

**From authoritarianism to African
liberalism: the Ugandan experience**

Shelton George

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NRM	National Resistance Movement
NRA	National Resistance Army
RCs	Resistance Committees
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
AU	African Union
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development

1. INTRODUCTION

Milton Obote and Idi Amin, between 1969 and 1985, transformed Uganda into one of Africa's leading post-independence autocratic regimes. Their role was one of destruction on three fronts: social, political and economic. The state in Uganda was turned against the people and served to reinforce the description of Africa as a sub-ordinate state system in international relations. Colonialism provided the foundation for this illiberal order. Uganda, like every other African country, "was formed by the geo-strategic motives of colonial powers, which considered many interests but that of natural geographic and ethnological divisions."¹ Furthermore little was done by the former coloniser and its western allies to counter or condemn the violent practices of Obote and Amin, leading one commentator to observe that "this rule of terror was tolerated quietly by the West for many years and cost the lives of 500 000 Ugandans."²

In 1986, following the rise to power of Yoweri Museveni, the fate of Uganda and its people began to change. The new President embarked on a process of reconstructing the state and restoring the unity of the country.³ Nevertheless, as this paper will show, "no case of political change in Africa is more ambiguous than that of Uganda."⁴ Developments in Uganda are illustrative of a number of important points. Firstly, it highlights autocratic politics and demonstrates the extent to which regimes would go in their efforts to consolidate illiberal governance; thus perpetuating the colonial disorder. Secondly, a reformist leader emerged, assumed power, began to reconstruct the fallen state, but in the process openly rejected and until recently continued to reject the multiparty or liberal democratic model; choosing instead to focus on the economic dimension of state rehabilitation. Thirdly, it shows how this particular African ruler is allowed to get away with his chosen path, while international agents make clear to others on the continent that there is no alternative to multiparty democracy.

The paper focuses on the colonial legacy as representing somewhat of an inadequate and disadvantageous entry of the African state as an independent actor in the world of global politics and economics, a world in which states still play an important role. It provides an overview of state collapse in Uganda, under Milton Obote and Idi Amin and deals with reconstruction in Uganda under Yoweri Museveni. Finally no-party democracy is discussed and the reaction of the international community considered.

2. THE COLONIAL LEGACY: EMERGENCE OF AUTHORITARIAN RULE

The colonial legacy in large measure explains and is responsible for Africa's developmental (political and economic) crisis. Since the birth of the state in seventeenth-century Europe, Ann Tickner argues, "states have

¹ *About Uganda*. 24 December 2001: 1.

² *Ibid.*

³ Ottaway M. *Africa's New Leaders: Democracy or State Reconstruction*. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999: 29.

⁴ Diamond L. 'Introduction' Diamond Larry, Plattner Marc F (eds.), *Democratisation in Africa*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999: xxi.

engaged in political practices designed to promote their economic security.”⁵ Reason being that their very existence, survival, growth, success and prosperity depended (and was justified) to a large extent on their economic condition.

In the case of Africa, the modern state system got off to a wrong, tragic and somewhat antithetical start, at least insofar as development and economic security is concerned. This is the case since the statist project in Africa begins with the nineteenth century scramble for Africa. This process “saw large swathes of African territory being carved up by and for European powers.”⁶ As a result tribes and clans were divided across arbitrary colonial borders. In this way many unviable African states were born.⁷

Furthermore in order for the colonial power to extract economic largesse, from their newly acquired territory (one of the primary reasons for colonial conquest of the African continent) they needed to install a repressive state apparatus. Hence Tieble Dame argues, “the colonial state was above all a military state.”⁸

This is the case since colonisation was more often than not a violent process. The violence took the form of both direct and indirect violence. That is, colonialism was generally imposed by force of arms, or through intimidation based on the threat of force. After all people do not passively allow themselves to be enslaved and/or colonised by foreigners. The point being emphasised is that the colonial order, established by conquest, “was typically a military order, which coerced the colonised peoples into a state of submission.”⁹ Moreover, conquest relied on the strategy of divide and rule. This simply means that certain people such as chiefs had to be co-opted to the side of the colonising power so as to facilitate and assist in the conquest of the African people. In order to achieve this the co-opted group had to be exempted from punishment for violation of whatever laws existed, both indigenous and foreign. That is, chiefs were not punished or removed from their position by the colonial authorities for cases of murder and other violations. The chiefs could also not be dethroned by their people. They now had advanced weapons and the backing of the colonialist. This resulted in the emergence of a culture of impunity, one that originated during the colonial period and continued into the post-independence period. In post-independence Africa those in uniform or those in control of the state ‘enjoyed’ the culture of impunity.

The story of Lieutenant Idi Amin provides a startling illustration of the manifestation and implication of the culture of impunity practiced by those (generally men) in uniform. This story further shows how the culture establishes a pattern or trend that became integral to post-independence politics. Furthermore, this culture bears reference to the implications and manifestations of military rule in Africa.

Idi Amin ranked as a Lieutenant in the King’s African rifles. In 1962 Lieutenant Amin commanded a platoon that killed a number of Turkana prisoners in Northwest Kenya. Despite the tragedy of Amin’s murderous

⁵ Tickner A. *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspective on Achieving Global Security*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992: 62.

⁶ Hussein S. ‘Overcoming the Archilles Heel of the African Renaissance - The Legacy of the Colonial State’, *Accord - Conflict Trends Magazine*. April 1999: 1-2.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

behaviour, Sir Walter Coutts - the then British Governor of Uganda - vetoed any criminal proceedings against him. It is therefore not surprising that "Lieutenant Idi Amin was later transformed into the 'Butcher of Uganda' during his reign of terror in this East African country."¹⁰

The overarching point is that the chiefs and later the post-independence political and military rulers grew more despotic, and hence the gulf between "government and citizen, state and human security, started to widen." For instance, in the case of the chiefs, they could no longer be removed from office by their people and were no longer accountable to them. Instead the chiefs were accountable to "London and Paris local representatives and their position were held at the whim of the colonial power." Furthermore any activity outside the control of the colonial state was regarded as a threat to the status quo and therefore had to be crushed.¹¹ This situation was antithetical to the emergence and development of a national democratic ethos.

In tandem with the above legacy and aggravating it, many of the early post-independence rulers relied on a fairly narrow or ethnic power base as support for their rule. This in turn fuels conflict between different ethnic communities, and together with military intervention and involvement in politics adversely impacts Africa's participation in the international political system and this in turns undermines development.

3. UGANDA UNDER OBOTE AND AMIN: CONSOLIDATION OF AUTOCRATIC POLITICS

Idi Amin's major contribution to the collapse of the Ugandan state was the militarisation of politics. The General once in power essentially acted in a manner that perpetuated the military dimension (militarisation of the state in Africa) of the colonial legacy. This process was however already set in motion by the civilian regime of Milton Obote. Obote abandoned the independence constitution of 1962. This constitutional arrangement or experiment represented an attempt to manage Uganda's cultural pluralism by allowing a "measure of decentralisation - dispersal of power among predominant ethnic groups." In Obote's view such an experiment served to "impinge directly on his ability to consolidate state power."¹²

It was the decision to abandon the constitutional experiment that placed Uganda firmly on a path toward state collapse (defined as the breakdown of authority; legitimate power, law and political order)¹³ and that subsequently entrenched and consolidated the role of the military in Ugandan politics. This is the case since in order to effectively deal with civilian opponents and impose the one-party state in 1967 Obote had to increase the power of the military, then under General Idi Amin. In order to successfully participate in the international political economy the state needs to create the necessary conditions or environment conducive to a vibrant domestic economic order and one essential to attracting investment. Such an environment centres on peace, stability and accountability - factors integral to prosperity. Various cases in Africa, for example Nigeria, demonstrate that military rule, especially military rulers that violate, oppress and exploit their

¹⁰ Hussein 2.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Khadiagala G. 'State Collapse and Reconstruction in Uganda.' Zartman William (ed.), *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Reconstruction of Legitimate Authority*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995: 36.

¹³ Ibid.

people, creating a situation that is antithetical to successful participation in the international economy. This applies to all states whose rulers rely heavily on the military as means of intimidation and force. In the first instance the state often commits too much resources and energy to building a strong military, which forms the basis of its authoritarian rule (not legitimacy.) In the second instance, people who are being exploited and oppressed show little or no commitment to building a strong and competitive state. In most cases the state is instead viewed with hostility, that is, it may be viewed as the enemy. Hence it is arguable that the militarisation of politics and the state is counter productive to the national and international economic success of a country. It is exhaustive of time and energy and resources that could have been utilised so as to create the conditions and environment for constructively engaging global economic and political forces.

Milton Obote, Uganda's first post-independence and civilian ruler, began the process of gradually disintegrating civilian institutions of statehood, and instead opted for a greater role to be played by the military in state making. That is, military power became both integral and indispensable to Obote's rule. As a result when the army led by Amin became too powerful Obote needed to build a countervailing force. Obote thus "downgraded civilian institutions of legitimation and created conditions for Amin's overthrow." This process however was to form the backdrop to Amin's military coup of January 1971.¹⁴

This scenario placed the military and its use of force at the centre of social, political and economic life in Uganda. The power of civilian and political institutions was severely undermined and eventually disintegrated and thus rendered powerless for resolving conflicts.

Furthermore, and following Amin's overthrow of Obote, the use of force to extract compliance resulted in the Amin regime losing its "organisational clarity and its functional role as a social manager." A government's organisational and functional duty is to manage political, social and economic processes geared toward development. Despotism thus proved counter productive to social, political and economic development. In other words, an important state institution, in the hands of irresponsible leaders, was being transformed into a source of insecurity as opposed to a source of security and progress.¹⁵

In this light it is therefore not difficult to see why African states are marginal players in the international system. For example, with regards to the economic dimension of collapse, stagnation with redistribution "was to become Amin's singular impact on the decline of the Ugandan economy."¹⁶ Whilst Amin redistributed property expropriated from Asian entrepreneurs, the Ugandan economy was in a state of deterioration. The Ugandan state had failed as manager, facilitator and catalyst for development. To compound the problem it was not only expropriating land; it was also expelling entrepreneurs.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Khadiagala 37.

¹⁶ Khadiagala 37-38.

4. UGANDA UNDER MUSEVENI: RECONSTRUCTING THE RUINED STATE

It is clear from the above that Uganda was in need of a political and economic recovery plan, one prioritising the restoration of legitimate authority. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and the National Resistance Movement (NRM) and its associated National Resistance Army (NRA) responded to this challenge. The NRM captured Kampala in January 1986 and Yoweri Museveni was sworn in as President.¹⁷ With power now in the hands of Museveni and the NRM the primary objective was to reconstruct the Ugandan state and rebuild state power. That is, the aim was to rejuvenate “institutional mechanisms that formerly gave consistency to state action, legitimised power and established social trust.”¹⁸ The goal was to return the state to the centre of political life. This is a necessary condition and prerequisite for the success of any given country in the context of world politics. It is necessary to reiterate that when the NRM, as the new state managers, began restoring statehood “they did so in a climate of diminished popular faith in the capacity of the state to provide security.” The dominant trend at the time was “institutional immobilism, creating uncertainty, loss of commitment to the common good, devaluation of human life, and mistrust of authority.”¹⁹

The cause and effect of the state’s loss of credibility was the militarisation factor. As a result, Museveni’s NRM embarked on a process of reversing the image of the military. This was necessary since Obote and Amin created a state system that showed little or no respect for its people. Furthermore, the government adopted a ten-point programme. This programme emphasised “democracy, security, national unity, and the restoration of the economy.” In so doing the regime was preparing and chartering the way for Uganda’s reintegration into the realm of world politics and global economics. The state’s role was to be that of constructive participant, thus breaking with the common stereotype of irresponsible leadership, increased marginalisation and underdevelopment. More importantly such an approach implied a “new and better future for the long-suffering people of Uganda.”²⁰

Of central importance to achieving this new and better dispensation is the state in Africa. The state must therefore be transformed, as occurred in Museveni’s Uganda, and in order to achieve this transformation, political and civil rights must be protected. The military cannot ride roughshod over these liberties, liberties that form the basis for social and economic success. The state in an African context must therefore protect civil and political freedoms and engage in activities directed at the realisation of socio-economic rights, including providing an environment conducive to both local and foreign investment. In this way the state acts as a fully-fledged, fully functioning and responsible member of the international community. It cannot achieve this whilst in a condition of collapse.

The post-1986 government was clear in terms of the task ahead and hence began a process of meeting the challenges that traditionally confront states, together with the more contemporary challenges, all of which pertain to developing state and society. The Ugandan state therefore engaged in a process of finding its place

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Khadiagala 38.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Khadiagala 39.

in a changing world. Moreover, for a state in Africa, in this case the Ugandan state, to find its place and redefine its role, function and importance, the determining factor is its effectiveness. An effective state "is vital for the provision of goods and services, rules and institutions that allow markets to flourish and people to lead healthier, happier lives."²¹

Without such a constructive role, civil and political, social and economic development is impossible. These objectives constitute the overriding concern and priority of all states in the international system. A hostile state as was the case in Uganda prior to the arrival of Museveni, serves to undermine rather than build up such effectiveness. It is thus antithetical to the goal of people centred and sustainable development.

The results, of responding so adequately and efficiently, have thus far been phenomenal. Museveni and his embrace of market economics, responsible and effective government underpinned by a substantial respect for political and civil liberties, has "helped turn into a star performer the basket case Uganda became during the nightmare years of Idi Amin Dada and his successor, Milton Obote." The country has managed to sustain an annual growth rate of between 6 and 7 % thereby rendering "this former jewel of British East Africa respectable even among today's Tigers of Asia." Foreign investors are coming in increasing numbers as Museveni sticks to his reforms of liberalising and privatising the economy. Museveni has also returned expropriated properties and welcomed back South Asian's who were expelled by Idi Amin's programs of the 1970's.²²

Apart from the economic turnaround, Museveni's social initiatives have also won him much respect and admiration as a responsible and effective leader. An example of this is his decision and strategy to tackle head-on Uganda's dire plaque of HIV/ AIDS. It is arguable that Uganda's strategy of prevention and protection is the best in Africa, and that its success measures well when compared with international best practices and standards. For example, one hospital experienced a drop in HIV-infected pregnant young women from 26 % in 1992 to 9 % in 1996.²³

It can thus be argued that Uganda represents one of the most remarkable political, social and economic comebacks in the world. This is significant for a country that was once a synonym for horror, death and destruction on all fronts - social, political and economic. In many respects Uganda is a 'Tiger' on the African continent.

It is in this vein that countries such as the United States, argue that social and economic rights, for example the right to development, is a logical extension of political and civil rights. In support of this argument they point to their own achievements in the realm of political and civil liberties and their economic success. The crux of the argument here is that the state must serve and guarantee political and civil rights. In this sense it is held to be the custodian of political and civil liberties. By doing this it brings government and citizen, state and human security closer together. Furthermore, it provides the necessary framework, environment and conditions needed for economic prosperity. Hence it is argued that economic, social and other rights flow almost naturally from this situation, one in which political and civil rights, are safely guarded by the state.

²¹ *World Development Report*. 'The State in a Changing World.' Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997: 1.

²² Walsh J. 'Shaking up Africa.' *Time*. April 1997: 41.

The provision of a stable and just political order is a necessary condition for entry and successful participation in the arena of global politics and economics. This, in part at least, explains why the United States government has to date not ratified the United Nations Covenant on Economic and Social rights. In their view this category of rights forms a logical extension of fulfilling the political and civil rights category. That is, the state must through its fulfilment of the latter category provide conditions for achieving the former. The United States government has ratified the Convention on Civil and Political Rights. The implication is that the international community is not the primary guarantor of economic and social justice. This in some respects accounts for the perspective that seeks to attribute all of Africa's problems to "African mismanagement" and consequently underestimating "the impact of the global economic environment on African economies."²⁴ The flawed view that was advanced and advocated is that political democracy will solve Africa's problems.

In Africa, the post-independence state failed to achieve or to facilitate a process of overcoming its colonial legacy of militarism and autocratic politics, instead it succumbed. Moreover, the implication of authoritarianism was the failure of the state to foster unity and bridge the divide between the government and its people. The result is state failure and collapse in many parts of the continent, a situation that is antithetical to protection and promotion of political, civil, social and economic rights, and this in turn adversely impacts on development.

The gist of the argument advanced is that the African state system is weak and fragile. It is to a large extent a weak and unsustainable clone of its western counterpart, and that this factor serves, at least in part, to undermine Africa's position in the world economy and world system of states. The situation is both negative and the consequences adverse insofar as the well being of its citizens are concerned. If the political and civil liberties prerequisite is not met then the economic dimension, which is the other side of the coin, will remain largely unfulfilled or only partially addressed at best. An example of this dilemma is the suggestion that Africa has none or very few answers and solutions to its current economic dilemma of marginalisation in the world economy. Hence it is obliged to except and implement foreign designed structural adjustment programmes as the solution. In most cases these failed despite the argument that the fundamentals are correct. Alternative options are sorely lacking and Africa will endure another round of structural adjustment programmes, unless governments in charge of the African state take responsibility. They need to confront their realities, including the colonial legacy, and implement the necessary changes. A lot is dependent on the ruling elite.

It is therefore of no great surprise that Uganda under the leadership of Museveni is achieving such levels of economic growth: economic growth that compares favourably to that witnessed in Asia amongst the so-called 'Asian Tigers'. This happened because the government, despite its shortcomings, is in the process of progressively and constructively bridging the gulf between government and citizen, and between state and human security.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Adedeji A. 'An Alternative for Africa.' *Journal of Democracy*. 1994; 5(4): 123.

The implication of what is taking place in Uganda (for example impressive levels of economic growth and successful social programmes and campaigns to control and counter the impact of devastating pandemics such as HIV/AIDS) is that Africa can succeed. It was never assumed that Africa could not, but its track record left it looking like a basket case.

Moreover, the Ugandan case demonstrates the importance of the state and its leaders - the government - in achieving successful growth and development in the context of the international political economy, whose conditions and framework generally favours the developed world, and at times adversely affect the development and advancement of the world's least developed countries.

A strong, responsive and responsible state that does not recklessly murder its own people (as was the case in Uganda under Amin) but instead acts in their interest by providing the necessary framework for their development (for example protecting political and civil rights), can flourish in the context of an intensely pressurised and at times harsh international environment.

None the less, armed conflict and continuous emphasis on military solutions may serve to undermine or threaten the social, political and economic gains achieved thus far under president Museveni. Furthermore the President's alleged megalomaniac tendencies and behaviour, within Uganda and the region, may also be creating a problem in terms completing the Ugandan transition.

5. THE NO-PARTY DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

Yoweri Kugata Museveni has "transformed Uganda from a shambles into a thriving concern."²⁵ This has been achieved within a no-party political framework. No-party democracy refers to a system of government that is open in terms of political participation but closed to political party activity thus making its political liberalism limited and reform of the autocratic state somewhat incomplete.

With regard to participation, the system encourages and promotes a limited model of political openness. For instance, within rural villages the participation is widespread as "adult residents gather to decide village issues, electing a council to govern and judge local cases, and recalling any elected officials who they have lost confidence in."²⁶ Museveni therefore points out that the people are involved in "making the decisions, which affect their daily lives."²⁷ In tandem the President argues that democracy "must contain three elements: parliamentary democracy, popular democracy and a descent living for every Ugandan."²⁸ This position is encapsulated in the "NRM's original manifesto, known as the Ten-Point Programme."²⁹

²⁵ Russell A. *Big Men, Little People: Encounters in Africa*. London: Pan Books, 2000: 280.

²⁶ Kasfir N. 'No-Party Democracy in Uganda.' *Journal of Democracy*. 1998; 9(2): 54.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Kasfir 51-54.

In respect of political parties, they are not allowed to actively campaign, operate and challenge the NRM regime. Nelson Kasfir points out Adebayo "parties may exist but are barred from political activity."³⁰ The original rationale for this approach to governance is due to Uganda's history of political sectarianism. Reflecting this reality is the fact that each of Uganda's rulers drew their support from different ethnic and religious groups, all from different parts of the country. Milton Obote was from the North and was a Protestant whereas Idi Amin was a Muslim from a different part of the North. The NRM on the other hand drew most of its support from the South.³¹ As a result, the governing elite argue that the banning of political party activity "is necessary to prevent appeals that smack of sectarianism - a term that in Ugandan usage refers not only to conflicts based on religion, but also to those based on ethnicity or regional ties (in Uganda, the three are often closely linked)."³² As a result many observers saw as plausible Museveni's argument that the country was not ready for multipartyism, as such a system would "exacerbate sectarian tendencies, and hence could never produce democracy."³³

Conversely, the no-party or as the NRM prefer to call it, movement (toward) democracy approach found favour. However while the NRM leadership claim to have created a movement democracy system, full or direct democratic participation beyond the village (at national level) is problematic. For instance, Resistance Committees (RCs) operating beyond the village does not enjoy the same influence and control as that witnessed within the village. Kasfir therefore notes that "even if a village RC wanted to remove someone whom it had originally elected, say on grounds of corruption, it could not do so after that official had been elected to a higher level."³⁴ The implication is that the system is far from an unqualified success in terms of democratic participation and openness at all levels of government, and may not be the ideal system of a traditional African government it is sometimes portrayed as being.

It must further be born in mind that the eastern insurgency that ended several years after the 1986 siege, together with ongoing war in the north suggest that the NRM's legitimacy is questionable.³⁵ Adding to this concern is the fact that the NRM regime is made up largely of Southerners, making it the "first Ugandan government to be run by southerners."³⁶

³⁰ Kasfir 50.

³¹ Kasfir 53.

³² Kasfir 50.

³³ Kasfir 51.

³⁴ Kasfir 51-55.

³⁵ Kasfir 53.

³⁶ Ibid.

6. INTERNATIONAL REACTION TO NO-PARTY DEMOCRACY

Western governments, financial institutions and multilateral organisations, acting as promoters of democratisation, hold the view that “a crisis of governance underlay the litany of Africa’s development problems.”³⁷ As a result they have come out strongly in favour of “political re-newel” underpinned by “political legitimacy and consensus.”³⁸ This has come to be regarded as a “precondition for sustainable development.”³⁹

Two reasons account for the emergence of what can be seen as a post-1989 strategy for development - one emphasising both political and economic liberalism as opposed to previous initiatives, taking the form of structural adjustment that focused on economic liberalisation. Firstly, the collapse of the Soviet Union and communism removed an obstacle to the universal promotion of western style democracy and capitalism. Secondly, Africa’s ongoing economic decline and increased peripheralisation, in spite of adopting western designed economic reform programmes, led to the World Bank, IMF and Western governments attributing “a decade of disappointing results from market-orientated structural adjustment primarily to this mismanagement, rather than to the inadequacies of their recommended policies or the vagaries of the international economic order.”⁴⁰

It is therefore somewhat perplexing that the Ugandan regime has managed to avoid pressure to move its political reform to the next phase and introduce multiparty democracy. Such a position would mean that the post-1989 strategy applies to all African and other states, without exception. As it presently stands, the Ugandan regime does not seem affected by the democratisation aspect, held as integral to the good governance criteria of the post-Cold War liberalisation agenda. Hence commentators like Timothy Shaw and John Ingebedion are proved somewhat incorrect, or at least guilty of overstating their case, when they make the point that “today Africa’s leaders, whether old guard or new breed, have to adapt to a growing number of externally imposed conditions arising out of the neo-liberal economic agenda and good governance criteria, including a push for greater democratisation.”⁴¹

The liberalisation approach of the NRM is flawed and one sided; yet accepted. No-party democracy is a system of governance that is only partially democratic. Participation takes on a direct form at the village (lower) level and is indirect at the national (higher) level. Furthermore, as the name implies parties may exist but are not to engage in political activity. Parties are held to be a source of disunity. This scenario gives rise to a huge contradiction in both the theory and praxis of Ugandan politics and renders the country an exceptional case as the rest of the continent is virtually given no choice but to adopt multipartyism. Larry Diamond poignantly observes, “Uganda is the only African country to liberalise its politics while clinging to the African

³⁷ Williams D, Young T. ‘Governance, the World Bank and Liberal Theory.’ *Political Studies*. 1994; XLII: 86.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Sandbrook R. *The Politics of Africa’s Economic Recovery*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993: 1.

⁴¹ Shaw TM, Ingebedion JE. ‘The Marginalisation of Africa in the New World (Dis)Order’ Stubbs Richard, Underhill Geoffrey (eds.) *Political Economy and the Changing Global Order*. London: Macmillan, 1994: 391.

refrain of the 1960s and 1970s that competing political parties only foster ethnic divisions."⁴² With regard to the view that Ugandan liberalisation is one-sided; this is the case since the leadership openly accords greater priority to the economic dimension.

International promoters or agents of democratisation have for a variety of reasons refrained from pressurising the Ugandan authorities to adopt and implement further political reforms. The motivation must be explored and evaluated as it signals inconsistency, double standards, contradiction and even hypocrisy - all of which hold negative implications for the current African and international wave of democratisation. Developments in Uganda are defined and underpinned by a complex interface between the following factors: its leader, democracy, progress, rights and international action (or in-action.) In essence the dynamic interplay between the above is shaping social, political and economic life within the state.

Museveni has openly rejected multiparty democracy, even though it is presented as an integral part of the post-1989 wave of democratisation and underpins the western model. This lead Alec Russell to point out that "Museveni is a firm believer in the argument that Africa is not ready for multiparty democracy."⁴³ This position is articulated in the Ugandan leaders autobiography 'Sowing the Mustard Seed' in which he writes, "western democracies criticise our system of government but we ignore them. Their opinion is not our concern. I consider it arrogant that the whole world must be managed in the same way."⁴⁴

Economic and social recovery underpinned by the restoration of responsible and stable governance in part accounts for the Ugandan regime been afforded space to decide its own affairs. That is, international role players, comprising governments and institutions have been impressed by the countries economic and political progress and have therefore accepted no-partyism. Nelson Kasfir thus remarks, "many foreign donors, who have become entranced by Uganda's economic and political recovery, have praised its new form of democracy."⁴⁵ Some have gone further (drawing on the sectarianism perspective) arguing, "what is happening in Uganda is... your own type of democracy that is trying to fit into the Ugandan context."⁴⁶

In sum the NRM's adoption and promotion of free enterprise and stable governance led to Museveni receiving the support of the international community. Hence James Walsh observes "with Museveni as its godfather, this realignment of Africa's old order tends to be Anglophone in its international voice, pro-American in its diplomacy and obeisant to Adam Smith in its economics."⁴⁷ Both multilateral and bilateral donors (the agents of liberal democracy) are satisfied with the decision to embrace market economics and with the success achieved. Added to that the manner in which the government tackles social issues like the Aids pandemic sweeping across Africa. Many observe that Museveni is spearheading "one of the most remarkable economic and social comebacks in the world" and he is heralded as a "distinctly new style Big

⁴² Diamond xxi.

⁴³ Russell 282.

⁴⁴ Russell 283.

⁴⁵ Kasfir 50.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Walsh 36.

Man" on the African continent.⁴⁸ While others point out that Uganda's political and economic success "has won it acceptance from Western governments ..."⁴⁹

Such support of the government and its leader dates back to 1987, when the government launched an economic recovery programme. This initiative was "supported by the IMF, the World Bank and bilateral donors."⁵⁰ Three factors appear key in explaining this support: (1) the previous governments eventually came to be despised; (2) economic reform and success is always held in high regard by international leaders; and (3) Museveni is seen as a regional leader and Uganda as a regional power and ally of the West.

Furthermore, the support did not turn out to be misguided, as was the case with many other African states. Uganda, by 1994, "had achieved an average growth rate of 6 % a year for six years."⁵¹ This success was carried on into 2001/ 2002. IMF officials forecast that "Uganda's economy would grow by 5,8% in 2001-2002."⁵² Such a remarkable recovery and rehabilitation of the economy served to decrease "international pressure on Museveni to carry out more rapid political reform."⁵³ For instance, "the New British Labour government has decided that it will not press for multiparty reforms in Uganda."⁵⁴ Furthermore, the Western world found an ally, one who not only enthusiastically embraces their system of free market capitalism, but also opposes extremism such as the former regime of Mobutu Seso Seko and the one in the Sudan. One US official observed, "we don't like Museveni's tendency to meddle regionally but the regional meddling he's done in Sudan we've helped fund."⁵⁵ There is an Islamist government in control of the Sudan, which the US opposes. Whatever the agenda of the Americans may be their behaviour serves to encourage and assist Museveni in promoting illiberal democracy. When they do this, they as a result encourage the IMF, the World Bank and their allies and friends to do the same. Williams and Young make the case, "there can be little doubt that the Bank is influenced by Western countries and in particular the United States."⁵⁶ In tandem George Joffe notes that "both multilateral organisations form the core economic institutions set up at the Bretton Woods conference in the late 1940s and today their philosophies reflect the neo-classical economic concerns of the major powers, particularly the USA..."⁵⁷ The influence of the US is thus beyond doubt.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Diamond xxi.

⁵⁰ Ottaway 38.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² 'IMF Lowers Growth Forecast' *Business Day*. 10 January 2002.

⁵³ Ottaway 38.

⁵⁴ Kasfir 50.

⁵⁵ Walsh 42.

⁵⁶ Williams, Young 88.

⁵⁷ Joffe G. 'Sovereignty and Intervention: The Perspective from the Developing World', Heiberg M (ed.) *Subduing Sovereignty: Sovereignty and the Right to Intervene*. London: Printers Publishers, 1994: 63.

Furthermore they are the most powerful nation in the world and the only superpower. For this reason and others Museveni “delights in his new friendship with America, which once shunned him.”⁵⁸

These factors have culminated in a blatant neglect on the part of Western leaders and institutions, the very one’s who claim to be the promoters of liberal democracy, to pressurise the NRM government to embark on a process of preparing the way for multiparty democracy. The economic and social success, together with Western interest, thus serves to play down the need to ensure the ideal conditions for civil and political rights to develop and flourish. The assumption is not that multiparty democracy is the only means of achieving this but it is arguably the most secure framework.

However, when consideration of conflict in Uganda is taken into account the merit in the no-party approach appears a better option. For example one of the main rebel groups fighting the Ugandan government is Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). For over a decade this group has been conducting an insurgency against the government.⁵⁹ They are a rebel outfit operating in Gulu and Kitgum in Northern Uganda who claim to want to rule the country based on the Bible’s Ten Commandments, yet they have proven to be extremely brutal and violent. Evidence suggests that they and other insurgencies like the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), waging their struggle in the west, are being co-ordinated and supplied by the Sudanese government.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, close observers of the conflict indicate that the war cannot be won. In a war situation no-party democracy may serve to further frustrate the mood in the country. Ottaway argues that “armed opposition still exists and is probably increasing in the north and along the western border, to some extent as a spill over of conflicts in neighbouring countries, but also because of a reservoir of discontent that the government appears incapable or unwilling to address.”⁶¹

Furthermore, “no one in the NRM has done much to develop or articulate the principles behind no-party democracy.”⁶² It would appear that “the NRM leadership may support no-party democracy primarily to help itself maintain its rule in the face of the various conflicts that it has inherited and to which it must respond.”⁶³ It also appears that much hinges on the life and person of President Museveni. The system clearly lacks a strong rationale and justification. The unity and stability of the state has largely been restored and there is a case for moving the country toward the next step of the democratic process. Yet the foreign donors continue to provide unconditional support to the Kampala regime, or rather its president. Illustrative of the latter is the reference to Museveni as the ‘blue eyed boy’ of the west. In some circles he is referred to as the godfather to Africa’s wider changes.⁶⁴ While others refer to him as the Bismarck of Africa.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Walsh 42.

⁵⁹ Hussein S. ‘Prospects for Peace in Northern Uganda’, *Accord - Conflict Trends Magazine*. 1998: 7.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ottaway 46.

⁶² Kasfir 51.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Walsh 36.

Too much praise is bestowed on the Ugandan leader with too little scrutiny of the Ugandan system. The brand of governance that's been promoted focuses primarily on economic success, and to some extent ignores addressing international standards related to civil and political freedoms. That is, it is not concerned with developing a framework and institutional capacity for the latter to flourish.

A variety of factors combine to inform the decision of foreign role players not to insistently promote and impose democracy on Uganda, by urging the NRM to move along its reform programme. Nevertheless, there are numerous reasons that seem to indicate the necessity of a change in approach. Firstly, "elsewhere in Africa, donors have insisted that aid depends on continuous progress toward permitting parties to form and compete freely."⁶⁶ Western governments heavily pressurise authoritarian regimes like that of the recently defeated Daniel arap Moi. Commentators have noted "what envy Kenyan president Daniel arap Moi must feel when he hears the praise that is heaped upon Uganda for its staunch refusal to allow parties!"⁶⁷ Others also remark "as an incomparable case in the Third World, Uganda convinced Western donors to cancel all its earlier debts in view of its positive developments."⁶⁸ It thus emerges that the process of promoting democratisation is marred by inconsistency and double standards, which ultimately threaten to bring down the quality and standard of democratisation in Africa.

Secondly, while its human rights have improved there is still reason for concern: first, Marina Ottaway's research shows that "freedoms of association and speech are still curtailed by the ban on party activities."⁶⁹ Second, a confidential World Bank report "exposed high-level graft of public and donor funds."⁷⁰ A further example is the fact that the President's brother "Major-General Salim Saleh, one of Uganda's wealthiest businessmen, had to resign from his post as a senior government advisor after admitting his role in an illegal deal to secretly buy 49 % of the country's largest Bank."⁷¹ Third, recent elections have been marred by vote rigging, thus undermining Museveni's democratic credentials. "Independent local observers corroborated reports of vote rigging in about a tenth of the country's polling stations."⁷²

Forth, the NRM is not doing enough to reconcile the country's different groups. Uganda comprises a number of ethnic groups, divided along lines of religion (Catholics, Protestants and Muslims) and strong regional ties. "The NRM did not create a program to reconcile groups, but simply expanded its base of support

⁶⁵ Russell 280.

⁶⁶ Kasfir 50.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ *About Uganda*.

⁶⁹ Ottaway 46.

⁷⁰ Russell 285.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² 'Museveni's image looks less glorious, the authors argue that the man who led Uganda out of the dark days has undermined his democratic credentials.' *Business Day*, 16 March 2001: 9.

by offering jobs to their leaders" writes Mahmood Mamdani.⁷³ This is significant if one considers that an important justification of no-party democracy is to foster unity.

Fifth, regional meddling such as the invasion of the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1998 is difficult to justify, especially, since Museveni is also guilty of autocratic leadership and "diplomats say the movement rules as though it is a one-party state."⁷⁴ Furthermore, French diplomats "depict him as an American stooge, helping an Anglo-Saxon take-over of Francophone Africa."⁷⁵

Sixth, the Ugandan model of no-party democracy is insufficiently developed and the NRM appears to lack an ideology. Museveni is central to the survival of both. Hence Kasfir argues that the NRM is "without institutions, without an ideology and, finally, without a rationale that can justify its no-party democracy, it no longer has any existence apart from its leader."⁷⁶

The final point to be made, in favour of the necessity of being consistent in terms of promoting greater democratisation - and showing that Uganda does not warrant exception - is the fact that Museveni is a dictator, albeit a benign or enlightened one, who is currently in his sixteenth year of rule. This reality together with corrupt and undemocratic practices and international action that is driven by selfish national interest, to a large extent is the reason why the African region finds itself facing such great turmoil. It thus emerges that Museveni's achievements are only impressive "in the context of the chaos and anarchy that prevailed elsewhere."⁷⁷

7. CONCLUSION

Uganda represents a complex and intriguing case study. Its system of government is by no means conventional but arguably enjoys a large measure of popular support within the country. Museveni has thus far rejected western preferred and advocated styles of democracy, choosing to co-operate with them but on his own terms. Furthermore apart from opting for a fundamentally different system, Museveni seeks to promote his brand of democracy amongst friends in the region and at one stage resisted internal demands to move Uganda forward - in the direction of free party activity.

International acceptance of Museveni's no-party political order is misguided. International actors take a soft approach because of the egregious nature of past regimes, the autocracy and corruption that surrounds it, strategic regional politics and because of their own national interest (pursuit of regional and economic advantage.)

⁷³ 'NRA/NRM: Two Years in Power' Mamdani Mahmood. *And Fire Does Not Always Beget Ash: Critical Reflections on the NRM*. Kampala: Monitor Publications, 1995: 48.

⁷⁴ 'Museveni's image looks less glorious, the authors(s) argue that the man who led Uganda out of the dark days has undermined his democratic credentials.'

⁷⁵ Walsh 42.

⁷⁶ Kasfir 62.

⁷⁷ Russell 285.

The survival and continued prosperity of the Ugandan state is overly dependent on the president. That is, without him gains made could suffer reverse, both in terms of economic success and stable government. The reason for this is that its political institutions are not sufficiently developed because the movement has not committed to achieving this. In the absence of the NRM created governance realm, one premised largely on stability and good economic governance, international donors are likely not to be as generous and friendly.

A number of important lessons emerge from the Ugandan experience. One, the politics of process is important. No-party democracy is supposedly part of a process and it has underpinned much economic success. Two, external actors such as multilateral and bilateral donors are inconsistent. Three, liberal democracy may not be Africa's only option. This point holds as yet unexplored implications for the objectives of the newly constituted African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).