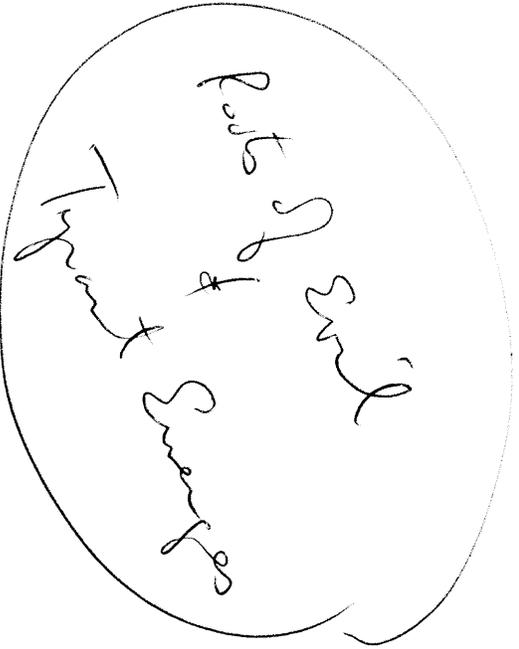


survive I had to flee. Moreover, I had a duty to leave. My experiences would allow me to speak with unique authority. I determined to tell the truth, as far as I knew it, about Amin's reign of terror. If I did not, Amin would continue to hide his brutalities behind any cause and any slogan that suited his purposes.

For too long the world has laughed Amin off, for too long the world has excused him. Too many exiles have been frightened into silence by the fear that he would wreak terrible revenge on friends and relatives remaining behind. I knew that by speaking out I would risk more lives, but I also knew that my silence would guarantee nobody's safety.

To end the injustice, the world has to be told the truth of how Amin came to power, the nature of his rule, his random viciousness, his wild unpredictability, his talent (for it is a talent) for manipulating colleagues into compliance. Someone has to speak out.



Risto S. Smith
A State of Blood

Roots of Evil

1

TO AN OUTSIDER, Amin's regime seems inexplicable. How could such a man gain and hold power? Although future historians will have the final say, I believe that the answer lies in Uganda's immediate past and the course of events that offered Amin opportunities to assert his remarkable personality. It is not a personality to be underrated. True, he is nearly illiterate; he is politically naïve; he is violently unpredictable; he is utterly ruthless. Yet he is also jovial and generous; and he has extraordinary talents—for practical short-term action, for turning apparent weaknesses to his own advantage, and for asserting his leadership among his gang of thugs. This maverick personality, its brutalities largely hidden in the early years, emerged with the erosion of democracy that has marked Uganda from Independence in 1962 to the present day.

Although my influence on Ugandan affairs was largely indirect—even as a Cabinet minister, I was a civilian in a system dominated by military men—I have, by chance, been an insider all my life. I was born with the tradition of government behind me. From my teens, I was familiar with the principal characters in the drama that has been played out over the years. I survived to serve longer than any other minister, and was able to escape, largely because I expressed little political ambition, and because I was able to maintain an outward detachment that never threatened Amin. What happened, and why it happened

the way it did, forms a story in which public events and personal experiences have often been inextricably intertwined.

I come from Bunya county of the Busoga tribal area in southeast Uganda, just north of Lake Victoria, not far from the source of the Nile. My grandfather and father were chiefs of our area, which, a hundred years ago, was one among many small, self-contained, independent fiefdoms that lay in the Central African highlands.

From some thirty of these tribal areas, the British forged Uganda in the late nineteenth century. Britain, the greatest imperial power, had a particular interest in Uganda, because the region controlled the source of the Nile, which controlled Egypt, which controlled the Suez Canal, which controlled the most direct route to India, the jewel in Britain's imperial crown. Because Uganda was important to the British for its own reasons, the borders were set without much thought for the people involved. Thus the borders did not coincide with tribal territories, which overlap neighboring Zaire, Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda.

Within the new Uganda, there were four long-established kingdoms: Buganda (the most powerful), Bunyoro, Ankole and Toro. Each had its king. The best-known king was the Kabaka of the dominant power, Buganda. In fact, it is from the root syllables of Buganda that Uganda takes its name. The four kingdoms dominated the southern, most fertile part of Uganda. The south also had a number of smaller tribes, including the Bakiga, Bagisu, Bakedi, and my own—the Basoga. Ethnically and linguistically, the southern tribes were all predominantly Bantu—the same stock as tribes like the Zulus to the south. To the north, in the sparser, more open countryside that fringes southern Sudan and northern Kenya, was a looser collection of mainly Nilotic tribes whose languages belonged chiefly to the Luo group. Although today the official language is English, there are still almost as many languages as tribes.

Uganda Radio used to broadcast news in twenty-four different languages. In one eastern area, Bukedi, there are fourteen small tribes, speaking several different languages.

When the British arrived in the late nineteenth century, they found that the southern areas, with their well-established social systems, were relatively easy to administer. These areas became provinces of the Empire, and their kings became in effect provincial governors. As long as they ruled in peace with the aid of British administrators, they were left largely alone. The Kabaka of Buganda remained in some ways a king among kings.

The more diverse and scattered northern tribes presented problems. Some, like the Kakwa, Amin's tribe, which spanned what is now the Uganda-Zaire border, were no more than village communities; some—like the Acholi and Langi—occupied much larger regions; some—like the Karamojong and Turkana of the northeast—roamed immense areas and have never taken to the idea of formal administration. They still pose problems for centralized government.

Throughout this diverse, fertile and beautiful area—Churchill called it the "Pearl of Africa"—there existed rivalries that have affected much of Uganda's recent history. For instance, the southern kingdoms of Bunyoro and Buganda were traditional enemies, and the northern Nilotic tribes were—and still are—suspicious of the more highly organized, better-educated Bantus.

When the Europeans came, three other elements were added to Ugandan society. One was European religion. The British brought their Anglicanism, and the French their Catholicism. These were more than a match for the Moslem faith brought by the Arab slave traders in the early nineteenth century. Today, only ten per cent of the population is Moslem, and the rest are about half-and-half Anglican and Catholic. The Europeans also established Christian schools. Since the Moslems did not do this, Islam soon came to be equated with a lack of

education.

The British were also responsible for the introduction of Uganda's Asians. The Asians were originally brought to build the Kenya-Uganda railway, which was supposed to carry troops to protect the source of the Nile against the imperial ambitions of the French, Belgians and Germans. Long before it was finished in 1901, however, such strategic justifications seemed foolish—the railway was nicknamed the “Lunatic Line” by British MP's appalled at its soaring cost. The line never carried troops, but it did enable the Asians to develop trade; they became the middle class of Uganda, and indeed of all British East Africa.

A third element, and one of particularly tragic significance for Uganda today, was the community of Southern Sudanese brought in as mercenaries by the British to staff the lower ranks of the army and the police. In Uganda, indeed throughout East Africa, they became known as Nubians. They have retained their own identity, like the Asians. They are wholly Moslem, and still speak their own version of Arabic.

I was born in December 1939. My father's name was Suleiman Kisajja; his surname was handed on to only one of my brothers. (Until recently, children did not automatically inherit surnames from their father. None of my brothers or sisters are called Kyemba, although—in response to European practice and the dictates of modern bureaucracy—my children are.) Soon after I was born, my father, who was not a chief in the old sense, but more an established member of the Imperial civil service, was transferred to another part of Busoga, our tribal area.

I was my mother's seventh son; I also had four half-sisters, children of my father's second wife.

To Europeans and Americans, the idea of having several wives seems strange. There is such a vast cultural gulf between Africans and western nations that the practice is often condemned out of hand by westerners (as

we condemn the western custom of extramarital affairs). But in Uganda—indeed in many parts of Africa—the system is long established, and still works well. In fact, I myself have two wives. Formerly, as in many warrior societies, there was usually an excess of women over men. Polygamy allowed—and still allows—single women to be readily absorbed into family life.

Moreover, large families, which confer status on the men, have always been regarded as a blessing. Uganda is on the equator, but it is also high—at an average of 5,000 feet above sea level—and never oppressively hot. The land is fertile and extra children cost nothing to feed.

Jealousy was—and is—seldom a serious problem. It is a foolish husband who allows his emotions to make a favorite of one wife. Marital sex is arranged on a rota system, as are the household duties. A senior wife often asks for a junior wife to help with the house and the children.

Traditionally, a man had to pay a price for his brides. In some areas, a bride costs a hundred head of cattle. In others—in Karamoja, for example—the price could be many times more. This encouraged cattle raiding, which led to local warfare and the loss of many lives.

Before 1971, the economic realities of living in an increasingly consumer-oriented, urbanized society tended to undermine these practices, although they were still quite common. Since 1971, however, more men have been killed than in the worst tribal wars, and the system has again become vital for some tribes. But there are already signs that the social strain imposed by Amin's slaughter is too great. Among the Acholi and Langi, for example, so many young men have been killed that for the first time ever there are single women without any social framework to support them.

I grew up mostly in government houses—colonial-style bungalows with a verandah and a surrounding hedge or fence. I soon became familiar with the business of government. My father had all the wide-ranging duties of a

colonial officer of the time. He was a magistrate, tax administrator, agricultural adviser and community welfare officer.

My father was stern but loving. He used most of his salary to pay for our education. The family had no car when we were young—we all walked the mile or two to school, and he rode a bicycle until we were in secondary school. Although my elder brother and I were the only two to go to university, all the boys were educated well enough to make good careers.

While I was in primary school, I spent one year in Busoga where the local headmaster was Mr. Kibedi, Amin's future father-in-law and father of the future Foreign Minister (who has since fled). Then I went to Busoga College at Mwiri, where the first Prime Minister of independent Uganda, Milton Obote, was also at school.

Obote was several years senior to me and I had no contact with him, but I knew him by reputation as a Langi, one of the many different tribes brought together by the British headmaster, Reverend F. G. Coates. Busoga College was to become a breeding ground for nationalist attitudes that transcended tribal loyalties. In later years, students used to boast when they left, "I come from a nationalistic school."

It was also at this time in my life that I first met Idi Amin. My elder brother Kisajja and Amin were in love with two sisters, Mary and Malyamu, the daughters of my old headmaster, Mr. Kibedi. Malyamu was later to become Amin's senior wife, and my brother was to have a son by Mary, Mrs. Amin's sister. In Ugandan terms, therefore, I am of the same family as Amin.

I met Amin a number of times while attending Busoga College. The first meeting I remember well. One of my brothers was running a shop next to my old school; there Amin was introduced to me as the prospective son-in-law of the headmaster. It was a very casual visit, but I remember being very struck by his size—6'4"—large even for a

soldier. He was only a sergeant in the King's African Rifles at the time, but he had already earned notoriety as Uganda's heavyweight boxing champion, a title he was to hold for nine years. He was a good soldier, renowned, as I later learned, for his willingness and smartness—"a tremendous chap to have around," in the words of one British officer. So enthusiastic were his superiors that they turned a blind eye to his inability to speak much English. He was to rise rapidly through the ranks.

I saw little of him after that. The troops were well disciplined and seen very rarely. Uganda was a quiet and peaceful place then—you saw soldiers in the town only in groups of twos and threes or on ceremonial occasions.

In 1957 I went to Makerere University on the outskirts of Kampala to study history. Obote had been there before me and had by now established a wider reputation for his involvement in the major issues of the day—the coming of independence and the status of the Kabaka of Buganda, Mutesa II, better known as King Freddy. The Kabaka had been banished by the British colonial government for advocating greater autonomy for Buganda. By 1957 he was back, and we all knew that independence was not far off.

I was at the university at the time of the elections for the Independence Parliament, in April 1962. I was not much involved in the elections although I was very much aware of what was going on. One of my brothers had joined the Democratic Party and later served briefly as a minister, and I had other friends and relatives who were active in politics. But I was set on joining the civil service; so, despite a sympathy for Obote's Uganda People's Congress, I remained relatively neutral. I was, however, pleased that Obote became Prime Minister.

Immediately after the elections, I joined the civil service as an Administrative Officer. I was asked where I wanted to be posted. I requested Kigezi on the Rwanda border, or Fort Portal in the Toro district, on the Zaire border. I chose these two because the climate and the

countryside are beautiful, and because they are relatively remote. In either place, I would have an opportunity to start life in a completely new environment, away from my own relatives.

But Peter Allen, the head of the civil service, had his own ideas about me. He decided to post me to the Prime Minister's office as assistant secretary. It was an unexpected appointment and I was delighted. When I started work in the Prime Minister's office, I found myself in charge of ceremony and protocol, one of a dozen or so bureaucrats deeply involved in the arrangements for independence.

It was at this time that I once again heard of Amin, though not by name. Ugandan troops had been sent to the northern part of Karamoja on one of their regular trips to clamp down on cattle raiding among the Karamojong and Turkana. Many lives had been lost in squabbles as tribesmen sought to enrich themselves at the expense of others. The information received in the Prime Minister's office was that a lieutenant had massacred a number of people in his search for arms. The British were considering prosecuting him. But because independence was near, it would have been politically unwise to take legal action against a black officer. (There were only two; the other was Amin's future commander, Shaban Opolot.) The decision was referred to Obote. He decided not to prosecute. I later learned that the officer involved was Idi Amin.

On October 9, 1962, Uganda became independent, with Obote as Prime Minister, supported temporarily by the powerful Kabaka of Buganda, who became President in the following year. Six months after independence, in May 1963 the Organization for African Unity was founded. I traveled to Addis Ababa as a member of the expert committee set up to establish the organization's headquarters, and also attended the OAU Defense Commission in Accra in Ghana, in October 1963.

After my return from Accra, Obote appointed me his

private secretary. He did so, I think because I was a graduate of Busoga College, and because I was always around trying to make things work as they should at state functions and receptions. Besides, he had never had a good private secretary; he had tried out two of his own tribesmen who were not part of the civil service hierarchy, and both had ended up in prison for embezzlement. It was a demanding job; to perform it properly, I had to take as my residence a house within the compound of the Presidential Lodge.

The most immediate problem facing independent Uganda was the issue of the "lost counties" which had once belonged to Bunyoro and were now part of Buganda. In the 1890s, the British had, with the assistance of the Kabaka of Buganda, fought and beaten Bunyoro, and the British had awarded the Kabaka a chunk of Bunyoro for his efforts. The Banyoro (people of Bunyoro) had always resented this. The British, conveniently for them, left the problem for the new regime to solve. The Independence Constitution called for a referendum to be held within two years so that the inhabitants of the "lost counties" could decide for themselves which area they wished to belong to. The current Kabaka, of course, had little interest in holding the referendum, for the Banyoro in the "lost counties" would undoubtedly vote to be governed by their own people rather than the Baganda. But Obote insisted on the referendum, which was held in 1964. The Kabaka duly lost the counties to Bunyoro, and the tenuous alliance between Obote and the Kabaka collapsed, a split between Prime Minister and President that eventually led to the end of democratic rule in Uganda.

Meanwhile, Amin had not been politically active, but he had begun to make a national impact in other ways. Throughout this period, the Belgian Congo—now Zaire—was in the turmoil of civil war. One aspect of the war, just coming to an end after six years, had peculiar significance for Uganda and Amin. Rebels to whom

Obote was sympathetic were still fighting the new government of Moise Tshombe and Mobutu Sese Seko, Chief of Staff and future President. Mobutu's troops were pressing the rebels hard towards the Ugandan border. Obote wished to aid the rebels to the utmost, and assigned Amin, now Deputy Commander of the Uganda Army, personal responsibility to assist them in and around Amin's own home area of Arua. Obote established a direct link with Amin, bypassing the Army Commander, Brigadier Shaban Opolot. He did this first because he wished Amin's activities to remain as secret as possible, and second because he regarded Opolot as a potential ally of Obote's old rival, the Kabaka.

I was closely involved with this operation. Obote and I had a personal radio link with Amin. Ours was code-named "Sparrow"; Amin's was "Kisu." The rebels often came to Entebbe, stayed in Amin's house, and saw Obote. Their greatest need was for arms and transport. They had no cash, but they did have truckloads of gold and ivory, seized as they retreated from towns they had once controlled. Amin, as the rebel's contact man, sold their gold and ivory and bought arms for them.

This was a considerable operation which revealed for the first time Amin's chief characteristics. To me, he was always charming and easy to work with, but he also displayed a ruthless practicality, individuality and enterprise. For the first time I saw the effects of his particular intelligence which enabled him to snatch any advantage unconsciously offered and turn it to his own benefit.

In Amin's dealings with the Congolese gold and ivory, no records were ever kept. The goods came by truck to his house. He did not have to account for what he sold. He simply began to bank for himself very large sums, regularly and in cash—up to 300,000 shillings at a time—amounting to something like a million dollars in all. He also kept large amounts in his house to avoid undue publicity. (A few days before my wedding in 1965, he pulled about 2,000 shillings from his pocket and gave it to

me as a wedding present.)

News of his sudden wealth began to leak out. His account at the Ottoman Bank was photocopied and handed out in Parliament by an MP, Daudi Ocheng, who demanded an inquiry. A debate followed, and the inquiry was authorized. Soon afterward, however, Obote seized control of the government, arrested five ministers, four of whom supported the charges against Amin, suspended the Constitution, fired the Kabaka and assumed his title of President. The inquiry would clearly have embarrassed Obote. He persuaded some of the Congolese rebels, who were in exile in Uganda, to speak on Amin's behalf and exonerate him.

For the second time, Obote had saved the man who was eventually to overthrow him. He did so because, at the time, Amin seemed indispensable. He was needed for the showdown that was clearly at hand between the Kabaka and Obote. Amin was still only deputy commander, but Opolot had by this time married a member of the Buganda royal family, and Obote would never trust him again. Amin was therefore the President's only hope.

On May 22, 1966, Obote arrested some of the chief supporters of the Kabaka. As news of the arrests spread, government cars were stoned and the Kabaka's people threw up barricades on the roads leading into the capital from the Kabaka's palace just outside Kampala. Unless action was taken rapidly, Buganda would declare itself independent, and the government would be faced with the embarrassment of being told to get out of its own capital.

The same day, Obote called a meeting in the President's Lodge in Kampala. The meeting was attended by Obote, the Inspector General of Police, the Chief General Service Officer, the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Minister of Defense, and myself. After some discussion, Obote told us that the disturbance was no longer a civil matter but a military one. He would ask Amin to move in

on the palace, which stood just three miles outside Kampala.

Unknown to us, Obote had already tipped off Amin. He now telephoned him and asked him to come to the President's Lodge immediately. Amin arrived soon afterwards in uniform and received verbal instructions to attack the palace the following morning, and to arrest the Kabaka. Meanwhile, the Kabaka's supporters, eager to ensure his protection, had poured into the palace compound, which was built like a fortified village. It had six-foot walls, and contained several office buildings, a school, and various residences (and even later, an airstrip).

Very early the next morning, Amin's troops attacked. The Kabaka must have been warned, for his supporters had arms and put up an unexpected resistance for several hours. At 3:30 P.M., Amin went to the President's Lodge in his open jeep, with its six-foot-long 122-mm gun, to report to Obote and to ask for permission to shell the Kabaka's main residence. He was in a jolly mood and obviously enjoying the fight. Permission was granted. He jumped into his jeep and drove off.

Within a few minutes, there were two large explosions. Shells punched holes in the Kabaka's main official residence. Smoke billowed up. Then, as if this was a signal to the heavens, it began to rain, torrentially. The fighting stopped. After the storm, the troops moved in quickly to find the Kabaka. At about 5:30, Amin, jovial as ever, came back to the Lodge bearing his trophies: the Kabaka's Presidential flag and the ceremonial cap that marked him as Commander in Chief of the Uganda Army. He did not know, he said, whether the Kabaka had been killed or had escaped. The Kabaka had in fact seized his opportunity during the storm and had escaped through a side entrance into one of the nearby houses. From there he eventually made his escape to Burundi and then to Britain, where he died three years later.

The Kabaka later claimed that thousands had died in

the assault; the official toll, based on Amin's own figures, was put at forty-seven; it was in fact much higher—certainly several hundred, perhaps as high as four hundred.

For several days afterward, Amin's troops looted the palace. I visited it while the looting was still in progress, and the dead were still being unearthed from the ruins. The Kabaka's other palaces, at Bamunanika and Masaka, were also ransacked.

Amin was now Obote's undisputed favorite. Obote had little civilian political support left and would have to rely heavily on the army, which was a significant political force in its own right, supplied and trained as it was largely by Israel and Britain. It seemed safe to trust Amin. He was, after all, nearly illiterate and showed no signs of political ambition. Indeed, Obote foresaw a danger, not from Amin, but from some of the younger officers who had been trained by the British and Israelis. Obote believed that Amin would act as a first line of defense against their ambitions.

Amin, now promoted to Army Commander, became Obote's principal means of preventing further unrest. I remember the many route marches ordered by Obote. I would often phone Amin with instructions to take a trip through one or another corner of Buganda. These route marches, commonly described as "map reading exercises," were really missions to cow the populace in areas where Obote feared there might be opposition.

In the space of just a few months, Uganda had gone from a peaceful democracy to something very close to a military dictatorship. With the Kabaka gone, and the Baganda quelled by force, there was no possibility of a lasting, working, parliamentary majority for Obote. Hundreds of prominent citizens were imprisoned without trial (including the former Army Commander, Shaban Opolot). Regular lists of political detainees—often up to eighty names at a time—were published, as demanded by law, in the weekly *Uganda Gazette*. Obote, backed by his

security forces, ruled supreme. It is ironic that the system later developed by Amin, an illiterate killer who strikes at random, was inherited half-formed from a man raised in the best democratic traditions.

Amin's preeminence at this time allowed him to forge another link in the chain with which he was later to fetter the country. In his support of the Congolese rebels, Amin had recruited many Nubians and Southern Sudanese, who were themselves in revolt against their government. He recruited them initially because they were people he could trust and because they came from the area where the operations were taking place—along the northwestern border of Uganda. They therefore had an interest in fighting there. But Amin and the Southern Sudanese had other mutual interests. Amin was supporting them in their long civil war against the Sudanese government. They, in their turn, provided Amin with an immediate ready-made corps which was steadily absorbed into many Uganda Army units. Amin even placed some of these men in the General Service Unit, the Secret Service institution close to President Obote. There they provided vital information to Amin. Their careers in the army depended on Amin alone. They owed him a personal loyalty, and felt no loyalty whatsoever to Obote.

For three years, Amin remained indispensable. At the same time—as Obote himself saw—he posed a steadily growing threat. Their nascent rivalry erupted into open enmity in December 1969.

On December 19, of that year, Obote attended an evening meeting of the Uganda People's Congress in a Kampala hall. After the meeting, Obote and I led the way out of the hall into the night air. Obote was slightly ahead of me to my right. A crowd followed behind, clapping and cheering in the happy mood that accompanies a successful meeting. As we came within ten feet or so of a tree on our right, a shot was fired. The would-be assassin had positioned himself behind the tree, presumably leaning over a lower branch to support his pistol. Immediately we

all threw ourselves to the ground, knowing it could only have been directed at us. At the same time, a grenade rolled out beside us. I was lying next to Obote. After perhaps five seconds, I realized that he had been hit. The bodyguards lifted him from the ground, seemingly lifeless, carried him to his car and drove off. The grenade had failed to explode. I hardly even registered my good fortune.

I ran to the Vice President's car and shouted to the driver to follow the President to the hospital. It was only when I got there that I realized that I too had been hit. The bullet had just grazed my neck; blood was staining my shirt.

The President had had an extraordinarily lucky escape. He had been turning back and forth to see the people cheering and clapping on either side of him. This—as well as the bad light—must have spoiled the assassin's aim. The bullet missed Obote's brain by a few inches, entering his jaw. It tore through one lip, took out two teeth in his right lower jaw, emerged through his open mouth and finally nicked me in the neck. My wound was slight, but I had been badly shaken and was kept in the hospital overnight. The President was out of the hospital within a week.

The attempt marked a turning point. Amin, who for some reason was not at the meeting, was immediately suspected. Soldiers ran to his residence, which was only a quarter of a mile from the scene of the incident. When they arrived, Amin simply fled without waiting to hear why they had come. In his haste, he did not even stop to put on his shoes. He scrambled over a barbed wire fence, badly tearing his feet in the process. He stopped a passing car and hitched a lift to Bombo, a place twenty miles away, predominantly occupied by a Nubian community, and a strong base for him today. From there, he phoned some junior officers to find out what was going on. It was several hours before he was traced by senior officers. Then, on the telephone, he said that he thought that the

soldiers had come to assassinate him. He was persuaded to come back to the capital and an army vehicle was sent to fetch him.

A month later, at a meeting of senior officers, Amin's No. 2, Brigadier Pierino Okoya, an Acholi, quarrelled violently with Amin on the subject of army discipline as it related to Amin's behavior after the attempted assassination. Among other things, Okoya accused Amin of desertion. A few days afterward, on January 25, 1970, the brigadier and his wife were shot dead at close range in the brigadier's home town of Gulu. Amin was again suspected, and inquiries were started.

For several months no evidence was found against him. He was in a position to block investigations that seemed to pose a threat. Every time the police began to question people in the army, where their investigations usually led, Amin knew of their activities and frustrated them. He would say that the men required for questioning were not available, or he would send them on holiday, or tie them up with other duties, or post them to other units.

In June 1970, there was another attempt on Obote's life. We were on our way to Entebbe, via Kampala, from Luzira Prison Officers' Mess at about 8:30 in the evening. We were in a Daimler. Obote was sitting in the back with a cousin. I was sitting in the middle row on one of the folding seats, facing inward, my back to the window, talking to the two of them. We had a police car to lead us. Normally it drove along with its roof light flashing. Not wishing to draw attention to the President's car, I instructed the police, just before we left, to switch off their light. We arrived in Kampala without incident.

But following us into Kampala, about a mile behind, was the Vice President, John Babitha, in a convoy similar to ours, and also with a police escort. He had allowed his police to keep their light flashing. When he got to a point opposite the Silver Springs Hotel, there was a rattle of machine gun fire and several bullets smashed in through

the rear window on one side, and out the other. Fortunately, the Vice President was sitting well back in his seat and was unhurt, if badly shaken. Obviously the volley was intended for Obote, but if the bullets had hit our car in the same place, I would have been the only one killed.

After the two attempts and the murder of Brigadier Okoya, Obote became increasingly suspicious and remote from reality. He appeared less and less often in public and relied increasingly on the Secret Police, mainly on the General Service Unit, headed by his cousin Akena Adoko. They knew precisely what he wanted to hear. File upon file of foiled "Obote assassination attempts" were compiled and delivered to me for passing on to him. Every day he would receive the Unit's green folders—sometimes containing many sheets, sometimes one typewritten page, sometimes a handwritten note. For a time, Obote kept them to himself, but after several weeks this clearly became impossible and he began to turn them over to me for filing.

One day Obote called for me around lunch time. I walked into the lounge where he was sitting. Without any hesitation, he looked at me and asked, "Kyemba, tell me, were you really shot during the attempt? The General Service Unit thinks that you were faking." For seconds I was speechless. When I found my voice, all I could do was shout "What!?" and storm out of the room. I sat in my office for several minutes to calm down, then gathered my briefcase and papers and left. I thought bitterly of resigning, but eventually decided that nothing would be gained by doing so. Anyway, if he was serious, he would throw me into prison whatever I did. As it happened, he was so embarrassed he never mentioned the incident again.

When I had the time, I looked through the files of General Service reports. There was the one on me. It stated that I was implicated, and that I had scratched my neck with a stone to fake the bullet wound. This was sheer

stupidity. If I wanted to kill Obote, I would have at least have arranged for my accomplices to make the attempt when I was not in the firing line and not within a yard or two of the grenade that was to finish the deed. (If it had been sent to me, as an accusation against someone else, I would have thrown it away, as I did with many obviously fabricated reports on high-ranking officials.)

In September 1970, Amin fulfilled a long-standing official invitation to visit Cairo. In his absence, Obote finally acted to outflank him. He planned several new Army appointments and tried desperately to conclude the eight-month-old investigation into the Okoya murder so that Amin, against whom there was now hard evidence, could be arrested soon after his return. In fact, Amin was instructed to extend his stay in Cairo, so that Obote would have the time he needed. But Amin's information service was good. His Secret Service contacts sent word of what was in the wind, and he returned unexpectedly and without ceremony. I happened to see him as I was driving to Entebbe. His car passed me going in the opposite direction. We waved at each other. Later, I telephoned Obote to tell him the commander was back from Cairo. He was astounded.

This was the first time I saw the way Amin could exploit his genius for unpredictability, a quality that has served him in good stead ever since.

All Obote could do now was to go ahead with the new appointments. But it was not enough. Amin was now in a position to exploit Obote's unpopularity and turn it to his own advantage. He began attending Moslem prayers with one of the Kabaka's uncles to reestablish some credibility with the Baganda. When he appeared at a graduation ceremony at Makerere University, he was cheered. He also stated publicly that he "feared no one but God"—a deliberate challenge to Obote.

Obote never told me directly that he was going to arrest Amin. But as principal private secretary I was in charge of the President's office, and I saw who came and went

and who was posted where. The signs were clear enough. No one actually said anything, but the maneuvers themselves revealed the long-term strategy of the two contestants.

One incident in particular showed the rivalry between them and illustrated Amin's growing superiority. Obote asked Amin to place a unit at Bannananka, the country residence of the late Kabaka, to guard against further troubles among the Baganda. Amin selected a number of his own Southern Sudanese soldiers, headed by a Lieutenant Hussein Marella, who after the coup was to be promoted to Brigadier and Chief of Staff of the army. Obote, seeing Amin's purpose, bypassed the army hierarchy and ordered Marella to disband the unit. Marella refused to take any action without consulting Amin. Obote was forced to admit that the order should have gone through the army commander. The unit was then disbanded with Amin's cooperation. But Amin's men, who should have been sent back to the Sudan, were in fact distributed to several other units, thereby ensuring a wider and less obvious distribution of Amin's influence.

Obote, however, now felt secure enough to go to Singapore for the Commonwealth Conference of January 1971. I was certain that he was not as secure as he felt and acted accordingly. I moved my more valuable personal property out of my residence, together with my car, a BMW, and took them to Jinja. This will be news to Obote; but I would like him to know that my activity was prompted by an intuitive interpretation of what was happening, and not by my prior knowledge of Amin's moves.

As we were preparing to leave Entebbe, I had a long chat with Amin. Obote was closeted in a small VIP room, with some selected army officers, the Minister of Internal Affairs and other General Service personnel. Amin, the commander of the army, was in another room, almost alone, with no one eager to talk to him in case they were suspected of collaborating with him. Feeling that this was

no way to treat the army commander. I spent some time talking to him. During the conversation he asked me to bring him something from Singapore. I promised I would.

Soon after we had gone, Amin called a number of meetings of senior officers at the army headquarters and addressed them to show that he was still in charge. The Minister of Affairs and the Vice President, who had remained in Kampala, received reports that an assassination attempt was to be made on Obote's life when he returned. Another report linked Amin with two other ministers—the Minister of Defense, Felix Onama, and the Minister of Education, Dr. Luyimbazi-Zake. But neither minister exercised any influence after the coup, and the second fled in the following year. I have grave doubts that either report was true.

Obote was told of the two plots, in reports of which I saw copies, and ordered the Minister of Internal Affairs, Basil Bataringaya, to supervise the arrest of Amin and his supposed collaborators. At once, Amin heard of the order from his contacts. He told me later that he had had a detailed report of a meeting in which the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Inspector General, and other senior officers of the army, planned his arrest. Amin acted quickly. In the early afternoon of January 24, he contacted a few of his most trusted officers and ordered them to take immediate command of the armories, a few tanks and the radio station. There was no plan of attack, no meetings, no formal strategy—and nothing, therefore, for Obote's men to fight against. Few people in the army even knew of the coup before it started. Again, Amin had proved a master of unpredictability.

In Singapore, I first got to know that something was wrong at home when Chris Ntende, who was then permanent secretary in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, arrived just after the Commonwealth Conference had ended. He told me that he had come to brief Obote on the discussions with the British Government on the non-Ugandan Asians resident in Uganda. He said he

wanted Obote to brief his colleagues from Zambia and Tanzania. The reason for his mission seemed unlikely. The Presidents of Zambia and Tanzania had left Singapore days before.

According to a later report, Obote came to believe that Ntende had told me of the plans to arrest Amin and that I had phoned through a warning to a fellow tribesman, Amin's brother-in-law Wanume Kibedi, in Kampala. This is nonsense. It would have been ridiculous for Ntende to travel to Singapore to deliver such a warning when he could have told any number of Basoga people—Kibedi included—in Kampala. (As it happened, the accusation was not a bad thing for me. It proved to Amin that I had no covert dealings with Obote, and thus assured my safety when I returned.)

That night, Ntende stayed in my room because the hotel was full. He told me that he was to speak to the President at 2:00 in the morning. I asked no questions, but it was certainly an odd time to see a head of state. Later that night I heard voices raised from the President's suite, which was not very far from my own. I had no doubt that they were trying to reach Kampala. As it happened, Obote was trying to contact Bataringaya to see how his plans for the arrest were going. He never did get through. There had been no arrest—Amin had already struck. Obote's men—who, Amin told me later, had been watched as they arrived for their meeting—had fled, abandoning their cars in the street. On my return I saw the cars, bullet-riddled, standing where they had been left.

At 10:00 A.M., just before our departure, one of the Singapore government officials attached to our delegation called me aside and told me that the radio had reported some problem at home. Immediately after, Obote called the senior members of the delegation into a meeting. He announced that there had been fighting in Kampala, but that all was not yet lost. He had tried to find out the true situation, he said, by calling a number of

places in Kampala, but had failed to get anyone. Then, while we were waiting to leave, Obote in desperation telephoned the Kampala Central Police Station. He spoke to a senior officer, Suleiman Dusman, now retired, who told him that the police were on standby. Obote asked "Standby for what?" The officer replied that the army was on the move. Obote asked why the police were not on the move if the army was; Dusman's reply reflected the confusion that reigned in Kampala.

We then caught the plane for Bombay and Nairobi. A couple of hours out of Bombay, when I was sitting in the cockpit having a snack and monitoring the radio, the BBC quoted a Uganda Radio report that Obote had been overthrown, that the army had taken over the country, and that his delegation was on its way back from Singapore. The last part, at least, was true—I assumed the rest was. The pilot asked whether he should tell the President. I thought that perhaps I should. I got up and walked back to the first-class compartment. As soon as Obote saw me, he leaned forward and asked if there was anything to report. I said "Yes, Your Excellency—not very good news." He asked me to hurry up and tell him. I said, "The Army has taken over." He said nothing. He just collapsed back into his seat without comment. I moved on to the other ministers repeating the information to them. One, Sam Odaka, the Foreign Minister, said in his jocular way, "Well, we now have no country."

I knew at the time that the reaction to the news would be mixed. Some delegates would welcome it because they had relatives in prison. Others, like myself, had simply become disenchanted with Obote's regime. And then there were those—Obote's own men, mostly his own tribesmen—who feared change.

We arrived at Nairobi airport at about 8:00 in the evening. Clearly the Kenyans had already decided that Obote was to be treated as a deposed leader. We were all shuttled into waiting cars, which sped us off to a hotel. The next day, we were put on board a new East African

Airways DC-9. It was to have made its inaugural flight to Entebbe that day. Instead, we left unceremoniously for Dar-es-Salaam. I left all my luggage—two suitcases and the presents I had bought in Singapore—in Nairobi, at a relative's house.

Our reception in Dar-es-Salaam was in marked contrast to the one we had experienced in Kenya. The then Vice President of Tanzania, Rashid Kawawa, was waiting for us (President Julius Nyerere was on a state visit to India). Cars stood by with the Ugandan Presidential flag waving. We were all given individual cars and taken to State House, Nyerere's official residence.

For the next several hours, we followed the news back home over the various news agency wires. We began to discuss who was going to do what. I was anxious to return to Uganda—if possible—and retire into private life. Obote did not realize that I would like to go home at all, let alone so soon, for my return would give a boost to the new regime. But I had my own plans, and contacted Kampala by telephone. I spoke to my office. Oddly enough, my secretary was still at her post. I told her I wanted to speak to Amin. He was out. I told her to ask him if I could come home or not. I also spoke to my family and several friends and told them that I was all right. I called again later. This time Amin was in. He said that he had already given instructions for me to be welcomed if I wanted to come back. "We're celebrating," he said. "When are you coming home?" This open-handed invitation took me completely by surprise. Scarcely concealing my delight, I booked a flight, called Amin back, and told him my arrival time. I left early the next morning, a Friday, just four days after the coup, without seeing Obote again. I was accompanied by one of Obote's own bodyguards who wanted very much to go with me.

When we arrived at the airport, I was met by one of Amin's men, with the President's BMW waiting on the runway. The driver, Ismail, was a man I had known before and had recommended to Amin as an army driver

the previous year. (He is now a major and Deputy Commander of Kifaru Battalion in Arua. He recently became the son-in-law of the Vice President, General Mustafa Adrisi.) Amin had clearly wanted to put me at ease by sending a familiar face to greet me—a thoughtful gesture which seems out of keeping with his brutal character, but is in fact typical of him. On the way Ismail told me that my residence in the Presidential compound had been looted. I was not particularly perturbed. They could have taken only the few small items that remained.

I was taken straight to Amin's residence (which he renamed "Command Post"). He was still in a meeting with a number of religious leaders, briefing them about the takeover. After his meeting, Amin called me upstairs. There were still several government officials in the room.

The first question he asked me was, "What have you brought me from Singapore?" I was thoroughly nonplussed. Considering what we had all been through, it was an incongruous greeting. I said, "I did bring something for you—a small radio and a piece of cloth for your wife—but I do not have it here because my luggage is in Nairobi. I'll let you have it when I get my luggage." He said "Thank you very much," then turned to the officials and added, "I asked him to get me something and he did."

Then he asked me, "Have you seen your family?" I replied that I hadn't.

"I am sure they are all worried about you," he said. "If you don't have a car, you take the Mercedes."

Then he added, "Go home for the weekend and come back on Monday. Go back to your office and continue as if nothing had happened." I could hardly believe my ears. I knew he had no reason to distrust me, but this seemed extraordinary. His driver took me in the Mercedes to meet Teresa, who had brought our own car from Jinja. We drove back home together, laughing and talking as we each heard the details of the other's life over the previous three weeks.

2

The Tyrant Emerges

IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE coup, in January 1971, the country greeted Amin as a hero. For several weeks, celebrations took up almost all of his time. He was not the type of man to sit at a desk and it was pure joy for him to be constantly on the move by car and helicopter. Whenever he went, his Cabinet and senior officials went: he wanted to show us off. For days at a time, there were hardly any leaders left in Kampala to run the country.

His visits developed a certain pattern. People would hear on the radio that Amin planned to be in their particular area. The local inhabitants would build a platform overnight, and the following morning would gather and await Amin's address. He would arrive by helicopter, make a speech, watch some dancing, receive presents (once, he was given nine hundred head of cattle), go to a reception, jump back into his helicopter and be off again—along with his government entourage. Our job was to sit on the platform while he spoke, socialize with him, and then follow him to the next stop.

Amin was greeted with delight; he had overthrown an unpopular regime. He had also, significantly, released Obote's detainees. Among them were the former Prime Minister and leader of the Democratic Party, Benedicto Kiwanuka, who was later appointed Chief Justice (and, later still, murdered); Brigadier Shaban Opolot, once Amin's commander and rival (Amin magnanimously

granted him all the back pay that had accumulated during his five-year prison stay); and Grace Ibingira, who was a minister and prominent lawyer, and was recently Amin's United Nations Ambassador in New York. He also released many of the late Kabaka's relatives, who had been imprisoned since 1966, arranged for the return of the Kabaka's body from London for reburial, and, in fact, even claimed he had saved the Kabaka's life by allowing him to escape.

The country seemed set for a return to peace. True, there was one early incident that shocked me. On my first day back in office, there was a car chase outside the President's Lodge. Major Emmanuel Ogwal, a pro-Obote officer, was chased through the center of Kampala by Amin's soldiers. He took refuge in a doctor's house and was killed during a shoot-out that we all heard from our offices. (The unsuspecting owner of the house, Dr. George Ebine, was—I learned later—traced to his hospital, taken to Malire barracks and crushed by a tank.) Amin's boys triumphantly brought Ogwal's driving license to Amin in my presence, as proof of their success. The incident was disturbing, but it seemed natural that there should be some dangerous opposition to be dealt with. It did not strike me as ominous.

At first the administration was delighted with Amin. He insisted on appointing only a few of his own people, like Lieutenant Colonel Obitre-Gama (Internal Affairs) and Charles Oboth-Ofumbi (Ministry of Defense). For the most part, he took considerable care to select the most capable people for the Cabinet, frequently seeking advice about the qualifications of possible appointees. Because he asked the advice of professionals like myself, the Cabinet was filled with experienced and efficient men, like Nyonyi Zikusoka, a brilliant engineer who became Minister of Works; Nkambo Mugerwa, Solicitor General, who became Minister of Justice; and Professor William Banage, Department Head of Zoology at Makerere University, who became Minister of Animal

Resources. The tribes were all fairly represented, and there was a good balance of Christians and Moslems.

I was Amin's principal private secretary, the secretary to the Cabinet, and permanent secretary to the office of the President. As secretary to the Cabinet, I was responsible for taking the minutes at Cabinet meetings, and for following up Cabinet decisions. As permanent secretary to the office of the President, I was head of the civil service, and responsible for informing the President of the activities of all departments. These three different jobs—which were later divided among three people—put me in a unique position. But it was also an impossible position: I could not do all the tasks efficiently on my own. I soon suggested that I be replaced as principal private secretary as quickly as possible.

At the first Cabinet meeting, Amin turned his mainly civilian Cabinet into a pseudo-military one. He swore all the ministers in as officer-cadets and gave them all uniforms. None of them was ever to rise above the rank of officer-cadet; all of them would now be subject to military discipline. At the time, however, this ominous implication did not register fully.

For that first meeting, I prepared a brief document on Cabinet procedures detailing how the President's office and Secretariat should be kept informed of all actions to be taken on Cabinet decisions. Copies were distributed. The President, in military uniform, spent some time talking about his trust in the new Cabinet, saying that he wanted them to run the country as well as possible. He said he wasn't a politician, and that it was the job of his expert advisers to get the country running smoothly. He announced that each minister should be assigned a black Mercedes Benz, and each car marked "Military Government." In the discussions that followed, Amin sat quietly and listened to the ministers' suggestions. When someone finished speaking, he would ask if anyone had anything to add. In fact, he was a model of decorum and generosity. We all left happy, convinced of both his good

nature and his good sense.

Over the next few days, there were some hints that all was not as it seemed. It puzzled us that Amin never spoke of military matters to his Cabinet except in the vaguest terms. We were angered when he announced on the radio on February 22 that the military government was to be in power for five years. (Following our protests, he declared that his was a caretaker administration only. He did not, however, mention a timetable.) But he had promised political freedom. He was clearly going to be a reasonable fellow. We were prepared to forgive him any small lapses.

Disillusion followed swiftly. To start with, the Cabinet and I prepared most of Amin's speeches. But his English is poor. The speeches were a great labor for him to read and a great bore for people to listen to. It was obvious that he was reading words he hadn't written, and the foreign press criticized him. He felt much more relaxed when he was talking off the cuff, and after a short while, he found he could make a greater impact that way.

Thereafter, everywhere he went on his jubilant tours, he promised paradise. If he found that a place needed a hospital, he would promise one. "The Minister of Health is here," he would say, and turn to the poor man. "You build one." Or, "Here is the Minister of Works and Communications—he will build you a road from here to there." It was an exhilarating time for him. Incapable of detailed administrative duties, he preferred grass-roots contact. He liked to joke with ordinary people. He liked to make a show of praising and blaming his ministers in public. He could really play "Big Daddy"—or "Dada" (grandfather)—as he liked to call himself. Yet, because we were constantly on the move, there was no time to follow up on these "immediate action" directives.

The ministers were, of course, taken completely by surprise by his random announcements, made both in speeches and on the radio. (He would brief the radio's news editors personally, without telling the Minister of Information.) The ministers took to carrying notebooks,

and as soon as he started to talk, began scribbling down what they were meant to do. I was supposed to coordinate the instructions to various ministries. This was fine to start with, because it followed, more or less, the procedures laid down by the colonial civil service, but soon it became impossible to keep track of all the orders. We had to read the newspapers and listen to Uganda Radio to learn the decisions he had made. Government officials began to use the radio as their guide. Colleagues often explained their actions to me by saying, "The President told me to do it—didn't you hear it on the radio?"

At first there was nothing sinister associated with these announcements. They were even amusing—as long as they concerned someone else. They became less amusing when you were the victim, as I soon was in a minor way. In March 1971, Amin decided to replace me as principal private secretary, as I had requested. He chose to announce this, and the name of my successor, on the radio. I wasn't particularly upset at his high-handedness, since I would in any case remain in my old office with control of the whole establishment. (Indeed, in one small way, I still am in control. As far as I know, I am the only person who possesses the combinations to the State House safes. They contain only some old files which may one day be of interest to academicians.)

From January 1971 to July (when I went on leave), I was extremely close to Amin. He knew my family well and we had worked together for many years. He used to call me to his bedroom, even when he was in bed, to sit down and have a chat. He would talk a lot about his girlfriends. (He had—and still has—an extraordinary sex life). I often traveled with him, and I was in constant touch with him. If he had something to say to a minister, he would normally contact him personally, but he often channelled information through my office.

Despite my intimacy with Amin, I was unaware of the terrible events that were then going on in the barracks,

events that presaged a yet more terrible future. Although the coup itself had not been particularly bloody, the murders started immediately. His "enemies" at this stage were principally the Acholi and Langi. Obote was a Langi—sufficient reason for Amin to suspect the entire tribe—and the Acholis also formed a large proportion of the armed forces. Amin lumped them both together. He used to tell his Cabinet that there were "mopping-up" operations going on, but we had no idea what this meant until later. These early murders have been documented in some detail, by the journalist David Martin, in his book *General Amin*.

Of those officers who held the rank of lieutenant colonel or above at the time of the coup, most have been murdered. I was later told that on the night of the coup, Amin's troops bludgeoned several officers to death with rifle butts and bottles in the Malire officers' mess. Also killed was Brigadier Suleiman Hussein, the Army Chief of Staff. He had been ordered, along with Bataringaya, to arrest Amin. After the coup he went into hiding, but was soon arrested, taken to Luzira prison, and beaten to death with rifle butts. It was rumored that his head was later taken to Amin, who kept it in a refrigerator overnight.

A picture of what was happening in Uganda's prisons in those first months was later given to David Martin by Joshua Wakholi, who had been Minister of Public Service and Cabinet Affairs in Obote's government for almost five years. He retired into private life, but was arrested in early March and taken to Makindye prison. He was placed next door to the notorious cell called "Singapore," reserved for those condemned to death. Wakholi reported that thirty-six army officers and one corporal were shot and slashed to death by three or four soldiers. The next morning, he was among those told to go into Singapore cell and scrub up the remains. The floor was a quarter of an inch deep in blood. It took six hours to clean. Along with the blood, there were pieces of

skull and teeth, brain tissue and empty shell cases. A number of other accounts confirm that Singapore cell was often used for such brutal killings.

Many other atrocities were taking place throughout the country. In May, Amin told his troops that they could shoot on sight anyone suspected of having committed or being about to commit a crime. He also issued a decree providing for detention without trial. The deaths mounted into the hundreds. At Malire, thirty-two senior Langi and Acholi officers were herded into a room and blown up with explosives. Of several hundred Langi soldiers who had obeyed Amin's call to report back to their barracks at Lira, scores were bayoneted and thrown into the Nile. On another occasion, several hundred people—soldiers and civilians—fled into Sudan, intending to join Obote. They were stopped by Sudanese guerrillas, and later executed on Amin's orders. In early July, scores of Acholi and Langi soldiers were killed in two massacres, at the Mbarara and Jinja barracks.

Also in early July, two Americans, Nicholas Stroh and Robert Siedle, began to investigate reports of the massacres. Stroh was the son of a wealthy Detroit brewer. He had left his job on the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* to work as a freelance journalist in Africa. On July 9, 1971, he and Siedle, a sociology lecturer at Makerere, went to ask questions about the massacre at Mbarara barracks. They saw the second-in-command, Major Juma Aiga (a taxi driver at the time of the coup and now District Commissioner in Toro). The Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Ali Fadhul Warriss, was in Kampala at the time, and was in close contact with Amin. Stroh and Juma got into a heated argument. The two Americans were killed, and were buried in a shallow grave nearby. Major Juma was later seen driving Stroh's blue Volkswagen in Mbarara. When the American Embassy in Kampala began inquiries a week later, the bodies were dug up from their grave, put into sacks and burned in the barracks. Their remains were then dumped

in a river. The car was burned and thrown into a mountain valley.

In April 1972, in unwilling response to American efforts to find out what had happened to the two men, Amin appointed a judicial inquiry headed by a British judge, Mr. Justice David Jefferys Jones. After reading a report of the killing—written by one of the men involved, who had fled—the judge managed to trace the car. Amin was furious and ordered that the inquiry be wound up. In May, Mr. Justice Jones—a friend of mine to whom I remarked, “This will be your last job in Uganda”—completed his report, as well as he could under the circumstances, and left the country. He had concluded that Ali and Juma were responsible for the two deaths. Amin dismissed the judge’s findings, calling them the result of a “prejudiced mind.” He later successively promoted Ali to Brigadier, Army Chief of Staff, provincial governor, and, more recently, minister.

Amin never gave explicit instructions to kill in my presence. But he had certain euphemisms that were recognized as orders for execution. One phrase was “Give him the VIP treatment,” which meant death after torture, a phrase I heard him use when he was ordering the death of the Minister of Information, Alex Ojera, in September 1972. Other code phrases were “Take him to Mairé” and “Kalasi,” which means “death” in Nubian, a language few Ugandans speak. I was also aware that many units and army personnel were moving from place to place to carry out executions. There were never any written instructions. First, he cannot write (no one I know has ever received a handwritten letter from him); and second, he always preferred to give his orders verbally, so that later, if necessary, he could deny any personal involvement.

To further escape responsibility, Amin preferred to be abroad when his massacres took place. He used this tactic in July 1971. The killing started in Jinja barracks half a mile from my own home, on July 11, the day Amin left for

a trip to Israel and Britain, seeking arms and cash. He was to use this tactic time and again; any journey abroad immediately threatened an increase in the level of violence at home.

On this occasion, a group of Acholi and Langi soldiers—the number has never been established—were rounded up and crammed into a guardroom near the entrance to the barracks. Fearing for their lives, they broke out into an adjoining room and seized a machine gun. Throughout the night they fought their guards. A few soldiers managed to escape, but most were killed. News of the battle spread throughout the Jinja area; bullets flew from the army barracks over the main road, and a number of passersby had very narrow escapes. During the battle, a military vehicle knocked a hole in the barrack wall in an attempt to flush out the prisoners.

Afterward, bulldozers arrived to clear out the bodies and demolish the buildings. Trucks were commandeered from the Jinja municipal council to cart the bodies away. I can vouch for this because Amin, on his return from abroad, wanted to see the barracks, and I went there on July 19 to make the arrangements. The building where the prisoners had been penned was a pile of rubble. The brickwork was splattered with blood. I was told that some of the army officers had tried to take over the barracks. I did not believe the story, and later learned the true details from an army contact.

Amin cannot avoid responsibility for these killings. The acting commander at Jinja was Colonel Suleiman, a relative of Amin’s. It is inconceivable that he would have acted on his own initiative.

Another case of which I had direct knowledge—a case that brought home to me Amin’s dangerously inconsistent and deceptive nature—concerned the Police Bandmaster, Ahmed Oduka. He was one of the men who had reported that Amin planned to assassinate Obote on the latter’s return from Singapore. He had fled immediately after the coup, to Mombasa. One of Amin’s

men visited him there in March and told Oduka that it would be safe to return. When he arrived, he was taken to see Amin, who asked him to record a statement at Makindye prison. The meeting was friendly, but as soon as Oduka left, Amin ordered him to be "taken to Malire." There his skull was smashed in with a club. News of the murder reached Amin while I was with him. He was telephoned by the chief medical officer of the army, Brigadier Bogere, who reported the facts of Oduka's death. Amin turned to me and said coldly, "Oduka is dead," as if reporting the completion of some trivial task. I already knew better than to react in any way.

Immediately after the coup, about eight hundred officers from the police, army, and Obote's secret police, the General Service unit, had been arrested and detained in Luzira prison. Among them was a friend of mine, who told me what happened. On December 29, 1971—after almost a year's detention, and many futile attempts to have them released—they were all blindfolded and transferred by buses under army escort to Mutukula prison. There, forty-five officers and between two hundred and two hundred and fifty noncommissioned officers were slaughtered. They were buried by those who still survived. On January 25, the first anniversary of the coup, Amin announced a general amnesty for all detainees, including the survivors in Mutukula.

It seems unbelievable, but ordinary people knew little of what was going on. The killings in the first few months after the coup were almost exclusively confined to the army and the details were kept secret. Reports of massacres appeared only abroad, where they were not taken all that seriously. In Uganda itself, we were mostly inclined to give Amin the benefit of the doubt. We accepted his talk of anti-Obote operations and of happenings over which he did not yet have control.

The secret killings did, however, have some obvious effects. To make up for the gaps in the officer corps, Amin began to appoint new officers. His choices were

judiciously inadequate. He put sergeants and sergeant majors in charge of battalions. He appointed tank and car drivers—the people he most enjoyed chatting with—as majors or intelligence officers. Sergeant Musa Eyega, a tank driver, was put in charge of the Malire Mechanized Regiment. (He is now a lieutenant colonel and Ambassador to Saudi Arabia). Private Ismail—the driver who had met me at the airport upon my return—was made the temporary head of the Intelligence Service, and a captain. His promotion came about in April when I had to introduce Ismail to a British officer. I did not feel I could introduce a private as the Secret Service chief. When I mentioned this to Amin before the meeting, he said, "You say he is a captain." From then on, he was a captain (until his further promotion).

Such promotions were never confirmed in writing. Men would simply confront the paymaster and say, "I am a captain," or "I'm a major," and ask to be paid accordingly from that date. Confusion followed. When Amin realized the administrative trouble caused by his orders, he decided that new promotions should be backdated to January 25, the day of the coup. His decision was naturally abused. People simply promoted themselves, knowing that the paymaster would never dare check back with Amin.

By mid-1971, an inexperienced junior officer corps virtually ran the country. One of the most feared of these men was—and is—Lieutenant Malyamungu who was in charge of quelling dissent in the army. Before he joined the army, he had been a gatekeeper at Nyanza Textile Industries, where my brother Kisajja was personnel manager. At the time of the coup, he commandeered a tank with which he shot up the entrance to the Entebbe airport terminal, killing two priests. After the coup he headed Amin's execution gangs, with unlimited power to execute anybody in the army, even officers senior to him. His modes of execution are as atrocious as anything imaginable. He is fond of disemboweling. Along with

several other officers, he is known to have executed his victims by having them run over by tanks. But perhaps the grisliest episode concerned Francis Walugembe, who had previously been Mayor of Masaka. In September 1972, Walugembe was arrested, had his genitals cut off and was paraded through the streets before being killed and dismembered. So violent and brutal is Malyamungu that even Amin once commented to me that he feared he might be going mad.

To rebuild a real officer corps from Amin's illiterate sadists, who could hardly speak a word of English, was an insurmountable problem. The British, however, gave it a try. Soon after the coup, Amin requested and was granted a British officer to train the Intelligence Service. The cadets given to him were Amin's best, yet they were still totally inadequate. I often met this officer on his way to and from the President's office and he would tell me of the difficulties he was having. He doubted that the men could ever benefit from his presence. "Obviously an intelligence officer needs some basic intelligence," he would say. "These chaps have none." Since they were semi-literate, all he could do was describe the basic tasks of an intelligence officer. Not that they could ever perform these tasks, let alone teach others, which was the long-term aim of the project. He often told me how ridiculous he felt. He stuck it out for three or four months, then said he would try to arrange training for them outside the country, and left.

Amin's other deficiencies became increasingly apparent as the months passed. One was his total financial naïvete, exemplified in the way he handled the construction of the OAU Conference Center and the nearby Nile Hotel. This major project was started in the Obote days in preparation for the OAU summit, scheduled for June 1971. After the coup, no one seriously believed that the OAU heads of state would come to Uganda so soon—if ever, given the nature of Amin's inadequacy as a politician. But Amin pushed ahead

anyway. The Yugoslav company, Energo-Project, which was doing the construction, worked twenty-four hours a day in three shifts to complete the conference center and hotel in time. In May, the OAU decided to hold the June summit in Addis Ababa. By June, the Nile Hotel complex was finished, three hundred percent over budget, with nothing to justify this cost. Not until 1975 did the OAU agree to meet there.

Uncounted millions were spent on other projects as well. The Israelis were heavily committed to a number of large-scale building projects—barracks, roads, airport runways, and apartment buildings. Besides these, Amin ordered the construction of what he later named Field Marshal Idi Amin Air Force Base, at Nakasongola, about seventy miles from Kampala. Appalled by the loss of the Egyptian Air Force to the Israelis in 1967, he was taken with the idea of an air base with underground bunkers to protect his so-called air force from a similar fate. Uganda didn't have many planes at the time—no more than two dozen—but he continued with his plan to give the impression that he really did have something to protect. As a matter of fact, he could not bear to have his planes that far away from him—they were always at Entebbe. He did not trust the people in charge of them, and wanted to have them close enough so he could visit them regularly. Hence the destruction of most of the Uganda Air Force during the Israeli raid in 1976.

All these projects were unbudgeted. There was no thought that the country might have to foot the bill some day. Amin was told of the financial limitation, but such warnings meant nothing to him. Obote had allowed for a deficit of 700 million shillings (80 million dollars) in his last budget but Amin could not grasp this fiscal reality. By his definition countries could not go broke, because they printed money and could always print more. In 1977, Uganda's deficit ran to three billion shillings. The ministers are still under orders to blame Obote.

His financial irresponsibility and total ignorance of

economic realities also has a personal dimension. He does not differentiate between personal and government expenditure. The government was required to maintain him and his several family establishments in food, clothing, furniture, cars, any luxury goods he fancied, and just plain cash. This last item is of particular interest. There was, in fact, an official provision that allowed for small amounts to be spent on information gathering at the discretion of the President and the permanent secretary to the President's office (at the time, me). This was normally accounted for by the permanent secretary to the Auditor General.

When Amin realized that such money was available, he began to demand cash for "intelligence missions." At first the sums were modest—a few hundred dollars—but eventually they ran into tens of thousands. In fact, he began to use the Bank of Uganda as a petty cash box. He would just come into the office or call me on the telephone and say, "Get some money ready for such-and-such an intelligence purpose." I would call up the Accounts Office and arrange it. He also used the Ministry of Defense to provide such sums. He carried cash in his briefcase and cash in his pockets—English pounds and American dollars (which are illegal to hold) as well as Uganda shillings. He would happily take a thousand dollars from his pocket at public functions and give it away. It meant nothing to him.

It was a very difficult situation for me; I could no longer account reasonably for money of this kind, nor did I have the time to do so, so he appointed a man in my office who was in effect his personal cashier.

Fortunately, I did not suffer the indignities imposed on me for long. In July 1971, having heard some gossip that he was perpetuating the Obote regime by being so close to me, Amin told me to go on leave for two months. (A decision I was supposed to hear first on the radio; in fact, a friend tipped me off beforehand.) I was happy to take a holiday—my job had become impossibly

demanding. I bought my own dairy farm just outside Jinja, and began to develop an orange orchard on a piece of land twenty miles to the east. I dictated my own hours, and worked hard; I enjoyed myself tremendously.

It was during my leave that the massacres in the army really became a public horror. Amin's troops were no longer killing people by the score but by the hundreds. It was impossible to dispose of the bodies in graves. Instead, truckloads of corpses were taken and dumped in the Nile. Three sites were used—one just above Owen Falls Dam at Jinja, another at Bujagali Falls near the army shooting range, and a third at Karuma Falls near Murchison Falls.

The intention was for the bodies to be eaten by crocodiles. This was an inefficient method of disposal. Bodies were frequently swept to the bank, where they were seen by passersby and fishermen. At Owen Falls many bodies must have been carried through the dam over which the Kampala-Jinja road ran, but many also floated into the still waters to one side, near the power station. Once, while driving across the dam at Jinja, I saw six bodies, revoltingly puffed up and decomposed, floating in the waters. Despite the presence of a boat that was (and is) in permanent use for dragging the bodies to the bank for disposal, workers from Jinja, who travelled daily over the dam between their houses and the many industrial plants on the Kampala side—like Nyanza Textiles, Nile Breweries and Mulbox, as well as the Njeru municipal offices—told me that they saw dozens of bodies almost every day.

Toward the end of my leave, one incident—the murder of Michael Kagwa, President of the Industrial Court—revealed to the country as a whole that the massacres were not to be limited to the army, or to the Acholi and Langi. Kagwa, who was extremely rich (he had a Mercedes sports car with its own television), had a girlfriend, Helen Ogwang, in whom Amin was interested. In September 1971, Kagwa was seized by Amin's bodyguards at the Kampala International Hotel

swimming pool. They shot him and burnt his body, together with his Mercedes, on the outskirts of the capital near Namirembe Cathedral. No attempt was made to discover who the murderers were. The senior police officers had already been arrested for investigating the Okoya murder. No one would risk death by asking questions that could lead only to Amin. The government "offered" a 50,000-shilling reward for information. So far it has gone unclaimed. Helen Ogwang was later posted to the Uganda Embassy in Paris, where she defected.

At the end of September 1971, when I was due to return to work, I asked where I should report for duty. No one knew. My successor as permanent secretary suggested that I take over an empty office somewhere in the Parliament building and bring myself up to date by reading files. I said there was no point in my reading files I might not have to deal with, and added that I would stay at my house in Jinja until I was required. Within two days, Amin summoned me. I found that I was to take over as permanent secretary in the Ministry of Culture and Community Development. This was a relatively unimportant ministry, and it suited me perfectly. In the President's office it had been hard enough to follow what was going on before I went on leave; to resume the work after a two-month absence would have been extremely difficult.

In my new role, I had some time to continue the development of my farm, but my official responsibilities were wide-ranging and interesting. At various times, I dealt with the National Theater, museums, the preservation of historical monuments, cultural activities, youth activities, the Probation and Welfare Department, the rehabilitation of the physically handicapped, refugees from Rwanda, Sudan and Zaïre, and sports. I also administered the Heartbeat of Africa, Uganda's national dance group, which then included the future Mrs. Amin, Medina, wife number four. I now had much less contact with Amin, although he did ask me to employ as a

secretary one of his girlfriends (whose husband, a doctor, he had murdered).

I was not, therefore, directly involved in the extraordinary developments of early 1972, when Amin broke with Israel and began his love affair with Libya. But I was to see their effects, and a brief summary is essential for an understanding of Uganda's recent history. The events were dictated by Amin's need for ready cash. Britain was still willing to help, but most of her funds were tied up with specific projects, and British officials always wanted feasibility studies before funds were allocated. Similarly, the Israelis, apart from the fact that they had limited funds and were deeply involved in a number of projects, gave serious consideration to new ideas strictly on merit. That was not the kind of money Amin wanted. He saw his chance while on a state visit to West Germany in February 1972. Shortly before his return, he decided to visit Libya's head of state, Gaddafi. Since he was flying an Israeli jet, many ministers were shocked at the prospect of his dropping in on an extremist Arab dictator, but he went, met with Gaddafi, and received promises of massive financial and military aid. It was an attractive prospect for Gaddafi as well, for he was suddenly presented with an opportunity to have Israel thrown out of an African country.

The first indication of Amin's switch in allegiance came in a joint communique attacking Israel, published and broadcasted in Uganda after Amin's return. The Israelis—indeed all in Uganda—were taken aback. Things then moved very swiftly. The Israeli ambassador complained about the remarks. Amin retaliated by broadcasting more violent statements against the Israelis. He refused to see the ambassador, and began to attack Zionism, blaming Israel for not returning Arab lands seized in 1967, and demanding that the Arabs be granted their rights. Finally, Amin accused the Israelis of milking Uganda of three million shillings a day in the projects they were undertaking, stated that Israel must be wiped off the face

of the earth, and ordered them out of the country.

Cleverly, the Israelis managed to drive much of their heavy construction equipment into neighboring Kenya. I passed some of these machines—cranes, trucks, bulldozers, scrapers—while driving between Kampala and Jinja. The Israelis were picnicking by the side of the road. By the time Amin realized that very valuable equipment was there for the taking and gave the order to stop the Israelis, most of the equipment had rumbled over the border. By the end of March 1972, the Israelis had gone.

The oil money from Libya was good for Amin personally, but it did little to sustain the loyalty of the army. To ensure this, he needed to offer cash or goods. He soon found a way to provide both.

On August 4, Amin appeared at the barracks at Tororo, near the Kenyan border, and announced to the troops that he had had a dream the previous night in which God instructed him to order the 50,000 Asians out of Uganda within ninety days. This he proceeded to do.

The Asian community was an ideal target. Asians almost totally controlled Uganda's trade, factories, plantations and industries. They were the managers, the bureaucrats, the accountants, the technicians, the doctors, the engineers, the lawyers. They formed an affluent middle class, a distinctive element in the population, with their own language, behavior patterns, names and occupations. On the whole they were not popular with the Africans. They have been described as the Jews of East Africa. They were, in other words, ideal targets.

By the 1970's, 30,000 of Uganda's Asians had British passports, but the other 20,000 were legally Ugandans. At the time of Amin's original announcement, nobody thought that he intended to expel both Ugandan Asians and British Asians. But it soon became clear that he did not intend to make a distinction between passports. He wanted the Asians' property to hand over to his troops. It

was a brutal and thoroughly racist decision, and one that was to deal the Ugandan economy a terrible blow.

The Asians were sent out of the country with nothing except a hundred-dollar personal allowance. A stop was put on their bank accounts. Amin did not care where the Asians went as long as they went, and he stuck to his deadline—November 8, 1972—with a countdown that proceeded remorselessly day by day on the radio. He announced that any Asians remaining after the deadline would be sent to detention camps. Informed that some Asians were attempting to avoid deportation by blacking their faces with shoe polish, he issued a dire warning to anyone found guilty of such practices. Understandably, all the Asians made every effort to move out of the country.

On the pretext of helping the Asians pack, Amin's soldiers snatched household goods for themselves. As the deadline approached, the army moved from house to abandoned house taking anything they could carry.

The Asians left all their Ugandan property behind (although some had wealth in Britain and in other East African countries). Amin told them they were allowed to airfreight out a few personal belongings. Boxes of goods began to pile up outside the airport under army guard "to prevent looting." Day by day, the number of boxes mounted into the hundreds and then into the thousands. The Asians left, but the boxes stayed. Passersby could see that the boxes had been split open and the goods removed. Gradually, the boxes themselves vanished. Eventually, all the crates were carried off by the soldiers who were supposed to be guarding them. Nothing was ever sent to its owners.

Meanwhile, there occurred the event that finally revealed to all Ugandans, civilian as well as military, Amin's true nature. In September 1972, a small army of Obote guerrillas invaded Uganda from Tanzania. The invasion was a farce. There were only a thousand men; they were badly equipped and ill prepared. They were

delayed crossing the frontier and attacked Amin's troops late in the morning, when there was no possibility of surprise. If Amin had ignored it, the whole thing might easily have collapsed of its own accord.

Obote's attack was a pure gift to Amin. His troops were anyway incensed at the invasion, which they saw as an attempt to stop them from seizing Asian property. Since the guerrillas were no conceivable threat, Amin could safely exaggerate the danger and thus show himself to be his country's savior. He could also, more ominously, use the invasion as a pretext to move against those members of the population whom he saw as a threat.

Early in the morning of Sunday, September 17, having spent the previous night at home in Jinja, I was preparing to drive out to my orchard when I heard the first reports of the invasion on the radio, which announced that people should go to church and pray. I found this announcement intriguing. Clearly the situation was not serious. Otherwise the government would have asked people to be on the lookout and ordered troops to report to the barracks.

I drove the twenty miles to my orange orchard. On my way I passed the ordnance depot at Magamaga. Soldiers in camouflage and army fatigues were rushing into the depot from the surrounding areas. I began to wonder if things were more serious than had been implied, so I returned to Jinja around lunch time and then left for Kampala.

There were a number of Army roadblocks between Jinja and Kampala. The troops said they were looking for Obote guerrillas, but it was clear that they were more interested in harassing the Asians who were passing through.

In Kampala the next day I began to find out what was really happening. The Obote guerrillas had attacked Mutukula, near the Tanzanian border, and the barracks at Mbarara. Announcements on the radio, however, gave the impression that countless other towns had been captured by Obote's troops. Friends of mine, when they

heard the reports, drove out to see what was happening. There were road blocks all right, but once clear of them the drive was uneventful. It was clear that Amin's reports on the radio were pure lies. To further dramatize his "victory," he even wildly asserted that the Tanzanian Army, the British and the Israelis were all involved in the invasion.

During the first few days after the invasion, Amin was reported to have appeared at the battlefield, where there was supposed to be heavy fighting, with one of his favorite sons, five-year-old Moses. More evidence that the danger was slight. He would hardly have risked his own life and that of a favorite son unnecessarily.

The truth was that he now had nothing to fear from Obote or from anyone else. Terror reigned across most of the country. The killings had already extended from the army deep into the population at large.

It is almost impossible to estimate the numbers of the dead. As early as 1973, the former Foreign Minister Wanume Kibedi, who fled in that year, estimated that 90,000 to 100,000 had been killed. My calculations—done on the basis of the sights witnessed by hundreds at the Owen Falls Dam—give a comparable figure. A boatman at Owen Falls works full-time removing corpses from the water. If he retrieved twenty bodies a day between July 1971 and my departure in April 1977—a reasonable assumption—then, in round figures, this would amount to over 40,000 dead. But this figure doesn't include those that must have been eaten by crocodiles or swept through the dam—at least another 10,000. Moreover, Owen Falls was only one of three dumping areas. Multiplying the Owen Falls numbers by three gives a total of 150,000 dead by mid-1977. There were in addition many, many other dead, abandoned in forests, and hidden in pits near barracks.

The dead are literally innumerable: all their names will never be known, their numbers never counted. My own list is but a small indication of the true horror. And day by day the total grows.