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UGANDA 'TODAY'*

Mahmood Mamdani

Thank you for inviting me to speak with you today. I'd like for us to focus our attention on an important recent event in Uganda: the takeover of power by the National Resistance Army (NRA) last January (1986). I will try to explain or underline the significance of that event and put it into context, particularly as it relates to Uganda, but also with respect to Africa. Although this is not the first example of a successful armed struggle in Africa, I think it would be correct to say that it is the first example of a successful armed struggle in an *independent* African country. All other instances have essentially been armed struggles in settler colonies. The anti-colonial struggles in Africa tended to be relatively peaceful in African colonies without large settler populations, and tended to take on the form of armed struggle where you did have settler colonialism, since the settler bourgeoisie had independent political aspirations which had to be dealt with. Though the method of struggle was different, I think the commonality was underlined by the objectives. Essentially these were struggles for national independence in the context of colonialism. So I think the events of last January merit attention at least for no other reason than that they suggest something new, so far as developments in Africa are concerned. So, what is new, and why? While I will try to underline the historical character of the recent developments in Uganda in order to begin to address these questions, I'm not going to start at the beginning; i.e. the pre-colonial and colonial period. Rather, I'll take as my starting point the events surrounding the fall of the Amin regime, and suggest to

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you that the first important thing to grasp if we are to understand the existing situation in Uganda is that the fall of the Amin regime in 1979 was not a "liberation". It was put forth as a liberation, but it was essentially the outcome of an interstate war between the armies of two different states, the consequence of which was the fall of the Amin regime in Uganda. That it constituted a liberation struggle has been an essential component of the ideology of every regime in Uganda since the fall of Amin. And that it did *not* constitute liberation has been equally essential to all of the stories and jokes in Uganda since Amin's fall. If a soldier stole your watch you say your watch has been liberated, giving a very different meaning to what the regime called liberation.

This is significant because you don't have many such instances where the existing repressive state apparatus has been dismantled. Amin runs away, the security forces and intelligence collapse and the repressive state apparatus is dismantled without a revolution. There has been no revolution and yet the repressive apparatus has been dismantled. It has to be reconstructed in the absence of any revolutionary mobilization or organization of the people, and it is essentially the factional struggle inside the dominant classes which shapes this newly reconstructed repressive apparatus. From 1979 onward, the repressive apparatus tended almost mechanically to reflect the factions inside the dominant class. You didn't have one army, you had at least four armies; you didn't have one intelligence service, you had at least four intelligence services. This also tended to condition the social character of those who were recruited inside these institutions.

I think one could say, to step back for a moment, that what was distinctive about the Amin army as opposed to the armies before was that it recruited predominantly from the lumpen strata, the urban riff raff, the unemployed, etc., and not the peasantry. This began around 1973 when you had the first big mobilization in the city of Kampala of the unemployed as volunteers of the liberation struggle in South Africa and in Palestine. Approximately 6,000 unemployed participated in this mobilization, and were subsequently recruited into an army which numbered only around 12,000 or 13,000 soldiers. After 1979, with the army and intelligence services being built up in the context of competition between different factions, you had a built-in impetus to develop these institutions as rapidly as possible. Each of these factions was recruiting from what we call training centers, made up of the semi-urban or urban riff raff population. Unlike Mobutu's coup in the mid '60s in Zaire, in the Ugandan case the factionalism inside the dominant classes was reproduced inside the state power itself, and consequently the state did not really have the necessary autonomy from the factions of

the dominant classes to impose a common discipline on them in their own interest.

So let us take some time now to examine the dominant class. I will use the word bourgeoisie, although I recognize it's a contentious word, especially given the character of this class in Uganda. It has some very distinctive features, so I will concentrate on underlining these distinctive features so that we don't spend our time in an argument over terminology, but instead focus on the processes that we are discussing. As a broad, although historically accurate generalization, one can say that the development of an indigenous bourgeoisie in African countries in the colonial period tended to go through two different stages. The first stage lasted roughly up to the Second World War, with the colonial powers essentially using political power itself to forestall the development of an indigenous bourgeoisie. It couldn't stop the process completely but wished to dampen it as much as possible. You had in the north and south of Africa generally a settler bourgeoisie whose origin was the imperialist country itself, and in the east and west of Africa, an immigrant bourgeoisie generally from the older colonies of India (in East Africa) and Lebanon (in West Africa). The indigenous middle class bourgeoisie tended to herald and champion the national struggle.

But after World War II with the development of militant nationalism, there was a shift in colonial policy. The colonial powers began to recognize the weakness of a strategy which discouraged the development of a middle stratum. Without a substantial middle stratum, and we're not even talking about a bourgeoisie at this point, you don't have a force which can, from the point of view of imperialism, discipline and contain the national movement. There is no force which will fight for the defense of property, forget the specific distinction between foreign property, local property, etc. After the Second World War, a whole series of colonial reforms were instituted with the general purpose of encouraging the development of this stratum, and they went under the rubric of "Africanization".

This process accelerated after independence, so that in most African countries, the development of an indigenous bourgeoisie is only very recent. The point I would like to emphasize is that the development of an indigenous bourgeoisie tends to be "top down", rather than "bottom up" in character. Access to state position tends to determine who is going to enter into the ranks of this bourgeoisie. This, I think, is of even greater significance in the Ugandan case, particularly as it relates to Amin's expulsion in 1972 of the Asian bourgeoisie along with all other classes within the Asian community in Uganda.

The redistribution of property and the creation of what was called the *Mafuta Mengi* Group, resulted in tension between this group which inherited the newly redistributed property and the state power itself. The state regarded this group with some suspicion, fearing that in time it might want to have its own control over state policy and might therefore be a source of coup attempts. This tension was partially resolved through redistribution of property. In the eight years of the Amin regime you had four redistributions of property, this group being reconstituted four times, in a sense. The result was the creation of a big property group with an extremely short-run orientation which had very little reason to believe in its long-run survival as individuals. This short-run orientation manifested itself in its preference of trade to production, black marketeering to trade, speculation to black marketeering, etc.

The only historical parallel I can think of is that of Pakistan after the partition in the 1940s and the expulsion of the Hindu bourgeoisie from West Pakistan. Up to the Ayubkhan regime, you have this extensive distribution and redistribution of property, and a bourgeoisie with a very short-term orientation which is extremely anti-social in character. This situation continues until Ayubkhan comes to power, after which there is a sort of legal affirmation of property rights which subsequently remain relatively untouched by the actions of any specific regime.

It is this type of a "bourgeoisie" to which we are now referring, and its character is further accentuated in the second Obote regime by the IMF program of 1981-84. A very important part of the IMF program was liberalization, essentially in the name of doing away with corruption. It called for an end to any mediation by state power between the domestic and foreign markets, with numerous implications which I will discuss later. Part of the liberalization involved allocation on the basis of the real costs of commodities, and real costs were reflected most clearly in the black market rather than the official market, which was tampered with by the state. So the real value of local currency was something closer to the black market value. As part of this program, you had a series of devaluations along with a built-in mechanism for continuous devaluation through weekly auctions of dollars. This provided a splendid opportunity for speculation, because with the dollars you bought this week, you had every interest in making sure those dollars were costlier next week so you could sell what you bought this week and make a speculative gain the following week. This resulted in rapid inflation of the Ugandan currency, from 8 shillings per dollar to approximately 1200 shillings per dollar within a relatively short

period of time. For this group which we referred to earlier, its most lucrative activity was not simply speculation but *currency* speculation.

Let me look briefly at the other classes in society, before I discuss the events of January. I hope you understand I am trying to throw light on it. I'm not going to give you a blow-by-blow account of who did what to whom. I can leave that to others more conversant with immediate events. Especially significant were the middle classes in Uganda, and particularly the intelligentsia. Ugandans tended to have a fairly large intelligentsia because historically, commodity production in Uganda has tended toward small commodity production by peasant producers, unlike in Kenya where there was predominantly settler production or in Tanganyika which combined the two. In Uganda, with millions of coffee-producing, cotton-producing, tobacco-producing peasants, you needed a fairly large civil service either to insure the quality of the product or to collect taxes. To provide this, a well-developed educational system was necessary to insure that this civil service was created and reproduced. Consequently, Uganda historically has had the most developed educational system in East Africa, and a large intelligentsia. And until about three years ago, even the university intelligentsia here tended to come predominantly from the middle peasantry and not from the dominant classes in society. The trend was for children of rich peasants to go overseas and this intelligentsia, after being trained in school, would leave the rural areas and obtain jobs in the cities.

All of this ended after the IMF program was implemented, however, because one of the conditions of the program required that this subsidy be discontinued. At the same time, due to inflation, fixed incomes became relatively meaningless. The response of the middle class with fixed incomes was essentially twofold. A significant sector of that middle class began to "moonlight" and also developed certain lumpen characteristics in order to survive in any way possible. Another sector of this middle class returned to the rural areas, since it was easier to make ends meet in the rural areas. I will return to this question when I discuss the politics of the middle class intelligentsia. Let me continue with the mapping that I am trying to do of Ugandan society.

The origin of a stable working class in Uganda is very recent, if we exclude migrant labor. We can trace it back to just after World War II, when an import substituting industry developed. I think one important characteristic of this working class was that a large number, not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of militancy and organizational skills, came from Kenya. The 1950s were also the period of the repression of Mau Mau in Kenya, and this resulted in a

rapid influx of especially militant and politically involved Kenyan workers into Uganda who found employment in the newly-established manufacturing industry. It is this sector in particular which provided leadership to workers in the years immediately following independence. In 1963-64 there was a series of wildcat strikes, essentially articulating the feeling among workers that only one sector of society had really achieved independence, and that workers had certain demands. The response of the first Obote regime was to pass legislation making it illegal for non-Ugandans to hold trade union positions. Then the same thing was accentuated with the first major economic crisis in 1969 after the assassination attempt on Obote. This year also saw the first major expulsion in Uganda's history - the expulsion of thousands of Kenyan workers from Uganda.

We see then that the most militant sector of the Ugandan working class was from outside of Uganda, and by the late 1960s, had already been purged from the unions. During the Amin regime, then, the working class had very little capacity to combat what was happening. It had already been battered, and was further battered through sheer objective processes; economic crisis, industrial crisis (which was most acute at the time), unemployment, etc. And this same trend which was accelerated by the IMF program again ended state mediation between the world market and the local market. The result was similar to what occurred during the colonial period, which was the flooding of the local market by relatively cheap foreign goods and the destruction of domestic industry. With the working class brutalized and reduced to its bare bones and unable to make ends meet from what they earned, many were forced to move into part-time hawking, retailing, or theft to survive. Yet there are accounts of wildcat strikes during this period, the most important of which was that of the postal workers and communication workers. Still, the city remained the front line of repression, and was still where the power of the regime was the strongest and where sustained opposition the least likely.

We turn now to the peasantry. I think in places like Uganda which are generally characterized by small commodity production, (leaving out labor reserve areas and landlord-tenant relations), the exploitation of the peasantry tends to have a twofold character. On the one hand exploitation exists through market relations. This has been extensively analysed and documented. The role of marketing boards is very well known. In the case of Uganda where coffee is the dominant crop (now something like 90 percent of export income), in the colonial period the peasant producer prices were roughly 40 to 50 percent of the selling prices of the marketing boards. In the Amin period it was

roughly 35 percent and in the second Obote period it was about 19 percent and declining.

Another form of exploitation to which the peasantry was subjected, which received much less attention, was extra-economic in nature (i.e. coercion which was not the result of market forces but was instead the result of direct compulsion on the peasantry by the employment of political power). It took various forms. The government forced the peasant to grow certain crops (an acre of cotton, for example), forced sales, forced labor (labor which previously had been used for the community now became labor for the state); forced contributions (by the ruling party or the chief); and forced land enclosures. These things varied. And I refer to the state now in a very broad sense, because it can be the ruling party, the state authority, or the church. These are the three main groups which will extract by means of these forms of extra-economic compulsion.

So the relationship between small commodity producers--peasants--and the state power has a twofold character again. On the one hand it is purely extractive but on the other hand, part of what is extracted is returned. It is returned in two forms. 1) It is returned through subsidies (extension programs and things like that--seeds, fertilizer, etc.) to insure the continued reproduction of the technical basis of agriculture. 2) It is returned through social subsidies (schools, medicine, transport) ensuring the social reproduction of the peasantry itself. Since one of the conditionalities attached to the IMF program was that all subsidies be discontinued (all commodities must sell according to their market prices), much of this return to the peasantry was discontinued. So although the pervasive myth was that peasant income was going up, the reality was in fact the opposite, if we are to consider this large reduction in indirect social income. Since the peasants' indirect social income vanished entirely, all income was reduced to direct income, which may have only increased slightly.

A significant political outcome of this process was that the state now appeared as a purely extractive and repressive force, since it now returned nothing to the peasants. It was not the source of education; it was not the source of transport; it was not the source of health care. You had to pay for everything. Even more important in terms of this changed relationship between the peasant and the state, was the shift in the character of exploitation, from market to extra-economic (since export must continue, roads still had to be cleared and other infrastructure developed and maintained). The peasant was subject to more and more demands by the state, and this provided the basis for the peasant revolts which followed. Peasant revolts occurred not simply

where the NRA was organized. They occurred throughout Uganda. The best known are the tax revolts in Busoga in 1983. The important point for the purposes of our discussion is that you can divide the country into two types of areas. When the peasants revolted, the peasantry was a force on its own and peasant revolts tended to have the character of a bush fire. They erupted and then died down. They tended to lack any real direction except in confronting their immediate enemies and then they tended to collapse.

So let me briefly deal with the question now of why you had this type of political orientation which resulted in the NRA, and the ideological orientation of the progressive intelligentsia. In Uganda the dominant ideological orientation of progressive intellectuals in the period immediately following independence was essentially characterized by the left wing of the Uganda People's Congress Party (UPC) of that period in control of the secretary generalship, in control of the UPC Youth League, etc. It was an orientation which asserted that progressive intellectuals should strive to get as many positions within the state as possible and then to use these positions to implement reforms in the interest of the people.

The experience of the first Obote regime partially discredited this thinking, the experience of the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) period (1979-80) further undermined it, and it was completely discredited during the second Milton Obote regime. But I think by the time even of the UNLF period, the idea that the neo-colonial state was not an appropriate vehicle for transforming a neo-colonial society increasingly became an idea which had a serious echo from minority sectors of the progressive intelligentsia. The lesson which it drew was that the state must be confronted and could be transformed from within. It was a lesson which was drawn in a certain context--the context of liberation struggles, such as that which occurred in Mozambique. And it was drawn by that sector of the intelligentsia in the closest contact with the struggle. Within the theoretical context of Frantz Fanon, the theoretician of armed struggle under conditions of settler colonialism, the conception was that the struggle must unfold as it had unfolded in settler colonies: you had progressive intellectuals moving outside the country; they would organize themselves there and obtain guerilla training etc.; they would then return to the country and confront the forces of the state; through that confrontation they would organize the peasantry and the peasantry would spontaneously rise up to join them. This was the idea. Now whereas this did tend to happen in settler colonies because the enemy was absolutely clear - it was a colony and it had settlers - it didn't happen in Uganda.

In Uganda what happened was that you had a group of committed heroic individuals confronting another group of committed dastardly individuals. It was as if the peasantry was at a football game. It was free to cheer and free to boo, but couldn't take part in the game. And of course, the result was defeat in 1972. So the changing ideological perspective was the result of a series of failures--people learn through mistakes, not just through reading books. This learning process is based upon what's happening inside Africa, and represents a deepening understanding of how our own situation is not quite the same as that of Mozambique or Zimbabwe.

So in 1980, instead of going to Tanzania or Rwanda these fellows moved into the countryside and initiated a guerilla struggle whose origin was urban, not rural. And the most interesting thing I think about the guerilla struggle which does take place is that you really had in the Buganda countryside (particularly workers in an area called the Luwero Triangle) not one, but several tendencies which were confronting the Obote regime. Each tendency was upholding a separate, distinctive orientation and conception of the nature of the struggle and of the problem in Uganda.

There were two major groups: one was the National Resistance Army, which is in power now, and the other was the Uganda Freedom Movement (UFM). And I think the most interesting development in that period of 1981-84 was the political (not military) defeat of the UFM by NRA. I think the significance will be clear once we understand that the UFM essentially was an anti-regime movement, but it was also a movement whose organizing ideology was what in the West is commonly called "tribalism". In other words, they put forth the conception of Buganda exceptionalism, and the exceptionalism of the oppression of the Buganda people. They therefore pointed to the need for an exceptional response to the regime which should be a Baganda response. Its leadership came from Buganda, its cadres came from Buganda. The NRA's leadership did not come from Buganda and its ideology was not tribal. Yet it succeeded in politically defeating the UFM in the Buganda countryside.

The question then is why did this occur, and what is its significance? I think the reason they were able to defeat the UFM politically is because what they carried out in the countryside was essentially an agrarian revolution. What they did in the countryside was to dismantle the existing authority of the state: the agents of the state at the local level--chiefs, sub-district commissioners, people like that. In other words, that agency which was crucial and pivotal to extra-economic compulsion through which extra-economic compulsion and

exploitation of the peasantry took place; that agency which had been untouched since colonialism. You could have elections in Kampala but the chief would never be elected. Even the UNLF, when it formed peasant committees, saw these as strictly complementing the chief to just curb *magendo* (black marketeering) but it wasn't supposed to democratize local authority. I think what was crucial to the social program of the NRA in the countryside was the dismantling of the local apparatus of the state. It was tantamount to a transformation in production relations because it was creating a free peasantry for the first time. In what had been a semi-free peasantry, now the conditions for a free peasantry were being created. These structures were being replaced by peasant committees, elected by the peasants themselves.

This "democratization" had a very different significance in a country where the bulk of the producers were not free. In a country like Uganda, this process stands in contrast to "tribalism", which is the construction of a united front or alliance between different classes of a particular ethnic grouping from above by a faction of the dominant class, the underlying objective of which is to reproduce the existing state. While it can be anti-regime, it is not anti-state at any point. I hope this distinction is clear. The NRA's politics of democratization were not only anti-regime, they were moreover *anti-state*. This represented the construction of a united front from the bottom up now, not from the top down. From the bottom up through an ideology whose purpose was to organize the oppressed and disorganize the oppressor.

Tribalism, on the other hand, conceived of a similar united front from above with the purpose of organizing factions of the oppressors and disorganizing the oppressed by pitting them against one another. It did this by convincing the workers and peasants that the source of the problem transcended class interests; that it was "our" problem as members of a particular social grouping against these others. There are important lessons to be learned from what happened in Uganda for other parts of Africa. It's not necessary for me to draw out these lessons for you today; after all, we are all thinking them and doing them. I have attempted here to lay out before you the raw material, a smorgasbord if you like. You can decide what to pick and feast on.

DISCUSSION

- Q: I feel almost dissatisfied with the fact that you have to stop here. Could I call on the chair to allow you to continue for a few more minutes? Is the state in the process of transformation now that the NRA has taken

control?

MM:

It is difficult to give a straight-forward answer to what you are asking, but I think I can underline a few aspects of it. The sort of agrarian program I am talking about was not implemented in any more than 20 percent of the country. The NRA themselves, even by their own reckoning in terms of an organized presence, controlled only perhaps 30 or 40 percent of the country before they took power. The support is much wider, but it is not organized support.

So we are in a curious situation. Reality seldom conforms to textbooks, but it should approximate it to a substantial degree if those textbooks are to remain on the shelves! Here you have a situation where the agrarian revolution has yet to be substantially carried out. The question which arises is, who will do this? Is it possible to have the subject of change also be its object? The target in this case is the state; can we expect it to dismantle the agents of the state? It would be difficult to predict the outcome of the struggles now taking place, since state power in contemporary Uganda has a very contradictory character. On the one hand there is a civil service which is essentially inherited; on the other hand a new army, the guerilla, has come to power. And this army which has been carrying out the revolution against the civil service is confronting that same civil service.

Clearly, it is a very transitional situation and one whose outcome is difficult to predict with any degree of certainty. We have no crystal ball to look into. So all I can do is to point out the variables which we might look at in order to get a sense of what is happening.

Q.

You have presented to us the underlying economic structures influencing Ugandan politics, the class formation, the objective conditions and so forth. But it appears that the same analysis could be applied to many other African countries. This then poses the

question, what explains the question of state formation in Uganda? What is it that is unique in Uganda which explains its ongoing crisis with respect to state formation?

MM: Well, I think I tried at least to partly hint at this from the very beginning. If you believe that this crisis, from the point of view of the dominant classes in society, is really a crisis from 1979 onward, and that these "musical chairs" which have been played since that time have had much to do with the way the Amin regime was thrown out, we must examine the reasons why political groups in Uganda have been unsuccessful in forging strong movement...

Q: To answer this, though, you have to explain the actions of Obote when he took power, the conflicts with the *Kabaka*, why Amin took over, how he could do what he did, why Obote came back and could not hold the system together, etc. What is it in Uganda's history to bring all of this?

MM: I don't have a two-sentence answer to all that. Really. You are asking me to digest, crystalize and present to you the essence of the history of Uganda. I think maybe we could discuss this later on, but it would be very difficult for me to give such a summary.

Q: I get the impression that when the Kenyan labor leaders were expelled from the country, suddenly the urban working class becomes rather impotent and plays no progressive role in the struggle. I get the impression that outsiders were the agitators. I know that this is not your position, so I would like it if you would elaborate on the reasons for the lack of activity and participation of the urban working class in the NRA?

MM: You could ask the question differently. What were the reasons for the NRA's failure to organize the urban working class? You see what I mean, depending on the point of view. I remember a

discussion in Zimbabwe some time ago and the minister of labor of the new government was saying why did the Zimbabwean working class fail to support ZANU, and somebody said "Why did ZANU fail to organize?" Two very different perspectives on the same empirical fact. But first I would like to correct two erroneous impressions which I may have given you. One, that there was no struggle after the expulsion of the Kenyan workers. There *was* struggle, but it was a much more weakened class. Two, that the role of the Kenyan workers had nothing to do with the fact that they came from outside. It had to do with the fact that this was the only sector of the working class which came with traditions of struggle in a context where other sectors were just being freshly recruited. They came with a tradition of struggle and a history of confrontation with settler colonialism and capacities to organize. This is why they tended to take leading positions both inside and outside the trade union movement, and the 1969 expulsion really represented the departure not only of Kenyan workers but the departure of the most experienced leadership of militant trade unions. This had the effect of crippling the working class.

But even after the Amin regime came to power with all of the promises of Amin, within six months there was a series of strikes that he had to confront, starting with city council workers and going on. And throughout the Obote regime you did have wildcat strikes. You can't pinpoint any period of more than two or three months where you did not have a strike going on.

Although I'm not privy to internal developments in the NRA, my own understanding is that the whole question of the relationship between the struggle of the peasantry and struggle of the working class in the urban areas would have been raised inside the NRA. Similar issues have had to be addressed in other attempts to organize struggles of this sort, such as that of the Mulele group in Zaire. The assessment of the Mulele group was essentially that we were wrong to

think that the countryside could confront the urban areas; we must, in fact, build an alliance; how is this alliance to be built between the working class and the peasantry?

In Uganda, the organization or the attempts to organize the peasantry coincided with a very sharp internal crisis of the bourgeoisie and its internal factional disintegration, of which this movement (the NRA) became a beneficiary to some extent. We could expect that in a different context it might have had to go a much longer distance before such a capture of power would have been possible. And those questions would have actually been confronted in practice.

Q: Now that the NRA is in power, what is its strategy for rebuilding Uganda?

MM: You know I am not a representative of the NRA and they have just come to power, and I have been outside the country - three fatal problems! I can only refer to the document they wrote: the Ten Point Program. The dominant issue which comes out of this document is building a national economy--linking agriculture and industry. Samir Amin talks about this. I'm not trying to avoid your question, but it would be presumptuous of me to try to say more than the little I have said. Maybe Godfrey Okoth could elaborate.

GO: I am also not a representative of the NRA, and I think that any effort by us to speculate on these matters at this early stage would be premature. We will have to wait and see what happens.

Q: You mentioned peripherally throughout your discussion about how imperialism impinged on the situation in Uganda, particularly in reference to the creation of these middle classes from above, the coffee crop, and the IMF which comes in here and there. Could you expand on that, particularly the role of arms sales? I would also like to take this

opportunity to ask another question, which you may have already covered: "What is the class basis of the NRA?"

MM: Let me take the last question first. The NRA is essentially a coalition. Its leadership comes from the middle class intelligentsia, petite-bourgeois sectors of society--people like Okoth and me whose social background is the peasantry. But in terms of class, they are the middle class intelligentsia who have their organized social base in the middle and poor peasantry. The government they have created now is really a coalition between this group and factions of the dominant classes. Landed interests from Buganda are found in that coalition; merchant comprador interests are found in that coalition. So it is a very uneasy coalition. It's a transitional one as I see it.

So far as the role of imperialism is concerned, you mentioned that my remarks in this regard were exclusively confined to the question of the role of the IMF. For me, of course, the most interesting part of the story has been the internal developments. In a way, you could reconstruct the same story from 1979. Very briefly, I think in 1979 you have what amounts to an African parallel to Haiti and the Philippines: the solution of the question of dictatorship from the point of view of imperialism, whether it is Bokasa, Nguema or Idi Amin. Not that it is a solution created by imperialism; imperialism is confronted with existing development, but it is development which is acceptable to imperialism and therefore encouraged by it. The Ugandan solution is an example of a social dictatorship--the Idi Amin regime in Uganda--not from the outside but from upstairs. It is not a solution from below.

Following that, the first government which came into power, the Lule regime had a very narrow base internally which was essentially landed property in Uganda, and that sector of the comprador connected with it. Externally, it was basically connected to

Britain. With each crisis you had an attempt to create a regime with a broader internal and external base. Over time, there was a shift from Britain to the United States, and internally there was an attempt to bring in larger and larger sectors of the comprador bourgeoisie in Uganda. With Obote back in power, there were at least two key compromises he made with the West. One was on the question of the IMF program. I think it was agreed that this program would be implemented. The IMF had never before had a laboratory free of charge and complete freedom of experimentation as it had in Uganda.

The second concerned the return of what was called "abandoned property", in the strange political language of Uganda. By this it was meant the property which was taken at the time of the expulsion of the Asian bourgeoisie in 1972--the return of the luminaries of the comprador Asian bourgeoisie which were connected to Britain. These compromises had been made in advance by Obote. Strangely enough, the IMF program undercut his social base completely. He had not only a tribal ethnic base, but he also had a base within the middle class which rested on the myth that he was a champion of reforms, and represented something akin to a move to the left, etc. This support dissolved completely, because it became clear that none of this was in the offering.

Essentially, the UPC, which stood for a kind of nationalism which was fighting a battle on two fronts--imperialism on the one hand and the people on the other--got sandwiched between the two in the coup of 1971. Obote rejected the conclusion of Nkrumah, who found himself in a similar situation and decided instead that there is a class struggle in Africa and you must confront imperialism on the basis of an organization constituted through this struggle. Obote's conclusion was the opposite: you can't afford to have two enemies at the same time, you must join with imperialism and that is what he did.

Q: I would like you to address the Tanzanian role in Ugandan political developments, particularly with regard to the position that there is no liberating effect in Tanzania's movement towards overthrowing the Idi Amin government in Uganda. Given the history of Tanzanian involvement in cultivating and nurturing the Ugandan resistance movement, it seems rather odd that you would just dismiss it.

MM: There are two types of positions on the Tanzanian role, usually coming from the same quarters but from two different periods. There is the position that Tanzania liberated Uganda. Here, to me, even the conception of somebody liberating you is so strange. The theoretical perspective from which I come is that the oppressed must liberate themselves. So the very minute you have a historical process which claims that one social grouping has liberated someone else, there is something wrong. But one conception is this one. The other conception is that Tanzania is responsible for all of the problems in Uganda. It comes from the same people. The people who said in 1979 that Tanzania liberated Uganda are the same people who in 1980 said that Tanzania was responsible for Obote.

I think that what this underlines is the failure to admit and emphasize the historical responsibility and the historical failure of the Ugandan Left--the failure of the Ugandan Left to create anything beyond small, tiny groups, confined to the middle class, without any organized base before 1979. In terms of the general flow of historical developments in Uganda, that cannot be characterized as liberation. It was essentially a confrontation of two states. And I think that the coming to power of Obote in 1980 cannot be explained as the result of a conspiracy by Tanzania. First of all, any conception of an external conspiracy would have to see Tanzania at most as a conduit. We cannot establish that Tanzania was ever in a position to be the conspirator. The most it could be is a conduit because of its own weakness. Secondly, what this conspiracy theory ignores is how it might

have been successful. Because, of course, there are thousands of conspiracies and not all of them are successful. What makes some successful and others fail? We must address internal issues if we are to answer this question. Why was this conspiracy successful? Because there was no alternative which represented the historical fruit of the organization of other social forces in society. So, I would like to clarify my remarks. I do not think that an explanation based on Tanzania as the subject of history in Uganda, whether it sees Tanzania as positive or negative, can really explain what happened. I do not even think that Tanzania's role was even as significant as it appeared.

Q: So you don't think Tanzania's involvement in Uganda was a pre-condition for the overthrow of Amin. Do you think it could have developed without a significant contribution from Tanzania? Without posing it as a "liberation" or the idea that Tanzania is solely responsible, I think it should not be conceived as a zero sum relationship; this obscures the significant role played by Tanzania. It doesn't have to be either a completely liberating force or a completely dominating force. There could be a middle road with respect to the role Tanzania played in the development of Museveni himself. I don't believe that conditions in Uganda would be as different as they are without Tanzanian involvement.

MM: I think the significance of Tanzanian involvement is important, particularly in reference to the overthrow of the Amin regime. Obviously, it was a great thing and we were all very happy. At home, one doesn't want to appear ungrateful after eating a good meal because you can't have another good meal. However, having thrown off the Amin regime, Tanzania really was unable to keep its army as the guarantor of law and order in Uganda. It had to withdraw. So essentially the period in which Tanzania could shape developments inside Uganda was a limited period and things had to return to what forces inside of Uganda

were capable or incapable of doing. It therefore brings us to the question of the crisis inside the bourgeoisie in Uganda. It points to the failure to work out any kind of unity. It brought this crisis to a head because it put the contention for political power now at the center. And *in that sense*, objectively it contributed to the acceleration of this disintegration, *not* because it put forces in Uganda. So not in the sense in which some would have it. After all I think one thing which was very characteristic of the NRA is that it did not have any external base anywhere. It did all its training inside the country. Very little training was done outside, and if it occurred outside it was never conducted in Tanzania, surely enough.

Q: In the Buganda areas, what is the state of ethnic relations. Has there been a major shift in the Buganda peasantry and the Buganda ideology?

MM: You see the problem with the analysis is not that empirically this has not been a problem, it surely has been. Rather, it is the general failure to explain it, and the failure to concretize it. Tribalism essentially has been an expression of the fact that political initiative has been confined to a particular class in society. Tribalism represents a way of cementing an alliance with other classes as they fight their own factional struggles. To the extent that the NRA represents for the first time a widening in terms of exercise of political initiative beyond this dominant class in Uganda, that widening ideology is expressed through non-tribal orientations.

Whether tribalism will once again occupy the center of the stage or not will depend on the political forces that control developments in Uganda...It is a question of pitting the agents of the state, who are from every part of Uganda and from all nationalities, against the producing classes from whom they extract through compulsions. And to the extent that this struggle is promoted, it becomes very difficult to reconstitute politics on a tribal basis. But, if this movement does

not go forward and the result is again simply a sharing of the spoils among the members of the NRA, then of course tribalism will return to the center of the stage, because that is how spoils are shared between factions of certain classes. This is the way in which they are able to organize the people behind them to strengthen their own demands. "We deserve more! Why do we have only one Muganda in the cabinet--if you have three!"

To see the significance of this, we should briefly review the history of politics in Uganda. After all Buganda was the area in which in the days of the militant Nationalist Movement, you had a very sharp class struggle. The peasants were fighting against the chiefs. If you start with the Bataka Movement in the 1920s and come to the peasant uprisings of 1945 and 1949, these were essentially uprisings of the peasantry against the Buganda chiefs of the colonial state. I think the analysis of the colonial reforms of the 1950s is really a question of how this movement was demobilized.

The problem with tribalism is that it begins with the perspective of the dominant classes, so the only thing that exists for it is the internal factional struggle. So if you begin with a different perspective, it doesn't mean that the internal factional struggle doesn't exist, or that tribalism doesn't exist, but that it is an expression of a particular class. It's not class versus tribalism; it isn't. If you look at any analysis of religion, people are beginning to understand that there is not one Islam--there are several Islams; there is not one Christianity--there are several Christianities. The Christianity of the Pope is not the same as the Christianity of liberation theology, expressing the politics of different classes in society. Why can't one have a similar concrete understanding of tribalism?

I'll give an example. In 1983 I was doing research in the northern part of Ugandan villages--the part of Uganda where there has been very little penetration of

commodity relations and where communal practices still dominate. In 1975, Amin issued a land reform decree providing for state appropriations of land. Peasants resisted this land appropriation on the basis of what you could call "tribalism", claiming that these are common lands. Their "tribalism" also manifested itself in other demands, such as the community defense of its tradition that there be no perennial crops on this land, or that during the dry season all goats and cattle be put to graze everywhere (effectively precluding the raising of perennial crops). Expressed in terms of tribalism, objectively it is really a defense against capital. So what we call tradition is not something which is unproblematically carried from past to present. It is born through confrontation and struggle, and then reborn. And each time we must analyze it in its specific context. So there is tribalism which is also progressive. It is only modernization theory which teaches people that tribalism is always bad. Tribalism is something which has been reified, something which possesses no history, which possesses no class or social content.