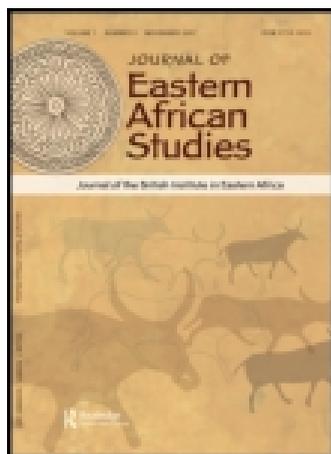


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Rethinking the state in Idi Amin's Uganda: the politics of exhortation

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This article – the introduction to a collection of articles on Idi Amin's Uganda – illuminates the infrastructure of Amin's dictatorship. It was through the technology of the news media that Amin's officials found it possible to summon and direct the actions of Uganda's people. The news media's apparently extensive audience made it possible for the authorities to address particular demographic groups who would otherwise fall outside the reach of government bureaucracy. When government officials did actually engage with the real people they addressed, they did so with measuring tapes and typewriters close at hand. In the paper reports they filed, Amin's bureaucrats tidied up complicated social situations, generating statistics that illuminated a particular constituency's adherence to – or deviation from – the official directive. Uganda's command economy was constituted through exhortations, inflated statistics, and other fictions on paper.

Keywords: Idi Amin; Uganda; state; dictatorship; archives

Historians have recently discovered post-colonial East Africa. The last few years have seen the publication of several texts that deal with the contemporary history of Kenya, Tanganyika, and Zanzibar.¹ In Uganda, by contrast, it is difficult to find the National Archives. There is no sign that marks the location of the archive, which is kept in the basement of the National Agricultural Research Organization in Entebbe. Neither has there been a catalogue. While materials from the colonial secretariat were catalogued through the 1920s, none of the more recent material had been listed. And because the National Archives has had neither space nor manpower to collect old records from government offices, a great amount of historical paperwork has been left in limbo, tucked away in the leaky attics, storerooms, and basements of old buildings. In the absence of archives to work with, Uganda's historians have contented themselves with a comparatively narrow range of subjects. There is a rich and growing historiography on the ancient kingdom of Buganda, and there is a smaller scholarship about the history of Uganda's western kingdoms.² While anthropologists have recently produced innovative studies on historical thought in northern Uganda,³ historians have done startlingly little work on colonial Uganda, and they have left Uganda's post-colonial history almost entirely unstudied.⁴

The infrastructure for historical research in Uganda remains uneven, but over the past few years a cadre of dedicated librarians, archivists and records officers has been cataloguing and preserving important records. Working with teams from the

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University of Michigan and Makerere University, archives staff recently catalogued the holdings of the National Archives, and a new building is soon to be constructed to house the collection. The archives of district governments are also being catalogued by a group of young, energetic district records officers. And at the National Library of Uganda, the Church of Uganda archives, and Makerere University Library archivists are scanning and digitizing important documents.

This collection of articles arises from a conference on “Uganda in the 1970s” convened at the University of Michigan in February 2011. The papers showcase the leading edge of an incoming tide in new historical scholarship, much of which is based on newly available research materials. One author uses district archives in Kabale, in Uganda’s south, to unpack the local politics of racial thought; another reads the newly released records of a Commission of Inquiry into human rights abuses in the Amin regime; a third employs the discarded paperwork of the Coffee Marketing Board to reconstruct the economics of smuggling. Taken as a group, this ensemble of papers brings the Amin state into sharper focus: not as a “State of Blood,” as the Ugandan author Henry Kyemba called it, but as a forum for agency.⁵ These articles bring a new set of political actors into view – clerks, smugglers, petitioners, councilmen, contractors – who kept records, practised persuasion, made claims, and shaped the trajectory of government bureaucracy. Working from the newly opened materials in district and ministerial archives, we can see the Ugandan state not as a homogenous Leviathan, a projection of Amin’s pathological political vision, and neither still as a hollowed-out, decayed shell, but as a field of action, in which officials, bureaucrats and citizens used paperwork, exhortation, and other rhetorical and administrative tools to compel others to act.

In this introductory article, we examine the infrastructure of official discourse in Amin’s Uganda. We are interested in the mode of politics that the circulation of newspapers and the widespread distribution of radio sets enabled. It was in the news media – particularly in the newspaper *Voice of Uganda* – that Amin and his colleagues found it possible to address, summon, and direct the actions of Uganda’s people. The official press was not simply a vehicle of propaganda. The news media gave Amin an infrastructure with which to dictate to Uganda’s publics.

Newspapers like *Voice of Uganda* do not give evidence of the limits of their circulation. There is no list giving the names of people who do not receive the newspaper, and neither are there notices about the localities from which news and information has not been gathered. Newspapers pretend to be comprehensive. The *Voice of Uganda* was full of newsy bits from every corner of Uganda, and government officers urged the *Voice*’s editors to “extend their sales to all citizens of Uganda and to make sure that newspapers are sold in every sub-parish and village.”⁶ The *Voice of Uganda* was a means by which government officers could address the whole Ugandan people, all at once. With such a powerful mouthpiece available to them, officials in Kampala found it easy to issue directives. The news media’s apparently extensive audience made it possible for the authorities to address particular demographic groups who would otherwise fall outside the reach of government bureaucracy. In the press the authorities could summon cloudy and indistinct constituencies – the youth, Asians, hawkers – as if the names corresponded to sociological realities, and impose obligations upon them. In the press, officials could dictate to women about the composition of their wardrobes, guide shop owners about the presentation of their goods, and direct cotton farmers in the routine work of planting. Through the

newspaper, particular Ugandan constituencies were addressed, blamed, and exhorted to mend their ways.

Distributed through the news media – an unanswerable medium – government directives left no time for bargaining or negotiation. There was a pre-emptory quality to official discourse in Amin's Uganda, a taken-for-granted assumption that directives would be unthinkingly obeyed. When government officials did actually engage with the real people they addressed, they did so with yardsticks and typewriters close at hand. In the paper reports they filed, Amin's bureaucrats tidied up complicated social situations, generating statistics and creating numbers that illuminated a particular locality's adherence to – or deviation from – the official dictate. It was through exhortations, inflated statistics, and other textualized fictions that Uganda's command economy was constituted.

Amin in scholarship

In the 1970s there was a decisive shift in the character of research within and about Uganda. In the decades prior to Idi Amin's rise to power, scholars affiliated with Makerere University and the East African Institute of Social Research (EAISR) had used oral sources, court records, and a range of government and private archives to pursue historical, ethnographic, and sociological research. But after 1971, Ugandan and foreign researchers – confronted by the new government's hostility to intellectuals – were obliged to abandon or relocate their projects.⁷ By the time of the coup's second anniversary, the murders of Makerere Vice-Chancellor Frank Kalimuzo, Makerere lecturer Robert Siedle, and *Munno* editor Father Clement Kiggundu had cast a pall over academic and journalistic research. Some scholars did consult old research notes and documents in European archives to offer revisions of earlier historiography.⁸ But it would be another two decades before there was a resurgence of historical scholarship based on new research.⁹

It was in the context of these connected changes in Uganda's political and scholarly arenas that much of the writing concerning Amin's regime emerged. Seeking to explain the military regime's persistent hold on power, scholars and journalists were obliged to work with second-hand data obtained outside the country, primarily from Ugandan exiles. The range of this scholarship was therefore constrained, focused on Amin's psychology and his political lineage. Political scientists examined the dynamics leading to the 1971 coup;¹⁰ journalists composed sensational stories in line with editors' and readers' post-colonial Cold War apprehensions;¹¹ exiled Ugandans worked to build political capital anticipating the realignment of power in Uganda.¹² Animated by motivations such as these, scholars had little reason to study the local experience of government in Uganda. The focus was almost exclusively on high politics. The Ugandan state often appeared as both a product and a personification of Amin's own personality. Thus, the former American ambassador to Uganda argued that Amin's Uganda was analogous to Hitler's Germany, a state that existed solely as a projection of a charismatic leader's warped vision.¹³ Social scientists were likewise drawn to the study of Amin's personality: political scientist Samuel Decalo argued that the 1971 coup had "purely personal" causes, and that Amin's domination of the Ugandan state would continue until "a new military clique . . . consolidates power."¹⁴

Writers' focus on Amin's psychological world reflected the preoccupations of their sources. For scholars and journalists alike, these consisted largely of Ugandan

government reports and the accounts of Ugandans who had left or fled the country. Caricatured images of Amin were multiple, changing and contested, not least of all by Amin himself.¹⁵ Amin's government expanded radio and television for domestic consumption "to educate the masses," and invested heavily in an external radio service, which was broadcast in English, French, Arabic and Swahili across the world.¹⁶ Amin closely monitored his depiction in international media and, where possible, took punitive action to edit how he was represented to foreign audiences. He detained the British writer Denis Hills to force his publisher to remove the characterization of Amin as a "village tyrant" from the next edition of Hills' book, and threatened the mass arrest of French citizens to force specific edits to French New Wave director Barbet Schroeder's 1974 documentary *Idi Amin Dada*.¹⁷ During the time Schroeder was filming, Amin and his subordinates worked to direct the camera, staging scenes and generating scenarios for the director to pursue.¹⁸ The performative nature of Amin's famously outlandish statements endeared him to some as a "folksy" anti-imperialist "from the womb of the countryside."¹⁹ Amin particularly attracted support from pan-African activists, who objected to the racist overtones of his portrayal in American journalism and were eager to recast him as a "down-to-earth, humorous" champion of African economic nationalism and the fight against neo-colonialism.²⁰

Ugandans living in exile, including many prominent scholars, were influential agents in shaping knowledge about the country. Journalists David Martin and Colin Legum regularly cited sources close to the deposed President Milton Obote.²¹ These informants had their own reasons for caricaturing Amin (and northerners generally) as unfit to rule. Two of the most vitriolic accounts of Amin's rule were published by Semakula Kiwanuka, a historian sympathetic to the historical claims of Baganda royalty, and Henry Kyemba, a recently defected former minister in Amin's government in the process of seeking political asylum in the United Kingdom.²² While Kyemba attributed Amin's butchery to "his tribal background" – particularly to the (alleged) cannibalism of his Kakwa people – another former minister, Wanume Kibedi, urged his readers to consider the intrinsically violent nature of Amin's "true character".²³ Appalled by the "perpetuat[ion of the] tribal hegemony" of Kakwa, Nubians and Muslims in government, Kiwanuka, Kibedi and other exiles attributed the perceived disintegration of Ugandan society to the underlying brutality and irrationality of Uganda's rulers.

The stereotypes they advanced found a receptive audience among Western journalists, with whom they helped co-produce images of Amin as an uncivilized tyrant. Like many of their Ugandan counterparts, British and American popular writers argued that Amin's background among the "shiftless people" of north-western Uganda, characterized by "sadistic brutality, lack of formal education" and "witchcraft and superstition," made him ill-suited to "the complicated politics of the modern world."²⁴ Western policy-makers were also receptive to this portrayal. The CIA analyst Jerrold Post concluded that Amin merely used "his power to compensate for feelings of inadequacy, especially intellectual inferiority" while Henry Kissinger considered Uganda's leader "a prehistoric monster."²⁵ Ugandan exiles' writings thereby helped to frame the global discussion of the Ugandan state around the inhumanity of a leader on the fringes of Ugandan civilization.²⁶

The most prolific and influential scholars of the Second Republic were themselves exiles forced out of the country by Amin's security forces. Ali Mazrui was Professor and Head of the Department of Political Science at Makerere

University until 1973, when he left the country in response to threats from state operatives. His writings, many of which took shape at Makerere, eschewed primary research in favour of linking semiotic analysis of Amin's speech and mannerisms with a selective reading of secondary ethnographic writings. Mazrui did not consider the state separately from Amin, whose seizure of power he considered (at least while under the regime's scrutiny at Makerere) a form of "structural democracy." Mazrui argued that Amin embodied a "deeply primordial" "rugged, peasant, and masculine charisma" that was "more typical of the population as a whole" than either Obote's or Mutesa's personas.²⁷ With Amin's public speeches and behavior as his primary sources, Mazrui considered the Ugandan state under Amin to be a vehicle for the military's restoration of a mythic African warrior tradition.²⁸

Mazrui's critics disparaged his failure to embed Amin's rule in a grounded social history of inequality. But even as critics shifted the focus from the psychological to the social, historical and economic, they were – like Mazrui himself – obliged to work with an exceedingly constrained source base. Aidan Southall, an anthropologist of northwest Uganda, was compelled to leave Makerere and Uganda around the same time as Mazrui.²⁹ He argued that Amin was the embodiment of the dialectical forces that – in the nineteenth century – had constituted the Nubians as a martial identity, but that in the twentieth century made the same military caste marginal to Ugandan nationalism.³⁰ Holger Hansen offered the most comprehensive study of "ethnicity in relations between the military and society," demonstrating that the army was not a self-contained interest group projecting Amin's individual will but was rather "involved in and itself an object of ethnic conflicts" across Ugandan society.³¹ Southall and Hansen both considered the Ugandan state under Amin to be the product of a longer-term process of ethnic differentiation.

If Southall and Hansen's focus remained on the composition of the regime itself, Marxist historians considered the state's position in a wider political economy. Many Ugandan scholars, including some figures in the political resistance to Amin's rule, were eager to identify colonial capitalism as a hindrance to the formation of an African petit bourgeoisie, arguing that the bourgeoisie's structural weakness in the face of stagnant productivity had prevented it from consolidating control of the state.³² In the Marxist view, the state's primary significance lay in its status as a vehicle for accumulation and class formation, and as a mediator in conflicts between international and national capitalists, amongst Ugandan commercial interests, and between "the needs of the bourgeoisie and those of the mass of the population."³³ Despite their differences over method and process, scholars such as Yash Tandon and Mahmood Mamdani, both of whom worked at the University of Dar es Salaam following Amin's 1972 Asian expulsion decrees, concluded that Amin's actions were products of a history of racialized class formation set in motion decades earlier.³⁴ Works in this dependency school commendably focused attention away from Amin's personality toward analyses of a wider set of processes and institutions. But the dependency scholars' emphasis on structural forces made it difficult to see the individual actors whose ambitions, vocations, and commitments shaped the trajectory of local politics under Amin's regime.

Today, over 40 years after Amin's rise to power, the 1970s are an unresolved presence in Ugandan politics, for Uganda's scholars, politicians and publics have yet to forge a unifying national historical myth. The Independence Monument is Uganda's only official site of memory for national post-colonial history. Erected in 1962, on the eve of Uganda's independence, the monument embodies the liberal promise of

freedom: titled “Mother Uganda bringing forth a new nation,” it depicts a mother, bound, thrusting aloft an infant with outstretched arms.³⁵ The monument encapsulated the moment of optimism that attended Uganda’s independence. More recently, another artist has set the independence monument in a very different frame. From 2007 until it was repainted in 2012, there was behind the monument a mural depicting the tragic events of Uganda’s post-colonial history. It was a pastiche of marauding soldiers – one of whom trampled upon the prostrate body of a bleeding man – and corrupt officials. In the official view of the ruling National Resistance Movement, the past is not a source of inspiration or instruction: it is a place of degradation and humiliation, a burden to be overcome. Uganda’s historians have tended to echo this approach.³⁶ For many, the 1970s remain an era of institutional collapse and economic chaos.

Very recently, however, there has been a surge of popular reflection on post-colonial Uganda’s history. Uganda’s fiftieth anniversary of Independence has occasioned a daily outpouring of historical commentary in newspapers, television and radio concerning the accomplishments of prominent Ugandans and the complexities of controversial historical episodes. The increased availability of internet access has turned blogs and social networking sites into forums for discussing personal experiences and broader narratives of post-colonial Uganda. It is the content of this writing, rather than its quantity, that is most significant. If some continue to discuss the 1970s primarily as an era of chaos and pain,³⁷ many young Ugandans, entrepreneurs, and political activists have begun to approach it more directly as a reserve of knowledge. Some have celebrated Amin’s political legacy. For example, a popular 2010 music video shows Amin’s image in an imagined “Heroes Museum,” while the launch of businessman Christopher Columbus Sembuya’s celebratory book *The Other Side of Idi Amin* was presided over by the head of an opposition party.³⁸ Other authors have written in an autobiographical mode, documenting their public service amidst trying circumstances.³⁹ This body of popular historical writing points toward a broader field of agency and struggle that scholars in the shadow of a historiography dominated by the outsized figure of Amin are only beginning to analyse.

The command economy

The opening of new archives, and the recent proliferation of memoirs, autobiographies and popular historical texts, makes it possible to tell a different kind of story about Idi Amin’s Uganda. Instead of focusing on the personality of Uganda’s president – his horrendous abuses of power, his appetites, his political lineage, his psychology – we can begin to understand the particular form of governmentality that the Amin state cultivated. We can also begin to see the forms of creative action that bureaucrats, smugglers, businessmen, petitioners, and other entrepreneurs pursued at the margins of the Ugandan state. If Amin’s government was dysfunctional in many regards, it also opened up novel forms of agency.

Local government officials in Amin’s Uganda could not exert much leverage over their subjects. The resources they had at their disposal were constrained. This was especially true in Bundibugyo and Kasese, new districts that were established in 1974. In Bundibugyo, the police commander was headquartered in a rented room adjoining a private residence. The walls were crumbling, and police officers were often disturbed by the racket of the neighbouring children.⁴⁰ In the absence of funding from Kampala, district government authorities were obliged to construct

their headquarters buildings on a “self help” basis. County chiefs compelled their subjects to spend one day per month on communal work, excavating sand and building blocks for use in the building project.⁴¹ Government work was a do-it-yourself operation. Bundibugyo’s survey officer lacked even a bicycle with which to travel.⁴² There was a periodic shortage of paper, and in 1976 the district government had to cease issuing cyclostyled minutes and circulars. “Suppose one is suddenly taken dead?” asked a county probation officer, complaining over the shortage of paper. “The new officer would find the work load in a mess.”⁴³ One sub-county chief waited for months for a supply of paper. Lacking the means to record the hours that workers had laboured, he suspended road building and other public works projects in his area.⁴⁴ The Bundibugyo District Treasurer lacked the most basic instruments of bookkeeping – there were no revenue forms, no rubber stamps, and no cashbooks.⁴⁵ In 1977 the Kasese District Treasurer reported that tax revenue had fallen short by 1,900,000 shillings, nearly a quarter of the estimated budget. The authorities were obliged to slash funding for the upkeep of government buildings, road improvement, and other public services.⁴⁶

The physical infrastructure by which modern bureaucracies work – the memorandum, the report, the register – was lacking in Amin’s Uganda. It was in the news media that government officers found a medium with which to address, exhort, and summon the Ugandan public. The *Voice of Uganda* newspaper was launched in December 1972 as the successor to the *Uganda Argus*. It was conceived as a channel of official communication: in the first issue its editors promised to “act as the liaison between the people and the government.”⁴⁷ The newspaper’s circulation was erratic, especially in Uganda’s far distant provinces. Newspapers arrived in remote Madi district between three and seven days after publication. One editorialist described how people coming on public transport from Kampala brought “papers already touseled or crumpled and dirty.”⁴⁸ Even in such a condition there was always a “big scramble” for the papers, and single copies sold for as much as a shilling. “We are as much interested in events in Uganda and elsewhere like every citizen of Uganda,” wrote the editorialist, “and indeed we depend on papers.” Readers in Bundibugyo likewise found it difficult to lay hands on the *Voice of Uganda*. In the best of times newspapers and postal mail took as long as three weeks to reach Bundibugyo.⁴⁹ During the rainy season floods and landslides washed the road away. In 1978 district government was obliged to send two clerical officers on a perilous hike over the mountains to Fort Portal, where they collected the post, purchased a precious few newspapers, and carried the lot on their backs back to Bundibugyo.⁵⁰ Radio broadcasts were likewise difficult to hear: the District Commissioner noted that the radio signal was “so faint that one can spend weeks and weeks without knowing what is happening in this country and what the government’s plans are.” He begged government to send special shipments of newspapers to his remote district, together with copies of the parliamentary Hansards.⁵¹ The unreliable availability of media meant that Ugandans seeking essential information on the progress of war with Tanzania or the availability of scarce essential commodities often had to clandestinely listen to banned foreign radio stations or rely on networks of rumours known as “Radio Katwe”.⁵²

The circulation of news media was manifestly uneven, but editors and contributors could not acknowledge the facts. They thought the circulation of news media to be universal and undifferentiated, and they presumed that readers were hanging on every word. At a briefing on 14 May 1973, for example, Amin

directed that two students from each of Uganda's major universities should meet him at State House at 8:30 pm the following day to discuss the prospect of a national language for Uganda.⁵³ There were no students physically present when Amin issued his directive. Neither was there a procedure by which university students could select their representatives. But Amin and other government officials were confident that, through the media, a specific constituency – the “students” – could be summoned. Government officers imagined an extensive, integrated, and biddable readership for *Voice of Uganda*. When in March 1973 the government radio station announced its intention to launch broadcasts in Rwamba – the majority language in Bundibugyo – a tiny column appeared in *Voice of Uganda*, inviting people fluent in the language to report to the Controller of Programmes – in faraway Kampala – by 8:15 pm that very day.⁵⁴ It was a physical impossibility that a Rwamba speaker, at the far end of a long and broken road, could somehow make his or her way to Kampala in the course of a day. But government officers were not worried over the limits of the transport infrastructure. So long as the reporters gathered before them, any occasion, and any audience, was an opportunity to address the whole Ugandan people. On the same occasion at which he instructed university students to attend a meeting regarding the choice of a national language (discussed above), Amin also instructed government authorities to install a water supply in Arua, directed the Yugoslav contractors building the Arua airport terminal to transfer their attention to the building of a hotel, and condemned waiters for demanding tips from their customers, calling it a “way of encouraging thieves and brain-washing people.”⁵⁵

With the Ugandan public transparently available to them through the news media, government officers used the press to issue directives. The machinery of internal government communication – ordinarily hidden from public sight – was conducted in the newspaper and on the radio. When, for example, Amin announced an amnesty for the rebels who had for years been fighting in the mountains above Bundibugyo, he gave local government officers guidance about the bureaucratic process through the *Voice of Uganda*. District Commissioners were told to place administrative officers at every sub-county headquarters, where rebels could register, fill in forms, and surrender their weapons.⁵⁶ On another occasion, when Amin spoke before an audience in Kampala, he issued a series of directives to city workers: light bulbs in all street lamps were to be repaired at once; the Entebbe to Kampala road was to be re-routed to minimize congestion; public parks were to be cleaned of grass.⁵⁷ Even Amin's conjugal communication was conducted through the press. In March 1974 he told an audience of security officers and pressmen that he had dismissed all of his wives save one. His wives were not aware of their new status until they heard a radio report on the subject.⁵⁸

Readers sometimes complained over the verbatim reports that the *Voice of Uganda* printed. It is “tiresome,” argued the editorialist A.R. Khadiagala, to “sit and yawn listening to a so called bulletin for thirty minutes or more as it is discouraging to read a lengthy story on the front page, and then see ‘turn to back’ two or three times on the same page.”⁵⁹ This editorialist wanted “reports independent of flamboyant and repeated facts,” giving room to “more human interest stories.” He missed the point. The *Voice of Uganda's* long reports were not meant to be enjoyed. The newspaper was a vehicle by which a particular mode of governmentality was made possible.

It was through the news media that Amin and his officials found it possible to dictate to particular constituencies. This government-by-directive was pre-emptory:

there was no time for debate or dialogue about policy implementation. Particular demographic groups – women, students, hawkers, chiefs – found themselves addressed in the press, and were obliged – at short notice – to act. On 5 February 1974, for example, Amin’s government summarily banned the wearing of wigs and trousers by women. In the directive, announced in the pages of the *Voice of Uganda* and over the government radio station, Amin described how wigs were “made by callous imperialists from human hair mainly collected from the unfortunate victims of the miserable Vietnam war.”⁶⁰ It is easy to place Amin’s directive within the broader context of eastern African cultural politics: police in Dar es Salaam were in 1970 and 1971 arresting women who wore miniskirts in public, and in 1973 the city’s authorities banned the wearing of tight trousers.⁶¹ The Tanzania campaigns were reported favourably in the *Voice of Uganda*. But while Uganda’s newspaper readers may have been aware of this wider context, Amin’s decree nonetheless came as a surprise. One editorialist named C. Kakembo listened to the news broadcast on the radio at 8:00 pm on 4 February, when no mention was made of the directive. It was only during the 10:00 pm broadcast – and in the newspaper the following day – that the directive was announced. It brought many people up short. “Those who heard the announcement and happened to be in public places had to pull off the wigs immediately to avoid being bullied, touched and embarrassed,” Kakembo reported.⁶² For Kakembo and many other young women, Amin’s dictates demanded the radical, rapid revision of their physical appearance. In the days following the presidential directive women were obliged to find ribbons and cloths to tie over their heads in order to “look respectable enough in public.”

The directives that Amin issued were meant to prompt rapid, immediate transformations in public life, in the appearance of women, and in the economy. On 25 January 1973, government suddenly announced that it was issuing new currency bearing the image of President Amin. The official directive hailed the measure as a contribution toward the “building of a true sovereign state which is both politically and economically independent.”⁶³ The directive allowed only 15 days for Ugandans to exchange their old currency for the new. In Toro District, in western Uganda, local government officers had to scramble to meet the imminent deadline. The District Commissioner sent round a memorandum on 31 January giving out a schedule: on Friday, 2 February, people in Bukonjo, Busongora and Bunyangabu were to gather at their county headquarters, where currency could be exchanged between 8:00 am and 3:00 pm; on Saturday, 3 February, people in Kyaka, Kibaale and Mwenge were likewise to exchange their currency.⁶⁴ There was no time to waste. “Those who fail to exchange their money,” the official noted, “will find their money worthless.” Working on such a compressed timeline, people were obliged to interrupt their activities, down tools and join the queue. In many sub-counties “there was no breathing space as men and women, some with babies on their back, scrambled in the queue in a bid to reach officers changing money.”⁶⁵

All of this – the sudden revision in the dress code, the changing of the currency – tells a familiar tale about the arbitrariness of Amin’s regime. Our point is that arbitrariness has an infrastructure. It was possible for Amin and his colleagues to issue rapid-fire directives because government officers had at their disposal a means of communication – the newspaper and the radio – by which the whole Ugandan public could be addressed, summoned and directed. The news media was more than a vehicle by which propaganda was disseminated. It was a vehicle by which populations were managed, and a machine through which government worked.

When in November 1976 a government chief in remote Ntoroko penned a memorandum to the local police chief, he assumed (as he wrote) that his interlocutor had listened on the radio to President Amin's "brea^f very strictly or worning at Kampala International Conference Centre on 18th November 1976 [*sic*]." Amin had urged Ugandans to combat smuggling. The chief in Ntoroko urged the policeman to "make sure that our things from Uganda are not smuggled across over Uganda in our nearing countries."⁶⁶ Radio broadcasts and newspaper reports were the means by which the dictates of government were addressed to Uganda's people.

The expansive nature of the newspaper's circulation invited government officers to think that, on its pages, they could address an undifferentiated, national audience. With the Ugandan public available before them, officials could compress the time-scale on which government ordinarily works, and make all Ugandans act in a kind of military drill. There was neither time nor space to answer back. Amin's government was a dictatorship.

Statistics and the work of attribution

As they issued marching orders, officials had to create mechanisms through which to measure forward progress. Particular constituencies – farmers, the urban youth, soldiers – were made responsible for solving particular social problems. In this economy of attribution, statistics were the means by which effort could be measured, successes evaluated, and commitment judged.

Local government employees were the first, most available, constituency for Amin's directives. They were obliged to inspire their subjects by their devotion and their discipline. "Chiefs of all grades should be the example to the people, behaviour, dressing, cleanliness, to keep time in any activity," a meeting of officials in Kasese District resolved in 1974.⁶⁷ Being a local government official was both taxing and precarious, for officials were obliged to contribute time and funds from their own resources to advance the work of government. When in 1974 Amin ordered Ugandan farmers to double the production of cotton, it was local government officers who were obliged to model the official standard. In Kasese, administrative staff in one county were instructed to cultivate two acres of cotton each. "Our hectares will be an example to the village people and visitors who will be coming to see cotton," wrote the county chief.⁶⁸ In Bundibugyo, the public celebrations marking the fifth anniversary of the military takeover had to be funded by contributions from district officials' wages: senior cadres were required to contribute 30 shillings; middle cadres contributed 15 shillings.⁶⁹ When in 1976 Israeli commandos raided the Entebbe airport, everyone with a government job – soldiers, clerks, teachers, prison warders – was obliged to contribute to the bereaved families of Ugandans killed during the raid. Lists showing the amount that each employee had contributed were forwarded to Kampala.⁷⁰

Even as they modelled patriotic behavior, local government authorities exhorted their recalcitrant constituents to follow their example. There was a self-righteousness pervading authorities' work, a confidence that cadres could, through instruction and remonstration, reform commoners' ways of living. The expulsion of South Asian traders in 1972 and the launching of the "Economic War" made it possible for even the humblest government officer to understand the mundane work of commerce as an essentially patriotic task. It was in economics, in farming, and in their livelihoods that black Uganda would take its "rank among the proud independent states of the

World where the indigenous people hold the destinies of their own nations,” as one officer put it.⁷¹ “Now these suckers have gone and I am glad to announce that the only black Country of Africa – that is our beloved Uganda – is now economically developing at supersonic speed,” said the Bundibugyo District Commissioner in a speech marking the visit of the Minister of Commerce to the area.⁷² In 1973 the earnest Trade Development Officer in Toro District spent an afternoon instructing a conference of shopkeepers how to do their business. “Some customers may often be exacting and unreasonable, but you must be courteous, alert, friendly and ready to serve,” he told them. Smudges on glass display cases were to be wiped away, and attendees were reminded that “your own personal appearance, being neat and well-groomed, makes a favourable impression.”⁷³ “We are now engaged in a dynamic programme to ensure the standard of living of our people in the countryside is improved,” an agriculture officer exhorted a group of county chiefs. “We have the land and the brains. What we need now is determination and hard work. CHESTS FORWARD, HEADS UP AND MOVE STRAIGHT TO THE FARMER.”⁷⁴ Government officers were confident that they had much to teach their constituents.

Local authorities evaluated Ugandans’ adherence to the official standard by generating statistics. Quantification and enumeration stretched into every arena of social and economic life. Issued in 1974, Amin’s “Nine Point Plan to Farmers” launched a campaign to double the production of cotton in Ugandan farms. The presidential decree instructed cotton farmers to “increase the yield per acre by planting your cotton correctly spaced. Two feet apart in rows, with planting holes one foot apart.”⁷⁵ Seeds were to be planted five to a hole. Plots were to be laid out in a grid, and intercropping was strictly prohibited. Amin himself kept a close eye on the weather, and when in August 1975 it began to rain heavily, he issued a circular exhorting Ugandans to “go out in full force and ensure that Double Production of food and cash crops is achieved during these rains.”⁷⁶ The numerization of cotton farming made it easy for local government officials to assess farmers’ conformity to the guidelines. Yustasi Mukirane, a county chief in Amin’s time, remembered that he used to inspect cotton plots, making certain the “cotton is planted in rows, and there is no intercropping. So that if in the cotton there was for example maize or beans planted there, then the owner of the plantation would be beaten!”⁷⁷ Archival records testify to Mukirane’s energy: in 1976 he toured his county, instructing subchiefs to uproot improperly planted cotton so that the rows were spaced at three feet. Each chief was to keep records on the names of cotton farmers and the location of their gardens.⁷⁸ Statistics tidied up the complex work of farming, making it clear when, and how, farmers ought to cultivate their crops. The judges for the “President’s Cotton Production Cup,” inaugurated in 1973, toured cotton farms throughout Uganda, assessing the success of the cotton scheme using a set of prescribed criteria. The answer to “How much cotton was planted in the recommended time?” earned contestants up to 20 points, while “How much was planted with the recommended spacing?”, “What was the percentage of cotton plots planted with other crops?” and “What is the average acreage per farmer?” were each worth 10 points.⁷⁹ With these criteria in view local officials could generate hard numbers with which to evaluate the progress of Ugandan cotton farming.

Even as Amin’s officials were tidying up the cotton fields, they were also engaged in a country-wide effort to “Keep Uganda Clean.” Launched in 1973, the campaign was meant to cleanse Uganda both of dirt and of moral turpitude. “Since I took over power I have been sweeping Uganda clean of corruption,” Amin announced in 1976.

“I found that the whole country was in an economic mess and political confusion.”⁸⁰ The penal code was rewritten, making it a criminal offence to beg for alms, play games of chance in public, or behave in a “disorderly or indecent manner in any public place.” In Bundibugyo officials warned parents whose children lived in town to “engage the youths in activities that were developmental.” Young people whose parents lived in rural areas were deported back to their homes.⁸¹ “Children must be polite, respect elders, willing to help the poor, the oppressed and the sick,” wrote one official in 1978. “Children must check their language and must never use crude, impolite and scandalous or abusive terminology... discipline is to be emphasized both at school and at home.”⁸² The Uganda Youth Development Organization (UYDO), launched in 1976, aimed to transform delinquent youths into hard-working, vigorous patriots. The organization’s architects argued that, in “our African Social Structure,” children were “owned by the whole community.”⁸³ Their labour was therefore communal property. “Having been born and nurtured in a community our young people owe a debt to their village in our African sense of belonging,” went the UYDO’s charter. Youth were obliged to construct access roads, bridges and schools, build village halls, and erect protective tanks for water as recognition of their debt to their community.

Uganda’s campaign to teach the young civic duty took form within a larger, east African context. As historian Andrew Ivaska has recently shown, the effort to discipline and control the decadent “youth” was fundamental to Tanzanian patriots’ efforts to build the nation.⁸⁴ Even university students were obliged to work as manual labourers in the National Youth Service. But where cleanliness in Tanzania was a convenient metaphor, in Uganda government authorities actually compelled citizens to sweep, sanitize, and polish up public and private buildings. “Government attaches great importance to cleanliness and tidiness in all aspects of life,” the Bundibugyo District Commissioner told residents in a circular.⁸⁵ Trading premises and private homes were to be kept “absolutely clean and tidy.” In Kasese town, local authorities agreed that the area was “overgrown with grass and was generally dirty.” They divided up the town centre into zones – the postmaster was responsible for the Shell service station – and at 8:30 am on a Saturday morning in 1978 they launched a campaign to sweep, eradicate the overgrown grass, and clean up dirt.⁸⁶ In one of Kasese’s sub-counties the chief obliged traders to spend an hour every Saturday at 3:00 pm sweeping and cleaning the market.⁸⁷ In another sub-county the chief visited the local government headquarters and was “annoyed to see that the Houses nearby the Road are too dirty.” He directed his subordinate chief to marshal his subjects and “start right out to clean all the houses near the road” so that “all these Houses are very clean, and they should work during the Weekend.”⁸⁸

Here we can see the discursive economy of attribution at work. In sanitation as in cotton production government officials set numerical guidelines and judged compliance by measuring adherence to the standard. Each year the authorities ran a nation-wide “Home and Environmental Improvement Competition,” aiming to identify the particular parish where householders and local authorities were most committed to clean living. A panel of eminent figures – including the Provincial Governor, the Provincial Commissioner for Community Development, and other authorities – adjudicated the competition. In each parish they toured a selection of homes and assigned marks: a clean water supply was worth 30 points; a carefully swept compound was worth 60 points; a pit latrine counted for 60 points; and a proper refuse pit was worth 20 points. The standards were not always met: a judge

responsible for evaluating a fishing village in Kasese was dismayed to find that many people did not possess beds, preferring to sleep on the floor in the company of their domestic animals.⁸⁹ Whether they were followed or not, the guidelines gave officers a quantifiable means of measuring the progress of the national campaign for cleanliness. When in 1975 Bundinyama parish was selected to represent Bundibugyo in the national Home and Environmental Improvement Competition, the district government assigned a team of agriculture experts, veterinary officers, and health workers to clean up the parish's households, muck out the kraals, and build latrines. Government officials were surprised to find that local people did not welcome this intrusion. "Some of you have been going around asking questions like 'Why are we being disturbed like this? What shall we benefit from this exercise?'" the District Commissioner complained. "You the people of Bundinyama should consider yourselves lucky."⁹⁰

Latrines were a particular fixation for local government authorities. The latrine was a visible, public marker of a householder's commitment to clean up his family's way of life, and government chiefs exhorted people to build them. Yustasi Mukirane, a county chief in Kasese under Amin, remembered that he and other chiefs toured private homes to investigate the arrangements for refuse disposal. "If one was found without a pit latrine, then the householder would be arrested together with his wife and children," Mukirane remembered. "Then the man would be separated, and in the middle of his family the man would be caned six times!"⁹¹ Latrine-building was an urgent business in Amin's Uganda. In 1977 a county chief in Bundibugyo issued a directive warning "very very seriously those people who are having no latrines in their houses." Within seven days, the chief directed, his subjects were to dig latrines in their homes; and "anyone who will be found with no latrine in those seven days action will be taken against him."⁹² A great many people ignored the chief's warning: at the end of the Amin regime only 45% of households in Bundibugyo possessed a pit latrine.⁹³ But as a rhetorical device, as a prod to drive people to rework their domestic arrangements, the latrine had no peer.

The dictatorial character of government in Amin's Uganda made local officials into statisticians, measuring the space between rows in a field of cotton, counting the number of homes with latrines, and assigning points to measure a particular locality's success in adhering to the official guidelines. This was a particular mode of governmentality. It was as though government officers were drill sergeants. In July 1978 Alex Owor, the Governor of Western Province, toured Kasese District. His report – cyclostyled and distributed to a great number of government employees – illuminates how the politics of exhortation worked. Owor did not spend more than a few moments with any one of the hundreds of teachers, clerks, police officers, or administrators he met over the course of his several days in Kasese. Neither had he expertise in any of the several fields of government work on which he was invited to comment. But he had in mind quantifiable criteria by which to evaluate, judge, and correct his subordinates. In his report, Owor felt free to offer instruction about a very wide range of issues.⁹⁴ About the infrastructure for health care, Owor "instructed the chiefs to mobilize the masses and erect aid posts," and commanded the district's nursing officer to "immediately begin the supply of medicine to the places with ready aid posts." About agriculture, Owor "stressed the point that every household should be self-reliant on all types of food crops, and should, if possible, market the excess." About education Owor directed that "all teachers must be clean shaven, they must trim their hair short and their finger nails, must not drink excessively, must not dress

in torn clothes or shoes, or come to duty drunk.” There were dozens of directives issued in Owor’s report. Each directive was marked in the margin with an exhortation in capital letters: “CHIEFS TO NOTE,” for example, or “TEACHERS TO NOTE.” His report – which ran over 50 typed pages – was a set of marching orders.

Of course Uganda was not a military encampment, and neither could the clerks, soldiers, police officers, and teachers who worked for the district government be marshalled into regimented obedience. In any case the reach of local government was strikingly limited. As Godfrey Asiimwe’s article in this volume shows, a whole field of economic activity was conducted outside the formal organs of the state, untaxed, undocumented, and ostensibly illegal. Government-run cooperatives paid farmers markedly less than their coffee crop was worth. Farmers therefore sold their crop to illegal buyers, who spirited the coffee out of Uganda for sale in Zaire, Rwanda or Kenya. In 1977 as much as 90% of Uganda’s Arabica coffee was smuggled out of the country (Asiimwe, this volume). By the mid-1970s the official channels for the distribution of commodities had broken down. Even in relatively prosperous Kampala shopowners had abandoned their specializations, stocking their shelves with whatever commodities they could obtain from government distributors.⁹⁵ It was the smugglers, not the bureaucrats, who were actually responding to Ugandans’ material needs in the 1970s. When in 1976 Simeo Kahindo was arrested in Bundibugyo for trading without a license, he was found to have an array of useful consumer items in his possession: 12 shirts, eight trousers, one radio, one bicycle, two belts, three pairs of shoes, five ties, two hoes, three kilos of sugar, and five kilos of salt, all for sale.⁹⁶ Men like Kahindo left no paper trail, because they did not pay taxes, apply for licenses, or file reports in government offices. Their work took place outside the documentary state.

There was a void between the world on paper and the real world. Government officers generated statistics and filed reports, but the paperwork was very often a disguise that covered up social and political realities. There are a few moments when the disguise is rent asunder, when the paperwork is revealed to be fraudulent. The Agriculture Assistant in Karugutu, in Bundibugyo district, was an enthusiastic writer of reports documenting the progress of the cotton production campaign, and in August 1976 he filed a report describing how 87.5 acres had been planted in his sub-county, with 350 plots cleared and ready for the hoe. The Provincial Governor presumably had that report in hand when, later that same month, he made an unannounced visit to Bundibugyo. Appearing in Karugutu, he measured up the cotton fields and found that a total of eight to 10 acres of land had actually been cleared, including only four acres planted with cotton.⁹⁷ This was a stunning embarrassment for the Agriculture Assistant, who was accused by his superiors of submitting “lies, inaccurate information, and too much exaggeration” in his reports. For our purposes the honesty of the government officer is less interesting than the circumstances in which the report was produced. The Agriculture Assistant composed his August 1976 report while resident in Busaru, 35 miles away from his post in Karugutu, where he had spent several weeks in the company of his wife and children.⁹⁸ For him the report was a work of fiction, with a plot that elevated his success in encouraging farmers to plant cotton and advance Uganda’s prosperity.

Paperwork mattered, not because documents indexed social and political realities but because they made bureaucracy work. Amin’s Uganda was a documentary regime in which the composition and management of identity cards, official letters,

and other papers gave people leverage. As Anneeth Kaur Hundle shows in this volume, the South Asians who remained in Uganda after the 1972 “expulsion” had to be particularly careful about records management. Amin’s government had issued identity papers to some South Asians in 1971, during a formal census of Asians in Uganda. After 1972 South Asians made strenuous efforts to keep their papers in order. Both Hundle’s and Taylor’s articles describe men who travelled to Kampala to have their documents verified, returning with red-coloured identity cards that showed them to be exempt from the expulsion decree (Hundle, this volume; Taylor, this volume). Other Ugandans were similarly careful about their paperwork. In her article in this volume, Alicia Decker shows how women widowed by Amin’s thugs assembled papers with which to convince officials to act in their favour. One woman, whose husband had disappeared in 1971, wrote dozens of letters to the Chief Justice, the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Chief of Staff, and other authorities. When she received a helpful letter in reply, she carried it with her to the gates of the prison where her husband was held, using it as a bludgeon to convince the guard to open the gates for her (Decker, this volume). Women like these recognized the compelling power of paperwork. Having the right papers helped move government officers to action.

Sergeant William B. Baker was a particularly energetic author of paperwork. In the decaying government archives there are dozens of communiqués he issued from his post as chief in Ntoroko, an obscure locality in Bundibugyo, Uganda’s most remote district. Addressed to the district’s Information Officer, Baker’s reports were meant to be read aloud on Radio Uganda’s daily news broadcast. Baker issued one of his earliest communiqués in December 1974. It was an amateurish production, written in the first person, and full of platitudes about Christmastide cheer. The report was conspicuously lacking in newsworthiness. “I checked in the police station, and no one was arrested,” Baker noted, “Please, keep in good spirit like that.”⁹⁹ Within a few months, though, Baker had begun to work out his voice as a reporter. In January 1975 Baker used his tour of Karugutu sub-county as the occasion around which his report was framed.¹⁰⁰ Karugutu itself – the people with whom he met, the travails of transport, the happenings in the locality – found no place in Baker’s report. Rather, Baker used his report to reiterate the directives he gave. “The county chief has seriously warned people of Karugutu to leave drunkenness as they have been drinking too much every time,” Baker reported. His communiqués were composed of orders, instructing constituents to obey government policy. In April 1977, Baker’s communiqué reported on the seven points he had made to a conference of elders. The directives were numbered:

1. As they are Elders they must not sit idle in their area, they must join hands with strong Cooperation with Government Officers to maintain law and order. . . .
2. Cotton must be cultivated in plenty, every Ugandan at least to cultivate one acre of cotton, not to take it as a Punishment you are given by chiefs. . . .
5. County Chief Ntoroko Mr. William B. Baker warned very, very seriously on those who are hiding robbers in their homes to attack their friends during the night. . . .
7. Tribalism must be stopped very very strictly. We are all Ugandans, our father is the Head of State.¹⁰¹

Baker could have issued these instructions to any audience, at any time during his tenure as chief. On the rare occasions when Baker gave other people a voice in his reports, they always spoke words of congratulation, like a Greek chorus commenting

on the protagonist's heroism. When in October 1974 Baker reported on his inspection of the crews building roads in his county, he described how the road crews had told him that "I, Sgt. William B. Baker, have been the first County Chief to . . . make a meeting with road works and advise them on Government Policies . . . They told me how they can't realize their mistakes unless they meet with an advisor like me."¹⁰²

So far as we know, none of Chief Baker's numerous communiqués were actually broadcast on Radio Uganda or printed in the *Voice of Uganda*. Radio broadcasters could only allocate one half-hour per day – at 9:00 pm – for the "provincial news roundup."¹⁰³ Bulletins from remote Bundibugyo District had first to be transmitted – on paper – over broken roads to Fort Portal. Once the material arrived, the Provincial Information Officer transmitted the most newsworthy items by telephone or telex to Kampala, where senior editors reviewed the material and assembled the broadcast. Editors' desks at the *Voice of Uganda* were overflowing with press reports from Uganda's provinces, and only a small fraction of the material sent in could actually find a place on the air.¹⁰⁴ Even as he composed his communiqués, William Baker must have known that they would never find a place on the news media.

Why then did this officer, posted in the distant marches of Amin's Uganda, devote so much time to writing press reports? It seems likely that his authorial energy arose from his insecurity, not from his confidence about his vocation. Government officers were in an exposed position in Amin's Uganda (Decker, this volume). Baker sought to overcome this insecurity by inserting himself into as many files as he possibly could. His communiqués – addressed to the authorities at Radio Uganda – were copied to a wider range of recipients: the Provincial Governor, the District Commissioner, the District Police Commander, schoolteachers, elders, church ministers. Baker made himself a constant presence in the archives. By this means he projected himself outside his provincial locality, and made himself an archetype of loyalty. That is why his reporting is so unilluminating, so devoid of context. William Baker was composing a persona through his reportage. When in 1977 President Amin invited chiefs to nominate constituents who had "made a positive contribution towards the development of Uganda" for the award of a special medal, Chief Baker placed his own name at the top of his list of nominees.¹⁰⁵ That was the power of paperwork.

These are the archives of the Amin regime: exhortatory propaganda, inflated statistics, self-regarding reportage and other fictions. Historians have long recognized that archives are not simply source material, welling up with factual information about the past. There are now several ethnographic studies that take the archive as their subject, exploring the selective process by which official paperwork gets saved, organized, and placed in the repository.¹⁰⁶ While all official archives are fabrications of self-interested bureaucrats, there are reasons to think that the archives of the Amin regime are uniquely fallacious. In Amin's government-by-exhortation, officials did not control an apparatus that controlled and disciplined their subjects. Their function was to survey, to measure, to keep statistics. Officials like William Baker or the Agriculture Assistant in Karugutu recognized the production of paperwork as a vocation in its own right, and they produced reports that bore little relationship to the social world they actually inhabited. That is why – even as local government officers produced reports that charted the successes of the "double production" campaign – the amount of cotton that was actually marketed declined markedly over the course of the 1970s.¹⁰⁷ That is why – even as chiefs exhorted householders to

“keep Uganda clean” – very few latrines were actually built. The paperwork that Amin’s officials produced did not record real developments on the ground. Amin’s officials produced paperwork as a discipline that helped make bureaucracy work.

The opening of new archives in Uganda is a cause for celebration. But new source material is unlikely to reveal new facts about the character of real life in Amin’s Uganda. As scholars chart the history of post-colonial Uganda and encourage Uganda’s archivists in their vocation, we must keep in view the contingent relation between statistics and facts, reports and reality, the archive and the world.

Prologue

It is fitting that this volume should begin with an article from Holger Bernt Hansen, for Prof. Hansen has long been an architect for the production of historical scholarship on Uganda.¹⁰⁸ In this article he revisits his influential paper “Ethnicity and Military Rule in Uganda,” which he composed in the waning years of the Amin regime.¹⁰⁹ For Hansen, Amin’s regime was a “decade of paradoxes and ambiguities,” characterized by the disjuncture between government’s stated ideology and its political practice. Amin professed his aversion to tribal prejudice, and his first cabinet was broadly representative of Uganda’s ethnic groups. But from 1973 onward Amin’s power base narrowed, and in the army as in the administration officers were increasingly drawn from Amin’s home area, in West Nile. For Hansen it was the insecurity of the regime that drove Amin and his allies to sort out supporters from allies. Hansen’s article gives us a novel way of thinking about Amin’s government: not as a dictatorship that imposed its will on compliant Ugandans, but as a nervous state, unsure about its constituents’ support, driven more by a pathological lack of confidence than by a coherent political project.

Godfrey Asimwe’s study of coffee marketing shows us how much we miss by focusing on the high politics of governance. Drawing on previously unstudied paperwork from the Coffee Marketing Board, Asimwe’s remarkable article manages to reconstruct a whole field of economic activity that stood outside the bureaucratic organs of the Ugandan state. Coffee smuggling – far from a shadowy black market operation – was a financially profitable operation in which a great number of Ugandans participated. Illegality, Asimwe shows, was a constitutive aspect of economic life in Amin’s Uganda. Nearly everyone was on the wrong side of the law. Asimwe’s article makes it possible to think about government bureaucrats in relative terms: not as a constant presence in Ugandans’ lives, but as limited, constrained, always competing with entrepreneurs who worked according to a different rationale.

If Asimwe’s article casts light on an arena of activity conducted outside the protocols of government bureaucracy, Alicia Decker’s illuminates forms of agency that developed in and through the institutions that Amin authorized. Decker has read 800 pages of transcripts from a Commission of Inquiry into human rights abuses that Amin authorized in 1974. Some 545 witnesses – 30% of them women – testified before the commission about the sudden disappearance of their relatives and friends. Their testimonies were acts of courage. But as Decker shows, testifying before the commission was only one of several strategies that bereaved widows, sisters and daughters pursued. She chronicles women’s wide-ranging efforts to generate sympathy, catch attention, and make allies in their efforts to locate their missing kin. These women, Decker writes, “refused to be silenced.” But they were more than heroes. Their dramatic engagements with government officials show us

how women seeking to work the system to their advantage could creatively deploy the polite conventions of human sympathy.

The two articles that conclude this collection, from Edgar Taylor and Anneeth Kaur Hundle, together highlight the social experience of the “expulsion” of Uganda’s South Asian community in 1972. Government bureaucracy is always present in these two articles. But like Decker and Asiimwe, Taylor and Hundle focus on the human, dialogical, constrained power that bureaucrats wielded. Taylor’s article considers the implementation of the 1969 Trade Licensing Act, through which the government of Milton Obote sought to roll back Asians’ control over the economy and promote Africanization. It would be easy to see this bit of legislation as one piece in a longer genealogy of racial discrimination in Uganda. But Taylor has access to a rarely used archive in Kabale District, in southern Uganda, and with these rich sources he is able to illuminate the idiosyncratic ways in which local officials interpreted directives handed down from Kampala. Kabale’s Asians were by no means passive objects of political discourse: they assembled paperwork to establish their citizenship rights, filed petitions and legal cases, and worked to sway bureaucrats to their side. The decisions that Kabale authorities made about their Asian interlocutors’ racial identity and legal status did not always accord with the logic that central government sought to impose. In Kabale as in other localities, Taylor concludes, government policy was an arena of contention, and racial identity and legal status were indeterminate categories, contentiously and provisionally worked out.

Anneeth Kaur Hundle’s article concludes this special issue by casting light on the small community of Asian men and women who were – against all expectation – able to remain in Uganda after the 1972 expulsion decree. Many of them were contractors, living legally – but surreptitiously – in a state that constantly decried their malign influence over the economy. From this position of insecurity Asian men and women managed their connections, kept their paperwork in order, and entertained Ugandan officials lavishly in their homes. Like the bereaved, marginal women who Alicia Decker studies in her article, Asian men and women practised diplomacy, making Ugandan officials into friends, cultivating sympathy, establishing a presence in the social field.

Taken together, these articles help us rethink both structure and agency in Amin’s Uganda. Rather than a monolithic dictatorship or anarchic mess, the Ugandan state under Amin was a field of action, in which officials struggled to exhort their subjects into compliance. By shifting attention away from the insecure high politics of Kampala, we can see the ways that officials sought to make bureaucracy work with limited resources. Meanwhile, Ugandans outside government administration mobilized documents both to ensure their personal and economic security and to shape the character of their communities. These articles render the social history of governmentality in Amin’s Uganda open for study.

Notes

1. For Kenya, see Hornsby, *Kenya*, and Branch, *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair*; for Tanzania, see Ivaska, *Cultured States* and Brennan, *Taifa*; for Zanzibar, see Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones*. Zambia’s post-colonial has likewise attracted historians’ interest: see Gewald et al., *One Zambia, Many Histories*, Macola, *Liberal Nationalism in Central Africa*, and Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics*.

2. Recent additions to this scholarship include Hanson, *Landed Obligation*, Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, Doyle, *Crisis and Decline in Bunyoro*, Medard, *Le royaume du Buganda au XIXe siècle*, Mutibwa, *The Buganda Factor*, and Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*.
3. Leopold, *Inside West Nile*; Finnström, *Living with Bad Surroundings*.
4. With a few exceptions, particularly Hansen and Twaddle, *Uganda Now* and Hansen and Twaddle, *Changing Uganda*. On colonial Uganda there is Thompson, *Governing Uganda* and Low, *The Fabrication of Empire*.
5. Kyemba, *State of Blood*.
6. "Read Newspapers and Uplift your Standards," *Voice of Uganda* 1 (79), March 6, 1973.
7. For example, Bunker, *Peasants Against the State* and Whyte, *Questioning Misfortune*.
8. Twaddle, "Ganda Receptivity to Change" and Mamdani, *Politics and Class Formation*. There also appeared manuscripts based on earlier research, e.g. Cohen, *Womunafu's Bunafu* and Tosh, *Clan Leaders and Colonial Chiefs*.
9. Musisi, "Transformations of Baganda Women"; Reid, "Economic and Military Change in Nineteenth-Century Buganda"; Hanson, "When the Miles Came"; and Doyle, "An Environmental History."
10. Decalo, "Military Coups and Military Regimes" and Lofchie, "The Political Origins of the Uganda Coup."
11. Katono, "Western Newspapers' Coverage of Idi Amin."
12. Kyemba, *State of Blood* and Kiwanuka, *Amin and the Tragedy of Uganda*.
13. Melady and Melady, *Idi Amin Dada*.
14. Decalo, "Military Coups and Military Regimes," and Decalo, *Coups and Army Rule in Africa*. Quoted in Sathyamurthy, *The Political Development of Uganda*, 634.
15. Katono, "Western Newspapers' Coverage of Idi Amin."
16. Amin, "New Year's Message"; Moyo, "Uganda."
17. An agency collected British newspaper clippings on Uganda, including those from small regional papers, for official monitoring. Some of these files are housed in the Uganda National Archives in Entebbe. Amin's former adviser Bob Astles claims that Amin relied on "one special right hand man for this, a Pakistani/British Asian called Malik. They were very close." Email communication with Taylor, January 17, 2007. On the Denis Hills affair, see Hills, "Postscript – 'Let a Man Lie in Prison,'" in Hills, *The White Pumpkin*, 326–44. On threats against French citizens in response to the documentary, see "2001 video interview with Barbet Schroeder" on *Idi Amin Dada*, directed by Barbet Schroeder (Criterion Collection, 2002).
18. Amin's former Minister of Health Henry Kyemba described the scene following a cabinet meeting, which Schroeder's crew included in the film as an example of Amin's ruthlessness as he denounced Foreign Minister Michael Ondoga, who was dismissed and murdered several weeks later. "Immediately after the television crew had left, [Amin] joked about his performance. 'How did it come out?' he asked me, laughing." Kyemba, *State of Blood*, 111.
19. "Folksy" was Carlos Russell's term, while Ali Mazrui considered Amin "a common man from the womb of the countryside" despite the General's long military background. Mazrui, "The Social Origins of Ugandan Presidents," 3. The South African journalist Colin Legum was among those who considered Amin's "clown[ish] performance" a diversion. Legum, "Behind the Clown's Mask."
20. Petersen, "U.S. Black Newspaper Coverage," and Nayenga, "Myths and Realities of Idi Amin Dada's Uganda." The quotation is from Carlos Russell on The MacNeil/Lehrer Report: "Idi Amin." Library #372, Show #2127. March 1, 1977. Minister Louis Farrakhan visited Uganda at Idi Amin's invitation in 1976, while Stokely Carmichael and Roy Innis received honorary Ugandan citizenship for their support of Amin's government. Mittelman, *Ideology and Politics in Uganda*, 243, and Mamdani, *Imperialism and Fascism*, 95.
21. Colin Legum was a close friend and admirer of Milton Obote since the 1950s, while both he and David Martin frequently referenced accounts by recent defectors for *Africa Contemporary Record* and the *Guardian/Observer*. He and the International Commission of Jurists relied on former Minister of Education Edward Rugumayo, who defected in 1973 and would go on to join scholars Yash Tandon, Dan Nabudere, and Omwony

- Ojwok as the 'Gang of Four' in the brief transitional UNLF administration following Amin's overthrow.
22. Kyemba, *State of Blood*; Kiwanuka, *Amin and the Tragedy of Uganda*.
 23. Kyemba, *State of Blood*, 109; Kibedi, "The Story Continues," 30.
 24. Melady and Melady, *Idi Amin Dada*, 109; Martin, *General Amin*, 14; Smith, *Ghosts of Kampala*, 37; Grahame, *Amin and Uganda*, 23; Listowel, *Amin*, 12.
 25. Post, *Leaders and Their Followers*, 17; "Office of the Historian – Historical Documents – Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume E-5, Part 1, Documents on Sub-Saharan Africa, 1969–1972 – Document 258. "Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Camp David, September 24, 1972, 11:37–11:52 a.m." <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve05p1/d258> (accessed August 12, 2011).
 26. Leopold, *Inside West Nile*, 57.
 27. Mazrui, "Social Origins of Ugandan Presidents," 4; Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen*, 76; Mazrui, "Phallic Symbols in Politics and War," 61.
 28. See Mazrui, "Soldiers as Traditionalizers."
 29. Burton, "Interview with Aidan Southall."
 30. Southall, "General Amin and the Coup."
 31. Hansen, *Ethnicity and Military Rule in Uganda*, 73, 86.
 32. Mamdani, *Politics and Class Formation*; Kabwegyere, *The Politics of State Formation*.
 33. Brett, "Political Economy of General Amin," 15.
 34. Mamdani, "Class Struggles in Uganda"; Mamdani, *Politics and Class Formation*; Mamdani, *Imperialism and Fascism*; Tandon, "Asians' Role in East Africa"; O'Brien [pseudonym for Yash Tandon], "General Amin and the Uganda Asians"; O'Brien, *Brown Britons*.
 35. The statue was commissioned in July 1962 by the committee responsible for organizing Uganda's independence celebrations, and executed by the artist Gregory Maloba. Makerere University Archives AR J 3/3: Independence Celebration Advisory Committee, July 18, 1962; Kyeyune, "Art in Uganda in the 20th Century," 82–97, 288.
 36. Kasozi, *Social Origins of Violence*; Mutibwa, *Uganda Since Independence*; Kirunda-Kivejinja, *Uganda*; Karugire, *Roots of Instability*.
 37. For example, see the "panel discussion" format in Rukandema, *Uganda*.
 38. Jose Chameleone, "Basiima Ogenze – Dr. Jose Chameleone" (video, 2010) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2e7v8Oibbu0> (accessed October 20, 2011; "Idi Amin Had a Good Side – Author," *New Vision*, May 20, 2009; Sembuya, *The Other Side of Idi Amin Dada*.
 39. For example, Kanyeihamba, *John Bikangaga*; Kakubi, *Memoirs of a Priestly and Episcopal Life*.
 40. Bundibugyo District Archives (hereafter BDA) Box 501, "Uganda Police, 1974" file: District Police Commander to DC Semuliki, October 3, 1974.
 41. BDA Box 521, "Rural Development" file: D.C. Semuliki to all county chiefs, December 27, 1976.
 42. BDA Box 513, "Planning" file: Semuliki District Team meeting, July 26, 1977.
 43. Kasese District Archives (hereafter KasDA) "Annual Reports" file: Community Development Officer, Bukonjo, annual report for 1979.
 44. BDA Box 531, "Mis. 3" file: Sub-county Chief Harugale to County Chief Bwamba, August 19, 1974.
 45. BDA Box 507, "Furniture" file: Treasurer Semuliki District to Executive Secretary, Western Province, April 1975.
 46. KasDA loose papers: Rwenzori District Administration, Finance Committee minutes, September 30, 1977.
 47. "Now it's Voice of Uganda," *Voice of Uganda*, December 2, 1972. 1 (1).
 48. Editorial letter, Mwanainehira Gazeti, *Voice of Uganda*, April 11, 1974, 1 (421).
 49. BDA Box 513, "Planning" file: Semuliki District Team meeting, December 18, 1974.
 50. BDA Box 522, "Postal Services" file: D.C. Semuliki to Postmaster, Fort Portal, April 17, 1978.
 51. BDA Box 502, "Complaints and Enquiries" file: John Bukombi, DC Bundibugyo, to Permanent Secretary, Office of the President, October 5, 1981.
 52. Gariyo, *Media, Constitutionalism and Democracy*, 33–34.

53. "National Language, New Flag being Considered," *Voice of Uganda*, May 15, 1973, 1 (139).
54. "Broadcasts in Rwamba," *Voice of Uganda*, March 17, 1973.
55. "National Language, New Flag Being Considered," *Voice of Uganda*, May 15, 1973, 1 (139).
56. "Amnesty Period for Rwenzururu," *Voice of Uganda*, March 8, 1973.
57. "President Discusses Cleanliness," *Voice of Uganda*, April 3, 1973.
58. "General Amin has One Wife and Others are Out," *Voice of Uganda*, March 26, 1974, 1 (407).
59. Editorial letter, A.R. Khadiagala, in *Voice of Uganda*, March 30, 1974, 1 (411).
60. "Decree Bans Women's Wigs and Trousers," *Voice of Uganda*, February 5, 1974, 1 (365).
61. Ivaska, *Cultured States*, chap. 2.
62. Editorial letter, C. Kakembo, *Voice of Uganda*, February 27, 1974, 1 (384).
63. "Uganda Introduces New Currency," *Voice of Uganda*, January 25, 1973, 1 (45).
64. KasDA "Fin/1" file: DC Toro, "The Exercise of Exchanging the Old Bank Notes for the New Ones," January 31, 1973.
65. "Changing the Old Currency," *Voice of Uganda*, February 2, 1973.
66. BDA Box 501, "Uganda Police, 1974-" file: Sgt. William Baker to OC Police Ntoroko, November 25, 1976.
67. KasDA "Meetings, Busongora County" file: Busongora County Team meeting, October 31, 1974.
68. KasDA, "Bukonjo County meetings" file: Bukonjo County meeting, September 1, 1976.
69. BDA Box 513, "Planning" file: Semuliki District Team meeting, January 19, 1976.
70. E.g. BDA Box 503, "Death" file: Y. Kawamara to all head teachers, Semuliki district, August 25, 1976.
71. BDA Box 513, "Planning" file: DC Semuliki, "A short welcome speech for the occasion of Africa Day," May 25, 1976.
72. BDA Box 513, "Celebrations, Ministry of Information" file: "DC's speech on the occasion of the visit of the Hon. Minister of Commerce to Semuliki District," October 21, 1975.
73. KasDA "Staff meetings and traders meetings" file: Meeting of Kasese traders, March 15, 1973.
74. KasDA "Boma file": Regional Agriculture Officer to all saza chiefs, March 15, 1971.
75. KasDA, file with no cover: HE the President of Uganda Alhaji General Idi Amin Dada, "Nine Point Plan to Farmers to Double the Production of Cotton and Produce More Money for Themselves and the Country," n.d. (but 1974).
76. KasDA "Information and Publicity" file: No author, "Announcement," August 27, 1975.
77. Interview: Yustasi Mukirane, Bwera Town, June 3, 2010.
78. KasDA "Bukonjo county meetings" file: Bukonjo County meeting, September 1, 1976.
79. KasDA, file with no cover: DC Toro to members of the District Cotton Judging Competition, January 4, 1973.
80. Amin, *Uganda: Five Years under Military Government*, 3. Cited in Decker, "Idi Amin's Dirty War."
81. BDA Box 513, "Planning" file: Bundibugyo District Team meeting, July 15, 1975.
82. KasDA "Circulars from DC Kasese" file: "Report of the Hon. Governor, Mr. Alex Owour's Tour of Rwenzori District," July 1978.
83. KasDA "Department of Youth" file: "Programme of Activities for the Development of Youths," July 27, 1976.
84. See Ivaska, *Cultured States*, Lal, "Militants, Mothers, and the National Family," and, more generally, Burton and Charton-Bigot, *Generations Past*.
85. BDA Box 512, "Trade and Commerce" file: DC Semuliki, circular to all traders, March 19, 1974.
86. KasDA "Busongora Conty: District Team" file: District Team meeting, September 6, 1978.
87. KasDA file with no cover: Sub-county chief Kilembe to parish chiefs, April 23, 1974.
88. KasDA file with no cover: County Chief Busongora to Sub-county Chief Bugoye, March 26, 1976.

89. KasDA file with no cover: Health Inspector Busongora, report on the results of the Fishing Villages' Health and Sanitation Competition, 1977.
90. BDA Box 513, "Celebrations, Ministry of Information" file: DC Bundibugyo, "An Address to the Residents of Bundinyama Parish," n.d. (but 1975).
91. Interview: Yustasi Mukirane, Bwera town, June 3, 2010.
92. BDA Box 513, "Celebrations, Ministry of Information" file: County Chief Karugutu to Information Officer, Semuliki, February 1, 1977.
93. BDA "Contagious Diseases" file: District Medical Officer Bundibugyo to Senior Medical Officer, Western Province, June 9, 1981.
94. KasDA "Circulars from D.C. Kasese" file: Report of the Honourable Governor, Mr. Alex Owor's tour of Rwenzori District, July 1978.
95. BDA Box 509, "Trade and Commerce" file: Trade Development Officer, Kampala to Provincial Commissioner for Commerce, Kampala, April 14, 1976.
96. BDA Box 501, "Uganda Police, 1974" file: County Chief Ntoroko to Deputy Police Commander, Semuliki, December 27, 1976.
97. BDA Box 508, "Cotton" file: District Agriculture Officer Semuliki to Agriculture Assistant, Karugutu, August 30, 1976.
98. BDA Box 508, "Cotton" file: Agriculture Assistant Karugutu to District Agriculture Officer, Semuliki, September 4, 1976.
99. BDA Box 518, "Information Services – General" file: Baker to Information Officer, Semuliki, December 30, 1974.
100. BDA Box 518, "Information Services – General" file: Baker to Information Officer, Semuliki, January 17, 1975.
101. BDA Box 513, "Celebrations, Ministry of Information" file: Baker to Information Officer, Semuliki, April 26, 1977.
102. BDA Box 518, "Information Services – General" file: Baker to Information Officer, Semuliki, October 4, 1974.
103. KasDA "Information and Publicity" file: Circular letter, Rwenzori District Information Officer, February 1, 1979.
104. BDA Box 513, file with no cover: Provincial Information Officer, Western, to Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, March 12, 1975.
105. BDA Box 514, "Cooperatives" file: William Baker to DC Semuliki, March 7, 1977.
106. See e.g. Hamilton et al., *Refiguring the Archive*, Burton, *Archive Stories*, and Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*.
107. In Western Province the amount of cotton planted in 1976–77 amounted to 15,363 hectares, down from 32,486 hectares in 1975–76. KasDA "Annual Reports: Provinces" file: Dept. of Agriculture, Western Province, Annual Report for 1976.
108. See, among other works, Hansen and Twaddle, *Uganda Now*, and Hansen and Twaddle, *Changing Uganda*.
109. Hansen, *Ethnicity and Military Rule in Uganda*.

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