Myths and Realities of Idi Amin Dada's Uganda

Idi Amin: Death-Light of Africa by David Gwyn; A State of Blood: The inside Story of Idi Amin by Henry Kyemba; Idi Amin Dada: Hitler in Africa by Thomas Melady; Margaret Melady

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MYTHS AND REALITIES
OF IDI AMIN DADA'S UGANDA

Peter F. B. Nayenga
St. Cloud State University


INTRODUCTION

Like several previous publications, the central theme of the books under review is their concern about the violation of human rights in Idi Amin Dada's Uganda. Unlike some of the earlier publications, however, these authors have unquestionable credentials for the task they embarked on. Although, for instance, Gwyn and the Meladys are foreigners, they lived in Uganda and studied Amin at close quarters. Kyemba, on the other hand, was born and raised in Uganda and worked as a cabinet minister in Amin's government before defecting.

Respectable as these authors are, however, the question which still remains unanswered is: what portion of their writings is a myth and what can be taken as a reality? While raising this question may be like hair splitting where there is no hair to split, note should be taken that although Amin is generally portrayed as a ruthless dictator, there are individuals who believe that such an assessment is due to bias rather than the realities of the Ugandan situation (N.Y. Amsterdam News, 7 May 1977). Furthermore note should be made of the fact that even some serious academic works on contemporary Uganda have been criticized for lack of depth. For example, able as Ali Mazrui is, his writings on Uganda have been questioned on grounds that they are not an "empirically disciplined explanation of the African process (Yeager, 1977: 293) or "because Mazrui seldom develops his arguments in any detail before moving on to another area, nor does he attempt to gather the necessary empirical support for his hypotheses" (Ravenhill, 1976: 725). Given the existence of such doubtful views on interpretations of recent Ugandan history, this paper will focus on the question of myth versus reality in examining the sub-themes of Amin's rise to power, his expulsion of Asians, the killings that followed, and the world reaction to these events.
RISE TO POWER

All three publications rightly trace Amin's rise to power from the situations created by British colonialism in Uganda (1894-1962) and Milton Obote's civilian rule (1962-1971). The British are castigated for their recruitment into the army of individuals from "remote areas" and conniving at the ruthlessness Amin exhibited during the Mau Mau in Kenya (Gwyn, 25-29 and the Meladys, 13). Obote failed to sack Amin, although parliament had called on him to do so because of reports concerning Amin's cruelty that surfaced in the early 1960s. Instead of being sacked, Amin emerged as a hero when Obote used him to introduce a dictatorship in 1966.

Valid as these criticisms may be, the authors do not, for example, realize that Amin's lack of a formal education resulted from the way Islam was introduced into Uganda rather than from British neglect of the so-called "remote areas." Amin's "misfortune" is that he is both a northerner and a Muslim. Whereas Christian northerners received some education, Muslims were denied this opportunity. This lack of a formal education is not restricted to northern Muslims, but is the plight of all practitioners of Islam. This situation arose because early education in Uganda was left in the hands of religious organizations. Whereas Christian missionaries considered education part of their religion, the Muslims only required their converts to learn a few Arabic words. In addition, Muslims in Uganda placed more emphasis on short-term materialistic things than long-term planning. This unfortunate situation continues to the present and consequently Ugandan Muslims have failed to exploit the economic favors which the Amin regime has showered upon them. In other words, Amin's lack of a formal education is more complicated than these publications indicate.

On the events surrounding Amin's coup of 25 January 1971 against Obote only Kyemba and Gwyn examine the subject in detail. Kyemba gives an excellent personal account of the events before the coup. He, however, fails to explain fully his lack of prior knowledge about the Amin coup. For example, it is odd that Kyemba moved his property out of the house before flying to Singapore with Obote; that he had the courage to have "a long chat" with Amin at a time when everybody else was scared to do so and that he was given "red carpet treatment" by being "met by one of Amin's men, with the President's BMW waiting on the runaway," at Entebbe airport (Kyemba: 33 and 57). Kyemba's difficulty, of course, is his inability to write objectively about events in which he was personally involved in the unpopular Obote and Amin regimes.

Of the three, Gwyn (46-51) clearly highlights the personal element involved in the Amin coup. Although Obote's regime had become unpopular due to the reign of terror inflicted by the General Service Unit (secret police), Amin's decision to oust Obote only materialized after he was personally threatened. Worried about the possibility of being removed from the position of commander of the army, he first engineered an assassination attempt on Obote in 1969 and in January 1970 murdered Pierino Okoya, the prospective candidate to head the army. This personalization of government has since 1971 become the trite characteristic of the Amin regime.

EXPULSION OF "ASIAN" MINORITIES

Until Amin expelled the Israelis and Asians in 1972 he was generally considered a moderate leader. Although the Israelis had made tremendous contributions to the development of Uganda, Amin became disillusioned by their refusal to sell him the arms which would have enabled him to attack a neighboring country (Shimoni, 1976: 53).
Later in 1972, Amin turned against the Asian community. As Gwyn (1977: 14) rightly observes, the group popularly referred to as Asians was not monolithic, but was composed of people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Goa. Their roots in East Africa go as far back as the nineteenth century and by 1972 they numbered 50 thousand. Claiming that God had instructed him to expel the Asians, Amin ordered them to leave the country within three months.

Gwyn and the Meladys address themselves to Amin's expulsion of the Asians, while Kyemba hardly tackles this important issue. From Gwyn and the Meladys, it is learned that Asian-African animosity was deep-rooted in Uganda's past, where Asians had been socially aloof and economically better placed than the majority of Africans. Obote's government made efforts to correct this economic imbalance. Thus Amin's treatment of the Asians differed from that of Obote in methods, but not objectives.

Gwyn and the Meladys, however, do not point out the ineffectiveness of Obote's "de-Indianization" policies. For example, after the passage of the Trade Licensing Act in 1969, various Asian communities opened their businesses to African partners. Commendable as this was, the Asians were such an entrenched economic group that through lobbying they prevented Obote's government from enacting further adverse legislation. Thus by the time Amin came to power little had been done to break the Asian control of the Ugandan economy.

Gwyn and the Meladys do not critically examine generalizations which are normally made about Asians. Yet a clear understanding of such generalizations as Asians controlled the economy, exploited Africans, or were entrepreneurs par excellence, may help to explain why Amin acted as he did. For example, the Meladys give the wrong impression that African animosity against Asians was directed against dukawallahs (traders). Such an assertion ignores the fact that African animosity was not restricted to the traders, but also to Asians in the civil service, mainly the Goans. The Meladys (1977: 79) uncritically report: "It took years and a great deal of discipline for these shopkeepers to save enough money to invest in larger stocks or another store." While nobody conversant with Ugandan colonial history will dispute the entrepreneurial ability of Asians, note should be made of the fact that Asians were partly able to achieve this because the colonial economic structure favored them.

According to Gwyn and the Meladys, Amin acted when he did against the Asians partly because of his racism. The Meladys, in fact, compare Amin's treatment of the Asians to that of Hitler against the Jews. There is no doubt, of course, that Amin espouses a black militancy that may attract some people and repel others as outright racism; but the question that should be addressed is whether Amin's racism was a result, rather than a cause of his expulsion of the Asians. Although there were symbols of racism as exemplified through separate residential areas, schools, social clubs, and hospitals for Europeans, Asians, and Africans, on the whole, colonial Uganda was not compartmentalized by strict racial segregation. Furthermore, in spite of Amin's rhetoric about his hatred for other races, deep down he appears to admire them. A case in point are the British whose way of life, titles, and military uniforms he admires. In other words, is it not possible that Amin's racism is only skin-deep and only arose as a result of the persistent attacks that were levelled against him in the western press?

None of the publications seriously examines whether Amin's expulsion of the Asians was motivated by nationalistic intentions. When Amin expelled the Asians, he was hailed by some people as a nationalist who wanted his country to achieve
both political and economic independence (Emeka, 1972: 46-47). Since 1972, Amin has capitalized on such observations by declaring what is popularly known in Uganda as the "Economic War." By so doing Amin has been able to attract the admiration of some people who study him from a distance. The fact of the matter, however, is that Amin is not a nationalist, as is evidenced by the fact that the Asian minority traders were replaced by the Nubians who may claim to be authentic Ugandans (Southall, 75: 85-105), but only constitute a small fraction of the entire population. Secondly, crediting Amin with ideological motives is probably misleading since it appears that he does not have an ideology beyond staying in power at any cost. In other words, it would appear that Amin's expulsion of Asians clearly reflects his background of being a common man with the simplistic assumption that there are always immediate solutions to any problems, however complex. Consequently, he naively believed that anyone could easily take the place of the Asian traders.

Amin's sudden expulsion order imposed hardships on the Asians. While Gwyn briefly examines their difficulties, the Meladys give a detailed account of the plight that befell them. Those who have gone through relatively similar situations will appreciate the Meladys' chapter, which fully demonstrates that a refugee is an individual who has no control over his environment.

While highlighting the plight of the Asians, the Meladys are not sufficiently critical. For example, did the British internationalize the "Ugandan Asian" plight out of humanitarian motives or just because their economic interests were at stake? Was Amin the first African leader to expel minorities, taking into account that as early as 1969 thousands of Nigerians were expelled from Ghana, that Ghanaians were expelled from Sierra Leone and Liberia, and that Zaire expelled over six thousand people from other parts of Africa? (Gupta, 1974: 312) In other words, without denying the Asian plight, it would appear that many other minority groups suffered just as much, but that their suffering was not internationalized because no big power was involved.

THE PURGES

Amin's sudden expulsion of Asians plunged Uganda into economic problems she has never recovered from. In the first place, the Nubians who stepped into the Asian shoes just did not have the relevant commercial expertise. Consequently, the economy was disrupted as evidenced by persistent shortages of essential commodities, the breakdown of social services, and the existence of abnormal inflation. Such economic problems, however, are common to most developing countries, and it may not be an exaggeration to observe that without the massive killings that have occurred in Uganda, Amin would simply have been one of the many soldiers who controlled the destiny of Africa at a particular time. It is on these killings then that attention must be focused.

Generally welcomed as "savior," Amin soon lost this role when he stopped all legal political activities, invested the armed forces with extensive powers to arrest, and worst of all, when he systematically killed Obote's supporters, mainly members of the Acholi and Lango ethnic groups. The authors emphatically point out that these killings began soon after Amin assumed power in January 1971.

Of the three, Kyemba and Gwyn document names, places, and the punishment meted out to the victims. Apart from a few of their friends, the Meladys often do not specifically identify victims of the Amin regime, but write in general terms. What is surprising, however, is that even some details surrounding the circumstances
of the deaths of their close friends are lacking. For example, who is the doctor that performed the autopsy on Clement Kiggundu and was subsequently killed? What of the man who tortured and killed Walugembe? Furthermore, the Ugandan friend who went to their house in a night dress is not identified. Who was the American woman who was slapped by soldiers at the Uganda/Zaire border? How about the pastor who was murdered for reading “on a radio church broadcast the Old Testament prophecy of Israel’s future triumph over its enemies” (125)? More examples could be cited, but it is sufficient to say that by not clearly identifying Amin’s victims, the Meladys leave doubts in the minds of those who still entertain the view that Amin is not as bad as he is normally portrayed.

The Meladys and Kyemba also made estimates of Amin’s victims, the former putting the figure at one hundred thousand and the latter at one hundred and fifty thousand. Whereas no one conversant with recent political developments in Uganda will dispute Amin’s brutality, it should be observed that any attempt to provide precise figures of the victims involved is an exercise in futility. In the first place, in a country where a private, a captain, or colonel can kill without being accountable to anyone, such lawlessness is bound to result in many unrecorded killings and murders. Secondly, it is virtually impossible to count the bodies which have been dumped into forests, rivers, pits, or those which have been burned in fire and acid. In other words, a rough estimate of the victims of the Amin regime will only become possible when political sanity returns to Uganda and after a careful population census is made.

All three publications, however, raise the important question of why these purges have occurred. The three authors take the view that Amin’s personality is the single crucial variable for the occurrence of these purges. The Meladys and Kyemba highlight that Amin’s personality is so deceptive that for a long time he succeeded in fooling both Ugandans and the rest of the world. He can be friendly or even give the impression of being a buffoon, but this clowning is really a mask that hides his terrible brutality. In other words, there is method in his madness.

Gwyn, on the other hand, emphasizes that the unpredictability of Amin’s personality is due to hypomania—“a condition of mental ill-health.” The victim suffering from this disease has a tendency to issue a rapid series of confused orders whenever he has acute attacks. As this disease is periodic, Amin often appears in public as an amiable gentleman, although the senseless killings that have occurred in Uganda demonstrate that he is not.

While there is some difference in their analyses of Amin’s personality, the three are agreed about Amin’s sadism and involvement in blood rituals. The authors document Amin’s ritual murders such as lining up prisoners with sledge hammers, with each required to batter the head of the man alongside him, leaving only the last survivor to be shot. In conformity with Amin’s Kakwa warrior tradition of attempting to prevent the spirits of the dead from haunting him, he has gone to the extent of eating the flesh of victims (Kyemba 108-10, the Meladys 136, and Gwyn 131-33).

In examining this strange behavior, the authors did not realize the implications of their statements with regard to other Ugandans. Some of their generalizations, for example, are such that it is not clear whether they pertain only to Amin’s personal idiosyncrasy or to other Ugandans as well. For example, despite their experience in Africa, the Meladys could still write:
Many Ugandans still hold to the old traditions and superstitions of the past. Some even though highly educated, still believe in witchcraft. Amin realizes this, for he himself is fascinated with the spirits. His mother was said to have earned a living by practicing witchcraft. Seers and spirituals from other parts of Africa frequently come to Uganda to foretell Amin’s future.

This accusation embraces the entire African continent. There would be nothing wrong in making such generalizations if they were examined in the context of African traditional religious beliefs. For instance while Gwyn (131-34) makes almost similar statements about African religious beliefs he does not simplistically dismiss them as “superstitions of the past” (the Meladys, 19), but tries to demonstrate that they constitute a complex religious system. Given the complexity of African societies, which Gwyn (49) observes may not be fully understood by foreigners, the Meladys should have restricted their conclusions to Amin, who incidentally is not in any way representative of the Kakwa.

Furthermore, holding Amin responsible for all the killings in Uganda would be tantamount to forgetting that influential as individuals may be in shaping historical events, they are in general guided by the socioeconomic forces in their societies. This is the problem Mazrui examines in his “afterword” (210-14) to Gwyn’s book. By making a distinction between anarchy and tyranny, Mazrui draws our attention to killings which may be due to the lawlessness in the country and not necessarily directed by Amin’s government. This lawlessness which had assumed epidemic proportions during the Obote regime, is represented by the existence of many kondos (armed robbers). In making this distinction, however, Mazrui fails to resolve the issue of who should be held responsible either for the tyranny or anarchy that exists in Uganda. The fact of the matter is that it is difficult to exonerate Amin for either situation, particularly if one takes into account the fact that Amin was the author of Decree No: 8, 1972 (Transition, 1975: 11) which reads thus:

Not withstanding any written or other law, no court shall make any decision, order or grant any remedy or relief in any proceedings against the government in respect of anything done or omitted to be done for the purpose of maintaining public order or public security in any part of Uganda or for the defence of Uganda or the enforcement of discipline or law and order or in respect of anything relating to, consequent upon or incidental to any of these purposes, during the period between the 24th day of January 1971, and such date as the President shall appoint.

This decree was, in essence, the legislation of anarchy and Amin as its author has to take the blame for the killings, many of which are carried out by his soldiers.

Mazrui also cites the government invasion of Makerere University in August 1976 as an example where responsibility for what happened should not be directly put to the government. Makerere University authorities who invited soldiers to solve administrative problems should take the blame for the brutalities that took place. In fact, what happened at Makerere is generally a reflection of what might be called “the Uganda mentality” - a mentality which reflects individualism.

A clear understanding of this mentality is important if one is to answer the question why Amin has successfully survived the last seven years, in spite of several attempted assassinations and coups. Part of the explanation is to be found in the individualism of Ugandans, which is generally reflected in their willingness to accept positions whose former owners might have been brutally killed. Usually working on the assumption that their predecessors either belonged to the wrong ethnic group or were collaborating with anti-government elements, they have faithfully served Amin until they were personally threatened. Unfortunately, this attitude is true of both civilians and soldiers, and Amin has fully exploited this weakness.
Kyemba's case provides a good example of this mentality. An insider, as he himself admits, Kyemba is not only at pains to explain to the world why he could not leave Uganda after the death of his brother, Kisajja[sic] in 21 September 1972; but because of his personal involvement with the Amin regime he fails to deal fully with the role of collaborators. For example, in addition to identifying Isaac Maliyumungu, Ali Towelli, Hussein Marella, and Farouk Minawa, it would have been fitting to explain the roles of such individuals as Abdul Nasur, Francis Itabuka, Major Ozi, Commissioner Obura, and Bob Astles; because any analysis of Uganda's recent history which does not mention these names would be incomplete in that these individuals are close to Amin.

For instance, it is common knowledge that Abdul Nasur, the governor of the central province, is personally responsible for many of the deaths that occur within the Kampala-Entebbe area. Ozi, on the other hand, was once a household name because he headed Amin's dreaded State Research Bureau (secret police). During the peak of the 1972-73 murders, for example, the first question which one would raise in case one's relative had been abducted by Amin's secret police would be: "Have you sought assistance from Major Ozi of the President's Office?" This question clearly points out Ozi's centrality in Ugandan political life at the time.

Obura and Itabuka are good examples of how Amin has succeeded in controlling Ugandans. Although Obura belongs to Obote's ethnic group, Amin put him in charge of one of Uganda's notorious secret police units located at Naguru, on the Jinja-Kampala road. Itabuka, on the other hand, until 1977, was in charge of the State Research Bureau at Nakasero. By appointing individuals such as Obura or Itabuka to positions they would not ordinarily qualify for because they are neither Nubians, Kakwa, nor Muslims, Amin normally obtains faithful followers. Such individuals have to do the extraordinary in order to demonstrate their loyalty to Amin. For example, it is common knowledge in Uganda that one has a chance of being spared should a Nubian officer handle one's case rather than Obura or Itabuka, whose leniency may be interpreted as disloyalty.

Finally, Bob Astles, a British-born confidant of Amin since 1971, is generally regarded by many Ugandans as the uncrowned vice-president of that country. As he has no specific governmental responsibilities, others view him as the economic link with the western countries. In addition, some call him a "double agent" who drives Amin to extreme courses of action in order to discredit the entire black leadership on the continent, thereby making it possible to justify the existence of minority regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa. Although any one of these views may be wrong, the crux of the matter is that Bob Astles is central to Ugandan politics and should, therefore, have been examined by the books under review.

The three books did not attempt to distinguish between purges arising out of genuine situations and those that were due to Amin's introduction of terror as a means of controlling Ugandans. There was, for example, an invasion of Uganda in September 1972 from Tanzania. This was followed by Charles Arube's abortive coup of March 1974 and an attempted assassination of Amin in 1976 at Nsambya police barracks. In June 1977, there was another abortive coup engineered by members of the air force.

One explanation for the failure of those attempted moves was disorganization, accompanied by betrayal by one of the plotters. The invasion of September 1972, for example, would have succeeded had it not been for poor planning. This failure gave Amin an excuse to engage in massive murders of individuals he suspected. Similarly, on several of those occasions when the attempted overthrow of Amin
failed, the reprisals were indeed heavy. Since many of those who were killed had not been the architects of these abortive moves, it is imperative that those who have intentions of overthrowing Amin should resolve their differences.

**WORLD REACTION**

For awhile, Amin's purges were lightly taken, largely on the grounds that what was happening in Uganda was common to most developing countries, particularly after a change in government. Furthermore, Amin was excused on the basis that since he lacked a formal education, he needed time to settle down before any judgments could be passed on his regime.

The three authors remind us that after seven years there should be no excuse for tolerating Amin's misrule, but that there should be concerted international efforts to put an end to this regime. In fact, the Meladys (175-82) and Gwyn (3) emphatically point out that just as Hitler was an international problem of the 1930s, so is Amin for the 1970s. While castigating the United Nations and the Organization for African Unity for not condemning the Amin regime, the authors ironically appeal to the same organizations to launch an international move that would lead to the overthrow of Amin. This failure to realize the ineffectiveness of these two organizations is the weakest point in their suggested concerted international appeal.

Although an international community is now represented by the United Nations, in actual fact it is only on rare occasions that various countries act in unison over world problems. This lack of agreement is sometimes due to historical factors, economic inequality, or different political philosophies. Given these limitations, it would have been just as befitting to examine world reaction to the Amin regime in a more subtle way than the Meladys (175-82) do. For example, while they give a brilliant and enlightening account of their efforts to have the U.S. Embassy in Uganda closed in 1973, they do not seem to realize that the closure of the embassy should be followed by more stringent measures if meaningful results are to be expected.

This is the problem Kyemba addresses himself to in his examination of the closure of the American Embassy. While appreciating what the Americans did, he observes that moral condemnation by itself is not enough and should, therefore, be followed by an economic embargo, specifically against the purchase of Ugandan coffee, and, refusing to allow Amin to service his planes in the U.S. (254). The American reaction to these suggestions has been encouraging; Congress has imposed an economic embargo on Uganda and American companies have consequently stopped buying both Ugandan coffee and supplying oil to that country. This move has seriously affected Amin's ability to receive foreign exchange which he uses to buy luxury goods for his army.

Kyemba also critically examines the belated closure of the British High Commission in Uganda in 1976. Noting the central role played by the British in the condemnation of Amin at the Commonwealth Conference of June 1977, Kyemba (253-54) again emphasizes that such condemnation would only be meaningful if followed by economic sanctions, such as ceasing to fly essential commodities from England to Amin's army. Although political pressure has caused the stoppage of such economic dealings with Amin, recent evidence indicates that Britain supplies military material to Amin "through some European countries" (*Africa*, 1978: 27). If this evidence is accurate, it would appear that the British relationship with Amin has been more concerned with financial interests than violations of human rights.
Such moral bankruptcy is characteristic of other western countries as well. Unfortunately, none of the publications seriously address themselves to the hypocrisy of many European countries that have never protested against the Amin brutalities. Whereas the eastern European countries can be excused for their silence, particularly since they are well-known for violating the human rights of their own people, western European countries have to be criticized for their connivance at the Amin regime. For instance, given their respect for human rights elsewhere, one would have expected the French to disassociate themselves from the Amin regime. Instead, France is among the few European countries which still fly to Entebbe, connecting Uganda with western Europe.

Only Kyemba and Gwyn critically examine why African countries have not condemned Amin. The Meladys, while addressing themselves to this problem, tend to narrate rather than analyze. In spite of their different approaches, however, the three are unanimous in their criticism of African leaders for failing to condemn Amin for violating human rights. Gwyn (3-4) in particular, is so embittered that he reminds African leaders that as long as they do not solve the Amin problem, they will give an opportunity to supporters of South Africa and Rhodesia to justify the existence of those regimes. Although this criticism may be valid, the problem is that all three books treat African countries as a block. Like the Europeans, African countries have diverse interests, which partly account for their inability to unite in condemning the Amin regime.

There are African leaders who view Amin as a temporary phenomenon in African politics, and thus tend to see the implications of official condemnation on other larger issues affecting the continent, such as regional and continental unity and, above all, the liberation of the entire continent, as being potentially divisive. The presidents of Botswana, Tanzania, and Zambia belong to this category: they have individually condemned Amin, but have refrained from initiating his condemnation through the Organization for African Unity, fearing that such a move might lead to unnecessary divisions within the organization.

Tanzania, in particular, has had a very difficult task of trying to promote overall African interests, while reflecting its anti-Amin outlook. This difficulty arose because Tanzania granted political asylum to the deposed President Obote, and because Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda had had a long history of economic unity (the East African Community) which the rest of the African continent regarded as the basis for political unity. Thus despite Tanzania's condemnation of Amin's inhuman rule since he assumed power in 1971, it was paradoxically the same country that unsuccessfully tried to stop the break-up of the East African Community in 1977.

Kenya, like Tanzania, has a common historical past with Uganda. Consequently, in spite of Kenya's sympathy toward Ugandan refugees, it has refrained from official condemnation of the Amin regime. Unlike Tanzania, which can avoid Uganda's cooperation without harming her economy, Kenya cannot. Uganda is land-locked and has to export and import all her materials through Mombasa. Kenya's economic significance to Uganda greatly increased in 1972 when Amin's expulsion of the Asians led to the crippling of Ugandan industries and thus made Kenya the only supplier of consumer goods. As Kyemba notes, however, the economic relationship between Kenya and Uganda is not one-way; apart from the market Uganda provides for Kenyan products, "Kenya depends for its export trade with Zaire and Rwanda on routes through Uganda territory" (Kyemba, 256). Kenya's economic dependence on her neighbors has been further exposed.
since August 1977, when Tanzania’s annoyance at the break-up of the East African Community made her close her border with Kenya. This move drastically affected Kenya’s trade with her neighbors, and forced it to more economic cooperation with Uganda than before. Given this delicate economic inter-dependence, the Kenyans are in no position to make any official condemnation of the Amin regime.

The failure to condemn the Amin regime is also attributable to the support he receives from some Muslim countries. This group, spearheaded by Muammar Quaddafi of Libya, has commissioned Amin to carry out an uphill task of turning a predominantly Christian country into an Islamic one. This Islamization of Uganda which reached its climax with the murder of the Anglican Archbishop of Uganda in February 1977 can be traced as far back as 1973, after Amin’s loss of credibility with the British made him seek financial assistance from Arab countries in return for a promise to Islamize Uganda. Thus as early as 1973, Amin passed decrees punishing excessive drinking and prohibiting mini-skirts or any other immoral attire not in keeping with Islamic culture. Such subtle moves were followed by such overt actions as allocating all the lucrative businesses to Muslims, making Friday as well as Sunday a public holiday, and killing, harassing and banning several Christian religious groups.

All three publications highlight the role of religion in recent Ugandan politics—perhaps at the expense of minimizing other important factors. This is the weakness that Mazrui notes about Gwyn in his “afterword” (215-23). Commendable as Mazrui’s analysis is, however, one wonders whether his conclusion that “as for the Ugandan situation, certainly ethnic factors continue to be very strong” (218) is tenable in light of other considerations. Is it true, for example, that Archbishop Luwum died just because he was an Acholi or because he was the head of a church that wanted to stage an international celebration of its hundred years existence? Was Oboth-Ofumbi killed just because as a Jopadhola he was historically related to the Acholi, or was it because he and Oryema (Acholi) were the two prominent Anglican cabinet ministers deeply involved in the planning of the centenary celebrations of the Anglican Church in Uganda (1977-1977)?

This reviewer would have concurred with Mazrui if he had raised the question whether Amin is a serious Muslim or not—apparently he is not, given the fact that he has done certain things which serious Muslims would not ordinarily do. For instance, he executed 15 people during the holy month of Ramadhan (Times-Union and Journal, 11 September 1977). It would then appear that since Amin uses Islam for political reasons, those countries which support him purely for religious reasons should re-examine their position. This way, the good relationship that existed between Muslims and Christians before Amin came to power may be restored.

Amin has not been condemned by African leaders also because some African countries have already experienced what is taking place in Uganda. Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, Zaire, and Burundi are examples of countries where similar events have occurred. Thus for such countries to condemn Amin would be like condemning themselves. It is unfortunate that these publications do not highlight this important factor. The Meladys in particular, who witnessed massive murders of the Bahutu in Burundi between November 1969 and June 1972, and wrote a book (Burundi The Tragic Years, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1974) condemning the violation of human rights in that country, should have used their rich experience to make a comparative analysis. The Nubians of Uganda, like the Batutsi of Burundi, are minorities that are terrorizing majorities. The OAU and UN proved to be as ineffective during the Burundi atrocities as they have been in the Ugandan
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situation. In other words, one wonders why the Meladys continue to appeal to the OAU or the UN, particularly since the two organizations have achieved practically nothing in either case. Perhaps it would have been more beneficial to make suggestions as to how western European countries can either jointly or individually help in weakening Amin's regime.

Equally unfortunate is the fact that while the three publications high-light Amin's flamboyant personality, they do not show how such a personality can be attractive, particularly to those who view him from a distance. For example, some third world leaders who might be frustrated with western European attitudes toward such sensitive issues as South African treatment of blacks or the Israeli occupation of Arab lands, find in Amin a licensed clown who will tell such countries what they themselves might want to tell them, but would rather not. Thus it is not surprising that even as late as December 1977, when five Nordic countries introduced a resolution in the United Nations General Assembly which would have condemned Amin for violation of human rights, such a move was blocked by African and other developing countries (Africa Report, January/February, 1978: 33).

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

While generally in agreement with their central thesis that Amin and his henchmen are a bunch of ruthless criminals whose atrocities have only been partially exposed to the rest of the world and have turned a once prosperous country into a massive grave of rotten flesh, this analysis has, at the same time, demonstrated that contrary to what these publications would have us believe, the Amin regime is more than a one-man show. Internally supported by opportunist Ugandans, the regime is also strengthened by external economic supporters that have continuously bought Uganda's coffee and have thereby made it possible for Amin to obtain foreign currency with which he purchases military hardware to terrorize the unarmed populace.

Lack of analysis is then the central weakness of these books. Consequently, these publications should be treated as what is normally called "the literature of the day." Caught up in the current anti-Amin outlook, these publications illustrate the problems involved in writing on contemporary Uganda. For instance, collecting any data on the Ugandan army may lead to one's death, as indeed happened to two Americans, Nicholas Stroh (a free-lance journalist) and Nicholas Siedle (a lecturer at Makerere University) in 1971. Being objective is sometimes impossible, particularly when one is dealing with an emotional issue. Furthermore, while the authors could handle the short-term consequences of the regime, its long-term impact was difficult to assess given the fact that the future lies in the realm of speculation—a sphere outside the perimeters of good historical analysis. Thus those who are looking for a scholarly analysis of recent events in Uganda will find these volumes disappointing; but any academic assessment of the Amin regime must wait for the return of political sanity in that country.

Thus the criticism leveled against these publications should be taken in the context of trying to put the record straight for posterity. These publications together with David Martin's General Amin (London: Faber and Faber, 1974) and the International Commission of Jurists' Violation of Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Uganda (Geneva/New York: 777 Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10017) should be enough to demonstrate to any doubting Thomas that Amin is probably beyond reform.
NOTES
I would like to register my appreciation for the useful comments which were made by Dr. Dale Clifford, University of North Florida, Jacksonville, and Ms. Mary Sue Koeppel, Waukesha County Technical Institute, Pewaukee, Wisconsin.

REFERENCES