view this as resulting from a deliberate strategy of concealment of course, and it may have been, but it was also the logical

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<sup>513</sup> Brahan Malengo, interviewed in Arua District, 9 December 2016.

<sup>514</sup> Former SRC agent, 9 December 2016.

<sup>515</sup> Francis Itabuka, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2054. UHRC.

outcome of Amin's longstanding reliance on men from marginalised communities with limited levels of formal education.

The implications of the regime's use of the security forces as a source of patronage went further than its impact on experience and literacy rates. Witness testimonies suggest that it severely damaged the chain of command within both the PSU and SRC. In both units there were senior figures who were popularly regarded to be 'Amin's men', Ali Towilli in the PSU, and Farouk Minawa in the SRC. Both men had been rapidly promoted from within Amin's inner circle, were Nubian speakers, and maintained close ties with Amin and his core supporters throughout the regime. In contrast, both Kassim Obura and Francis Itabuka had been trained and promoted outside of these networks. Both felt that they were often sidelined and overlooked at times as a result, and that this compromised their respective units.<sup>516</sup>

Given the nature of the 1986 investigations, and the obvious vested interest both Itabuka and Obura had in presenting what went on in the security forces as being the fault of other people, one should certainly approach their testimonies with scepticism. But their claims are born out by other sources, not least the newspaper and radio records. Former SRC agents have corroborated Itabuka's claim that Farouk Minawa was the most influential figure in the organisation.<sup>517</sup> Itabuka was eventually dismissed from the SRC altogether, and Minawa's influence with Amin was highlighted by his promotion to Minister of Internal Affairs in addition to his SRC role in the aftermath.<sup>518</sup> PSU staff had similar things to say about the relationship between Towilli and Obura, who were both warned repeatedly by Amin about their feuding through the news media.<sup>519</sup> Obura assumed full control of the unit for a short while when Towilli was sidelined in the wake of the

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<sup>516</sup> Obura, 1986 CIVHR, pp. 1455-57. Francis Itabuka, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2027. UHRC.

<sup>517</sup> Former SRC agent, 9 December 2016. Nelson Obiale, 9 December 2016.

<sup>518</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, 'Amin appoints new ministers, says refugees can return', 1500 GMT, 27 December 1978.

<sup>519</sup> *Kampala Domestic Service in English*, 'Amin warns officials, announces reshuffle', 1400 GMT, 10 April 1978.

Arube mutiny in 1974, but when the latter was restored relations between the two men continued to be strained until both were dismissed from the PSU in 1978 as the regime endured a period of heightened insecurity that prompted a reshuffle of key personnel.<sup>520</sup> Here again Amin's dependence on a small core of soldiers constrained the functional capacity of the coercive apparatus.

Recruitment and enforcement of discipline both suffered as a result of the preeminence of particular patronage networks. Itabuka and Minawa both recruited their own men separately, and were also sent 'candidates' for the SRC by Amin's army commanders, who made sure that their favourites secured posts.<sup>521</sup> A former SRC agent described the recruitment process as being 'not an interview, but a chance'.<sup>522</sup> He himself was fast tracked into the unit in the aftermath of the Arube mutiny, in which he had sided with Elly Aseni at the Malire Mechanised unit. Multiple promotions into the SRC had been offered by Amin in order to pacify the rebellious troops. Once recruited, such favoured candidates were protected by their status. Itabuka lamented that with the right connections 'the office boy' could have brought people to Nakasero and tortured them without consequence.<sup>523</sup> He gave the example of Peter Madrama, a recruit brought in by Farouk Minawa who ransacked the home of Finance Minister Moses Ali on Minawa's orders, but without formal clearance. When Itabuka dismissed him for this Minawa simply reinstated Madrama immediately.<sup>524</sup> Ulterior networks comprised alternative sources of power that were embedded within the formal structure of the security units, but which could bypass or challenge their organisational hierarchy.

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<sup>520</sup> Nelson Obiale, 9 December 2016.

<sup>521</sup> Francis Itabuka, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2027. UHRC.

<sup>522</sup> Former SRC agent, 9 December 2016.

<sup>523</sup> Francis Itabuka, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2057. UHRC.

<sup>524</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2072.

The most obvious consequence of this combination of oscillating commands from the political centre, limited experience and resources, and preferential treatment for members of certain sub-national networks was the space it generated for a wide range of informal practices developing within the security units. This meant that the agency of individual state agents at the local level was extremely important. Such agency took a range of forms, including abuse of one's position for personal enrichment, and the pursuit of localised vendettas, but it also expressed itself in unexpected incidents of mercy and intervention on the behalf of civilians.

Violent entrepreneurial behaviour was widely practiced in the PSU. Charles Tindyebwa offered to the 1986 Commission the example of Kalule, a driver who also worked in Nansana and was known in the PSU for bringing in wealthy people from his home area and extorting them. He was able to get away with this because he had the support of Ali Towilli.<sup>525</sup> Obura complained of sending men to investigate crime scenes only to find they themselves had then robbed civilians in the area.<sup>526</sup> Obura himself was implicated in similarly opportunistic practices. The businessman Samson Ddungu was killed at Naguru after a soldier he shared a business with had hired PSU men to force him to give up his share of the business. When a court ruled in Ddungu's favour, the same men abducted him from outside the building and subsequently murdered him.<sup>527</sup>

There is evidence of similar practice at the SRC. Emmanuel Kirenga was detained by SRC agents after he worked on a case in which some accident victims had been robbed of their claim forms from the National Insurance Corporation (NIC) by State Research men. These same men brought Kirenga to Nakasero in order to intimidate him into destroying the case files.<sup>528</sup> During his own detention in Nakasero, Apollo Lawoko witnessed numerous staff of Transocean Uganda Limited being detained in 1977. They had been informed on to the SRC by Hassan Gala, a Ugandan

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<sup>525</sup> Tindyebwa, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2956. UHRC.

<sup>526</sup> Obura, 1986 CIVHR, p. 1430. UHRC.

<sup>527</sup> Mirica Kisitu, interviewed in Kampala, 15/11/16.

<sup>528</sup> Kirenga, 1986 CIVHR, p. 3943. UHRC.

Nubian who was influential within the Amin regime.<sup>529</sup> Francis Itabuka complained that men in the SRC were also running a lucrative side business selling forged and stolen passports.<sup>530</sup>

Such behaviour extended out beyond the detention centres of the security forces too. John Kirya was a regular patron of nightlife in Kampala as a teenager. One bar in which he regularly drank became a regular haunt for two SRC agents, who effectively provided muscle for the owners in exchange for free drinks. One evening John's friends got into a scuffle with the SRC men, who beat one of them to death.<sup>531</sup> Mirica Kisitu's father was murdered in 1973 when a woman with whom he had a land dispute used her boyfriend's contacts with the SRC to have him killed. In such ways the impunity and opportunism of the security forces was also enmeshed and interwoven with civilian life.<sup>532</sup>

Violence was not used solely for economic gain. Personal feuds and vendettas were also settled by opportunistic state agents. Francis Itabuka described such incidents at the SRC as 'outside cases', and claimed that the murder of Amin's Foreign Minister, Michael Ondoga, was one such case. There is evidence to suggest that PSU staff had their girlfriends detained in order to punish and discipline them. Ali Towilli himself is reported to have detained his own wife for several hours on at least one occasion.<sup>533</sup> During the 1974 investigations into disappearances, one witness identified Brigadier Marella of the Military Police as having been responsible for the beating and kidnap of Omari Abdullai, after a dispute which seems to have been over a local woman called Aisha.<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> Lawoko, *The Dungeons of Nakasero*, p. 163.

<sup>530</sup> Itabuka, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2125. UHRC.

<sup>531</sup> John Kirya, interviewed in Kampala. 25/11/16.

<sup>532</sup> Mirica Kisitu, interviewed in Kampala. 15/11/16.

<sup>533</sup> Ntambi, 1986 CIVHR, p. 3514. UHRC.

<sup>534</sup> 1974 CIDPU, p. 98.

Violence at the local level also brought the three security units into conflict with one another. Sergeant Eriseyo Mangwi was a State Research officer. On 3 October 1973 he was arrested at his home and taken to Makindye by four military policemen. His family investigated, and were paid off and told to stop their inquiries by men on duty at Makindye. Francis Itabuka investigated the matter with Brigadier Marella, at this time still head of the unit, and Marella told him that the case was ongoing and refused to release Mangwi. When Lt. Col. Albert Drajua succeeded Marella at the Military Police he found no sign of the sergeant, who is presumed to have been killed in detention.<sup>535</sup>

This same informalisation of practice within the security organs could occasionally save civilians from harm. Mr Kawanga was detained at the PSU by Obura, who expressly ordered the duty staff not to give him 'breakfast'.<sup>536</sup> In this instance those instructions were followed, and Kawanga was released unharmed. In much the same way Mr Ntambi was able to secure a safer existence during his detention in Naguru by looking after Ali Towilli's goats, and thanks again to personal ties with Obura.<sup>537</sup> Ultimately he and a Mr Kanyari were both released thanks to the intervention of Kanyari's physician, who also happened to treat Obura and had been begging him to release them.<sup>538</sup> When Francis Ssemongwe was held at Naguru CID men intervened to have him released.<sup>539</sup> One of the guards at Naguru, an AIP Amullu, was known to have regularly allowed families to visit their detained loved ones, up until doing so cost him his job.<sup>540</sup>

The same factors that damaged the functional capacity of the security units contributed to an uncertain and arbitrary pattern of violence both inside and outside of their detention centres

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<sup>535</sup> 1974 CIDPU, p. 686.

<sup>536</sup> 1986 CIVHR, p. 2967. UHRC.

<sup>537</sup> Ntambi, 1986 CIVHR, p. 3508. UHRC.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid, p. 3517.

<sup>539</sup> Francis Ssemongwe, 1986 CIVHR, p. 3531. UHRC.

<sup>540</sup> Mr Ebaju, 1986 CIVHR, p. 12069. UHRC.

that also demoralised the men that staffed them. The corrosive and escalatory effects of political violence identified in earlier chapters can be identified here too. The title quote from a former SRC respondent is indicative of many of the assessments of the SRC, PSU, and MP offered by former soldiers and state agents. Specifically, they distinguished between the 'legitimate' violence necessitated by the needs and demands of the Amin state, and the 'illegitimate' predatory behavior of individuals within their respective units that was escalating out of control. Many West Niler respondents insisted that it was only Sudanese and Congolese 'foreigners' who were to blame for the spread of violence, despite the historical record showing that the influx of soldiers from outside Uganda can offer, at best, a partial explanation for what happened. The same is true of southern Ugandans, who are often quick to place all blame on 'West Nilers'. A broad cross-section of Ugandans played a facilitatory role in the entrenchment and sustainment of these atrocity environments, and some, like Charles Tindyebwa, 'Captain Simba', and Kassim Obura, participated actively. In an environment of such fragmentation and disorder, however, no single figure can be said to have been in complete control of what was happening.

To suggest that actors in the security apparatus were somehow immune to the fear and paranoia that the violence of this period instilled throughout the country would be to treat them as less than human, as nothing more than the sadistic caricatures that stereotype, racism, and political desperation have often sought to present them as being. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that many violence workers within the Amin state were as trapped in their roles as their victims. Francis Itabuka was repeatedly seeking transfer away from the SRC, stating that the situation was a 'frightening one in that there was a lot of uncertainties'.<sup>541</sup> Kassim Obura described the near paralysis that had overtaken life in the PSU by the late 1970s when he states that 'you handle everything by that time to come to a standstill. Everybody was somehow just thinking of himself, which way he could go'.<sup>542</sup> As has already been demonstrated agents throughout the

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<sup>541</sup> Francis Itabuka, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2042. UHRC.

<sup>542</sup> Kassim Obura, 1986 CIVHR, p. 1464. UHRC.



hierarchy of the security units were often forced to play contradictory, conflicted roles, freeing and protecting prisoners as well as exploiting and harming them.

As a Langi policeman in a regime that had massacred many men from his own ethnicity and background, Obura was in no doubt that any display of weakness would be taken as a sign of political dissent. In much the same way, the repeated hostility shown to Amin's 'foreign' supporters from the civilian population and armed forces can have left them in little doubt as to what might await them should they fall from favour, or fail to prevent the regime's fall. In a regime that repeatedly eliminated dissenters from within its own ranks, and in which so many of its senior staff were themselves detained at one time or another, it is hard to regard any of them as having been free of fear. Rather most were too close to the very apparatus of state power to safely step away.

If the pressure was intense for those staff at the top of the organisational hierarchy, it was even worse for those tasked with performing the routine violence itself. Charles Tindywebwa noted that torturers in the PSU 'would not last for four, five, six months. They all died because of these crimes. Devils would come and attack them at night. They would start firing amongst themselves.'<sup>543</sup> Brahan Malengo remembered a similar turnover amongst violence workers at the Military Police.<sup>544</sup> Francis Ssemombwe had heard that Oola, his former torturer, subsequently 'ran mad' and died.<sup>545</sup> Low-ranking SRC officers like Mohamoud Ali and Ali Ajak spent years in Luzira prison, as the leaders they had served lived out their days in luxurious exile.

### Conclusion

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<sup>543</sup> Charles Tindyebwa, 1986 CIVHR, p. 2942. UHRC.

<sup>544</sup> Brahan Malengo, 9 December 2016.

<sup>545</sup> Francis Ssemobwe, 1986 CIVHR, p. 3531. UHRC.

The historical record demonstrates that many of the key structural and institutional factors identified as key drivers of routinised violence elsewhere in the world are of analytical relevance to Amin's security units. The Military Police, SRC, and PSU were instructed to pursue a range of 'internal enemies', and given license to act with relative impunity. They were protected by ad hoc legalisation, and operated under a veil of government denial and secrecy. Internal hierarchies and compartmentalisation served to facilitate their operation, allowing the displacement of responsibility and hiding violent practices further from the public eye. Within the sites of Makindye, Naguru and Nakasero, practices of routinised violence developed and were entrenched at various times over the course of Amin's rule. Within these spaces certain forms of violence became structural, practiced and replicated against detainees time and time again.

However, the institutions in which Amin's violence workers operated were subject to the same challenges and limitations of the Amin state more broadly. Regarding them as perfectly functioning institutions would not be telling the entire story. All three units were heavily improvised, and thrown immediately onto the frontline of an extraordinary political moment. They had to work with a complete lack of experienced staff, and limited resources. The new regime's treatment of the security apparatus as a patronage network undermined its functional capacity, and created internal conflicts and mutual fears and hostilities within the units. The result of this was considerable variation and informalisation of practice within all three sites. Security agents exploited their positions for economic gain, to pursue personal vendettas, and could also offer up unexpected leniency. They were subject to the same fears, pressures, and near operational paralysis of other sections of the Ugandan government during this period. Ideas of compromised professionalism, of legitimate and illegitimate violent conduct, and of moral aberration were recurring features of violence work in this period.

## 5. Violence and Governance in Acholi District, 1971-1979

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the relationship between violence and governance during the Amin era with reference to a specific locality, that of Gulu town and the surrounding lands in northern Uganda. This chapter draws on archival materials from Gulu District Archive, most of which are internal documents from the West Acholi District Administration, and the Gulu Police Force. The Acholi are remembered to have suffered disproportionately under Amin's rule, with many thousands of men murdered by pro-Amin soldiers and security agents between 1971 and 1979. There is a wealth of literature on the armed rebel movements that later emerged in the region, most notoriously Joseph Kony's LRA. Despite this, the localised experiences of men and women in the region during the Amin years have received very little attention. Examining the impact of violence on Acholiland in the 1970s can help us to better understand the rebellions that subsequently took place there.

It is tempting to accept the conventional image of a violent and unpredictable frontier region, in which agents of state acted with impunity against a population they regarded as loyal to the former president, Milton Obote. The archival material tells a more nuanced story. Amin's forces certainly *did* employ violence against civilians in what they came to call Northern Province, with an overwhelming focus on the existing educated elite. However, these 'spikes' of regime-led violence were comparatively rare. For the most part they appear only fleetingly in the formal records of the Ugandan state, alluded to occasionally, leaving comparatively little trace. This can be partly explained as the result of the considerable fear administrators must surely have felt, but it is also a product of the character of Amin's support base, which hinged on the loyalty and action of a small core of soldiery, many of whom occupied low-ranking positions and acted without the

endorsement of their own institution, much less the other arms of the Ugandan state. This made their use of violence all the more terrifying, harder to trace and to appeal against. But it also meant that they constituted a graft, a cancerous presence within the national framework rather than its complete corruption and subordination to Amin's will. When the social order finally did break down altogether during Amin's defeat and flight from the country, the district administration seems to have re-established itself with remarkable speed, with many former soldiers and policeman from the first Obote government returning to their posts.

The dynamics of violence in the region also call into question simplistic binaries of 'state' and 'civilian', 'perpetrators' and 'victims'. Much of the violence captured in the archive stemmed from the interaction of local state actors with Acholi society, and the failure of the Amin regime to instil consistent patterns of conduct in the soldiers upon which they relied. At times actors performing violence on behalf of Amin did so without the knowledge or sanction of the formal apparatus of the Ugandan state. Conversely, state agents in the army, police and prisons seem to have regularly abused their positions without any obvious licence or encouragement from Amin and his subordinates. Disputes over land, theft of property, and violent feuding all contributed to escalating violence in addition to the violent efforts of Amin's regime to impose and protect itself. The importance of localised agency has often been alluded to, but the day-to-day reality of this has never been fully explored. As this thesis has already demonstrated in previous chapters with regard to other parts of the country, social and political life in Gulu under Amin's rule was awash with misinformation, malicious denunciations, and the cooption of national politics and discourse by feuding local rivals. The picture thus becomes murkier, and understanding the exact motivations for and causes of violent activity in the region requires appreciation of a broad range of alternative factors.

Contrary to some accounts that posit the Amin years as having been defined by complete anarchy and state collapse, the archive shows the Ugandan state to have been limited but nonetheless persistent in the face of ongoing violence. Local administrators were often 'out of the loop' as to the activities being taken by the constellation of soldiers and intelligence agents that answered to the regime itself, but this chapter will show that some still bravely sought to document what was happening, to condemn violent abuses, and to call the perpetrators of violence to account. Civilians wrote and appealed to the local administration in the hope that their concerns might be heeded, and their loyalty noted. There were intermittent interventions on behalf of the citizenry against predatory soldiers, some of them led by high-ranking ministers in Amin's government. The reach of government institutions was often severely constrained, and local administrators were far from all-powerful. Despite these limitations, and despite the deteriorating state of political and social life under Amin, the day-to-day imprint of formal government seems to have endured until Amin's fall, routinely threatened and tampered with by outside forces but never destroyed or replaced altogether. There is also striking similarity to be observed between many of the concerns and limitations of the 1970s bureaucracy and those of Uganda's former colonial administrators, as attempts to increase cotton production, gather taxes, and assert the state's authority in the face of other overlapping and competing forms with limited budget and means continued to occupy much of their time. This was still an attempt to maintain 'hegemony on a shoestring', made all the more difficult by the emergence of an unpredictable and unstable regime in Kampala.

The limitations of employing the fragmented archival record of 1970s Gulu as a historical source are self-evident, but bear repeating. Glimpses of stories and actions appear, but their ultimate resolution is often missing. The gap between written word and lived reality can be vast. One catches names and locations, singular interpretations of complex and contested events. Rather than drawing firm conclusions as to the exact goings on in a given area, the archive offers a

sketch of the concerns and preoccupations of people in a certain locality at a certain time. What is particularly striking about the Gulu District Archive in this era is the plurality of local actors and communities that suddenly loom into view, in immediate contrast to an existing historiography defined almost solely by the fraught victim-perpetrator relationship of the faceless ‘ethnic groups’ of the region with the exaggerated persona of Idi Amin during these years. Indeed, in the Gulu files Amin himself is largely absent, a distant name invoked occasionally for a range of purposes. In the hands of district administrators he serves as a threat against dissenting traders, but aggrieved civilians also wield his name and pronouncements to condemn the rogue behaviour of local soldiers and state agents. In its totality, then, this archive is not an empirical record, but is itself a site of contestation and reinterpretation, of struggles in a single regional centre, at the intersection between local happenings and the fraught politics playing out on the national stage.

#### Amin and Acholiland: The Start of the Spiral?

In the UK, Northern Uganda is a region most commonly associated with crisis. Having suffered immensely at the hands of Museveni’s NRA and Joseph Kony’s LRA, it is the latter rebel movement that one most commonly encounters in the UK standing in as a reference point for the Acholi people. The surprise success of the ‘Kony 2012’ viral awareness raising campaign by the NGO Invisible Children meant that, for the briefest of moments, the Acholi, and Uganda more broadly, were being widely discussed in several western countries.<sup>546</sup> In recent decades the Acholi have experienced mass forced displacement, persistent campaigns of insurgent and state-led violence, and brutalisation that extended to widespread child kidnapping and those extreme forms of

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<sup>546</sup> Lauren Gould, ‘The politics of portrayal in violent conflict: the case of the Kony 2012 campaign’, *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 39:4 (Nov 2014), pp. 207-230.

‘exotic’ violence that always seem most capable of catching the attention of outsiders.<sup>547</sup> Today the district is comparatively stable, with a nest of NGOs centred around Gulu, and the rebel movements that had plagued the area for years mercifully absent.

Academic focus on the region has, unsurprisingly, been centred on the extraordinarily difficult experiences of the local population during the years of upheaval. Important contemporary conversations about post-Cold War violence in Africa, the ‘rise’ of abducted child soldiers and brides, and transitional and indigenous forms of post-conflict justice, have all focused themselves on the era of LRA prominence between 1987 and the mid 2000s and its aftermath.<sup>548</sup> The immediate roots of that conflict are commonly identified as having been a combination of the Acholi’s sudden loss of access to state power following the fall of the Obote II regime and the short-lived successor regime of Tito Okello, the disbandment and return ‘home’ of thousands of soldiers from the UNLA, and the violence meted out in the area by Museveni’s victorious NRA. Finnstrom has analysed the political demands made by the LRA in various manifestos as well as the cosmological dimensions of the LRA’s legitimacy, and the initial role that local elders had played in encouraging certain forms of armed resistance to Museveni, before withdrawing their support.<sup>549</sup>

However, there is also a general agreement in this literature that the damage the region had previously suffered under Amin was important in sowing the seeds for the localised

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<sup>547</sup> Kevin Dunn, ‘Uganda: The Lord’s Resistance Army’, *Review of African Political Economy*, 31:99 (Mar 2004), pp. 139-142.

<sup>548</sup> Erin Baines, ‘Forced marriage as a political project: sexual rules and relations in the Lord’s Resistance Army’. *Journal of Peace Research*, 51:3 (May 2014), pp. 405-417.

<sup>549</sup> Sverker Finnstrom, ‘Wars of the past and war in the present’ The Lord’s Resistance Movement/Army in Uganda’, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 76:2, (2006), pp. 200-220. The extent to which such manifestos can be taken seriously as LRA policy has been a subject of some debate, but Finnstrom argues that recurring references to a return to multi-party politics, a depoliticised Ugandan military, and to the damages caused by economic liberalisation should not be ignored outright.

insurgency that emerged to confront Museveni's newly installed regime.<sup>550</sup> Branch goes as far as to argue that this violence had 'destroyed the link between the Acholi in the district and the national state,' underpinning their subsequent distrust of the NRM.<sup>551</sup> Contrary to contemporary stereotypes of a 'wild' and marginal frontier district, and despite the limited infrastructural links between it and the rest of the country, the Acholi had been deeply involved in the national politics of Uganda since before its independence. As well as the externally oriented cash-cropping and disproportionate recruitment of soldiers explored in earlier chapters, many Acholi had participated in Uganda's nascent political parties, particularly Obote's UPC.<sup>552</sup> There had been an emergent 'political middle class' of educated administrators, teachers, and local leaders, and it was this, Branch argues, that was destroyed by Amin's reign.<sup>553</sup> With such links destroyed, the argument goes, some members of the surviving populace chose complete disengagement from, and hostility towards, the Ugandan state.

Despite the more or less universal recognition of the enormous impact of the political struggles of the early 1970s and 1980s on the region and its people, very little academic work has yet explored the Amin era with an explicit focus on the Acholi and Acholiland itself. Most references in the broader LRA literature to the Amin years are brief and some are inaccurate. Consider, for example, Van Acker's assertion that 'Idi Amin's order in 1972 for Acholi and Langi officers and enlisted men to return to barracks only to be massacred' had introduced 'competitive retaliation on an ethnic basis' into Ugandan national politics, which manages not only to

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<sup>550</sup> Brief reference to the violence conducted against the Acholi in the Amin era can be found in Tim Allen and Koen Vlassenroot (eds.), *The Lords Resistance Army: Myth and Reality*, (London, 2010), p. 6, Adam Branch, 'Exploring the roots of LRA violence: political crisis and ethnic politics in Acholiland' in the aforementioned volume, p. 29, and Sverker Finnstrom, 'Wars of the past and war in the present,' p. 203.

<sup>551</sup> Branch, 'Exploring the roots of LRA violence', p. 29.

<sup>552</sup> Cherry Gertzel, *Party and Locality in Northern Uganda*, (London, 1974), pp. 3-10.

<sup>553</sup> Branch, 'Exploring the roots of LRA violence', p. 29.



condense eight years of conflict into a single deed, but to get the year wrong too.<sup>554</sup> A localised study utilising such archival materials as are now available can speak to this question of the role of Amin in the history of the Acholi and the emergence of the LRA in far greater detail, as Laruni's recent study of Acholi politicians's changing relationship with the idea of a 'Northern' Ugandan identity between 1950 and 1968 demonstrates.<sup>555</sup>

Even in the wealth of literature published on Amin during and immediately after his fall, the Acholi tended to occupy a peripheral and marginal position. They are a sub-plot in the national 'story' of Amin's reign:

[from February 1977, following attempts to assassinate Amin] 'death squads were sent into Acholi and Lango and the elites in these areas were massacred. It is estimated that about ten thousand people were killed in this period.'<sup>556</sup>

Demonstrated here is the same generally uncontested idea that the area and its inhabitants suffered disproportionately, and that thousands were killed. But most accounts of this, like that quoted above, take the form of improvised statistical estimates and horrific anecdotes rather than localised study.<sup>557</sup> The literature suffers from the same limitations so much of the material from this era did, namely an inability to safely access firsthand evidence from further out than Kampala itself, and the challenge of positioning oneself between the lies and denials of Amin's regime on the one side, and the exaggerated testimonies and accusations of his political opponents on the other. This is perhaps best reflected in the running attempts of human rights

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<sup>554</sup> Frank Van Acker, 'Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army: the new order no one ordered', *African Affairs*, 103:412 (Jul 2004), pp. 334-357. p. 340.

<sup>555</sup> Elizabeth Laruni, 'Regional and ethnic identities: the Acholi of Northern Uganda, 1950-1968', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 9:2 (2015), pp. 212-230.

<sup>556</sup> Kakosi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, p. 121.

<sup>557</sup> Gwyn, *Idi Amin*, p. 17. Martin, *General Amin*, p. 137.

activists to investigate and confirm the ultimately unfounded allegations that Amin's regime was conducting a systematic genocide in the north of the country.<sup>558</sup>

The previous chapters of this thesis have located the experience of the Acholi within the broader national narrative of Amin's rise and fall. It is the purpose of this final chapter to 'zoom in' to the district level, in an attempt to better understand and encapsulate what the rise of a violence and hostile regime in Kampala meant for the region. The primary source materials for the chapter are two boxes of files from Gulu District Archive, boxes 531 and 541. Files in these boxes cover a range of topics, including district security, armed forces correspondence, and poaching. Using these materials the chapter explores several key questions. Was Amin-era violence in Acholiland worse than elsewhere in the country? Can similar patterns of violence be identified here? Did the links between the Acholi and the Ugandan state collapse altogether in this period, as Branch suggests, destroyed by the abuses of rampaging soldiers? How did the populace respond and adapt to the increase in political violence? What continuities can be identified? By triangulating the aforementioned district archive materials with oral interviews and some secondary sources, it will seek to sketch a more accurate picture of what violence 'looked' like, to capture its logics, and to convey such localised human experiences of violence in this era as can be reclaimed. It will argue that the primary record confirms that the region and its people suffered considerable violence in these years, and that this greatly damaged their relationship to the Ugandan state. However, talk of the complete destruction of this relationship is not born out by the historical record. Although both were sorely tested, the structures of the state, and the populace's belief in it, outlived Amin's rule.

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<sup>558</sup> Amnesty International, *Human Rights Violations in Uganda*, (London, 1978).

## Echoes in the Archive: Collective Violence in Acholiland

The Gulu archive contains plenty of evidence of the spread of political violence that took place between 1971 and 1979. In the reports of ‘missing’ local staff and teachers, the surviving monthly security reports, or references to the abuses committed by soldiers in the area, there is a wealth of documentation with which to cross-reference the testimonies of the period that have been dissected in previous chapters.<sup>559</sup>

Like elsewhere in Uganda, the violent consequences of the ‘shocks’ to the regime’s power in 1971, 1972, and 1977-8, with their attendant ‘spikes’ in retaliatory, army-led violence, can be detected in the Gulu District Archive. In the aftermath of Amin’s coup, administrators struggled to keep track of deserting and ‘missing’ staff, and to document the flight of young men across the border into Sudan. Men disappeared from the tsetse fly control division, from the charcoal production unit at Akweri, and from the local army regiment. Files from the archive shed further light on one of the little-known massacres undertaken by Amin’s supporters almost immediately after taking power. The massacre of several hundred men at Ogwec corner in April 1971 is covered in detail in chapter one. However, a passing mention in an exchange between the Rwot of County Lango and the Administrative Secretary of Acholi District in April 1971 confirm both the identities of the soldiers who committed the massacre, and the organised nature of the killing. G. L. L. Ocititi, the acting Rwot, notes in the correspondence that 405 Ugandans were being held in Lekung, and that ‘the Uganda Army has passed by 15 motor-cars to Lekung Division for this matter.’<sup>560</sup> Amin subsequently blamed the deaths on the border on Ugandan guerrillas and

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<sup>559</sup> ‘County Chief, Kilak, to the District Commissioner, West Acholi,’ 22 May 1972. GDA.

<sup>560</sup> ‘Office of the Rwot, County Lango to the Administrative Secretary, Acholi District.’ 19 April 1971. GDA.

Anyanya fighters, but this evidence directly contradicts this, and corroborates the testimonies given to the 1986 investigations stating that the killings were orchestrated by the Uganda Army.

In the violence that followed the failed September invasion of 1972 there were multiple killings of district staff by the army, and the acting DC, Julius Abe, fled to Juba.<sup>561</sup> Abe was well-regarded in the area, and had previously written letters condemning the behaviour of Amin's soldiers. Another wave of desertions accompanied this violence,<sup>562</sup> which had severed many of the existing links between the district personnel and the local population, and caused considerable fear and unrest. It was an instructive lesson in the potentially existential threat posed by a military controlled by hostile forces that hailed from elsewhere in Uganda that the people of the region would not forget quickly. Violence was not confined to members of the formal government apparatus either. James Livingstone Ochen, the headmaster at Pagak Primary School, was taken by soldiers and 'disappeared' in the same wave of retaliatory killings.<sup>563</sup>

Administrators like Julius Abe were quickly replaced, and some of the new arrivals proved very unpopular with the local population. The case of Owot Singh, appointed County Chief of Omoro sometime after the September 1972 invasion, was a particularly bad one. In letters to the DC, residents complained that Singh used local soldiers to help him to extort traders in the area, and issued threats and beatings to civilians in his search for 'collaborators'.<sup>564</sup> Such activities put further strain on the relationship of the populace to the Ugandan state.

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<sup>561</sup> 'West Acholi District Office to the Office of the President.' 11 October 1972. GDA.

<sup>562</sup> 'West Acholi District to the Ministry of Public Service and Local Administrations.' 18 Oct 1972. GDA.

<sup>563</sup> 'County Chief of Kilak to the District Commissioner, West Acholi', 22 May 1972. GDA.

<sup>564</sup> 'Nekodemo Ojwiya to the District Commissioner, West Acholi,' 5 September 1974. GDA, and 'John Charles Moro to the District Commissioner, West Acholi,' 2nd November 1974. GDA.

As the short-lived veneer of legitimacy they had enjoyed gave way to rule by the gun, Amin and his supporters exhorted local administrators to maintain a state of constant vigilance, projecting their own anxieties into the work of the district. In a speech given at a passing out parade in Fort Portal in December 1972, some months after the violence that had followed the failed September invasion, Amin demanded that all local government personnel step up their efforts to detect visitors and strangers in their districts, 'particularly European strangers.' DC's who failed to do this would be 'appropriately dealt with.'<sup>565</sup> A summary of the speech was distributed across the country to the offices of every district commissioner. During his own time as Governor of Northern Province, Ali Fadhul was constantly preoccupied with the possibility of localised uprisings against the regime.<sup>566</sup> Strangers and 'foreigners' of various kinds were monitored in state documents, which reveal multiple instances of local administrators keeping tabs on such diverse 'threats' as Somali immigrants and local seminary priests.

The same pattern of selective violence, the 'picking' of individuals by soldiers and intelligence officers in vehicles that became common across the country under Amin is also visible in the Gulu archive. An Assistant Inspector of Police, V.O.W Baraza-Kamuzu, wrote to Gulu Air Base in October 1973 to protest against such an attack having barely escaped with his life. Four soldiers in an army land rover had pulled up alongside him on Gulu-Moroto road, beaten him, and attempted to take him away by car. He was able to flee into the nearby forest and escape capture. The incident demonstrates the ongoing impunity that soldiers were exercising over other arms of the state. Baraza-Kamuzu was terrified by the incident, reporting 'I don't sleep in my house nowadays'.<sup>567</sup>

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<sup>565</sup> 'President's Office to all District Commissioners'. 7 January 1973. GDA.

<sup>566</sup> Lawoko, *The Dungeons of Nakasero*, p. 92.

<sup>567</sup> 'District Police Headquarters, West Acholi District to the Base Commander, Gulu.' 2nd October 1973, GDA.

A similar incident had happened a month before, but the victim had not been so fortunate. Ibrahim Adenya Mwa was a prominent figure in the district, with a large farm and a number of shops, one of which he had received during the mass distribution that followed the expulsion of Uganda's Asians. He had been a prominent figure in the UPC. On the 12th September 1973 Mwa was picked up and taken by intelligence officers from Gulu Air Base, on allegations of acting as treasurer for a subversive organisation. In a letter to the President's Office, the acting DC for West Acholi at that moment, P.S. Katamba-Lujjo, made note of the arrest. The 'picking' of individuals was not always the shadowy, secretive process it is often conveyed as, but one that left a visible footprint in the archive. Administrators captured the process at work, and letters like Katamba-Lujjo's seem to be an attempt to document the arrests without passing judgement or contesting them, ensuring they were not forgotten whilst navigating the potential risks that condemnation might have incurred.

Chapter four explored the development of violent institutional cultures within Amin's security apparatus at their bases in Kampala. There is some evidence in the Gulu archive to suggest that institutional deterioration was leading to similar increases in violence in the north as well. In a letter to the DC in November 1974, L. M. Ngageno, the officer in charge of Gulu Prison, wrote to express his alarm at the repeated failure of staff to undertake proper inquests into the death of prisoners in custody at the prison. He included a list of prisoners whose deaths in custody had been variously attributed to suicide, injuries 'sustained whilst at large', and 'natural death in the cell', but whose deaths had not been properly investigated.<sup>568</sup> In an environment of military impunity, where inquiry into suspicious deaths could bring considerable risks to those involved, the knock on effect on institutional capacity was clearly being felt on the periphery too.

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<sup>568</sup> 'A.S.P Officer in Charge U.G. Prison Gulu to the DC West Acholi District.' 28 November 1974. GDA.

In 1974 a new army unit, Chui regiment (often referred to in historical sources as Chui battalion), was established in the area under the command of Lt. Col. Yefusa Bananuka. Bananuka had served in the army since 1963, and been promoted into the 'plateau' of senior officers in 1973.<sup>569</sup> He was one of the few longstanding officers at the new battalion, which was quickly staffed with fresh recruits from the various populations Amin leaned on most heavily for support.<sup>570</sup> Soldiers from Chui immediately became a major threat to the livelihood of people in the district. New intelligence officers based at the regiment conducted investigations in pursuit of 'subversives'. Raids were launched in the town centre in pursuit of 'hoarders' in accordance with the ongoing 'Economic War'. Soldiers stole cattle, forced families off their land, and harassed civilians on the roads and in the urban centres. The creation of new battalions had been intended to aid the projection of regime power, but the conduct of the soldiery served to accelerate the process of disconnection set in motion by earlier regime violence, as local people sought to disengage from the predatory hand of the military. Margaret Lamony, who lived in Omoro district at the time, remembered this process of disengagement:

'Amin's people just followed the main road. They were scattered in the small trading centres, they didn't go to the bush. If they saw you from their trucks, they might chase you, shoot at you. We started spending more time in the fields, we grew, we ate. You'd go to Gulu for salt, for paraffin, the tricky things, but there was less to buy, and we went less often. In the town you felt they could reach you at any time. There was no schooling by the end, we were only looking for what we could eat.'<sup>571</sup>

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<sup>569</sup> 'Life as an Amin army commander' *Daily Monitor*, 27 February 2017.

<sup>570</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>571</sup> Margaret Lamony, interviewed in Gulu District, 27/03/17.

In the final years of the regime, violent purges of Acholi and Langi men took place in the army and state bureaucracy, and large-scale flight of refugees across the border once again took place. This was explored in chapter three. The Gulu files contain very little direct reference to this, which is perhaps itself indicative of the climate of fear that had gripped the area in these final years of Amin's rule, especially given the willingness of administrators to record earlier disappearances. There are, however, some discernible traces of this final 'spike' in violence. Reports speak of town raids and beatings issued by the men of Gulu Air Base, and incidents in which entire populations fled their work or the market after reports of imminent arrests.<sup>572</sup> In a letter in June 1977 Polycarp Ochan, the County Chief of Omoro, noted that most of the local staff had failed to turn in their security reports during the earlier months of 1977, and that he was issuing directives reminding them to start doing so again.<sup>573</sup> The months coincide with the period before and after the death of Archbishop Janani Luwum when the killings of Acholi and Langi men had reached their peak. Might staff have ceased their security documentation for fear of what might happen to them if they reported on military violence?

The experience of the district seems to broadly mirror that of the country as a whole over this period. 'Spikes' of regime-led violence were targeted at members of the elite, destroying large chunks of the existing administration and creating considerable fear. The police came under attack and were themselves demoralised and subordinated to an increasingly powerful army. Alongside these moments of widespread violence was the ongoing spread of selective targeted violence against individuals. This too seems to have disproportionately targeted wealthy and influential individuals, and was facilitated by the use of vehicles, as soldiers and intelligence agents performed rapid arrests. Local responses included flight, and disengagement, avoiding contact with soldiers wherever possible. The region was exceptional in some ways, as its proximity

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<sup>572</sup> 'Provincial Executive Secretary of Northern Province to the Gulu Air Base', 24 August 1977. GDA. and 'J. L. Semakula to the District Commissioner, West Acholi. 6 July 1977. GDA.'

<sup>573</sup> 'County Chief Omoro to the District Commissioner, West Acholi.' 2 June 1977. GDA.



to the border and the association of it's people with the former government made it the focal point for the initial flight of Acholi men across the border, and the violent response of Amin's supporters as they attempted to prevent this from happening and root out political opposition. The violence of the takeover and the bad blood this created between the Acholi and the new regime made them a focal point for the military, which preyed on them throughout Amin's reign.

### Localised Agency

Regime-led violence played a crucial role in reshaping social and political life in this period, but the agency of local actors was also very important. Previous chapters have sought to demonstrate the tenuous nature of Amin's control over his own support base in the army, and the space which this created for a rise in hostile forms of agency by soldiers and members of the security organisations at the local level. Records from Gulu serve to corroborate this breakdown in army discipline, a process that had arguably been in motion since before Amin's own ascension to the Presidency. An exchange between the acting Base Commander at Gulu, Akkie B. Mutton, and the West Acholi administration highlights this lack of control. Mutton was writing in June 1971, a few months after the coup, in response to local reports that soldiers from the base were victimising civilians. He had recently received new instructions that the local DC's were to confirm and oversee future arrests, and he encouraged them to 'explain to [soldiers] the situation and help them to follow the correct paths when on arrest missions.'<sup>574</sup> The letter shows the base commander's lack of knowledge and control over his own troops, as well as his somewhat over-optimistic hope that the local administration could somehow fill this vacuum.

The situation only worsened after the establishment of Chui Battalion. After a visit in May 1975, A. Basheija, the Provincial Executive Secretary for Northern Province, noted with some

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<sup>574</sup> 'Uganda Air Force Gulu to East Acholi District and West Acholi District.' 11 June 1971. GDA.

horror that basic duties were not being kept, and 'officers are fond of visiting army and police barracks [in contravention of orders implemented after Arube's failed coup the year before] and at times they visit such barracks at night... some of you are permanently drunk.'<sup>575</sup> Violent entrepreneurial activity spiked as it had elsewhere, demonstrated strikingly in the Gulf archive by a series of documents from the mid 1970s that reported on an exponential increase in elephant poaching in the nearby Kabalega National Park. The reports detailed the 'mass execution' of elephants with automatic weapons, with the collusion and active participation of soldiers from the garrison.<sup>576</sup> In his role as CO of Chui Battalion Yefusa Bananuka was forced to address serious concerns about the security of civilians on the roads near the barracks, opting to blame the reports on 'various categories of people'.<sup>577</sup>

Soldiers exploited this lack of control to their own ends. In a brief to the governor in March 1974 Hannington Kimbulya bemoaned the misconduct of the soldiery. He gave the recent example of a man who was shot on Kitgum road, allegedly for impersonating a soldier. It was then discovered that one of the intelligence staff at Gulu Air Base had reported him maliciously because they were locked in a dispute over a 'girl friend'. Hannington flagged up the recent arrest of some East African Custom Staff members by soldiers, and the diplomatic risks this posed. He was similarly disgusted by the crass boasting of a Lt. Kaiga at market that a Mr Odida was now 'under Kabalega Falls'.<sup>578</sup> The picture that emerges is one of a soldiery that was barely, if at all, being held in check, and which, like elsewhere in Uganda, was exploiting its power at the expense of the local populace.

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<sup>575</sup> 'Office of the Governor, Northern Province to Chui Battalion', 26 May 1975. GDA.

<sup>576</sup> 'Anaka Sub-District to the District Commissioner, West Acholi' 8 April 1975, and 'The County Chief of Kilak to the District Commissioner, West Acholi' 8 March 1976. GDA.

<sup>577</sup> 'The Commanding Officer, Bibia Barracks to the District Commissioner, West Acholi' 20 May 1975. GDA.

<sup>578</sup> 'The District Commissioner of West Acholi to the Governor, Northern Province.' 12 March 1974. GDA.

In government Amin and his supporters relied on a network of informants and local 'gatekeepers', many of them outside of the formal state apparatus, to identify potential opposition and help them to project power. As earlier chapters have shown, this was a period in which some members of certain communities- West Nilers, Nubians, and Muslims in particular- enjoyed improved status, with others seeking to join or assimilate into these groups. The example of Mohammed Okello shows this same process at work in Acholiland. Okello had grown up in the area, and had briefly been in the Uganda Army, leaving to become a bus conductor in Gulu sometime before the coup. After the coup he had sought to position himself favourably with the new regime, converting to Islam and rejoining the army in March 1971. Okello came to blows with the staff of Samuel Baker School for turning up unexpectedly in civilian dress in the aftermath of the September 1972 invasion and harassing the staff.<sup>579</sup>

With their complete lack of political experience, their dependence on local informants, their preference for verbal commands and exchanges, and their limited knowledge of many of the regions over which they now governed, Amin and his supporters in the military were particularly susceptible to manipulation and co-option by local actors. This resulted in a wave of malicious denunciations, which has been explored in previous chapters. The Gulu materials tell a similar story. Investigations into allegations of guerrilla recruitment near Koro village were dismissed when it was discovered that the accusations had been made by Reverend Allipayo Latino against a local man with whom he was locked in an ongoing land dispute.<sup>580</sup> Writing in March 1974, Hannington Kibulya, the District Commissioner for West Acholi, reported back to Ali Fadhul on his efforts to quell the rampant rumour-mongering inside his own office:

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<sup>579</sup> 'The Headmaster of Sir Samuel Baker School to the O.C. Police, West Acholi District.' 11 October 1972. GDA.

<sup>580</sup> 'District Special Branch Office West Acholi to the District Commissioner, West Acholi District.' 4 February 1975. GDA.

'I used also to have some officials in my office, namely Mr Odora, the Internal Auditor and Mr. Tom Kidega, the Deputy Treasurer who had a habit of reporting each other on false grounds to the Intelligence unit but on 18th January, 1974 I seriously warned them about this practice and to the best of my knowledge this matter seems to have cooled down...

...some women working in my office still have the practice of intimidating officers that they will be reported to the Intelligence. I organised disciplinary action against them. For this matter I have warned the women concerned.'<sup>581</sup>

In a letter from the same month, Kibulya wrote to the commander at Gulu Air Base to warn him that Andrew Adimola, the former Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, had returned to the district following his dismissal, and had approached him in fear for his life after hearing rumours of his impending arrest. Kibulya advised the base commander 'not to take stories about him very seriously'.<sup>582</sup> Adimola later fled abroad, returning to government after Amin's fall.

This atmosphere of suspicion, surveillance and misinformation was only heightened by ongoing localised resistance to the regime. As well as the aforementioned flight of men over the border to join with pro-Obote rebels outside of the country, Acholiland witnessed persistent localised agitation against the new regime throughout the 1970s. This took diverse forms, including the distribution of anti-government pamphlets, some of which are stored in the archive.<sup>583</sup> Intelligence reports in the mid-1970s were preoccupied by regular 'night meetings' of influential former UPC politicians and local traders. The intelligence unit at Chui Battalion was

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<sup>581</sup> 'District Commission of West Acholi to the Governor, Northern Province.' 12 March 1974. GDA.

<sup>582</sup> 'District Commissioner, West Acholi to the Base Commander, Gulu Air Force', 28 March 1974. GDA.

<sup>583</sup> 'Uganda Underground Movement' May 1974. GDA. 'Read and Pass On'. GDA.

instructed to investigate the activities of a 'Uganda Progressive Party' rumoured to be operating out of Gulu in March 1974.<sup>584</sup> By the final years of Amin's rule local groups were colluding in direct sabotage with armed opposition forces just across the border, targeting pylons, survey pillars, and bridges.<sup>585</sup> Within the administration officials clearly felt great pressure to correctly identify and root out potential resistance, as demonstrated in a panicked communique from Hannington Kibulya to Ali Fadhul, in which the former apologised profusely to the Governor for his being snubbed and insulted by several local people because of 'underlying ill-feelings' at a recent party held in his honour, and promised action.<sup>586</sup>

The need to recognise the role of local and non-state actors in driving violence is further demonstrated by the wave of retaliatory violence that was meted out against groups associated with Amin in the immediate aftermath of his fall. There is a near-perfect symmetry with the immediate aftermath of Obote's fall, with rumours of guerrillas recruiting for the 'return of Amin', fears about 'Nubian wives' living in the area and spying for insurgent forces, and retaliatory acts of looting and violence. There was deliberate targeting of West Nilers and Nubians, with a spate of murders prompting public meetings in which officials pleaded with the populace 'not to kill any non-Acholi without proper investigation.'<sup>587</sup> Here too the divide between state and society, soldiers and civilians was blurry, complicated by the return home of many fighters from Obote's Kikosi Maalum, and confusion over who was now working for the government. Once again this created space for local actors to exploit the disorder for their own purposes, to the alarm of local administrators.<sup>588</sup> Accounting for the machinations of ambitious local soldiers and informants,

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<sup>584</sup> 'The District Commissioner, West Acholi to the Base Commander, Gulu Air Base.' 26 March 1974. GDA.

<sup>585</sup> 'Secret'. 21 February 1978. GDA.

<sup>586</sup> 'District Commissioner, West Acholi to the Governor, Northern Province.' 27 February 1974. GDA.

<sup>587</sup> 'Security Situation: Gulu District.' 17 October 1980. GDA.

<sup>588</sup> 'Gulu District Commissioner to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.' 14 July 1979. GDA.

and the ongoing resistance efforts of other local actors, enables us to build a more complete picture of the manner in which violence was directed in this period.

### Colonial Legacies and Continuities

To build a more complete picture of the pattern of violence between 1971-79, as well as political and social life in Acholiland more generally, it is important to recognise the long-running limitations of state power in the area, and the other sources of authority with which the state had to compete. Postcolonial states in sub-saharan Africa, like their colonial predecessors, were greatly limited in reach and capacity. They rarely enjoyed anything resembling Weber's 'monopoly on force'. This was the result of many factors, including minimal funding, limited manpower, and the comparatively short histories of westphalian-esque 'state' activity in many parts of the continent. These limitations were all the more pronounced on the peripheries of colonial and post-colonial territories, where the 'thin white line' of European administration had been expected to rule over vast stretches of territory and numerous constituencies with minimal resources, a challenge that their African successors had inherited after independence. Administrators had to compete for legitimacy and authority with local social systems and leaders who were often ambivalent or hostile towards external actors. At the same time formal institutions were expected to manage and contain the societal tensions generated by the extractive demands of the colonial and post-colonial economy, the conflicts caused by commercialisation and mono crop agriculture, by struggles over land, and by competition for power and influence within the newly established organs of the state itself.<sup>589</sup>

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<sup>589</sup> Anthony Kirke-Greene, 'The thin white line: the size of British colonial service in Africa', *African Affairs*, 79:314 (1980), pp. 25-44. See also Sara Berry, 'Hegemony on a shoestring: Indirect rule and access to agricultural land', *Africa*, 62:3, (1992), pp. 327-355.

The Gulu archive shows glimpses of these ongoing struggles of local administrators to impose their authority and that of the state in the face of local alternatives. In the peripheral towns of the district local chiefs and elders often enjoyed greater respect and legitimacy in the eyes of their peers than the staff of the formal administration, as they had since the onset of colonial rule. In a letter to the DC in May 1974, Mr Ekirapa of the Uganda Government Prison Farm at Patiko highlighted this ongoing struggle between overlapping forms of local authority. Patiko is a small town, located some 30 miles north of Gulu itself. It is situated next to the ruins of Baker's Fort, established before the British colonial occupation decades prior. Earlier in 1974, civilians in the area had become enraged by the abusive behaviour of local soldiers, who had severely mistreated them whilst searching for 'tax-defaulters'. Local chiefs who had previously cooperated with the administration and 'stuck to the law' had now started to rally the populace against the state:

The chiefs appear to have been deliberately out to punish the staff... there is no doubt that the chief who is employed to foster, encourage peace and order, tried to incite the villagers to re-open hostilities to the Prison, Prison Officers and their families. He appealed to their emotions to realise that the land was theirs. He appealed to them to renew *the old ways of treating askaris*.<sup>590</sup>

The events at Patiko highlight the fragile position the staff of the district occupied, caught between the abuses of an increasingly ill-disciplined military and the rising anger of the local population. Mr Ekirapa feared a return to an earlier state of upheaval, in which the local communities had effectively gone to war with the visible apparatus of the state. The scene he

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<sup>590</sup> 'Uganda Government Prison Farm Patiko to the District Commissioner, West Acholi District', 27 May 1974. Emphasis added.

describes couldn't be much further from the conventional picture of Amin's all-imposing 'state of blood':

You recalled the hostilities which happened here. Staff and families were ambushed whenever they tried to come out of the barracks to the village. Bore hole engines were broken and damaged indiscriminately by villagers, fish ponds were poisoned, farm crops were looted, some heads of cattle were slaughtered at leisure... The death of the then Officer in Charge which followed soon after the hostilities was also attributed to poisoning.<sup>591</sup>

In Patiko the picture that emerges is one of a thin line between cooperation and conflict, with the local staff seemingly impotent in their efforts to maintain the former and prevent the latter. The result was further disconnection between the state and Acholi society. Ekirapa bemoaned the harsh extraction of tax and its side effects, noting that Amin himself 'has often talked against this and has demonstrated his dislike for mistreating people by getting culprits tried in courts.'<sup>592</sup> Whether his appeals for help from the DC were ever answered is unclear. Similar troubles were being faced in the final years of the regime by Samuel Otto, the Jago (chief) in Amuru, north-west of Gulu town. In a letter in July 1977, at a time when Amin's soldiers are known to have been conducting selective killings in the north of the country, he reported that a group of local men were stealing livestock and robbing people on the road at night with spears, bows and arrows. He reported that 'there is no peace in the area, I request you to assist me in this matter.'<sup>593</sup> Whether his requests for armed soldiers from Gulu were answered is also unknown. These extracts

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<sup>591</sup> Ibid.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid.

<sup>593</sup> 'Jago Amuru to the District Commissioner, West Acholi', 7 July 1977. GDA.



point to many local administrators being far more preoccupied with the struggle to control and police their resident populations than with imposing the will of Amin's supposed police state.

This combination of isolation, vulnerability and political impotence is echoed in a series of letters written over 24 months by Mr J. Ojwe, who was acting Jago for Alero between 1973 and 1975. Alero is a small town on the main road linking Gulu to West Nile, situated 40 miles from Gulu town. From the letters Ojwe sent to the district administration it would be very easy to assume this entirely surmountable distance was in fact one of hundreds of miles, such is the sense of abandonment the author conveys. A report written by Ojwe in November 1973 outlined some of the challenges he had encountered since taking up his post. This included trouble created by local people who were 'quite fond of discriminating' against each other on the basis of 'tribal and religious differences.' Ojwe himself had faced immediate insubordination from members of the Alero clan, who he believed tended to 'disregard and sort of... undermine the other people who are non-Alero assigned by the Government to perform some duties in the area.' This took the form of refusals to follow his instructions:

'these are some of the parish chiefs sub-parish chiefs and those who claim to be coming from the royal families. In fact Sir, these are the people who are all the time trying to convince the public not to follow any policy put to them by the Jago, just recently the public were asked to dig road, collect charity fund, and come to help in erecting some buildings in the school, yet you find that the characters mentioned above in the villages are instigating people not to come for work simply because the Jago and the Headmaster of the school are not of the Alero birth.'<sup>594</sup>

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<sup>594</sup> 'Jago Alero to the District Commissioner, West Acholi', 11 November 1975. GDA.

In the second of four letters utilised for this study, written over a year later, things had not improved. Ojwe wrote of his alarm at local mobilisation, in particular the holding of ‘unlawful meetings’, and rumours circulating about his ‘eating’ of local goats that are undermining his authority. In an attempt to resolve what he described as ‘chronic problems’, he listed several local men who he believed to be the ring leaders, including Sarafino Orach, the Parish Chief, with whom he was particularly enraged, but also Yusuf Adam, a local trader. Ojwe noted that the local populace were now ‘beyond my control’. He noted somewhat bitterly that he had been writing letters to this effect since September 1974, without receiving any response or support.<sup>595</sup>

Ojwe’s struggles only worsened over the coming months. He wrote again in March 1975, listing yet more rumours circulating that accused him of corrupt practices, including involvement in ‘other people’s wives’, and the theft of community materials. His personal clash with Sarafino Orach had continued to escalate, after he had arrested Orach’s son, only for the chief to intervene and have him released. These ongoing power struggles had left Ojwe paranoid that an armed effort to ‘get rid’ of him might soon be in the offing.<sup>596</sup> In his final letter, months later in December, Ojwe continued to reel off lists of political enemies, Orach and Adam still first among them, apparently no closer to receiving meaningful support with which to deal with this local opposition a whole year on from first attempting to summon help.<sup>597</sup> On the northern periphery of the country the projection of centralised power continued to be a fraught, under-supplied affair.

Some of the clashes that appear in the archive appear to have little if anything to do with national politics or the army. A Special Branch report from June 1978 noted the case of Janan Otto, a farmer who was being harassed by ‘jealous people’ that were trying to drive him off his farm,

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<sup>595</sup> ‘Jago Alero to the District Commissioner, West Acholi’, 15 January 1975. GDA.

<sup>596</sup> ‘Jago Alero to the District Commissioner, West Acholi’, 6 March 1975. GDA.

<sup>597</sup> ‘Jago Alero to the District Commissioner, West Acholi’, 15 December 1975. GDA.

including Angelo Odali, John Atok, and Obia Loding. The men had gone as far as to start killing his cattle in an attempt to drive him away.<sup>598</sup> In an even more dramatic example from August 1974, a security report noted that a short clan conflict had broken out in Labala after a member of the Labala clan speared a member of the Kal clan to death. Urgent police intervention to stop further violence, and to shut down on illegal waragi distilling operations in the area (blamed for the outbreak of fighting) was requested.<sup>599</sup>

### A Limited, but Persistent State

Given these considerable limits on local state capacity, and the disregard and outright hostility that Amin and his supporters in the army regularly showed for formal state practice during their eight years in power, it would be entirely understandable to assume, as many have, that state function in the country would have broken down altogether. The word ‘paralysed’ is often employed at the time and afterwards, suggesting a kind of terrified stasis. But the historical record points to the endurance of a limited, but nonetheless persistent Ugandan state in this period. Reports continued to be written and sent, and court cases held. At times district commissioners and local chiefs fled, were murdered, or were removed, but they were also replaced, and their replacements continued to work. One might expect to see a complete deference to the military in light of its ascendancy and its ready recourse to violence, and yet examples of pushback against the army abound throughout the archive. How can one account for this?

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<sup>598</sup> ‘Special Branch Northern Gulf to the District Commissioner, West Acholi’, 5 June 1978. GDA.

<sup>599</sup> ‘Lt. Okello Lagojok to the DC, West Acholi District’, 29 August 1974. GDA.

One could look to Amin's style of rule, as analysed by Peterson, and explored in chapter one. A political system in which Amin and his ruling clique of generals favoured the verbal address and command, eschewing those forms of formal bureaucracy with which many of them had only rudimentary capacity to engage, nonetheless existed *in tandem* with the formal Ugandan state. Just as violence so often appears as a momentary aberration and disruption of social and political life under Amin, so too do his edicts, and his erratic attempts at policy. Despite occasional noises to the contrary, Amin and his allies never sought to completely dismantle the Ugandan State. Indeed, they adopted many of its goals, most notably drives for greater production, and they often sought to work with it rather than against it. The result was hybridity, a graft of the institutions kept largely intact since the colonisation of the region with the heavily improvised 'politics of exhortation' that constituted Amin's own style of rule. Far from being the 'one-man-show' that many commentators made it out to be from afar, this was a time of overlapping, often competing forms of authority and governance. As the previous chapters have attempted to demonstrate, this created enormous space for manoeuvre and action on the part of local actors across the country, albeit in an increasingly unpredictable and dangerous environment.

There is surprising evidence in the Gulu archive that shows how even elements of the state that Amin's regime had actively sought to subordinate or undermine continued to endure in Acholiland. One example is Amin's announcement in 1973 of new administrative provinces, with new governor positions to match. Mamdani has assessed the impact of these new political units, which served as patronage opportunities dished out to Amin's most reliable supporters, noting that they created new 'warlords', who were only under 'nominal control from the central government'.<sup>600</sup> This is certainly true, and the experience of Lt. Col. Ali Fadhul, embroiled in some of the worst violence of Amin's takeover before rocketing Icarus-like into the post of governor for the newly established Northern Province that included Gulu and the surrounding lands, is

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<sup>600</sup> Mamdani, *Imperialism and Fascism in Uganda*, p. 50.

instructive. An Amin favourite, Fadhul was in charge of the territory for years, but he appears in the archive only sparingly, invariably in verbal form, exhorting the staff of the district like a miniature mouthpiece for the president himself at meetings, threatening action against reported rebels, and demanding increases in cotton production. Local accounts of Fadhul portray him as distant, regularly in Kampala, interested primarily in the appropriation and exploitation of local businesses and smuggling networks.<sup>601</sup> In one illustrative moment from the minutes of a staff meeting in 1975 he expressed surprise at the expulsion of sixteen Catholic missionaries from the province, insisting he hadn't been aware of the decision to do so until one of the bishops called him, and that he had only learned of the reasons for their expulsion on Radio Uganda.<sup>602</sup>

It is clear from the records that Fadhul's Northern Province had an office, which was often copied into exchanges between officials from 1973 onwards. But what is equally striking is that all the existing structures of government seem to have continued in tandem to it, unaltered. West and East Acholi both continued to function as districts, and the network of localised County Chiefs, Jagos and Rwots in the area also persisted. It should be noted that there were extensive changes of staff in 1973, as Amin demanded a rotation and re-election of local chiefs. The archive doesn't offer us sufficient material to know the extent to which this was an 'Aminisation' of the local administration, but several regional staff continue to appear in the files from this time until the fall of the regime. The result was a hybrid system in which Fadhul appears to have played only a limited role as provincial governor, albeit one in which he enjoyed considerable influence and inspired dread in his subordinates, not to mention his extensive coverage in the regime-controlled press. After the fall of the regime the governor's post was simply removed, and the district system retained. In the meantime, local administrators, though undeniably constrained and threatened by their precarious position in the new status quo, continued to wield some degree of power.

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<sup>601</sup> Andrew Benedicto Adimola, 1986 CIVHR, pp. 10363-10365. UHRC.

<sup>602</sup> 'Minutes of meeting in Northern Province', 11 August 1975. GDA.

The other striking example from the archive is the endurance of Special Branch, supposedly abolished and merged into Amin's Public Safety Unit in early 1972. Despite Amin's own announcements to the contrary, Special Branch seems to have continued to operate in Gulu well into the final years of his rule. It also continued to conduct investigations. Writing in February 1975, Mr Mulindwa, an Assistant Inspector with Special Branch in West Acholi District, had investigated and disproved accusations against Mr Yonasani Odur, who had been falsely accused of harbouring guerrillas in Omoro County. Having defused the situation Mulindwa was seeking to meet with the DC in person to resolve the dispute.<sup>603</sup> Despite the known preference of Amin for his specially created SRC and PSU to conduct intelligence work, Special Branch also seems to have continued to undertake investigations on behalf of the local administration, as exemplified by a communique from the DC in West Acholi in 1975 alerting Special Branch to 'night meetings in Bwobo', and suggesting they investigate.<sup>604</sup> Here again the picture that emerges is of hybridity between the old and the new, rather than complete destruction and reinvention.

Another key factor in understanding the surprising endurance of local government under Amin was the importance and persistence of the *idea* of the state as an arbiter and source of protection, and the written word as a repository of this same protection. The archive contains numerous letters written by concerned civilians to the district administration, professing loyalty to the state, and making claims on its power. These letters often coincided with periods of heightened insecurity or violence, as literate actors sought to write themselves into the historical record and secure themselves against perceived dangers. In one such example James G. Otto, a former officer in Obote's disbanded GSU, wrote a letter documenting his visit to the district offices

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<sup>603</sup> 'District Special Branch Office West Acholi to the District Commissioner, West Acholi District', 4 February 1975. GDA.

<sup>604</sup> 'District Commissioner, West Acholi to the District Special Branch Officer, West Acholi', 3 January 1975. GDA.

in Gulu in accordance with an instruction broadcast over radio for former GSU staff to report in. He recorded that he had left his post in Soroti and had now returned home with his family to Gulu, and included contact details. This practice reoccurs across the period.<sup>605</sup> In one particularly strident example in September 1975 Jimmy Obuto, a member of staff in the Animal Husbandry Office in Kilak County, wrote directly to Chui Battalion condemning false accusations levelled against him by Peter Okoya, a soldier stationed there. Okoya had accused Obuto of 'engaging' his wife, and threatened him with bodily harm. Obuto used his letter to remind the commander at Chui Battalion that the president 'expects maximum cooperation between members of the armed forces and the civilians', echoing Amin's own oft-repeated commands, and he promised further legal action. Like James Otto, Obuto perceived the importance of writing himself into the official record, noting that 'in the meantime, should anything of any kind happen to me anywhere, you will be held responsible. The witnesses are informed accordingly.'<sup>606</sup>

Local administrators also sought to use their positions to condemn and counter the abuses of the army. The archive contains numerous letters written by Abdiges Bin Bakit, the County Chief of Kilak towards the end of Amin's rule. Following an all-too-familiar incident in October 1977 when Mr Patrick Oyet, a local trader, was arrested by unknown men in a motor vehicle and taken from the area, Bin Bakit seems to have furiously pursued the case, flagging up Oyet's disappearance to the district administration, before securing assistance from Moses Ali (at this time the Minister of Finance), and Juma Oris, Amin's acting Foreign Minister. With their help it was discovered that Oyet had been arrested on fabricated terms, and money stolen from his shop. They traced Patrick to the prison in Gulu. Bin Bakit then came to blows with the acting DC of West Acholi, Michael Lobuju, who was unwilling to release Oyet because the soldiers who had dropped

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<sup>605</sup> 'N. O. Obwoyo-Laker to the District Commissioner, West Acholi District', 15 May 1971. GDA.

<sup>606</sup> 'Kilak County headquarters to Chui Battalion Gulu', 16 September 1975. GDA.

him to Gulu were not known to be from the district. It seems highly likely that Lobuju was scared to accidentally cross soldiers who enjoyed favour with Amin or one of his other key supporters.

Whether Bakit's intervention on Patrick Oyet's behalf was ultimately successful is unclear, as the paper trail ends with Lobuju's refusal to release him. But the incident is striking for several reasons. It demonstrates that, even as late as 1977, a local administrator was still actively seeking to resist army abuses, and protect local civilians. Even more intriguingly, the manner in which Ali and Oris, two high-ranking regime figures, are enlisted in Bakit's search demonstrates the sometimes contradictory roles the 'Big Men' of Amin's government could play, as saviours as well as threats.

The Bakit case is far from the only evidence of the enduring will of government staff to intervene to counteract and overturn the abuses of the soldiery in the district. Several letters from March 1977 followed in the wake of an address given at Acholi Inn by the Minister of State for Defence and Army Chief of Staff (at that time Major Yusuf Gowon). In his address Gowon had condemned the recent seizure of cattle and properties by the soldiers of Chui Regiment, and insisted upon their return. In several related cases, stolen or repossessed goods were returned to the wives or daughters of their former owners, who seem either to have been killed, arrested, or to have fled the district. Mrs Salim Okulu assumed ownership of the Layibi Grinding Mill, and Miss Christine Akera was handed back sixty heads of cattle that had belonged to her father.<sup>607</sup> Once again, powerful regime figures appear briefly to intervene against the soldiery on behalf of the citizenry and in tandem with local government, in contradiction of their conventional image as one-dimensional, pro-military tyrants.

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<sup>607</sup> 'Office of the Governor, Northern Province to the Minister of State for Defence and Army Chief of Staff', 29 March 1977. GDA.



The persistence of the Ugandan state beyond (and despite) its armed forces is perhaps best demonstrated by its rapid rehabilitation in the wake of Amin's fall. Archival documents show that within months the temporarily abandoned district administration was being restaffed, and that many of those now coming to work had previously held posts in the first Obote government before fleeing or being replaced. Even in conditions of considerable instability, and with a near complete lack of supplies upon which to draw like food and vehicles, the police and prisons staff attempted to re-establish operations.<sup>608</sup> Patrick Dikwat, newly established DC of West Acholi, kept note of the large numbers of ex-soldiers who were now returning to their posts, replacing those who had fled from the local Chui Regiment.<sup>609</sup> The idea and structures of the formal state had endured, despite the severe challenges posed to it by Amin's rule. This is of particular significance when considering the extent to which the 1970s can be regarded to have laid the groundwork for the disconnection and suffering of the LRA years. The re-establishment of government, and the return of so many former staff, suggests that a complete collapse of state authority was not yet inevitable, and that the political struggles of the Obote II era that were to follow would prove crucial.

### Conclusion

In a letter to the president's office in February 1970, almost a year before Amin's seizure of power, the acting District Commissioner for Acholi, Mr Nangodi-Gubi, had expressed alarm at the state of the Gulu District Archive. He was appalled to have read a report which stated that only 11 old files

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<sup>608</sup> 'Gulu District Commissioner to the Ministry of Internal Affairs', 14 July 1979. GDA.

<sup>609</sup> 'District Commissioner, West Acholi to the Ministry of Provincial Administration.' 8 March 1979. GDA.

from the area had been kept since 1949, and was seeking to ensure that greater attention was paid to archiving government materials from the region in future:

‘every effort should be made to preserve all the useful records of the District

Administrations, which forms an important source for research purposes.

Correspondences, reports, documents or policy directives form raw materials for anyone doing research on any subject which involves the district as such.’<sup>610</sup>

Mr Nangodi-Gubi could not have known how prescient his concerns would soon prove to be. As this chapter has sought to demonstrate, the Gulu archive is a vital source of historical knowledge, challenging simplistic narratives and perceptions of the region’s past, and shedding slivers of light onto the lives and concerns of an array of actors who might otherwise have been consigned to oblivion by the fallible nature of human memory.

For a region defined by a recent history of enormous suffering and hardship, and the near-breakdown of the relationship between local populations and the Ugandan state, the files from the 1970s portray a pivotal and oft-neglected moment in the historical trajectory of Gulu, and Northern Uganda more broadly. We see the fear and panic generated by the emergence of a violent and unaccountable regime, with political violence and the ‘disappearances’ of civilians causing serious damage to the educated elite of the region in particular. This certainly had a knock-on effect on the people of region, sorely testing their faith in formal institutions, and pushing them to disconnect from an increasingly predatory and volatile national framework, or take up armed resistance. The archival record sheds further light on the atmosphere of mutual mistrust and hostility that Amin’s arbitrary and violent rule encouraged, as local actors sought to exploit the deadly but limited attention span of their new rulers with misinformation, malicious

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<sup>610</sup> ‘District Commissioner for Acholi to the Secretary for Research, President’s Office’. 11 February 1970. GDA.

denunciations, and opportunistic crime. It shows how local officials often struggled to make sense of these overlapping webs of agency, to sort genuine reports from false ones, the rebels from the falsely accused. It also corroborates a picture of a Ugandan security apparatus that was only ever partially under control, with ill-disciplined soldiers and state agents exploiting the power vacuum in the region for their own ends, often against the express wishes of their commanders.

But for all of the undeniably negative effects of the rise of Amin on the region, there is also remarkable evidence of continuity and resilience. State institutions were compromised and demoralised but nonetheless endured. The idea of the state as an arbiter lived on, and civilians with the means to do so continued to lobby their government, challenge abuses, and make demands through the written word. Some of the features of Amin's rule that made it especially terrifying and unpredictable to live under seem also to have limited the damaging impact it could have on the Ugandan State. Supposed reforms were left uncompleted, 'abolished' institutions continued to quietly function, and administrators carved out what space they could to continue working for their districts, and the local populace. Rather than a 'state of blood', defined by comprehensive anarchy, or a 'totalitarian' one-man-show, the Amin state was a hybrid, closer resembling Peterson's 'forum of agency', a grafting of the improvisatory ambitions of a small core of army officers onto the existing state apparatus. Ultimately, the latter outlived the excision of the former.

## 6. Conclusion

In a public statement on 13 August 2019, Police Spokesperson Fred Enanga of the Uganda Police Force issued a warning to motorcycle taxi drivers that attempts to issue ‘mob justice’ to real and alleged perpetrators of crime against the taxi driving community constituted ‘lawlessness’, and would not be tolerated. Enanga’s statement followed a recent incident in which a group of drivers had burned down the house of a suspected robber.<sup>611</sup> It demonstrates clearly the ongoing struggle of the Ugandan government to project itself as the sole reservoir of legitimate violence, and the challenges facing it in this endeavour. Some motorcycle taxi drivers are highly sceptical of the state’s capacity to protect them. Driving Kampala at night they are extremely vulnerable to opportunistic crimes, and investigations routinely fail to apprehend the robbers that target them. Others would argue that the police themselves often constitute a very real threat to the welfare of drivers operating in the city, much less a reliable source of support.<sup>612</sup> In such a situation, projecting a consistent ‘state effect’, in which sceptical drivers are won around to the idea of a powerful entity above society that can be expected to consistently respond to and prevent crime without the need of local inhabitants to employ violence towards their own ends, remains an elusive and ongoing exercise.

In the period of Uganda’s history explored in this thesis, the spread of political violence under Amin was intimately linked with the long-running struggles (and failure) of those ruling the Ugandan State to reproduce such an ‘effect’ of themselves as possessing a monopoly on deadly force, and to impose order and authority in the face of myriad challenges to both. The functional limitations of the coercive and administrative apparatus, a colonial inheritance further eroded by

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<sup>611</sup> ‘Uganda Police Force warns bodaboda operators against mob justice’, *UBC TV*, 12 August 2019.

<sup>612</sup> ”28 bodaboda riders murdered in three months”- police’, *New Vision*, 2 April 2019.

the political struggles that followed independence, created space for a small, opportunistic clique with historical links to the colonial military to employ violence for themselves to subvert the short-lived and fragile political order that had followed colonial rule from within. Thereafter the idea of the state and its resources were employed to sustain this inexperienced and precarious network of low-ranking soldiers in power, to legitimate and justify their actions, and to intimidate and eliminate their opposition. Moments of insecurity were followed by pronounced spikes of violence, the sequencing of which can be better understood by analysing political violence as an escalatory process, in which the deleterious and corrosive effects of previous violence can often prove a crucial driving factor in the recurrence and spread of further violence. Early arrests and killings triggered spirals of bilateral hostility, as the actions and reactions of opposing factions seemed to confirm the worst fears and suspicions of the other. Much of this spread far beyond the original aims and goals of the actors who had first turned to violence to protect and advance themselves.

The primary source materials utilised in this thesis confirm Peterson's theory of Uganda under Amin as a 'forum of agency', and Kalyvas's conceptualisation of violence as a joint production. It has demonstrated that key aspects of Kalyvas's theory, originally intended for discussion of civil wars, can be usefully applied to internal political violence in Uganda. The role of localised agency is crucial in shaping the particular patterns of violence that emerged under Amin, in the information and denunciations offered by informants, in the informal and opportunistic practices of soldiers and security agents, and in the efforts of Ugandan civilians to negotiate, co-opt, and exploit a dangerous but ill-informed and equipped regime. It is in the interaction of these many forms of agency with the contradictory and oscillating ideas and commands emanating from the political centre that the apparently random and arbitrary pattern of violence traditionally associated with Amin was established and sustained, resisting the efforts of soldiers and civilians alike to rein in violence and re-establish order. The efforts of the Amin regime to rule and to

impose itself proved even more 'arterial' and sporadic than those of their predecessors, prompting the increasing disconnection of many civilians from the formal state.

Despite the significant disruption and damage caused by the spread of political violence, the Ugandan state (and Ugandan society) proved extremely resilient. This can in part be explained by the heavily informalised nature of Amin's style of rule, in which a small network of officers sought to rule largely by bypassing the formal structures and processes of the state, but were reluctant to dispense with such structures altogether. Despite having come to power through the violation of Uganda's sociopolitical order, Amin routinely sought the legitimacy and authority afforded by the idea of the modern bureaucratic state, and his reordering of the state constituted a process of tampering and grafting rather than the complete destruction or redesign of the institutions and rules that comprised the state. Civil servants continued to work, and the police and courts continued to operate, albeit in demoralising and intimidating conditions. Ugandan civilians continued to buy into the idea of the state as a potential source of protection and order, a role that Amin and his followers had claimed for themselves upon seizing power, and which was a key factor in their early acceptance. The Gulu District Archive demonstrates the persistence of many of the quotidian practices of local government until right up to the fall of the regime. In their sporadic subsequent efforts to investigate 'disappearances' and to retrain and punish ill-disciplined soldiers one can observe a regime caught between the deleterious effects of the violent strategies that had enabled and sustained it and a contradictory desire to deliver on order and security.

Certain answers have remained elusive. Perhaps the most significant of these for the period in question is the exact nature, makeup and function of the circle of soldiers concentrated around Amin who assumed the senior positions of power during his rule. How cohesive and organised was this group prior to the coup? Was it formed in the army, or by the dramatic events of the coup

itself? It is clear from the historical record that Amin was far from the only actor calling the shots behind the scenes, but where exactly were key decisions to roll out violence and respond to particular threats with force taken, and how? Was the 'Defence Council' nothing more than an illusion, a veneer of formality over the ad hoc decisions of a handful of men, or were there regular meetings and negotiations? Identifying certain crucial figures like Isaac Maliyamungu, Hussein Marella, and Ali Towilli is one thing, but mapping out the exact contributions and intentions of a collective of men that had occupied such a negligible position in the historical record prior to their seizure of power has proved far more difficult. Examination of more of Uganda's rehabilitated district archives might also yield interesting results for comparison. Violence rarely maps evenly across a country, and there may be considerable spatial and temporal variations in violence to be observed by zooming in to other regional localities.

The findings of this thesis raise certain questions for students of Ugandan history, and of political violence more broadly. For Uganda, it is pertinent to ask what role the pursuit of and challenges to political order, the limitations and social embeddedness of institutions, the legitimating and concealing effects of 'the state', and the persistence of localised agency and informality played in the violence that subsequently broke out in the country after Amin's fall. What might these ideas contribute to our understanding of the 'Bush War' that ultimately brought Museveni to power, and to its combatant organisations, the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) and National Resistance Army (NRA)? How did these organisations confront similar challenges of the deleterious effects of violence, and of sustaining disciplined and effective institutions in the face of scarce resources and the warping effects of embedded social practices and groups? What role did these limiting factors play in precipitating and driving the civil war that followed? Can we understand the comparative success of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) during its time in government from 1985 onwards in containing violence, controlling dissent and imposing political order by consideration of the ways in which it conveyed a more convincing 'state effect'?

Has the NRM employed violence more effectively to convey consistent deterrent messages and control populations, in line with Kalyvas's theory on the importance of selective violence in establishing local collaboration?

For further studies of political violence, the case studies utilised in this thesis have demonstrated that whilst the enabling and legitimating effects of state institutions are important in driving and sustaining violence, their limitations and functional shortcomings can prove equally important. Routinised patterns of violence can be the product of the *failure* of a state to consistently implement policy as well of its success. In a context of scarce resources, limited information, and weak institutions one must warn against the allocation of disproportionate power and responsibility to the figureheads of particular governments and organisations, as we have consistently seen in the historical treatment of Idi Amin. The relative strength and influence of alternative actors and sources of power, and the interaction of aspiring 'state' actors with such groups has often gone overlooked. In the haphazard administrative organisation and malicious denunciations that hamstrung the Amin state's security units, and the struggles of administrators in Acholiland to impose order in the face of armed localised communities with limited interest in obeying them, we see the role that the limits and constraints on state power can play in driving violence. The idea that someone, somewhere is in ultimate control, such a crucial component ingredient in the successful reproduction of the 'state effect' outlined by Mitchell, may not map at all to the fragmented realities of a political situation in which incomplete information, limited institutions, and overlapping and powerful social networks interact with each other in unpredictable and ambiguous ways. Attempts to claim a monopoly on force, and to convey an image of a powerful ruling entity above society can obscure as much as they reveal in such conditions.



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