

Zaire and Uganda as Models of African Corruption

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Abstract

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (the ex-Zaire) and Uganda serve as African corruption models within the context of European colonialism and its disastrous effects on the continent. Comparisons between Idi Amin's and Mobutu Sese Seko's leadership styles will be made, along with the colonial influence of Belgium, the United Kingdom, and others, on their ex-colonies and the caste system that materialized, leaving many African nations with political instability. This can be attributed to the colonizers stealing resources, pillaging towns and villages, enslaving citizens, and engaging in other destructive activities, pitting nation-states against one another, leaving unstable societal structures. Depending on the colonial power, many colonies were left with varying degrees of ethnic strife, inadequate roads, and insufficient resources to sustain their economies. Mobutu and Amin are prime examples of the colonialist mentality's lasting influence and the engagement of corruption, kleptocracy and other forms of usurpation to gain power militarily, serving as a means by which they built their own empires. This was done to please themselves, to make up for inadequacies or feelings of inferiority ingrained in them by colonialism's ugly face through years of subjugation. This dehumanization of sorts still surfaces periodically throughout the African continent today.

KEYWORDS: African politics, colonialism, Mobutu, Amin, Congo, Uganda, Zaire

INTRODUCTION

For many years, the countries once known as Zaire, or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Uganda can be said to have once been some of the most corrupt countries in Africa. President Mobutu allowed so much extortion and other illegal means of gaining monetary funds that he even encouraged his own people in the system to follow his own example, and Uganda also carried a kleptocracy itself under Idi Amin. Mobutu as well as Amin had practically billions of dollars taking advantage of the African people, smuggling goods back and forth through both countries, and even engaging in stolen property with other African states. This was not only limited to property but to currency exchanges as well. Zaire and Uganda were said to be kleptocratic states, ones in which, as mentioned corruption was high (and still is), extortion was prevalent, and self-aggrandizement and embezzlement occurred frequently. For example, "It is not surprising that in countries like Zaire, employment is valued more for the opportunities it affords in the secondary economy than for the woefully insignificant wages" (Schissel, 1989). Under Amin, "The principal cause of the government's economic failures has been the vast amount of expenditures devoted

to the military” (Ravenhill, 1974). An individualist standpoint can best describe the model of corruption that the former Zaire has become today. The system itself was kept in place by a large militaristic type of government, in which there was a large standing army, high defence spending, a high-tech defence industry, and a controlling leadership, which of course was led by both President Mobutu and Amin. Each decided how and when things got done. The military kept a tight grip on their respective country to allow only those actions approved by the state. With the kind of strong armed forces in power and with the technology available, Mobutu and Amin were able to show free reign in his rule for many years. They both instituted a policy of external aggression against other countries in order to decrease the likelihood of others wishing to attack Zaire, and since the country itself was a police state, those who opposed in rule were certainly brought to their doom. Amin had similar policies. The goal of this paper, in essence, is to show that either case is a typical example of an African leader who is responsible for the plight of his country, as an individualist viewpoint explains.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

How did such a system arise in these countries? One must look at their history in order to understand what is going on. The Belgians, who colonized Zaire, basically exploited other countries’ resources in much the same way. Of course, the Belgians did this in a much similar fashion as the other Europeans operated in various African countries they colonized, which is why there is political chaos today nearly everywhere in Africa. They drew arbitrary boundaries and created artificial states. They sought to extract its rich resources, like gold, and plant cash crops in the country, like coffee, and also desired to export slaves. All the Europeans put in place a government with strong ties to the mother country. They felt the Africans were inferior and could never be like them, and so they engaged in maximizing political and economic exploitation of the people. "The impression was given that Africans, particularly the rural people, are, by virtue of being themselves, enemies of progress, including their own progress, for it is their own peculiar characteristics that sustain their underdevelopment" (Ake, 1996). They mined resources and planted crops to be shipped back home and to other countries with whom they traded. The leaders that they trained to be in power were educated mainly in Europe, learned English oftentimes or French, and had adjusted to a lifestyle of luxury. A class structure was beginning to emerge, with the rich people in the government and connections to business at the top, while the poor villagers and tradesmen were at the bottom. The higher class desired acceptance into European civilized society and so modelled their lives after the Europeans. They empowered locals after they had disconnected them from the traditional values that sustained them in the past. In their acquired colonial mentality, the local leaders, who naturally felt inferior to the Europeans, wanted to oversee the "lesser" classes to show them how they were more European than others with their lifestyle. Eventually a revolutionary movement emerged where the Belgians were ousted in Zaire, and the British in Uganda, and the military came to power. Their systems were supported by corruption, as a result of an inefficient system modelled after European systems being put into place. The economy itself was so corrupt that the black market could almost carry the regular economy quite well (Schissel, 1989).

As a result of the artificial nature of the countries, some of the problems existing in certain African states are those of ethnic versus national loyalty. First and foremost,

most of the modern African states were developed along the lines of which European country settled or desired which tract of land. The actual borders of the countries were drawn by the Europeans, without regard to which ethnic groups belonged to a specific area. Therefore, one might have a nation or ethnic group that could stretch across the borders of more than one country or a country made up of many nation-states. Such is the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Zaire, settled by the Belgians hundreds of years ago, and Uganda, settled by the British. Basically, all the Belgians and the British did was strip-mine the entire country of its resources and use the people as slaves in their desire to get resources to develop their mother countries. They left the African countries without infrastructure and no education for the general populace. Basically, the white settlers used the blacks as slaves or servants to satisfy their needs. They left in place nothing from which to significantly contribute to the country itself but exhaust its resources (Rodney, 1972). Therefore, the local leaders that they left behind were just as ill-equipped to represent their own people as the white settlers were. Due to colonial mentality, many of those in power did not quite appreciate their own culture. They felt inferior and believed that they had to impress the Europeans with a lavish, European lifestyle in order to be accepted into the industrialized world.

The subject of land redistribution, which further divided along ethnic lines, can be described simply in the terms of *divide et imperia*, or divide and conquer. The Europeans took the continent of Africa and divided it simply by drawing lines on a map, much like creating slices of pizza for everyone to share, thanks to the Berlin Conference of 1885. Particularly, the countries of Belgium, France, Portugal, Spain, and Britain had various parts of Africa to themselves, upon which they put their own influence and established their own ideology. Each country decided to treat its colonies differently than the other; France, through their assimilation policy, considered the land and the people to be French; Belgium, based on *evolué*, allowed only those who had completely jettisoned their African traditions to be Belgian. In all, the Africans were beneath them. The Portuguese even gave themselves, through their policy of *lusotropicalism*, the license to rape African women to beget lighter-skinned Africans, the only kinds they could accept as human. Spain felt that only those of Spanish blood could be Spanish; and the British maintained their segregationist apartheid Jim Crow system they had in America. France was the only country to truly integrate and consider everyone to be French immediately without being pure-blooded at first (Awomolo, 2002). The subject of racial inferiority came up in many of these countries, and the culture had a way of imposing itself on the people; therefore, in the case of a country like Belgium, one had to have Belgian blood to have any claim to the land. The Belgian, Portuguese, Spanish, as well as British colonies basically existed just to provide the mother country with supplies; the people themselves mattered little if at all. Therefore, the European treatment of these African peoples everywhere came down to making them servants or slaves for cheap labor, using the people to extract resources and crops from the land, and making them get the raw materials together and getting whites to refine and manufacture the goods to send directly back to Europe (Tordoff, 2002). Each of these three countries used the land to get as much as possible from their colonies to feed the ever-growing needs of Europe's elite. There was no consideration for the livelihood of the people themselves or building them anything that might last them after the Europeans left. They over-exhausted the soil from overproduction, the minerals were rapidly diminishing from the soil, the people had no system of roads (except those to the sea for slavery), and

education was only provided to the whites. The Belgians and the mixed people were the ones kept in power in the Belgian Congo, and the further one could trace one's ancestry to the mother country, the higher the one would be authority in authority. The British, in Uganda, had an identical ideology, but this was more flexible because one only had to speak or act British.

In addition, the Europeans introduced the concept of permanent and personal land ownership to the Africans. This had really never existed before in many countries; everyone used the land as he saw fit, but it was shared equally amongst all the people; the people lived on different parts of the land, but they did not hoard it or establish individualized property tracts. The Europeans started this and only allowed white or mixed settlers in the case of Spain, Portugal, and Belgium to own land. The British felt that if people learned their language and continued to become sophisticated, that they could become British and then settle the land, though they might still be a step below the true British. The French allowed land ownership, but many of them were in the ruling class and educated in Europe in the first place.

Lasting Effects

The colonies that treated the countries more liberally were the ones who had fewer problems in the long run with political stability. France needed the numbers and sought to increase their empire. Britain also wanted to expand the empire and not only provide the mother country with goods but send British people there and make these countries a part of the larger nation of Britain. There are fewer inferior complexes in the English- and French-speaking countries today than the others. Though the issue of apartheid existed in South Africa for a long time, many of these former colonies overall had little problem getting British citizenship or had major political problems. France, though, had more advantages in that they sent more of their colonial leaders to school in Europe and allowed them the privilege of going back and establishing themselves in government in their mother country. The people with education had a certain advantage over the poorer, more deprived population because they could control distribution of wealth, gain a high-powered office because of their education, and could even exploit those less fortunate in their countries. The political elite were the business owners also and profited from employing the less fortunate, which is still happening today.

What about land itself? If one considers South Africa again, that former British colony sought to separate the different ethnic groups and divided ownership according to ancestry; whites were at the top and could own just about any property; blacks at the bottom and had few ownership opportunities, and the mixed races were somewhere in between (SWAPO, 1981). Each had a different section to live in each town in the country. Whites were also the only ones who ruled until the election of Nelson Mandela in 1995.

Military Regimes, Mobutu and Amin

In some cases, when there was a military dictatorship, land was redistributed to just the ruling class and the cronies of the dictator. One had to be politically connected to the ruler if one wanted to get something. So, the poor were left out in the long run; however, if the government seized one's land in a dictatorship, one had to give it up

or likely face prison time. Oftentimes the militaries in these countries seized land when they felt the opportunity was needed and they took the cash crops from the families in the villages, leaving only what was left behind. Truly, then, the issue of land ownership remained amorphous at times, especially in an unstable political situation. So many scenarios were tried to give the land back to some of the lower class, but things got so complicated that the agricultural challenge of the small versus the large farmer was not effective, and the arable land versus productivity capabilities so many arguments as not to be as successful as it could be in the end (Moyo, 1987).

Such were the cases of Mobutu in Zaire, or the Belgian Congo, and Amin in Uganda. The only form of government that seemed to work in these situations with former colonies was military dictatorships, with European-like heads of state in power. Though the argument can be made that the Europeans may have brought peace to the feuding nations on the continent, in the end it left nothing but civil unrest because of unresolved ethnic identity crises. In Zaire Mobutu used the military and in Uganda Amin did likewise, as their means to stay in power, keep a certain nationalistic ideology, and kept the nations from fighting; however, besides the need they felt to impress themselves on their European mentors/masters with lavish spending, they still felt insecure that they were not fully accepted into their respective societies (Ake, 1996). They both took an aggressive military stance against surrounding countries, creating rifts that ultimately spelled disaster in the end.

They also encouraged so much corruption in their countries that everybody was dipping their hand in the money from the state government; nothing was accomplished, due to so much corruption and theft on a grand scale. Mobutu and Amin contributed little in stimulating the markets because of this widespread, open endorsement of stealing. Also, to get to the point, the Hutus and the Tutsis had always lived equally in peace. However, in the end, the aggressive military action against neighbors, like Rwanda, brought about a fall to the Zaire government with the rise of Joseph Kabila to power. Equally, because of aggression against Tanzania, Amin fell and had to flee Uganda. When one ethnic group gained power over the other in Zaire, a large massacre occurred and the government fell apart in 1997 in just seven months (McNulty, 1999). Because one group was favored over another, the other felt alienated and started attacking the one in power, like the Biafran Revolution in Nigeria. The same thing happened in Uganda, as an overthrow occurred and a new regime came to power. Therefore the Hutu- Tutsi situation escalated over from Rwanda into Zaire, and Mobutu was overthrown. Amin, of the Kakwa nation, did the exact same thing in persecuting the Acholi, Lango, and other nations, and tensions and escalations of conflict caused his regime to be overthrown (Guweddeko, 2003).

The point is that no matter what the Belgians wanted the Congo to be or the British wanted Uganda to be, it is quite hard to build a country on a nationalistic basis when the roots do not come from the people themselves. How does one just draw a big thing on a map and call it a country, without consulting the opinions of the people themselves or observing where the geographic ethnic boundaries are located? European countries took many centuries to build their own identities and gradually form together to become nation-states, which is why so many African states are carving their own niches today to truly represent their ethnic groups (like Eritrea from Ethiopia). Today as a result of the immediate aftermath of brutal colonialism and local dictatorships, the DRC and Uganda had very little infrastructure and few opportunities

for advancement and growth. The Belgians built no reliable road system in the Belgian Congo, for example, just as the British did not in Uganda, and they neither educated the people nor left them with any knowledge to pass on (except leaders that were educated in Europe and put in place to control the people). It is no surprise that the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda are both almost worse off than before Mobutu's Zaire or Amin's Uganda was created (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 1982).

History of European Exploitation, Class Conflict

Many former colonies exist in Africa that were coveted for their oil when settled by the British, Belgians, or any other European power. It is very unusual to think of how one can sandwich largely distinct ethnic groups in a country and expect unity. When one runs for an office in such a divided country, it is not like running in a European country. One cannot call oneself a Congolese or a Ugandan, for example, without first identifying with one of the nations. It is really bad and will not help a politician if he first tries to get the sympathy of another ethnic group before his own. He must first appeal to those that are like him, and then he or she can start branching out. This is why many countries in Africa have problems. One cannot develop the economic sector country-wide as easily as ethnic ones, and if many of these countries want to find a way to maximize their natural resource profits, they have to work together more.

Furthermore, one of the primary issues facing these countries is the environmental one. Certain areas definitely have a need to develop their waste management systems, cooperate to avoid deforestation and exploitation, and improve their protection of natural habitats. The larger cities are more modernized, but pollution has become a major problem. There are many poor areas without access to proper plumbing and sewage systems. What often happens is that developmental programs that are implemented never get off the ground because a politician might be pocketing the money or someone in the elite class (the politicians, businessmen, and royalty are all connected anyway) takes advantage of it and steers it toward that person's own interest. This high-level graft and corruption is what is happening in the DRC and Uganda still today. One can use the Goldsmith Corruption Perception index to measure levels of corruption (Goldsmith, 2000). Perhaps if the Europeans had let each country develop on its own moral values, there would have been a better, more sophisticated power base, economic sector, and fewer disparities amongst the general populace.

Many of these nations that existed after the colonial powers were driven out were then passed on to leaders who came to power either in a military coup or were among the ruling class elite, educated in a foreign land, bringing back foreign political ideas to position themselves in power. They modeled their own revolutionary movements and desired to carve out a niche for themselves in their nations. Some of them, like Mobutu and Amin (who gave himself a number of titles), wished to create a system of royalty and build a dynasty, much like the Europeans did in the royal order of succession. They wanted to make their own legacies and sought to be recognized in the history books, reminiscent of some rulers in history associated with various European countries, such as Czar Nicholas II of Russia, Napoleon from France, or Kaiser Wilhelm from Germany. Perhaps, they wanted to be familiar and literally become the face of their nation. Therefore, they oftentimes had one-party

democracies, made up titles for themselves, and even instituted an order of succession that consisted of their cronies and other political elites that reported to them (Jackson & Rosberg, 1998).

The military presence reflected some leaders' desire to be "revolutionary," much like Cuba's Castro or Che Guevara. They wished to be seen as grass-roots activists that represented the people. Many were inspired by the writings of other revolutionaries or the rulers in Europe, as stated before; many of these ideas did in fact originate in Europe. They wanted to have their own empires to conquer, sometimes for self-satisfaction, and at other times to fulfill a sense of insecurity to be accepted into the mainstream. Mobutu was exactly doing this, seeking to impress the former colonial powers when he surrounded himself with material wealth. Mobutu was estimated to be worth about four billion U.S. dollars in 1984, and Amin was estimated at about \$390 million before his death (Schroeder, 1974). They were in essence re-creating the system of the serfs and the bourgeoisie that existed in many Western European countries, perhaps to make the people dependent on the rulers and therefore rely on them heavily for food and means of survival. Along with ruling a country, each leader had a paternalistic touch to his rule; the government itself came from the will of each president or dictator in power. The order of succession was not hard to follow; the president chose each member of the political ruling elite, and the law was subject to the president's will also. Oftentimes a constitution was written that stated basic rights for all the citizens, but what that meant in practice could be a totally different story. The citizens could have elections; however, the choice of candidates might be the leader in power or the leader in power (Ake, 1996). Opposition to the leader could mean danger for the common citizens. Such a system does not help to bring equality to a nation.

The basic problem with having one person making all the decisions is that representation throughout the society could be suppressed. The people's basic needs may not be met because of lack of communication with the party in power. If the cronies of the president or military leader are controlling everything, then they are more likely to pay attention to what the leader says than what the people want necessarily. Yet, some feel, though, that one-party elections are the only form of election that might work in Africa, despite its limitations (Chabal & Daloz, 1999). Basic healthcare needs are more likely to favor the government officials than the people, and even the economic benefits are likely to be ignored; local villagers will probably rely more on subsistence farming for their needs. One needs to have some voice for the people, to have a voice for each people, especially in Africa's multinational states. However, with the backing of the military, a government does not necessarily have to listen to anyone else if they want their way. In fact, having many armed forces can be a problem too because of civil unrest and the pressure to use the military when they are present. Also, when the military are not in action, there exists the danger of militarism, troops endlessly roaming the countryside, looking for trouble, and extortion of the masses.

A large standing army can also bring endless conflicts with neighbours or perceived enemies who might possess something that that country wants. Mobutu and Amin both had problems with the military in that they advocated hostility towards their neighbours and an aggressive stance so that everyone knew how aggressive Zaire and Uganda both were. Without a solid foundation of a government, and one person in

power, a system like this is likely to fall after the demise or dismissal of a leader. There is less chance of being a peaceful order of succession, and something like what happened in the DRC and Uganda can happen in other countries as well. Just because someone would like to build an empire does not mean that it will last. If a leader wishes to build a true, representative dynasty, he must adhere to the local demands, stimulate the economy, take advantage of local resources and markets, and maximize the income-earning capacity of the country without disregard to basic human rights (Jackson & Rosberg, 1998).

Another issue that may be a problem with one person in power is the danger of losing one's rights, as mentioned earlier, but this includes not only the right to vote and survive on one's own, but to live by one's own livelihood. One should not be forced into the role of working to please the upper class, and people should have the right to free intellectual capacity without the danger of being imprisoned. The universities should be allowed to teach with free will and bring challenging questions to the minds of everyone in the country. Military people should not be able to pillage homes and take what they want or steal whenever they desire. Also, women and children have the right to be protected in society; in times of political instability the rights of women may be sacrificed in order to please males. Women and children sometimes remain in dire straits and may even be poorer than the men. The men may grow cash crops or join the military while the women live off of the simple subsistence crops, which is what they can grow in their gardens. If there is someone who controls distribution of wealth, then there is more chance of greater poverty, disparity, and profits for the wealthy. If freedom of thought is not encouraged also, this can be dangerous in that any person who is perceived as educated may be in trouble and can be thrown in prison, or even executed because of fear of breaking the common mould. This may also be due to a leader's paranoia about personal safety, such as the ever possible assassination or a coup. The threat of violent opposition always dominates the psyche of those who gained power in a similar fashion, and so there is constant conflict, as in Liberia and most recently the Ivory Coast.

MOBUTU VERSUS AMIN LEADERSHIP STYLES

When Mobutu and Amin came to power, and when Amin came to power, they personalized their military with ethnic loyalty to consolidate their power. Mobutu and Amin equally had cronies in politics that ran businesses as well to keep those below them in their place and encouraged people to steal from the public funds to support themselves. Therefore the underground economy thrived, since there really was no proper economy set in place when Zaire and Uganda were formed because the Europeans imposed their land boundaries without recognizing ethnic ones when designing the Belgian Congo. The only thing the Europeans succeeded in doing was forcefully bringing together hitherto distinct nationalities in Africa. They destroyed any governing system that was in place before, leaving things worse, inducing more corruption through exploitation of one another. Amin, and Mobutu and others, inherited this and made the state such an extremely political and corrupt institution, with few solid laws in place and no order. The military factions, under the supreme leader, essentially controlled the entire state, and though others might have existed, they had no say so in the government. For instance, "Mobutu, who is reputed to be one of the world's richest men and to have amassed an enormous fortune (in the billions of dollars) by personally appropriating or misusing the funds of the Bank of

Zaire, the state trading companies, and other governmental agencies."¹⁰⁴ (Jackson & Rosberg, 1998). Equally, "On November 17, 1971, Amin announced that any officer who wished for a month's advance of salary to help him celebrate an important religious festival had only to ask and it would be granted" (Ravenhill, 1974). Mobutu, having a Belgian-European dictatorial influence in his training and his learning of politics, had a strong colonial mentality, which left him with a debilitating inferiority complex, like many African leaders, and felt he had to do as much as possible to please his former European conquerors to feel accepted. He therefore bought Western clothes, cars, and lived a European-like lifestyle to be, hopefully, initiated in the mainstream with other world leaders. Likewise, Amin had an inferiority complex whereby he expressed himself with a lavish lifestyle, wanting to become another dynasty, like many great European nations did. The problems of underhanded acts only continued to cause problems and left the countries almost worse than before the advent of European colonialism in Africa. The situation is gradually changing, but the seeds of the ugly past are still inundating the present and stalling the future. European systems just did not function as well in Africa as they did in Europe. Therefore, a need for an emergent African system strictly for African people must continue to be developed, for Africa has the capability to develop, but it should maximize its resources and continue to diversify its markets.

CONCLUSION

The two regimes of Amin and Mobutu for Uganda and the former Zaire, respectively, have been shown to be full of corruption and instability, essentially becoming kleptocratic states in the form of an individualistic style of government. In addition, the cult of personality that the leaders surrounded themselves with, along with the class hierarchy system in place that allowed such leaders to come to power, remain a constant reminder of the colonialist system put in place by many European powers during the colonialist era. Today, many of these African states are beginning to make adjustments and move forward, but the damage done as a result of the Europeans raping the land and dividing the populace politically, socially, and economically have left a significant scar on the African continent. In some ways, this individualist standpoint has perpetuated itself continually, as warlords continue to come to power in a similar fashion, with the help of military factions. Many leaders also capitalize on any instability currently left in place within specific regions. Even in the current situation, states such as Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are still reeling from these after-effects of colonialism and are still trying to discover a lasting form of governance that will carry them forward to a time of peace, with new, local Africa-centered forms of governance, supported by nation-states within each country that make up clearly distinguishable ethnic groups. Some states at the current moment, though damaged by years and years of exploitation through a colonialist mentality and leaders influenced by the colonialist attitude, are beginning to make great strides, and the rediscovery of Africa's significant resources and maximization of potential by industry to develop these resources is moving rapidly in a positive direction each and every day. This means that a bright future is ahead for these many great-nations in Africa that will continue to contribute significantly to the world economy.

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